

A Wife for Isaac Part 1

Love, romance and marriage from a Biblical perspective

Text: Gen. 24:1-27

Introduction:

1. This chapter is the longest in the Book of Genesis. It is intriguing to think about why the Holy Spirit chooses to amplify certain accounts more than others. Some key events in Biblical history are dealt with very briefly. Others are treated at length. A couple of possibilities for the lengthy treatment of this account are:
 - To highlight the importance of this moment in Biblical history. This was a key moment in Biblical history in relation to the Messianic line. Rebekah, as wife to Isaac, would form a very important link in this chain.
 - To reveal the importance of marriage, home and the family to Almighty God. While there are some unique elements to how God brought Isaac and Rebekah together, there are many timeless principles that can inform and inspire believers in the area of love, romance and marriage.
 - To provide another beautiful typical tapestry of Christ, the coming Messiah.
2. There are two main strands of thought that run through this passage of Scripture:
 - Principles for Marriage.
 - Pictures of the Messiah.
3. In this message, we will focus on the theme of marriage in a biblical love story that has captivated the hearts and imaginations of millions down through the centuries. These principles are more important than ever as we face a society where marriage, home and the family have largely been shipwrecked on the rocks of lust, immorality, perversion, adultery and divorce.
4. There is something for everyone to learn from this account:
 - For singles, it teaches vital truths for finding God's best in a spouse.
 - For married couples, it is a refreshing reminder of the spiritual qualities and principles that are foundational for the continuation of marital harmony and blessing.
 - For parents, it helps us to know what we should be praying and working towards when it comes to spouses for our children.
 - For every saint, there are helpful and practical lessons to be gleaned from the characters in this account. It also provides us a rich and beautiful type of Christ which will be the focus of our next message.

I. THE PARENTAL DESIRE FOR A GODLY SPOUSE (VS. 1-9)

A. The Timing of Abraham's Initiative (Vs. 1)

1. Abraham was Aged (Vs. 1a)

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- a. By comparing Genesis 21:5 and 25:20, we conclude that Abraham was 140 years of age at this time. He would live to 175 years of age (Gen. 25:7) so that means he had 35 years left on the clock of his life.
 - b. The consciousness of his age was no doubt spurred Abraham to urgently seek a godly wife for his only son Isaac before he passed into eternity. His age made him more dependent on his faithful steward to help him in the task of finding a suitable helpmeet for his son.
 - c. The mention of Abraham's age is a reminder to all of us of the brevity of life which is "even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (James 4:14) Abraham, as his wife Sarah whose death is recorded in the previous chapter, was ready to die because he had been justified by faith. Are you ready to die? Have you received salvation by faith?
2. Abraham was Blessed (Vs. 1b)
 - a. Abraham was growing old but his life had been truly blessed by God. Old age does afford an opportunity for reflection upon a lifetime of walking with God and knowing His grace and goodness.
 - b. We would do well to pause and consider just how blest we are as the people of God.

B. The Terms of Abraham's Initiative (Vs. 2-6)

Abraham asked his servant to make a most solemn oath concerning who Isaac was to marry. This was no trifling matter to Abraham! The only other occasion we have a similar procedure was the time Jacob asked Joseph to put his hand under his thigh and promise he would not bury him in Egypt (Gen. 47:29).

1. Where Isaac's wife was not to come from (Vs. 3)
 - a. She was not to be taken from among the Canaanites. The Canaanites were heathen, pagan peoples.
 - b. This was not a prohibition on interracial marriage as some have wrongly interpreted. There is only one race, the human race! See Acts 17:26.
 - c. Abraham was concerned that his son not be in an unequal yoke. He was not to marry an unbeliever. This is the first and most important requirement for a spouse before any other criteria is considered (2 Cor. 6:14).
2. Where Isaac's wife was to come from (Vs. 4-6)
 - a. She was to come from the right family (Vs. 4). This reinforces the principle we just discussed. For Abraham, he wanted a wife for Isaac from among his own kindred. In our day we do not seek a wife from among our relatives as they did in ancient times, but we should seek a wife who is related to us spiritually (from the family of God). We want a wife who is both a "sister" and a "spouse" (Song 4:12; 1 Cor. 9:5).
 - b. She was to have the right followership (Vs. 5-6). Abraham made it clear that Isaac was not to be taken back to Mesopotamia where he was from originally. Abraham knew that God's call was for them to inherit the land of promise. The woman would need

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to be prepared to come to Isaac and follow him, not the other way around. This is the Biblical order. God created the woman to be a help meet for the man. It would be his career, not hers, that had priority in the marriage. This does not devalue the woman or make her inferior to the man. It simply highlights God's Divine order and structure for marriage and the home. 1 Cor. 11:9 "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man."

