



GENESIS

FOUNDATIONS



Studies in the book of Genesis
PART SIX— Genesis 20-24
Group Applications
Personal Study



FOUR OAKS CHURCH

Genesis 20, 21:22-34

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

— Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham and Abimelech

God promised Abraham that he would not only be the father of a nation that would bless all the families of the world, but also that all kings and nations who blessed him would themselves be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). The story of Abimelech and Abraham underscores that point. Abimelech the king of Gerar encounters Abraham and takes Sarah to be his wife. However, God tells Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife, and Abimelech releases her. This story shows us the gracious sovereignty of God.

First, God's sovereignty overrules Abraham's fears. Abraham lied about Sarah because he did not trust God's providence, just like in his encounter with Pharaoh. Abraham believed Abimelech would kill him to take Sarah as his wife. Instead, Abimelech shows his integrity by heeding the word of God warning him of Abraham's deception and responding with generosity to Abraham. Abimelech even says to the Lord that he is innocent and God confirms his integrity.

Second, God's sovereignty continues His promise. God intervened to prevent Abimelech from sinning so that the promised seed would come from Abraham. Not only did God preserve the seed as He promised, but He also blessed the nation that blessed Abraham. Pharaoh sent Abraham and Sarah out, but Abimelech gave them food and resources and allowed them to dwell freely in his land. Abimelech's hospitality to Abraham was rewarded with God healing the barrenness of his land. God is gracious to those even outside of Abraham's physical family.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. How would you define the word "blessing" in the Bible?

2. What is the church's role in blessing the nation?

Go

1. How would you explain God's care for his people to an unbeliever?

2. What are common difficulties people face with regard to God's sovereignty?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What is a habit that you've had a hard time breaking?
2. Abraham has done it again! Similar to his trip to Egypt, once again Abraham gives into fear and lies about his wife. What does this say about Abraham's faith and his fight against sin?
3. God rescues Abraham (and Sarah) from his sin again. What does this say about God's character towards His people? Also, how do God's actions fulfill His promises toward Abraham in Genesis 12?
4. What is an area/pattern of sin for which you need to repent? How might God rescue you? How might your group pray for and help you in this area?
5. When Abraham meets Abimelech again in chapter 21, how does he relate differently to Abraham this time? Why?
6. After establishing a covenant with Abimelech, Abraham calls on the name of the Lord as the Everlasting God. How might you praise God today?

Additional Reading

From Abimelech and Abraham¹

Abimelech, the king of Gerar, reappears in today's passage in order to seal a covenant that will prove to be very significant in the Lord's plan of redemption. Isaac's birth progresses Yahweh's promise toward its goal: a holy nation through which the world would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). This covenant with Abimelech in 21:22-34 is a substantial step forward regarding God's pledge of land (15:7-21).

Seeing that Abraham is blessed by the Lord, the king of Gerar seeks to make a pact with him. It is not clear how Abimelech knows the one, true God is with Abraham in all that he does; most likely he has witnessed the patriarch's general pattern of success, including the miraculous birth of Isaac. In any case, the king is evidently unnerved at Abraham's ascendancy. Abimelech seems to know this fortune will continue for the patriarch's children, and he assumes they might supplant his own kingdom (21:22-23).

¹Abimelech and Abraham // Ligonier Ministries, www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abimelech-and-abraham/.

Abraham agrees to make the proposed covenant, but not before scolding Abimelech about his servants' seizure of the patriarch's well (v. 25). Protesting his innocence, Abimelech receives a tribute of seven female sheep from Abraham, which signifies that the patriarch had indeed dug the well and had legal right to it (v. 26-32). After all this time, Abraham finally has physical proof that the Lord is going to give His family the land of Canaan. Access to water was necessary for life in the land, and so the well enables Abraham to set up permanent residence there (v. 33-34). His days as a nomad are over. Moreover, the name of the place Beersheba means "well of the oath," reminding everyone that Abraham's family has a just claim to the region.

Besides teaching the later generations of Israel that God gave Canaan into their hands, today's passage also reminded Moses' original audience they could make peace with certain inhabitants of the land. As with Rahab (Josh. 2; 6:22-25), Abraham's bond with Abimelech showed the Israelites they were to make peace with those who desired to embrace the blessings Yahweh had for the sons of Jacob. New covenant believers are also called to be peacemakers (Rom. 12:18), in order that many might enter the kingdom of Christ.

