

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this morning. We thank you for the freedom that we enjoy as citizens of this country.

We thank you for the opportunity that we have to gather and to fellowship in the study of your word. We thank you for the gifts that you have bestowed upon the body of Christ, individually to believers, and the opportunities that we have as believers to edify and build up and minister to one another under that ministry. We thank you for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and for the salvation that gives us hope, that gives our lives meaning and definition.

We thank you now at this time for the gift of your word, and we pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us as we study it. We pray that the illumination that we receive will enable us not only to understand what we study this morning, but to see its application in the circumstances and situations that we face each and every day. We pray that as a result our lives will reflect your glory and will reflect the image of our Savior.

We pray that our light will so shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

For a Scripture reading this morning, turn with me. We are probably the only place in the entire country that will have this chapter as a Scripture reading this morning: Ezra chapter 10.

Ezra chapter 10. We have a bright, sunshiny Sunday morning out here, and yet this is sort of a depressing chapter. It isn't the type of theme that inspires joy and so forth, but it's necessary.

It is very helpful in our study in Genesis as we see Abraham thinking and planning for the future. Ezra, as you know, Ezra and Nehemiah are accounts in the Old Testament that record some of the last situations that take place in the nation of Israel in the closing period of recorded history of the Old Testament age. This is after the northern kingdom and the northern ten tribes have gone out under the Assyrian captivity.

Then years later Judah, the southern kingdom, Judah and Benjamin, go out under the Babylonian captivity. You have the ministry of Jeremiah. You have Daniel and his three friends and so forth.

Then there is eventually a return to the land, and the captives that have been away for some 70 years return and begin the work of rebuilding the temple and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has fallen into disrepair during this period, which was a judgment from God because of apathy, disobedience, lack of interest in the things of God on the part of God's people, and because they did not observe the years of Jubilee and did not give the land its Sabbaths every seven years. God knew exactly how many of those had been missed, and so he gave the land its Sabbaths during the absence of the people who were taken away in bondage in accordance with what God had communicated to the nation through Moses. Moses explained and recorded what has come to be known as the five cycles of discipline, the five phases of apathy and disregard that lead to greater and greater degrees of national discipline, national judgment from God, culminating in loss of the land itself.

The land is one of the greatest gifts that comes to Israel through the Abrahamic covenant, and the loss—this is the thing that is a singular mark of God's promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would possess this land forever. And the very last thing to leave possession of Israel is the very first thing that God ever promised them, the very first thing God ever gave them. Way back in Genesis 12, when God told Abraham to get up and go to the place that he would show him, he tells Abraham, "I will give you this land. I will give it to you and your descendants as a perpetual inheritance forever." And even when they are absent, it is still a possession. They just don't enjoy the benefit of it while they're in captivity, but God returns it because it's a permanent and eternal gift. It's guaranteed by God's covenant promise when he walks between the pieces of the slain animals in the presence of Abraham.

So after these years of captivity, the people return. But in the meantime, of course, there have been people who were not deported. A large portion of them were, especially the noble families such as Daniel and his three friends, the important leadership individuals. The king and his retinue, of course, are deported. But there are other people who remain behind, and this, of course, is the origin of the hatred between Jews and Samaritans, because the Samaritans were those who had remained in the land and eventually intermarried with the pagan occupiers and those who overran the land. And in the vacuum of residency caused by the deportation of the native Israelites, these other groups and clans and so forth moved in, and there was intermarriage. And so the

Jews always viewed the Samaritans with deep suspicion as half-caste or as compromisers or however you want to term it.

But this is the scene, this return to the land and some of the problems that have cropped up during the captivity. This is what Ezra speaks of in Ezra chapter 10, actually in his entire book. But here in the last chapter in the book, “while Ezra was praying and while he was confessing, weeping and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women and children gathered to him from Israel, for the people wept very bitterly.”

