

## Chapter 3: The Blessings for Isaac

*Genesis 26:12–33*

When we hear God’s promises to bless his people, our minds tend to think of those blessings in one-dimensional terms. If we encounter comfort, peace, and prosperity, then we understand those experiences as blessings. On the other hand, if we encounter pain, trials, and hardship, then we view those as curses. In the life of the believer, we find God working in our lives through the good and the evil that we face. This does not mean that God does not make a distinction between good and evil. Furthermore, this does not mean that God is stingy in the blessings that he distributes to his people. On the contrary, God knows that he would do us eternal harm if we sent unhindered prosperity according to the kingdoms of this world, since our love for the pleasures of this world would choke out any true love for God and for *his* kingdom.

Instead, God blesses us by working out *all things* in this life *together* for the greatest possible good that we could receive (Rom. 8:28). This does not mean that everything we encounter will be good, considered in isolation. Rather, it means that, in the final analysis, we will recognize that God brings true, ultimate, eternal good in the way he weaves good and the bad experiences *together*. This principle provides us wisdom from God’s eternal vantage point to temper how we perceive each individual event in our lives. From this, we recognize that the good moments in life are not in themselves the best, eternal good that God is pursuing for us. This understanding keeps us from setting our hopes in the things of this world. Furthermore, we recognize in our suffering that God is still at work for our good, an encouragement that keeps us from despair. Through it all, we ultimately recognize that God is pursuing our good by pursuing a good that is *bigger* than us: the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Genesis 26:12–33 teaches us that *God blesses his people by promoting his kingdom*.

### **God Prospers his People through Pain (Genesis 26:12–22)**

In the previous passage, Isaac faced a crisis of famine (Gen. 26:11). From a human perspective, the obvious solution to that crisis was to go down to Egypt to seek relief from famine as his father, Abraham, did (Gen. 12:10) and as his son Jacob and his grandchildren will later do (Gen. 42–46). Nevertheless, God instructed Isaac not to go down to Egypt, but to await God’s blessings in the land of promise (Gen. 26:2–5). Isaac obeys this word from the Lord by remaining in Gerar (Gen. 26:6), although he then deals deceitfully with the men of Gerar by lying about his marriage (Gen. 26:7–11). Nevertheless, God protects him from the wrath of Abimelech, king of the Philistines (Gen. 26:8–11). Now, we see that God also provides for Isaac in abundance:

[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. (Gen. 26:12–13)

Isaac trusted in God’s word “against the attractions of Egypt” even though he “must remain a pilgrim” in the land of Gerar, not yet taking possession of the inheritance God promised to give to him.<sup>1</sup> In this, God blesses Isaac by reaping a hundredfold, a harvest that stands in stark contrast “with the famine in Canaan that precipitated this whole affair. A wasteland is only a few miles away, but here is Isaac, now a farmer, harvesting a bountiful crop.”<sup>2</sup> According to human wisdom, Egypt seemed like the only rational choice, but God now provides abundantly for Isaac within the land of promise.

### Blessings and Greatness

For a second time, we read that the Lord *blesses* Isaac (Gen. 26:12; cf. Gen. 25:11).<sup>3</sup> This restatement of God’s blessing toward Isaac confirms the fulfillment of God’s promise in Genesis 26:3: “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you *and will bless you*.” Isaac is experiencing the blessings that God promised on the condition that Isaac not go down to Egypt. If the first eleven verses of this chapter confirmed that Isaac is the true “successor” and heir of Abraham’s promises, then the remainder of this chapter narrates Isaac’s *experience* of laying hold of the blessings that God promised to Abraham.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that *Abraham’s* promised blessings are still in view here from the description of how Isaac “became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy” (Gen. 26:13). More literally, the Hebrew text uses the verb “to make great”: “...and the man *became great*, and he continually went, and he *became great* until he was exceedingly *great*.” This is the same word that God used in Abraham’s initial call: “And I will make of you a *great* nation, and I will bless you and *make your name great*...” (Gen. 12:2).<sup>5</sup> Isaac’s sudden increase of wealth—especially in the midst of a famine—proves that God is with him and that God is blessing him (cf. Gen. 26:3), just as God blessed Abraham (Gen. 13:2–7) and as God will bless Jacob (Gen. 30:25–43).<sup>6</sup>

