

Genesis 18-23 Podcast Notes

Genesis 18: Abraham & Sarah are promised a son

1. The Lord appeared to Abraham and he saw three men – Gen. 18.1-2.
2. Abraham is “under the tree”¹ while with these individuals – Gen. 18.4-8.²

¹ Genesis 18.8 renders “under the tree...” תחת העץ

² Abraham in the context of a visionary experience while being near a tree is a provocative image. Abraham, upon his arrival to the Promised Land, stopped at the terebinth of Moreh, or the *ay-lone'* of Moreh מֹרְהָ אֵלֹן (Gen 12:6). In many commentaries the word אֵלֹן is translated as terebinth. However, some translators give a different rendering of this word. Elah, Elon, El, Allon and Elon should also be rendered as oak, Tabor oak, or the evergreen oak, while elah and alah can be rendered as terebrinth. See: M. Zohary, [Plants of the Bible](#), Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 110-111.

The word Moreh as it is found in Gen. 12.6 is also interesting. It can mean “teacher,” and some scholars speculate that it is a reference to one who gives oracles. Claus Westermann writes, “To the terebinth of the oracle. מֹרְהָ Moreh can be in the genitive: tree of the oracle giver, where the priests who pronounced the oracles sat in ancient times.” He also suggests “the tree itself gives the oracle.” Later he adds, “Sacred trees with give omens or oracles are widespread among all peoples” and he later suggests that the tree in Genesis 12 is probably the same tree in Genesis 34.4, Deuteronomy 11.30, Joshua 24.24, and Judges 9.26, 37...

The other fact concerns the type of sanctuary. It is a tree that makes it a sacred place. The patriarchal story often speaks of particular trees at a particular place. They indicate the early type of sanctuary that is not yet made with hands. This means above all: a sacred place designated by a tree does not need any cultic institution, personnel, or building. It is a sanctuary typical of the life-style of the patriarchs. This can be demonstrated with the utmost clarity. R. de Vaux has drawn attention to it: “These trees have embarrassed later tradition ... ” See: Claus Westermann, [Genesis 12-36: Continental Commentaries](#), Fortress Press, 1986, p. 153-154.

Nahum Sarna says this regarding the terebinth at Moreh in Gen. 12.6:

Hebrew *'elon moreh*, undoubtedly some mighty tree with sacred associations. *Moreh* must mean “teacher, oracle giver.” This tree (or a cluster of such trees) was so conspicuous and so famous that it served as a landmark to identify other sites in the area. The phenomenon of a sacred tree, particularly one associated with a sacred site, is well known in a variety of cultures. A distinguished tree, especially one of great antiquity, might be looked upon as the “tree life” or as being “cosmic,” its stump symbolizing the “navel of the earth” and its top representing heaven. In this sense, it is a bridge between the human and the divine spheres, and it becomes an arena of divine-human encounter, an ideal medium of oracles and revelation. Fertility cults flourished in connection with such trees, and this form of paganism proved attractive to many Israelites. For this reason, the official religion of Israel forbade the planting of trees within the precincts of the altar, as stated in Deuteronomy 16:21

It is to be noted that Shechem seems to have been particularly rich in traditions about trees of special significance. Jacob hid idolatrous appurtenances “under the terebinth (*'eluh*) that was near Shechem” (Gen. 35:4); Joshua “took a great stone and set it up at the foot of the oak (*'allah*) in the sacred precinct of the LORD” in Shechem (Josh. 24:26); Abimelech was proclaimed king of that city “at the terebinth (*'elon*) of the pillar” (Judg. 9:6); and there was also “the terebinth of the soothsayers” in the Vicinity (Judg. 9:37). All these may refer to one and the same tree, although it is not certain that *'elon* is identical with the other similarly named trees (cf. Hos. 4:12)—the *'elah*, which is the *Pistacia terebinthus* and the *'allon*, which is the *quercus*. These latter two are used generically, whereas *'elon* always appears in a specific usage in combination with another term. See: Nahum Sarna, [JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#), 2001, Jewish Publication Society p. 91.

