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Sermon Notes

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God Provides a Wife for Isaac

Genesis 24

Introduction: Amazing Providence

One of the great mysteries in the world... how boy meets girl, they fall in love, get married, live happily ever after

In our era, when technology has broken down natural family and community ties and people are far more isolated, it is getting harder and harder for boy to meet girl. The Internet seeks to come to the rescue, and all kinds of Dating and Matchmaking services exist out there to get people together. Some rely on chance meetings, happenstance, horoscopes, little signs here and there. People are searching for their “soul mate”, their life partner, their spouse.

Solomon called it one of the most amazing things in the world... beyond his understanding:

Proverbs 30:18-19 "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: ¹⁹ the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.

But even harder to understand is the secret hand of providence, the hidden plan of Almighty God in bringing a man and woman together in marriage.

Are there coincidences?

Is there any such thing as “luck” or a “chance meeting?”

Illus. Mike and Dawn New in California

Can we see the hand of God in everyday life, in everyday events? Or is it merely religious fanaticism that sees God active in the details of mundane life?

Is God active in only the great matters of the rise and fall of nations? Does He neglect the rise and fall of sparrows? Or the foundation of a godly home?

Does God concern Himself with the ebbs and flows of our lives? Is He, for example, concerned about the marriage of one man to one woman? Does God make marriages? Some speak of a couple as a “match made in heaven”. But is it true that God joins a man and a woman in marriage as a part of His eternal plan?

Do we believe that everything in the world and in our own lives down to the minutest details is ordered by the providence of God? Do we ever take time to observe and meditate on the workings of providence? If not, are we missing much? It should be a delight and pleasure to us to discern how God works all things in the world for His own glory and His people's good. But it should be an even greater pleasure to observe the particular designs of providence in our own lives.

In our text today, we will see the special guidance and providence of God at work in the union of Abraham and Isaac four thousand years ago. We will trace out the way God led Abraham's trusted servant to a certain well at a precise moment in time, how the servant's remarkably specific prayer for guidance was answered in an astonishing way, how God orchestrated the entire encounter and those that followed to achieve his purpose: the union of Isaac and Rebekah in holy matrimony. We will see how that union was part of God's promise to Abraham and the nations, and how their marriage stands as a pattern for all marriages and as a type or picture of Christ and His Bride, the church.

Summary:

When Abraham grew very old, he sent a trusted servant to his ancestral homeland to find a wife for his son Isaac. Once there, the servant prayed to God that a woman would offer him and his camels water, a sign that she was the right woman to marry Isaac.

Rebekah, the beautiful granddaughter of Abraham's brother, came to the well and when the servant asked for a drink, she gladly gave it to him and to his camels as well. She offered him and his camels shelter for the night at her home.

When the servant told the family why he was there, they said that Rebekah must decide for herself whether to marry Isaac. That night the servant gave gifts of gold and silver to everyone in the family. In the morning Rebekah said, "Yes, I will go." Riding upon the camels, she and her maids followed the servant back to the land of Abraham, and she and Isaac were happily married.

I. What God Joined Together: Isaac Marries Rebekah

When Jesus Christ was asked about marriage and divorce, he made this remarkable statement

Matthew 19:6 what God has joined together, let man not separate."

"What GOD has joined together..."

Basic lessons... God makes marriages!!!

This was clearly true in Genesis with the first marriage

Genesis 2:22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

This is just as clearly true when God worked indirectly through providence and amazing circumstances to provide a wife for Isaac

Narrative Context

God had called Abraham to leave his homeland and travel to the place God would show him

God made a striking promise to Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Later God expanded His promise to Abraham in an amazing way

Genesis 15:4-5 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah, a miracle son in their old age

Now Sarah was dead, Isaac was forty years old and had no wife

If the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled, Isaac had to get married

Genesis 24 is the longest chapter in Genesis... a delightful historical account of how God provided a wife for Isaac

First: We are going to describe this account in some detail

Second: We are going to look at five theological topics connected with this account

Third: We are going to view the overall account in three different lights... as a moral example of how godly marriages are formed; as a key step in the Redemptive Historical Plan of God for the salvation of the world; as a type or picture of Christ and His church

A. Abraham Charges and Commissions His Servant (vs. 1-9)

1. Abraham's urgent concern: a godly wife for Isaac

vs. 1-4 Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. ² He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. ³ I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, ⁴ but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

a. Abraham is old and doesn't know how much longer he will be alive

- b. Abraham's great concern: that Isaac will compromise and just get a wife from the surrounding people
- c. note: the Father's role in getting a wife for his son... Isaac was 40 years old by this time!!! Yet he trusted his father's judgment in this matter
- d. Abraham's grandson MUST be brought up in faithfulness to the covenant
 - i) remember God's statement about Abraham and his family in Genesis 18

Genesis 18:18-19 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

- ii) remember also the great emphasis the Lord would put on fathers training their children in the covenant in Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

- iii) it is EXTREMELY difficult to do this with an ungodly wife...

