

Isaac Marries Rebekah: Part 1 – Genesis 24

sermonaudio.com

Genesis

By Dr. Joel Beeke

Bible Text: Genesis 24
Preached on: Sunday, August, 31, 2014

The Gospel Trumpet
540 Crescent St NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.gospeltrumpet.net
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gospeltrumpet

Announcer. Does faith in God's sovereignty make people passive and fatalistic so that they do nothing but wait for God to do something? Welcome to Doctrine for Life with Dr. Joel Beeke. In today's broadcast, we will hear the first part of Dr. Beeke's message on Genesis 24, the finding of a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac. God will provide for Isaac for he is the promised seed through whom God will multiply the people as he promised in the covenant. However, God's promise did not lull Abraham and his servant into lethargic waiting but moved them to courageous action and bold prayer. As you listen, may the Spirit give you ears to hear and a heart to believe the words of eternal life.

Dr. Joel Beeke. Well, Abraham is now very old, probably 140. Sarah has died and both Abraham and Isaac have grieved over Sarah's death. Not only Abraham, as we saw last week, but Isaac, too, was very sorrowful. These were both men of faith but as we saw last week, faith does not cancel grief. A child of God can experience great grief at the loss of a loved one.

Yet God has made all things well with Abraham. Actually, verse 1 is an amazing declaration of that. Did you notice at the end of the verse it says, "and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things"? Not just some things, all things. Sarah is dead but the Bible says God blessed Abraham in all things. I wonder if you would have come to the same conclusion looking at Abraham's life. He had to leave all his relatives behind in Ur, travel to Haran, then leave more of his family behind, and move on with Sarah and Lot to the Promised Land. Then he had to part ways even with Lot. He settled in the land, you recall, which he owned no property, he lived in tents all his life. He had to wait 30 years to receive a promised son. His first son, Ishmael, whom he was very glad with, had to leave the family home. Finally he receives Isaac and then God says, "Go and sacrifice him." But the Bible says he's blessed in all things.

We would probably say Abraham had a difficult life but, you see, Abraham was blessed. Abraham had the promises of God, the covenant of God. He had God himself. He had a God-fearing wife for many years. He received the promised son who became God-fearing as well. He was blessed with material prosperity. He lacked nothing and his descendants were promised the whole land of Canaan. The Lord provided for him. The Lord blessed him in all things.

I wonder how are you prone to think about God's dealings with you in your life? Do you think negatively? You see, so often when we don't realize what we deserve and we don't live by faith in God's promises, we're quick like Asaph to accuse God of not blessing us in all things. We get the Asaph mentality, that we get envious even of the wicked and we magnify our own trials and our own disappointments and we trivialize the blessings God showers upon us. Or do you say, "Lord, I see what I deserve. I see that anything above ground is the mercy of the Lord. Lord, thou hast blessed me in all things. I lack nothing, Lord. Though my life hasn't always been easy, thou hast never made one mistake. All things have worked together for good. Yes, God has blessed me in all things."

You see, one view is a view of unbelief, the other the view of faith, and if you're a believer this morning, actually God has blessed you in all things because you have Christ, and if you have Christ, you have everything, and everything God designs for you works together for good, Romans 8:28 says, to lead you to need Christ and to know Christ and to love Christ and to find your life in Christ, and therefore you are blessed in all things. Oh, that we would pray more, "Lord, teach me to honor thee in all things. Teach me to see thy blessed hand in all things."

Now, that doesn't mean that Abraham sits back and says, "Well, God has blessed me in all things so I'm going to live a passive life." The Christian life is never presented in the Bible as a passive life. It's always a life of activity. It's a life of reminiscing about the past, about my sins and about other things, but also thinking about the future and planning and considering and preparing for death, and that's what Abraham does in this chapter. He's actually preparing for death. He thinks about Isaac and he gets concerned. He says to himself, "I could very well die any day. I'm 140 now." He doesn't know he's going to live another 35 years. "Isaac is going to be a lonely man. He's still grieving the loss of his mother. He really needs a wife." So he concludes that he must take some action. He's concerned.

