

Rebekah

Genesis 22:20-24; 24:15-49

Don't you wish that it were that easy to find a mate? Wouldn't we wish it to be this easy to discern God's will with regard to the question of whom you should marry? Those of you who might be thinking about getting married yourself in the future, wouldn't it be great if God made it this clear in your life, whom you should marry?

Of course it would, for everything here is an example of God revealing his will to his people. Putting this model into practice would sure make that thing we call the courtship model a lot easier, wouldn't it? If you are helping your children find a mate, you could just derive some sort of external test. Maybe pull off the road and try to fix a flat tire, and ask the Lord to send someone along who not only helps fix the tire, but also puts some extra gas into your car. And, of course, he must have the right family ties. That's whom you should marry!

Well, I think you realize the silliness of that, but the point here is still well made, that,

I. GOD REVEALS HIS WILL BY ORDERING EXACT CIRCUMSTANCES.

That's a true statement, true not only in the Old Covenant but also in the New Covenant. God does still order exact circumstances. Everything that happens comes about in accordance with the pleasure of his will. In the words of our Shorter Catechism, "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions."

That includes everything. Including marriages. Therefore we

can still ask God to so arrange and order the circumstances of our lives so that we can properly discern his will. Even today, God reveals his will by ordering exact circumstances. And that was certainly the case in Abraham's day.

v.15-20

You have to wonder what this servant might have been thinking. I wonder how long he expected to have to wait, after all, the daily chore of the young maidens to come to the well to draw water was rather tiresome and rigorous. It was a difficult job, a hard, though necessary chore. Any number of young women might have offered a stranger water from her jar, but how soon would one voluntarily offer to feed the man's camels as well?

The servant of Abraham didn't have to wait long. In fact, he didn't even have to finish praying. Isn't God great! As he was finishing his prayer, God brought about the answer, in the person of Rebekah.

v.15

And God's grace is shown abundantly here, for we immediately learn several things about Rebekah. Obviously, by the nature of the request, she proves herself to be kind and generous, considerate not only to her fellow man but also to the animals which God has created. Her generosity extends even to the camels!

The test, the request for identification, was really a test of character, a test of a woman who be revealed to be a godly woman with a gentle and quite spirit.

v.19-20

But Rebekah was more than merely generous and kind. She is more than merely energetic and strong. She was beautiful.

And she was innocent, pure, and chaste.

v.16

Surely this servant must have been thinking along those lines of Paul's exclamation in,

Eph. 3:20 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

But there was still one very important question to ask, it's always an important question to ask when you're thinking about getting married. "What's your name?" That usually comes up pretty early in the relationship! The servant wondered, obviously realizing that this girl had responded exactly as he had asked God, but still knowing that his oath was to find a wife for Isaac from the family and relatives of Abraham.

So we read,

v.21

But remember, God reveals his will by ordering exact circumstances. And so the servant is confident enough to offer a gift, even as he discusses his mission and to some degree, initiates a marriage contract.

v.22-25

Three things happened in those verses. The girl is identified as belonging to Abraham's family. Hospitality is offered and received. And the gift is given, the first step of securing the marriage contract, once her identity was made known.

v.47-48

It was a gift befitting the wealth and status of Abraham, they were gifts worthy of the occasion. They were very valuable. But

then, of course, the final question, posed not to the young woman herself, but to her family,

v.49

That was the whole purpose for the trip, and as we'll see, God made the journey successful. Rebekah would return to marry Isaac.

The big picture here is that God reveals his will by ordering exact circumstances. God brought about this meeting, he arranged the events so that the servant of Abraham would find Rebekah, and she would marry Isaac. And as required, Rebekah was related to Abraham.

Let me refer back to some verses from chapter 22 which we have skipped,

Gen. 22:20 "Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21 Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, 22 Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." 23 And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah."

These relationships are always hard for me to keep straight, so let me try to explain it plainly. Abraham and Nahor were brothers. Abraham's son was Isaac. Nahor and his wife had eight sons, including Bethuel. And Bethuel was Rebekah's father.

