

A STUDY OF GENESIS 24:12-14

An Exegetical Paper

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ABSTRACT OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

1. Main Idea.

Abraham's servant, having been sent to acquire a wife for Isaac that the covenant blessings may be passed down another generation, prayed to the God of his master in faith. He trusted in the will, kindness, and ability of God to fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham. He expected God to perform an act of sovereign election, and then confirm that act by a sign. These themes of God's covenant love and faithfulness, God's purpose in election, human faith, and the use of prayer fill the passage and all point forward to a fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

2. Outline. Genesis 24:12-14

I. Abraham's servant prayed for a wife for Isaac (vv. 12-14)

A. The servant entreated God (v. 12)

1. Addressed God as "LORD, God of my master Abraham"
2. Requested success and "kindness" (*checed*)

B. The servant set the stage for his sign request (v. 13)

C. The servant requested a sign of God's *yakach* choice (v. 14)

1. Asked for the sign of a willingness to water both himself and his camels
2. Expected this sign as proof of God's *checed* to Abraham

Introduction

God is faithful, therefore His people have every ground to entreat Him in faith. The truth of this characterization and inference can be found on almost every page of Scripture, but in some places the theme is more prominent than in others. Genesis 24:12-14 stands as a prime example of this dynamic. This passage offers a wealth of riches for the Church when studied in detail. To be more specific, in this text, once properly viewed in historical-cultural and literary context, God's covenant faithfulness and electing purposes shine bright, with the proper human response of faith and personal prayer to his covenant partner mediated by election setting an example. In addition, as with all of Scripture, each of these themes from the text can be found to climax and find their full meaning in Jesus Christ. None of these claims needs to be particularly controversial, but they do need to be substantiated. What exactly does this passage say? What specifically and exactly did the author (and Author) mean? The investigation must begin in history.

Historical-Cultural Context

To understand any text, the original historical-cultural context is highly relevant. Every part of Scripture was written at a particular time to a particular people in a particular world. This must be acknowledged and treated to avoid appropriating a kind of Docetism into bibliology. So what is the context of Genesis 24:12-14? According to Jewish tradition, as well as the implications of Scripture and even the words of Jesus Himself, the book of Genesis was written by Moses after the Exodus, probably while he was on Mt. Sinai with God. Naturally, not all of this can be verified, and this has been a source of heated debate. Many scholars would like to assign the book, along with the rest of the Pentateuch (or even Hexateuch), to several editors and redactors, and until recently have preferred to divide this up into four primary source materials. These are J (Jehovist/Yahwist), E (Elohist), D

(Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly). Traditionally under this schema the entire account of Abraham sending his servant to acquire a wife for Isaac has been associated with the Yahwist. All of this, however, seems quite unnecessary. The purpose and scope of this essay do not permit an attempt at proving or even much defending Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, but enough work on this has already been performed by many scholars. Mosaic authorship can still be, despite many critical protests, affirmed with reason.¹ This places the original context of the writing within the Exodus period. The monumental event of the Exodus is quite relevant because precisely in the shadow of this event God chooses to reiterate to Israel the full story of their origins in the purposes of God. God delivered a people and then called the people to hear the story of how He brought them into being as a foundation for their future as His covenant partner. Genesis 2:14-15 should then be viewed as part of the larger project of establishing Israel's covenantal identity before God. Yet to go much deeper would turn this into the literary context and thus must be presently deferred.

More important to this particular text may be the historical context of the events described. When did this take place? While many scholars would like to argue that this story is simply one of many legends, folktales, or myths making up Israel's self-written history, the biblical texts point toward a historical time around the early second millennium BC. Dating from the years given in 1 Kings 6:1 and Exodus 12:40-41 both support this conclusion, no matter which of the predominant views of the Exodus date is preferred. This "Patriarchal Period" has been subject to many accusations of anachronism and fiction, but such accusations do not necessarily convict. There is comparatively little data about the Patriarchal Period from archaeology and other sources, which allows for this kind of ambiguity. Yet the skepticism seems mostly unjustified, as several clues point to an authentic date.

