

The Life of Abraham

A Bride for Isaac

Genesis 24:1-67

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A Bride for Isaac

Scripture

We are continuing our study of “The Life of Abraham” by examining selected incidents in his life.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and promised that he would make him into a great nation. That promise began to be fulfilled twenty-five years later when Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. Thirty-seven years after that, Sarah died. Genesis 23 narrates the death and burial of Sarah. The next chapter, Genesis 24, is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis (sixty-seven verses) and, aside from the account of the Flood (seventy-five verses), is the longest single episode recorded in the book of Genesis. Genesis 24 deals with the matter of finding a bride for Abraham’s son, Isaac.

Although we shall cover the entire chapter in our exposition today, for the sake of time, I shall only read Genesis 24:1-9:

¹Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, ³that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” ⁵The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” ⁶Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall

take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” ¹⁸ She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³ and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” ²⁴ She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel

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the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.”²⁵ She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.”²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord²⁷ and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.”²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things.

²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring.³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring.³¹ He said, “Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, “I will not eat until I have said what I have to say.” He said, “Speak on.”

³⁴ So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant.”³⁵ The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys.³⁶ And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has.³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell,³⁸ but you shall go to my father’s house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.’³⁹ I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’⁴⁰ But he said to me, ‘The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father’s house.’⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.’

⁴² “I came today to the spring and said, ‘O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go,⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin

who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,"⁴⁴ and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.'

⁴⁵ "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.'⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also.⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms.⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.⁴⁹ Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good.⁵¹ Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord.⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments.⁵⁴ And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master."⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go."⁵⁶ But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master."⁵⁷ They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her."⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go."⁵⁹ So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become
thousands of ten thousands,
and may your offspring possess
the gate of those who hate him!”

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death. (Genesis 24:1-67)

Introduction

About a month ago, Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, announced that Facebook passed two billion users, meaning that almost one in four people on the entire planet earth are signed up on Facebook. Zuckerberg went on to say that communities would be Facebook’s new mission and that it would be the company’s focus from now on. In fact, *The Sun* reported, “Mark Zuckerberg has claimed Facebook is ‘the new church’ and the social network can take on the role that religion once did in giving people a sense of community.”¹ Of course, many people, especially young people, find a greater sense of community and purpose in Facebook than they do in the Church of Jesus Christ.

¹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/tech/3904454/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-new-church/>.

Many church leaders fear for the future of the Church. They ask questions, such as: Will our children still be communicant members of the Church? What about our grandchildren? Will the Church still be in existence a century from now?

The people of God in the Old Testament often feared for its existence as a nation. The story of God providing a bride for Isaac encouraged them to remember that God was faithful to his covenant promises.

Lesson

The analysis of finding a bride for Isaac in Genesis 24:1-67 will show us how the Lord provided Rebekah as a wife for Isaac in order to continue the line of the seed of the woman.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Servant Was Sent by Abraham to Find a Bride for Isaac (24:1-9)
2. The Servant Met Rebekah at the Well (24:10-28)
3. The Servant Explained His Mission to Rebekah's Family (24:29-61)
4. The Servant Brought Rebekah to Isaac (24:62-67)

I. The Servant Was Sent by Abraham to Find a Bride for Isaac (24:1-9)

First, the servant was sent by Abraham to find a bride for Isaac.

God had promised Abraham a number of blessings when he called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Among the many blessings was the promise that God would make of Abraham a great nation. Abraham and Sarah eventually had a child in their old age, a son God named Isaac. But, after forty years it seemed that God's promise was running into a dead end. Genesis 24:1 says, **“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had**

blessed Abraham in all things.” Yes, God had **blessed Abraham in all things**, but for Isaac, now forty years old (Genesis 25:20), there was no wife and, more importantly, no children to continue the line of the seed of the woman.

Abraham could have decided to have Isaac marry one of the local Canaanite girls. And, if he could arrange a marriage with a wealthy Canaanite girl who owned property, then Isaac could not only have a bride but also expand his own property in the Promised Land. But Abraham refused to do that. He understood that Noah’s statement, “Cursed be Canaan” (Genesis 9:25), was applicable to the present Canaanite descendants. Later on, God specifically forbade his people from marrying Canaanites, when he said, “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons” (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1–4). One commentator said, “If Isaac is to inherit the land, he must not marry among those destined to disinherit the land.”²

In verses 2-4 we read Abraham’s last recorded words. He spoke to his servant, who is not named. It could be Eliezer of Damascus, mentioned in Genesis 15:2. However, whether it was Eliezer or another servant, we do know that he was a faithful servant who had come to trust in the God of his master Abraham. Abraham said **to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”** Putting a hand under Abraham’s thigh was apparently the ancient equivalent of swearing an oath on the Bible.

