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Abraham's Three Visitors

18: 1-8

Abraham's three visitors DIG: Who were the three visitors? How do we know? How can angels appear as men? Even with hospitality of strangers being mandatory in the Near East, how does Abraham go the extra mile for his three visitors? Why is he in such a hurry?

REFLECT: Whom can you serve in the name of Messiah this week? Do you have a sense of urgency about your ministry? What evidence is there of it? How eager are you to hear what the Lord has to say to you? Are you standing close enough to ADONAI that you can hear His gentle whisper (First Kings 19:12)?

Parashah 4: vaYera (He appeared) 18:1-22:24

(see my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People include three **angels**, **Abraham**, **Sarah**, **Lot**, **Abimelech**, **Isaac**, **Hagar**, **Ishmael**, and the descendants of **Nahor**.

The Scenes include **the trees of Mamre** in **Hebron**, **Sodom** and **Gomorrah**, **Zoar**, the **Negev**, **Gerar**, **Beersheba**, the **desert of Paran**, and **Moriah**.

The Main Events include the **angels'** visit, the promise of a **son**, **Sarah's laugh**, **Sodom** destroyed, the sister deception part two, **Isaac** born, **Hagar** and **Ishmael** cast out, treaty, the binding of **Isaac**, and **God's** provision of a **ram**.

It is test time for **Abraham**. By now **he** has acquired a well-deserved reputation for being a **man** of **faith**. But how **faithful** is **he**, especially when it gets really tough? We will find out in this parashah. For, in it, we will see **the LORD** giving **Abraham** a battery of tests concerning **his faith**. However, the tests were not designed so that **ADONAI** would discover something new about **Abraham**, for **He** already knew everything about **him**! The tests were designed for **Abraham** - to show **him** how much **he** had learned about **God** and in which areas **he** still needed to grow.

This Torah portion is also written for us, so that we can get a glimpse into the extraordinary quality and depth of **Abraham's faith**. As we examine this portion, we will also learn that our tests are like our father **Abraham's**. They, too, are custom-made for us by our loving heavenly **Abba**. They will teach us how to grow in our **trust** in **the Holy One** just as we observe how **Abraham, the man of faith**, walked through **his** trials.

ADONAI appeared to Avraham. **The rabbis teach that God came to visit him as he was recovering from circumcision (17:9-14)**. The place was **near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting**, apparently praying and meditating, **at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day**, or early in the afternoon **(18:1)**. This opening statement already has a great impact. Up until now **YHVH** had talked to and had revealed **Himself** to **Avraham** in a dream, in a vision, and in a conversation, but this is so much more than any previous occasion in which **the LORD** had communicated with **him**. For a king, for **Ha'Shem, the creator** of the universe, just to drop in without fanfare, or to at least have hundreds of angels preceding the entourage of **the King of kings** and welcome with flowers and a red carpet, is highly unusual, and I would say shocking!

Abraham looked up (18:2a). There are three places in **Genesis** where **Avraham looked up** or **lifted up his eyes**. They are some of the most important moments of **his** life. The *first* is when **the LORD** told him: **Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east, and west. All the Land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever (13:14b-15)**. The *second* is here where **Abraham looked up and saw the Lord** and two **angels**. And the *third* will be when **ADONAI will provide a ram caught in a thicket (22:13-14)**. Each time these words are very significant.



To **his** surprise, he **saw three men standing nearby (18:2a)**. The reader knows that one of these **three men** is really the preincarnate **Jesus Christ**, and the other **two men** will later be identified as **angels (19:1)**. **The rabbis teach these were merely three angels**.

They teach that one was to bring news that Sarah would give birth to a son, the second to overthrow Sodom, and the third to heal Abraham. Although there was nothing in the outward appearance of **the three** strangers to suggest they had come from heaven, **Avraham** somehow sensed that they were very special visitors, to be used by **ADONAI** in some way to answer **his** prayers.²⁹⁸

When Abraham saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground (18:2b). The phrase **bowed low** is actually the Hebrew word *shachath*, the usual word for worship. In fact, this is the first time it is used in the Scriptures. **His** whole manner suggests a sense of urgency. Although it was the custom to be very hospitable toward guests, this was clearly more than normal hospitality. **Avraham** was really treating these **men** like royalty.

