

Genesis 22:20-24:67 – Death of Sarah and Marriage of Isaac

Review

Last time we considered in detail the story of God’s call upon Abraham to sacrifice his promised heir Isaac as a burnt offering. We looked at the history of the land of Moriah where God called Abraham to make this offering that later became the site of the Hebrew temple. We saw Isaac’s obedience to both his heavenly Father and his earthly father as a picture of Jesus’ obedience to his heavenly Father and his willingly offering his own life as a sacrifice. We also considered God’s provision of the ram that was sacrificed in Isaac’s place as a symbol of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross in our place to rescue all mankind out of death in our sins. Finally, we considered the lessons God taught to Abraham, Isaac, and us through this call.

Nahor’s Children

²⁰Now after these things it was told to Abraham, “Behold, Milcah [מִלְכָּה milkâ - queen] also has borne children to your brother Nahor: ²¹Uz [עֹז ūz - wooded] his firstborn, Buz [בּוּז būz - contempt] his brother, Kemuel [קִמּוּאֵל qimû’ēl – raised of God] the father of Aram [אַרָּם ’ārām - exalted], ²²Chesed [כֶּסֶד keśed - increase], Hazo [חָזוֹ ḥāzô - vision], Pildash [פִּלְדָּשׁ pildāš – flame of fire], Jidlaph [יִדְלָפֶּ - weeping], and Bethuel [בֵּתוּאֵל bêtû’ēl – God destroys, man of God, dweller in God].” ²³(Bethuel fathered Rebekah [רִבְקָה ribqâ - ensnarer].) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. ²⁴Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah [רְאוּמָה r’ûmâ - elevated], bore Tebah [טֵבַח tēbah - a slaughter], Gaham [גַּחַם gaḥam - burning], Tahash [תַּחַשׁ taḥaš - dugong], and Maacah [מַעֲכָה ma’ākâ - oppression]. Genesis 22:20-24 (ESV)

There are many names in these verses. I have noted them in Hebrew along with their meanings for completeness, but only a few are significant to our study in Genesis. Milcah is only used as the name of Nahor’s wife, and apart from that significant distinction we are told nothing more about her.

Like many names in the Old Testament, some of these names are reused elsewhere. For example, Uz was one of Shem’s grandsons and Job lived in “the land of Uz.” Nahor’s grandson Aram should not be confused with Shem’s son Aram who was the progenitor of the Syrians. Maacah is found as both a man’s and a woman’s name. For example, Maacah was the name of King Asa’s mother and Caleb’s concubine.

Of all these names, the most important for our purposes are Bethuel and his daughter Rebekah (רִבְקָה **ribqâ**) who married Abraham’s son Isaac and became the mother of God’s chosen people Israel. The meaning of her name – ensnarer – is quite apropos as we shall later learn.

NOTE – The name of Nahor’s son Chesed (כֶּסֶד **keśed** - increase) shouldn’t be confused with the Hebrew word חֶסֶד **hesed** meaning mercy, kindness, lovingkindness, and goodness which makes a wonderful and encouraging word study.

ASIDE – Tahash’s name means dugong – a type of marine mammal found in the western Pacific and Indian oceans that is in the same family as the manatees found in the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Amazon. Who knew?

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The Death of Sarah

¹Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ²And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron [קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע *hebrôn* - association]) in the land of Canaan [כְּנָעַן *kna'an* - lowland], and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Genesis 23:1-2 (ESV)

Look at the [Patriots in Canaan map](#). Kiriath-arba (קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע *qiryat 'arba*) was the name of Hebron prior to the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. Recall that Abraham and Sarah had previously been living in the Negev – first in the area of Kadesh and later in the area of Beersheba. Evidently in the meantime they had moved back north to the area of Hebron, although this return is not specifically noted anywhere in the Biblical text.

This passage contains the first reference to both weeping and mourning. This is intriguing when we think back to the tragic stories that have gone before – the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the murder of Abel, the Flood of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But let's press on.

