

Finer Grounds

Genesis

Lesson 10: Visitors and Destruction

Read Genesis 18:1-15

As we begin chapter 18, we see Abraham receiving some visitors. Although it is three “men” who approach Abraham’s tent, we know from verse 1 that “the Lord appeared to him”. We will see later that the other two “men” were angels. It would appear that Abraham did indeed “entertain angels without knowing it” as the Hebrew writer spoke of in Hebrews 13:2. As was the custom, Abraham is quite hospitable to them and quickly sets out to serve and feed them. We cannot be certain if Abraham knew that it was the Lord who had come to visit him initially, but it seems safe to assume that he figured it out at some point as he later pleads for any righteous people in Sodom to be spared. It is also possible that Abraham knew it was the Lord rather early on in the visit as he uses the Hebrew word ADONAY in verse 3 for “Lord”. This particular word for “Lord” is almost always used in reference to God only. Either way, he entertained them with some of the best of what he had to offer.

As the visit goes on, they question where Sarah is and inform Abraham that she will have a son at the same time next year. It seems doubtful that they really needed to ask where Sarah was, but perhaps they were more interested in just mentioning her name so that she might begin to listen more diligently to the conversation. Of course Sarah finds it laughable for her and Abraham to be able to conceive in their very old age. Verse 13 records the Lord questioning why Sarah would laugh. He then draws their attention

to what she is really laughing about. It is not Abraham fathering a son at 100 years old or Sarah bearing a child in her 90-year-old womb. She is laughing at the Lord’s credibility and power and that is something that we should never find laughable or unbelievable.

Think About It:

Hospitality means “love to strangers”. When is the last time you showed “love to strangers” and what are ways we can do that today?

Have you ever laughed or excused something away only to realize later that it was actually your lack of faith?

Before we get too hard on Sarah, how hard would it be for you to believe that you would bear a son at 90 years old?

The Lord does not seem to be too harsh with Sarah when she lies about laughing in verse 15. Why do you think that is?

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Can you think of a time when you or someone you know lied because of fear?

Read Genesis 18:16-33

When the men arise to leave, Abraham walks with them to “send them off”. As he does, the Lord asks whether or not he should conceal His plans from Abraham. We are not told whether or not this is the Lord legitimately pondering this question or whether He is asking it rhetorically. We do know, however, that He does reveal His plans to Abraham. In verse 19 the Hebrew word for “chosen” in the NASB is YADA, which is actually better translated “know” in other versions. This changes the meaning slightly from “I have chosen him” to “I know him”.

The Lord lets Abraham know that there has been a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah because of their “exceedingly grave” sin. In verse 21, it seems as though the Lord is going to test the validity of that outcry so that, as He says, he “will know”. There are some questions we could ask about God’s omniscience in verse 21, but I would rather just say that I am grateful for a Father who investigates before He acts, whether it is for His own knowledge or simply to prove to us that He is always just. In verses 22-33 we have the exchange between the Lord and Abraham concerning the punishment of the wicked. This is obviously an immense testimony to God’s patience, but also a wonderful example of Abraham’s love toward others. Whether or not Abraham swayed the Lord or not is really a moot point as Sodom is still destroyed. Perhaps God allowed Abraham to question His plans so that he would understand what God already knew. What

God was about to do may not have seemed just to Abraham (see Genesis 18:25) until he fully understood the state of Sodom. I find it interesting that Abraham did not go any lower than ten, but overwhelmingly moving that God had no minimum for saving the righteous. What an awesome God we serve!

Think About It:

How does the word “chosen” being translated to “know” in Genesis 18:19 change the meaning?

Who do you think was responsible for crying out to the Lord concerning Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:20?

How much and how often are you willing to approach God on behalf of others?

Read Genesis 19:1-23

In Genesis 18:22 we saw that the “men turned away from there and went to Sodom” while Abraham conversed with the Lord. The Hebrew word for “men” used is ENOWSH and means “mortal man”. However, here in Genesis 19:1 we see that “two angels came to Sodom”, but still appeared to look like men. The Hebrew word for angel here is MAL’AK and means “messenger of God”. From this, it is fairly safe to conclude that Abraham was visited by the Lord and two angels

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(disguised as men) in chapter 18. Just as Abraham had been hospitable to them, we now see Lot extending that same kindness. In Genesis 13:12 Lot had “moved his tents as far as Sodom”, but by the time we get to chapter 19, Lot is living within Sodom. He is “sitting in the gate”, which was not uncommon at that time, when he sees them coming.

