

Servant Eliezer's Hesitation

GENESIS 24:8 HAYYEI SARAH

בראשית כד חיי שרה 1

my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. ⁸And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there." ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

¹⁰Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. ¹²And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant

דִּבְרִי לִי וְאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר לְזֶרְעִי
אֶתְּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח
מִלְאָכֹו לְפָנָי וְלָקַחְתִּי אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִשָּׁם:
⁸וְאִם־לֹא תֵאָבֶה הָאִשָּׁה לְלָכֶת אַחֲרָי
וְנָקִיתִי מִשְׁבַּעְתִּי וְאֵת רַק אֶת־בְּנִי לֹא
תִשָּׁב שְׁמָהּ: ⁹וַיִּשָּׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת־יָדוֹ
תַּחַת יָרֵךְ אֲבִרָהָם אֲדָנָיו וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ עַל־
הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

שלישי ¹⁰וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גִּמְלִים מִגִּמְלֵי
אֲדָנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל־טוֹב אֲדָנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיָּקָם
וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אַרְם נְהָרַיִם אֶל־עִיר נָחוֹר:
¹¹וַיַּבְרֶךְ הַגִּמְלִים מִחוּץ לָעִיר אֶל־בְּאֵר
הַמַּיִם לַעֲת עָרֵב לַעֲת צֹאת הַשָּׂאֲבָת:
¹²וַיֹּאמֶר | יְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָנִי אֲבִרָהָם

7. *His angel* God's providence is here personified as a heavenly being.

8. *clear of this oath* Free of further obligation.

THE SERVANT'S PRAYER (vv. 10-14)

10. *and set out* The details of the journey are ignored; only the goal and its realization are described.

ten of his master's camels Concerning the presence of camels in the patriarchal narratives, see Comment to 12:16. Here, the sizable convoy is intended to make a strong impression on the future bride and her family, to serve as the means for testing her character, and to provide transportation back to Canaan for her and her entourage.

Aram-naharaim The Septuagint took the second word of the name to mean "two rivers," and so arose the name "Mesopotamia": literally, the land "between the two rivers." These were the Tigris and the Euphrates, or the Euphrates and its tributary Balikh. The Aramaic transla-

tion rendered "Aram-naharaim" as "Aram which is on the Euphrates," referring to the territory bounded on three sides by the great bend of the Euphrates, within which lay the kingdom of Mitanni, called Naharain in ancient Near Eastern texts.

11. *by the well* Public wells served as a meeting place for townsfolk and shepherds. Newly arrived strangers could restock their water supplies, gather information about the town, and make useful contacts there.

at evening time When the chores are done and the day has cooled, the young women go out to draw water and can lounge about and engage in leisurely conversation.

12. *And he said* This unnamed servant of Abraham is the first person whom Scripture records as praying for personal guidance at a critical moment.

grant me good fortune The Hebrew verb here (*hakrei*) literally means "make it occur." What appears to be the result of chance (*mikreh*) may, in reality, be a deliberate determination of

12ff. Some of the Sages criticize the servant for his prayer. Conceivably, an unsuitable young woman might have come along to offer him water. Furthermore, although miracles do happen, a person may not demand a miracle.

Others see the content of the prayer as a brilliantly intuitive realization that the qualities Isaac most needed in a wife, and might not have known that he needed, were kindness and generosity.

me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham: ¹³Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; ¹⁴let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master."

¹⁵He had scarcely finished speaking, when 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. ¹⁶The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar." ¹⁸"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. ¹⁹When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish

God. Nothing is more characteristic of the biblical outlook than the conviction about the role of divine providence in everyday human affairs.

14. water your camels A single camel (and here there were 10!) requires at least 25 gallons of water to regain the weight it loses in the course of a long journey. It takes a camel about 10 minutes to drink this amount of water.

let her be the one Because she possesses nobility of character, is hospitable to strangers, and is kind to animals.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH REBEKAH (vv. 15–27)

The servant's prayer is answered at once.

15. born to Bethuel Her full genealogy is

הַקְרָה־נָא לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם וַעֲשֶׂה־חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם: ¹³הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי נָצַב עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם וּבָנוּת אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוֹת לְשָׂאב מַיִם: ¹⁴וְהָיָה הַנַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיהָ הִטִּי־נָא כַּדָּךְ וְאָשְׁתָּה וְאָמַרְהָ שְׁתֵּה וְגַם־גִּמְלִיךָ אֶשְׁקָה אֹתָהּ הִכְחַתְּ לַעֲבֹדְךָ לִיצְחָק וְבָהּ אֵדַע כִּי־עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם־אֲדֹנָי:

¹⁵וַיְהִי־הוּא טָרַם כְּלָה לְדַבֵּר וְהָיָה רִבְקָה יֵצְאת אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְבֶתְוָאֵל בֶּן־מִלְכָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ נָחוֹר אָחִי אֲבִרְהָם וּכְדָה עַל־שִׁכְמָה: ¹⁶וְהַנַּעֲרָה וְהַנַּעֲרָה טַבַּת מְרֹאֶה מְאֹד בְּתוּלָה וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָה וַתֵּרֶד הָעֵינָה וַתִּמְלֵא כְדָה וַתַּעַל: ¹⁷וַיָּרֶץ הָעֶבֶד לִקְרֹאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּמְיָאִינִי נָא מֵעֵט־מַיִם מִכַּדְּךָ: ¹⁸וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵּה אֲדֹנָי וַתִּמְחֹר וַתֵּרֶד כְּדָה עַל־יָדָהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶהּ: ¹⁹וַתִּכַּל לְהַשְׁקֹתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לְגִמְלֶיךָ

given because Nahor also had children from a concubine (related in 22:20–24). The child of a chief wife enjoyed higher social prestige. The relationship to Abraham is given to emphasize the providential nature of what occurred.

16. a virgin That is, a sexually mature young girl of marriageable age.

went down . . . filled . . . came up She went about her business briskly and conscientiously, not wasting time in gossip. This made a great impression on the servant.

17. let me sip To test her, he refrains from asking for water for the animals.

19. until they finish Her offer is not a hollow gesture but an act of generosity given in full knowledge of the labor involved.

16. Rebekah is described as beautiful and chaste, but her distinguishing characteristic is her kindness, offering to draw water not only for this stranger but for his train of camels as well. Abraham and Sarah, for all of their pio-

neering religious achievements, were sometimes insensitive to members of their own household. Rebekah's kindness and generosity may have been what was needed to correct those family dynamics.