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Rebekah – As a Chosen Agent of God

Rebeka – kot izvoljena Božja predstavnica

Abstract: This paper examines the character of Rebekah within the biblical narrative, highlighting her role as a pivotal agent in the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant. Through a close reading of the Genesis texts, particularly the Jacob cycle (Gen 24–27), this article explores how Rebekah, despite appearing marginalized by her cultural context, exerts significant influence over the transmission of the divine blessing. The analysis focuses on the narrative structure, Rebekah's characterization, and her unique relationship with God, which enables her to navigate complex familial dynamics and ensure the continuation of God's plan through her son Jacob. Additionally, the paper discusses the typological connections between Rebekah and Abraham, as well as the broader implications of her story in Christian theology, especially in relation to divine election as articulated by Paul in Romans 9. Rebekah's narrative is thus presented as a profound example of the interplay between divine sovereignty and human agency, demonstrating how Rebekah plays a crucial role in the fulfilment of covenantal promises.

Keywords: Rebekah, human agency, divine sovereignty and election, typology

Povzeteke: Članek obravnava lik Rebeke v svetopisemski pripovedi in izpostavlja njeno vlogo osrednjega akterja pri izpolnitvi Abrahamove zaveze. Z natančnim branjem besedil prve Mojzesove knjige, zlasti Jakobovega cikla (1 Mz 24–27), ta članek raziskuje, kako ima Rebeka kljub temu, da se zdi v svojem kulturnem kontekstu marginalizirana, pomemben vpliv na prenos Božjega blagoslova. Analiza se osredotoča na pripovedno strukturo, Rebekino karakterizacijo in njen edinstven odnos z Bogom, ki ji omogoča, da se znajde v zapleteni družinski dinamiki in zagotovi nadaljevanje Božjega načrta prek svojega sina Jakoba. Poleg tega članek obravnava tipološke povezave med Rebeko in Abrahamom ter širše posledice njene zgodbe v krščanski teologiji, zlasti v povezavi z izvolitvijo, kot jo Pavel izrazi v Rim 9. Rebekina pripoved je tako predstavljena kot globok primer prepletanja med Božjo suverenostjo in človeškim delovanjem, le-ta prikazuje, kako ima Rebeka ključno vlogo pri izpolnitvi obljub zaveze.

Ključne besede: Rebeka, človeško delovanje, božja suverenost in izvolitev, tipologija

1. Introduction

The biblical narrative frequently elevates unexpected figures as pivotal agents in God's plan, regardless of their social status or marginalization within their socio-cultural context. Women often play critical roles in fulfilling divine purposes, as illustrated by Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, who are notably included in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 1:1-17).

Although Rebekah is not mentioned in Matthew's genealogy, she stands out as a significant matriarch in the biblical narrative. Her importance extends beyond her role as Sarah's successor in the matriarchal lineage; it is also rooted in her direct relationship with God, which empowers her to preserve and transmit the Abrahamic blessing to the more discerning son, Jacob. Studies such as Sharon Pace Jeanson's *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (1990) and Lieve Teugels' *"A Strong Woman, Who Can Find?"* (1994) have sought to present Rebekah in a more positive light, emphasizing her active role in realizing God's plan for Abraham's lineage. Building on these works, this paper seeks to highlight Rebekah as a divinely chosen agent. It will do so by examining the narrative structure of Jacob's cycle (Gen 24–27), analysing her characterization, and exploring how her unique relationship with God is illuminated through typological readings of her role in Scripture.¹

2. Narrative Composition

Scholars commonly observe that the biblical narrator employs specific literary techniques—such as narrative commentary, repetition, and changes in narrative pace—to convey ideological concerns and convictions. However, it is often overlooked that certain compositional shifts are crucial for interpreting the overarching narrative. This analysis seeks to pinpoint specific preparatory stages of Jacob's narrative in which either Rebekah's presence is emphasized, or the narrative introduces pivotal information that shapes the development of the plot.

Gen 22:1-19: Abraham's binding of Isaac

Gen 22:20-24: Rebekah's Abrahamic lineage

Gen 23:1-20: Sarah's death

Gen 24:1-66: Choosing Rebekah as Isaac's wife

Gen 25:1-18: Abraham's heritage, his death and Ismael's lineage

Gen 25–28: Jacob's cycle

Gen 25:19-28: Rebekah and Isaac

Gen 25:20-34: Jacob and Esau on primogeniture

Gen 26:1-33: Isaac and Rebekah

Gen 26:34-35: Esau's marriage

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Gen 27:1-40: The blessing: Rebekah-Jacob and Isaac-Esau

Gen 27:41-45: Jacob's departure: Rebekah Jacob and Rebekah Isaac

Gen 28:1-5: Jacob's departure

Gen 28:6-9: Esau's marriage

2.1 Genesis 22: Foreshadowing Blessings for Future Generations

Rebekah is introduced in the genealogy of Nahor, Abraham's brother, immediately following the resolution of Isaac's near-sacrifice (Gen 22:23). This introduction is significant for several reasons. First, apart from Milcah and Reumah, Rebekah is the only woman mentioned in this genealogy. Second, despite the later prominence of her brother Laban in Jacob's search for a wife (24:28-32), Laban is notably omitted at this point, emphasizing Rebekah's importance. Lieve Teugels (1994, 103) describes Rebekah as a "divinely sent helper," suggesting that her introduction at this juncture is both intentional and meaningful. Her appearance in the narrative, positioned between the accounts of Isaac's near-sacrifice (Gen 22:1-19) and Sarah's death (Gen 23), underscores her role in safeguarding the divine promise and blessing. As a descendant of Abraham, Rebekah is foreshadowed as Sarah's successor, and to some extent, as Abraham's, in bearing God's blessing. This idea is further reinforced by the reiteration of the blessing originally given to Abraham, which is echoed by Bethuel's family (22:17; 24:60).

