God Provides for His Promise

Summary and Goal
God gave Abraham and Sarah Isaac, the son of promise, and then, as we saw in the last session, in a figurative sense, He took him away and gave him back. Isaac was certainly the son of promise, but he was not the fulfillment of the promise—that would be Jesus, and His birth was many generations away. In this session, we will see how God provided a wife for Isaac so that the covenant promises could continue. We will see that God directed the path of Abraham’s servant to find a wife for his master’s son from among their people. He also gave Isaac more than just a wife to continue the family line but a woman who provided him with the love and comfort he needed.

Session Outline
1. God’s covenant family will continue through Isaac (Gen. 24:1-9).
2. God directs the paths of His people for His purposes (Gen. 24:12-19, 23-27).
3. God provides the way to advance His covenant promises (Gen. 24:63-67).

Session in a Sentence
God works providentially to bring others into His family and fulfill His promises.

Christ Connection
God provided Rebekah as a wife for Isaac according to His covenant promise to bless the world through Abraham’s family. In the same way, God provides the church as a bride for His Son to bless the world by sharing about God’s plan of salvation through Jesus.

Missional Application
Because we are one people of God, the bride of Christ, we work together to invite others to become part of God’s family through faith in Jesus.
Group Time

Introduction

**INTERACT:** Pass around a copy of a fold-out paper map, a print-out of a digital map, an old GPS device, and invite group members to pull up a map app on a phone or tablet.

**EXPLAIN** the progression of maps over the years:
- **Paper maps.** In planning a trip, you would pull out a paper map, unfold it, and find where you wanted to go and the best route to get there. Getting lost required pulling over and studying the map once again.
- **Digital maps.** With the advent of the Internet, you could find a location on an online map, indicate your starting point, and receive turn-by-turn directions, which you then printed and took with you.
- **GPS devices.** These dashboard devices offered turn-by-turn directions and self-corrected if a turn were missed, but they could not account for traffic and construction.
- **Map apps.** Apps today on smart phones factor in real-life traffic conditions and offer alternate routes. They aren’t perfect, but they are highly accurate.

**READ** the following paragraphs in the DDG (p. 84).

The changes in travel planning over the past three decades highlight how we are wired to want, and seemingly need, clear guidance. There is something comforting about having clear, step-by-step, accurate directions as we travel. We don’t have to worry about getting lost or stuck in traffic, at least most of the time. We can travel with confidence.

Don’t you wish the rest of life were like this? Don’t you wish we had clear directions for the important decisions we have to make? We want it; we feel like we need it; but we wonder why clear guidance so often seems elusive.

**INTERACT:** Ask the group the opening question in the DDG (p. 84).

What are some areas of life that you wish you had clear guidance?

(Where to go to college; career direction; whom to marry; how to discipline children; where to live; which medical treatment to follow; how to plan for retirement; with whom to share the gospel)

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see that God directed the path of Abraham’s servant to find a kind and loving wife for his master’s son from among their people so that the covenant promises could continue. Clear guidance in life comes through trusting the covenant-keeping God.
**Point 1: God’s covenant family will continue through Isaac (Gen. 24:1-9).**


1 Abraham was now old, getting on in years, and the Lord had blessed him in everything. 2 Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household who managed all he owned, “Place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will have you swear by the Lord, God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live, 4 but will go to my land and my family to take a wife for my son Isaac.”

5 The servant said to him, “Suppose the woman is unwilling to follow me to this land? Should I have your son go back to the land you came from?”

6 Abraham answered him, “Make sure that you don’t take my son back there. 7 The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from my native land, who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘I will give this land to your offspring’—he will send his angel before you, and you can take a wife for my son from there. 8 If the woman is unwilling to follow you, then you are free from this oath to me, but don’t let my son go back there.” 9 So the servant placed his hand under his master Abraham’s thigh and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

**SAY:** Abraham decided it was time for Isaac to marry. So he sent his servant to his homeland, to his own people, to find him a wife. Abraham’s concern here was to protect the worship of God in his family.

