

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?

Abraham hurried to meet them and he bowed low to the ground. He also rushed to prepare an elaborate meal for them and stood by them while they ate. It seems he knew they were special - that they were messengers from God.

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

The “men” probably knew Sarah’s whereabouts. They just wanted to make sure she was listening. Abraham probably thought this a little strange.

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?

When she heard that she would bear a child, Sarah laughed to herself. It would seem that Abraham had not told her that God had promised him this same thing earlier. Or perhaps she just hadn’t believed it.

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. Some consider this to be pre-incarnate *Yeshua*.

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?

The text identifies the speaker as God (perhaps pre-incarnate Yeshua). God seems to be discussing with his angels his intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Two of the three "men" (presumably the angels) turn and continue on to Sodom leaving God alone with Abraham.

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?

Abraham knew that his nephew, Lot, was in Sodom and he feared for his life. His argument with God was based on the fact that a righteous God would not destroy the righteous people along with the unrighteous. Abraham clearly feels that he is being somewhat presumptuous bargaining with God. However, he seems to push it to the limit. Perhaps he stops at ten righteous people because he feels that Lot and his family comprise at least 10 people. Jewish tradition calls the presence of 10 righteous men a "minyan."

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?

Officials of the city usually sat at the gate; perhaps Lot was such an official. Knowing the evil of the city, Lot feared for the safety of the men. Given his insistence, Lot may have sensed they were "messengers of God."

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?

Lot prepared a meal for them but before bedtime, men from the city surrounded Lot's house and demanded he release his guests to them. Lot pleaded with them and even offered his daughters in their place (perhaps knowing that they would have no interest in them because they were women?). The angels struck the men with blindness and pulled Lot back into the house.

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?

Lot's sons-in-law thought Lot was joking about imminent destruction and ignored him. The angels had to physically take Lot and his family by their hands to get them to leave.

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

God rained down burning sulfur on Sodom & Gomorrah. Lot's wife looking back is symbolic of our returning to sin once redeemed by Yeshua.

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

God saved Lot because He "remembered Abram," symbolic of God saving us because He remembers Yeshua.

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)

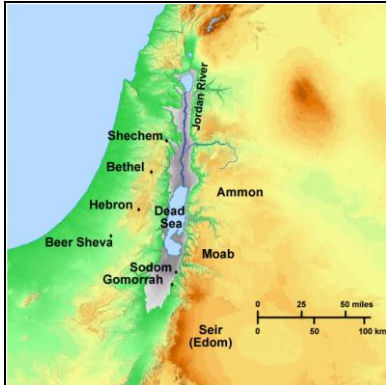
Lot and his daughters settled in the mountains. They may have been afraid to stay in Zoar because of suspicion that they caused the disaster.

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?

Because of their status as outcasts, Lot's daughters were afraid that they would never have husbands or children. Given the moral state of Sodom, having children by their father was probably considered acceptable. More than likely, Lot knew what was going on.

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?

One daughter bore a son named Moab meaning "from father" and the other bore a son named Ben-Ammi meaning "son of my people." Moab and Ammon are located north of Edom and east of the Dead Sea in today's Jordan.

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?

Abraham moved into the Negev between Kadesh & Shur (just east of present day Gaza). Verse 11 implies that Abraham was afraid to introduce Sarah as his wife. It's surprising that he did this after his experience in Egypt.

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?

It is doubtful that Abimelech was a believer, but God works in the lives of unbelievers as well. Abimelech protested his innocence, which God knew. God justly said that if he would return Sarah to Abraham, he would live.

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?

Abraham was probably feared and respected in this land because of what God had done for him (verse 8). The silver was to show everyone that Sarah had not been "cheapened" by the experience - she was vindicated. Abraham then prayed for Abimelech because God had caused the wombs of all his household to be closed up.

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)

Isaac, whose name means “laughter,” was born to Sarah and Abraham when she was 90 and he was 100. Isaac was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah. See Romans 9:6-9 for additional insight.

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

Abraham circumcised Isaac in obedience to his covenant with God. Review discussion of the Abrahamic covenant from the last lesson.

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?

Ishmael had mocked (made sport of) Isaac. Sarah was concerned that Ishmael would share in Isaac’s inheritance (the land and God’s blessing). She told Abraham to “get rid of (or drive out) that slave woman and her son.”

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?

Abraham was distressed with Sarah’s suggestion because he loved Ishmael. He did follow through, however, because God told him to. It must have been difficult for him to send his son Ishmael away, but he obeyed the next morning.

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?

After wandering in the desert, they ran out of water. God heard the boy cry and an angel showed them a well. Ishmael became an archer and lived in the Desert of Paran (the Negev). His mother got a wife for him from Egypt. See Galatians 4:21-31 for spiritual application of this story.

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?

Abimelech, a Philistine, probably saw the powerful workings of God in Abraham’s life and wanted to share in the blessings as well as not have him for an enemy. Abraham also wanted peace and wanted the return of his well.

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

Abraham gave Abimelech 7 ewe lambs as a witness that the well was his. Beer Sheva means “well of seven” or “well of the oath.” Abraham sojourned (not dwelt) in Beer Sheva a long time, i.e., it was a temporary 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?

God commanded that Abraham take Isaac to Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. This definitely seems “out of character” for God. God was testing Abraham’s obedience, to see if Abraham loved God more than Isaac. Have you ever experienced God’s testing?

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?

Verse 3 says Abraham, Isaac, and 2 servants left early the next morning for Moriah (traditionally, the Temple Mount in what would become Jerusalem). They traveled for 3 days. It’s not clear how old Isaac was at this time. Jewish scholars believe that this event caused Sarah’s death which would make him 37. Others feel that Isaac was probably 10 to 15 years old.

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?

Abraham and Isaac went up the mountain, telling his servants that "we will come back to you," indicating he 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?

Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb," indicating he believed God would do this. Isaac must have trusted his father completely.

"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?

Abraham was willing to be completely obedient to God. He may have believed that since God miraculously gave him Isaac in the first place, He could raise him from the dead if He desired. God was satisfied that Abraham was willing to sacrifice even his only son in obedience to Him.

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

God provided a ram for the sacrifice. Abraham named the place YHWH Yir'eh or "God provides" since He provided the ram.

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?

God restated His original promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3; 17:1-8).

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.

Such a table might include the following, as well as others:

- **Both sons born miraculously**
- **Both fathers willing to sacrifice their only son out of love**
- **Both sons willing to be sacrificed in obedience to their father**
- **Both sons sacrificed in the same place**
- **Both sons carried the wood for their own sacrifices**
- **Both sons rode donkeys to the place of their sacrifice**
- **Both sons lived after the sacrifice**

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?

Faith is only real if it is accompanied by actions. One's actions speak louder about what he believes than his words.

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?

Abraham developed such a close walk with God that it was not necessary for him to see God's promises fulfilled in order to walk in them. This would be a challenge for any believer.

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.

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