Now, there are three things we need to notice here about Abraham's concern. The first is this: he's concerned to find a suitable wife for Isaac as an essential part of his covenant responsibility before God. An essential part of his covenant responsibility before God. He's not just a dad looking for a wife for his son and wondering who he's going to marry, but Abraham's a covenant man. God has come to him. Notice verse 7, God has come to him and said that he will give the land to his kindred and Abraham's kindred shall know that the angel is sent before them. God is a covenant-keeping God. Isaac must live in this land, the future will reveal that God's people will be in this land, God will provide but Abraham must do his covenant responsibility.

So he calls his servant to him, his oldest servant, probably Eliezer, or perhaps not because Eliezer we know was his servant back in Genesis 15 and this is 60 years later, so it may have been another elderly servant. But he calls him in front of him and he says, "You must go to the land of my kindred to find a wife for Isaac." Now, Abraham you see here, is simply being obedient to the faithful God who has come to him in saving mercy. Isaac

is a child of promise. He needs a wife. The seed must be propagated. The Messiah must be born. So Abraham takes action.

But secondly, the concern of Abraham is at a natural level as well. He's concerned that a good wife be found for Isaac because marriage, a God-fearing marriage, is a good thing. Marriage is a creation ordinance. Marriage is God's norm for his people. There are exceptions, of course. The Lord Jesus Christ himself being the most notable exception. There are those who are single for the kingdom's sake but that doesn't take away from the fundamental norm that marriage is a creation ordinance. It's one of God's kind and merciful provisions not only for the propagation of human society but also for the well-being of human society, and that's why in our disintegrating culture today when bizarre alternatives are promoted such as homosexuality to replace marriage and family, godly families. Our society tragically seems to have neither the will nor the wisdom to see what is plain to see that when we disregard God's creation ordinance, entire culture becomes disenfranchised and disintegrated and fragmented and wicked.

So we have here before us, really, an arranged marriage. Abraham gets involved in arranging a marriage for his son but it's not only an arranged marriage and we can't just look at this and say, "Well, that was cultural. At that time parents arranged marriages," so we have nothing to do with this today. No, there is something more here. There is something deeper. It's also a family involvement in marriage.

Now, I'm not advocating that parents arrange marriages today. I don't think that would work very well, for one thing. It might make some good sense in another way. Our culture isn't doing very well in terms of marriage and divorce and remarriage with regard to people who choose their own spouses. But there is something deeper here. There is a covenantal corporate dimension to the Christian family. Christian marriage ought never to be merely the individual's pursuit. We ought not disregard what father and mother, young people, and the family have to say when we seek marriage. Surely, marriage ought to be in the very best sense a family reality where children involve their parents, seek their advice, seek their wisdom. Surely, we need in our day to recover the identity of the Christian family and we must raise children in such a context that they realize that marriage doesn't just involve two people but it involves two entire family circles.

When you marry, you marry into families, and so you need to ask the question: what is best, not just for me, but for the family? What is best for the glory of God through our families? Will God's name be honored in our family through this marriage? And what will serve the best interest of Jesus Christ in his extended family, the corporate family of his people throughout the world? Will the kingdom of God be more prone to come through this marriage? That's Abraham's concern.

Now notice, too, that Abraham doesn't wait for a wife to appear for Isaac. Of course, we must pray for a God-fearing spouse but we must not then sit on our hands. Abraham takes action. He puts his servant in the way where a suitable spouse may be found. Quite frankly, I'm often amazed at young people who actually say, "Well, I'm looking for a God-fearing spouse," and they don't go to youth group or they don't go to youth camp. It's

a mystery to me. You don't put yourself in the way where other young people might be, or maybe you've got a little bit of pride and you say, "Well, I think I'm a year or two too old," and so you stay away from opportune places and situations. Well, Abraham didn't do that. He understood that God's sovereignty doesn't cancel out our responsibility so he brings his servant into the picture and he sends him right in the way. He prays and then he uses the means to pursue a spouse for his son.