3. “Sarah thy wife shall have a son” – Gen. 18.10.
4. Sarah laughed³ – great pun in the text – Gen. 18.12-13 – cross reference with Gen. 21.6, 9-10.
5. Is anything too hard for the Lord? – Gen. 18.14.

To me, this tree at Moreh is a code for the temple and the tree that was originally in the Holy of Holies, but was removed by the Deuteronomistic reformers of the 7th century. Reading 1 Nephi 8 and 11 through the lens of the temple and the visionary men of this time period puts back many things which were lost, things that Nephi hints at in his text and things that Deuteronomists were opposed to in Lehi’s day. It is noteworthy that John, who knows the temple, places the tree back in the Holy of Holies in the book of Revelation. See: Mike Day, [The Tree Restored in the Holy of Holies – Revelation 22](#).

Margaret Barker writes, “Of all the Old Testament texts, Job offers most evidence for the older ways. **The name *Shaddai* occurs most frequently in Job: 31 times**, compared with 17 in the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. Job also has the most instances of *Eloah*: 42 times compared with 15 in the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, and these two names must be treated together. *Eloah* seems to have been a divine name: ‘In Ugaritic, Hebrew and Arabic (Allah < *al-ilahu*, the god) the usage as a divine name is clearly attested.’ ([DDD, p. 285](#)) This *ilh* receives a sacrifice of two ewes in the new year sacrifices at Ugarit, and Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE said that the equivalent name *Alilat*, the older form of *Allat*, was the chief deity of the Sinai Arabs, a goddess identified as Ouraniē. The book of Job is set in that region, and it is interesting that a deity with a name so similar to *Eloah* was also known as Ouraniē, ‘heavenly one’ [the Queen of Heaven?] and was female. Maybe *Eloah* was a title for the mother of the *’elohim* rather than *’elohim* being just the plural form of *Eloah*.

Just as possible meanings for *Shaddai* revealed something of how the deity’s character was remembered, so too with *Eloah*. The words most similar to *Eloah*, *’lh*, are the identical forms *’lh*, voiced *’ālāh*, meaning oath or curse; *’lh*, voiced *’allāh*, meaning oak tree; and *’lh*, voiced *’ēlāh* meaning terebinth. ***Eloah* may be concealed in several texts that are now thought to be about trees. Jacob buried all the foreign gods under the terebinth, (הָאֵלֹהִים) *ha’ēlāh*, near Shechem (Gen.35.4). Joshua set up a great stone in the sanctuary of the Lord at Shechem, ‘under the *’allah*, (הָאֵלֹהִים) presumably the oak tree that Jacob knew, the place where Abimelech was later made king (Judg.9.6), but here it is ‘in the sanctuary of the Lord’ (Josh.24.26). ‘Under the oak tree’, could also be read as ‘instead of the goddess’.** It is commonplace to observe that Abraham set up an altar at the oak, *’ēlōn*, of Moreh because the Lord appeared there to promise him the land (Gen.12.6-7), **and this was a sacred tree.** Had the priestly writer told this story, he would have observed his own rule that the deity who appeared to the patriarchs was *El Shaddai* (Exod.6.3), so was the ‘tree theophany’ originally a characteristic of *Shaddai*? **Did *Shaddai* appear in the tree or as the tree?**” Later she adds, “The religion of the patriarchs was the way of life purged by Josiah...” See: Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord: Volume 1 The Lady in the Temple*, 2012, p. 140, 146.

Regarding *Eloah*, [Dennis G. Pardee](#) writes, “In the Hebrew Bible, *’eloah* appears fifty-seven times (as compared with nearly 100 occurrences of *’elah* in the Aramaic sections, which constitute, of course, only a fraction of the total text). The plural form *’elohim* occurs some 2750 times, both as a common noun and as a divine name...

