

## Genesis 26 Tales of Timidity

### I. Problem

- A. ***26:1 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.***
- B. A new famine arises and Isaac leaves Beerlahairoi (in the land of Kadesh near the Negeb) and goes to Gerar to seek help from Abimelech king of the Philistines.
- C. Recall that, although Abraham had deceived and acted badly toward Abimelech they had parted on good terms for Abraham had prayed for Abimelech and God had blessed him with offspring. Hence there seems to be some reason that he can find recourse there.
- D. Yet, it is also problematic that he seeks solace from a pagan King. Perhaps it is not too severe to state that this is the first sign of timidity? Was God sought first? At least he did not go to Egypt as did his father in similar circumstances. Yet here too he seems tempted for God will later warn him not to go.

### II. Prescription

- A. ***2 And the LORD appeared to him, and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." 6 So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.***
- B. God clearly tells him not to let fear lead him to Egypt but to stay in the promised land and to trust. THIS is the land of promise, not anywhere else.
- C. Isaac is obedient but will have trouble exactly staying put!

III. Pretext

- A. **7** *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 for the sake of Rebekah"; because she was fair to look upon. 8* *When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah his wife.*
- B. Fear again. He lies, placing his wife's honor at risk to save his own hide. His fear is irrational as we shall see since the Philistine's later respect his wife's honor more than he!
- C. The lie is exposed when Abimelech later sees Isaac and Rebekah being intimate. Perhaps Abimelech is having déjà vu (all over again!) Like father like son.

IV. Protest

- A. **9** *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.'" 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."*
- B. Once again we can discuss the objective nature of sin in class. Abimelech's fear of reprisal seems exaggerated to us in an age where we so emphasize subjectivity.

V. Proscription

- A. **11** *So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death."*
- B. Here again we see pagan virtue outshine our hero's virtue

VI. Produce

- A. **12** *And Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, 13* *and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. 14* *He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. 15* *(Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.)*
- B. Despite Isaac's fear and timidity, God blesses him. Perhaps trying to calm his fear? But another test is soon to come. Will Isaac stay put where God has placed him or will he yield again to fear and move away from the promise? Stay tuned.

VII. Processions

- A. *16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us; for you are much mightier than we." 17 So Isaac departed from there, and encamped in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there. 18 And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names which his father had given them. 19 But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of springing water, 20 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. 21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called its name Sitnah. 22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and over that they did not quarrel; so he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." 23 From there he went up to Beersheba.*
- B. So here is the test. God had told Isaac to stay put. But when conflict arises, Isaac fears man, not God and moves. Every time a conflict arises, Isaac flees rather than stand his ground
- C. Was his “truster” damaged? Whence this timidity? Again, we can talk in class of this.
- D. It is interesting that he is redigging the wells of his father. Is there symbolism here? Perhaps the sins and issues of the father are revisiting the son?
- E. It is also odd that the Philistines would have filled in a well. Why would anyone do such a thing in an arid land? Perhaps they were attempting to hide the valuable water source from others?
- F. Names:
1. **Gerar** - a rough country from the Hebrew garar, meaning to drag off roughly; by impl. to bring up the cud (i.e. ruminant); by analogy to saw:--catch, chew, destroy.
  2. **Esek** - strife
  3. **Sitnah** - opposition
  4. **Rehoboth** - room, a width, avenue or area:--broad place (way), street. It is interesting that even after concluding that God had somehow made a way, Isaac moves on yet again! He goes back to Beersheba.

VIII. Promise

- A. **24 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 descendants for my servant Abraham's sake." 25 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.**
- B. At Beersheba (well of the oath) God seeks to reassure Isaac by renewing his oath
- C. Digging a well is a good sign that he means to stay a while.

IX. Pledges

- A. **26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. 27 Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the LORD is with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 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." 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 In the morning they rose early and took oath with one another; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.**
- B. Here again is evidence that Isaac's fear was misplaced for it is the Philistines who fear him! They fear him on account of God, not due to any great majesty of his own.
- C. Isaac is so blessed that even his enemies must acknowledge that "God is on his side." They wisely seek a peaceful co-existence with Isaac lest his blessings extend to annihilating them!

X. Proliferation

- A. **32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." 33 He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.**
- B. **Shibah** - means seven and also oath.
- C. God will bless Isaac when he stays put.

XI. Profanation

- A. **34 When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; 35 and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.**
- B. Recall that Abraham had been careful to have a wife for Isaac taken not from among the local inhabitants (Canaanites, Hittites, etc.) But carefully instructed that she be sought among his own kin:
1. Gen 24: 2 *And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."*
- C. From the modern point of view this all might seem a bit racist. There may in fact be some of this but there is more to it and we can discuss the reasons for this in class.
- D. Here too though is a sign of timidity for Isaac should have asserted himself in the marriage decision of Esau. By yielding he welcomes trouble.
- E. Isaac and Rebekah would later be more decisive
1. Gen 27:46 *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"* 28:1 *Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham!"* Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, Esau went to Ishmael and took to wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.