

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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**18** The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.<sup>2</sup> Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As

וִירָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֵי מְמָרָא  
 יְהוּא יֵשֵׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל פְּחָם הַיּוֹם:  
 וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים<sup>2</sup>

### DIVINE VISITORS (18:1–33)

HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS (vv. 1–8)

**1. The LORD appeared to him** This revelation, unlike the previous revelations, is unaccompanied by a formal act of worship or the building of an altar.

**the terebinths of Mamre** These are trees in the area of Hebron. See Comment to 12:6.

**the day grew hot** Noontime was approaching. The Bible does not divide time into hours,

minutes, and seconds. A specific time of the day may be marked by a cooling breeze, the heat of the sun, or the dawning of light (see Gen. 3:8).

**2. Looking up, he saw** The wayfarers appear suddenly at a time of the day when people normally would not be traveling.

**three men** There seems to be nothing unusual about their appearance. Abraham and the people of Sodom (19:5) see them as entirely human.

### CHAPTER 18

Even as the opening notes of a symphony often sound a theme that will be developed in various ways throughout the piece, the opening word of this fourth *parashah* of Genesis proclaims the theme: *Va-yera*, “The LORD appeared/was seen.” One incident after another involves people seeing or not seeing God. Hagar’s eyes are opened to see the miraculous well God has provided for her in 21:19. Abraham sees God atop Mount Moriah (22:4), while the servants who were traveling with him do not. One of the gifts with which spiritually sensitive people are blessed is the ability to see the presence of God in their daily experiences. Others, sharing the same experiences, are blind to the divine presence.

**1.** By visiting Abraham to distract him from the pain of recovering from his circumcision, God provides us with an example of the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick, *bikkur ḥolim* (BT Sot. 14a). Visiting the sick may not physically alter the course of an illness, but the knowledge that people care may ease the suffering and discomfort of one who is ill or recuperating and dispel any fears that the suffering is deserved because he or she is a bad person. The presence of a caring

friend lessens a sense of suffering. When the Sages envision God visiting Abraham to lessen his discomfort, they may be implying that sometimes all we can give an afflicted person is the gift of our caring presence, and when we do that, we are following God’s ways.

By turning away from God to attend to the three strangers, Abraham teaches us that caring for others is a great *mitzvah*. “Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence” (BT Shab. 127a). Aaron of Karlin taught that when we turn our attention from God to tend to the needs of people, we do God’s will. Conversely, God is not pleased when we place such a great focus on God that we ignore needy human beings.

**2.** Perhaps Abraham, having benefited from God’s show of concern, is no longer focused exclusively on his own problems and is moved to help others. A tradition has it that Abraham and Sarah’s tent was open on all four sides to facilitate their extending hospitality to wayfarers.

It will become clear (in 19:1) that these travelers are angels in human guise. What is an angel? An agent. The Hebrew for “angel” (*mal'akh*) is related to the word for “task” (*m'lakhah*). We can think of an angel as a phys-

#### HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

**18:1 The LORD appeared to him** The *mitzvah* of *bikkur ḥolim*, visiting the sick, is motivated by our desire to emulate God’s behavior here (BT Sot. 14a), for, as the last verses of the previous chapter indicate, Abraham had just been circumcised.

soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, <sup>3</sup>he said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. <sup>5</sup>And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!” <sup>7</sup>Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

**he ran** Abraham begins his hospitality even before the strangers reach his tent.

**bowing to the ground** Abraham reinforces this gesture of honor and respect by referring to himself as “your servant.”

**3. My lords** The word translated here as “My lords” (*adonai*), with a final long vowel, is a plural form otherwise used only for God. Rashi and Ibn Ezra understand it to mean “My lords.” Maimonides renders it “My Lord” (referring to God). Because it is clear that the patriarch is unaware of the strangers’ true identity, the unusual vocalization may be a signal to the reader that the three “men” are no ordinary wayfarers.

**4. Let a little water be brought** Water for bathing one’s feet was a much-appreciated comfort to travelers with their sandal-like footwear and the pervasive dust of the roads.

ical manifestation of God’s will and concern, appearing on earth to perform a specific task. As the chapter later discloses, when the task is completed, the angel disappears. This is also seen in the story of Samson (Judg. 13:2–21).

**4. let a little water be brought** God promises Abraham, “As you brought a little water to My emissaries, I will give your descendants water in the desert. As you brought them bread

נִצְבִּים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מִצָּאתַי חֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל־נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ: <sup>4</sup>יִקַּח־נָא מֵעֹטְמִים וְרַחְצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: <sup>5</sup>וְאָקַחְהָ פַת־לֶחֶם וְסַעְדוּ לַבָּכֶם אַחַר תֵּעָבְרוּ כִּי־עַלְפֹן עִבְרַתֶּם עַל־עַבְדֵיכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ פֶן־תַּעֲשֶׂה פֶאֶשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:

<sup>6</sup>וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֶלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־רִי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קֶמַח טֹלֶת לֹשֵׁי וַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת: <sup>7</sup>וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רָץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בָּקָר רֶךָ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנֶּזֶר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה וְחֶלֶב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהם וְהוֹאֵעַמְד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

**under the tree** Probably one of the famous local terebinths. See Comment to 12:6.

**6. choice flour** That is, the finest and choicest wheat flour, from which grain offerings in later times were brought to the sanctuary.

**7. Abraham ran to the herd** For the main dish, he himself selects the calf, a rare delicacy and a sign of princely hospitality among pastoralists.

**8. curds and milk** Staple products of a pastoral economy. Curds are similar to the modern leben or yogurt. Milk, regarded as a source of vitality, was also offered to the gods. Abraham personally serves the strangers this rich fare and then stands by, ready to attend to their needs.

**as they ate** The Talmud would not accept the notion that angels partook of food, understanding the phrase to mean that they only gave the appearance of eating (BT BM 86b).

to eat, I will sustain your descendants with manna for forty years. As you gave them shade under a tree, I will give the Israelites a cover of clouds to protect them from the desert sun” (Gen. R. 48:10).

**8.** The verse is remarkable for describing the angels as eating. Also, they ate milk and meat together (which was forbidden only after the giving of the Torah at Sinai). A legend about

<sup>9</sup>They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he replied, “There, in the tent.”  
<sup>10</sup>Then one said, “I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!” Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him.  
<sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.  
<sup>12</sup>And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?”  
<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?’  
<sup>14</sup>Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”  
<sup>15</sup>Sarah lied, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was frightened. But He replied, “You did laugh.”

9 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו\* אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר  
הִנֵּה בְּאֵהָלִי: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֲשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ  
בְּעֵת חַיָּיהָ וְהִנֵּה-בֵן לְשָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְשָׂרָה  
שָׁמְעַת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהוּא אַחֲרָיו:  
11 וַאֲבָרְהָם וְשָׂרָה זְקֵנִים בָּאִים בַּיָּמִים  
חֲדָל לְהִיּוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֶרֶח כַּנְּשִׂאִים:  
12 וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אַחֲרַי  
בְּלִתִּי הִיתֵהָ-לִּי עַדְנָה וְאֵדְנִי זָקֵן:  
13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם לְמָה זֶה  
צָחִיקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הֲאֵפֶן אֲמַנֶּם אֶלֶד  
וְאֲנִי זָקֵנָתִי: 14 הֲיִפְלֵא מִיְהוָה דְּבַר  
לְמוֹעֵד אֲשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ בְּעֵת חַיָּיהָ וְלְשָׂרָה  
שָׁנִי בֵן: 15 וַתִּבְחַשׁ שָׂרָה | לֵאמֹר לֹא צָחִיקָתִי  
כִּי | יִרְאֶה וַיֹּאמֶר | לֹא כִּי צָחִיקָתִי:

9. ו. נקוד על א' י' ו', ולפי גוסחים מקובלים אין נקוד על ל'

#### THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT SARAH (vv. 9–15)

**9. Where is your wife Sarah?** Their question (as Rashbam notes) is merely a way of politely opening a conversation about Sarah.

**10. next year** The Hebrew phrase translated as “next year” (*ka-et hayyah*) is an idiom, meaning “next year at this time.”

**11. the periods of women** Literally, “the way of women.” The phrase refers to the menstrual cycle, as it does in 31:35.

**12. Sarah laughed** See Comments to 17:17,19.

**enjoyment** The Hebrew word translated as “enjoyment” (*ednah*) has a sexual connotation here. It means “abundant moisture” and is an exact antonym of “withered.”

**13. Then the LORD said** God and the angels often speak interchangeably. In the Torah, an angel is often a manifestation of God in human form.

**to Abraham** The patriarch maintains a discreet silence.

**15. Sarah lied** The Bible does not gloss over the human failings of Israel’s traditional heroes.

**she was frightened** The supernatural character of the visitors has become apparent. Even

the time of revelation at Mount Sinai presents the angels protesting against God’s intention of giving the Torah to the people Israel, on the grounds that they inevitably would violate it. God silences them by reminding them that the angels themselves mixed milk and meat at Abraham’s table.

**12.** Sarah’s laughter may not be a response to

the far-fetched notion of pregnancy at an advanced age, but the laughter of delight at the prospect of two elderly people resuming marital intimacy.

**13.** In the previous verse, Sarah laughed at the prospect of bearing a child “with my husband so old.” God, in speaking with Abraham about this, deliberately misquotes Sarah as hav-

#### HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

**18:13 And the LORD said to Abraham** God rephrases Sarah’s comment to refer to her own advanced age rather than Abraham’s lest he be offended. Similarly, the Talmud states that one is not obligated to tell the whole truth if it will hurt someone’s feelings (BT Ket. 16b–17a) and that one may even speak an untruth for the sake of peace (BT Yev. 65a).

<sup>16</sup>The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. <sup>17</sup>Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup>since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? <sup>19</sup>For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” <sup>20</sup>Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! <sup>21</sup>I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”

<sup>22</sup>The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the

16 וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הַאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקֹפוּ עַל-פְּנֵי סֹדֶם וְאַבְרָהָם הִלֵּךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם: 17 וַיְהִי וַיֹּהִי אֵמֶר הַמֶּלֶכֶתָּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה: 18 וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרָכוּבוּ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ: 19 כִּי יִדְעֵתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת-בְּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הֵבִיא יְהוָה עַל-אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר עִלָּיו: 20 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה וַעֲקַת סֹדֶם וְעַמּוּרָה כִּי-רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כִבְדָה מְאֹד: 21 אֲרִדְדֶהנָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הַפְּצַעְתָּהּ הַבְּאֵה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ | כֻּלָּהּ וְאִם-לֹא אֲדַעָה: 22 וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הַאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדְדָנוּ עִמָּד לְפָנָי יְהוָה: 23 וַיִּגַּשׁ

though Sarah had laughed to herself, not aloud, her innermost thoughts had been read!

**16. The men set out** This statement links the first scene in the chapter with the next.

**looked down toward Sodom** At some point they must have been within walking distance of Hebron from which the Dead Sea region was visible.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT SODOM  
(vv. 17–22)

God informs Abraham of the decision to destroy Sodom, and Abraham feels compelled to plead for people’s lives.

**19. instruct** In the Bible, education of the young is the responsibility of parents.

**20. their sin so grave** Their wrongdoings are unspecified. They have been understood as being in the moral realm, including adultery, false dealings, arrogant disregard of human rights, and the encouragement of evildoers.

**21. I will go down to see** The fate of Sodom is not yet sealed. God personally will investigate the moral condition of the city. This statement of intent serves to vindicate the act of divine justice.

