

## Genesis 17-18 Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

These chapters tell us the *classic story* of Abraham & Sarah's longing for a child.

They've been waiting for over 25 years and still no crumb-cruncher.

So as we saw last week, they decided God needed some help in fulfilling His promise so they lent Him a hand, or I should say, Sarah lent Abraham her maid, Hagar the Horrible!

A son was conceived and born, whom they named Ishmael, who became the patriarch of the Arabic tribes.

But God made it crystal clear to Abraham He needed no help and their little use of a surrogate would bring great trouble – as the resulting Arab-Jewish conflict has amply proven.

Though God's promise of children had been given over 25 years earlier, the Lord was waiting for Abraham and Sarah's *natural ability* to have children to pass.

He wanted their son to be a *miracle* so that the people who would come from Abraham would realize from start to finish they are a testimony to God's power & grace, not man's strength or effort.

There's a space of 13 years between the events of ch. 16 & 17.

### GENESIS 17

**<sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I *am* [El Shaddai] Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.**

Abram has now arrived at the place where God can give him the long awaited promise.

At 99 he is well past the age where he has the power to father children, and Sarai, at 89 is *double barren*, both by age and infertility.

The 13 year gap between ch. 16 & 17 is interesting.

What happened during this time? Where did they live, what happened to them?

Did God ever come to them or were these years of silence?

No details are given – and that may very well be the lesson we’re to take from this.

That even though 13 years have passed with nary a whisper, the promise of God is still strong & sure and even when we have no dramatic revelations of Him, He is no less real and our faith is no less secure.

As God appears to him now after 13 years, He calls Abram to refresh and renew himself in their special relationship.

The word “blameless” means *whole*; it refers to *integrity*, being *morally pure*.

It’s a given that those who walk with a *Holy God* will concern themselves with *holiness*.

As it says in Amos 3:3 - Can two walk together if they don’t agree?

While God’s covenant with Abram is unilateral & unconditional, its *outworking* will result in Abram’s moral conformity & compatibility with God.

This is something that needs special attention today because of the loosie-goosie idea a few have about what it means to be a “Christian.”

They think integrity, moral purity, & holiness are *optional*.

They should heed the words of Hebrews 12:14

**Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.**

As good evangelical Christians, we all know that we’re not saved by works but by God’s grace.

What often gets lost in the evangelical message proclaimed today is that the grace that saves also changes.

If there is no change, then it casts doubt on the presence of grace.

**When we say that God saves us *from our sins***, many think of that only in terms of forgiveness.

What the Bible means by being saved from sins is wholistic.

- 1) The debt our sins has earned is discharged by being paid off by Christ.
- 2) We are forgiven the offense done to God as a person through the mediation of Christ.

3) We are restored to relationship with God through the reconciliation of Jesus.

4) We are delivered from the power of sin by the work of the Spirit who shapes us into the image of Christ.

So we aren't just saved from the legal penalty of sin, we're set free FROM the sins themselves!

That's what God's grace does – ALL OF IT!

So, the person who *continues in sin* as a lifestyle and claims to be walking with God is mixed up.

As it says in 1 John 2:4 - Anyone who says he/she walks with God and who also walks in sin is a- liar.

**2And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”**

God is not speaking of a *new* covenant here – He's telling Abram He will now implement the one He'd previously made; what has been promised will now come to pass.

**3Then Abram fell on his face, [the posture of worship] and God talked with him, saying: 4“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”**

Everything God had said in His previous appearances to Abram, He gathers up and elaborates here.

Then, He changes Abraham's name – He goes from Abram = Father, to Abraham = Exalted Father, Father of many.

By the simple addition of a hard-breathing sound (“hah”) into the

middle of his name he becomes a *new man*, signified by a *new name*.

It was the *breath of God* that created new life in Adam's body.

Here, God begins a new work by breathing into Abraham's life.

He adds His life *to* Abraham's life and thereby brings about a new way of living; by faith in God.

**<sup>9</sup>And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup>and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup>He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."**

Just as Abraham had asked God for a sign of His promise and God had answered with the call to gather the animals in ch. 15, so He now tells Abraham that *all his descendants* are to memorialize their unique relationship to God through His promise by *circumcision*.

Circumcision was that sign which marked and identified the Jews as the focus of God's redemptive plan until Christ came.

They ended up enduring a lot of ridicule and scorn in the ancient world, specially when it came to the Greek era because of the *nudity* that was commonplace.

The Olympic and Ionic games posed a special problem because the competitors competed in the buff.

It was always easy to pick out the Jews, though when modesty was the norm, their distinction wasn't as obvious.

By the way, *tattoos, cuttings and piercings of the flesh* were originally marks made in the body to show devotion to a pagan god, in rather the same way that *circumcision* was a mark of the Jewish covenant. God picked a covenant sign that would truly mark His people, but would also be private, not showy.

He didn't want their relationship with Him to degenerate into a mere outward form but to be an inner reality of the heart – something intimate – and you don't get more intimate than circumcision.

It also marked an area of the body that was central to the whole idea of having children and future generations who were the unfolding of the promise and covenant.

As a quick aside – why did God specifically say the 8<sup>th</sup> day after birth was the proper day to perform this rite?

Because this is the day when an infant's immune system is at the optimum level for such a procedure. [\[1\]](#)

In the book, *None of These Diseases*, McMillen identifies that fact that certain clotting agents don't appear in an infant until the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

The 8<sup>th</sup> day is the first day in which it's safe to perform the rite. McMillen also identifies that according to studies done in 1949 & 54, married Jewish women have a markedly lower rate of *cervical cancer*.

The thought is that this probably due to the practice of circumcision by their husbands.

**15**Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. **16**And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a *mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.*”

Sarai means “Princess” / Sarah means “Exalted Princess, Princess of many.”

Her name is changed, as was Abraham's -- by the addition of breath!

Okay – put yourself in Abraham’s *Babylonian Birkenstocks* for a moment and think about what’s just happened!

All his life, his name has been “Father” and until just 13 years before he’s had how many kids? NONE!!!!!!!!!!!!

Now he has 1 child – Ishmael, and God changes his name to what? *Father of many!*

This might appear almost *cruel*.

“What’s your name?” “*Father of many*” “Really, how many?”

“*Right now – 1, but soon, as many as the stars in the sky!*”

“How old are you?” “99!” “Right!”

Can you imagine Abraham talking to Sarah after this?

“Hey Princess, God appeared to me again today!”

“Really? Wow! It’s been what – 13 years hasn’t it?”

“Yeah – but He said that now’s the time when the promise of a child will be fulfilled.”

“Excellent!”

“Yeah – and he gave me a new name! ‘Father of many!’ And you, you’re ‘Princess of a multitude!’”

“Ah-huh! Abe, have you been nipping the barley juice again?”

In the Bible when God gives someone a new name, it marks a new day, a new beginning in their life. That’s true here for Abraham and Sarah.

It was true when God changed Jacob’s name from “dirty sneaking thief” to “Prince with God.”

It’s seen in Simon’s name change from “Unstable” to Peter – “Rock.”

Rev. 2:17 tells us that God has a *new name* for us.

We won’t bear the monikers we have now – God has a new name for each of us; it’s the way He sees us – what He created us to be as unique persons who bear His image in a specific and unique way.

It’s a name that’ll encapsulate and summarize the work God’s grace has completed in us.

**17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a *child* be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a *child*?” **18** And Abraham said to God,

## **“Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”**

Abraham’s response in these verses is so typical and something we can probably all relate to.

At first he laughs as he hears God’s incredible promise – it’s a laugh of *delight!*

But then he immediately looks at himself, his age and circumstances – his wife is doubly barren now.

So though he’s at first delighted in the face of God’s promise – he quickly catches himself and reins in his excitement.

Maybe God means *Ishmael* will be Sarah’s spiritual son!

So he floats that before the Lord – is that what God means?

Don’t we do that – we hear some wild, bold promise from the Lord and we think. COOL!

Then we start thinking about HOW we might see that promise fulfilled and we start thinking about ourselves and our situation and pretty soon were floating some silly idea before the Lord and saying –“Is that what you meant God?”

God promises us a *porterhouse promise* and we give thanks for a *stale Saltine*.

Abraham’s cautious about letting go and trusting God *for the best*.

**19**Then God said: “**No**, [And that’s an emphatic “NO!”] **Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac** [laughter]; **I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.** **20**And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **21****But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”** **22**Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

God couldn’t have made it any clearer!

*Sarah!* shall conceive and give birth to a son they will name “Laughter!”

Abraham’s initial hope and joy will be realized.

The promise of God will flow to *Isaac*, not Ishmael.

Islam claims it's the other way around even though the OT record is *crystal clear*.

**23** So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. **24** Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **25** And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **26** That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; **27** and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

This was a dramatic testimony to Abraham's faith because it was a risky venture!

The men of the camp would be out of commission for several days, maybe even a couple weeks while they healed.

They would be prime pickings for a raid - but God protected them.

## CHAPTER 18

**1** Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.

God spoke to Abraham in various ways.

12:1 – Now the Lord had said to Abram -

12:7 – Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said –

15:1 – After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision –

15:4-5 – The word of the Lord came to him, saying . . . then He brought him outside and said –

15:17 – There appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch –

17:1 – The Lord appeared to Abram and said –

So, sometimes it was the Voice of God Abraham heard but saw no form.



Other times God appeared to Him in a vision or dream.  
And then other times he appeared to Abraham in *bodily form* as  
He does here.

The **heat of the day** refers to the mid-afternoon when the heat of the Middle Eastern day is at its peak.

This is the time of the afternoon *siesta*. People did no strenuous labor at this time, because if they did it would leave them so exhausted it might take a couple days to recover.

They had learned to spend a couple hours during the heat of the day just lounging around or taking care of minor chores in the shade of their tent.

**Abraham seems to have settled down** in the region of Mamre near Hebron. [13:18, 14:13,24 18:1 23:17] [SHOW MAP]  
[PICTURE]

Mamre was a native Amorite ruler who controlled this area.

**Mamre had two brothers, Eschol and Aner** who, as ch. 14 tells us, were allies with Abraham. All 3 of these Amorite chiefs went with Abraham on his raid on the Northern Alliance that rescued Lot. [14:24]

The terebinth trees belonged to Mamre and provided the kind of shade nomadic clans would love to settle under.

[6 pictures of Bedouin life]

There's Abraham, sitting in the shade of his tent door, looking out over the low rolling hills before him -

**2So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, <sup>3</sup>and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. <sup>4</sup>Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."**

As he's sitting there, his eyes wander to the hillside next to his camp and there are three men standing there.

Abraham's camp wasn't alongside one of the main roads.

Nomads, *the Bedouin*, locate their camps where they can have privacy.

So when Abraham saw these men, he knew they were visitors. His response was swift as he showed the kind of *hospitality* that was expected and for which the Bedouin *to this day are famous*.

He got up, ran to where they were standing, bowed down to them as an act of deference and honor, and then invited them to take a break from their journey and enjoy the hospitality of his home.

Abraham says, “I will bring a *morsel* of bread, that you may refresh your hearts.”

A “morsel” sounds like a piece of toast – that wouldn’t go very far in refreshing them.

Abraham is just being humble – he says “morsel” but he means “feast!”

Now – notice the sense of urgency with which Abraham goes about getting the feast ready -

**<sup>6</sup>So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead *it* and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup>And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave *it* to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.**

The urgency Abraham demonstrates here may be a clue that he suspects who his visitors really are.

