

99-08-08a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Hebrews chapter 4. Hebrews chapter 4. In our Friday night study in the Gospel of Luke, we saw John the Baptist come and deliver the final Old Testament message of opportunity and warning to the nation of Israel. And we've seen that although they possess the promises of God, the fulfillment of those promises in their individual lives is not automatic. It depends on what they choose.

You can possess the promise. You can possess the potential for God's blessing. But it depends on choices.

It depends on faith. It depends on obedience as to whether or not the potential that God has made available is fulfilled. That of course is what we have seen illustrated in the contrast between Jacob and Esau that was introduced at the end of chapter 25 in Genesis.

Esau, unlike Ishmael, possesses the blessings of the firstborn. He possesses the birthright and yet he loses it. Why is that? We're going to see the outworking of attitudes as we move forward in Genesis through chapter 26 and into chapter 27.

But for our scripture reading this morning in Hebrews chapter 4, we have the illustration of Israel in the wilderness who have been delivered, brought out by a mighty hand. They possess all of the covenant promises made to their fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And yet something happens.

God has sworn that he would deliver them out of Egypt, not only deliver them from bondage, but deliver them into blessing and prosperity. And this is what the writer of Hebrews alludes to at the end of chapter 3. Therefore, in chapter 4, since a promise remains of entering his rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. The promise is still there.

For indeed the gospel which preached to us as well as to them, but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as he said. So I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The whole idea here is that the works have been completed. The promise has been made. The potential exists for their fulfillment.

If it doesn't happen, it isn't that God has changed his mind. It isn't that the promise or the blessing no longer exists. Verse 4, he has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way.

And God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again in this place, they shall

not enter my rest. Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter, why? Because of disobedience.

Again, he designates a certain day, saying in David, this of course is some 400 years after the generation we've just been talking about. Today, after such a long time as it has been said, today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. And this is a rest for the people of God. We're not talking about salvation for those who are not the people of God.

Entering into rest is not entering into salvation. There is a rest that is potential for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works just as God did from his.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. This is the message of the book of Romans. Righteousness comes by faith.

Entering into rest is to cease from one's own works, seeking to establish or pursue righteousness by works and achieve it by faith. Let us be diligent to enter that rest, lest, and this is another one of those uses of lest that is better translated otherwise, anyone might fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. In the pursuit of that rest, in the pursuit of the righteousness that comes by faith, when we face trials, there is mercy and there is grace to be had from the throne of grace, if we go there and ask. There is no need for us to begin to lean on our own resources, on our own solutions, our own devices to sustain us.

The purpose, as we sang earlier this morning and explained that last verse of how firm a foundation, the fire that we encounter is designed to consume the dross and refine out that which is worthwhile and valuable in our lives. So it is possible to sum up our experience after salvation in this life. Why does God leave us here? Why are we subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune? God has a purpose.

We, in a sense, should welcome adversity. We should look at difficulties and pressures and tests. This is really why we are here.

We are not really here to bask in prosperity and to float along, borne by a soft gentle current and a gently flowing breeze and so forth. It is really the adversity and the pressure of this life, the difficulties of this life, whether it is facing the vagaries of our sinful nature or the world and the devil that cause difficulties, that is the unique feature of this life. We will have a thousand years and all eternity to enjoy the milk and honey, the promised blessings that God has in store for us, and we will not have adversity.

We will not have temptation and testing like we have in this life. So that is the unique feature of this life, and that is what God is using to refine us and to teach us things that we can never learn. There is a wonderful hymn.

I don't remember how the words go, but it refers to the fact that the angels will never be able to sing the song that the redeemed of humanity can sing because they have not been rescued from the things that we have been rescued from. They have not been sustained by God's grace in the way that we have as fallen creatures. The unfallen angels cannot know firsthand the depth of God's love as we know it, as we are the recipients of it.

As great as the songs are that the angels can sing to God in heaven, it will not match the song of the redeemed that is sung in heaven. When we stand before the throne of God and praise Him for our salvation, not only our salvation from the lake of fire, but our daily deliverances, God's mercy and God's grace that come to us in time of need. With that in mind, as we return now to our study in Genesis chapter 26, we recall that at the beginning of this chapter there is a famine in the land.

