



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Vayera (וַיֵּרָא, "and he appeared")**
- **Chapters: Gen. 18:1-22:24**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week's parashah (Lekh Lekha) recounted how Abram left everything behind in response to the promise of divine inheritance given by the LORD. As a result of his obedience, the LORD told Abram that he would become the father of a multitude of people, "as numerous as the stars in heaven." Even in his old age, Abraham believed the promise and the LORD counted him righteous for his faith. Thirteen years later the LORD renamed him "Abraham" and made a unilateral covenant to give him the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. The LORD further commanded Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant.

According to Jewish tradition, it was just three days after performing his circumcision, the time of the most intense pain as a result of the procedure, that the LORD appeared to Abraham by the "trees at Mamre." Despite his discomfort, Abraham rushed off to eagerly prepare a meal for the three mysterious guests who appeared in the desert heat.

After Abraham served his visitors and they were eating, one of them announced that in exactly one year, He would return to them and Sarah would then give birth to a son. Sarah, who had been listening from the tent door, heard this and laughed within herself at the suggestion. To this the LORD (disguised as one of the three guests) replied "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

The three guests then set out from there for Sodom, and Abraham accompanied them. The LORD then explained that He was going to see if the outcry against the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was true, and if so, was going to pronounce judgment upon it. Abraham then questioned the LORD: "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" he asked. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" In a sequence of hypothetical questions and answers, Abraham asked the LORD whether He would destroy the city if there were righteous people dwelling there. God reassured Abraham that if there were only a handful of people dwelling in Sodom, he would spare the entire city....

(Summary continues on next page...)



Meanwhile, the two other angels had gone ahead and arrived at Sodom, where Abraham's nephew, Lot, extended hospitality and sought to protect them from the evils of nightlife in the wicked city. He persuaded the visitors to come to his home and prepared a meal for them, but soon a mob surrounded his house and demanded that he release the two strangers to them for sexual abuse. Lot tried to reason with them, and even offered his two daughters in their place, but the mob grew ugly and finally rushed him. The two angels intervened, however, by pulling him inside the house and striking the mob with blindness. They then revealed that they were sent by the LORD to destroy the city, and urged Lot to flee from the wrath to come. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, however, when she disobeyed the command not to look back at the burning city as the family fled for the city of Zoar.

Lot then decided to flee to the hills with his daughters. While taking shelter in a cave, his two daughters (believing that they and their father were the only ones left alive after the apocalypse) got their father drunk, had sexual relations with him, and became pregnant. The two sons born from this incident would become the father the nations of Moab and Ammon, respectively.

After this, Abraham moved south to Gerar. Apparently Abraham had an ongoing agreement with Sarah to pretend to be brother and sister during their travels, in order to avoid clan violence upon settling in a godless area. Sure enough, a Philistine king named "Avimelech" took Sarah to be part of his harem, but in a dream, the LORD warned him that he was a dead man if he failed to return her back to Abraham, her husband. Avimelech did so, though he castigated Abraham for his duplicity. Nonetheless, Abraham was given his choice of the land in the area.

As foretold by the Angel, Sarah miraculously conceived a son, whom Abraham called Yitzchak (i.e., "laughter"). Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah 90, when Isaac was born. According to the commandment of brit milah, Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. Later, when Isaac was weaned, Abraham threw a party, but Sarah noticed Hagar's son Ishmael mocking, so she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." At first Abraham was displeased, but the LORD told him to do as Sarah had asked, because it was through Isaac that his offspring would be named, and the LORD would bless Ishmael and make him the patriarch of a great nation.

So Abraham sent Hagar and his son Ishmael away to wander in the desert. When the water Abraham gave them ran out, Hagar covered her son in the brush and then went off to wail for his death. But God heard the voice of their crying, and an angel of God showed her a water supply to save the boy's life. "And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow."

After Abraham dwelt "many days" among the Philistines, God tested him by commanding him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering at a sacred place God would reveal to him. After a three day journey to Mount Moriah, Isaac allowed himself to be bound and placed on an altar, where his father raised his knife to slaughter his son in obedience to God's command. At the very last moment, the Angel of the LORD called out to stop him from going through with the sacrifice. Abraham then offered a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns, in Isaac's place. Abraham then named the site *Adonai-Yireh*, "the LORD who sees."

