

Genesis 23-24 • The death of Sarah and a bride for Isaac

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

We're in Genesis, chapter 23. Let's open up in prayer and then we'll get into a couple of chapters here tonight. Thank you, Father, for giving us this opportunity to come together as the body of Christ. It is such a delight to gather here in this place with my brothers and sisters and to fellowship and share the Word and share prayer and just the things that are going on in our lives, the way you're working in our lives.

And Lord, I want to thank you also for the many emails and letters that we get through the week from people giving their own testimony of how the Word of God is transforming their hearts, challenging them and strengthening them to live for Jesus every day, and we're so grateful for that as well, Lord. And we just want to present ourselves to you tonight to be recipients of your wisdom and understanding that we might apply these things in our lives. Walking them out day by day, living for you, surrendering to you more and more each day and being formed into the image of our Savior. For it is in His name, the name of Jesus that we pray, amen. Amen.

Chapter 23. The Bible begins here in this chapter by saying that, *“Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.” (ESV) 127*, that means that she lived long enough to see her son Isaac reach the age of 37, because she was 90 when he was born. So, it tells us in verse 2 that, *“...Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (and) (that is, (the area that is also known as) Hebron) (or He-bron, depending on how you decide to pronounce it) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”* She was the love of his life.

“³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ⁴ “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ “Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” ⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the

end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.”” I want you to stop there for just a moment because we need to kind of talk about what's going on here.

You'll notice that it talks in these first verses about the land of the Hittites. Because the Hittite empire, I don't know if empire is maybe the best word for it, but the Hittites had a, I guess empire is the best word. Just like the Egyptians, just like they covered and controlled a great deal of land and during the time of Abraham, they were largely in control of this land of Canaan.

Now, we don't really have any records of them controlling the area that is known today as Hebron, but it's very much within the realm of possibility that they had made their way down south during that time and controlled sections of the land to the point where Abraham needed to deal with them in order to obtain a burial spot for Sarah. Because you'll remember at the time, even though he'd been promised all that land by the Lord, he had no legal right to it, he didn't own any of the land.

God had promised him the land, but again, it was at the time occupied by other groups and at this time, the Hittites. What's important to know here though, going into this story is that in Abraham's culture, people considered it a very important, essential matter that when a family member passed away, you take them back to their ancestral land to bury them. Because they were to be buried with their ancestors, that was critical in that day and age.

So because Abraham and Sarah came from the area of Mesopotamia, it would have been tradition when Sarah passed away, for Abraham to take her body and make the trip back to that land, Haran, and to essentially bury her there. So the fact that Abraham is seeking a burial plot here in Canaan, here in Palestine, here in what will be Israel at a later time, shows that he is establishing a new ancestral land.

It shows that he is actually renouncing his actual biological ancestral land and he is embracing this new land that God has brought him to by faith, the land of Canaan. Which of course God has promised to give his descendants and that means that his future and the future of his family line is now in this land. It's kind of like planting a flag and saying this is now my homeland, this is now my ancestral land. Even though my ancestors, biologically speaking, were back in Heron, back in Mesopotamia, we are here now, we are establishing this place here right now. And this is an act, this is an act of faith on his part because remember, he owns nothing.

He is a stranger, he's a foreigner, he's wandering around the area. Even though God has said, I will give you this land, at this point he owns nothing. Now I want you to also pay attention to the fact that in verse 9, did you catch? That what Abraham is asking for is a cave, that's all he wants. He wants a cave and he located that cave and he knows that it's at the end of a field owned by a man named Ephron, who of course is a Hittite. And so, all he wants is the cave.

But now I want you to notice and pay attention to what Ephron makes as a counter offer, okay. Verse 10 and following it says, *“Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹ “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.”*

Now stop there because there's 2 important points you need to understand. It sounds very much like Ephron is offering to give Abraham, not just the cave, but also the field that goes along with it and to do it free of charge. I know it sounds that way, but that's not what's happening. This was a common bargaining tactic in the Middle East at that time. To basically say, oh, hey you know, here's what we'll do, I'm bargaining with you, here's what I'll actually give you. But he absolutely expects remuneration for this land, so this is just a bargaining tactic.