**22. The men went on from there** This note is connected with verse 16.

**Abraham remained standing** According to rabbinic tradition, this text is 1 of 18 instances in the Bible that required scribal corrections (*tikkunei sofrim*). Thus it is assumed that the original text read: “God remained standing be-

ing said “old as I am,” to spare her husband’s feelings. Although truth is a major value in Judaism, sometimes truth has to be compromised to maintain love and harmony between husband and wife (Gen. R. 48:18). Using the principle of truth as an excuse cannot justify words that wound another person.

**19.** This is a “verse of supreme importance in the Book of Genesis” (N. Leibowitz). God promises to have a special relationship with Abraham and his progeny, so that they will be

inspired to do what is right and just. The negotiation over the fate of Sodom is one result of that relationship and that commitment to what is right and just. “The descendants of Abraham are characterized by three traits: a capacity for kindness, a sense of shame, and a commitment to doing what is right” (BT Yev. 79a).

**22. remained standing before the LORD** A Rabbinic tradition maintains that Abraham instituted the morning service (*Shaharit*), inter-

LORD. <sup>23</sup>Abraham came forward and said, “Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? <sup>24</sup>What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” <sup>26</sup>And the LORD answered, “If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” <sup>27</sup>Abraham spoke up, saying, “Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: <sup>28</sup>What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?” And He answered, “I will not destroy if I find forty-five

אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם־  
 רָשָׁע: <sup>24</sup>אוּלַי יִשׁ חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ  
 הָעִיר הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לְמִקּוֹם  
 לְמַעַן חַמְשִׁים הַצְּדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ:  
<sup>25</sup>חָלִלָה לָּךְ מַעֲשֵׂת | כִּדְבַר הַזֶּה  
 לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְהָיָה כְּצְדִיק  
 כְּרָשָׁע חָלִלָה לָּךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא  
 יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט: <sup>26</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אִם־  
 אֲמָצָא בְּסוֹדִם חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ  
 הָעִיר וְנִשְׂאתִי לְכָל־הַמָּקוֹם בְּעִבּוּרָם:  
<sup>27</sup>וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי  
 לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְאֲנִי עֹפָר וָאֵפֶר:  
<sup>28</sup>אוּלַי יַחְסְרוּן חַמְשִׁים הַצְּדִיקִים  
 חַמְשָׁה הַתְּשֻׁחִית בְּחַמְשָׁה אֶת־כָּל־  
 הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית אִם־אֲמָצָא

for Abraham.” The Scribes, deeming it disrespectful that God should have to wait for Abraham, reversed the subject and the object of the clause.

#### ABRAHAM ARGUES WITH GOD (vv. 22–33)

Abraham stands before God to plead for the lives of pagans who are depraved.

**23. came forward** As if in a courtroom, he came forward to present his case.

**24. within the city** The narrative concentrates on Sodom because, as the metropolis, it stood for all the other cities of the Plain.

**25. Shall not the Judge** Abraham’s faith in God’s justice apparently gives rise to his serious questions about God’s morality in governing the world.

**27. but dust and ashes** Abraham approaches God with profound humility.

preting the verse to mean that he prayed when he rose early to face God (BT Ber. 26a).

**24. fifty innocent within the city** If a community can produce a subculture of righteous people, and if they involve themselves *within the city*, trying to change it, then there is hope for that community. But if the righteous are only isolated individuals who avoid or are barred from being involved in the affairs of the city, there is no hope. One can only extricate them and condemn the rest.

**25. Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal**

**justly?** Abraham’s challenge to God is rooted in the audacious claim that even God is subject to the moral standards divinely decreed for humans. If God is to be obeyed when commanding moral behavior, God must exemplify that moral behavior. A commentary takes this not as a question or a challenge, but as a demand: “Do not exact strict justice upon these people! You, LORD, know how weak human nature is. You know how hard it is to be a good person in Sodom. Treat them more leniently than strict justice would require” (*Meshekh Hokhmah*).

#### HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

**18:25 Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?** Abraham’s conviction that God must be just has provided theological grounds for Jewish commitments to justice and to social action, for just as God seeks justice and helps the poor, so must we (BT Sot. 14a).

there.”<sup>29</sup> But he spoke to Him again, and said, “What if forty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not do it, for the sake of the forty.”<sup>30</sup> And he said, “Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”<sup>31</sup> And he said, “I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty.”<sup>32</sup> And he said, “Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten.”

<sup>33</sup>When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

**19** The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground,<sup>2</sup> he said, “Please, my lords, turn aside

שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וּחֲמִשָּׁה: <sup>29</sup> וַיִּסֹּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאַרְבָּעִים: <sup>30</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא יַחַר לְאֲדֹנָי וְאֲדַבְּרָה אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים: <sup>31</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְהַנָּא הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרִים: <sup>32</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא יַחַר לְאֲדֹנָי וְאֲדַבְּרָה אֶן־הִפְעֵם אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרֵה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרֵה: <sup>33</sup> וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ:

**יט** וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סָדְמָה בְּעָרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סֹדֶם וַיֵּרָא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לְקִרְאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲפָיִם אַרְצָה: <sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְהָ נָא־אֲדֹנָי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל־בַּיִת

**32. ten** A round number that symbolizes totality, 10 is the number of adults who constitute the minimum effective social entity. Abraham has reached the limit of the ability of right-

eous individuals to outweigh the cumulative evil of a community.

**33. returned to his place** That is, to his tent near Hebron (18:1).

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH (19:1–29)

ARRIVAL OF THE ANGELS AT SODOM (vv. 1–5)

where the community’s affairs could be conducted with the full participation of the citizens, in the sight of all.

**1. sitting in the gate** The gate area of an ancient Near Eastern city served as a civic center

**32.** Why does Abraham stop at 10? Perhaps it takes a critical mass to generate an alternative way of living; isolated individuals cannot. The number 10 may be psychologically related to the stipulation of 10 people for a *minyan*, the quorum for public worship, the point at which an assembly of individuals becomes a group, a congregation.

**33.** Presumably God knew that Sodom was beyond redemption but was pleased that Abraham, unlike Noah, argued on behalf of his contemporaries (Tanh. 8).

CHAPTER 19

**1.** Only two angels now remain. According to the Talmud, an angel exists to perform one



to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early." But they said, "No, we will spend the night in the square."<sup>3</sup> But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

<sup>4</sup>They had not yet lain down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old—all the people to the last man—gathered about the house. <sup>5</sup>And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them."<sup>6</sup> So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him,<sup>7</sup> and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. <sup>8</sup>Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let

עֲבַדְכֶם וְלִינוּ וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִי בְרַחֲבֹב נָלִין: <sup>3</sup> וַיִּפְצְרֻבָּם מְאֹד וַיִּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמִצֹּת אָפֶה וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

<sup>4</sup> טָרַם וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ וְאֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אֲנָשֵׁי סֹדֹם נִסְבּוּ עַל-הַבַּיִת מִנְעַר וְעַד-זֶקֶן כָּל-הָעָם מִקְצֵה: <sup>5</sup> וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֵיךְ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלַּיְלָה הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנִדְעָה אֹתָם: <sup>6</sup> וַיֵּצֵא אֵלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתַח וְהִדִּילַת סָגֵר אַחֲרָיו: <sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָא אַחֵי תַרְעוּ: <sup>8</sup> הִנֵּה-נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ

**2. house** Lot, who formerly lived in a tent near Sodom (13:12), has become a townsman, residing in a house within the city. Although he has changed his style of living, he has preserved the virtue of hospitality characteristic of a pastoral society.

**be on your way early** The strangers are urged to get out of town before the people of Sodom become aware of their presence.

**No** These messengers are unafraid. Moreover, they must test the inhabitants to learn whether or not their evil reputation is in fact deserved.

**the square** The Hebrew word "r'hov," in the Bible, refers to a broad, open square or plaza.

**3. unleavened bread** A flat cake baked before the dough has had time to rise. It can be prepared very quickly for unexpected guests.

**4. the men of Sodom** The townspeople live up to their unsavory reputation; they are true

men of Sodom, as described in 13:13 and 18:20ff.

**young . . . to the last man** Not one decent person can be found.

**5. be intimate** This means to commit rape (see Judg. 19:22).

#### LOT'S MORAL RESISTANCE (vv. 6–11)

Lot is faced with a dilemma, for his own morals defy the standards of Sodom. He adheres to his own code of honor. The sacred duty of hospitality gave a guest the right of asylum.

**8. I have two daughters** A patriarch possessed absolute power over the members of his clan. Lot's tactic mirrors a value system that held daughters in low esteem.

**who have not known a man** Verse 14 shows that the two girls were betrothed but not yet married. That is why they still lived in Lot's house. According to biblical law, a betrothed

specific task, after which the angel disappears. One angel was sent to announce the good news to Abraham and Sarah, one to destroy Sodom, and one to rescue Lot (Gen. R. 50:2). Unlike angels, we human beings have multiple tasks, continuing to live our lives even after we have achieved significant goals.

4. The sin of Sodom was not just that some

people acted wickedly (people do that everywhere), but that wickedness became public policy, endorsed and approved by the authorities (PdRE 25).

8. Ramban condemns Lot for this proposal, declaring that a man should face death rather than permit his wife or daughters to be dishonored.

me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof.”<sup>9</sup> But they said, “Stand back! The fellow,” they said, “came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” And they pressed hard against the person of Lot, and moved forward to break the door.<sup>10</sup> But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door.<sup>11</sup> And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, they struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance.

<sup>12</sup> Then the men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else that you have in the city—bring them out of the place.”<sup>13</sup> For we are about to destroy this place; because the outcry against them before the LORD has become so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”<sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests.

<sup>15</sup> As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on,

woman is considered married, although the marriage has not been sexually consummated. The violator of such a woman incurs the death penalty. This is true in ancient Near Eastern law codes as well.

**9. The fellow** Literally, “the one,” a remark laden with contempt. Lot is being reminded that he is a stranger, without legal rights and protection, entirely dependent on the goodwill of the local community.

**11. blinding light** A sudden, immobilizing, blazing flash of light.

#### THE DELIVERANCE OF LOT AND HIS FAMILY (vv. 12–16)

**12. Sons-in-law** They list possible relatives, not only Lot’s immediate family.

אִישׁ אוֹצִיֵּא־הֵנָּא אֶתְהֶן אֲלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לֹא תַעֲשׂוּם הָאֵל אֶל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בַצֵּל קַרְתִּי: <sup>9</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ | גַּש־הֶלָּאָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא־לָגוֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט עֵתָה נִרְעֵ לָךְ מֵהֵם וַיִּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְשׂוּ לְשֹׁבֵר הַדֶּלֶת: <sup>10</sup> וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם וַיִּבְיֵאוּ אֶת־לוֹט אֲלֵיהֶם הַבַּיְתָה וְאֶת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגְרוּ: <sup>11</sup> וְאֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח הַבַּיִת הַכּוּ בַסַּנּוּרִים מִקִּטָּן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאֻוּ לְמִצַּא הַפֶּתַח:

<sup>12</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־לוֹט עַד מִי־לָךְ פֹּה חַתָּן וּבְנֵיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ בָּעִיר הוֹצֵא מִן־הַמְּקוֹם: <sup>13</sup> כִּי־מִשְׁחַתִּים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶת־הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־גִדְלָה צַעֲקֹתֶם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלַחְנוּ יְהוָה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ: <sup>14</sup> וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר | אֶל־חַתָּנָיו | לִקְחֵי בְנֹתֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ קוֹמוּ צְאוּ מִן־הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־מִשְׁחִית יְהוָה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְהִי כַמִּצְחָק בְּעֵינֵי חַתָּנָיו:

<sup>15</sup> וַכְּמוֹ הַשְּׁחָר עָלָה וַיֹּאצִּיאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים בְּלוֹט לֵאמֹר קוּם קַח אֶת־אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־

**13. the outcry** The guilt of the city is now beyond all doubt, and its punishment is inevitable.

**14. went out** To where his intended sons-in-law lived.

**who had married** This rendering, which is that of the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation), assumes that Lot had two married daughters in the city.