C. The Trust of Abraham's Initiative (Vs. 7-9)

1. The servant was struggling with some doubt as to whether the woman would be prepared to follow him back to marry a man she had never met. Abraham expresses words of faith and assurance to encourage the servant.
2. The faithfulness of God to Abraham in the past gave him faith that God would also meet the need of a wife for Isaac.

D. The Teaching of Abraham's Initiative

1. Abraham's example teaches us that it should be the fervent prayer and aim of every Christian parent to help their children marry well in the will of God. That they marry a believer is of utmost priority!
2. Like Abraham, parents should be actively involved in their children's quest to find a life's partner and even take practical, prayerful steps to see that it happens. Parents should avoid two unbalanced extremes:
 - a. The silly attitude that the kids can just work it out for themselves and it doesn't really matter who they marry so long as they're happy. Parents should not have a careless, indifferent attitude about who their children marry!
 - b. The selfish attitude that carnally tries to stop children from marrying a good candidate because of uncrucified natural affection. Some parents are so selfish, they don't actually want their children to get married but to stay with them! They see them as a resource to serve their needs in their old age rather than desiring and seeking the happiness and blessing of married life for their children.

II. THE PRAYER FOR A GODLY SPOUSE (VS. 10-15; 26-27)

The servant prepares a caravan of 10 camels for the journey to Mesopotamia which was just over 800 kms away. This would be roughly the equivalent of a trip from Adelaide to Melbourne.

A. The Asking in the Prayer (Vs. 10-14)

Abraham's servant sought God's leading in the place of prayer. Earnest prayer is an essential part of seeking God's best for a spouse. There were several things he asked God for.

1. The Pleasure of God (Vs. 12)

He asks for:

 - a. Send me good speed – he is seeking the Lord's favour on his endeavour and a speedy answer to his prayer.
 - b. Shew kindness unto my master – he prays for God to shew kindness to Abraham.
2. The Providential workings of God (Vs. 13-14)

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- a. He asks God to providentially lead through circumstances so that he would be able to identify the right wife for Isaac.
- b. This was a well-considered request and reveals the kind of woman the servant was looking for. He was looking for a servant hearted woman with initiative.
- c. Henry Morris writes, "The servant was looking for a woman who was a godly, virtuous maiden. Further, she should be an industrious girl, harbouring no delusions of a life of ease and idleness just because Isaac had great possessions. Finally, she should be gracious and considerate, of sensitive and compassionate spirit, because these attributes would be most desirable in coping with her many responsibilities among her servants and the people of the land."
- d. The principle of God working through our circumstances in answer to believing prayer is one principle among several key biblical principles we need to utilize when seeking God's will for a spouse. Do not wrongly conclude from this account that this is all that is all that is to be relied upon for making such a big decision! Let's remind ourselves about the context:
 - i. Abraham's servant did not have the written Word of God. He had the truth of God that Abraham had passed down to him orally but as yet, the Book of Genesis had not been written by Moses.
 - ii. Abraham's servant had been given direction and strict criteria to work to for finding a suitable bride. He was not just throwing care to the wind and asking for a random set of circumstances to line up as evidence for God's will. There was careful thought and fervent prayer taking place here. He was not trying to orchestrate the circumstances and asking God to rubber stamp what he wanted. He was seeking God's leading in the circumstances.
- e. As New Testament believers, with the advantage of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the completed Word of God, we would be very unwise to rely solely on circumstances as a guide for determining God's will. We need to also seek guidance from the Scriptures, a peace and leading from the Holy Spirit and the godly council of others.
- f. Note: Be careful about relying upon "putting out fleeces"! If you take the time to study that account you will find that Gideon's use of the fleece was more to seek reassurance for his doubts as opposed to finding out God's will. God had already told Gideon what He was going to do through him but Gideon was fearful and doubtful, so he sought confirmation through the fleece. If you make a fleece your primary means of knowing God's will, you may end up misled! The devil might bring his watering can along and give your fleece a little sprinkle and send you right out of the will of God!
- g. John Butler notes, "Some students in our Christian colleges have resorted to their version of a "Gideons' fleece" test. As an example, they will tell the Lord in their devotions that if their

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current girlfriend or boyfriend wears a certain coloured sweater the next day, they will take that as a “sign” that he or she is the one.”