Except in details of distribution, therefore, with the usage as a divine name being rare except in Job, the usage of *Eloah* is similar to that of *Elohim*. Lack of data precludes any conclusions about the possible relationship between the Ugaritic concepts *’Ilahu/Ilahuma* and the origin and development of Hebrew views of the same terms. The relationship between *Eloah/Elohim* and *Yahweh* must be elucidated, to the extent that presently available data permit such decisions, in the broader context of the identification of *Yahweh* with other deities/divine names (*El, Eloah, Elohim, Yah, Elyon*, and *Shaddai* are the permitted ones, though the range of popular usage may have been more extensive.” (Karel Van Der Toorn, editor, [Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible](#), Brill, 1998, p. 287-288. Also written as DDD.)

³ וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ “And Sarah laughed within herself...” The word for laugh צָחַק - *ṣāḥaq*, is a bit of word-play that is happening with the name Isaac – יִצְחָק, a word that is the 3rd person singular imperfect verb of “he will laugh” (obviously with different vowel pointing). Isaac’s name appears in Genesis 21.3.

6. The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah⁴ is very grievous: The bargaining between the Lord & Abraham. "Will you really sweep away the just/righteous with the wicked?" – Gen. 18.17-33.⁵

Genesis 19: The Destruction of Sodom

1. Angels come to Lot's residence – Gen. 19.1-3.
2. The men of Sodom surround Lot's house – Gen. 19.4-13.⁶
3. Lot goes out to his sons in law, he is rejected – Gen. 19.13-14.
4. The angels "hasten Lot" – Gen. 19.15
5. Lot escapes, Sodom & Gomorrah are destroyed – Gen. 19.16-25.
6. Lot's wife "looked back," and became a pillar of salt – Gen. 19.26.
 - a. Luke 17.32 – "Remember Lot's wife."⁷
 - b. Elder Holland's commentary on this verse – Luke 17.32 and Gen. 19.26.⁸

⁴ The exact location of these cities has never been discovered. Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 138.

⁵ Westermann writes, "The concern, so clearly recognizable in Genesis 18, that doubt can be cast on the justice of God, must have a recognizable background. This is clear in the book of Job where, just as in Gen. 18, the discussion turns on God's action in history, especially on his destructive action. In the powerful poem about God's destructive action in history in ch. 12, Job says that it is not true that one can discern the justice of God in his lot: "I am a laughingstock ... , a just and blameless man," (12:4); "With him are strength and wisdom, the deceived and the deceiver are his" (12:16). Job expresses his objection against his friends in its strongest form in 9:22: " ... Therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked." And in ch. 21 Job alleges experience which shows that his friends are not correct with their doctrine of retribution: "How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out?" (21: 17). This is the curtain before which the author of Gen. 18 speaks; there were at that time those in Israel who put in question a justice of God which they read in the lot of humans. This is the basis of the concern, the zeal of the present speaker. See: Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 286.

⁶ Sodom and Gomorrah's sin (according to the Biblical text):

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. (Ezekiel 16:49)

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:7)

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

Other verses on this subject: 1 Corinthians 6.9-11; 1 Timothy 1.9-11; Romans 1.26-27. One commentator writes, "Biblical writers were aware of same-sex relationships, and a few explicitly opposed them, or at least some of them. But the writers' understanding of such relationships, like their understanding of gender and slavery, was that of their own times. Contemporary moralists who argue that the Bible is opposed to homosexuality are correct, but when they appeal to the Bible's authority as a timeless and absolute moral code, they ignore the cultural contexts in which the Bible was written." Michael Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says*, 2011, p. 140.

⁷ μνημονεύετε τῆς γυναικὸς Λώτ.

⁸ In the time we have this morning, I am not going to talk to you about the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, nor of the comparison the Lord Himself has made to those days and our own time. I am not even going to talk about obedience and disobedience. I just want to talk to you for a few minutes about looking back and looking ahead.

7. The etiological tale of Moab: Lot's sin with his daughters – Gen. 19.27-38.
 - a. Some see this as an etiological tale used to explain how Moab came to be.⁹
 - b. The Moabites and Ammonites were neighbors to Israel and spoke kindred languages.¹⁰
 - c. It is noteworthy that Ruth is from Moab, and the Davidic line comes through her loins. See: [Ruth 4.13-22](#).
 - d. From ashes to beauty – Isaiah 61.3, “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.”¹¹

One of the purposes of history is to teach us the lessons of life. George Santayana, who should be more widely read than he is on a college campus, is best known for saying, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (*Reason in Common Sense*, vol. 1 of *The Life of Reason* [1905–1906]).

So, if history is this important—and it surely is—what did Lot's wife do that was so wrong? As something of a student of history, I have thought about that and offer this as a partial answer. Apparently what was wrong with Lot's wife was that she wasn't just *looking* back; in her heart she wanted to *go* back. It would appear that even before they were past the city limits, she was already missing what Sodom and Gomorrah had offered her. As Elder Maxwell once said, such people know they should have their primary residence in Zion, but they still hope to keep a summer cottage in Babylon (see Larry W. Gibbons, “[Wherefore, Settle This in Your Hearts](#),” *Ensign*, November 2006, 102; also Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990], 47). See: Jeffrey R. Holland, “[Remember Lot's Wife: Faith is for the Future](#),” BYU Speeches, January 13, 2009.

⁹ “**Modern scholars see this as an etiological element**, and a nasty swipe at these two nations. The story well accounts for the fact that the Ammonites and the Moabites speak a language similar to the Israelites' and are related to them in other ways...” James Kugel, *How to read the Bible*, p. 130.

¹⁰ Sarna disagrees with this being an etiological tale, and gives his view of the history of these peoples:

Moabite and Ammonite inscriptions confirm that they both spoke kindred Semitic languages that were much closer to Hebrew than to Aramaic. According to our narrative, the two peoples appear on the scene of history rather late, as indicated by their absence from the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. Archaeological surveys have determined that around 1900 BCE. Transjordanian Civilization was extinguished. Sedentary life in the area did not resume on a firm basis until about the end of the fourteenth century BCE. A century later, when Israelites were just settling in Canaan, Moab and Ammon were already organized as monarchies in Transjordan. This is in harmony with the inference from our story that Israel is younger than these two. It is difficult to understand the point of this episode since neither people plays any role in the patriarchal narrative. A theory that it expresses Israelite contempt for its traditional enemies is hardly likely to be correct. If this were the motivation, then surely a scandalous origin for Esau-Edom, the inveterate and implacable national enemy, would also have been invented, rather than have him be the son of Isaac and Rebekah. Nothing in our story suggests hostility. The daughters do not act out of lust. Lot, who is entirely unaware of what is happening, receives no blame. The later hostility to Moab and Ammon finds expression in the law prohibiting Israelite intermarriage with them, but the proscription in Deuteronomy 23.4 is conditioned on Israel's wilderness experience and is not based on the incestuous origin of these peoples. Indeed, their right to live peaceably in their respective homelands is acknowledged as God-given in Deuteronomy 2. 9, 19. It should also be remembered that King David is descended from a Moabite woman, a fact clearly attested in Ruth 4.17-22. See: Sarna, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#), p. 139.

¹¹ The passage is partly a comic inversion of the opening of this two-chapter section, which centers on the unlikely birth of a son to Sarah (18.1-15). Note the similarity of Sarah's remark “with my husband so old” (18.12) and the older daughter's words, our father is old (19.31). Gen. 19.30-38 provides an **unflattering account of the origins of**

Genesis 20: Abimelech desires Sarah:¹² An Elohist Narrative

1. This is the retelling of the sacrifice of Sarah, as found in Genesis 12. This is a triplet in the Genesis narrative of the wife/sister motif.¹³

