**Lesson 7**

**1-2 November 2021**

**A picture containing silhouette

Description automatically generatedGenesis 23 – 25:18**

***Another Perspective*:**

**Maps 1: Rebekah –** As we look at “Another Perspective” today, we will be focusing on *maps* to help us visualize where some of the important events of today’s lesson took place.



**Abraham’s Journey**

First of all, we want to find out where Rebekah lived when the servant found her. We know the general route that Abraham took from Ur to Canaan, so the servant probably reversed those steps to locate Abraham’s family. As he traveled, he would have come to Haran, which is located at the “top” of the route.



If we focus in on the region just below Haran, we can see both the area of Paddan-Aram and Aram-naharaim, which is identified as “Nahor’s town” in Genesis 24:10.

**Maps 2: Ishmael’s Descendants –** Today’s lesson ends with the death of Ishmael and a description of where his descendants settled. So where was that? Genesis 25:18 tells us that they settled “from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt”. Bible scholars are widely agreed that Shur is located in the area just east of Egypt…but where was Havilah? Some people have suggested it was the desert area east of Shur, while others think it covered a larger area. There is indication that Ishmael’s descendants may have occupied a very large area, including the entire peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. In fact, Ishmael’s descendants are still there today! If we superimpose a modern day map onto the ancient map, we see that the Arabs of today—who are Ishmael’s descendants—live in countries in and around that peninsula.

**Fascinating Clues –** As I was researching the location of Havilah on the internet, I came across a fascinating rabbit trail that I want to share with you. I have reprinted some excerpts from a **seven page article written by John D. Keyser**, a pastor associated with the Hope of Israel Ministries organization. I am including those excerpts as a separate document.

**see Keyser article**

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Description automatically generated*Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:*** The following comments were taken from Lesson 14 of the BSF course on Genesis.

* **Your deepest loves represent the most vulnerable space in your heart.** The people and dreams you treasure most bring forth both your greatest joys and deepest sorrows…We often set our sights on achievements, marriage or other dreams. Your personal identity can even be tied to your relationships and aspirations. But anyone who has lost a loved one through death or a broken relationship or has seen a dream die has experienced profound pain and loss. What we love most, we hate most to lose…Faith in God requires trusting Him with precious relationships and desires we think will bring us the greatest fulfillment…God did not test Abraham to gain information He lacked about Abraham’s faith. **God tested Abraham so Abraham would know what God already knew—that Abraham was willing to offer God what he loved most.** pg 1
* Isaac’s question of “Where is the lamb?” was answered for the last time almost 2000 years later by John the Baptist: **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** pg 3
* Mutual Respect: **Abraham approached his neighbors with graciousness and humility**. He asked the Hittites to purchase a burial plot for Sarah saying, “I am a foreigner and stranger.” He believed by faith that God had given him the land, but did not demand or take the land by military force. **The Hittites honored his presence among them and offered their best tombs.** Instead, Abraham asked for their help to negotiate a sale for cave in the field near Mamre. Abraham insisted on paying a fair price for the field, cave and land that was deeded to him. pg 4-5
* **Every life stage and phase will bring its own brand of challenges that build faith.** As you journey through life, your trust in God can sometimes have strings attached…Faith is a gift of God that must grow and develop. Without tests of our faith, we do not fully experience God’s faithfulness. We choose to trust God until doing so proves difficult. Unless you know how desperately you need God, human understanding and solutions still look appealing…**Abraham needed to experience that when he held nothing back from God, God held nothing back from him**…It is no surprise that God’s deepest work within you will touch who and what you love most in this world. pg 6

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #4: *The Long-Awaited Son,* part 2**

**God Tests Abraham…Again** – Chapter 22 begins with the statement that “God tested Abraham” and goes on to relate that the test consisted of sacrificing his son Isaac. This is not the first test God has given Abraham, but it is certainly the hardest one so far. When God called Abraham to leave the land of his birth, Ur of the Chaldeans, He was asking Abraham to let go of his *past*. Now He is asking Abraham to let go of his *future*.

**Sacrifice and Worship** – In this account we see many parallels to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. There is the *willingness* of a father to sacrifice his only son. The son labored under a death sentence for *three days*. The place of *worship* in the Old Testament is inextricably linked to the place of *sacrifice*. We tend to think of “worship” as something that doesn’t cost us very much, but Old Testament believers understood that to come to God in worship was to be prepared to sacrifice at great personal expense. And the idea of linking sacrifice with worship is *not* just an Old Testament concept. Paul wrote to the Romans that we are to present our bodies as a *living sacrifice*, which is our *spiritual worship*. So Abraham understood very well that to worship God is a costly act.

**Abraham’s Faith** – Abraham told the young men who accompanied him that he and Isaac would go and worship, and then both of them would return. We need to hear the faith in that statement. He believed that whatever happened, both he and his son would come back. Hebrews 11:19 gives us insight into why he believed this. It says, “He considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead…” Remember that he remembers that he was “as good as dead” and Sarah’s womb was “as good as dead” when Isaac was conceived. So he has already seen God perform one miracle of resurrection power on his behalf, and he believes that God can do it again to raise Isaac from the dead.

**Father and Son in Harmony** – As Abraham and Isaac travel toward the site for the sacrifice, they talk *together* about the sacrificial lamb, and then they travel on *together*. Similarly Christ did not act on His own when He went to the cross, but the Father and the Son worked together, moving toward what was next.

