

Genesis 24 The Wooing of Rebekah

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Overview

In the overall scheme of “the generations of Terah” (11:27-25:11), this chapter corresponds to 11:27-30 (the marriage of Abram and Nahor) and builds on the preparation given in 22:20-24. Just as 23 lays a foundation for a biblical understanding of funerals, so 24 provides many principles related to the marriage of believers.

This chapter has four scenes. It begins and ends in Canaan. The middle two scenes are in Haran, one by the well and the other in Laban’s house.

1-9, Canaan: Abraham Charges his Servant

These are the last words we hear Abraham speak during his earthly pilgrimage. (Our Lord records a later speech in Luke 16:24-31.)

1, Prologue

This is stated in two disjunctive (SV) clauses. The inverse word order has two effects:

1. It marks a break in the narrative stream; this is a new episode.
2. It emphasizes the subject (in this case the two subjects).

Here, the pairing sets the two protagonists over against one another. “Now: As for Abraham, ... As for the Lord ...” This reminds us that the whole story since 11:27 has really been, not about Abraham and Sarah, or the birth of Isaac, or the tension between Isaac and Ishmael, but about the relation between Abraham and the Lord. When we get to the end of the story, what do we find the state of these two protagonists to be?

As for Abraham, he was old, and well stricken in age.—“Well stricken in age” gives the impression of frailty, but this is not really in focus. The expression is simply “come into the days,” namely, the days of later life. This was already true of him in 18:11, at the age of 99; now he is somewhere between 137 (at 23:1) and 175 (his age at death, 25:7). There is no boast here of Abraham’s worthiness, of his faith or obedience. We are simply invited to contemplate him as one who has experienced a long pilgrimage. He is passive, receptive.

As for the LORD, he had blessed Abraham in all things.—All the action is on the Lord’s part, and that action has been for Abraham’s good. Looking back on a long life, one can say that he has blessed Abraham. That blessing has not been occasional or spotty, but “in all things,” in every circumstance. Compare the promise of Rom 8:28: “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” The blessing may not be apparent at the time, but when we look back from the end of our journey, we will be able to say with Samuel, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,” 1 Sam 7:12.

We will see how this experience gives Abraham the confidence to send his servant on this mission.

2-5, The Command

2, His eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had.—Perhaps the “Eliezer” of 15:2. Trusted, like a son to him.

Put thy hand under my thigh.—The word “thigh” can be used euphemistically for the loins, cf. Gen 46:26; Ex 1:5. Understood in this way, such an oath is viewed as binding the one who takes the oath not only to the lord who imposes it, but also to his offspring. There is only one other instance of such an oath in the OT, and that is when Joseph swears to Jacob not to bury him in Egypt, but to take him back to Canaan, 47:29. In both cases, the oath is being required by an old man who may die (and in Jacob’s case, certainly will die) before the promised action is completed. The offspring will have to oversee the execution of the promise.

3, the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth.—A new title for God, and the last one in the chain that Abraham utters. In order:

- 12:8; 13:4, “called upon the name of the Lord.” He knew him from the first as the covenant-keeping God, one who makes promises and commands obedience.
- 14:22, “the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth.” He combines the name “Lord” with Melchizedek’s collapsing of the old Canaanite mythology: no longer the genealogy Elyon → Heaven and Earth → El, but now El = Elyon, and heaven and earth are creatures, not deities. This synthesis shows that he recognizes the universality of the Lord. There are not regional deities to be appeased; the Lord who appeared to him is the same God who demands obedience of the Canaanites (though they were defective in their understanding of him.)
- 15:2,8, “Sovereign Lord.” *Adonai YHWH*. He indicates his willingness to submit to this one who has commanded him. He uses this title again in 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32.
- 21:33, “the Lord, the everlasting God,” *YHWH el olam. el olam. am olam* in Ezek 26:19,20 refers to the prediluvians, wiped out by the flood, and it has been suggested that *olam* refers in general to the world before the flood. The point here is that Abraham recognizes the Lord as the same God from before the flood. Compare *el elyon qoneh shamayim wearec* in 14, which combines old Canaanite names and transforms them into a title of the Lord. *El olam* asserts the identity of God throughout time, just as *el elyon* does through space.
- 22:8, “God.” In his deepest trial, he cannot voice any higher title, but still acknowledges God as the creator. Yet even here is progress, for this is the first time he uses the title of Gen 1:1. He has known the Lord as the promise-maker and has identified him with the gods of foreign lands (14:22) and ancient times (21:33), but now he goes back to a title he learned at his mother’s knee, from the ancient stories passed down from Adam and Eve.
- 21:14, “Lord,” closing the circle with 12:8.

The title in 24:3 (abbreviated in 24:7) resembles 14:11 in its reference to “Lord” and its allusion to 1:1. This time the link to 1:1 is even stronger through the use of the name “God” *elohym*.

