THE PENTATEUCH PART I: GENESIS
LESSON 11: Genesis 21:15-24:67
The Abrahamic Covenant part III
 The Death of Sarah and a Bride for Isaac

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Faithful Father,

Faithful men in ancient times submitted to Your authority through the covenantal rite of circumcision, an exterior sign that signified an interior condition of obedience to the covenant and the commitment to a life of righteousness.  In the New Covenant in Christ, You call all believers to circumcise their hearts, yielding their lives in obedience, service, and faithful love.  Give us circumcised hearts, Lord, that reflect an interior condition revealed in our actions'in the commitment of our relationship to You and in the mercy we show to our brothers and sisters in the human family. Guide us, Lord, in our study of the lives of the Patriarch Abraham and his righteous son Isaac, the man named to carry forth the "promised seed" and the future of Your earthly salvation kingdom.  We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen.

+ + +

*Remember the deeds performed by our ancestors, each in his generation, and you will win great honor and everlasting renown.  Was not Abraham tested and found faithful, was that not considered as justifying him?*
[1 Maccabees 2:52](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1maccabees/1maccabees2.htm#v52)

*It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac.  He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on.*
[Hebrews 11:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews11.htm#v17)

Genesis chapters 20-21 presented two challenges to God's plan of salvation.  [Chapter 20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v1) involved a crisis in Abraham's family in which the pregnant Sarah's abduction into Abimelech's harem threatened God's plan for the preservation of the "promised seed."  God intervened to save Sarah, therefore preserving Isaac's birth as Abraham's son and heir.  In [chapter 21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v1), true to God's promised, Sarah bore Abraham a son.  Obedient to God's commands, Abraham named the boy Isaac and had the child circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, in accordance to the covenant obligations God formed with him in part two of the Abrahamic Covenant ([Gen 17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v1)).  But, approximately three years later, there was another crisis in which God's plan for the salvation-kingdom was threatened by the question of who was to be Abraham's heir and the inheritor of the divine promises: the son born through human will or the son of the "promised seed" born through divine will.

On the day that Abraham gave a banquet celebrating Isaac's weaning, Sarah witnessed the 17 year old Ishmael, Abraham's son by her slave-girl Hagar, "laughing" with her 3 year old son Isaac.  In [Genesis 21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9) the Hebrew word"laughter" (*me-saheq*),from Hebrew root "to laugh," is understood from the context of the Hebrew text to be mocking or malevolent laughter (*Brown-Driver-Briggs,* page 850; Waltke page 274, 294).  Whatever she witnessed, Sarah was frightened enough to demand: *Drive away that slave-girl and her son ... this slave-girl's son is not to share the inheritance with my son Isaac*.  With God's assurance of the protection of Ishmael, Abraham gave Hagar her freedom and sent both Hagar and Ishmael away. In both the crisis in chapter 20 and now in the crisis of chapter 21, God intervened to preserve first the line of the "promised seed" and then the inheritance of the "Promised Land."

Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away with a skin of water and bread.  A skin held approximately 3 gallons of water (Waltke, page 295).([1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end1))

**Please read Genesis 21:14b-21: Hagar and Ishmael in Exile
21:14*She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba.* 15*When the skin of water was finished she abandoned the child under a bush.* 16*Then she went and sat down at a distance, about a bowshot away, thinking, 'I cannot bear to see the child die.'  Sitting at a distance, she began to sob.* 17*God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, 'What is wrong, Hagar?' he asked.  'Do not be afraid, for God has heard the boy's cry in his plight.* 18*Go and pick the boy up and hold him safe, for I shall make him into a great nation.'* 19*Then God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well, so she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.* 20*God was with the boy.  He grew up and made his home in the desert, and he became an archer.* 21*He made his home in the desert of Paran, and his mother got him a wife from Egypt.***

Once again, Hagar was journeying into the desert ([Gen 16:7-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v7)), but this time it wasn't Hagar's cries of distress that God heard.  He heard the cries of her son.  Notice that Ishmael is never named in this passage; two different Hebrew words are used to refer to Hagar's son: *na'ar* ([21:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v12), [17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v17), [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v18), [19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v19), [20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#20)) and *yeled* ([21:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v14), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v15), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v16)).  In references to God, he is called "boy" or "youth", *na'ar,* but in references to Hagar, he is called *yeled,* "child," identifying the biological relationship.  The use of the word for "boy" simply means "inexperienced" and so can refer to any age just as a parent's "child" can be any age (*Brown-Driver-Briggs,* page 409; Waltke, page 295.  The word *yeled* was the word used in [Gen 4:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis4.htm#23) for the young man who attacked Lamech: *Interlinear Hebrew-English Bible,* page 10).

**Question:** How did God keep his promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael?
**Answer:** He provided what Hagar needed to save the life of her son.

Specific details are given concerning Ishmael.  Details are always provided for a reason and it is important to look for repetition of the same or similar details as the narrative continues.

**Question:**  What became of Ishmael and what details did the narrative include about him?
**Answer:** Three details are given about Ishmael:

1. Ishmael made his home in the desert of Paran
2. He became an archer
3. He married a foreign woman.

Later, Hagar secured an Egyptian wife for her son, but Ishmael will not inherit any portion of the "Promised Land."  Like the wild desert donkey, whose image was use as an example in the prophecy of Ishmael's future in [Genesis 16:11-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v11), Ishmael and his descendants will inhabit the desert region of Paran (south of Kadesh-Barnea).  It was God's sovereign will that determined the "promised seed" was to be carried by Isaac and not Ishmael.

**Question:** Why did God choose Isaac the son of Sarah and not Ishmael the son of Hagar, to become the "son of the promise"?   Was there more to separate these two sons than their mothers?  Hint: see [Romans chapter 9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v6).
**Answer:** St Paul spoke of the difference between Isaac and Ishmael in [Romans chapter 9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v6) where he wrote that there was more than the issue of physical descent involved in God's choice: *It is not that God's promise has failed.  Not all born Israelites belong to Israel, and not all the descendants of Abraham count as his children, for 'Isaac is the one through whom your Name will be carried on.* ' *That is, it is not be being children through physical descent that people become children of God; it is the children of the promise that are counted as the heirs"* ([Rom 9:6-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v6)).  Ishmael's birth was the result of human will while Isaac's birth was determined by divine will.  Ishmael was "born after the flesh," but Isaac was "born after the Spirit."   It is the children born of the Spirit that are God's children ([Rom 8:14-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans8.htm#v14)).  It was divine will that determined that Isaac, the son born by the Spirit, was to be the heir whose descendants would inherit the earthly salvation-kingdom in the "Promised Land."

Yahweh's choice of Abraham's younger son Isaac in chapter 21 begins a chiastic pattern in the narrative that will be completed in Yahweh's choice of another younger son, Jacob, son of Isaac, in [chapter 27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v1):

A. God's choice of Isaac, Abraham's younger son ([21:8-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v8)).

       B. Marriage of rejected elder son Ishmael (an archer) to a foreigner ([21:20-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v20)).

             C. Dispute over Abraham's wells & covenant with Abimelech ([21:22-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22)).

                    D. Abraham's obedience to God's covenant ([22:1-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v1)).

                            E. Genealogy of Nahor = non-chosen line ([22:20-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v20))

                                   **F.** Death of Sarah and burial at Machpelah ([23:1-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v1)).

                            E. Genealogy of Ishmael = non-chosen line ([25:11-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v11)).

                     D. Esau scorns God's covenant'his birthright ([25:19-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v19)).

              C. Dispute over Abraham's wells & covenant with Abimelech ([26:15-33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v15))

       B. Marriage of rejected elder son Esau (an archer) to foreigners ([26:34-35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v34); [27:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v3)).

A. God's choice of Jacob, Isaac's younger son ([27:1-28:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v1)).

**Please read Genesis 21:22-34: The Covenant between Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba
21:22*About then, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, 'Since God is with you in everything you do,* 23*swear to me by God, here and now, that you will not act treacherously towards me or my kith and kin, but behave with the same faithful love to me and the land of which you are a guest as I have behaved to you.'* 24*'Yes,' Abraham replied, 'I swear it.'* 25*Abraham then reproached Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants had seized.* 26*'I do not know who has done this,' Abimelech said.  'You yourself have never mentioned it to me and, for myself, I heard nothing of it till today.'* 27*Abraham then took sheep and cattle and presented them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.* 28*Abraham put seven lambs of the flock on one side.* 29*'Why have you put these* seven *lambs on one side?'  Abimelech asked Abraham.* 30*He replied, 'You must accept these seven lambs from me as evidence that I have dug this well.'* 31*This was why the place was called Beersheba: because there the two of them swore an oath.* 32*After they made a covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and went back to Philistine territory.* 33*And Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beersheba and there he invoked the name of Yahweh.* 34*Abraham stayed for a long while in Philistine territory****.*

Note: underlined words indicate significant repeated words.

The words "about then" or "at this time" (see verse 22) in Scripture indicate that the events in the passage occurred at about the same time as the events in the previous passage.  Abraham was living as a resident alien in Abimelech's territory ([Gen 20:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v15)), and as such he was granted the use of the land.  He could dig his own wells and make use of the water source (Gen 21:30).  Wanting to maintain good relations with God's prophet, King Abimelech visited Abraham's camp seeking a covenant treaty with Abraham.

**Question:**  Who accompanied Abimelech and why is this significant?
**Answer:** It is significant that Abimelech's military commander, Phicol, accompanied him instead of courtiers.  The presence of the king's military commander suggests that this was more than a social visit.

Phicol is an Anatolian/ Hittite name (Waltke, page 299). Like Abraham he is an immigrant.  There are other Hittites living in the region, especially near Hebron.  Later, Abraham will purchase land in Hebron from the Hittite Ephron ([Gen 23:10-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v10)).([2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end2))

**Genesis 21:23:** *... swear to me by God, here and now, that you will not act treacherously towards me or my kith and kin (son and heir\*), but behave with the same faithful love to me and the land of which you are a guest as I have behaved to you.'* \* = literal translation (*Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English,* page 49).

Abimelech asked Abraham to swear to give the same *hesed,* "faithful covenant love" to Abimelech's son and heir that Abimelech has shown to Abraham'in other words, he is asking for a non-aggression treaty with Abraham.  Abimelech recognized this landless chieftain as a man who could be a valuable ally.

**Question:** Abraham used the occasion to bring up what grievance?  Why was this grievance an important issue for Abraham?
**Answer:** Wells he dug had been commandeered by servants of Abimelech (see [Gen 26:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v15)).  Water in the Negeb was a precious commodity; a dependable water source was essential for the survival of Abraham's herds and flocks of animals.

**Question:** What was Abimelech's response and what did his response indicate about his relationship with Abraham?
**Answer:** Abimelech professed not to know about the confiscation of the wells, but he did not defend the actions of his men, and his tone to Abraham was conciliatory.  One, however, wonders if he had not heard about the tensions between his herdsmen and Abraham's men and if this wasn't the reason for seeking a treaty with Abraham in the company of his military commander.  Abimelech undoubtedly remembered the trouble he had the last time Yahweh was offended by the treatment of His prophet ([Gen 20:3-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v3); [17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v17)).  In this encounter, Abimelech showed Abraham the respect of an equal.

**Genesis 21:27-30:**
21:27*Abraham then took sheep and cattle and presented them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.* 28*Abraham put seven (ewe\*) lambs of the flock on one side.* 29*'Why have you put these seven (ewe\*) lambs on one side?'  Abimelech asked Abraham.* 30*He replied, 'You must accept these seven (ewe\*) lambs from me as evidence that I have dug this well.'* 31*This was why the place was called Beersheba: because there the two of them swore an oath.* 32*After they made (cut\*) a covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and went back to Philistine territory.*
\*= literal Hebrew (*Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English,* page 49).

