

The Reception of Rebekah Within Genesis

By

Alison Forbes

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MA Biblical Interpretation

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically assess the relationship between the character of Rebekah and her reception history. This dissertation aims to understand how she has been received by scholars and artists in comparison with how Rebekah is literarily portrayed in the biblical text. This dissertation utilises two key methodologies, reception history and textual analysis, which have been utilized to understand Rebekah's presentation in Genesis through undertaking an independent reading of the texts to assess how she is portrayed. To investigate Rebekah's reception, it is important to understand Reception Theory and the emphasis on including all areas of reception as viable. This dissertation contains three main chapters, each dedicated to a prominent passage in Rebekah's narrative, Genesis 24, Genesis 25: 19-28 and Genesis 27, investigating both her portrayal and their receptions. Throughout this study it is demonstrated that Rebekah's reception history is complex and diverse, which does not always align with her textual presentation. Throughout the text of Genesis, Rebekah is first introduced as a holy woman. This is built upon through the developing passages, where she receives divine knowledge from God and eventually sees God's plans reach fruition in Genesis 27. Beginning in Genesis 24, Rebekah is understood as the ideal woman. However, she is edited by scholars, like Josephus, who portray her as the ideal woman but not so important she was chosen for Isaac by God. However, as her narrative develops her reception changes from an ideal woman to a manipulator, with little regard for her motives for tricking Isaac. There is a lack of presentation of her prophetic nature. Instead, her reception history focuses on Genesis 27, where she is portrayed as Lady Macbeth, controlling the men in her life.

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I would finally like to dedicate this dissertation to my Grandfathers. To Terry Lock, who believed education was the most important tool and who I know would be proud of me today. As well as Claud Forbes, who travelled from Jamaica for a better life and read the bible every night. I am their legacy.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

An Introduction

Introductory Aims

This dissertation shall critically assess and investigate the reception history of the biblical matriarch, Rebekah, within the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis has been identified and

selected as it holds the entirety of Rebekah's narrative. As one of the biblical matriarchs, Rebekah's reception is particularly enlightening as she is an intrinsic aspect of the ancestry recorded within Genesis. As Desmond Alexander states, Genesis contains a select family history, which is focal to the text, "Genesis highlights in a special way the early ancestry."¹ By marrying Isaac, Abraham's son and heir, Rebekah establishes herself within the line of this select genealogy. Rebekah's reception history is an important topic, as it illuminates how a profoundly significant ancestor has been understood and received through scholarship and artistic works. With this genealogy in mind, it is essential to understand Rebekah's reception within Genesis as she becomes essential to the second generation of ancestors recorded.² Investigating Rebekah and how she has been understood, in turn, illuminates ideas surrounding the second generational cycle and the entirety of the ancestry in Genesis.

To effectively examine Rebekah's reception history, this dissertation contains three central aims. Firstly, this dissertation aims to investigate the character of Rebekah within Genesis, exploring her importance and presentation. This must be achieved before being able to acknowledge her reception, as it is important to establish how she is depicted within the text. Before examining how this presentation has been understood throughout her reception history. Following this, this dissertation also aims to explore Rebekah's reception and reflect upon how scholars and artists have understood and received her biblical character. Both scholarly and artistic works will be considered to reflect the diversity in reception history. While it is not possible to cover all aspects of reception, through focusing on scholarly and artistic works a variety of reception can be considered. The final aim of this dissertation is to critically assess whether Rebekah's reception history reflects her textual presentation and if her presentations coincide with her textual depiction.

Strategy

Considering the three central aims outlined above, there are three central passages regarding Rebekah, her character and her reception which have been selected, Genesis 24, Genesis 25:19-28 and Genesis 27. These passages shall be uncovered as they provide a complete portrait of Rebekah's narrative within the Hebrew Bible and are essential to understanding

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, 'From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 61 (1) (1989), p.19.

² Lieve Teugels, 'A Matriarchal Cycle? The Portrayal of Isaac in Genesis in the Light of the Presentation of Rebekah', *International Journal for Philosophy and Theology*, 56 (1) (1995), p. 61.

her character. These passages are also the most prominent in her reception history, with varied engagement from scholars and artists. Each of the subsequent chapters will feature a textual analysis of the selected passage, an investigation of its scholarly reception and an insight into its artistic reception.

Chapter one focuses on Genesis 24. Genesis 24 is Rebekah's introduction into the Genesis genealogy narrative and, thus, is the beginning of her own.³ This is critical to study as, to understand her whole narrative fully, it must be studied from its beginning to its conclusion. This primary appearance highlights what Genesis 24's author has regarded as most important about Rebekah herself, as this is the reader's first chance to understand her character. This is seen as the first introduction and character description are vital as they allow readers to construct an understanding of their personality.⁴ To achieve this, the author has presented what they believe to be the most important qualities and personal attributes of Rebekah and is also the first opportunity for scholars and artists to draw their inferences regarding her portrayal.

Chapter Two will focus on Genesis 25:19-28 which has been chosen as it is a profound and central moment to Rebekah's character and development. This is reflected as God's voice holds an important place within the Hebrew Bible, as it holds immeasurable importance, "divine speech is of an altogether higher order of significance than human speech."⁵ Within this passage, Rebekah has the opportunity to commune with God, the significance of speaking directly with God and this experience is central to Rebekah's narrative. It is a turning point in her life and a compelling experience for her character. Genesis 25: 19-28 also impacts Rebekah's character throughout the remainder of her narrative, as it changes her motives. Thus, it is important to investigate this passage and its reception as it illuminates her relationship with God.

The final chapter, Chapter Three, centered on Genesis 27, where Isaac has been tricked into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. This chapter has been chosen as a purposeful bookend to Genesis 24 as it is the final physical depiction of Rebekah within Genesis. This passage is the last textual evidence to investigate regarding her importance and character. It is necessary to

³ Nahum Sarna, 'Rebekah', *The Jewish Virtual Library*, (2007) < <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/rebekah> > [Accessed 8th March 2024].

⁴ Aldo Nemesio, Chiara Levorato and Lucia Ronconi, 'The Reader in the Text: The Construction of Literary Characters', *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 29 (1) (2011), p.1.

⁵ Christopher C. H. Cook, *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine: Scientific and Theological Perspectives*, (Routledge: London 2019), p. 57.

study as it is the finale of her narrative and through studying both her beginning and her end a full chronicle can be established. As well as this, Genesis 27 is also significantly important to Rebekah's reception history. Genesis 27 is a prominent passage that heavily features within her artistic and scholarly reception. This is seen as it is a divisive passage amongst scholarship, with a clear divide amongst scholars, "founder of the nation or quintessentially deceitful female?"⁶

Methodology

Two central methodologies have been selected for the investigation into the literary and artistic portrayal of Rebekah. Reception Theory and textual analysis. Reception Theory has its roots in reception history, which is a continuously developing field of study examining how biblical texts have been remembered. As Jonathan Roberts explains in his definition of reception history, it is a study of the effect of biblical texts that "comprises every single act or word of interpretation of that book (or books) over the course of three millennia."⁷ Therefore, Reception Theory is an attempt to reflect upon the wide variety and diverse collection of material concerning biblical texts, as any act of interpretation past the conception of the text is viable material. This is also reflected in the work of Brennan W. Breed, who defines Reception Theory as removing the study of biblical texts from their historical context and exploring how they have been understood in the periods "after they were composed after they were finalized."⁸ This dissertation aims to apply Reception Theory to Rebekah's portrayal within three selected chapters of Genesis (24, 24 and 27) and this shall be achieved by exploring her subsequent vast reception history. Therefore, Rebekah's scholarly reception will be studied and her artistic reception history will also be investigated. While Reception Theory encompasses a diverse range of material, this dissertation has chosen to specifically focus on the connection between scholarship and artistic representations. Rebekah's artistic reception history has been chosen to reflect the variety of thoughts and materials, as she holds an interesting place amongst biblical art. This dissertation will explore physical painted representations as well as musical depictions and will not be limited by focusing on only the

⁶ Deborah L. Goodwin, 'And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes', in *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians Throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, ed. By Franklin T. Harkins, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 2010), p.179.

⁷ Johnathan Roberts, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. By Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011) p.1.

⁸ Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*, (Indiana University Press: Indiana 2014), p.3.

scholarly reception history. Rebekah's depiction amongst scholarship is also important, it is equally vital to investigate the physical depictions of Rebekah and how these artistic portrayals reflect and depict the artists understanding of her character.

Textual analysis is a method of study that has often been applied to biblical interpretation. Textual analysis aims to investigate biblical passages with a similar approach to studying literary works. As Ernest Wendland states reading the bible as a literary text is an approach that encompasses a wide range of techniques and interests, considering its structure, language and place amongst the larger biblical narrative.⁹ This will be applied to the character of Rebekah, considering her entire narrative and how the original author of Genesis has aimed to portray her. This dissertation aims to understand her character and how she has been presented within the text, considering her physical depiction, actions and motives. As well as how she interacts with other characters within the text. Textual analysis and interpretation are also greatly affected by the reader's context, as "one's social location or rhetorical context is decisive of how one [...] interprets biblical texts."¹⁰ Therefore, it is important to consider that this textual analysis and interpretation will be influenced by a personal context. With this understanding in mind, this dissertation's textual analysis will be inherently affected by personal experience. This is unavoidable as being a woman is an intrinsic aspect that impacts how the author of this dissertation interacts with the world and biblical texts.

⁹ Ernst Wendland, 'A Literary Approach to Biblical Text Analysis and Translation', in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, ed. By Timothy Wilt, (London: Routledge 2001), p. 179 - 230.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 'The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 107 (1) (1988), p. 3.

Chapter One Exploring Rebekah's Reception Within Genesis 24.

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 24 signals the beginning of Rebekah's narrative and her official introduction to the wider story of Genesis. Some scholars argue that Genesis 22 is her beginning, as it predicts Rebekah's birth.¹¹ It reveals a family genealogy that is later shown to be Rebekah's (cf. Gen 22:20). However, despite this argument, Genesis 24 is the first physical appearance of Rebekah and the first specific mention of her name. This passage provides ample material for the study of Rebekah as it is one of the longest chapters within Genesis, containing 67 verses.¹² Thomas Brodie titles this passage as "the Rebekah episode [...] the most elaborate in Genesis"¹³ highlighting its explicit connection to Rebekah and her character development. This is key to understanding Rebekah and her reception as it "initiates Rebekah as a full character."¹⁴ Genesis 24 permits scholars to form insights regarding who she is and her core characteristics, as it is a chapter dedicated to Rebekah's personhood. It is first necessary to investigate the text and what it presents surrounding Rebekah before understanding the consequent reception. To demonstrate this Genesis 24 must be read with a central focus on Rebekah's character, allowing for a sole focus on her presentation within a passage dedicated to her introduction.¹⁵ After this Rebekah-focused reading and examination has been achieved, the scholarly and artistic reception of Rebekah can be observed. It is important to reflect on the physical portrayal of Rebekah's reception and how artistic works have illuminated their ideas in a way that can be physically viewed.

¹¹ Lieve Teugels, 'A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 19(63) (1994) p. 91.

¹² Thomas Brodie, 'Rebekah, Betrothal, and Genealogy (24:1-25:18): The Double Betrothal (Chap 24) The Double Genealogy (25:1-18)' in *Genesis ad Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2001) p.278.

¹³ Brodie, 'Rebekah, Betrothal, and Genealogy (24:1-25:18): The Double Betrothal (Chap 24) The Double Genealogy (25:1-18)' p.278.

¹⁴ Teugels, 'A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives', p.89.

¹⁵ Jan Jaynes Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', *Review and Expositor*, 115(4) (2018) p. 559.

