

GENESIS 23:1-25:11

TWO FUNERALS AND A WEDDING

Last week we learned a lot more about Abraham and his relationship with God. As promised, God came through. "And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age" – Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 – "at the time of which God had spoken to [Abraham]." That son was Isaac. He became the miracle child through whom all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled. God then tested Abraham to see if he fully understood this. How did Abraham do on this test? He passed it with flying colors. He got an A-plus.

This morning we're going to be looking at two funerals and a wedding beginning as we pick up in Genesis Chapter 23. Our lesson opens on a bit of a down note. Sarah, Abraham's beautiful and beloved wife dies.

READ Genesis 23:1-2

Remember, Abraham is dwelling in a foreign land. He doesn't own any property. Not yet. So, where can Abraham bury his wife? Abraham goes to the locals who are referred to as "the Hittites".

READ Genesis 23:3-4

Because Abraham has such a good reputation, the Hittites agree to sell him the cave of Machpelah and the adjacent field. This is basically what v 5-18 tell us. Abraham purchases this piece of land for 400 shekels of silver, which is approximately 150 ounces of silver.

READ Genesis 23:19-20

Abraham holds a funeral for Sarah and then buries her in the cave that he just purchased. This piece of property will be the only portion of the Promised Land that Abraham will possess during his lifetime. God will eventually, centuries later, lead his descendants to take possession of the entire land of Canaan that He promised to Abraham. But for now this one field and cave near Hebron are all that Abraham owns.

As we come to Genesis Chapter 24, thirteen years have passed since Sarah's death. Isaac is now a middle-aged man. In fact, he is about 40 years old. At this point he is still unmarried. Abraham knows that he needs to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac pretty soon. As we will see Abraham goes to great lengths to make sure that Isaac gets a godly wife. Isaac is the covenant son. In order to carry on the family line and to provide the multitude of descendants that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac will need a wife who will bear him children. So here we go...

READ Genesis 24:1-4

The servant in this passage is never named. Many Bible scholars believe, based on the description given of him in v 2, "the oldest of his household," that this servant is very likely Eliezer of Damascus. He was mentioned back in Genesis Chapter 15. Abraham has an important mission for his servant. He has him swear an oath to the Lord Himself that he will do exactly as Abraham directs. The mission is this: Go and find a wife for Isaac.

Well, this is no easy task. The land of Canaan where Abraham lives is filled with pagan people. The locals do not fear the one true God. By and large they are an idolatrous and sexually promiscuous people group. Abraham realizes that if he's going to be able to find a good wife for Isaac, it will most definitely NOT be here in the land of Canaan. Isaac's prospective wife will have to be a woman who comes from HIS homeland, where HIS relatives live, and where Abraham years before had found his own good wife, Sarah. So that's where he directs his servant to head.

READ Genesis 24:5

The servant asks Abraham an obvious question... "What if the woman is unwilling to come back here with me?" And he thinks he knows the answer to this question – he will just have to take Isaac to where she is – "back to the land from which you [Abraham] came." But Abraham makes it clear that this is NOT the plan.

READ Genesis 24:6-8

Why would Abraham be so adamant about Isaac not returning to his homeland but remaining in the land of Canaan? Well, it all stems back to the covenant promises God made to Abraham. One of these was a land promise. THIS land here – the land of Canaan – is what God promised to give to Abraham’s descendants as a permanent possession. It is THE Promised Land. After God moves Abraham and his family to the land of Canaan, Abraham never returns to his homeland. He remains in the land of Canaan. Likewise, Abraham’s son Isaac does not return either. Isaac is the direct heir to the same promises that God gave Abraham. This land right here is where Isaac will remain. By the way, this is an important insight on Abraham’s part. Later in Genesis Chapter 26 God is going to direct Isaac to remain in the land. And as we will see, Isaac obeys and stays. Isaac will become the only one of the patriarchs who never leaves the land of Canaan during his entire lifetime.

Notice what Abraham tells the servant in v 7 – don’t miss this – “The LORD, the God of heaven...will send His angel before you.” You have to remember that back then they didn’t have the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide them the same way we Christians are guided today. But Abraham, being the man of faith that he is, knows that his God will direct his servant to find the right woman for his son.

Abraham answers his servant’s concern. If for whatever reason the woman will not return with him, then he will be free from his oath. Just looking at this story in the context of everything we have been studying regarding the Abrahamic Covenant, I firmly believe that Abraham knows that God has a wife for Isaac. He would not send his servant hundreds of miles on a wild goose chase. The woman who will become Isaac’s wife will possess the same godly characteristics as Sarah. If God’s plan is to establish a covenant people for Himself through whom He intends to bless the nations, then it stands to reason that Abraham’s descendants must fear God and follow Him the same way that Abraham does. And a key ingredient to that is to have godly parents. Abraham and Sarah had raised Isaac to follow

God. If Isaac is going to raise his children to follow God then he must have a wife who herself fears and follows God.

