

GENESIS

Lesson 26 - Chapter 26

Patterns. We see patterns, here in Genesis 26, that we've seen in earlier chapters. And, some of these patterns are built-upon and further developed in the narrative of Genesis 26. We've talked about patterns quite a bit in this class, because they are crucial in understanding Scripture. Because God has created a Universe and system of life that emulates Himself, it is of course orderly and not chaotic. Secular humanists know instinctively that if our Universe and the system of life on our planet are NOT chaotic and random, then it DOES have order. And, if it has order, who or what has created that order?

Relatively new theories of physics..... which, by the way, are now the generally accepted theories..... have shown that 1) many more dimensions of existence than the 4 we are familiar with (length, width, height, and time) are a mathematical reality, and 2) our Universe and system of life IS orderly and not random or chaotic. It is full of patterns and cycles that seem to repeat infinitely.

Therefore, faced with the inevitable conclusion that if the Universe has been ordered, by definition there MUST be a central order-er. Yet, the same scientific community that subscribes to these new theories cannot bring themselves to use the term "God"; so, they have coined the term "Intelligent Design".....refusing to discuss just WHO the intelligent designer might be.

Unfortunately for the scientific community, using the rather detached and neutral terminology of Intelligent Design has not allowed them to avoid the controversy their findings have caused. A school in Pennsylvania has been teaching its students about the decade old (or so) finding of intelligent design of the Universe in it's science classes...along, of course, with the obligatory theory of evolution; the result is a huge court battle over whether the students can even be told of the intelligent design discoveries. Keep an eye on this battle and read what you can about it. You will be astounded at the twisted claims and mental gymnastics that those who brought the lawsuit are alleging. You will be astounded at the institutions and people who you might never have associated with atheism and vehement secular humanism. Even more you will learn just how much of a minority you (as a Believer) are in our nation and our world, and to what extent the spirit of the Anti-Christ now dominates mankind's thinking.

I point this out to you, because most of us have been taught to read and study the Bible using secular humanist methods.....it's just that we don't realize it. That is, it is required that for every lesson, or principle, or law, or happening in Scripture, we MUST ask WHY? And, we are required to draw our conclusions based on the scientific method. If there are not good and largely complete answers as to "why", then the Biblical lesson, or principle, or law, or happening is discarded as myth, legend, and fantasy.

The Bible is not a secular humanist document, and it does not present the material in a

scientific way. Therefore, the search for “why” when studying Scripture can lead us down dead-end trails, in the same way that the rapidly-becoming-obsolete field of physics called Quantum Mechanics has led scientists down a road to a dead end that has amounted to nothing. The Quantum Mechanics approach to physics is to try to rationalize chaos; to try and find mathematical formulas able to PREDICT the unpredictable, and to explain how randomness can eventually produce order. The theoretical principles of chaos and randomness are the foundation of atheism and secular humanism. And, after more than 4 decades, the Quantum Mechanics approach to the operation of the Universe has proved utterly futile.

We are a Universe and life system of patterns.....because we are Universe and life system of order; we see patterns because God’s principles of order are rock-solid and they never change. This produces repetitions and predictable cycles....and I call these Biblical repetition, patterns.

Let’s read Genesis 26, now, uncover some more patterns, and watch history, even at this early date, repeat itself.

READ GEN 26 all

The fickle weather of Canaan had once again plunged the land into a state of hunger such that Isaac was forced to move on. Apparently, remembering his father, Abraham’s, similar plight and resulting sojourn into Egypt, Isaac was about to do the same. His route to Egypt took him into the territory of the Philistines, because the well-established trade route between Canaan and Egypt ran directly through the Philistine’s land. Even more, as verse 1 states, he went to the royal city of Gerar, because it was a known stores-city; that is, it was a place where the king resided, so the city had warehouses with food storage. It was common practice throughout the known world in that era to have both emergency and regular food warehouses AT THE CITY where the king of that region lived....obviously so the king could keep his eye on them and so he would have first shot at the best food as he wanted it.