- Cf. Dt 4:39, emphasis on God’s uniqueness. “heaven and earth” here are a merism, describing everything by naming two extremes. If the Lord is God of Heaven and God of Earth, there is nowhere else left for a God to be. Compare Deut 3:24.

- Cf. Rahab's confession of faith in Josh 2:11.
- Dt 10:14, he owns it all. It is all under his control, and Abraham's servant cannot escape his surveillance and enforcement of this oath. Neh 9:6; Ps 115:15

Go unto my country and to my kindred.—Like Hagar in 21:21, Abraham seeks to reduce the cultural barrier within the family, by taking a wife from among his own people. There may be some spiritual motive here as well, since the whole family had left Ur with Abraham on God's command (Acts 7:2), but we know that in fact the family was still worshipping idols (31:34), and Hagar's action suggests that the purpose is more cultural than spiritual.

Abraham here is making a distinction between the *land* and the *people*.

- By purchasing a burying ground in ch. 23, he shows his faith that his descendants will inherit the land.
- By avoiding union with the people, he avoids any kind of alliance that might enable them to remain there. God has promised to put out the Amorites, 15:12-16; to join with them (as Lot did, having sons in law in Sodom) would go against the promise.

The servant is to "take" a wife, bringing her back to Canaan.

5, The Objection

Abraham wants two things for Isaac: a wife from abroad, and continued residence in the land. Which is the more important? What if he can't have both?

6-8, The Answer

Abraham's answer is twofold, ABA:

- A. what to do in that case
- B. why you won't have to worry about that case.

6, 8, Bring not my son thither again.—Whatever the servant does, he is not to reverse Abraham's initial act of obedience and take Isaac out of the land of promise. God's first command to Abraham was to leave, and he dare not go back, even in the person of his son.

Notice the clear priority here between Isaac's relation to the *promise* and the desire for a *wife*. He might rationalize, "The promise involves a seed, so is no good without a wife." But godly faith will not compromise the promise if it seems unrealistic. It obeys and leaves the burden of fulfillment to God.

7, why this won't be a problem.—Abraham is confident that God, having done so much to give Abraham the land, won't now block the necessary step of providing a wife for Isaac.

- He took me from that land.
- He spoke to me, revealing himself to me.
- He swore to give me this land.

Surely he will send his angel to work out any problems.

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Abraham no doubt has in mind here not just any angel, but “his angel,” the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Word. This one has been instrumental in untangling impossible situations before.

- He met Hagar when she first fled from Sarah and brought her back, 16:7
- He met her again when she was expelled and cared for her, 21:17
- He stayed Abraham’s hand in the offering of Isaac, 22:11.

He will surely not leave the servant in an impossible situation.

This attitude is fundamental to faith. Consider God’s previous deliverances, and from them take confidence concerning his future faithfulness.

- Deut 29:1-5, recalling his kindnesses through the wilderness, as a basis for submitting to his law.
- Josh 24:1-14, the basis for Israel to serve the Lord.
- Psa 105, as a basis for praise: v.45, “praise ye the Lord.”
- Psa 106, as a basis for petition: v.47, “save us, O Lord.”
- Neh 9, the basis for the request of v.32, and for renewing the covenant.
- Rom 8:32, the offering of God’s own son, as a basis for trust.

9, The Oath

Thus assured, the servant promises as Abraham requests.

10-29, Haran: The Servant Meets Rebekah

10-11, The Journey

All the goods of his master.—He was “chief operating officer,” responsible for all the day to day operations of the household, and so now assembles generous gifts sufficient to ensure that whatever girl he finds, dowry won’t be an issue.

The city of Nahor.—Where is this? Nahor is not mentioned in the migration of the rest of the family in 11:31, but perhaps only because the focus there is on Terah, as the head of the family, accompanying Abram, Sarai, and Lot.

Some (Waltke) have suggested that this is a city named Nahor, near Haran, named in the Mari tablets. But Nahor the brother of Abraham is the father of Bethuel and the grandfather of Rebekah (22:20-24), whom we now find at Haran (the name Rebekah gives to her home, 27:43; cf. 28:10; 29:4, when Jacob flees there from Esau). He must have come after the initial migration. Slow to heed the call of God that brought the family out of Ur, later he comes part of the way.

Application: What a great difference in outcome a small difference in commitment makes! We know nothing of Nahor, other than his being a source for wives for Abraham’s descendants.

A well of water.—We frequently find travelers arriving in a city at the well.

