

GOD PORTRAYS WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER THREE

REBEKAH

Genesis 24-35

THE STORY OF REBEKAH as related in Genesis 24 is an example of the way God cares for every detail of our lives. There are three lovely verses in the Psalms that every young Christian should underscore.

- **“The Lord thinketh upon me”** (Psalm 40:17); the word for *thinketh* has the idea of planning, devising, or weaving for me. If I commit myself to Him, He will arrange and order the threads of my life.
- **“God that performeth all things for me”** (Psalm 57:2), or accomplishes everything on my behalf.
- **“The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me”** (Psalm 138:8).

Our Father for His children can never cease to care, He plans, performs and perfects as Sovereign everywhere.

Our hearts were moved as we went with Abraham and Isaac from Sarah’s funeral. How empty their home felt, bereft of its center, the devoted, loving, strong personality of holy Sarah!

Abraham and Isaac never realized how much they had leaned on her counsel until they were deprived of it. At that time Isaac was nearly forty years old. As Abraham realized Isaac’s loneliness, as well as his own, he said “Isaac needs a wife. God has directed my life and I know He is interested in my son’s life. I shall speak to Him about it.”

We can almost hear the friend of God talking fervently with the Lord about a subject so dear to him. It is amazing how many were interested in Isaac’s choice—God, his father, the angel, the servant and the relatives. It is indeed a most important step in any young life, for the future weal or woe of all the family connections may depend on that choice.

Abraham’s first thought was that Isaac should not marry into a godless family. He charged his servant about that. **“Swear,”** said he to his servant, **“by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth,** [the God to whom we will give account in the future, and the God before whom we live in the present] **that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell”** (24:3).

Yes, we are in the world but we do not need to be of the world.

Sometimes a parent's ambition for worldly advantage has made the hard bed on which their children lie. But Abraham dreaded an ungodly alliance for his son. In trouble and sorrow they could never kneel together before the Lord and comfort one another in spiritual things. The servant asked, If the girl will not come with me shall I take your son back? And Abraham said, **"Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again"** (24:6). We are not to take our children back to that from which God has delivered us.

The servant departed with tokens of his master's goods to confirm the sincerity of his message.

On reaching the city of Nahor **"he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water"** (24:11). Can you see the old man bowing his head to ask the Lord earnestly to prosper his journey? He loved Abraham and admired his godly walk before the Lord, and wished he were more like him. Hear how he addresses God. **"O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; . . . let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master"** (24:13-14).

The servant did not look for the bride for Isaac in questionable places of the world. It was at a well. How much is packed in this prayer! He asks

- (1) That the girl may be a good virtuous girl, a virgin;
- (2) That she may be polite to a stranger;
- (3) Polite to an old man; Scripture requires us to **"rise up before the hoary head,"** a good old-fashioned grace;
- (4) Not lazy, willing to draw for ten thirsty camels that could drink a lot of water. The virtuous woman **"worketh willingly with her hands"** (Proverbs 31:13).
- (5) That she might be the one appointed for Isaac, for Isaac served the Lord and surely deserved a good wife.
- (6) He argued **"thereby shall I know thou hast showed kindness unto my master."**

When Rebekah arose that morning she had no idea that today was to prove the turning point in her life. She did not dream it was the day of testing and decision for her.

We reveal ourselves in the way we discharge the ordinary duties of life, not just in our behavior on state occasions and before audiences. How do we behave ourselves toward those asking favors of us or putting us to inconvenience? We never know which may be our most critical day. Therefore we should pray each morning like David, **"Teach me to do thy will . . . [the thing that pleaseth thee]"** (Psalm 143:10).

Genesis 24:16 assures us she had the good countenance which characterizes those of good lives.

