

Reading Group Guide for
Rebekah: A Novel
by Jill Eileen Smith

1. The story begins with Rebekah at the side of her dying father. Her mother and her brother Laban do something that changes the course of Rebekah's future. What do they do, and how does it set the tone for the rest of the story?
2. After her father's death, Rebekah is at the mercy of Laban and must wait on him to secure a husband for her. Have you ever been in a situation where your future depended on someone else's decision? How did you respond?
3. Laban moves Rebekah to their grandfather's home in Paddan-Aram in an apparent attempt to better sort out the choices for her husband. Laban wants to gain as much wealth as possible from the arrangement, while Rebekah wants to marry an honest, noble man. When faced with opposing desires and demands, how does Rebekah handle things? How do you handle personal opposition?
4. Rebekah has a strained relationship with her mother, who seems to favor Laban above all others, even her own husband. How does her mother's relationship to Laban set the stage for Rebekah's struggles with her own mother/son relationships in the future?
5. In chapter 4, Rebekah and Deborah are at home when a merchant stops by and delivers household gods that Laban had purchased. What does this say about Laban's character?
6. In chapter 5, we meet Isaac. What do we learn about his relationship to his mother, Sarah? Do you think it was dysfunctional? Why or why not?
7. Later in the chapter, we meet Abraham's new family—Keturah and her six sons. Isaac and his father appear to have a strained relationship due to the history of Isaac's binding. Do you think Isaac's struggles are realistic? Or should he have gotten over the past by this time? Why or why not?
8. In chapter 6, we read the story of Isaac's binding. If you were to put yourself in the place of each of the main characters in the narrative, how do you think you would have felt if you were Abraham? Isaac? And later, hearing of the tale in the aftermath, Sarah?

9. While Isaac's father has dispatched a servant to find a wife for Isaac in Paddan-Aram, Rebekah despairs of ever marrying. The men who pursue her are unworthy, and Laban seems incapable of finding any other kind. In her desperation, a messenger of God speaks to her. How do you think such an encounter might have prepared her for the visit of Abraham's servant?
10. In chapter 9, Eliezer arrives at the well in Paddan-Aram and prays for God to bring the right girl to him there. The request he makes of God is a big one, given the possibility that some wells were circular with many steps to the spring far below. Why do you think Eliezer prays such a seemingly impossible prayer?
11. When the time comes for Rebekah to accompany Eliezer to Abraham's camp to marry Isaac, her brother and mother request that she be allowed to stay at home a little longer. Why do you think Rebekah readily agrees to leave right away? Have you ever been faced with a decision that needed to be made quickly—something that would affect your future in an irrevocable way? How did you respond?
12. In chapter 14, Isaac and Rebekah wed, and Isaac realizes he loves Rebekah more than he thought possible. He makes a decision that he will never take another wife, that she alone will be his for all of her life. How might the marriage of his parents and his father's other wives have contributed to Isaac's decision? Do you come from a blended family? How did your parents' choices affect your own adult choices?
13. In chapter 21, twenty years of marriage have produced no heir, despite the promises of Adonai to bless Abraham through Isaac. Rebekah is convinced she is barren and lays her burdens at Isaac's feet. What does Isaac do to seek an end to Rebekah's barrenness? How is this significant?
14. Rebekah does at last conceive and suffers greatly during her pregnancy. In chapter 22, she prays in desperation for answers, and God speaks to her with a prophecy about the future of her children. Does Isaac believe her? How does his reaction set the stage for the struggles between the twins?
15. In chapter 24, we see the beginnings of parental favoritism—Isaac for Esau and Rebekah for Jacob. Why do you think the parents choose a favorite son rather than attempting to love both equally? Have you been the subject of favoritism? What kinds of results can occur in families where such favoritism is practiced?
16. Rebekah spends years trying to get Isaac to see things her way, trying to convince him that she is right about the twins' future. How might she have handled things differently? How does Isaac receive her attempts to change his thinking? How does that affect their marriage?

17. In chapter 25, Ishmael spends some time in Isaac's camp after the death of their father Abraham. Their discussion turns to the goodness of God. Do you agree with the points Ishmael makes? Are Isaac's responses reasonable? If not, how might you have answered such questions?
18. Isaac has a habit of retreating to the wilderness to think, to work through tough issues of life. But he also tends to retreat from dealing with relationships, both with his father and with his wife. How might his actions be good and wise? How might they be risking the trust of those he loves?
19. In chapter 26, Isaac questions God about Rebekah's claim of having been visited by God's messenger during her pregnancy. He doubts the prophecy and has trouble believing her. Why do you think he finds it so difficult to believe her? How might things have been different if he had?
20. In the end, the rift between the twins comes between Isaac and Rebekah, nearly destroying their marriage. How do they handle the lost trust? Do you think the story ends realistically?

I hope you enjoyed my portrayal of Isaac and Rebekah. Their story in Scripture has much to teach us if we are willing to dig into it and learn.



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