

CHRIST: The Covenant Son Must Have a Bride

Read Genesis, chapters 24-26 & Ephesians 5.22-33; Revelation 19.6-10; 21.1-7

‘CHRIST IN GENESIS’: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS & SETTING THE CONTEXT

1/ With the birth of Isaac [ch 21.1-7], the ‘Abraham narratives’ in Genesis will be concluding. Isaac will now become the primary character in the narratives that will follow. Isaac is the Divinely-chosen and provided heir and carrier of the covenant promises Yahweh has first given to Abraham. Yahweh will preserve these same covenant promises throughout the history of His chosen covenant nation, Israel, for the purpose of bringing CHRIST into the world.

2/ As we have seen before, these promises were made historically to the patriarchs, but prophetically, they were made to CHRIST [see Galatians 3.15-29]. Only CHRIST can fulfill these covenant promises that will find their ultimate fulfillment in the New Covenant and the New Creation. AND, CHRIST testifies that He did just that! [see Matthew 5.17-18; Romans 9.4-5; 15.8-13; et. al.]

3/ But, getting back now to Isaac, we don’t how many years have passed since the ‘sacrifice of Isaac’ narrative in ch 22 and his marriage narrative in ch 24. We just know Isaac was a young man in ch 22, and we that Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah...to be his wife [ch 25.20].

4/ But in this lengthy lesson passage, which we can only read, survey, and summarize, what we will attempt to do is point out the CHRIST-markers that are laid out in these chapters. They will become ‘sign-posts’ along the way to trace the *historical-redemptive progression* of the covenant promises that will lead us to CHRIST! So, this first chapter 24 will form the foundation of our lesson: if the covenant son, Isaac, is going to carry on the promises of the innumerable offspring, he, too, must have a wife. This will all pre-figure, typify, and ‘pre-enact’ the innumerable spiritual offspring to be born to CHRIST through the ministry of the Gospel as it is proclaimed by His churches [Ephesians 5.22-33]. And, it will culminate in the much-celebrated Marriage Supper of the Lamb [Revelation 19.6-10 & 21.1-7].

I / Genesis 24.1-67 | The LORD provides His elect bride for His elect covenant ‘son’ - Isaac

1/ Throughout these 67 verses, the same testimony to the sovereign mercy [or steadfast covenant love] of Yahweh is repeated over and over. The overall theme and focus of the story is Yahweh’s faithfulness to His covenant promises – and His people’s faithfulness to trust and obey Him when they are acting in concert with His promises. Or, we may put it this way: *Believers may trust The LORD to give them guidance and success through His covenant faithfulness as they act responsibly in obedience to the covenant.* Abraham was faithful to the covenant promises of Yahweh when he instructed his faithful servant, Eliezer [ch 15.2], to go to the land of his family and kindred to find a wife for Isaac, and “that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell [ch 24.3]. And Yahweh was certainly faithful to His covenant promises in all the ways He sovereignly made it happen as He had commanded – and as it must happen. Allow me to sum up the gist of the various movements of this chapter which we will outline here by this summary quote from Allen P. Ross:

*“Central to the development of the story is the idea of covenantal loyalty [Hebrew word, **chesed**; often translated ‘mercy’ in KJV and ‘steadfast love’ in ESV], both from the divine perspective and the human. Abraham acted with **chesed** in preparing for the future of the covenant through the marriage, Eliezer acted with **chesed** in faithfully carrying out his responsibilities, and God demonstrated His sovereign **chesed** by guiding the servant to the proper place and ensuring that the mission did not fail ... With this concept at the heart of the story, the direction of the message is clear: it is about the providence of God in the lives of faithful people, ensuring the perpetuity of the covenant. Two considerations are important here. First, God is declared to be the sole cause of the events in the narrative. The characters in the story voice the narrator’s convictions on this point. Verse 27 records the theme clearly: ‘He has led me.’ Even Laban recognized this guidance and would not dare contest providence [vv 50-51]. Second, God is deliberately behind the scenes,*

yet directing the acts. In this respect the account is very similar to the Book of Ruth. The story records no word from God, no miracle, no cultic contact [i.e., religious exercises or Divine encounters], and no prophetic oracle; it does not even restate the Abrahamic covenant. It reports the hidden causality of God, sovereignly working through the circumstances of those who are acting in faith. The role of faith, expressed in personal prayer, trusting for divine guidance through the circumstances, and acting responsibly in anticipation of God's faithfulness, is predominant because God is not visibly active [that is, in Person]."

