

Genesis 18

Jehovah God appears to Abraham again, in this chapter to reiterate the promise that Abraham will have a son. Sarah will be brought into the discussion, as she laughs out of unbelief at the thought that she could have a son at her age. God is waiting until she is, literally, biologically past the point of child birth. He waits in order to fulfill His promise so that Abraham, Sarah, the Israelites, and Christians know that God can work miracles. This also shows that significant promises are made against the “wisdom” of man so that man’s faith will be in God. We also have, in this chapter, God’s negotiations with Abraham relative to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There are many parallels between the final discussion (18:22-33) and the destruction of the world in the days of Noah, but this time, the destruction will be focused and concentrated on just those wicked cities rather than the whole world. Israel and Christians should understand that if God punishes these wicked people, if they are guilty of the same, they will be punished the same. The Judge of the earth will do what is right (18:25).

TRANSLATION - 18:1-5:

1 Then Jehovah appeared to him among the great trees of Mamre and he was sitting at the door of the tent in the heat of the day. **2** And he lifted his eyes and he looked and behold three men were standing before him and he looked and he ran to meet them from the door of the tent and he bowed himself to the earth. **3** And he said, “My Lord, if please I found favor in your eyes, please don’t pass by from your servant. **4** Please let a little water be taken and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. **5** And let me take a piece of bread and you all be refreshed; afterwards you will pass by since you will pass by your servant.” And they said, “Thus you do, just as you have spoken.”

WORDS:

“Bowed” (verse 2; 173 times) is the first appearance of this verb in the Bible. It can mean to “bow down” or “to worship.” Here, it is an attitude of respect for visitors; most often, it is used as worship, either to God or idols. Abraham uses “please” three times in close proximity in verses 3 and 4, illustrating his deep hospitality. Beginning in verse 21, as Abraham negotiates with Jehovah God for the lives of the Sodomites, he will use the word an additional five times! The verb “to find” is found seven times in the negotiations from verses 26-32. “Favor” was first used of Noah in 6:8; see comments there. “Pass by” (verse 3; 553 times) is translated as “pass over, pass by, or pass through.”

ARCHEOLOGY:

The “great trees” of Mamre were found in 13:18; 14:13. This was the location of Abraham’s family for a long period of time.

COMMENTS:

This is now the fourth time Abraham has spoken to Jehovah God (15:2, 8; 17:17). This time, Jehovah is accompanied by two others. The “heat of the day” in verse 1 sets the stage for Abraham’s hospitality. It is mealtime, as well as time to quench the thirst. Observe the frequency Moses emphasizes Abraham’s haste to serve his guests: “ran” is used twice, “hurried” is used three times. Abraham wished to serve his guests quickly and thoroughly. There is no indication at this point that Abraham knew he was serving divine guests.

Abraham bowed himself before them, a sign of deep respect for strangers. The verb will come to apply to “bowing” before God with an attitude of humility in worship. Using the word “favor,” Abraham asks his guests to be gracious and allow Abraham to serve them. His expressions of “little water” and a “piece of bread” serve to downplay the meal he is about to provide.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abraham, at this point, does not know that his visitors were divine. He simply serves out of a heart of love for others.

Moses' Contemporaries - God will call on Israel to treat strangers respectfully (Exo. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:10, 33-34; Deut. 26:12).

NT writers - Jesus tells His followers that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The Hebrew writer will allude to this incident and encourage Christians to love hospitality (13:2).

TRANSLATION - 18:6-10:

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Hurry! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead and make cakes!" **7** Then to the herd Abraham ran and took a son of a cow, tender and good, and he gave to the young man and he hurried to prepare it. **8** Then he took butter and milk and the son of the cow which he prepared and gave before them and he was standing by them under the tree and they ate.

9 They said to him, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent."

10 And he said, "To return I will return to you at this time of life and behold, a son to Sarah your wife." And Sarah was hearing at the door of the tent and he behind it.

WORDS:

"Prepare" (verses 7, 8) is the verb "to make."

GRAMMAR:

"To return I will return" (verse 10) is the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the imperfect, an emphatic construction.

