



**Study # 20**

**Genesis Chapter 18**

**Summary of the passage:** While at Mamre, Abraham's H.Q. from his earliest times of worship in the land of Canaan, three men approached Abraham's tent and announced that Sarah would bare a son. Being within her tent and within earshot of the men's pronouncement, Sarah laughed inwardly with an attitude of doubt. The three messengers corrected Sarah when she denied laughing. They insisted on the fact that a child would be born at the appointed time.

The messengers then headed toward the city of Sodom on the plains beyond Jericho. While Abraham led them on the way they decided to share with Abraham the reports of the grievous sins being committed in Sodom and Gomorrah and the judgment soon to befall those cities.

Abraham then interceded for the cities pleading the cause of the righteous who may have dwelt there. He pleaded across the spectrum from 50 down to 10 righteous, and then left off praying. The final verse tells us that the LORD went his way and Abraham returned to his place.

**Key verse:** "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed, I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Chapter 18:14

This is an epic Bible question. To ask the question is to answer it. It is akin to Christ's words in Matthew 19:26, "With God all things are possible." It was a rebuke to Sarah, who laughed inwardly at the pronouncement that she was to bear a son. Who can question the fact that God is all powerful and can overcome any obstacle to the fulfil His will? This the God of the Bible.

**Observations on this chapter:**

1. **To facilitate man's level of comprehension, God visited Abraham in human form.**

When Abraham looked up from his tent door he saw that three men 'stood by him" (v2). This was to accommodate Abraham's human limitations. God fashioned Himself as a man. He is called LORD, or Jehovah. We conclude this was the pre-incarnate Christ. Abram addressed the Lord in the singular, saying "My Lord," (v3), and the Lord spoke to Abraham in the singular as well. With the exception of verse 9, the narrative reads like a one to one conversation.

The record of the event conveys that Abraham recognized that one of these men was a divine person. He "bowed himself to the ground" (v2), and referred to Him as, "My Lord" (v3). The other two "men" who attended were most likely angels in the form of men. Two angels visited Lot and entered his home (Ch. 19:1,5).

**How does this apply to me?** Theophanies, or pre-incarnate revelations of Christ, were necessary in the Old Testament. But now that Christ has come in human form by the miracle of His incarnation, He has revealed Himself and the God-head unto us. God now speaks through His Son (Heb. 1:2). With Christ, who is God's living word, and the Bible which is God's written word, we look for God's truth in the Scriptures alone, where Christ is revealed unto us. We, therefore, do not look for further revelations of God in human form outside of the person of Christ – the appointed Mediator between God and man (1Tim. 2:5).

2. **Abraham is to be commended for his hospitality.**

Recognizing that his visitors were from heaven, Abraham instinctively knew how to entertain them. He made himself their servant, offered water to wash their feet, and food to sustain them before they continued their journey. Then he called on Sarah to prepare a sumptuous meal including freshly prepared beef from their own calf. No expense or trouble was spared. Now that God had come down to the human level to Abraham, this was his opportunity to serve to the glory of God. His privilege was great, and he counted it all joy to minister unto them. It proved to be a blessing to Abraham as well as honourable to his special guests.

**How does this apply to me?** Perhaps it was to this event that the writer to the Hebrews exhorted New Testament believers to, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; *and* them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (Hebrew 13:1-3).

**Albert Barnes, commenting on this New Testament text, stated,**

“The motive here urged for doing it is, that by entertaining the stranger we may perhaps be honored with the presence of those whose society will be to us an honor and a blessing. It is not well for us to miss the opportunity of the presence, the conversation, and the prayers of the good. The influence of such guests in a family is worth more than it costs to entertain them. If there is danger that we may sometimes receive those of an opposite character, yet it is not wise on account of such possible danger, to lose the opportunity of entertaining those whose presence would be a blessing. Many a parent owes the conversion of a child to the influence of a pious stranger in his family; and the hope that this may occur, or that our own souls may be blessed, should make us ready, at all proper times, to welcome the feet of the stranger to our doors.”

### 3. The spirit of unbelief does not go unnoticed by the Lord.

At the pronouncement of her giving birth to a son, Sarah laughed within herself (v12). But her unexpressed thoughts of denial did not go unnoticed by the Lord, nor did they go unchecked (v15). Poor Sarah was a vessel weak in faith. This rebuke, however, must have reassured her that it would be so. The fact that this “messenger,” was able to discern her inward thoughts should have jolted her out of unbelief into renewed faith. The question, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” answers itself. The Almighty God, El-Shaddai, who appeared to Abram to renew his covenant by giving the rite of circumcision (ch. 17), was unchanged and still able to perform His promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age.

**How does this apply to me?** We need to meditate on the infinite character of God. When we lose sight of God’s almighty power we fall into unbelief. Whatever is promised to us by God is not impossible. We would build ourselves up in faith and in prayer if we listed the things that God has promised to His believing people and then expect that He will work His will in us. Such things are: our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3), our peace and comfort in the gospel (Rom. 5:1, 2 Cor. 13:11), our ability to bear witness for Christ to lost souls (Acts 1:8).

### 4. Intercessory prayer is effectual with God.

Abraham knew to pray for the righteous and God answered each time he asked (Ch. 18:23-33). Dr. Henry Morris’ comments on Abraham’s intercessory prayer are helpful:

“Several important principles become evident from a study of this amazing dialogue.

**First, God does not want to bring judgment on any city or any person.** He does respond to the prayer of those who intercede, if there is any basis at all within the framework of His holiness and justice to enable Him to do so.

**Second, the remarkable influence which even a tiny minority may have for good is noteworthy.**

Only ten godly people in the corrupt city of Sodom would have been enough to spare it the awful destruction to be experienced shortly. Let no one thin that his ministry is useless, regardless how small a number he may be able to reach for the Lord.

**Third, Abraham’s prayer was highly reverent** – never presumptuous at all – yet persistent and definite. This is the first example of an intercessory prayer recorded in the Bible, and almost certainly is included in such detail in order to serve as our prototype for all such prayers.

Note also that the prayer continually recognized, and indeed appealed to, the righteous character and loving-kindness of God as the basis for making the request. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee!” To be heard and answered, our prayers must likewise be in conformity with the revealed will and character of God, as well as reverent, specific, and persevering.” [The Genesis Record pg. 344.]

**How does this apply to me?** Every Christian is called to the ministry of intercessory prayer. As God has shown us mercy, we ought to seek God’s mercy for all those who are under His wrath. While we may never see all of society turn back to God, we can be the righteous who make a difference through intercessory prayer.

#### Things to do in light of this study:

- Read Hebrews chapter one to learn how much better off we are to know God through Christ...
- Exercise hospitality to some soul or souls, to discover the blessing of Hebrews 13:1-3.
- Consider and calculate the blessing of living in a country with a good number of fellow Christians.
- Offer intercessory prayer for some soul you know that is in danger of God’s judgment.
- Be an example of intercessory praying in your church.