

Lesson 1 30th April, 2017

Isaac, a Peacemaker

Lesson Scope: *Genesis 26*

References in brackets refer to Genesis 26 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

The events of chapter 26 are a parenthesis in the narrative of Jacob and Esau. Because of a famine in Canaan, Isaac moved his family to the Philistine city of Gerar. Isaac obeyed God by not going to Egypt, and God blessed him for Abraham's sake (26:3-5). Isaac's increased wealth of possessions and servants created great concern and envy among the Philistines. They felt threatened and commanded him to depart. Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar. The ensuing conflict with the herdsmen of Gerar centered around two wells Isaac's servants had dug. In all this, Isaac showed no hostility but peacefully moved on until God made a way for him.

Personal peacemaking was taught in the Old Testament. God never sanctioned selfish retaliation. God's command in Exodus 20, "Thou shalt not kill," was further explained by Jesus in Matthew 19:18, "Thou shalt do no murder." Old Testament saints understood this principle. David, for example, condemned Joab for having "shed the blood of war in peace" (1 Kings 2:5). On a national level, Israel was not nonresistant. But on a personal level, God promised reward for peacemaking—"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat ... and the LORD shall reward thee" (Proverbs 25:21-22). In New Testament practice, nonresistance affects all aspects of life.

Man's selfish tendencies create tension in human relationships. The man of faith, however, can often diffuse these tensions by overcoming evil with good.

Isaac's practice of peacemaking with his neighbors and enemies on a domestic level plainly exemplifies the very teachings of Jesus for New Testament saints in all of life. Israel, however, was not nonresistant as a nation. The "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" code of law was to be administered by the governing authority-not the individual.

The immediate rewards of nonresistance for Christians today may be on a different level than that of Isaac's day, but the eternal rewards are the same! Stay focused on the lesson aim to see types of New Testament nonresistance in the life of Isaac.

Lesson Aim: To see types of New Testament nonresistance in the life of Isaac.

Theme Verses: [Matthew 5:38-39](#). Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Lesson Text

"The Philistines Envied Him"

[Genesis 26:12-17](#)

Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundred-fold: and the LORD blessed him. ¹³ And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: ¹⁴ For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. 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. ¹⁶ And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. ¹⁷ And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

"The Herdmen ... Did Strive"

[Genesis 26:18-25](#)

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. ¹⁹ And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. ²⁰ And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water *is* ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. ²¹ And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. ²² And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. ²³ And he went up from thence to Beersheba. 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.

"They Departed ... in Peace"

Genesis 26:26-33

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? 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 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 sware 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.

Questions for Study

"The Philistines Envied Him"

1. Compare the results of God's blessing on Isaac versus the outworking of envy in the Philistines.
2. Should Christians ever feel accountable for opposition?

"The Herdmen ... Did Strive"

3. Compare the herdsmen's methods of stirring up strife with Isaac's method of response.
4. Discuss the relationship between a godly response to opposition and preparation for worship.
5. What promise and various commands does God give the New Testament peacemaker?

"They Departed ... in Peace"

6. Evaluate Isaac's questions and the Philistines' response.
7. Why is a peaceful conclusion to conflict more important than having all wrongs set right? (See Matthew 5:25.)

Analyzing the Passage

"And the LORD blessed him" (26:12) follows the record of Isaac's fruitful efforts of sowing and reaping in the Philistines' land. The Philistines, however, felt threatened by Isaac's superior force of possessions and servants and sent him away (26:16). Without a quarrel, Isaac moved into the valley

of Gerar, where he came into conflict with the herdsmen of Gerar regarding wells that his servants had dug. In those days the digging of a well gave one the right to land surrounding it. It seems the Philistines, for spite, had closed Abraham's former wells. Isaac had these reopened. Other wells followed. Isaac named each one according to the conflict involved. The well of "springing water" was named Esek (26:20), meaning "contention." Sitnah (26:21) means "enmity." The herdsmen simply claimed these wells as their own. Rather than fight for his rights, Isaac moved on to dig a third well, Rehoboth (26:22), meaning "broad places" or, as Isaac said, "The LORD hath made room." Later Isaac moved northeast to Beersheba, "the well of the oath" (26:25, 33), to worship, live, and begin digging yet another well. Abraham had named this place years before. It is significant that the Philistines came to petition a covenant with Isaac at the very place and for the same reason as they did with Abraham (21:22-33). Isaac's servants found water simultaneously with the Philistines' departure—a token of God's blessing on Isaac for making peace.

