

FROM FAMINE TO FEAST

WRESTLING WITH GOD: THE JACOB NARRATIVE

By Scott Grant

A world with dew still on it

In the movie *A River Runs Through It*, Norman Maclean, as an old man, looks back on his childhood: “Every afternoon I was set free, untutored and untouched until supper, to learn the natural side of God’s grace. And there could be no better place to learn than the Montana of my youth. It was a world with dew still on it, more touched by wonder and possibility than any I have since known.” (1)

Something in his voice touches our hearts. He speaks with reverence--and sadness--for a place he loved but is no more. If we ever had such a place, we miss it. If we’ve never had such a place, we long for it. If we have such a place, we hope we never lose it.

The story in Genesis 26 is about one man’s search for such a place. Perhaps it is also the story of our search for such a place. The story will lead us to ask three questions: 1) Can God provide water for our parched souls? 2) Where should we live? 3) How should we view the people of our land? The story follows Isaac as he meets with the people of the Promised Land and moves from place to place in search of water.

In Genesis 25, Jacob is introduced, and the narrative turns its attention fully to him in Genesis 27. But, in Genesis 26, the narrator interrupts the Jacob story to tell a story about Jacob’s father, Isaac. So, what is Genesis 26 doing here? The following reasons can be surmised:

- Having introduced Jacob and reverted to Isaac, the narrator links the present major section to the previous major section, connecting Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to the Abrahamic blessing that comes through Isaac. The Isaac story in Genesis 26, then, echoes the Abraham story. In similar fashion Genesis 34, which at first glance also seems misplaced, links the Jacob narrative to the Joseph narrative. Both Genesis 26 and Genesis 34 concern the relationship between the people of Abraham and the people of the land.
- The disputes in Genesis 26 echo and foreshadow the conflict between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 27. Only one of the twins inherits the blessing, but Jacob and Esau can learn to live with each other, just as Isaac learns to live with the locals in Genesis 26.
- Two stories that feature deception (Genesis 25:27-34, Genesis 27) bracket a story in which Isaac first deceives the locals but then receives God’s blessing and shares it with the locals. Such positioning indicates that Jacob doesn’t need to resort to deception to receive what God wants to give him.
- The concept of “place,” which plays a big part in Genesis 26, paves the way for similar treatment in Genesis 28 and 29. These texts ask the question, “Where is God in these places?”

What does this mean for followers of Jesus? First, we are linked with each of the previous generations of believers, through whom the blessing of God has been passed down. We are part of the historic chain of God’s blessing. Second, we can not only learn to live with those with different beliefs, we can learn to bless them as well. Third, we don’t need to resort to Jacob-like tactics in order to secure the blessings of God. We just trust God and receive them. Finally, in our journey we have occasion to ask ourselves, “Where is God in this place?”

Looking for water

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. The Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will

be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” So Isaac lived in Gerar. When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “my wife,” thinking, “the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.” It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, ‘She is my sister’?” And Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘I might die on account of her.’” Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, “He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.” Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. Now all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.” And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there. (Genesis 26:1-17)

The previous famine the narrator refers to is the one recorded in Genesis 12, which motivated Abraham to seek relief in Egypt. This story echoes Genesis 12:10-20, when Abraham told the Egyptians that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. Isaac, probably on his way to Egypt, heads south to Gerar and to Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. Abraham visited this place and interacted with this king as well, where he once again told the locals that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 20:1-18, 21:22-34). So Genesis 26 echoes not only Genesis 12:10-20 but Genesis 20:1-18 and Genesis 21:22-34 as well. The narrator wants us to hear these echoes in Genesis 26 so that we will see what Isaac learned--and didn't learn--from his father.

The Lord instructs Isaac not to leave for Egypt but to instead remain in the land that he promised to Abraham and his descendants. The Promised Land isn't looking so promising, however; that's why Isaac is on the verge of leaving it, as his father left it. Yet the Lord promises that he will fulfill the covenant he made with Abraham in “this land,” the land of promise, which at this time is also the land of famine. The covenant provides for God's presence, descendants and a land for them to dwell in, and the extension of the blessing of God to all the nations of the earth. The covenant with Abraham passes through his son Isaac.

