מדרש

# Midrash

ON GENESIS 25:22

## Why did Rivkah's twins struggle within her womb?

Bereshit Rabbah 63:6

The midrash on Genesis 25:22 reads the struggle of the twins in Rivkah's womb as active hostility. Rabbi Yochanan understands each brother as running to kill the other, while Reish Lakish reads it as each one nullifying the other's commandments, and Rabbi Berekhya, in the name of Rabbi Levi, adds that Esav's fist was already outstretched in the womb. Rabbi Yitzchak's account of Rivkah's distress, and the teaching of Rabbi Nechemya that she was worthy of bearing twelve tribes, frame her anguish as a prelude to that destiny, and the midrash closes by teaching that whoever honors a Torah scholar honors the Shechinah (the Divine Presence). AI SUMMARY

"The children were agitated within her, and she said: If this is so, why do I exist? She went to inquire of the Lord" (Genesis 25:22). "The children were agitated [vayitrotzetzu] within her" – Rabbi Yoḥanan and Reish Lakish, Rabbi Yoḥanan said: This one ran [ratz] to kill that one and that one ran to kill this one. Reish Lakish said: This one permitted the command of [matir tzivuyo] that one, and that one permitted the command of this one. Rabbi Berekhya in the name of Rabbi Levi: So that you will not say that it was after he [Esau] emerged from his mother's womb that he confronted him, but rather, while he was still in his mother's womb, his fist [zirte] was outstretched toward him. That is what is written: "The wicked are corrupt [zoru] from the womb" (Psalms 58:4).

"The children were agitated within her" – when she would stand adjacent to synagogues and study halls, Jacob would convulse to emerge. That is what is written: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5). When she would pass houses of idol worship, Esau would run and convulse to emerge. That is what is written: "The wicked are corrupt from the womb."

"The Lord said to her: Two peoples are in your womb, and two nations will be separated from your innards; one nation will prevail over the other nation, and the elder will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). "Her days to give birth were complete, and behold, there were twins in her womb" (Genesis 25:24). "The first emerged ruddy, all of him like a cloak of hair, and they called his name Esau" (Genesis 25:25). "Then his brother emerged, his hand grasping Esau's heel, and he called his name Jacob. And Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them" (Genesis 25:26).

"She said: If this is so, why do I exist [lama zeh anokhi]?" Rabbi Yitzḥak said: It teaches that our matriarch Rebecca was circulating around the entrances of women's houses and saying to them: 'In your days, did you experience this suffering? If this is the suffering that comes with children; had I only not conceived.' Rav Huna said: [She said:] 'If this is how I am destined to produce twelve tribes, would I only not conceive the numerical value of zeh.'

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Neḥemya: Rebecca was worthy to have twelve tribes emerge from her. That is what is written: "The Lord said to her: Two peoples are in your womb" – these are two;

"and two nations" – that is four; "and one nation will prevail over the other nation" – that is six; "and the elder will serve the younger" – that is eight. "Her days to give birth were complete" – that is ten. "The first emerged ruddy" – that is eleven; "then his brother emerged" – that is twelve. There are some who derive it from this verse: "She said: If this is so, why do I exist [lama zeh anokhi]?" Zayin – seven, heh – 5, that is twelve, the numerical value of zeh.

"She went to inquire of the Lord" (Genesis 25:22) – were there synagogues and study halls in those days? Did she not go only to the academy of Shem and Ever? It is, rather, to teach you that anyone who enters before a Torah scholar, it is as though he enters before the Divine Presence.