ARCHEOLOGY:

It is difficult to know exactly how much ancient measurements were. However, it seems a "seah" was about two gallons or eight liters. So three seahs would be about twenty-four quarts. If a seah was enough flour to make twenty loaves of bread, Abraham was making enough to bake sixty cakes of bread. "Fine flour" was milled finely, from wheat. "Butter" might have been what we call yogurt. Although butter goes well with hot bread!

COMMENTS:

Abraham compels Sarah to make food, in this case three "seahs," one for each guest. This would have been a considerable amount of food! The "cakes" were not dessert cakes but cakes of bread, something similar to our cornbread. "To the herd" comes first in the sentence (verse 7) which helps us picture Abraham running from point A to point B to serve his guests as quickly as possible. The "son of a cow" would have been a young cow. It could also mean a "heifer" as the word "son" could simply mean an immature animal in this context.

His guests ate this magnificent meal and, either during the meal, or afterwards, they bring Sarah into the discussion: "Where is Sarah?" Perhaps this is the first hint to Abraham that these visitors were not ordinary visitors; they have supernatural knowledge since they have not yet made acquaintance with his wife. Sarah was still in the tent, staying back away from the guests, as the customs of the time required. "They" asked where Sarah was, but only "He" promises to return the following year. The return, as we note in the Grammar section, is emphatic. Jehovah effectively promises that He will return and Sarah will, in fact, have a son. Here, God reaffirms the promise He had made to Abraham in the previous chapter.

Sarah is in the tent, apparently just on the inside of the tent, close enough to the door, with Jehovah standing on the outside, so that Sarah overheard the discussion.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abraham now becomes aware that his visitors are divine; they know Sarah's name without having met her. They also repeat the promise that Abraham

and Sarah will have a son. They know of the covenant God made with him in chapter 17. This time, they draw Sarah into the conversation.

NT writers - Sarah is not mentioned nearly as often as Abraham (only four times), but they praise Sarah. Her womb was “dead” when God caused her to conceive (Rom. 4:19). Verse 10 is quoted by Paul in Romans 9:9 to show Christians, specifically Jewish Christians, that God fulfills His promises based on His wisdom, not according to man’s expectations. In Hebrews 11:11, the writer praises Sarah’s faith and in 1 Peter 3:6, Peter points out that Sarah obeyed Abraham, her husband, to be an example of the Christian wife’s response to her own husband.

TRANSLATION - 18:11-15:

11 But Abraham and Sarah [were] elderly, coming in [their later] days. It had stopped to be for Sarah the manner of women. **12** So Sarah laughed in herself, saying, “After me, when I am old, will it be to me pleasure? And my lord [is] old?”

13 And Jehovah said to Abraham, “Why is this? Sarah laughed, saying, ‘Indeed, truly will I bear, and I, myself, am old?’ **14** Is it too hard for Jehovah anything? At the appointed time, I will return to you at the time of life and to Sarah [will be born] a son.”

15 But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh.” Because she was afraid. But he said to her, “No, but you did laugh.”

WORDS:

“Manner” (verse 11; 59 times) generally means “road, path, or way.” “Pleasure” (verse 12) is a related word with “Eden.” “Is it hard” (verse 14; 71 times) means “to be extraordinary, or wonderful.” “To deny” (verse 15; 22 times) means “to deny, deceive, lie.”

COMMENTS:

Yet, Abraham and Sarah were elderly. They were entering (“coming”) into their later years. As Moses has emphasized before (cf. 11:30), Sarah was barren and now biologically past the age of bearing children. It is now scientifically impossible for her to become pregnant. But God does not always operate according to His own laws of science! Not if He needs to make a point! God is delaying the pregnancy considerably past the biological point so that Abraham, Sarah, and everyone reading their story will know that it is God who graciously fulfills His promises.

Abraham had laughed earlier, out of unbelief. Here, Sarah also laughs out of unbelief. Either Abraham did not communicate God’s message to her (cf. 17:16, 19), or he was not able to convince her that God’s message was trustworthy. Either way, she did not have to understand all the details of the reproductive system to know that she was not having a child! Even Abraham, she believed, was too old to have a child!

So Jehovah asks Abraham why Sarah laughed at the idea that Abraham and Sarah would have a child. We do not know exactly why God questions Sarah’s response, but it likely has something to do with the appearances and promises that God had been making to Abraham for the past twenty-four years. Yes, it would be hard to maintain hope in the face of twenty-four years of unanswered prayers, but God had *appeared* to Abraham; idols do not do that!

