

Our Covenant God – Part Sixteen

A closer look at Isaac

Isaac is a pale character in comparison to his father, Abraham, and his son, Jacob. Besides the fact that he is a type of Christ, we don't have enough information to identify deeply with him. In some ways he followed in his father's footsteps, even making some of the same mistakes as Abraham did.

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was barren for twenty years. After Isaac pleaded with God on her behalf she gave birth to fraternal twin sons: Jacob and Esau. We are going to look at them in greater detail later on. Today we are focusing on Isaac.

Isaac had to learn the same lessons that Abraham learnt

As you read the story of Isaac's life you will see that Isaac did many of the things that his father, Abraham, had done – good and bad. For example:

- In the days of Isaac, just as in the days of Abraham, there was famine in the land (Genesis 26). This famine drove Isaac out of the Promised Land. He started to travel to Egypt but God stepped in and told him to go to the land of Gerar instead.
- Just like his father, Isaac lied about his wife – saying that she was his sister. He did it for the same reasons that Abraham did – he was scared that the men of the land in which he lived would kill him for his wife. This time no-one was punished for his lies; there were no plagues and no infertility as was the case with Abraham. Isaac's lie was exposed when Abimelech looked out of a window and saw Isaac being affectionate with his wife.
- Isaac also cut covenant with Abimelech. This was probably the son of the Abimelech that Abraham had cut covenant with.

Isaac's Wells

1. Beer Lahair Roi – “The Well of Him that Lives and Sees me!”

During Isaac's lifetime, he lived at many wells. Wells are really important to people who live in arid areas. A well means life or death because water is so scarce. The first well we read about in the Bible is called Beer Lahai Roi. This name means "the well of him that liveth and seeth me". It was Hagar who exclaimed at this well that God lives and sees her. Hagar, an Egyptian, had no covenant with God. She did not know Him. The gods that she knew were idols that neither lived nor saw her. Now she had come face-to-face with the real God.

After Abraham died, Isaac lived at Beer Lahai Roi. (Genesis 25:11). Jacob and Esau were fifteen years old at this time. This was before the famine drove them to the land of Gerar.

What is interesting about Beer Lahai Roi is that it was not a man-made well. In fact, if you read in Genesis 16 you will find that it is a spring that God provided in the middle of the wilderness / desert. This is significant because the God who lives and sees me is not man-made. Many people worshiped gods / idols that were man-made – being carved out of wood / stone or made from silver or gold and so on. They were man-made, lifeless, and blind. But our God – the real God – is alive and sees you! As we saw with Abraham on Mount Moriah, where God sees He also sees to it (provides). God saw to it, i.e. provided, water for Hagar at this well.

That provision is for whoever visits the well where the Living God sees them.

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2. Reopening his father's wells

The famine drove Isaac back to Gerar, the land of his birth.

Genesis 26:12-18 (NKJV) Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.

Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we." Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

While others roundabout suffered the effects of the drought God blessed him and he became the object of envy of the people of that land. In order for God's blessing to be released in his life so that his crops would grow so well, Isaac needed water. If Isaac had not found water the crops that were proof of God's blessing would have died. Thus, Isaac reopened the wells that his father had dug in that same land so many years before. These wells were closed up by the people of Gerar once Abraham died. It was a territorial issue. The wells were markers that stamped the land as Abraham's territory. The people of Gerar were determined to erase those stamps forever, thereby removing any claim by the heirs of Abraham to the land. Robert Jamieson's commentary states "The same base stratagem for annoying those against whom they have taken an umbrage is practiced still by choking the wells with sand or stones, or defiling them with putrid carcasses." (Jamieson, Robert; A.R. Fausset; and David Brown. "The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis." *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible.*)

We do not know what the names of these wells were. The only information that the text provides us with is that Isaac gave them the same names that his father had given them.

3. Contention, Accusation and a Broad Place

Genesis 26:19-22 (NKJV) Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But 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 quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

After Isaac re-opened all of his father's wells, he started to dig his own wells. The first well that Isaac dug was called Esek, meaning 'contention / injustice'. The second well that Isaac dug was called Sitnah, meaning 'opposition / accusation / hostility'. It is a stronger word than Esek is. The third well was called Rehoboth. Rehoboth means 'broad place', speaking of the fact that God made room for them because there was no quarreling over this well.

Even though Isaac rightfully owned the wells called Esek and Sitnah, each time that the people of Gerar fought with his servants over the wells, Isaac simply moved on to the next well. This tells us that Isaac did not get involved in contention even though he had suffered an injustice. He did not allow opposition / accusation / hostility to paralyze him. He didn't hang around to fight against the opposition, but instead

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moved on to dig yet another well. At this well there was no opposition and so God had enlarged him and made room for him in the land.