- 29:2, where Jacob arrived in Haran

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- Exod 2:15, where Moses sat when he arrived in Midian
- 1 Sam 9:11, where Saul and his servant inquired after Samuel
- John 4:6, our Lord's visit to Samaria

Reasons for this common trend:

- Wells are usually outside of the city, because they tend to be low, while cities tend to be on elevations. Thus they are outside the fortifications.
- A traveler is thirsty, and needs water. The servant here especially needs to water his camels.
- It is a place where people necessarily gather, so he will be able to meet people whom he can ask about where to find Abraham's family.

at the time of the evening, *even the time that women go out to draw water*.—The servant does not select the time of his arrival in Haran. He might have arrived around noon, but in fact he arrives just at that time of day when the women are coming out to draw water.

12-14, The Prayer

12, His View of God

His instructions from Abraham included the assurance that the God who had led Abraham all these years would not fail him now. Thus he now calls on this God to help him. The reference to "LORD God of my master Abraham" does not mean that he does not worship him as well, but emphasizes that he is invoking a continuation of that divine care to which Abraham has drawn his attention in v.7. The title "LORD God" is the same that Abraham used there, its first occurrence in the Abraham section.

His initial request shows two important concepts about God: he is powerful, and he is loving.

send me good speed.—Lit., "cause it to happen to me today." The servant believes that God can cause things to happen; that he can act in the world. Contrast this with the perspective of many today who believe in God only abstractly, and don't really think he can change anything. The servant has faith in God's ability to work.

shew kindness unto my master Abraham.—"kindness" here is *xsd*, covenant love. This is the first place in the Bible where we read of God's *xsd*. Lot spoke of the angels' *xsd* in 19:19, and in 20:13 (Sarah to Abraham) and 21:23 (Abimelech to Abraham) we have *xsd* from one person to another.

Note that in Lot's case and Abimelech, there is no antecedent covenant. See Harris's article in TWOT supporting Sakenfeld over Snaith and concluding that the word focuses on the freedom with which the love is given, not the obligation under a covenant; cf. 1 Kings 20:31 for a clear unmerited context. Still, it is often associated with a covenant, because covenants are themselves founded on an underlying relationship.

13, *His Circumstance*

Both verbs are participles, emphasizing ongoing present action. “Look, here I am standing by the well, and the girls are coming out.” He at once sees the providential timing. He came to find a bride for Isaac, and several candidates are on their way toward him.

14, *His Request*

The servant’s prayer has been criticized as demanding that God work in a certain way. Two considerations argue against this.

1. Other passages show that God does work through signs like this: Gideon in Judg 6:37; Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:10; Isaiah’s invitation to Ahaz in Isa 7:11.
2. The servant is building on the providential direction already evident. Here God has not only brought him to the city, but is bringing out the girls to him. It is natural for him to follow this hint and seek to discern whether the one he seeks is among them.

His request rests on an important assumption: that God has “appointed” a bride for Isaac. The servant’s view of his task is not to select a suitable bride, but to discern the bride whom the Lord has selected. He does in fact have his own idea of what constitutes a good wife, but this is not sufficient. He wants the Lord’s selection.

Application: This insight is critical for a successful marriage. Parents should pray for the Lord’s provision of a spouse for their children; children should seek the Lord’s choice. Compare Prov 19:14, “House and riches *are* the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife *is* from the LORD.” The task in find a spouse is not picking someone that is pleasing to you, but discerning the Lord’s direction.

The test he proposes is not unreasonable (not nearly as arbitrary as those of Gideon or Hezekiah). He seeks evidence that the girl is hospitable and diligent, two qualities that are highly desirable in a good wife.

- hospitable because she will offer him drink;
- diligent in being willing to water his camels. A camel can drink 25 gallons, or five of the jugs we use for spring water. Watering ten of them is a major task, involving up to fifty such jugs. I unload about five such jugs each week from the market, and it’s a heavy job!

15-16, *Appearance of Rebekah*

Moses introduces Rebekah by reminding us of the genealogy we have already seen in 22:20-24. He describes her in three ways:

- “very fair to look upon,” attractive
- “a virgin,” *betulah*, not a technical term as in English, but a young woman of marriageable age
- “neither had any man known her,” describing her chastity (perhaps evident to the servant by her mode of dress, which in some cultures marks married from unmarried women)

17-25, The Test

The servant ran to meet her.—He poses the question as he proposed in his prayer, and she responds exactly as he had envisioned, though his heart must have missed a beat while he was drinking to see if she would make the further offer he had in mind. Note the energy with which she draws water for the camels: “hasted,” “ran.”

21 the man wondering at her held his peace.—She clearly satisfies the test he had proposed to the Lord. But Abraham’s instructions were not just to get a good girl from “my country”; she must also be of “my kindred” (v.4).

made his journey prosperous.—Lit, “prospered his journey.” This is the first occurrence of this verb in the OT, and it will occur three more times in ch. 24 (vv. 40, 42, 56), always in the causative with the Lord as subject. The verb means “to accomplish what is intended.” This entire chapter is about a mission undertaken and fulfilled, and now that we are in the fulfillment, it is time to talk about “prosperity” in this sense. The servant’s attitude is one that we should have in all our daily undertakings: that prosperity can come only from the Lord. Both the purpose and its accomplishment must be of him; Phil 2:13, “to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

22 earring ... bracelets.—The earring (actually the word means “nose ring”) and bracelets weigh in total about 115 grams. An ounce is about 30 grams, so this is nearly 4 ounces, or \$1200 at today’s prices for gold, a princely gift. According to v.47 he didn’t actually give her the ornaments until he had learned who she was. The motive for the gift is probably to reward her for her hard work watering the camels, and to persuade her family to let him lodge with them.

