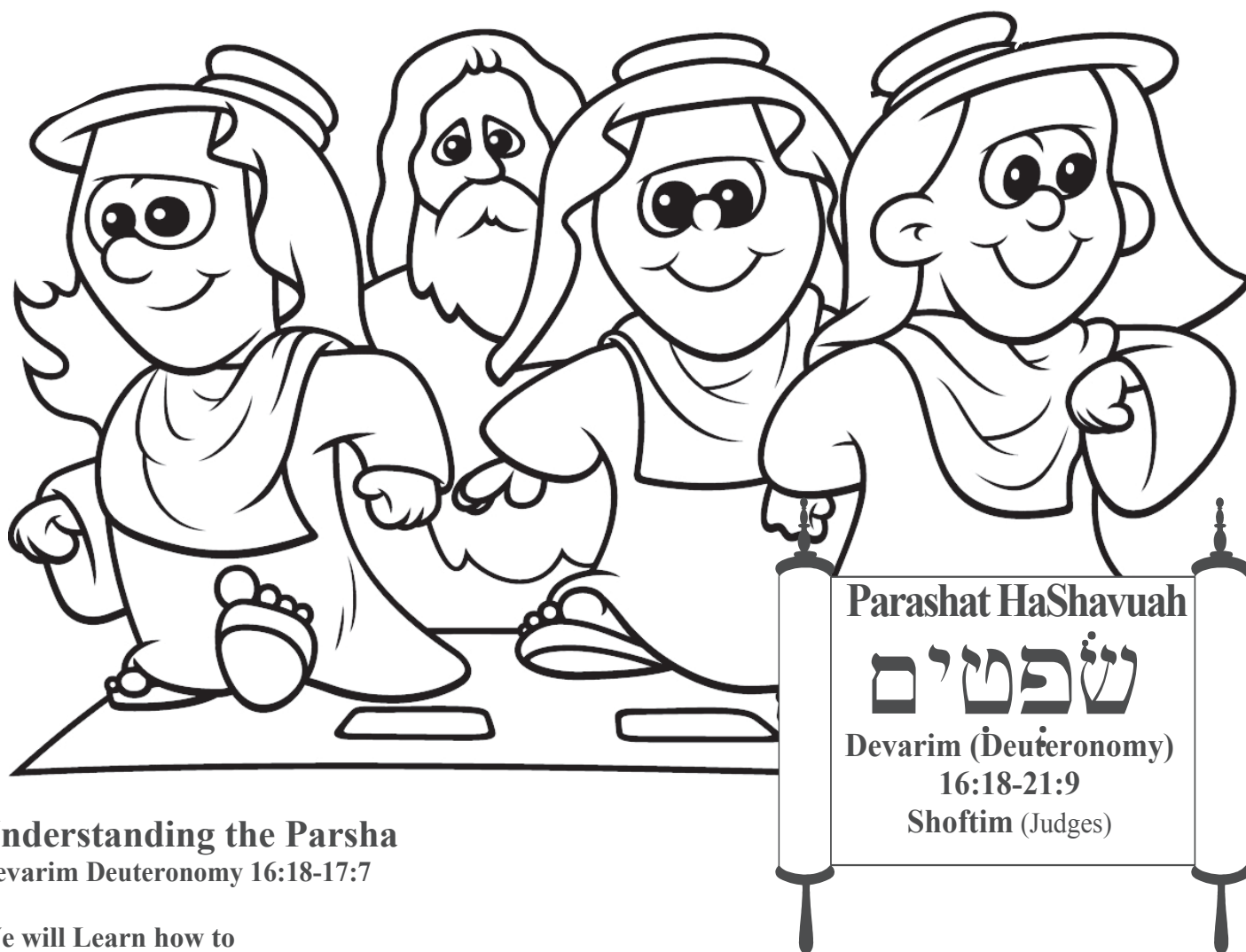




Understanding the Parsha

Devarim Deuteronomy 16:18-17:7

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 the Parsha Breaks

The Torah was written with two paragraph-like divisions called Parshiot (Parsha, singular). Although each Parsha is for one complete thematic subject, there is a difference in understanding between the two. In general, a Parsha **P'tuchah** is used to signal a major change in theme, topic and subject, and a Parsha **Stumah** is used to point to a lesser change in theme, topic and subject.

Read Devarim 16:18-17:7. Pay close attention to the Parsha breaks (listed at the beginning of this lesson) and the subject changes. You should see the following outline of the thematic flow:

Devarim 16:18-20 ו — The establishment of j judges and O officers (court system) to make sure that righteousness is upheld.

Devarim 16:21 ☐ — The forbidding of erecting idolatrous † trees.

Devarim 17:1 ☐ — Acceptable 0 offerings.

Devarim 17:2-7 ☐ — The d death penalty for idolaters.

