

## Life Under God's Blessing

Genesis 26:1-33

Every week, at the end of the service, I pronounce a blessing. This blessing is not magic, but neither is it wishful thinking. It is God's promise to all who believe His Son. Jesus Christ alone has redeemed us from the curse through His death on the cross. We who are in Christ are no longer under God's condemnation, but now live our lives under His blessing.

But what does it really look like to live "under God's Blessing"? Our hope is that God will work to make our life in this world better. We may not expect every day to feel like "walking on sunshine", but we are surprised, and even at times dismayed, when our ideas of "better" are left unfulfilled.

In fact, it is easy to look at our lives and conclude that they are only a random mixture of good and evil with little or no Divine Purpose... no sovereign outworking of God's Blessing at all.

I am convinced that this is what Esau concluded. He grew up under the blessing of God. But rather than purpose and meaning and direction in that blessing, he wanted more. And he believed that he could have a better life, apart from the blessing of God.

Genesis 26 is a summary of some key events in the life of Isaac. They have the feel of a grandparent telling stories to their grandchildren.

Isaac is the heir of God's covenant promises. The blessing first given to Abraham, now belongs to him. From the beginning of his life, God has had his hand of blessing on him.

But in these stories we see frustration, disappointment, and evil surrounding Isaac's life.

How is it that "the" Blessing could exist along with these?

Chapter 25 ended with Esau selling his birthright for a pot of stew. This chapter ends with the heartbreaking statement of Esau choosing wives from among the Canaanites.

Chapter 27 will begin with Jacob stealing the blessing from Esau.

As we read chapter 26, it is as if Isaac is telling these stories to help us not come to the same conclusions as Esau.

We need to see the greatness and certainty of the Blessing that Esau has despised.

And we need to see the various obstacles that God must overcome for His people to experience the fullness of blessing.

Read Genesis 26:1-6. (Covenant Blessing Confirmed to Isaac)

Now there was a famine in the land,  
besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham.

And

Isaac went  
to Gerar  
to Abimelech king of the Philistines.

If God's blessing rests on Isaac, why is there another famine in the land? The land is the Promised Land. The Land is to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

Instead of abounding fruitfulness, this land produces little to no blessing. Isaac, like his father, must leave the land simply to live.

The hard truth is that in this present life, God's people have to deal with famine.

I know that we have not personally lived through a true famine. But difficult trials happen to God's people. Cars break down at the worst time, and cost far more to fix than we hoped for. We lose our job, or do not get the raise

that we so desperately needed. We want to work to provide for ourselves but sickness or injury prevent us from doing so. Inflation is high. Even in a country that has rich resources, we often struggle to make ends meet.

Why would God allow the promised land to experience famine?  
God does not explain Himself.

But one thing is sure. If we are to experience the fullness of blessing, the curse upon the land must be removed. While God can and does give us seasons in which our lands relatively fruitful, the fullness of blessing must await the return of Christ, when the curse upon this world is entirely lifted and there is no more famine.

If we want to fully experience the blessing, then all famines must cease.

Another reason that God allows the famine is because it provides the context in which Isaac must learn to live by faith.

If you remember, it was famine led Abraham out of the Promised Land (Gen. 12:10-20)

That famine led Abraham to Egypt which was a low point in his faith. He doubted the goodness and power of God to overcome the obstacles and give the blessing.

Abraham left the land of promise in order to have food to feed his family. By going to Egypt, Abraham's confidence in God to provide was shown to be weak.

Our hopes of blessing are not joined to a piece of land in the Middle East. But when we experience the hardships of this life, it is easy to lose our confidence that God will indeed fulfill his promises of blessing to us. It is in times of scarcity that our faith can weaken. We begin to trust in ourselves, or in the things of this world to take care of us, rather than continuing to trust in God to provide.

Another lesson from this famine is that rather than learning from the bad choices of his dad, Isaac seems intent on repeating them. Isaac travels to Gerar. This is a region lying between the Promised Land and Egypt.

He is on his way to Egypt, just like Abraham.

Isaac is following in the footsteps of his dad. It even seems like he meets up with the same king as his dad.

This Abimelech is likely a son or grandson, but it is not by accident that the names are the same as during Abraham's day.

Isaac helps us to see that living by faith in God's promises will never come naturally.

God must train us to live by faith.

Without the intervention of God, we will follow the same path as Abraham and Isaac.

