

## **GENESIS 18:1-19:38**

### **ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES**

The title for today's lesson comes from a passage out of Hebrews 13:2. The writer of Hebrews says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." In these two chapters Abraham and Lot encounter angels that take on in human form. We'll see their reactions to these heavenly visitors.

We've covered a lot of ground so far in our three lessons about Abraham – his move from Haran to the land of Canaan, how he showed his human side down in Egypt, the various ways God blessed him, being declared righteous because of his faith and then, of course, the many promises that God made to him. Can you recall any of these promises? Well, there were the promises that he would become a great nation, he would have a child in his old age and then many descendants, and would be given the land of Canaan as an inheritance. By His grace God richly blessed Abraham and by His mercy God reckoned Abraham as righteous. Genesis tells us quite a bit about Abraham. His life is a major part of the book of Genesis. It covers nearly one-third of the book from Genesis Chapters 11 to 25. So, as we come to these chapters – Genesis Chapters 18 and 19 – we find ourselves somewhere in the middle of the biblical narrative of Abraham's life.

In this lesson we will be looking at the familiar story of Sodom and Gomorrah. What happens to these two cities? Fire and brimstone! God destroys them completely! Before we get into that story in Chapter 19 there is a key event that takes place in Chapter 18. So, let's go there first.

READ Genesis 18:1

The oaks of Mamre are located near modern day Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem in the hill country. This is Abraham's favorite spot to pitch his tents and to graze his flocks. So, this is where Abraham is sitting as the story unfolds.

READ Genesis 18:2

Don't miss this. Three "men" just suddenly appear out of nowhere. Abraham's sitting in the door of his tent at noon. He's awake. He's not asleep. But Abraham never sees these three men approaching. He looks up and he sees them standing in front of his tent.

Abraham "ran to meet them and bowed himself to the earth." Who are these three "men" that suddenly show up out of nowhere and whom Abraham greets with such enthusiasm? Good question. At this point they have not been introduced to us. Most commentaries agree that these are supernatural beings such as angels. Matthew Henry, the highly esteemed 19th Century theologian, says in his commentary: "These 3 men were 3 spiritual heavenly beings now assuming human bodies that they might be visible to Abraham." As we will see, they have an important message for Abraham and Sarah.

READ Genesis 18:3-5

The question I had as I studied this was, "Does Abraham KNOW who these three men are?" When you combine v 1, "And the LORD appeared to Abraham" with v 3 where Abraham addresses one of the visitors, "O "Lord" (the Hebrew word *Adonai*), it becomes apparent that Abraham realizes that one of these visitors is the LORD Himself. God appears here in human form to Abraham. This is referred to as a "theophany" and it is quite rare in the Bible. Abraham recognizes the LORD right off the bat. Look at his reaction. This nearly 100-year old man in the heat of the day runs to meet Him. He bows himself to the earth. He addresses Him as "Lord." Then Abraham offers the LORD and His angelic partners (we find this out later) some food and water.

READ Genesis 18:6-8

Abraham and Sarah prepare a feast for their guests and they eat. This goes beyond Abraham merely showing hospitality to three strangers who are just wandering by. Abraham recognizes that he is actually in the presence of the Lord God Himself! It's amazing to think about, really!

When I was a boy, my mom would read me a children's book, "If Jesus Came to My House." This book told a story from the perspective of a young boy who is surprised when Jesus comes to visit him at his house. It tells about all the things he does to make Jesus feel welcome. The boy is so excited that Jesus is there with him and he does everything to make Jesus's visit extra special. This is precisely what Abraham is doing here – he welcomes the LORD and does everything he can to be a gracious host. Wouldn't we do that too?

Well, I mentioned that they have message for Abraham and Sarah. God has shown up personally in order to confirm the promise He made earlier to Abraham. And what promise was that? This is very important. It's the promise that old man Abraham will have a son BY SARAH.

While they are sitting out eating under one of the oaks...