Genesis 27:46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."

more on this in a moment

- e. ALSO it was vital that Isaac not be allowed to leave the Promised Land... he might never come back!! When the servant asked...

Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?" ⁶ "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said.

Genesis 26:2-3 The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.

- f. NOTE: Abraham is not willing to compromise... for a marriage to the daughter of a local chieftain would have helped Isaac in the short run; also Abraham is not looking for the easy way out either... the journey was a journey of faith which could easily have failed!!!

2. Abraham solemnly commissions his servant with an oath... this is extremely serious!!
3. The servant has some questions

“What if she doesn’t come back with me?”

Very reasonable question!!! The woman is being asked to make a similar journey of faith that Abraham made so many years ago... to leave her father's household and go to a strange land, and to marry a man she's never met before

4. Abraham’s wonderful faith-filled answer... also practical!!!

vs. 7-8 *"The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'-- he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. ⁸ If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there."*

5. The servant swears the oath... and takes the commission

vs. 9 *So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.*

B. Abraham’s Servant: Journey and Model Prayer (vs. 10-14)

1. Abraham has chosen the servant wisely
 - a. not just any servant in the household
 - b. the chief steward, Abraham’s closest servant
 - c. clearly a man who had come into the same faith in God as had Abraham
2. Provisions for the journey
 - a. ten camels... laden with all kinds of provisions for the arduous journey back to Nahor
 - b. “all kinds of good things”... implies lavish gifts for the girl and her family... evidence of the great wealth of his master
 - c. also men to protect the good from desert brigands

Illus. WWII wolfpacks of Nazi submarines prowled the Atlantic; they were incredibly successful, sinking millions of tons of merchant ships trying to supply besieged England from North America... UNTIL they began to employ a strategy of convoy shipping... merchant ships stayed together in large convoys protected by destroyers...

This is the same approach to the caravan... many camels traveling together including armed soldiers to protect the valuables

BUT the servant's real security came from the living God

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

3. The arduous journey passed over in silence

up the King's highway to the Euphrates river

along the fertile crescent until they reached Aram Naharaim: literally "Aram between the two rivers"... probably not the modern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates

came to the town of Nahor, Abraham's father's name, where Abraham's brother Bethuel lived

NOTE: no time wasted searching elsewhere... he goes right back to Abraham's hometown

Qualities of the wife he was seeking: faith-filled, or Abraham's family origin, of virtuous character (i.e. chaste and pure, hard-working, hospitable, no lazy girl looking for a life of ease as the wife of a wealthy heir of Abraham)

4. The faith-filled, model prayer of the servant

Genesis 24:11-14 He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. ¹² Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'-- let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

a. faith-filled and specific

The watering of the camels at the girl's own suggestion would be the test

Offering water to a thirsty desert traveler was standard hospitality, and nothing significant about that at all

BUT offering to water ten thirsty camels is extraordinary... thirsty camels can drink up to 32 gallons of water at a time... one gallon of water weighs 8 1/3rd pounds... with the weight of the jar, each gallon would weigh ten pounds... a total of 320 pounds of water!!!

The filling of the trough for ten camels would have been a major effort, nothing the servant could ask of a girl

But it was a perfect test for the servant to give through prayer to the Lord

- b. clearly based on his need for immediate identification
 - c. so he forms his PRAYER TEST for the Lord... like Gideon's fleece
- More on this later!!

C. God's Providential Answer: Rebekah Waters the Camels (vs. 15-27)

1. Astonishing providence is often in the MIRACULOUS TIMING of ordinary events

vs. 15 Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder.

- a. this amazing timing gave the servant all the encouragement he needed
- b. when Rebekah came so quickly, the servant was ready to move out

vs. 17 The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."

2. Rebekah's qualities clearly on display

family origin: daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's brother

Genesis 22:20-23 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), ²² Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." ²³ Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor.

