

# *What Will You Do in the Time of Testing?*

## *Genesis 26*

What will you do in the time of testing? What will the testing reveal about your character or about your walk with the Lord? Some say trials build character. It may be more accurate to say that trials reveal character or expose a lack of character. Someone has said people are like tea bags if you want to know what is inside them, just drop them into hot water! That is what we are going to see in this chapter. The hot water of a famine is going to reveal the character of Isaac.

Has God ever tested your faith with a problem? What do problems reveal about you? We often look at problems or difficulties with dread. But if we are going to have a biblical response we should rejoice. Why rejoice? That seems like a contradiction. We should rejoice because God will use the trials in our lives to not only reveal or expose character, He will, if we let Him, use the trials to build our character (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-5). That is what we will see in this chapter. Isaac goes through a trial, but God is with him every step of the way guiding him and helping him grow in his faith and relationship with the Lord. Let's begin our study.

### **A Trial that Exposed Character**

**Genesis 26:1-6 - There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> Then the LORD appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."**

"There was a famine in the land" the text tells us (26:1a). A famine is a situation where the necessities of life are lacking. Famines can be physical (Genesis 12:10; 26:1; Matthew 24:7) or spiritual (2 Chronicles 15:3; Amos 8:11). The Bible says that God uses famines in His judgment (Jeremiah 5:12), as a warning (1 Kings 17:1), for correction (2 Samuel 21:1), as punishment (Jeremiah 14:12), and as a consequence of disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:48). Solving the problem of a famine is beyond human control. It requires faith in God. That is why God allows famines, to get His people to depend on Him and His word. Deuteronomy 8:3 explains this saying:

- **Deuteronomy 8:3 - <sup>3</sup> So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.**

This famine is a test of Isaac's faith. How would he respond? Testing in life is inevitable. No one goes through life trouble free. We all encounter either illness from within and or affliction and suffering from some outside source (e.g. Job). When that happens we have a decision to make. Either we will respond in the relative weakness of our own personal resources. I would include in this the looking to false gods because they are for the most part manufactured by fallen sinful humanity. When people do that they are unwittingly making themselves vulnerable to the manipulation of the enemy (Ephesians 6:12). The alternative is to look up to the Lord for strength and grace (e.g. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Again, the question is what will you do in the time of testing?

Isaac began to move his family south to the Philistine city of Gerar (26:1b). It is likely that Isaac was beginning to follow in the footsteps of his faith Abraham (12:10; 20). As Isaac reaches Gerar located towards the south of the Promised Land, God speaks to him. It is at this point that God encourages Isaac with a reaffirmation of the covenant (26:2-5). God instructs Isaac to not go down to Egypt. God saw the direction Isaac was going and got his attention to stop him. God tells him to dwell in the Land of God and God would provide for him. All Isaac would have to do to weather this storm of famine was obey the Lord. This provides us with an important lesson. When we are on the way, the Lord leads us (compare 24:27). By speaking to Isaac God is counseling him to avoid a similar lapse in faith to that of his father. God warns us and always provides a way out of tempting situations (e.g. 1 Corinthians 10:13).

God's affirmation in Genesis 26:2-5 should have been a source of great encouragement to Isaac. God was assuring Isaac the Covenant He had with Abraham would be passed on to him. God was telling him that He was going to look out for him. In the midst of the famine, God was affirming and offering reassurance to Isaac that He would help him through this situation. How would Isaac respond?

### **The Consequences of Partial Obedience**

**Genesis 26:6-22 - <sup>6</sup> So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. <sup>7</sup> And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She *is* my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "*She is* my wife," *because he thought*, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she *is* beautiful to behold."<sup>8</sup> Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife.<sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she *is* your wife; so how could you say, 'She *is* my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said, "What *is* this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us."<sup>11</sup> So Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."<sup>12</sup> Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him.<sup>13</sup> The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous;<sup>14</sup> for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.<sup>15</sup> Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth.<sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac,**

“Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”<sup>17</sup> Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.<sup>18</sup> And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.<sup>19</sup> Also Isaac’s servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there.<sup>20</sup> But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, “The water *is* ours.” So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him.<sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah.<sup>22</sup> And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, “For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

Isaac partially complies with God’s request. He doesn’t go further south into Egypt like Abraham did, but he does remain in Gerar. This move to Gerar opened Isaac and his family to personal danger and spiritual faltering. There is a consequence to partial obedience. There is a consequence in hanging out where you don’t belong. Isaac finds himself in a predicament not unlike that of his father Abraham (Genesis 12 and 20). What are the consequences of partial obedience?

***First, you open yourself to lust (26:7a).*** The land of Gerar is apparently a land of lustfulness as the men inquire about Rebekah. What does Isaac do? He follows in the footsteps of his father by calling Rebekah his “sister” (26:6-16).

