Isaac and Abimelech

As I write this message, we are approaching the closing of the polls which will mercifully bring an end to a highly contentious political season. As Steve said on Sunday, we need to accept the results of the election and remember that God is in control regardless of the outcome. What seems to be a common theme at the local, state and national level is that people have to look past the faults of the candidates in order to vote for them. This should come as no surprise as we are all flawed people. There are so many issues to be considered that it is hard to find someone you agree with in all matters. Our conflicted thoughts about making a decision may be best summed up by statements I heard about a particular candidate: “He’s a jerk, but he gets the job done” and “I’m going to hold my nose and vote for him”. Our perspective on how we view each other is different from God’s perspective of how he views us and our study of Genesis chapter 26 helps to reveal that difference.

The chapter begins with another famine in the land and Isaac went toward Egypt for food just as his father had previously. God intervened instructing Isaac to remain in Canaan and repeated the promises he made previously to Abraham. God promised that Abraham’s descendants would own the land, that they would be as numerous as the stars and that all nations would be blessed through them. Isaac stayed in Gerar, a Philistine town in south central Canaan but he did not fully trust God for his safety as he resorted to the same ruse that Abraham had employed, saying that his wife was his sister. David Guzik writes: *“Isaac went from such a high spiritual experience (*[*Genesis 26:1-5*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+26.1-5&t=NKJV)*) to such blatant sin because of the weakness of his own flesh, and also because of his father’s bad example.*

*Peter, with his confession and wrong counsel to Jesus, was a perfect example of how sin can follow upon an outpouring of God’s blessing. For good reason,*[*1 Corinthians 10:12*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+10.12&t=NKJV)*says:* *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*.” The results of this trick were the same as with Abraham: Abimelech discovered that Rebekah was his wife and confronted Isaac. Just as with Abraham, a pagan rightly rebuked a righteous man. This is not the same Abimelech as the one with whom Abraham dealt since nearly 100 years had passed. Similar to Pharaoh or Caesar, Abimelech was a title assumed by the king of the Philistine land. Just as Abraham had, Isaac benefited from the situation, not with money or livestock but with the blessing of God for a bountiful crop. The Philistines envied Isaac because of his success and tried to sabotage Isaac by filling in his wells. Often people envy those who are willing to put forth more effort. It is easier to try to bring them down to a lower level than to work harder to achieve success. When the nation of Israel was created in 1948, Jews who settled in the land worked hard to build farms that produced abundant crops on land that Arabs had not utilized to its potential. Their reaction was similar to Abimelech’s a few thousand years earlier: You should move away. When Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar, he encountered a similar situation with local herdsmen. Although they had not bothered to dig wells themselves, they claimed the water rights as their own when Isaac’s wells were successful. Isaac finally found unmolested territory and dug a well he named Rehoboth which may have served as a southern border to his territory. From there he moved on to Beersheba where God spoke to him reassuring him of his safety and again confirming the covenant He had made with Abraham. In response, Isaac built an altar and had his servants dig another well which was a sign that this would be a permanent home for him and his family. History again repeated itself as Abimelech saw that Isaac was blessed by God and sought him out to establish a peace treaty just as the previous Abimelech had done with Abraham. The chapter ends with a very brief but significant description of Esau’s marriages. Unlike Isaac or later his brother Jacob, Esau chose to marry a Hittite and compounded his sin by marrying a second one.

As I mentioned in the beginning, this chapter helps us to understand how God views us. As Steve said in his message on Sunday, God uses his people to execute his plan and I would add that He works within our limitations. Matthew Henry noted that God sent famines during the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob providing different guidance for each of them. “‘*There was a famine in Jacob’s days, and God bade him go down into Egypt [ch. 46:3](http://www.biblestudytools.com/genesis/46-3.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [ch. 46:4](http://www.biblestudytools.com/genesis/46-4.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) ), a famine in Isaac’s days, and God bade him not to go down, a famine in Abraham’s days, and God left him to his liberty, directing him neither way. This variety in the divine procedure (considering that Egypt was always a place of trial and exercise to God’s people) some ground upon the different characters of these three patriarchs. Abraham was a man of very high attainments, and intimate communion with God; and to him all places and conditions were alike. Isaac was a very good man, but not cut out for hardship; therefore he is forbidden to go to Egypt. Jacob was inured to difficulties, strong and patient; and therefore he must go down into Egypt, that the trial of his faith might be to praise, and honour, and glory. Thus God proportions his people’s trials to their strength.”* (see also 1st Cor. 10:13)

We also see how He views us as flawed people. Our way of dealing with flaws is to take the person as a whole not so much overlooking the negatives but using the positives to outweigh them. God has a different approach. Consider the following comment by David Guzik: *God said that He kept the covenant with Isaac because of Abraham’s obedience. A close look at Abraham’s life shows that his obedience wasn’t complete or constant; yet God recognized it. God could say this of Abraham because Abraham was declared righteous by faith (*[*Genesis 15:6*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+15.6&t=NKJV)*), and as far as God was concerned,* ***all He saw in Abraham was the righteousness of Jesus.*** Last week I included a quote by Charles Spurgeon who wondered how God could love a man like Jacob. Thanks to Mr. Guzik, we have the answer.