## Abraham: Father of Faith, Friend of God

By Joy Schmidt Pople

Tales of Abraham and his family drawing on Genesis accounts plus Jewish and Islamic sources.

Jewish Stories about Abraham’s Youth

*The Jewish Encyclopedia*

Abraham was the son of Terah, who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. The night he was born, the advisors to the ruler, Nimrod, were feasting in Terah’s house. Late at night, after the party, they saw a star in the sky which swallowed up four other stars from the four edges of the sky. They quickly went to Nimrod and said: "A baby has been born, and he will conquer this world and the next. Find the parents, give them as much money as they want for the baby, and then kill the baby."

But Terah, who was at the meeting with them, said: "Your advice reminds me of the man who told a mule, 'I will give you a barn full of barley if you let me cut off your head,' and the mule told him, “What good will the barley do me if I don’t have a head?' So, if you kill the son, who will inherit the money the parents get paid for their baby?"

The advisors said, “You talk like you have just had a son.”

"Yes," Terah answered, "a son has been born to me, but he died." He quickly went home and hid his son in a cave for three years.

When Abraham came out of the cave, he saw the sun rising in all its glory in the east and thought: "Surely this is the Lord of the universe, so I will worship him." But that evening he saw the sun set and darkness fall. Seeing the moon shining like silver, he said, "This must be the Lord of the world, and all the stars must be His servants. I will bow down to him."

When the moon and stars disappeared the next morning and the sun came up again, Abraham said: "Now I know that neither the sun nor the moon is the Lord of the universe, but He who controls both of them must be the Creator and Ruler of the whole world."

Abraham’s father made statues of gods and sold them to people. One day when his father was away, Abraham was in charge of the shop. An old man came in wanting to buy an idol. Abraham handed him the one, told him how much it cost, and asked the man how old he was.

"Seventy years," was the answer.

“You are foolish," continued Abraham, "How can you worship a god who is so much younger than you? You were born seventy years ago, and this statue was made just yesterday."

The buyer threw away the statue and asked for his money back.

Abraham’s brothers complained to their father that Abraham wasn’t a good salesman, so Abraham was put in charge of taking care of the statues the way priests did. One day a woman brought a cake to offer to the statues, and he noticed that the statues didn’t eat the cakes.

"These statues have eyes but can’t see, ears but can’t hear, mouths but can’t eat, and hands but can’t move things. Let the everyone who makes them and trust in them be the same way!" Abraham said. Then the broke the statues into little pieces and burned them.

Abraham asked his father: "Who created heaven and earth?"

His father pointed to one of his statues and said: "This great image is our god."

"Then I will make a sacrifice to him!" said Abraham, and he ordered a fine cake and put it in front of the statue. When the statue didn’t eat it, Abraham ordered an even nicer cake and offered it to the statue. But still the statue didn’t eat the cake or answer Abraham when he talked to him. Abraham got angry, made a fire and burned all the statues.

When his father came home and found that all the statues had been burned, he went looking for Abraham. "Who has burned my gods?" he asked.

Abraham answered: "Well, the big one got into an argument with the little ones and burned them all up."

"You fool!” his father shouted, “How can a statue that can’t see, hear, speak or walk around do something like that?"

Abraham told him: "Then how can you turn away from the living God and serve statues that can’t see or hear?"

The king heard about the things Abraham was saying and doing and called for him to come to the palace. "Don’t you know that I am god and ruler of the world?” he asked him. “Why did you destroy my images?"

Abraham said: "If you are the god and ruler of the world, why don’t you make the sun rise in the west and set in the east? If you are the god and ruler of the world, tell me what’s in my heart right now, and what I will do in the future."

The king was silent.

Abraham continued: "You are the son of Cush. You are a human being like him. You couldn’t prevent your father from dying, and you won’t escape death yourself."

The king ordered Abraham to worship the fire.

"Why not worship the water, because it puts out fires?" asked Abraham.

"Very well, worship the water!" he king replied.

"Then why not worship the clouds, which swallow the water?" Abraham said.

"Okay, then worship the clouds!" the king replied.

Abraham said: "Instead of clouds, maybe I should worship the wind which blows the clouds about!"

"Okay; pray to the wind!" the king replied.

"But," said Abraham, "a person can stand up against the wind or shield himself behind the walls of his house."

"Then bow down to me!" the king said.

Abraham refused. The ordered people to make a great pile of wood and set it on fire. Abraham was thrown onto the burning wood. God Himself went down from heaven to rescue Abraham.

This explains the place in the Bible where God told Abraham: "I am the Lord who brought thee out of the fire of the Chaldeans"

Abraham tried to persuade his father to stop praying to statues, but his father was afraid of what the people would say if he did that. He told his son to stop talking that way. Finally, when Abraham’s brothers also turned against him, he set on fire the house where the statues were kept, and his brother Haran died trying to rescue the statues from the fire.

One night when there was no moon, Abraham was looking up at the stars trying to figure out from the starts what the next year’s crops would be like. He began thinking that since God is so powerful and His will controls everything, there was no point in studying the stars to try to learn about the future from them. He began praying very sincerely, and he received a message from God that he should leave his people and travel to other nations to teach them these higher truths.

