

“The Covenant Renewed with Isaac”
 (“Isaac Follows in the Footsteps of His Father Abraham”)
 (Genesis 26)

As you know, we have now dealt with the whole life of Abraham, at least that which is recorded for us in the Bible, about fourteen chapters. And it was a very remarkable life, a life of trial and hardship, a life of faith and courage, a life that had very much of Christ in it, and for this reason a life that has much in it that we should imitate. Now we are looking at what Moses had to say about Isaac, the covenant seed. But the interesting thing is that there isn't that much recorded about Isaac. His life spans only about six chapters, and most of that only incidentally. Our passage this evening gives us about as much about his life as there is. We know him mainly as the boy who was a picture of Christ. He was the one who was born according to God's promise, who came forth miraculously from a woman who had been barren for the first ninety years of her life, who was persecuted by his brother who was born according to the flesh, who was nearly sacrificed on a mountain in the land of Moriah as a burnt offering, and who was restored to his father as one who had risen from the dead. Outside of this, we see very little of him. We know that he was sad when his mother died, but was comforted by his marriage to Rebekah. We know that he buried his father Abraham when he died, with his half-brother Ishmael. And we know that he prayed to God for his wife Rebekah when she was barren and received twins, Jacob and Esau. Even in our passage this evening we don't see anything really remarkable about his life, except for this one thing: he was the heir to the promise. He was the one through whom the Messiah was to come, and it is for this reason that he is important. Most of us here this evening perhaps aren't going to be or do anything that significant or important in our lives. The Lord may not have chosen us to do anything that great – to be an Abraham, a Moses, a David, an apostle Paul, an Augustine, Luther, Calvin or Edwards. Our significance might also be in the fact that we are simply children of promise. But if that is what the Lord wills, it is still an infinite mercy from God; and we should always be thankful for it, and do what we can to glorify Him in this life, before we are caught up into heaven to live with Him for all eternity.

This evening, I want us to consider the life of a rather ordinary man, the life of Isaac. What I want us to see is what we should hope to see in ourselves as we go through life: that he believed the promises of God and received them, and was willing to endure hardship because of them, so that he might eventually inherit the promises. One way we might summarize what we will see this evening is that Isaac followed in the footsteps of his father Abraham, something that we should also do, if we are to inherit the promises of God.

The Lord now tried the faith of Isaac through His Providence in bringing a famine in the Promised Land. What will he think of it now? Will it be better to stay in the land and inherit the promise, or to go somewhere else? Though the faith of Isaac was weak, he still considered it better to stay in the land of promise than to enjoy prosperity somewhere else. In this sense, he followed in the footsteps of His father Abraham.

First, Isaac followed in the footsteps of his father by moving to Gerar. Apparently, Isaac started to go down to Egypt in order to survive the famine, like his

father had done earlier. But when he stopped in Gerar, the Lord appeared to him and told him not to go down there, but to stay where he was. It's hard to tell exactly why the Lord didn't want him to go. When there was a famine in Abraham's day, He allowed him to go. When there will be another famine in the days of Jacob, He will send Joseph ahead of him to prepare the way for him there. But He didn't want Isaac to go down there. Perhaps it was because Isaac was the weakest of all the patriarchs. Perhaps his faith would not have been able to endure there. We know that the Lord is merciful and will never try His people beyond what they are able to handle. This might have also been why the Lord chose this time to establish His covenant with Isaac, to strengthen his faith during the famine. He promised to be with him, to bless him, to give him the land, to greatly multiply his descendants, and to make his seed a blessing to all the nations (which as we know was referring to the Christ). We can bear up under just about any load or trial if we truly know that the Lord is with us in it. Faith has to have something to hold onto. And here the Lord gives Isaac His promise that he might believe, so that he might be preserved through this trial. This is what we must do in the midst of our difficulties as well. We must look to the promises of God, that He has promised to be our God and we His people, that He has promised to sanctify all of our trials and tribulations to our good and growth in grace. We must look to what He has promised us in Christ.

But with a great privilege also comes great responsibility. The Lord had blessed Abraham and fulfilled His promise to him, to a God to him and to his seed, because Abraham had obeyed the voice of the Lord. Certainly the Lord would never bless anyone who was in rebellion against Him. God was now passing this promise onto Isaac because of Abraham's faithfulness, but if Isaac was to receive and hold onto this promise, he would have to obey Him as well. How could he do this?

We need to remember that what the Lord commands, He also fulfills in His people. All of us would rebel against the Lord if it were not for His grace in our lives. Abraham would have as well. It was only because of the grace of Christ working in him that he believed and obeyed. This is the only reason we will ever obey as well, because of the grace of Christ. And this was the only thing that would enable Isaac to persevere through this trial and still be able to hold onto and inherit the promise. Isaac must have remembered his father's obedience to God, that he was willing to give Him whatever He asked, even to offer him up as a burnt offering. Surely this must have also encouraged Isaac to follow in Abraham's footsteps. If his father was willing to give whatever God asked and would not hold anything back, how could Isaac now withhold his obedience from the Lord? The example of a godly father can go a long ways in the lives of his children.

But even though there were godly things to follow, there were also weaknesses. Second, we see Isaac follow in the footsteps of his father Abraham by lying about his wife Rebekah. Christ is the only perfect example. Everyone else will fall short. The Lord calls us to imitate what we see of Christ in each other, not what we see of each other's sins. It's not that Isaac intentionally followed his father in this. He wasn't even born at the time his father did this. But this showed that he had the same weakness his father had.

