

Examples of Godliness

Genesis 24

Introduction

The headline says, “Biblical Scholars Doubt Jesus Said He Would Return to Earth.” I love the “Biblical scholars” part. The article goes on to say, “A group of thirty Biblical scholars, accessing the most likely teachings of the historical Jesus, agreed overwhelmingly Saturday that He did not say He would return to earth and usher in a new age.”

One man from this committee said, “The findings on the second coming reflect what is really taught in most major universities and seminaries.”

Isn't that exciting?! Let's just turn the lights off and go home – there is no hope.

I cannot imagine claiming to be a Biblical scholar and coming to that conclusion. There are many reasons why, but I am glad we have the blessed hope and that comes basically from believing in the blessed book – the Bible.

In the Bible, as we study through it chapter by chapter, and sometimes verse by verse, we come to large narrative sections at times. We will study such a section today in Genesis, chapters 24 and 25. As a result, we will cover a lot of text to get to the main ideas of these chapters.

I am convinced that what the world needs, especially after reading articles like the one we just read, is the genuine item in the lives of believers. We need believers who are genuinely godly; who have a reality in their walk. Today, I want to introduce, by way of this text, the example of a godly father, and then, the example of a godly servant, and lastly, the example of a godly marriage.

An Example of a Godly Father

We will begin with the first verses of Genesis, chapter 24, and look at an example of a godly father.

Unwavering conviction before God

1. The first thing to note, as we read through Genesis, chapter 24, is that this godly father had an unwavering conviction before God.

Look at verses 1 and 2.

Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, “Please place your hand under my thigh,”

The reference to the age of the servant is probably indicating priority; that is, this servant was the first in rank; he had been there the longest; he had priority. This servant, with his great authority, probably had charge of all that Abraham owned.

Placing a hand under the thigh was evidently a custom when a promise was to be made of a certain nature. The patriarch would see to it himself, and that individual servant would come and slide his hand under the thigh of the patriarch.

Continue to verses 3 and 4.

“and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son [Isaac] from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

It is fascinating that Abraham's faith is so strong that he would be intent on keeping his end of the covenant with God. God had promised that through Abraham's seed; through the pure line of his tribe, the Messiah would come, as given in the Protoevangelium that we previously studied. So Abraham, believing that, is willing to risk his most loved servant. It will, in fact, endanger the servant's life to take this long journey back to Abraham's homeland to find a bride for Isaac.

This, by the way, is one of the most beautiful love stories in all of the Old Testament.

Unfaltering conviction before his son

2. Notice as well, not only Abraham's unwavering conviction before God, but his unfaltering conviction before his son.

This is just as important because Abraham's son, Isaac, is undoubtedly involved in this conversation

between Abraham and his servant. He is hearing; he is watching this oath being taken by the servant, who would perform his proper duty in taking the dowry and locating the wife.

Notice how Isaac must have felt as he heard his father and the servant speak. Look at verse 5.

The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?"

Now, I can imagine Isaac saying, "Yeah, Dad, what if she won't come back?"

Continue to verses 6 through 8 and notice the great conviction with which Abraham replies.

Then Abraham said to him, "Beware, that you do not take my son back there! The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angels before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there."

In other words, this was obviously not up for grabs. This was a conviction that Isaac would abide by, if he was to stay under the roof of his father's tent. This was conviction. Abraham, as it were, had set a fence post deep in the soil there, and his son knew it was always there, and that was, Abraham would not violate the word of God.

Let me give a few words of encouragement to parents today. You are in the process of building fence posts and you are laying them deep in the soil of your family life. Do you know what your children are doing? Periodically, they are checking to see if they have moved. They will shake them to see if they are weak; they will kick them; they will nail protest signs to them. They are convinced that somehow they are going to make those things move, and they are asking you questions. It will give your children tremendous security to know that even though they put on the pressure, you will never say what is wrong can be right.

On the other hand, what happens when parents, under their children's pressure, say, "Okay, what I've said for years is wrong, so this weekend, for this time

only, it's right."? We give them over as prey to the philosophers on the campuses of our universities who say to them that there are no absolutes; that there is no such thing as absolute truth; that there is nothing that is right or wrong; that everything is relative. Then, the child thinks, "Ah, that makes sense because my mom and dad showed me that if I applied the right amount of pressure, I could get that absolute to change; that even that is not in cement."