Principles and Applications

"The Philistines Envied Him"

1. Wicked men oppose God's people (26:14). Envy unchecked leads to unscrupulous actions. One man said to his Christian neighbor, "In any time of serious economic crisis, what's yours is mine." In other words, "I'll take what I want when I want it." So did the herdsmen of Gerar to Isaac. Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Our daily walk and actions should remind such people of the holy God to whom they are accountable.

2. Peacemakers follow Christ's example in meekly suffering wrong (26:16-17). Isaac was mightier than the Philistines, yet he showed no hostility toward them. Jesus was God incarnate, the great "I AM," yet "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not" (1 Peter 2:23). "For even hereunto were ye called ... that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). In any trial or opposition, we should remind ourselves of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, our perfect example, who even in His dying moments said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

"The Herdmen ... Did Strive"

3. A peacemaker will not retaliate (26:20-22). Deliberate acts of ill will dare not arouse in us a spirit of retaliation. Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19). While we labor diligently to provide for our own, all goods and possessions are gifts from God, who expects us to take joyfully

the spoiling of our goods (Hebrews 10:34).

4. The followers of Christ are patient in the face of repeated injustices (26:21). God controls the frequency, intensity, and duration of any opposition. "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11).

5. God always provides a way for His people (26:22). The way God provides will always be the best way. Prayer, commitment, and surrender to God's sovereign purpose give one confidence to trust God even when facing dire necessity.

6. God blesses the peacemaker (26:24). God did not fail to notice Isaac's resolve to live peaceably with his neighbors. He promised Isaac His presence, His blessing, and the enlargement of his family for Abraham's sake. Jesus' promise to New Testament saints is similar: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

7. God's people draw closer to Him in times of opposition (26:25). Our tendency is to fear man. God's word to Isaac is the same to us today—"Fear not." Isaac responded by building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord. Worshiping God should likewise be our first priority. To "draw nigh to God" is still the best help in any kind of trouble. He is our omniscient heavenly Father.

"They Departed ... in Peace"

8. Healthy communication promotes peace (26:27-28). Isaac's questions may seem reproachful, but they clearly outlined the perimeters where peace was needed. Also Isaac accepted Abimelech's peace commitment in spite of his questionable statement, "We have done unto thee nothing but good." He did not insist on having the last word or setting all wrongs right. These are New Testament principles. We should be "easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits" (James 3:17). "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

9. A peacemaker overcomes evil with good (26:30-31). The man who wrecked your house, moved the line fence, stole your tools, burned your building down, or whatever the case should receive your forgiveness whether he asks for it or not. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). A friendly smile, a loaf of bread, a cup of cold water, or another kind deed along with faithful daily prayer may be the good that overcomes evil.

10. Nonresistance promotes lasting peace (26:31). Jesus, the Prince of

Peace, is the author and giver of such perfect peace (John 14:27; 16:33). Even though nonresistant actions are not always understood and may not accomplish full reconciliation, the children of God will continually "let the peace of God rule in [their] hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

Important Teachings

1. Wicked men oppose God's people (26:14).
2. Peacemakers follow Christ's example in meekly suffering wrong (26:16-17).
3. A peacemaker will not retaliate (26:20-22).
4. The followers of Christ are patient in the face of repeated injustices (26:21).
5. God always provides a way for His people (26:22).
6. God blesses the peacemaker (26:24).
7. God's people draw closer to Him in times of opposition (26:25).
8. Healthy communication promotes peace (26:27-28).
9. A peacemaker overcomes evil with good (26:30-31).
10. Nonresistance promotes lasting peace (26:31).
11. Rather than fighting for their rights, Christians accept material loss (26:20-22).

