

CCLEB SERMON

NOTES

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 5, 2025
GENESIS 24:1-67

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WHEN GOD'S HAND IS REALLY OBVIOUS



Sometimes God's hand at work is really obvious. Mine and Sheri's first house was on 7th street, not far from here, just above the old Food Kart, halfway between Maple and Hill St. We loved that house. It was the house our boys were born into. It was a duplex, sort of designed like an old row home, with lots of fun character. We loved it! We loved our neighbors- even though some of them were transient and brought challenges, we loved Hill Top playground, we loved being in the city. And we also knew when it was time to move. Several reasons prompted our move. Plumbing issues, busy streets not being safe for our kids, and critters like termites being a few. We quickly learned that you never get rid of termites, you just chase them to your neighbors. We also learned that if you have neighbors with adjoining walls and they happen to have three pet snakes that are fed breeder mice from pet stores, eventually you end up with a mice infestation. And then when you have mice that die in your walls you have a fly and fly larvae infestation - that smelled bad. And then of course we also dealt with every city's most common guests, cockroaches. Termites, mice, flies & their larvae, and cockroaches. We were a critter motel. And to boot, all those critter connections coincided with the timing of us needing to secure a healthy education for Daniel. So we decided to move.

In my frustration, I personally wanted to unload our house as quickly as possible at way below market value, but Sheri convinced me otherwise. So we prayed, and made preparations to list our house, including dealing with our infestations. The house was finally clear of unwelcome critter guests and smells and the very day we listed our house one of the neighboring apartments was condemned, the very same day. Picture a "for sale" sign on one side of the duplex, and a "condemned" sign on the other. To sell the house now seemed impossible. But we prayed.

We had prayed specifically that the LORD would: send a buyer for our house, that the buyers would be Christians, and that they would continue to love our neighbors.

Incredibly there was interest and the realtor started scheduling showings two days later. The very first showing, the very first people that walked through our house, bought the house at full price.

They were Christians as we prayed for, and we later confirmed that they continued to love our neighbors as we had prayed for. God's hand was really obvious to us.

In our Genesis passage today, Abraham's servant was facing incredible odds and thus he prayed a very specific prayer re: identifying a wife for Isaac. And before he finished praying the first person to appear was Rebekah. Was this God being obvious?

Let's look at some context. **Chapter 24** immediately follows the death and burial of Sarah – Abraham's beloved wife – so in overall narrative of Genesis this is a story that transitions the focus away from Abraham and Sarah to focus on the next generation, Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac, was the promised seed, – the son of the covenant. So picture Abraham and Sarah fading into the background, and the rise of prominence of Isaac and Rebekah. Our chapter today is part of how that transition happened.

Verse 1 reminds us that Abraham was very blessed. The contextual definition of "blessed" from **Genesis 1** is that when God blesses something God supernaturally imparts his life giving, life producing, life flourishing quality into the blessed person or thing so that it thrives, flourishes.

— Blessed

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The opposite of "blessing" is cursed. Think of cursed as resulting in "life fading", "life diminishing", "life gasping for survival", "life ending".

So in **verse 1** Abraham is "blessed" because God is with him, and God made his life flourish! The blessing from God is part of the covenant. However, the opposite of "blessing" is _____ cursed. Think of cursed as resulting in "life fading", "life diminishing", "life gasping for survival", "life ending". Hold on to blessed and cursed.

So after the death of Sarah, blessed Abraham now wants to secure a wife for his son Isaac, so he assigns this task to his most trusted servant. And Abraham asks this servant to do a curious thing, "put your hand under my thigh". Now I'm already a bit squeamish reading that, however, consider though Abraham's agenda which helps us to understand Abraham asking his servant to place his hand under his thigh.

What is Abraham's agenda? God made a covenant with Abraham and Abraham's descendants that Abraham's descendants would be blessed, they would possess the land of promise, and that through Abraham's descendants all the families of the world would be blessed. Emphasis on blessed and descendants. Who in this story is Abraham's descendant through whom the covenant promise of blessing would be fulfilled? Isaac.

