



Genesis - Chapter Twenty Four

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

This lengthy chapter tells the story of Abraham's desire that Isaac should have a wife from their own people. He sends his most trusted servant back to his original homeland with the intention that he should bring back the most suitable woman for his son. On arrival in the vicinity of Haran, the servant prays that God will reveal the right woman by her being the first to come to the well drawing water, offering the servant a drink and then also providing water for his camels. Immediately, Rebekah appears and does as the servant had asked in prayer.

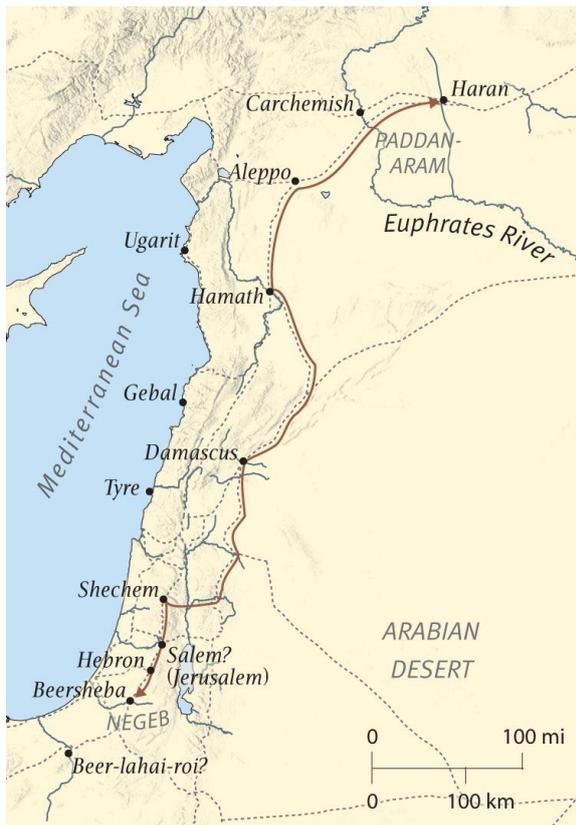
Rebekah's brother then joins them, inviting the servant into their home for a meal and shelter. He tells the family of the reason for his journey, offers the customary gifts for such a betrothal and agreement is reached. Rebekah returns with the servant and becomes Isaac's wife.

II.a.xix. Genesis 24:1-67 - The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah

The account of how Rebekah becomes Isaac's wife forms one of the longest episodes in the Book of Genesis. Displaying exceptional narrative skill, the author highlights how God controls events so that, after a long journey from Canaan to northern Mesopotamia, Abraham's servant is guided to Rebekah.

The journey from Hebron, where Sarah was buried (23:19), to Nahor in the district of Haran, where Rebekah lived (v.10), was approximately 550 miles or 900 km along ancient routes, a journey that would have taken Abraham's servant approximately 21 days to travel; a man travelling alone could cover an average of

25 miles a day or so, faster than a caravan, whose travel speed would be about 17-23 miles per day. See the map below.



The likely route of Abraham's servant to find Rebekah for Isaac

Genesis 24:1

The observation that the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things confirms the special relationship between God and Abraham, as Paul also records: <<*For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed*>> (Galatians 3:9).

² Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh ³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.' ⁵ The servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?' ⁶ Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there.'

Then, like Abraham, Rebekah must leave her family and country in an act of faith in order to journey to Canaan and marry Isaac, whom she has never met.

Genesis's first audience would marvel at how God orchestrated the servant's faithfulness, Rebekah's positive response, and some unlikely events, e.g. v.15, to bring about the marriage; they would be better able to see their very existence as the result of God's guiding hand.

¹ Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

Genesis 24:2-6

Abraham is deeply concerned that Isaac should not marry a Canaanite; he fears that this would have drawn him away from worshiping the Lord: <<***Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly***>> (Deuteronomy 7:3-4), and: <<***Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty’***>> (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). From Chapter Nine onward, the Canaanites are frequently portrayed as being wicked, refer to the comments made on 9:24-27, 10:6-20 and 13:11-13.

