

# The Promise of Abraham in the Hands of a Woman

Among the providential women of the Old Law, one especially stands out for her lofty mission and the similarity of her mentality with Our Lady's. Who was she?



Sr. Patricia Victoria Jorge Villegas, EP

**F**orming one Heart with her Divine Son, “the First-born of all creation,” in whom “all things were created, in Heaven and on earth” (Col 1:15-16), the Blessed Virgin is the axis around which the events of history revolve. God modelled all of creation on Jesus and Mary, and any forms of virtue or beauty that exist in souls and other beings are but reflections of their unsurpassable perfections.

Accordingly, the patriarchs, the prophets and the holy women of the Old Testament were, each in their own way, prefigures of the Saviour and His Mother, and their lives constituted true prophecies concerning them. Isaac, for example, announced the mystery of Redemption by accepting to be sacrificed to God by the hands of his own father (cf. Gn 22:1-9), and Judith, in beheading Holofernes (cf. Jdt 13:7-8), prophesied our Lady's victory over the race of Satan.

Now, among the providential women of the Old Law, one draws our attention in a particular way because of the trust that Providence placed in her and because of the similarity of her mentality with Our Lady's, even

before She appeared on this earth: Rebekah, wife of Isaac.

*“Two nations are in your womb”*

Indeed, from her youth Rebekah manifested an admirable docility to the divine designs. On hearing the invitation from the lips of Eliezer, ser-

vant of Abraham, to marry Isaac, and discerning the Lord's hand in this call, she did not hesitate to let go of all she had and to give her “*fiat*”, as the Mother of the Redeemer would later do at the proposal of the Archangel (cf. Gn 24:33-58; Lk 1:38).

The sacred author, under the inspiration of the Paraclete, describes her thus: “The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known” (Gn 24:16). On seeing her, Isaac was immediately charmed by her virtues and her beauty, and thus consoled after the death of his mother, Sarah.

Now, as usually happens with God's chosen ones, it was not long before perplexity entered Rebekah's life. Despite the holiness of her union with Isaac, she was barren, which constituted a paradoxical obstacle to the fulfilment of the divine promise that hovered over both of them... However, aware that “with God nothing will be impossible” (Lk 1:37), this upright soul dedicated herself to pray confidently for progeny.

After twenty sorrowful years of waiting, Rebekah finally began to sense that she had conceived. However, she experienced something akin to a duel with-



Vassil (CC by-sa 1.0)

**Discerning the Lord's hand in the invitation proffered by Eliezer, she unhesitatingly let go of all she had and gave her “fiat”**

Rebekah and Eliezer - Collegiate Church of Our Lady of Dinant (Belgium)

in her, which caused her terrible pain. Unable to understand what was happening, “she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger’” (Gn 25:22-23).

This revelation – the only one in Sacred Scripture in which God directly addresses a woman – was not long in coming to pass. Rebekah gave birth to two children who represented two lines of spiritual descendants, enemies until the end of time: that of the faithful souls and holders of the divine blessing, personified in Jacob, and the lineage of transgressors, whose prototype was Esau.<sup>1</sup>

### *The fate of the promise in her hands*

Rebekah’s prophetic mission began with the birth of her twin sons. The only one who knew the real designs of God on both of them, she had to obtain the patriarchal blessing for her youngest son Jacob.

Isaac believed that the promise of Abraham would rest on Esau, and for this reason he had a certain preference for him. He was also unaware that this unworthy son had sold his birthright to his brother in exchange for a dish of lentils. Sensing his approaching death, he wanted to bless him. Before doing so, however, he asked him to go hunting and prepare him a succulent dish.

Rebekah, who had heard the dialogue between the two, understood that at that moment the destiny of Abraham’s promise passed through her hands. Wise, prudent and sagacious, she immediately devised a plan in favour of her son Jacob. Knowing that Isaac was no longer able to distinguish



Reproduction

### **Rebekah’s intervention in events was decisive. What would have become of the divine promise in the ungodly hands of Esau?**

Detail of “Isaac blessing Jacob”, by the Isaac Master - St. Francis of Assisi Basilica, Assisi (Italy)

physiognomies because of his advanced age, she ordered Jacob to go to the field and bring two young goats so that she herself could prepare them. In this way, he could go ahead of Esau and receive the blessing in his place. Jacob hesitated: “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing” (Gn 27:11-12). But Rebekah, seized by a supernatural certainty in the divine promise, replied: “Upon me be your curse, my son” (Gn 27:13).

### *An essentially Marian soul*

After preparing the dish to be offered to Isaac, Rebekah began to disguise her youngest son: she dressed him in his brother’s clothes and covered his hands and neck with goat’s hair. Thus wrapped up in his mother’s protection, Jacob finally presented himself to his father. Divine Providence then guided the Patriarch’s discernment and the blessing of the birthright was granted to him, according to the will of the Lord (cf. Gn 27:18-29).

Through her “holy stratagem full of mystery”<sup>2</sup> and her maternal mediation

with the chosen son, Rebecca was a Marian soul par excellence. Indeed, “Our Lady was also endowed with the gift of holy sagacity. [...] The Virgin humiliates the devil by using power, discretion and cunning to trample upon his head and snatch from his accursed clutches the souls he intends to bring to perdition.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, She treats all those who trust in Her as new “Jacobs”: She adorns them with the prerogatives that they lack to be heirs of the blessing and obtains for them from God the graces and mercy that by their own merits they would never attain.

### *A fidelity that marked history!*

Undeniably, Rebekah’s intervention in events was decisive. Without her, what would have become of Abraham’s posterity? What would have become of the divine promise in the irresponsible and ungodly hands of Esau? The history of our Faith will never cease to praise the holiness of this lady, whose example will fill faithful souls with admiration until the end of time!

May she intercede for us with Mary Most Holy and grant us the grace to imitate her fidelity when, if it pleases God, circumstances may cause the future of Holy Church to pass also through our hands, however small and weak. ✧

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNON DE MONTFORT. *Tratado da verdadeira devoção à Santíssima Virgem*, n.185-200. 40.ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2010, p.180-192.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, n.184, p.177.

<sup>3</sup> CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Maria Santíssima! O Paraíso de Deus revelado aos homens [Mary Most Holy! God’s Paradise Revealed to Men]*. São Paulo: Arautos do Evangelho, 2020, v.III, p.34-35.