

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 19, 2025
GENESIS 26:1-33

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FOOD, WATER, AND THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS



I need to start with an apology and retraction. Last week I gave a Hebrew word that was not accurate. I said the Hebrew word for “struggle” was “matsa”. It is not “matsa”, it is “ratsats”. “Ratsats” means to “crush” or “break apart”, “break into pieces”, oppress”. When I looked back on my notes I apparently was struggling to read my own writing. Thank you to those who saw my mistake and held me accountable.. That will not be the last time I make mistakes. I invite you to be like the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**.



Last week I gave a Hebrew word that was not accurate. I said the Hebrew word for “struggle” was “matsa”. It is not “matsa”, it is “**ratsats**”. “**Ratsats**” means to “**crush**” or “**break apart**”, “**break into pieces**”, “**oppress**”.

We are in **Genesis 26** and I am really excited for our chapter today. This chapter has three main sections that are connected by a common thread. The common thread in **Genesis 26** is: food and water. Now for you and I we tend to have food and water in abundance. So much so that we take food and water for granted. However in the days of Isaac 3500 years ago food and water was often scarce and it dictated how people spent their waking hours. Why? Because survival depended on food and water. Survival based on food and water is the backdrop for **chapter 26**.

The common thread in **Genesis 26** is: food and water.



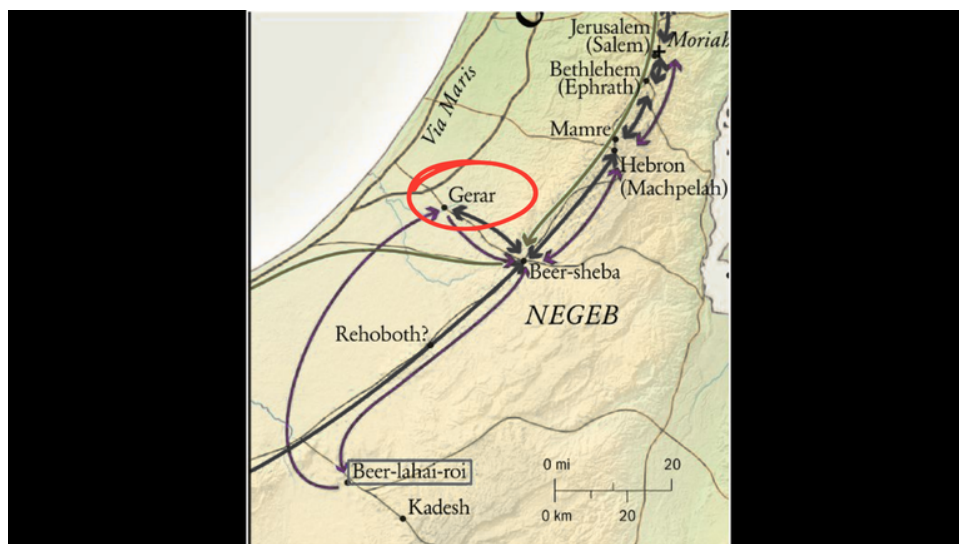
Genesis 26:1 starts off with a lack of food, it says “A severe famine struck the land...”. A famine means to not have enough food to eat. And not just for people, but for animals too. A famine is usually geographical, covering a region or territory, sometimes a big area, like in the story of Joseph and the famous famine in Egypt and surrounding countries.

In Isaac’s day when food was scarce there were not trucks that delivered food from one part of the country to the next, no Walmarts or Giants, no DoorDash to deliver groceries. Rather the primary source of food in the ancient near east was what you grew from the ground or gathered in the wild, what was raised in your herds or flocks, or what you hunted. Even local markets in towns were primarily stocked by local growers or gatherers, so markets too were affected by famines.

Now I’ve never been in a famine – it sounds awful. As a matter of fact I don’t think I have ever missed a meal unless I did it by choice. And right now I’m thinking about lunch – and in my head it’s not a matter of if I’m going to have lunch – it’s a matter of what I’m going to have for lunch. Food choice is a first world luxury.