**as one who jests** Their lack of seriousness reveals their insensitivity to the moral evil about them.

**15. two remaining daughters** Literally, “your two daughters who are here.”

saying, “Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city.”<sup>16</sup> Still he delayed. So the men seized his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters—in the LORD’s mercy on him—and brought him out and left him outside the city.<sup>17</sup> When they had brought them outside, one said, “Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away.”<sup>18</sup> But Lot said to them, “Oh no, my lord!<sup>19</sup> You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.<sup>20</sup> Look, that town there is near enough to flee to; it is such a little place! Let me flee there—it is such a little place—and let my life be saved.”<sup>21</sup> He replied, “Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken.<sup>22</sup> Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” Hence the town came to be called Zoar.

<sup>23</sup>As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar,<sup>24</sup> the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD

שְׁתֵּי בָנֹתָיָהּ הַנִּמְצָאֹת פְּנֵי-תַסְפָּה בְּעֵינָן  
הָעִיר: <sup>16</sup> וַיִּתְמַהֲמַהּ | וַיַּחְזְקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים  
בְּיָדוֹ וּבְיַד-אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְיַד שְׁתֵּי בָנֹתָיו  
בַּחֲמֹלַת יְהוָה עָלָיו וַיִּצְאָהוּ וַיִּנְחָהוּ  
מִחוּץ לָעִיר: <sup>17</sup> וַיְהִי כְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם  
הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמַּלְטֵ עַל-נַפְשְׁךָ אַל-  
תָּבִיט אַחֲרָיִךְ וְאַל-תַּעֲמֹד בְּכָל-הַכְּפָר  
הַהָרָה הַמַּלְטֵ פְּנֵי-תַסְפָּה: <sup>18</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט  
אֲלֵהֶם אַל-נָא אֲדַנִּי: <sup>19</sup> הִנֵּה-נָא מְצָא  
עֲבָדְךָ חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּגְדֵּל חַסְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר  
עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחְיֹת אֶת-נַפְשִׁי וְאַנְכִּי  
לֹא אוֹכַל לְהַמְלִט לְהָרָה פְּנֵי-תַדְבָּקֵנִי  
הָרָעָה וּמָתִי: <sup>20</sup> הִנֵּה-נָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת  
קְרִבָּה לָנוֹס שָׁמָּה וְהִיא מִצְעָר אֲמַלְטָה  
נָא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא מִצְעָר הוּא וַתַּחֲזִי נַפְשִׁי:  
<sup>21</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה נִשְׂאתִי פָנֶיךָ גַם  
לְדַבֵּר הַזֶּה לְבַלְתִּי הַפְּכִי אֶת-הָעִיר  
אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ: <sup>22</sup> מִהֵרָה הַמַּלְטֵ שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא  
אוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דְּבָר עַד-בֹּאֲךָ שָׁמָּה עַל-כֵּן  
קָרָא שֵׁם-הָעִיר צוֹעַר:

<sup>23</sup> הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא \* עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא  
צְעָרָה: <sup>24</sup> וַיַּהוֶה הַמֶּטֶר עַל-סֹדֹם וְעַל-

רביעי v. 23. סבירין ומטעין "יצאה"

**16. the LORD’s mercy on him** The deliverance of Lot is an act of divine grace, as verse 29 indicates.

**17. Do not look behind you** Do not linger. **the hills** The highlands of Moab.

**18. my lord** This translation takes the Hebrew word *adonai* here as a nonsacred term. Some commentators read it as a plural: “my lords” or “sirs.” Others understand it as a direct plea to God.

**20. a little place** The Hebrew word translated as “a little place” (*mitz-ar*) is a play on the place-name *tzo-ar* (Zoar) in verse 22. It is intended to explain, by popular etymology, the

change in Zoar’s form from the original Bela (14:2).

#### THE CATAclySM (vv. 23–29)

The passage contains traces of historical memory that the region was affected by earthquakes. Evidently, one of the last earthquakes had shaped the lower Jordan Valley region by allowing heat and gases to escape from the earth. Lightning then ignited the sulfur and bitumen that were there, obliterating everything in the area. According to geologic studies, this took place long before the age of Abraham.

**24. the LORD . . . the LORD** The repetition

**15. lest you be swept away** “Once destruction begins, it does not discriminate between

the righteous and the wicked” (*Seikhel Tov*).

out of heaven.<sup>25</sup> He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground.<sup>26</sup> Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

<sup>27</sup>Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the LORD,<sup>28</sup> and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln.

<sup>29</sup>Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

<sup>30</sup>Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was

עֲמָרָה גִפְרִית וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>25</sup>וַיִּהְיֶה אֶת־הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֶת כָּל־הַכְּנָעַן וְאֶת כָּל־יְשֵׁבֵי הָעָרִים וְצִמַּח הָאֲדָמָה: <sup>26</sup>וַתִּבֶּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח:

<sup>27</sup>וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>28</sup>וַיִּשְׁקֹף עַל־פְּנֵי סוּדוֹם וְעַמְרָה וְעַל־כָּל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכְּנָעַן וַיִּרְא וַהֲנִיחַ עָלָהּ קִיטָר הָאֲרָץ כְּקִיטָר הַכְּבֹשָׁן:

<sup>29</sup>וַיְהִי בִשְׁחַת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכְּנָעַן וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפָכָה בְּהִפָּךְ אֶת־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשָׁב בְּהֵן לוֹט:

<sup>30</sup>וַיַּעַל לוֹט מִצּוֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּהָר וּשְׁתֵּי

of this word and the phrase “out of heaven” both emphasize the conviction that what occurred was not a random accident of nature but an instance of God’s direct intervention in human affairs.

**sulfurous fire** “Sulfur” is Latin for “burning stone,” or “brimstone” in Old English.

**26. looked back** She lingered in flight and was overwhelmed by the rapidly spreading devastation.

**a pillar of salt** This image must have been suggested by some unique salt-rock formation in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. The origin of the salt tradition no doubt lies in the presence of Mount Sodom (Jebel Usdum), the base of which is a ridge of rock salt that extends for about 5 miles (8 km).

**27. Abraham hurried to the place** His argument with God had ended on an uncertain note. Now he hastens to his vantage point (18:16) from which he sees immense destruc-

tion and realizes that Sodom did not have even 10 righteous men.

THE BIRTH OF MOAB AND AMMON  
(vv. 30–38)

The concluding section of this chapter describes the incestuous origin of the peoples of Moab and Ammon. Yet the right of Moab and Ammon to live peaceably in their homelands is acknowledged as God-given in Deuteronomy (2:9,19). Furthermore, it should be recalled that King David was descended from a Moabite woman, as we are told in the Book of Ruth (4:17–22).

**30. Lot went up from Zoar** It is not known why Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar. Perhaps earth tremors continued to be felt there. Later sources have preserved a tradition that all five cities of the Plain—including Zoar—were destroyed. This would explain why Lot’s daughters believed the catastrophe was universal.

**26. she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt** Why salt? Salt is a preservative. It keeps things from changing. Lot’s wife sinned in her reluctance to break with immorality in the past, even as Lot himself “delayed” (v. 16), torn between rejection of where he was and fear of the

unknown future. Lot’s wife is judged more leniently by Ramban. As he sees it, she had difficulty leaving Sodom not because she was fond of the lifestyle there but because she had children there, her daughters and sons-in-law who chose not to leave.

afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he and his two daughters lived in a cave. <sup>31</sup>And the older one said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. <sup>32</sup>Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.” <sup>33</sup>That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. <sup>34</sup>The next day the older one said to the younger, “See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.” <sup>35</sup>That night also they made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

<sup>36</sup>Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. <sup>37</sup>The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. <sup>38</sup>And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

בְּנִתָיו עִמּוֹ כִּי יֵרָא לְשֵׁבֶת בְּצוּעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב  
בְּמַעְרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בְּנֹתָיו: <sup>31</sup>וַתֹּאמֶר  
הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ  
אֵין בְּאֶרֶץ לְבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדָרְךָ כָּל־  
הָאָרֶץ: <sup>32</sup>לָכֵה נִשְׁקֶה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יַיִן  
וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וְנַחֲיָה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע:  
<sup>33</sup>וַתִּשְׁקִינּוּ אֶת־אָבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא  
וַתְּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־  
יָדַע בְּשֹׁכְבָהּ וּבְקִוְמָהּ\*: <sup>34</sup>וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֶת  
וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה הֲיֵן־  
שְׁכַבְתִּי אִמָּשׁ אֶת־אָבִי נִשְׁקַנּוּ יַיִן גַּם־  
הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שְׁכָבִי עִמּוֹ וְנַחֲיָה מֵאָבִינוּ  
זָרַע: <sup>35</sup>וַתִּשְׁקִינּוּ גַם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־  
אָבִיהֶן יַיִן וַתִּקַּם הַצְּעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ  
וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשֹׁכְבָהּ וּבְקִוְמָהּ:  
<sup>36</sup>וַתִּהְרִינּוּ שְׁתֵּי בְּנוֹת־לוֹט מֵאָבִיהֶן:  
<sup>37</sup>וַתֵּלֶד הַבְּכִירָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מוֹאָב  
הוּא אָבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם: <sup>38</sup>וַהַצְּעִירָה  
גַּם־הוּא יָלְדָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־עַמִּי  
הוּא אָבִי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם: ס

**20** Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Ka-

**כ** וַיֵּסַע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב  
וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיֵּגֶר בְּגַרְר:  
v. 33. נקוד על ו

**32. drink wine** The implication is clear: Lot never would have been a willing partner to such an act.

**maintain life** There is no way of knowing whether their intent was renewal of the entire human race or just the perpetuation of their father's name. The narrative does not explicitly condemn the actions of the two daughters,

although the fact that they are not named implies censure.

**37. Moab** A popular etymology, based on the Hebrew word *me-avi*, “from [my] father.”

**38. Ben-ammi** Literally, “son of my [paternal] kinsman.” The name reflects the fact that the Ammonites are generally called *b'nei ammon* in the Bible.

## ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND ABIMELECH (20:1–21:34)

### THE SEIZURE OF SARAH (20:1–2)

**1. Abraham journeyed from there** That is, from the district of Mamre–Hebron, Abraham's only domicile since the separation from Lot.

