

Genesis 24:28-67
The Choice of Rebekah, Confirmed

Believers have the luxury of knowing that all things happen for a purpose. While many in the scientific community argue that the universe is random in its nature, believers know that God is sovereign and He works all things for His glory and our good. This well known fact ought never to be taken lightly by the children of God. As we move through life, making decisions and trying to find our way in His kingdom, we must never forget that God has a plan, and that His plan is perfect.

Abraham's servant had been entrusted with a seemingly impossible challenge. He was to travel hundreds of miles back to the family homeland to find the one woman God had chosen for Isaac to marry. He had taken camels laden with both provisions for the journey and gifts for the future bride, and made his way to the Tigris Euphrates River valley. There, he had rested by a well and called upon God to reveal if the girl He had chosen was among those in the village.

In one sense, the servant made it very easy for God. He asked for a specific sign to be given. The details were probably less important than the fact that the servant was trying to find a girl with the character that would be appropriate for the wife of his master's son. Still, the servant was very specific, and God was equally precise in providing the sign that Rebekah was indeed the girl. Rejoicing, the servant praised God for granting him success thus far on his journey, "blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers" (Genesis 24:27).

The Servant Relates His Story

Having given Rebekah some gifts as a token of his esteem, the servant asked if he and his entourage could stay with her family. Overwhelmed by the series of events that she likely did not fully understand, "the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things" (v. 28). The rapid movements that had characterized the meeting of the servant and Rebekah were continued here in the narrative. The servant 'ran' to meet her (v. 17). She had 'quickly' lowered her jar so he could drink (v. 18). She "quickly . . . ran" to the well to fetch water for his camels (v. 20). Now the girl ran to tell her family of what had transpired.

Some have noted that Rebekah went to "her mother's household" (v. 28). That wording seems out of place since normally the father would be considered the head of the family. One explanation is that this might mean either that her father, Bethuel was dead, which seems unlikely since he makes a brief appearance in v. 50. Another reasonable option is that perhaps that in this particular part of Mesopotamia, the family structure was matrilineal. A final interpretation is that Bethuel was very much alive, but old and perhaps not able to conduct the negotiations required with the servant, which was why Rebekah's brother played such a prominent role in the narrative.

In any case, the quick pace of the narrative is continued as "Laban ran outside to the man at the spring" (v. 29). The valuable jewelry and Rebekah's report of the conversation between herself and the servant had prompted such behavior. "He saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard

the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, ‘this is what the man said to me,’ he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring” (v. 30). Was Laban simply surprised to see his sister so attired? Or was he greedy to meet a man who bestowed such lavish gifts on a stranger? The latter is not unlikely as Laban, we will come to learn, had a fondness for riches, which we will see in future narratives involving Jacob.

In any case Laban moved with such speed that the servant had not had time to organize his men and camels and make their way to Rebekah’s home. Laban found him still at the well, and he wasted no time in extending his offer of lodging. “Come in, blessed of the Lord! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?” (v. 31). Interesting here is Laban’s use of the term *Yahweh*. *Elohim* would have been a more generic term for a pagan such as Laban to use, but perhaps it giving her account of the meeting with the servant, Rebekah had related the servant’s prayer to him as well.

The servant accepted the hospitality. “The man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him” (v. 32). We do not know how wealthy Laban was, though it seemed that he was well off enough to provide servants of his own for his sister (v. 59). Nevertheless, providing for ten camels and several men must have been no small undertaking, so we can assume that Laban was rather well off.

Not caring for the animals only, Laban provided a meal for the servant and his men. But the servant, with the sense of duty that must have commended him so well to Abraham, “when food was set before him to eat, he said, ‘I will not eat until I have told my business’” (v. 33). The servant refused to eat until he had resolved his duty. Recognizing that the servant was serious, Laban offered no objection. The servant then related what was essentially the first half of the narrative we have studied so far. He was not slavish in his details, but rather emphasized the hand of God in all circumstances. It was clear that his focus was to demonstrate that his finding Rebekah had been the will of God.

So, the servant began by focusing on the blessings God had given his master, Abraham. “The Lord has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys” (v. 35). But more than merely worldly wealth, Abraham had also been blessed with a son; a son that would inherit all that Abahaam had. “Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master in her old age, and he has given him all that he has” (v. 36). This was not the time for modesty. This was a serious negotiation. The point the servant wanted to emphasize was that Abraham was wealthy, having been blessed by God, and that his son, Isaac, was to inherit it all.