“Is anything too hard for Jehovah?” expresses the fundamental reason why God is trustworthy and deserves our allegiance. Of course, the answer is “no.” God giving Abraham and Sarah a son when they were past the age of biologically conceiving a child is proof that nothing is too hard for Jehovah. He is preparing humanity to believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

When confronted, apparently by Jehovah God, Sarah reacted in a normal, human way. She was afraid, which compelled her to deny she had laughed. The first time someone was afraid was Adam and Eve at their sin (3:10). God told Abraham not to be afraid (15:1). The fact that Jehovah knew and then confronted her about her laughter emphasizes to her God’s intimate knowledge, His foresight, and His power to make her conceive. This simply

emphasizes how incredible it was, how incredible Sarah believed it was, for she and Abraham to have a child! We are reminded that Isaac's name is a related word of the verb "to laugh," which is used here four times (18:12, 13, 15).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - We are not astonished that Sarah laughed in disbelief. We still believe that science has an answer to everything. Fear is also a stronger motivator, even to do things that are wrong. Sarah's faith will be buttressed in this God who was not like her parents' gods, when she becomes pregnant in just a few months.

Later Hebrew writers - Jeremiah seems to allude to or quote verse 14 in Jeremiah 32:17-18, 27. Zechariah 8:6 also seems to allude to this text.

NT writers - Jesus will remind His followers that nothing is impossible with God (Matt. 19:26; Luke 18:27; cf. Luke 1:37).

TRANSLATION - 18:16-21:

16 They arose from there, the men, and they looked toward Sodom and Abraham was walking with them to bring them. **17** Then Jehovah said, "Am I myself hiding from Abraham what I am doing? **18** Even Abraham to be will be a great people and numerous and they will be blessed in him among all the peoples of the earth, **19** that I know on what account which he will command his sons and the sons after him and they will keep the path of Jehovah to do righteousness and judgment." On that account Jehovah was bringing to Abraham what He spoke to him.

20 And Jehovah said, "The cry for help of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great and their sin that [it] has become very heavy. **21** Let me go down now and I will see according to their cry for help. It comes to me. They made destruction and if not, I will know."

WORDS:

"Looked" (verse 16; 22 times) means "to look down on, to look from above." "Hide" (verse 17; 153 times) means "to cover, conceal, hide." "Numerous" (verse 18; 31 times) alludes to God's promises that Abraham's family would be as numerous as the sand, dust, and stars. The word could also be understood as "mighty." "Righteous" is used 159 times and was first seen in Genesis 15:6. It refers to what is morally and spiritually right in the eyes of God. The family of similar words is found a total of 529 times. "Judgment" (425 times) refers to what is just or fair, again, as God defines the term. The whole family of words is found 625 times.

"Cry for help" (verses 20, 21) is a single word. It is found nineteen times, but the verb is found 73 times in the OT. "Has become great" is a single word. "Sin" is the typical word for violating God's expectations. It literally means to "miss the mark." The word family is found 591 times in the OT, first in Genesis 4:7. This is its second occurrence. "Has become heavy" is also a single word. "Now" (verse 21) is the same particle that is translated "please."

GRAMMAR:

"To be, he will be" (verse 18) is, again, the infinitive absolute with the imperfect.

ARCHEALOGY:

Mamre sat about 3,000' above sea level while the Dead Sea plain was 1,300' below sea level. However, the group would have had to walk some distance from Mamre to be able to look out over the plain of Sodom.

COMMENTS:

The men get up to leave, anticipating their movement to Sodom. Abraham walks with them, as a host often does, to a certain point. From there, the two (angels, 19:1) go on to Sodom. Jehovah God deliberated with His angels, before they left, whether to share with Abraham His plans for Sodom. He does. God emphasizes (see comments under Grammar)

that Abraham will, in fact, be a great and numerous nation (cf. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4-6)! How unusual it is to get a view into the thoughts of God! What we learn, however, is that what God says is what God is *thinking*.

