

Abraham Visited in the Plains of Mamre

Genesis 18

Genesis 18. The Lord having entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham (ch.17), He now comes to Abraham's dwelling to commune with him. Ch.18 is a direct contrast with ch.19. In chapter 18, three men visit Abraham and spend time with him, and it is evident that one of the three is Jehovah Himself. In chapter 19, only two men visit Lot (both are angels) for the purpose of saving him, but do not relish remaining in the city. These chapters picture two paths and their results. Both represent believers. One path is a life of faith, lived in separation from the world and communion with God. The second path is a life of compromise, association with the world, and total shipwreck in the end. In this chapter, we have four great privileges that the believer has in the path of faith: (1) communion with Divine Persons, (2) promises from God, (3) intelligence about the future, and (4) the ability to intercede for others.

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Communion: Abraham Cooks a Meal for the Strangers (18:1-8)

Divine Visitation. The first great privilege of faith is divine visitation; communion with God. Abraham received a visit from the Lord in his tent-door! Was this a privilege that was only for Abraham? It is out of the question that God might visit a believer today? No! God can visit us today, although in a different form than what Abraham saw. *"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"* (John 14:23). If we walk in

obedience to the words of Jesus, the Father will show His affection to us in a special way, and will make His presence known in our lives in a special way. It was an awesome privilege for Abraham to have!¹

CHAPTER 18

1 And Jehovah appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre [*'fatness'*]. And he sat at the tent-door in the heat of the day. **v.1 Abraham's Place.** When the Lord appears to Abraham, he is in the door of his tent among the oaks of Mamre. It speaks of a place of rest ("sitting") and communion with the Lord ("fatness"), while maintaining a pilgrim character ("the tent"). While things were buzzing down in the city, Abraham seems to be at perfect rest and peace. This was apparently Abraham's practice, to sit in the tent-door, because in v.33 it is called "*his place*". It was there that the Lord appeared to him. Like Abraham, we can have a daily time of quiet devotion to the Lord, and it is at those times that the Lord can come to us, and make His presence felt. It is amazing what depths can flow from a personal morning Bible reading! Other examples include 2 Sam. 7.

Pre-incarnate Appearances. Abraham saw "*three men*" in Genesis 18:2, but he recognized one of them as the Lord. Jehovah had come down to earth to visit Abraham in the form of a man. However, this was not incarnation. At the incarnation, "*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). In these pre-incarnate appearances, the Lord took on the physical form of a man, but it was only temporary. When the Word became flesh, it was permanent. Furthermore, at the incarnation, it wasn't merely a human body that the Son took, but manhood in all its attributes, apart from sin. The Son of God became a man: spirit, soul, and body. In Genesis 18 we see a body, but no soul or spirit. At the incarnation, the human and divine natures were joined in one inscrutable union, never to be dissolved! The pre-incarnate appearances are called *theophanies*. Several other examples include: Genesis 32:24-30; Judges 13:3-6; as well as references to "the Angel of Jehovah".

2 And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, three men standing near him. And when he saw *them*, he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself to the earth, **3** and said, Lord, if now I have found favour in thine eyes, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. **4** Let now a little water be fetched, that ye may wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. **5** And I will fetch a morsel of bread; and refresh yourselves; after that ye shall pass on; for therefore have ye passed on towards your servant. And they said, So do as thou hast said. **vv.2-4 Abraham Welcomes the Three Visitors.** When Abraham looked up, he saw the three men standing there. So often in our lives the Lord is there, but we don't see Him immediately because we have not looked up. But Abraham's response is instantaneous; "*he ran to meet them*". Although perhaps not at first, at some point Abraham

recognized one of the men as none other than Jehovah Himself! The Lord had not come in a splendid outward form, but Abraham still knew this was a visit that commanded reverence; *“and bowed himself to the earth, and said, Lord”*. Abraham addressed *one* of the three men as Adoni, or ‘my lord’. He had some sense about this One. The other two men were evidently angels, and perhaps they were the same two angels that visited Lot in ch.19. Abraham begged the visitors to stay, insisting on showing them every form of hospitality:

1. quality time (*“pass not away, I pray thee”*)
2. cleansing (*“Let now a little water be fetched, that ye may wash your feet”*) - the washing of water by the Word.
3. rest (*“rest yourselves under the tree”*) - perhaps it speaks of resting under the work of the cross. We rest where God Himself rests, under the tree.
4. sustenance (*“I will fetch a morsel of bread”*) - feeding on Christ.
5. refreshment (*“and refresh yourselves”*)

It is instructive that Abraham begged the Lord to stay. The Lord will not push Himself on us, yet He delights to respond when we invite Him in; *“And they said, So do as thou hast said.”* We have a similar thing in Revelation 3:20; *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”* And again in Luke 24:28-29; *“And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.”* It is interesting that Abraham discerned that the visit was not random, but that God had come for the *purpose* of visiting him; *“for therefore have ye passed on towards your servant”*. So with us, God desires our fellowship. We are not a mere side-attraction to the Lord, but the apple of His eye.

6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, Knead quickly three seahs of wheaten flour, and make cakes. **7** And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf tender and good, and gave it to the attendant; and he hastened to dress it. **8** And he took thick and sweet milk, and the calf that he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood before them under the tree, and they ate. **vv.6-8 Abraham’s Menu.** The hospitality shown by Abraham is carefully recorded in God’s Word. The calf was *“tender and good”*, and it was served with *“milk”* and *“butter”*. God takes note of the little things we do for Him. Notice also Abraham’s energy in this chapter. Abraham *“hastened”* and *“ran”*. He told Sarah to *“knead quickly”* the flour. Abraham was very old at this point, but he demonstrates remarkable energy in this chapter. It is a good representation of the *energy* of faith (see more in Hebrews 11). The cakes made of flour, the tender calf, and the milk all represent the subjects of Divine

communion. The “*calf*” represents what Christ is to God, the “*bread*” what His is to man, and the “*milk*” represents the blessing that flows from what Christ has done. These are the subjects that we can have fellowship with God about! It is nice to see that Abraham involves Sarah in the work of preparing a meal. It is a blessed thing for husbands and wives to be involved together in their devotions.

Blessing: Promise of a Son for Sarah, Her Laughter (18:9-15)

Blessings. The second great privilege given to Abraham is the confirmation of the promised child that would be born to he and Sarah. It represents in a broad way the blessings that God has given the Christian to enjoy. In addition to enjoying communion with God, He wants us to believe and enjoy the blessings we have in Christ (e.g. Ephesians 1).

9 And they said to him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. **v.9 Sarah in the Tent.** When the three men finished eating, they turn to Abraham. “Where is Sarah thy wife?” How did they know her name was Sarah? Perhaps at this point Abraham grew more assured that this was a Divine visitation. Abraham simply replied, “Behold, in the tent”. The Lord wanted to make sure Sarah was listening to what He was about to say. In this chapter Abraham and Sarah give us a good example for marriage, although in previous chapters they have made a very poor example. If God had asked Abraham “Where is Sarah thy wife?” in ch.12, what would he have said? He had traded her to Pharaoh; she was in the house of another man. But now she is in his tent, and everything is in order. Sarah was *with* Abraham in his pilgrim walk. What a blessed thing for a husband and wife to walk *together* in the pathway. She wasn’t down at the Sodom shopping mall with Lot’s wife. No, she was in the tent. What a blessing she received at this time! Young Christian wife, if God asked your husband next week, “Where is thy wife?”, what would he say? Are you with him, supporting him in the pilgrim path? Or are you off doing your own thing?

10 And he said, I will certainly return to thee at *this* time of the year, and behold, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent-door, which was behind him. **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old *and* advanced in age: it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. **12** And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am become old, shall I have pleasure, and my lord old? **vv.10-12 The Promise, Sarah’s Laugh.** Within Sarah’s hearing, the Lord affirmed the promise He had made in ch.17, that Sarah would

bear a son to Abraham, though He gives more details now; *“I will certainly return to thee at this time of the year”*. This was something that seemed totally impossible. *“Now Abraham and Sarah were old and advanced in age”*. Sarah was barren in the first place, but on top of that, by now *“it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.”* Abraham too was beyond the years now of fathering a child. Hebrews says that Abraham was *“as good as dead”* (Heb. 11:12). Naturally speaking, conception was totally out of the question. It says that Sarah was *“behind him”* and *“listening in the tent door”*. He did not at this time have the same relationship that Abraham had, who spoke with the Lord face to face. The Lord had inquired of her, although not exactly commanding her to stand before Him, but she could have come out of the tent. Perhaps she felt more comfortable behind the Visitor’s back, in the door of the tent.² *“Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am become old, shall I have pleasure, and my lord old?”* It was a laugh of unbelief. As we have already remarked in ch.17 when Abraham laughed, there are two kinds of laughter: the laugh of joy and the laugh of unbelief. Later in ch.21 Sarah laughs again, and that time it is a laugh of joy!

13 And Jehovah said to Abraham, Why is this, that Sarah laughs, saying, Shall I indeed bear, when I am become old? **14** Is any matter too wonderful for Jehovah? At the time appointed I will return to thee, at *this time of the year*, and Sarah shall have a son. **vv.13-14 Sarah Rebuked.** Sarah is rebuked by Jehovah, for so the individual is identified as, for her unbelief. She must have, at this moment, realized that this man was Jehovah. Who else can hear the silent laughter of the heart? *“Is any matter too wonderful for Jehovah?”* Isn’t this the root of all our failures? We somehow think either the Lord doesn’t care, or that He is unable to handle our matters. The question asked by Jehovah is rhetorical: nothing is too wonderful for the Lord! The promise is repeated in distinct terms; *“at this time of the year, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

15 And Sarah denied, saying, I did not laugh; for she was afraid. And he said, No; but thou didst laugh. **v.15 Sarah’s Denial.** Caught off guard and *“afraid”*, as any of us might, Sarah tried to deny that she had laughed. She was ashamed because she knew it was wrong. The Lord does not let her think she could get away with it. *“No, but thou didst laugh”*. How can I hide anything from God? *“You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off”* (Psalm 139:2 NKJV). How humiliating for Sarah, in years to come, to think back to this time when she had attempted to lie to God. It was a mistake she made once, and never repeated, as far as we know. It is wonderful to see that, in the months that followed this visit, Sarah’s unbelief was changed to faith. It was in the strength of this faith that she was able to conceive and deliver the child; *“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she*

judged him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11).

Intelligence: The Lord’s Plan to Judge Sodom & Gomorrah Revealed (18:16-22)

An Order with Regard to Prophecy. We have in vv.16-22 the Lord unfolding to Abram the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. But before this takes place, we have what comes before in vv.1-15. First Abram makes a meal for the Lord, and then the Lord explains to Abram and Sarah that they would have a son, according to the promised blessing of God. It speaks of (1) worship and (2) getting an understanding of our blessings in Christ. If we get into prophetic events before we understand our portion in Christ, we may become unstable. God first reveals what He would do for Abram, then what He would do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

16 And the men rose up thence, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to conduct them. **17** And Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? **vv.16-17**

Jehovah Treats Abraham as His Friend. The Lord’s mission at this time was twofold; to bring tidings of blessing to those of faith, and to undertake preliminary arrangements for the judgment of the wicked. Abraham at this time was ignorant of the second part; of the judgment that was about to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah. As Abraham conducts the men on their way, Jehovah says, almost to Himself, *“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?”* Having enjoyed communion with this man, the Lord desired to bring Abraham into the intelligence of His mind. It is in this sense the Abraham is called *“the Friend of God”* (James 2:23). What is a friend? *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (John 15:14-15).

We have been brought into the confidence of Christ, such that He calls us His friends, if we obey His commandments. We cannot be His friends if we disobey His requests. A friend is different from a servant, because a friend can enjoy the full confidence of another. A servant is only told what he needs to know to fulfill his duties. A friend is told much more, those things that interest and are valued by another. A servant is left in the dark on many matters, but a friend is told the truth. So the Father and the Son are in perfect communion about all that the Father is doing and will yet do (prophetic events, etc.). The Father and Son desire to bring us into that communion of thought.

18 Since Abraham shall indeed become a great and mighty nation; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. **19** For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, in order that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham what he hath spoken of him.

vv.18-19 Reasons Why Abraham Should Know. In speaking to Himself, the Lord gives two reasons why Abraham should be brought into the circle of intelligence regarding God's ways in judgment. The first reason (v.18) is that "*Abraham shall indeed become a great and mighty nation; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him*"; i.e. Abraham was an important player in the unfolding of the counsels of God. All nations would be blessed in Abraham, and therefore it was fitting that such a significant person be intelligent of God's counsels. Like Abraham, the Church has an important role in the counsels of God, as the bride of Christ. God's desire is for us to be intelligent about His ways in prophecy. If the first reason was *positional*, the second reason is *personal*. The second reason is that Abraham was personally living, and raising his family, consistent with the mind of God. God says, "*I know him*". What an amazing statement! How important it is to set the direction for our household and our children after us, to command and teach them "*the way of Jehovah*", that they might continue in "*righteousness and justice*" even after we are gone. This was "*in order that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham what he hath spoken of him*"; i.e. Jehovah could happily fulfil His promise upon Abraham's family if they were living in the fear of the Lord. The true character of a man is seen in the way he raises his children (1 Tim. 3:4-5).³ In this way Abraham was God's friend, because he was faithful and obedient to the Word of God (John 15:14), and that was reflected in his household.