¹ Kenneth Matthews, *The New American Commentary – Volume 1A, Genesis 1-11*, (Holman Reference, 1996), location 1606, Kindle ebook.

Genesis contains, for example, straightforward portrayals of God's people acting in ways which are taboo later in Israel's history, such as Abraham marrying his half-sister or Lot sleeping with his daughters. If the accounts originated in later times, these would appear problematic and unnecessary for the authors. Other evidence, such as the information on Ancient Near East customs and practices found in the Nuzi tablets, strengthen the case that, even if the early second millennium cannot be definitively pinpointed as the origin of these stories, the fanciful tale that they were invented much later around the Exilic period seem to lose much credibility.²

Given these factors, Genesis (including 24:12-14) should be read as a text written shortly after the Exodus about historical events which took place in the early second millennium BC. Moses wrote to Israel of events from the beginning of their history about half a millennium earlier with no clear indications of anachronism or inaccuracy. From this context, not a great deal is directly relevant to the three verses in question, but two notes are necessary. On the one hand, the mention of domesticated camels in verse 14 is treated as an anachronism by many. Supposedly the domestication of camels in Canaan did not take place until centuries later. This, however, relies mostly on an argument from silence, and frequently assertions like this are found to be false by new archaeological excavations.³ Beyond this, there is not much of note to the context of this particular passage. Thus the literary context must be the next major focus.

Literary Context

For Genesis 24:12-14, as with any other text (in Scripture or elsewhere), the literary context is the true key to meaning. Where does this text sit in the whole book or collection of books? This

² All of this is discussed in more detail in Kenneth Matthews, *The New American Commentary – Volume 1B, Genesis 12-51*, (Holman Reference, 1996), loc. 842-930, Kindle ebook.

³ Ibid, loc. 950.

particular text is found in the book of Genesis, which is ultimately inseparable from the entire Pentateuch (or even the Hexateuch). While the entire Pentateuch includes a couple of genres, the majority from Genesis 1 to the middle of Exodus is pure narrative. Many will argue that this narrative is fictional, mythical, legendary, or allegorical. While in theory one of these could be true, there is no necessary reason to think so, and the overall story should probably be classified simply as a *historical* narrative. This is most often contested on the grounds of theological and miraculous content, but neither of these preclude an intent to write real history. Obviously this is a highly controversial route, but the evidence does not ask for any other. In any case, unless the narrative is a pure allegory, the intended meaning of the text's canonical form is likely the same.

The story of Genesis which sets the context for 24:12-14 is essentially of origins. Genesis tells a story about the origin of the world (Genesis 1-11) and of Israel as God's people within the world (Genesis 12-50). The latter half about the origins of Israel begins with Abraham and God's covenant with Him. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His own people for divine blessing. The selection of Abraham is unexplained, presumably a simple function of God's free election. This text, then, appears in a transition period as Abraham passed his role on to Isaac, who had also been specially selected by God as the descendant through whom the chosen people would continue. Isaac would become the patriarch for the next few chapters. Thus he, like Abraham, would need posterity, which in turn meant he would need a wife. A wife would enable Isaac to take up his place as the next patriarch and continue the line of promise. Therefore, Abraham sent out a servant to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac from his own kin rather than from among the Canaanites.

