

God's Hand in Isaac's Marriage

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Date: 28 January 2018

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[0 : 00] And I'd like you to open up in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 24.

! Genesis chapter 24. We are now a little bit more quickly moving through the book of Genesis, through the middle of the book of Genesis, we are drawing near to, very, very near to the end of the life of Abraham, which we have been looking at for a number of months, almost a year now that we have been looking at the life of Abraham.

And now this morning in chapter 24, we're going to be looking at an event that happens just before we are told of the death of Abraham in Genesis chapter 25.

Now this particular story that we're going to be looking at in Genesis 24 this morning is actually, aside from the story of the flood, which occupies a few chapters in the first part of Genesis, aside from that account, it is the longest single story in Genesis.

Now of course you could conceive of the entire life of Abraham as one story, but I mean the individual episodes within the lives of the patriarchs. Among those, this chapter contains the longest story out of all of them.

[1 : 22] This chapter is 67 verses, and all 67 of those verses comprise this story. And so we're going to do something a little bit different this morning. Rather than read the entire scripture up front, we will take it in pieces as we move through the sermon.

But one of the things that I need to remind you of, and that you need to be aware of, is that we are in the midst of a transition in the book of Genesis. Chapters 23, 24, and 25 are transitioning us from looking at the life of Abraham, and learning about this great patriarch, learning about this great father of the people of God, to now transitioning to the next generation, to seeing the life of his son Isaac, and then after that the life of Isaac's son Jacob, and then the long account of the life of Joseph with other accounts of the patriarch sprinkled in the midst of that story.

But now we are in this important transition period, moving from Abraham to Isaac, and it began really at the end of chapter 22. You didn't see it because it was just a little short genealogy, and it's so easy to just kind of blow past those things and not notice, but the transition was signaled there at the end of Genesis chapter 22, where we saw a very short genealogy of another branch of the tree of Abraham's family, a branch that we had not expected to hear from again.

Once Abraham left the land of his forefathers, once he left the land of Haran and came to the promised land, as God had told him at the very beginning of chapter 12, we had no reason to expect, no reason to think that we would ever hear from any of Abraham's relatives that he left behind.

And then suddenly, at the end of Genesis chapter 22, after this moving account of the sacrifice, of Abraham being willing to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, and God substituting a sacrifice in the place of Isaac, after that moving account and that high point in the life of Abraham, and even in the story of Abraham's life, suddenly we get these, what we would typically consider to be somewhat boring verses, about a group of people that we thought we were done with.

[3 : 36] In fact, I want you to look back there at the very end of chapter 22. It starts in verse 20, this little genealogy. It says, Now after these things, after this great story you just heard in 22, and after these things, it was told to Abraham, Behold, Milcah also has born children to your brother Nahor.

Uz is firstborn, Buzz's brother. That sounds like East Texas names to me. Uz and Buzz, right? It's terrible. Kimuel, the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaf, and Bethuel.

And now in parentheses, this is what's important, because it's signaling what is to come, what we're looking at in chapter 24. Just in parentheses in the ESV. Now, Bethuel fathered Rebekah.

That's significant. Moses, as he constructs the story of the patriarchs, is preparing us for what's to come. And then we're told these eight, Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reuma, both bore Teba, Gaham, Tahash, and Ma'akah. Just in case you want to know how to pronounce those names. Now, that seems out of place.

[4 : 46] But then we recognize, as we get to chapter 24, that Moses was preparing us for the events that were to come. Moses was signaling to us that there is a transition about to take place.

He calls us back to the beginning of the story of Abraham. He reminds us of where Abraham came from, of who Abraham's family had been. And then he proceeds with the story, and he recounts for us the death of Abraham's beloved wife, Sarah.

And we know immediately, oh no, things are changing. Things are moving on. And now as we arrive at chapter 24, even the opening words of chapter 24 are there to signal to us that this change is taking place.

This transition is happening. Read the opening there in verse 1 of chapter 24. Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

Sounds like the summary of a man's life. And in many ways, it is because in chapter 25, we're going to get another little short summary of Abraham's life, and then the record of his death. So this is, in many ways, a little micro summary of the life of Abraham.

[5 : 57] He is old, well advanced in years, in case you don't know what old means. He has been blessed by the Lord in all things. So is that it? Is that the end?

