

# Well, Well, Well

- <sup>1</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines.
- <sup>2</sup> And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.
- <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.
- <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,
- <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."
- <sup>6</sup> So Isaac settled in Gerar.
- <sup>7</sup> When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance.
- <sup>8</sup> When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.
- <sup>9</sup> So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'"
- <sup>10</sup> Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."
- <sup>11</sup> So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."
- <sup>12</sup> And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him,
- <sup>13</sup> and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.
- <sup>14</sup> He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him.
- <sup>15</sup> (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.)
- <sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."
- <sup>17</sup> So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.
- <sup>18</sup> And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them.
- <sup>19</sup> But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water,
- <sup>20</sup> the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him.
- <sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah.
- <sup>22</sup> And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."
- <sup>23</sup> From there he went up to Beersheba.

- <sup>24</sup> And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake."
- <sup>25</sup> So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.
- <sup>26</sup> When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army,
- <sup>27</sup> Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?"
- <sup>28</sup> They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you,
- <sup>29</sup> that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD."
- <sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.
- <sup>31</sup> In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.
- <sup>32</sup> That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water."
- <sup>33</sup> He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

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### Genesis 26:1-33

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## **Fool Me Once...**

The old saying goes, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." But what about fooling a third time? Who is the fool then? I will never forget when I read our story today for the first time. I was in college and had not read through the Bible before. I was taking a class on the life of Paul and I had begun my journey into Calvinism and wanted very badly to know if predestination was biblical. So I took the plunge and started reading.

[Genesis 12](#) tells the story of [Abram](#) going down to [Egypt](#) because there was a great famine in the land of Canaan. Before he entered, he told Sarai to lie for him, saying that she is his sister rather than his wife, because he was afraid for both himself and for her. The Pharaoh ends up taking Sarai into his harem, though God intervenes before anything can happen, and Pharaoh ends up sending Abraham away. Interesting story. I keep reading.

I come to [Genesis 20](#) and see that [Abraham](#) now goes down into the desert of southern Canaan to live in a place called [Gerar](#). Before he enters, however, he tells Sarah to lie for him, saying that she is his sister rather than his wife. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, ends up taking Sarai into his harem, but God intervenes before anything can happen, and Abimelech ends up offering the choice of his land to Abraham in exchange for his blessing and prayer to protect him from God's wrath. Same story, different king. Very curious. I keep reading.

I come to [Genesis 26](#) and see that [Isaac](#), the son of Abraham, is told not to go down to Egypt even though there is a famine. So he goes to [Gerar](#) where Abimelech

is king. Before he entered, he told Rebekah to lie for him, saying that she is his sister rather than his wife, because he was afraid for his life because Rebekah was very beautiful. You've got to be kidding me, right? **Fool me once, fool me twice, fool me three times?**

<b>She Is My Sister Stories of Abraham and Isaac</b>			
	Genesis 12:10-20	Genesis 20:1-18	Genesis 26:1-17
<b>The Place and the Reason</b>	<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.	From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.	Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.
<b>The Promise</b>	<i>(Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. Gen 12:1-2)</i>	<i>(I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. Gen 22:17 ESV)</i>	<sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." <sup>6</sup> So Isaac settled in Gerar.
<b>The Ruse</b>	<sup>11</sup> When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." <sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.	<sup>2</sup> And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.	<sup>7</sup> When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance.
<b>The Taking</b>	<sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. <sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.	<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."	
<b>The Discovery</b>	<sup>17</sup> But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.	<sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup> Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." <sup>8</sup> So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these	<sup>8</sup> When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.

		things. And the men were very much afraid.	
<b>The Confrontation</b>	<p><sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"</p> <p><sup>19</sup> Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."</p> <p><sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?"</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'</p> <p><sup>12</sup> Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.</p> <p><sup>13</sup> And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother.'"</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'"</p> <p><sup>10</sup> Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."</p>
<b>The Removal</b>	<p><sup>20</sup> And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they <b>sent him away</b> with his wife and all that he had.</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him.</p> <p><sup>15</sup> And Abimelech said, "<b>Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.</b>"</p> <p><sup>16</sup> To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."</p> <p><sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.</p> <p><sup>18</sup> For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.</p>	<p><sup>11</sup> So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." ...</p> <p><sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, "<b>Go away from us</b>, for you are much mightier than we."</p> <p><sup>17</sup> So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.</p>

## Laugh Out Loud

Is it really possible that Abraham's son could pull off the same ruse to the very same king Abimelech? And why? How could this guy fall for it again? What is the purpose of this story? Who is the fool here? What is going on? I can remember reading this having all kinds of questions like these running around in my mind. But frankly, my first response to this story had nothing to do with questions and answers.