I have seen this with teens, as I have worked with young people as a youth pastor. I have seen it, but I never imagined it would happen with such young children – like mine!

I have twin three year old boys who, every morning, have one mission. They are going to find out if a fence post has moved overnight. I can hear them in their room, "Hey, Seth, you awake?"

"Yeah. Let's go see if a fence post has moved."

That is why, around our home, the early morning hours, between usually eight and ten o'clock, are the most difficult. It is as if one or the other runs around and says, "Hey, Dad, has this changed? Can you handle this?"

That is why I try to leave the house by 7:30 a.m. now!

It is the fence post that protects, guides, and gives children security. Now, children are fantastic lawyers. They have the appeal process down to a science. They are constantly looking for the loop hole. But that fence post; that guideline provides a foundation of tremendous security; it protects them.

I am reminded of a story that I read this past week. A little boy was riding his tricycle furiously back and forth; up and down the sidewalk in front of his house, with tremendous energy. Finally, a police officer stopped and asked, "Son, what are you doing?"

The little boy replied, "I'm running away from home."

He then, starts pedaling again.

The police officer says, "Wait a second. Why then, are you pedaling back and forth in front of your home?"

The little boy thought and answered, "Well, because my mom won't let me cross the street."

He is pedaling back and forth! He knew there was a fence post.

Isaac grew up in that kind of home; in that kind of setting. Do not think for a moment that Isaac never tested the fence posts. I can just see him as an eighteen year old, coming home and saying, “Hey Dad, I’ve met the cutest little Midianite. Oh those brown eyes have pieced my heart. . . . Now wait a second, Dad. I know she’s not part of the tribe, but she’s very interested in the covenant. She said she’d even come this Saturday to our family worship. She listened for hours as I talked to her about our family history. . . . What do you mean, ‘No’? Oh Dad, I can’t go out with anybody around here! They all think I’m strange.”

Do not miss this. Isaac grew up in that kind of setting, and I am convinced that he constantly tried, but Abraham would never move.

Let me give you a New Testament commandment that is along this same line. God specifically stated, in II Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 14a,

Do not be bound together with unbelievers . . .

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The implication includes marriage. I have heard teenagers say, “I’m not marrying them, I’m just dating them.”

Have you ever known a couple that married without at least one date? The point is not to try to find an illustration of that one rare couple. The Bible has placed a period at the end of that verse, and we are not to change it to a question mark. You and I as parents, will have to make sure that fence post is firm.

What a steadfast example of godliness Abraham had before God and his son.

An Example of a Godly Servant

Now, let us look at Abraham’s servant, who was an example of a godly servant.

Look at verses 9 and 10 of Genesis, chapter 24.

So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master’s in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

This is actually the dowry. Abraham, being a very wealthy man, needed ten camels to carry the

dowry. Some lucky father is going to meet Abraham’s servant in just a moment.

Continue to verse 11.

He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

Let me give a couple of things that I noticed from this servant that are an example of a godly servant.

Complete obedience to the word of his master

1. First, he was completely obedient to the word of his master.

This servant is going to fulfill every jot and tittle; he is going to carry it all out; he is going to make sure he obeys completely. He questions his master to find out what to do if there is a “what if” situation. He asks, “What if she won’t follow me? What if she won’t make the dangerous trip back? What if she won’t leave her family. What if?”

Abraham says, “No, don’t take Isaac there.”

So now, the servant is going to obey.

Complete dependence on the help of God

2. Notice a second thing, and we need to dig a little for this one; that is, he was completely dependent on the help of God.

Look at verse 12.

He said, “O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham.”

Would you note the humility shown by the servant in this verse? He says, “Grant to my master success.”

If we compared this servant with us as servants of God, I expect that we would rarely have that attitude. So often our attitude is not, “God, allow me to minister for You so that You get the glory.”

There is a tremendous sense of humility in this servant’s voice as he goes to God.

I once read that there is no telling what good a man or woman could do for God if they do not care who gets the credit. That is a powerful thought! It takes this servant’s attitude of humility.

Now look at verse 13, as the servant arrives and continues his prayer with the Lord. I love this.

“Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water;”

There might have been fifty, or a hundred, or more young women. We do not know how many are approaching this well. The servant is supposed to pick one out. There is not a chance in the world. So, he is going to give God some specifics. Continue to verse 14.

“now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also,’ – may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.”

