

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church**  
10 Downing St., Oakleigh, VIC3166

## **DHW**

### ***BOOK OF GENESIS***

#### **LESSON 17**

#### **CHAPTER 24**

#### ***INTRODUCTION***

This is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis. It deals with one very important phase of our lives - marriage. The marriage of a couple can go two ways. It can be filled with blessedness or be filled with bitterness. The divinely inspired account of Abraham instructing his servant to find a wife for Isaac provides some significant guidelines. Young people and Christian parents would do well to learn these precious guidelines for they affect the lives of two people for a lifetime.

The chapter can be studied under the following headings:

- (1) Abraham commissioned his chief servant to find a wife for Isaac (24:1-8);
- (2) Abraham's servant faithfully carried out his mission (24:9-14);
- (3) Abraham's servant met Rebekah (24:15-27);
- (4) Abraham's servant met Laban (24:28-53);

- (5) Abraham's servant requested to return immediately with the good news (24:54-67).

#### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### ***Abraham Commissions His Chief Servant to Find a Wife for Isaac***

Abraham was now 140 years<sup>1</sup> old. He knew that it was time for Isaac to take a wife. He gave specific instructions to his trusted chief servant to find a wife for Isaac. The divine plan that his descendants would come from Isaac was accompanied by the responsibility and action of man.

The solemnity and seriousness of the mission was marked by the servant taking an oath by placing his hand under Abraham's thigh. The meaning of placing his hand under the thigh is not clear. This probably was the custom at that time. However, the oath was taken in the Name of the LORD God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This means that if he did not comply with the specific instructions given, he would be under the judgment and curse of God<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Isaac married Rebekah at the age of 40 (Gen. 25:20). Abraham lived another 35 years after the marriage of Isaac before he died at the age of 175 (Gen. 25:7).

<sup>2</sup> There are passages that mention that children come from the thigh of their fathers: Jacob's children are said to come *out of his loins* (Gen. 46:26, Exodus 1:5). Hence, the implied symbolism is that if the servant should deviate in carrying out what he had been told to do, it would bring about the curse of sterility upon the offender or even the extinction of his offspring (Speiser, 178).

Abraham's instruction had two important factors: 1) the woman must not be a Canaanite, but must be from his country and kindred; 2) should she refuse to accept the proposal, the servant must not bring Isaac to Mesopotamia, from where Abraham first came.

How impossible it must have seemed to expect his servant to find the right woman and then to be able to persuade her to leave home and venture on a long journey of six hundred miles to marry a man she had not seen and she did not know. Yet Abraham was convinced that this was what God intended and that He would help to bring it to pass. Abraham assured his servant that the LORD God would ensure his mission would be fruitful (v.7). Abraham's insistence that Isaac's wife be from his own kindred was a wise decision. Taking a wife from among the Canaanites would affect the godly line of God's Covenant plan. Here, an important principle is given. A child of God must marry another child of God. He must not marry an unbeliever. The good sense of this principle is evidently clear. A person's actions are affected by his religious beliefs and convictions. If a prospective partnership does not have similar convictions, it will be followed by frequent disagreements and arguments. Peace and harmony in the family will be hard to maintain unless one party is willing to give in to the other. More often than not, the Christian is the one who gives way because he or she is governed by a spirit of maintaining peace. In this regard, it must be reminded that the maintenance of peace

must not be at the expense of God's truth. Other things can be compromised but not truths. So, the **first principle is: marry someone who shares the same faith and convictions.** Christians ought to marry Christians.

### *Abraham's Servant Faithfully Carries Out His Mission*

The servant obediently and bravely took the oath. He then wasted no time in making preparations to leave for Mesopotamia. He took ten camels and much *goods* (v. 10), which included jewellery and luxuries. He set out for the city of Nahor, which was about 600 miles north. The gifts were meant for the bride to be, and for the parents of the bride. They were tangible proofs of Isaac's ability to support a wife and family. The proposal was also of a serious and responsible nature. The **second principle is: be prepared to show an appreciable degree of seriousness and generosity.** Observe how Abraham's servant used the gifts wisely and appropriately.

