

引言 INTRODUCTION

Marriage matters. Getting married is a major decision in life. It is a transition from singleness to partnership with someone. From being under the supervision of parents you look for support from your spouse. Today's story is about Abraham searching for a wife for his son Isaac. It is one of the few love stories in the Bible. Other examples are the marriage of Boaz and Ruth and the romantic tales of the couple in the Song of Solomon. Human love is a snapshot of God's love for us. God loved Abraham and promised Him a lot of blessings. The man learned to put his trust in God from his experience. God proved to be faithful over and over again. Therefore, Abraham knew that God would prepare a wife for Isaac. God cares about our marriage too. He will give us His best if we put Him first. That was how Abraham handled the matter. From the story, we can see how God's provision intertwines with people's decisions to an amazing outcome.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 承諾 The Pledge

Let us navigate through the story by considering a few words that begin with the letter P. First is the pledge. We will read from **verse 1 to 4**. Abraham asked the oldest and most-trusted servant to make a pledge that he would go back to his hometown to find a wife for Isaac. The place was Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham asked the man to put his hand under his thigh when he pledged. It was an ancient custom. The area under the thigh symbolizes fertility and power. Though the instructions were clear, the servant wanted to make sure if there would be a plan B. Continue to read **verse 5 to 9**. Abraham repeated the conditions: the servant must bring the girl back to Canaan and Isaac must not move to Abraham's hometown. Abraham trusted that God would make the plan a success. He believed in God's promise that his descendants would inherit Canaan. Therefore, Isaac had to establish his family in Canaan and not to go elsewhere. Also, by marrying someone from Abraham's clan, Isaac ensured that his wife would believe in Jehovah. Abraham was rich. He could have organized a beauty pageant and chose the best-looking Canaanite from an influential family. That would guarantee Isaac a successful future in a foreign land. But those were not Abraham's goals. He knew that Isaac was born of God's promise. His son would carry on the family's heritage and continue God's covenant. Therefore, his future wife must come from the bloodline of Abraham's family and she must also follow the same God. Today, there are many valid reasons for getting married. Some people want to get a lifelong partner to curb loneliness, share bills or produce a few babies. Those are reasonable goals. But for Christians, personal choices will have spiritual consequences. The person you marry will affect your relationship with God. Your spouse will either draw you closer to God or pull you away from Him. If that person is not a believer, then there will be many potential conflicts down the road. Will both of you attend church every Sunday or go to Dim Sum King? Will

your spouse agree that your money is God's money? Can the two of you make compromise about life goals, whether to serve God or to get rich? What about parenting? Is the top priority bringing kids to Jesus or sending them to name-brand colleges? The difference is whether we pursue God's blessings or chase after the world's treasures. Single brothers and sisters and Christian parents: let us make a pledge to God that we will only look for Christians in future marriages.

2. 禱告 The Prayer

With that pledge, the servant and a few assistants went on their way. They arrived in late afternoon. The servant rested outside the town when he said a prayer to God. We pick up the story in **verse 12 to 14**. It turned cooler when the sun was about to set. Women came out to draw water. The servant asked God for a sign. He hoped that the lady who gave him water to drink, and also volunteered to give water to his camels would be the wife for his young master. How did things turn out? Look at **verse 15 and 21**. I love the description in verse 15: Rebekah showed up even before the servant finished praying. Would it not be great if God answers our prayers that fast? But more than likely, God wants us to wait patiently. The author describes Rebekah as “very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known.” In essence, she was beautiful and she was never married. Just like the servant prayed, Rebekah did not only give him water, she also offered to get water for his ten camels. One camel can drink as much as 15 to 30 gallons (or 60 to 110 liters) of water in one shot! Just imagine how much effort it would take for Rebekah to serve ten thirsty animals! She must be a muscular women! More importantly, she had a kind heart. In subsequent conversation, the servant learned that Rebekah's grandfather was a brother of Abraham. That means that she would be one generation younger than Isaac. We mentioned a while back that marriages between close relatives were permissible until God prohibited it in the Law later. Rebekah checked all the boxes! The servant then presented her a nose ring and two bracelets as gifts. He was not shy to ask to stay overnight at her family's house. He could not wait to present a marriage proposal. The beauty of Rebekah caught the attention of the servant. But even more attractive was her thoughtfulness to his needs. What do you look for in a potential boyfriend, girlfriend or a future spouse for your kid? The height and weight? How the person dresses? What brand of handbag she uses or what kind of car he drives? It is true that the first impression will last. But do not be fool by the outward package. The stuff you see can be items borrowed from friends, not to mention there is something deceptive called makeup. Spend time to talk to the person. Pay attention to how he/she interacts with others. Then you will get a glimpse of his/her personality and values. Is the person cold or warm, indifferent or compassionate, self-centered or helpful to others? People will only grow old and things of this world will gradually fade away. In comparison, a person with good moral characters will continue to mature. Those qualities will become more attractive with time.

3. 計劃 The Plan

Rebekah immediately ran home and told her family what had happened. Her older brother Laban saw the gold nose ring and gold bracelets the servant gave to her sister. He then went

to the well and invited the visitors to his home for a meal. The servant said he would not eat until he explained the plan of this trip. He talked about his master Abraham, his assignment to look for a wife for Isaac and his encounter with Rebekah. The servant highlighted God's role in Abraham's family, and how God directed him to Rebekah. God blessed his master with great wealth. He enabled the couple to have a son at old ages. Abraham had faith that God would lead the servant to the right woman. The servant also patiently waited for God's guidance in his pursuit. Laban was convinced that God intended to match Rebekah with Isaac. We resume the story in **verse 49 to 54**. The conclusion was clear: Rebekah was a perfect bride. Laban reasoned that if it was God's will, then he should not reject the request. In the ancient world, parents on both sides decided the marriage for their children. In this case, Rebekah's mom was silent and her dad played a passive role. Laban represented the family in the matter. At that time, it was not unusual for an older brother to make marriage plans for his younger siblings. Therefore, it was not out of the ordinary for Laban to be the decision-maker for the family. Both sides came to an agreement. They celebrated with a dinner. It was evident to everyone that God was the match-maker behind the scene. God works in the same way today. Do you see God's hand in your life from dating to marriage? It is God's plan as much as your plan. Surely, single people may feel stressful about their future-half. Parents and relatives may give you pressure. Anxiety will pile up as one after another of your peers get married. Movies and music often send unbiblical messages about marriage life too. Be patient and wait on the Lord may seem to be cliches to you. But that is exactly what God expects from us. There is no doubt that it takes efforts to look for a suitable person. Quite likely dating can bring you the sweetest memories and the most painful nightmares all at once. However, ultimately you must trust God. He knows our needs more than we know ourselves. He will lead you to the ideal person at the right time. One more tip: rather than looking for the perfect candidate, prepare yourself to be a likeable person. I am talking about internal qualities. Ask God to shape you to be more like Christ. Virtues such as gentleness, courage, sincerity and integrity are more charming than fancy clothes and expensive perfumes.

4. 進展 The Progression

Everything went well as planned. We will wrap up the story with the last P word on the list, which is progression. The servant achieved the goal of finding a bride. That set God's promises to Abraham in a progression. The servants, his men, Rebekah and her maids were ready to leave the next morning. Before that, Laban gave his sister a blessing in verse 60: ...**"Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!"** It is common to wish a family member to have many generations. The unique part is the second half of Laban's blessing. Compare that to what God said to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 – **"...And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies."** There was no way for Laban to know God's promise to Abraham. This seemingly spontaneous blessing to a sister confirmed God's plan for the couple and their future generations. They were blessed by God. We see a happy ending in **verse 63 to 67**. Picture it like a plot in a romantic movie when a future husband and wife meet for the first time. It does not happen on a computer screen or at a coffee shop, but outside Abraham's

home. It was not a first date, but a bride on a ride! Rebekah got down from the camel to show respect after she saw Isaac at a distance. She covered her face with a veil after she learned that the person would be her coming husband. Much like the ancient Chinese world, a bride in the Bible times covered her face until the wedding night. Through the way the servant interacted with Isaac, we see that a progression had taken place. The servant addressed Isaac as “my master.” Moreover, he reported everything to Isaac, even though it was Abraham’s idea to look for a bride. Those implicit hints tell us that Isaac was about to take over the role of his father. Subsequently, the boy and the girl got married. But there is no mentioning of a wedding banquet. Instead, the author tells us two things: Isaac loved Rebekah and his heart was comforted since the passing of his mom. The Bible rarely talks about the love between couples. That does not mean it did not exist. The point is that Isaac cherished this woman, even though they did not know each other before. Because of this new relationship, his grief of losing his mom now turned into joy. With the marriage, Isaac transitioned to a full-grown man. This couple would carry on God’s promises to Abraham. God would bless others through them. God intends to use us in the same way. It is more than your education, career, marriage and children. God can use those gifts to benefit others. To make this happen we have to rely on Biblical principles when making decisions and follow God’s directions when He opens the right doors.

結論 CONCLUSION

We see in this story how God’s provision intertwines with people’s decisions for an amazing outcome. It was a risky business to each character. Abraham did not know if he would have a daughter-in-law, or how that lady would be like. The servant might not find a suitable wife for his young master. Both Isaac and Rebekah had no choice as to who they would marry. Isaac’s family was rich. But what if he was short, not so handsome and bald? What if Rebekah was slightly over-weight and had a bad temper? Laban might have never met Abraham. How could he trust the servant’s words and leave her sister’s future in the hands of some unknown relatives? Everyone required much faith. Abraham’s household witnessed the faithfulness of God firsthand. Laban’s family had to trust that the servant was telling the truth, that God had been blessing Abraham. Today we put our faith in the same God. How He worked in the past in our lives and others’ lives gives us confidence for today, and it motivates us to step into the future. Genesis 24 is indeed a love story. But it is more than a love story between a man and a woman. It also shows God’s love for the people He had chosen. God will bless those who follow Him wholeheartedly.

引言 INTRODUCTION

婚姻是很重要的事。結婚是人生中的一個重大決定，代表著從單身轉變到與另一個人的結合。結婚之後，一個人離開父母的照顧，轉而尋求配偶的支持。今天的故事講述亞伯拉罕為他的兒子以撒尋找妻子的過程。這是聖經中少數的愛情故事之一。其他例子包括波阿斯與路得的婚姻，以及雅歌中那對情人的浪漫情節。人的愛情反映神的愛。神愛亞伯拉罕，並應許賜給他許多祝福。這位族長從自己的經歷中學會信靠神，而神一次又一次證明祂是信實的。因此，亞伯拉罕知道神肯定會為以撒預備妻子。神也關心我們的婚姻；若我們把神放在首位，祂必然將最好的賜給我們。亞伯拉罕就是以這樣的態度處理此事。從這個故事，我們看見神的供應如何與人的決定交織在一起，產生奇妙的結果。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 承諾 The Pledge

讓我們用幾個以英文字母 P 開頭的詞語來探討這段經文。首先是承諾 (Pledge)。我們來讀第 1 至 4 節。亞伯拉罕要求他最年長、最可靠的僕人承諾，回到他的家鄉為以撒尋找妻子。那地方是迦勒底的吾珥。亞伯拉罕吩咐那僕人把手放在他的大腿下起誓，這是一個古代的風俗；大腿下象徵生育與力量。雖然亞伯拉罕的指示很清楚，但是僕人想要確定是否有後備計劃。請繼續讀第 5 至 9 節。亞伯拉罕重申條件：僕人必須把女孩子帶回迦南，而以撒不能回到亞伯拉罕的家鄉。亞伯拉罕相信神必然使這個計劃成功。他相信神的應許，他的後裔將會承受迦南地。因此，以撒必須在迦南建立家庭，而不是去別的地方。此外，娶亞伯拉罕家鄉的女子，也可以確保以撒的妻子敬拜耶和華。亞伯拉罕非常富有，他大可以在當地舉辦一場選美大會，挑選最漂亮、出身在有勢力家庭的迦南女子。這樣有利於以撒的未來發展。但那並不是亞伯拉罕的目標。他知道以撒是憑著神應許所生的兒子，他要繼承家族的屬靈傳統，並延續神的約。因此，以撒未來的妻子必須出自亞伯拉罕的血脈，也要跟隨同一位神。如今，人們基於不同的理由結婚。有些人尋求終身伴侶來消除孤單、分擔開支，或是生孩子，這些都是合理的目的。但對基督徒來說，個人的選擇會產生屬靈的後果。和你結婚的人會影響你與神的關

係：你的配偶可以使你更親近神，或是使你遠離神。如果對方不信主，將來就很可能導致許多衝突。例如：你們是每個主日一起來教會，還是一起去點心皇飲茶？你的配偶是否認同你的錢是就神的錢？兩人能否在人生目標上有一致的看法：是服事神還是追求財富？在教養小孩方面呢？首要的目的是帶孩子相信耶穌，還是送他們進名牌大學？其中的差別在於，我們到底是追求神的祝福，還是追逐世界的財寶。單身的弟兄姐妹與基督徒父母：讓我們與神承諾，在未來的婚姻中只尋找基督徒作配偶。

2. 禱告 The Prayer

因著那個承諾，僕人便帶著幾個助手上路了。他們在傍晚時分抵達目的地。僕人在城外休息時向神禱告。所以禱告 (Prayer) 是第二個 P。我們來讀第 12 至 14 節。太陽快下山時天氣轉涼，婦女們便出來打水。僕人向神求一個記號：他盼望有一個女孩不但給他水喝、還主動為駱駝打水。他希望那個女子就是神為以撒所預備的妻子。結果怎樣呢？請看第 15 與 21 節。我特別喜歡第 15 節的形容：僕人還未禱告完，利百加就出現了！若神都這樣立時回應我們的禱告，不是太美好了嗎？但更多時候，神要求我們耐心等待。作者形容利百加「容貌極其俊美，還是處女，未曾有人親近她」。意思是她既長得漂亮又未婚。正如僕人所禱告的，利百加不僅給他水喝，還主動替他的十匹駱駝打水。一匹駱駝一次可喝十五到三十加侖（約六十到一百一十公升）的水！想像一下，要替十匹口渴的駱駝打水，要花多少力氣！利百加肯定是一位肌肉發達的女子！更重要的是，她有一顆善良的心。在隨後的對話中，僕人得知利百加的祖父是亞伯拉罕的兄弟。那也表示她比以撒年輕一代。我們之前提過，神允許近親通婚，直到後來祂在律法中禁止這樣的行為。利百加完全符合所有條件！於是僕人送給她一個鼻環與兩個手鐲作為禮物。他更出動請求在她家過夜。他迫不及待要提出婚事了。利百加的美貌當然吸引了僕人，但更令人注意的是她的細心、並願意服事別人的行動。那麼，你在為自己或孩子挑選未來的男朋友、女朋友或配偶時，看重的是什麼？身高體重？穿著打扮？手上拿的是什麼名牌包？或是開什麼牌子的車？第一印象固然深刻，但不要被外表的包裝欺騙。那些東西甚至可能是跟朋友借來的，更不用說化妝可以徹底改變一個人的容貌。你必須花時間與那個人交談，而且留意他怎樣與別人相處，從中你便能看到他的品格和價值觀。那個人是冷漠還是熱情的？漠不關心還是充滿憐憫？自我中心還是願意幫助別人？人的外表只會變老，物質的東西也會變舊；相比之下，有良好品格的人卻會持續成熟，那些特質會隨著時間越發吸引人。

3. 計劃 The Plan

利百加立刻跑回家，把發生的事告訴家人。她的哥哥拉班看見僕人送給妹妹的鼻環和手鐲，便到井邊邀請那些遠方來的客人回家吃飯。僕人表示，在解釋他的計劃之前，他不會吃飯。因此經文的是第三個 P 就是計劃 (Plan)。於是他講述主人亞伯拉罕的背景、為以撒尋找妻子的任務，以及他如何遇見利百加。僕人強調神在亞伯拉罕家中的作為，以及神如何引導他找到利百加。神賜福他的主人，使他得到財富，又使這對夫婦年老得子。亞伯拉罕相信神會帶領僕人找到適合的女子，而僕人也耐心等候神在過程中的指引。聽完之後，拉班相信神的確是要將利百加賜給以撒。我們繼續看第 49 至 54 節。結論非常明確：利百加是適合的新娘。既然這是神的旨意，拉班認為自己不能拒絕。在古代，婚事通常由雙方父母安排的。在這個故事中，利百加的母親沒有發言，她的父親也顯得被動；拉班代表家人作決定。在那個時代，家中的兄長替弟妹安排婚事是常見的事，因此拉班代表家人作主也不是例外。雙方很快達成協議，並一起吃飯慶祝。我們清楚看到，神是這場婚事的幕後媒人。今天，神仍然以同樣的方式在我們生命中作工。你能否看見神的手帶領你從交往走向婚姻？這既是你的個人計劃，也是神的計劃。單身的人往往會為自己將來的伴侶感到憂慮；父母與親戚也可能增加你的壓力；當朋友一個個結婚時，你也許會越來越心急。電影和音樂也常常傳遞不符合聖經的觀念。耐心等候神、信靠祂，或許聽起來像老生常談，但那正是神對我們的要求。當然，尋找理想的對象需要努力。約會可能帶給你甜蜜的回憶，也可能同時留下痛苦的噩夢。然而，最終你必須信靠神。祂比我們更了解我們的需要，祂會在最恰當的時間帶領你遇見最適合的人。再給你一個建議：與其努力尋找完美的對象，不如預備自己成為一個令人喜愛的人。我指的是內在的素質。求神塑造你更像基督，效法主的溫柔、勇氣、真誠、正直等美德。這些條件遠比華麗的衣服與昂貴的香水更具吸引力。

