



## Trust God's Covenant Faithfulness

### Wrestling with God: The Stories of Isaac & Jacob Series #1

Genesis 24

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I want to begin with a question. What circumstances in your life right now are threatening to erode the foundations of your faith in God's promises? Maybe for you it's loneliness or the loss of a job or financial stress and tension. Maybe God has taken a loved one from you, or He has brought a good friend into your life, only for that friend to betray you. Or maybe you're just looking at this world, and no matter how hard you try to live faithfully as a follower of God, it doesn't seem like anyone notices or that what you're doing accomplishes anything.

I'm not saying your faith is gone, but seeds of doubt have been planted through difficult trials or simple temptations. Like a tree that's planted too close to a home, the roots start to creep toward the foundation, threatening to compromise the integrity and strength of that foundation.

You may be wondering if Christianity is simply being used to create a comfortable culture for you. Or you may be thinking, "God, You've promised to build Your church, but are You? Are we gathering because that's just the normal and comfortable thing for us to do, just part of our routine? You've promised that You will never leave us or forsake us—but are You here? You've promised to work all things for good for those who are loved by You and called according to Your purpose. How can that be true in the circumstances I'm facing right now?"

These seeds of doubts, these questions, may be entering your mind. These aren't new struggles. Throughout history God's people have struggled with faith. I actually think Genesis was written primarily to answer this question. Moses wanted to strengthen the faith of God's people, to show them what He had been doing in this world to keep His covenant, to assure His people that they could trust His covenant faithfulness.

It's been over a year since we've looked at Genesis, so I want us to start in chapter one. We won't read it all, but let's skim through a little background on what we'll be looking at in Genesis 24. Moses is writing to God's people, a people who wavered in their faith. He begins by giving them a picture of God as the Creator of the entire universe. He creates the heavens and

the earth, the sea and the sky, and He fills them with everything that now exists. He then creates humanity in His own image and commissions humans to be fruitful, multiply and to fill the earth.

Then in chapters three and four, we follow the story of how sin entered the world, then death by sin. Adam and Eve plunged mankind into the curse, and throughout generation after generation, corruption filled the earth until the days of Noah. Then God almost gave the human race a fresh start by destroying the earth with a flood, but He saves Noah and his sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth. Again, God commissions them to be fruitful and multiply, but right away we read of Ham's sin against Noah. God responds by cursing Ham and his descendants, who would become the people of Canaan. That's going to be important for our story later today. God then pronounced blessing on Shem and Japheth.

Shem's descendants lead to a man named Abram, and in chapter 12 we read that God calls Abram and gives him a promise. Let's look at the first three verses:

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

Turn now to Genesis 15, where this promise is further filled out. So God calls Abram, the descendant of Shem, asking him to step out in faith, leaving his home and family. He then promises Abram again that He will bless him. Genesis 15:5-6 says:

*[God] brought [Abram] outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Now jumping to Genesis 17:15-17, we see the promises made to Abram are applied directly to his wife Sarai, who was later called Sarah. God has promised blessing, He has promised offspring—and not just some offspring, but lots of them. *"Number the stars, if you are able to number them."* Then here in chapter 17 we read:

*And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a*

*child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"*

Moving next to Genesis 22, we have one more piece of the background to add. This is the part of the story where God did bless Sarah with her son Isaac, but then God called Abraham to be willing to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeyed, God stepped in, and we have the beautiful picture of redemption. Then in response to Abraham's faith and obedience, God says in verses 17 and 18:

*I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*

Then in chapter 23 Sarah dies. God has promised that the blessing to Abraham would come through his wife Sarah, that nations would rise out of her offspring, her son Isaac. So now today we come to a new situation where Sarah has died and Isaac has no wife. There are just the two guys in this family: Abraham and Isaac.

So we see that the main theme of this story, the longest narrative in Genesis, is that God's covenant faithfulness is to be trusted. Remember, Moses is writing the story, and I think he is intentionally highlighting the fact what he has put in chapter 24 is not just a "how to find a wife" story, or a nice Bible love story, but rather it is one more instance where God is the Hero of the story. He is providentially guiding His people to fulfill His ultimate plan for this world.

