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Sarah is the Shofar
The Binding of Isaac, The Shofar: Sarah's Tears

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Following the story of the binding of Isaac, the Torah teaches that Sarah, his mother, died. The Midrash does not see this as coincidence and we are told that the cry of the Shofar are the tears of Sarah. The following are several midrashim which explain why Sarah died after the binding of Isaac.

After the Midrashim, a later commentator, Rashi, gives his elliptical interpretation which is related to the midrashim that precede it. Read these midrashim closely.

Are the small differences between the midrashim significant?

Tanach - Genesis Chapter 22-23:2

1. And it came to pass after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham; and he said, Behold, here I am.
2. And he said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.
3. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and broke the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him.
4. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place far away.
5. And Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come back to you.
6. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.
7. And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, My father; and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?
8. And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering; so they went both of them together.
9. And they came to the place which God had told him; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.
10. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
11. And the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Here am I.
12. And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you did not withhold your son, your only son from me.
13. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a

thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son.

14. And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-Yireh; as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

15. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven the second time,

16. And said, By myself have I sworn, said the Lord, for because you have done this thing, and have not withhold your son, your only son;

17. That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed my voice.

19. So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba...

1. And Sarah was a hundred and twenty seven years old; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2. And Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba; which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; *and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her*

Leviticus Rabba on Genesis 23:1-2

Abraham was not happy in this world of Mine and you seek to be happy! A son was born to him when he was a hundred years old, and in the end the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Take now your son... and offer him... for a burnt-offering (ib. 22:22)! Abraham went a distance of three days journey. After three days he perceived a cloud resting on the top of a mountain. Said he to Isaac: 'My son, do you see what I see?' 'Yes,' he answered him. 'What do you see?' he inquired. He told him: 'I see a cloud resting on the top of the mountain.' He said to Ishmael and Eliezer: 'Do you see anything?' 'No,' they answered him... He took Isaac his son and led him up mountains and down hills. He took him up on one of the mountains, built an altar, arranged the wood, prepared the altar pile, and took the knife to slay him. Had not an angel from heaven called him, Isaac would have already been slain. There is proof that this is so, for Isaac returned to his mother and she said to him: 'Where have you been, my son?' Said he to her: 'My father took me and led me up mountains and down hills,' etc. 'Alas,' she said, 'for the son of a hapless woman! Had it not been for the angel you would by now have been slain!' 'Yes,' he said to her. **Thereupon she uttered six cries, corresponding to the six blasts of the *Shofar*.** It has been said: She had scarcely finished speaking when she died. Hence it is written, And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her (ib. 23:2). Where did he come from? Rabbi Judah son of Rabbi Shimon said: He came from Mount Moriah. Now Abraham harbored doubts in his heart and thought: Perhaps, heaven forbid, some disqualifying blemish has been found in him and his offering has not been accepted. A heavenly voice went forth and said to him: 'Go your way, eat your bread with joy...for God has already accepted your works' (Kohelet 9:7).

Midrash Tanchuma on the Binding of Isaac

He came to the place to which God had told him to go, and he bound Isaac, his son:

When Abraham came to slaughter Isaac, Isaac said to him: "Father, bind my hands and legs, for the soul is impudent and when I see the knife I may be frightened and the sacrifice will be no good because my trembling will cause you to make a blemish."

Immediately, Abraham cast forth his hand and took the knife with which he would slaughter his son. Isaac said, "Father, do not tell my mother when she is by the well, or when she is standing on the roof, lest she fall and die. Immediately, they built the altar and Abraham bound his son upon it, and he took the knife and prepared to slaughter him drawing a cheekful of blood from Isaac. Satan came and pushed Abraham's hand and Abraham dropped the knife, and when he cast his hand to pick it up, the heavenly voice came, and called out from the heavens, "Do not cast your hand upon this boy." If it was not for this he would have already been slaughtered.

At that very moment Satan went to Sarah and disguised himself as Isaac. When she saw him, she asked: "My son, what has your father done to you?" He answered, "My father took me and made me climb up mountains and go down into valleys and he made me climb up a certain mountain, and built an altar. He set up the altar and arranged the kindling and bound me on the altar. He then took the knife to slaughter me. If the Holy One had not called out, "Do not cast your hand on this boy." I would have been slaughtered." He did not complete his sentence when, Sarah's soul had already gone from her. Thus it is written, "And Abraham *came* to mourn for Sarah and to cry for her." Where did he come from? From Mount Moriah. [Where the binding of Isaac occurred.]

Midrash Pirkei D'rebbe Eliezer, Chapter 31

When Abraham returned from Mount Moriah, Satan became infuriated. He had not gotten what he desired which was to thwart the sacrifice of Abraham. What did he do? He went to Sarah and asked: "Did you hear what happened in the world?" She answered, "No." He said, "Abraham took Isaac his son and slaughtered him, offering him up on the altar as a sacrifice." Sarah began to cry, and moan the sound of three wails which correspond to the three blasts of the *shofar*, and her soul burst forth from her and she died. Abraham came only to find that she had died. From where had he come? From Mount Moriah.

YOUR MIDRASH NAVIGATOR

How is Sarah portrayed in each Midrash?

What is the significance of introducing the devil into one of the Midrashim?

How do you understand the devil?

Why is Sarah so deeply connected to the Shofar?

Who is to blame for Sarah's death? What did they do wrong?

Rashi's commentary on Genesis 23:2

Rashi is the oral tradition's most popular medieval commentator on the Torah. He

usually quotes from midrashim.

And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her: The telling of Sarah's death directly follows the binding of Isaac, because when Sarah is told about the binding of Isaac where her son has been prepared for slaughter and then was nearly not slaughtered, her soul flew from her and she died.

YOUR RASHI NAVIGATOR

1. Which of the midrashim did Rashi use?
2. What does the phrase nearly not slaughtered mean?