

A Rood Awakening!  
Presents  
*Awakening in the Word*

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS  
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### THE OVERVIEW

Our portion this week concludes the saga of Abraham's servant finding a wife for Isaac. The portion begins with the continuation of Eliezer's narrative convincing Rebekah's family that the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah is the will of YHWH and that it truly is a match made in heaven. After hearing the servant's explanation of everything that happened, Laban and Bethuel are convinced that this is indeed so, and they give their consent for Rebekah to accompany Eliezer back to the land of Canaan. Gifts are given, and Rebekah gives her consent. After the farewell party is over, Eliezer, Rebekah and others return to the land of Canaan where Rebekah meets her husband for the very first time.

### THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 24:42-49 Eliezer's narrative continues
- Genesis 24:50-51 Permission is granted
- Genesis 24:52-54 The party
- Genesis 24:55-56 A delay is suggested
- Genesis 24:57-58 Rebekah consents to go
- Genesis 24:59-61 The journey home
- Genesis 24:62-66 Isaac and Rebekah meet
- Genesis 24:67 The marriage begins

### SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the means of marriage in the Torah?
2. What is the point and/or purpose of Eliezer's narrative?
3. Why can Laban not talk good or bad?
4. What does Eliezer use to persuade Rebekah's family?
5. Why does Laban do all the talking?
6. Who is Bethuel, and is he alive?
7. How old is Rebekah?
8. Why does Rebekah's family ask for a delay?
9. Do the bride and groom have "rights" in an arranged marriage?
10. Why does Rebekah descend from her camel at the sight of Isaac?
11. Why does Rebekah cover herself with a veil?
12. What is the significance of the word order in verse 67?
13. What can we learn about marriage from our portion?

**THE TEXT**

**Genesis 24:42-67** *And I came this day unto the well, and said, O YHWH Elohim of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go: <sup>43</sup>behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; <sup>44</sup>and she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom YHWH hath appointed out for my master's son. <sup>45</sup>And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. <sup>46</sup>And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. <sup>47</sup>And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. <sup>48</sup>And I bowed down my head, and worshipped YHWH, and blessed YHWH Elohim of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. <sup>49</sup>And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. <sup>50</sup>Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from YHWH: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. <sup>51</sup>Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as YHWH hath spoken. <sup>52</sup>And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped YHWH, bowing himself to the earth. <sup>53</sup>And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things. <sup>54</sup>And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. <sup>55</sup>And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. <sup>56</sup>And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing YHWH hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. <sup>57</sup>And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. <sup>58</sup>And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.*

<sup>59</sup>And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. <sup>60</sup>And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. <sup>61</sup>And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. <sup>62</sup>And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country. <sup>63</sup>And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. <sup>64</sup>And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. <sup>65</sup>For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. <sup>66</sup>And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. <sup>67</sup>And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

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Our portion this week continues the saga of Abraham's servant finding a wife for Isaac. Before we return to the narrative of Abraham's quest to find a suitable wife for his son, I think it would be wise to understand marriage from a biblical, Ancient Near Eastern perspective. It is difficult for us to truly appreciate the biblical narrative if we are not familiar with the customs and cultural context of the story we are reading. Let us, therefore, spend a little time in this study to gain some understanding of its context. Let me begin with a straightforward and somewhat academic definition of biblical marriage.

*Marriage is one expression of kinship and family pattern in which typically a man and at least one woman cohabitated publically and permanently as a basic social unity. Within most of the societies depicted in the OT and NT the household or family created by such a marriage represents the extent of one man's ownership and control of people and property...Furthermore, the married man possesses the privilege of sexual access to the married woman (and perhaps others) within the household, as limited by taboo and law. The children born of such sexual unions belong to the man and are part of the same household, under the same terms. Thus marriage forms a unit that is social, political, and sexual.<sup>1</sup>*

Clearly this understanding of marriage differs radically from the way most modern cultures view marriage. There are several important features of biblical marriage that we should understand. First, we should recognize that the primary purpose of marriage is to provide a helpmate for the man in fulfilling his calling to be the image of Elohim in the world. While this statement may sound "sexist" in many modern women's ears, it is, nonetheless, a phenomenal honor bestowed equally upon Adam and Chava. There is nothing sexist in this statement at all. Being the image of YHWH is something that husbands and wives are to do as one. This purpose is made quite evident in the creation narrative.