READ Genesis 24:9-10

The servant swears an oath, which gives Abraham the assurance that he will do exactly as instructed. He takes 10 camels, provisions for the trip and "choice gifts." These gifts undoubtedly are the dowry that will be used in acquiring the bride-to-be. He sets out on the long journey. It will take several weeks and cover a distance of a little over 1000 miles. He travels northward from Mamre (near Hebron) which is due west of the Dead Sea, up the Jordan valley, past Damascus, around the Fertile Crescent, across the Euphrates, and into Mesopotamia. The text says he goes to the city of Nahor. Nahor is Abraham's brother and we know from Genesis Chapter 11 that all Abraham's siblings lived in or around Haran. So that's where the servant heads, to Haran.

READ Genesis 24:11

It's been a long tiring trip. The servant is on a mission to find a wife for Isaac. But first things first – he must water all of his camels. Notice God's providence at work here. The servant arrives in the evening. He just happens to go to the same well at the same time the women of the city are out drawing water. Is this mere coincidence or good planning? No, I do not think so! I believe it is a God thing, God ordained.

The servant does the right thing. He prays...

READ Genesis 24:12-14

There is a great lesson here for us! Notice how specific his prayer is. Whenever you study some of the great prayers of the Bible do not forget this one! His prayer declares praise and dependence on God. His prayer is also very specific. And I believe his prayer was Spirit directed.

Notice how quickly God answers the servant's prayer...

READ Genesis 24:15

It says, "Before he had finished speaking..." That's pretty quick!

READ Genesis 24:16-20

God answers the servant's prayer exactly as he had asked. And Rebekah appears to meet all the qualifications you would want for a wife for Isaac. She's from the right family. She's beautiful. She's sexually pure. She possesses godly character. She's hard-working. She's kind and she's respectful. On top of all of that, her offering to draw water for the servant's camels is a direct answer to the servant's prayer from earlier. Everything adds up!

READ Genesis 24:21

The servant just sits there watching her in silence. He's amazed! God is so good! But is this woman REALLY the one? It just seems almost too good to be true. Well, it's time to find out.

READ Genesis 24:22-25

Rebekah offers to draw water for the servant's camels which is a direct answer to his prayer! At this point the servant has no doubt that Rebekah is indeed THE one to whom God has led him. And what does he do realizing that God has answered his prayer? He thanks God. He worships the Lord.

READ Genesis 24:26-28.

There's a lesson for us here! How often have we seen God come through and not only does He answer our prayer, but He does it far better than we ever anticipated? And what is our reaction? Like this servant, we need to reverently praise and worship God for His goodness.

I love the servant's prayer, how he recognizes the character of God in v 27: "...who has not forsaken His steadfast love and His faithfulness toward my master." That's the character of God – love and faithfulness.

Well, you know the rest of the story. I won't take time to read it all. Let me just summarize what happens next – The servant meets Rebekah's

family. He relates for them the whole story about why he's there. He requests that Rebekah be allowed to return with him.

READ Genesis 24:50-53

With that the servant presents the family with the dowry he brought – jewelry of silver and gold and fine garments.

READ Genesis 24:54-57

The servant spends the night. The next day Rebekah's family voices their desire for her to stay with them just for a little while longer. But the servant is eager to hit the road.

READ Genesis 24:58-61

Off they go. The servant, Rebekah and her attendants ("her young women"), riding on camels, make the long journey southward to the land of Canaan where Abraham and Isaac are living.

Three weeks later...

READ Genesis 24:62-65

There is no courtship, no dating, just "Isaac, here's your wife!"

READ Genesis 24:66-67

So, the chapter ends on a happy note... we have a wedding! Or at least THEIR version of it. Isaac and Rebekah are united in marriage. God incredibly provides a wife for Isaac. As it turns out, she's a good, godly woman. After 13 years of grieving his mother's death, it says that Rebekah comforts Isaac. She fills a deep void in Isaac's life. Again, God is so good!

Well, I wish we could end it right there on a happy note. Unfortunately, Genesis Chapter 24 is followed by Chapter 25. We learn that Abraham remarries. He has multiple sons and grandsons.

READ Genesis 25:1-6

V 5 tells us that "Abraham gave all he had to Isaac." V 6 says that Abraham gave all his other sons gifts and then sent them all away to the east country, beyond the Jordan River valley. This is to ensure that there will be no threat to Isaac, no squabbling later on, but that Isaac will be recognized as the rightful heir to Abraham's estate. Abraham has learned from his past mistake with Hagar and Ismael that resentments can build up. He's not leaving anything open to the possibility of a future dispute. Isaac is HIS heir!

We end our lesson the same way we started, with another funeral. Who is it that dies this time? Our friend, Abraham.

READ Genesis 25:7-11

Abraham dies at the age of 175. It says, "a good old age... full of years. He lived a good, long, faithful and productive life. Isaac and Ismael are reunited and grieve together their father's passing. Unfortunately far too often that's where many of our family reunions take place, at funerals. And so it is here. As it turned out Abraham ended up spending the last 100 years of his life living in the land of Canaan as a foreigner. But he was so richly blessed by God.

Abraham is buried in the same cave as Sarah his wife. As we enter the next phase of our Genesis study and follow the life of Isaac.

Like God had done with his father, v 11, "God blessed Isaac." Though not nearly as remarkable as his father, Isaac is still the one who has been chosen by God. He is the one thru whom God will carry forward His promises and fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant.