

Bride Chosen

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[0:00] Remember last week we looked at how the birth and near sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac were shadows of things to come.

! Tonight we're going to look at selected verses in Genesis 24 and through those we'll see another major event in Isaac's life. And as we look at chapter 24, keep in mind what's happened since we last saw Isaac.

Approximately 20 years have passed since the chapters we looked at last week. He's now about 40 years old and Sarah, his mother, has just died. And Abraham is now about 140 years old.

And Abraham's age sets the stage for what we'll see in chapter 24. We'll walk through the chapter and then we'll discuss how the events actually do foreshadow something else to come. So in verses 24, 1 through 9, we're going to see a fatherly desire.

So fatherly desire is the first thing that goes in your handout. And let's begin looking at that then by looking at verses 1 through 4 first. It says, And he had his chief servant swear an oath to find a wife for Isaac from his native land.

[1:49] And that was approximately 450 miles away. And putting his hand under the patriarch's thigh was a solemn sign that if the oath wasn't carried out, then Abraham's descendants would be able to avenge the servant's unfaithfulness.

So it was a pretty serious oath that the servant actually took. And although chapter 24 never identifies the servant by name, most scholars assume that the chief servant is still Eliezer that we met last week.

And for simplicity, we'll also assume that the servant is Eliezer. But Abraham's request is no small task there. Because a caravan could travel about 17 to 23 miles per day.

And so considering they had to go about 450 miles, the one-way journey would have taken approximately three to four weeks to just go that one-way trip. And then once he got there, if he found a suitable young lady, he'd have to convince her and her family to let her come back with him. And then they'd have to make the return journey as well. So it wasn't an easy task. And obviously Eliezer realized that. Look at the obvious question that he has in verse 5.

[2:59] It says, And the servant said to him, Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came? That's a pretty obvious question to ask when you're given a daunting task like that.

But Abraham insisted that Isaac's wife come from his kindred in Mesopotamia. But he emphasized that Isaac himself should not return there. And Isaac's future was in Canaan because God had promised that land to Abraham and his descendants.

So why do you think Abraham was so insistent that Isaac shouldn't take a wife from among the Canaanites? Yeah, they weren't very holy in what they did.

And Abraham actually knew what the Israelites eventually forgot. That if you associated with the Canaanites, it would lead to bad things. So Abraham knew what his descendants soon forgot.

But let's look now at verses 6 through 9. It says, So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

[4:29] And verse 7 shows just how strong Abraham's faith was. Look at verse 7 again. It says, The Lord God of heaven who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family and who spoke to me and swore to me saying, To your descendants I give this land, he will send his angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

And the phrase his angel there is grammatically equivalent to the expression, The angel of the Lord. So it's a way of referring to God's presence.

So Abraham believed that the 450 mile journey then was clearly under divine oversight. And that brings us to the next section of the chapter that covers verses 10 through 14.

We're going to see Eliezer loyally undertakes the far-reaching duty. So far-reaching duty is the next section there. We'll look at verses 10 and 11 first.

It says, Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, for all his master's goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

[5:44] So let's set the stage a little bit. The possession of camels in this ancient period was regarded as a mark of extraordinary wealth. And notice how many Eliezer took with him.

He took ten camels with him. So he certainly would have been noticed as he was by the well, waiting for somebody to draw him water. But he's more concerned about how he's going to notice the correct young woman, rather than how he gets noticed himself.

And verses 12 through 14 then have a very specific prayer. It says, Then he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of this city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, Please let down your pitcher that I may drink.

And she says, Drink, and I will give your camels a drink. Let her be the one you have appointed for my servant Isaac. And by this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.

[6:45] So what do you think of his method for identifying a wife for Isaac? He boxed in the Lord a little bit.

Do you think there might have been a better way perhaps to do that? Obviously, Eliezer has faith in the Lord and who prays for guidance. And the conditions that he set reveal that he's seeking a wife who has a generous and caring disposition similar to that of God, because anybody who would water the camels as well had to have a caring heart.

And the specific request in verse 14 is really not the ordinary way to ask for guidance. He might have been better off to ask for wisdom to discern the best choice rather than to probe into what God had said.