Genesis 21: Isaac is born, Hagar and Ishmael are cast out

1. The long-promised day finally arrives – Gen. 21.1-2.
 - a. A full quarter of a century has passed since Abraham first heard the divine call promising him great posterity (Gen. 12.4; 21.5). During the course of this period he received repeated affirmation of this pledge but experienced constant disappointment and faced periodic crises that threatened to make its fulfillment impossible. Now, at last, the word is fulfilled.¹⁴
2. Isaac is born, circumcised – Gen. 21.1-5.¹⁵
3. **The Song of Sarah** – Gen. 21.7.
 - a. This utterance of Sarah has **the form of a song**. It consists of three short clauses of three words each.¹⁶
4. Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian “mocking” – Gen. 21.9.
 - a. Playing is another pun on Isaac’s name (see Gen. 17.17, 18.12, 19.14, 26.8). Ishmael was “Isaacing,” or “taking the place of Isaac.”¹⁷

two of Israel's traditional enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites (Deut. 23.4-7). Nonetheless, a **midrash sees in these acts the origins of two of the great mothers of Israel, the Moabite Ruth**, ancestor of King David (Ruth 4.13-22), and the **Ammonite Naamah, wife of King Solomon and mother of his successor King Rehoboam** (1 Kings 14.21). "I found David" (Ps. 89.21), a rabbi observed. "Where did He find him?-in Sodom!" A seed of messianic redemption thus lies in the squalid events of Gen. 19.30-38 (Gen. Rnb. 41.4).

¹² This is the first occurrence of a text from the Elohist source. It does not appear to be the beginning of the E source, as Abraham and Sarah come out of nowhere. It appears that the redactor of the Yahwist account (J) and the Elohist narrative (E) favored J for the opening of the book of Genesis. Because of this, we cannot know what E began with, and therefore from the Biblical text alone we are left to guess whether E had a creation tale or tale of Noah. (See Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 61.) I would suggest that the [E text was on the Plates of Brass](#) and that these records had an Egyptian flavor. This being said, and if I am correct, E had a creation narrative contained within it. 1 Nephi 5.11 tells us that the Plates of Brass contained “an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents.”

¹³ For an analysis of the doublets and triplets in the first five books of the Tanakh, go to Mike Day, “[Doublets in the Pentateuch](#).” I have (so far) 18 reduplications in Genesis, 10 in Exodus/Numbers, and 7 in Leviticus/Numbers.

¹⁴ Sarna, p. 145.

¹⁵ Gen. 21.1-5 are a rare instance where the name YHWH appears in a passage identified as P. Much of the content in Gen. 21.-15 come from P, with all of Gen. 21.8-34 coming from the Elohist, or northern tradition.

מי מלל לאברהם	Who would have said to Abraham
היניקה בנים שרה	That Sarah would suckle children!
כי־ילדתי בן לזקוני	For/yet I have borne a son in his old age!

¹⁷ One commentator wrote, “Let us turn to Hebrew for the answer. If you know Hebrew letters, you can recognize that the word *metzahek*, מצחק, has the same root as Itzhak: יצחק. Therefore, it can be read as a verb formed from the root Isaac. Sarah saw that Ishmael was “Isaacing,” whatever that might mean! Probably, Ishmael

5. Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael leave, when the water is “spent in the bottle,” Hagar hears the angel of the Lord – Gen. 21.10-21.
 - a. S. Michael Wilcox has spoken of this as a way to see how God allows us to struggle. It can be related to the fourth watch as found in Matthew 14.22-31 and Mark 6.45-50.¹⁸
6. Abimelech and Abraham and their strife over water – Gen. 21.22-34.
7. Beer-sheba, the “well of the Seven,” or “well of the oath,” and the “grove” – Gen. 21.25-33.¹⁹
8. The “Land of the Philistines” – Gen. 21.32.²⁰

Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Isaac

1. Take thy son, thine **only son**... and offer him... for a burnt offering – Gen. 22.1-2²¹

was trying to take Isaac’s place...” Julia Blum, [The Story of Isaac and Ishmael, Israel Institute of Biblical Studies](#), 8.23.2018. Another commentator writes, “Except for the somewhat ambiguous text of Genesis 21:9, Ishmael and Isaac do not seem to have personal difficulties with each other. Their mothers are the ones who do not get along. In verse 9 there is a word play for the word “laughter” to describe Ishmael “laughing” (ESV), “playing” (NRSV) with Isaac or “mocking”(ASV), or “scoffing” (NKJV) him, depending on the translation. In the original language the expression sounds like Ishmael was “Isaacing” with Isaac. The original word for Ishmael’s “laughing” (צחק) actually points to the meaning of Isaac’s name. The same word is used to describe the laughing of Abraham (Gen 17:17), Sarah (Gen 18:12, 13, 15), and Isaac himself (Gen 26:8). See: Paulo Bechara, The Ishmael Story within the Structure of Genesis and Exodus: Ishmael and Hagar as Types for the People of Israel, in [A man of passionate reflection: A Festschrift honoring Jerald Whitehouse](#), Berrien Springs, Andrews University 2011, p. 195-212.

¹⁸ See: [Wait Upon the Lord](#). See also: S. Michael Wilcox, *Don’t Leap With the Sheep*, p. 156-159.

¹⁹ This well, in connection to the “seven,” or “oath,” in connection to the tree, has a direct connection to the tree that was discussed in Genesis 12.6. These things (to me) are connected to worship and have a direction connection to the idea of the sacred water under the foundation stone beneath the cosmic temple. See: [The Tree Restored in the Holy of Holies – Revelation 22](#).

²⁰ Scholars have long noted the anachronism with Philistines being in this setting at this place and time. See: Westermann, p. 347.

²¹ The passage in Gen. 22.2 begins as follows: וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ – It reads, “And he said, take now, your son, your ‘only’...” The word יְחִיד *yāhîd* means “only, only one,” or “unique.” I find it insightful that we see this same word used in **Psalm 22.20**:

הַצִּילֵה מִחַרְבַּב נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד-כָּלֵב יְחִידְתִּי:

My (literal) Hebrew translation: Save from the sword (מַחַרְבַּב) my soul (נַפְשִׁי) and from the power/hand of the dog (כָּלֵב) *yichidatiy*/my only one (יְחִידְתִּי).

My “poetic” re-rendering of the Hebrew: Save my only one and my very soul from the sword and from the power of the evil one!

Yichidatiy (coming from *yāhîd*) is an interesting word. It literally means “my only one,” and could very well be directly related to “my ONLY son” or “My ONLY child”... it is a term of endearment. We see it in the narrative of God commanding Abraham to take his son, his יְחִיד “only” son in Genesis 22.2. The Greek translators left the awesomeness of the text in the verse. Remember, the Greek speaking Jews translated the Hebrew into Greek around 330 BCE. This is known as the Septuagint (LXX):

LXX Ps. 22.20: ῥῦσαι ἀπὸ ῥομφαίας τὴν ψυχὴν μου καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς κυνὸς τὴν **μονογενῆ** μου.

My translation: Deliver my soul (ψυχὴν) and my only begotten child (μονογενῆ) out of the sword (ῥομφαίας) and from the hand of the dog.

- a. This is a type for how the Lord will text us.²²
2. Abraham takes two young men with him – Gen. 22.3.
3. On the third day Abraham and Isaac embark up the mountain of Moriah alone – Gen. 22.4-5.²³
4. The Sacrifice – Gen. 22.6-14.
 - a. Isaac is “bound” – Gen. 22.9.²⁴
 - b. The message of Genesis 22 shows the love the Father has for the Son.²⁵
5. The Promise repeated: “I will bless thee” ... “Thy seed as the stars” ... “Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” – Gen. 22.17-18.²⁶
6. The similarities between Genesis 22 and Genesis 12 are noted by Nahum Sarna.²⁷

So you can really see that the Greek translation (made centuries before Jesus) can render a translation for a “Christ-centered” interpretation, depending upon your point of view.

²² “God will feel after you, and He will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God.” (Joseph Smith, quoted by John Taylor, *JD* 24:197.

²³ This is an interesting bit of wordplay in Hebrew text of the opening of Genesis 22. הַרְרִים “The mountains” is an anagram of Moriah (מֹרִיָּה), see Genesis 22.2.

