

Genesis 18:1-33

After 13 years of silence, God renewed His covenant with Abraham, and assured him that the son of promise would soon be his.

Genesis 17:19 **"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."**

So Abraham waited patiently for God's next move, which, as it turned out, came in a most unusual way.

Genesis 18:1-3 **"And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;**

2: And he lift up his eyes and looked,
and, lo, three men stood by him: and
when he saw them, he ran to meet them
from the tent door, and bowed himself
toward the ground,

3: And said, My Lord, if now I have
found favour in thy sight, pass not
away, I pray thee, from thy servant."

V 1 says that "--**the LORD** appeared unto
him," and then V 2 indicates that
"three men stood by him."

So I think it is reasonable to assume that
"the LORD" was one of these three men
and was probably the pre-incarnate
Christ.

And who were the other two men?

Well, we don't have to guess about that, for
it becomes apparent as we read on, that
they were angels.

Obviously then, something very unusual and very wonderful was happening.

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This was not the first time that the Lord had appeared to Abraham, but for the most part, His previous manifestations had been in the form of a dream or vision.

However, this time it was different.

God, in the person of His Son, actually appeared in a physical body.

As far as we know, this had never happened before, and would never happen again, at least until Christ became flesh and dwelt among us.

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The men first appeared during **"the heat of the day."**

No doubt the tent door was a good place to be at that particular time of the day. Abraham could benefit from the shade of the tent flap while being refreshed by any breeze that might be stirring on the plain.

Actually, we don't know when the real significance of this visit dawned upon him.

However, it seems that Abraham at least suspected right from the beginning that these three individuals were no ordinary men.

First of all, the words in V 2, "**he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him,**" seems to indicate that they had suddenly appeared on the road while he was looking in that direction.

Whatever the case, Abraham was certainly excited, for, in spite of the fact that he was 100 years old, he **"ran to meet them."**

Yes, he definitely considered them to be special company, and he was definitely in good shape for a man of his age.

And not only did he *run* to meet them, but he **"bowed himself toward the ground,"** which would show great respect.

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V 3-5 **"And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:
4: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:
5: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that**

**ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye
come to your servant. And they said, So
do, as thou hast said."**

It was characteristic of this man to be very
hospitable.

Indeed, in New Testament times, Abraham was
held up as an example of hospitality to
the early church.

Hebrews 13:2 **"Be not forgetful to entertain
strangers: for thereby some have
entertained angels unawares."**

So, on the spur of the moment, Abraham
invited all three men for dinner.

And amazingly enough, the Son of God
accepted his invitation--**"So do, as
thou hast said."**

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Abraham's meal was as generous as his
invitation.

It wasn't leftovers, or even fast food,
although I must say it was prepared at
a moment's notice.

V 6 **"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth."**

Yes, at Abraham's insistence, Sarah quickly baked fresh bread for these unexpected guests.

Just a word of advice to the men.

Don't try that trick on your wife. You're not Abraham, you know.

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And he also made arrangements for fresh steak to be served.

V 7 **"And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and**

gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it."

There's that old man running again, and in the heat of the day, no less, and all the way out to the field and back.

I can just hear Sarah saying, *Slow down or you're going to have a heart attack.*

V 8 **"And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat."**

Yes, he personally served them.

Sarah could have done it, and he had lots of servants to do that very thing, but Abraham insisted on doing it himself.

And, after running all that way to the field and back, he didn't even sit down at the table with his guests.

No, he stood there on duty in case they might need something.

Earlier on, when God had talked to him about the Abrahamic Covenant, he had fallen on his face and remained prostrate in the dust.

But now he stood on his feet as the host, while God and His companions ate at Abraham's table.

Can you imagine the feelings that were surging through Abraham's being as he stood there and watched the Lord having dinner at his table?

What an unforgettable day this had turned out to be!

And as his guests made normal dinner conversation, he probably wondered when the real purpose of the Lord's visit would be revealed.

And then it happened!