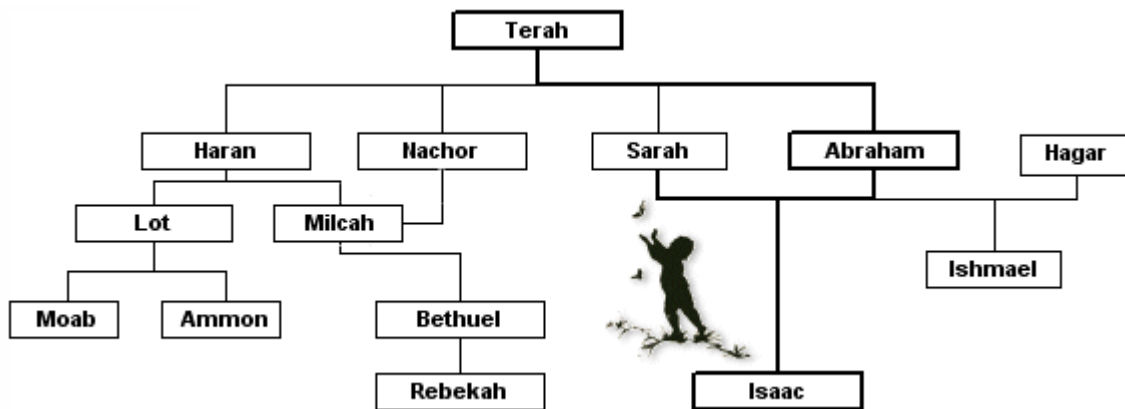
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On account of Abraham’s obedience and trust in the LORD, the Angel of the LORD then said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your Seed (singular) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Note that this supreme test of faith is called the *Akedah* (“binding”), or sometimes *Akedat Yitzchak* (“the binding of Isaac”), and the story of Abraham’s test is recounted daily by Orthodox Jews during morning synagogue services and also during Rosh Hashanah. In a very real sense, the Akedah represents the “Gospel according to Moses.”

The parashah concludes with Abraham settling in Beersheba and receiving news of the birth of a daughter, Rebekah, to his nephew Bethuel:



Note: The Akedah and Yeshua

As Messianic believers, we understand the binding of Isaac to foreshadow the ultimate sacrifice the heavenly Father would give on our behalf through Yeshua. Unlike Abraham, God the Father actually offered His only begotten Son (ben yachid) upon Moriah in order to make salvation available to all who believe (John 3:16-18; 1 John 4:9). As Abraham himself believed: Elohim yireh-lo hasheh, “God Himself would provide a lamb for the sacrifice.”

Briefly consider how the Akedah provides a prophetic picture of Yeshua as the “Lamb of God” (Seh haElohim) who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Both Isaac and Yeshua were born miraculously; both were “only begotten sons”; both were to be sacrificed by their fathers at Mount Moriah; both experienced a “passion”; both were to be resurrected on the third day (Gen. 22:5, Heb. 11:17-19); both willingly took up the means of his execution; and both demonstrate that one life can be sacrificed for another – the ram for Isaac, and Yeshua for all of mankind. Indeed, Isaac is a clear picture of the Greater Seed of Abraham to come, the One who would remove the curse and save us from death.



Parashah Questions



1. What does *vayera* (וַיֵּרָא) mean? (Gen. 18:1) ¹
2. *Where* did God appear to Abraham? (18:1) ²
3. Who was Mamre? (18:1) ³
4. According to Jewish tradition, why was Abraham “sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day” at this time? (18:1) ⁴
5. What does *Bikkur Cholim* (בִּיקּוּר חוֹלִים) mean? ⁵
6. What did Abraham see while he was sitting at the door of his tent? (Gen 18:2) ⁶
7. What did Abraham do when he saw the three men? (18:2) ⁷
8. What does *hachnasat orechim* (הַכְּנַסַּת אוֹרְחִים) mean? ⁸
9. According to Jewish tradition, who were the three visitors? (18:2) ⁹
10. How did Abraham address the visitors? (Gen. 18:3) ¹⁰

¹ Vayera is the 3rd person masculine singular of the verb *ra'ah* (רָאָה), “to see,” in the passive voice (niph'al) meaning “and he appeared,” with the explicit subject of YHVH. Note that the direct object (“to him”) is left indefinite, though we understand this to be Abraham, who had been circumcised three days earlier.

² The LORD appeared to him “in the trees of Mamre” (בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵא), perhaps to demonstrate that just as an old tree still bears fruit, so would Abraham bear fruit in his old age.

³ Mamre (מַמְרֵא) was the name of one of the three Philistine chiefs who joined forces with Abraham in pursuit of Chedorlaomer to save Lot (Gen. 14:13,24). He was Abraham’s friend...

⁴ He was recovering from his circumcision. The sages state that the LORD came to pay him a visit.

⁵ Bikkur cholim, or “visiting the sick,” implies providing comfort and support to people who are ill, homebound, or otherwise in distress. It is considered an act of kindness to visit and care for the sick in their need.

⁶ Abraham saw three men standing above him (שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו). Abraham “ran” to them even though they stood over him because he understood their angelic nature and/or mission.

⁷ He ran to meet them and bowed himself before them.

