

CHAPTER TWO

# Flexibility

**IS CONSERVING MY TIME AND ENERGY TO COMPLETE MY PRIORITIES**

*"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you."*

*1 Thessalonians 4:11*

## LIVING LESSONS ON FLEXIBILITY . . .

### FROM THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE

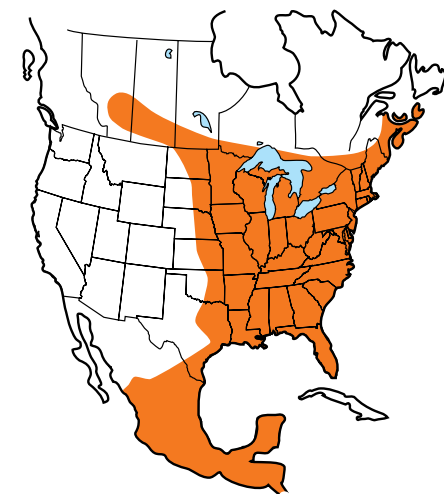
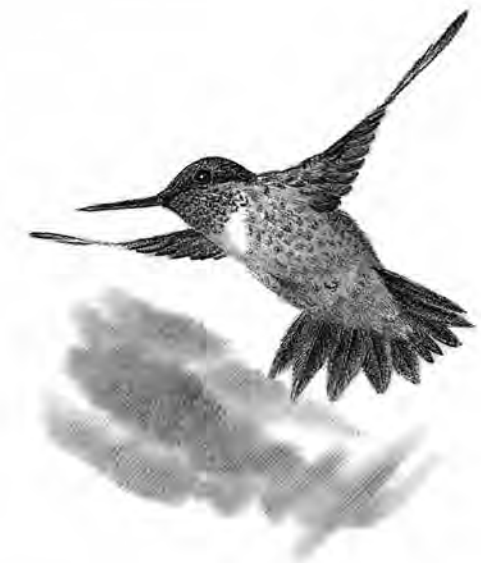
The highest praise that can be given to one who serves is that he accomplished a task with the same efficiency and quality as the one who assigned it would have. When a servant proves his ability in executing jobs of lesser importance, he becomes more and more valuable to the one he serves. One of the greatest servants described in Scripture was a man who was entrusted with a most difficult and important task. He had proven himself in years of faithful service, and God honored him in this crowning achievement by guiding him to accomplish it. This account demonstrates the importance of conserving our time and energy in order to complete our priorities.



### ILLUSTRATED IN THE WORLD OF NATURE

#### RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD *Archilochus colubris*

Confined to the western hemisphere, the hummingbird was virtually unknown in Europe before the voyage of Columbus. The hummingbird family (*Trochilidae*) consists of some 320 species and has the distinction of having as one of its members the smallest species of bird in the world. Of these species only one, the ruby-throated hummingbird, inhabits the eastern two-thirds of the United States. This three and one-half inch bird weighs about as much as a copper penny. The ruby-throated hummingbird has an exceptionally long migration. Its powerful little wings carry it as far north as Canada and as far south as Central America.



*The range and habitat of the ruby-throated hummingbird*

## FLEXIBILITY

### HOW DOES THE HUMMINGBIRD ILLUSTRATE FLEXIBILITY BY CONSERVING ITS TIME AND ENERGY TO COMPLETE PRIORITIES?

*It was twilight. All the daytime birds were settled, resting in their perches for the night. All the birds rested, that is, except one, the smallest of them all—the tiny ruby-throated hummingbird. It was busily flitting from flower to flower, trying to get every last bit of food before the light was gone and it would be forced to stop.*

Weeks earlier the hummingbird would have gathered this food for the purpose of sustaining itself through the night. But now its motivation was different. It was more determined. The hummingbird was about to undertake a major task which, if it wasted its resources, would prove disastrous.

Twice each year the ruby-throated hummingbird travels from southern Canada to as far south as Panama. The distance is long, but the bird can make most of it with relative ease. Along the way the voyager has many feeding stations which give it the needed strength to continue.

Gram for gram, the hummingbird has the greatest energy output of any known warm-blooded animal. The reason this tiny bird burns up so much energy is because of its very small size. Just as a teaspoon of hot water loses heat faster than a kettle of hot water, so a tiny body such as a hummingbird's will lose heat faster than a larger body. Because of this rapid heat loss the hummingbird must burn proportionately larger amounts of energy in order to keep warm.

