

me laughter” (Gen. 21:6). Yes, with a capital “L.” And suddenly, the wait was worthwhile. Isn’t that how it goes?

I’m amused at the lack of mention of Sarah’s old age in the text. Abraham’s alone is mentioned—and twice, in fact, but who’s counting (vv. 2,7)? After all, who could do anything but take his hat off to Sarah as she labored courageously and brought forth a son, nursing him like a twenty-year-old mother might do?

Abraham was beside himself. He believed God, so he knew that he would have a son. But for the life of him, Abraham didn’t know how he’d feel. Words are assigned to the smaller things, after all. Bigger matters are too sacred. You can’t describe them. If you’re wise, you just sit a spell and soak your weary, wandering feet in them.

I am tender to those of you who may find today’s lesson bittersweet, even painful. Perhaps your marriage has long outlasted a sense of passion or your womb remains empty—though you’ve prayed and prayed for a child. Was there any reason this was a difficult lesson for you (beyond the annoying teacher)?

Take heart, Dear One. This lesson may have been for you more than anyone. If Isaac’s birth says anything at all, surely it says that nothing is too difficult for the Lord. Among thousands of other things, God can perform miracles in marriages long past their prime. He can give offspring (using doctors, physically, by adoption, spiritual children—whatever the means)—to the barren. What may be a little more unsettling is the thought that both marriage and birth miracles could happen to the same couple!

That’s what happened with our Abraham and Sarah. I feel as if we stopped by their home today. In fact, the thought occurred to me what kind of gift I might have brought. I think a fun ending to today’s lesson is to muse over the gift we’d bring for Sarah or baby Isaac if we were invited to a party in honor of Isaac’s arrival. You’re welcome to think in terms of today’s kinds of gifts—keepsakes or modern conveniences—but conclude with a specific item that you’d give for such a special occasion. Oh, lighten up and do it! I’ll make sure to include my gift idea in the leader’s guide so I can share mine at small group, too.

You’re such a good sport. Thanks for letting me study with you today.

Week Four * Day Three

He Loved Her

I so wish we could watch today’s scenes on video together. I’d personally pop the corn and pour the Coke™, but you’d have to keep the remote control or I’d push pause every few seconds for discussion. The narratives in God’s Word are as rich and captivating as any great novel. The authenticity of these stories makes them all the better and proves—at least to me—that God Himself is a romantic.

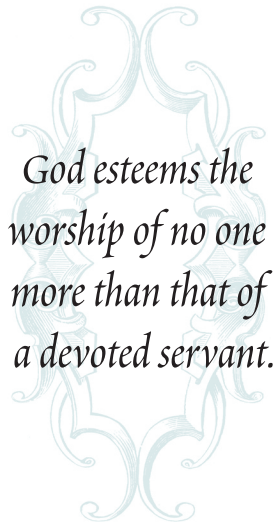


Today’s Treasure

“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her.”

Genesis 24:67

We will study the remainder of Genesis 24 today, but let's read it in two parts to let the drama build. First read Genesis 24:52-60. Many scholars believe the senior servant Abraham sent on this mission was Eliezer of Damascus who is mentioned in Genesis 15:2-4. If so, how special had he been to Abraham based on a review of those verses?



Whether or not the senior servant in Genesis 24 was Eliezer, his age indicates he'd been in Abraham's service for many years. I am touched by the depth of his own relationship with the Lord and the worship he demonstrated in Genesis 24:52.

How did the old servant respond to God after Laban and Bethuel agreed to let Rebekah become Isaac's wife (v. 52)?

The Hebrew transliteration *bawah* means *to prostrate oneself . . . worship*.⁸ As you picture this scene, imagine the old man going to his knees, perhaps even to his face. Surely the God of Abraham was also the God of the servant. I daresay God esteems the worship of no one more than that of a devoted servant, particularly one who is cloaked in anonymity and who is known only as *his Master's*.

