

# The Book of Genesis

## Lesson 22

### *Chapter 24*

Abraham was 137 years old when his dear Sarah died. Most likely because of the traditions of the time, Sarah was placed in the grave before the setting of the sun on the same day that Abraham purchased the field and cave of Machpelah. We do not know how long they had been married, nor do we know how old they were when they married. As a matter of fact, we really know only the events of the last 62 years of Sarah's married life with Abraham to this point in the story. As with all who have lost a spouse, life must continue after the funeral and so it was with Abraham after the death of Sarah. As chapter 24 begins, about three years had passed since the death of Sarah. Abraham was now 140 years old and Isaac was about 40.

#### **Wife for Isaac**

**Genesis 24:1 Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way.<sup>2</sup> And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, " Please place your hand under my thigh,<sup>3</sup> and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live,<sup>4</sup> but you shall go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac."<sup>5</sup> And the servant said to him, "Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?"**

Abraham's house was organized; however, he did not tend to every detail. He had a trusted servant, a second in command, who provided direction for dealing with all that Abraham owned.

Abraham called his trusted servant and said, **"Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth... ."** The English translators toned down the true translation of this passage, surely for modesty purposes; however, the original mentions the "section circumcised next to the femur" or thighbone. In other words, Abraham bound this servant by asking him to put his hand on the mark of the covenant God had made with Abraham and Abraham had made with God, the section of Abraham's body that had been circumcised. We must not make this a profane act in any form or fashion. The original covenant was between Abraham and all the males in his house with the **"LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth."** Abraham's servant had taken part in the circumcision ceremony and knew its importance and meaning. By placing his hand on the circumcised section of Abraham's body, the servant was promising to fulfill the oath to Abraham and "the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth."

Earlier, the LORD had told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet. The Canaanites of the tribe of Heth considered Abraham a prince and it would seem that Abraham would have been proud to have a Canaanite daughter-in-law for Isaac, but he was not. He sent his trusted servant to the house of his brother, Nahor, to select a wife for Isaac. At the end of Genesis chapter 22, word was delivered to Abraham that Nahor had been blessed with children, grandchildren and at least one great granddaughter named Rebekah. Surely other daughters were born to Nahor's house, but Rebekah was the right age to become the wife of Isaac who was now 40 year old.

The servant was concerned that he would not be able to fulfill the oath; therefore, he asked Abraham if he could take Isaac to meet his choice if she would not return with him to Hebron. Abraham's answer was "no."

### **Warning Concerning the Land**

**Genesis 24:6 Then Abraham said to him, " Beware lest you 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 birth, and who spoke to me, and who swore to me, saying, ' To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will 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 my oath; only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.**

Abraham seemed to have known that his servant would be successful; yet, he provided his servant with a way to be released from the oath. Abraham believed that the LORD would send an angel to prepare the heart of the woman for Isaac. But if Abraham was wrong, if she would not return with the servant, he would be released from the oath. Therefore, the servant made the oath with Abraham.

### **Servant and the City of Nahor**

**Genesis 24:10 Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; 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 evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 And he said, " O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham.**

Abraham's servant seemed to have been pragmatic. He knew the customs of the day concerning the dowry for the woman that he would choose. Notice that Abraham did not tell him how to accomplish his task. On his own initiative, the servant took the ten camels and a variety of goods that belonged to Abraham.

When the servant arrived in the city where Nahor lived in the area of Mesopotamia, "he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time." We must remember that evening in that day actually began as the sun reached high noon and began its descent in the last half of daylight. As evening began, just after high noon, it was normal for travelers and their animals to rest in the middle of the day especially if some sort of oasis was available. However, this passage tells us the time that the servant actually made the camels kneel down to rest; it was at the time when the women would arrive at the wells to draw water which occurred between 4:00 and 5:00 o'clock as the heat of the day was passing. The evening part of the day would not end until 6:00 o'clock.

At the well in the city of Nahor's home, the servant did what we should all do every day before every task; he prayed. He asked the LORD for success and His loving-kindness as he attempted to fulfill the oath he had made to his master.

### **Servant's Plan**

**Genesis 24:13 "Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; <sup>14</sup>now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also';-- *may she be the one* whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master."**

The servant continued his prayer by describing how he will know which of the women who came to draw water should be the one for Isaac. She will be the one who gives him a drink and offers to water the camels too.

### **Rebekah**

**Genesis 24:15 And it came about before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. <sup>16</sup>And the girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up. <sup>17</sup>Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, " Please let me drink a little water from your jar." <sup>18</sup> And she said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking." <sup>20</sup> So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.**

We must notice that the LORD answered the prayer of the servant! No one is so insignificant that the LORD will not listen to and answer the prayers of those who have sought His will in a proper way, in God's way, in the LORD's timing.

But the servant was not the only one in the will of the LORD, so was Rebekah. She was the epitome of the LORD's loving-kindness in her behavior with the servant. He had ten camels. During a rest break each camel could drink many gallons of water. It was not simple or easy to water them.