**Genesis 1:26-28** *And Elohim said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. <sup>27</sup>So Elohim created man in His own image, in the image of Elohim created He him; male and female created He them. <sup>28</sup>And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

**Genesis 2:15** *And YHWH Elohim took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, David Noel Freedman (Editor), Astrid B. Beck (editor), Allen C. Myers (Editor), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pp. 861-862

**Genesis 2:18** *And YHWH Elohim said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

**Genesis 2:21-25** *And YHWH Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;<sup>22</sup> and the rib, which YHWH Elohim had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.<sup>23</sup> And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.<sup>24</sup> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.<sup>25</sup> And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

The calling upon Adam was to embody the manifest presence of the Creator in the world. The Torah makes clear two specific means by which Adam and Chava would accomplish their calling. First, Adam was to exercise dominion over the animal realm. This included his own animal nature. Second, Adam was to be fruitful and multiply. To this end, a helpmate was created for Adam from his own flesh and bone. Together, Adam and Chava were to be the manifest presence of the Creator in the world by exercising dominion over the animal realm, sanctifying their animal nature, and producing life. Thus, we see in this first example of marriage that its primary purpose is to manifest the presence of YHWH in the world through the propagation of "seed."

That the purpose of marriage is for the propagation of seed is quite evident in the biblical narrative of Abraham. We have already witnessed the numerous references to seed and multiple seed in the promises of YHWH to Abraham. We have also discussed in previous portions the great reproach placed upon women for failing to provide their husbands with an heir.

**Genesis 30:22-23** *And Elohim remembered Rachel, and Elohim hearkened to her, and opened her womb.<sup>23</sup> And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, Elohim hath taken away my reproach.*

**1 Samuel 1:5-8** *But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but YHWH had shut up her womb.<sup>6</sup> And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because YHWH had shut up her womb.<sup>7</sup> And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of YHWH, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.<sup>8</sup> Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?*

**Luke 1:24-25** *And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,<sup>25</sup> Thus hath YHWH dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.*

We have also seen that in the times of the patriarchs the laws stated that if a wife could not provide her husband with an heir, she was often responsible for supplying him with another woman for that purpose. Referring to the Nuzu tablets, Gordon and Rendsburg write:

*The purpose of marriage in these documents is not companionship but an heir. As a result, if a woman who is bought as a wife does not produce an heir, she may be obliged by clauses in her marriage contract to supply her husband with another woman.<sup>2</sup>*

In the first marriage that takes place in the Torah, the union of Adam and Chava, we see that the first means of getting married was simply intercourse, which provided the potential of propagating seed and fulfilling the commandment to be fruitful and multiply.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bible and the Ancient Near East, Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, W.W. Norton & Company, Pg. 111

**Genesis 2:24** *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

**Genesis 4:1** *And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from YHWH.*

While other patterns and rituals developed later in the Torah, sexual intercourse continued to be considered a means of marriage, as is evident in later laws given in the Torah concerning such sexual unions.

**Exodus 22:16-17** *And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. <sup>17</sup>If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.*

**Deuteronomy 22:28-29** *If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; <sup>29</sup>then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.*

It is clear that the father of the damsel was not only to be consulted but also compensated before there was any such union between his daughter and the man. If this protocol was violated, it did not negate the fact that the Torah considered the couple to be married. Therefore, the man who violated the protocol was still held accountable to make good for the privilege he assumed upon himself. Clearly the Torah frowns on unions such as this, which are made from a failure to control or exercise dominion over the animal nature. These types of unions, created by mere sexual acts, are not consistent with what we see in the example of Adam and Chava. While it may appear that Adam and Chava's marriage was based upon simple sexual union, we should note that the Torah tells us that Adam "knew" Chava. In other words, this sexual union was not merely an animal urge or mechanical act; it was a spiritual act of becoming one in heart, mind, purpose, and flesh. Adam and Chava's marriage was not simply two total strangers meeting at the Forbidden Fruit Bar and Grill. In some sense, we should understand even Adam and Chava's marriage as having been arranged by the Father.

