

CLOSENESS TO THE LORD

Genesis 24

The account of the choice of Rebekah as the wife for Isaac in Genesis 24 presents a picture of Abraham and his chief servant (probably Eliezer of Damascus) as men whose lives were lived in constant reference to the Lord. It challenges us to evaluate the way our own lives are directed to the Lord and His will.

Abraham's actions were governed by the Lord's promise of the land of Canaan to his son Isaac and his descendants, and His promise to bless all nations through the Messianic Descendant of Isaac. Because of that, Abraham was determined that Isaac should not marry a wife from among the daughters of the Canaanites. He would not even allow Isaac to go back to Haran personally. His determination is evident in making his servant swear a solemn oath to carry out this special task faithfully. Rather than risk diffusion of devotion to the Lord through an idol-worshipping wife of Isaac, Abraham chose to look for a close relative as Isaac's wife. That was the basic reason why there was so much marriage of close relatives within these generations of Abraham's family. Isaac was going to be marrying Abraham's grand niece.

Abraham's trust in the Lord's promises gave him confidence. When his servant asked, "What is the women will not come back with me?" he simply answered, "The LORD, before whom I have been living, will send His angel with you. He will make your journey successful, and you shall get my son a wife from my relatives and from my father's family."

Closeness to the Lord is indicated in a remarkable way in Abraham's servant. When he reached the town of Nahor, in the cool part of the day when women came out to draw water, he made his camels kneel down at the well, but did not give them water himself. He prayed, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham) give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 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 shall water your camels) too,' let here be the one You have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown kindness to my master." His references to the Lord's kindness to his master Abraham should be understood with reference to the Lord's gracious covenant with Abraham, which focused on the descendants of Isaac.

Abraham's servant related the happenings of the day to the Lord's guidance) answer to prayer, and he did not forget to praise God. As soon as Rebekah introduced herself and indicated that he would be welcome to spend the night at Bethuel's home, the servant bowed down and worshipped 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 my journey to the house of my master's relatives." He worshipped and praised God, who had led him on the right road.

God hears prayer sometimes even before people get around *to* praying, and it was so on this occasion. Abraham's servant reported to Bethuel and Laban in their home, "I had not yet finished saying this in my heart when there was Rebekah coming out with her jar on her shoulder."

Whether we should test the Lord by asking for such signs is questionable. It comes into the area of what the New Testament calls faith, in the sense of heroic faith, faith that moves mountains, which not every believer in God has. It is absolute confidence that the Lord will provide, even when there is no evidence on hand that He will.

There is some question about the exclusive worship of the Lord in the home of Laban and Bethuel. Later when Jacob left Laban, Rachel stole her father's household gods. However) on this occasion, the way the Lord was directing the course of events for Abraham's servants forced them to acknowledge: "The thing has come from the LORD. We cannot say anything bad or anything good to you. 51 Here before you is Rebekah. Take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has said."

Again Abraham's first response was to bow down to the ground before the Lord.

The commitment of Abraham's servant to his task is also evident in his determination to leave for home immediately the next day. Surely, we think, common courtesy should have granted Rebekah's mother and brother's request for ten days for Rebekah to prepare for her new life and let them get used to the idea of her departure over a ten-day period.

The Lord's guidance of events was so apparent to Abraham's servant that he insisted, "Do not delay me. Now that the LORD has made my errand successful, send me on my way, that I may go to my master."

Rebekah's willingness to go off to marry a man she had never even met reminds us of some of the German women in the nineteenth century who were sent out by Lutheran seminaries in Germany as wives for

missionaries. When the boat arrived in the port, there the men were waiting for them disembark, each girl was wondering which of the men on the wharf would be her future husband. We wouldn't encourage that practice today, you might well say, in days when so many marriages are breaking up, even when a couple know each other quite well at the time of marriage.

They called Rebekah, and asked her personally, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I shall go." One word in Hebrew. What an evening for Rebekah, with the course of her future life settled within several hours.

Recognition of the Lord's guidance and His material and spiritual blessings on their relative Abraham lay behind their blessing: "Our sister, may you become the mother of millions. And may your descendants take possession of the cities of those who hate them."

We should not think that the Lord's guidance throughout these events is restricted to special people like the patriarchs. There really is no such thing as chance and luck. We acknowledge that, from our point of view, we think that affairs could have turned out differently. Things are contingent. However, from God's point of view there is not only foreknowledge, but also absolute necessity. For example, the time of death of each one of us will certainly not take God by surprise. It is fixed in His providence, not in a way that makes Him responsible for sin of ours, and not in a superficial sense, that whatever happens is right. Marriages are indeed made in heaven. In this instance, we should see the particular plan of God in operation, to choose for Himself a special people who would be the bearers of His Messianic promise, through Isaac and Rebekah, and, eventually, through them, His salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.