

Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord

Devotional Reading: Genesis 26:12-23
Background Scripture: Genesis 26:1-33

Genesis 26:24-33

²⁴ That night the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”

²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

²⁶ Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. ²⁷ Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?”

²⁸ They answered, “We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us

and you. Let us make a treaty with you ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD.”

³⁰ Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

³² That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, “We’ve found water!” ³³ He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.



Key Text

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. —Genesis 26:25

Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

Unit 1: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State the importance of Isaac's godly heritage.
2. Present evidence of God's presence with Isaac.
3. Identify evidence of God's presence in his or her life and express gratitude to God for his presence.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Treaties and Friendships
- B. Lesson Context

I. Covenant Promises (Genesis 26:24-25)

- A. God's Remembrance (v. 24)
Fear Not
- B. Isaac's Response (v. 25)
Questioning God's Faithfulness

II. Promises Kept (Genesis 26:26-33)

- A. Threat of Violence (vv. 26-27)
- B. Making Peace (vv. 28-31)
- C. Divine Provision (vv. 32-33)

Conclusion

- A. Provision of Peace
- B. Prayer
- C. Thoughts to Remember

Introduction

A. Treaties and Friendships

The formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, officially ended World War II, but a threat of conflict remained. While the Soviet Union eventually joined the Allies, the leaders of Western Europe and the United States never forgot that Joseph Stalin had signed a nonaggression pact with Germany in 1939. They knew that the Soviet Union wanted to continue to grow in territory and influence.

As a check against further aggression, the United States and 11 other nations formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. The key provision of this treaty was collective defense: the countries who signed would consider an attack against one nation as an attack on them all. Even the smaller states, who had limited militaries, would gain an umbrella of protection if a foreign power were to invade or attack. The treaty bound its signers across generations and offered future security. Leaders and administrations could change, but the descendants of those who signed continue to honor and benefit from this assurance.

While NATO is unique in many respects, similar binding agreements have been used throughout history. In the Bible and the ancient Near East, these treaties were known as “covenants.” Some covenants were made between groups of people or nations (examples: Joshua 9:14-15; 1 Samuel 20:12-17). However, much of the biblical narrative focuses on God's covenants with his people.

Last week's lesson on Genesis 22 examined the circumstances in which God guaranteed covenant protection to Abraham and his descendants. This week, we will explore how God showed himself faithful to those promises.

B. Lesson Context

After the death of Abraham (Genesis 25:1-11), the focus of Genesis shifts to Abraham's heir, Isaac. In the covenantal promises to Abraham, God committed to ensuring security and growth for Abraham's family (13:16; 15:4-5). The family line continued into a third generation when

God blessed Isaac and his wife Rebekah with twin boys, Jacob and Esau (25:19-26).

Isaac was the child of God's promise, the one to inherit the covenant blessings (Genesis 15:3-4; 18:10-14; 21:1-7). However, the security of Isaac's family was not yet clear. Some of the same patterns in Abraham's life were repeated in Isaac's. He became a wanderer in a foreign land, like his father (26:1; compare 12:10). God directed Isaac where he should go and promised him the same things that were promised to Abraham: land, innumerable descendants, and a blessing for other nations (26:2-5; compare 12:1-3). Nonetheless, Isaac experienced tensions with his neighbors and faced competition for resources (26:12-15). His lack of familial ties would have made him seem suspicious wherever he went.

Isaac also shared the same feelings of cowardice and callousness toward his wife Rebecca that Abraham felt toward Sarah. Fearing that Philistines might kill him and take Rebecca, Isaac claimed she was his sister (Genesis 26:7; compare 12:13; 20:2). Ironically, Isaac repeated this trick on a Philistine king named Abimelek, someone possibly related to the very king who had taken Abraham's wife. God providentially ensured that Abimelek saw Isaac behave intimately with Rebekah, and Abimelek forbid anyone from touching her (26:8-11; compare 20:3-13).

Abraham and Isaac both came into conflict with the Philistines over water resources. Since they were herders in the Negev—a region that receives less than 10 inches of rain per year—they both relied on finding water to sustain their herds. The first Abimelek eventually recognized Abraham's water rights (Genesis 21:25-32), but the Philistines filled up Abraham's wells with dirt after his death (26:15). As Isaac's wealth grew, the goodwill of the Philistines ran dry, and they pushed him from the land (26:17-22).