That it was Abraham who presented the gift of the animals from his flock and herd to Abimelech suggests that Abraham considered himself the lesser party and the chief beneficiary of the treaty.  However, the animals may also be intended as payment for the water rights.  Abraham does not accept "gifts" from pagans that might make him obligated to them ([Gen 14:22-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#22); [23:11-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v11)). Then, in addition to the animals given as a gift to Abimelech, Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs (repeated three times: verses 28, 29, and 30). Abimelech understood the gift of the cattle and animals of the flock in their treaty formation, but he is confused by the seven ewe lambs.

**Question:** What is the significance of the seven ewe lambs? Note: verse 32 states in the literal Hebrew that they "cut" a covenant at Beersheba.  The Hebrew verb *krt,* which is usually translated as "made" or "concluded," in Hebrew literally means "to cut."  It is the same Hebrew word used in [Genesis 15:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18): *Yahweh made (cut) a covenant with Abram...*    Also see [Jer 34:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jerremiah34.htm#v18).
**Answer:** For Abraham the verbal agreement and the gift of the animals in payment for water rights are not enough.  He is prepared to swear an oath to ratify the covenant (to "seven" himself in Hebrew) by providing the sacrifice of the seven ewe lambs (verses 31-32).  In a sworn covenant sealed in blood the covenant participants bound themselves by oath to suffer the same fate as the animals if either party did not fulfill the promises of the covenant'with the God of Abraham, to whom the animals were sacrificed, as keeper of the covenant oaths sworn by both men (*Brown-Driver-Biggs* page 503).  By both men swearing an oath and by Abimelech accepting Abraham's gift before witnesses, Abimelech is obliged by the covenant to acknowledge Abraham's right to the wells and both parties are committed to live in peace.

**Genesis 21:33-34:**
21:33*And Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beersheba and there he invoked the name of Yahweh YHWH the everlasting God].* 34*Abraham stayed for a long while in Philistine territory.*
[...] = literal translation (The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew - English vol I, page 50).

**Question:** What name did Abraham give to the well and why is the name significant?  Look up Beersheba on a map of Israel.  What is significant about this location when Israel is a nation?
**Answer:** "Beersheba" in Hebrew means either "well of the oath" or "well of seven;" it is a pun or word play on the key word "oath"'to swear an oath is to "seven oneself."  The well at Beersheba will be a reminder of the covenant sworn between the two men and it will mark the southern most boundary of the nation of Israel during the period of the monarchy.

Notice the repetitions in Genesis 21:22-34.  Repetitions in Scripture are always significant.  The number three signifies importance or completion while the number seven is another "prefect" number which symbolizes perfection and fulfillment, especially spiritual perfection.  Seven is the number of covenant.

**Question:** How many times are the words "swear/swore," "seven," and "Beersheba" found in [Genesis 21:22-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22)?  How many times are Abraham's and Abimelech's names repeated?
**Answer:**

Abraham's and Abimelech's names are repeated seven times:

* Abraham: [Gen 21:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22), [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v24), [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v25), [27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v27), [28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v28), [29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v29), [33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v33)
* Abimelech: [Gen 21:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22), [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v25) (twice), [26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v26), [27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v27), [29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v29), [32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v32)

  The other words are repeated three times each:

1. swear/swore: [Gen 21:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v23), [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v24), [31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v31)
2. seven ewe lambs : [Gen 21:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v28), [29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v29), [30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v30)
3. Beersheba: [Gen 21:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v31), [32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v32), [33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v33)

Do not miss the importance of the number seven in this drama.  The Hebrew verb "to swear" occurs three times in Genesis 21:23, 24 and 31: to swear in Hebrew is to "seven oneself."  The Hebrew word "seven" occurs three times in 21:28, 29, and 30.  Both words are derived from the same Hebrew root *sb,* which is also found in the word "Beersheba," ("well of the seven" or "well or the oath") found three times in Genesis 21:31, 32, and 33;therefore, the root *sb* occurs nine times in thirteen verses.  Each of the names of the principal players in this drama, Abraham and Abimelech, occurs exactly seven times.

**Question:** Why did Abraham plant the tree/ trees? See [Genesis 12:6-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v6); 13:4, [28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v28), and [15:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18)?  Hint: There is a practical and a spiritual reason.
**Answer:** It was at the Oak of Moreh and at the trees of Mamre that Abraham built an altar to Yahweh.  The planting of the small tamarisk tree(s), sturdy little trees that can survive the hot and dry climate of the summers in the Negeb, served as a landmark for the well and symbolized God's blessings to Abraham as he sojourned as a landless foreigner in the Negeb, shaded by the grace and presence of God as he "invoked the name of Yahweh" in worship, spiritually claiming another place in his "promised land."

Genesis Chapter 22: The Binding of Isaac (the Akeidah)

*My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal.  Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.  Cling to him and do not leave him, so that you may be honored at the end of your days.*
[Sirach 2:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach2.htm#v1)

**Please read Genesis 22:1-8: Abraham's Covenant Ordeal at Moriah
22:1*It happened some time later that God put Abraham to the test.  'Abraham, Abraham!' he called. 'Here I am,' he replied.* 2*God said, 'Take your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, where you are to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall point out to you.'* 3*Early next morning Abraham saddled his donkey and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac.  He chopped wood for the burnt offering and started on his journey to the place which God had indicated to him.* 4*On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* 5*Then Abraham said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey.  The boy and I are going over there; we shall worship and then come back to you.'* 6*Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, loaded it on Isaac, and carried in his own hands the fire and the knife.  Then the two of them set out together.* 7*Isaac spoke to his father Abraham.  'Father?' he said.  'Yes, my son,' he replied.  'Look,' he said, 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'* 8*Abraham replied, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.' And the two of them went on together.***

No other event recorded in the Old Testament so prefigures the Passion of the Christ as Abraham's call to obedience in Genesis chapter 22. Genesis 22 is the last record of Abraham's direct experience with the Divine'chapter 22 records Abraham's final command.  The Jews call this event the *akeidah,* which means the "binding" of Isaac.

**Genesis 22:1:** *It happened some time later that God put Abraham to the test.* These events were taking place about ten years or more after Ishmael's exile when Isaac was at least 13 years old.  Isaac is old enough to carry the wood for the sacrifice (Gen 22:6).  The narrative begins with the reader being taken into God's confidence by being told that Abraham was being tested'it was God's plan that Abraham was to face a covenant ordeal. The importance of this opening statement allays any doubt concerning God's purpose in the covenant ordeal and that His purpose does not intend an actual human sacrifice.  This was a test of Abraham's faith, trust, and obedience. Note: human sacrifice, especially child sacrifice, was a practice in parts of the Near East at this time.  The Canaanite cemeteries with hundreds of clay jars containing the bones of sacrificed children have been found in excavations.

**Question:** What is the difference between Satan testing us and God testing us?  See [1 Chr 21:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v1); [Sir 15:11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach15.htm#v11); [Mt 4:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v1); [1 Pt 5:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter5.htm#v8); [Jm 1:13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/james/james1.htm#v13); [Rom 6:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans6.htm#v23); [Ex 20:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus20.htm#v20); [Dt 8:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy8.htm#v2); [1 Kng 10:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v1); [2 Chr 9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles9.htm#v1); [Dan 1:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel1.htm#v12), [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel1.htm#v14); [Wis 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/wisdom/wisdom3.htm#v1), [4-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/wisdom/wisdom3.htm#v4); [1 Cor 10:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians10.htm#v13).
**Answer:** Satan tests us to destroy us ([1 Chr 21:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v1); [Mt 4:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v1); [1 Pt 5:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter5.htm#v8); [Rom 6:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans6.htm#v23)); God never tempts us to do evil ( [Sir 15:11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach15.htm#v11); [Jm 1:13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/james/james1.htm#v13)).  God only tests us to strengthen us and to give us the opportunity to prove ourselves worthy ( [Ex 20:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus20.htm#v20); [Dt 8:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy8.htm#v2); [1 Kng 10:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v1); [1 Ch 29:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles29.htm#v17); [2 Chr 9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles9.htm#v1); [Dan 1:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel1.htm#v12), [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel1.htm#v14); [Wis 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/wisdom/wisdom3.htm#v1), [4-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/wisdom/wisdom3.htm#v4); [1 Cor 10:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians10.htm#v13)).

**Genesis 22:1b-2:***'Abraham, Abraham!' he called. 'Here I am,' he replied.  God said, 'Take your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, where you are to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall point out to you.'*

The Hebrew word "Moriah" is from the root *r'h* = "to see" and its derivative nouns *mar'a* and *mar'e,* which means "sight, spectacle, or vision" (*Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible,* Jon Levenson, page 94-95).

**Question:** When did God first call Abraham and what was the test in that first call?
**Answer:** God called him to leave Ur and "go to the land I will show you" ([Gen 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1)).  God's first call was a test of Abraham's faith and obedience.

**Question:** What was Yahweh's final call to Abraham in Genesis 22:1?  How was the last call similar to the first?  How was Abraham being tested?
**Answer:** In the final call Yahweh again commanded Abraham "go to" but this time he was commanded "go to the land of Moriah".  This was a test of faith and obedience, clearly stated in 22:1, but it was also a test of Abraham's trust that God was going to fulfill His promises despite what seemed to be insurmountable odds against the fulfillment of those promised covenant blessings of many descendants if he sacrificed his only son.

The same Hebrew words "go to" (*lek-leka*) are found in the first command in [Genesis 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1) and again in the final command in 22:2 (*Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English,* page 27, 50; Waltke page 301).  These particular words do not appear together anywhere else in the Old Testament (Waltke, page 301):

* *Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for (go to = lek-leka) a country which I shall show you...* ([Gen 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1)).
* *'Abraham, Abraham!' he called.  'Here I am,' he replied.  God said, 'Take your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and go to (lek-leka) the land of Moriah...'* (Gen 22:1b-2a).

**Question:** God gave Abraham 3 commands.  What were they?
**Answer:**

1. ***Take*** *your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and*
2. **Go** *to the land of Moriah where you are to...*
3. **Offer** *him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains* *which I shall point out to you.*

**Question:** Where was the land of Moriah?  See [Genesis 22:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v4) and [2 Chronicles 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1)
**Answer:** Genesis 22:4 identifies the site as a significant **3** day journey from Abraham's camp at Beersheba.  [2 Chronicles 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1) identifies the Land of Moriah with the mountain range on which Jerusalem is located and the Temple of Yahweh would be built a thousand years after Abraham during the reign of King Solomon.

That the focus of the story involved Abraham's son is apparent in the repetition of the word "son."  The word "son" (*ben*) appears ten times in this passage (Gen 22:2 (twice), 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 16), while the word "only" (*yahid*) son is found three times (Gen 22:2, 12, 16).

**Question:** Why did God call Isaac Abraham's "only beloved son"?
**Answer:** Ishmael had been sent away.  Isaac was the son God promised would father a nation of descendants for Abraham in fulfillment of parts one and two of the three-fold covenant.

**Question:** Abraham was commanded to go to the land of Moriah.  What will be the significance of Moriah later in salvation history?  See [1 Chr 21:14-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v14), [26-22:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v26); [2 Chr 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1); [Jn 19:17-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v17).
**Answer:** [2 Chronicles 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1) identifies Mt. Moriah as the name of the mountain elevation located in the city of Jerusalem upon which David had a vision of Yahweh and where he was commanded to build an altar.  It is the same site upon which his son, King Solomon, built Yahweh's Temple.  Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on an elevation of Mt. Moriah below the Temple Mount, just outside the gates of the city.

