

# The Greatest Peacemaker

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“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” How often is Jehovah thus designated and in that order. The order is a most fitting one, with Isaac in the middle, for throughout his lifetime he was surrounded by those who towered above him. He has been called the ordinary son of a great father and the ordinary father of a great son. In Genesis, twelve chapters are largely devoted to Abraham, with a similar number given to Jacob and Joseph. But, except for an occasional mention, the history of Isaac is condensed into a single chapter, Genesis 26. Though he exceeded many of the patriarchs in longevity, less of his life is recorded.

#### He Was an Ordinary Man

Isaac speaks to the hearts of many in each generation because he was an ordinary man, having no one great accomplishment. He was a plain, patient, plodding patriarch whose name meant “laughter.” His mother, Sarah, laughed in disbelief at the angelic announcement of his impending birth. Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 at his birth.

When he was a young man, his father took him to Mt. Moriah, intending to obey God’s command to sacrifice him on an altar. At 40 he married Rebekah, whom he dearly loved. In fact, he was the only patriarch who did not practice polygamy. At 60 he became the father of twins, Jacob and Esau. At about 140, he was deceived by Jacob and at age 180 died. He was buried at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah, with Abraham and Sarah. Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were later buried there.

Two quotations will serve to give us a summary of his character. According to McClintock and Strong,

Isaac was evidently a man of kind and gentle disposition, of a calm and reflective turn of mind, simple in his habits, having few wants, good rather than great, fitted to receive impressions and follow a guide, not to originate important influences, or perform deeds of renown.

Isaac Errett had this to say:

He was a lover of quiet. . . . He was not lazy, idle or luxurious. He was not a stuffed specimen of a contented and sleek animal. He was a man of industry as his successful farming and his ever-growing riches testify; and he was a man of thought, as his fondness for meditation sufficiently evinces. But there was nothing in him warlike, nothing aggressive. . . . The gentler virtues—and these we take to have been rare in that age—shine with a sweet, pleasant, and steady light, like the stars in the heavens. His faith in God never trembles. He injures none. He is diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. He steadily maintains the worship of Jehovah, honors the memory of his father, cherishes great affection for his mother, is true to his wife, and works righteousness day by day. His life comes nearer to the tame, monotonous everyday life of good people, whose history has nothing startling in it, whose virtues are the steady, unobtrusive, modest virtues on which the peace of home, and the security of the commonwealth, and the prosperity of life depend.<sup>1</sup>

#### He Attained Greatness in Goodness

If Isaac was not great, he was nevertheless good. If he was ordinary, he was also ordered and ordained. His greatness lay in simply being good, just as ours can.

## He Was the Man of the Well

Isaac has been called “the man of the well.”

Isaac came from the way of the well La-hai-roi (Genesis 24:62; KJV).

Isaac dwelt by the well La-hai-roi (Genesis 25:11; KJV).

Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham (Genesis 26:18; see also 26:20-22, 25).

## THE GREATEST PEACEMAKER

Isaac is set forth in Genesis as a man of peace, one whose example could do more to bless the world than all the summits ever held.

Like his father before him, Isaac set out for Egypt in the time of famine. Arriving at Gerar, in the Philistine country, he was told by the Lord not to proceed to Egypt. Thus for some time he dwelt at Gerar, his flocks and herds increasing greatly.

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, . . . (Genesis 26:12-17).

His continuing prosperity resulted in the envy of his neighbors, who stopped up the wells which Abraham’s servants dug. This was an open and flagrant violation of the pledge made to Abraham by Abimelech (Genesis 21:22-34).

Though right and reason were both on his side, Isaac, the lover of peace, simply departed and drifted into the valley of Gerar. Prayerfully and peacefully did he steal away, avoiding a bloody confrontation.

The Philistines, however, were not through. Once again they pursued Isaac, filling with dirt the wells he had dug. This happened repeatedly, prompting Isaac to name the wells “enmity” and “contention.” Finally, Isaac opened a well which was left untouched and called it “Rehoboth,” meaning “broad places, room” because “at last the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land” (Genesis 26:22).

