

TWO BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A SPOUSE

24 Abraham was old, and well advanced in years. Now Jehovah had blessed Abraham in all things. ²Then Abraham said to his servant, the chief servant of his household, the one who had charge over all Abraham's possessions, I beg you, put your hand under my thigh. ³I will make you swear by Jehovah, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I am living; ⁴rather, you shall go to my country, and to my relatives, and get a wife for my son Isaac. ⁵Then the servant said to him, Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then bring your son back to the land from where you came? ⁶And Abraham said to him, Make sure that you do not bring my son back there again. ⁷Jehovah, the God of heaven—who took me from my father's household and from my native land, who spoke to me and who swore an oath to me, saying, To your offspring I will give this land—he will send his angel before you, and you shall get a wife for my son from there. ⁸If the woman is not willing to come with you, then you shall be released from my oath. Only you must not bring my son there again. ⁹So the servant put his hand under his master Abraham's thigh and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Mesopotamia, and came to the city of Nahor. ¹¹When he arrived there he made the camels kneel down by the well of water outside the city. It was towards evening, the time when the women of the city went out to draw water. ¹²And he said, O Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, I beg you, please give me success today and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³See, I am standing beside this well, and the young women of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴May the young woman to whom I say, Please, I beg you, lower your water pitcher into the well so that I may have a drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink—may that very girl be the one whom you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown kindness to my master.

¹⁵And it happened that, before he had finished praying, Rebekah—the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah (Milcah was the wife of Abraham's brother, Nahor)—came, bearing her water pitcher on her shoulder. ¹⁶Now the young woman was very beautiful in appearance, and she was a virgin, no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came back. ¹⁷Then the servant ran to meet her and said, I beg you, give me a little water to drink from your pitcher. ¹⁸And she said, Drink, my lord. Then she quickly lowered her pitcher to her hands and gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink she said, I will also draw water for your camels until they have finished drinking. ²⁰Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough and ran back to the well to draw more water. She drew water for all his camels.

²¹Without saying a word, the man watched her closely, to determine whether or not Jehovah had made his journey successful. ²²When the camels had finished drinking, the man gave her a golden ring, weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her arms, the weight of which equaled ten shekels of gold. ²³He said to her, Whose daughter are you? I beg you, please tell me, Is there enough room in your father's house to provide lodging for us? ²⁴She said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son whom Milcah

bore to Nahor. ²⁵Furthermore, she said to him, We have enough straw and fodder, and enough room to provide lodging for you. ²⁶Then the man bowed his head and worshipped Jehovah. ²⁷He said, Blessed be Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his lovingkindness and his faithfulness to my master. As for me, Jehovah has led me along the way to the house of my master's relatives. ²⁸Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban. Laban ran out to the well to greet the man. ³⁰When he saw the ring and the bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard his sister Rebekah's report, This is what the man said to me; he went out to meet him. Now the man was standing with his camels by the well. ³¹Laban said to him, Come to my house, you who are blessed by Jehovah. Why do you remain outside? I have prepared my house for you, and have made provision for your camels.

³²So the man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels. Laban provided straw and fodder for the camels, also water to wash the man's feet as well as the feet of the men who were with him. ³³Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, I will not eat until I have made known to you my mission. Laban said, Tell us. ³⁴And he said, I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵Jehovah has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great. Jehovah has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. ³⁶And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old. And my master has given him all that he owns. ³⁷Now my master made me swear an oath, saying, You shall not take a wife for my son from the young women of the Canaanites in whose land I am living. ³⁸On the contrary, you shall go to my father's household, and to my relatives, and from among them take a wife for my son. ³⁹And I said to my master, Perhaps the woman will not follow me. ⁴⁰And he said to me, Jehovah, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful. So shall you take a wife for my son from among my relatives, and from my father's household. ⁴¹You shall be released from my oath if you come to my relatives and they refuse to give her to you, if that be the case you shall be released from my oath. ⁴²Today I came to this well and said, O Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, if you will, now make my journey successful. ⁴³Look, I am standing by this well of water. Let it be that the young woman who comes here to draw water—the one to whom I shall say, I beg you, give me a little water from your pitcher to drink; ⁴⁴and she shall say to me, Drink, and I will also draw water for your camels—let her be the woman whom Jehovah has chosen for my master's son. ⁴⁵And before I had finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came with her pitcher on her shoulder. And she went down to the well and drew water. Then I said to her, I beg you, let me have a drink. ⁴⁶And she quickly lowered her pitcher from her shoulder and said, Drink, and I will also give your camels water to drink. So I drank, and she also made the camels drink. ⁴⁷Then I asked her, Whose daughter are you? And she said, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him. Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets upon her arms. ⁴⁸And I bowed my head and worshipped Jehovah and blessed Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's brother as a wife for his son. ⁴⁹Now if you will deal kindly and faithfully with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, so that I may turn to the right or to the left in pursuit of a wife for my master's son.

⁵⁰Then Laban and Bethuel answered, This matter comes from Jehovah. We can say nothing to you either one way or the other. ⁵¹Look, Rebekah is here before you, take her, and go on your way. Let her become the wife of your master's son, as Jehovah has spoken. ⁵²When Abraham's servant heard their words he bowed down to the earth to Jehovah. ⁵³Then the servant brought out silver and gold jewelry and articles of clothing, and presented them to Rebekah. He also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother.

⁵⁴Then they ate and drank, both he and the men who were with him, and they spent night there. When they got up in the morning he said, Send me on my way back to my master. ⁵⁵Rebekah's brother and her mother said, Let the young woman stay with us for a few days, at least ten; after that she shall go. ⁵⁶But he said to them, Do not detain me, since Jehovah has caused my journey to be successful. Send me on my way so that I may return to my master. ⁵⁷They said, We will call the young woman and ask her personally. ⁵⁸So they called Rebekah and asked her, Are you willing to go with this man? And she said, I am willing to go.

⁵⁹Then they sent their sister Rebekah, along with her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men on their way. ⁶⁰They blessed Rebekah and said to her, Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the cities of those who hate them. ⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maidservants got ready and mounted the camels and went with Abraham's servant. So the servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

⁶²Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, for he was living in the land of the South. ⁶³One evening he went out to the open field to meditate. He looked up and saw that there were camels coming. ⁶⁴And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted the camel. ⁶⁵Then she said to the servant, Who is this man in the field that is coming to meet us? And the servant said, It is my master. So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶The servant told Isaac all that he had done. ⁶⁷And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. She became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (Gen. 24:1-67)

Introduction

Sue Ellen was a vivacious senior in high school who had just recently found the LORD. Although I was a non-Christian at the time, I was attracted to her and to the quality of life she exhibited. She invited me to some Christian youth meetings, she shared the gospel with me, and eventually I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

I began to grow in the LORD, but Sue Ellen began to slip in her relationship with God. She had broken up with the Christian guy she had been dating for years and had begun to date a young non-Christian lawyer. Just out of high school, Sue Ellen was swept off her feet and married the guy within three months. All the while she was growing colder and harder towards spiritual things.

The marriage was rocky, and less than a year later they were divorced. By this time Sue Ellen was hardened by the world and utterly cold and callous toward the LORD.

Several months later, a friend and I went over to her apartment to speak with her about her relationship to Christ. She actually asked us to leave and to stop talking to her about Jesus. She didn't want to hear anything about the things of God. It is now some six years later, and as far as I know, Sue Ellen is still apathetic and cold towards Christ and His Word.

This youth worker goes on to write:

Sue Ellen's experience is only one of many, many examples I have seen when dating a non-Christian ruined the spiritual life of a person. I've worked with high school students for seven years and have seen that dating a non-Christian is one of the major reasons for losing interest in spiritual things. (Scott Kirby, *Dating: Guidelines from the Bible*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI1979, 49516, pp.47-48)

Like Abraham, we, too, must be concerned that our sons and daughters choose spouses who belong to "the household of faith," rather than from the unbelieving world at large. If we are to be true to the LORD's covenant, we must urge our sons and daughters to be discriminating in their choice of a spouse and follow the guidelines of Scripture.