There is an interesting study you can do on the principle of confessing the sins of one's nation. You find several examples of this, especially in the Old Testament, where an individual will go before God. The whole reason they are going before God is they care about God and the things of God, and they may themselves be upright and blameless, but they will come before God and, in a spiritual sense, weep over the failures and the sins of their nation. You have to, of course, keep this in the context of the difference in the ages and the fact that Israel was a nation of God's chosen people. We don't have that same type of arrangement in this age, where at some point in time one country or another is the chosen people of God. I think some have sort of tried to argue this, but it's not the same. God does not deal at a national level with his people in this age as he did in the Old Testament age.

But it is interesting to meditate on the principle that believers such as Ezra recognized sin that they were guilty of in a corporate sense as well as their individual sins and brought these before God. Paul does speak in the New Testament about prayer for those who are in authority. This, by implication, is prayer for one's nation, one's government, and seeing where the strengths and weaknesses, where the good things and the bad things are. So it's something to keep in mind.

We are citizens of a nation, and we do have a responsibility as citizens, a spiritual responsibility to bring national issues before God in prayer. This is one instance of it illustrated from the Old Testament. So Ezra was praying, he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God. A very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel, for the people wept very bitterly.

And Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, “We have trespassed against our God and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land. Yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now, therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law.”

Now, we could spend an entire lesson or two examining this episode, but just two things to keep in mind here. Number one, this is recognition of a breach of the law of Moses.

And we will see the specific areas of the law. If you want to make a note of them now, you might just put down Deuteronomy 7:3, Exodus 34:16, and Numbers 25. We'll be visiting those passages a little bit later.

But the law of Moses, which dictated national behavior, this was essentially the national constitution of Israel. What had been done was unconstitutional, if you want to use modern parlance. It was illegal according to the laws of the land, which were the laws that God gave Israel. So this is recognition of an illegality.

And it needs to be remedied. So these who tremble at the commandment of our God want to return to compliance and obedience with the law. Verse 4: “Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage and do it.” Ezra has civil authority as a government official.

So Ezra arose in verse 5 and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. Now this is interesting because the nation of Israel, of course, at the time that Moses brought the law down from Mount Sinai, swore an oath to be diligent, to keep it: “And behold, all that the Lord hath said we will do.” The pronouncement of the blessings and curses on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim when they went into the land was a reiteration of that pledge of allegiance, if you will.

But here is a fresh oath to adhere to something that has already been in place. So this is a renewal of faith, if you will, a renewed pledge to keep covenant responsibility with the law of God.

It puts me in mind: I saw a speech that Charlton Heston gave to a graduating class at one of the major universities. I think it might have been Yale, back in April of this year. And in that, of course, being high up—I think he's the president at the moment—of the National Rifle Association and so forth, with all of the school shootings, recent events regarding weapons, he has been in the spotlight when people talk about gun control and so forth.

But the point that he made in this speech to the graduating class at Yale, one of the emphases there was that there has been a lot of talk about gun control. There's been a lot of legislation that has been pleaded for and that has been passed. The press has brought this issue to the American people. You see high-up leaders in the government pleading for this and arguing for it and standing in the Rose Garden with a bevy of policemen behind, biting the lip and saying all these things about gun control legislation. And those laws get passed.

But Mr. Heston pointed out that after the passage of those laws that everyone made such a big deal out of, there were only four people in 1997 and only four people in 1998 that were prosecuted and convicted under those laws. So there's this great show of, "This is what we need to do," but there's no enforcement. In fact, it has been an administration policy to not prosecute felons. This is a policy in writing to not go after the people who violate these laws. So essentially it's been a big political dumb show, and people get a feel-good experience out of thinking that something has been done.

And just as they're doing now, there's lots of motions and hand-wringing about what to do and let's pass legislation and let's do this and the other. But there is no teeth in any of this action unless there is enforcement, unless people are actually made to comply.

Now the law of Moses here has been in existence for several hundred years, nearly 800 years since the giving of the law at this point. Maybe 900; I have to go back and do the math. But it's been a good long time. The law was given in 1440 BC, and this is down in circa 500 BC, give or take a few decades. So the law has been around for a long time, but what's the problem? No enforcement.

So what these people are pledging themselves to is not, "All that the Lord has said we will do," in the sense that they did at Mount Sinai. This is, "We know the law. We're going to enforce it. We're not just going to pass the law or confirm it that it's good and raise our hand and say, all right. We're going to actually put this into implementation. We're going to take some practical steps to make sure that the law is fulfilled."