When you first read the Parsha breaks they may seem somewhat random. Look at how some Parshiot are only one verse long! What are we to make of these strange markings? Well, as we said before, Adonai inspired these divisions; and that is what makes them important. These divisions are the basis for many of the Torah's teachings. Since we know that 1) a **Parsha Stumah** normally only signals a small change in subject and 2) a **Parsha P'tuchah** signals a major change in subject, we can guess that Devarim 16:18-17:7 may have one unified theme, even though there appears to be a wandering from the subject and theme in their flow. Let's check this out a little more closely.

Read the outline above and take notice of its general flow. The theme of Devarim 16:18-20 is connected to righteousness and judgment. The theme of Devarim 17:2-7 also is connected to righteous judgment. Right? This is our evidence that shows us that Devarim 16:18-17:7 has a complete unified theme even though there seem to be a wandering from the subject within it. Moses started off talking about righteousness and judgment (Devarim 16:18-20) and ended speaking about righteous judgment. But what about the two Parshiot between them. They sort of wander from the subject. We've seen how the two "outer" Parshiot are thematically related through the theme of judgment. Could these two "inner" Parshiot be thematically related? If so, how?

Yes, they are thematically related, because they both are connected to the a alter.

Write how the flow seems to look:

Devarim 16:18-20 ☐ — J judgment and R death.

Devarim 16:21 ☐ — A Altar.

Devarim 17:1 ☐ — A Altar.

Devarim 17:2-7 ☐ — R Righteous J judgment.

Does the pattern in this outline remind you of any kind of structures used in studying the Scriptures?

A C chiastic structure.

Remember, the Torah uses its own techniques inside the text, which we need to learn to understand. These Parshiot are organized as a **chiastic structure**. We've seen this many times before. A chiastic structure is a thematic method of organizing the stories of the Torah. A chiastic structure is a pattern organized as follows. Generally, a story is divided into two halves. The themes of the first half of the story are repeated in the second half of the story in reverse order. Also, both halves of the story point to the central axis, which will be the **most important part in the story**. Let's use this with our Parshiot, by carefully dividing them thematically. Then we'll look them over it to see the beautiful pattern.



A) Devarim 16:18-20— Appointing judges and officers to pursue righteousness.

COLOR YELLOW

B) Devarim 16:21 — The forbidding of setting up trees near the altar.

COLOR ORANGE

C) Devarim 17:1 — Acceptable offerings (sacrifices).

COLOR RED

B1) Devarim 17:2-3 — The idolater.

COLOR ORANGE

A1) Devarim 17:4-7 — Conviction and execution of the idolater.

COLOR YELLOW

Compare A and A1. What is the thematic connection between them?

In A, Adonai commands Am Yisrael to appoint judges and officers for the purpose of ensuring righteous judgments. The emphasis is on ensuring that judgment isn't corrupted.

A1 is thematically connected to A because it shows the judges and officers (in A) in action as they make sure righteousness is kept within Eretz Yisrael by convicting an idolater.

Compare B and B1. What is the thematic connection between them?

Both B and B1 are connected by the theme of idolatry! In B, Moses talks about an idolatrous practice. In B1, he talks about an idolater.



As we look at this chiasmic structure, we are immediately drawn to the central axis, C. Remember, the central axis is the most important part of the chiasmic structure. The two halves of the story always depend upon the central axis. Therefore, the question is this, “What do acceptable offerings have to do with the two halves of the chiasmic structure?”

First, let's notice the key words in this chiasmic structure. Obviously, **righteousness** is one key word because it is the theme of the two halves of the chiasmic structure. The other key word is **offering**, which is found in the central axis. So, the Torah has taught us that there is a thematic connection between righteousness and offerings. In order to make the thematic connection, let's cheat by looking at how the prophets often connected righteousness and sacrifice.

Read Psalm 51:16-19. How is this passage thematically related to the chiasmic structure?

Both passages about an acceptable offering

They both answer our question, “Which offering is the a _____ offering to the Holy One?”
acceptable

Based on the thematic connection between Psalm 51:16-19 and our chiastic structure, what lesson can we say the chiastic structure is trying to teach?

Through the chiastic structure we are taught that an a _____ offering (central axis) can
acceptable
only be made within the requirements of r _____ (two halves of the story).
righteousness

That’s right! The chiastic structure is the Torah’s “language” for teaching what is found in Psalm 51:16-19! Remember, chiastic structures are not just fluffy words. Adonai arranged His Words in these chiastic structures to teach us deeper spiritual truths. Our job is to learn the Torah’s language (e.g., chiastic structures) and then apply our knowledge so that we can gain all the wisdom He has for us. This idea, that offerings/ sacrifices are only acceptable within the context of righteous living on the part of the one making the offering, is a foundational message of the prophets.