2.2 Gen 25: Isaac as the Heir

In Genesis 25, the narrator refers to Abraham's story, thereby preparing the setting for Jacob's narrative. The crucial point is that Abraham entrusts Isaac with all his heritage and sends his other sons to the east (Gen 25:5-6). The narrator, ironically, clears the path for Isaac. The reader, introduced to Ishmael's genealogy, might expect to hear more about Ishmael, but instead, only learns of his death and the fact that his descendants live in southern regions of Arabia and Assyria (25:12-18). In contrast, after Abraham's death, Isaac enjoys the blessing at Lahai Ro'i (25:11). The location is significant since it distances him from his father's whereabouts at Mamre and places him at the well that recalls both distress and divine presence in their family through Hagar and Ishmael (16:14). However, it is only by moving to the Negev that he meets and is introduced to his future wife, Rebekah (24:62).

2.3 Gen 49: Rebekah at the Conclusion of Jacob's Cycle

The Bible does not specify when Rebekah died, but it notes that she was buried in the Cave of Machpelah alongside the patriarchs, Sarah, and Leah (49:31). This understated mention emphasizes the artistry of the narrative structure. Some preparatory elements concerning Isaac and Rebekah show that while Isaac is the bearer of the blessing in Abraham's family, Rebekah is introduced into the plot to help him fulfill the divine plan.

In summary, Rebekah's role is woven into the beginning and the end of Jacob's cycle. Once her role in passing the blessing to the next generation is accomplish-

hed, she vanishes from the scene, reappearing only at the closure of the narrative on the first patriarchs.

3. Characterization

To discern Rebekah's pivotal role, this analysis will focus on her and Jacob, who, though seemingly weaker, are essential in passing on the Abrahamic blessing. The narrator emphasizes the significance of these two characters through both characterization and the use of descriptive narrative modes, such as the *X-qatal* construction and the direct speech of characters, which serve as reflective narrative pauses, while the regular *narrative sequence of wayyiqtol* primarily governs the other two characters.² Rebekah's name (Heb. רַבְקָה, from the verbal root רָבַק, meaning "to tie firmly") aptly conveys her strong and resilient nature—a quality she demonstrates not only at the time of her betrothal but also throughout her married life with Isaac. Her character, first introduced in Genesis 22 and further developed through her actions in Genesis 24, has been comprehensively analyzed by Teugels (1994, 89–104). In this analysis, I will explore key traits in Genesis 24, where Rebekah is depicted as a divine agent, and further examine her role in Genesis 25 and 27, where her actions advance the blessing to the next generation.

3.1 Gen 24: Rebekah's Abrahamic Lineage

The initial characterization of Rebekah disrupts the servant's prayer (Gen 24:12–14) as she approaches the well (24:15). The narrator captures the reader's attention with the interjection "behold" (וַהֲגִידָהּ), immediately followed by a descriptive sequence using the *X-qotel structure*: "Rebekah is coming forth" (רַבְקָה יֹצֵאת). This narrative interruption explicitly emphasizes her Abrahamic lineage: "the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor." (24:15) This lineage, already referenced in her earlier introduction (22:20–23), underscores her significance within the broader narrative framework.

The verb יֹצֵאת ("to come/go forth") not only aligns with the servant's observation that the city's girls routinely come out to draw water (24:13) but also resonates with the servant's earlier query to Abraham about what should be done if the chosen bride refused to leave (24:5). The servant later emphasizes this arrangement when recounting the event to Rebekah's family, reinforcing that her "going out" directly corresponds to his request to God (24:45).

The narrative then employs a nominal clause followed by a *descriptive X-qatal phrase* to further characterize Rebekah: "The girl [was] very good-looking, a vir-

² While the narrative plot is primarily developed using the *wayyiqtol form* (conjunction "and" + verb in past tense), which depicts events unfolding in the foreground, the *X-qatal (or qotel) form* introduces a descriptive sequence. This sequence (subject + verb or participle in present tense) provides descriptions or information that may initially seem incidental but are, in fact, crucial for understanding the characters and the ongoing events in the foreground. For a more detailed discussion of these narrative modes, see Ska 1990; Alter 2011.

gin, and no man had known her” (24:16a: וְהַנְעִיךְ טַבַּת מְרִאָה מְאֹד בְּתוּלָהּ וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָהּ:). Her actions, on the other hand, are described using the *wayyiqtol narrative sequence*: “and she went down, filled [the jar], and came up” (24:16b: וַתֵּרֶד וַתִּמְלֵא וַתָּעַל), demonstrating her as an active participant in the story.

Rebekah’s deeds (24:17-20),³ which align with the servant’s request for water, further establish her as a “doer” in the narrative, as described by Teugels (1994, 97). Moreover, she fulfils the servant’s desire for a bride of Abrahamic lineage by identifying herself as “the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor” (Gen 24:24). Recognizing this as a sign, the servant bows down in worship and gratitude to the Lord (24:26-27).