Genesis 21:1-7

Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "the LORD has done great things."
— Psalm 126:2

Nothing is Too Hard for the Lord

God's promise to Abraham of an heir by Sarah is fulfilled with the birth of Isaac. God is the one who enables Sarah to conceive (Gen 21:1) and He fulfills His promise at the exact time He said it would happen (Gen 17:21). This points to God's omnipotence, His sovereignty, but we also see how deeply God cares for Abraham and Sarah by answering their prayers for a child. There have been multiple accounts of Abraham and God discussing this long-awaited child and now that bringing has been satisfied in a way only God could cause to happen. It points as well to the birth of Jesus and His miraculous conception. But rather than a virgin birth, here we see old age being defeated as the reason Sarah should not have been able to become a mother. At 90, God allows Sarah to conceive, give birth, and then nurse her son. It's all because He is able to do more than we ask or think (Eph 3:20).

This story is so sweet, it makes me want to rejoice to the highest degree in praise of God for His love, mercy, awesome power, sovereignty, and faithfulness. Sarah seems to understand that all who hear about her becoming a mother in her later years will share her joy. She responds with laughter that is sincere, overflowing from her heart. She laughs in awe of what God has accomplished and knows everyone who hears will laugh with her. How right she is— here we are thousands of years later and we do share her joy!

In Luke we find a similar example. Elizabeth was also very old and childless, but God allows her to become a mother to a son who is John the Baptist. The Bible says, "When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they rejoiced with her." Luke 15:7-8. It is shared rejoicing of the great joy of creation, that laughter of comprehending just part of God's magnificence, that Sarah anticipates all will experience when they hear what God has done.

There is truly nothing too hard for God to accomplish. What an amazing and loving God He is!

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What is something you can praise God for today?

2. When have you experienced God's perfect timing in your life?

Go

1. Where is God calling you to rely more on His plan?

2. How can you relate this story to today's culture?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share when you waited a long time for God to answer a prayer. What was the situation? How did God come through?
2. Spend some time thanking and praising God for these answers to prayer.
3. Abraham and Sarah have waited all their lives to have a child, and now God has answered those prayers. How do you think they felt?
4. Following God's instruction (Gen 17:19), Abraham and Sarah named their son Isaac, meaning laughter. How might this name represent God's redemption in their lives?
5. What are you currently asking God for? Where might your heart be tempted as you wait on God?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for these needs and for contentment in the waiting.

Additional Reading

From God Laughs Out Loud to Quiet Our Fears¹

LAUGHTER IN THE BIBLE

Laughter wields communicative power in Scripture. It often mocks, scoffs, or derides (Genesis 21:9; 38:23; 39:14, 17; 2 Chronicles 30:10; Psalm 52:6; 80:6; Proverbs 12:6; Ezekiel 23:32; Habakkuk 1:10). A fool's laughter reveals his folly (Proverbs 29:9; Ecclesiastes 7:6), while the laughter of the righteous signals confidence in God (Psalm 52:6). Laughter even serves as a form of what we would call "flirting" today (Genesis 26:8).

And most important of all is God's laughter. Made in his image, we get our laughter from him — which may be why psychologists today recognize it as "one of the distinguishing features of human beings" even while acknowledging that "little is known about the mechanisms behind it."

¹Mathis, David. "God Laughs Out Loud to Quiet Our Fears." *Desiring God*, 6 Jan. 2020, www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-laughs-out-bud-to-quiet-our-fears.

HIS PEOPLE LAUGH WITH HIM

The laughter of God is simultaneously horrible and wonderful— horrible for those who oppose him, and wonderful for those in his house, for his children, for his people, for those who hear in his laughter the greatest joys in all the world and echo back his contagious laughter in their own.

For now, his enemies may chuckle with the laughter of unbelief, as they did at Jesus (Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:40; Luke 8:53), but we, like the excellent wife of Proverbs 31:25, "laugh at the time to come," and in doing so communicate our confidence in God to handle our greatest possible troubles.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we are on a spiritual journey from the laughter of unbelief (Genesis 17:17; 18:12-15) to the laughter of faith (Genesis 21:1-7), knowing we will not experience the fullness of God's own laughter in us in this age of sin and pain (Luke 6:25). For now, we don't only laugh. Often our laughter turns to mourning (James 4:9). "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief" (Proverbs 14:13). But unhindered, unending laughter will be our experience to come. Jesus says, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). For now, there is "a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). One day, we will laugh forever, and like never before.

Genesis 21:8-21

And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction.