**EXPLAIN** why Abraham was so insistent that Isaac not marry a Canaanite but a woman from among his own people: He did not want his son persuaded to worship the pagan gods of the Canaanites. This was not a matter of interracial marriage but of preserving the faith.

**Commentary:** Abraham believed that if Isaac took a wife from the Canaanite women around them, he might be led away from worshiping the Lord. He was not concerned with the *ethnicity* of his son’s wife. This was not a matter of the potential bride’s skin color, spoken language, socio-economic status, or even culture per se. Abraham’s instruction had ethical and theological convictions behind it. As someone who was called out of idol worship and introduced to the living God (Gen. 11:27–12:1), Abraham understood the danger of his son marrying a woman who did not follow the one true God (Deut. 7:3-4). So this command to his servant was the loving act of a faithful father, not a sinful act of a bigoted man.

It’s important that we do not read this account as an apologetic or supposed proof that God is against interracial marriage. God has *never* been against interracial marriage. As sure as marriage is a picture of Christ and His church, interracial marriage is a beautiful picture of Christ’s multiracial bride. It’s a testament to Christ having torn down the dividing wall of hostility between God and humanity and within humanity (Eph. 2:11-22). Interracial marriages and multiethnic churches present the beauty of reconciliation through the gospel of Jesus, a powerful message the unbelieving world desperately needs to hear about and experience.
READ the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 85).

Why was Abraham so emphatic that Isaac not return to his family’s land? This restriction was born out of ethical and theological convictions. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would not only be numerous but that they would possess the land where he was living. Canaan was to be Isaac’s home, and the home of all those who came after him. Abraham did not want Isaac to go back in any way but follow God’s plan forward. And Abraham’s faith in God led to certainty of success (Gen. 24:7).

EXPLAIN that Abraham’s dedication to obeying his faithful, covenant-keeping God provided him with guidance for the next step on his journey.

Commentary: Abraham had learned to trust God and follow Him in faith—even when the steps he was taking didn’t make sense or appear to be moving toward the promise’s fulfillment. Isaac needed to learn to trust God as well. For Isaac to return to the land of Abraham’s family would be to move backward, away from God’s plan, not forward. Isaac was not to take one step forward, finding a wife, while taking another step backward, leaving the land. Abraham trusted that God would provide a wife for Isaac—in the land—to continue all of His covenant promises. He even trusted that God would send an angel before his servant to prepare the way for his success (v. 7).

PACK ITEM 10: PINHOLES: Use this Chambers quote poster to help your group members see that their desire for clear guidance in life has largely been addressed in the clear and purposeful commands of a loving God for us to obey on a daily basis.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How does daily obedience to God in the “small things,” acting on His promises, prepare you for the next step in your journey of faith? (discipline in the small things helps to prepare us for discipline in the big things; the rhythm of consistent obedience helps to get us in the habit of obedience regardless of circumstances; daily obedience helps us see the benefits of living life God’s way rather than our own)
**Point 2:** God directs the paths of His people for His purposes (Gen. 24:12-19,23-27).

**SAY:** Abraham’s servant swore an oath that he would complete his assignment as he had been instructed, so he took ten camels loaded with goods and traveled to the town of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. He arrived in the evening, when women went to draw water, and he waited at a well outside of town. But that was not all he did.


12 “LORD, God of my master Abraham,” he prayed, “make this happen for me today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13 I am standing here at the spring where the daughters of the men of the town are coming out to draw water. 14 Let the girl to whom I say, ‘Please lower your water jug so that I may drink,’ and who responds, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels also’—let her be the one you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

15 Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah—daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor—coming with a jug on her shoulder. 16 Now the girl was very beautiful, a virgin—no man had been intimate with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me have a little water from your jug.”

18 She replied, “Drink, my lord.” She quickly lowered her jug to her hand and gave him a drink. 19 When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I’ll also draw water for your camels until they have had enough to drink.”