**The Lord Will Provide** – Abraham has faltered in his faith at many points in his life previously: he fled to Egypt in the famine, he lied to Pharoah and Abimelech about his wife, and he relied on himself at key points in his life. But now he finally knows that God is the One who will provide everything that he needs. Romans 8:32 makes this same point about the abundant and complete provision of God in our lives: “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?”* Our greatest needs have already been met.

**Death of Sarah** – The customary practice of the day was to bury someone back in his or her homeland, so we might expect Abraham to take Sarah’s body back to his homeland for burial. But he doesn’t do that. Instead, he purchases a field with a cave suitable for burial purposes in Canaan where he has come to live. Why? By purchasing a burial plot in Canaan, he is placing a stake there and implying, “I also will be buried here when the time comes.” He is saying that he believes in a *new homeland* for himself and his descendants. If we were to write an epitaph for Sarah, it might read, “Here lies Sarah, who knew that nothing was too hard for the Lord.”

**Selecting a Bride for Isaac** – When Abraham tells his old, trusted servant to “put your hand under my thigh”, it is an oblique reference to circumcision, the sign of the covenant. In other words, he is asking his servant to solemnly swear by the covenant to do all that Abraham asks him to do. He specifically does not want Isaac to marry a pagan Canaanite woman. But even more importantly, he wants his son to marry someone from the righteous line of Shem.

Abraham also makes his servant swear that, no matter what happens, he is NOT to take Isaac back to Ur or anywhere else in Babylonia. He knows that there are many desirable things and a comfortable lifestyle back in Babylonia that may tempt Isaac to remain there, and so he does not want to expose his son to them.

**The Servant’s Quest** – Abraham’s servant shows great faith and insight. He asks God to show him very specifically which woman is the one for Isaac. And before he even finishes his prayer, Rebekah comes out and fulfills in detail the “test” that he has devised for her. It was a lot of work to give 10 camels enough water to satisfy their thirst—at least 150 gallons would have been needed, and Rebekah willingly pulled up all that water from the well. By doing so she revealed that she was not “just another pretty face.” She was strong, hard working and willing.

**Rebekah’s Brother Laban** – The text then introduces Rebekah’s brother Laban, and we learn something about his character from the way he reacts to what has happened. He sees the rings and bracelets that Abraham’s servant has given to Rebekah, and he recognizes that he is in the presence of a very wealthy man. He persuades the servant to stay at his house.

**Rebekah’s Response** – When Rebekah’s family hears the entire story from Abraham’s faithful servant, they do something rather unusual for that culture: they call for Rebekah to see what she wants to do! They do not make the decision for her. She is willing to go with the servant and to marry Isaac—a beautiful picture of the Bride of Christ who willingly joins her life with His. When she first sees Isaac in the field in Canaan, she demonstrates modesty and propriety by taking a veil to cover herself. And when Isaac marries her, she becomes the matriarch, replacing Sarah in the family.

**The Spiritual Significance of These Characters in the Story** – Chapter 24 tells the story of Abraham, Isaac, a servant and Rebekah. So we have a father who had a son by a miraculous birth, and the son was delivered from death to life. At the appropriate time, the father sends the servant to retrieve a bride for his son. The servant pictures for us the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When he finds the bride-to-be, she is under the control of a deceiver (Laban), and when he finds her, she responds immediately and willingly. So tucked in this story is a beautiful picture of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Bride of Christ (us).

**Abraham’s Other Wife and Sons** – The beginning of Genesis 25 tells about another wife—actually a concubine—that Abraham married and lists all the sons born to her. Why is this detail included in the account? Because these sons are the ancestors of several other enemies of the Israelites. Abraham does with them as he had done with Hagar and her son Ishmael, in obedience to God’s command. He sends them away with some provision for their needs.

**Death of Abraham** – Jen suggests that a suitable epitaph for Abraham might be, “Here lies Abraham, a friend of God, a sojourner whose home was in Heaven.” He lived in tents his entire life because he believed that there was a city that awaited him. Think about Abraham on his deathbed. He is Abraham, “father of a multitude,” who died with only one son in the promised line. He is Abraham, “possessor of the land,” yet he dies owning only a burial plot. As one person put it, Abraham was a man who died clutching a handful of promissory notes—but the promises came true in Christ.

**Ishmael’s Death** – We read the account of Ishmael’s descendants and death in Genesis 25:12-18. It is interesting to note that Ishmael was the “father of a multitude” when he died. Think of what that meant for Abraham, to know that being the father of a multitude was his legacy, and to watch *Ishmael’s* family flourish. We will see a similar situation when we read the account of Jacob.

**The Kingdom of God** – The family of God will always be faced with the question, “Do we trust the promises of God?” Think about how Jesus talked about the kingdom of God in the New Testament. He said that it is like a mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds in the garden, yet when it is planted it becomes a tree that fills the whole earth! From a human vantage point, it may appear that the people of God are not flourishing, but the plans of God go forward, and the kingdom does come.

Do we trust Him? Do we have a circumstance in our lives that makes us wonder if God is really as good as He says He is. Do you look around you and think that the church is shrinking? Any time that the church faces opposition, the church grows. Let’s look for the hand of God in the multiplication of the kingdom of Heaven.