²⁴ Isaac is “bound,” probably by his hands and feet, (קָדַע, the verb occurs only here in the entire Tanakh and gives rise to the Jewish term for this story: The Aqedah, that is, the “binding” of Isaac.

²⁵ It is written in the scriptures that God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son to die for the world, that whosoever believes on him...and keeps his commandments, shall be saved...While we give nothing, perhaps, for this atonement and this sacrifice, nevertheless, it has cost someone something, and I love to contemplate what it cost our Father in heaven to give us the gift of his Beloved Son...I think as I read the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac that our Father is trying to tell us what it cost him to give his Son as a gift to the world...Our Father in Heaven went through all that and more, for in his case the hand was not stayed. He loved his Son, Jesus Christ, better than Abraham ever loved Isaac, for our Father had with him his Son, our Redeemer, in the eternal worlds, faithful and true for ages, standing in a place of trust and honor, and the Father loved him dearly, and yet he allowed this well-beloved Son to descend from his place of glory and honor, where millions did him homage, down to the earth, a condescension that is not within the power of man to conceive...God heard the cry of his Son in that moment of great grief and agony, in the garden when, it is said, the pores of his body opened and drops of blood stood upon him, and he cried out: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me." I ask you, what father and mother could stand by and listen to the cry of their children in distress, in this world, and not render aid and assistance?...We cannot stand by and listen to those cries without its touching our hearts...His Father looked on with great grief and agony over his Beloved Son, until there seems to have come a moment when even our Savior cried out in despair: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In that hour I think I can see our dear Father behind the veil looking upon these dying struggles until even he could not endure it any longer; and, like the mother who bids farewell to her dying child, has to be taken out of the room, so as not to look upon the last struggles, so he bowed his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that he had for his Son. **Oh, in that moment when he might have saved his Son, I thank him and praise him that he did not fail us, for he had not only the love of his Son in mind, but he also had love for us. I rejoice that he did not interfere, and that his love for us made it possible for him to endure to look upon the sufferings of his Son and give him finally to us, our Savior and our Redeemer.** (Melvin J. Ballard, "The Sacramental Covenant," *The New Era*, Jan. 1976, 9-10).

²⁶ Richard Friedman notes that in the original E text, it is God who speaks, but as the text has been edited by RJE, it now appears to be the angel who reiterates the promises to Abraham. (See: *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 65.)

²⁷ The two crucial events are cast in common literary mold so that chapters 12 and 22 share many connecting links. God's first call to Abraham is introduced by the declaration, “Go forth . . . to the land that I will show you”; and his last employs almost identical language, “Go forth . . . to the land of Moriah . . . on one of the heights that I will point out to you.” The Hebrew *lekh lekha*, “go forth,” does not occur again in the Bible, a fact that underscores the deliberate and meaningful nature of its use in these two passages. In both instances, the precise ultimate

- a. “Go forth to the land I will show you” – Gen. 12.1 and “go forth to the land of Moriah” – Gen. 22.2.
 - b. The precise ultimate destination is withheld in both accounts.
 - c. Both end in promises of posterity- Gen. 12.7 & Gen. 22.16-19.
 - d. Both promises are given at similar sounding places: Moreh and Moriah.
 - e. Both sites have Abraham building an altar- Gen. 12.7 & Gen. 22.9.
 - f. This is all connected to the temple – see slides associated with this presentation.
7. The Genealogy of Rebekah – Gen. 22.20-24.²⁸

The Death of Sarah and the Cave of Machpelah – Genesis 23

1. Sarah dies at 127 years – Gen. 23.1.²⁹
2. Sarah died at Kirjath-arba – Gen. 23.2.³⁰
3. Abraham wept for Sarah – Gen. 23.2.³¹

destination of the trek is withheld, and in both the tension of the drama is heightened by the cumulative effect of several Hebrew epithets, the last of which is the most potent: “your land, your homeland, your father’s house”; “your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love.” Both episodes culminate in promises of glorious posterity, the second one containing striking verbal echoes of the first. One blessing was received at the terebinth of Moreh, the other at the similar sounding Moriah; and at both sites, it is stated, Abraham “built an altar there.” Finally, just as the account of the initial call is preceded by a genealogy that introduces the main character of the next episode, so the story of the final call from God is followed by a genealogical note having the same function. See: Sarna, *JPS Commentary*, p. 150.