— Genesis 16 :11

Hagar and Ishmael

Sarah and Hagar represent two paths of life: belief and unbelief. Abraham and Sarah in their unbelief orchestrated a scheme to impregnate Hagar to fulfill God's promise. In doing so, they decided their human efforts were sufficient rather than trusting in God's promise. However, God did not leave Hagar out to dry, but cared for her and her son Ishmael. God shows compassion on a woman who had no power to act for herself. He not only provided for her when Sarah cast her out, but promised to bless her son. Ishmael was an illegitimate child, but God promised to make him a great nation. When Hagar and Ishmael sojourned in the desert at Be'er-lavai, God told her not to fear. God was with them.

We see God's grace in this account. Sarah cast Hagar out as a mistake, but God never cast her out. Instead, God showered her with grace and cared for her. We must remember that God deals with sinners. He deals with people who have blown it big time. He also deals with those who find themselves cast out because of other people's sinful decisions. And yet through it all, God remains with those who have been sinned against. He remains with those who weep and cry out to Him. God does not count Hagar's life as cheap. He does not view her story as collateral damage. He stoops down to care for and bless her.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What does this passage teach us about God's compassion?

2. What is the significance of Ishmael becoming a great nation?

Go

1. How does God care for unbelievers?

2. How would you use Hagar's story to share the gospel?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you felt lonely or abandoned. What was the situation? Did it get resolved, and if so, how?
2. Sarah once again wants to send Hagar away. What does this reveal about Sarah's heart? What can we learn about jealousy and its effects on our lives?
3. When Hagar is sent away, how does God relate to her? What does this show us about God's character towards those who are lonely, needy, or oppressed (consider reading Psalm 34:15-18)?
4. What currently troubles you or causes you fear? How do you desire for God to provide for you? What steps of faith might you take toward God, who hears you, loves you, and is with you?
5. Spend some time as a group praying for one another.

Additional Reading

From *God Rescues Ishmael*

Abraham's reluctance to send away his son Ishmael is evident in his anger toward Sarah's demand (Gen. 21:11) as well as the need for the Lord to tell him to do as his wife has said (vv. 12-13). Once he has heard from God, Abraham obeys, but he does so halfheartedly. He only gives Hagar bread and a skin of water (v. 14), hardly enough supplies for a desert journey. Many commentators therefore suggest the patriarch wanted Hagar and Ishmael to remain close by, and so he provides only a meager supply of food and drink so that they cannot get very far.

However, Abraham is not the only one concerned for Ishmael and his mother. Today's passage finds Hagar and her son lost in the wilderness with no water left to drink. We are meant to sympathize with the Egyptian maid-servant's plight; her abandonment of the youth under a bush and retreat to a cave outside the earshot of his cries emphasize the dire situation she faces (vv. 15-16). Yet our sympathy is certainly not enough to help this poor mother. Only heavenly intervention can rescue this family.

¹"God Rescues Ishmael" Ligonier Ministries, www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-rescues-ishmael/.

The Lord has a special place in His heart for the afflicted (Ps. 140:12), and we should not be amazed that He rescues Hagar and her son from starvation (Gen. 21:17-19). His attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael is vastly different than Sarah's. Though He endorses Ishmael's removal in order to eliminate the threat to Isaac's inheritance, the Lord does not share Sarah's cruel motivations. This helps explain how the Lord works out His will. God sovereignly ordains everything that happens, including tragedy (Eph. 1:11). But as we see today, He never has the same callous heart as those who cause suffering.

Ishmael is not the chosen seed, but God remembers His promise (Gen. 17:20) and works to make him a great nation nonetheless. Hagar acts rightly, securing a wife for Ishmael like Abraham will do for Isaac (Q120-21; 24). Thus, Ishmael receives gracious benefits even though he is not one of the Lord's people. And thus, as Matthew Henry reminds us, "many are full of the blessings of God's providence who are strangers to the blessings of His covenant."

Genesis 22

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

— Mark 1:9-11

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

— Colossians 1:19-20

The Lord Will Provide

OUR FAITHFUL FATHER

He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22:2)

There are some passages of scripture that simply catch your breath, stop you in your tracks and make you uncomfortable. Genesis 22 is one of those passages. God asks a father to sacrifice his son, and the father obeys. He gathers his supplies and journeys for three days to a mountain where he is to offer his son as a sacrifice. Once on the mountain, his son asks him where the lamb is for the offering. His answer is simple. "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." This is a powerful example of Abraham's faith, but it is not the whole story. This story points to another Father and Son. A greater sacrifice. A bigger love.