And that's what needs to take place. You can pass laws all day, but if they're not enforced, it's meaningless. It's just political posturing.

So in verse 5, Ezra arose and made the leaders of the priests and the Levites and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. They haven't passed a new law. They've said, "We're going to stick to the law that's been in existence for lo these hundreds of years."

So in verse 6, Ezra rose up from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib. And when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity that they must gather at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. This is like revocation of citizenship.

So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month on the twentieth of the month, and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. And again, we don't have time to visit some of the details of this, but the more you look into it, the more fascinating it gets.

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel." It wasn't enough that the guilt of Israel accumulated to the extent that God had to execute the fifth cycle of discipline and drive them out of the land in bondage, in chains, but that even during that, when repentance is in order and a return—God always disciplines not with a view toward punishment, but with a view toward repentance. It is a change of mind that God is seeking to effect in the minds of his people when he brings about discipline.

Just as any good parent, you don't just want to punish your child and inflict pain because they've done wrong. Your desire is to wreak a change in their conscience and in their mind so that they don't repeat their mistakes. But even in the midst of this process, when there ought to be contrition and there ought to be a return, and the type of attitude that Ezra reflects in verse 1, these people sunk in even more disobedience. They violated very clear instructions of the law of Moses not to intermarry with pagans, not to adopt their worship practices and so forth.

It is a historical truism that when you look at Israel, the captivity, both of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, purged idolatry out of Israel. Idolatry was a constant problem from their days in Egypt all the way down until the captivity. But after the return of Israel, when you look at the Maccabees and down into the time of Christ and so forth, there's never again a problem with idolatry in Israel. That discipline achieved God's desired effect in that idolatry is no longer a national problem. You don't have any more prophets. After the great prophets of the captivity like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and so forth, you don't have any more hue and cry about idolatry because that fixed it. That giant spanking from God on the nation of Israel eradicated that problem.

But this is the last wagging of the tail of that problem, because these people, even during the captivity, this intermarriage involves with it the adopting or the tolerating or the participating of these pagan worship practices. And this is the final expunging of what we're seeing in this chapter. This is the purging out of this last bit of the old leaven.

So they say everybody must come. This is the head of household for every family in every clan of every tribe in Israel. So all the men of Judah and Benjamin—actually of the southern kingdom, I should say—all the men of Judah and Benjamin gather at Jerusalem within three days.

And in verse 10, “Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, ‘You have transgressed and taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and do his will.’” Now this is another great passage to note in the margin of 1 John 1:9. When we talk about confession of sin, we have a knee-jerk reaction of 1 John 1:9. There are many, many Old Testament passages that tell us that acknowledging of where we fail and what we have done wrong is an essential step in repentance, in forgiveness and cleansing from God. And this is one of those passages.

But you'll notice it's not just confess. Confess and do his will. “Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from the pagan wives.” And people that say, that argue, “Oh, this confession thing is not enough, you know, simply naming.” The idea in 1 John 1:7 and 9 is that if you want to be restored to intimate communication with God in both directions, that is not based on 1 John 1:9. That's 1 John 1:7. “If we walk in the light,” and that's a present tense that suggests continuous action, “if we are walking in the light, even as he keeps on being in the light, we keep on having fellowship, each with the other, us with him and he with us. And the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses, keeps on cleansing, cleanses as a regular thing, cleanses us from all sin.”

So that cleansing in 1 John 1:9 that is predicated on confession is also predicated on walking in the light in 1 John 1:7. There's been sort of a superficiality in some people's understanding of what it takes to be forgiven and cleansed, because this is one component of a relationship. It is not the only component. You can't have a relationship with somebody simply by every time you offend, or every time you wrong them, you come up and say, “You know what? I recognize that I've done something offensive. I really recognize that I've wronged you,” and then walk away and go do something else.

Relationship involves more than just acknowledging where you have failed. As anybody knows, there are all kinds of components to relationship, and relationship with God is no different. There's a lot more to it than just not having named some offense against God or some failure with regard to his calling. And that's indicated here: “Make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and do his will.”