³And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites [sons of Heth (Noah's great-grandson by Ham → Canaan)], ⁴“I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶“Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God [נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים *nāśî' 'ēlōhîm*] among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” Genesis 23:3-6 (ESV)

Although Abraham was very rich and possessed large flocks and herds, up to this point he did not own any of the land in Canaan despite his having lived there as a nomad for over 60 years (apart from the time he and Sarai fled to Egypt from the famine in Canaan – Genesis 12:10-20). Therefore, he had no place of his own in which to bury Sarah who was the first we're told of among Abraham's family to die since God called him to leave his father's house in Haran and journey to Canaan.

This passage is also the first mention of burial of the dead. Previously, the text used phrases like “he was gathered to his people” or simply “he died” without mentioning the disposal of the body.

Most English translations including the KJV render the Hebrew נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים *nāśî' 'ēlōhîm* as “mighty prince” although the ESV translation – “prince of God” is clearly most correct – both words in this phrase being nouns, not adjectives. Notice that even the idolatrous Hittites noted Abraham's special relationship with God - אֱלֹהִים *'ēlōhîm*. This reminded me of the story in Acts 4:1-13 of Peter's and John's testimony before the Jewish rulers, elders, scribes, and high priest in Jerusalem from which these leaders recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. May it also be so with us. Like Abraham, may our actions, our words, and our whole way of life truly reflect our relationship with God which permeates every corner of our being so that every believer and unbeliever around us can see that we are with Jesus.

⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron [עֶפְרָאֵן *'epr'ôn* - fawn-like] the son of Zohar [צֹהָר *ṣōḥar* - tawny], ⁹that he may give me the cave of Machpelah [מַכְפֶּלֶא *makpēlâ* -

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double or portion], *which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.*”
¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹“No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.” ¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵“My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels [about 10 pounds] of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. Genesis 23:7-16 (ESV)

This style of formalized courtesy, false humility, and pretended magnanimity in business dealings seems somewhat quaint to us. It continues in Middle Eastern cultures to this day. Abraham clearly must have noticed Ephron sitting among them yet initially spoke of him as if he weren't present, and then likely pretended to be surprised when Ephron rose to his bait. In his turn, Ephron, who clearly knew the value of the land, pretended not to desire payment for it. Then Abraham made sure that the payment was rendered in the presence of many witnesses so that there could be no “he said, she said” shenanigans later. It is interesting that the Genesis writer clearly knew the exact price Abraham paid for Ephron's field hundreds of years later.

¹⁷So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites. Genesis 23:17-20 (ESV)

The cave of Machpelah continued to be used as a burial site throughout the history of the Israelites recorded in the book of Genesis. Sarah, Abraham, Rebecca, Isaac, and Jacob were buried there.

Today, the cave complex in the heart of modern Hebron is known as the Cave of the Patriarchs. A building was constructed over the cave sometime during the reign of the Herodians. Later, a Christian Basilica was built on the site, which was later converted into a mosque by Muslim conquerors of Canaan. The mosque was taken over as a Christian church again by the European Crusaders and then back into a mosque when the Crusaders were driven out of Canaan. After the 1967 Six-day War, the victorious Israelis occupied the site dividing the building into a mosque and a synagogue.

Tragically, the site has seen much sectarian violence over the last half-century including 1994's “Cave of the Patriarchs Massacre” in which an Israeli soldier opened fire in the mosque killing 29 and wounding 125.

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Isaac and Rebecca

¹Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ²And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, ³that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” Genesis 24:1-4

(ESV)

This strange custom in which a person swore an oath by placing a hand under the thigh of the person to whom the oath was sworn was evidently a tradition in ancient Hebrew culture. Abraham’s grandson Israel (Jacob) asked his son Joseph to swear this way that he would not bury Israel in Egypt (Genesis 47).

Later after God gave the Law of Moses to the Israelites, they were forbidden to intermarry with the Canaanite peoples (a command that many disobeyed including Samson the judge of Israel). Although the prohibition against intermarriage had not yet been formalized in the Law, Abraham clearly didn’t want Isaac to take a Canaanite wife? Why? Abraham recognized the danger to Isaac and his descendants that they might be drawn into the idolatry of the Canaanites by a Canaanite wife. That is exactly what eventually happened to the Israelites under King Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-8).

