

IT CAN'T BE STOPPED

ABRAHAM

4,000 years ago a journey began that still challenges us today. It began on the green fields of an ancient city called Haran. The morning air rang with excited voices. Dogs ran about, barking aimlessly. Sheep bleated and pattered after their shepherds. Strong young women called instructions as they folded the tents and lashed them to the donkeys' backs. Mothers put toddlers in baskets on donkeys. Here and there a child rushed after a pet lamb.

In the dismantled camp, people paused for a last long look at the houses. They were mud-brick, domed houses that huddled under the shadow of the ziggurat. This ziggurat was a temple of the moon god, Nannar. Family ties and friendships were torn apart that morning. The colorful caravan finally poured forward onto the rocky road to the Euphrates River. They were bound for the far-off land of Canaan. Their great chieftain Abram rode before them.

Who was Abram? He was a wealthy sheep-breeder and caravan leader. We know him as Abraham: religious leader, prophet, traveler, merchant, soldier, devoted father, friend of God and man. He was an incomparable pioneer. He is still revered by Jews, Christians and Moslems. His life and steadfast faith brought hope to a fear-ridden people and direction to the history of the world.

Who was Abram among his contemporaries? "A wandering Aramaean was my father" ran the Hebrew saying of generations later. Padan-Aram, the "field of Aram," was in the upper part of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It is now crossed by the boundary between Syria and Turkey. Though legend may have covered details, Abraham's roots lie deep in history.

UR OF THE CHALDEES

Abram himself, the Bible tells us, grew up in the city of Ur south of Haran. It was an ancient, powerful city-state whose civilization had reached a refinement equaled only by Egypt in her glory days.

The boy who was to grow to Abraham must have been alert, questioning, and unafraid. A rich education surrounded him. He was familiar with the elaborate systems of state-maintained canals and dikes. They captured the water of the Euphrates for the date palms and grain fields that were the city's pride.

His education was at the docks. With their exciting smells of pitch and ocean salt and spices on the ships that came from the Arabian Gulf and the mysterious coasts of India. He learned also at the inn courtyards where he sat watching the merchants. They haggled over credits and installment payments. Clay records of these deals were kept (for

nearly four thousand years) in the local banks. Donkey drivers talked of the grapes and olives of Canaan, the greenery of the Nile delta, the grandeur of the pyramids.

In the busy markets he watched shrewd trading. He saw delicate necklaces and brooches, or statues in silver, gold and lapis lazuli sold. His bare feet trod the hot, torturous streets between two-storied brick and wood houses. Some had a dozen or more rooms around their central courts. Many of them had water and drainage systems.

Tucked in among the houses were shrines to countless gods. There were gods of growing things, of travel, and of hunting. Each one would be surrounded by gifts from men who felt the need of the god's goodwill. Towering above the city, visible for miles across the flat fields and the desert, brooding over every courtyard and marketplace, loomed the man-made mountain of worship, the ziggurat of the city's ruling god.

Merchants with their goods, farmers with lambs and doves for the sacrifice, and citizens bringing their tax money walked up its massive sides to the temples of the moon-god and his wife. There they were met by an army of priests whose word was law. In the temple were records that let no one escape from paying tribute. They were representatives of the great god Nannar, who held the city's destiny in his hands.

Everywhere, Abram saw people under the shadow of helpless fear. All life was controlled by the gods. Sin had nothing to do with morals. It was an insult to the gods, for bringing the too small, inappropriate or forgotten gift. In the quick-tempered divine family, an angered god might at any moment unloose the evil spirits of illness, failure or disaster. A mortal's path through life was insecure, a dreadful tightrope above the chasm of the god's disfavor.

Here Abram's sense of justice asserted itself. It was an insight that brought his priceless gift to the world; He rebelled at the notion of a world founded on chaos and ill will. In Abram grew the revolutionary certainty of an all-powerful, friendly God. A God that was faithful, unchanging and dependable to those who put their faith in him. This was the "city which hath foundations" (Hebrews 11:10) which the patriarch, starting that day in Haran, would make his lifelong quest.

UNTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW THEE

Abram's father Terah took his family out from Ur. They were bound for the free hills of Canaan. But they stopped among their kin in Haran. Terah died there, his intention unaccomplished. Abram became chieftain of his family.

Abram's invisible God was as real to him, his presence as tangible, as a friend beside him. So it is not surprising that God's message came to his consciousness as the voice of a friend:

...Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

He rejoiced in the sense of great things to come.

Abram and his people left home and family that spring morning. They set out from Haran, down the road to Canaan, the promised land of freedom, opportunity and peace.

Behind him, sitting sidewise on her donkey, rode Sarai, Abram's wife. Sarai rode with sorrow in her heart. There was no baby cradled at her back. There was no young son to carry on his father's divine concept. She and Abram were childless.

According to the customs of ancient Mesopotamia a man with no natural heirs might adopt, so that he and his wife might be cared for in their old age, and the family line continue. So Lot, the son of Abram's younger brother, who had died in Ur, traveled with them. His flocks and servants formed part of the small caravan. Abram's love was deep enough to embrace the young man as a son.

Down the stony road the patriarch and his people trudged. They were surrounded by the breathtaking beauty of crowding spring flowers and lush grass that would be parched in a few weeks. They traveled down to the Euphrates valley and across the river in woven baskets, ferries of the same type that are in use today. They continued west along the fertile valley. There farmers tilled the soil with tree branches. Then they went inland. They came to Aleppo, a caravan city where a proud legend still lives of Abram's passing through. They skirted the dry steppes of Syria. They lead their animals from waterhole to waterhole, trading as they went.

When the women were caring for the young children, the men gathered under the velvet, star-studded plate sky. They would discuss the day's happenings and to plan for the next day. Then the older boys would stop their games and quietly join the fringes of the men's group. There would be music and singing and, best of all, storytelling.

The stories of course were the ones the old men brought from their homeland. Some were pointless, some comical. They were a fun loving people. The most popular stories were those that attempted to answer the questions, "Who made the world?" and "Who am I?"

Such stories of creation, of human attempts to follow the gods, of a devastating flood, have been preserved from those days on clay tablets. They reel with the chaos and cruelty. This was the thing against which Abram had rebelled. In the light of his conviction of a good and merciful God, the old stories must have received their first movement toward order and purpose. Through centuries of experience and deepening

spiritual insight, Abram's descendents would mold those pagan folk tales into the spiritually instructive narratives that we find in the book of Genesis.

Travelers started in the early morning to escape the searing heat of the day. South and west the Caravan proceeded. They went through dust, rocks, blowing sand and pitiless sun, toward the Promised Land. A ridge of rugged limestone hills stretches down the length of the narrow country we now call Palestine. It separated the lowland of the Mediterranean shore from the deep rift of the Jordan valley. Midway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, the plains of Shechem form an east west passage through the hills. This was the heart of Canaan, and at last came Abram and his people.

Before him stood the stout stone walls of the Canaanite city of Shechem. The rock strewn, red earth slopes of Mount Ebal rose steeply to the north. Mount Gerizim was in the south. Between them green plains swept away to distant blue hills. He came as a friendly caravaner and shepherd, not as a conqueror. But Abram was prophetically aware that his descendants would one day call this land "home."

In humble acknowledgement of the faithful goodness of his God, he built an altar there beside the Canaanite shrine. He offered sacrifice. It was a very fitting place for this first altar. The Shechem was to play an important part in the long history of Abram's descendants.

But "the Canaanite was in the land" (Genesis 12:6); the valleys were full of farms. There was no place for newcomers with their flocks Abram moved on up into the hills. They came to the town now called Baytin. Here was room, forage for the animals, freedom, and the cool shade of trees.

Abram gave the command. The black and brown tents (so like those used by the Bedouins today, woven from goat hair that tightens and becomes waterproof in the rain) were stretched out and raised up on poles, secured by stout ropes. Lighter curtains marked off the women's quarters, where the household utensils were kept. Perhaps a baby's hammock was slung between the poles. Children gathered wood while the women built crude stone ovens in front of the tents. They set about baking big, thin cakes of wheat and barley flour.