**Genesis 22:3-8:**
22:3*Early next morning Abraham saddled his donkey and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac.  He chopped wood for the burnt offering and started on his journey to the place which God had indicated to him.* 4*On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* 5*Then Abraham said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey.  The boy and I are going over there; we shall worship and then come back to you.'* 6*Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, loaded it on Isaac, and carried in his own hands the fire and the knife.  Then the two of them set out together.* 7*Isaac spoke to his father Abraham.  'Father?' he said.  'Yes, my son,' he replied. 'Look,' he said, 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'* 8*Abraham replied, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.'  And the two of them went on together.*

The distance from Beersheba to Jerusalem is about 80 km, or 50 miles.  Traveling by donkey into the mountainous district of central Canaan, and counting the first day of the journey as day #1 and the day they arrived as day #3, it is reasonable to assume the journey took three day, but the number 3 is probably a symbolic detail indicating that the next event is important in fulfilling God's plan in salvation history.  It is important to note that for 3 days Abraham faced the death of his beloved son.

Note the repetition of threes in chapter 22:

* 3 commands ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2))
* 3 day journey ([Gen 22:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v4))
* 3 people accompanied Abraham: Isaac and two servants ([Gen 22:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v3))
* Abraham carried 3 items: the wood, the fire, and the knife ([Gen 22:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v6))
* The repeat of the 3-fold blessing ([Gen 22:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17))
* "Only son" repeated three times ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2), [12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v12), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v16))
* "will provide" = *yireh* repeated three times ([Gen 22:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v8), [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v14), (twice) )

**Question:** As Abraham and Isaac began to walk up the mountain, with Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice, what question did Isaac ask his father?
**Answer:** Isaac realized that they had everything needed for the sacrifice except the sacrificial victim.  Isaac asked his father "where is the lamb?"

Isaac's question must have wrenched Abraham's heart.  In Abraham's answer, that *Elohim himself will provide (yireh/ jireh) the sacrifice* (verse 8), Isaac must have begun to realize the role he was about to play in this sacrificial offering.  God's test in Genesis 22 required not only the obedience of Abraham's faith and trust but also Isaac's obedient submission.

It is interesting that in the first verse of this passage Scripture returns to identifying God in the plural as the *Elohim*, the God of the Creation.  The plural form "Elohim" will be used five times in this passage (Gen 22:1, 3, 8, 9, 12), while God's covenant name will be used four times (Gen 22:11, 14, 15, 16).  Those who espouse the Document Hypothesis theory suggest that this account is taken from two different oral traditions that are pieced together to form this part of the narrative (the "E" and "Y" elements; see note "a", New Jerusalem Bible, page 41).([3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end3)) However, those who hold that view miss the significant use of these two forms for God: that "Elohim" is only used in the first half of the narrative (and by the angel in verse 12), while the use of God's covenant name, "Yahweh", is only found in the narrative after Abraham passed the covenant ordeal.  God's covenant name is used twice to identify the angel as "the angel of Yahweh" (verses 11 and 15) and then two more times: in verse 14 where Abraham named the place *Yahweh yireh* ("Yahweh will provide") and finally in verse 16 when the angle of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, declaring "I swear by my own self, Yahweh declares...".

**Please read Genesis 22:9-19: The Angel of Yahweh Intervenes
22:9*When they arrived at the place which God had indicated to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood.  Then he bound his son and put him on the altar on top of the wood.* 10*Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.* 11*But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven.  'Abraham, Abraham!' he said.  'Here I am,' he replied.* 12*Do not raise your hand against the boy,' the angel said.  'Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God.  You have not refused me your own (only\*) beloved son.'* 13*Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush.  Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.* 14*Abraham called this place 'Yahweh provides', and hence the saying today: 'On the mountain Yahweh provides.'* 15*The angel of Yahweh called Abraham a second time from heaven.* 16*'I swear by my own self, Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your (only\*) own beloved son,* 17*I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore.  Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies.* 18*All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed my command.'* 19*Abraham went back to his servants, and together they set out for Beersheba, and Abraham settled in Beersheba.***\*Literal Hebrew has "only" and not "own" beloved son in verses 12 and 16 (*Interlineal Bible: Hebrew-English,* pages 50-51).

**Genesis 22:9:** 22:9*When they arrived at the place which God had indicated to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood.  Then he bound his son and put him on the altar on top of the wood.*

Having carried the wood for his own sacrifice, the beloved son was bound and laid upon the wood of the sacrifice.

**Genesis 22:10-13:** 22:10*Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.* 11*But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven.  'Abraham, Abraham!' he said.  'Here I am,' he replied.* 12*Do not raise your hand against the boy,' the angel said.  'Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God.  You have not refused me your own (only\*) beloved son.'* 13*Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush.  Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.*

Abraham passed the test'at the most dramatic moment, as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into the chest of his submissive son, the Angel of Yahweh stayed his hand by calling out to Abraham.  The angel identified by God's covenant name: "The Angel of Yahweh," makes his appearance in significant moments in salvation history ( [Gen 16:7-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v7); [22:11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v11); [Ex 3:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus3.htm#v2); [Num 22:22-35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers22.htm#v22); [Judg 2:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges2.htm#v1), [4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges2.htm#v4); etc., [2 Sam 24:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v16); [1 Kng 19:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings19.htm#v7); [2 Kng 1:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings1.htm#v3), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings1.htm#v15); [19:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings19.htm#v35); etc.; [Zec 12:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/zechariah/zechariah12.htm#v8)), and this is certainly one of those moments.  He may be a manifestation of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity'the pre-Incarnate Christ active in the plan of salvation.  He does tell Abraham: *You have not refused* ***me*** *your own (only\*) beloved son* ([Gen 22:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v12))*.*

**Question:** What is the major difference in the outcome of the intended sacrifice?
**Answer:** Yahweh spared Abraham's son by providing a male sheep (ram) for the sacrifice.

**Question:** Did Isaac struggle against his father when he was being placed on the altar?  Why was Abraham prepared to go through with Yahweh's command to sacrifice his son?  See [Heb 11:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews11.htm#v17).
**Answer:** Evidently Isaac submitted and did not struggle, even though Scripture recorded that he was bound ([Gen 22:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v9)).  Abraham believed God would give him descendants through this son with whom the covenant was to continue.  The inspired writer of the Book of Hebrews assures us that so great was Abraham's faith and trust in God's promises that he believed God would raise his son from the dead to keep those promises: *It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac.  He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on.  He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead* ([Heb 11:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews11.htm#v17)).

When the angel of the Lord stopped Abraham and showed him the male lamb "caught up" (*sebeck* in Greek and *achaz* in Hebrew) in a tree to offer up in sacrifice in place of the boy, Abraham realized that Yahweh had indeed provided the sacrifice.  In that moment Abraham's son was given back to him on the third day after their journey of death had begun.

**Question:** From then on what did Abraham call this place?  See [Gen 22:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v8) and [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v14) where the same Hebrew word *yireh* is used.
**Answer:** In [22:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v14) the translators rendered this verse: *Abraham called this place Yahweh provides*; in Hebrew = *yireh* [jireh], but in verse 8 the word is translated "will provide;" it is the same word that is used in [22:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v8) where Abraham told Isaac: *God himself* ***will provide*** *the lamb for the burnt offering.* Therefore, the place came to be called: *On the mountain Yahweh (will) provide* (Gen 22:14).

**Question:** What is prophetic significance of Abraham's statement in verse 8 that God *yireh/jireh* "will provide" the sacrifice? What is the significance that the same word is repeated, in Gen 22:14 in association with Abraham's role as God's prophet?  When is Abrahams' prophetic statement that God "will provide" a sacrifice fulfilled?
**Answer:** The day will come when Yahweh will provide the perfect male lamb'the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, God's only beloved Son who will carry his own wood to His sacrifice and who will be bound on the altar of the Cross ([Jn 1:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v29); [19:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v17)).

Abraham spoke prophetically when he told his son "Yahweh will provide."  According to Jewish tradition "Yireh" became part of the name of the town located on the mountain of Moriah, no longer Salem, *Shalom* "peace" but it came to be known as "will provide peace" or Yireh-salem/ Jerusalem ([Gen 14:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v18); [Ps 76:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm76.htm#v2); [Jdt 4:4-6/3-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judith/judith4.htm#v4); Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews, 6.10.1[438]*). It will be at Jerusalem approximately 2,000 years later in the year 30AD that God's **will provide** the sacrifice that will conquer death and heal the world of sin in offering the sacrifice of His righteous only beloved Son. Through the binding of Isaac, righteous son of Abraham, Yahweh foreshadowed the act when He "**will provide**" the unblemished male sacrifice for the sins of the world'Jesus the Lamb of God.

Abraham's willingness to trust God with his life and the life of his son is not just belief' it is a work of faith.  St. James, in writing to the Church about the necessity of living and active faith held Abraham up as an example of such faith: *Was not Abraham our father justified by his deed, because he offered his son Isaac on the altar?  So you can see that his faith was working together with his deeds; his faith became perfect by what he did.  In this way the scripture was fulfilled: Abraham put his faith in God, and this was considered as making him upright; and he received the name 'friend of God'.*

**Genesis 22:15-19:**
15*The angel of Yahweh called Abraham a second time from heaven.* 16*'I swear by my own self, Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your (only\*) own beloved son,* 17*I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore.  Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies.* 18*All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed my command.'* 19*Abraham went back to his servants, and together they set out for Beersheba, and Abraham settled in Beersheba.*
\* = literal Hebrew, *Interlinear Bible, vol. I,* page 51).

God swore an oath by Himself to keep His covenant with Abraham and his descendants in the third part of the 3-fold covenant (Gen 22:16), in which He repeated the three initial promises:  land, descendants, and a world-wide blessing.  Like part one of the covenant ritual in [chapter 15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v1), Abraham has no requirement to fulfill in this part of the covenant.  God is the keeper of this part of the covenant.  Dr. Meredith Kline compared the sacrificial offering ritual when God walked the path of death in [Genesis 15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v1) with the sacrificial ritual of Abraham's offering of Isaac in chapter 22: *On both occasions in Abraham's life where the works-reward motif appears there were symbolic actions prophetic of the sacrificial act of obedience of the Messiah, the meritorious work that secure the ultimate salvation-kingdom for God's people of all times.  In Genesis 15 it was the oath-passage of the Lord through the way of death.  In Genesis 22 it was the provision of the ram as the sacrificial substitute for Isaac.  [..].  It was only a typological pointer but the obedience of Abraham that God assessed as meritorious on these two occasions was richly symbolic of Messiah's mission.  In Genesis 15 the reward was announced in response to a kingly service of deliverance from the Lord's enemies.   In Genesis 22 the reward was for a priestly ministry of sacrifice. Together theses acts of obedience exhibited the negative and positive aspects of the consecration function of God's servant, guardianship of the sanctuary and tributary offering.  The obedient Abraham, the faithful covenant servant, was a type of the Servant of the Lord in his obedience, by which he became the surety of the new covenant* (M. Kline, *The Kingdom Prologue,* page 326).

God's action in the covenant formation ritual in Chapter 15 as the primary keeper of the covenant, taking upon Himself the self-malediction of the covenant curse by walking between the slain animals, united to the offering of Isaac as the sacrificial offering of the beloved son, prefigures the perfect sacrificial offering of the "promised seed," Jesus the Redeemer-Messiah who made the walk of death and offered Himself as a willing sacrifice in fulfillment of the promises of Abrahamic covenant and the promise of [Genesis 3:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v15).

God's command to offer Isaac in sacrifice seems entire contrary to what we know about God from Sacred Scripture: His compassion, His mercy, His uncompromising insistence on the sanctity of human life.  This passage of Scripture only makes sense in the context of the fulfillment of Abraham's blessings in the sacrifice of God's only beloved Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Redeemer-Messiah.  In the ordeal of the sacrifice of Isaac, the Fathers of the Church saw a prefiguring of the Passion of Jesus, God's only begotten and beloved Son, offered in sacrifice on the hill below the crest of Mt. Moriah, a hill called Golgotha, "the place of the skull", where God the Son would be crucified almost 2,000 years later.

