

Genesis 24:34-38,42-49,58-67

Verses 34-38

**He said, "I am Abraham's servant. Yahweh has blessed my master exceedingly and he has become great. He has granted him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, servants and maid servants, and camels and asses. Now, my master's wife Sarah bore a son to him in her old age and he has given to him all that he owns. My master made me swear saying, 'Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of Canaan where I live in their land. Since you shall not, you shall go to the home of my brother, my clan, and you shall take a wife for my son.**

This episode belongs to a beautiful extended narrative describing Abraham's commission to his chief servant (2) to avoid at all costs a Canaanite wife for Isaac but instead travel to Abraham's relatives and clan members in Aram (10). The aversion to the Canaanite women was not a capricious one. Abraham, though blessed and possessing great wealth and importance in Canaan, was nevertheless a foreigner unable to gain any land except for a cemetery (8). Probably a pact had been made to keep Abraham from becoming too strong and so was prevented from gaining a foothold in the community. Rather, the Canaanites preferred to absorb Abraham and his family into their community, culture and religion. Abraham was determined to maintain his distinctness, which was based on Yahweh's call and promise of grace. Yahweh had promised him land, dynasty, that a nation would come from him, blessing and power.

The servant could see two possibilities besides success: He could get a wife from the local people or take Isaac back to Abraham's ancestral home. However, Abraham blocks both possibilities (3,6). A third possibility, based on Yahweh's promises, was in Abraham's mind: **The Lord...will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there** (7,40). And so it transpired after the servant had prayed (12-14), indeed, **before he finished praying** (14) that the servant found Rebekah coming to the well and she happened to be Abraham's grand-niece and Isaac's first cousin once removed. She was Laban's sister and daughter of Bethuel, who was still alive though no longer able to speak on behalf of the family (50). The servant gave Rebekah presents, or were they already part of a marriage transaction, the bride price (22)?

The servant would not relax and eat until he had completed this business. The servant outlined the blessings of **Yahweh granted** (the Piel of give) to his master, in order to indicate the advantageous nature of this proposal. Abraham was advanced in age by this time and the management of affairs and ownership of property had already been transferred to Isaac: **has given him all he owns**. Abraham's brother's name was Nahor, Laban's grandfather. Abraham had sent the servant to his brother's household or clan, for Abraham had married his half-sister (Gen 20:12) and marriages amongst relatives posed no problems in Abraham's mind! Whilst there was a tradition in Abraham's culture to marry within family circles, it was the motivation of not losing the promises of God by being absorbed into the Canaanite population that Abraham made this approach to his family for a bride. The family of Abraham must remain an alien under the promise of Yahweh.

Verses 42-49

**"The day I came to the spring I said to Yahweh the God of my master Abraham, 'If you are now giving success to my journey on which I am travelling, look, I am stationed at the spring of water and may it be that this virgin coming up to draw to whom I say, "Please give me a little water from your jar" and she replies to me, 'You drink and I will also draw water for your camels', "may she be the wife whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son."**

The servant was speaking to Laban and relating how he came to choose his sister Rebekah (12-14). A glimpse has been given here of the servant's spirituality, which is not too different from many in the Old Testament who look for directions and confirmations from the Lord, for example Gideon. Several thoughts can be provided in reflecting on the servant's approach. He looked to Yahweh for help in the task granted to him, displaying the same faith as Abraham. Success belonged to Yahweh alone and

therefore the servant was completely dependent on him. He trusted in Yahweh and thus addresses him in prayer expressing confidence in the Lord's compassion. There is a connection to the method of casting lots; things do not happen by chance but are under the sovereign governance of the Lord. David used this method to determine when and how to organize his campaigns. However, there was a great deal of reasonableness in what he proposed to Yahweh. The girl or **virgin** who would accede to his request and offer to go beyond what he asked would be a likely candidate. She would have the virtues of generosity, helpfulness and kindness. Of course, the servant could have chosen another approach and sought the Lord's blessing for it. Perhaps he could have surveyed the families in the local area. So the actual details of his prayer were not the main thing but rather the trust in the Lord's promises and grace, the belief in his guidance and the receptivity of the offer to be God's partner. On this latter point, the servant was prepared for a negative answer, which he would have accepted (5). But he offered certain conditions in the prayer because he believed firmly that his Lord was open to his children and viewed Abraham as his friend.

But it was not pre-determined completely. Rebekah could still turn down the offer and insist she stay with her brother Laban. The men of the house, Laban and Bethuel did initially agree, recognizing from the servant's account that this was from the Lord (50,51). But Middle Eastern bargaining was never as simple as this. An open offer was often made but terms still had to be thrashed out (23:11,15). Verse 55 makes clear that Laban still wanted to bargain for more despite the servant having paid a very high price for the bride (53). When the servant demanded to leave the very next morning, Laban was forced to act desperately, hoping his daughter might stall proceedings.

Verses 58-67

**They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." They then sent off his sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's steward and his men. He, then, blessed Rebekah: "May you our sister be a thousand multitudes and possess the gate of those who hate them." Rebekah rose and her young servant girls and mounted the camel and followed the man. The servant took Rebekah and left.**

**Now Isaac travelling from Beer Lahai Roi and put down in the territory of the Negev. Isaac went out to meditate in the paddock. When he lifted his eyes he was surprised to see camels coming. Rebekah also saw Isaac ahead and dismounted from the camel. She asked the steward, "Who is this man walking from the field to meet us?" The head servant replied, "He is my master." She took her veil and covered herself. The steward reported to Isaac all the things he had done. [Later] Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and took Rebekah and made her his wife. He loved her and Isaac was comforted in his mother's [death].**