

October 28, 2018

Lesson 9: Isaac and Rebekah Continue the Legacy

Scripture: Gen. 24:12-21, 61-67

Context:

Our last lesson focused upon the story of Abraham and Sarah giving birth to a son in old age. This son Isaac will be their only son and thus we move onto his part of the story. This narrative focuses upon one of the last requests of Abraham. As he nears death, his last wish is for his son not to wed any of the Canaanite women. Instead, he desires that his son receive a wife from his home country among the people that Abraham would have considered faithful.

Abraham sends a servant in search of an appropriate wife. So the servant sets out taking goods and camels with him on his journey. When he gets to the city of Nahor, he stops to get water from the well. As he rests, the servant says a prayer for his mission and glances at the women coming to and from the well. He asks God to reveal to him which of the women will be Isaac's betrothal by her hospitality. The one who offers him water for both him and his camels will be the one to wed Isaac.

Sure enough, a woman named Rebekah walks onto the scene. She is a relative of Abraham and thus an extended cousin of Isaac. The text paints a pretty picture as she is described as very beautiful, old enough to be married, and a virgin. Voila! She is the perfect match and everything that Abraham would want for his son Isaac.

When the servant approaches her, she does everything that he prays she would do. The story continues with the servant meeting Rebekah's family and the servant giving the gifts to the family and taking off with Rebekah. The servant, Rebekah, and her entourage begin their journey.

The story continues to unfold as Isaac is out in the pastures of a plain and sees the camels approaching. Rebekah sees Isaac and they are introduced. The moment then moves to the climax as Isaac takes Rebekah into his mother's tent, and then they become husband and wife.

Somehow we deduce that either this happened right before or right at Sarah's death. The text proceeds to mention immediately after their marriage that Isaac finds comfort after his mother's death. There is now another female figure in his life to give him support just as his mother did. There is no mention of Abraham, but we can deduce that he did live after Sarah as the next chapter indicates he took another wife.

The text closes on this bittersweet note that the family continues on. Isaac has found a wife and Abraham's wishes are respected. Rebekah comes from a solid background and the family of faith will continue. The prophecy that Abraham and Sarah would give birth to generations is coming true!

Application

Beyond the obvious allusion to the song "Matchmaker" from *Fiddler on The Roof* about good Jewish girls marrying good Jewish boys, this text is perhaps one of the most joyful in the book of Genesis. Most of the narratives we read in Genesis with the first families possess drama and tension with few sweet, tender moments. This one carries a

completely different tone.

In what could be considered one of the more secular pieces of the Genesis saga, we receive a glimpse into how we might discuss the term “blessing.” For Abraham, there had to be a blessing that went with the marriage of his son and the woman he would marry. For the servant to find the right woman, there had to be something special, a blessing that arose out of the encounter with the potential spouse. When Rebekah met Isaac there had to be something mystifying about an arranged marriage. For Isaac, one of the more silent Genesis patriarchs, there was a blessing in being in a new relationship that helped soothe the loss of a deceased loved one.

This text is not just about marriage customs or a romantic love story. It is about experiencing the divine in the everyday. All of those characters found those blessings mentioned above. I have often been amazed that when you start to look for blessings, you will find them in all sorts of places. For each of our characters, there was something that was a blessing to them.

One thing I have tried to do is to find at least one thing in the day I find a blessing. It may be something work related that helped me see God at work. Or it might be the presence of someone who has made my day, maybe somewhat unintentionally. The blessing might be something found in nature that captures my attention.

In the wake of the recent Hurricane Michael that has devastated much of the panhandle of Florida, I have been amazed at how even people who lost everything continue to describe blessings they feel they have received in these hard weeks. Some praise God for finding loved ones safe and sound. Some praise God that even though they lost everything, they still have life and that is the greatest gift. Others receive a blessing through the generosity and willingness of others to give to support those affected by the storm. Flood buckets from UMCOR are being assembled across the country and folks continue to donate money to help with aide and support. Neighbors spend countless hours cleaning up yards and helping those who they may not have even known before the hurricane.

These are everyday blessings much like the Isaac and Rebekah story that reveal God at work in our lives and the lives of those around us. Even the little things help in the grand scheme of things and reveal God working through everyday people. Whenever people share blessings with one another, there is joy and goodness.

Do you look for God’s blessings everyday? How can you be a blessing to others? What prayers do you lift up to God when looking towards the future? Where are the places you find God’s blessings most obvious?

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