 **Question:** In the *akeidah,* the "binding" of Isaac,how is Isaac a "type" of Christ'the "offering up" and "raising up" of Abraham's beloved only son as a prefiguring the Passion (the "offering up") and the Resurrection (the "raising up") of God's only beloved Son?
**Answer:** Comparisons between the "offering up" and "raising up" of Isaac in [Genesis 22:1-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v1) and the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

* Isaac and Jesus were only, beloved sons of a righteous father; Ishmael ([Gen 21:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v14)) had been sent away. ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [Mt 3:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew3.htm#v17); [Jn 1:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v14))
* Both Isaac and Jesus are identified as the "son of Abraham." ([Gen 21:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v3); [22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [Mt 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v1))
* Both were offered in sacrifice.  ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [Jn 1:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v29); [Mt 27:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew27.htm#v35); [Mk 15:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark15.htm#v24); [Lk 23:33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke23.htm#v33); [Jn 11:50](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john11.htm#v50); [19:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v17))
* The sacrifice was offered in the land of Moriah – Jerusalem. ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [2 Chr 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1); [Mt 16:21-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew16.htm#v21)).
* Both sons carried the wood for their own sacrifice. ([Gen 22:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v6); [Jn 19:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v17))
* Both were "bound" and placed on top of the wood for their sacrifice. ([Gen 22:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v9); [Jn 19:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v18); [Phil 2:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/philippians/philippians2.htm#v8))
* Both willingly allow themselves to be offered in sacrifice. ([Gen 22:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v7); [Col 2:6-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/colossians/colossians2.htm#v6))
* Both sons were "resurrected" or "given back" to their fathers on the third day.  Isaac was essential "dead" to his grieving father when God commanded him to sacrifice his son.  On the "third day" God provided another sacrifice and his son was restored.  God's son died on the Cross and was resurrected on the third day! ([Gen 22:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v4); [Mt 16:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew16.htm#v21); [17:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew17.htm#v23); [20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew17.htm#v20); [19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew17.htm#v19); [Mk 9:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark9.htm#v31); [10:34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark10.htm#v34); [Lk 9:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v22); [18:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke18.htm#v22); [24:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke24.htm#v7), [44-47](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke24.htm#v44); [Acts 10:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts10.htm#v40); [1 Cor 15:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians15.htm#v4))

**Question:** Can you think of some Biblical passages that might parallel Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as well as the image of the lamb of sacrifice being "caught up" in the tree (Gen 22:16)?
**Answer:**

* [John 3:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john3.htm#v14): [Jesus said] ...*so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.*
* [John 8:27-28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v27): *They did not recognize that he was talking to them about the Father.  So Jesus said:  'When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I AM He*....etc.
* [John 12:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v32): [Jesus said] *And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all people to myself.*
* [Galatians 3:13-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v13): *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake since scripture says: Anyone hanged is accursed, so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles in Christ Jesus, and so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* Note: St. Paul is quoting from [Dt 21:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy21.htm#v23).

In Genesis 22:15, God "swore by Himself."  An oath is sworn on the basis of God's name as keeper of the covenant.  In the Sinai Covenant there will be the prohibition: *You shall not take the Lord's name in vain,* a prohibition against using the Lord's name casually in oath swearing or conversation*.*   The Latin word for "oath" is *sacramentum,* from which we get our word "sacrament."  Our sacraments are our active participation, or our oath-swearing, in the New Covenant in Christ. The Greek word for oath is *horckia.* *Ex- horckia*, from which we get the word "exorcism," means "to cast out by oath."

**Question**: Why did God swear and oath by Himself?  When do we swear oaths in modern society?  What did God swear?  See [Genesis 22:15-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v15) and [Hebrews 6:13-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews6.htm#v13).
**Answer:** God swore an oath that Abraham would have many descendants who would have power and dominion over the land and through whom a world-wide blessing would flow.  When we swear an oath, as for example as we used to swear in our civil courts of law to tell the truth, we "swore to God," meaning we evoked God as keeper of what we have sworn.  If we break our oath we are answerable to God. But since there is no one greater than God, He swears by Himself to keep the promise of the oath.

The inspired writer of Hebrews addressed the significance of God swearing an oath by Himself: *When God made the promise to Abraham, he swore by his own self, since there was no one greater he could swear by: 'I will shower blessings on you and give you many descendants.'  Because of that, Abraham preserved and received fulfillment of the promise.  Human beings, of course, swear an oath by something greater than themselves, and between them, confirmation by an oath puts and end to all dispute.  In the same way, when God wanted to show the heirs of the promise even more clearly how unalterable his plan was, he conveyed it by an oath so that through two unalterable factors in which God could not be lying, we who have fled to him might have a vigorous encouragement to grasp the hope held out to us.  This is the anchor our souls have as sure as it is firm, reaching right through inside the curtain\* where Jesus has entered as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever, of the order of Melchizedek* ([Heb 6:13-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews6.htm#v13))*.*  \*Note: the "curtain" in this passage refers to the great curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem.  This curtain kept the community separate from the presence of God in the sacred place known as the Holy of Holies.  Only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies once a year at the Feast of Atonement.  Christ has taken His place as both High Priest and perfect Sacrifice, and He has opened the way for us into the presence of God ([Mt 27:51](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew27.htm#v51%60); [Mk 15:37-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark15.htm#v37); [Lk 23:45-46](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke23.htm#v45)).

**Genesis 22:18:** *All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants because you have obeyed my command.*

**Question:** When was the promise of this world-wide blessing fulfilled?  See [Mt 28:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm#v18); [Mk 16:15-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark16.htm#v15); [Acts 3:25-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts3.htm#v25); [Gal 3:7-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v7).

**Answer:** This international blessing is being fulfilled now in the Age of the New Covenant Church in which Abraham has fathered "children" across the face of the earth who, by accepting the Gospel of salvation, exercise dominion through the kingdom established by Jesus the Redeemer-Messiah, whose Hebrew name Yehosua (Yah'shua) means "Yahweh saves" or even more literally, "I AM SAVES."

Abraham, a man of imperfect character and imperfect faith, in yielding himself in faithful obedience to God received the promises made to him in the form of a perpetual covenant that affected the lives of his descendants for generations and generations to come.  **The importance of the Abrahamic 3-fold Covenant is that it is foundational to all the other Biblical Covenants between Yahweh and His people.**

* The promise of land: partially fulfilled in Israel's possession of the Promised Land: [Dt 30:1-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy30.htm#v1) = Sinai Covenant.  It is only during the reigns of David and his son Solomon that Israel's boundaries stretched as far as the blessing of [Gen 15:18-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18).  This promise is perfectly fulfilled in the salvation-kingdom of the universal (catholic) New Covenant Church ([Mt 4:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v17); [5:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew5.htm#v4); [Mk 1:14-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark1.htm#v14)).
* The promise of many descendants: kingly descendants in the Davidic Covenant through which the Messiah was promised ([Gen 17:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v16); [2 Sam 7:12-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel7.htm#v12); [Mt 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v1)).  The promise is perfectly fulfilled in the New Covenant Church whose dominion over mankind is universal ( [Mt 28:19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v19); [Rom 4:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans4.htm#v17); [Gal 3:6-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v6)).
* The promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham is not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime, nor is it fulfilled during Israel's possession of the "Promised Land,"  but the promise will be repeated in [Jeremiah 31:31-40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah31.htm#v31): *Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new Covenant with the House of Israel....* It is a promise repeated by Jesus in [Luke 22:17-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke22.htm#v17): *Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall never again drink wine until the kingdom of God comes'* ([Lk 22:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke22.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v17)). .....*This cup is the new Covenant in my blood poured out for you* ([Lk:22:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke22.htm#v20)), and fulfilled in the New Covenant in Christ Jesus through the spread of the Gospel of salvation to every people of every nation on earth: [Mt 28:19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm#v19); [Acts 1:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#v8); [Rom 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans1.htm#v1).

The setting of the "binding" of Isaac took place in the "land of Moriah" ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2)).  The word "Moriah" is from a Hebrew verb root meaning "to see," and the word "moriah" is usually translated as "vision" (*Sinai and Zion,* page 94).  The land of Moriah/ Mt. Moriah is a significant setting in salvation history.  Not only will its highest point in Jerusalem be the site of Solomon's Temple and a lower elevation the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, but it is also where Jesus' ancestor, King David, like his ancestor Abraham, experienced a vision in an encounter with the Angel of Yahweh.  Mt. Moriah is linked to both the Patriarch Abraham and King David's experiences of covenant ordeal, sacrifice, and divine intervention.

**Question:** Compare David's experience with Abraham's experience. How are the experiences alike? Read [2 Samuel 7:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel7.htm#v16); [23:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel23.htm#v5); [24:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v17); [1 Chronicles 21:14-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v14); [22:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles22.htm#v1).
**Answer:** The visionary experiences of Abraham and David on Mt. Moriah involved:

1. God forming an unconditional covenant with both Abraham and David prior to the experience ([Gen 17:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v7); [2 Sam 7:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel7.htm#v16); [23:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel23.htm#v5)).
2. Both men experiencing visions and divine intervention on Mt. Moriah ([Gen 22:1-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v1); [2 Sam 24:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v17); [1 Chr 21:14-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v14)).
3. Both men passing the test of a covenant ordeal ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [2 Sam 24:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v1), [17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v17); [1 Chr 21:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v17)).
4. The tests of both men involve sacrifice ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [1 Chr 21:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v17)).
5. The sons of both men will have prominent roles in salvation history because of their fathers' visionary experiences ([Gen 22:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v2); [1 Chr 22:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles22.htm#v1)).

Both Abraham and David are the ancestors of the Redeemer-Messiah ([Mt 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v1)), and their visionary experiences prefigure the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**Please read Genesis 22:20-24: The descendants of Nahor, Abraham's Brother**
22:20*It happened some time later that Abraham received word that Milcah, too, had now borne sons to his brother Nahor:* 21*Uz his first-born, Buz his brother, Kemuel father of Aram,* 22*Chesed, Hazo, Pildash,  Jidlaph, Bethuel* 23*(and Bethuel was the father of Rebekah). These were the eight children Milcah gave Nahor, Abraham's brother.* 24*He had a concubine named Reumah, and she too had children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.*

Genesis 22:20-24 is a toledoth of Abraham's brother Nahor, listing the increase in the family which Abraham and Sarah left behind in Mesopotamia ([Gen 11:27-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v27)).  This branch of Abraham's family become "the people of Aram", the Arameans.  The Aram listed in this passage as the grandson of Nahor is not the same Aram listed among Shem's sons in the Table of Nations ([Gen 10:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v22) and [1 Chr 1:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v17)) .  These people, like Abraham and Sarah are considered to be Arameans ( [Gen 25:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v20); [28:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v5); [31:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v20), [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v24); [Dt 26:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy26.htm#v5)).([4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end4))

**Question:** How many men and women are listed in this line of the family of the 12 tribes of the Arameans, members of Abraham's family who stayed in Haran?
**Answer:** 12 names of men are listed and 3 women.

Among the names listed in this toledoth and in [Genesis 11:11-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v11), four are names of towns in south-central Turkey on the border with Syria recorded in ancient secular documents: Haran, Serug, Nahor and Terah.([5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end5))  That there are 12 names listed may suggest a comparison between the 12 sons of Ishmael in [Genesis 25:12-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v12), who are also not of the promised line, and the 12 sons of Jacob in [Genesis 49:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v28), who are the promised line of the 12 men who will become the 12 physical fathers of the Old Covenant Church, the nation of Israel.  In any event, the list introduces the name of Abraham's kinswoman Rebekah ([22:23a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v23)), providing the evidence that she was of the lineage of Shem, a daughter of Abraham's family by his cousin Bethuel, son of Abraham's brother Nahor and that she is born by his legal wife Milcha.  Like Isaac she was not the issue of her father's concubine but was born from the legal wife (a concubine was acquired like property, without the covenant between families, therefore, without payment of bride-money, and with fewer legal rights ([Gen 30:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis30.htm#v4); [Judg 19:1-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges19.htm#v1)).  In Scripture plural marriage is never presented in a positive light and Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in [Matthew 19:3-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew19.htm#v3) makes it clear that God established marriage between one man and one woman who became one flesh.   Rebekah's name also provides the link to chapter 24 when Abraham sent his trusted servant in search of a bride for Isaac from among Abraham's kinsmen.