1.2 A Reading of Genesis 24: Rebekah Chosen by God

The first recurring theme witnessed in Genesis 24 is Rebekah as a divinely elected figure. The servant, being sent by Abraham to travel and find a bride for Isaac, eventually comes to rest at a well (Gen 24:3-4). Faced with this difficult task, the servant asks God to provide a woman for Isaac, requesting that God make this woman identifiable by a test designed so the servant can find the woman whom God has chosen as worthy and has determined is the suitable bride for Isaac.¹⁶ This test shapes Rebekah's importance within the narrative if Rebekah fulfils this test, then she identifies herself as a profoundly significant woman God chose to become the next matriarch.¹⁷ The servant sets specific requirements for this test; "Let the young woman to whom I shall say 'Please offer your jar that I may drink' and who shall say 'Drink, and I will water your camels' – let her be the one whom you have appointed" (Gen 24:14-15).

Verse 15 marks her official entrance; "Before he could finish speaking, there was Rebekah" (Gen 24:15). This rapid entrance suggests that God "is already ahead of the servant"¹⁸ as she arrives to pass the test before it has finished being set. Rebekah's status as chosen by God is cemented within her introduction and Rebekah's significance is continuously built upon. Before she passes the test that the servant has set, she is seen to excel at unspoken tests rooted in biblical social expectations. The first is her genealogy, and it is also the first information that is given regarding who she is. After her entrance, the passage states how she is directly related to Abraham (Gen 24:15). Highlighting her "genealogical qualifications"¹⁹ as a future wife to Isaac, suggesting she has been chosen because she has the correct established family history and genealogical connections. This is mirrored through the text the servant was sent out to find a wife who was specifically one of Abraham's kindred from the land of his birth (Gen 24:6). Through her genealogy, Rebekah passes this requirement set by Abraham. The second unspoken test is that of her virginity, this is evidenced in the first physical description of Rebekah, "the young woman was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known" (Gen 24:16). Rebekah is immediately identified as a beautiful virgin, an important contributing factor to her eligibility as a bride. Within the biblical context being a virgin was

¹⁶ Brian Peterson, *Genesis: A Pentecostal Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill 2022) p.210.

¹⁷ Tammi J. Schneider, *Women in the Book of Genesis*, (Michigan: Baker Academic 2008) p.61.

¹⁸ Jack M Sasson, 'The Servant's Tale: How Rebekah Found A Spouse', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 65(4) (2006), p.255.

¹⁹ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009) p.222.

“ideal virtue and as the desirable state before marriage.”²⁰ Through these introductory lines and physical descriptions, it can be assumed that she is the woman God chose. She has the correct genealogy and is a virgin, thus, it can be seen that she is the answer to the servant’s prayer²¹ even before she passes the official test. This notion is furthered as Rebekah officially passes the test, as soon as the servant inquires for a sip of water, she does not hesitate. Rebekah immediately replies, “Drink my lord” and also waters his camels without being asked (Gen 24:18-19). She is not limited by her words and instead physically shows that she is the woman chosen by God, she does not simply speak but she proves it through her actions. While she does not reply exactly as the servant had wanted, “Drink and I will water your camels” (Gen 24:14), she does provide a chain of actions that confirm the test and exceed expectations.²² Through this official passing of the test, Rebekah is established as the future wife of Isaac, who has been chosen by God above all others. She not only passes this test but exceeds the requirements, coupled with her familial background and virginity Rebekah is cemented as the woman whom God has dictated to marry Isaac and worthy of God’s favour, to be the next matriarch.

1.3 A Reading of Genesis 24: Rebekah’s Character

Genesis 24 provides copious material regarding Rebekah’s character and one of the most prominent is her confident and active nature. Tammi Schneider claims that Rebekah is “one of the more active women in Genesis, and her actions contribute almost as much to her character.”²³ The actions of Rebekah define her character and through these actions she passes the servant’s test, depicting a confident and decisive figure. Rebekah passes the servant’s test and exceeds through her actions, she uses little words and instead sets about watering the servant and camels. Rebekah not only passes the test of the servant but “her actions at the well are clear and decisive”²⁴, another qualifying factor in her match with Isaac. She is not a woman who hesitates, she acts fast and confidently, which is emphasized throughout the language used to describe Rebekah. She is described through her actions multiple times within the text. She is often defined using the adjective quick, such as,

²⁰ M. H Poorthuis, ‘Rebekah as a Virgin On Her Way To Marriage: A Study In Midrash’, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*, 29(4) (1998) p.438.

²¹ Sasson, ‘The Servant’s Tale: How Rebekah Found A Spouse’ p. 242

²² Sasson, ‘The Servant’s Tale: How Rebekah Found A Spouse’ p. 254.

²³ Tammi J. Schneider, *Women in the Book of Genesis*, p.49.

²⁴ David E Fass, ‘Unbinding Mother Rebekah’, *American Jewish Congress*, 41(4) (1992) p. 365.

“quickly lowered her jar” (Gen 24:18) and “quickly emptied her jar” (Gen 24:20). This is also present within the original Hebrew language text of Genesis, suggesting that the original author, and not only the translator, placed great care into presenting Rebekah as a woman defined through her actions. The original Hebrew text uses *temahēr* and *tārās*, translated as “she hurried”, and “she ran” to “emphasize the deliberate action she took.”²⁵ Thus, it is clear that her actions are central to her character as Rebekah is physically dynamic and this is what defines her.

Rebekah’s dignified character is also revealed as she is presented as the standard for biblical women. This is seen through her veiling, highlighting how she is revealed and defined through her actions. Through this veiling Rebekah takes initiative as she is “not veiled during the journey, no one tells her to veil herself.”²⁶ Rebekah once again takes action to show herself as a strong and modest woman. Genesis 24 concludes with Rebekah travelling with the servant to meet Isaac, when she sees him on the horizon she quickly falls from her camel and covers her face with her veil, “so she took her veil and covered herself” (Gen 24: 64-67). This continues to reveal how Rebekah’s actions contribute to understanding her character, as through this act she is displayed as a modest and humble woman. This is mirrored as it is only upon seeing Isaac that she veils herself, signifying her humility when approaching her soon-to-be husband. Carol Meyers suggests that Rebekah’s act of veiling herself signifies her status as betrothed and references the “elite women in ancient Assyria.”²⁷ Meyers offers a profound image of Rebekah that closely links her to the dignity and modesty of the elite, highlighting that she is a regal woman. Lieve Teugel’s study of this passage also supports this understanding of Rebekah’s character as they state Rebekah’s veiling demonstrates her humility and modesty as a wife and “reveals a trait that fits the biblical image of a good wife.”²⁸ Through Rebekah’s veiling, the reader can understand a core feature of her character, that she is the ideal biblical woman a humble and dignified figure. This is not the only occasion where Rebekah is understood as an ideal biblical woman and wife, as has been previously studied, her genealogy and virginity also implements this idea, as well as her active nature and confidence in passing the servant’s tests.

²⁵ S Pace Jeansome, ‘Images of Rebekah: From Modern Interpretations to Biblical Portrayal’, *Chicago Society of Biblical Research*, 34 (1989) p.36.

²⁶ Schneider, *Women in the Book of Genesis*, p.55.

²⁷ Carol Meyers, *Rebekah: Bible*, (2021) < <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rebekah-bible> > [Accessed 6th November 2023].

²⁸ Teugels, ‘A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives, p.97.

1.4 The Reception of Rebekah Within the Work of Josephus as a Case Study

The work of Flavius Josephus offers an interesting insight into how he understood and received Rebekah, as he presents a dimensional interpretation. This is evidenced within his work, *Jewish Antiquities*, which features his unique retelling of the Genesis narrative. The Rebekah he presents is significantly less important than in the original text of Genesis. As Dr Malka Simlovich presents, Josephus rewrites several sections of Genesis, especially ones concerning Rebekah.²⁹ One of the first notable changes is that he adjusts Abraham's instructions. His version states that Abraham sent the servant after having chosen Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, "Abraham, having decided to give him to wife Rebecca" (A.J. 1.242). In contrast, Abraham's instructions in Genesis are vaguer and the servant is sent to find any bride from the land of Abraham's kindred (Gen 24:3-4). While this difference appears slight it has a substantial impact on Rebekah's reception within *Jewish Antiquities*, she loses her profound status as chosen by God. Instead, Abraham chooses Rebekah for Isaac, while there is significance in being chosen by Abraham, as he holds a profound place as the ancestor³⁰ and has chosen her for his son. However, being chosen by God is incomparable and has been stripped from her character. Within the original Genesis text, the servant inquires of God and asks that they signal the woman God has anointed to be married to Isaac (Gen 24: 14-15). Thus, the servant is led to the woman that God has specifically chosen for Isaac. However, Josephus' text admits this and states the servant was led to Rebekah by Abraham's orders, "in accordance with Abraham's decision, the servant is sent to arrange for Isaac's marriage with a definite, named woman."³¹ Therefore, Rebekah is no longer ordained by God but by Abraham, stripping her of being divinely chosen as the next matriarch. God still permits the match, as God allows the servant to find Rebekah, "if it were his pleasure that this marriage should be consummated, Rebecca [...] be found amongst these maidens." (A.J. 1.245). Nevertheless, her status as being divinely chosen to become the next matriarch is completely diminished, suggesting that Josephus does not support the notion that Rebekah is important enough to receive this honour. This idea is supported further as Louis Feldman explains,

²⁹M. Z. Simkovich, *Rebekah's Character*, (2021), < <https://www.thetorah.com/article/rebeccas-character> > [accessed 25th August 2023].

³⁰ F. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004) p.1.

³¹ Christopher Begg, 'Josephus' Rewriting of Genesis 24 in Ant. 1.242-255', in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques*, ed. By Jozef Zsengeller, (Brill: Boston 2014), p. 269.

Josephus's overall attempts to reduce Rebekah and her role within his alteration of Genesis.³² It can be argued that this rewrite is a clear example of his work against the character of Rebekah, as he has purposely chosen to change this detail so that Abraham chose Rebekah. As Feldman suggests, his retelling of the biblical texts creates an insight into his views and opinions.³³ It is plausible that he would have been aware of the repercussions of this change and how it altered her importance. This suggests that Josephus does not agree with Rebekah being divinely chosen, as he purposefully changes this to Abraham, keeping her character important as she has been hand-picked by the ancestor. While stripping her of the honour of being chosen by God. Thus, Josephus presents a complex reception of Rebekah and Genesis 24, she is important but not so significant that God would directly choose her for Isaac.

However, it should be noted that this is not the only change to the text that Josephus makes, as another notable adaptation suggests that she does still hold some importance in his narrative. Josephus's retelling of the well scene claims that the servant asked all the maidens at the well for water, and they all denied him as "it was no easy matter to draw it" (A.J. 1.246). Whereas, the biblical text only features one woman, Rebekah and there are no other maidens. This change is significant as it elevates Rebekah's ability to pass the test as others openly fail it. By comparing her with these women she is superior, as all refused but her, suggesting that she is special and unique. Christopher Begg studies the rewritten Genesis by Josephus and explains that by adding the other women the original text is adapted and the other women are reproached for their "lack of hospitality."³⁴ While this is a change that presents Rebekah as a unique and exalted woman, this change is undermined through previous changes Josephus makes and by removing her status as chosen by God her character is completely rewritten. This is further supported as Josephus makes another conscious modification, to Rebekah's detriment. This is the lack of Rebekah's veiling; Josephus's account ends simply with "and Isaac married her" (A.J. 1.255). As previously investigated her veiling highlights her regal qualities and her stature as "a modest bride."³⁵ This defining moment is omitted by Josephus and raises questions regarding why he has attempted to squash the profound moments of Rebekah's narrative, and by extension, reduce her character. This is another attempt to diminish Rebekah's character as her veiling is a profound aspect of

³² Louis Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, (Oakland: University of California Press 1999) p.311.

³³ Louis Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, (Boston: Brill 1998), p. xx.