It's not for Abraham. Because Abraham has in mind the next generation. Abraham has a great concern now near the end of his life. Just as for Abraham it was a great concern throughout much of his life, where would his descendant come from?

Where would this promised seed, where was he to be found throughout much of Abraham's life?

And then finally, Isaac comes through Sarah, and Abraham receives the promise.

But now here we are, approximately four decades removed from the birth of Isaac, and Isaac has no children. And Isaac has no children because Isaac has no wife.

Now here is Abraham, old and advanced in years. Yes, he will live a few more decades, but he is an old man. And he has no reason to think that he is going to live decades longer. Here he is an old man, advanced, and he is thinking of the next generation.

[7 : 07] His son Isaac needs a wife if the promise is to continue and to be passed on beyond just one generation. And so he tasks his servant with a job.

Go and find a wife. Find a bride for my son Isaac. But all of this is about really finding someone through whom the promises can continue.

Isaac needs his own Sarah. He needs someone that God will work through, through whom God will bring blessing into the world. And so Abraham sends out this servant of his. But he gives him very specific instructions.

Pick it up in verse 2. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household. Now, I want to pause for a moment there and mention to you that it is significant that we're never told the name of this particular servant.

You can guess. You can maybe conjecture. Could this be the servant that Abraham mentioned several chapters earlier before Isaac was born? Oh Lord, I don't have an heir. Eleazar of Damascus, that was one of his servants, will be my heir.

[8 : 11] This could be him, but we're not told. We're not meant to know the name of this particular servant. He is throughout this chapter just Abraham's servant. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, Put your hand under my thigh.

Now, I know that sounds weird. We see it a few times. There's no way to pass over that. We see it a couple of times in Genesis. It was a cultural way of swearing some sort of oath.

That's as much as I can tell you about it. That's all it is. And so he says, 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.

Very simple, straightforward instructions to him. I do not want my son to marry one of the Canaanite women. I want you to go back from the land from which I came, and there, from my clan, from my family, I want you to obtain a wife for my son, Isaac.

And the rest of this chapter is devoted to telling us how the servant went about doing that. But in reality, this chapter is not ultimately about the servant's work of obtaining a bride for Isaac.

[9 : 30] The story of the servant going and finding Rebekah is not a story that focuses primarily upon the faithfulness of the servant, although we see that.

It is not a story that focuses primarily upon the success of the servant, although we see that. It's not a story that focuses primarily upon Rebekah and her willingness to go, though we see that.

This is in fact a story of God's providence at work through the servant and through Rebekah to bring about the fulfillment and the continuation of his promises.

If I were to sum up this chapter in one single word, that is the very word that I would use. I would say that this is a chapter about providence. Now, I recognize that that's not a word that we use in our normal, everyday vocabulary for most of us.

If you like to read a lot of theology books, then you come across it. If you like to read a lot of old Civil War letters, you probably come across the word providence very often. But other than that, we don't typically use this language in a regular fashion day to day.

[10 : 33] So it's helpful for us, in order for us to see this theme properly, to have fixed in our minds what we mean by the term providence, and then we'll see clearly that that is in fact the theme of this chapter.

So when we talk about providence, the first thing that you need to recognize is that you can see in the word providence the word provide. So that the providence of God has something to do, some sort of connection, with God's willingness and God's ability and God's ways and means of providing for His creation, in particular, His own people.

And indeed, that is what providence is about. God provides. God is there. God takes care of. God shepherds. But because He takes care of and provides and shepherds His people within the midst of the world, where there are a lot of other moving parts, we need to be aware of the fact that providence is broader than His mere provision for His people.

In fact, providence includes everything that occurs. Everything that happens. Probably one of the best and most concise definitions of providence that I was able to find this week comes from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I want to read it to you. It says this, that God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing of all His creatures and their actions.

[11 : 57] So you note two terms there. It is God's preserving. That would be providing, protecting, keeping in existence. God's preserving, but also His governing. His exercising His sovereignty over.

His governing of not just His people, though preeminently His people, His governing of all His creatures. That's everything that exists. God is governing and preserving everything that exists.

And seeing how God's providence, how His exercise of control and His providing for the creation, seeing that and understanding that, I think, is the main point of this particular story.

In fact, the reason that this story is so long, the reason that it occupies 67 verses, is not because it's a complicated story, nor is it because the telling of the story requires that much space.

