

October 28

Lesson 9 (NIV)

THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Ephesians 5:21–33](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 24](#)

[GENESIS 24:12–21, 61–67](#)

¹²Then he prayed, “LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴May it be that when I say to a young woman, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

¹⁵Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor. ¹⁶The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

¹⁷The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.”

¹⁸“Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

¹⁹After she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.” ²⁰So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. ²¹Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

⁶²Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. ⁶³He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel ⁶⁵and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?”

“He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

[66](#) Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. [67](#) Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

KEY VERSE

Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.—[Genesis 24:61](#)

GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

Unit 2: God Destroys and Re-creates

LESSONS [6–9](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Explain how the story of Isaac and Rebekah fits into the larger creation/re-creation cycle in the book of Genesis.
2. Discuss the correct biblical perspective on the practice of seeking signs from God.
3. Write a commitment statement to take the next bold step of faith that presents itself.

LESSON OUTLINE

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[A. Putting Out a Fleece](#)

[B. Lesson Context](#)

[I. Answered Prayer \(GENESIS 24:12–21\)](#)

[A. Sign Requested \(vv. 12–14\)](#)

[B. Sign Granted \(vv. 15–21\)](#)

[II. Answered Call \(GENESIS 24:61–67\)](#)

[A. Journey of Faith \(vv. 61–65\)](#)

[*Stepping Out on Faith*](#)

[B. Fulfillment of Hope \(vv. 66, 67\)](#)

[*The Blessings of a Good Marriage*](#)

Conclusion

A. God's Choices and Ours

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Babel*Bay*-bul.

Beer Lahai Roi*Beer Lah-high Roy*.

Bethuel*Beh-thew-el*.

Canaan*Kay*-nun.

Hagar*Hay*-gar.

Harran*Hair*-un.

Ishmael*Ish*-may-el.

Nahor*Nay*-hor.

Rebekah*Reh-bek*-uh.

Introduction

A. Putting Out a Fleece

When facing an important decision, sometimes we may ask God for a sign to help us decide what to do. Based on a famous story involving Gideon in [Judges 6](#), such requests are often referred to as “putting

out a fleece.” Gideon’s story has been taken as evidence that God will grant signs of his will to those who ask for them.

While it is essential that we are open to God’s leading and while the Bible does record instances of individuals asking God for signs and receiving them, it is important to note the contexts of these biblical accounts. In each case the requested sign related to something God had already commanded or promised would happen. In the story of the fleece, for example, God had already called Gideon to save the Israelites from oppression and had given specific instructions on what to do ([Judges 6:1–16](#), [33–35](#)). These instructions did not involve Gideon’s personal well-being, but rather pertained to God’s larger plan for the redemption of his people. Gideon was requesting tangible signs to prove that he had not merely imagined that God had spoken to him. We also note what Jesus had to say about seeking signs in [Matthew 12:39](#); [Luke 11:29](#).

Our story today illustrates some principles in a context that frequently drives Christians to ask God for a sign: choosing a spouse. God had decided to preserve a chosen people by making a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Obviously, that plan could be fulfilled only if Abraham had faithful descendants. With stakes so high, it would be critical for God to be involved in the process.

B. Lesson Context

Our lessons this quarter have focused on God’s plan to create a perfect world populated with human beings who would live in fellowship with him and one another ([Genesis 1:26–31](#)). Sin spoiled this plan, but God did not give up. When the world was all but completely corrupted, God cleansed the earth through the flood and started the cycle of creation afresh with Noah and his family ([6:1–7:1](#); [9:1–7](#)). The line of faith continued through Noah’s son Shem and his descendants, even after the scattering of the nations following the Tower of Babel incident ([11:1–9](#)). Generations later, Abraham (as Abram) was called to leave his homeland. He did so carrying the promise of becoming a great nation ([12:1–3](#), [6](#), [7](#); [13:14–17](#); [15:1–7](#); [17:1–16](#)).

Many years after receiving this promise, Abraham and Sarah miraculously conceived Isaac, who would be heir to his father’s possessions and blessing ([Genesis 21:1–7](#)). After Sarah passed away ([23:1](#), [17–20](#)), Abraham was left with a final task: finding Isaac a wife who would continue his bloodline and pass along the promise that God would one day “crush the serpent’s head” ([Genesis 3:15](#)) through one of Abraham’s descendants, Jesus.

