



Lesson 15

Lessons in Humility

In our last lesson we saw how Abraham's great faith in God strengthened him to take Isaac, his son, and prepare to sacrifice him as God asked of him. God stopped him at the last moment and made the seventh and final promise to him. This looked forward to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abraham lived for another 50-60 years after this incident but there is no further record of God speaking to him and testing his faith further.

The Death of Sarah

In chapter 23 we read firstly that Sarah, Abraham's wife died in Hebron at the age of 127. She bore Isaac when she was 91 and her husband is now faced with a problem. God had promised him all of the land in which he lived but at this time he did not own any of it, in fact he had no place where he could bury Sarah.

Abraham went to a man called Ephron, who was a tribal chief, looking for a family burial place. Ephron told him that he could bury his dead amongst the dead of Ephron's tribe, the Hittites. This was not what Abraham wanted and finally he bought the cave of Machpelah from Ephron as a family burial place.

When we read things like this in the Bible, sometimes it is difficult to understand why they are there and what lessons they hold for us. However, the Bible says that '*all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*'. So we must search this account to see what it teaches us.

Remember that God had promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inhabit the land of Canaan forever. But now, when Sarah dies he owns no part of it at all, not even a small place where he can bury his wife!

But Abraham does not complain to God about this, he does not act arrogantly and claim the burial place as his right from Ephron. He buys it and pays the full asking price without argument. Twice we read about Abraham's attitude.

'Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land'. Genesis 23:7
'Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land'. Genesis 23:12

Notice Abraham's humility. He had learned to trust God absolutely in his life, whatever happened to him he knew that God's promises would be fulfilled. Even if he died without owning the land, he knew that he would be resurrected from the dead and be given immortal life so that he could have the land forever. It was this faith that now helped him to behave in this way.

This is a lesson for us in our lives. God has promised us a place in His kingdom if we believe His promises like Abraham and if we become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if we do this God does not promise us that suddenly our lives will become easier and all the things we would like now, in this life, will be given to us. God asks us to live in faith, trusting that, even if we die, He will raise us from the dead with Abraham and give us eternal life in the kingdom to come. The writer to the Hebrews summed up this faith in these words.

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."
Hebrews 11:13

A Wife for Isaac

We have seen that Abraham had to buy a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. The Hittites were the descendants of Heth who was a son of Canaan. They were related to the evil people who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah and they were not worshippers of the one true God – the God of Abraham.





It seems likely that the invitation of Ephron to Abraham to live more closely amongst the Hittites worried Abraham. The time had come for Isaac, his son, to get married and he did not want him to marry an unbelieving Hittite. It was important that Isaac married someone who would share his beliefs but Abraham was too old to do anything about this by himself. So he entrusted the task to his oldest, most loyal servant.

“And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”
Genesis 24:2-4

Eliezer a Faithful Servant

We know who this servant was for we have read in chapter 15:

“But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”
Genesis 15:2-3

This was the law of the land. If a man died childless then his steward could claim all of his possessions. Abraham was a very rich man with many cattle and the prospect of inheriting a great fortune must have been very attractive to Eliezer. Then Isaac was born and it seemed that the opportunity to inherit was lost. Now the steward is asked by his master to go and find a wife for Isaac so that Abraham’s family line can continue!

Eliezer is sent back to the land where Abraham came from to find a wife for Isaac from amongst Abraham’s tribe. He went to the city where Nahor, Abraham’s brother, had settled to look for her. When he arrived he prayed to God for guidance ‘*O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham*’.

God answered his prayer and he meets Rebekah, Nahor’s granddaughter, who agrees to return with Eliezer to Canaan and marry Isaac. What trust she had in Abraham and Isaac to do this!

But it is the behaviour of the steward, Eliezer, that shines through this chapter. We have seen that Abraham bowed himself in humility before Ephron, trusting in God’s promises. Now we read that Eliezer behaved like this also. He says:

“Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.”
Genesis 24:48

Look also at verses 26 and 52. Eliezer is a wonderful example of an outsider who became part of Abraham’s family through faith. He could not inherit the Promised Land by himself because he was not a descendant of Abraham but he looked at Abraham’s faith and accepted his beliefs as his own. This included believing that Abraham would have a special descendant through whom God would fulfil all the promises made to him. Eliezer is the first Gentile (non-Jew) to accept these things and so he is a great example for us today. The Apostle Paul wrote of this principle in the Letter to the Galatians telling us how we can become part of Abraham’s family like Eliezer and share the promises also.

“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”
Galatians 3:29

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- Even though God promised Abraham the land he had to buy a burial plot for Sarah. In doing this he showed his humility and trust in God.
- Abraham would not allow Isaac to marry a non-believer but sent his servant to find him a wife from his own tribe.





- Eliezer, the servant, was a man of great faith and so became part of Abraham's family.

