

LET GOD CHOOSE YOUR SPOUSE!

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” [Gen. 2:18]

Each time my wife (of 27 years) counsels young people, she reminds them that there are three critical events in their lives: birth, marriage and death. They have no control over when, how or where they were born or would die. However, marriage is their choice and a wrong decision there could hasten their death!

In God’s eyes, marriage is the union of a man and a woman [Gen. 2:24]. Any other arrangement is an abomination to Him [Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1: 26-28]. Although marriage is not compulsory [Matt. 19:12], it was instituted by God Himself as the basis for perpetuating the human species [Gen. 1:27-28]. Also, because it symbolises the relationship between Christ and His church [Eph. 5: 31-32], marriage is meant to last “till death do us part.” That is why God hates divorce [Mal. 2:16].

A good first step towards a happy unbroken married life is choosing the right spouse. For those of us who are already married, this lesson will assist us to advise our children on the subject. For the eligible single people among us, this is a timely discussion, and you had better pay attention! God is very interested in your choice of a spouse because of His plans for your salvation. His thoughts towards you are “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end” [Jer. 29:11].

As human beings, we can only assess others on the surface, but only God knows their innermost parts [1 Sam. 16:7]. Before we were formed in our mothers’ wombs, He already knew us [Jer. 1:5], for as David put it, “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” [Ps. 139:16]. Therefore, His choice of a spouse for us is bound to be superior, and it will guarantee a happy married life “till death do us part.”

Interestingly, however, His approach and choice may look ludicrous (laughable) to us. Adam woke up from an induced sleep and found a young beautiful woman by his side. Without any questions, he took her as his wife [Gen. 2:23] and they remained married for over 800 years [Gen. 5:4]! God’s plan is simple: to make each man “an help meet for him” [Gen. 2:18].

In today’s lesson, we shall study how Rebecca became Isaac’s wife in order to underline some spiritual principles to guide our steps.

1. Understanding God's approach

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither our ways His, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" [Is. 55:8-9].

In your little corner of the world, you may be scratching your little brain, making your list of the qualities of your ideal spouse. In another corner of the world, your potential spouse is making a similar list. You don't know each other. If you are both religious, each of you may be praying independently to God to help you to meet "Mr./Miss Right". But, right from the beginning, God saw both of you in your separate locations "for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" [2 Chron. 16:9].

God has His own plans concerning you and your future spouse. First, He has to assure that both of you are ready *as individuals*. He will not match-make a couple unless and until they are both ready *spiritually*. Second, since He does not violate our free will, He has to ensure that when He brings both of you together, that you will respect and accept His choice. He is the one that sets the standards, lays down the framework, the process and the methods, and sets the timetable and circumstances in motion. When you interfere by trying a carnal (human) approach, you may delay but cannot stop Him. Abraham's relationship with Hagar only delayed but did not stop God's promise for Sarah [Gen. 21:10-13].

As we study the story of how God chose a spouse for Isaac, let us pay attention to His careful plans for everyone involved and how He brought everything to pass.

2. Analysis: Isaac weds Rebecca [Gen. 24: 1-67]

I have chosen this story for the following reasons:

- ❑ Of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it was only Isaac who stuck to one wife.
- ❑ During the first 20 years of his marriage, there was no child [Gen. 25:26] and, yet, Isaac did not go aside to have a child by another woman as his father had done with Sarah's maid, Hagar [Gen. 16: 1-2]. With patience, God gave him twin boys, Esau and Jacob.
- ❑ Until his death at age 180 [Gen. 35:28], there is no evidence that he remarried, an indication that he and Rebecca lived to ripe old age [Gen. 49:31].

Thus, Isaac's case is remarkably similar to an ideal Christian marriage of our era, and I am curious to know how he chose his obviously precious wife!