Since Abraham was a wealthy and respected clan leader ([Genesis 12:1](#), [2](#), [16](#); [21:22](#), [23](#); [23:1–6](#); [24:1](#)), it would have been easy for him to broker a lucrative match for his son among the nobility of the local people groups. But recalling the nature of his covenant with God, Abraham instead determined that Isaac’s wife should come from his own relatives. He therefore sent a servant to choose a wife for Isaac, a wife whose family was willing to release her to relocate to Canaan ([23:2](#); [24:1–9](#)).

Finding such a young woman was no small task, for Abraham had been away from Harran in his homeland for more than 60 years (compare [Genesis 12:4](#) with [17:17](#) and [23:1](#)). There is no record of his having been in contact with his brother during the interim, except for the information received in [22:20–24](#). Further, there was no guarantee that Abraham’s relatives would allow one of their marriage-eligible daughters, if they even had any, to leave home with a stranger and move hundreds of miles away to marry a man she had never seen or heard of.

I. Answered Prayer

([GENESIS 24:12–21](#))

As today's lesson begins, the servant has arrived with 10 camels in the land of Abraham's family ([Genesis 24:10](#)). There the servant stops by a well outside the town of Nahor, apparently named after Abraham's deceased brother ([11:27–30](#); [22:20–24](#)). The servant needs to water his animals, and it is providential that he is there "toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water" ([24:11](#)).

Wells are a major gathering place for women of the time—one of the few places where they can meet regularly with friends from other households. Since women were generally not permitted to interact with men outside their families (see [Genesis 24:65](#)), the village well is the only place a traveling stranger might encounter local women. The servant seems to have chosen this location and time (see [24:11](#)) strategically as a good place to seek a sign from God.

A. Sign Requested (vv. [12–14](#))

[12](#), [13](#). Then he prayed, "LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water.

Marriage is viewed primarily as a business and political transaction in this era. In that light, the servant would seek out the leader of the local clan to initiate negotiations. Earlier, however, Abraham had told the servant that God would guide the proceedings ([Genesis 24:7](#)). As the servant begins to pray in that regard, he postures himself as a wealthy traveling merchant.

What Do You Think?

Considering the servant's alertness to an opportunity to fulfill his mission, what steps can our church take to develop alertness for opportunities to fulfill the church's mission?

Digging Deeper

What will be your own contribution to that task?

[14a](#). "May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,'

At the same time, the servant prays that God will fulfill the covenant promise to Abraham by giving a sign that will reveal which young woman he should choose for Isaac. In so doing, the servant states the criteria of the sign he is seeking. Three aspects of his prayer are notable.

First, he does not assume that the first woman he talks to will be the one God has chosen. Since it will be inappropriate for a woman to initiate conversation, he plans to do so himself. But he realizes that he may need to ask several women before receiving a positive response.

[14b](#). "and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac.

Second, in order to avoid a “false positive,” the servant’s test involves two elements: the chosen young lady will not only respond to his request by giving him a *drink* but will go beyond what he asks and offer to water his *camels* as well. Such a task would normally be relegated to his own servants. The latter condition makes it impossible for the servant to lead prospects toward an answer he might want, since the woman to whom he speaks will have to offer to *water* the camels on her own initiative.

As a side note, this test will identify the chosen woman as a person of unusual generosity: a single camel can consume up to 30 gallons of water, and the servant has 10 camels ([Genesis 24:10](#)). So this aspect of the sign will require many, many draws from the well.

14c. “By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

Third, it is important to note that the servant’s requested sign is tied to a divine commission that he has already received. It is not tied to any personal desire to know God’s plans for the future. By this time, God has told Abraham numerous times that his son by Sarah would carry the promises of the covenant (see [Genesis 17:15–19](#)). This charge necessitates that Isaac, Sarah’s only son, must marry a woman of the Lord’s approval.

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances, if any, should we seek a sign from God today? Why?

Digging Deeper

How do texts such as [Matthew 4:7](#); [12:38, 39](#); [16:1–4](#); and [24:3](#) affect your answer, if at all?

B. Sign Granted (vv. [15–21](#))

15. Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor.

