

Comments on Genesis 24

Sarah has recently died (cf. v. 67), and Abraham is nearing the end of his life and he wants to make sure Isaac does not end up with a woman who will lead him astray. We know from 6:1 that "sons of God" being led astray by "daughters of men" was a serious problem. Abraham was surrounded by Canaanites, a rather idolatrous and lascivious bunch. Lot's, Abraham's nephew, experience illustrates the risks of falling in among the locals and marrying one of them. So, Abraham is justifiably concerned about Isaac marrying the wrong kind of a woman.

Additionally, it might give some insight into Isaac's character. Was Isaac's eye being turned aside by these local women as was Lot's, such that his father had to step in? If Isaac was a zealot, would this action on Abraham's part have been necessary? In v. 62 we are informed Isaac had moved away from Abraham and set up camp in the Negeb to the South. Perhaps what precipitated the events of this chapter was Abraham's concern about Isaac moving out onto his own and falling in with the local women while not under the watchful eye of his father.

Theologically, the narrative makes it clear the Lord is once again working behind the scenes to make sure His promises are being kept. In this case, it is Abraham, his servant, and Rebecca doing the Lord's will, and Isaac takes a relatively passive part.

1 AND Abraham was old, [and] well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3 And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: 4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. 5 And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? 6 And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. 7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. 8 And 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. 9 And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that

matter.

v1-9 Abraham is growing old, and while the Lord has blessed him in all things (v. 1), he wants to be certain his posterity is blessed as well. Abraham summons his faithful servant and makes him swear an oath (v. 2) wherein the servant will obtain a wife for Isaac from among the Semites (v. 4) and not the local Canaanites (v. 3). The servant is concerned about the requirement so he asks about the conditions of his obtaining a bride for Isaac. If she or the family is unwilling to allow the marriage to Isaac without meeting him first, can he be taken back to meet? (v. 5) Abraham says "No" (v. 6), because this land is the land of inheritance. And, the Lord God has told him that He will arrange the marriage and all things will be prepared before him (v. 7). If the woman refuses to marry, then the servant is not bound by the oath (v. 8). The servant agrees to the terms and covenants to do as Abraham has asked (v. 9).

v1 "well stricken in age", this description is provided to explain why Abraham himself did not transact the business of arranging the marriage, but had the servant do so. He was too old to travel the required distance.

It also serves to emphasize that Abraham was probably very concerned about Isaac's marrying as he knew he was coming to the end of his own mortal life and his posterity was not yet ensured.

v2 "his eldest servant of his house", perhaps this is Eliezer from 15:2.

"Put...thy hand under my thigh", the oath that Abraham has the servant make has an unusual token associated with it (also cp. 47:29). The token certainly has reference to matters of procreation. The question is, what? Verse 41 indicates there was a curse associated with this covenant, so it might be associated with a curse: if the servant violates the oath, then Abraham's posterity (presumably Isaac) would vindicate it in the servant's destruction. Or, it could mean that if the servant violates the oath, he will have no posterity. Or, perhaps the token is simply a generalized one where Abraham is indicating what he is asking the servant to do affects his posterity. There is no consensus among historians or commentators as to what exactly is going on with the gesture.

With respect to "thigh", the IV/JST changes it to "hand",

presumably to remove any unseemliness.

v3 "swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth", this is a merism. Abraham is saying the Lord is God of all things.

v5 The servant is attempting to discern what is more important to Abraham, the land of inheritance or the non-Canaanitish wife. Abraham's reply in v. 6 is "Both". Abraham insists Isaac have both a non-Canaanitish wife and the inheritance plot.

v7 Abraham informs the servant this is no ordinary task he has been assigned, but rather a divinely inspired one. The servant must have been religious, otherwise the oath from v. 2 and these directions from Abraham would be meaningless. Abraham's directions also emphasize the servant rely on spiritual means in obtaining the wife as opposed to physical means. And the prayer in v. 12 and v. 26-27 make it clear the servant revered the Lord.

v8 "if the woman will not be willing", even though the Lord has prepared the way before the servant (v. 7) He will not go so far as to remove the woman's free agency and therefore subject her to His will. She still has her own free will, and this is what the servant is concerned about. If he cannot persuade her to come back with him, he wants to know what he is supposed to do.

10 And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master [were] in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. 11 And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, [even] the time that women go out to draw [water]. 12 And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I stand [here] by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: 14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: [let the same be] she [that] thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

15 And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. 16 And the damsel [was] very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down

to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. 17 And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. 18 And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. 19 And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw [water] for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. 20 And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw [water], and drew for all his camels.

21 And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. 22 And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten [shekels] weight of gold; 23 And said, whose daughter [art] thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room [in] thy father's house for us to lodge in? 24 And she said unto him, I [am] the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. 25 She said moreover unto him, we have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.

26 And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. 27 And he said, Blessed [be] the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I [being] in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren. 28 And the damsel ran, and told [them of] her mother's house these things.

v10-28 The servant follows Abraham's advice to use spiritual means in finding this woman and appeals to the Lord for guidance. He picks a rather detailed sign that leaves little doubt (v. 10-14). The servant is stunned at the fulfilment of his request scarcely as he finished praying (v. 15-20). He asks about her and her family, she tells him and extends customary hospitality (v. 23-25). He realizes she is related to Abraham and therefore Abraham's prediction and requirements of obtaining a wife are fulfilled, and therefore bows in reverence to the Providence of the Lord (v. 26). He identifies himself as a servant of one of her relatives who has been guided by the Lord on his mission there (v. 27). She runs ahead and informs the family of his imminent arrival, and of the events leading up to it (v. 28).

v21 Here the servant reflects on what just happened, and wonders over whether the Lord had accomplished it or not. Such is the nature of signs, even when received one still doubts about whether it was a coincidence or providence.

v22 The servant bestows rather substantial gifts upon Rebekah,

in part because of her arduous labors in watering the camels, but also certainly in an effort to ingratiate himself with her (v. 22).

v25 Rebecca's triple positive affirmation in response to the servant's question in v. 24 is interpreted as a providential superlative, and hence his response in v. 26. In Everett Fox's The Five Books of Moses, his translation of the text places three "Yes" into the text to make the implication explicit.