Read Malachi 3:2-3. How is Malachi 3:3 thematically related to our chiastic structure?

The Messiah will purify or purge u _____ from the sons of Levi SO THAT they can offer
unrighteousness
a _____ sacrifices, meaning, those offered in r _____.
acceptable righteousness

Other verses that teach this relationship are Devarim 33:19, and Psalm 4:5. Read Proverbs 21:3. What are the three subjects of this verse?

R _____, j _____ and S _____.
righteousness justice sacrifice

Think about how are they related to the chiastic structure?

They show that righteousness and justice are the g _____ of the Torah, not just a sacrifice empty of
righteousness
r _____ and j _____.
righteousness justice

Think about how the ideals of justice as well as righteousness in Proverbs 21:3 (*To do what is right and just is more pleasing to Adonai than sacrifice.*) are thematically related to our Parsha! Also, in Isaiah 1:26, (*I will restore your judges as at first and your advisors as at the beginning. After that, you will be called the City of Righteousness, Faithful City. Tziyon will be redeemed by justice; and those in her who repent, by righteousness.*) see the result of the restoration of judges? Jerusalem will be called a City of Righteousness!

To sum it up, the message of the chiastic structure is this: The acceptable sacrifice/ offering is the one made in righteousness. The chiastic structure is the literary tool the Torah uses to teach this. AND, we can see once again that oftentimes there is one overall theme between each Parsha P’tuchah, even though there may be many

Parsha Stumah's between them. This was such an example. There were three Parsha Stumahs before the final Parsha P'tuchah. Before we learned this, you may have been tempted to analyze these Parshiot separately. Especially considering the seemingly major topic change between Devarim 16:18-20 (the establishment of judges and courts to implement righteousness) and Devarim 16:21 (the prohibition against erecting idolatrous trees). Yet, by analyzing each Parsha thematically and connecting them thematically, we discovered a chiastic structure that clearly tied each Parsha to each other as one complete unit. This chiastic structure, blossomed into a teaching concerning a foundational topic (righteousness as a prerequisite for sacrifice) which was also taught by the prophets.



A Nation of Righteousness

Let's continue our study of the Parsha Devarim 16:18-17:7. In context, we know that Am Yisrael is about to enter the Promised Land and settle it. Moses will soon die, and is, teaching them the most important doctrines they will need when entering the land. This Parsha has pointed out the importance of righteousness within Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel). So, we know that Moses thinks righteousness will be a very important characteristic for the new nation.

Can you make a thematic connection between the concept of a righteous nation and the calling of Abraham? Read Genesis 18:16-20. Pay close attention to Genesis 18:19.

What was the reason, the Holy One call Abraham?

To e _____ through him a nation characterized by r _____ and j _____.
establish righteousness justice

In fact, Genesis 18:19 clearly says that it is through these two virtues that the Holy One will be able to cause Am Yisrael to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth! The idea that Am Yisrael will be a nation of righteousness and justice (remember Malachi 3:3) was on the heart of the Holy One from the moment He called our Father Abraham to follow him.

Why a Nation of Righteousness?

Read Genesis 18:1-19:38. Notice that there are no other parsha divisions in this story!

What does the fact that Genesis 18:1-19:38 is one complete Parsha tell us concerning the entire content of this parsha?

This entire passage of Scripture has o _____ common unique t _____.
one theme

How many stories or topics are in this parsha?

It appears that there are t _____ separate stories— one concerning the promise of a son and another concerning the destruction of Sodom.

At first glance do they appear to be unrelated stories? YES NO

Even though they seem to be separate stories/ topics, why is it important that they appear inside the same parsha?

Without knowing that they are linked together by Adonai in O unit (parsha), you would think they are totally unrelated stories. But because they are together in one parsha we are forced to realize that there is a common theme that u them.

What theme, words, subject, etc. (thematic connection), is common to both stories?

The a are present in both stories.

How does this common theme relate to both stories.

In the first story they a the promise of the son. In the second story they bring j upon Sodom and rescue Lot.

So far we haven't really shown anything in the texts that the two stories are related. We have simply reasoned that they are related since they are part of the same Parsha. What we really need is definite evidence thematically linking the two stories. In order to make the thematic connection between the story of the promise of a child and the destruction of Sodom clearer, let's see if we can figure out if there are any verses that connect the two stories.

Read B'reishit 18:17-19. Now explain how these verses thematically link the story of the promise of a son to the destruction of Sodom.

In Genesis 18:17, Adonai said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?" What was He about to do?

He was about to d Sodom, which is one of the two stories we're trying to link thematically. In

Genesis 18:18, Adonai says that the reason He won't conceal what He's about to do is because Abraham will

become a great and mighty nation. How will he become a great and mighty nation? Through the offspring of

his p son, which is the story we're trying to link thematically to the story of the destruction of Sodom.