23, he enquires of her family, and learns that she is indeed descended from Abraham’s brother (24), and that they can lodge a visitor. Now he is confident that she is the bride that God intends for Isaac. All that remains (and it may be a considerable task) is to persuade her family of this.

26-28, Responses

The servant’s response is to thank the Lord for his very direct answer to the prayer. God has cared for two people.

1. Toward Abraham, he has demonstrated “his mercy and his truth,” his true lovingkindness (*xsd* again, this time strengthened by “true”).
2. Toward the servant, he has led him in the way. “I” is emphatic, separated from the rest of the verse by a disjunctive *rebhia* accent. Those words form one predication, not two. The point is not “I was in the way and so the Lord led me,” but “as for me, the Lord led me in the way” In the face of all the potential dangers and all the wrong turns he could have taken, the Lord has directed him just where he should go. This would have been his hope at the outset of his journey; now he looks back and sees that it is so.

Rebekah’s response is to run back to her family, new gold ornaments jingling, and report her meeting with this wealthy stranger. Note “her mother’s house,” compare “Sarah’s tent,” v.67. The women had their own quarters.

29-61, Haran: The Servant and Laban

29-33, *The Welcome*

Laban.—Interestingly, although we have heard of Rebekah earlier (22:23), this is the first mention of Laban. He figures prominently in this story and the later history of Jacob.

29b and 30 are a summary-detail pair. The detail identifies two things that motivated him to come out and invite the servant in.

1. The wealth that he controls. This motive, listed first, suggests to us what will become clear in the Jacob history: Laban is avaricious. As he finds the servant by the well, the camels particularly catch his attention. A rare and expensive commodity, they reinforce in his mind the importance of cultivating this man's favor.
2. Rebekah's words, "thus spake the man unto me." Just what words does she have in mind? The servant has said three things to her:
 - a. Please give me a drink of water. This would not seem to motivate Laban.
 - b. Whose daughter are you? It's not clear that this would stimulate an invitation.
 - c. Is there room for me to stay with you? This would seem to be the inciting statement.

If the servant's prayer in v.27 was audible, she might have known his relation to Abraham, but this is not spoken "to me" as she says. It appears that Laban does not know the relation until 34. Thus he is motivated by the wealth that the man controls.

31-33a, Hospitality.—Compare Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors in ch. 18, or Lot's to the angels in ch. 19. In both those cases, the hospitality was offered without the carnal motivation that is clearly present here. Note that Laban at least knows the name of YHWH.

33, Priority.—In the earlier cases of hospitality, the meal preceded the discussion of business. Abraham's servant is so excited at how the Lord has unfolded his mission that he cannot hold it in, and must tell his mission before eating.

34-48, *The Explanation*

The servant's speech closely parallels vv. 1-27, often verbatim. As always when there are parallel passages, it is instructive to note how it differs. Wenham: The servant describes these things in such a way as to attract Laban to the idea of a marriage.

34, I am Abraham's servant.—Descriptive, not identifying. I am here because I serve Abraham, whose name you will recognize. He does not give his own name. Wenham: "If a mere servant has so much money to throw around, what must Abraham be like?"

Application: Note how the servant has great power, but to be used only to exalt and magnify his lord. So we, if our aim is to glorify the Lord Jesus, have access to the great authority and power that God has given him, but when we focus on ourselves, we are impotent.

35, The LORD hath blessed my master greatly.—35-34 amplify v.1, "the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things." These all things include material wealth and an heir. The servant describes these things in such a way as to attract Laban to the idea of a marriage:

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1. Emphasis on the details of Abraham's wealth
2. Explanation that Isaac is a son of old age, thus he will be young enough to marry Rebekah, a generation younger than he.
3. Explanation that Isaac is an only son, thus sole heir to all this wealth
4. Statement that Abraham has given all to Isaac (though this does not actually happen until ch. 25).

37, in whose land I dwell.— Abraham never describes the land as belonging to the Canaanites; God has promised it to him. V.3 simply said, “the Canaanites, among whom I dwell.” But here and later (v.40), the servant systematically omits references to the promise of the land. Recall that he is visiting the segment of the family that did not go all the way in obeying the divine call. This may have been the source of some tension at the time the two branches parted ways. He is not here to “rub their nose in it,” but actually to reaffirm their family unity through a marriage. Thus he does not remind them of the divine call.

