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Genesis 23 - 24



Genesis - Steve Gregg

In Genesis 23-24, Abraham's journey to find a burial plot for Sarah and a wife for Isaac is told. Through Abraham's acknowledgement of his status as a stranger and advice given to modern Christians in 1 Peter 2:11, the theme of pilgrimhood and the distinction between the values and conduct of the church and the world are highlighted. The story also emphasizes the importance of godly wisdom and guidance in finding a spouse, while recognizing God's sovereignty in bringing the right person to a single individual.

Transcript

This morning, we're turning to Genesis chapter 23. In this chapter, we have the death of Sarah. And of course, the death of Sarah creates a need that Abraham has not had previously, and that is the place to call his own little spot of land where he can bury his dead.

This is the first person in his family who has died, and he has not needed to secure any plot of land. Now, he's living in Canaan. He's wandering around in Canaan, a land that God has promised will belong to him and his descendants forever, but he doesn't own any of it.

And so, he has to acquire a piece of property, and this property will become a longstanding burial plot for him and his family for several generations afterward. We read in chapter 23, verse 1, Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah.

So, Sarah died in Kirgiz Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Now, Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at the time of death is given. I don't know why that is.

I don't know why it's not more often given, but we often have had men's deaths recorded previous to this and their age at death. Sarah is distinctive in that respect, and she therefore died when Isaac was about 37 years old, because she was 90 when he was born. And Abraham now is needing to obtain a piece of property, so he approaches the local people who were said to be the sons of Heth, also known as the Hittites.

They were a tribe in the land of Canaan, whose civilization has been very well documented from archaeology in the past century, but previous to about a century ago. Many scholars thought the Hittites, the sons of Heth, did not ever exist. They are mentioned frequently in the Bible.

Even as late as the time of David, Uriah the Hittite was the first husband of Asherah. And so they span a time of history in the Bible from Abram's time, at least to David's time, which is a thousand years. But archaeology has now been able to document Hittite civilization, about 1,500 years of Hittite civilization.

And we know quite a bit about the way they transacted business, and this chapter is a pretty good example of how it was done. It says, Abram stood up before his dead and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. Give me property for a burial place among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, Hear us, my Lord, you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place that you may bury your dead.

I just point something out here, which is, I think, significant. And that is that Abram, although God had promised that that was his land, he acknowledged that he was still at this point a stranger and a sojourner in other people's land. He did not think he didn't say, you know, I really deserve this land because the God who created it has offered it to me, given it to me.

But he acknowledges that these people have lived there before him and that at this point they still have a right to be there. God has not yet driven them out, as he will later in the days of Joshua. And Abram humbly acknowledged himself to be only a foreigner and a sojourner among them.

Actually, in Hebrews chapter 11, this statement of Abram's is referred to as something, I suppose, to speak of his humility, because in Hebrews 11, 13, it says, These all died in faith. And those who have been previously mentioned in this verse included Abram, Isaac and Jacob, says these all died in faith, not having received the promises and having seen them afar off, assured of them, excuse me, they were assured of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the land or on earth. Now the the statement in Hebrews is they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth could be translated on the land, but on earth or in the land would be probably what you'd expect.

And since it says on the earth, I believe it's saying that even though Abram was suggesting that in that particular land, he was a stranger and a sojourner, that the writer of Hebrews sees more in it than that. He was acknowledging that he had another land, not of this world. In fact, that's what it says in the next verses in Hebrews 11, 14 and 15,

says, For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

And truly, if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return for 16. But now they desire a better that is a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Now it says that they were acknowledging that this country, this land that they were in, was not their own. And while Abram seems to only be saying that about the land of Canaan, the writer of Hebrews says this really is far more true of all of us than maybe just that all of us really are looking for another country that's not of this world. And so even Abram was looking for a heavenly country.

Now, where did he get that idea? I believe it's based on how the New Testament writers understood the promises made to Abram about his seed and that the heavenly country is the city of God, the New Jerusalem. He was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. And the Messiah's kingdom is really what is in view there, I believe.

But to acknowledge one's pilgrim hood and sojourner hood is an important thing. Importantly, apparently for Christians today, according to 1 Peter and chapter 2, 1 Peter 2 11 says, Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. So he says you should have your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they observe glorify God in the day of visitation.

Peter assumes that it is kind of two different cultures here. There's the culture of the Gentiles and there's our culture. Ours is the culture of people who are not really part of this present system in this present age.

We have conduct among them. We live among them. And our standards are different than theirs.

And it's important for them to notice the superiority of the morality of our standards so that they might be attracted to it and that our conduct should be honorable among them. But Peter addresses the church as strangers and sojourners or pilgrims. Also in 1 Peter 1 1, although it doesn't maybe come out in our, but it does come out somewhat in our English translation.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, etc. He refers to the Christians as the Diaspora. Now, many people think that Peter is referring to the Jews because they were called the Diaspora, the Jews who are scattered outside of the land of Canaan.

The Diaspora means, or the Diaspora, the Diaspora means those who are scattered, those who are dispersed. And all the Jews who did not live in the land of Israel in the

days of the New Testament were referred to as the Diaspora. There are, of course, Koreans speak of the Diaspora of the Koreans.

There's Koreans all over the world outside of Korea are called the Diaspora. Any group of people that are scattered from their country are the Diaspora. But Peter uses it here, I think, figuratively.

He says that the Christian church in the world is like the Jewish Diaspora, which is spread outside their homeland. They are pilgrims traveling. They are dispersed in the world and away from our homeland.

And so Abram is the first to acknowledge this. And what I think is interesting is in Genesis 23, 4, where he says, I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. They say to him in verse 6, here is my Lord, you are a mighty prince among us.

Notice the difference. They acknowledge him as a prince of God. Actually, it's what it says in the Hebrew.

You are a prince of God among us. But they acknowledge that of him. He does not say that about himself.