If you want full restoration, if you want full-orbed blessing from God and enjoy all of the benefits and the blessings of our standing in Christ, there's a lot more to it than just naming of sin. “Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from the pagan wives.” You've got to undo the wrong that has been done to the extent that you're able. You can't make children be unborn if they've been born, but to the extent that you're able to rectify the mistake, this is what should take place.

So in verse 12, all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, “Yes, as you have said, so we must do. But there are many people. It is the season for heavy rain.” This is harking back to what we saw up in verse 9.

This heavy rain slows down traffic. If you have wagons, if you're traveling in any means that involves foot traffic, which is the only kind they had back then, then you're going to get slowed down by heavy rain. "We're not able to stand outside, nor is this the work of one or two days. There are many of us who have transgressed in this matter."

Verse 14: "Please let the leaders of our entire assembly stand and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." So rather than having everyone swarm at once in a season of bad weather, there is some common sense applied to this. Let's do this a piece at a time. Let's do this in a practical way.

This, by the way, puts me in mind of what we're going to be seeing in Luke with regard to the census of Quirinius and the coming of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. So you might just bookmark this in your mind. We'll return to this idea in Luke chapter 2.

Verse 15 of Ezra 10: "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support." So you have some naysayers. You have some what you might call soft-hearted people that say, "Oh, how can you do this awful thing?"

But the descendants of the captivity did so, and Ezra the priest with certain heads of the father's households were set apart by the father's households, each of them by name, and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month, they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives.

You'll notice that beginning in verse 20 going through to the end, there is a listing of the ones who had taken these pagan wives and who put them away. And we just saw in verse 15 those who opposed this. This is something because these men's names are recorded. Just as you have the Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and so forth that participated in the rebellion against God, how would you like to have your name recorded in Scripture as disobedient, as resisting the will of God, resisting the word of God? That would be an unhappy heritage to have.

But these who acknowledged that they had made a mistake and who conformed themselves to this effort to get back on solid footing with God, their names are also listed. And it's a comforting thing when you look at this list of names, and there's a lot of things we could say about it, but why is so much space devoted to this listing of men who had taken pagan wives and who gave their promise? Look at verse 19. "They gave their promise that they would put away their wives, and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering."

The great thing to note here is even when you make a big mistake, and a lot of times we think, well, this is about the biggest mistake you could make. If you're a parent and you have a child and you're worried about, are they going to mess up their life early by marrying the wrong person or by getting themselves—if they're a girl, you're always worried that they're going to get themselves in trouble. They're going to get swept away in a wave of emotion and wind up being pregnant out of wedlock or get caught up in something and be drawn away from the heritage that they've been given in a Christian home.

We tend to think, well, that's it. When you make that big mistake, it's all over. And after that, any happiness or any production in your life is just going to be sort of minimal. You've been sidelined. This one big mistake has wrecked your potential, and you're off track. You can never get back on the perfect plan of God, quote unquote, perfect plan of God, because you've made this big mistake.

Well, we certainly don't want to have a lackadaisical attitude about failing, or especially not failing in a big way. But the good news is, even when we fail in a big way, there is no failure that we can be party to. There's no sin that we can commit that is greater than the grace or the provision of God. And it doesn't matter how badly we foul up, do we really think that our ability to fail or our ability to sin is greater than God's ability to fix and to turn cursing to blessing, to bring goodness out of a bad situation? God can work all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who recognize their calling and pursue it.

These men, unlike Meshullam and Shabbethai and Jahzeiah and Jonathan, these men have the guts, if you will, to acknowledge that what they have done is wrong. And this is a hard step. You think about it. Some of these have been marriages of longstanding, of many years. They've had children with these women. They've lived in their household. And when this is pointed out, when this great time of national awakening and conscience with

regard to the law of Moses takes place, they take the hard step. They dissolve those marriages. They put away these foreign wives.

