

# A Rood Awakening!

Presents

## *Awakening in the Word*

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS

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### THE OVERVIEW

In our Torah portion this week, YHWH once again appears to Abraham. Following hard upon the heels of Abraham's previous encounter with YHWH, which resulted in the Covenant of Circumcision, this appearance of YHWH seems to leave us questioning the reason for His visitation. This portion is shrouded in controversy concerning the number of appearances, the purpose of these appearances, and the identity and nature of the visitors who appear. Within this portion we again witness the confirmation of the covenant with Abraham and his seed through Sarah. Sarah is told of the timing of her deliverance from the reproach of her barrenness. We also hear of YHWH'S mission concerning Lot's adopted home of Sodom and the city of Gomorrah. Clearly at the heart of this portion is Abraham's unique relationship with YHWH, as well as the revelation of Abraham's character and the influence it would have upon his descendants. There are numerous lessons for the descendants of Abraham to learn from this portion.

### THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 18:1                    The announcement of the appearance of YHWH
- Genesis 18:2                    The three visitors arrive
- Genesis 18:3-8                Abraham's great display of hospitality
- Genesis 18:9-16                The covenant is confirmed with Sarah
- Genesis 18:17-22                YHWH reveals His intention concerning Sodom and Gomorrah
- Genesis 18:23-32                Abraham intercedes with YHWH for the righteous
- Genesis 18:33                    The communion is ended

### SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Where does verse 1 belong?
2. YHWH has appeared to Abraham three times so far. What is different about this appearance?
3. What is the purpose of this appearance?
4. Who are the three men?
5. What are the three men?
6. What is the significance of the name "Adonai"?
7. What is the advantage of the KJV Bible's archaic language?
8. What is Abraham's trademark?
9. What are to be the attributes of Abraham's descendants?
10. How did Abraham manifest these attributes in his own life?
11. What did YHWH declare concerning Abraham?
12. How did Abraham understand himself?
13. What was the intention of the three visitors?
14. What was the sin of Sodom?

**THE TEXT**

**Genesis 18:1-33** *And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; <sup>2</sup>and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, <sup>3</sup>and said, My Adonai, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant: <sup>4</sup>let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: <sup>5</sup>and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. <sup>7</sup>And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. <sup>8</sup>And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. <sup>9</sup>And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. <sup>10</sup>And He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. <sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. <sup>12</sup>Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? <sup>13</sup>And YHWH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? <sup>14</sup>Is any thing too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. <sup>15</sup>Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And He said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. <sup>16</sup>And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. <sup>17</sup>And YHWH said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; <sup>18</sup>seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup>For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment; that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken*

of him. <sup>20</sup>And YHWH said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; <sup>21</sup>I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know. <sup>22</sup>And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before YHWH. <sup>23</sup>And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? <sup>25</sup>That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? <sup>26</sup>And YHWH said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. <sup>27</sup>And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto Adonai, which am but dust and ashes: <sup>28</sup>Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. <sup>29</sup>And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty's sake. <sup>30</sup>And he said unto Him, Oh let not Adonai be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. <sup>31</sup>And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto Adonai peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. <sup>32</sup>And he said, Oh let not Adonai be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. <sup>33</sup>And YHWH went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

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Our Torah portion this week begins with a controversy. While the simple narrative style of our portion falls neatly within the boundaries of one chapter, we should not be fooled by the additions of "modern invention." Let us recall that the Torah was originally revealed to Moses and then written down on a scroll. A quick look at either an ancient or contemporary Torah scroll will immediately reveal that there are no chapter and verse indicators. Chapters and verses were not added to the text of the Scriptures until much later in time.

Some believe that the chapter divisions were the work of the students of Cardinal Hugo of Saint Cher in 1240 A.D. Hugo was compiling a concordance to the Scriptures and sought a convenient way to locate specific words. Others give credit to Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1150-1228 A.D.). The earliest printed Hebrew Bible marked every fifth verse only with a Hebrew numeral. Later, Arabic numerals were added to intervening verses by Joseph Athias in 1661 A.D.<sup>1</sup> Others state that it was a printer in Venice in 1524 who first received permission to print a Hebrew Bible with chapter divisions and versification.<sup>2</sup>

While these chapters and verses have indeed made it possible to systematically study the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, a human intrusion into the text. For those who study the Torah, especially according to the artificial divisions of the rabbis (including the Ancient Triennial Torah Cycle), it becomes clear that these man-made divisions sometimes divide the organic units of the text. As we begin to look at the controversy, let me demonstrate with our current portion.

Let us note that our portion begins with the announcement that YHWH appeared unto Abraham.