What Abraham may not have known was that his family in Paddan-Aram also worshiped idols. At least they had begun to have “household gods” by the time Abraham’s grandson Jacob returned from Paddan-Aram many years later (Genesis 31).

*⁵The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” ⁶Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter. ¹⁰Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to **Mesopotamia** [אֲרָם נַהֲרָיִם 'āram nahārayim - Aram of the two rivers] **to the city of Nahor.*** Genesis

24:5-10 (ESV)

[Look at the Northern Levant map.](#) The journey from Hebron to Haran (the city of Nahor) is about 500 miles. Thus, it would have taken Abraham’s servant about 20-30 days. The return journey would have taken about a week longer since Isaac was living further south as we shall see. Abraham was adamant that his servant not take Isaac along on his mission to Paddan-Aram. Why? Abraham knew as he stated here that God had promised the land of Canaan to him and his offspring. Abraham had obeyed

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God when He called him to leave his father's house some 60 years before, and he considered that Isaac's returning there would amount to disobedience of God.

Furthermore, Abraham may have thought that if Isaac returned to their family in Paddan-Aram, he may have wanted to stay there rather than returning to Canaan.

Of course, neither could God fulfill His promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants if they were living in Mesopotamia.

11And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. 12And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. 13Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love [חֶסֶד ḥesed] to my master." Genesis 24:11-14 (ESV)

The servant's prayer that we read here is very specific. It is reminiscent of Gideon's prayers asking for specific signs that God would enable the Israelites to defeat the Midianites and Amalekites under Gideon's leadership (Judges 6:36-40). In fact, such specific prayers for God's reassurance have become known as "casting out a fleece" because of the way Gideon framed his requests.

The question is whether it's okay for us today to make our supplications to God in such a way. When the Israelites in the wilderness questioned whether God was truly with them because they didn't have water to drink, God commanded Moses to strike one of the rocks with his staff and water flowed out. Therefore, Moses renamed the place Massah (מַסָּה *massâ* – temptation) and Meribah (מִרְיַבָּה *m'rîbâ* – strife or contention). Then in Deuteronomy 6:16, God commanded – "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. Jesus quoted from this text when Satan suggested that He should cast Himself over the side of the pinnacle of the temple and let God's angels rescue Him as a proof that He is indeed the Son of God (Matthew 4:5-7).

When we make specific requests like Abraham's servant did for God to give us signs of His reassurance of His will for our lives, are we violating His commandment not to put Him to the test? I think the answer depends on our motivation. God will not despise a truly humble and contrite heart. Nor will His Word fail to accomplish His purposes in sending it forth. Our part is to simply obey.

Many years ago, Sue and I felt God calling us to leave Tucson where many of our family lived, and move to Aiken, SC to join a small church there. I was then a new believer and had recently read for the first time the story of Gideon and his fleeces. As I stood in line to rent the U-Haul truck for the move, I was praying – asking God to show me a sign that our move to Aiken was truly His will for our lives. Although my prayer wasn't as specific as Gideon's or the prayer of Abraham's servant, God's answer to me was specific and immediate as the reader will soon learn.

15Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out

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with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” ¹⁸She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” ²⁰So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

²²When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel [about 1/5 ounce], and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels [about 4 ounces], ²³and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” ²⁴She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” ²⁵She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.” ²⁶The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD ²⁷and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.” Genesis 24:15-27 (ESV)

God’s answer to the servant’s prayer was as specific as the prayer itself. The signs which God gave in response were exactly those the servant requested. Sometimes God gives us such specific and immediate responses to our prayers whenever He knows we need them to press forward with accomplishing His purposes in our lives.