How encouraging is it that God does not treat Isaac with harshness! Instead, God mercifully works to increase Isaac's faith.

2        And  
          the LORD appeared to him  
          and  
          said,  
          "Do not go down to Egypt;  
          dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.  
3        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.

4 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,  
5 because Abraham obeyed  
my voice  
and  
kept  
my charge,  
my commandments,  
my statutes,  
and  
my laws."  
6. So Isaac settled in Gerar.

It is significant that Isaac is not the one who initiates the encounter with God.

God appears to Isaac.

God knows that left to himself, Isaac will not keep trusting in the promised blessing.

God knows that he will do what we all do, look to whatever earthly wisdom we have to get us out of the situation.

But God does not leave his own people to their own devices.

God graciously intervenes. This is sovereign grace.

This is also Covenant grace. God is being faithful to Abraham by keeping Isaac from going to Egypt.

The Promised Blessing is not forfeit because of the famine. God is being faithful to His promises in the midst of famine.

But even though God initiates this encounter, we must not conclude that God does not expect anything from Isaac.

What does he expect?

He expects Isaac to trust and obey His word to him.

This is precisely what God expected of Abraham.

Abraham was called to “go” to the promised land.

Isaac is called to “remain” in the promised land.

But the essence of faith is the same. Isaac has a responsibility to obey God’s Word.

His obedience is not the cause of blessing. But it is the instrument through which he will receive blessing.

Obedience to God’s Word flowing from faith in God’s Promised Blessing is what God expects from us in this life. We are not so much to chase after the blessing for ourselves, but rather to live in humble reliance upon our good and faithful God.

Again, we see that it is the Word of God that encourages faith in God’s promises.

God continues to repeat the same promises that He proclaimed to Abraham.

He promises relationship: I will be with you and will bless you

He promises a fruitful Land which will provide a good home – no more famines.

He promises to him offspring: They will be multiplied as much as the stars of heaven.

And He promises that the other nations of the world will be blessed in his offspring.

These are the same promises given to Abraham. They are not new promises.

But in verse 5, there is something new that we did not see before.

God says that the fulfillment of the promises will come to pass because Abraham obeyed.

because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept

my charge,  
my commandments,  
my statutes,  
and  
my laws."

This statement raises questions.

The first is trying to make sense of the relationship between Abraham's obedience and Isaac's children receiving the blessing.

It is also challenging to understand why language of the Mosaic Law is used to describe the obedience of Abraham.

Let's deal with that question first.

If we rely upon what we have in Scripture, Abraham was given very few commands by God.

Leave your home, walk before me and be blameless, and sacrifice your son are all that we really have.

Commandments, statutes, and laws reflect the time of Moses.

**Deuteronomy 11:1** "You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.

Why use the same phraseology?

The obedience of the Mosaic Law is merely an expansion of the general command given to the Fathers.

The importance of Covenant Obedience has always been present.

Just as Abraham obeyed the voice of God, so all his children must live lives of obedience to God's commands.

Now, back to the first question.

What is the relationship between Abraham's obedience and Isaac's children receiving the blessing?

There are two ways to answer this.

First, every member of the covenant in any generation must follow Abraham's example of obedience to God's Word.

Even though our obedience does not earn the blessing, it is essential to our enjoying the blessing. Learning how to renounce our sin and embrace God's will for our lives is really the point of this life.

Submission of our heart to God, and obedience to His Word matters more than anything else in this life.

As a model to us, Abraham functions as a fellow member of the Covenant of Grace.

But it is also true that Abraham also functions as the head of the Covenant of Grace here. And as the Covenant Head, he earns blessings for all who are "in him."

In this way, Abraham functions as a type of Christ.

Jesus Christ obeyed perfectly and because of his perfect obedience all the blessings of the Covenant of Grace flow to us.

This is communicated here in the covenant. Because Abraham obeyed, his offspring will enjoy the blessing.

It is important for Isaac to respond in faith to God's Word.

1. He will appreciate that the Covenant promises come to him because of Abraham.
2. He will emulate Abraham's faith leading to obedience in his own life.

God's covenant promises were not given to you in isolation.

They were given to Christ first, as your covenant head. You are called to believe that His obedience earns you the blessing.

But given this faith, it is also important for you to emulate Christ in His lifelong commitment to obey God's Word above his own will.

