

Genesis 26 — Sequel

April 24, 2016

Has anyone watched the latest Star Wars movie? I haven't. I am not endorsing it but I will probably watch it because I love a good sequel. A good sequel is my favorite kind of movie. Growing up my favorites were the Rocky movies. In college we had Rocky movie marathons as we tried to watch them all in a row. Hollywood knows we love sequels. That is why they make so many. Other famous sequels are The Chronicles of Narnia and The Hunger Games. Today, we are going to study a great sequel.

As a church, we are studying the book of Genesis. Today we are in Genesis 26. Last week, Abraham — the great hero of the faith — died. His wife, Sarah, died a few chapters ago. Abraham and Sarah, the great heroes of faith that dominated more than 10 chapters in Genesis, were gone. The baton was passed into the hands of Abraham's son Isaac. What happened in his life? Today we study Isaac's story.

We find Isaac's life was a close sequel to Abraham's life. Isaac faced some of the exact same tests his father faced. He struggled with the same sins his father struggled with. He agonized over the same conflicts that kept his father awake at night. As Isaac obeyed God's word, he experienced the same blessings his father enjoyed.

Isaac's life was the next installment in the continuing story of men and women called by God to live by faith in God's Word and trust in God's promises. Isaac was the first sequel to Abraham but he wasn't the last. Today, you and I

are part of that lineage. We are the current installment of the Abraham-Isaac story of men and women learning to follow God by faith. This morning, before we look at our story, let's look at Isaac's story. How were God promises carried forward in his life?

1. I face the same struggles to obey God as my parents.

We struggle to obey God's Word when it makes no logical sense.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father." Genesis 26:1–3 (ESV)

Isaac ran into famine in the Promised Land. This was an economic downturn. We call it a recession. Unemployment was high. Crops weren't harvested. The farmers were hurting. If you didn't have crop insurance, you were done. There were soup lines in the cities. Everybody hunted for meat because they couldn't afford it at the supermarket. Things were bad.

Isaac did the first thing that came to mind. He did the logical thing. He started heading for Egypt. Why go to Egypt? Egypt had a Super Wal-Mart. Egypt has the Nile River so they could grow crops. They had water. The money was in Egypt. The jobs were in Egypt. Egypt was the logical place to survive a famine because they had water. It was a no-brainer. Isaac packed up the family and headed to Egypt. On the way he stopped at the Philistine city of Gerar. Isaac planned to make Gerar a potty break, a chance to refill Starbucks and top off the water in his camels for the road trip. God got ahold of him in Gerar and told him to stop right where he was and stay in Gerar, the land of famine. "Stay

where there is no money. Stay where there is no water. Stay in the Promised Land where it makes no sense to live.” This is like telling somebody to stay in Flint, MI. On paper, it makes no logical sense. Nobody wants to live there.

God told Isaac to stay in the Promised Land and trust that God would bless his obedience to God’s word.

If you have been with us for a while, this should sound familiar. It is a sequel. In Genesis 12, Abraham faced famine. Abraham panicked and ran to Egypt. Things did not work out well. He almost lost his wife to Pharaoh’s harem. He picked up a girlfriend in Egypt named Hagar, which ended up getting him and the rest of us in deep trouble for thousands of years. Egypt was not a good thing for Abraham. It would not be a good thing for Isaac. He had to trust God’s words on this one even though they made no logical sense. What would you do? Would you try and forget what God said? Would you rationalize? Would you obey your own thinking or God’s words?

Staying in Gerar, which was Philistine territory, was not an easy option. If you know your Bible, you know the Philistines were not typically friendly to God’s people. Later in the Bible David battles a giant named Goliath. Goliath was a Philistine. When you think Philistine, think enemy of God. If Isaac stayed in Gerar, he would not just be trusting God to provide him food in a famine, but he would be trusting God to protect his life because he had no legal rights because he wasn’t a citizen of this city.

Here is the million dollar question Isaac faced. It is the same question we face. Will he live by faith in God's Word when it seems to make no logical sense?