It is a different famine than the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. Who controls these things? Did Satan come and inflict a famine on the land? God is the one who causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. God controls the weather.

God controls the conditions in which we live. And there is a famine in the land. This is the land of promise.

This is the land that God called Abraham to, that God instructs Isaac to remain in. But there is a famine there. So this famine is in the will of God.

This is a part of the plan of God. And we should view the famines and the adversities of our life in the same light. We tend to think, well, this is a stumbling block.

This is an obstacle. This is slowing me down. This is a bad thing.

It is one of the marks of spiritual growth, one of the marks of our advance in viewing life through divine viewpoint, to recognize pressures and adversities as opportunities, as

good things that are a part of the plan of God that are strengthening to us. Anyone who has at some point in their life, maybe not currently, but a lot of us, especially in younger days, had a program of working out or running. Some of us still do to a greater or lesser extent.

And if you have that as a part of your experience, you know that in the beginning when you first, I remember when I first had to start gearing up to go to the Naval Academy, I had not been much in the way of sports or working out, but I knew that that was a very integral part of my coming life. And so I began to try to work out and get in shape so I wouldn't be obliterated by the regimen that would come please summer. It was very, very difficult to start running, to go out and you go out and usually you don't have a good idea of how much you should do, and so you overdo and then you get sore and that's even more discouraging because then the next time you try to go out it's even more difficult than it was the first time.

Your lungs are burning, your muscles are full of lactic acid, your whole body is screaming out for you to stop and your mind is telling you you have to keep going. And of course when you get into a program where someone else is running it and you have a leader up there and they say, well now we're going to do this many repetitions of this exercise and we're going to do 50 mountain climbers or we're going to do 50 squat thrusts or whatever it may be, well you get up to about 25 or 30 or 35 and every fiber of every muscle involved in that exercise is sending a little message to your brain saying that's enough, I've done all I can do, we can stop now, let's stop, let's really stop, I have to stop, I'm not going to contract the next time you give me an instruction to contract. Or you're running and it's a five mile run and after about three to three and a half miles your body says, okay well that was good exercise but now I'd like to stop and there's still a mile and a half to go.

I remember at Quantico, and this is a digression from a digression, but the course at the basic school that we had to run for the three mile run for time which was a part of the PT, the way they organized that you started out running downhill and you went down this road and it was uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill. You got to the mile and a half mark and turned around and came back. What that means is that the last several hundred yards of that run were uphill and you're already not doing well because you're running for time, you're running as fast as you can, you want to try to get as close to 18 minutes as possible to get a perfect score on the run and as you get to that last low point and you're looking at the finish line, you can see it up there, but it's uphill and your feet feel like lead, well at least mine did.

Anyway, the starting out in the beginning of this is difficult and it's discouraging and you don't want to go through it, you don't want to do it. But over the course of time, if you make a habit or a routine out of working out, that's no longer the case. People that ran five miles, three or four, five or every day of the week, coming to the three mile run for

the PT was a piece of cake.

It's like, oh, only three miles? What a breeze. And so if you become used to pushing against the resistance, if you train your body for that adversity, if you will, and if that becomes a regular thing, you find yourself, I usually run in the mornings when I am running, and it's always hard to begin and I wake up in the morning and I can think of 16 different reasons why I should not get up and get dressed and go out in the dark and run. But when I'm doing it as a regular thing, I can wake up in the morning and I feel better.

I feel rested after a night's sleep. I wake up at 5.30 or whenever it is and it's something to look forward to. I get up and it's pleasant to get out there and get your juices flowing and it's not the adversity that it was when you first started.

But it's all a matter of whether or not facing and overcoming that adversity in a productive manner becomes a part of your life. And right now, for me, it's not. And so I'm in that stage of having to try to start back again and it's difficult.

And every time I think I'm going to start, then these 16 reasons come up and I never do. But in a way, even as you face the adversity, even as you get up and run or work out or whatever it is, you have entered into a kind of rest because you've reached the point where that is a productive thing and it's even a welcome thing and an enjoyable thing, even though you're still running the same distance and your muscles are putting out the same foot pounds of work. Foot pounds is the measure of work in scientific terms.