**Please read Genesis 23:1-11: Sarah's Death and the Hittites offer Abraham a burial site
23:1*The length of Sarah's life was a hundred and twenty-seven years.* 2*She died at Kiriath-Arba'now Hebron'in the land of Canaan, and Abraham proceeded to mourn and bewail her.* 3*Then rising from beside his dead, Abraham spoke to the Hittites,* 4*'I am a stranger resident here,' he said.  'Let me have (give me\*) a burial site of my own here, so that I can remove my dead for burial.'* 5*The Hittites replied to Abraham,* 6*'Please listen to us, my lord, we regard you as a prince of God; bury your dead in the best of our tombs; not one of us would refuse you his tomb for you to bury your dead.'* 7*At this, Abraham rose and bowed low to the local people, the Hittites,* 8*and pleaded with them as follows, 'If you consent to my removing my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar,* 9*for him to let me have (give me\*) the cave he owns at Machpelah, which is on the edge of his field.  Let him sell (give\*) it to me in your presence at its full price, for a burial site of my own.'* 10*Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing (ears\*) of the Hittites, of all the inhabitants of his town (at the city gate\*).* 11*'No, my lord, listen to me,' he said. 'I give you the field and (give\*) the cave in it; I make (give\*) this gift in the presence of my kinsmen.  Bury your dead.'*
(\* = literal translation; *Interlineal Bible: Hebrew-English,* literal translation, page 53)**

At the venerable age of 127 (Gen 23:1-20), the beautiful Sarah, who stirred the hearts of kings, died near Kiriath-Arba, which is today the city of Hebron in the Palestinian sector about 20 miles south of Jerusalem.  She is the only woman in Scripture whose lifespan is recorded. Isaac was 37 years old when she died (three years before his marriage to Rebekah; [Gen 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17); [21:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v5); [24:67](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v67); [25:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v20)) and Abraham will live another 38 years ([25:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v7)).  Abraham, deeply mourning the death of Sarah, asked the local landowners to sell him a burial site for his wife.  That the negotiations took place at the city gate, where a community's legal transactions usually took place (see [Ruth 4:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ruth/ruth4.htm#v1)), is mentioned twice in the literal Hebrew text ([Gen 23:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v10), [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v18)).

Significant repetitions in the Hebrew text:

* "dead/died": referring to Sarah's death, occurs eight times = [Gen 23:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v3), [4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v4), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v6) (2 times), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v8), [11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v11), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v13), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v15).
* "to give": occurs seven times in the Hebrew text: Abraham = [Gen 23:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v4), [9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v9), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v13); Ephron = [Gen 23:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v11) (3 times).
* "to hear/listen": occurs six times: [Gen 23:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v6), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v8), [11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v11), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v13), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v15), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v16).
* "ears": occurs three times: [Gen 23:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v10), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v13), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v16).

**Question:** How did Abraham identify himself to the local landowners and why is this significant?
**Answer:** He identified himself as a "resident alien," which meant that he owned no land in the area and that he settled in the area by their permission.

**Question:** Who are the local landowners and what do they have in common with Abraham?
**Answer:** The locals, identified as Hittites, are like Abraham immigrants from the north.([6](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end6))

Abraham's Hittite neighbors gave him their sympathy and respect, but there is more involved here than offering sympathy to a neighbor'this exchange concerns the question of property rights. When Abraham offered to buy land to bury his wife the Hittites urged him to use one of their tombs.  While they are willing to allow this "great prince of God" to bury his wife on their land, they are hesitant to actually sell him land, thereby giving him permanent property rights (verses 5-6).  In presenting his plea to the Hittites, Abraham "bowed down" to them, a sign that he acknowledged their superiority over him as owners of the land.  He then asked them to intercede with Ephron son of Zohar to sell him the cave of Machpelah.  The name Machpelah means "double-cave," indicating a cave with two chambers. Abraham obviously has planned that more of his dead than Sarah would be buried in Hebron.

**Question:** What request did Abraham make of Ephron in front of witnesses?  What was Ephron's counter offer to Abraham's offer, which was a compromise to Abraham's refusal the first Hittite offer that Abraham use one of their family tombs?

**Answer:** Abraham asked to purchase Ephron's cave on the edge of field he owned.  Ephron countered by offering the cave and the field as a gift, more than what Abraham asked for.

**Please read Genesis 23:12-20: Abraham purchases the tomb of the patriarchs
23:12*Abraham bowed low to the local people* 13*and, in the hearing (ears\*) of the local people, replied to Ephron as follows, 'Be good enough to listen to me.  I will pay (give\*) the price of the field; accept it from me and I will bury my dead there.'* 14*Ephron replied to Abraham,* 15*'Please listen to me, my lord.  What is a plot of land for four hundred shekels of silver between me and you?  Bury your dead.'* 16*Abraham agreed [listened] to Ephron's terms, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver he had stipulated in the hearing (ears\*) of the Hittites, namely four hundred shekels of silver, according to the current commercial rate.* 17*Thus Ephron's field at Machpelah, facing Mamre'the field and the cave in it and all the trees anywhere within the boundaries of the field'passed* 18*into Abraham's possessions in the sight of the Hittites, all of the inhabitants of his town (gate of the city\*).* 19*And after this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre'now Hebron'in the land of Canaan.* 20*And so the field and the cave in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham's possession as a burial site of his own.*
(\*= literal translation; *Interlineal Bible: Hebrew-English,* pages 53-54).**

Bowing a second time, Abraham refused the offer and insisted on paying for the field and the cave.  Finally consenting to Abraham's offer, Ephron named the price of four hundred shekels of silver, which according to ancient documents was the going rate for a field in the 20th century BC.([7](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end7)) For the first time, at the age of 137, Abraham owned property in the land God promised to him and his descendants.

**Question:** Why did Abraham refuse Ephron's generous offer of the gift of the property?  How is the refusal similar to Abraham's refusal of the King of Sodom's offer in [Genesis 14:21-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v21) and his dealings with Abimelech in [21:27-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v27)?  How is his refusal connected to God's promise of the land as his descendant's inheritance?
**Answer:** Abraham's response to Ephron's offer is similar to his refusal of the reward from the king of Sodom and his payment to Abimelech for water rights in the Negeb.  In these cases Abraham would not accept a gift from the dwellers on the land promised to him by God, and he would not allow himself to be obligated to them.  The point of this section of the narrative is to show that God, and not any human being, was the source of Abraham's hope of blessing associated with the land. Abraham would not seek to become wealthy or to own land apart from the promises of God.

The archaeological discovery of the Hittite Legal Code offers an explanation why the Hittites may have urged Abraham to accept the entire parcel of land.  The reason may have been more out of self interest rather than out of friendship.  According to the Hittite code, the owner of an entire parcel of land must carry out the duties of feudal service to the Hittite lord, including pagan religious observances.  Since Abraham was a powerful chieftain, having him politically obligated as a vassal would have been very desirable to Ephron the Hittite.  It makes sense that Abraham refused the obligation of a gift and only purchased a small portion of the tract of land in order to avoid any involvement not only in being established as a Hittite vassal but to avoid having to make a sacrifice to the false gods of the Hittites (M. R. Lehmann, "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *Bulletin of the American Schools Of Oriental Research, 129 (1953), pages 15-18; Archaeology and the Old Testament, page 106*).  While it is arguable whether or not these 20th century BC Hittites had the same laws as the Hittite Empire to the north at its height of power several centuries later, it does explain the wrangling and Abraham's reluctance to accept a gift from men he considered to be neighbors.

King David will refuse a similar offer for the gift of land from a Jebusite upon which the Temple in Jerusalem will be built; however, that refusal didn't have to do with feudal rights but instead with the concern that no individual could make a future claim on land that must belong, free and clear, to the covenant people of the God Israel.  Abraham's refusal may also be associated with them protection for his family burial site ([2 Sam 2:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel2.htm#v22); [1 Chr 21:24-22:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles21.htm#v24)).

Abraham paid the price and legally came into possession of a section of land in Canaan that became the burial site for the Patriarchs and their wives'giving Abraham a permanent identification with the "Promised Land" (emphasized in the three time repetition of "give" in [23:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v11)). Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Leah and Jacob will all be buried at the cave of Machpelah.  This same site can be seen today in the modern city of Hebron.  The Arabic name of the city is El Khalil, "the friend," referring to Abraham's friendship with God.  It is holy to Moslems, who control the site, to Jews, the descendants of the three Patriarchs, and to Christians, the adopted/spiritual heirs of Abraham: *And simply by being Christ's you are that progeny of Abraham, the heirs named in the promise* ([Gal 3:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v29)).

Chapter 24: The Mission of the Unnamed Servant

*To Isaac too, for the sake of Abraham his father, he assured the blessing of all humanity...*
[Ecclesiasticus 44:22/24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach44.htm#v22)

**Please read Genesis 24:1-10: Abraham's Servant's Oath to Find a Bride for Isaac
24:1*By now Abraham was an old man, well on in years, and Yahweh had blessed Abraham in every way.* 2*Abraham said to the senior servant in his household, the steward of all his property, 'Place your hand under my thigh:* 3*I am going to make you swear by Yahweh, God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live* 4*but will go to my native land and my own kinsfolk to choose a wife for my son Isaac.'  The servant asked him, 'What if the girl does not want to follow me to this country?* 5*Should I then take your son back to the country from which you come?'* 6*Abraham replied, 'On no account are you to take my son back there.* 7*Yahweh, God of heaven and God of earth, who took me from my father's home, and from the land of my kinsfolk, and who promised me on oath, "I shall give this country to your descendants"'he will now send his angel ahead of you, so that you can get a wife for my son from there.* 8*If then the girl refuses to follow you, you will be quit of this oath to me.* 9*Only do not take my son back there.'  And the servant placed his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham, and swore to him that he would do it.* 10*The servant took ten of his master's camels and, carrying all kinds of gifts from his master, set out for the city of Nahor in Aram Naharaim.***

Abraham knew that God's three-fold covenant was to continue through the descendants of Isaac ([Gen 21:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v1)).  He was therefore determined to find a bride for Isaac from among his own people, the descendants of Shem.  The elderly and probably frail Abraham sent as his emissary his senior servant'his steward who was the chief administrator of his household, back to Mesopotamia.  One can't help but wonder if this is the same trusted servant that Abraham wanted to make his heir in [Genesis 15:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v3).  Tradition identifies him as Eliezer of Damascus, but it is significant that this key figure in the narrative is never named.  Before sending him on his mission, Abraham made his steward swear an oath of fidelity, which is in the form of a self-curse ([Gen 24:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v3)), to bring back a bride who is acceptable to God.  The servant taking hold of his master's genitals to swear the oath is intended to make the oath inviolable (also see [Gen 47:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis47.htm#v29)).  This man was given the title by Church fathers "The Unnamed Servant."

**Question:** What three commands did Abraham give his servant under oath?
**Answer:**

1. Choose a wife for my son from Abraham's family and not a foreign woman.
2. Do not take my son back there (repeated twice).
3. If the girl will not come the servant is quit of his oath.

**Question:** What is the oath and what are the consequences of failure?
**Answer:** In the oath swearing, the servant will be cursed if he does not endeavor to succeed under the conditions set forth by his master: to secure a willing bride from Abraham's kinsmen.

