

Choices

LEARNING *from the*

WOMEN *of the* BIBLE

Choices: Learning from the Women of the Bible
By Jenny Davies and Kristi Houser

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Preface

Choices—life is full of them. No matter what your age or stage of life, you’ve already faced some major decisions yourself.

Though the women of the Bible lived in a different time and culture, they were much like us. They felt pain, struggled with doubt, were tempted to run ahead of God’s timing, suffered rejection and loss—the list of similarities could go on and on.

In this 15-lesson study, we will examine the accounts of over a dozen prominent women in the Bible. Their stories are true, the struggles they faced were real, and the consequences of their choices changed the course of history.

God’s story is still unfolding. And you and I are part of that story. The choices that we face may seem inconsequential in the grand scheme of things, but are they really?

Our prayer is that this study will help you consider your choices in light of God’s character and ways, and that you will see the far-reaching impact of the decisions you make. May God grow you into maturity as you submit to the transforming nature of His powerful Word.

For His Glory,

Jenny Davies and Kristi Houser

About This Study

WHAT TO EXPECT

If you are familiar with Positive Action materials, you will notice that this study is different from many of our other studies. Most of our materials are presented as group studies with a lecture-style format. But this study is self-guided, much like our discipleship series *Milk, Meat, Bread, and Fish*. That means you can complete this 15-lesson study entirely on your own, at your own pace.

FEATURES OF EACH LESSON

Each lesson contains five main sections.

Introduction

The Introduction gives you a taste of what is to come. It is intended to engage your heart right away, preparing you for the lesson you will be studying.

Food for Thought

The Food for Thought section gives a verse or passage that pertains in some way to the lesson. Meditating upon and memorizing this Scripture will further deepen your study.

The Lesson

The Lesson is broken down into multiple subsections. Each subsection contains a passage for you to read and study, questions for you to answer, and a detailed summary of the passage. The summary provides answers to the study questions, as well as other cultural or background information you may not have known.

Thinking Back

The Thinking Back section presents personal application questions for you to consider. God's Word is a mirror, confronting us at heart level. Answering these questions will help connect what you've learned to your everyday life.

My Choice

The My Choice section brings all of the elements of the lesson together in a cohesive whole. It reviews the main points of the lesson and leaves you with a final personal challenge.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY IN A GROUP SETTING

Though this study is intended primarily for individual use, it can easily be adapted for use in a group setting. Below are a few suggestions to help you get started.

- Choose someone to facilitate your group time. This person wouldn't teach as much as lead discussion, bringing out key points from the lesson and keeping the group's conversation on target.
- Have all participants complete the lesson before your group meeting. Then you're not presenting brand new information, but rather reviewing what everyone has been studying.
- Give group members opportunity to say the memory verse if they've learned it. Or practice saying it together. If you're adventurous, you could even make it part of a game.
- Discuss the main sections together. Have the facilitator select certain questions from the lesson to answer aloud as a means of review. It would not be necessary to answer all of the questions that were in the lesson, just a sampling of them.
- Spend time going through the Thinking Back section together. Most of your discussion time will come from this section. Encourage participants to share what God is teaching them through the study, always remembering that Bible study isn't primarily about adding to our head knowledge, but allowing God to change our hearts through His Word.
- Read through the My Choice section together to conclude the discussion time.
- Allow group members to share prayer requests. Encourage participants to pray for each other in the specific areas that God has pinpointed as a result of the lesson. If time permits, pray aloud for one another. Prayer unifies believers and will cement the hearts of your participants together.

LESSON 1

Eve

INTRODUCTION

Choices—we make them every day, multiple times a day. Some of them are small and inconsequential, but others shape the course of our lives. Can you imagine what it would be like if the fate of your friends and family—the people you love most—hung on one decision that you had to make? That would be a lot of pressure, wouldn't it? What if your decision—good or bad—affected everyone everywhere in the world for all time?

If you're like me, the thought of that kind of pressure makes your stomach churn. Yet Eve, the woman we will study in this lesson, faced just such a decision. Did she realize all that hinged on the choice she faced? Probably not. But that did not change the outcome.

No matter how much we already know about Eve's life, there is still much to be learned. May God open our eyes anew to the ugliness of sin, the goodness of God, and the beauty of His redemptive promise.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Write James 1:13–15 on the lines provided. Throughout the week, meditate on these verses. Then commit them to memory. _____

THE LESSON

Created for a Purpose

Read Genesis 2. Then answer the following questions.