2/ So with that theme and focus in mind, here are the broad movements and divisions in this lengthy narrative about Abraham's sending his servant to find Yahweh's elect/sovereignly-chosen and provided bride for the covenant son, Isaac [ch 24.14]:

- **The Commission, vv 1-9.** Abraham is confident in the promise of The LORD that if he faithfully obeys Yahweh, Yahweh will providentially provide the bride for Isaac that He has chosen to become the 'matriarch' of the covenant offspring. He makes his servant, Eliezer, solemnly swear that he will faithfully carry out his Divinely-appointed mission and trust Yahweh to direct his ways and give him success. Eliezer makes that solemn promise and oath. [We will call Eliezer by name, but he is called 'servant' 14 times in this one narrative – stressing his personal covenant faithfulness [*chesed*] to the mission he had been sent to fulfill.]
- **The Trust in Yahweh's direction and provision, vv 10-27.** The servant set out, trusting in the sovereign Providence and covenant, faithful *chesed* of Yahweh. He arrives at the appointed city, not knowing anyone, and he prays to Yahweh for His Divine intervention and guidance – asks for a sign of 'success.' Yahweh's chosen and appointed bride for Isaac would not only give him a drink of water when he asked her, but she would also offer to water his camels. **"Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder [v 15].** She responds in all the ways Eliezer had asked Yahweh to show His will. Eliezer gives her the gifts he had brought from Abraham and tells her of his mission. She then reveals her relationship to Abraham's brother's family. Eliezer **"bowed his head and worshiped The LORD and said, 'Blessed be The LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His steadfast love [*chesed*] and His faithfulness toward my master. As for me, The LORD has led me in the way to house of my master's kinsmen'" [vv 26-27].** Rebekah runs to tell her household family about this encounter.
- **The Success of the bride-finding mission, vv 28-60.** Rebekah has a brother, Laban, who appears to be the family clan leader and chief spokesman. He runs out to meet Rebekah and sees the gifts Eliezer has given her. He then runs to Eliezer and offers hospitality and lodging for him and the camels. He offers a meal – but Eliezer will not even eat until he tells of his mission and errand. Once again, Eliezer recounts The LORD's providential hand upon the events of his encounter with Rebekah. He asks Laban: **"Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love [*chesed*] and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or the left."** Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, **"The thing has come from The LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as The LORD has spoken"** [vv 49-51]. You will note as you read through all these narratives, that there are 'conflicts' that arise in the events that transpire and the telling of them – some 'hitch' or reservation or 'contingency' that may arise to keep the planned mission from being prosperous or successful. It is often found in the words "but if not" or some similar language ... indicating 'but it may not work,' or 'it may not happen as we want it to happen.' But Yahweh is overruling any distraction or disruption to His covenant plan. As here, Eliezer got up the next morning to complete his mission and deliver 'the bride for his master's covenant son back to him. The family wanted him to stay for an additional ten days to give Rebekah time to think about it. But Eliezer had not come to stay or delay – he had come to be faithful to his mission. So they call for Rebekah to ask her: **"Will you go with this man? She said, 'I will go'" [vv 55-**

58]. NOTE now especially the blessing they pronounced upon Rebekah: **“And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, ‘Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!’”** What we need to note here is the fulfillment of the covenant promises Yahweh has been making to Abraham from the beginning: becoming a covenant nation, numerous offspring, blessing those who bless him and cursing those who curse him [referring to the covenant’s witness to faith in Yahweh. Yahweh had also given this same promise in these same words to Abraham after the ‘offering’ of Isaac in **ch 22.17**. Yahweh is keeping His covenant promises and re-affirming them to be fulfilled now through Isaac and Rebekah! Rebekah’s covenant offspring will be blessed by Yahweh, innumerable, successful in their mission, and unconquerable and invincible. It also sounds like the promise CHRIST has given to His churches as we bear witness to His New Covenant Gospel: **“...and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”** [see **Matthew 16.13-19**].

- **The Completion of the mission, vv 61-67.** Eliezer sets out to return to Abraham and Isaac with Rebekah, the bride for the covenant son he had been sent to bring back. Isaac had taken up residence in Beer-lahai-roi [‘The well of the God who sees and looks after me’] where Yahweh had first appeared to Hagar and Ishmael [see **ch 16.13-14**]. He had gone out into the field to meditate and pray as he anxiously awaited word about the mission: will it succeed? Will Yahweh provide the covenant wife he needed and wanted? Will Yahweh be faithful to His covenant loyalty [*chesed*]? As he looks to the horizon, he sees camels approaching! Rebekah asks Eliezer who the man is. Eliezer responds: **“It is my master,”** meaning that Isaac is now the recognized carrier of the Abrahamic covenant and heir of all the covenant promises Yahweh had given them. **“Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death”** [v 67]. What we must note here is that, by bringing Rebekah into Sarah’s former tent-house, Rebekah now becomes the ‘matriarch’ of the covenant offspring just as Isaac is now the ‘patriarch’ of the covenant offspring and heir of the covenant promises [see **Romans 9.6-9; Galatians 4.28-31; Hebrews 11.9, 17-18**]. AND, what we most need to see is that Yahweh is sovereignly superintending the historical perpetuity of His covenant promises and bringing us yet another step further along to bring CHRIST into the world to fulfill all the covenant promises IN CHRIST!

