

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
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23 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. ²Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. ³Then 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

כג ויהיו חיי שרה מאה ושבע ועשרים ותמת שרה בקריית ארבע הוא חברון בארץ כנען ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבנותה: ³ ויקם אברהם מעל פני מתו וידבר אל-בני-חַת לאמר: ⁴ גר-ותושב

v. 2. ב' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH (23:1–20)

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

13:18). Arba may also be a proper name (see Josh. 14:15, 15:10), which would make it “the city of Arba.”

THE DEATH OF SARAH (vv. 1–2)

THE APPEAL TO THE HITTITES (vv. 3–9)

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.

3. rose Mourners would sit on the ground.

Hittites See Comment to Gen. 10:15.

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

4. a resident alien The Hebrew phrase, literally “alien and resident” (*ger v'toshav*), 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

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.

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).

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

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

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.

among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.”⁵ And 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.”⁷ Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites,⁸ and 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.⁹ Let 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.”

¹⁰Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the

אֲנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תָּנוּ לִי אַחְזֹת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם
וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלְפָּנֶיךָ׃⁵ וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־הַתּוֹרָה
אֶת־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ׃⁶ שְׁמַעֲנוּ אֲדֹנָי
נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ בְּמִבְחָר
קְבֻרֵינוּ קֶבֶר אֶת־מִיתָתְךָ אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־
קְבֻרוֹ לֹא־יִכְלֶה מִמֶּךָ מִקְבֵּר מִתְּךָ׃⁷ וַיִּקָּם
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְעַם־הָאָרֶץ לְבְנֵי־הַתּוֹרָה׃
⁸ וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר אִם־יִישׁ אֶת־נַפְשְׁכֶם
לְקַבֵּר אֶת־מִתִּי מִלְפָּנֶיךָ שְׁמַעֲוֵנִי וּפְגַעֲוֵנִי לִי
בְּעַפְרוֹן בֶּן־צֹחַר׃⁹ וַיִּתֵּן־לִי אֶת־מַעְרַת
הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִצְיָה שְׂדֵהוּ
בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְאַחְזֹת־
קֶבֶר׃

¹⁰וְעַפְרוֹן יָשָׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי־הַתּוֹרָה וַיַּעַן עַפְרוֹן

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

a burial site The Hebrew term “*ahuzzat ke-ver*” 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’khesef 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.” ¹²Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, ¹³and 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.” ¹⁴And 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.” ¹⁶Abraham 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.

הִחַתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי־חַת לְכָל
בְּאֵי שַׁעֲרֵי־עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר: ¹¹ לֹא־אֲדֹנָי
שְׁמַעְנִי הַשְּׁדָה נָתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־
בּוֹ לָךְ נָתַתִּיהָ לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־עַמִּי נָתַתִּיהָ לָךְ
קָבֵר מֵתְךָ: ¹² וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם
הָאָרֶץ: ¹³ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם־
הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ אִם־אַתָּה לוֹ שְׁמַעְנִי
נָתַתִּי כֶסֶף הַשְּׁדָה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה
אֶת־מְתִי שָׁמָּה: ¹⁴ וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן אֶת־
אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ: ¹⁵ אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנִי אָרֶץ
אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל־כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ מֵה־
הוּא וְאֶת־מֵתְךָ קָבֵר: ¹⁶ וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם
אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן אֶת־
הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי־חַת אַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֹבֵר לְסוּחָר: שׁוּב

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

¹⁷So Ephron’s land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed ¹⁸to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town. ¹⁹And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. ²⁰Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

שני¹⁷ וַיִּקְם | שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי מַמְרָא הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ וְכָל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בְּכַל־גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב: ¹⁸ לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינָי בְּנִיחַת בְּכָל בְּאֵי שְׁעַר־עִירוֹ: ¹⁹ וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־מְעָרַת שָׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרָא הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ פְּנִנְעַן: ²⁰ וַיִּקְם הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֹת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת: ס

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

כד וַאֲבָרְהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים וַיְהִיֶּה בְרַךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּכֹל: ² וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם

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 קום 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.