***Second, you find yourself lying (26:7b).*** Isaac lies instead of trusts God for protection. Lies are never in line with the will of the Lord. We should always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

***Third, you are driven by fear (26:7c).*** Isaac was driven by fear rather than by faith in the Lord.

***Fourth, your witness is discredited (26:8-11).*** The result is a discredited witness.

***Fifth, even your blessings are mixed with difficulties (26:12-14).*** Even the blessing of God becomes a curse in that they become an object of envy.

***Sixth, you are unwanted (26:15-16).*** You don’t fit in. There is something out of whack. Isaac was asked to leave the land; he was not a good neighbor.

***Seventh, more conflict (26:17-22).*** As a result of all these consequences, Isaac moves a little bit closer to where God wants him but he still doesn’t go all the way. He moves into the Valley of Gerar. Because he is dragging his feet all he finds is more conflict.

We need to notice something here. Four times in verses 17-22 it mentions that Isaac was digging wells. This is significant. Abraham was an ***altar builder*** who worshipped God (12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). Isaac was a ***well digger*** who depended on the swet of his brow to secure the blessing of God. When you depend on self it is always an indication of spiritual decline (e.g. Romans 7). Abraham was more of a Mary and Isaac was more of a Martha (cf. Luke 10:38-42).

What happens in these verses is a telling exposure of a lapse in the character of Isaac. This trial revealed or exposed the carnal nature of Isaac who only followed the Lord half-heartedly. And when put to a further test by the inquiry of the men of Gerar about Rebekah, Isaac really shows his carnal nature. When the pressure is on Isaac reverts to the old ways of his father. With a carnal head of the family it is no wonder that we see dysfunction in this family. Remember it was Esau that flesh eating carnal hunter of a son who was the favorite of Isaac (25:28). And in the next chapter we see the infighting of the two brothers Jacob and Esau.

### **Erect an Altar; Call on God and Then Dig your Wells**

**Genesis 26:23-35 - <sup>23</sup> Then he went up from there to Beersheba. <sup>24</sup> And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “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 My servant Abraham’s sake.” <sup>25</sup> So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well. <sup>26</sup> Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. <sup>27</sup> And Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?” <sup>28</sup> But they said, “We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, <sup>29</sup> that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You *are* now the blessed of the LORD.’ ” <sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. <sup>32</sup> It came to pass the same day that Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” <sup>33</sup> So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city *is* Beersheba to this day. <sup>34</sup> When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. <sup>35</sup> And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.**

Finally Isaac begins to see the light; he begins to follow the Lord. This is seen in his move from the Valley of Gerar toward Beersheba, a place located closer to the heartland of the Promised Land (26:23). As he begins to get in step with the Lord, God speaks to Isaac and change for the better begins. When you dwell in God’s Land, you are guided by peace (e.g. Colossians 3:15). As soon as Isaac moved toward obedience of the Lord, the Lord made His presence known to him (26:24-25). Isaac began to get his priorities right. It says, “**he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD**” (26:15a). He was finally putting first things first. He was putting his relationship with God first. Once he did that, then it was time to dig. It continues, “**and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servant’s dug a well**” (26:15b). Before we *dig a well* we have to *erect an altar*. That is the proper order: ***Erect an Altar, Call on God and Then Dig your Well***.

Look at the change Isaac experienced around him as he got right with the Lord.

***First, the presence of God (26:24-25)***. As soon as he turned to the Lord and put Him first, Isaac experienced the presence of the LORD.

**Second, peace with your enemies (26:26).** His enemies not only reconciled with him, but *they* initiated the reconciliation!

**Third, an empowered witness (26:27-28).** His integrity and witness was renewed.

**Fourth, God's blessings were pure and not mixed (26:29-33).** He was at peace (26:29-31). And God's blessings began to overflow him (26:32-33). There was no regret, no mixed blessings.

The blessings of God on Isaac are pictured by his finding water (26:32). It is God who creates the water (Genesis 1:2, 6, 7). It is God who gives water (Psalm 104:13). It is God who blesses the earth with water (Isaiah 55:10). God can withhold water if He so desires (Isaiah 50:2). But He can also reveal with water (Psalm 107). God is a fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2:13). Those who are thirsty are called to come to God for thirst quenching water (Isaiah 12:2-3; 43:20; 44:3). And this is most beautifully pictured by Jesus in the New Testament (John 7:37-39). When Isaac found water, he found the Lord.

The chapter ends with a reminder of what awaits the carnal person. Esau was a grief to his parents Isaac and Rebekah (26:34-35). Unfortunately, this will not be the end of carnality in this family.

### **Worship, the Right Response in All Situations**

The Bible states we need to keep our heart with all diligence because out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). We need to keep ourselves in the love of God no matter what befalls us (Jude 21). How is this done? The answer is one word, **worship**. That is what Isaac ultimately did when faced with the problems he faced in our passage (26:25). That is what we should do too.