You'll notice they don't kill the wives, they don't kill the children, but they dissolve the relationship because this relationship is destructive. It is symbolic of toleration and compromise with pagan worship. That's why they're called pagan wives. If they were wives from the people of the Persians or the Babylonians or any of these others, if they convert like Rahab, the Bible is full of women who came to Israel from Moab or from Jericho or any one of a number of other foreign places. But when they came to Israel, they became Israelites. They married in and they said, "Your people are my people. Your God is my God." These women won't do that. They are pagan wives. Even after these years, they're still called pagan wives. And if they do not worship the God of Israel, then relationship with them, even a marriage of longstanding, has to be dissolved.

This is the principle. Where do they stand with regard to God? If they are pagan, you have over in 2 Corinthians, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with the faithless." More about that later as well. But here, this is necessary. Purge out the old leaven. Touch not the unclean thing. And regardless of how much baggage there is associated with these, these men make a covenant promise before the Lord to obey the law. And you can't perpetuate. Once you come to recognition, even if something's been going on a long time, when you recognize—this would apply in our modern day.

In an extreme example, you can think about people that have gotten into a homosexual lifestyle or into a substance abuse lifestyle. This may have been going on a long time. You may have lots of baggage. You may have lots of consequences. You may have gotten into criminal law problems. You may have gotten into financial problems. You may have done something over longstanding and gotten into financial difficulties. You may have cultivated relationships with people that are of longstanding. And this is an illustration of the fact that when we come to recognize that this is an obstacle standing in the way of obedience and a faithful life before God, pursuit of one's spiritual calling before God, it has to be put away.

This is the type of thing Jesus spoke of when he talked about plucking out the eye that offends or cutting off the hand that causes you to stumble or cutting off the foot. It is better to enter into life with one eye or one hand or one foot than having both of them to be cast into Gehenna, which is not the lake of fire. It's not loss of salvation. This is the trash pit outside Jerusalem. This is where fruitless, useless, worthless things are thrown and burned. This is where refuse and offscourings go.

Do you really want your whole life's fruit to be dead branches, withered fruit cast into the trash pit? Or do you want to prune away the things that offend, the things that slow down, the things that are preventive of fruit bearing and let God work with what's left?

So this is quite a huge step. And these men are memorialized in the pages of Scripture, not because they didn't ever commit a great failure, but because they recognized when they had failed and they brought the ram offering. They put away these pagan wives. They separated themselves. They essentially cut off their hand. They cut off their foot. They plucked out their eye. And this is a great step of faith. It's a great step of obedience.

That's why their names are listed here. You'll be able to go up and talk someday to Eliashib and Mattaniah and Jeremoth and Zabad and Aziza there in verse 27. Or Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai in verse 28. Each of these men, we don't know anything else about them except that at a time of recognition of great failure, they had the spiritual fortitude to do what God required. And wouldn't it be great if we have that same fortitude when the Word of God and the Spirit of God convict us of an area where we need to make a separation or make a change.

Now, the main reason we have come here to chapter 10 of Ezra, though, as our Scripture reading, and we might just conclude it by looking at verse 44, after the list of names: "All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children."

Now this would be a hard thing. Anybody that has children and anybody else, we all know what the bond is between parents and children. We know how hard it was when Abraham had to send Ishmael away. We know how hard it is for that love to be breached, in a sense, by cutting off contact. And yet, that's what many of these men had to do in order to be obedient. It was a hard thing to do. Some of them may have loved these pagan wives, and certainly loved their children. But when there is a conflict and a choice has to be made between pleasing God and pleasing oneself, the answer, of course, is obvious.

But this, among other things, stresses to us the importance in God's mind of purity, of separating ourselves from those things which cause us to stumble, which cause us to offend, which cause us to compromise. And it is this knowledge that drives what we see as we continue our study this morning, the life of Abraham in Genesis chapter 24.

We saw last time the great faith of Abraham in purchasing for himself a small piece of land in what God had promised would be his and his descendants' inheritance in the land of Canaan, a place where he could symbolically inter his wife, and he himself would be buried in the cave of Machpelah, as will his sons and grandsons and their wives. And this is a marker.