- Why did God make the first woman? (v. 18) _____

- How did God make the first woman? (vv. 21–22) _____

- Why did Adam call her “woman”? (v. 23) _____

- Describe the garden where God had placed the man and woman to live. (v. 9) _____

- What command had God given the man? (v. 16–17) _____

- What would be the consequence of breaking this command? (v. 17)

- What was one sure sign of the man and woman’s innocence? (v. 25)

The first woman, later given the name Eve, was made by God to be man’s helper. Adam was the only part of God’s creation that did not have a counterpart. According to God, it wasn’t good for Adam to be alone.

So, God put Adam into a deep sleep and removed one of his ribs. Then he formed or “built” the woman from the rib. Why did God use Adam’s rib and not some other part? Some believe it is because the rib was close to his heart, but only God knows for sure. Adam called this stunning creature “woman” because she was taken out of man.

The garden that God had planted teemed with all kinds of trees that were both beautiful to look at and good for food. Here He placed Adam and his wife, giving them the responsibility of working and taking care of it.

In the middle of the garden grew two important trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam and the woman not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eating from this tree would bring certain death.

Falling for Satan’s Deception

Read Genesis 3:1–5. Then answer the following questions.

- How is the serpent described? (v. 1) _____

- What did the serpent ask the woman? (v. 1) _____

- How did the woman respond to the serpent's question? (vv. 2-3)

- How did the serpent contradict what God had said? (v. 4)

- What did the serpent claim would really happen if the woman ate the forbidden fruit? (v. 5) _____

- What part of God's character do you think the serpent was trying to cause the woman to question? _____

- Who do you think this "serpent" really was? _____

It's important from the start to know that the serpent was Satan, God's greatest enemy (Rev. 12:9). In this account, the serpent is described as being craftier than any of the other animals God had made, and Satan chose to appear in the shape or likeness of just such a creature.

Before moving on, let's consider what we know of Satan from other parts of the Bible. First of all, Satan is a created being. He was a beautiful angel of the highest order, whom God created to glorify Himself. Unfortunately, Satan's heart became proud because of his own beauty, and he desired to be as God, wanting to usurp the glory that belongs to God alone. Because of this, Satan was expelled from heaven, cast down to earth in shame (Ezek. 28:2, 12-17; Isa. 14:12-15).

Among many other things, the Bible describes Satan as the following:

- The tempter (Matt. 4:3)
- The father of lies and a murderer (John 8:44)
- The thief, coming to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10)
- One who transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15)
- A roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8)

Though Satan is not God's equal in any way, he is still dangerous. In fact, listening to Satan's lies led the woman to her eventual downfall. We can learn

much from studying Satan's tactics with the woman, so let's trace the steps outlined in Genesis 3:1–5.

First, Satan asks the woman a simple question (v. 1). He prefaces it with, "Did God really say...?" causing the woman for the first time to question God. Before this time, the woman had no reason to doubt God. Satan also twists the words of God's command to be more inclusive than it actually was, making God seem unreasonable—like He was trying to keep Adam and his wife from something good.

Second, the woman engages in conversation with Satan (vv. 2–3). She explains that they may eat of all of the trees except the tree in the middle of the garden. Then she adds that they must not even touch it, or they will die. Was this part something that God had said or something that the woman herself added? The answer isn't clear. What is clear is that the woman was not wise, talking and listening to Satan.

Third, Satan directly contradicts God's word (v. 4). He starts with an outright lie—that they wouldn't die—and then offers the woman the "truth" that God has been keeping from her. According to Satan, God knew that their eyes would be opened to good and evil, and then they would be like Him.

By contradicting God's word, Satan plants a seed of doubt about God's character in the woman's mind. A seed of doubt doesn't take long to grow into a world of questions. Is God good? Is He truthful? Does He really have my best in mind? Is He holding out on me? These may have been some of the very questions in the woman's mind.

Making the Choice

Read Genesis 3:6–7. Then answer the following questions.

- What convinced the woman to take the fruit and eat it? (v. 6)

- What did she do after she ate some of the fruit? (v. 6)

- What happened immediately after the woman and Adam had eaten the fruit? (v. 7) _____

- What did they realize about themselves? (v. 7) _____

- How did they try to cover their shame? (v. 7) _____

The woman was faced with a choice—to trust God’s word or Satan’s. Already Satan’s deception had worked its poison in the woman’s mind. When she considered how good the fruit looked, as well as Satan’s promise that it would make her wise, she took the forbidden fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband Adam. How ironic and sad that the one created to be Adam’s helper would bring him—and the entire race of man—to destruction.

Immediately the eyes of both Adam and the woman were opened—the one part of Satan’s lie that was true. For the first time they recognized that they were naked and felt ashamed, for sin and shame always go together. With one act of disobedience, their innocence had vanished, and not even the fig leaves they sewed together could hide their shame.

