

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter II: Noach (Gen. 6:9–11:32)

Essay 9. Salvation from fiery furnaces

This parasha discusses that Noah follows G-d's commands in the face of mockery by others. Abraham, who is introduced at the end of this parasha, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, similarly face mockery, but are prepared to give up their lives to sanctify G-d's Name.

פְּסָחִים פָּרָק י' וְיֵשׁ אֹמְרִים "וְנִצְמַתְהָ לְעוֹלָם" גְּבַרְיָאֵל אָמְרוּ. בְּשַׁעָה שֶׁהִפִּיל נִמְרוֹד אֶת אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ לְכַבֵּשׁ הָאֵשׁ אָמַר גְּבַרְיָאֵל, רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אֲרֻד וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַכַּבֵּשׁ וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַצַּדִּיק מִכַּבֵּשׁ הָאֵשׁ. אָמַר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה אֲנִי יָחִיד בְּעוֹלָמִי וְהוּא יָחִיד בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, נִצָּה לְיָחִיד לְהַצִּיל אֶת הַיָּחִיד. וְלִפִּי שְׂאִין הַקַּב"ה מְקַפֵּחַ שָׂכָר כָּל בְּרִיָּה, אָמַר לוֹ: תִּזְכֶּה וְתַצִּיל שְׁלֹשָׁה מִבְּנָיו. דְּדָרַשׁ ר' שְׁמַעוֹן הַצְּדוּנִי: בְּשַׁעָה שֶׁהִפִּיל נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר הַרְשָׁע אֶת חֲנַנְיָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעֲזַרְיָה לְתוֹךְ כַּבֵּשׁ הָאֵשׁ, אָמַר יוֹרְקָמִי שֶׁר הַבָּרַד לְפָנֵי הַקַּב"ה אֲרֻד וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַכַּבֵּשׁ וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַצַּדִּיקִים הַלְלוּ. אָמַר לוֹ גְּבַרְיָאֵל: אֵין גְּדוּלְתוֹ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה בְּכֹף שְׂאֵתָה שֶׁר שֶׁל בָּרַד, וְהַכֹּל יוֹדְעִים שֶׁהַמַּיִם מְכַבִּים אֶת הָאֵשׁ. אֶלָּא אָנִי, שֶׁר שֶׁל אֵשׁ, אֵלֶּךְ וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הָאֵשׁ, וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַכַּבֵּשׁ, וְנִצְנֵן אֶת הַכַּבֵּשׁ. גַּם בְּתוֹךְ גַּם.

Pesachim, chapter 10:

And some say “And the faithfulness of the L-rd endures forever”¹ was said by [the angel] Gabriel. When Nimrod threw our father, Abraham, into the fiery furnace, Gabriel said: Master of the Universe, I will descend and cool the furnace, and I will save the righteous one from the fiery furnace. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: I am Unique in My world and [Abraham] is unique in his world. It is fitting for the Unique One to save the unique one. [Therefore, G-d saved Abraham directly.] And as the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not withhold reward from any [deserving] creature, He said [to Gabriel]: You will merit and save three of his sons.

For Rabbi Shimon HaTzidoni² taught: When the evil Nebuchadnezzar threw Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the fiery furnace,³ Yurkami, the

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¹ Ps. 117:2.

² The Vilna edition reads haShiloni, but some earlier manuscripts of Pesachim read haTzidoni, including Munich Cod. hebr. 6, and NY, JTS, Rab. 1623, have haTzidoni, as in the first edition of Zera Shimshon.

³ The book of Daniel, chapter 3, describes how Nebuchadnezzar built a massive golden image (likely of himself) and commanded all officials to bow to it when music played. The Chaldeans told the king that the Jews would not bow to it, and he decided to test them. Even though according to some halachic authorities it was not being used for idolatry, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refused to bow, declaring loyalty only to the G d of Israel. They were threatened with death in the fiery furnace, and still refused. Nebuchadnezzar ordered them thrown in to the furnace,

ministering angel of hail, said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: I will go down and cool the furnace, and I will save these righteous ones. Gabriel said to him: The greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, will not be [known] by this, [as] you are the minister of hail, and everyone knows that water extinguishes fire. Rather, I, the ministering angel of fire, I will go and I will heat it from the outside and cool it from within, and I will [thus] perform a miracle within a miracle.

