

ISAAC

Genesis 26:1-17

Although Isaac lived the longest of all the patriarchs less is recorded of him than of the others. This is the only chapter exclusively devoted to his life. His was a quiet, peaceful and normal life. He was the ordinary son of a great father, and the ordinary father of a great son. Like the rest of us, Isaac's experiences were marked by light and shade, by sin and discipline, by grace and mercy. This chapter teaches us how difficulties should and should not be met. Difficulty met by:

I. Divine Guidance. Genesis 26:1-5.

Once again there arose a famine in the land of Canaan and the difficulty about food quickly became urgent with Isaac and his large household. Trials are permitted to come into the life of the best and holiest of men, and it is by this means that God sometimes teaches His most precious lessons.

Believers are not immune from the ordinary judgments and natural disasters. In this case the famine provided a test for Isaac's faith and obedience. This famine did not take place spontaneously, or independently of the control of God. His sovereign will and power brought it about.

As a result of this famine Isaac left his home and journeyed southwards into the land of the Philistines to Gerar. The question naturally arises whether he was right in taking this journey, whether he had consulted God about it, whether it was undertaken by the will of God, or prompted by his own unaided wisdom. In any case the Lord appeared to him and prevented him from going further southward into Egypt as his father had done under similar circumstances. As a gracious direct warning not to make the mistake that Abraham had made, God said, "Go not down into Egypt." Egypt was not the promised land, and there were dangers there to body and soul from which it was necessary that Isaac should be safeguarded. With the prohibition came the definite Divine instruction to remain in the land of Canaan, and the promises to his father were thereupon repeated and confirmed.

It is a warning to us as well. In times of difficulty we ought not to go down into the world and adopt worldly methods of protection or alleviation. Our duty is to rely in all circumstances on our Heavenly Father's care and trust in Him to deliver us from trouble and to supply all of our needs. Such an attitude is always inevitably richly rewarded.

God said, "Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of." We ought to dwell in that particular place on earth where God's work for us lies and to which the Holy Spirit directs us. God will tell us of it, guiding us there by circumstances or sounding a call through the need of the place.

In verse three we have a command with a twofold blessing attached, and a twofold reason for the blessing. The command is to sojourn. The child of God must always be a stranger and a sojourner on the earth. "In this land" refers to the land of promise. Accompanying this command are two blessings. "I will be with thee." There can be no higher good than the presence of God. In Him is all we need. His presence carried every good thing with it. Having Him we have all, and we need nothing but Him. God's presence gives protection from harm and keeps alive a happy relationship of love and reverence. "I will bless thee." God's blessing brings happiness, success, prosperity and increase. If a Christian is blessed it is chiefly seen in his winning of souls.

There were two reasons for God's blessing of Isaac -- His purpose and His promise. God had a great purpose for Isaac, and this was the first reason for His blessing him. In these words He expressed that purpose, "For unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all

these countries." In the same way, if we find that God is with us and is blessing us, we may be sure that He has a purpose for us, something to give us. It is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. God was with Isaac and blessed him in order that He might fulfil a promise that He had made to another in the past. God said, "I will make thy seed to multiply."

II. Human Sin. Genesis 26:6-11.

God had told Isaac to dwell in Gerar and he simply obeyed. It was not very long before he was asked by the inhabitants of the place about his wife. Following his father's evil example he told a deliberate lie by saying, "She is my sister." In this he was actuated by cowardly fear and by deplorable selfishness, "lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah." This incident illustrates the proneness of the heart to give way to temptation in spite of full knowledge of the danger that had attended identical conduct in the past. In spite of the knowledge of the reproach that Abraham's attempts at deception had brought, Isaac evidently took his cue from his father. When Abraham said the same thing about Sarah, he was telling a half-truth. Isaac was afraid. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). Isaac forgot, when he was afraid, to trust in the Lord. Like Abraham in similar circumstances Isaac was mean enough to be ready to sacrifice his wife's honor to save his own life. This led him to dishonor God by acting as if He was incapable of protecting him.

This belief in Rebekah as Isaac's sister was evidently held by the people of Gerar for some time, for it was only after Isaac had been there "a long time" that the king of the Philistines detected the sin and became convinced that Isaac and Rebekah were husband and wife. Like his predecessor before him, Abimelech was a man of uprightness, for he very plainly rebuked Isaac and reminded him of the serious consequences that might have accrued to him and to Rebekah if the facts of the case had not become known. Abimelech had a conscience and a standard, and was convinced that adultery was wrong. Is there anything sadder in this world than that a child of God should be rebuked by a man of the world? The corruption of the best is indeed the worst, and when a believer sins and his sin has to be pointed out to him by men who make no profession whatever of religion, this is indeed to sound the depths of sorrow and disappointment.

What are we to learn from Isaac thus following the evil example of his father? The readiness with which Isaac followed in the way of Abraham suggests that it is much easier for children to imitate the vices and weaknesses of their parents than it is to emulate their virtues, and that the sins of the parents are frequently perpetuated in their children. Secondly, even though Abraham and Isaac were men of vastly different temperament, yet each succumbed to the same temptation. When famine arose each fled to man for help. When in the land of Abimelech each was afraid to own his wife as such. No matter what our natural temperament may be, unless the grace of God supports and sustains us we shall inevitably fall. What a warning!

III. Divine Blessing. Genesis 26:12-17.

Because of famine Isaac had purposed to go down to Egypt, the granary of the ancient world, but on his way there he was stopped at Gerar, which was on the borderland of Canaan and about half way to Egypt. While living at Gerar Isaac occupied himself with his daily agricultural work. He sowed seed and in the very same year received an hundredfold due to the blessing of the Lord. This was an exceptional result even for that exceptional land, and the divine blessing is of course the explanation. Not only so, but his flocks grew and his household increased "until he became very great."

This prosperity soon had its inevitable outcome. "The Philistines envied him," and this envy was shown in what was perhaps the most severe and trying way. "For all the

wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth." Genesis 26:15. Thus they made it virtually impossible for Isaac to remain there, so he departed, for he did not want to stay where he was not wanted.