Shifting the Blame

Read Genesis 3:8–13. Then answer the following questions.

- When Adam and his wife heard God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, what did they do? (v. 8) _____

- What did God do? (v. 9) _____

- How did the man answer Him? (v. 10) _____

- What did the fact that the man recognized his nakedness reveal to God? (v. 11) _____

- Whom did Adam blame for his sin? (v. 12) _____
- When God asked the woman what she had done, whom did she blame? (v. 13) _____

- Do you think that Adam and the woman responded the right way? Why or why not? _____

Can you imagine how delightful it must have been to walk and talk with God in the cool of the day? Adam and the woman had always enjoyed their fellowship with God. Their intimacy with God was unequalled, until now. Now they hid from Him, afraid that He would see their guilt and shame.

Still, God called out to the man, “Where are you?” Did God ask this because He really didn’t know where Adam was? No, God knew where Adam was, but He was probing after something deeper—the condition of Adam’s heart. Adam’s response to God—that he was afraid because he was naked—revealed his sin.

God knew exactly what had happened, but still He gave Adam the chance to answer for himself. Unfortunately, Adam was more eager to conceal his sin than to confess it. Adam not only blamed the woman but also God Himself because God had given him the woman. Likewise, when asked about her part, the woman blamed the serpent, claiming he had deceived her.

So, what was the truth? Who was to blame? It is clear from Scripture that the serpent deceived the woman (1 Tim. 2:14), but does this absolve her from blame? To answer this question, we must rightly understand the nature of sin and temptation.

According to Scripture, temptation itself isn’t sin. Even Jesus faced temptation (Matt. 4), and He lived a sinless life. Sin results when we give in to temptation, and temptation results from being enticed by the lusts that are already inside of our hearts (James 1:14). Like the conception of a child, our desires give birth to sin, which leads to death when it is full grown (James 1:14–15).

That means that when we sin, we sin by choice. We cannot blame Satan, God, or anyone else. The choice is ours alone, and we’re responsible for the consequences of that choice.

Enduring Sin’s Consequences

Read Genesis 3:16–24. Then answer the following questions.

- What consequences did God give to the woman concerning childbirth?
(v. 16) _____

- What consequences did God give to the woman concerning her husband?
(v. 16) _____

- What consequences did God give to Adam concerning the ground and his work? (vv. 18–19) _____

- What did God make for Adam and his wife? (v. 21) _____

- Why did God send Adam and his wife away from the garden? (vv. 22–24) _____

Though God is faithful and just to forgive us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), sin always brings consequences. In this instance, the consequences affected all of mankind (Rom. 5:12), bringing death into the world through sin.

From this point on, childbirth would be difficult for woman, and man would rule over his wife. For man, the earth would grow thorns and thistles, and he would labor by the sweat of his brow for his food.

Despite their sin, God still deeply loved Adam and his wife. He even made garments of animal skin to cover them. The fact that these clothes were made of skin indicates that an innocent animal gave its life to cover their shame. This picture beautifully foreshadows the sacrifice that Christ would one day make for us—the innocent Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world.

In His mercy, God drove Adam and his wife out of the garden so that they might not eat from the tree of life and live forever in their fallen state.

Trusting the Promise

Read Genesis 3:14–15, 20. Then answer the following questions.

- What curse did God pronounce upon the serpent? (v. 14) _____

- What great promise did God make? (v. 15) _____

- What do you think His promise really meant? _____

- What name did Adam give to his wife? (v. 20) _____

- Why did he choose this name? (v. 20) _____

As a consequence of the serpent's deception, he was cursed above all other animals, forced to crawl on his belly and eat dust all the days of his life. But that was just the beginning. The rest of his judgment is much more profound.

Tucked away in verse 15 of Genesis 3 we find the first prophecy in Scripture. At first glance this verse may seem to refer only to the situation at hand—sure, women and snakes don't get along—but its true meaning is much deeper. According to this prophecy, one day Someone from this woman's family line—Jesus Christ—would struggle with the serpent—Satan—and overcome. Though Satan would do his worst to Jesus by having Him killed (strike at His heel), Jesus would rise from the grave, gaining victory over sin and death (crushing Satan's head).

What a glorious hope we have because of this prophecy! The forgiveness of sins is freely available to all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

So, what does Adam finally name his wife? He names her Eve. Why? Because she would become the mother of all—including our precious Savior, Jesus Christ.

THINKING BACK

- What characteristics of God do you see revealed in this story?

- Which part of the story is most meaningful to you? Why?

- In what ways can you relate to Eve? _____

- Have you ever been tempted to question God's character? If so, how?

