

Abraham's guidance from the trajectories of God's word

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Readings: Genesis 24v1-9; 2 Timothy 3v10 to 4v5

Introduction

Jesus taught every Christian to pray to our Father God,

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In fact, he said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50).

So, if you're a Christian, you're part of Jesus' family and so your daily goal will be to know and to do the will of God.

To find out what God wants you to do and then do it.

Those two should be on your to-do list, every single day.

Are they? Or have they been they crowded out?

Conversely, if that isn't your goal in life, to know God's will and do it, then you probably aren't yet a committed Christian, or you've got seriously distracted as a Christian.

Jesus doesn't look for the perfect performance of God's will in your life, but he does expect the persistent desire to do it.

Not that I always hit the bull's-eye, but that I at least aim at the targets set by the Father.

But how do you know the will of God?

The short answer is 'from the Bible'.

The long answer is also 'from the Bible'.

It's just that it takes a lifetime of study!

So, if you want to know if its is God's will to murder someone, steal from them, slander them or to have sex outside marriage with them, that's where you need to go.

And I hope that all of you are clear on questions like that.

But what do you do when the Bible simply doesn't address something on which you want to know God's will?

Like contraception, nuclear disarmament, who to vote for?

Which school or college to go to; which job to take; whether to change jobs; which church to go to and where to live; what percentage of your income to give to God?

There are many questions the Bible doesn't specifically answer.

What do you do then?

God's Will and the Trajectories of His Word

In our reading from Genesis 24 there is an incident from Abraham's life that shows how he worked out God's will and so was confident that God would enable him to do it.

At the time, most of the Bible hadn't been written and God hadn't spoken to Abraham about Isaac's wife.

But I believe this story is here to teach us how to work out God's will when the Bible doesn't specifically tell us.

And then to trust God, and at the same time work with him, to get his will done.

This won't work for everything, but often you can discover God's will if you're familiar with the trajectories of his Word.

The trajectory of a rocket is the path it will follow on the basis of its shape, speed, weight, direction and power.

You can know whether to duck or just say a final prayer if you understand its trajectory.

That's the way it is with God's Word.

The Bible doesn't always give you a detailed description of God's will for your life.

But if you listen carefully and study its shape, its speed, its direction, you will see trajectories that give you guidance and will strengthen your faith.

Let's see how this worked for Abraham.

Turn to Genesis 24 with me on page...

Trajectories and Abraham

Now, don't forget, that Abraham was unique in history.

He was to be the Father of the entire Jewish Nation.

He was also to be the direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

So as Christians, Abraham is our Father, humanly speaking.

He was utterly pivotal in God's plans to save the world.

So he's not really like you and me.

Sometimes God spoke to Abraham directly.

Presumably through dreams and visions as God did with all the prophets bar Moses.

(Numbers chapter 12)

But as far as we know from Genesis, those times were rare.

Most of the time it seems Abraham had to trace out for himself his own trajectories of obedience, based on what God had said and done in the past.

And if you're familiar with Abraham's story, you will know he wasn't always very good at it!

So be encouraged if you're not!

But Abraham did get better!

But I think that is what's happening in Genesis 24.

Three trajectories from God's Word combine to show Abraham what God's will is at the present time.

The first trajectory is that Isaac, his son, must have a wife.

Second, the wife must not be one of the Canaanite people where they were living.

Third, Isaac mustn't return Abraham's home land.

As Abraham ponders these three trajectories of God's Word, he sees them merge into a single line of decision.

The decision becomes obvious for him: 'I'll send my most-trusted servant to find a wife for my son from among my own people, and bring her back to live here.'

Abraham forecasts where the trajectories of God's past revelation are leading him.

And Abraham is so confident that this is God's will, he says to his servant in verse 7,

"The LORD, the God of heaven... [who has done x, y & z in the past] will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there."

Once we know the will of God, from the Bible, we can have tremendous confidence that God will use his supernatural power to overcome obstacles for those who aim to do it. I think most of us here want that very much.

Don't you want to be able to project God's will for your life from the trajectories you've seen him reveal in the Bible?

And to enjoy that same confidence — that when you aim to do God's will, he will overcome the obstacles?

There are few things more exciting than seeing God doing exactly that in your life!

The apostle Paul said “All Scripture”, including Genesis 24, “is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim 3:16f.

So let's look at Genesis 24 more closely.

I said that three trajectories from what God had said in the past merge to show Abraham God's will in the present.

They're trajectories, not commands, because God hadn't said ‘Isaac must have a wife.’ He had not said, ‘His wife mustn't be a Canaanite.’

Nor had he said, ‘Isaac mustn't return to the city from which you came.’

But God had said things that pointed clearly in that direction.

The rocket of God's will had been launched, and several times God had pulled back the clouds so that Abraham could see its size and shape and speed and direction.

And from what he had seen and heard, Abraham traced its trajectory into the present and discovered God's will.

Isaac Must Have a Wife

So how did Abraham discover that Isaac must have a wife?

Not every father can see that trajectory for his son.

God's will for some people is to be single, Jesus said. Matt 19:12

But not so with Abraham and Isaac.

In Genesis 12:2 God said, ‘I'll make you into a great nation’.

And in Genesis 15:5, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars... So shall your offspring be.’

So one trajectory was that Abraham's child must have kids.

But couldn't it be Ishmael, Abraham's first son?

