

Genesis 26A (2011)

- We've been watching several generations growing up under God's hand
 - Abraham was the first, and now that he's gone the promises and blessing of God move on down the line
 - We know the son of God's choosing, Isaac, has received those promises
 - But last week Moses had already skipped past Isaac and begun to talk about his twin boys
 - We're already looking at how God is working to deliver His promises to that next generation
 - But wait a minute...we've hardly learned anything about Isaac
 - He's still the holder of the promises of God and he is still the patriarch
 - The narrative seems to be getting ahead of itself a little
 - And so it was, because in Chapter 26 Moses presents us with a few key moments from the life of Isaac
 - Truly, this chapter gives us just about all we might know about Isaac as the patriarch
 - Frankly, there isn't much here, especially compared to Abraham and Jacob
 - Abraham has about 13 chapters while Jacob receives at least as many
 - For Isaac, it comes down to a single chapter
- So we have to see this chapter in a certain light
 - Isaac lives longer than his father Abraham, so his life was long and full
 - It didn't see the same ups and downs as Abraham, nevertheless there are a few important moments
 - And Moses chooses to highlight three experiences in Isaac's life to teach us three important points concerning his life

[Gen. 26:1](#) Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines.

[Gen. 26:2](#) The LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you.

[Gen. 26:3](#) "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.

[Gen. 26:4](#) "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;

[Gen. 26:5](#) because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."

[Gen. 26:6](#) So Isaac lived in Gerar.

- If we wanted to give Chapter 26 a title, it might be 'back to the future'
 - The little we're going to learn about Isaac follows a very familiar storyline
 - For example, Isaac lived in the land during a time of famine
 - Moses clarifies that this is not the same famine that Abraham knew
 - This one has come many decades later
 - During that earlier famine, Abraham fled to Egypt to find food
 - As we studied back then, this was not the step of faith God wanted
 - Here again, God is bringing a famine upon the land
- This time, Isaac begins to move away from the famine
 - We were told in Chapter 25 that Isaac settled in Beer-lahai-roi
 - Now he moves northwest to Gerar
 - Gerar was the land of Abimelech, king of the people who would later become the Philistines
 - Notice that Isaac doesn't move south to the Egyptian border like Abraham did in his day

- Instead, he moves away from the high desert mountain ranges to the valleys near the Mediterranean Sea coast
- This move makes sense since it places his flocks in a better grazing environment
 - But any time a famine comes to a desert land, the situation becomes desperate very quickly
 - So even after this move, Isaac doesn't have enough to feed himself and his flocks
- This famine gives the Lord an occasion to appear to Isaac for the first time
 - This is a significant moment in the story of the patriarchs
 - Up to this moment, only Abraham had received a vision from the Lord
 - All that Isaac knew concerning the Lord came from Abraham's testimony and reports
 - Isaac himself had never seen or heard anything to validate Abraham's claims concerning a covenant
 - We know that Isaac had already demonstrated faith in God and was expecting to receive the covenant promises
 - But now he receives that assurance in person
- God repeats all the major elements of the promise that we've already seen Abraham receive
 - God admonishes Isaac to stay in the land; don't go to Egypt
 - God will be with Isaac and bless Isaac
 - And Isaac will receive these lands
 - These lands refers to the entire land promised in the blessing given to Abraham in Genesis 15
 - The land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River in Iraq
 - Isaac's descendants will be innumerable and will inherit these lands as well

- And through them, all the nations of the Earth will be blessed too
- We noted back in Chapter 12 that the promises God made to Abraham were unconditional
 - God's promises weren't dependent on anything that Abraham did
 - So why does God say in v.5 that this covenant is coming to Isaac because Abraham obeyed God?
 - The answer is that the English text doesn't capture the meaning properly
 - The Hebrew word for obey is *shama*, which is the word for hear
 - Abraham heard God and kept or guarded God's commandments
 - Isaac has the benefit of these blessings because Abraham heard from God and then believed what he was told
 - Belief in God's word makes everything happen

