

GENESIS

Chapter 24

Isaac and Rebekah

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." 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. 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 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. 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.

24:1 *was 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 *his servant, the oldest of his household.* Probably Eliezer of Damascus. (CSB)

who had 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)

you will not take 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)

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 their shameful idolatry. (PBC)

24:4 *my country.* Mesopotamia. (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)

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)

24:10 *camels.* 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.

Mesopotamia. The Euphrates and the Tigris. Aram Naharaim was the northern part of the area called later by the Greeks "Mesopotamia"—lit. "between the rivers." Today it is Iraq. (CSB)

city 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. Nahor was located in the Haran district and was ruled by an Amorite prince in the 18th century B.C. (CSB)

24:11 *time of 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 The servant had learned a lot from his master. He talked to God, whose work he was doing. (PBC)

24:14 *whom you have appointed* – 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 shall know. Like his master Abraham, the servant asked God for a sign to validate his errand. (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)

steadfast love. 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 speaking*. 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 your camels also* – If one camel can drink twenty gallons, her offer may have cost her an extra hour of work at the well. (PBC)

24:21 *in silence* – Could it be that the Lord had answered his prayer so promptly. (PBC)

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

Half a shekel. The bracelets alone 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 *blessed be* – He praised the Lord for as marvelous a display of divine providence as any human being has ever witnessed. (PBC)

24:28 *mother's household* – Wives in the polygamous society had their own tents and households. (TLSB)

24:29 *Laban ran* – 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 was a covenant. (TLSB)

24:36 *waas old* – 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 all that he has – 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*. 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 himself* – 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 marital 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 young woman 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 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)

24:65 *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)