

# He Calls and Preserves His Loved-Ones

Gn 24

09 May 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 16:30  
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)<sup>1</sup>

## Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You & I, here in New Zealand, live in a secular & humanistic culture – a culture which has, by & largely, rejected the God of the Bible. On top of that, our culture has become very pluralistic. Yes, ours is a culture which says, “All religions are leading to God and to eternal salvation.”

And so, the Christian who lives in such a culture, could indeed find himself asking the question: “O God, will Your Church survive?” “Yes, will Your church still stand in the years to come – in the days of our children and grandchildren?”

Well, my brother & sister, our Bible text of this afternoon answers that question.

You see, our text tells us that, not only will God protect and preserve His Church (i.e., His elect [loved ones]) *collectively*, but He will also protect & preserve *each individual one* of His elect.

See? God does & will preserve His elect *collectively* and also *individually*! <sup>2</sup> And this brings great comfort to everyone who is a child of God through Jesus Christ.

So, here is the main message of our text: **Faithful to His promises, the Lord brings Rebekah to Isaac – and that not just for Isaac’s joy, but so that the LORD would continue the line of the seed of the woman, and so would build His Church!**

Well, by way of the following three points we will see how God builds & preserves His Church:

- Fret
- Faith
- Faithful

## Fret (At times we Fret)

My brother & sister, remember: God had promised that He would make for Himself a nation through Abraham – yes, a people of God!<sup>3</sup>

And, God would make a nation specifically through a miracle son whom God would give to Abraham through Sarah!

Well, God did give that miracle son! It was Isaac!

But now? Where’s the promised nation?

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<sup>1</sup> With much appreciation for the wonderful work of GREIDANUS, Sidney. 2007. Preaching Christ from Genesis: foundations for expository sermons. Grand Rapids, MI : William B Eerdmans. p. 228-245

<sup>2</sup> cf. e.g. Phil 1:5-6, “...I always pray with joy<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,<sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Also Mt 16:18, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

<sup>3</sup> Gen 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth (כָּל מִשְׁפָּחֹת הָאָדָמָה) shall be blessed.”

Also Gen 22:18 “and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth (כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ) be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Our text tells us Abraham is old (v.1)!

What's more, Sarah is dead!<sup>4</sup> Yes, her tent is empty! Indeed, there's no mother anymore for future Israel!

And Isaac?

Well, Isaac, the promised son, is now 40 years old!<sup>5</sup> But look, Isaac still does not have a wife! How will that promised nation then be born!?

Indeed, looking from a *human* point of view, this is a huge dilemma, a crisis – yes, a time to *fret*! I mean, unless Abraham finds a wife for Isaac, there will be no offspring; no Israel; no people of God!

Of course, Abraham could decide to *fret* and pick an easy way out of this dilemma. Yes, Abraham could choose one of the many *Canaanite* girls for Isaac. But not just *any* Canaanite girl! After all, Abraham was a very wealthy man. So, he could even get a Canaanite *princess* for Isaac! What a smart idea!? You see, with a Canaanite princess at his side, Isaac could *score some land in Canaan*. Yes, in this manner Abraham could try to help God fulfil His promises re that land becoming Israel's homeland!

But no, by God's grace, Abraham does not do that; no, he does things on God's terms and for His glory!

Well, what a message for you & me!

How do you & I handle our crises/dilemmas – our moments of fret – on God's terms & for His glory, or on our selfish terms!?

(Which brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> point in the sermon...)

### **Faith (Acting in Faith)**

My brother & sister, in vv.2-4 we hear Abraham's last words.<sup>6</sup>

But we hear him speak with a God-worked faith – a faith which wanted no short-cuts, yes, a faith that looked at what was *not* yet seen!

Yes, in great faith, Abraham made his trusted servant swear by oath<sup>7</sup> that he would not go find a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites!

After all, not marrying a Canaanite was important!

I mean, did not God *separate* Abraham from the nations when He told him “***Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you!***” (Gn 12:1)?

If Isaac would now marry a Canaanite, he would bring God's salvation plan to nothing!<sup>8</sup>  
The servant understood!

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<sup>4</sup> cf. chapter 23

<sup>5</sup> cf. Gen 25:20, “***and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife***” (ESV).

<sup>6</sup> It's quite possible that as Abraham spoke these words he was on his deathbed!

<sup>7</sup> “This custom, which is only mentioned here and in Gen. 47:29, the so-called bodily oath, was no doubt connected with the significance of the hip as the part from which the posterity issued (Gen. 46:26), and the seat of vital power; but the early Jewish commentators supposed it to be especially connected with the rite of circumcision. The oath was by “*Jehovah*, God of heaven and earth,” as the God who rules in heaven and on earth, not by *Elohim*; for it had respect not to an ordinary oath, but to a question of great importance in relation to the kingdom of God” (cf. Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, pp. 164–167). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.)