**Question:** What two important points are being made regarding the future of Abraham's promised holy line?  See [Gen 24:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v3) and [24:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v6).
**Answer:**

1. The holy seed was not to be mixed with the seed of the Canaanites.  Abraham does not give a reason for his desire that Isaac not take a wife from the Canaanites, but it may be a further expression of the curse on Canaan from [Genesis 9:25-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v25): *cursed be Canaan,* but *blessed be Yahweh the God of Shem.* The inhabitants of Canaan are considered to be under a divine curse for their iniquity ([Gen15:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v16)) and so the line of Abraham, God's promised line, must be kept separate from the cursed line of Canaan.  Through Hagar, Ishmael was a descendant of Canaan's older brother Mizraim/Egypt and therefore was also not of the blessed line of Shem ([Gen 10:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v6)).
2. The promised seed of Abraham was not to return to the land of Abraham's father. The Promised Land is the inheritance and Abraham recognized the danger of his heir being enticed to remain in the north (a condition that will be experienced by Isaac's son Jacob in Gen 28-31).

**Question:** The Unnamed Servant was concerned about the success of his mission to find a bride; he asked what he should do if the girl will not leave her family.  What assurance did Abraham give him?  See [Genesis 24:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v7)
**Answer:** Once again the central theme of God's faithfulness in protecting the "promised seed" of the Redeemer-Messiah is expressed in Abraham's prophetic reply that God will send His angel to prepare the way and a girl will be found, but if she refuses to leave her people his oath will have been fulfilled.

The Unnamed Servant traveled with a caravan of men and camels to Upper Mesopotamia, to "Aram of the Rivers" (Mesopotamia).  Aram Naharaim is the area of Mesopotamia bordered by the Euphrates and Habur Rivers, near Haran, Abraham's home before leaving for Canaan.  The city of Abraham's brother Nahor was a site on the border of modern day Turkey and Syria. That the servant took ten camels loaded with riches is evidence of Abraham's wealth.

**Please read Genesis 24:11-27: The Unnamed Servant meets Rebekah
24:11*In the evening, at the time when women come out to draw water, he made the camels kneel outside the town near the well.* 12*And he said, 'Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show faithful love to my master Abraham.* 13*While I stand by the spring as the young women from the town come out to draw water,* 14*I shall say to one of the girls, 'Please lower your pitcher and let me drink."  And if she answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels too," let her be the one you have decreed for your servant Isaac; by this I shall know you have shown faithful love to my master.'* 15*He had not finished speaking when out came Rebekah'who was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor'with a pitcher on her shoulder.* 16*The girl was very beautiful, and a virgin; no man had touched her.  She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher and came up again.* 17*Running towards her, the servant said, 'Please give me a sip of water from your pitcher.'* 18*She replied, 'Drink, my lord,' and quickly lowered her pitcher on her arm and gave him a drink.* 19*When she had finished letting him drink, she said, 'I will draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough.'* 20*She quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran to the well again to draw, and drew for all the camels.* 21*All the while, the man stood watching her, not daring to speak, wondering whether Yahweh had made his journey successful or not.* 22*When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing half a shekel, and put it through her nose, and put two bracelets weighing ten gold shekels on her arms,* 23*and said, 'Whose daughter are you?  Please tell me.  Is there room at your father's house for us to spend the night?'* 24*She replied, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of whom Milcah bore to Nahor.'* 25*And she went on, 'We have plenty of straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.'* 26*Then the man bowed down and worshipped Yahweh saying,* 27*'Blessed be Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, for not withholding his faithful love from my master.  Yahweh had led me straight to the house of my master's brother.'***

Their evening is our afternoon since the day ended at sundown.  The women were collecting water for their families' final meal of the day.  Bedtime for the ancients, and most people in primitive societies, was sundown.   Near the well of the town the Unnamed Servant prayed to Yahweh.  His prayer is the first prayer for guidance recorded in Scripture.

**Question:** In his prayer what specifically was the Unnamed Servant's petition?  Why did he make this prayer? [Genesis 24:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v12)
**Answer:** He asked that God show him a young woman of good character and generosity of spirit who was God's choice for his master through the test of offering him water from her water jar as well as drawing water for his 10 camels.  He was going to rely on God's wisdom and not on his own abilities in making this critical decision.

A camel could drink about 25 gallons of water; times 10 camels, this would be no small act of generosity on a girl's part (Waltke, page 328).

**Question:** How was his prayer answered and what was his response?
**Answer:** His prayer was answered when Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, gave him water to drink from her jar and freely offered to water his camels.  His immediate response was to offer thanks and praise to God for answering his petition.

[Genesis 23:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v16) notes Rebekah's physical beauty; her spiritual beauty is reflected in her generosity and her quick response (mentioned three times in verses [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v18), [20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v20), and [46](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v46)).  In [23:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v16) the New Jerusalem translates the Hebrew word *bethula* as virgin, but according to the use of this word in Scripture, the translation might more accurately be rendered "young woman" (see [Est 2:17-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/esther/esther2.htm#v17) and [Joel 1:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel1.htm#v8) where *bethula* is a young woman of marriageable age).([8](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end8))  She is identified as a virgin by the line: *no man had touched her.* The servant's gift of jewelry to Rebekah was to reward her for her kindness and was also probably meant to impress her family.  The weight of the gold indicates that this was a very generous gift.

**Please read Genesis 24:28-49: Abraham's servant presents the marriage proposal to Laban and Bethuel
24:28*The girl ran to her mother's house to tell what had happened.* 29*Now Rebekah had a brother called Laban, and Laban ran out to the man at the spring.* 30*As soon as he had seen the ring and the bracelets his sister was wearing, and had heard his sister Rebekah saying, 'This is what the man said to me,' he went to the man and found him still standing by his camels at the spring.* 31*He said to him, 'Come in, blessed of Yahweh, why stay out here when I have cleared the house and made room for the camels?'* 32*The man went to the house, and Laban unloaded the camels.  He provided straw and fodder for the camels and water for him and his companions to wash their feet.* 33*They offered him food, but he said, 'I will eat nothing before I have said what I have to say.'  Laban said, 'Speak.'* 34*He said, 'I am Abraham's servant.* 35*Yahweh has loaded my master with blessings, and Abraham is now very rich.  He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, men and women slaves, camels and donkeys.* 36*Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son in his old age, and he had made over all his property to him.* 37*My master made me take this oath, "You are not to choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose country I live.* 38*Instead, you are to go to my father's home and to my own kinsfolk to choose a wife for my son."* 39*I said to my master, "Suppose the girl will not agree to come with me?"* 40*and his reply was, "Yahweh, in whose presence I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful, for you to choose a wife for my son from my own kinsfolk, from my father's House.* 41*Then you will be quite of my curse: if you go to my family and they refuse you, you will be quit of my curse."* 42*Arriving today at the spring I said, "Yahweh, God of my master Abraham please grant a successful outcome to the course I propose to take.* 43*While I stand by the spring, if a girl comes out to draw water and I say to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink from your pitcher,'* 44*if she replies, "Drink by all means, and I will draw water for your camels too," let her be the girl whom Yahweh has decreed for my master's son."* 45*I was still saying this in my mind when Rebekah came out, her pitcher on her shoulder.  She came down to the spring and drew water.  I said to her, "Please give me a drink."* 46*Quickly she lowered her pitcher saying, "Drink and I will water your camels too."* 47*I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?"  She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, whom Milcah bore to Nahor."  Then I put this ring through her nose and these bracelets on her arms.* 48*I bowed down and worshipped Yahweh, and I blessed Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, who had led me by direct path to choose the daughter of my master's brother for his son.* 49*Now tell me whether you are prepared to show constant and faithful love to my master; if not, say so, and I shall know what to do.'***

**Question:** What was it that motivated Laban to offer his hospitality to the stranger and his caravan?  What does this suggest about the character of Laban?  See [Gen 24:29-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v29).
**Answer:** Laban went into action as soon as he saw the jewelry the stranger gave his sister and heard her story.  He was motivated by the stranger's wealth, suggesting that Laban was materialistic and scheming, traits that will become apparent in his future dealings with Rebekah's son, his nephew Jacob.

Laban invited Abraham's servant to his home with all the promises of hospitality; notice that this is the third mention of "feet washing" ([Gen 18:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v4); [19:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v2); [24:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v32)) as a sign of hospitality.  The Unnamed Servant met with Rebekah's brother Laban and her father Bethuel and related the purpose of his mission, including a description of Rebekah's test.
**Question:** What did he tell Rebekah's family about Abraham's god?
**Answer:** He told them that an angel of Yahweh guided him on his mission and that the choice of his master's bride and the success or failure of his mission was in Yahweh's hands.

In asking for their decision he told them: *Now tell me whether you are prepared to show constant and faithful love to my master; if not, say so, and I shall know what to do.*  The words translated as "to show constant and faithful love," in Hebrew *hesed we'emet*, expresses the fidelity and loyalty of the "faithful love" of family' the bond of one human being united to another, an example of which is not only the connection by blood kinship but also through the covenant bond of marriage.  *Hesed* also expresses the persevering piety and faithfulness towards God as well as the fidelity and loyalty of the "faithful love" God extends to those in covenant with Him. See the document: "Is 'Hesed' the same as 'Agape'?  God's Love Defined by Covenant in the Old and New Testaments" in the Documents/Old Testament section of the website.

The Unnamed Servant laid out his mission and his intensions clearly to Laban and his father Bethuel.

**Question:** What information did the Unnamed Servant cleverly include in his narrative to both impress Rebekah's family and to let them know he could not be manipulated?  See [Gen 24:35-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v35).
**Answer:** He cleverly included the information that:

* Abraham's God controlled his mission.
* Abraham was rich.
* Isaac was the legitimate son and heir of aged parents (there would not be other sons with whom he had to share an inheritance).
* The mention of his master's rejection of a Canaanite wife for his heir assured Rebekah's family that she was to be the chief wife.
* The mention that he was freed of his oath if they refused his offer indicated that he was free to go if they refused'he did not need to plead with them for the hand of the girl.

In the final stage of the negotiations, Abraham's servant made it clear that he intended to either complete his mission or, if they refuse him the girl, to walk away.  He wanted their decision immediately and was not prepared to accept any delay'even to eat a meal.

**Please read Genesis 24:50-60: Rebekah agrees to marry Isaac
24:50*Laban and Bethuel replied, 'This is from Yahweh; it is not for us to say yes or no to you.* 51*Rebekah is there before you.  Take her and go; and let her become the wife of your master's son, as Yahweh has decreed.'* 52*On hearing this, Abraham's servant bowed to the ground before Yahweh.* 53*He brought out silver and gold ornaments and clothes which he gave to Rebekah; he also gave rich presents to her brother and to her mother.* 54*They ate and drank, he and his companions, and spent the night there.  Next morning when they were up, he said, 'Let me go back to my master.'* 55*Rebekah's brother and mother replied, 'Let the girl stay with us for ten days or so; then she can go.'* 56*But he replied, 'Do not delay me, since Yahweh has made my journey successful; let me leave and go back to my master.* 57*They replied, 'Let us call the girl and find out what she has to say.'* 58*They called Rebekah and asked her, 'Will you go with this man?'  She replied, 'I will.'* 59*Accordingly they let their sister Rebekah go, with her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.* 60*They blessed Rebekah and said to her: 'Sister of ours, from you may there spring thousands and tens of thousands!  May your descendants gain possession of the gates of their enemies!***

Laban and Bethuel acknowledged that Abraham's god was directing the events, but this did not mean that they acknowledged Abraham's god as their god.  Abraham's family worshipped pagan gods ([Gen 31:30-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v30)).

**Question:** What was the servant's first reaction when Rebekah's family agreed to the marriage?
**Answer:** Once again he gave thanks and praise to God.

