

# Genesis 26:1-35

by John Calvin

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*God's promise to Isaac is reaffirmed, and he is encouraged to obey God's voice and trust in His providence.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 26:1-2, Genesis 26:5, Genesis 26:12, Genesis 26:18, Genesis 26:24-25, Genesis 26:31-32

**Topics:** "Faith And Obedience", "Gods Providence"

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## Description

John Calvin preaches about the trials and blessings experienced by Isaac, highlighting how God's faithfulness sustains His servants through famine, divine guidance, and conflicts with others. Despite facing challenges, Isaac remains faithful and obedient to God, exemplifying patience and trust in the midst of adversity. The narrative showcases God's protection, provision, and favor towards Isaac, even amidst the envy and opposition of the Philistines. Through Isaac's experiences, we learn the importance of enduring faith, reliance on God's promises, and the necessity of seeking peace and reconciliation with others.

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## Transcript

1. And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

1. Deinde fuit fames in terra praeter famem superiorem, quae fuerat in diebus Abraham: et profectus est Ishac ad Abimelech regem Pelisthim in Gerar

2. And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:

2. Nam visus est ei Iehova, et dixit, Ne descendas in Aegyptum: habita in terra quam dicam tibi.

3. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father;

3. Inhabita terram hanc, et ero tecum, et benedicam tibi: quia tibi et semini tuo dabo omnes terras istas: et statuam juramentum quod iuravi ad Abraham patrem tuum.

4. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

4. Et multiplicare faciam semen tuum sicut stellas coeli, et dabo semini tuo omnes terras istas: benedicenturque in semine tuo omnes gentes terrae:

5. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

5. Eo quod obedierit Abraham voci meae, et custodierit custodiam meam, praecepta mea, statuta mea, et leges meas.

6. And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:

6. Et habitavit Ishac in Gerar.

7. And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

7. Et interrogaverunt incolae regionis de uxore ejus; et dixit, Soror mea est: quia timuit dicere, uxor mea est: ne forte occiderent me incolae regionis propter Ribcam, quia pulchra aspectu erat.

8. And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.

8. Verum fuit, quum protracti essent ei ibi dies, aspexit Abimelech rex Pelisthim per fenestram, et vidit, et ecce Ishac ludebat cum Ribca uxore sua.

9. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.

9. Tunc vocavit Abimelech Ishac, et dixit, Vere ecce uxor tua est; et quomodo dixisti, Soror mea est? Et dixit ad eum Ishac, Quia dixi, Ne forte moriar propter eam.

10. And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us.

10. Et dixit Abimelech, Quid hoc fecisti nobis? paulum abfuit quin dormierit unus e populo cum uxore tua, et venire fecisses super nos delictum.

11. And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

11. Praecepit itaque Abimelech omni populo, dicendo, Qui tetigerit virum hunc, et uxorem ejus, noriendo morietur.

12. Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him.

12. Et sevit Ishac in terra ipsa, et reperit in anno ipso centum modios: et benedixit ei lehova.

13. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great:

13. Et crevit vir, et perrexit pergendo et crescendo, donec cresceret valde.
14. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him.
14. Et fuit ei possessio pecudum, et possessio boum, et proventus multus: et inviderunt ei Pelisthim.
15. 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.
15. Itaque omnes puteos, quos foderant servi patris sui in diebus Abraham patris sui, obturaverunt Pelisthim, et impleverunt eos terra.
16. And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we.
16. Et dixit Abimelech ad Ishac, Abi a nobis: quia longe fortior es nobis.
17. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.
17. Abiit ergo inde Ishac, et mansit in valle Gerar, et habitavit ibi.
18. 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.
18. Postquam reversus est Ishac, fodit puteos aquae, quos foderant in diebus Abraham patris sui: quia obturaverant eos Pelisthim mortuo Abraham: et vocavit eos nominibus secundum nomina, quibus vocaverat eos pater suus.
19. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water.
19. Et foderunt servi Ishac in valle, et invenerunt ibi puteum aquae vivae.
20. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.
20. Sed litigaverunt pastores Gerar cum pastoribus Ishac, dicendo, Nostra est aqua: et vocavit nomen putei Hesech, quia litigaverunt cum eo.
21. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.
21. Et foderunt puteum alium, et litigaverunt etiam super eo: et vocavit nomen ejus Sitnah.
22. And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.
22. Et transtulit se inde, et fodit puteum alium, et non litigaverunt super eo: ideo vocavit nomen ejus Rehoboth: et dixit, Quia nunc dilatationem fecit lehova nobis, et crevimus in terra.
23. And he went up from thence to Beersheba.

23. Et ascendit inde in Beer-sebah.

24. And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

24. Et visus est ei Iehova nocte ipsa, et dixit, Ego sum Deus Abraham patris tui: ne timeas, quia tecum sum, et benedicam tibi, et multiplicare faciam semen tuum propter Abraham servum meum.

25. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

25. Tunc aedificavit ibi altare, et invocavit nomen Iehovae, et tetendit ibi tabernaculum suum: et foderunt ibi servi Ishac puteum.

26. Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army.