And what was the sign of the covenant? Circumcision. And where was the servant's hand to be placed? Yeah! This oath, symbolized by a hand "under the thigh", is about procreation of descendants of Isaac that would inherit the blessings of the covenant. And in order for Isaac to have descendants that would inherit the covenant, the covenant marked by circumcision, Isaac needed a wife!

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Then in alignment with the covenant, the oath taken before the LORD was that the trusted servant would secure a wife for Isaac and that the wife would not be from the local Canaanite woman. That seems harsh! Abraham was living in Canaan, why NOT find a wife for Isaac from local Canaanite families?

This clear boundary set by Abraham that Isaac’s wife could not be from Canaan was because the descendants of Canaan were cursed, the opposite of blessing. This curse of Canaan had to do with the repulsive actions of Noah’s son Ham, the father of Canaan, in **Genesis 9**. And in response to those actions, we see Noah curse Canaan. **Genesis 9:25-27**

Now we don’t typically read the word “Canaan” as synonymous with “cursed”, but in context of this chapter it is true, “Canaan” is synonymous with “cursed”. And “cursed” is “opposite of “blessing”, “blessing” is the same word used to describe Abraham in **verse 1** which is linked to the covenant. If Isaac’s wife was a cursed Canaanite what would that do to the blessing of the covenant for the descendants?

So Abraham’s agenda was to make sure that his son Isaac’s descendants would be the blessed descendants of the covenant, all of the blessings from God, (not curses). So Abraham makes his trusted servant take an oath, an oath – hand under the thigh- linked to the sign of the covenant, that Isaac’s wife, and thus his descendants, would not be from the cursed Canaanites.

Ok, so no Canaanites, that is clear! But if not a Canaanite, where would Isaac’s wife come from? Abraham’s plan for a wife for Isaac would be that she would come from his home country and relatives back in Mesopotamia, where Abraham was called out of.

Now the servant is hearing all this and we see in **verse 5** that he is dubious of his ability to be successful in bringing back a wife for Isaac. So he suggests that perhaps a prospective wife and her family would be more convinced of agreeing to a marriage with Isaac, if Isaac himself would go as well.

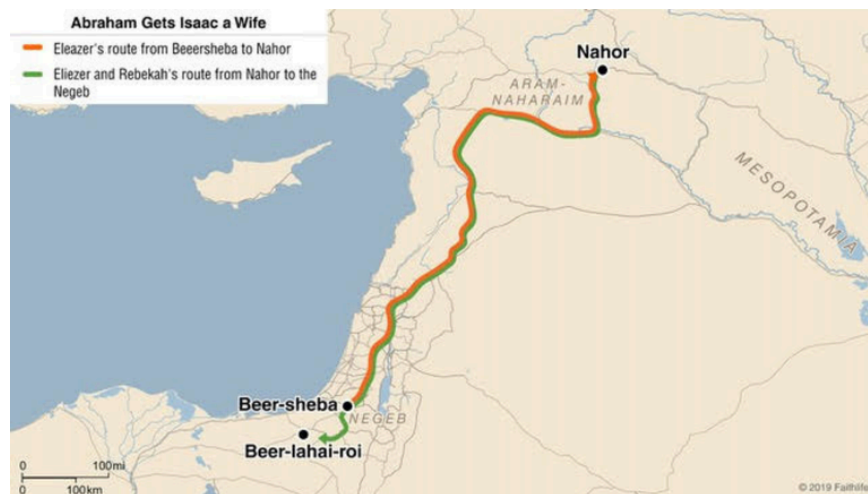
Abraham responds very strongly to the servant suggesting that Isaac go back to Abraham’s homeland to find his wife. And so Abraham sets his second requirement and boundary for the servant. That is, to never take Isaac back to where Abraham came from. Never. 1st boundary, no Canaanite woman. 2nd boundary – never take Isaac back to Mesopotamia. Why not take him back?