What we're going to see is that there's a lot of repetition in this story. And sometimes we get bored with repetition, but when we see repetition in the Scriptures, we need to pause and say, why does He keep saying this over and over?

[13 : 08] I just read almost those exact same words in that last paragraph, and now here they are again. The repetition is there to grab our attention. The repetition is there to show us God at work and to highlight for us that aspect of God's character or God's work that the writer of Scripture intends for us to see.

And in this chapter, that is the providence of God. The sovereign exercise of His will over His creatures and in and through the lives of His people.

That's what we're going to see throughout this chapter. But before we get there, let me cast for you a picture of God's providence, not just in terms of an old confession of faith, but in terms of the biblical language itself.

How do Jesus and the apostles conceive of God's exercise of His control over His creatures? How do they see that? Let me just take you to a couple of places.

We could go to a lot of places, but I want to take you to a couple of places now. And then as we move through the story, we may hit some other key Scriptures that speak of God's providence. But turn in the New Testament, if you would, to the Gospel of Matthew.

[14 : 21] The Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says something that will sound familiar to another passage we'll read from Matthew later this morning.

But Jesus says something in the context of speaking about fear. Now normally our fear is motivated by the unknown. We don't know what's to come, or we fear what the effects of what we know is coming may be.

We either don't know what is coming, or we don't know all the effects of what is coming, but we sense that something bad may be on the horizon. Our fear is often motivated by our lack of knowledge of what's going to happen.

And Jesus addresses that. He says in Matthew chapter 10, He gives an analogy. He says, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? So they're cheap.

And not one of them, He says, will fall to the ground apart from your Father. In other words, Jesus is addressing their fears by pointing out to them that even this most insignificant, and at least in the eyes of people, this most worthless of creatures, it's worth a penny in Jesus' day, even this most insignificant of creatures, not a single one of them will fall.

[15 : 35] That is, they will not perish apart from the will of your Father. That's the kind of governance that God exercises over all of His creatures.

Even the sparrow does not die, does not fall apart from God's will. And then He goes on to apply that. Verse 31.

Verse 30, excuse me. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows.

This is what we would call an argument from the lesser to the greater. Fear not, if God exercises such sovereign, governing authority and control over the sparrow so that not a single sparrow can die apart from His will, then you need not fear.

You are of much more value to Him than a sparrow. In other words, God will not fail to exercise the same kind of care and concern over your life that He exercises over the life of a mere sparrow if He rules sovereignly over other creatures.

[16 : 46] He will certainly rule sovereignly in the lives of His people. Jesus applies the doctrine of God's providence or of God's sovereignty in all things directly to our lives by saying, don't fear.

But the movement is from the picture of God's sovereign over all things, even the sparrow, to God's sovereign over your life as well. This is the attitude of the apostles too.

Let me just quote to you one place from Ephesians, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul says in Ephesians 1, verse 11, in Him, that is in Christ, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him.

In other words, so now He's going from a focus upon you, upon the believer, upon those who are in Christ, and then He'll move to a broader focus. We've been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

So He wants you to know now, God is going to continue and complete this great work of salvation. He has predestined you to this, and He who predestined you is the same person who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

[18 : 03] There is nothing that falls outside of the counsel of God's will. And so the same God who provides for and cares for and rescues you and delivers you from your sin is the one who exercises His governance, His control over all things.

Even the sparrow. That's a biblical portrait of the providence of God. From the lesser to the greater and from the greater to the lesser.

God rules in our lives and He's able to do that because He rules over all things with absolute sovereignty.

That is the theme, I believe, of Genesis chapter 24. And as we begin to move forward and see the servant fulfilling the vow that he makes to Abraham, we will see God's providence worked out.

But one of the things that we see at the very beginning of this story is something that we need to be reminded of when it comes to God's providence. And that is that God does not reveal to us, very often at least, He does not reveal to us what are the plans of providence.

[19 : 20] He does not tell us what the details of our life will be as they unfold. We don't know what tomorrow holds. We don't know what is going to happen to us.

Abraham doesn't know, nor does the servant. Look at verse 5. The servant says back to Abraham, 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? Because he's unsure. He doesn't know if God is going to provide a wife for Isaac when he gets there.

So, in that case, since I don't know, do you want me to take Isaac back? He responds, see to it that you do not take my son back there.

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. Notice, he will send his angel before you.

[20 : 27] That's providential language. He's going to prepare the way. He will send his angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there. Then the uncertainty.

