

Genesis 18 - Three Visitors; The Promise of Isaac; Angels Visit Sodom & Gomorrah; Abraham Intercedes

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

- (1) Life of Abraham (Gen 11:10—25:11)
 - (B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)
 - (b) The maturation of Abraham and Sarah's faith in preparation for covenant blessings (Gen 18:1—22:19)
 - (i) Testing of Sarah's faith (18:1-15)
 - (ii) Trial of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16—19:38)
 - (a) Abraham's intercession for the righteous in Sodom (18:16-33)

Genesis 18

- (b) The maturation of Abraham and Sarah's faith in preparation for covenant blessings (Gen 18:1—22:19)
 - (i) Testing of Sarah's faith (18:1-15)

1 Now **the LORD appeared** to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in **the heat of the day**.

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1 Later, the LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks belonging to Mamre. As Abraham was sitting near the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day,

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;

- "...the LORD appeared" - this is the sixth appearance of God to Abraham; the 2nd instance of a theophany (1st: 16:7, to Hagar)

- "...the heat of the day" - early afternoon, the time when the main meal of the day was normally eaten

— He was probably sitting at the door to his tent to get fresh air, while recovering from circumcision; Sarah was likely inside the tent, preparing the meal

2 When he raised his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them and **bowed** down to the

ground,

2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth,

2 he glanced up and saw three men standing there, not far from him. As soon as he noticed them, Abraham ran from the tent entrance to greet them and bowed low to the ground.

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,

- As the narrative will show, one of these three men was God in visible form (a theophany)
- "...bowed" - *shachat*, first usage in Scripture; this is the first of several contrasts between the welcome here and what will soon happen in Sodom (Abraham welcomed the guests; the Sodomites wanted to molest them)

3 and said, "**My Lord**, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by.

3 and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by.

3 "My lords," he told them, "if I have found favor with you, please don't leave your servant.

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

- "...My Lord" - *adonai*, plural; Abraham is not addressing all three angels, since the second person pronoun is singular. Rather, Abraham recognized one of the three to be God Himself, and thus used the divine title *Adonai*, literally, "My Lords"

4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and make yourselves comfortable under the tree;

4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree;

4 I'll have some water brought to wash your feet while you rest under the tree.

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

- Based on the visitors finding favor with Abraham (v3), he first offered them rest

5 and I will bring a piece of bread, so that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do as you have said."

5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said."

5 I'll bring some food for you, and after that you may continue your journey, since you have come to visit your servant."

So they replied, "Okay! Do what you've proposed."

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.

- Abraham's second offer was of food

— Abraham actually did a lot more than what he said he would do; he gave them a lot more than just a morsel of bread

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare **three measures of fine flour**, knead *it*, and make bread cakes."

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead *it* and make bread cakes."

6 Abraham hurried into the tent and told Sarah, "Quick! Take three measures of the best flour, knead it, and make some flat bread."

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 of fine flour" - becomes the traditional "fellowship offering" in both Jewish and Arabic traditions (Cf. Matt 13:33)

— "measures" - *se'a*, was one-third of an ephah, or about a peck and a half

— "fine flour" - two Hebrew words, *gemahò* and *solet*, are used to designate the exceptional character of the flour used in making the rolls for the meal

— This was a very large quantity for three men; this again shows that he went well beyond the minimum requirements of hospitality

7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave *it* to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it.

7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave *it* to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it.

7 Next, Abraham ran to the herd, found a choice and tender calf, and gave it to the young men, who went off in a hurry to prepare it.

7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.

- Abraham personally chose the calf that was to be slaughtered and made sure if was the best one picked

8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set *it* before them; and **he was standing by them under the tree** as they ate.

8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed *it* before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

8 Then he took curds, milk, and the calf that had been prepared, placed the food in front of them, and stood near them under the tree while they ate.

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.

- Serving milk and meat together is something forbidden by rabbinic law today

- *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

- "...he was standing by them under the tree" - this was the role of the host and a sign of respect to the visitors

9 Then **they** said to him, "Where is your wife **Sarah**?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

9 The men asked him, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

"There, in the tent," he replied.

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

- "...they" - plural

- "...Sarah" - the Speaker of the group knew Sarah's new name, and knew who she was

10 He said, "I will certainly return to you at this time next year; and behold, your wife Sarah will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

10 Then one of them said, "I will certainly return to you in about a year's time. By then, your wife Sarah will have borne a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

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.

- "...I" - this time, the singular pronoun was used; although three were present, this shows that the Lord was speaking

— Comparing this statement with 17:21 shows that only a very short period of time had passed between Gen 17-18

- This prophecy of a son both to Abraham and Sarah will be fulfilled in 21:1, showing that God was speaking

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; **Sarah was past childbearing**.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

11 Abraham and Sarah were old—really old—and Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing.

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

- "...Sarah was past childbearing" – Sarah's menstrual cycles had ended; from a human perspective, she was no longer physically able to conceive

12 So Sarah **laughed** to herself, saying, "After I have become old, am I to have pleasure, my **lord** being old also?"