23 “Whose daughter are you?” he asked. “Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”

24 She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” 25 She also said to him, “We have plenty of straw and feed and a place to spend the night.”

26 Then the man knelt low, worshiped the LORD, 27 and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld his kindness and faithfulness from my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.”

**EXPLAIN** the nature of the servant’s prayer in this passage: He prayed with hope for God’s promises to be fulfilled. He prayed with confidence because of God’s covenant with Abraham. And he prayed with wisdom, asking for a woman of godly character on behalf of Isaac.

**Commentary:** In his book *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, J. Gary Millar asserts that the thread that runs through every biblical prayer is “calling on God to come through on his promises.” When we pray, we pray with hope because we know we are neither coercing Him nor convincing Him; we’re only asking God to do what He already wants to do—fulfill His own promises.
Commentary (continued): The servant appealed to God not for his own sake nor even for the sake of Isaac. He asked God to show kindness to Abraham (vv. 12,14). The servant prayed with confidence because God had already proven His desire to show kindness to Abraham.

The servant prayed with wisdom as he specifically asked for a woman who would give him a drink and then offer to water his camels. Ten thirsty camels could drink up to three hundred gallons of water. This woman would be offering to haul two thousand, five hundred pounds of water for a stranger at the well. In this, we see that the servant was asking God to provide a generous and kind woman—a woman of godly character.

SUMMARIZE the lesson we should learn about prayer from Abraham’s servant with the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 86).

Abraham’s servant prayed specifically and expectantly because he believed God would fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham. We too can pray with expectancy because we know there is no such thing as luck (see Prov. 20:24). God is in control of it all, and His plan will be accomplished. So let us pray for God’s will to be done and then obey.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How have you experienced God answering your prayers? How has that shaped the prayers you pray now? (be prepared to give answers of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: After the servant witnessed God’s immediate answer to his prayer, he acted on his calling and then bowed down and worshiped the Lord. We often spend too much time trying to figure out how and where God is working so we can partner with Him. Instead, we should assume that God is always working, even if behind the scenes, and our job is to be faithful with every step we take, knowing that He is directing our paths.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How does our awareness of God’s character help us take steps of obedience and faith even when we cannot see all that God is doing? (in the trials and struggles of life, we know God is good and He allows tests in our lives to help us grow in the faith; God’s heart is for the lost, so we should take advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus with others; God hates sin, so we should resist temptation, even though we can try to justify it and excuse it)
Point 3: God provides the way to advance His covenant promises (Gen. 24:63-67).

SAY: The servant recounted his mission and prayerful success with Rebekah’s family, and all agreed this was the work of the Lord, and the next day, Rebekah made the choice to leave her family behind and go with the servant to become Isaac’s wife.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 24:63-67 (DDG p. 87).

In the early evening Isaac went out to walk in the field, and looking up he saw camels coming. Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?”

The servant answered, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done.

And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and took Rebekah to be his wife. Isaac loved her, and he was comforted after his mother’s death.

EXPLAIN that God’s faithfulness to His people includes the “big” story, of which we are a part, but it also extends to our “small” stories, and all for God’s glory and our good. (Refer to the first paragraph on DDG p. 87).

Abraham’s servant returned with Rebekah, and she became Isaac’s wife. With this marriage, God was arranging for His covenant promises to continue. But God was doing more than just fulfilling His promise; He provided a wife whom Isaac loved, who loved him, and who comforted him in the loss of his mother.

Commentary: God is not utilitarian in His purposes. Yes, He will bring to pass what He desires as He works in us and through us. And yes, God’s work in us and through us often transcends our lives; there is much more at stake than we can often see. But this does not mean that we are merely tools to Him. We are people He loves and cares for deeply (Deut. 7:9; Ps. 136:26; Eph. 2:4-5; 1 John 3:1). And in this we can find great comfort. God does not have His gaze fixed solely on the outcome of our combined situations. He is providentially working out His plan in this world, as we see in this account, but He is not only providentially working toward that end. He is aware of our fears, our doubts, our sorrows, and our pains. And He is equally aware of our joys, our hopes, our dreams, and our desires. And He cares.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How can it help us navigate life’s struggles and joys knowing that God loves us and is intimately involved in our daily lives? (we can know that God is with us and providing for us in our struggles; we should see our joys as blessings from our Father that cause us to praise Him again and again; we can believe that all of our struggles and joys come into our lives by God’s loving purpose and design)
READ the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 87).

