

Genesis: *I Will Go*

Genesis 24

As we resume our journey through Genesis, remember that Sarah, the beloved wife of Abraham, has died. She leaves behind her husband of at least 60 years as well as her only son, Isaac. Having committed Sarah to her final resting place in Genesis 23, Abraham will now turn his attention to the most pressing matter at hand: finding a wife for his son Isaac. This is a famous but somewhat long story that includes the entirety of chapter 24, so please stand, bend your knees so you don't pass out, and let us read this famous story together!

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³ and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." ²⁵ She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." ²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord ²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen." ²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹ He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." ³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

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

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

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

⁴⁵ “Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹ Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹ Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has spoken.”

⁵² When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. ⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴ And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.” ⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” ⁵⁶ But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” ⁵⁷ They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” ⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” ⁵⁹ So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become
thousands of ten thousands,
and may your offspring possess
the gate of those who hate him!”^[1]

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

If you are able, please keep your Bibles open to this text, or pull it up on your phone, because we are going to walk through this story. Then, next Sunday, we will come right back to this story and look at its allegorical significance that profoundly points to the Gospel. I wish we could do both in one setting, but we simply do not have enough time. OK, my message will fall under three subheadings this morning: 1) The Heart of the Father; 2) The Commissioned Servant; and 3) The Response of the Bride.

I. The Heart of the Father

This love story is first and foremost about the love of the Father for his only son. Abraham loves Isaac, and he is not at all content for Isaac to marry a local Canaanite woman. Instead, the patriarch has sensed from God that Isaac’s bride is to come from Abraham’s people and from his homeland. Abraham knows that whoever Isaac marries will greatly impact the descendants who will one day occupy the land; so, he summons his most senior and trusted

servant, and he commissions his servant with the most important task of his life: journey to a distant land, find the kinsmen of Abraham, and there select a wife for Isaac and bring her back to his beloved son.

We're going to look at the commissioning of the servant in a minute but let us first give the servant a name. Most scholars assume this man is named Eliezer of Damascus, the very servant that Abraham named as his heir-apparent due to the fact that he had no son back in Genesis 15.

Note that in 24:2, Eliezer is referred to as Abraham's servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that belonged to Abraham. I want you to take note of that language. Most of us have a very poor opinion of the term, "servant," and rightfully so given the horrible history of slavery in America. However, Eliezer was not a slave; he was a household servant. As a senior servant of Abraham, this man was considered family. He was an adopted member of Abraham's household, even though there was no blood relationship. Abraham was not just Eliezer's boss; he also played the role of a father in that Abraham provided Eliezer (and his family) with meaningful work, food, clothing, shelter and protection. So close was this relationship that Abraham entrusted Eliezer to steward his wealth, his business, and even significant responsibilities within his immediate family. There is a very special relationship between Abraham and Eliezer...hold that thought because it is important.

II. The Commissioned Servant

As the story begins, Abraham calls upon Eliezer and gives him this assignment in vs. 2ff: Put your hand under my thigh that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.

Abraham is too old to make the journey to Mesopotamia. Eliezer must be his representative and bear the responsibility of finding a wife for Isaac.

Note that Eliezer immediately asks a very reasonable question: "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me back to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"

Abraham responds immediately, "See to it that you do NOT take my son back there." God led Abraham away from his country and kindred with the promise that his descendants would one day inherit the land now occupied by the Canaanites. Thus, Abraham's only son, Isaac, must never return to Abraham's homeland. Instead, Eliezer must trust God to travel to Abraham's homeland and discern the bride according to the preemptive work of God's angel; and that bride must then choose to return to the father and his only son—she must consent to leave everything behind, travel to a new land, and marry the bridegroom whom she has never seen based upon the call of God. Abraham goes on to say that if the bride refuses to come, Eliezer is released from his promise.

Because of the servant's love and loyalty to Abraham, Eliezer places his hand under the thigh¹ of his master and swears an oath to do his master's bidding.

