



of cohesive written documents. Although the variety of the sources is substantial, at least four major streams (J, E, D, P) of tradition have been woven together in order to comprise the texts of these five documents, affectionately known as the “Books of Moses.”

**Internal History.** The place and time markers inside Genesis 24 merit consideration as background understanding of the text.

The place markers revolve around the scenes of the narrative; see exegesis below in the section **II. Message** for more details. The narrative begins with Abraham assigning his servant the task of finding a wife for Isaac. This episode took place in the traditional region of Abraham’s migration across central and southern Palestine. We are not told in the text where that location was until the final scene which identifies where Isaac had been living (v. 62). Abraham’s servant brings Rebekah home to where Isaac was at that time, “in the Negeb” (v. 62). Prior to that he had been in Beer-lahai-roi (v. 62), which was very likely the place from where Abraham had sent out his servant. And after taking Rebekah as his wife, once Abraham dies and is buried at Hebron, Isaac will return there to dwell (Gen. 25:11). The location is not certain. Beer-lahai-roi literally means “the well of the God who sees.” In 16:14, it was the place where the angel of the Lord first appeared to Hagar after having run away from Sarah. Its location is generally specified in 16:14 as “between Kadesh and Bered.” This would place it in the southern sector south of Palestine in the Negeb region (section 7W on the map).

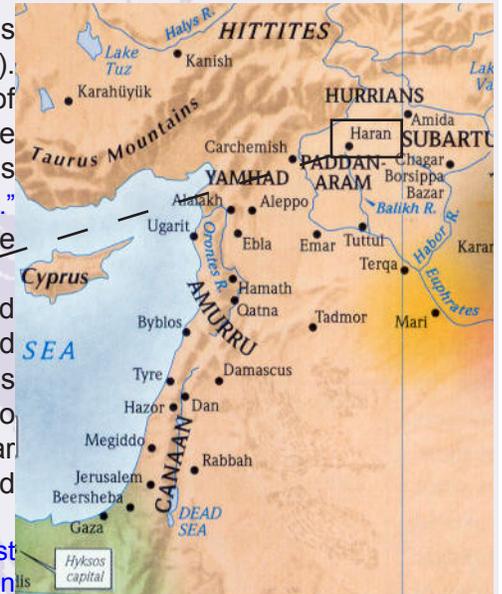
When Abraham’s servant left to go find a wife for Isaac, he traveled to “Aram-naharaim” (24:10). This specifies a region now associated with northern Syria. In that region, **Harran** was the city of Abraham’s relatives. It was where Abraham had lived before heading south into the land of Canaan at 75 years of age (Gen. 12:4). What is less clear is the reference to “the city of Nahor” (24:10). G.J. Wenham (Word Biblical Commentary, Logos Systems) provides helpful analysis:

Abraham had instructed him to “go to my country, my clan.” When last heard of, they were living in Harran (11:31), which was within the region called “Aram-Naharaim,” i.e., Aram of the two rivers, roughly the area bounded by the Euphrates on the west and river Habur on the east. The term “Aram-Naharaim” is also found in Deut 23:5(4); Ps 60:2(0); 1 Chr 19:6 and is apparently identical with *Nahrma* of the El-Amarna letters and *Nhrn* of sixteenth- to twelfth-century Egyptian texts.

“The city of Nahor.” Though this could be circumlocution for Harran (Westermann, Gispén), there was also the city called Nahor (*Nahur*) (first mentioned in the twentieth-century Kanish texts and later in the Mari letters and neo-Assyrian texts) that was near Harran (EM 5:805–9). Usage elsewhere in the OT (cf. Comment on 33:18) tends to favor the former view.

While there the servant first meets Rebekah at the well (later called a spring) just outside the city (either Harran or perhaps Nahor). Then they go to Bethuel’s house in the city, where the servant stays until leaving for home with Rebekah.