But we're going to see that God graciously honors his request anyway, and he uses that as a means to direct his events. So that brings us to the next section in the chapter.

And in verses 15 through 27, we'll see the forecasted dialogue. So forecasted dialogue is what goes next. And we'll read through verse 21 first.

[7:55] So starting in verse 15, it says, And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.

Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin, no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her and said, Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher.

So she said, Drink, my lord. Then she quickly let her pitcher down to her hand and gave him a drink. And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, I will draw water for your camels also until they have finished drinking.

Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man, wondering at her, remained silent as to know whether the Lord has made his journey prosperous or not.

So it was common hospitality in that day to give water to a thirsty stranger, but it wasn't common to give water to the stranger's animals.

[8:59] So the woman who would do that had to be unusually kind, and she served beyond the call of duty. So she had the attitude that Eliezer was looking for. And we saw earlier that she was beautiful, but even more than that, she had the right attitude to fit for Isaac.

She was also more than a pretty face, though, because she had to have been a strong young woman. Because a single camel can hold up to 25 gallons of water, and he had 10 camels to water. So serving them was a pretty big task, and it says she filled them all. So look at verses 22 through 24 now. It says, So it was, when the camels finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring, weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrist, weighing 10 shekels of gold, and said,

Whose daughter are you?

Tell me, please, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge? So she said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, Milca's son, whom she bore to Nahor. Moreover, she said to him, We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge.

So the young lady must have been wondering what was happening to her, because she was getting all of these expensive gifts all of a sudden. You know, it's probably not very often that she's had somebody give her a nose ring when she's watering the camels, but obviously something different was happening today.

[10:19] How did Rebecca identify herself? Notice she mentioned all of her relatives there. And in formal introductions in that day, the abbreviated genealogy then provided for specific identification.

And yes, if you were following that, that meant she was also Isaac's cousin. So they were already loosely related to each other. Notice, too, the question that Eliezer had for her.

He asked if there was room at her father's house for him to stay overnight. And again, she showed her kindness by offering him not only a place to stay, but also telling him that they had food for the camels as well.

So let's read verses 26 and 27 to see how Eliezer reacts to the hospitality. It says, Then the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord, and he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his mercy and his truth toward my master.

As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren. So in these and the following words, Eliezer gave God true public praise, similar to what we later find in the book of Psalms.

[11:36] And notice he paired mercy and truth together in what he said. And that pairing of mercy and truth really means something like the Lord's utterly unswerving loyalty. It really intensifies the loyalty that he saw from God.

But notice something else about this passage. God did lead him, but he was also willing to be led, and he was actively pursuing the will of God. So that brings us to the next section of the chapter. And in this section, we're going to cover parts of verses 28 through 49. And in that, we'll see two fascinating disclosures. And the first of these fascinating disclosures, then, is summarized in one sentence, and that's in verse 28.

It says, So the young woman ran and told her mother's household these things. But Eliezer caught the attention of Rebekah's brother as well.

And we'll see that Rebekah's brother is the familiar name. Look at verses 29 through 31. It says, We tend to remember Laban for his substance, and he has some subsequent dealings with Jacob in chapters 29 through 31 of Genesis.

[13:15] But here, he actually appears to be a gentle servant of God, and he recognizes Abraham's servant with generous hospitality. As we move on, though, we'll find out that Eliezer can hardly wait to make the second fascinating disclosure in this section.

But he has some chores to do first. Look at verses 32 and 33. It says, Then the man came to the house, and he unloaded the camels and provided straw and feed for the camels and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

Food was set before him, but he said, I will not eat until I have told about my errand. And he said, Speak on. So how do we know that Eliezer was really excited and enthused about telling what he learned today?

Yeah, he wanted to tell before he ate, and he was probably pretty hungry after being on the road for that long. But obviously, the Lord had done a marvel, and the servant wished to delay eating until he told his great story to Rebecca's family.

And the servant story continues then with dramatic flair, noting the details of the timing and the activity and just about everything he did. His first order of business, though, was to identify his master and then to explain his assignment, but not without stressing the blessings of God upon his master and upon the trip.