READ Genesis 18:9

The reason Sarah isn't out eating with Abraham and his guests isn't that she is being anti-social. It is a cultural thing. The custom in the Near East at this time does not permit women to sit and eat with men, especially strangers. That's why she's inside the tent. Sarah may be out of sight, but she's certainly not out of hearing range. God knows that Sarah is eavesdropping. So the LORD gives Abraham and Sarah the following message...

READ Genesis 18:10-11

At this time Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 89. Sarah has been barren, but even if she could have children she's well past the child-bearing age. This all seems so improbable, doesn't it? Well Sarah's reaction to hearing this is the same reaction that Abraham had when he had heard this the first time back in Chapter 17.

READ Genesis 18:12

Sarah laughs. "What? Me have a baby at my age and in my condition? And with a husband who's nearly 100 years old!" The whole idea is

laughable! Some commentaries say that Sarah laughs out of disbelief. For some reason they give Abraham a pass and not Sarah. I don't think that this is the case and here's why. From Hebrews Chapter 11 we read this about Sarah: "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). The writer of Hebrews says that Sarah is a woman of faith, not a woman of skepticism or unbelief. So then, based on this passage it seems to me that Sarah's laugh in Genesis 18 is out of a feeling that what she has just overheard is too good to be true. It is no different really than the reason Abraham had laughed when he heard this news. Yes, God DOES have a sense of humor, doesn't He! The whole idea is laughable from a human standpoint. But we know God can and will do the impossible, don't we?

READ Genesis 18:13-15

The conversation here is between Sarah and the LORD. Who else would know that Sarah had laughed to herself inside the privacy of her own tent? Only God could know this. When confronted with her reaction, she denies laughing, but God knows the truth.

I want to stop here and ask you to answer the question that the LORD posed to Abraham and Sarah in v 14: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Will Sarah get pregnant and have a baby in her old age with Abraham? You say "Yes." But how can you be so confident? Because you have read ahead in the story, haven't you? God promised that in one year Sarah would have a son. Does this happen? Yes, spoiler alert! Three chapters later, in Genesis Chapter 21 Sarah conceives and bears Abraham a son in his old age and in her old age in the timeframe given by God. So, we know that God keeps His promise to Abraham and Sarah. Nothing is too hard for the LORD!

READ Genesis 18:16

It's time to leave. Abraham walks with these three heavenly messengers, one of whom is the LORD. They depart from Abraham's tent and head down into the Jordan River Valley toward Sodom.

READ Genesis 18:17-19

God is about to reveal to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Why would God tell Abraham? Because of WHO Abraham is. He's the father of a great nation who will teach righteousness and justice to his descendants. He is God's man. God knows that when Abraham is informed of the plan to destroy Sodom that he will intercede for his nephew Lot and his family. Why? Because Abraham loves Lot and he cares for him and his family.

READ Gen 18:20-21

This is quite an interesting verse. This is God and He knows everything. What was the outcry that God had heard? Who did it come from? These were the cries of all the many victims of rape, incest and other horrible acts of evil which were being committed regularly down in the godless cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God knows what's going on. There are no secret sins in Sodom or anywhere else. Notice that God hasn't actually mentioned that He will destroy those cities, not yet.

READ Genesis 8:22

The LORD remains behind while the other two men [Note: Genesis 19:1 confirms they are angels] continue on their way to Sodom.

READ Genesis 18:23-26

Abraham knows God's character. He's a God of justice who will destroy evil but He's also a God of mercy who will spare the righteous. So Abraham requests that the LORD relent from destroying these cities for the sake of 50 righteous people. Abraham continues...

READ Genesis 18:27-33

Abraham implores God on behalf of Lot and a remnant of the righteous that may be living in Sodom. This is the heart of Abraham. Notice Abraham's boldness, yet his reverent attitude as He carries on this conversation with God. It's no wonder that Abraham is referred to as a "friend of God" in James 2:23 and in Isaiah 41:8.

As it turns out there are not even 10 righteous people in that whole city, are there? One website I looked at ([www.accuracyingenesis.com](http://www.accuracyingenesis.com)) estimates the population of Sodom at this time to be between 600 and 1200 people. We don't really know for sure but this is a reasonable guess. The fact that God could not find just 10 righteous people out of a population of 600-plus gives us some idea of just how rampant the evil is in Sodom. No wonder the name Sodom has become synonymous with unnatural sexual sins (sodomy, for example). It is a terribly evil place – certainly no place for someone like Lot, a supposed God fearer, to be raising his family!

