



Coming into the Scriptures this morning, I'm going to share with you the main idea right away: **God's promises transform his people from fear-fueled living to faith-fueled living.** As you've heard the text, you've probably heard terms related to food and drink. There's a famine. There are wells. There's a meal at the end. Food, faith and fear are interconnected within this chapter in order to teach us greater spiritual realities.

So, I have a question (it's not a trick one): What fuels your body? Food, right? If you stopped eating food and drinking water, your death is simply a matter of time. You need food and drink to fuel your physical body. Now, I have another question. This might be trickier for you to answer: What fuels your heart? I'm not talking about your physical heart. I'm talking about your entire being? As we've traveled through Genesis, we see this pull between fear and faith. When people resort to just looking at their circumstances (and away from God), they are filled with fear. As a result, they make decisions and choices that dishonor the Lord. The other way of living is by faith – believing, trusting, and depending on the Lord whatever he says and calls us to do (even, and maybe especially, when things don't make sense). What fuels your heart and soul? What animates your actions? What most often drives you to make the decisions you make? As with the text we studied two weeks ago, this text spans through the millennia and applies just as perfectly to us today as it did to people in the ancient near eastern world.

You may have noticed that today's text doesn't focus on Jacob or Esau. Moses takes a break and goes back to Isaac. One thing that intrigues me about Moses' writing about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is that Abraham gets a lot of attention and Jacob gets a lot of attention, but Isaac gets minimal attention. Having said that, I think of the record of Isaac like a concentrated story of Abraham and Jacob's life. When I said concentrated, I mean to think of getting orange concentrate. You have to mix it with water to settle down the intensity. All the orange is in that concentrate. It's just a smaller container than if you bought a bottle of orange juice. Make sense?

I say it this way because this chapter, Genesis 26, is a concentrated version of Abraham's life. We have God's promise. We have fear. We also have faith. And in the midst, we have blessing the nations and God's reiteration of his promise and presence. This reminds the wandering Israelites, who are the original audience, and all of us here, to not forget the main thing! God is calling all of us to himself through faith. Our lives are utterly dependent on him.

So, with this in mind, let's jump into the text, and I'm going to break down the main idea:

- 1. God's promise. . . (vv. 1-5).**

This chapter begins with the statement that there's a famine. This is a problem, right? If you have no food to fuel you, you're dead. So, Isaac goes to the land of Gerar to Abimelech. We've heard of him before with Abraham! Right off the bat, the Lord speaks to Isaac. God's declaration, I believe, is intended to comfort

and secure Isaac spiritually, mentally, emotionally even in the midst of a famine. Listen to what God says, beginning in verse 2: <sup>2</sup>And the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup>Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup>I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup>because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” <sup>1</sup>

There are a few things I want you to note here. First, God tells Isaac to not go to Egypt, like his father Abraham had done. He wants Isaac instead to dwell as a sojourner. That sounds like an oxy-moron. How do you dwell and sojourn at the same time? But the point is that Isaac has received the promised blessing of God – which means that Isaac isn’t to grasp for a land. He is to wait on the Lord to give it to his offspring.

God does promise to establish his covenant with Abraham with Isaac. And so, we hear God saying he will multiply Isaac’s offspring like the stars. He will give the offspring the lands. And again, remember, through the offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Keep this all in mind. This covenant with Abraham, and then with Isaac, goes all the way back to God’s promise to Adam and Eve in the garden, when he said that through the offspring of Eve, there would be One who will crush the serpent. So, God is continuing to care about this promise from generation to generation. From Abraham and now on to Isaac. But notice here what God said in verse 5. The nations will be blessed through Isaac’s offspring. Why? Because Abraham obeyed God’s voice and kept his commandments.

This is so intriguing. The phraseology of verse 5 actually follows later Jewish ways of speaking of one who obeyed the entirety of God’s OT Law. How can Abraham have been considered as obedient when the Law hadn’t been written? And, did Abraham perfectly obey God? No! He doubted. He grasped. He feared. What’s the deal? You may remember when God declared his promise to Abraham in Genesis 15, we hear the following: **And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**<sup>2</sup> Later in the Scriptures, when Paul writes about Abraham, he then quotes Psalm 32 that says, **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”**<sup>3</sup>

What does all of this mean? Through faith, belief, dependence, trust in the Lord; Abraham’s sin was not counted against him, and he was declared righteous by God – and thus his actions were accepted by the Lord as obedience. Now, as I say all of this, what I really want to emphasize is that the covenant to Isaac is *not* based in Isaac’s faith or obedience. It’s based on Abraham. This covenant has *no* conditions on Isaac, and this covenant is based in another. This is important as we move forward and will make application.

So, we have Isaac in the midst of famine. We have God commanding him not to go to Egypt. We have God calling Isaac to trust him and obey him because Isaac is receiving promises from God. So, I think God is calling Isaac to depend on the Lord and not lean on his own ways of thinking. Yet, what we see is that Isaac falls in similar and almost identical ways as Abraham (and all other people) have failed.

