
Birthright Blessing; Marriage in the Covenant

Lesson
10
Summary

Genesis 24; Abraham commands that Isaac shall not marry a Canaanite—The Lord guides Abraham's servant in choosing Rebekah as a wife for Isaac—Rebekah blessed to be the mother of thousands of millions—She marries Isaac.

Genesis 25; Abraham marries, has seed, dies, and is buried in the cave of Machpelah—His generation through Ishmael set forth—Rebekah conceives, and Jacob and Esau struggle in her womb—The Lord reveals their destiny to Rebekah—Esau sells his birthright for a mess of pottage.

Genesis 26; The Lord promises Isaac posterity as the stars of heaven in number—In his seed all nations shall be blessed—The Lord prospers Isaac, temporally and spiritually, for Abraham's sake—Isaac offers sacrifices—Esau marries Hittite wives to the sorrow of his parents.

Genesis 27; Rebekah guides Jacob in seeking blessings—Jacob is blessed to have dominion and rule over peoples and nations—Esau hates Jacob and plans to slay him—Rebekah fears lest Jacob marry one of the daughters of Heth.

Genesis 28; Isaac forbids Jacob to marry a Canaanite—He blesses Jacob and his seed with the blessings of Abraham—Esau marries a daughter of Ishmael—Jacob sees in vision a ladder reaching up into heaven—The Lord promises him seed as the dust of the earth in number—Also, that in him and in his seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed—Jacob covenants to pay tithes.

Genesis 29; Jacob meets Rachel at the well—He serves Laban seven years for her—Laban gives to Jacob, first Leah, then Rachel in marriage—Jacob serves another seven years—Leah bears Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

Modern Finds Give Insights to Biblical Culture: The Biblical area of Haran may have been discovered in modern Iraq. Writings found in an ancient town of Nuzi give some insight to the culture of Biblical times: "NUZI is an ancient city in northeastern Iraq. Between 1925 and 1931, a team of archaeologists from several American universities undertook a series of very successful excavations at the site of ancient Nuzi. They discovered thousands of tablet-documents dating from the 15th-14th centuries B.C.E., the period in which Nuzi was one of the major cities of the Hurrian empire. These tablets, when deciphered, turned out to be extremely valuable, not only shedding light on the lives and customs of the ancient Hurrians, but also for studies of the Bible. The 15th to 14th centuries was also the period of the biblical patriarchs and the city of Nuzi was part of the same social and cultural area as the city of Haran, the home of the patriarchs." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Selling Birthright Was Legal: On the assumption that the socio-legal features of life in Nuzi were also current in Haran, it became possible to evaluate many of the biblical tales against the background of the information gleaned from the tablets. During the last few decades, biblical scholars have undertaken just such a comparative evaluation, and have discovered that many puzzling aspects of the narratives concerning the patriarchs are, in fact, revealed to be accurate representations of legal and social features of Hurrian life of that time." "Esau's selling of his birthright to Jacob also has been confirmed as a legally permissible, though not common, procedure in Hurrian law." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Jewish Marriage Customs: Marriage in Jewish custom has always been regarded as forever. It may be considered that the ring is used as a symbol of "eternity." In any case, words such as "Until death do you part" are not part of Jewish wedding ceremonies. The ring is examined by a Rabbi and is considered "kosher" only if it is unblemished and with no pits. A "huppah" or canopy is used, probably to symbolize the Temple. A glass is shattered symbolizing the destruction of the Temple. Both the bride and groom are addressed by their Hebrew "special names." The "tallith" (prayer shawl) is used. To some it is customary to drape the "tallith" over the couple. It may be considered symbolic that the "tallith" is the remaining remnant of garments used in the ancient temples."

Marriage Under the Canopy of Heaven: “By law, the ring must belong to the bridegroom, and can be constructed of any material, as long as it is free of precious stones . . . it was customary for the groom to cover the bride's head with his tallit as a symbol of sheltering her; and in modern-day Israel, for weddings of soldiers on active duty, it is not unusual to see a huppah constructed of a tallit supported by four rifles held by friends of the bride and groom. . . . among Orthodox Jews, the preferred custom is to erect the huppah outside, or at least in a spot open to the sky, underneath the stars . . .” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Ladder of Saintliness: Possibly connecting to Jacob’s ladder, there is a legend of a Rabbi, Pinehas Ben Yair, who is buried in Safed. “He constructed the famous "ladder of saintliness" in which Caution (against evil) leads through Eagerness (for good), Cleanliness, Purity, Asceticism, Holiness, Humility, Fear of God, Attainment of the Holy Spirit (divine inspiration), ultimately to the Resurrection of the Dead.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

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