

## Prayer

Father God; You are the source and Creator of everything, and there is no good thing that does not come from You. May we be worthy channels of Your goodness, truth and justice, and may we be active partners with You in the proclamation of the Gospel; for our own salvation, the salvation of others and the salvation of the whole world. We ask this for not for ourselves but for the glory of Your great Name; AMEN

## Further Suggestions for Prayer

### Weekly Theme: Those who are ill

Pray today for all who suffer from illnesses which healthy or younger people easily shrug, but which are very difficult for those who are elderly or ill.

Pray especially for the elderly, and those for whom illness brings isolation and unhappiness, and emphasises their loneliness and personal distress.

## Meditation

The scriptures ask us to 'examine' ourselves;

We find it hard, but how can we refuse God's Word?

Jeremiah asked the people of Israel to examine  
Whether they had abandoned their God (Jer 2:10-13).

He also asked the people who had done so  
To change their ways and return to the Lord (Lam 3:40).

Ezra sat down with the people to see whether  
They had kept up the standards of godly marriage (Ezra 10:16).

Paul asked God's people to examine themselves  
Before sharing 'bread and wine' with each other (1 Cor 11:28).

He also challenged the Colossians to test whether  
The presence of Christ was, in truth, with them (2 Cor 13:5).

Lastly, the writer of Ecclesiastes examined 'everything'  
And saw that the righteous were 'in the hands of God' (Eccl 9:1.)

Why does the Lord require us to 'examine ourselves'?

Because He wants us to know whether we are being true to our calling.

## Bible Study - Genesis 24:59-67

<sup>59</sup> So they sent their sister Rebekah with her nurse-maid away, together with Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup> And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands upon thousands; may your descendants take possession of the gates of their enemies!" <sup>61</sup> Then Rebekah and her maids prepared themselves, mounted the camels, and followed on after the servant; this is how he took Rebekah, and went his way.

<sup>62</sup> Isaac, meanwhile, had travelled from Beer-lahai-roi, and was living in the Negeb.

<sup>63</sup> He went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, saw camels coming. <sup>64</sup> Rebekah also looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted from the camel <sup>65</sup> and said to the servant, "Who is that man over there, walking through the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.

<sup>66</sup> Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done. <sup>67</sup> So Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah. He married Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her.

Isaac was also reassured after the death of his mother.

## Introduction

This is the conclusion of the wonderful story of the quest for Isaac's wife by Abraham's servant. The long and detailed story was at an end; Rebekah had been found; she left her family living in the northern regions of Mesopotamia, and travelled an estimated three to four hundred miles by

camel to the Negev desert in southern Canaan, in order to meet her new husband, Isaac. We are given no details of what must have been an arduous journey, but there is no question that the story of their meeting is 'love at first sight'. Although there were proper social niceties expected of arranged marriages (as when Rebekah placed a veil over herself (24:65) when she saw Isaac in the distance), their meeting was immediately successful. They were soon married and their relationship was described emphatically in Hebrew by the word 'love' (24:67); a word that means passionate, unhindered and lasting love. This word for 'love' is also used on many occasions in the Old Testament to describe the love of God for His people.

Within this story there are many fascinating details and themes which are all covered in the following Bible study, but two of these arise immediately; firstly, the continuing trust and faith shown by the bride-to-be, Rebekah. Even we, who have read the story of Genesis, know little about the character of Isaac; we are as ignorant of what kind of man he is as is Rebekah! All we know about him can be gleaned from the incident in which his father took him to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him (22:1f.) in obedience to God's call. Isaac was of course saved, but this event would surely have instilled into Isaac's mind the special nature of God's call upon his life. Though we cannot imagine what may or may not have been said on the journey south to meet Isaac, it is probable that this was the heart of what Rebekah would have learned. For the elaborate manner of the marriage proposition put to her and the wealth and extensive retinue in which she travelled could only have been arranged for someone special.

Rebekah was sent on her way with family blessings which were typical of her day, but which were also remarkably close to the special blessing God gave to Abraham and Isaac after the incident on Mount Moriah (22:17). In this way, scripture tells us that God's hand was upon the marriage, and the blessings spoken to both Isaac and Rebekah by their families were not simply both the same, they were the Lord's and they echoed the eternal Covenant God has already made with Abraham; 'and his descendants for ever' (15:5; 17:2f.). When Isaac and Rebekah finally came together, they would have quickly discovered this truth about the blessings they had each been given, independently, by their families.

