

# Genesis

## Chapter 18



**Michael Fronczak  
Bible Study Resource Center  
564 Schaeffer Dr.  
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

**[Biblestudyresourcecenter.com](http://Biblestudyresourcecenter.com)**

**Copyright © 2005, 2007**

**Theme:** God reaffirms His promise; God announces the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

**Torah Class Introduction:** This chapter is a good reminder of the character and essence of the entire book of Genesis; it is the book of beginnings. Or, in a similar light, it is the book of foundations.....foundations of principles, and types, and laws of God.

We could speed through this chapter, but we'd miss the beginnings of several God-principles set down for us. And, these principles will form the basis for how the whole Bible will play out.

The scene we witness in this chapter, takes place in hills of Hebron, from where one can get a beautiful view of practically the whole of the Dead Sea. And, we start right out with a mystery that we likely cannot answer. In Verse 1, it says "the Lord" appeared to Abraham; or perhaps in your bible, as in mine, it says "Adonai" appeared..... to Abraham. And, it's important to get this as straight as we can, because it impacts the entire rest of the chapter. The word "Adonai" is a Hebrew word, and it translates to Lord or Master. So, that much certainly is right. There's just one problem; that's not the word used in the original Hebrew OT manuscripts. The word is actually Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh in the Hebrew Alphabet.....Yhwh in the English alphabet.....and we typically translate it to Jehovah, or in Hebrew we would say Yahveh or Yahweh. Two things: first, the reason we see it the way we do in our Bibles is due to a Tradition among the Jews. And, that tradition is that it is forbidden to say the name of God. It has evolved to the point that among most observant Jews, you also can't say the word "God", or even spell it. So, quite often, if you read something concerning God written by a Jew, God will be spelled G dash D. By the way: nowhere in the Holy Scriptures is there a prohibition about saying God's name, Yahweh, except when using it in vein. That said, Jewish Tradition says that simply pronouncing God's name is to use it in vein. I don't wish to get into some theological argument about this, but I cannot find that it is vanity to pronounce God's name. If God did not want us to pronounce His name why give it to us? Why are we TOLD to call upon the name of the Lord, and then if we do it is sin?

I can also tell you that I have met several Jews who feel that it is not so much a matter of trespassing against God to use His Holy Name, as it is a matter of showing respect to refrain from using it.

Therefore, I will tell you that as Paul advised, be sensitive to the things that offend others even if you cannot fully understand why, or even might disagree with it. Therefore, as I full well know that practically all religious Jews, and some simply Traditional Jews, find the use of the word "God", or "Yahweh", offensive to them, I do my best to say HaShem, or the Lord in their presence, out of respect to them. When I go to Israel, I am particularly careful. Let's face it; it is certainly NOT offensive to us who find no fault in using God's name, to hear Him called HaShem or the Lord, so it's not a difficult trade-off.

In this class, I will use many names for God: God, Jehovah, Adonai, Yahweh.....and for Jesus: Christ, Jesus, Yeshua, Yeshua HaMashiach, Lord, Savior, and a few more. I ask you to try and understand that this is a classroom and I am speaking to quite a varied audience. Further, most Bibles will use those names. And, if I do use code words for God and for Jesus that are totally unfamiliar to many in here, then I'm not communicating or

teaching.....I'm just mouthing words. So know that I respect your views and mean no offense.<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction by McGee:** Until you get to the New Testament, you may wonder why the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Genesis are included in the Bible. They seem rather detached from the story of Abraham. They deal with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chapter 18 is a rather lengthy chapter in which God tells Abraham about the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham intercedes on behalf of the cities of the plain. This is an illustration, I think, of the blessed Christian life, of life in fellowship with God. But in chapter 19, down in Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot, we will see what I would call the blasted life—all because of a decision that was made.

Unfortunately, we have both kinds among Christians today—those living a blessed life and those living a blasted life. There are those who have really made shipwreck of their lives; they have gotten entirely out of the will of God. I would not suggest even for a moment that they have lost their salvation, but they sure have lost everything else. As Paul says, they are saved, "... yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15).<sup>2</sup>

*(1 Cor. 3:11-15) <sup>11</sup>For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; <sup>13</sup>Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup>If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

---

<sup>1</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>2</sup> McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

## **Genesis 18:1**

**And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;**

**[And the LORD appeared unto him]** This is the fifth time the LORD appeared to Abraham since he had come into the land of Canaan. (1) The first was the appearance at the altar Abram built in Shechem when he first entered the land (12:7). (2) The second was after Lot had separated from Abram when they came back to Canaan from Egypt (13:14–17). (3) The third followed Abram’s heroic rescue of Lot from the league of invading kings and the subsequent encounter with Melchizedek (15:1–21). (4) The fourth came 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, when the Lord renewed His covenant with Abraham and instituted the rite of circumcision (17:1–22).

**[plains]** *'elown*, (H436) *ay-lone'*; prolonged from Hebrew 352 (*'ayil*); an oak or other strong tree :- plain. See also Hebrew 356 (*'Eylown*).

The residence of Abraham was in the immediate vicinity of Hebron. “Plains”: the Hebrew word *elon* can be translated “oak” or “terebinth.” Abraham had been living here since the time of Genesis 13:18 and continued to live here until he “journeyed from thence” as in Genesis 20:1.

**[he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day]** For the purpose of enjoying the refreshing air in the heat of the day, when the sun had most power. The goatskin tents of pastoral nomadic people were designed to hold in heat at night with the flaps down and to allow a breeze to pass through during the day, when the flaps were up. Sitting at the entrance during the heat of the day would provide needed shade while a person enjoyed the breeze and guarded the tent’s contents. A custom still frequent among the Asiatics.

**Nachmanides: “and He appeared to him”** Rashi comments: “To visit the sick man. Said Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina, ‘It was the third day after his circumcision, and the Holy One, blessed be He, came and inquired after him.’ And, lo, three men: angels who came to him in the form of men. Three: one to announce to Sarah that she would bear a son, one to heal Abraham, and one to overthrow Sodom. Raphael who healed Abraham went from there to rescue Lot” for these do not constitute two commissions. This is because the second mission was in another place, and he was commanded thereon after [he had completed his first mission]. Perhaps it is because the two missions had rescue as their common goal. “And they did eat: they appeared to be eating.”

Now here is the interpretation of this portion of Scripture. After it says that in the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, Scripture says that G-d appeared to him while he was sick from the circumcision as he was sitting and cooling himself in his tent door on account of the heat of the day which weakened him. Scripture mentions this in order to inform us that Abraham had no intention for prophecy. He had neither fallen on his face nor prayed, yet this vision did come to him.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

**Chumash; Sparks of Chasidus:** The Kabbalah speaks of “50 gates of spiritual understanding,” 49 of which can be achieved by a person as a result of his own initiative. The final 50<sup>th</sup> gate is then granted by God from above.

When Avraham had circumcised himself, he had reached the greatest degree of spiritual perfection that he could possibly achieve as a human being – the 49<sup>th</sup> gate – and he became “sick” yearning for the fiftieth gate. This is alluded to by the fact that “a sick person” in Hebrew has the numerical value (gematria) of 49. Then, “God appeared to him,” revealing to him the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of spiritual understanding, which cured his spiritual sickness.

And, being that his physical sickness was a reflection of his spiritual dissatisfaction, the Divine revelation healed him physically too.<sup>4</sup>

**Chumash; “The Last Word”** When the Rebbe Rashab was four or five years old and he learned that, “God appeared to (Avraham),” he burst into tears and complained to his grandfather (the Tzemach Tzedek): “Why doesn’t God reveal himself to me?”

The Tzemach Tzedek replied, “When a Jew decides to circumcise himself at the age of 99, he deserves that God should reveal Himself to him.”

The fact that the previous Rebbe (Rabbi Yosef Yitzcak of Lubavitch) told this story in public and publicized it, proves that it contains a practical lesson in the education of all children, not just exceptional individuals, such as the Rebbe Rashab.

Namely, that while in the past children could only be drawn towards physical prizes and rewards – as the Rambam writes that children should be tempted to observe Torah and mitzvos with prizes of nuts etc.” Now days however, times have changed and even small children can be taught to have a desire for spiritual things, for Divine revelation, to the extent that its absence reduces them to tears.<sup>5</sup>

**Chumash; Classic Questions:** “Why did God Reveal himself to Avraham?”

**Rashi:** To visit the sick. Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said: it was the third day from Avraham’s circumcision, and God came to inquire about his welfare.

**Mizrachi:** Because, on the first day Avraham was busy circumcising Yisma’el and all the members of his household, so God did not visit him. God then chose to visit him on the third day and not the second, since the third day after circumcision is particularly dangerous, whereas the second day is not.

**Our HaChayim:** The Shulchan Aruch rules that, “friends and relative are allowed to visit a sick person immediately, whereas others must wait three days”. The reason for this is because the immediate presence of anyone but a friend or relative would publicly “declare” the person as being sick, which is not good for his *mazal* (fortune).

Even though God is a “relative,” so to speak, of every Jew, nevertheless a visit from God is highly public affair. Therefore, in this respect God could not be considered a “relative” and therefore He waited before visiting Avraham.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>5</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>6</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

**Chumash; classic Questions:** “Did Avraham feel pain from his circumcision?”

**Midrash:** Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said, “He felt pain, in order that God could double his reward.” (no pain – no gain)

**Rabbi Levi** said, “Avraham didn’t circumcise himself. He simply looked and found himself circumcised.” **Rabbi Birchya** said, “On that occasion, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana cursed Rabbi Levi, saying, “You are a liar and a cheater!”