The parallels between the stories of Abraham and Isaac are crucial to understanding today's lesson. God reiterated the same promises to Isaac, but Isaac had new problems: former allies had become enemies. He was eager to know whether God would prove faithful in his situation, as God had been to his father.

I. Covenant Promises

(Genesis 26:24-25)

A. God's Remembrance (v. 24)

24. That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

After facing conflicts over water rights, Isaac departed for Beersheba (Genesis 26:23), where Abraham and the previous Philistine king had made a covenant (21:27, 31). Beersheba is located roughly 75 miles southwest of modern-day Jerusalem, at the northern tip of the Negev Desert. In this stressful situation, *the Lord* intervened to comfort Isaac. The Lord identified himself as *the God of your father Abraham*, emphasizing Isaac's heritage.

God highlighted Isaac's unique role as he offered encouragement to Isaac. The expression *do not be afraid* sometimes appears in Scripture's accounts of angelic appearances (examples: Genesis 21:17; Luke 2:10). In this case, the admonition likely targeted Isaac's fear of his circumstances. Isaac did not need to fear; God promised to remain with Isaac and *bless* him as God would *increase the number of his descendants*. These promises and the encouragement are similar to the ones God made to Abraham (Genesis 15:1, 4-5).

The explanatory phrase *for the sake of my servant Abraham* highlights why Isaac received the blessing, giving him reason to trust in God. The stipulations of God's covenant with Abraham transcended generational boundaries, benefiting Isaac and his descendants. If Isaac doubted whether God would show concern, he could rely on the fact that God would honor his previous promises to Abraham.

What Do You Think?

How can believers honor the faith traditions passed down by previous generations of God's people?

Digging Deeper

How will you encourage and support younger generations of believers in their walk with God?

Fear Not

One night, I dreamt I was being thrown overboard into the sea with a heavy load tied to my waist. On the list of things I fear the most, drowning would rank near the top. In this dream, I felt as if I had something left to say, but I couldn't communicate it before I slipped beneath the waves. I awoke from the dream, startled. Gasping for breath, I could still feel a tightness in my chest.

Sometimes, I marvel at the things people have endured for the sake of Christ. I wonder whether I have the strength to endure persecution or death for the sake of the Lord. Do you imagine you could face your worst fear if God were to ask? What is one way to remind yourself that you are not alone?

—J. K.

B. Isaac's Response (v. 25)

25. Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

Both Abraham and Isaac built altars as places for sacrifice and prayer. Abraham built an altar to mark off the territory of Canaan for his family and to create memorials in the places where God had appeared (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 22:9). Isaac's son Jacob would also build an altar (33:20; 35:1-7).

An altar was more than a pile of rough stones; it was a holy spot, a marker of the connection between the divine and human space, and a place of access to God. People often used the same altar for generations, even centuries. At this *altar*, Isaac *called on the name of the Lord* for protection and guidance and made this location his home as *he pitched his tent* there.

Apparently, there was no easily accessible water source, like a stream or spring, at this location. To address this shortcoming, Isaac's *servants dug a well*. The act of digging a well was a source of tension that had led Isaac to this location (see Genesis 26:17-22). Although Isaac was the recipient of covenantal promises, he continued to face practical challenges—water was hard to come by!

Questioning God's Faithfulness

I arrived home one day to find my car, but not

as I had left it. Rather than sitting on four wheels and tires, one side of the car sat on cinder blocks, and the other sat on the curb. Over the next several days, I spent countless hours navigating how to report the theft and repair the car. I installed new wheels, but not before the city towed my car and charged me to recover it. The whole situation perplexed me, and during one phone conversation, I let my frustrations be known.

During the whole ordeal, I had trouble knowing that God was with me and that he was in control. But God *did* supply everything I needed, helping me through that difficult season.

I was never in as much danger as Isaac, and God brought him through even worse circumstances. Have you experienced so much frustration that you question God's provision? Do you have a better sense of God's presence when you look back in hindsight?

—J. K.

II. Promises Kept

(Genesis 26:26-33)

A. Threat of Violence (vv. 26-27)

26. Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces.

Abimelek and the Gerarites opposed Isaac partly because of his deception regarding his wife, Rebekah. Their king had complained, "One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us" (Genesis 26:10). They presumed that the God of Isaac would have punished them if they violated his wife even accidentally (compare 12:17).