With brush and rocks, the men fashioned enclosures for the sheep and goats. Then the shepherds, Abram's and Lot's, swung away with their flocks and herds to the pasture lands.

On the hilltop Abram gazed north, south, east and west at the long view of tumbled hills. Rising clouds of mist marked the wooded valleys, ancient roads and paths through the plains. Here again he piled stones one upon another for an altar. He "called upon the name of the Lord." No doubt he killed and roasted a lamb there, as was the custom.

DOWN TO EGYPT

As the weeks passed the flocks became Abram's chief concern. The rains failed, and famine settled on the land. Abram and Lot, along with their people, folded their tents and wandered south along the hills in search of forage. They went down into the parched, wild Negeb. There the few houses were brick-domed over pits dug in the soil. This protected the inhabitants from the terrible heat where every drop of rain or dew was cherished carefully. South and west they went to the wonderful green flag of the Nile delta in Egypt.

Unlike the Canaanites, the Egyptians were of a different race from Abram's own. Although friendly, they knew little of the customs of his people. When Abram proudly said of his wife Sarai, "She is my sister," the court princes misunderstood. They were fascinated with the beautiful, apparently unattached woman from Canaan. The Pharaoh ordered her brought to him in the palace. He gave rich gifts to Abram.

Things then went badly in Pharaoh's household. When he discovered Sarai's real status as Abram's wife, he was convinced his mistake had caused his misfortunes. Quickly he expelled Abram, Lot and their caravans from Egypt.

Centuries later the nobility of the "sister" title had been outgrown. The writers of the patriarchal legends had forgotten the ancient customs. When they wrote it down they missed the point of their ancestress' high standing. They pictured the deception as intentional.

FAREWELL TO LOT

Back from Egypt trudged Abram and Lot and their people. They went up through the Negeb hills, along the highland ridge, to Bethel where the altar was.

Their wealth grew in increasing larger flocks and herds. But these riches proved to be stumbling blocks. There was not enough forage for the flocks and herds the two men had acquired. Then Lot began to show his true colors, allowing his men to wrest from Abram's herdsmen the precious waterholes and pastures. Sadly Abram faced the need to banish his only heir. Greed and worldliness could never carry on Abram's vision of a good and reliable God. Nevertheless, he spoke with characteristic kindness to his nephew:

...Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herd men and thy herd men for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: (Genesis 13:8, 9)

He offered the young man his choice of the land. The long range of hills stretched north and south. Westward laid the plateaus and plains where the Canaanites were settled. Toward the east the land fell swiftly down to the wide Jordan valley. There the river

wound through deserts and semi-tropical vegetation. Beyond beckoned the fertile plains of Tran Jordan.

Lot chose for himself the Jordan Valley. Eventually he would exchange the rough tent life for the softer ways of the city of Sodom.

Abram was left alone. The limiting hills about him faded from sight. Suddenly he glimpsed the limitless extent his life and the mission it unveiled to him. In his ears, the Lord's voice spoke:

...Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art
Northward, and southward, and eastward and westward: For all the
land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.
(Genesis 13:14, 15)

Abram moved his tents farther south to the higher ground. This later became the city of Hebron, which today is called El Khalil, "The Friend," in memory of the revered patriarch. In the shelter of ancient oak trees he built an altar and settled. They lived in peace and friendliness with the Amorite tribes who dwelt there.

TO THE RESCUE

About that time an Elamite king, conquered the lowlands where Lot lived. He forced the inhabitants to pay heavy tribute. After twelve years the people rebelled. King Chedorlaomer came plundering through the prosperous towns and the rich copper mines to the south. A man who had escaped the pillage hurried up to Abram and told him that the city of Sodom had fallen! Lot and all his family were taken captive!