**Toras Menachem:** this is why Rabbi Abba Bar Kahana reacted so vociferously to Rabbi Levi’s claim that Abraham felt no pain. For, without a physical feeling in the “flesh,” the covenant of circumcision loses its significance. Therefore, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana felt the need to negate such a notion as sharply as possible.

**Ramban:** writes that when, “God appeared to (Avraham), he was instantly healed by the Divine revelation. Therefore, if god would have revealed himself to Avraham earlier he would have been immediately healed, and he would not have felt the pain, which was associated with the mitzvah, to a sufficient degree. Therefore, only after Avraham had experienced the pain of circumcision in his physical flesh for a prolonged period, did God reveal himself to Avraham, causing a miraculous recovery.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Genesis 18:2**

**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,**

**[three men]** The Lord and two angels, (18:1, 18:13). (Genesis 18:2,13-14,17,20; Genesis 19:1,15), called "men" in Genesis 18:16,22; Genesis 19:5,10,12,16.

**[stood by him]** were standing over against him; for if they had been standing by him, as our translation says, he needed not to have “run from the tent door to meet them.” To Abraham these appeared at first as men; but he entertained angels unawares, see Hebrews 13:2.

**[he ran to meet them]** When the visitor is an ordinary person, the host merely rises; but if of superior rank, the custom is to advance a little towards the stranger, and after a very low bow, turn and lead him to the tent, putting an arm round his waist, or tapping him on the shoulder as they go, to assure him of welcome.<sup>8</sup>

**(Heb. 13:2)** *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

---

<sup>7</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>8</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ge 18:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

### **Genesis 18:3**

**And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:**

### **Genesis 18:4**

**Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:**

**[wash your feet]** In these verses we find a delightful picture of primitive hospitality. In those ancient times shoes such as ours were not in use; and the foot was protected only by sandals or soles, which fastened round the foot with straps. It was therefore a great refreshment in so hot a country to get the feet washed at the end of a day's journey; and this is the first thing that Abraham proposes.

A common practice to this day because sandals are worn (Genesis 18:4; Genesis 43:24; Luke 7:44). The kind of shoes worn by God and the two angels is not stated, but they had feet to wash the same as men of earth.

**[rest yourselves under the tree]** We have already heard of the oak grove of Mamre, Genesis 12:6, and this was the second requisite for the refreshment of a weary traveler, viz., rest in the shade.

**Torah Class:** Now, often we are told that what this really means is that this “man” called Yahweh was Jesus. Right? Because here was God, in some kind of visible form, that appeared as a man. And, the general rule in the evangelical Church is, if God has physical characteristics, it's Jesus. But, wait, when have you ever heard Jesus referred to by the Father's personal name, Yahweh? Mostly certainly we regularly will call him “the Lord” (which could be one translation of the word Adonai). |But, again, in the original Hebrew the word used to open chapter 18 is Yahweh, NOT Adonai. In V3, however, after we're told that Abraham looked up and saw 3 men, we DO encounter the word Adonai. Here's the thing, Adonai is plural.....Adon is singular. Adonai, a plural, is sometimes used to refer to God, and it is referred to as a plural of majesty. In other words, when Adonai is referring to God its not denoting more than one, it's simply denoting greatness. Here, however, the context indicates that Abraham was addressing all 3 so-called “men”, and therefore verse 3 should likely read: “.....he (meaning Abraham) said, my *lords*, if it please you, do not go on past your servant....”.

This whole thing is complicated by the fact that in verse 2 where it says, “and he saw 3 men standing near him.” The Hebrew word used for men, here, is enosh.....which specifically means men, as in human men; sometimes it is used to indicate mankind in general. But, NEVER does the word enosh refer to spirit beings. The Rabbis and sages are fairly evenly divided on this issue; some think that one of the “men” is a manifestation of God, and the other two are just humans. Others think that one is a manifestation of God and the other two are angels.

Now, let me throw another monkey wrench into the works. All this bowing and scraping Abraham is doing.....calling them lords.....telling his wife to hurry and bring

food.....foot bathing, etc.....is just typical and traditional Middle Eastern hospitality of that era; and to some degree it exists even today. Nothing Abraham does is out of the ordinary for greeting much welcomed guests. So, his actions don't help us in determining just who these 3 individuals actually are.<sup>9</sup>

### **Genesis 18:5**

**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.**

**[fetch a morsel of bread]** This was the third requisite, and is introduced in its proper order; as eating immediately after exertion or fatigue is very unwholesome. The strong action of the lungs and heart should have time to diminish before any food is received into the stomach, as otherwise concoction is prevented, and fever in a less or greater degree produced.

**[for therefore are ye come to your servant]** In those ancient days every traveler conceived he had a right to refreshment, when he needed it, at the first tent he met with on his journey.

God and the angels not only agreed to wait until the dinner was prepared, but "they did eat" (Genesis 18:8; cp. Exodus 24:9-11; Psalm 78:25).

### **Genesis 18:6**

**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.**

**[three measures]** A measure, *se'a*, was one third of an ephah, or about a peck and a half. Two Hebrew words, *gemahò* and *solet*, are used to designate the exceptional character of the flour used in making the rolls for the meal. *Hòema*, "curdled milk" mixed with fresh milk, a refreshing drink served to tired travelers while the more substantial food was being prepared. The calf was a rare and added luxury provided for these distinguished visitors.

"Three measures of meal" becomes the traditional "fellowship offering" in both Jewish and Arabic traditions (Cf. Mt 13:33).

**(Matt 13:33)** *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

---

<sup>9</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## He Recognized Them

- Abraham hurried to them v.2
  - He hurried back to the tent v.6
  - He ran to the herd v.7
  - His servant hurried v.7
- Abraham bowed low before them v.2
- He got water to wash their feet v.4
- He served them
  - freshly baked bread v.6
  - a choice calf (not kosher w/milk?) v.7
  - curds and milk (not kosher w/meat?) v.8
- He stood while they were eating v.8; cf. vv.1-2

**[upon the hearth]** Or under the ashes. This mode is used in the east to the present day. When the hearth is strongly heated with the fire that has been kindled on it, they remove the coals, sweep off the ashes, lay on the bread, and then cover it with the hot cinders.

**[Cakes]** are mentioned 38 times (Exodus 12:39; Leviticus 7:12; Leviticus 24:5; 1 Kings 17:12-13; 1 Kings 19:6; Jeremiah 7:18).

**Abraham hastened ... unto Sarah ... make cakes upon the hearth**—Bread is baked daily, no more than is required for family use, and always by the women, commonly the wife. It is a short process. Flour mixed with water is made into dough, and being rolled out into cakes, it is placed on the earthen floor, previously heated by a fire. The fire being removed, the cakes are laid on the ground, and being covered over with hot embers, are soon baked, and eaten the moment they are taken off.<sup>10</sup>

## Genesis 18:7

**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.**

**Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf**—Animal food is never provided, except for visitors of a superior rank when a kid or lamb is killed. A calf is still a higher stretch of hospitality, and it would probably be cooked as is usually done when haste is required—either by roasting it whole or by cutting it up into small pieces and broiling them on skewers over the fire. It is always eaten along with boiled corn swimming in butter or melted fat, into which every morsel of meat, laid upon a piece of bread, is dipped, before being conveyed by the fingers to the mouth.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ge 18:6). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>11</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ge 18:7). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**Nachmanides; “and Abraham ran unto the herd.”** The purport thereof is to tell us of his great desire to bestow kindness. This great man had three hundred and eighteen men in his house, each one a swordsman, and he was very old and weakened by his circumcision, yet he went personally to Sarah’s tent to urge her in the making of the bread, and afterwards he ran to the place of the herd to chose a calf, tender and good, to prepare for his guests, and he did not have all these done by means of one of his servants who stood ready to serve him.<sup>12</sup>

**Origen: “No one is slow in the House of a Wise Man”** “But he ran,” the text ways, “to the cattle and took a calf.” What kind of calf? Perhaps the first one he encountered? Not at all, but “a good and tender” calf. And although he would hasten in all things, nevertheless he knows that what is excellent and great should be offered to the Lord or to angels. He took therefore or chose from the herd a “good and tender” calf and delivered it to his servant. “The servant,” the text ways, “hastened to slaughter it.” He himself runs, his wife hastens, the servant makes haste. No one is slow in the house of a wise man. He serves therefore a calf and at the same time with it bread and fine wheat flour, but also milk and butter. There were the courtesies of hospitality of Abraham and Sarah.<sup>13</sup>

### **Genesis 18:8**

**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.**

[**butter**] *chem'ah*, (H2529), *khem-aw'*; or (shortened) *chemah*, *khay-maw'*; from the same root as Hebrew 2346 (chowmah); curdled milk or cheese :- butter. (Genesis 18:8; Deut. 32:14; Proverbs 30:33; Isaiah 7:15-22).

[**stood by them under the tree, and they did eat**] Nothing is more common in Hindostan than to see travelers and guests eating under the shade of trees. Feasts are scarcely ever held in houses. The house of a Hindoo serves for sleeping and cooking, and for shutting up the women; but is never considered as a sitting or dining room—Ward.