I. When Choosing a Spouse, Seek a Fellow Christian

Abraham is at an advanced age when we meet him in Genesis 24, he knows that the time of his departure is at hand, and he knows he has one thing left to do: provide for Isaac a godly wife. So it is that he calls to him his most trusted household servant, and makes him swear that he will seek the right kind of spouse for Isaac.

Abraham stipulates that she must not be "*from the daughters of the Canaanites;*" rather, the servant must go to Abraham's own relatives and seek a wife for Isaac. Abraham knew that among his relatives there was a knowledge of the LORD and there would be found a wife who would share a common Christian faith with Isaac (note vs. 31 and 50.)

We must appreciate the spiritual perspective that regulated Abraham's life and induced him to take such action on behalf of his son. There would have been a great temptation for Abraham to have his son, Isaac, wedded to one of the daughters of the Canaanites. Abraham, as a wealthy man, could have selected a very choice spouse for Isaac, and in so doing, he would have created an alliance with any one of the leading families of Canaan. He would thereby have gained a possession in the land of Canaan and secured a place in the land for Isaac, not to mention guaranteeing Isaac a continued and increased source of wealth.

But Abraham's spiritual perspective enabled him to look beyond the immediate and the temporal to that which is transcendent and divine. The LORD has

promised to give Abraham's descendants the land, as he explains to his servant upon sending him out on this mission of procuring a believing wife for Isaac, "**Jehovah, the God of heaven—who took me from my father's household and from my native land, who spoke to me and who made an oath to me, saying, To your offspring I will give this land—he will send his angel before you, and you shall get a wife for my son from there**" (Gen.24:7.) Also, the LORD is going to judge and expel the present inhabitants of the land. He had revealed to Abraham, "**in the fourth generation your descendants shall come back to Canaan; because the iniquity of the Amorite has not yet reached its full measure**" (Gen.15:16,) indicating the LORD's purpose to judge and expel the present inhabitants of the land when their iniquity did become full.

Furthermore, it was Abraham's spiritual perspective that enabled him to resolutely take the course he did, binding his servant by an oath and demanding that he only seek a wife for Isaac from among their own relatives.

The first biblical guideline when choosing a spouse: Seek a fellow Christian. Bear in mind the Apostle Paul's counsel to the Corinthians, "**A wife [or a Christian husband] is bound to her husband [or to his wife] for as long as he lives. But if the husband [or wife] dies, she is free to marry whomever she desires, but only in the Lord** [i.e.; only a fellow believer]."

As a young Christian man or woman, take seriously the commandment of the LORD your God:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship do righteousness and iniquity have with each other? Or what communion does light have with darkness? ¹⁵And what harmony does Christ have with Belial [the devil]? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Cor. 6:14-15)

Do not be deceived; bad company corrupts good morals. (1 Cor. 15:33)

Now king Solomon loved many foreign women, ... ²from the nations concerning which Jehovah had told the children of Israel, You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you; for they will surely turn your heart away to their gods. Solomon held on to them with love. ³ ... and his wives turned his heart away from Jehovah. ⁴... his wives turned his heart away to other gods; thus his heart was not fully devoted to Jehovah his God, as was the heart of David his father. ...⁹And Jehovah was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from Jehovah, the God of Israel, ... (1 Kgs. 11:1-4,9)

Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women? (Neh. 13:27)

Let your parents' biblical counsel sink in and govern your thinking and decision-making, even though it is difficult and you may have a strong tendency to resist it, note Proverbs 19:27, "*My son, stop listening to instruction; but if you do so, you will stray from the words of knowledge.*" The godly father of Proverbs facetiously instructs his son to yield to his natural desire to reject his father's counsel, but he informs him that if he does so he will depart from the way of godliness, which is the way of life.

As a Christian young man or woman, you must avoid becoming involved in dating relationships with unbelievers. Remember and take to heart the testimony of that youth worker:

There is a very predictable process of spiritual decline that I have seen occur time after time when a Christian begins to date a non-Christian ...

Satan will bring a really attractive person into your life. ... Girls, perhaps it will be that football player who is so popular. Guys, maybe it will be some cute cheerleader ... Whatever the case, this person will seem perfect in every way except that he or she is cold toward spiritual things.

