

## CHAPTER 18 – Sarah laughs and Abraham negotiates with God for Sodom and Gomorrah

THEME: God reaffirms His promise; God announces the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Until you get to the New Testament, you may wonder why the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Genesis are included in the Bible. They seem rather detached from the story of Abraham. They deal with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chapter 18 is a rather lengthy chapter in which God tells Abraham about the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham intercedes on behalf of the cities of the plain. This is an illustration, I think, of the blessed Christian life, of life in fellowship with God. But in chapter 19, down in Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot, we will see what I would call the blasted life—all because of a decision that was made.

Unfortunately, we have both kinds among Christians today—those living a blessed life and those living a blasted life. There are those who have really made shipwreck of their lives; they have gotten entirely out of the will of God. I would not suggest even for a moment that they have lost their salvation, but they sure have lost everything else. As Paul says, they are saved, "... yet so as by fire" (1Co\_3:15).

***Gen 18:1 -4 Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.***

Abraham is living down there in Mamre, and he's an old man, by the way. Notice the hospitality that Abraham extends. The little story that I told in the previous chapter has a basis of fact, at least, although I don't think it ever took place. The point is that this man Abraham is a very gracious, hospitable man. It seems very strange to us to tell a visiting stranger to wash his feet and come in. We wouldn't quite say that today, but this is probably the oldest custom that is known. Remember that in the Upper Room our Lord washed the disciples' feet—and there is a tremendous spiritual message there. Here Abraham says, "Wash your feet." It was a token of real hospitality when someone came into a home to have him take off his shoes and wash his feet. In that day they did not take off their hat, but they did take off their shoes. Today we have reversed it. When you come to visit somebody, you leaves your shoes on and take off your hat. I'm not sure which is right. I like the idea, myself, of taking off my shoes. I like to go barefooted in the summertime. I think this was a great custom. It sure would make you feel at home to take off your shoes, wash your feet, and rest yourself under the shade of a tree. Abraham is really entertaining these men royally. - McGee

How do we treat guest today? The bible is clear about the importance of hospitality.

***Gen 18:5-8 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.***

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Isn't this a marvelous way of entertaining? Abraham has prepared a sumptuous meal. He took a little calf, a servant killed and prepared it, and the chef probably barbecued it. They had veal steaks or veal roast, I imagine, and all the trimmings that went with it. "And he took butter, and milk"—my, it was a real feast! Abraham entertains these three guests.

Then we find that these guests are royal guests. In the New Testament it is suggested to us that "... some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb\_13:2). That was Abraham—he didn't know whom he was really entertaining. McGee

***Gen 18:9-10 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.)***

It was not proper in that day—and even in the East today—for the wife to come out and be the one to entertain, especially since there were three male guests there. But now they ask and make inquiry about Sarah. I think Sarah had her ear to the keyhole and had been listening in. Both Abraham and Sarah now discover that they are entertaining angels unaware. - McGee

***Gen 18:11-12 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"***

That is, Sarah asks, "Is it possible that I will have a son?"—and she laughs. Now what kind of laughter is this? I think this is the laughter which says that it is just too good to be true—that's all. Again, I'm sure that most of us have had experiences like this. God has been so good to us on a certain occasion that we just laughed. Something happened that was just too good to be true, and that was the way Sarah laughed. She is saying, "This is something just too good to be true. It just can't happen to me!" – McGee

***Gen 18:13-15 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"***

When Sarah overheard the Lord say that she would have a child within a year, her laughter betrayed her unbelief. She was rebuked with the searching question, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" But the promise was repeated in spite of her doubting (vv. 9-15). Heb\_11:11 indicates that Sarah was basically a woman of faith in spite of this momentary lapse. – Believers' Bible Commentary

***Gen 18:16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.***

Abraham didn't have a front gate, so he walked out with them a little farther than the front gate to bid them goodbye. And as they walked out from where Abraham lived, they could look down to Sodom and Gomorrah. When I was in that land, it was amazing to me how far you could see on a clear day. I could see from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. And from the ruins of old Samaria, I could see Jerusalem, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Sea of Galilee. I could see Mt. Hermon from most anyplace—it's

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tremendous. Abraham walked out a ways with these guests, and down below there, they saw Sodom and Gomorrah. They were the great resorts of that day, and they must have been very delightful and beautiful places to be. – McGee

***Gen 18:17-19 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."***

Up to this point, the Lord has not revealed to Abraham what He is going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah: He is going to destroy them. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?"

