GENESIS

Chapter 24

*Isaac and Rebekah*

**Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. 2 He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh. 3 I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, 4 but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.” 5 The servant asked him, “What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?” 6 “Make sure that you do not take my son back there,” Abraham said. 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. 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.” 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter. 10 Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. 11 He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.12 Then he prayed, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13 See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14 May it be that when I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.” 15 Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. 17 The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.” 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.” 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. 21 Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. 22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. 23 Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” 24 She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor.” 25 And she added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night.” 26 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, 27 saying, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.” 28 The girl ran and told her mother’s household about these things. 29 Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. 30 As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. 31 “Come, you who are blessed by the Lord,” he said. “Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.” 32 So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. 33 Then food was set before him, but he said, “I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say.” “Then tell us,” Laban said. 34 So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant. 35 The Lord has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. 36 My master’s wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. 37 And my master made me swear an oath, and said, ‘You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, 38 but go to my father’s family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.’ 39 “Then I asked my master, ‘What if the woman will not come back with me?’ 40 “He replied, ‘The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father’s family. 41 Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you—you will be released from my oath.’ 42 “When I came to the spring today, I said, ‘O Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. 43 See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, “Please let me drink a little water from your jar,” 44 and if she says to me, “Drink, and I’ll draw water for your camels too,” let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master’s son.’ 45 “Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ 46 “She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too.’ So I drank, and she watered the camels also. 47 “I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ “She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.’ “Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, 48 and I bowed down and worshiped the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son. 49 Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn.” 50 Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. 51 Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.” 52 When Abraham’s servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the Lord. 53 Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. 54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, he said, “Send me on my way to my master.” 55 But her brother and her mother replied, “Let the girl remain with us ten days or so; then you may go.” 56 But he said to them, “Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.” 57 Then they said, “Let’s call the girl and ask her about it.” 58 So they called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?” “I will go,” she said. 59 So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, “Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies.” 61 Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left. 62 Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. 63 He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. 64 Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel 65 and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?” “He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. 67 Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.**

**24:1** NOW OLD – Abraham was 140 years old. (TLSB)

Three years had elapsed since Sarah’s death. Abraham realized there was an important matter for him to attend to before his time ran out. Isaac needed to have a wife who would share his faith in God’s promise. (PBC)

 HAD BLESSED – Spiritually and physically. (TLSB)

**24:2** *chief servant in his household.* Probably Eliezer of Damascus (see note on 15:2). (CSB)

 ONE IN CHARGE – Was the oldest and in charge of the household. (TLSB)

 *Put your hand under my thigh.* Near the organ of procreation, probably because this oath was related to the continuation of Abraham’s line through Isaac (see 47:29). (CSB)

Cultural gesture to accompany the oath. The loin and thigh, the body’s largest muscles, represented one’s physical and reproductive strength (cf. 1 Kings 12:10; Ps. 147:10). The oath testified to their faith in the coming Messiah, who would be born of Abraham’s line. (TLSB)

**24:3** *the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth.* See v. 7. For a similar majestic title used by Abraham in an oath see 14:22. (CSB)

 GET A WIFE – Because of Abraham’s advanced age, the servant was asked to assume this parental responsibility. (TLSB)

All such transactions in the Orient were arranged through intermediaries. (Leupold)

 NOT…CANAANITES – Despite potential political advantages, the servant was not to look among the heathen Canaanites. (TLSB)

Canaanite religion was a filthy combination of idolatry and adultery, and a Canaanite wife would not share a common faith with believing Isaac. She could not nourish and transmit that faith in the coming Savior to future generations. And, furthermore, God had promised that the Canaanites would fall under his condemnation because of ther shameful idolatry. (PBC)

**24:4** *my country.* Mesopotamia (see note on v. 10). (CSB)

Abraham placed great emphasis on the cultural compatibility of the marriage, perhaps because of the immoral culture he witnessed among the Canaanites, who were cursed (9:25). (TLSB)

Abraham does not instruct his servant to select a bride who believes in Yahweh. Religious qualifications of the bride or her family are not part of the agreement. Later chapters reveal that Laban, Rebekah’s brother, was a practicing polytheist, who panicked when “his gods” were stolen. The concern is that Isaac’s future wife be Aramean and not Canaanite. Isaac must not marry outside of his culture in Canaan but return to Aram-Naharaim for an same culture bride. (Hamilton)

Abraham instructed his servant to travel 500 miles north to Mesopotamia, to the city of Haran, Abraham’s former home. Abraham couldn’t attend to this personally, because God had directed him to leave Haran. Although Isaac at forty was old enough to have picked out his own wife, Abraham didn’t want him to leave the land of Canaan, either. We take for granted that in this entire matter Abraham acted with the full knowledge and consent of Isaac. (PBC)

 *get a wife for my son.* See note on 21:21. (CSB)

**24:7** *To your offspring I will give this land.* Repeats the promise of 12:7. (CSB)

Isaac was the God intended heir of Canaan, the Promised Land. (TLSB)