Abram, the man of peace, quickly turned to war. Always vigorous and efficient, he gathered 318 of his servants, together with young men from the neighboring tribes. Then he set out in quick, determined pursuit. With the total surprise of a two pronged night attack, he routed the four kings, rescued the captives, and recovered the loot.

The unselfishness and ability of this foray brought respectful recognition to Abram among his neighbors. Actually it was they, rather than his own people, who preserved the story. For Abraham is referred to as "the Hebrew," a name related to certain servant tribes of the time. Not until many centuries later would the sons of Abram use the word among themselves.

From the city of Salem (the name means peace) came its priest-king, Melchizedek, who was quite possibly an overlord of the district.

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand.

(Genesis 14:19, 20)

Evidently holding the priest-king in the greatest esteem, Abram delivered to Melchizedek a tenth of all the booty he had gathered. But from the king of Sodom he would not accept so much as a thread or a shoelace of the goods he had recovered.

ISHMAEL

Lot remained in Sodom. Who would be Abram's heir? In a vision, Abram again heard God's promise:...

Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? (Genesis 15:1, 2)

In the absence of a blood relative, this chief steward would be his heir. What could he understand of his master's revolutionary concept and aspiration? God told Abram to number the stars in the brilliant evening sky: "So shall your descendants be," came the repeated promise. Abram's faith in the compassionate, reliable power he had come to know did not waver. This meek trust would later be "counted to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3-9; Galatians 3:6)

Sarai was as unhappy as Abram in her failure to provide a son. We know now that marriage contracts of her time often said that if a woman were barren, she must give one of her maidservants to her husband as a wife, so that his line might continue. Sarai at last gave Abram her Egyptian slave, Hagar.

However, human planning brought out human frailties. Hagar became contemptuous of her mistress. Sarai, in turn, dealt harshly with her, and Hagar finally fled from her cruelty into the wilderness. There the angel of the Lord found her, comforted her, and persuaded her to return to Sarai. The boy she was to bear, the angel said, would have multitudes of descendants. But the angel gave the dreadful prophecy:

He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. (Genesis 16:12)

When Hagar's boy was born Abram named him Ishmael, "God hears." However this wild boy could never be heir to his father's mission.

THE COVENANT

Thirteen years passed. Once again the Lord appeared to Abram:

I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. (Genesis 17:1,2)

This was no longer a simple demand for faith in God's existence. It was a covenant, a sacred treaty. A king demands tribute and honor from his people in return for his protection. So Abram's offspring, a chosen people, must express the perfection of God in their lives forever. As Abram reverently accepted this awesome responsibility his whole outlook on life was uplifted and purified. And God said:

Neither shall thy name anymore be called Abram (exalted father), but thy name shall be Abraham (father of a multitude): for a father of many nations have I made thee. Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. (Genesis 17:5, 9)

As a sign of recognition and loyalty to this covenant, the rite of circumcision was instituted. This would be tangible evidence, through all generations of Abraham's descendants, of their acceptance of the treaty's conditions.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah (Princess) shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: ...and she shall be a mother of nations (Genesis 17:15, 16)

Sarai a mother! Abraham "fell on his face and laughed." He was ninety-nine years old, and Sarai eighty-nine! Nevertheless, his years of firm trust prevailed over human judgment. He arose and returned to camp. Obedient to God's command, he circumcised his son Ishmael and all the men of his household.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Not long after this Abraham looked out from the door of his tent and saw three men standing nearby. With the friendliness which was natural to him, Abraham ran from the tent door and bowed himself before the strangers. He invited them to wash their feet and rest in the shade of the tree while he had food prepared for them.

And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and

good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it. (Genesis 18:6,7)

He brought them savory meat and milk curds and stood by the men under the spreading tree as they ate.