***Genesis 18:1*** *And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day.*

We know that YHWH appeared unto Abraham because of the larger context of the story, but this is not what our text says. The text simply tells us that YHWH appeared unto "him" – without identifying for us to whom the pronoun "him" refers. The identifying proper noun "Abraham" last appeared in Genesis 17:26 and does not appear again until Genesis 18:6, leaving us wondering whom the pronoun "him" is referring to in Genesis 18:1. The absence of the identifying proper noun "Abraham" at the beginning of this chapter has led many to assume that this verse belongs to the previous story of Abraham's circumcision. In other words, the text should be read as follows:

***Genesis 17:24-18:1*** *And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. <sup>27</sup>And all the men of his house, born in the house, and*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scripturessay.com/article.php?cat=&id=383>

<sup>2</sup> The Kestenbaum Edition Tikkun, Rabbi Avie Gold, ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications

*bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him. <sup>18:1</sup>And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day.*

If this reading is correct, then it would suggest that the appearance of YHWH to Abraham was, in some sense, a reward for his faithful obedience.

*In this connection Ramban quotes another dictum of our sages: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings...in every place where I cause my name to be mentioned I will come unto thee and bless thee" (Exodus 20:21)[English 20:24]. If to him who builds an altar in my name I reveal myself and bless him, how much more so unto Abraham who circumcised himself for my name! (Avot De Rabbi Nathan).<sup>3</sup>*

Since this brief announcement of YHWH appearing unto Abraham contains no instructions, revelations, or dialogue, the sages of old have seen this "reward" as an example of YHWH demonstrating the *mitzvah*<sup>4</sup> of visiting the sick (Abraham and the male members of his household who are recovering from the rite of circumcision).<sup>5</sup> Thus, the proponents of this understanding see the opening verse of our Torah portion as being the climactic ending of the previous portion.

If this is the correct reading of the text, it presents us with several interesting challenges. Clearly the absence of the identifying proper noun in the opening verses of our portion indicates that the story of the circumcision and the appearance of YHWH to Abraham are to be understood as an organic whole; thus, the chapter break may be somewhat artificial. However, if chapter 18 verse 1 is the climax of chapter 17, the story of Abraham's circumcision, then the next verse would appear to be an interruption of this merciful appearance.

**Genesis 17:24-18:2** *And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. <sup>27</sup>And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him. <sup>18:1</sup>And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; <sup>2</sup>and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.*

This would seem to indicate that while Abraham is in the middle of an "appearance" of YHWH, he is distracted by the sight of three visitors and interrupts his communion with the Sovereign One to extend hospitality to his human guests. This understanding of the text has led some to teach the dictum that hospitality to strangers is even more important than welcoming the divine presence of YHWH. Hospitality to strangers is thus seen as the absolute epitome of "loving our neighbor." While hospitality is Abraham's trademark, it is difficult for me to believe that Abraham would interrupt such a communion with the Holy One to welcome human strangers. Nonetheless, there is a profound lesson to ponder in all of this. I will use a personal experience to make my point.

I have always had, and still have, a great desire for intimacy with the Holy One. Some of my most joyous times were the times I spent on retreat in various monasteries. The solitude, peacefulness, stillness, and quiet of the monastery setting allowed me to focus completely upon the presence of the Holy One. One night at one of the monasteries I had a dream. I dreamed that I was trying to get closer and closer to the Holy One. I was climbing up a tower higher and higher above the earth, moving farther and farther from the world, its chaos, and its numerous distractions. With each step my heart beat faster and harder with excitement and anticipation. The higher I climbed, the more joyous I felt. The sounds of the world and

<sup>3</sup> New Studies in Bereshit, Genesis, Nehama Leibowitz, LAMBDA Publishers Inc., Pg. 161

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word *mitzvah* means "a commandment of the Jewish law" or "a meritorious or charitable act."

<sup>5</sup> Leibowitz, Pg. 161

life had faded into a distant, muffled murmur. Finally, I reached a door with a bright light extending through the crack at the bottom. I opened the door and entered the cell. The room was stark and empty. There was but one high, thin window with bright radiant light streaming in. I was quickly drawn to the light. From outside the window I could hear the sound of great rejoicing, singing, laughing, and praising, and I wanted to join it. I wanted so much to be in the presence of the Holy One. I jumped up to the window and pulled myself up to look out. I wanted to see the cause of all the rejoicing. When I looked, my heart stopped. There, way down below me, was a small crowd of people gathered around an infant resting in a manger. It was from this infant that the light was emanating. I quickly realized that the whole point of the gospel was that the Holy One had chosen to tabernacle among men. I realized that in my selfish desire to flee the world and commune with the Creator, I had neglected to realize that He is present all around me, especially in each of my brothers. I recalled the words of the Messiah:

**Matthew 25:34-40** *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup>for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: <sup>36</sup>naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. <sup>37</sup>Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Master, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? <sup>38</sup>When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? <sup>39</sup>Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? <sup>40</sup>And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

The commandments to love YHWH and love one's neighbor are truly two sides of the same coin. Since the Creator is infinite and without the limits of carnal existence, it is difficult for us to demonstrate our love and affection for Him. To this end, the Creator has chosen from the beginning to be embodied in and through mankind. Therefore, we are to show our love for the Creator through our love for the bearer of His image. This is clearly reflected in the respect for human life that we have been commanded to demonstrate in the covenant made with Noah after the flood.

**Genesis 9:6** *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of Elohim made He man.*

While I adamantly agree that hospitality to strangers is of the utmost importance and is, in fact, a demonstration of our love for YHWH, I do not necessarily feel that this is the correct location of the passage in question. If 18:1 is to be the climax of the previous story, then we are faced with yet another challenge. If Abraham's visit with YHWH is cut short by the sudden appearance of three strangers, then why does Abraham call one of the visitors "Lord"? To solve this problem, we need to understand the title "Lord."

The Hebrew word for "lord" is *adon* (*aleph, dalet, vav, nun*). It is sometimes spelled without the *vav*. The word *adon* is often idiomatically written in the plural form, *adonai* (*aleph, dalet, nun, yud*). This plural spelling is often used as the "plural of grandeur" when referring to significant personages such as princes and kings, or as is in our case, the Holy One. The King James Version of the Bible, along with many other English translations, has created some confusion by honoring the rabbinic custom of "hiding" the name of YHWH by using the appellative "LORD" in all uppercase letters. On occasions where the name YHWH and the title "Adonai" appear together, the English translations will use the word "GOD,"<sup>6</sup> also in all uppercase letters, to hide the name. This is loosely based upon the desire to fulfill the commandment not to take the name of the Creator in vain.

**Exodus 20:7** *Thou shalt not take the name of YHWH thy Elohim in vain; for YHWH will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

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<sup>6</sup> Cp. Genesis 15:2 with Genesis 9:26

**Deuteronomy 5:11** *Thou shalt not take the name of YHWH thy Elohim in vain: for YHWH will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

Likewise, the rabbis point to a few other texts to support this practice.

**Jeremiah 44:26** *Therefore hear ye the word of YHWH, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by My great name, saith YHWH, that **My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt**, saying, Adonai YHWH liveth.*

**Exodus 3:15** *And Elohim said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, YHWH Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is My name **for ever**, and this is My memorial unto all generations.*

The Hebrew word translated as “for ever” is the word *olam* (*ayn, vav cholem, lammed, mem*). In this particular passage, however, the word *olam* uses a variant spelling – (*ayn, lammed, mem*). Spelled in this fashion, the Hebrew word may be read as *elem* (*ayn, lammed, mem*), which means to “keep from sight” or “hide.” Based upon this variant spelling, the rabbis have adopted the practice of “hiding” the name YHWH by using various other titles, such as HaShem (The Name), Adonai (Lord), Elohim, and in written form, G-D. The use of the titles “LORD” and “Lord” can sometimes create confusion or hide significant clues that will help us gain valuable understanding.

Another source of confusion surrounding the word “Lord” is the fact that even when addressing a single individual, it is often used idiomatically in the plural form. Let us look at our portion for a specific example of this confusion.

**Genesis 18:2-3** *And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, **three men** stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet **them** from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, <sup>3</sup>and said, My **Lord (Adonai)**, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant.*

Clearly the text tells us that three men approached Abraham and stood by him. Abraham’s response to these men was to bow toward the ground in homage and invite them to accept his hospitality. Abraham extended this invitation by using the appellative “Lord.” Here is where some of the confusion comes in – and we will have to address some of these questions later in the study. The word “Lord” is in the plural form – “Adonai.” Thus, from the Hebrew, it is difficult to determine whether Abraham was addressing all three men as “my lords” or just one of the guests as “my Lord.”

Why is this confusing? Many teach that one of these three “men” was YHWH Himself. We will address this issue separately in a moment. If, in this instance, the word Adonai is used as an idiomatic plural of grandeur, then it is possible that Abraham was addressing the presence of YHWH in one of the visitors. Why is this confusing? Because if verses 1-2 describe an appearance of YHWH to Abraham being interrupted by three visitors, we must ask why YHWH would appear to Abraham and then interrupt the appearance to appear to him again. Clearly there is something amiss in this understanding. Let us see if we can unravel the confusion.