**the region of the Negeb** The northern Negeb in the Beer-sheba Basin is the site of fertile soil and some vegetation.

**settled** Abraham made a prolonged stay in this region.

desh and Shur. While he was sojourning in Gerar, <sup>2</sup>Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. <sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman.” <sup>4</sup>Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, “O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent? <sup>5</sup>He himself said to me, ‘She is my sister!’ And she also said, ‘He is my brother.’ When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean.” <sup>6</sup>And God said to him in the dream, “I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, restore the man’s wife—since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you—to save your life. If you fail to restore

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחֲתִי  
 הוּא וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ גֵּרָר וַיִּקַּח  
 אֶת־שָׂרָה׃<sup>3</sup> וַיָּבֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ  
 בַּחֲלוֹם הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִיךָ מֵת עַל־  
 הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־לָקַחְתָּ וְהוּא בִּעְלַת בְּעַל׃  
 וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי  
 הֲגֹי גַם־צְדִיק תַּהְרֹג׃<sup>5</sup> הֲלֹא הוּא אָמַר־  
 לִי אַחֲתִי הוּא וְהִיא־גַם־הוּא אָמְרָה אַחִי  
 הוּא בְּתַם־לִבִּי וּבִנְקִינָן כִּפִּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת׃  
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹוִי הֲאֵלֹהִים בַּחֲלָם גַּם אָנֹכִי  
 יִדְעֹתִי כִּי בְּתַם־לִבְבִךָ עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת  
 וְאַחֲשֹׁף גַם־אֲנֹכִי אוֹתָךְ מִחַטּוֹתַי לִי עַל־פְּנֵי  
 לֹא־נִתְתִּיף לְנַגַע אֵלֶיהָ׃<sup>7</sup> וְעַתָּה הֲשִׁב  
 אֶשְׁת־הָאִישׁ כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל

v. 6. חסר א.

*between Kadesh and Shur* The line between the oasis of Kadesh on the southern border of Canaan and the Egyptian defense wall in the eastern Delta of the Nile. This is the southernmost limit of Abraham’s wanderings.

*sojourning in Gerar* At some point, the patriarch left the Kadesh–Shur grazing region to visit the royal city of Gerar. Perhaps he wanted to trade pastoral products and purchase supplies in the city; perhaps he was attracted by the rich pasture lands in the vicinity. In Gerar he is an alien (*ger*), unprotected and subject to mistreatment.

**2. She is my sister** Abraham takes the initiative in passing off Sarah as his sister without asking her for permission to do so. This is unlike the case in Gen. 12:10–20ff.

GOD’S ADMONITION TO ABIMELECH  
 (vv. 3–7)

**3. in a dream** Dreams were accepted as media of divine communication throughout the ancient world. Here the reproach conveyed by the king’s dream is clear and no interpreter is needed.

**4. approached her** This is a euphemism for sexual relations. The reason for Abimelech’s abstinence is withheld here, to be revealed only later (v. 6).

**O Lord** *Adonai* is used here, and not the di-

vine name *YHVH*, probably because the king is not of the Abrahamic faith. See Comment to 18:3. *Adonai* very often is substituted for God’s name *YHVH*, which is used more sparingly because of its great sanctity.

**will You slay** The king appeals to God’s justice, which also was Abraham’s approach in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**people** That is, my household. The Hebrew word translated “people” (*goy*) usually means “nation,” but on occasion it has the sense of “people,” “folk,” or “group.”

**5. heart . . . hands** This refers to sincere intent and upright behavior.

**6. And God said** God affirms only that the possible adultery was unintended, nothing else.

**I kept you from** How this happened is not disclosed until verses 17–18.

**sinning against Me** Israelite law regards adultery as a violation of a husband’s rights and as an offense against divinely given standards of morality. The former alone was the general view of the ancient Near Eastern law codes.

**7. he is a prophet** The Hebrew word for prophet (*navi*) appears here for the first time in the Bible. It means “one who receives the (divine) call,” “one who proclaims,” or “a spokesman.” It is in the latter sense that Abraham is here designated a prophet whose role, as stated immediately, is to intercede on behalf of others.

her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours.”

<sup>8</sup>Early next morning, Abimelech called his servants and told them all that had happened; and the men were greatly frightened. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. <sup>10</sup>What, then,” Abimelech demanded of Abraham, “was your purpose in doing this thing?” <sup>11</sup>“I thought,” said Abraham, “surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. <sup>12</sup>And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father’s daughter though not my mother’s; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup>So when God made me wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.’”

**you shall die** The excuse that there was no intent will no longer be credible.

#### ABRAHAM’S DEFENSE (vv. 8–13)

The dream makes such an impression on the king that he convokes his council of state, whose members are thoroughly alarmed by his report. Abraham is summoned. Confronted by Abimelech, he tries to defend himself.

**9. so great a guilt** Literally, “a great sin,” a phrase that reflects legal terminology found in ancient Near Eastern documents. The “great sin” is adultery.

**11. they will kill me** Abraham believed that the king would have had him killed to avoid committing adultery. Adultery would be an of-

בְּעֵדְךָ וְחַיָּה וְאִם־אֵינְךָ מְשִׁיב דַּע בְּיָמוֹת  
תָּמוֹת אֶתְּהָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ:  
<sup>8</sup>וַיִּשְׁפָּם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בְּבִקְרָ וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־  
עַבְדָּיו וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה  
בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד: <sup>9</sup>וַיִּקְרָא  
אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה־עָשִׂיתָ  
לָנוּ וּמַה־חָטַאתִי לָךְ כִּי־הִבַּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל־  
מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה מֵעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־  
יַעֲשׂוּ עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי: <sup>10</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ  
אֶל־אַבְרָהָם מַה רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־  
הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי  
רַק אֵין־יִרְאֶת אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה  
וְהִרְגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אֲשֶׁתִּי: <sup>12</sup>וְגַם־אִמְנָה  
אָחֹתִי בַת־אָבִי הִוא אֵף לֹא בַת־אִמִּי  
וַתְּהִי־לִי לְאִשָּׁה: <sup>13</sup>וַיְהִי בְּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעַו  
אֶתִּי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וָאֹמַר לָהּ זֶה  
חֲסִדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל כָּל־הַמָּקוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר נָבֹוא שָׁמָּה אֲמַר־לִי אָחִי הִוא:

fense far graver than the murder of a husband who, as an alien, was outside the protection of the law.

**12. she is in truth my sister** The statement must be derived from a tradition of great antiquity, because marrying a half-sister was forbidden in later Israel.

**my father’s daughter though not my mother’s** Although abhorrence of incest is nearly universal, the definition of prohibited kinship marriage varies widely among societies.

**13. made me wander** That is, gave me the command, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house” (12:1).

**whatever place** The danger was seen as a recurring one. Kidnaping women for the royal

## CHAPTER 20

### **11. there is no fear of God in this place.**

“Fear of God” is the closest term in the Bible for what we call “religion.” It refers not to a theological position (e.g., belief in God’s existence or nature) or to an emotional state (e.g., fear of punishment) but to an awareness that

certain kinds of behavior are unconditionally wrong. A verse in Psalms (111:10), “the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD,” refers to that sort of awareness. The midwives in Exodus who disobey Pharaoh’s edict to kill the Israelite babies are described as “fearing God” (Exod. 1:17).

<sup>14</sup>Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him. <sup>15</sup>And Abimelech said, “Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.” <sup>16</sup>And to Sarah he said, “I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver; this will serve you as vindication before all who are with you, and you are cleared before everyone.” <sup>17</sup>Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that they bore children; <sup>18</sup>for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

<sup>14</sup>וַיִּקַּח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וְעַבְדִּים וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשֶׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: <sup>15</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֵׁב: <sup>16</sup>וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֵלֶיךָ כֶּסֶף לְאַחִיךָ הִנֵּה הוּא־לְךָ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ וְאֵת כָּל וְנִכְחַת: <sup>17</sup>וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִמְהוּתָיו וַיֵּלְדוּ: <sup>18</sup>כִּי־עָצַר עֶצֶר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה בְּעַד כָּל־רַחֵם לְבַיִת אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָהָם: ס

**21** The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He

**כא** וַיִּהְיֶה פָקֵד אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר:

harem was feared to be widespread, not an exceptional experience. No special insult to Abimelech was intended.

**He is my brother** The absence of children would reinforce her claim.

**ABIMELECH’S RESTITUTION, ABRAHAM’S INTERCESSION** (vv. 14–18)

**14. gave them to Abraham** Abraham, considered to be the injured party, receives reparations from the king.

**15. settle** No longer will he be an alien in Abimelech’s realm.

**16. a thousand pieces of silver** Either the worth of the gifts listed in verse 14 or a separate award granted for Sarah.

**vindication** The Hebrew phrase *k’sut einayim* means, literally, “a covering of eyes.” The

payment can be seen as a declaration that Sarah’s honor was not violated, so that the eyes of others are henceforth closed to what occurred and she is not to be scorned.

**17–18. bore children . . . closed fast every womb** Abimelech and his household enjoy the restoration of sexual vigor.

**THE BIRTH OF ISAAC** (21:1–7)

Some time has passed since Abraham first heard the divine call promising him great posterity (12:2, 15:5). Although this pledge has been affirmed repeatedly, he has experienced constant disappointment and has faced periodic crises that threatened its fulfillment. God’s word now comes to fruition.

**1. took note** The Hebrew stem פקד often is used to describe God’s intervention in human

**17.** Though one could see Abimelech as the aggrieved party, the Midrash praises Abraham for so readily and wholeheartedly forgiving one who did him wrong and then sincerely apologized (*Midrash Ha-Gadol*). Similarly, the Sages condemn the person who refuses to forgive someone who sincerely apologizes (BT BK

93a). Only after Abraham prays for others are his prayers for his own needs answered.

CHAPTER 21

This chapter and the next make up the Torah readings for the two days of *Rosh ha-Shanah*. Why were these chapters chosen? Perhaps to



had spoken. <sup>2</sup>Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. <sup>3</sup>Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. <sup>4</sup>And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

<sup>7</sup>And she added,

“Who would have said to Abraham  
That Sarah would suckle children!  
Yet I have borne a son in his old age.”

<sup>8</sup>The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

וַתְּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן לִזְקֵנָיו  
לְמוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים: <sup>3</sup> וַיִּקְרָא  
אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שֵׁם-בְנוֹ הַנּוֹלָד-לוֹ אִשָּׁר-  
יָלְדָה-לוֹ שָׂרָה יִצְחָק: <sup>4</sup> וַיִּמַּל אַבְרָהָם  
אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶן-שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים בְּאִשֶּׁר  
צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים: <sup>5</sup> וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן-מֵאָת  
שָׁנָה בְּהוֹלֵד לוֹ אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ: <sup>6</sup> וַתֹּאמֶר  
שָׂרָה צִחָק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כָּל-הַשְּׁמַע  
יִצְחָק-לִי: <sup>7</sup> וַתֹּאמֶר  
מִי מָלַל לְאַבְרָהָם  
הַיִּינִיקָה בָנִים שָׂרָה  
כִּי-יִלְדָתִי בֶן לִזְקֵנָיו:  
וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּגְמַל וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם  
מִשְׁתֵּה גָדוֹל בְּיוֹם הַגְּמִל אֶת-יִצְחָק: <sup>8</sup>

affairs. Here it connotes making good an unfulfilled promise. The birth of Isaac thus marks a new and momentous stage in biblical history.

**as He had promised** The reference is to 17:16.

**2. at the set time** See 17:21 and 18:10,14.

**3. Isaac** The name was chosen by God. Thus Isaac is the only patriarch who does not undergo a change of name. For the meaning of “Isaac,” see Comment to 17:19.

**4. eight days old** He is the first person reported to have been circumcised at that age, thereby emphasizing his role as the one true heir to the Abrahamic covenant. (Ishmael was circumcised at the age of 13.)

**had commanded** Referring to 17:12.

**5. a hundred years old** This chronologic

note echoes the incredulity expressed by Abraham in 17:17.