- Pesachim 118a-b

גַּם לְדַקְדָּק בְּתִירוּץ הַקַּב"ה אָנִי יְחִיד בְּעוֹלָמִי וְכוּ' נֶאֱמַר לְיַחֲדִיד, שְׁלֹכְאוֹרָה הֵם דְּבָרִים בְּעֵלְמָא וּבְנֻדְאֵי שְׁצָרִיךְ לְמַצּוֹא בְּהֵם טַעַם וּסְבָרָא מְכַרְעַת. וְעוֹד מְהוּ זֶה שְׁאָמַר גַּבְרִיאֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה גַם בְּתוֹךְ נֶס, דְּמִי אָמַר לוֹ שְׁצָרִיךְ שְׁתִּי נְסִים וְדִילְמָא אִין צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶלְא גַם אֶתְד.

Question 1: It is necessary to analyze the reply of the Holy One, Blessed be He: “I am unique in My world and [Abraham] is unique in his world. It is fitting for the Unique One to save the unique one.” For apparently these are mere words, but surely there must be a decisive reason and explanation within them.

Question 2: Also, what is the meaning of Gabriel’s statement: “I will perform a miracle within a miracle”? Who told him that two miracles were needed; perhaps only one was required?

וְעוֹד מְקַשִּׁים הָעוֹלָם לָמָּה לֹא עָמַד שׂר שֶׁל בְּרַד אֶף לְהַצִּיל אֶת אַבְרָהָם, וּמָה שְׁתִּירֵץ מִהַרְשֵׁ"א שְׁאֶפְשֵׁר שֶׁהִנֵּה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהִצִּילָתוֹ לֹא תִהְיֶה אֶלְא מִן הַקַּב"ה מִטַּעַם שֶׁהִנֵּה יְחִיד וְכוּ' הוּא דוֹחֵק, וְעוֹד דָּאִם גַּבְרִיאֵל לֹא יָדַע מִנָּא לִיָּה לְשַׁר שֶׁל בְּרַד לְדַעַת. עוֹד מְקַשִּׁים לָמָּה עָמַד שׂר שֶׁל בְּרַד בְּהַצִּיל תְּנִינָה מִישָׂאֵל וְעוֹרָה, וְתִירֵץ מִהַרְשֵׁ"א שֶׁלֹּא הִנֵּה יוֹדֵעַ מָה שֶׁהַקַּב"ה הִבְטִיחַ לְגַבְרִיאֵל, וְגַם זֶה דוֹחֵק, וּמִכָּל שֶׁפֶן לוֹמַר שְׁפַעַם אַחַת יָדַע וּפַעַם אַחֶרֶת לֹא יָדַע. וְעוֹד קוֹשֵׁי לֵן לָמָּה לוֹ לְגַבְרִיאֵל לְהַצִּילָתוֹ פֶּל כֶּף עִם שׂר שֶׁל בְּרַד, תִּיפּוֹק לִיָּה שֶׁזֶּאת הִהְצִילָה נוֹגַעַת לוֹ בְּשִׁבִיל הִבְטַחְתּוֹ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה. וְאִם נֶאֱמַר שֶׁגַבְרִיאֵל בָּא לְהוֹכִיחַ שֶׁזֶּאת הִהְצִילָה נוֹגַעַת לוֹ אֶף בְּלֹא הִבְטַחְתּוֹ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה, אִם כֵּן קוֹשֶׁה מָה הוֹעִילָה לוֹ זֹאת הִבְטַחְתּוֹ.

Question 3: Moreover, people ask why the ministering angel of hail did not stand forth to save Abraham as well, and only volunteered to save Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. What the Maharsha explained—that perhaps [the ministering angel of hail] knew that Abraham’s salvation would be only through the Holy One, Blessed be He, since He is unique—is a forced explanation. Furthermore, if Gabriel did not know that G-d would save Abraham directly, how would the ministering angel of hail have known?

Question 4: They also ask: Why did the ministering angel of hail rise to save Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah? The Maharsha answered that [the angel] did not know of the promise that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had made to Gabriel, rewarding him for his desire to save Abraham by instead promising him that he would save three of Abraham’s descendants. This too is difficult, and all the more so to say that one time he knew something, viz, that Abraham’s salvation would come directly from G-d, and another time he did not know something, viz, that Gabriel had been promised the right to save three of Abraham’s descendants.

while according to a Midrash, the Chaldeans stood outside mocking them. The three men were seen walking around inside the furnace with an angelic being, and then the three men emerged from the furnace.

Question 5: Another difficulty for us is why did Gabriel prolong his words so much with the ministering angel of hail? I.e., why did he have to tell him that the miracle would be a greater vindication of G-d's Name coming from the ministering angel of fire rather than the ministering angel of hail. It would have sufficed for him to say that this salvation concerned him because of the promise of the Holy One, Blessed be He. If we say that Gabriel wished to show that this salvation concerned him even without that promise, then there is a question of what purpose did that promise serve?

ומשום הכי יותר נראה לומר שאין הכי נמי ששר של ברד היה יודע מה שהבטיח הקב"ה לגבריאל אבל בפעם הזאת היה צריך לעשות שתי דברים הפוכים, והם גם בתוך גם, דהיינו לצנן הפכשו מבפנים ולשרוף האומות העומדים בחוץ שהיו משחקים עליהם, שגם זה הוא לכבוד הצדיקים שהקב"ה תובע עלבונם.

Therefore, to answer Questions 3 and 4, it seems better to say that indeed the ministering angel of hail knew of the promise the Holy One, Blessed be He, had given to Gabriel. But this time, two opposite things were required, namely, a miracle within a miracle: to cool the furnace from within so as to save the three Jews, and to burn the nations standing outside, who were mocking them. This too was for the honor of the righteous, whose insult the Holy One, Blessed be He, avenges.

ומשום הכי סבירא ליה לשר של ברד שמה שהבטיח הקב"ה לגבריאל לא היה אלא לעשות גם אחד בלבד דהיינו גם ההצלה ולא לעשות שני נסים, שהרי לא אמר אלא תנפה ותציל ולא אמר לו לעשות נמי נקמה מהאויבים. והבטחה זו יכולה להתקיים בצדיקים אחרים שאין צורך בהם אלא להצלתם בלבד כמו שהיה באברהם, ולכן היה רוצה השר של ברד לירד הוא ולעשות שני נסים, גם בתוך גם, לפי שהיה מרתים מבחוץ אף על פי שהוא שר של ברד.

Thus, the ministering angel of hail thought that what the Holy One, Blessed be He, had promised Gabriel was only to perform a single miracle—namely, the miracle of rescue of the descendants of Abraham—and not two miracles. For He said only, “You will merit and save,” and did not tell him to exact vengeance upon the enemies. That promise could be fulfilled with other righteous men, whose rescue alone was needed, as with Abraham. Therefore, the ministering angel of hail wanted to descend and perform two miracles, a miracle within a miracle, by heating the furnace from without even though he is the ministering angel of hail, who typically brings cooling hail, and not heat.

אבל גבריאל השיב לו אין גדלתו של הקב"ה בכך, כלומר עקר הגדולה של הקב"ה היא להציל הצדיקים ולא להמית את האויבים, כמו שמצינו באברהם שרצה להצילו הוא בעצמו כדי להרבות בגדולת הצלתו. ומטעם זה לא אמר לי אלא תנפה ותציל ולא אמר לי להמית את האויבים, ואם אני ארד להציל יש גם בתוך גם בהצלת הצדיקים שזה הוא העקר שאצנן מבפנים אף על פי שאני שר של אש.

But Gabriel answered him: “The greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, will not be [known] by this,” as if to say that the principal part of the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is to save the righteous, not in destroying the enemies. This is as we find with Abraham, whom He desired to save by Himself in order to magnify the greatness of [Abraham's] salvation. For this reason, He told me only “You will merit and save,” and not “You will destroy the enemies.” If I descend to save, there will be a miracle within a miracle

in the salvation of the righteous, which is the main point, that I will cool it from within even though I am the ministering angel of fire. I.e., the two miracles are not saving the three men and destroying the enemies, but saving the three men and doing it by having the ministering angel of fire bring a cooling effect, the opposite of his usual action. The burning of the mockers, proposed as a second miracle by the ministering angel of hail, is not counted in Gabriel's definition of a double miracle, because the main honor is saving the righteous.

