

## Prayer

Who are we to ask anything of you, Lord Jesus? You have already done everything possible for the eternal salvation of our souls. Lead us therefore to the place of peace where we know that our sins are forgiven, and by Your Holy Spirit, give us the assurance that they are forgiven completely and for ever. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

## Further Suggestions for Prayer

### Weekly Theme: Driving and cars

Pray today for all those whose employment requires them to be constantly travelling on the roads; salesmen, drivers of all kinds, and company representatives, for example. The economies of the world need many people to do this kind of work.

Pray for the particular needs of those who have to spend long periods of time 'at the wheel', spending time away from home on a regular basis, and even in other countries. Pray for the effects of this on social and family life, and pray also for their safety.

## Meditation

Have you seen the power of the Lord, in the wonders of the world?

Have you listened to the Word of the Lord, telling you the truth?

Have you accepted the love of the Lord, freeing you from sin?

Have you felt the touch of the Lord, bringing peace to your soul?

Have you heard the voice of the Lord, asking You to follow?

Have you accepted the challenge of the Lord, and found your way prepared?

Have you known the presence of the Lord, giving reassurance to your spirit?

Have you experienced a miracle of the Lord, healing you from pain?

Have you looked forward to the coming of the Lord, promised in His Word?

For if you have, my friend, you have lived!

## Bible Study - Genesis 24:42-59

<sup>42</sup> "When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please make what I have come to do successful! <sup>43</sup> I am standing here by the spring of water. Therefore, if a young woman comes out to draw, and I say, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar," <sup>44</sup> and she says, "Drink, and I will also draw for your camels" then let her be the woman the LORD has chosen for my master's son.' <sup>45</sup> "I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' <sup>46</sup> She quickly lowered the jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. <sup>47</sup> Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor. So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. <sup>48</sup> Then I bowed down to worship the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right path to obtain the daughter of my master's relatives for his son.

<sup>49</sup> Now then, if you will deal with my master loyally and with truth, let me know; and if not, let me know, so that I may know which way to turn."

<sup>50</sup> Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD; we cannot comment whether it is for good or ill. <sup>51</sup> Look, here is Rebekah, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has said." <sup>52</sup> When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down before the LORD. <sup>53</sup> Then he took out gold and silver jewellery and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave valuable gifts to her brother and her mother. <sup>54</sup> 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 back to my master." <sup>55</sup> Her brother and mother said, "Let the girl remain with us for the usual period of time, and after that she may go." <sup>56</sup> But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go

back to my master." <sup>57</sup> They replied, "We will call the girl, and ask her about this." <sup>58</sup> So they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." <sup>59</sup> So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way together with her nurse, with Abraham's servant and his men.

## Introduction

This passage today forms the dramatic climax of the story we have been reading in the last few days. Abraham's servant has faithfully followed his master's instructions and travelled a long distance in faith to find a wife for Isaac, the 'son of promise' who would be Abraham's sole heir, and was led directly to the home of the extended family of Abraham's brother, Nahor. He swiftly came across Rebekah, who met all his criteria, and moved carefully to make his formal request for her to marry Isaac. Unknown to her, Isaac was not just the heir of a man of great wealth, but the bearer of God's Covenant, and as the second forefather of the people of Israel he would be an ancestor of Jesus, the Messiah and Saviour of the World. Although we know that all will work out for the best, we are none the less held by the story in suspense as we await to see firstly whether Rebekah will be allowed to go, and secondly, whether she will want to go to fulfil her great calling!

The servant told his story to Rebekah's parents and relatives in full, so that they could understand the way in which the Lord's hand had directed affairs. If he had not made this case, then his actions would have been considered as presumptuous, as he had already cut across the normal rules of hospitality by refusing to eat until he had spoken of his errand (see yesterday's passage, 24:33). He described the circumstances of his prayers (24:42-44) and how Rebekah had fulfilled every detail of his prayerful request (24:45-47) before making his proposition completely clear (24:48). The centre of the story was his demand of Rebekah's relatives to know whether they would accept the marriage proposition (24:49).