First, let me point out that in our text, as it appears in the King James Versions, one can easily answer the question of whether Abraham was addressing all three visitors or merely one by just looking at the pronouns. In the King James English (and possibly in some other language translations as well), “thou,” “thee,” “thy,” and “thine” are singular, while “ye,” “you,” “your,” and “yours” are plural. In our text above we see that Abraham, although using the plural form of the word “Adonai,” is clearly speaking to one of the visitors specifically. Note that Abraham uses “**thy** sight,” “I pray **thee**,” and “**thy** servant” – all in the singular. While Abraham idiomatically uses the plural form of the appellative, it is quite clear that he is addressing only one of the visitors as “Adonai.”

What does all this mean? It means that chapter 18 verse 1 cannot be the climactic finish to chapter 17; rather, it begins a new story within the overall story of the covenant between YHWH and Abraham. Because of the lack of the identifying proper noun "Abraham," we clearly understand that this portion and the previous portion are part of a larger organic unit. Nevertheless, we should understand that chapter 18 verse 1 is not a climactic finish; it is the summary announcement of yet another appearance story. In other words, verse 1 is the announcement that YHWH appeared to Abraham. The verses that follow this announcement are the very details of the visitation. This would explain why Abraham would bow before one of the visitors and call Him "Adonai." It would also mean that we are witnessing one visitation, not two visitations with one interrupting the other.

Helping to substantiate this reality is the fact that YHWH never appears without revealing His reason. In every appearance story in the Torah, YHWH always reveals some event, instruction, or prophecy. If chapter 18 verse 1 were indeed the climactic finale of chapter 17, it would be the only appearance story in the Torah where YHWH did not speak or reveal His purpose for appearing. Since there is a great deal of revelation given in chapter 18, it is clear that this announcement of YHWH'S appearance to Abraham belongs with the revelations contained in the following verses. Therefore, we may emphatically state that while chapters 17 and 18 are a part of a larger organic unit, chapter 18 verse 1 is a transitional passage belonging to the verses that follow it. While this answers a number of questions, it also raises many more.

If verse 1 is, in fact, the announcement of YHWH'S appearance to Abraham, then what follows describes this appearance. This raises the challenging question concerning the nature of the three visitors which seem to comprise the "visitation" or "appearance."

**Genesis 18:1-4** *And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;<sup>2</sup> and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, **three men** stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,<sup>3</sup> and said, My Adonai, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant:<sup>4</sup> let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.*

Verse 1 clearly states that it is YHWH who appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. The idea that YHWH could or would appear to His servants is nothing new to the Torah. Over the course of our studies thus far, we have read of numerous occasions where YHWH communicates His purposes and intentions to His creatures.

**Genesis 1:28-29** *And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.<sup>29</sup> And Elohim said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.*

**Genesis 2:16-17** *And YHWH Elohim commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

**Genesis 3:8-22** *And they heard the voice of YHWH Elohim walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of YHWH Elohim amongst the trees of the garden.<sup>9</sup> And YHWH Elohim called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? <sup>10</sup>And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. <sup>11</sup>And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? <sup>12</sup>And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. <sup>13</sup>And YHWH Elohim said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. <sup>14</sup>And*

*YHWH Elohim said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: <sup>15</sup>and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. <sup>16</sup>Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. <sup>17</sup>And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; <sup>18</sup>thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; <sup>19</sup>in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. <sup>20</sup>And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. <sup>21</sup>Unto Adam also and to his wife did YHWH Elohim make coats of skins, and clothed them. <sup>22</sup>And YHWH Elohim said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.*

**Genesis 4:9-10** *And YHWH said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? <sup>10</sup>And He said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.*

**Genesis 6:13** *And Elohim said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

**Genesis 7:1** *And YHWH said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation.*

**Genesis 8:15** *And Elohim spake unto Noah, saying...*

**Genesis 9:1** *And Elohim blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.*

**Genesis 12:1** *Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.*

**Genesis 12:7** *And YHWH appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto YHWH, who appeared unto him.*

**Genesis 13:14** *And YHWH said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward.*

**Genesis 15:1** *After these things the word of YHWH came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

**Genesis 17:1** *And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, YHWH appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am El Shaddai; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.*

In all of the above stories of YHWH communing with His creatures, there is not a single reference to any physical appearance of the Infinite One. We witness YHWH verbally communicating with Adam, Cain, Noah, and Abram, but nowhere is there mention of a physical manifestation of the Infinite One. In the story of the Covenant of the Pieces (Genesis 15:1ff) we are told that YHWH appeared to Abram in a "vision," but no description is given. Therefore, this visitation is the first story where the presence of the Holy One is described in tangible terms.

