

A Biblical Romance

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 07/05/20
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Abraham knew he was approaching the end of his life, so he gave a special mission to his most trusted servant: to find a wife for his son Isaac. Abraham sent his servant with the assurance that God would be with him.

But, just in case God needed a little help, Abraham added a little 'encouragement' of his own: he sent along with his servant a small entourage of ten camels loaded down with enough sorted trinkets and treasures to let anybody see that here was someone with "means."

The old servant went just as Abraham had told him, trusting the Lord to guide him; and, in order to be certain that he would find the right woman, asked the Lord to give him a sign.

The sign the servant asked for, was this: when he came to a spring near Abraham's hometown, he would ask a woman to draw him a jar of water to drink from. If the woman did what he asked for and offered water for his camels as well, he would know that she was the woman the Lord had chosen - just like that.

Well, lo and behold, the first woman he met, did; and Rebekah turned out to be that woman.

Rebekah was an independent woman. If, for instance, the servant Abraham had sent had looked like nobody special, it's not hard for me to imagine Rebekah telling him to get his own water, thank you very much, and, while he was at it, to get those camels out of there before they started mucking the whole place up.

But, that's not what she said. Rebekah offered to water all his camels. He told Rebekah he had traveled many miles to find a woman just like her for his employer's son. He told her she was surely the woman. She told him that, if that were the case, on a matter as serious as this she would have to consult her father and brother.

As it turned out, Rebekah's brother was a man named Laban, no slouch himself; and no sooner had Abraham's servant followed Rebekah home than Laban was greeting him like a long-lost brother. "Come in and take a load off," he said to Abraham's servant.

Once again, the servant repeated his story and how Rebekah had turned up, just at the right moment. Not surprisingly, just as soon as the camels were unpacked and the gifts shared, the betrothal was blessed and Rebekah was all but on her way back to the land of Canaan and her waiting bridegroom.

Wolfgang Roth called today's story, 'The Wooing of Rebekah.' And he says, it was told with skill and good humor by an author who believed that God was in the way things took place. Just how God was in them was the question.

In scripture, we find that the differences in cultural understandings are huge. And an understanding of those cultural differences are needed, in order to get beyond the differences, in order to get to the real point underneath. You may or may not have already noticed is that I changed the language. Instead of 'master,' I asked Tressie to use the word, 'employer.'

Abraham's servant was probably more of a manager and calling Abraham is my attempt to address that cultural difference. But he was probably the most senior and most trusted of Abraham's household managers.

Another adjustment is that of the idea of an arranged marriage. The idea of marrying someone out of love or romance is a relatively new concept. And even today, marriages are still arranged in a number

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of cultures.

Jane and I are friends with a couple whose marriage was arranged for them by their parents. They are happy and they are a wonderful couple. A Jewish commentator says that in the scripture, the ideal was not “first love, then marriage,” as it is today, but the reverse, “first marriage, then love.”

Beyond the cultural differences between an ancient story and our 21 c. culture that could get us bogged down, the story of Isaac and Rebekah is about the next generation’s trust and faith in God.

Rebekah trusts God to leave her family and go to a strange land to marry Isaac. Faith in God was lived out by Abraham and used as an example by his son, Isaac. As most of you know, children watch their parents closely and learn about relationships from them.

Children become adults and live their lives, not as they are told to do by their parents, but rather as their parents have modeled. In the Book of Genesis, we are finding out that parents with dysfunctional patterns of behavior are either copied by their children or their children make opposite choices.

So, an inheritance is not just material possessions, but it is the handing down of ways to live in positive, productive relationships and faith to sustain the next generation. To do this, adults have grow as individuals themselves, by taking the first step of increasing their self-awareness. It is to look oneself in order to become aware of one’s thoughts, actions, intentions and behaviors and to take responsibility for them. Changing patterns of behavior is challenging, and it is tempting to blame others, perhaps even God, for our situation.

Ingrained patterns resist change. Prayer, small groups in church and fellowship, provide insight and encouragement as we strive to grow. The result will be adults who are independent, well-functioning and at peace with themselves.

Passing on one’s faith gives children a solid foundation to navigate life’s inescapable turbulence without destructive behavior.

Perhaps, the truth of this week’s story is a reminder that we are more like Abraham, Rebekah and Laban -- people trying to make the best happen anyway they can -- more than we care to admit -- and that God not only doesn’t hold it against us, God keeps on working beneath the surface of it all, to make it happen too.

So God keeps on nudging us to take chances. who keeps on prodding us to believe in the gifts strangers bring and who keeps on giving us the very dreams that, with God’s help, will come true.