

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 26

In this chapter we have,

I. Isaac in adversity, by reason of a famine in the land, which,

1. Obliges him to change his quarters, **#Ge 26:1**. But,
2. God visits him with direction and comfort, **#Ge 26:2-5**.
3. He foolishly denies his wife, being in distress and is reproved for it by Abimelech, **#Ge 26:6-11**.

II. Isaac in prosperity, by the blessing of God upon him, **#Ge 26:12-14**. And,

1. The Philistines were envious at him, **#Ge 26:14-17**.
2. He continued industrious in his business, **#Ge 26:18-23**.
3. God appeared to him, and encouraged him, and he devoutly acknowledged God, **#Ge 26:24-25**.
4. The Philistines, at length, made court to him, and made a covenant with him, **#Ge 26:26-33**.
5. The disagreeable marriage of his son Esau was an alloy to the comfort of his prosperity, **#Ge 26:34-35**.

Ver. 1.

Here,

I. God tried Isaac by his providence. Isaac had been trained up in a believing dependence upon the divine grant of the land of Canaan to him and his heirs; yet now there is *a famine in the land*, **#Ge 26:1**. What shall he think of the promise when the promised land will not find him bread? Is such a grant worth accepting, upon such terms, and after so long a time? Yes, Isaac will still cleave to the covenant; and the less valuable Canaan in itself seems to be the better he is taught to value it,

1. As a token of God's everlasting kindness to him; and,
2. As a type of heaven's everlasting blessedness. Note. The intrinsic worth of God's promises cannot be lessened in a believer's eye by any cross providences.

II. He directed him under this trial by his word. Isaac finds himself straitened by the scarcity of provisions. Somewhere he must go for supply; it should seem, he set out for Egypt, whither his father went in the like strait, but he takes Gerar in his way, full of thoughts, no doubt, which way he had best steer his course, till God graciously appeared to him, and determined him, abundantly to his satisfaction.

1. God bade him stay where he was, and *not go down into Egypt: Sojourn in this land*, **#Ge 26:2,3**. There was a famine in Jacob's days, and God bade him *go down into Egypt* (**#Ge 46:3,4**), a famine in Isaac's days, and God bade him *not to go down*, a famine in Abraham's days, and God left him to his liberty, directing him neither way.

This variety in the divine procedure (considering that Egypt was always a place of trial and exercise to God's people) some ground upon the different characters of these three patriarchs. Abraham was a man of very high attainments, and intimate communion with God; and to him all places and conditions were alike. Isaac was a very good man, but not cut out for hardship; therefore he is forbidden to go to Egypt. Jacob was inured to difficulties, strong and patient; and therefore he must go down into Egypt, that *the trial of his faith might be to praise, and honour, and glory*. Thus God proportions his people's trials to their strength.

2. He promised to be *with him, and bless him*, #Ge 26:3. As we may go any where with comfort when God's blessing goes with us, so we may stay any where contentedly if that blessing rest upon us.
3. He renewed the covenant with him, which had so often been made with Abraham, repeating and ratifying the promises of the land of Canaan, a numerous issue, and the Messiah, #Ge 26:3,4. Note, Those that must live by faith have need often to review, and repeat to themselves, the promises they are to live upon, especially when they are called to any instance of suffering or self-denial.
4. He recommended to him the good example of his father's obedience, as that which had preserved the entail of the covenant in his family (#Ge 26:5):

"Abraham obeyed my voice; do thou do so too, and the promise shall be sure to thee."

Abraham's obedience is here celebrated, to his honour; for by it he obtained a good report both with God and men. A great variety of words is here used to express the divine will, to which Abraham was obedient (*my voice, my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*), which may intimate that Abraham's obedience was universal; he obeyed the original laws of nature, the revealed laws of divine worship, particularly that of circumcision, and all the extraordinary precepts God gave him, as that of quitting his country, and that (which some think is more especially referred to) of the offering up of his son, which Isaac himself had reason enough to remember. Note, Those only shall have the benefit and comfort of God's covenant with their godly parents that tread in the steps of their obedience.

Ver. 6.

