



**Sunday School Lesson for September 30, 2007  
Released on September 26, 2007**

**“Isaac and Rebekah”**

**Printed Text: Genesis 24:34-40, 42-45, 48**

**Background Scripture: Genesis 24**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 100**

**Genesis 24:34-45**

**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:**

**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.

### **GENESIS 24:48**

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.

### **HOW TO SAY IT**

CANAANITE. *Kay-nun-ite.*

ELIEZER. *El-ih-ee-zer.*

LABAN. *Lay-bun.*

MESOPOTAMIA. *Mes-uh-puh-tay-me-uh* (strong accent on *tay*).

NAHOR. *Nay-hor.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage has fallen on hard times in today's world. The divorce rate continues to escalate among believers and unbelievers alike. While books, magazine articles, and television programs continue to offer advice on how to have a successful marriage, good marriages are becoming more and more rare.

It has been said that many marriages are destroyed in the courtship. In other words, potential marital problems often arise when a couple is dating but are never dealt with adequately before the wedding. In fact, often much time is spent on planning the wedding but little on planning the marriage!

When Christians contemplate marriage, choosing a partner of "like precious faith" (II Pet. 1:1) should be a primary consideration. To be "unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14) with an unbeliever is to invite conflict and heartache in most cases. On the other hand, marrying "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39) does not automatically ensure a successful marriage.

As demonstrated by Abraham's servant in this week's text, finding a suitable mate should be the result of divine providence, careful planning, and earnest prayer.

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Sarah, Abraham's wife, died at age 127 (Genesis 23:1, 2). Since she was 90 years old when Isaac was born, we assume that Isaac was nearing age 40 when Abraham began the search for that son's future wife (25:20). Sarah's death probably caused Abraham to realize that his own passing was coming, and that he must see to the marriage of his son before it was out of his hands.

This week's lesson is about an arranged marriage that was crucial to the history of Israel. God's promise to Abraham was that he would be followed by many

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descendants (Genesis 12:2), and that one of those descendants would be a blessing to "all families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3). We know that this later "seed" of Abraham was Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). God had provided Abraham with Isaac. But there would be no descendants unless Isaac had a wife and they produced children. How that wife was provided is the focus of this lesson.

## **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to show how Abraham took steps to find a wife for his son Isaac and to recognize how God leads His people.

**Principle:** to show that God's sovereign will can displace our fears and doubts.

**Application:** to demonstrate that God will lead us in His will even today if only we trust our lives to Him.

## **Mission Explained (Genesis 24:34–41)**

### **1. Who is the servant (Genesis 24:34)?**

We do not know the name of this *servant*. Some believe it is Eliezer, mentioned as the steward of Abraham's household in Genesis 15:2. This reference to Eliezer, however, is 40 to 50 years prior to the text in front of us. It is thus likely that he has already died.

The unnamed servant of this story is probably in a similar position to Eliezer's, the senior servant (Genesis 24:2). He is presented as a person whom Abraham trusts without reservation. He is a man of prayer and integrity (see 24:12–14). He is speaking to Laban, Rebekah's brother, shortly after arriving at the town of Nahor (24:10, 11, 28–33).

### **2. How is Abraham's wealth measured (v. 35)?**

Abraham's wealth is measured in the number of animals he owns, the number of servants he has, and the amount of precious metals he has accumulated. In all of these things, God has richly *blessed* Abraham. When the servant said that Abraham has *become great*, he means that he has become wealthy and recognized in his community (compare the description of Isaac's wealth in Genesis 26:14).

Abraham's servant provides another important piece of information in verse 36. Abraham has only one *son* considered to be an heir, and this son will inherit *all* of Abraham's wealth. This means that the servant is searching for a woman to marry a man who will be very wealthy when his father dies. The fact that Isaac was born in the time of *old* age of his parents implies that Isaac should receive his inheritance in the near future.

### **3. What oath did Abraham make his servant take (vs. 37, 38)? Why?**

Abraham no doubt has thoughts about the promises of God. Abraham knew that if the promises made to him were to be fulfilled, his son Isaac would have to marry and have an heir.

Consequently, Abraham called his servant and made him swear that he would find a suitable wife for Isaac. He instructed his servant not take a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites but go to his (Abraham) country and to his family to seek out a wife for Isaac.

Although Abraham has prospered in the land *of the Canaanites*, he has been unwilling to assimilate into their culture. This is largely a religious issue. Abraham and his family have a tradition of worship of the one true God.

