

"Play it again, Sam "

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end as well as some information about Francis Bacon]

Introduction

Could you repeat that? When you read today's section of Bible, you think someone has just asked God or Moses who wrote this, if they wouldn't mind repeating themselves. Much of what we hear today is similar, even identical to what happened a few chapters earlier in the story of Abraham. So is this a déjà vu? Or a typo? Or is something going on that is both an encouragement and a warning to us all? I believe that the stories of Isaac are given to show us true history and to help us all find real meaning in our lives in connection with those who have already gone before. As a result of all this, we shall aim to be heartened in our own walk with God, even here in Sydney, even this week. The father of modern psychology, Dr William James is quoted as saying, "There is nothing so absurd but if you repeat it often enough people will believe it."

This was certainly true of the Big lie about our Jewish people in World War 2, but I'm not talking about mantratism or cloning. Rather I'm speaking about history repeated to instruct.

Famine in the land

The story begins with a famine. We saw that earlier as Abraham left his new country of residence and nomadically traveled to Egypt. There he met a fellow named Abimelech and the whole 'she's my sister' story ensued. There is no mention why Isaac should not return to Egypt. All we know is God said, "don't go there." Throughout this whole story of Isaac, I'm reminded of his character. He is a follower. He does what his daddy did. I'm not saying that's a weakness, but simply a personality difference. Abraham might go safely to Egypt, Isaac might not; in firmness and decision of character there was a wide difference between the two men.

The covenant renewed

Renewal of covenant is a huge topic in the Bible. And it's the question on the bookshelves and in the press today... whose land is the land of Israel? Who has the blessing of God on their lives? Without the worry of modernism, Moses writes that God renewed the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac. His seed would be great in number (12:2), the land would be his (12:7), and all the nations of the land would be blessed in him (12:3). All that is here in verses 3-4.

This isn't done to ask God to repeat Himself. This is done so God who never speaks an extra word, or an unnecessary one, will show to all who really want to know, that He is the owner of the Land, and the owner of the Blessing. No trickery will get it, no conniving, no selling, no buying... it's God's to give and it's God who does give, and He has chosen to whom to give.

She's my sister

Has this record been played on the Bible radio before? Isaac tells a man named Abimelech that his wife is really his sister. There are several similarities between Isaac and Abraham in this section. Just as Abraham "stayed in Gerar" (20:1), so also did Isaac. Just as Abraham once devised a scheme with his wife Sarah, calling her his "sister" (20:2), so also did Isaac with Rebekah. Just as Abraham was rebuked by the Philistine king, Abimelech, for the great shame he might have brought on his people (20:9), so also was Isaac. Such similarities can hardly be coincidental.

There is a difference though. And it's not with Isaac. It was not God who warned Abimelech not to touch Abraham's wife (20:6); Abimelech himself forbade anyone to touch Isaac's wife. It was not God who protected the wife with the threat of capital punishment (20:7); Abimelech himself said that anyone who molested Isaac or his wife "shall surely be put to death."

I'm impressed in the story with the Philistine king. He learned by his mistakes. Or at least he learned from history. Isaac should have learned from his father's tribal story; we should learn from it as well.

The scene of the lying with Abimelech is haunting, isn't it? Isaac, we saw the episode in the movie theater a couple weeks ago. Your dad got caught sinning; don't do the same! We as audience members are weak. We want to help, but the situation is too fixed. Remember we said that a proper definition of a lie is any word spoken with the intention to deceive.

Death was the punishment for adultery among the Canaanites, Philistines, and Hebrews. And we read this week of an African woman caught in adultery and there is little difference in the scenario. Only they say the world is different today. Is it?

Y'shua said that the world would continue to get worse until He returned. In fact, He predicted that the state of the world would be characterized by famines and earthquakes, and fear would grip the hearts of many. If that's not a description of the result of terrorism, I don't know what is.

Another thing I see throughout this story today is the obviousness of Isaac's sins. Why is it that your sins are manifest to me and mine are to you, but to ourselves, we are almost blind? God puts us in communities to help us break down the blindness and to help us to repent of our sins and find eternal life in Y'shua, who is the only one who can redeem us from our sins. Wasn't it He who said, "with the same measure you judge you will be judged. Take the log out of

influence, or riches, the people were jealous. There is a remarkable saying of Francis Bacon on this subject, which seems to intimate that he had this very circumstance under his eye: "Public envy is an ostracism that eclipses men when they grow too great." The 'your growth is beyond our growth' is repeated in the story of Egypt in the next book, remember? The envy of the Egyptians about the high birth rate and the possible collapse of Egyptian economy was a principal cause in the pain of the Exodus story. Our growing prosperity is rarely a good thing in world opinion about Jews.

Isaac moved along (verse 21) rather than cause strife. We learn well the message of Y'shua, "don't resist him who constrains you." Or "turn the other cheek" from such as Isaac.

23-25 Just as the Lord had spoken to Abraham after he had separated from Lot (13:14-17) and renewed his promise of land and great prosperity, so now after Isaac had returned to Beersheba, the Lord appeared and renewed the promise. For a third time it is said that the Lord would bless Isaac (vv. 2, 12). Like his father (12:7; 13:3-4), Isaac responded by building an altar and worshipping God.

Are you getting the idea. What happened before is happening now. Like father, like son, they say. "Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." James Baldwin.

Summary

Here are some things I see as we conclude, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) Seeing history and learning from it helps us to create a good future
- 2) Sins of the fathers can come back to us; what we do with those returns determine our destiny
- 3) God's covenant with Abraham and then Isaac is still in force
- 4) The word of God sown in you will produce good fruit, even 100 fold
- 5) Industry when combined with faith in God will generate good results in due course.

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour Y'shua, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, and yet it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.