I still have the note in my Bible: "**Same story, funny.**" I wrote that because I can still remember doing an *lol*, before the internet gave us that slang. But I really did laugh out loud, because how can you not? This is some funny, crazy stuff. I want to spend a moment before we get into the story just thinking about this story from the stand point of **humor**.

My guess is that you probably won't find a single commentary that will talk about the humor in all of this. Commentaries take themselves much too seriously for that. I once had an idea of writing a short book about all the funny stories and sayings that are in the Bible—at least that are funny to me. This story would probably be Chapter 1. And why not? God gave humans a sense of humor, which seems to say the he must in some sense have one too. After all, he inspired this story to be written, didn't he?

But why make it funny? The *Literary Study Bible* (an excellent resource) says, “Compared to the titanic spiritual experiences of the other patriarchs, the story of Isaac might seem anticlimactic.” It goes on to give reasons for why it shouldn’t, but the main reason it misses is the humor here. But I would suggest that something that can actually make you laugh because it is so crazy, especially when we are talking about God’s word and how serious it often is, is actually the opposite of anticlimactic. I think this is a point worth making.

Through the humor, we learn things on a deeper level than we might ordinarily. The humor exposes people as different as Isaac and Abimelech by the very way the story is told, leveling them down to the same equal ground as sinners who just can’t escape themselves. We are ridiculous people in our sin. And because God is inspiring the way the story is told, apparently “He who sits in the heavens laughs” (Ps 2:4). But what does he laugh at? Am I saying that sin is a joke? Of course not.

He laughs at that absolute silliness that is man’s strivings and fears and the repetition of failures and sins that keep falling into. He laughs not because it is funny in itself, but because it is so absurd. Why can’t we trust God as we should? Why do we fall into the exact same traps as those who came before us? Why are we always learning, but never able to actually overcome ourselves? For those who know Christ, the point will be made clear as can be, that he is here in midst of our sins, having overcome them when we were not able, this being rooted in the promises giving 4,000 years ago to a family of wandering nomads called to live in a foreign land, called to trust in the God who was ever with them, but often silent. Perhaps Christians would be wise to sit back, have a little fun with the story, and learn not to take themselves quite so seriously. It might ironically help us to learn valuable lessons about ourselves.

### **The God of My Father**

Let’s look at the story in detail. It begins the same way the Abraham and Pharaoh story did—with a famine in the land (Gen 26:1), a famine different from that of the days of Abraham perhaps 80 or more years earlier (Gen 12:10). While the famine points us to the Abraham and Pharaoh story, the next words point us to the Abraham and Abimelech story. “And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines” (26:1; *on Philistines see 21:32*). If we remember that Abraham was quite old when he went to Gerar, and if we assume that Abimelech was younger, there is no reason why this could not be the same Abimelech. It is possible that this is his son. It is also possible that Abimelech, like Pharaoh, is simply a throne name. But it is much more ironic and humorous, and thus fitting a major purpose of this story, if it is the same man. It certainly reads that way.

Now, before Isaac and Abimelech have their encounter, we read the important interlude that “the LORD appeared to him [Isaac]” (Gen 26:2). Yahweh “appeared” (the verb *raah*, meaning “to see” is the language of sight), to Abraham four times (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:2; Acts 7:2 going back somewhere into Genesis 11:28-31). Once, it was when he and two angels came and met Abraham face to face at his tent, where they ate a meal and had their feet washed. To put this another way, the preincarnate Jesus is coming here to speak to Isaac, and Isaac saw him.

Jesus tells him not to go down to Egypt, as Abraham did. Instead,  dwell in the land of which I shall tell you (Gen 26:2). This is exactly what the Lord did when he appeared to Abram so many years earlier saying, “Go ... to the land that I will show you” (12:1). In other words, Christ’s coming to Isaac at this moment serves as his initial call.

