

# OpenTheo

## The Family of Abraham: Part 14—Rebekah, Bride and Matriarch

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Today, I comment on Genesis 24 and the quest for a bride for Isaac.

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## Transcript

Welcome back to this, the 14th in my series on Abraham and his family. We've arrived at Genesis 24, which concerns the quest to find a bride for Isaac. Abraham instructs the oldest servant in his house, the chief servant, the one who rules over everything that he owns, to go and to search for a bride for his son.

Now, the character in question is probably Eleazar of Damascus, who's mentioned previously in chapter 15, a noteworthy character insofar as he was at one point due to inherit everything that Abraham possessed. His commitment to his master is quite striking in that it is something that he is making his master's name great, even though that means that he will not be the one to inherit. For if Isaac were not the one to inherit, he would be, in many ways, next in line, now that Ishmael has gone.

And so it's worth paying attention to him, what he is doing here. In many respects, he is

like Abraham is in relationship to God within Abraham's household. He is one who's committed to make another person's name great over his own.

He is instructed to take an oath, and he takes this oath by putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, presumably next to his genitals. And it would be, he wouldn't be wearing underwear, it would be a very intimate thing, a very vulnerable thing to do that. And it would be, this isn't the usual way that you take an oath, it would be a very extreme, serious oath, an oath that made the person to whom the oath was being taken very vulnerable to the person who was making the oath.

It was also something that expressed the significance of what was being done as concerning Abraham's loins, what came forth from him, his seed. This was his legacy that was at stake. And Abraham is old at this point, and this chapter represents an important transition.

It represents the transition from Abraham at the centre of the picture to Isaac at the centre of the picture. And it is an important movement that maybe suggests that what's taking place at this point is related in part to maybe a last will and testament that Abraham is making. He's instructing his servant.

And at the beginning of this, we're told that he's Abraham's chief servant. At the end, he's spoken about as the servant of Isaac. There is a transition and a passing over of the baton at this point.

And the passing over of the baton is associated with the quest to find a bride for the son, a bride for Isaac. Now he's sent and he's instructed not to take a wife from the Canaanites, from the daughters of the Canaanites, nor to return Isaac to the land where Abraham came from. Rather, the servant is to go to the land that Abraham came from and find a wife for the son.

And the servant asks what will happen if the woman isn't willing to follow him back to the land? Should he take the son back, Isaac, back to the son? And Abraham instructs him firmly not to do so. And that he will be given the land of Canaan. And so it's important that whatever son, whatever wife is found for the son, that she be committed to leaving that place.

Consider what's taking place here in part. There is a return to the place where Abraham came from. And there's the expectation that the suitable bride for Isaac will make a similar decision to the one that Abraham made.

That she will leave her father's house, that she will leave her kindred, that she will leave her homeland, and that she will go to a place that God is showing. And so the suitable bride will be akin to Abraham himself, will be someone that leaves the place of her origin, leaves that particular realm, and returns with the servant to the place of promise.

If the woman won't follow him, the servant will be released from the oath.

And in that case, he should not take the son back there. And he takes this oath, and then he goes out on his journey. He takes 10 of his master's camels and departs.

I'm not sure why it's 10, maybe just a full number. Maybe it's just the way it happened and that's all it is. But why we would be told it was 10 is maybe a detail that invites some sort of reflection.

All his master's goods are placed in his hand. And he arises and goes to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahal. All his master's goods in his hand, in part because it's going to be transitioned to Isaac.

At the end of this story, he becomes Isaac's servant. And so he's bearing this responsibility of the transition of all Abraham's property to Isaac. And it seems at this point that Abraham and Isaac are not living in the same place.

We do not have a blessing narrative for Abraham. As Abraham dies and blesses, or is about to die and blesses his son and all these sorts of things, that doesn't happen. They don't seem to be in the same place.

We see it in the story of Isaac and his son Jacob. And Esau as well, of course, involved in that story. And we see it also in the story of Jacob.

But we don't see it in the story of Abraham. So maybe there's some rift between the two. We don't know.

