

Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church
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DHW
LESSON 13

The Book of Genesis
Chapter 18 & 19

INTRODUCTION

There are valuable lessons to be learned in these two chapters. What God has promised, God will perform. There is nothing too difficult for God to do. Another truth we know about God is that whatever He does, it is always righteous. How often has man misjudged the righteous Judge of all the earth? Do we not sometimes think that God is unfair? The study of these two chapters should help us to understand the character of the LORD our God and to keep trusting and obeying Him. The LORD manifests His faithfulness in keeping His promises, and His grace, mercy and justice in His judgment of the wicked deeds of man.

Chapters 18 and 19 can be divided into the following sections:

- 1) The LORD visited Abraham who treated his guests to a sumptuous fellowship meal (18:1-8);
- 2) The LORD reaffirmed His promise to Abraham that Sarah, his wife, would conceive a son (18:9-15);
- 3) The LORD shared with Abraham His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-21);
- 4) Abraham interceded for the city of Sodom (18:22-33);
- 5) The two angels who visited Lot smote the Sodomites with

blindness because of their wickedness (19:1-11);

- 6) The two Angels saved Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:12-29);
- 7) Lot's daughters committed an incestuous relationship with their father (19:30-38).

STUDY THE WORD

**The LORD Visits
Abraham**

The LORD together with two angels visited Abraham in the plains of Mamre where he pitched his tent. It was a hot day. They appeared as ordinary men. But Abraham apparently did not think that they were ordinary, especially for one of them. While their identity was initially hidden, Abraham addressed one of them as "my Lord" (Hebrew: *adonai*), a term which could mean just "Master" or God. But in the course of their conversation it became clear to Abraham it was the LORD God who was now with him with two angels.¹ Such an appearance in human form by the LORD is theologically understood as *theophany*.²

There are some interesting observations on this visit to Abraham by the LORD with the two angels. Firstly, Abraham received the three guests without any hesitation. He extended his hospitality to his guests in no small measure. The bowing down to welcome his guests was an eastern custom as a gesture of honouring his seemingly distinguished

¹ There is no ground to interpret this appearance of three as the Trinity, the three Persons of the Godhead. This kind of interpretation is reading beyond the given text.

² A compound Greek word consisting of *theo*, meaning "God" and *phaneros*, meaning "visible".

guests. Abraham might have suspected that his guests were worthy of honourable treatment and addressed the apparent leader as “my lord.” It was only in the course of their conversation that the real identity of the LORD was revealed. Secondly, the usual custom at that time towards guests was to wash their feet, which had been soiled by the dust of the paths on which they had trodden. In addition Abraham extended his hospitality by providing refreshments and food. This extension of Abraham’s gracious and kind hospitality to his guests is both commendable and instructive. In fact he had entertained the “angels unawares.” The invitation to have a fellowship meal with them and waiting on them expresses a desire to strike a close friendship with them.³ This reminds us of the Lord Jesus Christ, who invited His disciples to His Supper in the upper room. He told them to remember Him each time when they ate the bread and drank of the cup which showed His love towards them by laying down His life for them so that they might have all their sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life! Fellowship or communal meals in the Christian community is one of the beautiful means of manifesting our love and joy of our oneness in Christ. Another striking feature is that the LORD and the two angels, although they came from heaven, could eat and enjoy a meal just like us! Did not our Lord Jesus Christ when He resurrected from the dead and having the glorified body also ate in fellowship with His disciples?⁴

³ Abraham was called a friend of God (James 2:23).

⁴ Luke 24:42 And they gave him (Christ) a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. 43 And he took *it*, and did eat before them.

The LORD Reaffirms His Promise to Abraham

Nevertheless, the purpose of the LORD’s visit was to tell Abraham and Sarah that the time had come for the birth of Isaac. The guests knew the name of Sarah, for they asked Abraham, *Where is Sarah thy wife?* (18:9). Then the LORD said that the time had come for Sarah to conceive and bear a son (18:10). Sarah heard it and laughed within herself in disbelief. But the LORD, who can see the inner and hidden thoughts of man, rebuked Sarah for laughing in disbelief. The LORD remarked, *Is anything too hard for the LORD?* and reiterated that the appointed time was near and that she would conceive and give birth to a son. The LORD declared to His people that nothing is *too hard for the LORD* (18:13). If God had promised, God would be able to perform. As for Abraham and Sarah’s part, they needed to be patient and to wait for the LORD’S appointed time.