The focus then shifts to Rebekah’s family dynamics. After Rebekah runs to inform her mother (24:28), her brother Laban assumes the role of inviting the servant into their home (24:30-33). Following the servant’s retelling of the events (24:34-49), Laban and Bethuel acknowledge the divine hand in the matter, entrust Rebekah to the servant, and they share a meal together (24:51-52). In this familial context, Rebekah’s determination to follow the divine plan is evident in her decisive declaration, “I will go” (24:58: אֵלַי), mirroring Abraham’s response to God’s call in Genesis 12:1.

In brief, Rebekah’s willingness to leave her family and homeland without hesitation reinforces the central motif of obedience and faith in the Abrahamic lineage. Consequently, she embodies key Abrahamic qualities – determination and faithfulness – that are crucial for following the path to God’s blessing.

3.2 Gen 25: Rebekah defines herself before the Lord

The beginning of Isaac’s genealogy marks a new narrative section: “These are the generations of Isaac” (Gen 25:19: וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת). His portrayal, “and it happened that he was forty years old, as he took Rebekah for his wife” (25:20: /.../ לֹו לְאִשָּׁה) serves as an introduction that reintroduces Rebekah as the daughter of Bethuel and the sister of Laban (25:20). Though the mention of Rebekah’s barrenness is brief, this narrative reticence is significant. The twenty-year period of childlessness is succinctly summarized in a single verse: “Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them” (25:26: וַיִּצְחָק בְּנֵי־שֵׁשִׁים: (שָׁנָה בְּלִדְתָּ אֹתָם), minimizing its prominence within the narrative.

Isaac’s love for Rebekah – first expressed in Gen 24:67, “and he loved her” (וַיִּאַהֲבֶיהָ) – compels him to intercede for her. Both his love and his subsequent actions are conveyed through the *wayyiqtol narrative sequence*. He prays to the Lord on her behalf, and the Lord responds to his prayer: “And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, and the Lord was entreated by him” (Gen 25:21: / וַיַּעֲתָר לוֹ יְהוָה: (וַיַּעֲתָר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ). This focus on divine intervention underscores the cen-

³ Her first words of welcoming “drink” are followed by a string of actions “she hastened, and lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink (Gen 24:18). Similarly, her promise “I will draw water for your camels” (24:19) are followed by action “she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew (24:20).

trality of God’s blessing in ensuring the continuation of Abraham’s lineage through the next generation. His prayer and the narrative description of the difficult pregnancy are intertwined by verbs in *wayyiqtol* thus forming a *narrative sequence* (25:21: “and he prayed/ and she conceived,” [וַיַּעֲתַר / וַיִּהְיֶה]; Gen 25:22: “and the children struggled together” [וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ]).

In this situation, Rebekah comes to the fore when the children struggle within her womb. Her question, “If this is happening, why this (to) me?” (25:22: אִם־כֵּן (לְמָה זֶה אֲנֹכִי), is ambiguous, reflecting either her pain and doubt or her desire to understand how to act. Importantly, Rebekah, previously portrayed as strong, now reveals her greatness by being the first to seek the Lord’s guidance, thus finding God’s purpose for her life. Moreover, the comparison of the similar question posed in different crucial situation (expressed by Rebekah but also Esau), shows the greatness of her character.

Gen. 25:22	אִם־כֵּן לְמָה זֶה אֲנֹכִי	“If so, <i>why that</i> , I am/ “If so, <i>why is this</i> happening to me?”
Gen. 25:30	הֲלֹעִיטָנִי נָא מִן־הָאֵדָם הָאֵדָם כִּי עָפָר אֲנֹכִי	“Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff, for I am faint.”
Gen. 25:32	לְמוֹת הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ [לְמָה־זֶּה לִי בְרִיחָה:]	“Behold, I am about/ going to die; so of <i>what use then</i> is the <i>birthright</i> to me?”
Gen 27:45	לְמָה אֲשַׁכַּל גַּם־שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד	“Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?”
Gen 27:46	אִם־לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת־הַתְּחָת כְּאֵלֶּה מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לְמָה לִי טוֹב	“if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, <i>what good</i> will my life be to me?”

Table 1: Comparison of the use of personal pronouns and questions in the narrative.

Rebekah does not define herself on her own terms, as Esau does (Gen 25:30: being faint, Gen 25:32: going to die), but rather sets herself in a search for the Lord (Gen 25:22: “And she went to search for the Lord” [וַתִּלְךְ לַדְּרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה]). Only when she tries to save Jacob, she uses this phrasing as an emotional means to convince both Jacob to flee to Laban as well as Isaac to send him away to his brother-in-law.⁴ By this move she distinguishes herself from all previous characters using a personal pronoun for defying oneself or his own actions (Gen 3:10).⁵

⁴ Rebekah, knowing that Esau plans to kill Jacob, she uses emotional, existential and socio-religious argument to convince Jacob to flee and Isaac to send Jacob away to Laban. She tries to show how pointless her life would be, if she would lose both sons (Gen 27:45) and if Jacob would take a wife from Heth’s daughters as Esau did. (27:46).