A second means of marriage in the Torah is through the exchange of something precious. This has led to the idea that a man is to "buy" a wife. This is truly not the case. However, there is clearly an element of compensation given. We should understand that children were considered to be part of a man's wealth. With our modern social security and welfare systems, and in some places, socialized medicine and other government programs, it may be difficult for us to imagine how hard and dangerous life was in biblical times. Many children meant a ready-made work force and army to supply and protect the family and its estate. A large family was much more likely to survive hardships such as famine, drought, and raids by other ethnic or religious groups. More children also made it possible to care for bigger herds and flocks.

**Genesis 49:3** *Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.*

**Deuteronomy 21:17** *But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

**Psalms 127:3-5** *Lo, children are an heritage of YHWH: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. <sup>4</sup>As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. <sup>5</sup>Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

**Psalms 128:3** *Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.*

**Proverbs 17:6** *Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*

**Proverbs 31:28** *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

We should recall from various stories in the Torah, including our current one, the economic benefits of children to their parents.

**Genesis 24:13** *Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water.*

**Genesis 25:34** *Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

**Genesis 27:3-4** *Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison;<sup>4</sup> and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.*

**Genesis 29:6** *And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.*

**Genesis 37:2** *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

**Exodus 2:16-17** *Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. <sup>17</sup>And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.*

These are but a few of the examples in the Torah where we see children, both sons and daughters, participating in the economic life of the family. Thus, when a man came to take away a daughter from the workforce, it was customary to compensate the family for the loss of a laborer. It was also customary to give a dowry to the prospective family. It should be known that this dowry was to be held onto by the family for the sake of the daughter. In many respects this dowry money was part of the provision for the daughter and prospective bride in the event of a divorce or the death of her husband. While it was generally acceptable for the family to use the interest earned from this money, the principal belonged to the bride herself. In the event of the sudden death of the bride, the dowry was often returned to the husband or the heirs. It is this dowry that Leah and Rachel refer to when agreeing to move from their father's house with Jacob.

**Genesis 31:14-15** *And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? <sup>15</sup>Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.*

This "bridewealth" or dowry was often given at the time of betrothal as an assurance of the sincerity of the groom and as proof of the assent of the bride's family. The seriousness of this exchange is seen in the various legal codes of the Ancient Near East that were in effect in various cultures in biblical times.

From the Lipit-Ishtar Legal Codes we read:

*If a son-in-law enters the household of his father-in-law and performs the bridewealth presentation, but later they evict him and give his wife to his comrade, they shall restore to him twofold the bridewealth which he brought and his comrade will not marry his wife.<sup>3</sup>*

From the Laws of Eshnunna we read:

*Should a member of the awilu-class bring the bridewealth to the house of his father-in-law, if either (the bride or groom then) should go to his or her fate, the silver shall revert to its original owner (i.e., the widower or his heir).*

*If he marries her and she enters his house and then either the groom or the bride goes to his or her fate, he will not take out all that he had brought, but only its excess shall he take.*

*If a man come to claim (his bride) at the house of his father-in-law, but his father-in-law wrongs him and then gives his daughter to a [another], the father of the daughter shall return two-fold the bridewealth which he received.*

*If a man brings the bridewealth for the daughter of a man, but another without consent of her father and mother abducts her and then deflowers her, it is indeed a capital offense—he shall die.*

*If a man marries the daughter of another man without the consent of her father and mother, and moreover does not conclude the nuptial feast and the contract for (?) her father and mother, should she reside in his house for even one full year, she is not a wife.*

*If he concludes the contract and the nuptial feast for (?) her father and mother and he marries her, she is indeed a wife, the day she is seized in the lap of another man, she shall die, she will not live.<sup>4</sup>*

The Hammurabi Code declares:

*If a man marries a wife but does not draw up a formal contract for her, that woman is not a wife.*

*If a man should be captured and there are sufficient provisions in his house, his wife, [...she will not] enter [another's house].*

*If that woman does not keep herself chaste but enters another's house, they shall charge and convict that woman and cast her into the water.*

*If a man should be captured and there are not sufficient provisions in his house, his wife may enter another's house; that woman will not be subject to any penalty.*

*If a man should be captured and there are not sufficient provisions in his house, and before his return his wife enters another's house and bears children, and afterwards her*

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<sup>3</sup> Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, 2nd ed., Martha T. Roth, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World, Atlanta: Scholars Press, Pg. 32

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 63

*husband returns and gets back to his city, that woman shall return to her first husband; the children shall inherit from their father.*<sup>5</sup>

By no means should it be thought that the children of Israel bought their brides. Clearly there was provision for a purchased servant to become a wife to the master of the house or to his son. In the case of a servant becoming a wife, no dowry was required. This was clearly the case with Zilpah and Bilhah, the handmaids of Rachel and Leah, who after the deaths of their mistresses, rose to the status of wives. One could also take a wife from among the captives of war.

