

Rebekah: Mother of Two Nations

Rebekah's story is a great example of God's sovereignty and how God blesses those who are faithful to Him. Her story is one filled with courage, romance, drama, treachery, deceit and loss. Far from perfect, God still used her to bring about His plan for redemption for the world.

Before we even meet Rebekah in Genesis 24, God was already putting His plan into motion concerning her future. Abraham, now very old, had decided it is time to find a bride for his son, Isaac. He calls upon his trusted servant, Eleazer, to handle the search for him. Abraham was very clear that he did not want his son to marry a Canaanite woman and instructed Eleazer to go find a wife from his ancestors (family) in Ur of the Chaldees. Thinking through what Abraham was asking him to do, the servant anticipated that it might not be very easy to convince a young girl to leave her family and travel so far away to marry someone she didn't even know. So he asked Abraham what he should do if she said no; should he come back for Isaac and take him to her? Abraham responded that he was confident God would bring her - "*the angel of the Lord will go before you and he'll set things up.*" Abraham was very clear that Isaac was not to leave Canaan, he needed to stay in the land God had promised to them.

So the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed. It was probably a large and impressive caravan. They carried substantial riches that were described as "*all his master's goods were in his hand.*" (vs. 10) The journey was long; it was almost 500 miles and would take 2-4 weeks depending on the traveling conditions.

READ Genesis 24:11-14

Abraham's servant has no idea who the woman is he's looking for so he asks God to show him who she is by setting up a little "test." He really doesn't want to make a mistake.

READ Genesis 24:15-21

God answered the servant's prayer before it was finished. Isaiah 65:24 speaks of this kind of gracious answer to prayer: "*It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.*" Don't we wish all prayers were answered so quickly! Most of the time it seems God makes us wait for an answer. Why is it that sometimes prayer gets an immediate response and other times it feels like God isn't hearing us and the answer takes a long time? Because God is in control; His timing for everything is perfect. He desires to build our character and will always work for our good.

Rebekah as a Young Woman

She was physically beautiful

We first meet Rebekah at the well. It was early evening when the women came to gather water for their families. Rebekah brought her pitcher on her shoulder to do the same. Scripture tells us she was "*very beautiful to behold.*" Like really, really pretty. She had the beauty of Sarah, Abraham's wife and Rachel, the love of Jacob's life, and Esther, the Jewish queen who changed

history. The meaning of her name (to tie firmly, ensnare - which carries the idea of a rope used to tie animals) suggests that she was so pretty that men could easily fall for her. In later years when Isaac went traveling, he lied and said Rebekah was his sister, fearing the king would kill him and take her.

She was hospitable

When Eleazer arrived in Rebekah's town he was thirsty. He saw Rebekah and requested water to drink. Without hesitation, she was quick to fulfill his request. Then came the sign for which the servant had been waiting, "*I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.*" And she did just that! Later when she takes him home to her family, she prepares a meal for him and all of those with him.

She was hard working and physically strong

Watering camels was no easy task. A single camel could drink 20 gallons of water and she watered all ten. She took her pitcher back and forth from the well to the watering trough until they had their fill. Twenty gallons of water weighed 167 pounds! Eleazer watched her in silence as she faithfully completed the job, observing that she had the heart of a servant. Rebekah had fulfilled the sign he prayed for, so he gave her precious gifts of a nose ring and two bracelets - about five ounces of gold which would have been worth thousands of dollars. It was a generous gift and revealed the wealth of Abraham, the master he represented.

Eleazer then asked about her family and praised God when he found out she was related to Abraham's family. Her father, Bethuel, was Abraham's nephew and her grandmother, Milkah, was Lot's sister and Abraham's niece. Actually, she and Isaac were second cousins. When he heard her answer the servant worshiped the Lord, thanking God for directing his path: "*Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.*"

Rebekah excitedly went home to tell her family what had happened and ask permission for Eleazer and his fellow travelers to stay at their house. Laban, Rebekah's brother, spotting the gold ring and bracelets decided to be the charming, gracious host. As we learn later, Laban was a fairly greedy guy and he probably wondered how he could profit from the situation. He ran to greet Eleazer and brought the whole entourage home. Once there, Eleazer addressed the task at hand:

"The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys."