When Abraham’s servant departs with Rebekah, he will travel

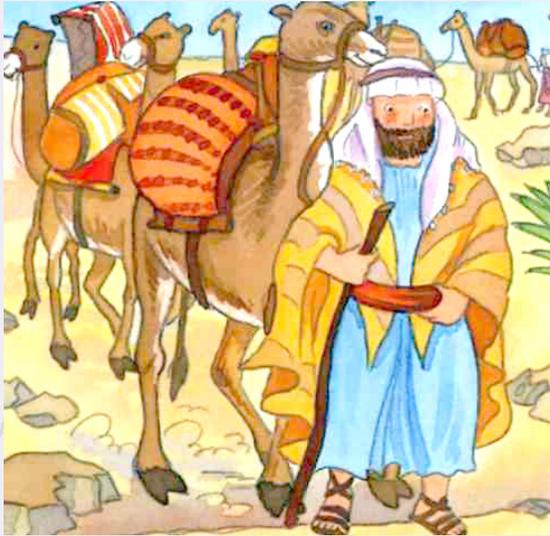


again back to “the Negeb” (24:62) and most likely to Beer-lahai-roi, which was located in the Negeb.

Helpful for understanding is to realize the distance traveled by camel. It was a trip of several hundred miles each direction. Thus a rather lengthy period of time was necessary for the servant to make this trip.

The time markers inside chapter 24 are not many. From the surrounding context, especially chapter 23, we know that this

event happened after the death of Sarah. The narrative is introduced with the declaration that “Abraham was old, well advanced in years” (24:1a). According to 23:1, Sarah died at 127 years of age. Since Isaac was born when she was 90 years old, he was 37 years old at his mother’s death. Evidently, the episode of chapter 24 took place not too long after the burial of Sarah. Thus Isaac had passed the mandatory 30th birthday in order to be eligible for marriage.



Harran in northern Syria. From a glance at a map, simple geography would suggest this was a trip of over 400 miles. Traveling as a large group even by camel would take several weeks, assuming no delays or interruptions.

The servant did arrive at watering well outside Haran in the late afternoon (24:10). He and his party spent the night there with Rebekah’s family (24:54). The following day everything was agreed upon, and the group, including Rebekah, left to make the trip back south to where Isaac was in the

Inside the narrative in chapter 24, very few direct time markers surface. Nothing is mentioned regarding the length of the trip from southern Palestine to

Negeb some 400 miles to the south. According to 24:63, the group arrived at Isaac’s tent in the early evening at the end of the journey.

### b. Literary

**Genre.** Again, the literary form of the content of chapter 24 is episodic narrative. Essentially, it is the story of the securing of a wife for Isaac. From a narrative critical standpoint the episode breaks down into four basic scenes as signaled by movements from one location to another inside the text. Some of the literary traits of this story are well summarized by John Kselman (*Harper’s Bible Commentary*, Logos Systems):

The story of the mission of Abraham’s steward to seek a wife for Isaac among Abraham’s kindred in Mesopotamia is told twice, first in Abraham’s instructions to his servant, followed by the narration in vv. 1-27 of the servant’s arrival and then in the servant’s retelling of the story to Rebekah and her family in vv. 34-49. The meeting at a well in vv. 11-27 that leads to a marriage is a stock scene that appears also in Genesis 29, Exodus 2, and John 4.

J has fashioned the account of the wooing of Rebekah upon the model of the call of Abraham. In 24:1, 35-36 we learn that, in accord with his promise in Gen. 12:2, Yahweh has blessed Abraham with long years, great wealth, and a son. The verb “bless” is a key word in this chapter, occurring in vv. 1, 27, 31, 35, 48, and 60. God’s command “Go!” to the patriarch in 12:1 is complemented by Rebekah’s “I will go” in 24:58 (and her family’s “she will go” in v. 55). In 12:1, Yahweh commands Abraham to leave “your land and your kinsfolk and the house of your father.” In chap. 24, the same expression occurs in whole or in part in vv. 4, 7, 38, and 40. Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in 12:2 (“I will make your name great”) is repeated in his servant’s words

in v. 35 (“Yahweh has blessed my master exceedingly and he has become great”).

The echoes of Genesis 12 in this chapter make the point that Rebekah is an essential link in the transmission of the divine promise and is thus called by Yahweh, as Abraham was, to her matriarchal role. The climax of the account is Rebekah’s one-word answer in v. 58, *’elek* (Heb., “I will go”). The parallelism of 12:1, where Abram goes from his land, his family, and his father’s house, with 24:4 and 38, where he sends his steward back to his land, kin, and father’s house, forms a frame around most of the Abraham cycle of narratives.

