

READING GROUP GUIDE



1. In *Rebekah*, Orson Scott Card takes up an author's quintessential challenge: writing across the gender gap. Though written by a man, this is very much a woman's story. How authentically female do you think Rebekah's voice is? How realistic are her concerns as a woman?
2. From adolescence on, Rebekah is unusual for a woman of her time and her society. How does she stand out from the women around her? What are the benefits—and the dangers—of her uniqueness?
3. The idea of beauty is used in complex ways in this story. What does Rebekah learn early on about the power of her own beauty? What is her sense of her own attractiveness as the story begins, and how does it change during the course of the book? What is the association between beauty and love? Between beauty and a woman's worth, in Rebekah's day and now? Between beauty and "goodness" or virtue?
4. The relationship between Rebekah's will and her faith is a complicated one, often involving her assuming powers that a woman in her society typically would never have. What gestures or decisions does Rebekah ascribe to her devotion to the God of Abraham? Do you believe that

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faith is her true motivation in these situations? Would her relationship to her religion be different if she were a man in that same society?

5. The biblical time in which Rebekah's story takes place is an extraordinarily harsh one, filled with mortal dangers of all kinds. Where do you see courage in the book's characters? What different forms does it take in different people? Who do you think are Card's most courageous characters in this story?
6. In the patriarchal society of biblical times—in which religious leadership and knowledge can only be passed from father to son, and female concubinage is a standard practice—what, if any, power do women like Rebekah or her mother have in their marriages? In their families? In determining their fate? Are there subversive ways in which Rebekah and other women in the book gain or wield specific kinds of power?
7. The veil is a potent symbol in this story. In what different ways and for what reasons does Rebekah use it? What does it offer her? How does the veil function for other female characters?
8. The story of Rebekah is laced with a sense of divine judgement, of reward and punishment from God for how one lives one's life. Rebekah's father believes that he lost his hearing as a punishment for having separated his children from their mother. How does that same sense of moral consequence play out for Rebekah?

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9. Once Mother returns to Rebekah's family, the dynamics in the camp begin to change. How does Mother's leadership of the women of the camp differ from Rebekah's? What does each woman's style of relating to people say about her personality? About different kinds of female power?
10. In early Judaism, the birthright—the ownership and leadership of faith—is passed from father to son, not held or possessed by women. Yet Rebekah often feels that she has a unique relationship with God. What do you think is the real nature of that relationship? Has Rebekah been chosen by God, more so than her male relatives? Could or should she be a recipient of the birthright in her family and in her marriage?
11. In Rebekah's mind, in the first half of the book, Abraham is an almost legendary figure of goodness. Yet once they meet and are joined as family by Rebekah's marriage to Isaac, it almost immediately becomes obvious that theirs is going to be a contentious relationship. How does Rebekah's view of Abraham change during the last half of the book? How do marriage and family alter people's opinions of one another?
12. The character of Isaac is unusual among the men of the book; more often than not, he is self-effacing to the point of being self-hating, deeply unhappy with his own personality and identity. How does Rebekah's love and reverence for him coexist with his own self-esteem? How does that coexistence affect the power

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dynamics in their marriage and family? Ultimately, do you think of Isaac as a strong character or a weak one?

13. Rebekah and Esau have a difficult relationship beginning in his infancy. Do you think that Rebekah loves both her sons? Does Isaac? Do most parents have a favorite among their children, whether or not they will admit it?
14. Rebekah's disguising of Jacob as Esau so that Jacob can receive the birthright from his father is the climax of a decades-long family battle over personality, morality, destiny, and power. Rebekah goes to elaborate lengths to justify her plan and Jacob's actions on the basis of her faith and its consequences for history. Did Rebekah do the right thing by having Jacob supplant his brother? Can faith ever justify deception?