As the bird darted from flower to flower gleaning nectar and insects, it felt the coolness of the evening. The temperature was dropping rapidly. In the morning it was going to undertake the most dangerous leg of the migration. Tomorrow's flight pattern was five hundred miles over treacherous

gulf water to Mexico. If the hummingbird ran out of fuel, it would drop into the sea and perish. There could be no turning back.

Extra energy was required for the hummingbird to maintain its body temperature during this cool night. Darkness would confine it to a perch, prohibiting it from gathering any more food. The bird had stored a certain amount of fat to serve as fuel, but if the trip were to be successful, it could not afford to take the chance of using any of the reserve now.

Although this could be a serious problem, the flexible little hummer would not let this hurdle interfere with the priority of reaching its destination. The tiny traveler would regulate its energies by a simple but effective means. It would do something very unusual for a bird. The hummer would hibernate for the night.

The bird permitted its body to go into a torpid condition. By doing so, only one-fifth to one-sixth the amount of fuel that normally would have been needed to maintain the warmth of its body was used. In this torpid condition the hummingbird became motionless—so much so that one could actually touch the bird and it would not move.

The little bird passed the night hours in this condition. In the morning when the sun rose, its warm rays penetrated the body of the little creature and the bird slowly began to stir. Soon it was back among the flowers sucking nectar and capturing small insects in final preparation for the journey.

The trip would be successful. This three and one-half inch, feathered creature had regulated its energies to allow it to accomplish the remarkable feat of flying five hundred long miles—non stop.





**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF  
THE HUMMINGBIRD IN SCRIPTURE**

*"Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers . . ." (Psalm 124:7).*

A bird's life is endangered by nets which are lifted into the air. Because the hummingbird is so small, it is able to escape from nets which would trap larger birds. God uses the example of how large we are in our own eyes to indicate our vulnerability to the snare and destruction of pride. King Solomon was honored with wisdom when he saw himself as *"but a little child"* (1 Kings 3:7). God chose Saul when he was little in his own sight (1 Samuel 15:17).

*" . . . Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest"* (Psalm 55:6-8).

The hummingbird conserves its strength for long flights in two ways—first by taking a unique rest prior to the flight and then by making every motion count in flight. God promised to crown the efforts of the Jew with success if he entered into the rest of the Sabbath (see Isaiah 58:13-14) and made the best use of each of the remaining six days. (See Exodus 20:9.)

**CHARACTERISTICS AND PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD**

*The flexibility which the ruby-throated hummingbird employed to conserve its energies enabled it to survive and complete a rigorous task. Unfortunately, this little creature hasn't always been so successful. In the early 19th century, the hummingbird and other members of its family were a mark of high fashion. Women sought them for jewelry and decorative ornaments for their hats. The demand was so great that during one year a London firm imported more than 400,000 skins from the West Indies. Over a period of years, millions of hummingbirds were killed. Many species have never been seen since.*

**HOW WAS THE HUMMINGBIRD USED AS AN ORNAMENT?**

The glittering feathers of the hummingbird produce intense metallic shades of green, blue, ruby, and violet. These skins made striking accents on apparel. The gem-like feathers are usually on the gorget or the crown of the bird. The male is more elaborately adorned than the female.

**IS THE HUMMINGBIRD A CREATURE OF HABIT?**

Yes. When the hummingbird arrives from its migration, it carefully selects a perch which it vigorously protects. The hummingbird becomes so accustomed to this perch that if something causes it to break off, the bird has a very hard time adjusting. The little hummer just cannot believe that this has happened. Refusing to believe the perch has been lost, the little hummer will make as many as one hundred attempts to land at the spot where the perch used to be.

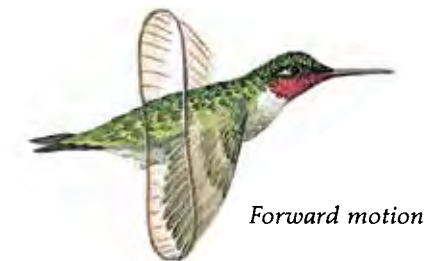
**HOW DID THE FAMILY GET A NAME LIKE TROCHILIDAE?**

It is really very appropriate. The name comes from the Greek word meaning "a bird." The hummingbird is a prime specimen with its beautiful feathers, sleek form, and skillful ability in flight. No other bird can duplicate the same feats in the air. The hummingbird can fly forward, backward, upside-down, and straight up like a helicopter. In fact, it can even remain suspended in the air. In flight the wings move so fast, that only their misty outline can be seen.