38, My father's house.—Abraham had said (4) only “my land,” but clearly his deepest wish was for a closely related bride, and the servant weaves this into the narrative, to make the union even more attractive to the family.

39, Peradventure.—The servant's version makes no mention of the possibility of bringing Isaac back to Haran. That is left out of the picture entirely. Abraham has forbidden it; he must not even bring it to the mind of his hearers.

Cf. Rom. 13:14, “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”

40, The LORD, before whom I walk.—“Before whom I walk” replaces “take, speak, swear” in v.7. We can learn two things from this change, both important for our example in our witness to others.

- a. As discussed in connection with v.37, the servant makes no mention of God's promise to Abraham. He is not there to gloat over the privileges of the elect. So we are not to strut our salvation as a privilege that we enjoy to the exclusion of others.
- b. The original statements all refer to things that God did for and with Abraham in ch. 12. The servant's phrase takes us down to the closer relation invoked in 17:1, and to the responsibility of Abraham to live in response to those promises. (Recall the context of 17:1 in the light of the failure of ch. 16.) The servant makes clear that Abraham is a servant of the Lord, just as he (the servant) is a servant of Abraham. He does not gloat over Abraham's election, but neither does he hide his devotion to the Lord (and the devotion he expects of his family). Rebekah must know that she is coming into a family that lives under God's supervision.

41, if they give not thee one.—Abraham's actual words put the onus on the girl, “if the woman be not willing to follow thee,” v.8. The servant deals with the family and makes clear he is there to secure their agreement.

42, the prayer.—Omits references in 12 and 14 to “show[ing] kindness” (*xsd*) to Abraham, probably because of covenant associations (see 37 and 40 above). It is true that God's tender, faithful love is peculiarly Abraham's privilege, but the servant does not mention that elective distinction to Laban. Even though the servant is the first person in the Bible to use this term of

God (12, 14, 27), it occurs in the second half of the story only with reference to Laban's decision to send Rebekah (v. 49).

44, my master's son.—Instead of "Isaac." The name means nothing to them; the point is that this son is the heir of Abraham's wealth, and thus a worthy suitor for Rebekah.

45, in mine heart.—To emphasize that her response was not the result of overhearing him, he emphasizes that his prayer was silent

47, whose daughter?—46 omits any mention (as in 21) of the servant's hesitation before learning of her background. This verse makes clear that the gift of jewels was not given until after he learned who she was.

48, worshipped the Lord.—He does not hesitate to give credit to the Lord. Notice that his words confirm our reading of v.26: not "I being in the way," but "the Lord led me in the way."

Summary of differences between the accounts (other than omissions of narrative detail):

- He emphasizes Abraham's wealth, to make the union more attractive.
- He omits any reference to his question about Isaac's return to Haran, to keep that subject off the table. In the light of Laban's later treatment of Jacob, this is critical. What if he wants Isaac to serve for seven years?
- He deemphasizes the special covenant relation between God and Abraham, so as not to emphasize the breach in the family that occurred when Abraham left. He describes Abraham's relation to the Lord with emphasis on Abraham's obedience rather than the Lord's covenant.
- He emphasizes the closeness of the relation between Abraham's family and Laban's. Not just "my kindred," but "my father's house."

49-51, The Negotiation

49, The Servant

49, kindly and truly.—Lit. **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** "lovingkindness and truth." A common cooccurrence, probably to be understood as hendiadys: "true lovingkindness," or perhaps "enduring lovingkindness." This is a common association in the OT (about 30x in all), but the servant is the first to use it, in v.27, where he ascribed it to God (and compare v.12 where he asks for **חֶסֶד** at the beginning of his prayer. But in his communication with Laban, he says not a word of this. Instead, it is Laban and Bethuel of whom he asks "enduring lovingkindness." It is not inappropriate to use the term of human relations; in fact, the first three time it appears in the Bible (19:19; 20:13; 21:23), it refers to inter-human relations. What is important is that the servant emphasizes to these quasi-pagans their responsibility, not the sovereign rule of God.

That I may turn....—He is charged to find a wife. If they won't give him one, he will take his search (and his rich gifts) elsewhere. He is a shrewd bargainer—no wonder Abraham trusted him with his wealth.

50-51, Rebekah's Family

50, Laban and Bethuel.—It seems unusual to mention the son before the father, and in fact the first verb (“answered”) is singular, not plural. It seems that Bethuel is old and infirm at this point, and Laban leads in the negotiations. Or is the father dead and is this a younger Bethuel?

Speak ... bad or good.—Probably synecdoche of the part for the whole, as in 31:24, 29; 2 Sam 13:22. “It would be inappropriate for us to say anything. If we were to oppose you, we would be fighting against God. If we were to encourage you, it would be superfluous. The matter is settled.” Thus their heart is in the hand of the Lord (cf. Prov 21:1).

