



# East of Eden

## Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

### THE FAMILY TREE

*Genesis 26*

#### I. It Is Well, Well, Well with My Soul—Genesis 26

##### A. Examine the text

1. The Lord appears to Isaac (Gn 26:1–5).
  - a. Famine in Canaan—Don't go to Egypt (like your **daddy** did).
  - b. God renews the covenant he had made with Isaac's **daddy**.
  - c. God blesses Isaac because of his **daddy's** obedience
2. Out of fear, Isaac tells the Philistines that Rebekah is his **sister** (Gn 26:6–11).

His daddy had pulled this stunt **twice** before: with Pharaoh in Egypt (Gn 12:10–20) and with Abimelech<sup>1</sup> in Gerar (Gn 20:1–17). Though there are obvious differences in the three incidents, the similarities are striking: a patriarch visits a pagan land and, to protect himself, pretends his wife is his sister; this invites God's judgment on the land and brings a strong moral rebuke from the pagan king.
3. Isaac prospers and the Philistines become jealous (Gn 26:12–22).
  - a. Isaac's prosperity is credited to the **Lord's blessing**, not to his business savvy.
  - b. **Jealousy** caused the Philistines to plug up with dirt the wells<sup>2</sup> that Abraham had dug earlier and then tell Isaac to leave their territory.
  - c. Isaac **redigs** the wells his daddy had dug and names them the same names.
  - d. In his book entitled **Revival** (Crossway, 1987), Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses Genesis 26:17–18 as a text to call God's people to clear out the "Philistine" rubbish and drink again from the living water that Father Abraham made possible. See pages 21–91.
4. God appears again to Isaac at Beersheba (Gn 26:23–25). "I am the God of Abraham your **father**. . . ." Isaac responds by building an **altar** (his first and only altar) and digging another well.
5. Abimelech and Isaac make a **covenant** (Gn 26:26–33).
  - a. "We see plainly that the Lord is with you . . ." (Gn 26:28).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Both Abraham (Gn 20) and Isaac (Gn 26) tell a pagan king named Abimelech that their wife is their sister. The two incidents are about 75 years apart, so it is unlikely the two Abimelechs are the same person. It could be a father and son (or grandson) with the same name or just evidence of the custom of kings having the same name.

<sup>2</sup> In the Middle East, then as now, a well was a sign of prosperity and blessing. Rather than taking by force the wells that Abraham had dug, envy and jealousy caused the Philistines to stupidly fill them in with dirt—an act of sabotage (terrorism?) that hurt them as much as it hurt the Hebrews.

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of pagans who recognized the blessing of God on Israel include: Jethro (Ex 18:10–11), Rahab (Jos 2:9–11), and Namann (2 Kgs 5:15).

- b. The similarities between this covenant and the one Abraham (Isaac's daddy) made with an earlier Abimelech (and Phicol) at Beersheba are striking (see Gn 21:22–34).
- B. Department of Redundancy Department
1. Isaac's life seems like an **echo** of his father's life: the same issues (famine), temptations (go to Egypt, say wife is sister), wells, neighbors (Abimelech), and locations (Beersheba).
  2. The text seems to underscore the reality that all Isaac's blessings are the result of his **daddy's** faithful obedience and that the God he worships is his **daddy's** God (second-hand faith?).
  3. It's tough being **the son** of a great man, so that your **identity** is shaped by someone else. Isaac's story is sandwiched between Abraham (14 chapters) and Jacob (26 chapters). Genesis 26 is the single chapter that tells us about Isaac's contribution to history. His story is short and **unspectacular**. While God told Abraham to "Go!" (Gn 12:1–3), he told Isaac to "Stay!" (Gn 26:2). While other patriarchs took exciting journeys, fought important battles, and accomplished great deeds, Isaac basically stayed home and dug wells. Like an acorn that falls from a mighty oak tree, his life was lived in the **shadow** of his father Abraham. It's hard to find a great man who had a great son.
- II. The Three Chairs
- A. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob<sup>4</sup>
- Genesis gives a surprising amount of information about these three men, the patriarchs. Apparently, God wants us to think deeply about what happens to the faith when it gets **passed/transmitted** from one generation to the next. In a relay race, the key moment is when the baton is passed from one runner to the next.
- B. Father Abraham (Gn 12–25).
1. General characteristics of a first-generation believer:
    - a. Knows firsthand the reality of raw **paganism** and idolatry.
    - b. Has a **conversion** that is clear and dramatic.
    - c. Knows God; has a personal **relationship** with him.
    - d. Has a faith that is vibrant, bold, **passionate**.
    - e. Whole-hearted, full commitment, total consecration, **absolute surrender**.
    - f. Thinks **everyone** should know God.
  2. Abraham's life is characterized by **altars**: at Shechem (Gn 12:6–7), at Bethel (Gn 12:8), at Hebron (Gn 13:14–18), and at Moriah (Gn 22:1–2, 9). An altar is a place of **sacrifice**, thanksgiving, worship, and **communion** with God.
- C. Isaac—the son (Gn 21–35, especially chapter 26).
1. General characteristics of a second-generation believer:

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note how Genesis includes the story of Joseph (chapters 37–50)—a fourth chair. Though not one of the three patriarchs, Joseph illustrates how a fourth-generation believer rediscovers the first-generation passion for God and commitment to God's will that his great-grandfather knew.

