

## PARASHAT VAYERA

*Genesis 18:1–22:24*

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*Parashat Vayera* begins with the visit of three men to Abraham. He welcomes them with generous hospitality, and they promise that Sarah will soon bear a son. When the men depart for the city of Sodom, God appears to Abraham and tells him that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed because of the sinful behavior of their residents. Abraham protests, asking God not to destroy innocent people along with the guilty ones. God promises that, if there are as few as even ten innocent people in the cities, they will not be destroyed. Afterwards, two men-angels arrive in Sodom and are offered hospitality by Lot. He protects them from the Sodomites, who threaten to harm them. The men-angels warn Lot to leave Sodom. He escapes the next morning as fire rains down upon the cities, but his wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Abraham travels to the Negev, where Abimelech, king of Gerar, sees Sarah and wants her for a wife. Fearing the king, Abraham claims that Sarah is his “sister.” The king takes her as a wife, but God appears to him and reveals Sarah’s real identity. Abimelech returns her to Abraham along with a great bounty. As the visitors to Abraham had predicted, Sarah bears a son whom they name Isaac. After a few years, Sarah persuades Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, claiming that only Isaac should inherit Abraham’s wealth and position. Abraham agrees when God tells him that “I will make a nation of him [Ishmael].” Several years later, God tests Abraham’s faith by ordering him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. Isaac is saved at the last moment when God praises Abraham’s loyalty and tells him to sacrifice a ram in Isaac’s place.

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