The bride price was paid ([Gen 24:53](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v53)), which was regarded as compensation to the family for the loss of the productivity that the girl contributed to the family.  It is unusual that Rebekah's house is described as the house of her mother ([Gen 24:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v28)), that Laban is mentioned first and his father second in the negotiations, that their father is only mentioned once ([Gen 24:50](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v50)), that only Laban and his mother received the gifts ([Gen 24:53](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v53)), and that in the final negotiations only Laban and his mother are mentioned ([Gen 24:55](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v55)). This may suggest that Bethuel was infirm of either mind or body (or both) and that Laban was the one making the family decisions.

Rebekah's family agreed to the marriage and accepted the "bride price" ([Gen 24:53](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v53)); however, they wanted Rebekah to wait 10 days before leaving. This was not an unusual request ([Tobit 8:20-21/23-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/tobit/tobit8.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v20)).  However, when the Unnamed Servant gave them the warning if they detained him from fulfilling his mission that they were acting contrary to the will of God (verse 56), Label curiously asked Rebekah "Will you go with the man, then?"'suggesting that she might not go, which in light of the bride-price already having been paid was an unethical question.  This might suggest Laban had another plan'perhaps to keep the bride and the dowry.

Rebekah's family left the decision to go or not to go in her hands.

**Question:** What did the girl decide and what was the significance of her decision to salvation history? See [Genesis 24:54-60](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v54) and [Lk 1:38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v38).
**Answer:** Rebekah gave her consent, decisively stating that she would go immediately with Abraham's servant.  The destiny of the "promised seed" was expressed in the maiden's "yes," just as the destiny of the "promised seed" will be fulfilled in another maiden's "yes" in the spring of 3/2 BC (see the document "Dating the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth" in the Documents/New Testament section) when Mary of Nazareth said to the angel Gabriel: *let it happen to me as you have said* ([Lk 1:38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v38)).

The Unnamed Servant was not only faithful; he was also wise. His insistence on leaving immediately will not be repeated by Rebekah's son Jacob who became mired down for 20 years serving the scheming Laban ([Gen 31:38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v38)). Rebekah took her personal servants (a sign of her family's wealth and social status) and her childhood nurse, Deborah ([Gen 24:59](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v59), [61](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v61)).  A baby's wet nurse usually became the child's nanny in childhood and personal servant in adulthood.  Deborah will play a role in raising Rebekah's sons ([Gen 35:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v8)).

**Question:** In [Genesis 24:60](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v60) Rebekah's family blessed her.  What other blessing made by God to Abraham, which concerned Isaac, was similar to this blessing and why is this link important?  Hint: see [Genesis 22:15-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v15); what promised blessing and what line of Scripture was repeated?
**Answer:** The blessing for Rebekah by her kinsman and the blessing of God to Abraham in [22:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17) both include the statement *may your seed possess the gates of their enemy.* The purpose is to again show God's careful attention in choosing this wife for Isaac'she who is replacing Sarah as the bearer of the "promised seed."  In the first blessing to Abraham and Isaac as the chosen seed in [Genesis 22:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v15) God said: *I swear by my own self* (literally = "I seven myself") *Yahweh declares...,* and He promised the blessings of abundant descendants and the promise of possession of the "Promised Land" in the prophetic statement: *Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies.*In this episode in the selection of the bearer of the "promised seed," it is the Unnamed Servant who swears the oath, but God has overseen all these events, even to the same blessing (which God put on the lips of Rebekah's kinsmen) that has been given to both Isaac and his bride'the promise that the numerous descendants of this couple will inherit the land promised to Abraham, gaining possession of "the gates of their enemies" when their descendants become the nation of Israel, the salvation-kingdom of the Old Covenant Church ([Jn 4:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v22)).

**Question:** Who is the hero of this drama in securing a bride for Isaac?
**Answer:** Yahweh working through the Unnamed Servant is the force behind the success of securing Isaac's bride.

The servant is mentioned fifteen times from [Genesis 24:2 to 66](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v2), but God is mentioned seventeen times from [Genesis 24:3 to 51](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v3).  God is mentioned:

* Twice by Abraham: Gen 24:3, 7.
* Ten times by the Unnamed Servant: Gen 24:12, 17 (2 times), 35, 40, 42, 44, 48 (2 times), 56.
* Three times by Laban and Bethuel: Gen 24:31, 50, 51

**Please read Genesis 24:61-67: The Unnamed Servant Takes the Bride to the Bridegroom
42:61*And forthwith, Rebekah and her maids mounted the camels, and followed the man.  The servant took Rebekah and departed.* 62*Isaac meanwhile had come back from the well of Lahai Roi and was living in the Negeb.* 63*While Isaac was out walking toward evening in the fields, he looked up and saw camels approaching.* 64*And Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac.  She jumped down from her camel,* 65*and asked the servant, 'Who is that man walking through the fields towards us?'  The servant replied, 'That is my master.'  So she took her veil and covered herself up.* 66*The servant told Isaac the whole story.* 67*Then Isaac took her into his tent.  He married Rebekah and made her his wife.  And in his love for her, Isaac, was consoled for the loss of his mother.***

Rebekah returned with the Unnamed Servant to Canaan.  Isaac, walking in a field in the afternoon, and Rebekah, arriving on the back of a camel, both "looked up" and saw each other at the same instant, once again an indication of God's hand in the drama (Gen 24:63-64).  When the servant acknowledged that the man she saw was her bridegroom, Rebekah "covered herself with her veil" in preparation for meeting Isaac.  Hebrew women were not normally veiled at this time in salvation history, but the donning of the veil indicated that she was Isaac's virgin bride, since a bride was veiled in the presence of the bridegroom until the wedding night (hence the deception in which bride Jacob married in [Gen 29:20-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v20)).([9](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end9))

Rebekah was a confident and decisive young woman.  She didn't hesitate to fulfill the Unnamed Servant's request to give water to him and his camels, she hurried home to tell her family about her encounter with Abraham's servant, and when asked if she would go immediately to Canaan she agreed without hesitation.  And now in this final scene, she jumped down from the camel and immediately prepared herself to meet her bridegroom.  Her decisiveness is a virtue in this part of the narrative, but later it will prove to be a detriment when Rebekah attempts to take the destiny of her younger son into her own hands instead of patiently relying on God's plan.  After a meeting with the Unnamed Servant, Isaac took Rebekah as his bride.  Isaac loved Rebekah and the promised line was to continue through their descendants.

**Question:** Where had Isaac been living before he came back to the Negeb, probably to Beersheba ("well of the oath")?  What was the significance of that place?  See [Gen 16:13-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v13); [25:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v11).
**Answer:** He was at the well of Lahai Roi between Kadesh-Barnea and Bered.  This was the well where Hagar was sitting when the Angel of Yahweh sent her back to Sarah when Hagar was pregnant with Ishmael.  It may also be the same well which saved Ishmael's life in [Gen 21:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v19).  Isaac will come to make his home by this well.

**Question:** When did Isaac come to love his wife?  What is significant about when his love for his bride began?
**Answer:** After they were married.  Marital love is based upon a mutual trust and commitment bound by covenant in a shared life with God as the center of the marital union.  Love before marriage is not as important as the love that grows after marriage.

The fathers of the Church saw the Unnamed Servant as a symbolic "type" of God the Holy Spirit.

**Question:** Compare the major players in this narrative with the Most Holy Trinity and the Church.
**Answer:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Just Father**  | Abraham  | Yahweh, God the Father  |
| **Righteous Son**  | Isaac  | Jesus the Son  |
| **Servant**  | Unnamed Servant  | Holy Spirit  |
| **The Bride**  | Rebecca  | The Church  |

**Question:**Why did the Church fathers use the name "The Unnamed Servant" for God the Holy Spirit?  What is his mission in the New Covenant?

**Answer:** God the Holy Spirit is the only person of the Trinity not to have a personal name.  It is His mission to bring the "Bride"= the Church, to the Bridegroom = Christ: *However, when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth...* ([Jn 16:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john16.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v13); also see [Jn 14:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john14.htm#v26); [15:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john15.htm#v26)).

**Question:** How is Rebekah's preparation a symbol for those of us in covenant with Christ in the Universal (Catholic) Church?  Compare the virgin Rebekah's preparation in Genesis 24:64-65 with Lot's hesitation in [Genesis 19:15-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v15) and the disastrous result of a foolish life in the light of Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins in [Matthew 25:1-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew25.htm#v1).  Quote the significant verse from the parable.

**Answer:** Like Rebekah, each of us must heed Jesus' warning in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and prepare ourselves to be ready to receive our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.  He is expecting to receive His Bride upon His return and His Bride must be ready when He comes'whether is coming is at the end of our earthly lives or in His promised Second Advent.  To hesitate like Lot, instead of being ready like Rebekah, will lead to disaster instead of divine delight: *Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants (virgins) arrived later.  "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us."  But he replied, "In truth I tell you I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour* ([Mt 25:10b-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew25.htm#v10)).

Please remember this encounter with the bride at the well as "the encounter at the well #1."  Be watchful for more wells and more future brides.  Repetitions of words, phrases or events in Scripture are significant signs that contribute to the interpretation of the biblical text.  Any repetition of three events points forward to a more significant event in salvation history, like the 3 events of the abduction of a patriarch's bride which points to God's bride, Israel, being delivered out of Egypt.

**Questions for group discussion:**

In [Galatians 4:21-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians4.htm#v21), St. Paul will allegorize the story of Sarah versus Hagar, associating the stubborn continuation of Old Covenant Judaism with Hagar and Ishmael and New Covenant Christianity with Sarah and Isaac.

**Question:** Please read [Galatians 4:21-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians4.htm#v21) and [Romans 9:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v7).  How did St. Paul allegorize the story of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians? What is his message to Christians in both the Galatians and in the Romans passages?   What is the conflict and what is the promise? What Scripture from Genesis chapter 21 does St. Paul quote in the Romans passage?
**Answer:** The conflict is human will versus sovereign grace.  It is through sovereign grace that God's promises reach fulfillment through the birth of a supernatural son and not through human planning.  The Jews claimed their inheritance from God through the promises made to Abraham, but St. Paul counters that not all the children born to Abraham became "children of God" (i.e., Ishmael and Abraham's sons by Keturah).  It isn't physical descent that counted in God's covenant formation in Abraham's time, nor does physical descent (human will) count in the New Covenant formation in which the promises to Abraham are fulfilled: *It is not that God's promise has failed.  Not all born Israelites belong to Israel, and not all the descendants of Abraham count as his children, for 'Isaac is the one through whom your Name will be carried on.'  That is, it is not by being children through physical descent that people become children of God; it is the children of the promise that are counted as the heirs* ([Rom 9:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v7); quoting God's promise to Abraham in [Gen 21:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v12)).

Some historians and biblical scholars have suggested that the worship of Yahweh was an adaptation of the worship of other regional gods of the Canaanites or Egyptians.  The pantheon of pagan gods of the Canaanites and Egyptians included gods who were representations of nature; for example: Nuit the Egyptian goddess of the night, Baal the Canaanite storm god, Horus the Egyptian god personified as a hawk, and Sin the moon god of Ur.  In the mid 14th century BC the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (18th Dynasty, New Kingdom), who changed his name to Akhenaton, rejected Egypt's pantheon of gods in favor of the one Egyptian god, the god of the sun, Aton (Aten), represented by a sun disk (c. 1348 BC).  Many historians hail Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton as the first monotheist, but Abraham (2000 -1900 BC), the monotheist, lived centuries earlier than Akhenaton, and the children of Israel's 430 year sojourn in Egypt would have introduced the Egyptians, with whom they intermarried, to the concept of only one supreme God.