- When tempted to sin, how do you think a believer should respond?

- Why is blaming others for our sin never acceptable to God?

- When you have sinned, how can fellowship with God be restored?

- What has God been showing you specifically through this lesson?

- How will you respond to what He has shown you?

MY CHOICE

I don't know about you, but I've often caught myself pointing a finger at Eve, blaming her for the problems that we face in this fallen world. It is easy to think that you or I might have made the right decision in the garden that day, but would we have? Really? I'm afraid that if we allowed ourselves to be completely honest, we would have to admit we have more in common with Eve than we think.

In fact, we face similar temptations every day—temptation to question God's character, temptation to doubt God's goodness, temptation to believe Satan's lies over God's truth. The question is: how will we respond to each temptation?

When it comes to dealing with temptation, only one thing can strike down Satan's deception—the truth of God's Word. When tempted, even Jesus used God's Word to dispel Satan's lies. If we are to have victory against the enemy, we must root ourselves daily in God's Word, allowing its truth to sink deep into our hearts—that we might not sin against God (Ps. 119:11).

LESSON 2

Sarah

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been tempted to try to “help” God? Perhaps something in your life—your heart’s desire—seems to be taking too long. You reason, “Surely God must want me to have ____, so why is He withholding it?”

If you’ve ever had a thought like that run through your mind, you’re in good company. The woman we’ll study in this lesson faced just such a situation. God had made a very specific promise, but would she trust God to fulfill it? Or would she take matters into her own hands? There is much to be learned from the life and experiences of Sarah, so let’s dig in.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Write Hebrews 11:11–12 on the lines provided. Throughout the week, meditate on these verses. Then commit them to memory. _____

THE LESSON

Following Her Husband

Read Genesis 12:1–7. Then answer the following questions.

- What did the LORD instruct Sarai’s husband Abram to do? (v. 1)

- What promises did the LORD make to Abram concerning his future? (vv. 2–3) _____

- How did Abram respond to what the LORD told him? (v. 4) _____
- Whom and what did Abram take with him? (v. 5) _____

- What was Abram’s destination? (v. 5) _____
- What promise did God make to Abram about the land of Canaan? (v. 7) _____

- What do you learn about Sarai’s character based on her willingness to follow her husband? _____

As we pick up in this account, Abram is seventy-five, and Sarai is sixty-five. While most people at this age had settled down, the LORD instructed Abram to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household and go to the land that He would show Abram. Obedience to such instruction would take great faith and trust in God, especially considering that, at this point, all God had promised was to show Abram some land.

Then the LORD made a series of promises to Abram. God promised to make Abram into a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and to make him a blessing. Furthermore, God would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. And all peoples of the earth would be blessed through him—a promise that would ultimately be fulfilled when Jesus sacrificed His life for the redemption of mankind.

Abram took God at His word and set out from Haran, the land where he had been living. He took his wife Sarai, their nephew Lot, and all the possessions they had accumulated. Having no idea where he was going, Abram simply obeyed the LORD.

When Abram and those with him arrived at Canaan, God made him another promise. He promised Abram that He would give this land to Abram's offspring—an amazing promise, especially considering Sarai was barren.

Can you imagine what it would be like to leave everything familiar without even fully knowing where you were going? Sarai's willingness to follow her husband into such uncertainty shows us both her love for Abram and her submissiveness to him. Abram obeyed the LORD, and Sarai trusted Abram and followed where he led.

God's Promise to Abram and Sarai

Read Genesis 15:1–6. Then answer the following questions.

- Years later, the LORD spoke to Abram in another vision. What did He say this time? (v. 1) _____

- What was Abram's complaint to the LORD? (vv. 2–3)

- What promise did the LORD make to Abram? (v. 4)

- How did the LORD further illustrate His promise? (v. 5)

- What was Abram's response? (v. 6) _____

- How would this promise affect Sarai? _____

Years later, the LORD revisited Abram. By this time, Abram had grown in wealth and honor. But the one thing he wanted most—a son—he still didn't have. Sarai remained barren. Though the LORD promised to be Abram's shield

and reward, Abram's heart was grieved at the thought of leaving his inheritance to his servant instead of his own child.

Then the LORD assured Abram that a son, one of Abram's own flesh and blood, would be his heir. God told Abram to look up at the night sky and count the stars, for his offspring would be as numerous as these. Even at this time in history, people believed that the stars were innumerable. In essence, God promised Abram that his descendants would be too many to count. What a promise!

Again, Abram took God at His word. He believed God, and God counted his faith as righteousness (Rom. 4:3).

Helping God

Read Genesis 16:1-5. Then answer the following questions.