John 6:28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

- Abraham didn't earn the blessings of the covenant; He heard God's word and He believed it
 - And Abraham's belief produced a change in his behavior
 - It didn't make Abraham sinless...Moses' account makes that clear
 - But his faith did grow him into a man who trusted in God and in His word
 - This is the normal, expected transformation that Scripture calls all believers to expect and pursue
 - Our faith changes us spiritually, and that change is expected to produce outward changes of behavior

[1John 2:3](#) By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

[1John 2:4](#) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

[1John 2:5](#) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

[1John 2:6](#) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

[1John 2:7](#) Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

- John warns that someone who claims to know Jesus should show evidence of that knowledge in their life
 - John's test isn't that we lead perfect lives or even necessarily that we have a mature walk
 - But the central truth is in v.6
 - The one who says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same manner
 - Ought means we should
 - We should expect it in ourselves and in others
 - But ought also gives room for the possibility that a few Christians might do otherwise
 - The flesh is so powerful, and it will trap some Christians in a life of disobedience
 - For a few, the ought means they aren't there yet
 - They aren't willing to acknowledge the power of sin repent and make the hard choices that will lead to putting sin aside and moving forward
- But for the majority of Christians, the ought means we – like Abraham – will show progress in our lives
 - And notice that John says in v.7 that this commandment to walk in obedience to God's word is not a new commandment
 - It's an old commandment, from the beginning

- And the beginning refers to the word Adam received in the garden
 - All mankind has been called from the beginning to walk according to the word of God
- What effect did God's word have on Isaac?
 - We see in v.6
 - Isaac remained in Gerar
 - While he might have been contemplating moving to Egypt, as his father had done, now he decided to stay where he was
 - In fact, Isaac is the only patriarch who never left the land in his entire lifetime
 - And he did so because the Lord had directed Isaac to do so
 - So the first thing Moses wanted to teach us about Isaac was he was a man who obeyed God's word
 - Perhaps even more so than Abraham – and certainly more than Jacob – Isaac was content to hear the word of the Lord and do it
 - If Abraham was the father of faith, then perhaps Isaac was the father of obedience

Gen. 26:7 When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful."

Gen. 26:8 It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah.

Gen. 26:9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'I might die on account of her.'"

Gen. 26:10 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."

Gen. 26:11 So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

- Once more, it's back to the past

- Isaac is living in a foreign land, though ironically this is the land he will receive as an inheritance
 - This land is owned by the forerunners of the Philistines
 - And Isaac's fear of the Philistines was understandable
 - They were a particularly brutal and pagan people
 - A sea people that migrated from Crete primarily in the 12th century BC, but some appeared earlier like those in Isaac's day
 - Universally hated (e.g., Egyptians thought of them as pirates)
 - Others from Crete were often called cretins as a demeaning term
- So, Isaac pulls a page from Dad's play book and calls Rebekah his sister
 - The men from the region inquire about Rebekah
 - There is only one reason to inquire about a woman
 - You are interested in marrying her
 - Isaac should have simply said she is my wife, but he feared he was vulnerable and weak and could be killed easily
 - So he tells the men that Rebekah is his sister
 - Once again, a man puts his wife at great risk to save his own neck
 - At least this time there is no indication that Rebekah is asked to lie with him as Sarah was told
- Isaac's opportunity to make this claim would have depended on being childless
 - So these events must have occurred before Jacob's and Esau's birth in Chapter 25
 - Where before Abraham and Sarah were in fact half siblings, now Isaac and Rebekah are cousins
 - But of course, that relationship doesn't change the fact that both Abraham and now Isaac are lying

