

Genesis Chapter 18

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;”

“The LORD appeared”:

Another instance of a theophany (a visible manifestation of God).

Although Abraham perhaps did not recognize at first that one of his visitors, whom he humbly greeted and entertained (verses 2-8), and properly sent on their way.

“Plains of Mamre”:

See note on 13:18.

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,”

The “three men” who appeared to Abraham were the preincarnate Christ and two angels (verse 22; 19:1).

Here we find an example, not only of “entertaining angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2), but also of God becoming the guest of one of His saints (John 14:23; Rev. 3:20).

This him was Abraham

These three were in the form of men.

These were messengers from God.

These three were associated with the Spirit of God.

The statement “the LORD appeared”, lets you know that at least one of these beings was the Spirit of the LORD.

I believe the reason three appeared was to show that God the Father, God the Word, and God the Holy Ghost were in agreement with the message that was brought.

Abraham realized who this was, as even from a distance, and so he ran out, and kneeled, and then worshipped.

Abraham humbled himself before these three.

Genesis 18:3 “And said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:”

“My Lord”:

Although perhaps first used as the customary respectful address of a host to a visit, later in their interchange it was used knowingly by Abraham of his true and sovereign LORD, whom he addressed as “Master” and whom he must have recognized when the visitor spoke of Himself as “LORD” (verse 14).

Here again, Abraham called him LORD.

He said, if you have judged and found me okay, don’t leave.

Abraham realized he was God’s servant.

Genesis 18:4 “Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:”

“Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet”:

Which was very refreshing to travelers in hot countries, who walked barefoot or in sandals; and this he proposes to be done by one of his servants, whose business it was, only desires they would give him leave to order it (1 Samuel 25:41).

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.

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.”

The narrative affords a pleasing instance of the primitive manners of the East.

The hospitality of the pastoral tribes was spontaneous and unreserved.

The washing of the feet, which were partly at least uncovered in walking, the reclining under the tree, and the offer of refreshment, are indicative of an unchanging rural simplicity.

“For therefore are ye come to your servant”:

Not that he thought they came this way on purpose to take some refreshment with him, but so it was ordered by the providence of God; and since it was, he desires that they would accept of his invitation: and they said, “so do as thou hast said.”

They agreed to it, that water should be fetched to wash their feet, and food for them to eat.

Abraham wanted to serve these.

He humbled himself and washed their feet.

He was offering food and whatever they needed.

Then he asked is there something I am doing wrong?

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.”

“And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah”:

In order to acquaint her with his guests, and to give proper instructions for providing food for them; and this he hastened to do, being hearty in the entertainment of them, and that he might not keep them too long from their journey.

“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.

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.

“And Abraham ran unto the herd”:

While Sarah and her maids were kneading the dough, and making the cakes, Abraham fetched a calf; a fine fat calf which was reckoned very delicious food.

Much in use with the ancients and generally made a part in any grand entertainment, and was accounted fit for a king (see 1 Sam. 28:24).

“Gave it unto a young man”:

One of his servants, to kill and dress as soon as possible.

Jarchi says this was Ishmael, whom he trained up to such service, “and he hasted to dress it”.

The young man made all the haste he could to get it ready, according to the orders of Abraham.

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.”

Abraham had a numerous household, and plentifulness was the character of primitive hospitality.

“Hearth cakes,” baked among the coals.

“Butter”:

Seemingly any preparation of milk, cream, curds, or butter, all of which are used in the East.

“And the calf which he had dressed”:

Either the whole of it, or some principal parts of it, reckoned the finest and choicest.

Though by what follows it seems to be Abraham himself, who may be said to dress the calf, or it being done by his orders.

“And set it before them”:

A table being placed under the tree.

He set, or ordered to be set, all those provisions before the three men, to feed upon.

The cakes and butter, the milk and fatted calf.

“And he stood by them under the tree”:

Not only to bid them welcome, but to minister to them.

Abraham was like an excited school boy.

He gave them the very best he had (like a sacrifice).

Verses 9-13: Despite a promise clearly reminiscent of God's words to Abraham, Sarah reacted with similar unwillingness to believe as her husband had done (17:17).

