וַיֵּרָא

Vayera

Genesis 18:1–22:24 — three visitors, Sodom, Abimelech, Isaac and Ishmael, the Binding

Mega Bible
parasha sheet
theothermatthewmiller.com

THE PARASHA BY THE NUMBERS

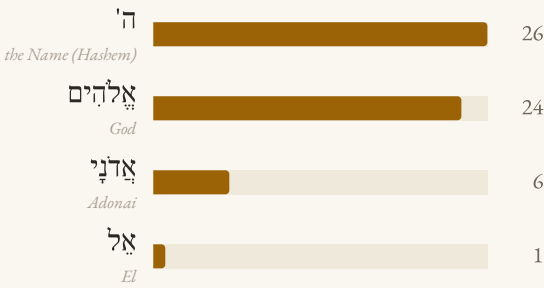
147	2085	438	13
VERSES	WORDS	DISTINCT ROOTS	HAPAX LEGOMENA

MOST FREQUENT ROOTS



Averaging **14.2 words** a verse. The longest verse is **19:8** at 29 words — Lot offering the mob his two daughters, **אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא**; the shortest, **21:24**, has only 4 — **וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי**, Abraham agreeing to swear to Abimelech.

WHAT THE PARASHA CALLS GOD



Four designations, and a hand-off that happens twice. Chapter 18 is the Name's, ה׳ ten times and אֱלֹהִים not once; אֱלֹהִים takes over in Gerar (six of chapter 20's eight) and holds chapter 21, eleven times. The Binding splits five and five: אֱלֹהִים tests and commands, and ה׳ enters with the angel's call (22:11). Four of the six אֲדֹנָי are Abraham's plea for Sodom (18:27–32); Abimelech echoes it: אֲדֹנָי הֲגוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תַּהֲרֹג (20:4).

THIRTEEN WORDS THAT OCCUR NOWHERE ELSE IN THE BIBLE

19:29 **הַהֲפֵכָה** ‹הֲפֵכָה› — H2018
destruction

19:38 **בֶּן עַמִּי** ‹בֶּן־עַמִּי› — H1151
Ben-Ammi, a son of Lot

21:16 **כִּמְטַחֲוֵי** ‹טָחָה› — H2909
to stretch a bow, as an archer

21:20 **קַשָּׁת** — H7199
a bowman

22:9 **וַיַּעֲקֹד** ‹עָקַד› — H6123
to tie with thongs

22:22 **כֶּשֶׂד** — H3777
Kesed, a relative of Abraham

22:22 **חָזוֹ** — H2375
Chazo, a nephew of Abraham

22:22 **פִּלְדָּשׁ** — H6394
Pildash, a relative of Abraham

22:22 **יִדְלָף** — H3044
Jidlaph, a Mesopotamian

22:24 **רְאוּמָה** — H7208
Reumah, a Syrian woman

22:24 **טֶבַח** — H2875

22:24 **גַּחַם** — H1514

Tebach, the name of a Mesopotamian and of an Israelite

Gacham, a son of Nahor

22:24 **תַּחַשׁ** H8477

Tachash, a relative of Abraham

> Hapax legomena, counted against the whole Tanakh: thirteen of this parasha's 438 roots are used exactly once in all of Scripture, and 189 appear only once here. Nine sit in chapter 22: **וַיַּעֲקֹד** (22:9), the verb that named the Binding, and eight names in the last five verses, the sixty-word report of Nahor's family. Two are Hagar's archery, the bowshot **כִּמְטַחֲוִי** and the bowman **קַשָּׁת**, and two follow Sodom: **הַהֲפֵכָה**, the overthrow, and **בֶּן־עַמִּי**, the son who becomes Ammon.

19:29 הֲפֵכָה

the overthrow of Sodom becomes a revolution

וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה — God sent Lot out from the midst of the overthrow (19:29). הֲפֵכָה occurs only here, but its relative מַהְפֵּכָה is the Bible's word for Sodom's fate: מַהְפֵּכַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה (Deut. 29:22; cf. Amos 4:11). Modern Hebrew kept the root and turned it round: a מַהְפֵּכָה is a revolution, a הַפִּיכָה a coup. The word for a catastrophe that leaves nothing standing now means turning a world over on purpose.

22:9 וַיַּעֲקֹד

a once-only verb becomes the name of the story

The Torah never calls Genesis 22 a sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ, bound his son (22:9), and this is the only use of the root עקד in the Bible. Tradition named the chapter after its single hapax: עֲקֵדַת יִצְחָק. In Modern Hebrew the עֲקֵדָה is shorthand for the sacrifice of sons, above all a generation lost to the nation's wars, and a poem or play on the עקדה is close to a genre.