They’re more than just passers-by; there’s *something* about their appearance and bearing that marks them as heavenly and Abraham shows all diligence to serve them.

This is *more* than typical Bedouin hospitality, as extravagant as that was.

Abraham was a rich, powerful and influential chieftain, but he realized he was in the presence of those more exalted than he. He told Sarah to take the finest flour they had and make bread.

Because of the speed these had to be cooked, they would have been unleavened flat-cakes – large pita loafs.

If you've ever had these hot off the griddle as they were served that day, you now how incredible they were.

He had some nice veal prepared and together with the bread, some butter and milk, brought it all in to his guests and then stood by to wait on them should they need anything. [Pic: Beduoin woman making butter. They place milk into an inflated sheep skin and shaking it. This method of making butter dates from Bible times and is still in use today.]

Does anyone see anything wrong here? CLUE: "Kosher"

Abraham served dairy and meat at the same meal – and His heavenly guests ATE IT!

Kosher law demands that all dairy and meat be kept utterly separate.

This is based on the command of **Exo. 23:19; 34:26; & Deut. 14:21** which says,

**You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.**

This was something the Canaanites did; they would make a meal by boiling a kid in it's mother's milk. It was cruel, and God forbade his people duplicating it.

God wanted His people to honor the principle of the *specialness of life*, even the life of animals!

So even when they butchered animals for meat, they were to exercise a level of respect and honor.

What happened was that over time, the simple prohibition to not prepare a kid in it's mother's milk became a complete prohibition against swerving meat and dairy!

As with most of the Law, the rabbis, in order to keep the people from violating it, built fences around it so far back from it they came up with all kinds of rules and regulations.

Their reasoning went like this – The law says, don't boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

But what if I buy goat meat from *this* butcher, and milk from *that* vendor – how do I know if the milk didn't come from the mother of the goat whose meat I bought? And if I eat them at the same meal, they will go into my stomach and mix, and that's a kind of stewing, which violates this command.

So – no dairy and meat together – ever!

To this day, kosher means keeping meat and dairy in separate

refrigerators!

Separate utensils, pots, pans, plates and silverware are used!

You can't have cheese on your burrito and cheeseburgers are not kosher.

Here we read of Abraham offering an apparently non-kosher meal to His guests, and they eat it!

All because there was in fact no violation of the real prohibition!

**9**Then they said to him, “Where *is* Sarah your wife?” So he said, “Here, in the tent.”

**10**And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.)

The visitor now makes it clear that He is the Lord; He says “**I** will return.”

The phrase, “according to the time of life” is a challenge to interpretation.

In light of all that's taken place with Abraham and Sarah, we ought to take it to mean that God will visit them with the *gift of conception* when it's the perfectly right time according to God's plan for that conception to take place.

This visit from the Lord takes place not long after the events of ch. 17 when God had promised Abraham he and Sarah would have a son. Here He is again a short time later *renewing* the promise.

We might wonder why God repeats the promise again & again.

Because He knows Abraham needs to hear it again & again.

He needs to be reminded that every day that passes without seeing the promise is in fact bringing him that much closer *to* it!

Friends – like Abraham, whose spiritual children *we are*, we need to constantly and continually abide in the promises of God!

It's good to rehearse them, review them, memorize & repeat them!

Our faith is built up by immersing ourselves in the Promises of the God Who cannot lie and Who is Only and Always faithful!

Faith comes by *hearing* the Word, the Promises of God! (Romans 10:17)

I know a man who's read the bible from cover to cover over a

hundred times!

And as long as he lives, he will continue to read it through because he knows the value of abiding in the promises of God.

**11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.**

**12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**

This enforces our interpretation of v. 10 – that the time of life means the time ordained by God for Sarah to conceive.

All along God was waiting for Abraham and Sarah to come to the place where bearing children was impossible!