This provides one possible solution to Question 2, why Gabriel thought that he should produce a double miracle: because he was answering the ministering angel of hail, who himself wanted to produce a double miracle.

It also answers Question 5, why Gabriel gave such a lengthy explanation to the ministering angel of hail, instead of simply saying that the rescue of the three men had been promised to him.

אָמַנְם בְּתִירוּץ קוּשִׁיאַ הַנְּאָמֵר לְעֵיל לְמָה לֹא עָמַד שָׁר שֶׁל בְּרַד אֶף בְּהַצֵּלַת אַבְרָהָם, וְעוֹד לְמָה הָיָה שָׁכְרוּ שֶׁל גַּבְרִיאֵל לְהַצִּיל דְּנִקָּא חֲנֻנְיָהּ מִשְׂאֵל וְעוֹרְיָהּ, שְׁהָרִי פִמָּה צְדִיקִים וְחַסִּידִים אֲחֵרִים נִיצוּלוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, יוֹבֵן בְּמָה שְׁפָתַב הַרְבּ בְּעַל פְּרִשְׁת דְּרָכִים (סוֹף ד' [רוּשׁ ב' דף ח') שְׁהַמְלָאָכִים הָיוּ סְבוּרִים דְּכִינּוֹן שְׁלֹא יֵצֵא אַבְרָהָם מִכָּלָל בְּן נֹחַ לֹא הָיָה רִשְׁאֵי לְמָסוּר עֲצָמוֹ עַל קְדוּשׁ הַשָּׁם, וְאַבְרָהָם סְבִירָא לִיָּה פִסְבֵּרַת הַחוֹלְקִים דְּרִשְׁאֵי לְהַחְמִיר עַל עֲצָמוֹ אֲפִילוּ שְׁיִהְיֶה לְאַבְרָהָם דִּין דְּבֵן נֹחַ, דּוּמְנָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׂאָר מִצּוֹת בְּצִנְעָה דְּרִשְׁאֵי לְהַחְמִיר עַל עֲצָמוֹ. וְהָיָה מְבִיא רְאָיָה מִמָּה שְׁעָשׂוּ חֲנֻנְיָהּ מִשְׂאֵל וְעוֹרְיָהּ שְׂאֵף שְׁהָיוּ פְטוּרִים שְׁהָרִי לֹא הָיָה שָׁם עֲבוּדָה זָרָה כִּי אִם אֲנִדְרִטִי שֶׁל מְלָכִים מְסָרוּ עֲצָמָם עַל קְדוּשׁ הַשָּׁם וְכוּ' וְעֵי"שׁ.

Indeed, in solving the question discussed above, Question 3, why the ministering angel of hail did not stand to save Abraham, and why Gabriel's reward was specifically to save Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, though many other righteous men in Israel were saved, this can be understood from what the author of *Parashat Derachim* wrote (end of Discourse 2, page 8).⁴

The angels thought that since Abraham had not yet left the category of “descendant of Noah,” he was not permitted to give up his life for the sanctification of the Name of G-d. That is, *Perashat Derachim* notes that with the receipt of the Torah at Sinai, the Israelites left the halachic category of the descendants of Noah and were treated halachically as Jews. However, there is a question whether the patriarchs and pre-Sinai Israelites should be considered as Jews, or whether they were still part of the descendants of Noah. The Gemara debates whether non-Jews are required to give up their lives for the sanctification of the Name of G-d.⁵ The Rambam states that if one is not required to give up his life, then to do so voluntarily would be tantamount to suicide, which is forbidden.⁶

But Abraham held like those who disagree, that one may be strict upon oneself even if he has the status of a descendant of Noah, similar to Israel, who may be strict upon themselves and willing to give up their lives to sanctify G-d's Name even regarding other commandments done privately, for which there is no obligation to sacrifice oneself. He brought proof from what Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did. Thus, even though they were exempt,

⁴ Judah ben Samuel Rosanes (1657-1727), *Parshat Derachim* (Constantinople, 1727).