We must pause to notice an important point in this story; Rebekah did nothing more and nothing less than what the servant had asked of the LORD as proof that she was the right woman for Isaac. Had she offered to do more, perhaps it was just her nature to be overly kind and she might not be the right one. The reverse was not a concern, the servant asked only for a drink for himself but she was to offer to water the camels too. If she had just given him a drink, she would not have been the one. But Rebekah did offer to water the camels on her own but nothing more. Had the servant asked the LORD for more, surely she would have done more. The point that she fulfilled the servant's prayer just as it was requested shows the mighty hand of God in that moment.

### **Servant's Gaze**

**Genesis 24:21 Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not.**

The servant watched Rebekah to make sure she was the one to fulfill his oath.

### **Payment and Question for Rebekah**

**Genesis 24:22 Then it came about, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold,<sup>23</sup> and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?"**

The original Hebrew identifies the "gold ring weighing a half-shekel" as a nose ring. Such rings were worn in the left nostril of Semite women who were not married. The servant offered the ring and bracelets to Rebekah with a question, "is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?" The servant knew that he had to make a business arrangement with Rebekah's father. If her father was not alive, he would have to do business with her brothers. He could not make the marriage arrangement with Rebekah directly. It would be rude and dishonoring to Rebekah's family if he took her to Isaac without the permission of her father or brothers.

### **Room for the Night**

**Genesis 24:24 And she said to him, " I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25 Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in."**

Rebekah identified herself and offered to feed and lodge the troop in her father's house.

### **Servant's Worship**

**Genesis 24:26 Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. <sup>27</sup> And he said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers."**

With Rebekah's introduction, the servant knew that the LORD had led him to the right place, the right people and the right woman. Like the servant, we should worship the LORD and thank Him for His guidance and provisions each day in each circumstance.

### **Rebekah's Report**

**Genesis 24:28 Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.**

Notice that Rebekah did not run to her father or her brother; she ran to her mother's household. Would that not also be her father's house? Not necessarily! In the Semitic families, the women had separate homes from the men where the children and unmarried women and maids lived apart from the older boys and men. As has been seen in past chapters in Genesis, Abraham had his tent and Sarah had hers; likewise, Rebekah's father had his quarters and her mother had hers. Such arrangements did not mean that the couples were estranged and should not be considered as such. In this case, it may shed more light on the topic than the ordinary custom of the times. Although Rebekah identified herself as the daughter of Bethuel, it is highly likely that he was old, incapacitated, or dead at the time because her brothers will make the lodging and marriage arrangements with the servant. Therefore, her mother's house would have been the proper place to make the announcement.

### **Rebekah's Brother**

**Genesis 24:29 Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran outside to the man at the spring. <sup>30</sup> And it came about that when he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring.**

The servant did not follow Rebekah to her mother's house; he stayed with the camels and his assistants at the spring where he met Rebekah. Laban, the apparent leader of the men of the household and spokesman for the family, made his way to the spring to speak with the servant.

### **Washing the Feet of the Servant and Men with Him**

**Genesis 24:31 And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?" <sup>32</sup> So the man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.**

Laban's kind words toward the servant were actually directed at him because of his relationship with Abraham. Abraham was Laban's kin and it is not too far-fetched to assume that he already knew of the accomplishments of Abraham and the LORD's blessing on him. After all, Abraham had heard the news of Nahor's house a few years before and the messenger surely returned to tell of Abraham's house. In the custom of the Semitic people, the camels were fed and the feet of the men were washed.

### **The Business of the Servant**

Genesis 24:33 **But when food was set before him to eat, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my business."** And he said, "Speak on." 34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 **"And the LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys.**

The servant would not eat before his business was completed. It would have been an insult to eat the meal with an unknown agenda lingering in his mind. Therefore, the servant began to tell the story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac.

### **Servant's Story**

Genesis 24:36 **"Now Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master in her old age; and he has given him all that he has.** 37 **"And 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 live;** 38 **but you shall go to my father's house, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.'** 39 **"And I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman does not follow me.'** 40 **"And he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives, and from my father's house;** 41 **then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'**

Genesis 24:42 **"So I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now Thou wilt make my journey on which I go successful;** 43 **behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar";** 44 **and she will say to me, "You 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 jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew; and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.'** 46 **"And she quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; so I drank, and she watered the camels also.**

**Genesis 24:47** "Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. <sup>48</sup> "And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.

### **Servant's Request**

**Genesis 24:49** "So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left." <sup>50</sup> Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The matter comes from the LORD; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. <sup>51</sup> "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." <sup>52</sup> And it came about when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD.

At this point in the story, Bethuel appears with Laban. This appearance has caused a dilemma for commentators of the past. Some assume that Rebekah's father, named Bethuel, was dead and this was a son by the same name. They also assume that Laban was the older brother of Bethuel because he had assumed the leader's position when he invited the servant into the house. Such gymnastics make the interpretation of this passage difficult and cumbersome. In Genesis chapter 22, Rebekah was identified as the daughter of Bethuel with no mention of brothers. It is possible that Rebekah was the oldest with Laban next in line as well as others not formally named. Bethuel may have been a younger brother named after his father. This interpretation is most likely the best. Later in verse 53, the servant will give gifts to Rebekah, the brother and the mother but no gift is mentioned for the father.