26. Porro Abimelech profectus est ad eum ex Gerar, et Ahuzath qui erat ex amicis ejus, et Phichol princeps exercitus ejus.

27. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?

27. Et dixit ad eos Ishac, Cur venistis ad me, et vos odio habuistis me, et emisistis me ne essem vobiscum?

28. And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee;

28. Et dixerunt, Videndo vidimus quod esset Iehova tecum, et diximus, Sit nunc juramentum inter nos, inter nos et inter te, et percutiamus foedus tecum.

29. That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD.

29. Si feceris nobiscum malum: quemadmodum non tetigimus te, et quemadmodum fecimus tecum duntaxat bonum, et dimisimus te in pace: tu nunc es benedictus Iehovae.

30. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.

30. Instruxit autem eis convivium, et ederunt, atque biberunt.

31. And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

31. Et surrexerunt mane: et juraverunt alter alteri: et deduxit eos Ishac, et abierunt ab eo in pace.

32. And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water.

32. Adhaec fuit, in die ipsa venerunt servi Ishac, et nuntiaverunt ei de puteo quem foderant, et dixerunt ei, Invenimus aquam.

33. And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

33. Et vocavit eum Sibhah: idcirco nomen urbis est Beer-sebah usque ad diem hanc.

34. And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:

34. Erat autem Esau quadragenarius, et accepit uxorem lehudith filiam Beeri Hittaei, et Bosmath filiam Elon Hittaei.

35. Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

35. Et irritabant spiritum Ishac et Ribcae.

1. And there was a famine. Moses relates that Isaac was tried by nearly the same kind of temptation as that through which his father Abraham had twice passed. I have before explained how severe and violent was this assault. The condition in which it was the will of God to place his servants, as strangers and pilgrims in the land which he had promised to give them, seemed sufficiently troublesome and hard; but it appears still more intolerable, that he scarcely suffered them to exist (if we may so speak) in this wandering, uncertain, and changeable kind of life, but almost consumed them with hunger. Who would not say that God had forgotten himself, when he did not even supply his own children, -- whom he had received into his especial care and trust, -- however sparingly and scantily, with food? But God thus tried the holy fathers, that we might be taught, by their example, not to be effeminate and cowardly under temptations. Respecting the terms here used, we may observe, that though there were two seasons of dearth in the time of Abraham, Moses alludes only to the one, of which the remembrance was most recent. 36

2. And the Lord appeared unto him. I do not doubt but a reason is here given why Isaac rather went to the country of Gerar than to Egypt, which perhaps would have been more convenient for him; but Moses teaches that he was withheld by a heavenly oracle, so that a free choice was not left him. It may here be asked, why does the Lord prohibit Isaac from going to Egypt, whither he had suffered his father to go? Although Moses does not give the reason, yet we may be allowed to conjecture that the journey would have been more dangerous to the son. The Lord could indeed have endued the son also with the power of his Spirit, as he had done his father Abraham, so that the abundance and delicacies of Egypt should not have corrupted him by their allurements; but since he governs his faithful people with such moderation, that he does not correct all their faults at once, and render them entirely pure, he assists their infirmities, and anticipates, with suitable remedies, those evils by which they might be ensnared. Because, therefore, he knew that there was more infirmity in Isaac than there had been in Abraham, he was unwilling to expose him to danger; for he is faithful, and will not suffer his own people to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. (1Co 10:13.) Now, as we must be persuaded, that however arduous and burdensome may be the temptations which alight upon us, the Divine help will never fail to renew our strength; so, on the other hand, we must beware lest we rashly rush into dangers; but each should be admonished by his own infirmity to proceed cautiously and with fear.

Dwell in the land. God commands him to settle in the promised land, yet with the understanding that he should dwell there as a stranger. The intimation was thus given, that the time had not yet arrived in which he should exercise dominion over it. God sustains indeed his mind with the hope of the promised inheritance, but requires this honor to be given to his word, that Isaac should remain inwardly at rest, in the midst of outward agitations; and truly we never lean upon a better support than when, disregarding the appearance of things present, we depend entirely upon the word of the Lord, and apprehend by faith that blessing which is not yet apparent. Moreover, he again inculcates the promise previously made, in order to render Isaac more prompt to obey; for so is the Lord wont to awaken his servants from their indolence, that they may fight valiantly for him, while he constantly affirms that their labor shall not be in vain; for although he requires from us a free and unreserved obedience, as a father does from his children, he yet so condescends to the weakness of our capacity, that he invites and encourages us by the prospect of reward.

5. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice. Moses does not mean that Abraham's obedience was the reason why the promise of God was confirmed and ratified to him; but from what has been said before, (Ge 22:18,) where we have a similar expression, we learn, that what God freely bestows upon the faithful is sometimes, beyond their desert, ascribed to themselves; that they, knowing their intention to be approved by the Lord, may the more ardently addict and devote themselves entirely to his service: so he now commends the obedience of Abraham, in order that Isaac may be stimulated to an imitation of his example. And although laws, statutes, rites, precepts, and ceremonies, had not yet been written, Moses used these terms, that he might the more clearly show how sedulously Abraham regulated his life according to the will of God alone -- how carefully he abstained from all the impurities of the heathen -- and how exactly he pursued the straight course of holiness, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left: for the Lord often honors his own law with these titles for the sake of restraining our excesses; as if he should say that it wanted nothing to constitute it a perfect rule, but embraced everything pertaining to absolute holiness. The meaning therefore is, that Abraham, having formed his life in entire accordance with the will of God, walked in his pure service.

