

The wells of Isaac

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Let's turn for a minute to the 26th chapter of Genesis, we'll read from verse 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. And the Biblic said unto Isaac, Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we.

And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gera, and dwelt there. 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. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. [00:01:05] And the herdsmen of Gera did strive with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water is ours. And he called the name of the well Esek, which means contention, because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also. And he called the name of it Sitna, hatred.

And he moved from thence, and digged another well, and for that they strove not. And he called the name of it Rehoboth, which means room. And he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. And he went up from thence to Beersheba. 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.

And he built an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there.

[00:02:01] And there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Then Abimelech went to him from Gera, and Hazath, one of his friends, and Thichol, the chief captain of his army.

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

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.

And further down, verse 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 found water. And he called it Sheba.

For the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

This is a very interesting account of happenings in the life of Isaac.

We find a certain parallel between Isaac's history and Abraham's, in that they both went [00:03:05] down into the south country in a time of famine.

Although Abraham went down into Egypt, it tells us in the 12th chapter. But Isaac doesn't go to Egypt, and this chapter starts off with telling us that the Lord appeared to him, in verse 2, unto him and said, Go not down into Egypt, dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of, sojourn in this land. So he stayed there at Gera, in the land of the Philistines.

He committed the same mistake as his father had in saying that his wife was his sister. But the Lord preserved him. We don't find that she was ever taken into the Philistines, into Abimelech's house, as Sarah was.

And he's rebuked, of course, for denying the relationship. There's an important lesson in this, that both Abraham and Isaac denied their relationship [00:04:07] with their wives.

Abraham could make the excuse that it was a kind of what we call today a white lie, that Sarah was his half-sister, and of course Isaac could have said that Rebekah was his cousin.

But they did it with the purpose of denying the relationship. The lesson, I think, for us is that we should never deny our relationship that we have with the Lord.

That was a very serious thing. This is a relationship established of God. They denied it. We have a relationship that has been established. And it's a lack of faith when the Christian, by whatever means he does it, denies the relationship, acts as if he isn't a Christian, and is ashamed of the Lord when he should be a testimony for him.

[00:05:02] But I want to speak a little bit about these wells.

It tells us that the Philistines had stopped the wells that Abraham had dug.

Abraham during his lifetime had dug wells, and these were springing wells. They were wells where the water sprung up from underneath. There's a big difference in the Bible between a springing well and a cistern well.

A cistern well is just a well that's dug to hold water. The water has to come into it, gathered up from somewhere else. A springing well is a well that is fed from a spring underneath, what we would call an artesian well.

And that is the type of well we find here. The water bubbles up from underneath.

And that was the well, of course, that Jacob's well, that the Lord sat by, was that type of well.

[00:06:02] But the Philistines had stopped up these wells. Now the wells in the Bible are very important. We have many lessons.

We find that both Jacob and Moses found their wives at a well.

And it's been said that that's a very good lesson for young men who want to get a Christian girl. They should look for one at the well. One who is nourished from the Word of God and the power of the Spirit of God. Because the well speaks of, the water springing up in the well speaks of the Word of God, but it's the Word of God and the power of the Spirit. And the spiritual lesson here is that if we need the wells by which we could be nourished, Abraham needed the water for his flocks and for himself. In that country, as in any country, you cannot exist without water. And to have the right kind of wells was very important. And Isaac found that too. [00:07:01] Well when he gets into this land of the Philistines, he's there where his father had been, but the Philistines have stopped up the wells. We've pointed out before that in Scripture, the Philistines represent the inclusion of the natural man into the things of God.

The Philistines represent those who profess to be Christians, but they didn't get into the land across the River Jordan.

They were there in the land, settled on the Mediterranean coast, but they had not come across the River Jordan as the children of Israel did. They originally came from the island of Crete, as far as we can gather from history, and they settled there. They gave their name to the land, because the name Philistine just is derived from the word Palestine.

And there they were. They settled there, but they weren't God's people. And they represent those who take the place, they're in the land, they take the place of [00:08:02] being the Lord's people, but they've never come across the River Jordan. They've never come out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. They don't know what the Passover means. They don't know what the Red Sea means. They don't know what the Brazen Serpent means. They don't know what the River Jordan means. All these are different views to us of the death of the Lord Jesus.

They don't know the value of that work that was finished. The work of Christ for redemption is the value of its unknown to them. They make a profession of Christianity, but they have nothing in their hearts. And they're a danger to the people of God.

And we find here that they opposed the wells.

You see, they don't want God's people to get the water from the well.