There's, by the way, no uncertainty regarding whether or not God will send his angel. There's no uncertainty expressed as to whether or not God will go ahead and God will provide and God will prepare. That's not where uncertainty is found.

The uncertainty is found in exactly what God is going to be doing. So he says, 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. So neither the servant nor Abraham knows what God has planned. They don't know. They only know, or at least Abraham knows and is confident that God is in control.

He will send his angel, his messenger, ahead of the servant. He will prepare the way. And whatever it is that God is doing, whatever God's plan is, God will work that plan out.

[21 : 27] But they don't pretend to know the details of it. Neither pretends to know exactly what's going to happen as the servant leaves and the servant arrives. Now I think that's significant for us.

I think that as we're looking in this portion of Genesis that is all about a transition from one generation to the next, I think for us there is particular application as we think about our transitions in life.

Because the times of uncertainty usually strike us. We're always uncertain. But the moments when uncertainty becomes real in our minds, are in those times of transition within our own lives.

You know, whether it's a transition from being a teenager into adulthood, being out from under your parents' house and being out on your own and working and providing for yourself and all those things, that's a strange transition to make and it's difficult and it can come with all sorts of fears and insecurities and you don't know how things are going to work out, you need to trust in God's providential hand.

Or in the early days of marriage, I mean that's a major transition from being single to being married. It doesn't always unfold the way that you would expect it to unfold. Things don't always go the way that you think they're going to go.

[22 : 44] Your marriage may not look the way that you thought that it would look before you were married. Transitions can be difficult and in the midst of those transitions, in the midst of a difficult start to marriage, or maybe not difficult, but just different and somewhat surprising and maybe unsettling, we need to trust in God's providence.

And then there's that next stage where we have our first children. That is a difficult transition to make. To move from being married yet have all sorts of freedom to go and do to suddenly you're responsible for this little one.

You know, one of the things that struck me after Nate was born was that all of a sudden the late night runs to Sonic to get a milkshake at midnight when they were open.

Those were over. Because you can't just leave the baby laying there at home or at least you're not supposed to, right? Or just deciding on a whim, hey, let's go see a late movie tonight.

That's gone. That's over with. And those seem like such trivial things, but they signal the major shift that takes place in your life when you move from it just being the two of you going where you want, doing what you want, no big deal, to suddenly, oh no, there's another human being here and I've got to do something with them.

[24 : 00] That's a hard transition to make. And in the middle of that, you have to trust in God's providential hand that on those really hard days where it feels like I'm done, I can't do this for another 18 or 20 years, I can't even do it for two months.

You have to trust that God is at work and He has a plan in the midst of that. When you transition into having teenagers or when you transition into your retirement years, all of those transitions can be frightening transitions or they can at least be uncertain days.

Even if they don't frighten you, even if you don't find yourself facing a lot of trouble, they are uncertain days and you don't know exactly what's going to happen or what's going to come.

God doesn't reveal the details of His plans to us. So you don't know as your kids move out of the house, will they go far away? Will it be just the two of us again when you're too tired to go to the late movie or to go to midnight shake?

Will it just be the two of us again and suddenly everybody's gone? Will they be close or will they be far? What's the situation going to be? And in the middle of that transition you trust in God's providential care and concern over your life.

[25 : 11] And you don't need to know the details. You only need to know that He will send His angel ahead of you. That He will prepare the way and He is in control.

That's what this chapter is about. Because as the servant moves, as the servant begins to do things, we see God's hand at work in obtaining a bride for Isaac.

Now I mentioned that there is a lot of repetition here. There's repetition because as the story unfolds, beginning in chapter 10 you get a very sort of quick account.

He just goes there. He just takes the camels and he goes. And then you have this prayer of the servant to the Lord. And it's a very specific prayer. A very specific prayer.

He goes, he sits by a well, he's got a number of camels with him and he prays to God, God, just bring her to me. Show her to me. I need, here's what I'd like to happen, Lord.

[26 : 13] I would like for a young woman to come out to the well to offer me a drink and when she gives me a drink then to water my camels as well. Now that's, that seems like that's not a big deal, right?

I mean, if you give me a glass of water and then you give a bowl of water to my dog, that's not a big deal. But this is a big deal. I mean, he's, I mean, look there at the beginning. He's got ten camels. Each camel can drink at a time about five gallons of water. So you're talking about a major task for her to water all of these camels and the servant says, so, so if it's the right woman would you have her water all of these camels and then I will know.