On arrival at the city of Nahor, the servant moved to a position of advantage. He stopped at a well where the women folks would come out to draw water. This was the sensible thing to do especially relating to his mission. He made his camels to kneel down. Then he prayed specifically and expectantly (vv. 11-14). His prayer was for Abraham's sake. He asked for God's general blessing on the mission. He asked in specific detail for practical, sensible yet simple signs. He

asked the LORD to lead him to the right girl. The girl must be kind, considerate, hardworking, possessing some measure of initiative and willing to do more than what was asked for<sup>3</sup>. His prayer was answered even before he had finished praying. **The third principle is: prayer is important but the petitioner has his part to play.** *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths* (Proverbs 3:5, 6). Prayer is important. It is an act that acknowledges the providence and goodness of God. But that does not dispense with our responsibility and action. In fact it should spur us to act by faith and perform what we can and ought to do. Then, we should exercise patience and wait upon the LORD.

### ***Abraham's Servant Meets Rebekah***

Before he could finish his prayer, the LORD providentially brought Rebekah, the grandniece of Abraham, to the well. She was beautiful. She was a 'virgin' and she had gone to the well to fetch water<sup>4</sup>. She must have been the first one there.

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<sup>3</sup> It is reported that a camel can drink 20 gallons of water after a long hot journey. And assuming that Rebekah's pitcher was about a gallon, she would have to draw and walk many times to the water trough to give the camels drink!

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word for "virgin" is *betulah*. The word may mean "virgin" and also a "virgin who is betrothed to a man" (Deuteronomy 22:23). Hence, the qualifying phrase in verse 16 that "neither had any man known her." The other word for "virgin"

Abraham's servant, who had prayed for the LORD'S leading was sensitive enough to see the hand of the LORD working. He saw Rebekah approaching the well and quickly seized the opportunity to ask her for a drink (17). He was astonished that his prayer and petitions were answered to the very letter. Still not satisfied with the circumstantial evidences, he proceeded to inquire about her family. She answered that she was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor. Abraham's servant was now convinced that Rebekah was the LORD'S choice. He bowed down, worshipped and blessed the LORD. He declared, *I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren* (27b). This testimony of the servant leaves no doubt that he was led and guided by the LORD. So, **the fourth principle is: To discern carefully that it is the LORD's choice.** While sometimes circumstantial evidence might seem favourable, it is necessary to double-check that the prospective partner's profession of faith in Christ is genuine and true. Does the prospective partner really have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?

### ***Abraham's Servant Meets Rebekah***

Rebekah ran back to her parents' house where her brother, Laban, seemed to

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used in Isaiah 7:14 is *almah*. There is no doubt that *almah* refers to a young girl who is a virgin. There is no need for any qualifying statement. Matthew 1:23 comments on Isaiah 7:14. Observe that in verse 43, when the servant rehearsed the events to Laban, he referred to Rebekah as "the virgin, *almah*."

have “rulership” over the household (vv. 28, 29). When Laban *saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister’s hand, and he heard the words of Rebekah* (v.30), he warmly welcomed the servant and set food before him and even prepared the place for the camels. After the customarily welcome with the washing of feet, they were invited to a meal. But Abraham’s servant refused any food until he had discharged and made known his mission. Work before enjoyment. He told Laban and Rebekah’s family in detail the purpose of his mission. He began by introducing his master to them and testifying that the LORD had blessed his master greatly. At each important point of his narration, he made reference to the LORD’S guidance, goodness and greatness:

- *the LORD hath blessed my master greatly (35);*
- *The LORD before whom I walk will send His angel with thee and prosper thy way (40);*
- *O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go (42);*
- *let the same be the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master’s son (44);*
- 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 (48).

Apparently, his purpose was to let them know that all that had happened were the LORD’S doing and that Rebekah was the woman for his master’s son. As Laban and Bethuel, Rebekah’s mother (v.24) listened, they unhesitatingly acknowledged God’s leading and guidance (v.50). He agreed to give Rebekah away to be the wife of his master’s son (vv. 50-51). When Abraham’s servant heard those words, he immediately worshipped the LORD. Accordingly, the servant gave gifts to Laban, Rebekah and her mother. **Principle number five: When one has discerned the LORD’S choice, one should make known one’s intention and speak with the parents or guardian of the girl.** The reason for this is quite obvious. Having found the girl, one must be serious about one’s intention and let it be known.