**6. brought me laughter** The laughter is now joyous, in contrast to the skeptical laughter recorded in 17:17 and 18:12ff.

**7. who would have said** This utterance of Sarah, in Hebrew, has the form of a song consisting of three short clauses of three words each.

#### THE EXPULSION OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL (vv. 8–21)

**8. was weaned** Weaning at about age three marked the completion of the first significant stage in an infant’s life cycle. It, therefore, was a festive occasion.

make the point that the real story of humanity is a story of parents and children, husbands and wives, not of kings and wars. Perhaps to emphasize that Judaism is meaningful not when it is a private faith but when it is passed from parent to child.

**1. took note** This is not only a statement about God’s remembering and fulfilling a promise. It places Sarah at the center of events. Isaac, Sarah’s child, rather than Ishmael, will be Abraham’s true heir because God’s covenant is with Abraham and Sarah. Many modern lit-

urgies include the Matriarchs in the opening blessing of the Amidah, and praise God as blessing Sarah as well as being “the shield of Abraham.”

**6. everyone who hears will laugh [rejoice] with me** “My experience will give new hope to other childless couples” (Gen. R. 53:8).

**7. That Sarah would suckle children** The plural noun (rather than the singular “child”) gave rise to a legend that Sarah’s breasts overflowed with so much milk that she was able to nurse many infants in addition to Isaac. A tradi-

<sup>9</sup>Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. <sup>10</sup>She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” <sup>11</sup>The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. <sup>13</sup>As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.”

<sup>14</sup>Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And

**9. playing** He either was amusing himself or was playing with Isaac.

**10. Cast out that slave-woman** Ishmael was entitled to a share of Abraham’s estate. Inheritance rights, according to ancient Near Eastern law, are a legal consequence of a father’s acceptance of an infant as his legitimate son. Abraham undoubtedly recognized Ishmael as such (16:15, 17:23,25ff.). The key to Sarah’s demand lies in another ancient Near Eastern law, a stipulation that a father may grant freedom to a slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit all claims

9 וַתֵּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת־בֶּן־הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־  
 יֹלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מִצְחָק: 10 וַתֹּאמֶר  
 לְאַבְרָהָם גֵּרְשׁ הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ  
 כִּי לֹא יִירֶשׁ בְּנֵי־הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת עִם־בְּנֵי  
 עַם־יִצְחָק: 11 וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינָי  
 אַבְרָהָם עַל אֹדֶת בְּנֹו: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים  
 אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֲלֵי־רַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל־הַנְּעַר  
 וְעַל־אִמָּתְךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה  
 שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לָהּ זֶרַע:  
 13 וְגַם אֶת־בֶּן־הָאִמָּה לְגוֹי אֲשִׁימְנֵנִי כִּי  
 זֶרַעָהּ הוּא:

14 וַיִּשְׁפֹּם אַבְרָהָם | בִּבְקָר וַיִּקַּח־לָחֶם  
 וְחֶמֶת מַיִם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַגֵּר שָׁם עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ  
 וְאֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּשְׁלַחַהּ וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּתַּע בַּמִּדְבָּר

to his property (see Judg. 11:1–3). Sarah is asking Abraham to exercise that right.

**11. The matter distressed Abraham** Fatherly love and moral concerns inhibit Abraham from giving his consent.

**12. God said to Abraham** Apparently, this happened in a night vision, because it is immediately followed by “early next morning.”

**14. over her shoulder** This refers only to the bread and water container. Ishmael could hardly have been carried by his mother.

**child** The Hebrew word translated here as “child” (*yeled*) can be used for a youth and is

tion suggests that all those who convert to Judaism are the descendants of those children nursed by Sarah.

**9.** Sarah fears that the danger of Ishmael corrupting his younger brother is greater than the prospect of Isaac being a good influence on Ishmael (Hafetz Hayyim). This is why she urges Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael. Some of the Sages try to justify Sarah’s behavior by interpreting the word “playing” as a reference to Ishmael’s cruelty and lewdness, perhaps even sexual molestation (Gen. R. 53:11). Alter suggests that Ishmael was *m’tzahēk*, “playing at being Isaac,” comports himself as if he were Abraham’s heir and continuer of the covenant.

**11.** One *midrash* says that this banishment

of Abraham’s firstborn son and the child’s mother was the hardest of his many trials (PdRE 30:67a).

**12. do as she says** Literally, “listen to her voice.” Hirsch takes that to mean, “don’t only listen to her words, her demands; listen to your wife’s anguish, her fear, the tone of pleading in the voice of the woman you have been married to for so many years.”

Commentators who view Ishmael unfavorably note that the reference to him as “playing, laughing” (*m’tzahēk*) is in the present tense, whereas Isaac’s name, associated with laughter (*Yitzhak*) is in the future tense. Although forces of evildoers may laugh now, the good will have cause to rejoice in the end.

she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. <sup>15</sup>When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, <sup>16</sup>and went and sat down at a distance, a bow-shot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

<sup>17</sup>God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup>Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink. <sup>20</sup>God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman. <sup>21</sup>He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע: <sup>15</sup>וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן־הַחֶמֶת וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד תַּחַת אֶחָד הַשִּׁיחִים: <sup>16</sup>וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנְּגַד הַרְחָק כְּמִטְחָוִי קִשְׁת בַּי אִמָּרָה אֶל־אֲרָאָה בְּמוֹת הַיֶּלֶד וַתָּשֶׁב מִנְּגַד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קִלְעָה וַתִּבְרַךְ:

<sup>17</sup>וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּקְרָא מִלְאָךְ אֱלֹהִים | אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה־לָּךְ הָגָר אֶל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱר בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם: <sup>18</sup>קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר וְהִחֲזִיקִי אֶת־יָדָךְ בּוֹ כִּי־לִגְוִי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימְנּוּ: <sup>19</sup>וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתִּרְא בְּאֵר מַיִם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּמְלֵא אֶת־הַחֶמֶת מַיִם וַתִּשָּׂק אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר: <sup>20</sup>וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּגְדַּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר וַיְהִי רֹבֵה קִשָּׁת: <sup>21</sup>וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּאֲרָן וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ

שְׂשִׁי אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: פ

interchangeable with *na-ar*, which can also refer both to a baby and to a young man.

**she wandered** Presumably, she set out for her native Egypt but lost her way.

**15. When the water was gone** Had she not lost her way, her original supplies would have been sufficient.

**17. God heard** That is, heeded. The phrase has the same meaning as the name Ishmael.

**called to Hagar from heaven** Both sons of Abraham are saved at a critical moment by an angelic “voice from heaven” (see 22:11).

**18. a great nation** Unlike Isaac, Ishmael is

promised only nationhood, not national territory.

**20. a bowman** The tradition that the Ishmaelites were professional marksmen is preserved in Isa. 21:17, which speaks of the bows of Kedar’s warriors. Kedar is listed as a son of Ishmael in Gen. 25:13.

#### ABRAHAM’S PACT WITH ABIMELECH

(vv. 22–34)

Abraham makes his first acquisition—a well at Beer-sheba. His rights are acknowledged and guaranteed by the king.

**17. God heard the cry of the boy** But we never read that Ishmael cried aloud! Thus we learn that God can hear the silent cries of the anguished heart, even when no words are uttered (Mendel of Worka).

**18. hold him by the hand** Hagar need not feel helpless. She can at least be with her child, so that her presence will allay his fears. The literal meaning of the Hebrew here is, “make your hand strong in his.” Often, when we are

fearful or depressed, we gain strength and courage by taking someone else by the hand and helping that person.

**19. God opened her eyes** God performed a miracle, not by creating a well where none had been before, but by opening Hagar’s eyes so that she could see what she previously had been blind to, the existence of life-sustaining resources in her world. Once again, we encounter the theme of seeing.

<sup>22</sup>At that time Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, said to Abraham, “God is with you in everything that you do.” <sup>23</sup>Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you.”

<sup>24</sup>And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. <sup>26</sup>But Abimelech said, “I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today.” <sup>27</sup>Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a pact. <sup>28</sup>Abraham then set seven ewes of the flock by themselves, <sup>29</sup>and Abimelech said to Abraham, “What mean these seven ewes which you have set apart?” <sup>30</sup>He replied, “You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well.” <sup>31</sup>Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath. <sup>32</sup>When they had concluded the pact at Beer-

שׁוֹי<sup>22</sup> וַיְהִי בַעַת הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צִבְאוֹ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה: <sup>23</sup> וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי בֵאלֹהִים הַנֵּה אִם-תִּשְׁקֹר לִּי וּלְנִינִי וּלְנִכְדֵי בְחֹסֶד אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּךְ תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעַם-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-גֵּרְתָה בָּהּ: <sup>24</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי אֲשָׁבֵעַ:

<sup>25</sup> וְהוֹכַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל-אֲדוּת בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר גָּזְלוּ עַבְדֵי אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ: <sup>26</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי עָשָׂה אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְגַם-אַתָּה לֹא-הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וְגַם אָנֹכִי לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בְלַתִּי הַיּוֹם: <sup>27</sup> וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם צֹאן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית: <sup>28</sup> וַיִּצָּב אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שֶׁבַע כְּבָשׂוֹת הַצֹּאן לְבִדְהָן: <sup>29</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם מָה הֵנָּה שֶׁבַע כְּבָשׂוֹת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר הִצַּבְתָּ לְבִדְהָנָה: <sup>30</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֶת-שֶׁבַע כְּבָשׂוֹת תִּקַּח מִיָּדִי בְעֵבוּר תְּהִיָּה-לִּי לְעֵדָה בִּי חֲפָרְתִּי אֶת-הַבְּאֵר הַזֹּאת: <sup>31</sup> עַל-כֵּן קָרָא לְמִקְוֹם הַהוּא בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע כִּי שֵׁם נִשְׁבְּעוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: <sup>32</sup> וַיִּכְרְתוּ בְרִית בְּבְאֵר שֶׁבַע

**22. At that time** Soon after the expulsion of Ishmael.

**Abimelech** The deliberate omission of his royal title emphasizes that he and Abraham are considered to be equals.

**said to Abraham** The entire action occurs in the Beer-sheba region. Hence, Abraham must have left Gerar for this place after the episode recounted in chapter 20.

**God is with you** This is an acknowledgment of Abraham’s success and power.

**23. not deal falsely** Abimelech is suggesting a mutual nonaggression pact.

**kith and kin** The Hebrew phrase *nin*

*v’nekbed*—literally, “son and grandson”—simply means “posterity” or “forever.”

**as loyally as** This refers back to 20:14–16.

**25. seized** They had prevented Abraham from free access to water for his herds.

**27. sheep and oxen** The animals may have been part of the pact-making ceremony.

**29. these seven ewes** The seven ewes are not part of the traditional ceremony but a separate transaction. By accepting them as a gift, the king publicly acknowledges Abraham’s ownership of the well.

**31. Beer-sheba** The name can mean either “well of oath” or “well of seven.” The narrative,

**22.** After the birth of Isaac, Abimelech realizes that the clan of Abraham is there to stay.

sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup>[Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup>And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.

וַיִּקַּם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ וַיָּשׁבוּ  
 אֶל-אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים: <sup>33</sup>וַיִּטַּע אֲשֶׁל בְּבְאֵר  
 שֶׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם בְּיָהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם:  
<sup>34</sup>וַיֵּגֶר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים יָמִים  
 רַבִּים: פ

**22** Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,”

**כב** וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִטָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׁבִיעִי

like the parallel story in connection with Isaac (Gen. 26:23–33), fuses both meanings.

