

## Famine-proof (Toldot)

*Unbelief starves the soul; faith finds food in famine. -Richard Cecil*

It was certainly true that in biblical times drought and famine led directly to starvation and death. Abraham's strategy, in the time of drought, was to leave the dry land of Canaan and head to the greener pastures of Egypt. His son Isaac also considers the same strategy; however, God directly instructs him to stay within the boundaries of Israel (Genesis 26:2). Isaac remains in the area of Gerar, ruled by Avimelech.

One of the predictable things that ensues is a battle for water rights. In the middle of the drought, Isaac, with great effort, seeks out water and digs wells in locations that his father had staked in the past. The locals fight him, claiming the water belongs to them. Two well-digging operations end in contention. Instead of prolonging the altercation, Isaac moves on.

Isaac's third attempt is successful, or far enough from the locals for him to remain undisturbed. Once Isaac has established an operating well, he departs the immediate vicinity of Gerar and moves on to nearby Beer Sheva.

That very same night, God appears to Isaac and blesses him. Then Isaac builds an altar and does something the Torah describes as "calling in the name of God". The Torah makes multiple references to Abraham doing likewise. The simplest explanation is that he was merely giving a heartfelt thanks and prayer to God. Another interpretation is that these were major communal and social events, where the forefathers spread the knowledge and name of God to all those surrounding them in the area.

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475-1549) explains that it is after this precise action of "calling in the name of God," that massive success came to Isaac, even in the middle of the famine. A few verses earlier, Isaac is reported as having cultivated 100 "shearim" – some great abundance of crop. He is so successful that Avimelech banishes him from Gerar for fear of him being a draw on resources. However, after Isaac moves to the Beer Sheva area, he immediately and almost effortlessly finds another well. Isaac then becomes such a force in the area that Avimelech comes to Isaac with his General, Pichol, and sues for a peace treaty with him.

May we as people, not only survive the difficult challenges of our day, but also thrive as our forefathers did before us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To the memory of Rabbi Zvi Kogan hy" d, who was murdered in a horrible antisemitic attack in the United Arab Emirates. May God avenge his blood.*