After worshipping his faithful God, Abraham's servant presented the family with a lavish dowry. A celebratory dinner took place and all turned in for the night. Can you imagine Rebekah getting a wink of sleep? She knew nothing about the man she would marry except that they came from the same "stock" as my grandmother might say. The custom of marrying someone sight unseen has been practiced widely. Still, I can hardly imagine it. I fear my mind would be inundated with *what ifs*.

How about you? List several *what ifs* you would have in Rebekah's position.

I couldn't agree more! And I could add a few! *What if* he doesn't like dogs? *What if* he has no teeth? *What if*—this is a big one, girls—he snores? I already loved Keith before he started waking the dead with his snoring. I don't know if I could have stood it from the first night. Don't you wish we were chatting face-to-face about this right now? What fun we'd have!

Speaking of fun, get a load of Genesis 24:54-55. Abraham's servant awakened with a one-track mind: "Send me on my way to my master." After all, Abraham was old, and the servant wanted to present this new bride to him and relish his master's joy. Every true servant lives to hear, "Well done!"

Instead, the initial response with submission to God's will, what request appears in verse 55?

Look carefully for the key to the change of heart. According to verse 55, who entered the picture?

“Her brother and her _____ replied ...”

The mother! She obviously decided they needed to keep Rebekah for another 10 days or so. I love the “or so” part. I’m a mom who can picture this moment vividly. I loved planning for Amanda’s wedding and having our own Cinderella Ball the evening she and Curt were married. I didn’t even mind sending them off for their honeymoon, but when they returned I suddenly developed an unexpected feeling. I felt like she should come back home for a while. We’d grow her up a bit more, wait until we were tired of her, and maybe—in 10 days, 10 years *or so*—give her back to Curt. A mama needs a little time! How much, a man may ask? A little bit more.

Please note who cast the deciding vote according to verses 57-58.

Bethuel, the father Laban, the brother Rebekah, herself

This point is important. From the time Abraham first issued instructions to his servant, coercion was clearly out of the question. If the woman did not want to come with the servant, Abraham clearly stated that the servant was released from the oath (24:8). Remember how important “firsts” are in the study of God’s Word. We will witness Isaac and Rebekah’s imminent marriage as the first in the line through which God chose to bless all nations. Abraham and Sarah were already married when God called Abraham. I believe we see a conceptual precedent God set through the direction of His “friend,” Abraham. Prospective wives were to be respected and asked. If they said “no,” they were to be released. If they said “yes,” the wives were to be blessed with treasures (in our application, chiefly of the heart) and treated as God’s chosen gifts for their husbands—not treated as possessions.

I have a man who sees me as God intended. If you’re married, I deeply hope and pray that you do, too. If you do not, go to God right now. Ask Him to change your spouse’s heart and attitude toward you. Also ask what changes your heart needs for healing to come. Do not cease to ask until you receive such healing! Cry out for your marriage, Dear One!

Don’t miss the blessing spoken over Rebekah as she is sent on her way. Please write it in this space (vv. 59-60).

Rebekah’s family meant this blessing literally, but we as God’s family can make spiritual applications. Rewrite this prayer in spiritual terms as a New Testament believer (v. 60):

I think one of my most important prayers is for people to bear much fruit for God’s glory. When we bring people into His family together, we build spiritual tenacity to possess the gates of their (our) enemies (the devil and his dark hosts). My lexicon tells me that “the city

gate was where people congregated for business transactions.”⁹ You can be sure the enemy and his demonic forces congregate to make all sorts of seedy business transactions. Never doubt that he’s a planner. Oh, that the offspring coming from our family lines would stand so firmly against our enemies that every demonic plan would be thwarted! Lord, let it be!

Sisters, let’s stop right now and pray our physical and spiritual families will stand firm. When you have prayed, check this box and proceed.

Now read the remainder of Genesis 24. (vv. 61-66) Surely you see some romance in these passages. What is your favorite part?