[14:37] Look at verses 34 and 35. It says, So he said, I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great. And he has given me flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.

We'll skip over verses 36 through 48, because the long speech that Eliezer gives in verses 36 through 48 really closely repeats much of what's already been narrated in the first part of this

chapter.

He includes some additional minor details in there because he does mention in verse 47 that he did put the gold ring in Rebecca's nose. But skip to verse 49 for the last two sentences of Eliezer's speech.

In verse 49 he says, Now if you 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. So Eliezer finally refers the matter to their consideration and he waits for their decision.

In other words, he says, If you'll be sincerely kind, you'll accept the proposal and I'll have what I came for. But if you're not going to accept the proposal, don't hold me in suspense.

[15:50] And the answer to Eliezer's question then begins the next section of the chapter. And that section covers verses 50 through 56. And we'll see Laban and Bethuel answer with fitting deference.

So fitting deference is what goes into your next section there. And let's look at verses 50 and 51 first.

It says, Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing comes from the Lord. We cannot speak to you either good or bad. Here is Rebecca before you. Take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the Lord has spoken.

So Rebecca's brother and father acknowledge that the providential nature of all that has taken place really has convinced them that Rebecca should become Isaac's wife.

And they say it's clearly God's will. And let's see how Eliezer reacts to Laban and Bethuel's decision. Look at verses 52 and 53. It says, And it came to pass when Abraham's servant heard their words that he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth, then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebecca.

[17:06] He also gave precious things to her, I mean to her brother and her mother. So this is not a section, but if you want to fit with the alliteration, you can also say this was finery delivered on this point.

I came up with that one and couldn't find a place to put it as a section, so I had to throw it out there anyway. But only after acknowledging the Lord's grace does Eliezer present Rebecca and her household with the gifts.

And Rebecca first receives unspecified articles of gold and silver, as well as valuable clothing. And then the servant generously extends costly gifts to her brother and to her mother.

But mourning brings some possible complications, though. Look at verses 54 and 55. And 54 is talking about Eliezer when it says, And he and the men who were with him ate and drank and stayed all night.

Then they arose in the morning, and he said, Send me away to my master. But her brother and her mother said, Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten.

[18:10] After that, she may go. Before we consider the complication, we need to consider why Laban is so much involved here in all of these discussions, instead of the father.

And in that society, a woman's brother traditionally gave his sister in marriage. So that explains why Laban, then, is really taking the lead in the negotiations more than the father.

But what do Laban and Milka request for Eliezer? They want her to stay at least ten days with them so that they can have more time with her before she goes.

So you could say that Milka wanted to milk Milka all the time for all it's worth. Anyway, on that one, we'll find out what Eliezer thinks of that.

Look at verses 56 there. We'll just look at 56 first. It says, And he said to them, Do not hinder me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away, so that I may go to my master.

[19:12] So Eliezer's so anxious to get home, he doesn't want to dawdle even for a few days. He's convinced that the divine purpose of his mission has to take precedence over family wants.

And he's certain that the divine will has made this normally mundane trip a really pressing matter. And so his objection then sets up the next section of the chapter.

And in verses 57 through 61, we see a fast departure. And we'll see a fast departure coming up here. When Laban and Bethuel encounter the resistance from Eliezer, they take the easy way out. And verse 57 has their response. It says, So they said, We will call the young woman and ask her personally. So what do you think of them for leaving the decision up to Rebecca?

Yeah, I think that's a good and fair decision for them to do. It's probably a little bit unusual for that culture to leave that up to her too. But, you know, before we jump to other conclusions, we have to remember that she's a lady who was able to draw up to 250 gallons of water for those camels. [20 : 19] So I probably wouldn't want her angry with me either if I tried to stop her from doing something. But let's see what happens whenever they ask her. Beginning in verse 58, we see these words.

It says, Then they called Rebecca and said to her, Will you go with this man? And she said, I will go. So they sent away Rebecca, their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them. Then Rebecca and her maids arose, and they rode on camels and followed the man.

So the servant took Rebecca and departed. So until now, nothing has been said about Rebecca's desires, but we finally hear from her when she says, I will go.