20 And Jehovah said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grievous, **21** I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to me; and if not, I will know it. **vv.20-21 The Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.** The Lord here speaks to Abraham as a man, in language that Abraham could understand, and would be comfortable conversing with. Certainly, Jehovah did not need to come down to see the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, because God is omniscient. But He speaks in such a way that Abraham could understand what He meant. This verse also gives us an important principle of God's ways in judgment. God always judges according to actual fact. The "*cry*" was very great, but before Jehovah would judge, He would "*see whether they have done altogether according to the cry*". The expression, "*and if not, I will know it*", shows that God will not judge unless there is actual sin. His judgment is perfect.

22 And the men turned thence, and went towards Sodom; and Abraham remained yet

[standing before Jehovah](#). **v.22 Abraham Left Before Jehovah.** The two men (evidently angels) turned to go toward Sodom, but “*Abraham remained yet standing before Jehovah*”, making clear that the one visitor was Jehovah Himself.

Intercession: Abraham Intercedes for the Righteous in Sodom (18:23-33)

Intercession. The fourth great privilege of faith is that of intercession. Intercession is a form of prayer in which the soul comes before God on behalf of another. [Read more...](#) Every believer is a priest, and as priests we have access to the throne of grace to intercede for others, as well as to pray for ourselves, and to worship. Abraham demonstrates this great priestly privilege of intercession in the final verses of Genesis 18.

23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also cause the righteous to perish with the wicked? **24** There are perhaps fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not forgive the place for the sake of the fifty righteous that are therein? **25** Far be it from thee to do so, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that the righteous should be as the wicked — far be it from thee! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? **vv.23-25 Abraham Pleads for the Righteous to be Spared.** We see in Abraham a liberty to speak to God. We detect a certain confidence in Jehovah, although there was yet much for Abraham to learn about God. “*Abraham drew near*”. He felt free to intercede. If Abraham, who knew relatively little of God, and lived before the cross, could draw near and speak to God, how much more can we “*draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Hebrews 10:22). We can have even more confidence than Abraham! The man of faith is not thinking of himself, but for others. No doubt Abraham had his nephew Lot on his heart, but he never mentions the name of Lot. Abraham seemed to grasp that the judgment of Sodom was a moral issue. He doesn’t ask God to spare Lot as a personal favor to him. He counts that Lot was righteous, and so he was. Would God judge the righteous along with the wicked? “*For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds*” (2 Peter 2:8). Perhaps Abraham thought Lot had done some good in Sodom, and suggests that “*there are perhaps fifty righteous within the city*”. His estimate was too high. Yet Abraham rightly grasped the principle that “*the Judge of all the earth*” will always “*do right*”. The Lord knows how to deliver the righteous, and still judge the wicked (2 Peter 2:9). His judgment is perfect.