- What problem plagued Sarai's life? (v. 1)

- Whom did Sarai blame for this problem? (v. 2) _____
- What solution did Sarai devise? (v. 2) _____

- How did Abram respond to Sarai's suggestion? (vv. 2-3)

- Did their plan work? (v. 4) _____
- What happened once Hagar knew she was pregnant? (v. 4)

- Whom did Sarai blame for this new problem? (v. 5) _____
- Do you think that what Abram and Sarai did honored God? Why or why not? _____

We've talked quite a bit about Abram so far, but what about Sarai? Where does she fit into all this? God had made some huge promises to her husband concerning his descendants. But it had been ten years, and still she had no children. Barrenness was the most common reason for divorce during this period of time because of the importance that having a family played in their culture. Abram must have really loved Sarai.

Furthermore, Sarai believed—and rightly so!—that it was the LORD who kept her from having children. Can you imagine the heartache and frustration she must have felt? Sarai was faced with a decision—trust God’s promise and allow Him to work in His time and way or take matters into her own hands and “help” God fulfill His promise. After all, God didn’t say how this promise would be fulfilled, right?

In desperation and impatience, Sarai made the wrong choice. Most likely, she reasoned that since God had not specified that the son would come from her, then the family could be built through her slave, Hagar. Although this idea makes no sense to us today, it was a common practice in this culture for slaves to help build the family. So, Sarai proposed to Abram that he marry Hagar.

Abram agreed and married Hagar. Shortly after, Hagar became pregnant. The plan appeared to have worked beautifully at first. However, once Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise Sarai for not being able to have children. This created even more strife and heartache for Sarai, and soon she was blaming Abram, claiming he was responsible for her suffering.

Distrusting the Lord and attempting to help Him resulted only in disaster. While Sarai’s idea may have seemed logical, it contradicted what God intended to do. It was God’s plan all along that Sarai bear the son of the promise. Her barrenness (as we’ll see later) was no obstacle to the LORD. The more impossible the situation, the more glory God receives. For it is through the impossibilities that God makes His power and might known to the world.

The consequences of Sarai’s sin—for we must call it what it was—are still being felt. The descendants of Ishmael (Hagar’s son) and the descendants of Isaac (the son of the promise) continue to be in conflict to this day. If Sarai had one life regret—something she could go back in time and change—I believe this would have been it.

Receiving a New Name

Read Genesis 17:1–8; 15–22. Then answer the following questions.

- By what name does God reveal Himself to Abram for the first time?
(v. 1) _____
- Why do you think God revealed this name to Abram at this time?

- When Abram was ninety-nine years old, what covenant did God make with him? (vv. 2–4) _____

- What new name did God give to Abram? Why? (vv. 5–6)

- What further promise did God make to Abraham? (vv. 7–8)

- What new name did God give to Sarai? Why? (vv. 15–16)

- What special blessing would be hers? (v. 16)

- What was Abraham’s response to all that God had said? (v. 17)

- What was special about the duration of the covenant that the LORD made with Abraham? (v. 19) _____

At age ninety-nine, God once again made a covenant with Abram. This time He promised that Abram would be the father of many nations. To signify what He was about to do, the LORD changed Abram’s name from Abram, which means “high father,” to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.” The covenant that God was making was to be an everlasting covenant between Him and Abraham’s descendants.

As for Sarai, she received a name change, too. From now on, she would be called Sarah, which means “princess,” for she would be the mother of nations. According to the LORD, kings would come from her.

Does anything strike you as odd about the promise made concerning Sarah? Sarah was still barren! And now thirteen more years have gone by, making Sarah about eighty-nine. Sarah’s womb, which should have been a place of life, was more like a tomb, for it was as good as dead (Heb. 11:11–12). Still, Abraham believed what God said.

Did you notice that God revealed Himself by a new name in this passage? This meeting with Abraham presents the first time God revealed Himself as God Almighty, or El Shaddai. In essence, this name reveals God’s sufficiency. The covenant that God Almighty makes with Abraham has nothing to do with the sufficiency of Abraham and Sarah—they were well past child-bearing years!

But it has everything to do with God's sufficiency. When God makes a promise, *He* will fulfill it.

Doubting God

Read Genesis 18:1–15. Then answer the following questions.