Even so, we should be careful about the message that we glean from this passage. While it is true that Isaac’s growth in “greatness” demonstrates God’s blessing in his life, the reverse is *not* true. That is, the absence of material wealth in our own lives does not demonstrate God’s curse against us. Allen Ross wisely reminds us that “A narrative report that God blessed someone in a certain way is no guarantee that he will do so for all. In fact, wisdom literature later dealt with the problem of why the righteous at times suffer and face poverty and famine.” As we will soon see, Isaac’s great wealth becomes a source of conflict in his life. These blessings are not ends in themselves, but rather a miraculous provision in the midst of suffering to allow Isaac to retain “the taste of [God’s] paternal love” toward him in the midst of trials.<sup>8</sup> Allen Ross’s further comments on this issue are worth quoting in full:

The blessings that Isaac received were material, but they were proof of the spiritual heritage he had received from his father. In the New Testament also, believers often enjoy God’s blessings. It is their responsibility to live in the expectation of divine provision for the needs of this life and, when enjoying them, to proclaim the divine presence. If opposition should come, believers can take the lead from the example of Isaac on how to live in peace with all people. If believers were truly confident that God would supply all their needs no matter what hostility they face from the world, their proclamation of the faith would be far more substantive and convincing.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the Apostle Paul tells us that we have every reason to expect to receive the blessings of God’s promises to Abraham: “So then, those who are of faith [in Christ] are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” for “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [has] come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:9, 14). Notice, though, the specific blessing that Paul identifies: *receiving the promised Spirit through faith*. We may be confident that God gives us *himself* in the person of the Holy Spirit, “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession if it” (Eph. 1:14). God promises to provide for our material needs in this life, but more importantly, he promises to give us the riches of Jesus Christ in glory (cf. Eph. 1:11).

What we will also see in this passage is that God does not bless Isaac for the sake of *Isaac’s* exclusive good. God articulated his purpose for blessing Abraham and Abraham’s offspring right from the beginning of his interactions with Abraham: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, *so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:2). God bestows blessings and greatness upon Isaac so that Isaac may be a blessing to the nations surrounding him—including the Philistines who will persecute him in this passage. While we tend to see God’s blessings as existing for our consumption, God blesses us for the consummation of his Son’s kingdom in the world.

### Envy and Strife

Isaac’s blessings do not entirely insulate him from suffering. In fact, Isaac’s blessings become the source of envy and strife from the Philistines among whom he dwells:

[14] He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. [15] (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) [16] And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.” (Gen. 26:14–16)

Previously, Isaac nearly brought great guilt on the Philistines by lying that Rebekah was merely his sister (Gen. 26:10), and now his prosperity draws even more ill will from the people he betrayed: “That Isaac would lie to them is bad enough. That he would subsequently prosper beyond them is worse again.”<sup>10</sup> Later, the same term for “envied” will also describe the envy of barren Rachel toward her fruitful sister, Leah (Gen. 30:1), as well as the envy of Jacob’s older sons toward Joseph (Gen. 37:11).<sup>11</sup> In all three cases, this word *envy* describes a powerful sense of motivation to defeat a personal threat in one way or another.

Here, this envy drives the Philistines to hinder the growth of Isaac’s greatness by filling water wells with earth (Gen. 26:15).<sup>12</sup> The subject of *wells* will dominate the rest of this narrative, since Isaac’s physical wealth (including crops and livestock) depends on a steady source of water.<sup>13</sup> Now, the explicit reference to the famine in the days of Abraham (Gen. 26:1) reminded us of Abraham’s faithless journey down to Egypt (Gen. 12:10) as a backdrop to Isaac’s option to go down to Egypt as well. Here, the reference to the wells that “his father’s servants” dug “in the days of Abraham his father” (Gen. 26:15) remind us that Abraham not only *dug* those wells, but that he also secured a treaty with the Philistines that Abraham’s claim to water from the well he dug (Gen. 21:25–30).<sup>14</sup>

*Unlike* his father, Isaac did not go down to Egypt; *like* his father, Isaac will enter into another treaty with the Philistines of Gerar over water rights (Gen. 26:28).