- My master has only one son and he will inherit everything
- My master is looking for a wife for his son; one who would be willing to leave her home and move to Canaan
- I need your answer right away

She was courageous and decisive

Literally overnight, Rebekah's life changed completely. She chose, father, brother and all of her friends. She left everything that was familiar to her to marry man she had never met. She trusted God enough to go with the servant He had sent for her. Talk about leaving

your comfort zone! Rebekah chose to obey right away and God blessed her with a husband who loved her.

She was chaste and modest

Genesis 24: 64-65 *Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; ⁶⁵for she had said to the servant, “Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself. She did this both out of modesty, and as a token of subjection to him, for the veil was put on when the bride was introduced to the bridegroom. She presented herself as his bride.*

Rebekah as a Wife

..and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her.

Very little is written about their early marriage but we do know a few things:

- God definitely brought them together
- They were both people of prayer
- Jacob loved Rebekah - theirs was the first monogamous marriage
- Rebekah brought joy to Isaac and helped him to get past the grief he still felt over his mother's death three years earlier

Rebekah was barren but God showed up

Like so many other women, Rebekah had difficulty in conceiving a child. God had promised to make them a great nation and she couldn't seem to have even one. Feelings of failure, frustration, disappointment, anger, and depression are hard to cope with. It says Isaac pleaded with God for his wife. It was a 20 year wait before God opened her womb. God's promise came through waiting and prayer. Isaac was 60 and Rebekah around 40 when they finally became parents.

Rebekah was a woman of faith and prayer; she heard and believed God

She was finally going to have a baby but all was not going well. “But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: “Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.” (Genesis 25: 22-23)

The struggle that was taking place in her womb made her seek God. When she did that, God spoke to her, revealing the number, the gender, and the destiny of the sons she was carrying. Rebekah would give birth to twin boys. The twins would each father nations. (Esau would become Edom and Jacob would become Israel.) One nation shall be greater than the other and the older will serve the younger.

READ Genesis 25:24-28

When Rebekah gave birth, God's word was proven true. Esau, born first, was given his name because he was red and hairy. Jacob received his name because he was holding on to the

heel of his brother during birth. The idea of a heel-catcher meant something in that day: it had the idea of “trickster,” “con-man,” “scoundrel,” or “rascal.” It definitely wasn’t a compliment.

Rebekah as a Mother

As the boys grew, they developed totally opposite personalities. Esau was the outdoor type. He was a skillful hunter, a man of action, worldly-minded. He spent his time pursuing the things that made him happy and avoiding responsibility. Jacob was a mild man who preferred to stay in the tent. He was more spiritual minded and the studious type. He knew how to cook and was more of a homebody. And thus we come to a big problem.

Rebekah picked a favorite child and showed partiality

Though we say Rebekah did this, Isaac was just as guilty. Isaac loved Esau because he loved the venison he brought him; since Isaac himself was a quiet man, I’m sure he loved to listen to Esau recount all of his adventures as he ate the stew he loved. Rebekah loved Jacob’s gentle nature and they spent a lot of time together while Esau was out roaming. Knowing that God already told her Jacob would be the one to continue the family line, we have to wonder if that also contributed to her favoring Jacob. The one time we know Isaac and Rebekah shared the same feeling about Esau was when he married two Canaanite women. They were heartbroken when he took two wives rather than one and both were pagans.