His view is that he's merely a passer through. But it says we take on the character of persons belonging to another society, not the society that we're in, really. Although we participate in it and we're not trying to stand aloof from it, yet we have different loyalties.

We have different values. And as we behave as strangers and pilgrims, rather than seeking to fit in by compromise, well, it's actually when we are true to our pilgrim character that the world recognizes us for what we are and should be. They can recognize the church as something superior when the church sees itself as something different.

And I think the biggest mistake that many times the Christian church makes is they feel like we need to fit in well. We need to copy. We need to imitate the world.

Many times in our church services, the idea seems to be let's make this as much like an entertainment situation such as the world would enjoy. So maybe they'll enjoy coming to our church or we want to act like we're not really different in ways we can feel our views and our values that are different, maybe out of embarrassment or maybe simply out of a desire to relate. But there's times when we just need to act like we belong to another country.

And we're strangers here, especially when this country or this world is so corrupt that we have to assume that there are people in it who would like to know that there is an alternative. There are people in it who are probably would probably be drawn to another

country if they believe there was one. But if all those who claim to belong to it don't act like they belong to any other society, they just act like they belong to this one, then there'll be no convincing testimony to the alternative.

And Abram, when he referred to himself, when he saw himself as a foreigner and a sojourner, they saw him as something greater than that. Now, they said initially, go ahead and bury your dead in whatever choice burial places you can find here. I don't know if they meant never mind purchasing property, just choose one of our graveyards and feel free to use it for free.

Just go ahead and bury your dead in one of our graveyards. That might be what they meant, or they might have meant we'll just give you a piece of property, you name it. However, we should recognize as we read through this that the magnanimity of the Hittites, as it appears to be in the bargaining, especially Ephron, who says, no, just take it.

I don't want your money. This is really the way bargains were done in the Hittite civilization. As we know, there are testimonies to this in the Newsy tablets and other archaeological finds.

And it says, verse seven, Then Abram stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and meet with Ephron, the son of Zohar, for me. Apparently, he had already kind of scouted out the various real estate that might be suitable for what he was looking for.

And he had identified this one cave on a certain patch of ground, and he'd even done a title search and found out that it was owned by a guy named Ephron. And so he asked that the Hittites would intercede for him with Ephron and make him amenable to selling the property. Verse nine says that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he has, which is at the end of his field.

Let him give it to me at the full price as property for a burial place among you. Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth. And Ephron, the Hittite, answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of the city, saying, No, my lord, hear me.

I give you the field and the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you.

Bury your dead. Then Abram bowed himself down before the people of the land, and he spoke to Ephron in hearing of the people and of the land. If you will give it, please hear me.

I will give you money for the field. Take it from me, and I will bury my dead there. And

Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, My lord, listen to me.

The land is worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead. And Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abram weighed out the silver for Ephron, which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

Now, again, it sounds like Ephron's being very generous. I'll just take it. Just take it.

Just take it. He says three times in one verse. Just I give it to you.

I give it to you. I give it to you. And Abram said, Nonsense.

I'll give you the fair price. Well, OK, it is worth so much now. The amount that was quoted four hundred shekels of silver.

There are disputes among scholars as to its actual value compared with other purchases in the Bible. It seems exorbitant. For example, Jeremiah bought a field for seventeen shekels of silver in the book of Jeremiah.

Now, this is four hundred shekels of silver. And some scholars say that four hundred shekels of silver is the amount the average labor would make in fifty years. Now, Abram was rich enough that it wouldn't hurt him to do that.

He is extremely wealthy, chic, but and it may be that Ephron was taking advantage of him. Although some scholars say, well, the shekel had different values at different times, just like gold and silver do today. They didn't have coinage back then.

You can see he weighed out the silver. It was sold by weight. And so instead of having minted coins, they sold it by the ounce or by the shekel.

And just as today, the value of gold and silver goes up and down, some say, well, you know, in the time of Jeremiah, the value of the shekel may have been very different than that in the days of Abram. And that is possible. It does say in that last line of verse 18 or 16, excuse me, according to the currency of the merchants.

Now, currency doesn't mean coinage. It would mean, you know, whatever value the merchants at that time placed on the shekel. Nonetheless, it does seem like a high price.

I mean, if if Jeremiah could buy a field for 17 shekels and I believe, I believe Omri bought the entire city of Samaria for, I don't remember the exact amount, I think it was like 600 shekels, something like that. A whole city he bought for, you know, half again is this much. It does seem like Ephraim was taking advantage somewhat of this rich guy who had no choice but to buy at whatever price he offered.

After all, Sarah was rotting. I mean, these transactions had to be done quickly. They

didn't embalm people back then.

The Egyptians did, but other people didn't. So, as soon as someone died, you had to get them in the ground in two or three days or it's going to be an ugly picture. Bodies do rot quickly when they're not embalmed, especially in the heat of the day.

They didn't have refrigerated compartments like they do in our modern funeral homes and so forth. So, almost as soon as she died, he had to secure something. Ephraim knew that this man was rich enough to buy the cave at any price and would buy it at any price.

So, Ephraim, I don't think he's being so generous here. In fact, it may have been well understood by Abraham and the Hittites that this was a situation of Ephraim taking advantage of a rich guy in a, you know, hard spot. But why did he seem so generous then at the beginning? Why did he seem to just take it, just take it? This is the way that they bargained in those days.

It was understood that you don't accept the first offer, but it's polite to make the offer. I remember I was living with a guy from somewhere in the Midwest. He's actually, he's a friend of mine, a Canadian who grew up in the Midwest.

But he, when I was single and he was single, we lived together. And I remember he used to, whenever he was cooking, he'd offer me some of what he was making. And I always had made other arrangements or whatever.

I wasn't hungry or something. I'd turn him down. And then a few minutes later, he'd offer it to me again.

I'd turn him down. And then he'd offer it to me a third time. I mean, and after he did this a few times, I said, you know, why, why do you keep offering me the food when I tell you I don't want it? He said, oh, I thought, he said, where we come from, you're supposed to turn down an offer of food the first two times.