This system of stores-cities and warehouses existed primarily because the “taxes” every king extracted from his people came....for the most part..... in the form of grain or some other kind of produce. So, huge amounts of wheat and barley brought in as taxes had to be stored and controlled by the king’s men, under the king’s watchful eye. The result was the need for enormous warehouses and underground silos for safekeeping the king’s property.

There, Yahweh appeared to Isaac and told him NOT to go down to Egypt, but rather to stay right where he was! In other words, despite what his eyes told him.....despite the fact that all his human instincts told him they must go elsewhere or perish from starvation, God told him to stay in the land God had set aside for Abraham and his descendants. That God would take him THROUGH the trouble, not out of it. How often we choose to do just what Isaac was about to do.....cut and run, instead of listening to, and trusting, God to take us through the hard times and challenges of our lives.

This was no easy decision for Isaac; he was an owner of flocks and herds. He, by now, had an enormous clan to oversee and care for. To choose to stay in an area that was now under a

famine was a most serious one; it could mean the end of his clan. One can only imagine the shock and disbelief of his clan members at this decision. This was to be a test of faith in his father's God.

Let's do a little housekeeping. First, the timing of chapter 26 necessarily occurs BEFORE chapter 25. So, the twins Esau and Jacob had not **yet** been born to Isaac's wife, Rivka. We can know this because there is no mention of them, AND, the king of the Philistines never would have inquired about Rivka if he knew she was married; children being the dead giveaway that she WAS married.

Let's also talk for a moment about the first words of verse 2, where it says, "The Lord appeared to him....", referring to Isaac. What does this mean, "the Lord appeared"? Does this indicate a theophany? Did God make a PHYSICAL appearance before Isaac? BTW, as in most cases in the OT, the word translated as "lord" is actually Y-H-W-H.....God's personal name.

The Hebrew word used here, and normally translated as appearance, is va-yerah'; and this word IS indicative of divine revelation. Another Hebrew word for a kind of divine intervention is very similar: va-yo'mer. Va-yomer invariably is referring ONLY to divine **speech**....words, something audible. Va-yerah is most commonly used in the Bible in reference to the Patriarchs....Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is indicative of a more direct and intense receiving of communication from God. It is a communication with the Lord that is not questioned. Visions, another form of communication with Yahweh, are often questioned; was it God or just a dream? Do I understand correctly what He said? What does it all mean? The word form va-yerah', on the other hand, indicates an unquestionable, unmistakable contact with God that includes a crystal clear message.....that could, but does not necessarily, include a visual experience. So, the word "**appearance**" should not be taken to mean that the Lord, in some way, made Himself visible; it's more of an expression of near-ness of a human to God's presence.

Final piece of housekeeping: the Abimelech that we see here is NOT the same Abimelech that Abraham encountered. Abimelech means "father-king", or "my father the king". It is an epithet, and a title. It was probably a name that many Philistine kings chose for themselves. We really shouldn't have to wonder about this: we find modern Catholic Popes choosing names for themselves of past Popes. We find kings of England and France doing the same thing: Henry the 8th was called that because there were 7 royal Henrys before him. Same idea here.

So, beginning in verse 3, God renewed the covenant promises He had made with Abraham, with Isaac. Let us never forget, all the Bible characters were real human beings; Isaac would naturally wonder, over extended periods of time, if God was still with him. He'd look at his circumstances, as we all do, and question whether he fully understood what God had told him.....because little, if any, of those covenant promises seemed to be coming to pass. And, the one promise that was so valuable to a clan, in that era.....land.....certainly hadn't materialized. Isaac NEEDED the reaffirmation from the Lord, so he got it.

