

Genesis 18 - The Promise of Isaac Confirmed

A. Abraham meets some very important visitors.

1. (1-5) Abraham invites the LORD and two others to a meal.

a. **Then the LORD appeared:** Apparently, this happened a short time later. In Genesis 17:21, God said Sarah would give birth one year later, and at this time, she is not yet pregnant. So this couldn't be more than three months after the events in Genesis 17.

b. **Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees:** Here again, the LORD came to Abraham in human appearance. This is another presentation of Jesus in human form before His incarnation.

i. We can assume that this was God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, appearing to Abraham before His incarnation and birth at Bethlehem. We assume this because of God the Father it says, *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:18), and no man has ever seen God in the Person of the Father (1 Timothy 6:16). Therefore, if God appeared to someone in human appearance in the Old Testament (and no one has seen God the Father) it makes sense the appearance is of the eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

c. **Behold, three men were standing by him:** We don't know if Abraham immediately recognized who these visitors were. Though the LORD (in the Person of Jesus Christ) appeared to Abraham twice before (Genesis 12:7, 17:1), we don't know if Jesus looked the same each time, or if Abraham could just know who this was.

d. **He ran from the tent door to meet them:** According to his godliness and the customs of that culture, Abraham offered the hospitality of his house to these travelers.

2. (6-8) Sarah and Abraham prepare a meal for their visitors.

a. **Abraham hurried into the tent:** Again, to us this may seem to be overdoing it, but ancient culture had an extremely strong sense of hospitality to visitors. *And* it is also likely Abraham knew it was the LORD visiting him.

3. (9-10) God reconfirms His promise of a son.

a. **I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son:** We may wonder why God repeated the promise again, so close to the time when He said it previously. After all, it seems God was silent about the promise for more than 13 years. Now He came personally to repeat it twice in three months.

b. **Sarah your wife shall have a son:** We *need* to hear God's promises over and over again. It is a way God uses to encourage and develop our faith: *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17).

i. Perhaps also, Abraham and Sarah needed this visit to be an encouragement for them to do what they needed to do in bringing God's promise to pass - to have sexual relations.

4. (11-12) Sarah's reaction to God's promise.

a. **After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure?** Sarah laughed within herself at this promise. She could not believe God would literally grant this child as the result of normal sexual relations.

i. Leupold translates Genesis 18:12, "After I have become worn out, have I enjoyed sexual delight and my lord too is an old man?" Leupold the observes, "The matter is not put very delicately by Sarah."

ii. It may be, even after the dramatic promises of Genesis 17, Abraham and Sarah had a way of "spiritualizing" God's promise, making it mean something other than what God intended. Here, God made it plain: Abraham and Sarah will have normal sexual relations and produce a baby.

iii. It is strangely characteristic of us to believe God's promise for a long, long, time, and endure through much discouragement along the way, until the promise is *almost there*, and then we find doubt. We are grateful that He is greater than our doubts.

b. **Sarah had passed the age of childbearing:** By all outward circumstance, there was good reason for Sarah to “spiritualize” the promise and laugh at its literal meaning. She **had passed the age of childbearing**, which literally seems to mean, “the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah.” She had stopped menstruating and had gone through menopause.

i. Even accounting for their long lives (Abraham lived to be 175 and Sarah 127), they were both well past middle age. It would take a miracle of God for them to have literal children through normal means.

c. **Therefore Sarah laughed within herself:** Significantly, this is what Sarah (and Abraham) *most wanted all their lives*. Yet, they find it so hard to believe God’s promise when He says He will grant it to them.

5. (13-15) God answers Sarah’s laugh.

a. **Why did Sarah laugh:** God heard Sarah’s laugh even though she *laughed within herself*. There was nothing hidden before the LORD.

i. We might live very differently if we remembered that God hears and knows everything we think and say.

b. **At the appointed time I will return to you:** We might think God would say, “I gave you this promise twice and twice you laughed at it. That’s it! No more promise. I’ll take it to someone who will appreciate it.” Instead, God responded by dealing with her sin of unbelief, but not by taking away the promise.

i. *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself* (2 Timothy 2:13).

c. **Is there anything too hard for the LORD?** Thankfully not, and God can also triumph even over our weak faith.

i. **Hard** is the same word for *wonderful* in Isaiah 9:6: *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given . . . And His name will be called Wonderful*. Jesus is our “wonderful” One, and He isn’t to **hard** or wonderful for God to give unto us.

d. **The LORD said to Abraham:** Significantly, God dealt with **Abraham** about this, not Sarah herself, because Abraham was the head of his home.