And that's the work of Satan, to hinder the Lord's people from getting the water from the well, the well of the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God. Well, Isaac sets out to dig them again. [00:09:01] He sends his servants. And it seems that two of these wells, we don't get them mentioned before. Apparently these weren't wells that Abraham had dug, but the wells that Isaac himself sends his servants to dig.

One is called Esek, the other is called Sitna.

And apparently they don't get them. They dig the well. There's such an opposition from the Philistines to having this well, even after they've done the work on it, that they don't get the benefit of it. So Isaac calls the first one contention.

And the same thing comes with the second one, and he calls it hatred. Perhaps the lesson we've learned here, beloved, is that if we try to get something that belongs to the religious world, and take that in to spiritual things, we'll find that we won't profit by it.

[00:10:01] It'll only bring hatred, and it'll bring contention. You know, this, I think, is an ever-present danger with the Lord's people. With those whom the Lord has called out from the world's systems to gather to the name of the Lord Jesus.

The danger is to go back from where we've come to try and borrow something from them.

And God doesn't give any blessing to us on that basis.

We've got to get what God has given us in his precious word. And this is very important. If we try and take something from the religious world, what's going to happen? It's only going to bring hatred. It's only going to bring contention. It won't really bring us, in the end, real profit. But it came to the point where they got to re-digging a well that Abraham had dug. You see, Abraham had laid the base. Abraham had really put the toil into getting those wells. And these wells had been stopped up by the Philistines, but Isaac's servants, they had [00:11:06] to really bow their backs and work hard to get the rubbish cleaned out of those wells. But the wells that Abraham had dug originally, they were the ones that God gave them back. That would represent what God has given us in his precious word. The enemy would seek to even fill those up with rubbish, and we'd have to work to get them back.

You see?

But once we do, well then, we'll find that this is something that God has given us. When they dug that third well there in the 22nd, it says, for that they strove not. The Philistines says, well, we'll let them have that. And God allowed that. And he called the name of it Rehoboth. And he said, for now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. So here's a well that they're getting the full benefit of all the water that's in the [00:12:02] well. There was room. Yes? Everything that was there was for Isaac to make use of. And so we have the full word of God that God has given us in the power of his Holy Spirit that we can draw from to make use of.

And then it says in verse 23, and he went up from thence to Beersheba. Now, I want to bring out a few points in connection with this last well, Beersheba.

First of all, it says he went up.

He went up from thence to Beersheba.

Beersheba was also, this well at Sheba, it means the well of the oath, was also a well that Abraham had dug.

And Isaac had to go up there.

Now when the Bible speaks about going up and going down, there's usually a spiritual lesson in that.

Abraham went down to Egypt.

[00:13:02] That was a downward step.

He had to come up out of Egypt in order to get back to the place where he'd been at the beginning.

Isaac is here.

He goes up to Beersheba.

He's really coming out of the Philistines' land and coming in to a part of the land that was really, eventually, of course, all became the possession of Israel.

But it was outside of the land of the Philistines. So he goes up.

So the lesson in this would be, beloved, that we need to go up. We need to make progress in the Lord's things. God doesn't expect us to be standing still. And if we're just standing still, we're not going forward. In fact, if we're standing still in the things of the Lord, we're going back. Because the Christian life is like a person rowing upstream. If you're rowing upstream in a boat and you rest on your oars, you don't stay still.

[00:14:04] You drift down with the current. That's what the Christian life is. It must be one of activity. It must be one of exercise. If we just get to the point where we think, well, now I've made such good progress in the things of the Lord, I'll just rest on my oars, we'll just drift back. That's a very, very dangerous position for the Lord's people to get into. It's something that might be very easy for us to do, because we can so easily fall asleep. And when the Lord's people fall asleep, they go back. The five wise virgins went to sleep, as well as the foolish virgins, remember. And that lets us see that it's possible for the Lord's people to go to sleep. And so Isaac went up to Beersheba.

Then it says in verse 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.

[00:15:03] The Lord appeared unto him. When he went up to Beersheba, then the Lord made known his mind to him.

The Lord was able to reveal something to him. Now he says, don't be afraid, Isaac. I'm sure Isaac was rather afraid of all these Philistines. He'd had quite a lot of struggle with them. He'd tried to get these two wells, and he hadn't. But now they've come to the point where there's room, and where they're not worrying him anymore.

So the Lord says, now Isaac, fear not.

I heard it said once, I've never tested this out, but I heard it said once there are 366 fear notes in the Bible. This brother said that there was one for every day of the year, and one for leap year. As I said, I've not counted them up, but I'm pretty sure that there are a very, very large number of times in the

scriptures where we have those words, fear not.

