

Union United Methodist Church
Fall FOCUS Bible School, 2022
FOCUS: Followers Of Christ Understanding Scripture
Study: Book of Genesis

Week 4: October 26, 2022

Intercession & Judgement: Sodom & Gomorrah

This Week's Study: **Genesis chapters 18 through 20**

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1. Recap & Reminder

- **Overview of Genesis**

The table below gives a breakdown of the chapters of Genesis, with themes that we shall be exploring in this study. We shall cover one theme per week. Our next week's study is Genesis 18 through 20 for the week.

From	To	Theme
1	4	Creation & The Fall, Original Sin
5	10	Adam through Noah: Judgement & New Covenant
11	14	Babel, A New Beginning in Abram
15	17	Abrahamic Covenants
18	20	Intercession & Judgement: Sodom & Gomorrah
21	25	Isaac - A Promise Fulfilled; Faithfulness Proven
26	30	Abrahamic Covenants: Second Generation - Jacob & Esau
31	36	Jacob's Family; Reconciliation with Esau
37	41	Abrahamic Covenants: Third Generation - Jacob's Children
42	47	Joseph & Migration to Egypt
48	50	Israel in Egypt, Death of Jacob

Please refer to last four week's outline and lectures for more background and to catch up. You can find these on our website: <https://unionumcnc.com>

2. Genesis 18 to 20 Overview

- **Genesis 18:1-5 Abraham's Three Visitors**

Shortly after the covenant renewal in chapter 17, and before the promised Isaac is born, Abraham and Sarah are visited by three persons. The visit and what transpires after that is the subject of chapter 18.

1The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground." 18:1-3NRSV

- **Who Were the Three Visitors?**

The text indicates a **physical appearance of divine being/agents**, in human form, to Abraham and Sarah. As we read in the text, two of the beings were angels (19:1) and one was The Lord ("Adonai").

A few points to note:

- **Abraham did not initiate this contact or appearance of the Lord.**
It was completely at the discretion of the Lord. Abraham was cooling himself "as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day" -v1

This is a reminder of what Jesus told his disciples in John 14

"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." John 14:21 NRSV

Abraham clearly fulfilled the pre-conditions for divine revelation:

- they had God's commandments (move to Canaan, change of name, circumcision, etc.)
- their obedience to God's commandments was indication of their love for God
- thus, the Lord continued to reveal himself to Abraham and Sarah

- **Abraham recognized that they were divine agents**

We see this from Abraham's stunning reaction - running to meet them, bowing down. It seems clear that Abraham had had encounters like this before - in his long walk with God

Question: *Do we have such a fellowship with God that we can recognize God or his divine agents showing up before us?*

- The divine agents just appeared - seemingly out of nowhere
"2He [Abraham] looked up and saw three men standing near him" NRSV
There seems to be a curtain that separates the spiritual world from the physical world that we know.

- **Genesis 18:2-8 Abraham's Reaction on Seeing the Visitors**

- **Enthusiastic Reverence**

"When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground." - v2

Abraham was not exactly young - he was 99 years old at this point. But his excitement and reverence are palpable.

- How do we behave when in the presence of the Lord?
- Do we show reverence?
- Are we mindful of the Lord's presence with us, individually and when we come together?
- Jesus said:
"where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Matthew 18:20 NRSV

- **At the Lord's Service**

Abraham immediately put himself at the Lord's service. He begged to be allowed to serve the divine visitors.

3He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 18:3-5 NRSV

The Lord was clearly pleased, and said, "Do as you have said."

Abraham and Sarah set a great example of reference and service for us here. Even though they were wealthy and had servants,

- *Abraham insisted Sarah should take charge of the meal preparation*
6And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes."
- *Abraham took personal charge of the preparation to serve the visitors*
7Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it.

Abraham chose the best for the Lord.

- *Abraham served the meal himself and stood by at their beck and call.*
8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

○ **Some Lessons for us include**

- **We should be very hospitable - even to strangers**
2Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured
- **We should love and give our best to the Lord**
- **We show love for God**

● **Genesis 18:9-15 Blessings of the Visit**

After taking care of the divine visitors, the Lord in turn blessed Abraham and Sarah. These were mainly practical reaffirmations of the covenant renewal promises of Genesis 17.