Beyond Abraham's negotiations with the Philistines in Genesis 21, the narrator uses language here from two other stories. First, Isaac's separation from Abimelech reminds us of Abraham's separation from Lot in Genesis 13:

Just as Abraham's prosperity became the occasion for the conflict between Abraham's shepherds and those of Lot (13:2–7), so also Isaac's wealth angered the Philistines. They became jealous and contention arose. Again the writer is intent on drawing a line of comparison between Abraham and Lot (chap. 13) on the one hand, and Isaac and Abimelech on the other. Thus this section relates that "the shepherds of Gerar contended with the shepherds of Isaac" (26:20), virtually using identical terms as in the narrative of contention which broke out between the shepherds of Abraham and the shepherds of Lot (13:7).<sup>15</sup>

In Genesis 13, Abraham sought a peaceful resolution by separating from Lot (Gen. 13:8–13). Here, Abimelech forcibly separates from Isaac by sending Isaac away: "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we" (Gen. 26:16). Later, Pharaoh will send away Moses in nearly identical language in Hebrew: "Get away from me" (Ex. 10:28).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the description of Isaac as "much mightier than" the Philistines is only used elsewhere to describe the Israelites in comparison to the Egyptians (Ex. 1:7, 20).<sup>17</sup> In that story also, God's blessing on his people causes them to flourish, but also draws the wrath of the people among whom they live as sojourners.

### Wilderness Wanderings

After his expulsion, Isaac finds himself "caught between a hostile city and a waterless countryside."<sup>18</sup> In order for him, his household, and his livestock to survive, Isaac must find water or perish. At the beginning of this chapter, Isaac had no food (Gen. 26:1), and now he has no water:

[17] So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. [18] And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. [19] But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring 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 they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." (Gen. 26:17–22)

Once again, the narrator uses precise language because he intends for us to hear echoes of other stories from the Bible. Here, the word "encamped" (Gen. 26:17) is used once more in the book of Genesis (33:18), but "elsewhere in the Pentateuch always refers to the Israelites' camping in the wilderness (e.g., Exod 14:2; 19:2; Num 33:5–49). Like Abraham's before him, Isaac's life foreshadows the experiences of his descendants."<sup>19</sup> Just as the people of Israel searched perpetual for water in the

wilderness (Ex. 15:22–27; 17:1–7; Num. 20:10–13), so Isaac moves from site to site, digging new wells in search of water.

Even though Isaac departs from the Philistines, “the squabble over water rights between the two peoples remained.”<sup>20</sup> Isaac gives two wells negative names (Esek and Sitnah) before eventually opening up a well that does not draw quarreling, which he calls Rehoboth. Although the narrative passes rather quickly to the final story of success, make no mistake—Isaac endured a significant amount of hardship in seeking a well. The word “Sitnah” comes from the same Hebrew word for which we get our word, “Satan,” meaning “opposition.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, when Isaac finds a spring of water, the herdsmen of Gerar *quarrel* with Isaac’s herdsmen, insisting that the water belongs to them (Gen. 26:20). This word for *quarrel* (*rib*) was the same word that appeared to describe the “strife” (Gen. 13:7) between Abraham’s herdsmen and Lot’s herdsmen; however, it is also the same root word for *Meribah*, the site of Israel’s quarreling over water in the wilderness (Ex. 17:7).<sup>22</sup> Isaac lays hold of the Lord’s blessings, but not without significant opposition and suffering.

### Fruitfulness in the Land

Ultimately, though, Isaac does find a “room” in the land at the well of Rehoboth. When Isaac finally secures his uncontested well, he praises the Lord for his provision: “For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land” (Gen. 26:22). The word for “fruitfulness” recalls God’s original promises to bless his people by making them “fruitful” in the land (Gen. 1:28).<sup>23</sup> Additionally, God restated this promise to Abraham: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful” (Gen. 17:6; cf. Gen. 17:20). With a well for water, Isaac recognizes that the Lord has provided him what he needs to be fruitful in the land of his sojourning.