Trivial, unstudied acts indicate character. Notice her pleasant alacrity to do more than she was asked. As she hastened to draw the water, the man stood in silence watching God answer every item of his prayer. Do you not delight to see God's hand undertaking for you? Again the old man bowed his head and gave thanks for answered prayer. The servant was so assured of God's guidance he brought out the tokens of marriage and put them on Rebekah.

Evidently Rebekah's father was dead. She ran home to tell her mother what had happened at the well. Her brother Laban was impressed when he saw the precious jewels and heard about the old gentleman's prayers. He suitably addressed Abraham's servant as **"thou blessed of the Lord."** Do folk recognize us as blessed of the Lord because of our deportment?

Another admirable trait of the old man was his care of his men and animals. He was faithful in discharging his commission from his master before seeking his own comfort. **"I will not eat before I have told mine errand"** (24:33). Oh, that we had such faithfulness to the Lord, and godly tact and patience as we seek to win souls for Him!

As Rebekah and the family listened to Eliezer's report of the Lord's definite leading, they exclaimed: **"The thing proceedeth from the Lord!"** (24:50).

They had a little prayer meeting. Perhaps Rebekah hadn't attended so many prayer meetings in a day in her whole life. But her heart was touched and she was not rebellious. She heard, believed and accepted the report and made her decision. Is that not the way a sinner responds to the proclamation of the Gospel and accepts the person of Christ? **"But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God"** (John 1:12).

There is such a thing as election—**"the woman whom thou hast appointed"**—but parallel with it runs another track, man's responsibility, **"whosoever will."** Rebekah had the personal privilege of choice—to accept or refuse.

When she decided to accept Isaac, tokens of his love were given to her and her family. Blessings came to the whole house as a result of her decision. What foretastes we get of all we are to enjoy forever with Him! Not gold or jewels, but more priceless treasures: forgiveness of sins, peace with God, His joy, His peace, rest, etc.

The family begged the servant to delay their departure, but the faithful servant said, **"Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master"** (24:56).

What hindrances some folk would put in the way of one who desires to immediately follow the Lord! But the servant would not have Isaac robbed of a single day of Rebekah's love. The mother and brother replied:

"We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (24:57-58).

The servant brought her and her damsels safely across the desert, spending the long days and warming her heart toward Isaac with details of the life of her prospective husband. Isaac went out into the fields to meditate and pray one evening and looking up saw the camels coming in the distance. Rebekah saw him and asked the servant who it was coming to meet them. When he replied **“It is my master,”** she alighted from the camel and took a veil and covered herself.

How delightful it is to notice her modesty and respect! She did not flaunt her charms or try to make a display. She became his wife and he loved her, and she comforted him after his mother’s death.

Many have shown what a delightful type this story is of God the Father sending the Servant, the Holy Spirit, to win a Bride, the Church, for His Son. The Church consists of those who individually accept the invitation to come to Christ, who respond to the word, **“Wilt thou go with this man?”** with **“I will go.”**

Isaac and Rebekah were married twenty years but had no children. This gave them deep concern and the many reproaches and jibes from friends did not help them. Isaac said, “We will speak to the Lord about it,” and no doubt added, “And, Rebekah, never mind what other people say “The record says, **“And the Lord was intreated of him”** (25: 21). This should encourage the head of every house to bring family concerns to the Lord. **“And Rebekah his wife conceived. 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”** (25:21-22).

Certainly the Bible accounts are true to life. We frequently fuss and fret for what we lack, and upon obtaining what we desire we fuss and fume because it is too much or too little.

At first Rebekah was troubled over no children, then over too many.

But she did a wise thing. She is the first woman in Scripture of whom we read that she prayed and her prayer was concerning her children. Are others in your household encouraged to pray by your example? Nothing is beneath the Lord’s interest and notice. **“Let no anxieties fret you.”**

“In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests [not demands] be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

She knew there must be a reason for her present trial. It is wise to go to the Lord with our internal struggles before they become manifest to others.

The Lord said, **“Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger”** (25:23).

God has a purpose for every life. Here the Lord let her share a bit of His perspective. God foretold to Hagar the animosity of the two rival religions of the Arabs and the Jews that has run through the ages.

Sometimes we hear the passage quoted, “**Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated**” as if it were spoken before the children were born, which certainly gives a false impression. You will look in vain for it in Genesis. In fact it was not spoken until they had been dead for centuries and their characteristics and those of their descendants had been manifested to all. It was not until Malachi 1 that the statement was made. Esau and his descendants were ever cruel enemies of Israel and hindered the Lords people at every possible turn.

“And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents” (25:27).

Doubtless we would call Esau a sport. He was athletic, fond of good food, popular with the ladies, had an eye like an eagle, and a steady hand. If he had gone to one of our universities he would have carried off all the trophies. He was nimble, alert, and as someone has said, “a fine animal.”

He was loud in whatever he did—if he wept everybody was aware of it, if in good humor, he was most generous. His moods affected everyone around him. Jacob was a quiet man, devoted to his mother, skillful with the cattle, interested in their flocks and herds. He valued possessions and loved bargaining. He was easily persuaded by those he loved.

“And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob” (25:28).

This remark does not raise Isaac in our estimation. He was brought up the darling of the aged couple, Abraham and Sarah, indulged and shielded; he had not developed the rugged characteristics that Abraham learned through severe testings. One would almost infer that he lived to eat, and he favored those who indulged him. A home where partiality is practiced by parents is always an unhappy abode. Rivalries, jealousies, bickerings, suspicions, and duplicity find a fertile spot in which to grow.

The birthright had evidently been the subject of frequent discussions. It granted:

- (1) headship over the brothers or tribes,
- (2) A double portion of the inheritance,
- (3) Right of priesthood in the family,
- (4) Share in the promised blessings to Abraham.

Everyone knew Esau’s evaluation of it, for as usual he was loud in expressing his opinions. Rebekah and Isaac each had their hearts set on their favorite obtaining the birthright, though each knew God’s thoughts on the matter. (Rebekah would argue with conviction that God had said, **“The elder shall serve the younger”**).

Esau came in from the field faint and weary, and found Jacob cooking pottage. There are many hunters in this world seeking satisfaction and **“finding none.” “Whosoever drinketh at the world’s waters thirsteth again.”**

“Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint” (25:30).

His language was always extravagant. If he didn’t get this or that he’d die with disappointment, but he seemed to live on in spite of his protestations. Jacob, with cruel cunning, replied, **“Sell me this day thy birthright.”** Esau exclaimed in effect, “What good is a birthright to a hungry man—you can’t eat it.”

And Jacob said: **“Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob”** (25:33).

Esau lived for the flesh. Paul wept over such, **“whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame** [or, are proud of their indulgent life]” (Philippians 3:19); living only for self-gratification, who mind earthly things, despising all that is spiritual. Hebrews 12:16 speaks of Esau as a profane person—meaning *outside the temple*. He had no interest in things spiritual. It is possible to be a physical giant and very intellectual, yet be utterly destitute of spiritual interest and attainment.

May I ask kindly, What do divine privileges mean to you?

Are you preferring carnal gratification? Do you say, **“Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,”** with the flippancy of those who would eat and drink and dance with the Esaus? How sad those words are: **“He did eat and drink and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright”** (25:34)!

There was no regret that he had given away his birthright. He went away from home, threw off all restraints, and renounced his religious responsibilities for a mess of pottage. Never sell your birthright to man, woman or the Devil. Do not be among those who forfeit eternal treasures for a momentary pleasure.

Many a young person suffers bitter, unforgettable remorse the rest of his life because of one hour’s sinful indulgence of the flesh. Do choose, I beseech you, the birthright that comes with the Gospel and the new life that God offers.