But even if you want it. So we offer it three times in our culture. And I guess that reminded me a little of this situation where if Abraham said, oh, sure, I'll take it for free, you know, that would have been considered extremely rude, maybe an act of war even, who knows, you know, it was just not the culture of the time, the etiquette of the time was someone said, I want to buy it for you, oh, take it for free.

But you really had better not, because it's understood you won't do that. You're supposed to come back and say, oh, no, I'll give you whatever it's worth. And then the real deal really is made after that.

It's just kind of protocol. And so the man sounds very generous just because sometimes in Eastern culture, there's this outward magnanimity that's part of the culture, but the man really, I think, kind of took advantage of it, charged a lot of money for that field. And

so this became the only piece of property in the promised land that Abraham ever owned.

And it says in Hebrews 11 that he and Isaac and Jacob wandered and lived in tents in the land that had been promised to them, not really owning it. They only own this one little field. And this field became the place where not only Sarah was buried later, in chapter 25, Abram is buried there when he dies.

And as we go on through the story in Genesis, we find that Isaac and Rebekah are buried there and Jacob and Leah are buried there. Interestingly, Rachel is not. She is buried near Bethlehem because she apparently died too far away from Machpelah to get her there before it was too late to bury her.

So she didn't get in there, but Leah did. Anyway, it says, so the field of Ephraim, which was in Machpelah, which was before memory, the field in the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of her. For all who went into the gate of the city, notice the gate of the city in verse 10 also was the place where this transaction took place.

Now it mentions it again. I said in an earlier lecture that the gate of the city is where business and legal transactions generally took place. That's where the court hearings were conducted.

The elders of the city sat in the gate of the city. And so also this, as a legal transaction, had to be done in the gate of the city where the magistrates of the city would be sitting. After this, Abraham buried Sarah, his wife, in the cave of the field of Machpelah before memory that is Hebron in the land of Canaan.

So the field in the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of her as property for a burial place. So not much happens in that chapter except that Sarah dies and he acquires land. But that is something he now has an anchor in the land.

He now has something he really owns there. Now the rest of the land will become the property of his descendants by military conquest. But here he got the land peaceably.

And this is probably the only piece of land in Israel that has that about it. It's a place that was acquired without conflict, without war. It's a peaceable piece of land.

Unfortunately, it's not so peaceable now, that particular spot. It's been in the hands of the Muslims for, I think, since the 13th century. And they have a mosque standing on what they believe is this spot.

Now, I say what they believe is this spot because the Muslims have not allowed any non-Muslims into this mosque or into this place where presumably the patriarchs are buried.

And to my mind, that'd be perhaps the most interesting spot to see in the Holy Land. Some people might like some other spot because of some famous story.

But if you actually stood at the grave where Abram and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Rebekah and Leah were buried and possibly Joseph too, it would be, I don't know, to me that'd be an awesome thing to stand there and say all those people I've read about are right in there, you know. Now the problem is it's not entirely certain it's the same spot. And after the Six Day War in 1967, the Jews gained access to the place for the first time in centuries.

And the access to the tomb where the bodies are buried is under the floor through a really small opening, like only about 11 inches wide. It's too narrow for an adult to get in. And during that brief period while the Jews had some access to it, a 12-year-old girl agreed to go down there and check and see what's down there.

And they lowered her down on a rope with a torch, you know, or with a flashlight. And she saw the burial compartment and so forth, but there were no bones there. So no one knows if the bones, you know, they're just too old, they deteriorated, or if they were later moved by the Arabs or whatever.

But she couldn't find any of the bones there. So it may not even be the right spot, or it might be that after, you know, this is actually 4,000 years ago. In 4,000 years lots of things can happen.

There are grave robbers and things like that. So there were not apparently any bones in there when she went down there. And so, of course, the correct identification of these spots in the Holy Land has always been tricky.

This location was identified in the 12th century, I believe, and I'm not sure how they identified it. You know, when you go to the Holy Land, so-called, to Israel, a lot of the sites that are considered to be the holy sites, you know, the place where Jesus allegedly was born, the place where the Sermon on the Mount was preached, those kind of things, those were identified not by any scientific or archaeological means in many cases. When Constantine, the emperor, became a Christian, his mother professed to have visions, and she identified many of these holy spots in the Holy Land from her visions.

So, I mean, depending on how much you trust her, the veracity of her spiritual experiences will depend on how much we can trust the traditional sites of many of these things. Though I don't think she was the one who identified this place, because from what I've read, it was identified much later than her time. That was a short chapter.

We now come to a very long chapter, and it's made the longer by the fact that it tells the same story twice in detail. This is the story of the marriage of Isaac. Now, Abram's going to die in chapter 25, right at the beginning of the chapter.

It's clear that we're almost finished with his story. There's only a couple of things that needed to be done. We had to record how he found a place that he himself would be buried and where Sarah was buried.

We also have this other unfinished business. Isaac's not married. Isaac needs a bride.

He's 40 years old. There's been God's promise that through this son, all the nations will be blessed, but he's going to have to have children for that. And so the last order of business for Abram, although he lived another 35 years after this, the last recorded story in the life of Abram is his acquiring a bride for Isaac, because that is essential to the story.

All the remaining 35 years of Abram's life after this, really nothing else is recorded of. Now, Abram was old and well advanced in age and Yahweh had blessed Abram in all things. So Abram said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, please put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear.

This is a strange arrangement to us. It's an old Middle Eastern custom of how to take an oath. The putting of the hand under the thigh, scholars are not really sure exactly what it's signified.

And that's not too unusual for things in such ancient cultures. You know, they had these practices and it's really kind of, you can only guess at, you know, what the origin of that practice was. But, and I don't know, but most scholars think that having the servant put his hand under Abram's thigh as he sat there was an act of submission or something like that.