**33. [Abraham]** The name does not appear in the Hebrew here but is present in ancient versions of the text.

*a tamarisk* This tall, shady tree develops deep roots, requires little water, and is particularly suitable for the sandy soil of the northern Negev area. We are not told why Abraham planted the tree.

THE AKEDAH: THE BINDING OF ISAAC (22:1–19)

This is the climactic event in Abraham’s life. God asks the aged patriarch to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. This ultimate trial of faith has come to be known as “the *Akedah*,” from the Hebrew stem meaning “to bind” (עקד) in verse 9. With the *Akedah*, Abraham’s spiritual odyssey, which

began with God’s call at Haran, comes to an end.

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM (vv. 1–2)

**1. Some time afterward** The phrase indicates an indefinite connection with previous

**33. tamarisk** The Hebrew word for this tree is *eshel*. This word has been taken to be an acronym signifying eating-drinking-lodging (*akhilah-sh'tiyah-linah*). The Vilna Gaon interpreted this tree as not only facilitating Abraham’s practice of hospitality but symbolizing a new start for the world, to atone for the failures of Adam (eating), Noah (drinking), and Lot (incestuous relations).

CHAPTER 22

The narrative of the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac, the *Akedah*, is an unforgettably harrowing story that defies easy interpretation. God commands Abraham to sacrifice the child born to him after so many years of longing. Is this a test of Abraham’s faith and readiness to obey, as the opening verse suggests? Is it a protest against the widely observed ancient practice of sacrificing firstborn children as the firstborn of the flocks were sacrificed? Is it to teach us that, for the believer, the voice of God

must override the voice of human conscience—what Kierkegaard called the “teleological suspension of the ethical”?

The medieval philosopher Joseph Albo taught that God, who knew how Abraham would respond, wanted Abraham to discover the great depth of his faith. “The reward for potential good deeds is less than the reward for actual good deeds.”

In an intriguing interpretation, Theodore Reik notes the parallel between the story of the *Akedah* and the coming-of-age ordeals imposed on adolescent boys in many primitive societies. A boy on the verge of outgrowing childhood is taken away from the company of women and made to undergo a life-threatening experience, which sometimes included a simulated death. Afterward, he is welcomed into the company of adult males and initiated into the lore of the tribe.

The *Akedah* was recalled from another perspective by persecuted Jews of later genera-

and he answered, “Here I am.” <sup>2</sup>And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.” <sup>3</sup>So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his

אֲבִרְהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי: <sup>2</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתְ אֶת-יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ-לְךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ: <sup>3</sup>וַיִּשָּׁבֶם אֲבִרְהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת-חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אֹתוֹ וְאֵת

events. No specific age is given for Isaac, but he is now old enough to carry a load of firewood and to ask an intelligent question based on experience and observation.

**God put Abraham to the test** This information is divulged to the reader, although not to Abraham, to remove any possible misunderstanding on the reader’s part that God requires human sacrifice.

**He said** Abraham receives God’s call in a night dream or a vision.

**Here I am** The Hebrew word “*hinneni*,” the only word Abraham utters to God during the entire episode, expresses an attitude of conscientious receptivity and response.

**2. And He said** The descriptive terms are listed in ascending order of endearment (son, favored one, Isaac, whom you love). This emphasizes the enormity of God’s request and the agonizing nature of the decision Abraham must make (see 12:1).

**Take your son** The Hebrew adds the untranslated particle *na* to the imperative for “take.” This makes it a strong, emphatic expression with a sense of urgency.

**your favored one** Literally, “your only one.”

**whom you love** This is the first time that the Hebrew verb meaning “to love” (אהב) appears in the Bible, used here in connection with the parent–child relationship. It is next used (24:67) in the husband–wife relationship.

**go** Hebrew: *lekh l’kha*. This phrase echoes 12:1, and thus it serves here to close the narrative cycle about Abraham.

**the land of Moriah** The site remains unknown. In 2 Chron. 3:1 it is identified with Jerusalem.

**that I will point out** The manner of communication is not specified.

ABRAHAM MEETS THE CHALLENGE

(vv. 3–10)

**3. early next morning** The aged patriarch makes no verbal response, not even “Here I am!” (*hinneni*), but rises early to fulfill God’s charge. Remarkably, Sarah is never even mentioned in this chapter.

**two of his servants** An eminent person such as Abraham would be accompanied by two attendants.

tions. Shalom Spiegel has written: “In the light of the historical reality of the second-century persecution under the Roman Empire, it seemed almost as though something of the splendor and awe of the biblical Akedah story was diminished. Who cares about some ancient, far off in time, who was merely *thought of* as a *possible* sacrifice on the altar, but who was delivered from danger, whom no misfortune overtook, when right before your eyes, in the immediate present, fathers and sons en masse ascend the executioner’s block to be butchered and burned, literally butchered and burned?” Many medieval Jewish communities suffering persecution saw themselves as re-enacting the drama of the *Akedah* without the redemptive ending.

**1. Here I am** Abraham responds to God

with a readiness to listen and serve. Abraham responds to Isaac with the same word (*hinneni*, v. 7), prompting the comment that Abraham was as responsive to the voice of his child as he was to the voice of God.

**2.** The Sages imagine a dialogue between God and Abraham:

“Take your son.” / “I have two sons.”

“Your only son.” / “Each is an only son to his mother.”

“Whom you love.” / “I love them both.”

Finally God is explicit: “Isaac” (BT Sanh. 89b).

**3.** The reader is struck by the contrast between Abraham’s readiness to argue on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:23ff.) and his reluctance to argue in defense of his own child.

son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. <sup>5</sup>Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. <sup>7</sup>Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup>And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.

<sup>9</sup>They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid

יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי עֲלֵה וַיִּקַּם וַיִּלְךָ אֶל־  
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים: <sup>4</sup> בַּיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא  
אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק: <sup>5</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם  
אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וְאֲנִי  
וְהַנֶּזֶר גֹּלְכָה עֲד־כָּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה  
אֵלֵיכֶם:

<sup>6</sup> וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיִּשֶׂם  
עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־  
הַמַּאֲכָלֹת וַיִּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: <sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר  
יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי  
וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ  
וְהָעֵצִים וַאֲיֵה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה: <sup>8</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר  
אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְנִי  
וַיִּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

<sup>9</sup> וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ

**He split the wood** Because he does not know the precise destination, he cannot be certain he will find fuel there.

**4. On the third day** Three days, in the biblical worldview, constitute a period of significant duration, especially in connection with travel. The long trek allows Abraham the opportunity for sober reflection about his assent to God’s request. His resolve, nevertheless, is not weakened.

**saw the place from afar** Perhaps it is an existing sacred site, or perhaps he instinctively recognizes it as the proper place.

**5. we will return** Abraham uses the plural form to conceal from Isaac the true purpose of the journey.

**6. Abraham took the wood** He removed it from the beast of burden. He himself carried the dangerous articles—the firestone and the

knife—so that the boy would not be harmed on the way. Were Isaac to be injured, he could not be offered as a proper, unblemished sacrifice.

**firestone** A flint that produces fire.

**the two walked off together** There appears to be perfect harmony between father and son.

**7. where is the sheep** The oppressive silence is broken by Isaac’s simple query. Is a suspicion of the awful truth beginning to dawn on him?

**8. God will see to the sheep** The father’s feeble reply surely sustains whatever doubts Isaac now feels, especially in an age when human sacrifice is possible.

**walked on together** The repetition of these words from verse 6 heightens the tension. The bond between the father and the son remains unbroken.

**9. They arrived at the place** The narrative busies itself with the details of the preparatory

**4. he saw the place** Abraham saw the Presence of God on the mountaintop (*Makom*—meaning place—is one of God’s names in Jewish tradition). He asked Isaac if he saw it as well, and he did. He asked the servants if they saw it, but they did not. Abraham, perceiving the distinction between those who are sensitive to

God’s presence and those who are blind to it, left the servants behind as he rose to a higher level with Isaac (Gen. R. 56:2).

**8. God will see to the sheep** Once again, we encounter the thematic verb of seeing. One suspects that Isaac, at this point, intuited that he himself was to be the offering. Both father

out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup>Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.” <sup>12</sup>And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.” <sup>13</sup>When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. <sup>14</sup>And Abraham named that site Ado-

הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְנֶן שָׁם אֲבִרָהִם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֶךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשָּׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לְעֵצִים: <sup>10</sup>וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִרָהִם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמֵּאֲבָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת־בְּנוֹ: <sup>11</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלֶּאֱיָהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרָהִם | אֲבִרָהִם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי: <sup>12</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וְאֶל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי | עֲתָה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵתָהּ וְלֹא חֲשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי: <sup>13</sup>וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבִרָהִם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אַחֵר\* נֶאֱחָז בְּסֻבְּךָ בְּקִרְנָיו וַיִּלֶּךְ אֲבִרָהִם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַחַת בְּנוֹ: <sup>14</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִרָהִם שְׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה |

v. 13. בנוסה אחר "אחד"

procedures. Both Abraham and Isaac are silent. The anguish of this moment is beyond words.

**bound** The Hebrew stem of the word translated as “bound” (עקד) is found nowhere else in connection with sacrifices in the Bible.

GOD ACKNOWLEDGES ABRAHAM’S FIDELITY (vv. 11–12)

**11. called to him from heaven** Angels normally need to travel between heaven and earth (see 28:12), as well as from place to place on earth (see 18:22). The urgency of the moment, however, dictates an exceptional mode of angelic intervention, as it did in 21:17.

**Abraham! Abraham!** The repetition conveys urgency and a special relationship between the one addressed and the one who calls.

**12. And he said** In the Bible, God and His angels often interchange imperceptibly.

**for now I know** In the biblical view, the genuinely righteous man must deserve that status through demonstrated action. The act might go

unfulfilled, but its value lies as much in the intention of the doer as in any final enactment.

THE SUBSTITUTION OF A RAM (v. 13)

Abraham interprets the sudden appearance of a ram to mean that a substitute animal offering is desired in place of Isaac.

**13. a ram** All contemporary printed editions and a few ancient renderings read here *ayil ahar*, which can be taken to mean “a ram behind [him]” or “a ram, later [caught].” Many ancient versions and several medieval manuscripts read “a single ram” (*ayil ehad*), which differs by only one similar-looking letter. This translation follows the latter tradition.

THE NAMING OF THE ALTAR (v. 14)

In accordance with patriarchal practice, the site of a revelation becomes sacred and is given a name reminiscent of the occasion.

**14. whence the present saying** A popular saying arose based on this event.

and son missed an opportunity for open conversation about a matter of supreme importance to each of them. This father and son never speak with each other again.

**14. On the mount of the LORD there is vision** We can paraphrase the name that Abra-

ham gives the site as “the high point where I saw God.” (This is an intriguing contrast to Gen. 16:14, where the name that Hagar gives the well that saved her life can be understood as “the low point where I saw God” [*B’er la-Hai Ro-i*]). The *parashah*, which begins with Abra-



nai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the LORD there is vision.”

<sup>15</sup>The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup>and said, “By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, <sup>17</sup>I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. <sup>18</sup>All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.” <sup>19</sup>Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

<sup>20</sup>Some time later, Abraham was told,

*there is vision* The Hebrew word *yera-eh* literally means “He/it shall be seen,” but here the subject of the verb is unclear. The Septuagint renders, “On the mount the LORD appears.” Note that Mount Moriah is identified with the site of the ancient Temple Mount in 2 Chron. 3:1.