Abraham entrusts the important task of finding a wife for Isaac to his most reliable servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had. Although not named here, the man could be Eliezer of Damascus (15:2). However, it must be remembered that sixty years had passed since that account and therefore someone else could now have become the senior servant.

To place his servant under oath, Abraham instructs him to put your hand under my thigh. On the significance of this action, refer to the comment on v.9. The need for such an oath may indicate that Abraham recognised that he may not have lived to see the servant’s return.

In spite of having left Haran in northern Mesopotamia almost a hundred years earlier, Abraham refers to it as my country. He hopes that a wife may be found for Isaac from among his relatives there. Although Abraham insists that Isaac’s wife should come from his kindred in Mesopotamia, he emphasises that Isaac himself should not return there i.e. see to it that you do not take my son back there. Isaac’s future is to be in Canaan, for God has promised this land to Abraham’s descendants. Later, Abraham’s grandson Jacob will also marry women from the same family still living in that region (29:1-28).

⁷ The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, “To your offspring I will give this land”, he will send his angel before

you; you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.’ ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

Genesis 24:7-9

The servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham. Since striking one’s thigh was possibly understood as a sign of remorse and submission: <<*For after I had turned away I repented; and after I was discovered, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was dismayed because I bore the disgrace of my youth*>> (Jeremiah 31:19), and: <<*Cry and wail, O mortal, for it is against my people; it is against all Israel’s princes; they are thrown to the sword, together with my people. Ah! Strike the thigh!*>> (Ezekiel 21:12), the placing of one’s hand under the thigh of another may have indicated submission to that person’s strength and authority. In any case, by undertaking this action, the servant binds himself to obey Abraham’s request.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.

Genesis 24:10

Some biblical scholars have maintained that the mention of camels in Genesis is anachronistic, on the assumption that they were not domesticated until about 1100BC. Archæological finds of camel bones, however, suggest that some camels were in use by humans as early as the 3rd Millennium BC. While the evidence is limited, it is hardly surprising, given the use to which camels were put. In Genesis they usually appear in passages that involve long-distance journeys through or close to deserts. The scarcity of camels in the period of the patriarchs made them a luxury of great worth, and thus their listing here and elsewhere may serve to emphasise Abram’s wealth. This is supported in other passages of scripture: <<*She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind*>> (1 Kings 10:2), <<*And also their neighbours, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, came bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen – abundant provisions of meal, cakes of figs, clusters of raisins, wine, oil, oxen, and sheep, for there was joy in Israel*>> (1 Chronicles 12:40), and: <<*An oracle concerning the animals of the Negeb. Through a land of trouble and distress, of lioness and roaring lion, of viper and flying serpent, they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and*

their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them>>
(Isaiah 30:6)

The Hebrew expression Aram naharaim, meaning ‘Aram of the two rivers,’ is an expression that denotes the north western part of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, literally ‘between the rivers,’ appears in some translations and was the Greek title for the entire region between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. This is the first of several references to this place in the OT: <<*Then Balaam uttered his oracle, saying: ‘Balak has brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: “Come, curse Jacob for me; Come, denounce Israel!”’>>* (Numbers 23:7), <<*No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you>>* (Deuteronomy 23:3-4), and: <<*Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim for eight years>>* (Judges 3:8).

The city of Nahor, probably to be identified with Nakhur, which is mentioned in ancient texts that were recovered from Mari on the Euphrates, was located near Haran in northern Mesopotamia; refer to the comment on 11:31. Nahor is also the name of Terah’s father (11:25) and Abraham’s brother, refer to 11:26-27 and 22:20. The use of the same name for both a city and a person is not unusual; settlements are sometimes named after people, especially if they were either an original founding father or principal citizen in the city, and people are sometimes named after places.

¹¹ He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was towards evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, ‘O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the girl to whom I shall say, “Please offer your jar that I may drink”, and who shall say, “Drink, and I will water your camels” – let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.’

Genesis 24:11-14

The time when women go out to draw water. This was traditionally the work of the women: <<*The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw*

water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock>> (Exodus 2:16), <<As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and said to them, 'Is the seer here?>> (1 Samuel 9:11), and: <<A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'>> (John 4:7).