Even before the servant finishes stating the criteria of the sign he is seeking from God, a young woman appears at the well. The text immediately identifies her as a person meeting Abraham’s standards for his son’s bride ([Genesis 24:3–8](#)). First, *Rebekah* is a relative of Abraham: his grandniece, being the granddaughter of his *brother Nahor* (see also [22:20–23](#)). She is therefore of the right bloodline, not of a Canaanite tribe ([24:3](#)).

16. The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

Second, she is an unmarried *virgin*, eligible to marry and bear legitimate children as heirs to Isaac. As an added bonus, she also happens to be physically attractive, although that is by no means essential for God’s purposes.

17. The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.”

The servant does not hesitate to approach Rebekah. We may wonder how much the slow pace of the long journey influences the quickness of his step at this point, but the text doesn't say. We rightly infer that he is focused on applying as quickly as possible the criteria he has established.

What Do You Think?

What are some times that impel (or should impel) us to move more quickly than others in doing the will of God? Why?

Digging Deeper

Considering [Hebrews 6:12](#); [12:1](#); and [2 John 9](#), what sins most seem to keep Christians from moving at best speed to do the will of God? What is the evidence for your conclusion?

18. “Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

The first test ([Genesis 24:14](#)) is immediately passed as Rebekah offers Abraham's servant a *drink* from her *jar*. This is significant in view of what the servant, and Abraham, will ask Rebekah to do. Since she will need to leave her home and travel hundreds of miles to join a family she has never met, she will need to feel comfortable with strangers.

19, 20. After she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.” So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels.

Without prompting, Rebekah proceeds to fulfill the second test by also watering the servant's *camels*. At this point, she is unaware of the significance of her actions.

21. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

Although—or because—his mission is urgent, the servant is careful not to jump to conclusions. In the first place, he has asked God that the proper candidate would water his camels ([Genesis 24:14](#)), and that task is not yet complete. He has 10 of them ([24:10](#)), and watering will take quite some time. Further, the servant has had no confirmation that God has agreed to his request for a sign. He is therefore appropriately cautious and seems to wait to see whether Rebekah's actions are simply coincidental gestures of hospitality.

II. Answered Call

([GENESIS 24:61–67](#))

In the intervening text that is not part of today's lesson ([Genesis 24:22–60](#)), Abraham's servant concludes that Rebekah is the one he seeks. So he reveals his identity and mission. The leaders of Rebekah's family agree that she can go.

A. Journey of Faith (vv. [61–65](#))

61. Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

In certain respects, Rebekah's story parallels that of Abraham. Both are called by God to leave a comfortable life (see [Genesis 11:27–12:5](#)); both are given a chance to participate in God's formation of a people-group; and both are required to migrate to Canaan in order to fulfill their calling.

What Do You Think?

How will you decide if embarking on a trip to an unknown future is a step of faith or a step of foolishness?

Digging Deeper

In what way, if any, do the two episodes in [Ruth 1:16–18](#) and [3:1–6](#) plus the illustrations in [Luke 14:28–33](#) provide direction for your conclusions?

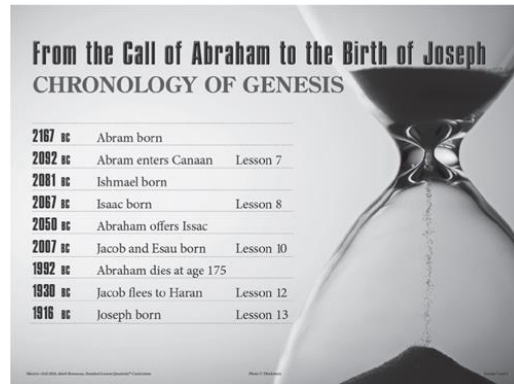
Because the circumstances of this proposal are unique, it may seem at first glance that Rebekah's family ultimately leaves the decision to her ([Genesis 24:55–58](#)). But such a procedure would be quite out of the ordinary in the ancient world, since women of the time do not participate in making major decisions (compare [24:50](#), [51](#)). Some propose, therefore, that Rebekah's decision is actually limited either to leaving with the servant immediately or to leave after spending 10 days with her family ([24:55](#)). Her choice to leave immediately illustrates her confidence in God's plan.