Step 1: Preparing the 2 families spiritually

(a) *Isaac's family*

Abraham has been called God's friend [**Is. 41:8**] and the father of faith [**Rom. 4:11-12**]. At the age of 75, God called him out from among his pagan people in Syria:

*Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing... and **in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed** [**Gen. 12: 1-4**]*

At the time that God made this promise to Abraham, his wife, Sarah (then called Sarai) was barren. For the next 24 years, she remained so. Meanwhile, during that long period, God taught both of them how to trust Him and rely on Him alone and only. Therefore, when Isaac, the child of promise was born, there is no doubt that he was raised in the fear of the Lord. "Train up a child the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" [**Prov. 22:6**].

(b) *Rebecca's family*

Bethuel, Rebecca's father, came from the lineage of Nahor, Abraham's brother [**Gen. 11:27; Gen. 24:24**]. As family, Abraham's people were in touch with him to report their own activities and progress, and to find out how his family was doing. For example, soon after Abraham returned from the journey where God provided a ram for sacrifice in place of Isaac, he received the following message from his home people:

*And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she had born children unto thy brother Nahor; Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, and Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and **Bethuel, and Bethuel beget Rebekah** [**Gen. 22:20-23**].*

Those who brought this message would certainly have hurried home to recount how Sarah had miraculously had a son at age 90, and how God had blessed Abraham. By the time that Abraham's servant came to Bethuel's home years later, there is evidence that Abraham's home people had embraced the worship of the one true God, as the following suggests:

*Then Laban [Rebecca's brother] and Bethuel answered and said, The thing procedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good [**Gen. 24:50**]*

In deed, both families were already in the will of God and Isaac and his future bride had been spiritually prepared for their first meeting!

Step 2: Abraham sends his servant to Syria to look for Isaac's wife

In his old age, Abraham called his eldest servant and made him swear to “go unto *my country and to my kindred* and ***take a wife*** unto my son Isaac” [Gen. 24: 4]. He added, “the Lord God of heaven ... shall send His angel before thee and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence” [v. 7].

Abraham's eldest servant was the one who “ruled over *all* that Abraham had” [Gen. 24:2]. Certainly, he was also a man who feared God and knew of God's plans for his master and his family. So, he knew that Abraham was not dishing out his own personal opinion but God's precise plan for Isaac's wedding. Isaac's resentment of his son, Esau's marriage to a Hittite many years later [Gen. 26:34] confirms that he was aware of and supported his father's plan for him to marry from among his own people. ***That was the will of God.***

Step 3: The servant prays for God's guidance

Led by the Spirit of God, the servant knew where he was likely to meet decent girls. However, he would not know the exact girl meant for Isaac. So, he prayed and asked for God's speed and kindness. More specifically, he put the criteria for identifying Isaac's wife before the Lord in prayer as follows:

*Behold I stand here by the well and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that **the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac*** [Gen. 24:14]

Step 4: No time to waste!

Abraham's servant did not waste any time. As soon as Rebecca met the spiritual standard, he moved quickly to know her more closely: “Whose daughter are thou? Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?” [v. 23]. When he knew that she was from Abraham's clan, he bowed down and thanked God for leading him to the right place [vv. 26-27]. In no time, he was in the home of her father, Bethuel, and brother, Laban, telling the story of his mission and how he had relied on God to lead him [vv. 28-49]. As said earlier, her family was in deed God-fearing, and this is how they received the news:

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceededth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good [v. 50].

Many people lose their God-given spouses because they are listening to the world: “don’t act cheap!” “don’t throw yourself at him/her!” “a short courtship is dangerous because you don’t know him/her!” etc. If you are walking in accordance with God’s plan, you can ignore such distractions.

Step 5: Rebecca gives her consent

Bethuel was willing to allow his daughter to marry Isaac [v. 51] but her consent was essential because God will not force us against our will. So, they called Rebecca “and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go” [vv. 57-58]. Even before she met Isaac, she gave her consent without fearing whether her future husband was ugly, impotent or whatever! Marriage begins with faith, not love. If God led Abraham’s servant to her, then, she believed that all would be well.