No, because God gave Abraham another glimpse of how the rocket of his will was aimed.

And in Genesis 17:19 he said, ‘your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.’

So for Abraham the first trajectory was clear.

Though God had never said it in so many words.

Isaac, who was now forty years old, must have a wife and clearly wasn't sorting it himself!

Isaac's Wife Must Not Be a Canaanite

The second trajectory was that Isaac's wife mustn't be a Canaanite.

Again, God hadn't said this to Abraham explicitly.

So what made Abraham come to this conclusion?

What pointed Abraham in this direction?

In Genesis 15:13, God tells Abraham that his descendants will move abroad and be ill-treated for 400 years and then, he says, ‘your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.’

The Amorites are the pagan peoples living in Canaan.

They are marked out for judgment because of their sin, but God won't drive them out until the history of their actions is so appalling no one could accuse God of injustice.

Now put yourself in Abraham's position as a parent.

If God had said that to you, about the people around you, how keen would you be to have your son marry one?

These were dreadful people doing dreadful things, and God said they were only going to get worse.

Abraham saw a trajectory in God's Word that went like this:

‘Through Isaac I will keep my promise to be the God of your descendants. So don't let him marry a woman who worships other gods & will lead him astray into judgment.’

That's exactly how God warned Isaac's descendants when they were about to enter the promised land centuries later:

‘Don't intermarry with them... for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.’ Deuteronomy 7:3f

So from what God had said, Abraham traced out this trajectory: ‘Isaac's Wife Must Not Be a Canaanite’.

Isaac Must Not Return to Abraham's home town

The third trajectory was that Isaac mustn't return to Abraham's home town.

Abraham is adamant on this point.

He says to his servant in verse 6, ‘Make sure that you do not take my son back there’, and repeats it in verse 8.

Why? What had God said to make Abraham so sure of this?

Well, remember when we first meet Abraham, back at the start of Genesis chapter 12.

‘The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”’

God then directs him and the family to Canaan, and then in v7 we read ‘The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”’

And he repeats the promise in Genesis 17v8: ‘The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.’

To go back would mean one of two things: unbelief in God's promise and power to fulfil it, or else rank disobedience.

Isaac mustn't leave the promised land.

Obvious conclusion

So do you see that the promises which God had given to Abraham in the past gave rise to three trajectories which led to an obvious conclusion.

God promised Isaac descendants... so he needed a wife.

She mustn't be a Canaanite, lest she draw him away from God and into the coming judgment.

And he mustn't return to Abraham's family home... because God had promised them the land of Canaan.

So, by looking back on the trajectories of God's Word, Abraham discerns God's will.

He then has the relatively simple task of implementing it.

Namely, that his servant should go and find a wife for Isaac from his brother's family and bring her back here.

And notice the confidence Abraham now experiences.

His servant says in v5, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?'

Now listen to Abraham point out to his servant the trajectories that have led him to his conclusion. Abraham answers him in v7 'The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, "To your offspring I will give this land" - he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there.'

Of course the Lord will do it, if this is so clearly his will for Isaac and all his descendants. The Lord will always prosper his will. Why else would Jesus teach us to pray daily, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?'

But it is nonetheless rather impressive of Abraham, isn't it?

To work out God's will in this situation based on what God had said in the past.

Abraham trusted the God of the promises.

And so can you and so can I.

When the trajectories of God's Word merge to form an obvious conclusion, we can count on all God's sovereign power to carry it through.

He'll send his angel before us and overcome any obstacles.

I have seen that happen many times in my life and I know that many of you have too.

But just in case Abraham seems to be a bit too confident here, notice the rather nice final touch.

Because we can't ever be 100% certain of God's will in an area that the Bible doesn't specifically address.

No matter how confident we might feel, there always needs to be left a bit of room for humility!

So in v8 he tells his servant: 'If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine.'

Illustration

Let me finish with just one illustration from our experience and then a challenge to us all for Bible Sunday.

When I was going through the process towards ordination, Lynn & I were confident we were doing what God wanted.

I fulfilled the requirements of a minister in 1 Timothy 3.

I had a heart set on being a gospel minister, another requirement from that book.

And God had guided us and answered so many specific prayers, that had confirmed it.

All was going well, until I learned that a sister business, that I wasn't directly involved in, had gone badly wrong.

So we faced going into the church bankrupt, with nothing behind us and not even a home to retire to.

Logically, I must keep working hard to pay off all the debt.

But what about the trajectories of God's will?

Nowhere in the Bible does it say Tony must be ordained!

But all those trajectories pointed in that direction.

So much so that as we talked and prayed, we became convinced that to not go forward would be disobedience.

So we kept on going.

The details are long and complex, but suffice it to say that a couple of years in to the training, I was not bankrupt, we had kept our house, and we even had money behind us.

You can believe in the God of promises when you know his will for you and you are doing all you can do to obey it.

I. Challenge

The challenge is obvious and clear from Genesis 24, isn't it?

Is discovering God's will and doing it at the top of your to do list every day?

It was for Jesus.

And are you spending sufficient time reading and studying the Bible so that you are not only clear on the specifics of God's will in your life, but also the trajectories from which you can discover it in other areas.

Yes I do mean setting aside some quality time each and every day to read the Bible and learn from it, as well as to pray.

Are you really giving enough time to what Jesus says is your and his No 1 priority?

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Let's pray.

Prayer (do business)