Keep in mind that Rebekah, her nurse, the old servant, and his men traveled quite a distance to reach Abraham’s homestead. Certainly they’d seen other people on their journey. These roads were well established and frequented, as long-distance travelers stayed close to rivers. Even though Rebekah’s entourage met any number of people along the way, I believe Scripture strongly suggests what we might call love at first sight as they approached the field where Isaac stood.

If you don’t like romance, you might consider stopping right here. On the other hand, reading on might do you some good! Let’s not grow cynical. God is the author of pure romance. Let’s enjoy the story and perhaps even invite God to change our own. If we have to already possess something to enjoy reading about it, how do we know what to hope for? Hope pertains not only to this world but to Heaven where you will no doubt have the perfect Groom. But, let’s get back to our story . . .

Maybe Rebekah’s heart leapt suddenly as she looked in the distance, feeling somehow that the approaching stranger might be Isaac.

What was Isaac doing when he looked up and saw the camels approaching (v. 63)?

The word *meditate* could simply mean thinking or even roaming about, but it could also be a form of a verb that means praying. Keith’s very religious grandmother went to her grave thinking her grandson and I met at church. We met at a fraternity party. After he told her I was a “good Christian girl,” she assumed we met at church, and he never got around to correcting her for the remaining 20 years of her life. If Keith was “meditating” when I met him, the word meant “thinking” or “roaming about.” It most assuredly did not mean “praying.” Isaac, however, did not belong to a fraternity and might indeed have been in a prayerful state.

What did Rebekah do when she learned the man in the distance was Isaac (v. 65)?

If you don’t know already, you’ll be blessed to learn the common custom of veiling a bride originates right here in Genesis 24:65. I learned this when I researched wedding customs for Amanda. My heart tenders as I read with you that when Rebekah saw Isaac she “took her veil and covered herself.” One of my coworkers shared this morning that her husband took

their grandchildren to a public place yesterday and said to her later, “I was stunned over the way young women dress these days in public!” He was embarrassed and uncomfortable with his grandchildren growing up in such a world.

My friends in the contemporary Christian group “Point of Grace” have been wildly popular among young adolescent and teenage girls. Having been entrusted by God with such a platform, the group feels called to openly address the immodesty in our culture and God’s plan for all things adolescent, from wardrobes to sexuality. One of the group’s mottos has been “dress classy, not trashy.” I like that! Some of the girls I see out and about offer a public viewing meant by God for their husbands alone. I am saddened to say that I at times dressed immodestly in my young, desperate, and self-destructive years. We must think of ourselves as treasures of God rather than giving ourselves away flippantly and cheaply. Where is the mystery in our culture’s approach? Rebekah demonstrated the mystery of modesty. That’s healthy, Sisters.

The concluding verses in chapter 24 grant us another characteristic of the first wedding we get to witness in God’s chosen line. Isaac “loved her.” The Hebrew word is strong, teeming with joy, protection, and demonstrative affection.¹⁰

Let’s view Isaac and Rebekah as precedent-setters. From their example, what would you like to see adopted into godly marriages?

Ideally, in our opinions Isaac would have chosen his own bride, but remember that Abraham insisted, “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” (v. 8). Abraham did not want Isaac, the child of promise, enticed by the old Mesopotamian culture. With that in mind, I see a number of precedents set by Isaac and Rebekah’s example: the ideal of parental blessing, prayer and the leadership of God, mutual consent, a draw of hearts toward one another, and a growing love that outlasts the romance of first sight. From where I sit, the only thing missing is her mother. Imagine Isaac saying, “We’ll send for your mother in ten days, ten years or so.”

I have loved studying today’s lesson with you. I hope you’ve enjoyed it, too. I’ll conclude with a fitting quote from G.K. Chesterton on marriage. Meditate on it, and I don’t mean “roam around” it!

“They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—‘free love’—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word.”¹¹