Instead of resisting the temptation, you begin to rationalize ... by thinking, "Just this once ..." "Well, it's better than sitting at home." "He **is** a nice guy." "Maybe I can witness to him."

You start spending time with this person. You may ... greatly enjoy the relationship, but it is not on a spiritual plane. Often you find yourself getting involved in a deep physical relationship very quickly.

It is amazing how often this happens ...

You must make a choice, either consciously or unconsciously, between God and that person. If you choose God, you will be hurt emotionally because you must break off the relationship. But if you choose the other person, then you will be hurt spiritually because you are putting another person before God.

If you choose another person before God, then it will lead to a rapid spiritual decline. Your heart will become hard and cold toward spiritual things.
(*Dating: Guidelines from the Bible*, pp.51-52)

As a Christian parent, let your son or daughter see in your life an example of a true spiritual perspective and priority in practice. Offer your son or daughter wise biblical counsel, reminding them of the **commandments** of the LORD as revealed in Scripture. Also reminding them that "exceptions to the rule" are just that, they are exceptions that are out of the ordinary, not guaranteed experiences—bear in mind the testimony of that youth director: Sue Ellen's

experience is only one of many, many examples I have seen when dating a non-Christian ruined the spiritual life of a person.

II. When Choosing a Spouse, Seek the LORD's Blessing

Note that when Abraham's servant is entrusted with this most important task, the servant looks to the LORD for grace and favor: *"And he said, O Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, I beg you, please give me success today and show kindness to my master Abraham"* (vs. 12.)

Abraham had earlier expressed confidence that the LORD would give His provision concerning the right spouse for Isaac:

Jehovah, the God of heaven—who took me from my father's household and from my native land, who spoke to me and who made an oath to me, saying, To your offspring I will give this land—he will send his angel before you, and you shall get a wife for my son from there. (Gen. 24:7)

His confidence was based upon the importance of this matter, as well as the fact that it was in accordance with the LORD's will. Furthermore, Abraham's confidence was supported by the fact that he himself was setting a godly example. The servant reports Abraham's testimony as follows, *"[My master] said to me, Jehovah, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful. So shall you take a wife for my son from among my relatives, and from my father's household"* (vs. 40.)

Even in the face of uncertainty, there was still the determination to do God's will and trust Him for His provision (vs. 49.) If Rebekah's family is unwilling to give her in marriage to Isaac, Abraham's servant will continue his search among the other families of the area, (presumably Abraham's more distant relatives.) Earlier the servant had expressed some questions (vs. 39); in reply, Abraham had assured him of the LORD's faithfulness—but to ease his mind, Abraham also set a limit to his servant's own personal responsibility (vs. 40-41.)

Here is the second biblical guideline when choosing a spouse: Seek the LORD's blessing.

As a young Christian man or woman, make the matter of a future spouse a matter of prayer. Be confident that the LORD will provide you with what is truly good. The LORD blessed Isaac with a truly desirable wife (vs. 16.) The LORD granted Rebekah a choice in the matter, she was not forced to do what was against her will (vs. 57-58.) Bear in mind the promise, and the conditions, presented in Psalm 84:11-12,

Jehovah God is a sun and a shield; Jehovah will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you. (Psal. 84:11-12)

As Christian parents, having committed yourself to the LORD and to prayer, expect Him to be faithful to provide (vs. 27,40.) Expect Him to do so because of the importance of this matter for the spiritual welfare of your son/daughter, and because you are seeking what is in accordance with His commandment. Then, when He does provide the person of His choosing, accept His faithful provision (vs. 50-51.) Recognize the fact that if your son/daughter is united in marriage to a committed Christian, that is the greatest blessing they can receive, far greater than material comfort or temporal “security.”

Conclusion

The choosing of a spouse, a lifetime partner, is no small matter; it is of the utmost importance. If we are to be true to the LORD, like Abraham, we must be concerned that our sons/daughters choose spouses who belong to “the household of faith,” rather than from the unbelieving world at large. As Christian parents, we must lovingly urge our sons/daughters to be discriminating in their choice of a spouse and follow the guidelines of Scripture.