⁸ Hospitality; hosting guests; showing kindness and charity to the stranger. This virtue is considered one of the major expressions of *gemilut chasadim*, performing “acts of loving kindness.” Abraham’s tent was said to have had an entrance in each direction, open on all sides, so that anyone could easily enter.

⁹ The three visitors were three angels: Michael (sent to give the message to Abraham and Sarah about their forthcoming son); Gabriel (sent to deliver judgment upon Sodom), and Rafael (sent to heal Abraham from his wound of circumcision). According to Christian interpretation, the central Angel was Malakh Adonai – the Angel of the LORD, i.e., Yeshua before His incarnation (not Michael). Most rabbis regard God as being “in the background” here - sort of a “bystander” to the visitation, despite the grammatical absurdities this implies.

¹⁰ He called them (or Him) Adonai (אֲדֹנָי), indicating that Abraham understood this to be God. Note that Abraham said, “if I have found grace (חַן) in your eyes,” the same phrase used to describe God’s view of Noah (Gen. 6:8).



11. Why did Abraham say to the angels, “Wash your feet, rest under the Tree”? (18:4) ¹¹
12. Why did Abraham offer to bring a “morsel of bread” when he actually planned to bring them much more? (18:5) ¹²
13. What sort of meal did Abraham intend to serve? (18:6-8) ¹³
14. Who was the “lad” that prepared the calf for the meal? (18:7) ¹⁴
15. Why did Abraham serve curds, milk, and meat but *no* dinner rolls? (18:8) ¹⁵
16. If Abraham observed all of the Torah (Gen. 26:5), then how could he serve dairy and meat together in his banquet for the angels? (18:8) ¹⁶
17. Who told Abraham that he would return the following year when Sarah would have a son? (Gen. 18:10) ¹⁷
18. Identify some mysteries surrounding Sarah’s laughter over the prospect that she would be a mother. (18:12-14) ¹⁸
19. How do we know that the angel who said he would return the following year was none other than the LORD Himself? (18:10-14) ¹⁹

¹¹ It was regarded as customary to “worship” the dust on the feet as a sign of their own effort and energy to do and acquire good in this world. Abraham found this doctrine disgusting and therefore provided water to wash the feet. This is connected to the idea of “resting under the tree,” which is the Tree of Life.

¹² “The righteous say little and do much.” The Hebrew word for “morsel” (פֶּתִימָה) is related to the word for “suddenly” (פְּתָאוֹם), which suggests that Abraham would have prepared a great feast if his visitors had not surprised him.

¹³ Abraham hoped to host a major banquet. He asked Sarah to make rolls using twenty quarts of flour, and the calf prepared for the meal was far more than the three visitors needed.

¹⁴ Though Abraham had 318 servants, Jewish tradition states that he gave the calf to Ishmael so that he would have a share in the good deed of serving the angels.

¹⁵ Sarah miraculously received her monthly cycle anew at this time, and this explains why Abraham was unable to offer them the cakes despite Sarah’s earlier preparation for them. Abraham was very careful only to serve food that was ritually pure.

¹⁶ Because there is no genuine Torah restriction against eating dairy with meat. The Torah text here is emphatic and clear: He took the milk (חֵלֶב) and the calf (בֶּן־הַבָּקָר) and gave it to the angels, and they willingly ate the food.

¹⁷ Contextually we know it was the LORD (יְהוָה) who said this to Abraham (see 18:13), though at this point in the narrative all we know is that it was one of the angels (i.e., “he said...”).

¹⁸ When Sarah heard the news that she would bear a child within a year, she “laughed at her insides” and regarded Abraham as “an old man” (Gen. 18:12). When the LORD rebuked her, however, He did not repeat her thoughts about Abraham, but paraphrased her thoughts, “Will I give birth when I am so old?” (Gen. 18:13). It is puzzling, however, that Sarah - who was a great prophetess - somehow failed to believe the promise the LORD gave to Abraham earlier regarding the promised seed (i.e., Gen. 15:1-ff). Indeed, it was after God gave him this promise that her name was changed from Sarai to Sarah, etc. Sarah’s laugh became the basis for Isaac’s name, too...

¹⁹ The text at first does not identify the subject in 18:10: “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son,” though in 18:13-14 the LORD is identified as the subject: “The LORD (יְהוָה) (וַיֹּאמֶר) said... at the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”



20. When was Abraham circumcised, and why does that matter? ²⁰
21. How do we explain Sarah’s denial that she laughed? (Gen. 18:15) ²¹
22. When the angels got up to go, Abraham went with them to send them on their way. (18:16). What does that teach us about hospitality? ²²
23. Why (and to whom) did the LORD ask whether he should reveal to Abraham his plans to judge Sodom and Gomorrah? (18:17-21) ²³
24. What is the “way of the LORD” (הַדֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה) that Abraham would guard? (18:19) ²⁴
25. What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? ²⁵
26. What was Abraham’s response to God’s plan to judge Sodom? (18:22-33) ²⁶
27. Did Abraham’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah go far enough? ²⁷

²⁰ Isaac was born after Abraham was circumcised, a year from the time the angels visited him. If Isaac was born on the first day of Passover (Talmud: Rosh Hashanah), then Abraham would have been circumcised at this time as well.