○ **Clearly this was the Lord - who knew them by name**

9They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

- **Covenant Promise of Isaac (Genesis 17:21) Reiterated**

In Genesis 17:21 the Lord had said to Abraham,

"my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

Now the Lord reaffirmed this promise:

10Then one said, "I will surely return to you **in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.**" And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

Note: "in due season"

A reminder of this verse in the NT:

"let us not grow weary while doing good, for **in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.** 10Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Galatians 6:9 NKJV

- **Sarah's Doubt & Amazement, Fear Reaction, The Lord's Reaction**

Interestingly, the promise of Isaac was emphatically made to Abraham earlier in Genesis 17:21. Did Sarah believe it then?

10Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. **11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"** NRSV

Sarah laughed, but it is not clear that it is because she did not believe what the Lord said. It seemed to be a laugh of incredulity or amazement tinged with doubt.

The dialogue that follows is interesting:

13The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." 15But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Interesting points:

- The Lord can hear and see what we say and do in secret
 - The Lord was firm in his promise - he repeated it in the face of Sarah's obvious doubt
 - Sarah told a lie out of fear - fear can have that effect. One more reason not to act in fear
 - The Lord clearly did not ignore the lie but was merciful.
- **Genesis 18:16-33 The Lord's Purpose Revealed; Abraham's Intercession for Sodom & Gomorrah**

The Lord clearly appeared to Abraham at this point for a purpose. At this point, after the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, the reaffirmation of covenant promises, etc. the Lord reveals why the divine agents appeared so suddenly to them.

- **Why God Chose Abraham**

The Lord did not want to hide his purposes from Abraham. Why?

17The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?19No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the

way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” NRSV

- *Abraham was God’s partner in blessing the world.*
So, God did not want to hide anything from him.
- *God chose Abraham to pass on the ways the Lord to his descendants.*

*As Christians, why have we been called to be the Christians?
Has God changed in this respect? Are we not called to a similar
purpose, to be partners of the Lord to bless the world, and to pass on
the Lord’s ways to our families and descendants?*

- **The Lord’s Purpose Revealed**

It was time for judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah.

20Then the Lord said, **“How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! 21I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.” NRSV**

- We see here something about God’s nature and ways. God does not just punish sin – he gives people a chance to repent. And God’s judgements are right – after God has been merciful and patient, sometimes for a very long time.
- Recall: **Judgement - Reason for Possession of Canaan by Abram’s Descendants**
“the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” 15:16 NIV

God is just, and judgement eventually comes if people do not repent.

- For us, there is a future judgement as well. This is why we must preach the gospel and intercede on behalf of others.

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. **9The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,** and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.”

2 Peter 3:8-10 NRSV

- **Abraham’s Intercession for Sodom & Gomorrah**

- Recall: God’s ears are open to the prayers of the righteous

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.” 1 Peter 3:12, Psalm 34:15 NRSV

- In telling Abraham about the impending judgement on Sodom & Gomorrah, God was giving Abraham a chance to intercede for them.

18:22So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

- Note how Abraham pleads his case with God:

23Then Abraham came near and said, **“Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” 26And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.”** Genesis 18:23-26 NRSV

32Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I

will not destroy it." 33And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

- **Genesis 19:1-23 Lot, the Angels, and the Men of Sodom**

- **Lot's Journey**

- ***Lot first went to live near Sodom after parting from Abraham***

11So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: **12Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.** 13Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

Genesis 13:11-12 NIV

- ***By this point, Lot was clearly living in Sodom***

"The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and **Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom.**" Genesis 19:1 NRSV

- ***He became vexed with his righteous soul - he hurt himself***

"**Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)**" 2 Peter 2:7-8 NIV

- **Lot's Reaction to Angel Visit: Similar to Abraham's**

When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the square." 3But he urged them strongly; so **they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.**" NRSV

- Lot's breeding in Abraham's household stood him in good stead
 - Lot recognized the divine agents - he had been with Abraham
 - Lot was hospitable.
- **Sodom & Gomorrah's Sins Become Apparent**
 - **Recall: God is a righteous God, a holy God.**
 - Oxford Learner's Dictionary definition of righteous:
 - **"morally right and good"**
 - **a righteous God**
 - Miriam-Webster dictionary defines "righteous" (adjective):
 - "acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin"
 - **What is Sin?**

Sin is breaking God's moral laws.

