

Stories From The Stable

Christmas Series

Genesis 24

Written By

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What could you possibly learn personally from a camel? A lot. During my first trip of Israel, we stopped in the Judean Wilderness to, you guessed it, ride camels. Sitting alongside the road, a large mother and her two children prepared themselves to give us a much needed adventure. They didn't let us down. Some folks from our tour group mounted the saddles on the smaller camels, leaving me, and a retired Marine, to take a trip with the massive female.

Before I knew it, the Marine jumped on to the saddle located just behind her hump at the rear, resulting in me getting the joy of riding "up front" in the bigger saddle. As I walked past the quiet mother camel just sitting there, she opened her mouth what seemed to be four feet wide and let out a primal scream. The sound and smell almost took me out, literally. I'll never forget her decayed brown teeth, with chunks of mushy cud stuck between them. Obviously, she had never seen a dentist in her lifetime of wandering the desert of Israel, nor did she know what dental floss is all about. I just stood there frozen and overcome by the smell of it all. I guess she was not too happy about me taking a tour with her.

After a few seconds, I moved toward the saddle, grabbed the saddle horn (or what resembled one), and started to throw my right leg over the top of it so I could sit down. That's when she all of a sudden stood up, leaving me dangling several feet off the ground. With people yelling at me to just pull myself up, the Bedouin realized that would never happen, so he, in customary fashion, webbed his fingers together to give me a much needed boost. A few struggling, air-sucking, laughing minutes later, I was prepared for the journey of lifetime.

Once she started moving, my immediate verbal response was the epitome of sound theological analysis: How in the world did Abraham ride one of these across the desert from Ur of Chaldees to Israel? How indeed. Talk about weird movement. In one moment your body is leaning to the front right, then the next thing you know your body is leaning to the back right, and then you're leaning to the front left, and so on and so forth. Believe me, a camel ride is really all about motion sickness.

Now, let's get back the question at hand. What can you personally learn from a camel? Where do I start? How about, "Don't do it. Save yourself." How about, "Don't walk in front of them, ever, unless you are in a hazmat suit with your own oxygen supply." How about, "Make sure the Marine sits up front, so you can take the easier-to-get-into back seat."

Here's another pertinent question: What can a camel teach us this Christmas season? Before we get into this, let me make two salient points. First, let's simply state they had to be either in or outside the stable of Christ for they were one of the modes of transportation, especially if you had some money. Don't you think some wealthy people enjoying the warmth of the inn had their camels valet parked in the stable of Christ? Sounds reasonable. Second, the Magi had to come to Israel on camels because this was their mode of traversing the dangerous, deadly desert separating Mesopotamia and Israel (Matthew 2:1). Having established the probability of their proximity to the birth story of Christ, and knowing how the Father employs the finest of details to speak spiritual truth, we posit, one more time, the question before us: What can a camel teach us this Christmas? Plenty, but for sake of time we need to limit our analysis to one theological point of interest.

What Can We Learn From The Camel?

Plenty, really more than we can cover in this one study. For our purposes, we'll set our sights on just one pragmatic concept.

Camels Teaches Us About The Fulfillment Of The Promise (Genesis 24:1-67)

What promise? The Abrahamic promise. What's that promise about? Simply put, God promised to bring the Promised Seed, the Messiah, through the Abraham and his people, the Israelites. And He would, also, give them a land to dwell in where the Messiah would eventually show himself a Davidic King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Genesis 12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:5, 18; 17:8, 19; 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2; Isaiah 2:1-5; 9:6-7, Jeremiah 23:5; 30:9; 33:17,21, 22, 26, 30; 34:23, etc.).¹ We see this ancient, eternal divine promise and covenant being worked out in Genesis 24 at the end of Abraham's life, and, you guessed it, camels are involved. You might need to read that again.

Let me paint a brief narrative picture for you because Genesis 24 is the longest chapter of the book, and knowing it would be an absolute MIRACLE for me to cover all these verses in the allotted time, this background info is so important. Verses 1 through 3 give us the snapshot of the problem behind the plot of this particular passage:

¹For a good overview of this wonderful, eternal covenant, cf. Charles Ryrie, *The Basis of Premillennial Faith* (Neptune: NJ, Loizeaux Brothers, 1981), 48-75,

¹ Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. ² Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, “Please place your hand under my thigh, ³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴ but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.

Isaac, the son of promise, was 40 years old at the time (Genesis 25:20), putting Abraham, the father of the coveted covenant, around 140 years of age. No wonder the biblical text says he was “advanced in age.” I’d say 140 is, pretty much, getting there. What was the old saint concerned about? That God would give his son, Isaac, a bride so the covenant could go forward as God promised. Yet, at 40, the field narrows, doesn’t it? The choices for a mate are, well, not as optimal, either, for, as some would say, “All the good ones are gone.”