Isaac had now laid aside all thoughts of going to Egypt, and, in obedience to the heavenly vision, sets up his staff in Gerar, the country in which he was born (#Ge 26:6), yet there he enters into temptation, the same temptation that his good father had been once and again surprised and overcome by, namely, to deny his wife, and to give out that she was his sister. Observe,

I. How he sinned, #Ge 26:7. Because his wife was handsome, he fancied the Philistines would find some way or other to take him off, that some of them might marry her; and therefore she must pass for his sister. It is an unaccountable thing that both these great and good men should be guilty of so strange a piece of dissimulation, by which they so much exposed both their own and their wives' reputation. But we see,

1. That very good men have sometimes been guilty of very great faults and follies. Let those therefore that stand take heed lest they fall, and those that have fallen not despair of being helped up again.

2. That there is an aptness in us to imitate even the weaknesses and infirmities of those we have a value for. We have need therefore to keep our foot, lest, while we aim to tread in the steps of good men, we sometimes tread in their by-steps.

II. How he was detected, and the cheat discovered, by the king himself. Abimelech (not the same that was in Abraham's days, Genesis 20, for this was nearly 100 years after that, but this was the common name of the Philistine kings, as Caesar of the Roman emperors) saw Isaac more familiar and pleasant with Rebekah than he knew he would be with his sister (#Ge 26:8): he saw him sporting with her, or *laughing*; it is the same word with that from which Isaac has his name. *He was rejoicing with the wife of his youth, #Pr 5:18.* It becomes those in that relation to be pleasant with one another, as those that are pleased with one another. Nowhere may a man more allow himself to be innocently merry than with his own wife and children. Abimelech charged him with the fraud (#Ge 26:9), showed him how frivolous his excuse was and what might have been the bad consequences of it (#Ge 26:10), and then, to convince him how groundless and unjust his jealousy of them was, took him and his family under his particular protection, forbidding any injury to be done to him or his wife upon pain of death, #Ge 26:11. Note,

1. A lying tongue is but for a moment. Truth is the daughter of time; and, in time, it will out.
2. One sin is often the inlet to many, and therefore the beginnings of sin ought to be avoided.
3. The sins of professors shame them before those that are without.
4. God can make those that are incensed against his people, though there may be some colour of cause for it, to know that it is at their peril if they do them any hurt. See #Ps 105:14,15.

Ver. 12.

Here we have,

I. The tokens of God's good-will to Isaac. He *blessed him*, and prospered him, and made all that he had to thrive under his hands.

1. His corn multiplied strangely, #Ge 26:12. He had no land of his own, but took land of the Philistines, and sowed it; and (be it observed for the encouragement of poor tenants, that occupy other people's lands, and are honest and industrious) God blessed him with a great increase. He reaped a *hundred fold*; and there seems to be an emphasis laid upon the time: it was that *same year* when there was a famine in the land; while others scarcely reaped at all, he reaped thus plentifully. See #Isa 65:13, *My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry, #Ps 37:19, In the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*
2. His cattle also increased, #Ge 26:14. And then,
3. He had *great store of servants*, whom he employed and maintained. Note, *As goods are increased those are increased that eat them, #Ec 5:11.*

II. The tokens of the Philistines' ill-will to him. They *envied him*, #Ge 26:14. It is an instance,

1. Of the vanity of the world that the more men have of it the more they are envied, and exposed to censure and injury. *Who can stand before envy?* #Pr 27:4. See #Ec 4:4.
2. Of the corruption of nature; for that is a bad principle indeed which makes men *grieve at the good of others*, as if it must needs be ill with me because it is well with my neighbour.

(1.) They had already shown their ill-will to his family, by stopping up the wells which his father had digged, #Ge 26:15. This was spitefully done. Because they had not flocks of their own to water at these wells, they would not leave them for the use of others; so absurd a thing is malice. And it was perfidiously done, contrary to the covenant of friendship they had made with Abraham, #Ge 21:31,32. No bonds will hold ill-nature.

(2.) They expelled him out of their country, #Ge 26:16,17. The king of Gerar began to look upon him with a jealous eye. Isaac's house was like a court, and his riches and retinue eclipsed Abimelech's; and therefore he must go further off. They were weary of his neighbourhood, because they saw that the Lord blessed him; whereas, for that reason, they should the rather have courted his stay, that they also might be blessed for his sake. Isaac does not insist upon the bargain he had made with them for the lands he held, nor upon his occupying and improving them, nor does he offer to contest with them by force, though he had become very great, but very peaceably departs thence further from the royal city, and perhaps to a part of the country less fruitful. Note, We should deny ourselves both in our rights and in our conveniences, rather than quarrel: a wise and a good man will rather retire into obscurity, like Isaac here into a valley, than sit high to be the butt of envy and ill-will.

