

What's the Message – Lesson Fourteen

Today's study shows us that Yahweh is both a God of promise, as well as a God of justice.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Once again we pray that the Lord will use this study to enrich your understanding of God's promises and blessings on us, and to enable you to obey His will. For He will deliver justice upon those who continue to disobey Him. Amen

Last time we introduced the material aspect of God's promises to Abraham, and the proper use of those gifts. Today we study Genesis chapters 18 and 19, chapters which relate two distinctly different events in the life of Abraham. These events begin on a hot day, as Abraham sat at the door of his tent, which had been set up by the great oak trees of Mamre in the highlands of central Palestine.

Three visitors suddenly appear before him, and in keeping with the oriental traditions of his people, Abraham quickly began preparations to be a host to them with a fine meal.

Our Greek-oriented minds want to know how Abraham became aware that these were other-worldly visitors, one of whom was the Lord God Himself, but we are not given this explanation. What we are told is that during the course of the meal the Lord repeated His promise of a son for Abraham by saying: *“I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.”*

Although Sarah was keeping out of sight behind the tent flap, she was well within hearing range, and when she heard this promise, she laughed to herself for she knew full well that she was past the normal child-bearing years. Then the Lord responds with this admonition in verse 13: *“Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’*

Then He added: *“Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

After the meal the visitors departed and headed toward the city of Sodom, where Lot had taken up residence. And the Lord reveals to Abraham that He is about to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness. Then we have this fascinating little bargaining between Abraham and the Lord about destroying the innocent with the wicked, and on the surface it appears that Abraham has struck a deal with God that if only 10 righteous people are found in the city, it will not be destroyed.

Of course, we all know that there were no righteous to be found other than Lot and his family, and we also see that even they weren't very good examples. Nevertheless, God would spare them if they would only obey His instructions. But even one little restriction was more than Lot's wife could obey, and she also suffered the consequences of disobedience.

And so the cities and the areas around Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone – “with all the inhabitants, and everything that grew from the ground” – because their wickedness was so great. In brief summary, those are the highlights of the visit by God to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. But what does it all mean? Teacher, what guidance does it give us today?

As you said, these are two distinct events, each with their own lessons for us. First, there is the doubting of Sarah. She knew that it would take a miracle for her to bear a child at her age, and she just could not bring herself to believe that something like that could ever happen.

Don't we all face events similar to this during our lifetimes? Aren't we all tested with events in our lives where things that we want to happen are completely beyond our control? Do we trust that God will care for us, and use events for our eternal good, or do we laugh to cover our doubt?

Sarah thought she was hidden from the Lord, and that her laughter was only to herself. But nothing is hidden from God, and He reproved her because of her doubt. It may seem ironic to us that the name given to this promised son, Isaac, means “laughter” or “he laughs.”

It is best that we remember God's words to Abraham here: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Faith is what God calls for, not doubt.

The second lesson for us is that although Yahweh is a God of mercy and forgiveness, He is also the God of justice. His "bargaining" with Abraham was to teach Abraham that God is always willing to forgive, . . . if we will but repent and obey. But when God is rejected, His punishment is sure, and it will come. The sins of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah "cried out to heaven."

Dr. Paul Kretzmann has written in regard to this story, that "sinners of our days will also find this out to their eternal sorrow." Then he adds, "And let us not forget that there is a sin which is even worse than that of the Sodomites, namely, that of rejecting Christ, His Word, and His grace."

Next time we will see the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah.

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