

**TIKKUN EREV LEIL SHAVUOT
SHELTER ROCK JEWISH CENTER**

**REBEL WOMEN OF THE BIBLE:
SPOTLIGHT ON REBECCA**



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Rebel: *to oppose or disobey one in authority or control (Merriam-Webster dictionary)*
What does a "rebel woman" of the Bible look like?

A Star is Born

Genesis 22:20-24

²⁰Some time later, Abraham was told, "**Milcah** too has borne children to your brother Nahor: ²¹Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; ²²and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel"—²³**Bethuel being the father of Rebekah**. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

PART 1: Finding Rivka

Genesis 24:1-9

Abraham sends his servant, Eliezer, back to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac:

...⁶Abraham answered him, "On no account must you take my son back there! ⁷The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. ⁸And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there." ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

Questions to Consider:

-What are Abraham's required characteristics for the ideal wife?

Eliezer's Prayer

Genesis 24:10-14

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. ¹²And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day [make it happen for me], and deal graciously with my master Abraham: ¹³Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; ¹⁴let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master."

Questions to Consider:

-What are Eliezer's characteristics for the right wife?

A Prayer Answered

Genesis 24:15-17

¹⁵He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar." ¹⁸"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. ¹⁹When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking." ²⁰Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels....

Questions to Consider:

-What do we immediately learn about Rebecca? What characteristics are added? How is she described? How does she act?

COMMENT: *She has met Eliezer's criteria for a good wife, but not yet Abraham's. He has to ask her - who is she? And will her family offer him hospitality? When he hears that Providence has brought him to Abraham's close kin, he immediately offers blessing and thanks to God. God has truly led him on the path of success to find this exemplary young woman from Abraham's own lineage. But there are two hurdles before he can be successful: will her family agree? And will she come?*

A Family Affair

Genesis 24:28-52

²⁸The maiden ran and told all this to her mother's household.^{*} ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban....

Eliezer followed Rebecca home and was welcomed by her father and brother, Betuel and Lavan. He recounts his story emphasizing the right facts to impress her family and he wins their approval:

⁵⁰Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The matter was decreed by the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." ⁵²When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the Lord.

COMMENT: *But the marriage is not a fait accompli. Rivka must agree. Abraham had mentioned the possibility that the girl might not agree to go. We do not often hear of the consideration of children in an arranged marriage. Abraham and his servant do not consult Isaac before the servant tenders his offer. But Rivka has to move far away, cut her ties to her birth family and go out to what is essentially a pioneer country. (Kensky, 13)*

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Genesis 24: 53-62

...⁵⁷And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." ⁵⁸They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." ⁵⁹So they sent off their

sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“O sister!
May you grow
Into thousands of myriads;
May your offspring seize
The gates of their foes.”

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶²Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb.

Questions to Consider:

Describe Rebecca in your own words:
When she says she will go, what is she agreeing to?

Part 2: Love at First Sight

Gen.24:62-67

⁶³And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel ⁶⁵and said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field toward us?” And the servant said, “That is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

Questions to Consider:

How is Rebecca transformed in this passage from the woman we meet in Mesopotamia, to the one who meets her betrothed in the Negev?

COMMENT: The reader is given two clues that God has a special interest in Rivka. Both the announcement of her birth and the providential nature of her marriage indicate that she is a woman of destiny with a divinely ordained role to play. But first, she must become a mother. And this is neither easy nor ordinary. Like Sarah before her and Rachel after her, Rivka has to undergo a period of infertility. (Frymer-Kensky, 15)

Part 3: Birth of Nations

Genesis 25:20-26

²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, “If so, why do I exist?” She went to inquire of the Lord, ²³and the Lord answered her,

“Two nations are in your womb,
Two separate peoples shall issue from your body;
One people shall be mightier than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

Questions to Consider:

-Twenty years have passed since Rebecca and Isaac met. How does that impact our reading of this passage? Why do you think Isaac prays for Rebecca when she is clearly capable of praying for herself? How do you interpret Rebecca’s remarks/prayer?

²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

COMMENT: Rivka takes a prominent role in fulfilling her birth oracle, acting to guarantee that her younger son will achieve his destiny as the preeminent heir. That moment comes as it is time to transfer the family heritage from Isaac to the next generation. (Frymer-Kensky, 17):

Part 4: Fulfilling a Destiny

Genesis 25: 27-28

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp. ²⁸Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob.

26: ³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 27:1-13

The Plan

When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, “My son.” He answered, “Here I am.” ²And he said, “I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. ³Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. ⁴Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die.”

⁵Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, ⁷‘Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the Lord’s approval, before I die.’ ⁸Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. ⁹Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. ¹⁰Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies.” ¹¹Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. ¹²If

my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing. ¹³But his mother said to him, “Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me.”

COMMENT: The story never tells us that Rivka must use deception because she is powerless, and later readers have often accused her of improper and immoral behavior. But the biblical world valued cunning in the underdog. Only the powerful value honesty at all costs. The powerless know that trickery may save their lives... (Frymer-Kensky p. 19)

Question to Consider: Do you judge Rebecca or are you rooting for her?
How premeditated do you think the plan was?

27:14-17 ¹⁴He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his father liked. ¹⁵Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on; ¹⁶and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids. ¹⁷Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

The story proceeds with Isaac tricking his father and the receiving a blessing. Followed by Esau’s approach, his emotional response and his blessing...

27:41-46: ⁴¹Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, “Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.” ⁴²When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. ⁴⁴Stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury subsides—⁴⁵until your brother’s anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!”

⁴⁶Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?”

Questions to consider:

-What recourse does Rebecca take to get the job done? What makes her effective?
How does she appeal to both men?