**Exodus 21:7-9** *And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. <sup>8</sup>If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. <sup>9</sup>And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.*

**Deuteronomy 21:10-14** *When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and YHWH thy Elohim hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, <sup>11</sup>and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; <sup>12</sup>then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; <sup>13</sup>and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. <sup>14</sup>And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.*

In these situations there was no bridewealth or dowry exchanged beyond the purchase price of the servant. This bridewealth or dowry was proof that the groom did, in fact, have the provisions to care for his wife. With the money already in the hands of the bride's family, there was no need to worry about her future. In the narrative of Eliezer, we note that the servant gives Rebekah several gifts. At the well he gives her a gold earring (possibly a nose ring) and two silver bracelets. After permission to marry Isaac is given, Rebekah receives other jewels and clothing.

**Genesis 24:22** *And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold.*

**Genesis 24:53** *And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.*

Here we should note that it was Rebekah, not her family, who received the most precious and valuable of gifts. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch correctly points out that the Hebrew word *migdannot*, translated here as "precious things," comes from the Hebrew word *meqed* (*mem, gimmel, dalet*), which means "sweeten."<sup>6</sup> Hirsch writes:

*There is no justification for interpreting this term as "precious things." It denotes "delicious fruits," not "precious gifts." Meqed ["something delicious," "sweet"], from which this term is obviously derived, occurs in Scripture only in this connotation. Wherever it occurs in the scriptural text (c.f. Ezra 1:6 and 2 Chronicles 21:3), it comes*

<sup>5</sup> Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, 2nd ed., Martha T. Roth, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World, Atlanta: Scholars Press, Pp.105-107

<sup>6</sup> A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English, Ernest Klein, MacMillan Publishers, Pg. 314

*last in an enumeration of jewels and objects of value; hence, it cannot represent the most valuable of gifts.<sup>7</sup>*

Thus, Eliezer did not purchase Rebekah; he merely provided her with a dowry.

The third means of marriage we encounter in the Torah is that of contract. We should take note in the references above that many of the early legal codes made it clear that without a contract there was no marriage. Once the contract was agreed upon, however, it was considered to be in effect. The most classic example of a marriage by contract in the Torah is the marriage of Jacob to Rachel and Leah.

**Genesis 29:18-20** *And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. <sup>19</sup>And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. <sup>20</sup>And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*

**Genesis 29:25-30** *And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? <sup>26</sup>And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup>Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. <sup>28</sup>And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. <sup>29</sup>And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. <sup>30</sup>And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.*

What may be considered unusual in this story is that Jacob is doing his own negotiating. Regardless of this fact, we see in the Torah that there is some previous agreement made with the father or family of the intended bride prior to any sexual activity.

In truth, these three means of marriage are not mutually exclusive, but they are present in almost all marriages. We clearly see the servant Eliezer working to convince Rebekah's family that they should indeed approve of this marriage. Here we may note that Eliezer begins his negotiations by singing the praises of his good master and pointing to his worldly wealth.

**Genesis 24:35-36** *And YHWH hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and He hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. <sup>36</sup>And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath.*

By boasting of his master's great wealth, Eliezer may be hoping to catch the attention of Rebekah's father and brother. It is important for the family to know that the man who wants to take the bride away from her family's protection, provision, and love is indeed able to provide for her. But is Eliezer's game plan merely to convince them of Abraham and Isaac's great wealth? Let us look carefully at Eliezer's argument as he retells the events of his journey.

Note that even when speaking of Abraham's wealth, Eliezer gives the credit to YHWH: *And YHWH hath blessed my master greatly.* Throughout his retelling of the events, Eliezer again and again points to YHWH as the reason for everything that has happened. Nine times Eliezer makes reference to YHWH'S name, benevolence, and intervention. Eliezer repeatedly points out the fact that it was YHWH who arranged this meeting with Rebekah.

