

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 24:1-9

Topic

After instructing his servant about where to find a proper wife for his son Isaac, Abraham has him swear an oath by placing his hand under his thigh

Title

"Thigh Master"

Introduction

It's been said that you should "pray as if everything depended upon God, and act as if everything depended upon you."

It's as good a practical summary of the Bible doctrine of God's providence as you are likely to find.

Providence is defined by theologians as "that continuous agency of God by which he makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design with which He created it."

A shorter summary of God's providence would be to simply say, "God is in control."

If "God is in control," do I have free will? The free will actions of human beings are part of God's providence. In other words, we are not robots simply playing out a predetermined script. Within His providence God tells us to act in ways that can most definitely affect the world around us.

For example, God tells us to pray and we are taught in Scripture that the effective fervent prayer of the righteous has an effect on the world around us.

We have to say, then, that "God is in control AND prayer changes things."

I may never fully understand the relationship between providence and free will, but I can enjoy and apply God's providence everyday in my walk with Jesus.

Abraham is a great example of how I can enjoy and apply the truth of God's providence. When he sent out his servant to secure a bride for Isaac, Abraham was positive that God was in control and would provide the bride. But simultaneously he believed that both he and his servant must act prudently within God's providence.

The same should be true of us in our daily walk with the Lord. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Can Be Positive Of Trusting In God's Providence, and #2 You Should Be Prudent While Trusting In God's Providence.

#1 You Can Be Positive Of Trusting In God's Providence (v7)

Tucked away in the middle of this text is Abraham's great statement about God's providence. Let's find it by reading the whole story through.

Genesis 24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

Genesis 24:2 So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh,

Genesis 24:3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell;

Genesis 24:4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Genesis 24:5 And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

Genesis 24:6 But Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there.

Genesis 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your

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descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

Genesis 24:8 And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there."

Genesis 24:9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

In the middle of his very prudent, practical, down-to-earth instruction to his servant, Abraham gave a very powerful statement of God's providence in verse seven.

Without verse seven it sounds as if everything depended upon Abraham's counsel being followed to the letter. Even to the point that if the proper young lady refused to accompany the servant back, then the search was to be abandoned.

Yet at the very same time, simultaneously, Abraham could state with a positive certainty that God "**will** send His angel before you, and you **shall** take a wife for my son from there."

Abraham knew that God had a very definite plan and that God would see to it that His plan was accomplished.

Part of that plan is stated in the first part of verse seven. "The LORD God of Heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land...'"

The promises that God had made Abraham were all dependent upon his son, Isaac, having a child or children. There would be no "descendants" unless Isaac married and produced them.

Abraham was positive that God would see His plan through to the end. He was positive that God was in control. It was the context within which he lived his life and walked with the Lord.

You and I can be absolutely positive regarding God's plan for our lives. The broad aspects of His plan are already known to us all. We live in an

age in which the Gospel is to go out to the whole world, to the effect that “whosoever believes” will be saved. We know that the Lord is coming to resurrect and rapture His church. If we die before He comes, we will be absent from our bodies and present with Him in Heaven. We know He is in Heaven right now preparing for each of us a mansion and that, when we see Him, He will reward us.

There are lots of other things we are positive about. One author commented,

Providence in certain ways is central to the conduct of the Christian life. It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in His care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance.

Even when we can't really make sense of our circumstances, we having a positive assurance that God is in control.

At the same time...

#2 You Should Be Prudent While Trusting God's Providence (v1-6 & 8-9)

“Prudent” means being *wise in your practical affairs*. Providence should not lead me to a ‘let go and let God’ approach to living. On the contrary, I should be all the more careful to walk properly knowing that God has a wonderful plan for my life, that He has goods works which He has before ordained I should discover.

In the context of God's providence, Abraham acted as if everything depended upon him.

Genesis 24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

It's clear God had a plan for Abraham. While it reads as a very dramatic plan, as we've seen in our studies, it's pretty much the same plan God has for everyone. He calls upon us to turn to Him from idols and walk on this

earth as strangers, as citizens of another realm, looking for our heavenly home.

Genesis 24:2 So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh,

Most commentators say this was Eliezer, who Abraham once thought could be his heir. Not a lot is written about him but what is written is striking. He was a servant, thought of more like a son, who could be trusted to carry out the will of his master.

