

Genesis – the basic essentials of what we need to know

- *God’s plan of salvation*
- *What it means to believe God’s promises*
- *The story continues – leadership passes to Isaac*
- *Isaac needed the right wife*
- *God’s guidance*
- *God’s guidance is God’s work more than ours*
- *More like following a map than a construction plan*

Four cultural aspects unique to Abraham’s day

- *We do not imitate the culture of the Bible*

1. A special need - so Abraham could expect God’s guidance.

The book of Genesis is the most basic of all of the books of the Bible. It gives us the essentials of what we need to know about God and salvation, covering considerable areas of the teaching that Christians need. If we were only able to have one book of the Bible, I think it would have to be Genesis! It has in it what we need to know about creation and sin and judgement. It has the promise of a Saviour. It has the model of faith, Abraham. In principle it covers all of the highlights of the Christian faith.

Genesis 1:1–11:26 gives us the background and setting to the plan of salvation. It tells us why there is need of a Saviour.

Genesis 11:27–25:18 tells us the story of Terah, Abraham and Ishmael. In Abraham it gives us a model – although imperfect – believer. Christians are the ‘children of Abraham’. Abraham is God’s example of what it means to believe in the promise of God.

At the point where we pick up the story we are at the end of the life of Abraham and he is just about to pass the leadership of the household of faith to Isaac. The story will show us again how the famous heroes of Israel were men of faith and despite great personal weaknesses inherited the promises of God. But first we see how Abraham prepared the way for his son.

Isaac needed a wife, but Canaanite women did not make good wives! It was a time when Abraham needed the very special guidance and help of God.

Many people have difficulties over the matter of guidance. ‘If only I knew God’s will,’ they say.

Guidance is God’s work more than it is ours. God will guide if we are in tune with Him. A lot of the time we do not need special guidance. It is clear when we read the stories of the great men and women of faith in the Bible that they did not have special guidance all the time.

We should not think of guidance as being like following a diagram or a builder’s construction-plans. If one bit of the building goes wrong there is disaster. But God’s guidance is more like following a map as you walk along or drive along in a car, in an area you only half-know. From time to time you look at the map. Occasionally you get lost and then you look at the map again to find your way back to where you should be. It is something that you are doing as you go along. Genesis 24 is not a perfect account of how to find a wife! There are things in it that are cultural and were unique to the days in which Abraham lived. I can mention four of them.

1. You don’t have to marry a wife without seeing her, as Isaac did.
2. Your father does not have to arrange your wife for you. This is done in some cultures, especially in India, but it is not a law for all time and for all societies.
3. You do not have to send a servant to find a wife for your son.
4. You do not have to marry someone in your own tribe, as Abraham found one of his own people for Isaac.

Following the Bible’s teaching is not the same as imitating the culture of Bible times. Parts of this story are Mesopotamian culture and can be left aside.

1. **The situation was a time of special need and so Abraham could expect God’s guidance.** He was old ^{☞1}. There was a danger that Isaac might want to marry a Canaanite, and Abraham made his servant swear that this would never happen ^{☞2}. Abraham felt his son should marry someone from his own people in Haran ^{☞3}. It was not that he was being racist. It was not that he was being narrow-minded about Isaac’s marrying someone from his own tribe. The point was more a spiritual one. He wanted Isaac to marry someone who shared his faith and there were people who shared his faith back in his home area.

☞1 24:1

☞2 24:2-3

☞3 24:4

• *Someone spiritually matched*

It is important to marry someone from the people of God. Whether they have the same nationality or tribe is not so important. What is important is that the person concerned should be saved and that you flow with them spiritually. Abraham is deeply committed to the principle that on no account should Isaac marry an unspiritual and unconverted Canaanite. It is this that he feels about so strongly.

2. He is very concerned that the next generation should move forward not backwards spiritually

2. **He is very concerned that the next generation should move forward not backwards spiritually.** The servant raises a problem. Maybe there will not be any woman willing to come with him. Should Isaac go back to his father's homeland and persuade a girl to come with him? ^{□1} Abraham's answer is 'no'. On no account must Isaac go back to Haran. It would be going against everything God had told Abraham. God had sworn an oath that the future of Abraham's family would be in Canaan ^{□2}. (This can be said now since the event of Genesis 22:16–17 has taken place. If this story were before Genesis 22:16–17 Abraham could not be saying what he is saying.) He is sure that the servant will find the right person. But if God does not do things this way He will send help in another way. Certainly Isaac must not go back on the guidance that has already been given.

• *We are not always 100% certain*

There are some spiritual principles here. One is that a believer is not always a hundred per cent certain of the will of God. We do not have to feel guilty if at any point we are not absolutely sure about God's will.

• *Faith often takes the form of an instinct*

Another principle is this. Faith often takes the form of instinct. One often has the feeling that a certain thing is the right way to go but you are not 100% certain.

• *No compromise on key principles*

Another principle is that there are certain principles one should never go back on. Abraham is certain that Isaac must never marry a pagan. And he is certain that Isaac should not go back on the way the family have been led by God until this point (24:8). 'Do not take my son back there,' he says firmly.

So the servant takes the oath ^{□1}, gets ready ^{□2}, and leaves for Aram Naharaim. Eventually he arrives at the Aramean town of Nahor. He stops to make the camels drink water ^{□3}.

The priority of prayer

At this point, **he is concerned to make his task a matter of prayer.** He has arrived in the area where he has to look for a wife for Isaac, and he is not sure where to start. So he prays, 'Give me success today' ^{□1}. It is quite a bold prayer. He is praying that he might have the answer 'Today!' I am sure many young men looking for a wife would like to pray that prayer. 'Give the answer today!' But God does not always guarantee to be quite so speedy! The servant did not have much time. He could not stay in Nahor for many weeks. He needed God's answer speedily and he felt led to pray in the way he did. You will not always be able to pray, 'Give the answer today!' The principle is: pray in the way you feel led to pray. But you must pray.

^{□1} 24:5
^{□2} 24:6-7

^{□1} 24:9
^{□2} 24:10
^{□3} 24:11

^{□1} 24:12



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