⁵ Sanhedrin 74b.

⁶ Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah 5:3; see also Rambam, Iggeret HaShmad (Letter on Martyrdom), Chapter 4.

since according to some opinions there was no idolatry there but merely a royal statue, they were prepared to give up their lives for the sanctification of the Name, etc. See there in *Parashat Derachim*.

והתוספות כתבו בפרק קמא דשבת (דף י"ב) על ההיא דאין מלאכי השרת מפירין בלשון ארמי, לבד מגבריאל דאמרין בסוטה בא גבריאל ולימדו שבועים לשון עכ"ל. ואיתא בזוהר (שמות דף י"א) בשעתא דאיתליד גופא דצדיק, בהאי עלמא קב"ה קרי ליה לגבריאל ונטיל האי נשמתא דצדיק די בגנתא, ונחתא ליה להאי גופא דצדיקא, דאיתליד בהאי עלמא, ואיהו אתפקד עלה ונטיר לה עכ"ל.

The Tosafot wrote in the first chapter of tractate Shabbat (page 12b) that the ministering angels do not recognize the Aramaic language, except for Gabriel, as it says in tractate Sotah: “Gabriel came and taught him seventy languages.”⁷ Also, it is brought in the Zohar (Shemot, page 11): “When the body of a righteous man is born in this world, the Holy One, Blessed be He, calls Gabriel, who takes the soul of that righteous one from the Garden [of Eden] and brings it down into that body; and he is appointed over [that soul] and guards it.”⁸

ובזה הכל מתורץ, שמתחלה בא דנקא גבריאל לפי שהוא משובח משאר המלאכים, ועוד ששמירת הצדיק מוטלת עליו, והוא היה יודע סברת אברהם והיה שומרו לפי סברתו שהיה יכול למסור את עצמו, אמנם השר של ברך היה סובר פסברת שאר המלאכים ומשום הכי לא עמד להציל, אמנם בהצלת חנניה מישאל ועזריה עמד להציל לפי שהיו בני ישראל ורשאים למסור עצמם ועמד להציל פסברות הנאמר לעיל.

With this, all is resolved: that Gabriel came specifically because he differs from the other angels, and also because the guarding of the righteous is entrusted to him. He knew Abraham’s reasoning and guarded him according to his understanding that he could give up his life. But the ministering angel of hail thought like the other angels, and therefore did not rise to save him. Yet in the case of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, [the ministering angel of hail] rose to save, for they were Israelites post-Sinai, i.e., unquestionable Jewish and removed from the category of descendants of Noah, and thus permitted to give up their lives, and he acted according to the reasoning mentioned above.

ולפי זה אתי שפיר נאה ליחיד להציל את היחיד שאני יחיד בעולמי והוא יחיד בעולמו, לפי שעקר פוננת אברהם למסירת עצמו על קדוש השם אף על פי שיש להסתפק אם היה רשאי אם לאו לא היה אלא פדי שיתפרסם בעולם אלהותו של הקב"ה, שלא היה שום אדם בעולם שיפירהו אלא הוא לבדו, הא אם היו אחרים שיפירו גם הם שמא לא היה נכנס בספק זה, ומשום הכי קאמר נאה ליחיד להציל את היחיד.

Answer to Question 1: Accordingly, the statement “It is fitting that the Unique One save the unique one: ‘I am unique in My world and he is unique in his world’ ” is now well understood. For the main intent of Abraham in offering his life for the sanctification of the

⁷ I.e., Shabbat 12b quotes Rabbi Yochanan that the angels do not understand Aramaic. The Tosafot point out that in Sotah 33a and 36b, there is a teaching that Gabriel visited Joseph and taught him 70 languages.

⁸ Zohar, II:11a (Shemot 17:181).

Name—even though it was uncertain whether he was permitted to—was only that the Divinity of the Holy One, Blessed be He, be made known in the world, since no one else in the world recognized Him but he alone. Had there been others who recognized Him, perhaps he would not have entered into this doubt. Therefore, He said: “It is fitting that the Unique One save the unique one.”