But the transition of property from one to another seems to occur through the servant. Through his mission to find a bride from the father's mission. And then bring that to the son with the possession of everything that Abraham possesses.

He goes and makes his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time. When women go out to draw water. And he says to the Lord that if he will give him... He prays for success and for kindness to his master Abraham.

And he asks that as he stands by the well of water and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. That the young woman to whom he asks, please let down your pitcher that I might drink. And she responds by drink.

And I will also give your camels to drink. That she will be the one that God has appointed as a bride for Isaac. And this will be proof of God's kindness to his servant Abraham.

Now again, consider what's being asked here. This is quite a Herculean task. To get all this water for 10 camels.

Camels are thirsty animals. They're going to drink a lot. And to go down into the well.

Presumably this is a well that you had to step down into. And come back up. The suggestion is she would be having to move in some sort of a blur to get all this stuff done.

She's going to be taking on a considerable task of hospitality upon herself. This is over and above anything that anyone should reasonably expect. And all he's done is asked for this most basic act of hospitality.

Just a drink. And then she will go over and above. And she will express this extreme hospitality.

This giving not just to him but to all his camels. Now again, what might this remind us of? This reminds us of Abraham. That Abraham is a man who's distinguished by extreme hospitality.

In chapter 18 we see that as the three men, the three strangers, come towards Abraham. That he expresses this remarkable hospitality towards them. Over and above.

What he gives to them is a grand feast. And what Abraham's servant is asking here in part is he's asking for a sign. But the particularity of this sign is important.

On the one hand, this woman is going to be asked to undertake a journey similar to Abraham himself. On the other hand, she's being asked to display hospitality on a scale similar to Abraham. This is remarkable hospitality.

And it's proof that she is a suitable person to bear the covenant line with Isaac. That this is a suitable partner for the son. And the one who will bear the covenant.

The covenant that's been defined to this point in large part by hospitality. Going over and above. Making the name of others great.

And making the name of God great. And sacrifice. All these sorts of themes.

That that will be born by the next generation too. And what is the suitable woman for that? Well, someone who's going to leave her father's house and go to a place of promise. And someone who's going to display extreme hospitality.

So what happens next is he sees the women coming out to draw water. And before he had finished speaking. Behold, Rebekah.

Who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor. Abraham's brother. Came out with her picture on her shoulder.

Was she introduced this way? She's described as the son of Bethuel. And Bethuel is described not just as the son of Nahor. But as the son of Milcah.

That's an interesting detail. It suggests maybe that we're supposed to consider the story that goes back. The story that Milcah is a significant character in her own right.

That she is the daughter of the dead brother, Haran. And so the significance of Rebekah is that she is the son. Well, she's the daughter of the.

Of the granddaughter of the daughter of the dead brother. And so this is a fulfillment in many ways of the raising up of the seed. This is the raising up of the seed to the dead brother.

The sort of leverage arrangement that exists between Nahor and Milcah. Has now led to the fruit of not just Bethuel, but Rebekah. Rebekah is the one who brings those sides of the family together.

With the other side of the family in Abraham and presumably Isca. Sarai, who is taken as the daughter and sister of Lot. The daughter of Haran.

And these two sides of the family. Both of whom were committed to building up the name of the dead brother. Are going to be brought together in one united family.

And there's something fitting about that too. So we see features of this woman. She is someone who will undertake a journey like Abraham.

She will leave her father's house, go to a place of promise. She is someone who will display extreme hospitality. And she is someone who has come from a union that is designed.

To build up the name of the dead brother. Not to make their own name great, but to make the name of another great. This is all aspects.

These are all aspects of her character that qualify her. To be a suitable bearer of the line of promise. What happens then? She's described in more detail.

She's described as very beautiful to behold. There are a number of characters described as beautiful within the. Or attractive or good or having pleasant figures in the story of Genesis.

Particularly we see that of Sarah. We see it of Rebecca. We see it of Rachel.

We see it of characters like Joseph is described in many of these terms. So it's a line of promise is often associated with that sort of sign of physical beauty. That is a sign of the fittingness of this particular.

These are well-favoured characters in appearance as well as in character. She's a virgin. No man had known her.