That is same challenge Abraham faced. Would Abraham trust in God's Word and wait for Sarah to conceive after menopause or would he take a girlfriend on the side and try to help God? Would Abraham obey God's word and sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah even though it made no sense? Isaac had the same challenge as his daddy. Life is a sequel. We have the same challenge. When we read God's Word, it says a lot of things that don't appear to make sense. Will we live in faith obeying God's word or will we succumb to do what looks practical and best at the moment?

Let me give you some examples. Jesus said,

...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:13 (ESV)

It is hard to forgive. I know some of you have former-spouses that have done and said horrific things. You read Colossians and think forgiveness is a good idea but your circumstances are different. Your circumstance are harder. God's words don't apply.

Will you live by faith and obey God's words, especially when they are hard?

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Luke 6:27-29 (ESV)

Jesus commanded us to not ignore our enemies but to actually go out of our way to do good to our enemies, not just tolerate them. Those are hard commands from Jesus. We like to say bad things about our enemies. Jesus' words appear to make no practical sense in this area. The only way we will obey God's Word on this is if we are willing to live by faith, trusting God will work things out, especially when God's words appear to make no logical sense. Rational sense told Isaac to go to Egypt for food in a famine. Rational sense says to say hurtful words to your enemies not help your enemies. Will you live by faith and obey God's words when they are hard to obey?

Obey God's Word and God will bless the life of my children.

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. Genesis 26:4–5 (ESV)

God told Isaac he was already the recipient of the blessing of his father. Since Abraham kept God's charge and commandments, God blessed him. God's blessing to Abraham did not just stay in Abraham's life but it cascaded into the life of his son Isaac.

We think of our walk with God as an individual thing. It isn't. As we obey God's words — especially when they are hard — we are blessed by God. God's blessing is not just for us but it overflows into the lives of our children. Living by faith obeying God's word when it is hard is not just about us. It is about blessing your children. A couple facing a rocky time in their marriage, when they obey God's Word and humble themselves and work together to save their marriage,

they are not just doing it to honor God and save their marriage. They are doing it to bless their children.

God reminded Isaac that he was enjoying the blessing of his father's obedience to God's word. Then he needed to pass the blessings of his own obedience onto his children, just like his father did for him. We are called to do the same.

I face the same temptation to sin as my parents.

It is hard to break the cycle of sin from my parents.

When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" Genesis 26:7–9 (ESV)

Isaac settled in the region of Gerar. He was living in a famine-ravaged land. He had no rights as a foreigner. Under pressure and in fear, he stepped into the same sin as his father. When Abraham went to Egypt, he lied and pretended his wife was his sister because Sarah was beautiful. He was afraid someone would kill him to get her. In Gerar, the very same Philistine city, Abraham did the same thing and pretended Sarah was his sister because he feared for his life because of her beauty. Abraham had a real problem with this particular sin. Isaac did the exact same thing with Rebekah. He lied and said she was his sister because he was afraid someone would bump him off to marry her. Isaac struggled with the same sins as his father.

Isaac had many reasons he shouldn't have given into this sin.

1. God providentially guided Isaac and Rebekah together. Isaac knew God had his hand on his wife and his life. If God brought them together, certainly God could protect him to keep them together. Isaac shouldn't have been afraid because of her beauty.
2. Isaac was a boy on Mt. Moriah when God told his daddy to sacrifice him. Isaac remembered hearing God's voice saving his life from the knife of his father. Isaac remembered God providing a ram caught in the thicket to save his life. If God could save Isaac's life on Mt. Moriah, saving his from a bunch of Philistine thugs would be no problem.
3. Isaac heard God's voice telling him to stay in this land. He also heard God promise not to hurt him but to bless him for his obedience. If God told him to stay in the land, certainly God could protect them in the land. Isaac had no good reason for living in fear and walking around with his wedding ring off.
Why did he do this?

We underestimate how hard it is to not repeat the sin of our parents, especially under pressure. The sin we see in our parent's lives is very hard to not repeat in our lives. When we find ourselves under pressure, we quickly repeat it.

