

Parashah 4

Vayera

וַיֵּרָא

“He appeared”

Genesis 18:1 – 22:24

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion includes several stories with many valuable lessons, including the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the birth of Isaac, and Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice to God. One can learn a great deal about God's love for us and the type of faith he values in us. These lessons are foundational for a good understanding of God's character and the relationship He would like to have with His children.

1. The Three Visitors - 18:1-15

a) What did Abraham do when the three men approached his tent? Based on his actions, who do you think Abraham thought these men were?

b) Why do you think the men asked about Sarah's whereabouts? What do you think Abraham thought about this?

c) What was Sarah's response when she heard the man's prophecy? Do you think Abraham had told Sarah about God's promise to him in chapter 17?

The Value of Hospitality

Even though hospitality was highly valued in this society, it would appear that Abraham knew that these “strangers” were very special. He rushed to prepare them a very elaborate meal and stood while they ate. According to Rabbinic tradition, it was Ishmael who prepared the calf for the meal.

The Three “Men”

Notice that in verse 10, one of the “men” is identified as “the LORD,” God himself. Remember that these words were written by Moses several hundred years after the events described. The conclusion that can be reached is that God, in the form of a man, along with two others (angels perhaps) paid a visit to Abraham.

God's Righteousness

It was probably concern for the safety of his nephew, Lot, that led Abraham to plead for the "righteous" in Sodom.

Notice Abraham's argument for not destroying the righteous along with the wicked: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

(Genesis 18:25)

It is comforting for us to know today that we can trust "the Judge of all the earth to do right."

Lot's Strange Offer

Why would Lot offer his daughters to this mob? Although it is difficult for us to imagine why Lot may have done this, here are some possible explanations. First, Lot clearly knew his visitors were very special and he was determined to treat them well, at any cost. Second, perhaps, Lot knew that the men would not want his daughters and so never expected to be taken up on his offer. Third, perhaps Lot's values had become distorted because of his having lived in Sodom for so many years. In any case, because of the actions taken by his visitors, the eventuality never occurred.

2. Abraham pleads for Sodom - 18:16-33

a) Analyze the conversation in verses 17-21. Who is speaking? What is the intent of this conversation? Who leaves the conversation in verse 22? Who's left?

b) Why do you think Abraham began to plead for the righteous in Sodom? What was the essence of his argument? What do you find interesting about the way Abraham "bargained" with God? Why do you think he stopped at ten righteous people?

3. Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed - 19:1-29

a) Why do you think Lot was at the city gate? Why did he insist that the men stay with him?

b) Describe the events that occurred at Lot's house. Why do you think Lot was so committed to the stranger's protection? What do you think about him offering his daughters in their place?

c) How did Lot's sons-in-law receive the warning that Sodom was about to be destroyed? What did the men finally do to get Lot and his family to leave?

d) Describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. What symbolism do you see in the fate of Lot's wife?

e) According to verse 29, why did God spare Lot? Do you see any types and shadows here?

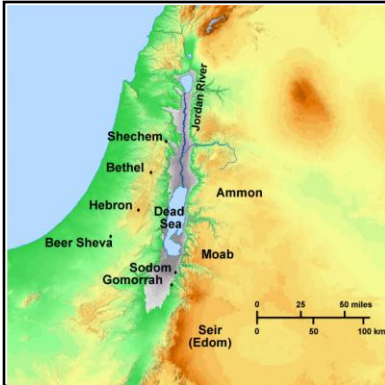
4. Lot and his daughters - 19:30-38

a) Where did Lot and his daughters finally settle? Why do you think they might be "afraid to stay in Zoar?" (verse 30)

b) What were the reasons that Lot's daughters wanted to have children by him? How does this reasoning reflect on where they had been living? Do you think Lot was a willing participant?

Scripture Link:

For further insight into how God deals with the righteous and unrighteous when executing his judgment, **see Luke 17:26-37** and **2 Peter 2:4-10**. Here we see that God can be trusted to protect His children, even in the midst of devastating destruction. It's useful to remember, however, that like Lot, God doesn't do this because of our own righteousness, but because of his love for Abraham (or in our case, *Yeshua*).



Maob & Ammon Today

These areas, along with Edom (Petra) are in present-day Jordan and are sometimes still referred to by their Biblical names and indeed, the capital of modern Jordan is Amman.

What's in a name?

The name **Abimelech** may have been more a title than a name. In Hebrew, *Abba* means "father" and *melech* means "king." So this name means "father-king," which could also have been the title given to the leader of this community in Gerar.

Abraham's Sister?

Why do you suppose Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister after all the trouble it caused him in Egypt? There is certainly no indication in the text that he went to God about his decision to do this, but it appears that God protected him anyway. How many times have you been protected by God when you acted foolishly, not once but several times?

c) Both daughters bore sons. What names were they given and what did they mean? Can you locate the areas that were named after them on a map?

5. Abraham and Abimelech - 20:1-18

a) Where did Abraham encounter Abimelech? Why do you think Abraham again introduced Sarah as his sister? Do you think he was justified in doing this?

b) Abimelech heard from God in a dream. Do you think he was a believer? What was Abimelech's defense before God? Do you think God treated Abimelech fairly?

c) What reputation do you think Abraham had in this land? Why do you think Abimelech gave Abraham 1000 shekels of silver among other things? What did Abraham do?