V 9 **"And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent."**

Of course the LORD already knew where Sarah was, and perhaps Abraham did also.

Abraham said, **"in the tent,"** which was the truth, but not a completely accurate answer.

Actually, she was on their side of the tent, and she was eavesdropping!

The Lord *knew* that, and as He continued His conversation, I wouldn't be surprised if there was a bit of a smile on His face.

Did He have news for her!!

V 10 **"And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall**

have a son---(with those words, Abraham
knew immediately who his guest was---
**And Sarah heard it in the tent door,
which was behind him."**

You know, that must have blown her away.

V 11-12 **"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and
well stricken in age; and it ceased to
be with Sarah after the manner of
women.**

**12: Therefore Sarah laughed within
herself, saying, After I am waxed old
shall I have pleasure, my lord being
old also? "**

Behind the curtain and behind her visitors'
back, she felt quite safe.

Besides all that, she was only laughing to
herself, but she got caught.

And she was not laughing for joy either, as her husband had done. She was laughing in unbelief.

V 13-14 **"And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?**

14: Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Poor Sarah was so surprised that she blurted out, *No, I didn't!*

That's about what V 15 says, doesn't it?

"Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh."

He rebuked her, but He did not punish her,
and one day her faith would be as
strong as her husband's.

Hebrews 11:11 tells us, "**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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Genesis 18:16 "**And the men rose up from
thence, and looked toward Sodom: and
Abraham went with them to bring them on
the way.**"

Abraham probably noticed that they were
heading towards Sodom.

Why would such a group of men ever want to
visit such a wicked city?

Surely there was trouble ahead.

And then the Lord lagged behind as the two angels walked on down the road.

As we have already mentioned, it seems obvious that Abraham was talking to Christ.

And certainly what He said next was very characteristic of Christ's way of doing things.

And what was Christ's way of doing things?

Well, do you remember what He said to His disciples in John 15:14?

He said, "**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.**"

So first of all, being a friend of Christ is quite different from being a friend of anyone else.

If you are to be His friend, you must also be His servant.

Yes, Jesus' friends are His *servants*, but His servants are always treated as His personal friends.

Reading on in John 15:15, Jesus said,

"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."

Yes, one sign of a true friend is that you can safely share your secrets with him or her.

And, in spite of Abraham's failings, he was God's true friend.

So the LORD was not going to leave His friend in the dark.

V 17-19 **"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;**

18: Seeing that Abraham shall surely 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 the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Apparently Abraham's godly control of his family and servants was one of his strong points.

That characteristic became very apparent in his ability to immediately obey God's command in regard to circumcision.

He simply said, *We must do this*, and everyone obeyed.

And God also wants Christian fathers to exercise godly leadership in their homes.

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So because of Abraham's excellent record in this regard, God wanted him to fully understand why He had decided to destroy Sodom.

God knew that in the days to come, Abraham would use that desolate plain as an object lesson to teach his children the awful consequences of sin.

V 20-21 **"And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because 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 unto me; and if not, I will know."**

God is omnipresent, so He did not really need to visit Sodom and Gomorrah personally to be aware of their sin.

So why did the pre-incarnate Christ say, **"I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."**

And for that matter, why did He need to visit Abraham on his way to Sodom?

Well, as we have just seen, God wanted Abraham to understand why He considered it necessary to destroy Sodom.

But there was a much more important reason for the Lord's visit than that.

God wanted to give Abraham the opportunity to intercede on their behalf.

Yes, if Abraham would be willing to speak for the inhabitants of Sodom, they

would never be able to say that they had not been given an advocate to plead their cause.

And also God's personal visit to the scene of the crime would sweep away any complaint of circumstantial evidence in the Day of Judgment.

Yes, God is righteous in all His dealings, even with the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

So you might say God gave them their day in court.

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No, the LORD hadn't updated Abraham just to keep him informed.

He was providing him with yet another benefit of friendship.

God was going to allow Abraham to give his input in determining the outcome of this matter.

