

פרשת
תולדות
Parashat Toldot

*Bereshit / Genesis 25:19-28:9, Malachi 1:1-2:7
Luke 3:1-18*

A Testimony of Faith in the Life of Isaac

In this week's Torah Portion, we read about a famine in the Land and Isaac and all that he owned moved down to Gerar near to the king of the Philistines, *Bereshit / Genesis 26:1*, וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכָּד, הָרָעָב הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ־פְּלִשְׁתִּים הָרְעִיב הָאֲרֶזֶת: תִּים גְּרָרָה: *“There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.”* In *Bereshit / Genesis 26* we read about how Isaac went down to Gerar and feared the people and the king so he said his wife is his sister. (26:7) and then the king saw them together and realized this was his wife. (26:8-11) Then because of Isaac's faithfulness to God to remain in the Land and not go to Egypt, He blessed him with great wealth, power, and caused him to be envied and feared (26:13-14). Then we are told how the Philistines had stopped up the wells that Abraham had dug and how Isaac dug those wells again. (26:15) We read in *Bereshit / Genesis 26:3* the Lord God said to Isaac, גֹּיֵר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאַהֲבֵנָה עִמָּךְ וְאַבְרָכְךָ כִּי־לֹךְ, וְלִזְרַעְךָ אֶתְּן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־הַשְּׂבִעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם: *Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath*

that I swore to your father Abraham. (NASB) This verse may be an indication why we read about the situation of the Philistines stopping up the wells. The purpose of the Philistines stopping up the wells was so Isaac's servants could not draw water in the hope that Isaac would go away because of the lack of water. It is interesting how we read in *Bereshit / Genesis 26:1*, וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכַד הַרְעֵב הָרְאִישׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה, *There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar*” and then because of Isaac's wealth and blessing, Abimelech told Isaac in *Bereshit / Genesis 26:16*, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ, *And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us.”* Now God had blessed Isaac because of his faithfulness, he had acquired large quantity of livestock so there was no room for them to live together. Note there may be a parallel here from the sense that Lot and Abraham parted ways. What did Isaac do? He remained faithful according to *Bereshit / Genesis 26:17*, וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיֵּחֵן בְּנַחַל-גֶּרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם: *So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled.* It appears as if Isaac went to Gerar and then when requested to leave by the king, he did not leave that place as being obedient and faithful to God's command. Even though we read about Isaac's fear of the people of the land, this week's Torah portion speaks to the importance of having faith and being faithful.

We note how the Hebrew texts states, וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיֵּחֵן בְּנַחַל-, וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם: specifically it says וַיֵּחֵן בְּנַחַל-גֶּרָר meaning “in the valley of Gerar” suggesting that he moved as Abimelech had requested, but he remained near hence going against their will. This is why we read what follows is Isaac digging the wells that his father had dug. We are also told according to *Bereshit / Genesis 26:18*, וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת כַּשֵּׁמֶת, *“And He called them by the name his father called them.”* The purpose of his calling them by the same name was to show these were not new wells and that he had faith in God's promises to give him the Land.

The text we are looking at for this week is from *Bereshit / Genesis 26:17*.

ספר בראשית פרק כו

א ויהי רעב בארץ מלכד הרעב הראשון אשר היה בימי
 אברהם וילך יצחק אל-אבימלך מלך-פלשתים גרר: ב
 וירא אליו יהוה ויאמר אל-תירד מצרימה שכן בארץ אשר
 אמר אליך: ג גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עמך ואברכה פי-
 לך ולזרעך אתן את-כל-הארצות האל והקמתי את-השבועה
 אשר נשבעתי לאברהם אביך: ד והרביתי את-זרעך
 ככוכבי השמים ונתתי לזרעך את כל-הארצות האל והתברך
 כו בזרעך כל גויי הארץ: ה עקב אשר-שמע אברהם בקלי
 וישמר משמרתו מצותי חקותי ותורתו: [שני] ו וישב
 יצחק בגרר: ז וישאלו אנשי המקום לאשתו ויאמר אחתי
 הוא כי ירא לאמר אשתי פן-יהרגני אנשי המקום על-רבקה
 פי-טובת מראה הוא: ח ויהי פי-ארכו-לו שם הימים ויש-
 קף אבימלך מלך פלשתים בעד החלון וירא והנה יצחק
 מצחק את רבקה אשתו: ט ויקרא אבימלך ליצחק ויאמר
 אף הנה אשתי הוא ואיך אמרת אחתי הוא ויאמר אליו
 יצחק כי אמרתי פן-אמות עליה: י ויאמר אבימלך מה-זאת
 עשית לנו כמעט שכב אחד העם את-אשתי והבאת עלינו
 אשם: יא ויצו אבימלך את-כל-העם לאמר הנגע באיש
 הנה ובאשתו מות יומת: יב ויזרע יצחק בארץ ההוא וימ-
 צא בשנה ההוא מאה שעירים ויברכהו יהוה: [שלישי] יג
 ויגדל האיש וילך הלוך ויגדל עד פי-גדל מאד: יד ויהי-לו
 מקנה-צאן ומקנה בקר ועבדה רבה ויקנאו אתו פלשתים:
 טו וכל-הבארות אשר חפרו עבדי אביו בימי אברהם אביו
 סתמום פלשתים וימלאום עפר: טז ויאמר אבימלך אל-
 יצחק לך מעמנו כי-עצמת ממנו מאד: יז וילך משם יצחק
 ויחן בנחל-גרר וישב שם