22:1 נִסָּה

a test that proves a person becomes an attempt

וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם — God tested Abraham (22:1), a trial that shows what a person is made of. Modern Hebrew uses the same verb for any attempt: נִסִּיתִי, "I tried"; a נִסּוּי is a lab experiment, and נִסָּיוֹן is an attempt and the experience on a CV. Balashon asks whether נֵס, a miracle, is the same family: Abraham's ten trials against Egypt's ten miracles. The Mega Bible annotation cites Ma'agarim (Mendele, 1862, among the early examples) and Ben-Yehuda.

21:20 רֹבֶה קַשָּׁת

an archer becomes a rifle

Of Ishmael in the wilderness: וַיְהִי רֹבֶה קַשָּׁת — he became an archer (21:20). קַשָּׁת, "bowman", is a once-only word, and Hagar had sat down כִּמְטַחֲוֵי קֶשֶׁת, a bowshot off (21:16), the parasha's other archery hapax. The participle רֹבֶה, a shooter (its root is debated), is the form Modern Hebrew uses for the weapon: רוֹבֶה is a rifle. The man who shoots gave his name to the thing he shoots with. Sources: Ma'agarim (Mendele, 1862) and Ben-Yehuda.

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>
> נתנו בידי רובה כדי להגן על חיי-ולמרבה הצער גם להרוג בשעת סכנה
>
> A State Archives sheet whose headline puts a רובה, "rifle", in a soldier's hands "to protect my life, and unfortunately also to kill in a moment of danger." Plain public vocabulary.

NINE NARRATIVE UNITS, BY WORD COUNT



וַיֵּרָא	חָלִלָה לְךָ	סְדֹם	בְּנוֹת לוֹט	גְּרָר	יִצְחָק	בְּאֵר שָׁבַע	הַנְּעָרִי	נָחוֹר
Three visitors; Sarah laughs	Abraham pleads for Sodom	The angels, Lot, the overthrow	Lot's daughters: Moab & Ammon	Abimelech takes Sarah	Isaac born; Hagar & Ishmael sent out	Treaty with Abimelech	The binding of Isaac	Nahor's family
189 words	248 words	440 words	123 words	282 words	278 words	158 words	307 words	60 words

The overthrow of Sodom is the longest unit, 440 words, and Nahor's family the shortest, 60: the parasha spends more than seven times as many words on a city's end as on the news, in its last verses, that Rebekah has been born. The Binding, famous for its restraint, takes 307.

MORE FROM THE MODERN HEBREW LAYER

18:4 **עֵץ**
the tree under which they rest → Modern Hebrew splits "wood" (עץ) from the Aramaic אִילָן for a tree; Balashon on Kutscher's Tu BiShvat question

18:6 **סֹלֶת**
fine flour for Sarah's cakes → semolina (Balashon, "solet and semolina")

18:8 **חֶמְאָה**
what Abraham serves with milk → butter (Balashon, "chemah")

18:25 **חָלִלָה לְךָ**
"far be it from You" → חַס וְחָלִילָה, God forbid (Balashon, "chalila and chas")

19:24 **גָּפְרִית**

21:6 **צְחֹק**

Sodom's brimstone → גַּפְרוּר, a match; Ben-Yehuda's מַדְלֵק lost out (Balashon, "gafrur")

Sarah's laughter → laughter, play, mockery and intimacy (Balashon, "tzchok")

21:23 **נִין וָנֶכֶד**

descendants → great-grandson and grandson (Balashon, "neched and achyan")

DEVICES MARKED IN THE MEGA BIBLE

18:26 **סְדֹם**

synecdoche · Rashi

19:24 **גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ**

hendiadys · Orlinsky

20:4 **הַגּוֹי**

synecdoche · Radak; Seforno

20:16 **לְאָחִיהָ**

sarcasm · Prager

21:23 **וּלְנִינִי וּלְנֶכְדִּי**

wordplay · Orlinsky

22:19 **אַבְרָהָם**

synecdoche · Ibn Ezra; Radak

URIEL SIMON ON VAYERA

> Prof. Uriel Simon z"l read this parasha as the place where Abraham's contradictions meet: he argues with God over Sodom, and on Moriah, and then to his son, he answers with a single word, **הִנֵּנִי** (22:1, 7).
>
> **מתוך ביטחון גמור בשיפוט המוסרי העצמי שלו הריהו מטיח כלפי בוראו "חללה לך מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם רשע"... (י"ח, 25).**
>
> Out of complete confidence in his own moral judgment he flings at his Creator, "That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked"... (18:25). — *Biblical Abraham: The Blessing of Contradictions*. Read the full sheet at theothermatthewmiller.com/uriel-simon/vayera.