<sup>8</sup> Besides, here's another reality: by God's plan, the Canaanites would soon *disinherit* that land. So, if Isaac would marry a Canaanite, he would become one with those destined to lose that land! (Important point made by Hamilton, apud Greidanus, S. 2007. *Preaching Christ from Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI : William B Eerdmans. p.237).

But, now, he asks Abraham a valid question – yet a question that would not sway Abraham’s faith!

“But, Master Abraham, is it not better that I take Isaac, your son, to the land from which you came?” “After all, which young woman would wish to leave her father and mother, her family and friends, and follow a stranger like me to a far-away land to go marry a man she does not know!?” “Yes, Master Abraham, why not have the *groom* move to the *bride’s* country!?”

Well, again in God-worked faith, Abraham rightfully rejected such an idea!

I mean, is it not so that *to take Isaac back to the land from which God had called Abraham*, would be to go against God’s call of Abraham – would go against God’s promise that *Canaan* would become the homeland for Abraham’s offspring!?

Besides, if Isaac would go back to the land where Abraham had come from, then all the sixty-plus years during which Abraham & Sarah had wandered as strangers & aliens in Canaan, would be all for nothing!

So, there was only one way: the servant had to find a wife for Isaac on *God’s* terms and for *His* glory, so that a godly offspring would follow!

Young person, is that the way you think about your future wife/husband? Do you keep in mind your future children’s standing before God in Jesus Christ?

Well, Abraham’s servant had to find Isaac’s wife on God’s terms – the terms re the future God-promised nation to be born!

Yet, what a task this poor servant faced!

He had to travel nearly 700km<sup>9</sup> to go find a young woman who is not just a *relative* of Abraham, but who would also *be willing to come back* with the servant, to go marry a *total stranger*!

Daunting!

Yet, in great God-worked faith, Abraham assures his servant, “***The Lord, the God of heaven... will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there***” (v.7).

My brother & sister, think with me: Years later, when Israel left Egypt, would they not love these assuring words of Abraham? I mean, did Israel not see how the LORD also went ahead of *them* in a pillar of cloud by day (and of fire by night) to give them light? And did Israel not hear from God as they were about to enter Canaan, “***I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites!***”<sup>10</sup>

Well, what encouragement for every child of God (also for you & me) that, in our times of hardship, we will have the protection of an angel from God!<sup>11</sup>

(Which brings us to point 3)

### **Faithful (God is Faithful)**

After a journey that would have taken him at least one month,<sup>12</sup> Abraham’s servant arrived at a spring just outside of the city of Nahor<sup>13</sup> – the city where Abraham’s relatives were still living.

The servant is a man of prayer! He prays fervently, “***O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. “Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the***

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<sup>9</sup> Almost the same distance as from Wellington to Whangarei

<sup>10</sup> Ex 33:2

<sup>11</sup> Also cf. Hebrews 1:14 ***Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?***

<sup>12</sup> cf. Speiser (apud Greidanus, *ibid*:238)

<sup>13</sup> In the region that was known as “Aram-Naharaim.”

*city are coming out to draw water; 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"* (vv.12-14 NASB).

Wow! What a prayer!

Is it not like “putting out a fleece” before the Lord – like irreverently (and in lack of faith) asking the Lord for a sign? (Like “twisting God’s arm”?)

Well, we should note that the servant was not *selfishly* asking for a sign; no, his asking for a sign was so that he could find out the will of God for his master’s son and for the promised future nation!<sup>14</sup>

And the girl who would become Isaac’s wife, had to reveal kindness; had to be hospitable and not afraid of hard work! After all, it would have been quite some task to give ten thirsty camels a drink, especially if one considers that a camel that has gone a few days without water can drink up to 94 litres!<sup>15</sup>

Even if she had to let just one thirsty camel drink, she would have to spend quite a bit of energy!

Well, v.15 tells us, “**Before he (this servant) had finished speaking** (See the LORD’s faithfulness! – before he had finished praying) **behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder.**”

Of course, Abraham’s servant did not yet know her from a bar of soap! All that he could straightaway see was that she was a very beautiful girl! But, re the detail of v. 15 – her name and family ties – he would only later on find out those details!

So, how will he know whether she’s the right one?

Well, of course, by watching her and talking to her!

So, just as she had finished filling up her own jar and was walking up out of the spring, the servant ran to her to put her to the test: v.17 “**Please give me a little water to drink from your jar**” said he!

“Oh yes,” said she, “**Drink, my lord.**” **And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.**

Now here comes the miracle! You see, we read in v.19, “**When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.'**”<sup>20</sup> **So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.**”

Wow! The servant is blown away! She did everything he had prayed for!

Thus, to show his gratitude for her hard work, he gave her a golden nose-ring as well as two bracelets for her wrists!

But look, he still does not know whether she’s of Abraham’s relatives!

So, boldly and in faith he asks a double question (v. 23), “**Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?**”

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<sup>14</sup> How do we know that this servant prayed unselfishly and having God’s will for his master in mind/heart? Well, look what this servant says in verse 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”** (NASB; Emphasis mine).