I could see how that might be. A man who wants to signify that he's not going to use his hands, if he sits on his hands deliberately, it makes it very clear that he's, he's remaining powerless or inactive in a situation. I've mentioned before that there's only been one time that I've actually been hit by another man who was angry at me.

And I saw him coming. I knew he was, I knew he was angry at me. And I, I took my glasses off and handed them to a friend.

And, and then I sat down on my hands and I wanted to, in doing that, I wanted to make it very clear to him, you know, he can hit me if he wants to, but I'm not going to hit him back. He did hit me, but he didn't hit me back. I mean, I didn't hit him back.

He didn't hit again. But, but I mean, to me, it was, it just seemed natural. I hadn't thought of this in advance.

I just thought I'm going to demonstrate that I'm not going to, I'm not going to do anything. You know, I'm not going to do anything with my hands. So, I sort of made myself visibly powerless to defend myself.

And it may be that by saying, put your hand under my thigh, it means you're giving up all of your power to do what you want to do. And you're now under my power. Of course, the servant would be under Abraham's power anyway, but he was being, he's swearing to do something that, that Abraham wanted to do.

Not necessarily that he would choose to do. I don't know if that has anything to do with the origin of the custom. It may have had totally different meaning, but I've thought about it a lot and I don't have any, I don't have any real authoritative ideas about it.

It's just an ancient and strange custom. But he said, put your hand under my thigh and I'll make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell. But you should go to my country and to my kindred and take a wife for my son, Isaac.

Now the Canaanites were a corrupt people with a corrupt religion and Abraham didn't want any of that coming into the family line. I mean, if Isaac had married someone from a corrupt family, even if it was a good girl, the influence of in-laws and all that kind of stuff, pressure to honor the gods of the Canaanites, those kinds of things Abraham didn't want coming into the family. Now at a later date, Esau married a couple of Canaanite girls and it grieved his parents, Isaac and Rebecca.

And it would seem that all of Jacob's sons must have married Canaanite girls because there were no Jewish girls. They were the first Jews, the boys. And so if they married local women, which seems likely, it would seem that all of Jacob's, well, 11 of Jacob's sons must have married Canaanite girls.

Joseph married Egyptian women. But initially Abraham was concerned not to include any Canaanite stock or Canaanite blood or probably Canaanite philosophy and religion in the family. So he insisted that Isaac must marry somebody who's more, has more of an affinity with the family, both not just biologically, but religiously.

We don't know much about the religion of Abraham's family that he sent his servant to, but they do seem to at least acknowledge Yahweh and they may have been worshippers of Yahweh through Abraham's influence. We've heard nothing much about them since Abraham left them now 140 years earlier. Excuse me, it wasn't 140 years earlier he left them.

He left them about 55 years earlier, I guess. He says, but you should go to my kindred and take a wife for my son, Isaac. Verse five, and the servant said to him, perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land.

Must I take your son back to the land from which you came? So if she won't come here, should Isaac go there? If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, should Mohammed go

to the mountain? And the Lord, Abraham said to him, beware that you do not take my son back there. Yahweh, 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, saying to your descendants, I will give this land. He will send his angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath. Only do not take my son back there. Now, I guess Abraham was not so sure Isaac would come back if he left the land.

After all, he is wealthy, but he is a wanderer. If he had gone back to Haran where the family was and married, he might well have found that the settled life in Haran, the city life, maybe the economy, the social life, the stability that that may have appealed to him and that he might just have decided to stay there and never come back to the land. Abraham was afraid that might happen.

So he says, no, don't take him back there. You bring the woman here. Now, if she won't come, then you're free from your oath.

But he said the Lord will send his angel ahead of you. Now, we don't read that that any angel was visibly leading this servant as he traveled. But no doubt, Abraham was correct.

It does seem that he was led in some way to the place, to the right spot at the right time. And so perhaps we should understand that God's angels do serve as agents to invisibly guide. Although we think of more in terms of being guided by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit also has his angels stationed with us.

And so Abraham felt that the angel would guide him as Moses was told by God that the angel would go before them into the land of Canaan, though they didn't necessarily see the angel. But once when Joshua met with an angel before the conquest of Jericho. Anyway, it seems as if Abraham is stating as a certainty that because God will send the angel to the right spot, the woman will be willing to go.

And he says, and you will bring her back here. But then he's not so sure he said at least if she doesn't come, then you're free from your oath. So I don't want you to feel under pressure that you have to that you have to pressure her if she's not willing to come.

I don't want you to force her or kidnap her or make her feel that she has to come against her will. You'll be released from the oath if she says no. So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Then the servant took 10 of his master's camels and departed for all his master's goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. Now, the city of Nahor is not the name of the city in all likelihood, but this is the city that Nahor

apparently had settled in.

And I mean, it's possible the city had come to be named after him. That sometimes was the case. Cities were sometimes named after individuals.

But we know that Nahor was the other brother, the other surviving brother of Abraham after the death of the brother Haran. And it would appear that when Tara and Abram and Sarah and all those people left Ur of the Chaldees and went to Haran, Nahor was with them. And so this city, as far as Abraham was concerned, was Nahor city.

This is where Nahor lived. And that's where the family of Nahor would be, from whom a wife would be sought. So he went to the city of Nahor.

Now, this would be near Haran up in Mesopotamia. The journey, by some estimates, was about 450 miles or 725 kilometers. Some estimates make it a little longer by the ancient routes that would have probably been traveled.

It's not as direct. Some say it was about 520 miles. So it's somewhere between 450 and 520 miles journey in kilometers at 725 to 837 kilometers.

Now, it would seem a man traveling alone can travel 20 miles or more a day. But with a camel caravan, camels, you know, they're not usually running. They're walking and even probably a little slower loaded down than a man walks.

So they might travel only about 15 miles a day or so, maybe 20. In any case, it would take between 20 and 30 days to make the trip across the desert. And he had these 10 camels loaded down with gifts, really betrothal gifts.