²¹ Sarah’s denial was not directed to God, but to Abraham, who reported to her God’s word. She thought Abraham was asking her why she laughed, which she denied. The statement, “No, you did laugh” was spoken by Abraham. She was punished, however, because she would later not seeing her son married in her lifetime.

²² It is important to see a guest off when he or she leaves. Abraham did so even though he was still recovering from his recent circumcision. The angels did not deny him the opportunity to do this mitzvah.

²³ Apparently this rhetorical question was addressed by the LORD to the angels. Was Abraham to be entrusted with the oracles of God? Since God foresaw that Abraham would be faithful to instruct his children to keep God’s way, and the Jewish people would become a great and mighty nation that would bless other nations in the earth, he chose to reveal his plans to him. God also knew Abraham’s concern for his nephew Lot, of course...

²⁴ The “way of the LORD” is to “do righteousness and justice” (לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט).

²⁵ According to the sages, the people of Sodom were so obsessed with materialism and self-gratification that the very idea of hospitality and charity was an “alien” thing - so much so that it was regarded as a capital crime against the state to help the poor and the stranger! Sodom was a wealthy city that was filled with crime, corruption, and institutionalized greed. The laws of Sodom were biased in favor of the rich and outright murder was routinely practiced. God gave them 25 years to repent, but Sodom grew more proud and hardened in its perversity. In light of the straightforward narrative given in Genesis 19:1-17, however, I should add that the people of Sodom were also sexual deviants who attempted to literally gang rape the two angels (as well as Lot himself), which reveals further just how depraved they were... They “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire” (ἀπελοῦσαι ὀπίσω σαρκὸς ἑτέρας), referring to wanton promiscuity that blindly crossed gender lines (Jude 1:7; 2 Peter 2:7-10). Add sexual violence, exploitation, and the wholesale “pornogrification” of culture to the list of Sodom’s evil ways that resulted in catastrophic judgment by fire.

²⁶ Abraham continued to stand before the LORD (אַבְרָהָם עֹרְנֵי עַמְּדָה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה) and questioned Him, “Will you actually wipe out the righteous along with the wicked?” How could God justify the destruction of an entire city for the sins of a few? It would be sacrilege to say that the Judge of all the Earth was not righteous in his judgment... Note that Jewish tradition states there are always 36 hidden righteous people (lamed-vavniks) who keep the world itself from being destroyed by fire.

²⁷ What if there were but one or two individuals who were righteous in the city? “Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there I AM...” Some argue that Abraham should have made the case that if even there was only a single solitary individual who was righteous, God should withhold his judgment to destroy the entire city... Abraham’s satisfaction with 10 righteous led Jewish tradition to adopt the idea of the *minyán* for prayer.



28. What is a “Lamed-vavnik”?²⁸
29. Why did the two angels come to Sodom in the evening? (Gen. 19:1)²⁹
30. Why was Lot was “sitting at the gate of Sodom”? (19:1)³⁰
31. Why did Lot solicit the visitors to come under his protection? (19:1-3)³¹
32. What did Lot do after the visitors finally agreed to come with him? (19:3)³²
33. What does Jewish tradition say about Lot’s wife?³³
34. What did the inhabitants of Sodom do when they discovered that Lot had surreptitiously invited the two guests into his home? (19:4-5)³⁴
35. What is “sodomy”?³⁵
36. Why did Lot call these Sodomites “my brothers” and go on to offer his two virgin daughters to be abused in place of his two visitors? (19:7-9)³⁶

²⁸ In Jewish mystical tradition, there are Lamed-Vav Tzaddikim (ל"ו צדקים), or 36 “hidden righteous ones” who keep the world from being destroyed. This idea comes from Abraham’s intercession from Sodom, when he appealed to God not to sweep away the righteous with the wicked in judgment. Abraham argued that if only 10 righteous were found in a wicked city, God should preserve the city for the sake of the 10 (i.e., minyan).

²⁹ The two angels were said to be Michael (sent to save Lot) and Gabriel (sent to destroy the cities). When Gabriel saw Abraham praying for the city, however, he waited, which implies that Abraham spent all day in prayer.

³⁰ Lot had become a judge or city official by this time. Psalm 1 warns, “Blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scoffers.” First Lot walked toward Sodom by selfishly desiring worldly gain; then he stood in the way of the sinners, moving his tent closer to the city. Finally he sat in the seat of the scorners, and his mind became debased. “Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor” (Prov. 3:34).

