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The Mysterious Disappearance of Sarah

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ONE OF THE UNRESOLVED MYSTERIES OF THE MIDDLE chapters of the Genesis narrative is the location of one of its central figures—the matriarch Sarah—for over 30 years.¹ The last time Sarah appears alive is in Genesis 21, when she is in her early 90s, dwelling with her husband Abraham and their son Isaac in or around Beersheba (Genesis 21:9 ff.) Abraham and Isaac figure prominently in Genesis 22 (the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac), but Sarah is conspicuously absent. Abraham returns to Beersheba at the close of Genesis 22. The text does not say, however, that Abraham returned *to* Sarah at Beersheba.

Her notable absence in Genesis 22 becomes even more problematic as Genesis 23 begins. There, we learn that Sarah has died at age 127 and that she was some 25 miles north of Beersheba at Kiryat Arba/Hebron when she died.

The text gives us no reason why Sarah, at such an advanced age, should be living so far from home. It also gives no indication that Abraham and Sarah were dwelling together at the period of her death. In fact, the opposite would appear to be the case. A bit further in the text, Genesis 23:19 states that “Abraham stayed in Beersheba,” using the word *va-yeshav* (*va-yeshav*), a verb nearly always used to indicate permanent residence.² Likewise, there is no indication that Sarah’s beloved son Isaac is present at her funeral. Clearly, Abraham was not with her when she died; Genesis 23 unambiguously states this. The literal text explains that he traveled to Kiryat Arba/Hebron to mourn Sarah (Genesis 23:2).³ Abraham has no permanent connection to Hebron⁴; he says as much as he begins negotiating with the local inhabitants to purchase land for a family burial plot. Sarah, too, would seem to be unattached to the place where she died, for if she was a resident, it is inconceivable that Abraham would have needed to purchase a burial plot for her.

Where, then, was Sarah living for three decades—and more? As shall be shown below, Genesis 24:67 provides a major clue to Sarah’s whereabouts when the Torah explains that after Isaac met Rebekah, he “brought her into the tent of his [now deceased] mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife.”

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Using primarily biblical texts, but also midrashic, traditional and modern commentaries, I propose solutions to the mystery surrounding Sarah's whereabouts during her final 30 years, why she died in the environs of Hebron, and the significance for Sarah of the locale of B'er L'chai Ro-i.⁵ These suggestions are an alternative way of understanding the received tradition. The proposals in this article are speculation. Some may see this as a form of modern midrash, understanding the ancient text in a newly imaginative way. The speculation, however, is based on clues buried within the Genesis text. This rereading explains why, of all places, Isaac dwells for a time at B'er L'chai Ro-i. It fixes Isaac's age at the Akeidah at 13. It provides a different picture of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar. Finally, it offers an answer to Sarah's missing years.

In this strange and wonderful foundational narrative, many possibilities exist, possibilities in themselves that are both intriguing and full of intrigue. Biblical characters, just as we in our own day, have multiple reasons for saying what they do. The surface explanation may disguise hidden meanings. What is said, and what is meant, may be two different matters.

Where was Sarah?

In Genesis 22, the Binding of Isaac, is Sarah present, but unmentioned? If the events of the Akeidah took place immediately after Genesis 21, in which Sarah is mentioned, her presence in Genesis 22 is not beyond possibility. The Akeidah story depicts Isaac, without directly saying so, as a young child. Weaning, which took place in the previous chapter, would have occurred at age 3.⁶

Nonetheless, Sarah's participation during that fateful and faithful expedition to Moriah seems unlikely. The Akeidah has the sense of a religious ritual. Sarah generally is not associated with Abraham and rituals (cf. Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 15:7 ff. The weaning of Isaac, which obviously involves women, may be the lone exception to this observation.) Does she simply remain in the familial encampment while the two most important men in her life leave her behind? Does Abraham consult with Sarah before this journey to Mt. Moriah? Alternatively, does he simply take off early in the morning with his entourage before she awakes? If she neither accompanies them, nor remains behind, where is she?

The text does not even hint at an answer. Surprisingly, none of these questions merited attention by the traditional commentators, so there is no help coming from that area. What did merit attention is that the Binding takes place in Genesis 22, and as Genesis 23 begins, Sarah has died. One traditional explanation, which assumes that Sarah does remain in Beersheba, is that when Abraham returns from Moriah to Beersheba without

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Isaac, Sarah dies of grief, believing her son to have been sacrificed. Alternative explanations involve Satan, who comes to tell Sarah that Isaac has been sacrificed, and she is so grief-struck that she dies. A third possibility is that Isaac himself comes back and tells Sarah, recounting in some detail what transpired. She then dies of shock.⁷ All of these explanations are predicated on the fact that Isaac would be 37 years old at the time of the Akeidah, a matter that defies the sense of the narrative in Genesis 22.⁸

These explanations do not address what Sarah has been doing for the last 30 years (much less Abraham and Isaac). Further, if she breathed her last in Beersheba, how did her remains get to Hebron (and why was it brought there at all)? Yet, if she really died in Beersheba, why does the Torah explicitly say that she died at Kiryat Arba/Hebron (Genesis 23:2)?

Another explanation is possible: Sarah is absent at the beginning of Genesis 22 because she is absent, period. She left Abraham between the events of Genesis 21 and the Akeidah, and is living elsewhere. The Torah does not say so directly, but certain subtle hints do exist in the text.

Sarah has ample reason to be concerned with, and worried about, the continuing actions of her husband. At times, his actions must appear eccentric to her.⁹ Abraham chose to follow through on his own father's plan to travel to Canaan (Genesis 11:31).¹⁰ He took Sarah from her ancestral home, forsaking civilization, as she knew it, to explore new and strange countries. Twice, in Genesis 12 and Genesis 20, Sarah was the lure or attraction in a "bait and switch" scheme, the second time when she either was already pregnant, or about to become so. A year earlier, she had seen her surrogate son Ishmael suddenly circumcised at age 13 and her 99-year-old husband take the knife to himself, as well. Then Isaac, when he was but eight days old, was circumcised, a "sign of the covenant," Abraham had said.

Anyone observing Abraham's increasingly strange behaviors (Genesis 15: a covenant ritual involving walking between carcasses and then swooning; Genesis 17: adult circumcision; Genesis 18: lavishly entertaining strangers and debating/bargaining with God) would be impelled to take a proactive position to protect Abraham's children. Their mother surely would. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to consider the possibility that an alarmed Sarah is moved to action on behalf of her natural son Isaac and Ishmael, the son born to her through a surrogate.

Sarah's plan

Sarah suspects that Isaac's circumcision (in Genesis 21) is actually part of a preliminary ceremony for something that Abraham will suggest when Isaac will be 13, much as Ishmael underwent his rite of passage at

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that age. Since Isaac has been circumcised, she would have had to be concerned about what would be next. Consequently, she formulates a plan to protect Isaac.

Sarah is a capable woman and a strong personality in her own right.¹¹ Although Isaac was circumcised at eight days, she knows that his weaning will be several years off. This gives her time to further develop her plan. Sarah consults and conspires with Hagar. The earlier tension between the two women had subsided. For 13 years and more, both believed that Ishmael was the heir apparent. Sarah and Hagar, once rivals, learned to live with each other. Each was a significant figure in Ishmael's life. Because it was in their mutual interest to forge a working relationship,¹² they become co-mothers for him.¹³

By the time of the events portrayed at the weaning ceremony of Isaac in Genesis 21, Sarah and Hagar have colluded and concluded that Abraham is so God-driven that even more bizarre behavior was possible. After all, God has never communicated directly with Abraham; his actions are based solely on his own interpretation of the indirect messages he does receive—and those interpretations may be colored by an excessive zeal to please.¹⁴ It is physically and emotionally unsafe for the women and for their offspring.

Hagar, for her part, understands that Isaac's birth has changed the family dynamics. She worries that Abraham might send them away, for with this new heir Hagar and Ishmael are no longer "needed" in the same way. Abraham's God promised that both their sons will be great nations (Ishmael in Genesis 17:20 ff; Isaac in Genesis 17:15 ff). Therefore, the time had come to take them away, to distance them from Abraham. Sarah and Hagar decide to seek out a safe place for themselves and their sons. This way, each son will realize his own destiny.

After due deliberation, they choose the natural oasis of B'er L'chai Ro-i.¹⁵ It was there that the angel of God met with Hagar when Ishmael was yet *in utero* (Genesis 16:7 ff.)

Taking action

When Isaac is about three, it is time for his weaning ceremony. Sarah and Hagar are ready with their proposal. "First," Sarah said to Hagar, "you and Ishmael will leave for B'er L'chai Ro-i. Sometime later, I will join you with Isaac."

At, or just after, the weaning ceremony, Sarah makes her move. She turns to Abraham and says, "It is time to make some changes. We cannot have two households in the one encampment." Sarah plays into Abraham's belief that Isaac is to be the primary heir, but that Ishmael also will be

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rewarded, as foretold in Genesis 17: “As for Ishmael..., I will bless him...and make him exceeding numerous..., a great nation.”

Sarah purposely uses forceful language as she misrepresents her own relationship with Hagar. She demands that Abraham “Get rid of that slave woman and her son” (Genesis 21:10). Sarah purposely distances herself from Hagar. She does not mention her ally by name (there also are no references to Ishmael by name then, or even later in that chapter) and, in fact, Sarah disparages Hagar.¹⁶ We are told that the matter disturbed Abraham because it “concerned his son,” but God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah’s voice and he does (Genesis 21:11-12). Early the next morning, Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away with presumably enough food and water to get to B’er L’chai Ro-i.¹⁷

Sarah and Hagar’s plan nearly goes wrong when Hagar loses her way in the wilderness. Fortunately, an angel of God sees (or perhaps was watching over) her and points her in the right direction, where she finds a well of water, the well at B’er L’chai Ro-i.

After a while, Sarah makes her bid to escape. She tells Abraham that she and Isaac are joining Hagar and Ishmael at B’er L’chai Ro-i. In the absence of any contradictory comments from God (after all, God had told him to listen to Sarah’s words), Abraham agrees to support them there. It is in his self-interest to do so. They are the living link to his future name and fame. He does offer one stipulation, that he can maintain connections with his sons. Sarah agrees, for she knows that she cannot deny Abraham this request, for Abraham is Isaac’s father. Midrashic tradition suggests that Abraham did occasionally visit Ishmael and that Ishmael visited him.¹⁸

Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born, and about 93 at his weaning. She then takes Isaac with her to join Hagar and Ishmael at B’er L’chai Ro-i. Sarah believes that time is on her side. Abraham now is over 103. Who knows how long he will live? If Isaac were to be living with Abraham, constantly in his sight, and even with Sarah present to protect her son, who knows what the patriarch may propose?

A decade passes. Abraham is living in the general area around the Negev. He “invokes” God’s name in the intervening period (Genesis 21:33), but God has been silent for a long time. Now, suddenly, as Genesis 22 begins, God speaks to Abraham again. God’s demand to sacrifice Isaac is a test for Abraham. It may also be an unstated test for Sarah. In the final analysis, are you willing to put your full trust in God?

Isaac now is 13, the same age as his older brother Ishmael was at his coming-of-age. On one of his visits to see his family, Abraham explains that he wants Isaac to live with him at Beersheba for part of the year. What Abraham does not explain to Sarah is that God has come to him and said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go

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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.”

Sarah is now over 103. She has her own living quarters at B'er L'chai Ro-i. She is aging. Even though she would like to accompany her son, this is not feasible. In a male-dominated society such as Canaan was at the time, Sarah is powerless to deny Abraham's request. She had hoped to protect Isaac from what Abraham might suggest for their son at age 13, but she feels that there is nothing she can do.

Sarah is rightfully worried. She draws comfort, however, from Ishmael's offer to accompany Isaac on his visit to Abraham. In addition, Sarah knows that Abraham's senior servant, Eliezer, will be there. She believes Eliezer has warm feelings for her son.¹⁹

The Binding of Isaac; Returning to B'er L'chai Ro-i

The Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22, becomes a defining event for Isaac. Bound upon an altar, Abraham lifts up a knife presumably to slaughter him. This is a terrifying moment, for son no less than for father. As the Genesis text makes clear, just as Isaac obviously is present going up the mountain, at the descent, Abraham is alone—“Abraham then returned to his servants and they departed together for Beersheba” (Genesis 22:19.) I suggest the word “they” refers merely to Abraham and Eliezer, not to Ishmael, who accompanies Isaac back to B'er L'chai Ro-i.²⁰

Because this experience atop the mountain is so violent and cruel, Isaac is scarred by that episode. Following this trauma, he refused to accompany his father back to Beersheba. In fact, we never see the two of them together again until Abraham's funeral. Accompanied by Ishmael, Isaac instead returns to Sarah and Hagar at B'er L'chai Ro-i. He then seeks to recover from his father-induced ordeal. They remain there living together as a family, for a couple dozen years—Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac.²¹

Sarah's death

Following the Akeidah episode, Isaac refuses to talk about what happened on Moriah. Time, however, softens those brutal memories. Sarah is aging. Isaac feels he can no longer keep the story from her. Sarah is now nearly 127 and Isaac 37. He finally agrees to tell her. Perhaps he takes Sarah along the route that he and Abraham journeyed on that strange venture, making it only as far as Kiryat Arba/Hebron, where he recounts to her the gruesome details. Perhaps, too, Sarah moved to the area at some point. In any case, at her advanced age, the shock of what Abraham did is too much. Sarah lets out a wail and dies.²²

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Isaac is saddened by his mother's death. He sends word to his father that Sarah has died, but does not wait around for his father's arrival, for he has not fully reconciled with Abraham. Isaac returns to B'er L'chai Ro-i, leaving it to his father to make the funeral arrangements. Surely it is significant that Isaac is not mentioned being present when Sarah is buried.

Nearly three years pass (Isaac is 37 when Sarah dies. He is 40 when he marries.) Abraham realizes his duty to find a wife for his son; he wants this person to come from the "family."²³ Genesis 24 describes Abraham's decision to send his senior servant to the old country to find this special person. It is clear that Isaac is not living with Abraham. When the servant returns from Paddan-aram with Rebekah, he takes her not to Abraham, but directly to Isaac's encampment.

Isaac continues to be associated with B'er L'chai Ro-i, "for he was settled" in the area (Genesis 24:62) when the servant returns with Rebekah.

Coincidentally, when eventually Abraham dies, Ishmael and Isaac together bury him. The text reports the two of them together so casually as to suggest nothing unusual in that, a far cry from rabbinic depictions of their relationship.

Although Isaac will also live for a time in Beersheba and elsewhere, as well, it is significant that following the death of Abraham, God specifically blesses Isaac and he goes to dwell at B'er L'chai Ro-i (Genesis 25:11).

Concluding remarks

Sarah's disappearance from the biblical text for those many decades following Isaac's weaning and the silence surrounding her non-appearance in the Akeidah narrative begs for an explanation. The proposal of her presence at B'er L'chai Ro-i provides a place to locate Sarah during her 30-plus-year absence. This article also implicitly addresses Isaac's age at the Akeidah, and further where Isaac was during those same missing 30 years, a matter the Bible does not address.

Sarah's legacy, however, is much more than just a place for her to spend her later years. Her living at that particular location says something about the relationship she was able to forge with her former rival for Abraham's affections. In establishing a bond with Hagar, she shows that gut-wrenching tensions and enmities with former enemies or adversaries can be overcome in time. The two women made a pact because they realized that together they could work for a common purpose, and thereby create a climate in which each of their sons would prosper; where each would realize his destiny. It also suggests that Isaac and Ishmael had an ongoing relationship. The tension between the two brothers is a reflection

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of later political conditions and considerations.²⁴ The implications for the modern world should not be ignored. It is not the purpose of this article to address the political map of the Middle East, but there are—or could be—parallels which might be explored in a different forum.

NOTES

¹ Hagar and Ishmael likewise disappear from view after the biblical text explains that they settle in the wilderness (Genesis 21:20). There are further references to Ishmael (Genesis 25:9 ff., 12 ff.; 28:9). Although Hagar is not mentioned, according to rabbinic tradition she is equated with Keturah, Abraham's other wife (Genesis 25:1; *Genesis Rabbah* 60.14; Rashi to Genesis 25:1.)

² On the other hand, as Nahum Sarna notes, "The Hebrew stem *g-w-r*, "to sojourn," indicates temporary residence." Nahum N. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis*. Philadelphia: JPS (1989) 93. If Abraham was returning to Beersheba only for a brief time, as Nachmanides (the Ramban) and others insist, then we would have expected the text to say ויגר אברהם (*va-yagawr avraham*, and Abraham sojourned). I am indebted to JUDAISM's editor, Shammai Engelmayer, for this insight, and several other suggestions to an earlier version of this article. Deep appreciation also to Rochelle Treister for reading this in an earlier version and offering valuable comments, especially in terms of the implications of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar.

³ ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה (*va-yavo avraham lispod l'sarah*, which literally means "Abraham arrived to mourn Sarah." Ramban, in his commentary to Genesis 23:2, dismisses any thought of Abraham and Sarah living apart. According to Ramban, Abraham had taken a brief trip to Beersheba when word came to him to return home to Hebron because his wife had just died. Ramban (Nachmanides), *Commentary on the Torah, Genesis*, trans. Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1971) 282-285.

⁴ He has been to Hebron before, of course (Genesis 13:18), and it may even be home to allies of his, especially to Mamre, assuming that the reason for the placename Mamre here is because Abraham's brother-in-arms (see Genesis 14) owns the land or somehow holds sway over it.

⁵ The Documentary Hypothesis suggests that there are various traditions (J, E, P and D) which a later editor drew upon to form the Torah. B'er L'chai Ro-i, whether mentioned in Genesis 16, 24 or 25 is consistently a J source reference. Genesis 23 is a P source. Sarah's encounter with Abraham in Genesis 21, and Hagar and Ishmael's encounter with the angel in Genesis 21, all are the E source, as is Genesis 22. While no source directly mentions Sarah living at B'er L'chai Ro-i, Isaac and his links to his mother, his brother Ishmael, and step-mother Hagar provide a common thread that leads to B'er L'chai Ro-i. For example, Genesis 24:62, 67 explains, "Isaac had just come from... B'er L'chai Ro-i... Isaac brought [Rebekah] into the tent of his mother Sarah... Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death." As the biblical scholar Ephraim Speiser noted, often E and J sources contain similar characteristics, even if they do not repeat exact details. He writes referring to Genesis 22, "[T]he style of the narrative is far more appropriate to J than to E.... [O]n external grounds, J was either appended to E, or E was superimposed on J." E. A. Speiser, ed., *Genesis, Anchor Bible*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964, 166. This article, in part using a J source, reconciles a discrepancy between an E source (Sarah last seen at age 90 plus) and a P source (Sarah dead at age 127.)

⁶ See note 8 below. For weaning at age 3, see Sarna, 146.

⁷ Sarah sees Abraham alone: *Torah Shelimah* Vol. 4, p. 918, note 5, quoted in W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Torah A Modern Commentary*, (New York: UAHC, 1975), 159; Sarah hears from Satan: G. Friedlander, trans., *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1916 [1981]), chapter 32; Isaac himself recounts the events: *Leviticus Rabbah* 20:2; W. G. Braude and I. J. Kapstein, trans., *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975), Piska 26.3.

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⁸ A related mystery, though not the direct focus of this article, is the age of Isaac at the Akiedah, as depicted in Genesis 22. If the time sequence of Genesis 23 (which begins with the announcement of Sarah's death) follows directly upon that of Genesis 22, Isaac would be 37 years old. In Genesis 22:5, Isaac is termed a "lad" (נער, *na'ar*) by his father. Thirty-seven-year-old men are not lads. More to the point, the depiction of Isaac in Genesis 22 is that of a young boy. His dialogue with Abraham sounds like that of a youngster.

⁹ It could be argued, of course, that Sarah has first-hand knowledge that God talked with Abraham and that he was not eccentric. After all, she was present at one of those conversations and, in fact, took part in it by defending herself against a charge of laughing (Genesis 18:11-15). In truth, though, this could not have occurred as Genesis reports it. Only Moses had the privilege of actual conversation with God. "Hear these My words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses...; with him I speak mouth to mouth..." (Numbers 12:6-8)

¹⁰ It is equally possible that it was indeed Abram, as he is then called, who undertakes the journey, but with his father as part of the entourage. Genesis 11 only says it was Terach who set out for Canaan because he, after all, is the head of the family at that point. In any case, Terach drops out and Abram completes the journey, which the text in Genesis 12:5 seems to underscore when it pointedly states, "they set out for the land of Canaan and they arrived in the land of Canaan" (this is the literal translation of the verse; JPS renders it otherwise).

¹¹ Sarah's powers are greater than that of Abraham's, *Exodus Rabbah* 1.1. Sarah is also accounted as a prophet, *Babylonian Talmud* tractate *M'gillah* 14b. Sarah's concerns about Abraham's eccentric behavior may have surfaced earlier, even before she became pregnant with Isaac. The origins for this plan may have focused on Ishmael, for he was her official son, albeit through a surrogate mother (see Genesis 16:2). When Abraham suddenly introduced the concept of circumcision, Sarah probably saw it as another example of strange behavior. In the event, within a year of Abraham and Ishmael's circumcision, Sarah became pregnant. This required her to postpone the implementation of the "B'er L'chai Ro-i plan."

¹² S. J. Teubel, *Hagar the Egyptian* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 77.

¹³ The idea of co-mothers with shared responsibilities repeats as a theme in Genesis 37:10. Joseph suggests that the sun and moon are to bow down to him. Jacob asks Joseph, "Are your mother and I to do this?" Yet Jacob's mother, Rachel, has been dead a long time. "Your mother" refers to Leah (or perhaps to Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, all of whom are Joseph's step-mothers)—the other mother figure(s) in Joseph's life. Thanks to Daniel M. Zucker for pointing out this parallel, and making some other suggestions to an earlier draft of this work.

¹⁴ See note 9.

¹⁵ Genesis 16:14 refers to a well at B'er L'chai Ro-i. There Hagar finds sustenance when she is in the desert. I extrapolate that this well is an oasis, for as mentioned below, Isaac also will live there (Genesis 24:62; 25:11.) B'er L'chai Ro-i is only mentioned in Genesis, and the name itself means "the Well of the Living One Who sees me." Although its locale is unknown today, it was located in the Negev, perhaps 25 miles or so southwest of Beersheba, between Kadesh and Bered (Genesis 16:14). Bered is associated with Nabatean ruins some 12 miles southwest of Beersheba (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 6:690). Kadesh is probably some 50 miles southwest of Beersheba (M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 106.

¹⁶ Traditional commentators support Sarah in her desire to force Hagar and Ishmael from the Abrahamic encampment. They portray Ishmael as a villain. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 30; *Genesis Rabbah* 53.11. See also *Exodus Rabbah* 1.1; *Tosefta Sotah* 6.6, among other sources.

¹⁷ When in Genesis 22 Abraham goes on a three-day journey he takes a donkey. The absence of a pack animal, and other provisions, suggests that Hagar and Ishmael's destination is not far away and, based on Hagar's first journey to B'er L'chai Ro-i, when she was running away and clearly not as well provisioned, it could not have been a very far journey. That Abraham loves his son Ishmael is not in question. Further, as mentioned elsewhere in this article, God has promised descendants through Ishmael, so neither the teen-ager nor his mother are being cast off to die.

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¹⁸ *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, chapters 30 and 31.

¹⁹ That Ishmael keeps Isaac company when he goes to see Abraham is supported by the tradition that Ishmael and Eliezer are the servants accompanying Abraham and Isaac on the road to Moriah, *Leviticus Rabbah* 20.2. Eliezer later represents Isaac's interests when he travels north to find a wife for him (*Genesis Rabbah* 60.4; the servant Abraham sends is not identified in Genesis).

²⁰ The Hebrew יהדו וילכו יחדו (*vayailchu yachdav*, they departed together) is a wonderfully ironic contrast to Genesis 22:6 and 8, where the references are to Abraham and Isaac walking "together."

²¹ There is some debate among the traditional commentators about where Isaac is living. Rashi (comment to Genesis 24:67) has Isaac living in B'er L'chai Ro-i. Ramban and Onkelos argue that Isaac was living in Beersheba (comment to Genesis 24:67). That Isaac occasionally went to Beersheba is not a problem, over two dozen years he probably visited his father there periodically. *Genesis Rabbah* 60.14 specifically links Isaac and Hagar at B'er L'chai Ro-i.

²² *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, Piska 26.3.

²³ For a possible reason why, see Shammai Engelmayer, "Ivri: Naming Ourselves", *Judaism*, Vol. 54, No. 1-2, (Winter-Spring 2005) 16-17.

²⁴ See David J. Zucker, "Conflicting Conclusions: The Hatred of Isaac and Ishmael" in *JUDAISM*, (Winter 1990), 39.1, 37-46.