Then it serves a second purpose. “Sojourn in this land” (it will not be your permanent home), “and I will be with you and will bless you” (26:3). This is the same personal promise that the Savior gave to Abram, “I will bless you” (12:2). Wherever he goes, the Angel of the LORD will go before him and with him, overseeing him and protecting him and blessing him. Therefore, given all that he had brought Abraham through, all that Isaac had himself seen God does, what is there to fear when Yahweh himself is on your side?

This reconfirmation of the covenant given to Abraham continues with the same specific promise, “to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father” (26:3). Here, the all important “seed” promise is made. Passed down from Eve to Noah to Shem to Abraham and now to Isaac, the seed-promise is The Golden Thread that ties all of Scripture together. For this is the promise, ultimately, that Jesus himself would come to crush Satan’s head. How amazing that Jesus as the Angel promises that he himself would give Isaac as seed, ultimately climaxing in his own coming in the flesh? Who had fathomed that this is what God had in mind? Until my dying breath, I will continue to point Christ out to you in these ways, for this what makes the Bible God’s Holy Word. The word is about Christ.

But a near fulfillment is also in view. Somehow, God would multiply Isaac’s seed “as the stars of heaven and would give to his seed all of these lands” (26:4)—the lands of his sojourning where the Philistines and Canaanites and Amorites many others are now living. The language repeats the covenant made with Abraham (22:17). Notice how “oath” here is a synonym for “covenant.” What may be even more astonishing about this promise, is that it is quite possible that this story takes place prior to the birth of Jacob and Esau in the chronological life of Isaac.

Here, I want you to remember that [Genesis has just taken material out of chronological order](#), telling us about the death of Abraham before it tells us about the birth of Jacob and Esau ([ch. 25](#)), even though when we add up the numbers, Abraham lived for 15 more years after they were born. Genesis does this because it is telling *a story*, and it likes to wrap up one thread before introducing another. Or, it likes to introduce different threads together before teasing each out, in order to create tension as any good story teller would do.

The reason it is possible that Isaac has not had children yet, is because in this story he and Rebekah are able to carry out the very [same ruse](#) that Abraham and Sarah had tried—not once but twice—and it is difficult to believe that they could have done that with two little twin boys running around the city with mommy and daddy. I mention this only to put this promise in [a more powerful context](#). If Isaac is near the age of 60 when he goes to Gerar, which was his age at the birth of his sons, then he, like his father, has lived a long time and had no children.

He apparently has not had the Lord come to him until his moment, at least not personally. He knows about the Angel. He saw him on that day long ago when Abraham almost put his son to death. He heard about the promise. He heard the stories of the many times Christ saved his father. But is it all really going to come to him? Could it be? It has been 60 years and nary a word has been spoken about it by God to him personally. This is the power of God's timing so often in the Bible. He remains silent until just the right time, when he finally wants to interject himself in order to strengthen our faith with his special presence. This is what he is now doing for Isaac, and from what follows, it is very clear that he is going to need it.

### **The Obedience of Abraham Towards Christ**

If the first few verses here are telling us that Christ is making his covenant anew with Isaac, then Isaac must see that he is being treated as the new Abraham. [Isaac will thus need faith](#), and this faith will need to be a faith that learns to obey God. [Genesis 26:5](#) adds a very important note about Abraham, “[Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.](#)” This is important for at least two reasons.

[First](#), this week I was having a discussion where I told a few people that Jesus gave Moses the law. *Jesus* did that. And so we cannot pit the law of Jesus in one Testament against the law of Jesus in another. One person, whom I later found out was an atheist, but who sadly speaks for many unwitting Christians said, “[That's ridiculous. Jesus wasn't even born yet.](#)” Not in human flesh, no. But here is a proof text that he was there as the Law-Giver, and it goes back even earlier than Moses. These

are the Angel's, Christ in the OT's commandments, his statues, his laws, his charge, delivered by his voice.

The Targums universally add the now familiar Memra to this verse. And yet, they also separate in some way Yahweh's law and the Memra's charge. In fact, one has Yahweh's charge, while another has the Memra's charge. Same being. These Rabbis were at the same time careful to let their people know that the law came from God, and yet were also clearly wrestling with how this Word of God Person was involved. Multiple persons.

