

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE opening verse of this chapter connects itself with Chapter 12.

**“There was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham.”**

The trials which meet God’s people in their course are very much alike; and they ever tend to make manifest how far the heart has found its all in God. It is a difficult matter - a rare attainment - so to walk in sweet communion with God as to be rendered thereby entirely independent of things and people here. The Egypts and the Gerars which lie on our right hand and on our left present great temptations, either to turn aside out of the right way, or to stop short of our true position as servants of the true and living God.

**“And Isaac went unto Abimelech, King of the Philistines, unto Gerar.”**

There is a manifest difference between Egypt and Gerar.

*Egypt is the expression of the world in its natural resources, and its independence of God.*

**“My river is mine own,”** is the language of an Egyptian who knew not the Lord, and thought not of looking to him for aught. Egypt was, locally, farther removed from Canaan than Gerar; and, morally, it expresses a condition of soul farther from God. Gerar is thus referred to in Chapter 10: **“And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza: as thou goest unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha”** (Ver. 19).

We are informed that **“from Gerar to Jerusalem was three days’ journey.”**

It was, therefore, all compared with Egypt, an advanced position; but still it lay within the range of very dangerous influences.

- Abraham got into trouble there, and so does Isaac, in this chapter, and that, too, in the very same way.
- Abraham denied his wife, and so does Isaac.

This is peculiarly solemn.

To see both the father and the son fall into the same evil, in the same place, tells us plainly that the influence of that place was not good.

Had Isaac not gone to Abimelech, King of Gerar, he would have no necessity for denying his wife; but the slightest divergence from the true line of conduct superinduces spiritual weakness. It was when Peter stood and warmed himself at the high-priest's fire that he denied his Master. Now, it is manifest that Isaac was not really happy in Gerar.

True, the Lord says unto him, "**sojourn in this land;**" but how often does the Lord give directions to his people morally suitable to the condition he knows them to be in, and calculated also to arouse them to a true sense of that condition?

He directed Moses, in Numbers 13, to send men to search the land of Canaan; but had they not been in a low moral condition such a step would not have been necessary. We know well that faith does not need "**to spy out**" when God's promise lies before us.

Again, He directed Moses to choose out seventy elders to help him in the work; but had Moses fully entered into the dignity and blessedness of his position, he would not have needed such a direction.

So, in reference to the setting up of a king in I Samuel 8, they ought not to have needed a king. Hence, we must always take into consideration the condition of an individual or a people to whom a direction is given before we can form any correct judgment as to the direction.

But again it may be said, if Isaac's position in Gerar was wrong, how do we read, "**Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received the same year an hundred-fold: and the Lord blessed him.**" (Ver. 12).

I reply, we can never judge that a person's condition is right because of prosperous circumstances.

We have had already to remark that there is a great difference between the Lord's presence and his blessing.

Many have the latter without the former; and, moreover, the heart is prone to mistake the one for the other,- prone to put the blessing for the presence; or at least to argue that the one must ever accompany the other.

This is a great mistake.

How many do we see surrounded by God's blessings, who neither have, nor wish for, God's presence?

It is important to see this.

A man may **“wax great, and go forward, and grow until he becomes very great, and have possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants,”** and all the while not have the full, unhindered joy of the Lord’s presence with him. Flocks and herds are not the Lord. They are things on account of which the Philistines might envy Isaac, whereas they never would have envied him on account of the Lord’s presence.

He might have been enjoying the sweetest and richest communion with God, and the Philistines have thought nothing whatever about it, simply because they had no heart to understand or appreciate such a reality.

Flocks, herds, servants, and wells of water they could appreciate; but the divine presence they could not appreciate.

However, Isaac at length makes his way from amongst the Philistines, and gets up to Beersheba. **“And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not for I am with thee, and will bless thee”** (Ver. 24).

Mark, it was not the Lord’s blessing merely, but the Lord himself. And why? because Isaac had left the Philistines, with all their envy, and strife, and contention behind, and gone up to Beersheba. Here the Lord could show himself to his servant.

The blessings of his liberal hand might follow him during his sojourn in Gerar; but His presence could not there be enjoyed. To enjoy God’s presence we must be where He is, and He certainly is not to be found amid the strife and contention of an ungodly world; and hence, the sooner the child of God gets away from all such, the better.

So Isaac found it.

He had no rest in his own spirit; and he assuredly did not in any wise serve the Philistines by his sojourn amongst them. It is a very common error to imagine that we serve the men of this world by mixing ourselves up with them in their associations and ways.

The true way to serve them is to stand apart from them in the power of communion with God, and thus show them the pattern of a more excellent way.

*Mark the progress in Isaac’s soul, and the moral effect of his Course.*

- **“He went up from thence,”**
- **“the Lord appeared unto him,”**
- **“he builded an altar,”**
- **“he called upon the name of the Lord,”**
- **“he pitched his tent,”**
- **“his servants digged a well.”**

Here we have most blessed progress.

The moment he took a step in the right direction,

- He went from strength to strength.
- He entered into the joy of God's presence,
- He tasted the sweets of true worship, and
- He exhibited the character of a stranger and pilgrim, and
- He found peaceful refreshment, an undisputed well, which the Philistines could not stop because they were not there.

These were blessed results in reference to Isaac himself; and now observe the effect produced upon others.

**“Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phical the chief captain of his army. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore came ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there now be an oath betwixt us, &c.”**

The true way to act on the hearts and consciences of the men of the world is to stand in decided separation from them, while dealing in perfect grace toward them.

So long as Isaac continued in Gerar, there was nothing but strife and contention.

He was reaping sorrow for himself, and producing no effect whatever upon those around him. On the contrary, the moment he went away from them, their hearts were touched, and they followed him, and desired a covenant.

This is very instructive.

The principle unfolded here may be seen constantly explained in the history of the children of God.

The first point with the heart should ever be to see that in our position we are right with God, and not only right in position, but in the moral condition of the soul. When we are right with God, we may expect to act salutarily Upon men.

The moment Isaac gat up to Beersheba, and took his place as a worshipper, his own soul was refreshed, and he was used of God to act upon others. So long as we continue in a low position, we are robbing ourselves of blessing and failing totally in our testimony and service.

Nor should we, when in a wrong position, stop to inquire, as we so often do, “Where can I find anything better?”

God's order is, **“Cease to do evil;”** and when we have acted upon that holy precept, we are furnished with another, namely, **“Learn to do well.”**

If we expect to **“learn”** how **“to do well,”** before we **“cease to do evil,”** we are entirely mistaken.

**“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead.”** And what then? **“Christ shall give thee light.”** (Ephesians 5:14).

My beloved reader, if you are doing what you know to be wrong, or if you are identified in any way with what you own to be contrary to Scripture, hearken to the word of the Lord, **“Cease to do evil.”** And be assured, when you have yielded obedience to this word, you will not long be left in ignorance as to your path.

It is sheer unbelief that leads us to say, **“I cannot cease to do evil until I find something better.”**

The Lord grant us a single eye and a docile spirit.

**~ end of chapter 26 ~**

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