When I reached the front of the line at the U-haul store in Tucson and told the salesperson where I wanted to go, the man behind me in line said, “Aiken? That’s where I’m from.” After we’d both finished our business, we talked for a few minutes about Aiken and what I thought God might have in mind by calling us there. Although my prayer had been only a general request for a sign of reassurance that our move was God’s will for us, He gave me an immediate response that was just as specific as I needed His reassurance to be in obeying His will.

...

WARNING – It is tempting to take God’s answer to the prayer of Abraham’s servant as a proof text for the dangerous, blasphemous, and utterly false so-called “Prosperity Gospel” doctrine being preached so widely by ostensibly “Christian” celebrity preachers and teachers in the world today. These charlatans prey upon people’s selfishness, greed, poverty, desperation, and gullibility by misusing scriptures like this one...

...whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” Matthew 21:22b (ESV)

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Once they've thrown out the bait and their victims have taken it, these evil prosperity preachers then set the hook, revealing their true greedy purposes by misusing scriptures like this to call upon their victims to "sow" (financially) into their so-called "ministries."

38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Luke 6:38 (ESV)

But when God doesn't grant the selfish wishes of these foolish, gullible people with the worldly things they have asked for, the prosperity preachers then argue that their victims just didn't have enough faith or that perhaps they didn't sow quite enough "seed" into the prosperity preachers' "ministries."

Sadly, this spiritual abuse of weak and gullible people has shipwrecked the faith of many. Even worse, many of these have misplaced their trust in the "healing power" of some prosperity gospel preacher who holds them in thrall, sometimes putting them in mortal danger and causing dismay and desperation for their families because they refuse to seek healing elsewhere. Worst of all it has caused untold damage to the lives of many others who recognize the falsity of the prosperity gospel and conclude that the true Gospel of Jesus Christ must also be false.

...

The true lesson we can glean from the prayer of Abraham's servant and God's immediate, specific answer is that the servant was asking within the will of God to accomplish the mission which God had already determined for him. The servant only needed guidance and reassurance to complete the assigned task, and that is exactly what God gave him in response.

When Jesus says...

13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:13-14 (ESV)

...He doesn't mean we just need to add the phrase "In Jesus' Name" at the end of our prayers of supplication. He means we need to ask for guidance and provision in the way God is leading us in accordance with the will of the Father. This is what Abraham's servant was doing in his prayer, and apparently what I also was doing that afternoon at the U-haul store.

28 Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things. 29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban [לָבָן] lābān - white. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. 30 As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 He said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." 32 So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on." Genesis 24:28-33 (ESV)

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This is our first acquaintance with Laban – Abraham’s great nephew and Abraham’s grandson Jacob’s future father-in-law. As we can tell right away, Laban was a man with a keen eye to the main chance. Small wonder he was struck by the valuable gifts Abraham’s servant had already given his sister Rebekah. If each of the bracelets was 4 ounces of pure gold, they would be worth over \$20,000 at today’s prices. That’s no casual thanksgiving gift for a kindness shown to a stranger during a chance encounter. No doubt, Laban was hoping there was plenty more where that came from.

***34**So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant. **35**The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. **36**And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. **37**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 dwell, **38**but you shall go to my father’s house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.’ **39**I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’ **40**But he said to me, ‘The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father’s house. **41**Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.’*

***42**“I came today to the spring and said, ‘O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, **43**behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,” **44**and who will say to me, “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 water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ **46**She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. **47**Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. **48**Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son. **49**Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”* Genesis 24:34-49 (ESV)

Since the servant’s testimony is practically a word-for-word repetition of the story we’ve read in this chapter so far, we won’t delve too deeply into it. Of note though are the servant’s complete obedience

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to his master, his devotion to and faith in God Almighty, and the truthfulness and completeness of his testimony to Rebekah's family.

50Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. 53And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. 54And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master."

Genesis 24:50-54 (ESV)

As we shall learn later, Laban was a conniver and a deceiver whose primary motivation was his own gain. But here in Genesis 24:50-51, we see that he and his father (for whom Laban his son had apparently assumed the role of spokesperson) at least got *something* right. They recognized that God is sovereign in all things. They could discern from the servant's testimony that the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah was ordained by God. Therefore, they reasoned that it would be pointless to resist. That realization didn't keep her family from trying to negotiate a little as we shall soon see, but nevertheless they surely recognized the move of God when they witnessed it. Their resignation to obeying God's will is reminiscent of the response Gamaliel the teacher of Saul of Tarsus gave to his fellow members of the Jewish ruling council when they wished to kill Peter and John for teaching in the Name of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem.