O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today. The servant, like Abraham, has faith in the Lord and prays for guidance, which is similar to: *<<O LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!' At the time, I was cupbearer to the king>> (Nehemiah 1:11).* The conditions set by the servant reveal that he is seeking a wife who has a generous and caring disposition similar to that of God, who shows steadfast love to Abraham.

The specific request in v.14 is not the ordinary way to ask for guidance – the servant might better have asked for wisdom to discern the best wife for Isaac rather than to probe into what God had providentially appointed. Nevertheless, God graciously honours the request as his means of directing events, as is also seen in the account of Gideon's fleece in Judges 6:36-40.

By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master. The servant was looking for a sign from God to show him that this was truly from him, as many others have done since: *<<Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death>> (Joshua 2:12-13), <<Then he said to him, 'If now I have found favour with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me'>> (Judges 6:17), <<But if they say, "Come up to us", then we will go up; for the LORD has given them into our hand. That will be the sign for us>> (1 Samuel 14:10), <<Show me a sign of your favour, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me>> (Psalm 86:17), and: <<When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation'>> (Luke 11:29-30).*

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.

Genesis 24:15-16

Before he had finished speaking. Isaiah 65:24 speaks of this kind of gracious answer to prayer: <<*Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear*>>.

The description of Rebekah as a virgin whom no man had known is important in the context as it indicates the expectation that she may well be the one intended by God to be Isaac's wife.

¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, 'Please let me sip a little water from your jar.' ¹⁸ 'Drink, my lord,' she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.' ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

Genesis 24:17-21

Rebekah's actions of providing a drink for the man and then for his camels exactly mirror what the servant had earlier prayed for in v.14. Thus the servant knew that this was God's choice of a wife for Isaac.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³ and said, 'Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?' ²⁴ She said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.' ²⁵ She added, 'We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.'

Genesis 24:22-25

There was nothing strange, shocking, or rebellious about wearing a gold nose-ring in that culture. Many believe it to be simply a gift while others as a marker for future betrothal or ownership, as indicated by the way God had adorned his own people: <<*I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, ear-rings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head*>> (Ezekiel 16:11-12).

We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night. In answer to the man's question, Rebekah did not hesitate to offer both accommodation for the

man and for his camels. She did not wait for permission from either her father or her husband as she knew very well that the culture demanded such unstinting hospitality to a stranger. Her response would not have been swayed by the gold nose-ring that he had just given to her.

²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshipped the LORD ²⁷ and said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.'

Genesis 24:26-27

The man bowed his head and worshipped the LORD. God's swift response to the servant's prayer evokes an immediate response of worship and praise. This is the appropriate response for all who believe and trust in God: <<*The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped*>> (Exodus 4:31), <<*Then David said to the whole assembly, 'Bless the LORD your God.'* And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD and the king'>> (1 Chronicles 29:20), and: <<*Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshipping the LORD*>> (2 Chronicles 20:18). Even Jesus prostrated himself in prayer to his Father: <<*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him*>> (Mark 14:35).

As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin. The servant also recognises that God has not only been gracious to Abraham in identifying the right wife for his son, he had also guided the servant to a successful conclusion to his task, enabling him to fulfil his oath to his master.

²⁸ Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. ²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.

Genesis 24:28-29

The actions of Laban, Rebekah's brother, suggest that he has taken on the day-to-day responsibility of overseeing the family. While Laban's father Bethuel is still alive, as confirmed in v.50, his lack of involvement in the narrative suggests that he may already handed over the running of his affairs to his son, possibly through old age.

Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. The act of running on such occasions indicates the determination to show hospitality and to honour and welcome even strangers into their home.

³⁰ As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, 'Thus the man spoke to me', he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹ He said, 'Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?' ³² So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³ Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my errand.' He said, 'Speak on.'

Genesis 24:30-33

As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms: Laban's eyes were on the riches the servant brought. He was motivated to show appropriate hospitality to this mysterious visitor and to warmly greet him: Come in, O blessed of the LORD: <<*May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth*>> (Psalm 115:15).

So the man came into the house. This refers to the servant and those that had travelled with him. As he was carrying gold and jewels for the endowment it would have been necessary to take a security contingent along as well.

Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. It is more likely that Laban oversaw his own staff undertaking these tasks and would normally have been female servants who would wash the feet of the men.

Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my errand.' The servant knew that such meals were part of the social fabric and would no doubt have lasted most of the evening. His business with the family was much too important for him to be diverted by social niceties.

³⁴ So he said, 'I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. ³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the

Canaanites, in whose land I live; ³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son." ³⁹ I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman will not follow me." ⁴⁰ But he said to me, "The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; even if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath." ⁴² 'I came today to the spring, and said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³ I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also' – let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son." ⁴⁵ 'Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink." ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels." So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" She said, "The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him." So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹ Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left.'

Genesis 24:34-49

I am Abraham's servant. The man clearly identifies his role and his long speech closely repeats much of what has already been narrated in the first part of the chapter. Additional minor details are occasionally included; for example, v.47 reveals that the gold ring mentioned in v.22 was put on Rebekah's nose.

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. ⁵¹ Look, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken.'

Genesis 24:50-51

Then Laban and Bethuel answered. Although Laban had been the one to speak for the family, Bethuel feels the need to be involved in such an important decision.

The thing comes from the LORD, as the LORD has spoken. Rebekah's brother and father acknowledge that the providential nature of all that has taken place convincingly indicates that Rebekah should become Isaac's wife. This is clearly God's will.

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. ⁵³ And the servant brought out jewellery of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴ Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, 'Send me back to my master.' ⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, 'Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.' ⁵⁶ But he said to them, 'Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go, that I may go to my master.' ⁵⁷ They said, 'We will call the girl, and ask her.' ⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah, and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will.' ⁵⁹ So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men.

Genesis 24:52-59

And the servant brought out jewellery of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. The gifts confirm what the servant has earlier said about Abraham's wealth, see v.35.

Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go, that I may go to my master. The servant was determined to leave promptly, and Rebekah was determined to make her home with her new husband. She understood that her loyalty should be with her new family. Therefore, She said, 'I will.'

⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

'May you, our sister, become
thousands of myriads;
may your offspring gain possession
of the gates of their foes.'

Genesis 24:60

They blessed Rebekah. The hopes expressed in this brief blessing echo the divine oath made to Abraham in 22:17, emphasising both many descendants and a special descendant who will conquer his enemies.

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

Genesis 24:61

Then Rebekah and her maids rose up. Bethuel was a wealthy man and therefore it would be natural that his daughter have servants of her own to tend to her needs.

The servant took Rebekah, and went his way. No further time was lost and the homeward journey now began. No doubt the servant would have much to tell Rebekah about Abraham, Isaac and the new life that awaited her in the land that God had promised to them.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. ⁶³ Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming.

Genesis 24:63

Isaac went out. This is another divinely directed event, which allows for Isaac to be the first person to meet Rebekah when they arrive at Isaac's homeland.

⁶⁴ And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, 'Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?' The servant said, 'It is my master.' So she took her veil and covered herself.

Genesis 24:64-65

She took her veil and covered herself. It was customary for a woman to cover her face with a veil during the period of betrothal or when in the company of men other than her immediate family or their servants. This is reflected in: <<*How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil*>> (Song 4:1a).

⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Genesis 24:66-67

And she became his wife. This is another key event leading toward the fulfilment of the promise to make of Abraham a great nation. There was no specific wedding ceremony for such things are cultural rather than ordained by God. He simply requires a man and woman to live in a monogamous relationship; one that brings honour and glory to him.

He loved her: Isaac loved his bride, and Jesus loves his Church.

Summarising the pictures of Isaac, Rebekah, Jesus, and the Church.

i. Both Rebekah and the church:

- Were chosen for marriage before they knew it (Ephesians 1:3-4).
- Were necessary for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:10-11).
- Were destined to share in the glory of the son (John 17:22-23).
- Learned of the son through his representative.
- Must leave all with joy to be with the son.
- Were loved and cared for by the son.

ii. Both Isaac and Jesus:

- Were promised before their coming.
- Finally appeared at the appointed time.
- Were conceived and born miraculously.
- Were given a special name before birth.
- Were offered up in sacrifice by the father.
- Were brought back from the dead.
- Were head of a great company to bless all people.
- Prepared a place for their bride.
- Had a ministry of prayer until united with the bride.