One of the features that distinguishes the male ruby-throated hummingbird from the female is its ruby-colored gorget.

**MOVEMENTS OF THE RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD**



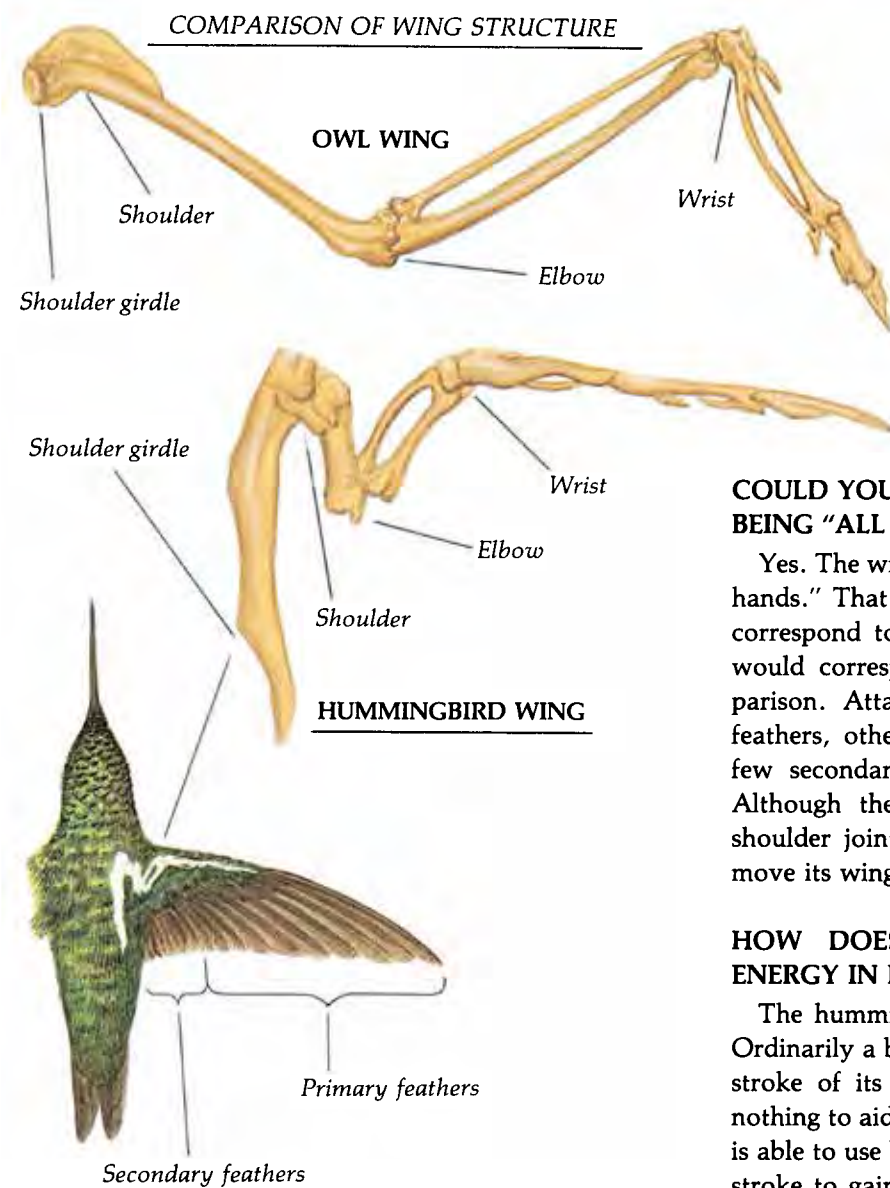
Forward motion



Hovering motion



Backward motion



There is no other bird as adept in the air as the hummingbird. The hummingbird is limited, though, in its ability to soar on motionless wings. This ability is reserved for owls and other large birds.

