

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

A famine in the land obliges Isaac to leave Beer-sheba and go to Gerar, v. 1. God appears to him, and warns him not to go to Egypt, v. 2. Renews the promises to him which he had made to his father Abraham, vv. 3-5. Isaac dwells at Gerar, v. 6. Being questioned concerning Rebekah, and fearing to lose his life on her account, he calls her his sister, v. 7. Abimelech the king discovers, by certain familiarities which he had noticed between Isaac and Rebekah, that she was his wife, v. 8. Calls Isaac and reproaches him for his insincerity, vv. 9, 10. He gives a strict command to all his people not to molest either Isaac or his wife, v. 11. Isaac applies himself to husbandry and breeding of cattle, and has a great increase, vv. 12-14. Is envied by the Philistines, who stop up the wells he had dug, v. 15. Is desired by Abimelech to remove, v. 16. He obeys, and fixes his tent in the valley of Gerar, v. 17. Opens the wells dug in the days of Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up, v. 18. Digs the well, Ezekiel 19:1-14, 20; and the well Sitnah, Ezekiel 20:21; and the well Rehoboth, Ezekiel 20:22. Returns to Beer-sheba, Ezekiel 20:23. God appears to him, and renews his promises, Ezekiel 20:24. He builds an altar there, pitches his tent, and digs a well, Ezekiel 20:25. Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phichol, visit him, Ezekiel 20:26. Isaac accuses them of unkindness, Ezekiel 20:27. They beg him to make a covenant with them, Ezekiel 20:28, Ezekiel 20:29. He makes them a feast, and they bind themselves to each other by an oath, Ezekiel 20:30, Ezekiel 20:31. The well dug by Isaac's servants (Genesis 26:25) called Shebah, Genesis 26:33. Esau, at forty years of age, marries two wives of the Hittites, Genesis 26:34, at which Isaac and Rebekah are grieved, Genesis 26:35.

Verse 1

There was a famine - When this happened we cannot tell; it appears to have been after the death of Abraham. Concerning the first famine, see Genesis 12:10.

Abimelech - As we know not the time when the famine happened, so we cannot tell whether this was the same Abimelech, Phichol, etc., which are mentioned Genesis 20:1, Genesis 20:2, etc., or the sons or other descendants of these persons.

Verse 2

Go not down into Egypt - As Abraham had taken refuge in that country, it is probable that Isaac was preparing to go thither also; and God, foreseeing that he would there meet with trials, etc., which might prove fatal to his peace or to his piety, warns him not to fulfill his intention.

Verse 3

Sojourn in this land - In Gerar, whither he had gone, Genesis 26:1, and where we find he settled, Genesis 26:6, though the land of Canaan in general might be here intended. That there were serious and important reasons why Isaac should not go to Egypt, we may be fully assured, though they be not assigned here; it is probable that even Isaac himself was not informed why he should not go down to Egypt. I have already supposed that God saw trials in his way which he might not have been able to bear. While a man acknowledges God in all his ways, he will direct all his steps, though he may not choose to give him the reasons of the workings of his providence. Abraham might go safely to Egypt, Isaac might not; in firmness and decision of character there was a wide difference between the two men.

Verse 4

I will make thy seed - as the stars of heaven - A promise often repeated to Abraham, and which has been most amply fulfilled both in its literal and spiritual sense.

Verse 5

Abraham obeyed my voice - שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי (meimeri), my Word. See Genesis 15:1.

My charge - שָׁמַר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי (mishmarti), from שָׁמַר (shamar), he kept, observed, etc., the ordinances or appointments of God. These were always of two kinds:

1. Such as tended to promote moral improvement, the increase of piety, the improvement of the age, etc. And
2. Such as were typical of the promised seed, and the salvation which was to come by him.

For commandments, statutes, etc., the reader is particularly desired to refer to Leviticus 16:15, etc., where these things are all explained in the alphabetical order of the Hebrew words.

themselves to Abraham, by a solemn oath, not to injure each other in this or any other respect. See Genesis 21:25-31.

Verse 16

Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we - This is the first instance on record of what was termed among the Greeks ostracism; i.e., the banishment of a person from the state, of whose power, influence, or riches, the people were jealous. There is a remarkable saying of Bacon on this subject, which seems to intimate that he had this very circumstance under his eye: "Public envy is an ostracism that eclipseth men when they grow too great." On this same principle Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites. The Philistines appear to have been jealous of Isaac's growing prosperity, and to have considered it, not as a due reward of his industry and holiness, but as their individual loss, as though his gain was at their expense; therefore they resolved to drive him out, and take his well-cultivated ground, etc., to themselves, and compelled Abimelech to dismiss him, who gave this reason for it, *xçxixžx^a xžxžx x* (atsamta mimmennu), Thou hast obtained much wealth among us, and my people are envious of thee. Is not this the better translation? for it can hardly be supposed that Isaac was "mightier" than the king of whole tribes.