We must not just quickly skip by what is said towards the end of verse 4, though it seems we

have heard it before. In fact, the form of the promise “ so that all the nations of the earth shall BLESS THEMSELVES by your heirs.....” ADDS a small nuance from the earlier promise that “all the nations of the earth will be blessed by you”. The idea is that ALL humanity will have their hopes and well being somehow organically connected to Israel. General mankind’s fate is dependent on Israel’s fate.

What, exactly, does that mean? Well, even though we are so far along in the process of God’s plan of redemption that we have a greater picture and understanding of how this is all playing out than those who came before us.....much of it is still to come, and therefore much is still a mystery. When we get to Genesis 48, 49, and 50, more information is added that both sheds light AND adds to the mystery of just HOW all the nations of the earth will be blessed by Abraham’s descendants. And, remember, the word “**nations**”, in Bible speak, is referring more to PEOPLE than to territory. Don’t necessarily equate the words nation and country; in our modern vocabulary, we use the words nation and country interchangeably. But, that is NOT the case in the Bible. Nations, for the most part, means definable groups of people along with their government....their leaders.

Isaac obeyed; like his father, Abraham, he listened to God and did what He was bid to do. But, Isaac carried in him a trait similar to his father: fear. Now in the midst of famine, and currently residing upon a people he didn’t particularly trust, he felt insecure.

And, as a result, here we find Isaac sporting **another** familiar family trait.....a problem with being truthful.....especially when it comes to his wife. No doubt Isaac had heard the tales of his father Abraham’s trip into Egypt, and so he now mimics Abraham’s behavior by telling the city folk of G’rar that Rivka is his sister.

One day, Abimelech looks out his window and spots Isaac caressing his lovely wife Rebecca; having heard the scuttlebutt that Rivka was Isaac’s sister, what he witnessed says otherwise, and so Abimelech figures out the deceit and confronts Isaac. Isaac admits his lie, and the furious Abimelech warns his people that nobody is to touch her, or they’ll die. A lesson he had likely learned from HIS father.

Now, although there are many obvious patterns playing out here that we saw with Isaac’s father Abraham, the outcomes are quite different. Abraham encountered famine, determined to go to Egypt to ride it out, and did so. Isaac encountered famine, determined to go to Egypt to ride it out, but did NOT go.

The king of the Philistines spotted Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was told she was Abraham’s sister, and so he more or less kidnapped her for his harem. The king of the Philistines spotted Isaac’s wife, Rivka, had been told she was his sister, BUT NOTICED that she obviously was not, and so did NOT take her. In fact, he warned his people against doing anything as regards Rivka.

It is quite interesting to me, that whenever this king of the Philistines makes reference to Isaac’s God, He calls Him by name; that’s right, the original Hebrew doesn’t have Abimelech referring to Isaac’s God as “Lord”, as most of our Bibles do; rather, each time Y-H-W-H is present. Abimelech obviously had familiarity with Isaac’s God, and had fear and respect for

him. And, in fact, it was the fear of the God of the Hebrews that drove Abimelech's decisions in the way he dealt with Isaac and his clan.

We find in verse 13, that apparently the extended famine caused Isaac to decide to plant crops to supplement, and likely to feed, his herds, flocks, and family. Ancient historical records prove the truth of this. Often keepers of flocks and herds would plant the equivalent of a large garden so as to have grain and herbs for their families. And, there is also record of shepherds growing crops to supplement their food supply in hard times, so this act of Isaac doing so is completely consistent with both his culture and profession; in no way does planting crops indicate an intent to settle down and stay in a spot permanently.

God blessed Isaac for trusting Him to stay in Canaan, by causing the crops to produce 100 times what was sowed. In that day, planting methods were primitive and the yield of the seed was small; generally, something on the order of 25 times the amount of seed sown became harvestable. A great year was 50 times, and 75 was extraordinary. 100 times yield was only possible supernaturally. We're told in V13 that Isaac's wealth kept compounding, and the local Philistines became bitterly jealous. And, from Abimelech's instructions to Isaac, we can also understand that there was fear coupled to that jealousy by the Philistine people of both Isaac's God, and of the already sizeable number of people that formed Isaac's clan. Isaac was a threat, as the Philistines saw it.