**He wanted to give them a miracle** because it was imperative they and all their descendants realize that they owe their very existence to the grace and power of God – not the strength or ingenuity of man’s flesh.

Up to this point, God has spoken only to Abraham – and he’s passed on the revelations to Sarah second-hand.

This is the first time Sarah has met the Lord herself – but she sees these guys as just visitors. She doesn’t discern that they’re from heaven.

Therefore, when she hears the leader of the trio speaking to her hubby, she snickers behind her hand as she waits inside the tent.

She’s given up on having kids; after all, she’s *doubly* barren, both by infertility and age. She’s already been through *menopause*.

When she said, “**After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord [by which she means Abraham] being old also?**” - this may be a hint as to the main reason why God came to them at this time.

They may have given up being physically intimate!

The combination of *age*, and the disappointment of barrenness may have made love-making just too much work and too emotionally painful.

God’s coming to them at this time may have been meant to urge them to not give up! [But rather to “give it up!”]

**13 And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh,**

saying, 'Shall I surely bear a *child*, since I am old?' <sup>14</sup>Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied *it*, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

When Sarah snickered, even though it was to herself, the Lord knew it and challenged her *disbelief*.

Her response was *fear*; she knew there was no way they could have heard her.

The rebuke made her to realize these were no ordinary visitors. At this point, she steps out of the tent and attempts to deny she'd laughed; but her denial is denied!

She's quickly realizing these are not people to be trifled with. Her lack of faith is being challenged and for the first time she's coming face to face with God's promise directly to *her*!

**16**Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

Once the meal and interview under the terebinth tree of Mamre was complete, the three visitors got up and set off toward the east and the Jordan Plain.

As was expected of a good host, Abraham went with them for the first steps of the journey.

**17**And the LORD said, . . .

This makes it clear that God is one of the three visitors.

This is another *Christophany*, an appearance of Jesus Christ in the OT.

**17**And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, <sup>18</sup>since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup>For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do

**righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”**

God’s plan for Abraham and his descendants was to use them as the agents of His plan of redemption, bringing about the salvation of mankind through them.

The ultimate purpose for singling Abraham out in the first place was to deliver man from the wrath of God’s judgment.

So now, as God is going to Sodom to bring judgment, He gives Abraham the opportunity to fulfill his role of staying and delaying judgment.

God would rather show *mercy*, but there must be someone to intercede for it.

So He gives Abraham the chance to be the agent of mercy.

**20** **And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, <sup>21</sup>I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”**

This has troubled some as they read it because it appears to present God as less than omniscient (all-knowing) & omnipresent.

It sounds like someone’s been bringing Him reports but that He has to go now and check in for Himself.

Really, God’s words here are in keeping with the form He’s taken in order to *appear* to Abraham – as a *man*.

God is describing His actions in *human terms* – which of course are going to fall short of accurately expressing Him because He’s infinite and His ways are not our ways.

This kind of description of the actions of God are called *Anthropomorphisms* – attempts to describe God in human forms. [anthropos = human / morpheme = form]

**22** **Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that**

were in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

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

The two others, who we learn later are angels, continue on their way toward Sodom.

But the Lord stays and talks with Abraham who knows full well who it is he’s standing before – the Judge of all the earth.

Though Abraham’s knowledge and experience of God has been *limited*, there’s at least *one thing* he knows with absolute clarity & confidence: **God is Righteous!**

While it would be totally just to judge the wicked, it wouldn’t be consistent with God’s character for Him to be *indiscriminant* in judgment, lumping the righteous together with the wicked.

So based on this awareness of the nature of God, Abraham dares to stand before Him *boldly*, yet with all due deference.

He asks if it would be right for God to judge the cities if there were 50 good people there.

God consents and says that if there were 50 righteous people found in Sodom, He would withhold judgment altogether.

Now – this is an amazing thing and there’s much for us to learn from this passage.