III. His constancy and continuance in his business still.

1. He kept up his husbandry, and continued industrious to find wells of water, and to fit them for his use, #Ge 26:18, &c. Though he had grown very rich, yet he was as solicitous as ever about the state of his flocks, and still looked well to his herds; when men grow great, they must take heed of thinking themselves too big and too high for their business. Though he was driven from the conveniences he had had, and could not follow his husbandry with the same ease and advantage as before, yet he set himself to make the best of the country he had come into, which it is every man's prudence to do. Observe,

(1.) He opened the wells that his father had digged (#Ge 26:18), and out of respect to his father called them by the same names that he had given them. Note, In our searches after truth, that fountain of living water, it is good to make use of the discoveries of former ages, which have been clouded by the corruptions of later times. Enquire for the old way, the wells which our fathers digged, which the adversaries of truth have stopped up: *Ask thy elders, and they shall teach thee.*

(2.) His servants dug new wells, #Ge 26:19. Note, Though we must use the light of former ages, it does not therefore follow that we must rest in it, and make no advances. We must still be building upon their foundation, *running to and fro, that knowledge may be increased*, #Da 12:4.

(3.) In digging his wells he met with much opposition, #Ge 26:20,21. Those that open the fountains of truth must expect contradiction. The first two wells which they dug were called *Esek* and *Sitnah*, *contention* and *hatred*. See here,

[1.] What is the nature of worldly things; they are made occasions of strife.

[2.] What is often the lot even of the most quiet and peaceable men in this world; those that avoid striving yet cannot avoid being striven with, #Ps 120:7. In this sense, Jeremiah was a man of contention (#Jer 15:10), and Christ himself, though he is the prince of peace.

[3.] What a mercy it is to have plenty of water, to have it without striving for it. The more common this mercy is the more reason we have to be thankful for it.

(4.) At length he removed to a quiet settlement, cleaving to his peaceable principle, rather to fly than fight, and unwilling to dwell with those that hated peace, #Ps 120:6. He preferred quietness to victory. *He dug a well, and for this they strove not, #Ge 26:22.* Note, Those that follow peace, sooner or later, shall find peace; those that study to be quiet seldom fail of being so. How unlike was Isaac to his brother Ishmael, who, right or wrong, would hold what he had, against all the world! #Ge 16:12. And which of these would we be found the followers of? This well they called *Rehoboth, enlargements*, room enough: in the two former wells we may see what the earth is, *straitness* and *strife*; men cannot thrive, for the throng of their neighbours. This well shows us what heaven is; it is *enlargement* and *peace*, room enough there, for there are many mansions.

2. He continued firm to his religion, and kept up his communion with God.

(1.) God graciously appeared to him, #Ge 26:24. When the Philistines expelled him, forced him to remove from place to place, and gave him continual molestation, then God visited him, and gave him fresh assurances of his favour. Note, When men are found false and unkind, we may comfort ourselves that God is faithful and gracious; and his time to show himself so is when we are most disappointed in our expectations from men. When Isaac had come to Beer-sheba (#Ge 26:23) it is probable that it troubled him to think of his unsettled condition, and that he could not be suffered to stay long in a place; and, in the multitude of these thoughts within him, that same night that he came weary and uneasy to Beer-sheba God brought him his comforts to delight his soul. Probably he was apprehensive that the Philistines would not let him rest there: *Fear not, says God to him, I am with thee, and will bless thee.* Those may remove with comfort that are sure of God's presence with them wherever they go.

(2.) He was not wanting in his returns of duty to God; for *there he built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord, #Ge 26:25.* Note,

[1.] Wherever we go, we must take our religion along with us. Probably Isaac's altars and his religious worship gave offence to the Philistines, and provoked them to be the more troublesome to him; yet he kept up his duty, whatever ill-will he might be exposed to by it.

[2.] The comforts and encouragements God gives us by his word should excite and quicken us to every exercise of devotion by which God may be honoured and our intercourse with heaven maintained.