This requirement to never take Isaac back to where Abraham came from is also tied to the covenant promise as we see in **verse 7**. Abraham wanted to be sure that his descendant Isaac was living in the land of promise given in the covenant, possessing the land of promise, not living back in Mesopotamia. How tempting would it have been for Isaac to go back to Mesopotamia and stay there.

And with the “no Canaanite woman” and “no Isaac back in Mesopotamia” settled, Abraham then in the end of **verse 7** reassures the servant, who is uncertain of his success, by telling the servant that the LORD “will send his angel ahead of you”. Remember, an angel is a messenger of the Lord, or one who completes a task of the LORD. And in this story the angel from the Lord is a forerunner to the servant's arrival – one who prepares the way for the arrival. This is a statement of faith of Abraham, because he knows that the success of the mission is dependent on the LORD already there working ahead of them. Now we don't know what the message or task was that was delivered or accomplished by the angel in advance of the servant's arrival, but I'll point out to you what I suspect the angel did when we get to that verse.

The success of the mission is dependent on the LORD already there working ahead of them.

Now in **verse 9**, as we read earlier, the servant takes the oath, then loads up ten camels displaying a variety of Abraham's wealth, and heads off to the town of Nahor in Mesopotamia.



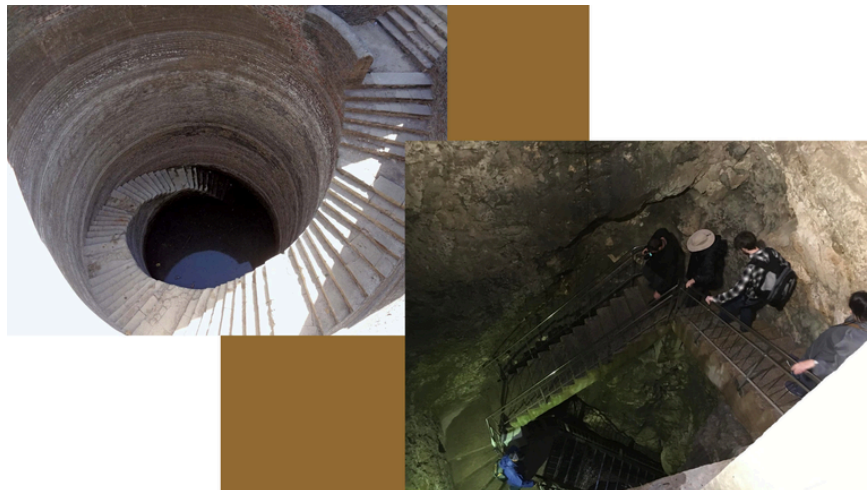
Now if the city of Nahor is also the city of Haran, then that is a 500-600 mile journey – and by camel it is estimated to be four weeks of travel. If Nahor is in Ur of the Chaldeans then it's almost double the distance and travel time. So picture a caravan of ten camels and servants headed on a long journey. The first step for Abraham's servant seeing that God is in this, is to simply obey by getting going in the right direction and trusting God to lead. Sometimes we have to be on the move before God provides direction.

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And when they arrive in Nahor, the trusted servant and caravan end up parked at the well outside the city. Often we think of a well as this... bucket, pulley etc..



However sometimes wells in ancient middle and far east were wells with steps down to a spring. It appears that is the case here and this is where the servant's caravan is stopped, at the well/spring, outside the city.



Now the head servant understands the seemingly impossible task of finding a wife for Isaac - how could he possibly know who is the right woman - so he models for us the appropriate next step in seeing God in his quest The servant humbly prays.

The Next Step

The Servant Prays

And in his prayer the servant appeals to a characteristic of the LORD – the LORD’s “unfailing love”. This unfailing love is a hallmark characteristic of the LORD that we see later in **Exodus 34:6**

“Unfailing love” is the word “hesed”- often translated as “kindness”- but it's broader than that, it means “loyal love, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness”.

Hesed

“Unfailing love” is the word “hesed”- often translated as “kindness”-it means “loyal love, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness”.