What were the chances Isaac would find a good, godly wife? According to www.brainmeasures.com, which is an online calculation site used to determine the probability of a person getting married at forty, the chances were 32% for Isaac. Not bad, but not great . . . *but, then, there is the sovereign, providential will of God Almighty. Stats don’t trump His eternal plans, ever.* If you’re forty and single, place your hope in God’s leadership of your life, not on some statistical site. Nothing will thwart His perfect will for your life.

The unnamed main servant of Abraham had one issue with the dating request.

⁵ The servant said to him, “Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?”

No kidding. He understood why Abraham didn’t want a Canaanite girl for his boy. They were sexually and spiritually compromised. Yes, he understood the important of finding a pure, innocent, and godly young woman. But what was he supposed to do if he found her in Mesopotamia, a 424 camel ride from their region in Israel (as the crow flies), and she said, “I’m not going with you, a total stranger, to go to a land and marry a man I’ve never met.”

I love Abraham’s response:

⁶ Then Abraham said to him, “Beware that you do not take my son back there! ⁷ “The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give this land,’ He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ “But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Why did Abraham say what he said in verse 6? He didn't want Isaac leaving Israel, the land of promise, meeting a girl in his former homeland, falling in love with her and staying there for that wouldn't have been what God wanted.

After this brief patriarchal warning, Abraham waxed eloquent about the divine land promise wedded to the Abrahamic Covenant (as listed above), and about God's angelic assistance in the task at hand (yes, God can even use angels to help you when you, as a parent, are seeking the right mate for your child ☺). But he did leave a back door open, if this endeavor turned out not to be God's perfect will. "If she won't come with you, then you are free from the oath you've made with me." Abraham was a class spiritual act.

Now, this is where the story gets most interesting. Enter the camels, all ten of them.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

Moving north through Damascus along the chosen ancient "highway" to Mesopotamia, the servant rode 100 miles to Aleppo, and then another 80 miles east toward Nahor, located near the Balih River . . . an offshoot of the mighty Euphrates (As a sidelight, his presence in Aleppo shows there is hope for this beleaguered area for the messianic king will, in time, bring PEACE to this land in the kingdom age).

When the tired travelers finally made it to Nahor (unfortunately, they didn't have Dramamine if this was their first camel ride), Moses tells us what happened next:

¹¹ He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

The servant strategically placed himself where he knew the young ladies of the town would congregate. Smart man. Today he'd probably park and wait at the Fair Oaks Mall outside of Forever 21.

Note the prayer of this godly man, and, yes, you should be in prayer all throughout the dating process for so much is at stake. Are you? This man was. He wanted God's will above all else.

¹² He said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ "Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; ¹⁴ now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'— may she *be the one* whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.

The test for finding the divinely appointed life mate for Isaac was two-fold. First, he said let the girl be the first one who will positively respond by giving him (them) a drink, and two, let the girl offer, without prompting, to water all the camels. This is some kind of test. Watering a man

is one thing. Watering a camel is quite another. Say a thirsty man can drink two eight ounce glasses of water. A camel, on the other hand, is a walking water tanker. Contrary to popular belief, the camel's hump doesn't hold water, just energy rich fat for food storage (please, high schoolers, don't use this a biblical argument for going to *Five Guys* daily). The water is held in the digestive and circulatory system, and the typical camel can drink fifty-three gallons at one time IN A FEW MINUTES. That's why I say this was some kind of test. While a young woman might give a dusty, dirty, thirsty traveler a drink from the local well, what's the probability she'd go the extra mile and water ten camels? You do the math. Ten camels times fifty three gallons equals five hundred and thirty gallons, Wow. Who wouldn't want a woman like this, right men? The servant looked for godly, pure, and powerful young woman, a hard worker, and he prayed to that end, for this would be the type of woman to carry the Abrahamic promise forward.

Did the servant find her? Immediately. Yes, immediately. Sometimes God makes you wait in the dating game to accomplish His lofty purposes, be what they may (viz., it's probably got something to do with shaping, honing, and deepening you spiritually and personally). Isaac waited for 40 years. But now, in one brief encounter at a well, some 400 miles away, all the loose dating dots of Isaac's life fell into providential place.

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

Underscore the adverb "before." The servant no sooner uttered the dating prayer out of his mouth than God answered. Don't tell me God doesn't hear our prayers, or that He's not humorous, or that He can't answer quickly if He sovereignly chooses to. Not only did she offer him a drink, and out of her hand of all things, but she, without prodding, asked if she could water all the camels, plural. Let's go back to the math. Ten camels times fifty three gallons equals five hundred and thirty gallons, which, in turn, meant Rebekah moved 4,240 pounds of water (figuring water at 8 pounds per gallon). Not only was she beautiful, pure, and godly, she was powerful/strong . . . a tough woman who'd be perfect as the wife of the leader of the up and coming nation God would build for the Messiah. Lemuel would write about a great woman like her years later in Proverbs 31.

