

Part 77

• *The outworking of the promise*

• *Involves overcoming the conflicts and testing that come to the man or woman believing the promise*

The problems of faith

1. *Unsettlement*

2. *Fear for one's life*

3. *Proneness to sin*

4. *Strife*

5. *The strain of delay*

6. *Problem in the family*

The story of the book of Genesis is the story of a promise. First we have seen the **need** of the promise, in Genesis 1–11. Now we are looking at the **outworking** of the promise. Abraham was told that through him and his seed all the world would be blessed. Eventually God made the promise into an oath and now it is sure and certain that the promise will come to pass. However the fact that a sworn oath must come to pass does not predetermine that any one particular person must be blessed by God. God can still withhold the blessings that have been sworn and give them to the next generation. Each patriarch, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, has to persist in faith. Isaac is a person to whom the promise has been given. *'In Isaac shall your seed be called into being,'* said God. But for him, too, it involves overcoming the conflicts and testing that come to the man or woman believing the promise.

Let us consider, first, **the problems of faith.**

1. There is **unsettlement**. There is a famine in the land. This had happened before in the life of Abraham and Abraham had gone to Egypt ^{□1}. But that occasion had not turned out well for Abraham. Isaac is distressed by anxiety about his physical well-being. God appears to him and warns him not to go ^{□2}.

2. There is **fear for one's life**. Like Abraham he fears that his life might be in danger because some powerful figure might want Rebekah as his wife.

3. There is **proneness to sin**. As often happens, anxiety led to sin. Abraham had twice half-lied about Sarah's being his sister. It was true that he and Sarah had the same father ^{□1}. On neither occasion had it done Abraham any good. Yet Isaac does the same thing. He does not have the excuse that Abraham had; in no way can Rebekah be thought to be Isaac's sister. He goes to the same place as Abraham had once gone to, Gerar, and tells the same lie ^{□2}. Isaac gets caught just as Abraham had twice been caught out before. This time someone is looking through a window ^{□3}! Like Abraham he is rebuked by the pagan king for his suspicions and his deceit ^{□4}. But Abimelech gives a command that Isaac is not to be harmed.

4. There is **strife**. Isaac was rich and getting richer ^{□1} but wealth brings its own problems with it, and Isaac was the object of Philistine envy ^{□2} and that in turn led to resentment and malice. They were stopping up his water-wells that had been dug by Abraham ^{□3}. He moved elsewhere at Abimelech's request ^{□4} but that did no good. Although he opened up fresh water from old wells ^{□5}, the herdsmen were still in the mood to be quarrelsome ^{□6}. So bad was the strife the very place- name was changed to 'Esek' ('Strife'). Further attempts to find another area still met with no success ^{□7} and only on a further move did there come any peace ^{□8}.

5. There is **the strain of delay**. God had promised Isaac the land just as He had promised it to Abraham. In fact, the promise was more secure because it had been sworn to Abraham. Although Isaac and his people were hoping to be *'fruitful in the land'* ^{□1}, their inheriting of any land at all was slow in happening.

6. There is a **problem in the family**. After the blessing of God's appearing ^{□1}, and the end of the strife when Abimelech proposed a covenant ^{□2}, and the discovering of fresh water ^{□3}, that was still not the end of their

□1 12:10–20
□2 26:1–5

□1 see
Genesis
20:12

□2 26:6–7

□3 26:8

□4 26:9–10

□1 26:12–

14a

□2 26:14

□3 26:15

□4 26:16–17

□5 26:18–19

□6 26:20

□7 26:21

□8 26:22

□1 26:22

□1 26:24–25

□2 26:26–31

□3 26:32–33

problems. Esau decided to marry two Hittite wives ^{□4}. He was not interested in going back to Haran. He wanted his wife now! And he wanted two! It brought great distress to Isaac and Rebekah.

^{□4} 26:34–35

The remedies of faith

However, although there are the conflicts of faith, there are also **the remedies of faith**.

1. The guidance and the presence of God

1. The greatest of them is **the guidance and the presence of God**. When Isaac is about to go to Egypt, a trip that will take him away from the promised land and might well lead to disaster, God appears to him and says ‘Do not go down to Egypt’ ^{□1}. God does not always give us direct guidance but there are times when we need special help or when God’s kingdom is in special danger and we find we have the leading or the restraining hand of God.

^{□1} 26:1–2

2. The renewals of God’s promises

2. There are **the renewals of God’s promises**. God repeats the promises that He had given many times before: ‘I will be with you and bless you ... I will give all these lands ... I will establish the oath ... I will multiply your descendants ... by your seed all the nations ... shall be blessed’ ^{□1}. There is an extra phrase that has not appeared before: ‘because Abraham obeyed me.’ The oath may be a reward for obedience, and it was that way with Abraham. The day came when Abraham was summoned to a high level of obedience ^{□2} and there was a day when God told Abraham that because of his fear of God he had received the oath ^{□3}. For Abraham’s sake God is renewing His promises to his seed.

^{□1} 26:3–4

^{□2} 17:1

^{□3} 22:12, 16

3. The forgiving grace of God

3. There is **the forgiving grace of God**. Despite Isaac’s foolishness ^{□1}, God had been gracious towards him. God showed him mercy in letting him be found out ^{□2}! Sometimes God is merciful to us in letting us be exposed. Then God gave Abraham favour with Abimelech ^{□3} and he was protected from the foolishness of his own ways.

^{□1} 26:7–9

^{□2} 26:10

^{□3} 26:11

4. God added His blessing to Isaac’s generosity

4. **God added His blessing to Isaac’s generosity**. Isaac was generous to the herdman. Several times he moved away. It is clear that he wanted to avoid strife if he could. God blessed him in his passivity and eventually even his enemy made peace with him. His patience was worthwhile and eventually he had the advantage of a covenant with Abimelech.

• God sees us through

The life of faith brings many practical conflicts with it, but God is God and sees us through.



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