

## Abraham the Friend of God

**Text:** Gen. 18:1-21

### Introduction:

1. This chapter forms a prelude to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Abraham receives a visitation from God and two angelic beings. God reiterates His promise concerning Isaac in Sarah's hearing and then reveals His intentions judge the cities of the plain viz. Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. Abraham responds to the news of Sodom's impending doom with intercessory prayer. This is the first recorded example of intercessory prayer and it is rich in instruction for this aspect of the believer's prayer life. Moses is also another example of a great Intercessor in the Old Testament (Gen. 32:30-33; Deut. 9:18-29).
3. Intercessory prayer is something that is connected with being a "friend of God". While Abraham is the only Bible character actually called by this title (2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23), as children of God we can all be "friends" of God if we walk closely with Him in obedience. John 15:14 "**Ye are my friends**, if ye do whatsoever I command you."
4. We will learn from Abraham's example in this chapter the key principles of how to be a friend of God.

### *A friend of God is one who:*

#### **I. SERVES IN THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE (VS. 1-8)**

Abraham receives a visitation from three heavenly personages and serves them.

##### **A. The Identity of the Heavenly Visitors (Vs. 1-2)**

Who were these three visitors?

1. The Divine Person (Vs. 1a)  
This appearance of the LORD (Jehovah) is another Theophany. Clearly the Lord Himself was manifest as one of the three who were manifest in the form of "men" (Vs. 2).
  - a. "the LORD appeared unto him" (Vs. 1)
  - b. "and the LORD said unto Abraham" (Vs. 13)
  - c. "and the LORD said" (Vs. 17)
  - d. "And the LORD said" (Vs. 20)
  - e. "but Abraham stood yet before the LORD" (Vs. 22)
  - f. "And the LORD went his way" (Vs. 33)
2. The Angelic Persons (Compare Vs. 22 & 19:1)
  - a. Two of the three "men" who appeared to Abraham were angels.
  - b. These two angels appear in Sodom in verse 1 of the next chapter and ultimately rescue Lot and some of his family from the doomed city.
  - c. This is the first reference to angels in the Bible and we learn some basic truths about these heavenly beings from this account:

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- i. They are ministering spirits who serve God's children (Heb. 1:14).
  - ii. They are servants of Almighty God to administer His justice. These angels were associated with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Angels will be involved in judgment at the end of the world (Matt. 13:41, 49).
  - iii. They often appear as men in the Bible and thereby often go undetected by God's people. Heb. 13:2 "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."
  - iv. While angels do not need to eat as humans, it is evidently possible for them to do so in connection with their ministry to men as directed by God.
3. Note: The number 3 is of interest in this account and some have seen in it a glimpse of the Trinity.

### B. The Hospitality to the Heavenly Visitors (Vs. 3-8)

These verses give us a good picture of the serving aspect of the walk of faith. We can learn at least 7 practical lessons about serving Christ from Abraham's godly example. Abraham served the Lord...

1. **Humbly** – Abraham was a man of considerable wealth and position in Canaan and yet we see a sweet spirit of humility towards the Lord in his words and actions.
  - a. Humble in actions – "bowed himself toward the ground" (Vs. 2b).
  - b. Humble in words – "my Lord" (Vs. 3a); "I pray thee" (Vs. 3b, 4a).
  - c. No matter how successful you may be as far as this life may be, always have a humble, servant's attitude. Sadly, for some Christians, wealth and position have the effect of making them proud. 1 Tim. 6:17 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they **be not highminded**, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;"
2. **Personally** – Abraham had many servants but he was still a servant Himself. We see Abraham personally involved in serving the Lord; he didn't just delegate it all to others.
  - a. Abraham personally selected the calf for the meal.
  - b. Abraham set the meal before his guests and then stood by, ready to serve as the needs arose (Vs. 8).
3. **Generously** – Abraham gave his best for the Lord and served with excellence.
  - a. "Make ready quickly three measures of **fine meal**" (Vs. 6)
  - b. "a calf tender and good" (Vs. 7a)
  - c. "he took butter and milk" (Vs. 8a)
  - d. Give God your best, not your left overs! God deserves the best of our time, talent and treasure. He is worthy of it!
  - e. John Butler notes, "A number of professing believers like to think they are serving the Lord, but their giving often betrays them. They are stingy and miserly... They know little about sacrifice in giving. They not only give little in quantity, but they also give little in quality. They reserve the best for themselves and give God what they do not want... These folk are concerned the church

