

## Appendix 1

### Doesn't Genesis 24 teach that God will choose and reveal the most suitable spouse for me?

From our study of 1 Corinthians 7 we have seen that the choice between remaining single and getting married is assigned by God to the individual believer. It is one of those “non-commanded decisions” where the Christian is given the freedom and the responsibility to decide.

Some who hold the traditional view of guidance cite two Old Testament accounts as evidence that the choice of a spouse should be made by God (who will reveal his “will” to the inquiring believer). They appear to be relevant to our study because, in both cases, God chose the bride.

#### A Matter of Limited Options

The first of these instances was also the first wedding – that of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2). Some writers take this passage to indicate that for each man, God has prepared one woman perfectly suited to be his wife.

Now Genesis 2 *does* set forth several normative principles for marriage. We know this because they are stated, and *declared to be normative*, in verse 24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” However, nothing whatever is said about mate selection. No promise is made that God will similarly prepare and introduce men and women He has chosen to be joined in marriage. Eve was part of God’s *revealed* will for Adam because He created her and brought her to Adam to be his wife. The whole scenario was an extraordinary event never again repeated. There could be only one first man and one first woman. That’s what it took to start the human race.

#### One Hump or Two?

The most frequently cited biblical support for the traditional view’s concept of a divinely chosen spouse is Genesis 24.<sup>1</sup> Abraham sent his trusted servant to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia to seek out a wife for his son Isaac from among Abraham’s relatives. When he arrived at his destination, the servant stopped by a well and made this request of God:

“O Lord, God of my master Abraham, guide me today. Be faithful to my master, Abraham. Here I am, standing by the spring, and the daughters of the people who live in the town are coming out to draw water. I will say to a young woman, ‘Please lower your jar so I may drink.’ May the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac reply, ‘Drink, and I’ll give your camels water too.’ In this

way I will know that you have been faithful to my master.” (Genesis 24:12-14).

Soon thereafter, Rebekah came to the well and fulfilled the sign completely. The servant visited her family, Rebekah agreed to become Isaac’s wife, and the servant was able to take her back to Canaan – mission accomplished!

This passage provides apparent support for three specific aspects of the traditional view: (1) the granting of detailed guidance beyond the moral will of God, (2) the validity of using a circumstantial “fleece” to discover God’s will, and (3) the notion that God’s individual will includes the specific person a believer is supposed to marry.

The problem with arguing these points from Genesis 24 is that the experience of Abraham’s servant is *not normative*. Virtually no one is inclined to take it that way. Who would be willing to send out a servant to seek a wife for a son, and then accept that servant’s choice on the basis of a drink of water for man and beasts?

Of course, it could be done. Making cultural allowances, a father could hire a Christian dating agency. He could then send its agent on a search to find a wife for his son. The agent could drive into a service station, offer a prayer, and sign up the first woman who meets his request for a drink by filling his water jug and checking his radiator! The idea sounds preposterous, because Genesis 24 is not normative for several reasons.

First, the Bible does not promise that every believer will have a mate. But Isaac *had* to have one, because God had promised Abraham that he would have innumerable descendants (Genesis 15:5; 24:7). That promise required the birth of a son, and hence, a wife. Therefore, Genesis 24 does not depict the normal father using the normal method to pick a normal wife for his normal son. Rather, the account concerns Abraham, the recipient of God’s covenant oath and the consequent promise of a great seed. “Isaac was not regarded as a merely pious candidate for matrimony, but as heir of the promise.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the servant based his request on God’s character as One who is faithful to His promises (Genesis 24:7, 14, 27). And the wife that would fulfill the divine promise was appropriately described as the one “appointed” (Genesis 24:14) — appointed, not because God has selected a mate in His individual will for each person, but because God promised a wife for Isaac.

Furthermore, God had promised special guidance for the servant to guarantee the success of his venture. Specifically, an angel went ahead of the servant to make sure that the goal was accomplished (24:7, 40). Such a guarantee and such angelic assistance go beyond the normal promises of God’s guidance.

### **When in Doubt, Check Things Out**

From the behavior of Abraham’s servant, it is clear that the circumstantial fleece was not the usual method of guidance even then. Having no other ideas on how to proceed, but being fully assured of God’s guidance, the servant asked God to give the

needed guidance through this method (24:12). He did not know for sure that the Lord would do what he asked; he simply asked, and then watched to see what would happen. Even when the sign was quickly fulfilled, he was still not sure that God was using his sign (24:21).<sup>3</sup> Even when the woman's background was discovered to be acceptable (24:23–24), the matter was not concluded in the servant's mind until Rebekah indicated a willingness to return with him (24:58). If her family would not let her go, he would look elsewhere for a wife (24:49). By his careful investigation following the fulfillment of the sign, the servant showed his awareness that such a procedure was highly unorthodox, and not to be fully trusted until all other conditions were met.

Genesis 24 does not contain a promise of specific guidance, nor approval for providential signs, nor any indication that God will choose and reveal one's perfect mate. From the text it is clear that events unfolded as they did because of the existence of a special covenant, the promise of angelic assistance guaranteeing success, and God's willingness to use a non-normative method in response to the servant's prayer. This account of special guidance was recorded in detail not because it describes how God normally leads, but because it was an important step in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. God proved to be faithful to each part of the covenant, including the promise of a great seed – a promise that is central to the theme of the book of Genesis.

#### **“The Woman You Gave Me . . .”**

The traditional view of guidance includes one other feature that is not usually addressed in the discussion of these two examples. It is said that one of the ways believers can tell that they have discovered the individual will of God is the confirmation that comes through the results of the decision. With respect to mate selection the expectation is that if God makes the match, the couple will live happily ever after. “If marriage is part of God's plan for you, then you can trust Him to work out every detail, both for you and for the mate He has destined for you. He will bring you together with a person who is exactly suited to you that, together, you may experience marriage as God originally designed it. This will be on a level higher than the world has ever dreamed of.”<sup>4</sup>

Those who suggest that the cases of Adam and Eve and Isaac and Rebekah provide the divine pattern for mate selection focus entirely on the beginning of each relationship. But there is a relevant question that isn't asked. As Dr. Phil would say, “How's that working for you?” In the interrogation that followed the disobedience of the first marital couple, one can detect a tone of complaint in Adam's excuse: “The woman whom you gave me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12). And it doesn't appear Isaac and Rebekah experienced “marriage as God originally designed it” either. Isaac's depiction of Rebekah to Abimelech's clan as “my sister” to protect his own hide would not have engendered a strong sense of loyalty and security in her (Genesis 26:7). And Rebekah's behind-the-scenes manipulations to secure the patriarchal blessing for her favored son, Jacob, resulted in the complete fragmentation of a highly dysfunctional family (Genesis 27-28).<sup>5</sup> The theory that God's selection of a

spouse will ensure marital bliss is not substantiated by the cases where God actually chose the bride.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jeffress uses this passage as a paradigm for finding God's will for one's mate. "The same God who directed Eliezer will direct you." *Hearing the Master's Voice: The Comfort and Confidence of Knowing God's Will* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 139-148.

<sup>2</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), vol. 1: *The Pentateuch*, 258, quoting Hengstenberg, *Dissertations*, 1:350.

<sup>3</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 2:669.

<sup>4</sup> Derek Prince with Ruth Prince, *God Is a Matchmaker* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Chosen Books, 1986), 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> For a fascinating analysis of the interpersonal dynamics with Isaac's family, see "Isaac and His Family Tree," by Dave Carder. Dave Carder, Earl Henslin, John Townsend, Henry Cloud, Alice Brawand, *Secrets of Your Family Tree: Healing for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 49-63.