Bethuel was Abraham's nephew and Isaac's cousin... Rebekah was Bethuel's daughter; according to a website chart I found (www.genealogy.com/16_cousn.html), that made Rebekah Isaac's first cousin once removed.

physical beauty: "very beautiful"

virginity: no man had ever lain with her

Nowadays virginity is frequently seen as a joke or as a blight on character... how perverted is this!! The Bible always looks on this as a pure state, a godly state... a gift to give to your spouse when you are married

Young people, don't throw away that purity that God has given you

hard work: "quickly" she worked doing a difficult task; she drew enough for ALL the camels... a huge amount of work

hospitality: seen many times in this account... her offer to water the camels just the first...

respectfulness: she said “drink, my lord” ... a title of honor

graciousness and compassion

courage and faith

3. Rebekah’s fateful hospitality

little did she realize that this brief act of kindness would change her life forever

this is more exciting than any romance novel could ever be!!

A marriage found its origins in a young girl’s servant heart and hospitality

Matthew 10:42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

4. The servant’s quiet observation... NOTE: he waits until she FINISHES the job!!

vs. 21-25 Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful. ²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels.

The gifts were ample reward for her cheerful labor... but a far greater reward was about to come

5. Rebekah’s hospitable answer completes the miracle of providence

²³ Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." ²⁵ And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night."

6. JOYFUL WORSHIP!!!!

Genesis 24:26-27 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, ²⁷ saying, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

a. great joy comes from being in the center of God’s will

b. when you feel that you and God are co-laborers in some great work of eternal significance, the joy is incredible

c. I have felt this the most when I have been witnessing

Illus. Philadelphia Christmas Conference... first witnessing experiences; praying for the children and TV to quiet down; “Making Your Mark.”

D. Rebekah's Family Learns of God's Providence (vs. 28-49)

1. Something's Different About Rebekah!

- a. Rebekah's excitement and joy

vs. 28 *The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.*

- b. Rebekah's jewelry: nose ring and costly bracelets
- c. Rebekah's story: she told her mother's household everything that had happened

2. Laban's Role (vs. 29-33)

vs. 29-33 *Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. ³¹ "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." ³² So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. ³³ Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say." "Then tell us," Laban said.*

- a. we meet Laban for the first time
 - i) later will swindle Jacob concerning Rachel and Leah
 - ii) something of a self-focused conniver
- b. head of house?: Laban seems to have this role
 - i) perhaps Bethuel is very ill or incapacitated
 - ii) Laban takes a strong role in dealing with the possible marriage
- c. Laban's hospitality
 - i) immediate and generous: ample provision for Abraham's servant and his men and their beasts
 - ii) gracious and pious: "Come you who are blessed by the Lord"
- d. the servant refuses to eat, however, until the business is completed

3. The Servant's Story (vs. 34-49)

- a. story recounted verse by verse

b. key details:

- i) Abraham's wealth: sheep, cattle, silver, gold, servants, camels, donkeys
- ii) Isaac's role: sole inheritor... all of Abraham's wealth will go to Isaac [vital: a man must be able to provide for a wife... Isaac is well able]
- iii) Abraham's solemn command concerning a wife: not from the Canaanites, but from my father's household... to which the servant swore an oath
- iv) servant's objection: what if she will not come?
- v) Abraham's first assurance: God will send his angel and give you success
- vi) Abraham's second assurance: if she will not come or if the family will not let her go, you will be released from your oath
- vii) the meeting with Rebekah recounted: the servant's faith-filled prayer, God's amazing timing and providence and Rebekah's actions concerning the watering of the camels
- viii) the final confirmation: "Whose daughter are you?"

vs. 47-48 *"I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?'" She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' "Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, ⁴⁸ and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son.*

4. The Servant Pops the Question: Will She Come or Not?

vs. 49 *"Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn."*

E. Rebekah and Her Family Submit to God's Providence (vs. 50-60)

1. Recognizing the Hand of the Lord

vs. 50 *Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD;*

- a. Laban and Bethuel both see how clearly the Lord brought this about
- b. so much of the godly life is seeing God's invisible hand at work in daily life

2. Submitting to the Hand of the Lord

vs. 50-51 *"We can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed."*

- a. literally: “As the Lord has spoken”... it is not for us to say yes or no... the Lord has done this and all we can do is submit to it

BUT perhaps a good deal of sadness too... like godly Christian parents who see their children go off to the mission field... you may never see that person again

- b. notice in that culture that Rebekah is not immediately asked concerning her desires
- c. the biblical view is that a father protects and cares for a daughter until she is married, then her husband becomes her head and protector

