HAYYEI SARAH

23 Sarah’s lifetime—the span of Sarah’s life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. 1 Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, 4 I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site.

THE CAVE OF MACHPELlah (23:1–20)

Here are the first recorded death and burial in the history of the people Israel. The cave of Machpelelah is the first parcel of real estate acquired by the founding father of the nation in the promised land.

THE DEATH OF SARAH (vv. 1–2)

1. Sarah’s lifetime—the span of Sarah’s life This repetition that emphasizes a woman’s age at her death is unique in the Bible. It testifies to Sarah’s importance as the first Matriarch.

2. Kiriath-arba An explanation offered for the name is “city of four,” referring to the four settlements that confederated and received the name “Hebron,” meaning “confederation” (see 13:18). Arba may also be a proper name (see Josh. 14:15, 15:10), which would make it “the city of Arba.”

THE APPEAL TO THE HITTITES (vv. 3–9)

3. rose Mourners would sit on the ground.

Hittites See Comment to Gen. 10:15.

4. a resident alien The Hebrew phrase, literally “alien and resident” (ger v’ishah), is a figure of speech in which two terms express a single notion. Abraham mentions his status because it is the underlying reason for the request that follows. A resident alien was unable to purchase real estate.

sell me The Hebrew verb translated here as was prepared to slay their son without informing her or because of the alarming news of his near death. According to one legend, Sarah is told that Abraham has killed Isaac at God’s command. Believing it, she dies on the spot. One commentator sees her death, even after learning that Isaac has survived, as an inability to live in a world as dangerous and unreliable as she has found this world to be, a world where life hangs by such a fragile thread (Zornberg).

1. one hundred and twenty-seven years In the words of the Midrash, Sarah retained the innocence of a 7-year-old when she was 20, and the beauty of a 20-year-old when she was 100 (Gen. R. 58:1).

4. resident alien Abraham is uncertain

CHAPTER 23

This parashah marks the transition from one generation to the next. It begins with Sarah’s death and concludes with Abraham’s. But its major theme is arranging a marriage for Isaac, the effort to find the right wife and partner so that the special tradition of Abraham and Sarah will continue beyond their lifetimes and the life of their son.

Although the Torah never explicitly makes the connection, many commentators connect Sarah’s death with Isaac’s narrow escape from tragedy at the Akedah, because it follows immediately after that in the narrative. Some see Sarah dying of shock either because Abraham was prepared to slay their son without informing her or because of the alarming news of his near death. According to one legend, Sarah is told that Abraham has killed Isaac at God’s command. Believing it, she dies on the spot. One commentator sees her death, even after learning that Isaac has survived, as an inability to live in a world as dangerous and unreliable as she has found this world to be, a world where life hangs by such a fragile thread (Zornberg).

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HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

23:3–4 Abraham rose . . . that I may remove my dead for burial Mourning does not eclipse the need to make arrangements for the prompt burial of the deceased, as required under Jewish law (S.A. YD 357:1). See Deut. 21:23 for a discussion about extenuating circumstances affecting immediate burial.

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among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.” 5And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him,6 “Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.” 7Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, 8and he said to them, “If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. 9Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst.”

Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the

“sell” (нести) can mean “to give, sell, or pay.” Its ambiguity permitted the dialogue to be conducted in an atmosphere of delicate dignity, if somewhat contrived, politeness.

a burial site The Hebrew term “ahuzzat kever” denotes an inheritable tomb. This element is vital to the transaction, because the cave is to serve future generations of the family of Abraham.

6. Bury your dead Abraham receives permission to bury his dead within the municipal boundaries of Hebron. Now he must acquire a plot of land.

7. bowed low In gratitude.

the people of the land Abraham may not approach the landowner directly. First he must deal with “the people of the land,” which refers either to the general body of citizens or to the group of rulers who served as the town council. Their approval was necessary for an alien to acquire real estate and before a citizen could agree to negotiate the sale of property.

8. Ephron son of Zohar Because the Bible rarely records the father’s name in the case of a non-Israelite, its presence here suggests that Ephron was a man of high nobility.

9. Machpelah It is traditionally identified with the site the Arabs call haram el-khalil (in present-day Hebron), “the sacred precinct of the friend (of God),” referring to Abraham. Tradition has it that Sarah and Abraham were buried there, as were Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah.

at the edge of his land Legal procedure naturally requires specification of the plot’s locale.

at the full price Literally, “at full silver” (b’hakesef malei). The silver shekel, a weight of about 0.4 ounces (12 g), was the most common medium of exchange in business transactions. (Coinage, invented at about the end of the 8th century B.C.E. by the Lydians, was not found in the land of Israel until the end of the biblical period.) The phrase appears in ancient Near Eastern commercial documents.

whether his neighbors accept him as a fellow resident or tolerate him as an alien in their midst. Their answer surprises him, going beyond both acceptance and toleration. Rather, they admire him for the quality of his faith: “you are the elect of God among us” (v. 6).

Much of Jewish history has seen the majority of Jews living as “resident aliens” in the midst of other nations. The descendants of this resident alien, the people Israel, will be extraordinarily creative when living in their own land, giving the world such spiritual treasures as the Psalms and the Prophets. The same spirit of creativity will mark their presence in the lands of the Diaspora.
hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, 11 “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.” 12 Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” 14 And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, 15 “My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead.” 16 Abraham accepted Ephron’s terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites—four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants’ rate.

THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EPHRON
(vv. 10–16)

The assembly must have indicated its assent to Abraham’s request. His negotiations with Ephron take place at the city gate, which served as a center of civic activity. The sale is given the widest possible publicity, to avoid any likelihood of litigation in the future.

10. all who entered the gate of his town
The phrase seems to mean “all who had free access to the town,” that is, the body of free citizens. It could also be an ancient term for the town council.

11. I give you the field
Abraham seems to have had in mind only the cave. Ephron offers the cave together with the field as a gift. It is either a sincere offer or the opening gambit in the usual manner of Near Eastern bargaining.

12. bowed low
A gesture of gratitude (see v. 7).

15. four hundred shekels of silver
The price is introduced by Ephron with an air of seeming nonchalance. In the absence of any information about contemporary land values and the size and quality of the property, it is not possible to know whether or not the price quoted was exorbitant. (Three texts from the city of Ugarit in northern Syria, dating from the 14th to 13th centuries B.C.E. and written in Akkadian, do record real estate transactions involving a purchase price of 400 shekels of silver.)

16. paid out
Literally, “weighed.” The term was regularly used of payment in commercial transactions because the metal was weighed each time on a pair of scales.

at the going merchants’ rate
A similar expression appears in Akkadian, referring to the rate that is current among merchants, a specification necessary and important in view of the variations in the shekel weight. There was a common weight and a royal weight (2 Sam. 14:26); and within each class, also a light standard and a heavy standard.

10–16. Ephron may be pretending to give Abraham the land while hinting at a steep price for it. Such bargaining seems devious and hypocritical; however, custom may have deemed it dishonorable to sell ancestral land but acceptable to give it as a present to a close friend (who, presumably, would give you a present of equal value). Although Abraham has God’s promise
17 So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town. And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan.

24 Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in

A LEGAL SUMMATION (vv. 17–20)

The final passage reads like a legal document. The act of burial completes the transaction, makes the sale absolute and incontestable, and confers the power to dispose of the property by testament or will.

17. Mamre This ancient and influential family in Hebron seems to have lent its name to one of the town's important quarters (see Gen. 13:18).

and all the trees The specification of the trees in land sale contracts is widespread in the ancient Near East.

19. Abraham buried his wife This terse statement echoes the simplicity and lack of ostentation with which Abraham buried Sarah.

20. passed Literally, “arose.” The stem שלם is a legal term used in connection with property transfers.

from the Hittites Because the ultimate control of land was vested in the community, mention of the Hittites in the legal summation was essential.

A WIFE FOR ISAAC (24:1–67)

ABRAHAM COMMISSIONS HIS SERVANT (vv. 1–9)

1. old, advanced in years Abraham's extreme old age adds urgency to his search for a wife for Isaac. That is why he is about to request that his servant take an oath rather than give him a simple order.

blessed . . . in all things Abraham's wealth

that the land will belong to his descendants, it is important for him to pay full price for it.

CHAPTER 24

1. After Sarah's death, Abraham, perhaps confronting his own loneliness and mortality, turns his attention to finding a wife for Isaac. As long as Isaac is unmarried, the divine promise of posterity will remain unfulfilled. He does not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman, so he sends his servant back to Aram to find a bride from among Abraham's relatives. The commentators wonder about this, because the Arameans were idol worshipers no less than the Canaanites. Hizz'kuni says that had Isaac married a Canaanite, people might attribute his claim to the land to his wife's inheritance, not to God's promise. Hirsch sees Abraham concerned about the influence of Canaanite neighbors and relatives on Isaac. Rabbenu Nissim attributes Abraham's rejection of a Canaanite bride not to Canaanite idolatry but to Canaanite moral depravity.

