



# Re-reading Genesis 24:55b–60 in the context of marriage by proxy in Awkunanaw, Enugu State



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Genesis 24:55–60 takes cognisance of the right of a damsel in marriage arrangement. The study aims to examine Genesis 24:55–60 in the context of marriage by proxy in Awkunanaw, Enugu State, Nigeria. The methodology employed in this study is narrative analysis. The findings of the research indicate that marriage by proxy has been a longstanding practice in ancient Awkunanaw. The approach to this practice has evolved between ancient Awkunanaw and contemporary Awkunanaw. The study also reveals that damsels were granted the right to choose their life partners within the socio-cultural context of Genesis 24:55–60. The Hebrew phrase supporting this claim is *niqrā' lanna`ārā*, meaning 'we will call to the girl'. This suggests that Rebekah, the damsel in the text, consented to the marriage made on her behalf. Therefore, the study recommends that parents and guardians in contemporary Awkunanaw should adopt the socio-cultural practices of Laban's society, as indicated in the study, to help curb the state of chaos within families in Awkunanaw.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This study emphasises the need to advocate for the rights of young women in Awkunanaw concerning marriage by proxy. It indicates that allowing a woman to choose her marriage partner would help reduce domestic violence and other marital crises in Nigeria, particularly in Awkunanaw.

**Keywords:** marriage by proxy; Genesis 24:55b–60; consent; Old Testament; selfless motive.

## Introduction

Marriage by proxy in the Old Testament text of Genesis 24:55b–60 takes into consideration the consent of the damsel who is being intended to be married by a suitor, who is often represented by another person probably from the family tier. Henry (2003:15) observes that the provenance of proxy marriage is a long-time establishment with an emphasis that its first recognition can be traced back to biblical times and events. Hence, marriage by proxy has been a perennial practice in the Old Testament and has been a welcomed development because it often led to good and successful marriages. This socio-cultural practice of the ancient Israelites was never performed for material benefit. Similarly, in the pristine Awkunanaw society, parents do not allow their daughters to be engaged or married to any man whose source of wealth is questionable. Marriage by proxy in the contemporary Awkunanaw has taken another dimension and trend other than it was in ancient times. In the past, marriages were arranged by parents for their children with the sole aim of establishing a high moral background and success for their children. Most times, a mutual relationship that existed between two friends always resulted in such marriage for those friends' children so as to retain the friendship and secure a good background for their children. Most of such marriages were always successful. It is quite regrettable to observe that in the contemporary Awkunanaw society, parents wish and plan towards making their children marry a well-to-do man who is financially buoyant, a man who is academically established alongside other expectations without giving a solemn thought to the background, attitude and moral rectitude of such a man. On the other hand, some parents forbid their sons from getting married to certain young girls because they are from poor backgrounds and uneducated. They relegate to the background and moral rectitude of such girls. This other approach of marriage by proxy in recent times has created perennial problems such as domestic violence and incessant divorce among various couples in Awkunanaw. Therefore, the aim of the researchers in this article is to explore the literary unit Genesis 24:55b–60 in the light of marriage by proxy in the Awkunanaw society of Enugu State. The approach adopted in the study is narrative analysis. The narrative method is used to study a biblical text which is in prose form. According to Obiorah (2015:96), the 'narrative method is used to study the place, characterisation of persons and events in the story, and point of view taken by the narrator'. The narrative method is apt for this study because the text of the study, Genesis 24:55b–60, is a narrative.

**Note:** Special Collection: African Hermeneutics.

## Historical context of Genesis 24:55b–60

The event as narrated in the text of Genesis 24 is one of the good examples of Ancient Near Eastern influence on the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Marriage transaction or arrangement was a predominant practice in Mesopotamia where Abraham lived with his father, Terah. Hence, marriage negotiation on behalf of young members of the then society by their parents and/or guardians was standard for marriage practice for that contemporary. This gives a clue as to why the negotiation for the marriage between Isaac and Rebekah, was conducted by Eliezer, on behalf of Abraham, and Rebekah's brother and father. It was typically a major practice among ancient Mesopotamians who surely did feel love. Marriage in ancient Mesopotamia was a legal transaction and was treated as such, often between the groom and the bride's father or, more often, between two families (Bertman 2003:121–122). In this kind of marriage negotiation, it is left for both parents and/or guardians to make a decision, hence in Genesis 24, the negotiations for the marriage were between Eliezer, on behalf of Abraham, and Rebekah's brother and father. Both intending couples would have no say in that matter. This gives a clue to why Isaac practically had no say in the matter regarding his marriage. The same thing applies to Rebekah though she was consulted to seek her consent according to the vv 57–58 of that text (Gn 24). This Mesopotamian practice influenced Israeli culture through the pioneer patriarch of Israel. It was after this interaction with Mesopotamian people that Israel adopted marriage negotiation and transactions as part of their major cultural practices. In support of this, the *Library of Apostolic Faith Church* (2024:14) notes that in the culture of that time of Isaac and Rebekah, it was the right and social duty of the father to typically arrange the marriage for his children.

## Close reading of Genesis 24:55b–60

The text of Genesis 24:55b–60 brings into focus the consent of the damsel who is being intended to be married by a suitor. The prospective husband is often represented by another person probably from a family tier. A close reading of Genesis 24:55b–60 is examined in this section.

## Clash of interest between Eliezer and Rebekah's paternal members (vv 54b–56)

There is a clash of interests here; Eliezer wanted the damsel to follow him immediately to his master's house as the new wife of his master's son. But in contrast to his wish, Laban, the damsel's brother and the maiden's mother saw it as an impromptu arrangement. Therefore, they raised objection to the idea at once. The Hebrew שְׁלֵחֵנִי לְאֲדֹנָי which is translated in various English versions as 'send me away to my master', 'send me back to my master', 'send me away unto my master' and send me away that 'I may go to my master' are not the actual representation of the original text. Though the thought

of the text is not completely altered, there is an addition of elements which are not part of the original text as seen clearly in the Hebrew text. שְׁלֵחֵנִי לְאֲדֹנָי is best translated as 'send me to my lord' or 'send me to my master'. The addition of other elements such as 'send me away', 'send me back' and 'send me that I may go' seem to be the corruption of the manuscript. The verb שְׁלֵחֵנִי derives its root from the root of the Hebrew verb 'to send'. The form of this verb in the study text is imperative. Whereas imperative in Hebrew denotes command, other volitives denote an appeal or supplication. For שְׁלֵחֵנִי to be imperative implies that Eliezer requested that the family of Bethuel give him the authority to return to his master with Rebekah. He was not demanding that the damsel join him back home in a commanding tone. Unfortunately, this expected authority was not granted to him as he expected. Instead, there was an objection against his request (Ugwuewo 2023).

The response given to Eliezer by Laban, Rebekah's brother and Rebekah's mother was unfavourable for Eliezer. The Hebrew clause הַשֵּׁב הַנַּעֲמָר אִתָּנוּ which is translated as 'let the damsel dwell with us' is volitive. Hebrews often use הַ to show its volitive that is request. הַ is not an independent word; it is usually attached to the word which is used to make the request. The English equivalent of הַ is 'let' or 'may'. So, הַשֵּׁב הַנַּעֲמָר אִתָּנוּ is used in the text to express the intention of Laban and Rebekah's mother that it was not yet the right time for Rebekah to go with him as the daughter-in-law of Eliezer's lord.

Observing the event in the text, one would take note of Eliezer's uncontrolled impatience to return to his master with Rebekah. Spence-Jones (2004:54) concurs with this observation as he posits 'that Eliezer's immediate request to go with Rebekah shows that he is impatient to report to Abraham the success of his expedition'. According to Carson (1994):

[T]he servant of Abraham, Eliezer was a model of loyalty and persuasive speech, who commended his master's interests by word and deed. His speeches were finely judged to persuade Rebekah's family to give her in marriage to the unknown Isaac. (p. 90)

However, Mcgee (1997) explains that:

Laban and Rebekah's mother saw Eliezer's request as being in a hurry. Such a decision is not shrewd to be taken in a hurry. They need to be given at least ten days to tell Rebekah good-bye and to have better talk with her on Eliezer's mission of taking her as a wife for his master's son, Isaac. (p. 32)

Matthews, Chavalas and Walton (2000:101) interpret the text to mean that the 10 days that Rebekah's family requested would have given them a little more opportunity to make sure that everything was as it appeared to be. The Hebrew sentence אַל־תְּאַחַרְרֵנִי אֵתִי is translated in various English versions as 'do not delay me', 'hinder me not'. The words 'delay' and 'hinder' do not express the same meaning. Whereas delay designates a period of time when one has to wait for

something, or a time or situation when something does not happen as it should, hinder, on the other hand, designates making something difficult for someone to do a thing. The root of the word **תָּאַחַר** is best translated as 'delay' not 'hinder'. From the happenings in the narrative as well as to retain the accurate Hebrew grammar in the text, **אַל-תָּאַחַר אֵינִי** is best translated as 'do not delay me'. This denotes that there is no need for Eliezer to keep waiting longer and lingering on the outcome of the already achieved mission.

Henry (1991:15) interprets the text in the context of Eliezer being a responsible man who is dedicated to his duties. 'He (Eliezer) knew his master would expect from him on his arrival at home'.

## Need to seek damsel's consent in marriage arrangement and approval by parents (vv 57–58)

The bone of contention of this article is found in this text. Vv 57 and 58 of Genesis 24 contain the major subject matter the researchers are undertaking. These two verses narrate the invitation of Rebekah to inquire if it is her wish to go with Eliezer in order to become the wife of Eliezer's master's son. Rebekah was accorded regard in that proxy marriage. According to the narrative, she was neither coerced nor persuaded to accept the marriage. She was asked to make her choice. The Hebrew phrase **וַיִּאָמְרוּ** could also be used to mean that Laban and Rebekah's mother avowed publicly and bluntly that Rebekah must not be given out in marriage without giving her due regard. According to Alidon (2024:8), 'the paternal family of Rebekah leaves the time of departure up to Rebekah'.

The following Hebrew sentence **וְנִקְרָא לְנִעֻמָּה** translated as 'we will call the girl' as used in the text shows that Rebekah's parents were serious in seeking her consent for the marriage. **וְנִקְרָא לְנִעֻמָּה** is given a variety of translations by different English versions such as 'we will call the girl', 'we will call the damsel' and 'let us call the girl'. Therefore, **וְנִקְרָא לְנִעֻמָּה** is used in the text to insinuate that they want to engage Rebekah in a meeting in order to know her stand in that proxy marriage before giving her out to Eliezer to give to his master's son as a wife.

Another Hebrew group of words that needs description and explanation in v 57 is **וַיִּשְׁאַלְהָ אֶת-פִּיהָ**. This has been given various translations in the English versions. Some of these translations include: 'and inquire at her mouth', 'and consult her wishes', 'and ask her'. However, the English equivalent of this Hebrew sentence is: 'and we will inquire her mouth' or 'and we will ask her mouth'. To inquire about her mouth in this context means to seek her speech and to discover her opinion regarding the proxy marriage. This text denotes that Rebekah's parents are not ready to give Rebekah to that marriage if it is not her will. Seeking her consent indicates that they recognise her right as a young damsel to make a personal decision to become the wife of the husband already chosen for her through a proxy arrangement. From this

foregoing, it implies that the confirmation of the will of *YHWH* in that proxy marriage is Rebekah's willingness to accept the man without any external influence. This is why it is highly necessary that her paternal family seek her consent privately.