So that showed she was actually willing then to go with him. And it would have been no easier for that family to send away their daughter and sister than it would be for us. So it really was an act of courage and faith in the Lord for everybody concerned.

[21 : 25] And in the customs of the ancient Near East then, the family gave the formal blessing on her, and gave the blessing on her future wedded life. And so these words are more than just a formality.

They're actually a prayer for God's blessing on her life. And the chapter has one more section, and in verses 62 through 67, we'll see Eliezer's finished deed.

So finished deed is the next section there. So let's read those verses. It says, Now Isaac came from the way of Beer-la-hoi-roi, for he dealt in the south.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening. And he lifted his eyes and looked, and there the camels were coming. Then Rebecca lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from her camel.

For she had said to the servant, Who is this man walking in the field to meet us? The servant said, It is my master. So she took a veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

[22 : 27] Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. And he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

So we're not told here how God drew Isaac away from home, but he was at the precise right time and right place to meet the caravan returning with his fiancée. And convention demanded the designated bride veil her face in the presence of her future husband.

And so Isaac then established his acceptance of her as his wife before he had actually seen her beauty. And we're told that when he saw her beauty, then he loved her. So let's think about what we can learn from these events.

First of all, we see that God was the sole cause of all the events in the story. So once again, God was the sole cause of all the events in the story.

Think back to Eliezer's words. He said, The Lord led me. And he said that a couple times in both verses 27 and verses 48. So they're actually the motto of this story, talking about how the Lord led him.

[23 : 36] And of course, this is true throughout all of the Bible. And even Laban, Rebecca's brother, recognized that this was the Lord's doing. The second thing then, is that God was deliberately behind the scenes, directing the acts.

So God was deliberately behind the scenes, directing the acts. And if you think about the narrative that we read in Genesis 24, it records no direct words from God.

It doesn't have a miracle. It doesn't have a prophetic oracle. And it doesn't even restate the Abrahamic covenant. And it's unique to Genesis, but it's realistic for believers today as well. Because what we see from Genesis 24 is the role of faith expressed in personal prayer. Because remember how Eliezer had prayed. And so that looks for outward evidences of God's working. And it's predominant then in Genesis 24, just like it is in our lives. Because oftentimes, just like it was in this chapter, God is not visibly active, even though we know that he is working behind the scenes.

[24:42] The third thing there is that the story reveals more than God's providence. So the story reveals more than God's providence. It's also part of the development of God's plan to bless mankind.

Because think of all the potential mishaps that could have happened along the way. The servant could have failed. You know, he might have missed the sign when it was given.

Laban might have refused to let his sister go. And Rebecca might have refused to go as well. But yet God steered everything so that all the potential hazards were avoided and all the parts were put together just exactly as what God wanted them to do.

But we also need to look at it from another angle as well. Because human responsibility is also evident in this chapter.

So for those of you filling in the blanks, human responsibility is the next one. And think about the human responsibility that we see in this chapter. Because Eliezer faithfully carried out his assignments because he was loyal to the Holy Commission to follow God's program to bless mankind.

[25:53] So loyal is what goes into your blank there. The second thing we can see from Eliezer was that he trusted God implicitly, looking in prayer to God's leading.

Think about all the different times he showed us how he trusted God. And remember, he had three to four weeks on his way to pick out Rebecca to think about it some more.

And you know there had to be some times that crossed his mind when he was thinking, what in the world am I doing here? What if this doesn't work out? But yet he was still faithful to do it anyway.

The third thing we can learn from him is that he was motivated primarily by covenant loyalty.

He didn't want to disappoint his master and he wanted to make sure that he really exhibited that loyalty to Abraham. The fourth thing we can learn from him is that he praised God at least twice even before his assignment was completed.

So once again, he praised God at least twice even before his assignment was completed. We saw that in verse 27 and we saw it again in verses 48 and 49. And the praise is an important part of the story.

[27:03] It's easy to pass over the praise as being repetitious, but that's the point. The point is that this is such a marvelous story that the praise has to be repeated and God deserves for the praise to be repeated.