There is more than ample evidence that the right response, the saving and sustaining response in all situations is to worship the Lord no matter what. Here are some examples of worship helping people work through trials:

1. Abraham - When God asked Abraham to do something he surely didn't fully understand, when God asked him to sacrifice his only son Isaac, Abraham worshipped the Lord. When God asked him to do something that was as painful as anything God could have asked him to do, Abraham the man of faith worshipped God (Genesis 22:4-5).
2. David during a time of personal sin - When the discipline of God came on David and God would not allow him to enjoy the fruit of his sin, David worshipped (2 Samuel 12:19-20).
3. David when betrayed - When David was betrayed by his son and best friend, David worshipped (2 Samuel 15:32).
4. Job in a spiritual war - When the unseen enemy attacked Job and took everything from him, Job worshipped (Job 1:20).
5. Daniel in the lion's den - In the lion's den Daniel worshipped God (Daniel 6:10).

6. Habakkuk during times of fruitlessness - When the fig tree is barren and all our earthly resources are drying up or dried up, Habakkuk is inspired to tell us we should worship the Lord (Habakkuk 3:17-19).
7. Apostles when persecuted - When we are persecuted and beaten we should rejoice and worship the Lord because we have been counted worthy for that purpose (Acts 5:41).
8. Apostles when imprisoned - Even in the darkest prisons of life we should sing songs of worship to the Lord (Acts 16:25).
9. Jesus at the cross - Jesus, for the joy set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:1-2). That was worship. When the inevitable trials in life come, no matter what, the right, best and most strengthening response is to worship the Lord.
10. Us when we go through trials – James is inspired to tell us to count it all joy when trials come upon us (James 1:2-5).

Worship is an important weapon in our spiritual arsenal. It's always right to respond with worship. Worship is the way to encounter trials and difficulties in life. We see this throughout the Bible and in the practical outworking of life.

In 2 Chronicles 20 there is an account of threat to Judah by confederacy of nations. Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah at the time and his initial response was to fear the situation. But he responded to his fear by seeking the Lord and calling for a fast throughout all Judah. (20:1-3). Judah gathered and cried out to the Lord (20:4). Jehoshaphat led his people in intercession. It is a prayer that recognizes who God is, what He had done in the past for Judah and what they needed for Him to do now for them. Their prayer ended with “our eyes are upon You” (20:5-12). All the people stood before the Lord (20:13). Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel and he proclaimed from the LORD, “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.” (20:14-19). But the important part here is to note that the people, “bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD” (20:18). They turned to God and worshipped Him in their time of crisis and the LORD delivered them from the enemy (20:20-30). The battle was won in “The Valley of Berachah” (20:26). “Berachah” means *blessing*. If you are up against an enemy or being tested in some way, pray to the LORD, worship Him, and He will bring you to your Valley of Berachah.

### **Summary**

Let's summarize what we have seen in this chapter about Isaac's response to testing. Isaac acted on impulse and the consequence was to turn to those who were perennial enemies of God's people, the Philistines. He also relied on what came natural to him; he went in the way his father Abraham had gone; the way of the flesh (26:1). But God is merciful. He reached out to Isaac to warn Isaac (26:2), remind him of His promise (26:3-4), and instruct him in the way he *should* go (26:5). Isaac responded to God with only partial obedience. He set up camp in Gerar which was only part way back to where he needed to be based on God's instructions (26:6). Partial obedience is always a bad place to be. When Isaac only partially obeyed God his life was governed by fear, lies (26:7), dangerous complications (26:8), shame, a tarnished witness and rebuke (26:9-11). Keep in mind that through all of this God continued to bless Isaac. Which tells us that just because God blesses does not mean we are where we should be (26:12-14). The

world where Isaac sought refuge was a well-stopping place. It was a place where the refreshing provision from God was stopped up (26:15). The alternative to being where God wants you to be often is a place where the Spirit is not flowing. Isaac moved a little closer to God's will for him, he moved into the Valley of Gerar. When you move into the valley you will only find strife, difficulty and mixed blessing (26:17-21). Isaac needed to come all the way to where God wanted him. Only then did he begin to see undiluted and full blessing from God (26:22-33). The chapter ends with a reminder of what happens when you choose to live in your flesh apart from God; you end up being a source of grief to those around you; like Esau (26:33-34).

What about you, what do you think you will do when the time of testing comes to you? What will be revealed or exposed about your character or lack thereof? These are important questions because everyone goes through trials. The question isn't *if* we will go through trials but *when* we will go through them. And the greater question is what will you do in the time of testing when the trials come? I hope you will learn from Isaac that the shortest route to victory in trials is from your knees to the floor. Victory comes as soon as we listen to the Lord and obey Him. God bless you in your trials.