Abraham was now old Before Abraham, although people lived for many years, none
all things. 2 And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, “Put your hand under my thigh 3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, 4 but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac.” 5 And the servant said to him, “What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” 6 Abraham answered him, “On no account must you take my son back there! 7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from.

will be a decisive factor in gaining consent to the marriage and to the bride’s journey to a distant land.

2. senior servant Possibly Eliezer, mentioned in 15:2. The chief servant in an aristocratic household held considerable power and responsibility.

Put your hand under my thigh Gestures that accompany oath taking were universal in the ancient world. The “thigh” here refers to the genital organ, in which the power of procreation resides (see 47:29 for the same expression). Abraham is thereby invoking the presence and the power of God as the guarantor of the oath.

3. swear by the LORD In light of the fact that the mission involves travel to a distant land, Abraham invokes God’s universal sovereignty, using a title (“the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth”) that is unique in biblical literature. It may be a monotheistic version of an ancient Near Eastern oath formula in which the gods of heaven and earth were invoked as witnesses.

4. get a wife The Hebrew verb נל י take literally means “to take.” It defines the marriage institution from the perspective of the groom.

6. Abraham answered him This verse and the following two verses are the last words of the patriarch.

was described “old,” with its connotations of wisdom and maturity, not just chronologic length of days. In Jewish tradition, the Hebrew word for “old” (zaken) is associated with wisdom because it forms an acronym meaning “this one has acquired wisdom” (zeh kanah hokhmah). Abraham was the first person in history to grow wiser as he grew older [Gen. R. 59:6]. Another midrash comments that Abraham began to feel old only when Sarah died [Tanh.].

2. Why is the genital organ involved in this oath taking? According to the Sages, it acquired sanctity because it was marked by the covenant of circumcision (b’rit milah). We know of similar involvement in other cultures, as the words “testify” and “testimony” (derived from “testes”) indicate.

3. The God of heaven and the God of the earth The Midrash suggests that, before the time of Abraham, God ruled in heaven but was unknown on earth. Abraham brought God’s sovereignty down to earth [Sifrei Deut. 313].

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH
24:3 that you will not take a wife This is the first indication of the Jewish norm of endogamy, of marrying within the clan. Jewish law requires that Jews marry Jews (see Gen. 26:35, 28:1; Deut. 7:3).
my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. 8 And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there.” 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. 12 And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant

7. His angel  God’s providence is here personified as a heavenly being.
8. clear of this oath  Free of further obligation.

THE SERVANT’S PRAYER  (vv. 10–14)

10. and set out  The details of the journey are ignored; only the goal and its realization are described.

ten of his master’s camels  Concerning the presence of camels in the patriarchal narratives, see Comment to 12:16. Here, the sizable convoy is intended to make a strong impression on the future bride and her family, to serve as the means for testing her character, and to provide transportation back to Canaan for her and her entourage.

Aram-naharaim  The Septuagint took the second word of the name to mean “two rivers,” and so arose the name “Mesopotamia”; literally, the land “between the two rivers.” These were the Tigris and the Euphrates, or the Euphrates and its tributary Balikh. The Aramaic translation rendered “Aram-naharaim” as “Aram which is on the Euphrates,” referring to the territory bounded on three sides by the great bend of the Euphrates, within which lay the kingdom of Mitanni, called Naharin in ancient Near Eastern texts.

11. by the well  Public wells served as a meeting place for townsfolk and shepherds. Newly arrived strangers could restock their water supplies, gather information about the town, and make useful contacts there.

at evening time  When the chores are done and the day has cooled, the young women go out to draw water and can lounge about and engage in leisurely conversation.

12. And be said  This unnamed servant of Abraham is the first person whom Scripture records as praying for personal guidance at a critical moment.

grant me good fortune  The Hebrew verb here (hakrei) literally means “make it occur.” What appears to be the result of chance (mikreh) may, in reality, be a deliberate determination of

12ff. Some of the Sages criticize the servant for his prayer. Conceivably, an unsuitable young woman might have come along to offer him water. Furthermore, although miracles do happen, a person may not demand a miracle.

Others see the content of the prayer as a brilliantly intuitive realization that the qualities Isaac most needed in a wife, and might not have known that he needed, were kindness and generosity.
me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham; 13 Here I stand by
the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; 14 let the maiden to whom I
say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You
have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with
my master.”  