There is a notable event in this text that triggered a quest for knowledge. A woman participated in the decision, especially in regard to the marriage arrangement of a damsel. This tends to contradict the already known practice in the Old Testament where the father is the head of all decision-making. This is obviously strange to patriarchal practice and system in the Old Testament. Be it as it may, Walvoord and Zuck (1985:225) clarify this confusing phenomenon by asserting that in that society, a woman as well as a woman's brother has the authority to give his sister in marriage, which explains why Laban, Rebekah's brother and her mother, were the negotiators in this marriage contract.

Henry (1996:97) and Canel (2012:65) reveal that before the matter of the proxy marriage is resolved, the damsel's voice must be heard, particularly her own words from her mouth. The damsel is the party who is principally concerned in the matter at hand. Therefore, she ought not to be ignored. Her consent is more important than that of everyone else. She must be principally consulted because her final decision determines the fate of the emissary for the marriage proxy.

Verse 58 tells about the meeting with Rebekah. **וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְרֵבֶקָה** 'and they called to Rebekah' denotes the family meeting at Bethuel's house where Rebekah is specifically invited for her consent to be sought. Her parents thought it is wise to accord respect and regard for her as a damsel who has the right and privilege to take the decision of who to spend the rest of the days of her life with, under the web of marriage. The meeting with her is a private affair between her and her paternal family. The essence of this meeting is to find out the proper response which Laban and Rebekah's mother would give to Eliezer afterwards. The agenda of this family meeting is to inquire from Rebekah her mind regarding the arrangement already planned by her parents. Though the proxy marriage has been arranged, its reality and feasibility will be determined by the willing acceptance of Rebekah to be the wife of the unknown man arranged for her. The Hebrew interrogation used to show the line of this discussion in the meeting is **וְעִמָּךְ יֵלְכִי עִם-הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה** which is translated 'will you go with this man?' implies that Rebekah was neither coerced nor persuaded to accept the marriage proposal made on her behalf. This question directed to Rebekah is used to attest to the fact that she was formally consulted by her parents to inquire if it is her wish to accept the marriage. Though **וְעִמָּךְ יֵלְכִי עִם-הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה** is literally translated 'will you go with this man?', the implication of this interrogative statement is 'will you accept the proxy marriage proposal made by this man?' This question is apt because the major intention of the coming of Eliezer is to seek the hand of Rebekah in marriage for his lord's son, Isaac.

Wiersbe (1993:73) asserts that Rebekah's faith was rewarded. She shared Isaac's love and wealth, and she became an important part of God's plan. Had she refused to go, she would have died an unknown woman. The use of 'I will' by Rebekah denotes willing acceptance of the marriage proposal. Acceptance of that marriage by proxy by Rebekah is an indication of trust in *YHWH* and fulfilment of destiny. This corresponds to Abraham's acceptance of departure to an unknown land as commanded by the LORD. Both Rebekah and Abraham demonstrated trust. Rebekah never knew Isaac before accepting to marry him. Abraham had not known the place he was to make his abode before accepting to forfeit his ancestral heritage to that unknown land.

It is noted that Rebekah's name has connectivity with covenantal blessing to Abraham. According to Wenham (2000), the significance of Rebekah's name lies in the fact that it shares the consonants b and r with Abraham's name [-*hrbaavraham*] and the keyword 'blessing' [*hkrb berakah*]. Apart from the aforementioned literary link between Rebekah and Abraham, the connection of their faith in *YHWH* further reinforced the connection between their names. Keeryer (2022) posits that after declaring her intention to leave, Rebekah receives the blessing thus 'may you become thousands of ten thousand'. Teugels (2004) avers that it is at the marriage of Rebekah to Abraham's family that the fulfilment of Abraham's covenantal promise and blessing of becoming a great nation came to be realised.

## Efficacy of mutual agreement and final blessing (vv 59–60)

The resolution made in the family meeting which culminated in mutual agreement between Rebekah and her parents consequently brought about happiness and celebration. The preparation to send Rebekah to her matrimonial home began afterwards. The Hebrew clause וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ translated 'and they sent away' needs clarification. The root of this Hebrew verb is 'to send'. The Qal form of this verb is always 'send'. Westminster Seminary (2001:18) observes that וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ is a verb, piel, imperfect, waw consecutive, third person masculine plural. Ordinarily, it should be regarded as an imperfect, but because it is in waw consecutive, its status has been transposed from imperfect to perfect tense. The best English translation of piel of the Hebrew verb root is 'sent away'. Eventually, Rebekah, by the confirmation of her acceptance of that proxy marriage, is hereby handed over to the man in the marriage by proxy. Fleming (2005:66) posits that sending Rebekah away by her paternal family implies paternal support and consent.

וַיְבָרְכֵהָ אֶת־רִבְקָה translated 'and they blessed Rebekah' is an important element of this discussion. The Hebrew words בָּרַךְ and בְּרָכָה meaning 'blessed' and 'blessing' are carefully and deliberately used. Usually, it is an expression and pouring out of great positive and pleasant wishes on another. This outpour of good intentions comes from the inward of the pourer. In the Old Testament, parents (especially fathers) are

ontologically bestowed with the authority to bless their children, especially in their old age. This is called the testament of the patriarch. Therefore, וַיְבָרְכֵהָ אֶת־רִבְקָה denotes that Rebekah's parents have settled her in all ramifications of life. She has received her parental blessings to excel in all aspects of her life as a wife and mother. The details of their words of blessings which are contained in the Hebrew sentences אַתְּ תִהְיִי אֶתְּמַנְי אֶתְּמַנְי אֶתְּמַנְי וְרַבְּתֵי אֶתְּמַנְי שְׂנָאִיו translated 'May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes' authenticate this parental outpour of blessings as a means of settling her. Calvin (2002:44) maintains that Rebekah's being blessed by her parents is comprehended as a prosperous state of life.

In summary, the parents of the damsel in the narrative were not desperate to give their daughter's hand in marriage (vv 54b–56). The discovery of the exegesis particularly vv 57 and 58 reveals that it was a common socio-cultural practice to seek the consent of a damsel in marriage arrangement. The parents of the damsel in the study text engaged her in a family meeting in order to seek her consent in that proxy marriage.

## Brief history of Awkunanaw

Awkunanaw (also spelt Okunano) is one of the sub-clans that make up the Ntuegbenese clan, hence Awkunanaw Ntuegbenese. The Ntuegbenese clan comprises only five groups, all of which share a common legendary founding father whose name is known as Ntuegbe Eze. His five sons who came to be the founding fathers of the five sub-clans of Ntuegbenese are Ogwuwgwu, Owelli, Ihe, Agbogwugwu and Awkunanaw (Osagwede) or Akegbe-Eze. These towns are arranged in sequential order of their traditional seniority; this indicates that Ogwuwgwu is the eldest son (Ekwomchi in Nnaji n.d.).

There are various versions of opinions and submissions about the origin of Awkunanaw. Most of these records of the origin of Awkunanaw are orally represented. One of the notable versions reports that UbaOjene, a hunter who came from the Akaeze area and settled in Ogwuwgwu, was the progenitor of Ntuegbenese. When Ntuegbenese came to the age of responsibility, he married two wives. One gave birth to three boys namely, Ogwuwgwu, Agbogwugwu and Awkunanaw in order of elderly. The other wife gave birth to two boys namely, Owelli and Ihe in elderly order. Their father Ntuegbenese was known as Shikeaguma, but the names of these five sons came as a result of where they settled, not the original names given to them (Enechukwu 1993). The present-day Awkunanaw, otherwise called contemporary Awkunanaw, is found under the two following Local Government Areas in Enugu State. One is Enugu South where Amechi Awkunanaw, Ugwuaji Awkunanaw, Obeagu Awkunanaw and Akwuke Awkunanaw belong. The other one is Nkanu West where communities such as Amodu Awkunanaw, Obuofia Awkunanaw, AkegbeUgwu Awkunanaw and Umueze Awkunanaw belong.