12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

12 That's why Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, "After I'm so old and my husband is old, too, am I going to have sex?"

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

- "...laughed" – Abraham also laughed (17:17)

— Her laugh was one of unbelief; note that her unbelief did not cancel the unconditional Promise

— "...lord" – Peter referred to this passage in 1 Peter 3:6 when complimenting Sarah in that she called her husband "lord"

13 But **the LORD** said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I actually give birth to a *child*, when I am so old?'

13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a *child*, when I am so old?'

13 The LORD asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and think, 'Am I really going to bear a child, since I'm so old?'

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

- "...the LORD" – reveals a fact that we already knew: one of the angels was God

- God is revealing His omniscience because Sarah laughed "within herself"

14 Is anything too **difficult** for the LORD? At **the appointed time** I will **return** to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

14 Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

14 Is anything impossible for the LORD? At the time set for it, I will return to you—about a year from now—and Sarah will have a son."

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.

- "...difficult" - *pele*, could mean "wonderful," "extraordinary" or "surpassing"
- It is one of those words that is only used of God, never of man (Judges 13:18; Ps 139:6; Is 9:6; 28:29)
- The phrase literally reads: "Is anything too 'wonderful' for God to do?"
- The same question is asked in Matt 19:26 (Cf. Luke 1:37)
- "...the appointed time" - a reaffirmation of the Promise; one year from that time
- "...return" - not necessarily physical through another appearance, but returning in the sense of fulfilling the Promise

15 Sarah denied *it*, however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

15 Sarah denied *it* however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

15 But Sarah denied it. "I didn't laugh," she claimed, because she was afraid. The LORD replied, "No! You did laugh!"

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

- Although she laughed, and was caught in her lie, Sarah did believe (Heb 11:11; Cf. Luke 1:45)

(ii) Trial of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16—19:38)

(a) Abraham's intercession for the righteous in Sodom (18:16-33)

16 Then the men rose up from there, and **looked down toward** Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

16 After this, the men set out from there and looked out over Sodom. Abraham went with them to send them off.

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

- "...looked down toward" - looked down [ESV, NKJV]; God was looking down on Sodom both geographically and morally

17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

17 "Should I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do," the LORD asked,

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

- God talks to Himself

- Cf. Is 41:8; John 15:15 ("friend of God")

18 since Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty **nation**, and **in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?**

18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

18 "since Abraham's descendants will become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him?

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

- God gives the basis for His revelation to Abraham (v18-19)...two reasons:

- The first reason is based on the future fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

- "...nation" - *goy*, refers to Israel; does not refer to Gentile nations

- "...in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed" - shows once again the spiritual facets of the Abrahamic Covenant will extend to Gentiles, and that Abraham and his seed will be the means of blessing to other nations

— Shortly, one nation, composed of four cities, will be removed from this opportunity of blessing

19 For **I have chosen him**, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

19 For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

19 Indeed, I've made myself known to him in order that he may encourage his sons and his household that is born after him to keep the way of the LORD, and to do what is right and just, so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised."

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.

- "...I have chosen him" - the second reason is because of God's personal relationship with Abraham (Cf. Amos 3:7)

— "chosen" - to know by experience; intimate knowledge. It is because of this intimate relationship that Abraham became known as the "friend of God" (Cf. James 2:23).

- So God gave the purpose of His revelation to Abraham: so he could command his children, meaning that he would pass down the commandments of the Lord to his descendants, along with obedience to those commands ("keep the way of the LORD")
- This obedience involved doing two things: "justice" (righteousness), which is internal, and "judgment" (justice), which is external
- In fact, God was about to destroy four cities because of their unrighteousness and injustice
- The second purpose of His revelation was so that God could fulfill all His Promises to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant

20 And the LORD said, "The **outcry** of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.

20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.

20 The LORD also said, "How great is the disapproval of Sodom and Gomorrah! Their sin is so very serious!

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

- The Lord begins the actual revelation...

- "...outcry" - a cry for help from someone who is oppressed

- The iniquity of the two cities, by that time complete, had reached a point of no return before the Lord, who demonstrated before Abraham how justly He assessed the time for judgment

21 I will go down now and see whether they have done entirely as the outcry, which has come to Me *indicates*; and if not, I will know."

21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

21 I'm going down to see whether they've acted according to the protests that have reached me. If not, I wish to know."

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.

- God's investigation of their sin, for the purpose of their destruction (Cf. 11:5,7)

— This was not an admission that God did not already know these things, but the point is to show that God carefully scrutinized every detail

— Thus, when God performs a massive judgment, it does not come out of ignorance. This punishment came after a very full investigation and a very full accounting of their sin.

