

Chayei Sarah חיי שרה *Sarah's Life*

Genesis 23:1-25:18

The Machpelah Tomb

And then Avraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 23:19)

Avraham's wife, Sarah, had died. Although God had promised to give Avraham's seed the entire Land of Canaan, Avraham did not even own a place to bury his wife. Avraham negotiated with the locals to buy the field.

Why does the Torah here go into so much depth about the negotiations? It must be understood that there were three main obstacles for Avraham to overcome. First, he cannot just acquire local burial facilities without municipal permission, and, as an alien in the land, he cannot just acquire land. Second, even if these restrictions were to be overcome, he would still face the problem of procuring an inheritable estate to be used by future generations, for an alien could not normally own land in perpetuity (cf. Lev. 25:23). Third, apart from legal problems, there is still the reluctance of landowners to part with their property. The land is looked upon as an ancestral trust.

Avraham wishes to ensure that his purchase is final and binding, and irrefutable. For these reasons, he refuses a gift: donations are notoriously insecure in law. They may be challenged by heirs or by other members of the family or community, or even by the donor himself should he change his mind. Only a payment that is accepted by the seller ensures the unchallengeable nature of the transaction. That is why Ephron, not Avraham, must first state the price and why, once that is done, there is no further bargaining.

Before the end of our passage today, Avraham will be buried in the same cave. Isaac and Jacob will also be buried there. Although death entered the world through sin, God promised Avraham the hope of redemption. This is why Paul could say, "**Get up, sleeper! Arise from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you!**" (Ephesians 5:14)

A Bride for Isaac

Go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." (Genesis 24:4)

Avraham commissions his servant, most likely Eli'ezer, to find a wife for his son, Isaac. This passage can be understood messianically. Remember that in last week's passage, Isaac prefigured the Messiah in several ways. If we carry this imagery forward, we can look to this story of Eli'ezer and Rivkah for insight into the bride of Messiah.

Here Avraham sends out Eli'ezer on a mission. In Hebrew, a person sent out on a mission is a *shiliach*, a "sent one." It is the same word translated into the Greek as *apostolos*, "apostle." Therefore, Eli'ezer is a shiliach, an apostle of Avraham.

Yeshua sent His Apostles out to make disciples for Him. These disciples, in turn, make up the greater Assembly of Messiah, metaphorically referred to as His bride. "**Let us rejoice and be glad! Let us give him the glory! For the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and his Bride has prepared herself**" (Revelation 19:7) Also, Yeshua the Messiah is Himself the Shiliach of God, sent by the Father to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Canaanites

I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell (Genesis 24:3)

Avraham makes Eli'ezer vow that he will not look for a bride for Isaac from among the Canaanites. Is not the Gospel for all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike? What did Avraham already know about the Canaanites here in our passage? Avraham had already been promised that the Canaanites would be removed from the Land by his descendants. Hence, it would be impossible for Isaac, the son of promise, to be married to a woman from a race of people from whom the Land was to be taken.

Also, the Canaanite peoples, through their pagan religions, would become a poison for the children of Yisra'el, seducing them into idolatry and syncretism. We realize that we are not to bring the pagan religion of the Canaanites into the house of Avraham. In our zeal to win converts, we have historically allowed pagan influences to enter into the Assembly of the Messiah.

One example can be seen in the church following the pagan Emperor Constantine in denying God's day for rest and worship, Shabbat, and changing it to Sunday, which was known as the day for worshipping the pagan sun-God. In so doing, we have brought a pagan bride to the Messiah. As Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: **Do not yoke yourselves together in a team with unbelievers. For how can righteousness and lawlessness be partners? What fellowship does light have with darkness? What harmony can there be between the Messiah and B'liya'al? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement can there be between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God — as God said, "I will house myself in them... and I will walk among you. I will be their God, and they will be my people."**

However, we must always remember that God can transform even the most godless idolater or sinner into a worthy bride, sanctified **"by the washing of water and by the Word And He will establish the assembly for Himself, being glorious: and in which is no spot, and no wrinkle, and nothing like these, but it will be Set-Apart [holy], without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:26-27) Two events in the Scriptures illustrate this point.

First is the account of Yeshua's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. John reminds us that **"the Judeans have no social dealings with the Samaritans."** (John 4:9) In those days, the Jewish people considered the Samaritans to be the equivalent of the Canaanites. Yet Yeshua put aside the prejudices of His day and struck up a conversation with the Samaritan woman.

The second account is that of Peter and Cornelius. Peter considered gentiles to be outside of God's redemptive hand. He regarded them as Canaanites. Until his vision of the sheets in Acts chapter 10, he most likely understood the Lord's commission to take the gospel to all nations to mean that he was to spread the Good News to the Jewish people scattered amongst the nations. However, God reoriented Peter's thinking in that the Good News was to spread to all people, including the gentiles.

However, although we are to go to all peoples with the gospel, we are not to bring the ways of Canaan into the Faith. In our zeal to convert Canaanites, pagans, we are not to dress up the gospel to make it look more pagan. Hence, we are not to dress up our gospel and make it look more like the world in order to try to make it appeal more to the lost.

Sadly, this is exactly what the church has done. The church has incorporated many pagan elements into the church, including idolatry and the honoring of pagan feast days (Christmas, Easter, Halloween, etc.). On a deeper level, we have incorporated pagan thought-patterns and adapted them to fit Christianity. We have not obeyed Yeshua's warning that **Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.** (Matthew 12:25)

Taking Yeshua out of Judaism

Beware, that you bring not my son back there. (Genesis 24:6)

Avraham sternly commands Eli'ezer not to take Yitz'chak out of the Land. Yitz'chak is to remain in the Land. In our zeal to share the gospel with diverse people from different ethnicities and backgrounds, it may appear good to remove Yeshua from His 1st century Jewish culture. How many times have church leaders stripped Yeshua of His Jewishness in an attempt to present a more universal Messiah to the world—a kind of, one-size-fits-all Savior?

However, the problem is that we have removed Him from His heritage and identity. We have taken Yeshua out of Yisra'el. Eli'ezer is to find Yitz'chak a wife and bring his bride back to the Land. In similar fashion, we are to find true converts for Yeshua from the world and take them back to the Torah-observant Yeshua within His own Jewish culture and background.

This can be illustrated in the story of the woman at the well. The Samaritan woman at the well challenges Him on the conflict between the Samaritans and the Jewish people. Yeshua did not give in to her beliefs as a Samaritan. Instead, He emphatically maintains His Jewish beliefs and the truth of Judaism: **You worship, that which you do not know: but we worship what we know, because life, is from the Jews.** (John 4:22) So here we see Yeshua remaining as the Jewish Messiah, even though He is “**the Savior of the world**” (John 4:42).

Sending His Angel Before Him

YHWH, the Elohim of heaven...will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. (Genesis 24:7)

Avraham ensures Eli'ezer that God will send His angel before him, insuring success on his mission. Although Genesis 24 never mentions Eli'ezer's name, we have good reason to assume that it is Eli'ezer, of whom we read in Genesis 24:2, **And Avraham said unto his servant--the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had.** We find the name of Avraham's head servant in Genesis 15:2: Eli'ezer.

We must now wonder why the Torah does not include his name here. Eli'ezer is to function here as Avraham's shiliach, his messenger, his apostle. The function of a shiliach is only to fulfill the mission of the one who sent him. So in this case, Eli'ezer's identity is unimportant, being that he is being sent out by Avraham to represent Avraham.

Remember how Paul designates himself in Romans chapter 1: **Paul, a servant of Yeshua the Messiah, a called [one] and an emissary [an apostle, a sent one]** (verse 1). An apostle is a servant of the one who sends him. Hence, when we go forth as sent ones, we represent the Messiah, not ourselves. Our own, interests, desires, and opinions must be set aside. We are servants of Yeshua the Messiah, servants of God. Yeshua is the Servant of the Lord, and we are sent out by Him.

Eli'ezer's name in Hebrew means “God of Help.” As Eli'ezer goes out to find a bride for Yitz'chak, he relies on God's help. Similarly, when we go out to spread the Gospel, we must rely on God's help. Our responsibility is to speak God's word to our generation. It is not our responsibility to seek to make it more attractive or more easily acceptable. We are not to try and “close the deal” as if we are peddling the Gospel. Our sole responsibility is to faithfully proclaim His message of salvation and then we need to get out of the way and allow the Spirit to do the rest.