While God’s provision of Rebekah to be Isaac’s wife was God’s perfect plan to carry on the covenant promises, we soon discover that Isaac and Rebekah were far from perfect. God’s provision is always perfect, but His people never are, that is, until Christ completes His work of perfecting a pure and spotless bride, comprised of all the believers in His church.

EXPLAIN the gospel of Jesus, how His perfect sacrifice cleanses sinners and calls them to the mission of proclaiming God’s covenant promises in Christ everywhere for all to believe.

Commentary: God works through His Son, Jesus, to provide salvation to the world. By faith, Jesus takes imperfect people and covers them with His perfect obedience, and His perfect sacrifice on the cross cleanses us of our sins that we would become the pure and spotless bride of Christ, His church. Until the day He comes to be with His bride forever, we proclaim His gospel to the nations, calling on everyone to trust in Christ and experience the blessings of God’s covenant promises in Him.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 87).

Bride of Christ: The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed.

Essential Doctrine “Bride of Christ”: The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ’s relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

Voices from Church History

“The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation, By Spirit and the Word; From heav’n He came and sought her To be His holy Bride; With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died.”

—Samuel J. Stone (1839-1900)
My Mission

EXPLAIN: Sometimes God gives us clear guidance and reveals what He is doing, but at other times He gives us little, or perhaps even nothing, to go on. Regardless of our situation, we need to remember who God is, pray with expectancy and clarity, and walk in obedience to what we know of God’s will. Part of that will is providing a bride for His Son to bring blessing to the world. Our part in God’s will, in this regard, is sharing God’s plan of salvation through Jesus so that we are a blessing to our communities, cities, nations, and world.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 88), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are one people of God, the bride of Christ, we work together to invite others to become part of God’s family through faith in Jesus.

• How do you need to trust in the plan and purposes of God in light of His sovereignty and covenant promises in Christ?
• What are some specific ways to pray for one another concerning decisions and situations we are presently facing?
• What steps can you take this week to obey God’s call to share the gospel with unbelievers?

PACK ITEM 11: HYMN HANDOUT: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together.

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are sovereign and in control; You know the end from the beginning. So we pray for Your wisdom and guidance as we live on mission for Jesus, our Savior. And when we cannot know Your plan, help us to walk by the light of Your Word, knowing You are faithful to Your promises. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 89-91), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 92) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 89-91) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 92) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 89-91) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

• Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

• Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 3 as a part of point 2 in the session: As followers of Christ, we have been called to practice hospitality, even if it comes at great cost to us (see Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). The reason is because hospitality affirms the gospel.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

• Day 1: “Mourning death is proper because in our tears we communicate the value of the gift God has given us in our loved one.”

• Day 4: “While seeing what God is doing around us is sometimes difficult, there are times when we make what we know He has done difficult for others to see.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 92) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

• Encourage group members to reflect on God’s providence in their lives and how He is working out His covenant purposes through them and for them.

• See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1: God’s covenant family will continue through Isaac (Gen. 24:1-9).**

“Sarah’s death had reminded Abraham of his own mortality. Placing a hand under a thigh, also found among the Babylonians, was a recognized method of sealing an oath (cp. 24:2 with 47:29). The thigh, considered the seat of procreative power, was thus symbolic of the solemnity of the oath. The effect was to swear by the whole family since the procreative power and heritage is the source of the family. Abraham had a strong sense of family and understood God’s command not to marry outside His chosen people (see Deut. 7:1-4). The maintenance of the spiritual formation of the family is paramount. The Semitic line seemed designated for a godly tradition in contrast to the Canaanites, who were Hamites … Yahweh was preserving the covenant with His people through whom His promises would be fulfilled. This truth is confirmed by the fact that Abraham did not have the same concern about the marriages of the sons borne to him by other wives. Isaac’s wife had to know and trust Yahweh and thus share a common faith with her husband.”

