

God Provides
November 29, 2015
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Genesis 24:1-17

Opening discussion: **How did you meet your spouse? Is anyone willing to share briefly?** This text tells us how God provided a bride for Isaac. The real lesson for us in this text is about trusting God and cooperating with His plans.

There's an old gospel song that says: "*Prayer is the key to heaven; but faith unlocks the door.*"¹ That lyric speaks of the BIG IDEA in this lesson: God provides for the needs of His people in a way that is consistent with His eternal plan.² The key is our obedience and faith!

Chapter twenty-four is the longest chapter in Genesis. It's centrally located right in the middle of the fifty chapters and it's pivotal to the COVENANT STORY of God's people. Let's dig into the text to find out why this account is so important. As always, we'll explore: what it says; what it means; and how it should change us this week. Let's start with the first nine verses.

Genesis 24:1–9 (ESV)

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred,

and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

- Verse one: What a picture of a life well lived! Abraham was at a ripe old age and "blessed...in every way. 140 years old, and he would live 35 more years³)" What a great example for us. May God allow us to finish well regardless of our lifespan!
- Verse two: We're not told who the "oldest" servant was. Some assume it is Eliezer whom Abraham had earlier believed would be his heir. The verse confirms that this is his most trusted aide. If it was Eliezer, it also demonstrates tremendous loyalty to Abraham. When Isaac was born it removed the possibility that Eliezer would have inherited all that Abraham owned. Yet this man (probably about 85 years old) was not resentful. He was obedient to God's plan.
- Verse two also reveals a strange ancient custom for sealing a promise: "Put your hand under my thigh."
- I have always winced when I read this strange command. Today, to seal a deal we "shake hands, swear oaths, or sign documents in the presence of a notary public."⁴ In that day a very important promise was sealed with a very strange gesture. At the risk of being indelicate, you need to understand what "under my thigh" really means.

The word thigh—Hebrew, *yarek*—is a euphemism; that is, a mild or indirect word that is substituted for one that is considered too harsh, blunt, or offensive. Without question, the servant's hand was placed beneath Abraham's *procreative organs* (these words are also euphemisms).⁵

- As bizarre as this is, it demonstrates this was a serious assignment for the servant, and a solemn promise from the servant to Abraham. Now, (if you can get that image out of your mind!) let's look at that assignment.
- Verse three: **What assignment was Abraham giving to his servant? Why was this such an important task (historically speaking?)**
- Wiersbe writes: [Abraham's] "great concern was that, before he died, he would find a wife for his only son Isaac. Only then could God fulfill His covenant promises to bless Abraham with many descendants and give them Canaan for their inheritance (12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:18; 21:12)."⁶
- This whole episode begs the question: **Why didn't Abraham just allow Isaac to find his own wife? Any ideas?**
- We're told it was common and acceptable at that time for marriage to take place within a family, and be arranged by the parents. So, arranging a marriage was a cultural "norm" in that day. In this case Abraham was being a bit of a "control freak" for some specific reasons.
- Verses three and four: Abraham was serious about seeing that Isaac didn't marry the wrong kind of person. **Was he just being a bigot?**
- Verse six: **Why was it important that Isaac not go back to Abraham's old homeland?** Verse seven gives us a clue.
- Verse seven is a concise summary of Abraham's experience with our promise-keeping God. It described Abraham's trust in God's faithfulness.

Genesis 24:7 (NLT)

⁷ For the Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my descendants.* He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a wife there for my son.

- Verse eight: Abraham was so confident that God would provide the right wife for Isaac that he gave his servant a release from the oath if God did not provide.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

- Since the servant didn't have access to e-Harmony or Match.com, he went to the town's well. **Why was this a prime place to find a wife for Isaac?**
- Look at verse twelve. **Why is this a great example for us?**
- The servant didn't charge ahead with his own plan. He prayed for guidance. He asked specifically that God would give him success and show kindness to Abraham. Do you and I do that? Or do we "shoot first and ask questions later?"
- It is clear that Eliezer had learned a lot from Abraham. **How is that a lesson for those of us who are parents and spiritual leaders?**
- Then the servant asked for a specific sign indicating the right woman for Isaac. **What was the specific sign he asked for in verse 14? What do Christians call that? Any thoughts about that practice?**