Observe here that God says He “knows” that Abraham will command his sons (children) and their sons (his grandchildren) to keep the path (commands) of Jehovah God, to do things which are righteous and just in the eyes of God. Thus, when Abraham obeys God and offers Isaac in chapter 22 and says, “now I know that you fear God...,” this was not a new revelation to God. He foresaw Abraham’s obedience before it occurred.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were crying out to God for relief. That outcry was extreme because sin was running rampant, unchecked in the cities of the plains of Jordan. Sin creates an imbalance on the scales of justice and only God can correct that imbalance. Here, He contemplates the destruction of these two cities and their surrounding villages. Moses had already told us in 13:13 that the men of Sodom were wicked and extreme sinners against Jehovah God. He plans to do something about it, but not before sharing His plans with His faithful servant, Abraham. When sin and violence were prevalent before, God destroyed the entire world. Now His destructive judgment will be isolated to just these cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, and other cities of the plains of Jordan.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - While Abraham’s faith was not as strong as it could have been at times, he clearly walked in the paths of Jehovah God, which will be well-illustrated in chapter 22 (22:15-18; cf. 26:5; Rom. 4:16).

Moses’ Contemporaries - Israel will “cry for help” before Jehovah God while they are enslaved in Egypt (Exo. 3:7, 9). God desired Israelite parents to teach their children to walk in the paths of Jehovah God (Deut. 6:1-9). In fact, the whole nation of Israel was to be the conduit through whom knowledge of God was to be spread around the world (Exo. 19:4-6; Is. 42:6; 49:6). The path of Jehovah is a metaphor for showing loyalty to Jehovah God’s commandments: Deut. 8:6; 9:12; Judges 2:22; 2 Kings 21:22.

Later Hebrew writers - God will refer to Abraham as His “friend” in Isaiah 41:8. Later Hebrew writers will use Sodom as an example of God’s destructive judgment, to warn Israel to repent of her own sins: Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9; Ezek. 16:46-49, 53-56; Amos 4:11. The weeping prophet laments that Jerusalem’s sins were “greater” than the sin of Sodom (Lamentations 4:6). Jeremiah (23:14) identifies Sodom’s sins as: committing adultery, walking in falsehood, and strengthening the hands of evildoers. Ezekiel identifies Sodom’s sins as arrogance and not caring for the poor and needy. Babylon’s destruction will be like Sodom’s (Isa. 13:19; Jer. 50:40). Edom’s destruction will be like Sodom’s (Jer. 49:17-18). Moab’s destruction will be like Sodom (Zeph. 2:9). Through Amos, God says that He does not do anything without revealing His will to and through the prophets (3:7). The path or “way” of the Lord continues in the prophets (Jer. 5:4, 5; Ezekiel 18:25, 29; 33:17, 20).

NT writers - Jesus will warn that a city which refuses His Gospel will receive a worse fate than Sodom and Gomorrah’s (Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12), specifically Capernaum’s (Matt. 11:23-24). Peter will warn Christians that if they turn their backs on Christ, they will receive punishment from God assuredly as did Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:6). Jude identifies Sodom’s sin as “gross immorality and [going] after strange flesh” (Jude 7). John will use Sodom as a picture of the coming destruction of the great, “eternal” city of Rome (Rev. 11:8). Jesus wants Christian parents to teach their children to walk in the paths of Jehovah God (Eph. 6:1-4). Jesus identifies Himself as the epitome of the way of the Lord in John 14:6, which becomes a metaphor for Christianity in the book of Acts (9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

TRANSLATION - 18:22-33:

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom and Abraham was still standing before Jehovah. **23** And Abraham came near and said, “Will you even sweep away

the righteous with the wicked? **24** Perhaps there exists fifty righteous in the midst of the city. Will you even sweep away? And will you not spare the place on account of the fifty righteous who [are] in its midst? **25** Anathema to you to do such a thing [as] this, to put to death the righteous with the wicked! Even it will be as the righteous as the wicked - anathema to you! The Judge of all the earth, will He not do justice?"

26 So Jehovah said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous in the midst of the city, then I will spare for all the place for their sake."

27 So Abraham answered and said, "Behold, please, I am persisting to speak to my Lord and I, myself, [am] dust and dirt. **28** Perhaps they will diminish, the fifty righteous [by] five? Will you destroy by five all the city?" And He said, "I will not destroy if I find there forty-five."

29 Then he repeated again to speak to Him and he said, "Perhaps they will be found there forty?" And He said, "I will not do for the sake of forty."

