



Photo: Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, 1617-1682

Rebekah: Our Matriarch of Strength

The second Matriarch in the history of the Jewish people was Rebekah, wife of Isaac and mother of Esau and Jacob. When we first encounter Rebekah, we learn that she was from the family of Abraham (Genesis 24:15), that she was beautiful (v.16), and that she was kind. In this study, we'll discover that she was also strong in character, action, and faith. Mother Rebekah, *Rivka Imeinu*, was a true biblical woman of valor.

After Abraham's servant discovered that Rebekah was the right match for Isaac, he spoke with her family. They agreed that the proposed marriage was *"from the Lord"* (Genesis 24:50) and gave their approval.

And Rebekah answered without hesitation: *"I will go."*

Hundreds of years later, we hear Rebekah's response echoed in the words of a young Moabite woman, Ruth, who told her Israelite mother-in-law, *"Where you will go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God"* (Ruth 1:16).

From a young age, Rebekah was already a strong woman, unafraid to go to an unknown land. In this month's Fellowship Study, we will witness this strength that served Rebekah throughout her life.

Whenever called upon to draw on her inner strength, Rebekah did so with faith. With faith, she turned to God for answers when her pregnancy became difficult. With faith, she acted upon that God-given revelation before her sons were born.

Rebekah serves as an example for us all to tap into reservoirs of strength we never knew we had. We are stronger than we might think and capable of great, wondrous things when we choose, like Rebekah, to go forward in faith.



Photo: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, c. 1659-1700

So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said.

— GENESIS 24:58



A Rose Among the Thorns

We are introduced to the Matriarch Rebekah shortly after she made her entrance into the world: *“Bethuel became the father of Rebekah”* (Genesis 22:23). It’s no coincidence that we hear of Rebekah’s birth before we read about Sarah’s death in the opening verses of Genesis 23. In Ecclesiastes 1:5, we read, *“The sun rises and the sun sets,”* reminding us of life’s continual ebb and flow. However, we also see that God does not take away one great figure without first sending a replacement. In this case, Rebekah was born to ultimately fill Sarah’s role.

So, why was Rebekah worthy of being the next “mother” of Israel?

The Jewish sages referred to Rebekah as “a rose among the thorns,” from Song of Songs 2:2, which reads *“Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women”* (the Hebrew word for lily is translated as “rose”). Rebekah grew up in a home full of deceit, greed, and idol worship; her brother Laban displayed his true nature later when he tricked Jacob into marrying Leah instead of Rachel (Genesis 29:15-29).

Yet, like Sarah before her, Rebekah rejected the ways of her family and the society around her. Instead, she chose goodness, truth, and kindness. She had the inner strength to define and defend her own beliefs, and like a delicate, beautiful rose, she stood out from the rest.

Abraham’s servant charged with finding Isaac a wife—the next Matriarch—knew nothing about Rebekah’s character. So the servant prayed, *“May it be that when I say to a young woman, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’ – let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac”* (Genesis 24:14).

Abraham’s servant was not asking God for a random sign. Rather, he set up a test of character, and Rebekah passed it beyond his expectations.

The servant was looking for an exceptionally kind woman. Not only did Rebekah happily give the servant water, but without being asked, offered to draw water from the well for the servant’s ten camels. This would have been about 140 gallons of water—a superhuman feat for a young woman.

Yet, Rebekah willingly drew the water and did not question why the servant didn’t offer to help her. Unlike her selfish society, Rebekah chose to be selfless and kind, caring for all. Like Abraham and Sarah, known for their hospitality and kindness, it brought her joy to help others. This “camel test” offered the servant a glimpse into Rebekah’s true greatness.

In performing this ordinary activity, Rebekah demonstrated her extraordinary character. The great Rabbi Baal Shem Tov taught that a soul comes into the world with the sole purpose of doing one act of kindness for another person. In the Christian Bible, Paul wrote about the importance of this characteristic, *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”* (Colossians 3:12).

Rebekah’s kindness, strength, and determination to help another person in need qualified her to become the second Matriarch who would ensure the continuation of Abraham and Sarah’s legacy.



“Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.”

— GENESIS 24:18

A Hidden Source of Strength

When we next encounter Rebekah in the Bible, it is in the context of becoming pregnant and giving birth to Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 25:21, we read: *“Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.”*

At first glance, it appears this was a straight forward matter—they prayed, and God answered. Yet when we consider that Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah, and that he was 60 when the twins were born, we appreciate that the couple endured being childless for 20 years.

Like Sarah, Rebekah was barren. Like Sarah, Rebekah knew God had promised her husband heirs to carry on His mission. And like Sarah, she withstood this test of faith. Rebekah carried on with faith and prayer, without questioning God’s promise.

But once Rebekah was pregnant with her long-awaited child, she questioned what was happening: *“The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD.”*

This was more than just the active stirring of a child in the womb. Jewish tradition teaches that whenever Rebekah passed by a place of learning about God, the baby inside her womb would kick and struggle. However, the same would happen when she passed by a house of idolatry. Her pain increased to the point that it became unbearable. Finally, in despair, Rebekah turned to God for answers and His guidance.