The LORD Shares with Abraham His Intention to Destroy Sodom and Gomorrah

After the meal and having announced to Abraham and Sarah of the time of Isaac’s birth, the guests proceeded in the direction of Sodom. The LORD shared with Abraham His intention of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, as a friend would share with his friend. The LORD asked the question: *Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?* (18:17). And He answered Himself. Abraham should know, and the LORD gave three reasons. The first reason was that Abraham was to be a channel of

blessing to all the nations of the earth. The second reason was that Abraham had the responsibility of teaching his children and the families after him *to keep the way of the LORD, to keep justice and judgment* in order that the LORD might perform what He had spoken to him (18:19). The third reason was *the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous.* (18:20). The Hebrew word for cry (*za'aq*) is an expression or an outcry of people who have been oppressed and brutalized.⁵ In other words, the sin in Sodom was not just sexual sin (homosexuality). The prophet Ezekiel described thus (16:49-50): *Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.* The poor and needy were marginalized and brutalized.

The LORD then said that He would go down to Sodom to find out whether what He had been told of the sins of the city was correctly reported to Him (18:21). This seems strange because the LORD, who is God should know everything. Why this statement? Here is an instance in which the LORD spoke anthropomorphically (to speak in terms of human attributes). The LORD was assuring Abraham that His judgment and justice against Sodom would be righteous and accurate. Hence, Abraham's question (18:23): *Will thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?* He was not questioning the judgment and justice of the

LORD. Abraham's bold question should be taken in this light: if the LORD'S judgment was just and righteous, would He destroy the righteous together with wicked? Abraham had his own idea of who were righteous and who were wicked.

In his intercession for Sodom, Abraham first asked if there were 50 righteous men, would the LORD destroy the city. The LORD said that if there were 50 righteous men, He would not destroy Sodom. Abraham continued interceding and for the next two times he reduced the number of righteous men by 5, and when God said that He would spare Sodom if there were 45, he began reducing the number by 10 for the next two times until he reached the number 10 when he stopped. No reason was given why he stopped. The question of whether God is morally fair or not is never brought up. Abraham appealed to the mercy of God in his intercession for the Sodomites. And this sets the model for other intercessions.⁶

Abraham's intercessory prayer teaches us to be frank and open with God for He knows our inner thoughts and intents. We cannot hide anything from Him. For this truth we must praise and thank the LORD, for many times, when we are falsely misunderstood and accused, only the LORD knows the truth. So Abraham confidently and boldly asked God to be merciful which was based on his knowledge of God's character and integrity. God cannot deny Himself. The truth we learn here about God is that God

⁵ Compare Exodus 2:23; 3:7, 9; 22:22, 23; Deuteronomy 24:15).

⁶ Hamilton, p.25. The author quotes the following intercession prayers for examples: Samuel (1Samuel 7:5-9; 12:19-25), Elijah (1 King 17:17-23), Elisha (2 Kings 4:33; 6:15-20), Job (Job 42:7-9), Amos (Amos 7:1-6, and Moses (Exodus 32:11-13, 31-34; 33:12-15; 34:9; Numbers 12:11-13; 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 9:16-29).

is willing to spare even the wicked for the sake of the righteous.

The Two Angels Come to Lot in Sodom

Two angels, apparently the ones who came with the LORD earlier, were now sent by the LORD to the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom (19:1). Earlier Lot had pitched his tent *near* Sodom (13:12). Later it was reported that he *was living* in Sodom (14:12). And now he *sat* in the gate of Sodom, meaning that he had attained some prominence in Sodom, for only important officials of the city were allowed to sit in the gate, where they engaged in the affairs of the city. Lot had left his fundamental background and assimilated with the Sodomites. His ways reminded us of what the Psalmist describes in Psalm 1. First he walked in the counsel of the ungodly, then he stood in the way of sinners, and finally he sat in the seat of the mockers!

When Lot saw the two angels he approached and received them respectfully. He cordially invited them to stay in his house. When the angels refused his invitation, he implored them to stay in his house. But before the “guests” could settle down, the male Sodomites surrounded Lot’s house and demanded that he release the two angels, so that *they may know them* (an expression meaning to engage in sexual intimacy). Lot went out of his house shutting the door behind him, and pleaded with the Sodomites not to do this wicked deed. He was even willing to let them have his two “virgin” daughters! They could do what they liked to them, but not to his “guests”. While Lot may be commendable for his efforts to protect his “guests”, yet his willingness to give his

daughters to the men to do whatever seemed good to them is an extremely perverted gesture which is totally unacceptable. However, Lot was completely helpless in the situation (19:8-9). They warned him not to behave like a judge or else they would deal worse with him. They pressured Lot so intensely that the door of his house was near breaking down. But the two angels rescued Lot. Then they smote the Sodomites with blindness, *both small and great*.