**First** – God is a Just Judge **AND** a Merciful Savior.

Judgement *will* eventually fall on the wicked, but mercy delays that judgment, offering the wicked a space in which to repent and be saved from inevitable judgment.

What *opens* that space of time, brings mercy and stays judgment is the intercession of the intercessor.

I’m reminded of [Habakkuk 3:2](#) -

**O LORD, I have heard Your speech *and* was afraid;  
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the  
years! In the midst of the years make *it* known;  
In wrath remember mercy.**



This is a verse I believe applies with special force to today. The prophecies of the Bible tell us of the terrors of the last days as man unites in his rebellion against God and God allows him to experience the fruit of that rebellion.

Just as God prepared to rain down judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, our world is about to experience the Day of God's Wrath.

But just as Abraham interceded on behalf of the cities, we can intercede on behalf of our nation and the world – asking for an extension of mercy and that God would revive His work in this moment to reap one last mighty harvest before the end.

We must intercede for mercy, not pray angry prayers of judgment.

**Second** – God is willing to withhold judgment from the wicked whole due to the presence of a small number of the righteous! The region of Sodom & Gomorrah was a rich area and the cities were well inhabited.

Yet God said He would forestall judgment if 50 righteous could be found.

As we'll see, Abraham managed to bargain God down to only 10; if only 10 righteous people live in Sodom, God promised to defer judgment.

Of course, as we know, there weren't *even* 10 – there was just Lot's family of 4.

But even then, God *removed them before* pouring out His wrath.

**27** Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: **28** Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of five*?” So He said, “If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it*.”

**29** And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose there should be forty found there?” So He said, “I will not do *it* for the sake of forty.”

**30** Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will

**speaking: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there."**

**31** And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty."

**32** Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten."

As Abraham intercedes, he keeps getting a *ready response* from the Lord so he keeps pressing for a lower & lower number.

Why he stopped at 10 is a mystery. Maybe he figured that his nephew Lot who lived in Sodom would have grown his household to *at least* that many and their presence would mean the forestalling of God's judgment.

If that was Abraham's reasoning, he was badly mistaken.

Lot's not *been an influence* so much as he's *been influenced* by the corruption of Sodom.

**33** So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

## CONCLUSION

Abraham gives us a great picture of the *role of the intercessor*.

He hears of judgment, and *pleads for mercy*.

When he gains God's *ready response* to his first request, he pushes further.

When he meets the same reaction from God, he takes it even farther.

What God was doing was deepening Abraham's awareness of just how full of mercy He is.

He wanted to shape Abraham's heart after His own.

The center of all intercession is to discover and then pray the heart of God.

God longed for the people of Sodom & Gomorrah to repent.

But if they wouldn't, then to keep the moral pollution and terrible depravity that had infected them from spreading, they had to be judged.

Even God's judgment, when it finally comes, is bounded by His mercy and grace, just as His mercy and grace is always bounded by His perfect righteousness.

When we intercede on behalf of others, our ultimate concern ought to be for their salvation.

If they're already saved, our main concern ought to be for them to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Right now as we intercede for our nation; the president, the men and women in uniform, for the intelligence services who are tracking the terrorists, foremost in our prayers ought to be the request that God would save them, and if they're saved, to use what's happening to further His work in their lives.

At the same time, we must be careful that we don't fall into the trap that the children of Abraham later did and that was to pray God's FAVOR on their fellow Jews, but God's WRATH on Gentiles.

We can easily confuse our loyalty as Americans with our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

While we pray for the protection of our military personnel, it's easy to pray for the demise of those they fight.

But God's love for men & women does not stop at the border or at the level of national affiliation.

Our cause may be more just, more righteous, but that doesn't mean God loves our enemies any less!

The very best way to defeat an enemy isn't to kill him but to see him converted to Christ and persuaded to follow the path of righteousness.

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[\[1\]](#) Guzik, David, *Online Commentary*