⁵ The use of first personal pronoun has usually a negative connotation: Adam hides himself as he is naked (Gen 3:10: עֵירֹם אֲנִי); Cain does not care for his brother (Gen 4:9: אֲנִי אֶחָי אֲנִי); Abram yields as childless to the Lord (15:2: וְאֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי) and Sara jealously complains to Abram that she gave him her servant (16:5: וְאֲנִי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּהִיקָד). Hagar flees from her mistress (16:8: בָּרַחַת). Abraham and Abimelech swear to one another to stipulate an alliance after they both cheated on one another

Rebekah's search for God is akin to Abraham's approach to God (18:27), yet she surpasses him in her pursuit of divine understanding (25:22), a stance later attributed to Moses (Exo 18:15: "the people come to me to inquire of God" [יבא אלי] [הָעַם לְדַרֵּשׁ אֵלַיִם]). Rebekah's encounter with the divine, marked by the prophetic oracle, is crucial for understanding her role within her family and before God. The oracle, expressed enigmatically (Gen 25:23), foretells the future of her twin sons and the nations they will lead:

"Two nations are in your womb;
and two peoples shall be separated from your body;
and one people shall be stronger than the other;
and the older shall serve the younger."

While the prophecy could be interpreted in multiple ways (Eichler 2019, 584–593), Rebekah relates it to her unborn twins (Gen 25:24), setting the stage for the narrative's irony and the unfolding logic of God's plan. The detailed description of the twins, Esau and Jacob, allows the reader to grasp the symbolic and political significance of the struggle between Edom and Israel (Alter 1996, 126). Within this context, the narrative reveals the logic of God's plan, where the younger son will prevail over the elder.

The contrasting descriptions of Esau and Jacob, along with the narrative techniques employed, build the reader's interest and sympathy toward Jacob, who is destined to carry on the Abrahamic blessing. Esau's characterization unfolds within a *wayyiqtol narrative sequence*, emphasizing his appearance and actions: "And the first came out red, and they called his name Esau" (Gen 25:25: וַיֵּצֵא / וַיִּקְרָאוּ).

In contrast, Jacob's introduction interrupts this sequence with an *X-qatal construction*, drawing attention to his symbolic gesture of grasping Esau's heel: "and his hand had hold on the heel of Esau" (25:26: וַיִּחַרְבוּ כֹּף יָמִינוֹ אֶחָיו וַיִּדְּוֹ אֶחָזֶז בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו). This act foreshadows Jacob's later struggles to obtain the blessing, highlighting his role as one who must "grasp" and even wrestle with God to secure his place as the bearer of the Abrahamic promise. Interestingly, Jacob's naming – marking his entry into the social world – is expressed in a *wayyiqtol form*, paralleling Esau's earlier naming: "and they called his name Jacob" (25:26: וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב).

The antipathy toward Esau is further developed through the *wayyiqtol narrative sequence* that presents him as "a man skilled in hunting and a man of the field" (25:27: וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צֹדֵד אִישׁ שָׂדֵה), contrasting with the *descriptive X-qotel* phrase depicting Jacob as "a simple man, dwelling in tents" (25:27: וַיְהִי יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם). The narrator subtly favors Jacob, the "complete, simple, quiet, blameless home-

(21:24.26: אָנֹכִי אֲשַׁבֵּעַ / אָנֹכִי לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי). Maybe, being humble is the right posture of a man either before the Lord or in front of a man, as is enacted by Abraham, who defines himself as dust and ashes before the Lord (18:27: וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר) and as a stranger and sojourner before Heth (23:4: גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב אָנֹכִי). At Bethuel's house the person's stance is firmer and thus the personal pronoun is more frequently used (24:24.27.31.34.37).

boy,” whose integrity resembles that of Job (Job 1:1), while later directly condemning Esau for “spurning his birthright” (Hamilton 1995, 181–182; Alter 1996, 128). The difference between the “smooth” Jacob and the “hairy” Esau, revealed later in the narrative (Gen 27:11), necessitates a disguise, with Jacob wearing Esau’s clothes and using animal skins to mimic Esau’s hunting actions. This will present a pivotal moment, as Jacob will not only grasp Esau’s heel but also seize his birthright and blessing (27:36).

The narrative then presents the parents’ preferences: Isaac’s love for Esau is conveyed through a *wayyiqtol form* (25:28: “And Isaac loved Esau” [וַיֵּאָהֱבֵב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו]), but this love is conditional, based on Esau’s ability to provide him with hunted game (25:28: “because he had a game was in his mouth” [כִּי־צִיד בְּפִיו]). This indicates how dependent Isaac was on his son (Goodnick 1995, 223; Alter 1996, 128; Matalon 2008, 245). In contrast, Rebekah’s love for Jacob is described using an *X-qotel form*, indicating an unconditional and constant love, likely rooted in the divine prophecy (Gen 25:28: “Rebekah loved Jacob” [וַרְבֵּקָה אֶהְבֶּת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב]), as Matalon notices (Matalon 2008, 246). The reader is met with a crucial point. This sets the stage for the subsequent narrative, where the stronger duo of Isaac and Esau will be challenged by Rebekah’s unwavering belief in the divine plan, which favours Jacob.

