

"A wife for Isaac "

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end]

Introduction

Today in our story Abraham sends out his servant Eliezer to find a bride for his 40 year old son, Isaac.

This is fairly common in those societies and in Jewish society up until the middle of the last century. The ministry of the shadchan, the matchmaker is made famous for our day by the movie and stage play *Fiddler on the Roof*. The role of the matchmaker combined the yenta, the old lady busybody of the town, with the shadchan ministry of matchmaking.

Traditionally the shadchan did not have much to work with. Shalom Aleichem the great Yiddish author of about 100 years ago, defined a shadchan as 'a dealer in livestock.' The stories in Jewish literature are rife.

A shadchan having sung the praises of a female client, brought his excited male prospect to see her. The young man took one look at the damsel to whom the shadchen elaborately introduced him, and recoiled.

"What's the matter?" asked the shadchen.

"You said she was young!" whispered the young man. "and she's forty if she's a day! You said she was beautiful, and she looks like a duck. You said she was shapely and she's fat enough for two. You said—"

"You don't have to whisper," said the shadchen, "she's also hard of hearing."

You might remember the words of Molly Picon in *Fiddler* as she said, "the way she sees and the way he looks, it's a perfect match!"

So the shadchan organizes the marriages of the young and the old. Why anyone would want to get married is beyond some. Marriage is when you agree to spend the rest of your life sleeping in a room that's too warm, beside someone who's sleeping in a room that's too cold.

Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handsprings or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it.

The insurance salesman said this to the customer: "You've filled in this application all right except for one thing, Mr. Cohen -- where it asks the

relationship of Mrs. Cohen to yourself, you should have put down 'wife', not 'strained'".

The speaker at the woman's club was lecturing on marriage and asked the audience how many of us wanted to "mother" our husbands. One member in the back row raised her hand.

"You do want to mother your husband?" the speaker asked.

"Mother?" the woman echoed. "I thought you said smother."

How to find a mate

An Austrian anthropologist named Weizl who lived for a time among the natives of northern Siberia was frequently accosted by giggling young maidens who showed up at his door and pelted him with freshly killed lice. Eventually Weizl learned that among northern Siberians, lice-throwing was a customary manner for woman to declare her interest in a man and indicate that she was available for marriage.

On her golden wedding anniversary, my grandmother revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. "To tell the truth," she replied, "I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'"

Commentary

1-9 Abraham's concern that God's promise come to the descendants of Isaac is evidenced in the oath Abraham made with his servant. Abraham is promised a seed, remember? Now the seed has to have seed too or this will just be a one generational reality. So Abraham sees to the situation.

Two important points are made regarding the future of Abraham's seed. First, they were not to be mixed with the inhabitants of Canaan, which appears to be a further expression of the notion of the two lines of blessing and curse (9:25-27). The seed of Abraham must be kept separate from the seed of Canaan. This notion of separation is not just about kosher foods in the Torah; it's from the beginning. Light and dark separated, the sons of God and the daughters of men,

the City of God and the City of Man (as we described some weeks back)...all are important images of separation.

Second, Abraham's descendants are not to return to the land of their fathers. The new land, Israel, or as they called it, Canaan is their home, and Abraham is careful to ensure that Isaac not be taken back to the ancestral home.

This section once more portrays the faith of Abraham. The questions raised by the servant provide the occasion. As so many times before, Abraham's reply proves to be both prophetic (anticipating the final outcome of the story) and thematic (providing the central motive of the narrative). "The LORD, the God of heaven, . . . will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there." The key idea is God's going before the servant to prepare his way.

1. The rite or ceremony used on the occasion: the person binding himself put his hand under the thigh of the person to whom he was to be bound; i.e., he put his hand on the part that bore the mark of circumcision, the sign of God's covenant, which is tantamount to our kissing the book, or swearing on the Bible in a courtroom.
 2. The form of the oath itself: the person swore by Yahweh, the God of heaven and the God of the earth.
2. Three essential attributes of God are here mentioned: 1. His self-existence and eternity in the name Jehovah. 2. His dominion of glory and blessedness in the kingdom of heaven. 3. His providence and bounty in the earth. The meaning of the oath seems to be this: "As God is unchangeable in his nature and purposes, so shall I be in this engagement, under the penalty of forfeiting all expectation of temporal prosperity, the benefits of the mystical covenant, and future glory."