Life Application Study Bible has an interesting perspective:

“Was it right for Abraham’s servant to ask God for such a specific sign? The sign he requested was only slightly out of the ordinary. The hospitality of the day required women at the well to offer water to weary travelers, but not to their animals. Eliezer was simply asking God to show him a woman with an attitude of service—someone who would go beyond the expected. An offer to water his camels would indicate that kind of attitude. Eliezer did not ask for a woman with good looks or wealth. He knew the importance of finding a woman with the right heart, and he asked God to help him with this task.”⁷

- It was one thing to give a stranger a drink, however the likelihood of the average girl offering to also water the servant’s camels was something else.
- This was no small task. A camel can drink 20 gallons of water at a time. There were ten camels in this account. That’s 200 gallons hauled by jar up and down steps out of this natural spring well. If you were looking for a hard-working woman, this would be her! God had such a young woman picked out.

Dave Guzik writes:

“Eliezer was wise enough to ask for a sign that was remarkable, but (in human terms) possible. He didn’t tempt God by asking for fire to fall from heaven or for protection as he leapt from the pinnacle of the temple.”⁸

- Personally, I’m a little hesitant to “put out a fleece.” However, I’m never hesitant to ask God to make the answer UNMISTAKEABLY clear. If we’ll be patient, I believe He will.

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and

filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar."

- Verse 15: I love this part, "before he had finished praying, Rebecca came out with her jar..."
- Sometimes God makes us wait to see the fulfillment of his promise. We have certainly seen that in the story of Abraham and Sarah waiting 25 years for Isaac to be born. On the other hand, sometimes God shows us his direction right away!
- **When we pray and get an immediate and obvious answer, what does that do for our faith? How can it serve as a testimony for others?**
- Sometimes God makes us wait for His answer...He's wise like that.
- Yet, sometimes He answers so quickly and so obviously that we know only God could have done it. As we read in Isaiah 65:24 (NLT) sometimes God says:

²⁴ I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

- Our text ends at verse seventeen because the "big idea" is about the servant's faith. I can't leave you hanging though. I have to give you the "rest of the story."
- Rebekah gave the servant a drink. Then she "quickly" watered the camels.
- The servant confirmed she was a member of Abraham's tribe (VV. 23-24).
- Then look at what the servant did in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven:

Genesis 24:26–27 (ESV)

²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord ²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."

So, What's the Takeaway?

John MacArthur writes:

*"The steward's prayer manifests not only his trust in God to direct affairs, but also the selflessness with which he served Abraham. His patience after prayer (v. 21), his worship at answered prayer (v. 26), and his acknowledgment of divine guidance (v. 27) also portrayed his faith."*⁹

- This lesson is about the PROVIDENCE of God: the belief that God will provide just what we need as only He can.
- Just last week I saw a perfect example of this at work. (A story to share)
- What about you and me? Do we really believe God will provide?
- Do we believe it so much that we're willing to seek God for answers rather than trying to force events and circumstances into the answer we want?
- Are we willing to cooperate with His plans? Abraham's servant traveled 500 miles by camel both ways. Two months there and two months back. Some of us get impatient if God doesn't answer our prayer by next week!
- Are we willing to ask God in great faith for what we need and TRUST Him to do what's best?
- Do we slow down enough to notice when God does provide? Do we pause to worship Him when He does?
- What do you need God to provide for you this week? Are you wrestling with doubt, or waiting with anticipation?

¹ "Prayer Is the Key to Heaven Lyrics." Lyrics.net. STANDS4 LLC, 2015. Web. 27 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.lyrics.net/lyric/2138157>>.

² Explore the Bible Leader's Guide – Lifeway – P. 130

³ Abraham was now 140 years old (Gen. 21:5; 25:20) and would live another 35 years (25:7). Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). Be Obedient (p. 117). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Life Application Study Bible

⁵ Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible* (p. 34). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 117). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ Life Application Study Bible NKJV by Tyndale – P. 48

⁸https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Gen/Gen_24.cfm

⁹ The MacArthur Bible Commentary by John F. MacArthur