I think joules is another similar measure. You're doing the same amount of work. You're asking the same of your body.

But because of your mindset and because of the pattern of your life, it can be enjoyable and it can be productive. It's one of my favorite times to pray and to meditate on the things of God. Whatever I'm currently studying goes through my mind while I'm running.

I have a clear mind. I can enjoy. There's hardly anybody else out at that time of the morning, and so I can enjoy God's handiwork and not be... It's not like when I'm driving through traffic, which is also a favorite time to pray, but those are usually imprecatory prayers.

Lots of people in my way. But the point is, what are we going to do with adversity? Here is a famine in the land. What is adversity? Adversity is either going to bring out the best in us or it's going to bring out the worst.

It depends on the pattern of life. It depends on our attitude. Are we looking at it from a divine perspective or a human perspective? You and I right now are facing adversities in some part of life.

I can say that with confidence, and it's not a function of the gift of prophecy, but I know that's true for each of us as believers because that's why God left us here. We may have relative prosperity in the material area. We may have cars that work and a roof that doesn't leak and so forth, but in some part of your life and in some parts of my life, we have adversity.

We face testing. It is what we do with that test. That's why we're here.

It's the whole reason you and I are still drawing oxygen out of the atmosphere and still living day after day after day. That's the purpose, to face adversity and to see what we do with it. We either grow from it or we are eroded by it.

This is what's going to happen for Isaac. God sends a famine on the land. What is Isaac going to do? The Lord appears to him.

God speaks to Isaac in the midst of this famine. He says, don't go down to Egypt. The Word of God is there to guide Isaac in the midst of this adversity.

God says, don't solve this problem in the wrong way. Don't use a human expedient. Don't go to the land of Hagar.

Don't go to the land which is going to be the land of bondage, which is going to symbolize enslavement to sin. God says, don't go there. Dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.

This is sort of indefinite. He doesn't say, go to a place where I will provide you seven wells full of water and I will provide you sustenance and I will shield you. I will hide you in the palm of my hand until the adversity is passed.

It's sort of indefinite. It's vague. God says, trust me on this.

Don't go to Egypt. I'll tell you a place to go. But he doesn't tell him.

So right away, the issue for Isaac is faith in the face of adversity. Obedience in the face of adversity. It doesn't look like the common sense thing to do.

One of the things we're going to see this morning is that because of this famine, remember all the great wealth and the flocks and the herds and the resources that were a part of Abraham Incorporated? Well, Abraham has died. And what do you do when things start getting scarce and thin? Well, you start eating into your savings. Hopefully, ideally, we have some sort of savings in the financial area so that when there are hard times, you've got something to fall back on.

That nest egg, that thing you set aside for a rainy day. Well, the rainy day comes and you go and get your rainy day fund. Well, after you do that, your rainy day fund is gone.

And in this famine, when things started getting scarce and so forth, Isaac started selling stuff off. He bartered. He traded to sustain his family.

He had to let some servants go. He got rid of some flocks. He sold this.

He sold that. He bartered things away. And now his resources, he is down to the bare minimum.

And all that prosperity is gone. When there's a famine in the land, when you've got 5,000 sheep and 5,000 yokobatsen and there's a famine, you can't keep all of those animals. So you slaughter some.

You sell others. You live off of some. You barter away others.

And now that stuff is gone. Isaac is no longer prosperous. He has enjoyed prosperity inherited from his father, but now it's gone.

So he's starting to get into a panic. He sees this stuff dwindling. And this is something, when you sort of unconsciously begin to rely on all of this, you think, well, we're in good shape.

We've got these vast resources. Well, that stuff is gone. And there's a famine.

So the Lord appears to him and says, don't go to Egypt. Don't go down there thinking, well, this is a place of safety. Dwell in this land.

I will be with you and bless you. Well, what has the trend been over the last several months or the last few years? The trend has been everything's getting worse. This would be like holding stock in a company, and you look in the financial pages and the stock is dropping and dropping.

You're having to sell off some shares and sell off some shares, and you think, well, I'm just going to get out of the whole thing and go to something else. And God says, don't do it. Stay here.

