

Genesis Chapter 18 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 18 Overview:

The eighteenth chapter of Genesis describes two big events in the life of Abraham: (1) God's reappearance to Abraham and Sarah confirming the impending pregnancy of Sarah with Isaac in verses 1-15 and (2) God's announcement of judgment against Sodom followed by Abraham's intercession on its behalf for Lot's sake in verses 16-33.

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

- This event took place no longer than three months after those of chapter 17.
- Abraham was ninety-nine going on one-hundred years old.
- In Genesis 21:5 when Isaac was born, Abraham turned one-hundred years old.
- The place is the "plains of Mamre" which is Hebron and evidently had a grove of oak trees.
- He most likely had pitched his tent in that grove for shade.
- We have another Theophany recorded here - a physical appearance of God
- This may have even been a Christophany – a preincarnate appearing of Jesus Christ

Genesis 18 : 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.*

- It was midday and "*three men stood by him.*"
- The context makes clear the supernatural, divine nature of these three individuals.
- In fact, the text that follows makes clear one of the three is Jehovah (verse 13).
- If the position is assumed that Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament, what is described here is a Christophany.
- The question then remains who the other two 'men' were.
- Many believe that this is the historical basis for the comments made in **Hebrews 13:2** of entertaining strangers, "*for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*"
- The bible calls the other two 'angels' in Hebrews 13:2.
- Other theologians have taken the position the other two were the other two persons of the Trinity in the person of the Holy Spirit and the Father.
- However, that does not seem to fit with Hebrews 13:2.
- I believe that the three were a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ accompanied by two chosen angels.
- It appears that Abraham recognized the Lord.
- This would explain why Abraham responded to him so hospitably.
- Abraham realized the stature of his guests.
- He likely did not respond to all total strangers who showed up at his place this way.
- Notice that, "*he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.*"
- It is clear Abraham recognized at least one of his guests as the Lord.

Genesis 18 : 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.*

- Abraham asked his distinguished guests to stay.
- He immediately offered to them some middle-eastern hospitality.

Genesis 18 : 6-8 - *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. 7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. 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*

- Abraham asked his wife to bake fresh bread.
- He personally selected a choice calf and had it butchered for the best choice cuts.
- His guests rested under the shade of the oaks of Mamre
- Abraham set a dinner of fresh baked bread, choice veal, butter, and milk for them.
- The mention of Abraham standing by them under the tree implies that he himself served as their waiter.
- Both the Lord along with the accompanying angels actually ate physical food.
- They clearly had assumed temporary human bodies for the mission at hand.

Genesis 18 : 9 – 10 - *And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. 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. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.*

- They asked where his wife Sarah was.
- God announced that he would certainly return unto Abraham according to the time of life, and Sarah his wife would have a son.
- The **time of life** may be referring to the normal human gestation period of nine months.
- God's promise no longer was on the distant horizon.
- Its focus had now narrowed to the present.
- Though they had waited (at times with wavering faith) for twenty-four years, God clearly implied Sarah would be pregnant with Abraham's son *soon*.
- Three months earlier in Genesis 17:21, God had told them "*at this set time in the next year,*" Sarah would bear a son.
- Three months had evidently passed.
- Nine months were needed for the pregnancy.
- The promise was about to become fact.
- Sarah behind the tent door heard everything.

Genesis 18 : 11- *Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.*

- Abraham and Sarah "**were old and well stricken in age.**"

- The comment that it had “*ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women*” implies she had already gone through menopause.
- Conception therefore was humanly impossible.

Genesis 18 : 12 - *Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*

- As Sarah stood behind the tent door and heard the Lord’s prediction, she laughed and thought to herself, “*am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also.*”
- She knew that humanly she was beyond the point of conceiving a son, nursing him, and bringing him up.

Genesis 18 : 13- *And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?*

- Abraham evidently did not hear Sarah for she “*laughed within herself.*”
- But God heard her.
- He confronted them with the question, “*Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?*”

Genesis 18 : 14 - *Is anything 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.*

- And then God, removing any question of what was going to happen, asked “*Is anything too hard for the LORD.*”
- Though humanly impossible for Sarah to become pregnant, it was not too hard for God.
- Nothing is impossible with God.
- The “*time appointed*” likely is the time God announced in Genesis 17: 21 “*the set time.*”

Genesis 18 : 15 - *Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.*

- I am sure Sarah was embarrassed and now frightened.
- She therefore denied, saying, “*I laughed not; for she was afraid.*”
- Yet God confronted and corrected her about her doubting laughter and her lie.