Once the camels were all watered, the servant then discovered she was, in fact, distant kinfolk to Abraham:

And she said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor" (Genesis 24:24).

Bingo! This was THE right woman, per the request of Abraham. Bethuel was one of eight children of Nahor and Milcah (Huz, Genesis 22:21; Kemuel, Genesis 22:21; Chesed, Genesis 22:22; Hazo, Genesis 22:22; Pildash, Genesis 22:22; and Jidlaph, Genesis 22:22). Who was Nahor? The brother of, you guessed it again, Abraham, whose father was Terah, who, in turn, came from the line of Shem, the son of Noah (Genesis 5:32; 10:21), who, in turn, was the line of the Messiah as promised by God (“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’” Genesis 4:25). Amazing.

Even though it didn’t look like God was a work, even though the biblical text doesn’t say God was outrightly working, even though the dating trip was fraught with all kinds of potential hazards . . . like what happens if the chosen bride-to-be won’t come, even though finding her would be like finding trying to find a lost diamond studded earring in the sand at the beach, even though the odds were against the servant of finding a suitable young woman from the people of Abraham, after all, the odds of her being married already were great, God providentially had His loving, guiding hand on the wheel all the time so the way for the Messiah could be opened up some 2,021 years later (subtracting Isaac’s age of 40 from his birth in 2066 B.C. brings us to 2026 B.C.² Subtract 5 B.C. from this for the birth of Christ, and you get 2,021 years where God was working and through all the mechanizations of governments and people’s lives to usher in the Messiah). As the servant rightfully says two times in this narrative context, “*The LORD has led me*” (Genesis 24:27, 48), and, indeed, He had in the most surprising, amusing, and definitive fashion so the messianic promise would be eventually realized in time and space.

And the camels saw and heard it all. Put differently, God employed camels for one of the most important dating journeys of all time. He used the right animals at the right time, to make sure the right man ran into the right woman who would become the right woman for the promised son of the covenant, so the right man, Jesus, could come and be the Messiah and Savior.

How did the young woman, Rebekah, respond to all of these divinely ordered coincidences? We’ll skip all the cultural negotiations with her brother, Laban, and get right to the heart of the matter. At the end of the day, she could have said, “I’m not going anywhere. Never been to Israel and don’t want to go now. I don’t want to leave my friends and my parents. I don’t want to ride over 400 miles on a camel to meet and marry a man I don’t even know what he looks like.” Admit it, young ladies, you would probably say “No” if a potential husband popped up like this. Imagine the modern conversation. “Let me see. You, a buddy of Steve, whom I’ve never met, want me to go meet and marry him simply because I am distant kin and I came out of the *Forever 21* store in the mall, and I stopped and offered to buy you a Starbucks, and one for all your friends as well? Right?”

What did Rebekah do? Read on and you’ll see a woman of faith in action.

⁵⁷ And they said, “We will call the girl and consult her wishes.” ⁵⁸ Then they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will go.” ⁵⁹ Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham’s

²Eugene Merrill (one of my former Old Testament professors at Dallas Theological Seminary), “Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (July-September 1980), 241-251.

servant and his men. ⁶⁰ They blessed Rebekah and said to her, “May you, our sister, Become thousands of ten thousands, and may your descendants possess The gate of those who hate them.” ⁶¹ Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed. ⁶² Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev. ⁶³ Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. ⁶⁴ Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. ⁶⁵ She said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?” And the servant said, “He is my master.” Then she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

Ah, this is most interesting. Rebekah, the great woman of faith, saw the hand of God written all over this dating dilemma, and she responded by climbing up on a CAMEL to ride 424 arduous, dusty, hot, smelly, uncomfortable miles to meet and marry the man God had specifically chosen for her. Together they would have a son they’d call Jacob, and he, in turn, would become the father of the twelve tribes of Judah (Genesis 46), and from one of those tribes, Judah, would come the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus, the Christ (Matthew 1:1-17), the baby of Bethlehem . . . the city of the great David empire.

This is why, I believe, it was probably quite appropriate for a camel to be there in the stable with Jesus that starry, still night. A camel had sovereignly brought the servant of Abraham to the bride of the messianic lineage, so it would be most logical for a camel to be resting on the straw when another divinely chosen woman, Mary, actually brought the Messiah in to the world.

Who says God’s ways are not past finding out? Who says God is not in control? Nothing or no one would stop Him bringing the Messiah, and He employed a few camels to get His wise work done. My friend, this Christmas I hope and pray you see His fingerprints working all over your life so you can come to know and follow His perfect leadership. And if you already know Him, I trust and pray you will trust and pray as you, like the servant of Abraham, seek to live a life of fearless faith.