

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 24

24:1 Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.

Time Frame

Finding a wife for Isaac occurred shortly after the death of Sarah [1839 B.C.], as seen in Verse 67 when it states that Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. We also find in 25:20 that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah [1836 B.C.], which places this event sometime between 1837 and 1836 B.C. [There was still a direct connection to the Flood alive at the time in the person of Shem, who did not die until 1826 B.C.]

24:2 He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh [REB: "Give me your solemn oath"]. (NIV)

"Hand Under My Thigh"

According to the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem, Eliezer was to place his hand on Abraham's mark of circumcision, the sign of the covenant made with God. This practice was done when making only the most solemn vow or oath.

24:3-4 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 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." (NIV)

Abraham's Reasoning

It was the normal custom to marry within the tribe from which one came, preserving the ethnic makeup of the family. A more important reason for this request however, was that Abraham did not want to leave the impression that his descendants received the promised land by marrying into Canaanite tribes. It was important that all people understand that the land came to his descendants due to God's gift and blessing.

24:5 And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

Eliezer's Commission

Eliezer had to fully understand what the oath entailed, because once it was made, no editing was allowed.

24:6 Abraham said to him, 'On no account are you to take my son back there. (REB)

24:7 "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 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. (NIV)

Abraham points out that God would work out the details, all Eliezer had to do was escort Isaac's wife back.

24:8 *If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there.* (NIV)

Abraham assures Eliezer that if he is not successful in finding a woman that will come back, the oath would be nullified.

24:9-12 *So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim [NKJ: "Mesopotamia"] and made his way to the town of Nahor [REB: "town where Nahor lived"]. He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.* (NIV)

Eliezer prayed to God in the name of Abraham, because all members of the patriarchal household were expected to worship the god of the patriarch.

24:13-14 *See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one You have chosen for Your servant Isaac. By this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.* (NIV)

Be Specific

This example shows that we should be specific in our requests to God.

24:15-16 *Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. The girl was very beautiful, a virgin [Hebrew: "bethulah" = "virgin"]; no man had ever lain with her [MOF: "The girl was very beautiful, unmarried, and a virgin"]. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.* (NIV)

Rebekah

Rebekah was a type of the bride of Christ (REV 14:4).

24:17-21 *The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.* (NIV)

Eliezer observed her character, finding her industrious and willing to serve.

24:22-27 *When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring [worn on the left nostril] weighing a beka [NKJ: "half a shekel"] and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night." Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, saying, "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."* (NIV)

Eliezer's Example

Eliezer recognized that this was not just circumstantial; he fully understood that God had guided his journey. Eliezer then set the right example of quickly giving God thanks for answering a prayer.

24:28-33 *The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say." "Then tell us," Laban said. (NIV)*

Laban

It was not Rebekah's father, Bethuel, who came out to meet Eliezer, nor was it Bethuel who encouraged Eliezer to tell his story, rather it was Rebekah's brother, Laban, who seemed to be in charge.

From Laban's statement in vs 31, it seems evident that Nahor's family worshipped the same God as Abraham. Since a clan normally worshipped the same god, Terah, Abraham's father, must have begun to worship God at some point in time. This could have been due to the influence of Noah or Shem. Terah was contemporary with Noah for the last 127 years of Noah's life, and Shem died 75 years after Terah.

24:34-49 *So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. And my master made me swear an oath, and said, 'You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, but go to my father's family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.'" "Then I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?'" He*

replied, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's family. Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you—you will be released from my oath.' "When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden [NKJ: "virgin", Hebrew: "haalmah" = "a young woman"] comes out to draw water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," and if she says to me, "Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too," let her be the one the LORD has chosen for my master's son.' "Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' "She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also. "I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' "She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' "Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, Who had led me on the right road 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.'" (NIV)

"Which Way to Turn"

If God had not chosen Rebekah, then Eliezer still had other members of Nahor's descendants to interview.

24:50 Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. (NIV)

Marriage Negotiations

The social customs of the area of Upper Mesopotamia required the brother to negotiate the marriage of his sisters, explaining why Laban was in charge of the proceedings. In later Israelite practice, the father did the marriage negotiations for his daughters.

Bethuel

Some commentaries, such as Josephus, state that Bethuel, Laban's father, was probably dead by this time, and that the Bethuel mentioned here was a brother.

24:51-53 Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed." When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the LORD. Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. (NIV)

Absence of Father

In the presentation of gifts, Laban is mentioned before Rebekah's mother, and her father received nothing—indicating he was not present.

24:54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master." (NIV)

24:55 Her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." (NRS)

24:56-59 But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master." Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said. So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse [Deborah, GEN 35:8] and Abraham's servant and his men. (NIV)

Rebekah's Consent

It was customary at that time, in that area, to require the woman's consent for marriage. Rebekah, a type of the NT Church, shows she is willing to give everything up—including her way of life—in order to become the wife of a man she had never seen—a man who had been sacrificed and dead in his father's mind for three days.

24:60-62 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister [use of this term indicates it was Laban who pronounced the blessing], may you increase to thousands upon thousands [NKJ: "become the mother of thousands of ten thousands"]; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies." Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left. Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi ["well of the Living One who sees me" or "well of the Living"], for he was living in the Negev. (NIV)

Beer Lahai Roi

This was the well where the angel had first appeared to Hagar.

24:63-65 One evening when he had gone out into the open country hoping to meet them, he looked and saw camels approaching. When Rebecca saw Isaac, she dismounted from her camel, saying to the servant, 'Who is that man walking across the open country towards us?' When the servant answered, 'It is my master,' she took her veil and covered herself. (REB)

24:66-67 Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (NIV)