An oath of this kind, taken at such a time, and on such an occasion, can never be deemed irreligious or profane. You shall swear by his name — shall acknowledge and bind yourself unto the true God, as the just Judge of your motives and actions, is a command of the Most High; and such an oath as the above is at once (on such an occasion) both proper and rational. The person binding himself proposes for a pattern the unchangeable and just God; and as HE is the avenger of wrong and the punisher of falsehood, and has all power in the heavens and in the earth, so he can punish perjury by inflicting the loss due to ungodly men, among whom liars and perjured persons occupy the most distinguished rank. Our ideas of delicacy may revolt from the ceremony used here; but, when the nature of the covenant is considered, of which circumcision was the sign, we at once perceive that this rite could not be used without producing sentiments of reverence and godly fear, as the contracting party must know that the God of this covenant was a consuming fire.

10-27 The servant spelled out specifically the nature of the sign he sought from the Lord. God prepared the way, bringing the young girl in question on the scene even before the servant finished speaking. All the details of her background are given as soon as she enters the picture. While the servant is unaware of the actual identity of the girl, we know that she is Rebekah, the

daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah. Clearly, the Lord has answered the servant's prayer. From the type of information given, there is no doubt that this was the girl the servant had asked for and that God had indeed sent his messenger out ahead of him to prepare the way. Such divine preparation for the descendants of Abraham and the line of the blessing must be accompanied by the kind of appreciation seen in the servant in vv. 26-27. Of note is that she exceeded the prayer request by Eliezer. If she had simply filled the request exactly, we might have thought that Eliezer actually made it up; but here she went beyond his imaginings.

Verse 26. Bowed down his head, and worshipped— Two acts of adoration are mentioned here; 1. Bowing the head, יִקְּוֹד yikkod; and 2. Prostration upon the earth, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה vaiyishtaehu. The bowing of the head was to Rebekah, to return her thanks for her kind invitation. The prostration was to Jehovah, in gratitude for the success with which he had favored him.

28-49 After meeting Laban and his household, the servant retells the episode. Rather than a mere repeating, however, the retelling reasserts the central points of the first narrative. Originally Abraham is recorded as saying, only generally, that God would send a messenger and that the servant would find a wife for Isaac (v. 7). When he retold the story, however, the servant included the idea that God would send the angel and also added that the angel would make his journey a success by gaining a wife for Isaac from his own family. The further details make the miracle of God's provision even more grand than suggested in the original incident itself.

50-61 At the conclusion of the servant's account, Laban and Bethuel acknowledge that it was the Lord who prepared the way for the servant to meet Rebekah. Thus several witnesses testify that these events were the work of God: the narrator (vv. 15-16), the servant (vv. 26-27), and Laban and Bethuel (v. 50). The final witness is Rebekah herself, who, against the wishes of her brother and her mother, returned with the servant to Isaac. The simplicity of her response (v. 58) reveals the nature of her trust in the God of Abraham (cf. Ruth 1:16).

62-67 The importance of the blessing of Rebekah by her family lies in the similarity of this blessing to that given to Abraham by the Lord in 22:17. This reveals the careful attention to detail the Lord has shown in choosing this wife for Isaac. In God's plan the same blessing is given to both Isaac and his bride.

For the first time in the story, Isaac enters the narrative, just as the servant is bringing the young woman to him. They both lift up their eyes and see the other in the distance. The narrator, along with the readers, knows who it is that Isaac and Rebekah see, but they themselves do not.

Verse 66 shows that the writer knows just how long to tell the story and stops short of going beyond that point. He says merely that the servant "told Isaac all he had done." The final remarks again show that God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him. When Isaac took Rebekah as his wife, he loved her and was comforted with her after the

death of his mother. So Rebekah follows Sarah in the line of the descendants of Abraham.

I love my wife and am honored to be married to her the last 25 years. Joseph H. Choate was a thorough gentleman as well as a distinguished lawyer some years back. He had a quick wit which made him good copy for journalists. Someone once asked him, "Mr. Choate, if you were not yourself, who would you most like to be?"

Without a second's hesitation Choate replied, "Mrs. Choate's second husband."

That's the way men ought to think about their wives.

Summary

I hope you had fun with the many stories and thoughts on marriage today.

Here are some things I see as we conclude, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) Confidence in God's promises is not limited to early stages of trust
- 2) God wants to be our provider and this includes marriage partners
- 3) Servants often have to serve in uncomfortable places and jobs
- 4) Hard work or industry is a value for a child of God.

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour Y'shua, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, and yet it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you haven't yet been restored into fellowship with Him, maybe God is vindicating you today. Won't you pray this prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins, whatever they might be, and come home to pleasure with God? Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah, the Serpent Bruiser, Y'shua himself. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua and make me born again. I trust you.