Genesis 24:12-14 lies at this point and must be taken as part of this ongoing narrative of the patriarchs. The prayer of the servant sits in the middle of this crucial transition period. God had made a

covenant promise to provide many descendants to Abraham and Isaac after him. At this moment the question came in the form of the servant's prayer, "Will God be faithful, and if so how?" The ongoing history of God's people was found once again to hinge on God's provision, election, and faithfulness, just as for Abraham when he trusted God for a son. John Walton highlights the issue thus:

[G]etting a wife for Isaac in a way that will preserve the covenant ideals is not an easy matter. It is for that reason that the narrator goes to such great length to demonstrate the role that God played in bringing the marriage to fruition. Abraham has not yet become a great nation. Survival of the line still hangs by a thread.⁴

Therefore, the context presents Isaac and even, in a certain sense, Rebekah, as the rightful successor(s) of the first patriarch, and the source of the blessings which are still to come in the rest of the story.

The Basic Content

So, with the context in history and the literature firmly established, the actual content of the passage can be examined. What happened in Genesis 24:12-14? Abraham sent out his chief servant to acquire a wife for Isaac, since Abraham was getting old and would die soon. The servant came to the town of Nahor and approached a well, where he then uttered the prayer of these three verses in question. In this prayer, he asked God to show kindness to Abraham his master by giving success in the wife-finding journey. He asked in particular for God to highlight a woman He had chosen by a particular sign, the sign of extraordinary hospitality in the form of an offer to draw water for both him and the camels from the well. In fact, the text is short enough that quoting the full prayer is probably warranted. The servant's prayer reads as follows in the NIV, which the standard throughout this paper:

"O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you

⁴ John Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary Set – Genesis*, (Zondervan, 2011), "Genesis 23:1–25:18," Olive Tree resource.

have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”⁵

That is the full text of the prayer which will be discussed. The events afterwards bear note as well, however. In the rest of the narrative, God did give the sign and led the servant to Rebekah, whom Isaac married. Keeping this storyline in mind, the interpretation can begin. What does the text actually mean?

“Kindness” and “Chosen”: Two Key Words about the Faithful God of Abraham

Key to this passage will be two words which highlight the redemptive-historical themes of the account. The first of these is translated in the NIV as “kindness.” The servant asked God to “show kindness” to Abraham, and at the end of the prayer asked for a sign so he could know that God had shown “kindness.” The Hebrew is the word *checed* (חֶסֶד) which is used fairly frequently in the Old Testament, occurring 241 times.⁶ *Checed* has a very wide translation range (including in the NIV such diversity as “condemn,” “devout,” and “loving deeds”), but the meaning seems to primarily orbit around some blend of commitment and benevolence. Thus in 174 instances the NIV uses a variant of “love” yet also includes at times “devotion,” “faithfulness,” and “loyalty.” In support of this blend, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, for example, predominantly translates *checed* as “faithful love.”⁷ There is an unmistakable covenantal flavor to the included faithfulness in many of the occurrences, and many times in the Psalms *checed* could almost be defined: “God’s unswerving mercy and love in being faithful to His covenant with Israel and her king.”

In Genesis 24:12-14 in particular, the common rendering “kindness” fits well enough, but an argument could well be made that God’s covenant faithfulness should not be left out of the picture.

⁵ Genesis 24:12-14 (New International Version).

⁶ John R. Kohlenberger III, *NIV Word Study Bible with G/K and Strong’s Numbers*, (Zondervan, 2015), entry H2617, Olive Tree resource.

⁷ See, for example, Exodus 15:13 (Holman Christian Standard Bible), compare NIV.

After all, as mentioned earlier, this was a pivotal moment. God's covenant with Abraham was about to transition to his son Isaac. The wife Isaac required would be the means by which Isaac could bear children according to the promise. Thus for God to answer this servant's prayer would be to show His covenant love to Abraham and his family. Those were the stakes, and as the narrative later explains, God did just that. In yet another moment of importance for God's people, He came through out of faithful love.