Ride out this adversity, even though the trend makes you want to leave. To you and to your descendants, I give all these lands. Well, right now, this is a land of famine.

And Isaac might think, well, what are you giving me here? I mean, this isn't a place I'm even wanting to stay. I'm thinking about leaving here. And God says, stay here, and I'll give it to you.

Well, it looks like it's barren. It looks like it's unfruitful. God says, I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.

God says, this will be a productive, fruitful land. You will be blessed, and you will be so

prosperous that you will be a blessing to others. But this is pie in the sky.

This is future. And God is speaking this to Isaac when he's standing on barren ground. God says, you see this barren ground? Don't leave it.

I'll give it to you, and I will perform the oath to Abraham. So this is a big faith challenge for Isaac. He has to believe in what he cannot see.

He has to believe against the evidence of his senses, against the evidence of his business judgment. Common sense would say, it's barren. Leave.

But God says, I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven. I will give to your descendants all these lands. Well, if he's got descendants multiplied like the stars of heaven, how are they going to live on barren land? It can't stay barren.

It has to become fruitful to sustain all of these multiple descendants, doesn't it? So this calls upon Isaac to draw a conclusion from the promise of God. God doesn't spell it all out. God doesn't say, you see this ruined, barren, dry land here? I will prosper it again.

When God says, I will give you descendants multiplied like the stars of heaven, and they will dwell in this land, that implies that the land will once again be fruitful. That it will be such a bountiful land that it will sustain people even though they multiply like the stars of heaven. So this is a second principle.

The first principle is, adversity is a test of faith. I mean, I'm a master of the obvious here, but that's what it is. And we forget that.

As obvious as it is, we can forget it. Just like Israel forgot, in the shadow of the pillar of cloud, in the light of the pillar of fire, they worried and they were fearful of starving and of dying of thirst, and they wanted to go where? Back to Egypt. That's what Isaac's descendants are going to do just a few generations hence.

But adversity is a test of faith. God brought them to a place and there wasn't any water. God didn't say, well, you know, Moses, if you follow this route, there's going to be a well every six miles, and you'll be able to stop and feed these six million people out of these wells that are going to be in there every two miles.

You'll never watch. You'll never lack. You'll never have an occasion where you wonder where your next meal is coming from or where your next skin of water is going to come from.

God led the children of Israel into a place where there was no water, where there was no food, where there was no pasturage. Why? The same reason he's telling Isaac to stay in this land where there's little water. One of the big reasons for famine is lack of water.

Rainfall goes way down and the grass doesn't grow anymore. When you don't have crops

and you don't have pasturage, that's a famine. So this is a no water situation which leads to a no food situation, whether it's food for the animals or food for the humans.

So what are you going to do? Well, here's the promise of God that comes to Isaac in the midst of the famine. And he says, don't leave. I'll fulfill everything I've ever said to your father.

And I will fulfill it. And in your seat, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because Abraham obeyed. Once again, look at the example that God leaves to Isaac in Abraham.

God says to Isaac, he doesn't come right out and say, if you obey, I will bless you. He says, look, I blessed your father Abraham because he obeyed my voice and kept my charge, kept my commandments, kept my statutes, kept my laws. The other interesting thing about this is it doesn't just say because Abraham believed me.

He says, because Abraham obeyed me. His faith translated itself into obedience in the big things and obedience in the little things. It doesn't mean he had a perfect record, but this was the pattern.

This was the climate in his life. And this is important because of what follows. Isaac obeys.

Isaac trusts the promise of God, and he stays in the land. Part of the land is this eastern area, sort of southeastern, if you will, over in Gerar, the land of Abimelech, the place where his father Abraham had dwelt for a while. So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

The men of the place asked about his wife, and he said, she is my sister. Why does he do this? He's done well in the big thing. He didn't go to Egypt.

He's sticking it out in the land. He's gone to a place where he can find some sustenance. But remember now, he's scaled way down.

He's got a few flocks, a few herds. He's got a small household, a few servants. He's not a big corporation like his father Abraham.

That stuff's all gone. So he goes there, and the men of the place ask about his wife. He says, she is my sister.