²⁸ Abraham had two sons whose careers ran in parallel with each other. After their birth late in Abraham’s life, Ishmael’s career is summarized first. As a lad, he faced death and was rescued by an angel, who promised to make him a great nation. Subsequently, he married one of his mother’s people, an Egyptian (21.9-21). In 22.1-19, Isaac’s career has passed through a similar series of stages, climaxing with a tremendous assurance about his descendants, but the last stage, Isaac’s marriage, is missing. The reader expects something at this point, but the editor tantalizes him with a mere genealogy. But buried within it is the mention of one grandchild, who is also a girl. This surely raises expectations. (Gordon J. Wenham, *World Biblical Commentary Genesis 16-50*, Zondervan, 2000, p. 119.)

²⁹ Sarah was last mentioned in 21.12, when she ordered Ishmael’s expulsion, but her part in the reaction to the momentous events in 21.22-22.24 are passed over in silence, according to the narrative a period of nearly 35 years. Suddenly, however, her total lifespan and her death are mentioned... Whether her age is supposed to be taken literally is unclear. The midrash saw symbolism in it: 100 stands for great age, 20 for beauty, and 7 for blamelessness. (Gordon Wenham, *World Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50*, Zondervan, 2000, p. 125.)

³⁰ Kiryat-Arba is nearly always glossed as Hebron. Hebron seems to be the Israelite name of the city earlier called Kiryat Arba, either “city of Arba” or “city of four,” and lies about 25 miles south of Jerusalem on the way to Beersheba. It is also close to Mamre, where Abraham received the great bulk of the promises recorded in Genesis. (Wenham, p. 125-126.)

³¹ Abraham was engaging in [שָׁפַד](#) *sāpād*, a term meaning that he was “bemoaning” the dead. This term is associated with the traditional mourning customs of ancient Israel, such as rending the garments, disheveling his hair, cutting his beard, scattering dust on his head, and fasting. (See Leviticus 21.5, 10; 2 Samuel 1.11,12; 13.31; Job 1.20, 2.12.) The second term [לִבְכָתָהּ](#) *live-kotah*, from the root [בָּכָה](#) *bākā*, suggests that Abraham was also weeping for joy. (See Gen. 33.4 and 45.14 for the uses of this verb. In Gen. 33.4 “they wept,” [וַיִּבְכוּ](#) refers to Jacob and Esau at their reunion, and in Gen. 45.14 we read that Joseph fell upon Benjamin’s neck and he wept [וַיִּבְכֶּה](#). (see also *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2020, p. 113.) This opens up some provocative possibilities in Abraham’s mourning. I see his mourning as both joyful and sorrowful. This passage opens up for me a scriptural passage to understand the complexities of mourning and I also appreciate the nuanced layering of this single verse of scripture.

4. Abraham negotiates a price for the burying place of Sarah – Gen. 23.3-15.³²
5. Abraham buries Sarah – Gen. 23.19-20.

³² The negotiations between Abraham and the Hittites proceed in 3 stages. Each time, Abraham makes a proposal and the Hittites then accept. First, Abraham asks if he may have a place to bury Sarah. Then, he asks if he may buy the cave of Macpelah מַכְפֵּלָה (Macpelah can mean “double” or “portion,” and is related to kaw-fal' קָפַל a word that means “to double, fold, or double over”). Finally, Abraham insists that its owner Ephron name the price of the land. This three-stage development is typical of narrative style. (Jacob Licht, [Storytelling in the Bible](#), The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1978, p. 55-69. See also: Wenham, p. 126.)