But secondly, it is important that you also notice that Ephron wants to sell to Abraham, not just the cave, but the entire field. And we've actually uncovered, archaeologically, laws that went along with the Hittite culture and we know why this was advantageous for Ephron to do and the reason is, there were tax obligations that went along with land. And so what Ephron is attempting to do here is to get rid of some of his own tax obligations and lay him on Abraham instead. He says, no, not just the cave, oh, let's bargain for the whole piece of land and the cave. He's trying to get out of his own obligations to pay to the king which is who you paid your taxes to and so you can kind of see what's going on here.

Verse 12 goes on and it says, *“Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.””* So what is Abraham doing here? He's agreeing to the terms, he's saying, okay I'll buy the whole field and he knows that the cave obviously is included in that. Verse 14, *“Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ “My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.”* So Ephron is pretending to be this

magnanimous, you know, man who's willing to do, you know. I'll just, we'll help you out here, we'll take care of you here, sort of a thing. But you'll notice that he gives the assessment of the land at 400 shekels of silver and what we've learned from the contracts that we've discovered from the Hittite culture, we've learned that this was way out of sight in terms of the price for the land. This is an exorbitant asking price, but he probably expected Abraham to haggle because again, that's what they did. You start off high, right? And you settle where you want to settle.

Isn't it interesting that people still do that today. When they come to buy something from you, they kind of expect that you have priced it above what you really want and so in order that, they're going to feel better that they kind of haggled you down a little bit, they're going to get you down \$50, \$100 and that's probably what you really wanted anyway, you know. And have you ever noticed that?

Now some of you might even do that when you're buying and selling things. I hate haggling, I hate it, I just, I won't do it, I won't haggle. So whenever I'm selling something, I'll put the price at exactly what I want. Drives people crazy because they'll come and they'll look at thing. One time I was selling a motorcycle that I had and I've done that a lot, and I put the price at whatever it was and you know. I don't know what it was, it was probably like something like \$1,200 or something and the guy comes, he looks at it and he looks over, rides it, you know and he comes back. He says, "yeah, I think, I'll tell you what, I'll give you a \$1,000, take a \$1,000? I said, "no, it's \$1,200" and he just kind of looked at me like, so, you know, "you don't haggle then," you know, "yeah, I don't haggle, no, no haggling." I just put it where I wanted and that's what, and it's like, take it or leave it, you know what I mean? But there are some people they just live for this kind of stuff, you know. Yeah, you're not going to believe the deal I got on this thing. I got them down \$500 bucks, you know, and then they feel all good about themselves. But that's probably what they wanted in the first place, right? The original, anyway.

So he expects Abraham, I'm quite sure, to haggle and Abraham basically says, okay. Remember, he's got a lot of money, I mean, he's a really wealthy man. So, essentially, he says, alright, I'll do that. *"Abraham listened to Ephron, (verse 16) and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants."*

And *"So (in verse 17, we're told that) the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees*

that were in the field, throughout its whole area, (and by the way, trees were a big deal when it came with land, it says,) was made over ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city.” And the reason the gate of the city is mentioned more than once in these verses, is because as most of you know, that's where transactions took place. There was no clerk of court, there was no courthouse. It was the gate of the city and the elders who were the aged men among whatever people lived in that particular city, they would gather at the city gate.

They were the honored among the population and they would be witnesses of whatever transactions were taking place, including marriages and the giving of the dowries and bride prices and things like that. And they would hear the terms of whatever covenant or contract or transaction was being made but they heard it for a reason. The reason they heard it is because if there was ever a problem down the road with someone saying, you cheated me, you didn't pay me what we agreed or whatever the case might be, the elders would stand up and say, I was there. I heard the terms and they would also witness the exchange of those terms being made.

If somebody said, I'll pay you 14 pieces of silver, 2 goats and a lamb, they would witness the exchange of that money and goods so that they could say, I was there, I saw that happen and what was agreed upon was paid, right? That's the job of the witness, that's the job of the witness. Do you know that's where we get our tradition of witnesses at weddings? And usually it's the maid or matron of honor and the best man, but not always. I've been, I've even done some weddings where the witnesses were different than the people who stood up with them. But the witnesses, even though it's traditional today in weddings to do that, we've lost the meaning. Because today in our culture, if the witnesses of weddings still did what witnesses were supposed to be doing, they'd be busy people. Because they would be constantly going to people who were filing for divorce and they would say, I was there at your wedding and I was a witness and I heard you make a promise and you said, till death do us part, for better or for worse, now, what are you doing? That was the job of the witness, that was the job of the witness.