Notice now the reason that God is not going to hide it from Abraham. Abraham is going to have a tremendous influence. He is going to influence multitudes of people, including the succeeding generations. That is true right now today. As I write and as you read this book, Abraham is influencing us—we cannot avoid it. God says, "I'd better not hide it from Abraham because he will get a wrong impression of Me." Notice by the way, that this man Abraham had discipline in his household. – McGee

***Gen 18:20-21 And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."***

In other words, God is saying to Abraham, "I know the situation there, but I'm going down to investigate." God never does anything hurriedly or hastily. It is a good thing that God told Abraham He was going to destroy these cities, because otherwise Abraham would have gotten a wrong impression of God. He would have thought that God was rather dictatorial and vindictive and that He was One who apparently showed no mercy for or consideration of those who were His. Abraham would really have had a distorted and warped view of God, and so God lets him know what He is going to do. Abraham now has time to turn this over in his mind. It is also a good thing that God told him because he did have a wrong idea of God and of Sodom and Gomorrah—he was wrong about many things. This is one of the reasons that God is telling us as much as He is. There are a lot of things that He does not tell us, but He has told us enough so that though a man be a fool and a wayfaring man, he needn't err therein. - McGee

### ***Abraham Intercedes for Sodom***

***Gen 18:22-23 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"***

What is the first thing that enters Abraham's mind? The first thing that enters his mind, of course, is Lot. He had rescued Lot once, and now Lot is again in danger down there. I think that Abraham had wondered many times about Lot and his relationship to God, but at least he believes that Lot is a saved man. He is asking God, "What about the righteous?" I believe that Abraham would have told you that he thought there were many people in the city of Sodom who were saved. He could not understand why God would destroy the righteous with the wicked. What a picture we have here! – McGee

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***Gen 18:24-25 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"***

Abraham begins with fifty. He says to the Lord, "Lord, suppose there are fifty righteous down there in Sodom. Would You destroy the city if there were fifty righteous?" That is still a question that many people ask: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And there is an answer to it. The rest of the Bible testifies to the fact that the Judge of all the earth always does right. Whatever God does is right, and if you don't think He is right, the trouble is not with God, but the trouble is with you and your thinking. You are thinking wrong; you do not have all the facts; you do not know all of the details. If you did, you would know that the Judge of all the earth does right. We are wrong; He is right. – McGee

***Gen 18:26-28 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."***

In other words, Abraham says, "If there are forty-five righteous left, would You destroy the city for forty-five?" And God tells him, "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." - McGee

***Gen 18:29-32 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."***

This makes the man a little bit bolder, and he says to the Lord, "Suppose there are forty?" The very interesting thing is that God says, "I will not destroy it for forty." And Abraham keeps on bringing the number down. He says, "How about thirty?" God says, "If there are thirty there, I still won't do it." Abraham says, "Suppose there are twenty there?" God says, "I'll not destroy it." Abraham is overwhelmed now, and he takes another plunge: "Suppose there are ten righteous there. Would You destroy it if there are ten?" And God says, "If there are ten righteous in the city, I will not destroy it." - McGee

***Gen 18:33 So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.***

Now the question arises: Why didn't Abraham come on down below ten? I'll tell you why: At this point he is afraid that Lot is lost, and this disturbs him a great deal; so he is not going to come down any further. But he could have come down to one. He could have said, "Lord, if there is one in that city who

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is righteous, would You destroy the city?” Do you know what God would have said? He would have said, “If there is one who is righteous in that city, I am going to get him out of that city, because I would not destroy a righteous man with the city.” How do I know that is the way it would have been? Because that is the way it worked out. There was one righteous man there—Abraham didn't believe it, but God knew him—and that one was Lot. God said to Lot, “Get out of the city. I cannot destroy it until you are out.”

Do you know that the Great Tribulation period cannot come as long as the church is in the world? It just cannot come, my friend, because Christ bore our judgment, and the great tribulation is part of the judgment that is coming. This is the reason that the church cannot go through it. This is a glorious picture of that truth. We are going to see that Sodom and Gomorrah are a picture of the world—and what a picture! What a condition the world is in today—it is very much like Sodom and Gomorrah. That does not mean that the Lord is going to come tomorrow. I do not know—and no one else knows—when He will come. But He could come tomorrow, and it certainly would be in keeping with the carrying out of the picture which is before us here in Genesis. - McGee