And she goes down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up. So presumably it says some sort of step well. She goes down into the well and she comes up with the water.

This is one of the first occasions within the book of Genesis. That we have a more explicit connection between women and wells. And the marriage theme in the connection with the well.

We'll find that later on in the story of Jacob and Rachel. We'll see it in the story of Moses and Zipporah. And later on in the New Testament, of course, we see it with Christ and the woman met at the well.

Marriage themes and the well and the woman are connected together. As we look throughout the Old Testament, we'll see something of where this comes from. The woman is associated with the garden.

And at the heart of the garden of the Garden of Eden is a spring that gives life. And that gives life to the garden and it flows out into the world. In the book of Songs, we see similar themes again.

The garden is a spring that's enclosed. And as it's opened up, it gives life and its waters flow out into the world. This is something that we see in association with the temple.

The temple is associated with waters that flow out. That give life to areas of the barren. That turns the salt sea fresh.

And it makes these places realms of life and fertility. So the woman is described as like an enclosed garden. And she's described as associated with a well and water.

In the story of Rachel, we'll see that the well is closed up. It's covered up with a great stone that Jacob has to remove. These are all important themes.

We've already seen some connections in this respect. We've seen the connection between Hagar and a well or a spring, the eye in the wilderness. And there are other themes that we must consider.

Such as the conflict between Abimelech and the men of Abraham over wells. And the story of how Beersheba was founded. The seven new lambs and the seven ewes and the wells.

And all this competition over wells is associated with the conflict over wives. And the wife is a well that gives life and water arises from that. We see it in similar ways in the account of creation itself.

That water comes up and it feeds and it fertilizes the land. And these are broader themes of marriage, the woman, her fountain. We have that sort of language described in Leviticus.

The uncovering of the woman's flow. That these are water images. These are images associated with wells, with gardens, with springs, with fountains.

And what we have here, I think, is the symbolism that's very closely associated. And these stories, we need to consider their similarities and their differences. So, Rebekah in this story is very much the active partner.

The servant is described as someone who just relates the story on a number of occasions. Gives gifts. He's someone who looks a lot.

Someone who pays attention and marvels at what's taking place. But Rebekah is the woman of action in this context. She's very much the person who's going up and down, getting water from the well.

Giving water to the camels. And then she's the one who runs and tells her parents. She's very much an active party within this story.

And this story then is one that connects with themes of fertility, with bearing seed, with all these other themes that are taking place in association with wells. The purity of the well is also associated with the fact that she's a virgin. These themes are taken up in places like the wisdom literature and Proverbs, Song of Songs and elsewhere.

They're important themes and it's worth considering how they play out in the New Testament as well. He makes his request and she says, Drink my lord. And she hastened and let her pitcher down to her hand and gave him a drink.

Now she had finished giving him a drink. She said, I will draw water for your camels also until they have finished drinking. So there's a bit, if there's a pause here, she first gives him a drink.

And she, he must be wondering at that point, is this really the one? She's fulfilled part of it, but nothing else is happening yet. I'm waiting. Is there going to be anything more? And then of course, she says she's going to get water for the camels too.

There's that second stage of the sign is about to be fulfilled. So she hastened, emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw water and drew for all of his camels. And the man wandering at her remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.

And so he's waiting for her to complete the task. And he's wondering at just how remarkable this is and whether God is in fact bringing to pass this remarkable sign that he had asked for. When the camels finished drinking, the man takes a golden nose ring wearing half a shekel and two bracelets for her wrists, weighing 10 shekels of gold and then gives them to her.

And at that point he asks, whose daughter are you? Tell me please, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge? Again, it's another request for hospitality. And she responds by saying that she is the daughter of Bethuel, Milca's son, whom she brought to Nahor. Now described as the daughter of Bethuel, she doesn't give her mother's name, but she gives her grandmother's name.

And Bethuel is very much described as the son of Milca. Now, why might that be? Maybe because there is a Leveret situation going on here. That the Leveret situation means that it's primarily Haran and Milca that are being built up through the work of Nahor.