The final element worthy of note is the comparison of Hagar in chap. 21, who, in departing from Abraham, moves away from the source of blessing and Rebekah in chap. 24, who, in agreeing to the marriage with Isaac, moves toward the blessing and becomes an honored member of the blessed family.

**Literary Setting.** The literary context of chapter 24 leads to some important issues. The unusually long narrative for a single episode -- by far the longest anywhere inside Genesis -- has occasioned questions about its role in the patriarchal narratives. G. Wenham (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) provides an important summary of these issues:

The exceptional fullness of this account, the longest of any in Genesis, has prompted some commentators to see it as rather isolated (e.g., Coats). However, it contains so many links with both the Abraham narratives that precede it and the Jacob and Joseph stories that follow it that it should not be dismissed as an erratic

boulder within Genesis. The main retrospective references are: v 1, cf. 18:11; 12:2; 22:17; vv 3, 37, cf. 12:6; 13:7; v 4, cf. 12:1; v 5, cf. 15:7; v 7, cf. 22:16; 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; v 10, cf. 11:27–29; 22:20; v 35, cf. 12:2, 16; 13:2; v 36, cf. 21:1–7; 25:5; v 40, cf. 17:1; 13:17; v 60, cf. 22:17; v 62, cf. 16:14; v 67, cf. chap. 23. But it also looks forward. Rebekah and Laban are two of the most prominent characters in the Jacob stories (chaps. 25–32), and this scene at the well (vv 11–48) has close parallels with Jacob’s encounter with Rachel, also at a well (29:2–14). Other lesser similarities include v 1, 33, cf. 26:29; v 12, cf. 27:20. This episode also has affinities with the story of Joseph, particularly its stress on God’s providential overruling of human affairs, but there are specific verbal links as well (v 2, cf. 41:38; 50:7; 47:29; v 9, cf. 47:31; v 28, cf. 39:17, 19; v 36, cf. 39:7–8; vv 42, 56, cf. 43:4; 39:2, 3, 23; v 49, cf. 47:29; v 65, cf. 38:14).

The servant’s speeches serve as a prospective obituary for Abraham. His reflections on Abraham’s career underline that he has indeed been blessed by the Lord as he was promised. But this episode also shows that the promises will not die with Abraham: the Lord has made full and perfect provision to ensure that Abraham’s son will marry and continue to live in the promised land of Canaan. Indeed, Rebekah’s willingness to leave her land and kindred shows that she is, as it were, a female Abraham, who like him will be blessed. Her name, like his, contains the consonants b and r, which begin the verb “bless” (ברך brk), a key word of this chapter (vv 1, 27, 31, 35, 48, 60).

As already mentioned, this episode serves to introduce us to two of the most dominating characters, Rebekah and Laban, in the whole book of Genesis. Reading the subsequent accounts of their activity, it would be easy to conclude that what happened was largely the result of human scheming, but this story shows that such an interpretation would be misguided. It was God who



led Abraham’s servant to Rebekah and answered his prayers so clearly that no one can doubt that her future career is also under divine control. The very fullness with which this episode is related indicates just how important it was to the author of Genesis.

Thus we can conclude that this story stands as one of the major pivot points in the patriarchal narratives and becomes essential for understanding a lot

of what will happen once Isaac and Rebekah are married and begin having children.

One matter of note is the declaration in v. 67, “he loved her.” This will be said of no other patriarch about his wife and will show up only two other times in the entire Old Testament. Of Elkanah, Hannah’s husband, it will be stated in 1 Sam. 1:5, “to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.” Finally, of the Persian king Ahasuerus it will be stated (Esther 2:17), “the king loved Esther more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won his favor and devotion, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.” Love of a husband toward his wife was not necessary in ancient Semitic marriages. It virtually never took place prior to marriage and might or might not develop after marriage. Thus the Isaac / Rebekah story possesses this unusual trait of marital love. Isaac’s love for Rebekah at the very beginning of their marriage marks this story as exceptional. In Jewish interpretative history, this unusual trait of marital love has marked this story for teaching and inspiration for marital love among Jews.