In faith Abraham anticipated no difficulty, and emphatically refused to act contrary to God’s will. He knew that the mission on which he was sending his servant was God’s will. He was simply applying to this present situation what God had told him. In the same way you and I know that God is committed to making it possible for us to do what he has called us to do. (PBC)

 *his angel.* See note on 16:7. (CSB)

**24:10** *camels.* See note on 12:16. (CSB)

These were needed to bear gifts for the bride and to carry the bride and her company on the return trip. These were choice presents for the bride and her parents. (TLSB)

Abraham was a wealthy man, so he sent along with his servant gifts for the prospective bride and her family, gifts which would reflect favorably on the social standing of the prospective bridegroom. (PBC)

The Bible narrative says little about the long journey to Mesopotamia, a trip which may have taken a month. Instead the sacred writer focuses our attention on the servant as he stood at the town well and thought about his assignment.

 *Aram Naharaim.* See NIV text note; lit. “Aram of the two rivers”—the Euphrates and the Tigris. Aram (see note on 10:22) Naharaim was the northern part of the area called later by the Greeks “Mesopotamia”—lit. “between the rivers.” Today it is Iraq. (CSB)

 *town of Nahor.* Perhaps named after Abraham’s brother (see v. 15; 11:26). It is mentioned in clay tablets excavated by the French beginning in 1933 at the ancient city of Mari on the Euphrates (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”). Nahor was located in the Haran (see note on 11:31) district and was ruled by an Amorite prince in the 18th century b.c. (CSB)

**24:11** *toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.* The coolest time of day. (CSB)

Before him he could see the women of the city coming to draw water for family and flocks. How was he to know which one the Lord had picked out for Isaac? (PBC)

**24:12-14** The servant began his search with prayer and ended it with thanksgiving (vv. 26-27), a practice worthy of imitation. (TLSB)

**24:12** THEN HE PRAYED – The servant had learned a lot from his master. He talked to God, whose work he was doing. (PBC)

**24:14** HAVE CHOSEN – The servant was confident that God had someone in mind, since He had promised to give Abraham many children through Isaac. (TLSB)

 *By this I will know.* Like his master Abraham, the servant asked God for a sign to validate his errand (see note on 15:8). (CSB)

What does this sign say about the young lady? It would certainly show friendliness and hospitality and kindness. It would indicate a willingness to serve. And to make repeated trips down to a well to draw enough water to satisfy ten thirsty camels would require physical stamina. (PBC)

 *kindness.* See v. 27; probably a reference to God’s covenant with Abraham, which had promised numerous descendants through Isaac (see 17:19; 21:12). (CSB)

**24:15** *Before he had finished praying.* God had already begun to answer. (CSB)

Isaiah 65:24 “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”

 *Rebekah … was the daughter of Bethuel son of … the wife of Abraham’s brother.* Isaac would thus be marrying his father’s grandniece (see v. 48). (CSB)

Rebekah was Isaac’s second cousin. (TLSB)

**24:16** SPRING – Wells often were springs accessible by steps. (TLSB)

**24:19** WATER FOR CAMELS TOO – If one camel can drink twenty gallons, her offer may have cost her an extra hour of work at the well. (PBC)

**24:21** WITHOUT A WORD – Could it be that the Lord had answered his prayer so promptly. (PBC)

**24:22** GOLD NOSE RING – This is what the woman of the Orient wears suspended from the middle wall of her nose. (Kretzmann)

 *beka.* Half a shekel (see Ex 38:26); see note on 20:16. (CSB)

The bracelets along weighed four ounces; these were gifts worthy of a rich man. (PBC)

**24:23** FOR US – Apparently the servant did not travel alone. (TLSB)

**24:27** PRAISE BE – He praised the Lord for as marvelous a display of divine providence as any human being has ever witnessed. (PBC)

**24:28** MASTER’S RELATIVES – Wives in the polygamous society had their own tents and households. (TLSB)

**24:29** LABAN…HURRIED OUT – Later chapters of Genesis will reveal some character traits of Laban that are less than noble, but we have no reason to suspect his motives here. (PBC)

**24:31** COME…BLESSED – Luther: “From those most eminent patriarchs Shem, Nahor, and Terah they learned that guests should be received with a ready and willing heart” (AE 4:28). (TLSB)

**24:33** The pious servant politely declined to eat, however, until he had explained the purpose of his special mission. (PBC)

**24:34–49** The servant explained his mission to Rebekah’s family. His speech, which summarizes the narrative of the earlier part of the chapter, is an excellent example of the ancient storyteller’s art, which was designed to fix the details of a story in the hearer’s memory. (CSB)

**24:35** BLESSED MY MASTER –Complete statement of the master’s wealth and the son’s financial prospects was essential for a marriage proposition because a wedding as a covenant. (TLSB)

**24:36** OLD AGE – He explained that Isaac was born when Abraham was an old man. (Rebekah’s father Bethuel might otherwise have wondered about a possible generation gap between his cousin Isaac and his daughter Rebekah). (PBC)