READ Genesis 27:1-10

Rebekah was deceptive

Esau had already willingly given up his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew. This meant Jacob would receive a double portion of the inheritance and become the head of the family and spiritual leader when his father passed away. The only thing left to get was Isaac’s blessing. Isaac, much older (137) and pretty much blind, decided he was dying and it was time to give the blessing. He was determined to pass the blessing to Esau despite what the Lord had said. The fact he was doing this so secretly showed that he knew it was wrong. Unfortunately for Isaac, Rebekah overheard the conversation and discovered his plan. At that point, she had to make a choice: trust God or help Him out. Sadly, she made the wrong choice.

Rebekah devised the whole deceptive scheme to trick Isaac and put Jacob up to it. She told Jacob what to do to look, smell, and feel like his brother in order to deceive her own husband. She cooked the meal that Isaac had asked Esau to prepare. She made sure the plan was properly executed and it worked: Jacob received Esau’s blessing which God had already promised. So why was it wrong? The work of God never depends upon our deception, or conniving, or scheming. Their mistake was thinking God couldn’t fulfill His purposes without their help.

READ Genesis 27:41-46

Rebekah was manipulative

When she realized the extent of Esau’s anger, she knew that her two sons could not live in peace. So Rebekah came up with a good excuse for Isaac to send Jacob away, saying that their pagan daughters-in-law were a real vexation and a problem so she wanted Jacob to go get a wife from her own family. Isaac agreed and Jacob left home at the age of about 70. Rebekah anticipated a short stay of a few days for Jacob, just until his brother’s anger had subsided.

However, Esau did not cool off in a hurry and Rebekah never sent word it was safe for Jacob to return home. The consequences of their deception is that Rebekah was deprived of ever seeing her beloved son again. She died while Jacob was still in Haran.

Lessons from Rebekah

1. **Rebekah was the perfect combination of a pretty face and beautiful heart.** Her outward beauty mattered little when she saw Eleazer in need of a drink. She provided water for him and his 10 camels. That was the heart of a servant. It's alright to be concerned about our outward appearance but we should be more concerned with the appearance of our heart. That's what is important to God.
2. **God answers prayer.** We saw that demonstrated throughout Rebekah's life. Some prayers were answered quickly, like Eleazer's plea to find the right bride for Isaac. Others took longer, like Isaac's asking God to open Rebekah's womb. When Rebekah was concerned about her pregnancy, she prayed and asked God what was happening. We can see God is concerned about every aspect of our lives and waits for us to come to Him.
3. **Parents need to work as a team in raising children.** We saw the destruction of a family when parents favor different children. We also know that children are clever enough to play mom against dad if they discern any lack of unity between their parents. Favoritism can build mistrust, insecurity, and anger for everyone as well as damaging the parents' marriage. How did Isaac feel about Rebekah after she deliberately deceived him?
4. **Deception yields terrible fruit.** *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (Galatians 6:7)* Rebekah understood this principle. She told Jacob she would take responsibility for the scheme they were cooking up. **"But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me."** (Genesis 27:13) However, I doubt she thought the consequences would be so severe:
 - Esau nearly killed Jacob out of anger
 - She had to send her favorite son 500 miles away
 - The few days she anticipated before his return turned to 20 years
 - She had to face Isaac every day knowing he probably would never trust her again after her betrayal and Esau probably wanted nothing to do with her at all
 - She never saw her beloved son again

5. **Let God carry out His plan.** Rebekah tried to take God's plan into her own hands and help Him out. As we learned from Sarah, this never works out like we hoped. When God doesn't move soon enough for us we often get impatient or anxious and take things into our own hands. Waiting on God is difficult but there are blessings for those who do - it's how He builds our faith.

We've seen that Rebekah was a human being, just like you and me. She had her good qualities but also made her fair share of mistakes. However, despite her failings, God still used Rebekah. Through her, Isaac would have children and the family line would continue to the birth

of God's own Son, Jesus. What an honor. Even today, our sin and shortcomings cannot thwart His plans and he desires for us to be a part of them. We just need to trust and obey... and wait.

*Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.
Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)*