So in essence the servant is praying, “LORD demonstrate your unfailing love, your covenant love by guiding me to the wife of Isaac”. But, the servant doesn’t stop there with his prayer, he then proceeds to ask the LORD to give him specific signs. Signs indicating which is the right young lady for Isaac. The specific signs were: that when the right young lady comes to the well, she will offer him water, and offer to water the camels. Keep in mind 10 camels! Now note in **verse 14** what the servant asks for as signs are all about the character of the bride he wants for Isaac. The characteristics for the bride for Isaac that the servant is asking for were: He requested of the LORD, offering water to a stranger – so kindness. That she would be willing to water the camels also. Which is also willing to do hard work while serving a stranger. And what is implied later in the story is that the bride for Isaac would also have follow through to completion.

Character of a Bride for Isaac

- ☐ offering water to a stranger – so kindness.
- ☐ That she would be willing to water the camels also.
- ☐ Which is also willing to do hard work while serving a stranger.
- ☐ And follow through too completion

And **verse 15** tells us that before the servant finished praying for God to reveal Isaac’s wife, Rebekah shows up at the well. Is this God being obvious? This divine timing is sometimes referred to as a “divine coincidence”. God’s miraculous timing influencing what the world would consider a coincidence. Before the servant was done praying, Rebekah showed up. Now I suspect that the angel that was sent ahead orchestrated Rebekah being the first to show up at the well the exact time the servant was praying.

Divine Coincidence

God’s miraculous timing influencing what the world would consider a coincidence.

Verse 16 gives us a description of Rebekah. And it is interesting that the text describes her going down into the well, filling the jar, and coming up.

Down and filled and up are significant here – this has more meaning than just her going down to a well, filling her jar, and going up. Rebekah is going to repeat those actions down, filled, up, many times in the next few moments.

So in **verse 17-18** the servant runs to meet her and asks for a drink, Rebekah lowers her jar from her shoulder or head and offers Abraham's servant a drink. – So far what the servant prayed for is happening. Then **verse 19-20** makes the servant even more hopeful that the LORD had answered his prayers and lead him to Isaac's future wife.

Now many commentators have observed that watering 10 camels could have been more than an hour or more of work as camels can drink 20+gallons of water at time. If the camels only needed half that, and if Rebekah was using a typical 2 gallon jar, that is 50 trips down into the well to fill the jar then carry it up to the trough. I'm impressed by that, and so was Abraham's servant.

So let's go back to what the servant had asked the LORD for in a bride for Isaac. Kindness to offer water to a stranger. Check. Willing to water the ten camels also. Check. Willing to work hard while serving a stranger. Check. Follow through to completion. Check.

Character of a Bride for Isaac

- ✓ Offering water to a stranger – so kindness.
- ✓ That she would be willing to water the camels also.
- ✓ Which is also willing to do hard work while serving a stranger.
- ✓ And follow through to completion

The servant is watching all of this in **verse 21** and I imagine him excited as he sees his prayer being answered.. check, check, check, check. Eyes getting bigger in awe, this is the one! What this meant then, was the last trip Rebekah made going down to the well, filling the jar and going up to the trough, she went down a daughter, and came up a bride. Down, filled, then up. This is a picture of **James 4:10 NKJV** "humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, (that's the going down part) and he will lift you up, (that's the filling and lifting you up part!)

And so in **verse 22**, the servant is convinced by the divine timing and the clear signs from the LORD that this was the one, so he "took a gold ring...". For those interested in cultural detail, the ring mentioned here was most likely a nose or ear ring as in hoops. These expensive jewelry gifts were meant to communicate the grooms ability to provide for his bride. These jewelry gifts were not part of the "bride price" or dowry – that would come later.

Verse 23-25. Rebekah tells Abraham's servant that she was the great niece of Abraham meaning that the LORD had led the servant of Abraham directly back to the family of Abraham.

