

Genesis 24A (2011)

- In our study last week, we noted that Abraham's life was drawing to a close
 - But before he could die, there were two matters of unfinished business in his life
 - He needed to secure a resting place for himself and his family
 - And he needed to secure a wife for his son, Isaac
 - Abraham addressed the first issue upon the occasion of his wife's death
 - He bought the cave of Machpelah
 - And now Sarah is lying there awaiting her husband
- It's now been three years since her death, and Abraham turns his attention to addressing the second outstanding question: where will Isaac find his wife?
 - Remember last week we learned that Abraham was determined to remain in the land where God planted him
 - Even when culture and tradition would have dictated that Abraham journey back to his ancestral home and be buried with his family, he stayed in Canaan
 - The world would have said that Canaan was not Abraham's land, but Abraham lived by a faith that knew it was to be his one day
 - And now that it's time to find a daughter in law, Abraham is going to make a similar counter-culture choice by faith
 - The world would have expected Abraham to intermarry with the Canaanite people
 - Finding a local daughter for his son would have ensured a strong family connection with the Canaanites
 - Abraham and Isaac could have strengthened their rights to live in the area
 - And Abraham could have been directly involved in the process of selecting the proper Bride
 - Instead, Abraham is going to live by faith again

- He knows God has given him the land of Canaan, but God has also made clear that Abraham is to be separated from these people
 - He has lived as a nomad, never permitting anyone to claim they made Abraham rich
 - And he won't have a woman from the Canaanites lay claim to any part of his family
- So let's study the way Isaac receives a bride
 - And as we embark on this study, we're also going to watch a beautiful and important picture of Christ developing in this story
 - But this picture isn't only of Christ
 - You and I are also represented in this story

Gen. 24:1 Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way.

Gen. 24:2 Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh,

Gen. 24:3 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,

Gen. 24:4 but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Gen. 24:5 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?"

Gen. 24:6 Then Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there!

Gen. 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 before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there.

Gen. 24:8 "But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there."

Gen. 24:9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

- Moses says that Abraham is advanced in years and God has blessed him in every way

- God's blessings for Abraham include long life, wealth, a loving wife, a promised son and the freedom to sojourn in the entire land of Canaan without worry
 - And these are the least of Abraham's blessings
 - In a future day, after the Resurrection of the Saints, Abraham will receive his eternal inheritance
 - And that inheritance will pale in comparison to the one he has seen in his earthly life
 - And in this way, God will have blessed Abraham in every possible way
- Every believer shares in a measure of this same blessing
 - We all receive some measure of blessing in this life
 - To some degree, our blessings will follow our obedience but we have no guarantee of anything this side of Heaven
 - But in the life to come, we'll receive our eternal inheritance, and this coming blessing will dwarf whatever we receive here
 - As Paul wrote:

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are **not worthy** to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- Then came the time for Abraham to seek a bride for his son
 - Since Abraham will not leave his home in Canaan, he sends his servant back to find a wife for Isaac
 - Abraham wants the servant to act according to Abraham's specific instructions
 - He must find a wife among his household back in Ur
 - The servant cannot seek a wife from among the Canaanites
 - Abraham is worried that the servant might get lazy and fail to make the trip all the way to Ur
 - He might return with a woman from some other place and simply claim she was from Ur

- So Abraham requires the servant to participate in a tradition of the day
 - The servant places his hand under Abraham's thigh, the text says
 - The Hebrew word for thigh is actually far more personal
 - It could also be translated loin
 - The servant was asked to swear while holding something very dear to Abraham as a sign that if the servant failed, Abraham's descendants would exact revenge upon him
 - The sacred oath would ensure the servant did everything in his power to obey Abraham's command
- And the instructions Abraham delivered to the servant were strict: find Isaac a wife from Abraham's relatives and bring the wife back to Canaan
 - The servant asked the logical question: what if the woman didn't want to return?
 - Abraham answered first that Isaac was not to go to Canaan...the woman must come here
 - He then repeats the promise God had given to him
 - Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan
 - And Abraham was determined to see his son remain in the Land and inherit the promises
 - In fact, Isaac will be the only one of the three patriarchs to never leave Canaan at any point in his entire life
 - He lives out his years in the land
 - Abraham responds as only a man of faith would
 - He says God appeared to Abraham and swore that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan
 - Clearly, that oath God gave Abraham in Chapter 22 has had the intended effect in Abraham's life
 - He has taken hold of the hope set before him, namely that he would receive the land God promised
 - Based on that oath, Abraham is absolutely sure that God will keep His promises

- And because God has made this promise, Abraham is absolutely confident that God will work all things to ensure that this promise will come to pass
 - Abraham's faith in God give him confidence to pursue this course of action on Isaac's behalf
- In. v.7 Abraham says that if God has promised this thing, then he can be sure God will bring Isaac a wife without requiring Isaac to leave the land
 - So Abraham tells the servant that God will go before the servant to ensure the servant finds the right bride
 - And should the servant find no woman willing to return, then he would be freed from the obligation
 - They would both take such an outcome to be a sign of God's will
- This is such a beautiful and clear picture of living by faith
 - First, it begins with an understanding of God's promises
 - Then it moves to a faith that God will keep His word
 - Which then brings about a change in our thinking and behavior
 - Ultimately producing a confidence that as we walk with God, He goes before us causing all things to work for good according to His plan
 - This is wishful or positive thinking
 - This is faith in action
- So the servant swears he will obey Abraham's request and follow in faith

[Gen. 24:10](#) Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

[Gen. 24:11](#) He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

[Gen. 24:12](#) He said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham.

[Gen. 24:13](#) "Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water;

[Gen. 24:14](#) 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 You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master."