STEPPING OUT ON FAITH

Some years ago, I was invited to join a former college professor of mine on a trip to survey the feasibility of starting a new mission in Africa. He wanted me to help him evaluate the situation. After my wife and I prayed about it, we decided I should make the trip. The circumstances we found there were positive, and I made a commitment to return.

At the time, my wife and I had just entered new teaching careers. We had been preparing for those careers for years, yet we felt led to go. Saying yes to God's call meant risking our future and vacating our first new home. And then there was the matter of raising thousands of dollars to support a family of four and to launch the yet-to-be-birthed mission.

And God provided! Others joined us in this journey of faith. Some went with us in the venture, and some faithfully supported us with prayer and finances during our time in Africa.



Visual for Lesson [7](#) & [9](#). Point to this chart as you ask, “Given that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, what year would that have been?”

The decision on the part of Rebekah and her family to accept the call to go to a land unknown undoubtedly took more faith than was required of us. She left home to travel with a man she had just met, to marry a man she had never met, and to live the rest of her life in an unfamiliar land and society about which she knew little or nothing. In Africa, we could stay in touch with home through mail, telephone, and ham radio. Today it’s even easier with video streaming, etc. Rebekah wasn’t assured of ever again having contact with her family of origin.

Whatever our situation, the essence of faith is trusting God to care for us in his calling for us. Do you live that truth?

—C. R. B.

[62, 63.](#) Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching.

The scene switches to the end of Rebekah’s long journey, as she and the servant return to Abraham’s territory. *Isaac* is 40 years old at this time ([Genesis 25:20](#)). Apparently he has accumulated significant livestock herds of his own and is grazing them near *Beer Lahai Roi*.

This location is significant to Isaac’s family as the site where God appeared to Hagar, Ishmael’s mother, to tell her to return to Sarah ([Genesis 16:7–14](#)). The Hebrew name of the well means “well of the Living One [God] who sees me.” This may explain why Isaac is meditating.

[64, 65.](#) Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?”

“He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

Upon learning that the man approaching the caravan is her betrothed husband, *Rebekah* covers her face with a *veil* as customary for unmarried women at the time.

B. Fulfillment of Hope (vv. [66, 67](#))

66, 67. Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The servant's complete disclosure regarding *all he had done* convinces Isaac that Abraham's requirements have been met. Isaac's marriage to a woman of the bloodline of Shem and Noah demonstrates that God's promise to Abraham to become the father of a great nation is being fulfilled.

What Do You Think?

Considering the full disclosure from the servant to Isaac, how do we know when that's a model for us, as opposed to times when we should keep silent?

Digging Deeper

What lessons have you learned the hard way in this regard?

THE BLESSINGS OF A GOOD MARRIAGE

"And they lived happily ever after." So goes the clichéd description of a so-called fairy-tale marriage. Many people today don't believe in such idealistic marriages—or in marriage period. The concept of traditional marriage has fallen on hard times. A high percentage of marriages don't last, although the good news is that the divorce rate has been decreasing in recent years.

The bad news, however, is that more people are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage. In the process, they are depriving themselves of the opportunity for growth that the challenges of marriage provide.

Isaac's marriage to Rebekah came about in a way that seems strange to our culture. The romantic idea of "falling in love" seems to have been absent (at least in the way we think it should come about). However, that may be what is wrong with many relationships. If a relationship is based solely on physical desire and the lightheaded thrill of "being in love," the partners may be blind to the fact that the satisfaction of an enduring love is possible.

We read that Isaac loved Rebekah, a woman he had married according to God's leading. Although they were personally as imperfect as we are, their life together reflected their commitment to the plan of God. And following the death of Isaac's mother, Sarah, it was his marriage to Rebekah that brought him comfort. Sometimes God meets more than one need at a time, doesn't he?

—C. R. B.

Conclusion

A. God's Choices and Ours

One of the greatest doctrinal debates in history concerns the tension between God's sovereignty and humanity's free will. Obviously, God is all-powerful, knows everything, and works all things according to

his purposes. At the same time, the Bible provides many examples of people who made a godly difference, or who attempted to subvert God's plans, through their choices.

In either case, we are bound to hear someone say, "Well, it was God's will." But what does that mean? The answer lies in seeing God's will in terms of three categories.