³¹ Lot knew the corruption and violence of the city and earnestly sought to protect them from harm. Therefore he “pressed them” to come with him (the same verb used to describe the violence of the Sodomites in 19:9). Because of this Lot is regarded a righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7). Moreover, Lot learned the art of hospitality and the importance of social justice from his uncle Abraham.

³² He made them a feast and baked them matzah! During the feast the angels discussed their mission. Note that Lot apparently did not know he was entertaining angels but assumed they were prophets announcing God’s word...

³³ Lot’s wife (Irith) did not want to give the angels a room in the main house and was such a miser that she did not want to let Lot use any salt for his feast. She finally demanded that the visitors sleep in an adjoining shed, which explains why Lot later said that the men came “under the shadow of my rafters” for protection (19:8).

³⁴ They surrounded the house and demanded that Lot “bring them out to us so that we may know them.” Note that the language indicates sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1), and therefore the Sodomites were demanding that the strangers be handed over for homosexual relations... That this is the correct meaning is clear from Lot’s warning that they “not do so wickedly,” and his offer to give them his daughters instead (note that later his daughters “returned the favor” to their father).

³⁵ Unnatural sexual relations, especially sexual intercourse between men or between a man and an animal. This behavior is condemned in Scripture as an abomination (Lev. 20:13).

³⁶ This reveals how far Lot had sunk because of his association with the Sodomites. For Lot, adultery and prostituting his own daughters was not as serious an offence as failing to protect the strangers.



37. Why was it *middah keneged middah* justice – “like for like” – that the men of Sodom were struck with blindness when they tried to break down the door of the house? ³⁷
38. How many daughters did Lot have? (19:12-13) ³⁸
39. Why did Lot’s sons-in-law think Lot was joking when he warned them of the impending disaster to come upon Sodom? (19:14) ³⁹
40. Why did Lot *hesitate* when the day of judgment dawned? (19:15-16) ⁴⁰
41. Why was Lot and his family spared from the destruction? (19:16) ⁴¹
42. Why did Lot say he could not escape to the hills? (19:19) ⁴²
43. How did God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? (19:24-25) ⁴³
44. What happened to Lot’s wife? (19:26) ⁴⁴
45. What did Abraham do after he realized Sodom was destroyed? (19:27-29) ⁴⁵
46. Why did Lot’s daughters scheme to be impregnated by their father? (19:30-36) ⁴⁶

³⁷ It was “like for like” because they were already blind by their own lusts to the reality and the danger that confronted them. All they could see was their evil desire, and this became the darkness of a burial shroud.

³⁸ Either two or four. If Lot’s sons-in-law refer to the men who were betrothed to his virgin daughters, it might have been two, though Jewish tradition states there were four daughters – two married and two betrothed.

³⁹ Either because Lot had lost all credibility in Sodom or because they were fatalists who thought it was impossible to run away from God’s judgment, and therefore they mocked the idea of “fleeing from the wrath to come.”

⁴⁰ First Lot might have been worried about his two married daughters (who were not with him) and thought further about how to save them, and second, he might have been overly concerned with his material possessions, not knowing what to take and what to leave behind.

⁴¹ Because of the compassion (חַמִּלָּה) of the LORD (i.e., יְהוָה). This beautiful expression connotes God’s desire to spare someone because of his love for them.

⁴² First Lot was ashamed to see his uncle Abraham in the hill country of Hebron, and second, Lot was accustomed to living in the lowlands and was worried about his health. Therefore he asked to flee to the insignificant city of Zoar, a small outpost of the larger Sodom-Gomorrah region.

⁴³ The LORD (יְהוָה) rained down “sulfur and fire” (נִפְרִית וָאֵשׁ) from the LORD in heaven (מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם). The language here is somewhat obscure though it supports the idea of triunity within the Godhead. Note that the verb used to describe how God “overthrew” the cities (הִפְךָ) is based on a root idea of perversity.

⁴⁴ She was turned into a pillar of salt (מַלְחָה) for looking back at Sodom. The midrash says that she was turned into salt because she refused to pass the salt to her husband during the feast with the angels! The rabbis use this story to justify the dubious practice of washing your hands *after* you eat – i.e., to ceremonially remove the “salt of Sodom” that might have been included in the meal from your hands! Yeshua had a problem with this...

⁴⁵ He prayed at the same place where he made intercession for Lot the day before, and he received revelation that the LORD had delivered his nephew from destruction.

⁴⁶ They thought the conflagration they witnessed was literally the end of the world and they therefore sought to preserve the human race from destruction. Because their motives were basically good, God allowed the Messiah to come from the line of Moab.



