The Patriarchs from the book of Genesis Part 18 – December 17, 2023

With input from https://www.bibleref.com/Genesis24

https://www.gotquestions.org/hand-under-thigh.html; https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/the-best-way-of-getting-out-of-the-whole-canaanite-genocide-thing-and-it-comes-right-from-the-bible-but-you-may-not-like-it/: https://bible.org/seriespage/how-find-godly-wife-genesis-241-67

Last week we evaluated the very public negotiation and transaction between Abraham and Ephron the Hittite. Abraham buys his first real estate in the ‘promised land.” By taking this action he is showing his full commitment to staying in the promised land and that is now his home.

**Genesis 24:1-6:**

*Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. 2 Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household who was in charge of all that he owned, “Please place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live; 4 but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”*

*5 The servant said to him, “Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?” 6 Then Abraham said to him, “Beware that you do not take my son back there!*

Now let’s dissect:

**Genesis 24:1:** *Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way.*

Scripture often uses this language at the end of a person's life to set up their final actions. Abraham, however, will apparently not die for another 35 years or so (Genesis 25:1–11). In fact, he will marry another wife and have several more children. Still, Abraham's conversation as reported in this chapter contains his final recorded words in Genesis.

Many times in Genesis, God promised to bless Abraham. This is one of the few verses which indicate that God had, indeed, blessed him "in all things." In addition to the birth of Isaac, God had blessed Abraham with great wealth and status in the land. He had not yet received the promised possession of the land of Canaan promised to his offspring, but Abraham was known as blessed by God in all things.

**Genesis 24:2:** *Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household who was in charge of all that he owned, “Please place your hand under my thigh,*

Here he selects his most trusted servant, and the oldest of all his servants, for a crucial assignment. This servant is never named, but we are told that he was in charge of everything Abraham owned. He was Abraham's right-hand man. Earlier in the book of Genesis, Abraham named a man, Eliezer, as his prospective heir, since at that time he had no sons (Genesis 15:2). At that point in time, Eliezer would probably have been considered Abraham's "most trusted" servant. The man Abraham speaks to here, decades later, might be the same person, and many interpreters assume this is the case. However, chapter 24 never specifically names him, so this might well be a different person.

Abraham begins by asking the servant to swear a sacred oath to complete the assignment he's about to give him. That request is concluded in the following verse.

In our culture, taking an oath usually involves raising the right hand or placing a hand over the heart or on a Bible. In ancient Hebrew culture, we find something a little different. Genesis 24:9 describes an odd practice that involved Abraham’s servant swearing to obey his master’s command to find a wife for Isaac: “So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.” In Genesis 47:29, Jacob makes his son Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan, not Egypt. The same ritual is observed: Joseph is required to put his hand under Jacob’s thigh as he makes the promise. It seems strange to us, but placing one’s hand under someone else’s thigh had a symbolic purpose.

In both cases, the request is made by a patriarch nearing death. Also, both oaths deal with family matters. In the case of Abraham and Jacob, the family was blessed by God Himself (Genesis 15:5; 28:14).

The thigh was considered the source of posterity in the ancient world. Or, more properly, the “loins” or the testicles. The phrase “under the thigh” could be a euphemism for “on the loins.” There are two reasons why someone would take an oath in this manner: 1) Abraham had been promised a “seed” by God, and this covenantal blessing was passed on to his son and grandson. Abraham made his trusted servant swear “on the seed of Abraham” that he would find a wife for Isaac. 2) Abraham had received circumcision as the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:10). Our custom is to swear on a Bible; the Hebrew custom was to swear on circumcision, the mark of God’s covenant. The idea of swearing on one’s loins is found in other cultures, as well. The English word testify is directly related to the word testicles.

Jewish tradition also offers a different interpretation. According to Rabbi Ibn Ezra, the phrase “under the thigh” means literally that. For someone to allow his hand to be sat on was a sign of submission to authority. If this is the symbolism, then Joseph was showing his obedience to his father by placing his hand under Jacob’s thigh.

Abraham’s servant kept his oath. He not only obeyed Abraham’s instructions, but he also prayed to Abraham’s God for help. In the end, God miraculously provided Rebekah as the choice for Isaac’s wife (Genesis 24).