3. The Principle of asking from God

The servant’s actions highlight the importance of seeking God’s guidance in prayer generally but most importantly in this context, the importance of seeking God’s leading with your choice of a marriage partner.

- a. Parents, pray for your children in this matter even from the time of their birth. While marriage may seem so far away, before you know it, your child will be of marital age and if you wait till then to start praying it might be too late!
- b. Singles, pray for your future spouse, even while you are young. Pray for God’s keeping hand upon him or her and that God will bring you both together in His perfect timing. Unless it is God’s express will and calling for you to be single for life, your future spouse is probably alive somewhere today!

B. The Answer to the Prayer (Vs. 15, 26-27)

1. The promptness of the answer (Vs. 15a). Sometimes it is God’s will for us to wait for an answer. Other times He answers our requests speedily. Sometimes God answers a prayer before we have had time to properly pray about it! Isaiah 65:24 “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”
2. The preciseness of the answer (Vs. 15b). Asking brings receiving. Specific prayers yield specific answers in the will of God. God sent a lady across the servant’s path who perfectly fit the criteria! She was from the right family.
3. The praise for the answer (Vs. 26-27)
 - a. The posture of his praise (Vs. 26). The servant demonstrates worshipful reverence to God for the answer to his prayer. Do we respond to answered prayer with worship and thanksgiving or do we forget to even thank God for answered prayer?
 - b. The point of his praise (Vs. 27). He thanks God for showing mercy to Abraham in this matter and for leading him in the way. This is an important reminder on how God leads us. As we are faithful to walk the path he has chosen for us, he leads, guides and directs. But you must first be “in the way”. Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

III. THE PROFILE OF A GODLY SPOUSE (VS. 10-15)

Rebekah appears on the scene and demonstrates the qualities of an ideal wife. In fact, these qualities can really apply to male or female. They are a reminder of the kind of character traits that are important in a marriage. Rebekah’s qualities are also a challenge to us in the area of service for the Lord. There are at least **5 qualities** we can identify. Rebekah was:

A. Charming (Vs. 16a)

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1. Rebekah was a very beautiful lady – “very fair to look upon”. Beauty is not evil in and of itself. Beauty is created by God and is one of the features of many aspects of His creation. The world and the devil use the natural endowment of feminine beauty in a corrupt way and evil way but it has its proper place within the marriage union and is a part of what God uses to draw a couple together.
2. Warning: Do not make this your only criteria when choosing a spouse! Beauty is only skin deep and you need to be most concerned to marry a spouse who possesses inner, spiritual beauty (See Prov. 31:30; 1. Peter 3:4-5). No doubt the beauty of Rebekah’s personality shone through, affecting her outward demeanour and attractiveness. Your value as a woman is not only determined by your outward appearance. The rest of the account demonstrates this clearly! Rebekah was much more than just a pretty face.
3. There is also an application that we should give some attention to the way we groom and dress ourselves. We are not talking about a worldly vanity and fixation on the external but as God’s people we should practice good personal habits of hygiene, modesty and seek to look our best for the Lord. After all, the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

B. Chaste (Vs. 16b)

1. There is a double statement of Rebekah’s purity.
 - a. She was “a virgin”.
 - b. No man had “known here”.
2. Your virginity as a single person is a precious thing. Don’t let the world and the devil rob you of your purity! Treasure and guard it and give it as a gift to the spouse God gives you on your wedding day.
3. If you have immorality in your history prior to salvation, be encouraged that the blood of Christ has washed the stain of impurity away, making you totally pure in God’s sight. But now that you have been made clean, keep yourself pure for your spouse!
4. Remember that your body as a believer was purchased by the blood of Christ and is now the temple of the Holy Ghost. To take that body and use it for immoral purposes is a grievous sin. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”
5. We are living in a society today where moral purity is despised and is under constant, relentless attack. But God has not changed and purity is still precious to Him.
6. Spiritually speaking, we need to keep ourselves pure for our Heavenly Bridegroom. 2 Cor. 11:2 “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as a chaste virgin* to Christ.” See also James 4:4 and James 1:27.

