

# Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace — study 21



## NAME GREAT, yet NO CONTINUING CITY

### NO RETURN (24:1-28)

**24:1-9** *Why is Abraham willing to allow Isaac a wife from Mesopotamia, but not willing that Isaac should return there?*

(1) This blessing had been promised while Abraham was still in Ur (12:2), and it was fulfilled to the letter. Abraham had been slow to obey, but God had blessed him in all things. Abraham did not separate from his kindred for years, but God blessed him in all things. Abraham went into Egypt instead of staying in the land, but God blessed him in all things. Abraham induced Sarah to lie and was on the point of seeing her dishonored, but God blessed him in all things. Abraham lapsed from faith and dishonored God once more in the land of Abimelech, but God blessed Abraham in all things. What greater instance do we need to show that all of God's dealings are in grace, and totally unrelated to any worth in the man to whom the promises are made? It is all of grace. Grace blesses in all things. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *Genesis* Vol.2 p.14

(2) This chief steward is one of the most attractive minor characters of the Bible, with his quiet good sense, his piety (26f.,52) and faith, his devotion to his employer (12b,14b,27) and his firmness in seeing the matter through (33,56). If he is the Eliezer of 15:2,3, his loyalty is all the finer in serving the heir who has displaced him, almost as a John the Baptist to his Master (cf. Jn.3:29,30). -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p.146

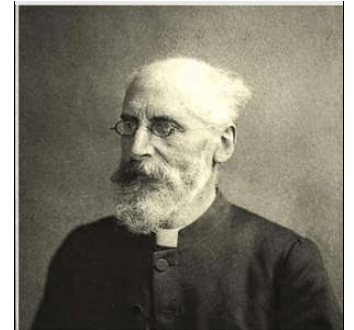
#### THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM:

The beginning of the great line of faith is testimony that God is faithful, even when "the faithful" are not – *He cannot deny Himself* – 2 Timothy 2:13

(3) Now the thigh in biblical usage is symbolic of the reproductive organs, the seat of the procreative powers. Thus. offspring may be described as "those who issue from the thigh." The placing of the hand on the thigh when taking an oath in connection with the last wishes of a superior symbolizes, therefore, an involvement of posterity in the faithful implementation of the instructions and gives added weight to the solemnity and inviolability of the obligation incurred. --

**Nahum M. Sarna**, *Understanding Genesis* p.170

(4) ... the patriarch now despatched "his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that was his" -- generally supposed to have been Eliezer of Damascus, though at that time he must, like his master, have been far advanced in years. But before departing, he made him swear by *Jehovah* -- since this manner concerned the very essence of the covenant -- to avoid every alliance with the Canaanites, and to apply to his "kindred." - **Alfred Edersheim**, *Bible History* Vol.1 p.107 [I can find only one photograph of Edersheim, How interesting that the author of *The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah*, perhaps the greatest work ever published on the Lord's life, should be nearly as invisible as the nameless steward of Abraham. -- ed.]



ALFRED EDERSHEIM  
(1825-1889)  
Swearing by YHWH  
– "the very essence  
of the covenant"

### **24:10-28** *What brings about the servant's wonder and worship?* (vv. 21,26,27)

(5) One of the most characteristic qualities of biblical man was a profound and pervasive conviction about the role of divine providence in human affairs. ... one cannot fail to be impressed by the fact that it is this man who is the first person of whom it is expressly recorded in the Bible that he prayed for personal divine guidance at a critical moment of his life. ...The only criterion the servant lays down is that the girl must be generous and hospitable to strangers and kind to animals. This was apparently more important to him than family relationship, since he gave Rebekah the costly gifts he had brought with him even before discovering her identity. -- **Nahum M. Sarna** *op. cit.* pp.173,174

(6) Irreligious men, partly because they do not hold marriage sufficiently in honour, partly because they do not consider the importance attached especially to the marriage of Isaac, wonder that Moses, or rather the Spirit of God, should be employed in affairs so minute; but if we have that reverence which is due in reading the Sacred Scriptures, we shall easily understand that here is nothing superfluous: for inasmuch as men can scarcely persuade themselves that the Providence of God extends to marriages, so much the more does Moses insist on this point. - **John Calvin**, *The Book of Genesis* Vol.2 p.11

## **FAITH in GOD'S PROVIDENCE (24:29-67)**

**24:29-52** *What knowledge of God still survived among the descendants of Shem — even outside Abraham's line?* (Deut. 32:7,8; compare Job)