First, there's God's *purposive will*. These are actions God takes unilaterally of his own volition. Deciding to create the earth is an example.

Second is God's *prescriptive will*. These are things God wants us to do (he prescribes them), but allows us a choice to obey or not.

Third is God's *permissive will*. These are things God desires that we do not do, but he permits us free will to disobey; sin falls in this category.

Our lesson today illustrates what happens when God's desires and our choices align to fulfill his purposes. Centuries before Abraham, God had decreed that he would destroy the work of Satan ([Genesis 3:15](#)) and had worked through Seth, Noah, and their descendants to maintain a family line of faithfulness. He then made a covenant with Abraham to create a chosen race and caused Abraham and Sarah to have a child, Isaac, to fulfill this plan. Clearly, God had planned that Rebekah would play a key role in this story long before she had ever heard of Isaac.

What if Rebekah's family had refused to let her go? Would that have ruined God's plans? No. God can always find a different way. Even so, today's story is one of obedience, not of rebellion. It is a story of what can happen when we align our plans with God's purposes.

B. Prayer

Lord, help us to be alert to what your purposes are and to your desires for how we can advance the cause of Christ. Grant that we will step out on faith when called. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

"We want big directional signs from God.

God just wants us to pay attention."

—Lysa TerKeurst,

President, [Proverbs 31](#) Ministries

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

Have this request displayed on the board as learners arrive:

List one to three things that popular culture tells us to do or have in order to be happy.

Ask volunteers to read their lists aloud. (*Expect responses that involve food, fashion, achievement, physical fitness, beauty, status, wealth, power, etc.*) After acknowledging the diversity of responses, ask, “What do you think we need to do in order to be happy?” Encourage free discussion. (*Possible responses: trust in God, faithfulness to him and our families, loving service to others.*)

Make a transition by asking, “The old hymn ‘Trust and Obey’ declares that there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. So why are those two things so difficult at times?”

Into the Word

After a time of free discussion on the preceding question, ask a student to read [Genesis 24:12–21, 61–67](#) aloud. Break the class into two groups: the *Trust Group* and the *Obey Group*. Distribute handouts (you prepare) to the groups with the instructions below; have enumerations of the lesson’s [17](#) verses down the left side. (If your class is larger, create additional groups so that group sizes are from three to five.)

Trust Group: List next to the verse references the times in [Genesis 24:12–21, 61–67](#) that someone had to trust God, another person, and/or themselves.

Obey Group: List next to the verse references the times in [Genesis 24:12–21, 61–67](#) that someone had an opportunity to obey God or another person who was working to a godly end.

After groups complete their tasks, have a member from each read its list to the class. (*Sample responses to anticipate:* for *trust*, verse [14](#), the servant trusted that God would honor his request for a sign; for *obey*, verse [67](#), Isaac obeyed his father’s plan for an arranged marriage.)

Then ask, “What would be different if Rebekah, her family, and/or Isaac had chosen not to trust or obey in their story today?” (*Possible responses:* If Rebekah’s family had said *no* to leaving, she wouldn’t have been a part of the lineage of Christ. If Isaac had chosen a bride from among the peoples where he lived, it could have disqualified him from being a patriarch of Israel.)

Into Life

Then say, “Even if Rebekah’s family had said no, she still could have led a life that honored God. But she would have missed out on the epic role God had in mind for her.” Ask the class to use the back of the handout from the Into the Word activity to list one to three instances when they faced an epic choice. Then have them reflect on whether they made the *epic choice*—to trust and obey God, following him to something great—or if they made a safe choice. Assure them that (1) they won’t be asked to share their lists and (2) a *safe* choice isn’t necessarily a *sinful* choice—it may simply be to miss an epic opportunity that God had for them.

After a few minutes, ask, “How will the call to trust and obey influence the next time you are faced with an epic choice?” Encourage free discussion. (*Possible responses:* It will grow my faith as I trust the

Lord even when it is scary. I will have to consciously consider what “obeying” looks like when faced with the choice. I will consider whether or not the Lord is calling me to something greater in making the choice one way or the other.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Trust and Obey” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs or trios to complete it as indicated. Encourage them to use this to ponder the mandate to *trust* and *obey* as they face choices in the week ahead.