

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

On Finding Your Lifelong Companion

Genesis 23:1–2, 19–20; 24:1–4, 61–67; 25:20

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Through the ups and downs of Abraham's life, God faithfully provided what was needed to fulfill His covenant. The ultimate provision was Isaac, the promised son born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Isaac's birth, however, was just the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise of generations of descendants to Abraham (Genesis 22:17). As heir, Isaac needed to marry, have children, and hand the covenant blessing to his descendants. Once again, the Lord would prove Himself faithful by providing a wife for Isaac.

As we'll see in this study, the story of the search for Isaac's wife culminates in a heart-pounding moment when Isaac meets his bride, Rebekah. This scene is the focal point of the story, and it recalls the moment when God escorted Eve to Adam as the one divinely chosen for him (2:22).

God is the central character of both stories. He is the divine Father who lovingly created Eve for Adam and who sovereignly guided the events that brought Isaac and Rebekah together. He is the writer and director of life's beautiful dramas who deserves praise as the One who "does great things too marvelous to understand" (Job 5:9)!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Prepare your heart to read Genesis 23 and 24 by taking a moment to pray. Thank the Lord for the ways He has sovereignly directed you through your ups and downs. Just as God led Abraham and his family through the seasons of family life, He will guide you as well. Meditate on the following verse, and write down a prayer for God's guidance on your journey of faith.

For You are my rock and my fortress;
For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.
(Psalm 31:3 NASB)

Quotable

*In every great
courtship there are
some things that
you can't explain.
You just know that
God is in it.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Overview and Flow of the Story

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, or unlike. In narratives like the passage we're studying, we look for themes that weave through the story, noticing problems that lead to solutions.

Through problems and solutions, good literature builds and resolves tension. Characters face a problem or a crisis, go on a search for a solution, find their hearts' true desire, and become better people along the way. Think of the story of *The Wizard of Oz* in which Dorothy's journey begins with a tornado (her crisis) that takes her to the Land of Oz. She then embarks on her own amazing journey. Finally, the crisis resolves when she returns home forever changed.

Read **Genesis 23 and 24** and take note of the problems and solutions, the crises that lead to resolutions, as you grasp the flow of the story. Use the chart below as a guide.

Verses to Compare	Problem or Crisis	Solution or Resolution
Genesis 23:1–2 and 24:67		
Genesis 23:3–4 and 23:17–20		
Genesis 24:2–4 and 24:27, 48		
Genesis 24:49, 57 and 24:58–61		



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Can you see how Genesis 23 and 24 are linked? The two chapters are a pair. Sorrow over the death of Sarah gives way to joy when Rebekah arrives. Sarah's death and burial described in Genesis 23 raises the question, "Who will be the next mother to continue the family line?" Genesis 24 answers the question with a story that builds our faith in God who guides and provides a mate for Isaac.

How do we interpret the meaning of this ancient story of courtship and marriage and apply it to us? Although traditions differ today, the principles we learn from this passage span the centuries and teach helpful guidelines for finding a mate.



Interpretation: Helpful Guidelines for Choosing a Mate

With the big picture in place, let's draw five principles from the story that we can apply to our cultural setting.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

A principle is a statement based on a truth that transcends time and culture. It applies to all people in all eras, from the tent-dwelling nomads in Abraham's day to the selfie-clicking millennials of the postmodern age. Principles express the central meaning of the biblical text, and they are the basis for making accurate applications.

Hear and Heed the Counsel of Godly Parents—Genesis 24:1–9

God blessed Abraham "in every way" (Genesis 24:1), with a long life and great wealth. And yet his greatest treasure, Isaac, lacked the blessing of a mate. So Abraham called upon his oldest and most-trusted servant, likely Eliezer (15:2), to find a wife for his son.

What did Abraham warn his servant *not* to do (24:3, 6)? And why were these prohibitions so important to Abraham and the future of the Hebrew race?



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What wise counsel did Abraham give his servant about where to find a wife (Genesis 24:4)? And what reassurance did he give his servant (24:7)?

Abraham's instructions to his servant model the warnings and wise counsel that godly parents give their adult children. Chuck Swindoll advises those seeking a spouse:

[Godly parents] often know you better than you know yourself, and they can help you examine your motives. Your parents will also maintain a healthy objectivity that will help balance your “in love” subjectivity. Pay attention to that sixth sense parents often have about people.