The Lord.—Here as in v.31, Laban at least knows the name of the Lord (YHWH), showing perhaps some recollection from when Abraham was part of the family. But this does not make him a true worshipper, as we learn a generation later, when we find him solicitous for the family idols.

52-54, The Servant

His response is three-fold.

1. He thanks the Lord, visibly. Now that they have acknowledged the Lord's role in this decision, he can return thanks to him without appearing “holier than thou.”
2. He offers them rich gifts.
3. Finally, he satisfies his hunger and that of his servants.

Note the priority: the Lord first, then others, and finally his own needs.

54, send me away.—He is eager to get back to Abraham with news of his success.

55, The Family

Now the negotiation turns from whether Rebekah will marry Isaac, to the timing.

Her brother and her mother.—No mention of Bethuel, who seems to be very much in the background.

A few days, at the least ten.—They ask for a delay and time of preparation. The expression may in fact mean “a year or at least ten months.”

The Jacob story suggests a possible motive for their request. Laban managed to wheedle many years of hard labor out of Jacob before granting him his wives. Perhaps he has similar objectives here: to milk the servant for all he is worth before actually releasing his sister.

54, The Servant

Here is the final occurrence of “to prosper” in the story. By the well, the servant wondered whether the Lord had prospered his journey (v.21). Now he knows that he had, and is eager to get home.

57-61, Rebekah's Decision

58, Wilt thou go?.—Much has been made of Rebekah's decision in the matter, but in the context, the question under consideration at this point is not whether she will marry Isaac, but when she should depart. Is she willing to leave so soon?

59, their sister.—suggests that other siblings were involved in the decision; perhaps the Bethuel of v.50 is a brother of Laban.

62-67, Canaan: Isaac meets Rebekah

This section is marked off by the disjunctive introduction of Isaac, who has been unnamed though the subject of the entire narrative. "Now as for this Isaac, the one to whom Rebekah is betrothed: as the caravan moves south, he is also on the road, returning to the Negeb from the well Lahairoi."

62-65, The Encounter

62, he dwelt in the south country.—That is, in the Negeb, the hour-glass region around Beersheba. When last we saw Abraham, he was living in Hebron, where he purchased a cave and buried Sarah. Recall that Isaac vanished from the narrative after the offering atop Mount Moriah. Now that he emerges again, his venue is constantly in the southern part of the country: here (the Negeb), 25:11 (by the well Lahai-Roi), 26:6 (Gerar), 26:23 (Beersheba). Only at his deathbed do we find him again in Mamre. It appears that after Moriah he took up an independent life, remaining to the south even after Abraham returns to Mamre before the death of his wife.

Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi.—Lit., "from going to the well" Probably part of his migratory lifestyle, moving from one area to another as the climate changed. Some think he had visited the well because of its spiritual significance; more likely Moses is reminding us of his pilgrim status. Rebekah is leaving life in a house in the city for a nomadic life in tents.

63, to meditate.—This is the first reference in the Bible to meditation, of a total of 20 (AV "meditate" and "meditation"). We have unfortunately let the spiritist movement steal this concept from us. It is a critical part of a healthy spiritual life. The two Hebrew roots that lie behind these references both refer to speech; one to murmuring, suggesting a more emotional engagement with the object of meditation, the other to conversation, suggesting that the subject is reflecting deliberately and rehearsing the matter to himself.

Isaac takes time apart from his daily routine to draw apart from the bustle of the encampment and reflect before the Lord. Our Saviour urges us to seek out our "closet" for privacy (Matt 6:6), but tents have no closets, and Isaac's "closet" is the open field.

What was the subject of his meditation? We are not told, but a common object of meditation in the Bible is God's word and works. It would be very appropriate if he were reflecting on his own history and the yet-unfinished mission of the servant sent to fetch his wife. What is most important for us to note is that he takes time to calm himself reflectively before the Lord.

He lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold.—To "lift up one's eyes and see" indicates that what is seen is of great significance (so Wenham), like Lot's view of the plain of Jordan that is to dominate his destiny, or Abraham's view of the three visitors with their life-changing message (18:2), or his discovery of Mount Moriah (22:4) or of the ram (22:13). "Behold" puts us in the

viewer's shoes. His meditation is interrupted by the notice of something moving on the horizon. As he gazes on it, he realizes that it is an approaching camel caravan. He may not yet recognize it as his father's, but at least it will bring news and the opportunity for trade.

64-65, Rebekah's response.—Three steps:

1. She notices a man approaching, and learns from the servant that it is Isaac.
2. She veils herself in modesty, not to appear too forward. Contrast our culture, where women show themselves off to try to attract male attention. Her instinct is not to try to stimulate him, but to impress upon him her chastity and modesty. This approach is designed to appeal to an honorable man, and shows what Rebekah values in a husband. You get what you go looking for. If you attract a man seductively, don't be surprised if he later yields to seduction by others.
3. She alights from the camel; it would be disrespectful for her to ride while her bridegroom walks.

