

Truth for Today

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Lessons from the Lives of Old Testament Characters: Rebekah

The Old Testament story of Rebekah is one of the great romance stories of the Bible. It is the story of how the aged Abraham sends his servant back to the place of Abraham's kin to find a wife for his son Isaac, and how that servant, guided by God, finds himself at the well outside the city of Nahor and asks God to show him who, of the daughters of the men of the city, should be the one for Isaac. Amazingly before he ends his prayer, one of the young women comes to him and answers his questions in exactly the way he had prayed that she should.

When all this is recounted to her brother and father, they say, "The thing proceeds from the Lord" (Genesis 24:50). But the final decision has to be made by Rebekah. When she is asked, "Will you go with this man?" she immediately replies, "I will go" (Genesis 24:58). So she leaves her family and home to take a journey of about eight hundred miles, with a servant she had only just met, to meet a man whom she had never met, to become his wife. The meeting of Isaac and Rebekah and his love for her is the happy ending to a wonderful story. But this is a story that has a deeper meaning than just the historical facts that we have related.

We can only rightly understand the Old Testament, if we look at it in the light of the New Testament. Otherwise it will be just a collection of stories and endless instructions concerning the nation of Israel. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11, tells us that "they were written for our admonition".

We are going to consider Rebekah as she appears in Scripture as a picture of the Church, as the wife of Christ. In order to understand this we need to look at when she is first mentioned in the Bible. A very helpful guide for us in studying the Bible is that when a thing is first mentioned, we often get help there in the way in which it may be used throughout the scriptures. In Genesis 22 there are two remarkable firsts. In verse 2 we have the first mention of love, "And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest". Here we see the love of a father to his son.

This verse clearly shows us that Isaac is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's well beloved Son. Can we not recall those wonderful words in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"? The story in Genesis 22, goes on to tell us of the way that Abraham took Isaac with him, and they went both of them together, to the Mount Moriah, where Isaac was taken, and bound, and laid on the altar. Abraham raises the knife to slay his son, but his hand is stayed, and a substitute was found for Isaac in the ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. What a wonderful picture of the death of the Lord Jesus this is. God gave His well beloved Son to die for us, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

We are told in Hebrews 11:19 that Abraham believed that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead: "From whence also he received him in a figure". This verse makes it plain that Isaac is a picture of the Lord Jesus as risen from the dead. How remarkable it is that just at this point in Genesis 22 we have the first mention of Rebekah in the Bible. She is the one whom God had in His mind as a companion for Isaac. This is a picture of the church being in the mind of God from eternity, a suitable companion for His Son, as a Man risen from the dead.

Rebekah is the daughter of Bethuel, who was the eighth son of Nahor. This is the second mention of the number eight in the Bible. The first one is in 21:4, "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old". Also in Colossians 2:11, Paul says to the Christians, "In whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands ... by the circumcision of Christ". Here circumcision is used to describe a certain aspect of the death of Christ, how that in His death, He brought to an end all that we were as in the flesh, our unconverted condition, so that we might have a new beginning with Christ in resurrection. It is perfectly in keeping with this truth that the number eight is used throughout Scripture to speak of a new beginning. For example, in the book of Acts, the Lord's day, which is the day that begins the Christian's week, was in fact the eighth day of the Jewish feast of Pentecost.

So Rebekah comes to light as being born of the eighth son, the one who was to be the wife of the man who in picture was raised from the dead. In chapter 23 Abraham's wife, Sarah, dies. She was, of course, the mother of Isaac. There is a divine significance in the historical order of these events, because she is a picture of the nation of Israel, of which Christ was born according to the flesh, the natural line. In the death of Christ, that natural relationship came to an end. His death was, in fact, a result of His being rejected by the nation of Israel, as John in John 1:11 says, "He came unto

His own things, and His own people received Him not". So in our subject we have in picture the Lord Jesus risen from the dead and the nation of Israel, His earthly people, for the moment set aside. This corresponds with Sarah dying.

In chapter 24 Abraham calls to him the steward of his house and gives him very precise instructions as to a suitable wife for his son Isaac. Let us read verses 1 to 6: "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac'".

And the servant said unto him, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?" And Abraham said unto him, "Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again".

Notice how insistent Abraham was about two things. Isaac must not have a wife from among the Canaanites, but from his own kindred, and that Isaac on no account was to be taken to the land from which Abraham had been called out. The wife of Isaac must be of the same lineage as Abraham, and that woman must be prepared to leave everything, as Abraham had done at the call of the God of Glory. There are very important truths being set out for us here in order that the Lord Jesus Christ, the man out of death and in resurrection, should have a companion, she must be of His own lineage, having the same life and nature as Himself, for without this she could never answer to His love and His desires and not be able to share His place in glory. Similarly, there was not found an help meet for Adam in the garden of Eden amongst all the beasts of the field. Why was this? They did not have his life and his nature, which he had received from the breath of God, and so they could not fulfil the love and yearnings of his heart. Adam's companion had to be built from a rib taken from his side. When Adam saw Eve, he said, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

This wonderful truth is brought out in that touching scene at the sepulchre, in John 20. Mary, who thought she had lost the Lord Jesus forever, was let into a far more wonderful thing than she had ever known before. When the risen Lord Jesus made Himself known to her by calling her by her name, "Mary", she would have held Him. But she was not allowed to, because that earthly relationship was ended in His death. But she was to know and have the Lord Jesus in a far better way as risen from the dead. He said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). The Lord Jesus had never before called His disciples, "My brethren". He could not, because He was the second man out of heaven. But now as risen from the dead, He calls them brethren because a new relationship was being formed with those who would have His own life and nature, because He was going to give them eternal life - so they could share in all that He had.