- Rebekah is his wife
- Like his father before him, Isaac is displaying a belief that the ends justify the means
 - We said before that any form of deception reflects a lack of trust in the Lord
 - When we go against the Lord's commands to suit our own purposes, we declare by our actions that we don't place our trust in God's plan
 - If it were God's intention that Isaac die at the hands of the Philistines or the famine, then death would have been the best thing
 - Isaac's deception is soon discovered
 - Abimelech, king of the Philistine people, looks out a window to see Isaac caressing Rebekah
 - This is probably the son of the king who met Abraham in Chapter 20
 - The term Abimelech is a title given to the king of the Philistines
 - Still, it could be the same king since we're less than 100 years since the previous encounter and men are still living 175 years in this day
 - The word for caressing is actually the word for laugh, which if you remember is the root word for Isaac
 - So, the text actually says something like Isaac was isaac-ing with Rebecca
 - By the context, we get the point
 - Isaac was engaged in behavior with Rebekah that brothers don't normally do with sisters
 - It was something that husbands do with wives
 - And Abimelech immediately gets the point
 - Isn't it interesting that this was enough to tell Abimelech that this visitor was lying

- Isaac's behavior gave a more accurate testimony concerning the truth than did Isaac's words
- This is so ironic given we just saw how Isaac's behavior was cause for commendation a moment earlier
 - He stayed in the land to obey the voice of the Lord
 - But now Isaac's behavior becomes a witness against his own word
 - Once again the principle of 1 John 2 is proved true
 - What we do tells us more about our hearts than what we say
- What led Abimelech to see Isaac's behavior?
 - Wouldn't we credit God with this discovery?
 - Back when Abraham went into Egypt, God revealed that Sarah was Abraham's wife by bringing plagues
 - Later when Abraham did the same thing to Abimelech, God revealed the truth through a dream
 - Now God has simply given Abimelech the opportunity to see the truth in a natural moment
 - God is capable of revealing our sins in countless ways, but we should expect Him to do so sooner or later
 - Exposing our sin is the first step to ending it in our lives
 - Don't expect it to remain hidden forever
 - If not in this life, certainly in the next life

[Luke 8:17](#) "For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

- As with Pharaoh and the earlier Abimelech, this king is livid at discovering the deception
 - Once again, a foreigner has stepped into the land and lied about his wife

- And by that lie, Isaac brought the possibility that another man – perhaps even the king – might be guilty of adultery
- Wouldn't it be nice to live in a day and culture where people worried this much about violating marriage?
- Where even the leader of a nation was threatened by the prospect of committing adultery?
- In this day, this problem was serious
 - Remember that Isaac is a wealthy man, and his wealth poses a threat to Abimelech
 - So Abimelech has his own reasons to avoid a conflict
 - So the king admonished Isaac and declares that no one may touch Rebekah
 - His declaration is assurance to Isaac that he had nothing to fear in the first place
- And so Moses teaches us a second important fact concerning Isaac
 - He wasn't sinless, no more than his father
 - But God continues to bless and protect Isaac nonetheless
- In fact, look at the result of Isaac's remaining in the land as God directed

[Gen. 26:12](#) Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him,

[Gen. 26:13](#) and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy;

[Gen. 26:14](#) for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.

- Isaac grew strong and soon was a real threat to this king, just as his father had been in the earlier generation
 - The people in the land become increasingly jealous of Isaac
 - Remember this harvest comes during the years of a famine
 - It's likely that Isaac alone is seeing this increase since the famine has probably decimated the herds and crops of all those around him

- It must have been a remarkable testimony for Isaac to be rich in the midst of a famine
 - Isaac's life has resumed being a witness to God's power and mercy and grace
 - He lived in the land, he depended upon the Lord, he stopped lying to protect himself
 - And so God's presence in Isaac's life shines through
- But does His presence cause the Philistines to respond in kindness and understanding?
 - Not at all...the world will respond as enemies of God and God's people

A young man saw an elderly couple sitting down to lunch at Burger King. He notices that they ordered one meal, and an extra drink cup. As he watched, the gentleman carefully divided the hamburger in half, then counted out the fries. One for him, one for her, until each had half of them. Then he poured half of the soft drink into the extra cup, and set it in front of his wife. The old man began to eat, and his wife sat watching, with her hands folded in her lap.

The young man decided to ask if they would allow him to purchase another meal for them so that they didn't have to split theirs.

The old gentleman said, "Oh, no. We've been married 50 years, and everything has always been and will always be shared, 50/50."

The young man then asked the wife if she was going to eat, and she replied, "Not yet. It's his turn to use the teeth."