“Did Abraham lay down this requirement purely because he wanted someone from his own culture for his son? Can this ancient practice of marrying half-sisters (Abraham and Sarah), nieces (Nahor and Milcah) and cousins (Isaac and Rebekah) be used to justify marriages between close relatives today? … When trying to answer these questions, we need to consider why Abraham was so set on finding a bride for his son from his own family. The answer seems to be linked to the same principle that would later be expressed in the instruction not to be ‘yoked together with unbelievers’ (2 Cor. 6:14). Abraham wanted his son’s wife to be a woman who had, or could be easily helped to have, some fear of God, as opposed to a Canaanite woman (24:3). The increasing moral decline in Canaan was bringing the area to the point where it was under the threat of God’s judgment. It could be assumed that Canaanite girls would not know the Lord. But God’s promise required a community that was faithful to the Lord, and the wife would have to have an important role in passing on this belief. Thus Abraham sought a marriage for his son in which all parties would remain faithful to the promise in order to pass it on.”

**Point 2: God directs the paths of His people for His purposes (Gen. 24:12-19,23-27).**

“This is the longest continuous passage in Genesis, and its quality of narration is striking. Generally, it is one of the classic biblical case studies on seeking to follow God’s will. Specifically, it reflects how important it was for the heir of promise to have the right wife and for that marriage to come about according to God’s direction.”
“The servant exhibits another mark of spiritual fervor when at the remarkable discovery of Rebekah he falls prostrate and praises the Lord (cf. vv. 48-49). He does not forget the Lord in the midst of his excitement, recognizing that God alone brought him to the very person required (vv. 4,7,14). ‘Bowed down’ … and ‘worshiped’ … translate a common tandem describing homage to God (e.g., Ex. 4:31; Num. 22:31) or an official (e.g., 43:28). ‘Praise’ … is another of many occasions that bārak (‘bless’) appears in the chapter (vv. 1,27,31,35,48,60; cf. 9:26; 14:19,20). The servant’s exaltation of God recognizes his own humble place in the divine plan; his success comes only by virtue of his relationship to Abraham, ‘my master’ (v. 27[2x]). It is the Lord’s loyalty and reliability that are foremost in his exultation (cp. Ps. 138:2). ‘Kindness’ … and ‘faithfulness’ … often occur together (e.g., Ex. 34:6; Josh. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 115:1; Prov. 3:3), each depicting a strong relational commitment among humans or between God and humanity. The two terms are common in the narrative (vv. 27,48,49), assuming a prior commitment between God and Abraham. It is God’s (‘his’) loyalty to his promises that leads to the discovery of Rebekah (cp. Pss. 25:10; 43:3; 57:3[4]; 89:14[15]).”  

**Point 3: God provides the way to advance His covenant promises (Gen. 24:63-67).**

“As part of the marital ritual Isaac brought Rebekah into what had been his mother Sarah’s tent. This would now become her home, which marked her as the clan matriarch, the most powerful woman in the group. There Isaac and Rebekah consummated the marriage. Having waited forty years to marry, Isaac loved his wife deeply, and was finally comforted after his mother’s death, which had occurred three years earlier (17:17; 23:1; 25:20).”

“The sincere prayers of Abraham and his servant had been answered, even more abundantly than they had imagined possible. This was no mere marriage duty to ensure God’s promises would come true. It was a gift of love and joy from the Father to the offspring of his faithful servant, Abraham. How often this pattern has been repeated throughout the ages: Trust and obedience results in joy unspeakable.”

**References**

A Word from the Editor

Trevin Wax

General Editor—The Gospel Project

AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING

This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel

For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.