In other words, he is saying, “Lord, we’ve got a hundred gals coming here. They are all eligible and I’ve got to pick one of them out. So what I’m going to do is just kind of put the fleece out, and I’ll kind of let my gaze rest on one of them, and I’ll go up and ask her for a drink. If she says, ‘Why I’d be delighted to give you a drink, and not only that, I’ll give water for your camels as well,’ then I’ll know, or at least I’ll have an inkling. She still has to be part of the family, but at least I’ll know to carry it a little further.”

An Example of a Godly Marriage

Now we are about to be introduced to Rebekah.

The Character of Rebekah

Let me give three things from this text that are striking about her character of godliness.

Refused temptation

1. The first is in the next few verses, and that is, she refused temptation.

Note verses 15 and 16 of Genesis, chapter 24, as the servant is still praying to God and is about to say, “Amen”.

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with

her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up.

Rebekah’s purity is mentioned twice in scripture. While our society considers this virtue not worth protecting, and in fact, our young people are given incredible amounts of pressure that this virtue is even an embarrassment, the word of God states differently. It is interesting that when something is repeated twice in the scriptures, it is not because God stutters, but rather because He is emphasizing the point.

I like the fact that it adds that she was beautiful. It is implied that she had turned down many suitors and had refused temptation.

God intends this bonding of a physical nature to be part of that total unity as one person, though it is taken out of context today. Beware. You will never be sorry for saying, “No”; you will never be sorry for initiating this policy.

If you have given that treasure away, I want you to know that God forgives that as He does anything else. I would then challenge you to immediately initiate a policy of abstinence until you are married. God will bless you for that discipline.

Respected an elder

2. Rebekah also, secondly, respected an elder.

This is what I gleaned from the next few verses. Note verses 17 through 19.

Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, “Please let me drink a little water from your jar.” She said, “Drink my lord”; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking.”

The servant is probably thinking, “This is too good to be true.”

Continue to verse 20.

So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

Now understand, here is a man with ten camels. Ten camels drink about twenty gallons of water. This little girl has just volunteered two hundred trips to the spring.

Do you know what the servant's response is? It is classic. Notice the first phrase of the next verse, verse 21a.

Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence . . .

The servant could not believe his eyes and ears. He is thinking, "This woman has actually done just what I've said to God. I thought I made it too tough. Maybe it's been too easy."

Here Rebekah comes with great respect for a man that she knew was a servant; a slave. She could tell by his appearance, by his garment, that he represented another. Yet she, in great respect for an older individual, I think, gave him a drink.

Let us read the next couple of verses, verses 21 through 22.

Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not. When the camels had finished drinking, . . .

(that probably took two or three hours),

. . . the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel . . .

I hate to tell you this, but that was for her nose. All of a sudden, you have a different image of Rebekah, right? Beautiful? Oh man, not a chance! That was for her nose. In fact, if you do not believe me, verse 47 says,

. . . I put the ring on her nose . . .

The ring weighed a half-shekel. I am not sure how much a half-shekel weighs, but I hope it was light.

Continue to verses 22b and 23.

. . . and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?"

This is all extra – over and above what he had asked God to do with this gal – but he had to find out was whether she was a relative of Abraham. God had promised the seed to Abraham's family, and this servant had to make sure she was related.

Rebekah answers, "Yes," in verse 25.

Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in."

Look at the servant's response in verses 26 and 27.

Then the man bowed low and worshipped the Lord. He said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers."

They were related. Mission accomplished. The first one he selected was, in fact, the one that he would give the proposal to.

Responded to God's will

3. Rebekah refused temptation and she respected an elder. Now notice a third thing, and that is, she responded to God's will.

We will not take the time to read verses 28 through 49. The servant is ushered into the presence of Laban. You may remember that character. We are going to study more of him a little later. Laban probably saw those ten camels with all of the good things and thought, "This is too good to pass up." He invites the man in, and the servant relays to him the whole story. He starts from the beginning, and that is what occurs between verses 28 and 49.

Now Laban will respond and I want you to notice what happens. We will begin with verse 50.

Then Laban and Bethuel replied, "The matter comes from the Lord; so we cannot speak to you bad or good."

They had enough insight to notice and to believe that, in fact, this was the will of God; this was from God. Continue to verses 51 and 52.

"Here is Rebekah before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord.

And said, "Thank you, Lord." – that is in the Hebrew. Continue to verses 53 and 54.

