

Proclaiming the Word of God

Ordination of Scarlett Stevens

Scripture: Genesis 24

Sermon: The Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca- a love story

With today's story of Isaac and Rebekah, we have come to the end of Abraham's Adventures in the Promised Land. Realize that with the exception of Jesus Christ, Abraham was the most written about and referred to person in our entire Bible. He is also considered the founding father of the world's three greatest religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But now we must move on to the stories of his immediate heirs -- Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers -- to watch the further unfolding of God's covenant promises with these next individuals who would eventually grow into the nation of Israel.

With the opening of this tale, Isaac is now forty years old, unmarried, and still grieving his mother Sarah's death three years past. Though quite old, Abraham will live another thirty-five years and get to witness the birth of his twin grandsons Esau and Jacob.

But, before leaving Abraham completely behind we should note two more events in his life. Sometime after the birth of Isaac, Abraham again took on a second wife (and possibly a concubine) who bore him five more sons. But when each of these boys came of age, he gave them a gift and sent them away as he had earlier done Ishmael so as not to jeopardize Isaac's claim to full inheritance of his estate.

And to bring a somewhat more joyful end to the sad tale of Hagar and Ishmael, when Abraham did die at the ripe old age of 175, both brothers Isaac and Ishmael once again were standing together at their father's burial beside his beloved Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. (25:8-9).



So we move on to just two stories about Isaac. For whatever reason, his was a quiet and blessed life. He lived for 180 years and got to see all his grandchildren by Esau and Jacob. The only incidences in his life worth a Biblical note are his storybook marriage to Rebekah, which we will attend to today. His copycat lie to Abimelech – the same person his father lied to – which got him invited to pasture his sheep elsewhere (we covered this previously), and the family breakup when younger son Jacob stole his elder twin's birthright and then fled, fearing for his life into a fourteen year exile (which we will cover next week).

So this week for the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, I am going to do something completely different.... which is to simply read this beautiful tale of how good life can be when you trust everything to God.

You have heard cautionary tales of catalog brides and perhaps have seen the show Married at First Sight, so you know that arranged marriages do not always succeed. Today let's hear the very first story ever recorded of an arranged marriage involving faith, prayers and camels that did end happily ever after.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.'

The 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?' Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, "To your offspring I will give this land", he will send his angel before you; you shall take a wife for my son from there. But 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.' So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was towards evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, "Please offer 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 to my master.'



Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder. The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.

The servant ran to meet her and said, 'Please let me sip a little water from your jar.' 'Drink, my lord,' she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.' So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, 'Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?' She said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.'

She added, 'We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.' The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord and said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.'

Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.

As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, 'Thus the man spoke to me', he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring. He said, 'Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?' So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my errand.' Laban said, 'Speak on.'

So he said, 'I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. 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 live; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son." I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman will not follow me." But he said to me, "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; even if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath."

'I came today to the spring, and said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, **'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,'** 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."

'Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, **"Please let me drink."** She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, **"Drink, and I will also water your camels."** So I drank, and she also watered the camels.