This Father and Son would also make a sacrifice. But it would be for the whole world. This Father would send His only and dearly loved Son into a world that would reject Him,

mock Him, and deny Him. This obedient Son would climb to His place of sacrifice and give His life for ours. This beloved Son would then experience the sorrow of being forsaken by His Father because He made Him self-sin for us.

Matthew Henry describes the separation this way:

"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Surely never sorrow was like unto that sorrow which extorted such a complaint as this from one who, being perfectly free from sin, could never be a terror to himself; but the heart knows its own bitterness. No wonder that such a complaint as this made the earth to quake, and rent the rocks; for it is enough to make both the ears of every one that hears it to tingle, and ought to be spoken of with great reverence."

God provided the ram in the thicket to take Isaac's place. He knew what would be needed, and in His grace and mercy He provided it. God provided again in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God knew what would be needed, and in His grace and mercy He provided it. He knew we would never be able to defeat sin on our own accord. He knew we would falter, fall, and fail, time and time again. He knew there would be only one way to salvation and He provided it.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What does Genesis 22 teach us about God's character?

2. Why is the theme of sacrifice so important in Genesis 22?

Go

1. What are some ways people might object to what happens in Genesis 22?

2. How does Genesis 22 illustrate the gospel?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time your faith was tested. What were the circumstances? How did you meet or not meet the test?
2. Consider the circumstances of Abraham's test in Genesis 22. How might all of these circumstances make this test so difficult?
3. Abraham passes the test. What does this reveal about his faith (see Hebrews 11:17-19)?
4. Now consider Isaac's response to his father Abraham. How does this reflect Isaac's trust in his father and his God?
5. How does this story help us learn about God the Father and God the Son when Jesus dies on the cross? How are you led to praise God today?
6. Spend some time as a group praising God for His character and deeds towards us as His people, particularly at the cross.

Additional Reading

From *God Will Never, Never Break His Promise*¹

How might Isaac have explained to his young sons, Jacob and Esau, why God had commanded his father, Abraham, to offer him as a burnt offering (Genesis 22)?

"Father, tell Esau to stop shooting at me!" Isaac knelt down between his eight-year-old twins who were supposed to be sleeping. Esau had been firing imaginary arrows in the dark at Jacob, who could hear Esau's "pheoo" with every shot.

"You have a shield, Jacob. It's called ignoring him. Use it, Esau," Isaac said.

"Yes, Father."

Isaac couldn't help letting a chuckle slip, "Stop shooting your brother."

There was a giggle in the darkness. "Yes, Father."

¹Bonom, Jon. "God Will Never, Never Break His Promise." *Desiring God*, 6 Jan. 2020, www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-will-never-never-break-his-promise.

"Father?" Jacob asked.

"Yes, my Son."

"Was Grandfather Abraham really going to stab you with the knife?" The boy had been pondering the strange, disturbing story his father had told them the previous night.

"He would have if God had wanted him to."

"Did God really want him to?"

"That's a good question. What God really wanted was for Father Abraham to trust him."

"Did you know Grandfather Abraham was going to sacrifice you?"

"No. I noticed we didn't have a lamb. But when I asked him about it he said, 'God will provide for himself a lamb.'"

"Did that mean you were the lamb?"

"Well, it looked like I was the lamb. But the main thing is that Father Abraham trusted God and was willing to obey him even if he didn't fully understand."

"But if you had died, Esau and I wouldn't have been born."

Isaac paused thoughtfully. "I don't think that's true, Jacob. Because God had made a promise to Father Abraham. Do you remember? He said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named' (Genesis 21:12). When God makes a promise, He never breaks it. That means He knew I would grow up and have offspring and that you two would be my offspring."

"But if you died, how could you have offspring?"

"I asked Father Abraham the same question. And he told me that he believed that God would keep his promise and if God was asking him to sacrifice me, then God must have planned to bring me back to life from the dead."

Esau interjected, "Like a ghost?"

"No, not like a ghost. God would have healed me and made me alive again, just like I am now."

Jacob continued, "But He didn't do that. God made a ram get caught in the bushes."

"That's right. God provided the sacrifice just like He promised. And it wasn't me, God be praised!"

"But why did God tell Grandfather Abraham to make you the sacrifice if He knew He was going to provide the ram?"