In Abraham, the Lord found an obedient covenant partner: He “kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.” This terminology foreshadows the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 11:1). It appears that the Lord wrote his laws on Abraham's heart long before he ever wrote them on stone and scroll. As such, Abraham was a precursor to the participants of the new covenant, who have God's law written on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). Isaac, too, is an obedient covenant partner: He defies the famine, listens to the Lord and remains in Gerar, within the Promised Land.

The lessons of Abraham, stemming both from his successes and his failures, should teach faith. Isaac, with the Lord's voice ringing in his ear and probably with his father's ill-advised journey to Egypt lingering in his mind, remains in the Promised Land. He believes God can provide in the land of promise even though it appears to be a land of famine. Yet in another way, Isaac fails to learn from his father's failure in that he, too, tells the locals that his wife is his sister. In the same place with the same people, Abraham lied because he thought “surely there is no fear of God in this place” (Genesis 20:11), but Abimelech in that story proved responsive to God (Genesis 20:3-7). Isaac also thinks wrongly about “the men of the place.” Isaac lies because he's afraid the men will kill him and take his wife.

Chronologically, Genesis 26 precedes Genesis 25:21-34. If Isaac and Rebekah had already had Jacob and Esau by this point, the fact that they were husband and wife would have been obvious. Isaac is messing with the promise of descendants. The promised seed is with Isaac and Rebekah, yet no child has been born yet. Instead of trusting that God will keep him alive to produce descendants, he reasons that he might be killed. Instead of protecting the seed, he endangers it by making Rebekah available to the Philistines. It appears that Isaac trusts God for the land but not for the descendants. And in treating the Philistines in this way, he is not extending the blessing of God to the nations.

Even though it was “a long time” before Abimelech caught on, none of the Philistines had taken Rebekah yet. Isaac’s fears regarding Abimelech and the Philistines appear to be unfounded, as were Abraham’s (Genesis 20). The Lord didn’t let Abraham get away with deception, and he’s not letting Isaac get away with it, either. He intervened more directly to let Abraham’s hosts know that Sarah was his wife. Here, Abimelech sees Isaac caressing Rebekah and concludes that she is his wife.

Abimelech, speaking of the guilt that would have been incurred by someone who had lain with Rebekah, demonstrates moral sensitivities by the king of the “this place” that take Isaac by surprise. He even acts to protect Isaac and Rebekah, raising the specter of a death sentence for anyone who harms either of them. Isaac was worried that being straightforward would lead to his death. Now the threat of death is applied to anyone who harms him or Rebekah. If he had been straightforward in the first place, such protection would have been his.

The Lord said, “Sojourn in this land,” and, “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven.” If the Lord tells Isaac to stay in the land of the Philistines, he will protect the seed from the Philistines. Isaac’s failure is one of faith.

Isaac, rebuked by an uncircumcised Philistine, trusts the Lord, sows in the famine-stricken land and reaps an exceptional crop (Matthew 13:8). The Lord also blesses him with riches, livestock and a great household consisting of many servants. The blessings are such that the Philistines take notice of--and envy--Isaac.

Isaac’s presence in the lives of the Philistines hints at the extension of God’s blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3, 26:4). In verses 6 through 11, it appears that the people of God and the nations can live side by side. In verses 12 through 14, God blesses his people with the intention that others will take notice and even be envious so that they might seek him (Romans 11:11). But in verses 15 and 16, the Philistines demonstrate that they are not ready to seek God. They stop up the wells that Abraham dug, thereby negating the covenant that they made with Abraham (Genesis 21:22-34), and Abimelech sees Isaac as a threat, not a blessing. So Abimelech requests Isaac’s departure, not his presence. Isaac’s growing strength and Abimelech’s fear foreshadow Israel’s strength and Pharaoh’s fear (Exodus 1:19). Eventually, Pharaoh sent Israel away as well.