One point that is of significance here is that Abraham is dwelling in the land of Canaan; however, he does not associate himself with their idolatry practices. Just as believers today are in this world which is full of all manners of evil, we don't have to be partakers in it. We are to show ourselves to be a peculiar people; set apart and set aside for the purposeful use of God.

#### **4. Why did Abraham not want Isaac to take a wife from among the local Canaanites?**

Abraham knew there would be a problem if Isaac married a Canaanite woman because they were idolaters and had many vile practices which were contrary to serving the true and living God. If Isaac were to marry a Canaanite woman, no doubt she would be influential in Isaac's life; to the point of him adapting to those same practices. If he were going to have an heir, his heir would of course follow the same influential pattern, therefore, causing Abraham's generation to turn away from God. Abraham could not bear the thought of this happening so he had his servant make an oath that he would carry out Abraham's wishes and seek a wife for Isaac.

This servant was no doubt someone Abraham trusted wholeheartedly to carry out this task. This request, as we see, is not taken lightly. The servant prepares himself for a long journey and takes 10 camels loaded with goods and provisions for this lengthy trip of approximately 500 miles. When the servant leaves his master, Abraham probably does not expect him to return in less than a year.

#### **5. Where was the servant to journey to find a wife for Isaac?**

Abraham then provided his servant with a plan to fulfill this oath. Abraham directed his servant to return to northwestern Mesopotamia, where Abraham had relatives, and to find a bride among them. However, "Abraham made it perfectly clear that his descendants are not to return to the land of their fathers. Canaan is their home, and Abraham is careful to ensure that Isaac not be taken back to the ancestral home" (Barker and Kohlenberger, NIV Bible Commentary, Zondervan).

Some of you may be wondering, Why Abraham just didn't give Isaac the instructions? Abraham knew that if anything happened to him, he could rely on his top servant who over the years had proven himself to be trustworthy to carry out Abraham's wishes. Being a part of Abraham's household, this servant no doubt adopted some of the spiritual qualities Abraham possessed. Abraham knew he could trust him with this great affair and not Isaac himself, because he would not have Isaac go at all into that country, but marry there by proxy" (Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

#### **6. What concerns did the servant have about his mission? (vs. 39-40)**

Continuing his explanation to the relatives of Abraham, the servant pointed out that Abraham had forbidden the servant from taking a wife for his son from among the Canaanites (vs. 37). Rather, the trusted servant was to return to Abraham's relations in Haran, where a bride might be obtained for Isaac.

Abraham's servant had been concerned about the possibility that the young woman might be unwilling to return to the land of Canaan. Finding a bride might be the easy task; getting her to journey to a distant land to marry a man she had never met might be the more difficult task. Consequently, the servant wanted some assurance from Abraham that he would be released from his oath should the young woman be unwilling to come back with him. Should that be the case, the servant would not be held to the promise he had made to Abraham.

Abraham's faith was such that he was confident of the servant's success. So Abraham told his servant, "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way" (Gen. 24:40). "The servant appears worthy of the master he served. He resolves to follow the leading of Providence; and while he shows good sense in the tokens he fixes upon of ascertaining the temper and character of the future bride, he never doubts but that in such a case God will direct him" (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary*, Zondervan).

In like manner, when we set out on a task we know to be God's will, we should proceed with such confidence that we are certain of the Lord's blessing. For example, when Paul and his coworkers were traveling across Asia, they were sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Once they concluded that God wanted them to go to Macedonia, they immediately went (Acts 16:6-10). We may not always receive such clear guidance as Paul or Abraham's servant, but we must always be looking for open doors in answer to our prayers (1 Cor. 16:7-9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:7-8).

## **7. What are some other ways we can discern the Lord's will?**

We can discern the Lord's will by studying the Bible to learn general principles relating to God's will. The more familiar we become with how God worked in the past, the better equipped we are for learning His will for the present and the future. Recognizing open and closed doors, listening to the advice of godly Christians, and bathing every decision in prayer.

### **Woman Identified (Genesis 24:42–45)**

## **8. How long was it before the prayer of the servant was answered (vs. 42-45)?**

Abraham's servant no doubt was a praying man. He prayed (within himself) when he entered the city seeking a wife for Isaac not depending on his own wisdom or ingenuity, but that of the Lord's. In his prayer, he asked for certain signs to verify which woman would be chosen and before he had finished his prayer, his request had been answered. Sometimes God answers a prayer very quickly – perhaps so quickly that we fail to recognize it as answered prayer! That the servant was speaking in his heart indicates that this was a silent prayer, which is not the norm for prayers recorded in the Bible. Both those prayers spoken aloud and those offered silently come into the Lord's presence.