That's why in the Book of Malachi, God actually confronts the men of Judah for putting away their wives and He says to them, I myself am rising up as the witness. And He's saying, the witnesses who witnessed your wedding vows aren't coming forward, so I'm going to, and I'm going to tell you, I was there. I was present when you made a covenant with that woman that you've now decided to put away and I'm here to tell you, that's not what you promised. So

the job of the witness was a very, very important element of transactions, covenants, and the like.

Verse 19, “*After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.*”²⁰ *The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.*” Now, did you notice that the author is repeating himself here?

He's telling you and me again, this land was made over to Abraham and the reason he's repeating it is because it is important. And when we get further into the Book of Genesis, we're going to find out that this very cave is also going to be the burial place of Abraham himself. It will be the burial place of his son, Isaac and his wife, and it will be the burial place of his grandson, Jacob and Leah, his first wife.

Again, those burials, and again, we don't really do this as much. I mean, you know, there are some people, you know, who have burial plots for the whole family, and it's an important thing for them to do that. But this was much bigger back in those days and what this established is the fact that this was now their ancestral home. Now that they are these burials taking place, make a statement and it is now their permanent place.

This is the promised land, it literally bound them to the land as a family, right? To be buried in this land, ancestrally bound them to the land. And so is it interesting that the death of Sarah, although a very sad event, I'm very sure, in the life of Abraham, also is seen here in the scripture as an act of hope on his part, given the fact that Abraham is establishing that family connection to this land as an enduring possession. In other words, this is an act of hope, it's an act of faith on his part. Because remember, God promised him the land, but he hasn't gotten any of it. This is really similar to the promise of Isaac.

It was, what, 25 years that they waited for Isaac to be born after the promise basically came. So, you know, there was that long time of waiting until Isaac finally came on the scene and then it was like, wow, this is joyful, so they even named him laughter. But there's another promise that is yet unfulfilled and that's the land, this is not Abraham's land, it doesn't belong to him. It is promised to him, you with me? But it's not his, not yet, it's not.

So, the fact that Abraham is choosing to bury his wife, his beloved Sarah, in this land is an act of faith saying, I believe and my hope is in the promise that God made to me that this will be our forever home. So I hereby, through this burial,

establish this as our ancestral home. So, it's kind of the bright spot in what would otherwise be kind of a depressing chapter, frankly. Because you, when you just read through this chapter, it's just the death of Sarah and this, kind of this transaction that Abraham was forced to go through in order to just even have a piece of land.

How would you like to live in a land where your loved one passed away and you got no place to put them? You have no place to bury them, nothing that you, that belongs to you, you know? So this is an act of faith, this is an act of faith and it's a beautiful act of faith.

All right, Genesis chapter 24. This is a particularly long chapter and it begins by saying, *“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, (we assume this is Eliezer because he'd mentioned him by name, but he is unnamed in this chapter) 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.””* Stop there, let's talk about what's happening here very briefly.

The statement that Abraham was old and well advanced in years expresses the understanding, essentially, by Abraham that he's not going to live forever and he needs to move now to make arrangements for his son so that that Isaac can continue to walk out the promises that Abraham has been walking out now for all of these years. Which of course is to dwell in the land, which will, you know, become the nation of Israel.

So Abraham speaks to his trusted servant, you'll notice, and you'll see here also that he asks him to swear a promise that he will make certain that Isaac does not get a wife from any of the Canaanites. He doesn't want any of that sort of pagan influence into his family at this time. Instead, he desires for Isaac to marry a woman from their own family back in Mesopotamia, which, by the way, was a journey of about 450 miles, so this is no small request that he's making of his servant here. And then we have that issue of that very odd swearing of the oath that we read about, where Abraham asks his servant to put his hand under his thigh and swear that he will do what he asks him to do. And I, you know, that's really weird, you know, sort of a thing, but I looked around and I found some information that shed some light on this practice. So I'll put this on the screen for you, we can read it together. The ancient form of oath swearing described in

verses 2 through 4, and then again in verse 9 is explained by Charles Pfeiffer and he writes this in his commentary,

The ancient form of oath swearing described in verses 2-4 and 9 is explained by Charles F. Pfeiffer:

According to Biblical idiom, children are said to issue from the “thigh” or “loins” of their father. Placing the hand under the thigh signified that, in the event that an oath were violated, the children who had issued, or might issue from the “thigh” would avenge the act of disloyalty. This has been called a “swearing by posterity” and is particularly applicable here, because the servant’s mission is to insure a posterity for Abraham through Isaac.