The people from Gerar had proved to be fearsome defenders of "their" water resources. They had closed Abraham's wells, a hostile act that risked destroying Isaac's flocks, throwing him into poverty, or perhaps even killing him (Genesis 26:18). The narrative implies that Isaac had headed toward Beersheba to escape this conflict (26:22-23). However, the conflict seemed to be following Isaac.

Abimelek brought two of his highest officials. The designation *personal adviser* refers to the king's associates, like a modern-day presidential cabi-

net. This verse is the only mention in the Bible of an individual named *Ahuzzath*. The name *Phicol* likely has its roots in the Egyptian language, a reminder that the region of Gerar was located on the edge of Egyptian territory, where other powerful rulers lived.

27. Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?”

Isaac’s question implied both surprise and fear upon seeing the unexpected visitor. The mistreatment Isaac had faced at the hands of Abimelek’s men had forced him to leave Gerar (see Lesson Context).

The word *hate* can refer to a feeling of animosity toward someone else. In this context, however, it probably refers to the aggressive actions of Abimelek and his people against Isaac’s household. Although Abimelek had a positive relationship with Abraham, the Philistines treated Isaac with disdain and had pushed him out of their territory. Isaac was left wondering what reason Abimelek could have had for pursuing him to Beersheba.



Visual for Lesson 4. Display this visual as you ask the following question for discussion: “How do you call on the name of the Lord?”

one true God of Abraham and Isaac. Many people of the ancient Near Eastern world believed that numerous gods existed, and a wise person would avoid offending the most powerful gods and the people under the protection of those gods. Isaac’s blessings were (rightly) perceived as evidence of God’s power and favor on Isaac. Rather than offend Isaac and earn the wrath of God, Abimelek and his people attempt to make peace with them both.

To that end, Abimelek suggested that they swear an *agreement* with one another. The word translated *treaty* is the same Hebrew word as “covenant.” The connection between sworn agreements and covenants lies in the mechanics of covenant-making: the two sides put a covenant into effect by swearing an oath. The oath was a conditional curse to place on oneself, if one of the parties to the agreement broke it. The potential curses could be elaborate, as seen in the list of curses threatened against Israel in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

Thus, Abimelek spoke in the technical language of ancient diplomacy when he proposed this arrangement with Isaac. This type of agreement is called a “parity treaty,” which means a commitment between two equal parties. While the Philistines had previously envied and disrespected Isaac, they now treated him with the honor expected for someone with equal social status.

29. “that you will do us no harm, just as we

What Do You Think?

How should a believer respond to an apparent adversary who requests reconciliation?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts should inform the believer’s response?

B. Making Peace (vv. 28-31)

28. They answered, “We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you

But Abimelek and his advisors had not come to make trouble for Isaac. On the contrary, they were afraid of him and the power of *the Lord*. Isaac’s abundant harvest and the rapid growth of his wealth had convinced them that Isaac enjoyed divine favor (see Genesis 26:12-14). Their admission *that the Lord was with* Isaac does not mean that they had become followers of the

did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD.”

This verse outlines the content of the oath Abimelek wishes them to take. He asks Isaac to *do us no harm*, which could refer to taking military action against the people of Gerar. But after Abimelek’s assertions about Isaac’s divine favor, and also seeing that he called Isaac *blessed by the Lord*, Abimelek’s fear was more likely that Isaac would appeal to God for their destruction.

As a basis for this request, Abimelek claimed that he and his men had not harmed Isaac; instead, they had done only good to him and *sent him away peacefully*. Abimelek’s words appear one-sided, as Isaac had left Gerar after experiencing mistreatment by the people living there. There are two possible explanations for Abimelek’s claims. First, Abimelek might have referred to his immediate intentions: right then and there, he was not attacking Isaac or acting in any manner other than kindness toward him. Second, Abimelek could have been asking Isaac to dismiss the prior behavior of Abimelek’s people. In either case, the ruler of Gerar asked Isaac for peace between them. Thus, in a surprising display of divine providence, Isaac’s enemies suddenly became his friends.

What Do You Think?

How can your business agreements or partnerships be a way for you to represent Christ to an unbeliever?

Digging Deeper

What are other ways you can apply the teachings of the Bible to your business dealings?

30. Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank.

Isaac turned to hospitality toward his new allies and friends. The *feast* cemented their new relationship. In most ancient cultures, feasting was a tool for building alliances—whether at marriages, funerals, major holidays, or the beginning of business partnerships (examples: Genesis 29:22; 1 Kings 1:24-25; Esther 2:18).