The other interesting detail of the story is that the servant was sent on his way by Abraham. One would have thought he would return to Abraham, and then present Rebekah to Isaac, following patriarchal approval. Some suggest that at this point, Abraham had in fact died, but that is not what the text says. The focus of the story is simply upon Isaac and Rebekah because God's future now lay with them. Whether or not Abraham was still alive at this point in his old age (see later in the Bible study), his 'last will and testament' was that the Covenant God had given him be ensured by the finding of a wife for Isaac (24:1-9). His job was done.

### ***Saying goodbye!***

Rebekah was sent on her way by her family, probably with mixed feelings after all that had gone before. She was allowed to take with her the 'nurse-maid' who had been with her from birth (the Hebrew word means 'the one who suckled her'), and we find out from later passages of scripture that her name was Deborah (35:8), who appears to have had a significant role in the upbringing of Jacob and Esau. It is an important detail for what follows in scripture.

The blessings given to Rebekah for her marriage were given by Laban and her mother, representing the 'household' (24:55f.). We have already seen that they were very close to the blessings given to Abraham and Isaac by God on Mount Moriah, and the Covenant blessings repeated to Abraham throughout his life. What is new and unique in both this blessing and also that for Isaac, is the phrase 'may your descendants take possession of the gates of their enemies!' (22:17; 24:60). These are very significant words, and we must understand how and why they were used. Today, we treat the power of words too casually, for the common attitude is that everyone has a right to say what they think. This obscures the fact that words have great power and as we all know, can 'stick in the mind' for a long time, if not for ever. For this reason, ancient people saw it as wise for people to speak words that were well chosen, and keep random thoughts to oneself. They certainly used their words as if they had great meaning and also knew that words would almost always either bless or curse; therefore, a blessing such as this was regarded as something very similar to what we might call 'prophecy' today.

Even if Laban and Rebekah's mother used words that were a 'standard' form of blessing of the day, they had deep and abiding meaning. The coming together of two identical prophecies was significant for scripture. By this, we are told that descendants of Isaac and Rebekah, or perhaps one descendant, would defeat the enemies of the people of God! Of course, it was probably not in the minds of the people who said these words or received them, to think that one day, a Messiah would come and save not just God's people, but the whole world, by defeating 'the enemy'! However, it is

highly likely that by the time this story was written down in the form we have it today, the people God led to do this task recognised in these words something of a prophecy of a coming Messiah; even if they did not at that time know anything about Jesus. These blessings are therefore important texts which point forward to God's salvation of His people!

### ***The meeting in the Negev***

Everyone who studies this passage of scripture will notice that Abraham's servant headed straight for Isaac, who was living in the Negev regions of southern Canaan, moreover, Abraham simply does not feature in this concluding part of the story! The last we heard of Abraham's whereabouts in scripture, he was living near Hebron (23:19), where he had purchased a field for the burial of his wife, Sarah. This should alert us to scripture's agenda, for what has happened is that after the death of Sarah, a new 'matriarch' has been found in Rebekah!

The absence of Abraham in this story has led many to suggest that Abraham died during the search for Rebekah; however other references in scripture tell us that Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah (25:20), and that this would have made Abraham 140 at the time of this story. Moreover, Abraham died aged 175 (25:7). In my opinion it is best to simply assume that Abraham is absent from the story because for the purposes of scripture, he is not now relevant. This story is the point at which the succession of God's blessing falls on Isaac and Rebekah (see above), and for this reason, the story revolves around them.

What may be significant is that Isaac was found 'having travelled from 'Beer-lahai-roi'. The text does not say exactly where Isaac was when the meeting took place, except that it was somewhere in the Negev, an extensive desert region to the south of Hebron, where Abraham could be presumed to be if he was still alive. It is easy to fail to notice the name 'Beer-lahai-roi', but scripture does not mention place names casually, even in this case where it is the place Isaac had travelled from. The origin of this place name is to be found in the story of Abraham's slave girl, Hagar (16:13f.). It was the place she met the Lord when she was 'on the run' from Abraham's household after she became pregnant with Abraham's child; and it was given its name by Hagar, meaning 'well of the living who sees me'. We are left to wonder what Isaac could have been doing visiting a place named by woman whose son almost usurped his inheritance! We can only suppose that Isaac did so in order to become acquainted with significant facts about the story of his own life and all that had happened to his father and mother before he was born.

The story of the meeting of Rebekah and Isaac is enigmatic and powerful. The narrative does all it can to indicate to us that there was a moment of recognition between Isaac and Rebekah before they had even met; he saw the camels arriving and she saw him in the field. It was one of those moments in which time seemed to stand still, and the hand of God was on Isaac and Rebekah as they fulfilled His guidance by recognising each other before they had seen each other. Rebekah's response was proper and correct. Having found out from Abraham's servant that this was indeed Isaac, she quickly covered herself with her veil as was appropriate for a bride before a wedding.

