

# Abraham Visits Ishmael

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## A Jewish Version of the Story

### *Pirkey deRabbi Eli'ezer, Ch. 30<sup>1</sup>*

Gen.21 <sup>14</sup>*So Abraham rose early in the morning, and he took bread and a waterskin, putting them on Hagar's shoulder, with the boy, and he sent them off. So she went out and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.... And [Ishmael] dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife from the Land of Egypt.*

...And they walked through all the wilderness until they came to the wilderness of Paran. They found there streams of water and they dwelt there, as it is said, *And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran* (Gen.21:21). Ishmael sent and took a wife from the daughters of Moav, and `A'ishah [var. `A'ifa] is her name.

After three years, Abraham went to see Ishmael his son, having sworn to Sarah that he would not get off of his camel in the place where Ishmael lived. He arrived there at midday and found the wife of Ishmael there. He said to her, "Where is Ishmael?" She answered him, "He went with his mother to bring fruit and dates from the wilderness." He said to her, "Give me a little bread and water, for I am terribly faint from the journey through the desert." She said to him, "I have no bread and no water." He said to her, "When Ishmael comes [home] tell him this story, 'the son of a wise man is like half of a wise man,' and tell him that an old man from the Land of Canaan came to see you, and he said, 'Exchange the threshold of your house, for

מדרש פרקי דרבי אליעזר (היגר) -  
"חורב" פרק כט [נוסח ווארשא שנת ברי"ת פרק  
ל]

בראשית פרק כא (יד) וַיִּשְׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם  
בְּבִקְרַ וַיִּקַּח לֶחֶם וְחֶמֶת מִיָּם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל  
הָגָר שָׂם עַל שִׁכְמָהּ וְאֶת הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּשְׁלַח  
וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּתֵעַ בְּמִדְבַר בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע... (כא)  
וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרָן וַתִּקַּח לוֹ אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה  
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: פ

...והלכו אל המדבר כלו עד שהגיעו  
למדבר פארן ומצאו שם מוצאי מים  
וישבו שם שנ' ( בראשית כא, כא)  
וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרָן, שלח ישמעאל  
ולקח לו אשה מבנות מואב  
[ועאישה/עיפה שמה].

לאחר שלש שנים הלך אברהם לראות  
את ישמעאל בנו, ונשבע לשרה שלא  
ירד מעל הגמל במקום שישמעאל  
שרוי תמן, והגיע לשם בחצי היום,  
ומצא שם את אשתו של ישמעאל,  
אמ' לה היכן הוא ישמעאל, אמרה לו  
הלך הוא ואמו להביא פירות ותמרים  
מן המדבר, אמ' לה תני לי מעט לחם  
ומים כי עייפה נפשי מדרך המדבר,  
אמרה לו אין לי לחם ולא מים, אמ'  
לה כשיבא ישמעאל הגידי לו את  
הדברים הללו וב"ן חכ"ם כחצ"י חכ"ם  
ואמרי לו זקן אחד מארץ כנען בא  
לראותך ואמ' חלף מפתן ביתך שאינה  
[סף הבית אינה] טובה לך, וכשבא

<sup>1</sup> An English translation may be found in Gerald Friedlander, transl. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer* (NY: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), p. 218.

it is not good for you." When Ishmael came in from the wilderness, she told him the story, 'a son of a wise man is like half of a wise man,' and Ishmael understood. His mother then sent for a woman from her father's house, and her name was Fatimah.

After three years, Abraham again went to see his son Ishmael, having sworn to Sarah as on the first occasion that he would not get off his camel in the place where Ishmael lived. He arrived there at midday and found Ishmael's [new] wife. He said to her, "Where is Ishmael?" She said to him, "He and his mother went to graze the camels in the wilderness." He said to her, "Give me a little bread and water, for I am terribly faint from the journey through the desert. She brought out bread and water and gave them to him. Abraham arose and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He for his son, and Ishmael's house became filled with all good things of the various blessings. When Ishmael came [home], she told him what had occurred and Ishmael knew that his father's love and compassion for him remained, as it is said, *Like a father has compassion for his children* (Ps.103:13).