29 And Rebekah had a brother, and his name [was] Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. 30 And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. 31 And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. 32 And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that [were] with him. 33 And there was set [meat] before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on.

34 And he said, I [am] Abraham's servant. 35 And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. 36 And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. 37 And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: 38 But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. 39 And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. 40 And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: 41 Then shalt thou be clear from [this] my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee [one], thou shalt be clear from my oath.

42 And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: 43 Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw [water], and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; 44 And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: [let] the same [be] the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son. 45 And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and

drew [water]: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. 46 And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her [shoulder], and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. 47 And I asked her, and said, whose daughter [art] thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. 48 And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

49 And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with 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 proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. 51 Behold, Rebekah [is] before thee, take [her], and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken. 52 And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, [bowing himself] to the earth. 53 And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave [them] to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.

54 And they did eat and drink, he and the men that [were] with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. 55 And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us [a few] days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. 56 And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. 57 And they said, we will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. 58 And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. 59 And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou [art] our sister, be thou [the mother] of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. 61 And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

v31-59 Laban recognizes this man is important so he goes to meet him at the well. Laban welcomes him and arranges food for him and the camels (v. 31-32). The servant accepts the hospitality, but will not eat until he relates the entirety of the remarkable events (v. 33-48). After relating the tale the servant asks them if they believe it, and if they do then let him carry out his task of returning with Rebekah, and if not then he will just leave (v. 49). Laban replies the matter is decreed of the Lord, so they cannot obstruct the marriage (v.

50-51). The servant is once again grateful for Providence and bows down before the Lord (v. 52). He then distributes additional gifts to Rebekah and the family (as bride price) and they all sit down to eat and relax (v. 53-54). The following morning the servant is ready to leave with Rebekah, but the family wants her to stick around for a few more days (v. 55). The servant is adamant about leaving, so the family defers to Rebekah and she chooses to leave rather than stay (v. 56-58). So, they pack up her and her nurse and they go (v. 59-61).

v53 "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold", the "jewels" would be better translated "objects".

v55 The issue at hand is probably the betrothal period. Typically the betrothal lasted one year wherein the couple were for all intent and purpose legally "married" but not civilly married or cohabitating. This was a traditional period of time, probably performed to indicate that it was not a "shotgun wedding" (i.e., they had to get married because she was pregnant). But in this case, since the bride and groom had never met there was no way this could have happened. However, the family appears to still want to participate in some of the traditions and festivities associated with the betrothal, hence their desire to have her stay a few more days.

v59-61 "her nurse...and her maids", here we are informed Rebekah, previously presented as a woman lugging a water urn, has a nurse (cf. 35:8) and maids. It was a common practice to bestow maids at the time of wedding, but more importantly what this indicates is her family was well-off materially. Thus, Rebekah did not have to lug water for her family or the servant's camels either. This presents Rebekah as a willing and deliberate hard worker who doesn't take advantage of her family's wealth to live a life of ease and sloth.

v60 With Rebekah's departure a blessing is pronounced upon her. It is unclear who administered the blessing, as apparently her father is either deceased or not present. The text presents a plural "they" as speaking, but the statement starts with a reference to her as "sister". Since there is only one other sibling identified as present, Laban, it was probably him who pronounced it. However, the "sister" reference may have been a term of endearment as opposed to a literal statement of fact. In any case, the blessing delivered is one of physical security

and progeny, one which parallels the blessings bestowed upon Abraham.

62 And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country. 63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels [were] coming. 64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. 65 For she [had] said unto the servant, what man [is] this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant [had] said, It [is] my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. 67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's [death].

v62-67 Isaac was surely apprized of the efforts underway to obtain him a wife, so naturally he would be return home from his camp to see what turned up (v. 63). When Rebecca sees a lone man in the distance she inquires who it is of the servant and upon being informed it is the groom she veils herself in token of her betrothal (v. 64-65). They come up to Isaac, the servant tells Isaac about everything that has transpired (v. 66), he accepts Rebekah and they get married (v. 67).

v63 "meditate", the Hebrew term here is obscure and uncertain. The Jewish Publication Society translation renders it "walking".

v65 "she took a veil and covered herself", regarding this the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary on Genesis states:

...the veiling of the bride was part of the marriage ceremony. In Akkadian the bride on her wedding day is called kallatu kutumtu, "the veiled bride". Pussumtu, "the veiled one", in another term for kallatu, "bride". The Middle Assyrian laws make the raising of a concubine to the status of a wife contingent upon her being veiled in the presence of the court. In light of all this, Rebekah's veiling herself has both symbolic and socio-legal significance. It is an unspoken signal to Isaac that she is his bride.

Also compare 29:21-25 where Leah must have been wearing a veil.

v67 The references to him taking her into his mother's tent and his love for her comforting him after the death of his mother

suggest Isaac was displacing his emotions over the death of his mother onto Rebekah. It is plain from preceding chapters that Sarah was quite protective of Isaac, and from this verse it is plain he was very fond of Sarah as well.

The question is "Did Isaac really fall in love with Rebekah, or was it ardor as a result of his heightened emotional state?" In subsequent chapters it is plain Isaac and Rebekah don't communicate much, and here they had just barely met when they got married, and the text closely associates his love with his getting over his mother's death. This suggests it was ardor and not enduring love.

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