

February 14-20, 2022

Genesis 18-23

“IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD”

Summary: *Genesis 18. Abraham entertains three holy men—They promise that Sarah will have a son—Abraham will command his children to be just—The Lord appears to him—They discuss the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Genesis 19. Lot entertains holy men—The men of Sodom seek to abuse Lot’s guests and are smitten with blindness—Lot is sent out of Sodom—The Lord rains brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah—Lot’s daughters preserve his seed in the land.

Genesis 20. Abimelech desires Sarah, who is preserved by the Lord—Abraham prays for Abimelech, and the Lord blesses him and his household.

Genesis 21. Sarah bears Isaac—He is circumcised—Hagar and her son are cast out of Abraham’s household—The Lord saves Hagar and Ishmael—Abraham and Abimelech deal honorably with each other.

Genesis 22. Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac, his son—Both father and son yield to the will of God—Abraham’s seed will be as the stars and the sand in number—In his seed, all nations will be blessed—Rebekah is born to Bethuel.

Genesis 23. Sarah dies and is buried in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham buys from Ephron the Hittite.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What Hebrew customs include “heavenly guests?”

The existence of pre-and post-mortal life is suggested in

various Jewish holidays when heavenly guests are expected to come to a Jewish home. The seven-day Fall festival of *Sukkot* which begins on first full moon after the Fall equinox, it is anticipated that the souls of the seven great leaders of Israel – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and King David – will partake with the family in celebrating the deliverance of the Children of Israel through the Exodus journey. A delightfully decorated booth, hut or “tabernacle must be large enough to eat, sleep and feed your family and the seven guests

(*Ushpizin*) – should they arrive. “To welcome these illustrious souls, many have the custom to recite a lengthy mystical invitation upon entering the *Sukkah* (temporary booth) for the first time. Additionally, many invite the *Ushpizin* each time they partake of a meal in the *Sukkah*. Some *Sephardic* (Eastern) Jews even have the custom of setting aside an ornately-decorated chair covered with fine cloth and holy books.” (**The 7 Ushpizin Guests, Aish HaTorah, <https://www.aish.com/h/su/dits/48965711.html>**) The seven-day Spring festival of Passover, which begins on first full moon after the Spring equinox, it is anticipated that Elijah will come. “According to tradition, at this moment our homes are graced by the presence of Elijah the prophet.” “There are multiple reasons and meanings behind this age-old tradition. Here are

some of them: After heralding the coming of the Messiah, one of Elijah's tasks will be to resolve all hitherto unanswered *halachic* (Biblically/legalistic) questions . . . (an) expression of redemption . . . we express our hope and firm belief in the coming of *Moshiach* (Messiah), who will usher in the new and final redemption very soon." (https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/504495/jewish/Why-Is-Elijah-the-Prophet-Invited-to-the-Seder.htm)

What do Jews say about Abraham's visitors?

"The *Torah* recounts that three angels appeared to Abraham (**Genesis 18:2**). Although the *Torah* does not mention the names of the angels that went to visit Abraham, the *Talmud* (written Bible interpretations) tells us they were Raphael, Michael and Gabriel. (**Bava Metzia 86b**)" "(There are) instances in which the angels act as individuals. For example, only the angel Michael told Sarah that she was going to have a baby (**Genesis 18:10**). In Sodom, only the angel Raphael told Lot to flee from the city (**Genesis 19:17**). Similarly, it was only the angel Gabriel that informed Lot that the city was going to be destroyed. From these verses, we can derive that . . . Gabriel's mission was to destroy Sodom; Michael's mission was to inform Sarah that she would give birth in a year's time; Raphael's mission was to heal Abraham and save Lot). (**Talmud - Bava Metzia 86b, Rashi - Genesis 18:2 and 19:16**)

What are the interpretations of Isaac's name and birthdate?

Isaac was a miracle child, born of Sarah who was ninety-years old and barren. When she became pregnant, even in ancient parameters, one could ask, "what did the neighbors say?" The name Isaac in Hebrew means laughter, humor, amusing or delightful. Abraham and Sarah were delighted. A human impossibility became a God-given fulfillment. In the

Lord's own plan, he kept his promises! "According to the *Aggadah* (Jewish legends and traditions), Isaac was born to Sarah on the first day of Passover," (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) According to revelation, the Savior was born on the same day as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, April 6, 1830. Using the biblical and Jewish calendar, that day was the first day of Passover that year. That also means that the Son of God was born to Mary on the first day of Passover. Abraham, who was saved from a pagan human sacrifice in the Ur of Chaldees was later instructed by the Lord to sacrifice his firstborn son of Sarah. Later we see that Isaac was saved from human sacrifice as well. The Messiah's sacrifice was at Passover that year.

How can I better combine the concepts of sacrifice and atonement?

Those two men experienced a profound way of being taught about the planned atonement. The firstborn Son of God, however, would be the one to be sacrificed. Isaac's intended sacrifice was to bring both father Abraham and his son Isaac closer to the son of God (*YHVH*). "The Hebrew term for sacrifice, *korban*, is from a root meaning "to draw near," and originally denoted that which was brought near, or offered, to God. It is also possible that the term signified "that which brings man near to God" and, indeed, a late *aggadic* (legendary) source interprets sacrifices in this sense." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The place where Abraham was commanded to bring Isaac was Mount Moriah. In Hebrew, '*moreh*' refers to teacher and '*Yah*' is the shortened version of the sacred name of the Lord, Jehovah (*YHVH*). The planned sacrifice of Isaac was an experience in being "taught of the Lord." It was part of the profound teaching moment of the Lord, the firstborn son, the Lamb of God, who would be offered at the same mount. "The next day

John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) “And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father . . .” (1 Nephi 11:21) In ancient times, sacrifices always happened at the north end of the altar. This is mentioned in the Bible. “And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle his blood round about upon the altar.” (Leviticus 1:11) The place of crucifixion was at the north end of Mount Moriah, north of the altar. Additional symbolism can be found by comparing the rabbinic tradition that Isaac was in his early thirties when Abraham brought him to Mount Moriah. Jesus was sacrificed on the eve of his thirty-fourth birthday, (the first day of Passover that year).

How significant to the Arabs and Jews is Abraham's and his family's burial place?

The Cave of the Patriarchs also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs, is known to Jews as the Cave of *Machpelah* (multiple caves). It is a sacred place for Muslims identified as the Sanctuary of Abraham. These multiple caves are situated about 19 miles south of Jerusalem in the heart

of the Old City of Hebron, now in the West Bank. According to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Islam, the place and adjoining field were purchased by Abraham as a burial plot. (Genesis 23:9, 16-20) Over the cave is a large rectangular Herodian (37 BCE–73 CE) enclosure. Later, the Byzantines (395 CE) built a Christian Basilica on the site; the structure was converted into the Ibrahimi Mosque following the Muslim conquest (634 CE). It was retaken by Crusaders (1099-1187 CE), and in (1188 CE) it was regained by the Ayyubid sultan, Saladin, who again changed it into a mosque. During the Six-Day War of 1967, the entire Jordanian-ruled West Bank (west side of the Jordan River) was retaken by the State of Israel, and the structure was divided into a synagogue as well as a mosque. The Cave of *Machpelah* is considered to be the second-holiest place in Judaism, after “Temple Square” in the Old City of Jerusalem. Jewish tradition states that in addition to the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, the tombs of Adam and Eve are at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world. The sacredness of burial and respect for the dead is a common tradition among most religions.