7. And the men of the place asked him. Moses relates that Isaac was tempted in the same manner as his father Abraham, in having his wife taken from him; and without doubt he was so led by the example of his father, that he, being instructed by the similarity of the circumstances, might become associated with him in his faith. Nevertheless, on this point he ought rather to have avoided than imitated his father's fault; for no doubt he well remembered that the chastity of his mother had twice been put in great danger; and although she had been wonderfully rescued by the hand of God, yet both she and her husband paid the penalty of their distrust: therefore the negligence of Isaac is inexcusable, in that he now strikes against the same stone. He does not in express terms deny his wife; but he is to be blamed, first, because, for the sake of preserving his life, he resorts to an evasion not far removed from a lie; and secondly, because, in absolving his wife from conjugal fidelity, he exposes her to prostitution: but he aggravates his fault, principally (as I have said) in not taking warning from domestic examples, but voluntarily casting his wife into manifest danger. Whence it appears how great is the propensity of our nature to distrust, and how easy it is to be devoid of wisdom in affairs of perplexity. Since, therefore, we are surrounded on all sides with so many dangers, we must ask the Lord to confirm us by his Spirit, lest our minds should faint, and be dissolved in fear and trembling; otherwise we shall be frequently engaged in vain enterprises, of which we shall repent soon, and yet too late to remedy the evil.

8. Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out at a window. Truly admirable is the kind forbearance of God, in not only condescending to pardon the twofold fault of his servant, but in stretching forth his hand, and in wonderfully averting, by the application of a speedy remedy, the evil which he would have brought upon himself. God did not suffer -- what twice had occurred to Abraham -- that his wife should be torn from his bosom; but stirred up a heathen king, mildly, and without occasioning him any trouble, to correct his folly. But although God sets before us such an example of his kindness, that the faithful, if at any time they may have fallen, may confidently hope to find him gentle and propitious; yet we must beware of self-security, when we observe, that the holy woman who was, at that time, the only mother of the Church on earth, was exempted from dishonor, by a special privilege. Meanwhile, we may conjecture, from the judgment of Abimelech, how holy and pure had been the conduct of Isaac, on whom not even a suspicion of evil could fall; and further, how much greater integrity flourished in that age than in our own. For why does he not condemn Isaac as one guilty of fornication, since it was probable that some crime was concealed, when he disingenuously obtruded the name of sister, and tacitly denied her to be his wife? And therefore I have no doubt that his religion, and the integrity of his life, availed to defend his character. By this example we are taught so to cultivate righteousness in our whole life, that men may not be able to suspect anything wicked or dishonorable respecting us; for there is nothing which will more completely vindicate us from every mark of infamy than a life passed in modesty and temperance. We must, however, add, what I have also before alluded to, that lusts were not, at that time, so commonly and so profusely indulged, as to cause an unfavourable suspicion to enter into the mind of the king concerning a sojourner of honest character. Wherefore, he easily persuades himself that Rebekah was a wife and not a harlot. The chastity of that age is further proved from this, that Abimelech takes the familiar sporting of Isaac with Rebekah as an evidence of their marriage. 37 For Moses does not speak about marital intercourse, but about some too free movement, which was a proof of either dissolute exuberance or conjugal love. But now licentiousness has so broken through all bounds, that husbands are compelled to hear in silence of the dissolute conduct of their wives with strangers.

10. What is this thou hast done unto us? The Lord does not chastise Isaac as he deserved, perhaps because he was not so fully endued with patience as his father was; and, therefore, lest the seizing of his wife should dishearten him, God mercifully prevents it. Yet, that the censure may produce the deeper shame, God constitutes a heathen his master and his reprover. We may add, that Abimelech chides his folly, not so much with the design of injuring him, as of upbraiding him. It ought, however, deeply to have wounded the mind of the holy man, when he perceived that his offense was obnoxious to the judgment even of the blind. Wherefore, let us remember that we must walk in the light which God has kindled for us, lest even unbelievers, who are wrapped in the darkness of ignorance, should reprove our stupor. And certainly when we neglect to obey the voice of God, we deserve to be sent to oxen and asses for instruction. 38 Abimelech, truly, does not investigate nor prosecute the whole offense of Isaac, but only alludes to one part of it. Yet Isaac, when thus gently admonished by a single word, ought to have condemned himself, seeing that, instead of committing himself and his wife to God, who had promised to be the guardian of them both, he had resorted, through his own unbelief, to an illicit remedy. For faith has this property, that it confines us within divinely prescribed bounds, so that we attempt nothing except with God's authority or permission. Whence it follows that Isaac's faith wavered when he swerved from his duty as a husband. We gather, besides, from the words of Abimelech, that all nations have the sentiment impressed upon their minds, that the violation of holy wedlock is a crime worthy of divine vengeance, and have consequently a dread of the judgment of God. For although the minds of men are darkened with dense clouds, so that they are frequently deceived; yet God has caused some power of discrimination between right and wrong to remain, so that each should bear about with him his own condemnation, and

that all should be without excuse. If, then, God cites even unbelievers to his tribunal, and does not suffer them to escape just condemnation, how horrible is that punishment which awaits us, if we endeavor to obliterate, by our own wickedness, that knowledge which God has engraven on our consciences?