The narrative foreshadows how Jacob will gain the status of the firstborn and eventually receive his father’s blessing. The narrator intentionally plays with words, depicting Jacob as one who “cooks, boils, acts presumptuously” (Gen 25:29: וַיִּזְד) and Esau as one who “hunts game” (25:28: צִיד), thereby inverting the positions of the two brothers. Esau, initially presented as a strong hunter, is ironically left without food, while Jacob is the one preparing it (Hamilton 1995, 182). Moreover, Esau is revealed to be weak and shortsighted, trading his birthright for a simple meal, “that red stuff” (25:30: הָאֵדֹם הַזֶּה), due to an exaggerated fear of death, “what use then is the birthright to me?” (25:32: לִי בְכֹרֶהָ לִי לְמַעַן־חַיִּים). This impulsive act renders Esau unworthy of carrying the Abrahamic blessing (Alter 1996, 129), a failure further emphasized by his marriage to Hittite women (Gen 26:34–35). However, Jacob must still find a way to gain his father’s recognition of his status as the firstborn and receive his blessing.⁶

To sum up, Rebekah’s role in Genesis 25 is crucial as she exemplifies how to navigate life’s challenges through seeking divine guidance. Her example of faith and understanding is passed on to Jacob, who, through his thoughtful and determined approach, secures Esau’s birthright for himself and positions himself favorably for the future.

3.3 Gen 27: Rebekah’s agency in God’s plans

The narrative of Genesis 27 begins with the arrangement of the blessing between Isaac and Esau, marked by a *wayyiqtol sequence* that emphasizes the unfolding

⁶ Interestingly, the Book of Jubilees interprets the events favoring Jacob, since already Abraham himself saw the evil deeds of Esau and has blessed Jacob as the future holder of the blessing (Zucker 2019, 74–79).

of events (Gen 27:1: “And it came to pass/ and his eyes were dimmed/ and he called/ and he said” [וַיִּקְרָא / וַיִּאמֶר / וַיִּהְיֶה / וַיִּתְקַדֵּשׁ]). This sequence is driven by Isaac’s desire to secure a blessing for Esau through the preparation of a hunted game (27:1-4). Some scholars, such as Reiss (2004, 93–94), argue that Isaac’s actions are influenced by his traumatic experience during the Akedah (binding), suggesting that he seeks consolation in this moment by reenacting the scenario, albeit with Esau in the role of the provider of the sacrificial meal. Others, like Hyman (2005, 61–64), offer a different perspective on Isaac’s motivations.

The narrative sequence in *wayyiqtol*, describing Esau’s departure to the field to hunt – “and Esau went to the field” (Gen 27:5: וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו הַשָּׂדֶה) – is abruptly interrupted by an *X-qatal* as Rebekah secretly listens to the conversation: “and Rebekah was listening while Isaac was speaking” (27:5: וַיִּשְׁמַע רִבְקָה בְּדַבַּר יִצְחָק). This shift from *wayyiqtol* to *X-qatal* marks a pivotal narrative transition, moving from Isaac’s covert plan to Rebekah’s decisive intervention. Unlike Sarah, who overheard the conversation between Abraham and his guests and laughed secretly within the tent (18:13.15), Rebekah, upon hearing the discussion between Isaac and Esau, grasps the necessity for immediate and decisive action. The *X-qatal* construction continues as Rebekah reveals Isaac’s plan to Jacob: “Rebekah said to Jacob” (27:6: וַיִּרְבְּקָה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב), followed by her urgent command: “Now, my son, listen to my voice” (27:8: וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי). The structure of her command underscores its urgency and Rebekah’s personal authority over Jacob. This is conveyed through (1) the temporal adverb “now,” (2) the vocative “my son,” and (3) the imperative “listen to my voice,” forming a pattern of authoritative speech that demands obedience. Furthermore, Rebekah strategically reinforces Jacob’s connection to Isaac by consistently referring to Isaac as “your father” (27:6.9-10.12.14) and to Esau as “your brother” (27:6.11).

Deliberately omitting any mention of Esau’s hunting, Rebekah reframes the situation by emphasizing that the blessing is to be received in the presence of God (Gen 27:7). By doing so, she personally involves Jacob in her plan to secure the blessing (Hamilton 1995, 215–216). Notably, the narrative unfolds in divided scenes where the two brothers never meet directly but act solely under their parents’ instructions (Giuntoli 2013, 139–140). Rebekah takes an active role in executing the plan. Her determination is emphasized using the *yiqtol* (*imperfect*) tense with *cohortative force* in the phrase “I will prepare a savory dish” (Gen 27:9: וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים לְאָבִיךָ),⁷ indicating her deliberate intention to see the plan through. Additionally, her willingness to accept the potential curse (Gen 27:13; for the deceit of the blind, see Lev 19:14; Deut 27:18) resulting from their deception (Gen 27:8-10; 27:14-24) further illustrates both her resolute character and her belief in the prophecy received during her pregnancy (Večko 2014, 153; Giuntoli 2013, 140).

However, some additional factors must be considered. First, the narrative clearly presents the divine prophecy given to Rebekah (Gen 25:23) and Esau’s rejection of his birthright (25:34) as influences on the final outcome. As Tsymbalyuk

⁷ For aspects of mood and modality see Gianto 1998, 183–198.

and Melnik (2020, 3) note, Rebekah's actions do not stem from a dislike of Esau – evidenced by her preservation of his clothing – but rather from her understanding that Esau has failed to appreciate the value of the family tradition and blessing, which has brought grief to both parents (Gen 26:34-35). Second, as Giuntoli (2013, 140–141) observes, there is an element of irony in the narrative for the Israelite audience, who might feel sympathy for Jacob despite the moral dilemmas presented. Third, there are consequences for both Rebekah and Jacob, as noted by Davis (2008, 91). Rebekah never sees Jacob again after he leaves for Padan-Aram, and Jacob must endure the repercussions of his actions, including twenty years of difficult exile.