She was not thinking of divine miracle but of divine providence working only within the normal course of life, being convinced that, at their age, bearing children was just not naturally possible.

Genesis 18:9 “And they said unto him, Where [is] Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.”

The men now enter upon the business of their visit.

“Where is Sarah thy wife?”

The jealousy and seclusion of later times had not yet rendered such an inquiry uncourteous.

Sarah is within hearing of the conversation (verse 10, 14: Romans 9:9).

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.”

“I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life;”

Literally the living time, seemingly the time of birth, when the child comes to manifest life.

“Sarah thy wife shall have a son.”

Sarah hears this with unbelieving surprise, and laughs with mingled doubt and delight.

She knows that in the nature of things she is past child-bearing.

“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”

Sarah laughed within herself, within the tent and behind the speaker; yet to her surprise her internal feelings are known to him.

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.”

“Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age”:

The one being ninety nine years of age, and the other eighty nine; and which is observed to make it the more surprising that they should have a son at such an age; and what follows still makes it more so.

“And it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women”:

Her monthly visitors (periods), had left her, so that she was unfit for conception, and there could be no hope of it in a natural way.

Genesis 18:12 “Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

“Sarah laughed within herself” either because she did not know of the promise of (17:19), or because she was unconvinced it would be fulfilled.

In either case, one of the three men was now clearly identified as Yahweh, who knew Sarah’s thoughts.

These three brought unusual blessing to Abraham.

Now, that Abraham was old and Sarah had already gone through the change of life she was to have a son.

Sarah was very well aware that changes in her body had made it impossible in the natural to have a child.

She laughed, because it was so unbelievable.

With man, it was impossible. But through God, all things are possible.

Take note that Sarah called Abraham, lord, but it was not capitalized.

He was ruler over her body, not her spirit.

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?”

She finds there is One present who rises above the sphere of nature.

In her confusion and terror, she denies that she laughed.

But He, who sees what is within, insists that she did laugh; at least in the thoughts of her heart.

There is a beautiful simplicity in the whole scene.

Sarah now doubtless received faith and strength to conceive.

Verses 14-15

A rhetorical question (“Is any thing too hard?”) A divine declaration (“At the time appointed”), coupled with obvious knowledge of her thoughts (“laughed to herself”), made Sarah fearfully perceive her total misperception of God’s working.

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 anything too hard for the LORD?”

Whose power is infinite; or “too wonderful”?

So wonderful and beyond all belief, that it can never be thought it will be done by him; and why then should it be thought incredible or impossible that Sarah should have a child?

Can anything be too great a miracle for him to effect?

God has full sway, and by his own power works all things after the counsel of his own will.

Is there an effect to be produced?

God can produce it as well with or without means.

He produced nature, the whole system of causes and effects, when in the whole compass of his own eternity there was neither means nor being.

He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

How great and wonderful is God!

“At the time appointed will I return to thee”:

According to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son; which words are repeated not merely for the confirmation of Abraham’s faith, which staggered not, but to remove Sarah’s unbelief, and to encourage her faith in the divine promise.

Genesis 18:15 “Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.”

“For she was afraid”:

Then Sarah (who had overheard the conversation, and the charge preferred against her, and who probably now appeared before the stranger denied), saying “I laughed not”.

Sarah’s conduct will admit of no other explanation than that which the sacred narrative itself here has given.

The knowledge that her secret thoughts had been deciphered must have kindled in her breast the suspicion that her visitor was none other than Jehovah.

With this a sense of guilt would immediately assail her conscience for having cherished even a moment, any doubt of the Divine word.

In the consequent confusion of soul, she tries whatever seems to be the first impulse of detected transgressions, deception (Gen. 3:12-13).

And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

With a directness similar to that which he employed in dealing with the first culprits in the garden, not contending in a multiplicity of words, but solemnly announcing that what she said was false.

The silence of Sarah was an evidence of her conviction; her subsequent conception was a proof of her repentance and forgiveness.

The LORD wanted to know why Sarah laughed.

He made her body, and He could restore her youth long enough for her to have a child.

He was disappointed in her doubt.