REAFFIRMATION OF THE BLESSINGS  
(vv. 15–18)

**16. Because you have done this** Because Abraham has demonstrated his willingness to forfeit his posterity in obedience to God’s will, it is fitting that all previous promises now be re-

ham encountering God in the form of three strangers, which contains so many references to seeing and not seeing, concludes with Abraham finding God in this searing experience. We come to see God not only in the daily experiences of the beauty and order of nature; the companionship of others; and our abilities to grow, to learn, and to share. We come to see God as well in our peak experiences—of love, marriage, parenthood, personal success, and being delivered from danger—and in our ability to survive and transcend misfortune.

**17. your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes** Hirsch chooses to see this blessing as something other than a military victory. He

יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהָר יְהוָה יִרְאֶה:

<sup>15</sup>וַיִּקְרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>16</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם-יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת-בְּנֶךְךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ: <sup>17</sup>כִּי בְרַךְ אֲבָרְכְךָ וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרַבֶּה אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שֹׁפֶת הַיָּם וַיִּרֶשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֶת שַׁעַר אִיְבָיו: <sup>18</sup>וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֲלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקֹלִי: <sup>19</sup>וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל-בְּעָרָא שָׁבַע וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבָאֵר שָׁבַע: פ

מפסיר <sup>20</sup>וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּגַּד

affirmed as a reward for the patriarch’s devotion to God.

THE OFFSPRING OF NAHOR (vv. 20–24)

These verses establish the genealogy of Abraham’s brother Nahor and forge a link between the *Akedah* and chapter 24. If the blessings of Abraham are to be fulfilled, Isaac must marry and establish a family. The mention of Rebekah, Bethuel, Milcah, Nahor, and Aram, hints at Isaac’s forthcoming marriage to Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, of the city of Nahor in Aram-naharaim.

takes “gates” to mean the public forums where people sat to discuss significant matters. Thus Abraham is given the blessing that his ideas will prevail in many lands.

**19. Abraham then returned to his servants** Where was Isaac? Estranged from his father? The Sages suggest that he went to devote himself to the study of Torah at the *y’shivah* of Shem and Ever. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk taught that although it was hard for Abraham to bind Isaac on the altar, it was just as hard to release him. For Abraham realized that Isaac, for the rest of his life, would remember that his father had almost killed him.

“Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup>Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; <sup>22</sup>and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel”—<sup>23</sup>Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. <sup>24</sup>And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

לְאַבְרָהָם לְאִמְרוֹ הִנֵּה יְלֵדָה מִלְכָּה גַם־  
 הוּא בְנִים לְנַחֹר אָחִיו: <sup>21</sup> אֶת־עוּץ  
 בְּכֹרוֹ וְאֶת־בּוּז אָחִיו וְאֶת־קִמּוֹאֵל אָבִי  
 אָרָם: <sup>22</sup> וְאֶת־פִּדְשָׁד וְאֶת־חִזּוֹ וְאֶת־פִּלְדָּשׁ  
 וְאֶת־יִדְלָף וְאֶת־בְּתוּאֵל: <sup>23</sup> וּבְתוּאֵל יֶלֶד  
 אֶת־רִבְקָה שְׂמֹנֶה אֵלֶּה יְלֵדָה מִלְכָּה  
 לְנַחֹר אָחִי אַבְרָהָם: <sup>24</sup> וּפִילְגֶשׁוּ וּשְׂמָה  
 רְאוּמָה וְתֵבַל גַּם־הֵוא אֶת־טֵבָה וְאֶת־  
 גָּחַם וְאֶת־תַּחַשׁ וְאֶת־מַעֲכָה: ס

This genealogic list echoes historical reality and represents a league of tribes tied to one another by kinship or treaty. Often, when such a list includes the words “wife” and “concubine,” it is reflecting certain relationships within the tribal confederation. Thus wife tribes were most likely more influential and may have constituted the original core of a tribal league. The concubine tribes would then have been later affiliates, subordinates who were absorbed into the confederation of tribes. Such tribal organizations were common throughout the ancient Semitic world.

**20. Milcah too has borne children** The earlier genealogy of 11:29 mentions Milcah together with Sarah.

**Nabor** An important city in ancient Mesopotamia, situated in the upper Euphrates region in the Balikh Valley. The derivation of all these

tribes from Nahor implies that the city was the original center of the confederation.

**21. Uz** The attribution of “first-born” status to Uz means that this tribe constituted the oldest, or most powerful, element within the group (see 10:23). Of Milcah’s eight sons, nothing at all is known about Kemuel, Pildash, or Jidlaph. They must have disappeared from the scene of history early in the 2nd millennium B.C.E.

**Buz** Situated in northern Arabia.

**22. Chesed** The supposed ancestor of the Chaldeans (Hebrew, *kasdim*; see 11:31).

**Hazo** A region in Arabia.

**Bethuel** A Semitic personal name. No tribe or geographic entity with this name is known.

**23. Rebekah** The wife-to-be of Isaac.

**23. Rebekah** Now that it is clear that Isaac will survive, Abraham’s next concern will be finding a suitable wife for him, one who would share with him the responsibility of carrying on the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

Tradition identifies the site of the *Akedah* with Mount Moriah, the mountain on which Solomon’s Temple was built. (The rock at the heart of Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock at the

Mosque of Omar, built on the Temple’s site, is alleged by the Sages to be the rock on which the *Akedah* took place.) Why was the Temple built there, rather than on Mount Sinai, the site of revelation? Because a place where an ancestor of Israel was prepared to offer his life for the sake of God is holier than the place where God gave the Torah to the people Israel (Ḥayyim of Tzanz).

# הַפְּטָרָה וִירָא

## HAFTARAH FOR VA-YERA

2 KINGS 4:1–37 (*Ashk'nazim*)

2 KINGS 4:1–23 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* presents two miracles performed by the prophet Elisha. In the first miracle, Elisha provides a poor widow with oil, so that she might redeem her children, taken in debt-bondage, and live on the proceeds of the remainder (4:1–7). In the second, he tells a barren woman that she will give birth to a child, as a reward for her charity. Later, after that child suffers a fatal illness, the prophet restores him to life (4:8–37). These wonders are part of a cycle of tales about help and healing that commence with the death of Elijah (mid-9th century B.C.E.) and the descent of his spirit upon his disciple, Elisha (2 Kings 2:1–15).

At first sight there seems to be little connection between the miracle of food for a debtor widow and the resurrection of a wealthy woman's son. Yet the two narratives are intertwined, with intriguing and complex relations. Food provides the first point of contact. Its absence in the first text is the reason for the miracle of plenty, and its presence in the second text (as charity) is the reason for the announcement of the woman's pregnancy and giving birth. Significantly, both narratives include the query "What can I/we do for you?" (4:2,13), and the subsequent fulfillment of a request. The second point of connection revolves around the restoration of children. In the first case, children who had been taken away are restored to their mother; in the second, a child given up for dead is restored to life. Furthermore, each story uses the same phrase about the enactment of a miracle. In the first, the woman is told to "go in and shut the door behind you" (v. 4). In the second account, Elisha himself "went in" to the child's room (actually his own guest room; cf. v. 21) and "shut the door behind the two of them" (v. 33).

Such thematic and verbal patterning suggests a close tie between the two tales. They may draw on a cluster of oral traditions with similar stylistic shaping. Such sharing of motifs within this miracle cycle extends beyond it. For Elisha repeats actions that had been performed by his teacher, Elijah (in 1 Kings 17:7–24).

This *haftarah*, in its present form, has the character of an artful narrative. Something like this tale of wonders must have circulated among the prophets' disciples—reworked as retold, restyled as reworked, and eventually written down for generations to come. Note the recounting of Elisha's miraculous deed in 2 Kings 8:4–6. Similarly, the great deeds of God, from the Exodus on, were told from mouth to ear, as memory and message, until the day they were collected and inscribed as sacred scripture for all time (see Exod. 10:1–2; Ps. 78:2–8, 106:2).

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

In the *parashah*, Abraham at Mamre extends hospitality to three unexpected visitors. Immediately thereafter, he receives the divine promise that "at the same season (*la-mo-ed*) next year (*ka-et hayyah*)" the barren Sarah will have a child (Gen. 18:14, cf. 18:10). There is no statement that this constitutes a reward for hospitality, but in the *haftarah*, reward for hospitality is an explicit theme. The wealthy woman of Shunem who provides food and lodging for Elisha is rewarded with the announcement that "at this season (*la-mo-ed ha-zeh*) next year (*ka-et hayyah*), you will be embracing a son" (2 Kings 4:15).

**4** A certain woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha: “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know how your servant revered the LORD. And now a creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves.” <sup>2</sup>Elisha said to her, “What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?” She replied, “Your maidservant has nothing at all in the house, except a jug of oil.” <sup>3</sup>“Go,” he said, “and borrow vessels outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, as many as you can. <sup>4</sup>Then go in and shut the door behind you and your children, and pour [oil] into all those vessels, removing each one as it is filled.”

<sup>5</sup>She went away and shut the door behind her and her children. They kept bringing [vessels] to her and she kept pouring. <sup>6</sup>When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” He answered her, “There are no more vessels”; and the oil stopped. <sup>7</sup>She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

<sup>8</sup>One day Elisha visited Shunem. A wealthy woman lived there, and she urged him to have a meal; and whenever he passed by, he would stop there for a meal. <sup>9</sup>Once she said to her husband, “I am sure it is a holy man of God who comes this way regularly. <sup>10</sup>Let us make a small enclosed upper chamber and place a bed, a table, a chair, and a lampstand there for him, so that he can stop there whenever he comes to us.” <sup>11</sup>One day he came there; he retired to the upper chamber and lay down there. <sup>12</sup>He said to his servant Gehazi, “Call that Shunammite

**2 Kings 4:1. A certain woman . . . cried out to Elisha** This cry (*tza-akah*) denotes an appeal for legal aid. It is used here in the context of a creditor who has seized a widow's children for repayment of a debt. A biblical exhortation

**ד** וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׂי בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים צָעָקָה אֶל-אֵלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר עַבְדְּךָ אִישִׁי מֵת וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ כִּי עַבְדְּךָ הָיָה יָרֵא אֶת-יְהוָה וְהִנֵּשֶׂה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת-שְׁנֵי יְלָדָי לוֹ לְעֶבְדִּים: <sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלִישָׁע מָה אַעֲשֶׂה-לָּךְ הַגִּידִי לִי מִה-יֵשׁ-לְךָ בְּבֵית וְהֵאמֶר אֵין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כֹּל בְּבֵית כִּי אִם-אֶסוּף שָׁמֶן: <sup>3</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לְךָ לְכִי שְׂאֲלִי-לָךְ פְּלִים מִן-הַחוּץ מֵאֵת כָּל-שְׂכֵנֵיךָ פְּלִים רַקִּים אֶל-תִּמְעִיטִי: <sup>4</sup> וּבָאת וְסָגַרְתָּ הַדֶּלֶת בְּעַדְךָ וּבְעַד-בְּנֵיךָ וַיִּצְקֶתָ עַל כָּל-הַפְּלִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהַמָּלֵא תְּסִיעֵי:

