

The Bride 7-22-07

Genesis 24

Sarah, the matriarch of the Hebrews, had died. Isaac was now 40-years-old. It was time to find a bride for him. Mesopotamia must have had traditional ways of doing things, but as the father of the Hebrews, Abraham is beginning his own traditions. He wants his future daughter-in-law to be from his family clan. He has seen the pagan idolatry of Canaan and refused to have its influence in his home. So he summoned his chief servant. We don't know if this is Eliezer who was mentioned in Genesis 15:2. Since he remains nameless, I would guess that it was someone else. We can be sure that it was a trusted longtime servant.

Marriages in Hebrew culture were arranged, much as they are to this day. The major difference is that Abraham was concerned about the woman's spiritual state rather than her family's monetary wealth. Unfortunately, the later concern seems to prevail today. I trust that is not true in your household. Abraham knew the spiritual destruction that can come into a home through ungodly influences. He had seen the influence of Canaan bring about the spiritual downfall of his nephew, Lot. (Genesis 19:14) That is not what he wanted for his precious son of promise. I trust that is not what any of you as parents or grandparents want for your heirs. A godly home is worth more than any amount of money or fame.

Our culture promotes romance as if it was the key factor in making one of life's most important decisions. Romance is too often just another term for youthful lust. Certainly there can be godly romance, but the key factor should be the spiritual life of the prospective mate. (2Timothy 2:22)

Abraham had his chief servant swear that he would not get a wife from the Canaanites, but would find a relative. ⁷ "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'--he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. The servant was concerned about not being able to keep his word. A vow like this was very serious. So Abraham reassured him by reiterating the promises of God. Abraham believed what God had promised; the land would belong to his heirs. (Genesis 17:8) Convinced of that, he concluded that God would be sending his angel ahead of the servant to prepare the way.

I wonder if we are so convinced of God's word that we draw the same kinds of conclusions. Do we see that God declared His love for mankind that when we share with someone, we are convinced that God has already been working in their heart, and that He will give us the words the person needs to hear? (Ephesians 6:19) I count on it every Sunday. If the message subject and wording were merely up to me, I would have no confidence whatsoever that it would be what you need to hear. But I believe that Jesus loves you and wants His flock fed. So I draw the conclusion that the Lord will direct my thoughts and inspire me with what you need to hear. It is trust in the providence of God. We'll see that emphasized later in the story.

Commented [notes1]: 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Commented [notes2]: 14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

Commented [notes3]: 22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Commented [notes4]: 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Commented [notes5]: 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,

Then Abraham gave the servant an out. I refer to it as the "but if not" clause. ⁸ *"If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there."* Many generations after Abraham, the three friends of the prophet Daniel told a king that God could deliver them from the fiery furnace, but if not, they still wouldn't bow to his image. In other words, I have this conviction, but if God doesn't work in the way I imagine, I will still trust and believe in Him. Abraham was convinced the angel of God would go before the servant, but if it did not work out, he was released from his vow. I don't know if perhaps Abraham said this for the servant's sake, because the servant lacked faith, or if Abraham was being realistic and considering that he might have drawn a wrong conclusion. We can be dogmatic about the Word of God, but we should hold our personal conclusions in the light of our human limitations. God's word will not fail, but my conclusion may be faulty. (Isaiah 55:11)

Commented [notes6]: 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Notice that Abraham was insistent that Isaac not be taken back there. This conviction was also based on the promises and direction of God. Abraham had learned the hard way that leaving the Promised Land was not productive. It held temptations and difficulties he did not want Isaac to face. He believed the promises of God, but he didn't want to test them by allowing Isaac to leave the land. Isaac's entire life was lived in the Promised Land. We can learn from this as well. Yes, we are promised that God will keep us and that our salvation is fixed in heaven (1Peter 1:4,5), but we should not test God by intentionally stepping outside His will. (Deuteronomy 6:16) Don't go back there! Amen? (Deuteronomy 26:11)

Commented [notes7]: 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

The servant promised and set out with his men and gifts for the prospective bride and her family. This will, in future generations, be a custom referred to as the bride price (Exodus 22:16) and become a negotiated amount. We'll see Isaac's son make the negotiation with Laban in later chapters. (Genesis 29:18)

Commented [notes8]: 16 Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.

