



Fulfilling a Promise

Genesis 24:22-41

Responsibility is not something we seem to value today as in times past. We think more of what seems convenient at the moment, what pleases us, what attracts us. We look around and we see case after case of people who have set aside one commitment or another for convenience. We see this in the abundance of divorce. We see it in the acts of businessmen who take advantage of their employees without accepting the responsibility for their commitments to said employees. We see it in the actions of politicians who assume positions that counter the benefit of the population they should serve. We see it in the attitudes of Wall Street executives who act with minimal remorse for the effects occasioned by their greed. Perhaps it is not really so different than in times past. Is this any reason to devalue our responsibilities in exchange for immediate gratification?

Eliezar, Abraham's Damascan steward, held fast to his obligations. He understood that while he traveled far from Abraham, he was still responsible for his actions. The gifts he had given to Rebecca were very valuable. In today's market, the gold in the nose ring was worth more than \$200.00, and the bracelets over \$3500.00. In the context of a much simpler life in that day, this was a fortune for the general populace. Just this quantity of wealth would have been sufficient for Eliezar to have begun a new life free from his position as steward. More than that, he traveled with a retinue at his service, along with camels and other valuable goods. He was not concerned with all this, however. He recognized that he had before him a mission to accomplish. He recognized a greater value in being faithful to his master than in seeking privilege, luxury, and personal blessings.

It would have been a simple thing to escape with his master's goods. There were no organized, international police forces. There were few organized nations extending much beyond the territory of a few neighboring cities. This was a time in which roving bands could pillage without much worry, especially in the lands in which he found himself. There were ways to hide with his master's wealth, but he determined that such was not a good option for him.

Eliezar also had the opportunity to simply place his mission on a secondary level of priority and enjoy the welcome extended by Rebecca's family. He did not accept even the food offered, however, until he had related the purpose of his coming. He did not take his charge as something to accomplish by secondary intention. It was not a purpose he might fulfill as a secondary plan while traveling and enjoying the experience of life. He had a firm purpose. He had a mission to accomplish. He had prepared to act at the moment he had left his master's presence. Now arriving at the destination he had sought, in the home of his master's relatives, he felt his charge as present as when he had first accepted the mission at Abraham's hands.

He had sought God's direction to find Rebecca. On verifying in her actions the sign he had requested from God, he sought immediately to verify her identity and parentage as belonging to Abraham's family. He asked information about her family. On hearing the answer from her lips that she belonged to the family he sought, he bowed immediately in prayer to God, giving thanks for answering his requests and guiding him to find Rebecca with such ease.

Recognizing in these events something rare and important, Rebecca ran home to tell her family what had happened and the presence of the man who had given her a nose ring and bracelets of such

luxury. Her brother Laban ran out to invite Eliezar to lodge in their home along with the men who traveled with him and the animals. Laban may have done this due to his own greed and the opportunity to receive more gifts from Eliezar, but regardless, he extended his invitation and Eliezar accepted.

Installed in their accommodations, Eliezar with his companions and animals, bathed to eliminate the odor and filth from so much travel, they were presented with food and refreshment. There was every indication that a feast was prepared in order to hear news from Abraham and rejoice with the visit and offer of hospitality. For Eliezar, however, there were greater concerns that impeded his celebrating as guest of honor. He was too aware that he had arrived before Abraham's family with a mission of great importance to his master. He would have been negligent if he had not announced immediately the reason for his journey and visit.

It was even possible that after he indicated the reason that brought him they would deny his participation in the feast being offered. Eliezar knew that it was high time to clarify the mission that had brought him to the region of Haran. He refused to participate in the meal until he had declared the purpose and intentions of his master. Only after declaring that he sought Rebecca as a wife for Isaac would he be able to begin celebrating. Even this depended yet upon the family's disposition in giving the girl as a wife for Isaac.

He did not yet know how the family would respond to his charge. He did not know how Rebecca would react on hearing that she would need to leave her family to go live with Isaac in a very distant land far from all her relatives and acquaintances. There were many reasons to wait for later to tell the tale of why he had come to Laban's home. All these excuses, however, were also reasons to get on with the responsibility Eliezar had accepted. Letting it wait until the morning to tell his news would make it all the more difficult to find another appropriate moment to tell the reason for his coming. Eliezar recognized that there was only one reason for him to be in this house and he needed to relate the purpose of his coming immediately. Waiting would be to ignore the responsibility Abraham had given him.

He declared his intent to clarify the charge that had brought him to Laban. He related how Abraham had placed on him a very important charge. He clarified that the wife he sought would marry the heir of his wealthy master. He gave primary importance to Abraham's mission and intent that Isaac should not marry a woman from among the Canaanites. He then told how the promise he had made would only release him if there were no marriageable girl among Abraham's relatives who would agree to marry Isaac and that the family would allow her to go.

With this, the steward placed before Laban the reason for his visit, what this visit asked of Laban, and how Laban could accept or deny the proposition. Even though Laban's Rebecca's reactions were not determined, his mission was complete and the results were no longer in Eliezar's hands. Offering Rebecca marriage to Isaac, his charge and mission were complete. The rest was simply a return to his master to report the results of his travels.

We also have a charge placed upon us. In like manner as that of Eliezar, it is the offer of an intimate relationship with God. The great difference is that God charges us to seek those who do not know him to offer the chance of relationship. God does not make us responsible for their response, but to offer the details of the charge he has given us. Are we ready to fulfill the charge to offer salvation to all? Leaving our responsibility to wait for some other moment is just a means of avoiding responsibility.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*