



ABRAHAM STUDY GUIDE

A 10 WEEK DEEP DIVE INTO THE LIFE & WALK OF ABRAHAM

QUESTIONS:

1. In this chapter, God's providential care is extended to the next generation of Abraham's offspring. What role does the concept of offspring play in God's covenantal promises to Abraham?

See, for example, Genesis 17.

2. While Isaac could have taken a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites, Abraham goes through the much more difficult process of finding a woman of his own lineage, and so he must go through the trouble of sending his servant on a journey of hundreds of miles. And he does this because of his commitment to God's covenant with him. When in your life did obeying God's will require much more from you than you would have had to give, had you ignored God?

10: OFFSPRING

GENESIS 24

What is the longest individual story in the book of Genesis? Is it the one that tells of God's covenant with Abraham, establishing him as the forefather of the people of God? Is it the supreme test of his faith on Mount Moriah? No. Oddly, it is the final one, which introduces Rebekah, the wife of Abraham's son, Isaac. More space is given to this one story than to all those that seem to tower over it in terms of their overall importance in the history of God's work in the world.

The question of why this is the case is one more of the big mysteries of Genesis. While we can't be sure, it seems to be that this is the story that first carries forth the mission of God beyond Abraham, where God extends his sovereign hand over the next generation. Note the central importance of offspring in God's covenant with Abraham. The Lord, who has been faithful to Abraham, can be trusted to also bless those who follow in his footsteps.

FAITHFUL TO THE PROMISE

When the chapter begins, Abraham is advanced in years and confined to his bed. A bride must be found for Isaac, but Abraham is determined that she must not be one of the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land he dwells. Rather, she must be chosen from his own extended family, even though they all live hundreds of miles north in Haran. Ever since God initially established his covenant with Abraham, it has been clear that the covenantal Promised Land is to belong to his offspring, not those of the Canaanites, who would ultimately fall under God's judgment because of their sinful practices.[1] In order to honor this, Abraham sends his most trusted servant to his family, living in the distant north. Abraham's commitment to God's agenda is so strong, in fact, that he absolves his servant of all responsibility, should the woman be unwilling to live with Isaac in Canaan. "Only you must not take my son back there." [2] His purpose is to ensure that his family would remain in the land that God had sworn to give them. [3]

After a journey that would have taken nearly a month, the servant, bearing lavish gifts for a bride, arrives outside the city of Abraham's brother Nahor. As he waits by the city's well, he prays, asking God to reveal to him the young lady to be wed to Isaac. His plan is to ask a woman for a drink from her jar, and if she responds, "Drink, and I will water your camels," then he will know that she is the one.

THIS AT LAST IS FLESH OF MY FLESH

The events that unfold are told in such a way as to emphasize that not only is Rebekah the one, but that she exceeds all expectations in every possible way. Before the prayer is done, she arrives. She is attractive, unmarried, and more hospitable than Abraham's servant could have imagined. His prayer was that she would offer to water his camels, but she replies that she will do so, "until they have finished drinking." [4] Then, bursting into action, she proceeds to



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3. In this passage, Abraham's servant discerns the will of God through answered prayer. Has there ever been a time when God has revealed his special will for you, and how did you know?

4. Rebekah is portrayed as a woman who is committed to following God, even if her family is more interested in stalling (vv. 54–58). When was a time when you boldly followed God into the unknown? Is there a way in which you are being challenged to do this now?

thoroughly water all ten of his thirsty camels, each of which would have consumed as much as twenty-five gallons.