Well, the actual Hebrew text is perfectly clear. It is all the LORD's law, that is, it is God's law, it is the Father's law, it is the Spirit's law,<sup>1</sup> and more explicitly here, it is Christ's law. Learn these things, beloved, so that you will not be fooled into splitting God's law into two different versions, one by that mean OT God of war and revenge, the other of that nice-guy loving Jesus.

Second, Notice how it says that Abraham obeyed (*shama*) the voice (*qol*),<sup>2</sup> and kept (*shamar*) the charge (*mishmereth*), the commandments (*mitsvah*), the statues (*chuqqah*), and the laws (*torah*). You have heard of the Shama: "Hear, I Israel! The LORD our God is One." *Shama* is the verb "to hear." It is rendered in the ESV as "obeyed" my voice in our verse. It is literally "Abraham heard my voice." But the idea is clearly that hearing results in doing, because it is coupled with "keeping" the other things. This is the word *shamar*. So he *shama-ed* and he *shamar-ed*. I might say he heard and heeded.

But notice, he heard and heeded *torah* and several other words that are used throughout the law of Moses, the Psalms and other places to refer to it. My point is, moral law was not created by God on Mt. Sinai. Here is it, throughout Genesis as something that God's people have always known in one form or another, and always desired to obey. Isaac is now being called to that same obedience of his father.

### Not Again

So if Jesus is coming to Isaac now in all of these ways, how will Isaac do? Now we come to the two main stories of the chapter. He settles in Gerar, where Abraham settled (**Gen 26:6**). Now, the first story begins. It is the third time that a patriarch tries to fool a king by having his wife tell everyone what she is his sister. Our story assumes that we know the first two, thus it doesn't go into all the details, because we don't need them. "When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister'" (7).

<sup>1</sup> GOING DEEPER: On the Spirit's (wind/breath) relationship to the law cf. Neh 9:29-30; Psalm 1:2-4; Zech 7:12; Rom 8:2; 2 Thess 2:8; Heb 10:28-29.

<sup>2</sup> The NAS has "Abraham obeyed Me" rather than "Abraham obeyed my voice." The latter is correct, and the former only obscures Christ's relationship to God as the voice/word.



We start to laugh, but it really isn't funny. It is only funny because of how pitiful it is. I want you to remember here that Sarah actually was Abraham's sister, his half-sister ("she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother;" Gen 20:12). But Rebekah is a cousin. There is no word for "cousin" in Hebrew, so maybe that is what he meant. But we get the impression that it is the same half-truth told by mom and dad, in which case, this is pretty much just a lie. And so the very first thing we see Isaac doing after receiving the promises of Christ, the covenant, the blessings, and all of those amazing things, is that he lies.

The second thing is that he lies because he is afraid. "For he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah'" (26:7). Just like Abraham, he became afraid. Just like you and I, he became afraid. Fear is a powerful toxin that poisons our reason and our wills. It is the opposite of love, for perfect love casts out fear. Frankly, it is a sin, because fear does not trust God to be good to me and to carry out his word. So the first two things we see Isaac doing are sins. And both point us back to Abraham, lest we suddenly find ourselves wanting to idolize our hero, we learn that all of the patriarchs are sinners, which will only become more evident with Jacob.

At any rate, as before, Isaac and Rebekah are discovered. However, this time there is no direct intervention from God. Rather, after having been in the city for a long time, "Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife" (8). Now this is just brilliant story telling. What does Isaac's (*Yitschaq*) name mean? "laugh." What is he doing with Rebekah? The word is *tsachaq*. It is a play on his name.

The ESV brings that out with the translation "laughing." But you and I both know they are not telling jokes after having come home from a Steven Wright concert. Other translations say "caressing" or "fondling." Isaac was delighting in his beautiful bride. The word play is brilliant: (using the lemmas of the words) *Yitschaq tsachaq ... ishshah*.