This is the sanctification that Grace alone produces in the heart when we trust in Jesus to save us.

Isaac will have to wait his whole life to experience the fullness of the Covenant Blessing.

But throughout his time of waiting, he is to be learning how to trust God more, and to obey God more.

This may seem simple. But it is far from easy.

Read Genesis 26:7-11. (Fear of Man)

The opposite of faith is fear. To be more specific, the fear of man.

The fear of God is a good thing.

But the fear of men is an obstacle to enjoying the Covenant blessing.

Abraham was a man of faith. You might think that his faith would naturally be transferred to his son. You would be wrong. Instead, it is his propensity to fear men that he passes on.

Isaac finds himself in a very similar dilemma to that of his dad. And he adopts the same strategy as his dad.

The fear of pain and suffering is natural. Living by faith is not natural.

It is a good principle to ask yourself when faced with decisions: Am I making this decision because of any other fear than the good fear of God? Am I trusting God and his promises to me?

Isaac's initial lack of faith is not designed to make us conclude that he had no faith. It is designed to help us see that even when faith is present, it can and must be nourished and strengthened.

And it also helps us to remember that sincere faith is not the same thing as perfect faith. Only Jesus had perfect faith. We have an imperfect faith that proclaims, "I believe, help my unbelief."

The blessing is not dependent upon the perfection of your faith any more than it is dependent upon the perfection of your obedience.

God intervenes into this situation, but not through a dream as before. Abimelech simply happens to see Isaac playfully and romantically interacting with Rebekah.

God's hand of providence is just as good as His direct intervention in a dream.

Once Abimelech discovers that Isaac and Rebekah are married, he confronts Isaac.

His rebuke of Isaac is enlightening.

Abimelech recognizes that God's blessing resides upon Isaac. This is important.

He believes that taking Rebekah as a wife would bring cursing upon them as a people – not on Isaac for lying.

What lesson are we to learn from this? That to harm God's Promised Seed would result in being cursed.

Isaac represents the visible people of God in his day. God takes very seriously people who harm his treasured people.

Abimelech recognizes this. And so, he issues an order that no one is to harm Isaac or Rebekah in any way.

Even though Isaac has failed as a protector, God continues to protect Rebekah.

Can you see how good God is to those who are heirs of His covenant blessing?

In all of this, Abimelech values the Blessing more than will Esau.

Fear is an obstacle to enjoying covenant blessings.

Not only are we to strive to overcome our fears, but we are to look forward to a land in which there will not even be a reason to fear.

**1 John 4:18** <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Read Genesis 26:12-14. (The Envy of Men)

12       And  
          Isaac sowed in that land  
          and  
          reaped in the same year a hundredfold.  
          The LORD blessed him,  
13       and  
          the man became rich,  
          and  
          gained more and more  
          until he became very wealthy.  
14       He had possessions of  
          flocks  
          and  
          herds  
          and  
          many servants,  
          so that the Philistines envied him.

The first thing to see is that Isaac sows. He is not in “the” promised land. But he works hard to produce fruit where he is. And so must all who live under God’s blessing. We are called to work hard in life.

And God blesses his work a hundred fold.

Isaac is given material wealth.

This helps us to see that material wealth in this life is not inherently evil.

It is the product of hard work and God’s blessing.

But the riches of material blessing are the cause of another problem.

The Philistines envied him.

The love of material wealth produces in the heart jealousy and envy.

What does this tell us about the New Heavens and New Earth?

In order for the NH/NE to work, the problem of envy must be fixed within the hearts of all who dwell there.

It is very likely that the riches of eternity will in some ways be varied. While every spiritual blessing is ours in Jesus Christ, it is also true that Christ distributes the gifts of the Spirit differently among His people. Are you content, like David, to be a doorkeeper in the house of your God? Or would envy fill your heart if others were given greater gifts?

God must destroy all envy in our hearts, except to be jealous for the glory of God.

It is also wonderful to see here that God's blessing is not dependent upon being in the Physical Land of Israel. God can bless his people anywhere on this earth.

Read Genesis 26:15 (Destruction of Previous Blessing)

15 (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.)

What did the Philistines do because of their envy?

They stopped up the wells that Abraham's servants had dug previously.

I find this helpful. This world is in bondage to decay. And it is also full of evil men who will destroy what was once gained.

It is depressing to work for something your whole life only to see it destroyed.

