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Isaac Reopened the Wells of His Father Abraham

26: 12-22

Isaac reopened the wells of his father Abraham 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? What victories have you won with those who would derail your ministry?

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 (see my commentary on [the Life of David, to see link click Cn - David Defeats the Philistines](#)).

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.

We find an amazing parallel to what was happening in the patriarchal period and what **the Lord** is doing today in **Isra'el**. In this age of Jewish renaissance in the homeland where **wells** are being literally dug, bringing back the desert areas of **the Negev**, we can appreciate the greatness of **the patriarchs** who combined their spreading of the true faith with the practical reclamation of the soil by digging wells and watering the ground. Indeed, the enemies are largely the same: the Canaanites. And they are still trying to stop up **the wells** and hinder the spread of the knowledge of **the God of Isra'el** throughout **the Land**. But **God** always reigns as the supreme **Sovereign** of the universe. **He** is making **His** great name increasingly known throughout **the Land**.

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 **Isra'el'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, we 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).**