11. And Abimelech charged all his people. In denouncing capital punishment against any who should do injury to this stranger, we may suppose him to have issued this edict as a special privilege; for it is not customary thus rigidly to avenge every kind of injury. Whence, then, arose this disposition on the part of the king to prefer Isaac to all the native inhabitants of the country, and almost to treat him as an equal, except that some portion of the divine majesty shone forth in him, which secured to him this degree of reverence? God, also, to assist the infirmity of his servant, inclined the mind of the heathen king, in every way, to show him favor. And there is no doubt that his general modesty induced the king thus carefully to protect him; for he, perceiving him to be a timid man, who had been on the point of purchasing his own life by the ruin of his wife, was the more disposed to assist him in his dangers, in order that he might live in security under his own government.

12. Then Isaac sowed. Here Moses proceeds to relate in what manner Isaac reaped the manifest fruit of the blessing promised to him by God; for he says, that when he had sowed, the increase was a hundredfold: which was an extraordinary fertility, even in that land. He also adds, that he was rich in cattle, and had a very great household. Moreover, he ascribes the praise of all these things to the blessing of God; as it is also declared in the psalm, that the Lord abundantly supplies what will satisfy his people while they sleep. (Ps 127:2.) It may, however, be asked, how could Isaac sow when God had commanded him to be a stranger all his life? Some suppose that he had bought a field, and so translate the word **קנח** (kanah) a possession; but the context corrects their error: for we find soon afterwards, that the holy man was not delayed, by having land to sell, from removing his effects elsewhere: besides, since the purchasing of land was contrary to his peculiar vocation and to the command of God, Moses undoubtedly would not have passed over such a notable offense. To this may be added, that since express mention is immediately made of a tent, we may hence infer, that wherever he might come, he would have to dwell in the precarious condition of a stranger. We must, therefore, maintain, that he sowed in a hired field. For although he had not a foot of land in his own possession, yet, that he might discharge the duty of a good householder, it behoved him to prepare food for his family; and perhaps hunger quickened his care and industry, that he might with the greater diligence make provision for himself against the future. Nevertheless, it is right to keep in mind, what I have lately alluded to, that he received as a divine favor the abundance which he had acquired by his own labor.

14. And the Philistines envied him. We are taught by this history that the blessings of God which pertain to the present earthly life are never pure and perfect, but are mixed with some troubles, lest quiet and indulgence should render us negligent. Wherefore, let us all learn not too ardently to desire great wealth. If the rich are harassed by any cause of disquietude, let them know that they are roused by the Lord, lest they should fall fast asleep in the midst of their pleasures; and let the poor enjoy this consolation, that their poverty is not without its advantages. For it is no light good to live free from envy, tumults, and strifes. Should any one raise the objection, that it can by no means be regarded as a favor, that God, in causing Isaac to abound in wealth, exposed him to envy, to contentions, and to many troubles; there is a ready answer, that not all the troubles with which God exercises his people, in any degree prevent the benefits which he bestows upon them from retaining the taste of his paternal love. Finally, he so attempers the favor which he manifests towards his children in this world, that he stirs them up, as with sharp goads, to the consideration of a celestial life. It was not, however, a slight trial, that the simple element of water,

which is the common property of all animals, was denied to the holy patriarch; with how much greater patience ought we to bear our less grievous sufferings! If, however, at any time we are angry at being unworthily injured; let us remember that, at least, we are not so cruelly treated as holy Isaac was, when he had to contend for water. Besides, not only was he deprived of the element of water, but the wells which his father Abraham had dug for himself and his posterity were filled up. This, therefore, was the extreme of cruelty, not only to defraud a stranger of every service due to him, but even to take from him what had been obtained by the labor of his own father, and what he possessed without inconvenience to any one.

16. And Abimelech said unto Isaac. It is uncertain whether the king of Gerar expelled Isaac of his own accord from his kingdom, or whether he commanded him to settle elsewhere, because he perceived him to be envied by the people. He possibly might, in this manner, advise him as a friend; although it is more probable that his mind had become alienated from Isaac; for at the close of the chapter Moses relates, that the holy man complains strongly of the king as well as of others. But since we can assert nothing with certainty respecting the real feelings of the lying, let it suffice to maintain, what is of more importance, that in consequence of the common wickedness of mankind, they who are the most eminent fall under the suspicion of the common people. Satiety, indeed, produces ferocity. Wherefore there is nothing to which the rich are more prone than proudly to boast, to carry themselves more insolently than they ought, and to stretch every nerve of their power to oppress others. No such suspicion, indeed, could fall upon Isaac; but he had to bear that envy which was the attendant on a common vice. Whence we infer, how much more useful and desirable it often is, for us to be placed in a moderate condition; which is, at least, more peaceful, and which is neither exposed to the storms of envy, nor obnoxious to unjust suspicions. Moreover, how rare and unwonted was the blessing of God in rendering Isaac prosperous, may be inferred from the fact, that his wealth had become formidable both to the king and to the people. A large inheritance truly had descended to him from his father; but Moses shows, that from his first entrance into the land, he had so greatly prospered in a very short time, that it seemed no longer possible for the inhabitants to endure him.