Release from Oath

And if the woman be not willing to follow you, then you shall be clear from this my oath, only you shall not bring my son back there. (Genesis 24:8)

Eli'ezer is told that if the woman he finds for Yitz'chak is not willing to leave her pagan past behind and come to Yisra'el, then Eli'ezer is released from his oath. We are responsible for sharing the Gospel

with people, but we are not to force them or trick them into doing something against their will. Our obligation in evangelism is to spread God's word. The results are not in our hands, but are in the hands of God.

History has shown us the unfortunate results of the many times when people were forced into conversion. Also, we only have to look at the impotent and pagan influence within the church to understand the results of allowing people to enter into the Land, into the church, bringing all of their pagan beliefs and gods with them.

The Good Things from the Master

And the servant took ten camels--of the camels of his master--and departed, having all goodly things of his master's in his hand. And he arose, and went to Aram-naharaim, unto the city of Nachor. (Genesis 24:10)

Just as Eli'ezer took from the good things of Avraham, so are we to bring the good things of the household of God into a lost and hurting world. What exactly are these good things? They are acts of loving-kindness, forgiveness, mercy, wholeness, and peace (shalom). Many in our day have never experienced unconditional love. They have never known real kindness, real friendship, and real companionship. These are the things that we have experienced and been given through Yeshua the Messiah. And we are to take these out to a sick and dying world.

This is why our life-style is so important. So many in the church, unfortunately including many of the so-called leaders, offer a watered-down message and a terribly unbiblical life-style to the world. Is it any wonder why so many in the world today look at the church and, seeing the hypocrisy and blatant sins of its leaders, reject the message? We must live Torah-observant lives so that others will then receive the message we bring them. Our generation has many religions and philosophies for sale. The world doesn't need another religion—the world needs to see believers in the Messiah being Torah-observant, and then they will at least be willing to hear what we have to tell them. As St. Francis of Assisi supposedly said, "Preach to Gospel to everyone, and if necessary, use words."

This Message is for Those Who are Thirsty

And he made the camels to kneel down without the city, by the well of water, at the time of evening, the time that women go out to draw water. (Genesis 24:11)

Eli'ezer waits at the well outside the city in order to find a wife for Yitz'chak. Remember when Yeshua went to the well and met the Samaritan woman? Our best opportunities to share the Gospel are with those individuals who know they are lost and hurting and who are thirsty and seeking. Although the thirsty soul seeks out many wells, only the well of Living Water (Yeshua) can quench their thirst. **Yeshua answered and said to her: Every man who drinks from this water will thirst again, But every man who drinks from the water that I give him, will not thirst forever. But that water that I give him, will be in him a spring of water, that will spring up unto eternal life. (John 4:13-14)**

Preparation through Prayer

And he said, O YHWH, the Elohim of my master Avraham! Send me I pray You, good speed this day, and show loving-kindness [chesed] unto my master Avraham. (Genesis 24:12)

Before meeting Rivkah, Eli'ezer took the time to pray to the God of Avraham. The Hebrew word for "loving-kindness" is *chesed*, better translated as "covenant devotion and loyalty." Eli'ezer reminds God of His covenant obligations to Avraham. In our case, we remind God of His covenant loyalty to His Son,

Yeshua. Our success in evangelism is ultimately not for our benefit, but for the benefit of Yeshua the Messiah.

After all, we are not trying to—or at least, shouldn't be trying to—seek disciples for ourselves, but for Yeshua. Many church leaders, as well as Messianic congregation leaders, need to learn that we are not building our own congregations and ministries, but are only serving God as shiliach, messengers, seeking disciples of Yeshua the Messiah.

Before we have anything worth saying to anyone, we need to first take the time to commune with our God. He is the One who will send His angels and His Spirit before us to guide our paths—if we spend time with Him in prayer and obey His mitzvot, His commands.