And so Nahor is a secondary party within that. In the same way as the daughter or the son that's born to Ruth is described as Naomi's son. And not primarily, in some ways it's not primarily Boaz that we have as the Obed, the son of Boaz, not primarily.

In some ways it's primarily Obed is the son of Naomi. And in a similar way, I think it might be that we have Bethuel primarily is the son of Milca because of this Leveret type situation. Then the man bows down his head and worships the Lord.

Blessed be the Lord God of my father, Master Abraham, who has not forsaken his mercy and his truth towards my master. As for me being on my way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren. So the young woman ran and told those of her mother's house these things.

This is again something that goes over and above what he expected. He was looking for someone from the land from which Abraham came, but he was not explicitly sent to the household of his master's brethren. But yet it transpires that the woman who's brought for Isaac is not just someone of the master's brethren, but seemingly the most fitting person.

Someone who represents the union of these sides of the family. Someone who represents the name of the dead brother being built up. And all these sorts of things are expressed in the character of Rebecca.

And just before this, remember, Abraham has received news that Nahor has had children through Milca. And this marriage is a significant one, I think, when we look back in chapter 11. She tells her mother's house these things.

Why her mother's house? It's interesting. We don't have her mother's name, but we have a reference to her mother's house. Bethuel is mentioned later on, but Bethuel doesn't seem to be that active within things.

He's privy to some of the arrangements later on, and seems to be party to some of them in certain respects. But mostly the work is undertaken by the brothers, Laban in particular, and the association with the mother is also stressed. Presumably, in part, because Rebecca and the daughters would be associated primarily with the mother.



They would be maybe with the mother in her tent, around her tent, and working with her in her day-to-day work. Or maybe because Bethuel was unwell, and Bethuel wasn't really in charge of things in the same way anymore. And his wife was now running things.

Or maybe it was more, it seems to be, certain matrilineal elements at points. Now I'd suggest that's mostly because of the reference to the Leveret arrangement, but it's worth considering what's taking place. It's not entirely clear.

There's a lot of emphasis upon the figure of the mother within this chapter more generally, as we'll see later on. So bear that in mind. There may be something there.

I'm not sure what to make of that particular detail. It seems that we should make something of it, but what exactly, I'm not sure. At this point, we're introduced to the character of Laban.

Laban is the brother of Rebecca, and Laban runs out to meet the man by the well. And our characterisation of Laban immediately sets him up as a particular sort of figure. What does he notice first? He sees the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists.

And when he heard the words of his sister, Rebecca, saying, It seems that he's the sort of person who notices these great gifts primarily. He's someone who has an eye for the material gain that he might get from a situation. And he invites the man into the house.

It's not entirely clear in the next verse who exactly prepares all the things for the camels. Is he extending hospitality in the same way as Rebecca did? It's not entirely clear. It says, The man came to the house.

And throughout the story, the man is presumably Eleazar of Damascus. It's the servant who's the man. The man comes to the house and he unloaded the camels and provided straw and feed for the camels and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

Is that Laban or is it the man? It's unclear. It might be either. You may be led to believe that the balance shifts very much in favour of the servant.

That this may be the servant is doing this and Laban is just not as characterised by hospitality as his sister. And Laban's hospitality, as we'll see later on as the story develops, is something that has downsides to it as well. Tarrying too long in Laban's house is not a good thing.

Food's set before them to eat and he does not eat before he tells them about his errand. Abraham's servant throughout the story is someone who's very much, he's on a mission and throughout this task, he describes things in a way that he's not going to waste time. Things happen very quickly.

There's the hurrying of Rebecca and the hurrying of the servant. Very much, they parallel each other. Whereas Laban is the one who is towering.

Laban is the one who wants to delay things. And immediately things happen. Before he had finished giving his prayer, Rebecca comes on the scene.

And then Rebecca's hurrying and doing all these things. Rebecca runs to her house before they have finished, before they have started eating the meal, he must give them his mission, tell them his mission. And then first thing in the morning, he wants to leave.

This is a man who's hurrying. This is a man who's on a mission. And this is a man who's very similar to Rebecca, who has similar characteristics.