18. And Isaac digged again the wells of water. First, we see that the holy man was so hated by his neighbors, as to be under the necessity of seeking a retreat for himself which was destitute of water; and no habitation is so troublesome and inconvenient for the ordinary purposes of life as that which suffers from scarcity of water. Besides, the abundance of his cattle and the multitude of his servants -- who were like a little army -- rendered a supply of water very necessary; whence we learn that he was brought into severe straits. But that this last necessity did not instigate him to seek revenge, is a proof of singular forbearance; for we know that lighter injuries will often rack the patience even of humane and moderate men. If any one should object to this view, that he was deficient in strength; I grant, indeed, that he was not able to undertake a regular war; but as his father Abraham had armed four hundred servants, he also certainly had a large troop of domestics, who could easily have repelled any force brought against him by his neighbors. But the hope which he had entertained when he settled in the valley of Gerar, was again suddenly cut off. He knew that his father Abraham had there used wells which were his own, and which he had himself discovered; and although they had been stopped up, yet they were well known to have sufficient springs of water to prevent the labor of digging them again from being misspent. Moreover, the fact that the wells had been obstructed ever since the departure of Abraham, shows how little respect the inhabitants had for their guest; for although their own country would have been benefited by these wells, they chose rather to deprive themselves of this advantage than to have Abraham for a neighbor; for, in order that such a convenience might not attract him to the place, they, by stopping up the wells, did, in a certain sense, intercept his way. It was a custom among the ancients, if they wished to involve any one in

ruin, and to cut him off from the society of men, to interdict him from water, and from fire: thus the Philistine, for the purpose of removing Abraham from their vicinity, deprive him of the element of water.

He called their names. He did not give new names to the wells, but restored those which had been assigned them by his father Abraham, that, by this memorial, the ancient possession of them might be renewed. But subsequent violence compelled him to change their names, that at least he might, by some monument, make manifest the injury which had been done by the Philistines, and reprove them on account of it: for whereas he calls one well strife, or contention, another hostility, he denies that the inhabitants possessed that by right, or by any honest title, which they had seized upon as enemies or robbers. Meanwhile, it is right to consider, that in the midst of these strifes he had a contest not less severe with thirst and deficiency of water, whereby the Philistines attempted to destroy him; such is the scope of the history. First, Moses, according to his manner, briefly runs through the summary of the affair: namely, that Isaac intended to apply again to his own purpose the wells which his father had previously found, and to acquire, in the way of recovery, the lost possession of them. He then prosecutes the subject more diffusely, stating that, when he attempted the work, he was unjustly defrauded of his labor; and whereas, in digging the third well, he gives thanks to God, and calls it Room, 39 because, by the favor of God, a more copious supply is now afforded him, he furnishes an example of invincible patience. Therefore, however severely he may have been harassed, yet when, after he had been freed from these troubles, he so placidly returns thanks to God, and celebrates his goodness, he shows that in the midst of trials he has retained a composed and tranquil mind.

23. And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. Next follows a more abundant consolation, and one affording effectual refreshment to the mind of the holy man. In the tranquil enjoyment of the well, he acknowledges the favor which God had showed him: but forasmuch as one word of God weighs more with the faithful than the accumulated mass of all good things, we cannot doubt that Isaac received this oracle more joyfully than if a thousand rivers of nectar had flowed unto him: and truly Moses designedly commemorates in lofty terms this act of favor, that the Lord encouraged him by his own word, (Ge 26:24;) whence we may learn, in ascribing proper honor to each of the other gifts of God, still always to give the palm to that proof of his paternal love which he grants us in his word. Food, clothing, health, peace, and other advantages, afford us a taste of the Divine goodness; but when he addresses us familiarly, and expressly declares himself to be our Father, then indeed it is that he thoroughly refreshes us to satiety. Moses does not explain what had been the cause of Isaac's removal to Beer-sheba, the ancient dwelling-place of his fathers. It might be that the Philistines ceased not occasionally to annoy him; and thus the holy man, worn out with their implacable malice, removed to a greater distance. It is indeed probable, taking the circumstance of the time into account, that he was sorrowful and anxious; for as soon as he had arrived at that place, God appeared unto him on the very first night. Here, then, something very opportune is noticed. Moreover, as often as Moses before related that God had appeared unto Abraham, he, at the same time, showed that the holy man was either tormented with grievous cares, or was held in suspense under some apprehension, or was plunged in sadness, or, after many distresses, was nearly borne down by fatigue, so as to render it apparent that the hand of God was seasonably stretched out to him as his necessity required, lest he should sink under the evils which surrounded him. So now, as I explain it, he came to Isaac, for the purpose of restoring him, already wearied and broken down by various miseries.