The caravan traveled about a thousand miles. It could have easily been a journey of several months. The family was still in the town of Nahor. The caravan set themselves near a well and the servant of Abraham began to pray. It is what would later become known as a "fleece". We get the term from Gideon's request that if God was truly directing him, the fleece he set outside his door would be wet and the ground dry. It happened just as he had prayed so he reversed the condition, the fleece dry and the ground wet, and God made that happen as well. (Judges 6:36,37) So we call this asking that conditions be met by God to confirm what we sense as His direction a "fleece". There is a noted difference between Gideon's fleece and the servant's request. Gideon's fleece asked God to do something contrary to the course of nature. The servant of Abraham expected God to be working within the course of nature.

Commented [notes9]: 11 As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.

Commented [notes10]: 16 "If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife.

Commented [notes11]: 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

The servant didn't make it easy. He wanted the LORD to have the future bride give him and his camels water. Now, giving a man a drink is one thing, but have you ever seen how much a camel can drink? One camel can consume 25 gallons of water. Not only that, but this apparently an underground spring. Notice how it is referred to as a spring and a well. The passage also describes her going down to

Commented [notes12]: 36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised-- 37 look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said."

draw and coming up. We think of a bubbling pool on the surface. It very well may have been steps down into the earth to where the water level was. That is a lot of work and a lot of trips up and down for the typical three-gallon water jar! Not only would that assure that the girl was generous, but physically strong as well. That is quite a fleece!

Abraham's faith was a contagious faith. (2Timothy 1:5) The servant had caught it. His prayer of faith was full of conviction and expectation that God's hand was in our daily routines. What he had observed in Abraham, he believed would be true there in his circumstance. He believed God was sovereign. He believed God had special love for his master.

I don't recommend using a fleece in our day. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. We should be able to discern His leading without demanding that God do this or that for us. (Isaiah 30:21) The Apostle Paul seemed to let some conditions be an indicator of God's will, but he certainly did not lay out demands that he was asking God to meet so that he could discern God's will. (Acts 16:6,7) God wants an intimacy with us that goes beyond asking for signs. In fact, Jesus said that a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. (Matthew 16:4) The people of that time had the entire Old Testament to go by and didn't need signs. Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies on a daily basis. For what reason did they need a sign? Young men or women, please don't ask the Lord to have the person you are interested in do this or that if they are the one for you. You can discern if they are a suitable partner by observing their spiritual life and going through premarital counseling. Do expect God to be at work in your daily routines. (Isaiah 48:17)

It is amazing how this came together. The sovereignty of God and the free will of man obviously intersected in this incredible story. It's hard for us to comprehend how this could happen because we are so limited. The servant prayed what he purposed to pray. Did God somehow inspire his thoughts in that direction? Then, after a long day in the sun, Rebecca responded in an atypical way for a teenager. ¹⁸ "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." Of her own free will she responded just as the servant had prayed she would, volunteering several hours of hard labor. All of that was God's perfect plan. God's will was done. (Psalm 135:6) The servant's will was done. Rebecca's will was done. The three coincided in a way that is hard for us to comprehend, but it happened and it happens everyday in your life and mine.

If you think God is only at work in what we call the miraculous, you have limited the limitless God. He is at work in everything all the time. All of life is a miracle. The sooner you recognize Him in the ordinary, the sooner you'll realize how truly extraordinary He is. God is the "extra" in the ordinary that makes things extraordinary.

The servant still didn't know for sure if she was the one. He didn't know if she was a relative, so finally he asked. She was! Oh, the faithfulness of God! ²⁶ Then the man

Commented [notes13]: 5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Commented [notes14]: 21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Commented [notes15]: 6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

Commented [notes16]: 4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

Commented [notes17]: 17 This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.

Commented [notes18]: 6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

bowed low and worshipped the LORD. In awe of what God had just done, he bowed to the ground and worshipped JHWH, the God of his master Abraham.