With that we pick up the action in Chapter 19 as our two heavenly messengers approach Sodom.

READ Genesis 19:1

The identities of the two men from Chapter 18 are now revealed. They are angels. Notice in this passage where Lot is seated. He's sitting in the gate of Sodom. John Phillips says that Lot has become one of the city's officials. He has risen to prominence. Lot rises to meet the angels and bows. Like Abraham, Lot recognizes that these messengers are from God, but unlike Abraham, Lot doesn't appear all that eager to hear from them as we will see.

Let's talk a little more about Lot. Like Abraham, Lot is referred to as "righteous" (2 Peter 2:7). Like Abraham, Lot is a God-fearer. But there the similarities end. Abraham and Lot are quite different. We know from earlier in our study that Abraham was considered to be righteous by God because he believed God (Genesis 15:6). As for Lot, well, let's just say from his actions that he doesn't appear to be very righteous. Peter says that Lot

“was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless.” Which begs the obvious question – why then does Lot continue to live in this wicked city and raise his family in such a terrible environment? The Bible never answers that question. Some conjecture that he’s a man driven by financial prosperity or opportunities for fame and fortune or whatever. It was not spiritually motivated. Clearly this is not a good place for any supposed God-fearing person to be living!

READ Genesis 19:2-4

The angelic messengers initially decline Lot’s invitation to come stay with him in his house. Contrast that with their willingness to accept Abraham’s invitation to stay for a while with him. It is only after Lot presses them strongly (Lot knows the imminent danger they will face outside at night) – only after Lot strongly urges them do they agree to enter his house.

A reprobate mob soon surrounds Lot’s house and begins yelling...

READ Genesis 19:5

The ESV softens the language of the mob’s evil intentions saying, “Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” The NASB is more blunt. It says, “Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.” These are men with homosexual tendencies who intend to gang rape Lot’s visitors. That’s sick!

READ Genesis 19:6-8

Notice how Lot responds to these deviant thugs, these twisted minds. Like a politician he addresses them “my brothers.” What? Brothers? Really, Lot? And then, instead of telling them to go home and that what they are doing is wrong, Lot tries to reason with them. But you cannot reason with evil! No, instead Lot – and this is almost unimaginable – he offers his own two daughters as a substitute for this mob’s lustful intentions. Lot says, “Do with them as you please.” What a loving father! Contrast Lot’s relationship with his two daughters (which cannot be very good) with

Abraham's relationship with Ishmael and later Isaac. Abraham wants the very best for his sons.

This incident shows us just how far Lot, a God follower, has slipped morally. Unfortunately, and far too often, the world out there tends to influence believers to become more like they are than we in the church influence the world to become like Christ. So, Lot's influence on Sodom was not much. But Sodom's influence on Lot was enough to cause him to be this deviant.

Anyway, the situation only gets worse...

READ Genesis 19:9-11

Only divine intervention spares Lot from personal disaster. Notice how the mob disrespects Lot when they don't get what they want. That's how the world is. They will put their arms around you and call you their friend, that is, until you don't do things their way and you refuse to play by their rules. Then all of a sudden you become expendable. You become useless to them. This is how the political world has become in our day.

READ Genesis 19:12-14

The angels tell Lot God's intention to destroy Sodom. Lot urges his sons-in-law to leave and warns them that God is going to destroy Sodom. But Lot has lost all credibility with them. A believer who lives like the world will effectively lose their witness. Notice the apparent affection that Lot and his family have for this wicked place.

READ Genesis 19:15-16

It says that they lingered. Lot, his wife and his two daughters have to be forcibly led out of the city by the angels! Isn't that like us? God is so merciful to us, even though we, like Lot's family here, often push back against God and His best plans for us. Sometimes God has to drag us kicking and screaming, but it is all for our own good. Of course we know what happens to Lot's wife – we'll see that here in a minute.