**COULD YOU THINK OF THE HUMMINGBIRD AS BEING "ALL HANDS"?**

Yes. The wings of the hummingbird are practically "all hands." That part of the wing's structure which would correspond to our arm is quite small. The part which would correspond to our hand is very large in comparison. Attached to the "hand" are ten large flight feathers, otherwise known as primaries. The relatively few secondary feathers are attached to the forearm. Although the wrist and elbow are rather rigid, the shoulder joint is so flexible that the hummingbird can move its wing in all directions.

**HOW DOES THE HUMMINGBIRD CONSERVE ENERGY IN FLIGHT?**

The hummingbird is extremely coordinated in flight. Ordinarily a bird will achieve lift only on the downward stroke of its wing. The upward stroke does virtually nothing to aid lift. The hummingbird, on the other hand, is able to use both the upward stroke and the downward stroke to gain momentum. By altering the angle of the wing, it can achieve both lift and propulsion. In other words, the agile hummingbird needs to work only half as hard as a normal bird in flight.

**DOES A HUMMINGBIRD HAVE TO SLOW DOWN BEFORE IT STOPS?**

No. The hummingbird can approach its perch at full speed, abruptly stop, and start up again as quickly as it stopped. The hummer starts flying before leaving the perch and it is practically at full speed the instant it is in the air.



The hummingbird can produce both lift and propulsion with the upstroke and downstroke motion of its wings

**HOW MUCH FOOD DOES A HUMMINGBIRD EAT IN ONE DAY?**

The daily food requirements of the hummingbird are somewhere between two and four grams. If a man were to match this on a pound for pound, gram for gram basis, he would have to eat approximately 300 pounds of food each day. The hummingbird needs this amount of food in order to meet the energy requirements of its daily activities. This inquisitive little bird is always on the move. Its exploratory spirit aids it in discovering new food sources.

**DOES THE HUMMINGBIRD JUST EAT NECTAR?**

No. The hummingbird would not survive if it lived on nectar alone. It must balance its diet with protein by eating insects such as gnats and mosquitoes.

One method of supplementing its diet is by looking out for swarms of insects, dashing through and scooping them up as it flies. The hummingbird is usually careful to pursue only those insects which it can eat whole. It does not care to tear them up and eat them piecemeal as is characteristic of some other insect-eating birds.

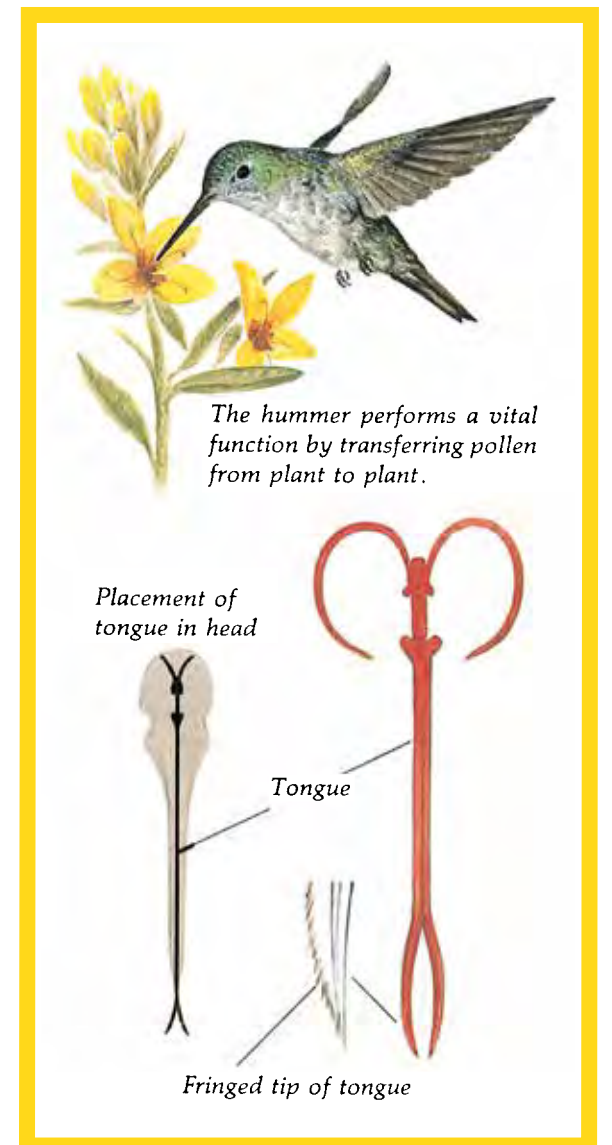
**WHY IS THE HUMMINGBIRD'S TONGUE FRINGED?**

Some thought it was caused by wear and tear from sticking it in and out of flowers. But the real purpose for this fringed effect is to allow the bird to stretch its long, slender tongue into flowers and sweep out insects which were attracted to the flower by the scent.