The men were actually messengers from the Lord. They told him that within the year Sarah would bear a son. Sarah overheard them and laughed. But they reproved her:

Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14)

When the strangers arose to go they turned toward Sodom. Suddenly, with divinely inspired intuition, Abraham realized that the city would be destroyed. Lot was there! His own affairs forgotten, he protested to the Lord:

Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said,...Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?... (Genesis 18:23,24,27,27,28)

The Lord agreed that for the sake of forty-five he would spare the city. But Abraham persisted: suppose there are forty righteous? ...thirty?...twenty?... ten? And the Lord answered, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." (Genesis 18:32)

However there were not ten righteous men in Sodom. That evening, when two strangers appeared in the city only Lot offered them the shelter of his home. The others sought to do them harm. In the morning the two angels led Lot, from the doomed city. His two daughters and his wife were with him. In spite of warnings his wife looked back and, according to legend, she became a pillar of salt among the grotesquely eroded sandstone pillars of the region.

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. (Genesis 19:24, 25),

What actually happened? We can only guess with our modern knowledge. The authors of the Bible were not in the least interested in listing historical or natural events for future generations. They were simply devoted to recording their knowledge of God, and the relationship of God to men, particularly to his chosen people. If they had known that the Jordan valley lies along the deepest geological fault on the earth's crust, and is therefore particularly liable to rock slippage and earthquakes, they would not have mentioned it. If they could have foreseen that their own descendants, the Israelis of today, would harness reservoirs of natural gas in this region for roaring modern industries, they

would not have considered it relevant. They were recording one more instance of the impermanence of things based on sensuality and greed before the might of the everlasting God of rightness.

Archaeologists tell us that prosperity suddenly ceased along the Jordan valley in Abraham's time. Ancient Sodom and Gomorrah probably sank beneath the shallow waters of the southern reaches of the Dead Sea. However, the Bible reports:

And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. (Genesis 19:27,28)

ISAAC

What about the messengers' promise to Sarah? That promise could only be fulfilled by a power greater than the fading forces of nature. Within the year Sarah bore the long-awaited child of promise. Gladness reigned in Abraham's camp. He named the boy Isaac (Laughter). When the child was weaned at the age of three, he made a sumptuous feast of celebration. During the festivities Sarah observed young Ishmael mocking her. Her discontent with Hagar flared again.

Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. (Genesis 21:10)

Cast out his firstborn son? The old laws were explicit. The bondwoman, who had born him an heir, could not be cast out. However the covenant with God transcended the ancient customs. Through Isaac, child of faith, must Abraham's work be carried on. The Lord answered his anguished prayer: "Do as Sarah tells you." Early in the morning Abraham took bread and a skin of water and put it on Hagar's shoulder. The bondwoman with her son wandered out into the wilderness of Beersheba. There Ishmael grew to manhood. Many present-day Arabs proudly trace their descent from Abraham through Ishmael.

THE SACRIFICE

Though all seemed well, a gnawing fear arose in Abraham's affectionate heart. Until then, his main object in life had been the search for and service of his God. Could it be that he was growing to love his child more than his great friend? He'd been accustomed to expressing his gratitude for plenty by bringing the firstborn of his flock and the first fruit of the vine as an offering to the Lord. His Canaanite neighbors sacrificed their children to their gods. Was he justified in withholding his son? One day he heard the Lord's voice:

Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Genesis 22:2)

His son, his dearest treasure, the only visible sign that his life and mission, even his name, would not be extinguished as though they had never been! But half-heartedness had never held a place in Abraham's life. He'd given up his kin, his country, his nephew Lot and his son Ishmael. Now he set about obeying this most agonizing of demands. He cut wood for the sacrificial fire, called two young men to bring provisions for the journey, and started out early in the morning with his beloved son.

Three days they traveled, until they neared Melchizedek's Salem. The young men were told to wait while Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain to worship. Abraham placed a bundle of wood on Isaac's shoulders. In his own hands he carried the firestone and the knife. As they hiked together up the path, Isaac broke the silence:

My father: And he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? (Genesis 22:7)

Abraham's answer must have come slowly, in the word which he had always leaned so heavily:

My son, God will provide... (Genesis 22:8)

Sheltered though his education had been, Isaac must have understood. Every child in the land knew of the dreadful custom of human sacrifice.