C. Courteous (Vs. 17-18a)

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1. Rebekah responded to the servant's request in a respectful and tactful manner. She responded with the words "Drink, **my lord**". She used a respectful title for this venerable, aged servant of Abraham. What a contrast to the loud, brassy, sassy women of today!
2. There are some who suggest the Bible knows nothing of titles of respect but not so! It is a good practice to use respectful titles for those in positions of authority or those who are our seniors.
3. If you are interested in a prospective wife, you should consider what kind of relationship she has with male authorities in her life (e.g., father, pastor). If she bucks against their authority and sasses them, she will do the same to you! If as a single woman you don't have a godly father, then cultivate appropriate relationships with godly men in the assembly and learn to interact properly with them.

D. Charactered (Vs. 18b-21)

Her character is highlighted in the fact that she was:

1. Servant-hearted (Vs. 18)
 - a. Rebekah was faithful to her duties. The first picture we get of her is walking to the well with a waterpot on her shoulder and then going down into the well, drawing water and then coming back up (Vs. 15-16). Her early arrival at the well before the other maidens says something of her character. Drawing water was a regular household chore in those days as it still is in many places even today. Little did she know that day as she went faithfully about her normal duties that her life was about to be swept up in the plan of God and moved in an exciting direction. F. B. Meyer writes, "Elastic in step, modest in manner, pure in heart, amiable and generous, with a very fair face, as the sacred story tells us – how little did she imagine that the wheel of God's providence was soon to catch her out of her quiet home, and whirl her into the mighty outer world that lay beyond the horizon of desert sand."
 - b. Rebekah was willing to serve others with enthusiasm – "she **hasted**, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink". She served with diligence, excellence and passion. There was a spring in her step and a sparkle in her eyes.
 - c. This is an essential quality for a good marriage. Both husband and wife will need to invest time and effort into the marriage. Marriage and home life is a wonderful blessing, a little taste of heaven on earth but it requires hard work. Laziness in either spouse causes problems in a marriage.
 - d. John Butler writes,

"A selfish husband is the kind who will seldom take his wife out for a nice outing but will not hesitate to leave her at home struggling with the care of the children while he goes out and has a good time with the boys going to ball games, playing golf, fishing, hunting or pursuing some other pleasure. A selfish wife is the kind who insists on having her own way in everything, demands that they see her relatives frequently but will not give equal time to his relatives, and spends nearly all her husband's hard-earned money on herself, caring not that she leaves very little for him."

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- e. Parents, are we training our daughters to be home keepers or do we indulge laziness? If your daughter can't cope with a few duties now, how will she handle married life?
- f. Dr. Bob Jones Sr:

“Young man, have you been going with one of those painted dolls who lets her mother do all the work? Have you been keeping company with a girl who does not get up in time for breakfast, who leaves it to mother to wash the dishes while she spends all her time on looking pretty and pleasing herself? If she one day tells you that she likes you very much and admires you but somehow she simply cannot love you and that she will always be just your good friend; and if you hear soon thereafter that she is engaged to marry another man, don't you play the fool and go and kill yourself! No, go and buy them a wedding present! And don't be stingy; make it a thank offering! Then get down on your knees and thank God that He saved you from marrying a parasite who never learned to work, and who could not make a good wife because she was not a good woman.”

2. Second mile (Vs. 20-22)

- a. Rebekah volunteered to go beyond what was requested. She showed initiative. She would water the camels until they had “done drinking”. That represents a lot of work for 10 thirsty camels!
- b. A thirsty camel can drink up to 200 litres in several minutes! That's over 44 gallons of water for one camel! If all 10 camels drank around that amount, it means Rebekah hauled somewhere in the order of 2,000 litres of water out of the well or 440 gallons. That is the equivalent of 100 2 litre bottles of milk per camel. Or to put it another way, that would be the equivalent of the volume of liquid it takes to fill 533 cans of coke. That's around 5,333 cans worth for the 10 camels! Let's be generous and say Rebekah's waterpot could hold 10 litres. That would represent 200 trips to the well!
- c. Rebekah clearly had the gift of serving. Servants have a wonderful way of discerning the needs and taking the initiative.
- d. Rebekah's example challenges us to think about whether we serve the Lord with all our might. Is our mindset to do the minimum for the Lord or are we prepared to work hard and go beyond the call of duty in our service for the King of kings?

E. Caring (Vs. 22-25)

Rebekah's care and compassion is highlighted in:

- 1. Her concern for the camels.
- 2. Her openness to showing hospitality to the visitors.

Conclusion:

- 1. Will you promise God that you will earnestly seek His will for your life's partner?
- 2. Will you promise God that with His grace and help, you will keep yourself pure for your future spouse?
- 3. Will you serve your Heavenly Master with passion and purpose?