The other significant word in the passage, not repeated but certainly important, is "chosen." The Hebrew word is *yakach* (יָכַח). Though not as common as *checed*, *yakach* does show up in the Old Testament enough to notice, namely fifty-five times. The basic meaning of *yakach* has to do with rightness.⁸ The word is quite flexible, with "rebuke" having a plurality of the NIV renderings at twenty instances, but the rest divided between many others like "judge," "vindicate," "complain," or "mediate." This passage contains the rendering "chosen," also "appointed" or "prepared" in other translations. Many of the other possible meanings for *yakach* make intuitive sense (e.g. "vindicate" is to prove right, "judge" to discern right, "rebuke" to correct wrong with right, etc.), but how that ties to the concept of choosing or appointing is less obvious. Perhaps the intended sense is judging that a particular choice is the right one, recognizing that what is being chosen or appointed is right or fit for the purpose.

If this sense of discerning rightness according to a purpose is correct, then the servant implicitly acknowledged that God has a righteous plan with a particular woman who will be the best gift for Isaac. The one God has chosen, *yakach*, would be right for him and thus help bring about the blessings of the covenant which she was needed to fulfill. The Lord of all the earth does what is right, and the servant

⁸ Kohlenberger, *NIV Word Study Bible*, entry H3198.

fully expected (and entreated) Him to do the same in this particular circumstance, in this moment on which the future of the covenant hang. Thus, even while not used in the same sentence of the text, these two important words function together. The servant prayed for the God of Abraham to show faithful love to the family by his right choice of a woman through whom the covenant could transition to Isaac, and thus God's plan in election could reach fullness.

The Meaning of the Servant's Prayer of Faith

These themes of God's covenant faithfulness and sovereign election are key to understanding Genesis 24:12-14, but they are not the whole. There is the human side as well, the side in which the servant actually did the praying. The faithful God was entreated by a human in need of His faithfulness. The God of the covenant was asked by a member of His partner's party to fulfill His terms. Clearly, Abraham's relationship to God was not closed off and private. Instead, his servants were aware of God's covenant, promises, and terms. All of Abraham's household had to walk in faith, and in this passage the chief servant did just that. He expressed trust in his master's God by making an implausible request in prayer. (This is, however, something with which Calvin wrestled.⁹ How does a prayer of true faith include a prescription to God for a definite sign? While the discussion might be interesting, there is no room for addressing the question here. May the simple observation that Scripture never recognizes such a tension suffice.)

This prayer presents the basic paradigm of the God/human covenant relationship. God initiates, God gives promises, the humans agree, and finally the humans call upon God to fulfill His promises when they are needed. This basic pattern can be found repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, with Genesis 24:12-14 being a prime early example. By itself, the servant's prayer might not teach anything

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis – Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), notes on Genesis 24:12, theWord Bible module.

but the admirability of faith. Yet this prayer was grounded in the faithfulness of God, which was again proved when God heard and answered the prayer in verses 15-20. Thus working in reverse a truth becomes clear: the faithfulness of God to His promises calls forth absolute dependence from His people. Just as Abraham earlier “believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness,”¹⁰ now the servant trusted in God, and God gave to him the success needed for the covenant to be fulfilled.

One interesting quality of the servant’s prayer is the narrative introduction. In particular, verse 12 opens up saying, “Then he prayed.” The word “prayed” here is translated in the NIV beyond the basic meaning, which is simply “said.” There is no technical sense of prayer here, only a conversation. This is supported by the tone, which lacks any liturgical refinement, specific theological terminology, or accompanying posture or rites. Such a tone is in accord with the general prayer habits of the patriarchs, which tended to be simple, personal, and informal.¹¹ The servant just spoke to God. He asked God for some help as anyone else might ask a human friend. That God answered such a prayer on multiple occasions, including this one, indicates a profoundly personal orientation between God and His people. Liturgy has a place, as the Torah demonstrated, but this prayer stands as an example that there was never a time when God was first met in rigid procedure rather than personal encounter. Yet even this personal encounter has another layer.

