

Series: "Genesis...The Beginnings Continued"

Sermon: "Where'd He Get His Wife? Part 1"

Text: Genesis 22:20-24

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- Do the details of life ever get confusing for you?
- I pulled up to the FBC building last week to find *Jameson* guarding the front entrance. Over the years, I have encountered bears, deer, and an elk, even a naked man when arriving at FBC. I'll be honest, even with that variety, I never expected to find a 1 ½ horned goat at our front door waiting to greet me.
- Life can be so confusing!! But, if you were listening closely, you already have a clue to the explanation for this particular confusion in the fact that I could tell you the goat's name was "Jameson." You already know there is more to the story than the unexpected appearance of a goat.
- Very soon after meeting the goat, I met a young woman who had driven up in a sort of "hippy bus" with the words "love," "peace" and similar sentiments spray-painted on the sides. She asked me if the goat was in the way. Then she told me he had escaped after she had taken him to the vet clinic next door to have a plastic bag he had eaten removed from one end or the other.
- The procedure evidently required anesthesia and painkillers so we were dealing with a stoned 1 ½-horn goat whose name, she informed was *Jameson*.
- Trying to start an evangelistic conversation, I suggested to her that was a rather formal name for a goat. She replied that was his name when she got him. I wasn't aware you could not change a goat's name.
- Anyway, the young lady and her gat Jameson stayed around for a while so he could sober up and she could coax him back into the bus. Her deadline was 5:30 because the elders were coming to meet and they might be hungry.

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- What in the world might this confusion, name and explanation that resolved things have to do with our study of *Genesis*? There are no goats in the passage for today but there was some confusion for me in need of explanatory resolution and a single name is the clue.
- We are in the last part of *Genesis* chapter 22. Most of the chapter, which we considered last week, is the climactic story of Abraham's faith and obedience in sacrificing his promised heir, Isaac.
- In that story, we learned that Abraham rightly "*feared God*"—that is, he gave the LORD the right place in his life because of who the LORD is. We learned he trusted and obeyed the LORD even above his own feelings—even through the darkness of human confusion—even when doing so would cost him what was most precious to him in this world.
- If we can grasp what was happening to and in Abraham when God tested him this way, it is no wonder Abraham's story and this event in his life are enshrined in the NT book of *Hebrews* chapter 11 which we sometimes call, "*The Hall of FAITH.*"
- No wonder Abraham is the focus of chapter 4 of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans in which Paul addresses justification and life coming by faith rather than by our own autonomous goodness or good works. Paul designates Abraham as "the Father of all who believe"—the Father of all who have faith in God instead of themselves or some other means of life.
- But, interestingly I am confused in *Genesis* 22 at what comes next—what comes after this great demonstration of faith in God that makes Abraham the father of all those of faith in God who come after him. I'm confused because I come to the end of this chapter, verses 20-24, and I find a sort of 1 ½ horn goat waiting at the door by comparison.

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- I find in these verses a list of the offspring of Abraham's brother Nahor, both by his wife and by his semi-wife, a concubine. Putting aside the confusion that polygamy and accepted concubinage immediately brings to the mind of a lad raised up in the morality of conservative, Fundamentalist Baptist theology—putting that aside, I am still confused.
- Why did Moses, under the perfecting inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put this bit of a genealogy of Nahor here? His name, forgive me Nahor, I had long forgotten. He has played no visible role in the story since Abraham moved to the Promised Land.
- Think about that as I read the verses. Why are these verses here at the climactic point and the concluding events of Abraham's story?
- **READ Genesis 22:20-24**
- Why are these verses here at the climactic and concluding points of "Abraham's story? That was trick question that begs the question by assuming it was **Abraham's** story. In two ways, it is not his story.
- Remember that Hebrew word, "**toledote**" that we ran into some months ago? Moses uses it as a literary divider in the book. The word sometimes is translated "generations of" speaking of the offspring or lineage that came from a certain person for whom the "**toledote**" is named.
- But, remember, it is not always a person and not always just speaking of a lineage from human reproduction. So, "**Creation**" has a "**toledote**."
- For this reason I think of "**toledote**" as indicating a more general idea like "this is what came from something or someone" whether that is a *something* like creation or a *someone*, in this case where we are in Genesis. In this way, each *genesis* "**toledote**" is telling the story that comes from a source.