Eliezer loads up ten camels worth of gifts and goods, and upon arriving in Abraham's homeland, he stops and he prays, saying:

"O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

Eliezer is a wise man. He knows his mission is impossible if God does not move in a supernatural way. So, he seeks a sign from the LORD that will identify God's chosen bride for his master's son.

Church, asking for a sign is not an offense to God *when we are walking in faith*. We remember Gideon's need for confirmation and courage when he laid out his fleece. Hezekiah asked Isaiah for a sign to confirm that he would recover when he was deathly ill. Moses asked for a sign that he was indeed the one chosen to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. On the night of Christ's birth, the angels presented a sign to the horrified shepherds, and the sign was a child wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed in a manger.

God knows that we often need confirmation, courage, and direction to pursue His will when we are walking in faith, so He is more than willing to give the faithful a sign when asked. But let us never demand a sign from God as a condition of our faith. The unbelieving Jews once asked Jesus to give them a sign so they could verify that He was the Messiah. It is one of the few instances in the Gospels where we see Jesus get angry. Signs are given to those who believe God and need direction—that's what signs are for. However, signs are not given to those who withhold their belief until God performs a magic trick. If you are desperate for a sign from God, start walking in faith. Go as far as God leads you and then wait on God for the sign of where to go next. That's how faith works, and that's how our faith grows. Eliezer's story is a perfect illustration of this truth.

Eliezer has been commissioned with a difficult assignment. He has been walking in faith, obediently going to the foreign land of his Master; but now, Eliezer is in desperate need of a sign to know what woman God intends to for his master's son, Isaac.

¹ In some ancient cultures, a promise between men included an intimate sign of fidelity. We've already noted in the Covenant of the Pieces that men would walk between the severed bodies of animals as a sign that covenant unfaithfulness would require death. Here again, our text describes a very important promise. This time, however, Abraham has Eliezer "put his hand under Abraham's thigh that he might make Eliezer swear by the LORD." It is quite possible that Abraham is commanding Eliezer to take hold of his genitalia as a sign of his fidelity to the promise Abraham is asking him to make. Ancient men would often swear by their own genitalia, much like we hold our hands over our hearts or place our hand on the Bible in the court of law. So common was this practice in the Roman world that the Latin word "testis" means both witness and testicles. The point of "placing a hand under the thigh" is to emphasize the personal urgency and sincerity of Abraham's request and the weightiness of Eliezer's promise before God.

Note that the sign Eliezer seeks is not a woman of extraordinary beauty or a woman of noble rank; instead, Eliezer seeks a woman who will be humble, kind, hard-working, and generous. Eliezer asks that God's appointed bride be a woman who will eagerly share her water and voluntarily offer to care for his animals. And Eliezer asks this of the LORD so that he might see God's steadfast love for ABRAHAM! Church, Eliezer never thinks of himself. This mission isn't about him; it's about serving his master and finding a bride for the master's son. Eliezer's confidence is in God's steadfast love for *Abraham*—the servant is a very humble man, and God hears the prayers of the humble, amen?

As he finishes the prayer, Eliezer is prepared to wait on the LORD for as long as it takes, though we learn that he doesn't have to wait long! We read in vs. 15ff: ¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.

God is good! Eliezer is immediately impressed with the young maiden named Rebekah. Her beauty is striking, but there is something more about her that stands apart from the other local women. Eliezer wastes no time. He runs directly to the young woman and initiates the test. He asks the young lady for a taste of her water, and Rebekah doesn't hesitate for a moment. She lowers the jar for the stranger to draw from and immediately offers to keep drawing water until all his camels are satisfied.

Eliezer is impressed, but not yet convinced. We read in vs. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

Eliezer is not just gazing...he is praying. The humble servant had asked God for a sign, and the sign was satisfied. Even so, he waits quietly now for the confirmation of God's Spirit until no doubt remains.