### ***Handing over from Abraham and Sarah, to Isaac and Rebekah***

Isaac also acted according to proper protocol. Even though the story indicates a 'quickenning of the heart' as soon as the two of them sensed each other's presence, they did what was expected of them to avoid any suggestion of indecent haste. It is sometimes said that in this story, Rebekah and Isaac fell in love instantly and proceeded to consummate their marriage in the tent of Isaac's mother; suggesting that everything happened without any acknowledgement of proper marriage protocols of the day. The story is certainly rapid, but on the contrary, there is enough within it to tell us that both of them 'did what was right'.

Isaac's first action was to take Rebekah to the tent of his mother, who had died only a little time before. The significance of this is not that they immediately consummated the marriage, but that Rebekah was immediately installed as the new 'matriarch' of the extended family of Isaac. In other words, Isaac accepted her immediately and without question as God's gift to him as a bride. It is only in the next sentence that the story says, by way of summary, that Isaac married Rebekah. At this point, the narrative has moved on from the slow and repetitive pace that characterised what happened at Rebekah's original home, and it is now simply telling us 'the facts' of the matter (24:67). Most importantly, it ends with the wonderful words 'he loved' Rebekah. These last words were not about sexual contact, for the word in the Hebrew was not the one for sex, but a different word meaning 'passion', 'commitment' and 'love' (see above).

Again, some translations and commentators add the final sentence ('Isaac was also reassured after the death of his mother' – 24:67) to what has gone before, implying that Isaac's love for Rebekah was something to do with his psychological needs following the death of his mother. This is not true. The brief and summary scriptures now tell us snippets of information, and this

last sentence explains that Rebekah had taken the place of Sarah; a fact that completed the Covenant transition from Abraham and Sarah, to Isaac and Rebekah.

### **Application**

The formal blessing of Sarah (and Isaac – 22:17) reminds us of important issues to do with words and how we use them. If we take from this passage the message that the use of words is important and that they can be used for significant and prophetic blessing, then we will have learned something. Moreover, with some thought, we will realise that everything we say will either bless or curse those we speak to, and it is best if we use our words consciously, in a positive manner, and as befits our calling to follow the Lord. Also, the words of blessing in this text were given as a matter of routine; they were probably a form of 'liturgy' for the day; there is even some evidence of this in ancient texts that are not in the Bible. In an age when we are keen to use words responsively to the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we should be careful not to abandon the use of words that have been formed, crafted and written down specifically to bless. Scripture tells us that they can be powerfully prophetic.

The meeting of Rebekah and Isaac also tells us that the Lord does indeed have his hand upon us for the blessing of our marriages. Certainly, Isaac and Rebekah were special because they were the forefathers of God's people, but we who believe in God, His son Jesus Christ, and salvation by grace, are now the people of God. The Lord therefore has his direct plans for each of us, and it is unthinkable that He does not have in mind the relationship of marriage when guiding us through life. It is true that people will sometimes say 'No' to the Lord's leading, and the His will is sometimes diverted. But He is big enough to account for this within His command of all time and space, and He leads His people in a way that offers them the fulfilment of their hearts if they follow His ways. Indeed, it can be positively dangerous for a Christian man or woman to try and find answers to their perceived sexual and marital needs outside of the will of God, or do so in a manner that is presumptive of His will for our lives.

The good news, however, is that the Lord seeks to bless us, not to curse. His curses are directed towards the 'enemy' (24:60), and Satan has already been broken and will be finally defeated at the end of time. In Jesus Christ, we have the victory, and we have blessing.

## **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***

There are a number of issues we can pick up in these verses: firstly the challenge to use our own words in a measured and careful way, so that they bless others; this is a challenge with which we all may require help, and it may be necessary to confess our need. Secondly, the challenge to recognise that like Isaac and Rebekah, we are God's people, passing on God's Covenant to others. Thirdly, the challenge to accept that we are bearers of the Covenant through our families, and God wants to use the testimony of our lives. These challenges are all worth our time and effort.

## **Final Prayer**

Lord God of love and passion and commitment; help us to reflect these qualities of love in our own family lives, so that the whole church of God may show them to the world. May we, Your people, demonstrate the joy and peace of living according to Your Word. AMEN

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

1. In what ways are words used too casually today? Are words used too casually in the life of your church? Discuss.
2. The meeting of Isaac and Rebekah was a moment of instant recognition. Have you had moments in your life when you instantly knew God's will?
3. What are the problems faced by Christian people who wish to marry today? How does scripture help them in their quest?