B. Abraham intercedes for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

1. (16-19) God decides to reveal to Abraham the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

a. **Abraham went with them to send them on the way:** As would be customary for a hospitable host in that day, Abraham will accompany his guests on their journey for a while as they depart.

b. **Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing:** Because of what God would bring from Abraham (**a great and mighty nation**), and because Abraham had to be a great leader (**that he may command his children and his household after him**), God will reveal to Abraham what He will do with Sodom and Gomorrah.

i. This point is vital; God’s purpose in this is not “gossip” with Abraham about what He will do, nor is it to satisfy Abraham’s curiosity. God wanted to do something in Abraham’s life through what He will reveal to him.

2. (20-21) God tells Abraham He will see if Sodom and Gomorrah are worthy of judgment.

3. (22-26) Abraham asks an important question: will God destroy the righteous with the wicked?

a. **The men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD:** We see the two **men** are actually the angels who visited Sodom in Genesis 19. The third “man” in the party is actually the **LORD** Himself.

b. **And Abraham came near:** Abraham **came near** to the LORD. Effective intercession is a matter of drawing near to God so we can pray with *His* heart.

c. **Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?** In discussing this question, Abraham “reminded” the LORD of His own nature and principles (**shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**) Abraham thought that God, as a righteous **Judge** could not punish the innocent the same way as the guilty.

i. We might find it remarkable Abraham even *cared* about the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He might have just prayed “LORD, get my nephew Lot out of there first,” but he didn’t. Abraham’s heart was full of sorrow and compassion, even for the wicked of Sodom and Gomorrah.

d. **If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes:** God said this because Abraham asked. When Abraham drew near to the LORD and prayed according to God’s revealed nature and will, God agreed. The LORD said that He would spare the city if there were 50 righteous there.

4. (27-33) Abraham bargains with God for Sodom and Gomorrah.

a. **Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous:** Now the principle is established - God will not destroy the righteous with the wicked - now it is just a matter of numbers. How many righteous people will God spare the city for?

i. Abraham’s intercession was effective because it was *specific*. He talked about specific numbers with God, not in broad, general terms. Often our prayers are ineffective because we really don’t ask the LORD to *do* anything. Instead we often just toss wishes up to heaven.

b. **Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak:** Abraham continued his intercession with a “bold humility.” He was not proud or arrogant before the LORD, but he still continued to ask.

i. Abraham’s humility was demonstrated in that nowhere in his prayer did he ask “Why?” or did he demand that God explain Himself and His actions.

c. **Suppose ten should be found there?** Abraham was a skilled negotiator and he prevailed upon God to lower the number of righteous required to spare the city. First by units of five, then by units of ten, until the number settled at ten.

i. It is impossible to miss the persistence of Abraham in intercession. Why didn’t he give it up at 40 or 50 and say simply “it’s in the LORD’s hands” or “the LORD will do what the LORD will do”? Because an intercessor must feel, at the moment of prayer, that the eternal destiny of men depends on his prayer.

ii. This is the kind of heart God wanted to draw out of Abraham - a heart that cared so much for people made in the image of God that he worked hard to intercede on behalf of a city that deserved judgment. This was the heart a great leader of a great and mighty nation needed to have.

iii. Remember, there is a sense in which all this negotiation was fruitless. There were not ten righteous people in the city, only four. The cities were destroyed. Yet God specifically revealed the fate of these cities to Abraham to draw out of him an intercessor’s heart of love, so even before the time of Jesus Abraham could be *conformed into the image of His Son* (Romans 8:29) who is Himself an intercessor (Hebrews 7:25).

d. **Abraham returned to his place:** We wonder if Abraham should not have continued the negotiations because there were only four righteous in the city. Would God have spared the city for four if Abraham had asked? Perhaps Abraham felt Lot would surely have brought six people beyond his own family to God in his time in Sodom.

Conclusion: Pray without ceasing and do not forget to listen for an answer. Trust in the Lord, **always**. The Bible instructs Jews and Christians to be bold in their faith and to intercede for the needs of others whether they be fellow Jews, Christians or among the lost.

References: David Guzik, *The Bible*