When you, in those days, wanted to make a deal with the family to take one of their daughters for your son, you would give a bride, there was a bride price you'd give. Now, Abram, being extremely wealthy, could afford, could offer a very high bride price. 10 camel loads would be a very high amount of wealth, I'm sure, whatever was in it.

We know there are gold rings and such because some of those are produced in the story. There might have been a lot of gold and silver and rubies, all kinds of stuff. It says, he made his camels kneel down outside the city after he got there by a well of water at evening time, the time when women got to draw the water.

Customarily, the women would carry the water jars home. And so I don't know if he was just there because he was thirsty and it was the natural place to be or if that's where he knew he'd meet the young women who were coming from town at that time to take water back home. Then he said, O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day and show kindness to my master Abraham.

Behold, I stand here by the well of water and the daughters of men of the city are

coming out to draw water. Now, let it be that the young woman to whom I say, please let down your picture that I may drink. And she says, drink, and I will also give your camels drink.

Let her 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. Now, notice the man assumes certain things.

First of all, he assumes that there's a particular girl that God has appointed to be Isaac's wife. Secondly, he assumes she's going to be among the girls who are going to be coming out. And he hopes that she'll be the first one he approaches, or else he may end up drinking a lot of water before the right one gives him water.

You know, please give me some water. OK, here. No mention of the camels.

Find another girl. Could you give me some water? And drinks water from eight or ten different jugs before one finally says, I'll give you camels. But he did believe that she'd be there.

He assumes that to be true. Perhaps he just knew that there's not going to be any young women in this town, except the ones who come out here to draw water. So one of them's got to be the right one.

Now, the idea that there's one that God chose is it seems to be that theory seems to be vindicated by the events that followed, because God did, of course, find apparently the woman who is best connected to the family and in many respects, probably the best girl in town and maybe the best in the world for Isaac. And so we could see that God would have chosen her. Many people would ask, and many Christians think they know, whether it is so that there's only one person in the world for each person to marry.

And, you know, you got to marry that one or or you missed the boat. And the Bible doesn't really say clearly about that. It seems to me that one could worry about that a little too much.

I certainly believe when I look at my parents' marriage, that I couldn't imagine a better match for my dad or for my mom. And so it kind of would seem like, you know, God picked them out for each other. And it certainly seems like God picked out Rebecca for Isaac here.

On the other hand, in talking about widows in First Corinthians, chapter seven, Paul indicates that while he thinks widows may be happier and able more to devote themselves to the service of God if they remain single. Yet, he said, there's certainly nothing wrong with them getting married. And it's funny how he actually says it here.

In verse thirty nine of First Corinthians seven, he says, a wife is bound by the law as long

as her husband lives. But if her husband dies, she's at liberty to be married to whom she wishes. Only in the Lord.

Now, when it says a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, that means as long as she's married and he's alive. Certainly, Paul is not describing every circumstance. He's trying to make a general point.

The circumstance is that if a woman is still married, that is, she's not legitimately divorced, then if she's not divorced, then she's married until he dies. But if he's dead, well, then she's not married and she's free to remarry. And what's the point I would observe is that it says she's free to be married to whomever she wishes.

Only in the Lord. So there's only one condition. A woman or a man, a Christian has to marry another Christian.

But it seems like they're at liberty to choose whoever they want, unless Paul's idea is, well, the first person they married was God's choice, but now that they're dead, there's not another choice out there. So they can marry whoever they want to. But I think that's unlikely to be his meaning.

It seems like probably from the point of view of the Christian, even if God does have one person picked out for you. It's not like you have to stress about whether you'll find that one or not. It seems to me that like with many things in the guidance of God, you make decisions about that according to wisdom, according to feeling, according to the kinds of things that godly considerations would consider.

And then you. And then if you move forward into marriage, you're married. Then it turns out that's the one God chose for you.

Now, on occasion, I think I think there are occasions when God has a special and picked out for someone. And I know that when my wife, June, which is probably the only wife I should have ever married, as things turned out, of course, I wouldn't have any of my children if that had been the case. So I don't know.

God knows. But my wife, June, before I ever really knew her well or had an interest in her, we knew each other as friends in a group. And we spent a lot of time together, not just one on one, but as a group of people.

And she apparently had prayed at one point and told God that if she were to marry, she had never actually wanted to marry. She was raised Catholic and she kind of had wanted to be a nun when she was young. And even as a Christian, she had not really had any interest in marriage.

But she she prayed once, apparently. And I didn't learn this till much later after I proposed to her. But she said, you know, Lord, if you want me to marry anybody, I'd like

to marry Steve.

And the Lord spoke to her and said, you will. And she didn't say anything about it to me. But later I proposed to her and then later she told me about this.

But I don't know if that means that God had the two of us picked out, you know, and she was the only one in the world I could have married or I was the only one in the world she could have married. Or if God just knew it was going to happen and assured her that it was going to happen. I think Christians who are single can stress about this an awful lot, like, you know, well, is this the one that God has chosen? I would be I'd be careful about being too concerned about picking a spouse that way.

I'll tell you another story of my life. It's really confusing. I told this to somebody already, but it really confuses me.

When I was in high school, when I was just ready to graduate as a senior in high school, I was teaching a Bible study every day at lunch. And there was a young woman who was attending the Bible studies every day. And she's attractive and quiet and attentive and so forth.

And I was attracted to her, though I didn't have any experience at all with dating or anything like that. I had not really done that as a younger person. And I was newly, newly baptized in the spirit.

So the whole spiritual gifts and guidance and things were all brand new. I didn't know how things were supposed to be done. But I knew about, you know, the fleece.

The fleece that was put out, I thought, well, Lord, if I should pursue this woman, then I laid out a circumstance that was very unlikely to occur. I said, let this happen in this time frame. And it did happen.