Bereshit / Genesis 26:1-17

26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the

Philistines. 26:2 The Lord appeared to him and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. 26:3 'Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 26:4 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 26:5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.' 26:6 So Isaac lived in Gerar. 26:7 When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he was afraid to say, 'my wife,' thinking, 'the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.' 26:8 It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. 26:9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, 'Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?' And Isaac said to him, 'Because I said, 'I might die on account of her.' 26:10 Abimelech said, 'What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.' 26:11 So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, 'He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.' 26:12 Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the Lord blessed him, 26:13 and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; 26:14 for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. 26:15 Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. 26:16 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Go

*away from us, for you are too powerful for us.’ 26:17
And Isaac departed from there and camped in the val-
ley of Gerar, and settled there. (NASB)*

After all of these things we read Isaac dug a well as it says in *Bereshit / Genesis 26:19*, יט וַיִּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי-יִצְחָק בְּנַחַל וַיִּמְצְאוּ-שָׁם בְּאֵר, מַיִם חַיִּים: “*But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of living water.*” I feel this is a significant statement here. You will find looking up this in your English translations, the English translations do not say “*living water*” (מַיִם חַיִּים) but either just water of flowing water, etc. Note the rabbinic way of interpreting מַיִם חַיִּים is to be flowing water. The shepherds of Abimelech fought over this well of living water. More importantly, we see how Isaac lived out his faith being faithful to God and because of this he found a well of life (living waters, מַיִם חַיִּים). This is a significant aspect of the Hebrew text that shows us how having faith and remaining faithful we will find a well of living water! There are many parallels to this and our faith in Yeshua the Messiah as the One who gives us a well of living water (read *John 4*).

If we study the Rambam and his commentary, he does not find any purpose or glory to Isaac. There is however great glory to the credit of Isaac in the sense that he was faithful to God and believed in God’s Promises just as Abraham his father was faithful! Since Isaac was faithful, we are told as he dwelled in BeerSheva the Lord appeared to him and promised him saying in *Bereshit / Genesis 26:24*, כד וַיֵּרָא, אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּלַיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם אַבְרָהָם אֵל-תִּירָא כִּי-אֲתָדָּבְרָה אֲנֹכִי וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ בְּעֵבֹר אֲבֹרָהֶם עַבְדֵי: “*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 the sake of My servant Abraham.*” The Lord appeared and confirmed His Promise to Isaac. This suggests to us that the Lord God is the one who gives us the power to overcome our enemies and to live our lives for Him! These things reveal to us if we remain faithful to the Lord He will both be with us and bless us!

Returning to the beginning of *Bereshit / Genesis 26*, looking at the opening verses, we read according to *Bereshit / Genesis 26:3* the fol-

lowing:

Bershit / Genesis 26:3

גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאַהֲנֶה עִמָּךְ וְאַבְרָכְךָ כִּי-לֹךְ וְלִנְרָעָךְ אִתּוֹ
אֶת-כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-הַשְּׂבִיעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
:אָבִיךָ *Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.*

Looking closely at the Hebrew text, why did God phrase the command to not leave the Land of Israel as Isaac being a גֹּר meaning to “ *dwell as a stranger*” when the Lord had told him previously that he will *נִשְׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ* “ *dwell permanently in the Land?*” The rabbis say this is due to the Lord giving him a hint of גֹּר אֲרִיָּה “*sojourner of a lion*” the rabbis say is the vision God had given him while laying on the altar during the Akedat Yitzchak, and they also say that his experience led to *פַּחַד יִצְחָק* “*the fear of Isaac.*” This led to His faith and faithfulness in the God of Abraham throughout his life remaining obedient to the teachings of his father.

In *Bereshit / Genesis 26:15* we are told that the Philistines stopped up the wells of his father and that He continued to dig wells also shows us something very important.