**Question:** What differences are there between Yahweh and the pagan gods of the Canaanites and Egyptians?
**Answer:**

1. The God worshipped by Abraham and his descendants, the children of Israel, and by the New Covenant children of God, is One omnificent and omnipresent God.  Worship of Yahweh is, and has always been, monotheistic.
2. God was not personified through the elements of nature: the sun, moon, stars, or animals; these were strictly objects of God's creation.
3. Yahweh is a god of history not a god of mythology.  Pagan gods have origin myths but Yahweh has no beginning and no ending.  He is the God, who in real time, intervenes in the history of mankind to bring man to fulfill the destiny for which he was created: to live in eternally with God.
4. Yahweh is not anthropomorphic.  He does not marry mortals, as many of the pagan gods did, nor does He engage in mortal pursuits like the pagan gods.  Although anthropomorphic language was used in Scripture to accommodate humanity's limited understanding of the attributes and nature of God who is spirit, God is not just a spiritual being'He is the eternal Being.
5. God is a unity of One.  He does not have a female deity consort as was common among pagan gods (i.e. the principal Egyptian male and female deities Osiris and Isis).  In fact, in biblical Hebrew there is no word for "goddess."
6. Thousands of images have been found of Canaanite gods, but no images identified by an inscription as Yahweh have ever been found at archaeological sites in the Holy Land.  It is man who is the "image" of God.
7. Pagan gods practiced all the sins of man: lying, adultery, coveting, etc.  There is an absence of morality among most pagan deities, while Yahweh's attributes include the perfection of righteousness and justice.  Yahweh also demands a strict moral code among those in covenant with Him.
8. The concept of a god swearing an oath and entering into a binding covenant relationship with man is unique to Yahweh's relationship with His people.

Endnotes:

[1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note1). Sarah's giving of her slave-girl to her husband when she was unable to have a child and Abraham's decision to expel the slave's son so that he could not challenge the legal status of Isaac are actions that are legislated in the civil laws of the region at about the time Sarah and Abraham lived.The Nuzi tablets, which recorded the customs of a predominantly Hurrian population in the region of the eastern Tigris River in the 15th century BC, also reflected the legal and cultural traditions of the region from the 2nd to the 1st millenniums BC.   Among the documents, a marriage contract obliged a wife to provide her husband with a substitute should she prove to be barren.  If a son was born from such a slave substitution, the document included the stipulation that the expulsion of the slave and her son by the chief wife was forbidden.  The protection of a slave woman who had borne a child by her master from her master's chief wife was also a law in the Code of Hammurabi.  However, the Law Code of Lipit-Ishtar stipulated that if a slave woman who had given birth to the master's children was given her freedom, she and the children could be sent away and the children could not lay a claim to the master's estate upon his death, protecting the inheritance rights of the legitimate heirs.   In addition to these civil laws, a 15th century marriage contract found in the ruins of Alalakh, in what is today Northern Syria, recorded that a father could disregard the primogeniture of the eldest son as his heir in favor of a younger son (John Bright, *A History of Israel,* page 79; *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* page 160 no. 25, 172).  The crisis in Abraham's family is a reflection of the kind of problems faced by society in Abraham's time, and the laws of the period reflect that Abraham and Sarah's actions were common to the period.

[2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note2). Hittites: In the Old Testament these people are called Hethites, "sons of Heth" ([Gen 10:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v15)).  The Hittites were a people of Indo-European origin who began to exert their influence in Anatolia sometime before 2000BC.  By the 15th century BC the Hittites had become the regional power in Anatolia. Anatolia is the land bridge between Asia and Europe, usually called "Asia Minor."  The region is an elevated plateau enclosed by mountains in what is today modern Turkey.  The Hittites became a regional power, forming the Old Hittite Empire (1900 – sometime in the 16th century BC), controlling Anatolia, N. Syria, and even invading Mesopotamia as far south as Babylon.  The Hittites were the first people known to have developed the light horse-drawn chariot, which was the dominant offensive military weapon for a thousand years in Near Eastern warfare.  After the collapse of the old dynasty a new dynasty revived the Empire in about 1425 BC, expanding Hittite influence southward into the Levant.  The struggle for control of the Levant between the Neo-Hittite Empire and the Egyptian Empire led to a major battle with the Egyptians at Kadesh (Syria) in 1285 BC, which ended in a draw and produced the oldest documented international treaty between two regional powers. The Neo-Hittite Empire collapsed in the early 12th century BC from pressures cause by the incursion of the "Sea Peoples" and with the growing power of Assyria.  The Hittite Empire came to and end with the destruction of their capital in 1180 BC and the people were absorbed into the Assyrian Empire (*Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 3, "Hittite History,* pages 219-224;and *vol. 4, "Kadesh-on-the-Orontes,"* page 3; *Dictionary of the Bible,* McKenzie, S.J., pages 363-64).

[3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note3). Document Hypotheses Theory: A theory concerning the literary composition of the first five books of the Old Testament, first introduced by the Protestant scholars Graf and Wellhausen at the end of the 19th century AD.  According to this theory, which has been expanded since its first introduction, the Pentateuch was not written by Moses but is a product of collective authorship, a collection for four strands of oral traditions which came to be labeled the JEDP: J (for the German letter Y) = Yahwistic, E = Elohistic, D = Deuteronomic, and P = Priestly oral tradition.  According to the theory these four oral stands, which were handed down by storytellers, were woven together by different redactors into a single text and appeared in its present version sometime in the 6th century BC.  No two scholars agree, however, as to which passages in the Pentateuch should be assigned to which strand. The so-called E and Y (J) traditions were the first divisions proposed by Graf and Wellhausen and are based solely on those passages in which God is referred to either as Elohim or Yahweh, suggesting that God was only known by one name or the other in each of the two oral traditions.  The Catholic Church and Catholic scholars rejected this theory of the Bible's origins until the theory began to be taught by biblical scholars in Catholic seminaries and universities in the liberal 1960s.  Today this theory is, unfortunately, widely accepted by most Protestant and Catholic scholars and is accepted as fact instead of as a theory without a shred of documented evidence'no separate written "stands" of a separate text have ever been found.

[4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note4). Arameans: In non-biblical sources the Arameans are first mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1112-1074 BC).  The Arameans settled in northern Syria and in southern Babylonia, where they intermarried with the Chaldeans.  Haran was an Aramean commercial center and Abraham's nephew Laban is called an Aramean ([Gen 25:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v20); [28:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v5). [31:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v20), [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v24)).  The Arameans developed several important commercial city-states in Syria which became major caravan stops.  The Hebrews affixed "Aram" as either a prefix or a suffix to Aram-Naharaim (Aram between the rivers = Mesopotamia) and Paddan-Aram ([Num 23:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers23.htm#v7); [Dt 23:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy23.htm#v5)).  At the height of Aramean power Damascus was their capital ([2 Kng 8:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings8.htm#v7)).  Aramaic, the language of the Arameans whose cities became important commercial centers, became the common tongue of the region.  It was the common language of Judea and Samaria in the first century AD and the language Jesus spoke in the Gospels.  It is the parent tongue of Arabic.  Israel's relationship with the Arameans was sometimes hostile ([2 Kng 6:8-7:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings6.htm#v8); [13:22-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings13.htm#v22)), but the two cultures remained commercially and culturally close.  The Aramean city-states prospered until the Assyrian conquests of 9th – 8th centuries BC, when the Arameans were absorbed into the great Assyrian Empire.  The collapse of the last of the Aramean city-states and their domination by Assyria in the 8th century BC opened the way for the Assyrian conquest of Northern Kingdom of Israel.

[5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note5). Names of Abraham's family members in Mesopotamia that are still towns today or have been identified in other documents (*Archaeological Study Bible,* pages 22, 48, 54, 73):

* Haran: Abraham's brother who fathered Lot.  The city of Haran is located in Turkey about 10 miles north of the Syrian order.  It was located in a strategically important site on the historic east-west trade route which linked the Tigris River caravan route with Way of the Sea trade route that came out of Egypt and up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.  It was one of northern Mesopotamia's most important commercial centers and was also a religious center for worship of the moon god, Sin.  Haran is mentioned in the ancient documents of the Babylonians and in the Mari texts (18th century BC).
* Serug: Abraham's great-grandfather who fathered Nahor. The name corresponds to the place called Sargi in Assyrian inscriptions of the 7th century BC and is today the modern town of Suruc, 35 miles northwest of Haran.
* Nahor: Abraham's grandfather who fathered Terah and the name of one of Abraham's brothers.  The town of Nahor is mentioned in [Genesis 24:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v10) as the home of the descendants of Bethuel son of Nahor ([Gen 24:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v24)).  This town is also mentioned in the 18th century BC Mari texts and in Assyrian 7th century BC documents which refer to it as Til Nakhiri, which means "Mound of Nahor."  The location of the ancient city has not been found but ancient documents place its location in the Balikh River valley south of Haran.
* Terah: Father of Abraham.  A town named Til Turahi, "Mount of Terah," is mentioned in 9th century BC Assyrian texts as being north of Haran on the Balikh River.

[6](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note6). See [note 2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm#note2) on "Hittites."

[7](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note7). Three texts from the ancient city of Ugarit record transactions for the purchase of land for 400 shekels (Waltke, page 320).

[8](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note8). Hebrew scholars since the 2nd century AD have rejected the word *almah* (used in the prophecy of [Is 7:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/iasiah/isaiah7.htm#v14) as quoted in [Mt 1:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v23), for a prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth) as meaning "virgin," even though the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) translated the Hebrew *alma* as "virgin" in the Greek = *parthenos.* Instead, Jewish scholars came to identify the Hebrew word *bethula* as "virgin," making Isaiah's prophecy loose its connection to the virgin birth of Jesus.  However, Sacred Scripture presents a problem with this interpretation of the word *bethula* as "virgin."  In the Old Testament the word *bethula* is used to identify a "young woman of marriage age," whether she is married or unmarried.  In [Esther 2:17-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/esther/esther2.htm#v17) the word *bethula* is applied to the new members of the king's harem both before and after they had spent their wedding night with the king: *and the king loved Esther above all the other women; none of the other virgins (bethula) found so much favor and approval with him.  And he set the royal crown on her head...  [..]. And when the virgins (bethula) were gathered together the second time* (after their wedding night with the king)*...Esther had not revealed her kindred or her people...*  And [Joel 1:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel1.htm#v8) the *bethula* cannot be a virgin since she has a husband: *Wail, like a virgin (bethula) girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth!*  If *bethula* did indeed mean "virgin"'a woman who had never had intercourse with a man, why was it necessary in the verse about the *bethula* Rebekah to add to the text of [Gen 24:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v16) the phrase: *no man had touched her*? (for Scripture quotes see *Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English vol. II, page1306; vol. III,* page 2093).

[9](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_11.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note9). In Old Testament times a woman's movements were not restricted and the wearing of a veil in public was not required; i.e., see [Gen 12:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v14) where the Egyptians were able to "see" Sarah's beauty.  In [Gen 38:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis38.htm#v14) Tamar covered herself with a veil to show she was ready for a sexual encounter, like a "bride," a suggestive device employed by prostitutes.  Later, the custom would change.  Wherever the Old Covenant people were under foreign domination the seclusion of women, unknown in earlier times, became the common practice.  Under the rule of the Syrians the mother of the seven martyred sons in 4 Maccabees 18:7  said: *I was a pure maiden and I strayed not from my father's house,* and Philo of Alexandria, Egypt, wrote that it was preferable for women, especially unmarried girls, not to go out of the house at all (Philo, *Special Law. III,* 169).  At the end of the 1st century BC and in Jesus' time when Judea was under the foreign domination of the Romans, a Jewish woman was always veiled: *When a Jewess of Jerusalem left the house, her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized* (Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, page 358*).  A woman only went uncovered in her wedding procession, and then only if she were a virgin and not a widow (*Mishnah: Ketubim 2:1*; also seeJosephus, *Antiquities of the Jews 3:11.6 [270]*. St. Paul advised prudent and modest Christian women to cover their heads with a veil, especially when worshiping ([1 Cor 11:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corintians/1corinthians11.htm#v6), [13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians11.htm#v13)).