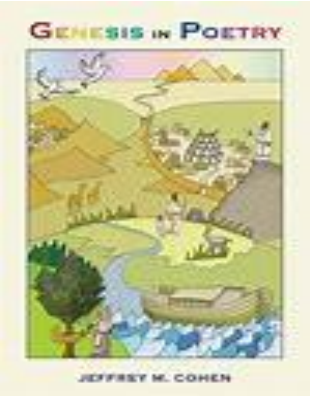
Excerpted from

Genesis in Poetry

(Copyright © Jeffrey M Cohen, 2019
Available from the publishers, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon, USA,
Amazon Books, and Kindle edition.)



This rendering of the main episodes of the Biblical book of Genesis into rhymed verse is a ground-breaking literary exercise. Its inspiration is Midrash, the folklore of Judaism, which supplements the Biblical narrative in a fascinating, engaging and informative manner, adding new insights into the text by entering into the minds of the main characters to reveal character, psycholo…

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LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS
(Gen. 19:30 -38)

Lot and his daughters fled in fear
To a cave in a mountainside,
Where they stayed for many a year,
Losing all sense of pride.

One sister said to the other,
‘‘If all the young men are dead,
Where will we find two suitors

To whom we might be wed?
But if God has destroyed his entire world,
Yet preserved us alive,
Then surely our task is to procreate
To enable it to survive.

‘‘As I see it, there’s but one male
To provide us both with seed,
And that is dad -
And I know it’s bad -
But this *is* a critical need.

‘‘Let’s ply him with an abundance of wine—
The strongest he’s ever produced—
And when he’s drunk let’s lie with him,
That he might be seduced.’’

The girls lay down on succeeding nights
In their drunken father’s bed,
Where they both conceived
And Lot became
To his own daughters wed!

The older girl brazenly called
Her son *Moab*—
“From dad”;
The younger named hers *Ben-Ami*,
“Of my people”—
A fine young lad.

* * *

ISAAC AND ISHMAEL
(Gen. 21:1 – 21)

True to God’s promise,
Sarah gave birth
To a son called Isaac,
Meaning “laughter” or “mirth”;
Recalling the trust
She’d hitherto lacked,
That God renews bodies,
By old age once racked.

She’d laughed at that time
At elderly passion;
Now her friends were laughing
At her baby’s milk ration!

But the child grew up in his father's tradition,
Believing in God and in his own mission:
To transmit the truth both far and wide,
And be heaven's witness,
In love and pride.

But Ishmael, his big brother,
Taunted him till he cried;
And his total lack of any faith
Was a thorn in Isaac's side.

''You worship a god,'' mocked Ishmael,
''Whom you cannot see;
Claiming him as Creator—
What supreme folly!
You also waste all your time,
Doing righteous deeds,
And preaching to all and sundry
Against idolatrous creeds,
When you could be fishing,
And hunting wild deer,
Or quenching your thirst
On wine and beer;
Lying in wait, to rob and maim,
Playing with friends a favorite game;
Admiring a maid in her skirt and blouse,
And seizing her as she milks the cows!''

Sarah heard Ishmael's godless taunts,
And his account of visits to unholy haunts;
She feared the influence that he exerted,
And the moral cause that he blithely perverted.

''We must drive him out,'' she announced one day.
''I know in my heart there's no other way
For us to preserve our home-life intact,
And never renege on the good Lord's pact.''

''We cannot do that,''
Was Abraham's reply.
''He remains our son
Till the day we die!''

But God whispered in his ear
That he mustn't shed a single tear,
But banish Ishmael from his home
And leave him entirely free to roam
And do whatever he may please—
Leaving Isaac alone
And at ease.

So, Hagar was banished with her son;
In Beersheba desert they strayed.
In time her reserves of water were gone,
So, she raised her voice and prayed
To the God of Sarah and Abraham,
To have mercy on their handmaid.

The sun beat down on Ishmael's head;
He collapsed,
And Hagar, filled with dread,
Dragged him to the shelter of a nearby shrub,
Squeezing out a drink of ripe carob.

She then caught the sound
Of a heavenly voice,
Giving her reason to rejoice:
A promise that Ishmael would soon proceed
To the destiny that God had decreed:

''*Arise, seize hold of the lad's hand;*
Look around and you shall see
Confirmation of my promise that
A great nation he shall be.''

Hagar raised her eyes and saw
A well that had sprung into view;
She filled up the empty flasks
For herself and Ishmael too.

The lad revived and made his home
In that rugged, desert place,
Where, together with his many friends,
He'd hunt and roam and race.

In tests of strength he was the best—
Acclaimed as a cut above the rest;
Amassing much ill-gotten gain,
Head of a horde,
Inflicting pain;
Seizing other people's wives,
Begetting children,
Destroying lives.