He describes himself as Abraham's servant. Now, why are we, we end up having the whole story more or less told again. Why would it do that? We earlier on, we have Rebecca just telling his, her brother and her mother's house, these things.

We could have it as short as that. He could just tell them his story and that would be it. The text doesn't have to repeat the story.

By repeating the story, the text suggests that there's something that we need to notice here. The way the story is being told perhaps. That there are some differences and in those differences is a message for us to learn.

Now, if we look through the story, it's worth noticing this is the longest story in the book of Genesis. There is a great attention given to the character of Rebecca and the choice of Rebecca. This choice of a bride for Isaac is a keystone event.

It's a key transition as well, as I've suggested. From Abraham being the center of the picture to Isaac being the center of the picture. It's associated also with the death of Sarah.

Abraham is old, but it's at the death of Sarah, this is part of the transition that's taking place. This is not just a quest to find a bride for Isaac. It's a quest for a new matriarch for the whole people of Israel.

This is the new matriarch figure that's going to be at the center of the nation from now on. And so the choice of Rebecca is a very important one. Who is a suitable matriarch? This is not just a bride for an individual Israelite.

This is going to be the woman who's the heart of this sheikdom. The one who represents Abraham's house from now on. The woman at the heart of it.

The woman whose character defines the way that people live their lives. Sarah was that for a while. She was the one who set the terms of the house.

And now it's going to be the person that Eliezer finds. And Rebecca, we'll see, is a very suitable person for that. So how does Eliezer tell his story or the servant? The Lord has blessed my master greatly and he has become great.

And he has given him flocks and herds, silver, gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. He starts off with talking about Abraham's great wealth. And he does not actually mention the, I mean, he talks very much about God's blessing of his master.

He talks about success for his mission and all these sorts of things. He doesn't mention kindness as much. God's kindness to his master, which is very much the theme of his prayer.

And there are other ways in which he talks about God's blessing. In the earlier part of the story, we hear mention of God's blessing. In ways that aren't mentioned so much here.

Rather, the emphasis is very much on material property. And this is presumably because he noticed where Laban's eyes first went. Laban's eyes went to the gifts that had been given to Rebecca.

Laban noticed that this guy has some property. If this servant has all this wealth, then maybe his master is someone that he's a suitable guy to get our sister involved with. Now, as we look through the details, we'll see that other ways that Rebecca is, or Isaac is being set up as he's very much an eligible bachelor.

He's the sort of person that you want your sister to marry. It says, Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old. And to him, he has given all that he has.

Now, he's given two important pieces of information here. First, Isaac is of a suitable age to marry. He was born in Abraham's very old age and Sarah's old age.

This is not a son who was born just, who's born in the same generation as it were, as Bethuel, there was a generation gap almost. There have been two generations of Nahor and Milka's family in the time that it has taken for at least two generations of Nahor and Milka's family in the time that it has taken for Isaac to be born. So there's a suitability in this match that Isaac is not really old.

Isaac is someone who's still fairly young and he's someone who will be a suitable marriage age. And then the other detail is he has given him everything that he has. This is not, I mean, if you think about blessing, you'd often think about blessing in terms of many offspring and things like that.

But if you're the person who wants to marry into that family, well, ideally, you don't want that family to have too many children because if they have a lot of children, then the

inheritance is split between them. But now you just have one child who's going to inherit it all. And this one child is a very eligible bachelor.

Here we have this wealthy sheik and he's given all his property to his son, this one son, Isaac. And maybe you want your daughter to marry, you may want your sister to marry this one. And so he's instructed to go to the land of his, the land that he came from, his father's house and to his kindred.

Now, this is a detail that we don't actually have in the original instruction. He's told to go to the land from which he came. He's not told to go to his father's house and to his kindred.

Presumably, this is what Abraham would ultimately desire. This would be his ideal scenario, but it's not explicitly what he says. The servant is maybe suggesting that this is a very suitable match, that this is the ideal match, that there couldn't be a better match, that this is meant to be, that this Rebecca is not just one of many potential partners, but she is the one.

I mean, there's no one else who really fits the criteria as well as she does. And in some respect, that's true. But he's really having to sell this to Laban.