3. Rejoicing in the Hand of the Lord

- a. we can submit to God’s sovereign hand joyfully or grudgingly
- b. God wants us to celebrate what He is doing!!!

vs. 52 *When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the LORD.*

4. Profiting from the Hand of the Lord

vs. 53 *Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother.*

- a. weddings are times of joy and celebration
- b. in every culture, lavish gifts are involved

Illus: United Arab Emirates: an average middle class wedding can cost more than \$75,000!! The money goes on the bride's wardrobe, her jewelry, a sum paid to her father; a huge women's-only reception for all her friends and relatives – and a men-only one for him. Such is the importance of keeping up appearances in the UAE that many grooms will go into debt to pay for all this, rather than lose face before their bride's family.

- c. Arabic cultures: almost always a bride-price is paid to the father; the money is used to buy jewelry and wedding cloths for the bride; these remain the sole property of the wife all her life... a sort of financial insurance policy for her provision

5. Completing the Task Without Delay (vs. 54-57)

- a. after spending the night, the servant and the men are eager to go
- b. Laban wants them to stay for ten days... it’s all so sudden!!
- c. later, he will do this exact thing when Jacob tries to leave with Leah and Rachel
- d. but the servant is adamant to leave immediately

Important not to run ahead of God... but also important not to lag behind!!

e. finally, they ask Rebekah... this is the first time she is asked in the account

6. Rebekah's Faith-filled Reply

Rebekah answers in faith... willing to go sight unseen to an unfamiliar land and marry a man she's never met

vs. 58 *So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said.*

7. Rebekah sent away with the family's blessing

vs. 59-60 *So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies."*

F. Isaac Marries Rebekah (vs. 61-67)

Genesis 24:61-67 *Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left. ⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. ⁶³ He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴ Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel ⁶⁵ and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" "He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. ⁶⁷ Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

1. Journey passed over in silence

a. BUT use your imagination... the servant and Rebekah must have discussed Isaac as they went

b. huge entourage... Rebekah had maidservants with her, for she was not poor either

2. Dramatic first meeting

a. Isaac living in Beer-Lahai-Roi in the Negev... the desert region of Palestine

b. piety: gone out in the field for a time of quiet meditation

unusual word... used only here; however, it shows his quiet, pious side

c. first meeting: Isaac sees a caravan approaching, Rebekah sees a man.

- She is so excited it says she literally fell from the camel... it may mean simply jumping down to the ground, but the standard translation is “fell”... most likely she quickly lighted from her camel in exuberance
- Next, she asked about the man: “He is my master”, the servant answered
- Isaac was heir, and therefore also this servant’s master
- Rebekah veiled herself... covering herself for chastity sake
- The servant reported the whole story to Isaac
- Isaac took Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent to stay until the wedding could be arranged
- Rebekah’s position as matriarch of the clan was established immediately by this symbolic act of Isaac taking her to his mother Sarah’s tent
- The wedding itself is never mentioned... but we have to assume there was a great celebration and feast

3. Their Beautiful Relationship

- a. Isaac significantly a “one-woman man”
- b. the text says he loved her... Isaac cherished Rebekah and cared for her
- c. it also says Isaac was “comforted after his mother’s death”... the gentle love and tenderness of a woman is irreplaceable in a man’s life... Sarah was gone, now Rebekah would be more to him than his mother had ever been

II. Five Theological Topics

- A. Covenant Faithfulness
- B. God’s Accurate Guidance
- C. God’s Sovereign Providence
- D. Godly Marriage
- E. Faith-Filled Prayer

III. Three Distinct Points of View for Applications

- A. Examples of Godliness: Imitation in Daily Life
- B. Redemptive History: Fulfilling the Promise to Abraham
- C. Spiritual Typology: Christ and His Bride

IV. Application

1. Trust in God's Faithfulness to His Promise in Christ

Story centers in God's faithfulness to keep his promise to Abraham

All lessons in the Bible on God's promise-keeping faithfulness ultimately bring us to Christ

Gospel promises the greatest of all... and God will keep every one of them!!

2. Be Faithful to Your Promise as a Servant of God
3. Understand and Trust in God's Providence
4. Rely on God to Lead You Through Daily Life
5. How Godly Marriages Are Formed

In submission to God's overall redemptive plan

In submission to parental guidance and initiative

By the sovereign hand and timing of God

Two godly people becoming as one

Sexual purity until marriage

6. Be active in daily, faith-filled prayer

Demonstrate confidence in God's sovereign providence over large and small things!!