Though one is justified in seeing lessons here about hospitality, the angels certainly did not visit Abraham for the purpose of teaching him this. Why did the Angel of the Lord approach Abraham in this manner? Why did He not use an oracle, a vision, or a voice? Possibly He meant it as a test for both Abraham and the Sodomites. The moral states of Abraham and Sodom may have been indicated by their different treatments of strangers. Abraham’s peaceful, quiet visit contrasted greatly with Sodom’s outbursts of brutality and inhumanity (cf. chaps. 18-19).

---

<sup>12</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>13</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

But more likely Abraham's visitors meant to convey intimate fellowship. To eat together was important for fellowship, peace offerings, and treaties. When the Lord was ready to specify the fulfillment of the covenantal promise, He came in person and ate in Abraham's tent. Nothing could more significantly communicate their close relationship.

**[he stood by them under the tree]** It is said that an Arab chief never eats with his guests. He generally stands by while they eat, as if enjoying his own hospitality. This was Abraham's custom.

**[they did eat]** God and angels eat even in heaven, so why not on earth? (Exodus 24:11; Psalm 78:25; Luke 22:16,18,30; Luke 24:30,43; Acts 10:41; Hebrews 13:2). What else could this mean but what it says? One of the great promises of Christ to His disciples, to be fulfilled after their bodies are resurrected and glorified, pertains to their eating. Luke 22:30 says, "That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom."

**Torah Class:** Sarai does as Abraham instructs her.....she brings food and water, milk and curds, even some meat.....and as it says in verse 8: "He (Abraham) took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them (the 3 men); and he waited on them under the tree *as they ate!*"

Not only is it hard to imagine Yahweh eating food, it is equally as difficult for us to envision angels eating food. Josephus, the Targum Jonathan, and the Talmud simply cannot accept that we have here a scene of both God and angels dining; eating bread, meat, and milk. So, they say that it was only that the 3 individuals gave the appearance of eating, but they really weren't.

In the end it is very difficult to know what to make of all this; yet, it is undeniable that something supernatural is occurring here, because we are told directly and undeniably that this was an appearance of Yahweh, and that these 3 individuals had authority, and knew things they should not have been able to have otherwise known....such as Sarah's name or the fact that she was barren.<sup>14</sup>

**Torah Class:** Last week we started the story of the 3 men suddenly appearing to Abraham, that he brought them to his tent, and that they sat down and ate what was prepared for them. There is much disagreement on whether these were men, or angels, or some of each. No matter, something supernatural was happening here, although exactly what that was in difficult to discern.

Permit me the folly of offering my own opinion: I have said on a number of occasions that while on the one hand I fully subscribe to the general notion of the Trinity (that is that the Godhead consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), I do NOT subscribe to the notion that, therefore, every manifestation of God must embody ONE of these 3 persons of God in the strictest sense. Yet, could it be that the strange visitation of these 3 individuals was as a model of the 3-part Godhead?

Maybe. But, it really messes with the traditional Christian concept of what the Trinity amounts to if that is the intent. For instance, when have we ever heard of the Holy Spirit

---

<sup>14</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

assuming ANY physical form? Christian tradition is that ALL physical forms of God are supposed to be Jesus. Did we have 3 Jesus' standing before Abraham?

What else could these 3 have represented? What was the burning bush? What was the Shekinah? What was that cloud that led Israel through the wilderness? What was that "Angel of the Lord" who identified Himself as God Almighty to Hagar? Who wrestled with Jacob? And, now, what are we to make of these 3 non-descript men who are somehow part of an appearance of Yahweh Himself? I think we do a great disservice to ourselves when we attempt to artificially limit the possible *manifestations* of God to 3, just so it satisfies and kind of makes Christian doctrine nice and tidy. And, I think it is utter foolishness to believe that we can honestly subject God to any limits whatsoever. He exists in a way that we cannot fathom. He exists in a dimension we cannot enter. We comprehend but the tiniest fraction of who God is; and sometimes we just need to get comfortable with that, and leave some mysteries as mysteries.

The prophets who had visions of things far into the future; or others, like John, who got a glimpse of Heaven, found these things so difficult to describe and communicate to others. They had no choice but to use descriptive words of things they were familiar with.... animals, precious stones and metals... fire.... stars and the moon; what else would they use? Yet, what they were seeing was either spiritual in nature and therefore human words would NEVER be able to capture it; or they were seeing so far into the future that words had not yet been invented to describe things that had not yet been invented.

I think we have a similar situation here. Clearly, there is some kind of God thing going on, but there are simply no words to describe it. So, the writer did the best he could. And, you can be sure that some future writer probably tried to help the words a little bit, and has made it all the more difficult for us, now. And, I also doubt that Abraham could make heads or tails out of what was really going on, either. It happened. They said what they said. It came true. And, that is that.<sup>15</sup>

### **Chumash: How could Avraham serve milk and meat together?**

**Da'as Zekeinim:** Rashi writes that Avraham served them, "bit by bit as each item was prepared". Thus, he did not serve them meat and milk together, which is forbidden, but rather milk and then afterwards meat, which is permissible.

**Likutel Sichos:** In addition to the argument of Da'as Zekeinim, that the cream and calves were served separately, this circumventing the prohibition of eating milk and meat, one could also argue that he offered each of the angels either milk or meat. This, "three calves tongues with mustard" were prepared to give each of the guests the option of eating meat: This was done in order to fulfill the mitzvah of welcoming guests in the best possible fashion. No guest however was served milk and meat.<sup>16</sup>

**Cumash; "The Last Word"** The Torah states that the angels ate the food which Avraham served them on which Rashi comments, "they pretended to eat."

It appears, therefore, that Avraham did not perform a mitzvah by feeding his guests, for ultimately they were angels who did not need to eat. Thus a.) Avraham interrupted

---

<sup>15</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>16</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

his audience with the Divine Presence unnecessarily, and b.) How can we learn the principle that, “welcoming guests is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence” from an incident where there were no real guests present?

Generally speaking, with acts of kindness, the primary focus is on the results of the mitzvah, i.e. the benefits given to the guests – food and drink etc.

The unique quality of the mitzvah of welcoming guests is that the primary focus is not on the benefits received by the guests, but rather, on the good will demonstrated by the host. In this light, it turns out that Avraham did fulfill the mitzvah of welcoming guests, in the most exemplary manner.<sup>17</sup>

**Ephrem the Syrian; “Blessing Distributed”** The bread and meat, which was in abundance, was not to satisfy the angels but rather so that the blessing might be distributed to all the members of his household. After the angels had washed and sat down beneath a tree, “Abraham brought and set before them what he had prepared”; he did not dare recline with them but like a servant “stood apart from them.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Genesis 18:9**

**And they said unto him, Where *is* Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.**

It was not proper in that day—and even in the East today—for the wife to come out and be the one to entertain, especially since there were three male guests there. But now they ask and make inquiry about Sarah.

**[Where is Sarah thy wife]** Question 23. Next question is in Genesis 18:12.

Cp. Genesis 4:9.

**Torah Class:** Now, let’s get back to something we can wrap our fleshly minds around a little better. In verse 9 is an example of a kind of statement we see often in the Bible; and these words are put into God’s mouth or the mouth of an angel. One of the 3 individuals says to Abraham “Where is your wife, Sarah?”. This is a rhetorical question. This is simply a nice way to open a conversation about Sarah. It’s not that these men don’t know the answer. The fact is, spirit beings, and particularly God, and has to dumb things down pretty severely to communicate with humans. So, we get a lot of rhetorical and figurative statements subscribed to God and angels. Don’t go off on some tangent ascribing human attributes, frailties, imperfections, and weaknesses to angels or to God because of these kinds of statements.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>18</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>19</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 18:10**

**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.**

**[according to the time of life]** Abraham was now ninety-nine years of age, and this promise was fulfilled when he was a hundred; so that the phrase according to the time of life must mean either a complete year, or nine months from the present time, the ordinary time of pregnancy. Taken in this latter sense, Abraham was now in the ninety-ninth year of his age, and Isaac was born when he was in his hundredth year.

The 24th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 18:10, fulfilled). Next prophecy is in Genesis 18:14. This is the eighth prophecy concerning Abraham's seed. It was fulfilled the following year in the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-8).

**Nachmanides; “I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh around”** Rashi comments, “The angel was not announcing that he would return to him, but he was speaking to him as G-d’s agent, [meaning that G-d would return]. This is similar to the verse: *And the angel of the Eternal said to her [Hagar], I will multiply thy seed exceedingly.* But he [the angel] has not power to multiply, and he was therefore speaking as G-d’s agent. So also here, he spoke as G-d’s agent.”

Now the Rabbi found it necessary to say so because the Holy One, blessed be He, told Abraham here, At the set time I will return unto thee. However, whether it be a reference to the angel or to the Holy One, blessed be He, we do not find it recorded that at the set time he returned. Perhaps a reference to this return is included in the expression, And the Eternal remembered Sarah, as He had said, and the Eternal did unto Sarah as He had spoken.<sup>20</sup>

### **Genesis 18:11**

**Now Abraham and Sarah *were* old *and* well stricken in age; *and* it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.**

**[it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women]** And consequently, naturally speaking, conception could not take place; therefore if she have a son it must be in a supernatural or miraculous way.