Awkunanaw (Okunano) people used to be industrious independent farmers, whose social outlook and customs have been seriously influenced by their proximity to Enugu Township.

Farming used to count 100% of what the people of Okunano did for their living. Today, from the influence of urbanisation and proximity to the township, the status of the occupation of the people of Okunano changed, such that farming cannot count up to 30% of the clan's population. Of course, it will not be far from the truth that those who practise farming do so as a part-time job. (That is supplementary to white-collar jobs). Because of the dynamic nature of culture, the occupations of the whole communities of Okunano have greatly changed to civil service. In recent times and because of the nearness of Ogbete main market, Kenyatta market and Afor Okunano market, a number of the citizens of Okunano have joined the business world in the activities of buying and selling goods and services. The success of those in the business class has reduced the original occupation of farming to a part-time activity or hobby rather than a major means of living for the people. The surge into the business of buying and selling has adversely affected both the number entering schools and those wishing to do civil service jobs. This is a complete redirection of people's occupation. Moreover, a good number of the sons and daughters of Okunano have shown interest in modern politics and have even produced politicians of local, national and international repute (Nwobodo 2001). Different political positions held by indigenes of Awkunanaw from Old Anambra State to date authenticate this claim.

## Genesis 24:55–60 and marriage by proxy in Awkunanaw

It was a common practice for communities to abide by the tradition which gave parents the audacity to decide the choice of marriage of their daughters without the consent of their daughters. However, one of the discoveries from the exegesis of the study text contrasts this practice. The discovery of the exegesis, particularly vv 57 and 58 reveals that it was a common socio-cultural practice to seek the consent of a damsel in marriage arrangement. Such prevalent practice was revered in the social milieu of Bethuel's residence at that time. The attempt by Laban and Rebekah's mother to meet with Rebekah to inquire if it is her interest to accept the proxy marriage proposal gives credence to that. On this note, the researchers strongly propose that all communities including autonomous communities in Awkunanaw adopt this way of life. This would enhance mutual understanding as well as save each community from the incessant troubles caused by proxy marriage forced on damsels in the Awkunanaw clan. This new trend, if practically adopted, would present contemporary Awkunanaw as a civilised society among other civilised societies of the contemporary (Ugwuewu 2023). It would obviously indicate that the Awkunanaw clan has produced men and women who are enlightened and sophisticated, and are conversant

with the global happening instead of being influenced by the archaic and unfavourable practice of ancient times.

It should be extended that a damsel must not be preyed on or her right violated because it is not in her interest to succumb to the personal will of their parents and guardians. As it was a known practice in the social-cultural days of the society of Bethuel, it should be made so in Awkunanaw. This practice must be followed by a strict warning against the deliberate marginalisation of a damsel for her refusal to accept marriage against her will. Stipulations should be enacted against parents and guardians who would be defiant. This practice would make Awkunanaw communities free of escalated violence often ensued between damsels and parents or damsels and guardians which usually disrupts the peace of the community. It would also aid the possibility of making every marriage ceremony a happy one instead of an avenue where a damsel is reluctant to participate in her marriage rites and celebration.

This part of the hermeneutics of the text is the heart of the discussion. First of all, the parents of Rebekah made an attempt to know if the marriage arrangement of their daughter was divine will. The finding of the exegesis which is used to imply that the plan for the marriage arrangement is directly from a divine source gives credence to this exegetical finding. Another corresponding Hebrew statement in the study text is the convincing of the LORD which denotes that Rebekah's parents accepted the proposal as the LORD has spoken. The only factor that motivated them to accept the marriage arrangement was divine involvement. They confirmed that the LORD is the initiator of the marriage from the onset. This exegetical discovery is found in vv 50–51 of the study text.