**HOW LONG IS THE BILL OF THE BIRD?**

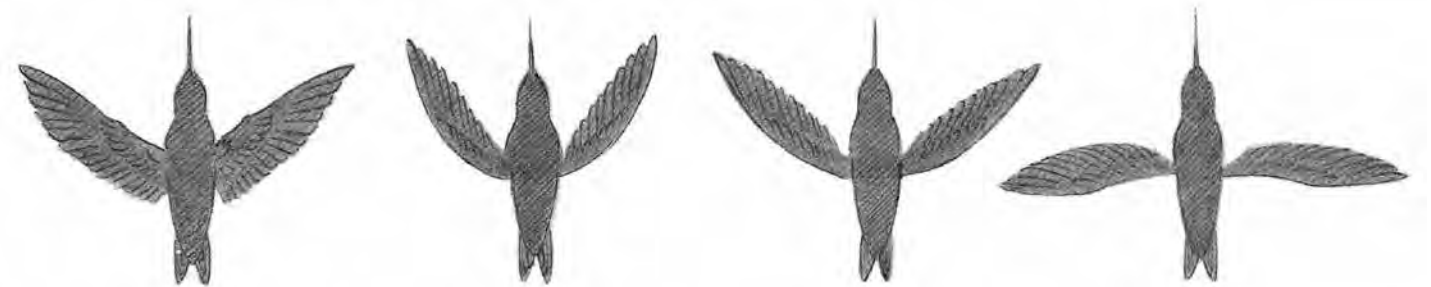
The hummingbird's bill varies from species to species. The bill of the ruby-throat is about one-fifth of the total body length.

The bill serves many functions. It directs the tongue in reaching into crevices to draw out nectar. The female uses her bill like a needle when she constructs the nest. The hummer has gained a reputation for being a pugnacious little bird, and it will also use its bill as a threatening weapon to drive intruders away from its territory.



The hummer performs a vital function by transferring pollen from plant to plant.

The hummingbird uses its long, tubular tongue to draw up nectar. The slender bill protects the tongue and aids the hummer in reaching into hard-to-get-at places for food.





At 15-minute intervals the female thrusts the full length of her long bill down the throats of her young, regurgitating food for them.

#### HOW DOES THE HUMMINGBIRD HANDLE LARGE INSECTS?

It doesn't, and many times they handle the hummingbird. Accounts have been recorded of insects such as the praying mantis and dragonfly capturing the hummingbird. The mantis will quietly wait for insects to come and feed at flowers, and sometimes the unsuspecting hummingbird becomes the victim of its jaw-like clamps. Dragonflies have also been known to pursue and capture hummingbirds which have crossed into their territory.

The hummingbird has some other unusual enemies. The frog is one, and even fish are able to jump out of the water and successfully catch one of these low-flying birds. Thistle plants may also impale the delicate, little creature on their needle-like thorns.

#### ARE SPIDERS A FRIEND OR FOE OF THE HUMMINGBIRD?

They can be both. Sometimes the hummingbird unknowingly flies into the network of a spider's web. Of course, in order to entrap the bird, the web would have to be that of a large spider, and it would also have to be very well-constructed. Cases have been recorded, though, of it happening. While the hummingbird tries to escape, the spider injects it with its poison, waits for it to die, and entombs it with the silky threads. On the other hand, a spider web can also be a benefit to the hummingbird. The female uses large amounts of spider web to glue together various materials for its nest.

#### WHAT BUILT-IN FEATURE DOES THE NEST HAVE TO PROTECT THE EGGS?

The rim of the nest is constructed so it curves inward. Because of this feature, the two eggs are less apt to be shaken out. The female constructs a nest the size of half a walnut. The bulk of the nest is composed of bud scales. These scales are covered with lichen and tufts of green moss then cemented to the nest with the cobweb material.