In the New Testament, believers are taught not to make oaths, but rather to let their “yes” mean “yes” and “no” mean “no” (James 5:12). That is, we should consider all our words to have the weight of an oath. Others should be able to trust our words without requiring an oath - God among them.

Strange as that may sound to modern culture, this was a gesture of profound symbolism. It implied that the one swearing the oath would answer to the other man's seed—his offspring—if the oath was not kept.

Abraham, however, also insists that his servant also swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, binding him to answer to God if he failed to do as promised. Abraham, apparently concerned that he might die before Isaac could be married, asks his servant to swear not to let Isaac marry a local, Canaanite woman. In the following verse, he will add that Isaac must marry a woman from Abraham's former homeland and extended family. Further, though, Abraham will insist that Isaac not be allowed to leave Canaan to search for this bride (Genesis 24:5–8).

**Genesis 24:2-3:** *“Please place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live;*

Abraham is concerned, even in this first generation, that God's people maintain a separate and distinct identity from the people of the land of Canaan.

Later, the Israelites will be officially commanded by God not to intermarry with the people of the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1–4). Then, as now, the issue has nothing to do with race. Rather, the concern is over faith—avoiding the particularly wicked practices of the Canaanite people.

**Exodus 23:27-30:** I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. 28 And I will send the pestilence in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. 29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.

**Leviticus 18:24-28:** *Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. 25 Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you 27 (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); 28 otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.*

**Leviticus 20:22-23:** *You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. 23 You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them.*

In Exodus 23, it looks like a pestilence of some sort (famine? locusts?) by God’s hand is what will drive out the Canaanites: it will throw them into confusion and so they will turn their backs on the Israelites. This process, we are told, will happen gradually. But note there is no word of annihilating the Canaanites by war.

In Leviticus, we see another side to all this. Note the use of the past tense in these passages. Even though these words from God are spoken on Mt. Sinai, i.e., before Israel entered Canaan 40 years later, the expulsion of the inhabitants of Canaan is something God did. The Canaanites are vomited out of the land already.

**Genesis 24:4-6:** *but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”* *The servant said to him, “Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?” 6 Then Abraham said to him, “Beware that you do not take my son back there!*

This man is explicitly charged with finding a woman of Abraham's extended family, in his old homeland, Mesopotamia, outside of Canaan. Before swearing to do so, however, the servant responds with a reasonable objection: What if I find a girl, but she doesn't want to travel away from her family to a strange land to marry a man she's never seen? Should I then take Isaac back to your people to live among them?

The servant's question is very reasonable. He needs to know if marrying a girl from Abraham's people is so critical that Isaac should be taken to live in Abraham's former old homeland, if no woman will agree to come to Canaan. Abraham's response will fully resolve that question—his absolutely forbids the servant to allow Isaac to return to Mesopotamia. Abraham does not want to jeopardize, in any way, his descendants' possession of the Promised Land.

**Genesis 24:7:** *The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give this land’—He will send His angel ahead of you, and you will take a wife for my son from there.*

Where did Abraham's confidence that God would work in this way come from? He remembered that the Lord did the exact same thing in his own life. He came to Abraham in the land of his own people and took him from his father's house and promised to give the land of Canaan to his offspring (Genesis 12:1–7). If God did that in Abraham's life, the Lord would also do that in the life of this woman Isaac was meant to marry.

Abraham's confidence in God's ability to move people where He wanted them was based on the experience of God acting in his own life. We, too, can have confidence in God's ability to work in the circumstances of others as He has worked in ours.

**Genesis 24:8-9:** *But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free of this oath of mine; only do not take my son back there.” 9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham, and swore to him concerning this matter.*

Now, though, Abraham assures his servant that if he's wrong, meaning if the woman is not willing to return to Canaan, then the servant will be released from the oath. The most important thing is that his servant not take Isaac out of Canaan under any circumstances. Did Abraham make this concession because he suddenly doubted God would provide? Probably not. More likely is that Abraham wanted to reassure his servant. This would make it easier for the man to swear to take on this mission without himself having to be confident that God would supernaturally intervene.