Despite the informal and conversational tone of the prayer, there is also an element of mediation. The servant did not address Yahweh as “my God.” Instead, he called Him, “God of my master Abraham.” The servant may have been implicated in the blessings of the covenant and perhaps by membership in Abraham’s house something of a covenant member, but ultimately the covenant was between God and Abraham, not God and the servant. God chose Abraham specifically. His

¹⁰ Genesis 15:6.

¹¹ Matthews, *NAC Vol. 1B*, loc. 7812.

descendants and other members of his household only could participate by virtue of their relationship to him. The shape of election is visible here as three parties are visible: God, Abraham, and those who belong to Abraham. God elected Abraham freely, and through Abraham's election the servant received a covenantal status from which he could entreat the God who elected Abraham. A mediation appeared between God and His people, a person through whom His faithfulness and their faith could intersect.

Christ Embodies *Checed* and *Yakach*

At this point all of the themes visible in this text—God's covenant faithfulness, His gracious election, His people's answering faith and dependence, and the personal nature of a covenant relationship—all cry out for a point of unifying fulfillment. If God is truly faithful to His covenant, if the servant prayed for the fulfillment of that covenant through an act of kindness and election, then how did this all unfold? In the short term, the answer is quite simple. God answered the prayer of the servant by electing Rebekah as a wife to Isaac (in a way suspiciously similar to the election of Abraham in the beginning). Yet the overall context of Scripture points also further. After all, God did not set up His covenant with Abraham to no purpose. Abraham and Isaac were the beginning, but a day of fulfillment was always destined, a day in which all God's purposes would climax. So what does the canonical context of Scripture add to this text?

Jesus Christ once declared, "You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me."¹² The wider context, indeed the true meaning, of all Scripture is Jesus. This applies no less to Genesis 24:12-14 than to any other passage. For this reason, He should be viewed as the true key which unlocks the secrets remaining in this text. Jesus fulfills all of the themes of the servant's prayer and the story in which the prayer is embedded.

¹² John 5:39 (HCSB).

In Jesus, God's *cheched*, His loving faithfulness and faithful love, broke fully into the world and was (and continues to be) truly actualized. Of Him the Scriptures say, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."¹³ Indeed, the fuller meaning of *cheched* as covenantally faithful love is clear in the rest of Romans, as when Paul declared that God's covenant faithfulness is demonstrated through the faithful work of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The merciful promises that God made to Abraham, which in this particular passage were in a state of transition and needed another divine act to be accomplished, were kept by Him through all the years until their fulfillment in Jesus. Both of the primary shades of *cheched*, the kindness which the servant asked God to show to Abraham, benevolence and faithfulness, were completed once for all in the work of Jesus, Himself both God and the human covenant partner.

The theme of God's *yakach*, His choosing or election, is also fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is called the Chosen One.¹⁵ He is the one human through whom all of God's purposes have finally been accomplished. Rebekah was chosen by God to advance the covenant by helping Isaac have seed, but Jesus is the final chosen Seed¹⁶ who crushed the serpent's head.¹⁷ The servant prayed that God would choose someone to show kindness to Abraham, and in Christ God chose someone to show kindness to the entire world. The fulfillment of the servant's prayer for Rebekah was ultimately a fulfillment designed from the beginning of God's covenant to lead up to Jesus. Moreover, as the Chosen One around whom God's people are now constituted, the mediation has changed. The servant's relationship to God was in some sense mediated by Abraham as the covenantal head. Election was defined by relationship to God's chosen human, Abraham. Now this has shifted. The elect head of God's people is

¹³ Romans 5:8 (NIV).

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), ch. 7.

¹⁵ Luke 23:35.

¹⁶ Galatians 3:16.