24. And the Lord appeared unto him. This vision (as I have elsewhere said) was to prepare him to listen more attentively to God, and to convince him that it was God with whom he had to deal; for a voice alone

would have had less energy. Therefore God appears, in order to produce confidence in and reverence towards his word. In short, visions were a kind of symbols of the Divine presence, designed to remove all doubt from the minds of the holy fathers respecting him who was about to speak. Should it be objected, that such evidence was not sufficiently sure, since Satan often deceives men by similar manifestations, being, as it were, the ape of God; -- we must keep in mind what has been said before, that a clear and unambiguous mark was engraven on the visions of God, by which the faithful might certainly distinguish them from those which were fallacious, so that their faith should not be kept in suspense: and certainly, since Satan can only delude us in the dark, God exempts his children from this danger, by illuminating their eyes with the brightness of his countenance. Yet God did not fully manifest his glory to the holy fathers, but assumed a form by means of which they might apprehend him according to the measure of their capacities; for, as the majesty of God is infinite, it cannot be comprehended by the human mind, and by its magnitude it absorbs the whole world. Besides, it follows of necessity that men, on account of their infirmity, must not only faint, but be altogether annihilated in the presence of God. Wherefore, Moses does not mean that God was seen in his true nature and greatness, but in such a manner as Isaac was able to bear the sight. But what we have said, namely, that the vision was a testimony of Deity, for the purpose of giving credibility to the oracle, will more fully appear from the context; for this appearance was not a mute spectre; but the word immediately followed, which confirmed, in the mind of Isaac, faith in gratuitous adoption and salvation.

I am the God of Abraham. This preface is intended to renew the memory of all the promises before given, and to direct the mind of Isaac to the perpetual covenant which had been made with Abraham, and which was to be transmitted, as by tradition, to his posterity. The Lord therefore begins by declaring himself to be the God who had spoken at the first to Abraham, in order that Isaac might not sever the present from the former oracles: for as often as he repeated the testimony of his grace to the faithful, he sustained their faith with fresh supports. Yet he would have that very faith to remain based upon the first covenant by which he had adopted them to himself: and we must always keep this method in mind, in order that we may learn to gather together the promises of God, as they are combined in an inseparable bond. Let this also ever occur to us, as a first principle, that God thus kindly promises us his grace because he has freely adopted us.

Fear not. Since these words are elsewhere expounded, I shall now be the more brief. In the first place, we must observe, that God thus addresses the faithful for the purpose of tranquillizing their minds; for, if his word be withdrawn, they necessarily become torpid through stupidity, or are tormented with disquietude. Whence it follows, that we can receive peace from no other source than from the mouth of the Lord, when he declares himself the author of our salvation; not that we are then free from all fear, but because the confidence of faith is sufficiently efficacious to assuage our perturbations. Afterwards the Lord gives proofs of his love, by its effect, when he promises that he will bless Isaac.

25. And he builded an altar there. From other passages we are well aware that Moses here speaks of public worship; for inward invocation of God neither requires an altar; nor has any special choice of place; and it is certain that the saints, wherever they lived, worshipped. But because religion ought to maintain a testimony before men, Isaac, having erected and consecrated an altar, professes himself a worshipper of the true and only God, and by this method separates himself from the polluted rites of heathens. He also built the altar, not for himself alone, but for his whole family; that there, with all his household, he might offer sacrifices. Moreover, since the altar was built for the external exercises of faith, the expression, he called upon God, implies as much as if Moses had said that Isaac celebrated the name of God, and gave

testimony of his own faith. The visible worship of God had also another use; namely, that men, according to their infirmity, may stimulate and exercise themselves in the fear of God. Besides, since we know that sacrifices were then commanded, we must observe that Isaac did not rashly trifle in worshipping God, but adhered to the rule of faith, that he might undertake nothing without the word of God. Whence also we infer how preposterous and erroneous a thing it is to imitate the fathers, unless the Lord join us with them by means of a similar command. Meanwhile, the words of Moses clearly signify, that whatever exercises of piety the faithful undertake are to be directed to this end, namely, that God may be worshipped and invoked. To this point, therefore, all rites and ceremonies ought to have reference. But although it was the custom of the holy fathers to build an altar in whatever place they pitched their tent, we yet gather, from the connection of the words, that after God appeared to his servant Isaac, this altar was built by him in token of his gratitude.