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- If you are like me, you may have forgotten whose "*toledote*"—whose story this is. It must be Abraham's right? No, it is not Abraham's *toledote*. We have to turn all the way back to chapter 11 and verse 27 to see the designation of whose *toledote* we have been following for these weeks. **READ Genesis 11: 27-32**
- We have been studying what came from Terah, Abraham's father. What could be more important than Abraham the Father of those of faith coming from him? Well, maybe nothing more important came from him but still something very important—important enough to mention both here and in chapter 22 and it has something to do with that forgotten brother of Abraham named Nahor.
- So technically, this is not Abraham's *toledote*—not his story—not simply what came from Abraham but rather it is Terah's.
- Why does it matter? Because the story Moses is telling is broader than one man of great faith. Abraham is heroic in his faith but he is not the hero of the story of *Genesis*. We should be careful not to make him that as we sometimes do in our moralizing stories that make humans the example—the point of the story when we are not.
- God is the hero of *Genesis*. Ultimately, *Genesis* is telling the story of God and his interaction with the creatures he made to serve as his image bearers in the Creation.
- Although we don't always see it. We tend to get focused on the sub-stories of humans we might choose to copy or condemn. However, God is always at work in bigger ways bringing about the complete story only he can produce.
- One reason verses 20-24 of *Genesis* are here is to remind us God is working on a bigger story than the story of one great human hero like Abraham.

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- Moses is about to close the *toledote* of Terah. The next *toledote* will be that of Ishmael and then the *toledote* of Isaac. Abraham plays a big part in the record of the *toledote* of his father Terah but he is not the whole story of what came from Terah.
- Part of the reason this passage struck me like a goat named Jameson meeting me at the front door is because it is a mini-genealogical list. I have trouble keeping track of all the names and connections in the genealogies in *Genesis*.
- When you combine that with polygamous marriages and marriages of close family members, it confuses me even more. Many months ago I suggested to you that many of our marriage regulations such as you can't marry your half-sister as Abraham did with Sarah, came later. I suspect God was protecting against the broken genetics as that brokenness got worse.
- I still don't have a good explanation for polygamy because I believe the pattern with Adam and Eve was one man and one wife for life. That pattern changed quickly and, in some cases in the early chapters was an expression of autonomous power. "Look what I can do God! I am so powerful I can marry many women!"
- When it comes to polygamy I suspect it comes under the heading of God uses imperfect humans to accomplish his plan. I too am an imperfect human in many ways—not polygamy—but I trust God can still use me as I trust him even in my imperfection.
- Let's keep in mind as we consider the fact that God can still use us in our imperfections, that the grace in which we live is not given to us so that we can live lives of increasing imperfections knowing we can still be part of God's plan. Both Paul and Peter write in their letters that grace and its freedom are never meant to be motivators or excuses for increasing sin but rather increasing righteousness.

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- I have called this sermon "Where'd He Get His Wife Part 1" in honor of all the smart people skeptics out there who think they have killed a big one invalidating the Bible by presenting us with this question that never seems to go away: "Where did Cain get his wife?"
- Reading the text of *Genesis 4* tells me that Cain had a wife before he struck out on his own and built his own city in Nod called Enoch. In order for this to be true, Cain married either a sister or perhaps a niece.
- The fact that we are not given information about sisters and/or nieces does not mean there were none. There was more going on in God's larger story than the focus of the individual stories.
- Here in *Genesis 22*, the "he" and the "his" in the title "where'd he get his wife" is not referring to Cain. And, we shall see that, in this case where "he" gets "his" wife is a very important matter.
- However, we are not quite there yet so, once again, let us put aside the potential confusion for many of us brought into these verses by polygamy and consanguinity in the ancient marriages and see if a **name** might help resolve any confusion as to the point of Moses telling us this small additional part of the *toledote* of Terah—one other small piece of his story.
- Please don't answer these next questions out loud yet. Do you find any name in the list that sticks out to you? (It is not Jameson!) Did Moses include it in any special way that highlights that name? If so, why did he do this?
- Verse 20 starts with Abraham learning Milcah is a mother as well as Sarah. Does a focus on being a mother clue us into something here?
- Milcah, we just read back in *Genesis 11*, is the daughter of Haran who was Lot's Father as well. Milcah and Lot are at least half brother and sister.

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- More importantly, Milcah has borne sons to Abraham's brother the aforementioned but oft forgotten, Nahor. She may also have borne daughters but we don't need to know that here.
- If you are following closely this confusing lineage, Milcah and Nahor are niece and uncle. But, that's not the important part of the story.
- The sons born to Milcah, Abraham's niece and Nahor, Abraham's brother, are likely in order of birth since firstborn is emphasized (and, as always feel free to borrow any of these names for naming your own children): Uz (the firstborn), Buz, Kemuel, Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph AND lastly Bethuel.
- These 8 sons of Nahor are with Milcah but this is not all of Nahor's sons.
- Nahor had a **concubine** named Reumah. Bruce Waltke tells me this English word used to translate here means she was a second-class wife that Nahor acquired without having to pay her family "bride-money" and this meant she possessed fewer rights as a wife.
- Again, I've got just one "first-class" wife and that is quite enough for me. As often as I fail to reflect the character of God in a relationship with one wife, I would never even try to imagine how hard it might be for me to live godly with two or more.
- Nahor sons with Reumah are Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.
- Other than the fact that this is a whole bunch of sons, 12, neither of these listings is what is most important here.
- What is likely most important? Well, if you were reading along with me as I listed these sons you noticed I skipped a comment made following one son, Bethuel. Bethuel was not the firstborn son. He was likely the youngest son of Milcah.
- How many times will the LORD need to tell the Israelites that "my ways are not your ways!" Their way, and we'll see this clearly in the

stories to come, is for the family blessing, wealth and control to pass down through the firstborn son. The firstborn son is the important son but not when God is working—not in this case.