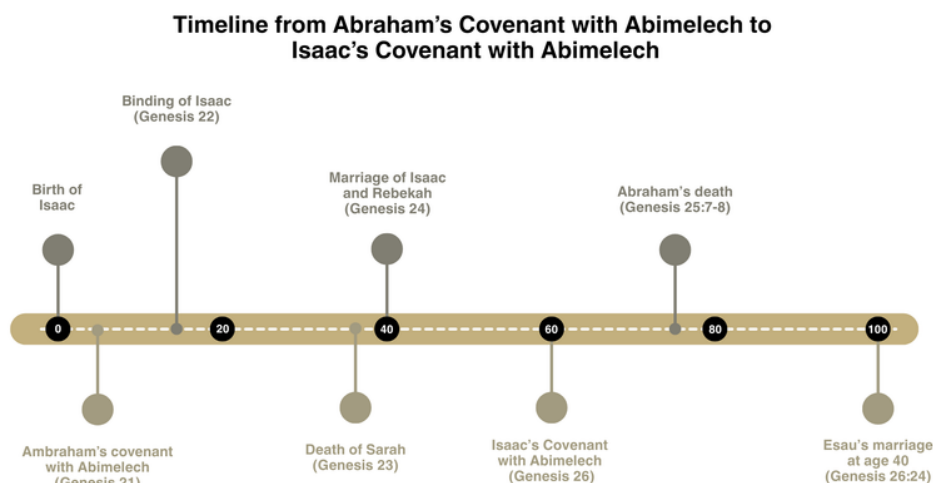
That wasn’t the case back in Isaac’s day in **Genesis 26**. So for you and I to grasp what is happening in this text related to food and water we need to transport ourselves in our minds into the Western Negev desert – 3500 hundred years ago. You are standing in the wild. Looking around there is no vegetation alive, just wind and dust. It is dry, the expected winter rains never came, and so your fears have come true - the crops failed, the grazing pasture failed. Without winter rain there is no hope in replanting for a whole year, a whole year.no bread, no grain, no beans, no food for your family or for your animals. What are you going to do?

Well we know what Isaac did in the famine scenario. **Verse 1** tells us that he left where the famine was and headed for Gerar in route to Egypt.



Now this story sounds familiar because it repeats things from two previous Genesis stories. **Genesis 26:1a** opens with the exact same line as **Genesis 12:10a**... “a severe famine struck the land”. In **Genesis 12**, not long after Ab arrives in Canaan, a famine hit, and Abraham went south, looking for food, till he arrives in Egypt. Abraham’s famine was about 80ish years before Isaac’s famine in **Genesis 26:1**. And it was in Egypt that Abraham, in order to protect himself, deceived a foreign king regarding his wife Sarah being his sister. And we know that Abraham repeats that deception roughly thirty years later in Gerar with King Abimelech.

Now in **Genesis 26:1**, another famine hits and Isaac heads for Gerar. Why Gerar? Gerar offered a safe passage for Isaac to go to Egypt along the coast. The reason that Gerar was a safe passage is because roughly 50 years prior, when Abraham was in Gerar he made (**Genesis 21:23**) a peace agreement with the King of the Philistines, Abimelech. And that generational peace agreement would give Isaac safe passage through the land of Gerar. Now if the timeline here of Isaac’s story is confusing, maybe this will help.



We know from **verse 2** that Isaac’s intent was to go to Egypt – just like Abraham his father did 80 years earlier. How do we know that Isaac was headed for Egypt? The LORD, who can read the intents of the heart, told Isaac not to go to Egypt!

While in Gerar, Isaac, in order to protect himself, deceives a foreign king re: his wife being his sister just like his father did twice. So now we have two generations with the same sin of lies and deception.

In **verse 2** while Isaac is in Gerar, God appeared to Isaac and He said to Isaac “don’t go to Egypt”. Look at this appearance from God as in intervention to keep Isaac from going to Egypt. God wanted Isaac to stay in the land that was given to his father Abraham and trust God to take care of him in the land – so God intervened.

Genesis 26:3–4 Covenant

1. I will be with you.
2. I will bless you.
3. I will give your descendants all these lands.
4. I will establish my oath with your father with you.
5. I will multiply your descendants.
6. By your descendants all nations of the earth will be blessed.