15 He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son
of Milcah the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder.
16 The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down
to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. 17 The servant ran toward her and said, “Please,
let me sip a little water from your jar.” 18 “Drink, my lord,” she said, and she quickly lowered her
jar upon her hand and let him drink. 19 When she had let him drink his fill, she said, “I will
also draw for your camels, until they finish

God. Nothing is more characteristic of the bib-lical outlook than the conviction about the role
divine providence in everyday human affairs.

14. water your camels  A single camel (and
here there were 10!) requires at least 25 gallons
of water to regain the weight it loses in the
course of a long journey. It takes a camel about
10 minutes to drink this amount of water.

let her be the one  Because she possesses
nobility of character, is hospitable to strangers, and
is kind to animals.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH REBEKAH
(vv. 15–27)
The servant’s prayer is answered at once.

15. born to Bethuel  Her full genealogy is
given because Nahor also had children from a
concubine (related in 22:20–24). The child of a
chief wife enjoyed higher social prestige. The rel-
ationship to Abraham is given to emphasize the
providential nature of what occurred.

16. a virgin  That is, a sexually mature
young girl of marriageable age.

went down . . . filled . . . came up  She went
about her business briskly and conscientiously,
not wasting time in gossip. This made a great
impression on the servant.

17. let me sip  To test her, he refrains from
asking for water for the animals.

19. until they finish  Her offer is not a hol-
low gesture but an act of generosity given in full
knowledge of the labor involved.

16. Rebekah is described as beautiful and
chaste, but her distinguishing characteristic is
her kindness, offering to draw water not only
for this stranger but for his train of camels as
well. Abraham and Sarah, for all of their pio-
near religious achievements, were some-
times insensitive to members of their own
household. Rebekah’s kindness and generosity
may have been what was needed to correct
those family dynamics.
quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the Lord had made his errand successful or not. When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two gold bands for her arms, ten shekels in weight. Pray tell me," he said, "whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?" She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." And she went on, "There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night." The man bowed low in homage to the Lord and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by the Lord, to the house of my master’s kinsmen."

The maiden ran and told all this to her mother’s household. Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring—when he saw

22. a gold nose-ring  Partly in return for her arduous labors and partly to win her goodwill and to impress her family, the servant lavishes rich gifts on the girl—even before learning her identity! Rashi understands the servant’s action to be an expression of faith in God’s response to his prayer. Most Jewish commentators reverse the order of events (he asks her name, then gives the gifts), citing verse 47 as proof.

23. ten shekels in weight  The weight is specified because items of jewelry were cast according to fixed standards and used as media of exchange.

24. I am the daughter of Bethuel  She has no reason to include her father’s relationship to Abraham, as the narrator did in verse 15.

25. plenty of straw  To offer food and shelter for the camels is a most generous act.

26. kinsmen  Literally, the “brothers of [my master].”

28. her mother’s household  This indicates that her father probably was not alive. (The lone reference to him in verse 50 may be the result of a scribal error.) That is why her brother Laban is introduced immediately in the next verse.

29. Rebekah had a brother  Not included in the genealogy of 22:23, he needs to be introduced now.

Laban  In Hebrew the word lavan means “white.” The feminine form lavanah, “the white one,” is a poetic term for the moon. This association is in keeping with other names in Abraham’s family that are connected with lunar worship, such as Terah, which has been connected with yarei-ah, “moon.”

30. when he saw the nose-ring  Laban’s hospitality appears to match that of his sister, but
the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah say, “Thus the man spoke to me.” He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring. 31 “Come in, O blessed of the Lord,” he said, “why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?” 32 So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him. 33 But when food was set before him, he said, “I will not eat until I have told my tale.” He said, “Speak, then.”

34 “I am Abraham’s servant,” he began. 35 The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich: He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and asses. 36 And Sarah, my master’s wife, bore my master a son in her old age, and he has assigned to him everything he owns. 37 Now my master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell; 38 but you shall go to my father’s house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.’ 39 And I said to my master, ‘What if the woman does not follow me?’ 40 He replied to me, ‘The Lord, whose ways I have followed, will send His angel with you and make your errand successful; and you will get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father’s house. 41 Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, when you come to my kindred, they refuse you—only then shall you be freed from my adjuration.’

we are given the impression that he is motivated by greed.

Thus the man spoke to me Referring to verse 23.

34. I am Abraham’s servant The servant recounts his experiences in a long and detailed speech. This type of repetition, which has its origins in orally transmitted literature, is characteristic of ancient Near Eastern epics and is found in various kinds of biblical prose narrative.