Verse 18

In the days of Abraham - Instead of *x'xTMxžxTM* (bimey), in the days, Houbigant contends we should read *xçx'xTM* (abdey), servants. Isaac dug again the wells which the servants of Abraham his father had dug. This reading is supported by the Samaritan, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; and it is probably the true one.

Verse 19

A well of springing water - *x'x*xTM xžxTMx x—xTMxTMx* (beer mayim chaiyim), A well of living waters. This is the oriental phrase for a spring, and this is its meaning both in the Old and New Testaments: Leviticus 14:5; Leviticus 14:50; Leviticus 15:30; Numbers 19:17; Song of Solomon 4:15. See also John 4:10-14; John 7:38; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1. And by these scriptures we find that an unfailing spring was an emblem of the graces and influences of the Spirit of God.

Verse 21

They dug another well - Never did any man more implicitly follow the Divine command, Resist not evil, than Isaac; whenever he found that his work was likely to be a subject of strife and contention, he gave place, and rather chose to suffer wrong than to have his own peace of mind disturbed. Thus he overcame evil with good.

Verse 24

The Lord appeared unto him - He needed especial encouragement when insulted and outraged by the Philistines; for having returned to the place where his noble father had lately died, the remembrance of his wrongs, and the remembrance of his loss, could not fail to afflict his mind; and God immediately appears to comfort and support him in his trials, by a renewal of all his promises.

Verse 25

Built an altar there - That he might have a place for God's worship, as well as a place for himself and family to dwell in.

And called upon the name of the Lord - And invoked in the name of Jehovah. See note on Genesis 12:8; See note on Genesis 13:15.

Verse 26

Abimelech went to him - When a man's ways please God, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him; so Isaac experienced on this occasion. Whether this was the same Abimelech and Phichol mentioned Genesis 21:22, we cannot tell, it is possible both might have been now alive, provided we suppose them young in the days of Abraham; but it is more likely that Abimelech was a general name of the Gerarite kings, and that Phichol was a name of office.

Ahuzzath - The Targum translates this word a company, not considering it as a proper name: "Abimelech and Phichol came with a company of their friends." The Septuagint calls him Ἰϋίλζιϋίλζι, á½• İ½İ...İ¼İ±İ³İ°İ³İ¿İ, , Ochozath, the paronym, he who conducts the bride to the bridegroom's house. Could we depend on the correctness of this version, we might draw the following curious conclusions from it:

1. That this was the son of that Abimelech the friend of Abraham.

2. That he had been lately married, and on this journey brings with him his confidential friend, to whom he had

lately entrusted the care of his spouse.

Verse 27

Seeing ye hate me - He was justified in thinking thus, because if they did not injure him, they had connived at their servants doing it.

Verse 28

Let there be now an oath betwixt us - Let us make a covenant by which we shall be mutually bound, and let it be ratified in the most solemn manner.

Verse 30

He made them a feast - Probably on the sacrifice that was offered on the occasion of making this covenant. This was a common custom.

Verse 31

They rose up be times - Early rising was general among the primitive inhabitants of the world, and this was one cause which contributed greatly to their health and longevity.

Verse 33

He called it Shebah - This was probably the same well which was called Beersheba in the time of Abraham, which the Philistines had filled up, and which the servants of Isaac had reopened. The same name is therefore given to it which it had before, with the addition of the emphatic letter x" (he), by which its signification became extended, so that now it signified not merely an oath or full, but satisfaction and abundance.

The name of the city is Beer-sheba - This name was given to it a hundred years before this time; but as the well from which it had this name originally was closed up by the Philistines, probably the name of the place was abolished with the well; when therefore Isaac reopened the well, he restored the ancient name of the place.

Verse 34

He took to wife - the daughter, etc. - It is very likely that the wives taken by Esau were daughters of chiefs among the Hittites, and by this union he sought to increase and strengthen his secular power and influence.

Verse 35

Which were a grief of mind - Not the marriage, though that was improper, but the persons; they, by their perverse and evil ways, brought bitterness into the hearts of Isaac and Rebekah. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, and that of Jerusalem, say they were addicted to idol worship, and rebelled against and would not hearken to the instructions either of Isaac or Rebekah. From Canaanites a different conduct could not be reasonably expected. Esau was far from being spiritual, and his wives were wholly carnal.

