

GOD ESTABLISHES ISAAC'S FAMILY

Genesis 23:1-24:67

Lesson 11

Key Verse: 24:58

"So they called Rebekah and asked her, 'Will you go with this man?' 'I will go,' she said."

The death of Sarah was a milestone in Abraham's life. He had believed God's promises and obeyed his word, and God had given him a son by Sarah. God had blessed Abraham materially, and had trained him in faith so that he might grow spiritually. Abraham had lived out his life as an alien and a stranger in the land of promise. He didn't even own enough land to provide a burial place for his wife. Chapter 23 gives us some insight into the customs of the times, and teaches us the practical faith of a man of vision.

Chapter 24 describes how Abraham found a suitable wife for Isaac. Abraham firmly believed that God would make his descendants into a great nation, and give them the land of Canaan, as he had promised. So Isaac was very important as the one who would inherit the covenant promises. Isaac was a quiet and shy young man, and he needed a woman of faith to be his wife. He needed a wife who believed God's promises as he did, a woman who could help him be a steward of God's blessings.

The main actor in chapter 24 is Abraham's servant. Abraham entrusted him with the important mission of finding a wife for Isaac. We can learn from him how a man of mission can carry out the mission given him by God.

1. The death of Sarah (23)

Abraham's wife Sarah lived to be 127 years old, and she died at Hebron. Abraham mourned for her, then he faced a very practical problem. He needed a place to bury his wife. Even though God had promised him the whole land of Canaan, he actually owned nothing--not even a foot of ground. (Acts 7:5) He did not confuse reality with vision. He believed that God would give the land to his descendants, but he knew that the present reality was that the land was occupied by the Canaanites. He did not allow this to make him doubt God's promise, and he did not try to use his spiritual privileges to get material gain. He simply followed the customs of his time and negotiated with Ephron the Hittite. See verse 4. "Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, 'I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.'" The Hittites regarded him as "a mighty prince among us" and agreed to give him land. He purchased the cave of Machpelah and the field around it for 400 shekels of silver. This became the burial place of the patriarchs--and the only piece of real estate which Abraham owned in the promised land. Abraham's faith did not depend on the tangible things in his hand. He trusted God and believed God's promises throughout his lifetime.

2. A wife for Isaac (24)

Abraham was old and full of years. God had blessed him in every way. His wife, Isaac's mother, was dead, and he was praying about a wife for Isaac. When he thought about a wife for Isaac, he gave first priority to faith, because Isaac, the covenant son, must live by faith in God. We can learn from this chapter how to find and follow the will of God in the important decisions of life, and we can see here what a marriage by faith is. This chapter tells how God's guiding hand provided just the right wife for Isaac.

First, promise "that you will not get a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites..." (1-9)

Abraham called his chief servant, the man in charge of all that he had, and commissioned him to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham was a wealthy man. He was living in the promised land, Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. He must have seen many attractive and wealthy women who might make good marriage candidates for Isaac.

And Isaac, although he was quiet and obedient, must have thought about these girls too. It is natural for sinful man not to think about a girl's inner character, but to only look at her outward appearance when choosing a girl to marry. Some men, in their ignorance and pride, think that if they find a woman who fits their human standards, they can marry her, then later on, make her into a woman of faith. The men of Noah's time thought this way. The men of Abraham's time must have been the same. But this never works. A man who marries a worldly woman becomes a worldly man. Marriage is the measure of a man; it is the touchstone of faith.

Abraham remembered God's promise. He knew that the Canaanite culture and religion were very corrupt. Abraham did not want to compromise with it. He did not worry about cultural incompatibility--that's what he wanted. He called his most able and faithful servant, the man who was in charge of all of Abraham's business and household affairs. He said, "Put your hand under my thigh." (The way in which men made solemn promises to one another in those days) Then he said, "I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac." (24:3,4) Abraham wanted his son Isaac to marry by faith. It was important that Isaac's family really belong to God and not be tainted with human compromise. So Abraham charged his servant with the task of finding a wife for Isaac.

Abraham's decision to send his servant back to his far-distant home country to find a wife for Isaac instead of introducing him to one of the near-by Canaanite girls seemed complicated and difficult. Abraham's servant was a thoughtful man who knew how to get things done. He immediately put his finger on the hardest part of Abraham's commission. "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?" Abraham's answer was a clear and unequivocal "No." The woman must have enough faith to come. This was the test. How could such a woman be found? It seemed like "mission impossible." If the woman refused to come, then the servant would be released from his promise. He was not to take Isaac to that land. Abraham promised, "The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised to me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land--he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there.'" Abraham promised his servant that he would not be alone. God's angel would accompany him and give him success.

Second, a faithful and prayerful man of mission (9-49)

Abraham's servant accepted the mission Abraham gave him. He made a vow to take responsibility for this task. He was an old man with much experience, and he knew what kind of preparations he must make. So he took ten camels and loaded them with all kinds of good things and went to Padan Aram, to the town of Nahor. He went to the place where he would be most likely to meet the right girl--the village well. He had made the necessary human and material preparations with great thoroughness. But he did not depend on his human preparation nor did he depend on his wisdom and experience. He depended on God. He prayed. He asked the God of Abraham to grant him success in his journey. Then he set a very improbable condition which the woman God had chosen for Isaac must meet. She must willingly volunteer to water his 10 thirsty camels! Before he had finished praying, a beautiful young girl balancing a jar on her shoulder came to the well. When he asked her for a drink of water, she graciously drew water for him and offered to water his ten camels (15-20)! Abraham's servant was speechless. He just stood there, dumbly watching her (21). Perhaps he was transfixed by her graciousness and beauty. Even more than this, he was overcome by the fact that God is alive and God had heard and blessed his prayer.