## II. Message

**Literary Structure.** The thought flow inside this narrative is relatively easy to determine from a narrative critical standpoint. Four separate locations provide the basis for telling the story. (1) Abraham’s tent (vv. 1-9); (2) the watering well outside Haran (vv. 10-27); (3) Bethuel’s house (vv. 28-61); (4) the return home to Isaac’s tent (vv. 62-67). Again, Wenham (WBC, Logos Systems) summarizes key points:

Abraham’s key command, “Go and take (a wife for my son),” is eventually answered by Laban and Bethuel’s response to the servant, “(Here is Rebekah) take her and go,” and fulfilled in v 61, “The servant took her and went,” and in v 67, “Isaac ... took and married her.” As often in biblical narrative, there is roughly palistropic organization of the material. Scenes 1 and 4 correspond in that both are set in Abraham’s household in Canaan, whereas 2 and 3 are both set in Aram-Naharaim with Rebekah’s family. Indeed, the servant’s account of his meeting Rebekah by the well (vv 42–48) matches the second scene most closely.

Because of the extra long passage, the listing of the scripture texts will be done differently in order to conserve space.

## a. Scene 1: the Assignment at Beer-lahai-roi, vv. 1-9

### NRSV

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

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 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, 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. 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, and 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.

### Notes:

The reformatting of the single NRSV English translation is intended to highlight the dialogical nature of this narrative. What various individuals will say, i.e., their "speeches," becomes the key vehicle for moving the story forward, as well as the source of the most important content in the narrative.

The initial statement in verse 1 sets up the entire narrative. Abraham's advanced age and the Lord's blessings, mostly with a son of inheritance, Isaac, means that it's now time for Isaac to have a wife so as to produce children to continue Abraham's lineage in accordance to the covenant promise of God made earlier (cf. chaps 12, 15 and 17).

The conversation between Abraham and his servant serves to begin the story with the assignment to go back to Abraham's people to seek a bride for Isaac. Again, Wenham's comments (*WBC*, Logos Systems) are helpful:

The first scene after an editorial introduction (v 1) consists almost entirely of dialogue between Abraham and his servant. First, Abraham asks his servant to swear that he will find a suitable wife for Isaac from his homeland (vv 2–4). The servant raises a possible difficulty (v 5), and this prompts Abraham to insist once more that only a girl from his own clan must marry Isaac; the Lord who led him out of Ur and promised him the land will surely make this possible (vv 6–8). So the servant swears (v 9).

This first scene contains the last recorded words of Abraham. So although 25:1–11 may indicate that Abraham lived a good few years after this, this scene is analogous to the deathbed scenes of Jacob and Joseph (47:29–31; 50:25). But there are interesting differences. In the latter cases, the patriarch makes his sons swear; here, Abraham makes his will known to his servant. The absence of Isaac is notable and suggests his passivity. And whereas Jacob and Joseph's last words concern their burial in the land of promise, Abraham is most worried about a wife for his son, for without offspring none

of the promises will be fulfilled. Abraham enters history through the divine promises (12:1–3, 7); he passes out of history with this promise on his lips.

Although in popular tradition the servant here has been identified with Eliezer mentioned in 15:2, nothing in chapter 24 suggests that this is correct. Not the name but the servant's character and trustworthiness is what is important here. He was the oldest slave and was in charge of managing Abraham's household. Thus he, of all the slaves, could be trusted to carry out this most crucial assignment.

The servant was placed under oath to complete this assignment. The unusual manner of confirming the oath was quite normal for that period of time, as Wenham (*WBC*, Logos Systems) describes:

It is no ordinary request that Abraham is making, so he couches it with some delicacy. By putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, the servant was touching his genitals and thus giving the oath a special solemnity. In the ancient Orient, solemn oaths could be taken holding some sacred object in one's hand, as it is still customary to take an oath on the Bible before giving evidence in court. Since the OT particularly associates God with life (see the symbolism of the sacrificial law) and Abraham had been circumcised as a mark of the covenant, placing his hand under Abraham's thigh made an intimate association with some fundamental religious ideas. An oath by the seat of procreation is particularly apt in this instance, when it concerns the finding of a wife for Isaac.

