

Rashi states in general terms “to visit the sick” rather than more specifically “to visit him,” because... God meant to establish a general precedent for man to emulate. Had Rashi stated that it was specifically to visit Abraham in his sickness, then people might be misled to construe that only the righteous ill are to be visited.

... God visited the convalescing Abraham to signify Divine approval of his compliance with God’s command; the revelation itself constituting the reward for his obedience.

- 5-39 On the purported significations of the heat of the sun that day, see Matt and Zlotowitz.<sup>1085</sup>
- 5-40 Mizrachi notes: “The sick normally stay indoors. Abraham went outdoors so that he could offer hospitality to passing travelers.”<sup>1086</sup>
- 5-41 Zlotowitz cites Ramban’s observation: “In the literal sense, the *Torah* mentions that Abraham was sitting by the door of his tent to inform us that Abraham had not expected a prophetic vision. He had neither ‘fallen on his face’ [to make himself fit to receive prophecy,] nor was he engaged in prayer; it came upon him unexpectedly as a sign of favor...”<sup>1087</sup>

Legend further recounts that Abraham was sitting under the paradisiacal oak of Mamre when he received the visit of the three strangers. Sometimes identified with the Tree of Life, the oak was reputed to possess healing properties and powers that ultimately enabled Abraham to “rectify the world” in his day.<sup>1088</sup> Traditions speak of a nearby altar where ritual meals, offerings, and the receipt of divine oracles and revelations could take place.<sup>1089</sup> Religious devotions performed in such settings were an approved necessity in nomadic times, but were later condemned when they became a distorted substitute for temple worship.<sup>1090</sup>

Three sites in the vicinity of Hebron have been associated with the location of Abraham’s tree. One of these locations, venerated since the beginning of the Middle Ages and located near the site the church of the Holy Trinity Monastery (Moskabia) built in 1871, is kept by the Russian Orthodox Church. Located about 1 km. west of the bypass road, it was the subject of contention among the Palestinians and two different factions of the Russian Orthodox Church from 1997-2007.<sup>1091</sup> Israel Abrahams gave the following description of the site in 1912:

Abraham’s Oak<sup>1092</sup> is still shown at Hebron, and one can well imagine how it was thought that this magnificent terebinth dated from Bible times. A few years ago it was a fresh, vigorous giant, but now it is quite decayed. The ruin began in 1853, when a large branch was broken off by the weight of the snow. Twelve years ago the Russian Archimandrite of Jerusalem purchased the land on which the tree stands, and naturally he took much care of the relic. In fact, he took too much care, for some people think that the low wall which the Russians erected as a safeguard round the Oak, has been the cause of the rapid decay that has since set in. Year by year the branches have dropped off, the snow and the lightning have had their victims. It is said that only two or three years ago one branch towards the East was still living, but when I saw it, the trunk was bare and bark-less, full of little worm-holes, and quite without a spark of vitality...

Abrahams’ description still fits what I found in a visit to the site in May 2008.

Sites identified with the oak of Mamre at an earlier date include Jebel er-Rumeide and Ramet el-Khalil.<sup>1093</sup> At the latter location, poorly preserved Herodian, Roman, and Byzantine ruins can be seen, as well as signs of towers and walls from the Davidic kingdom and the early monarchy.<sup>1094</sup> About the site, Wilkinson writes:

1085 D. C. Matt, *Zohar 1*, Be-Reshit 1:21b, p. 162; R. M. Zlotowitz *et al.*, *Bereishis*, 18:1, pp. 126-127.

1086 *Sifsei Chachomim*, cited in Rashi, *Genesis Commentary*, 18:1, 2:174.

1087 Cited in R. M. Zlotowitz *et al.*, *Bereishis*, 18:1, p. 626.

1088 D. E. Callender, *Adam*, pp. 43ff; L. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:235 n. 137; H. Schwartz, *Tree*, 519, pp. 404-405. See also *Excursus 45: Impact of the “Black Death” on Art and Literature*, p. 640.

1089 T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, pp. 125-126.

1090 *Ibid.*, pp. 122-136. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 12:2; Isaiah 1:29; Hosea 4:13; cf. D&C 124:30. Other OT mentions of oaks possibly associated with a cultic function include Genesis 35:4; Judges 9:6, 37; 1 Samuel 10:3.

1091 *Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia*.

1092 *Balut es-Sebat* = Oak of Rest.

1093 = Arabic “the high place of the Friend,” i.e., Abraham; cf. Hebrew “Hebron” from *haver* = friend.

1094 C. Umhau Wolf, cited in Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, Section A, n. 5; *Mamre*.