Believers Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, Arthur L. Farstad

According to Biblical idiom, children are said to issue from the “thigh” or “loins” (right) of their father. (And then, so) Placing the hand under the thigh signified that, in the event that an oath were violated, the children who had issued, or might issue from the “thigh” would avenge the act of disloyalty. This has been called a “swearing by posterity” and is particularly applicable here, because the servant’s mission is to insure a posterity for Abraham through Isaac.

So I know this is weird, this is nothing we would do today, but it's kind of like saying, I want you to swear to me by my future children that if you violate this oath, they're going to come get you. And that's kind of what it all comes down to. So it was just, it was really just a way of making a promise. It's a way of saying, I'm willing to make this promise and put myself under this curse, if you will, that if I don't fulfill this oath your kids are going to come for me someday. And so it's a little weird, a little dark, but you know, it was a way of making promises.

And by the way, Jacob is going to much later on, he's going to make his son, Joseph, do the very same thing before he passes away in Egypt. He's going to say, swear to me that you don't bury me here in Egypt, but you take me back and you bury me with my forefathers. Remember that, because that's so important, so important to them. That's the land of my ancestral heritage and he makes Joseph swear that same oath in that same sort of a way.

Verse 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.*” He says, no don't take Isaac back, I don't want him live there. Why? God made us a promise here and that's what he goes on to say.

Verse 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,’ (right, not that land, but this land, he says, listen) 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.”* All right, so we've got this all set up, Abraham is making arrangements now for his son and we move on in the story.

Verse 10, and this covers a time of 450 miles and however long that would have taken. It says, *“... the servant took ten of his master's camels (and by the way, I want you to note that number, cause that's going to be important in just a little bit, 10 camels, right? Remember that) and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor.”* And so, you know, this took a while, 450 miles. I mean, it takes a while for you and me to go 450 miles, can you imagine with a bunch of camels? And I'm sure there's an entourage of servants that probably went along as well. You got to have, if you're taking a lot of goods like that, you have to have protection because there are bandits and crooks along the way and the chance of you know, losing your possessions and even your life is a very real issue.

Verse 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.”*” Now, this is cool. We're going to keep reading, but this isn't not just a test of who the woman is that God had chosen for Isaac, but it's also a test of her character as we're going to see.

It goes on, *“¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, (who's a woman) 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. (meaning, she had never been physically with another man) 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.’ ¹⁸ She said, ‘Drink, my*

lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” Now, stop there for a minute.

Did you notice the question that Abraham's servant asked her? He said, would you give me a little water to drink? The Hebrew literally means, give me a sip of water, okay. So he's not asking for a lot and you'll notice he doesn't ask anything related to his camels. By the way, I don't know how much a camel can drink, but I assume that it's a lot. So, you know, let's get into this here a little bit. So he says, give me a sip.

It says, “²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.” And it says that he just sat and looked at her. “²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.” So again, this is not just a test of who's the one that God has chosen for my master's son, this is a test of, is this a woman who is honorable, hospitable and ready to serve, she has a heart to serve. You know, if she didn't have a heart to serve, she'd say, well, okay, let me get you a little something to drink and then just move on with her business. She's got heavy work to do, carrying water was no small deal, but she says here's some water and let me also get water for your 10 camels.

So I read something where they could drink up to 20 gallons a piece. I don't know if that's accurate, so don't quote me on that. But either way, this was probably not a small sort of an endeavor for Rebekah to get this water. But she certainly proved herself as a hospitable and you know, woman who's ready to serve.

Verse 22, “When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,²³ and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?”²⁴ She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.”” And just to remind you, Nahor is Abraham's brother. Nahor had a son named Bethuel, Bethuel is the father of Rebekah. So that means that, you know, Rebekah is the daughter of Abraham's nephew, that make sense? As the world turns.

Sounds like one of those soap opera sort of connections or whatever, but here we are. She's a fairly close relative and notice what she says, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.” So I want you to notice here that Rebekah goes on to offer, not just accommodations for the servant of

Abraham, but also food and shelter for his animals. So again, showing this kind of hospitality is, I'm sure very encouraging to Abraham's servant, that this is a woman of high character.

