

## Rebecca: Woman of Faith Part 3

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You probably think that by now, the most exciting part of our story is over: our heroes have now met, and this initial meeting went very well—the girl even fell down from the camel when she saw her bridegroom for the first time—clearly she was very impressed by him, so what else could we expect from this story? But I can assure you that there are still some very interesting details to be found here, so let's continue drawing our biblical portrait—let's keep watching Isaac and Rebecca.

### The Story of Love

We already know that this story, before it became a story of love, was first a story of faith, and now we can really witness this amazing transformation: the story of faith becomes the story of love. The whole of Genesis 24 expressed the faith of different people—Abraham, his servant, Rebecca—but at the end of this long and eventful chapter, after everything that has transpired so far, we read:

*Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her (אָהַבָּהּ). So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.[1]*

It is very important to note that in a romantic sense, as referring to a relationship between a man and a woman, the verb “love” (in Hebrew *ahav*) occurs here for the first time in the Torah (and for the second time overall: the first time we find this root is in Genesis 22, where God says to Abraham, “Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you **love**”). Isaac's feelings for Rebecca must have been very strong if the Torah finds it necessary to use this verb here. It's also interesting to note that on both occasions, the verb “to love” is attached to Isaac: he was the one who was loved in Genesis 22, and he is the one who loves in Genesis 24.

There is something else we can learn from this verse: Isaac was not only an affectionate husband, he was also a tender and loving son. He was 40 when he married Rebecca, and he was 37 when his mother died (Sarah died at the age of 127). It's worth mentioning, by the way, that Jewish tradition connects the death of Sarah in chapter 23 with *Aqedat Itzhak*, with the events of Genesis 22, which means that Isaac was 37 when he was led to Mount Moriah, and not a teenager as is often depicted in Christianity. But even if Sarah's death was not connected

to Aqedah, the math is still the same: Isaac was 37 when his mother died, and he was 40 when he married Rebecca – and Scripture tells us that it was only after he married her, was he comforted – so for three years he had been grieving his mother’s death.

## Godly Marriage

Before we say anything about this marriage, it’s important to point out that Isaac was the only patriarch who remained monogamous (unlike Abraham or Jacob): Rebecca was his only wife for his whole life! I think this fact by itself speaks volumes. However, there is more:

There is a verse in Genesis 25 that invariably touches my heart: *Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer ...*<sup>[2]</sup> This verse provides us an insight into this marriage, into the very close and intimate relationship of this couple, because there are several things, especially in Hebrew, that make this verse special.

First of all, the very fact that Isaac prayed for his wife is very significant. Both Sarah, Abraham’s wife, and Rachel, Jacob’s wife, were also barren for a time, yet we don’t hear a single word in Scripture telling of Abraham praying for Sarah. It was even worse with Jacob: when Rachel complained about her barrenness, Jacob became angry and said, “*Am I in the place of God?*”<sup>[3]</sup> Maybe they also prayed, but the Scripture tells us explicitly only about Isaac “*praying to the LORD*” on behalf of his barren wife.

Second, the choice of words in Hebrew in this verse is very remarkable. The word “prayed” here (in many translations it’s “pleaded”) renders the Hebrew word יָעַתַּר (*ye’etar*), which has the connotation of a passionate commitment to continue until the desired result is achieved. Even more remarkable is the fact that both phrases: “*Isaac prayed to the LORD*” and “*The LORD answered his prayer*”, use the same Hebrew root: when Isaac pleaded (יָעַתַּק וַיַּעֲתַר) with the LORD, the LORD pleaded back and answered his plea (יָתַתְּ לּוֹ וַיַּעֲתַר).

This whole dynamic between Isaac’s plea and the Lord’s answer is completely lost in translation, because both phrases are translated with absolutely different verbs. And yet we understand that it is this dynamic, this commitment to continue and press in, that brought the desired result: the LORD answered him and Rebecca his wife conceived. Rashi writes: He (God) allowed Himself to be entreated and placated and swayed by him.”

## Godly Woman

In the beginning, we spoke of this young girl who came to the well when the servant was standing and praying there. Even then, Rebecca demonstrated a very kind, humble and serving heart – offering to draw water for ten camels, a huge and exhausting job for a young woman – even though she didn’t grow up in a believing family, as Isaac did, and didn’t know God, as Isaac did. However, God’s touch and God’s call through Eleazer that day were so real that she decided at once that she wanted Him in her life and surrendered her life to him. She didn’t yet know God—nevertheless, she wanted *Him* in her life.

Twenty years have passed, and now we see Rebecca knowing God and being steady and mature in her faith. When she doesn’t know what going on with her and her pregnancy, she inquires of the Lord:

*And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.[4]*

By the way, “*to enquire of the LORD*” translates here the same Hebrew expression ( לְדַרֵּשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה ) that is sometimes translated as “*seek the Lord*”. For example, we read in Deuteronomy: “*But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul,[5]*” וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ: בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ תְּדַרְשֵׁנּוּ. This expression doesn’t often occur in the Bible, and when it does, it never refers to a woman—except here. Once again, Rebecca is a very unique character: she is the only woman in the Bible of whom it is said explicitly that she went “*to seek the Lord*”. It’s no wonder then that she really heard from the Lord—because she went to seek Him. I think we would all be familiar with the Lord’s answer—the prophecy that defined the lives of Jacob and Esau. We will analyze this prophecy next time as we will be speaking about Rebecca’s motherhood and Rebecca’s sons.

[1] Genesis 24:67

[2] Gen.25:21

[3] Gen. 30:2

[4] Genesis 25:22

Questions:

What do you learn about the fervor of Isaac's love for Rebecca? Have you ever experienced love like that? Have you ever given love like that?

Does it surprise you that Rebecca sought the Lord so passionately in her prayer? How and when do you pray? In the midst of doubt and difficulty, can you honestly bring your requests to God?

What do you learn about godly marriage in this passage? Did the lives that Isaac and Rebecca lead prepare them for their union and future family? Why or why not? If you are single, what can you learn about preparing for marriage from the examples of Isaac and Rebecca?