

Genesis, Part 23

As we continue our study of the Book of Genesis, we come to the longest chapter in Genesis. one that focuses on a most important matter, the selection of a proper wife for Isaac. The material here can be summarized in four words: concern, commitment, choice, and comfort.

There are two institutions that God has given to the human family: one is marriage and the other is human government where God permits man to rule himself today. These are two universal and critical institutions for mankind. When either of these is broken, that society will fall apart. When both are broken we have a disaster. While human government is essential to a society, the home is at its core and was intended by God to give strength and stability to society. Thus, it should be clear why marriage is a target of Satan in this age. Destroy the institution of marriage, and society will begin to disintegrate.

As this story suggests, God is very much interested in whom you marry. It can be argued that God selected a mate for you in eternity past. In some cases because of our sinful natures, we marry the wrong person, but that does not mean God failed—we did—we chose the wrong mate for the wrong reasons. For those of us who are fortunate enough to marry the right woman or man, marriage can truly be a blessing, a blessing for the married couple, a blessing for the children resulting from it, and a blessing for society as a whole. As we go through this chapter, the leading of the Lord in all the details becomes obvious. This marriage of Isaac and Rebekah emphasizes the providential working of God in the circumstances of His faithful servants. You may also be able to look back on your own lives with 20/20 hindsight and see the leading of the Lord in your own marriage.

The key idea in this chapter is in the word *hesed*. There is not a really good English translation for this word. It is translated in various ways as “mercy,” “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness,” “kindly,” “merciful,” “favor,” “good,” “goodliness,” “pity,” “reproach,” and even “wicked thing,” but it goes beyond that. How it is translated heavily depends on the context. Here it is translated as “steadfast love” (vv. 12, 27, 49), but that does not convey the full meaning of the word. For us in this passage, in His “steadfast love,” the

Lord providentially ensured the fulfillment of His promise by guiding Abraham's servant in acquiring a bride for Isaac.

Genesis 24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, 3 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, 4 but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Three years after the death of Sarah Abraham became especially concerned about securing a wife for his son Isaac. At this point, Abraham is 140 years old (see 25:20 and 21:5) and Isaac is 40. Though he had been blessed in all things, this burden weighed heavy on his heart. So Abraham summoned his oldest servant and asked him to put his hand under the patriarch's thigh. This was the common practice in a most solemn oath (cf. Gen 47:29). Eliezer was to swear by the God of Heaven and the God of Earth. The servant was probably Eliezer, but, significantly, the servant is nameless in this event, as we shall see.

The oath had a twofold thrust. On the negative side, the servant was never to take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites. Abraham knew full well the gross idolatry and immoral worship that characterized Canaanite religious life. On the positive side, he was to go to the kindred of Abraham to secure the wife. Worship of the true God among these kinsmen, while not entirely pure, was far superior to the Canaanite religion. More than anything else, Abraham wanted his family to remain faithful to the Lord. In that sense, Abraham is a model for every believing parent. Every Christian parent ought to want—more than fortune, fame, or education—their children to walk with the Lord. And that means that every Christian parent ought to be intimately and helpfully involved, as their children mature, in helping them choose wisely in matters of education, career, and certainly marriage

Gen 24:5 The 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?”⁶ Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there.”⁷ 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.”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.

In a spiritual sense, the unnamed servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit whose work is to bring the lost to Christ and thus make up His bride. Before swearing the oath, the servant wisely inquired as to the implications. If no woman could be found who would accompany him back to Canaan, should he then take Isaac back with him to Paddan Aram? Abraham’s answer was an emphatic “No.” God had given Canaan to his descendants. For his son to forsake the land, even for a wife, would be wrong and an affront to God. If the woman would not return to Canaan, then the servant was released from his oath. The implication here is that it is better to remain single than to marry the wrong woman (or man). But probably in the mind of Abraham, he was thinking that if his servant fails to find a bride for Isaac, then surely God has another way of working this out. One thing he was certain of is God didn’t want Isaac to marry some godless Canaanite woman.

All talk of what might happen if the marital prospect refused to return with the servant was academic. Abraham believed that God would send his angel before the servant. That fact would crown his mission with success. Here then is the logic of faith. God had made promises, and he would keep those promises. Isaac belonged to God, for Abraham had laid him on the altar long before. Therefore, God would supply the need now as surely as he supplied the ram on Moriah. Otherwise, the promised seed could never be born. This is what faith is—acting on the Word of God. God said the promise would be fulfilled through Isaac, and Abraham believed it.

Having explored the stipulations of the proposed oath, and having heard Abraham’s optimistic forecast about the mission, the servant put his hand under Abraham’s thigh and swore the oath (24:9).

Gen 24:10 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."

The servant lost no time in departing on his mission. Ten camels were loaded with supplies and gifts for the bride-to-be. These animals would also serve to carry the new bride and her retinue back to the land of Canaan. The servant's destination was the city of Nahor (Haran). This region is also known as Mesopotamia.

