

“Rebecca and A Water Jar, Genesis 24”
3rd in the Series of Youthful Bible Stories You Haven’t Heard Since Sunday
School

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I must tell you how much I have enjoyed revisiting these stories of youthful characters from the Bible. I had forgotten about the “Little Maid from Israel.” I did remember about the “Lad and his Lunch”, but when Spurgeon reminded readers that the fish and loaves had a history, it made me think. Today’s sermon is just as captivating. There is a pun in that statement. You see, one of the main characters in this story is Rebecca. Rebecca literally means something likely a lasso but is more like an ancient idiomatic construction idea that means “captivating.” As a young woman she was a beautiful person, so beautiful she was that the story would be incomplete without her name. There was something about her that caused people to pause to consider her in their presence. But to be clear, there is something about Rebecca’s beauty, inside and out, that God used to complete her story.

Her story is important to our allegiance to the Bible because it recognizes how God uses God’s people for God’s glory. It may take generations to accomplish God’s will, just as it does in this instance. Reading Genesis 1-12 sets the backdrop of creation and fall. But, over time, generations in fact, key people from the middle east shift from animism and polytheism to monotheism. From those people the Jewish nation is born. Most of the remainder of Genesis tells that story of their emergence as the chosen people of God through whom the populations of the world will be blessed. And Rebecca is an essential character in that story.

Some preachers say that Rebecca’s story is some kind of moral tale about how to find a spouse. I don’t think so. Others say that the story is just a mythological story that is one more chapter in the beginning of the history of Israel. Others, those with whom I agree, say that this story about Rebecca is a case study about how God chooses people for God’s glory, and by their willingness to seek God’s purpose are transformed to accomplish essential elements of God’s amazing plans for all humanity.

I especially like what the commentary that says that this story beats any you have ever heard from *E-harmony*: God mystically works across borders, between two places four hundred miles apart, and without social media to make the perfect marriage connections. So, what a story! Several commentators I read called this one of the “sweet” stories in the Bible. Others say it is nice to have this story in

the Bible so soon after all the drama of the first half of Genesis. I would have to agree with that, too.

It might be difficult to explain this in the short time I have. It doesn't seem fair to say something like "Well, you just have to understand this from the culture from back then." And, yet, that is the best way to retell the story if you will remember that you are reading a story that is resolved by faith and can only be explained from our long view of Jewish history. Isaac was the beloved son of Sarah, no doubt. We are told that when Rebecca came into his life his mourning for his mother ceased.

Rebecca's story begins as an early to late teen-ager, though earlier than late is more likely. But, Isaac was forty, if we do the math from the several chapters that make up this involved heritage study. Isaac is with his father Abraham in Canaan and has yet to take a bride. Abraham does not want him to marry a local woman because she would represent a degree of difference in Abraham's position about a mono-theistic God. Nahor is traditionally thought of as being polytheistic but we won't go there.

Back home around Ur, Abraham has a brother, Nahor, and they are both descended from their grandfather Nahor, and his son Terah their father, who has children and grandchildren, and among the grandchildren, three soon to be matriarchs, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel. As was common in those days, marriage could be within a family for various cultural reasons. Abraham may not have known his grand (or great) niece Rebecca, but he knew in his heart that the children of Isaac and whoever would be the mother of his sons had to come from the same lineage. We are told that it was important to Abraham and the unfolding of God's promises to him for the future nation of Israel.

So Isaac was Rebecca's fourth removed cousin, if I calculated correctly. I read that these kinds of marriage are still common in the middle-east today. So, when the Jewish affirm the great triad of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob there is a specific Pandan-aram, or Mesopotamian, lineage connection. Recall, that in the story of Jacob, he also marries Leah and then Rachel from among the same family back among Nahor and Abraham's kinfolk.

This is a story that explains how God chooses people for God's glory, and by their willingness to seek God's purpose are transformed to accomplish great things for God. But, to recall, Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, from the marriage of Leah to Jacob, whose mother was Rebecca. But, let's not get bogged down. Stay with me . . .

Now, to make this story come together, you really need to start reading about three chapters before this short passage you read. But so much happened where do we up in on Rebecca's story? I think for the purposes of this sermon we begin with Abraham's servant. He was obviously prepared to follow Abraham's

directions to the letter but then, as he came closer to Haran with his caravan it occurred to him that his instructions had not been so clear. Yes, he was to locate a wife for Isaac. Yes, she needed to come from the family back home. And, yes, the angel of the Lord was supposed to lead him. But, then, what instructions the servant didn't get the servant had to fill them in-correctly, of course.

As the servant was praying, he decided that the bride-to-be would have to be the one who offered him water to drink, but also water his camels. And, then, before he finished praying Rebecca comes out with her water jar and offers to get him water. But, he doesn't tell her anything until she waters the ten camels, too. Once the camels had finished drinking, he let the cat out of the bag. One writer said he found it interesting because 10 camels could drink as much as 25 gallons a piece after such a long journey--250 gallons she could have hauled in a water jar and the servant didn't say a thing until they all filled up.

Clearly, God was in matchmaking mode, not for the sake of match making, so much as for nation building. Rebecca, the captivating young woman with a water jar was in God's plan all along. But, wait, there is one final part to the story that we can't go home without. It seemed straightforward that she was the chosen bride and that she was headed down to Canaan to be the mother of the son who would be one of the fathers of the nation of Israel. I found it incredible, though, that the story does not take Rebecca's part in the story for granted. Rather, we are told, that before she left, her mother and her brother called her aside and asked her the most important question of her life: "Will you go with this man?" and Rebecca said, "I will go."

Think how different the history of the world would have been if Rebecca had said "no" to what was to be God's purpose for her life. In the end of the story the young woman, girl if you will, saw Isaac. When she pulled her veil down over her face she signified that she was no longer a girl but a wife, and in time a mother, from which the nation of Israel is born. We must conclude that our lives carry with them great purposes of which we know little when our journey begins. Do not be afraid to ask in your own spirituality what it is that God is doing in our life that will change the world for God's glory. Do not be afraid to say "yes" no matter how complicated the decision is. Do not hang around to wait to see if you need to reconsider. There is probably something more to the symbol of the water jar when she set it down or is it possible, she took it with her to Canaan as a memento of when God so clearly demonstrated to her what she needed to do with the rest of her life.