Thirdly, we have to notice here, of course, that Abraham is concerned to find a wife from the household of faith. You notice that in verses 2 through 4. He says, "Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but thou shalt go into my country, to my kindred, take a wife unto my son, Isaac." You see, Abraham's concern was the land in which you dwell was filled with pagans. They were worshipping other gods and he said this would not be a good influence on my son, Isaac. So he's passionately concerned that Isaac's wife come from no one outside of his own relatives and household in which there was at least some semblance of the fear of God, and this, of course, is just a biblical principle. How can two walk together except they be agreed? How can light be joined with darkness?

So we need to be concerned about who our children marry. It's not good enough just that they find someone from the church, but we need to ask the question: are they finding a real Christian? A godly Christian? A mature Christian who fits their needs and they fit that person's needs? You just don't marry the first Christian that comes along who is interested in you. You marry the right kind of Christian that fits your concerns and your personality and your goals and your vision. Our children must not settle just for, not even just for the good, they must settle only for the best. Marriage isn't something you can enter into lightly but you must wait for God's best provision and pray about it and pursue it and seek it and contemplate it and pray over it. And we parents are to be like Abraham. We are to be very concerned about this. Twenty years or more of investment of our time can go to the wind if our children marry the wrong person.

Are we praying? Are we praying when our children are in the womb already? Are we praying as we raise them up with this in mind, that our great goal in raising them up is to present them one day to a spouse, trained, well trained to be a God-fearing spouse to that person? That's really our goal. We're really temporary parents, aren't we? We're temporary care-givers and trainers and we are molding them to turn them over to a spouse and we need to do that as effectively as we can.

So Abraham brings his servant into the picture. That leads us to our second thought: his servant's cry. Abraham's oldest servant is a remarkable mentor in faith for us in this amazing chapter. Abraham asked him to swear an oath; to follow through on this. You see, that's how serious Abraham takes it. "You must follow through on this task. Swear an oath to me," he says.

Well, the servant is also a man of faith and he's not keen on swearing oaths rashly. He knows that if he swears an oath, that means that God may damn him if he breaks that oath if he can't fulfill it. So he says to Abraham, notice verse 5, "Peradventure the woman will

not be willing to follow me unto this land. Not everyone is willing to go all the way to the land of Canaan and be in no-man's land, Abraham. Is it okay, Abraham, if I then take Isaac back to the land where you were?" Abraham responds, verse 6, "No, bring not my son hither again." So now you've got two conditions: Isaac may not intermarry with the Canaanites, but he may also not leave the land of Canaan because that would be unbelief, leaving the land of promise. That's what he says in verse 7.

Then Abraham goes on to say by faith that he believes that God will prosper his servant and he will turn this impossibility into reality so that Isaac can have a God-fearing wife from his own people in the land of promise. "God shall send his angel before thee and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." Yet Abraham, of course, knows he's not God and he's sensitive to the conscience, the tender conscience of his servant, so he says in verse 8, "if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again." In other words, he's saying, "I know what you're worried about, dear servant, but don't worry about that. If you do your best and it doesn't work out for some way, if God's ways are above my ways and I'm reading this wrong and it doesn't work out, you're relieved of your oath."

Well, under these conditions, the servant feels liberty to swear the oath, to swear that he will do all he can to secure a wife for Isaac who will be willing to come to the land of Canaan from the kindred of Abraham. So he puts his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swears to him concerning that matter, verse 9 says. Now, putting one's hand under the thigh was a special form of oath swearing and scholars disagree what it means, but probably it means one of two things: it can mean that just as a thigh supports your body, so Abraham can fully rely on his servant to pursue this task; or, which I think is more likely, it refers to circumcision, the sign of the covenant, which invoked the power and the presence of the Lord God to fulfill the oath through our efforts, the Lord God who gave the covenant himself.

So the servant takes the action to fulfill the oath. He begins immediately in verse 10. He doesn't wait a long time, you notice that. In verse 10, he takes 10 camels, 10 camels in which to store all kinds of gifts, and several servants to accompany him on his 1,000 mile journey, which probably took him several months. And finally, this caravan arrives in the city of Nahor where he has to be. Nahor, you remember, is Abraham's brother.

