

Isaac Sowed in Famine

by Gary Carpenter

I had been praying in the Spirit for fifteen hours when I heard the Spirit say to me very plainly:

"Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. You have been taught that this passage means, 'give bigger offerings to God when things are tough'. That is not what Isaac did! He sowed into the earth during drought. The modern day equivalent would be those people who bought Oklahoma land during the Dust Bowl days and those who bought stocks during the Great Depression. They all became rich later."

That is a word for word quote, including the references to the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. [By the way, I was not meditating on this passage of Scripture nor thinking about Isaac at all prior to His speaking].

The longer I meditated on this statement and prayed, the more this piece fit into the overall puzzle concerning financial exaltation. If the lesson to be learned from Isaac's sowing was to teach us to give bigger offerings to God, then we would have seen Isaac building an altar and sacrificing animals on it as his father Abraham had done.

There was no temple, so this was the only avenue available to them in that time to make offerings to God. Or Isaac could have tried to track down Melchizedek to offer gifts. But bigger offerings to God was not the lesson to be learned here. God had a reason for wanting to bless Isaac materially and He caused Isaac to sow material seed into the material earth to do it.

Another example of this principle; when God wanted to exalt Pharaoh to be the most powerful ruler on earth, He did not instruct Joseph to tell him, "What you need to do, Pharaoh, is to offer bigger and bigger offerings to God." No, God wanted to exalt him materially and He used material means and supernatural information to accomplish it.

God gave Pharaoh a dream containing, basically, the "inside information" regarding the future of their commodities market. Joseph gave the interpretation which contained within it the plan of God, "Gather the surplus grain during the seven fat years". [Note: because of the glut of surplus grain available in the marketplace, this seven year period of gathering would have generated no profit at all in a typical commodities market. No doubt the "economic experts" of the day lampooned him as being foolish.]

The rest of God's plan was, "Sell during the seven lean years." [Note: because Pharaoh now had the market cornered, the profits were enormous. This is the exact opposite, but the same principle as buying Oklahoma Dust Bowl land then selling it later. The principle is: Buy (invest, sow) when others won't, then sell to them when they have no choice but to buy from you. You can name your own price then.]

THE PLAN OF GOD

It is critical to point out that this is not a formula. Hearing God's voice and flowing with his overall plan for each generation is critical. Famine was occurring in Canaan during Isaac's day just like it had in his father Abraham's.

No doubt his thinking went something like this; "We are in famine. My father Abraham fled to Egypt during famine and God blessed him there. If I flee to Egypt, God will bless me there."

Isaac was following in his father's footsteps when the Lord appeared to him in the city of Gerar. If you look at a map of the land during Isaac's generation, you will see that Gerar is the last inhabited city in Canaan before entering the Wilderness of Shur along the well traveled caravan route between the nation of the Philistines and Egypt.

Up to this point, Isaac was going by formula. But when the Lord appeared to him, He said He did not want Isaac to go to Egypt, but rather to stay in Canaan and the Lord promised to bless him there (where famine was raging). The Lord was doing a different thing in Isaac's day than Abraham's and it was critical to flow with His plan. The same is true for every generation.

HOW DID ISAAC REAP A HUNDRED FOLD IN FAMINE?

I have often asked the Lord how He caused Isaac's crops to grow during the famine when nobody else's would. Obviously, there was no rain. That's what was causing the famine.

I have asked, "Lord, did you cause it to rain only on Isaac's crops and nowhere else? Or, did you miraculously cause his crops to grow without rain at all? What did you do?"

I know the Lord is perfectly capable of doing any kind of miracle He wants, but the silence in the Word regarding how these crops grew is almost deafening. The Word is not usually very timid in telling us about the miracles of God. It is very bold and says things like, "and Aaron's rod budded, or, the river became blood, etc.". But regarding Isaac's bumper crop it simply says,

Gen 26:12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him.

It doesn't give us a clue as to how this miracle crop grew during a time of famine. One day as I had been praying many hours in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit drew my attention to the many occurrences in the Genesis account concerning Isaac and the digging of wells:

Gen 26:18-19 And Isaac dugged again the wells of water... And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water.

Gen 26:21-22 And they digged another well... And he removed from thence, and digged another well...

