

Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord

Do you understand, Ida?" asked Keysha.

"No," she replied. "My niece's product can be used on the hair, face, and entire body. She is a local entrepreneur. She's a perfect fit."

The women's ministry at Peace Tabernacle was planning its first annual Women's Care, Comfort, and Creativity Bazaar, featuring female merchants. Keysha had come up with the idea, and the women of the church had seized upon it. Now Ida was having problems with some of the details.

First of all, why couldn't there be multiple vendors offering similar services and products? She also didn't like the idea of having booths staged indoors and outdoors. It made it seem more like a garage sale than a bazaar. Sometimes, it seemed as though the younger women were trying to take over.

"But Ida," Keysha was saying. "We have two other vendors offering skin and hair products. We want to offer as wide a range of vendors as we can, and we want the merchants to have the best chance of making sales. That's why we agreed to limit the number."

Driving home, Ida realized the real quarrel was with herself. Did she just want to have her way?

Ida felt the familiar tugging at her heart. "I need Your peace. Deliver me from myself, Lord. Give me grace to always love. In Jesus' name, amen."

- 1.** *When have you seen a conflict escalate quickly?*
- 2.** *How might the example of Jesus shape our response to conflict?*
- 3.** *How can we be better communicators in the middle of conflict?*

An Altar for the Worthy God

Genesis 26:24–27 KJV

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.

25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. 27 And Isaac said unto them, wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?

Genesis 26:24–27 NIV

²⁴ That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

²⁶ Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. ²⁷ Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

Near Beersheba, close to the Negev, water is essential. As the Philistines contend for these wells of water, Isaac must be realizing the critical need for water for his people.

At this point, the Lord appears to Isaac (v. 24). He assures Isaac that He is the same God who was faithful to his father, Abraham. Amidst the scarcity of water and the potential for regional conflict, God's words gives hope. The Philistines might be destroying the wells dug up by the people of God, but they don't have the final word.

"Fear not," says the Lord (v. 24). God promises to be with Isaac and to bless him. These words echo God's earlier promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:1). The comparison is explicit: "I will bless you . . . for the sake

of Abraham" (v. 24). God's fidelity to His promises will not end after Abraham is gone; the promises extend to Abraham's children. God reminds Isaac that He is present and that He will multiply Isaac's offspring. The covenant remains intact.

God's faithfulness demands a purposeful response, so Isaac follows the pattern of his father, Abraham, who also built altars in memory of God's provision (Gen. 12:8). Isaac builds an altar and calls upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:25). To the contemporary reader, this might sound like an archaic gesture. But Isaac builds this altar to remember a tangible location where he encountered God.

At that very moment, God's promise of protection is tested. Abimelek, the king whom Isaac had previously deceived and who had sent Isaac's clan away, comes out to speak to him. He is not alone, for he has brought his advisor and the captain of his armed forces. Isaac's words reveal the uncertainty in his heart, for he wonders whether trouble has followed him to his new home.

4. What factors make the survival of Isaac's family "high-stakes" or tense?

5. In what ways has God already shown faithfulness in Isaac's story?

Peace at the Table

Genesis 26:28–33 KJV

28 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;
29 That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and

Genesis 26:28–33 NIV

²⁸ They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and

have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD.

30 And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.

31 And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

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 have found water.

33 And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD."

³⁰ Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

³² That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!"

³³ He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

Based on his previous experience, Isaac anticipates a dispute, perhaps even an armed conflict with these men in the field. Abimelek, the king of the Philistines—more of a tribal leader than a "king" as we might imagine—arrives where Isaac has just begun digging a new well, after Isaac's previous wells were destroyed (Gen. 26:15–16). But instead of coming to trade blows, the men have a different intention altogether.

Against all odds, Abimelek calls Isaac "blessed by the LORD" (Gen. 26:29). This does not mean that the Philistines have adopted Isaac's God or become monotheistic worshipers of Yahweh. In their religious context, it was normal to come across powerful gods who needed to be treated with respect.

Isaac is so clearly blessed because, even when his enemies try to get rid of him, God keeps multiplying his crops a hundredfold and multiplying livestock to make him wealthy (Gen. 26:12–14). The Philistines know that Isaac has a special purpose.