41. my adjuration The Hebrew word alah refers to the curse—the penalty for noncompliance—attached to an oath.
I came today to the spring, and I said: O Lord, God of my master Abraham, if You would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged. As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, ‘Please, let me drink a little water from your jar,’ and who answers, ‘You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels’—let her be the wife whom the Lord has decreed for my master’s son. I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ She quickly lowered her jar and said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So I drank, and she also watered the camels. I inquired of her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ And she said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.’ And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms. Then I bowed low in homage to the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way to get the daughter of my master’s brother for his son. And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me; and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left.”

50. Laban and Bethuel  The father plays no further role in the proceedings. Numerous ancient Near Eastern texts demonstrate that in a patriarchal society a brother had important duties and powers in regard to his sisters.

bad or good  That is, anything at all; we have no choice in the matter. The combination of opposites expresses a totality. See Comment to 2:9.
52. When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the Lord. 
53. The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and her mother. 
54. Then he and the men with him ate and drank, and they spent the night. When they arose next morning, he said, “Give me leave to go to my master.” 
55. But her brother and her mother said, “Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go.” 
56. He said to them, “Do not delay me, now that the Lord has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master.” 
57. And they said, “Let us call the girl and ask for her reply.” 
58. They called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will.” 
59. So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham’s servant and his men. 
60. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, 
   “O sister! 
   May you grow 
   Into thousands of myriads; 
   May your offspring seize 
   The gates of their foes.”

53. objects of silver and gold  The two types of gifts—one for Rebekah, the other for her family—correspond to the “bride-price” and “gifts” mentioned in 34:12. The first was a fixed amount paid by the groom to the bride. The second consisted of ceremonial marriage gifts to the bride’s family.

55. But her brother and her mother said 
At issue here is not consent to the marriage—it has already been given and its formalities completed—but agreement to leave the family at once for a distant land, without the customary elaborate leave-taking ceremonies Laban describes in 31:27.

59. her nurse  The Hebrew word “meneket” refers to a wet nurse. In Mesopotamia the wet nurse frequently had the duties of bringing up the child and acting as guardian. The nurse, having attended and reared Rebekah from birth, must have remained as a member of the household and now will accompany her as a chaperon (see 35:8).

60. they blessed Rebekah  She receives the same kind of blessing that God bestowed on Abraham after the Akedah.

57. The Sages cite this verse when they rule that the consent of a woman is required before she may be married.

60. These words are used today at the veiling of the bride (Yiddish: bedeken) that customarily precedes the Jewish wedding ceremony.
Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb. And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel and said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field toward us?” And the servant said, “That is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother’s death.

61. her maids Having maids was a mark of social status. In the ancient world, occasionally one gave a maid to one’s daughter at her wedding.

REBEKAH AND ISAAC (vv. 62–67)

62. Beer-lahai-roi The name of a well located in the Negeb (16:14), probably part of an oasis to which sheep breeders came for water and pasturage. Isaac later settled there (25:11).

63. walking This translation of the Hebrew lastu-āb is based on the Arabic word saha, “to take a stroll.” Another translation, from the Hebrew word si-āb, “to talk, to meditate, to pray,” has Isaac “chatting” with his friends.

63–64. saw The Hebrew text, using identical phrases for the actions of Isaac and of Rebekah, conveys an impression of simultaneity. Their eyes met in instant recognition; each knew instinctively who the other was.

64. She alighted Some Jewish commentators observe that this phrase properly belongs after verse 65.

65. my master He merits this title because he is his father’s sole heir.

her veil Israeliite women normally were not veiled. In the ancient Near East, the veiling of the bride was part of the marriage ceremony, but wives generally went about unveiled. By veiling herself now, as a sign of modesty, Rebekah signals Isaac that she is his bride.

66. into the tent of his mother Thereby she formally became the successor to Sarah the matriarch, ensuring the continuity of the generations.

67. as his wife Literally, “and she became his wife.” The marriage was consummated and her status was recognized by all.

66. married her The first reference to love in the Bible (22:2) concerned the tie between parent and child. This, the second reference to love, relates to the bond between husband and wife.

67. Isaac comes to love Rebekah after he marries her. Their love is the result, not the prerequisite, of their relationship.

after his mother’s death “As long as Sarah was alive, a light shone over her tent (signifying the divine Presence). When she died, it disap-
Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummites. 4 The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. 5 Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; 6 but to Abraham’s sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living.

THE GENEALOGIES OF ABRAHAM (25:1–18)

After Isaac’s marriage, the biblical text reports nothing more of Abraham’s activities, even though he lived for another 35 years. His death and burial are now recorded, preceded and followed by lists of his descendants: two groupings of nomadic tribes or peoples, mostly identifiable as Arab. Many of the names are known from cuneiform sources. The two lists represent in reality two confederations of tribes that once enjoyed kinship, trade, or political ties with the early Israelites. In keeping with common biblical practice, these relationships are expressed in family terms and arranged in a genealogic pattern.

THE DESCENDANTS OF KETURAH (vv. 1–6)
The “sons” of Keturah, six in number, are to be regarded as the original core of the tribal confederation to which others, here referred to as “grandsons” and “great-grandsons,” later adhered.

1. Abraham took another wife Verse 6 refers to Keturah as a “concubine,” not a wife. Abraham probably had children with her during Sarah’s lifetime.

Keturah Neither her parentage nor her origin is given. The name Keturah is related to the Hebrew word for “spices” (k’ore). The “sons” of Keturah were probably a tribal confederation that traded in spices, the source of which was southern Arabia.

2. she bore him Of the six names listed, the first three have not been identified with any degree of confidence, but most likely they refer to peoples or oases along the international trade routes.

Midian The Midianites traded in frankincense. Their land lay along the territory east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwestern Arabia.

3. Sheba A source of frankincense and other spices, it is situated in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

Dedan This major center of the spice trade is identified with the modern oasis of ’el ’Ulla in the northwestern part of the peninsula.

Asshurim, Letushim, Leummites Possibly obscure tribes that fell under the domination of the Dedanites or that were associated with them.

4. The descendants of Midian The Midianites were a confederation of five tribes, here called “sons” in Hebrew (b’nei midyan). Ephah is mentioned in Assyrian sources. The others are unknown.

5. Abraham willed Isaac is formally declared to be the sole heir of Abraham. In this period, unlike the Torah legislation of a later age (Deut. 21:15–17), the father had the absolute right to designate his own successor, regardless of the birth order of his sons.

6. Abraham gave gifts A gesture of generous
and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.

7 This was the total span of Abraham’s life: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. 9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. 11 After the death of Abraham, God

8. old and contented The phrase denotes a full life.

be was gathered to his kin Death is regarded as a transition to an afterlife where one is united with one’s ancestors in Sheol, envisioned as a huge cavern under the earth.

9. Isaac and Ishmael In order of importance, not birth.

Macpela This refers to the transaction described in Gen. 23. The cave now becomes a family tomb.

11. After the death of Literally, “It was after the death of.” The Hebrew expression occurs again in Josh. 1:1; Judg. 1:1; and 2 Sam. 1:1 in connection with the death of Moses, of Joshua, and of Saul, respectively. In each instance, it indicates that a historic turning point has been reached. An era has come to an end, but the continuity of leadership has been ensured.

God blessed . . . Isaac He made him the

and gave presents to the sons by the concubines. Abraham gave his other children material gifts, but to Isaac he gave himself. As a result, Isaac became his true heir; the other children were only footnotes in his biography.

9. Isaac and Ishmael are reunited at their father’s funeral, a sign that Ishmael changed his ways as he matured (BT BB 16b). Although he could not have forgotten how his father treated him and how his brother supplanted him, he seems to have forgiven Abraham for having been a less-than-perfect father. Isaac too seems to have come to terms with his father’s nearly killing him on Mount Moriah.

Might these reconciliations have occurred in Abraham’s lifetime and be the reason for the Torah’s describing him as “contented” in his old age (Gen. R. 38:12)? Can we see this as a model for family reconciliations, forgiving old hurts? And can it not be a model for the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac, contemporary Arabs and Israeli Jews, to find grounds for forgiveness and reconciliation?

11. after the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac God teaches us by example the importance of the mitzvah of comforting a mourner, nihum avelim.

The next years will be critical in determining whether the faith of Abraham will survive his death and become the heritage of his descendants or whether it will die with him, remaining the insight of one remarkable individual.
blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi.

12This is the line of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s slave, bore to Abraham. 13These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedmah. 16These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments: twelve chieftains of as many tribes.—17These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; then he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kin.—18They dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur; they camped alongside all their kinsmen.

recipient of the covenant, in fulfillment of the promise of 17:21.

near Beer-lahai-roi This is mentioned in Gen. 16:14 as the site of God’s promise of a son—Ishmael—to Hagar.

THE LINE OF ISHMAEL (vv. 12–18)

13. Nebaioth Ancient Near Eastern documents refer to an Arab people called Nabaiai. Some identify this people with the later Nabataeans, who lived in the former Edomite homeland.

