



Abraham, age ninety-nine, is recuperating from his recent circumcision. Sitting at the door of his tent, Abraham receives a prophetic vision – G-d Himself has come to visit the sick. Suddenly, Abraham spies three wayfarers; interrupting his communion with the Al-mighty, he runs to greet them and implores them to partake of his hospitality. The strangers, who are actually angels, announce that Sarah will bear Abraham a son. Although Abraham has already heard this news from G-d, Sarah has not; she laughs at the thought of bearing a child at her advanced age.

The angels finish their meal and depart; G-d resumes his communication with Abraham. “Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am doing?” declares G-d, and proceeds to inform Abraham of the impending destruction of wicked Sodom and its four neighboring cities. Without hesitation, Abraham steps forward to plead for mercy, asking – almost demanding – that G-d spare the cities if a minimum number of righteous individuals can be found there. G-d agrees in principle – but the requisite number does not exist.

The angels arrive in Sodom and encounter Abraham’s nephew Lot, who resides there. Like Abraham, Lot entreats the angels to be his guests; the Sodomites learn that Lot is hosting strangers and a mob surrounds the house. The angels inform Lot that they are here to destroy the cities and that he is to be spared; they usher him out of the city and command him to flee and not look back. Lot’s wife does look behind her, and becomes a pillar of salt. Lot and his two unmarried daughters escape the destruction.

Abraham travels to the land of the Philistines. Just as he did in Egypt, Abraham calls Sarah his sister rather than his wife; like Pharaoh, the Philistine king Abimelech takes Sarah, but is prevented by Divine intervention from harming her.

At last, Sarah is blessed with a son, who is given the name Isaac – “he will laugh” – in keeping with G-d’s command. Abraham is one hundred years old, and Sarah is ninety.

Ishmael, Abraham’s older son from Hagar, behaves inappropriately, and Sarah demands that he be banished from the home. Abraham recoils at the idea, but G-d insists, “Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her!” – indicating that Sarah is a greater prophet than her husband.

Wandering in the wilderness with his mother, Ishmael takes ill. An angel appears and promises that Ishmael will survive to become the father of a great nation. Ishmael marries and settles in the Wilderness of Paran.

G-d appears to Abraham and presents him with the last of his Ten Tests: Abraham is to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. On the summit of Mount Moriah (today the Temple Mount), as Abraham is on the verge of sacrificing Isaac, he is commanded to desist. Having passed the most difficult test of all, Abraham has earned immeasurable reward, and brought blessing to his descendants for all time.