My master.—The servant's wording seems a bit strange; up until now, "my master" has always referred to Abraham.

1. Some suggest that Abraham has died since the start of the chapter. But the dates don't line up. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 (21:5), and married at the age of 40 (25:20), so Abraham is now 140 years old, and didn't die until he was 175 (25:7); he has yet 35 years more to live.
2. More likely, the servant is trying to exalt Isaac in Rebekah's eyes. After all, this is Isaac's encampment, not Abraham's; Isaac is a mature adult running his own affairs, not a boy under his father's control. She is coming to be a wife to an important sheik, not a daughter-in-law to his father.

66-67, The Marriage

The actual marriage ceremony in these days was simple and unadorned, but included basic elements that persist today.

66, the servant told Isaac.—It was *deliberate*. Isaac must hear the account of the transactions that have been made on his behalf.

67, his mother Sarah's tent.—She has her own quarters in the encampment, with the other women, thus protecting her modesty until the union takes place.

Isaac took Rebekah, and she became his wife.—These clauses express the fact of the marriage; to "take" a woman is a standard formula for marriage in the Bible.

He loved her.—Note the inversion in time order with respect to today's custom. Today, the couple fall in love, and are then married. In the Bible, they are married, and then follows love. Even in the NT, the pattern is never to marry the one you love, but rather, to love the one you marry: "Husbands, love your wives" (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19). Love is not a bubbly feeling, but a responsibility undertaken and deliberately executed.

Isaac was comforted.—It has been three years since his mother's passing (23:1). "It is not good that the man should be alone" (2:18). While his mother was alive, she provided the feminine

touch for the family, and for him, but her passing left him with a severe void. Now that there is once again a lady of the house, that gap is filled.

Notes

Expressions of Old Age

Old *zqn*.—24:1; 25:8. The standard expression.

Stricken in age *b' bymym*.—24:1, “come into the days,” sc. a recognized period of life (definite); always with *zqn*. 18:11; 24:1; Josh 13:1; 23:1,2 (Joshua); 1 Ki 1:1 (David);

In a good old age *bsybh +wbh*.—25:8, with “died”. Only 4x in AV: 15:15; 25:8; Judg 8:32 (Gideon); 1 Chr 29:28 (David), always adverbial to “died” or “be buried.”

Full of years *sb*(.—25:8, Sated, always associated with *zqn*. Here only the adj; other passages are explicitly “full of days,” *sb(ymym*, 35:29 (Isaac); 1 Chr 23:1 (verbal); 29:28 (David); 2 Chr 24:15 (Jehoiada; verbal forms); Job 42:17. Cf. Jer 6:11 *zqn(m ml)ymym*. Outside of gerontological contexts, the root seems to mean “sated, satisfied,” as 1 Sam 2:5; Prov 27:7, but one can also be sated with evil and disappointment, Job 10:15; 14:1.

Meditate

Summary observations

Both words are used in Psa 77:13 (ET 12) and 143:5, in parallel.

Both are used with *zkr*.

Only *hgh* is used of animal sounds

Only *hgh* is used in parallel with “howl” *yll* and lament *qyn(h)*.

Hgh focuses more on the *sound*, a murmur or low muttering; *syx* is more rational, higher-level conversation.

Syx is used six times in Ps 119, but *hgh* never is.

Hmh roar, growl is used in parallel with both:

- *syx*: Psa 55:18; 77:4 (with *zkr*, cf. v.13)
- *hgh*: Isa 59:11

Ps 77:4 is key verse: moaning is the response of the spirit, speaking of the mind. Ps 77 three times associates *syx*, *zkr*, and *hmh/hgh/spirit*:

- 4, remembrance leads to *hmh*; *syx* leads to agitation of spirit. He turns to God.
- 7, Remembrance is parallel to *syx* and searching (*xps*) by the spirit. The focus here is his night song of question.
- 12-13, remembrance is parallel to *hgh* and *syx*. Focus is God’s past mighty acts.

Hgh

God's Word and Works

^{KJV} **Joshua 1:8** This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt **meditate** therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

^{KJV} **Psalm 1:2** But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he **meditate** day and night.

^{KJV} **Psalm 35:28** And my tongue shall **speak** of thy righteousness *and* of thy praise all the day long.

^{KJV} **Psalm 37:30** The mouth of the righteous **speaketh** wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.

^{KJV} **Psalm 63:6** When I remember thee upon my bed, *and* **meditate** on thee in the *night* watches.

^{KJV} **Psalm 71:24** My tongue also shall **talk** of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

^{KJV} **Psalm 77:12** I will **meditate** also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.

^{KJV} **Psalm 143:5** I remember the days of old; I **meditate** on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.

