

The Voice of Abraham
Prose Poem by
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Editor's Note:

Fr. Dominic Rover, O.P. planned to write a number of dramatic monologues by various important characters in the Old and New Testaments, each speaking in his or her own voice. He only managed two of them before illness prevented further work. We published the first of these below, The Voice of Abraham.

A subsequent issue of Logos Review will offer The Voice of Moses.

Author's Introduction

This is written in the form of a dramatic monologue. My intention is to honor three distinct values: one, fidelity to the scriptural message; two, an authentic feeling for the scriptural character who is speaking; and three, a contemporary feel for setting. Not contemporary in time and place, but in mood and language and human concern. I will be happy if I can harmonize these values in a work that reflects the ageless attractions of the word of God. I will be happier still if the word seems to come alive in these little pieces, inspiring and nourishing a faith which we do not always experience as a living thing.

The Voice of Abraham

THAT WAS A STRANGE BARGAIN Yahweh struck with me at Ur of the Chaldeans. He promised to give me what I wanted most—abundant land; a progeny as numerous as the stars in the sky, as the sands of the sea; bounty of the womb; bounty of the ripening earth—a nest of promises given to an old man with a barren wife and the sea of sand before him scarcely fit for traveling. All—in exchange for what? Belief in the promises plus a willingness to leave home, to pack up and go whenever Yahweh called. Belief in the promises.

I caught Sarah's eye across the bare altar of a shrine we built to honor Yahweh. She smiled at me as though to say, "Take the bargain while you can. You don't have to believe in every little detail." Straightforward as always, but not always respectful, Sarah shared with me the common flaw of nomads—a passion for the land and a passion for a selective disbelief. Yet I have always thought it was one of the chief duties of a wife to examine bargains carefully to protect the family patrimony, however small, and to detect with a woman's shrewdness all pacts and promises

that seemed to be one, unclear; two, grandiose; or three, dangerously naïve.

I'm not surprised that Yahweh was angry and even hurt, but He doesn't know Sarah the way I do. Still, I wish she hadn't laughed out loud at His grand and secret promise to overcome her barrenness. Whether you believe in a promise like that or not, it's bound to be a shock to a woman her age, planning a different kind of future for herself and her husband. Besides, Sarah isn't well. Remember that attack she had last year? She still wakes up in anguish, muffling cry after cry (or so she says) so that I might sleep right through. I always feel much better when I sleep right through the night. And it was very confusing to her – first the promise of Isaac, the natural son; then the alternate plan with Ishmael that left her shaken, unprepared, and of course, fearing the worst.

"Maybe I'll have a miscarriage," she said. "Maybe the business with Hagar and Ishmael won't work out. Maybe Yahweh will punish us for our disbelief and revoke the promises. Maybe Isaac will be a weakling, too compliant for his own good, unable to take up the burdens of leadership after you are gone. And remember, we still have a long, long way to go before we reach the land that Yahweh has willed to us by promise. I can see you now, Abram," she said fondly, "trudging ankle-deep in a sea of sand, head down, leaning against the wind, balanced like a crippled dancer. Remember the sand storm at Bethel? Yahweh sent a friendly whirlwind to bedevil the camp of our enemy. Suddenly it veered toward *us*. They were scared and we were stuck, half of our tents scattered or destroyed. Is that the way Yahweh blesses his children who believe in Him? Or have we been too trusting with our wayside shrines and our easy faith in the promises? Someday, Abram, you'll thank me for my doubts and misgivings. I'll do my part, but I won't be *too* surprised if it turns out badly." This was Sarah's reading of the promises – the logic of the possible and the ardor of the anxious wife.

But I know something about Yahweh that she could never, never understand. When He makes a promise, it's like the rush, the implacable rush of a waterfall that cannot be dammed or diverted. When He sets His mind on something, He pours out His heart like a young lover and is puzzled when we try to measure His love in bowls and cups, cups and bowls. We look for equity where there *is* none; equity for Him is the excitement of giving more than He can ever receive. Equity is His passion for giving. His passion for emptying out everything, pockets, purses, and promises until there is nothing left except the bare sweet passion of giving.

In the end, yielding to our complaints, forgetting the mockery of His own, favoring the claim of the impossible, Yahweh gave us our natural son. Like the springtime burst of flowers of the desert floor, there Isaac blossomed in the barren womb of Sarah to be son of our blood, the life of our people yet to come. For her, he was a comfort in her old age. For me, he was a sign of that test of faith, of the miracle of faith.

I remember the day Yahweh marked Isaac out for sacrifice at my hands. The child walked beside me up the long path to Mount Mariah, his hand in mine, babbling on the way, his mother's child, always asking questions. I had no answers, save the knife and the sticks of wood for the fire, while Sarah murmured at the outrage. "Yahweh gives and Yahweh takes away." The bleeding ram struggled in the thorn bush, then gave himself to Abram's knife.

"There is no other way than the way of faith," Abram said.

"And faith always calls for a victim," the ram said.

"If there *is* none, then *I* will be the victim," Yahweh said.

