

REDIGGING THE WELLS

"And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them." Genesis 26:18.

In God's Word He called Himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Because of Abraham's faith in God and faithfulness to Him, we can understand why the Heavenly Father would refer to Himself as the God of Abraham. He was a spiritual giant. We can see why He would call Himself the God of Jacob, when we think of how He redeemed him from a life of sordidness and transformed the trickster into a prince with God. But it is not quite so obvious as to why He called Himself the God of Isaac, since there was not any particularly outstanding feature in his life. What was there in Isaac's life that should have caused him to be singled out as a faithful servant of God? Isaac was one of the common people whose life was lived to the praise and glory of God.

From this study of Isaac's life we hope to get some helpful suggestions for our own conduct. From his sins we should take warning; in his virtues we may recognize an example; and in his blessings we may receive encouragement. His sins are very typical of those which mar the lives of believers today and greatly hinder their testimony for the Lord.

In many ways the life of Isaac was similar to that of Abraham. The example of his father had a great influence on his conduct. However, there seems to be an aptness in most people to imitate the weaknesses of those who are the nearest to them. Isaac was tried on the same ground where his father had failed, and, as is so frequently the case, he fell into the same trap.

It is quite a coincidence that both Abraham and Isaac should have an incident occur in their lives nearly a hundred years apart, in the same place, in which both of them lied about their wives, for the same purpose, and to kings of the same names. Isaac lied about Rebekah's relationship to him, denying that she was his wife, for the purpose of protecting himself from any harm at the hands of someone desiring her, but in so doing he subjected her to possible insult and injury at the hands of wicked men. Instead of doing that, he should have declared that she was his wife and trusted God to protect him in doing so. Obviously this Abimelech was not as kind in his dealings with Isaac as his predecessor had been with Abraham. He seemed to forgive Isaac, but not long thereafter, when he encountered some difficulties with the herdsmen, apparently the king did not make any effort to stop the evil deeds of his men.

Abraham was a pioneer. He was noted for many things. One of them is the fact that in every community where he settled for a time he dug one or more deep wells. A substantial well was a good fortune in any community and it gave Abraham a good name throughout the land.

After the death of his illustrious father, Isaac received his inheritance. He enjoyed the blessings of God upon his efforts, whereupon there was a tremendous increase in his flocks, herds and servants. Isaac's prosperity irritated the Philistines. Success and prosperity always provoke jealousy. It is not surprising that the Philistines became exceedingly envious of Isaac. Envy has been correctly named, "the slime of the soul." There is no limit to what it will lead a person to do.

Envious of Isaac, the Philistines resolved that they would get him out of the country. A most effective method of displaying the diabolical sin of envy was by filling the wells which Abraham had left with earth and debris, for the flocks and herds would die without water. This was done with the intention of driving Isaac out of their midst. How terribly blind envy makes those whom it possesses and rules. To stop up the wells was a great damage to the Philistines themselves, for they needed an adequate supply of water themselves. An envious person will rob himself of many blessings he would enjoy, simply because he cannot bear to see others enjoy them. How foolish!

Isaac's unpopularity with Abimelech seemed to increase. Presently he was told to leave Gerar. Aware that trouble was brewing, the king ordered Isaac to leave in the interest of peace. With this order there seemed to be an implication that Isaac was the cause of the trouble.

In order to avoid strife, Isaac gave up the place which he had occupied and departed thence as he had been commanded. However, he did not go very far, for he stopped in the valley of Gerar. Remaining that close by, he soon had more trouble.

Considering it the greatest calamity that could have befallen the people when the wells were filled with dirt, sand and rubbish by the spiteful Philistines, Isaac immediately ordered them reopened. He knew that he could not find any better locations for wells than Abraham, his illustrious father, had selected. When Abraham dug those wells, he did so not only for himself and for his generation, but also for Isaac and his generation, and for all the generations to come. Isaac reopened those wells because of the blessing they had been in the past, as well as for the sake of those who needed the water then, and for all who might come that way in the future. In other words, it was both a personal necessity and a public service. The wells would remain to provide water for all who might live there. That tremendous task demanded sweat, labor and toil, but it was worth it. The beauty of it is that it was done uncomplainingly.

Soon after Isaac had initiated this program of redigging Abraham's wells, he encountered additional trouble. As soon as water was obtained, the Philistine herdsmen came out and contended for the well that had been reopened, demanding it for their own use. Perhaps Isaac reasoned thus with himself: "All this trouble is due me. I lied about Rebekah. I grieved the Spirit of God. God is good to me after all."

Christians frequently complain about God permitting one of His children to go through so much trouble. Perhaps they would never ask why God does that if they did not dwell so much upon their own excellencies. If they would only recall their weaknesses, neglects and offenses they would wonder that God had not permitted something worse to come upon them. Has anybody ever treated you as badly as you have dealt with God?