And all that prayer is recorded in detail. And then the events unfold almost verbatim as he had prayed. And so he, and so he asks her, can I stay, can I, do you have a place for me to stay?

And he meets her family and then he recounts for her family all the details of his prayer and the fulfillment of his prayer. So in some sense, you're getting these details three or four times in the middle of the story.

[27 : 18] But why? Why such repetition? As I said, the repetition is there to show us that God is involved in the details. That behind all of these things, there is the invisible hand of God moving and working and preparing the way.

Read the prayer. Verse 12. And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.

Now note that language, grant me success. He's recognizing that it is in God's hand to grant or to withhold success in this endeavor. Behold, I'm standing at the spring of water and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.

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.

There's providential language again. Whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this, I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.

[28 : 28] And then sure enough, starting in verse 15, things happen exactly as he had asked. God is providentially ordering the events as they unfold before the servant for him to be able to recognize the wife that God has already appointed for Isaac.

This is an incredible story of God's hand at work in even the details. And so we get repetition starting in verse 15 and moving all the way down to verse 21.

We get repetition of his prayer because we're told that the prayer is fulfilled precisely. And then we jump in at verse 21. The man, this is his response to the precise fulfillment of his prayer.

The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not. You see what he's trying to discern?

He's trying to ascertain. Okay, I prayed, God answered, now he's trying to discern, is this the Lord's hand at work? Is this the provision that I prayed for?

[29 : 38] That God, is God moving in the midst of this to prosper me and give me the success that I have asked for? And indeed it is.

He concludes apparently that it is because in the very next verse he takes all the bracelets and gold rings and he gives them to her. That's kind of a very quick sign to her. I can't imagine how she would have responded.

She's shown great kindness to this man. She's offered him a drink. She's gone through all the labor of watering his camels and then suddenly he begins to give her these bracelets and rings and all sorts of things.

Notice what he says in verse 23. Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night? And then she replies, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.

And she added, we have plenty of both straw and fodder and room to spend the night. In other words, everything that you asked for and even all the things that your master Abraham sent you here to find, they are right here.

[30 : 44] God has gone ahead of you. He has prepared everything. It's not coincidence that the woman who comes to the well, who meets all of his requirements, happens to not only be a relative of Abraham, but happens to be the daughter of the son of Abraham's brother and not a son, by the way, by means of the concubine of Abraham's brother.

Not like Ishmael. No. More like Isaac. That's the purpose of the genealogy early on. to show us precisely who she is. She identifies herself to him.

And his response is what our response ought to be. Notice verse 26. The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord.

And he 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 kinsman.

And then she runs off and she tells everybody what had happened. All along the way, the servant is trusting in God's provision. And all along the way, the servant is recognizing God's provision.

[32 : 07] God is providentially overseeing all of these events. He has a plan. He has something that he's doing and that he is accomplishing.

And the servant is a piece of that puzzle. And because the servant gets to be a piece of that puzzle, the servant rightly acknowledges God's grace and mercy in including him.

And he falls down in worship before him. Now, God's provision in God's hand, they do not mean that everything is going to go smoothly. We could, at least so far in this story, think, yeah, I'm all on board with God's providence if that means that I can pray very specific, weird prayers and God's going to immediately answer them exactly.

I'm on board with that. If that's God's providence, I'm good with that. But that's not how God's providence normally works. Yes, we are seeing some unusual twists and turns.

We are seeing some things unfold in ways that we might not expect. But there are bumps along the road for this servant of Abraham. There must have already been bumps that have been skipped over.

[33 : 12] I mean, he had to make a 400 mile journey with his camels. There were probably already difficulties, but those are passed over. We know nothing of those. But now, as he begins to negotiate, in a sense, for Rebekah to become the wife of Isaac, now there's a bit of difficulty.

Difficulty that he can't even see at the beginning because at the beginning everything looks good. And that's where we fool ourselves. Sometimes things look good and things appear to be moving smoothly.

And so we make the assumption that, oh, God's going to make everything easy. And yet, God's providence doesn't guarantee an easy path. There are normally bumps along the road. Now, the bumps here seem minor to us as we read through the passage, but they would have for a moment at least felt devastating to the servant because we are introduced to a character who will later on in Genesis, in just a few chapters, he will become a notorious person.