<sup>15</sup> cf. Walton (apud Greidanus, ibid:239). Also cf.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/weepingcamel/thecamels.html> “Well adapted to harsh climates, camels are famous for their ability to travel as many as 100 miles (161 kilometers) without water. They retain their body moisture efficiently, but they do not function without water. In fact, a thirsty camel can drink as many as 30 gallons (135 liters) of water in about 13 minutes.”

And how does she answer!?

V.24-25, ***“She said to him, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.’<sup>25</sup> She added, ‘We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.’”***

My brother & sister, look at the servant’s reaction!

V.26-27, ***“The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord (See to whom he gives the credit?) and (then he) said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master.’***

See how this servant does not just praise the LORD’s *steadfast love* (loving-kindness) to his master Abraham, but also the LORD’s covenant *faithfulness* to the promises He had made to Abraham!?

And that’s what it’s all about – that’s what our *passage* is all about – to show God’s covenant faithfulness to the promises He has made re *building a nation for Himself through Abraham and Isaac!*

Thus, the servant finishes his prayer of praise saying, ***“As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.”***

The Lord is faithful to His promises made regarding His chosen – His church!

What He has promised He will fulfil!

Yes, with or without you/me worrying/fretting, God Himself is able to uphold is Church collectively and individually!!

God is faithful to His promises re His chosen ones – His Church!

My brother & sister, as we are no going to read vv. 33-50, please see how wonderfully the Sovereign and Faithful Covenant Lord removed all remaining hurdles in order to get Rebekah to Isaac (according to His eternal plan)!

(Please open again your Bible with me at Gen 24:33ff.)

***But when food was set before him to eat, he (the servant) said, “I will not eat until I have told my business.” And he (Bethuel) 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;<sup>16</sup>***

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Then he tells them all he had prayed about. And then he continues....

***“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***

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<sup>16</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ge 24:33–42). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

*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 (See?) 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."*

Well, my brother & sister, our text shows us a few more hurdles – all of which the Lord overcame!

Thus, it happened that, by the Lord's doing – and His faithfulness to His promises regarding a nation He would build through Isaac – He brought Rebekah to Isaac!

And so, just as *Abraham* once left his country and followed the will of the Lord, so did *Rebekah*!

And she came to Isaac!

He, also – having heard from his servant all that had happened – took Rebekah as a Godsend!

She became his wife!

And, very important: *Sarah's tent was filled again*; yes, the faithful covenant Lord made sure that again there was a mother for future Israel – a mother on God's terms & for His glory – a mother through whom God would build His church!

My brother & sister, as Israel later on read this story, what would go through their minds? Well, would they not realise that, when Isaac needed a wife (yes, when he did not yet have Rebekah), their very existence was in the balance?

If Isaac had married a Canaanite girl, there would have been no Israel!

If God had not guided the servant to Rebekah – if God had not prompted Rebekah's heart to go, there would have been no Israel!

You see, from Gen 3 (actually way before), God's mind was with the continuation of the seed of the woman – the seed that would one day crush the serpent's head!

Thus, God provided Rebekah.

In the very next generation, God also provided Leah & Rachel for Jacob.

So, by the time Jacob moved to Egypt there were already seventy Israelites in total.

But look! Centuries later, the LORD called another young woman to continue the seed!

You see, the angel Gabriel came to a town in Galilee – a town called Nazareth; to a woman called Mary!

And, just as Rebekah had said, "I will go!" so Mary, too, responded: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

And so was born THE Seed of the woman – Jesus, through whom God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, "In you all the families/nations of the earth shall be blessed!"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gen 12:3 "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth (כָּל מִשְׁפָּחֹת הָאָדָמָה) shall be blessed."

My brother & sister,

Rebekah's story encouraged Israel (God's Old-Testament Church) to entrust themselves for their very existence to the LORD's providential care!

Well, does not Mary's story – rather Jesus' story – encourage every believer (indeed, the Church) to entrust themselves for his/her very existence to God's providential care?

And so, are you/I worried (do we fret) – yes, are we daunted by secularism which is battering the church from without!? Are we scared that the Church will be quashed by other religions and ideologies?

Well, is not *this* our comfort that, just as God provided Rebekah as mother for His holy people – and *so* secured the survival of His Church, so *will* He continue to build and protect His church so that the *gates of Hades/Hell will not prevail against it?* (cf. Mt 16:18).

Have your children received Jesus as their Saviour & Lord? Have they been born from above/again? If so, then keep praying for their perseverance in the faith, but know that God will preserve them! After all, God does not only preserve His Church collectively, but also each one of His elect individually!

Look, Phil 1:6 says, “**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**”<sup>18</sup>

AMEN (3123 words in total, but 2370 words excluding footnotes and the 753 words from the Bible passage quoted from Gen 24)

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Also Gen 22:18 “*and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth* (כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ) *be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*”

<sup>18</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 1:6). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.