



## Abraham's Hospitality

### New Testament Hebrews 13:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup>Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

<sup>1</sup>Ἡ φιλαδελφία μενέτω. <sup>2</sup>τῆς φιλοξενίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε, διὰ ταύτης γὰρ ἔλαθόν τινες ξενίσαντες ἀγγέλους.

English translation: NRSV

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### Introduction

The letter to the Hebrews investigates the connection between Jesus and the Law of Moses. It attempts to convince the Jewish Christians of the time not to forsake their faith in Jesus in order to avoid persecutions. The author argues that Jesus is the complete revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This passage is one example among many that the author draws from the Hebrew Bible; he uses them to show how faith in God requires trusting in God's promises, even when not receiving the things promised. After attempting to convince the recipients not to forsake the faith, the author now provides them some practical instructions.



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### Quran

#### Scattering [Winds], 51:24-30

24 [Muhammad], have you heard the story of the honoured guests of Abraham? 25 They went in to see him and said, 'Peace.' 'Peace,' he said, [adding to himself] 'These people are strangers.' 26 He turned quickly to his household, brought out a fat calf, 27 and placed it before them. 'Will you not eat?' he said, 28 beginning to be afraid of them, but they said, 'Do not be afraid.' They gave him good news of a son who would be gifted with knowledge. 29 His wife then entered with a loud cry, struck her face and said, 'A barren old woman?'" 30 but they said, 'It will be so. This is what your Lord said, and He is the Wise, the All Knowing.'

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾ إِذْ دَخَلُوا  
عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ  
فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ فَقَرَّبَهُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾  
فَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً ﴿٢٨﴾ قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ ۖ وَبَشَّرُوهُ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٩﴾  
فَأَقْبَلَتِ امْرَأَتُهُ فِي صَرَاقَةٍ فَصَكَتْ وَجْهَهَا وَقَالَتْ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٌ ﴿٣٠﴾  
قَالُوا كَذٰلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣١﴾

English Translation: Abdel Haleem

### Introduction

This passage is taken from chapter 51 of the Quran. It is an early Meccan chapter and takes its name from the first verse, traditionally considered to refer to 'angels' or the earthly wind. The chapter deals with explaining the Day of Judgement and how the Prophets and the righteous deal with God's commands. The selected verses, 24-30, consider Abraham's hospitality to strangers. According to a traditional explanation the visitors were the angels Gabriel, Michael and Israfil on their way to visit the prophet Lot. Abraham grows afraid when they do not eat his food, and he realises that they might be angels (who do not eat). Abraham is said to have gone and prepared from the best of his cattle. The "son" mentioned here is Isaac.



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### Hebrew Bible

#### Genesis 18:1-8

<sup>1</sup>The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths\* of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. <sup>2</sup>Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, <sup>3</sup>he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. <sup>5</sup>And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on – seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

<sup>6</sup>Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" <sup>7</sup>Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to the servant boy, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

English Translation: JPS 1985

א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵא; וְהוּא יָשָׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם. ב וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו, וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו; וַיֵּרָא וַיָּרֶץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה. ג וַיֹּאמֶר: אֵלֵי אֵם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ--אֵל-נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ. ד יִקַּח-נָא מַעֲט-מִים וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם; וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ תַחַת הָעֵץ. ה וְאָקַחְהָ פַת-לֶחֶם וְסִעְדּוּ לְבָבְכֶם אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ--כִּי-עַל-כֵּן עָבַרְתֶּם עַל-עַבְדְּכֶם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּן תַעֲשֶׂה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ.

ו וַיָּמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה אֶל-שָׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר מְהֵרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קָמַח סִלְת--לוּשִׁי וְעֲשִׂי עֲגוֹת. ז וְאֶל-הַבָּקָר רֵץ אַבְרָהָם; וַיִּקַּח בֶּן-בָּקָר רַךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנַּעַר וַיָּמַהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ. ח וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה וְחֵלֶב וּבֶן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהֶם; וְהוּא-עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ.

### Introduction

The chapter immediately before our text tells of God's command to Abraham to circumcise himself and his household, a practice called *brit milah* which continues in Jewish communities to this day. The circumcision is the sign of an everlasting covenant between God and Abraham's offspring. Circumcision would usually be carried out eight days after birth, but Abraham here is one hundred! The Rabbinic commentators pick up on the fact that Abraham is sitting in the entrance of his tent at the heat of the day, as he recovers from his circumcision; they see it as a sign of great hospitality, as he is looking out for guest despite his great pain.

Abraham does not seem to know his three guests, and there are hints throughout that they might be angelic messengers. In verse 3, the pronouns and verbs are singular, as if Abraham is speaking to one man. In verse four, they are plural, and they continue to switch throughout this passage.

In preparing food for the three strangers, Abraham is self-deprecating in relation to the great effort he goes to. It is interesting to note that Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut* (chronologically given much later in the time of Moses) are not observed as dairy and meat products are served together.

### Text notes:

\*A *terebinth* is usually understood to be an oak tree

\*\* Each seah is nearly 150 egg-sized portions. Therefore this would have been a huge amount of food!