**Genesis 24:44** *And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom YHWH hath appointed out for my master's son.*

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<sup>7</sup> The Pentateuch, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Judaica Press, Pg. 118

**Genesis 24:48** *And I bowed down my head, and worshipped YHWH, and blessed YHWH Elohim of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.*

**Genesis 24:56** *And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing YHWH hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.*

While many of the rabbis have painted Laban as evil and motivated by greed, as stated in our last portion, we should take careful note that it is not wealth or blessings that are referred to in Laban's response to Eliezer. Instead, Laban (and possibly Bethuel [see below]) gives permission for the marriage based on the strong evidence that it is the will of YHWH.

**Genesis 24:50** *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from YHWH: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.*

The idea that one cannot speak either "bad or good" is recognition that YHWH Elohim has willed something. When YHWH wills something, it is complete, and there is nothing to be added to or taken away from it. Therefore, there is no need to suggest something other than the perfect will of the Creator, nor is there any need to edit it. When the will of Elohim is discerned, it is necessary only to submit oneself to His perfect will. This is exactly what Laban does. In Laban's statement we should hear shades of YHWH'S prohibition against adding to or subtracting from the Torah.

**Deuteronomy 4:2** *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of YHWH your Elohim which I command you.*

**Deuteronomy 12:32** *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*

I should also mention here that there is some debate as to whether Bethuel is present at these events. It is clear that Bethuel is Rebekah's father.

**Genesis 22:22** *And Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel. <sup>23</sup>And Bethuel begat Rebekah: these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother.*

**Genesis 24:15** *And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.*

However, it is Laban, Rebekah's brother, who does all the talking. We know from the Ancient Near Eastern law codes of Lipit-Ishtar that it was acceptable for a brother to give his sister away in marriage if their father was dead.

*If a daughter is not given in marriage while her father is alive, her brothers shall give her in marriage.<sup>8</sup>*

We may also note that when Rebekah returns from the well, it is not to her father's house that she reports but to her mother's.

**Genesis 24:28** *And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things.*

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<sup>8</sup> Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, 2nd ed., Martha T. Roth, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World, Atlanta: Scholars Press, Pg. 30

It is clearly Laban who does all the talking, and when the negotiations are over, the servant gives gifts to Rebekah's brother and mother. No mention is made of her father.

**Genesis 24:53** *And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.*

Several rabbinic sources explain the absence of gifts to Bethuel by teaching that after the marriage was agreed upon Bethuel tried to renege on the agreement, and because of this, Elohim killed him.

*To her brother and her mother...Where was her father Bethuel? The entire family had expected extravagant gifts from Eliezer. Disappointed that he had given them only fruit...Bethuel tried to renege on his agreement, or to poison Eliezer, so God sent an angel to kill him. (Midrash, Rashi).<sup>9</sup>*

This fanciful story is not at all supported by the Scriptures. Victor Hamilton presents a much better reason for questioning whether Bethuel is present, especially at the agreement.

*...some suggest that M.T. "ub-e-tu-el, " "and Bethuel" be read as a textual corruption of "ub-e-to, " "and his household."<sup>10</sup>*

In other words, Hamilton presents the possibility that the scribes corrupted the text by inserting the very similar name *ub-e-tu-el* instead of *ub-e-to*, or "and Bethuel" instead of "and his household." Given the complete lack of input from Bethuel and the lack of mention of him receiving any gifts, we must at least consider the possibility that the text has been corrupted and that it should read:

**Genesis 24:50** *Then Laban and his household answered and said, The thing proceedeth from YHWH: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.*

There is another question we may address at this point, which is Rebekah's age. There are several rabbinic traditions concerning Rebekah's age at the time that Eliezer came for her. We should remember that the Torah expressly tells us that Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah.

**Genesis 25:20** *And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.*

Now let us look at the teachings of the rabbis.