How can he pass off Rebecca as his sister? Well, some have suggested that this story is chronologically out of place and that this is before the birth of Jacob and Esau. I think not. I think that Jacob and Esau have grown to manhood, and it's not obvious, especially when you look at the disparity between Jacob and Esau, how different they look and act, that they may not even be identifiable as brothers to look at them.

And if they're grown and if they're doing their thing, it's not obvious that Rebecca is their mother or that Isaac is their father. Maybe they're just senior functionaries in the

household or whatever. So I'm not sure that we need to believe that this is out of sequence.

There are some other things that make me think that as well. But they go to Gerar, and Rebecca is a beautiful woman. She's a desirable woman.

And Isaac, he's trusted God for his daily sustenance. He's trusted God for the long-term fulfillment of the promises. But here's a short-term crisis.

At least it's a crisis in Isaac's mind. And you know how it is. If you create something in your mind and it's a problem, it doesn't matter whether it really exists or not.

In your mind, it's a problem. I faced this when one of my daughters has a loose tooth. This creates a crisis because pulling a tooth can be painful.

There's a little moment of twins of pain there when you yank out a loose tooth. But those of us who already went through losing all of our teeth, we know that it's of short duration, and you feel a lot better once you get the loose tooth out. Your gum that's been irritated will heal up.

It doesn't ache and throb and bleed for hours and hours on end. Getting that tooth out, there's a momentary twinge, but then you feel better. But in the mind of my daughter, the prospect of having this tooth removed created a huge crisis that can last for hours.

And we've gone through this more than once. And there is all kinds of fear, and there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of the other teeth. And you can talk, you can reason, you can explain, you can remind.

Remember the last time you were in this situation, how much better you felt once the tooth came out? Why don't you either pull it yourself, let me pull it, let mom pull it, let's get the tooth out and this whole thing will go away. There's no way to create the objective reality in the mind of the person who has the loose tooth, because in their mind there is this big crisis. Well, in the mind of Isaac, there is this fear that he is going to be murdered so that someone can take Rebecca to life, because she is so beautiful.

In his mind, his life is at risk. And apparently this must be the reputation. There must have been stories floating around, because remember Abraham had this same fear.

There's no evidence in the passage that this was a common practice. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. But this is a problem largely in Isaac's mind.

It's based on fact. Rebecca is a beautiful woman. If someone wanted her bad enough to commit murder, Isaac's life would be at risk.

But the place where it breaks down is, there really is no fear of this. And the reason we know this is, he goes ahead and tells this lie. Why doesn't he go to God and say, Oh God,

behold, the woman you have given me, she is beautiful to behold, and the men of the city will come and kill me.

Lord, what should I do? He doesn't do that, does he? He comes up with his own solution. And you get the idea that Isaac comforts himself. He says, you know, I'm a man of faith.

I'm a man of God. I'm sticking it out here in the land of famine. I'm trusting the promise of God.

But in this immediate issue, that pattern doesn't manifest itself. And it just doesn't seem to occur to Isaac to go to God. He arrives at his own solution, and his solution is deceit.

I will not tell these people that Rebekah is my wife. He thought the men of the place will kill me for Rebekah because she is beautiful to behold. Now it came to pass in verse 8 when he had been there a long time.

What does this tell us? Everybody in Gerar, okay, Rebekah is an unmarried sister to Isaac. Nobody even came up and tried to marry her, apparently. They've been there a long time.

And it's not like with Abraham, where when he went to Egypt, Pharaoh took her into the harem. It's not like Abraham in Gerar, a generation previously, when Abimelech's father saw Sarah and thought she was beautiful and wanted to bring her into the household. This doesn't happen with Rebekah.

So the threat is much less here than it's all in Isaac's mind, apparently, because they lived there a long time and nobody makes any approaches to Rebekah, at least none that are mentioned. But Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looks through a window and saw, and there was Isaac, sporting with Rebekah, his wife. And the word sporting is a harmless word.

It's not even generally used as a euphemism for intimate contact. It's a word that means to play or to jest or to sport in the innocent sense. And this could have been much less than they got physically intimate in a man-wife way within view of the window.