So, Isaac's father and Rebekah's grandfather were brothers. Isaac and Rebekah's father were actually cousins. That makes Isaac and Rebekah second cousins.

There was yet no prohibition against the marriage of cousins, and, in fact, Abraham had commanded his servant to find a relative for Isaac to marry. And the Lord made his journey successful. This is perhaps the most delightful example of God's providence in all of Scripture, so full of romance and joy. Everyone likes a good love story.

The servant's delight in God's providence was so obvious that he had to state his business before being served dinner, something which went against the traditional customs of the time.
v.32-49

And of course, as we'll study next week, Rebekah went back with the servant and was married to Isaac, a marriage made in heaven.

After all that, it is appropriate for us to ask the question, "Does God still work this way in our lives?" My answer to that question is a very definitive, "yes and no."

There are some distinct differences in the way that God revealed his will in the Old Covenant from the way that he does now in the New Covenant, differences explained quite well by the words of,

Hebr. 1:1 "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."

In the Old Covenant, God spoke through prophets, "at various times and in various ways." But that continuing revelation of the prophets has ended. Now we have the final word of revelation, the completed word. The perfect word, which is Jesus Christ in the flesh.

So it would not be appropriate for us to ask for revelation in precisely the same way that Abraham's servant did, asking, as we studied last week,
v.14

He was asking for inspired revelation, and he received it. We no longer have that opportunity, and ought not to ask for it. Choices and decisions such as whom to marry are now part of God's secret will, that is, things which God has determined in the counsel of his own will but has not revealed to us before they happen. But even so, God does still reveal his will by ordering exact circumstances.

Circumstances do not give infallible direction. They don't provide inspired revelation. When God "opens" or "closes" a door, as we often speak of it, we can't claim inspired revelation. But circumstances, when they are interpreted by biblical precepts and biblical principles, do give us grounds to consider how to discern God's will. God does reveal his will by ordering the exact circumstances of our lives.

But instead of seeking prophetic revelation, we ought to pursue in ourselves true godliness and God-centeredness. We are to separate ourselves from the patterns of this world, then we can discern God's will. Specifically, Paul says,

Rom. 12:2 "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

You can't discount circumstances entirely, but you must still test and approve what God's will is. You must look at your circumstances, look at Scripture, and then you must discern. Instead of seeking inspired prophetic revelation, you should seek not to "conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is --his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Or even as I emphasized last week,

Prov. 3:5 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

But again, my point from Genesis 24 is that God does reveal his will by ordering exact circumstances. God does order every single detail of your life, and the way that he orders them does give you the ability to test and approve what his will is.

Illus: I could give lots of examples from my own life, and I hope, even if only in hindsight, you could identify similar examples yourselves. God orders exact circumstances, not giving us infallible revelation, but still directing the affairs of our lives. I could recite multiple ways in which external circumstances brought about your invitation for me to come to this church eight years ago. Again, a variety of un-related decisions and actions which God worked together to bring about his sovereign purpose. Ultimately, he revealed his will by ordering exact circumstances.

I say all of that to give you encouragement and freedom. Freedom to make decisions without wondering “if it’s God’s will or not.” It is the great freedom of truly believing in God’s providence and sovereign control over every aspect of our lives, is that you can make decisions freely! And confidently.

Prov. 3:5 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

To be more practical, when you are attempting to discern the

Lord’s will about a particular decision or situation, first search the Scriptures to make sure what you are considering is not forbidden. Make sure it’s consistent with biblical principles. Pray to God diligently and search your own heart so as to be sure that you are acknowledging the Lord, then make your decision. With the freedom and confidence to know that,

Rom. 8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

But let’s go one step deeper into this popular and enjoyable love story. Let’s go one step deeper than merely understanding that God arranges and orders the exact circumstances of our lives. Let’s look at God’s promises.