Verse 26, *“The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord²⁷ 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.”²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring.”*” And let me pause here just a moment to say that as we get further into Genesis, you're going to be hearing a lot more about this man Laban and he is a piece of work. Let me tell you right now, and he's quite a guy, and if you want to know just a little bit about his character the very next verse tells you pretty much everything you need to know about Laban.

Verse 30, *“As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring.³¹ He said, “Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”* Doesn't he sound like a great guy? He does sound that way, but he's a shyster and we're going to learn that later on and he's going to actually give one of his daughters to a shyster too.

“³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, “I will not eat until I have said what I have to say.” He said, “Speak on.””

Now, I want you to stop there for a moment because at this point in the narrative, the servant of Abraham is going to recount everything we just read in specific detail and it's going to encompass everything from verse 34 down to verse 48. So we're just going to read this without comment, okay, we'll just read these verses because this is just kind of like repeat land.

³⁴ So he said, “I am Abraham's servant.³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys.³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has.³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell,³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.’³⁹ I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’⁴⁰ But

he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

⁴² "I came today to the spring and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, ⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.'

⁴⁵ "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son."

There it is, part 2, take 2 of the entire procedure. But you know, this was probably important because he's suggesting that Bethuel is to give his daughter to this man that he's never met before. He claims to be the servant of Abraham, his relative, but how is he going to know all this is actually accurate and true and so forth.

So the fact that the servant recounts this whole story to Bethuel, which is proper in this sort of a situation being that she, he's the father, he is giving them the witness, or if you will, the testimony of God's sovereign, providential care along the way. And saying, this is what my master told me to do, I set out to do this and these are the events as they transpired, now you decide, is this the Lord or not? Because if it's the Lord, what are you going to do if you're going to argue against it, you're going to argue against the Lord. Unless you decide, well, I don't know, that's just coincidence, right? And that's his choice.

Bethuel could have said, yeah, I don't think so and in which case the servant of Abraham would have been off the hook and he would have gone home empty handed. But you'll notice that it goes on. He goes on in verse 49 to say, "Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell

me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.” In other words, he's saying, tell me if my journey and my search was a success or not.

“⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel (notice Laban is mentioned before the father, which is interesting, but *Laban and Bethuel*) answered and said, “The thing has come from the Lord; (and their saying, this has to this has to be from God) we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹ Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.” So, they basically say, we don't think this is just coincidence, we believe that the Lord supernaturally orchestrated these events, and in fact, this is the doing, the work of the Lord.

“⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. ⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother (that's Laban) and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴ And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.” ⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” I mean, you can understand why a mother wouldn't want to part with her daughter. On Laban's part, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he thought it was an effort to get some more goods, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised.

“⁵⁶ But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” ⁵⁷ They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” (very wise decision) ⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” ⁵⁹ So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, “Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!” ⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.” And again, this is another 450 mile trip, so you know that there's going to be some open air camping along the way and that sort of thing.

Now, verse 62 says, “Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. (which is southern part of Canaan, later Israel) ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening.” I find that an interesting phrase, I want to pause on it for just a second because this is frankly a lost art in our culture today. We're so busy, we're so engrossed in the world, technology, whatever's in front of our eyes or whatever.

We don't do this very much anymore and frankly, even the art of meditation has even gotten a bit of a black eye when Eastern religious groups began to talk about meditation and so even Christians began to think of meditation as a bad thing, you know. Like when transcendental meditation came out in the 60s and 70s and Christians were kind of put off by it. And the whole idea, if you mentioned meditating, if you said, well, I was just meditating, you know, somebody would go, oh, wow, you know, you better repent.

Well, listen, there's nothing wrong with meditating on the Word of God. There's nothing wrong with meditating on the creation of God. You know, David writes in the Psalms, when I consider the heavens, the work of your hands, and he's actually meditating on the creation. And he's saying, when I think of the majesty and the enormity of your creation, and then I ask myself, who am I that you would condescend to bless this little person like me, who isn't even a blip on your eternal radar, you know, but how do those sorts of things come about? They come about through meditation, thinking.