Then Sarah became afraid when she realized that this was the LORD of heaven.

She denied laughing, but she (as we), could not hide anything from the LORD (He knows everything).

Verses 16-33

This section gives the basis for Abraham's being called the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23).

Because Abraham was the friend of God and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him, he was allowed the high privilege of learning something about God's principles of dealing with those nations.

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."

"And the men rose up from thence":

From their seats at Abraham's table under the tree, all three of them.

“And looked toward Sodom”:

They then set their faces and steered their course that way, by which it appeared they intended to go thither.

“And Abraham went with them, to bring them on the way; which was another piece of civility to strangers used in those early times, as well as in later ones (Acts 20:38).

**Genesis 18:17-18 “And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;”
“Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?”**

“Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do”:

The LORD’s reason for permitting Abraham to know of judgment in advance underscored his special role in the plan of God and the certain outcome of His covenant with Abraham, many offspring and great blessing.

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.”

“For I know him, that he will command his children”:

An expression of divine confidence, i.e., a tribute to faithfulness, obedience, and consistency.

Here, the LORD decided to tell Abraham what He was about to do to Sodom.

He spoke the blessing again, that Abraham would be a mighty nation.

He knew that Abraham would teach his children and grandchildren the ways of the LORD.

He already knew, because of the blood covenant Abraham had already kept (The circumcision of the men).

Genesis 18:20 “And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;”

“The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great”:

The iniquity of the two cities, by then complete (15:16), had reached the point of no return before the LORD, who demonstrated before Abraham how justly He assessed the time for judgment (verse 21).

Their sins cried out for punishment (4:10; Hosea 7:2; Jonah 1:2).

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.”

“I will go down” (11:7), indicates that God’s justice moved Him to demonstrate that He had full possession of the facts.

Actually, the two angels went to Sodom and the Angel of the LORD stayed with Abraham.

Abraham expressed concern for the people (13:8-9).

The LORD was going to investigate this terrible situation which was going on.

We will find out a little later that this city’s iniquity was homosexuality.

The LORD was explaining to Abraham about the sin and its consequences.

Genesis 18:22 “And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.”

“And the men turned their faces”:

That is, the two angels who accompanied Jehovah were now sent towards Sodom; while the third, who is called the LORD, remained with Abraham for the purpose of teaching him the great usefulness and importance of faith and prayer.

I guess it is time to deal with the two that were with the LORD when He first came to Abraham.

My own personal opinion (I have no Scripture to back this up), is that the two with the LORD were two very important angels (ministering spirits carrying out their orders from the throne).

These could even have been Gabriel, and some other angel of great importance.

The word men was loosely used, because they were in that form.

The LORD remained with Abraham to discuss the problem, and then He sent the two angel men on to Sodom.

Genesis 18:23 “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”

“Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”:

The intercession for the two wicked cities began with a question that portrayed Abraham’s acute awareness of God’s mercy toward the righteous and the distinction He made between the good and the bad (verse 25).

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?”

Here is the first solemn prayer upon record in the Bible; and it is a prayer for the sparing of the country of Sodom.

Abraham prayed earnestly that Sodom might be spared, if but a few righteous persons should be found in it.

Learn from Abraham what compassion we should feel for sinners, and how earnestly we should pray for them.

We see here that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Abraham, indeed, failed in his request for the whole place, but Lot was miraculously delivered.

Be encouraged then to expect, by earnest prayer, the blessing of God upon your families, your friends, your neighborhood.

To this end, you must not only pray, but you must live like Abraham.

He knew the Judge of all the earth would do right.

He does not plead that the wicked may be spared for their own sake, or because it would be severe to destroy them, but for the sake of the righteous who might be found among them.

And righteousness only can be made a plea before God.

How then did Christ make intercession for transgressors?

Not by blaming the Divine law, nor by alleging aught in extenuation or excuse of human guilt; but by pleading HIS OWN obedience unto death.

This was very presumptuous of Abraham to question the LORD.

The number 50 pertains to jubilee.

This number indicates setting the captives free.

Abraham was pleading for this city.

This LORD, spoken of here in the next verse, is the Judge of all the earth.