mentators 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

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 com-

all things. ²And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, “Put your hand under my thigh ³and 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, ⁴but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac.” ⁵And 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?” ⁶Abraham answered him, “On no account must you take my son back there! ⁷The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from

אֶל-עַבְדּוֹ וְקָן בֵּיתוֹ הַמַּשְׁל בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי: ³וְאֲשָׁבִיעֲךָ בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבָּם: ⁴כִּי אֶל-אֶרֶצִי וְאֶל-מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵלֵךְ וְלִקְחָתָ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי לְיִצְחָק: ⁵וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָעֶבֶד אוּלַי לֹא-תֵאבְדָה הָאִשָּׁה לְלִכְתּוֹת אַחֲרַי אֶל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הַהִשָּׁב אֲשִׁיב אֶת-בְּנִךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יֵצֵאתָ מִשָּׁם: ⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם הַשְּׁמַר לְךָ פֶּן-תָּשִׁיב אֶת-בְּנִי שָׁמָּה: ⁷יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וְאֲשֶׁר

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 לקח 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 as “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 hokmah*). 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. ⁸And 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.” ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. ¹²And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant

הַדְּבָרִי וְאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתְּנֶנּוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח מִלְּאָכּוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנֵי מִשְׁם: ⁸וְאִם־לֹא תֵאָבֶה תֹאבֶה הָאִשָּׁה לְלָכֶת אַחֲרַיךָ וְנִקִּיתָ מִשְׁבַּעְתִּי זֹאת רַק אֶת־בְּנֵי לֹא תִשָּׁב שָׁמָּה: ⁹וַיִּשָּׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת־יָדוֹ תַּחַת יָרֵךְ אֲבִרְהָם אֲדָנָיו וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ עַל־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

¹⁰וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֶשְׂרֵה גַמְלִים מִגְּמָלָי אֲדָנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל־טוֹב אֲדָנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אָרָם נְהַרִים אֶל־עִיר נַחֹר: ¹¹וַיִּבְרָךְ הַגְּמָלִים מִחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם לַעֲת עָרַב לַעֲת צֵאת הַשָּׂאֲבֹת: ¹²וַיֹּאמֶר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָנָי אֲבִרְהָם

שלישי

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 transla-

tion 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 Naharain in ancient Near Eastern texts.

11. by the well Public wells served as a meeting place for townsmen 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 he 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: ¹³Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; ¹⁴let 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.”

¹⁵He 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. ¹⁶The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷The 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. ¹⁹When she had let him drink his fill, she said, “I will also draw for your camels, until they finish

הַקְרָה נָא לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם: ¹³ הִנְנִה אֲנִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵינַי הַמַּיִם וּבָנוֹת אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוֹת לְשֹׂאב מַיִם: ¹⁴ וְהָיְתָה הַנַּעֲרָה הַנּוֹעֵרָה אֲשֶׁר אֹמֵר אֵלֶיהָ הַטִּינָא כִּדְפִי וְאֶשְׁתָּהּ וְאֶמְרָה שְׂתָהּ וְגַם-גַּמְלֶיךָ אֶשְׁקָה אֵתְּהָ הַכַּחֲתָ לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וְבָה אֲדַע כִּי-עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם-אֲדֹנָי:

¹⁵ וַיְהִי-הוּא טָרַם כְּלָה לְדַבֵּר וְהִנֵּה רַבְקָה יֹצֵאת אֲשֶׁר יֹלְדָה לְבִתּוֹאֵל בֶּן-מִלְכָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ נְחוּר אַחֵי אַבְרָהָם וְכַדָּה עַל-שִׁכְמָה: ¹⁶ וְהַנַּעֲרָה וְהַנּוֹעֵרָה טַבַּת מִרְאֵה מְאֹד בְּתוּלָהּ וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָה וַתֵּרֶד הָעֵינָה וַתִּמְלֵא כַּדָּהּ וַתַּעַל: ¹⁷ וַיִּרְץ הָעֶבֶד לִקְרֹאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגְּמִיאֵינִי נָא מֵעֵט-מַיִם מִכַּדְּךָ: ¹⁸ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂתָה אֲדֹנָי וַתִּמְהַר וַתֵּרֶד כַּדָּהּ עַל-יָדָהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ: ¹⁹ וַתִּכַּל לְהַשְׁקֹתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לְגַמְלֶיךָ

God. Nothing is more characteristic of the biblical outlook than the conviction about the role of 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 relationship 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 hollow 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-

neering religious achievements, were sometimes insensitive to members of their own household. Rebekah’s kindness and generosity may have been what was needed to correct those family dynamics.

drinking.”²⁰ Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

²¹The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the LORD had made his errand successful or not. ²²When 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. ²³“Pray tell me,” he said, “whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” ²⁴She replied, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” ²⁵And she went on, “There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night.” ²⁶The man bowed low in homage to the LORD ²⁷and 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.”