Clearly our text describes the visitors as “three men.” The Hebrew word translated as “men” is the Hebrew word *enoshim* (*aleph, nun, shin, yud, mem*), from the root word *enosh* (*aleph, nun, vav, shin*). The word *enosh* is a more generic and less dignified term than *adam* (*aleph, dalet, mem*), which is likewise translated as “man.” *Enosh* is possibly derived from the word *anash* (*aleph, nun, shin*), which means “weak” or “vulnerable.” Thus, the word *enosh* may best be translated as “mortal.” This is how we see the word *enosh* used in the poetic literature of the Tanach.

*Enowsh means “man.” (1) It occurs 25 times in biblical Aramaic and 42 times in biblical Hebrew. (2) Hebrew uses enowsh exclusively in poetical passages. The only apparent exception is 2 Chr 14:11, but this is a prayer, and, therefore, uses poetical words. (3) Enowsh never appears with the definite article and at all times except once (Ps. 144:3) sets forth a collective idea, “man.” (4) In most cases where the word occurs in Job and the Psalms it suggests the frailty, vulnerability, and finitude of “man” as contrasted to God: “As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth” (Ps. 103:15). As such, “man” cannot be righteous or holy before God: “Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?” (Job 4:17). (5) In the Psalms this word is used to indicate the enemy: “Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight” (Ps. 9:19). (6) Enowsh may connote “men” as weak but not necessarily morally weak: “Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold of it” (Is. 56:2). (7) In a few places the word bears no moral overtones and represents “man” in a sense parallel to Hebrew Adam. (8) He is finite as contrasted to the infinite God: “I said I would scatter them into the corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men” (Deut. 32:26).<sup>7</sup>*

There are several Hebrew words translated as “man” or “men,” each with its own nuances. We may chart these words as follows:

- **ADAM**—connotes man as the creature created in the image of Elohim, the crown of all creation.
- **IYSH**—is used for man as the counterpart of woman and/or as distinguished in his maleness.
- **GEBER**—denotes a male as an antonym for female, or strong man.
- **ENOSH**—sets forth a collective idea of man, suggesting the insignificance, frailty, vulnerability, and finitude of man as contrasted to Elohim the Infinite One.
- **BACHUR**—signifies the fully developed, vigorous, unmarried man in his prime.<sup>8</sup>

Another word that we may want to take note of is the Hebrew word *mal'ach*, which, most often translated as “angel,” rightfully means “messenger.” The English word “angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos*, which likewise means “messenger.” The word “angel” is a very loaded word in English, invoking images of glowing, winged men in white robes playing harps and floating in the air. The term “messenger,” however, rightly conveys the idea of someone bringing a message from someone else. The first appearance of the word *mal'ach* is in the book of Genesis in the story of Hagar.

**Genesis 16:7** *And the angel of YHWH found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.*

Here we see that the word *mal'ach* is part of the title “angel of YHWH.” Again, the use of the word “angel” invokes all manner of feathery images. But if we translate the word simply as “messenger,” a different understanding may appear. The word *mal'ach* may be etymologically derived from several different roots. The Hebrew word *halach* (*hey, lammed, khaf*) can mean to walk or carry. If we add the preposition *meen* (*mem, nun*) to this root we would convey the idea of “carry from.” This could easily be understood as describing the duties of a messenger. We may also note the similarity to the word *melech* (*mem, lammed, khaf*), meaning “king,” and *malach* (*mem, lammed, khaf*) meaning to “rule” or “reign.” From

<sup>7</sup> The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words, James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., Thomas Nelson Publishers, Pp. 337-338

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 338

these definitions we may understand that the one sent with a message from the king also has the authority of the king. To receive the messenger is to receive the king; to reject the messenger is to reject the king. We see this concept clearly in the teaching of Messiah concerning his *talmidim*.<sup>9</sup>

**Matthew 10:40** *He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me.*

**Mark 9:37** *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me.*

**Luke 9:48** *And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth Him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.*

**Luke 10:16** *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me.*

In the Scriptures the *malachim* or messengers do not necessarily have to be divine or spiritual beings; they can be mere mortals (*enoshim*).

**1 Samuel 29:9** *And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as a messenger of Elohim: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle.*

**Haggai 1:13** *Then spake Haggai the messenger of YHWH in YHWH'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith YHWH.*

**Malachi 2:7** *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts.*

In each of these instances, as well on other possible occasions, the *mal'ach*, *mal'ach* Elohim, or *mal'ach* of YHWH is an *enosh*, a human being. In other instances, however, the *mal'ach* is clearly not a human being, even though it would appear so in every regard.