## 2. . . .fear-fueled living. . .(vv. 6-11).

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 26:2–5.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:6.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 4:7–8.

What many of us probably notice here is that Isaac does almost exactly what Abraham did before with Abimelech. Except Isaac goes further than his dad. Abraham was partly accurate in saying Sarah was his sister. She was a half-sister. But Isaac's is an outright lie. He thinks by lying he's going to protect them and stay out of trouble. I mean, what good is God's promise to a dead man? So, he's thinking self-preservation – and this self-preservation is all based in fear. But Isaac's lie betrays God's standards.

Now, look at verse 8 with me: When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.<sup>4</sup> There's a play on words going on here. The name "Isaac" means "he laughs." And now we have Isaac laughing with Rebekah. What does this mean, especially when you go on to the next verses and we're told that Abimelech knew they were married because they were laughing together? I mean, I don't assume that if you're laughing with someone that you're married! The word for "laughing" here implies laughing that is taking place as they are showing physical affection.

When you understand this, then think about Abimelech's rebuke! He is *not* happy. Now, no one actually took Rebekah (like Abimelech had with Sarah), but he knows the seriousness of God's judgment. Here's Isaac laughing and having fun with Rebekah behind the scenes, and citizens of Abimelech's people could have died! No wonder Abimelech says, "What have you done to us?" In other words, Isaac wasn't think about other people at all. He was just thinking about himself.

Abimelech's rebuke aligns with the Lord's heart. After all, God said at the beginning of Isaac's sojournings (in verse 4) that through his offspring the nations will be blessed. Isaac isn't thinking about blessing. He's thinking of saving his own skin. He's more fear-fueled than faith-fueled in these actions. Yet, God still protect Isaac and Rebekah. Abimelech charges the people to not marry Rebekah and Isaac doesn't need to be afraid.

Even though there's fear-fueled living, leading to hiding and unloving deception, I do believe the Lord uses this situation and Abimelech's rebuke to be a pivotal scenario in Isaac's life and that's why the main idea is that God's promises transform us from fear-fueled living to faith-fueled living. And so, I want to move on to the next section.

### 3. . . .transforms his people. . .to faith-fueled living (vv. 12-33).

I don't know when Isaac first trusted the Lord, but I am not confident it's in this narrative. I can't help but wonder if it was when Abraham was about to sacrifice him and he didn't fight back. Whenever his first moment of faith was, this chapter makes clear that his faith increases in his life. I want to emphasize that point because sometimes people can tend to read biblical narratives about people and think that if they didn't exercise great faith, then they clearly didn't have faith at all. So, if Isaac lived on the basis of fear and then now we see immense faith, then Isaac wasn't saved and now he is. But what if we evaluated ourselves that way. Give me a snippet of your life this past week where you were acting more on the basis of fear. Do you want me to say you're not saved yet? You would say that's not true. So it is for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the saints throughout the ages. Instead, what we see in God's children – the people who have faith in him – that their faith grows. Less and less does fear fuel them, and faith increasingly fuels them.

You look at verses 12-14, and we're told that Isaac increases in wealth by the Lord's blessing. He had flocks, herds, and many servants. But then the Philistines envied his prosperity. And then in verse 16,

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 26:8.

we're told that Abimelech tells Isaac that Isaac has become mightier than Abimelech and his people. There appears to be envy and fear.

Notice here that this verbiage is much like Egypt's response to Israel. They were afraid of their growth and so they enslaved them. Thankfully, Abimelech doesn't do that. But I think that's because Isaac truly was stronger. He could have probably fought and won. And notice something. Isaac doesn't fight. He doesn't say, "This is *my land!* I'm going to fight for it." I think Isaac remembered the Lord's command to him that he is to sojourn. If you're a sojourner, even if you have a home for a long time in one place, it's not your *home*. So, he doesn't fight. He leaves.

What's the first thing Isaac does when he arrives to a new area? He digs for a well. We're told in verse 15 that the Philistines had already filled in the wells Abraham created; so, Isaac is trying to redig these wells. Question: how important is water to a civilization? Critically important, right? So, Isaac's servants go through the work of unstopping a well, and then Philistines come by and fight for it. Notice again, Isaac doesn't stay. He's a sojourner. Now, he and his people could die without water, but he moves on and simply names the well "Contention." They undig another well and name it "Enmity." This word is actually related to the word for Satan. This brings out the ideas again of the seed of the woman versus the seed of the serpent. Yet, Isaac is clearly trusting the Lord. He doesn't fight to dwell there with that water – even though he needs water. Why? Because God has promised! He believes the promises of God. And so he moves on. Finally, he gets to a place and unstops a well and there's no fighting. This is called "Broad places." And he believes the Lord has placed him there.