Gen 26:25 And he built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Gen 26:32 And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water.

I didn't know what to make of this for a while, and then suddenly, I just knew: Isaac's seeds produced crops during the drought because he introduced a new technology to the land of the Philistines. HE IRRIGATED HIS CROPS FROM WELL WATER!

That is why we are not told how the Lord performed this miracle, because it was not a miracle in the sense of a supernatural intervention into the natural laws of the earth, although God could certainly have done that had it been His desire.

How did Isaac come up with this idea? Again, after much prayer, the Holy Spirit not only answered this question but another one that has been in my mind for nearly fifteen years:

WHY WAS IT WITHIN GOD'S WILL FOR ABRAHAM TO GO TO EGYPT?

In the Word of God, Egypt is always a type of the world. Repeatedly we are admonished throughout the Word of God not to go to the world, nor depend on the world for our deliverance when things are tough. Yet this seems to be exactly what Abraham did during the time of famine.

I have never heard one preacher or teacher give a plausible explanation of this apparent contradiction concerning Abraham. Abraham went down to Egypt during the time of famine and God blessed him there to the point that Abraham returned to Canaan a very rich man.

It seems to contradict every other teaching regarding reliance upon the world system taught in the Word of God. Thank God for the Holy Ghost, our Teacher.

Remember, it is not by formula that we prosper, but rather by finding out the plan of God for each generation and flowing with that plan. God wanted Abraham to go to Egypt because He wanted Abraham to see something there.

Notice that during all of these famines, Egypt nearly always had excess crops. Why? Egypt is a very arid land and seldom receives sufficient rainfall to produce good harvests. The Egyptians had long since mastered the art of irrigation. The land of Egypt was blessed with the Nile River, which has its headwaters deep in the mountains of Africa. Drought in Egypt did not affect the Nile because the source of its flow was in Africa.

God wanted Abraham to observe how the Egyptians irrigated their crops. You could put it this way: While Abraham was in Egypt, he had the opportunity to observe the

"cutting edge" of technology regarding crop irrigation in an arid land. I am sure, to Abraham, this technology was interesting, but he could see no application for it in the land of Canaan. After all, Canaan had no Nile River from which to irrigate, and you certainly cannot use saltwater from the Dead Sea nor the Ocean.

Sometime while young Isaac was growing up, he surely asked his father, "What was Egypt like"? In telling the lad about Egypt and their customs which were so different from their own, he certainly must have described how they irrigated their crops from the Nile instead of depending on rainfall. That information was filed in Isaac's mind for future use.

ADAPTING THE TECHNOLOGY

Now Isaac was grown and had a family of his own. There was famine in the land, yet the Lord had actually "appeared" to him in the city of Gerar and specifically told him not to go down to the land of Egypt as his father Abraham had done. The actual promise reads like this:

Gen 26:1-5 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

This was the mind of God for Isaac, and Isaac chose to flow with it. The Lord said He would bless him in this land, yet there was drought, no rain from above. By now the rivers had run dry or were so low that there was not enough water flow to irrigate as Abraham had told him the Egyptians had done.

Isaac had faith like his father Abraham and knew that the Lord would not lie, and that what He had promised, He was well able to perform it. His thinking may have gone something like this, "I know God will bless me here, as He has promised. I need water to grow my crops. There is no rain, no water from above. The rivers are dry, no water available from them...."

And right about there, the idea must have hit him, "There must be water available from below. I could irrigate my crops using well water." He adapted the cutting edge technology of his day to the conditions existing in Canaan, and his crops grew when nobody else's would. Remember,

Prov 8:12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

Because of this one idea from God, not only did Isaac have plenty of food for his household, but an abundance left over to sell to the Philistines. His prosperity really began to increase rapidly now, as the wealth of the Philistines was transferred from them to him.

In fact, he became so rich and powerful that the king said that Isaac's household was more mighty than the entire nation of the Philistines, and they sought a peace treaty with him. You don't have to be a genius to prosper. All it takes is one idea from God, acted upon.

HOW DID ISAAC PROSPER DURING FAMINE?

