

The Life of Isaac
Genesis 26:1-31

Introduction

Of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one we know least about is Isaac. Most people can recall the incident when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, but not much more about him. He has been overshadowed by his great father, and the doings of his younger son Jacob. Genesis 26 is in fact the only chapter that tells of Isaac's life, even though, of the three, he lived the longest.

Little is said of him, good or bad. In summary, he was about 25 when Abraham was asked to sacrifice him, at 40 he married Rebekah, at 60 his sons Jacob and Esau were born, at 137 Jacob deceived him, and at 180 he died. He did not move about much, therefore is only associated with a few places. In fact, he was pleasant, harmless, useful, unromantic, drab and colourless. He was quiet, peaceful and submissive. He was the very ordinary son of a great father, and the very ordinary father of a great son – "Mr Average". In some ways, this makes him easier to identify with. He led the usual sort of life we all have. He made mistakes. He had the usual crop of problems. He knew deep disappointments in his family – the marriage of his son Esau with foreign wives did not please Isaac. The deception of his other son Jacob caused him heartbreak.

We are going to look at three aspects of "Mr Average", which are typical of us all. We all have to deal with temptation, we all have to deal with other people, and we all have a relationship with God.

Isaac's reaction to temptation

It all began so innocently. There was famine in the land so Isaac went to Gerar, whose ruler was Abimelech, king of the Philistines. God had appeared to him and warned him not to go to Egypt, but stay where he was. God renewed to Isaac the promise he had already made to his father Abraham, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. **Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed** (Genesis 26:4). So Isaac did as he was told, and stayed there. He entered a wonderful experience with God very close, His presence known, a time of reassurance, comfort and joy.

At this very point, temptation struck and Isaac fell shamefully. How true to our experience. After wonderful closeness to the Lord, temptation suddenly presents itself so powerfully and attractively. C.f. Christ's own baptism, a wonderful high point, was immediately followed by three great temptations. So it happened to Isaac. But unlike the Lord, Isaac fell badly, and told a lie to the men of Gerar.

His good-looking wife was very attractive, so he feared for his life, and said she was his sister. He was gripped by fear and cowardice. He wanted to save his own skin at

all costs – regardless of the honour and safety of his wife, and regardless of the truth and God’s promises. His cowardly lying ways were contemptible.

Note that his father Abraham had committed exactly the same sin in Egypt and in Gerar. Abraham’s particular weakness had passed on to the next generation. The power of example is a strange thing. How often we observe something in a young person and comment, “I’m not surprised. I know where he got that from.” Sometimes children are set the best of examples and teaching, and they follow the lead of their parents. And yet others, set the same example, go their own way. How powerful example is. How serious our responsibility – parents, teachers, friends, church members. We are being watched – and copied!

Then the awful shame when the sinful action was pointed out by men of the world. Isaac was from God’s chosen race, and he was rebuked by the Philistines, who were outside the covenant, heathen idolaters. They had higher standards and more respect for Isaac’s wife than he had. There is nothing sadder than for a believer to be told the sad truth about himself by a non-Christian. He is left without a leg to stand on.

This whole episode is all too familiar. We all have known times when an emergency has arisen, and panic starts, and our faith goes out the window, fear takes over. We forget our fine profession, and our preaching to others. Somehow we feel here is a situation which God cannot handle, so we must take the short cut, and lie. Sin seems to be the answer – the short-term solution. It ends, however, in shame and dishonour – not just to us, but also to God’s name.

What a test the emergency brings, in revealing the reality of our faith and profession. **No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it** (1 Corinthians 10:13). In any emergency, the first thought should be “God, show me the way of escape.”

Isaac’s dealings with other people

It is evident that Isaac was very meek and peace loving. Recall his willingness to be sacrificed at Mount Moriah. Maybe in later life he was dominated by his wife. But his meekness was not weakness. It enabled him to be the hero in some situations. When the wells had been stopped and filled with earth, a serious situation arose for Isaac’s flocks and herds. Abimelech urged Isaac to leave – which he did. When there was further strife with the Philistine herdsmen, Isaac moved on till he found somewhere there was no dispute, so he restored peace. **He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."** (Genesis 26:22).

Meekness, patience and willingness to yield and sacrifice, rather than taking up arms and asserting himself, showed great magnanimity. **Blessed are the meek** (Matthew 5:5). Isaac did not insist on his pound of flesh. He waived his rights and acquiesced. In some ways this reminds us of Christ. **When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly** (1 Peter 2:23). It does not mean bullies and hooligans are to be allowed to run riot. It does not mean being quiet in the presence of

injustice or wrong. It does not mean being a slave to the whims and prejudices of others. But, **if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone** (Romans 12:18). **The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth** (2 Timothy 2:24,25).

The Christian is to be meek. He is to take the initiative in giving up his rights, in saying “after you”. **Let all men know and perceive and recognize your unselfishness (your considerateness, your forbearing spirit)** (Philippians 4:5, Amplified Bible).

Isaac's relationship with the Lord

Isaac was overshadowed by his famous father, he had his own family troubles and griefs, he made mistakes, he was not a very dynamic character, but he was a man of God. He was an illustration of Micah's words, as a man who **walked humbly with thy God** (Micah 6:8). Hebrews 11:8-9 suggests that Isaac shared his father's faith and devotion to the Lord. Throughout life he walked with the Lord, and, despite mistakes, he came through. When Abraham's servant Eliezer returned with Rebekah, to be Isaac's bride, Isaac was to be found out in the field meditating (Genesis 24:63). When Rebekah failed to conceive, Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, and the Lord answered (Genesis 25:21). It was evident to the Philistines that Isaac was a man of God (Genesis 26:28). The Lord was clearly guiding Isaac's footsteps (Genesis 26:2,3).

Later on, when the Lord appeared at night to Isaac and renewed His covenant with him, **Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord** (Genesis 26:25). An altar was a sign of consecration to the Lord, and prayer showed he was conscious of his need.

Isaac may not have been a great giant in spiritual terms, but he walked with God and was constantly in touch with God. He received revelations of the divine will. He received guidance and was assured of blessing. He knew what it was to consecrate his life to the Lord.

In F.B.Meyer's biography, it is recorded that during his last illness he was asked if he had had a new vision of Christ, to which he replied, “No, just a constant interchange between myself and Christ”. The biographer comments that Meyer and Christ were well acquainted! This had been true of his whole life – just as it was true of Isaac's.

God first in the life, in everything and behind everything. It is a mistake to imagine we need God just in the great events and great crisis of life. We need to walk with Him daily. There is a need for a constant interchange. Isaac's story shows nothing is too small for God's guidance. Nothing is too trivial for need of his grace and power.

Conclusion

In many ways we find we can identify with “Mr Average” Isaac more than we can with Abraham or Jacob. He has much to teach us even though we know so little about

him. When we are under pressure and are tempted, we need to beware of falling, and learn from Isaac's mistake. In dealing with others we can learn from Isaac's meekness and graciousness. We can try to be unfrontational, and let the Lord bless us. Above all, we should imitate Isaac in the way he walked with God, interchanged with God, knew His blessing guidance and provision. We should respond with consecration and a life of prayer.

It is good to meet a man like Isaac. Some Bible characters seem so great, they can disconcert us. But we need them to keep us awake and humble. Yet it is good to read of characters like Isaac as well, whose experiences we share. "He walked with God, and why should not I?" said John G. Paton of his father. And we can say this of Isaac.