I've often thought, you know, when someone dies, we have cemeteries, we have the funeral or the memorial service, we take the body or the ashes or whatever it may be, we go out to the cemetery and we inter the remains and we set up the headstone. When I was stationed in Fort Sill and was working out, there was a cemetery just south of Fort Sill on the main street there, and when I would run or ride my bike or so forth, that was a good quiet place to cover a lot of ground without having to fight a lot of traffic. So I would run through the cemetery or ride my bike through the cemetery, and it always struck me, looking at all the headstones and the epitaphs. Some of them were very plain, the most inexpensive thing that just has a name on it just to mark the place. Others had these elaborate mausoleums and monuments. Sometimes you'd see where someone had actually put a picture of the deceased on the headstone behind acrylic, or there would be some detail of their life: beloved father, noted physician, this, that, and the other.

And you think about what is left behind after someone dies and what their life—especially after the generation that knew them. There's a cemetery out in West Texas where some of the previous generations of Hulls have been buried, and I saw a copy of an extract from a county registry out there describing this cemetery as it looked several decades ago. And my great-great-grandmother, Sarah Elizabeth Hull, was buried out there, and there was a description of her grave and a little paling fence around it, a little wooden fence. And they said at that time, which was many, many years ago, that this little fence was falling down and so forth.

Well, I doubt that anybody besides a handful of us have any idea who she was, anybody that goes out and visits that cemetery, if there's anything left at all of the marker. Who was it? What did their life mean? Nobody knows.

Abraham, when he buys this cave, and when he sees to it that he himself and the next couple of generations are all interred there, this leaves a lasting monument for his descendants. And if they don't remember anything else, they remember that Abraham has laid claim to what God promised. God promised him the land, and he made sure that that's where his bones rest. God promised it to him, and he's not leaving until he gets it. He's not going anywhere else. He doesn't want to be carried back up to Haran or back to Ur. He says, "I'm going to bury my wife here. I want to be buried here. My son's got big enough cave. We can all be buried here, and we're going to wait for the fulfillment of the promise of God." And his great-grandson, Joseph, is going to do the same thing with his bones.

It's an interesting meditation to reflect on what sort of epitaph or what sort of memorial one can leave behind after departing this life. Can you leave a mark? Some people leave a mark in politics or in history or in some area of endeavor. The Wright brothers invented air flight, and Marconi or different people we know from history have left a mark. But isn't it a great thing that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, their memorial is an example of waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise? And what a great heritage to leave behind to anyone who has any knowledge of your life.

So this is what we saw in chapter 23. And you get the idea that Abraham is starting to realize that he's much closer to the end of his life than he is to the beginning. And when you get to chapter 24, verse 1, it says, "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age." Anytime the narrator in the Old Testament uses these words, you're looking for this individual to be checking out pretty soon.

If you look at Joshua chapter 13 and verse 1, you find very similar language used. "Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him, 'Joshua, you're old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.'" And this is sort of the swan song for Joshua. You find the same thing in Joshua chapter 23 and verse 1. The identical phrases are used. "Now it came to pass a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about that Joshua was old, advanced in age."

So Joshua at this point calls for the elders of Israel. "You have seen all the Lord has done for you." He predicts what God is going to do. He's going to finish expelling the people of the land and so forth. And this note that

Joshua is old, advanced in years, this precedes his swan song, his final acts in this life. And you can find the same thing in 1 Kings 1.

So we expect here that this is going to be Abraham's final act of defiance, if you will, before his story ends. Abraham was old because we knew he was old back a couple of chapters ago. Told us he was old before Ishmael was born, before Isaac was born. But he's old, well advanced in age, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. This is the first time that the narrator in Genesis has told us that Abraham is blessed. God promised him many times, "You will be blessed and you will be a blessing." Melchizedek calls him blessed, but this is the first time that the unseen narrator here has specifically said Abraham was blessed in all things.

So then in verse 2, Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had. Now you can sort of see the connection to Ezra chapter 10. Abraham is very concerned that Isaac not intermarry with the Canaanites. Abraham said to him.

And in verse 10 and following, we get the account of this trip that the servant makes. There are some fascinating things that we see in this scene between Abraham and his servant. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll examine them.