Those who choose for Christ get a double portion: godliness is profitable not only in this life but also in that which is to come. It entails the privileges of the priesthood, a life of cleanliness and of helpfulness to others, offering to God acceptable sacrifices as holy priests and showing forth the virtues of Christ in compassion on others as royal priests (I Peter 2).

As in Abram’s day, **“there was a famine in the land”** and Isaac and Rebekah fled to Egypt. We too, when in difficulty, would like to run away and change our environment so that we may escape the test. Yet these very times of discipline prove productive of spiritual stamina in our lives. To run away requires no grit, grace, or gumption, but proves to be weakening to our moral fiber.

Rebekah, like Sarah, was admired and sought after. In Isaac we see repeated the weaknesses of Abraham. He did what his father did and no doubt justified himself in it. Are we to make constant excuses for our family or national weaknesses and faults? Paul, in writing of the Cretans who were noted for telling lies, said, **One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies** [not excuse the national weakness] **Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith**" (Titus 1:12).

"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man," which is to be moulded to become like Christ (see Colossians 3:9-10).

It seems easier to imitate our parents' vices than their virtues. Sins of the parents are frequently perpetuated in the children. Abraham and Isaac were men of very different temperaments, yet when beset by similar difficulties they yielded to the temptation the same way.

In the Old Testament when God called attention to the sins of the fathers, he says as in Zechariah 1:2, 4: **"The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore . . . be ye not as your fathers . . . turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings."**

In the New Testament we are warned not to blindly follow even our leaders in the church, **"Whose faith follow,"** not whose failings follow. Even Paul, in asking the saints to be followers of him, qualified it, **"even as I also follow Christ."**

Like Abraham, Isaac was reproved by Abimelech for his inconsistency. God never excuses sin in His child but allows him to be reproved even by the world.

And Esau was forty years old when he married Judith (whose name meant *celebrated*) and Bashemath (which means *spicy*), Hittite women, who were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah. I suppose Esau, the day he brought home his dashing, heathen wives, enjoyed the shock he had given to his parents.

When one brought up in the fear of the Lord deliberately turns his back on all things sacred, he sinks deeper than the heathen around. Esau married two women at once. Their godlessness and loose ways distressed to the depths poor old Isaac and Rebekah. Esau's behavior disqualified him from any claim to the birthright. How could one who displayed such lack of morals ever be a priest in the family?

Spiritual things are unsafe in such carnal hands.

Yet how tenaciously a parent's love will cling to his offspring! Even with all the grief Esau caused Isaac, he set his heart on giving that son the blessing. Many a time Rebekah and he had discussed God's expressed purposes, but Isaac seemed infatuated with his preference for Esau. Do you ever act thus? Though you know the will of God, are you determined to go your way? Don't forget that you must reckon with God. You may propose, but God disposes. Old age does not necessarily minimize prejudices.

*If Esau sold the birthright for a mess of pottage, his old father schemed to sell the blessing for a “**savory dish of venison such as I love.**”*

He would condone his action too by working on the sympathy and compassion of Esau: “**I am old, I know not the day of my death.**” But he lived forty years more, and he displayed his love for fine food more than for doing the will of God. What a warning to every child of God, not to live according to the flesh, but to see that the Spirit dominates one’s life!

Some of us begin our Christian course well and in the Spirit, with springtime promise of a wonderful autumn of life with a harvest for God. But how are we ending it? Paul declared, “**None of these things [afflictions] move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus**” (Acts 20:24).

The Christian is required to exercise self-denial and self-control and in such matters as eating and drinking it is to be done “**to the glory of God.**” Poor Isaac! His eyes were dim and his spiritual discernment was all but wasted away.

And Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to his son, and she talked to Jacob. Every human weakness has its hour of temptation, and if we do not watch and pray we will be overtaken.

Rebekah matched her cunning against Isaac’s intrigue. Jacob was at first shocked by his mother’s proposal to pretend to be Esau and steal the blessing by deceit. He could not see how he could have God’s blessing in any other way than God’s way. But her insistence prevailed over his arguments. Jacob said, “**My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing**” (27:12).