- Who came to visit Abraham? (vv. 2–3) _____

- How did Abraham treat the three visitors? (vv. 2–5)

- What did Abraham ask Sarah to do? (v. 6)

- What strange question did the strangers ask Abraham? (v. 9)

- What promise did one of the strangers make concerning Sarah?
(v. 10) _____

- What was Sarah's response from within the tent? (vv. 11–12)

- What did the stranger say to Abraham concerning Sarah's response?
(vv. 13–14) _____

- What did Sarah lie about? Why? (v. 15)

- How was Sarah's lie exposed? (v. 15) _____

According to this passage, three visitors came to see Abraham and Sarah. As was the custom of the day, Abraham treated the visitors with great hospitality and respect. He invited the visitors to wash their feet and rest under the shade of a tree while he prepared them something to eat. Sarah baked bread, and Abraham selected a calf to be prepared.

The visitors accepted Abraham's generosity. As they ate, one of them asked him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" Abraham replied that she was in the tent. Was Sarah being rude by staying in the tent instead of serving her guests? Not at all. In

fact, it would not have been considered proper for her to entertain—especially three men.

Then one of the guests said to Abraham, “I will return about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Sarah, whose ears had probably perked up when she heard her name earlier, was listening at the entrance of the tent. When she heard what the stranger said, she laughed to herself. Hers was a laugh of disbelief—surely this news was too good to be true. Now that her body was worn out and her husband was old, now she was going to have a baby?

Then the same man, whom we find out is really the LORD and not just an ordinary stranger, asked Abraham why Sarah had laughed and doubted in her heart? Then He asked, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” and reiterated the same promise.

At this point, the text says that Sarah was afraid. Had she, too, realized who this visitor really was? To cover herself, she lied, denying that she laughed. But the LORD, who knows all, said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

Laughing for Joy

Read Genesis 21:1–7. Then answer the following questions.

- How did the LORD show grace to Sarah? (v. 1)

- What promise did the LORD keep concerning Sarah? (v. 2)

- What name was given to the baby? (v. 3) _____
- How old was Abraham at this time? (v. 5) _____
- What was Sarah’s response to the birth of Isaac? (vv. 6–7)

The LORD showed grace to Sarah by keeping His word. Just as He had promised, Sarah bore Abraham a son in his old age—and at the very time that God had said. Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah was ninety. Through this supernatural birth, God indeed proved that nothing is too difficult for Him.

Abraham named his son Isaac, which means “laughter.” After all these years, God had brought Sarah laughter, and everyone who heard of what God had done would share in that laughter as well.

THINKING BACK

- What characteristics of God do you see revealed in this story?

- Which part of the story is most meaningful to you? Why?

- In what ways can you relate to Sarah? _____

- Do you find it easy or hard to submit to God's plan, especially when it doesn't make sense? _____

- Have you ever tried to "help" God with His plan? What happened as a result? _____

- What consequences have you faced as a result of impatience?

- What have you learned about God's promises through Sarah's life and experiences? _____

- What has God been showing you specifically through this lesson?

- How will you respond to what He has shown you?

MY CHOICE

God instructs us in His Word to trust Him, relying on His wisdom instead of our own frail understanding. However, like Sarah, our faith wavers at times. When that happens, we often make choices based on human understanding, rather than trusting God. Such decisions are quickly regretted. Have you ever made such a decision? Thankfully, God doesn't abandon us when we choose poorly. He remains faithful to His promises.

Throughout her life, Sarah's faith was tested repeatedly. Sometimes she passed those tests with flying colors—like when she faithfully followed her husband into the unknown. And sometimes she didn't—like when she tried to “help” God by encouraging her husband to marry Hagar. And we all remember how that turned out.

As the years passed and Sarah's body began to decline from age, her hope in God's promise must have grown dim. It's no wonder that she laughed when the LORD declared that she would have a child at age ninety—completely absurd! But somewhere beyond the laughter of doubt, a new faith sprung to life in Sarah's heart. According to Hebrews 11:11, Sarah received the power to conceive because she trusted the faithfulness of the One who made the promise.

And here's the good news for us: God is still faithful to His promises. He may do things in His own time and way, but the LORD always keeps His Word. And, as we've seen through the life of Sarah, God is not bound by the things we see as obstacles.

In your life, what do you need to entrust to God? As we've observed, impatience is costly. Don't rush ahead of God—just trust Him. He is faithful.

LESSON 3

Rebekah

INTRODUCTION

Can you imagine what it would be like to be asked to marry someone you had never met? What if that man—a complete stranger to you—lived miles away, causing you to leave your own family, the home you'd grown to love, and everything you'd ever known? What if, though you didn't understand why, you knew that this was God's plan? Would you do it?

We may gasp at the thought of such a situation, yet this is precisely the situation Rebekah faced. Though Rebekah's circumstances in the following lesson are unique, the choice she encountered is not. Rebekah's choice: Would she yield to God's plan—even though it would require great sacrifice? Or would she decline God's invitation, choosing to remain comfortable but missing the blessing of a lifetime? Let's find out.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Write Proverbs 3:5–6 on the lines provided. Throughout the week, meditate on these verses. Then commit them to memory. _____

THE LESSON

Relying on God's Promise

Read Genesis 24:1–9. Then answer the following questions.