We might note that the servant had no reason to mention Ishmael. To do so might only have caused Laban to be concerned in case he thought a rival to Abraham’s inheritance might lay on the outskirts of the narrative. Also, by pointing out that Sarah had given birth to Isaac in her old age, the servant was able to emphasize that Isaac was a miracle baby and thus another sign of God’s blessing. In addition, it also served the rather practical element of letting Laban know that Isaac was still a relatively young man and thus a suitable candidate for marrying Rebekah. Clearly Abraham had chosen this servant well.

The servant then moved from his master to his mission. 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 live; ³⁸but you shall go to my father’s house and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son” (v. 37-38). Interestingly, the servant included the concern he had raised with Abraham. ³⁹“I said to my master, ‘suppose the woman does not follow me.’ ⁴⁰He said to me, ‘the Lord, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father’s house; ⁴¹then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath” (v. 39-41).

One might think that giving Laban a way to decline the offer of marriage might not have seemed prudent. Yet the servant was acknowledging only what would have been understood anyway, and he did so in a way that empowered Laban and the family to hold sway in the decision process. Tactfully, the servant did not inform Laban that under no circumstances was Isaac to return to his homeland. Either Rebekah would come to Canaan, or the marriage was not possible.

The servant then went on to relate his meeting with Rebekah. He made certain he was not paraphrasing what had happened, as can be seen from the frequent use of direct quotations in his retelling.

⁴²“So I came today to the spring, and said, ‘O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now You will make my journey on which I go successful; ⁴³behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, “please let me drink a little water from your jar”; ⁴⁴and she will say to me, “you drink, and I will draw for your camels also”; let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master’s son.’ ⁴⁵Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, ‘please let me drink.’ ⁴⁶She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder, and said, ‘drink, and I will water your camels also’; so I drank, and she watered the camels also. ⁴⁷Then I asked her, and said, ‘whose daughter are you?’ And she said, ‘the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him’; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. ⁴⁸And I bowed low and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son” (v. 42-48).

The servant insisted that it was the Lord Who had answered his prayer. All credit for the discovery of Rebekah should go to Yahweh. One change in this retelling was that the servant claimed not to have given Rebekah the gifts until he was certain of her parentage. In the original account, he had given her the rings and bracelets before he learned who she was. This may have been a subtle ploy to remind Laban that the servant was not ready to commit himself until he knew that the potential bride for Isaac was indeed from Abraham’s family line.

Now, having given his account, the servant sat back and concluded, “so now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left” (v. 49). He couched his request in the same language that he had used for how the Lord had dealt with both himself and with Abraham. The Lord had shown ‘kindness’ and now the servant wanted an immediate answer as to whether the family of Rebekah would do the same.

Laban's Response

Clearly, the servant was successful persuading Laban that his being there had been the will of God. “Laban and Bethuel replied, ‘the matter comes from the Lord; so we cannot speak to you bad or good’” (v. 50). The servant had left them little choice, other than to clearly defy the will of God. The men of Rebekah’s family admitted that it was not their place to intervene to stop God’s will in the course of events. They simply said, “⁵¹here is Rebekah 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 ground before the Lord. ⁵³The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. ⁵⁴Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night” (v. 51-54). It was clear that “the Lord has spoken” (v. 51).

Since this was the only appearance of Bethuel in the narrative, some commentators have argued that his involvement is an addition, and not part of the original text. As we have mentioned, they suggest that, for example, Scripture said Rebekah went to “her mother’s household” (v. 28). And clearly, Scripture makes it obvious that Laban played the major role in the negotiations. Also, the text mentions that the servant gave costly presents to Rebekah, her brother, and her mother, but none, it seemed to Bethuel (v. 53). As we mentioned before, though, there are several other explanations for the seeming insignificance of Bethuel in the narrative without compromising the integrity of Scripture. It could be that the family was matrilineal, or perhaps that Bethuel was too old and ill to play such an active role.

We are left to decide whether Laban was merely being polite or if he genuinely believed that this was from the Lord. Again, to Laban, as a pagan, Yahweh was another of many gods, and had no particular significance for Laban. On the other hand, Laban made no mention of Abraham’s wealth or of the family connection. He simply agreed to allow Rebekah to leave because he claimed to have seen the unmistakable hand of God in the proceedings. The servant, himself, recognized this, and he worshipped yet again to give thanks to God for His providence (v. 52). His anxiety, if it had even been present, had been abandoned to adoration. His task was now complete. The servant had served his master well. And God was to be given all the glory.

The matter resolved, “he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night” (v. 54). All seemed well, and after a good night's rest the servant was ready to return to Abraham. However, in the morning, when the servant requested that Laban “send me away to my master” (54), Laban and her mother delayed. Instead, “her brother and her mother said, ‘let the girl stay with us a few days, say ten; afterward she may go’” (v. 55). It was quite natural, I think, since they knew that they were losing Rebekah forever. All of this had come upon the family quite abruptly, and the idea of a week or so of farewells did not seem out of place.