At this point, the servant is overcome by the clear demonstration of the LORD's kindness, faithful love, trustworthiness, so he falls to the ground in worship the LORD. **Verse 26 -27.**

Give credit where credit is due. The servant doesn't take any credit for finding the bride for Isaac. Rather, he knows it was of the LORD who orchestrated this success, thus he bows before the LORD in worship. Here's what this teaches me about seeing God in something. For the servant to see that the LORD was in this, he had to humbly recognize that the success of finding Isaac's bride was not of his own doing. If he thought for a second that this was his own doing he would have been blinded to seeing the LORD at work.

We can conclude then that if we are going to see the LORD at work then humility is necessary in seeing that the LORD is in something.



Humility is necessary in seeing that the LORD is in something.

James 1:17 NIV. Let me ask you this question, what is your pride blinding you to that the LORD is doing? How do you resolve that? Go down, be filled at the well of the Lord, and he will lift you up and give you sight.

So in **verse 28-29** when Rebekah hears all this from the servant and sees all that that Abraham sent with him, she takes off running to her mother's household. It's implied she tells her brother Laban, and Laban rushes out to the well where the servant had been left standing. This is a lot of running. The servant first runs up to Rebekah when he sees her, Rebekah then runs to her house, Laban then runs to the servant at the well.

After all that running this is what happens next: **verse 30-34**. Sounds like everything is heading the right direction doesn't it?

Now from **verse 34 - verse 48** Abraham's servant recants the entire story that we just learned, a few minor differences, but almost verbatim. Why does the bible repeat the story a second time? You and I the readers had the opportunity to witness God's kindness and faithful love in action in the first telling **verse 1-33**, but Rebekah's family had not yet heard the story, so now it was their turn to hear the testimony of God's obvious kindness and faithful love. They needed to hear that story for their faith, just like you and I needed to hear it for our faith.

Here's a quick application - never grow tired of retelling the story of God's kindness and faithfulness, his unfailing love in your life - there are always people who need to hear it.

Revelation 12:11b NKJV

So at the end of Abraham telling the story of the LORD's kindness, unfailing love and faithfulness in coming to find a bride for Isaac, he asks for their answer re: allowing Rebekah to be Isaac's bride - **verse 49**

Note that the servant uses the same language of "unfailing love and faithfulness" in what he expects from Rebekah's family that he also used in his prayer in **verse 12**

So Laban and Bethuel respond in **verse 50-51**. That the LORD was in this is obvious to Laban and Bethuel by their response, it's the Lord directing. They too could see the LORD's unfailing love and faithfulness in the miraculous leading of the servant to Rebekah.

Abraham responds by again bowing to the LORD in worship - give credit where credit is due. Every good gift is from above.

Note Rebecca's immediate willingness to go. She was willing to leave her family and her brother, and leave her home country, and go to where she was called to go. Sound familiar? Do you see the similarity to Abraham's calling by God in **Chapter 12** to leave the same way, same place?

In **verse 59-61** we see the family send their sister away with their blessing, and note the similar blessing language given to their sister that was given to Abraham by the LORD.

And here is the happy romantic ending, and of course it just happens to be at sunset. **Verse 62-67**. So Isaac is out walking and meditating and he lifts his eyes and see Rebekah coming. At just the same time Rebekah lifts her eyes and sees Isaac. And the rest is history.

Thoughts for prayer and meditation:

Let's talk about when God's hand is obvious, like this story and Gideon's fleece story, and when God's hand at work is NOT as obvious. Sometimes the LORD reveals his unfailing love and faithfulness in obvious ways like divine timing, but not always.

So I want to start with a warning: Even if you think it is obvious that God is in something, confirm it with someone who has discernment, knows God's word, and has walked with the LORD a long time! Between our fleshly desires and the opportunistic enemy's deception, we can get really messed up here. So humble yourself, and seek counsel.



Warning!

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that God is in something,
confirm it with someone who
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word, and has walked with the
LORD a long time!

Now, if we are going to see God in something, here is what this story teaches us.