After dinner, but before they have retired for the evening, the men of Sodom come and quite obviously wish to attack the visitors sexually. Some have suggested that this account has nothing to do with a homosexual crime, but an honest look at the text reveals no other logical explanation for what ensues. Although we cannot begin to fathom how a father could offer up his own daughters as a substitute for such treatment, we must remember the time and the culture. It was understood in Lot’s time that you protected your guests at all cost, up to and including your own life. That seems to bear true in Lot’s words in verse 8 when he says, “only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

The men do not take Lot’s daughters as an alternative, they call him an outsider who acts “like a judge”, and they decide to mistreat him as well in Genesis 19:9. This verse seems to epitomize what the Lord had said about Sodom’s “exceedingly grave” sin. They want to do one the most sinful things they can think of, they have no desire to be swayed from their evil intentions, they attack anyone who tries to hinder them in their sin, and they only want to compound their transgressions. On top of all that, the text tells us in verse 4 that this sin was committed by “both young and old, all the people from every quarter”. Sodom truly was filled with excessive sin.

Because of the state of Sodom, the angels tell Lot in verse 13 that they have been sent by the Lord to destroy the city. They tell him to gather his relatives and leave, but some do not take it seriously and Lot himself hesitates. They end up fleeing to the small town of Zoar after Lot asks permission to go there instead of the mountains. The angels grant his request, but as we know, his wife disobeys the command to not look back and ends up turning into a “pillar of salt”. The Hebrew word for “pillar” in verse 26 is NETSIYB and means “something stationary, a prefect, a statue, pillar, garrison, or post”. I find this word intriguing because I like the idea that maybe she was more like a “statue of salt”. Either way, salt is salt, but I cannot help but wonder what she looked like or how Lot and his daughters felt.

Think About It:

Does Lot moving close to Sodom and then into Sodom have any lesson for us and our closeness with the unrighteous and, if so, what?

What do you think the men of Sodom planned on doing to Lot in Genesis 19:9?

What do you think went through the minds of Lot and the men of Sodom when the angels struck them with blindness in Genesis 19:11?

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Read Genesis 19:24-38

As soon as Lot and his family are clear of the destruction, the Lord overthrows the cities of the plain. The word for brimstone in verse 24 is GOPHRIYTH and means “cypress resin or sulphur”. Whatever the Sodomites woke up to coming out of the sky that morning must have been absolutely terrifying. Archaeologists have unearthed the remnants of some cities in the area they believe Sodom and Gomorrah were located and the cities have tremendous evidence of severe burning. Although we cannot know for sure at this time what caused these fires nor if these cities were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is exciting to see the possibilities of yet more archaeological proof of the authenticity of the Biblical account.

At the end of chapter 19, we see Lot and his daughters living in a cave in the mountains. I imagine by now Lot was ready to go to those mountains that the angels had originally told him to flee to. While living in the cave, Lot’s daughters concoct a plan to preserve their family. They intoxicate their father and lie with him in order to become pregnant. Their plan is successful and they become the mothers of the Moabites and the Ammonites. Again, we must consider the time and culture. Preservation of your family was of the utmost importance and, although father and daughter relationships were probably not common, propagating with your relatives was not taboo back then.

None of us are without sin and that includes Lot. He may not stand out in Scripture to us as a great man of faith, but we know from 2 Peter 2:7-8 that Lot was indeed a righteous man. We also know from that passage that his soul was in torment from the sin of the Sodomites around

him. We have to give him some major credit for remaining righteous even though he continually witnessed excessive sin all around him. Lot was rescued, but he still suffered great loss. I think that is a huge take home message for us today. If you play around fire, you will get burned. Lot was surrounded by the unrighteous and, although he survived, he did not escape unscathed. If we continually put ourselves in a sinful environment, we risk our souls, the souls of our loved ones, and gain the potential for great personal loss.

Think About It:

Do some research on the discovery of Sodom and Gomorrah.

What do you think went through Abraham’s mind all night and early the next morning as he looked toward the cities in the plain (Genesis 19:28)?

Who was God remembering when He spared Lot? (Genesis 19:29)

What part of Lot’s rescue do you find the most interesting and why?

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What spiritual applications, if any, can we draw from God and/or Abraham's role in Lot's "salvation"?

Thank you for continuing to share in this study of God's word with me. I pray for each of us to gain a greater love and knowledge of our Lord through it. God bless you all.