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Rebecca and the ten stinking camels

based on **Genesis 24:10-67**

by **Ralph Milton**

from [Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?](#)

Wood Lake Books

I knew Rebecca was a very special person when I read how she watered the servant's ten camels. Wells at that time were usually wide enough to have a stairs down to the water level, which could be quite low.

Camels can drink huge amounts of water, and I calculated that Rebecca would have had to walk down all those steps to the water level, and then carry that heavy jar of water up again somewhere between 100 and 300 times.

OK, allow for a bit of story-teller's exaggeration. But that woman would have had one set of strong legs.

And yes, I can attest to the fact that camels are cranky, disdainful, and they have terrible body odor.

"Ten camels. I should have my head examined for saying I would water ten stinking camels!"

Rebecca was muttering to herself. She had been up and down the well for almost two hours, and the camels were still drinking.

She'd been very willing at first. Her upbringing and her own good nature had prompted her to volunteer to water this man's camels. He was a stranger in town, so when he asked Rebecca for a drink, she was glad to offer him her water jar. And then she offered to water his camels too.

Finally, the last of the camels raised its head from the water trough, gave her a disdainful look, and turned away. "Well, the same to you," Rebecca thought to herself. She had never really liked camels. They had bad tempers, they had terrible body odor and they always looked disdainful.

The man approached her. "Thank you very much," he said. "You are very kind, and you must be very tired. Here, I have something for you."

With more gentleness than Rebecca expected of men, he gave her two heavy gold bracelets on her arm and a ring for her nose. "Tell me whose family you belong to. And is there room for me to stay at your house tonight?"

"My father's name is Bethuel. And yes, we have plenty of room and lots of food for *all ten* of your camels." Rebecca hadn't really meant to emphasize "all ten" that way, but she was relieved when the man chuckled.

"They are thirsty beasts, aren't they?"

"I'll run ahead and tell my mother you are coming," said Rebecca. Her tired legs found new life in her excitement as she ran down the path to her home.

"Mom, Laban, everybody! We're having company. I don't know who he is but I watered all ten of his camels and then he gave me all this! Look!" The whole household came running to see Rebecca's expensive gifts. "I told him he could stay here tonight."

"Who is he?" Laban, her brother demanded.

"I don't know. He didn't say. But he's got something on his mind, I can tell."

"Did he say what?" Laban looked at his sister intently. Rebecca blushed.

"No, but he watched every move I made while I watered all ten of his camels."

"Well, don't stand around. Get the house cleaned. Start cooking." Laban barked the command and rushed out of the house to find this wealthy stranger.

Rebecca often thought about that night, how it had totally changed her life. The man had come to their house, identified himself as Abraham's servant, and told the family that God wanted Rebecca to come and be wife to Abraham's son Isaac. He knew it was Rebecca God wanted because she had watered all the camels. That was a sign.

When Rebecca heard that, she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "So could maybe two or three camels have been enough sign?" she wondered.

Laban her brother and Bethuel her father just shrugged. "Well, if that's what God wants, that's how it has to be." Nobody bothered to ask Rebecca how she felt about all this.

The next day she was on the way. Her family had wanted her to wait for a few days, give them all a chance to say good-bye, but Rebecca refused.

"If I've got to go, I want to go now. Let's not drag this thing out." So across the desert they went, swaying on top of those cranky, smelly camels, day after hot dreary day. Motion sickness and boredom and heat. That's mostly what Rebecca remembered about the trip. That, and a churning stomach as she wondered what this Isaac was like that God wanted her to marry.

"Did I have a choice?" she wondered. No. The answer was quite clearly no. Women had very few choices. "Then God, help me make the best of whatever is to be," she prayed.

She first saw Isaac walking across the field. The camel driver pointed him out to her.

Rebecca got down from her camel, pulled her veil down across her face and walked toward him. She saw the embarrassment, the strain in the man's face. He obviously felt he should say something but had no idea what.

So Isaac turned, and walked toward his mother's tent, and she followed in silence. There in a short little ceremony, they were married. Before they said their first words to each other.

It was a strange marriage. A strange relationship.

Isaac clearly wanted Rebecca to be a replacement for his strong and active mother, Sarah who had died a few years earlier. But Rebecca was herself and Isaac learned to love her in a dependent small-boy kind of way. She had to watch herself. Appearances were everything, and it was important that Isaac still appear to head the household.

"God, you called me here, right?" Like other desert folk, Rebecca was candid and direct in her conversations with God. "You got me married to this man, this weak and indecisive man, who will make nothing of himself unless I do it."

"I didn't have a lot of options, did I God? Well, running this household through this man is no harder than watering ten camels. So if you wanted a weaker woman for this man, why ten camels? Two camels would have got you a nice mousy woman for this man."

And Rebecca laughed a little, and went about doing what she knew she had to do, making the best of whatever was.

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