The servant arrived at the city well in the evening when the women normally would go out to draw water. There he made his camels kneel. The servant bowed his head and prayed for success. He would ask the maidens for a drink. If a maiden also offered to water the camels, he would know that the Lord had led him to the right woman.

The women were the ones who watered and took care of the livestock while the men were trading and doing other work. Thus, it was the custom for the women to go out and draw water. Abraham's servant waited because that was the proper thing to do, not to water his camels before the others who lived in the community.

Gen 24:15 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.

Before he was finished with his prayer, Rebekah came to the well to draw water. This virgin was very beautiful. After she had filled her jar from the well, Abraham's servant approached her asking for a drink of water. The girl cheerfully complied. When he had finished drinking, she offered to water his camels, also. This would be no easy task. Camels are notorious for the amounts of water they consume after a long desert journey. The servant remained silent during this period, wondering in his mind whether or not this was the girl who had been chosen by the Lord.

That Rebecca was so beautiful and gracious, plus unafraid of hard work, for watering ten very thirsty camels after a long desert journey would be an arduous task, the servant was convinced that God had answered his prayer and he had indeed found the right bride for Isaac.

Gen 24:22 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 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 Lord 27 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.

Nahor was the brother of Abraham, so Rebekah was related to Abraham and Isaac. The servant sees the hand of God in this, "the Lord has led me

in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen" (v. 27). The Lord leads those who are "in the way," that is those who are in His way, waiting to be led, who will be led by Him, and who will do what He wants done. The servant is expressing his willing heart (faith) and the providential acts of God.

When the camels were through drinking, the servant gave to the maiden a valuable nose ring and two bracelets. He then inquired about her family and asked if lodging might be available at her house. Rebekah was not hesitant to extend to the stranger an invitation to lodge at her home. The servant bowed his head and thanked the Lord for leading him so quickly to the family of Abraham.

Gen 24:29 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.

Note Rebecca's brother Laban's response. He knows wealth when he sees it. We will later see that Laban is a wheeler and a dealer when Jacob comes looking for a wife. Jacob will discover that Uncle Laban is a better trader than he was.

The servant is patiently waiting by the spring to see how he will be welcomed. Laban scurries out to greet him.

Gen 24:31 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."

Evidently, Laban recognized the fact that there was one true God, the Creator of everything. This was further confirmation that the servant had come to the right place. Laban invites the servant to come to his home.

Gen 24:32 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.

What we have here and following is a wonderful picture of the relationship of Christ to the Church. The then-future Church is described as the Bride of Christ. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to go out and win converts to Christ. The servant is seeking a bride for Isaac, and the Holy Spirit is in the world today to call out a Bride for Christ.

Gen 24:33 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.

Notice the servant does not give his name. Likewise, the Lord Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit will not speak of Himself but rather of Another, Christ. What is the Holy Spirit's name? Like the servant, He has no formal name given in Scripture.

Gen 24:35 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.

The servant tells about the father's house, something the Spirit of God would have us know about.

Gen 24:36 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.

In an infinitely greater way, the Lord Jesus is the Inheritor, and we are joint heirs with Him.

Gen 24:37 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.”

The servant began by emphasizing the wealth of Abraham and the fact that Isaac was to inherit all this wealth. He then related the circumstances that brought him to Haran, how he had prayed at the well, and how Rebekah had fulfilled precisely the requirements that had been stipulated in his prayer. The servant then called upon his hosts to give some indication of how they were responding to this request so that he might determine his next move.

Gen 24:50 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."

Laban and Bethuel were impressed by the sequence of events that the servant narrated. They were convinced that God himself had selected Rebekah as Isaac's wife. They felt that they had no right to interfere in any way. They gave approval for the servant to take Rebekah with him back to Canaan. Basically, they said, "Since this is of the Lord, here is Rebekah, go ahead and take her."

Gen 24:52 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.

The servant was overjoyed with this immediate and devout response. He thanked the Lord for what had happened, and he gave rich gifts to Rebekah and her mother and brother. Then the servant and those with him ate and went to bed.

Gen 24:54 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."

In the morning the servant bade leave of his hosts to return to Canaan. The mother and brother thought this departure to be too hasty. They wanted to give Rebekah a proper send-off. Ten days would be required for them to prepare her for such a journey. The servant, however, persisted in his request for an immediate departure. Finally, the mother and brother decided to let Rebekah herself decide.

Rebekah had to make an important decision: would she stay home with her family or would she by faith believe the words of the servant and go to be with Isaac, a man she had never seen? Certainly, there were obstacles in the way: her brother wanted her to stay awhile (v. 55); the trip would be long and difficult; Isaac was a pilgrim without a settled home; and she would have to leave her loved ones.

She was willing to leave immediately, and she said, “I will go.”