We gain the feeling from the relatives that they are distinctly unimpressed by some aspects of the situation they have been presented with. They would normally expect to receive substantial benefit from any marriage alliance, indeed, most marriages between wealthy families would be expected to be of benefit to both parties. Their initial reaction was neither 'good or ill' (24:50), but they were reluctant to stand against what they perceived to be God's will. Abraham's servant then presented them with gifts, as would have been expected, and finally agreed to sit and eat; but the real surprise came the following morning when he demanded to go immediately, very much against the social traditions of the day which would have wanted things done at a far more leisurely pace. In the end, Rebekah herself breaks the deadlock. She was asked directly whether she would go with Abraham's servant, and in the face of the complete unknown, said 'I will' (24:58).

This is a most extraordinary moment in the story. Although it is not said in so many words, it is impossible not to read these words and find in Rebekah's response the same kind of faith that Abraham had showed in heeding God's call to go to Canaan. This is quite literally what she did, and more than that, her response is similar to Abraham's 'faith' that was 'counted to him as righteousness' (15:6); she trusted that God would bless her as she accepted the proposition to be a wife and mother according to God's special will for her, and her generations. It is perhaps too negative to call this 'blind faith'; it was only blind from an earthly point of view. Perhaps she saw the Lord's hand in what was happening and was openly content to follow His will.

## Bible Study

### *Truthfulness and Covenant Loyalty*

It is a feature of the whole of chapter 24 that the Hebrew word 'emet' appears in several critical places; it is a word which has its roots in the idea of 'truthfulness' or 'faithfulness', and either of these is a correct translation. The first time this word appeared was when Abraham's servant first realised that the Lord had blessed his journey and he believed he had found the woman who met his master's requirements as a bride for his son 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his loyalty and faithfulness toward my master' (24:27). On that occasion, the word 'faithfulness' was paired with 'loyalty', this second word being the Hebrew 'cheseth' which is closely related to the idea of the 'Covenant'. In our passage today, these two words are paired again right at the heart of the whole narrative, in verse 49 'if you will deal with my master loyally and with truth, let me know ...'. The word also

appears in the previous verse (48) to describe the Lord's guidance of Abraham's servant; 'I praised the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right path ...'

Right at the heart of this story therefore is the idea that through the Covenant, God has dealt with his servant Abraham with loyalty and with faithfulness (or truth – 24:27,48). The servant therefore asked the family of Rebekah to deal with him and with the Lord with the same quality of truthfulness (24:49). Anything less would be an insult, not merely to him and his master Abraham, but to Almighty God. Whilst Bethuel and Laban were not themselves part of God's 'chosen' people, they were god-fearers nevertheless and knew full well what the servant was talking about. Whatever their misgivings about the marriage proposal and the haste with which it was enacted by Abraham's servant, it was not easy for them to go against this call for truthfulness, loyalty and honesty.

### ***Bridal negotiations***

We are left wondering whether Laban was indeed happy with these arrangements. For if his hand was forced in this way by an appeal to truthfulness before God, there are indications within the text that Laban could well have felt cheated by the way in which Abraham's servant dealt with him. It is certainly true that by the time Laban negotiated with Isaac's son Jacob, many years later, for the marriage of his daughter, he did so with such gleeful deceit that many have suggested he felt cheated first by Abraham's family on this occasion of Rebekah's marriage negotiations.

In yesterday's passage (24:28-41), we observed that Laban was only Rebekah's brother and appears to have taken the place of his father Bethuel in the negotiations (although Bethuel does make one appearance, rather submissively, in verse 50). He was also very quick to observe what was happening and see in it the potential of advantage, and this could well be why the wise servant acted as he did to prevent Laban from manipulating the situation. Notice, for example, that in the re-telling (24:45-48) of what had happened, the servant made no mention of meeting Laban when he first went to the spring, something which was part of the original story (24:29) and a detail that was left out whilst little else was.

Secondly, the normal custom of the times was that the family of the bride were given substantial gifts of both money (silver and gold) and good (clothes etc.) when an engagement was arranged. Then, when a marriage took place, most of that would be returned with the bride, forming the initial wealth and inheritance of the newly-wed couple. It was, on the surface, a fairly equitable system. What happens in our story is therefore very revealing of the mistrust that lay beneath the surface. The servant gave significant gifts initially to Rebekah (before she was properly promised in marriage); he then directly gave her more, after the formal agreement of the family was obtained (24:53), when he also gave some gifts to Laban and the mother. Was the servant trying to ensure that the scheming Laban, who he did not trust, would not take some of this wealth for himself and not return it in the usual and proper way?