You know, we talk about scripture memorization, it's very similar, it's a close cousin to meditation. To meditate is to think deeply on a particular subject. So imagine you take a verse of the Bible, something that just comes, it strikes you as you're reading your Bible. Maybe it's one verse, maybe it's even a phrase, maybe it's even a word and you meditate on that throughout the day, throughout the entire day, that's all you're just meditating. I mean, what, as often as your mind is free to meditate, you spend time just focusing on that. It is amazing what the Lord will do to open our understanding when we just take time to focus on some element of truth that is laid out in the Word of God.

And so here we have Isaac out in the field meditating and, you know, he's got no TV or Xbox or laptop or you know, anything like this to distract and he's just going to go out and hang out. And it says here in the middle of verse 63 that, “... he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming.”⁶⁴ *And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel*⁶⁵ *and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself.*” Which was obviously a traditional thing to do at that time.

And so it says, “⁶⁶ *And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.*”⁶⁷ *Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*” And by the way, we're going to learn in the next chapter that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, which means

Abraham was 140 at that time. So, you know, this wasn't a teenage wedding by any stretch of the imagination.

But I want you to notice something here. There's a few things I want to point out as we kind of close out this chapter. Did you notice there's no mention of a wedding ceremony? There's nothing here that we're told about how they got married. All we're told is Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother, that's it, that's all we're told.

And, so, that obviously brings up, you know, additional questions. I get this question from time to time. People have asked, what is required for some a couple to be married before God? I want you to think about that, what is required biblically, for a couple to be married before God? Now, if you ask people just, and you don't really prime the pump with any information, but you just ask people, what is required to be married before God? You know, people are going to say a lot of things like, well, they have to get married in a church, I hear that one quite often. They have to be married with a pastor officiating, right? And then they begin to talk about some of the other things that go along typically or traditionally with marriage.

Do you know that none of that is in the Bible? There's not one word in the Bible about pastors officiating at weddings, not one word. There is not one word about people getting married in any particular location, like a building, church, synagogue, even, you know. In fact, the Jews were married under a tent that was tradition for them.

We know of traditions, but in the Bible, there are no instructional passages that say, if you want to get married, do it this way. God left it up to local traditions. But the thing we have to remember is that they are local traditions and they're not biblical mandates. Because there is a danger that goes along with beginning to embrace our traditions as authoritative and here's one of them. One other thing that people will say to you when you say, what is it what makes a couple married? Many people, including Christians, will say to you, they need to have a marriage license. And you probably have heard in lots of weddings, by the authority granted me by the state of Oregon, Idaho, whatever, I pronounce you husband and wife. And people hear that over and over, and over again, and they begin to realize, or they begin to conclude rather, it is by the authority of the state that people are married. Well what's the converse of that? If you want to get unmarried, well you just go get a legal divorce.

Here's the question. Does a marriage license make a couple married? No, of course not, has nothing to do with marriage. I mean, my great grandfather was a

Methodist preacher back in the, you know, late 1800s, early 1900s and he would marry people in his house. They'd come sometimes at night to get married, knock on the door, get him out of bed, make him marry them. He just did it, you know, you're married, get out of here. You know, sort of a thing and there was no marriage license. Were those people married?

What about your great grandparents? They didn't get a marriage license. But were they? Well, I guess they weren't married then, you know. I was watching a movie once with Sue where this couple got married, these movies make me so angry sometimes when they mess with truth. And this couple got married and they found out that something about their marriage license wasn't legal and so the family started saying to them in this movie, well, you guys aren't married. And I was like, arrghhh!, I wanted to break the TV, you know, because this is what we have begun to adopt.

Listen, what do we know about marriage? We know that God created marriage, all right? It's His institution, it's not man's. Man didn't decide to create marriage one day, God made marriage. It's outlined for us in the Book of Genesis, chapter 2, after the creation of the man and ultimately the woman. And while there are no direct passages in the Bible outlining what constitutes a marriage before God, there are some indirect statements in the Bible that help give us a bit of understanding. I've already made reference to one of them, but what we learn from the Bible is that marriage is a covenant made before God, and that is from the Book of Proverbs.

And we learn, as I mentioned earlier, that marriages had witnesses and that they were not done in secret, but they were promised or these covenants... Because covenants were never meant to be made in secret and marriage is a covenant and as with all other covenants, transactions, or arrangements, things were done in front of witnesses. And really, those are the 2 biblical elements, other than the fact that it is all about a couple coming together and saying, you are mine, I am yours till death, okay.