- 47. Where did they get the wine for their scheme? (19:30-36) ⁴⁷
- 48. What were the names of the two children born to Lot and his daughters? ⁴⁸
- 49. Why did Abraham move from Hebron to Gerar, in the desert? (Gen. 20:1) ⁴⁹
- 50. Why did Abraham say Sarah was his sister to Abimelech, king of Gerar? (20:2) ⁵⁰
- 51. What happened to Abimelech and his kingdom after he abducted Sarah? (20:3-18) ⁵¹
- 52. When did Sarah conceive and give birth to Isaac? (21:1-2) ⁵²
- 53. What does “Isaac” (יִצְחָק) mean? (21:3) ⁵³
- 54. How old was Isaac when he was circumcised? (21:4) ⁵⁴
- 55. How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born? ⁵⁵
- 56. Why was Sarah threatened by the presence of Ishmael? (21:9-10) ⁵⁶
- 57. How does the Apostle Paul refer to Hagar’s descendants? (Gal. 4:21-31) ⁵⁷



⁴⁷ Apparently the people of Sodom had stored wine in the caves of the surrounding area which they found.

⁴⁸ The firstborn daughter’s child was named Moab, meaning “from father,” and the younger daughter’s child was named ben-Ammi, meaning “son of my people” (note that these names made the scandal clear to everyone). There is some question whether Lot was complicit in these acts of incest, particularly in the second case. Nonetheless, from Moab would descend Ruth, great-grandmother of David and descendant of the Messiah, and from Ammon would descend Solomon’s wife Naamah, mother of King Rehoboam of Judah.

⁴⁹ Abraham had lived in Hebron for 25 years but left after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some say it was because he wanted to entirely separate from the scandal surrounding Lot and his daughters, and in fact hereafter there is no further mention of Lot in the Torah.

⁵⁰ For the same reason he said this to Pharaoh earlier – to avoid being killed for her sake (Gen. 20:11).

⁵¹ He and his people were stricken with terrible plagues and maladies, including stillbirths, etc. God visited Abimelech in a dream and told him “Behold you are dying because the woman you took is a married woman.”

⁵² There are two main opinions, though the more popular one is that the angels visited Abraham on Nisan 1, and therefore Sarah would have conceived sometime in the summer (after the incident with Abimelech) so that Isaac would have been born on Nisan 15 (i.e., Passover). This is hinted at the text itself, where it is written that Sarah gave birth “at the appointed time that the LORD had said” (21:2).

⁵³ “Laughter” or “he will laugh,” from the verb *tzachak* (צָחַק), an imitative word meaning to laugh. Sarah exclaimed “God has given me laughter. All who hear will laugh for me!” (21:6).

⁵⁴ Isaac was eight days old when Abraham circumcised him according to God’s commandment (Gen. 17:12). Isaac was the first Jew who was ever circumcised on the 8th day of life. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. He was 14 years old.

⁵⁵ Ishmael was “making laughter” (יִצְחָק) in mockery of Isaac during the “weaning” party that Abraham organized when Isaac turned 3 years old (Ishmael would have been 17 years old at the time). Apparently Ishmael regarded himself as the firstborn heir of Abraham and Sarah was going to put an end to that! She demanded that Abraham drive out Hagar and Ishmael from the family to avoid any confusion regarding family inheritance.

⁵⁷ This is a discussion question. “The son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.”



- 58. What did God tell Abraham regarding Sarah’s demand to cast out Hagar and Ishmael? (21:11-12) ⁵⁸
- 59. Why did Abraham plant a Tamarisk tree at Beersheba? (21:31) ⁵⁹
- 60. What is considered the supreme test of Abraham’s life? (Gen. 22:1) ⁶⁰
- 61. How often is this test of Abraham recalled in Jewish prayer services? ⁶¹
- 62. What were the “ten tests” of Abraham? ⁶²
- 63. Why did God put Abraham to the test? ⁶³
- 64. Why did God say, “Take your *only* son” when Abraham had two sons? (22:2) ⁶⁴
- 65. Why did Abraham split the burnt offering wood? (22:3) ⁶⁵
- 66. Who were the two who accompanied Abraham and Isaac? (22:3) ⁶⁶
- 67. Why did it take three days to travel from Hebron to Moriah? (22:4) ⁶⁷



⁵⁸ According to the sages, many bad things had happened to Abraham in his long life, but having to drive away his son was the worst of all. Despite Abraham’s agony, God told him to listen to Sarah since “through Isaac will your offspring be called.” In other words, Ishmael was essentially an illegitimate child and not to be regarded as Abraham’s promised heir. God consoled Abraham by promising to bless Ishmael and make him into a nation.

⁵⁹ Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech, the Philistine king. Later he planted a tamarisk tree there, at the “well of the oath,” perhaps in anticipation of the Tree of Life that God promised would be restored by the coming Seed of the woman. After the tree began to grow, God *tested* Abraham (22:1).