Isaac, having decided to stay in Gerar was now faced with the same temptation that his father had been earlier with regard to Sarah: what if someone saw his wife Rebekah and wanted her for himself and killed him? And so he lied about his

relationship with her. Some say that this must have happened before Jacob and Esau were born, which is why she could have been mistaken for his sister. With children running around, it would be hard to imagine that they could have thought she was single. However, we read at the end of the chapter that Esau, at forty years of age, takes two wives from among the Canaanites. It may have been that the twins were so old by this time, they could have been mistaken for servants or children by another marriage. But again, here we see the same weakness of faith that Abraham experienced. Isaac apparently didn't trust the Lord enough to protect him. He thought he had to deal with this situation in his own way, in the way Abraham did. But obviously, he didn't. At least in this case, Rebekah wasn't taken into Abimelech's household. His deception was discovered before that happened. After he had been there for a long time, Abimelech happened to look out his window and saw Isaac caressing his wife. This probably wasn't the same Abimelech that Abraham had earlier lied to because this event most likely took place about ninety years later. Remember that Isaac wasn't even born when Abraham went to Philistia. Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah, and he was sixty when the twins were born. When we read at the end of the chapter that Esau married at forty, Isaac could have been at this time anywhere between sixty and one hundred years old. Besides, Abimelech is really not the name of a person so much as it is a title for a king. Now when Abimelech saw him with his wife, he rebuked Isaac. He asked him why he lied, and Isaac told him that it was because he was afraid that someone might kill him and take his wife. Abimelech, possibly remembering what had happened to his father or grandfather in the case of Sarah, how the Lord had appeared to him and told him that he was as good as dead, realized that Isaac had put him and his people into a very serious situation. If one of his people had taken Rebekah, he would have brought guilt on all of them. So Abimelech charged the people not to touch Isaac or Rebekah upon the pain of death. This same thing had happened in the case of Abraham. The Abimelech of those days also rebuked the one who had the promises of God. If the Lord can use a donkey to rebuke a prophet, He can certainly use a heathen to rebuke His people for their sin, when there is no one else to do it. But in spite of this, we need to see the goodness of God again in this: the Lord didn't allow any harm to come to Isaac or to Rebekah, even though Isaac, like his father, had a fairly significant lapse of faith. This reminds us that even good men can fall into sin when their faith becomes too weak to hold onto God's promise. We must remember to keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord and His promise. He has said that He will never fail to honor it. We can't have a better guarantee than that.

Next we see that Isaac followed in the footsteps of his father Abraham in that he was blessed by God like Abraham.

In spite of his lapse of faith, the Lord still blessed Isaac. I understand that usually a crop yields about fifty times as much as you plant, but Isaac reaped a hundredfold. His flocks and herds also increased, as did his number of servants, so much so that the Philistines envied Isaac. Abimelech finally told him to move away from them for he was too powerful. Abimelech was afraid perhaps that Isaac would attack him and take away what he had, or that his own people would turn on him and begin to serve Isaac out of envy. But for whatever reason, Isaac didn't stay and fight, but peaceably moved on and settled in the valley of Gerar. The Scripture tells us that the peacemaker will be blessed, and that is exactly what Isaac was doing. And even after he was expelled from the land, when he dug for water in the valley and found it, and the herdsmen of Gerar quarrel with

him over them, he simply moved on until there was no contest, and then he settled down. Perhaps this is to show us that if we seek for peace long enough, eventually we'll find it. Sometimes it doesn't happen right away, but if we want it bad enough and pray for it long enough, eventually it will be ours. Isaac didn't fight back, and the Lord not only blessed his possessions, but made room for him in the land.

Next we see that Isaac followed in the footsteps of his father Abraham in that he returned to Beersheba to settle down.

We're not really told why, but once there is room in the land for Isaac and his household and herds, he decided to pack up and move to Beersheba, which is about twenty miles from Gerar. This is the same place that Abraham had earlier made a covenant with Abimelech and Phicol, when they saw the Lord was with him and had come to him to make a covenant with him. This was also where Abraham complained to Abimelech about some of his herdsmen who had seized a well that he his servants had dug. But it is here that the Lord again appeared to Isaac to renew the covenant. He again comforted Isaac, telling him not to be afraid, and promising to bless him and to multiply his children for the sake of His servant Abraham. And it is here that he built an altar, and like his father, called upon the name of the Lord and worshiped Him for His goodness and mercy to him and his household. Wherever we go and whatever the situation is around us, we must always draw near to the Lord, for He is our help and our shield. It was the Lord's mercy that preserved Isaac, and it was His continuing mercy that would keep him through the rest of his life.

Finally, we see Isaac follow in his father's footsteps in that he makes a covenant with Abimelech.

The last thing we see is Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, come to Isaac in order to make a covenant with him. The reason they wanted to do so was again because they knew the Lord had blessed him, and they were afraid of him. Interestingly enough, this covenant was made in the same place that Abraham had earlier made a covenant with Abimelech and the commander of his army. In both cases, the heathen of the land – those who really had no right to the land of promise – were forced by the Lord to enter into a covenant with the one who did have the right by the promise. They were the intruders or foreigners in the land. But it was Isaac's by promise. And so they were forced to humble themselves and enter into a covenant. The Bible says that when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Isaac had followed the Lord, and the Lord had made room for him in the land He had promised him. He even allowed him to find the water he so desperately needed, and so he named that place Beersheba, or the well of the oath, to remember the faithfulness of the Lord to His promise. This is to remind us that if we follow the Lord, He will work everything out for our good. Don't look at things as they outwardly appear, but look at them through the promise, for the Lord will bless all things to your good. Amen.