¹⁷ Genesis 3:15.

now Jesus rather than Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Moses,¹⁸ and all God's people find their election not in themselves, but in Christ¹⁹ and His mediation.²⁰ Thus the prayer has been fulfilled for God to show kindness through one He chose, and "God of my master Abraham" has been replaced with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."²¹

Christ Embodies the Reality of Faith-filled Prayer

In addition to the fulfillment of the prayer itself, the concept of God's faithfulness calling forth the faith-filled prayers of His people has also been given a new dimension in Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Jesus fulfilled the role of the one who is constant in prayer and faith. Like the servant who trusted in God and asked for His will to be done, Jesus had true faith in His Father and persisted in prayer, "and he was heard because of his reverent submission."²² The servant prayed for the will of God to be accomplished, and so did Jesus.²³ Jesus in fact went beyond the role of the servant, taking a full and active role in bringing about God's will, not just as the prayerful man but also as the faithful God. In Christ the prayer and the answer, the faith-filled entreaty and faithful response, became one.

However important the prayerfulness of Christ may be, though, this is not the end of the fulfillment of prayer. Because of what Jesus has accomplished, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the people of God.²⁴ Now that the people of God have been given the Spirit, they can pray like the servant but in greater faith with greater power, for their prayers are enhanced. The Spirit they have received is the Spirit of God Himself, who knows the deep thoughts of God,²⁵ and thus they are given

¹⁸ Romans 9.

¹⁹ Ephesians 1:4.

²⁰ 1 Timothy 2:5.

²¹ Romans 15:16.

²² Hebrews 5:7.

²³ Matthew 6:10.

²⁴ John 15:26.

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.

deeper intimacy and deeper power in their prayers. They can entreat the God who has already fulfilled the decisive promises of His covenant, knowing that He has already proved Himself fully and forever faithful in Jesus Christ. Thus the prayer the servant offered in faith has become but a type and shadow of the reality of prayer which Christ has given to His people by His Spirit.

Finally, of course, Jesus also fulfills the personalization of the covenant between God and man. There was, to be sure, a personal quality to the patriarchal intercourse. The prayers did remain relatively informal and conversational. However, there was always a degree of barrier, if for no other reason that the theophanies and Christophanies were short, temporary, and not of full and abiding human substance. As the old age continued, the barriers between God and man only grew as the Torah was instituted and a personal relationship with God was inhibited by the cultic system designed to shield man from God. Yet in Christ God has made Himself fully personal to His people, taking on their own flesh that He might speak to them, act to them, and know them as one of their own.²⁶ In the Incarnation God became bone of human bone and flesh of human flesh,²⁷ fully and personally revealed Himself²⁸ to His creatures from within the depths of individual human existence. Now God's people can pray to Him in a more personal and intimate way than the servant ever could, crying out "Father!" by the Spirit Jesus poured out on them.²⁹ With this relationship in play, God makes good on all of His promises and hears His people as a faithful Father, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Exegetical Conclusions

Having studied the role of the faithful God, the prayer of the faith-filled man, and the fulfillment of both of these in Christ, the meaning of Genesis 24:12-14 should be quite clear by now. In

²⁶ 1 John 1:1-3.

²⁷ Hebrews 2:14.

²⁸ John 1:14.

²⁹ Romans 8:14.

the original, local context, the account of the servant's prayer to the God of Abraham makes for a powerful display of multiple biblical themes. The faithful love of the covenant God was expressed in both the request itself and the answer. An appeal was made to the electing purposes of God. The necessity of prayer from a posture of faith within a covenant structure of mediation and election was also demonstrated. Abraham's servant appeared as a great example, and his request glorified God in its fulfillment. All of this is multiplied when taking into account the wider, canonical, redemptive-historical context. The faithful love of the covenant God went from the provision of Rebekah to the self-giving of God in Christ. The electing purpose of God was revealed in the appearance of the Son of God as the Chosen One in whom the Church is also chosen. Prayer and faith found perfect human expression in the life of Jesus, and by His Spirit the people of God can now pray and trust God in a new, more vital sense than in the past, in the days of Abraham, his servant, Isaac, and Rebekah. In all of this, the glory of God in covenant, promise, faithfulness, wisdom, sovereign choice, and love shines manifold.