Kedar The Kedarites are depicted as herders of sheep and goats who pursued a seminomadic existence and lived scattered over a wide area of the desert region east of the land of Israel.

16. villages These were unfortified encampments, often dependent on neighboring towns.

twelve chieftains The phrase indicates that God’s promise (17:20) has been fulfilled. The “chieftain” (nasi) was the leader of the tribe. The 12 are taken to be the historical personalities from whom the tribes and places of the Ishmaelite confederacy received their names.

tribes The Hebrew word ummah denotes here a large nomadic tribal unit. The word usually means “a nation.”

17. the life of Ishmael From the patriarchal period on, the Bible records only the life spans of the heroes of Israel. This notice about Ishmael is exceptional and appears because of two earlier chronologic notes: Abraham’s age at his birth and the boy’s age when he was circumcised.

18. They dwelt The territorial boundaries of the Ishmaelite confederation, or the geographic limits of their settlement and migration patterns, are now given.

Havilah Its location is uncertain because there was more than one site with this name.

Shur The line of Egyptian fortifications in the eastern delta discussed in connection with 16:7.

Asshur Not Assyria but some place in the northern Sinai desert.

they camped . . . their kinsmen The Hebrew has the singular “he . . . his” because it harks back to the prediction of 16:12, which speaks of Ishmael, the person.
This haftarah begins with an account of the last days of King David (c. 965 B.C.E.), which yield anything but a harvest of honor. It records the power struggle for seizing the crown of the king, even as his blood is turning cold (1:1–4). It seems that David never could escape the plots of his advisers and of his sons, in this case the scheming of his son Adonijah, who wanted to be king, versus the advisers who backed his son Solomon, the intended heir to the throne.

The narrative is structured and developed around pairs: David and Abishag (in the prologue), Nathan and Bathsheba, and Nathan and David (in the middle sections), and David and Bathsheba (in the epilogue). The pivotal scene of the narrative is the encounter between David and Bathsheba, with Abishag present (vv. 15–21). The text initially states that the king “did not know” Abishag the Shunammite maiden (v. 4). Bathsheba must now tell her husband what he “does not know”—that Adonijah has claimed the throne (v. 18).

The narrator, clearly a master of thematic intonation, connects and counterpoises various other episodes as well, with consummate skill. Another example of the subtle texture of this haftarah is provided by the threads linking the verb shawa (to swear an oath) with the name Bathsheba (Hebrew: Bat-sheva) (as in 1:28–29).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The parashah and the haftarah are linked by the expression “old, advanced in years” (zaken ba ba-yamim) found in both Gen. 24:1 and 1 Kings 1:1, and by the theme of old age. Abraham and David represent two distinct models of aging. The Abrahamic type enters old age with all the religious and moral integrity of his life intact.

Thus we see that Abraham, after the death of Sarah and the purchase of a family tomb (Gen. 23), “became old” and prepared for succession in his family. He directed his servant to “swear” (v’ashbi-akha) that he would not allow Isaac to marry one of the Canaanite women but, rather, would procure a wife for him from Abraham’s homeland (Gen. 24:1–4). The patriarch was active in securing a future that would continue the past. Being blessed by God with “all things” (ba-kol; 24:1), Abraham passed on to Isaac “all” (kol) he had (25:5). This was his deposition before death, along with “gifts” to the children of his concubines (v. 6). Eliminating contention over the inheritance and preparing for new generations, Abraham died “in good ripe age” (seivah), “old and contented” (savei-a). The harmony between a good old age and contentment (v. 8) suggests an integrated aging, a balance between his physical person and his spiritual self.

David entered old age in the atmosphere of a catastrophe. He spoke too soon when he boasted, in a poetical testament, “Is not my House established before God? / For He has granted me an eternal pact, / Drawn up in full (ba-kol) and secured. / Will He not cause all (kol) my success / And [my] every desire to blossom?” (2 Sam. 23:5) The story of David’s aging focuses on his physical debility and on the schemes of his dependents for securing their own stake in the future. Succumbing to infirmity, he did not “know” what was going on. His courtiers seem self-serving, and he himself represents all the frustrations of defunct power. David was a manipulator for most of his life, but his memory and pride were manipulated in his old age. Stung by the disclosures of Nathan and of Bathsheba, David “swears” (va-yishava) that he will fulfill his “former” oath (1 Kings 1:29). Something of the old David has thus returned. Giving final vent to
his complex personality, he transmits to Solomon some advice for survival: "Observe the Torah, so that God will fulfill His promises to the dynasty, and kill the renegade soldier Joab, to secure the realm (2:1–5). Both theological and political sensibilities marked the man. But his was a "fullness" (kol) of will and conceit, far removed from the noble "wholeness" of Abraham.

1 King David was now old, advanced in years; and though they covered him with bedclothes, he never felt warm. 2 His courtiers said to him, "Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, to wait upon Your Majesty and be his attendant; and let her lie in your bosom, and my lord the king will be warm." 3 So they looked for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel. They found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to the king. 4 The girl was exceedingly beautiful. She became the king's attendant and waited upon him; but the king was not intimate with her.

5 Now Adonijah son of Haggith went about boasting, "I will be king!" He provided himself with chariots and horses, and an escort of fifty outrunners. 6 His father had never scolded him: "Why did you do that?" He was the one born after Absalom and, like him, was very handsome.

7 He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported Adonijah; 8 but the priest Zadok, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the prophet Nathan, Shimei and Rei, and David's own fighting men did not side

1 Kings 1:2. wait upon Your Majesty Literally, "stand before (am'dah lifrei) [the king]." In royal contexts, the idiom means to "serve at court" (cf. 1 Kings 12:8).

7–8. Joab, who was David’s longtime faithful commander-in-chief (2 Sam. 8:16), now becomes a follower of the rebel Adonijah. Benaiah, who had served David as head of the elite guard (8:18), becomes the new commander-in-chief (1 Kings 4:4) with the succession of Solomon, who instructs him to kill Joab (2:28–34), in fulfillment of David’s wishes.

The priests Zadok and Abiathar were descended from Aaron, although they were not brothers. Both served David and were frequently paired (cf. 2 Sam. 15:29,35; 20:25); but Abiathar supported Adonijah, and Zadok sided with the supporters of Solomon. After Solomon's succession, Zadok replaced Abiathar (1 Kings 2:35), who was dismissed from his office and banished to Anathoth. He was not killed, however, because of his past loyal service to David (2:26–27).
with Adonijah. Adonijah made a sacrificial feast of sheep, oxen, and fatlings at the Zohel-lath stone which is near En-rogel; he invited all his brother princes and all the king’s courtiers of the tribe of Judah; but he did not invite the prophet Nathan, or Benaiah, or the fighting men, or his brother Solomon.

11 Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, “You must have heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has assumed the kingship without the knowledge of our lord David.

12 Now take my advice, so that you may save your life and the life of your son Solomon.

13 Go immediately to King David and say to him, ‘Did not you, O lord king, swear to your maidservant: “Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne”? Then why has Adonijah become king?’ 14 While you are still there talking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words.”

15 So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber.—The king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was waiting on the king.—

16 Bathsheba bowed low in homage to the king; and the king asked, “What troubles you?”

17 She answered him, “My lord, you yourself swore to your maidservant by the Lord your God: ‘Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne.’ Yet now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, know nothing about it. 18 He has prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fatlings, and sheep, and he has invited all the king’s sons and Abiathar the priest and Joab commander of the army; but he has not invited your servant Solomon. 19 And so the eyes of all Israel are upon you, O lord king, to tell them who shall succeed my lord the king on the

13. Did not you . . . swear to your maidservant This appears to be a ruse, because there is no record of such a conversation between them.

18. you As in many manuscripts and ancient versions; the usual editions have “now” [Transl.].
thone. 21 Otherwise, when my lord the king lies down with his fathers, my son Solomon and I will be regarded as traitors.”

22 She was still talking to the king when the prophet Nathan arrived. 23 They announced to the king, “The prophet Nathan is here,” and he entered the king’s presence. Bowing low to the king with his face to the ground, 24 Nathan said, “O lord king, you must have said, ‘Adonijah shall succeed me as king and he shall sit upon my throne.’ 25 For he has gone down today and prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fattlings, and sheep. He invited all the king’s sons and the army officers and Abiathar the priest. At this very moment they are eating and drinking with him, and they are shouting, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ 26 But he did not invite me your servant, or the priest Zadok, or Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your servant Solomon. 27 Can this decision have come from my lord the king, without your telling your servant who is to succeed to the throne of my lord the king?”

28 King David’s response was: “ Summon Bathsheba!” She entered the king’s presence and stood before the king. 29 And the king took an oath, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has rescued me from every trouble: 30 The oath I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, that your son Solomon should succeed me as king and that he should sit upon my throne in my stead, I will fulfill this very day!” 31 Bathsheba bowed low in homage to the king with her face to the ground, and she said, “May my lord King David live forever!”