One other point in the text meriting commentary is Abraham's insistence on Isaac not taking a bride from among the Canaanites where he was living. Instead, the servant is instructed to "go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my Son Isaac." These instructions are fairly generalized. The region of Haran is implied in "my country." And "my kindred" in the Hebrew text seems to designate, via 12:1, a



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."

26 The **man** bowed his head and worshiped 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 toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin."

28 Then the **girl** ran and told her mother's household about these things.

### Notes:

Scene two brings us to the discovery of Rebekah by Abraham's servant. With ten camels loaded with a wide array of costly gifts, the servant headed north to Abraham's homeland in northern Syria. The text doesn't indicate how many other men accompa-

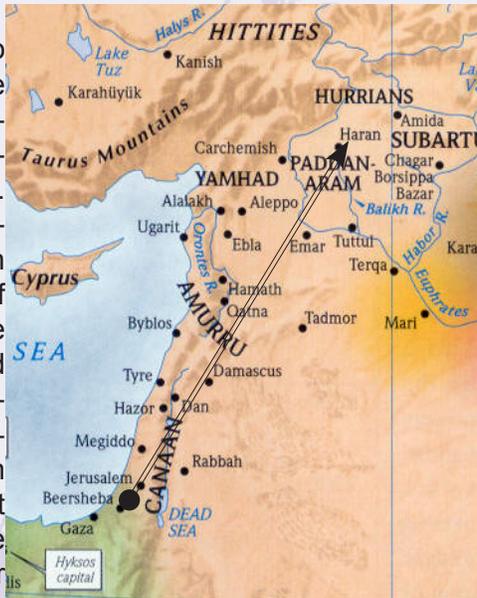
nied the servant, but one would have to conclude several would have been necessary to protect a sizeable hoard of wealth in all the gifts being transported. A single person could not have managed ten camels alone.

Coming into the region of Aram-naharaim, he came to the city where Nahor lived, which was mostly likely Haran (sometimes also spelled as Harran). Earlier in 22:20-24, the reader has been alerted to expect this event:

20 Now after these things it was told Abraham, "Milcah also has borne children, to your brother **Nahor**: 21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, 22 Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and **Bethuel**." 23 **Bethuel became the father of Rebekah**. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

The literary balance in this scene has been explained helpfully by Wenham (*WBC*, Logos Systems) and merits our attention:

The second scene is set beside a well in Aram-Naharaim and involves just three actors, Abraham's servant, Rebekah, and the Lord. Here God is not actually on stage, but the servant prays to him at the beginning and the end of his meeting with Rebekah, and the whole action and dialogue in vv 15–25 are such a palpable answer to the servant's prayer that we feel God is just behind the curtain pushing Rebekah on stage right on cue. The scene may



be analyzed as follows:

vv 10–11 **Servant journeys to well**

vv 12–14 **Servant prays**

vv 15–25 **Prayer answered**

vv 15–16 **Rebekah appears: description of her and her actions**

v 17 **Servant asks for a drink**

v 18 **Rebekah agrees and gives drink**

vv 19–20 **Rebekah offers to water camels and does**

vv 21–22 **Servant's reaction: thoughts and deeds**

v 23 **Servant asks Rebekah about family and house**

v 24 **Rebekah identifies herself**

v 25 **Rebekah describes her house**

vv 26–27 **Servant worships**

v 28 **Rebekah goes home**

The scene is nicely balanced. Both remarks by the servant elicit a double reply from Rebekah (vv 17–19, 23–25). The description of Rebekah's character and action corresponds to the servant's thoughts and deeds (vv 15–16, 21–22), and the whole is framed by the servant's prayers (vv 12–14, 26–27).

As Abraham's servant arrives at the well, the

"moment of truth" comes: "I'm here; where is the potential wife? How will I identify her?" His religious heritage

shines at this moment when in prayer, he asks God to identify the woman to him. He senses in a polite girl who will offer him a drink and to his camel's also the character needed to make a good wife. Even before ending his prayer, God's answer, Rebekah, appears on the scene and more than measures up to his requested standards. Watching her closely while she watered the camels, his thoughts were toward God and a divine confirmation that this young girl was God's choice.