We see this in alcoholism and drugs. If the parents were alcoholics, their children have a hard time breaking the cycle, especially under pressure. If parents were workaholics, children will tend to be workaholics, especially under pressure. If husbands abuse their wives, a father's son will tend to abuse his wife under pressure because that is what he learned in his home. If a mother is

a whiner and complainer, her daughter will tend to do the same thing under pressure.

I am not saying these cycles of sin can't be broken. I am saying we need to realize how easy they are to fall into. We need lots of prayer, growth in our Bible and accountability to break the cycle. Jesus can break the patterns of sin.

How many of you find yourself saying and doing things just like your parents, especially things you promised you would never do? Raise your hands. The Bible even warns us of the sins that get passed from parents to children.

So these nations feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day. 2 Kings 17:41 (ESV)

What are the sins in your life that you do under pressure that you do not want to pass onto your children? How you handle your anger? Is that the way you want your children handling their anger? How do you handle your lusts? Do you want your children doing the same? How do you treat your spouse? It will be very hard for a son or daughter to not do the same thing under pressure because they haven't seen anything different. Today, ask God to help you show them something different and through prayer and accountability. Focus on breaking that cycle.

When I sin, I expose others to the consequences of my sin.

In that day people had flat rooftops. People could spend a little time in the sun on their privacy of their flat roofs because many houses had privacy walls on the roof. While most houses were the same height, there was one house in the town that towered over the rest. That was the king's. While this is reading into the text a bit, apparently Isaac and Rebekah were sneaking a little husband and

wife time in the sun, possibly on their secluded roof, when the king happened to peep out his window at an unexpected moment. What were they doing? The Bible doesn't give us details. All we know is that it was clearly not a brother-sister relationship. It was a husband-and-wife relationship. I will let your imaginations fill in the blanks.

Abimelech called Isaac to the carpet on this one and told him he shouldn't have lied because some man might have taken Isaac's wife as his wife and then the king's nation would have been in trouble.

Isaac's sin exposed others, and the entire Philistine nation, to the consequences of his sin. Another man could have innocently entered into adultery. The entire nation could have suffered. There is no way around it. Isaac's lie was not just an attempt to protect his life. It was a set-up for handing out the consequences of sin into another's life.

Way to go Isaac. Way to love your neighbor as yourself. The lesson is that sin never stays isolated in our lives.

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. Romans 14:7 (ESV)

This simply means our lives are woven together. When we honor God, it blesses others. When we sin, we bring suffering into the lives of others. In Joshua 7, when Joshua was conquering the Promised Land, Achan was a soldier that stole stuff from God that was to be destroyed after the battle of Jericho. He kept it for himself under his tent. He kept his sin to himself. He thought nobody else would know. It didn't work that way. In Israel's next battle — against the small town of Ai — they were defeated. Thirty-six people died. Why did they

die? God withdrew his hand of protection on the nation because of Achan's sin. A bunch of innocent people died because of his sin of greed. That is the way sin works.

When a student cheats on a test, it ruins the curve for everyone else that did the hard work of studying, making innocent people suffer. When someone submits a fraudulent insurance claim, it raises the rates for the rest of us. When someone cleans out his or her lawn shed and pours toxic chemicals into Big Spirit Lake, it is the innocent little boy swimming on the other side of the lake that comes down with cancer. When you drink and drive, you usually kill somebody you never met. Sin makes innocent people suffer. That is what almost happened with Isaac. It is what can happen to you and me when we sin. Sin never stays isolated in our lives.

God, in his kindness, providentially allowed Isaac to get caught in his sin before other people suffered for his sin. Getting caught before there was more damage was God's kindness. Do you ever get angry at God because it seems every time you sin you get caught? You wonder if God hates you because you never get away with anything. When you get caught for your sin it isn't because God hates you. That is God loving you. That is God keeping innocent people from suffering for your sin.

I face the same conflicts as my parents.

If God blesses my life, expect envy of my life.

And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. (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.) And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.” So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Genesis 26:12–17 (ESV)

God kept his word. God told him to stay in the land of famine and God would bless him. That is exactly what happened. Isaac sowed a crop and reaped a hundredfold. This may not sound impressive until you remember this was a time of famine. This was a time when nobody was making money. Isaac was living by faith and God was blessing him because of it. Right in front of the Philistines Isaac got richer and richer. It seemed like everything Isaac touched turned to gold. It was not just in the fields but his flocks grew and his employee count skyrocketed. Isaac went from working in a garage to having the net worth of Microsoft and Apple combined.