From the beginning, God has sought a fruitful people. God not only sought fruitfulness originally from the first human beings (Gen. 1:28), but from Israel (cf. Deut. 7:13). Ultimately, rather than becoming a fruitful vine in the land of Canaan (Ps. 80:8–16; Isa. 5:1–7), Israel instead becomes a dry, barren, useless vine, good only to be burned in the fire (Eze. 15) because of their faithlessness and sin. For this reason, Jesus came into the world to make his people abundantly fruitful by abiding in him (John 15:1–11). Today, God gives us his Spirit so that we will bear the Spirit’s fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). We cannot understand Isaac’s hopeful cry of becoming “fruitful in the land” as a desire for growing greater according to the kingdoms of this world. Rather, he is expressing God’s intention to raise up a fruitful people as his kingdom in the world.

### God Proclaims his Word (Genesis 26:23–25)

God does not build his kingdom in this world with material provision alone. Much more, God proclaims his word to Isaac:

[23] From there he went up to Beersheba. [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 offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.” (Gen. 26:23–24)

In this chapter, Isaac has lacked both food and water. Not only has God met Isaac’s physical needs,

but God also provides for Isaac's deepest, *spiritual* needs by appearing to him this second time. As John Calvin writes, "Food, clothing, health, peace, and other advantages, afford us a taste of the Divine goodness; but when he addresses us familiarly, and expressly declares himself to be our Father, then indeed it is that he thoroughly refreshes us to satiety."<sup>24</sup> By this word, God grounds Isaac in the truth of how to understand all the painful circumstances that are swirling around him.

### Old Promises for a New Day

We have already observed the many ways that this passage of Isaac's growth in wealth, strife, and separation from the Philistines is similar to Abraham's growth in wealth, strife, and separation from Lot in Genesis 13. Here we see another element of that: "Just as the Lord had spoken to Abraham after he had separated from Lot (13:14–17) and renewed his promise of land and great prosperity, so now with Isaac, after he had returned to Beersheba, the Lord appeared and renewed the promise."<sup>25</sup> Here, by stating "I am the God of Abraham your father," the Lord does not merely identify himself, but he reminds Isaac of the promises, the oath, and the covenant that he swore to Abraham and Abraham's offspring.<sup>26</sup>

As in the earlier appearance to Isaac, God promises again to be "with" Isaac and to "bless" him and multiply his offspring for the sake of Abraham, his servant (Gen. 26:23; cf. Gen. 26:3–5). By this revelation, the Lord does not provide new information to Isaac; rather, he reapplies the same information in the midst of a new set of hardships. Earlier, Isaac needed to know that the Lord would provide food for his family if he did not take the road of human wisdom down to Egypt. Now, Isaac needs to know that God will continue to bless him in the midst of a water shortage and opposition from the Philistines. In the midst of new trials, God's people do not need a new word from the Lord. Instead, we need to hear that the same promises of the gospel apply to our current situation. We need to be reminded that the same God who has faithfully cared for his people in the past will continue to be faithful to care for us today.

### Worship and Work

Isaac responds to the Lord's revelation with renewed vigor in the areas of his worship and his work: "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" (Gen. 26:25). In building an altar, Isaac is not initiating contact with God, but responding to the word of the Lord in worship.<sup>27</sup> Abraham before him built altars (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9) and Jacob after him will build altars (Gen. 33:20; 35:7), passing down this heritage of worship through three generations of the family.<sup>28</sup> As we observed in our study of when Abraham "called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33), this language can both refer to calling *upon* the name of the Lord in prayer as well as calling *out* the name of the Lord by proclamation (cf. Ex. 34:5).<sup>29</sup> By calling *upon* the name of the Lord, Isaac is asking God to meet his own spiritual and physical needs. By calling *out* the name of the Lord, Isaac is announcing the good news of God's kingdom to the surrounding nations who are persecuting him. Although it seems unlikely that the surrounding Philistines will repent from their persecution, Isaac remains a faithful witness to the gospel of the kingdom of God through his public worship.