At the end, he says that the Lord will send his angel before him on his way. Again, this is similar to the way that the angel is involved in these stories. The angel is described in the story of Jacob when he blesses later on.

And Jacob is someone who's guided and assisted by the angel. He wrestles with the angel. The angel is the one who leads you and protects you as you go away from home.

The one who leads Israel and goes ahead of them into the promised land. The angel is the one who prepares the way. And this is a preparation of the way into the finding of a wife.

And this also gives you a sense of how significant this event is. That the angel that goes before is the angel that goes before as they are led into the land. The angel that goes before and a number of other key occasions that prepares the way before God's face.

Now, what we're having here, I suppose, is something very similar. The choice of a bride for Isaac is an event of great significance, which is why the text gives it such close and detailed and almost exhaustive attention. Telling things two or three times over just so that we get a sense of how important things are.

And he talks then about the sign that he asked for. The one who the virgin that would come and draw water for him and then offer to give water to his camels also. And that hurried character of Rebecca, he mentions that as well.

And all these details are given again. Now, this suggests that there is, first of all, the significant changes. But also that this is an event that is of great significance.

We should pay attention to the details. That there is something happening here that represents Rebecca as a suitable partner. And suitable partner from Laban's perspective, that Isaac will be an eligible bachelor.

He's the one that Laban would want to give his sister to in marriage. And again, it's worth, as we look back through these stories, the connection between the wife and sister and the brother and the sister. And the sister in their marriage arrangements.

These are worth paying attention to. Laban is the one who's primarily the one to win over here. The brother is the one who's arranging the marriage situation.

And that helps us to understand in part why Abraham represented himself as the brother of Sarah. Not just her wife. And not just her husband.

It meant that he was in a position to bargain. The prospective suitors would have to go through him. And so he was in a position to protect her better than if he was a direct obstacle of the husband.

What else can we notice here? That the arrangements are very similar to arrangements from the ancient Near East concerning a sort of brother or wife-sister arrangement. Where the wife was adopted into as her husband's sister and became his wife too. So there's a deeper relationship there.

So deeper knitting into the circle of kin. It's not just a matter of becoming a wife. It's a matter of becoming part of that kin group as well.

They say after they've heard the story that it obviously comes from the Lord. It's to be. And so they consent.

And then they bring Rebecca before them. And Rebecca has a right of veto. She has the right to consent.

This is not arranged marriage in this situation. It's not just you must marry this person. You have no choice.

Rather it's an arrangement in which the prospective wife has veto power and needs to have her consent. And that's a part of the arrangement is expected. This is something that suggests that Rebecca was very much active within this.

She wasn't the one doing all the negotiations, setting out the terms of the agreement. But she had a part in it. She had to give her consent.

The other thing to notice is that all these giving of gifts, it was in some respect a matter

of giving surety. So if Rebecca was divorced or something like that, her brother Laban and her father's house would have resources that had been given to her against such an eventuality. She also is given property as she is married.

And that property that she has herself is not allowed to her husband. He is not allowed to dispose of it. But rather if she needs it, that's her independent property.

And often that will come in the form of jewellery and gold and things like that. So these are all ways in which she's being provided for, ways in which she's given some independent wealth, some ways in which she's given surety and guarantees in case something goes wrong, in case her husband dies, in case she's divorced or something else along those lines. It's a sign that she's not just a concubine.

She's a full wife, that a concubine wouldn't have those same sorts of privileges, wouldn't have those. I mean, the modern marriage situation, you don't really have those to the same extent. And so a modern situation would maybe be closer in some respects to the situation of a concubine without having some of the same privileges.

But clearly, since we have monogamy, it's a very different situation. So it's not really comparable. The marriage to Rebecca then is, they want to delay it.

So they say, just a little while longer, he and the men who were with him ate and drank and stayed all night. Then they arose in the morning. And he said, send me away to my master.

There's, he wants to get on his way. And we've seen throughout the story, he's someone who wants to hurry and get things done. He's a man of action.

Rebecca's a woman of action. And he's not wanting to be delayed. But her brother and her mother said, let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least 10.

