

ONCE UPON A CAMEL

Read Genesis 24

Camels don't (usually) speak. But in the story of the search for a wife for Isaac they do. They whisper in our ear the local gossip about each of the main characters. We need to listen very carefully to the camels or we may miss significant information about Abraham, Rebecca, and Laban, the characters in Genesis 24.

"Camel" is the second most repeated noun in the chapter, signifying its importance. Yet, the camels do not appear to be noteworthy. That is why we must read the story using the first "key" to a dynamic Bible study—diligently seeking repeated terms. This activity helps us focus on the author's main points. So, what could possibly be noteworthy about a camel?

Abraham has determined that it is time for his forty year old son, Isaac, to have a wife. He commissions his servant to "go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:4). The servant will carry a variety of precious items--enough to impress any future father-in-law. Most importantly he will transport "ten **camels** from the **camels** of his master" (v. 10).

Domesticated camels were very rare at the time of Abraham. They were the Rolls Royce of the ancient world. Thus, Abraham has over ten Rolls Royce's in his garage! The camels are whispering to us—Abraham is filthy rich.

Arriving at a well near the home of Abraham's family at "the time when women go out to draw water," the servant prays for a wife for his master's son. He intends to locate a girl who is as cordial a host as his master Abraham was to the Lord when He visited Abraham (Gen. 18:1-8). Not only does his prayer require that she offer him a drink, but she is to provide water for ten thirsty camels, a mammoth feat. Thirsty camels drink approximately ten gallons each. The math tells us that she would have to traverse from well to trough a hundred times.

A "beautiful girl, a virgin" promptly arrives. In reply to his request for water she says, "Drink, my lord" (24:18) and adds, "I will draw also for your **camels**" (v. 19). Then she "quickly emptied her jar into the trough" and "ran back to the well to draw. . .for all his **camels**" (v. 20). Again the camels whisper to us: This girl is as hospitable as Abraham who also ran to provide bread cakes and a choice calf to be prepared for the Lord (Gen. 18:6-7).

Only when "the **camels** had finished drinking" does the servant present the gifts of jewelry from Abraham to the maiden and inquires, "Whose daughter are you?" (24:23). His prayer is totally realized as she reveals her pedigree: she is of Abraham's family! He responds, "Blessed be the LORD, who has. . .guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers" (v. 27). Only one question remains—would she be willing, as Abraham had, to leave all in order to go to an unknown land?

The third time the camels speak is when we are introduced to Laban, brother of Rebecca. Rebecca is running again. She "ran and told her mother's household about these things" (v. 28). But it is Laban who, after he "saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists. . .went out to meet the man" (v. 30). Laban sees again something that captures his attention—it is the servant "standing by the **camels** at the spring" (v. 30). Laban declares to the servant that he has already prepared the house, "and a place for the **camels**" (v. 31). It is not until Laban first "unloaded the **camels**" and "gave straw and

feed to the **camels**,” that he supplies “water to wash the feet” of the travelers (v. 32). The camels whisper, “Laban is material minded; don’t trust him.”

Camels have given us the low-down on three characters. Abraham is rich enough to assure his family that his son can provide well for his future wife. Rebecca is an admirable hostess. Laban appears materialistic and hence we are not surprised when years later he deceives Rebecca’s son, Jacob, by switching brides and wrangling Jacob of his rightful earnings.

In the final scene with the camels, it is unmistakably obvious that Rebecca continues to be a replica of Abraham. Rebecca “arose with her maids, and they mounted the **camels**” and followed Abraham’s servant to an expectant Isaac (vv. 61, 67). She would go (UPON a camel) leaving family and home behind as Abraham had left his country, his relatives, and his father’s house to go to a land God would show him (Gen. 12:1). The last whisper from the camels is, “Her Abraham-like faith makes her the right choice for Abraham’s son.” Perhaps one day the camels would also kneel alongside Rebecca’s two sons, Esau and Jacob, and whisper their tale, “Once UPON a Camel. . .”