

“AVOIDING CONTENTION”

GENESIS 26:12-22

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

Isaac may be regarded as “the ordinary son of a great father—Abraham.

Isaac may also be regarded as “the ordinary father of a great son—Jacob.

Yet, this “ordinary” life is a well-ordered life.

Isaac has just been rebuked by Abimelech—king of Gerar (vv. 1-11). Is there anything sadder than for a child of God to be rebuked by a man of the world?

It is not surprising that there would be some residual animosity over what had just happened. Moreover, the described prosperity of Isaac in vv. 12-14 was bound to induce jealousy and additional animosity from those who have “small hearts” and unredeemed hearts.

Envy is and has always been a plague to the people and work of God.

1) Families with multiple children see this played out on life’s stage regularly:

- Food at the table
- Toys and possessions
- Sitting in the front seat of the car
- Privilege to go somewhere
- Getting to stay up later etc. etc.

2) Neighbors who have a new car, a boat, a better house etc.

3) Sports figures who are envious of another better than themselves.

4) Co-workers envious of a promotion received by someone else.

5) Envy manifested in marriages and in relationships

6) Pastors envious of other pastors.

7) Churches envious of other churches.

8) The list can go on indefinitely

How should a believer react to unjust envy on the part of others, and to the potential strife connected with it?

YOU MUST NOT BE ENVIOUS, BUT BE CONTENT WITH WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU.

I. ISAAC’S PROSPERITY (12-14)

A. Size (12a, 13)

- “A hundredfold”—cf. the parable of the sower
- “Great...grew greater...became very great”; or “rich...grow richer...became very rich”

B. Source (12b)—“The Lord blessed him”

C. Substance (14a)

- We already have seen great crops
- Flocks—of sheep and goats
- Herds—of cattle, maybe camels
- A great household—not so much children (Jacob and Esau), but of servants and workers

II. THE PHILISTINES’ ENVY (14b-17)—“And the Philistines envied him”

A. Cruelty (15)

1. Wells dug by Abraham’s servants (21:25, 30)

- Digging of a well might be considered a claim to the possession of the land; the Philistines resented such.
- 2. Abraham's death (25:8; v. 18)
- 3. The wells filled in with dirt
- B. Rejection (16)—“go away from us; you are too powerful—much mightier than us.”

III. ISAAC'S MEEKNESS (17-22)

- A. Departure (17)—To the “Valley of Gerar”, likely to the Southeast
- B. Renewed Efforts (18)
 - 1. Re-dug Abraham's wells that the Philistines had stopped up
 - 2. Gave them the same names
- C. Sustained Quarrels (19-21)
 - 1. The well of Esek (19-20)
 - A well of “living”—i.e. springing or flowing—water
 - Gerar's herdsmen quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen.
 - “The water is ours”
 - “Esek” means “contention”
 - 2. The well of Sitnah
 - Dug another well.
 - Quarreled over it also.
 - “Sitnah” means “enmity” or “hostility.”
- D. Ultimate Peace (22)
 - 1. Isaac yielded his “personal rights” and moved away from there.
 - Such a quality of character is rare in the Middle East, or anywhere for that matter.
 - Such “trivial matters” evidences Isaac's **bigness of soul**; he was magnanimous.
 - 2. He dug another well—persistence; he did not give up!
 - 3. They did not quarrel over it (maybe it was far enough away!).
 - 4. He named it “Rehoboth” meaning “broad places”
 - Some churches have chosen that name
 - “Truly now the LORD—the God of the covenant, the faithful God of the promise, “has made room/**broad** for us.”
 - “We shall be fruitful in the land.”
 - God will “make space” for you, bless you, give you “the broad places in the land,”
 - **But you must trust Him, and not strive to make your own way in the flesh!**

CONCLUSION

Notice what follows this incident—Yahweh's renewal of the covenant with him (26:24).

We all want our “space”, our “broad places”, but we often go about it in our flesh, seeking what WE want in OUR way.

That kind of behavior leads to contention, confusion, trouble, misery—the way most people live!

Do we *fight back, defend ourselves, return insults, hurts*, etc.? Show kindness instead (Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:17-21)

**YOU MUST NOT BE ENVIOUS, BUT BE CONTENT WITH WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU.
NOR MUST YOU STRIVE IN YOUR FLESH**

God's work done in God's way will result in God's blessing.