Again, parents aren't always right, but you are wise to hear their counsel and take it seriously.¹

Saturate the Entire Process in Prayer—Genesis 24:10–14

The servant led his caravan laden with gifts to Haran, where “Abraham's brother Nahor had settled” (Genesis 24:10). At a well outside of town, Rebekah, Nahor's granddaughter (24:15), came to draw water. Here she met Abraham's servant—a meeting not of chance but of divine leading and answered prayer.

For what, specifically, did the servant pray (24:12–14)?

What lessons about praying for a mate can you draw from his prayer?



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The sign for which the servant prayed was, in fact, a test of character—which leads to the next guideline when searching for a mate.

Look for Qualities That Reveal Character—Genesis 24:15–20

What character qualities did Rebekah's kind deeds display (Genesis 24:15–20)?

Rebekah was a lovely woman with the right pedigree, but it was her moral purity and strong character that made her God's choice for Isaac.

Proceed Cautiously . . . Think Deeply—Genesis 24:21–32

Rather than assume Rebekah was the “one” based on first impressions, the servant cautiously and thoughtfully “watched [Rebekah] in silence, wondering whether or not the LORD had given him success in his mission” (Genesis 24:21).

Take time to observe your potential spouse under pressure. What often surfaces that you might not see otherwise?

Find out about the person's family. The servant asked about Rebekah's family: “Whose daughter are you?” he asked. “And please tell me, would your father have any room to put us up for the night?” (24:23).

Shining a light on a family often reveals a hidden side of an individual from that family. According to Chuck Swindoll:

When you marry the person, you marry the family. Even if you don't live near them or visit often, your mate carries his or her family within. . . . I have seen wonderful healthy people emerge from terrible families, but they are rare. I'm not advising you to call it off right away; I merely suggest that it's a flashing caution sign on the road to the altar. Pay attention.²



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Determine If There Is a Mutual Interest in Spiritual Things—Genesis 24:33–67

A final principle emerges from the servant's dinner conversation with Rebekah's brother, Laban. What is the conclusion of the conversation according to Genesis 24:48–50?

Rebekah's family could sense the hand of God moving, but did Rebekah? Was she spiritually in tune and willing to take a step of faith as Sarah did when she left her family in Haran decades earlier? Read Genesis 12:4–5, and compare Abraham and Sarah's faith in action with Rebekah's (Genesis 24:56–61). What similarities do you see?

Imagine a young woman leaving her hometown and her family—whom she'd never see again—and traveling hundreds of miles to marry a man she'd never met! Why did Rebekah say yes?

Rebekah's journey of faith led her on the same road into the unknown as Sarah's journey with Abraham! Her spiritual life synced perfectly with Isaac's heritage of faith. She would be the ideal match for Isaac and the ideal woman to bear the Abrahamic covenant to the next generation.

Application: Some “Always” and “Nevers” Worth Remembering

Read one more time the account of the climactic moment when Rebekah and Isaac met (Genesis 24:62–67). Look past the ancient traditions, and notice Rebekah's respect and dignity and Isaac's commitment and love—reminiscent of the relationship of humanity's first couple, Adam and Eve.



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In this day of shallow relationships, hurry-up romances, and carnal escapades, let Isaac and Rebekah's story give you a model to follow . . . along with these application points from Chuck Swindoll:

- *Always pursue God's will, and always be honest in your relationship.* Build a foundation of submission to God and authenticity of character in your dating relationship. Then you'll have something on which to build a lifetime of marriage.
- *Never rush into anything, and never rationalize around the importance of sexual purity.* Take time to really know each other, and give your spouse the gift of purity before marriage and fidelity afterward.

Perhaps one of these applications hits home, or maybe God is revealing an application just for you. Write down what you find meaningful in this passage and how you can put it into practice.

Now let's close in prayer, praising God for His guiding hand in every aspect of our lives.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard me from pursuing what I want rather than what You want in my relationships. Give me the courage to be honest, the strength to remain pure, the patience to be thoughtful, and the sensitivity to see Your hand in the subtleties of life's circumstances. Thank You for the good that will come from following the counsel of Your Word. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 226–7.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 231.



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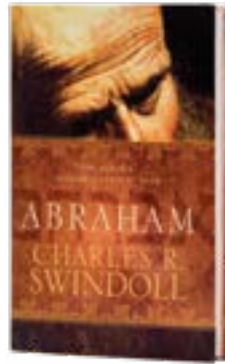
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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