Abraham was ninety-nine and Sarah eighty-nine, for when Isaac was born the next year Abraham was a hundred and Sarah ninety years old (Genesis 17:17; Genesis 21:5).

---

<sup>20</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

### **Genesis 18:12**

**Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?**

Questions 24-26. Next question is in Genesis 18:17.

**Chumash; “Sparks of Chasidus”** The patriarchs and matriarchs were all perfect *tzadikim* (righteous people) who never sinned. They were a “vehicle of expression” for the divine will their entire lives. Therefore, when the Torah describes Sarah’s “sin” here – of laughing in disbelief at the news that she would bear a child – this does not mean to say that she sinned in the literal sense of the word. Rather: a.) She performed an act that, outwardly, appeared to be a sin, and, b.) the act was not a transgression (*cheit*) but rather, a shortcoming (*chesaron*), i.e. a failure to act in the best possible manner.

Most people struggle with their evil inclination, to choose good over evil. A *tzaadik* however struggles between a choice to two good actions, one greater than the other. This, if they fail, and choose the lesser good, it still remains a positive act.<sup>21</sup>

### **Genesis 18:13**

**And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?**

**[And the LORD said unto Abraham]** So it appears that one of those three persons was the Lord God, and as this name is never given to any created being, consequently the ever-blessed God is intended; and as he was never seen in any bodily shape.

### **Genesis 18:14**

**Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.**

**[Is any thing too hard for the LORD?]** Numbers 11:23; 2 Kings 4:16; Jeremiah 32:17.

**[At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son]** The 25th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 18:14, fulfilled). Next prophecy is in Genesis 18:17. The ninth prophecy of Abraham having children through Sarah.

---

<sup>21</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

## **Genesis 18:15**

**Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.**

A call to believe that God can do the impossible:

**(Luke 1:37)** *For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

**Torah Class:** Now, let's get back to something we can wrap our fleshly minds around a little better. In verse 9 is an example of a kind of statement we see often in the Bible; and these words are put into God's mouth or the mouth of an angel. One of the 3 individuals says to Abraham "Where is your wife, Sarah?". This is a rhetorical question. This is simply a nice way to open a conversation about Sarah. It's not that these men don't know the answer. The fact is, spirit beings, and particularly God, and has to dumb things down pretty severely to communicate with humans. So, we get a lot of rhetorical and figurative statements subscribed to God and angels. Don't go off on some tangent ascribing human attributes, frailties, imperfections, and weaknesses to angels or to God because of these kinds of statements.

Now comes the purpose for this mysterious visit: in verse 10 one of the 3 informed Abraham that he was coming back in a year, and that Sarah will have given birth to a son by then. Yahweh's promise to Abraham of a son has been coming about, step-by-step.

First, back in Genesis 12:2, God tells Abraham that he'll make Abraham into a great nation, which tells Abraham he will have many children. Second, in Gen. 15:4, Abraham is promised an heir, and that the heir will be natural-born son of Abraham. Third, in Gen. 17:16-21, Abraham was assured that his wife, Sarah, would give him a son. And, now, here in 18:10, it is time to fulfill all those promises.

Now watch this basic and elegantly simple God-principle in action; notice how each of God's promises build upon earlier promises. And, how each covenant is built upon earlier covenants. A new promise or new covenant doesn't replace or countermand an earlier one; it simply takes the sum of the earlier ones to the next level. When one builds a house, it starts with preparing the ground. Over that prepared ground a foundation is built. One can no longer see the ground under the foundation, but it's still there. Upon that foundation the first floor is built. One can no longer see the foundation, but it's still there. Upon the first floor, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is built, and so on. One thing built upon the former. Without the ground you can't have a foundation; without the foundation you can't have the 1<sup>st</sup> floor; without the 1<sup>st</sup> floor you can't have the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Yet, if one could somehow, magically, remove the prepared ground from under the foundation, the building would collapse. If you could remove the foundation from under the first floor, the building would fall. If you could slide the 1<sup>st</sup> floor out from underneath the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, the building would instantly become rubble. Each portion of the structure of the house is dependent on the other; leave one out, or remove one, and the house is destroyed. This is how God's covenants work. The New Covenant, the Covenant of Jesus Christ, is not a covenant that replaces the earlier ones, nor does it stand-alone. The New Covenant is dependent on ALL the earlier ones, and it is the fulfillment of all the earlier ones...each covenant built upon the ones preceding it. The promises of God to Abraham in bringing about an heir sets up this pattern of bringing about His will in stages.

Well, Sarah... who was curious about these 3 guys, as anybody would have been... was listening through the tent walls (not very hard to do) and heard what was said. She about dropped over from trying to stifle the laughter that wanted to burst out of inside her. Believe me, this was not an “Oh boy I can hardly wait for the baby to come” kind of laughter. This was a “who are these yo’yo’s and have they got one good brain between’em all?” kind of laughter. In other words, Sarah laughed in ridicule. Uh-oh. Yahweh says, why did Sarah laugh? Busted. God makes it clear that Sarah WILL have a son.....because He’s decided it. And, it’s going to happen within a year. Sarah then does the natural thing: she denied that she laughed. God, says, oh yes you did.

As odd as this encounter has been; even ending with Yahweh having a little argument with Sarah.....it continues in yet another vein.

### **Genesis 18:16**

**And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.**

**[looked toward Sodom]** The purpose of this earthly visit was to see if Sodom was as wicked as God's scouts had reported to Him (Genesis 18:20-21). On the way they visited their friend, Abraham. Now they looked toward Sodom.

**[Abraham went with them to bring them on the way]** This was another piece of primitive hospitality—to direct strangers in the way. Public roads did not then exist and guides were essentially necessary in countries where villages were seldom to be met with, and where solitary dwellings did not exist.

**[went with them to bring them on the way]** This shows that at this time God is a real person with a body. Abraham simply walked with his guests toward Sodom. This was done out of courtesy and respect, not to show God the way.

**Ephrem the Syrian; “Hiding a Decree of Wrath”:** After the three men promised Sarah fruit, “they arose, and they looked toward Sodom.” It was not revealed to Sarah that they were going to Sodom lest, on the same day that they had given her joy in the promise that a son was to be hers, she be grieving over her brother on account of that sentence of wrath decreed on Sodom and the nearby villages. They hid this from Sarah lest she never cease weeping, but they revealed it to Abraham so that he not cease praying and so that it be announced to the world that nowhere in Sodom was there found a single just man of whose sake it might be saved.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

### **Genesis 18:17**

**And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;**

**[Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do]** That is, I will not hide. A common mode of speech in Scripture—a question asked when an affirmative is designed. Do men gather grapes of thorns? Men do not gather grapes of thorns, etc.

The 26th prophecy of Genesis (Genesis 18:17-19; Genesis 18:17-18 fulfilled; Genesis 18:19 unfulfilled). Next prophecy is in Genesis 21:12. The tenth prophecy of Abraham's seed and the fourth distinct prophecy of all nations being blessed through Christ (Genesis 3:15). The prediction of the seed of Abraham keeping God's laws has never been completely fulfilled, but will be in the Millennium and in the New Earth forever.

Question 27. Next question is in Genesis 18:23. God's secrets are revealed to His friends (Psalm 84:11; John 15:15; James 2:23).

### **Genesis 18:18**

**Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?**

### **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 the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.**

*(Amos 3:7) Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.*

**[I know him]** "I know him" indicates God's foreknowledge and choice of Abraham—especially significant because the promises were conditional, based on Abraham's obedience.

### **Genesis 18:20**

**And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;**

God judges sin in everybody and metes out the right penalty for sin, even to His own sons, whether angels (Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6-7; Rev. 20:10) or men (Genesis 2:17; Exodus 32:32-33; Ezekiel 18:20-26; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:12-13; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Col. 3:6-10).

### **Genesis 18:21**

**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.**

A lesson to magistrates, teaching them not to judge according to report, but accurately to inquire into the facts themselves—Jarchi.

This is another proof that God acquires knowledge of conditions and becomes acquainted with facts.

### **Genesis 18:22**

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

This may teach that like men and angels, God is limited to one place as far as the body is concerned. The doctrine of the omnipresence of God can be proven, but not His omnibody. In His body He goes from place to place like other persons (Genesis 18:21; Genesis 11:5-9; Genesis 17:22; Genesis 18:33; Genesis 35:13; etc.). Abraham still stood before the bodily presence of God, but not before the bodily presence of the two angels who had gone to Sodom (Genesis 19:1).

### **Genesis 18:23**

**And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?**

The exchange between Abraham and God serves as a dramatic *theodicy*, a justification of the Lord's ways

A form of speech similar to that in Genesis 18:17, an invariable principle of justice, that the righteous shall not be punished for the crimes of the impious.

Questions 28-31. Next question is in Genesis 19:5. This is the first example of intercession in Scripture, but not the first prayer. Abraham pleaded with God for mercy on others, giving reasons for his requests.

### **Genesis 18:24**

**Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein?**

A very important principle is laid down here. Abraham intercedes for the righteous—including Lot.

