

36. Faith that needs to be tested

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True faith is always tested, either by temptations within us or trials around us because a faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. God tests us to bring out the best in us, but satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us.

In one form or another, each new generation must experience the same tests as previous generations, if only to discover that the enemy doesn't change his tactics and that human nature doesn't improve.

This morning we are going to find Isaac, the son of Abraham is facing a test of his faith. He could come out with a flying color or fail it as his father did previously.

A. THE TEMPTATION TO RUN

Genesis 26:1-6 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. 2 Then the Lord appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 4 And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed 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 dwelt in Gerar.

When Abraham arrived in Canaan, he found a famine in the land and faced his first serious test of faith according to chapter 12. His solution was to abandon the place God had chosen for him, the place of obedience, and to run to Egypt, thus establishing a bad example for his descendants who were prone to imitate him.

Listen, the safest place in the world is in the will of God because the will of God will never lead us where His grace can't provide for us. Unbelief asks, "How can I get out of this?" while faith asks, "What can I get out of this?"

This time when Isaac faced the same kind of problem of famine as his father, he decided to go to Gerar, the capital city of the Philistines, and get help from Abimelech. God permitted Isaac to remain in Philistia and promised to bless him. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be greatly multiplied and one day would possess all those lands. Thus Isaac had a right to be there as long as God approved.

We can never successfully run away from trials because God sees to it that His children learn the lessons of faith regardless of where we go. We can never grow in faith by running from difficulty.

Romans 5:3b-5 knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

B. THE TEMPTATION TO LIE

Genesis 26:7-11 And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She is my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "She is my wife," because

he thought, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold." 8 Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. 9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" 10 And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us." 11 So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Isaac could flee from famine, but when he put himself into a situation that offered no escape, he had to turn to deception to protect himself. Abraham committed this same sin twice, once in Egypt in chapter 12 and once in Philistia in chapter 20. Remember, faith is living without scheming, and telling lies seems to be one of humanity's favorite ways to escape responsibility.

The 19th-century American preacher Phillips Brooks once said, "Truth is always strong, no matter how weak it looks; and falsehood is always weak, no matter how strong it looks." Isaac succumbed to the temptation and got caught. It's a sad day when unbelieving people like Abimelech publicly expose God's servants for telling lies. What an embarrassment to the cause of truth and giving an opportunity for unbelievers to blaspheme the glorious name of our God!

Before we go to the next verse, I need to take a few minutes to talk about a heresy that floats around in certain Christian denominations. Some have actually made theology out of what I believe is a false assumption. They claim that the Bible mentions "Generational Curses" in several places, such as Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9. It sounds unfair for God to punish children for the sins of their fathers.

Generational Curses is nothing more than pointing fingers to someone else to blame our own willful sins.

I find that there are two major flaws in this heresy "Generational Curse":

1) The scriptural references of Generational Curses are out of context.

You know by now how much I insist that we need to keep the Bible verses we read in context. Remember what I taught you before? Any text out of context is a pretext which is an absolutely wrong way to make a premise of a theology.

When you read the Scriptures that I mentioned before, in context, you will know that the Lord was speaking to the people of Israel as a nation regarding their idolatry, not individual sins. The Israelites disobeyed the Lord and worshiped the gods of the nations which they previously conquered and other foreign nations. What happened to them? They ended up in exile to Babylon for 70 years – the third and fourth generations.

2) Generational Curses theology contradicts other Scriptures.

We should not interpret and apply what Scripture says against other verses, because the Bible never contradicts itself since it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and has inerrancy.

God knows that the effects of sin can pass down from one generation to the next. When a father has a sinful lifestyle, his children are likely to have the same sinful lifestyle by seeing the bad example of their father. That is why it is not unjust for God to punish sin to the next generations if they are committing the same sins their ancestors did.

The Bible specifically tells us that God does not hold children accountable for the sins of their parents.

Deuteronomy 24:16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

Let me make this very clear once more: the theology of Generational Curses is flat out WRONG. When we become Christians, we are new creations. Old things have passed away; all things have become new. Romans 8:1 teaches us that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The cure for generational curses is salvation through Jesus Christ and life-time obedience to Him.

C. GOT WATER?

Genesis 26:12-25 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. 13 The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; 14 for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him. 15 Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. 16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we." 17 Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. 18 And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. 19 Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. 20 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. 21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. 22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." 23 Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 24 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

In the last portion, we saw Isaac sinned against God with his deception. But we don't see any of God's punishment against him. Did Isaac go scot free on that? No, he will be deceived terribly by his own son later. Remember, God's millstone grinds slowly, but it grinds exceedingly fine.

Isaac inherited flocks and herds from his father Abraham, who had lived a nomadic life, but now the wealthy heir settled down and became a farmer.

God blessed Isaac because of Abraham's life and faith, just as He blesses us for the sake of Jesus Christ. We'll never know until we get to heaven how many of our blessings have been "dividends" from the spiritual investments made by godly friends and family who have gone before.

Looking at Isaac's experience from a spiritual point of view, we can learn an important lesson. The church keeps looking for some new social programs that would be popular and acceptable to the people when all we need is to dig again the old wells of spiritual life that God's people have depended on from the beginning – the Word of God, prayer, worship, faith, the power of the Spirit, sacrifice, obedience, and service – wells that we've allowed the enemy to fill up. Whenever there's been a revival of spiritual power in the history of the church, it's been because somebody has dug again the old wells so that God's life-giving Spirit can be free to work.

The first well was named 'Esek' which means "contention," because it made others jealous. The second well was named 'Sitnah' which means "hostility" for similar reasons. But the third well was named 'Rehoboth' which means "enlargement," because it was far enough away to not be a problem.

All of us would like to find our "Rehoboth" where we have plenty of room and no contention, but Isaac's Rehoboth was found only after he endured conflict. It's through difficulties that God enlarges us for the larger places He prepares for us.

God used the conflicts to lead Isaac back to Beersheba means "the well of the oath," where Abraham had been before. God doesn't want us to live in contention and hostility, but they can be used by God to lead us to the place where He wants us to be.

D. MAKING PEACE WITH NEIGHBOR

Genesis 26:26-35 Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. 27 And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 But they said, "We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.' " 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. 32 It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." 33 So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. 34 When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

Although Isaac almost seems weak in his dealings with the men of Gerar, the king of Gerar realized that Isaac could easily put up a fight. So he followed Isaac to Beersheba in order to establish peace. The influence of Isaac in that land was not that of a weak man.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Esau didn't care about the God of his parents, nor their wishes. It is no wonder God hated him.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) The faith that is not tested cannot be trusted.

2) We don't need more special social programs in the church, rather we need to stick to the Word of God, prayer, worship, obedience, etc. - the basic things of Christianity faithfully.