The egg—shown at its actual size—produces a baby hummingbird no larger than a bumblebee.

The hummingbird—very protective of its territory—chases a song sparrow. These tenacious little birds have even been known to drive away a golden eagle.

#### HOW TO ATTRACT HUMMINGBIRDS

You can provide yourself with hours of entertainment by purchasing an inexpensive feeder and filling it with a solution of sugar water. The little hummer can detect when there is not enough sugar, and if the solution is too weak it will avoid the feeder. A recommended solution is one part sugar to eight parts water. Honey is not a good substitute because it has been discovered that this tends to promote the growth of a fungus harmful to the bird. This sweetened solution will only be a supplement to the diet of the hummer. The bird will need to balance this supply with the protein of insects.



### HOW DOES SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATE FLEXIBILITY BY CONSERVING TIME AND ENERGY TO COMPLETE PRIORITIES?

Jesus taught that even a cup of cold water given in His name would receive its reward. Where in Scripture did the gift of a drink of cool water result in a great reward?

*(Pause for a response—see page 20)*

The trusted assistant of the richest man in the country was summoned by the one he served. He listened intently as his kindly employer poured out his heart and gave him his most difficult assignment.

This wise, diligent servant was not a man accustomed to defeat, but this unusual task posed the very real prospect of failure. Carefully and respectfully he summarized his concerns, and one by one his alert questions were answered. Then he was sent on his way.

To understand the difficulty of his mission, we must realize that one of the most important decisions that any man will ever make is discerning the right life partner. An even more difficult task would be to choose a partner for someone else. Such was the responsibility given to this servant. He was to choose a bride for his master's son.

After many years of working with people he had learned to discern vital character qualities. He now devised a plan to detect them in a young lady, and then he submitted his plan to the Lord. No sooner had he done this than a beautiful girl walked to the

well by which he rested and fulfilled the very requirements of his test. At his request she offered him a drink of the water she had just drawn. Then she volunteered to draw water for his ten thirsty camels also.

He gave her a valuable reward of costly jewelry and asked if he could meet her parents. At her home he was invited to sit down for a meal, but he graciously declined and stated that he would not eat until he had finished his task.

He explained how God had answered his prayer and had also blessed the life of the one he served. He asked permission of the girl's parents and brother for her to become the bride of his master's son, heir to all the family wealth.

But the mother and brother made one request. "Let her stay here a few days, at least ten, and then let her go." He emphasized the importance of quickly completing the task that had been assigned to him so that he could fulfill the priority of the one he was serving. The parents asked the girl what her wishes were, and she agreed to go at once.

In this final request Abraham's servant was called upon to be flexible, but he knew that flexibility is only a desirable quality if it does not hinder completing the tasks and priorities which have been assigned.

From Genesis 24





*"And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels."*

**BY CONSERVING TIME AND ENERGY,  
A SERVANT WAS USED TO SHAPE A NATION**

The immediate cause of Abraham's desire to obtain a wife for his son, Isaac, is given in Genesis 24:1, "Now Abraham was old, and well stricken in age." Abraham was now 140 years old; his wife, Sarah, had died about three years before, and their only son, Isaac, was forty and as yet unmarried.

**CHOOSING THE MOTHER OF A NATION**

The last half of Abraham's life had centered around God's promise to bless the world through a descendant of his son, Isaac (Genesis 12:3; 17:19). Now in his old age, he felt both the urgency and the responsibility to select a wife for his son who would be worthy of being the mother of the Lord's people.

**A SERVANT IS CALLED TO DO THE JOB**

Abraham felt that the best wife for his son was to be found in the family of his brother in Mesopotamia. He refused, however, to let Isaac himself go and choose his wife. He knew his son well and may have felt that Isaac would be pressured into remaining in Mesopotamia instead of returning to the land the Lord had promised them. To avoid this risk, he sent his most trusted servant instead and made him swear that he would never bring Isaac into the land of Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:6).

**A TRUE TEST OF LOYALTY**

The name of Abraham's servant is not mentioned. All we know is that he was the "eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had." (Genesis 24:2) A very strong possibility is that this servant is Eliezer, previously mentioned as the heir of Abraham's household (Genesis 15:2,3). If that is the case, Eliezer would then have been at least sixty or seventy years old and no doubt the senior servant as well. If this servant was indeed Eliezer, it is a tribute to his character that Abraham chose him for such a task. It was Isaac who had displaced him from his possible inheritance; now he was choosing a wife for him.