All became clear when God explained that she was carrying twins. *“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated”* (Genesis 25:23). Rebekah would give birth to two very different children and one would be drawn toward holiness, the other toward sin.

God’s plan for Isaac’s heirs is reiterated in the Christian Bible. Paul wrote in Romans 9:10-13, *“Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”*

Yet, Rebekah never said a word of this to Isaac. Instead, she bore the burden alone. The sages explained that Rebekah understood that if she told Isaac what God had revealed to her about the nature of their sons, he would automatically withdraw from Esau and possibly send him away.

Even with Esau’s disposition, she wanted him to gain everything he possibly could from his holy father who completely believed in him. Rebekah understood that whatever nation emerged from Esau could only gain from having its origins in the home of Isaac. Rebekah can be credited with everything good found in Esau’s offspring.

Sometimes strength is found in speaking up. Other times, true strength is in knowing when to remain quiet. Rebekah understood when to speak up and when to remain quiet. In doing so, she shaped history and brought more goodness into the world.



The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD.

— GENESIS 25:22

Shaping Our Destiny

Rebekah played a critical role in one of the most dramatic episodes: *“When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son”* (Genesis 27:1).

Isaac called Esau in order to bless him with the abundant blessings that he had reserved for his first-born, which would confer on Esau the mantle of carrying out God’s promise to Abraham.

However, Isaac’s *“eyes were so weak that he could no longer see.”* Isaac wasn’t only physically blind, but also blinded to the truth about Esau’s character. As it tells us in Scripture, Isaac favored his elder son, not because of some great character trait, but because Esau was a hunter, and *“Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau”* (Genesis 25:28).

Esau rejected his spiritual place in the family. He gave up his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Later, he married two Hittite women who *“were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah”* (Genesis 26:35).

But Rebekah, who had grown up with family members like Esau, saw his true character. She also knew that only one of the twins would carry on Isaac’s legacy. To Isaac, it seemed the twins would carry on the mission begun by Abraham. But Rebekah knew that wasn’t God’s plan. She devised the plan we are familiar with. Jacob would pretend to be Esau.

By doing this, Rebekah risked her marriage, knowing Isaac would learn the truth. She risked Jacob’s life, knowing Esau would seek revenge. She risked Jacob’s future; Isaac might curse Jacob instead of blessing him. When Jacob expressed this very concern, Rebekah replied, *“My son, let the curse fall on me”* (Genesis 27:13). She would bear any consequences.

Rebekah knew what had to be done, and she had the courage to put into action what she believe God had intended. Delicately and quietly, Rebekah dressed her son Jacob as Esau, handed him Isaac’s favorite food, sent him off to his father, and just like that, she changed the course of history. Had Esau received the blessing, it would have been a disaster. With a keen analysis of the situation, Rebekah accomplished what she knew to be God’s plan for her sons.

Rebekah’s actions have been the source of much debate for people of faith. Some see her actions as deceitful and manipulative, calling her a conniving, tricky mother, favoring one son over another. Yet, Rebekah’s love for her son was certainly aligned with God’s love for Jacob, as we read in Malachi 1:2-3, *“Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”* God’s plan from the beginning was for the covenant made with Abraham to pass through Jacob.

With courage and fierce determination, Rebekah did what needed to be done for her family, the nation of Israel, and what was clearly God’s will. Her strength and courage are an everlasting legacy teaching us that we need not be victims who stand on the sidelines. Rather, we have the power to intercede and take action when necessary. In so doing, we can help shape our destiny and that of all who come after us.



“Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you . . .”

— GENESIS 27:8

Think About It

1. **How do society and those around you influence your values?** How would you define your values based on your beliefs, especially when they conflict with popular ideas surrounding you?
2. **Why do you think kindness was the litmus test Abraham's servant used in order to find the right wife for Isaac?** What is unique about kindness as opposed to all other virtues?
3. **What is important enough to you that you would be willing to risk everything for it?**
4. **What is the longest you have prayed for something?** Did you receive an answer? If not, have you stopped praying for it? Consider revisiting old prayers and engaging in them again.
5. **Where in your life might you need more strength and courage?** How has Rebekah's story inspired you?



Apply It

1. **Practice radical kindness.** Just as Rebekah did when she encountered Abraham's servant, extend kindness to whomever you encounter throughout the day. (Micah 6:8; Colossians 3:12)
2. **Think before you speak.** Rebekah was extremely mindful of when to speak and when to keep silent. We can all benefit by considering when to speak and when to remain quiet. (Proverbs 21:23; James 1:19)
3. **Act on God's promises.** Like Rebekah, we must be willing to act in accordance with God's promises in the Bible, even when it might be difficult. (Deuteronomy 10:12; 2 John 6)
4. **Be courageous.** Rebekah was a woman of courage, allowing her to accomplish great things. When we act with conviction and courage, in faith, we, too, can achieve our goals. (Deuteronomy 31:6; 1 Corinthians 16:13)
5. **Pray and pray again.** Rebekah and Isaac prayed repeatedly for a child. After 20 years, their prayer finally was answered. Be encouraged to keep praying and never give up! (1 Samuel 12:23; Colossians 4:2)