Noted for his greed, noted for his trickery and his schemes, his name is Laban and he happens to be the brother of Rebekah.

I mean, the brother of Rebekah. Jumping in verse 29. Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. And Laban ran out toward the man to the spring.

[34 : 36] Now, as we're reading, Moses gives us a clue that Laban is not a great guy. He's suspect. Verse 30, as soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms and heard the words of Rebekah, his sister, as soon as those things happened, that's what grabs Laban's

attention because he is a greedy person.

We will see that in more detail as we follow along in the next generation in their story, we will see Laban on the scene again as a much older man but still greedy, still pulling tricks.

And so we're given this subtle warning here when he saw all the gold, when he saw the wealth, that's when he responds. That's when he wants to know who this servant is. That's when Laban becomes interested.

And for whatever reason, Laban is the head of the family right now. Bethuel the father is alive. We don't know if he is incapacitated. Or if he is sick, we don't know what's wrong with him.

But Laban acts as the head of the family throughout this story. And so he's the one that the servant has to deal with. And he, we're already warned in verse 30, he's a greedy man. He sees the ring. He sees the bracelets.

[35 : 43] Now he's interested. Now he's interested. Verse 31, every word that he says in light of that becomes questionable. 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. 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.

Food was set before him to eat. But he said, I will not eat until I have said what I have to say. In other words, the red carpet is being rolled out.

Laban is on to things. He sees the wealth. He rolls out the red carpet. He's taking care of the camels and getting their feet washed and making sure they're comfortable. He's going to serve them a meal. It would be very easy at this point for the servant to become distracted from the task given to him by his master.

But he doesn't. He says, Wait, wait, wait. Before we do this, I have something to say. I've come here for a reason. And then he begins to speak in a way that indicates that perhaps this servant is smarter than we may have realized.

[36 : 56] So he said, I'm Abraham's servant. The Lord has greatly blessed my master and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds and silver and gold and male servants and female servants and camels and donkeys.

If Laban is interested in the wealth, fine. Here's what my master has. He'll play on that. That's not a big deal. That's not a big deal for him at all. There's much more to come. 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.

There's a new generation on the scene and everything that my master has belongs to Isaac. It's all going to be his. And this is what my master told me.

You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell, but you shall go to my father's house, to my clan and take a wife for my son. So he lets them know immediately.

Yes, my master is wealthy. My master has a son and he's the heir of all my master has. And I've come here looking for you specifically, this family, so that I might take a wife for my master's son, the heir of all the wealth.

[38 : 08] He knows. He knows how to play on Laban. Verse 40, But he said to me, The Lord before whom I have walked will send his angel with you and will prosper your way.

You shall take a wife for my son from the clan and from my father's house. Then you'll 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. So the servant makes it clear, I don't have anything to gain or lose here.

He told me to come and find a wife. If I find the wife, I'm free from my oath. I can go. If I don't find a wife, I'm free from my oath. I can go. I'm not in this for personal gain. I'm doing what my master charged me to do.

Now, the Lord will prosper my way. The Lord is guiding me. The Lord will do something. But once again, he doesn't pretend to know how things are going to unfold.

So he simply leaves things in Laban's court. Initially, things look good. As I said, sometimes they look good. He recounts the story of how God led him toward Rebecca.

[39 : 12] And the initial response from Laban seems positive. Verse 50, Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing has come from the Lord.

We cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before her. Take her and go. Let her be the wife of your master's son as the Lord has spoken. So everything on the surface seems to be

working out.

Everything seems to be good. They're agreeable. They're okay with it. Well, again, if this is how providence works, if there are no bumps in the road, then why not? This is an easy doctrine to accept, except that that's not the end of things.

Everything's not simple and easy. Laban throws sort of a curveball and he requests, Oh, well, you know what? Hold on.

Yeah, take her and go, but then suddenly there's a turn. Verse 52, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord and the servant brought out the jewelry of silver and of gold and garments and gave them to Rebekah.

[40 : 19] He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. So he gives them the things. This would probably be some sort of dowry, a bride price. It was a customary in that culture for the groom to pay some sort of price to the family for the loss of a daughter, for the loss of a worker within the family.

They give to them money. So the servant gives all these sorts of things. He gives them to Rebekah, he gives them to Laban himself. They eat and sleep.