And in that intervention God repeats to Isaac the main points of the covenant he had given to Abraham. 1. I will be with you. 2. I will bless you. 3. I will give your descendants all these lands. 4. I will establish my oath with your father with you. 5. I will multiply your descendants. 6. By your descendants all nations of the earth will be blessed

And God said he would do that for Isaac (**verse 5**) because Isaac's father Ab had obeyed the LORD's "requirements, commands, decrees and instructions".

Now every intervention lead to a choice. I've been involved in interventions where family and friends will surround a person dealing with addictions and tell the person how the addiction has affected them, how much they love them, etc.. all leading up to asking the addict to make a choice to go get help. But at the end of the intervention, the person still has to choose to go get help. God never denies someone choice. You may be thinking "wow Isaac was lucky God showed up and spoke to him. If God showed up in person and asked me not to.... then I would stop." Really? Well God did show up in person, Jesus and Jesus told us not to. God showed up in his Word and told us not to, that's twice. And every time the Holy Spirit says "don't" that's God showing up - that's minimally three times God shows up to tell us not to. So it's not a matter of God showing up to say don't, it's a matter of us listening.

Now the intent of the LORD's intervention was for Isaac to trust the LORD and not go to Egypt. In **verse 6** it says. Good choice Isaac. But after a good choice, sometimes there comes a "bad choice" and the retelling of bad choice in the bible often starts with the word "when".

And then the sin of the father, lying and deception, the role of the serpent, is repeated in the son Isaac, a bad choice. Why did he do it? Verse seven identifies the motivation for the bad choice, for the sin, to be fear. Isaac admits he was "afraid". And Isaac's fear was tied to bad thinking. He thought he would be killed so others could have his wife.

But stop there for a second, hadn't the LORD told Isaac to stay in Gerar? Yes. And didn't the LORD tell Isaac he would be with him? Yes. And bless him? Yes. And didn't the LORD tell Isaac he would have descendants? Yes. Hrrmm...So why the fear?

Let me share something with you I learned about fear (from a wise pastor - Thom). Fear that controls your decisions, fear that that leads you to not trust God, fear that leads you to sin is functional atheism. Functional atheism is believing that God is not in your future. And because of your belief that God is not in your future, you take matters into your own hands. Lies, deception, manipulation ... Rather than taking on the promise of God that he is with us we in our fears take on the role of the serpent and lie, deceive, to protect ourselves or get what we want.

Isaac looked at his future in Gerar and thought **verse 7**, "they are going to kill me for my wife". His picture of the future in his head had no God in it protecting him. And where there is no God with you it is terrifying! But hadn't God just told him in **verse 3** "to stay in this land", and God "would be with him and bless him"? Yes! But what Isaac imagined in his mind in **verse 7** did not include truth from God that God would be with him and bless.

So stop for a minute and think about some of your fears, fears that could be controlling you or are controlling you - fears perhaps leading distrust and to sin. Whatever you are fearing, whatever scenario, in your mind do you see God in it? God with you? God protecting you? God blessing you? If you do not see God in it, your thoughts are wrong and your feelings of fear that are controlling your choices are based on a lie.

When Isaac was faced with the thought of living in a foreign land with a beautiful wife and that others might kill him to have his wife, God told him he would be with him - in essence God said in (**verse 3-4**) "Isaac, trust me, I'll protect you, I'm not leaving you buddy". But Isaac, rather than trusting in the LORD to protect him while in Gerar, turned to his own devices to protect himself lying - deceiving. In essence Isaac because he didn't trust the LORD, accept the LORD's partnership in this situation, Isaac succumbed to the serpent from **Genesis 3**. Where the serpent lied to and deceived Eve in the garden of Eden, Isaac lied to and deceived Abimelech regarding his wife being his sister - just his father Abraham lied to and deceived first Pharaoh then the previous king Abimelech. Abraham and Isaac are the patriarchs of the faith...and here they are following the serpent in lying in deception.

We were told by the LORD in **Genesis 3:15** that one of the seed of Eve would crush the head of the serpent, the deceiver. READ. Not only have Abraham and Isaac not crushed the serpent's head, they have repeated the serpent's behavior, lying and deceiving. Neither of the patriarchs of the faith are the serpent head crusher. It appears the serpent is alive and well from generation to generation. Let's move on.