The Bride

And the damsel was very fair to look upon; a virgin: neither had any man known her. And she went down to the fountain and filled her pitcher, and came up. (Genesis 24:16)

In our passage today, the bride-to-be, Rivkah, is very beautiful; however, the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 has had five husbands and is living with a man who is not her husband. How many of us felt unworthy of salvation when we first believed? Many times a person will feel completely unworthy. But these are only externals. God looks at the heart. Remember that at the time of our salvation, we also were dead in our sins. Although the soul of each individual is tarnished, God is able to restore our soul to a “holy and blameless” state. (Ephesians 5:26-27)

Initiating the Conversation

And the servant ran to meet her and said, Give me to drink, I pray you, a little water of your pitcher. (Genesis 24:17)

In our passage, Eli'ezer runs to meet Rivkah and ask her for water, just as Yeshua did with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7). Both Eli'ezer and Yeshua use the occasion of their thirst to initiate a conversation. Just as they took advantage of a real situation to initiate conversation, so must we. In order to have the opportunity to lead others to the Messiah, we must first lead them into relationship with us.

Knowing When to be Silent

And the man looked steadfastly on her, holding his peace to know whether YHWH had made his journey prosperous or not. (Genesis 24:21)

Before Eli'ezer made an offer of marriage to Rivkah, he silently observed her actions. He took the time to study her before he began to speak too much. We need to learn to be silent. The silent testimony of a godly life will compel others to ask questions. If we walk in Torah-observance and allow people to develop curiosity, sharing our belief in the Messiah will become a natural part of the conversation. Until a person realizes he or she has a need, that person will not be able to accept our answers.

Establishing Credibility

And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold (Genesis 24:22).

Convinced that this was the woman God had chosen, Eli'ezer gives her gifts. In this manner, Eli'ezer established credibility with her and her family. In similar fashion, we need to establish credibility with people before we can deliver our message. Just as Eli'ezer did not give her fake jewelry, so we must

always only offer true friendship and perform acts of genuine kindness. Our involvement with others must always be done out of real concern and compassion for them. The gifts we have to give to others include the power of prayer, the wisdom of Yeshua, the sole authority of Scripture, the blessing of forgiveness, the shalom (peace) of observing Shabbat and God's mitzvot, and the joy of celebrating God's feast days.

Salvation is a gift from God. Yeshua entices the Samaritan woman by saying, **"If you knew the gift of God."** (John 4:10) Yeshua continues, **But every man who drinks from the water that I give him, will not thirst forever. But that water that I give him, will be in him a spring of water, that will spring up unto eternal life** (John 4:14).

Blessing God

And the man bowed his head, and prostrated himself before YHWH. And he said, Blessed be YHWH, the Elohim of my master Avraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master! As for me, YHWH has led me in the way to the house of my master's brothers. (Genesis 24:26-27)

Eli'ezer bowed down and blessed God. We are never to make secret the fact of our belief in God. If we are being Torah-observant in our lives, it will be obvious to all who are around us. If people do not easily notice that we are people of faith in God, then we may need to question our life-style and possibly even our professed salvation. There are no "secret agent" believers!

People need to know that we live by our convictions and belief in God. Many people claim many things, so only our actions will be noted. God's word is the sole authority in our lives. If our lives are not God-centered, Torah-observant, and God-honoring, then nobody will care what we have to say.

Enthusiasm is Contagious

And the damsel ran, and told her mother's house according to these words. (Genesis 24:28)

Before Rivkah ran back to tell her family, she was already convinced that Eli'ezer was for real. When people encounter genuine kindness, fellowship, compassion, and concern, they will run to their friends and family and tell them the news.

Let's continue looking at the encounter between Yeshua and the Samaritan woman. He waited while the Samaritan woman, filled with joy, ran to her village and told everyone she could find about Him. **And the woman left her water pot, and went into the city and told everyone, Come see the man who told me everything that I have done. Is this not the Messiah?** (John 4:28-29)

Going to Them

And the man came into the house. (Genesis 24:32)

When Eli'ezer presented his message to Rivkah and her family, he did not require that they go to him. No, he went to them. Yeshua remained with them for 2 days (John 4:40). Also, Peter went to Cornelius and entered his house. We, likewise, must go to others and share our message. However, we must use godly wisdom, and not just enter any establishment on the pretense of sharing the Gospel.

Business First

And there was set food before him to eat, but he said, I will not eat, until I have told my errand. (Genesis 24:33)

As soon as Eli'ezer establishes relationship with the household, he tells them his errand. Eli'ezer first recounted his testimony of the events of the days leading up to their meeting. When Peter was with Cornelius, he informed him of the events leading up to his going into Cornelius' house. Likewise, when we

have established relationship with others, we are not to become so involved in their lives that we delay in telling our testimony and how we came to our convictions.