There you have it. Concrete textual evidence linking the two stories! **What reason does Adonai give for deciding to tell Avraham what He's about to do?**

He confides in Avraham because He's 1) going to make

Avraham's descendants into a great n,

2) all nations will be b through him/that nation



and 3) Avraham will instruct his family to do works of r righteousness and j justice.

Can you see Adonai's reasoning. Abraham's descendants will become a great nation AND as a nation, his descendants will bless other nations AND the future nation will be characterized by righteousness and justice (which, by the way is thematically related to the Devarim 16:18-17:7, the reason why we're studying this story— in case you're lost ?).



Why does Torah make this thematic connection between these two stories?

Because Torah wants us to see that these two stories, (1) the story of the p promised son who will be the first step in starting the nation and (2) the destruction of S Sodom, are CLEARLY related.

Let's Genesis 18:19. This verse tells us that there is a condition that must be met BEFORE Adonai can "bring upon Abraham all that which He had

spoken to him." What was "all that which He had spoken to him?" It was the promise that Abraham's descendants would bless all other nations.

What was the condition that needed to be met before Adonai could cause all nations to be blessed by Abraham's descendants?

In Genesis 18:19 it says, Abraham's descendant's needed to be a nation of r righteousness and j justice BEFORE Adonai could "bring upon Abraham all that which He had spoken to him."

The Torah now begins to show us how Abraham tries to save Sodom! Thematically, what is the one word that describes Abraham's actions as he tried to save Sodom?

I Intercession! He makes intercession on behalf of Sodom.

What is the main reason for Avraham asking Adonai not to destroy Sodom?

He asks Adonai not to destroy Sodom for the sake of any r righteous ones in Sodom.

Knowing that Adonai's will is that all come to repentance, why would he not destroy a nation for the sake of the righteous within it? Let's take inventory. Abraham, one man, tried to save one nation, Sodom, by interceding for them. We know that Abraham was righteous. And, we know that he was definitely trying to be a blessing to Sodom. Do you see where this is going? There is a thematic parallel here. Adonai's plan is that the righteous nation made of Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to all nations just as Abraham was trying to be a blessing to Sodom! Wow!

You have just seen another example of how actions of the Patriarchs are prophetic foreshadows of future events in the lives of their descendants! The story of righteous Abraham trying to be a blessing by interceding for Sodom is a foreshadowing of how the future nation of Israel will be a blessing to all nations of the earth. 7

Through the righteous nation of Israel, Adonai wants to save other nations! That's the connection.

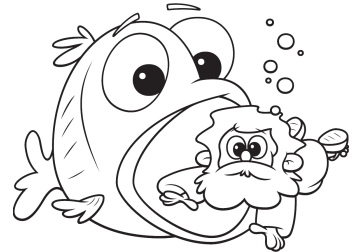
Wrapping up the thematic connection between the two supposedly unrelated stories (the promise of the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) of our parsha:

Adonai plans to make Avraham into a great nation. This nation is destined to become one that represents the one and only true Elohim (God) to all other nations. They are to be a nation that practices righteousness and justice. 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 other nations will perform teshuvah because of the example of righteousness and justice found in Israel and their intercession on behalf of those nations (remember how Jonah saved Ninevah). In order to impress upon Avraham Avinu (Abraham, our Father) the hugeness and seriousness of his calling, He gave Avraham a chance to see what would happen to mankind (the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah) without the positive influence of a nation characterized by righteousness and justice. This real-life example will serve to motivate Avraham to fulfill his calling to be the father of such a nation. This interpretation helps to explain how these two seemingly unrelated stories are truly related. Their being side by side in a common parsha helps us to make the connection.



Can you find the words from this Parsha?

A	I	N	A	T	I	O	N	S	N	U	C
N	L	M	R	I	G	H	T	E	O	U	S
G	A	T	R	F	A	T	M	C	I	H	D
E	N	L	A	S	E	S	O	N	S	A	O
L	D	A	E	R	S	U	D	A	S	I	F
J	U	D	G	E	S	N	O	T	E	S	F
S	C	H	L	C	S	T	S	N	C	S	E
H	E	B	A	I	D	O	L	E	T	E	R
I	Y	A	R	F	S	R	N	P	N	M	I
P	S	D	A	F	G	A	T	E	I	S	N
I	O	S	E	O	R	H	P	R	T	E	G
A	V	R	A	H	A	M	T	E	I	S	N
I	O	S	E	S	H	O	F	T	I	M	G



SHOFTIM
AVRAHAM
ISAAC
SODOM
REPENTANCE
BLESS
NATIONS
ANGEL
SON
RIGHTEOUS
JUSTICE
INTERCESSION
LAND
MESSIAH
TORAH
OFFERING
IDOL
JUDGES
OFFICERS
ALTAR