[00:16:01] That's what David said to Mephibosheth, remember? That fear not, when he was trembling and afraid as he was brought into David's presence. And as Isaac is a little afraid, and perhaps wonders just what's going to happen in the land, and whether the Lord is really going to confirm his promise to him as he did to Abraham, the Lord says, fear not, Isaac, I am the God of Abraham, my father, fear not. I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. He had, as it were, to receive the word of God that God had given to Abraham, he had to receive it for himself, to really enter into the good of it.

Now that's true for us too.

Those of us who have been brought up in Christian homes and our parents have taught us the truth of God, and we have heard these things since we were very young, but you see, that's not sufficient.

[00:17:01] We have to receive it for ourselves.

We have to take God's word home to ourselves. You know, we wonder sometimes why it is that some young people that are brought up in the assembly and have learned all of these precious truths, don't seem to value them.

And you find them going off to places where they'll sit under a ministry that doesn't really seem to satisfy their souls at all, and yet they go there. And yet you find others that have never had the privilege of being brought up and being taught the precious truth, and yet when they do come in among the saints, they say, why, why wasn't I taught this years ago?

These are wonderful things that the Lord has revealed to us. Well why is it that some go off like that? It's because they haven't made it their own. They've just rested on their parents' faith, but they haven't taken these things home to their own hearts.

And I just would like to stress this upon our young people today, dear young brothers [00:18:06] and sisters, make these truths your own.

Don't just rest, don't just hold them just because your older brethren hold them, or even perhaps that your parents held them, but make them your own. Because if you don't make them your own, you're not going to value them. This had to be a truth for Isaac, just as much as it was a truth for Abraham. And so he hears the Lord's word say to him, fear not, the Lord appeared to him. And may the Lord appear to you. That is, you feel that the God is speaking this to you, that you're not receiving it second-hand because brother so-and-so gets up and tells you, or because I'm here talking about these things, but that you receive these truths from the Lord. It's the Lord that appears to you, and it's the Lord that brings these things home to your hearts.

And I think that's the lesson that we get in this second point. Then we come on to the third point, it says in verse 25, and he built him an altar there.

[00:19:04] We read of Abraham in chapter 12 that he built an altar.

But we don't find Abraham had an altar when he went down into Egypt. But when he came back up

out of Egypt, we find him with his altar again. And there are two things that characterize Abraham, his tent and his altar. Well, here we find the first thing that mentions in Isaac here is that he built the altar. We get the altar mentioned before the tent.

Why doesn't it say he pitched his tent first, and then that he built an altar? Why does it say he built an altar first? Do you think that this order is put down in scripture indiscriminately? No. The Holy Spirit, in leading God's servants to write the scriptures, was very careful in the selection of words, and even in the order of things.

[00:20:02] Why does it say he built an altar first? He put God first.

He built the altar for the Lord before he pitched the tent for himself. And this is a very important thing. God must come first.

Why did Elijah, when the Lord sent him to the widow woman to take care of him, why does he say to her when she says, I'm going to gather some sticks and make a cake for myself and my son, and then we'll die because that's going to use up all the meal and all the oil we have.

Why does Elijah say, you go and make me a little cake first?

When I was a young fellow, I used to read that. I used to think, well, Elijah was a very selfish man. He tells that poor widow to go and make a cake for him first, and then whatever's left she's going to have for herself. Elijah wasn't selfish at all.

Elijah was doing this to see whether she had faith in God.

[00:21:02] Elijah was God's servant. And to the woman, he was God's representative, you see. And in making him a cake first, she was really putting God first. And it was a proof as to whether she would believe what Elijah said, because Elijah said to her, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not fail, nor shall not, what is it, how does it put it now, the barrel of meal shall not diminish, nor the crews of oil fail until the Lord send rain upon the earth. Well, she believed it.

So she was willing to use all the oil and all the cake she had, all the meal she had, and make Elijah a cake, and give Elijah that cake because she was giving it to the Lord. And then she found there was still meal and oil for herself and for her son, and there continued to be meal and oil for herself and for her son and for Elijah until the day that the rain came. You see, it was a question of putting God first, and before our own things, before her [00:22:06] things.

And so it is here. Isaac built an altar. You know, we read of Lot who went with Abraham, that Lot pitched his tent with Abraham, but we never read that Lot had an altar, and Lot lost his tent. We find him later on down in Sodom living in a house. He lost his tent, but he didn't have an altar. Abraham had an altar. Now Isaac has an altar, and the altar in those days marked the man out as a worshipper. And I'm sure that Isaac's altar must have marked him out to those people as a special kind of a worshipper, because every altar in those days was made in front of an idol.