Now we see that in **verse 8** Isaac sold the lie pretty well because the lie lasted for "a long time" before Abimelech learns the truth and realized that he had been deceived. **Proverbs 12:19** says, "Truth stands the test of time, lies are soon exposed". The lie was exposed. Abimelech happens to look down through a high window and "saw Isaac caressing Rebekah". Now of course Abimelech seeing this playful intimate contact between Isaac and Rebekah made him realize that Rebekah was Isaac's wife and that he had been lied to and deceived.

In response to being lied and being deceived Abimelech confronts Isaac with the question in **verse 10 NASB** "What is this that you have done?". This is the fifth time so far in Genesis that we have seen this exact question after someone was lied to and deceived. **Genesis 3:13** The LORD of Eve, **Genesis 4:10** The LORD of Cain; **Genesis 12:18** Pharaoh of Abraham; **Genesis 20:9** Abimelech of Abraham; **Genesis 26:10** Abimelech to Isaac; **Genesis 29:25** Jacob to Laban; **Genesis 31:26** Laban to Jacob. One question, repeated seven times, confronting sin and deception.

What is this you have done?



Genesis 3:13 The LORD of Eve
Genesis 4:10 The LORD of Cain
Genesis 12:18 Pharaoh of Abraham
Genesis 20:9 Abimelech of Abraham
Genesis 26:10 Abimelech to Isaac
Genesis 29:25 Jacob to Laban
Genesis 31:26 Laban to Jacob.

One question, repeated seven times,
confronting sin and deception.

Note the first time this exact question was the LORD asking "what have you done" was confronting deception and lies, the deception by Satan and the sin of Eve in taking the fruit. The LORD will not allow sin and deception go unconfronted. After Cain kills Able the LORD then asks the same question to Cain. So again the LORD confronting deception and sin.

The next three times the question "What have you done" is asked are foreign kings asking Abraham twice and Isaac once when they both lied about their wife being their sister. God used foreign pagan kings in confronting lies and deception. Interesting also that all three foreign kings knew that the lie and deception and sleeping with another man's wife was wrong, even if the patriarchs didn't, or didn't care.

And the last two times the question "What have you done" is asked are chapters we have not looked at yet. This is a battle of two deceivers... Jacob asks Laban the question after Laban deceives him, and then Laban asks Jacob the question after Jacob deceives Laban. Deceiver confronting deceiver.

Here are a few things we learn from this so far:

1. God will reveal the truth and confront deception and lies. "What have you done?"
2. The deceiving serpent's influence on the covenant lineage is alive and well in the generations in Genesis so far.
3. Neither Abraham or Isaac, nor Jacob are the serpent head crusher that Gen 3:15 prophesies. How do we know that? They have all repeated the deception and lies of the serpent.

What we have learned



1. God will reveal the truth and confront deception and lies. “What have you done?”
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3. Neither Abraham or Isaac, nor Jacob are the serpent head crusher that **Genesis 3:15** prophesies. How do we know that? They have all repeated the deception and lies of the serpent.

Yet despite all those truths and the failure of Isaac to not repeat the sin of his father, to not succumb to the influence of the serpent, look how God treats Isaac in **verses 11-14**. In **verse 11** Abimelech protects Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac gets royal protection, and edict to protect him from the Kings own mouth. And the LORDs blessing gets even better.

In **verse 12** Isaac plants seed and the return on his seed investment is 100 fold. Just to put what a 100 fold is in perspective, several ancient agriculture historians, Hopkins, Borowski and Vanderveen, all say that the normal crop yield was a range from 4-10 times the investment. You buy one bag of seed for planting and you will get a return of bw 4-10 bags of seed. Isaac has a 100 fold yield – ten times the normal yield – clearly miraculous! What caused miraculous yield? Look at the end of **verse 12** “Blessed” here is **Genesis 1** language that means God puts his supernatural life giving, life multiplying, life flourishing ability into something. In this case God blesses Isaac’s seed planting, and 1 bag of seed, produces a 100 fold.

And this blessing happens even though Isaac did not trust the LORD to protect him. This blessing happens even though Isaac allowed his fears to control him, which leading to him deceiving and lying. The LORD treats Isaac with covenant faithfulness despite Isaac’s shortcomings.