Abimelek's acknowledgment of Isaac's God and the blessing upon him signals another fulfilled promise. God had said "all peoples on earth will be blessed" through Abraham and his descendants, for those who bless Abraham's family will be blessed in turn (Gen. 12:3). Blessing is an abstract concept, but one immediate kind of blessing is the absence of conflict. In the distant future from these events, God provides blessing to all nations by inviting them to become part of the family of Abraham, by faith (Gal. 3:7-9).

Now, Isaac could have taken issue with what Abimelek claims, that he and his people "always treated [Isaac] well" (Gen. 26:29). Blocking up a family's wells was certain to threaten their safety, and it could be perceived as a hostile act (Gen. 26:15). But Isaac says nothing of this. He welcomes a resolution to the conflict through the making of a "sworn agreement" or "oath" (v. 28).

To make the peace official, Isaac invites the visitors to share a feast (v. 30). Today, peace is often signaled by spoken words or a signed treaty. But in this context, sharing a meal was a way of cementing the relationship. Enemies were reconciled, not with words on a page, but around shared food at a common table. Through this meal, Isaac demonstrates the virtue of hospitality toward his guests. He treats these former enemies as honored company.

Even as Abimelek and his men return to their homes in peace, Isaac hears some additional good news. From the start of the conflict, he had been competing for the limited water resources in the area. Elusive as water had been, God comes through by leading Isaac's workers to create a reliable well. Thus Isaac gives an appropriate name to the site: Beersheba, which means "the well of the oath" (v. 33).

6. How does God start to fulfill the promise to "bless the nations of the earth"?

7. How is peace demonstrated between opposing parties in the ancient world?

Conflict inside the House

Families can be messy. And to Sarah, hers seemed especially complicated. For as long as she could remember, her extended family always had something going spectacularly wrong. The smallest disagreement between cousins would blow up into yelling matches that left Sarah feeling exhausted. Somehow, everyone would get involved.

And now, whenever Sarah and her husband would discuss their holiday plans, she felt sick at the thought of going to her family's annual Christmas bash. And as the event drew nearer, her anxiety-induced stomach knots would become an anxiety-induced illness, until at the event she'd need to excuse herself. She was miserable.

Jesus draws this contrast: "In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). The peace comes from God, but that doesn't put an end to the conflicts we face. Conflict is not from God, but God can still use conflict for our good, to teach us patience and endurance and to make us more like the image of Jesus.

Isaac and his later descendants would remember this experience of living in tents as unwelcome strangers. They would face the same kind of jealousy in Egypt one day, and through this God teaches His people to welcome outsiders (Ex. 22:21).

God reminded Isaac that the covenant made with Abraham was still in effect. So, even though the Philistines kept filling up his wells, Isaac did not have to fear. No matter who might come against us, we can share with others the peace that we have found with God.

8. *Do you find it harder to handle conflict with outsiders or with family members?*

9. *What does the security of peace with God invite you to do?*

10. *What promises are you trusting God to fulfill?*

Peacemaking

In the first lesson of this quarter, you were invited to be holding a particular relationship before God. This week, your challenge is to find a way to invite peace or to thank a friend for your good relationship. You could make a phone call, send a letter or email, offer to mow a neighbor's lawn, or almost any other concrete way that you imagine could honor your relationship. If asked why you are doing this, you could say, "I serve a God who invites me to be at peace."

► *This week, I will make the following gesture of peacemaking or kindness:*

KEY VERSE

And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.
—Genesis 26:25 KJV

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.
—Genesis 26:25 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 23 through June 29

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 35:1–7—Jacob's Return to Bethel.
- Tues.** John 15:1–8—Abide in Christ, the True Vine.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 29:8–14—Seek God with All Your Heart.
- Thurs.** Matthew 18:15–20—Christ Is among His Gathered People.
- Fri.** Matthew 28:16–20—Christ Is with Us Always.
- Sat.** Psalm 16—Fullness of Joy in God's Presence.
- Sun.** Genesis 28:10–22—The Lord Is in This Place.