### ***Abraham’s Servant Returns with the Good News***

Having accomplished his mission, the next important thing for the servant to do was to return to his master as soon as possible. That would certainly allay further anxiety on the part of his master who might be wondering about the outcome of his servant’s mission and his safety. At the same time, he could not wait to report the good news to his master.

The decision to leave so soon was a test of Rebekah’s faith. She must immediately leave her home, friends and travel six hundred miles with a man she had just met and to be married to another man she had never met and that she would

have to live with him for life in a strange land. However, her faith in Abraham's servant was not without any reasonable evidence: the servant's story, the circumstantial providence of God, the proof of gifts to show that Abraham was wealthy promising a good life, and the serious demeanour of the servant himself. Rebekah's decision involved both risk and definite action on her part. She must act at that moment. Her faith was truly in the promises of God. One can safely comment that she wanted to be caught up with the people of God.

Rebekah's brother and mother wanted to delay her departure but when the servant insisted, they let Rebekah decide. Rebekah replied that she would go as suggested by Abraham's servant. They therefore gave their blessings. **The sixth principle is: Have a strong commitment to marry and build a family and to fulfil the will for which the LORD has brought them together.**

When the entourage was near to Beersheba, Isaac had come out of the city to meditate in the field at evening time. This showed Isaac's gentle, quiet and reserved nature. Rebekah saw him and when told that he was her husband to be, she immediately alighted from her camel and pulled the veil over her face. This was an acknowledgement of her femininity and her submission to him, who was going to be her husband and master.

The servant reported to Isaac everything that had happened. God had met Isaac's need by sending Rebekah who became a comfort to him after the death of

his mother. Isaac brought Rebekah to his mother Sarah's tent, symbolising that Rebekah was the new matriarch. Of course they were married according to the custom then with festivity and joy. Isaac loved her and he was comforted. **The seventh principle is: The wife should take her proper place of being submissive to her husband who in turn must love his wife.** If this last principle is kept, the foundation for a happy and harmonious family is laid. Indeed, then there will be less tension and trouble in the home.

#### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

We have drawn seven guiding principles to guide us in matters relating to marriage. Considering that this chapter is the longest in the book of Genesis with so much detail recorded, surely they are intended for our learning so that any child of God will lean upon these guidelines when he is contemplating marriage. God gives them so that our marriage will be founded on a sound ground. God does not force His children to do according to His ways. He could if He wanted. But He created us and endowed us with a freedom to obey or disobey Him. When we obey, we are blessed, but when we disobey, we do it to our own hurt and harm.

Another valuable instruction is the character and conduct of Abraham's servant. He showed great sensibility when he was given the task to look for a wife for Isaac. At the very outset, he knew it was a difficult mission. It was not easy to convince a young marriageable woman in a far country to leave home, parents,

siblings and country where she had enjoyed the comforts of life to agree to go with someone who was a stranger and not the least be married to a man whom she had not seen. And so the servant shared with his master that his mission might meet with failure. Abraham assured him that he would not be held responsible should the woman refuse to come. However, Abraham trusted God for His blessing in this matter, believing that his choice of a woman from among his own people was according to God's will. Abraham showed unwavering faith in God. The servant knew what was needed on his part when he met the prospective bride. He brought ten camels of gifts and presents for the families of the bride-to-be. But the most important part which he did in his journey was that he prayed to the LORD God for specific indications of His leading. When we seek God in important matters, which are according to His will, God never fails to hear and help us for His sake. Many Christians are slow to realise that fervent praying to the LORD is their privilege and there is much power in it. If only we will learn this wonderful spiritual practice, our lives would surely be different (Psalm 5:11, 12; 9:10).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> **Psalm 5:11** But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. <sup>12</sup> For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as *with* a shield.

**Psalm 9:10** And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

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The next wonderful thing that we learn is that we observe the providential workings of God in everyday life. In this chapter, the episode of Abraham's servant's experience was told twice faithfully and appropriately. This confirms the workings of God. It teaches us that God takes a great interest in our day to day life. He maintains our lives, involves Himself in all events and directs all things to their appointed end while seldom interrupting the natural order of things and life. God is in control of all things. He is all powerful, all knowing, all present. This is the LORD our God. It is an awesome thought but the truth! AMEN