

Jan 28, 2007

A BLESSING IN A FOREIGN LAND

GENESIS 26.1-6

(1) Why is this passage placed here? (a) We enter this story knowing that Isaac understands who is designated as his heir; i.e., the heir of the blessing/promise; and (b) we learn what the blessing/promise/inheritance entails.

(2) Movement of the chapter: famine -> promise -> rejection -> promise -> feasting/wells.

Famine, Descent, and Promise (1-6)

A. FAMINE AND EXILE (1)

Famine and new beginnings: cp. 12.10ff.; famine forces him from the land. Connection is made between famines.

(1) This is not the same famine. This is another famine besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham.

(2) Both occurred in “the land.” This is the Promised Land—the land that will flow with milk and honey.

Famine = dead land; i.e., it is unfruitful, bearing only thorns and thistles.

Initial creation: formed Garden teeming with life, fruitfulness. Food is provided (1.29). Adam’s sin brought death; the ground will not be fruitful.

Famine prevalent in “new beginnings:” Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Isaac, children of Israel in the wilderness, Jesus in the wilderness after baptism. But through death—like a seed in the ground—fruitfulness, life, food will come.

Living among the nations: famine drives Isaac out of the land. Goes to Abimelech, king of Philistines in Gerar.

Why go to Abimelech? the covenant that Abraham made with the earlier Abimelech (I) has something to do with this (cf. 21.22ff.).

Remember that the Philistines are Egyptians (cf. 10.13-14). Isaac is still dwelling with Egyptians.

The city of Gerar is just outside the boundaries established for the Promise Land earlier (cp. 10.19). Isaac is now dwelling among the “nations.” He is in a “foreign” land. He is in exile.

B. THE PROMISE OF BLESSING (2-6)

“Don’t go down to Egypt” (2): YHWH appeared; cp. 12.7; 17.1; 18.1

Why he is not to go to Egypt is not totally certain. Cp. 12.10ff., Egypt was not friendly. Pharaoh drives them out.

Contrast: Abimelech and Philistines are converted.

Isaac, like his father Abraham, was called to live by faith. That is, he was to hear and heed God’s word. Where God said to go, he was to go. When God said “Stop,” he was to stop. His life—his thoughts, attitudes, and actions—were to be shaped by God’s word.

A stranger in the land (3a): “Sojourn [“dwell” NKJ] in this land.” Word occurs previously in 12.10.

Emphasis not as much on geographical location as being a dislocated stranger; i.e., “resident alien.”

Promise later: his seed will be given “all these lands.” Promise is not the same thing as inheriting. He is a stranger.

E.g., we are promised resurrection and inheritance of the world (cf. e.g., Rom 4, 8), but not yet. Peter calls us “strangers” in 1 Pet 1.1; that is, we have not yet inherited the promise.

“I will be with you” (3b): *Emmanuel* promise: “I will be with you.” God is with him even in exile.

Cp. Mt 28.20 - Even as we are strangers in the world, waiting for our inheritance, our God is with us.

“[I] will bless you (3b): used in original creation, reiterated to Noah, promised to Abraham.

God’s blessing us has to do with life, and, more particularly, living life as God intended us to live it. Involves 3 things: (1) community, (2) fruitfulness, and (3) dominion (all interrelated).

Through Isaac a new *community* will be formed (later reconciliation of the Philistines). Reflects God’s community.

Isaac will also be *fruitful*. Birth of sons and promise of progeny.

Isaac will also have *dominion*. He will take dominion over the land and the land will yield its fruit to him (later one hundredfold harvest).

“I will give all these lands” (3d, 4b): i.e., the lands outside of the borders of the land of Canaan. Said 2x.

See 13.14-15: Abraham is promised all the land north, south, east, and west (cp. Rom 4.13)

The land of Canaan was a downpayment, as it were, on the whole world.

“I will establish my oath” (3e): used with Noah (6.18; 9.11) and Abraham (17.7, 19). There seems to me to be a strong emphasis on continuity between what was established previously and what is being established. That is, this is not something that is totally new (even though it is new in one sense). Rather it builds upon and is a continuation of the previous with some transformations.

The covenant established at creation, renewed with Noah and Abraham, is now being continued with Isaac.

The importance of this is that we understand the nature and purpose of what God is doing in his plan of salvation: he is renewing and bringing to completion his original intentions of creation.

Isaac is now the one upon whom the privilege and responsibility of this covenant rests. He has a particular position/responsibility in the history of God’s redemption of the world of which he has been made a steward.

“I will multiply your seed” (4a): cp. Gen 15; as “the stars of heaven:” numerous, yes, but also rulers in heaven (1.14-19). They are governors, rulers in the heavenly places. (See the story of Joseph.)

“In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (4c): Cp. 12.2-3; 18.18; 22.17-18. Life will come to the world through Isaac’s seed. That is, the world will live through the seed of Isaac.

Foundation for the Great Commission (Mt. 28.18-20).

“because Abraham obeyed my voice ...” (5): (1) Isaac is receiving this blessing/promise *because Abraham obeyed*.

Not *earning* or *meriting* God’s favor. Throughout the promises listed earlier it is clear that God is the One promising and giving. The promises are pure grace.

What God requires of those with whom He enters into covenant—or, if you would like, makes these promises—is faith.

Faith, as we have seen in the past, is not an idea (i.e., it is not pure thought). Rather faith is having the whole of your life conformed to God’s word. It is a relation of trust that conforms to what God says. Obedience is what faith looks like. Cf. 2 Thess 1.8; 1 Pet 4.17; Rom 1.5; 16.26

(2) The nature of the blessing is that it is “objective.” It is as much a *vocation*, a mission, as anything. In other words, God is entrusting Isaac with stewardship that is real. A steward is not the owner, but he has real position/authority.

The obedience of Isaac (6): Isaac dwells in the land God commanded.

(1) When God pronounces blessing upon you, you have been blessed. You are called to be a faithful steward.