The servant would not accept this, however. Hardhearted though it may have seemed, he insisted “do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master” (v. 56). Faced with his intransigence, the family determined to let Rebekah have the last word. “⁵⁷And they said, ‘we will call the girl and consult her wishes.’ ⁵⁸Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go’” (v. 57-58). Rebekah was finally asked her thoughts, and her

response was simple and quiet, “I will go” (v. 58). Her agreement to the arranged marriage left nothing more to say.

And so the family prepared to part with their sister and daughter. ⁵⁹They sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰They blessed Rebekah and said to her,

‘May you, our sister,
Become thousands of ten thousands,
And may your descendants possess
The gate of those who hate them’” (v. 59-60).

Her nurse, we later learn was named Deborah (Genesis 35:8), must have held an honored position in the household. She likely played the same role for Rebekah that the unnamed servant who had been such an integral part of this narrative played for Abraham. She would provide a reminder of home as well as meet the particular needs of a young bride-to-be. Naturally as a servant, she was given no choice in the matter.

The blessing given by the family was a commonplace in the culture. The idea of “thousands of ten thousands” was meant only to imply an uncountable amount and reminds the reader of the promise given to Sarah (Genesis 17:16) and even Hagar (Genesis 16:10). In a culture where barrenness was the ultimate curse for a woman, the ability to have countless children was seen as the greatest blessing. Laban and her mother could give Rebekah no greater blessing.

Isaac and Rebekah

The scene now shifted back to Canaan. Scripture provides no details of the return journey there. The month or so that it must have taken passed silently by in Scripture. Instead, we learn that “Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev” (v. 62). He was likely overseeing some of his father’s herds and flocks in the region. And it is interesting that we do see Isaac here for the first time as independent from his father.

We can recall that Beer-lahai-roi was the name given to the well in the area by Hagar when she had encountered an angel during her flight from Sarah (Genesis 16:14). It was also here that God had promised Hagar a future and it was where Isaac and Rebekah would eventually make their home (Genesis 25:11). So, one day, Isaac “went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming” (v. 63). The word used for ‘meditate’ could mean either to pray or to complain. Perhaps Isaac, who no doubt was aware of the mission on which his father had sent the servant, was praying for a successful conclusion. Perhaps he was complaining that it was taking so long, or perhaps that he had not been permitted to find a wife for himself. Scripture is unclear.

Isaac saw a group of camels on the horizon. Rebekah saw Isaac as well. ⁶⁴Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. ⁶⁵She said to the servant, ‘who is that man walking in the field to meet us?’ And the servant said, ‘he is my master.’ Then she took her veil and covered herself.” (v. 64-65). The servant identified Isaac as “my master” which may have confused Rebekah, since it was only Abraham who had been referred to by that name thus far. Still, Rebekah displayed the proper decorum of the culture by covering herself with her veil. Even assuming that it was

her father-in-law and not her husband who was coming to meet them, social custom dictated such modesty.

“The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done” (c. 66). We can only imagine Isaac’s feelings as he discreetly sought to catch a glimpse of his bride-to-be. We do not know if the servant and his party had stopped to find Abraham on their way to the Negev to give him an account of the success of their journey. Surely the servant would have reported first to Abraham. After all, Abraham had been an old man, perhaps there was even concern he would not live long enough to see the wife the servant would find for Isaac. So it is not likely that the servant and their party went directly to the Negev to find Isaac. More likely they found Abraham, and from him learned where to find Isaac as he pastured his father’s flocks.

The marriage of Rebekah and Isaac was soon consummated. “Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (v. 67). It was a poignant ending to the narrative. Isaac and his new bride enjoyed intimacy. Isaac was comforted after Sarah’s death. Since Scripture is silent on the matter, we are left to wonder at Rebekah’s feelings at the time.

Takeaways

The fact that God is sovereign is an undeniable theological truth. Yet, as profound as it is, it really is a very simple concept as well. God is intentional. God has a plan, and He is in control of that plan. Nothing can thwart or impede that plan without His consent. Every detail of life is worked out precisely as God would have it. If God did not have a plan, the universe would be random. If God was not able to execute His plan, He would not be much of a God worth worshipping.

We see in this narrative the unfolding of God’s perfect plan for His chosen family line. As much as it may have seemed to the servant, or to us as readers, nothing had been left to chance. God had orchestrated the servant’s travels. God had ordained that Rebekah would be coming to the well just as the servant prayed for divine guidance. God had prepared the hearts of Laban and the rest of the family for the departure of Rebekah.

So, as we go through the days of our lives, making decisions prayerfully, may we seek God’s grace to find ourselves centered in His perfect will.