But what is the point? Abimelech has found them out. Was he suspicious? Was this just an innocent gaze through his window? My guess is that he wanted to get at the bottom of their relationship. It apparently wasn't very difficult. He just looked out of a window. As soon as he found them out, you have to think that Abimelech's mind suddenly went back all those years earlier when this guy's father pulled the same stunt and God closed the wombs of all the women in the city. How could he be so gullible? (Did you know that "gullible" is not in the dictionary)?

The king immediately warns everyone, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death" (Gen 26:11). (Notice the death penalty even in pa-

gan societies). He has clearly learned his lesson. And **he sends Isaac away (16)** because **Isaac had become very powerful and wealthy**. Why? Listen carefully. It is because in *the midst of his sin*, **“Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundred-fold. The LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him” (12-14)**.

Here is something you will rarely hear from a pulpit. God blessed this man in the midst of his sin. Usually, we hear that God only blesses you when you are good, sort of like Santa when he comes to give presents to whoever is naughty or nice. But God is not Santa.

Why do we rarely hear such a thing? It is because we fear that if we admit this to ourselves, much less say it out loud, that it will only incite sin. **“Hey, if I’m bad and God blesses me, why shouldn’t I just keep on sinning?”** In fact, the other thing we don’t tell people (and how can we if we won’t talk about it in the first place), is that God blessed Isaac *because Christ swore that he would*. In other words, the blessing of God was not to reward bad behavior. It is for Christ’s sake first, for his honor, his name, his word that Isaac is blessed.

What happens when we admit such a thing is that **we learn to stop thinking about Christianity as being a works religion, and start seeing that God does all things for his glory and honor**. The focus stops being about us, because it is put upon God. The LORD swore he would do this. Isaac sins. The LORD keeps his word anyway.

Is this an incentive to sin? No. Rather, when you understand God’s grace in the midst of it, it actually breaks you. How could God do such a thing as that? That isn’t fair. Isaac didn’t deserve that. He wasn’t being a good little boy. But that’s just the point. It is God’s grace that does this. And it occurs over and over and over in the life of a believer in order to convict you of your sin, to bring you to Godly sorrow through God’s goodness rather than out of fear. For it shows you that God is always your heavenly Father, no matter what. **Has this happened for you?** When you hear me say this, are you repulsed that anyone would dare say such an obviously wrong thing? Or does it cause you to look at God’s grace in your own life and see that he is continuing to be near you, to bless you, to prosper you in spite of your sin, for the sake of Jesus, so that you might turn to him in faith, and/or so that you will be more conformed into his image, as you think on the cost this was to God to be able to show you grace like this without compromising his justice?

## Well, Well, Well

At this point the second story begins. We read in [Gen 26:15](#) that the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that Abraham had dug. They are trying to take back their territory, going back on their own covenants with him, and it is partly out of retaliation towards Isaac because they were jealous of him. Jealousy causes no end of scheming and sinning. But it was also partly because Isaac had deceived them. Let us look at the consequences of this deception.

After Abimelech sends Isaac away (16), Isaac settled at an encampment in the Valley of Gerar, probably not far away (17). Here, Isaac begins to dig again the wells of water that had been stopped up (18). He gave them the same names that Abraham had given them (cf. Beer-lahai-roi, [16:14](#); Beersheba, [21:31](#)).

Suddenly, Isaac's servants strike ancient black gold, old fashioned Texas Tea. Not oil, but a spring of water (19). Of course, as soon as the herdsman of Gerar found out, they came out to claim the spring as their own (20). And we learn that Isaac called the well Esek, meaning "contend" (20).

Then they dig another well and quarreled over it too, so he called it Sitnah meaning "hostility" or "enmity" (21). Then Isaac digs yet another well, but they did not quarrel over it. My guess is, Isaac is now too powerful. They beat him anymore. He wins the dispute. They give up. And why? Look at that Isaac discovered. It is because "the LORD has made room for us" so that "we shall be fruitful in the land" (22). It is because of God and God alone. In these two short stories, Isaac is learning what it means to live by faith in the promises of God towards him.