That's all I want to be!

This putting the hand "under" the "thigh" has lots of suggested meanings. No one knows for sure why but this was the way they swore oaths in those days. It's their version of raising your right hand while putting the other on a Bible.

Genesis 24:3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell;

Generally speaking, we don't need to go around swearing oaths or making promises. We should simply act from integrity with honesty. At the same time, there's nothing wrong with commemorating especially important events with a promise. I know, for example, a lot of parents encourage their kids to take purity vows. Marriage vows are another important oath.

Abraham was prudent. He didn't just "let go and let God" when it came to raising his son. He knew that God had promised descendants from Isaac, and that meant, on a practical level, it mattered who Isaac married. The nonbelieving "daughters of the Canaanites" were off-limits to Isaac.

You know, it matters how you raise your kids. You should raise them to know the Lord. You should example for them a life of faith and trust in God. They should know that it matters who they marry and should only marry in the Lord and not become unequally yoked with nonbelievers.

Genesis 24:4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Isaac would end up marrying the daughter of one of his cousins. It sounds odd to us, but 'cousin-marriage' is something we are familiar with. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin Roosevelt, was his fifth-cousin.

The point we are stressing is that *within* and *because* of God's providence, we are to act prudently. We shouldn't ignore God's Word and go about thinking "it will all work out in the end." **Our free will actions matter within the providence of God.**

Genesis 24:5 And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

Eliezer understood the priority of securing the proper wife. Now he was concerned about where they ought to live. Should Isaac move back to Abraham's boyhood home?

Genesis 24:6 But Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there.

Wow. Strong language. But understandable since God's promises to Abraham were tied so closely to the land He had brought him into.

We are not tied to any geography. But we can "go back" to the world if we are not careful. In our studies in the life of Abraham we've seen him stumble by going back to Egypt when he should have stayed the course in Bethel despite a famine in the land.

We've seen Abraham's nephew, Lot, look longingly towards Sodom only to end up living a defeated spiritual life as one of its leaders.

God's providence should amplify my carefulness rather than be taken casually. God's providence ought to encourage greater spiritual discipline and diligence rather than slacking-off.

Genesis 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your

descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

Genesis 24:8 And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there."

Abraham was positive God would provide Isaac a wife but he simultaneously understood that folks have free will to choose for themselves. Man, *that's a mind-boggler!*

How can God's providence not cancel-out your free will? Enter the theologians! This is where theologians, who all agree on God's providence, disagree as to its outworking in our lives.

A fairly recent book was published giving four major views on God's providence with respect to man's free will. Without going into too much detail, these are the four views.¹

1. God causes all things. Period. This view effectively cancels-out free will.
2. God directs all things. This view accounts for free will by saying that not only does God know everything that will happen in the universe at all times, but He also knows what might happen given a certain set of circumstances. Thus God controls all events while allowing spiritual beings complete free will.
3. God controls by liberating. The proponents of this view argue that God acts before, in, through, and beyond our acts - even our evil acts - to accomplish His will. Whatever my act truly and lastingly accomplishes is the will of God because it is an act of God.
4. God limits His control. In this interpretation, God does not necessarily know or control all moral actions of His created spiritual beings. Accordingly, although God knows all that *might* happen in the universe, He does not know with certainty what *will* happen within each person's sphere of moral choices.

If I have to choose one of those, it's gonna be Door #2, behind which God directs all events while allowing us complete free will.

¹ from *Four Views on Divine Providence*, Boyd, Craig, Helseth & Highfield.

The point I'm making today is that regardless your intellectual apprehension of the doctrine of God's providence, on a daily, practical basis you are to proceed as if your choices and actions mattered...

Because they do!

You are to pray, for instance, believing that prayer not only changes you but can actually affect the course of events. There are definite examples in Scripture where prayer changed the course of events within God's larger providence.

Genesis 24:9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Eliezer understood his charge and agreed to it by swearing an oath in the custom of the times. He would go on to faithfully carry-out his assignment by securing Rebekah for Isaac.

When asked by a captain how he could remain so calm "with a storm of shells and bullets raining about his head," General Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson reportedly said, "my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time of my death..."

We would agree - *but also encourage him to duck when being fired upon!*

Live your life in the context that God is in control, and precisely because He is in control, be disciplined and diligent in all your actions.