4. 進展 The Progression

於是一切都按著計劃順利進行。現在我們來看最後一個以 P 開頭的字 – 進展 (Progression)。僕人成功地為以撒找到新娘，使神對亞伯拉罕的應許有進展。第二天早上，僕人和同伴、利百加與她的使女們準備上路。在出發之前，拉班在第 60 節為妹妹祝福：「...我們的妹子啊，願你作千萬人的母！願你的後裔得著仇敵的城門！」祝福家人多子多孫是很普遍的，但特別之處在後半句的祝福。我們把這句話與神在創世記 22:17 對亞伯拉罕所說的相比：「...你子

孫必得著仇敵的城門。」拉班不可能知道神對亞伯拉罕所說的話。從這裡我們看到他給妹妹的祝福，印證了神對這對新人以及他們後代的計劃。他們的確是蒙神祝福的人。這個故事在**第 63 至 67 節**有一個完滿的結局。其中的畫面像浪漫電影裡男女主角第一次相遇的情節，但這一次不是出現在電腦螢幕前，也不是在咖啡店，而是在亞伯拉罕的家門口。這不是第一次約會，而是送上門的新娘！利百加遠遠看見以撒之後便下了駱駝，以表示尊敬。當她知道那人是自己未來的丈夫時，便用帕子蒙上臉。與古代中國的習俗相似，聖經時代的新娘在新婚夜之前都會蒙面。從僕人與以撒的互動中，我們注意到一些特別的地方。僕人稱呼以撒為「我的主人」，而且他向以撒匯報找新娘的過程，雖然那是亞伯拉罕的主意。這些細節暗示，以撒即將接替父親的角色。其後，這對新人結為夫婦。經文並沒有提到婚宴，而是提到另外兩件事情：以撒愛利百加，並且他因媽媽去世所受的傷痛得到了安慰。聖經很少描述夫妻之間的愛，這當然不代表愛並不存在。這裡要強調的是：以撒珍惜這位女子，縱使他們之前沒有見過面。因著這段新的關係，他心中的哀傷轉為喜樂。透過婚姻，以撒從青年過渡為成熟的男人。這對夫婦將延續神給亞伯拉罕的應許，並成為神祝福別人的器皿。今天神也照樣要使用我們。你的學歷、事業、婚姻或孩子不只是屬於你；神能夠使用這些恩典來祝福更多的人。要成就這一切，我們必須在作決定時遵循聖經原則，並在神為我們開門時，順服祂的帶領。

結論 CONCLUSION

從這個故事，我們看見神的供應如何與人的決定交織在一起，產生奇妙的結果。對故事中的每一個角色而言，這都是一次冒險的經歷。亞伯拉罕不知道自己是否會找到媳婦，也不知道那個女子會是什麼樣的人。僕人也可能找不到適合他年輕主人的妻子。至於以撒與利百加，他們對自己的結婚對象毫無選擇權。以撒雖然是個富家子弟，但萬一他個子矮小、長相一般又禿頭怎麼辦？若利百加稍微胖一點、又脾氣暴躁怎麼辦？拉班可能從未見過亞伯拉罕，他又如何能相信僕人的話，將妹妹的未來託付給一群不熟識的親戚？其實每一個人都需要極大的信心。亞伯拉罕的家人親眼見證了神的信實；而拉班的家庭則必須相信僕人所說的都是真話，而且相信神一直在祝福亞伯拉罕。今天，我們把信心放在同一位神身上。祂過去在我們與別人生命中的作為，給我們今天的信心，也激勵我們邁向未來。創世記第 24 章是一個愛的故事，但它不只是一個男女之間的愛情故事，它同時彰顯了神對祂所揀選之人的慈愛。凡全心跟隨祂的人，神必親自賜福。