"Well, I don't know all of God's reasons, Son. He always has more than He tells us. But remember what I told you last night. God told Grandfather Abraham: 'By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice' (Genesis 22:16-18). So, Jacob, you tell me: why did God tell Father Abraham to offer me as the sacrifice?"

Jacob thought for a moment. "To see if Grandfather would obey him?"

"Yes. But it was also to show us—me and you and Esau and your children some day and their children—what it means to trust God. Father Abraham trusted God so much that he was willing to even sacrifice the fulfillment of God's promise (me) because he believed that God would still fulfill His promise. That's important to understand because the promise God made to Father Abraham He is also making to you: 'In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' Someday you're going to have to trust that God will keep His promise even when it looks like He won't. When that happens, remember Father Abraham and say with him, 'The Lord will provide' (Genesis 22:14). Does that make sense?"

"Yes, Father," said Jacob.

"Now, what the Lord wants to provide for you tonight is sleep. So let's have it quiet."

Two tired voices responded, "Yes, Father."

As soon as Isaac's footsteps faded away Jacob heard a sound in the dark: "pheeoo."

As he walked toward Moriah with Isaac, Abraham must have felt confused and heartbroken beyond words. He didn't understand all that God was doing. He didn't know He was illustrating for God's people for all time what justifying faith looked like (James 2:21-23). He didn't know this act would foreshadow the sacrifice of God's only Son—a Son who would not be spared because he was the provided Lamb (John 1:29). He only knew that God knew what He was doing and that God could be trusted to keep His promise even if it appeared like the promise was going to die (Hebrews 11:19). And God proved Him self faithful to Abraham. He will prove Him self faithful to you as well.

Genesis 23

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.
The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have
a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me
counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the
Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall
not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole
being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not
abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see
corruption.

- Psalm 16:5-10

The Death of Sarah

Abraham's faith in God and God's continual promises to him are key themes within Genesis. Here we see Abraham following the testing of his faith through the sacrifice of Isaac, and mourning the death of his wife Sarah. It would be natural for us to question: will Abraham continue to hold faith in God?

After a period of mourning, Abraham presents himself before the city gates to ask for a burial plot for Sarah. The custom of public decisions and transactions being made at the city gates is well recorded within scripture (Ruth 4:1-11). Abraham is following the customs of the land, having now lived within Canaan for roughly 60 years. And yet, Abraham identifies not with the people around him, but as a sojourner and foreigner. He is holding fast to the promises that God has for him while aware of the painful fact that this is not yet his fleshed out reality.

Even as Abraham is following tradition and adhering to cultural customs, he is also setting a precedent. His financial exchange with Ephron, son of Zohar, allows him to purchase the field in Machpelah as a final dwelling place for Sarah. This is the first description of a burial within scripture, and the ones to immediately follow are of those who would have learned by Abraham's example (namely, his children).

The tension in this passage could be easy to miss but is rich in what it reveals about

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What ways do you doubt God's promises to you?

2. How do you respond to the "death" of good things in your life?

Go

1. How would you explain the concept of a covenantal promise to a non-believer?

2. In what ways can you demonstrate faith in God's promises to others, despite feeling like a sojourner?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Describe some different ways our culture deals with death. How might these be good or not good?
2. Share a time that someone close to you passed away. How did you deal with this loss?
3. After many years of marriage, Abraham's wife Sarah passes away and Abraham mourns her loss and then purchases a burial plot (a cave). What might we learn from this story related to dealing with the death of a loved one?
4. In John 10, Jesus mourns the loss of Lazarus. Psalm 56:8 records that God keeps count of all our tossings and our tears. How might these and other passages help us understand God amid our loss and pain? How might we learn from Him in ministering to others in their mourning?
5. Today, is there any loss which you need to mourn over? Today, who might God be calling you to comfort in their pain?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for these things mentioned in question 5.

Additional Reading

Throughout Genesis, God uses land to cast an illustration of His covenantal promises to us. He first does this through His creation of the dwelling place of Eden for Adam and Eve (Gen 2:8-15), then again with Noah and dry land (Gen 8:14-19) and then, most notably, with the calling of Abram (Gen 12:7).

This particular passage introduces us to the only parcel of land that Abraham owned within Canaan, reminding us of God's faithfulness and patience. Abraham's life of faith was that of a sojourner, yet even in his wandering, God provided a final resting place within the land originally promised. What a mercy this is!