### **Genesis 18:25**

**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?**

### **Genesis 18:26**

**And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.**

God showed Abraham that He was both just and merciful. Sodom must be punished, and that punishment would be a permanent lesson to Abraham and his seed. The place was Mamre beside Hebron, which lies in a valley near the southern end of the mountain chain of Judah. From Hebron there is a rapid descent of 4,200 feet to the Dead Sea. Sodom was situated near the Dead Sea about 26 miles southeast of Mamre, at a place now covered by the sea. Abraham could see the plain and cities from the mountain top. The angels had gone on, while Abraham remained to intercede. When he was finished God "went His way" and Abraham went back to Mamre, returning the next day to see the destruction (Genesis 18:33; Genesis 19:27).

### **Genesis 18:27**

**And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes:**

### **Genesis 18:28**

**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*.**

### **Genesis 18:29**

**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.**

### **Genesis 18:30**

**And he said *unto him*, Oh let not the Lord 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.**

### **Genesis 18:31**

**And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for twenty's sake.**

### **Genesis 18:32**

**And he said, Oh let not the Lord 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.**

**A very important principle:** The two angels will spend an entire chapter (19) getting Lot out of there before they can accomplish their assigned mission! There may be a prophetic implication here regarding the church being raptured before the Tribulation?

**[for ten's sake]** Knowing that in the family of his nephew the true religion was professed and practiced, he could not suppose there could be less than ten righteous persons in the city, he did not think it necessary to urge his supplication farther; he therefore left off his entreaties, and the Lord departed from him. He was not aware of the comment of Peter in 2 Peter.

*(2 Pet. 2:6-9) <sup>6</sup>And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;*

*<sup>7</sup>And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: <sup>8</sup>(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

*<sup>9</sup>The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*

What if Abraham had negotiated down to one? What if there had only been one righteous in the city? The answer may be in the next chapter, that the angels could not do their job until the righteous had left Sodom.

### **Genesis 18:33**

**And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.**

The Lord "went His way" and Abraham "returned to his place." Two friends had walked and talked together and now parted. In Exodus 33:11 the Lord spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."

The Great Tribulation Period cannot come as long as the church is in the world? It just cannot come, my friend, because Christ bore our judgment, and the great tribulation is part of the judgment that is coming. This is the reason that the church cannot go through it. This is a glorious picture of that truth. We are going to see that Sodom and Gomorrah are a picture of the world—and what a picture! What a condition the world is in today—it is very much like Sodom and Gomorrah. That does not mean that the Lord is going to come tomorrow. I do not know—and no one else knows—when He will come. But He could come tomorrow, and it certainly would be in keeping with the carrying out of the picture which is before us here in Genesis.<sup>23</sup>

**Caesarius of Arles; “Angels Enter a Hospitable Home”:** Lot too received men, but only two, not the whole Trinity; moreover in the evening, not at noon. What did he serve them? He baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Because he was much inferior to Abraham in merits he did not have a fatted calf. Nor did he recognize the mystery of the Trinity in the three measures of flour. However, since he offered what he could in a kindly spirit, he merited to be freed from the destruction of Sodom. Notice, brothers that even Lot deserved to receive the angels, because he did not reject strangers. Behold, angels enter a hospitable home, but houses that are closed to strangers are burned with flames of sulphur.<sup>24</sup>

**Torah Class:** From Abraham’s tent, the 3 men set out for the wicked city of Sodom, and Abraham accompanies them for a short distance. In verses 17-19, we get a glimpse into something that we rarely do in Holy Scripture: we see into God’s mind, so to speak, and we are given *the reasoning* behind a decision of God. I’ve told you on more than one occasion, not to seek WHY in the Scriptures, but rather to seek out patterns. Here, for one of the few times, we are told WHY. And, the WHY is about God’s treatment of Sodom and Gomorrah, and whether or not Abraham should have foreknowledge of God’s plans. And, at least one thing we should take from this is that God does not keep His plans for mankind a secret. He does not keep the reasons for His judgments on people and nations secret. He does not keep the reasons for giving out blessing, secret. And, a second thing that we see is that God will do His revealing, and bring about His purposes, almost exclusively through His Hebrew people....beginning right here with Abraham, the first Hebrew.

---

<sup>23</sup>McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

<sup>24</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

When Abraham finds out God's plan to devastate Sodom, well aware that his nephew is living there, he goes into a typical Middle Eastern bargaining session with God. But, what we are actually seeing is many things. First, we are seeing that Abraham cares about more than himself. Second, we are getting a glimpse into God's definition of justice and righteousness. Third, we are getting a glimpse into God's mercy when justice or retribution would seem to be called for.

Now a 4<sup>th</sup> thing we see is absolutely fascinating: repentance does *not* play a role in the story of Sodom, any more than it played a role in the Flood story of Noah. I have mentioned on a few occasions that, much to people's surprise, the notion of dying and going to heaven is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. Well, in fact, the entire *concept* of repentance is nowhere to be found, yet, in Genesis....and it will be some time before we do see it develop. The only issue, thus far revealed, in God's justice system as regards mankind's behavior is: is that person righteous in God's eyes, or not. The wicked remain wicked, and the righteous remain righteous. We don't find Noah pleading with the wicked to repent; we don't find Abraham pleading with the wicked to repent. In Abraham's pleadings to Yahweh, it's not about whether the people who are doing wrong might REPENT and turn from their evil; it's ONLY about whether those who are NOT doing wrong will be judged right along with those who ARE doing wrong.

We also see that long before Moses and the Law of Mt. Sinai, God is applying some universal standard to all human behavior. The Hebrews refer to this standard as the 7 Noachide Laws. And, in this chapter, we see that Sodom has crossed over a line of wickedness, that violates that standard, and that God will no longer tolerate it. And, since that line has been crossed, the ONLY possible outcome is for God's wrath to be visited upon them. Now, the specifics of Sodom's sins can be, and regularly are, argued over; but, what is clear is that they are moral....or better, immoral....in nature. Later, as Lot enters the picture again, we'll get a couple of specific sins mentioned....like sodomy and homosexuality....but we never get a laundry list of Sodom's evil acts. Let me also quickly inject that Sodom was but the primary city, and government seat, of a 5-city district that was under common rule; Gomorrah was one of those 5 cities. So, when ONLY the name Sodom is mentioned, it is just that Sodom is representative of the whole district. When destruction was finally poured out, it was upon all 5 cities.

There have been all manner of allegorical sermons and teachings about the purpose of this verbal wrestling match. But, here's the thing I personally take from it: God does not destroy the righteous, along with the wicked. That is not to say that when God allows a conquering army to discipline His people that righteous people don't get killed, too. No, what I'm talking about is when God pours out His supernatural divine wrath, like the Flood for instance, and soon on Sodom and Gomorrah, He doesn't allow the righteous to die along with the wicked.

There is a major difference between God pouring out His supernatural wrath, and His permitting bad things to happen, by which all are affected. For instance, let's say that "the big one" hits San Francisco; that 9.0 earthquake that is utterly devastating levels the city, and thousands are killed. Now, we all know that in our time, San Francisco is held up as a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, are we to take this hypothetical 9.0 earthquake as an outpouring of God's wrath on that city? No. That the earthquake occurred, in a way, was indeed allowed by Yahweh, but it was not an ACT of Yahweh. The good WILL be killed along with the wicked as occurs with all these cataclysmic events that have happened

over the centuries. But, the earthquake fault has existed for millions of years, and earthquakes of that size have occurred before along that fault-line. It's just that now, millions of people live there, whereas they didn't before.

The outpouring of God's wrath is when God SENDS a catastrophe. It is unique. Its scope is so far beyond what nature could normally do, and it occurs at a time that God ordains. The Flood is one example. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is another. At the end of the world, the earth's population will see phenomenon never before seen by man; and the Bible clearly states God is sending it as a judgment.

Further, an outpouring of God's wrath is preceded by ample warning. It's not sudden and unannounced. And, when it is God's destructive wrath, the good are divided away from the wicked. Again, the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are our examples. And, as we read Revelation, we see the same pattern; those who are in Christ, will be protected as the wicked are singled out for destruction.

This is a pattern of God's behavior that we can count on; yet, there was another pattern that baffled the prophets and the sages. Why, they often asked, does God allow the wicked to prosper? And, the answer, though mysterious in most ways, has something to do with their evil actions either being part of a stage in God's plan being fulfilled by means of that wicked activity, or some benefit coming to His people by means of the Wicked's actions (though it is most certainly not the intention of the wicked for God's people to benefit). So, even though Yahweh allows bad things to happen to good people, we can also be certain that God is not going to pour out His wrath on the wicked, and let His people also die, in a supernatural destruction; because that is simply not what God does; it is not within His character. The purpose of the Rapture is to whisk His chosen away to safety.

Before we move on to chapter 19, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, let me point out a common misquote of the dialogue between God and Abraham: the final bargaining number was 10 innocent people, not 1. And, we'll find in later books of the Bible that 10 is a common minimum number for a useful congregation size. To this day, Jews generally will not conduct a service, nor even pray in a group of less than 10 individuals; in Hebrew this is called a *minyan*. So, Yahweh was saying that providing there was a minyan in the midst of the wicked population, He would stay His hand of judgment.

**Now, the conversation is over, and it says in verse 33 that “the Lord” departed. Actually, the original Hebrew says, “Yahweh departed”. That Yahweh departed is something to keep in mind as we begin the next chapter.<sup>25</sup>**

---

<sup>25</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

**Book of Jasher:**

## CHAPTER 18

3 And in the third day Abraham went out of his tent and sat at the door to enjoy the heat of the sun, during the pain of his flesh.