What does it mean for us to “stay in the land”? The New Testament declares that the promise of the land will be fulfilled in the new creation and that the Holy Spirit is a down payment of this inheritance. Therefore, in a nonmaterial sense, we have already arrived at this place (Matthew 5:5; Romans 4:13; Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:6; Hebrews 12:22, 13:14; Revelation 21:1-2). This heavenly land is where we find living water. In this land, Christ, through his Holy Spirit, provides the living water for our souls (John 4:10, 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

Oftentimes, even those of us who have tasted of the heavenly water encounter a famine of the soul. We thirst for something powerful, something meaningful, something transcendent, but Christ doesn’t seem to satisfy us. Our spiritual lives become parched. Then we ask ourselves, “Should I go down to Egypt? Should I go outside of Christ?” We know that there are easier and quicker ways to find relief. Yet the Lord says to us, “Stay in the land. Don’t go outside of Christ. I’ll provide for you here.” And we ask, “When? I am dying of thirst here.” And the Lord says, “Stay here. I’ll bless you here. Trust me.” Keep digging--pray, read, study, write, worship, lament, obey. Defy the famine. Trust the Lord. “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and springs in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land fountains of water” (Isaiah 41:18).

Although our home is in a heavenly land, we also dwell on earth. Not only that, we each dwell in specific places on earth. We all live here. Why this place? Some of us picked this place. For others of us, this place seemingly picked us. Many of us can’t really say why we’re here; we’re just here. Should we stay here? Should we leave? However you answer these questions, you know one thing for sure: You’re here now. Don’t underestimate what the Lord can do in this place. Although it is true that some of us hang on too long, it is equally true that some of us jump too soon. When the landscape gets a little dry, we want to pull up stakes. But maybe we haven’t stayed around long enough to find out if there’s any water in this place.

And what of the people of this place--the men and women who hold different beliefs? Like Isaac, we may assume things about people, based on broad categories and stereotypes that simply aren’t true. In an unsafe world, such categorization gives us the illusion of safety. Like Isaac, we put people into categories in the interest of self-preservation. We define people so that we might understand how they threaten us and our way of life. But each individual is a person, not a category, with hopes and dreams and desires very similar to our own. If we listen to

their hearts, this is what we will find: We may not share the same faith, but we share the same humanity and the same Creator. As followers of Jesus in this place, we are creating a spiritual legacy. Don't sacrifice it for the sake of self-preservation. Resist broad categories and stereotypes that serve an illusion of safety. Trust the Lord in this place. If we opt for self-preservation, we may find ourselves being shown up by someone like Abimelech who turns out to be more righteous than we are.

Where then should we live?

Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek ["strife"], because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah ["enmity"]. He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land."

Then he went up from there to Beersheba. The Lord appeared to him the same night and said,

**"I am the God of your father Abraham;
Do not fear, for I am with you.
I will bless you, and multiply your descendants,
For the sake of My servant Abraham."**

So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well. (Genesis 26:18-25)

Isaac complies with Abimelech's request, but not before making a statement of sorts. Verse 18 is most likely a flashback. In order to demonstrate the injustice of Abimelech's actions, Isaac, while he was still in Gerar, had dug again the wells of Abraham that the Philistines had stopped up and gave them the same names, thereby claiming ownership. The flashback sets the stage both for the quarrel over wells in this section and for Isaac's meeting with Abimelech later in the chapter.

Isaac is forced to leave a place, where God has provided, for another place. The unspoken question the narrative asks and Isaac entertains is, "Will God provide in another place also?" Note that Isaac does not depart for Egypt but for the valley of Gerar, which is still in the land of promise. The Lord told him to sojourn in the land of promise, and Isaac does so.

Once again, Isaac encounters success in a new place when his servants dig a well and find water. Literally, they find "living water," which hints that these were spiritual people who were looking for more than water for the body. The Lord calls himself "the fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13). Also, once again, Isaac encounters opposition because of his success. The herdsmen of Gerar claim ownership of the water and quarrel with Isaac's herdsmen. Isaac's people dig another well, and a quarrel ensues once again. It isn't until he moves away from the herdsmen and digs a third well that he encounters no opposition. He gives the first two wells names that commemorate the conflicts.

These conflicts and the naming of wells foreshadow the conflict that the Israelites would have with the Lord himself when they would not believe that he would provide water for them. Moses named the place of that conflict Massah and Meribah, which mean "testing" and "strife" (Exodus 17:1-7). In the case of both Isaac and the Israelites, the Lord provided water despite the quarrels.

