

Finer Grounds

Genesis

Lesson 13: Oaths and Marriages

Read Genesis 24:1-61

In our last lesson, we left Abraham and Isaac mourning the death of Sarah and laying her to rest in the cave of Machpelah. We pick back up in chapter 24, which is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis. It begins with Abraham commissioning his oldest servant to seek a wife for Isaac among his relatives. Some believe that this servant is Eliezer of Damascus from Genesis 15:2, but the text neither denies nor confirms this belief. The point is Abraham does not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman, and maybe even more so, he does not want him to leave and return home. It seems Abraham wants to ensure that his son does the right things and remains faithful to God thereby ensuring the fulfillment of God's promises. He also seems to believe that God will fully support his efforts as we see from verse 7 as he confidently claims God's angel will go with his servant and make his task successful.

If you are like most people, the manner that the oath between Abraham and his servant is made stands out as peculiar. This type of oath is only recorded one other time in the Bible and it is when Jacob (Israel) is about to die and makes his son Joseph swear to not bury him in Egypt, but rather with his ancestors in Genesis 47:29. There are various thoughts on this practice, but almost all scholars agree that it is an oath rendered on Abraham's posterity. To understand this thought we need to first understand the Hebrew word that is translated "thigh" in verse 2, which is YAREK and means "thigh, loins, or euphemistically the

generative parts". It is translated "loins" in Genesis 46:26 and Exodus 1:5, in which it is clearly related to the reproductive system, but it is also translated thigh, side, and other terms that do not necessarily reflect a meaning of the genitals. The concept behind the hand under the thigh (or loins) is believed to be connected with the covenant that God made with Abraham in which circumcision (relating to the male generative part) was given as the sign. Where ever the servant had his hand, the main point seems to be the very sacred and serious nature of this oath.

Abraham's servant is faithful and heads out on an over five-hundred-mile journey. He ends up in Nahor, which is most likely named after Abraham's brother Nahor. As he lingers by the well, he says a prayer for success and before he even finishes, God sends Rebekah. In verse 14, the word "appointed" that the servant uses to describe the woman he is seeking is the Hebrew word YAKACH and means "the right one or to be right or correct". The servant is faithful in choosing the wife both Abraham and God desire and he seems successful, but he continues to remain steadfast in being certain that Rebekah is the one. Verses 15 and 47 tell us that Rebekah was the daughter of Milcah and Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor so he gives her gifts of gold jewelry and asks to lodge with her family.

If you remember from the end of Genesis 11, Abraham had 2 brothers named Haran and Nahor. Haran died in their home land of Ur and Nahor apparently stayed there as he did not

Finer Grounds

accompany Terah (Abraham's father), Abraham, Sarah, and Lot when they left. Laban, Rebekah's brother, welcome's the servant and begins to take care of him, the men with him, and their animals. The servant is once again faithful and dutiful in his mission. He tells them his purpose, he tells them how God has guided him, and asks for a speedy answer to the question of taking Rebekah back to be Isaac's wife. It seems rather obvious by Laban and Bethuel's answer in verse 50 that they have a faith in God. The Hebrew word in verse 50 for "matter" is DABAR and means "speech, word, or thing" and the word for "we cannot" is YAKOL and means "to be able, to prevail, overcome, or have power". So, Laban and Bethuel are basically acknowledging that they are not able to supersede God's word. They do not even seem to question or hesitate. They humbly accept that it is from God and they cannot and should not venture to alter it in any way.

The servant continues to give gifts, which would not have been uncommon. It would have been viewed like a dowry. It also would not have been uncommon for the girl to remain with them for a time as well. Many would be betrothed for a year before actually leaving home and being joined in full marriage. However, being ever diligent, the servant does not wish to be delayed. The Hebrew word in verse 56 for "delay" is 'ACHAR and means "to loiter, procrastinate, hinder, or hesitate". He was absolutely determined to fulfill his oath and to do so in as timely a fashion as possible. God's word is never something we should procrastinate on, hinder, or hesitate in fulfilling.