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*

- The meeting was over.
- Again, Abraham’s visitors were referred to as ‘men.’
- Though they without question they were heavenly and at least one was Deity, they clearly were in human form.
- This is one of the clearest examples of a Theophany or Christophany in the Bible.
- As a good host, Abraham escorted them on their way.
- They looked toward Sodom, and they paused to confer.

Genesis 18 : 17 - *And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do.*

- Jehovah clearly is one of the three.
- As God, He already knew what He was going to do in regard to Sodom.

- Yet, he asked the advice of His two companions.
- Maybe they indeed were more than angels.
- This why some theologians believe that in fact the three may have been the Trinity.

Genesis 18 : 18 - *Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*

- Jehovah while conferring with his companions noted to them that Abraham would become a great nation and all other nations would be blessed in him.

Genesis 18 : 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.*

- How profound is the following statement: God *knew* Abraham.
- He **knew** he would command his children and his household to keep the way of the LORD
- He knew he would command them to do justice and judgment.
- God knew what Abraham would do not only from His omniscience, but also from observing Abraham over the years.
- The word translated as **justice** (hqud *zedek*) is the basic word otherwise translated as ‘**righteousness.**’
- The word translated as **judgment** (jpv *mishpat*) also has the sense of **doing justly.**
- God knew Abraham would train his children to do right and be just.
- This may be a hint as to why God chose Abraham in the first place.
- He knew what kind of a father he would be in training his children after him.

Genesis 18 : 20- *And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous.*

- The conversation by Jehovah to his companions now shifted back to the matter of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The word translated as **grievous** (dbk *kabawd*) has the sense of ‘**heavy**’ or ‘**weighty.**’
- In other words, the sin of Sodom was immense.
- God knew full well of their sin and He knew what He was going to do about it.
- However, for Abraham’s sake to show Himself just in His judgment, He gave the appearance of investigating the sin of Sodom.

Genesis 18 : 21-22 - *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. 22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.*

- The two companions of the Lord therefore departed for Sodom. However and evidently, the Lord lingered with Abraham.
- While the Lord’s two companions headed for Sodom, Abraham remained in His presence.
- Abraham’s purpose then becomes clear.
- He intended to intercede on behalf of his nephew Lot.

- There was no question in Abraham’s mind what God would find in Sodom and Gomorrah.
- And there was little question in his mind what God was going to do.
- Therefore, he began to plead with God.

Genesis 18 : 23- *And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*

- Though Abraham knew his nephew, Lot, had compromised himself in moving to Sodom, he still considered him as a man of God and righteous.
- So he asked God, “*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*”
- Then Abraham began to negotiate with God.

Genesis 18 :24 - *Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty right-eous that are therein?*

- If there were fifty righteous men would God spare them? Abraham asked

Genesis 18 : 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?*

- It is of interest that Abraham clearly *knew* the Lord.
- He pled his case with God on the basis of personal friendship.
- He pled that it was not in God’s character to judge the righteous with the wicked.
- Clearly they knew each other.
- What is implied is that Abraham had spent much time with God in the fellowship of prayer. H
- He had gotten to know the Lord and how He worked.

Genesis 18 : 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.*

- God said that he would spare the place for fifty righteous within the city.

Genesis 18 : 27-28 - *27 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.*

- Abraham, perhaps realizing how forward he had been with God, now humbled himself in referring to himself as “*dust and ashes.*”
- Nevertheless, he went on asking God to spare the city for forty-five righteous.
- God acknowledged that for forty-five righteous, He would not destroy it.

Genesis 18 : 29-32 - *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. 31 And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. 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.

- Abraham continued to bargain.
- He then pled for thirty.
- Then for twenty and finally ten.
- God promised that He would “***not destroy it for ten's sake.***”
- The irony of it was, Abraham knew there probably were not ten righteous in the city.
- Yet, he hoped against hope.
- As will later be noted Lot still had two daughters at home.
- That along with his wife made four.
- He also had *sons* in law.
- That implied at least two other daughters and their husbands.
- That was another four, maybe more.
- Those two married daughters likely may have had children.
- Lot's immediate family probably included at least ten persons in Sodom.
- Yet, there were not even ten righteous in that city.

Genesis 18 : 33 - *And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.*

- When they were done, the Lord therefore went His way and Abraham returned to his place.
- God evidently went on to Sodom.
- Abraham's place likely was home to Hebron.