This is a scenario that will be played out time and time again with the Israelites, and then the Jews, as God's blessing upon them with plentiful food, longevity, fertility, and wealth also served as a cause for envy and then persecution by whatever peoples they lived among. The P'lishtim, the Philistines, showed their anger and frustration by filling in water wells so vital to Isaac's clan's well being. Abraham had dug these wells years earlier.

So, Isaac's clan had grown so large and powerful, that they represented a threat to the Philistines, and Abimelech asked them to leave his land. Yet, we must understand that we have the weaker asking the stronger to leave. Isaac could have refused, and a war might have resulted with Isaac the likely winner. In those days, as now, however, Abimelech knowing that he could not have defeated Isaac, would have made some type of power and wealth sharing pact with Isaac. Isaac well knew this; but, instead, chose to comply and so he gathered his clan left, moving to the bank of the G'rar River (Vadi, or Wadi, means "river"), and began unclogging some the water wells that had been filled with dirt by the Philistines. When the water began flowing again, the Philistines claimed it was their water, and the conflict started anew.

So, Isaac took his tribe and moved further away to Be'er-Sheva. Abimelech, an able politician, knew it was wise to try and mend fences with this growing clan that could, if it wished, come back and overrun his land. So, he renewed the pact that he had made so many years earlier with Abraham.

Beer-Sheva means well of the seven. And, recall, it was a place well known to Isaac, because it where Abraham moved after Isaac had his near-death experience on the altar at Mt. Moriah. So, Isaac was simply going back to comfortable familiarity. Also, we must understand that this

was simply an oasis. There was no city, there. It would be long into the future before a city was established at that spot, and the city's name was taken from the ancient name Abraham had given it.

Beginning in verse 23, upon Isaac taking his large clan to Be'er-Sheva, God again comes to Isaac....the text says Y-H-W-H "**appears**" to Isaac, and it uses the same Hebrew word **va-yera'**, that is common in describing many of the Patriarch's communications with the Lord. Isaac had just come through a pretty troubling time. He may have felt like he failed, because he left an area of land, without putting up a fight, that God said would go to Abraham's descendants. And, Yahweh comes to Isaac as a comforter; he says, "fear not". Why fear not? Because Isaac was fearful.....

Emulating his father, Isaac builds an altar, sacrifices to Yahweh, and has his men start digging a new well; something he was sure to need. And, during the process of digging the well, Abimelech shows up along with his chief of staff, Ahuzzath, and the general of his army, Phicol. Isaac is annoyed. His statement to Abimelech is something on the order of "what now!..... I did everything you asked in order to maintain peace between us, and here you are again."

But, Abimelech has not come to make trouble; he is coming with his hat in hand. He wants a peace treaty with Isaac. Isaac is setting up shop right on the border of Abimelech's influence. He feels he has pushed Isaac as far away as he can get away with, but he still feels insecure. I suspect that Isaac knew full well why Abimelech was there, simply by who came with him. If Abimelech were there to make war, he would not have had his civilian chief of staff with him. No, this was the usual entourage necessary for two nations to make a pact.

And, the nature of the pact is spelled out in verses 28 and 30; it is too live side-by-side, peaceably. The pact is concluded in the usual manner, with a ceremonial meal, and some oaths in the name of the gods each worships are spoken; Abimelech and his men depart. The same day, the men digging the water well struck water. This was always interpreted as a good sign.....a sign of blessing..... and I have no doubt that is exactly as God intended it.

Peace and prosperity, and room to grow were now Isaac's; life was good. But, trouble was brewing; his unwise, petulant son Esau did the VERY thing Isaac and Rebecca most dreaded: he took two Hittite women as his wives. God knew what He was doing when, 40 years earlier; He had assigned the first-born birthright to Esau's twin brother Jacob, while they both were yet in their mother's womb.