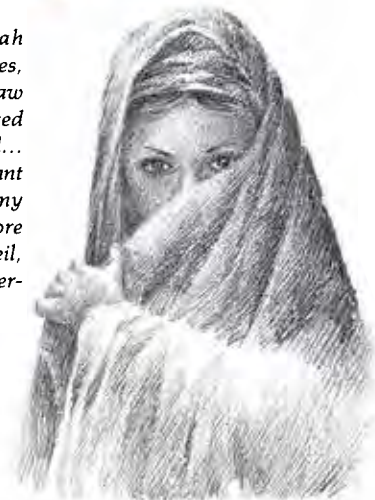
**A THREE-FOLD MISSION**

The servant began his assignment in complete dependence on the Lord (Genesis 24:12). His priorities were clear. His first responsibility was to worship the Lord. "And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord." (Genesis 24:26) His second concern was for his master, Abraham. "And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master, Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth." (Genesis 24:27a) His third concern was for his own success in serving the Lord and his master. "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." (Genesis 24:27b)

When the servant returned, having successfully completed his mission, he told Isaac all the things that he had done (Genesis 24:66). No words of commendation are recorded, but we can only imagine that Abraham's response was similar to the words the Lord will say to his faithful servants: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21)



*"And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel... and the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself."*



**ABRAHAM'S SERVANT CHARACTER SKETCH**

**WHY WAS THE SUCCESS OF ABRAHAM'S SERVANT SO IMPORTANT?**

Abraham was concerned that his son not marry a Canaanite (Genesis 24:3). He knew that if he were to die, Isaac might be tempted to marry into one of the influential Canaanite families. That would be conducive to peace, social standing, and acceptance in a strange land. But as a man of faith, Abraham was more concerned about the spiritual prosperity of his descendants than their material and social prosperity. He wanted a wife for Isaac who would not corrupt their children with the ungodly beliefs and practices of the Canaanites. He wanted a wife who would support her husband in the worship of the Lord and teach her children the knowledge of the Lord. Abraham felt that the best wife for his son would be found among his own family in Mesopotamia where they had not entirely lost the knowledge of the true God (cf. Genesis 24:50). This strong conviction of Abraham was later expressed in national law (Deuteronomy 7:3). The reason is given, "For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods." (Deuteronomy 7:4)

**WHY DID ABRAHAM'S SERVANT DEVISE SUCH A DIFFICULT TEST TO DISCOVER ISAAC'S APPOINTED WIFE?**

It was not unusual for a girl to offer a drink of fresh water to a stranger after a long journey. But to offer to quench the thirst of ten camels was unusual indeed. As many as twenty gallons of water can be consumed by one camel in a drinking session. If the camels had been watered only the night before, they still could have easily consumed at least fifty gallons. This was no small task for a young girl.

However, the servant's test was neither spectacular nor arbitrary. It was designed to bring to light the very qualities that would best complement his master's son, Isaac—hospitality to a weary traveler, alertness to the needs of the animals, generosity and ambition in giving of herself, endurance in completing the task, joyfulness if she did the job cheerfully, and flexibility in changing from what she was doing.

**WHY WAS ABRAHAM'S SERVANT SO ANXIOUS TO COMPLETE HIS ASSIGNMENT?**

At two different times, the servant expressed urgency in accomplishing his task. When food was set before him he said, "I will not eat, until I have told my errand." (Genesis 24:33) Later, when asked to stay a little longer he replied, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master." (Genesis 24:56)

His eagerness to return immediately is surprising under the circumstances. The trip from southern Canaan to Haran was about 500 miles. A team of freight camels averages 28 miles per day without difficulty. Hence, the trip would have taken between two and three weeks. The men were undoubtedly tired and would have normally welcomed a ten-day rest before returning. The servant knew the concern this delay would have caused Abraham and Isaac who knew the exact traveling time of the trip to Haran. A ten-day delay would have caused them unnecessary anxiety for the safety and success of their servant. Such concern may have prompted the prayer and meditation in which Isaac was involved when his servant returned (Genesis 24:63). The faithful servant had put his personal conveniences second to his master's priorities—a genuine expression of selfless love.



*"And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done."*

