



Respecting God's Plan

Genesis 24:42-60

What does God want with us? What are God's plans for our lives? We often ask these questions of God. Perhaps, however, they are the wrong questions to be asking. Most often we already know God's will. We have God's instructions in the Bible. We have read the Sermon on the Mount, the teachings of Paul, and the call to love God with all that we are and others as ourselves. What we are lacking is to bring our lives and actions under God's purposes.

Eliezar had taken care to obey his master Abraham's instructions. He had completed the first half of his journey, finding Nahor's family. He recognized Abraham's intentions that he should seek among his master's relatives a girl to become a wife for his son, Isaac. These were Abraham's basic instructions. In order to accomplish that task, there were many preparations to be made.

He had prepared the animals he would use to facilitate the long journey to the land from where his master had come. He had packed luxury gifts for the family of the girl. He had prepared clothing and jewelry for her. He had gathered food for the journey, as well as all the necessary equipment for the journey. He had selected a group of men to accompany him, offering protection and aid for whatever they might encounter along the way. Despite all these preparations being necessary, he had not been asked by Abraham to do any of this. In truth, Abraham's instructions included very few details. He did not tell him which jewelry to take for the girl and her family. Eliezar took care of arranging all these things, simply because he recognized them as necessary to accomplish the mission ahead of him.

As a good steward, Eliezar respected the task he had been entrusted. He respected the need to take personal initiative while he set out to locate a wife for Isaac, just as he had been instructed to do. He left with his equipment, with his animals, and the men chosen to accompany him. He began down the way that would take him toward the region around Haran, where he proposed to arrive in search of Abraham's relatives.

Along the way, he began to formulate a plan. He may well have formulated various plans before arriving at the well near where Nahor's family lived. He had not worried with asking too many details about Abraham's will, for he well understood his master's central wish. The rest just did not really matter to him. The mission was to acquire a wife for Isaac from among his master's people. The details did not depend on Abraham's specific will, but rather on Eliezar's action.

Having found the well at the correct site, he formulated a plan of action. He stopped to pray to his master's God, seeking aid in locating the appropriate girl for Isaac. The details of the trail and journey toward the place had no importance. Finding the appropriate girl was the central motif of his mission. On witnessing God's indication that Rebecca was the chosen one, he prostrated himself in thankfulness and went forward to finalize the mission he had been given. He still needed to present Rebecca's family with the reason behind his journey and his master's purpose in returning with Rebecca as wife for Isaac.

Expressing to Rebecca's family the reason that had brought him to them, Eliezar had fulfilled the essential portion of his mission. He had made the journey, had found Abraham's relatives, and had asked them to grant Rebecca in marriage to Isaac. God's hand had been revealed in the process of his

efforts, and Eliezar had given thanks for God's help and guidance. Now there was nothing left to do except wait to see how Rebecca's family would react. Obviously, he would have to return to Abraham, but the essential charge had been fulfilled. Now it was time to await to see the results.

Laban was the one who acted as spokesman for the family. He was the one who answer for the others. His answer is interesting, for from what we know of Laban, his answer is rather different from what we would expect. This is the same Laban who years later would trick Jacob on his arrival in search of a wife. This is the Laban who would promise to grant Jacob a daughter in marriage, but would give him the other in her place. Laban was not the man of character that his words here would seem to indicate. He was rather one who would trick his own family to enrich himself at another's expense. He was the man who sought to take advantage of others. At this point, however, Laban saw the events around him and measured them as demonstrations of God's action.

In Eliezar's story, Laban recognized God's action and presence. He recognized in the story that God had brought Eliezar to his home with the intention that Rebecca should marry Isaac, Abraham's son. This same man recognized at this moment God's will as represented in Eliezar's story. What is perhaps stranger, then, is that on recognizing it he determines to obey God's will. He humbled himself and accepted that what should direct him were not his own plans, but those of God. He recognized God and submitted himself to God's plan.

As Laban responded to Eliezer that he accepted God's plan, the celebration began. It was the occasion to celebrate Rebecca's marriage. The wedding was very different from what we might imagine. Isaac was not present. This was no wedding celebration according to our traditions. It was a party in which the details of the sale of a girl as wife for a man were determined. It was a celebration of her passing into a new stage of life and social standing. At the same time, the celebration was her wedding, as she came to belong to Isaac's family, even if he were absent.

In the morning, the party having ended, Eliezar asked that he be allowed to leave with Rebecca on his return trip to Abraham and Isaac. In a way, this request was a little out of the ordinary, as his coming to arrange the marriage had been concluded rather quickly. At the same time, he understood that something out of the ordinary had happened in the marriage arrangements, as God's hand and action were palpable in the situation. Eliezar was asked to wait and allow the celebration to continue, but the decision was left in the hands of the girl. Rebecca answered in a similar manner to what her brother had said before. "This is of God. Why delay?"

Her family gave her their blessing and bid her good-bye. That she might fulfill her purpose with the blessing of God of having children and a great number of descendants. That the fruit of her marriage would multiply to become a great nation. With this blessing, her trip began to fulfill God's purpose in her life, giving her future and hopes into God's very hands.

Who know if perhaps we likewise see and understand God's will for our own lives: That we love God above all else, that we love one another as ourselves. This is something that we learn from a young age in our families. The greater difficulty we have is not in recognizing God's mission for our lives. Our greater difficulty is in bowing our lives to fulfill that purpose. Are we ready to give over our days, plans, and actions to accomplish His will?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*