And there Isaac's servants digged a well. It is remarkable that whereas this place had already received its name from the well which had been dug in it, Isaac should there again have to seek water, especially since Abraham had purchased, for himself and his posterity, the right to the well from the king. Moreover, the digging itself was difficult and labourious; for Moses had a design in saying, that afterwards the servants came and said to him, We have found water. I have, therefore, no doubt, that throughout the whole of that region a conspiracy had been entered into by the inhabitants, for the purpose of expelling the holy man, through want of water; so that this well of Sheba also had been fraudulently stopped up. The context also shows, that the first care of the holy patriarch concerned the worship of God, because Moses relates that an altar was erected, before he speaks of the well. Now it is of importance to observe with what great troubles these holy fathers continually had to contend; which they never would have been able to overcome or to endure, unless they had been far removed from our delicate course of living. For how severely should we feel the loss of water, seeing that we often rage against God if we have not abundance of wine? Therefore, by such examples, let the faithful learn to accustom themselves to patient endurance: and if at any time food and other necessaries of life fail them, let them turn their eyes to Isaac, who wandered, parched with thirst, in the inheritance which had been divinely promised him. 40

26. Then Abimelech went to him. We have had an exactly similar narrative in Ge 21:22. The Lord, therefore, followed Isaac with the same favor which he had before shown to his father Abraham. For it was no common blessing, that Abimelech should voluntarily seek his friendship. Besides, he would be relieved from no little care and anxiety, when his neighbors, who had harassed him in so many ways, being now themselves afraid of him, desire to secure his friendship. Therefore the Lord both confers signal honor upon his servant, and provides at the same time for his tranquility. There is not the least doubt that the king was led to this measure, by a secret divine impulse. For, if he was afraid, why did he not resort to some other remedy? Why did he humble himself to supplicate a private man? Why, at least, did he not rather send for him, or command him with authority to do what he wished? But God had so forcibly impressed his mind, that he, forgetting his regal pride, sought for peace and alliance with a man who was neither covetous, nor warlike, nor furnished with a great army. Thus we may learn, that the minds of men are in the hand of God, so that he not only can incline those to gentleness who before were swelling with fury, but can humble them by terror, as often as he pleases.

27. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me? Isaac not only expostulates concerning injuries received, but protests that in future he can have no confidence in them, since he had found in them a disposition so hostile to himself. This passage teaches us, that it is lawful for the faithful to complain of their enemies, in order, if possible, to recall them from their purpose of doing injury, and to restrain their

force, frauds, and acts of injustice. For liberty is not inconsistent with patience: nor does God require of his own people, that they should silently digest every injury which may be inflicted upon them, but only that they should restrain their minds and hands from revenge. 41 Now, if their minds are pure and well regulated, their tongues will not be virulent in reproaching the faults of others; but their sole purpose will be to restrain the wicked by a sense of shame from iniquity. For where there is no hope of profiting by complaints, it is better to cherish peace by silence; unless, perhaps, for the purpose of rendering those who delight themselves in wickedness inexcusable. We must, indeed, always beware, lest, from a desire of vengeance, our tongues break out in reproaches; and, as Solomon says, hatred stirreth up strifes. (Pr 10:12.)

28. We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee. By this argument they prove that they desired a compact with Isaac, not insidiously, but in good faith, because they acknowledge the favor of God towards him. For it was necessary to purge themselves from this suspicion, seeing that they now presented themselves so courteously to one against whom they had before been unreasonably opposed. This confession of theirs, however, contains very useful instruction. Profane men in calling one, whose affairs all succeed well and prosperously, the blessed of the Lord, bear testimony that God is the author of all good things, and that from him alone flows all prosperity. Exceedingly base, therefore, is our ingratitude, if, when God acts kindly towards us, we pass by his benefits with closed eyes. Again, profane men regard the friendship of one whom God favors, as desirable for themselves; considering that there is no better or holier commendation than the love of God. Perversely blind, therefore, are they, who not only neglect those whom God declares to be dear unto him, but also iniquitously vex them. The Lord proclaims himself ready to execute vengeance on any one who may injure those whom he takes under his protection; but the greater part, unmoved by this most terrible denunciation, still wickedly afflict the good and the simple. We here, however, see that the sense of nature dictated to unbelievers, what we scarcely credit when spoken by the mouth of God himself. Still it is surprising that they should be afraid of an inoffensive man; and should require from him an oath that he would do them no injury. They ought to have concluded, from the favor which God had showed him, that he was a just man, and therefore there could be no danger from him; yet because they form their estimate of him from their own disposition and conduct, they also distrust his probity. Such perturbation commonly agitates unbelievers, so that they are inconsistent with themselves; or at least waver and are tossed between conflicting sentiments, and have nothing fixed and equable. For those principles of right judgment, which spring up in their breasts, are soon smothered by depraved affections. Hence it happens, that what is justly conceived by them vanishes; or is at least corrupted, and does not bring forth good fruit.

29. As we have not touched thee. An accusing conscience urges them to desire to hold him closely bound unto them; and therefore they require an oath from him that he will not hurt them. For they knew that he might rightfully avenge himself on them for the sufferings he had endured: but they dissemble on this point, and even make a wonderful boast of their own acts of kindness. At first, indeed, the humanity of the king was remarkable, for he not only entertained Isaac with hospitality, but treated him with peculiar honor; yet he by no means continued to act thus to the end. It accords, however, with the common custom of men, to disguise their own faults by whatever artifice or color they can invent. But if we have committed any offense, it rather becomes us ingenuously to confess our fault, than by denying it, to wound still more deeply the minds of those whom we have injured. Nevertheless Isaac, since he had already sufficiently pierced their consciences, does not press them any further. For strangers are not to be treated by us as domestics; but if they do not receive profit, they are to be left to the judgment of God. Therefore, although Isaac does not extort from them a just confession; yet, that he may not be thought inwardly to cherish any

hostility towards them, he does not refuse to strike a covenant with them. Thus we learn from his example, that if any have estranged themselves from us, they are not to be repelled when they again offer themselves to us. For if we are commanded to follow after peace, even when it seems to fly from us, it behoves us far less to be repulsive, when our enemies voluntarily seek reconciliation; especially if there be any hope of amendment in future, although true repentance may not yet appear. And he receives them to a feast, not only for the sake of promoting peace, but also for the sake of showing that he, having laid aside all offense, has become their friend.