And I thought, well, that could be a coincidence. So I came up with another scenario that was equally unlikely to happen by chance. I said, well, Lord, if she's really the one I should be considering, then let such and such happen.

And it happened. And I was kind of nervous about this. I wasn't really sure if this is the way you're supposed to be getting guidance about such things.

But I, I, I did it again and again and again, actually seven different times after I got to the seventh time and they all turned up positive. I thought, well, seven's a good number. I guess I should stop there.

And literally, things that I, that I, I made them harder and harder situations, right? You know, as each one materialized, I thought, well, that was apparently too easy, you know? So, I mean, all these situations are more difficult than the previous. And in every case,

the answer came up positive. So I thought, well, it sounds like this is the one, you know, sounds like this is the one God's leading me to.

I went to her and spoke with her. I says, you know, I, I mean, I wouldn't do this today with a woman, but I didn't know better. Says, you know, I, uh, this is strange.

I know we don't know each other that well, but I just kind of feel like God may want us to, uh, start seeing each other and get together. And she said, well, you know, that's fine and all, but I just want you to know, I don't love you. I said, well, that's okay.

I mean, if, I mean, if God wants it to happen, you will. And if not, then that's fine. It won't happen.

And the next day she came to me, she said, you know what? I love you teenagers, you know, pretty, pretty flaky, but you know, it seemed like a confirmation to me. It seemed like, wow, you know, everything confirms that this is the right one. So we went out once and then the second time around to go out with her, her parents wouldn't let her.

They, they called me the guy from Jesus. They didn't like Jesus and they didn't want her seeing a guy from Jesus. And, uh, so we'd talk on the phone until her parents pulled the plug out of the wall and wouldn't let her talk on the phone.

There weren't cell phones back then. So, I mean, they cut off all communication with us and she was a year younger than me. So she wasn't in any of my classes.

The only time we saw each other was at lunch and I was teaching the whole lunchtime and, and they'd take her to school and pick her up. And there's absolutely no way for me to see her. So as the weeks and months went by, obviously we didn't get any closer.

And eventually she ended up seeing someone else. And when she graduated, she moved in with a guy, someone else, she backslid. And I thought, well, that is a really strange set of circumstances.

I mean, it's not strange that, you know, two teenagers that think they like each other would, would eventually not end up together. What was strange is all those fleeces and stuff. I mean, this guy was putting out a fleece for God.

You know, if there's a woman who says, you know, sort of the countersign, like two secret agents meeting, see if you're the one, you know, it's the countersign, you know, give me a drink of water, drink, and I'll give you a camel's drink also. Okay. You're the one I'm supposed to meet here.

But I had more than that going for me. And it, and it turned out to be, I'd have to be mistaken. Now that was an early experience of mine in divine guidance.

And it was the most confusing one I've ever had. And so what's the conclusion? My

conclusion is this. Don't assume that God is telling you that you're going to marry somebody.

Although he might be, if he is, you'll find out because it'll happen. But I think that it's a, it's an awkward and dangerous thing for someone just to feel, you know, they're obviously someone you're already attracted or infatuated with, say, God's telling me to do this. And then to, and then if it doesn't happen, then you begin to doubt God.

I think that we, it's hard to know. It's hard to be objective. And I, I don't know if I fooled myself or what in that situation, but it was a very, it was very instructive to me.

And it made me think, okay, I'm never going to marry somebody just because I think I've got signs or because I think there's some kind of supernatural thing going on here, because I, that obviously can be from more than one source. In any case, it worked in this case. And maybe that's what encouraged me in those days to try that.

But I guess God does different things in different cases. There weren't too many women in the whole world at that time that would qualify for Isaac's wife. After all, the whole world were pagan.

Perhaps only this family were believers in Yahweh in the whole planet. So for there to be one girl that would be right for Isaac is not unthinkable in the world today with so many Christians around the world. Of course, it's not as likely that there's only one person that each one would be happy with.

There's probably multiple people that would be possibilities. Anyway, I know that single people like myself, when they read a story like this, you know, what does this tell us about God's will in bringing people together? Well, it certainly shows in this case, the sovereignty of God working to bring Rebekah to Isaac. There's no question about that.

And verse 15 says it happened before he had finished speaking. That behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abram's brother, came out with her picture on her shoulder. Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin.

No man had known her. And she went down to the well and filled her picture and came up. Now it mentions she was very beautiful to behold.

Actually, the same thing is mentioned about Sarah and the same thing is said about Rachel later on. It's usually the first thing you hear about them and then you find out they're a virgin and they're related to so-and-so. In other words, you find out there are other qualifications as you find out they're beautiful.

And I don't know why that's always mentioned first, except that that's probably what men notice first, honestly. I mean, men can notice if a woman's beautiful before they

know anything else about her. And generally speaking, that's kind of the first qualifier, the kind of first eliminator.

If a man doesn't find a woman physically attractive, she might be in all other respects a wonderful person, but it might not go anywhere from there. He might not even find out. And it does seem that although physical beauty is certainly not the most important thing, it is the first thing that people notice in general.

It's usually the first thing that's mentioned when we're being introduced in the scripture to somebody's, you know, potential wife. And no doubt the reason is because that was the first thing the servant noticed as a man. And he didn't know anything else about her, but he knew she was beautiful.

And it turns out she was also a virgin. That means she was available. And she came to fill her pitcher up with water.

And the servant ran to meet her and said, please let me drink a little water from your pitcher. So she said, drink, my Lord. Then she hastened and let her pitcher down to her hand and gave him a drink.

And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, I will draw water for your camels also until they have finished drinking. Now, that's obviously the counter side. He knew he had met his contact here, but she didn't know it yet.

Now, think of what she was offering. She's offering to water all these camels that have been traveling for a month across the desert. Camels can drink a lot of water and then go a long time without water.

But once they've gone a long time without water, they can take a lot to replenish them. A camel can drink about 25 gallons of water or 100 liters per camel. And he had 10 camels.