Avraham said to the leader: **If I have found favor in your eyes Adonai** (or my **Lord**), **do not pass your servant by (18:3).** Now **Adonai**, which is one of the names of **God**, means *the One who claims obedience and service*. But the same name is used as a title of respect for **men**, so this does not necessarily prove **Abraham** recognized **Him** as **the Lord**. However, **he** might have suspected that this stranger was **the Lord** because of the way **he** acted. So the name **Adonai**, would have been proper in either case. However, if **Abraham** did have suspicions about this being **the Lord**, they would vanish very soon.

Because **the rabbis** do not believe that one of these **three** was **ADONAI** they have come up with three options to get around the obvious. **Their first option is that Abraham is merely addressing the leader of the three angels, so the word does not imply deity. The second option is that Abraham was really praying to God Himself before attending to his guests. The third option was that Avraham recognized that they were angels, and therefore, called them by their Master's name, O Lord.**

Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way - now that you have come to your servant. It would not be fitting that they would leave without partaking of his hospitality. As **Hebrews 13:2** reminds us: **Don't forget to be friendly to outsiders; for in so doing, some people, without knowing it, have entertained angels.** Very well, they said: **Do as you say (18:4-5).** You get the sense that **Abraham** is in a hurry to get these courtesies taken care of so **he** could learn what the visitors had to say.

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. Quick, he whispered: Get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread (18:6). This is the beginning of a tradition

in both Jewish and Arabic cultures that **three seahs of fine flour** make up a fellowship offering. In the Jewish tradition it is to be unleavened. **First Samuel 25:18** tells us Abigail made sufficient provisions for David and his band of outlaws with five **seahs** of parched grain. The trench Elijah dug around the base of the altar at Mt. Carmel, which was then filled with twelve jars of water, was large enough to hold two **seahs** of seed (**First Kings 18:32**).²⁹⁹ These two references suggest that **Sarah's three seahs was a very large quantity for only three men. Then he ran to the herd and personally selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who again hurried to prepare it (18:7).** This shows that **Abraham** was going well beyond the bare minimum of hospitality.

He then brought some butter and milk (side dishes to bring out the taste of the meat and to diminish their thirst).³⁰⁰ **and the choicest calf that had been prepared, and set these before them (18:8a).** Because this was before the commandments of the Torah, **Abraham served both milk and meat together (Deuteronomy 14:21).** **Today this is forbidden by rabbinic law because Jews must separate dairy from meat products, but because the rabbis teach that the Torah always existed they have to come up with an explanation here. They say that Abraham served both butter and milk as soon as it was prepared, then he served the meat from the calf later. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree (18:8b).** This is one of the most human-like appearances of **the Lord** in the entire TaNaKh. **He** did not appear in the form of a **vision**, as in **Chapter 15**, nor was it in the form of a spoken word, as in **Chapter 17**. It was a divine appearance as a **Guest**, thus making this a time of friendship and fellowship with **the Lord** for **Abraham**.

It might seem strange that **angels** would eat human food. **They** don't have to, but evidently it is possible for **them** to do so. In order to communicate with mankind, **they** frequently appear in the Scriptures as **men**. This appearance is not a ghostlike, unsubstantial appearance, but in every way physical and real. There is no way of explaining how this happens. **Angels** are **spirits (Hebrews 1:14)**, but evidently **ADONAI** allows **them** to appear in human form when necessary. It is probably something like the appearance of **Yeshua** to **His** apostles when **He took broiled fish and ate it in their presence (Luke 24:42-43).** **The Lord Himself** taught that, in the resurrection, we ourselves **will be like the angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30)**; and there is an indication that the activities in the New Jerusalem will include eating (**Revelation 22:2 and 14**).³⁰¹

As **Abraham** stood by these **three** visitors, **he** was very eager to know why **they** had come. **He** had been thinking about **ADONAI's** promise of a son for **him** and **Sarah**, and somehow sensed that **they** had something to do with **His** promise.