26 And Jehovah said, If I find at Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sakes. 27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have ventured to speak unto the Lord; I, who am dust and ashes. 28 Perhaps there may want five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city on account of the five? And he said, If I shall find forty-five there, I will not destroy *it*. 29 And he continued yet to speak with him, and said, Perhaps there may be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for the forty's sake. 30 And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry that I speak! Perhaps there may be thirty found there. And he said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. 31 And he said, Behold now, I have ventured to speak with the Lord. Perhaps there may be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for the twenty's sake. 32 And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, that I speak yet but this time! Perhaps there may be ten found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for the ten's sake. **vv.26-27 Abraham Pursues God's Grace.** The Lord assures Abraham that He would spare the city for fifty righteous. Abraham, in great humility ("*I, who am dust and ashes*"), proceeds to ask about forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten righteous in Sodom. Each step Abraham takes, the Lord replies that He would spare the city if the righteous were there. With each step, Abraham seems to grow more apologetic, sensing the holiness of God. It seemed is huge step to go from twenty to ten; "*Oh, let not the Lord be angry, that I speak yet but this time!*" He had pursued God's grace to the limits of his own faith, but not to the limit of God's grace! Why didn't Abraham ask about "*one*" righteous man in Sodom? Certainly he was thinking of only one man. But he asked as far as his faith could carry him. Great as his faith was, it stopped short of asking what he really wanted. But Jehovah knew what Abraham wanted, and the unspoken prayer was answered in the salvation of Lot. Some have wondered if the "ten" allude to Lot (1), his wife (1), his two young daughters (2), his married daughters and sons-in-law (4), and his sons (2), which add up to ten. But these were not righteous, as we later see. There was only *one* righteous in that city, and the Lord would remove Lot from the city before the judgment fell. God would not spare the wicked city, neither would He destroy the righteous. We find in the New Testament that the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is a type of the appearing of Christ to judge the world (Luke 17:28-30). Many dear believers are living in Sodom, so to speak. Their lives are wrapped up the with the things of this world, whether it be the attractions, or the desire to sit in the gate as Lot did. Those who remain separate from the world have the privilege of *interceding* for others.

God's character known. Abraham seemed to wrestle with the grace and holiness of God. On one hand, he knew God would not spare the wicked, because He is holy. On the other hand, he knew God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked because He is gracious. In Genesis 18:23-33 Abraham is struggling to find some "balance" between these two

characters of God; that He is light and love. It isn't until the New Testament that we find God fully revealed in the Person of the Son. And nowhere do we see light and love more fully manifest than at the cross. We find that there is no balance between light and love; God is 100% light and 100% love. His holiness demanded full payment for sin. But in love, God provided His Son to suffer and die in our place. Both come together perfectly in the cross, and nowhere else can they be seen so clearly.

33 And Jehovah went away when he had ended speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. **v.33 The End of the Conversation.** The Lord departed after the conversation ended, and Abraham went back to his tent door. It is beautiful to see that it is called "*his place*". The habit of enjoying communion should be so well formed in our lives that such a thing could be said of us.

Footnotes

1. *The peculiar privilege here was that God Himself deigned to be the guest of Abraham: yea, and more than that, for He treats him as His intimate, stamping on the patriarch for ever that remarkable designation, "the friend of God," which is founded on this very chapter. - Kelly, W. Abraham, the Friend of God.*
2. *Sarah, no doubt, was an honoured woman, but her state was spiritually different from that of Abraham. We hear of her during this conversation behind the door. I dare say she ought not to have been there, but there she was; and if she was where she ought not to have been, need we wonder that she indulges in feelings that little became her? She laughed in her doubt of the word. Could any of us imagine Abraham behind a door? Was there not a simple dignity in him incapable of hiding and listening behind a door? We can understand easily an eastern wife's temptation to conceal herself in more modern times, when woman was more of a prisoner, and otherwise degraded; but it is evident that in those early days no such reason operated, and no excuse could thence be for anything of the kind. For we find Rebekah, and others far later, going to the well, without any idea of impropriety. Sarah must no doubt have enjoyed no less a degree of freedom, but would have from her circumstances much more. She, the matron, by no means young now, was under no conceivable custom of keeping out of sight. Wherever such manners as those before us are resorted to, never expect anything good or worthy. - Kelly, W. Abraham: The Friend of God.*
3. *... We should search ourselves, and see whether there are grounds for the Lord to speak so about ourselves and our households. For you generally find that a saint's ways are shown, not merely in his own personal conduct, but even more in the relation of his family all round to the Lord, as the fruit of his faith or the lack of it. This is the reason why (in the New Testament), no matter what gift a man had, no matter how much he might be personally excellent, if his household were unruly and not in subjection, such an one could not be an elder or bishop. How could a person rule the church of God, if he could not rule his own home ~ Because, where moral power would be shown most is, not in a discourse, or in company, or in a visit, but where a man unbends, where he is no longer the teacher or preacher, where he can either familiarly bring in God or habitually leave Him out, where he can have a free and constant circulation of that name, with all its fruitful consequences, in the family, or he proves that his heart is in ease. Show or money for them is really for himself. The Lord assuredly looks for a reflex in the household of the ways of God with the head of it; because there it is that God should manifestly be owned, and habitually govern; and there it is that the one who stands at the head is responsible to God for showing what his mind and heart value. - Kelly, William. Abraham, the Friend of God.*