30 Then he said, "Please do not be angry my lord and let me speak... perhaps they will be found there thirty?" And He said, "I will not do if I find there thirty."

31 And he said, "Behold please, I am persisting to speak to my lord. Perhaps they are found there twenty?" And He said, "I will not destroy for the sake of twenty."

32 Then he said, "Please do not be angry my lord and let me speak... only once more.... perhaps they are found there ten?" And He said, "I will not destroy for the sake of ten."

33 Then Jehovah went, just as He completed to speak to Abraham and Abraham returned to his place.

WORDS:

"Sweep away" (verse 23, 24; 19 times) means to "take, sweep, snatch or carry away." "Spare" (verse 24; 659 times) here suggests either taking away the sin of Sodom, in the sense of forgiveness, or not taking away the city in destruction, in effect, offering forgiveness. "Anathema" (verse 25; 21 times) is an exclamation meaning "far be it!" or "never!" It is related to the verb "to profane or pollute." It is a very strong negation. "Judge" and "justice" are related words.

"Answered" (verse 27; 316 times) can mean to "respond, reply, testify." "To persist" (18 times) means "to be intent on something, be determined, show resolve." Abraham uses the word twice here (vs 31). The word "destroy" (152 times) in verses 28 (twice), 31, 32 was used in the destruction by the flood (6:11-13, 17; 9:11, 15). It will also be used in the description of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in 19:13-14, 29. "Be angry" (verse 30, 32; 93 times in the OT) means "to be or become hot, burn with anger, become angry." Cain was the first person to become angry (4:5-6). This is the first reference (and only one in Genesis) to the anger of God.

COMMENTS:

Two of the divine visitors continue to travel toward Sodom while Abraham stays behind, with Jehovah God. Moses has let the readers look into the thoughts of God so the reader anticipates God sharing with Abraham what He plans to do. Abraham moves closer to the manifestation of God; we do not know how or what this manifestation was. Then Abraham asks Jehovah if He will destroy the righteous with the wicked.

We do not know how populated Sodom was at that time, but Abraham begins his negotiations with fifty righteous. "Perhaps" (Abraham uses this word in 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32) fifty righteous can be found. Abraham asks God if He will refrain Himself from sweeping away the city if fifty righteous people can be found there. So holy and righteous does Abraham view God that it is inconceivable to him that God would punish the righteous with the wicked. Jehovah God graciously acquiesces to Abraham's request, for the sake of fifty people. To some degree, righteous people preserve a corrupt society from destruction.

With extreme humility and politeness and conscious of the existential difference between Abraham ("dust and dirt") and Jehovah God, Abraham negotiates five less than fifty.

God acquiesces. Feeling that he is walking on thin ice, Abraham next drops the number: forty righteous. God acquiesces to forty; He will save Sodom if forty righteous souls can be found. Abraham drops the number by ten: thirty righteous. God acquiesces. Abraham drops the number by ten again: twenty righteous. God acquiesces. Finally, in Abraham's last effort to save the city of Sodom, he drops his number by another ten: ten righteous. The gracious and loving and patient God Almighty acquiesces. Ten righteous souls will not be found in Sodom.

Jehovah God left Abraham again and the concerned patriarch returns to Mamre. The next appearance of Abraham will show him arising early in the morning and looking at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:27-29).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abraham was called out of a pagan environment after having lived in it for 75 years. The God who speaks to Him is different than the gods who "spoke" to his family and friends. For the past 24 years, Abraham has been learning what it means to walk by faith. He is humbly learning to trust God. God's relationship with him motivates Abraham to have concern for the people of Sodom. Faith. Humility. Obedience. Love.

Moses' Contemporaries - Perhaps it was Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah that motivated Moses to intercede similarly for the sinful nation of Israel (Exo. 32:9-10; Num. 14:11-12).

Later Hebrew writers - Samuel will intercede for Israel (1 Sam. 7:5-9; 12:19-25). Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-23) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:33; 6:15-20) will intercede for their contemporaries. Job (42:7-9) will intercede for his friends. Just as Abraham has interceded for the Sodomites, Isaiah predicts that One will come who will intercede on behalf of all sinners (53:12).

NT writers - Jesus Christ is the One who intercedes and mediates between man and God (1 Tim. 2:5-6; Rom. 8:34).