4 And the Lord appeared to him in the plain of Mamre, and sent three of his ministering angels to visit him, and he was sitting at the door of the tent, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and lo three men were coming from a distance, and he rose up and ran to meet them, and he bowed down to them and brought them into his house.

5 And he said to them, If now I have found favor in your sight, turn in and eat a morsel of bread; and he pressed them, and they turned in and he gave them water and they washed their feet, and he placed them under a tree at the door of the tent.

6 And Abraham ran and took a calf, tender and good, and he hastened to kill it, and gave it to his servant Eliezer to dress.

7 And Abraham came to Sarah into the tent, and he said to her, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it and make cakes to cover the pot containing the meat, and she did so.

8 And Abraham hastened and brought before them butter and milk, beef and mutton, and gave it before them to eat before the flesh of the calf was sufficiently done, and they did eat.

9 And when they had done eating one of them said to him, I will return to thee according to the time of life, and Sarah thy wife shall have a son.

10 And the men afterward departed and went their ways, to the places to which they were sent.

11 In those days all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the whole five cities, were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord and they provoked the Lord with their abominations, and they strengthened in aging abominably and scornfully before the Lord, and their wickedness and crimes were in those days great before the Lord.

12 And they had in their land a very extensive valley, about half a day's walk, and in it there were fountains of water and a great deal of herbage surrounding the water.

13 And all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah went there four times in the year, with their wives and children and all belonging to them, and they rejoiced there with timbrels and dances.

14 And in the time of rejoicing they would all rise and lay hold of their neighbor's wives, and some, the virgin daughters of their neighbors, and they enjoyed them, and each man saw his wife and daughter in the hands of his neighbor and did not say a word.

15 And they did so from morning to night, and they afterward returned home each man to his house and each woman to her tent; so they always did four times in the year.

16 Also when a stranger came into their cities and brought goods which he had purchased with a view to dispose of there, the people of these cities would assemble, men, women and children, young and old, and go to the man and take his goods by force, giving a little to each man until there was an end to all the goods of the owner which he had brought into the land.

17 And if the owner of the goods quarreled with them, saying, What is this work which you have done to me, then they would approach to him one by one, and each would show him the little which he took and taunt him, saying, I only took that little which thou didst give me; and when he heard this from them all, he would arise and go from them in

sorrow and bitterness of soul, when they would all arise and go after him, and drive him out of the city with great noise and tumult.

18 And there was a man from the country of Elam who was leisurely going on the road, seated upon his ass, which carried a fine mantle of divers colors, and the mantle was bound with a cord upon the ass.

19 And the man was on his journey passing through the street of Sodom when the sun set in the evening, and he remained there in order to abide during the night, but no one would let him into his house; and at that time there was in Sodom a wicked and mischievous man, one skillful to do evil, and his name was Hedad.

20 And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the street of the city, and he came to him and said, Whence comest thou and whither dost thou go?

21 And the man said to him, I am traveling from Hebron to Elam where I belong, and as I passed the sun set and no one would suffer me to enter his house, though I had bread and water and also straw and provender for my ass, and am short of nothing.

22 And Hedad answered and said to him, All that thou shalt want shall be supplied by me, but in the street thou shalt not abide all night.

23 And Hedad brought him to his house, and he took off the mantle from the ass with the cord, and brought them to his house, and he gave the ass straw and provender whilst the traveler ate and drank in Hedad's house, and he abode there that night.

24 And in the morning the traveler rose up early to continue his journey, when Hedad said to him, Wait, comfort thy heart with a morsel of bread and then go, and the man did so; and he remained with him, and they both ate and drank together during the day, when the man rose up to go.

25 And Hedad said to him, Behold now the day is declining, thou hadst better remain all night that thy heart may be comforted; and he pressed him so that he tarried there all night, and on the second day he rose up early to go away, when Hedad pressed him, saying, Comfort thy heart with a morsel of bread and then go, and he remained and ate with him also the second day, and then the man rose up to continue his journey.

26 And Hedad said to him, Behold now the day is declining, remain with me to comfort thy heart and in the morning rise up early and go thy way.

27 And the man would not remain, but rose and saddled his ass, and whilst he was saddling his ass the wife of Hedad said to her husband, Behold this man has remained with us for two days eating and drinking and he has given us nothing, and now shall he go away from us without giving anything? and Hedad said to her, Be silent.

28 And the man saddled his ass to go, and he asked Hedad to give him the cord and mantle to tie it upon the ass.

29 And Hedad said to him, What sayest thou? And he said to him, That thou my lord shalt give me the cord and the mantle made with divers colors which thou didst conceal with thee in thy house to take care of it.

30 And Hedad answered the man, saying, This is the interpretation of thy dream, the cord which thou didst see, means that thy life will be lengthened out like a cord, and having seen the mantle colored with all sorts of colors, means that thou shalt have a vineyard in which thou wilt plant trees of all fruits.

31 And the traveler answered, saying, Not so my lord, for I was awake when I gave thee the cord and also a mantle woven with different colors, which thou didst take off the ass

to put them by for me; and Hedad answered and said, Surely I have told thee the interpretation of thy dream and it is a good dream, and this is the interpretation thereof.

32 Now the sons of men give me four pieces of silver, which is my charge for interpreting dreams, and of thee only I require three pieces of silver.

33 And the man was provoked at the words of Hedad, and he cried bitterly, and he brought Hedad to Serak judge of Sodom.

34 And the man laid his cause before Serak the judge, when Hedad replied, saying, It is not so, but thus the matter stands; and the judge said to the traveler, This man Hedad telleth thee truth, for he is famed in the cities for the accurate interpretation of dreams.

35 And the man cried at the word of the judge, and he said, Not so my Lord, for it was in the day that I gave him the cord and mantle which was upon the ass, in order to put them by in his house; and they both disputed before the judge, the one saying, Thus the matter was, and the other declaring otherwise.

36 And Hedad said to the man, Give me four pieces of silver that I charge for my interpretations of dreams; I will not make any allowance; and give me the expense of the four meals that thou didst eat in my house.

37 And the man said to Hedad, Truly I will pay thee for what I ate in thy house, only give me the cord and mantle which thou didst conceal in thy house.

38 And Hedad replied before the judge and said to the man, Did I not tell thee the interpretation of thy dream? the cord means that thy days shall be prolonged like a cord, and the mantle, that thou wilt have a vineyard in which thou wilt plant all kinds of fruit trees.

39 This is the proper interpretation of thy dream, now give me the four pieces of silver that I require as a compensation, for I will make thee no allowance.

40 And the man cried at the words of Hedad and they both quarreled before the judge, and the judge gave orders to his servants, who drove them rashly from the house.

41 And they went away quarreling from the judge, when the people of Sodom heard them, and they gathered about them and they exclaimed against the stranger, and they drove him rashly from the city.

42 And the man continued his journey upon his ass with bitterness of soul, lamenting and weeping.

43 And whilst he was going along he wept at what had happened to him in the corrupt city of Sodom.

## CHAPTER 19

1 And the cities of Sodom had four judges to four cities, and these were their names, Serak in the city of Sodom, Sharkad in Gomorrah, Zabnac in Admah, and Menon in Zeboyim.

2 And Eliezer Abraham's servant applied to them different names, and he converted Serak to Shakra, Sharkad to Shakrura, Zebnac to Kezobim, and Menon to Matzlodin.

3 And by desire of their four judges the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had beds erected in the streets of the cities, and if a man came to these places they laid hold of him and brought him to one of their beds, and by force made him to lie in them.

4 And as he lay down, three men would stand at his head and three at his feet, and measure him by the length of the bed, and if the man was less than the bed these six men would stretch him at each end, and when he cried out to them they would not answer him.

5 And if he was longer than the bed they would draw together the two sides of the bed at each end, until the man had reached the gates of death.

6 And if he continued to cry out to them, they would answer him, saying, Thus shall it be done to a man that cometh into our land.

7 And when men heard all these things that the people of the cities of Sodom did, they refrained from coming there.

8 And when a poor man came to their land they would give him silver and gold, and cause a proclamation in the whole city not to give him a morsel of bread to eat, and if the stranger should remain there some days, and die from hunger, not having been able to obtain a morsel of bread, then at his death all the people of the city would come and take their silver and gold which they had given to him.

9 And those that could recognize the silver or gold which they had given him took it back, and at his death they also stripped him of his garments, and they would fight about them, and he that prevailed over his neighbor took them.

10 They would after that carry him and bury him under some of the shrubs in the deserts; so they did all the days to any one that came to them and died in their land.

11 And in the course of time Sarah sent Eliezer to Sodom, to see Lot and inquire after his welfare.

12 And Eliezer went to Sodom, and he met a man of Sodom fighting with a stranger, and the man of Sodom stripped the poor man of all his clothes and went away.

13 And this poor man cried to Eliezer and supplicated his favor on account of what the man of Sodom had done to him.

14 And he said to him, Why dost thou act thus to the poor man who came to thy land?

15 And the man of Sodom answered Eliezer, saying, Is this man thy brother, or have the people of Sodom made thee a judge this day, that thou speakest about this man?

16 And Eliezer strove with the man of Sodom on account of the poor man, and when Eliezer approached to recover the poor man's clothes from the man of Sodom, he hastened and with a stone smote Eliezer in the forehead.