We mistake “infatuation” (emotional feelings) or even a strong liking for love. Love is a life-long thing. The love between a newly married couple may be more passionately expressed than that between another couple celebrating their golden (50th) wedding anniversary. The love a mother shows to her daughter is different from the one to her husband or her God. True love can only emerge out of a shared relationship. Therefore, don’t be surprised that couples may actually fall in love after, not before, their marriage! Otherwise, Paul would not have needed to enjoin husbands to love their wives [Eph. 5:25].

Step 6: Isaac accepts Rebecca as his wife

While waiting for his bride, Isaac was praying and meditating [v. 63]. That evening, he looked up and saw his father’s servant’s entourage. For the first time, he set eyes on Rebecca. “And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebecca, *and she became his wife and he loved her*” [v.67]. Now, examine the sequence: she became his wife and he loved her. Marriage came before love. As used here, love does not mean marital relations because elsewhere in the book of Genesis, the language for that is “Adam knew Eve” [Gen. 4:1] or “I pray thee, go in unto my maid” [Gen. 16:2]. By faith, Isaac accepted Rebecca as his wife, just as she had done earlier. Faith begets faith, then love is the output, and “God is love and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” [1 Jn 4:16].

Final Step: Isaac counts his blessings

“Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” [v.67]. Rebecca had fully replaced Sarah, his mother, as his confidant and friend. In deed as the Lord has promised the righteous, “thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table” [Ps. 128:3]. The price of a virtuous woman “is far above rubies” [Prov. 31:10].

3. Some General Principles

Here are the general principles that we can deduce from the above case study:

- (a) Get right with God and learn to rely on Him *absolutely*. “Without faith, it is *impossible* to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is a rewarder of them that *diligently seek Him*” [Heb. 11:6].
- (b) God is in control of the whole process, but you can pray for His will in your marriage to be fulfilled in the spouse you seek. Pray for clear and specific road signs to guide your walk by faith.
- (c) How do you know that God is the one speaking to you? When you are in spirit, you will know. God has promised that in the latter days, “I will pour My Spirit upon *all flesh*; and your sons and daughters *shall prophesy*, your old men shall *dream dreams*, your young men shall *see visions*” [Joel 2:28].
- (d) Don’t put unnecessary pressure on yourself. God is in control of the clock and pace and everything else. Your duty is to cooperate by following the leads He reveals to you. Pray for the spirit of discernment to know when the devil is trying to play tricks.
- (e) When you finally meet the spouse that God has chosen for you, accept him/her **by faith**. You may not like him/her that first time but endeavour to befriend and like him/her. You can fall in love after marriage because what we call love during courtship may be just infatuation. It does not survive the wedding ceremony and a marriage built on that alone is like a house built on sand [Matt. 7:26-27].
- (f) You need faith to complete the process because genuine love will take time, effort and patience to cultivate and nurture into maturity. Love is a life time pursuit in marriage and the road to it is always under construction! That is why God commands us to love one another [1 Jn 3:23].

4. Conclusion

Before some of us got married, we did not have the privilege of first putting the search for a spouse before God in prayer. Some got lucky and wound up with dream spouses. The not so lucky majority wound up with unhappy marriages or broken homes. As a result, children who may have been the victims are playing a holding game through trial marriages and single parenting. Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the number of unmarried couples has doubled in the 1990’s from 3.2 million to 5.5 million. Less than one in four American households can be counted as traditional nuclear families (i.e., married couples plus children). Nevertheless, marriage still has its attractions, and God will not allow Satan to destroy the very foundation of His church.

For those who are at the threshold, you are now better equipped to seek and obtain God’s guidance all the way. Don’t be anxious and don’t set deadlines for Him. Adam and Isaac married total strangers. Both marriages were successful in that they fulfilled God’s plans for humankind. So, what you need is patience so that “after you have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” [Heb. 10:36].