Abraham's servant then presents several valuable gifts to Rebekah—a nose ring weighing half a shekel and two ten-shekel bracelets for her arm.[5] And he asks her whose daughter she is and whether he might lodge at her father's house for the night. When she tells him what we already know from verse 15—that she is the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel[6]—and that there is indeed plenty of room and food for him and his camels, it is clear that the Lord has blessed the servant's journey, and he launches into praise, that the Lord has indeed “shown steadfast love to his master.”[7]

Back at the family homestead, the servant is introduced to Rebekah's brother Laban, who is acting as his family's spokesman, even though his father is still alive.[8] This is the same Laban who will later play an important role in the Jacob narratives, where he proves to be a huckster intent on milking as much financial gain as possible from the chosen family.[9] True to form, he lays eyes on the ring and the bracelets, given to his sister by a messenger standing next to ten expensive camels, and this prompts him to welcome Abraham's servant with open arms: “Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”[10]

But before he is willing to accept the family's hospitality, Abraham's servant insists on doing what he was sent to do. He makes it known that the fabulous wealth he bears is not his own, but his master's. Then, in meticulous detail, he recounts his journey so far, including the very specific ways God has acted to bring him to Rebekah. To us, this might seem like needless repetition, but it is actually a way of underscoring what God has done in providentially guiding him to their family. He then tells them of the way in which the Lord has blessed his master Abraham, all the way back in Canaan, both with fabulous wealth, as well as with a son in his old age. This is the same God who now has brought him to their house, having confirmed in an amazing way that Rebekah is indeed the chosen wife for Isaac.[11]

The family agrees to the marriage, and gifts are exchanged. The next day, after attempting to stall his return (this foreshadows Laban's actions with Jacob years later), Rebekah steps in and asserts her own desire to go with him to be married to Isaac. Far from being an unwitting bartering chip between two families, Rebekah is shown to be willing and enthusiastic about becoming part of a family that is so obviously blessed by God.

“HE LOVED HER”

The final scene is a picturesque description of the love between Isaac and Rebekah when they first meet each other. Isaac is meditating in the field. The sun is setting. “And he lifted up his eyes, and he looked, and behold—camels were coming!”[12] Still far off, Rebekah turns to the servant and inquires about the man in the distance. Upon learning that this indeed is Isaac, she covers herself with a veil. Isaac receives her, the two are married, and, we are told, “he loved her.”[13]

LOOKING FORWARD

God's plan for redemption is now moving forward. The promise of offspring as numerous as the stars in the heavens, who would inherit the land of Canaan, and through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, is now being given to the next generation, as the saga of Abraham's family unfolds. As God counted Abraham's faith in him as righteousness, so this will be the standard to which all his descendants will be held. Will they trust in



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5. In what sense is Abraham, the man of faith, truly a “father of many nations”?

God’s promises to them, or will they turn to their own ways, pursuing their own agendas, and worshipping gods whom they think will give them what they want when they want it?

What better way to conclude our study of the life of Abraham, than to meditate on Paul’s words in the book of Romans, which reflect back on him as a model of all who trust in his God:

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:16-15).

[1] Genesis 15:12-16. [2] Genesis 24:8.

[3] John Walton’s commentary is helpful here: “At this early stage, intermarriage with the people of the land would risk assimilation into those people and thus jeopardize the covenant promises of the land to Abraham’s descendants. He is personally not going to achieve those promises through intermarriage any more than through conquest or purchase. This also allows the Israel of Moses’ audience to understand that the people that they are to drive out of the land are not related to them in any way” (Genesis, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 529).

[4] Genesis 24:18-19. [5] A shekel weighed between 2 & 2 1/2 ounces.

[6] Making Rebekah Isaac’s second cousin. [7] Genesis 24:14.

[8] Genesis 24:50. [9] Genesis 28-31.

[10] Domesticated camels were so rare in Abraham’s time (early second millennium BC) that they would have been seen as an exotic luxury. This has led some skeptical scholars to see their presence in the patriarchal narratives as a historical fiction. Osteological evidence dated significantly earlier than the patriarchal era, however, demonstrates exactly what seems to be at play in Genesis—domesticated camels were rare and the privilege of the wealthy. But they were by no means nonexistent (see J. Zarinis, “Camel,” Anchor Bible Dictionary 1.824-26; M. Ripinsky, “The Camel in Ancient Arabia,” Antiquity 49 [1975]: 295-98; Kenneth Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 339). [11] Genesis 24:34-48

[12] Genesis 24:63. [13] Genesis 24:67.