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might give too much money to a visiting missionary, while they wine and dine in the most expensive restaurants. They begrudge the pastor and evangelist a salary anywhere close to their salary, yet they expect these servants of God to work twice as many hours a week as they themselves do. When an unexpected, special offering is solicited for some worthy occasion, they will not, like Abraham, get the best from the heard and give it to the Lord; but they will instead be very slow in opening their pocketbooks. And when they do, it will not be in the category of “tender and good” but more like tight and grudgingly.”

4. **Immediately** – Abraham was willing to serve even though it was during the “heat of the day” and the customary time for rest (Vs. 1). Abraham’s schedule was submitted to the Lord’s schedule. He served the Lord without delay! If you delay serving the Lord until it becomes “convenient” for you to do so, you probably won’t end up serving the Lord much at all. This is why so many believers don’t serve. They don’t want any inconvenience to their personal schedules.
5. **Diligently** – Abraham served the Lord with promptly and efficiently. This was no half-hearted, drag-your-feet kind of service.
  - a. He “**ran** to meet them” (Vs. 2). Not bad for a 99-year-old!
  - b. He “**hastened** into the tent unto Sarah” (Vs. 6).
  - c. He “ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf” (Vs. 7).
  - d. While we do not want to approach Christian service with the Martha spirit of rushing around in the flesh, we do want to serve with Spirit-filled diligence.
6. **Cooperatively** – Abraham worked with and inspired others to work with him.
  - a. He involved his wife in ministering to the Lord (Vs. 6). Note: Sarah was available as his helpmeet and was clearly a good cook and homemaker. She wasn’t working in another’s man’s tent somewhere! In a day when women are encouraged to be “professional” and “skilled” in so many areas, we are sadly losing the biblical “profession” and “skills” that really matter for a Christian woman.
  - b. He involved a young man in ministering to the Lord (Vs. 7). A good leader not only serves himself but encourages others to serve also. Some Christians approach Christian service as lone rangers. They are autonomous and independent and can’t be counted on to get in the harness with others.
7. **Hospitably** – Abraham was serving the Lord through hospitality. This is another forgotten art in the realm of Christian service but an important and a biblical one.
  - a. Pastors are to be “given to hospitality” (1 Tim. 3:2) and “lovers of hospitality” (Titus 1:8).
  - b. Christians are to extend hospitality to the saints.
    - i. Romans 12:13 “Distributing to the necessity of the saints; **given to hospitality.**”

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- ii. 1 Peter 4:9 “**Use hospitality one to another** without grudging.”
- iii. Acts 2:46 “And they (the Jerusalem church), continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat** with gladness and singleness of heart,” The early church is noted for the practice of hospitality.
- c. Believers are to extend hospitality to strangers. Hebrews 13:2 “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”
- d. By lovingly serving others, we serve Jesus Christ our Lord (Matt. 25:34-40), and we promote the spread of God’s truth (3 John 5-8).

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### II. TRUSTS IN THE LORD’S PROMISES (VS. 9-15)

God again speaks to Abraham about His promise of a son but this time in Sarah’s presence. Abraham had come to a place of trust in God’s promise but God detected unbelief in Sarah’s heart and graciously comes to draw it out and deal with it. Sarah is the primary one in focus in these verses.

#### A. The Revelation to Sarah (Vs. 9-10)

- 1. God made a point of asking where Sarah was located. The promise was spoken to Abraham but it appears it was the Lord’s intention that Sarah hear it also.
- 2. God promised that Sarah would have a son within a year (compare Gen. 17:21 and 18:10).

#### B. The Response of Sarah (Vs. 11-12)

- 1. Abraham and Sarah were now aged (Abraham 100 and Sarah 90). Sarah’s monthly cycle had ended so it was humanly impossible for her to conceive (Vs. 11).
- 2. Sarah was well aware of this and responds to the Lord’s promise in her heart with laughter and scepticism. Sarah was human and was looking at the impossibility of the situation from man’s point of view. We all naturally tend to walk by sight rather than by faith!
- 3. There is one spiritual point revealed in Sarah’s thoughts that the New Testament picks up in 1 Peter 3:6 – she used the term ‘lord’ in reference to her husband. This was a term of respect. It would equate to something like ‘Mr’ or ‘Sir’ in our vocabulary today. The same word is used by Lot in Genesis 19:2 when speaking to the two angels – “Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night...”
- 4. Note: There are some who suggest titles of respect are not biblical and that we should call everyone by their first name. This is not a biblical concept. We should be prepared to use titles of respect.