The Two Angels Save Lot & His family

What is most sad is to know the depths of moral depravity into which the people of Sodom, including the children, had fallen. We also learn that angels possess supernatural power to smite the men, who invaded Lot’s house, with blindness. The iniquities of the Sodomites were full. In the eyes of the LORD they deserved to be destroyed. The angels then warned Lot that the LORD had sent them to destroy the city. Lot was told by the angels to tell his family to get out of the city before it was destroyed. Lot believed and obeyed. But his sons-in-law thought that Lot was joking and so did not believe him. But the time was imminent and the angels hurried Lot to take his wife and two daughters, but he lingered! So the angels took them out of the city forcefully by their hands. And the most wonderful piece of revelation in the passage is *the LORD being merciful unto him* (19:16). After they were out of the city, they had to run for their own lives to safety. They were told to run to the mountains for refuge, but Lot pleaded that they should seek refuge in a nearby town Zoar. Lot reasoned that something might happen to

them in the mountain and be killed. The angels allowed Lot and his family to run into Zoar which would be spared from destruction.

They were told not to look back. The LORD poured brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the twin cities. But Lot's wife looked back and she was turned to a pillar of salt. God destroyed the twin cities and all the wicked people, but the LORD saved Lot because God remembered Abraham's covenant and intercession (19:29). God dealt with Abraham as a family. God judges and punishes the wicked but delivers and saves the righteous. The justice and judgment of God never fail. This destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could be related to the End-Time Judgment of the world, when the LORD would send His angels to gather the wheat and burn the tares (Matthew 13:30):

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

If there is one lesson which we can learn from the deliverance of Lot, it is that we should intercede fervently for the salvation of our loved ones and relatives, and may the LORD be merciful to us and to them by saving them from the fires of hell!

Lot's Daughters Commit Incestuous Relationship with Lot

Lot did not live long in Zoar. He left the city and fled to the mountain where he lived in a cave with his two daughters. He feared to live in Zoar. Lot was wiser now. Zoar was one of the cities in the plains and it could also be under the LORD'S judgment. Lot was learning fast.

This is a lesson for many of us. We should not procrastinate or even be stubborn in such things. What Lot's daughters did with their father showed the extent of the influence they had been subjected to in Sodom. They took advantage of the weakness of their father and committed sexual incest. The two sons born to each of them, Moab and Ammon, had descendants who became neighbours of Abraham's descendants. But the Moabites and the Ammonites lived totally different ways of life from their Abrahamic relatives. The Moabites indulged in idolatry and orgy, and worshipped a fertility god (Numbers 25). The Ammonites became a cruel and wicked group of people. Both of these tribes refused Israel's safe passage through their land when the Israelites were about to enter into the Promised Land. They also did not treat the descendants of Abraham kindly. The LORD commanded Israel that they should have nothing to do with the Moabites and the Ammonites (Deuteronomy 23:3-4):

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: 4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

The lesson from Genesis 19:30-38 is that those who flirt with sin is on a downhill path. They are like Jonah, who deliberately disobeyed God and took an opposite direction, and he went down into the belly of a great fish. James describes it most

succinctly and to the point (James 1:13-15):

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Another lesson we learn is that children do suffer from the consequences of the sins of their fathers. Lot's daughters might not have known about the righteous way of life with God. They lived in Sodom, and they were brought up there. This was all because of the sin of their father. Lot knew the right path of life with God, but he rather chose to live near Sodom. Then not too long later he moved into Sodom, and took his daughters with him. He made a wrong choice. His daughters followed him, and were exposed to the way of life of the Sodomites. This strikes a serious and sobering note to Christian parents. How do we conduct ourselves in the world? Have we not grown up and are taught the ways of God but have preferred the ways of the world? Pray that we may not fall into the same sin as Lot, who was drawn by the attractions of the city of Sodom.

PRACTICAL VALUE

What valuable spiritual lessons can we draw from these two chapters? Abraham's hospitality towards the LORD and His two angels is an example for Christians to be charitable and hospitable to others, particularly those who are poor and needy. We do this for the Lord Jesus

Christ's sake. He has taught in His Word that we should give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and care for the sick and visit those who are in "prison" (Matthew 25:40). Just as God had blessed Abraham, He has also blessed many of us. Let us use what He has blessed us freely to do good works to glorify Him.

God never forgets His promises as He will fulfil all of them. He promised Abraham, although he was advanced in age, he would have a son. Although there was a delay, Abraham and Sarah expected its fulfilment much earlier, for the LORD did not forget His promise. In His time, He came to Abraham in the plains of Mamre in the heat of the day to announce the time had come for the promised child to be born. In addition, He saved Lot and his family from destruction solely because He remembered His covenant with Abraham. In this regard too we learn that the LORD deals with us as a family. We need to walk in His ways. Therefore, let us not be impatient with the LORD. He knows what He is doing, why He is doing, and when he would be doing, and how He should be doing. He will do it for His glory and for the spiritual benefits of His children.

Lot's attraction to the city of Sodom is a telling lesson for all of us. We are in the world and we should beware that we are not lured into the system and philosophy of the world. What had happened to Lot and his daughters will happen to us. *Love* not the world, nor the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15). When we love the world, we do it at our own loss and deprivation of the wonderful blessings God would have bestowed on us.

AMEN