I think there's probably a good possibility that Eliezer praised God even more than the two times that we have recorded here in this chapter. He would have had plenty of time on the way back to praise God for how well things had worked out as well.

So when you think about it, the choice of a bride for Isaac was God's. The sign confirmed it. Laban then recognized it and Rebekah complied with it.

So it really shows that those who do the will of God prayerfully and obediently are the ones who are led by God. And so Eliezer, Laban, and Rebekah in this story are real-life examples of Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6.

And Proverbs 3, 5 and 6 are the verses that say, Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding and in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path.

[28:09] But as we mentioned in the introduction, in addition to being real examples for us, most of the characters in this story also are shadows of other things.

And so let's look at what they're shadows of now. Who do you think Abraham, the father, in this story represents? Right, I heard it up here. He definitely represents God.

So if Abraham represents God, who do you think Isaac represents? That's exactly right. Just like last week, Isaac is a shadow of Jesus.

So who do you think Eliezer represents? Eliezer actually represents the Holy Spirit because he is sent to find the bride for the son.

So who do you think Rebekah then represents? That's right, I heard it up here. Rebekah represents individual believers who make up the church.

[29:13] So again, she represents individual believers or individual Christians who make up the church. So just think about the cycle that we see every day, even to this day.

Every day, God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to add believers to his son's bride, the church. So just to show you that I wasn't making this stuff up, let's remind ourselves of a few verses that show the church as Jesus' bride.

I put all these cross-references in your handout so that you could just read them there without having to try to flip to all of them and really let them soak in a little bit. So listen to Paul's words to the believers in Corinth.

This is 2 Corinthians 11.2. It says, For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

So Paul makes it very clear then that the church or the believers are going to be presented to Christ to be the bride. But then he also says these words to the Ephesians in Ephesians 5.25-27.

[30 : 20] Ephesians 5.25-27 say, Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So then now let's look at a scripture where Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom. Starting with Matthew 9.14, we'll look at Matthew 9.14 and 15.

And these verses have an exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist's disciples. So Matthew 9.14 and 15 say this, It says, Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. So you can see that Jesus clearly referred to himself as the bridegroom.

And we also have several scriptures that show the Holy Spirit is the agent who draws people into the true church. And I put a few in your handout, just so you know, and there's a mix from the Old Testament and New Testament there.

[31 : 42] Ezekiel 37.14 records these words from God. God said in Ezekiel 37.14, I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.

Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and performed it, says the Lord. So the Holy Spirit in believers is not just a New Testament concept.

You can see there in Ezekiel 37.14 where God said he was going to put his spirit in them. And then moving over to the New Testament, we have one example in Titus 3, verses 4 and 5.

In Titus 3, 4 and 5 say these words. It says, But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

So notice that the Holy Spirit is what does the renewal there. And we can look at several other scriptures that show the Spirit's work in salvation, but you get the point.

[32 : 50] By the way God worked through Abraham and Eliezer to find a bride for Isaac, God was giving us a picture of the salvation that he would one day provide and now has provided for us.

Eliezer also brought gifts for the bride just as the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers. Listen to 1 Corinthians 12. 4 through 7. It says, There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

So God showed us what he would do long before he did it. But that should also give us confidence for today and also for the future because one day all true believers will be part of the marriage supper of the Lamb and we'll be the bride of Christ.

So I put John's words in Revelation 19, 6 through 9 in your handout as well. They say, And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.

[34 : 01] Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be a rain of fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God. So think about something else.

We saw where Isaac was out in the field when Rebekah and Eliezer were coming back. How do you think Isaac recognized who Rebekah was? He'd never seen her before, but yet he seemed to know that she was the one that was intended for him.

Well, remember, she got all kinds of garments and gifts from Eliezer. So most likely, she was adorned in those garments and gifts.

So when he saw her, he recognized her because she was already dressed in his garments. And one day we will be dressed in Christ's garments when we stand before God.

[35:08] So there's even a little bit of a parallel there as well. But in the meantime, while we're waiting for the marriage supper of the Lamb, this should really show us that we can rest in the words of Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 that we looked at earlier.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. And in all your ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.