In the story of Manoah and his barren wife,<sup>10</sup> the ambiguity of the *mal'ach* being described is very evident. The messenger appears to the wife of Manoah and declares his message. Manoah then entreats YHWH to send the "man (*ish*) of Elohim" again for the sake of instruction. When the *mal'ach* does reappear, Manoah wants to make a burnt-offering to him, but the *mal'ach* instructs him to do so only to YHWH. Thus, we see that the *mal'ach* is distinct from YHWH. The *mal'ach* once described as a "man" (*ish*) then ascends into the heavens in a flame, clearly indicating that he is not a mere mortal. After his departure, Manoah then declares:

**Judges 13:22** *And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen Elohim.*

Here we witness that regardless of the nature of the messenger, the identification of the *mal'ach* with the Infinite One is so great and so clear that to see the messenger is like unto seeing YHWH Himself.

*Divine messengers are usually depicted as indistinguishable from human beings (Heb 13:2; Gen 19:1-22; 32:25-31[24-30]; Dan 8:15; Tob 5:8,16; Luke 24:4; cf. Judg 13:3-23), while it is in the later books of the OT that they are depicted in overwhelmingly*

<sup>9</sup> *Talmidim* is the Hebrew word for "disciples."

<sup>10</sup> Judges 13:1-25

*supernatural terms (Dan 10:6). Therefore, since humans could also be perceived as messengers sent from God—notably prophets (Hag. 1:13), priests (Mal 2:7), and kings (1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20; 19:28 [27])—the use of the same term mal'ach to identify both human and supernatural messengers results in some passages where it is unclear which of the two is intended if no further details are provided (Judg 2:1-5; 5:23; Mal 3:1; Eccl. 5:6).<sup>11</sup>*

In our portion there is some confusion as to whether there are three *enoshim* serving as *malachim*, or whether the picture is describing YHWH in human form accompanied by two *enoshim/malachim*.

In several instances in our portion it would appear that the verbal visitor speaks of YHWH in the third person, clearly indicating that YHWH is other than the one talking.

**Genesis 18:14** *Is anything too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

**Genesis 18:19** *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment; that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*

But there are also several references in this same portion of the narrative where it would appear that it is clearly YHWH Himself visiting Abraham.

**Genesis 18:13** *And YHWH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?*

**Genesis 18:17** *And YHWH said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do...*

**Genesis 18:20** *And YHWH said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous...*

**Genesis 18:22** *And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before YHWH.*

Based upon this evidence, I would suggest that the appearance of YHWH to Abraham in this instance was no different than the previous instances where an appearance was marked by the voice of YHWH and not a physical presence. In other words, the voice of the Infinite One was present with Abraham while the substantial presence of the three visitors stood before him. It is apparent that all three *enoshim* were serving as *malachim*; thus, the *malachim* manifested in their presence the presence of the Infinite One, but were not themselves the Holy One.

What is important for us to understand is not the nature of the messenger but the messenger's identification with the author and the authority of the message. In other words, regardless of what medium the Infinite One chooses to communicate through, whether human, animal, or spiritual, we are to receive the message as though it is coming directly from YHWH. We may briefly recall that YHWH spoke to Moses from a burning bush<sup>12</sup> and to Balaam through a donkey.<sup>13</sup> The presence of YHWH was also observed in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night while Israel was in the wilderness.<sup>14</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst, Brill Academic Publishers and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pg. 48

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 3:2

<sup>13</sup> Numbers 22:28

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19, 24; Numbers 12:5, 14:14; Deuteronomy 31:15; Nehemiah 9:19

presence of YHWH was likewise visible over the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>15</sup> In all of these examples we witness the manifest presence of the Infinite One in very observable and finite means. None of these means, however, should be confused with the Infinite One Himself. We should remember here that in the Garden of Eden man chose to live by his senses. Since that time, YHWH has met man in a manner in which he would understand.

While the word *mal'ach* or "angel" does not appear in our portion, it does, however, appear in the following portion regarding at least two of the three visitors which continued on to Sodom.

**Genesis 18:21-22** *I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know. <sup>22</sup>And the enoshim turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before YHWH.*

**Genesis 19:1** *And there came two malachim to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.*

What does become evident in this passage is that YHWH can and does manifest Himself in and through His creatures. That these *enoshim* eat and drink in the presence of Abraham demonstrates that they are not mere phantasms, but living beings. That the Infinite One has chosen to appear to Abraham through messengers in human form should not cause us to stumble at all. From the very beginning of creation, YHWH has chosen to reveal Himself through that which can be seen.

**Romans 1:20** *For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Mightiness; so that they are without excuse.*

This is especially true of man.

**Genesis 1:26-28** *And Elohim said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. <sup>27</sup>So Elohim created man in His own image, in the image of Elohim created He him; male and female created He them. <sup>28</sup>And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

From the beginning, man (Adam) was to be the bearer of the finite image of the Infinite Being. Clearly YHWH'S will and purpose for creation was to be revealed through the life of Adam. In this regard, the invisible Word of Elohim would become flesh. Clearly we understand Yeshua the Messiah, the last Adam, as the perfect example of YHWH being manifest in finite means.