His mother answered, “**Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice**” (27:13), and he went.

Jacob was more concerned with seeming to be a deceiver than he was about being a deceiver.

He seemed willing enough to follow her wrong advice and played up to it, trying to get a godly blessing in a most ungodly manner. Whoever follows even a mother’s devices contrary to God will reap bitterly. God answered Rebekah’s prayer, “**Upon me be thy curse.**” God will give His blessing but not before the due time.

Rebekah worked quickly preparing the meal while Jacob was dressing up in Esau’s clothes, whispering and feverishly plotting to accomplish all before Esau’s return. Can you see Rebekah breathlessly standing and watching for the outcome? She must have blushed when Jacob wakened his father to hear him say, “**I am Esau; eat of my venison**” as he served him the dish of savory meat his mother had prepared.

And when his father asked, “**How hast thou found it so quickly?**” he piously replied, “**Because the Lord thy God brought it to me**” (27:20).

Isaac was suspicious but willing to trust his feelings. He said, **“Come near that I may feel thee.”**

Our feelings are a very poor test; they are too fickle to be trusted. **“The voice is the voice of Jacob.”** Can I trust my ears? All the time he prolonged his meal, he was not at all satisfied. **“Come near and kiss me.”**

He felt Esau’s fine clothes, smelled the perfume Esau used. He blessed Jacob. Unwittingly he fulfilled God’s purposes that Jacob should be blessed. As Jacob left and Esau came in, Isaac realized he had been outwitted and that God had allowed it because of his own willful scheming. Isaac trembled greatly, but declared, **“He shall be blessed.”** Esau lifted up his voice and the home and its environs rang with **“the great and exceeding bitter cry”** of Esau. Esau is like many who want God’s blessings but have no care for God Himself.

And Esau hated Jacob, and Jacob deserved it. The inconsistencies of Christians bring them deserved scorn from the world. Esau said to everyone, “Wait till my father dies, I’ll get even with him.” He comforted himself in purposing to kill Jacob.

Oh, the anguish of Rebekah’s heart! Was she going to have Eve’s grief of heart, deprived of both her boys in one day, one murdered by the hand of the other? It cannot be. She must act quickly. “Jacob, you must go away until Esau gets over his frenzy.”

“Go to my brother Laban and tarry a few days until thy brother’s anger turn away and he forget that which thou hast done to him, [Our sins are not so quickly forgotten by others] and I will send and fetch thee from thence.”

Then Rebekah conferred with Isaac. She told him that her new daughters-in-law were a great trial to her. **“I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth.”** What a camouflage this self-pity was for the real reason! **“If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?”** (27:46).

And Isaac called Jacob and said, “Do as your mother says and go to Laban.” So Jacob was exiled because of his sin, by his mother and father! Our sins and their consequences take all the joy out of life.

Did Jacob enjoy the blessing as a result of his deceit? Indeed not! He didn’t enjoy it for over twenty years. What had he won by his deceit?

- It brought him exile from home;
- He never looked on his mother’s face again.
- He had to learn what fruit deceit brings from another deceiver, Laban, his father-in-law.
- He was deceived by him many times.
- He was deceived by the clothing of his wife Leah when she came to him dressed in bridal attire.
- And at another time when his sons brought Joseph’s coat and he thought an evil beast had killed him.

“God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

These parents had a dreadful reaping because of their lack of faith and patience of faith to wait God’s time without scheming and interfering.

After God disciplined Jacob for twenty years, He brought him back to bless him. But what sad lonely years they were for the aged couple! Isaac, the blind old man, outlived his wife Rebekah, and the sons came home to bury their father.

Do let us pray that **“we may finish our course with joy”** and that the Lord may get pleasure from our last days. May we lay hold of that for which God has laid hold of us and **“run well”** to the end of our days.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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