³⁴ Begg, 'Josephus' Rewriting of Genesis 24 in Ant. 1.242-255', in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques*, pp 271- 273.

³⁵ Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', p.561.

her character. This is opposed to the Rebekah that is presented and understood within Genesis 24.

1.5 Scholarly Reception of Rebekah within Genesis 24

Nonetheless, Rebekah's scholarly reception is not wholly destructive, several scholars praise her importance within Genesis 24. The work of Teugels, *A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24* is an excellent example of this. Teugels' study offers an investigation into her characterization and presentation within the text, illuminating her importance. Teugels achieves this by comparing the characterization of both Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah is defined by Teugels as a strong, independent woman, the desirable marriage candidate whose "decisiveness and purposeful behaviour deserve special mention."³⁶ Isaac, in contrast, is described as "largely absent from the story"³⁷ despite being the groom of this marriage narrative. It is through this comparison that Teugels' reception of Rebekah is made clear, as a more prominent and significant character than Isaac. Teugels implies that Rebekah is the protagonist of this narrative, the most significant person within it, an example of scholarly work praising Rebekah Genesis 24. The work of Brodie, *Rebekah, Betrothal, and Genealogy (24:1-25:18): The Double Betrothal* also mirrors this notion. Brodie admires Genesis 24's unique woman-centered narrative explaining that Rebekah is the manifestation of God's love and guidance within the passage.³⁸ Brodie also understands Rebekah to be a prominent focal point of the text with profound importance. She is the "radiant personification of God's love" and a "divinely sent helper"³⁹ She holds an indescribable place within the passage as not only the focal figure but a character who is intimately linked to God. This is further supported through the work of Schneider who praises Rebekah repeatedly and claims that her description proposes that she is "somehow innately good" as well as chosen by God.⁴⁰ These studies highlight how certain scholarly works understand and receive Rebekah as a profound and central character of Genesis 24, the figure the text focuses on and a woman who is close to God. Rebekah's reception within

³⁶ Teugels, 'A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives, p. 97.

³⁷ Teugels, 'A Strong Woman, Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives, p. 99.

³⁸ Brodie, 'Rebekah, Betrothal, and Genealogy (24:1-25:18): The Double Betrothal (Chap 24) The Double Genealogy (25:1-18)' pp.280-282.

³⁹ Brodie, 'Rebekah, Betrothal, and Genealogy (24:1-25:18): The Double Betrothal (Chap 24) The Double Genealogy (25:1-18)' pp.280-282.

⁴⁰ Schneider, *Women in the Book of Genesis*, p.49.

Genesis 24 is not entirely dominated by works that attempt to diminish her role, such as Josephus.

1.6 Artistic Reception of Rebekah within Genesis 24



Figure 1 gathers water.⁴⁴ The figure of Rebekah commands the attention of the viewer, for she has a striking appearance. As the London National Gallery states “Pellegrini has emphasized Rebecca’s luminous, pale skin and the golden curls of her hair.”⁴⁵ This depiction of Rebekah is intriguing as she is presented as a beautiful but inaccurate figure, particularly concerning her pale skin and blonde hair. Reverend Wil Gafney rationalizes that through several paintings and artistic depictions “biblical characters have been whitewashed” and had

These artistic receptions have been chosen as to what they highlight regarding their connections to the text and the scholarly receptions already studied. They offer a new insight into the reception of Rebekah within Genesis and her scholarly reception that has been studied so far. The first artistic depiction of Rebekah is the oil painting titled *Rebekah at the Well* by the Venetian painter Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini.⁴¹ Pellegrini is regarded as an influential 18th-century painter whose work has been described as decorative and illusionistic⁴² with bold and bright colours.⁴³ This is exhibited in his portrayal of the well scene, which features Rebekah and the servant conversing while she

⁴¹ Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, *Rebekah at the Well* [Oil on Canvas], (1708-13), < https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/#/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000871267 > [Accessed 17th November 2023].

⁴² Ian Chilvers, ‘Pellegrini, Giovanni Antonio’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 5th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015).

⁴³ Bernard Aikema and Ewoud Mijlief, ‘Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini 1716-1718: A Venetian Painter in the Low Countries’, *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art*, 44 (1993), p.221.

⁴⁴ Pellegrini, *Rebekah at the Well* [Oil on Canvas].

⁴⁵ The National Gallery, *Rebecca at the Well*, (2023) < <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giovanni-antonio-pellegrini-rebecca-at-the-well> > [Accessed 17th November 2023].

European values placed on them.⁴⁶ Pellegrini's work is a clear example of this as his depiction places a European interpretation of beauty upon the figure of Rebekah to depict her noble qualities, as exemplified through her blonde hair and pale skin. When studying the relationship between pale skin and beauty in 18th-century art it can be seen that portraits of women from this era had an "emphasis on the transparency and paleness of female skin" and how this pale skin was closely linked to the feminine ideal.⁴⁷ Thus, Pellegrini's pale representation of Rebekah suggests that he is attempting to portray her importance and ideal qualities, as through this painting, the viewer can only rely on her image to understand her wider character. Pellegrini is attempting to highlight Rebekah's significance as an ideal biblical woman through her outward appearance, painting her in his contextual notions of beauty to achieve this. Therefore, it can be assumed that Pellegrini's pale Rebekah is an attempt to promote her as a figure that is beautiful and feminine ideal. Pellegrini achieves this through a beauty standard that is prominent within his context. This is seen as she has significantly paler skin when compared to the servant⁴⁸ suggesting that is important for Rebekah in particular to be pale, as this pale skin emphasizes her ideal character. Therefore, Pellegrini receives Rebekah as a prominent figure and his depiction is an attempt to emphasize her noble qualities. Pellegrini attempts to promote Rebekah as a holy and ideal beautiful woman through his familiar notions of beauty and holiness. However, it would be amiss to not address how this representation erases Rebekah's racial identity and instead forces European notions for her to be seen as beautiful. Pellegrini's reception of Rebekah within Genesis 24 mirrors the biblical text and while she is not presented as overly active, through her regal appearance it can be understood that she has been received as a noble and important character. Despite these inaccuracies of her appearance, it is undoubtable that Pellegrini is attempting to display a Rebekah that is significant, and that the viewer should pay attention to. This is mirrored within the text as she is presented as a figure that God has ordained. Through his notions of beauty, Pellegrini reinforces this as she stands apart from the other figures in the painting, with paler skin which has been seen to link to the feminine ideal of his context. Thus, Pellegrini echoes the text of Genesis 24 as he depicts Rebekah who is the feminine ideal and above other women, suggesting he is trying to connect her to her

⁴⁶ Wil Gafney, *Whitewashing Biblical Characters*, (2022), < <https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/whitewashing-biblical-characters/> > [Accessed 25th November 2023].

⁴⁷ Angela Rosenthal, 'Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture', *Art History*, 27(4) (2004), p.572.

⁴⁸ Pellegrini, *Rebekah at the Well* [Oil on Canvas].

holiness and favour with God. This also connects to scholarly works that support Rebekah's status as chosen by God and as a holy woman, such as the work of Brodie.

The artistic reception of Rebekah within Genesis 24 also encompasses musical depictions as well as physical art. Amongst these musical depictions are oratorios, often defined as a musical genre that was first established in 1660s Italy and is a "sacred, narrative-dramatic text based on a biblical story."⁴⁹ It is important to note the context of these works when young women had chastity and morality heavily placed upon them and "forced to suppress their individual needs."⁵⁰ Helen Leneman offers an in-depth analysis of three separate oratorios that depict Genesis 24 in her work, *Exploring Biblical Women in Music*, citing three separate oratorios that portray Rebekah. One prominent theme throughout these oratorios is that Rebekah is portrayed as a "pale version of Rebecca" from the biblical text.⁵¹ This is seen through Leneman's analysis as they state that all three works promote a Rebekah who is overly pious and submissive. It has been understood that Rebekah within Genesis 24 is a strong, confident and divisive character, however, within these musical pieces, this is replaced with a submissive and fragile Rebekah. These oratorios are composed by Ferdinand Hiller, Cesar Franck and Celanie Carissan separately. Leneman states Rebekah within these oratorios is an "androcentric mold of an obedient and compliant woman."⁵² This is evidenced within all three oratorios, Hiller omits the watering of the camels and diminishes her strength in doing so, Franck's oratorio excludes "verses that depict Rebecca's strength and independence" and Carissan's Rebecca is overly thankful that she has been chosen to water the servant, praying to God continuously.⁵³ It is notable that all three examples feature this depiction of Rebekah and suggest that these composers are intimidated by her strong character and therefore, have softened her within their portrayals. This is supported through Carissan's oratorio, where Isaac is presented as the distinct central character, while Rebekah is subdued. While Rebekah sings passionately and seductively, Isaac has a strong tenor and "emerges as a romantic hero."⁵⁴ Carissan's representation of Rebekah subdues her character to inflate Isaac, a character who is largely absent from the biblical narrative. However, within

⁴⁹ Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio: Vol. 1: The Oratorio in the Baroque Era: Italy, Vienna, Paris Centuries*, (Carolina: University of North Carolina Press 1977), p.4.

⁵⁰ USC Dornsife: College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, *Women of 16th Century Venice*, (2024), <<https://dornsife.usc.edu/veronica-franco/women-of-16th-century-venice/>> [Accessed 18th March 2024].

⁵¹ Helen Leneman, 'Exploring Biblical Women in Music', in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. By Susanne Scholz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020), p.379.

⁵² Leneman, 'Exploring Biblical Women in Music', p. 380.

⁵³ Leneman, 'Exploring Biblical Women in Music', pp. 379-380.

⁵⁴ Leneman, 'Exploring Biblical Women in Music', p. 381.

this musical piece, he is largely present and significant. These oratorios directly contrast the Rebekah character within Genesis 24, where she is portrayed as active and confident, while Isaac only appears once. They instead replace her with a more docile notion of a woman. Rebekah's strong identity is switched to a damsel who needs Isaac. This is reminiscent of Josephus' understanding of Rebekah within Genesis 24 as he also edits her narrative to present her as a more submissive character who is important but not so important God would choose her for Isaac.

1.7 A Conclusion on Genesis 24

Overall, through this reading of Genesis 24, several key aspects regarding Rebekah and her nature have been studied. The first key theme that has been identified is that of Rebekah as a sacred woman, a figure who has been hand-picked and chosen by God. She is cemented as worthy of being Isaac's wife through other unspoken criteria, such as her virginity and genealogical connections. These ideas allow the reader to understand why God has chosen her to become the next matriarch, as she is more than qualified. It is through her actions that she signifies herself as the wife chosen by God, as instead of speaking she physically proves to the servant that she is who he has been searching for. As a confident and decisive character, Rebekah is a prominent feature in Genesis 24. She can also be understood as a modest and refined woman, displayed through her self-veiling, she is not ordered to do this but does so of her own volition. This signifies that it was important to her to cover herself before her future husband, strengthening her modesty and humility.

The scholarly reception of Rebekah is predominantly in her favour, understanding her as a woman who is deeply important to both the narrative and God, arguably more so than her soon-to-be husband Isaac. This is supported by the study of numerous scholarly works and how they perceive the figure and characterization of Rebekah. However, the work of Josephus presents a challenge to this understanding as he attempts to undermine and diminish her importance. He also alters sections of the narrative that contribute to the detriment of her character. This is evidenced through the removal of her veiling and the alteration of who has chosen her for Isaac. These moments are central to her importance and character and through adapting them, he has stripped this significance. This raises questions regarding why he has felt the need to alter the text like this and why specifically he changed Rebekah's character but not that of Isaac or Abraham.