38b...in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39a but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" Acts 5:38b-39a (ESV)

Before we move on, something unwritten struck me about this whole story. All of those involved – the writer, the human participants, we the readers, Rebekah, and – dare I say it – God Himself, assume without mention that Rebekah herself had no say at all in the matter of her marriage to Isaac. Even Isaac had no part in choosing his wife. This story is our first explicit Biblical encounter with prearrangement of marriages by the families of betrothed couples without even consulting the husband and wife to be, and often while the couple were still very young children. We are not told how any of the marriages we read of in God's Word after Adam and Eve came about. In fact, the Bible rarely mentions the wives at all except for scant references in the genealogies or in stories where the name of the wife is important to the narrative. Even these are most often in the context of the woman's role as mother rather than her role as spouse (e.g. Hannah the mother of Samuel, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary the mother of Jesus).

The cultural tradition of prearranged marriage was already well established before Abraham's time (or so we must assume). It continues in many cultures around the world even to the present day. I'm not passing judgment about it. But I *am* intrigued by it, since I am firmly convinced that my own marriage was "prearranged" by God our Father albeit not by our earthly parents.

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⁵⁵Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” ⁵⁶But 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.” ⁵⁷They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” ⁵⁸And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” ⁵⁹So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands [תַּבָּאָר רִבְאָה – multitudes, ten-thousands],

and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!”

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Genesis 24:55-61 (ESV)

Although Rebekah had no power to determine *whether* she would go with Abraham’s servant to marry Isaac, her family granted her the authority to determine *when* she would go. We can only speculate why Rebekah’s brother and mother wanted to delay Rebekah’s departure. Perhaps they hoped to negotiate a better bride price for Rebekah, although the servant had already surely shown Abraham’s great generosity to the family and to Rebekah herself.

No doubt the prospect of remaining a little longer in comfort and plenty as the guest of the family would also have been more appealing to Abraham’s servant than the month-long return journey to Abraham and Isaac in the desert of the Negev. Yet the servant was determined to carry out the mission he had sworn to undertake. In this, I’m reminded of what Paul said about our Lord Jesus.

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [ἄρπαγμός harpagmos – seized or held onto], *⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

ASIDE – Ten thousand is the largest specific number expressed as a single word in the ancient Hebrew Old Testament. Thus, when Rebekah’s family blessed her, they did not wish for her to have tens of millions of offspring, but thousands of ten thousands. Elsewhere (1 Chronicles 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 14:9) where the Old Testament refers to a million men and a million talents of gold, the Hebrew is literally “thousand thousand.” But I digress...

⁶²Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had

Genesis 22:20-24:67 – Death of Sarah and Marriage of Isaac

done. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Genesis 24:62-67 (ESV)

Isn't it ironic that Isaac was living in **בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי** *b'ēr laḥay rō'î* (the well of the living one who sees me) – where God found and rescued his stepmother Hagar and half-brother Ishmael (Genesis 16) – when he met Rebekah returning with Abraham's servant from Paddan-Aram?

It may be confusing that Rebekah would don her veil upon meeting Isaac, when she had not apparently been wearing it along the journey with Abraham's servant and his men. In this case, the veil was not a symbol of modesty or chastity as it is today in the Muslim world and other cultures. In Rebekah's case, wearing the veil was a symbol of her betrothal to Isaac, so she wore it whenever she was in his presence up until the time of their marriage. Thus, the veil symbolized the bride's devotion to her husband to be, just as the garter traditionally worn by some brides on their wedding day does today.

Looking Ahead

Next time, we'll study the death of Abraham, the descendants and death of Ishmael, and the birth of Isaac's twin sons Jacob and Esau.