

Avraham pleads for Sodom to be saved, as messengers are sent to Sodom.

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סָדְמָה בְּעֶרְבַּ וְלוֹט יָשָׁב בְּשַׁעַר-סְדֹם וַיֵּרָא-לוֹט וַיִּקָּם לִקְרֹאתָם
וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ אַפְּיָם אֶרְצָה:

“And the two messengers came to Sodom in the evening. And Lot sat in the gates of the City of Sodom, and Lot saw, and he got up towards them. And he bowed toward them, his nostrils groundward.” (Bereishis 19:1).

Well known, from Gemara and Midrash, is that the “men” were angels. That is *drush*. When the Torah wants to say “angel” it uses the term “messenger of Hashem.” (See e.g. Bereishis 16:7-11, 22:11, Shmos 3:2, 22:22). Here the term is simply “man” or “messenger.” If they were angels did Avraham and Lot know, because they both treated them as people. If they were actual angels, why did they eat and drink? Also, why did an angel need to bring Sarah news that they already knew (the news about having a son was given to Avraham, previously). Why were they men before Avraham but then Angels came to Lot and then they are referred to as men again? If the angel came to destroy Sodom why did Hashem do it, Himself (Ibid 19:24)?

The answer is the in the plain reading that the men were men, and the “messengers” were Avraham’s messengers. This is revealed when the entire episode is read carefully in context.

When reading the beginning of perek 18, we note that Avraham’s name does not appear until pasuk 6, “And Avraham hurried.” (Ibid). This is because the beginning of the episode is a continuation, an expounding, of the pervious perek’s revelations. Since Hashem changed Avraham’s name, “your name shall no longer be Avram, but your name shall be Avraham,” (Ibid 17:5), the Torah could not call him Avram in perek 18. Therefore, the name is left out until it gets to the part that it is elaborating.

Perek 17 does not finish what happened because it explains that Avraham then went and circumcised himself and his entire household that day. (Ibid 17:26). Perek 18 then elaborates on what occurred during this appearance by Hashem.

After serving the men under the tree it says: “And He [Hashem] said, I shall surely return to you at this time.” (Ibid 18:10). It is Hashem because, first, it is singular, and second, Hashem already is recorded saying this exact revelation. (Ibid 17:21). “Sarah will bear a child to you at this appointed time, in the next year.” (Ibid). It says further, “Hashem said to Avraham...I will return to you at this appointed time.” (Ibid 18:13-14). It was not a *malach* or messenger that told Avraham. Hashem did, as recorded. Avraham even rejoiced that even though he and Sarah were so old, they would have a son. (Ibid 17:17). Now it elaborates and says “Sarah is ninety” (ibid) was because she no longer had the way of women (ibid 18:11) and she also heard and also rejoiced. (Ibid 18:12).

Then the men got up and they looked to go toward Sodom. (Ibid 18:16). וַאֲבְרָהָם וְאֶלְחָזָר וְאֶל־בְּרָחָה וְאֶל־שְׁמֵרַיִם וְאֶל־בְּנֵי־הָעִיר וְאֶל־כָּל־הָעַם לְשִׁלְחָם "And Avraham walked among them and sent them." (Ibid). Avraham is the one that sent them to Sodom. This is because Hashem revealed the plan to destroy Sodom. (Ibid 18:17-21). He sent two. Knowing it would be destroyed, one went on his own way. Avraham pleads to save the cities. (Ibid 23). Avraham gets the conciliation from Hashem that Lot can be saved. "And the men turned from there and went to Sodom, and Avraham continued to stand before Hashem." (Ibid 18:22). Hashem only departed when He finished speaking to Avraham (Ibid 18:33), as it said before "And He finished speaking with Avraham and Hashem went up." (Ibid 17:22).

Lot invites the messengers to lodge but they refuse. (Ibid 19:2). When Lot is adamant, they know they have the right Lot. (Ibid 19:3). In this episode, every time it says "men" it refers to the people of Sodom, except pasuk 5 (because the Sodomites do not know they are messengers). The messengers are referred to as "messengers." The "people of Sodom" surrounded the house. (Ibid 19:4). After Lot leaves his house to plead with them, "The men [of Sodom] sent their hands [enforcers, to get Lot] but [Lot's household and the messengers] brought Lot into the house and closed the door." (Ibid 19:10). "And the men [of Sodom] at the door of the house were struck with blindness. (Ibid 19:11). "And the men [of Sodom] said to Lot, further, 'Who is with you here, your sons-in-law, daughters...take them out of this place.'" (Ibid 19:12). Having been struck with blindness they knew Lot and these messengers were no good for them. They wanted them out of the city.

"For we are destroying this place." (Ibid 19:13). This cannot be referring to the messengers talking. The pasuk says "we" but only one destroyed Sodom (Ibid 19:25) and it was Hashem. (Ibid 19:24,29). The men of Sodom realized they were destroying their own city with their sins. It should be read *It is destroying us*. Whatever power struck them with blindness, they wanted it gone. "Because their cry was the face of [or facing] Hashem, 'and we sent Hashem to destruction.'" (Ibid 19:13) Their "cry" was their "sin" as it clarifies earlier. (Ibid 18:20). Unlike the Tower of Bavel incident, the people of Sodom did want to destroy Hashem.

"The messengers pressed Lot to leave." (Ibid 19:15). "He tarried so the men [of Sodom] took his and his wife's hands and his daughter's hands ... and put them outside the city." (Ibid 19:16). They threw them out and did not kill them because of Hashem's pity (and promise to Avraham). (Ibid). "He [Hashem] said, 'Flee for your life.'" (Ibid 19:17). We know it is Hashem talking – not a *malach* – because Lot only pleads with one "Lord." (Ibid 19:18). The only One that could grant Lot the favor of saving the small city and allow Lot to go there was Hashem. It was not a man or messenger or *malach* that destroyed Sodom, but Hashem. (Ibid 19:24,29). "It was when the Lord destroyed the cities." (Ibid 19:29).

There are many lessons to be learned from the Gemara and Midrash, and it is also important to know the plain meaning.