They consult Rebekah and she agrees to go with the servant immediately. Arranged marriages

were probably not extremely uncommon at this time, but I cannot imagine she felt no reservations in leaving the only home she probably ever knew, leaving behind all of her known family, and travelling over 500 hundred miles with some strangers to be joined to a man she has never once laid eyes on. I for one never really thought of Rebekah and Laban as very faithful especially considering Laban's future treatment towards Jacob, but having studied this chapter, I have gained a much greater appreciation for the faith of Rebekah and the rest of her family.

Think About It:

Why do you think Abraham wanted Isaac to have a wife from among his relatives and not among the Canaanites?

Make a family tree for Abraham's family, starting with his father Terah and including Abraham, Sarah, Nahor, Haran, Lot, Milcah, Ishmael, Hagar, Isaac, Bethuel, Laban, and Rachel. (Hint: see Genesis 11:27-29, 24:15, 29)

What would change in our lives be like if we humbled to God's word without question or reservation as Laban and Bethuel did?

Finer Grounds

What would change in our lives if we did not hesitate to fulfill all that God has commanded of us with the same diligence as Abraham's servant?

Read Genesis 24:62-25:18

Although the text never tells us, it would seem logical that Abraham has told Isaac of his intended plan. This is about three years after the death of his mother, Sarah. We know this because Isaac was about 37 years old when Sarah died (see Genesis 17:17 and 23:1) and the text later tells us he was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (see Genesis 25:20). In verse 63, we find Isaac meditating in the field. Perhaps he was meditating on God or perhaps he was wondering whether or not he would soon be married and, if so, what she would be like. Whatever filled his thoughts on that fateful evening, they were soon replaced by the arrival of his future wife. According to Genesis 24:16, Rebekah was very beautiful. Her name means "ensnarer, fettering (by beauty)" and she apparently lived up to that name for Isaac according to Genesis 24:67. It seems as if it was love at first sight for Isaac. Of course, we women love a good romantic ending, which is exactly how chapter 24 wraps up.

As we head into chapter 25, Abraham is remarrying. We are not told how long after Sarah's death, but assuming this portion of text is chronological, it would have been at least three years. He has more sons whom he gives gifts to and sends away from his son Isaac, most likely to allow Isaac the room to become the great nation

that God promised. Even towards the end of his life, Abraham is still thinking, planning, and acting in full faith of God's promises. He lives to be one-hundred and seventy-five years old and verse 8 says he "died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life". Is that not what we all want to be able to say? What joy to be able to take your last breath "satisfied with life".

Isaac and Ishmael are the only two sons mentioned who bury Abraham in the cave at Machpelah with Sarah. It is encouraging to know that they must have stayed in touch in some way despite the circumstances of their separation as children. The text goes on in chapter 25 to tell about Ishmael's twelve sons, Ishmael's passing at the age of one-hundred and thirty-seven years old, and the confirmation of God's words to Hagar that he would be in "defiance of all his relatives". The Bible does not follow the lineage of Ishmael as Jesus is not his descendant, but it is still interesting that he ends up with twelve sons as Jacob will end up with twelve sons that become the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham is truly the father of many nations, but only one will bring us the Messiah.

Think About It:

Do a simple search of all the verses that mention the word "meditate" and its derivatives (ie. meditates, meditated, meditation, meditating) and list the various things we should meditate on.

Finer Grounds

How many sons in total does Abraham have?

Does your thinking, planning, and actions center around the promises God has made to you?

What do you think was Abraham's key to being "satisfied with life"?

Can you locate the 7th toledoth in chapter 25? (Hint: see Lesson 4)

We will end our study in the middle of chapter 25 as it is the best breaking point. There is much more in the book of Genesis, but I want to say thank you now for allowing me to walk with you as you have faithfully studied the first twenty-five chapters of the book of beginnings. As always, my prayer is that God will be glorified through us all, that you ladies have been edified through this series, and that you will continue to seek God's truths that you might be continually strengthened, encouraged, and growing in all grace and truth. God bless you all!