



Understanding the Parsha

Bereishit (Genesis) 18:1 - 19:38 □

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

Understanding a Difficult Parsha

We are learning that the Scriptures were written with paragraph-like divisions called **Parshiot** (Parsha, singular). Each Parsha contains its own unique theme. That's why they exist, because they reveal a complete thought. I'm sure you've noticed by now that some Parshiot are short (sometimes only one verse), and others are very long. In this week's lesson we will examine the Parsha Stumah which is Bereishit 18:1 - 19:38 □. We will look at this Parsha because of

- 1) its length and
- 2) the fact that it contains two separate and unrelated stories.

A. Let's begin by reading Genesis 18:1 - 19:38. Can you see that there are no other parsha divisions in this story? That tells us that every portion of this parsha has one unique theme.

B. So then, how many stories or topics does this Parsha appear to contain? Circle the correct answer

2 4 6 8

There appears to be two separate stories

When you first read the stories, did 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? Circle the correct answer

Yes No

Yes

C. Even though they seem to be two different stories, why is it important that they appear together within the same parsha? Circle the correct answer

The two stories together in one parsha teaches us to think that there is a common theme that unites the two stories together.

The two stories together are in one parsha are there so that we learn two more things in one week.

Teaches us to think that there is a common theme that unites the two stories together.

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 seek to find something that unites them in some way.

A. Can you find a common theme, or words, or subject (*thematic connection*), that is in both stories?

Fill in the blanks to find the connection

So he lifted his eyes and looked, and saw three _____ standing opposite him. Genesis 18:2

So the _____ turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but YHWH still stood before Abraham. Genesis 18:22

That's right. The **men** are principle players in both stories.

B. Let's think about how this common theme relates to both stories. Connect the correct themes with a line.

They announce the promise of a son

They bring judgment upon Sodom and rescue Lot

They are agents of death

They are agents of life/blessing

They announce the promise of a son and They are agents of life and blessing
They bring judgment upon Sodom and rescue Lot and They are agents of death

In both stories, those who showed hospitality (Abraham and Lot) to the men were blessed with some form of life, and those who did not show hospitality (the people of Sodom and Gomorrah) received death.

C. Next, let's find out if there are any verses that connect the two stories. In other words, are there any textual connections between the two stories? Read Genesis 18:18-19

D. What reason does Adonai give for deciding to tell Avraham what He's about to do? Fill in the blank spaces below

“inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and mighty _____, and all the nations of
The earth will be _____ by him? For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give
orders to his children and to his _____ after him to keep the way of Adonai and
to do what is _____ and _____, so that Adonai may bring about for
Avraham what he has promised him.” Genesis 18:18-19

Look at what is happening here with these verses! This is the connection we've been looking for! Can you see how the Torah thematically connects the judgment of Sodom with the promise of the son. Look ...

The importance of the promise of the son is that he will be the first step in the creation of the nation! So, when Adonai says, "now that Avraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation," He is actually connecting the promise of Isaac's birth (the way in which the nation will come) to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

E. Why does Torah make this thematic connection? So that we will CLEARLY see that these two stories are related. Remember that Adonai 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.

F. How will Adonai's special nation be a blessing to all mankind (see 18:19)?[Vayeira10] [17]

Because they will teach their children _____ and _____.

This interpretation is based on the Pashat reading of the text. This is the literal meaning we are learning at this time.

G. Before going further, we must remember what we have already learned. Remember that the things that happened in the lives of the Patriarchs that we are reading, are prophetic shadows of future events in the lives of their descendants. We can expect that this episode with Avraham and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will 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 Adonai tries to show Avraham 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 Adonai told him that He was going to destroy Sodom? Circle the right answer

Interceded (prayed for) Try to boss Adonai around to change His mind He didn't do anything

That's right! He was interceding! Do you see it?

B. Why was Avraham asking Adonai not to destroy Sodom? Fill in the right word

For the sake of the _____ ones living there.

Knowing that Adonai's will is that all come to repentance, why would he not destroy a city for the sake of the righteous within it?

He wouldn't destroy it in hopes that the _____ will be a positive influence on the _____
_____ to bring them to proper teshuvah (repentance).

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.

Adonai 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 way 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 (we'll learn more later). In fact, Isaiah rebuked Am Yisrael (Isaiah 26:18) because the nation had failed in its mission.

We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world (Isaiah 26:18).

In order to show Avraham Avinu (Avraham our Father) the scope and seriousness of his calling, Adonai gives Avraham a chance to see what will happen to mankind (the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah) without the positive influence of a nation that is known for righteousness and justice. This real life example will serve to encourage Avraham to keep his part of his calling to be the father of such a nation. This understanding helps to explain how these two stories are related. This is a thematic understanding of this Parsha. Our lesson helped us to take into consideration that these two seemingly unrelated stories are actually two pieces of a unified message the Holy One is trying to reveal.