This particular land appears again later in Genesis on several occasions. Firstly, Abraham himself dies and "his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah" (Gen 25:9). Again, it appears when Jacob urges his sons to bury him where "they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah" (Gen 49:31). This land is significant to those who are buried alongside Sarah, just as the promise of a dwelling place is significant to God.

Later in scripture, the illustration of a dwelling place shifts away from physical land to the new promise—the promise offered through not the burial of the mother of all nations but the burial of the king of all nations (Rev 15). This passage points to the later coming of Christ and His physical dwelling upon the Earth, then burial and resurrection bringing us into a new covenant. The life of faith is now that of being built together with the body as the dwelling place for God through the Spirit made possible by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:18-22).

Genesis 24

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

— Acts 17:26-27

Down to the Details

Abraham's story is full of miraculous interventions from start to finish. God called him out of his land to follow Him and birth a new nation. God saved him from the Egyptians. God granted a son to him in his old age. God communed with him. God dined with him. God showed up in lots of "big" ways. But here in this passage we see God's involvement in even the small details. Abraham asked his servant to go and find a wife for Isaac. So the servant leaves Abraham's camp (in modern-day Israel) and travels about 500 miles north back to Abraham's home town in search of a wife for Isaac. Upon reaching the home town, the servant prays that God would orchestrate Project "Get Isaac a Wife." And God did just that! Rebekah showed up at exactly the right time and offered water to both the servant and his camels—her hospitality indicated that this was the one whom God had chosen for Isaac. Just think about this for a second: God orchestrated an interaction between two people, from two families, from two cities, who were separated by 500 miles (a journey that could have taken a couple of months each way). He determined and actualized their meeting at a well in the tiny town of Nahor. God decreed not only that a 100-year-old man and his 90-year-old wife would naturally give birth to a son who would father the nation whose most glorious descendant would be the Savior of the world, but God also decreed and planned out and executed the finding of a wife for that son—at a well in Nahor, surrounded by a dozen lovely-smelling camels. It's tempting to have a myopic view of God's work in the world—to think that God is more involved in the "big" events. This passage blows that view of providence out of the water. God is as involved in the small events as He is in the big events. To God, nothing is big or small. All of it is part of His story. May we draw comfort from God's providential orchestration of all things for His glory and the good of His church. Amen.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What are some ways in which God has been faithful in ordinary ways to you?

2. What does this passage teach us about trusting God?

Go

1. How would you explain God's care for His people in the small things to an unbeliever?

2. What is our culture's view of divine intervention? How does it relate to the Bible's view?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share your story (or your parents' story if you're not married) leading up to marriage—when & how you met, any fun dating memories, how long your engagement was.
2. Abraham asks his servant (most likely Eliezer of Genesis 15:2) to make a solemn oath to find a wife for Isaac. Based on this oath, what do we learn was most important to Abraham when finding a spouse? How might this be the same or different from what our culture deems most important?
3. As Eliezer interacts with Rebekah, what do we learn about this woman's character? How might Rebekah serve as a godly example for us?
4. Take some time as a community group to affirm one another's character. For married couples, have the husband affirm his wife and vice versa.
5. God providentially leads Eliezer to the right place and the right person for Isaac. What can we learn from this story about making decisions? For those who aren't married, what can we learn from this story related to waiting for the right spouse?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for your marriages and/or praying for those who aren't married.

Additional Reading

From *The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty* by Jonathan Edwards (1735)

God is worthy to be sovereign over all things. Sometimes men are the owners of more than they are worthy of. But God is not only the owner of the whole world...but such is his perfection, the excellency and dignity of his nature, that he is worthy of sovereignty over all. No man ought in the temper of his mind to be opposite to God's exercising the sovereignty of the universe, as if he were not worthy of it; for to be the absolute sovereign of the universe is not a glory or dignity too great for him. All things in heaven and earth, angels and men, are nothing in comparison with him; all are as the drop of the bucket, and as the light dust of the balance. It is therefore fit that every thing should be in his hands, to be disposed of according to his pleasure.

His will and pleasure are of infinitely greater importance than the will of creatures. It is fit that his will should take place, though contrary to the will of all other beings; that he should make himself his own end; and order all things for himself.

God is possessed of such perfections and excellencies as to qualify him to be the absolute sovereign of the world.

Certainly it is more fit that all things be under the guidance of a perfect unerring wisdom, than that they should be left to themselves to fall in confusion, or be brought to pass by blind causes. Yea, it is not fit that any affairs within the government of God should be left without the direction of his wise providence; least of all, things of the greatest importance.



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