By the time she finishes the task of watering the camels, the servant is convinced that she is the one God sent him to fetch for Isaac. He then lavishes here





with very costly gifts. All together the gifts weigh over two pounds of gold. The nose ring is half a pound of gold, and the bracelets total 40 ounces

of gold (a shekel = 4 ounces). Not a bad tip for watering his camels! His request is who her father is and whether he might spend the night with them.

Her gracious answer sends chills of joy up his spine, since he knows now that she is the daughter of Abraham's brother Bethuel. Not only is she within the parameters of Abraham's countrymen and kindred (cf. v. 4), she is family -- something far better in the customs of that era. Consequently, he bows again in worshipful praise to God praying, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin." God has indeed gone ahead and opened the door for the servant to complete his mission, just as Abraham had said He would (v. 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, and you shall take a wife for my son from there." While

the servant was praying, Rebekah, excited over the lavish gifts from this stranger, runs home to tell her family about all this.

Now we're starting to get into the story with a touch of the dramatic surfacing. God has led the servant straight to the girl He had chosen to be Isaac's wife. She has demonstrated character and courtesy signaling the makings of a good wife. The servant bows in praise of God for the unfolding of these events.

But how will the story now unfold? With just bare knowledge of ancient customs, we know that daddy will have the say-so over whether she is permitted to leave with this stranger. The servant's task now is to convince her family of God's leadership in this matter.

Before moving to the next scene, however, we should pause to ask what spiritual truths possibly reside in this part of the text that can challenge and inspire us today. The central point that pops out to me is the providential leadership of God in all this. For us as readers this seems obvious. But if we can put ourselves into the text without the benefit of the narrators giving us this divine perspective, we then can better grasp the challenge to the servant. He didn't know with absolute certainty how all this was going to unfold. His prayers on either side of meeting Rebekah make that clear. But, he trusted God to guide him to the right woman. His faith played the pivotal role in this episode. Just as his master Abraham was convinced that God would lead him to the right person, the servant felt the same and sought to be sensitive to God's leadership. And God answered that prayer in ways much beyond their expectation. And for people of faith today, He still does.

### c. Scene 3: the Agreement with Laban, vv. 29-61

NRSV

29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. 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." 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 worshiped 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." 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." 52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry 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. 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." 61 Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

#### Notes:

This third scene focuses on the overnight stay of the servant with Rebekah's family, and the negotiations for her to return to the Negeb with Abraham's servant. It naturally divides itself into two segments: 1) the events of the evening climaxed with the meal (vv. 29-53); and 2) the preparations for departure the following morning (vv. 54-61).

Once Rebekah's brother, Laban, saw the ring and the bracelets and heard her story of the stranger, he went to the well outside the city to find the man. Finding the servant still at the well, Laban graciously invited him to come home to find rest for him and the camels. In fact, preparations were already underway for them.

Upon arrival, Laban was the gracious host who had the cargo unloaded from the camels and had them fed. He provided the customary water for the washing of the dust from the feet of the visitors. For the first time in the text, we are informed about "the men who were with" Abraham's servant (v. 32). Dinner is prepared and offered to the men. But the servant indicates that he must explain his mission before eating at their table.

In verses 34-50, the servant recounts all the events from his assignment and oath with Abraham to the meeting of Rebekah at the well. He tells them that he's convinced that God has led him to Rebekah to become Isaac's wife, but before eating their food,

he seeks their reaction to his story. Again, he seeks divine confirmation from the response of the father and the brother that Rebekah is the right one. Their response is what he hoped for (v. 50-51): "Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. 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.'" His depiction of events stressing God's providential involvement was persuasive and an agreement is reached. Then the servant and his men enjoy the evening meal with their hosts in the confidence that the hard part of their mission is now finished. After dinner the servant lavishes Rebekah with even more costly gifts, along with providing a sizeable dowry of costly ornaments to Rebekah's mother and brother.