But those who worshipped the Lord didn't have an idol at the back of their altar. And when they must have asked Isaac and said to him, where's the God that you're worshipping, [00:23:06] he would say, the God that I worship is not represented by any image. He's the true God, the maker of heaven and

earth, the creator. He's the one that I worship. That was a testimony. So Isaac builds his altar.

And then, that's the third point. Then the fourth thing is, he built an altar, verse 3, and it says, he called upon the name of the Lord.

That's the fourth point. That goes along with the altar. When he puts the altar there, he builds his altar, then he calls on the name of the Lord. Now calling on the Lord in scripture represents owning the Lord.

In the Old Testament, it was owning Jehovah as the true God. In the New Testament, it's owning the Lord Jesus as Savior, calling on the name of the Lord. [00:24:02] We read of those who began to call on the name of the Lord, among Adam's descendants, and it became in the departure, there were those who didn't call on the name of the Lord. And so, Isaac is marked out as one who calls on the name of the Lord. It's a very definite testimony that he's giving. In that land where all around were pagans and idolaters, he calls on the Lord's name. So you see, we have two things mentioned before we get his tent. He builds his altar, he calls on the name of the Lord. Now the fifth thing is, he pitched his tent there. You see, as we said before, he didn't pitch the tent first.

He built the altar first.

He called on the name of the Lord as a result of his altar. Then he pitches his tent.

And the tent marks him out as a pilgrim. A tent, with his tent, he didn't have a very definite dwelling place.

He realized that he was there as a pilgrim, passing through, but he was going on, as it [00:25:04] tells us in the 11th of Hebrews, where it mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelling in tents.

And it says, they look for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And of course, this is a picture for us too.

The tent speaks to us of the pilgrim character.

We can't settle down here. In our Bible class this morning, we were noticing that a characteristic of the last days, and that will be developed fully after the Lord takes the church away, is that we see those who dwell on earth.

The earth is their dwelling place. They settling down on earth. That's what Lot tried to do, but that wasn't God's will for him. And so he got dragged out of it.

But everything he had went up in smoke. And that's what the Lord allows for his people when they try to settle down on earth. The Lord won't allow it. [00:26:01] He'll take it away from them. If we can't hold what we have for the Lord, the Lord won't allow us to have it. And so we need to be like Isaac here.

We need to know what it is to pitch our tent, to realize that whether we have little or whether we have much, we're to hold it for the Lord.

And remember that we're his. He pitched his tent there. And then it says in the sixth point in the end

of the verse, and Isaac's servants dig the well.

Well, we've been noticing that he dug these other wells. This is the last well that they dug. And this is the one that is Beersheba. His servants dig a well. And of course, as he comes up there to live here in Beersheba, there he has an ample supply of water.

It's a lovely picture of the position, picture for us of the position of a Christian who is seeking to honor the Lord.

He goes up, he makes progress, the Lord appears to him and encourages him.

[00:27:06] Thirdly, he builds an altar.

Fourthly, he calls on the Lord's name.

Fifthly, he pitches his tent, he's a pilgrim.

And lastly, his servants dig a well so that there's an ample provision, the well speaking to us of the Word of God, of our taking home to ourselves the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God, the nourishment for our daily life.

And then we find that these very ones who were the enemies, these Philistines, they come and they say in verse 28, we saw certainly that the Lord was with thee.

And they're not going to strive. That is, he's a testimony to these people now. He was no testimony to them when it was hatred and when it was contention. That was no testimony. But now he's in a place where he's honoring the Lord. [00:28:03] He's putting the Lord first. And when he puts the Lord first, then God sees that that is, without Isaac realizing it, that's a testimony to the others. There's a testimony there now for those around. They said, we certainly saw that the Lord is with thee. And as they dug out this well, because this was one of Abraham's wells that the Philistines had choked up with rubbish and they had all this work of digging it out, they had to get right down and finally they come and say, we have found water. And he called it Sheba. For the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day. So Isaac is now in the place where God can bless him because he sought to put the Lord first and to honor the Lord.

So beloved brethren, may we know what it is to draw water out of the precious wells of the word of God, not allow the Philistines to choke them up for us, not to seek to take [00:29:03] the Philistines' methods to do the things of God, because the moment we start borrowing from the methods of the religious world to do God's things, we're sure to bring in nothing but trouble and, as we have it here, contention and hatred.

But let us draw what we want from the word itself. God has given us all we need in his precious word. We don't need to go outside of the word to get what we need for the doing of the Lord's work, but he's given us here this precious well, the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God, and every need will be met as we seek in this sense to put the Lord first.