The artistic reception of Rebekah is as diverse and complex as her scholarly reception. Certain depictions, such as Pellegrini's artwork attempt to highlight Rebekah's noble and beautiful character through her outward attractiveness. This is seen as Pellegrini depicts Rebekah as the model of a beautiful and ideal woman within his cultural context. However, he achieves this at the detriment of her racial identity and accuracy. However, Rebekah again features a diminishing of her character. The musical works that have been studied attempt to present a portrayal of Rebekah that is an inaccurate representation of her character within the biblical text. They present Rebekah as a submissive and pious character, who does not reflect her active and confident character within Genesis 24. Now that Rebekah's introduction to Genesis has been studied her next prominent appearance must be investigated to understand how her reception history begins to develop now that she is established within the text.

Chapter Two Exploring Rebekah's Reception Within Genesis 25: 19-23.

2.1 Introduction

Genesis 24 has presented Rebekah as an active and holy character, primarily reflected within her reception history. Scholars and artists recognize her as a prominent character who is modest with divine ordinance. However, there are exceptions to this as noted in the work of Josephus and Rebekah's presentation within Oratorios. This study of Rebekah's introduction raises questions regarding how her character and reception will develop as her narrative does. Does her character continue to reinforce this divine image and receive praise from both scholars and artists? Does she face similar rewrites and edits such as seen within Josephus' Genesis 24? The study of Rebekah's reception and character will continue through examining Genesis 25, as it continues to give further insight into her narrative. While the whole of Genesis 25 is an important text, for this study the scope has been narrowed, as to allow appropriate attention to be paid to Rebekah. Therefore, Genesis 25: 19-28 has been specifically chosen as it offers a second reflective insight into Rebekah's character. This passage is necessary to study Rebekah's character as she has a life-altering experience that is fundamental to her development in the text, as Rebekah receives a holy oracle from God.⁵⁵ This passage takes place shortly after the death of Abraham at one hundred and seventy-five years old (Gen 25:1-11). Abraham's death marks the end of the first cycle of biblical ancestors within Genesis and marks the beginning of the second cycle, the time of Isaac and Rebekah a patriarch and matriarch. This is important when studying Rebekah within this passage as it gives the first insight into Rebekah fulfilling her role as matriarch, as she is now one of the "major actors" of this biblical cycle.⁵⁶ Rebekah was deemed qualified for this role throughout Genesis 24, where she was selected by God and proved herself worthy. Genesis 25:19-28 shall be read through a Rebekah-focused lens to fully focus on her importance and character within the passage. Once this study has been achieved the artistic and scholarly reception of Rebekah can be investigated with a focus on Josephus' adaptation of this narrative, as well as selecting other evidence of rewriting. It is also important to consider the

⁵⁵ Rachel E. Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women's Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible*, (Sheffield Phoenix Press: Sheffield 2015), p.20.

⁵⁶ Jae Gu Kim, 'The Existence and Function of the Isaac-Rebekah Cycle (Genesis 23:1-25:18), in *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckham*, ed. By Joyce R. Wood, John E. Harvey and Mark Leuchter, (T&T Clark: New York 2006), p.39.

distinct lack of artistic portrayals of Rebekah's divine experience and what this suggests regarding how these artists understood her importance. Especially when considering the focus on her labour narrative and her sons, instead of her prophetic experience.

2.2 A Reading of Genesis 25:19-28: Rebekah As The New Matriarch

Genesis 25 marks the beginning of Rebekah fulfilling her role as the next matriarch, a role that she was chosen for by God and established as worthy through the servant's tests within Genesis 24. This is highlighted through the passing of Abraham, initiating the start of the second ancestral cycle, where Rebekah and Isaac take precedence.⁵⁷ Within the text, Rebekah is emphasized as the new matriarchal figure through her close link to Sarah. Sarah dies before Rebekah is introduced to the narrative (cf. Gen 23), despite this, the two matriarchs are closely connected. This is significant as Rebekah is now one of the leaders of this biblical cycle, replacing Sarah.⁵⁸ This is made exceptionally evident through Rebekah's difficulty conceiving and how this explicitly mirrors Sarah's earlier narrative. As Jae Gu Kim explains, "Rebekah is Sarah's substitute and successor"⁵⁹ and this difficulty intrinsically links both women, establishing Rebekah as a matriarchal figure who is Sarah's successor. Rebekah's infertility is central to her narrative within Genesis 25:19-28 as seen in the beginning of the text. The opening introduces Rebekah and Isaac's lack of children by establishing a list of Isaac's descendants, of which there are none (Gen 25:19-20). This is the first indication that the couple is yet to conceive as children are notably absent. This is further developed only a few lines later as Isaac is seen praying, "Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren" (Gen 25:21).

Rebekah's difficulty conceiving is reminiscent of Sarah's long struggle for children earlier in Genesis. Sarah's struggle to bear children is one of her most prominent narratives and begins in Genesis 16, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children" (Gen 16:1). Sarah's struggle for children is prominent that she even laughs at the idea of being able to have a child (Gen 18: 14). Both women and the similarity of their experiences suggests a closeness between the two matriarchs. It is also clear that both women can only have children through God's

⁵⁷ David Cotter, *Berit Olam; Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: Genesis*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press 2003), p.82.

⁵⁸ Kim, 'The Existence and Function of the Isaac-Rebekah Cycle (Genesis 23:1-25:18), p.39.

⁵⁹ Kim, 'The Existence and Function of the Isaac-Rebekah Cycle (Genesis 23:1-25:18), p.39.

intervention, confirming their connection. For Rebekah, Isaac prays to God over their lack of children, and in response to this prayer, God allows Rebekah to become pregnant with twins, “the lord granted his prayer and his wife Rebekah conceived” (Gen 25:21). In comparison, Sarah is only able to birth Isaac in her old age when God promises them a son and Sarah laughs at the idea of finally having a child (Gen 18: 14). This promise is eventually fulfilled as she conceives at the age of ninety, “The lord did for Sarah as he had promised. She conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age” (Gen 21:1-2). The similarity of their narratives further bonds the two women and Rebekah is reinforced as a matriarchal figure. Sarah’s barrenness is “reversed” by God who “has the last laugh at the birth of the miracle child Isaac.”⁶⁰ Rebekah’s infertility is remedied through the intercession of Isaac praying and God’s response.⁶¹ Kim states how God’s power is made clear through the control God exhibits in the infertility narratives, as for both women God is the only force able to solve their fertility problems.⁶² Not only do they suffer from infertility, but they also receive the same solution, God’s intervention. This is distinct within the Hebrew Bible as there are five infertility narratives and three of these are surrounding the matriarchs.⁶³ Thus, establishing a matriarchal pattern. Kim states how God’s power is made clear through the control God exhibits in the infertility narratives, as for both women God is the only force able to solve their fertility problems.⁶⁴ Rebekah is cemented as a biblical matriarch through this struggle as it bonds her with Sarah and future matriarchs. Her barrenness connects Rebekah and Sarah reaffirming her matriarchal status. Thus, Rebekah is presented as a strong matriarchal figure who is as important and profound as Sarah the original matriarch and “ancestress of her people.”⁶⁵ The similarities between these barren narratives and their solutions intrinsically link these two women and highlight Rebekah as a matriarch who is close to her predecessor.

2.3 A Reading of Genesis 25:19-28: Rebekah As Prophet

⁶⁰ Janice P. De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an*, (Boston: Brill 2018), pp. 87-94.

⁶¹ De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an*, p. 103.

⁶² Kim, ‘The Existence and Function of the Isaac-Rebekah Cycle (Genesis 23:1-25:18), p.49.

⁶³ Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton 2015), p.22.

⁶⁴ Kim, ‘The Existence and Function of the Isaac-Rebekah Cycle (Genesis 23:1-25:18), p.49.

⁶⁵ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Sarah/ Sarai: Bible*, (1999) < <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sarahsarai-bible#:~:text=After%20securing%20Isaac's%20position%20in,the%20ancestress%20of%20her%20people.&text=Sarah%20is%20the%20wife%20of,the%20ancestress%20of%20all%20Israel.> > [Accessed 5th December 2023].

As the narrative of Genesis 25 continues it develops Rebekah's holy presentation as it portrays a figure who speaks directly to God and receives a divine oracle. This oracle from God impacts Rebekah's narrative and her actions within later Genesis, specifically Genesis 27.⁶⁶ To declare Rebekah as a prophetic figure, it is first necessary to define a biblical prophet. This is challenging as biblical prophets "come in all shapes and sizes"⁶⁷ and are hard to define. Kenneth Seeskin offers an in-depth study regarding the biblical prophets, specifically within his work, *Thinking about the Prophets: A Philosopher Reads the Bible*. Seeskin is a current scholar of Jewish civilizations specializing in Jewish philosophy.⁶⁸ Seeskin offers his definition of a biblical prophet, claiming that a prophet is a person who "can read omens or has received a divine communication" and transmits the voice of God.⁶⁹ According to Seeskin's definition, Rebekah qualifies as a prophet, she receives divine communication. Through receiving this information Rebekah also has the opportunity to transmit and act on the voice of God, which is evidenced within later investigations of Genesis 27. However, Pamela Scalise defines a prophet within the Hebrew Bible through certain characteristics, specifically their proclamations of God's good news and the future rebuilding of the holy land.⁷⁰ Rebekah within this passage does not align with Scalise's definition of a prophet but she does with Seeskin's. While Rebekah does not fulfil Scalise's notion of a prophet, she does receive an oracle and prophecy for the future from God. Rebekah's qualifying factors, according to Seeskin's definition, are displayed as the narrative of Genesis 25:19-28 continues. Through an investigation of the text and a consideration of Seeskin's ideas, it can be seen that Rebekah does have a prophetic nature.⁷¹

After struggling to conceive God intervenes upon Isaac's request and Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. However, it is immediately noticeable that "her pregnancy does not go well"⁷² as the text describes Rebekah's struggles. The two children within her womb begin to fight causing Rebekah to become uncomfortable. In response to this pain Rebekah expresses her discomfort, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" (Gen 25:22). Rebekah, a woman of action, decides to confront God regarding her pain, the reader is told that she "went to inquire

⁶⁶ Goodwin, 'And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes', p.190.

⁶⁷ Kenneth Seeskin, *Thinking About the Prophets: A Philosopher Reads the Bible*, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press 2020), p. xx.

⁶⁸ The Torah.com, *Professor Kenneth Seeskin*, (2022), < <https://www.thetorah.com/author/kenneth-seeskin> > [Accessed 18th March 2024].

⁶⁹ Seeskin, *Thinking About the Prophets: A Philosopher Reads the Bible*, p. xvii.

⁷⁰ Pamela Scalise, 'Circling the Prophets: Refocusing the Definitions of Who They Were and What They Did', *Review and Expositor*, 97(4) (2000), p.441.

⁷¹ This shall be further explored on pages 25 and 26.

⁷² S.A. Brayford, *Genesis*, (Boston: Brill 2007), p.343.

of the Lord” (Gen 25: 22). As Carolyn J. Sharp claims Rebekah takes “spiritual initiative”⁷³ to address her situation and this is a continuation of Rebekah’s decisive nature that was first witnessed in Genesis 24. Rebekah in Genesis 25:19-28 is a character who is brave and takes her fate into her own hands. It is clear that Rebekah in Genesis 25:19-28, is as active and determined as her first introduction to Genesis, “instead of sitting passively with the pain in her horizon, Rebecca interrogates life.”⁷⁴ She is notably the first woman in the Hebrew Bible to directly question God regarding her fate.⁷⁵ Not only is Rebekah active and bold to seek direct answers from God, but God provides her with a divine prophecy regarding the fate of her children;

“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” (Gen 25:23).

Reflecting upon Seeskin’s earlier definition of a prophet and this statement from God, Rebekah’s image as a prophetess is solidified. This is supported by Rachel Adleman’s claims that Rebekah clearly receives a prophecy but is noticeably lacking from a list of seven official prophetesses.⁷⁶ Rebekah decides to “consult Yahweh and receive a divine oracle”⁷⁷ learning godly knowledge regarding her children and the future of Abraham’s line. This suggests that Rebekah has been blessed with divine insight into God’s plan for her sons and has been selected to receive this knowledge. Rebekah is honoured by becoming privy to divine knowledge that has not been given to anyone else within the text, specifically her husband.⁷⁸ God does not offer this information to Isaac, their father. Instead, selecting their mother, suggesting that Rebekah was chosen to hear this prophecy for a particular reason and as part of God’s plan. This is mirrored as the information God provides Rebekah with is later proven true, as Esau sells his birthright as the oldest to Jacob (Gen 25: 33). Providing Jacob with a rightful claim to Esau’s authority and power as the oldest son.

2.4 Josephus’ Reception of Rebekah within Genesis 25: 19-28

⁷³ Carolyn J. Sharp, ‘Genesis 25:19-34’, *Interpretation (Richmond)*, 77 (1) (2023), p.77.

⁷⁴ Stephen Stern, ‘Rebecca: The First Dialogic Philosopher’, *Women in Judaism*, 6(2) (2009), p.8.

⁷⁵ Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008), p.50.

⁷⁶ Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women’s Deception and Divine Sanction In the Hebrew Bible*, p.18.

⁷⁷ Sharp, ‘Genesis 25:19-34’, p.77.

⁷⁸ Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women’s Deception and Divine Sanction In the Hebrew Bible*, p.18.

The scholarly reception of Rebekah within Genesis 25:19-28 is a complex understanding of her character. Certain early Jewish interpreters have edited and revised this passage so that Rebekah never communes with God, thus not receiving her prophecy. Through their edits, it can be suggested that they do not accept Rebekah as worthy of receiving this experience with God. This is first evidenced through the work of Josephus, where he edits Genesis so that Rebekah never has her prophetic experience. It has been previously studied that the work of Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, features several rewrites and edits of the Genesis text, impacting the reception and image of Rebekah. Josephus' retelling of Genesis 25 features a briefer passage that Rebekah is noticeably absent from, despite this passage concerning her body, pregnancy and children. Josephus' rewritten Genesis lacks any representation of Rebekah's thoughts and feelings regarding her bodily pain and uncomfortable pregnancy, making her voiceless. Instead, Josephus "represents Isaac as making the inquiry"⁷⁹ and confronting God. Within his work, he claims that Isaac consulted God who "told him that Rebecca would give birth to twins" (A.J. 1.257). This directly contrasts the biblical passage, where Isaac is featured but is not a prominent character and Rebekah receives this oracle and exchanges with God (Gen 25: 23). This removes her significance as the first woman in the Hebrew Bible to confront God and instead presents her as a subdued woman who needs her husband to do so for her, as she is unable to do this herself. Within the original Genesis text, Isaac is seen praying to God (Gen 25: 21) but the passage focuses on Rebekah's experiences of her pregnancy and confronting God, presenting a confident and active woman. Josephus' retelling features Isaac as the protagonist, who communes with God and receives this divine information stripping Rebekah of her autonomy regarding her bodily knowledge and prophetic experiences. In replacing Rebekah with Isaac, he elevates Isaac's character while subduing Rebekah, David Zucker states that Josephus purposefully "downplays the role of Rebekah" by attributing her actions to Isaac.⁸⁰ This passage coupled with earlier studies of his rewritten Genesis 24, suggests that Josephus chooses to downplay and target Rebekah's character, favouring Isaac instead. Thus, it can be deduced that Josephus holds a bias against Rebekah and her original biblical presentation. Christopher T. Begg claims that Josephus had a stylistic rewriting of Genesis with deliberate choices to create a "revised and improved version of the Genesis story."⁸¹ Therefore, it is clear that Josephus has chosen to reduce

⁷⁹ Christopher T. Begg, 'Genesis in Josephus', in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, ed. By Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Peterson, (Boston: Brill 2012), p.321.

⁸⁰ David J. Zucker, 'Rebekah Redux: The View from Jubilees', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 49 (2019), p.73.

⁸¹ Begg, 'Genesis in Josephus', pp.323-325.

Rebekah's character purposefully and has edited Genesis to achieve this. It can be claimed that he does not feel she is worthy of the strong and prophetic character in the original Genesis text. Rebekah's reception within Josephus suggests that he does not agree with her portrayal within Genesis and alters this as he attempts to portray Rebekah, which he believes is more accurate. A quieter, absent character with no prophetic experiences or divisive actions.

2.5 The Reception of Rebekah within Genesis 25: 19-28 In The Genesis Rabbah

Another early Jewish source that redacts Rebekah's narrative is the Genesis Rabbah, which strips her of this experience similar to Josephus as "certain midrashim in *Genesis Rabbah* take a similar approach" to Josephus.⁸² The Genesis Rabbah states that Rebekah never spoke to God, but instead to an angel claiming that "The Holy one, blessed be He, never spoke directly with a woman [...] that was through an angel" (Gen. Rab. 20: 6). This suggests that Rebekah is not as significant as to directly commune with God. While this text does not claim Rebekah never received a prophecy, it downsizes her experience from direct communion with God to an angel messenger. An angel messenger still suggests Rebekah's importance, as they have been sent directly to her by God, however, when compared to the original narrative this change strips Rebekah of a profound experience. This midrash has chosen to replace God with an angel to diminish Rebekah's original experience. When considering Josephus and Genesis Rabbah's careful editing of Rebekah's prophetic experience, it can be deduced that these early texts held a fundamental bias. They are seen to hold issue with Rebekah communing with God and either omit this experience entirely or replace God with an angel. Rebekah is understood as unworthy to speak with God and receive a prophecy. It is unsure why these texts refute Rebekah's experience; an argument can be seen for their bias against her womanhood. Josephus seems to hold no concern with the prophecy itself, his only edit is that this prophecy is given to Isaac instead. The Genesis Rabbah also still includes the prophecy, however, it directly states that God did not speak to any woman other than the exception of Sarah, as Dr Malka Z. Simkovich states it "reflects a general aversion to imagining God speaking to women."⁸³ This can be seen as both texts still include the prophecy, suggesting that it is important to the overall narrative. The only aspect of the text

⁸² Simkovich, *Rebekah's Character*; (2021).

⁸³ Simkovich, *Rebekah's Character*; (2021).

that is purposefully edited is Rebekah's involvement and significance. This is not to say that all early Jewish literature devalues Rebekah, as Zucker's work, *Rebekah Redux: The View From Jubilees*, highlights a profound reception of Rebekah's prophetic experience. As Zucker states Rebekah's reception within Jubilees contrasts that of Josephus and the Genesis Rabbah as "Rebekah is celebrated, she is a heroine."⁸⁴ While the Book of Jubilees does not include Rebekah receiving a prophecy, it instead depicts Rebekah with the holy authority to bless Jacob herself. This reinforces Rebekah's prophetic image as she blesses Jacob as "a spirit of truth descended upon her mouth."⁸⁵ Thus, while Jubilees does not include Rebekah communing with God, it does present God speaking through her. This embellishes her prophetic experience and suggests that she has been received as a prominent prophetess.

2.6 The Absence of Artistic Depictions of Genesis 25:19-28;

While investigating Rebekah's artistic reception history it was made evident that there is a distinct lack of portrayals of her prophetic experience. Her divine narrative is absent and her depictions are limited to the idea of Rebekah as a mother. The first is witnessed

through the painting, *The Birth of Esau and Jacob*, by British painter Benjamin West.⁸⁶ The specific date of this painting is unknown, however, West was a highly recognized religious painter from the eighteenth century, who painted numerous cathedrals across England, including being among those interviewed to paint the St Paul's Cathedral in London.⁸⁷



⁸⁴ Zucker, 'Rebekah Redux: The View from Jubilees', p. 72.

⁸⁵ Zucker, 'Rebekah Redux: The View from Jubilees', p. 76.

⁸⁶ Benjamin West, *The Birth of Esau and Jacob*, [Oil on Canvas] < <https://www.bible.gallery/art/benjamin-west/the-birth-of-esau-and-jacob/813/art-info> > [accessed 18th November 2023].

⁸⁷ Jerry D. Meyer, 'Benjamin West's Chapel of Revealed Religion: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Protestant Religious Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 57 (2) (1975), p.247.

Figure 2

Therefore, West is heavily inspired by the Biblical text and draws from it what he understands as important imagery. And his depiction of Rebekah mirrors how he has understood her importance. This painting features Rebekah shortly after she has given birth to her sons, as the boys are handed over to their father, she lays exhausted. Rebekah is that she is cast to the side of the painting, while her sons are at the forefront and held by anonymous women.⁸⁸ Despite being in the background, Rebekah is clocked in stark white, similar to Jacob and Esau. This distinguishes Rebekah from the other women in the painting, clearly connecting her to the children as their mother. Contrasting this she is notably cast aside to the backdrop of the painting. This suggests that her role in the scene is now over and overshadowed by her sons. This is evidenced through the work of Jerry Don Meyer. Don Meyer titles this painting, “Esau and Jacob presented to Isaac” and does not mention Rebekah. Instead, he refers to Jacob as being fathered by Isaac, completely ignoring the figure of Rebekah.⁸⁹ This creates the impression that Rebekah is not the most important figure within the painting, so much so that she is rarely mentioned in the scarce surrounding scholarship. West has interpreted Rebekah’s act of mothering as the most significant part of her narrative within Genesis 25 as it is the only scene he portrays. This erases Rebekah’s prophetic experience, she is overshadowed by her sons, suggesting they are more important. This is further supported as the Hebrew Bible matriarchs are often limited in artistic representation of their motherhood as “conventionalized stereotypes.”⁹⁰ Rebekah is specifically linked to a grand love story between herself and Isaac and her subsequent motherhood.⁹¹ Rebekah’s prophetic experience is severely absent from artistic representation, and she is limited to her role as a mother within Genesis 25. This is further supported by other artworks, for example, *The Mess of Pottage*, by James Tissot, which focuses on the introduction of Esau and Jacob.⁹² This is additional evidence of artwork that is choosing to neglect Rebekah, instead finding her sons more important. Therefore, it can be seen that the artistic reception of this passage is disinterested in Rebekah’s prophetic experience, as it dismisses it in its entirety. This is reminiscent of Josephus and the Genesis Rabbah who also reject her experience, instead claiming that it never happened at all. In doing so they diminish

⁸⁸ West, *The Birth of Esau and Jacob*, [accessed 18th November 2023].

⁸⁹ Jerry Don Meyer, ‘The Religious Paintings of Benjamin West: A Study in Late Eighteenth-Century and Early Nineteenth-Century Moral’, *New York University*, (1973) p.140.

⁹⁰ Mati Meyer, *Art: Representation of Biblical Women*, (1999), < <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/art-representation-of-biblical-women#biblio> > [Accessed 17th January 2024].

⁹¹ Meyer, *Art: Representation of Biblical Women*, [Accessed 17th January 2024].

⁹² James Jacques Joseph Tissot, *The Mess of Pottage*, [Gouache on Board], (1896-1902), < <https://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/26295-the-mess-of-pottage> > [accessed 18th November 2023].

her importance and limit her to her motherhood. Without this prophetic experience, Rebekah's only role in the passage is when she gives birth to Jacob and Esau.

2.7 The Work of Robert Crumb;

One of the only available artistic depictions of Rebekah's prophetic experience within Genesis 25:19-28 is seen within the work of Robert Crumb. Crumb's adaption of Genesis features a depiction of Genesis 25:19-28, where Rebekah communes with God. Crumb presents a visual representation of the bible through his comic titled, *The Book of Genesis Illustrated*, where he pairs illustrations with the biblical text. Crumb's Genesis aims to graphically depict the Hebrew Bible text with nothing left out or omitted.⁹³ His work illustrates Rebekah's narrative in Genesis 25, leading to her communion with God and ending with the birth of her sons.⁹⁴ It is first important to address that Crumb has faced accusations of misogyny within his artwork and how he portrays female characters. As Zanne Domoney-Lyttle states "Crumb has often been accused of producing sexist or misogynistic work" due to his production of sex scenes and oversexualized women.⁹⁵ This has been carefully considered when analyzing his work and depiction of Rebekah and has not been dismissed, for example, his portrayal features Rebekah with protruding nipples.⁹⁶ This is an unnecessary inclusion that does not add to the prophetic depiction Crumb is attempting to portray. This is evidence

of the previous critiques that Crumb oversexualizes his female characters, as he has chosen to portray Rebekah's body this way.



⁹³Don Jolly, 'Interpretive Treatments of Genesis in Comics: R. Crumb & Dave Sim', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 25 (3) (2013), p.333.

⁹⁴ Robert Crumb, 'Chapter 25', in *The Book Of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York 2009), p.97.

⁹⁵ Zanne Domoney-Lyttle, 'Thinking Outside the Panel: Rewriting Rebekah in R. Crumb's Book of Genesis', *Open Theology*, 6 (1) (2020), p.559.

⁹⁶ Crumb, 'Chapter 25', in *The Book Of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb*

Figure 3

Crumb's illustration presents Rebekah as a figure who is not limited to her birthing narrative and is overshadowed by her sons. This suggests that Crumb has understood Rebekah as significant in her own right, through her communion with God and her prophetess attributes. Domoney-Lyttle offers a comprehensive study of Crumb's interpretation and reception of Rebekah, within their work, *Thinking Outside the Panel: Rewriting Rebekah in R. Crumb's Book of Genesis*. This is mirrored within this work as they explain how Crumb creates a profound image of Rebekah as she confronts God, "Rebekah in the light of a goddess, surrounded by an aura of light and stars."⁹⁷ He presents Rebekah in a way that mirrors the Genesis text, as a figure who is important and graced with divine presence. Although Rebekah cowers in the face of God, this establishes her as a matriarch who must suffer before she can have children, it is "Crumb's attempt to paint Rebekah in the light of both high priestess [...] and a matriarch."⁹⁸ Therefore, Crumb's work is a unique artistic reception of the character of Rebekah and is one that illuminates her importance as both a matriarch and prophetess, through his depiction of her holy experience with God. However, the image of Rebekah as a prophetess contrasts with his sexual presentation of Rebekah. This is exemplified through the deliberate emphasis on Rebekah's breasts and nipples, where Crumb has chosen to portray her physically this way. Thus, one of the only available artistic depictions of Rebekah's profound communion with God and prophecy is also tainted by over-sexualization, which Crumb has been criticised for within his catalogue of work. Therefore, Rebekah is limited to her motherhood in artistic depictions, and when she is depicted as a prophet she is subjected to sexualization. This contrasts the Genesis account as there are no explicit mentions of her body and the passage is focused on her experience with God.

2.8 Conclusion

Overall, Rebekah, as she is portrayed literary in Genesis 25:19-28, is a profound character, she is reinforced as a matriarch and a prophet. This is seen throughout the passage. Firstly, she is intrinsically linked with Sarah, through her struggle to conceive. Rebekah's narrative concerning her infertility is reminiscent of and mirrors Sarah's as both women are unable to have children until God intervenes. Thus, through this connection and the recent death of Abraham, Rebekah can be seen as the new matriarch, who is close to Sarah. As the new

⁹⁷ Domoney-Lyttle, 'Thinking Outside the Panel: Rewriting Rebekah in R. Crumb's Book of Genesis', p. 566.

⁹⁸ Domoney-Lyttle, 'Thinking Outside the Panel: Rewriting Rebekah in R. Crumb's Book of Genesis', p. 566.

matriarchal figure, she is depicted as holy and authoritative, as the ancestors begin their second cycle, with Rebekah as one of the main players. Adding to this image of Rebekah as a matriarch is the notion of Rebekah as a prophetess. Not only does God commune with Rebekah but God also grants her divine knowledge through prophecy. Therefore, Rebekah can also be understood as a prophetess who is important to God's plans for her children. This is emphasized as God does not present Isaac with this information, only Rebekah.

The scholarly reception of Rebekah within Genesis 25 is damaging, as the majority of significant early Jewish works edit her narrative. Josephus rewrites Rebekah and grants her prophetic experience to Isaac instead. This suggests that the prophecy is important to the overall narrative for Josephus, but his problem lies with Rebekah. This is coupled with Josephus' edits of Genesis 24, which also seek to diminish her character. The Genesis Rabbah also adapts Rebekah's narrative, they claim she received the prophecy but by an angel, as God would not speak to any woman. Therefore, the scholarly reception of Rebekah suggests that most sources aim to limit and diminish her profound character as they have a bias against her womanhood and communing with God. However, this is contrasted by the Book of Jubilees which openly declares Rebekah a prophetess and grants her the ability to bless Jacob herself.

Finally, the artistic reception of Rebekah is considerably lacking in depictions of her prophetic experience. There are limited artistic works that feature Rebekah within Genesis 25. While some artworks do present a Rebekah figure, she is limited to her birthing narrative and overshadowed by her sons. Crumb's illustration, however, offers a physical depiction of Rebekah communing with God. While this scene is seemingly forgotten within other artworks, Crumb highlights Rebekah's prophetic abilities and her status as a matriarch. It should be noted that Crumb's work is one of few depictions available of this scene and does not represent the majority, where Rebekah is noticeably absent or cast aside.

Chapter Three Exploring Rebekah's Reception Within Genesis 27.

3.1 Introduction

Genesis 27 is the the last passage to be investigated regarding Rebekah and her reception history and is also the final passage that directly features Rebekah. Genesis 24 and 25:19-28 have already been discussed as both the beginning of her narrative and as a crucial passage regarding her developing character. Therefore to complete a full and comprehensive picture of Rebekah's character and reception, Genesis 27 must be studied. The context of Genesis 27 depicts Rebekah as a mature matriarch who has communed with God. Her husband is now old, and her children have reached adulthood. This is mirrored within the text as Isaac is described as "old and blind" (Gen 27:1) and Jacob and Esau are stated to be "forty years old" (Gen 26:34). This passage is an opportunity to study Rebekah's character as a matriarch who is older and established in her role. This image is furthered when considering that this passage is focused on the topic of inheritance. Rebekah and Isaac are ready to settle matters for when they pass, as "the narrative now begins to focus immediately on the question of succession."⁹⁹ The narrative of Genesis is shifting towards the end of the second cycle of ancestors and Rebekah is at her final moments as matriarch. Within the previous chapters of this dissertation, Rebekah's character in the text has been established as a strong and assured woman with an intimate connection to God. However, her reception has been diverse and complex, this is especially evident in Genesis 27, a passage that has a distinctively intricate reception history. This is notable as it is regarded as divisive amongst scholarship. Scholars such as Bruce Vawter, E. A Speiser and Harold Bloom regard Rebekah as a manipulator and Isaac as her victim.¹⁰⁰ Others, for example, Racheal Adelman and David Zucker understand Rebekah's actions as necessary to the plans of God. To reflect on both Rebekah's reception and characterization within Genesis 27 it is first necessary to undertake an independent reading. This shall be accomplished through a study of Rebekah's actions and her motives within the narrative. Following this a dedicated study of Vawter's work shall be undertaken, to assess his understanding of Rebekah's character and how certain scholars view her as a trickster

⁹⁹ Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 244.

¹⁰⁰ Adrien Bledstein, 'Binder, Trickster, Heel and Hairy man: Rereading Genesis 27 as a Trickster Tale Told by a Woman', in *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. By Athalya Brenner-Idan, (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield 1993), pp. 283 – 295.

mother. Finally, the artistic portrayals of this chapter shall be investigated, considering how they have presented Rebekah as a manipulative wife and controlling mother, omitting her divine reasonings.

3.2 A Reading of Genesis 27: Rebekah's Actions

It is first necessary to investigate Rebekah's actions within Genesis 27, before understanding her motivations. Rebekah's energetic and decisive nature has been repeatedly examined throughout Genesis, for example, Rebekah's lack of words and preferred action helped her pass the servant's tests within Genesis 24 effortlessly. Rebekah presented in Genesis 25 takes charge of her pain and decides to confront God. Therefore, it is clear that the Rebekah of Genesis is identifiable through "her decisiveness, her strong will and her embrace of her destiny."¹⁰¹ This active nature is most clearly displayed within Genesis 27 when Rebekah takes charge of the plot to bless Jacob and deceive Isaac.¹⁰² It is first essential to understand the context for Rebekah's actions as the narrative begins with Isaac, who is described as "old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see" (Gen 27: 1). Before Isaac dies, he wishes to establish his favoured son as the new patriarch, thus, he asks Esau to prepare him a feast of game so he can be blessed (Gen 27:1-4). Upon overhearing this proposal, Rebekah's dynamic nature is demonstrated, she springs into action, creating a detailed plan that will ensure Jacob is blessed instead. She aims to trick Isaac and does so with forethought as Rebekah "sets up the scenario whereby Jacob receives the blessing."¹⁰³ This is first seen as Rebekah asks Jacob to fetch meat for his father, a repetition of Isaac's orders to Esau. Instead of telling Jacob to hunt any game, as Isaac told Esau, Rebekah is a step ahead. Isaac only states, "Hunt game for me" (Gen 27: 3) and Rebekah asks Jacob to specifically fetch kids. Rebekah strategizes, "Go to the flock and get me two choice kids so that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes." (Gen 27:9). Rebekah has chosen kids so that when Jacob presents himself as Esau, Isaac will believe that his oldest and favourite son has gone hunting and has purposefully chosen kids, knowing it is his father's favourite. And so, Isaac shall be pleased and honoured that Esau has been so thoughtful, especially as he is the son he prefers. Adding onto this Rebekah goes so far as to prepare the meat herself, highlighting her capability in taking charge. She is actively making the plan successful as she "literally

¹⁰¹ Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women's Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible*, p.34

¹⁰² Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', p. 562.

¹⁰³ Schneider. *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis*, p. 56.

prepared the food and garments necessary for Jacob.”¹⁰⁴ Rebekah’s plan not only accounts for any problems but also thinks of every possible detail. Rebekah selects kids so that Isaac will be pleased, and Jacob will have unknowingly won him over. This is also noted by Zucker who states that this is a thorough plan that has been worked out to ensure the blessing goes to Jacob.¹⁰⁵ This is reflected when Jacob raises concerns about their plan failing as he is considerably less hairy than his brother and Isaac will be able to feel the difference. Rebekah presents a solution, she is unwavering in facing this problem as she covers him in animal skins and Esau’s clothing, “and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck” (Gen 27:16).

Rebekah uses her active and confident nature to create a detailed plan to deceive her husband and son. While her reasoning and motives are yet to be discussed, it is undeniable through the investigation of her actions that Rebekah tricks Isaac and Esau. This is cemented as Rebekah’s plan works, as Bill Arnold states within his commentary of Genesis 27, Isaac is convinced by Rebekah’s plan and disguise.¹⁰⁶ Isaac blesses Jacob and only later when Esau appears does he realize his mistake. When Esau comes for his blessing, Isaac realizes he has blessed the wrong son as he exclaims, “I have already made him your lord” (Gen 27: 37). Rebekah within Genesis 27 is presented as a confident and dynamic character, who creates a detailed and successful plan. She is presented as a strong and capable woman who ensures her son Jacob deceives Isaac and steals his brother's blessing. This is supported by David Cotter, who states that Rebekah “prepares to wrest the blessings” from Esau and deceive Isaac.¹⁰⁷ It is undoubtable that Rebekah tricks Isaac and deceives members of her family to accomplish Jacob’s blessing and thus, she can be identified through her actions as a trickster. Although it has been understood that Rebekah’s actions are that of trickery, it is crucial to discuss why she has committed these acts.

3.3 A Reading of Genesis 27: Rebekah’s Motives;

Rebekah undoubtedly deceives her husband, and this has been viewed through a study of her actions within the passage. Now that her actions have been established an important question

¹⁰⁴ Zucker, ‘Cold Case: Restoring Rebekah, Intrigue in Genesis 27’, p.115.

¹⁰⁵ David Zucker, ‘Cold Case: Restoring Rebekah, Intrigue in Genesis 27’, *The Asbury Theological Seminary*, 71 (2) (2016), p.116.

¹⁰⁶ Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁷ Cotter, *Berit Olam: A Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, p. 201.

must be addressed, why did Rebekah commit such a controversial act and trick her husband? The result of their trickery is Esau's anger, leaving Jacob fearing for his life and fleeing (Gen 27: 42). Why risk a rift between her sons and having to send her favoured son away? Rebekah's detailed plan means she will never see her favourite son again, before he can return to his homeland she dies, "the cost of their success to Rebekah, however, is steep."¹⁰⁸ This raises questions regarding her motive, why would she risk her favourite son's life and punish herself to never see him again? Why does Rebekah take this risk? The answer is found within Genesis 25, she must ensure the blessing for Jacob as God commanded it. Rebekah receives an oracle from God in Genesis 25, which states that her oldest son must be subordinate to the youngest, "one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen 25: 23). This prophecy is essential to understanding Rebekah's motives as they irrecoverably change her purpose as cements the notion that Jacob is "fully entitled heir to the Abrahamic covenant."¹⁰⁹ Rebekah is tasked through divine knowledge to ensure that the blessing goes to Jacob and so she tricks Isaac. He is about to, unknowingly, bless the wrong son since he lacks divine insight. Rebekah is embroiled with divine knowledge and through this awareness is tasked with ensuring that the son God has chosen becomes the next heir, "she alone was privy to the divine oracle foretelling the dominance of the younger of her twin sons."¹¹⁰ This changes Rebekah's portrayal as a trickster to an agent of God who makes the necessary sacrifices to ensure the divine plan is followed. She is willing to risk the consequences as the reward is high, this is mirrored within the text as she declares she will take any punishment that happens as a result of the deception, "let your curse be on me son" (Gen 17: 13). While it may be argued that Rebekah only needed to communicate this plan to Isaac instead of tricking him. Esther Fuchs argues that Rebekah does not favour any son unfairly and she must use deception because of the patriarchal culture she lived in.¹¹¹ She had little control over the situation and who the blessing would go to, so she must deceive as "deception is typically used by powerless characters in the Bible."¹¹² This is mirrored within Genesis as she only discovers Esau and Isaac's plan as she overhears it (Gen 27: 5), confirming that she was not consulted. Rebekah needed to deceive Isaac as she had no other means of controlling the situation.

¹⁰⁸ Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', p. 563.

¹⁰⁹ Goodwin, 'And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes', p. 192.

¹¹⁰ Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', *Review and Expositor*; p.559-560.

¹¹¹ Jeansome, 'Images of Rebekah: From Modern Interpretations to Biblical Portrayal', p.45.

¹¹² Jeansome, 'Images of Rebekah: From Modern Interpretations to Biblical Portrayal', p.45.

The work of Goodwin is especially enlightening concerning how Rebekah's motives are intrinsically linked to God selecting Jacob before he was born. Within their work, *And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes*, Goodwin states that "God loved Jacob, so did Rebekah."¹¹³ Goodwin explains that a lack of early Christian interest regarding Rebekah's motives fails to understand that Jacob became her favoured son as she was "privy to the counsel of the Spirit" that ordained him as the rightful heir.¹¹⁴ She is not tricking her husband for selfish reasons, but as a necessary evil to ensure God's will, Rebekah acts on God's behalf. During a study of Genesis 25, the text offers no evidence of Isaac receiving the prophecy as well. Consequently, Rebekah must trick Isaac to stop him from unknowingly blessing the wrong son, "Rebekah's actions were motivated on an understanding that Isaac's actions conflict with the words that the Israelite Deity gives her."¹¹⁵ Rebekah is faced with a difficult situation, her husband favours the wrong son and wishes for him to be his successor. It is stated that Isaac loved and favoured Esau, "Isaac loved Esau because he was fond of game" (Gen 25:28). Isaac's favoritism for Esau is cemented within Genesis 27 as he calls on him to receive a blessing, without considering Jacob (Gen 27: 1). As Adelman states, Isaac's blindness within this passage mirrors his blindness to the divine plan as "he lacks initial insight as well as physical insight."¹¹⁶ Isaac's favoritism also blinds him from Esau's unsuitability. Genesis 25 presents Esau carelessly selling his birthright to Jacob for a meal (Gen 25: 29) and chapter 26 claims that Esau married Hittite women and "they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen 26:35). Rebekah's mission is reinforced by the notion that Esau is not ordained by God but also unqualified. Isaac is preparing to bless the wrong son concerning God's plan, as well as the son who has proven himself unworthy. Esau goes against tradition and chooses his bride and sells his birthright within Genesis 25, thus, "Esau appears unfit for family leadership."¹¹⁷ Esau openly defies the notion throughout Genesis which presents that "wives in the family are sought within the kinship group and that Canaanite women are to be avoided."¹¹⁸ Thus, Rebekah tricks Isaac as she has to, she is motivated as an agent of God who has divine knowledge. She is able to have an active hand in keeping the divine plan on the correct path

¹¹³ Goodwin, 'And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes', p 191.

¹¹⁴ Goodwin, 'And Rebekah Loved Jacob, But Why? Responses from Two Twelfth-Century Exegetes', p. 180 – 198.

¹¹⁵ Schneider. *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* p.51.

¹¹⁶ Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women's Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Quesada, 'Rebekah; Model Matriarch', *Review and Expositor*; p.559-560.

¹¹⁸ Kojo Okyere, 'Esau's Wives and the Question of Cross-Ethnic Marriage in Genesis', *Oguaa Journal of Religion and Human Values*, 6 (3) (2022), p.120.

as an agent of God who is aware that Esau is unfit. This notion reinforces the character of Rebekah that has already been displayed within Genesis, a strong-willed agent of God. This is not the first time that the younger son has been chosen over the oldest as this has been seen within the Abrahamic line, suggesting that Rebekah's actions were not as controversial as first thought. As Adelman states Isaac is not the oldest son of Abraham, instead, Ishmael is. However, God instead chooses Isaac, "Isaac is selected, while Ishmael is excluded from the covenant of Abraham."¹¹⁹ Abraham is not denounced for casting Ishmael out and denying him his birthright, as he was following God's command. Abraham is not convicted for this act, whereas Rebekah is titled a deceitful female by certain scholars who argue that "by fighting for one son she is actually harming the other unfairly."¹²⁰ Rebekah was similarly following God's orders as they blessed her with knowledge alone, tasking her with ensuring Isaac did not ruin these plans. While it is not Isaac's fault that he is unaware of this divine message that Rebekah received, it can be seen that he was about to unknowingly derail God's plans, he is "deliberately fighting against the sovereignty of God."¹²¹

3.4 Bruce Vawter's Reception of Rebekah Within Genesis 27;

There are several arguments considering Rebekah as a manipulative, controlling and deceitful woman, who preys on her older husband and sons. To fully investigate this reception, the work of Bruce Vawter and his treatment of Rebekah shall be used as a case study. Vawter's work, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, offers his commentary on the Genesis narrative and provides insight into his interpretation of Rebekah's character. Vawter's presentation of Rebekah openly condemns her as he labels her as a manipulative woman who controls her male family members. Vawter titles Rebekah, Lady Macbeth¹²² and this depiction illuminates his opinion of Rebekah's character. Lady Macbeth is one of the central characters of William Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, where she manipulates her husband into murder, to achieve the power she craves. As Yuhe Cheng states Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most memorable figures who is widely "recognized as the most nasty and cruel female characters

¹¹⁹ Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women's Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 22.

¹²⁰Jeansome, 'Images of Rebekah: From Modern Interpretations to Biblical Portrayal', p.43.

¹²¹ Ligon Duncan, *The Blessing of Esau*, (1999), < <https://rts.edu/resources/the-blessing-of-esau/> > [Accessed 13th February 2024].

¹²² Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, (Southampton: Camelot Press Ltd 1977), p. 299.

ever seen.”¹²³ By comparing Rebekah to Lady Macbeth, one of the most condemned women in literature, Vawter portrays her as power-hungry and manipulative. His comparison emphasizes his understanding of Rebekah as an openly cruel and nasty character within the Genesis 27 narrative. This is highlighted through Vawter’s depiction of Jacob within the plot to trick Isaac, as he is seen as submissive and controlled by his mother. Vawter titles him docile, lacking any initiative and merely following his mother “willing but fainthearted.”¹²⁴ This is a contrast to the biblical text, where Rebekah creates the plan, but Jacob is a willing participant. He even raises concern over his lack of bodily hair and that this might derail their plan (Gen 27: 16). Vawter adds to his portrayal as he claims that Rebekah needed the job to get done and orders Jacob, “just do as I say!”¹²⁵ Through the depiction of Rebekah as cruel, coupled with the notion that Jacob is submissive to his mother, Vawter presents a harsh reading of Rebekah within Genesis 27. He understands her to be solely responsible for tricking Isaac and that this action is unforgivable and wicked. He portrays Rebekah as a woman who seeks to take advantage of her elderly husband, who is vulnerable due to his age and blindness.¹²⁶

Vawter’s reception of Rebekah lacks any understanding of her motives from Genesis 27. While it has been studied that Rebekah undoubtedly tricks Isaac, it has also been seen that she does not do so lightly. She has been granted divine knowledge and is stopping her husband from derailing God’s plans. Vawter, however, labels Rebekah’s motive as mere favouritism of Jacob as her beloved son.¹²⁷ Vawter displays sympathy for Esau as Rebekah’s least favourite son, she preferred Jacob and so casts her other son aside. This is an attribute also applied to Lady Macbeth, as Marta Bernabeu claims she is presented as a woman who would dash the brains out of her own child if she needed too.¹²⁸ Vawter openly condemns her actions and ignores her motives, he presents a figure who is selfish, and manipulative rather than the agent of God witnessed within the whole of Genesis. Vawter understands Rebekah as an iron-willed, scheming mother who undertakes “ruthless and unscrupulous conduct.”¹²⁹

¹²³ Yuhe Cheng, ‘Feminist Study of Lady Macbeth’, *SHS Web of Conferences*, (2023), < https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2023/07/shsconf_icpahd2023_02025.pdf >, [Accessed 15th February 2024], p.1.

¹²⁴ Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 300.

¹²⁵ Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 300.

¹²⁶ Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 300.

¹²⁷ Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 306.

¹²⁸ Marta Bernabeu, ‘Redeeming Lady Macbeth: Gender and Religion in Justin Kurzel’s *Macbeth*’, *Critical Survey*, 35 (2) (2015), p. 67.

¹²⁹ David Zucker, ‘Choosing Jacob: The Coded Language of Genesis 27’, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 29 (2) (2015), p. 233.

This is inaccurate when compared with the biblical presentation of Rebekah, where she is tasked with ensuring God’s plan. As well as the character that Rebekah has displayed throughout Genesis, she is continuously displayed as a modest and faithful woman, who even receives the honour of direct contact with God. Vawter changes Rebekah from a pious woman who has been driven by God her whole life to a vicious, serpentine and controlling woman, who dominates the men in her life. It is important to note that Vawter wrote and published this work in 1977, Suzanne Scholz claims that up until the 1980s and 90s biblical works and scholarship were predominantly androcentric.¹³⁰ Vawter’s work is a prime example of this as he is limited to his masculine reading and makes no attempts to understand Rebekah’s character or motives. His work is an example of a Genesis reading that is limited due to its male-dominated context and concerns.