It would be nice to think that the kingdom of God is always expanding and never facing retreat.

How frustrating is it to rebuild what was previously built and then destroyed.

Do not our hearts yearn for a day and a place where what we build will not be destroyed by people or time?

Do not look for this in this life?

But learn to build anyway.

Isaac does not fall into despair saying, “What is the point?”

“The Blessing given to Abraham is only going to rot!”

As Isaac seeks to live in this life, God directs him back to the Promised Land.

Read Genesis 26:16-22. (Quarreling and Strife and Room)

Just as the people are envious of Isaac’s wealth, so Abimelech is fearful of Isaac’s power.

He wants him to move away because he has become too powerful.

He moves away, but not too far. He finds good water, fresh water. But a good source of water is like gold. So, the people claim that Isaac does not have the rights to this water.

Whether or not they had a legal claim is not the point. In a land of scarcity, people will fight over such things as water.

Isaac moves on and digs another well.

This does not solve the problem.

Isaac moves again. Guess where he is heading?

Back into the Promised Land.

When he gets here, he is no longer disturbed, so he calls the well “roomy”. He is able to stretch out and not feel like he is stepping on the toes of his neighbors.

I know that some people really like living in crowded cities.

And I know that the New Jerusalem is a city.

But I am looking forward to having enough room to live in peace.

Scarcity, fear, envy, destruction and quarreling... you can expect these things in this life.

They may even tempt you to think that there really is not a blessing after all, or that it is not of much use. That is what Esau concluded.

Even though you are heir of the blessing, co-heirs with Jesus Christ, this world is not your home.

Live here. Sow here and look for God's blessing, in part, here.

But live more concerned about living by faith and learning to obey than about obtaining the fullness of blessing.

The Blessing has value for this life.

But its true value is for eternity.

We are encouraged to be confident in this blessing by the Word of God, not by our lives.

At the beginning of this chapter God appeared to Isaac.

Now, he will appear to him again, confirming the same promises previously given.

Read Genesis 26:23-25. (The Promised Blessing)

23 From there he went up to Beersheba.

24 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."

25 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.

We are to hear these statements of Covenant Blessing as if they were spoken directly to us.

And we are to respond to these promises in the same way that Isaac responded.

We are to worship God.

And we are call upon His name all the days of our life.

In every trial God is directing Isaac back to the Promised Land, geographically... but also in Isaac's heart.

And we too must have our hearts continually redirected back to God's promise of blessing.

What we find is that even though this world is full of trials, God's blessing is to be valued and treasured.

This passage ends with Abimelech recognizing the blessing of God that is upon Isaac.

Read Genesis 26:26-33. (Others recognize the Blessing upon Isaac)

26 When Abimelech went to him from Gerar  
with Ahuzzath his adviser  
and

Phicol the commander of his army,

27 Isaac said to them,

"Why have you come to me,  
seeing that you hate me  
and

have sent me away from you?"

28 They said,

"We see plainly that the LORD has been with you.

So we said,

let there be a sworn pact between us,  
between you and us,

and  
 let us make a covenant with you,  
 that you will do us no harm,  
 just as we have not touched you  
 and  
 have done to you nothing but good  
 and  
 have sent you away in peace.  
You are now the blessed of the LORD."

Abimelech had previously commanded Isaac to move away. Now, he realizes that he would be better off to seek a treaty with Isaac.

The point here is God will bring all people to recognize the blessing upon His children.

Every knee will bow before Jesus Christ.

People may mock the church now. But in the end, they will see the error of their ways.

Abimelech recognizes that Isaac is blessed.

Abimelech helps us to see the foolishness of Esau.

Even unbelievers recognize the blessing upon Isaac.

That blessing rightfully belongs to Esau. And he could care less.

How about you?

Your life is a lot like Isaac's. You can see many ways in which God has been very kind to you. But you have also experienced frustrations, disappointments, and evils in this life.

Have these weakened your confidence in God's goodness to you?

It is not easy to believe that God is not cursing you in your trials. But it is true for all who are in Christ.

Rather than cursing you, God is training you.

His training is not always pleasant. But it flows from God's love and out of His blessing.

**Hebrews 12:11-16** <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup> Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup> that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

God has promised to you "every spiritual blessing" in Jesus Christ. We are called to live our entire lives under that blessing... even as we experience all sorts of trials.