When the maiden completes her task, Eliezer approaches her with expensive gifts and asks: "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

Young Rebekah then reveals her identity as the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother, and invites Eliezer's party to her home! Eliezer is blown away by the faithfulness of God. He bows and prays, saying (vs. 27): "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."

God has once again proven Himself faithful. Eliezer praises God's faithfulness to his master, Abraham, but note the growing faith of Eliezer. For the first time, Eliezer acknowledges God's faithfulness to him, personally. He now knows without a doubt that God has directed his steps, identified the woman of God's choosing, and now only one question remains: will Rebekah willingly leave her country, her kindred, and her father's house? Will she willingly choose to trust God and be carried to a distant land where she will marry a man she has never met? That leads us to our third subheading.

III. The Response of the Bride

As those who live in America in the 21st century, it is easy for us to think poorly of this story. Arranged marriages are foreign to our cultural sensitivities, and the notion that young Rebekah would be carried off to marry an older man she has never met sounds sketchy to most of us.

I would point out, however, that you don't get that offended when you read the story of Snow White or Cinderella, right? You love the fairy tales that feature a forgotten girl destined to hardship and poverty who gets rescued by a handsome prince and becomes his beloved princess. Never mind the lack of courtship or even knowing anything about each other—it was destiny that brought them together, and you are perfectly fine with the whole thing!

Well, where do you think those stories came from? Church, all the best stories point back to the one true story, and this true story is literally a plot we are all very familiar with.

We must imagine young Rebekah in her small, Mesopotamian town...a town named after her dead uncle, Haran. Her life is hemmed in by tribal traditions, hard work and service to her family's business. She has no dreams, no aspirations and no hope of ever leaving Haran. Rebekah is, like so many young women in the developing world, a beautiful, virtuous, strong woman who is hidden away in her dusty little town and destined to lead the same life as her mother and her mother's mother.

No doubt Rebekah has heard the stories of her famous uncle, her Uncle Abraham, who long ago heard from God and set out to a distant land. Over the years, travelers would come to town, telling stories of Abraham's wealth, his courageous victory over King Chedorlaomer, and perhaps even the miraculous birth of a son born to Abraham and his wife Sarah in their old age. Stories were the currency of the ancient culture, and these stories would have stirred her young imagination.

Imagine then that fateful evening when Rebekah set out for the local well. Like many women even to this day throughout the world, Rebekah would have carried her jar to the well once in the morning and then again in the evening. On this particular evening, Rebekah is one of the first women to arrive at the well, and she is astonished to see a large party of foreign men gathered there with ten camels loaded with goods. Strangers were rare in her little town, and those strangers that did happen upon Haran were not always to be trusted.

Rebekah quickly draws her water and turns to leave, but her body stiffens as she sees one of the men dressed in strange attire running towards her. She prays for courage to fight or run, but as the man approaches, she can see that he is aged and is kindly in expression. The man asks only for a drink of her water. Rebekah is filled with compassion. She can see these men have traveled a great distance through the rugged terrain, and she quickly lowers her jar. As the man drinks, she notes that the camels are also worn out from the long journey, so she offers to draw water until the camels are satisfied as well.

Upon completing her task, a task that would have not been rewarded by men in the ancient world, the stranger approaches her with wealth beyond anything she has ever seen! He

offers the ring and the bracelets as gifts and then asks about her family and if they might accommodate his party for the night.

What happens next is the stuff of fairy tales! When she speaks of her family, the stranger begins to weep. He falls to his knees and begins to praise God! She then learns that this man...this strange man in strange clothes with untold wealth and ten camels...has traveled from a distant land seeking the kinsmen of his master, a man whose name was well known in her little town...a man named Abraham!