The next morning the enthusiasm for sending daughter and sister away has somewhat waned. They want the servant and his men to stay with them some ten days (the Heb. text could also mean 'a year or two'), but the servant knows better. He insists that they must leave now so that he can complete his mission in bringing back a wife for Isaac. Now Rebekah must decide for herself whether or not she wants to go with these men. Fortunately, she says "I will" (v. 58). Perhaps this was the family's ploy to delay the departure, but, if so, it backfired on them. Rebekah's



## NASB

1 Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. 2 Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, 4 but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac." 5 The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" 6 Then Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there! 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 who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send angel before you, and you will 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 my oath; only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

10 Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 He said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'--*may she be the one* whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master." 15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." 18 She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19 Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking." 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21 Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not. 22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing

a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, 23 and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?" 24 She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25 Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in." 26 Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. 27 He said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers." 28 Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.

29 Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran outside to the man at the spring. 30 When he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?" 32 So the man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 But when food was set before him to eat, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my business." And he said, "Speak on." 34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys. 36 Now Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master in her old age, 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 and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.' 39 I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman does not follow me.' 40 He said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father's house; 41 then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.' 42 "So I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now You will make my journey on which I go successful; 43 behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jar'; 44 and she will say to me, 'You 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, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' 46 She quickly lowered her jar from

her *shoulder*, and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; so I drank, and she watered the camels also. 47 Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. 48 And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left." 50 Then Laban and Bethuel replied, "The matter comes from the LORD; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 Here is Rebekah before you, take *her* and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. 53 The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.

54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." 55 But her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us a few days, say ten; afterward she may go." 56 He said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." 57 And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes." 58 Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." 59 Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 They blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, Become thousands of ten thousands, And may your descendants possess The gate of those who hate them." 61 Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed.

62 Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev. 63 Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. 64 Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. 65 She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. 66 The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

## NRSV

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

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. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward 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." 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. 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. 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." 26 The man bowed his head and worshiped 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 toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin." 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. 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." 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 worshiped 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." 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." 52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry 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. 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." 61 Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

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. 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. 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.

## NLT

1 Abraham was now a very old man, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. 2 One day Abraham said to the man in charge of his household, who was his oldest servant, 3 "Swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not let my son marry one of these local Canaanite women. 4 Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac." 5 The servant asked, "But suppose I can't find a young woman who will travel so far from home? May I then take Isaac there to live among your relatives?" 6 "No!" Abraham warned. "Be careful never to take my son there. 7 For the LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my offspring. He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a young woman there to be my son's wife. 8 If she is unwilling to come back with you, then you are free from this oath. But under no circumstances are you to take my son there." 9 So the servant took a solemn oath that he would follow Abraham's instructions.

10 He loaded ten of Abraham's camels with gifts and set out, taking with him the best of everything his master owned. He traveled to Aram-naharaim and went to the village where Abraham's brother Nahor had settled. 11 There the servant made the camels kneel down beside a well just outside the village. It was evening, and the women were coming out to draw water. 12 "O LORD, God of my master," he prayed. "Give me success and show kindness to my master, Abraham. Help me to accomplish the purpose of my journey. 13 See, here I am, standing beside this spring, and the young women of the village are coming out to draw water. 14 This is my request. I will ask one of them for a drink. If she says, 'Yes, certainly, and I will water your camels, too!', let her be the one you have appointed as Isaac's wife. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." 15 As he was still praying, a young woman named Rebekah arrived with a water jug on her shoulder. Her father was Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. 16 Now Rebekah was very beautiful, and she was a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. 17 Running over to her, the servant asked, "Please give me a drink." 18 "Certainly, sir," she said, and she quickly lowered the jug for him to drink. 19 When he had finished, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough!" 20 So she quickly emptied the jug into the watering trough and ran down to the well again. She kept carrying water to the camels until they had finished drinking. 21 The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not she was the one the LORD intended him to meet. 22 Then at last, when the camels had finished drinking, he gave her a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets for her wrists. 23 "Whose daughter are you?" he asked. "Would your father have any room to put us up for the

night?" 24 "My father is Bethuel," she replied. "My grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. 25 Yes, we have plenty of straw and food for the camels, and we have a room for guests." 26 The man fell down to the ground and worshiped the LORD. 27 "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham," he said. "The LORD has been so kind and faithful to Abraham, for he has led me straight to my master's relatives." 28 The young woman ran home to tell her family about all that had happened.