3.5 The Artistic Reception of Rebekah Within Genesis 27;

The artistic receptions of Genesis 27 often mirrors Vawter’s treatment of Rebekah, and this is reflected in the depictions of Genesis 27 from the 17th century. European art during this period was known as Baroque art, a general term that encompasses a variety of artists. It is identified as “both sensuous and spiritual” with an attempt to inspire the faithful through painted scenes that are vivid and emotional, “stimulating the public’s faith in the church [...] an overtly emotional and sensory appeal.”¹³¹ This is embodied through several examples of

Baroque art that depict Genesis 27, as well as their connection to Vawter’s reception of

Rebekah. The majority of Genesis 27’s artistic reception is from this period and examples Rebekah as a dramatic,

Figure 4



¹³⁰ Suzanne Scholz, ‘Reading the Hebrew Bible with Feminist Eyes: Introduction’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. By Suzanne Scholz, (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2021), p, xxvi.

¹³¹ Britannica The Editors of Encyclopaedia, *Baroque Art and Architecture*, (2024), < <https://www.britannica.com/art/Baroque-art-and-architecture> > [Accessed 21st March 2024].

dominating figure, much like the Rebekah that Vawter titled *Lady Macbeth*. The first to be studied is the work of Jusepe de Rivera and his interpretation of Genesis 27 titled *Isaac Blessing Jacob*.



Known for his biblical works, Ribera is titled one of the “Spanish masters of the golden age” of seventeenth-century art.¹³² The painting features the figures of Rebekah and Jacob at the pivotal moment where they trick Isaac.¹³³ Most of the painting is covered with bright reds and lights illuminating the scene.

However, Rebekah is cloaked in

Figure 5

black with her figure almost melting into the dark backdrop. She places a strong hand on Jacob’s back, who is portrayed as childlike with a younger and softer face.¹³⁴ This presentation is a striking one and this is typical for the work of Ribera, as he is known for his appreciation for the dramatic.¹³⁵ This presents Rebekah as a controlling mother, pressuring her son to act. Itay Sapir notes that Jacob within this painting is depicted as a “young man.”¹³⁶ Ribera presents a young Jacob who is pressured into the ruse by Rebekah, represented through the physical pressure of his hand on her back. Ribera contrasts the biblical account as Jacob is over 40 years old when the events of Genesis 27 occur (Gen 26: 34). This depiction of Jacob is significant to understanding the figure of Rebekah in the painting. By depicting Jacob with a young and naïve appearance, Ribera suggests that he is childlike. This coupled with Rebekah’s hand on Jacob’s back suggests that he is only young and does not know what he is doing, unlike his mother who leads him. This is reminiscent of Vawter and his understanding that Jacob was complacent but lacked any will power or passion. This notion is also depicted within other artistic works, symbolizing that this is a

¹³² Nina Mallory, ‘Jusepe de Ribera’, *College Art Association*, 52 (1) (1993), p.90.

¹³³ Jusepe de Ribera, *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, [Oil on Canvas], (1637) < https://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/ribera/2/blessing.html > [Accessed 17th November 2023].

¹³⁴ Jusepe de Ribera, *Isaac Blessing Jacob* [Oil on Canvas].

¹³⁵ Hugh Brigstocke, ‘Ribera, Jusepe de’, in *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001).

¹³⁶ Itay Sapir, ‘Baroque Science, Experimental art? Jusepe de Ribera and other Neapolitan Sceptics’, *Ber. Wissenschaftsgesch.*, 44 (2021), p.26.

common understanding among Rebekah's artistic depictions. Jacques-Joseph Tissot also shows Rebekah looming over Jacob, stern and ever-watching. While Tissot is later than the Baroque period, his depiction has various similarities with the 17th-century artistic depiction of Rebekah. Tissot was a French artist who was known for his unique works, he became especially interested in the bible at the end of his life.¹³⁷ His rendition of Genesis 27 is displayed within his work, *Jacob Deceives Isaac*. Tissot's depiction features Rebekah sternly overseeing Jacob and Isaac, ensuring that the blessing takes place. She looms over Jacob and

Figure 6



Isaac, her hands on her hips and a stern expression on her face.¹³⁸ While Tissot's work features Jacob at a more accurate age, Rebekah still hangs over him. The placement of Rebekah with her strict posture and hovering over the men signifies Rebekah as a controlling figure. This supports the notion that Rebekah's artistic representation displays her as a domineering and manipulative mother. Erasing her role as an agent of God and dismissing her motives, instead only focusing on her actions. It is noteworthy to consider the lack of artistic portrayals of Genesis 25 and Rebekah's prophetic experience, however, there is an abundance of Rebekah tricking Isaac. This raises questions regarding why her prophetic experience was negated but the opportunity to condemn her was instead a popular subject to represent. This is supported by other works readily available that depict similar ideas, such as Gerrit Willemisz¹³⁹ and Gioacchino Assereto's¹⁴⁰ works, also from the European Baroque period. These four



Figure 7

¹³⁷ Eugenia Parry Janis, 'Tissot Retrospective', *The Burlington Magazine*, 110 (782) (1968), p. 300.

¹³⁸ James-Joseph Tissot, *Jacob Deceives Isaac*, [Gouche on Board], (1896-1902), < <https://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/26297-jacob-deceives-isaac> > [Accessed 17th November 2023].

¹³⁹ Gerrit Willemisz, *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, [Oil on Canvas], (1638), < <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/isaac-blessing-jacob-200101> > [Accessed 28th February 2024].

¹⁴⁰ Gioacchino Assereto, *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, [Oil on Canvas], (1640), < <https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/a/assereto/index.html> > [Accessed 28th February 2024].

works highlight the prominence of this artistic reception and understanding of Rebekah's character within Genesis 27.

3.6 Conclusion

Overall, through an investigation of Genesis 27 much has been illuminated regarding Rebekah's character. While it is undeniable that Rebekah tricks and deceives Isaac, she has holy motives. The confident and active nature that was first displayed by Rebekah follows her to the end of her narrative. She uses this nature to conduct a strong plan with her son Jacob so that he might ensure the blessing. While Rebekah's actions are divisive, it is also undoubtable that she had little choice. Isaac was not privy to the divine knowledge that she was, and she did not hold the power in her society to publicly protest his choice of son. She takes the actions necessary to ensure God's will is followed, her trick was an act of faith and sanctioned by God.

While there is much support for Rebekah's actions, her scholarly reception is not wholly understanding of her deception. Vawter's work is a leading example of this reception as he presents his reading of Rebekah's character. Vawter openly condemns Rebekah and labels her with harsh critique. He terms her a cruel character who selfishly pushes Jacob to trick his father. Vawter omits any understanding of her prophetic motives and instead suggests that she acts on mere favoritism, ready to betray her other child. This reading lacks appreciation of her divine task and how God has chosen her for this task. Instead, Vawter is limited to her actions rather than understanding her true holy motives.

The artistic reception of Rebekah also negates her divine experience. While studying her reception within Genesis 25, it was seen that interpretations of Rebekah's divine experience were limited. However, there are numerous depictions of Genesis 27. Several of these artistic works focus on Rebekah as a controlling and ominous figure in the background. She stands over Isaac and Jacob dutifully watching, on one occasion she even physically pressures Jacob with her hand on his back. Therefore, the artistic reception of Rebekah is also limited to her actions and negates her motives. This is seen through the numerous depictions of Rebekah as a stern and looming figure. Thus, her artistic reception is dominated by the understanding that she is a dominating figure.

Final Conclusion;

Overall, Rebekah's presentation and reception history is intricate and multi-faceted, this is established through an investigation of this dissertation's key aims.

The first aim of this study was to investigate the character of Rebekah and her presentation within Genesis. Rebekah is solidified as one of the most profoundly important matriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, exemplified through her close relationship with God and her intrinsic integrity. Genesis repeatedly attempts to demonstrate Rebekah's faithfulness and core qualities that present her as a capable and holy woman. Her introduction highlights her intrinsic holiness and active character, as God selects her to become the next matriarch. Through this dynamic character, she proves herself worthy of this honour as she is praised for the confident and decisive actions that identify her. These actions and her nature continue to identify her throughout Genesis. Her communion with God in Genesis 25 is the direct response to her actions, her nature allows her to confront God and leads to her a prophecy. She plays an active role in ensuring this divine prophecy reaches fruition by ensuring that Jacob is blessed. Not only does this display her preference of actions over words but it emphasizes her closeness to God. She takes the role of a prophet, entrusted to ensure God's plans reach realization. Therefore, Rebekah's character within Genesis is a strong, holy woman who is close to God throughout her whole narrative. She is chosen by God for her innate characteristics that present her as noble, active and determined. Rebekah is a profoundly significant character who is not only presented as important but as an ideal model of a matriarch.

The second aim was to explore how scholars and artists have received and understood the biblical character of Rebekah. Rebekah's reception history is diverse and the target of several purposeful rewrites of her narrative, evidenced by the relationship between Rebekah and early Jewish sources, specifically the work of Josephus. Josephus redacts Rebekah's biblical narrative to subdue her strong character, while the biblical Rebekah is a strong and holy woman, Josephus' Rebekah is stripped of this. God does not choose her to become the next matriarch; she does not commune with God or receive her prophecy. The Genesis Rabbah also claims God would never personally speak to Rebekah. Adding to this, the work of Vawter highlights how scholarship has labelled Rebekah, Lady Macbeth, a cruel female character who manipulates the men in her life. However, Rebekah's scholarly reception does

not only condemn her and diminish her. The work of Zucker, Goodwin and Teugels praise Rebekah for her closeness to God and her active character, claiming she is more prominent than her husband. This divisiveness is also displayed within Rebekah's artistic portrayals. When she is depicted at the beginning of her narrative she is largely praised, she is viewed as a noblewoman who is favoured by God. However as her narrative develops her character in artwork diminishes, she fades from a beautiful modest woman, to almost invisible and when she reappears, she is unrecognizable. When she is depicted in Genesis 25, the middle section of her narrative, she is either invisible or limited to her motherhood. One of the few artistic depictions of her speaking with God is also subject to sexualisation. There is a notable lack of depictions regarding her prophetic experience and the next time she is seen in artwork she mirrors Vawter's Lady Macbeth analogy, an almost grotesque woman hiding in dark corners and pressuring her son to betray his father.

The final aim of this dissertation was to critically assess the relationship between Rebekah's textual depiction and how she has been received. Rebekah's reception does contain some reflection of her biblical character, specifically the artistic reception of Genesis 24, as well as support from scholarship for her actions in Genesis 27. However, Rebekah's reception history is subject to several rewrites and many inaccurate readings of her character. For example, Vawter has been seen to understand that Rebekah tricks Isaac out of selfish motives. This disregards the previous instalments of her narrative and is unlike the Rebekah seen before Genesis 27. Before Genesis 27 her entire narrative presents her as an ideal woman close to God, it is unlikely that she would suddenly change into a villainous woman with selfish motives. This is reflected in the artwork, where her portrayals begin as an ideal woman and adapt into her as a dark intimidating figure. The work of Josephus mirrors this, as his changes to her passages completely diminish the original confident character witnessed within Genesis. He strips her of important moments, and this changes her entire presentation. Therefore, it can be seen that Rebekah's reception is divisive and does not always reflect her biblical portrayal. This is evidenced through rewrites and artistic portrayals, where her character drastically changes. Instead of reflecting her importance and holiness, they limit her through the notion that she grows into Lady Macbeth. This does not reflect the character previously studied within the Hebrew Bible and amplifies a misunderstanding of Rebekah.

In conclusion, Rebekah's original biblical presentation is profound, where she is exalted as an ideal woman who has a deep relationship with God. She is an active and determined prophet. While several scholars reflect upon this character and her importance, Rebekah's reception is

heavily impacted by interpretations that present her as less important when compared to her male counterparts and as a manipulator. The character of Rebekah suffers rewrites and adaptations that strip her of her importance and prophetic experiences. As well as this, she is often regarded with disdain for her actions within Genesis 27, despite their foundation in faith and dedication to God's will.

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