^{KJV} **Proverbs 8:7** For my mouth shall **speak** truth; and wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips.

^{KJV} **Proverbs 15:28** The heart of the righteous **studieth** to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

Deceitful, wicked Plans

^{KJV} **Job 27:4** My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue **utter** deceit.

^{KJV} **Psalm 2:1** Why do the heathen rage, and the people **imagine** a vain thing?

^{KJV} **Psalm 38:12** They also that seek after my life lay snares *for me*: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and **imagine** deceits all the day long.

^{KJV} **Proverbs 24:2** For their heart **studieth** destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 59:3** For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath **muttered** perverseness.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 59:13** In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and **uttering** from the heart words of falsehood.

Other speech

^{KJV} **Psalm 90:9** For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a **tale** *that is told*.

^{KJV} **Psalm 115:7** They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither **speak** they through their throat.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 8:19** And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that **mutter**: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

^{KJV} **Isaiah 33:18** Thine heart shall **meditate** terror. Where *is* the scribe? where *is* the receiver? where *is* he that counted the towers?

^{KJV} **Job 37:2** Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the **sound** *that* goeth out of his [God's] mouth.

Animal sounds

^{KJV} **Isaiah 31:4** For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion **roaring** on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, *he* will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 38:14** Like a crane *or* a swallow, so did I **chatter**: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail *with looking* upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 59:11** We roar all like bears, and **mourn** sore like doves: we look for judgment, but *there is* none; for salvation, *but* it is far off from us.

Mourning (cf. syx “complaint”)

^{KJV} **Isaiah 16:7** Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kirhareseth shall ye **mourn**; surely *they are* stricken.

^{KJV} **Jeremiah 48:31** Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab; *mine heart* shall **mourn** for the men of Kirheres.

^{KJV} **Ezekiel 2:10** And he spread it before me; and it *was* written within and without: and *there was* written therein lamentations, and **mourning**, and woe.

Syx

Speaking

^{KJV} **Judges 5:10** **Speak**, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

^{KJV} **1 Kings 18:27** And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is **talking**, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

^{KJV} **2 Kings 9:11** Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord: and *one* said unto him, *Is* all well? wherefore came this mad *fellow* to thee? And he said unto them, Ye know the man, and his **communication**.

^{KJV} **Job 12:8** Or **speak** to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.

^{KJV} **Psalms 69:12** They that sit in the gate **speak** against me; and I *was* the song of the drunkards.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 53:8** He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall **declare** his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Complaint

^{KJV} **1 Samuel 1:16** Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my **complaint** and grief have I spoken hitherto.

^{KJV} **Job 7:11** Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will **complain** in the bitterness of my soul.

^{KJV} **Job 7:13** When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my **complaint**;

^{KJV} **Job 9:27** If I say, I will forget my **complaint**, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort *myself*.

^{KJV} **Job 10:1** My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my **complaint** upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

^{KJV} **Job 21:4** As for me, *is* my **complaint** to man? and if *it were so*, why should not my spirit be troubled?

^{KJV} **Job 23:2** Even to day *is* my **complaint** bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.

^{KJV} **Psalms 55:2** Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my **complaint**, and make a noise;

^{KJV} **Psalms 77:3** I remembered God, and was troubled: I **complained**, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.

^{KJV} **Psalms 102:1** <A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his **complaint** before the LORD.> Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.

^{KJV} **Psalms 142:2** I poured out my **complaint** before him; I shewed before him my trouble.

^{KJV} **Proverbs 23:29** Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath **babbling**? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

Meditation

^{KJV} **Psalms 77:6** I call to remembrance my song in the night: I **commune** with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.

Prayer

^{KJV} **Psalms 55:17** Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I **pray**, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

^{KJV} **Psalms 64:1** <To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.> Hear my voice, O God, in my **prayer**: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

God's Works

^{KJV} **1 Chronicles 16:9** Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, **talk** ye of all his wondrous works.

^{KJV} **Psalms 77:12** I will meditate also of all thy work, and **talk** of thy doings.

Genesis 24 The Wooing of Rebekah

^{KJV} **Psalm 104:34** My **meditation** of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD.

^{KJV} **Psalm 105:2** Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: **talk** ye of all his wondrous works.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:15** I will **meditate** in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:23** Princes also did sit *and* speak against me: *but* thy servant did **meditate** in thy statutes.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:27** Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I **talk** of thy wondrous works.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:48** My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will **meditate** in thy statutes.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:78** Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: *but* I will **meditate** in thy precepts.

^{KJV} **Psalm 119:148** Mine eyes prevent the *night* watches, that I might **meditate** in thy word.

^{KJV} **Psalm 143:5** I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I **muse** on the work of thy hands.

^{KJV} **Psalm 145:5** I will **speak** of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.

^{KJV} **Proverbs 6:22** When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and *when* thou awakest, it shall **talk** with thee.