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

22 Then two of the men turned away from there and walked toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing in the presence of the LORD.

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

- The two angels left toward Sodom, leaving Abraham and God's visible form behind to talk

23 Abraham **approached** and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the **righteous** with the **wicked**?"

23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

23 Abraham approached and asked, "Will you actually destroy the righteous along with the wicked?"

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

- Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom was instigated by his concern over his nephew Lot

- "...approached" - first, Abraham drew near to God; drawing near often has the concept of worship

— He was already standing near God's manifestation, but now he took a posture of worship

- "...righteous" - those who are joined to God through the Promise and walk in obedience

- "...wicked" - those who have no part in the Promise of God and no interest in obeying Him

— The basis for Abraham's pleading with God was whether God's judgment would destroy the righteous with the wicked

24 Suppose there are fifty righteous people within the city; will You indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?

24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?

24 Perhaps there are 50 righteous ones within the city. Will you actually destroy it and not forgive the place for the sake of the 50 righteous that are found there?

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

25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous along with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike! The Judge of all the earth will do what is right, won't he?"

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?

- God's justice and righteousness are evident in His judgments (Cf. Deut 32:4; Ps 89:14)

26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the entire place on their account."

26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account."

26 The LORD said, "If I find 50 righteous people within Sodom, I'll forgive the whole place for their sake."

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.

27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *only* dust and ashes.

27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the LORD, although I am *but* dust and ashes.

27 Abraham answered, "Look, even though I am only dust and ashes, I've ventured to speak to my LORD.

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

28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the entire city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there."

28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there."

28 What if there are five less than 50 righteous ones? Will you bring destruction upon the city because of those five?"

The LORD said, "I won't destroy it if I find 45 there."

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.

- Abraham suspects that there aren't 50 righteous people in Sodom who would be saved, so he begins to lower the number to 45

29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* on account of the forty."

29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* on account of the forty."

29 Abraham continued to speak to him, asking, "What if 40 are found there?"

The LORD replied, "I won't do it for the sake of those 40."

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.

- 50, 45, 40...

30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there."

30 Then he said, "Oh may the LORD not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there."

30 Abraham then asked, "I hope my LORD will not be angry if I speak. What if 30 are found there?"

The LORD answered, "I won't do it for the sake of those 30."

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.

- 50, 45, 40, 30...

31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the twenty."

31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the LORD; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the twenty."

31 "Look," Abraham said, "I've presumed to speak to my LORD... so what if 20 are found there?"

"For the sake of those," the LORD responded, "I won't destroy it."

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.
- 50, 45, 40, 30, 20...

32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once: suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten."

32 Then he said, "Oh may the LORD not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten."

32 Finally, Abraham inquired, "I hope my LORD will not be angry if I speak only once more. What if ten are found there?"

He replied, "For the sake of those ten I won't destroy it."

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.
- 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10...

- The reduction of the number of righteous people required to forestall judgment from 50 to 10 may have reflected Abraham's knowledge of the intense wickedness of the cities, as well as Lot's ineffective witness there

- A very important principle: The two angels will spend an entire chapter (Gen 19) getting Lot out of there before they can accomplish their assigned mission! What does this imply regarding the Church and the Tribulation?

Lot's Family

Abraham stopped at 10, because he assumed that would be sufficient because of the size of Lot's family, since Lot's total household at this point did number 10:

- Lot and his wife (2) +
- Two single, virgin daughters (2) +
 - 19:8a: "Now look, I have two daughters who have not had relations with *any* man;"
- Two sons (2) +
 - 19:12: "Then the *two* men said to Lot, "Whom else do you have here? A son-in-law and your sons and daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring *them* out of the place;"
- Two married daughters, with two sons-in-law (4) +
 - 19:14: "So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is destroying the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be joking."
- Total: = 10 family members

33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

33 As soon as he finished talking to Abraham, the LORD left and Abraham returned to where he had been sitting.

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

Two Observations

(1) Five things that can be noted from Abraham's prayer:

- It is very specific, numerically specific
- He was willing to come to God with boldness, making his request
- At the same time, his boldness was coupled with humility, recognizing he was dust and ashes before God
- There was earnestness involved, pleading to be allowed to approach just one more time, expressing a sense of earnestness
- He was persistent, willing to go from 50 to 45, to 30, to 20, to 10

(2) The second observation concerns God's answer. God did not answer *Abraham's specific request* to spare Sodom because Sodom was, after all, destroyed. However, God did answer *Abraham's desire*, which was to save Lot, because 19:29 states that God remembered Abraham when He rescued Lot. Sometimes God will not respond positively to specific prayer requests, but He will respond to the desire behind those prayer requests.