After that, she may go. Now, it's not entirely clear what this means, whether it's, it could be years, it could be a year or 10 months. There is debate about what this exactly means.

One way or another, it's the expectation that he tarry. He tarry and Rebecca tarry for a few days. We have a number of these stories.

We have that story within the time of Jacob with Laban, where he's only supposed to be a few days until Esau's anger dies down and his mother will call him back. But it ends on winding up to be many years, decades. In the story of the Levite's concubine in Judges chapter 19, we see a similar thing.

The drawing out of hospitality and wearing on for many days and being tarried in the house of the father-in-law. It's not an ideal situation. It has an ominous tone to it in that

context.

And maybe not such an ominous tone here. But as we read later on, tarrying in the house of Laban is not a good thing. It leads to a sort of slavery for Jacob.

And so the fact that Abraham's servant wants to get immediately on his way, it's a good thing that he's not going to be tarried. He's not going to be wasting time in the house of Laban. Rebecca is quite happy to go as well.

They call Rebecca and they said to her, will you go with this man? And she said, I will go. And they send away Rebecca, their sister and her nurse, presumably Deborah, who's mentioned later on, and Abraham's servant and his men. They bless Rebecca and they say to her, our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of 10,000.

And may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them. That might draw our minds back to Genesis chapter 22. In blessing, I will bless you.

And in multiplying, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand, which is on the seashore. Your descendants shall possess the gates of their enemies. So the blessing upon Rebecca here by her family is a similar blessing to the blessing that's given to Isaac at the time of the binding of Isaac.

The angel that gives the blessing is giving a blessing that reminds us of what happens to Rebecca here. And those two things brought together again suggest that this is a very suitable partnership. Rebecca and her maids arise, ride on the camels and follow the man.

And the servant took Rebecca and departed. Now, just one note, many people argue that camels were not domesticated until a few centuries later. And so this is an anachronistic feature of the text.

I don't know exactly what to make of this feature of the text. It's possible that they were used for limited purposes in certain desert journeys, but we don't know. And it's always dangerous to speculate too much upon these sorts of details when we just do not have enough maybe to judge.

But it's important to register that particular detail. Many of the commentators will point this out. Isaac comes from the way of Beelahelroi, for he dwelt in the south.

Now, that is the site that Hagar meets with the angel of the Lord in chapter 16. It's associated, the Negev is associated with Ishmael. It's not really a site where you would expect Isaac to be.

Isaac does not seem to be living with his father at this point. So he's now living down in the south. And some have suggested that he was going to meet with Hagar, maybe to

bring Hagar up.

And we're not up to Abraham after the death of Sarah. We're not sure. It's not entirely certain.

He goes out to meditate in the field in the evening, and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there the camels were coming. So he lifts his eyes and looks, and he sees this thing on the horizon, something coming towards him. Lifting up eyes and looking.

We've seen that on a few occasions within the book of Genesis. It happens when Abraham is met by the three men at the Oaks of Mamre. He lifts up his eyes and he sees these people coming towards him.

Then we have it in the event of the story of the sort of shadow binding of Isaac in the events surrounding Hagar and Ishmael in chapter 21. And we have lifting up eyes and looking in the story of the binding of Isaac 2, the Akedah story. And each one of these stories, there is some sense of this lifting up eyes, looking, seeing something far off, whatever it is, that this is a very significant thing that's coming into view.

And this looking and seeing something coming towards is something that happens on both sides. So Isaac lifts up his eyes and sees the camels coming. And then Rebecca lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from a camel.

Again, she falls off a camel. She comes off a camel quickly. She's a woman who does things in a hurry.

She's someone who does things quickly. She's someone who does not waste time. In the same way as we see that Abraham hurries in his hospitality in chapter 18.

These are not things that he wastes time about. He's someone who's a man of action. Who is this man walking in the field to meet us? And the servant said, it is my master.

So she takes a veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all these things that he had done. Again, it can tell these things very quickly when it wants to, the text.

But the author wants us to notice that there is something important about these events. So it tells them in great detail on at least a couple of occasions. Then Isaac brought her into his mother, Sarah's tent.