(7) He does not, therefore, boast of his good fortune; but he declares that God had dealt kindly and faithfully with Abraham; or, in other words, that, for his own mercy's sake, God had been faithful in fulfilling his promises. ... This thanksgiving, therefore, teaches us always to have the providence of God before our eyes, in order that we may ascribe to him whatever happens prosperously to us. -- **John Calvin**, *op. cit.*, p.23

(8) For the third time, the servant prays. It is a point of interest that he had stood, watchful for the answer, to make his request (12,13a, cf RSV); it was the answers that progressively prostrated him (28. 'his head'; 52, 'to the earth'). - **Derek Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p.148

(9) They declare that the thing proceedeth from the Lord; because he had, by the clearest signs, made his will manifest. Hence we perceive, that although the true religion was in part observed among them, and in part infected with vicious errors, yet **the fear of**

JOHN CALVIN:  
The fear of God never  
completely extinguished ...  
even among idolaters

**God** was never so utterly extinguished, but this axiom remained firmly fixed in all their minds. that God must be obeyed. If, then, wretched idolaters, who had almost fallen away from religion, nevertheless so subjected themselves to God, as to acknowledge it to be unlawful for them to swerve from his will, how much more prompt ought our obedience to be? -- **John Calvin**, *op. cit.*, p.25 (emphasis added)

**24:53-58** *Why would Rebekah make such a seemingly unreasonable choice?*

(10) The grace of God is irresistible. When He moves to accomplish His eternal purpose, everything gives way before Him. The natural heart must yield, as well as the renewed heart. God moves the natural heart by coercion, force of circumstances, or by punishment. He will move the heart of His own by love, wooing them and drawing them on to Himself. God reached down in grace to Rebekah even as He had previously called Abraham alone (Isaiah 51:2), and He moved her people to let her go. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *op. cit.*, p.31

**24:59-67** *Assess Isaac's personality*

(11) Isaac went out in the evening to *meditate* or to *pray*. For the Hebrew word [*soach*] may mean either. It is probable that he did this according to his custom, and that he sought a place of retirement for prayer, in order that his mind, being released from all avocations, might be the more at liberty to serve God. Whether,

however, he was giving his mind to meditation or to prayer, the Lord granted him a token of his own presence in that joyful meeting. -- **John Calvin**, *op. cit.*, p.28

(12) To the very end, God's will for Isaac continued to make demands on Abraham's faith. With old age and wealth to anchor him to the past or present, he now looked on steadfastly to the next stage of the promise and acted with decision. The story, told with unobtrusive artistry, gives living form to the charge 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' (Pr. 3:6). At this distance from the event, we can see how decisively the courageous obedience of a few individuals over a family matter was to shape the course of history. -- **Derek Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p.146

## **The DEATH of ABRAHAM (25:1-10)**

**25:1-6** *What may be behind Abraham's last recorded act, the decision to send away his offspring by Keturah & Hagar? (15:18-21)*

(13) This dismissal was, indeed, apparently harsh and cruel; but it was agreeable to the appointment and decree of God, in order that the entire possession of the land might remain for the posterity of Isaac. For it was not lawful for Abraham to divide, at his own pleasure, that inheritance which had been granted entire to Isaac. Wherefore, no course was left to him but to provide for the rest of his sons in the manner here described. - **John Calvin**, *op. cit.* p.35

(14) The original blessing to Abraham promised simply to make his name great. After the covenant established with him and the ensuing change of name, the promise is spelled out with greater precision. A "great name" means to be "the father of a multitude of nations." Abraham would be "exceedingly fertile," kings would issue from him. Accordingly, the record of the demise of the patriarch is an appropriate place for the genealogical lists in that they demonstrate how the divine promise was fulfilled. That is to say, the entire Abrahamic biography is encased within a framework of promise and fulfillment. -- **N. Sarna**, *op. cit.* p.176

**25:7-10** *What assumption lies behind the expression "gathered to his people"?*

(15) The description of his death (ver. 8) is very beautiful, and it is interesting to note that he was 'gathered to his people,' referring to their reunion in the unseen world. It is obvious that this phrase cannot possibly refer to his burial, since only Sarah's body was in that tomb. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *Genesis 1-25* p.278

(16) The word *faith* does not occur in the Old Testament, but the quality is exhibited there, and nowhere more dearly and wonderfully than in Abraham. The objects of faith are the future and the unseen, and its office is to give present existence to future things, and vital reality to unseen things (Heb.11:1). ... Most people die without ever having truly lived, but Abraham being dead yet lives. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* Vol.1 p.112