### **God Worshiped (Genesis 24:48)**

## **9. How did the servant respond to the quickness of God's answer? (v. 48)**

When prayers are answered as rapidly as was this prayer of Abraham's servant, some might think it a matter of coincidence. Providence, not coincidence, was the reason these events unfolded. The servant knew that this was a speedy answer to a specific request. Realizing this, Abraham's servant did what was appropriate for the occasion: he bowed his head in worship to the Lord, the God of his master, Abraham.

Like Abraham's servant, we should always praise God when He leads us in the right way. Indeed, if we follow the teachings of the Bible, we will walk in the way of the Lord, for God's Word light the path for us (Ps. 119:105), to prevent us from stumbling.

### **10. How did Rebekah respond to these events (v. 58)? Extra credit (not in today's text).**

After hearing of the providential events related by Abraham's servant, Rebekah's brother, Laban, and her father, Bethuel, concluded that these things were from the Lord. They, therefore, offered Rebekah to Abraham's servant to become Isaac's wife, which was their province as male relatives (Gen. 24:50-51). His task completed, the servant wanted to return to Abraham as quickly as possible. Rebekah's family, however, wanted her to stay with them for a while. But the servant replied, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master" (v. 56).

Obviously, the young woman needed to be consulted concerning the journey to Canaan to marry Isaac. "And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (Gen. 24:58).

"The entire story makes it clear that God had chosen Rebekah for Isaac, for His providential leading is seen each step of the way. Yet Rebekah had to make her choice of Isaac. There is no conflict between divine sovereignty (God's plan) and human responsibility (man's choice). In fact, Jesus taught both in one statement: 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me [divine sovereignty], and him that cometh to me [human responsibility] I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37)" (Wiersbe).

Upon arriving in Canaan, Rebekah was married to Isaac (v. 67). Shortly thereafter, the aged Abraham completed his earthly journey at the age of 175 (25:7), "an old man, and full of years" (v. 8).

## **CONCLUSION**

### Hearing God's Voice, Accepting His Lead

Many believers have thought that life's decisions would be simpler if they could just hear an audible word from God telling them what to do. If only God were like a magic mirror on the wall, which could speak directly into our situation and unambiguously tell us what to do!

But if God were to speak this way, would we listen and heed His voice? We all have been given solid advice by our parents that we ignored. As acts of rebellion and as assertions of independence we shunned this advice.

God has given us loads of "advice" in the form of His Word, the Holy Scriptures. Yet we often disregard this form of divine guidance and think that our way is better. This is to our detriment and loss. We learn hard lessons. We come back to God, ask for forgiveness, and admit that His ways are best for us. Do we really believe that an audible voice of God would keep us from ignoring His direction? On the contrary, just as we heard Mother's warnings and still did the wrong thing, we would be found guilty of disobeying God's direct, personalized counsel.

This has bearing when it comes to finding a marriage partner. It is unrealistic to expect a return to a system of arranged marriages today, but we can learn from this process. The young person would be well served to hear the opinions of his or her parents and other wise family members. The parents would be prudent to consider the best interests and happiness of their son or daughter before they attempt to veto a potential partner.

And all sides would be sensible to act as people of faith, praying fervently for God's guidance and blessing. For parents, such prayer should begin when the son or daughter is very young. That will make it more likely that a pending marriage will be the cause of great celebration and joy, as it was for the servant of Abraham in this lesson.

God's Word should be the guide to the one seeking a spouse and to the parents who provide counsel. While we should not expect to hear God's voice pointing us to marriage partners, we can easily use God's standards to "narrow the field," so to speak (see I Corinthians 7; 2 Corinthians 6:14). We can pray persistently that God will lead us to the right person. We can ask others to pray for us. And in all things, whether married or unmarried, we can resolve to be used by God and be joyful in His service.

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## **PRAYER**

Dear Heavenly Father, You are always faithful and merciful. We acknowledge that You guide Your people if they follow Your lead. We know that You will never abandon us if we trust in You.

May we be resolved to seek Your will and follow Your paths in all our decisions, small or great. We pray this in the name of the author of our salvation, Jesus Christ, amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

God still wants to guide our decisions, so keep Him first in all you do.

## **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Study next week's lesson in Genesis 25:19-34 (Esau and Jacob as revivals).

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