We cannot help but admire her decision: “I will go.” This act of faith changed her life. She was changed from being a servant to being a bride, from the loneliness of the world to the joy of love and companionship, from her poverty into Isaac’s wealth. Did she see all of Isaac’s wealth? Of course not! That would be impossible! Did she know all about him? No. But what she saw and heard convinced her that she must go. Similarly, with lost sinners today, the Spirit speaks and shows them the things of Christ, sufficient for them to make the right decision.

Rebekah’s faith was rewarded. Her name was recorded in God’s Word; she shared Isaac’s love and wealth, and she became an important part of God’s plan.

Gen 24:59 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.

The world often advises the sinner to wait, just as Laban advised his sister. (Note, however, that when it came to getting material things, Laban could be in a hurry, vv. 28–31. We wonder if he invited the servant home out of courtesy or covetousness!) Sinners, however, generally are not in a hurry about the salvation of their souls.

Having secured her assent, the father, mother, and brother pronounced a blessing upon Rebekah. They expressed the hope that she would have a multitude of descendants and that those descendants would be powerful enough to possess the gate of their enemies. Rebekah's old faithful nurse who had tended her since infancy was sent on the journey along with several maids. So the small camel caravan departed.

Gen 24:62 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.

We left Isaac (as far as the record is concerned) on Mt. Moriah, for 22:19 mentions Abraham alone. Isaac is a picture of our Lord who went to Calvary to die for us, then returned to heaven to wait for His bride. In chapter 24, the servant (the Holy Spirit) went forth to seek the bride. Then, when the bride approached, Isaac appeared to receive her. What a scene! Just as it was "eventide" when they met, so it will be dark in this world when Christ returns for His bride.

In contemplation of his forthcoming marriage, Isaac had visited the sacred site of Beer-lahai-roi where the angel of the Lord had once appeared. He appears to have separated himself from the camp of Abraham for he was living in the Negev at this time. Isaac went out to the field one evening "to meditate" (*lasuach*), a word used only here in the Old Testament. He lifted up his eyes and saw the caravan approaching. How his heart must have pounded with excitement as he contemplated meeting his bride for the first time.

Rebekah noticed a man coming across the field to meet the camels. When she got down from her camel, she learned that this was Isaac and covered her face with a veil. She was demonstrating modesty and respect for her

future husband. When the servant rehearsed the details of his journey, Isaac knew that Rebekah was his divinely chosen mate.

Isaac honored his bride by assigning her to the tent of his beloved mother. After arrangements could be made, Isaac married Rebekah. Even though there had been no lengthy courtship considered so essential in Western culture, Isaac loved Rebekah. She supplied that womanly charm and companionship that brought Isaac comfort in the loneliness he experienced after the death of his mother Sarah.

Review

Let's take another look at this picture being painted for us. This was approximately 4,000 years ago with this family entertaining a stranger and entertaining him royally. They have fed his camels and have set a meal before him, but before he takes food he wants to state his business.

He has come to get a bride for his master's son, Isaac. The servant passes out gifts to the family, for Abraham was very wealthy. The stranger begins to tell about his master, as all of the family gathers around the fire. Standing in the background just behind the others is a very beautiful young woman with deep brown eyes. She listens intently and hears the servant tell of his master, Abraham, and Isaac's miraculous birth. He tells them of that day when his father took Isaac up on Mt. Moriah and was prepared to sacrifice him to the Lord exactly as the Lord had commanded. That must have drawn gasps from the hearers. Then he tells of how Abraham's hand was stayed, as he was about to slit Isaac's throat, and the Lord provided a ram as a substitute. Finally, the servant tells of how his master has sent him to find a bride for his son from among his own people, He does not want a bride from among the Canaanites; she must be one of like mind who has the same capacity for the living God, one who is born again of the Word of God. The stranger tells of how his prayer to the Lord at the well was answered in Rebekah and she is the one he seeks.

Rebecca has been listening to all this, and now it is her turn. No one has paid much attention to her until now. "What about it, Rebecca? Will you go with this man?" She does not hedge or fudge or beat around the bush or hesitate. She says, "I will go."

Have you noticed that the men whom the Lord called to be His disciples also did not hesitate? They left their nets and followed Him.

The Holy Spirit is still calling today. He has taken the unnamed servant's place. The Father and the Spirit sent the Son into the world to die for the world. And when the Son went back to Heaven, He said He would send the Comforter. The Spirit has now come into the world, and He is calling out a bride for the Son, saying, "Will you go?" when you do you will be born again and become a child of God, part of the Church, the Bride of Christ that will someday be presented to Him.

The question is will you go? Will you accept the invitation? Will you trust Christ as your savior?

In this story, we are given a view of the coming of Christ for His Bride. Rebekah, seeing a man walking toward her, asks who he is. Throughout the long journey, the stranger has been telling her about him. Now she is about to see him face-to-face. This is like our situation now. "Though you have not seen him, you love him" (1 Peter 1:8).

Gen 24:67 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.

"And he loved her..." Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her.