Ver. 26.

We have here the contests that had been between Isaac and the Philistines issuing in a happy peace and reconciliation.

I. Abimelech pays a friendly visit to Isaac, in token of the respect he had for him, #Ge 26:26. Note, *When a man's ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, #Pr 16:7.* King's hearts are in his hands, and when he pleases he can turn them to favour his people.

II. Isaac prudently and cautiously questions his sincerity in this visit, #Ge 26:27. Note, In settling friendships and correspondences, there is need of the wisdom of the serpent, as well as the innocence of the dove; nor is it any transgression of the law of meekness and love plainly to signify our strong perception of injuries received, and to stand upon our guard in dealing with those that have acted unfairly.

III. Abimelech professes his sincerity, in this address to Isaac, and earnestly courts his friendship, #Ge 26:28,29. Some suggest that Abimelech pressed for this league with him because he feared lest Isaac, growing rich, should, some time or other, avenge himself upon them for the injuries he had received. However, he professes to do it rather from a principle of love.

1. He makes the best of their behaviour towards him. Isaac complained they had *hated him, and sent him away*. No, said Abimelech, *we sent thee away in peace*. They turned him off from the land he held of them; but they suffered him to take away his stock, and all his effects, with him. Note, The lessening of injuries is necessary to the preserving of friendship; for the aggravating of them exasperates and widens breaches. The unkindness done to us might have been worse.

2. He acknowledges the token of God's favour to him, and makes this the ground of their desire to be in league with him: *The Lord is with thee, and thou art the blessed of the Lord*. As if he had said,

"Be persuaded to overlook and pass by the injuries offered thee; for God had abundantly made up to thee the damage thou receivedst."

Note, Those whom God blesses and favours have reason enough to forgive those who hate them, since the worst enemy they have cannot do them any real hurt. Or,

"For this reason we desire thy friendship, because *God is with thee*."

Note, It is good to be in covenant and communion with those who are in covenant and communion with God, #1Jo 1:3; Zech 8:23.

3. He assures him that their present address to him was the result of mature deliberation: *We said, Let there be an oath between us*. Whatever some of his peevish envious subjects might mean otherwise, he and his prime-ministers of state, whom he had now brought with him, designed no other than a cordial friendship. Perhaps Abimelech had received, by tradition, the warning God gave to his predecessor not to hurt Abraham (#Ge 20:7), and this made him stand in such awe of Isaac, who appeared to be as much the favourite of Heaven as Abraham was.

IV. Isaac entertains him and his company, and enters into a league of friendship with him, #Ge 26:30,31. Here see how generous the good man was,

1. In giving: *He made them a feast, and bade them welcome*.

(2.) In forgiving. He did not insist upon the unkindnesses they had done him, but freely entered into a covenant of friendship with them, and bound himself never to do them any injury. Note, Religion teaches us to be neighbourly, and, as much as in us lies, to *live peaceably with all men*.

V. Providence smiled upon what Isaac did; for the same day that he made this covenant

with Abimelech his servants brought him the tidings of a well of water they had found, **#Ge 26:32,33**. He did not insist upon the restitution of the wells which the Philistines had unjustly taken from him, lest this should break off the treaty, but sat down silent under the injury; and, to recompense him for this, immediately he is enriched with a new well, which, because it suited so well to the occurrence of the day, he called by an old name, *Beer-sheba, The well of the oath*.

Ver. 34.

Here is,

1. Esau's foolish marriage--foolish, some think, in marrying two wives together, for which perhaps he is called a *fornicator* (**#Heb 12:16**), or rather in marrying Canaanites, who were strangers to the blessing of Abraham, and subject to the curse of Noah, for which he is called *profane*; for hereby he intimated that he neither desired the blessing nor dreaded the curse of God.

2. The grief and trouble it created to his tender parents.

- (1.) It grieved them that he married without asking, or at least without taking, their advice and consent: see whose steps those children tread in who either contemn or contradict their parents in disposing of themselves.

- (2.) It grieved them that he married the daughters of Hittites, who had no religion among them; for Isaac remembered his father's care concerning him, that he should by no means marry a Canaanite.

- (3.) It should seem, the wives he married were provoking in their conduct towards Isaac and Rebekah; those children have little reason to expect the blessing of God who do that which is a grief of mind to their good parents.