## A PEACEMAKER WHO PUT GOD FIRST

As Isaac went to Beersheba, the Lord appeared to him 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.” There he built an altar, pitched a tent, dug a well, and called upon the name of the Lord. Notice the order: the altar, the tent, the well. God is first, then home, and then business.

Isaac continued at Beersheba for some time, and from there Jacob fled into Padanaram. At age 180, Isaac died in Hebron.

## PEACEMAKERS NEEDED TODAY

### War and Peace

A well in ancient times was a matter of life and death. It might be compared to the worth of a horse in the old West. There, the high crime was horse-stealing because a man’s life depended to a large degree on his horse. Without it, he was at the mercy of Indians, buffalo stampedes, hunger, and thirst. A horse thief was usually strung up by the neck. In the same manner, filling up and destroying a well in Isaac’s time was the gravest of offenses.

Isaac refused to make war with his neighbors. Adam Clarke notes:

Never did any man follow more implicitly the divine injunction, *resist not evil*, than did Isaac. Whenever he found that his presence and work became the subject of strife and contention, he gave place and chose to suffer wrong, rather than to have his own peace of mind disturbed. It was in this way that he overcame evil with good.

There has been so little peace in our world. Choose any century you wish, and it is the same—“wars and rumors of wars.” For example, between A.D. 193 and 285, the Roman Empire was wracked with strife. Twenty-two emperors ruled during that time, and only one died a natural death!

The times in which we live are likewise wracked with violence, bloodshed, assassination, and attack. Over fifty wars have been fought since World War II. More than one million persons have already died in the Iran/Iraq confrontation. The Middle East is continually under siege, with Jews and Moslems trading threats and bombs. The Koran, the supposed inspired book of Islam, insists, “Prescribed for you is fighting” and “Fight strenuously against the misbelievers and hypocrites, and be stern toward them.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this are the words of Scripture:

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21).

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Romans 14:19).

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

### Crime and Assault

Among the most insoluble problems of modern life is the housing of criminals, with presently more than 500,000 inmates in our prison population. The cost to taxpayers is estimated to be \$17,000 per prisoner per year—or more than \$8,500,000,000 annually. Our prison population is also growing ten times faster than the general population. Our crime crisis actually threatens our financial resources.

Most serious criminal activity can be traced to a handful of offenders. Police Chief Joe Casey, of Nashville, Tennessee, estimates that four hundred persons are responsible for 75 per cent of the crime in that city. Unfortunately, liberal laws and courts, along with light sentences, make it difficult to prosecute and incarcerate for long those who are guilty.

### Quarrels and Grievances

Beyond the province of war and organized crime are the day-to-day quarrels, confrontations / petty grievances, and upsets familiar to us all. Neighborhoods, office staffs, and even churches find it difficult to maintain peace over a long period of time. The first real problem in the early church involved "a complaint of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews" (Acts 6:1). Even in Philippi, Paul found it necessary to urge two Christian women to "live in harmony in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2). Strife is not part of the mind of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

Robinson Crusoe was unique in that he lived precisely to suit himself. Alone and cast away on an uninhabited island, he could build where he wished, eat whatever pleased his fancy, and shoot his gun in any direction . . . until one day he discovered another person on the island. From that moment his liberty was limited. There was at least one direction in which he had no right to shoot and one spot where he could not build a hut. While his companionship with Friday brought great gains, it also meant relinquishing certain privileges.

All men face the same problem of getting along with people. *We bless each other* through a mutual acceptance of responsibility, but we also *bump each other* through selfish strivings and personal pursuits. Our goal, like Isaac, must be, "so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

The man who lives at peace with God, with his own family, and with his neighbors can live happily and die triumphantly. Galatians 4:28 says, "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise."

—Paul Rogers

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Isaac Errett, *Evenings With the Bible*, Vol. 1, (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1956), 127-28.

<sup>2</sup>Koran 2:212, 6:31, 66:9, 9:292.

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## QUOTATIONS

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"The increasing need for friendship is closely associated with the increasing divorce rate."

Dr. Froma Walsh

"Choices are the hinges of destiny."

Edwin Markham

"All great saints have been early risers."

Prebendary Webb-Peploe

"With the death of every friend I love, a part of me has been buried, but their contribution to my being of happiness, strength, and understanding remains to sustain me in an altered world."

Helen Keller