

Unusual House Guests for Abraham and Lot (Genesis 18-19:3)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Recap from the Previous Lesson (which was on **Genesis 17**)

- a. God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision when Abraham was 99. It was given to him and his descendants as an “eternal covenant”.
- b. Like all covenants (including the new covenant that Christians are under) there are responsibilities upon both parties and consequences for failing to uphold the covenant. Very important to understand our obligations under any covenant with God!
- c. Even in the Old Testament (for example in **Deuteronomy** and **Jeremiah**) God made it clear that he was looking first and foremost at circumcision *of the heart*.
- d. Circumcision was a major controversy in the early church was regarding whether Gentiles Christians also would have to get circumcised. In **Acts 15**, the apostles decided in the Council in Jerusalem that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised.
- e. Circumcision foreshadowed Christian baptism. According to Paul in **Colossians 2**, we undergo the “circumcision of Christ” when we are “buried with Him in baptism”.
- f. When Sarah was 90, God promised that she would have a son to be named Isaac. The promises of the covenant would be through him, not through Ishmael. This contradicts what Muslims are taught (that the blessing would come through Ishmael).

II. God ‘Appears to Abraham’, Again Promises a Son to Sarah

- a. Read **Genesis 18:1-8**
 - i. It says “God appeared to him”, along with two other ‘men’.
 - ii. Water brought for their feet, sit in shade of a tree, have a meal with Abraham.
 - iii. Who were these three? Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Or God plus two men?
 1. One is described as “the Lord” and as “God” in **Genesis 18**; the other two ‘men’ are described as angels in **Genesis 19**.

- iv. How can someone see, talk to, sit down with and wash the feet of God? Doesn't it say in Scripture that no one has seen or can see God?
 1. **John 1:18** says, "No one has seen God at any time."
 2. **1 Timothy 6:15-16** speaks of the Father, "who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see".
 3. Is this a contradiction in the Bible? Or is there some deep truth for us to learn by putting these two things together?

- v. Early Christian writers saw references like this one, where God is reportedly seen by people, as referring to the Word of God (Son of God), who was before all things, who proceeds from the Father, who is begotten of the Father and therefore divine.
 1. The Word of God existed before all things, as it says in **John 1:1-3**, **Colossians 1:15-20** and **Hebrews 1:1-3**. The eternal Word of God became flesh when Mary conceived and gave birth to Jesus.
 2. Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 160 AD) uses the encounters with God in **Genesis 18**, as well as other similar interactions from **Exodus**, to prove the divinity of the Word of God. Justin tells Trypho, a Jew, "you must not imagine that the only begotten God Himself came down or went up from any place. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, or sleeps nor rises up, but remains in His own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and He sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes His observation; and He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. *How, then, could He talk with anyone, or be seen by anyone, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of Him who was sent from Him...?*"
 3. (Justin continues) "Therefore neither Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father and ineffable Lord of All, and also of Christ, but (saw) Him who was according to His will *His Son, being God...*"
 4. (Justin continues) "And that Christ being Lord, and God the Son of God, and appearing formerly in power as Man, and Angel, and in the glory of fire as at the bush, so also was manifested at the judgment executed at Sodom, has been demonstrated fully

by what has been said.” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 126-128, ANF v.1, pp.263-264)

b. Read **Genesis 18:9-15**.

- i. Sarah hears the Lord saying that she will have a son, and laughs to herself. Then she denies it when the Lord confronts her.
- ii. Note that Sarah is held up for her own faith in **Hebrews 11:11**, where it says in the NKJV “By faith Sarah herself also received the strength to conceive, and she bore a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”
 1. Note that some other translations attribute the commendable faith described here to Abraham.
- iii. Sarah is also held up by Peter as being a good example for married women to follow. Read **1 Peter 3:1-6**
 1. Wives, be submissive to husbands as Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him ‘lord’.
 - a. She called him ‘lord’ in **Genesis 18:12** when she said, “I have not had a child until now, and my lord is old also”.
 2. Wives should focus on inner adornment to make themselves truly beautiful, as Sarah did (not on outward adornment like gold, fancy hair, fine clothes).

III. God Tells Abraham He Plans to Destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Read Genesis 18:16-33).

- a. Abraham, the gracious host, escorts the three visitors from his home.
- b. The Lord tells Abraham he has heard about wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, and plans to investigate (and to destroy them if it is true).
- c. The two angels go on ahead to Sodom; Abraham discusses further with the Lord.
- d. Abraham (perhaps concerned about his nephew Lot who is in Sodom) tries to talk God out of destroying Sodom. Perhaps some lessons for us, in how Abraham relates to God (like prayer, except that he sees the Lord).
 - i. Abraham reasons with God. “Would you really destroy if *50* people found there? ...What about *5 less* than that? ...what about if *10* righteous are found?”

- ii. Note that God does not respond like John Calvin or Martin Luther or their followers today might. The Lord does not tell Abraham that “There *are no* righteous people”!
- iii. Abraham is bold and persistent. Similar in that way to the ‘persistent widow’ that Jesus called us to imitate, in **Luke 18:1-8**.
- iv. Abraham appeals to God’s nature. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (**Genesis 18:25**)
- v. Abraham also is humble regarding who he is in approaching God, “Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord.” (**Genesis 18:27**)
- e. Bottom line: if the Lord finds even 10 righteous people in the city, he will preserve it for their sake. Lesson: God does care for the righteous few, and provides for them.
- f. Conclusion of **Genesis 18**: the angels are off to Sodom, the Lord goes on his way, and Abraham returns home.