17 And the blood flowed copiously from Eliezer's forehead, and when the man saw the blood he caught hold of Eliezer, saying, Give me my hire for having rid thee of this bad blood that was in thy forehead, for such is the custom and the law in our land.

18 And Eliezer said to him, Thou hast wounded me and requirest me to pay thee thy hire; and Eliezer would not hearken to the words of the man of Sodom.

19 And the man laid hold of Eliezer and brought him to Shakra the judge of Sodom for judgment.

20 And the man spoke to the judge, saying, I beseech thee my lord, thus has this man done, for I smote him with a stone that the blood flowed from his forehead, and he is unwilling to give me my hire.

21 And the judge said to Eliezer, This man speaketh truth to thee, give him his hire, for this is the custom in our land; and Eliezer heard the words of the judge, and he lifted up a stone and smote the judge, and the stone struck on his forehead, and the blood flowed copiously from the forehead of the judge, and Eliezer said, If this then is the custom in your land give thou unto this man what I should have given him, for this has been thy decision, thou didst decree it.

22 And Eliezer left the man of Sodom with the judge, and he went away.

23 And when the kings of Elam had made war with the kings of Sodom, the kings of Elam captured all the property of Sodom, and they took Lot captive, with his property, and when it was told to Abraham he went and made war with the kings of Elam, and he recovered from their hands all the property of Lot as well as the property of Sodom.

24 At that time the wife of Lot bare him a daughter, and he called her name Paltith, saying, Because God had delivered him and his whole household from the kings of Elam; and Paltith daughter of Lot grew up, and one of the men of Sodom took her for a wife.

25 And a poor man came into the city to seek a maintenance, and he remained in the city some days, and all the people of Sodom caused a proclamation of their custom not to give this man a morsel of bread to eat, until he dropped dead upon the earth, and they did so.

26 And Paltith the daughter of Lot saw this man lying in the streets starved with hunger, and no one would give him any thing to keep him alive, and he was just upon the point of death.

27 And her soul was filled with pity on account of the man, and she fed him secretly with bread for many days, and the soul of this man was revived.

28 For when she went forth to fetch water she would put the bread in the water pitcher, and when she came to the place where the poor man was, she took the bread from the pitcher and gave it him to eat; so she did many days.

29 And all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah wondered how this man could bear starvation for so many days.

30 And they said to each other, This can only be that he eats and drinks, for no man can bear starvation for so many days or live as this man has, without even his countenance changing; and three men concealed themselves in a place where the poor man was stationed, to know who it was that brought him bread to eat.

31 And Paltith daughter of Lot went forth that day to fetch water, and she put bread into her pitcher of water, and she went to draw water by the poor man's place, and she took out the bread from the pitcher and gave it to the poor man and he ate it.

32 And the three men saw what Paltith did to the poor man, and they said to her, It is thou then who hast supported him, and therefore has he not starved, nor changed in appearance nor died like the rest.

33 And the three men went out of the place in which they were concealed, and they seized Paltith and the bread which was in the poor man's hand.

34 And they took Paltith and brought her before their judges, and they said to them, Thus did she do, and it is she who supplied the poor man with bread, therefore did he not die all this time; now therefore declare to us the punishment due to this woman for having transgressed our law.

35 And the people of Sodom and Gomorrah assembled and kindled a fire in the street of the city, and they took the woman and cast her into the fire and she was burned to ashes.

36 And in the city of Admah there was a woman to whom they did the like.

37 For a traveler came into the city of Admah to abide there all night, with the intention of going home in the morning, and he sat opposite the door of the house of the young woman's father, to remain there, as the sun had set when he had reached that place; and the young woman saw him sitting by the door of the house.

38 And he asked her for a drink of water and she said to him, Who art thou? and he said to her, I was this day going on the road, and reached here when the sun set, so I will abide here all night, and in the morning I will arise early and continue my journey.

39 And the young woman went into the house and fetched the man bread and water to eat and drink.

40 And this affair became known to the people of Admah, and they assembled and brought the young woman before the judges, that they should judge her for this act.

41 And the judge said, The judgment of death must pass upon this woman because she transgressed our law, and this therefore is the decision concerning her.

42 And the people of those cities assembled and brought out the young woman, and anointed her with honey from head to foot, as the judge had decreed, and they placed her before a swarm of bees which were then in their hives, and the bees flew upon her and stung her that her whole body was swelled.

43 And the young woman cried out on account of the bees, but no one took notice of her or pitied her, and her cries ascended to heaven.

44 And the Lord was provoked at this and at all the works of the cities of Sodom, for they had abundance of food, and had tranquility amongst them, and still would not sustain the poor and the needy, and in those days their evil doings and sins became great before the Lord.

45 And the Lord sent for two of the angels that had come to Abraham's house, to destroy Sodom and its cities.<sup>26</sup>

### **Summary of Chapter 18 by Adam Clarke:**

THIS chapter, though containing only the preliminaries to the awful catastrophe detailed in the next, affords us several lessons of useful and important information.

1. The hospitality and humanity of Abraham are worthy, not only of our most serious regard, but also of our imitation. He sat in the door of his tent in the heat of the day, not only to enjoy the current of refreshing air, but that if he saw any weary and exhausted travelers he might invite them to rest and refresh themselves. Hospitality is ever becoming in one human being towards another; for every destitute man is a brother in distress, and demands our most prompt and affectionate assistance, according to that heavenly precept, "What ye would that men should do unto you, do even so unto them." From this conduct of Abraham a Divine precept is formed: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2.

2. Whatever is given on the ground of humanity and mercy is given unto God, and is sure to meet with his approbation and a suitable reward. While Abraham entertained his guests God discovers himself, and reveals to him the counsels of his will, and renews the promise of a numerous posterity. Sarah, though naturally speaking past child-bearing, shall have a son: natural obstacles cannot hinder the purpose of God; nature is his instrument; and as it works not only by general laws, but also by any particular will of God, so it may accomplish that will in any way he may choose to direct. It is always difficult to credit God's promises when they relate to supernatural things, and still more so when they have for their object events that are contrary to the course of nature; but as nothing is too hard for God, so "all things are possible to him that believeth." It is that faith alone which is of the operation of God's Spirit, that is capable of crediting

---

<sup>26</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

supernatural things; he who does not pray to be enabled to believe, or, if he do, uses not the power when received, can never believe to the saving of the soul.

3. Abraham trusts much in God, and God reposes much confidence in Abraham. He knows that God is faithful, and will fulfill his promises; and God knows that Abraham is faithful, and will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; Genesis 18:19. No man lives unto himself; and God gives us neither spiritual nor temporal blessings for ourselves alone; our bread we are to divide with the hungry, and to help the stranger in distress. He who understands the way of God should carefully instruct his household in that way; and he who is the father of a family should pray to God to teach him, that he may teach his household. His ignorance of God and salvation can be no excuse for his neglecting his family: it is his indispensable duty to teach them; and God will teach him, if he earnestly seek it, that he may be able to discharge this duty to his family. Reader, if thy children or servants perish through thy neglect, God will judge thee for it in the great day.

4. The sin of Sodom and the cities of the plain was great and grievous; the measure of their iniquity was full, and God determined to destroy them. Judgment is God's strange work, but though rarely done it must be done sometimes, lest men should suppose that right and wrong, vice and virtue, are alike in the eye of God. And these judgments must be dispensed in such a way as to show they are not the results of natural causes, but come immediately from the incensed justice of the Most High.

5. Every man who loves God loves his neighbor also; and he who loves his neighbor will do all in his power to promote the well-being both of his soul and his body. Abraham cannot prevent the men of Sodom from sinning against God; but he can make prayer and intercession for their souls, and plead, if not in arrest, yet in mitigation, of judgment. He therefore intercedes for the transgressors, and God is well pleased with his intercessions. These are the offspring of God's own love in the heart of his servant.

6. How true is that word, The energetic faithful prayer of a righteous man availeth much! Abraham draws near to God by affection and faith, and in the most devout and humble manner makes prayer and supplication; and every petition is answered on the spot. Nor does God cease to promise to show mercy till Abraham ceases to intercede! What encouragement does this hold out to them that fear God, to make prayer and intercession for their sinful neighbors and ungodly relatives! Faith in the Lord Jesus endues prayer with a species of omnipotence; whatsoever a man asks of the Father in his name, he will do it. Prayer has been termed the gate of heaven, but without faith that gate cannot be opened. He who prays as he should, and believes as he ought, shall have the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of peace.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

## **Be Obedient:**

Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

Sir Winston Churchill spoke those words to the British House of Commons on August 20, 1940. He reviewed the first year of the war and then paid special tribute to the brave Royal Air Force fighter pilots who were “turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and their devotion.”

The citizens of Great Britain *knew* what the Royal Air Force was doing for them, but the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain did not know that three persons—Abraham, Lot, and Jesus Christ—stood between them and total destruction.

### **1. Abraham, the friend of God (Gen. 18)**

Abraham is given this special title in 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; and James 2:23; and he is the only person in the Bible to have it. Jesus called Lazarus His friend (John 11:11), and He calls “friends” all who believe on Him and obey Him (15:13–15). As His friends, we can share His love and fellowship, and we can know His will. “If we are beset by an unseen foe,” wrote Vance Havner, “we are also befriended by an Unseen Friend. Great is our adversary but greater is our Ally.”