- In this case, it is the youngest son who is the father of a daughter that is important enough to be listed. "***Bethuel became the father of Rebekah,***" writes Moses so that we will not miss it in any confusion we find in Genealogy.
- Why does this matter? Because Rebekah will become Isaac's wife. It matters because in just a few more verses we will read the story of how important it was that Isaac's wife not be from the lineage of the autonomous unbelievers but from the lineage of Shem—the lineage of Terah and Abraham and Abraham's offspring to follow—the lineage of those who, after the flood began to "lift up the name of the LORD" in order to fulfill his created purpose for humans to image God in the Creation.
- This is only part 1 of 2 parts of the sermon "Where'd He Get His Wife?" Part 2 will come after one more important event and it will constitute the single longest narrative of continuous events in the book of *Genesis*.
- Rebekah will soon become the "new mother" of the nation of Israel as Sarah dies. Rebekah will become the mother through whom the promise moves forward. For this reason, it is important who Rebekah is in the lineage of humans.
- One of the most important lessons the generation about to enter the promised land needed to learn but often failed to learn was that who they married would make a big difference in whether or not they could participate in fulfilling the promises made to Abraham.
- The nation of Israel didn't just come from any source and that source didn't matter. It wasn't a lineage produced by chance or even due

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solely to personal human choice. It was a lineage—a family started, watched over and grown by the exacting work of God to carry out his perfect plan.

- So, why is this confusing "goat" of a passage here—right here—in *Genesis*? It is right where it is to begin finishing the long toledote of Abraham's father Terah.
- It begins that finish by telling the reader that, while you have been focused on Abraham and his wonderful story in the Promised Land, God has also been working it unseen ways elsewhere—even back in Mesopotamia—even in a son of Terah not called to go to the Promised Land with Abraham.
- God is working in unseen ways to accomplish his plan. God is always working perfectly to honor his promises. God is doing this even when we are not aware of it.
- This little mini-genealogy makes that point. God has prepared a wife to be the next "mother of his people."
- Does God still do this? Is he doing it in ways that might impact my life and yours?
- In high school, I was required to study a foreign language to be in the college prep program. I chose Spanish because it seemed to me to be the easiest over French, German and Latin. Yes, at that time, those were all choices even in a poor Detroit Public High School.
- When I started college, I was told I had to take a foreign language if I wanted to be in the program that would lead to law school. Guess what. Being the ever industrious student and longing to stretch and learn new things, out of the 10 or 12 possibilities at that university, I picked Spanish because it was easiest and I had already studied it in high school.

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- After graduating, I spent more than a decade without uttering a word in Spanish other than "taco" or "burrito."
- Then came a call to pastor a church in Mexico City, Mexico. Guess what language many people who live in Mexico City speak. You got it. My Spanish, learned because of lazy choices that seemed meaningless, was rusty but it allowed us to move and minister there immediately and gave us a big chunk of years of serving God in that church.
- Some of my kids grew up where they did and grew up wonderfully as they did—uniquely shaped as they are because I chose Spanish in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I didn't know that then and couldn't have by my own human resources. However, I believe God was at work on his plan even when I didn't know it.
- Taking those Spanish classes may not seem like much more than serendipity. You may think they really didn't have that big of an impact.
- I believe I met skinny legged, boisterous Cheerleading, piano playing Mary Woodworth at Temple Baptist Church when we were both young teenagers serving at odds with each other in the youth department because God had a plan that one day I would be standing here preaching this "goat" of a message to you.
- What are those verses in Ephesians 2 we free grace folks like to quote? **<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.**
- Then sometimes we forget this one that follows: **<sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

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- When life is confusing and goats named Jameson show up at your front door without explanation, please be sure God has been at work ***"preparing in advance."***
- You can't figure all that out and make it happen. You may never know all that he has arranged—at least not in this life, but God has been working ***"preparing in advance"*** in your life so that you can be a good part of his plan.
- Sometimes we can be so focused on our small part of the bigger story of God. Sometimes we can despair over how it might all work out as if our part of the story is all there is to God's bigger story.
- Just as it was with Rebekah for Isaac, God is at work preparing in advance all that is necessary for his perfect plan and our part in it.
- I think I find a great deal of peace in that truth!