Later that night, when Rebekah and the other women of her household have served the strangers dinner, she hears a new story...a story that will forever change her life. Master Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for his only son. The bride was to be of Abraham's line and from Abraham's country, but the servant had no way of knowing who the bride would be. But then the servant asked God for a sign, and the sign pointed to one girl and one girl only—Rebekah, the granddaughter of Nahor, the great niece of Abraham. Through the master's servant, God identified Rebekah to be the chosen bride of Abraham's only son, a man named Isaac. Isaac would be the sole inheritor of Abraham's vast holdings. He would become a lord over all the business, people, and possessions of his father, and Rebekah would become his wife!

Rebekah's father and brother initially consent to allow the arranged marriage because they can discern God's hand at work. But Rebekah's mother is torn. She could be happy for Rebekah's future, but she is not yet ready to let Rebekah leave the next day when the strangers prepare to return to Abraham's country. She asks for ten days, but we get the sense she is hoping it will be longer. Maybe by delaying her departure, the men will find some other young woman and Rebekah will not be taken from her.

Eliezer is understandably impatient! God has identified the bride for his master's son, and there is no cause for delay. Abraham is old, and the servant has made a pledge that he must fulfill. So, after Eliezer begs the worried mother to let her daughter go, the matriarch turns to her daughter and states, "Will you go with this man?"

Rebekah has a choice to make, and our brief narrative hardly does this moment justice. Rebekah knows that to leave with this man is to never return. She may never again see her mother or father, her brother or her extended family. She would be leaving behind everything and everyone she had ever known to journey into a foreign land and marry a man she has never met. It is likely that Rebekah is barely 20 years old if even that...this is a huge moment in the story. We might expect Rebekah to ask a lot of questions or express doubt about this whole arrangement. We would not be surprised if she started to weep or she begged her father to send these people away.

But that is not what happens at all. Rebekah simply replies, "I will go." The only reasonable explanation for why Rebekah responds this way is that she believes God; just as her Uncle Abraham believed God. Church, can you see it? Rebekah will leave her country and her kindred and her father's house because she believes God...and that is exactly the bride that God has chosen for Abraham's only son—the son of the promise—the son whose name means "Laughter"—the son through whom will be born a mighty nation, whose descendants will

outnumber the stars. And it will be through Rebekah, God's chosen bride, that the world will one day come to meet Jesus, the descendant of Abraham and Sarah—the descendant of Isaac and Rebekah.

Church, there is so much here that points to the Gospel, and I will show that to you next Sunday. For now, let me close with a few things for us to remember as we step into our week.

First, if you are a young person, note that God cares about who we marry...that is made clear in this story. Jesus said that God brings husbands and wives together, and so let us carry this truth in our hearts. Whether you are seeking a spouse or you are already married, let us remember that God is actively working to bring men and women together as husband and wife; which means that marriage is sacred ground, and it is to be honored as such.

Secondly, let us identify with Eliezer as a servant sent into the world with a great commission by our Master. Ultimately our lives are not about us; we serve a Master who is Christ, our Lord. We belong to Jesus, and every day our lives are to be about His business, His agenda, and His glory, amen? Never forget who you are; we are servants of the one, true King who purchased our souls on a cross He did not deserve, that we might love Him and serve Him all the days of our lives.

Third, when you are walking in faith, don't hesitate to ask God for a sign, and then learn to wait on God before plowing ahead. Most of the responsibilities that we have been commissioned to perform are those which we cannot hope to achieve without God's hand, power and direction. That is as it should be. Our faith will not grow until we see God accomplish His purpose through us in ways that only God can get the glory. That is Eliezer's story, that is Abraham's story, that is David's story, that is my story, and that is the story of countless believers throughout the ages. Learn to wait on God, and you will see signs and wonders as God accomplishes His purposes through your life.

Finally, I will close by asking this question: when God makes a clear call upon your life through the signs of His divine hand and the witness of His people...when that call requires you to step out in faith and to go where you have never been and to leave everything else behind, will you go? Will you go? I pray that it will be said of this church, when the time comes, that our answer was that of our mother, Rebekah, who said in faith, "I will go."

Will you pray with me?