The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they

arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master."

The servant is ready to go back. Look at the response in verse 55.

But her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us a few days, say ten; afterward she may go."

Now, they have decided that this is the will of God. We do not know if Rebekah has even been asked yet. Of course, in this culture, your spouse was normally chosen by your relatives. There was still submission on the part of the children in accepting that spouse. They want her to stay for ten days; they want to have a long good-bye. So they say, "Well, we'll call Rebekah in."

How will she respond to something that she knows is God's will? She evidently believes it as well. Notice that she responds immediately to the will of God. Look at verses 56 through 58.

He [the servant] said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes." Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."

That is an amazing verse. This beautiful little lassie just said, "I believe it's God's will. You believe it's God's will. I am evidently part of this covenant promise. I've never met Isaac. I've never been away from home [probably], and you are asking me to go to the other side of the world. What is my response? I'll go."

This is the kind of wife Isaac would need to trust God with in fulfilling the covenant promise, as we will see in just a moment.

The character of Isaac

Before we get to the romantic conclusion, let us back up and take a look at what kind of man Rebekah is about to meet. We will not read the verses again, but let me give you three things about the godly character of Isaac.

A compliant son

1. First, he was a compliant son.

Look at verses 4 to 6 of Genesis, chapter 24. Isaac is in the conversation concerning his future wife, and obviously, as I have implicated, he has grown up testing this fence post, and probably not understanding. Now, dad has selected a bride that he will not see until she is introduced to him.

Do not mistake what is happening in this situation. Isaac is not an eighteen year old at this point. He is not a twenty-five year old. He is not a thirty year old. Isaac is a forty year old man. He could have said at any time, "Dad, the covenant is for you. You've got a wife. I'm going back to see if that Midianite girl is still available. I'm forty years old."

However, Isaac patiently waited and complied. What a son!

A consistent believer

2. Secondly, he was a consistent believer.

Look at verse 62.

Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; . . .

When there is a Hebrew name, such as "Beer-lahai-roi," you need to find out what it means. Hebrew names were always significant, especially in relation to Isaac. This name means, "the place where God lives and sees me." All of his years, Isaac had lived with the sense of God's presence.

How in the world could a man grow up and wait until he is forty, an eligible bachelor, and continually say "No," to the temptation and the pressure of his pagan culture? How could he wait as a compliant and obedient son? I think the next verse gives us the clue. Look at verse 63.

Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; . . .

(the original Hebrew indicates this is a habit; this is a continual process),

. . . and he lifted up his eyes, as he would, and looked . . .

I think this is why Isaac was the kind of man that he was, because it was his practice to meditate daily. Perhaps you have a time with the Lord in the morning, or perhaps in the afternoon; his time was in the evening, at dusk, when it was cool. Isaac would go out and have a time daily, with his God.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us go back to basics for a minute. Is it any wonder that God would use a man

like Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem when we learned at the very beginning of his ministry that he had a pattern of praying and praying constantly throughout that entire effort? Is it any wonder that we talk about Nehemiah today? Is it surprising to us that God would use a man like Daniel to face the pagan pressures of a court given over to licentiousness, and to then, face the lions, when we learned that he prayed three times every day? Do we think all that Jesus Christ accomplished is a coincidence when we know that He was constantly in prayer with His Father? His prayer was, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 26, verse 39b,

. . . Father, . . . not as I will, but as You will.

As I meditated on this thought, it occurred to me that one of the few specific things that Jesus Christ taught His disciples to do was what? Pray. I thought of the fact that He did not give them a “play by play” on how to win Jerusalem, even though He could have. He did not, from what we are told, give them all the facts on how to go out as a pair, or on what they were going to encounter and what they were going to face. We do know the scriptures give us a specific lesson on how to pray.

Ladies and gentlemen, you may wonder today, why God’s hand is on someone else. Perhaps you have wondered why your spiritual experience is shallow. You might be saying, “Wait twenty years? I can’t wait twenty minutes.”

I suggest that the problem may be that the hinges on the door of your prayer life are rusty. We would rather have some quick little formula.

Now let us go back to our existence with God when we are all alone. Do we pray? Evidently, Isaac had the habit of prayer, and he developed godliness over that forty year period of waiting for his wife.

A committed husband

3. Now notice the third thing in Isaac’s character, and that is, he was a committed husband.

Note verse 64.

Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel.

The literal Hebrew for “dismounted” means that she “jumped,” as it were. Boy, this is a romantic conclusion! She jumps off that camel and, in verse 65,

She said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?” . . .

(“I think I know!”),

. . . And the servant said, “He is my master.” Then she took her veil and covered herself.

I cannot figure that out. Why in the world would she cover her beautiful face? He had not even seen her before, but yet, that was the custom.

Continue to verses 66 and 67.

The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her .

. .

This is one of the few times in the Old Testament that we specifically learn of a man’s love; this is one of the few times it is ever even mentioned. We obviously know that it is assumed with these couples, but Isaac and Rebekah’s was a special love story. The Bible emphasizes the fact that he took her to himself and he loved her.

The characteristics of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage

There are at least three characteristics that mark the quality of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage that I want to give.

The characteristic of adjustment

1. The first is the characteristic of adjustment.

Here is a man who has been a bachelor for forty years. He is just like you and me. After forty years of living on planet earth, you have the system down. Isaac might have been the kind of man who would leave his shawl all over the floor of the tent. I do not know. He might have had the practice of eating at a particular time. He already had his taste buds developed and knew what he wanted to eat. Isaac’s life was fairly well set, and isn’t it interesting that he brings Rebekah to himself and there is the development of love.

I like what one man said, “Love is developed after marriage, not before.”

That is a powerful thought!

The characteristic of empathy

2. The second thing that strikes me of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage is the characteristic of empathy.

We would learn this elsewhere, but let me tell that Isaac has been mourning his mother's death for three years. They were obviously very close.

Let me say this about mourning. The Bible never says that when you have a death in the family or go through a tragedy that you are supposed to "keep your chin up". There was a three year period of mourning with Isaac, and he was a godly man.

Evidently there was empathy from Rebekah, because she came, and we are told in the last part of verse 67,

. . . thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Do not assume that is naturally going to happen. It did in this case, which shows us a lot about their relationship and about Rebekah especially.

The characteristic of patience

3. Thirdly, the characteristic of patience is obvious.

As Isaac and Rebekah would now wait for the promise of God to come to them, guess what God does? God gives Isaac a barren wife. You would think that all of the struggles that Abraham went through to receive what God had said He would give would be enough, but God does the same thing with Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah will pray together and wait patiently, not for five years or for ten years, but for twenty years before God fulfills what He said He would do. Their relationship was marked by patience, and in the process of waiting patiently, they revealed their godliness.

Application – Truths About Godliness Today!

Let me give two characteristics of godliness.

1. The first is that godliness is not delivered upon conversion, it is developed. Isaac developed godliness through his daily habit of prayer.
2. The second characteristic is that godliness is not strengthened under stress, it is revealed whether or not you have it. Isaac and

Rebekah revealed their godliness in their waiting with patience.

Well, godliness began with an obedient Abraham, and that was contagiously caught by the next generation. We will learn that it was also caught by the generation after that and the next and the next.

I heard from my father a couple of days ago that his Uncle Herald passed away and went home to be with the Lord. Uncle Herald was a godly man of eighty-seven years of age. He was the sixth generation preacher, which made my father the seventh, and made my older brother and me the eighth. We began tracking back on the phone, which it is unusual for my dad to do anything sentimental, and he related stories that I had heard slivers of, but he expounded. He told me about our family and some things that had occurred.

My father said, "You know, it all really began with a pioneer couple who came to Minnesota in a covered wagon and settled as farmers. They were my grandparents on my father's side. The man was an unbeliever; he did not believe in God. However, he had married a woman who was a stout believer in the principles of the word of God. She prayed for thirty-five years that her husband would come to Christ. After thirty-five years, he bowed his knee and came to the cross."

As a result of that relationship, they would have a son who would also follow God. He would have a son who would raise me. I feel very responsible to carry on that tradition, not necessarily that my sons would go into the ministry, but that they would carry on the tradition of godliness.

Ladies and gentlemen, one day we are going to look down history's lane and see lives that are affected. Godliness has to be developed. As dads and moms, godliness must be evidenced. As servants who live for Him, completely obeying His word, completely dependent upon Him for strength, godliness must be evidenced. Godliness must be developed in the home and in the marriage if we ever hope to impact this world for Jesus Christ. The world is not looking for a sermon, it is looking for reality in the lives of the saints. Let us take stock.