But something took place that Abimelech saw out the window and he realized when he saw this, you know how it is, this could have been something very innocent, where they're teasing one another or maybe Isaac chased Rebekah around the clothesline or something and caught her and gave her a big smack on the lips. They were just playing. This was something that was apparently out in the open, but they didn't think they were being observed.

But it was very clear from what Abimelech saw out the window, these people aren't brother and sister. And it's also interesting that in that pagan time, there was no hint that somebody thought, well, this is incest. This is a weird brother-sister thing.

What he saw, he knew right away, they were man and wife, not brother and sister. It's interesting to think back, isn't it, on the previous two occasions when Abraham tried to pass off Sarah as his sister with apparently some justification. Apparently maybe they were half-brother and sister.

But how did the king in each case find out? In the first case in Egypt, how did Pharaoh find out that Sarah was Abraham's wife? Pharaoh brought her into the harem and suddenly there were plagues, right? So there was a supernatural intervention in the form of occurrences in nature, if you will. This was something in the biology of the people. They had this plague on the land.

So there was a manifestation that even an unbeliever could realize something is wrong in their view of the world, in their worldview. When something goes wrong like this, you've ticked off one of the gods. And so they found out that way.

In the second case, with Isaac's father and with Abimelech's father, in the same land, Abimelech brought Sarah into his household, but he had not had any relations with her yet. What happens? God appears and speaks to Abimelech Sr. and says, Don't touch the woman. She belongs to Abraham.

He tells him that she needs to be returned to Abraham and that Abraham is a prophet and he needs to pray for Abimelech and the people because their wombs have all been closed up. All the women, nobody can conceive and bear children. So there's a combination of direct revelation from God and something of a plague.

And so everybody in Gerar realizes something is amiss. God speaks directly to Abimelech Sr. and tells him what's up. Interesting that God doesn't go to Abraham and say, Look what you've brought on the people.

God goes to Abimelech Sr. and Abimelech Sr. tells Abraham what's up. But oddly enough, it's Abraham who has to go pray to God before this situation will be resolved. Now, here's Abimelech Jr. on the throne of Gerar and God doesn't speak to him the way he spoke to Abimelech Sr. God doesn't put a plague on the people the way that he did in Egypt and in the previous case in Gerar.

It almost seems to be a happenstance. It is through circumstances that Abimelech Jr. realizes that he has been deceived and that this deception has been foisted on the people. Why does God not speak, in this case, to Abimelech? Why does God not put a plague on the people? It's an interesting thing to ponder that in each situation there are differences.

I think you can look at it in this way. In the first case, they're in Egypt which is the universal throughout the Bible symbol of dealing with unbelievers. And in the unbelieving case, God manifests the fact that you're messing with his people through

plagues.

He's going to do this later on in Egypt. He's going to plague them again. In the second case, Abimelech Sr. apparently is a believer in God because of the way he speaks and the fact that God communicates to him in the way that he does with his own people.

God speaks to him and God talks to him. In my observation of the Scripture, how can you not believe in God when he's right there talking to you and you act on his word? People have tried to say, well, Hagar wasn't a believer or Cain wasn't a believer or Abimelech Sr. was not a believer. But in each case when God appears to them and speaks to them, they acknowledge him as God and they obey what he says.

God tells Hagar, return. Hagar returns. God tells Cain different things and Cain takes it as fact.

There's no doubt in Cain's mind that God is God or that what God has said is going to come to pass. He believes in God. He's not obedient and he's not faithful.

That's the issue. Abimelech Sr. hears the word of God, obeys the word of God, does exactly what God says, puts trust that if Abraham prays, the plague will be removed, the wombs will be opened and so forth and everything comes to pass. You find no fault.

In fact, he is a better example of faith and obedience than Abraham is in that situation. So when you look at this by way of illustration or application, here is a case where you have someone who is a believer but who has failed and the context is unbelievers with Abraham in Egypt. In the second Abraham case, here is a believer who fails and the context is he's among fellow believers.

He doesn't really know it but Abimelech Sr. is more of a man of God than Abraham has given him credit for and he wrongs someone who believes in God, someone who has standards, who has morals, who would not have done what Abraham thought in terms of killing him and taking Sarah as wife. And Abraham has wronged, has not only disobeyed God and expressed faithlessness in God, but he has wronged the people of the land because he assumed them to be pagan unbelievers when they were not. And so God goes to those believers that Abraham thought were not or who were lesser and uses them to communicate to Abraham.