READ Genesis 19:17

Their clear direction is NOT to look back but to escape to the hills.

READ Genesis 19:18-21

“OK, Lot, your life and your family’s life has just been spared. Why don’t you just do what the God’s messengers have told you to do? Not Lot! He argues. Lot wants things his way! His reasoning makes no sense at all. Does Lot really believe that God will spare his and his family’s life just to have them die up in the mountains? Really, Lot? Is your idea of God that perverted?”

God, however, shows Lot a great deal of grace. Lot is granted his request to go to that little insignificant city which we learn is named Zoar. I want you to contrast Lot’s unwillingness to follow God’s direction and trust Him with Abraham’s obedience. Every time Abraham receives direction from God, he believes and he obeys without argument. This is why I find it curious that Peter calls Lot righteous.

READ 19:22-26

The name Zoar means “insignificant.” How appropriate it is that Lot’s desire is to head toward that which is insignificant rather than to the place God directed him to go. In the process, however, the entire city of Zoar is spared from destruction. We conclude then that God spared that entire city for the sake of just THREE righteous people (Lot and his two daughters). What a merciful God!

Now, let’s talk about what happened to Lot’s wife. It serves as a warning to those whose hearts are divided between the things of this world and the things of God. In Luke Chapter 17 Jesus teaches that we cannot have divided loyalties. We either choose to follow Him or to follow after this world. You cannot do both. Jesus concludes by saying, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Jesus uses her as an object lesson. Lot’s wife looked back toward the smoldering garbage heap of Sodom rather than looking ahead with eager anticipation at the bright future, the blessing,

that could have been hers as a follower of God. You could say that, as a result, she receives a curse rather than a blessing! This is a principle we see driven home throughout Scripture.

READ Genesis 19:27-29

Abraham realizes that there were not even 10 righteous people in the city. God spares Lot because of Abraham's intercession, which Abraham will find out later.

Well, things do not end well for Lot and his daughters...

READ Genesis 19:30-38

Instead of living in Zoar, Lot and his two daughters head for the hills which is where they had been directed to go by the angels in the first place. Lot's two daughters get their father drunk and they wind up getting pregnant by their dear old dad. It's a tragic story. Instead of being part of the Abrahamic Covenant (part of the nation of Israel with its Promised Land and being a blessing to the world) – instead of enjoying all of that blessing, Lot becomes the father of the Ammonites and Moabites (future enemies of Israel).

Let me close by answering the question from earlier – Why does Peter call Lot "righteous"? (2 Peter 2:7). John MacArthur provides the best answer in his commentary: "[Lot] was righteous, as all the saved are, by faith in the one true God. Righteousness was imputed to him, by grace through faith, as it was to Abraham. There was spiritual weakness in Lot – for example, immorality and drunkenness. His heart was in Sodom, yet he did hate the sins of his culture and strongly sought ways to protect God's angels from harm. [Lot] obeyed the Lord in not looking back at Sodom. In both illustrations where God rendered a wholesale judgment (the Flood account and Sodom and Gomorrah), God's people were rescued. Lot was troubled deeply... with the immoral, outrageous behavior of the people living in and around Sodom and Gomorrah. Tragically, it is ordinary for believers today no longer to be shocked by the rampant sin in their society."

Application for us from all of this – God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants to make them a great nation with a promising future was unconditional. Likewise, when we accept Christ, God’s promises to secure us, give us the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of heaven, are unconditional. His plans and purposes will not be thwarted. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. However, sadly, we will not realize all the blessings that could be ours in Christ as long as we live in willful disobedience to Him. This is pictured in Lot. God must deal with our rebellion as a loving father deals with His disobedient children. Yes, we Christians are eternally secure, but far too many of us do not enjoy all that could be ours in Christ. The contrast before us is the life and actions of Abraham who lived in obedience and the life and actions of Lot who did not.

Look around at our society today. How do you view the behavior that has become so accepted by our society? What’s more important to you – what the popular culture says or what the Bible says? Are you being salt and light? Are you impacting those around you positively? Do others see Jesus in you? No pun intended, but that is a LOT to think about!