We then read that he goes on to Beersheba and the following happens as recorded in verses 24-25: <sup>24</sup> And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." <sup>25</sup> So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well. <sup>5</sup>

God restates and reaffirms the promises. And he even adds, "I am with you." Isaac's response is worship and confession. He believes. He trusts. And as God is his fuel, he decides to live there and then receive God's blessing in that place. After this, Abimelech comes and asks for a peace treaty between Isaac and Abimelech's people. He confesses he knows Isaac is blessed by the Lord. And what does Isaac do? He doesn't say, "Are you kidding me? You kicked me out. Your people took my wells. Ridiculous!" No. Isaac's heart is beating with the Lord's. God's design has always been to draw sinners to himself. People who are fear-fueled and trusting in themselves and managing life on their own. People who are taking all of God's creation and using it for themselves, God has designed to draw them back to him.

Isaac's blessing isn't just for selfish purposes – it's for the world! Will Isaac care about them? He does because he's experienced God's protection and care of him. And so, he covenants peace with Abimelech, and we read the following in verses 30-31: <sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. <sup>6</sup>

A meal because God is the sustenance. God is the source of all blessing. God is the one who turns enemies into friends and reconciles people to one another. As you think about this narrative, how do you think this applies to us and to you? You've probably already picked up some ideas, so I'm going to emphasize just a

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 26:24–25.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 26:30–31.

few. First off, do you know the promises of God? Do you know the Serpent-Crusher, Jesus. He's the seed of the woman who came and took the curse of God on himself. He took the punishment our sins deserved on himself and also lived perfectly before God. He wasn't just like Abraham and counted righteous. He is righteous. And he rose from the dead, conquering death. He now calls everyone everywhere to turn to him and turn from their sins.

And, God's promises are all based on HIM – not on you. It's based on *him*. Do you know him? Do you believe him? Do you trust him? If you do, how much is fear still fueling your life? This past week, I was listening to a friend and former pastor I worked with, Mark Vroegop. He was talking about fear and he said this: **"Fear is a powerful motivator. Fear is also a powerful justifier of regrettable decisions."** Stop there for a moment. Isaac justified lying and putting Abimelech's people in harm's way because of fearing his life. Abraham went to Egypt because he was afraid for his life and risked losing his wife. Fear is a powerful justifier of regrettable decisions and is also a powerful motivator. Mark Vroegop went on to say: **Be a little afraid of your fear. Be skeptical of people who try to make you afraid because you are highly temptable and highly motivated when you're afraid.**

I recall our study through John and in chapter 11, the religious people were afraid of what Jesus could do. They said that if they let Jesus continue on, the Romans will take away their nation and their place. There was a direct connect between people's fear and the crucifixion of Jesus. Fear kept them from seeing Jesus. What about you? How much are you allowing fear to fuel you? Have you forgotten the promises of God? Maybe you're like the religious leaders in Jesus' day, or like Isaac lying. You are comfortable here in this nation and land and you don't want persecution. I get it! But you're resorting to justifying sin and deceptions. Ask yourself, **how often do I allow fear to motivate me? How do I talk and speak? If someone is listening to me, are they hearing that the basis of my motivation is fear?**

Now, let's ask another question. If you are Christ's, then God promises to transform you. **How have you seen God transform you from fear-fueled to faith-fueled?** What opposition and struggles have you faced, and even what blessings have you received in life, and they have not diverted you from clinging to and resting in Jesus? We see from Isaac that it's through God's promise that his faith is increased. And this is the message of Scripture. Faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ. Maybe you're still living with fear because you don't know his promises. I'd urge you to open up the Bible and read and listen and rest and rejoice in the promises. Let them be to you as the firm foundation that they are! **Don't neglect the Spirit's miraculous work through the Word of God.**

Something I find profound here in this text of Genesis is how it really does lead to loving others and making peace. So, this is something I want to highlight. If you walk away from this sermon thinking, "Wow, I got some pretty good information," and you haven't been drawn closer to the Lord nor have you been compelled to love others more and better, something went wrong. I want to urge you to see that because God has covenanted with you (on the basis of Jesus) and has reconciled himself to you, then you are now an agent of reconciliation with others. Do you know what that means? You can speak God's peace to others and truly welcome them into your lives – whether they have hurt you or not. But the reason for doing this is to magnify God's goodness and glory. His mission is to reconcile and bring people to him!

If we live in fear, we'll push people away. If we are fueled by faith, then faith will be like gasoline that gives life to all our actions. **God's promises transform us from fear-fueled to faith-fueled living.** So, as we conclude this time in the Word, I want to urge you to pray that the Spirit fuels you increasingly by faith in the Lord. We're going to sing a song in a moment: Completely Done. The reality is that if you are his, your faith will not fail! You will grow. This should compel all of us to pray and ask the Lord to make all his promises real to us every day. Will you take time to respond in prayer, and then I will conclude in prayer.