#### C. The Rebuke of Sarah (Vs. 13-15)

God asks two questions in response to Sarah’s scepticism and also makes a further affirmation of His plan.

- 1. The Omniscience of the Lord (Vs. 13)

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- a. We are reminded that the Lord knows our hearts, including our inmost thoughts and feelings.
  - b. We are reminded that "...all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13)
  - c. Note: It is interesting that God addresses the question to Abraham, not Sarah. Perhaps because he bore a measure of responsibility as head of the home for his wife's spiritual temperature?
  - d. Note: Sometimes in a marriage, you have a situation where one is stronger in faith and godliness than the other, even though both know the Lord. In marriage, strive to be on the same page spiritually!
2. The Omnipotence of the Lord (Vs. 14)
    - a. The question concerning the Lord's Omnipotence (Vs. 14a). The answer is implied in the question. Nothing is too hard for the Lord! God specializes in things thought impossible. The answer to this question is found in Jeremiah 32:17 – "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, **and there is nothing too hard for thee:**" The answer is found in Matthew 19:26 – "...with God, all things are possible.
    - b. The affirmation of the Lord's Omnipotence (Vs. 14b). God reaffirms that He WILL do exactly as He said He would do. God says what He means and means what He says.
    - c. When we doubt the Lord, we are really questioning His Veracity and Ability. Does He keep His promises? Does He have the power to do what He says He will do?
  3. The Objection of Sarah (Vs. 15). Sarah denies that she laughed. Denial is often our first response to a rebuke from the Lord but the Lord again affirms the truthfulness of what He has said.
- D. The Revival of Sarah (Heb. 11:11)**
1. Sarah's life should be an encouragement to all of us that a season of unbelief and doubt does not have to be permanent. We can move from unbelief to faith by God's grace. It is possible to have our name moved from the register of the faithless to the hall of faith!
  2. Hebrews 11:11 gives us some insight into the change of heart that took place in Sarah. It appears she responded to the Lord's rebuke in the end and began to exercise faith, like her husband, that God would do as He had promised. "**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.**"

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### III. LEARNS OF THE LORD'S PLANS (VS. 16-21)

In these verses we learn of the thoughts of God towards Abraham and His determination to reveal His plans. It highlights the closeness between Abraham and God. John 15:15 "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for

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all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” “If we live near God, we shall have many things revealed to us which are hidden from the wise and prudent.” (Meyer)

### A. Why God Revealed His Plan to Abraham (Vs. 17-18)

God would reveal His plan to Abraham because of:

1. Abraham's Influence (Vs. 17-18)
  - a. God's plan was to make Abraham a great nation and bless the nations through him. Therefore, God wanted Abraham to have knowledge of his ways so that he could influence coming generations.
  - b. God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would be a significant display of Divine Justice that would go down as a marker in Biblical history so it was important that Abraham and his descendants have an understanding of what God was doing.
  - c. What an amazing thought that God Almighty desired to share His heart with Abraham His friend about what He was about to do.

### 2. Abraham's Integrity (Vs. 19)

This is a tremendous statement of confidence from the Lord and concerning Abraham's godly character. What an incredible vote of confidence from the Lord Himself! God was confident in:

- a. Abraham's leadership of the home (Vs. 19a)
  - i. What happens in the Christian home is of great interest and importance to Almighty God.
  - ii. That the home be structured and ordered according to God's Design is of great importance to Almighty God and God's plan is for the husband/father to be the head of his home and "command" his children and his household. God will reveal Himself to such a man!
  - iii. A godly father is to be actively interested and involved in the affairs of the home and the training of his children. The wife and the children need to be submitted to God's model for the Christian home.
  - iv. 1 Cor. 11:3 "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God."
- b. Abraham's followership in the home (Vs. 19b)
  - i. God knew that Abraham and his family would walk in holiness and obedience. It is interesting that God specifically mentions that they would keep His way "to do **justice** and **judgment**." So, God wanted Abraham to learn something of His justice and judgment through God's just dealings with the cities of the plain.
  - ii. Because of this, God would bless Abraham and fulfill his promises. Obedience brings blessing from the Heavenly Father's hand!