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לֹזֵמֵר טַעַם אַחֵר לָמָּה לֹא עָמַד שָׂר שֶׁל בְּרַד אֶף בְּהַצֵּלַת אַבְרָהָם, לְפִי שְׁהֵינָה סוֹבֵר שְׁהֵינָה דְבָר נוֹגַע לְהַקְבִּי"ה לְהַצִּיל זֶה הַצַּדִּיק, מִפְּנֵי שְׁצַרְיָהוּ לְהַכְרִיעַ בֵּין הַמַּתְלוּקָת הַקְּדוּם אִם אַבְרָהָם רָשָׁאי הִיָּה לְמַסּוֹר עֲצָמוֹ אוֹ לֹא וְהַהֲכָרְעָה זֶה רְאוּיָה דוֹקָא לְהַקְבִּי"ה, אֲבָל גַּבְרִיאֵל עָמַד לְהַצִּיל לְפִי שְׁהֵינָה מְמוּנָה עַל הַצַּדִּיקִים כְּנֶאֱמָר לְעִיל. וּבְדִרְגָּה זֶה אֲמִי שְׁפִיר נְמִי פִירוּשׁ מִהַרְשֵׁ"א הַנֶּאֱמָר לְעִיל,

Another reason may be given why the ministering angel of hail did not stand to save Abraham: He thought that this matter pertained to the Holy One, Blessed be He, Himself, to save that righteous man. For it was necessary to determine the ancient dispute of whether Abraham was permitted to give up his life or not, and such judgment belonged only to the Holy One, Blessed be He. But Gabriel rose to save because he was appointed over the righteous, as said above. According to this, the explanation of the Maharsha mentioned earlier also fits well.

וּיְתוּרָן נְמִי גַם בְּתוֹךְ גַּם, לְפִי שְׁמֵהַצֵּלַת אֱלֹהֵי הַשְּׁלוּשָׁה יֵשׁ הַזְכָּחָה לְמַפְרַע שְׁגַם אַבְרָהָם הִיָּה רְאוּי לִינְצֵל, וְנָהוּ גַם בְּתוֹךְ גַּם, וְנָהוּ הַשְּׂכָר שְׁנִיתָן לְגַבְרִיאֵל דוֹקָא בְּאֵלֵי הַשְּׁלוּשָׁה מְדָה כְּנֶגֶד מְדָה מֵה שְׁאִין כֵּן אֱלֹהֵי הִיָּה נוֹתֵן לוֹ הַצֵּלַת שְׁלוּשָׁה אַחֵרִים, וְאִפְשָׁר נְמִי שְׁהֵינָה מֵה שְׁרַמְזוּ גַבְרִיאֵל לְשָׂר שֶׁל בְּרַד שְׁאֵלֵי הַשְּׁלוּשָׁה צַדִּיקִים דוֹקָא הֵם הַמְגִיעִים לוֹ לְפִי שְׁיֵשׁ בְּהֵם גַּם בְּתוֹךְ גַּם כְּנֶאֱמָר לְעִיל.

The phrase “miracle within a miracle” is likewise explained: for from the salvation of these three men there is retroactive proof that Abraham, too, was worthy of being saved. This was a miracle within a miracle: saving the three men from the fiery furnace, and retroactively proving that Abraham was always worthy.

Thus, earlier the Zera Shimshon offered a physical, dual phenomenon: cooling the inside of the furnace saved the righteous, while heating the outside of the furnace killed the wicked. Here, he discusses a spiritual double miracle, a miraculous event in the present, i.e., the saving of the men from the furnace, reflects Divine justice in the past.

This was the reward given to Gabriel specifically with these three, a measure-for-measure reward, something that would not have been the case had he been assigned to save three others. The nature of the double miracle served as public confirmation that Avraham’s self-sacrifice was correct. That confirmation was Gabriel’s reward for letting G-d act alone in Abraham’s case.

Perhaps this is what Gabriel hinted to the ministering angel of hail: that these three righteous men in particular were his due, because in them there was a “miracle within a miracle,” as explained above.

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