**Genesis 24:10-12:** *Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and went out with a variety of good things of his master’s in his hand; so he set out and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water when it was evening, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 And he said, “Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.*

The servant takes with him a demonstration of Abraham's great wealth, beginning with ten camels. In that era of the Middle East, apparently, camels, were not yet common. To bring ten of these rare, useful animals would communicate great riches to the family of any perspective wives. In addition, the servant packed a variety of expensive gifts to present to a potential bride and her family.

Custom demanded that a suitor give gifts to the bride's family. Abraham's servant would make sure not to fail in his quest due to a lack of generosity.

Sufficiently equipped, the servant soon arrived at his destination in the city of Nahor. Nahor was the name of Abraham's brother (Genesis 11:27), making this a good place to start looking for a bride among Abraham's kinsmen.

Having arrived at his destination in the evening, Abraham's servant needed to water the camels. He makes them kneel down by the town well outside the city. It was the time women would typically come to the well to draw water for their families. Abraham's servant is likely tired from his journey, but he has a specific plan in mind to find the right woman for his master's son.

Now, he prays to God. More specifically, the servant prays to Abraham's God for Abraham's sake. He asks Abraham's God to give him success in this mission of Abraham's. And He asks that God would, in doing so, show His steadfast love to Abraham.

Has there ever been a more servant-minded servant? Not only is he doing what his master has asked, he is doing it with the prayer that his master's God would show love to his master.

**Genesis 24:10-12:** *And it came about, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. 16 The young woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had had relations with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.*

The servant's plan is this: He will ask the young women to draw some water for him to drink. The one God has chosen will be the one who says, "Drink, and I will water your camels also." What this young woman would be offering in watering the camels would not be a small task. Abraham's servant had ten thirsty camels with him. That will require drawing a lot of heavy water.

In addition to seeking a divine confirmation from God about which girl is the right one, it's likely the servant also intends this as a test of the girl's generosity and servanthood. Anyone willing to serve in this way without being asked would be demonstrating good and generous character. The servant is not merely looking for the prettiest or the most eager young woman; he is sincerely seeking a woman of depth and virtue.

The servant concludes his prayer by saying that when the Lord does this for him, he will know that God has shown steadfast love to his master. God's answer to the prayer will be a sign of God's love.

**Genesis 24:13-14:** *Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”*

Imagine for a moment that you had been given the commission of Abraham’s servant. How would you possibly go about finding an acceptable wife for Isaac? What an awesome task this must have been. It may have appeared to be like finding a needle in a haystack. Naturally you would make adequate preparations, as the servant did, and journey to the land from which Abraham had come where his relatives still lived. The “city of Nahor” (verse 10) may have been Haran or near it (cf. 11:31-32).

A younger servant would probably have gone about this task in a very different manner. I can imagine him coming into town, advertising the fact that he worked for a very wealthy foreigner with a handsome, eligible son who was to be his only heir. His intention to find a bride would have been publicized, and only one lucky girl was to be chosen. To select such a bride the servant might have held a “Miss Mesopotamia” contest. Only those who were the most beautiful and talented would be allowed to enter, and the winner would become the wife of Isaac.

How different was the methodology of this godly servant. When his small caravan came to the “city of Nahor,” he immediately sought the will and guidance of God in prayer:

And he said, “O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’—may she be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master” (Genesis 24:12-14).

Rebekah was, indeed, the right woman for Isaac. She was the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham’s nephew. Beyond this, she was a beautiful woman who had maintained her sexual purity—essential to the preservation of a godly seed. Seemingly, she was the first to appear and the only woman there at the moment. Everything the servant saw suggested that this woman was a candidate for the test he had devised.

Running to the woman, he asked for a drink. She quickly responded, lowering her jar and then returning time after time for more until the camels were satisfied. Not until the camels were thoroughly cared for did the servant speak up. While the woman’s evident beauty may have satisfied the standards of lesser men, the test was to be allowed to run its course. Adorning the woman with golden gifts, the servant proceeded to determine her ancestry. When this qualification was satisfied, the servant bowed in worship, giving the glory to God for His guidance and blessing:

Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. And he said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master’s brothers’