*And her nurse...According to the most common Rabbinic chronology, the nurse was sent along because Rebekah was but three years old at the time, so that she would have needed someone to care for her.<sup>11</sup>*

*The Rabbis disagree as to the age of Rebekah at the time of her marriage to Isaac. The statement of the Seder 'Olam Rabbah (i.) and Gen. R. (lvii. 1) that Abraham was informed of Rebekah's birth when he ascended Mount Moriah for the 'Aqedah, is interpreted by some as meaning that Rebekah was born at that time, and that consequently she was*

<sup>9</sup> The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash, Volume 1: Bereishis / Genesis, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Pg. 129

<sup>10</sup> New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50, Victor P. Hamilton, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pg. 157

<sup>11</sup> The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash, Volume 1: Bereishis / Genesis, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Pg. 130

*only three years old at the time of her marriage. Other rabbis, however, conclude from calculations that she was fourteen years old, and that therefore she was born eleven years before the 'Akedah, both numbers being found in different manuscripts of the Seder 'Olam Rabbah (comp. Tos. to Yeb. 61b). The "Sefer ha-Yashar" (section "Hayye Sarah," p. 38a, Leghorn, 1870) gives Rebekah's age at her marriage as ten years.<sup>12</sup>*

While arranged marriages were sometimes made well in advance of the age of sexual maturity, the idea that the patriarch took a three-year-old girl home and engaged in sexual intercourse with her is absolutely repulsive, unsubstantiated in the Scriptures, and totally unacceptable. This is the type of "leaven" that has poisoned believers and corrupted the Word of YHWH for generations. I don't know how anyone could assert that we are to submit to the authority of the rabbis after reading a suggestion as repulsive as this. The truth of the matter is that we do not know how old Rebekah was at the time she encountered Eliezer; the Torah does not tell us. But we are told several things about her when she first appears at the well.

**Genesis 24:16** *And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.*

The Torah tells us that Rebekah is very good to look upon, that she is a *betulah*, and that no man has known her. The Hebrew word *betulah*, most often translated as "virgin," does not necessarily mean virgin in the sense that her hymen is still in tact. Instead, it implies that she is a maiden of marriageable age. This is why it is necessary to add the statement *neither had any man known her*. It is this second part of the phrase that tells us that Rebekah is, in fact, a virgin as we would understand it. For our study, however, it is not her reputation but her age that is at issue.

*Betulah* is clearly a word used to describe a woman of marriageable age. Since biblical marriage was largely for the purpose of bearing children, we may assume that marriageable age would be after a young girl had reached puberty. We should, therefore, assert that Rebekah is at least a post-pubescent girl. We do not know what age she is before Isaac marries her. We also know from the previous portion that Rebekah is of sufficient age, size, and strength to draw 125 gallons of water for Eliezer's camels. Clearly we can rule out any notion of Rebekah being under the age of puberty.

We may also note that after the agreement is made between Laban and Eliezer and permission is given for Rebekah to marry Isaac, her family suddenly requests that she be given ten days (possibly ten months) to remain with them. Here we may see early signs of Laban's personality that would later change Jacob's contract ten times. While he may be making this sinister request in hopes of gaining more gifts from Abraham's servant, it is more than likely a request to honor the normal time of the betrothal. After the agreement and contract had been made between families, there was generally a time of betrothal when the groom went and prepared a house and the bride prepared herself for a new life. Yeshua makes reference to this process in his words of comfort to his disciples.

**John 14:2-4** *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. <sup>4</sup>And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

Clearly witnessing the speed with which YHWH answers His prayer and makes this appointment, Eliezer sees no reason for delay; therefore, he declines the offer. Ultimately it is Rebekah who is called upon to give her consent.

**Genesis 24:57-58** *And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. <sup>58</sup>And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.*

<sup>12</sup> JewishEncyclopedia.com, "Rebekah," Emil G. Hirsch, M. Seligsohn

This text provides us with an important principle. Even in arranged marriages, the bride and groom had to give their consent. While arranged marriages may seem strange to us today, there is much that can be said for this practice.

I all too often find myself in situations where I am called upon to make an important decision about something that I have absolutely no knowledge of or experience with. In such situations I try to seek good counsel from people who do have knowledge and experience in the matters concerning the decision demanded. Upon receiving their counsel I can more confidently make a decision.

When I think back to the time in my life when I was making a decision about a wife, I realize how naïve I was. I had never been married before, had never had children before, and had never been responsible for a wife and family before. I had very little knowledge and even less experience. What I did have were a lot of raging hormones, fleshly eyes wide open, and a gusto to jump into something that was "feelin' good." I wish now that my parents, who had been married for 25 years at the time, had raised two children, had faced life's challenges and changes, and had known me all my life would have been actively looking for someone who was "right" for me. If there was ever anything that I was very sure of in my life, it was that my father and mother loved me. They were always there for me. They taught me, provided for me, blessed me, stood up for me, defended me, and picked me up when I fell down. But when it came to making one of the biggest decisions of my life, I suddenly trusted my rollercoaster-like emotions more than I trusted my parents. Needless to say, that marriage ended in divorce.