Our primary mission is to spread the Gospel. How many times do believers befriend unbelievers with every intention of sharing the Gospel with them, and then hesitate to do so? How many so-called believers have unbelieving friends that do not even know they claim to be believers?

In our present passage, Eli'ezer tells Rivkah's family; **now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.** (Genesis 24:49) Notice how Rivkah's family responds. They respond: **The thing proceeds from YHWH. We cannot speak unto you bad or good.** (Genesis 24:50) Eli'ezer has so acted before them and presented his message to them in such a way that they can raise no objections. All they can say is **Behold, Rivkah is before you. Take her and go, and let her be your master's, son's, wife, as YHWH has spoken.** (Genesis 24:51)

In the account of Peter and Cornelius, the people become believers before Peter even finishes speaking to them. And in the story of Yeshua and the Samaritans, **And many believed in Him because of His word. And they were saying to that woman, Now not because of your word, do we believe in Him: for we have heard and know, that this is truly the Messiah, the Savior of the world.** (John 4:41-42)

Her Response

And they called Rivkah and said unto her, Will you go with this man? And she said, I will go. (Genesis 24:58)

In the end each person must make their own decision. Here, only Rivkah can decide. Similarly, when we share our message, each person must decide for himself. Also, notice that after Rivkah agrees to go, the family tries to delay her departure. Eli'ezer understood that once her decision had been made, it was time to take her to her new home.

In similar manner, when someone dedicates their life to Yeshua as the Master and Savior, we must not delay to take them into the community of faith. It is always tempting for them to stay with their past relationships and share what has happened, but it is more important for them to be introduced into the family of faith. In order for a new believer to grow, the person must sever ties with unbelievers from the past and be nurtured in God's word.

Rivkah's Blessing

And they blessed Rivkah, and said unto her, Our sister ... be you the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let your seed possess the gate of those that hate them. (Genesis 24:60)

This blessing here from her family is very prophetic. It speaks of the bride of the Messiah: **thousands of ten thousands, and let your seed possess the gate of those that hate them.** In ancient warfare, most cities were fortified with walls; therefore the most vulnerable spot was at the gates of the city. To **possess the gate of those that hate them**, their enemies, means to defeat one's enemies. In similar fashion, Yeshua tells His disciples that the gates of Sheol will not be able to withstand His Assembly (Matthew 16:18).

Falling Off Her Camel

And Rivkah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Yitz'chak, she alighted from the camel. (Genesis 24:64)

In the Hebrew this verse says that when Rivkah saw Yitz'chak, "she fell (*naphal*) from her camel." Remember that many of the Sages said that Yitz'chak went to Paradise until his return here in this scene with Rivkah. The Sages said that Rivkah fell off her camel because she saw Yitz'chak return from the skies!

Now, I am not saying that this is biblical. I am just telling you how the Jewish Sages understood the reason Rivkah fell from the camel. I believe it was love at first sight!

Now in our rather “midrashic” interpretation of today’s passage, Yitz'chak represents the Messiah and Rivkah represents the Bride of the Messiah, His Assembly. Since Yitz'chak’s “death” he has not been seen again until now by his bride. So Yeshua the Messiah, after His death and ascension will not be seen again until He comes down from heaven on the clouds to be united to His Bride.

And they said to them: men of Galil, why do you stand and gaze into heaven? This Yeshua, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner like you have seen Him, who ascended into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

And the servant told Yitz'chak all the things that he had done. And Yitz'chak brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rivkah and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Yitz'chak was comforted for his mother. (Genesis 24:66-67)

The Fall of Ishmael

Over against all his brothers he did settle. (Genesis 25:18)

In this verse the Hebrew literally says, “upon the presence of all his brethren he {Ishmael} fell (*naphal*).” Many Sages have understood this verse to be referring to the end of days when the descendents of Ishmael, the Arab peoples, will finally fall. In fact, the Sages taught that only after Ishmael falls will the history of Yitz'chak truly begin, under the reign of the Messiah. Therefore, when Yeshua the Messiah returns, Rivkah (the Bride of the Messiah) falls from her camel in surprise and joy, but Ishmael (Islam) will fall before his brothers (Yisra'el) in defeat.