<sup>5</sup> וְתִלְךָ מֵאֵתוֹ וְתִסְגְּרִי הַדֶּלֶת בְּעַדְךָ וּבְעַד בְּנֵיךָ הֵם מִגִּשִׁים אֵלֶיךָ וְהִיא מִיצֶקֶת מוּצָקֶת: <sup>6</sup> וַיְהִי | כִּמְלֵאת הַפְּלִים וְהֵאמֶר אֶל-בְּנָהּ הַגִּישָׁה אֵלַי עוֹד פְּלִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיךָ אֵין עוֹד פְּלִי וַיִּעֲמֵד הַשָּׁמֶן: <sup>7</sup> וְתָבֵא וְתִגְדֵּל לְאִישׁ הָאֵלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי מִכְרִי אֶת-הַשָּׁמֶן וְשִׁלְמִי אֶת-נִשְׁכֵי נְשִׁיךָ וְאַתָּה בְּנִיכִי וּבְנֵיךָ תַחְיִי בְּנוֹתָר: פ

<sup>8</sup> וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיַּעֲבֹר אֵלִישָׁע אֶל-שׁוּנֵם וְשָׂם אִשָּׁה גְדוֹלָה וְתַחֲזוּקָבּוֹ לְאָכַל-לֶחֶם וַיְהִי מִדֵּי עֲבָרוּ יָסַר שָׂמָה לְאָכַל-לֶחֶם: <sup>9</sup> וְהֵאמֶר אֶל-אִישָׁהּ הִנֵּה-נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא עֹבֵר עָלֵינוּ תָּמִיד: <sup>10</sup> נַעֲשֶׂה-נָא עֲלִית-קִיר קִטְנָה וְנִשְׂמִים לוֹ שֵׁם מִטָּה וְשִׁלְחָן וְכִסֵּא וּמִנּוֹרָה וְהָיָה בָּבֵאוּ אֵלֵינוּ יָסוּר שָׂמָה: <sup>11</sup> וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֵא שָׂמָה וַיָּסַר אֶל-הַעֲלִיָּה וַיִּשְׁכַּב-שָׂמָה: <sup>12</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גִּחְזִי

warns creditors against keeping debtors' garments as security overnight, noting that compassionate God will come to the poor person's rescue if such a one "cries out" (*yitz-ak*) to Him in distress (Exod. 22:24–26, cf. 22:20–22).

woman.” He called her, and she stood before him. <sup>13</sup>He said to him, “Tell her, ‘You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak in your behalf to the king or to the army commander?’” She replied, “I live among my own people.” <sup>14</sup>“What then can be done for her?” he asked. “The fact is,” said Gehazi, “she has no son, and her husband is old.” <sup>15</sup>“Call her,” he said. He called her, and she stood in the doorway. <sup>16</sup>And Elisha said, “At this season next year, you will be embracing a son.” She replied, “Please, my lord, man of God, do not delude your maidservant.”

<sup>17</sup>The woman conceived and bore a son at the same season the following year, as Elisha had assured her. <sup>18</sup>The child grew up. One day, he went out to his father among the reapers. <sup>19</sup>[Suddenly] he cried to his father, “Oh, my head, my head!” He said to a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” <sup>20</sup>He picked him up and brought him to his mother. And the child sat on her lap until noon; and he died. <sup>21</sup>She took him up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and left him and closed the door. <sup>22</sup>Then she called to her husband: “Please, send me one of the servants and one of the she-asses, so I can hurry to the man of God and back.” <sup>23</sup>But he said, “Why are you going to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath.” She answered, “It’s all right.”

<sup>24</sup>She had the ass saddled, and said to her servant, “Urge [the beast] on; see that I don’t

נַעְרוּ קְרָא לְשׁוֹנְמִית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָאֶלָּהּ וַתַּעֲמֵד לְפָנָיו: <sup>13</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אָמַר-נָא אֵלֶיהָ הֲנָה חֲרָדָת | אֵלֵינוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַחֲרָדָה הַזֹּאת מָה לַעֲשׂוֹת לָךְ הַיֵּשׁ לְדַבְּרֶלְךָ אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אוֹ אֶל-שָׂר הַצָּבָא וַתֹּאמֶר בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אָנֹכִי יִשְׁבֶּת: <sup>14</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר וּמָה לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר גִּיחֲזִי אָבֶל בֵּן אִין-לָהּ וְאִישָׁה זָקֵן: <sup>15</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאֶלָּהּ וַיִּקְרָאֶלָּהּ וַתַּעֲמֵד בַּפֶּתַח: <sup>16</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה כָּעֵת חַיָּה אֵתִי אֶת חֲבִיקָת בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-תִּכְזֹב בְּשִׁפְחָתְךָ:

<sup>17</sup>וַתֵּהֵר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֵד בֵּן לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה כָּעֵת חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-דָּבַר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהֵי-שָׁע: <sup>18</sup>וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אָבִיו אֶל-הַקְּצָרִים: <sup>19</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אָבִיו רֹאשִׁי | רֹאשִׁי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הַנֶּעֱר שָׂאָהוּ אֶל-אִמּוֹ: <sup>20</sup>וַיִּשְׂאָהוּ וַיְבִיאָהוּ אֶל-אִמּוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-בְּרִיָּה עַד-הַצָּהֳרַיִם וַיָּמָת: <sup>21</sup>וַתַּעַל וַתִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ עַל-מִטָּת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּסְגֹר בְּעָדוֹ וַתֵּצֵא: <sup>22</sup>וַתִּקְרָא אֶל-אִישָׁהּ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחָה נָא לִי אֶחָד מִן-הַנְּעָרִים וְאֶחַת הָאֲתָנּוֹת וְאָרֻצָּה עַד-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וְאִשׁוּבָה: <sup>23</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר מְדוּעַ אֵתִי אֶתֵּן הַלַּכְתִּי הַלַּכְתָּ אֵלָיו הַיּוֹם לְאִי-חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא שָׁבַת וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם:

<sup>24</sup>וַתַּחֲבֹשׂ הָאֲתָנוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-נַעֲרָה נְהַג וְלָךְ אֶל-תַּעֲצָר־לִי לְרֹכֵב כִּי אִם-אֲמַרְתִּי

**16. At this season next year** In Hebrew: *la-mo-ed ha-zeh ka-et hayyah*. The phrase translated as “next year” (*ka-et hayyah*) in the promise to the barren woman is also used when the pregnancy of Sarah is predicted (Gen. 18:10). The Hebrew may be more literally rendered “in a living (or viable) time”; that is, “in due course.”

**23. But he said, “Why are you going to him today?”** After the woman announces that

she wishes to see the “man of God” concerning her dead son (2 Kings 4:22), her husband asks this question and adds a complaint that “It is neither new moon nor sabbath.” Presumably, it was on such sacred days that people customarily visited local shrines to consult the local man of God on various matters. Based on this passage, rabbinic tradition justified the custom of visiting one’s teacher on the New Moon or *Shabbat* (BT Suk. 27b).

slow down unless I tell you.”<sup>25</sup> She went on until she came to the man of God on Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her from afar, he said to his servant Gehazi, “There is that Shunammite woman.”<sup>26</sup> Go, hurry toward her and ask her, ‘How are you? How is your husband? How is the child?’” “We are well,” she replied.<sup>27</sup> But when she came up to the man of God on the mountain, she clasped his feet. Gehazi stepped forward to push her away; but the man of God said, “Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me.”<sup>28</sup> Then she said, “Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn’t I say: ‘Don’t mislead me?’”

<sup>29</sup>He said to Gehazi, “Tie up your skirts, take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him. And place my staff on the face of the boy.”<sup>30</sup> But the boy’s mother said, “As the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you!” So he arose and followed her.

<sup>31</sup>Gehazi had gone on before them and had placed the staff on the boy’s face; but there was no sound or response. He turned back to meet him and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”<sup>32</sup> Elisha came into the house, and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch.<sup>33</sup> He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD.<sup>34</sup> Then he mounted [the bed] and placed himself over the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm.<sup>35</sup> He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon, the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes.<sup>36</sup> [Elisha] called Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite woman,” and he called her. When she came to him, he said, “Pick up your son.”<sup>37</sup> She came and fell at his feet and bowed low to the ground; then she picked up her son and left.

לָךְ: <sup>25</sup>וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַר הַפְּרָמִל וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹת אִישׁ-הָאֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה מֵנֶגֶד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-גִּיחֹזִי נִעְרוּ הִנֵּה הַשּׁוֹנְמִית הַלְזוּ: <sup>26</sup>עַתָּה רוּץ-נָא לִקְרֹאתָהּ וְאָמַר-לָהּ הַשְּׁלוֹם לָךְ הַשְּׁלוֹם לְאִישׁךָ הַשְּׁלוֹם לְיֶלֶד וְהֵאמַר שְׁלוֹם: <sup>27</sup>וַתָּבֹא אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הָהָר וַתַּחֲזֹק בְּרַגְלָיו וַיִּגֶשׁ גִּיחֹזִי לְהִדְפֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים הֲרַפְּהֶלָה כִּי-נִפְשָׂה מִרְהֶלָה וַיְהוּהָ הָעֲלִים מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא הִגִּיד לִי: <sup>28</sup>וְהֵאמַר הֲשִׂאתִי בֶן מֵאֵת אֲדֹנָי הֲלֹא אָמַרְתִּי לֹא תִשְׁלַח אֹתִי:

<sup>29</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר לְגִיחֹזִי חָגַר מִתְּנִיךָ וְקַח מִשְׁעֲנֵתִי בְיָדְךָ וְלֶךְ כִּי-תִמְצָא אִישׁ לֹא תִבְרַכְנוּ וְכִי-יִבְרַכְךָ אִישׁ לֹא תַעֲנֶנּוּ וְשָׂמַת מִשְׁעֲנֵתִי עַל-פְּנֵי הַנְּעָר: <sup>30</sup>וְהֵאמַר אִם הַנְּעָר חִי-יְהוּהָ וְחִי-נִפְשָׁךְ אִם-אֶעֱזֹבְךָ וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ:

<sup>31</sup>וַגִּיחֹזִי עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-הַמִּשְׁעֲנֵת עַל-פְּנֵי הַנְּעָר וַאֲיִן קוֹל וַאֲיִן קֶשֶׁב וַיֵּשֶׁב לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיִּגְדֵּלוּ לֹאמֹר לֹא הִקִּיץ הַנְּעָר: <sup>32</sup>וַיָּבֹא אֶלְיִשָׁע הַבִּיתָה וְהִנֵּה הַנְּעָר מֵת מִשְׁכָּב עַל-מִטָּתוֹ: <sup>33</sup>וַיָּבֹא וַיִּסְגֹּר הַדֶּלֶת בְּעַד שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל-יְהוָה: <sup>34</sup>וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל-הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּשֶׂם פִּיו עַל-פִּיו וְעֵינָיו עַל-עֵינָיו וְכַפָּיו עַל-כַּפוֹ וַיִּגָּהַר עָלָיו וַיִּחַם בָּשָׂר הַיֶּלֶד: <sup>35</sup>וַיֵּשֶׁב וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּבֵית אַחַת הַנְּהָ וְאַחַת הַנְּהָ וַיַּעַל וַיִּגָּהַר עָלָיו וַיִּזוּרֶר הַנְּעָר עַד-שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנְּעָר אֶת-עֵינָיו: <sup>36</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-גִּיחֹזִי וַיֹּאמֶר קְרֹא אֶל-הַשּׁוֹנְמִית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָאָהּ וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאֵי בְנֶךָ: <sup>37</sup>וַתָּבֹא וַתִּפֹּל עַל-רַגְלָיו וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת-בְּנָהּ וַתֵּצֵא: פ