### **Scene One: Abraham's faith in sending a servant**

Reading from Genesis 24:

*Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."*

*<sup>5</sup> 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?" <sup>6</sup> Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.*

Putting his hand under the thigh is similar to today's practice of putting your hand on a Bible to swear to take an oath. Abraham was saying to his servant, "I am sending you on a mission." But look especially at Abraham's faith in his instruction. Why was Abraham requiring these things? He was over 400 miles from his homeland near Mesopotamia. But he still insisted that the servant not take a wife from the Canaanite people, which is why I mentioned earlier the curse on the descendants of Ham. So Abraham believed God would fulfill His promise through one of Abraham's kin—someone from his own family—not through the Canaanite line.

But then the servant asked a pretty logical question: "What if she doesn't want to come? Can I take Isaac to live there?" In Abraham's response to this question he's highlighting another aspect of God's promise: that God's people would live in the land He had promised to give them. It was why Abraham had been sent there, and it's where God had said the offspring would live. Again, this was another expression of Abraham's faith in God's promise. Isaac's wife should be from his people, and they should live in this Promised Land.

Through this we're seeing Abraham's faith: "*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'*" (24:7). That is what drives Abraham's faith that God will fulfill His promise.

## **Scene Two: The faith of the servant**

Continuing in chapter 24:

*<sup>10</sup> 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. [Nahor was Abraham's brother, and probably the city was named after him as well.] <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my*

*master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> 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."*

The servant is demonstrating remarkable faith in God's covenant faithfulness and providence. He was not asking God for a supernatural sign, in the sense that it would go against the laws of nature—what we would call a miracle. But he's pleading for God in His providence to lead the right woman to him. He's saying to God, "I've traveled 400 miles to this well. But You alone can grant me success in my mission and show Your steadfast love to my master."

The Hebrew word used here is *checed*, which speaks of God's faithful covenant love for His people. "*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.*" So he's pleading with God, "Lead the right woman to me according to Your faithful covenant promises."

### **Scene Three: God's answer to the servant's prayer**

*<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.*

*<sup>17</sup> Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." <sup>18</sup> She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.*

*<sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are."*

She had first passed the hospitality test he had set up. Now he's wondering if she would also pass the kinsman test. Is she of the right family? *"She said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.'"* And immediately the servant would have known that she was a descendent of Abraham's brother.

*<sup>25</sup> She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night."<sup>26</sup> The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord <sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.*

Consider what happens in this scene. Before the servant even finishes praying, God brings Rebekah to him. He stands in silence, wondering if the Lord had indeed prospered his journey and fulfilled His promise. Rebekah passed the first test—hospitality. Some have tried to calculate how much water she would have carried to water all the camels. It is estimated that a camel can consume 25 gallons at one drinking, and we know that the servant took ten camels. That's 250 gallons of water! So assuming her pitcher would hold three gallons...it's a lot of water.

All the while the servant is watching her serve him, a stranger. But then imagine his awe when he also learns that she is from Abraham's family. He worships the Lord, saying "God, You have not forsaken Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness. You have led me in the way."

#### **Scene Four: A conversation with the family**

The servant has found the woman he believes is to be Isaac's wife. But the question remains: will she be willing to return with him? And will her family be willing to let her go as well? This is the longest portion of the story, but I want to read it because it's God's Word for us. As I read, try to place yourself in this scene. Maybe you can identify with the servant who has to try to convince the family to let their daughter go. Or maybe you see yourself as a member of the family who will be asked to release their daughter to move 400 miles away because this man has a master who needs a wife for his son. Try to feel the tension in this story.

While there probably would have been some idea of their connection to Abraham, still he had been gone from there for a long time. As we go through this scene, think about the faith in God that is being required of these people as they consider letting Rebekah leave with this stranger.

<sup>29</sup> *Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. [We'll read more about Laban later in Genesis.] Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> 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." <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." [Laban] said, "Speak on."*

<sup>34</sup> *So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.' <sup>39</sup> I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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.'*

<sup>42</sup> *"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, <sup>43</sup> 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," <sup>44</sup> 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.'*

<sup>45</sup> *"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.' <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> 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.*

<sup>48</sup> *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.*

<sup>49</sup> *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."*

So the servant has finished telling them his story about how God in His steadfast love and faithfulness has led him to Rebekah. Then he puts the question to the family, "Are you going to respond to that in faithfulness? Tell me yes or no."

<sup>50</sup> *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. <sup>51</sup> 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."*

Again, this is another group of people who are seeing these events and hearing this story, and they too are expressing faith in Yahweh. "This has to have come to us from the Lord our God. So we can't say yes or no. We have to trust and submit to God." Both in the story of the servant and in the response of the family, God is the Hero, the primary Actor in this event. It has all come from Him. So the family has agreed—but now, what about Rebekah herself?