After the death of Sarah, Abraham returned and took his divorced wife, as it is said, *And Abraham again took a wife and her name is Qeturah* (Gen.25:1). It says *again* because she was his wife earlier, but he did not continue to have relations with her. Her name is *Qeturah* because she was perfumed (*mequteret*) in all kinds of scents. Another explanation: She is called *Qeturah* because her deeds were beautiful like incense. She gave birth to six sons for him, and all of them were named after Ishmael, as it is said, *And she bare him Zimran, Yokshan, Medan and Midian...*

ישמעאל מן המדבר הגידה לו את הדברים הללו, וכן חכם כחצי חכם, והבין ישמעאל ושלחה אמו ולקחה לו אשה מבית אביה פְּטִימָה שמה.

ועוד אחר שלש שנים הלך אברהם לראות את ישמעאל בנו, ונשבע לשרה כפעם ראשונה שאינו יורד מן הגמל במקום שישמעאל שרוי שם, והגיע לשם בחצי היום ומצא שם אשתו של ישמעאל ואמ' לה היכן הוא ישמעאל, אמרה לו הוא ואמו הלכו לרעות את הגמלים במדבר, אמ' לה תני לי מעט לחם ומים כי עייפה נפשי מדרך המדבר, והוציאה לחם ומים ונתנה לו, עמד אברהם והיה מתפלל לפני ה' על בנו ונתמלא ביתו של ישמעאל מכל טוב ממין הברכות, וכשבא ישמעאל הגידה לו את הדבר וידע ישמעאל שעד עכשו רחמי אביו עליו שנ' (תהילים קג, יג) כָּרַחַם אָב על בָּנָיִם.

לאחר מיתתה של שרה חזר אברהם ולקח את גרושתו, שנ' (בראשית כה, א) וַיִּסַּף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וְשֵׁמָה קְטוּרָה, ומדקאמר ויוסף משמע שפעם ראשונה היתה אשתו ועוד לא הוסיף לבא עליה, ושמה קטורה שהיתה מקוטרת מכל מיני בשמים, ד"א קטורה שהיו נאים מעשיה כקטרת, ילדה לו ששה בנים וכלם נקראו על שמו של ישמעאל, שנ' (שם ב) וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת זִמְרָן וְאֶת יֶקֶשׁן וְאֶת מִדְּן וְאֶת מִדְּיָן...

## An Islamic Version of the Story

***A History of Prophets and Kings by Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d.924).***<sup>2</sup>

When Hagar died, Ishmael married a Jurhumite woman [in the area of Mecca]. Abraham asked Sarah's leave to go to visit Hagar, and Sarah permitted it, but she made it conditional that he not settle down there. Abraham set out – Hagar had already died – to Ishmael's house. He said to Ishmael's wife, "Where is your husband?" She answered, "He is not here. He went hunting." Ishmael would often leave the Sanctuary to go hunting. Abraham asked, "Do you have any accommodation? Do you have any food or drink?" She answered, "I have nothing at all." Abraham said, "When your husband comes, give him greetings and tell him to change the threshold of his door."

Abraham left, and when Ishmael came back he found the scent of his father. So he said to his wife, "Did anyone come to you?" She answered, "An old man of such-and-such description came to me" – as though she were making light of him. Ishmael said, "What did he say to you?" She answered, "He told me, 'Give your husband greetings and tell him to change the threshold of his door.'" So he divorced her and married another.

Abraham remained [at home] as long as God willed, and then asked Sarah's leave to visit Ishmael. She permitted him but made it conditional that he not settle down there. Abraham came to Ishmael's door and said to his [new] wife, "Where is your husband?" She answered, "He went hunting but will return soon, God willing. So stay and may God be merciful to you!" He asked her, "Do you have any

تاريخ الرسل والملوك ل محمد ابن جرير الطبري  
وماتت هاجر، فتزوج إسماعيل امرأة من جرهم،  
قال: فاستأذن إبراهيم سارة أن يأتي هاجر، فأذنت  
له، وشرطت عليه ألا يتزل، وقدم إبراهيم – وقد  
ماتت هاجر – إلى بيت إسماعيل، فقال لامرأته: أين  
صاحبك؟ قالت: ليس ها هنا (284)، ذهب يتصيد،  
وكان إسماعيل يخرج من الحرم فيتصيد، ثم يرجع،  
فقال إبراهيم هل عندك ضيافة؟ هل عندك طعام أو  
شراب؟ قالت: ليس عندي وما عندي أحد، قال  
إبراهيم: إذا جاء زوجك فأقرئيه السلام، وقولي له،  
فليغير عتبة بابه.

وذهب إبراهيم وجاء إسماعيل، فوجد ريح أبيه فقال  
لامرأته: هل جاءك أحد؟ قالت: جائي شيخ صفته  
كذا – وكذا المتسخرفة بشأنه – قال: فما قال لك؟  
قالت قال لي أقرئي زوجك السلام. وقولي له: فليغير  
عتبة بابه، فطلقها وتزوج أخرى.

فلبث إبراهيم ما شاء الله أن يلبث، ثم استأذن سارة  
أن يزور إسماعيل، فأذنت له واشترطت عليه ألا  
يتزل، فجاء إبراهيم حتى انتهى إلى باب إسماعيل،  
فقال لامرأته: أين صاحبك؟ قالت: ذهب يتصيد و  
يجيء الآن إن شاء الله، فانزل يرحمك الله! قال لها:  
هل عندك ضيافة؟ قالت: نعم، قال: هل عندك خيرا  
أو بر أو شعير أو تمر؟ قال: فجاءت باللبن واللحم،  
فدعا لهما بالبركة، فلو جاءت يومئذ بجنيز أو بر أو

<sup>2</sup> An English translation of this may be found in William Brinner, transl. *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. 2 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 77.

accommodation? She answered, "Yes." He said, "Do you have bread or wheat or barely or dates?" She brought milk and meat, and he prayed for blessing on both of them. Had she brought bread or wheat or dates or barely on that day, then [Mecca] would have been the most plentifully supplied with wheat and dates barley and dates on earth. She said, "Stay so that I may wash your head." But he would not stay, so she brought him the *maqam* and placed it on his right side. He set his foot on it and the mark of his foot remained on it. She then washed the right side of his head. Then she moved the *maqam* to the left side and washed the left side. He said to her, "When your husband comes home, give him greetings and say to him, 'The threshold of your door is in good order.'" When Ishmael came, he found the scent of his father and said to his wife, "Did someone come to you?" She answered, "Yes, an old man, the most wonderful and best-smelling man. He said to me such-and-such, and I answered such-and-such, and I washed his head, and this is the mark of his feet on the *maqam*. He asked, 'What did he say to you?'" She answered, "He said to me, 'When your husband comes, give him greetings and tell him that the threshold of your door is in good order.'" Ishmael said, "That was Abraham."

Abraham stayed [home] as long as God willed, and then God commanded him to build the House (*al-bayt*).... [Between the time that he said, *Our Lord, I have settled some of my progeny in an uncultivable valley near Your Holy House* (Q.14:37) and the time he said, *Praise be to God who has given me Ishmael and Isaac in my old age* (Q.14:39), there passed a number of years that `Ata' did not memorize.]

Muhammad b. Sinaan related – Ubaydallah b. Abd al-Majid Abu `Ali al-Hanafi – Ibrahaim b. Naafi` - Kathir b. Kathir – Sa`id b. Jubayr – Ibn Abbas:

He came – that is, Abraham – and found

شعيراً أو تمر لكانت أكثر أرض الله برّاً وشعيراً وتمرّاً، فقالت: انزل حتى أغسل رأسك، فلم يتزل، فجاءته بالمقام فوضعتة عن شقه الأيمن، فوضع قدمه عليه فبقي أثر قدمه عليه، فغسلت شق رأسه الأيمن، ثم حولت المقام إلى شقه الأيسر، فغسلت شقه الأيسر، فقال لها: إذا جاء زوجك فأقرئيه السلام، وقولي له: قد استقامت عتبة بابك. فلما جاء إسماعيل وجد ريح أبيه، فقال (285) لامرأته: هل جاءك أحد؟ قالت: نعم شيخ أحسن الناس وجهاً وأطيبهم ريحاً، فقال لي: كذا وكذا، وقلت له كذا وكذا، وغسلت رأسه، وهذا موضع قدميه على المقام، قال: وما قال لك؟ قالت: قال لي: إذا جاء زوجك فأقرئيه السلام، وقولي له: قد استقامت عتبة بابك، قال ذلك إبراهيم.

فلبث ما شاء الله أن يلبث وأمره الله عز وجل ببناء البيت...

[قال: وكان بين قوله: "ربنا إني أسكنت من ذريتي بواد غير ذي زرع عند بيتك المحرم"، وبين قوله: "الحمد لله الذي وهب لي على الكبر إسماعيل وإسحاق" كذا وكذا عاماً، لم يحفظ عطاء.]  
حدثني محمد بن سنان، قال: حدثنا عبید الله بن عبد المجید أو علي الحنفي، قال: أخبرنا إبراهيم بن نافع، قال: سمعت كثير بن كثير يحدث عن سعيد بن جبیر عن ابن عباس قال: جاء - يعني إبراهيم - فوجد إسماعيل يصلح نبلاً له من وراء زمزم، فقال إبراهيم: يا إسماعيل، إن ربك

Ishmael mending his arrows behind Zamzam and said to him, "O Ishmael! Your Lord has commanded me to build Him a House." Ishmael replied, "Then obey your Lord and do what He commanded you to do." Then Abraham said, "He has commanded that you assist me with it." Ishmael responded, "Then I'll do it!". They began together, Abraham doing the building while Ishmael handed him the stones, and both of them saying, *O Lord! Accept this from us, for You are the Hearer, the Knower*" (Q.2:127).

When the building had become tall and the old man was too weak to lift the stones so high, [Ishmael] came upon a stone that was the *Maqam Ibrahim*. He began to give it to him, while both were saying, *Accept this from us, for You are the Hearer, the Knower* (Q.2:127).

When Abraham had finished building the House that God had commanded be built, God commanded that he proclaim the pilgrimage among humankind, saying to him, *And proclaim the pilgrimage unto humankind. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine* (Q.22:28).

قد أمرني أن أبني له بيتاً (286)، فقال له إسماعيل:  
فأطع ربك فيما أمرك، فقال إبراهيم: قد أمرك أن  
تعينني عليه قال: إذا أفعل: قال: فقام معه، فجعل  
إبراهيم بينه وإسماعيل يناوله الحجارة ويقولان " ربنا  
تقبل منا إنك أنت السميعُ العليم."

فلما ارتفع البنيان وضعف الشيخ عن رفع الحجارة  
قام على حجر، وهو مقام إبراهيم، فجعل يناوله  
ويقولان: " تقبل منا إنك أنت السميعُ العليم " .  
فلما فرغ إبراهيم من بناء البيت الذي أمره الله عز  
وجل ببنيائه، أمره الله أن يؤذن في الناس بالحج، فقال  
له: " وأذن في الناس بالحج يأتوك رجالاً وعلى كال  
ضامر يأتين من كل فج عميق."

## Motif Comparison Version

<i>Pirkey deRabbi Eli`ezer, Ch. 30</i>	<i>A History of Prophets and Kings</i>
<p>1. ...And they walked through all the wilderness until they came to the wilderness of Paran. They found there streams of water and they dwelt there, as it is said, <i>And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran</i> (Gen.21:21). Ishmael sent and took a wife from the daughters of Moav, and `A'ishah [var. `A'ifa] is her name.</p> <p>2. After three years, Abraham went to see Ishmael his son, having sworn to Sarah that he would not get off of his camel in the place where Ishmael lived.</p> <p>3. He arrived there at midday and found the wife of Ishmael there. He said to her, "Where is Ishmael?" She answered him, "He went with his mother to bring fruit and dates from the wilderness."</p> <p>4. He said to her, "Give me a little bread and water, for I am terribly faint from the journey through the desert." She said to him, "I have no bread and no water." He said to her, "When Ishmael comes [home] tell him this story, 'the son of a wise man is like half of a wise man,' and tell him that an old man from the Land of Canaan came to see you, and he said, 'Exchange the threshold of your house, for it is not good for you.'"</p> <p>5. When Ishmael came in from the wilderness, she told him the story, 'a son of a wise man is like half of a wise man,' and Ishmael understood. His mother then sent for a woman from her father's house, and her name was Fatimah.</p>	<p>1. When Hagar died, Ishmael married a Jurhumite woman [in the area of Mecca].</p> <p>2. Abraham asked Sarah's leave to go to visit Hagar, and Sarah permitted it, but she made it conditional that he not settle down there.</p> <p>3. Abraham set out – Hagar had already died – to Ishmael's house. He said to Ishmael's wife, "Where is your husband?" She answered, "He is not here. He went hunting." Ishmael would often leave the Sanctuary to go hunting.</p> <p>4. Abraham asked, "Do you have any accommodation? Do you have any food or drink?" She answered, "I have nothing at all." Abraham said, "When your husband comes, give him greetings and tell him to change the threshold of his door."</p> <p>5. Abraham left, and when Ishmael came back he found the scent of his father. So he said to his wife, "Did anyone come to you?" She answered, "An old man of such-and-such description came to me" – as though she were making light of him. Ishmael said, "What did he say to you?" She answered, "He told me, 'Give your husband greetings and tell him to change the threshold of his</p>

<p>6. After three years, Abraham again went to see his son Ishmael, having sworn to Sarah as on the first occasion that he would not get off his camel in the place where Ishmael lived.</p> <p>7. He arrived there at midday and found Ishmael's [new] wife. He said to her, "Where is Ishmael?" She said to him, "He and his mother went to graze the camels in the wilderness."</p> <p>8. He said to her, "Give me a little bread and water, for I am terribly faint from the journey through the desert. She brought out bread and water and gave them to him. Abraham arose and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He for his son, and Ishmael's house became filled with all good things of the various blessings.</p> <p>9. When Ishmael came [home], she told him what had occurred and Ishmael knew that his father's love and compassion for him remained, as it is said, <i>Like a father has compassion for his children</i> (Ps.103:13).</p>	<p>door." So he divorced her and married another.</p> <p>6. Abraham remained [at home] as long as God willed, and then asked Sarah's leave to visit Ishmael. She permitted him but made it conditional that he not settle down there.</p> <p>7. Abraham came to Ishmael's door and said to his [new] wife, "Where is your husband?" She answered, "He went hunting but will return soon, God willing. So stay and may God be merciful to you!"</p> <p>8. He asked her, "Do you have any accommodation? She answered, "Yes." He said, "Do you have bread or wheat or barley or dates?" She brought milk and meat, and he prayed for blessing on both of them. Had she brought bread or wheat or barley or dates on that day, then [Mecca] would have been the most plentifully supplied with wheat and barley and dates on earth. She said, "Stay so that I may wash your head." But he would not stay, so she brought him the <i>maqam</i> and placed it on his right side. He set his foot on it and the mark of his foot remained on it. She then washed the right side of his head. Then she moved the <i>maqam</i> to the left side and washed the left side. He said to her, "When your husband comes home, give him greetings and say to him, 'The threshold of your door is in good order.'"</p> <p>9. When Ishmael came, he found the scent of his father and said to his wife, "Did someone come to you?" She answered, "Yes, an old man, the most wonderful and best-smelling man. He said to me such-and-such, and I answered such-and-such, and I washed his head, and this is the mark of his feet on the <i>maqam</i>. He asked, "What did he say to you?" She answered, "He said to me, 'When your husband comes, give him</p>
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<p>10. After the death of Sarah, Abraham returned and took his divorced wife, as it is said, <i>And Abraham again took a wife and her name is Qeturah</i> (Gen.25:1). It says <i>again</i> because she was his wife earlier, but he did not continue to have relations with her. Her name is <i>Qeturah</i> because she was perfumed (<i>mequteret</i>) in all kinds of scents. Another explanation: She is called <i>Qeturah</i> because her deeds were beautiful like incense. She gave birth to six sons for him, and all of them were named after Ishmael, as it is said, <i>And she bare him Zimran, Yokshan, Medan and Midian...</i></p>	<p>greetings and tell him that the threshold of your door is in good order." Ishmael said, "That was Abraham."</p> <p>10. Abraham stayed [home] as long as God willed, and then God commanded him to build the House (<i>al-bayt</i>).... [Between the time that he said, <i>Our Lord, I have settled some of my progeny in an uncultivable valley near Your Holy House</i> (Q.14:37) and the time he said, <i>Praise be to God who has given me Ishmael and Isaac in my old age</i> (Q.14:39), there passed a number of years that `Ata' did not memorize.]</p> <p>Muhammad b. Sinaan related – Ubaydallah b. Abd al-Majid Abu `Ali al-Hanafi – Ibrahim b. Naafi` - Kathir b. Kathir – Sa`id b. Jubayr – Ibn Abbas:</p> <p>He came – that is, Abraham – and found Ishmael mending his arrows behind Zamzam and said to him, "O Ishmael! Your Lord has commanded me to build Him a House." Ishmael replied, "Then obey your Lord and do what He commanded you to do." Then Abraham said, "He has commanded that you assist me with it." Ishmael responded, "Then I'll do it!" They began together, Abraham doing the building while Ishmael handed him the stones, and both of them saying, <i>O Lord! Accept this from us, for You are the Hearer, the Knower</i>" (Q.2:127).</p> <p>When the building had become tall and the old man was too weak to lift the stones so high, [Ishmael] came upon a stone that was the <i>Maqam Ibrahim</i>. He began to give it to him, while both were saying, <i>Accept this from us, for You are the Hearer, the Knower</i> (Q.2:127).</p> <p>When Abraham had finished building the House that God had commanded be built, God commanded that he proclaim the pilgrimage among humankind, saying to him, <i>And proclaim the pilgrimage unto humankind. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine</i> (Q.22:28).</p>
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