6. The birth of Isaac - 21:1-7

a) How old were Abraham and Sarah when Isaac was born? What does his name mean? Can you see why he was called “the child of promise”? (see Romans 9:8-9)

b) What did Abraham do with Isaac when he was 8 days old? Why did he do this?

7. Hagar and Ishmael sent away - 21:8-34

a) At the feast celebrating Isaac’s weaning, what happened that upset Sarah? What things were of concern to her? What was her proposed solution to the problem?

b) What was Abraham’s response? Why did he follow through with Sarah’s proposed solution? How do you think he felt about this? How long did he wait to act?

c) What happened to Hagar & Ishmael after they left Abraham? Who did God hear? What finally became of Ishmael? Where did he settle? Where did he get his wife?

Ishmael Sent Away

It must have been very difficult for Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away. After all, Ishmael was his son and he loved him very much. It was only after God confirmed His will in the matter that Abraham acted. As we know, God did indeed protect and bless Ishmael and Hagar. Ishmael and Isaac may have seen each other from time to time as together they buried their father, Abraham, when he died (**Genesis 25:9**).

Scripture Link:

In **Galatians 4:21-31**, the Apostle Paul uses the story of Isaac and Ishmael as a parable to teach the difference between salvation by works and salvation by faith in God.



Beer Sheva Today

Today, *Beer Sheva* is one of the larger cities in Israel (with a general population of about 500,000) and is located at the northern end of the arid Negev desert. It is reminiscent of cities in the US desert southwest. The wells spoken of in this passage are still visible today and there is little doubt that this city is at least 4000 years old.

Akeidah –‘Binding’

In Jewish tradition, this story is known as *Akeidah Yitzchak* in Hebrew which is translated as “the binding of Isaac.” The name refers to Abraham as he binds Isaac and places him on the altar, presumably to sacrifice him to God. It is interesting to note that while Abraham was determined to be obedient to God, Isaac was also willing to obey his father, even to the point of death.

8. The Treaty at *Beer Sheva* - 21:22-34

a) Of what nation or race was Abimelech? Why do you think he wanted a treaty with Abraham? What did both sides stand to gain? What did Abraham want?

b) How was the treaty ratified? What does *Beer Sheva* mean? Did Abraham make *Beer Sheva* his permanent home?

9. Abraham tested (the ‘*Akeidah*’) - 22:1-19

a) What did God ask that Abraham do with his only son, Isaac? Does this seem consistent with God’s character to you? Why do you think he asked this of Abraham?

b) How long did Abraham wait before obeying God? Who went with him and to where did they go? How long was the journey? How old do you think Isaac was at this time?

c) When they arrived at the mountain, who went up? Based on Abraham's instructions to the others in verse 5, do you think Abraham expected to return with Isaac?

d) Analyze the conversation between Abraham and Isaac in verses 6 - 8. What do you think of Abraham's response to Isaac's question? What do you think Isaac thought?

"God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

Genesis 22:8

e) From verse 10, it certainly appears that Abraham was willing to offer his only son as a sacrifice to God. Why do you think he was willing to do this? What did God say to Abraham?

f) What was provided for the sacrifice to God and who provided it? What did Abraham name the place where this happened and why?

g) What did God say to Abraham in verses 15-18 that show that he was pleased with him? Do you think God's promise has been fulfilled?

Child Sacrifice?

Some of the Canaanite cultures in the land at this time practiced child sacrifice to the pagan god Molech. Later in the *Torah*, God makes it clear that he detests this practice. Considering the environment that Abraham lived in, however, this request may not have seemed as outrageous as we find it today. Try to imagine some of the thoughts that Abraham must have had during this trial.

Scripture Link:

In Jewish tradition, Mount Moriah is believed to be the location of the future temple in Jerusalem. In Abraham's day, the town of Jerusalem had not yet been founded. **II Chronicles 3:11** states that "Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah . . ." This is still the subject of some disagreement among Bible scholars.

Digging deeper

1. There are many parallels between the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac and Yeshua's sacrificial death on the cross. Construct a table listing as many comparisons as you can.

Abraham's Changing Character

To sacrifice his only son in obedience to God was a true test of Abraham's faith. Although it must have been an extremely difficult thing to do, Abraham showed no hesitation in his actions of obedience. Is this the same man who earlier introduced his wife as his sister in Egypt out of fear? It can be argued that the miracle of Isaac's birth to an old and barren couple was enough to convince Abraham that God could be trusted to do what He said. If God promised that Abraham's offspring would be "as numerous as the stars of the sky," then He could be trusted to make this happen, even if He had to bring Isaac back from the dead. Abraham's actions show that he believed that.

2. Read James 2:14-24. Does your study of Abraham offering up Isaac make this discussion of faith and works more meaningful to you?

3. Read Hebrews 6:13-20 and 11:13-19. How do you feel about the fact that Abraham believed God's promise to him even though he never saw it fulfilled in his lifetime?

For further study, see

Haftarah : 2 Kings 4:1-37

Brit Hadashah : Luke 17:26-37; Romans 9:6-9; Galatians 4:21-31;
Hebrews 6:13-20; 11:13-19; James 2:14-24;
2 Peter 2:4-10