⁶⁰ The supreme test (nisayon) of Abraham’s life was the Akedah, or the “binding” of Isaac. Notice that the word for “knife” in 22:10 (“...he took the slaughter knife”) is *ha-ma’akhelet* (הַמַּאֲכֵלֶת), a word that literally means “food maker” and which suggests that sacrifice of Yeshua (i.e., the fulfillment of the Akedah) would yield “spiritual food” and blessing for the world. Some of the sages make a connection between a sign (*nes*) and a test (*nisayon*).

⁶¹ The Akedah is part of the morning service, recited daily, as well as during Rosh Hashanah every year. Some say the Akedah took place on Rosh Hashanah, whereas others say it took place on the afternoon of Yom Kippur.

⁶² 1. The rejection of the idol worship of his father(s); 2. persecution by Nimrod; 3. leaving his homeland; 4. the test of famine in Canaan; 5. dealing with Sarai’s abductions; 6. being forced into warfare; 7. the Dreadful Vision (bondage in Egypt); 8. painful Circumcision at an old age; 9. the eviction of Ishmael; 10. the sacrifice of Isaac.

⁶³ It is written that “The LORD tests the righteous” (יְהוָה צֹדֵיק יִבְחֵן) in order to *reward* them for their faithfulness.

⁶⁴ Literally God said, “Please take your son” (קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ). Abraham replied, “I have two sons.” God said, “your *only* son.” Abraham replied, “But both are only sons to his mother...” God said, “the one whom you love.” Abraham replied, “But I love *both*...” God replied: “Take Isaac – and go to the land of Moriah to ascend as a whole burnt offering (עֹלָה) on one of the mountains which I will show to you.” According to midrash, Abraham’s first thought was how he would explain all this to Sarah.

⁶⁵ Abraham arose early and made all the preparations himself. He split the wood for the sacrifice himself because he wanted to ensure that it was examined and found fit for the altar (i.e., insect free, etc.). Abraham wanted to perfectly fulfill all the laws involving sacrifice when he offered Isaac.

⁶⁶ Eliezer of Damascus and Ishmael were said to accompany Abraham and Isaac on the way to Moriah.

⁶⁷ This distance is about an eight hour walk. Abraham took his time going to the place in order to experience the depths of his sacrificial act before God.



- 68. How did Abraham see “the place” (הַמְקוֹם) on the third day? (22:4) ⁶⁸
- 69. Why did Abraham say that he *and* Isaac would return after they worshiped? (22:5) ⁶⁹
- 70. Why did Abraham place the wood for the altar on Isaac’s shoulders? (22:6) ⁷⁰
- 71. When Isaac asked his father, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” what did Abraham say? (22:7-8) ⁷¹
- 72. Why did Abraham build “the altar” at the place? (22:9) ⁷²
- 73. Why did Abraham *bind* Isaac? (22:9) ⁷³
- 74. When Abraham took the knife to slaughter his son, what happened? (22:10-12) ⁷⁴
- 75. What was offered in place of Isaac upon the altar? (22:13) ⁷⁵
- 76. What did Abraham call the name of that place? (22:14) ⁷⁶



⁶⁸ Ha-Makom (“the place”) is another name for God, and therefore God revealed the location by means of a cloud of glory surrounding the location. According to tradition, the third day was Rosh Hashanah (or Yom Kippur). Abraham asked Ishmael and Eliezer if they could see the Shekhinah cloud, but they said they saw nothing, and therefore Abraham told them to wait with the donkey while he and Isaac went off to worship...

⁶⁹ Instead of saying, “I will return to you,” Abraham said “we will return to you.” It was a slip of the tongue, though it was divinely inspired.

⁷⁰ Abraham did this to hint that Isaac was carrying the means of his own execution (similar to how one condemned to be crucified would carry his own cross).

⁷¹ When Abraham said, “God will see to a lamb for the burnt offering, my son,” some interpret this to read, “God will see to a lamb for the burnt offering – my son!” At this point, Isaac fully agreed to his role in the sacrifice.

⁷² This was the same altar that Adam, Abel, Noah, and Shem had used to offer sacrifice to the LORD. Therefore the Torah states Abraham built *the* altar, not an altar... Midrash states that this altar stands exactly opposite the Throne of Glory itself.

⁷³ Isaac asked to be bound (עָקַר) so that he would not inadvertently flinch and cause the ritual sacrifice to be performed improperly. This is the “Akedah” moment where Isaac became a willing sacrificial victim, allowing his father to bind him like a sheep. Abraham had Isaac lay down on the ground and tied his two hands and feet together behind him so that he could not move. He then laid him upon the arranged wood, face up on the altar, so that Isaac could look into his eyes.... It was at this time that Isaac began to pray to be spared from the sacrifice.