This indicated that this was the same Spirit as the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the LORD of all the earth.

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?”

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Abraham’s clear understanding of God’s character being able only to do what is good and totally above reproach was affirmed with this rhetorical question.

Abraham was saying, LORD, You are righteous; this is not like You as You are a perfect Judge.

Notice, in the Scripture above, that Judge was capitalized.

This also tells us that this was the LORD, not an angel.

I would be absolutely scared to death to speak to the LORD like this.

Abraham was almost scolding the LORD.

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.”

“If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city”:

Sodom is particularly mentioned because Lot dwelt there, and being the metropolis, and the city of greatest note, as Jarchi observes, it is put for the rest; and the sense is, if fifty righteous persons could be found in all the five cities, mercy should be shown them.

Then will I spare all the place for their sakes; not Sodom only, but the whole city, of which Sodom was the chief; the LORD takes up and agrees to the number Abraham pitched upon, and grants the request he makes.

You see, just a very few righteous people can be a blessing to the masses.

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:”

“Which am but dust and ashes”:

Abraham’s negotiation, far from being crassly or selfishly manipulative, humbly and compassionately expressed his concern for people (13:8-9), and particularly interceded for the place where his nephew Lot and his family lived.

Neither did he intend to anger the Lord by his repeated requests (verses 28, 30, 32).

Genesis 18:28-32 “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].” “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.” “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.” “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.” “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.”

Abraham intercedes for Sodom.

His spiritual character is unfolded and exalted more and more.

He employs the language of a free-born son with his heavenly Father.

He puts forward the plea of justice to the righteous in behalf of the city.

He ventures to repeat his intervention six times, every time diminishing the number of the righteous whom he supposes to be in it.

The patience of the Lord is no less remarkable than the perseverance of Abraham.

In every case, he grants his petition.

“For ten’s sake”:

That the number of righteous people necessary to forestall judgment had been reduced from 50 to 10 may have reflected Abraham’s awareness both of the intense wickedness of the cities as well as Lot’s ineffective witness there.

Abraham probably had the whole of Lot’s family in mind.

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 ... Abraham return unto his place”:

Nothing more could be done; the judgment was inevitable!

This was an interesting conversation between Abraham and the LORD.

One thing that really stood out in this was the patience of the LORD.

At least, Abraham humbled himself, and admitted he was but dust and ashes.

Another thing so notable to me, God was so gracious that if even ten (represents world government) were righteous, He would spare the thousands who lived there.

The terrible thing in our society today, is that in our large cities, God would be hard pressed to find even 10 (by His standard), righteous people.

The idea of ten satisfied Abraham, because Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family were there, and Abraham figured God would spare the city from destruction for them.

Then the LORD and Abraham went back to their respective homes.

We will see in the next lesson, that not even all of Lot's family was righteous.

God would destroy the city.

Genesis Chapter 18 Questions

1. Where did the LORD appear to Abraham?
2. Whom did Abraham see coming to him?
3. What did Abraham do?
4. Who were these three?
5. Why did Abraham bow down to them?
6. What did Abraham call one of them?
7. What two things did Abraham do for them as they entered his tent.
8. What question did Abraham ask them about himself?
9. What three foods did Abraham set before them?
10. What does the time of life mean?
11. What was Sarah's reaction when the LORD told Abraham that Sarah would have a son?
12. Why did she think she could not have a child?
13. With men it is impossible, but with God _____.

14. Was Sarah's denying that she laughed accepted by the LORD? Why?
15. What city did the men look toward?

16. Would God conceal His plan from Abraham? Why?
17. Sodom and Gomorrah's sin was _____ before God.
18. What was this city's iniquity?
19. Who stayed to talk to Abraham?
20. In Abraham's first remark, how many did he ask the LORD to save it for?
21. What does this number pertain to?
22. What else, was the LORD called here?
23. Whom do the men believe the other two men were?
24. How low a number of righteous did Abraham and the LORD finally settle on?
25. Why was Abraham satisfied with that number?
26. What message stood out in this conversation of Abraham and the LORD?
27. What is the number ten representative of?
28. In the next lesson, what will we learn about Lot's family?