Everything seems good. But Laban has now received what he wants. And so in verse 55, there's the curveball. Her brother and her mother said, Let the young woman remain with us a while.

At least ten days. After that, she may go. Now, it was actually fairly common before a marriage for them to wait not days, but months.

You see, this is the opening to what could turn out to be a long delay. Now, when we read forward into Laban's story, what we learn later on in Genesis is that's exactly the way that Laban operates.

[41 : 32] That's exactly the sort of thing that Laban would do. He offers one thing and then he removes it and substitutes something else. He delays over and over. That's what he will do to Jacob.

He will say, Yes, you can marry my daughter and then he substitutes another daughter. He makes an agreement, you're going to have to work for this amount of time for my daughter. And then he has to double that time to work for the other daughter.

This is how he works. This is how he thinks. This is the kind of person that he is. And so now he's opening the door to that sort of deception. At least ten days, let us wait. Why? Because they've got all the gold and silver.

They've been enriched. So now they'll try to delay as long as they can. And yet that is not a part of God's plan at this time. Curveball it may be, bump in the road it may be, but God's providential plan now is for a wife to be obtained for Isaac.

And so God overrules that through Rebekah. Notice as the story goes, verse 57, let us call the young woman and ask her.

[42 : 37] And they called Rebekah and said to her, will you go with this man? And then she gives the surprising answer, I will go. They had planned to delay.

And yet Rebekah says, no, I will go. And the results of that is very immediately the story starts to move rapidly. So they sent away Rebekah with their sister and her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men and they blessed Rebekah.

Verse 61, Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rolled on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Mission fulfilled.

Mission complete. He has found her. The Lord over and over has led the way, has prospered him, has given him success. God has been sovereignly orchestrating all these things.

Now we've seen them sprinkled as we go through the story, but let me just read off for you all the providential language as it occurs through this story because when they're spread out, it's easy not to feel the full weight of it.

[43 : 39] So beginning early on in verse 7, Abraham says that God will send his angel before you. In verse 12, the servant asks God, grant me success.

And then down again in verse 14, the servant speaks of God who has appointed, appointed a wife for Isaac. And then as you move down through the story, you see in verse 13 where the Lord prospered the journey there.

The Lord prospered. And then again in verse 27, he confesses, the Lord has led me in the way. And then again a reference to the Lord's angel in verse 40, he will send his angel and then he will prosper your way.

That prosper language in verse 42 again. If now you are prospering the way that I go. Verse 44, the Lord has appointed for my master's son.

Verse 48, he speaks then of the Lord who had led me by the right way. In verse 50, this thing has come from the Lord spoken even by Laban, the sinner.

[44 : 51] In verse 56, the Lord prospered my way. Throughout the story, providential language is just sprinkled all over the place so that as we read, we will see, oh, this is not mainly about the servant.

This is about the Lord's hand at work in and through the servant to provide a wife for Isaac so that ultimately God's steadfast love to Abraham and his offspring might be maintained and the promise might move forward.

God has an ultimate plan from the perspective of Abraham to bless all the families of the earth through the offspring of Abraham. But that plan is not just an end goal and it doesn't matter how God gets there.

All along the way, God has planned and orchestrated and He has providentially ordered the events of His people and everything around them so that His promise might be fulfilled.

And that's exactly what God does in our lives. He has given us great and powerful promises.

Romans 8.28, He works all things for the good of those who love Him.

[46 : 07] They're called according to His purpose. He works all things for our good. And He spells out what that good is so that we might be conformed to the image of His Son in verse 29.

So God's given a great promise working all things for good to conform us to the image of His Son. But that means that all things must be worked. That means not just eventually we'll be conformed to the image of God's Son no matter what's around us and God doesn't care about the details no it means that God is orchestrating the details so that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. And here God is orchestrating the details so that His covenant promises to Abraham might be fulfilled through the providing of a wife and therefore a means for a new generation the continuation of the seed to come.

That's exactly what we see at the end of the chapter. Verse 66 the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done so he recounts for Isaac the whole story the whole thing then Isaac brought her that's Rebecca into the tent of Sarah his mother took Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her and so Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Right there another hint another reminder of the transition that's happening in these chapters. God has been orchestrating and moving and working all along so that this might happen.