Rebekah, convinced of the righteousness of her actions, does not perceive them as deceit but as a necessary fulfilment of God's plan (Goodnick 1995, 225). This is not an act of revenge against Isaac for his earlier deception in Gerar but rather a plan to ensure the enactment of God's plan, as revealed to her during her pregnancy (Gen 25:22). Once Rebekah's determination is established, the narrative accelerates into a *wayyiqtol sequence* as Jacob and Rebekah work together to execute the plan. They prepare the dish and bread for Isaac (27:14: "And he went, and fetched, and brought [וַיִּקְחֶהּ וַיִּבְרֶךְ] / and she made" [וַתַּעַשׂ; 27:17]: "and she gave" [וַתַּתֵּן]) and disguise Jacob using Esau's clothing (27:15: "and Rebekah took" [וַתִּקַּח רֶכְשָׁה] "and dressed" [וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ]) and the skins of the kids to cover his hands and shoulders (27:16). While Isaac, relying on his failing senses (sight) and disregarding his stronger senses (hearing, odour, and instinct), mistakenly blesses Jacob, Rebekah remains firm in her conviction that this action is in the best interest of their family and in accordance with God's will. While Rebekah's plan seems to succeed, there is still a narrative suspense before the blessing will be imparted (27:27-29), as Giuntoli (2013, 142) notices.

Reflecting on this narrative, it becomes evident that the theme of divine testing, previously seen in Abraham's binding of Isaac, now extends to the family dynamics. Isaac, constrained by conventions and his attachment to Esau, fails to grasp the broader divine plan. In contrast, Rebekah, guided by the prophetic revelation she received during her pregnancy, takes on the responsibility of fulfilling God's plan, even at the risk of losing both sons. The narrative does not focus on the morality of Rebekah's actions but on the fulfilment of a greater good: the continuation of God's plan through Jacob, the appointed heir (Matalon 2008, 249). Biblical logic suggests that the wicked will ultimately alienate themselves (Ps 58:3-4), and here, the narrative illustrates how the blessing is transferred to the deserving individual despite complex circumstances (Fass 1992, 372).

While Abraham's blessing had a universal scope – "in your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 22:18) – the blessing Isaac confers on Jacob is more individualistic, emphasizing the dominance of one nation over others and the impact of the blessing or curse on those who interact with Jacob (27:29). This focus reflects the initial prophecy (25:23) regarding the destinies of Jacob and Esau. Isaac's declaration to Esau – "I blessed him, and he shall be blessed" (27:33) – indicates that the blessing was irrevocable and aligned with God's plan. Howe-

ver, due to the narrow scope of this blessing, no additional blessing of equal magnitude could be given to Esau. Instead, he receives a secondary blessing that resembles a curse: he will live by the sword and serve his brother, although he will eventually break free from Jacob's dominion (27:40). This outcome underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of the blessing, which Isaac will subsequently bestow upon Jacob.

In summary, Rebekah's determination to fulfil the divine prophecy is evident in her strategic planning, which includes employing deception to ensure that Isaac's blessing is rightly conferred upon Jacob.

3.4 Gen 27: Rebekah's Role in the Family

The deceit engineered by Rebekah triggers Esau's rage and his plan to kill Jacob (Gen 27:41). Once more, Rebekah becomes aware of the situation. The narrator's use of the passive form "it was reported to Rebekah" (27:42: וַיִּגֹּד) suggests not divine intervention nor eavesdropping, but rather underscores Rebekah's central and authoritative role within the family. This section of the narrative is structured with a specific rhetorical framework:

Gen 27:41-42: Introduction of the plot

Gen 27:42-45: Rebekah informs Jacob and sends him to Laban

Gen 27:46: Rebekah complains to Isaac

Gen 28:1-5: Isaac's command and blessing of Jacob

Gen 28:6-9: Esau's reaction by marrying Ishmael's daughter

Rebekah functions as a wise mediator between the men in her family. Initially, she intervenes between the elder and the younger son. Understanding the urgency of the situation, she acts swiftly, employing a series of imperative verbs: "sends," "calls," and "says" (Gen 27:42: וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר). She directly communicates Esau's plan to Jacob, using the particle "behold" to emphasize the immediacy of the threat (27:42: הִנֵּה). Rebekah, as she has done before, urges Jacob once again to heed her voice, emphasizing the urgency of the situation and the need for immediate action by using (1) the temporal adverb "now" (27:43: 2) (עַתָּה), the vocative "my son," (27:43: בְּנִי) and (3) the personal emphasis on the verb of perception "hear my voice" (27:43: שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי), followed by a series of verbs of motion: "get up, flee, hide yourself" (27:43: קוּם בְּרַח-לְךָ). Her language is direct and authoritative, underscoring her urgency and concern for Jacob's safety.

Rebekah's honesty with Jacob is evident as she attributes Esau's wrath to Jacob's deceit: "what you have done to him" (27:45: עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ). She acknowledges that Jacob will face consequences for his actions, just as she will face her own, given that she will never see Jacob again despite her hope to see him return after Esau's anger subsides (27:44-45). Rebekah's role as a mediator continues as she subtly persuades Isaac to send Jacob away to her brother Laban (27:46), by lamenting Esau's choice of Hittite wives, which she presents as a common grievance (26:35).