How then was a suitable wife for Isaac to be found? The unnamed servant of Abraham's house was commissioned to perform this task. I believe this servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit, who was sent down from heaven, from where the Lord Jesus now is. He is now forming here the Church, the companion of Christ. This happened historically on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came down upon all those believers who were gathered together in one place, and began that work which will unite all believers into that one body, which soon will be caught up to be with Christ forever.

So the servant takes that long journey to the city of Nahor and waits at the well outside the city. He prays for guidance and asks that the damsel to whom he shall say, "Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also" (Genesis 24:14), that this would be the one chosen for Isaac. Before he had ended his prayer, there stood before him Rebekah who answers his request just as he had prayed. He wonders if his mission was to be successful, not knowing who she was. How glad he was when he learnt that she was the daughter of Bethuel, who was Abraham's nephew. He gives her the gifts of jewellery that he had brought and she introduces him to her family.

After hearing his story and seeing the riches and the jewels that he had given to Rebekah, they consent to her going to be Isaac's wife. They acknowledged that God's hand was over it all. Then the servant wants to be away quickly to bring Rebekah to Isaac. This is an illustration of the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus and bringing us into the enjoyment of all that is His in the presence of His Father. You remember Jesus' words in John 16:14 and 15, about the Spirit of Truth, "He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you". Abraham's servant had given to Rebekah some of the riches that Isaac had received from his father. Likewise the Holy Spirit gives to Christians today the power to enjoy the blessings that God wants to bring us into. These blessings have all been given into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rebekah's family try to delay her departure, suggesting that she stays at least ten days. Sadly our natural feelings may hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. How often perfectly natural and legitimate things are put before studying the Bible and learning about the person of the Lord Jesus. What excuses we sometimes make, rather than doing what the Bible tells us. In Luke 14 a man made a great supper and sent out his servants to ask those invited to come. But they all began to make excuses. One had bought a piece of ground and wanted to go and see it. Another had bought some oxen and wanted to try them. Then the worst of all said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:20). There was nothing wrong with buying a piece of land, or having oxen, and certainly not of getting married! But all these were considered more important than the invitation to the feast.

The call of the Lord Jesus that the Holy Spirit would bring to us, to give ourselves and our lives to Him should be the most important thing in our lives. If we allowed the Holy Spirit to control us, it certainly would be. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". How hard this may seem to us, just as the immediate departure of Rebekah from her family may have seemed to them. Isaac needed her more than they did! The Lord Jesus not only needs each one of us, but has a right to us, because Scripture says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). That price was the precious blood that He gave at Calvary.

Rebekah has to make the decision, "Will you go with this man?" She answers without any hesitation, "I will go" (Genesis 24:58). It is a wonderful moment in our lives when we give the Lord Jesus the first place and are prepared to allow Him to control, by the Holy Spirit, everything that we do and say. It will involve sacrifice. We may have to give up many legitimate things, which our friends and families may not understand if they have not done the same. But it will result in our enjoying the things of the Lord Jesus more and more, because the Holy Spirit will not be hindered in His work. The only time that we have the actual words of the Holy Spirit in the Bible are in Revelation 22:17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'". This shows us that when our hearts are controlled by the Spirit of God, our desires and His will be the same, calling for the Lord Jesus to come quickly and to take us to be with Himself.

So the long journey back to Hebron is begun. I do not doubt that, throughout that journey, the servant told Rebekah a great deal about Isaac, so much so that, before they had gone far, he was the only person that filled her heart. Being with him was what she wanted most. She may have got tired of the journey, but always before her was the thought that soon she would see him. As they drew towards the end, it almost seems as though the servant knew where Isaac would be waiting, and so it was. Rebekah sees Isaac walking in the fields towards them and asks, "What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" The servant replies, "It is my master" (Genesis 24:65).

The deep longings and feelings of her heart are seen at that moment. She springs off the camel, not waiting for someone to help her, and then takes a veil to cover herself. She could not wait to be with him, and, we would say, she ran into his arms. In covering herself with a veil, she indicated that she was now for him alone, her beauty was not to be seen by any other. This final event again is a picture of how the work of the Holy Spirit will not be complete in us until that wonderful moment when we shall see the Lord Jesus. Then, the Church complete, will be entirely for Him and not for any other. Isaac takes her into his mother's tent. "And she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:67). This is the second mention in Scripture of love. How fitting it is that the first is the love of a father to a son; the second is the love of that same son to his wife. Are we not reminded of those words in the prophet Isaiah near the end of that wonderful chapter, Isaiah 53:11, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

He will never be satisfied until you and I and every believer are with Him in glory.

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