Additionally, this confirmation of the Lord's presence and blessing in Isaac's life reinvigorates him for his work in the land of promise. Once again, Isaac's servants undertake to dig a well where they will find plentiful water (Gen. 26:32). Just as God placed Adam in the garden of Eden to *work* it

by cultivation and to *keep* it holy according to God’s commandments (Gen. 2:15), so Isaac both works the land and keeps it holy by his worship. “Both kinds of labor projects are necessary” for Isaac to take possession of his promised inheritance.<sup>30</sup> God is establishing his kingdom inside the territory of the enemy, so there is much work to do! By hearing the promises again, Isaac finds reassurance and strength to carry on the work that God has given to him.

### **God Promotes His Kingdom (Genesis 26:26–33)**

Now that Isaac has found food and water, the only remaining trial at this stage has to do with his relationship with the Philistines. At first, it was Isaac’s own deception that caused a rift between him and Abimelech; however, that rift has grown in proportion to Isaac’s accumulation of blessings from the Lord (Gen. 26:14). Abimelech sent Isaac away (Gen. 26:16) and still Isaac flourishes under the Lord’s provision. At this point, Abimelech stops fighting Isaac and comes to Isaac to enter into a treaty with him:

[26] When 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 has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, 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.” (Gen. 26:26–29)

Just as Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army went out to Abraham (Gen. 21:22), so Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army comes to Isaac—but this time with Ahuzzath his adviser as well (Gen. 26:26).<sup>31</sup>

### The Lord’s Presence with Isaac

After his extensive mistreatment by the Philistines, Isaac tersely asks why they have come to him, “seeing that you hate me and sent me away from you” (Gen. 26:27). By Isaac’s “initial frankness and subsequent restraint,” the patriarch is able to secure lasting peace with these Philistines.<sup>32</sup> Isaac states his concerns about Abimelech’s intentions initially, but after this word he says nothing more to undercut the treaty negotiations. Abimelech has indeed been cruel to Isaac, but the king of the Philistines can no longer justify setting himself in opposition to Isaac, for “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you” (Gen. 26:28). Just as the previous Abimelech sought a covenant with Abraham after acknowledging God’s presence in Abraham’s life (Gen. 21:22–32), so this Abimelech seeks a covenant with Isaac after acknowledging God’s presence in Isaac’s life.<sup>33</sup> While not explicitly stated, this seems to be a reviving of the previous covenant rather than a new covenant altogether, even if Abimelech has acted up to this point as though the previous covenant did not exist.<sup>34</sup> God seems to have prompted Abimelech to recognize his powerlessness in the face of someone who has the power and promises of God on his side.<sup>35</sup> Is it possible that God has even used Isaac’s public proclamation of the name of Yahweh (Gen. 26:25) to bring about Abimelech’s repentance? By word and by deed, Abimelech is like other Gentiles (cf. Ex. 18:10–11; Josh. 2:9–11; 2 Kgs. 5:15) who

comes to recognize “the power and presence of Yahweh with his people.”<sup>36</sup>

For the terms of the covenant, Abimelech requests that Isaac will do the Philistines no harm (Gen. 26:29; cf. Gen. 21:23). Abimelech requests this kindness from Isaac in consideration of the treatment that the Philistines toward Isaac. Specifically, Abimelech cites the fact that the Philistines have not “touched” Isaac, a reference to the decree Abimelech made after discovering that Isaac lied to him about Rebekah: “Whoever *touches* this man or his wife shall surely be put to death” (Gen. 26:11).<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Abimelech’s claim that his people “have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace” is, at worst, a lie, and at best a “euphemism” that attempts to frame his actions toward Isaac in the best possible light.<sup>38</sup>

### Blessed for the Sake of the Nations

Finally, Abimelech closes his speech in the same way that he opened it, by acknowledging the presence of the Lord in Isaac’s life: “You are now blessed of the LORD” (Gen. 26:29). Therefore, from Abimelech’s perspective, a covenant with Isaac was his only choice:

Because the Lord was with Isaac and blessed him, the blessing would thrive, no matter how much opposition came. The more the Philistines attempted to seize the water, the more water Isaac’s servants found. In the final analysis these people, and other nations at other times, had to acknowledge that God’s hand was on the seed of Abraham. The only recourse for the Philistines was to seek peace and share the blessing. Thus it was with Isaac, and thus it would be with the nation of Israel when they were obedient worshipers enjoying God’s blessing, and thus it is with God’s people in all ages.<sup>39</sup>

So, just as Melchizedek acknowledged the Lord’s blessing of Abraham (Gen. 14:19–20), Abimelech acknowledges the Lord’s blessing of Isaac.<sup>40</sup> Also like Abraham, Isaac becomes the source of blessings for all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:2; 26:4).<sup>41</sup> This theme is the heart of Psalm 67, where the psalmist prays for God’s blessing (Ps. 67:1) in order that the nations may come to know God’s saving power (Ps. 67:2–5):

- [1] May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*
- [2] that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.
- [3] Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!
- [4] Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*
- [5] Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!
- [6] The earth has yielded its increase;



God, our God, shall bless us.  
 [7] God shall bless us;  
 let all the ends of the earth fear him! (Ps. 67)

God blesses *us* for the sake of his kingdom (Ps. 67:6–7). Whatever good or evil we encounter along the way, God is working those experiences together for our good by building up his kingdom. Through his faithfulness to us, God is calling the nations to believe in him.

Of course, not every nation responds to the power of the Lord in faith, even after seeing powerful demonstrations of the Lord's blessings for his people. Pharaoh of Egypt will see Israel growing exceedingly strong (Ex. 1:7, 20; cf. Gen. 26:16), and he will see the many ways that God preserves Israel from the plagues that Egypt endures. Nevertheless, he will refuse to let God's people go until God puts to death all the firstborn in Egypt. After Pharaoh sends Israel away, he comes back out to them like Abimelech does in coming back out to Isaac (Gen. 26:26). Pharaoh, however, does not come to seek a covenant with them. What Isaac needlessly feared about Abimelech's approach (Gen. 26:27) is true when Pharaoh comes out to Israel: he pursues them to bring them back as his slaves. Rather than humbling himself to seek the blessing of the God who has decimated his nation, Pharaoh comes one last time to seek victory from those who defeated him. Pharaoh had far more opportunities than Abimelech to hear the word of the Lord, and yet he hardens his heart against God's word each time (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 16; 9:7, 34). In response to Pharaoh's hard-hearted faithlessness, God crushes his army with the Red Sea (Ex. 14). God promises to bless all those who bless Abraham and his offspring, but he also promises to curse any who dishonor them (Gen. 12:3).

### Isaac's Covenant with Abimelech

In spite of his mistreatment at the hands of Abimelech, Isaac swears a covenant with the Philistines:

[30] So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. [31] In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. (Gen. 26:30–31)

The feast represents more than hospitality on Isaac's part; rather, communing together over a meal is "an integral element of the covenant-making process."<sup>42</sup> We also see people sharing a meal during covenant-making ceremonies in Genesis 31:54, and even God shares meals with his people to seal his covenant with them—both at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:8–11) and at the last supper of our Lord Jesus (Matt. 26:26–29).<sup>43</sup> The next morning, they exchanged oaths with one another and departed in peace (Gen. 26:31). Regardless of Abimelech's claims (Gen. 26:29), Isaac did not depart in peace from Abimelech (Gen. 26:17); nevertheless, Abimelech now departs from Isaac in true peace.<sup>44</sup>

### Provision of Water

On that very day, Isaac receives one more blessing by finding more water:

[32] That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." [33] He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. (Gen. 26:32–33)

The direct correlation of dates between the finalizing of the peace treaty and the discovery of a new well implies that these two events are “not a coincidence but a signal of the Lord’s blessing. The man could now rest comfortably in the land, knowing that his neighbors had been pacified and that provisions abounded.”<sup>45</sup> Through many trials, the Lord has provided for Isaac every step of the way. From this point forward, Isaac may walk “confidently in his father’s footsteps, experiencing for himself the incipient fulfillment of the divine promises.”<sup>46</sup> This chapter began with poverty, but it ends with plenty. Through everything, God has been building and promoting his kingdom. Isaac has endured much, but God has worked all things together for Isaac’s true, ultimate, lasting good—just as he promises to do for you and for me.

## Discussion Questions

1. Where is God prospering you? Brainstorm as many places as possible where you see the hand of God accomplishing far more than you can explain, humanly speaking. Where are you experiencing pain? Is any of your prosperity related to your pain? How is God keeping you from seeking joy from your prosperity? How is God keeping you from despair in your pain?
2. What is God working to teach you from his word right now? Which truths is he impressing on your mind? To which emotions is he ministering? Which behaviors is he addressing? Are you learning something genuinely new, or is God applying his same word to a new circumstance? What might we learn from God’s steadfast patience in teaching us his word?
3. Why does God call us to worship him? What happens when we do not respond to his word in worship? What happens when we do respond to his word in worship? How does God use worship for his glory and our good? Why does God also call us to work? What does God teach us about work? What aspect of your work is God clarifying right now by his word?
4. What kingdom work has God entrusted to you? Where has God called you to bring God’s blessing in the gospel of Jesus to the nations? What pain, bitterness, and fear have you experienced as you have sought to love those who hate you for the sake of King Jesus (cf. John 15:18–16:4)? How have you seen God meet your needs in the midst of suffering for the kingdom?

## Notes

1. Kidner, *Genesis*, 164.
2. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 200.
3. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 188.
4. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 408.
5. “This is the second time the writer has spoken of Isaac’s blessing. Its repetition is apparently to underscore the connection between Isaac’s prosperity and God’s promise to Abraham in chapter 12: ‘I will make you a great [גדול] nation and I will bless you’ (v. 2). What God promised to Abraham has been fulfilled

with Isaac; hence the text emphasizes that Isaac ‘became great’ (גדל).” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 188–89.)

6. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 191.
7. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 466.
8. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 65. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>
9. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 469.
10. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 200.
11. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 191.
12. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 200.
13. Kidner, *Genesis*, 164.
14. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 409.
15. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.
16. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 200–01.
17. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 191.
18. Kidner, *Genesis*, 164.
19. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 191.
20. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 410.
21. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 202.
22. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 410.
23. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.
24. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 68. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>
25. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.
26. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 70. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>
27. Kidner, *Genesis*, 164.
28. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 205.
29. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 469.
30. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 205.
31. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 72–73. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>
32. Kidner, *Genesis*, 165.
33. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.
34. Kidner, *Genesis*, 164.

35. “There is not the least doubt that the king was led to this measure, by a secret divine impulse. For, if he was afraid, why did he not resort to some other remedy? Why did he humble himself to supplicate a private man? Why, at least, did he not rather send for him, or command him with authority to do what he wished? But God had so forcibly impressed his mind, that he, forgetting his regal pride, sought for peace and alliance with a man who was neither covetous, nor warlike, nor furnished with a great army. Thus we may learn, that the minds of men are in the hand of God, so that he not only can incline those to gentleness who before were swelling with fury, but can humble them by terror, as often as he pleases.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 72–73. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>)

36. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 206.
37. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 198.
38. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 193.
39. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 469.
40. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 193.
41. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 189.
42. “This meal is not simply a courtesy extended by Isaac to Abimelech as host to visitor. It is, rather, an

integral element of the covenant-making process, in which, in a sense, the individual offering the meal admits the other individual to his family circle. The counterpart to Isaac's meal given to and shared with Abimelech (i.e., a visible sign of covenant making) is Abraham's gift of animals to Abimelech (21:28)." (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 207–08.)

43. Kidner, *Genesis*, 165.

44. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 193.

45. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 414.

46. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 194.