Isaac, in response to her indirect suggestion, calls Jacob, blesses him, and commands him not to marry a Canaanite woman but to go to Haran (28:1), using another series of imperative verbs: “rise, go, take for yourself” (28:2: קוּם לְךָ וְקַח־לְךָ). This part, while certainly reflecting redactional changes, narratively introduces the tranquillity over the conflict, where Isaac’s fatherly role emerges upon both his sons, who obey his orders. (Giuntoli 2013, 148–149)

At the moment of Jacob’s departure, Isaac blesses him once more, this time expanding the blessing to include fruitfulness and multiplication, so that Jacob will become a community of nations and inherit the land promised to Abraham (Gen 28:3-4). This blessing marks a shift from the individualistic perspective of Genesis 27:29, where the focus was on Jacob’s dominance over his brothers and other nations, to a more universal perspective, where Jacob’s lineage is seen as the assembly of nations (Gen 28:3; similarly echoed in 35:11; 48:4).

The narrator then concludes with Esau’s response. Reflecting on Isaac’s blessing and command to Jacob, Esau realizes his father’s disapproval of his Canaanite wives. In an attempt to remedy the situation, Esau marries one of Ishmael’s daughters (28:6-9). However, the narrative focus shifts away from Esau as the plot now centers on Jacob, indicating that Rebekah’s role in the narrative has been fulfilled. Her last mention occurs at the end of Jacob’s cycle when Jacob, before his death, blesses his sons and notes that he was buried with Rebekah in the Cave of Machpelah (49:31). As Quesada (2018, 563) observes, this mention “signals the completion of the foundational phase of the Genesis Ancestor stories”.

In summary, Rebekah, guided by her deep relationship with God and her keen understanding of her family’s dynamics, emerges as a wise and proactive force in God’s plan. Instead of adhering to conventional practices, she discerns and acts upon the deeper, divine intentions, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to the blessings meant for those devoted to life, family, and God.

4. Biblical Echoes

Rebekah is portrayed as a figure of faith, righteousness, and wisdom, whose role as a chosen agent of God is reflected in various typological connections with other biblical figures, particularly Abraham and certain women in the Old Testament. This section will explore these connections by focusing on (a) the call, (b) prayer, and (c) promise and covenant, drawing out the significant parallels between Rebekah and these other figures.

4.1 Abraham

The typological connection between Rebekah and Abraham is profound. This connection is evident in several aspects of their narratives, particularly in their responses to divine calls, their practice of prayer, and their roles in the unfolding of God’s promises and covenant.

Call

The correspondence between God's call to Abraham and Rebekah's response to her circumstances is striking. God's command to Abraham, "Go forth" (לֶךְ-רָחֵק) from your country, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land which I will show you" (Gen 12:1), is intertwined with the promise of making Abraham into a great nation. Abraham's obedience is immediate; he departs without hesitation.

In contrast, Rebekah's departure from her home involves a subtle but decisive test of whether she is divinely appointed. This test is encapsulated in the actions of the servant, who, after a prayerful encounter, recognizes Rebekah's hospitality – offering water to both him and his camels – as a sign of God's choice. The servant's prayer and Rebekah's family's recognition of the divine orchestration, as revealed in Gen 24:50: "The matter comes from the Lord," culminates in a blessing: "May you, our sister, become thousands of ten thousands, and may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them." (24:60) However, the most decisive moment is Rebekah's own declaration, "I will go" (24:58: אֵלַי), which mirrors Abraham's readiness to follow God's call. Rebekah's decision is arguably even greater, as she acts on subtle hints through human agency rather than a direct divine promise, yet she fully embraces the role God has prepared for her.

Prayer

Abraham is portrayed as a righteous man of faith (Gen 15:6), whose relationship with God is marked by constant interaction, not only at his initial call (12:1ff.; 22:1ff.) but also at various stages of covenantal promise (15:1 ff.; 17:1ff.; 18:1ff.). Notably, at the brink of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction, Abraham intercedes with God on behalf of the people (18:22-33). This intercession is marked by the verb of movement "he approached" (וַיִּגֵּשׁ) and the subsequent dialogue "he said" (וַיֹּאמֶר) in Gen 18:23, demonstrating Abraham's proactive engagement with God.

Rebekah, on the other hand, during her pregnancy, also seeks divine guidance due to the struggle within her womb. The narrative uses the phrase "she went to inquire of the Lord" (25:22: וַתֵּלֶךְ לִקְרֹא אֶת-יְהוָה), which parallels Abraham's approach to God but is uniquely profound as it marks a woman's unprecedented direct relationship with God through prayer. Reiss (2004, 95) highlights this moment as a significant display of Rebekah's faith, showing her willingness to confront and seek understanding from God in a manner similar to Abraham.

Promise and Covenant

Abraham is undoubtedly the prototype of God's promise and covenant. His call is directly linked to a promise that serves as the foundation of the covenant, wherein God pledges to make Abraham into a great nation and to bless all peoples through him (Gen 12:2-3). This covenant is later reaffirmed through numerous descendants (13:14-17), the establishment of a formal covenant (15:1-20), and symbolically marked by the change of name and circumcision (17:2; 12-14).

