

# The Most Perfect Love Story Ever Told

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## Author Note:

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## Reading from Swedenborg

“Rebekah came out” means a love of truth coming from spiritual principles. This is clear from the representation of Rebekah as divine truth that is to be united with the divine goodness on the rational level. (*Arcana Coelestia* #3077)

## Sermon

Many love stories are recorded in the Word. Some are heavenly, some the opposite, for the particular purpose at hand.

Also, of course the love of a man for a maid has been the theme, and still is, of countless books and stories throughout the ages. Surely the most perfect of all these stories, sacred or profane, is that of Isaac and Rebecca as recounted in Genesis 24.

It is the greatest story of young love ever told because for one thing, no objecting parent is involved, no jealous suitor is on the scene, there is no unfaithfulness, no uncertainty, and it fails to follow the principle upon which nearly all love stories are based, namely, “Boy meets girl, boy and girl separate, boy and girl join again and are married.”

You will remember the Bible’s account: Abraham grows old, and he begins to think of his son Isaac’s future—that he should marry. So the patriarch sends for his chief servant. He is to go out and seek a wife for Isaac, but she must not be from among the Canaanites. The servant must swear to this.

Soon the servant starts off with all his retinue, including ten camels, reaching a city called Nahor, in Mesopotamia. Of course, there is a well at its center where the women come for water, wayfarers refresh themselves, and the animals are watered. The good servant prays that a damsel who would be the chosen one for Isaac may come to the well. Before long, a beautiful maiden appears with her water jug. Intuitively the servant, always unnamed, knows this is indeed she whom the Lord has appointed.

Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son (Nahor was Abraham’s brother), gives the servant a drink of water from her jug, seeing he was a wayfarer, and then thoughtfully draws water into the trough for his camels. The servant gives her in gratitude the gold and jewels Abraham had provided. Rebecca runs home to tell her brother Laban all that occurred.

The servant is then invited by Laban to the house of Bethuel, where he tells the little family the purpose of his visit to Nahor. The two men ask Rebecca if she is willing now to go back with the servant to meet Isaac. She agrees; and when at the end of their journey she sees Isaac, she goes without question to his side, enters the tent that had been his mother's, and joins Isaac as his wife, to become the forebear of "thousands of millions" (*Genesis 24:60*).

This beautiful account is not set down in the Word only for our admiration of a perfect love. It is like a golden treasure chest that contains precious stones of truth as insoluble as the tablets on which the Commandments were engraved by God's finger. We have learned there are three levels of truth in the Word: celestial, spiritual, and natural. The celestial pertains to the Lord; the spiritual to man at his highest; the natural, to man in his ordinary, earthly state, which he should always be endeavoring to improve.

What is the story of Isaac and Rebecca telling us about ourselves? How does it show us to, as Paul said, "Work out our own salvation" (*Philippians 2:12*)?

The account starts off by referring to Abraham's old age. He is no longer "Abram," but by addition of the "h" now represents the divine good with truth within it. Therefore it must mean that we may become so indifferent to, say, the Commandments that we may mistakenly think of such principles as "old stuff." Yet there is the still, small voice of conscience, the element of good, that may become our servant, telling us that our truth-by-rote needs to be joined—married—to some fresh and beautiful intention for good, as represented by Rebecca.

So the eldest servant—the well-established experience— begins its quest. Note that ten camels are named, ten corresponding to a full remnant of good and truth in us, while the camels, because of their water carrying ability, correspond to the affection for natural truth that must be the basis for what is higher.

The little cavalcade reaches a city, which as we know, always stands in the Word for doctrines, or instruction. They come to a well. Much is said concerning water: drinking it, reviving the camels with it. Water, signifying truth which quenches the thirst for it, also here indicates that doctrine must be born of truth.

It is significant that the servant presents Rebecca with gold and other precious things. Gold, being the most valuable of metals, stands for good; for no matter how much we desire to know the truth, unless it is for a good use, it is as though gold were used to embellish a skeleton that will soon return to dust.

Rebecca runs home to report on events at the well, and to show her brother Laban and her father Bethuel the precious things Abraham's servant has given her.

In a sense, individuals named in Scripture, whether historical or not, are as actors playing their parts on the stage of life, to which Shakespeare calls attention. So Laban, the brother to whom Rebecca first speaks, represents the affection for good that must dwell with truth to make it effective. This is beautifully illustrated by the actions of Laban, who, being first to see the precious things in Rebecca's hand, goes at once to the servant at the well, invites him to their home, and tells him he has already a place there for him and his camels.

Bethuel the father does not play a large part in the story; but as the parent of Laban and Rebecca, he represents the source of the truth that is to be initiated into good: the source of the maiden and her brother—who, as we have seen, is the affection for that good. Very little is said of the mother except that she thought Rebecca should wait a while before going with the servant to marry Isaac. It is as though the worldly things in us want to hold us back when a decision is to be made between right and wrong.

However, truth seeking good, instead of just piling up facts for the pride of knowledge, decides to go to Isaac—who always represents good as the result of understanding. The two meet, there is immediate attraction, and soon marriage. The story of life moves on. Good and truth, or love and wisdom, make one, and from this is born a useful, happy life.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for drawing us into your Word through the use of exciting and beautiful stories that we can hold in our minds and hearts. And thank you for hiding deeper meanings within those stories, so that when we are ready to hear your still, small voice, you speak to us from within your Word of the deeper things of spiritual life. As we read the stories of love and marriage, and of adultery and betrayal in the Bible, open our minds and hearts so that we may know to avoid the adultery of the spirit, but eagerly seek after the inner marriage of love and wisdom that you freely give to all who turn to you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

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