But **the servant** spotted a difficulty in Abraham’s proposal, and **said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to**

² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 237.

follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” (24:5). That is a good question. What young woman would leave her family and go with a stranger to a distant land and marry someone she had never met? Wouldn't it just be easier to have Isaac move to the bride's country?

Abraham was adamant that Isaac not leave the Promised Land. In fact, Kent Hughes observed, “Isaac was never once permitted to leave the land, even in time of famine (cf. 26:2). Isaac encapsulated the divine promise of a people and a land.”³ **Abraham said to his servant, “See to it that you do not take my son back there”** (24:6). Abraham then encouraged his servant with an assurance of the Lord's providential guidance, and he said in verses 7-8, **“The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.”**

What is significant in Abraham's words is his faith in God. In the beginning of his relationship with God, Abraham at times doubted God's word to him that he would be given a son. But now, in his last recorded words, Abraham expressed unwavering faith in God. Abraham believed that God would provide a bride for his son Isaac. Kent Hughes notes, “There will be no miracle in this story, as we usually think of miracles. No rearrangement of molecules—no sun standing still—no healing—no river stopped up. Rather, God will bring about the acquiring of Isaac's bride through the ‘normal’ events of life—the delays, the customs, the stresses, the chance meetings. As J. I. Packer says, believers ‘are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 316.

that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice.”⁴

So, with that assurance from his master Abraham, the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter (24:9).

II. The Servant Met Rebekah at the Well (24:10-28)

Second, the servant met Rebekah at the well.

Verse 10 says that without any delay, **the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor.** Moses covered the month-long journey in just half a verse! The journey was not important; what was important was what happened when the servant reached his destination (fifty-one verses for one evening and morning, verses 11-61).

So, a month later, when he arrived at Nahor, the servant **made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water (24:11).** And then he prayed. Undoubtedly, he had prayed during his month-long journey too. But when he arrived at his destination, he prayed in a very specific way. He prayed in verse 14, **“Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”** Abraham’s servant was asking God for a sign. But note that it was not a miraculous sign, like Gideon’s fleece. The sign he requested was appropriate to the task at hand, and showed that Abraham’s servant had thought carefully about asking God for a sign. Commentator James Montgomery Boice quotes Henry Morris to describe what

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word, 316.

Abraham's servant might have been thinking:

God has protected them on the journey, but now the real work was at hand. How was he to know which girl he should choose for his master? He knew some of the qualities she must have, of course. She must be from Abraham's people; she must be a godly, virtuous maiden and, hopefully, fair to look upon. But suppose there should be several who would fit these specifications, then how would he know which was the right one?

In addition, he may have reasoned, she should be strong and healthy, because she would have to make a long trip with the caravan and then would have to assume charge of a large household of servants and to bear and raise children. She should be an industrious girl, harboring no delusions of a life of ease and idleness just because Isaac had great possessions. Finally, she should be gracious and considerate, of sensitive and compassionate spirit, because these attributes would be most desirable in coping with her many responsibilities among her servants and the people of the land.

But how could Abraham's servant determine quickly which of the girls that would soon be arriving would have such qualities? It would be necessary for him to make the first approach toward conversation, and the obvious thing would be for him to ask her for a drink of water from her pitcher. However, almost any girl, out of common courtesy, would agree to such a request as that; so that act alone would not be sufficient. If, however, she would then, on her own initiative, offer to help in some further way, going a second mile as it were, this would definitely be a good sign. Perhaps the most severe test would be whether she was willing not only to give him some water, and perhaps even his attendants, but also his ten camels. Surely, if she would do this, without grumbling, it would go far toward proving that she was the kind of wife Abraham was seeking for his son.

But this would be a most unreasonable thing to expect. Drawing enough water to satisfy the thirst of ten large and tired camels would be a hard and wearisome task, to say the least. He couldn't really ask a girl to do such a thing. Nevertheless, if she would do it voluntarily, it would be a strong indication that she

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was the right one.