The servant wanted an answer from Laban and Bethuel concerning Rebekah. When he said, "**let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left.**" The servant meant that if they would not let Rebekah go with him to Isaac, he wanted to leave and search for another a woman among other relatives of Abraham in another place.

Laban and Bethuel were not against the servant's request and gave their permission. The servant immediately worshiped the LORD.

### **Servant's Gifts**

**Genesis 24:53** And the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.

Evidently, the ten camels had a greater purpose; each camel carried precious articles and gifts for the bride, her brother and her mother. It would be correct to interpret these gifts as a dowry for the hand of Rebekah.

## Ten Days

Genesis 24:54 **Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master."**<sup>55</sup> But her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us *a few* days, say ten; afterward she may go."<sup>56</sup> And 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."

After the meal and the night of rest, the servant was ready to depart for Isaac's home. However, the mother and Laban wanted ten more days with Rebekah before she left. The servant did not want to delay; he was ready to complete his task. Notice the response of the family in the next verse.

## Rebekah's Wishes

Genesis 24:57 **And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes."**<sup>58</sup> Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."<sup>59</sup> Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men.<sup>60</sup> And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, Become thousands of ten thousands, And may your descendants possess The gate of those who hate them."

The family wanted ten days with Rebekah but the servant wanted to leave that morning. In an extremely unusual move, the family allowed Rebekah to decide whether she would leave that day or stay for ten days. Rebekah was ready to go; she was ready to meet her groom; she was ready to wed; she was ready to begin a new life; she was ready for a new home. Her mother and brothers could not keep her there although they were justified in selfishly wanting just ten more days with her, knowing they might never see her again. But because she was ready, they were ready to honor her in light of the Divine purpose for her life ordained by the LORD. They blessed her and her nurse who would be one of the maids who accompanied her to Canaan land.

## Rebekah and Maids Depart

Genesis 24:61 **Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed.**

The camels had two purposes; they carried the servant and his men with all the gifts to Mesopotamia and they would carry the men and Isaac's precious gift in return with all her maids.

## Isaac's Meditation

Genesis 24:62 **Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev.**<sup>63</sup> And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming.

The date was 2131 years since the creation of Adam. While the servant was on his journey to Mesopotamia, Isaac had moved to live at Beer-lahai-roi. We first encountered this location in Genesis 16:7-14. It was the well where the LORD provided water for Hagar and Ishmael when Abraham had sent them away from the clan. The name means “the well of him who seeth me.” Hagar and Ishmael had not been in that location in 36 years; they were living in Paran and the Arabian Desert. Beer-lahai-roi was in the desert of the Negev on the west side of the old Jordan River valley below the Dead Sea. The Negev desert stretched westward well into the land of Egypt.

As indicated in the passage, as evening was approaching, Isaac went to the field to meditate when he saw the camels approaching.

### **Rebekah's First Sight of Isaac**

**Genesis 24:64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. 65 And she said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself.**

Isaac saw the cluster of camels as they arrived with his father's trusted servant and assistants as well as several women. Rebekah saw Isaac alone; she noticed him before he knew she was the one.

For the first time in the Bible the veil is mentioned. Evidently, the custom was already well established at least in the Mesopotamia region. We must remember that Rebekah was accustomed to a totally different culture and a totally different way of life. She had lived in a wood and brick home; Abraham and Isaac lived in tents. She lived in a well-established city; Abraham and Isaac moved from place to place, from well to well, from pasture to pasture. She had a closely-knit family of blood kin; Isaac was a lone child in the home from the age of four. Her veil was a sign. Women and children generally appeared in public unveiled; however, once engaged, a woman would veil herself from head to toe with only her eyes and hands showing. It was a sign that she legally belonged to a man she would marry; likewise, it was a sign that she was no longer available for engagement to another. When Rebekah put the veil on, it was a sign to Isaac, the servant and her maids that she was willing to become the wife of Isaac.

### **Isaac and Rebekah Marry**

**Genesis 24:66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.**

It is interesting that this is the first chapter where the LORD did not directly intervene in the lives of the participants. Rather, the LORD seemed to work in the background as His followers worked through His providence. It is a new seed of theology showing how the LORD will work

through His followers who faithfully communicate with Him. At each step along the way, the faithful servant stopped to pray and worship the LORD. The servant asked for a sign from the LORD to confirm his actions with each step. We call that the providence of God. If the servant had not received the outcome that he prayed for, he would have known that he was not in the will of the LORD and would seek another way. Because every prayer was answered exactly as petitioned without any addition or subtraction, without need for any interpretation or speculation, the servant knew he was in the perfect will of the LORD. In this passage, the servant reported all the details of the task and Isaac accepted the results and received Rebekah as his ordained wife. He took Rebekah into the tent to unveil her for the first time and marry her in the same way that all marriages were performed in the past. Evidently, Isaac had been extremely close to his mother and the marriage to Rebekah filled a special place in his life. In response to his marriage, Isaac accepted Rebekah and loved her. She will be Isaac's only wife for his entire life; he will not bring into the marriage any concubines or maids.