At the beginning of the lesson I said there were two things that were needed for survival, food and water. Our text so far was about food. It began with a “famine” in **verse 1** and in **verse 12** there is a 100 fold crop yield. With God’s blessing, despite Isaac’s lack of trust in God which led to sin, the food went from “famine” to 100 fold crop yield.

Now let’s look at the second thing needed for survival, water. The first twelve verses were food, the next verses are about water. **Verses 13-17** are similar in design to **verse 1**. In **verse 1** Isaac had food, then a famine hit, and he had no food, then Isaac moved to find food. Likewise in **verse 13-15** in summary Isaac had water from wells. Then the philistines filled up the wells, meaning Isaac no longer had water, and then Isaac moved to find water.

It appears from the end of **verse 14** that the motivation for the Philistines to fill up Isaac’s wells was jealousy, other translations say “envy”. Doesn’t jealousy and envy always cause problems, create division, drive people apart? Church, guard your hearts from envy!

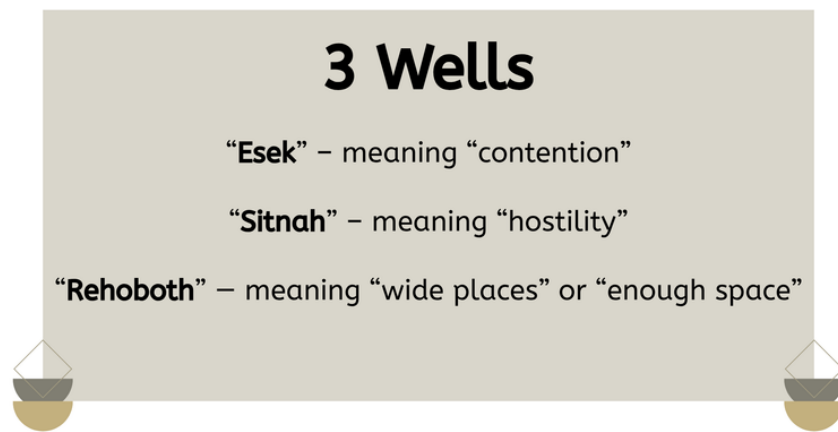
And we see in **verse 16** that the philistines were not just envious of Isaac they were also scared. “Too powerful”. That word can be used to describe both resources and numbers of people. So Abimelech commands Isaac to leave, and Isaac moves, but not far. He goes to the Gerar valley.

So at this new location, Isaac has food but now they need water. **Verses 18-25**. So Isaac reopens his father’s old wells, uses the same names for the wells his father did and then digs a new well. It’s important to see this as a continuation of the blessing of Abraham on Isaac. God had blessed Abraham, Abraham then gave all he had to Isaac and now Isaac is even using Abraham’s wells. But God also wants Isaac to have his own blessing of water from the Lord, and so the LORD gives Isaac a well of “fresh water”. Historians say that the likelihood of digging a well and hitting water is between **Genesis 1:3** and **Genesis 1:10**

hitting water once for every ten wells you dig. So that Isaac dug a well and hit water is the first sign of God's favor blessing.

Now regarding this being a well of "fresh water". Other translations say "running water". Some believe this is a well that has a very fast refresh rate; or it could be where at the bottom of the well there is flowing water like tapping into an underground stream. Others think this might be an artesian well where the water comes up the well shaft and runs out on its own. Whichever type of well this flowing water is, this well is superior to the other wells, and would be much desired. God blessed Isaac with a better well than his father's. That they hit water and that its flowing water is a sign of God's blessing on Isaac.

Of course the philistines took that well, and therefore Isaac named the well "Esek - meaning "contention". Isaac digs another well, the Philistines take that one too, and Isaac names the well "Sitnah - meaning "hostility." Isaac moves further away and digs a third well, far enough away that the Philistines don't quarrel over it, so he names the third well "Rehoboth" meaning "wide places" or "enough space" implying there is finally enough room for he and his clan.



So now wealthy Isaac is further away from Abimelech and Gerar, further away from Abimelech's protection. Spiritually I think this is God moving Isaac away from the props that Isaac was leaning on that were getting in the way of Isaac trusting the Lord.