Additionally, covenant ceremonies sometimes

included a ritual meal. Exodus 24:11 notes that the leaders of Israel “ate and drank” in God’s presence after the ritual sacrifice and sprinkling with the blood of the covenant (Exodus 24:6-8).

In the New Testament era, the practice of Communion instituted by Jesus combines a meal with a covenant, with its reference to Christ’s “blood of the [new] covenant” (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

Therefore, by serving a meal, Isaac showed his guests the expected courtesy. The feast also completed the ritual that bound them together in peace.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to plan a feast celebrating God’s work in your neighborhood?

Digging Deeper

Who among your neighbors will you ask to help plan such a feast?

31. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

The next day saw the final parts of their ceremony of alliance-making. The parties of the covenant swore their oaths *to each other*, asking God to hold them to account if they should break them. To go *away peacefully* means not just that they avoided immediate conflict, but they also anticipate a continuing positive relationship with one another.

The Hebrew word translated as “peacefully” is *shalom*, which has a wide array of meanings, including “wholeness,” “good health,” or even “success.” It is a favorite term that the prophets of Israel and Judah use to reflect a vision of restored order and community (examples: Isaiah 55:12; Jeremiah 29:7; Malachi 2:5-6). Isaac *sent* Abimelek away with their conflict fully resolved.

C. Divine Provision (vv. 32-33)

32. That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, “We’ve found water!”

That day sets the context as being immediately

after Abimelek’s party left. The result is that Isaac would have the impression that finding *water* was a sign of God’s blessing and covenant fidelity. As if one blessing for the day was not enough, God also addressed the immediate need of Isaac and his family for survival (see Genesis 26:25, above).

33. He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

The name *Shibah* sounds like the Hebrew word for “oath.” It is joined to the Hebrew word translated “well” to become a new name: *Beersheba*. This account explains the origins of a major Israelite town—one still occupied today—as the location of divine blessings. The *town* became a reminder of the covenants that Isaac and his father, Abraham, had made that forged justice and peace between neighbors. The designation points to the hope of peace between enemies and stands as an image of God’s faithfulness to Abraham’s family.

Conclusion

A. Provision of Peace

Scripture tells of a God who made covenants with his people and followed through on each and every promise. Long before God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and gave them the law at Mount Sinai, he made a covenant with their ancestor, Abraham. God promised Abraham a homeland and descendants as numerous as the grains of sand and the stars in the sky (Genesis 13:16; 15:5). God also promised that “all peoples on earth” could “be blessed” through Abraham and his offspring

How to Say It

Abimelek	Uh-bim-eh-lek.
Ahuzzath	Uh- <i>huz</i> -uth.
Beersheba	Beer- <i>she</i> -buh.
Gerar	<i>Gear</i> -rar (<i>G</i> as in <i>get</i>).
Phicol	<i>Fye</i> -kahl.
Philistines	Fuh- <i>liss</i> -teenz or <i>Fill</i> -us-teenz.
shalom (Hebrew)	shah-lome.
Sinai	<i>Sigh</i> -nye or <i>Sigh</i> -nay-eye.

(12:3). Abraham did not see those promises fulfilled in his lifetime, but he saw their beginning when Sarah bore him a son, Isaac. Isaac became the heir of promises and suffered many of the same hardships and disappointments as his father. But God was with him.

God was with Isaac when he was searching for water and security. Although we don’t understand how God orchestrated those circumstances, God turned Isaac’s enemies into his allies. Instead of fearing for his life, Isaac’s circumstances were changed by God in a matter of days.

For modern-day readers, the account of Isaac and Abimelek does not mean that God will always turn our enemies into friends. In Isaac’s case, God protected him because, through his descendent, Jesus, God would fulfill his most important promise. Through Jesus, God offers reconciliation and peace (Romans 5:1).

God’s offer of grace comes to people who are counted as “enemies” before God (Romans 5:10). Therefore, we can take consolation that, even though human alliances can fail, the peace that God grants through Jesus will never fail; God is always faithful to keep his promises.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the significance of biblical covenants to a new believer?

Digging Deeper

How would you explain their significance to an unbeliever?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to seek peace with our friends, neighbors, and enemies. When we fail to find peace with others, remind us that we can have peace with you. Help us be like Jesus, who was willing to show kindness to us when we were still like enemies. Teach us to seek peace, with Christ’s example before our eyes. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God keeps his covenant promises.