1. Isaac had to find out God's plan.
2. Isaac had to hear from God.
3. Isaac had to obey God's voice.
4. Isaac had to break with the tradition of his father.
5. Isaac adapted the wisdom of previous generations to the circumstances he was living in [Famine in Canaan].
6. Isaac had to be bold enough to do something that had never been done before [irrigation from well water].
7. Isaac had to overcome resistance [they contended for his wells].
8. Isaac had to persevere and not become discouraged by the resistance.
9. Isaac refused to get in strife with those who were opposing him.

Basically, Isaac had to believe what God had said. In this sense, he was following in the steps of the faith of his father Abraham. You could say, "And Isaac believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."

He also had to believe that what God had promised, He was well able to perform it. God had promised Isaac that if he would remain in Canaan, in the midst of famine, that God would bless him there! I am sure that in the natural that seemed impossible, but Isaac believed God.

Notice that in Gen 26:5 the Lord was reminding Isaac that the reason that God could bless Abraham was because Abraham obeyed His voice! He was telling Isaac to do the same.

Of all people on the earth, Isaac knew the power of God's Word, THE FACT THAT HE EXISTED WAS BASED ON ABRAHAM AND SARAH'S FAITH IN THE WORD OF GOD TO THEM!

There is no doubt that Abraham and Sarah had told young Isaac about the miraculous way that he was conceived and born. He knew that he, himself, was a product of his parents believing the Word of God. Surely his attitude was, "If God birthed me by His Word, surely He will sustain me by His Word."

WE SHOULD HAVE THE SAME ATTITUDE! ALL OF US WERE BIRTHED BY THE WORD OF GOD!

1 Pet 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

SINCE GOD HAS BIRTHED US BY HIS WORD, SURELY HE WILL SUSTAIN US BY HIS WORD!

Once Isaac made the decision to obey the voice of the Lord and remain in Canaan where famine was raging, what were the "nuts and bolts" of his faith to receive the promised blessing from God? What did he do?

His situation seems so precisely the same as mine and Sue's once we hearkened to the voice of the Lord to go full time in the ministry with no visible means of financial support at all. It certainly appeared to be a "land of famine." All I could do was walk the floor and worship God and put Him in remembrance of His Word by confessing it for hours a day.

It seems to me that Isaac could not have done much differently. Isaac had a family and servants and cattle to support. They were all looking to him as the head of the house. Once he told them that he was going to obey God and stay in the land of famine because God had told him that He intended to bless them there, I am sure there were some who wondered if he had lost his mind. Once the decision was made to stay in Canaan, what could Isaac do at first but worship God and put Him in remembrance of His Word that "I will bless you there."

WORSHIP THROWS THE BALL BACK INTO GOD'S COURT!

Isaac had done his part. He obeyed God and stayed in the land of famine. Now he could turn his face toward God in worship and trust that "What God had promised, He was well able to perform it." This put the responsibility for blessing Isaac squarely back on God. Isaac was standing on God's Word, and it was God's responsibility to make His Word good.

In this case, God manifested His Word to bless Isaac by giving him an idea that no man had ever had before. Isaac knew about irrigation from rivers because Abraham had told him about what he had seen during his sojourn in Egypt. But nobody had ever thought of irrigating crops from well water until God dropped that wisdom into Isaac's heart. This was a "Word of Knowledge " straight from the mind of God to Isaac.

NOW THE BALL WAS BACK IN ISAAC'S COURT!

Once you receive a "Word of Knowledge" and/or instructions from the Lord, then it is up to you TO ACT ON IT! God did not dig the wells for Isaac. That was Isaac's responsibility.

Notice the two way communication going on here. Communication requires RELATIONSHIP, not FORMULA! God spoke to Isaac. Isaac obeyed and turned back to God in worship and trust in God's Word until God dropped the Word of Knowledge into him. Then Isaac acted on that Word of Knowledge.

It is important to notice that resistance came in the form of the Philistines stopping up the wells of water, yet Isaac endured and continued to act on the Word of Knowledge that God had given him. Isaac patiently endured until he received the blessing. He had learned well the secret of endurance and trust in God's Word from having watched his father Abraham,

Heb 6:13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself. Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Isaac was truly walking in the steps of the faith of his father Abraham.
Isaac prospered by RELATIONSHIP....NOT FORMULA!

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