IV. Lot Meets the Two Angels, Invites Them to His Home (Read **Genesis 19:1-3**)

- a. Lot insists that the angels come with him.
- b. No indication that Lot was aware that they were actually angels (appeared to be like normal men).
- c. Lot provides a great example of hospitality toward God-fearing people he did not know personally. He was deeply concerned about their safety and comfort. Lot risked his own life, comfort and well-being to provide for them.
 - i. Read **Hebrews 13:1-2**. “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing *some have unwittingly entertained angels.*”
 - 1. Note that this statement in Hebrews comes right immediately after we are reminded that “our God is a consuming fire”, which is how God would destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis 19**.
 - ii. I think of Abraham and his wife in **Genesis 17**, and Lot’s household in **Genesis 18** as possibly the examples the Hebrews writer has in mind. (Abraham knew one of his visitors was the Lord, but perhaps did not know who the other two were; Lot presumably did not know his visitors were angels).
 - iii. Jesus’ teaching on hospitality, from the gospels.

1. After encounter with the rich young ruler, the disciples are shocked at Jesus' hard teachings regarding wealth. Read **Mark 10:28-31**.
 - a. Those who follow Jesus will give up possessions and family. However, in this life they will get even more family and more possessions (and persecutions, too).
 - b. Jesus is NOT teaching the modern so-called 'prosperity gospel'. Quite the opposite!
 - i. **Question:** How will we get more brothers, sisters and mothers?
 - ii. **Answer:** Because we are becoming part of a larger family (our spiritual brothers and sisters) with homes and relatives all over the world!
2. In **Matthew 24 & 25**, Jesus warns His disciples to always be prepared for His return. He will come suddenly and will take many by surprise. He spells out clearly what we must do in order to be prepared.
 - a. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**
 - i. Jesus has entrusted his servants with feeding and taking care of their fellow-servants. If they don't, upon His return He will 'cut them in two' and place them with the hypocrites.
 - b. Read **Matthew 25:31-40**
 - i. "I was a stranger and you took me in." (**Matthew 25:35**).
 - ii. "Inasmuch as you did to one of the least of *my brethren*, you did it to Me." (**Matthew 25:40**)
 - iii. **Question:** Does this teaching on taking in strangers, feeding people, etc., call us to take in *Christians* (who may be poor or distant from their homes) or to take care of *the poor in the world* (unbelievers)?
 1. **Possible Answer:** (My opinion here) It seems to me that Jesus is speaking primarily about how we treat other Christians here, since he refers to those being served as "My brethren". However,

that does not imply that we should not also show love and concern to unbelievers (consider Jesus' teaching on the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**).

2. Perhaps Paul captured the proper spirit when he said in **Galatians 6:9-10**, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us *do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*"
- iv. From Peter, in **1 Peter 4:8-9** "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins' (quoting **Proverbs 10:12-13**). Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."
1. Show real love. Practice hospitality joyfully, without grumbling! (Just like we are to give money *cheerfully and not under compulsion*, as described in **2 Corinthians 9:7**.)
- v. From Paul, in **1 Timothy 5:9-10** "Do not let a widow under the age of sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well respected for good works: if she has brought up children, *if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has received the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.*"
1. These were the qualifications for older women to enter a special ministry of prayer and service in the church. Shows the things that God values in spiritual women.
 2. Does not say, 'must be a powerful speaker/teacher, compelling writer, dynamic 'type A' personality, highly educated, make a lot of money, stylish dresser, professional, or personally converted many other women' or other things highly prized in many churches (and the world) today.
- vi. Putting this into practice (opening our homes to Christians we don't know) can be challenging. Let's face it.
1. Need to be careful to not neglect our immediate family and elderly parents in the process. (**1 Timothy 5:8**)
 2. Don't keep your life so busy that there is no room for hospitality.

3. Realize that this will be a sacrifice (money, privacy, time, wear-and-tear), especially for the sisters. Brothers/husbands need to rise up and help as well (Abraham and Lot as examples here).
- vii. Many great examples of Christian households (Mahlon and Martha Fisher in Pennsylvania; my wife Alison; Janet Appleby; Finny and Laura; so many others...) who are extremely hospitable toward the saints, toward travelers and believing strangers they do not know!
- viii. Could it be that some of us could be inviting in angels today without being aware of it? Possibly. Angels are involved in the spiritual battle and are assisting us still (**Hebrews 1:14**). And they can take on physical form to appear like humans, as we can see from the stories of Abraham and Lot.

V. Recap of This Lesson

- a. The Lord appeared in human form and visited Abraham in **Genesis 18**. Early Christians, who understood that it is impossible for someone to see God the Father, understood this to be referring to the Word of God (Son of God, who would later in the flesh become Jesus).
- b. Although Sarah laughed, she is held up as an example to women today in her submission and respect for Abraham, and her inner beauty.
- c. Abraham's boldness and humility in approaching God regarding something he was deeply concerned about is a good example for us.
- d. Lot and Abraham are examples of hospitality, likely what the Hebrews writer has in mind when he calls us to be hospitable, in view of the fact that some have "entertained angels unaware". You never know who that visiting Christian might really be.