The same reflections which were suggested by Abraham's conduct in denying his wife in Egypt and Gerar, will apply to that of Isaac; but the case of Isaac was much less excusable than that of Abraham. The latter told no falsity; he only through fear suppressed a part of the truth.

1. A good man has a right to expect God's blessing on his honest industry. Isaac sowed, and received a hundred-fold, and he had possession of flocks, etc., for the Lord blessed him. Worldly men, if they pray at all, ask for temporal things: "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Most of the truly religious people go into another extreme; they forget the body, and ask only for the soul! and yet there are things requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul, and things which are only at God's disposal. The body lives for the soul's sake; its life and comfort are in many respects essentially requisite to the salvation of the soul; and therefore the things necessary for its support should be earnestly asked from the God of all grace, the Father of bounty and providence. Ye have not because ye ask not, may be said to many poor, afflicted religious people; and they are afraid to ask lest it should appear mercenary, or that they sought their portion in this life. They should be better taught. Surely to none of these will God give a stone if they ask bread: he who is so liberal of his heavenly blessings will not withhold earthly ones, which are of infinitely less consequence. Reader, expect God's blessing on thy honest industry; pray for it, and believe that God does not love thee less, who hast taken refuge in the same hope, than he loved Isaac. Plead not only his promises, but plead on the precedents he has set before thee. "Lord, thou didst so and so to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to others who trusted in thee; bless my field, bless my flocks, prosper my labor, that I may be able to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and have something to dispense to those who are in want." And will not God hear such prayers? Yea, and answer them too, for he does not willingly afflict the children of men. And we may rest assured that there is more affliction and poverty in the world than either the justice or providence of God requires. There are, however, many who owe their poverty to their want of diligence and economy; they sink down into indolence, and forget that word, Whatsoever thy hand findeth to

do, do it with thy might; nor do they consider that by idleness a man is clothed with rags. Be diligent in business and fervent in spirit, and God will withhold from thee no manner of thing that is good.

2. From many examples we find that the wealth of the primitive inhabitants of the world did not consist in gold, silver, or precious stones, but principally in flocks of useful cattle, and the produce of the field. With precious metals and precious stones they were not unacquainted, and the former were sometimes used in purchases, as we have already seen in the case of Abraham buying a field from the children of Heth. But the blessings which God promises are such as spring from the soil. Isaac sowed in the land, and had possessions of flocks and herds, and great store of servants, Genesis 26:12-14. Commerce, by which nations and individuals so suddenly rise and as suddenly fall, had not been then invented; every man was obliged to acquire property by honest and persevering labor, or be destitute. Lucky hits, fortunate speculations, and adventurous risks, could then have no place; the field must be tilled, the herds watched and fed, and the proper seasons for ploughing, sowing, reaping, and laying up, be carefully regarded and improved. No man, therefore, could grow rich by accident. Isaac waxed great and went forward, and grew until he became very great, Genesis 26:13. Speculation was of no use, for it could have no object; and consequently many incitements to knavery and to idleness, that bane of the physical and moral health of the body and soul of man, could not show themselves. Happy times! when every man wrought with his hands, and God particularly blessed his honest industry. As he had no luxuries, he had no unnatural and factitious wants, few diseases, and a long life.

O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas!

O thrice happy husbandmen! did they but know their own mercies.

But has not what is termed commerce produced the reverse of all this? A few are speculators, and the many are comparatively slaves; and slaves, not to enrich themselves, (this is impossible), but to enrich the speculators and adventurers by whom they are employed. Even the farmers become, at least partially, commercial men; and the soil, the fruitful parent of natural wealth, is comparatively disregarded: the consequence is, that the misery of the many, and the luxury of the few, increase; and from both these spring, on the one hand, pride, insolence, contempt of the poor, contempt of God's holy word and commandments, with the long catalogue of crimes which proceed from pampered appetites and unsubdued passions: and on the other, murmuring, repining, discontent, and often insubordination and revolt, the most fell and most destructive of all the evils that can degrade and curse civil society. Hence wars, fightings, and revolutions of states, and public calamities of all kinds. Bad as the world and the times are, men have made them much worse by their unnatural methods of providing for the support of life. When shall men learn that even this is but a subordinate pursuit; and that the cultivator, of the soul in the knowledge, love, and obedience of God, is essentially necessary, not only to future glory, but to present happiness?