

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 26:16-35

“Isaac and Abimelek - Part 2”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. Family becomes the concern and Genesis begins to answer the third question, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” In Genesis 25, we have visited the family of Abraham, and we have seen how Abraham’s family was fractured because Abraham did not trust God completely and did not follow the plan of God for marriage. We saw how the family of Isaac, Abraham’s heir, was divided by parental favoritism. So far, we have not seen a family that remained healthy and intact. This text continues by showing what happened in Isaac’s family.)

Genesis 26:16-35

Verses 16-18

¹⁶ Then Abimelek said to Isaac, “Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”

¹⁷ So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar, where he settled. ¹⁸ Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

- Abimelek (see notes of Genesis 26:1). This may not be the same Abimelek as mentioned in 26:1. But Isaac had been so blessed that this king feared him and asked Isaac to move out of the territory which he controlled because he feared losing control of it to Isaac.
- Without delay, Isaac complied and moved farther away to the valley of Gerar. Abraham, Isaac’s father, had lived in the area to which Isaac moved before and when living there had dug wells. But to reclaim the territory in

which Abraham had lived, his neighbors filled in his wells after he left that area. When Isaac moved back to this area, he reopened the wells which Abraham had dug.

Verses 19-22

¹⁹ Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. ²⁰ But the herders of Gerar quarreled with those of Isaac and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. ²² He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

- After opening the old wells, Isaac's servants dug a new well. But the people who already lived in the land claimed that the water in the new well belonged to them. Isaac named this well "Esek." This Hebrew word means "dispute or argument."
- Isaac's servants dug a second new well and another dispute arose with the people who lived in the place. Again, they claimed that the water belonged to them. Isaac named this well "Sitnah" which means "opposition or quarrel."
- He then moved farther away and dug a third new well. He named this well "Rehoboth" which means "room." Because his neighbors did not argue about the water, Isaac assumed that this was the place where YHWH wanted him to settle.

Verses 23-25

²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

- Isaac went to Beersheba and that night YHWH appeared to him. YHWH confirmed the promise he had given to Abraham (see Genesis 12:2-3). YHWH told Isaac that he would fulfil this promise through Isaac.
- Isaac built an altar there and worshipped YHWH. He settled there and dug a well there, claiming the place as his own.

Verses 26-29

²⁶ Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. ²⁷ Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?”

²⁸ They answered, “We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the Lord.”

- As time passed, Abimelek saw that Isaac prospered and grew stronger. He came to Isaac to ask for a treaty of peace between him and Isaac.

Verses 30-33

³⁰ Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

³² That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, “We’ve found water!” ³³ He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

- Isaac and Abimelek made a treaty with each other and partnered in peace.
- Another well was dug there. “Beersheba” means, “well of the oath.”

Verses 34-35

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. ³⁵ They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah

- When Esau, Isaac’s firstborn son was 42 years old, he married two women, Judith and Basemath. He did not choose to trust God by obeying God’s plan for marriage which was one man married to one woman for life. He brought his wives into his father’s household, and they made life difficult for Isaac and Rebekah.
- So while God was blessing Isaac, his family was divided.

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