- As the servant departs for Ur, he takes a substantial entourage with him
 - He has ten camels carrying a variety of his master's goods
 - Collectively, these camels are the price to pay for the Bride
 - They are a small fraction of Abraham's wealth, but they will still be a significant gift to whomever receives them
 - The number ten in Scripture is always the number for testimony
 - So the ten camels are a testimony of Abraham
 - Of his wealth, of his generosity and his desire for his son to have the perfect bride
 - And then he sets out for Mesopotamia
 - He will likely travel the fertile crescent which is the half circle that extends from Canaan northeast around Arabia and back down the Euphrates river valley
 - The total distance will be 500 miles one way
 - This is a long distance to go to find a bride for Isaac
 - We notice also that it is a trip from the West to the East
 - From the Promised Land back to the world
- Eventually, he reaches the city of Nahor
 - The city isn't named Nahor
 - It is the city of Nahor because this is the town where Nahor, Abraham's brother, lives
 - The servant would have known to come to this town based on the news that Abraham received concerning his brother a number of years earlier
 - The town had a well near the outskirts of the city

- Since wells were a precious resource, they were located strategically to support the entire town
 - Women had the duty of drawing water and bringing it back to the home, often several times a day
 - Since wells were a gathering place of women, they were also popular places for men looking for a companion
- Three notable OT figures found their wives at wells
 - Isaac, Jacob and Moses
- And Jesus had several interesting encounters with women at wells in the Gospels
- The servant brought his camels to rest at the well outside the city expecting this might be a good place to come upon the woman for Isaac
 - The question is, how to know which woman to select?
 - The servant had no doubt he would see women that day, as he might on any day
 - But how would he know which woman to select for Isaac?
 - The servant's faith in God was also strong, so strong that he prayed for the Lord to direct him specifically
 - His prayer was for God to show lovingkindness to Abraham by granting the servant the opportunity to find the right woman
- So the servant devises a simple but certain test
 - He asked God to bring about a certain circumstance
 - The woman who was appointed to marry Isaac would be kind enough not only to give the servant water upon request
 - But she would also voluntarily water all his camels
 - The servant designed this to be a test
 - If the circumstances unfolded in the way the servant prescribed, then he would interpret them as a sign from God

- The Bible records tests in numerous places, and Christians can sometimes become confused over if and when tests are appropriate
 - As when Moses taught the Israelites in the desert

[Deut. 6:16](#) "You shall not put the LORD your God to the **test**, as you tested Him at Massah.

- So did the servant do the wrong thing when he tested the Lord?
 - No, because there are two different kinds of tests in Scripture
 - There are times when we test God's patience
 - We are knowingly disobedient and continue in sin daring God to take action to stop us
 - If we dare to test the Lord too often, He will eventually respond to bring discipline
 - This is the kind of test Scripture prohibits, because it's another word for sin
 - Then there are times we ask God for a test so we may discern His will
 - This is a very different meaning of the word test
 - Gideon is well known for seeking a sign from God as a test of God's will
 - And that's what the servant is doing here
 - This second type of test is done in faith by a heart that desires to obey and simply isn't sure of the proper course to take
 - God delights to answer the questions of an obedient heart
 - There is nothing wrong with using tests to discern God's will
 - When we are given direction from the Lord and we sense Him communicating to us through prayer, circumstance, or His word, we may lack clarity
 - In those circumstances, it's perfectly acceptable to construct a test to discern God's will

- But if we are to apply this principle properly, there are some clear guidelines we must follow if we are to be sure we hear God properly
- First, we should only request a test from God when considering matters placed before us by God Himself
 - God is not a genie that we can conjure up at our whim
 - He will not communicate to us except on His terms as He pleases
 - If simply want to know the winning lottery numbers, don't place a test before God expecting an answer
 - But if you hear God telling you to sell all your possessions and you want to be sure you heard correctly, proposing a test might be the right thing to do
 - Here the servant was engaged in a matter given him by God through Abraham
 - So he sought the Lord's guidance
- Secondly, the test should be specific and unmistakable
 - We narrow our concerns to the issue on our heart and ask God to give us specific direction on that issue
 - For the servant, the question was which woman to select for Isaac
 - For Gideon, it was whether to go ahead with the attack against the much more powerful forces aligned against Israel
 - We can't use tests for fishing expeditions
- Finally, they must be constructed in such a way they will lead us to the clarity we seek
 - There can't be a chance of ambiguity in the final result
 - In this case the servant wanted to be sure that he could know that it would be God speaking in the test
 - So he contrived a situation that was as improbable as any

- A thirsty camel could drink 25 gallons of water in one sitting
- So ten camels would require 250 gallons of water – a significant amount of work for any woman to complete
- It would be unthinkable that any woman would agree to undertake such a task for a stranger
 - And it would be even less likely that she would volunteer to do so without even being asked
- The nature of the servant’s request precluded any chance that he might misinterpret the outcome
 - Or that he might miss it when God speaks
- Why don’t Christians rely on tests like this more often?
 - Asking the Lord for a test is a Biblically legitimate way to gain clarity in following God
 - Yet many Christians walk through their spiritual life unsure of what God is asking of them
 - God can speak to us in many ways and does
 - But we are poor listeners
 - What a shame that we aren’t willing to seek the Lord in this honest and faithful way, confident that the Lord will answer
 - Could it be that we don’t seek a test from God because we’re afraid of the answer?
 - It’s relatively easy to ask a question, even a question to God
 - The hard part is accepting the answer when it comes
 - Gideon asked God to confirm that he should enter battle with only 300 men against a huge opposing force
 - He asked once and got his answer
 - He asked again to double-check and got the same answer
 - Then the issue became, would he obey?

- Next week we'll see if the servant finds a woman willing to do the unlikely and improbable task
 - Then we'll see what he does in response
 - And we'll also start to break down the picture of Christ that's in this story