- When Abraham was very old and his wife Sarah had passed away, what urgent desire did he have for his son Isaac? (v. 3)

- What did Abraham ask his servant to do? (vv. 3–4)

- Why do you think it would have been important to find a wife for Isaac from among Abraham’s own relatives? _____

- Why do you think it was so important to Abraham that Isaac marry and have children of his own? (v. 7) _____

- What important attitude must Isaac’s future bride have? (vv. 5, 8)

Abraham’s greatest desire towards the end of his life was to find a wife for his son Isaac, and he was adamant about the kind of woman that she must be. The woman must not be an idolatrous Canaanite—even though Canaan was the land where Abraham lived—but must be someone from his own family.

Marrying someone within your own family does not make sense to us today. However, during the time of Abraham this practice, called endogamy, was quite common. Abraham had been promised a great inheritance and wanted it to remain in the family.

In fact, this great inheritance provided Abraham’s motivation for finding Isaac a wife. Not only had God promised Abraham the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7), but He had also promised that Abraham’s descendants would outnumber the stars (Gen. 15:5). In this passage we see that even after all these years, Abraham still believed the promises that God had made to him.

In addition to being from Abraham’s own family, Isaac’s future bride must also be willing to leave her own country and her family in order to marry him. This was so important that if the girl was not willing to follow the servant, the servant would be absolved from his oath to Abraham.

Trusting God to Lead

Read Genesis 24:10–19. Then answer the following questions.

- When Abraham’s servant set out for his journey, what did he take with him? (v. 10) _____

- How did the servant address God when he prayed (v. 12)

- According to the servant’s prayer, how would he recognize the woman that God had selected as Isaac’s future wife? (v. 14)

- What happened before he had finished praying? (v. 15)

- How does the Bible describe Rebekah? (v. 16)

- What happened when the servant asked Rebekah for a drink of water? (vv. 18–19) _____

When Abraham’s servant set out for the land where Abraham’s relatives lived, he took with him ten of his master’s camels loaded with all kinds of goods. After arriving at the town of Nahor, the servant prayed, addressing God by His covenant name, LORD or *Yahweh*. Over the years the servant had likely observed God’s covenant-keeping power often in the life of Abraham, so much so that the servant called the LORD Abraham’s God.

The servant’s prayer was specific—he asked that the woman that God had chosen for Isaac would not only agree to give him water but would also offer to water his camels as well. Did you notice when God answered his prayer? Before he had finished praying! At just the right moment Rebekah, a beautiful young girl who had kept herself pure, just happened to walk by with a water jar on her shoulder.

Of course, nothing “just happens” with the Lord. In this situation, God perfectly orchestrated this meeting, providentially guiding the servant to Rebekah—just as the servant had prayed that God would.

But was Rebekah the one God had chosen? Did she offer to water the servant’s camels? Yes, she did. In fact, she was polite and well-mannered toward the

servant, offering to do what would have been quite a job. Depending on when the camels had been watered last, Rebekah may have had to make 8 to 10 trips to the well per camel—that could have been as many as 100 trips to the well! Watering the servant’s camels may have taken hours. As Abraham’s servant eagerly watched to see if God had made his journey successful, Rebekah’s hard labor revealed her character to him.

Unveiling the Details

Read Genesis 24:20–51. Then answer the following questions.

- What did the servant do when his camels had finished drinking? (v. 22) _____

- What did he ask Rebekah? (v. 23) _____

- How did Rebekah reply? (vv. 24–25) _____

- What was the servant’s response? (vv. 26–27) _____

- How did Rebekah’s family treat Abraham’s servant? (vv. 29–31) _____

- After the servant had explained to Rebekah’s brother Laban about the purpose of his journey and the providential events that had unfolded, what was Laban’s response? (vv. 50–51) _____

When the servant’s camels had finished drinking, the servant was confident that God had led him to Isaac’s future bride. The servant gave Rebekah a nose ring and bracelets for her arms. Why did he do this? In biblical times it was customary for families to exchange wealth before a couple was married. The gifts that the servant gave Rebekah were a down payment of sorts, assuring her family that a wedding would take place.

After this, the servant asked Rebekah about her family and inquired if there was room for him to spend the night. When she replied affirmatively that there

was plenty of room for him to stay, and he realized that Rebekah was indeed from Abraham's family, the servant bowed down and worshipped the LORD. He praised God for His kindness and faithfulness in leading him exactly where he needed to go.