Answers to Questions

1. Compare the results of God's blessing on Isaac versus the outworking of envy in the Philistines.

God's blessing on Isaac produced incentive for him to continue in frugal labor, providing for his own and for others. He did not allow the increase of possessions and greatness to make him proud and contrary but humble and peaceable in Gerar.

The Philistines, on the other hand, in envy of Isaac's possessions and strength in numbers, resorted to actions of spite, destroying basic resources for survival. They closed up the wells of Abraham. Also feeling threatened by Isaac's greatness, they sent him away, even though Isaac had made no hostile gestures of intent to conquer.

2. Should Christians ever feel accountable for opposition?

Christians should not apologize for God's blessing on diligent labor and frugality of life. Rather we should testify of God the giver and live in evidence of surrender to His lordship.

Men may envy our material blessings, but hatred and opposition often come because of what we represent: the life and teachings of Jesus worked

out in shoe leather. A holy life reminds them of the holy God "with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 14:13).

"But let none of you suffer as ... an evildoer.... Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, . . . let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:15-16).

3. Compare the herdsmen's methods of stirring up strife with Isaac's method of response.

The herdsmen waited until the hard work of digging was done and then simply claimed the wells. They took advantage of Isaac's godly code of ethics. Did they perceive that Isaac would not retaliate even though he had a superior force in numbers?

In those days the digging of a well gave the man who dug it the right of ownership to the well and the land surrounding it. Isaac's method of response lined up with his code of ethics. He did not strive for his rights. He named the first two wells contention and enmity, respectively. Isaac simply moved on until God made "room" for him at Rehoboth.

4. Discuss the relationship between a godly response to opposition and preparation for worship.

The one begets the other. A godly response to opposition gives immediate peace to the conscience and carries no future regrets. Love for our fellow men and love for God go hand in hand. True worship manifests itself "in spirit and in truth," in word and in deed.

5. What promise and various commands does God give the New Testament peacemaker?

The promise is found in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Various commands are as follows: "The servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Timothy 2:24); "Follow peace with all men ... without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14); "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves.... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21); and many more!

6. Evaluate Isaac's questions and the Philistines' response.

Isaac's questions, on the surface, may seem to be reproachful and accusing. But he spoke the truth and would know the truth from them. Also his later actions of feeding his enemies and his readiness to make a covenant of peace with them give indications of a pure motive in his questions.

The Philistines' response was mixed with falsehood. Had they really done Isaac nothing but good? They were quite willing to make peace with a covenant without any acknowledgment of wrong or offers of restitution. We should, however, at least give them credit for making the first move.

7. Why is a peaceful conclusion to conflict more important than having all

wrongs set right? (See Matthew 5:25.)

Jesus said, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him" (Matthew 5:25). This principle definitely applies here. The time to make peace with those who oppose us is when they are ready. To level the ground on all injustices could well cause the adversary to further the conflict. We should not demand any rights we might have, but neither should we agree to any details that conflict with the principles of God's Word.

Summarizing the Lesson

Let there be light, Lord God of Hosts!
Let there be wisdom on the earth!
Let broad humanity have birth!
Let there be deeds, instead of boasts.

Within our passioned hearts instill
The calm that endeth strain and strife;
Make us Thy ministers of life;
Purge us from lusts that curse and kill!

Give us the peace of vision clear
To see our brothers' good our own,
To joy and suffer not alone:
The love that casteth out all fear!

Let woe and waste of warfare cease,
That useful labor yet may build
Its homes with love and virtue filled!
God, give Thy wayward children peace!
—*William Merrell Vories*

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter on "Nonresistance" in *Doctrines of the Bible*, pages 505-516.
2. Study Jesus' commands from Matthew 5:21-26, 38-48.
3. Meditate on Jesus' example of nonresistance on the cross found in the four Gospels.