

Abraham, God's Friend

Genesis 18

At several points in Scripture, we learn that Abraham was “God’s friend” (Isaiah 41.8; 2 Chronicles 20.7; James 2.23). This concept can be misused to bring God low. Biblically, it speaks of a close relationship. It shows us that we can come to know God as we can come to know a friend.

Throughout these chapters of Genesis, Abraham is learning to walk with God (Genesis 17.2). In this chapter, God sends “three men” to the patriarch and Sarah (Genesis 18.2). We again see the interplay between God’s promises, man’s response, and God’s granting increased clarity of His Word.

While the precise identities of the three men are unclear, they speak for the LORD (Genesis 18.13). Does this indicate a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity? This would explain the reference to “the two angels” in Genesis 19.2.

Abraham welcomes God into his life.

Upon meeting these three men, Abraham instinctively bowed down and recognized God’s presence (Genesis 18.2-3). He then shows them hospitality, offering refreshments and rest. In short, Abraham wants God to be present in his life (Genesis 18.4-8).

The appearance of the “three men” serve to encourage Sarah’s faith. Before they announce the word about a son to be born in a year, they make sure Sarah can hear their conversation (Genesis 18.9).

Given her advanced age, Sarah “laughed to herself” about having a baby (Genesis 18.12; Cf. Genesis 17.17). It has now been 24 years since God first communicated the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12.4, 18.10, 21.5). Did Abraham fail to bring Sarah along (Genesis 18.13)? The LORD knew what Sarah was thinking so He rebuked her for lying (Genesis 18.13-15).

Abraham’s welcoming of these guests leads to spiritual growth in his home. They gain clarity on God’s promise.

We, too, are asked to invite God into our lives (John 14.23).

Abraham prays boldly to the Lord.

When Abraham learns that Sodom will be judged, he draws near to God and prays (Genesis 18.23). Though Abraham does not mention him by name, he is probably concerned for his nephew, Lot (Cf. Genesis 19.29).

While Abraham struggles with God's judgment, he knows that God is the Just Judge (Genesis 18.25). Abraham knows God will ultimately distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.

Abraham prays respectfully showing an awareness of his own creatureliness (Genesis 18.27). Abraham's concern about God being "angry" shows his understanding of God's authority (Genesis 18.30, 18.32).

The back and forth between God and Abraham is not a negotiation, but rather an illustration of how a faithful person speaks to God. In prayer, we appeal to God's character to work in our circumstances.

Do we intercede for godless people? Do we believe that the Judge of all the earth will do what is just? Do we see the justice and mercy of God meeting in the cross of Jesus Christ?

Key Idea: Invite God in and cultivate a life of prayer

Application Questions:

How does Abraham receive these guests? What do we learn from him about keeping fellowship with the Lord? How does this relate to the biblical idea of Abraham being "God's friend" (Isaiah 41.8; 2 Chronicles 20.7; James 2.23)? How does this connect to Jesus calling his followers "friends" (John 15.13-15)?

Why does God tell Abraham about Sodom's impending destruction (Genesis 18.16-21)?

What are the marks of Abraham's intercession for Sodom?

In Genesis 18.14 we get the rhetorical question "Is anything too hard for the Lord"? How does believing in God's power impact our lives?