An angel of God taught him Hebrew, the language of revelation. This gave him the ability to understand all the secrets of the ancient books. Leaving his brother Nahor with his father, Abraham went to the Holy Land looked around to see everything that was going on there.

Islamic Stories about Abraham’s Youth

*Qur’an 6:74-83, 19:41-50, 21:51-71, 26:70-82, 37:83-98, 2:258*

Abraham was born in a house of idol worshippers, in the kingdom of Babylon. His father, Aazar, was a well-known sculptor and made the statues that people worshipped. As a young child, Abraham watched his father carve statues from stones or wood. When his father was done with them, Abraham would use them as toys, riding on their backs and sometimes even kicking them. Later, he would see these same statues in the temple and people bowing down in front of them!

Abraham asked his father why he took the toys to the temple. His father said: "These statues represent our gods. We worship them, ask them for favors, and offer them presents." Abraham couldn’t accept this idea, and he disliked the idols.

When Abraham grew up, he laughed whenever he saw them go into the temple, bow their heads to the statues, put nice food in front of them, and ask them to forgive them for doing wrong thin. He was angry that people didn’t realize that the statues were just stones and stones could not help them or harm them. They couldn’t be gods since they didn’t have any power. He thought that God is the creator, so He must be greater than the things that the people were worshipping. He thought that God is more powerful and more wonderful than anything people could make. He couldn’t imagine such a God sitting on a temple table!

One night, Abraham climbed a mountain, leaned against a rock, and looked up at the sky. He saw a shining star and asked himself, "Could this be my Lord?" But when it set he realized it couldn’t be God, because God is always present. Then he saw the moon rising in splendor and said, "Could this be my Lord?" But it also set. At daybreak, he saw the sun rising again and said: "Could this be my Lord, this is bigger?" But when the sun set he said: "Other people think Allah has partners! I am going to focus on the one Who created the heavens and the earth. I won’t worship any partners of the one who made everything and has the power to make the stars rise and set.

Abraham then heard Allah calling him: "O Abraham!"

Abraham answered with a shaky voice: "Here I am, O my Lord!"

"Submit to Me! Be a Muslim!" God told him.

Abraham kneeled down, lowered his head to the ground, and said: "I submit to the Lord of the universe!" He kept bowing down until the sky became dark. Then he got up and went back home. He felt peaceful, convinced that Allah had guided him to the truth.

Abraham’s life changed after this. He had a purpose, and it was to call his people to the truth. He started talking with his father, because he was close to him and loved him so much. In a kind, soft voice Abraham said: "O father! Why do you worship things that don’t hear you, don't see you, and can’t help you at all? O father, I have learned about things you don’t know about, so please follow me. I will guide you on a straight path."

His father got angry and said: "Are you rejecting my gods? If you don't stop, I will throw stones at you. You should move out of my way before I punish you."

Abraham said: "I only wish you peace! I will ask my Lord to forgive you."

Abraham gave up trying to convince his father about the right path and started talking to the people of the town. But they also rejected his call and threatened him.

A big celebration was planned, and everybody went to the edge of the river for a big feast. After making sure that nobody was left in town, Abraham took an ax and went to the temple. In the temple, there were statues of all shapes and sizes. They were nicely decorated. There was food on plates in front of them, but they weren’t eating the food.

"Well, why don't you eat?” Abraham joked. “The food is getting cold." Then he destroyed all the statues except the biggest one. He hung the ax around its neck and left the temple.

When the people came back to the temple they were very shocked. They stood around in amazement, looking at their gods which were broken in pieces. They wondered who might have done this. Then they thought of Abraham, who had been saying bad things about their idols. They brought him to the temple and asked him if he was the one who broke the idols.

Abraham said: "No, the biggest statue did it. Ask them to tell you what happened."

"You know very well that these idols don't speak," they answered.

"Then how come you worship things that can’t speak or see, or even do things for themselves? Have you lost your minds?"

The people were quiet for a while, because Abraham had a good point. Their minds were telling them that Abraham was telling the truth, but their pride kept them from accepting the truth, because it would mean rejecting the idols that they and their people had been worshipping for generations. They started yelling at Abraham and calling for him to be killed.

King Nimrod and the priests decided that Abraham should be burned to death. The news spread like a fire all over the kingdom, and people came from everywhere to watch. A huge pit was dug and a large amount of wood was piled up. Then the biggest fire people had ever seen was lit. The flames were so high that the birds didn’t fly over them, because they were afraid of being burned! Abraham's hands and feet were chained together, and he was put in a catapult that would throw him into the fire.

Then the angel Jibreel came to Abraham and said: "O Abraham! Do you want to make a wish?" Abraham could have asked to be saved from the fire, but he said: "My only wish is that Allah will be pleased with me."

The catapult was released, and Abraham was thrown in the heart of the fire. But Allah would not allow His Prophet to be killed, so He ordered the fire to cool down so Abraham would be safe. A miracle happened. The fire obeyed and burned only Abraham’s chains. Abraham came out of the fire as peacefully as if he were coming out of a garden. His face was shining, and there wasn’t a trace of smoke on his clothes.

People were shocked as they watched this. They said: "This is amazing! Abraham' s God has saved him from the fire!"

Abraham's reputation became greater after this, and the king was worried that he would lose power because he was pretending that he was a god. He decided to have a debate with Abraham and show his people that he, the king, was god, and Abraham was a liar. He sent for Abraham and asked him: “What can your god do that I cannot do?”

“My God is the Lord of life and death." Abraham said.

“I give life and death. I can bring a person from the street and have him killed, and I can pardon someone who was sentenced to death and save his life," the king said proudly.

“Well, my Lord Allah makes the sun rise from the east. Can you make it rise from the west?” Abraham said.

The king couldn’t say anything. He was beaten at his own game, in his own place, and in front of his own people! Abraham went back to his main work calling people to worship the one and only God, Allah.

Only a woman named Sarah and a man named Lot believed in Allah and followed Abraham. Abraham realized that nobody else would listen to him, so he decided to leave the country to spread His message elsewhere.

Before he left, he talked to his father about God once more, but his father would not change his mind. Abraham said to his father and his people: "We are free of you and of whatever you worship besides Allah. We reject you and we will be enemies forever unless you believe in Allah and Him alone."

God calls Abraham

*Genesis 11:10 - 12:4*

After the flood, people forgot God. They prayed, but not to God. Wherever they went they worshipped something. Many people worshipped what they saw up in the heavens: the sun, moon and stars. Others worshipped what they saw around them, such as the rivers, mountains and hills. Sometimes they carved images of wood or stone and called them gods.

There was an shepherd named Terah in the land of Ur. He was a descendant of Noah's first son, Shem. He had three sons: Abraham, Nahor and Haran. The third son died and left a son named Lot. Terah took his family and all his cattle and sheep to a place east of Ur called Haran. There Terah died.

Terah worshipped idols, but Abraham began to believe in one God. God chose Abraham to be a new father of faith. One day Abraham heard God’s voice calling him: “Leave this country and your relatives and go to a land that I will show you. I will bless you and make a great nation out of you. You will be a blessing, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

With his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, their servants and large flocks and herds, Abraham set out on another trip. He was seventy-five years old. They traveled west toward the land of Canaan. They crossed mountains and valleys, rivers and dry land. Each day, they were farther from their homeland and nearer to the land God had promised to them.

**Abraham and his new neighbors**

*Genesis 12:5-20*

When Abraham, his household and his flocks entered Canaan, they passed through the hilly land of Shechem and arrived at a plain where the Canaanites were living. Abraham did not live in a city but in a tent in the countryside. Abraham became a very rich man. He had many servants, cattle and sheep. He had much silver and gold. Lot also had many servants, sheep and cattle. When they put up all their tents, it looked like a tent town. All around them the land was dotted with their cattle and sheep.

God visited Abraham and said, "Unto thy seed I will give this land," and Abraham built an altar there to God. When he moved south to Bethel he also built an altar to God there.

He kept traveling south. When food was hard to find, they went to Egypt. Sarah was very beautiful. Abraham worried that if people knew he was Sarah’s husband, someone would kill him in order to marry her. So he told Sarah to pretend to be his sister. Pharaoh became interested in Sarah and took her into his house. Then he and his household began to suffer from plagues. When Pharaoh learned that Sarah was Abraham’s wife, he asked them to leave the country and take all their possessions with them.

Sara and Pharaoh

*Jewish Encyclopedia*

Sarah was the niece of Abraham, being the daughter of his brother Haran. Sarah was greatly admired for her beauty. She was so beautiful that all other persons seemed like apes in comparison. Even the hardships of her journey with Abraham did not affect her beauty. According to another explanation, she had the ability to see into the future, and she was more gifted as a prophet than Abraham was. She was like the crown of her husband, and he listened to her because he recognized her gifts. She was the only woman whom God spoke to directly; other women prophets received their revelations through angels. In their travels, Abraham taught the men about God, and Sarah taught the women. Her name meant princess, because she was the princess of her house and of her tribe.

On the journey to Egypt, Abraham hid his wife in a chest in order that no one might see her. At the frontier the chest had to pass through the hands of certain officials, who insisted on examining its contents in order to determine the amount of duty payable. When it was opened a bright light proceeded from Sarah's beauty. Each of the officials wanted to keep her for himself, and they offered Abraham higher and higher prices for her.

When they met the Pharaoh, Sarah told him that Abraham was her brother, and the king gave her many gifts. To show his love for Sarah, the king offered her all his property; he gave her the land of Goshen as a place where she and her descendants could live. He gave her also his own daughter Hagar to be her slave. Sarah prayed to God to protect her from the king, and God sent an angel who hit Pharaoh every time he tried to touch her. Pharaoh was so astonished at these blows that he spoke kindly to Sarah, and she admitted that she was Abraham's wife. The king then stopped bothering her.

According to another version, Pharaoh kept bothering Sarah even after she had told him that she was a married woman, so the angel made him very sick to keep him from bothering Sarah. According to one tradition, when Pharaoh realized the miraculous way Sarah was protected he gave her his daughter Hagar as slave, saying: "It is better that my daughter should be a slave in the house of such a woman than mistress in another house." Sarah treated Hagar well, when women came to visit her she had them visit Hagar also.

During Sarah's lifetime her home was always open to visitors, and when she made bread, there was always enough for everyone. A light burned from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and a pillar of cloud rested upon the entrance to her tent.

Abraham and his family lived at Mamre [Beer-sheba], where the roads crossed. Their tent was open on all sides, and they kept a table with all kinds of food and wine to share with the passersby. After a meal, when people were about to offer their thanks to their host before going on their way, Abraham pointed to God above, whom he served and to whom alone they owed thanks. By loving people he taught them how to worship God.

Abraham and the Kings

*Genesis 13-14*

Abraham and his household returned to Canaan. Abraham’s servants and Lot’s servants began to argue over land for their animals. Abraham talked to Lot: “I don't want there to be any arguments between us or our servants. There is not room enough for all of us to live together. But the whole land lies before us. Let us separate. If you choose the west country, I will go east; but if you want the east country, I will take the west.”

Lot chose the east country, in the Jordan Valley, where there was plenty of grass and water for his flocks. Lot put up his tents near the city of Sodom, where people were very evil and never thought about God. After a while, Lot moved closer to Sodom and finally went to live inside the city.

Again God visited Abraham and renewed His promises to Abraham. Abraham moved to the hilly land of Hebron and built an altar there.

A group of kings made war on Sodom, Gomorrah and neighboring cities. After 12 years of being servants of the invaders, the kings in the area rebelled against the invaders. But the local people were defeated and the people and belongings were carried off by the invaders. Abraham's nephew Lot was one of the captives. Abraham and his servants attacked the invaders and drove them off, rescuing not only Lot but the other people and their belongings.

The king of Sodom went out to greet the victorious Abraham. Melchizedek, a priest and king of Salem [the word means peace], also came to greet Abraham with gifts of bread and wine. Melchizedek said, "Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be the most high God who delivered your enemies into your hand." And Abraham gave Melchizedek one tenth of everything he had.

The king of Sodom asked Abraham to return the captives and offered to let Abraham keep all the booty from the battle. However, Abraham gave the credit to God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and returned to the king of Sodom everything that was his. Abraham did not want the king to complain that Abraham’s wealth came from the king’s belongings.

Abraham and the offerings

*Genesis 15*

Afterwards, God appeared to Abraham in his sleep and said, “Do not be afraid, for I will protect you and will give you a great reward for your faith.”

Abraham was growing old. God had been guiding and protecting him, and Abraham had shown his faith in God in many ways over the years. He had left his home and gone to the land God showed him; he built altars to God wherever he lived; he had helped out Lot and other people who were in trouble; he was brave and unselfish. However, he still had no children.

Abraham replied, “Lord God, what will you give me? I have no children. I have no heir.”

God told Abraham to go outside. “Look toward heaven, and tell me if you can count the stars. Some day the children in your family will be like the stars—so many that no one can count them.” Abraham believed God.

God told Abraham to make an offering to show his faith. God asked Abraham to choose a heifer, a goat, a sheep, a turtledove and a pigeon. Like the animals in Noah’s ark, these animals symbolized the whole earth.

Because Adam and Eve turned away from God and followed Satan, people are torn between good and evil. People make offerings in order to cut themselves off from Satan and try to connect with God. In those days, when people prepared an offering, they were supposed to cut the animals in half. Abraham cut the cow, the goat and the sheep in half, but he did not cut the birds. God could not accept his offering, and birds of prey came to take the animals away.

Abraham fell asleep, and God told him that his children, grandchildren and the people born after them would have to spend four hundred years living in another country. Their life would become difficult and they would be treated like slaves, but finally they would return to Canaan.

Sarah and Hagar

*Genesis 16 & 17*

Sarah had an Egyptian servant girl named Hagar. Abraham and Sarah taught Hagar about the true God. Abraham and Sarah longed for the child that God had promised them, but they still had no children. Sarah suggested that Abraham take her servant, Hagar, as a concubine, like another wife. If Sarah couldn’t have a child herself, she hoped she could claim her servant’s child. This was a custom in those times. However, when Hagar became pregnant, she thought she was better than Sarah.

Sarah punished Hagar so severely that Hagar ran away. Hagar walked down the sandy desert road. When she got tired, she stopped to rest by a fountain called Lahairoi. There an angel of the Lord found her.

“Hagar, Sarah’s maid, where did you come from, and where are you going?” the angel asked.

“I am running away from Sarah,” Hagar replied.

“Go back,” the angel said, “and submit to Sarah. I will multiply your seed, and you will have more descendants than people can count. You are expecting a child, and you will bear a son and call him Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your suffering. He will grow up to be a strong, impatient man; he will always be fighting against others and they against him. He will live in the presence of his brothers.”

Hagar recognized that a messenger from God had spoken to her. She called him "the Lord who sees me" and realized that God had known about her all the time. She obeyed God and returned to Sarah. Her son was born, as God had promised. Abraham was eighty-six years old when his son Ishmael was born.

Thirteen years later, God spoke to Abraham again, repeating the blessings and the promise of a son. God gave Abraham a new name, Abraham, meaning father of many nations. He also changed Sarah’s name to Sarah, promising that she would be mother of many nations.

Abraham loved his son Ishmael, but Ishmael was not the child that God had been promising him. He asked God about Ishmael.

God answered: “I have heard what you asked. I have blessed him and will make him fruitful. I will multiply his descendants. He will give birth to twelve princes, and I will make a great nation out of him.”

[Sarah is not directly mentioned in the Qur’an; but she is referred to as standing by when Abraham received the visit of the angels.]

The Angels and Abraham

*Genesis 18;Qur’an 11:69-76, 15:51-59, 51:24-30*

One day, as Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent in the plain of Mamre, he saw three strangers coming towards him. It was the custom to welcome travelers into one’s home and be kind to them. Abraham ran to meet the visitors and bowed low.

“Do not go on, but stay here,” Abraham said. “Please rest under the tree. I will bring you some food. Then you may go on.” The three visitors agreed.

Abraham brought water for his visitors to wash their feet. Then Abraham told his wife to knead some dough and bake bread while he prepared meat for his visitors. He chose a calf and had a servant prepare and cook it. When everything was ready, Abraham brought the food to his visitors. He stood by them while they ate.

As they were eating, one of them asked, “Where is Sarah?” Abraham replied that she was in the tent. The visitor then said, “Your wife Sarah will have a son.”

When Sarah heard this she laughed. She and Abraham were old. The thought of such old people having children was amusing.

The visitor turned to Abraham and asked, “Why did Sarah laugh and think she was too old to have a child? Doesn’t she know that nothing is too hard for the Lord?”

When they had eaten, the travelers started off again on their trip. They were heading toward Sodom. Abraham walked with them a little way. By this time he knew that they were not men but spiritual beings. He had given his best hospitality to visitors from heaven.

One of the visitors was speaking for the Lord. “Shall I tell Abraham what I am going to do?” he asked his companions. “All the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I know that he will teach his children and everyone in his household to keep my ways and do what is right.”

Turning to Abraham, he said, “The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is crying out for punishment. I will visit Sodom and Gomorrah to see whether these cities are as evil as they seem.”

Abraham wondered what would happen to his nephew Lot if these cities were destroyed. Because Abraham loved Lot he asked, “Will you destroy the good people along with the evil people in Sodom?” The Lord said, “If I can find fifty good people in Sodom, I will not destroy it.”

Abraham was afraid that there might be fewer than fifty, so he pleaded with the Lord: “Would you save the city if there were only forty-five good people?” The Lord answered, “If I find forty-five good people, I will not destroy it.”

Still Abraham felt troubled. There might not be even forty-five good people. He asked, “What if you find only forty good people?” The Lord said, “I will not destroy the city if there are forty good people in it.”

Abraham worried that there might be fewer than forty. “O Lord, don’t be angry with me, but if there are only thirty good people, will you spare the city?” The Lord promised not to destroy the entire city if only thirty good people could be found. Abraham kept pleading until the Lord promised not to destroy the city if only ten good people lived there. Then Abraham returned to his tent.

The Angels and Lot

*Genesis 19; Qur’an 11:77-81, 15:61-77, 51:31-37*

It was evening when the angels reached Sodom. Soon the city gates would close. Lot was one of the wise men who sat at the city gates and solved the problems people brought to them. When Lot saw two strangers approaching, he greeted them with a low bow and invited them to his house for the night. At first, the strangers refused. They would spend the night in the streets. Because Lot knew the desires of the men in the city, he insisted that the strangers come home with him. Finally they did.

Like Abraham, Lot practiced hospitality. Lot prepared food for them to eat. Soon the news spread over the city that Lot had two visitors. From all parts of the city, men young and old hurried to Lot’s house, wanting to harm the strangers. Lot offered his daughter instead, but the men only wanted the strangers. When they tried to break open the door to Lot's house, the angels pulled Lot inside and caused the men of Sodom to become blind.

The angels told Lot, “Sodom is so evil that God is going to destroy it. You must get out of Sodom. Tell your daughters and their husbands to get out too.”

Lot went to the homes of his sons-in-law, who were men of Sodom. He told them, “We must get out of Sodom, for the Lord is going to destroy it.” But they did not believe him.

Before the sun rose, the angels urged Lot, “Take your wife and two daughters and run for your lives.” Lot didn’t want to leave his home in such a hurry. But God had good plans for Lot and his family. The angels forced him and his family to leave the city. Once they were outside the city, the angels said, “Run to the mountains for your lives. Do not even stop long enough to look back.”

When the sun came up, fire and brimstone fell like rain from the sky upon Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying the cities and everybody who lived in them. In her heart, Lot’s wife missed Sodom, and she looked back at the city. When she did, she turned into a pillar of salt. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed so completely that no one even knows where the cities were.

Lot and his daughters no longer had a home. They found a cave in the hills to the east of Sodom and lived there. In the hills of what is now Jordan, two sons were born to Lot and his daughters: Moab and Ammon. Their lineage came from the family who worshipped the one God and hosted heavenly visitors.

Abimelech and Sarah

*Genesis 20*

Afterwards, Abraham traveled south and spent time in Gerar. Again Abraham told Sarah to say she was his sister. Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her for himself. But God came to Abimelech in a dream at night and told him that she was a married woman. Abimelech had not touched Sarah, so he answered God, "Lord, will you slay a righteous nation? He said she was his sister and she said he was her brother. I acted from the integrity of my heart and my hands are innocent."

God replied that He had been watching over Abimelech. “Give Sarah back to Abraham,” God said. "He is a prophet. He shall pray for you and you will live."

Early in the morning, Abimelech got up, called his servants to him and told them what happened. He called Abraham and asked why he had done this.

Abraham answered, "Because I thought the people here did not fear God, I thought they would kill me in order to get my wife. Indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother. When God caused me to leave my father's house I asked her to tell people and I am her brother."

Abimelech gave Abraham animals and servants, returned Sarah to him, and invited him to live in his land wherever he wished. He told Sarah he gave Abraham a thousand pieces of silver for her protection.

No children had been born in Abimelech's household while Sarah was there, and Abraham prayed to God for them and they had children.

Sarah and Isaac

*Genesis 21:1-13*

Afterwards, God visited Sarah, as He had said He would. He kept His promise to Sarah, and she gave birth to a son a year after the angels’ visit. Abraham called his son Isaac. Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. When Isaac was eight days old Abraham circumcised him.

Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and everyone who hears about this will laugh too. Who would have thought that Sarah could give Abraham a son in his old age?”

The child grew, and Abraham celebrated with a great feast.

One day Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac, and she asked Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. She did not want Ishmael to share anything that belonged to Isaac.

Abraham was sad at this request, because Ishmael was his son. But God said to Abraham, “Don’t be sorry on account of the boy and the servant. Listen to Sarah, for Isaac’s descendants will be your true lineage. Still I will make a great nation out of Ishmael, because he is your son.”

Years earlier, if Abraham had offered the animals in the proper way, Ishmael and Isaac would have been born on the foundation of Abraham’s faith. Perhaps, then, a way could have been found to reconcile the mothers and avoid the separation of his descendants.

*Jewish Encyclopedia*

Sarah was sterile; but a her youth was miraculously restored and she gave birth to Isaac. People could not believe that such a miracle, and they thought that the patriarch and his wife had adopted an abandoned baby and pretended that it was their own son. So Abraham invited all the important people in the region to a banquet on the day Isaac was old enough to eat food by himself. Sarah invited the women to come, along with their babies, and she nursed all their babies, convincing the guests that a miracle really had happened.

Hagar and Ishmael

*Jewish Encyclopedia*

Some Jewish teachers had good things to say about Hagar. For example, Hagar did not want to have a relationship with Abraham but Sarah encouraged her by telling her that she would be happy to be with such a saint. Hagar was a godly person because she was not scared when an angel came to her. Her name may mean “to adorn,” meaning that she was beautiful because she was faithful to God and helped other people. She was faithful to Abraham even after Abraham sent her away. Some say that after Sarah’s death, Isaac went to bring Hagar back to the house of his father.

Other Jewish teachers had less kind things to say about Hagar. For example, she told people that Sarah was not as godly as she pretended to be, because she had no children even though she was married to Abraham for many years, but Hagar became pregnant right away. When Hagar and Ishmael were sent out into the wilderness, some think she complained to God that He had promised to multiply her descendants and her son was dying of thirst and then she worshipped idols.

Sarah took revenge on Hagar by keeping her away from Abraham, whipping her with her slipper, and making her do small tasks such as carrying her bathing-materials to the bath. Some teachers said that Sarah put an evil eye on Hagar when she was pregnant, making the baby die, and Ishmael was her second child.

Hagar and Ishmael

*Genesis 21:14-21*

Abraham got up early in the morning, took bread and a bottle of water, and gave them to Hagar. Then he sent Hagar and Ishmael away. They headed south into the wilderness. When the water was gone, Hagar placed her son in the shade of a bush and sat down a little ways away. Not wanting to watch her son die, she turned her back to him and began to cry.

God heard Ishmael’s voice and an angel called to Hagar: “What is wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid. God has heard the voice of the child. Rise up, lift him up and take him by the hand, because I will make him a great nation.”

God opened her eyes and Hagar saw a well of water. She filled the bottle with water and gave some to Ishmael to drink.

God was with Ishmael. He grew up living in the wilderness of Paran and became an archer. His mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

*Sahih Bukhari 4:55:583*

Abraham woke up one day and asked Hagar to prepare herself and baby Ishmael for a long travel. They walked across a fertile land and barren mountains until they arrived at the desert of Arabic. Abraham brought Hagar to a high hill called al-Marwa, made her and her baby sit under a tree, placed a bag of dates and some water near her, and headed back home.

Hagar ran after him and said: "Are you going to leave us in this desert where there is no one to keep us company?" She repeated the question many times, but Abraham would not look back at her. "Has Allah ordered you to do so?" she asked.

When Abraham said “yes,” Hagar responded, "Then He will not neglect us."

Abraham kept walked until he was out of their sight. Then he raised his hands and prayed: "O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley with no cultivation, by Your Sacred House, in order that they may offer prayers. So fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks."

Hagar nursed Ishmael and drank from the water until it was all used up. She became very thirsty and the child was crying. She left him on the al-Marwa hill and hurried to the nearest hill, as-Safa. From that hill, she looked around, but she could not see anybody. She went down to the valley and climbed al-Marwa hill again, looking for someone. She kept running between the two hills seven times, looking for a sign of life. When she climbed al-Marwa for the last time, she sat down exhausted next to her baby.

Then she heard a voice.

She stood up and said: "Whoever you are, can you help me?' She saw the angel Jibreel, who kept digging into the earth until water started flowing! She made a little basin around the source, scooped up the water with her hands and drank. Then she filled her water skin and nursed her baby. The place from which water flowed was Zamzam.

Muslims cherish the holy water of Zamzam, and during the Hajj they walk between the hills as-Safa and al-Marwa seven times to commemorate Hagar’s search.

A group of Arabs traveling through Makkah noticed some birds flying around al-Marwa and thought they might be a sign that water was nearby. Following the birds, they found Hagar and asked permission to stay nearby and drink water from the well. She agreed and was pleased with their company. They brought their families and settled there. New life came to the entire valley.

Ishmael grew up, learned Arabic, and married an Arab woman.

Abimelech and Abraham

*Genesis 21:22-34*

Abraham’s neighbor Abimelech and his captain Phichol came to Abraham and said, "God is with you in everything you do. Now swear by God that you will not deal falsely with me, my son or my grandson. Return the kindness that I have done to you."

Abraham promised to do so. Then he mentioned that Abimelech's servants had taken a well away from him, something Abimelech did not know about.

Then Abraham gave Abimelech sheep, oxen and seven lambs and Abimelech accepted them, recognizing that Abraham had dug the well. They called the place where they made the covenant Beersheba. Abraham planted a grove of trees and prayed to God there. Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Abraham Offers Isaac

*Genesis 22:1-19*

Isaac was the child that God had promised to Abraham, and Abraham loved him as a gift from God. Abraham looked forward to the time when Isaac would become a man and have a family, fulfilling God’s promise.

As Isaac grew, Abraham taught him to know and worship God. Perhaps he took Isaac with him when he made offerings. Abraham taught Isaac that God would accept the gifts and hear the prayers of people who did what was right and trusted in God.

One day God called Abraham and said to him, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, and give him back to me as an offering. I will show you where to build the altar.”

Abraham did not know why God asked him to do this. God had promised to make a great nation from Isaac's family line. How could God keep His promise if Abraham had to offer Isaac on an altar? Abraham did not understand, but he trusted that God knew best.

Abraham got up early in the morning, put a saddle on his donkey and tied on it the wood for burning the offering. With Isaac and two servants, Abraham started out. On the third day, God showed Abraham Mount Moriah [Jerusalem] and told him that was where he should make the offering. Abraham told his servants, “Stay here with the donkey, while Isaac and I go to worship God.”

Abraham gave the wood to Isaac to carry, and he took the container of coals and the knife. Together they set out.

Isaac was old enough to help carry the wood and understand what was needed to make an offering. He said, “Father, we have the fire and the wood. Where is the lamb for the offering?”

“My son, God will provide a lamb,” Abraham answered. Abraham trusted God, and Isaac trusted his father. They continued on their way.

When they came to Mount Moriah, Abraham built an altar, piled the wood on it, tied up his son Isaac, and laid him on top of the wood. Then Abraham took his knife and lifted up his hand. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham.”

“Here am I,” he answered.

“Don’t put your hand on the boy. Don’t do him any harm. Now I know that you fear God, since you have not kept back your son, your only son, from me.”

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Abraham took the animal, and he and Isaac offered it up to God. Abraham called the place Jehovah-jireh, meaning "the Lord will provide."

Then God said to Abraham: “Because you have not kept back your son, your only son, from me, I will bless you and multiply your family line. They will be as many as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the seashore. In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

By trusting his father and helping him make the offering, Isaac showed the same faith as his father. Like Abel and Noah before them, they made offerings in faith. Both Abraham and Isaac became fathers of faith.

Abraham and Isaac went back to Beersheba.

Sarah’s Death

*Genesis 23*

Sarah died in Hebron at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. Abraham mourned for her. As a shepherd Abraham did not own any land. Now he asked his neighbors, the sons of Heth, to sell him some land.

"You are a mighty prince among us," the men answered. "Choose the best of our sepulchers to bury your dead. None of us will hold back our sepulchre from you."

Abraham stood up, bowed down to the people of the land, and asked to buy the cave of Machpelah near Mamre from Ephron the son of Zohar.

Ephron, a Hittite living in the area, offered to give Abraham both the field and the cave in it. Abraham again stood, bowed down before all the people, and offered to buy the field. Ephron said it was worth 400 shekels of silver, and Abraham measured out the money.

A border was set around the field, the cave and all the trees in the field, marking Abraham's possession in the presence of the children of Heth. Abraham buried Sarah in the cave.

*Jewish Encyclopedia*

Sarah was originally destined, like Abraham, to live until the age of 175, but 48 years of her lifespan were taken away from her because she complained about Abraham, blaming him for Hagar not respecting her.

Legends connect Sarah's death with the sacrifice of Isaac. In one version, Samael came to Sarah and said: "Your old husband seized the boy and sacrificed him. The boy wailed and wept; but he could not escape from his father." When she heard this, Sarah began to cry bitterly and finally died from sadness.

According to another legend, Satan dressed like an old man, came to Sarah and told her that Isaac had been sacrificed. Believing the story, Sarah cried bitterly but comforted herself thinking that the sacrifice had been offered at the command of God. She left their home in Beersheba and headed to Hebron, asking everyone she met which direction Abraham had gone. Then Satan appeared again in human shape and told her that that Isaac had not been sacrificed but was alive and would soon return with his father. On hearing this, Sarah died of joy at Hebron.

Abraham and Isaac returned to their home at Beersheba, and, not finding Sarah there, went to Hebron, where they discovered that she had died.

Abraham Offers Ishmael

*Qur’an 37:99-111*

Abraham yearned to see his son, whom he loved and missed very much. He had not seen Ishmael since he was a baby and thus went Mecca to visit him. Upon arriving, he heard that Hagar had died, but Ishmael was still living there. He saw Ishmael under a tree near the well of Zamzam, sharpening his arrows.

When he saw his father, Ishmael rose up, hugged him and greeted him. It was the happiest moment for both father and son. But Allah wanted to put them to a test, and it was a difficult test. One night Abraham had a dream in which he was slaughtering Isaac to Allah. In the morning he told Ishmael about the dream and asked what he thought of it.

Both of them understood the dream to be an order from Allah. Without hesitating, Ishmael said: "Do what you are commanded." Both of them submitted to the will of Allah. Abraham had his son lie down with his forehead on the ground and aimed a sharp knife at his neck.

At this very moment, Allah called him: "O Abraham! You have fulfilled the dream! Thus do We reward the good doers!" A big sheep was sent down from heaven to be slaughtered instead of Ishmael. Abraham killed the sheep, and they held a bit celebration.

This event is celebrated every year by all Muslims. It is Eid al-Adha, when Muslims slaughter the sacrificial sheep.

Abraham and Ishmael Build the Ka’bah

*Qur’an 2:125-127*

Abraham and Ishmael kept on calling people to worship Allah. At that time there was no place built for the worship of Allah. Abraham wished there could be such a place where people would be in peace, and concentrate solely for the worship of Allah. His wish was answered when Allah ordered him to build the Sacred House, the Ka'bah.

Abraham said to Ishmael: "O Ishmael, Allah has given me an order, will you help me carry it out?" Isaac agreed to help, and Abraham pointed to the location Allah had showed him, on a hill higher than the surrounding land.

They went towards the place and started building the foundations of the Ka'bah. Ishmael brought the stones and Abraham started building the walls. As the wall became higher, Ishmael brought a large stone for his father to stand on, and Ishmael continued bringing him stones. As they worked they prayed continually, "O our Lord accept this service from us."

When they finished, the Angel Jibreel descended from heaven and showed Abraham the rituals of Hajj. Then Abraham stepped on the stone and called out to the people: "O people obey your Lord."

This large stone which Abraham stepped on is near the Ka'bah, and it is called Makam Abraham.

Friend of God

*Jewish Encyclopedia*

Jewish teachers thought of Abraham as a key link between God and humankind. "Until Abraham's time the Lord was known only as the God of heaven. When He appeared to Abraham, He became the God of the earth as well as of heaven, for He brought Him nigh to man" (Midr. R. to Gen. xxiv. 3). Abraham made humanity one family (Gen. R. xxxix).

For Jews, Christians and Muslims, Abraham is the father of faith. He is the founder of the synagogue (see Pes. 117b; Mek., Beshalla?, § 3; I Macc. 2:52; Philo, "Who is the Heir?" xviii.-xix.), the church (see Rom. 4:1, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23), and the mosque (Qur’an 3:58-60).

All three traditions also refer to Abraham as a friend of God:

*"Didst not thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and give it for ever to the descendants of Abraham thy friend?" (2 Chronicles 20:7)*

*"You, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend." (Isaiah 41:8)*

*"Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. (James 2:23)*

*“For God did take Abraham for a friend.” (Qur’an 4:125)*

Sources: Genesis; the Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906 edition; the Qur’an; collection of Islamic writings at <http://answering-islam.org.uk/Index/A/abraham.html>

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