

Isaac Reopened the Wells of His Father Abraham

26: 12-22

DIG: What did Isaac do here for the first time? Who did the wells belong to? Why? Why had Abimelech's attitude toward Isaac changed? Why do you think Abraham and Isaac both prospered even when they were not truthful? How did Isaac choose to be a peacemaker?

REFLECT: Is there peace in your valley? Are you at peace with everyone? Where in your life would you like the quarreling to stop and the reconciliation to start? What steps of faith might the LORD want you to take toward that end?

Earlier, before Isaac had practiced deception with his wife Rebekah, ADONAI had promised him, "I will bless you" (26:3). Now the Word of God records the fulfillment of His promise. Isaac (Hebrew: Yitz'chak) planted crops for the first time. Until this time, he and his father seem to have been solely occupied with raising animals. Now, however, he acquired some land, possibly by a rental agreement, on which to plant and raise crops. Perhaps the famine had persuaded him that he needed a more reliable source of food for his flock and herds. At any rate, he began to practice agriculture, and it proved highly successful.⁴¹⁹ The yield, even in very fertile regions, was generally no greater than twenty five to fifty fold.⁴²⁰ But because the LORD blessed him, Isaac reaped a hundred times as much as he expected to produce in the same year as the drought (26:12). He who promised was faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

Isaac became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. In fact, God prospered Yitz'chak so much that his wealth and influence began to surpass even that of the king of Gerar. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines, already upset because of Abimelech's protection of him, envied him so much that they started to retaliate against him. Their jealousy was so great that even during a famine, they were willing to cut off a vital water supply. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth to force Isaac out of their country. Because Yitzchak had become too powerful for them (26:13-16), they resorted to vandalism rather than war.

In the Near East, digging wells gives title to unoccupied lands. Therefore, Yitz'chak owned the land by inheritance in the vicinity of which these wells had been dug by his father Avraham. In a pastoral country it is a serious matter to stop up a well that has been dug to water flocks and herds. It is, in fact, a declaration of war and has always been looked upon as a hostile act.⁴²¹

Then Abimelech said to Yitz'chak: Please move away from us; you have become too powerful for us (26:16). The rabbis teach that the people said, "We would rather have manure from Isaac's mules than Abimelech's gold." He had indeed become too powerful. Isaac could have resisted this demand, since the earlier Abimelech had given his father the right to live anywhere in the land he wanted (20:15), and since the wells belonged to Abraham by right of construction. Also he might well have been able to defeat the Philistine colonists in battle if it had come to that because he had become too powerful for them.⁴²² Nevertheless, Yitz'chak amicably moved away from the capital, going east and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there (26:17). He was a man of peace.

To his credit, Isaac does not respond angrily against those who stopped up his father's wells. Instead, Yitz'chak reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died (26:18a). Isaac started to reopen these wells. The Philistine settlers were not using the land, so he thought they would not object. To emphasize his right to the wells because of inheritance, he gave them the same names his father had given them (26:18b). In addition to the wells of his father, Isaac's servants dug another well in the lower valley and discovered a well of fresh or living water there, providing a constant supply of running water (26:19). But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said: The water is ours! This was probably on the grounds that Yitz'chak had no right to dig new wells in their country. So he gave it to them and named the well Esek, meaning *strife* or *the Quarrel Well*, because they disputed with him (26:20). All this *strife* would eventually lead to continual warfare between the Philistines and King David.

Isaac again moved east away from Gerar and dug another well, but Philistine settlers quarreled over that one also. So he gave them the second well and named it Sitnah, which is from the same root as the Hebrew word for Satan, meaning *opposition*, *advisory* or *Hatred Well* (26:21). However, Yitz'chak refused to fight back.

He continued to move on much further from there and dug another well, and this time no one quarreled over it. The Philistine settlers, in frustration, finally left him alone. Isaac regarded this as a mark of favor from God and named it Rehoboth, meaning *broad place, or the Well of Ample Room*, saying: Now ADONAI has given us room and we will flourish in the land (26:22). Yitz'chak then left some of his flocks and herds under the care of his herdsmen, and he himself went on even further. The LORD was gently, but firmly, leading Isaac back to Beersheba.

Because we are at peace with God, we should be **peacemakers**; because we are counted righteous, we should live righteously. But peace is a two-way street. It is not possible for two persons, or two nations, to live at peace with each other if one of them is persistently belligerent (witnessed by Israel's dilemma with Palestine today). Jesus was peaceful toward all men, but all men were not peaceful toward Him. Rabbi Sha'ul clarifies this principle: **Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy (Hebrews 12:14a)**. We are responsible for our side of the **peace** process, but we cannot use another's hostility as an excuse for responding in kind unless, of course, they are trying to kill us. Then we have the right to defend ourselves (see my commentary on **Exodus Dp - You Shall Not Murder**). Consequently, under normal circumstances, have an obligation to live peaceably whether or not those around us treat us peaceably.⁴²³ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9)**.