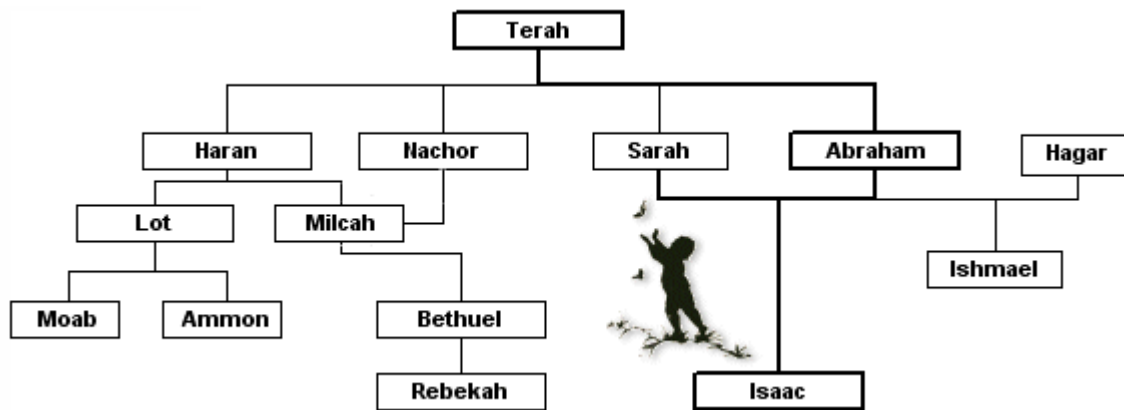
⁷⁴ Abraham took the knife in his right hand and put it to his son’s throat, ready to cut. The Angel of the LORD (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה) then called out to him from heaven in a loud voice commanding him not to go through with the sacrifice. Notice that the word for “the knife” (הַמַּאֲכֵלֶת) literally means “food maker” and suggests that sacrifice of Yeshua (i.e., the true fulfillment of the Akedah) would yield “spiritual food” and blessing for the world.

⁷⁵ A ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. Midrash says this was a perfectly white ram created on the twilight of creation, i.e., a “lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Since this ram was sacrificed in place of Isaac on Rosh Hashanah (or Yom Kippur), the shofar (ram’s horn) is sounded to recall the sacrifice at this time.

⁷⁶ Abraham called it *Adonai Yireh* (יְהוָה יִרְאֶה), “God will see,” with the comment that “On God’s mountain He will be seen,” referring ultimately to the sacrifice of Yeshua on the cross at Zion. Recall that Malki-Tzedek was the priest/king of Shalem (perfection) who blessed Abraham. Abraham later called the Shalem “yirah,” and God combined the two terms to form the name Jerusalem (יְרוּשָׁלַם). HaMakom is therefore the perfection of the Cross!



- 77. What did God say to Abraham after he “passed the test”? (22:15-18) ⁷⁷
- 78. Did Abraham believe that Isaac was going to be resurrected from the altar? ⁷⁸
- 79. Why isn't Isaac mentioned as returning with Abraham after this ordeal? Where did Isaac go? (22:19) ⁷⁹
- 80. Why does the portion end with a list of the eight children that Milcah, Abraham's sister-in-law, bore in Mesopotamia? (22:20-23) ⁸⁰



For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Chayei Sarah** (i.e., Genesis 23:1-25:18)
- Read the Haftarah (1 Kings 1:1-31)
- Read the New Testament (Matt. 1:1-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-57)



⁷⁷ The Angel of the LORD said, “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, that because you have done this and not withheld your son – your only son (ben yachid) – I will surely bless you and surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed *because* you have obeyed my voice.” This seems to imply that because Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac, God would therefore reciprocate with the offering up of His Son. Note that Paul makes use of the ambiguity in the word “offspring” here (a plural noun that can be used in a singular sense) in Galatians 3:16.

⁷⁸ While the NT says that Abraham believed that Isaac would be resurrected from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19), this does not diminish the supreme test he faced as he lifted up the knife to slay his promised son.... Similarly, God the Father's suffering was great as He gave up His Son Yeshua upon the cross, even though He foresaw the resurrected glory...Yeshua's passion (like Isaac's) was real as he tasted death for every man at Calvary.

⁷⁹ There is a lot of speculation about this. Some say that Abraham sent Isaac off to study at the school of Shem and therefore he did not return with him to the waiting servants; others say that Isaac was so “freaked out” by what had happened that he literally ran away from his father. Note that the next time Isaac is mentioned in the Torah is when he met his Gentile bride Rebekah (Gen. 24:64-67). This is prophetic of the resurrection of Yeshua as well.

⁸⁰ This genealogy is meant to prepare us to meet Rebekah, Isaac's paternal cousin and future wife.