This was a test of Isaac's caliber. Was he self-centered? Was he willing to give up life itself if, in some mysterious way, the blessing of all nations, which was the substance of his father's covenant with God, might be fulfilled? The answer was yes. The stouthearted boy neither cried, nor attempted to flee. Abraham and his son tramped silently on together.

At the place designated by God, Abraham heaped stones for an altar. Slowly and methodically, he placed the wood in order. Then he forced his heavy hands to bind his quiet son and lay him on the wood. When all was ready, he reached for the knife.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord called: and he said, Here am I. ...Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. (Genesis 22:11,12)

There was a commotion in the thicket behind him. Abraham turned. A ram was there, caught in the branches by his horns. Quickly Abraham loosed Isaac and happily offered the ram for a burnt offering.

Wrapped in awe and reverence, father and son descended the mountain. Two great truths had been established. They would be a blessing to all nations. First, human sacrifice was not a part of the worship of the God of righteousness. Second, God will provide for those who turn their lives to him.

Abraham called the place Jehovah-jireh, "the Lord will provide."

MACHPELAH

Isaac had grown to full manhood when his mother Sarah died. She was a hundred and twenty-seven years old. Heavy with sorrow, Abraham purchased the double cave of Machpelah. He bought it in strict accordance with the Hittite law, so that no question of authentic ownership could ever arise. There he buried his beloved wife. There he himself would be buried, as would Isaac and others of his promised tribe. An ancient Moslem mosque now stands over the sacred cave.

A WIFE FOR ISAAC

One more task remained for the aging Abraham. A wife must be found for Isaac. The many gods of the Canaanites were thought of as a squabbling, sensuous family with superhuman powers. It was clear to Abraham that no woman who had grown up under their influence could ever make a suitable helpmeet for his son.

Calling his trusted servant he demanded a solemn oath that he would never allow a marriage between Isaac and a Canaanite woman. However under no circumstances was Isaac to return to his moon worshipping relatives beyond the river. The steward himself must undertake the long journey back to Padan-Aram to find among Abraham's relatives a wife suitable for Isaac.

The servant departed with a string of ten camels loaded with choice gifts from his master's treasures. The little caravan came at last to the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

The day was nearly spent when he arrived at a well outside the city. How was he to find the right woman? How could he, a mere servant, determine the choice of his master's God? Humbly, he outlined in his mind a little drama. If it happened it would be a sign that he could understand

And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou has showed kindness unto my master. (Genesis 24:12,14)

Before he had finished speaking in his heart, a beautiful young woman came down to the well and filled her jar. The steward ran to test her. "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher." (Not at all an unusual request from a traveler.) With quick friendliness she replied, "Drink, my lord." She let down her jar from her shoulder and held it for him to drink from. Then she hurried to fill the trough for his animals. When the camels were finished drinking he rewarded her with a golden nose-rings (called 'earrings' in the King James translation) and two golden bracelets. Then he asked her whose daughter she was. She was Rebecca, the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother!

With great excitement, Rebecca turned and ran to her mother's home to tell of the stranger at the well and the gifts. Her brother Laban hurried out to invite the man into his house. Overwhelmed with awe at the evidence that his master's God indeed guided him, the steward related his amazing experience at the well. Then he stated his errand before breaking bread with his host. Laban, as his sister's guardian, agreed to the marriage. The steward joyfully presented gifts to the bride and the rich treasures of the bride-price to her mother and brother.

The very next day the little caravan set out for the southland. Rebecca rode on one of the tall camels, her nurse and maidservants riding nearby.

Isaac had moved from his father's home near Bethel. He now lived with his great flocks in the Negeb. Into this harsh land of dry hills and blowing sand the brave young girl came.

The long journey was nearly ended when Isaac came through the fields to greet them! Rebecca dismounted from the camel as token of subjection to her husband.

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife; and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (Genesis 24:67)

Thus another link was added to what was destined to be a long chain of pioneers, who prove to all who listen that material appearances are not boundaries, and that "the Lord will provide."

To Rebecca's lot it would fall to rescue the young movement, Abraham's mission, from almost certain oblivion.