1. The first step in seeing if God is in something, is to simply obey by getting going in the right direction and trusting God to lead. See **Acts 16:6**
2. Pray and be specific.
3. Be humble. Humility is necessary in seeing if the LORD is in something. You will only see that God is in something if you humbly recognize that any success is from the LORD and not your own doing.
4. Go back to the warning.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

24:2 “Oldest servant” – can mean both “senior” as in highest ranking, or “oldest”. Many scholars believe that this was Eliezer the servant from Damascus that was mentioned in **Genesis 15:2**

24:10 “ten camels” – why the author wants us to know there is ten camels is uncertain. Perhaps this is related to the Old Testament notion that ten represents wholeness, completion, sufficiency, and divine order, as in the ten divine statements God utters in bringing creation into existence “And God said”. Or the “ten commandments” (Torah “ten words”), or the “ten plagues”. Thus “ten camels” represents that “Isaac” was “complete”, and his life “ordered by God”, that he had what was needed to take care of Rebekah.

24:15 Theme of woman being met at wells in the bible.

Hagar was met by the LORD twice at two different wells. Rebekah is met here by Abraham’s servant at a well – led to marriage. Rachel is met by Jacob at a well, that led to a marriage. Zipporah is met by Moses at a well, that led to marriage. (We should expect Women’s shelter ladies to be digging a well out in the middle of Willow Street soon). All of that provides an interesting back drop for Jesus meeting the woman at the well in **John 4**. I’d be interested in hearing your thoughts on how that all ties into the bride of Christ?

24:16 “very beautiful”. Note the similarities in how Rebekah is described to how Sarah, Isaac’s mom, was described in Genesis 12:11, 14. And also the similarities to how Rachel was described later **Genesis 29:17**. Although the difference in type of beauty is mostly absent in the English, the nuance in Hebrew is significant.

1. Rebekah is a wholesome striking beauty, pleasant beauty, noticeable to everyone.
2. Sarah is a more refined beauty, elegant beauty, a stately beauty.
3. Rachel is a complete beauty – both in form and face.

24:27 What did Rebekah hear? What Rebekah may have heard from the servant are the words “Abraham”, and “house of my master’s brother”. Now Rebekah would have made the connection that the servant’s master was brother to Nahor, her grandfather, making Abraham her great uncle. But the name Abraham was probably unfamiliar to her. She would have heard stories about Abram, the “exalted father”, the one that God called to leave and go to Canaan long before she was born. But she probably was not familiar with Abraham the “exalted father of many”. But given that the servant’s master was her grandfather’s brother Abram, this would have meant that the renaming from Abram to Abraham indicated that a lot had changed for the better in her great uncle Abram’s life, which is now represented by her uncles’ servant showing up with 10 camels.

24:28 Why did Rebekah run to her “mother’s household”? That Rebekah ran to her mother’s household and not her father’s household may be an indication that her father Bethuel had already died. Interesting in **verse 67** Isaac takes his bride Rebekah into his mother’s tent, not his father’s tent, also indicating that Abraham may have already died by the time the servant returns with Rebekah. If so, **chapter 25** is anachronistic, and thus heightens the urgency and importance of the oath in **24:2**, because Abraham is about to die and thus lose his influence on his son’s choice for a wife.

24:29 “Laban”. The name means “white” as in “purity”. Laban’s later deception antics then change the name to symbolize “deceptive appearance” as in one that is not what it appears to be on the surface.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

24:50 Who is Bethuel? This was probably Rebekah's other brother, or perhaps a sister, named Bethuel and not Bethuel the father. In addition to the argument that Bethuel the father had already died in **verse 28** above, the servant only gives gifts to the brother and mother in **verse 53**. And then **verse 59** says "their sister" indicating that Bethuel was also a sibling.

24:62 Why was Beer-Lahai-Roi mentioned here? This was probably highlighted to remind Isaac and the reader of LORD who sees us in our place of need, and through his faithful love and kindness, takes care of us. Just like he did for Hagar at Beer-Lahai-Roi, just like he did for Isaac, just like he did for Abraham's servant, and will do for you and I.