Being essentially a man of peace, and much preferring to suffer injury rather than to do wrong, Isaac moved on instead of fighting for his rights. He was willing to yield his rights rather than cause contention. In order to avert serious trouble, he acceded to the wishes of the Philistines, knowing full well that there was more water to be had for the digging. Without a doubt Isaac was entitled to the use of these wells. His father had dug them and then his own servants had shoveled out the dirt which the Philistines had thrown in them. But Isaac did not insist on what was without question his right. Instead, he left the fruits of his labors to the enjoyment of others. How much happier God's children would be, and how much greater blessing they would be to others, if they would only emulate the example of Isaac! While the natural man cannot understand this kind of fighting, when instead of displaying fleshly grit we manifest heavenly grace, it is far better in the end.

Isaac sincerely believed that it was far better to trust the providence of God than to engage in fighting for his own rights, as his natural reaction to injustice would prompt him to do. He much preferred to leave his case in God's hands for future settlement. To commit to God every injustice which may be done to one and to trust him for deliverance constitute the secret of entrance into sweeter communion and greater satisfaction. Being a man of great patience and persistence, it was the policy of Isaac to continue redigging wells until his enemies got tired of fussing about and contending for them.

So, Isaac named the well which was the subject of controversy, "Esek," which means "strife," and let the Philistines have it. His servants then proceeded to dig another well which Isaac named "Sitnah," meaning "hatred." Some forty miles from Gerar they dug another well which Isaac named "Rehoboth," and here they were not molested but enjoyed peace. Isaac's

patience and perseverance had finally daunted and overcome the Philistines. He said, "For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." The room which the Lord prepares and arranges for His own is always superior to anything acquired through strife and contention.

One is impressed with the fact that Isaac did not stop with the reopening of the wells which Abraham had left. He did not say, "The wells that were good enough for my father are good enough for me." After he had reopened the old wells, he dug some new ones, from one of which the water flowed spontaneously like a fountain. So we are not merely to redig the old wells, but we must also dig some that are deeper and better. All of us owe a debt of gratitude to those who have dug the wells out of which we drink, and planted the trees in whose shade we delight or whose fruit we eat, and built the bridges over which we cross the streams. Others have labored, and we have entered into their labors. Let us dig wells and build for the generations to come.

From this incident we learn that a person who is fully dedicated to the doing of God's will can accomplish far more by making some personal sacrifices than the unyielded life can ever produce by being cantankerous. Isaac might have tried getting even with his enemies, but what would he have accomplished by the attempt? Instead, he wisely left his enemies in the hands of God and was richly rewarded with a wonderful peace, satisfaction and joy, and by being given a larger and better place.

In due time Isaac returned to Beersheba. There the Lord appeared unto him, encouraged him and blessed him in a great way. The consciousness of God's presence and personal blessings were not the only good effects of his return to Beersheba. When he got back there where God wanted him and lived a separated life, others were influenced for good by his conduct. Even Abimelech, the pagan king, was impressed with Isaac's patience in tribulation. He recognized that Isaac's God was far superior to all other gods. For this reason he wanted to make a treaty or covenant with Isaac.

In reply to the query as to the cause of the change of attitude on the part of the king, he said, "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee." What did they see that convinced them of this fact? They saw God's evident blessing on him in giving him a hundredfold harvest and in providing for him ample wells whenever he needed them, and the humble and godly manner in which Isaac had met the unkindness of the herdsmen as well as the rebuff of Abimelech himself. That had to be help from above in order for Isaac to act in this way, which was so unnatural and yet so pleasing to God. They simply watched the life of Isaac and were influenced for good by it. As we live in fellowship with the Lord, others, who are watching our lives, will be drawn closer to Christ because of what we say and do. In sweet fellowship with Him is the very best place in which any Christian can abide. Living close to the Lord will enable us to have the best influence on others.

Back at Beersheba, Isaac received a vision, erected an altar and re-established a home. He was infinitely happier there among the unsettled hills with God than with the contentious herdsmen in the crowded pastures of the valley. It is to his credit that he built an altar before he pitched his tent and had his servants to dig a well. He knew full well that the success and happiness of his home depended more upon the blessing of God than upon his own unaided efforts. It is not surprising that he built an altar, called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. The altar was his testimony to the Lord's authority; the calling upon His name was an admission of his reliance upon God; and the pitching of the tent was an evidence of his readiness to move as and when the Lord directed.

Now, let us apply this lesson. We need to redig the wells of yesterday for the generations of tomorrow. What wells do we need to dig again?

1. The well of scriptural authority.

Through the years gone by, it was widely recognized that the Word of God was authoritative. Concerning any subject whereon it spoke, its message was recognized as authoritative. Our forefathers accepted the statements of God's Word as final. Today, with all too

many, human reason, expediency and the wisdom of man are substituted for the Bible.

2. The well of the Lord's Day observance.

With multitudes Lord's Day observance is a thing of the past. It is considered the biggest day for pleasure seekers. In defiance of God's Word many work and operate business on that day to make the extra money for sinful living on other days or nights.

3. The well of prayer.

In the case of so many this well is practically closed up. What a tragedy!

Let us redig these wells because of the blessing they have been, they are and they will be in the future. Let us do these things for the generations to come.

The Bridge Builder

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,
"You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way;
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide--
Why build you the bridge at eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be--
He, too, must cross, in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him."

--Will Allen Dromgoole