Now when he arrives in Nahor, he doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know who to contact. As strangers, he doesn't know the directions to Nahor's house. So what he does is he positions his camels by the well where he knows that young women come out to draw water for their flocks, and when he gets them in position, he then turns to God in prayer. He cries out to God for his blessing, for his guidance, verses 12 through 14. Then later on we read in verses 42 and 43 more of what he says in his prayer. Basically he's asking the Lord that Isaac's future wife might be the one who would come to the well, who would realize that he has no pitcher to draw, and would give him water and would give his camels water to drink also, and if she was one of the relatives of Abraham, he's praying that God would make that to be a sign that this is the woman that would be Isaac's wife.

Now, no doubt this servant has been praying all along the long journey, of course. In fact, what strikes me about this man, all throughout this chapter and when something, when one prayer is answered, another prayer is answered, he bows his head, he worships the Lord. This is a man who spontaneously worships God habitually. He lived a lifestyle of crying to God. I wonder if we can say that, too, this morning? That really prayer is our breath. That throughout the day every day we're concerned about our ways and about our future and we're crying to God, "Help me in this! And help me in that!" And breaking out into doxological praise like this servant time and time again. Are you a frequent visitor at the throne of grace? Or do you just pray 2 or 3 times a day at your stated times? Is it a lifestyle for you?

The great Puritan, Joseph Alleine, said when he loses that spirit of prayer, he said, "I feel like a bird out of my nest, and I'm not comfortable until I'm back in my old way of familiarity with God again." I just love that expression. My old way of familiarity with God again. That's the way this man was. He's praying, praying, praying, praying. He gets to the well. The first thing he does is he prays. He prays.

Now, while he's praying, God's already answering. In fact, Rebekah left her home before he begins to pray so that when he opens his eyes, Rebekah is there, and when she arrives, he runs to meet her and he says, "Let me drink, I pray thee." And she notices he's a stranger from the desert and so she draws water for him. Then she volunteers, "Drink and I will give thy camels drink also." Well, that was no small offer. At that time, an ancient well was a very deep hole in the earth with steps leading down to the spring of water so that each drawing of water required substantial effort and the jug would handle about 3 gallons of water. It was quite a trek to draw one jug of water. Well, each camel typically drank 25 gallons of water so that's 8 or 9 treks for each camel down into the well. Ten camels, that's 80 or 90 trips. This must have taken 1 ½ hours or 2 hours. And notice, Rebekah does it all running, the Bible says. Running.

And we read in verse 21 that the servant held his peace. The original Hebrew actually says this literally, "He staring and waiting silently was amazed." He's thinking to himself, "Is this young lady with the beautiful face and the willing hands also the one with a faithful heart that I am searching for?" God seems to be answering his prayer immediately and wonderfully, but he needs to know more. Was she from the house of Nahor?

Well, when she's done, immediately he calls her to himself. First he wants to reward her and his pulse must have been racing as he took out of his sack the costly gifts of a gold ring and 2 gold bracelets and he asked her, "Whose daughter are you? And is there room in your father's house for me?" How it must have sounded like music in the servant's ear when Rebekah responded, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son who Milcah bare unto him." Nahor, Abraham's brother. This young woman is a granddaughter of Nahor so she's Isaac's second cousin. How much closer could you get to fulfilling Abraham's request?

"This is exactly the woman I'm looking for," the servant thinks. He's overwhelmed. Reality sinks in. Rebekah, this woman is God's answer. What an awesome God. Verse 26 says he bows. He bows down to the earth in the presence of this woman. His soul is soaring in ecstatic gratitude and his heart is humble in the dust. "The man bowed down his head, the Bible says, "and worshiped the LORD."

Have you ever done that when the Lord answered your prayer? You were so amazed. The answer was greater than the gift itself. The fact that God was answering and you had to stop what you were doing, you had to bow your head down to the earth and worship the Lord. What an awesome God who answers prayer.

Announcer. Thank you for listening to Doctrine for Life with Dr. Joel Beeke. If you would like to support the ministry of Doctrine for Life, please send a check to the Gospel Trumpet, 540 Crescent NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. William Aames said, "Theology is the doctrine of living to God. May God write the doctrines of the Bible upon your heart so that you may truly live."