In the first part of the chapter, the Lord had shown Isaac his covenant faithfulness despite Isaac's sin, the Lord had blessed his crops and cattle and household. And then the Lord had blessed Isaac with the wells of his father. And then blessed Isaac with his own well of living water, flowing water. And then when Isaac moved further away from Abimelech and Gerar the Lord blessed him with a well in open space - Rehoboth. Do you think that sometimes God moves us away from the props that we are leaning on in order to create space for us to trust in him and not need the props?



**Do you think that sometimes God moves us
away from the props that we are leaning
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in him and not need the props?**



In **verse 23** Isaac leaves Rehoboth and goes to Beersheba, yes, another well. Beersheba is the place that when Abraham made a peace agreement with the previous Abimelech 50 years prior, Abraham named the well “Beersheba”, meaning “the well of seven” or “the well of oath”.

Beersheba



“**Beersheba**” meaning “the well of seven” or “the well of oath”.



Now this text has a lot of wells. If you lay all these wells out, to me from **verses 18-23** is a trail of wells that leads to trusting God.

1. God gave Isaac the wells of his father Abraham – God’s blessing to Isaac continued. **Verse 18.**
2. God gave Isaac a well of flowing or living water. Isaac’s own well, blessing from God, better than his father’s well. **Verse 19.**
3. God gave them another well in **verse 21.**
4. God gave Isaac a well in a wide open space – Rehoboth - where there would not be contention or hostility. **Verse 22.**
5. And then God led Isaac back to the place of the well named Beersheba – meaning “the well of oath.. or covenant”. **Verse 23.**

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5. And then God led Isaac back to the place of the well named Beersheba – meaning “the well of oath.. or covenant”. **Verse 23**

And it is at Beersheba, the place of the oath or covenant, that the LORD appears in **verse 24** and reassures Isaac saying:

1. Do not fear.
2. I am with you.
3. I will bless you.
4. I will multiply you.

Now at this point of Isaac’s journey with the LORD, Isaac clearly sees the LORD’s covenant faithfulness and blessing despite Isaac’s sinfulness, and Isaac humbles himself, builds an alter to the LORD, and worships the LORD. That’s a beautiful moment. Isaac pauses in recognition of what the LORD has done for him, what he didn’t deserve, and worships the LORD. That’s true worship. Praising God for what he has giving us that we don’t deserve. Which is praising God for his covenant faithfulness.

And then guess what Isaac does after he worships the Lord? He digs another well (**verse 25b**).

Now that Isaac finally sees the LORD's covenant faithfulness and the LORD's blessing upon him, we are made aware in the text that Abimelech and the philistines are aware of God's blessing on Isaac as well.

Verse 26. [Both those names are titles and add context to the story. Ahuzzath means "to seize or take possession" – exactly what they have done up till now, take possession of the wells; Philco, the commander of the army means the "the voice of all" or "the voice for all" - probably in the sense of "whatever he says goes – or else...".]

In **verses 27-31**. ("hate" in Hebrew also means "to reject").

So in the narrative, the Abimelech the King meaning power/might/rule, Ahuzzath – the one who seizes things, and Philco – the reinforcer, the one whose word goes for everyone – show up acknowledging the LORD's presence and blessing on Isaac. These three figures of power saw the miraculous 100 fold crop, and growth of Isaac's flocks and herds, and household. They saw the miracle of all the wells every well hit water and one of them hit flowing water. And to them the cause behind all these miracles is obvious, they say in **verse 28a** "We can plainly see that the LORD is with you." My friends can the world plainly see that the LORD is with you?

The Philistines

Abimelech the King meaning power/might/rule

Ahuzzath – the one who seizes things

Philco – the one whose word goes for everyone, the reinforcer.



Abimelech and his power figures come to Isaac not to seize what Isaac had, but they came in humility recognizing that they were no match for the LORD, so they humbled themselves before the LORD and asked Isaac for a treaty. Imagine what that felt like for Isaac! Isaac gave them the treaty. And true to God's faithfulness, after the Abimelech and his power figures left, the LORD blessed Isaac with water in the well. This well Isaac called Beersheeba.. the well of Oath.