So she had to draw about 1000 liters of water or 250 gallons of water to feed those camels. If she had, let's say, an eight gallon jar, which would be relatively heavy to lift and to pull out of a well, she'd have to refill it 30 times to feed these camels all the water. And yet she volunteered.

He didn't ask her to do it and she didn't do it grudgingly. He just asked for a drink himself. But she saw he had camels there.

She obviously had a servant's heart. She thought, well, this man, his camels are gonna need water too. So I'll volunteer to do that too.

And then it says she hastened and emptied her pitcher into the trough and ran back to the well to draw water. She didn't even move slow. She was running.

She might not have been running by the time she was carrying the 30th jar, but at least she was enthusiastic at the beginning. And so she ran back to the well to draw water and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.

Now, this man is a little slow to convince, I would say, but no wonder. He still didn't know if she'd be willing to make the trip. So it was because, you know, even he might have decided this is the one.

This woman is the one that God has led me to. This is the one that God would have to marry Isaac. But he still knew that she had a free choice in the matter.

She might even be the right one and she might choose not to go there. People do choose for themselves things and sometimes they choose contrary to what the will of God is for them. So he still wasn't sure if his journey was prosperous or not.

So it was when the camels had finished drinking that the man took a golden nose ring, weighing half a shekel. Now, half a shekel. I don't know.

I don't know exactly how much a shekel is, but it's obvious this is a gold shekel, not a silver shekel. Abram bought the field of Machpelah at an exorbitant price for 400 silver shekels, but a gold shekel is probably worth what? What's gold worth? Twenty times as much as silver or something like that. I don't know.

And so this would be a very valuable piece of gold and two bracelets for her wrist, weighing ten shekels of gold. So, I mean, this is like more than she'd probably more than her brothers would make working in a lifetime, perhaps these items, by the way, they impressed her brother when he saw them. And the servant said, Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please.

Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge? So she said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, Milka's son, whom she bore to Nahor. Moreover, she said to him, We have both straw and feed enough and room to lodge. Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped Yahweh.

And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master, Abraham, who has not forsaken his mercy and his truth toward my master. As for me being on the way, Yahweh led me to the house of my master's brethren. So the young woman ran and told those of her mother's house these things.

Now, the servant, of course, when he heard the family issues with only confirmed from the other evidence he had that this was the right one and he just recognized, apparently it just dawned on him that God had led him to that spot at that time. If he had come a half hour later, he would have missed her. If he'd come a half hour earlier, he might have run into a different girl.

And he had been traveling for probably a month and without necessarily having any sense of an angel directing him or God, he's just making his way along the route, the way you go, probably breaking camp at whatever time of day was convenient and setting up camp at whatever time is convenient, not aware that he's being led moment by moment, step by step to this specific well at this specific hour or this specific moment. And after his while, while I was traveling, the Lord was leading me. And that's how divine guidance often is.

You're making your decisions just on the basis of ordinary considerations in many cases. You know, you're just going by common sense or wisdom or the opportunities that arise. And so you're not aware of divine guidance until something happens to say, wow, I had to be here at this moment for this to happen.

And I was being led by God without even being aware of it. And I, you know, it says in Romans 8, as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the children of God so that all children of God are led by the spirit of God, not always consciously, though a lot of the guidance is unconscious. And you can probably look back at a number of encounters that have been very important in your life at one in one way or another and realize that you met that person or heard that information or got into that circumstance just because you'd made a certain choice that day to go this way or that way.

And and, you know, it could have been the other way around, but you happen to go this way, you were not aware of any significance that would come of it. But God was leading you. You can see in retrospect, oh, God was leading me into this situation because of these things.

And that's what this man, this man got, got the revelation that he'd been led by God, although inadvertently and unknowingly. Now, Rebecca had a brother whose name was Laban, who, of course, becomes very significant in the story later on. And Laban ran out to the man at the well.

Now he saw, of course, the gold and stuff. So it came to pass when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists. And when he heard the words of his sister, Rebecca's name, thus, the man spoke to me that he went to the man and there he stood by the by the camels at the well.

So the servant had stayed at the well waiting to see if the family would come out and invite him in. Rebecca had gone home and taken the news. And Laban said, Come in, oh, blessed of Yahweh.

Why do you stand outside? For I've prepared the house and a place for the camels. Now, it's interesting that Laban blessed him in the name of Yahweh. Laban was not extremely godly man, but it's clear that he was not using the names of the foreign gods as blessings.

And he apparently the family maintained the religion of Yahweh in some sense, maybe not exclusively, but it's clear that the first name for God that came to his mind just spontaneously was that of Yahweh. And that's a good sign in a world of pagans and hard to find people who knew the God of Abraham. And so the man came to the house and he unloaded the camels and he provided straw and feed for the camels and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

And food was set before him to eat. But he said, I will not eat until I have told my errand. And he said, Speak on.

So he said, I am Abraham's servant. Now, they knew who Abraham was because they knew Nahor and they knew that Nahor was had brother, a brother named Abraham. So they now know something about this man that they didn't know before.

He's connected to a relative of theirs, a respected one, no doubt one who, you know, one who is revered because he was like the brother of their ancestor. He says Yahweh has blessed my master greatly and he has become great and he has given him flocks and herds and silver and gold, male and female servants and camels and donkeys. Certainly the lot that he had brought with him on those camels was a demonstration of the wealth of Abraham 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.

Now 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. And now he goes through the whole story. We don't have to read the whole story again because we read it already.

He goes through the details about how he made this agreement with God to have a girl answer this way and so forth. He tells the story completely and he says in verse 49. Now, if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me.

And if not, tell me that I may turn to the right hand or to the left. I don't know if I'm going to have to keep looking for another girl or if this is going to be the one. And it depends on you guys, because I can't take it without your permission.

Now, her older brother is in the negotiations more than her father. It may suggest that her father was very old and nearly incapacitated. He was there, as we see in verse 50.