And Abraham seemed to understand the unique position that the Lord had put him in. With complete confidence, he stood before the LORD as an intercessor on their behalf.

Of course it is obvious to everyone that Abraham's nephew was uppermost in his mind.

However, I think he was also concerned for the inhabitants, or at least for some of the inhabitants of Sodom.

Perhaps there might still be some in Sodom who had not succumbed to the wickedness of that city.

Also, we must not forget that Abraham knew some of these people personally, for at

one time he had saved them from captivity.

So, in the will of God, Abraham stood in the gap.

There was no hint of disrespect in his appeal, but with holy boldness he began to bargain.

V 23-24 " **And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?**

24: Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?"

This is the first example in scripture of intercessory prayer, and no doubt Abraham's petitions form a pattern and example for this ministry.

First of all, we should be aware of the fact that, in His heart, God really does not want to bring judgment.

Yes, He is ever willing to hear the prayer of those that would stand in the gap for the sinner.

And, although Abraham was highly reverent in his petitions, and was never presumptuous, he was persistent and definite.

The basis of Abraham's appeal centred on God's righteous nature and His loving kindness.

V 25 **"That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"**

Yes, Abraham based his whole argument on the character of God, and that is exactly what Moses would do when pleading for the idolatrous nation of Israel.

Abraham chose the firm ground of God's righteous judgment.

Moses built his case upon God's reputation as a deliverer.

We see Moses' appeal in Numbers 14:12-16.

God had said of Israel, **"I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.**

13: And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)

14: And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have

heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

15: Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

16: Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness."

Yes, Moses stayed God's hand of judgment by pleading His reputation as a deliverer.

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And in today's lesson, Abraham appealed to God's reputation as a righteous judge,

and questioned the moral correctness of slaying the righteous with the wicked.

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Now God does not need a man to keep Him on track.

He is ever the faithful deliverer and the righteous judge.

So why did the Lord ever allow Himself to be drawn into this conversation?

The fact is, God delighted in Abraham's intercession, for He is ever seeking for those that will *stand in the gap*.

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For example, when Israel sinned as a nation, God held off judgment, and actually looked for someone to be an intercessor on their behalf.

We see this in Ezekiel 22:30: **"And I sought for a man among them, that should make**

**up the hedge, and stand in the gap
before me for the land, that I should
not destroy it: but I found none."**

However, God had found a willing heart in Abraham, and He was pleased to consider his petitions and arguments.

V 26 **"And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."**

And then, unbelievably, Abraham begins to barter with God, and the LORD actually allowed him to do so.

V 27-32 **"And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:**

28: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou

destroy all the city for lack of five?
And he said, If I find there forty and
five, I will not destroy it.

29: And he spake unto him yet again,
and said, Peradventure there shall be
forty found there. And he said, I will
not do it for forty's sake.

30: And he said unto him, Oh let not
the Lord be angry, and I will speak:
Peradventure there shall thirty be
found there. And he said, I will not do
it, if I find thirty there.

31: And he said, Behold now, I have
taken upon me to speak unto the Lord:
Peradventure there shall be twenty
found there. And he said, I will not
destroy it for twenty's sake.

32: And he said, Oh let not the Lord be
angry, and I will speak yet but this

once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

We will never know whether God would have spared Sodom for five righteous.

After all, up to this point, the LORD hadn't refused any of Abraham's petitions.

But as it turned out, Abraham just stopped asking.

No doubt he thought he had gone far enough, and maybe that was prudent on his part.

Anyway, he probably thought that by now his nephew would surely be safe.

After all, Lot's immediate family would add up to at least 10.

Let's take a minute to count them.

There was Lot, his wife, and his two unmarried daughters at home.

That makes *four*.

Then, if we skip ahead to Chapter 19 and verse 14, we read, **"And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters--."**

I am told that the original text indicates a greater number than two, so the implication is that he had at least three sons in law, and, of course, three married daughters, which would bring the number up to at least 10.