Abraham's servant was not impulsive. He waited on God. He had to be sure that this was really God's leading and not just his own wishful thinking. After Rebekah had finished watering the camels, he gave her a gift to show his appreciation and asked her about her family. When he learned that she was Abraham's great neice, he bowed his head and worshipped God. He said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives." When he obeyed by faith and prayed by faith, God blessed his prayer. His prayer also reveals his faithfulness to Abraham. Abraham loved and feared God. So he planted in his servant this same awesome respect for God. Abraham's servant believed the God of Abraham. He served Abraham as though he were

serving God. He served him with prayer. He realized that, for Abraham's sake, God was leading his mission step by step and worshiped and thanked God each step of the way.

Third, a man who regarded his mission as precious

Abraham's servant must have been tired and hungry after his long journey. He was led to Rebekah's house and there received generous hospitality. But when the abundant feast was placed before him, he refused to eat. He said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say." Laban could not but let him speak. The old servant began at the beginning and told everything that had happened. He focused on how God had answered his prayers and led him each step of the way. As he told his long story, the food got cold, but he didn't care. This servant was an old man, but he was so intent on carrying out his mission that he forgot about being tired and hungry. Even a young man, if he has no sense of mission, cannot overcome his own physical desires. If he is tired and hungry, he only thinks about eating and sleeping.

We can learn from Abraham's servant that mission must be regarded as more precious than eating. Ordinarily, people work hard to make money and eat well. Sinful men living in a cursed world regard personal security as more important than mission. But this old man did not think about himself. He believed in the God of Abraham, and he was willing to risk even his life in order to fulfill God's mission. Paul in the New Testament was such a man. He said in Acts 20:24, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me..." Originally, God created man for mission. He entrusted the stewardship of the earth to mankind (Ge 1:28). He created each of us for a purpose and has a mission for each of us (Eph 2:10). If a man is not faithful to the mission God has given him, he is only a cursed lump of clay, and he can never be happy. When a man living in a world under curse works hard in order to live well, the harder he works the more cursed his life in the world becomes. The only real way of happiness is to know God, receive from him the mission he has prepared for us, and be faithful to that mission to death. This servant's faithfulness to Abraham was in reality faithfulness to God.

Abraham's servant pushed Laban and Bethuel to make a clear decision. The servant said, "...the Lord, the God of my master Abraham...led me...to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn." Laban and Bethuel listened to the servant's account and were moved. They realized that God had indeed chosen Rebekah to be Isaac's wife. But just knowing God's will without any decision of faith is worth nothing. They said, "This is from the Lord; What can we say? Here is Rebekah. Take her and go." Then they celebrated with a great feast.

Fourth, a man who completed his mission (54b-67)

Abraham's servant did not regard his mission as complete until he had actually escorted Rebekah back to Isaac in Canaan. He knew human nature well. People who make decisions of faith when they are thinking only about God and his will can have second thoughts when they began to calculate humanly. So the next morning Abraham's servant said, "Send me on my way to my master." Rebekah's family urged him to wait for ten days or so. They wanted to keep their lovely daughter for just a few days longer. It was a good chance for the old servant to take a short vacation in the sun--after all, he had earned it. But he answered, "Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey." Send me on my way so that I may go to my master." His heart was full of God's grace. He didn't even think about resting. He was free--he could have stayed, but he didn't. He only wanted to return quickly and finish his mission. Then he discovered that the final and most important matter had not been settled at all. No one had asked Rebekah. She was the one to make the final decision.

3. Rebekah

Rebekah was qualified in many ways to be the wife of the covenant son, Isaac. She was pure and chaste and very beautiful (Abraham's old servant had almost lost his heart to her.); she was generous and broadminded and not afraid of hard work (How ugly are the women who paint their long fingernails, and lie around lazily, yawning in boredom); she was loving and thoughtful. She had willingly served an old man and ten thirsty camels. She had invited him to come and stay with her family. But her most important qualification was her faith. She had listened to

the old man's long account of how God had led him to find a wife for Isaac. She realized that this was God's will. She had eyes to see how God was working and leading, and she had the courage to make a decision of faith to participate in God's great work of world salvation. Read verses 57-58. So they called Rebekah and asked her, 'Will you go with this man?' 'I will go,' she said." She was willing to give her marriage to God. Surely a woman's marriage is most precious and personal to her. It is the content of her secret dreams. Most women will give everything else to God, but they reserve their marriage and their choice of a husband for themselves. Rebekah made a decision of faith to please God, not please herself in her marriage. Her family sent her off with this blessing: "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies." (60) So God blessed her and used her to establish, with Isaac, God's covenant family.

Rebekah was a motherly woman. Rebekah went with Abraham's servant to Canaan. When she saw a young man in the distance, and found that he was Isaac, she quickly took her veil and covered herself (65). She was quick and active, but at the same time, she kept her mysterious womanly secrecy. Isaac's mother had died. He was her only son, and he had received much love from her. He grieved for his mother. He needed a wife who could also give him a mother's love. A man must grow spiritually and humanly after his marriage. His wife must make a home that is full of love and laughter, a home that is full of prayer and faith and deep respect, so that her husband can grow up to be a useful servant of God. Women who only seek love from their tired and world-weary husbands, who say sharp and painful things that hurt their husband's pride and pierce his vulnerable spots cannot please God or help their husbands. The servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah, and she became his wife. He loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.