And he took Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. The significance of this, again, is that she is the new matriarch.

That she is taken into Sarah's tent. This is not just the tent of his mother. It's the tent of the matriarch of the people.

That she is now the central woman within this sheepdom. She's the one who everyone



will gather around. And she's an important figure for that reason.

And as I've noticed, she noted, she is someone who's like Abraham himself. She has an Abraham-like character and a Sarah-like character. And in those respects, she is a suitable bride for Isaac.

She's a suitable person, not just as a bride for Isaac, but a suitable one who will, with him, bear the destiny of the covenant. She is the one who will hold that baton and bring it forward to the next generation. That relationship with the taking of a bride and being comforted after the mourning of his mother, again, that's something that we need to pay attention to.

That there is a transition here. A transition from, first of all, the property of Abraham becomes the property of Isaac. The destiny of the covenant is moved from Abraham to Isaac.

And now we also see this transition from Sarah to Rebecca. And that transition is one that takes place psychologically for Isaac. Isaac moves from the mourning of his mother to the taking of a wife.

And his presence at this particular location might be associated with Ishmael. Maybe Ishmael lives at this particular location too. But they seem to be associated in some ways.

They both live in the Negev. And there are various other ways in which we might think that there is an association with Ishmael and Isaac at this point. Maybe their relationship has been healed to some extent.

That the rivalry between their mothers is not expressed on the next generation. We don't know. But those are details that we can maybe speculate about.

Are there any other features of this text that are worth noticing? I've already mentioned the significance of the theme of wells and women. That's one theme. But there is another story within the Old Testament that has very similar features.

It has signs that are given as someone goes in a quest to find something. It involves servants setting out on a particular mission. It involves seeing a significant character.

It involves finding a party that will be suitable as a partner for some other party. What is that story? It's the story of Samuel and Saul. In chapter 9 of the book of 1 Samuel, we see that Saul goes out on a mission to find the lost donkeys of his uncle.

And as he searches for his father Kish, and as he searches for these donkeys, he gets to the place of the prophet, the city of the prophet. And he goes to inquire of the prophet. That's his intention.

But as he goes to this city, what does he see? As they go up the hill to the city, they meet some young women going out to draw water. And he asks, is the seer here? And they answer them and said, yes, there he is just ahead of you. Hurry now, for today he came to this city because there is a sacrifice of the people on the high place.

It says they will find him, etc. And they will not eat until he comes. And then immediately as they were going up to the city, there was Samuel coming out towards them on the way up to the high place.

It's a very similar description to the first encounter with Rebecca. And what happens next, there's the appointing of Saul as the true bridegroom, as it were, of Israel. He's going to be the bridegroom, the king that will lead them.

Now, that connection, I think, is a helpful one because it helps us to understand that in both of these cases, we are seeing the quest for a marriage partner. In the first quest, it's a quest for a bride for Isaac, the patriarch of the people. In the second, it's the quest for the bridegroom, the king that will lead them.

And in both of these stories, what we have at the end is a new union that's created. The new union of the covenant that Abraham's son Isaac now has a bride and the two of them, Isaac and Rebecca, in that union, they will become the mother and the father of Jacob, through whom all the tribes will descend. We see it also in the story of Samuel and Saul.

Samuel is given a sign that this is the one. He is told the day before that God will bring this particular person to him. He will meet him the next day.

And then when Saul comes across his path, God says, this is the one. Again, we have God's involvement giving the confirmation of a sign. And within the surrounding chapters in chapter 10, we see a series of signs that are given to Saul himself.

Signs, things that will befall him. And those things as they befall him will be demonstrations, proof that this is in fact what God has intended, that he is in fact going to be the king of Israel. And each one of these things is a confirmatory sign.

Then connecting these two stories, I think we are seeing something broader about the significance of both of these events. The story of the choice of Rebecca then is an important story, and its significance is highlighted by just how much space is given to it, and also by the parallels with the story of the quest for a king for Israel. If you found this helpful, please like or subscribe to this channel.

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Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow with the 15th of my series. God bless, and thank you for listening.