²⁸The maiden ran and told all this to her mother’s household. ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring—³⁰when he saw

אֶשְׂאָב עַד אִם־כָּלוּ לְשֹׁתוֹת: ²⁰וַתִּמְהַר וַתַּעַר כַּדָּהּ אֶל־הַשְּׂקֵת וַתִּרְץ עוֹד אֶל־הַבְּאֵר לְשָׂאב וַתִּשָּׂאב לְכָל־גַּמְלֵיוֹ:

²¹וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתַּאֲהָ לָּהּ מִחֲרִישׁ לְדַעַת הַהֶצְלִיחַ יְהוָה דְּרָכּוֹ אִם־לֹא: ²²וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ הַגַּמְלִים לְשֹׁתוֹת וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ נְזָם זָהָב בְּקַע מִשְׁקָלוֹ וּשְׁנֵי צַמִּידִים עַל־יָדָיָהּ עֶשְׂרֵה זָהָב מִשְׁקָלָם: ²³וַיֹּאמֶר בַּת־מִי אַתְּ הַגִּידִי נָא לִי הֵיזֵשׁ בֵּית־אָבִיךָ מָקוֹם לָנוּ לָלִיץ: ²⁴וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל אֲנֹכִי בַן־מִלְכָּה אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָה לְנַחֹר: ²⁵וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גַּם־תִּבֶן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנוּ גַם־מָקוֹם לָלוֹן: ²⁶וַיִּקַּד הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה: ²⁷וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם רַבִּיעִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ וְאַמְתּוֹ מִעַם אֲדֹנָי אֲנֹכִי בְּדַרְךְךָ נִחַנִּי יְהוָה בֵּית אֲחֵי אֲדֹנָי:

²⁸וַתִּרְץ הַנַּעֲרָה הַנִּעְרָה וַתִּגַּד לְבֵית אִמָּהּ כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: ²⁹וַלְרַבְּקָה אָח וּשְׁמוֹ לָבָן וַיִּרְץ לָבָן אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַחוֹצֵה אֶל־הָעֵין: ³⁰וַיְהִי | כִּרְאֹת אֶת־הַנְּזָם וְאֶת־

THE BETROTHAL (vv. 28–61)

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 *lvanah*, “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

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.

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.

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

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.'

הַצְּמִדִּים עַל-יָדַי אַחֲתוֹ וְכִשְׁמְעוֹ אֶת-דְּבָרֵי רַבְקָה אַחֲתוֹ לֵאמֹר כֹּה-דָּבַר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל-הַגְּמָלִים עַל-הָעַיִן:³¹ וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְרוּךְ יְהוָה לָמָּה תַעֲמֹד בַּחוּץ וְאַנְכִּי פָנִיתִי הַבַּיִת וּמְקוֹם לְגַמְלִים:³² וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ הַבַּיִתָּה וַיִּפְתַּח הַגְּמָלִים וַיִּתֵּן תַּבָּן וּמִסְפּוֹא לְגַמְלִים וּמִיַּם לְרַחֵץ רַגְלָיו וְרַגְלֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ:³³ וַיּוֹשֶׁם לְפָנָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא אֲכַל עַד אִם-דִּבַּרְתִּי דְבָרֵי וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַר:

³⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי:³⁵ וַיְהִי כִּרְךָ אֶת-אֲדֹנָי מְאֹד וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ צֹאן וּבָקָר וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב וְעֶבְדִּים וּשְׁפֹחֹת וּגְמָלִים וְחֹמְרִים:³⁶ וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה אִשְׁתׁ אֲדֹנָי בֶּן לְאֲדֹנָי אַחֲרֵי זְקֻנָתָהּ וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ:³⁷ וַיִּשְׁבַּעַנִּי אֲדֹנָי לֵאמֹר לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנֵי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶצוֹ:³⁸ אִם-לֹא אֶל-בֵּית-אָבִי תֵלֵךְ וְאֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּלְקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי:³⁹ וְאִם-לֹא-אֲדֹנָי אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְּהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ אִתָּךְ וְהִצְלִיחַ דְּרָכְךָ וּלְקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּמִבֵּית אָבִי:⁴¹ אִזְּנִיקָה מֵאֲלֹתַי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְאִם-לֹא יִתְּנוּ לָךְ וְהָיִיתָ נָקִי מֵאֲלֹתַי:

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.

⁴²“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! ⁴³As 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,’ ⁴⁴and 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.’ ⁴⁵I 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.’ ⁴⁶She quickly lowered her jar and said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷I 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. ⁴⁸Then 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. ⁴⁹And 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.”

⁵⁰Then Laban and Bethuel answered, “The matter was decreed by the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master’s son, as the LORD has spoken.”

47. Inquired of her See Comment to verse 22. The order of events is not the same as previously recorded. But had the servant not reported as he did, he would have been open to the charge of contradicting his assertion that he came specifically to find a wife from among Abraham’s family.

48. my master’s brother “Brother” here simply means “kinsman,” as it does in 29:12,15.

⁴²וְאָבָא הַיּוֹם אֶל-הָעֵיִן וְאָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם אִם-יִשְׁפָּטָנָא מִצְּלִיחַ דְּרַפְּי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי הֵלֵךְ עָלֶיהָ: ⁴³הִנֵּה אֲנִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵיִן הַמַּיִם וְהִיא הָעֹלְמָה הַיִּצְאָת לְשָׂאֵב וְאָמַרְתִּי אֵלֶיהָ הַשְּׁקִינִי-נָא מְעַט-מַיִם מִכַּדָּי: ⁴⁴וְאָמְרָה אֵלַי גַּם-אַתָּה שְׂתֵה וְגַם לְגַמְלֵיךָ אֶשְׂאֵב הוּא הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-הֵכִיחַ יְהוָה לְבֶן-אֲדֹנָי: ⁴⁵אֲנִי טָרַם אֲכַלֶּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל-לִבִּי וְהִנֵּה רַבְקָה יֹצֵאת וְכַדָּה עַל-שִׁכְמָהּ וְתִרְדַּד הָעֵינָה וְתִשְׂאֵב וְאָמַר אֵלֶיהָ הַשְּׁקִינִי נָא: ⁴⁶וְתַמְהָר וְתוֹרַד כַּדָּה מִמְּעִלְיָהּ וְתֹאמַר שְׂתֵה וְגַם-גַּמְלֵיךָ אֶשְׁקֶה וְאֶשְׂתַּ וְגַם הַגַּמְלִים הַשְּׁקִתָּהּ: ⁴⁷וְאֶשְׂאֵל אֹתָהּ וְאָמַר בְּתַמִּי אַתְּ וְתֹאמַר בְּתַבְתּוּאֵל בְּנִי-נָחוּר אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֶה-לּוֹ מִלְכָּה וְאִשָּׁם הַנָּזִם עַל-אַפָּהּ וְהַצְּמִידִים עַל-יַדֶּיהָ: ⁴⁸וְאֶקְדֹּ וְאֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה וְאֶבְרַךְ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדַרְכֵי אֱמֶת לְקַחַת אֶת-בַּת-אָחִי אֲדֹנָי לְבִנּוֹ: ⁴⁹וְעַתָּה אִם-יִשְׁכֶּם עֲשִׂים חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אֶת-אֲדֹנָי הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאִם-לֹא הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאֶפְנֶה עַל-יָמִין אוֹ עַל-שְׂמָאל: ⁵⁰וְיַעַן לְבָן וּבְתוּאֵל וְיֹאמְרוּ מִיְהוָה יִצְאָ הַדָּבָר לֹא נוֹכַל דַּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ רַע אוֹ-טוֹב: ⁵¹הִנֵּה-רַבְקָה לְפָנֶיךָ קַח וְלָךְ וְתְהִי אִשָּׁה

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.

⁵²When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the LORD. ⁵³The 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. ⁵⁴Then 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." ⁵⁵But her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go." ⁵⁶He 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." ⁵⁷And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." ⁵⁸They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." ⁵⁹So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰And 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

לְבֶן־אֲדָנָיְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ⁵²וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת־דִּבְרֵיהֶם
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה לַיהוָה: ⁵³וַיּוֹצֵא הָעֶבֶד
כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי זָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן לְרֵבְקָה
וּמַגְדָּנֹת נָתַן לְאַחֶיהָ וּלְאִמָּהּ: ⁵⁴וַיֵּאכְלוּ
וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הוּא וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ וַיִּלְּנוּ
וַיִּקְוּמוּ בַבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְחֵנִי לְאֲדֹנָי:
⁵⁵וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ תֵּשֵׁב הַנֶּעַר
הַנֶּעֱרָה אִתָּנוּ יָמִים אֹ עָשׂוֹר אַחַר תֵּלַךְ:
⁵⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־תֵּאַחֲרוּ אֹתִי וַיְהוֶה
הַצְּלִיחַ דְּרָפִי שְׁלַחוּנִי וְאַל־כָּה לְאֲדֹנָי:
⁵⁷וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לַנֶּעַר לְנֶעֱרָה וְנִשְׂאַלָהּ
אֶת־פִּיהָ: ⁵⁸וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְרֵבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְתֵאמַר
אֵלָּה: ⁵⁹וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־רֵבְקָה אַחֲתָם וְאֶת־
מִנְקָתָהּ וְאֶת־עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו:
⁶⁰וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־רֵבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ

אַחֲתָנוּ

אָתָּה הִי

לְאַלְפֵי רֵבְבָה

וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרְעֶךָ

אֶת שַׁעַר שַׁנְאָיו:

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.

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶²Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb. ⁶³And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel ⁶⁵and 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. ⁶⁶The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Isaac 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.

וּתְקַם רִבְקָה וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ וַתִּרְפָּבְנָה עַל-
הַגְּמֵלִים וַתִּלְכְּנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח
הָעֶבֶד אֶת-רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ:

וַיִּצְחָק בָּא מְבוֹא בְּאֵר לַחֵי רְאִי וְהוּא
יּוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב: ⁶³וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׁוּחַ
בַּשָּׂדֶה לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא
וְהִנֵּה גְמֵלִים בָּאִים: ⁶⁴וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה
אֶת-עֵינֶיהָ וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת-יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל
הַגְּמֵל: ⁶⁵וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָעֶבֶד מִי-הָאִישׁ
הַלֹּזֵה הַהֶלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לְקִרְאָתָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר
הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנָי וַתִּקַּח הָצַעֲרִיף וַתִּתְכַסֵּ:
⁶⁶וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד לְיִצְחָק אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: ⁶⁷וַיְבִיאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּה
שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי-לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבָהּ וַיִּנְחָם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי

שְׁי אִמּוֹ: פ

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 *lasu-ah* is based on the Arabic word *saha*, “to take a stroll.” Another translation, from the Hebrew word *si-ah*, “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 commenta-

tors 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 Israelite 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.

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

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

loved 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.

63. walking The Talmud takes the word to mean “praying.” Rebekah saw Isaac praying and was impressed by the piety of her future husband. The Sages maintain that Isaac instituted the afternoon service of *Minḥah* (BT Ber. 26a–b).

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-

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. ⁴The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. ⁵Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; ⁶but to Abraham's sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living,

כה וַיִּסֶּף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וּשְׁמָהּ קֵטוּרָה: ²וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת־זִמְרָן וְאֶת־יֻקְשָׁן וְאֶת־מִדְּן וְאֶת־מִדְּן וְאֶת־שִׁבְא וְאֶת־דִּדָן: ³וַיֻּקְשָׁן יָלַד אֶת־שִׁבְא וְאֶת־דִּדָן: ⁴וַיִּבְנֶי דִּדָן הָיוּ אֲשׁוּרִים וְלִטְוּשִׁים וְלֵאֲמִים: ⁵וַיִּבְנֶי מִדְּן עֵיפָה וְעֵפֶר וְחִנֹּךְ וְאַבִּידָע וְאֶלְדָּעָה כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי קֵטוּרָה: ⁶וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ לְיִצְחָק: ⁶וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילִגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם נָתַן

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'toret*). 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, Leummim 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 generos-

peared. When Rebekah arrived, it returned" (Gen. R. 60:16). Rebekah does not replace Isaac's mother; she fills the emotional void in his life.

CHAPTER 25

5–6. Translated literally, the verse tells us that "Abraham gave everything he had to Isaac,

and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.

⁷This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, ¹⁰the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. ¹¹After the death of Abraham, God

אֲבָרָהָם מֵתָנֹת וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם מֵעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
 בְּעוֹדָנוּ חַי קְדָמָה אֶל-אֶרֶץ קְדָם:
 וַיֵּאֱלֹהֵ יָמָי שְׁנַיִחַי אֲבָרָהָם אֲשֶׁר-חַי
 מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחֹמֶשׁ שָׁנִים:
 וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אֲבָרָהָם בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה זְקֵן
 וְשִׁבַּע וַיֵּאָסֵף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ: ⁹וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ
 יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׁמַעֵאל בְּנָיו אֶל-מַעְרַת
 הַמְכַפְּלָה אֶל-שְׂדֵה עֶפְרָן בֶּן-צֹחַר הַחִתִּי
 אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא: ¹⁰הַשְּׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר-קָנָה
 אֲבָרָהָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חֵת שָׁמָּה קָבַר
 אֲבָרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: ¹¹וַיְהִי אַחֲרָי

ity on his part to secure the goodwill of the other sons toward Isaac or to compensate for their surrender of future claims.

sent them away Isaac's portion is secured by the separation of the half-brothers from the clan of Abraham and their migration to another land.

concubines Hagar and Keturah.

the land of the East In the Bible, the word *kedem* (east) covers a wide territorial expanse east of the land of Israel from the Aramean area of the Middle Euphrates down to northern Arabia.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF ABRAHAM
 (vv. 7–11)

7. the total span According to the chronology of Genesis, Abraham resided in the land 100 years and lived to see the 15th birthday of his twin grandsons Esau and Jacob.

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

he 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.

Machpelah 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.

מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק
בנו וישב יצחק עם באר לחי ראי: ס
ואלה תלדת ישמעאל בן-אברהם
אשר ילדה הגר המצרית שפחת שרה
לאברהם: ¹³ואלה שמות בני ישמעאל
בשמתם לתולדתם בכר ישמעאל נבית
וקדר ואדבאל ומבשם: ¹⁴ומשמע
ודומה ומשא: ¹⁵חדד ותימא יטור נפיש
וקדמה: ¹⁶אלה הם בני ישמעאל ואלה
שמותם בחצריהם ובטירתם שנים-עשר
נשיאם לאמנתם: ¹⁷ואלה שני חיי
ישמעאל מאת שנה ושלושים שנה
ושבע שנים ויגוע וימת ויאסף אל-
עמיו: ¹⁸וישפנו מחוילה עד-שור אשר
על-פני מצרים באכה אשרה על-פני
כל-אחיו נפל: פ

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 Nabaiati. Some identify this people with the later Nabateans, 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.

הַפְּטָרָה חַי שָׂרָה

HAFTARAH FOR ḤAYYEI SARAH

1 KINGS 1:1–31

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 *shava* (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 poetic 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. ²His 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.” ³So they looked for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel. They found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to the king. ⁴The girl was exceedingly beautiful. She became the king’s attendant and waited upon him; but the king was not intimate with her.

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

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

א וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים וַיִּכְסְּהוּ
בַבְּגָדִים וְלֹא יָחַם לוֹ: ²וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ עַבְדָּיו
יִבְקְשׂוּ לְאֹדְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ נַעֲרָה בְּתוּלָה
וְעַמְדָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְתַהֲיֶילוּ סִכְנַת
וְשֹׁכְבָה בְּחִיקוֹ וְיָחַם לְאֹדְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:
³וַיִּבְקְשׂוּ נַעֲרָה יָפָה בְּכָל גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־אֲבִישָׁג הַשּׁוֹנַמִּית וַיָּבִיאוּ
אֹתָהּ לַמֶּלֶךְ: ⁴וְהַנַּעֲרָה יָפָה עַד־מְאֹד
וְתַהֲיִי לַמֶּלֶךְ סִכְנַת וְתִשְׁרָתְהוּ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ
לֹא יָדַעָהּ:

⁵וַאֲדֹנִיָּה בֶן־חַגִּית מֵתַנְשֵׂא לֵאמֹר אֲנִי
אֶמְלֹךְ וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ רֶכֶב וַיַּפְרֹשִׁים וְחֲמֻשִׁים
אִישׁ רָצִים לִפְנָיו: ⁶וְלֹא־עִצְבוּ אָבִיו
מִיָּמָיו לֵאמֹר מִדּוּעַ כָּכָה עָשִׂיתָ וְגַם־
הוּא טוֹב־תֵּאֵר מְאֹד וְאֹתוֹ יִלְדָה אַחֲרַי
אֲבָשָׁלוֹם:

⁷וַיְהִי דִבְרֵיו עִם יוֹאָב בֶּן־צְרוּיָה וְעִם
אֲבִיתָר הַכֹּהֵן וַיַּעֲזְרוּ אַחֲרַי אֲדֹנִיָּה:
⁸וְצָדוֹק הַכֹּהֵן וּבְנֵיָהוּ בֶן־יְהוֹיָדָע וְנָתָן
הַנָּבִיא וְשִׁמְעִי וְרֵעִי וְהַגְּבוּרִים אֲשֶׁר

1 Kings 1:2. wait upon Your Majesty Literally, “stand before (*am’dah lifnei*) [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. ⁹Adonijah made a sacrificial feast of sheep, oxen, and fatlings at the Zoheleth stone which is near En-rogel; he invited all his brother princes and all the king's courtiers of the tribe of Judah; ¹⁰but he did not invite the prophet Nathan, or Benaiah, or the fighting men, or his brother Solomon.

¹¹Then 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. ¹²Now take my advice, so that you may save your life and the life of your son Solomon. ¹³Go 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?' ¹⁴While you are still there talking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words."

¹⁵So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber.—The king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was waiting on the king.—¹⁶Bathsheba bowed low in homage to the king; and the king asked, "What troubles you?" ¹⁷She 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.' ¹⁸Yet now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, know nothing about it. ¹⁹He 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. ²⁰And so the eyes of all Israel are upon you, O lord king, to tell them who shall succeed my lord the king on the

לְדוֹד לֹא הָיוּ עִם־אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ: ⁹וַיִּזְבַּח אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ צֹאן וּבָקָר וּמְרִיא עִם אֲבָן הַזֹּהֶלֶת אֲשֶׁר־אֶצֶל עֵין רֹגֵל וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלִכְל־אֲנָשֵׁי יְהוּדָה עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ¹⁰וְאֶת־נָתָן הַנְּבִיא וּבְנֵי־הַיָּמִין וְאֶת־הַגְּבוּרִים וְאֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה אֶחָיו לֹא קָרָא:

¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל־בַּת־שֶׁבַע אִם־שָׁלְמָה לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ כִּי מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ בֶן־חַגִּית וְאֲדֹנֵינוּ דָּוִד לֹא יָדָע: ¹²וְעַתָּה לְכִי אִיעֲצֶנָּה נָא עֲצֵה וּמַלְטִי אֶת־נַפְשִׁי וְאֶת־נַפְשׁ בְּנֵךְ בְּנֵךְ שְׁלֹמֹה: ¹³לְכִי וּבֹאִי אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְאָמַרְתְּ אֵלָיו הֲלֹא־אָתָּה אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאִמְתְּךָ לֵאמֹר כִּי־שְׁלֹמֹה בְנֵךְ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאִי וּמִדּוּעַ מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ: ¹⁴הֲנִיָּה עֹדֶנָּה מְדַבְּרַת שֵׁם עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲנִי אָבוֹא אַחֲרָיָהּ וּמִלֵּאתִי אֶת־דְּבָרֶיהָ:

¹⁵וּתְבֹא בַת־שֶׁבַע אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחֹדְרָה וְהַמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן מְאֹד וְאַבִּישַׁג הַשּׁוֹנַמִּית מְשַׁרְתָּת אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ: ¹⁶וַתִּקַּד בַּת־שֶׁבַע וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־לָּךְ: ¹⁷וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲדֹנָי אָתָּה נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְאִמְתְּךָ כִּי־שְׁלֹמֹה בְנֵךְ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאִי: ¹⁸וְעַתָּה הֲנִיָּה אֲדֹנִיָּה מֶלֶךְ וְעַתָּה* אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא יָדָעְתָּ: ¹⁹וַיִּזְבַּח שׁוֹר וּמְרִיא־וִיצְאֹן לְרֹב וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְאֲבִיתָר הַכֹּהֵן וְלִיָּאֵב שֵׁר הַצֶּבֶא וּלְשְׁלֹמֹה עַבְדֶּךָ לֹא קָרָא: ²⁰וְאֶתָּה אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ עֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיךָ לְהַגִּיד לָהֶם מִי יֹשֵׁב עַל־

v. 18. בנוסח אחר "ואתה"

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.].

throne. ²¹Otherwise, when my lord the king lies down with his fathers, my son Solomon and I will be regarded as traitors.”

²²She was still talking to the king when the prophet Nathan arrived. ²³They 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, ²⁴Nathan said, “O lord king, you must have said, ‘Adonijah shall succeed me as king and he shall sit upon my throne.’ ²⁵For he has gone down today and prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fatlings, 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!’ ²⁶But he did not invite me your servant, or the priest Zadok, or Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your servant Solomon. ²⁷Can 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?”

²⁸King David’s response was: “Summon Bathsheba!” She entered the king’s presence and stood before the king. ²⁹And the king took an oath, saying, “As the LORD lives, who has rescued me from every trouble: ³⁰The 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!” ³¹Bathsheba bowed low in homage to the king with her face to the ground, and she said, “May my lord King David live forever!”

21. traitors Literally, “offenders” (*hata-im*).

כָּסָא אַדְנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו: ²¹וְהָיָה כְּשֶׁכַּב אַדְנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ עִם־אֲבֹתָיו וְהָיִיתִי אֲנִי וּבְנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה חַטָּאִים:

²²וְהִנֵּה עֹדְנָה מְדַבֶּרֶת עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנָתַן הַנְּבִיא בָּא: ²³וַיִּגִּדּוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה נָתַן הַנְּבִיא וַיִּבֹּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־אִפְיוֹ אֶרְצָה: ²⁴וַיֹּאמֶר נָתַן אַדְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶתָּה אִמַּרְתָּ אַדְנִיָּהוּ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאִי: ²⁵כִּי י יָרַד הַיּוֹם וַיִּזְבַּח שׁוֹר וּמְרִיא־וּצֹאן לְרֹב וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְשָׂרֵי הַצָּבָא וּלְאֲבִיָּתָר הַכֹּהֵן וְהַנָּם אֲכָלִים וְשֹׁתִים לִפְנֵי וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַדְנִיָּהוּ: ²⁶וְלִי אֲנִי־עֹבְדֶךָ וְלִצְדֹק הַכֹּהֵן וּלְבְנֵיהוּ בֶן־יְהוֹיָדָע וּלְשֹׁלֹמֹה עֹבְדֶךָ לֹא קָרָא: ²⁷אִם מֵאֵת אַדְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִהְיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא הוֹדַעְתָּ אֶת־עַבְדֶּיךָ עֹבְדֶיךָ מִי יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאֵי אַדְנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו: ס

²⁸וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר קְרְאוּ־לִי לְבַת־שֶׁבַע וַתָּבֹא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתַּעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ²⁹וַיִּשָּׁבַע הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר חַי־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־פָּדָה אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִכָּל־צָרָה: ³⁰כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָךְ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר כִּי־שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִךְ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאֵי תַחְתָּי כִּי בֵן אֶעֱשֶׂה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ³¹וַתִּקֹּד בַּת־שֶׁבַע אַפָּיִם אָרְצָ* וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ וַתֹּאמֶר יְחִי אַדְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד לְעֹלָם: פ

v. 31. סבירין ומטעין "ארצה"