Friendship involves ministry; and in this chapter you will find Abraham ministering in three different areas: to the Lord (18:1–8), to his home (18:9–15), and to a lost world (18:16–33).

***He ministered to the Lord (Gen. 18:1–8).*** All ministry must first be to the Lord; for if we fail to be a blessing to the Lord, we will never be a blessing to others. This was true of the Jewish priests (Ex. 28:1, 3–4, 41; 29:1) and of God’s servants in the early church (Acts 13:1–2). “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men...for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23–24, NKJV).

Abraham was taking his daily rest during the heat of the day when he saw three strangers approaching. Few people ever traveled when the sun was so hot, so Abraham was immediately both curious and courteous. Hospitality is the first law of the East, and Abraham faithfully obeyed it.

The three strangers were the Lord Jesus Christ and two of His angels (Gen. 18:1, 22; 19:1). There was nothing about their appearance that told Abraham who they were; but as he fellowshiped with them, he learned that he was entertaining royal visitors. His ministry to the Lord was so acceptable that we ought to follow his example today.

To begin with, he served the Lord *personally*. Remember, Abraham was ninety-nine years old and a wealthy sheikh, and he could have entrusted this task to his chief steward or one of his more than 300 servants (14:14). Instead, he decided to minister to his Lord personally.

He also ministered *immediately*. Abraham could have ignored them by pretending to be asleep, or he could have asked them to sit down and wait until he had finished his siesta. But Abraham was a man of faith, and faith does not delay when it comes to serving the Lord.

This chapter emphasizes that Abraham ministered to the Lord *speedily*. He *ran* to meet the visitors (18:2) and *hastened* to tell Sarah to bake some bread (18:6). He *ran* to get a tender calf and saw to it that the young man *hastened* to dress the meat (18:7). Keep in mind that this is an old man running around in the heat of the day! Only after he had served his guests did Abraham stand still (18:8).

Abraham served the Lord *generously* and gave Him the best that he had. Sarah baked bread from “fine meal” (18:6), and the meat was “tender and good” (18:7). No leftovers or second-rate fare for such important guests! What a contrast to the priests in Malachi’s day, who did not give God their best (Mal. 1:6–14).

Abraham’s service was marked with *humility*. He bowed to his guests (Gen. 18:2), called himself a servant (18:3, 5), and called the feast only “a morsel of bread.” He served the three visitors and then stood near to be available if needed. He interrupted a comfortable afternoon nap to become a servant to three strangers; but because of that service, he received tremendous blessings for himself and his wife.

Finally, he served the Lord *cooperatively* and involved the ministries of others. Sarah baked the bread; a young man dressed the meat; and no doubt other servants brought Abraham the butter and milk. “I would rather put ten men to work than do the work of ten men,” said evangelist D.L. Moody; and he was right.

Over the years, I have studied the biographies of great Christians; and I have learned that dedicated servants of God encourage and inspire others to serve the Lord. D.L. Moody was used of God to enlist and assist a host of workers, including F.B. Meyer, G. Campbell Morgan, and R.A. Torrey. Paul Rader had a similar ministry in his generation, helping give birth to ministries still with us today. When we serve ourselves or our own ministries, our work perishes; but when we serve the Lord, He gives lasting and abundant fruit (John 12:20–28).

Before leaving this section, I should say a word about the importance of Christian hospitality. In this day of convenient motels and hotels, we rarely think about what it means to entertain strangers (Heb. 13:1–2); but hospitality is an important part of Christian ministry (Rom. 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9). In fact, “given to hospitality” is one of the requirements for leadership in the local church (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). By lovingly serving others, we serve Jesus Christ our Lord (Matt. 25:34–40), and we promote the spread of God’s truth (3 John 5–8).

***He ministered to his wife*** (Gen 18:9–15). Because Abraham was faithful to the Lord, he became a channel of blessing to his wife and eventually to his family (Gen. 18:19). Sarah had an important role to play in the working out of God’s plan of salvation for the world, and she did her part (Heb. 11:11; 1 Peter 3:1–7; Rom. 4:18–21). Sarah was now eighty-nine years old; yet she was still a desirable woman with charm and beauty (Gen. 20), partly because her husband loved her and treated her like the princess that she was.

The Lord had come all the way from heaven to give Abraham and Sarah an announcement: At that same time next year, Sarah would give birth to the promised son! The news was so incredible that Sarah laughed and questioned whether such a thing could happen to two elderly people. Abraham’s laughter had been born out of joyful faith (17:17); but Sarah’s laughter was marked by unbelief, even though she tried to deny it.

Of course, whenever we doubt God, we are questioning both His veracity and His ability. Does He keep His promises? Does He have the power to do what He says He will do? The answer to both questions is yes! (See Rom. 4:20–21.)

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14) Of course not! If you need proof, then listen to Job (42:2), Jeremiah (32:17 and 27), the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:37), and the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:20–21). If God makes a promise, you can be sure He has the power to fulfill it; and He will remain faithful even if we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). Sarah

eventually repented and, with her husband, trusted God; and He gave them the promised son.

The husband who ministers to the Lord will find himself ministering to the members of his own family, especially his wife. He will be a source of blessing in the home. When we study Genesis 19, we will see the contrast in Lot, a worldly man who had no spiritual influence in his own home.

***He ministered to a lost world*** (Gen 18:16–33). Abraham belonged to that select company of God’s people known as *intercessors*, individuals like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, the apostles, and our Lord Himself. In fact, our Lord’s ministry today in heaven is a ministry of intercession (Rom. 8:34); so we are never more like our Lord than when we are interceding for others. It is not enough for us to be a blessing to our Lord and our home; we must also seek to win a lost world and bring sinners to the Savior.

Charles Spurgeon said: “If they [lost sinners] will not hear you speak, they cannot prevent your praying. Do they jest at your exhortations? They cannot disturb you at your prayers. Are they far away so that you cannot reach them? Your prayers can reach them. Have they declared that they will never listen to you again, nor see your face? Never mind, God has a voice which they must hear. Speak to Him, and He will make them feel. Though they now treat you despitefully, rendering evil for your good, follow them with your prayers. Never let them perish for lack of your supplications” (*Metropolitan Pulpit*, vol. 18, pp. 263–264).

The Lord and the two angels left Abraham’s camp and started toward Sodom, but the Lord lingered while the angels went on (Gen. 18:16, 22; 19:1). In the first half of the chapter, Abraham is running here and there; but in the last half, he is standing reverently before the Lord and interceding for Lot and the other people in Sodom. Blessed are the balanced!

An intercessor must know the Lord personally and be obedient to His will. He must be close enough to the Lord to learn His “secrets” and know what to pray about (Amos 3:7; Ps. 25:14). The Lord’s words “I know him” (Gen. 18:19) mean “I have chosen him, and he is My intimate friend” (John 15:15). Abraham knew more about Sodom’s future than the citizens themselves, including Lot. It is the separated believer who shares God’s secrets.

Sarah and the servants helped Abraham when he prepared a meal for the three visitors; but when it came to the ministry of intercession, Abraham had to serve alone. Abraham drew near to the Lord (James 4:8), and the Hebrew word means “to come to court to argue a case.” Abraham was burdened for Lot and Lot’s family, as well as for the lost sinners in the five cities of the plain; and he had to share that burden with the Lord.

Abraham’s prayer was based not on the mercy of God but on the justice of God. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25; see Deut. 32:4) A just and holy God could not destroy righteous believers with wicked unbelievers; and Lot was a believer (2 Peter 2:6–9), even though his actions and words seemed to belie the fact.

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were exceedingly wicked (Gen. 13:13) because the men of these cities were given over to sexual practices that were contrary to nature (Gen. 19:5; Jude 7; Rom. 1:27). The words “sodomy” and “sodomize” are synonyms for these homosexual practices. The men did not try to hide their sin (Isa. 3:9). Nor would they repent (Jer. 23:14). The sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is used in Scripture as an example of God’s righteous judgment on sinners (Isa. 1:9; 3:9; Lam. 4:6; Zeph. 2:9;

2 Peter 2:6ff), and Jesus used it as a warning for people in the end times (Luke 17:28–32). But why would Abraham want God to spare such wicked people? Far better that they should be wiped off the face of the earth! Of course, Abraham’s first concern was for Lot and his family. In fact, Abraham had already rescued the people of Sodom solely because of Lot (Gen. 14:12–16), though none of the citizens seemed to appreciate what he had done for them. They all went right back into the old way of life and did not heed the warning of God.

But even apart from Lot’s situation (and he should not have been in Sodom in the first place), *Abraham did not want to see all those people die and be lost forever*. God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9), and He “will have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). The issue is not what kind of sins people commit, though some sins are certainly worse than others, but that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and beyond that death is an eternal hell. Intercessors must have compassionate hearts and a deep concern for the salvation of the lost, no matter what their sins may be. (See 9:1–3; 10:1.)

We must not get the idea that Abraham argued with the Lord, because he did not. He was very humble before the Lord as he presented his case (Gen. 18:27, 30–32). Abraham was sure that there were at least ten believers in the city.

Never underestimate the importance of even a small number of believers. As few as ten people would have saved a whole city from destruction! If Lot had won only his own family to faith in the Lord, judgment would have been averted. Your personal witness today is important to God, no matter how insignificant you may feel.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1991). *Be obedient* (Ge 18:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.