Bereshit / Genesis 26:15

וְכָל-הַבְּאֵרֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ עֲבָדָי אֲבִיו בְּיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיו סָתְמוּ
:מָוִם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּמְלְאוּם עֹפָר׃ *And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth.*

The way Isaac proceeded in life, He kept the wells of his father and he named them the same names is a very significant detail because it shows us the meticulous way in which Isaac adhered to the norms of his father and the things that Abraham had taught him. We also note that Isaac's name was not changed, something that we see happening to both Abram --> Abraham, and Jacob --> Israel, this is distinctly dif-

ferent and again illustrates how Isaac followed the teachings of his father Abraham.

There is real evidence that dads have a unique and important impact in the lives of their children! This is illustrated here from the life of Isaac. Our culture seems to place little value on the role of fathers. This is pretty evident everywhere, from pop culture and media to government policy. In the life of Isaac, we see that he did not drift spiritually from what his father had taught him. If we consider this idea of drifting spiritually, there are a few examples. One example may be found when Moshe went up the mountain and delayed in coming back. Another is when Israel entered the Promised Land and Moshe died, Joshua died, and all of those who lived through the exodus died, the people drifted spiritually from the teachings of their father. Another example, when Yeshua ascended into heaven, we can see how over the course of thousands of years, people have tended to drift spiritually from the truth. When Moshe went up the mountain, the people wondered “*what has become of him?*” The people asked this question and then said “*we do not know what has become of him.*” This illustrates how Moshe did not return according to their expectations. The Israelites then decided to look to the world, what they know, for a solution, and in this case to the place they were raised, Egypt. They asked to make a golden calf to worship as their god. Moshe’s delay was longer than the people expected that he should be gone so their affections pulled their attention elsewhere.

We know that man has an inner quality to worship something, whether this is God or something else (money, etc). We also know this innate desire wants to be free to worship according to the dictates of one’s own mind. This leads to worship without boundaries, confusion, and leads many to seeking a god of their own creation. We know according to the Scriptures that God is not pleased with this approach to worship. He is actually calling people out of this way of thinking because we as the people of God are not to allow the world to mold us into its conduct, character, and attitudes. Solomon wrote in *Mishley / Proverbs 21:6* saying, “*A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the congregation of the dead.*” Is this not a pretty strong way of saying what we are discussing here? The point is most people do not set out to deliberately depart from the truth of God and

His Messiah Yeshua. They begin learning new things, and little by little they begin to spiritually drift. Once the truth becomes a little blurry, it is more easy to move a way from the truth and to be deceived into many things. Even one's way of thinking may be warped to the extent that he or she will not return to the truth found in the Scriptures, such as what we are taught concerning the gospel message in the NT. The author of the book of Hebrews makes an analogy that is similar to a boat drifting away in relation to the topic of spiritual drift.

Hebrews 2:1-3

2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2:2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 2:3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard (NASB)

Here the author of Hebrews calls us to pay close attention to the truth and to hold fast to it so that we do not drift away from it. He says that every transgression and disobedience received just penalty (2:2) and how we have a great salvation in Yeshua the Messiah, how can we neglect such a great salvation? A person neglects this great salvation for many reasons, one is pride. I have run into people who trust in their works of righteousness for their salvation believing that God's word forbids Yeshua from taking our sins upon himself. Presumption of the truth often results in careless drifting, which then quickly advances from simple neglect to willful disobedience and sin. We are called to be in a continual state of Teshuvah (repentance) and to diligently seek the Kingdom of God and truth. Considering the spiritual drift and becoming dull to hearing, Solomon had some things to say concerning this in *Mishley / Proverbs 8:32-36*.

Mishley / Proverbs 8:32-36

8:32 'Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. 8:33 'Heed instruction

and be wise, And do not neglect it. 8:34 'Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. 8:35 'For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the Lord. 8:36 'But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.' (NASB)

Notice how Solomon states that we are to listen carefully and apply diligently what we have been taught. If we do not but instead live a life of sin, then the conclusion is that one loves death rather than life. Since believing in Yeshua, have we ever thought of ourselves as “*loving death?*” Those who do not consciously and purposefully direct their lives by faith toward obedience to God in reality love death! These are the things that Isaac is drawing out for us in this week’s Torah portion. Isaac’s life may not be as dramatic as his predecessors or as that of his children, but great credit goes to Isaac in the sense that he was faithful to God and believed in God’s Promises just as Abraham his father was faithful! He proceeded in life by keeping the faith, i.e. He kept the wells of his father and he named them the same names is a very significant detail because it shows us the meticulous way in which Isaac adhered to the norms of his father and the things that Abraham had taught him. So too we must trust in the truth that is laid out in the Scriptures as we understand it, the love of God for His people led to the sending His of Son Yeshua to die for our sins so that we may receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life!