Accordingly, he decided to pray to this specific end. He knew, as did Abraham, that he had followed the Lord's leading to this point. Now, surely, he could trust God to show him the right woman, and what better indication could there be than this? Unreasonable as it might at first seem, therefore, it was really a most appropriate request.⁵

Now, what made this sign so interesting was the amount of work that it involved. Apparently, the well had several steps down below the ground where jars were used to draw up water. So, drawing water required a lot of effort. Moreover, as Hughes notes, "a camel typically would drink about twenty-five gallons of water, and an ancient water jar held about three gallons of water. This means that Rebekah made between eighty to one hundred descents into the well. As to the amount of time she gave to this, a camel takes about ten minutes to drink its full complement of water. Rebekah's labors filled one and one half to two sweaty hours!"⁶

Remarkably, ***before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder*** (24:15). At this point, the servant did not know if Rebekah was God's provision of a bride for Isaac. He asked her for a drink, and she gave him a drink (24:18). It would not be too much trouble to give a man a drink, but would she offer to water his camels? Verse 19 says, **"When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.'" And she did so.**

After she had finished watering the camels, the servant gave her several gifts, and asked her whose daughter she was. **She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor"** (24:24). When the servant heard that

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 719–720.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word, 318.

she was a grandniece of Abraham, he **bowed his head and worshiped the Lord and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen”** (24:27). Here again we see God’s providence in leading Abraham’s servant to Rebekah.

But there were still more hurdles to overcome. Would Rebekah’s family be willing to let her go with a stranger and marry an unknown man? And would Rebekah herself be willing to leave her family and marry someone she had never met?

III. The Servant Explained His Mission to Rebekah’s Family (24:29-61)

Third, the servant explained his mission to Rebekah’s family.

Rebekah’s brother, Laban, invited Abraham’s servant to spend the night at their home. Food was set before the servant, but he insisted that he explain his mission to Rebekah’s family before he would eat. He explained how it was that he came to be there looking for a bride for Isaac. He concluded his explanation by saying in verse 49, **“Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”**

Sensing that God had sent the servant on this mission, **Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has spoken”** (24:50-51). Having accomplished his mission, the servant, those with him, and Rebekah’s family enjoyed a feast.

However, the next morning there was another problem. When Abraham’s servant got up to leave, Laban and Rebekah’s

mother said, **“Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go”** (24:55).

But Abraham’s servant insisted that they leave immediately, and said to them, **“Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master”** (24:56).

Thinking that Rebekah would want to spend time with her family before leaving them, most likely never to see them again, they said, **“Let us call the young woman and ask her.”** And they called Rebekah and said to her, **“Will you go with this man?”** She said, **“I will go”** (24:57-58). Rebekah was an amazing woman of faith. Kent Hughes said, “Her simple ‘I will go’ states the nature of her trust in the God of Abraham. Young Rebekah willingly left her father’s house—recognizing the call of the same Lord who called Abraham, casting herself on him alone, with a noble confidence worthy of the woman who was to be Abraham’s daughter.”⁷

Rebekah’s family sent her away with the following blessing, **“Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!”** (24:60).

Only one question now remained: Would Isaac accept Rebekah as his bride? Or would Rebekah have travelled all that way for nothing?

IV. The Servant Brought Rebekah to Isaac (24:62-67)

And fourth, the servant brought Rebekah to Isaac.

The scene switches to Isaac, who **had returned from Beerlahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb**, which was southern Canaan. **And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there**

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word, 320.

were camels coming (24:62-63).

At the same time, **Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself (24:64-65).** In that culture, a bride wore a veil when meeting her groom.

When Isaac got to the place where the servant and Rebekah were, **the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done (24:66).** Isaac clearly acknowledged that all that had taken place was from the Lord, because he **brought Rebekah into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her (24:67a).** This is the first time in Scripture that a man is said to love a woman.

But, more importantly, God’s covenant promise would now continue through Rebekah. She would eventually bear twin sons, named Esau and Jacob, and the seed of the woman continued.

Conclusion

Centuries after Rebekah, there was another young woman who said, “I will.” She was Mary, the mother of Jesus. The son that was born to Mary was *the* seed of the woman. Through Jesus, God is fulfilling his promise to bless all the families of the earth.

Jesus is building his Church. We may be assured that just as the Lord provided Rebekah as a wife for Isaac, he will providentially care for the Church of Jesus Christ. Although the Church is currently falling on hard times, we should be encouraged to believe that God will bring men and women, boys and girls to a saving knowledge of his Son, Jesus Christ. Let us pray for the Church. And let us continue to proclaim the good news of the gospel so that all the elect may be saved. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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