- a. Born into a family where prayer, faith, Scripture, and church are the **norm**.
  - b. Paganism is an “outside” evil, to be avoided at all costs—and we have family **rules**, practices, and rites to follow so that we don’t fall back into the evil of worldliness.
  - c. Our family is **blessed** in every way. Daddy is not a drunkard or a gambler. He works hard and loves his family. And God has blessed us materially.
  - d. We practice our faith and live moral lives because that is what our **parents** taught us to do. Tradition. We may not be passionate about God but we do worship and respect him.
2. Isaac’s life is characterized by **wells**: at Esek, Sitnah, Rehoboth, and Beersheba (Gn 26:17–25, 32). A well is a place of prosperity, a place where the blessings of life can be **enjoyed**.
- D. Jacob—the grandson (Gn 25–50).
1. General characteristics of a third-generation believer:
    - a. Detecting the lukewarm, double-minded, respectable, predictable religion of his father, he fails to see the vital importance of faith in God and concludes it is a “**department**” of life (similar perhaps to “exercise,” “civil involvement,” “religion”; useful for emergencies).
    - b. This generation finds it easy to **rebel** and reject the teachings of their parents and grandparents. They can quickly slip into practices and behaviors that would be **shocking** to their grandparents: immorality, alternate lifestyles, marrying outside the faith, worldliness, selfish ambition, etc.
  2. Jacob’s life is characterized by **pillars**: at Bethel to commemorate his dream of the stairway to heaven (Gn 28:16–22; 35:9–15), at Mizpah/Galeed to commemorate his covenant with Laban (Gn 31:43–49), and at Bethlehem to mark the grave of Rachel (Gn 35:16–20). A pillar resembles an altar and has an air of religiosity, but it has a totally different purpose. Like a shrine, memorial, or **historical marker**, a pillar commemorates something that happened to our ancestors long ago.
- E. Fill in the chart on page 36.

### III. Make It Personal

- A. Think about your own family tree: In which chair do you sit?
- As with Goldilocks, only one chair is “just right”—the **first-generation** kind of relationship with God. Although the **drift** toward spiritual mediocrity is a constant pull toward the kind of lukewarm faith that Jesus condemns (Rv 3:16), this downward trend is not inevitable. It can be resisted! We don’t have to wait until a “Joseph generation” arises to rediscover **Abrahamic faith**.
- B. Think about your children (and, if you have them, grandchildren). As a result of this study, how will your prayers for them be different?

## The Three Chairs

*So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might to another generation,  
your power to all those to come. (Psalm 71:18)*

|   | First Generation         | Second Generation            | Third Generation                 |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Person</b>                           | Abraham                  | Isaac                        | Jacob                            |
| <b>Symbol</b>                           | Altar                    | <u>Well</u>                  | <u>Pillar</u>                    |
| <b>God</b>                              | Relationship             | <u>Religion</u>              | <u>Duty</u>                      |
| <b>Heart</b>                            | Whole-hearted            | <u>Half-hearted</u>          | <u>Hard-hearted</u>              |
| <b>Character</b>                        | Holy                     | <u>Moral/Nice</u>            | <u>Selfish</u>                   |
| <b>Passion</b>                          | Seeks the blessing       | <u>Enjoys the blessing</u>   | <u>Demands the blessing</u>      |
| <b>Experience</b>                       | Knows God                | <u>Knows about God</u>       | <u>Doesn't know God</u>          |
| <b>Focus</b>                            | To please God            | <u>To please others</u>      | <u>To please self</u>            |
| <b>World</b>                            | Lives for other world    | <u>Lives in two worlds</u>   | <u>Lives for this world</u>      |
| <b>Bible</b>                            | Eats the Bible           | <u>Believes in the Bible</u> | <u>Owens a Bible</u>             |
| <b>Evidence of second work of grace</b> | Yes—Gn 17<br>Name change | <u>No</u>                    | <u>Yes—Gn 32<br/>Name change</u> |

## **Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above**

By Charles Wesley (1759)

*Come, let us join our friends above  
Who have obtained the prize,  
And on the eagle wings of love  
To joys celestial rise.  
Let saints on earth unite to sing  
With those to glory gone,  
For all the servants of our King  
In earth and heaven are one.*

*One family we dwell in him,  
One church above, beneath,  
Though now divided by the stream,  
The narrow stream of death;  
One army of the living God,  
To his command we bow;  
Part of his host have crossed the flood,  
And part are crossing now.*

*Ten thousand to their endless home  
This solemn moment fly,  
And we are to the margin come,  
And we expect to die.  
E'en now by faith we join our hands  
With those that went before,  
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands  
On the eternal shore.*

*Our spirits too shall quickly join,  
Ike theirs with glory crowned,  
And shout to see our Captain's sign,  
To hear this trumpet sound.  
O that we now might grasp our Guide!  
O that the word were given!  
Come, Lord of hosts, the waves divide,  
And land us all in heaven.*