

THE LORD VISITS ABRAHAM

Genesis 18:1-19:38
Key Verse: 18:19

Lesson 9

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Abraham was called a friend of God. (James 2:23; Isaiah 41:8) In chapter 18, the Lord and two angels visit Abraham. From this visit, we can learn what it means to be a friend of God. In chapter 19, the two angels visit Lot in Sodom. There is a contrast between Abraham and Lot in these chapters. We can see the terrible toll which living a compromised life takes on the character and on the life of a man who really wanted to be righteous. We can also learn that God is a God of judgment. The fire and brimstone that fell on Sodom is a portent of God's final judgment on the wicked at the end of the age.

1. Good news for Sarah (18:1-15)

When the Lord and two angels visited Abraham in the heat of the day, he was sitting at the entrance to his tent. He welcomed his guests and did his best to show them hospitality. When he invited them to stay and rest and eat a bite with him, they readily agreed. They felt a genuine welcome in Abraham's home. Abraham quickly mobilized his household and they prepared a banquet for the guests. The words, "hurried" and "quickly", "ran" suggest that Abraham was eager to serve his guests. He was very happy to see them. Perhaps he did not recognize the Lord at first, but surely by the time they sat down to eat he knew whom he was serving. The banquet he served consisted of a choice, tender calf, expertly butchered and cooked by his servants, about 20 quarts of fine flour, personally kneaded and baked into bread by Sarah, some curds and milk. Abraham, in good oriental fashion, did not sit and eat with them; he stood near them to serve them and make sure that they had everything they needed. Abraham joyfully welcomed his wonderful Friend into his home and did his best to serve him.

But this was not just a social call. The Lord had come to give Abraham some good news and also, some bad news. First, the good news. The Lord made sure that Sarah was in hearing distance, because he had come to give this good news to her. She was to bear Abraham a son. Sarah was in the tent, listening. When she heard the Lord's message, she laughed in disbelief. Her barrenness was her life problem. How she had wanted to bear Abraham a son! But now? She was old--past the age of child-bearing. She had given up hope of having children long ago, and had even given her servant Hagar to Abraham so that he might have a son by her. Fatalism about her life problem was deeply rooted in her heart.

In chapter 17, the Lord had told Abraham that Sarah would have a son, and when Abraham laughed to himself, the Lord told him that his son's name would be Isaac, which

means "he laughs." Isaac would be born the next year. Now, Sarah laughed, and the Lord asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?...Is anything too hard for the Lord?" It was to teach Sarah that nothing is too hard for the Lord, to plant creation, resurrection faith in her heart that he had come to visit. Sarah was caught in her unbelief, and she was afraid, so she said, "I didn't laugh." But the Lord rebuked her. "Yes, you did!" God planted enough faith in her heart for her to overcome her fatalism and have a son by Abraham the next year.

2. Abraham pleads for Sodom (16-33)

Then came the bad news. The men got up to leave, and Abraham walked down the road with them a ways. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" God lets his friends know what he is doing. (Jn 15:15) What was he going to do? In verse 20, he talked about the grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. His two angels planned to visit Sodom to see if it was as bad as they had heard. The implication was clear: God planned to destroy Sodom.

God was educating Abraham. God is not only a God of blessing; he is also a God of judgment. He punishes wickedness and injustice. The mighty acts of judgment in the Bible--the flood, the destruction of Sodom, the plagues on Egypt, the destruction of the Amorites and Canaanites, even the destruction of Jerusalem--all look forward to the Final Judgment, the Day of the Lord, when the Son of Man will come to judge the living and the dead. Peter speaks of this final judgment as follows: "...by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed...by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men." (2Pe 3:5-7) God who saves is also God who judges and punishes.

It is important for the descendants of Abraham--those who follow in his footsteps of faith--to know that God is the "Judge of all the earth." He is righteous; he does right. We must love God and we must also fear him. It is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (Pr 9:10). If we love and fear God we can keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. (19) Then God can fulfill the promise he made to Abraham.

The Lord knew that Abraham was concerned about Sodom for personal reasons: Lot lived there. So when the two men turned to go to Sodom, Abraham stood before the Lord to pray. Abraham, God's friend, knew how to pray to the Lord. His prayer was not based on his own worth or goodness. He said, "I am nothing but dust and ashes." His prayer was based on the righteousness of God. He said, "The Lord is the Judge of the earth who will surely do what is right." The word "righteous" or "right" is found here at least 7 times, and it is implied many more times.

Although God did not say in so many words that he was going to destroy Sodom, Abraham knew what he would surely do. And, although Abraham did not mention Lot in his prayer, God knew Abraham's shepherd heart and why he prayed so earnestly. Finally, God agreed to spare Sodom if as many as ten righteous men could be found in the city.

3. The destruction of Sodom (19)

Lot lived in Sodom. He was called a righteous man (perhaps by comparison with the people of his times!) (2Pe 2:7,8). God had agreed to spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous

men, and Lot was one. This chapter clearly shows us that there were no others.

The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening. They met Lot, who was sitting in the gateway of the city. He was sitting by himself, apart from the other men of the city. When he saw the strangers, he got up to meet them. He recognized them as godly men and he invited them to his home to spend the night. They had readily accepted Abraham's invitation, but they hesitated to accept Lot's. They sensed that his invitation came from a sense of duty. He insisted, however, and they went with him. Lot prepared for them a simple supper of unleavened bread, but no one in his family helped him; apparently his wife and daughters were out--or otherwise occupied.

That night, all the men of the city came to Lot's house to demand that he turn the strangers over to them. They wanted to sexually abuse them. Lot tried to compromise by offering his daughters instead, but he was despised and berated as an alien and judge, and they tried to grab him. The angels rescued him.

Lot had come to Sodom to enjoy its material advantages--he had not come as a missionary. So he had no sheep and no friends. Even his sons-in-law-to-be laughed at him. He had tried to live a moral life, and he had succeeded to some extent, but when he tried to protect his guests from the evil men of Sodom, he exposed his own corrupted and compromised heart and life by offering to give them his daughters instead. There were not even 10 righteous men in Sodom because Lot had not tried to make friends for God. He had lived there like a Pharisee, keeping himself pure and looking with contempt on the unrighteous people around him. But the cultural diseases of city life had deeply infected him. Even when God's servants told him that God would destroy Sodom, he was loath to leave. His wife couldn't bear to leave her nice home and convenient kitchen and bathroom, so she looked back and was turned into a lump of salt. His daughters became thorough-going Sodomites. In order to solve their marriage problems and be "like everyone else" they committed incest with their father and gave birth to sons, bad seed, who later became enemies of God's people.

Lot came to this pagan, godless city not to make God known, but for the sake of personal advantage. He could not but live a compromised life. A compromised Christian life is life of curse, not a life of blessing.