Thoughts for your meditation and application:

1. In this chapter we see the covenant faithfulness of God despite the sinfulness of man. This leads us the readers to a choice. Am I going to trust God's covenant faithfulness or not?

In **verse 24** the LORD exhorts us to trust him. He says: 1. Do not fear. 2. I am with you. 3. I will bless you. 4. I will multiply you.

2. The lying deceiving serpent is alive and well in every generation – this is why we see people commit the sins of their fathers. All mankind succumbs to the influence of the serpent -all are sinners. Which means that no ordinary man in history was capable of crushing the head of the serpent, not even the patriarchs! Yet **Genesis 3:15** says from the seed of the woman a head crusher will come. The only person who can crush the head of the serpent is the one who does not succumb to the influence of the serpent – meaning they are sinless. And that sinless person is Jesus. Jesus death on the cross as the sinless lamb of God – and his resurrection from the dead, crushed the head of the serpent.

3. The story of food and water points to Jesus. It's not surprise then that Jesus when speaking to the woman at the well in **John 4:10**. And then **John 4:14**. And Jesus later in John says **John 6:33, 35, 48, 51**. So we come back again to choice. Will you trust the God who is faithful despite your sinfulness? Will you trust the only one who never succumbed to the serpent, who is the serpent head crusher, the only one that has defeated sin? Will you trust the one is the living water, the one whose living water can become a fresh bubbling spring within you – meaning eternal life?

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

Genesis 26:1 Who are these Philistines? The Philistines as we know from the time of Saul, David etc. were not around during Abraham or Isaac's life time. The Philistines arrived in the area roughly 500 years later. So why does the text say "Abimelech king of the Philistines" in **verse 1** and **verse 8**? The book we call Genesis was written and given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai who had arrived from their deliverance from Egypt within the past year. So being at Mount Sinai the Israelites and their descendants, hearing these stories about Abraham and Isaac having dealings with Abimelech King of the Philistines, would know who the current occupants of southern coastal Palestine were – the Philistines. It is thought then for simplicity, the author simply called the inhabitants of the coastal plain the Philistines, a name that would be familiar to the Israelites at Sinai.

Genesis 26:1 Who was this story written for? The Israelites at Mount Sinai were the first readers/hearers of Genesis. The intent of the historical narrative of Genesis was largely to help the Israelites, who had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years, to prepare for a covenant relationship with the LORD God, what we call the Mosaic Covenant. Genesis taught them who they were in relationship to the LORD, where they came from with the LORD, why their lives have meaning with the LORD. Genesis taught them about the LORD, the LORDS design of partnership relationship with mankind to reign over the earth. Genesis taught them about the LORD's grace, his firm boundaries, his love. Genesis taught them about the LORD's covenant faithfulness despite the Israelites unfaithfulness.

Genesis 26:1 Is this the same Abimelech as in Abraham's day? The Abimelech in this story is not the same Abimelech as with Abraham fifty years prior. "Abimelech" is a title related to the dynasty of Philistine kings.. every Philistine king was called Abimelech in this era.

Genesis 26:8 Abimelech looking down through a window and seeing the truth reminds me of God in **Psalms 53:2-3** "God looks down from heaven on the entire human race he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one."

Genesis 26:8 Interesting note on Isaac caressing Rebekah...this was clearly sexual. The Hebrew word translated here as caressing contains the same root word as Isaac's name that means: playful – laughter – sporting. This is playful sexual action is the same action that Joseph was accused of by Potiphar's wife in **Genesis 38:17** translated as "fool around".

Genesis 26:16 "Mighty / powerful" – this is the same word in Hebrew used in **Genesis 18:18** where God said that Abraham would become a mighty nation. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy. Later on this repeats when the Israelites go to Egypt, this exact story of the descendants of Isaac being blessed, being fruitful multiplying, becoming powerful, and then their host nation becoming fearful of the Israelites due to their size.

Genesis 26:17 What is the Gerar Valley? In Hebrew this is a "wadi". When we use the word valley we think of Lebanon Valley, Cumberland Valley. A wadi isn't that, a wadi is the ravine where water runs during the winter rains. Often flash floods. For example the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem is literally the "wadi Kidron" and for most of the year it is dry, but during the short winter rainy season there is a stream that flows to the Salt sea.