GIVEN HIM EVERYTHING HE OWNS – He introduced the matter of Abraham’s wealth, and emphasized that at Abraham’s death his estate would pass to Isaac. (PBC)

**24:40** *before whom I have walked.* See notes on 5:22; 6:8–9; 17:1. (CSB)

Most striking in the servant’s speech to Rebekah’s family is his use of God’s OT covenant name. Father Abraham’s interest was not just in getting his son married, but in finding a proper wife for the heir of God’s covenant promises. (PBC)

**24:42-49** The servant told the story of the encounter at the well, enhancing it when helpful: Rebekah is called a virgin instead of a young woman, and the instruction not to take Isaac to Mesopotamia is omitted. The servant’s prayer describes his personal reflections on the matter. (TLSB)

It’s interesting to note that the servant did not come right out and ask for Rebekah to be Isaac’s wife. He simply restated the facts and let them speak for themselves. The Savior’s guiding hand had to be as obvious to Rebekah’s family as it was to him. (PBC)

**24:50** They saw that the Lord had taken this matter out of their hands. (TLSB)

The servant’s recital of the astounding chain of events convinced Rebekah’s family. It was obvious to them that this was the Lord’s will, which they did not dare to oppose. Their use of God’s covenant name shows that they were believing children of God and that they were happy Rebekah would be in the family of the promised Savior. Their words made it all the more clear why Abraham wanted his son’s wife to come from this background. (PBC)

**24:52** BOWED DOWN – To show his thanks. (TLSB)

The family’s response once again brought the servant to his knees in worship. (PBC)

**24:53** The rich gifts bestowed on Rebekah and her family indicated the wealth of the household into which she was being asked to marry—far from her loved ones and homeland. (CSB)

Betrothal gifts concluded the engagement covenant. (TLSB)

The social custom of the day required a prospective bridegroom to give his future in-laws a special gift known as “the bride-price.” This gift served a number of purposes. It provided evidence that the martial agreement was made in good faith, and seal the covenant between the two families. It established the social standing of the groom. Since the bride would be leaving the father’s household, the bride-price reimbursed him for the loss of a worker. And it served as a sort of prepaid alimony in case the husband later deserted or divorced his wife. (PBC)

**24:54** SEND ME AWAY – The old servant might have been excused if he had stayed in Haran a few days to rest, and rest the animals after a 500-mile journey. The family encouraged him to do this. But the servant knew, however, that the delay would only make the eventual parting harder. (PBC)

**24:55** LET THE GIRL REMAIN – It is easy why the family urged a delay. Up to the precious day they hadn’t ever seen the man, and once Rebekah left it was unlikely they would ever see her again. (PBC)

**24:58** WILL YOU GO – Luther: “A marriage should be brought about in such a way that we have God present. He established marriage for countless good purposes, and He Himself joins the spouses. Nor does He only join them; He also blesses them. But He requires the consent of the parents as well as of the girl, in order that there may be a lawful and truly divine union” (AE: 4:298). (TLSB)

Her answer “I will go is not to be understood as her consent to be Isaac’s wife. Her parent’s consent had already been expressed in verse 51, and her acceptance of the bridal gifts indicated that she had concurred in that. Her answer “I will go” announced that she was ready to leave immediately with Abraham’s servant. (PBC)

**24:59** HER NURSE – Deborah, who helped raise her. Some servants also accompanied her (v. 61). (TLSB)

Her nurse Deborah (Genesis 35:8), who had cared for her since infancy, went with her, as did several maids. (PBC)

**24:60** See 22:17 and note. (CSB)

The parting blessing spoken by the family members is remarkable. These were descendants of Noah who were aware of the blessings God had promised to Shem (Genesis 9:26) and to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17). God saw to it that their prayer was granted. Rebekah did become the ancestress of numerous descendants, who later conquered the cities of Canaan. (PBC)

**24:62** *Beer Lahai Roi.* See note on 16:14. (CSB)

**24:65** *she took her veil and covered herself.* Apparently a sign that she was unmarried (cf. 38:14, 19). (CSB)

A sign of modesty and respect. Cf. 1 Cor.11:7-10. (TLSB)

**24:67** *tent.* Often used as a bridal chamber (see Ps 19:4–5). (CSB)

No mention is made here of Abraham. Perhaps this is the writers way of indicating that Isaac is to become the new patriarch of the clan, as Rebekah is the new matriarch. (PBC)

**Ch 24** Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Rebekah and her parents consent to the proposal. Though they have not met, Isaac and Rebekah consent to a marriage that will be filled with God’s blessing and love. Many people today wrongly see romance and emotion as the basis of marriage. Instead, God wants marriage (lifelong faithfulness vowed publicly) to be the basis for the love of husband and wife. Such love is a picture of Christ’s love for the Church. He sought us from afar and promises His faithfulness to us. • O Christ, our heavenly Bridegroom, help us to trust the Word spoken by Your servants, the Word that calls us to be joined to You. Amen. (TLSB)