I truly believe that the modern divorce rate is what it is because we have forsaken the biblical practice of arranged marriages and have exchanged true biblical love with lust, desire, romance, and emotions. Just because parents are given the responsibility of finding righteous spouses for their children does not mean that the bride and groom forsake their right of refusal. For a marriage to be arranged in no way implies that the marriage is to be forced. Consent should always be sought. Children certainly should communicate with their parents as to whom they are interested in or what they would hope for in a spouse, but ultimately, the parents should be the ones responsible for finding a righteous life partner for their children. In our modern world marriages are based predominately upon fickle emotions. Not much thought is given to fulfilling the commandments, manifesting the image of YHWH, or sanctifying the animal nature.

Let us take note here of the particular order of events at the conclusion of this week's portion.

**Genesis 24:63-65** *And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. <sup>64</sup>And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. <sup>65</sup>For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.*

First, we should note the shift of focus from Abraham to Isaac. Our narrative began with Abraham sending his servant under oath to find a wife for Isaac. Upon his return from this quest, the servant returns not to Abraham but to Isaac. Second, we see Isaac in the fields in the evening. The King James Version states that Isaac was there to "meditate." The Hebrew word *lasuach* (*lammed, sin, vav, chet*) is used only here in the Tanach and leaves us, therefore, with no definition. It could simply mean that Isaac is in the field walking. We do not want to make too much out of this word since it is of uncertain origin and meaning.

Regardless of what he is doing, it is clear that when Rebekah sees him, she descends from her camel. Here we witness Rebekah's great display of humility. She does not greet him perched upon the back of a beast of burden; she comes down to meet him where he is at. Clearly she demonstrates in this act of humility her willingness to be his partner. Even further is the fact that when she sees Isaac for the first time, she covers herself. This gesture demonstrates Rebekah's willingness to come under Isaac's covering, but also to preserve herself, her beauty, and her being for Isaac's eyes only. How different this is from today's culture where very little of a woman's body is preserved for her husband. Today many

women see this preservation as bondage. In the days of the patriarchs such modesty was considered a crown of honor.

There is much that we should learn and understand from this portion. As the Spirit of the Holy One continues to call His people out of the darkness and into the light, we need to learn again how to walk in the light as a sanctified people, as the heirs of Abraham, and as the bride of YHWH.

Finally, we should note that Isaac receives Rebekah to be his wife, and then he loves her.

**Genesis 24:66-67** *And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. <sup>67</sup>And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

This is an essential lesson to be learned. To receive someone as a spouse without having first known or even seen the person requires one to submit to the will and wishes of the parent who arranged the marriage. Isaac demonstrates for us that he is willing to submit to Abraham's will, and in this case, to Eliezer's choice. We should note that before Isaac takes Rebekah, he hears Eliezer's account of all that took place. Therefore, we may assume that Isaac hears how YHWH made this divine arrangement. Not only is Isaac submitting to Abraham and Eliezer; he is specifically submitting to YHWH.

This is how marriages should be arranged. We should not count on our own emotions but submit ourselves to the clear will of the Creator. After Isaac submits to the will of YHWH and receives Rebekah as his helpmate, he loves her. In other words, love comes after the fact. Love is not described here as a warm, romantic feeling. Love is submitting to the will of the Creator and doing whatever it takes to fulfill the purpose of marriage with the Creator's choice. Love means learning to die to one's own emotions and giving oneself to the will of the Creator. Love is a growing, learning process. Love is what comes from years of working together, learning about each other, and serving each other. Love is born through years of self-sacrifice and patience. Love, in this regard, is the fruit of marriage and not the motivation for it.

We should apply all that we learn here to our relationship with YHWH. We are the bride of YHWH; therefore, we should humble ourselves, cover ourselves in modesty, and submit ourselves; and after we have done this, we shall love YHWH. Our love and fear of the Sovereign One is truly born out of our commitment to walk with Him. By submitting our lives to doing the will of our Husband, we shall grow in true, biblical love.

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