**John 1:14** *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

**Colossians 1:15** *Who is the image of the invisible Elohim, the firstborn of every creature...*

Therefore, we should have no trouble simply defining the *malachim* as being a part of the manifest presence of YHWH. This is what our portion is relaying to us. YHWH, regardless of the means, appeared to Abraham and communicated His will and intention to him.

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<sup>15</sup> Numbers 9:17

The question we may ask on this matter is why the Torah so specifically identifies the means of YHWH'S manifestation as *enoshim*. I would suggest three possible reasons. First, it may be as a reminder that man was created to be the very image of YHWH. This image was desecrated and distorted through the fall of man. It would be the promised descendants of Abraham, however, who would be called to restore this image through obedience to the Torah. Possibly this is what is being communicated in YHWH'S declaration concerning Abraham and his descendants:

**Genesis 18:19** *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall **keep the way of YHWH**, to do justice and judgment; that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*

A second reason that the Torah may specifically use the word *enoshim* is to demonstrate that even the least and most vulnerable of human beings may be used by YHWH to manifest His divine will and glorious presence. If we connect these two reasons, then we may indeed understand a prophetic allusion to Yeshua the Messiah, who would simultaneously embody in his flesh both the Word of YHWH as well as the vulnerability of the fallen human race. Clearly Yeshua demonstrates both of these attributes within his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection, and his complete submission to the will of the Father.

A third reason the Torah may have described the visitors as *enoshim* is to reveal to us the character of Abraham, our father in the faith. If the word *enosh* is to communicate a sense of mortality, lowliness, and vulnerability, then we should take note as to the manner in which Abraham greets his visitors. The Torah describes Abraham as running to meet them, bowing to greet them, and hurrying here and there to provide them with water for washing, food for eating, and a comfortable place for resting. We may also note that Abraham speaks of his actions as though they are small.

**Genesis 18:4-5** *Let a **little** water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: <sup>5</sup>and I will fetch a **morsel** of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.*

Yet we see that Abraham prepared his guests a veritable feast of bread, meat, butter, and milk. We also see that Abraham stood by and waited upon his guests while they enjoyed the fruits of his hospitality. In this too we are given an example of how to welcome others into our lives. We are to take no regard for the stature of the man; rather, we are to show the love of YHWH equally to all men.

**Leviticus 19:15** *Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.*

**Deuteronomy 1:17** *Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is Elohim's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.*

**Matthew 22:16** *And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of Elohim in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.*

**Mark 12:14** *And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of Elohim in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*

**Acts 10:34** *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that Elohim is no respecter of persons.*

**James 2:9** *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

Whether our visitors be *malachim* or *enoshim*, we are to greet them with warmth, love, and hospitality, showing them the very equality of YHWH. To this end the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes:

**Hebrews 13:1-2** *Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup>Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

For our study, however, let us simply recognize that YHWH was present with Abraham. We too should be ready to recognize YHWH in our brethren, whether they be believers or non-believers. Like Abraham, we should be quick to greet every human being as we would the Creator Himself. This may possibly, after all, be the point of the ambiguity! I can still hear my parents and grandparents warning me never to treat anyone with disrespect because we never knew who they might turn out to be. Let me illustrate with a story I read concerning the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

There was once a Jewish family living in Spain. One of the neighborhood Spanish boys was quite the bully and picked upon the youngest Jewish boy of the family. Every day the grandmother of the family would sit outside the house with cookies, candies, or some other treat to give to the children passing by. It did not matter to her whether the children were Jewish or not. When the bully came by, the grandmother would, to his amazement, offer him a treat as well. This did not stop the bully, however, from picking on her grandson. Later in life, the bully became the Chief of Police. When the practice of Judaism was outlawed, many Jews practiced their faith secretly behind shuttered windows and closed doors. One day while the family was lighting the Sabbath candles, the door burst open and in rushed a small army of policemen. Fear filled the hearts and faces of the family. Suddenly, the Chief of Police looked at the old woman sitting calmly at the table and recognized her as the kindly lady who handed out treats to the children. He quickly stopped his men and commanded that they leave the house, declaring, "These people are not Jews; they are merely celebrating a birthday." The old woman looked at the bully chief and smiled, and offered him a treat from her table.

I constantly warn my children to be respectful even to their enemies, for they never know who their jailer might be during the great tribulation. Clearly we would be wise to follow Abraham's example, making advocates in our lives instead of adversaries. This is best accomplished by treating each person, regardless of their status, as if we are entertaining YHWH Himself.