Laban's sense of being cheated came from his own scheming nature, and was something that the servant had to work against in order to secure God's will. He did this by emphasising trust and honesty within his negotiations wherever he could; for by so doing, he acted properly himself, and kept Laban's dishonesty at bay.

### ***Decisions, decisions ...***

Then, with hardly a break in the narrative story-line, Abraham's servant demanded to set off with Rebekah immediately! This is almost certainly an indication that there was no real human trust between the two parties involved. The time period of delay that was expected by Laban and his family before their visitors could depart is very unclear in Hebrew, so I have translated it 'the usual period of time' (24:55); some scholars think it was two days, some believe it to have been ten months! Nevertheless, Abraham's servant was intransigent; and the story implies that Laban's household were equally stubborn. They gave no direct response themselves and brought in Rebekah, to give her the choice. One would imagine that the household would expect a young girl in these circumstances to remain with her family. However, she can hardly have been unaware of the underlying tensions of the situation, and if she knew of the less than savoury side of her brother, then her mind could well have been easily made up. She was happier to leave with a godly stranger and with good prospects, than remain under the authority of her brother.

Rebekah said yes to Abraham's servant with words that have been said in marriage services now for centuries! There are other precedents for the use of 'I will' in the marriage service, but

there can be fewer more daring acts of faith on the part of God's people than this! In these words, Rebekah, as a woman, accepted taking a place in the line of God's Covenant people, and proved in the rest of her life to be one who was truly worthy of the call.

### **Application of Scripture**

This scripture is dominated by issues of trust and faithfulness, both of which come from the same Hebrew word. God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham enabled his servant to trust that the Lord would secure His purposes through the mission on which he had been sent, and at each point of the story where there is direct confirmation of the Lord's guidance, he bows down to worship (e.g. 24:26,52). In the same way, we are called to trust God in whatever mission we are called to engage in. We may not be called to travel long distances or negotiate with difficult relatives, but what the Lord requires of each of us may well seem as strange to us as this mission did to the servant of Abraham. Only faith and trust in God will see us through. It is also important to note that trust was not simply the 'inspiration' for the mission, but the 'method'. In dealing with people who were probably more manipulative, the wise servant appealed to honesty and truthfulness, and thereby prevented Laban from scheming. It was a risky plan from a worldly point of view, but it was the Lord's will, and a witness to truth to all those involved, and an example of it to us who read of it later.

The faith of Rebekah may seem to us to be romantic, if not glamorous. That is because we know that the story works out for the best. At the point at which she made the decision to go, Rebekah was as bold in her faith as anyone else in the Old Testament, placing herself and the whole of her life at the disposal of the Lord in circumstances that were far from straightforward. Her example is an inspiration to all who read scripture, and she immediately stands out as a woman of considerable stature. It is fascinating that at this point in scripture, we know little of the character of Isaac, but we certainly know much about Rebekah!

### **Lifestyle Challenge**

Please use the programme of lifestyle challenges which can be found by following the link 'lifestyle challenge'. The downloadable 'worksheet' will help you follow through any challenge which you feel is right for you to take up.

#### ***Suggestions about discipleship and Christian lifestyle***

Would you find it easy to respond to a challenge from the Lord to leave most of what you know and love in the course of one day, and follow someone else who the Lord was telling you to follow? I am not suggesting that the Lord would break up marriages or families in an inappropriate way; that is not what he does; but there is little else in our lives that the Lord cannot either change or lead us away from into some new life of His service. Some have travelled this path, and will know what it is like. Others will not be able to countenance this for a variety of reasons. Behind all this, however, is a very real question; do we trust the Lord?

### **Final Prayer**

Speak through us your people, Lord God. Speak through our words and prophecy to the world; speak through our deeds and change the world for the better; speak through our presence so that all people know there is a God of Love. And may our presence, our deeds and our words all testify to the truth of God found in Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN

### **Questions (for use in groups)**

1. Look carefully at verses 42 to 47 and compare it to verses 12 to 22. Note what was left out or changed, and discuss why.
2. Does the servant of Abraham accept the possibility that God might have a different woman for him to find for Isaac, in verse 49?
3. Discuss 'faith' and 'trust'. In what ways are they similar, and in what ways are they different?