Rebecca ran back to tell her family the exciting news. Laban ran out to meet the servant and his men and invited them in. A feast was prepared, but the servant wanted to make sure the family would allow her to go with him. He insisted on an answer before he would eat. If only we were so eager to find out God's will in our lives! (Psalm 123:2)

The servant reiterated the whole story. An interesting side note, the servant mentioned that Isaac was the only heir of the great wealth of Abraham, just in case they were motivated by wealth instead of purely wanting to know God's will. A later story about Laban will show he was driven by materialism. (Genesis 30:27) Still, the family could not deny that the whole scenario was orchestrated by the Lord. They gave their permission. ⁵² *When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD.* ⁵³ *The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.* Overcome again at the greatness of God, the servant of Abraham must stop and worship. There are those times when heaven seems to open and we get a clear but fleeting glimpse of the wonder of God. It is difficult to just go on with life at the moment that occurs. You must stop and worship. It would be hardhearted to do otherwise. (Psalm 95:6)

The next morning the servant was ready to go. The family wanted a 10-day farewell party, but the servant insisted. The family let Rebecca decide. ⁵⁸ *So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said.* May the Lord help us to be as quick to leave our comfort and security behind to follow where He leads! (Hebrews 11:24,25)

As the returning caravan approached the place where Isaac was staying, Rebecca got down and covered her face with a veil. Isaac had been out in the field meditating. The servant relayed to Isaac the miraculous story. Then we have the description of an ancient Hebrew style marriage. ⁶⁷ *Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.* They consummated the marriage. This is the Hebrew way of marriage even through the days of Jesus. The couple would consummate the marriage in the place where the groom was conceived. (Song of Songs 8:5) It gave a sense of continuity with previous generations. The Hebrews had a new matriarch, Rebecca.

The end of verse 67 tells us Isaac loved her. This is the first mention in the Bible of marital love. It also tells us that Isaac was comforted. Marital relations should bring both ingredients into the relationship, love and comfort in times of difficulty. After all, it is a picture of Jesus relationship with us, and that is certainly what we experience with Him.

If the sovereignty of God and free will of man showed the wonder of an unfathomable God, then the analogy that the true story gives should cause us to do

Commented [notes19]: 2 As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.

Commented [notes20]: 27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."

Commented [notes21]: 6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

Commented [notes22]: 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Commented [notes23]: 5 Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?
Beloved
Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth.

what that servant did twice in this passage, fall down and worship. Previously we saw how clearly Isaac was foreshadowing of Christ. Isaac was the beloved son of promise. There were the three days he was considered dead in the heart of Abraham, the belief in resurrection, carrying the wood for his execution up the very same mountain, being laid on that wood in preparation for execution, the provision of God, the promise of future provision on that very spot. But now, having read the passage about the bride, we can take it a step further.

If Isaac is a foreshadowing of Jesus, is Rebecca a picture of the bride of Christ? First, it is Abraham's father who has decided the bride should be of His family. In the parallel spiritual picture, that would be God the Father adopting us as His own so that we can be in the family, a suitable bride. (Ephesians 1:5) The servant in the passage is unnamed, just as the Holy Spirit stays in the background and always points to Jesus.

Father Abraham believed the Lord's angel would go and prepare things to come together. The author of Hebrews tells us that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will be heirs of salvation. Hebrews 1:14 Angels have orchestrated the conditions that came together to bring each of us to saving faith in Jesus, making us the bride of Christ.

We lived in another family, the family of the world. (Ephesians 2:3) When the Holy Spirit came and called us to leave our family and follow, the world asks for more time with us, but children of God are ready to go. (2Corinthians 6:17) They want to get moving to their new life. The servant, the Holy Spirit, gives us gifts, and we say goodbye to our old life. (2Corinthians 5:17) The journey begins as we make our move from our old home to The Promised Land and to our marriage with a groom we have not yet seen with our eyes. (1Peter 1:8) We do know that He is heir of all. (Hebrews 1:2)

The Scriptures did not speak of Isaac from the time he was to be sacrificed to this time when he comes out to greet her. So it is with Jesus. He is not physically present, but when our journey is complete, He will be there to greet us. (1Thessalonians 4:16,17) Then we will hear the amazing story of grace as the servant relays our testimony. Finally Isaac consummated the marriage. Our marriage to Jesus will be consummated at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb and so will we ever be with the Lord. (Revelation 19:7)

There is more, but we have to wait until the next chapter to see the analogy continue. As God directs history, He is writing His story. What an amazing God! Sovereignty and the free will of man, and a story within a story, all at once in a way we could have never dreamed possible. God works in the everyday whether we recognize it or not. What a mighty God we serve! Pray that your eyes will be open to increasingly see what He is doing all around and in you. (Ephesians 1:18)

Commented [notes24]: 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

Commented [notes25]: 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Commented [notes26]: 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Commented [notes27]: 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." [

Commented [notes28]: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Commented [notes29]: 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

Commented [notes30]: 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Commented [notes31]: 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Commented [notes32]: 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Commented [notes33]: 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,