29 Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban. 30 When he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard her story, he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. Laban said to him, 31 "Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the LORD. Why do you stand here outside the village when we have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels!" 32 So the man went home with Laban, and Laban unloaded the camels, gave him straw to bed them down, fed them, and provided water for the camel drivers to wash their feet. 33 Then supper was served. But Abraham's servant said, "I don't want to eat until I have told you why I have come." "All right," Laban said, "tell us your mission." 34 "I am Abraham's servant," he explained. 35 "And the LORD has blessed my master richly; he has become a great man. The LORD has given him flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, a fortune in silver and gold, and many servants and camels and donkeys. 36 When Sarah, my master's wife, was very old, she gave birth to my master's son, and my master has given him everything he owns. 37 And my master made me swear that I would not let Isaac marry one of the local Canaanite women. 38 Instead, I was to come to his relatives here in this far-off land, to his father's home. I was told to bring back a young woman from here to marry his son. 39 "But suppose I can't find a young woman willing to come back with me?" I asked him. 40 'You will,' he told me, 'for the LORD, in whose presence I have walked, will send his angel with you and will make your mission successful. Yes, you must get a wife for my son from among my relatives, from my father's family. 41 But if you go to my relatives and they refuse to let her come, you will be free from your oath.' 42 "So this afternoon when I came to the spring I prayed this prayer: 'O LORD, the God of my master, Abraham, if you are planning to make my mission a success, please guide me in a special way. 43 Here I am, standing beside this spring. I will say to some young woman who comes to draw water, 'Please give me a drink of water!' 44 And she will reply, 'Certainly! And I'll water your camels, too!' LORD, let her be the one you have selected to be the wife of my master's son.' 45 "Before I had finished praying these words, I saw Rebekah coming along with her water jug on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water and filled the jug. So I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' 46 She quickly lowered the jug from her shoulder so I could drink, and she said, 'Certainly, sir, and I will water your

camels, too!' And she did. 47 When I asked her whose daughter she was, she told me, 'My father is Bethuel, the son of Nahor and his wife, Milcah.' So I gave her the ring and the bracelets. 48 "Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham, because he had led me along the right path to find a wife from the family of my master's relatives. 49 So tell me, will you or won't you show true kindness to my master? When you tell me, then I'll know what my next step should be, whether to move this way or that." 50 Then Laban and Bethuel replied, "The LORD has obviously brought you here, so what can we say? 51 Here is Rebekah; take her and go. Yes, let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed." 52 At this reply, Abraham's servant bowed to the ground and worshiped the LORD. 53 Then he brought out silver and gold jewelry and lovely clothing for Rebekah. He also gave valuable presents to her mother and brother.

54 Then they had supper, and the servant and the men with him stayed there overnight. But early the next morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." 55 "But we want Rebekah to stay at least ten days," her brother and mother said. "Then she can go." 56 But he said, "Don't hinder my return. The LORD has made my mission successful, and I want to report back to my master." 57 "Well," they said, "we'll call Rebekah and ask her what she thinks." 58 So they called Rebekah. "Are you willing to go with this man?" they asked her. And she replied, "Yes, I will go." 59 So they said good-bye to Rebekah and sent her away with Abraham's servant and his men. The woman who had been Rebekah's childhood nurse went along with her. 60 They blessed her with this blessing as she parted: "Our sister, may you become the mother of many millions! May your descendants overcome all their enemies." 61 Then Rebekah and her servants mounted the camels and left with Abraham's servant.

62 Meanwhile, Isaac, whose home was in the Negev, had returned from Beer-lahairoi. 63 One evening as he was taking a walk out in the fields, meditating, he looked up and saw the camels coming. 64 When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted. 65 "Who is that man walking through the fields to meet us?" she asked the servant. And he replied, "It is my master." So Rebekah covered her face with her veil. 66 Then the servant told Isaac the whole story. 67 And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother's tent, and she became his wife. He loved her very much, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother.