

Genesis 18 part 2

B. Abraham intercedes for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

1. (16-19) God decides to reveal to Abraham the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 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."

- a. **Abraham went with them to send them on the way:** In that day, it was customary for a hospitable host to accompany his guests on their journey for a while as they departed.
- b. **And the LORD said:** God asked Himself a question. He didn't do this because He didn't know what to do or needed to process His thinking. God asked Himself this question to reveal His thinking to us, the readers of Genesis.
- c. **Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing:** Because of what God would bring from Abraham (a great and mighty nation), and because Abraham had to be a great leader (that he may command his children and his household after him), God determined to reveal to Abraham what He would soon do with Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - i. The reasons stated in this passage are important. God's purpose in revealing this to Abraham was not just to share interesting or shocking information, and it wasn't to simply satisfy Abraham's curiosity. God wanted to do something in Abraham's life through what He would reveal to him. When God reveals something to us it is for our good and the good of his kingdom. It also means He trusts us with the information.

2. (20-21) God tells Abraham He will see if Sodom and Gomorrah are worthy of judgment.

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."

- a. **Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great:** The offense of these cities was great, their sin was very grave, and we may suppose that this outcry came from many sources. Sodom and Gomorrah had a reputation. They still do.

b. **Think of it this way.**

- God and His holy justice cried out against Sodom and Gomorrah.
- On-looking angelic beings cried out against Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The multitude of victims of Sodom and Gomorrah's depravity cried out against those cities.
- Creation itself was affected by their unnatural transgression, and cried out against them.

b. **I will go down now and see:** Because the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous (Psalm 19:9, Revelation 16:7), God would only judge Sodom and Gomorrah on direct, accurate knowledge. We are not told this because God did not know, but to demonstrate to us the thorough character of God's knowledge and integrity. I think this translates to us. When we need to make a decision or a judgement call – have all the information. I think God is giving Abraham and us a template for decision making here.

3. (22-26) Abraham asks an important question: Will God destroy the righteous with the wicked?

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? 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?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

a. **The men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD:** We see the two men were actually the angels who visited Sodom in Genesis 19. The third person in the party was actually the LORD Himself.

b. **And Abraham came near:** Abraham came near to the LORD. Effective intercession is a matter of drawing near to God so we can pray with *His* heart.

c. **Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked:** In discussing this question, in a sense, Abraham reminded the LORD of His own nature and principles (**shall not the Judge of all the earth do right**). Abraham thought that God, as a righteous Judge, could not and would not punish the innocent in the same way as the guilty.

Mmm, over the past weeks I have been asked why God does not eliminate the causes of the pandemic. Why God would allow Christians to die along with others. Are these valid questions today? Well, look here. What does Abraham do? Petitions God, not the government but God. He lays out his heart. That is our template for prayer in relation to the pandemic. Lay out your heart. But be realistic, and ask yours Self this question: did it make a difference? God knew what the outcome would be, God knew the situation, God did what needed to be done. When you pray sometimes expect a no answer.

But take these. Points too:

i. Effective prayer speaks knowing who God is, and how God works in a particular situation. Effective prayer doesn't see itself as a passive spectator in what God does, but effective prayer acts as if it must actually remind God in prayer.

ii. We might find it remarkable Abraham even *cared* about the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He might have just prayed, "LORD, get my nephew Lot out of there first," but he didn't. Abraham's heart was full of sorrow and compassion, even for the wicked of Sodom and Gomorrah.

d. If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes: God said this because Abraham asked. When Abraham drew near to the LORD and prayed according to God's revealed nature and will, God agreed. The LORD said that He would spare the city if there were 50 righteous there.

4. (27-33) Abraham bargains with God for Sodom and Gomorrah.

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." 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." So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

a. **Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous:** In his first exchange with God, Abraham established a principle – that God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. With that principle established, it was then just a matter of numbers. How many righteous people would God spare the city for?

i. Abraham's intercession was effective because it was *specific*. He talked about specific numbers with God, and not only in broad, general terms. Often our prayers are ineffective because we really don't ask the LORD to *do* anything. Instead, we often just toss wishes up to heaven.

b. **Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak:** Abraham continued his intercession with a bold humility. He was not proud or arrogant before the Lord, yet he still continued to ask.

i. Abraham's humility was demonstrated in that nowhere in his prayer did he ask why or did he demand that God explain Himself and His actions.

c. **Suppose ten should be found there:** Abraham was a skilled negotiator and he prevailed upon God to lower the number of righteous required to spare the city. First by units of five, then by units of ten, until the number settled at ten.

i. It is impossible to miss the persistence of Abraham in intercession. Abraham did not stop asking at 40 or 50 and say simply, "Now it's in the LORD's hands" or "The

LORD will do what the LORD will do.” Abraham shows us that there are times when an intercessor must feel that the eternal destiny of men and women depends on the intercessor’s prayer.

ii. This is the kind of heart God wanted to draw out of Abraham; a heart that cared so much for people made in the image of God that he worked hard to intercede on behalf of a city that deserved judgment. This was the heart a great leader of a large and mighty nation needed to have.

iii. Remember, there is a sense in which all this negotiation was in vain, because Sodom and Gomorrah *were* destroyed. There were *not* ten righteous people in the city, only four; and surely God knew how many righteous people there actually were in the cities. Yet God specifically revealed the fate of these cities to Abraham to draw out of him an intercessor’s heart of love, so even before the time of Jesus, Abraham could be *conformed into the image of His Son* (Romans 8:29), who is Himself an intercessor (Hebrews 7:25).

d. **Abraham returned to his place:** We wonder if Abraham should not have continued the negotiations because there were only four righteous in the city. Would God have spared the city for four if Abraham had asked? Perhaps Abraham felt Lot would surely have brought six people beyond his own family to God in his time in Sodom.