Let us now turn our attention to the content of the visit. The first part of the revelation given to Abraham is confirmation that the promised seed would indeed come through his wife Sarah.

**Genesis 18:9-10** *And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. <sup>10</sup>And He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.*

Here we should take note of the phrase "the time of life." A little further on in the dialogue with Abraham and Sarah we learn that Sarah's barrenness was not due to her sinfulness, as many may have assumed; it was because she was being "preserved" for a special honor and purpose. It is clear that YHWH had a plan that included the opening of Sarah's womb, the bestowing of honor, and the birth of a son to Abraham at an appointed time. We too would do well to trust YHWH and wait upon Him to fulfill all that He has promised. I cannot help but to recall Joseph, who after having received revelations of YHWH'S intentions for his life, suffered rejection. He was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and cast into prison before the promises of YHWH were realized.

While the first part of this revelation begins with the joyous news of YHWH'S return visit and the birth of a son, the second part of this visitation goes to the opposite extreme, announcing the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, within this portion of the narrative we witness the characters of both

YHWH and Abraham. We should note that both are concerned about justice and judgment. YHWH has already described doing justice and judgment as key attributes of the descendants of Abraham.

**Genesis 18:19** *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment; that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*

We witness YHWH exercising justice and judgment in that He has heard the cry of those who suffer from the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. While homosexuality is often singled out as the chief sin of Sodom, the Scriptures reveal much more than this.

**Ezekiel 16:49-50** *Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. <sup>50</sup>And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.*

**Isaiah 1:9-17** *Except YHWH of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. <sup>10</sup>Hear the word of YHWH, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our Elohim, ye people of Gomorrah. <sup>11</sup>To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith YHWH: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. <sup>12</sup>When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? <sup>13</sup>Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. <sup>14</sup>Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. <sup>15</sup>And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. <sup>16</sup>Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; <sup>17</sup>learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

**Jeremiah 23:14** *I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto Me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.*

Greed, haughtiness, injustice, perverse judgment, and a lack of care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger were rampant in Sodom and Gomorrah. All this, added to the sexual perversion and inhospitality, were more than the Holy One could endure. Seeing the future outcome of such wretchedness provoked the Righteous One to action. But let us note that the Creator does not simply act. Bound by His own Word, the Holy One goes down to inquire and investigate as the Torah commands.

**Deuteronomy 13:14** *Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you...*

**Deuteronomy 17:4** *And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel...*

We should also note that a pair of witnesses is sent to confirm the findings of this inquiry.

**Numbers 35:30** *Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.*

**Deuteronomy 17:6-7** *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. <sup>7</sup>The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.*

**Genesis 18:22** *And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before YHWH.*

YHWH clearly demonstrates Himself to be an Elohim of justice and judgment. Abraham, on his part, likewise demonstrates these attributes in his intercession for the righteous. The text does not say that Abraham is interceding for Lot, but he may well have his nephew in mind. We should take careful note that Abraham does not ask YHWH to forego judgment upon the wicked; rather, he intercedes for the righteous that may be suffering while living among them. It seems inconceivable to Abraham that there would not be righteous men living among the unrighteous.

Abraham begins his intercession with the grand hope that at least 50 righteous men would be found. YHWH patiently entertains Abraham's request, knowing all along what the outcome will be. Abraham continues to entreat the Holy One, reducing the number from 50 to 45, to 40, 30, 20, and finally to 10. YHWH, on His part, agrees not to destroy the city even if only 10 righteous men are found.

We may ask at this point why YHWH allows Abraham to continue negotiating when He already knows the outcome of His inquiry. I would suggest that a possible reason for this is to encourage Abraham in his positive love for the righteous, for justice, and for mercy. As a father, there have been many times that I have witnessed my children attempting to do the impossible. Even though I knew they would not succeed, I still encouraged them to keep trying so that they might build up a good work ethic and a strong spirit. I believe that YHWH likewise rejoiced in Abraham's heartfelt plea for life instead of destruction and encouraged Abraham to grow in this attitude and attribute that he might demonstrate it for his descendants. So too should we always be quick to intercede and slow to condemn. We may remember that the ministry of hasatan (the adversary) is one of accusation, while the ministry of Messiah is one of intercession.

**Romans 8:34** *Who is he that condemneth? Messiah that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of Elohim, who also maketh intercession for us.*

**Hebrews 7:25** *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto Elohim by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

**Revelation 12:10** *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our Elohim, and the power of His Messiah: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our Elohim day and night.*

As members of the body of Messiah, we, like Abraham and Yeshua, should be quick to intercede for the righteous who are suffering in the darkness of unrighteousness in our decaying world.