In these stories of the wells (wells were obviously of critical importance in the deserts of southern Canaan), we do not find Isaac sinning. Neither do we find him not sinning. The focus is simply on Isaac now trying to live in the land as God had commanded that he do. Was he a perfect, sinless man in his dealings with these Philistines? We don't know. That isn't its focus. The focus is on how, because he is obeying God by living in the land (see [26:3](#)) even though there is clearly hostility between himself and these other people, God not only is with him, but he is blessing him. And so Isaac confesses his faith in God's provision. This seems to me to be a real turning point in Isaac's life. He does so publicly, by naming the well Rehoboth meaning "broad places." God has provided room for Isaac. This is what faith does. It confesses its trust in God, despite circumstances. God has sworn and he keeps his promises, therefore, I confess him. One might even say that through this second story about water, that Isaac the Laughter has now found it well with his soul.

## The God of Isaac

One this side of his spiritual journey in the desert, we suddenly get **another appearance of Christ**. This is very important to the story. After naming the well, he moves travels to **Beersheba** (23). It was in the wilderness of **Beersheba** that Hagar saw the Angel of the LORD by a well (21:14, 19). It was in **Beersheba** that Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant with one another (21:31-32). It was in **Beersheba** that Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and called on the Name of the LORD: El Olam, Everlasting God (21:33). So also God appears to Isaac in the same place.

The language is the same, **Isaac sees the LORD**. This time it happens **at night** (26:24), perhaps in a vision or a dream or maybe in neither. So why does Jesus come to him? It is to *reaffirm* his earlier promises with Isaac as if to say, “See, I told you I would be with you. You have no need to fear, Isaac.” “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake” (24). “Isaac, I can see that we have a lot of work to do with you. But I made a promise to your father, and I will keep that promise, for Abraham was a man of faith in me.”

Now, in a profound demonstration of faith, the very next thing Isaac does is not sin, but **worship**. Just like his Father, but now God is no longer Abraham’s God, but Isaac’s also. “So he built an altar there and called upon the Name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well” (25). Targum Neofiti says he prayed “in the name of the Memra of the LORD.” Christians pray in the Name of Jesus. How curious.

### **The Spread of the Gospel**

Astonishingly, there is one more piece to this story. Sometime later, **Abimelech comes to Isaac** from Gerar with **Ahuzzath** his adviser and **Phicol** the commander of his army (Gen 26:26). This is similar to what happened earlier with Abraham (21:22). Isaac is rather set on edge by this, as I’m sure any of us would be too.

“Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” (26:27). A most reasonable question, I can assure you, especially when a five star general is at your door. Are you now here to make war with me? Do you see how both times in this chapter that after the LORD leaves, Abimelech enters the story? Isaac’s response previously was to lie. Now he questions. He is no longer acting like a man afraid. The Gospel seems to be working its wonders in his heart.

As it is my be in Abimelech’s too, who seems to nearly have confessed Christ himself earlier with Abraham. “They said, ‘We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not

touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD'” (26:28-29). OK, so it isn't like Abimelech is purely in awe of God, nor that he confesses him personally. He is also being political, realizing that he cannot win if Isaac decides to take vengeance, for what was happening with the wells. “Hey Isaac, it wasn't me doing that to you. Let's make a covenant.”

Isaac's reaction is one of pure gospel work. Beautifully, Isaac makes them a feast, and they ate and drank (30). This is the covenant meal before the exchanging of oaths (31). “I will not harm you. You shall be my ally and friend.” And now Isaac sends *Abimelech* away, and they departed from him in peace (31). This is the kind of fruit that the gospel is supposed to bring. It is also a demonstration of the profound witness that Isaac was to these people. They couldn't help but see the LORD at work in his life, often in spite of Isaac. God is gaining a name for himself.

It seems that this story could not end here, though. Because this is a story about life and about water, and about the Water of Life. “That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, ‘We have found water.’ He called it Shibah;<sup>3</sup> and the name of the city is Beersheba to this day” (26:32-33), not only the day that the scribe recopied this for his generation, but even in our own day, where it is still called Beersheba. And so God's workings and dealing with those whom he showed himself to nearly 4,000 years ago are still remembered. Such is the longest story in the Bible of Isaac, the man of faith, a man changed by the kindness and goodness of the God who covenants and keeps his promises. May the LORD be pleased to put you in that same story through Christ—the God of Isaac.

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<sup>3</sup> Though not the same root, there is a neat play on the Queen of Sheba ( *Shibab*, *Sheba*) from Solomon's day.