The Bible says that for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and that means coming out from under the authority of his parents and their household family structure and it says, and he will be joined to his wife. And that means they will create a new family structure with a new authority and he will cling to his wife or the Old King James, I believe, is cleave to his wife and they, and the two will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

So these are the elements of what the Bible gives us related, you know, to marriage. I've had couples come to me and, you know, who are living together

and I'll sit down and talk to him and say, "you know, so you, are you guys married?" "No, we're not married," "are you living together?" "Yeah, yeah, we're living together." "Well, why aren't you married? You guys are believers, right?"

"Yeah, we're Christians." "Why aren't you married?" "Well, we just haven't gotten the money for a marriage license." I want to slap him. You know what I usually would do? I'll tell them, you don't need a marriage license, well, you can do that later. A marriage license accords you certain legal rights according to the state, and they're not bad and I would encourage you to get a marriage license, there's nothing wrong with it. By all means, get a marriage license, but don't let that hold you back from doing what's right, let's marry you right now. I've done that, I've married people after a Sunday service, I've married people in my living room with my wife and my daughter as the witnesses, you know. I'll do it if somebody wants to, why wait? You know, do what's right, do what's right, right? And yeah, there you go.

I want to end with this. This chapter is a wonderful story of God's supernatural and sovereign provision for Isaac to get a wife and that sort of thing. But I want to call your attention to the element of faith that plays into this story and we're going to do this very quickly. Because as you know, faith requires action. When Peter said to the Lord, remember they were on the sea and the boat was rocking and the wind and the waves and they saw Jesus walking on the water.

Peter said, Lord, if it's you, let me come to you walking on the water and Jesus had come and then Peter had to climb out of the boat. That's the action that see... You can say, I have faith to walk on the water but if you in order to climb out of the boat, what good is your faith? You never acted on it, right? You with me? Well, there are 4 actions that we see in this story and the first action of faith is Abraham preparing for the future of his son and moving to protect the promise that he received from God, that his descendants would inherit the land. That was an act of faith, but the action was sending his servant to Mesopotamia to go and find a wife for his son.

The second action was the servant of Abraham, who faithfully carried out Abraham's wishes, trusting the Lord to show him the way. You'll notice when he got there to the well, he got down off his camel and he immediately started to pray. Lord, help me, show me, show me who this woman is that you have chosen for my master's son and so forth. So that was faith, it took faith for him to say, Lord, show me this, I'm going to be watching now. When the women come, I'm going to give you specific guidelines here. Please, Lord, meet these so that I might know who the girl is.

The third action is, frankly, Rebekah's father and her family recognizing the circumstances that the servant of Abraham related to them as from the Lord as something that only God could orchestrate, that takes faith. To look at the circumstances and not don't just poo poo it or say, oh, I don't know, it could have happened to anybody, but rather saying that was God, that was God and that takes faith. And so that's the third action.

And then the fourth and final action is Rebekah, responding in faith and confidence. Guys, she got on a donkey with a stranger and went to a land she had never been to before and she went to go marry a man she had never met or seen. This guy could have looked like Quasimodo for all she knew, but yet she went by faith and you know, talk about faith, trust in the Lord, and you know, in God's providence, He worked through what? He worked through the actions of their faith.

Guys, please don't miss this. God worked through the actions of their faith. He didn't just work through their faith, He worked through the actions of their faith. And that's what James talks about in his letter when he writes concerning Abraham up on the screen, we'll end with this. He says,

James 2:22 (ESV)

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;

Or we could say in this case, faith was completed by actions, right. They acted on their faith and that's where we're gonna end for tonight. So let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for these 2 chapters in Genesis. What a delightful grouping of chapters. Even Lord, we see faith throughout this whole thing, even in the story of the death of Sarah and how Abraham acted out of faith to make this land that you had promised him, his ancestral home to start a new history with his family. Lord, that was an act of faith on his part because he didn't own anything of the land.

And I thank you, Lord, that we were able to see that tonight. And thank you, Father, God, also for this story of the provision of God in the wife for Isaac and how we see in this story, just this beautiful providential work that you accomplished through these various people as they responded and acted on their faith.

And I thank you for that and I pray my Father that we too would learn from this and that we would act on our faith as well, trusting you completely. We thank

you and praise you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our soon coming King and all God's people said, amen.