Isaac acknowledges the Lord's provision by naming the third well Rehoboth, which means "Open Spaces" and relates to the verb which translated "has made room" (*rahab*). The verb is used later in connection with the Promised Land (Exodus 34:24, Deuteronomy 12:20, Isaiah 54:2) and in a metaphorical sense, sometimes in reference to increased space in one's heart (Psalm 119:32, Isaiah 60:5). Isaac sees that the Lord has "made room for us" and envisions fruitfulness in the land of promise. He sees this as a place of growth.

Isaac's separation from Abimelech and from the herdsmen of Gerar echoes Abraham's departure from Lot in Genesis 13. The herdsmen of Abraham and Lot contended with each other because the land could not sustain both clans. Abraham proposed that they separate, allowing Lot to choose where to settle. Lot departed for Sodom, enabling Abraham to dwell in the Promised Land. Abraham and Isaac see the land as a gift from God to be received.

With room to grow, Isaac spreads out to Beersheba, which is still on the southern edge of the Promised Land. Beersheba was the place where Abraham made his covenant with Abimelech. As it turns out, yet another encounter with Abimelech is in the offing. Before that encounter, however, the Lord appears to Isaac, just as he appeared to Abraham after his separation from Lot (Genesis 13:14-18). For the second time in Genesis 26, the Lord shows up to affirm that the covenant he made with Abraham is active with Isaac. This is a crucial time for the Lord to show up, after Isaac's conflicts with Abimelech and the herdsmen of Gerar, and before yet another encounter with Abimelech.

In response, Isaac follows the practice of Abraham, building an altar, calling on the name of the Lord and pitching his tent. Abraham did the same things after the Lord appeared to him with the covenant promise of the land after Abraham separated from his family (Genesis 12:8). Abraham also built an altar when the Lord appeared to him after he had separated from Lot (Genesis 13:18). The altar is for worship and to claim the land for the Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord is a form of worship. Isaac's servants also began digging a well in Beersheba. Considering everything that has happened with the digging of wells up to this point, we're left to wonder what will be the result of these efforts. More water? More conflict?

We ask the question, "When should we leave a place?" Sometimes the answer comes through circumstances that leave you almost no choice. You leave because, in effect, you have to. Sometimes, as in the case of Isaac, people ask you to leave. They kick you out.

This is particularly worrisome if the place you are leaving happens to be fruitful; a place that has allowed you to taste the living water of the heavenly land. Now that you have to leave, you wonder, "Will God provide in another place?" You hit the road, you find living water in the next place, but soon you have to leave that place also. You remember what Peter said, that we are "aliens and strangers" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Then finally you arrive at a place that opens its arms to you. You're allowed to stay. Put down roots. Make friends. Find a faith community that nourishes you. In some way, though it isn't heaven, you sense that the place suits you. You come to Open Spaces. And you say, "Rehoboth! At last the Lord has made room for me, and I will be fruitful in the land." There's room to grow. You can spread out.

If we find a place like Rehoboth, and we're fruitful there, it probably has as much to do with how God has prepared us for the place as with the place itself. And it probably has a lot to do with the room God has made for himself in our own hearts. The journey, which takes us to places of famine, failure and conflict, and, yes, the occasional well of living water, expands our capacity to receive God's love. Paul, in his prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19, makes reference to the space that the Spirit makes for Christ in our hearts:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

The Spirit makes room in our hearts so that Christ may make his home in them.

Making a feast

Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army. Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away

in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.” Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac’s servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. (Genesis 26:26-33)

The specter of more conflict appears on the horizon with the arrival of Abimelech; his adviser Ahuzzath; and Phicol, the commander of his army. Abimelech and Phicol came to Abraham to make a covenant with him (Genesis 21:22-34). But Isaac’s more recent history with Abimelech suggests that this may not be a friendly overture. With that in mind, Isaac feels threatened, and he questions Abimelech’s intentions. The Isaac-Abimelech story here again foreshadows the Jacob-Esau story. When Jacob hears that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men, Jacob will be frightened (Genesis 32:6-7).