II / Genesis 25.1-34 | Abraham dies and Isaac carries on the covenant lineage

1/ vv 1-6 / Now that the transition of the covenant patriarchy has been passed from Abraham to Isaac, this chapter will relate the historical record of Abraham’s later descendants by his wife after Sarah’s death, Keturah. There is no question, however, that as it relates to the covenant Yahweh had made with him, **“Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac,”** as he had done with Ishmael before [ch 21].
 2/ vv 7-11 / Abraham dies. We all serve God in our own days and generations, and then we die. No one of us indispensable. We only want to be useful and effective in the ways God has appointed us to serve and be faithful in the exercises of our assigned responsibilities and roles. AND, we must always be proactive in securing the passing on of God’s witness and legacy to the generations coming after us. Abraham is buried in the cave of Machpelah which he had bought from the Hittites [see **ch 23**]. In the coming years, Isaac and Jacob also will be buried in this same family tomb [see **chs 35.29; 49.30; 50.13**]. **“After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son.”** Thus, the promised ‘blessing’ of the Abrahamic covenant are now conferred on Isaac. ***These will ALL be fulfilled in CHRIST, and given to ALL of us who believe in CHRIST!*** [see **Galatians 3.7-14**]

3/ vv 12-18 / Here is the 7th toledot / ‘tohl-dah’ found in the Book of Genesis. As we have noted before, there are ten of these *toledot* that are collected together to make up the larger narrative. A *toledot* begins with **‘These are the generations of...’** and they describe the descendants of someone, or ‘these came from, what became of.’ You can think of them as ‘short stories’ that are collected together to make the

‘longer story.’ Or, they are brief biographies of the one who is named. In this particular *toledot*, we are given a brief account of Ishmael because he, too, is one of Abraham’s sons – though not the covenant son of promise. But the narrator wants to give a complete record - Ishmael is a significant part of the history. 4/ vv 19-34 / This is the 8th *toledot*. We now begin the ‘story’ of Isaac. Not that we haven’t seen or heard of him before, but now he is the carrier of the covenant and becomes the primary character. We are also introduced to the birth of Jacob, who will become the third patriarch of the ‘Covenant Triumvirate: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Jacob is also announced as the elect brother of the two – Jacob and Esau – to be the heir of the covenant [see Romans 9.6-13]. Esau also shows his disregard for the spiritual inheritance of the covenant by ‘selling’ his firstborn birthright privileges to satisfy his immediate fleshly, physical appetite: **“I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me? ... Thus Esau despised his birthright”** [see also Hebrews 12.15-17].

III / Genesis 26.1-35 | The LORD reiterates and re-affirms His covenant blessing with Isaac

1/ vv 1-5 / Yahweh appears to Isaac to confirm their covenant relationship and to personally re-affirm to Isaac the same covenant promises He had given to Abraham. The occasion of this appearance was another famine in the land. So, Isaac does what Abraham before him had done: he migrates toward the more fertile regions now inhabited by the Philistines [see ch 20]. Yahweh warns him not to go to Egypt, as also Abraham had done [ch 12.10-20], but to remain in the land Yahweh had promised to give to their descendants. **“And the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven [see also ch 15.5] and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, [see also ch 12.1-3] ⁵because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws [see also chs 19.17-19; 22.15-18].”**

2/ vv 6-11 / Isaac also repeats the same failures of faith in Yahweh’s power and faithfulness to preserve his life to fulfill His covenant promises – Isaac needs only to trust Yahweh and obey Him in every way. Isaac instead lies about Rebekah being his wife...says ‘She is my sister’ for fear of being killed.

3/ vv 12-33 / This whole section is about a common strife that arose among the peoples of that day – conflict over wells of water and the ownership of them. There was an obvious ‘turf war’ waging between the Philistine herdsmen and Isaac’s. Isaac was being blessed by Yahweh, and there was a ferocious jealousy among the Philistine herdsmen. So much so, that even if the Philistine herdsmen couldn’t successfully take ownership of the precious wells, they would stop them up—refill them with dirt—just out of spite so Isaac couldn’t have them either [v 15]. Isaac proceeded to ‘re-claim’ the inheritance by re-digging the wells that Abraham had used before him. When there was conflict, the peace-loving Isaac just moved on and dug another well rather than get into a running conflict with the Philistines. The wells were named according to the conflict associated with them: ‘Esek’/contended; ‘Sitnah’/enmity; ‘Rehoboth’/room [because there was no quarrel over this one. *By the way, when our church re-located from our former site to where we are now, this un-developed site was named ‘Rehoboth’ - God had provided us ‘room’ for future growth and ministry*]. In the coming days, Isaac and the Philistine king, Abimelech, made a covenant like Abraham had done previously. That same day, Isaac’s servants came to him to tell him about another plentiful well they had dug, **“and said to him, ‘We have found water.’ He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day”** [vv 32-33]. [see also 21.21-33]

4/ And now, today, we, too, are waiting for the final and eternal fulfillment of all these covenant promises IN CHRIST ... in the New Covenant ... in the New Creation!

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” [Revelation 7.9-10]!