The law referred to in 1 John 3:4 is divine moral law

4Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 5But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 6No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

1 John 3:4-6 NIV

- **Sodom & Gomorrah's Sins**

19:4But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; 5and they called to Lot, **"Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them."** 6Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, 7and said, **"I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.** 8Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9But they replied, **"Stand back!"** And they

said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. NRSV

Their sins include:

- Sexual depravity
- Ungodliness (2 Peter 2:6)
- Lawless deeds (2 Peter 2:8)

- **Genesis 19:23-29: Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah**

- **God mercifully spared Lot and his wife and daughters**

- 15When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city.

- **The Angels did not enact judgement until Lot and his daughters were safe**

- even a small city, Zoar, was spared because of them - v17-23

- **Lot's wife did not obey the angels' instructions and looked back - she turned to a pillar of salt - v26**

- **Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire rained down from above - v24-28**

- **God remembered Abraham and spared Lot**

- 29So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, **God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow,** when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled.

- **2 Peter 2:1-16 is a great exposition of what happened with Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah, and God's attitude to sin and why judgement eventually comes.**

- **Genesis 19:30-36: Lot and his end - Moabites & Ammonites**

For additional study. What was Lot's end?

- **Genesis 20 Abraham's "Sarah is my sister" Ploy - Part 2**

This is almost a repeat of Abraham and Sarah's problems in Egypt - this time we see Abimelech and his household in trouble because he took Sarah as his wife when Abraham said she was his sister. Is there any truth to what Abraham said about Sarah being his sister? What do we discover in this chapter about how Abraham and Sarah are related? How are Abimelech and his family affected and how do they recover?

3. Daily Study Schedule & Questions

- **Day 1 & 2: Genesis 18:1-8 Abraham's Three Visitors**

As you read and study the verses, here are some suggestions of themes to reflect on - see the cross-references in other scripture:

- Abraham and Sarah's hospitality
- The role of reverence and hospitality in our faith
- How we are to reverence God in our daily lives, in Church, with other Christians
- How we make ourselves available to the Lord, to serve the Lord and live for God
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- **Day 2: Genesis 18:9-15 Blessings of the Visit**

Suggested reflection themes:

- How did God reaffirm the covenant promises to Abraham and Sarah?
- Why did Sarah laugh at the promise of Isaac?
- The necessity of revisiting God's promises to us over and over again
- How God responds to our reverence and giving our best for the Lord

- **Day 3: Genesis 18:16-33 The Lord's Purpose Revealed; Abraham's Intercession for Sodom & Gomorrah**

Suggested reflection themes:

- What are God's expectations of us as Christians in blessing others?
- How God related to Abraham - how does God want to relate to us?
- What power we have in prayer - cross reference James 5:13-18
- God's expectations of us as Christians in our families

- What changes are needed in our prayer lives and attitudes to our own family?
- **Day 4: Genesis 19: Lot, the Angels, and the Men of Sodom, Judgement**
Suggested reflection themes:
 - Lot's journey and where and how he ended up
 - God's views on sin
 - Judgement and God's mercy
 - Importance of obedience (e.g. in the case of Lot's wife)
 - God's mercy to Lot because of Abraham
 - How God can spare our loved ones because of us
- **Day 5: Genesis 20 Abraham's "Sarah is my sister" Ploy - Part 2**
Suggested reflection themes
 - Why Abraham felt the need to use the "Sara is my sister" excuse.
 - Was the fear justified in view of God's protection and blessing
 - How Abimelech and his family were impacted as a result
 - How God protected Sarah