Here in the third case, so we have extremes in the first two cases. Unbelievers at the far end of the spectrum, Abimelech who is apparently not of the people of Abraham and yet seems to be a believer. Now we're going to have a case in the middle, something between those two extremes because Abimelech Jr. in this passage, God doesn't come and speak to him and this tells me he is not the man his father was.

Kind of reminds me of the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. The Pharaoh who knew Joseph was apparently, if not a believer himself, at least sympathetic to Joseph and to the

people of Joseph, to the beliefs that Joseph had. He puts everything in Joseph's hand.

He seems to be a good guy. But then the Pharaoh that comes along after him, his son or his grandson, is not and has antipathy and animosity toward God and the people of God and the things of God. Well that's the way this Abimelech is.

However, there are still laws on the books and there are still principles that work in the land of Gerar that were put in place by Abimelech Sr. That you don't kill a man and take his wife and that you don't commit adultery. And that's what we find out when Abimelech sees this out the window and in verse 9 he calls Isaac and says quite obviously she is your wife. How could you say she is my sister? He is upset at the deception.

Deception is not allowed. It's not practiced. It's not countenanced in Gerar.

And Isaac, who is supposed to be the big man of God here and the big man of faith, he has committed a sin that is not countenanced in this land that is not so much a place of God. Isaac says, because I said, lest I die on account of her. Of course, Isaac conveniently leaves out the fact that what he really said was the men of the place will kill me for Rebekah because she is beautiful to behold.

He doesn't bring that part up. He just says, lest I die on account of her. Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us? What is this you have done to us? Almost identically, the words that Mary speaks to Jesus when he is in the temple at the age of 12.

What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt on us. Even this Abimelech, who is not interested in the things of God, knows he is moral and he knows the immorality and he knows the consequences of immorality and he says, If we had taken this and you apparently would not have stopped us, we would have brought guilt on ourselves. It is just fortunate that nobody did, is what Abimelech says.

So Abimelech charges all his people saying, He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death. Abimelech knows that this is wrong. Abimelech doesn't put Isaac to death for his offense.

He is a moral man, but he is not upright in the sense that his father was. He is not a man who actually believes in God and who will exchange words with God. So he is in the middle.

We have these three examples of a believer who fails in the presence of unbelievers. Abraham the second time fails in the presence of people who he underestimates and who are in fact believers who care something about God. Here in this subsequent generation you have Isaac failing in the presence of people who are somewhere in the middle.

They are either very moral unbelievers or very apathetic believers who believe in morality but who are not in the place where God will speak directly to them. But the biggest thing is when you look at Isaac you have a case of someone who greatly exaggerates in his own mind the danger. From a divine perspective there is no danger.

These are people God has told him to dwell in this land and apparently Gerar is where God told Isaac to dwell and Isaac dwells there but he thinks he has to lie to preserve himself. So he is not really taking the promise of God to the bank. He is not saying if God told me to live here obviously I am not going to be killed here.

He does not take the promise of God and apply it in his immediate circumstance the immediate pressure that is put on him by the thought that he might be killed. This is what we have to watch out for. We can hurdle the first obstacle of faith in God for the long term and we say I am a believer I am going to trust God for the big things in life like Isaac does.

But then in the immediate crisis in the short term prospect of danger something that causes fear or uncertainty or the need for an immediate solution in our life do we apply the word of God and the truth of God and our understanding of the plan of God in these near term short fused situations. Isaac does one and not the other and he gets a rap on the knuckles here. This seems to be a much more minor incident than what Isaac goes through because we have already seen the major outline of the principle.

We have already had the major illustration. But here is Isaac following in his father's footsteps as it were and learning the same lesson on his own. So Abimelech charged all the people and then in verse 12 Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold.

We are starting a new chapter in the story of Isaac here. We are going to pause here and take our break when we come back. This is of course review but we want to review this because as we go forward we are going to need this in order to make sense of what follows.

We are going to pause here and take our break. When we come back we will resume with the renewed prosperity of Isaac in the land.