

# Bible Study Questions for *Rebekah: A Novel* by Jill Eileen Smith

1. Read Genesis 22:1–19, the story of Isaac’s binding. We normally see this story from Abraham’s point of view. How might this event have shaped the man Isaac became?
2. In Genesis 24:1–9, Abraham commissions his chief servant to return to the land of his birth to find a wife for Isaac. From what people group does Abraham *not* want Isaac to take a wife?
3. Presumably, the land Abraham came from was pagan in its worship, as are the Canaanites in the land where he lives at this time. Also, God had told Abraham to leave his family. Why do you think Abraham wants a wife for Isaac from among his relatives?
4. In this same passage, what command does Abraham give his servant regarding Isaac. (v. 6)? Why do you think he says this?
5. What does Abraham say to do if the woman will not come? How does he show his faith in the God of heaven and earth regarding his son’s future wife?
6. Abraham assures the servant that God will send His messenger ahead to help secure a wife for Isaac. While the Bible does not tell us how God accomplished this, it is possible that He sent a messenger to Rebekah to prepare her. How does this fit with God’s later visit to Rebekah when she carries the twins (Gen. 25:21–23)?
7. In Genesis 24:10, the servant sets out to do as Abraham requested. What does he take with him? Later, in Genesis 28:1–5, Isaac sends Jacob on a similar mission. Several chapters later, in Genesis 32:10, we learn that Jacob took far less with him to seek a wife than Abraham’s servant brought with him. What are the differences and similarities in these two situations?
8. In Genesis 24:12–14, the servant prays to the God of his master Abraham and asks for success in finding a wife for Isaac. What does he ask? Does this seem like a reasonable request? Or might he be asking for the unusual—even the impossible—to show him that God alone would answer?
9. Rebekah appears at the well before the servant even finishes his prayer and offers to do the very thing he requested. Read the account in Genesis 24:15–

27. What does Scripture tell us about the servant in verse 21? Why do you think he waits to say anything to Rebekah?
10. Read Genesis 24:22–61. In verse 55, we are told that Rebekah’s mother and brother request that she be allowed to stay with them ten days or so. Commentator Robert Alter says that the phrase “ten days or so” literally reads “days or ten.” He suggests that “days” (in this plural form) sometimes means “a year,” which would make ten days more like ten months.<sup>1</sup> This would have been an expected time frame between the betrothal and the wedding. Whatever the exact timing, why do you think they request that Rebekah not leave immediately? Why do you think the servant does not want to wait?
- Bonus question: Read ahead to the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in Genesis 31. What might the servant suspect of Laban’s character to cause him to want to hurry his return to Abraham and Isaac? How does Jacob later escape Laban’s house?
11. In Genesis 24:62–67, we read the story of Isaac and Rebekah meeting for the first time. What do we learn of both people in this passage? Verse 67 conveys Isaac’s feelings for Rebekah. How much time do you think could have passed in this one verse? Why might Isaac’s love for Rebekah be significant?
12. In Genesis 25:1–4, we are told of another wife of Abraham. What is her name, and how might her entrance into Abraham’s life have affected Isaac? In verses 5–6, what does Abraham do? What does that tell us about Abraham’s relationship to these sons? To Isaac?
13. Read Genesis 25:19–28. Give a brief history recounting the birth of the twins and their relationship to each parent. At least three times in Isaac’s life, the Bible makes reference to love—his father’s love for him (Genesis 22:2), Isaac’s love for Rebekah (Genesis 24:67) and their individual love for their sons (Genesis 25: 28). Why might this be significant?
14. Read the rest of the twins’ account in Genesis 25:29–34. What happens between Jacob and Esau? How might Rebekah’s encounter with the Lord have set the stage for Jacob to deceive Esau? How might the favoritism of one parent have led to this moment?
15. In Genesis 26, famine leads Isaac and Rebekah into the foreign land of the Philistines, where Isaac claims Rebekah is his sister in order to save his own life. Hostility rises from the Philistines, and Isaac runs into problems of water rights and wells. Yet God uses this time to bless him with large crop yields and wealth. Make a list of the problems Isaac faces in this foreign land, and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Norton, 2004).

then make another list of the blessings he enjoys. Now look over the past year of your life and make a similar list of problems and blessings. Can you see ways in which God has used the trials and the blessings for your good?

16. Genesis 26:34 states that Esau is forty years old when he marries two Hittite wives. (Hittites were among Isaac's Canaanite neighbors.) What does verse 35 say about these women? Why do you think Esau chooses to marry them?
17. Read Genesis 27:1–40, the story of Jacob stealing Esau's blessing. Since God had told Rebekah "the older will serve the younger," why do you think Rebekah and Jacob resort to subterfuge to obtain the blessing? Might there have been a better way?
18. Esau does not take kindly to the deceit. In Genesis 27:41, what does he plan to do to set things right? When Rebekah hears of it, what does she do (vv. 42–46)?

Bonus question: Does Rebekah ever see Jacob again?

19. In Genesis 28:1–9, Isaac sends Jacob away with his blessing. The scene ends with Esau learning what happened between Jacob and his father, the parent who had always loved Esau most. When he hears that Isaac admonished Jacob not to take a wife from among the Canaanite women of the land, how do you think it makes Esau feel, knowing that his two wives are Hittites? What does Esau do to regain the good favor of his father (vv. 8–9)?

The story of Isaac and Rebekah takes up only a few chapters in Genesis, as if it is a parenthesis between Isaac's father Abraham and his son Jacob. And yet there is much that we can learn from the relationship of Isaac and Rebekah, from the love they shared to the way they parented. They have much to teach us.