Thou art now the blessed of the Lord. This is commonly explained to mean that they court his favor by flatteries, just as persons are accustomed to flatter when they ask favor; but I rather think this expression to have been added in a different sense. Isaac had complained of their injuries in having expelled him through envy: they answer, that there was no reason why any particle of grief should remain in his mind, since the Lord had treated him so kindly and so exactly according to his own wish; as if they had said, What dost thou want? Art thou not content with thy present success? Let us grant that we have not discharged the duty of hospitality towards thee; yet the blessing of God abundantly suffices to obliterate the memory of that time. Perhaps, however, by these words, they again assert that they are acting towards him with good faith, because he is under the guardianship of God.

31. And sware one to another. Isaac does not hesitate to swear; partly, that the Philistines may be the more easily appeased; partly, that he may not be suspected by them. And this is the legitimate method of swearing, when men mutually bind themselves to the cultivation of peace. A simple promise, indeed, ought to have sufficed; but since dissimulations or inconstancy causes men to be distrustful of each other, the Lord grants them the use of his name, that this more holy confirmation may be added to our covenants; and he does not only permit, he even commands us to swear as often as necessity requires it. (De 6:13.) Meanwhile we must beware, lest his name be profaned by rashly swearing.

32. And it came to pass the same day. Hence it appears, (as I have said a little before,) that the waters were not found in a moment of time. If it be asked, whence a supply of water had been obtained for his cattle and his household during the intervening days, I doubt not, indeed, that he either bought it, or was compelled to go to a distance to see if any one would be found from whom he might obtain it by entreaty. With respect to the name, (Sheba,) they are mistaken, in my judgment, who deem it to be any other than that which Abraham had first given to the well. For since the Hebrew word is ambiguous, Abraham alluded to the covenant which he had struck with the king of Gerar; but now Isaac recalling this ancient memorial to mind, joins with it the covenant in which he had himself engaged.

34. And Esau was forty years old. For many reasons Moses relates the marriages of Esau. Inasmuch as he mingled himself with the inhabitants of the land, from whom the holy race of Abraham was separated, and contracted affinities by which he became entangled; this was a kind of prelude of his rejection. It happened also, by the wonderful counsel of God, that these daughters-in-law were grievous and troublesome to the holy patriarch (Isaac) and his wife, in order that they might not by degrees become favorable to that reprobate people. If the manners of the people had been pleasing, and they had had good and obedient daughters, perhaps also, with their consent, Isaac might have taken a wife from among them. But it was not lawful for those to be bound together in marriage, whom God designed to be perpetual enemies. For how would the inheritance of the land be secured to the posterity of Abraham, but by the destruction of those among whom he sojourned for a time? Therefore God cuts off all inducements to these inauspicious marriages, that the disunion which he had established might remain. It appears hence, with what perpetual affection Esau was loved by Isaac; for although the holy man justly regarded

his son's wives with aversion, and his mind was exasperated against them, he never failed to act with the greatest kindness towards his son, as we shall afterwards see. We have elsewhere spoken concerning polygamy. This corruption had so far prevailed in every direction among many people, that the custom, though vicious, had acquired the force of law. It is not, therefore, surprising that a man addicted to the flesh indulged his appetite by taking two wives.

#### Footnotes

36

Abimelech, king of the Philistines, mentioned in this verse, was not he who is spoken of in Genesis xxi., but perhaps his descendant. "It is probable the name was common to the kings of Gerar, as Pharaoh was to the kings of Egypt. The meaning of the word ■■■■■■ is, My father the king. Kings ought to be the fathers of their country." -- Menochius in Poli Syn.

37

The following passage is here omitted in the translation: -- "Non enim de coitu loquitur Moses, sed de aliquo liberiore gestu, qui vel dissolute lasciviae, vel conjugalis amoris testis esset."

38

The allusion is obviously to Isa 1:3: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." -- Ed.

39

Latitudines, a literal Latin translation of the Hebrew word ■■■■ (Rehoboth,) a plural form, expressing the notion of abundant enlargement and room. -- Ed

40

Qui siticulosus in haereditate sibi divinitus promissa erravit. Qui est errant en l'heritage qui Dieu lui avoit promis, et tarrissant de soif. -- Fr. Tr.

41

Neque hoc a suis requirit Deus, ut quicquid noxae illatum fuerit, taciti devorent; sed tantum ut animos et manus contineant a vindicta. Dieu ne requiert point des siens, qu'ils avallent sans mot dire toutes les nuisances qu'on leur fera, mais seulement qu'ils gardent leurs coeurs et leur mains de vengeance. -- Fr. Tr.

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