By this point the basic theological lessons should be clear, but they bear repeating with concision and clarity for the sake of summary. The first point is that God is always loving and faithful. He is always characterized by *cheched*, a devoted will to do good to His people. This is proved in His fulfillment of the promises to Abraham both in answering the servant's prayer for Isaac's wife and in providing Christ as Savior and Messiah. Therefore, God's people can always count on Him today. God can always be trusted to do what is right and fulfill all of His promises, which are a "Yes" in Christ.³⁰ The theme that God chooses, and chooses for a redemptive purpose, is also important. God's election is not seen in this text as an exclusionary act by which certain people are selected and others rejected for

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:20.

grace and redemption. Rather, God's election is shown to be a means of setting the whole world right through the choosing of one important character at a time. First Abraham was chosen, then Isaac, then in this account Rebekah, and in the end Christ was the Chosen One of God through whom all God's plans were accomplished. Any theology of election today must be oriented around the fact that God has chosen Christ in this inclusive and outward-oriented way just like with Rebekah. An articulation of election must be in accord with something Karl Barth once wrote, namely that Christ "is both the electing God and elected man in One."³¹

Finally, the power and nature of faith-filled prayer stands as an essential lesson. Through this text God's will to be faithful to the entreaties and requests of His people is made known. Praying and trusting just as the servant did, just as Christ did, in the power and mind of the Spirit who has been poured out on God's people by Christ, is immensely powerful and will move God to act, not for no reason at all, but because He has made a covenant to which He promises to be faithful. This text serves as a reminder that God has set the terms by which He may be approached and thus on His character and act alone hinges Christian confidence in the power of prayer.

Application

With Genesis 24:12-14 now exegeted at both the local, simply historical and the wider, theological/Christological level, there remains only a short bridge to find relevant applications to the life of the modern Christian. Indeed, both the event described and the theological interpretation are full of meaty substance. There are in fact three primary applications to draw from the exegetical work in this paper, not to say that nothing else might be added by further or other work. They correspond to the

³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), part 2, 3 (§32).

faithful love of God, the electing purpose of God, and the prayer of faith, in accord with the primary teachings of the passage.

First, in this text God's loving faithfulness is displayed in such a way that Christians today can stake all of their hope and assurance on Him. God was benevolently faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham by answering the servant's prayer, and He further demonstrated His merciful devotion by completing the *telos* of the covenant in Christ and His faithfulness. Because of this pattern of faithfulness, God's people can trust Him in each day, in each battle or struggle. They may find themselves in a crisis or a critical transition in life, but just as He answered the servant to fulfill His covenant love He will answer His people today. Therefore, Christians have every reason to trust in God unfaithfully.

There is also an application from the electing purpose of God. God chooses to use particular people to propel His purposes, and He chooses to bring about salvation through covenants He makes real human beings. This began in Abraham, and in this text continued as the servant prayed for another act of election, and God answered the prayer. This serves as a reminder that God can choose to use anyone at any time to accomplish any purpose He wishes. The Church as God's chosen people in Christ can be seen as a means by which God brings about His will, which should impel her members to find their place and take up whatever action to which they are called.

At the last, then, the final application returns to prayer in faith. If God is faithful, if God loves, if God chooses and works through human beings, then His people have every possible reason to believe, to trust, and to expectantly pray for God to act. God has plans and will fulfill them, and precisely because He works in this way there exists a call for His people to call out to Him. He has bound Himself by covenant to act when entreated, to do His will when His people seek His will. The servant

was an example for all today. He trusted in the God of his master Abraham and asked for His help at the appropriate redemptive-historical moment. Likewise, the righteous are called to trust in the God of their Lord Jesus Christ and ask for His help in every moment of need. Prayer and faith, promise and faithfulness, all fulfilled in Christ—this is the meaning of Genesis 24:12-14, and by this meaning Christians must move forward in their lives, submitting to God’s voice in the Scriptures.

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