

A Reading List for the New Year

Source Sheet by Michael Danziger

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Genesis 21:1-21

(1) The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. (2) Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. (3) Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. (4) And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. (5) Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. (6) Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me." (7) And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham That Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age." (8) The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. (9) Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. (10) She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." (11) The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. (12) But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. (13) As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed." (14) Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. (15) When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, (16) and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. (17) God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry

of the boy where he is. (18) Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” (19) Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink. (20) God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman. (21) He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 22:1-19

(1) Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.” (2) And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.” (3) So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. (4) On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. (5) Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you.” (6) Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. (7) Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” (8) And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together. (9) They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. (10) And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. (11) Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.” (12) And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.” (13) When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. (14) And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the LORD there is vision.” (15) The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, (16) and said, “By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, (17) I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. (18) All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.” (19) Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

From "Introduction to the Torah Readings for Rosh Hashanah" in *Mishkan Hanefesh*

Rather than moral exemplars, the Torah presents flawed human beings wrestling with intense emotions: love and fear; anger and jealousy; fervent faith and profound self-doubt. Their struggles remind us of our own complex family dynamics and

personal dilemmas. In this season of self-reflection, we are drawn into stories that demonstrate the challenges of discerning God's voice and choosing the right path.

Both stories center on a dramatic moment in which the characters' eyes are opened to reveal a new direction for their lives. Hagar sees a well in the wilderness; Abraham sees a ram caught in the thicket. This change in perception, this instant of renewed vision, holds the promise that we, too, might discover new possibilities and resources for our lives as we contemplate the year ahead.

Most of all, these are stories that affirm life. In Genesis 21, young Ishmael comes close to death; Isaac is imperiled in Genesis 22, and with him the future of the Jewish people. In the end, both sons of Abraham are saved; both receive the divine promise that their line will endure - a message that recalls our own fervent prayers to be "inscribed for life" and renewed for a good year.

Genesis 18:16-33

(16) The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. (17) Now the LORD had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (18) since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? (19) For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." (20) Then the LORD said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! (21) I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note." (22) The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. (23) Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? (24) What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? (25) Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (26) And the LORD answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." (27) Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: (28) What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?" And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." (29) But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." (30) And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." (31) And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." (32) And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten." (33) When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

From "Introduction to the Torah Readings for Rosh Hashanah" in *Mishkan Hanefesh*

Genesis 1, offered as an alternative reading for Rosh Hashanah, recalls the Rabbinic view of the New Year as the anniversary of creation, and of human beings in particular. This story, too, affirms the value of life in this world, with its repeated refrain of *ki tov* (God saw that it was good) reminding us to protect nature and orient our lives toward goodness. Genesis 18, another alternative reading, shows us Abraham challenging the Judge of the whole earth to do justice - a story of compassionate engagement with the fate of the world for this *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgment).

