

VISION OF SOMETHING BETTER

A Devotional Meditation on Vayera (And He Appeared)

Genesis 18:1-22:24; 2 Kings 4:1-37; Proverbs 14:12;

Matthew 1:18-23, 25:14-30; Hebrews 11:8-22

Albert J. McCarn

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My pastor says much of the Torah is written as a story because in the stories we learn the application of God's teachings, instructions, and laws. The stories of our earliest ancestors demonstrate what happens as people either live by or disregard God's ways.

Abraham's family provides many examples, such as the contrast between Abraham and his nephew, Lot. Abraham was a man of vision who walked out the ways of life as the Creator guided him. Lot chose a way that seemed right, but the end thereof was the death of his reputation and godly legacy, and many people as well.

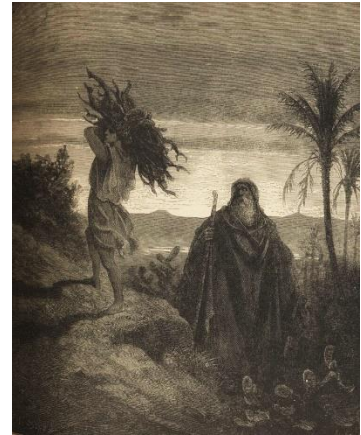
We meet Abraham when he receives God's commission to go to the Promised Land and start the process of bringing redemption to the planet. We would probably be right in saying it was God who chose Abraham, and Abraham responded by choosing God. Abraham's relationship with God was already mature when at the age of 75 he received God's commission.

God promised Abraham that he would father a son to carry on the mission of redemption. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had known for years that they couldn't have children, but God said they would have a son, and the promise of global redemption depended on it. Thus we understand why they decided, after fourteen years of waiting, to help God by seeking a surrogate mother. That's how Sarah's servant, Hagar, became Abraham's concubine and the mother of his oldest son, Ishmael.

Unfortunately, Ishmael was not God's choice. Abraham loved Ishmael and prayed fervently for him, but God insisted that Abraham's heir would be the son Sarah would bear to him. That son finally came into the world when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90.

Many women in Bible stories were infertile, including Abraham's daughter-in-law Rebecca and his granddaughter-in-law Rachel. The Bible says God intervened to give them children, but do we really believe that? If we believe God is the Creator of life, why do we struggle believing he could put life in a dead womb? And if he can do that, why would we have trouble believing he could insert life in the womb of a virgin girl, as he did with Mary, the mother of Messiah Yeshua?

When we think about it, the tests of faith we read about in the Bible are tests of our faith as well. Either God is God, or he is not. That's something we can accept as children, but learn over a lifetime, just as the mothers and fathers of our faith learned.



The Trial of the Faith of Abraham, Gustave Doré, The Doré Bible Gallery, 1891, [Project Gutenberg](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10000/10000-h/10000-h.htm).

Maybe what we really have trouble accepting is that part about time. When we're hurting, a single minute seems like a lifetime. How many times must our hopes and dreams get sidelined before disappointment turns into despair, and despair becomes bitterness? That's in the Bible too.

We read Abraham's story in a few minutes, not registering that we're reading about a man's entire life. He and Sarah waited 25 years for their son Isaac, and even then their story was only beginning. Would we have waited that long? Would we have stayed true to the calling and the vision God had imparted? Could we do that knowing we still had to raise the child, protect him from harm, teach him God's ways, find him a wife, and help him raise children? It's hard enough to raise children at the normal time of life, and even harder when you're old.

What happens when the child is threatened? We know what Sarah did: she demanded that Abraham expel Ishmael and his mother from the family. Imagine what Ishmael thought. He already had a father wound when he came into this world as the product of Abraham's lapse of faith. How betrayed did he feel when his father chose Sarah and Isaac over him and his mother? God did do what he promised Abraham by making Ishmael the father of a great nation, but Ishmael's children inherited his rootlessness and difficulty at making attachments. That's what a foundational breach of trust does to a child. It still plagues Abraham's family to this day.

God looks after the brokenhearted and disaffected. Sometimes we can't see his provision because we're too focused on our circumstances. Hagar teaches us that. When Abraham sent her away, she cried to God in desperation. He answered, and that's how we know that God cares for the widow, the orphan, and the outcast. She had collapsed near a well of life-giving water, but her heart pain prevented her from seeing it. Only when she called on the Living One Who Sees did she have her eyes opened to see beyond her circumstances and appropriate the provision for her son and herself.

Hagar despaired of life, but Abraham and Sarah despaired of failing God. When God called on Abraham to give up Isaac on the altar of sacrifice, did he think he had failed? Isaac was 37 years old at the time. It could be that Abraham considered God's demand as the final judgment on his unsuitability as custodian of the Covenant – until his eyes were opened just like Hagar's and he saw the ram God provided as the substitute sacrifice. That's when Abraham realized he and Sarah had passed the test of a lifetime.

We hope one day to hear our Savior say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Abraham heard something like that. God responded to his life of faithful obedience by swearing on his own Name to bless Abraham, multiply his seed, and bless all the nations of the earth through that seed.

That may be the greatest lesson of all. That century of suffering, testing, and pain wasn't really for Abraham and Sarah after all. It was for us. That's what a good friend of mine is learning. The trials she faces battling a chronic ailment aren't for her sake, but for the sake of others who see her clinging to the Creator in her perseverance. It takes vision to do that – vision of something better, given by the Maker of Life, even if it takes more than a lifetime to receive it.