Rebekah's brother Laban warmly welcomed the servant, preparing a place to stay for both him and his camels. Laban listened with wonder as the servant recounted the story of his journey and the events of the day. Laban's reaction to it all—this is from the LORD.

Yielding to God's Plan

Read Genesis 24:51–67. Then answer the following questions.

- What did Laban advise the servant to do? (v. 51)

- How did Abraham's servant respond? (v. 52)

- What did the servant give to Rebekah, her brother, and mother? (v. 53) _____
- The next morning, what did the servant say? (v. 54)

- How did Rebekah's family respond? (v. 55)

- Because the servant did not want to be detained, what choice was Rebekah faced with? (v. 57) _____

- What was Rebekah's response? (v. 58) _____

Once Laban realized that God had orchestrated the events that had taken place, he advised Abraham's servant to take Rebekah and go, letting her become Isaac's wife. At this response, the servant again bowed down and worshipped the LORD.

Then Abraham's servant gave jewelry and clothing to Rebekah, as well as costly gifts to her brother and mother. These gifts were part of what was known in

that culture as the bride price or marriage price, a transfer usually made in two parts. In this case, the first part or down payment was made when the servant initially gave Rebekah the nose ring and bracelets (Gen. 24:22), and the second part, usually taking place shortly before the wedding, was made here.

Abraham's servant was eager to return to his master with Rebekah. However, Rebekah's family asked that she be able to remain for ten days or so. Still, the servant persisted, leaving Rebekah with a difficult choice—"Will you go with this man?"

Why would this have been a difficult decision? Not only did this situation happen very quickly—meeting the servant one day and leaving with him to marry a complete stranger the next!—but it meant Rebekah was leaving her home and family. In effect, this meant leaving the provision and protection she'd known all of her life. What faith it must have taken to say, "Yes, I will go." And that's exactly what Rebekah did.

Experiencing the Blessing of Obedience

Read Genesis 24:59–67. Then answer the following questions.

- What blessing did Rebekah's family bestow upon her as she left? (v. 60) _____

- What was Isaac doing when Abraham's servant and his entourage arrived? (v. 63) _____
- What did Rebekah ask when she saw Isaac for the first time? (vv. 64–65) _____

- How did the servant respond? (v. 66) _____
- What did Rebekah do when she found out that this man was Isaac, the one to be her husband? (v. 66) _____

- What was the outcome of this story? (v. 67) _____

- In what ways do you see God's blessing of obedience?

Rebekah's family pronounced a blessing upon her and her children as she left. When Abraham's servant and those with him arrived home, Isaac was out in the field meditating. Who knows what Isaac was thinking of when he saw that line of camels approaching, but when Rebekah saw Isaac she said, "Who is that man coming to meet us?"

Once Rebekah learned that this was Isaac, the man she was to marry, she quickly veiled her face, as was the custom of the day. Because of her willingness to yield to God's plan, Rebekah was blessed greatly. That very day she became Isaac's wife, and he loved her.

THINKING BACK

- What characteristics of God do you see revealed in this story?

- Which part of the story was most meaningful to you?

- In what ways can you relate to Rebekah? _____

- What did you learn about prayer? _____

- What did you learn about God's providence, the way He works behind the scenes in the circumstances of our lives? _____

- How have you seen God’s providence in your own life?

- What situation are you facing right now in which you need God’s guidance? _____

- Is there an area in your life in which you need to yield in obedience to God’s plan? _____

- In what ways have you experienced God’s blessing when you obeyed Him? _____

- What has God been showing you specifically through this lesson?

- How will you respond to what He has shown you?

MY CHOICE

In this account, Rebekah was faced with the choice of whether or not she would yield herself to God’s plan. Would she, despite the difficulty of the decision to leave her home and family, trust God and follow His leading?

How many questions must have been swirling around Rebekah’s mind when faced with the question—“Will you go?” It’s such a simple question, yet with an outcome that would affect Rebekah’s life forever. Because of Rebekah’s faith in God and belief in His providence, she would join Abraham’s family line, becoming a pivotal link in the line of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

While most of us will never face a situation exactly like Rebekah's, we will arrive at crossroads—probably more than once, maybe even daily—in which we must decide if we will or will not yield to God's plan for our lives. The choice, like Rebekah's, will likely not be easy, but the blessings bestowed as a result of obedience cannot be matched.

Each time we yield to God's plan, we take a step of faith. Following God's Word, we must choose to trust in the Lord rather than our own understanding, acknowledge God's ways, and allow Him to direct our paths (Prov. 3:5–6). When we do, who knows the mighty things that God can accomplish through the woman who chooses to yield her life to His plan?