Here is the problem with success. When God blesses us, it is very hard for people around us to handle it. This is the exact same problem Isaac’s father, Abraham, had in the city of Gerar.

Why is it hard for us to see people become wildly successful? There are three things that typically happen when we see others blessed.

1. **Envy.** The Hebrew says the Philistines burned with envy to have Isaac’s success and possessions. Isaac’s riches become a filter in their eyes. His wealth colored every relationship he had with people. People couldn’t be happy for him. All they could do was be jealous of him. Are you envious of other’s success or can you celebrate God’s blessing on their lives even when God hasn’t put that same blessing on your life? The Bible tells us this is to be our attitude as Christians.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Romans 12:15 (ESV)

As Christians, we celebrate with others when God blesses their lives. The reason we celebrate is because every good gift is from God. We are not celebrating the person. We celebrate God who is pouring out goodness in their lives that none of us deserve.

For many of us, this is hard in sports. I experienced it in wrestling. My high school coach had a poster in his window that essentially said, "Anyone can be a state champion if they work hard enough." The problem is I believed it. While hard work is important, not everyone can be a state champion. Some people are natural athletes. God blessed them with great abilities. They don't have to work as hard as you do, and they are wildly successful.

When natural athletes that don't work as hard as you do succeed, it is hard to celebrate. It is hard to not be filled with envy. As Christians, we are to be different. We celebrate with those who celebrate because success comes from God. Nobody deserves it. When we celebrate someone's success we are thanking God for a display of his kindness that nobody deserves.

2. **Malice.** The second thing that happens is malice. That means people move from being jealous of your success to actively working against your success to tear you down. In Abraham's case, they plugged up the wells his father dug. If you don't have water in the desert during a famine, you are essentially done. You are toast. Your animals look like raisins. They shrivel up and die.

The world does this with successful people. People put them under intense scrutiny to try and tear down their success. If they find any area of their

lives aren't perfect, they assassinate them. This is malice. God says this is not to be part of the Christian life.

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 1 Peter 2:1 (ESV)

Unfortunately, I see a lot malice in the American church toward successful pastors and churches. There are blogs and Christian groups where almost every article they write about what is wrong with a successful Christian church or ministry. I am not giving you the web addresses of these blogs because I despise them. All they do is assassinate influential Christians. They tear down people like John Piper, Rick Warren, John MacArthur and many others while these blogs offer no practical or spiritual good.

Are Piper, Warren and MacArthur perfect? No. God blessed their work and they have done a lot of good for God. Do I agree with everything they have said and done? No. But I don't engage in malice writing blog articles trying to ruin their names and their ministries. In all honesty, those kind of blogs and those fringe groups are not driven by love for Christ. They are driven by jealousy because God put his hand of blessing on an imperfect man and an imperfect ministry and chose to make them successful. The Bible says envy and malice is not to be the way we live, especially toward other Christians where we disagree with them on small points of doctrine or practice.

3. Isolation. The third thing that happens when God blesses someone is he or she often finds himself or herself pushed out and isolated. People were so jealous of Isaac that he had to move away and live alone. Imagine being so blessed by God that you have nobody to celebrate and enjoy God's blessing with

you. The church is to be just the opposite. We shouldn't envy someone's success, we should genuinely celebrate God's blessing in his or her life. We don't work against them to tear their success down, we work with them to build them up. We don't isolate the successful, we welcome them into the community and family of the church, where everyone is the undeserved recipient of salvation through Jesus. In the church, we are different.

In a conflict, I can be wronged and stay at peace while I trust God to take care of me.

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. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, 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. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that 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, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." From there he went up to Beersheba. 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." 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. Genesis 26:18–25 (ESV)

Isaac opened up wells of water that were his father's which the Philistines filled out of malice. Isaac's didn't start a war. He quietly unplugged the wells they filled in out of envy.