There are many times, today as in the days of Abraham, that we can claim God’s promises as we seek his will. And sometimes, you can come to discern God’s will by studying those promises. The point made obvious with Isaac and Rebekah is that,

II. GOD REVEALS HIS WILL BY SPEAKING SPECIFIC PROMISES.

The servant of Abraham surely understood that.

v.27a

God showed mercy and demonstrated truth. That means keeping your word, fulfilling your promise. But what promise? How was God faithful?

v.27b

The promise was made to Abraham that his son Isaac, the promised son and the line through which the covenant would continue, would have a wife from Abraham’s own family. Notice

again how the servant describes his business,
v.34-40

Everything about Isaac was a promise. We've been studying that for weeks, in chapter after chapter of Genesis. He was the child of promise. His conception and birth were the result of God's promise. So specifically. And his very life was spared only because of God's promise, for Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, but the Lord promised, "the Lord will provide."

Therefore, Isaac becomes a symbol of all believers, for we, too, are called children of promise. As Paul says,
Gal. 4:28 "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise."

Futher,
Gal. 3:26 "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

And most clearly of all, we read about the true identity of Christians in,

Rom. 9:6 "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

Therefore, we are children of promise, which means that our salvation is based upon God's promise. Everything about our salvation, from first to last, is the direct consequence of God's promise. Or as we read in,

Eph.2:4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

God reveals his will, including his will for our salvation, by speaking specific promises. And finally,

III. GOD REVEALS HIS WILL IN ORDER TO PROVOKE HIS PEOPLE TO WORSHIP.

All of God's actions are ultimately self-centered, that is, centered upon his desire for the praise of his own glory. After all, he's God! And there is such an appropriate response here in this account, particularly from Abraham's servant.

When it became clear to him that his prayer had been so immediately answered, he bowed down and worshiped.
v.26

It was a response of humility, the only appropriate response to such an outpouring of God's grace. He bowed down low, his body language reflecting the attitude of his heart. He worshiped the Lord. He sang God's praise.
v.27

Again, he describes his worship.

v.48

He praised God for his leading and his guidance, for revealing his will through circumstances and for keeping his promises. God had promised that Isaac would have a wife from the Abraham's own family, and he did. God led the servant down the right road at the right time to the right place to meet the right girl.

And he still does the same thing today. And we should respond the same way today. Worship.

You will note in many examples of biblical praise and worship that God's acts on behalf of his people are the subject of praise. For example, the song of Moses,

Deut. 32:3 "For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. 4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He...8 When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel. 9 For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. 10 "He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. 11 As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, 12 So the LORD alone led him, And there was no foreign god with him. 13 "He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock; 14 Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes."

Or David's song,

2 Sam.22:1 "Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. 2 And he said: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; 3 The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence. 4 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies...47 "The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let God be exalted, The Rock of my salvation! 48 It is God who avenges me, And subdues the peoples under me; 49 He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man. 50 Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name. 51 "He is the tower of salvation to His king, And shows mercy to His anointed, To David and his descendants forevermore."

God's work on behalf of his people should be the subject of our songs! And the highest subject of praise is God's ultimate act on behalf of his people, the redemption that he accomplished in Jesus Christ. So we should sing about Christ and about the cross, as we so often do.

It is so edifying to look back upon your own life, and to identify specifically the mighty acts of God on your behalf. Look back upon the ways in he has directed your paths, and sing his praise. Worship him.

As we end, let me read some of these songs of praise, songs we should be singing to God today.

Ps. 71:14 "But I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And Your salvation all the day, For I do not know their limits. 16 I will

go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only. 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. 18 Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.”

Or,

Ps. 145:1 “I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. 2 Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. 3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. 5 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works. 6 Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness. 7 They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness...13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.”

So as you learn to recognize more and more, and consider just how God has directed your paths and granted you great promises unto salvation, sing his praise in worship. With absolute and unrestrained gratitude, worship him. “The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.”