[47 : 41] So that Isaac might have a wife so that she might have children so that the promise to Abraham might continue. This is what God does. God orchestrates and orders the events of His life of our lives in order that His promises to us might be fulfilled.

which means that His promises are not far out there things that someday we'll achieve somehow but God's not concerned with how we get there.

No it means that God is moving in our lives God is doing things and God is active and He is exercising His sovereignty over all things in order that our course and our steps might be moved toward the fulfillment of His promises to us.

this is how the Scriptures speak. I want you to hold your place in Genesis and turn to the book of Proverbs so that you can see very clearly this language elsewhere in Scripture that God is actually directing our course.

Proverbs 16 verse 9 the heart of man plans his way just as the servant planned his trip his master sent him and he planned and he expressed those plans to God in prayer he had a plan in mind the heart of man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps because we have our plans we have our intentions we have our ideas of what we want to do but at the end of the day the Lord establishes our steps he determines them turn over a couple of pages to Proverbs chapter 19 something similar here is said many are the plans chapter 19 verse 21 many are the plans in the mind of a man there it is again but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand we all have plans we all have ideas just as the servant had a plan and had an idea but at the end of the day the purpose of

[49 : 47] God will stand he will accomplish all that he has planned he is sovereign in all things and over all things and he will providentially take us to where he wants us to go and that may be according to our plans and it may not be according to our plans we can make our plans but at the end of the day God's purposes will be accomplished around us and in our lives James says

something similar but he does it in the context of giving us a warning in the book of James over in your New Testament James wants us to be aware that there are practical implications to recognizing God's providential control over our lives and one of the practical implications of that is that we ought to in all of our dealings and in all of our planning we ought to acknowledge God's sovereignty over our lives James chapter 4 verse 13 come now you who say today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend the year there and trade and make a profit now he does not go on to say you shouldn't say that kind of thing you shouldn't make plans that's not what he says but he does ask a question yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring what is your life you're a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes instead you ought to say if the Lord wills we will live and we will do this or that it's okay to say we're going to do this or that it's okay to say I plan to be alive tomorrow plan to be doing this in five years it's okay to say that he says but what you ought to say is if the Lord wills this this is what will happen you ought to acknowledge in all of your plannings that

God's will is supreme and that means that when our plans fall through and when life doesn't look the way that we expect it to look because God doesn't always give us the precise answers like he did to the servant's prayer God doesn't always make things as easy as he does for the servant many times our lives take strange directions and crooked paths and there are rocky bumpy roads and mountainous terrain that we have to cover and if we will think the way that James tells us to think we won't fail to plan ahead but we won't place our hopes in those plans we will place our hopes in the fact that if God takes us the direction that we're planning then that's what God wants us where he wants us to be and what he wants us to be doing but God may derail those plans and take us over here and if our plans fall through still God will take us to where he wants us to be and have us do what he wants us to do if God wills we recognize whatever happens whatever befalls us if God wills he is sovereign and he is working and so the worry and the anxiety and the sense of disappointment and the sense of failure they dissipate you feel as if you have failed things are not where you thought they would be your career is not what you thought it would be what did I do what went wrong you feel like a failure no

God is at work he has directed the course of your steps it's simply that God's providential plan did not take you where you planned to go but he is prospering your way in the way that he wants sometimes God's prospering of our way is the kind of discipline that we're told of in the book of Hebrews God disciplines His children as a father disciplines!

His children sometimes that's how God redirects our steps to take us where he wants us to go and so sometimes that redirection is painful sometimes that redirection is good and pleasant and takes us away from the pain that we would have experienced had we gone according to our plans but in all of it whether in pain or in pleasure whether in straight paths or crooked paths on flat even terrain or mountainous rocky terrain whatever the course of our lives may be if we will but say the Lord wills the Lord prospers the Lord appoints the Lord is at work here then the outcome will be the fulfillment of his promises in your life and the ultimate promise of God to his people is that in Christ through faith in him our sins are washed away and we have secured!

and laid up for us a great eternal lasting inheritance pleasures forevermore at the right hand of God through faith in Jesus that is an iron clad promise that whatever course your life takes no matter what place you end up no matter what job you work no matter what happens no matter what sickness befalls you that is an iron clad promise that at the end of all of these things and all the different directions!

[54 : 44] that God takes your life he's got something good in store for you he has promised you eternity through his son and even on the way there he is working all things for your good and for his glory that's the doctrine of the providence of God let's pray