Isaac's servants then dug for another well in the valley. They found spring water. In the desert, especially during a famine, it was hard work to dig a well. You could dig a deep well and not find water. You often dug many wells that came up dry. Especially rare in the desert were spring-fed wells. Most wells were upper level rain water. Rain water was poor quality water. Spring water

was top quality water. Isaac's servants dug a well and found spring water. Why did this happen? God promised to bless Isaac. As you can imagine, the Philistines, out of envy, fought him for it. Did Isaac start a war to defend his ground? Did Isaac make a big stink? No. He simply told them he would name the well and they could keep the well. He called the well "Quarrel" and moved on to dig another. At the next well Isaac's servants hit water again. Every project Isaac worked on turned to gold. The Philistines were green with envy before; now they are purple. They made a big stink and fought him for it again. Notice Isaac didn't start a war. Isaac didn't insist on his rights. He simply agreed to name the well, let them have it, move on and dig another. He called the well Sitnah, which in Hebrew means adversary. It is short for Satan. I think Isaac was really struggling to keep his cool when he named the well Satan.

Finally, he moved far away and dug a well where nobody could contest. He struck water again, except this time call it Rehoboth, which means roomy.

Here is my point. Isaac was enjoying God's blessing because he was obeying God's Word. When things went bad and people became jealous of God's blessing in his life he had two options. He could have started a war and insisted on his rights or he could just gently let the Philistines have what they did not dig, remain at peace, move on and get back to work, trusting that if God blessed him once, he could do it again.

This is something we can learn. When we live by faith obeying God's words, God may bless our lives. How do we handle the envy and malice of others? We don't start a war. We stay at peace, even giving people what isn't

rightfully theirs, then we get back to the business of following God's Word while we trust him to bless us again.

Maybe at work you are doing a good job but out of envy people are slandering you behind your back. What do you do? Do you slander them back? No. Remain at peace. Don't start a war. Just stay faithful to God's Word. Keep working hard and trust God will keep blessing you. If you have to leave one job, trust he will continue blessing you at another job.

Maybe you are a salesman or saleswoman that works on commission. You work on a big order but at the last minute a fellow employee swoops in and takes part of your commission. Do you fight him or her or do you just move on and keep working and trusting God to take care of you and give you the next sale? Be known as someone who works hard and trusts God to keep blessing you.

It is a question of who you believe is in control of your future. Do you believe God is in control of our lives and promises to take care of us as we follow and obey his Word, or are you the one who has to take care of yourself because God can't? Are you a believer or a practical atheist?

But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.
Luke 12:28–31 (ESV)

As I trust God in life, temptations and conflicts God will take care of me and make his name famous through my life.

When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me,

seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” 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, 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.” So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. 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.” He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. Genesis 26:26–33 (ESV)

There existed a lot of tension between Isaac and the Philistines. It is not because Isaac had been mean to them but simply because they were jealous of him. Repeatedly the way Isaac handled conflict was peaceful. He simply let himself be wronged and trusted God to take care of it. This is what the Bible tells us to do.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:17–18 (ESV)

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 1 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

God tells us to bless people in a conflict, not to hurt others in a conflict. That is especially hard when the conflict is not your fault. It is always right to do what is right, then you leave the results in God’s hands.

I love the way this story ended up. Isaac could have created a war. He didn’t. It eventually resulted in the very people that hated him trying to make peace with him and recognizing God’s hand on his life. The peace he sought in the conflict allowed God to work in their hearts.

As long as Isaac lived in obedience to God's word, even if there was a famine, even if people were actively fighting against him, all he needed to do was obey God's words and God took care of everything.

Conclusion

I told you Isaac's story was a sequel. He faced a famine like his father, Abraham. He faced the same sin in the same city as his father. He had the same conflicts over wells as his father. Just like Abraham, when he obeyed God's words, especially when they were hard and made no logical sense and God took care of him.

There is another sequel to Isaac's story. It is your life and my life. We are the next chapter of what it means to obey God's words by faith when it seems to make no sense. This week, will you obey God's words when they are hard and seem to make no sense? Will you trust God in a conflict when you are wronged for no good reason knowing he will take care of you. If he blessed you once, he can bless you again.



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