However, V 14 tells us that he was totally ignored when he tried to warn them--
"he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law."

No, they just didn't take the old man seriously.

Certainly, God could not have said of Lot as He had said of Abraham--**"For I know him, that he will command his children**

and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD."

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So Abraham was content to stop at 10, being fully assured by God that 10 righteous would be sufficient to halt His judgment.

This teaches us an important lesson.

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Jesus told His followers--"**Ye are the salt of the earth.**"

Now salt is not only useful to make our food taste better.

In the days before refrigeration, salt was used to prevent decay.

If we stand up for the Lord, we can be pretty sure that we will not be popular with the world.

But, you know, our salty presence is a preservative, giving lost mankind another day of grace.

The unsaved may not appreciate the Christian, but they will never know the value of God's people in their midst.

Remember, 10 righteous would have averted Sodom's judgment and given them a little more time to repent.

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Returning to the subject of intercessory prayer, I would like to quote John Phillips' words concerning George Mueller:

"It was studying in Genesis 18 that taught saintly George Mueller of Bristol, that modern giant of faith, one of the most important secrets of prayer.

*It taught him to use argument in pleading
his case before God.*

*He would remind the Lord that the orphan
boys and girls entrusted to his care
were not his orphans, they were God's.
Had he not declared Himself to be the Father
of fatherless?*

It was God's work, not Mueller's.

He was but the instrument.

*If it were God's work, was not God bound to
take care of it?*

*Could God suffer His glory to be diminished?
Was not a half-believing church looking on
and a wholly unbelieving world?*

Must not God silence the jibing tongue?

*Must He not silence the scoffer and the
skeptic?*

*Thus George Mueller prayed and thus he
received truly astonishing answers from
God.*

*And thus Abraham prayed, besieging his
heavenly visitor with plea after plea."*

End of quote.

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Next week, we will be descending into the
city of sin, but today I would like to
stay on the higher ground.

So, for the rest of this lesson, we will
spend our time with Abraham up on the
plain of Mamre.

A few years previously, Abraham and Lot had
parted company.

Abraham chose the higher ground, the
separated life, rather than the
material prosperity of the well-watered
plain.

Up in the highlands, he could see the true picture of Sodom's future.

He had not obtained this information from the important men of that city who would have told him their stories of prosperity, the pleasures of society, and would have laughed heartily at any mention of judgment.

But here, where Abraham stood before the LORD, he could see the true situation.

Here he stood above the fogs and mists of Sodom, in the clearness and calmness of the Divine presence where he could understand it all.

And not only did he understand the situation, but he also had an audience with the Lord.

He had just received that long awaited
promise from the LORD, and would soon
be looking upon his son.

Had it not been for his backsliding nephew
and the few righteous that still might
be in Sodom, and the fact that their
welfare rested heavily upon his soul,
he could have stayed in his tent,
contemplating God's blessings.

But he could not forget them, so he used his
exalted position with God to become
their intercessor.

Abraham played his part well, but even he,
fearing lest he draw too heavily upon
the bank of heaven, ceased to ask, and
God ceased to give.

The principle is--"**According to your faith
be it unto you,**" isn't it?

As a result, Genesis 11:33 ends the chapter by telling us that "--**the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.**"

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Those of us, who like Abraham have been the recipients of God's blessings, must also use our exalted position to intercede for others.

Yes, the soul that can "**draw near to God**" in the assurance of faith, having the heart and conscience perfectly at rest, should be willing to intercede for others.

And, you know, the humblest saint that is so employed is a picture of his exalted Lord Who, at this very moment, is at

the right hand of the Father,
interceding for us.

But our Great High Priest, our Intercessor,
is not like Abraham who stopped short
at 10 righteous, as if God's mercy
would extend no farther.

No, Christ is **"able also to save them to the
uttermost that come unto God by him,
seeing he ever liveth to make
intercession for them."**

So we must draw upon His unlimited power for
our own lives, and we must be faithful
in our intercession for others.