

THE LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP

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- I. We have already learned that the Scriptures were written with paragraph-like divisions called Parshiot (Parsha, singular). Furthermore, we have stated that each Parsha contains its own unique theme. That's why they exist, because they convey a complete thought. I'm sure you've noticed by now that some Parshiot are short (sometimes only one verse), whereas others are quite lengthy. In this week's lesson we will analyze the Parsha Stumah extending from Bereishit 18:1 - 19:38 s. I've chosen this Parsha because of 1) its length and 2) the fact that it apparently contains two separate and unrelated stories.
 - A. Read [Genesis 18:1 - 19:38](#). Note that there are no other parsha divisions in this story. What does that tell us *concerning the entire content of this Parsha*?ⁱ
 - B. How many stories or topics does this Parsha appear to contain? At first glance, does the story of the promise of a son to Abram and Sarai appear to be unrelated to the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah?
 - C. Even though they seem to be independent stories/topics, what is the significance that they appear within the same parsha? This is where thematic analysis will pay off. You must realize that each Parsha contains a unique theme. By knowing this, we are forced to realize that these two stories are definitely related and part of a unified theme.
- II. Although these two stories appear to be totally unrelated, we must find something that unites them in some manner.
 - A. What common theme, words, subject etc. (thematic connection), is common to both stories? That's right. The men are principle players in both stories.
 - B. Discuss how this common theme relates to both stories.ⁱⁱ
 - C. Next, let's determine if there are any verses that connect the two stories. In other words, are there any textual connections between the two stories?ⁱⁱⁱ
 - D. Read [Bereishit 18:17-19](#). What reason does God give for deciding to tell Avraham what He's about to do? Do you see what has just happened here with these verses? This is the connection we've been looking for. Note how the Torah thematically connects the judgment of Sodom with the promise of the son. How? The significance of the promise of the son is that **he will be the first step in the establishment of the nation!** Therefore, when God states, "*now that Avraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation,*" He is actually connecting the promise of Isaac's birth (the vehicle through which the nation will come) to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - E. Why does Torah make this thematic connection? We know that God is going to make a great nation out of Avraham's descendants so that his future descendants will be a blessing to all the nations of the world—Genesis 12:1-3.

THE LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP

- F. How will God's special nation be a blessing to all mankind (see 18:19)? This interpretation is based on the Pashat reading of the text. I know there is a Messianic fulfillment of this text also, but we're dealing with the literal meaning at this time.
 - G. Before going further, we must remember what we have already learned. Events in the lives of the Patriarchs are prophetic shadows of future events in the lives of their descendants. Therefore, we should expect that this episode featuring Avraham and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah may be a prophetic shadow of how the future nation of Israel will interact with the nations of the world.
- III. To tie this all together, we simply need to understand *why God tries to show Abraham that the future nation from his loins will have some effect on the destruction of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah.*
- A. Now put on your thematic thinking caps. Thematically, what does Avraham do after God told him that He was going to destroy Sodom? That's right! He was interceding! Do you see it?
 - B. What was the basis for Avraham asking God not to destroy Sodom?^{iv} Knowing that God's will is that all come to repentance, why would he not destroy a city for the sake of the righteous within it?
- IV. Let's wrap up the thematic connection between the two seemingly unrelated stories—the promise of the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God plans to make Avraham into a great nation. This nation is destined to be a witness to the glory of the one and only true Elohim to all other nations. Their mission is to be a light to the nations. They are to be a nation that practices righteousness and justice—Genesis 18:18-19. *In this manner they will be a blessing to all nations, showing them true righteousness and justice, so that they can perform proper teshuvah (repentance) and not need to suffer divine judgment (remember the flood and the generation of the tower of Babel).* The goal is that the other nations will perform teshuvah as a result of the example of righteousness and justice found in Israel and their intercession on behalf of those nations (more later). In fact, Isaiah rebuked Am Yisrael (Isaiah 26:18) because the nation had failed in its mission.

Questions about the Bible Reading:

1. What does vayera mean? (Gen. 18:1)
2. Where did God appear to Abraham? (18:1)
3. Who was Mamre? (18:1)
4. According to Jewish tradition, why was Abraham "sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day" at this time? (18:1)
5. What does Bikkur Cholim mean?

THE LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP

6. What did Abraham see while he was sitting at the door of his tent? (Gen 18:2)
7. What did Abraham do when he saw the three men? (18:2)
8. What does hachnasat orechim mean?
9. According to Jewish tradition, who were the three visitors? (18:2)
10. How did Abraham address the visitors? (Gen. 18:3)

Answers:

1. Vayera is the 3rd person masculine singular of the verb ra'ah, "to see," in the passive voice (niph'al) meaning "and he appeared," with the explicit subject of YHVH. Note that the direct object ("to him") is left indefinite, though we understand this to be Abraham, who had been circumcised three days earlier.
2. The LORD appeared to him "in the trees of Mamre" perhaps to demonstrate that just as an old tree still bears fruit, so would Abraham bear fruit in his old age.
3. Mamre was the name of one of the three Philistine chiefs who joined forces with Abraham in pursuit of Chedorlaomer to save Lot (Gen. 14:13,24). He was Abraham's friend...
4. He was recovering from his circumcision. The sages state that the LORD came to pay him a visit.
5. Bikkur cholim, or "visiting the sick," implies providing comfort and support to people who are ill, homebound, or otherwise in distress. It is considered an act of kindness to visit and care for the sick in their need.
6. Abraham saw three men standing above him. Abraham "ran" to them even though they stood over him because he understood their angelic nature and/or mission.
7. He ran to meet them and bowed himself before them.
8. Hospitality; hosting guests; showing kindness and charity to the stranger. This virtue is considered one of the major expressions of "gemilut chasadim", performing "acts of loving kindness." Abraham's tent was said to have had an entrance in each direction, open on all sides, so that anyone could easily enter.
9. The three visitors were three angels: Michael (sent to give the message to Abraham and Sarah about their forthcoming son); Gabriel (sent to deliver judgment upon Sodom), and Rafael (sent to heal Abraham from his wound of circumcision). According to Christian interpretation, the central Angel was Malakh Adonai – the Angel of the LORD, i.e., Yeshua before His incarnation (not Michael). Most rabbis regard God as being "in the background" here - sort of a "bystander" to the visitation, despite the grammatical absurdities this implies.

THE LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP

10. He called them (or Him) Adonai, indicating that Abraham understood this to be God. Note that Abraham said, “if I have found grace in your eyes,” the same phrase used to describe God’s view of Noach (Gen. 6:8)
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