### **Scene Five – Rebekah's response**

<sup>52</sup> *When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. <sup>53</sup> 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. <sup>54</sup> 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." <sup>55</sup> Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go."*

That seems like a reasonable request. They've just been asked to give their daughter and sister away forever, so they ask, "Couldn't she just stay with us for ten more days?"

<sup>56</sup> *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." <sup>57</sup> They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." <sup>58</sup> And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." <sup>59</sup> So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her*

*nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup> 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 them!"*

*<sup>61</sup> 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.*

In many ways, we see in this story Rebekah following in the steps of Abraham, who himself was called by God in faith to leave his family and his home and his country to go to a place completely unknown to him. She is having to step out completely in faith—and she is willing to go, trusting in God. As with Abraham, we see a blessing being pronounced on her.

Let's go back to the promise Abraham was given in Genesis 22:17-18, to see the connection between the two promises. God says to Abraham, *"I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies."* Compare that to what was said to Rebekah in Genesis 24:60: *"Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them!"*

## **Scene Six – Isaac meets Rebekah**

*<sup>62</sup> Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. <sup>63</sup> 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. <sup>64</sup> And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel <sup>65</sup> 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. <sup>66</sup> And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. <sup>67</sup> 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.*

So the story concludes with a woman, a mother of God's people, to whom is promised generations of offspring that would come through her. This means there is hope. God has made a way for Himself to fulfill His faithful covenant promises. As Moses writes this, you can see his

desire to show God's faithfulness. These writings would have caused the Israelites of his day to be strengthened in their faith. God acted in history and is still acting to fulfill His promises.

So ultimately the promise that is contained here is that a Redeemer will come. In one translation we read, "*May your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them.*" This is a possible rendering of the word "them," as it could be either singular or plural in the original Hebrew. But there are indications that something has been switched here. Earlier it talks about "thousands of ten thousands," but here the word "offspring" is singular. So then it could be, "*May your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him.*"

In Genesis 3:15 there was a promise given—this first glimpse of good news after the fall—that there would be an Offspring, "Seed of the woman," an Offspring of Eve Who would redeem God's people. Specifically it says that He would crush the offspring of the serpent, and the serpent would bruise His heel—a hint of what was to come in Christ. Also Sarah was given a promise, again the "Offspring of the woman." And now through Rebekah there is yet another mention of the "Offspring of the woman," that the promise would come through a descendant of Rebekah.

Paul references the singular nature of this Offspring in Galatians 3:16. It's not just that she's going to have a lot of descendants, but that there would be a specific Offspring Who would set God's people free. Paul says, "*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ.*"

So we can see the faith-building effect this would have on the people of Israelite, causing them to hope in and trust God's covenant faithfulness. They could see how He had done everything He promised up to this point in Moses' story. But at that time they were still looking forward to the Offspring Who would crush the serpent's head. They were looking forward to their Messiah Who would come and make all things new. That Offspring, that Seed, Who would come through Rebekah.

Today as God's people, we still struggle with faith, even though we have all of the Scripture and we see how God has done this throughout history—and how He is continuing to fulfill His promises. Yet we still doubt some things. For example, Jesus said, "*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). But sometimes when we look at our world, it seems like we're being stopped by the gates of hell. How is the church supposed to be growing and thriving when it feels like we're meeting too much resistance? Has God lost sight of that promise?

Or maybe we will look at the key providence text in Romans 8:28-32, and we doubt.  
“God, are You really working all things together for good?” We know He said:

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Listen to this. “*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all thing?*” So when we’re faced with trials and temptations, and those seeds of doubt are planted, we look to Christ. If God, in His covenant faithfulness, worked through all of those circumstances in His providence to build up a people, and out of that people to bring a Messiah Who would crush the serpent’s head, Who would set His people free, if God did not spare His Own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not with Him also graciously give us all things?

So we look at the trials, we even look at our temptations, and we see how God is using those providentially to lead us toward His greater good: our glorification.

The Communion Table—the bread and the cup—is also a means of grace by which God strengthens the faith of His people. Remember, “God, You did not spare Your own Son. Jesus, You gave Your body, You gave Your blood.” Allow that to strengthen your faith in His covenant faithfulness to you.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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