In their first encounter, Abimelech, who felt threatened by Isaac’s deceitfulness, asked Isaac, “What is this you have done to us?” Now Isaac, feeling threatened, asks Abimelech, “Why have you come to me?” Earlier, Abimelech “saw” evidence of Isaac’s deception (Genesis 26:8). Now he makes an observation regarding Isaac similar to the one a different Abimelech made regarding Abraham (Genesis 21:22): “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you.” This is what the Lord wants the nations to see in his people--that he is with them. Isaac’s deception in his first encounter with Abimelech obscured the king’s vision of the Lord’s presence. The Lord’s provision for Isaac in the face of famine and opposition opened Abimelech’s eyes. After his initial encounter with Abimelech, Isaac nurtured the kind of faith that allowed the Lord’s presence to be seen in his life. Through failure, famine and conflict, his faith was nourished.

Abimelech proposes a covenant along the lines of the one he made with Abraham. He tells Isaac, “You are now the blessed of the Lord.” Abimelech sees that the Lord has blessed Isaac just as he blessed Abraham. The narrator allows a pagan king to affirm that God’s blessing to Abraham has been passed on to Isaac.

Isaac prepares a feast for Abimelech and his men, which serves to consummate the covenant. Isaac now fulfills the call to be a blessing to the nations. The Lord blesses him, the nations observe it, and Isaac blesses the nations. These two men exchange “oaths” just as the Lord made an “oath” with Isaac (verse 3), heralding that the Abrahamic covenant is programmed to be for all peoples. The Lord gives Isaac a second chance to be a blessing to Abimelech, and Isaac takes advantage of it. In making such a feast, Isaac foreshadows the Christ-centered party that the Lord himself is throwing, and will throw, for all peoples (Isaiah 25:6, 55:1-5; Matthew 8:11; Revelation 19:9).

Isaac’s interaction with Abimelech shows up Jacob for his treatment of Esau in Genesis 25:27-34. When Esau came in from the field, Jacob bargained for his birthright and offered him lentil stew. When Abimelech comes to Isaac, Isaac enters into a covenant with him and makes him a feast. Esau defiantly “ate and drank, and rose and went on his way.” Abimelech “ate and drank” as well but lingered over the feast and “arose” only when it was morning.

Earlier, Abimelech, feeling threatened, told Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.” That uneasy parting is now replaced by a parting of peace when Isaac sends Abimelech away. In modern parlance, this parting brings closure. This story is sandwiched between two stories that end in the uneasy parting of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:34, 27:41-28:5), but it raises hope that reconciliation is possible for the two brothers and that, perhaps, one day they will meet and part on better terms.

The servants’ report that they have found water where they had been digging brings closure to the entire Genesis 26 story as well. The Lord’s blessing on Isaac is once again evident in that water was discovered “the same day,” just as he reaped a harvest the “same year” (Genesis 26:12). Once again, the Lord provides water in a time of famine in the land of promise. Isaac names the well “Shibah,” which means “oath,” in commemoration of the covenant he made with Abimelech. Thus the name of the place: “Beersheba.” The name does not so much commemorate the Lord’s blessing on Isaac as it does how the Lord’s blessing has enabled Isaac to bless the nations.

Water was a source of contention between the herdsmen of Isaac and the herdsmen of Gerar. Now, the water that Isaac has found has produced a fruitfulness that has enabled him to celebrate his reconciliation with Abimelech. At the end of the story, he finds more water, hinting that the place the Lord has given him and his fruitfulness in the land will enable him to continue sharing the Lord’s blessing. The Genesis 26 story opened with a famine and tension with the locals. It closes with a feast of reconciliation and flowing water.

We now find out that all the twists and turns in this story were about bringing Isaac to the place where he could make a feast for a pagan king, one who he at first misjudged and deceived, but one who also felt threatened by him.

