

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 18

Chapter 18

LORD's Appearance to Abraham

Genesis 18:1 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day.

Wherever Abraham lived, a sea of tents dotted the area as shelters for all of the people living in his house and under his care. One hot day, Abraham was “sitting at the tent door” of his shelter when the LORD approached him in Hebron in the oak forest belonging to Mamre.

Abraham's Response

Genesis 18:2 And 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,³ and said, " My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.⁴ "Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree;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."⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, " Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead *it*, and make bread cakes."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.⁸ And 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.

Abraham saw the LORD with his two assistants. We should not dismiss the detail that Abram recognized the LORD. He had had several personal conversations with Him before this visit; one visit was fewer than 90 days before. Many questions come to mind in this passage. Because Abraham instructed his people to prepare a meal for the LORD, we must ask, “Can the LORD eat earthly food?” In the next chapter, we will discover that the two assistants with the LORD were angels. Do angels need their feet washed? Do they need water to drink? Can angels eat earthly food? Evidently, according to this passage, they can! Although Abraham had demanded that the preparation of the meal for his three visitors occur quickly, the process still took time. Sarah could prepare the bread only in a specific time frame. The meat had to be cooked a certain amount of time. The preparation of the curds and milk also restricted the start of the meal. The heat of the day began about 11:00 AM. If the meal preparation was completed within four hours, it was still hot when the food was ready to eat. When it was all prepared, it was placed under an

oak tree and the four stood to eat. This position was unusual; the Semite people ate their meals in a lounging position on the ground surrounding a carpet or tapestry on which the food was placed. Abraham's meeting with the three was not quickly completed. We must wonder what the three men did while Abraham and his family prepared the meal. We do not know; however, it was very likely that they stood under the oak tree and waited for the meal.

LORD's Promise of Sarah's Son

Genesis 18:9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." 10 And he said, " I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

The LORD and his two assistants had several reasons to address Abraham that day. The first was to announce the time of the birth of Isaac. Sarah was in her tent and she had heard the LORD's comment to Abraham and she laughed. The door to her tent was just behind Abraham, behind the oak tree. When we think of Bedouins, which Abraham was for his entire life, we think of tents staked in the desert sands void of shade trees. But this was clearly not the case for Abraham and all the people of his house. The tents of Abraham's house were nestled among the oaks of Mamre. The meal was under a tree directly in front of Abraham's tent. The oaks of Mamre did not consist of just one or two trees, it was a small forest which provided the much needed shade to bear the heat of the sun. Sarah was close enough to hear the conversation occurring under the tree, and she roared with laughter.

Sarah's Laughter

Genesis 18:12 And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, " After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' 14 " Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Sarah's laughter was different from that of Abraham. His was a laughter of joy for the fulfillment of the LORD's promise; Sarah's laughter was one of disbelief; she thought she was too old to have a child. The LORD had to ask, **"Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"** Sarah denied her laughter, and for that reason we know her heart was not the same as Abraham's about the birth. Nevertheless, the promise remained and by the same time in the following year, Isaac would be born and the LORD would attend the birthing ceremony. We do not think about birth as a ceremony, but it is! Although the actual birth is customarily private in nature, it is a ceremony that culminates in the gift of earthly life.

The LORD Moved Toward Sodom

Genesis 18:16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. 17 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? 19 "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

After the meal and after the confirmation of Isaac's birth with Sarah, the LORD, with Abraham and the two assistants, began to walk to the east from the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. Even though Sodom was about 20 miles from the oaks, Abraham's camp was high enough to see in the distance the depression of the valley of Siddom on the Jordan River.

Abraham held a special place in the plans of the LORD. It really did not matter that Abraham knew the plans of the LORD, but because of the LORD's admiration for Abraham, the decision was made to tell him about His plan. It was the second purpose for the visit to Abraham.



Figure 6 Map 23: Hebron to Dead Sea

Outcry of Sodom's Sin

Genesis 18:20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 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."

When Lot pitched his tent in the city of Sodom in Genesis 13, we were told that Sodom's and Gomorrah's sin was exceedingly great and yet Lot chose to make it his home. According to verse 20, the sin was exceedingly grave meaning heavy or burdensome to the LORD. Notice that the English says "sin" and not "sins"; the English text is correct, it was a single sin that was exceedingly burdensome to the LORD; it was not a conglomeration of sins that bothered the LORD but one specific sin. The passage uses the word "outcry." We must remember that the LORD is and has forever been all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing and all-powerful. The sin of the cities in the valley of Siddom was seen, heard and evident to the LORD. He was going to

send his two assistance, the two angels, to bring an end to the sin. The LORD had revealed to Abraham His plan because of the sin that was extremely disturbing to him.

Men Turned to Sodom

Genesis 18:22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

Not all three visitors made their way to Sodom, only the LORD's two assistants, the two angels. The LORD already knew the verdict of the guilt of the sin in Sodom and the other four cities. The LORD remained with Abraham to discuss the coming destruction.

Abraham's Plea with the LORD

Genesis 18:23 And Abraham came near and said, " Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 "Far be it from Thee 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 Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 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." 27 And Abraham answered and said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *but* dust and ashes. 28 "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, wilt Thou destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there." 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." 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." 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." 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." 33 And as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

In this passage we see an earthly man attempt to reason with the Almighty God of heaven and earth. Will the Almighty God destroy the righteous with the wicked? It is a good question. Will the Almighty God deal justly with all men? It, too, is a good question. What will the Almighty do? Abraham, the chosen man of the Almighty God, began to question the LORD and tried to find a way to save his nephew and his family. Abraham began with the possibility that 50 righteous people might be living in Sodom; would the LORD destroy the city and the 50? No! Thinking about his proposition, Abraham lowered the number several times and each time the

LORD promised him that the city would be saved according to the restrictions of each request. The final request was for 10 righteous people and the LORD saw fit to promise that the city would not be destroyed if 10 righteous people were present. Perhaps Abraham had counted the immediate family of Lot and thought the city was safe. Surely Abraham knew that Lot and his wife lived in their house with their two daughters; therefore, surely that amounted to four righteous people. We will learn in the next chapter that Lot had more daughters and sons-in-law. If at least three more daughters and their husbands were added to the count, 10 righteous members of the family of Lot would surely save the city. Abraham was through with his requests of the LORD and the Almighty One departed from Abraham who returned to his tent. Had Abraham made a calculated mistake? Why did he not ask for just four? Far too often we think we know the people with whom we have long association. We are often surprised when they do something we would never expect! Although it is not clearly revealed here, Abraham must have concluded that at least 10 of Lot's family were righteous.

As we will find out in the next chapter, the LORD did not go to Sodom, only the two angels arrived later that evening in the city. The LORD knew that 10 righteous people did not live in the exceedingly sinful village. What was their sin? Chapter 19 will reveal that sin which was exceedingly grave to the LORD and caused the destruction of the villages of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim in the valley of Siddim. Only the village of Zoar escaped the destruction to survive to this day.