It is observed that in the traditional Awkunanaw society, it was the parents who used to decide the fate of their daughters in marriage (Nwobodo 2001:37). Awkunanaw parents are hereby encouraged to adopt by emulation, the approach used by Rebekah's parents. The major interest of the parents in the study text is the conviction that *YHWH* is directly involved in that plan, hence they had no need to struggle over it. Parents of damsels in contemporary times should devise the necessary means to seek divine will in regard to the marriage approval of their daughters. It is high time they refused to be tossed by material gain and other personal interests while considering the acceptance of the suitor of their daughters. Sentiments caused by social status as well as other acquisitions of a suitor or a damsel before approval of the choice of marriage partner of a damsel by concerned parents should be abrogated. Rather, such concerned parents should trust it in the hand of the LORD for proper execution. It is observed that in recent times, some parents in the Awkunanaw clan have arranged fake prophetic oracles in order to lure their daughters to accept a man of their choice as a husband. Most times, the factors that motivate parents to decide approval of their daughters' choice of marriage and acceptance of marriage rites on behalf of their daughters are not far fetched

from avarice and gluttony (Ugwuewo 2023:131). It is against this practice that the exegetical lesson of the study text warns contemporary Awkunanaw parents to desist. This will enhance the tranquillity and progress of Awkunanaw society. Parents of contemporary Awkunanaw are strongly advised to absorb on every occasion and where necessary, the finding of this exegesis. This will enable to curbing of social vices often bred by enforcing marriage on a damsel. They are expected to use necessary means with respect to their belief to seek divine approval before taking any action regarding the proposed suitor of their daughters. This will greatly help to minimise the menace of coercing a damsel to accept or not accept certain marriage proposals.

A typical marriage arrangement in Awkunanaw involves a middle person often called *onye na-eji otuwa* or *onye otuwa*. This person is an individual who is trusted by the family of the damsel who would be a channel of communication between the families of both the proposed bride and the proposed groom (Nwala 2000:41). *Onye na-eji otuwa* could be a man or woman who is trusted to have a good reputation and worthy character. Such a person could be married or single. According to Nnaji (n.d.), such a person could be a man or a woman and must be a very close family friend or relation.

The equivalent of *onye otuwa* or *onye na-eji otuwa* in the study text is Eliezer. The finding of the exegesis reveals that Eliezer's mission to the family of Bethuel to take a wife for Isaac was not in selfish interest. He went further to engage in the herculean task of commitment to prayer to seek YHWH's intervention and assistance. *Onye otuwa* or *ndi otuwa* (plural form of *onye otuwa*) should learn from the pattern adopted by Eliezer in that proxy marriage in the study text. They must not betray the trust the families have in them. They must be objective in their opinion of the marriage arrangement in order to maintain tranquillity and transparency on both sides (Ugwuewo 2023).

## Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows:

- Parents of the contemporary Awkunanaw should learn from the parents of Rebekah to allow their daughters to make choices about their marriage partners and the responsibilities that follow afterwards.
- Damsels of Awkunanaw origin should advocate for their rights, and they can always do that by making special reference to Genesis 24:57–58.
- Individuals who are often the middlemen or women in marriage by proxy should learn from Eliezer who was selfless in his mission to take a wife for the son of his master.
- Various communities in Awkunanaw should make a communal law which should support seeking the right of a damsel in any marriage arrangement.

## Conclusion

Marriage by proxy in the study text, Genesis 24:55–60 is a good platform for the establishment of an enactment that

would give strong allegiance to the right of a damsel in marriage by proxy in the Awkunanaw socio-cultural milieu. The preying of some damsels by their parents or guardians for their selfish interest has been in existence since the time of ancient Awkunanaw. Some parents in the ancient and contemporary Awkunanaw have exchanged their daughters for wealth. They usually do this by coercing them into marrying a wealthy suitor whom they do not wish to marry. It is reported that damsels who have experienced this bad encounter are numerous in Awkunanaw society. Both ancient and contemporary Awkunanaw societies have witnessed this practice. The text becomes a veritable tool to handle the issue of such practice in Awkunanaw society.

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### Ethical considerations

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### Data availability

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### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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