Rebekah, while not the primary recipient of the covenant, plays a crucial role in its continuation. The promise she receives, which emphasizes the covenant's

future through her sons, particularly Jacob (Gen 25:23), mirrors the covenantal blessings given to Abraham. The blessing Rebekah receives from her family (24:60), echoes the covenantal blessing bestowed upon Abraham after the binding of Isaac (22:17b), further solidifying the typological connection between Rebekah and Abraham (Quesada 2018, 561).

4.2 Echoes in the Old Testament

Rebekah's role as a divine agent is reflected in the actions of other women in the Old Testament, who, like her, act in unconventional ways to ensure the continuation of God's plan. Tamar, for instance, secures her rightful place within Judah's lineage by taking bold and unconventional steps, echoing Rebekah's determination to fulfil God's promise.

In Genesis 38, Tamar is initially denied her rightful position as the mother of Judah's heir when Shelah is withheld from her. Understanding the covenantal significance of securing offspring within Judah's line, Tamar disguises herself to ensure her union with Judah. This act, though unconventional, is vital in preserving the line of Judah, much like Rebekah's actions ensure the continuation of the Abrahamic blessing.

Wisdom literature, particularly in the Book of Proverbs, also echoes Rebekah's role by extolling the virtues of a wise wife within the household. Proverbs 19:14 states that "a prudent wife is from the Lord," and other passages highlight how a wise woman brings honour and stability to her household (Prov 11:16; 12:4; 14:1). These proverbs resonate with Rebekah's role in guiding her household and ensuring the fulfilment of God's covenant.

4.3 Use of Rebekah's Episode in the New Testament

Although Rebekah is not mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew, her story is referenced in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul, who uses Rebekah as a key example in his theological arguments regarding divine election and God's sovereignty.

In Romans 9:10-12, Paul introduces Rebekah as a critical example to illustrate the doctrine of divine election. He emphasizes that God's choice is not based on human actions or merit but on His sovereign will. Paul writes, "Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'" (Rom 9:10-12)

Paul's argument centers on the concept that God's choice of Jacob over Esau, declared before their birth and independent of their actions, exemplifies the principle that divine election is rooted in God's mercy rather than human achievement. This is further emphasized when Paul quotes Malachi 1:2-3: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" in Rom 9:13. By invoking Rebekah's story, Paul underscores the theme of God's sovereign will, showing that God's choice operates beyond human

understanding or conventional expectations. Rebekah's role in the narrative becomes a test case for understanding God's providence. Her actions and the divine oracle she received (Gen 25:23) are interpreted by Paul as evidence that God's plan unfolds according to His purposes, not human merit. In this context, Rebekah's story serves as a foundational example of the theological principle that salvation and blessing come from God's grace rather than human effort.

By invoking Rebekah's narrative, Paul deepens the theme of divine providence. Rebekah's decision to support Jacob, despite cultural norms favouring the firstborn, and the prophecy she received regarding her sons, are used by Paul to illustrate how God's purposes often subvert human expectations. This idea aligns with the broader biblical theme that God frequently chooses the unexpected or seemingly weaker individuals to fulfil God's plans – a principle evident not only in figures like Moses but also in Paul himself. Paul acknowledges the power of God's grace, recognizing that he is strong in Christ even when physically weak (2 Cor 12:9-10).

5. Conclusions

Rebekah is portrayed in the biblical narrative as a strong and virtuous woman whose life is deeply intertwined with God's plan. Her significance lies not only in her actions but also in her profound relationship with God, which shapes her decisions and the destiny of her family. This relationship with God first manifests during her pregnancy when she seeks divine guidance and receives a prophetic oracle that defines her role in the unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant.

Throughout the narrative, Rebekah's love for Jacob stands in contrast to Isaac's conditional affection for Esau. Rebekah's love, rooted in the divine prophecy, guides her actions as she orchestrates the transfer of the Abrahamic blessing from Isaac to Jacob. Her willingness to engage in deception is not motivated by self-interest but by her unwavering belief in the prophecy she received, which designated Jacob as the rightful heir to the blessing.

Rebekah's wisdom is evident in her ability to navigate the complex dynamics of her household, mediating between Isaac, Esau, and Jacob to ensure the fulfilment of God's plan. Her actions, though morally ambiguous, are driven by a higher purpose – the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant through the chosen son, Jacob. The narrative does not focus on the morality of her actions in isolation but rather on the broader divine plan that her actions help to realize. In her final role within the narrative, Rebekah's influence ensures that Jacob receives the blessing meant for him, securing his place in the lineage that will lead to the formation of the nation of Israel. Her foresight and determination, though costly – resulting in her separation from Jacob – are essential for the preservation and transmission of the Abrahamic blessing.

Rebekah's story resonates beyond the Genesis narrative, influencing New Testament theology, particularly in Paul's discussion of divine election in Romans 9.

Here, Rebekah's narrative becomes a key example of God's sovereign choice, illustrating that divine favour is not based on human merit but on God's will.

In conclusion, Rebekah is portrayed as a chosen agent of God, whose actions are crucial in the preservation and continuation of the Abrahamic blessing. Her life exemplifies the interplay between divine sovereignty and human agency, demonstrating how individual decisions, guided by faith and divine revelation, contribute to the fulfilment of God's larger plan. Rebekah's legacy, both in the Old Testament and in the theological reflections of the New Testament, underscores her role as a pivotal figure in the biblical story, since through her seeking the Lord, she demonstrates how a human being can discern divine will and thereby become an agent of God's purpose and a bearer of His blessing into the world.

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