How do we view the people of our land--our neighbors, our co-workers, our classmates? God has brought us to this place, and we live among them. Are they a threat to us? Or are they people in need of a blessing? The only way in which they could truly threaten us is if they were able to take from us something eternal. God has taken us to the heavenly land. We have tasted the living water from that place. No one can take that land from us. No one can deny us living water. No one can take Christ from us (Romans 8:38-39). Jesus told his disciples, who would be martyred for their faith, "Yet not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:18). In the end, not even death poses a threat. The people of our land, therefore, pose no threat. On the other hand, they long for something from beyond this land, just as we do. They thirst for living water, just as we do. They need a blessing.

In some cases, they're not ready for it, and perhaps we're not ready to give it to them. It's hard to bless someone you consider a threat. Isaac, protecting himself from Abimelech, deceived him. He wasn't able to bless Abimelech. A rebuke by someone such as Abimelech, however, can lead us to repentance. The Lord takes us from place to place and from well to well, nourishing our faith through famine, failure and conflict. Then perhaps someone whose eyes were blind to the reality of Christ sees something of the Lord in us. Maybe he even comes to us and says, "You are the blessed of the Lord." Having tasted of the living water, we're now in the place where we can make a feast for the people of the land. In this, we are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, who specializes in throwing parties for those who don't know him. We offer a blessing. We share the living water. We make them a feast. They'll find out that the real feast is Jesus himself. The covenant is not just for us; it's for all peoples. It's for the people of our land.

From the perspective of this passage, famine, failure and conflict are designed by God to shape our faith and bring us to the open spaces where we can make a feast for the people of our land. We start out searching for water for our souls; we find the fountain of living waters; and we make a feast for our neighbors. We start out in famine and end up making a feast.

The Lord gives Isaac a second chance with Abimelech. He gives us second chances as well. Is there an Abimelech in your life? Perhaps you feel that you've brought dishonor to Jesus in the way you have responded to a neighbor, a co-worker or a classmate. Watch for the second chance that God gives you. And be ready, in your own way, to make a feast for him or her. Hold out the blessing of God.

More to come

Returning to our three questions: 1) Can God provide water for our parched souls? Emphatically, yes. He gives us living water in Christ. The best place is the heavenly place, and we have already tasted of it. 2) Where on earth should we live? For now, we should live here. Don't underestimate what God can do in this place. 3) How should we view the people we live near? We should view them as people we can invite to a feast.

I have heard it said that the Silicon Valley has no soul. Surveys routinely rate its residents as among the least spiritually inclined in the nation. I read a story in the newspaper a while back that said only 4 percent of those living here identify themselves as evangelical believers. One might say there is a famine in the land.

Once upon a time, this valley was covered with orchards. It was called the Valley of Heart's Delight because it was covered with orchards. I grew up here, playing in the orchards and eating the fruit. Then, as a teen-ager in this place, I tasted the living water. I left for college, for career, for theological training. I returned 10 years ago--only for a moment, I thought. I didn't want to stay here; I wanted to go to a new place. As I sat in a coffee house in Mountain View one afternoon, where I heard four different languages being spoken, I realized something: This is a new place. So I stayed. I found myself quoting a line from a country-western song: "Look how far I've had to come to get back where I started from." In the last 10 years here I have drunk more deeply of the living water than I have at any other time and place. I've also had the opportunity to invite some of the people of this land, many of whom have come here from distant lands, to the feast that is Jesus. You can find living water here. And if you find it here, in the place you're not supposed to be able to find it, then you have met a God who can meet your deepest needs. The orchards are gone, replaced by chips made of silicon, to be replaced by something else in the future. But the living God still

makes his living water available here, which makes it a land touched with wonder and possibility. It makes it, for those of us who have tasted the living water here, the Valley of Heart's Delight.

Once you taste the living water, you want more --and we know there's more to come. The heavenly place, where the living water flows, will one day become the earthly place. The holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2, 10). An angel gave the apostle John a vision of that time and place:

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-5).

When we enter the gates of that place, we will say, “Rehoboth! A world with dew still on it! The Valley of Heart's Delight! At last the Lord has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land.”

NOTES:

(1) *A River Runs Through It*, © 1992 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.

Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (“NASB”). © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Catalog No. 4866

Genesis 26:1-33

Second Message

Scott Grant

September 14, 2003

[Back to Index page](#)

Copyright © 2003 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the prior written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.