But most of the negotiations seem to be done by Laban, her older brother, who may have been assuming the role of leadership in the home at this point because of the father's perhaps incapacity. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, the thing comes from Yahweh. We cannot speak to you either bad or good.

Here is Rebecca before you. Take her and go and let her be your master's son's wife as the Lord has spoken. And it came to pass when Abram's servant heard their words that he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth.

Then the servant brought out jewelry and silver, jewelry of silver and jewelry of gold and clothing and gave them to Rebecca. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank and stayed all night.

Then they arose in the morning and he said, send me away to my master. But her brother and her mother said, let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least 10. After that, she may go.

And he said to them, do not hinder me since Yahweh has prospered my way. Send me away so that I may go to my master. So they said, we will call the young woman and ask her personally.

Then they called Rebecca and said to her, will you go with this man? And she said, I will go. So they sent away Rebecca, their sister and her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. And we haven't read too much about the men who were traveling with him, but since he was traveling with a lot of treasures, he probably had an armed entourage with him.

Remember, Abraham had sufficient armed servants that he could fight an army and he had done so. This entourage might have been 50 or 100 men armed traveling with these camels to make sure that, you know, raiding Bedouins wouldn't come and steal and kill the servant and ruin his mission. I'm sure Abraham took every precaution.

So there's probably quite a large group here. And they blessed Rebecca and said, our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of 10,000 and may your descendants possess the gates of those that hate them. To possess the gates probably means to control the entry to the city.

Walled cities were protected against invaders, except if you, if you got through the gates, you could conquer them. And so may your enemies conquer and may your children conquer their enemies, is basically what they're saying, and possess access to the gates of their cities. Then Rebecca and her maids arose and they rode on camels and followed the man.

So the servant took Rebecca and departed. Now Isaac came from the way of Bir-le-Hiroy, for he dwelt in the south. That's, of course, the well of him who lives and sees me, which had been so named by Hagar when she was fleeing from Sarah.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening and he lifted his eyes and looked and there the camels were coming. Then Rebecca lifted her eyes when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from her camel. For she said to the servant, who is this man walking in the field to meet us? And the servant said, it is my master.

So she took a veil and covered herself, which would have been a way of her showing her submissiveness and her betrothal. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.

Then Isaac brought her into his mother, Sarah's tent, and he took Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her.

So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Now, there's no wedding ceremony mentioned here, but there probably was something that transpired in the ancient Middle Eastern world. Weddings are extremely simple.

I've read some books on this very thing to know what the origins of marriage ceremonies are. The Mesopotamian people in those days, a man and woman who had agreed to get married would stand before witnesses and say, you're my wife. And she'd say, you're my husband.

They were married. So it's just a verbalized agreement that they made. It's a covenant.

And it was, of course, agreed to by both. It may seem like the woman is more like a pawn here because the negotiations are done between the man and her brother or father or whatever. But she was still given some measure of choice in the matter, but not not entirely.

I mean, those in those days in the Middle East, of course, women had much less rights. But we do see her willingness. I mean, she said she'd go early rather than delay.

She was willing. And I might just say before we pass from the story that that Christians have often seen in this story a type of Christ, Isaac being a type of Christ and Abraham, his father being a type of God, the father. Jesus said in Matthew 22, one or two at the beginning of Matthew 22, Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a king who wanted to make a marriage for his son.

And that's really what it is like. God wanted to find a bride for his son, Jesus. And he's called us all to be that bride.

And so Abraham is like God seeking a marriage for his son. And he sends his servant with gifts. The servant in this case might have been Eliezer at a much earlier time, really about about 55 years earlier.

Eliezer had been the heir of the household. He was. But he may have been dead by now.

If Eliezer was the oldest servant, 55 years earlier, it's just that he might have been replaced by an older one by now and be dead. In any case, the oldest servant, if it was Eliezer, would have been particularly unselfish and that Isaac had supplanted him. Eliezer had been at one time the heir.

And then when Isaac was born, that dashed any of his hopes of being the heir of all that huge estate. But if that was him and some people think it was, then he's particularly an unselfish individual showing so much concern for Abraham's well-being and Isaac's well-

being, although he himself is receiving nothing out of this. But many people see Abraham as a type of God, the father, Isaac, a type of Jesus and a servant as a type of the Holy Spirit who is sent into the world to find a bride for Jesus.

And Rebecca, therefore, would be like a picture of the church or maybe of the individual Christian who she agrees to marry someone she's never even seen. Remember, it says in 1 Peter 1, verse 8, it says of Christ, whom having not seen, we love. We've chosen to love Christ and to be joined in covenant with him, though we've never seen him.

It says in 1 Peter 1.8. And so Rebecca also never having seen Isaac, but she had heard of his father, no doubt. She probably knew his father by reputation, just like many people know about God before they become Christians. They know God by reputation, but they don't know Christ.

And there's a decision made to be connected to him and to be committed to him before even meeting him face to face. She receives gifts from the servant as tokens. And God has sent the Holy Spirit to give us gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are the tokens of the betrothal.

There's more to come when we meet the bridegroom, but there are gifts that are given in the meantime. And she makes this arduous journey across the desert to meet her husband. And that's sort of like the Christian life.

You make a decision to be joined to Christ and then there's the rest of your life with its trials and its difficulties. And it's just something that we accept, which is that the time will come when we meet him face to face. In the meantime, there's this desert to cross.

There's this uncomfortable camel ride with various dangers and so forth associated with it. But many have found it impossible to resist the temptation to see this as a picture of Christ in the church, because so many things about the story fit well as parallels. The New Testament doesn't really make that application, though it does seem to approve of Isaac being a type of Christ in other respects.

For example, when Abram offered up Isaac, that is seen generally as a picture of God offering of Christ. So if Isaac is a picture of Christ in that story, he might well be a picture of Christ in this one as well. Anyway, that brings us to a stopping point and we'll take a break.