4. Beersheba

Thereafter, Isaac moved to Beersheba, meaning 'well of the seven/oath'. Just like his father had done before him, Isaac cut covenant with Abimelech at this well. This well existed in Abraham's day and Isaac gave it the same name that his father had given it.

Homework Question #1: Why do you think that Isaac had to learn the same lessons that his dad had learnt?

Homework Question #2: What does that teach us as Christians today and what does this teach parents today?

A memorial of the covenant at Beersheba

We see a progression from generation to generation. In part eleven of the study we saw that Abraham planted a tamarisk tree as a covenant memorial at Beersheba (Genesis 21:33); Isaac went a step further by building an altar there as a memorial to God and camping there for a while (Genesis 26:23-25); Jacob went even further by offering sacrifices to God there – probably on the same altar that Isaac built (Genesis 46:1).

The importance of the altar

An altar is a place of sacrifice to God. An altar can also be a reminder/memorial of a covenant or an encounter with God. It was often a boundary marker. A stone altar would be made using stones formed naturally – they were never to be chiseled or shaped using any tools. Stones are very interesting. The early altars as well as Jacob's pillars were natural stone. Stone symbolizes permanence. Uncut stone speaks of it being the way God made it, unhampered by human effort. Stones don't absorb and therefore they are always ritually pure.

A sacrifice always gives up its life. Its blood is always shed. There is no such thing as a partially sacrificed animal. For the sacrificial animal the altar is a place of total commitment and surrender. A sacrifice has to be perfect. It cannot have anything wrong with it at all.

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Applying the lesson of Isaac's wells to our own lives:

A well is what we drink from. If we do not drink water we will die and so wells are essential for survival. After Abraham died, Isaac's journey started at Beer Lahai Roi, which is "the well of Him that lives and sees me." Our spiritual journeys must start at this same well. We must drink the revelation that God is alive and that He sees us.

We also need water to nourish the precious seed of God's Word in our lives. Without it, the seed will die and never bear fruit. Thus, we have to then reopen our fathers' wells. They have been stopped up by the enemy and are filled with rocks and dirt and rotting corpses.

To drink from those wells all the works of the enemy must be undone. For example, one of our spiritual fathers is Martin Luther. Martin Luther was a monk who reformed the church and changed the course of history because he had a divine revelation that it was only through faith in Jesus as Messiah that any man could be saved. However, Luther's views on women and Jews were ungodly, to say the least. His opinion was that Jews' homes should be destroyed, their synagogues burned and their money confiscated. He said that it was useless to convert any Jew, and accused them of a relentless hatred of Christianity and of many crimes. His anti-Semitic writings were a source of inspiration for Hitler. Concerning women, he said: "If a woman grows weary and at last dies from childbearing, it matters not. Let her die from bearing, she is there to do it" and "the word and works of God is quite clear, that women were made either to be wives or prostitutes."

Isaac could easily have been so revolted by the rotting corpses stopping up his father's wells that he may have abandoned them altogether. In the same way, it would be easy to be revolted by Luther's views on Jews and women and so we should be! However, if we remove the enemy's works and bury what stinks we will gain access to the clean and beautiful water that is hidden underneath it all. That precious water can save lives: that the just shall live by faith in Jesus Christ alone!

After we go through that process of opening up our fathers' wells and removing the works of the enemy we then discover living water. Living water is a natural, moving fountain. When living water is at the bottom of a well it means that the well is fed by moving underground springs. It is not stagnant water. It is alive and life-giving. (We will look at the subject of living water in more detail when we examine Jacob's well in another lesson.)

Isaac teaches us that when we start to dig our own wells we often come against opposition. It can cause quarrelling and contention and others may even use our wells as an opportunity to accuse us. When God starts to give you spiritual revelations from His Word it may be very unpopular if others don't see things the same way that you do. Sadly, it is usually your own brothers and sisters in Christ who are most likely to turn on you and accuse you if you are drinking from a well of revelation that they have never sipped from. If you, like Isaac, refuse to be drawn into the conflict and keep moving along and digging more wells then one day you will find yourself in a broad place. When you get there you will look back and find that the same people who attacked you in the past are now drinking from those wells you dug.

Once you have gone through this whole process, you will find yourself at the well of covenant oath where you are one with those who sent you away in the past. At that well of covenant oath you must build an altar and become a living sacrifice to God. This is a place of prosperity, blessing, wholeness, restoration and resurrection, to the Glory of God.

Selah.