### B. What God Revealed of His Plan to Abraham (Vs. 20-21)

#### 1. The iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah (Vs. 20)

The depth of the depravity in these cities is described in two ways:

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- a. “the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great” = a descriptive way of describing the wickedness of these cities. The sin and its associated suffering came up before God like a great cry. Cain’s sin in murdering his brother Abel is described in similar terms (Gen. 4:10). The angels who came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah use the same terminology (Gen. 19:13). “There, far down the valley, bathed in the radiance of the westering sun, lay the guilty cities, still and peaceful. No sound travelled to the patriarch’s ear... Quiet though Sodom seemed in the far distance, and in the hush of the closing day; yet to God there was a cry. The cry of the earth compelled to carry such a scar. The cry of inanimate creation, groaning and travailing in pain. The cry of the oppressed, the down-trodden – the victims of human violence and lust. The cry of the maiden, the wife, and the child. These were the cries which had entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. And each sin has a cry (example of Cain & Abel). And, if each sin has a cry, what must not be the volume of sound for a life, and for a city!” (F.B. Meyer)
  - b. “their sin is very grievous” = it means their sin was very severe and serious. No matter how much our wicked society tries to normalise and whitewash the sins of Sodom, God has not changed. The sins of Sodom are just as abominable and repugnant to our Holy God as they were in Abraham’s day and our nation promotes them at our great peril. God is not asleep to the cry of our sins that rises up before His throne.
  - c. Abraham knew more about Sodom’s future than the citizens themselves, including Lot. It is the separated believer who shares God’s secrets. (See Psalm 25:14)
2. The investigation of Sodom and Gomorrah (Vs. 21)
- a. To emphasise that the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah will be according to God’s perfect Omniscience, the Lord describes His actions in investigative terms. The language is similar in reference to the tower of Babel (See Gen. 11:5).
  - b. This is what is referred to by Theologians as an Anthropomorphism; that is, God revealing Himself in terms we can understand as humans. It is calculated to impress upon our minds the fact that God’s judgment will be according to perfect knowledge of the situation.
  - c. Henry Morris explains, “It was not, of course, that God could not know the full facts without actually going down into the city, since He is Omniscient. He no doubt did this for appearance’s sake, that men might know directly that God had actually seen the full situation before He acted in judgment.”
  - d. God’s checking on Sodom does not imply that He is ignorant of what is going on. Rather “God chooses this mode of procedure to make apparent the fact that He, as Just Judge of all the earth, does nothing without first being in full possession of all facts” (Leupold)

*To be continued in next message...*

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#### **IV. INTERCEDES IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE (VS. 22-33)**

##### **A. The Motivation behind Intercessory Prayer (Vs. 23, 25)**

Abraham was motivated by:

1. A concern for the righteous.
2. A concern for God's honour.

##### **B. The Method of Intercessory Prayer (Vs. 22-33)**

Abraham's prayer of intercession is rich in instruction for us on this aspect of prayer. Some of the lessons we note are as follows:

1. Intercessory prayer takes place in the context of a relationship with Almighty God (Vs. 22)
2. Intercessory prayer takes place in God's presence (Vs. 22)
3. Intercessory prayer involves drawing near to God (Vs. 23)
4. Intercessory prayer involves appealing to God's character (Vs. 23-25)
5. Intercessory prayer is motivated by a concern for the reputation of God (Vs. 25)
6. Intercessory prayer is motivated by a concern for the righteous (Vs. 23-25, 28, 29, 30, 32).
7. Intercessory prayer requires persistence before God.
8. Intercessory prayer needs to be approached with humility and reverence.
9. Intercessory prayer involves boldness and confidence before God.
10. Intercessory prayer brings great and miraculous answers from God.  
Genesis 19:29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, **that God remembered Abraham**, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

#### **Conclusion:**

1. Are you a child of God? You cannot be a friend of God without first being born again.
2. If you are saved, are you pursuing a friendship with the Saviour? Do we serve our Heavenly Friend? Do we trust His promises to us? Do we seek His help?