

# GENESIS

## Chapter 18

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3 and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I bring a morsel of 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." 6 And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8 Then 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. 9 They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." 10 The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" 13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh." 16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to 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 have chosen him, that he may command 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 to Abraham what he has promised him." 20 Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."

**18:1** *appeared.* This was Jesus. The other two men who accompany him are angels. (CSB)

As has already been stated, because of the importance of what took place when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, this year is particularly memorable. In fact, it is the most memorable year in his life. Within it family circumcision and the two promises, the spiritual and the material; later on the journey to Palestine and the deliverance; also the overthrow of Sodom. And, what is most important, the Lord appeared to Abraham several times and conversed with him in a friendly manner. (Luther)

The chief content of this chapter is that God wants to confirm the promise He had made concerning Isaac. In the preceding chapter Abraham is promised a son from Sarah, and the Lord calls this son Isaac because Abraham had laughed. But Sarah was not present at that time, and it seems that she did not believe Abraham when he told her about this. Therefore the promise is repeated here, in order that Sarah may hear it, not from the mouth of Abraham, as had been the case, but from the mouth of God Himself, of whom it is stated that He stood turned away; that is, He had turned His back, to indicate that Sarah did not believe until she was reproached. (Luther)

*great trees.* The terebinths may have been a larger grove near Hebron, which Mamre allowed Abraham to put to use for encamping in their shade. (Leupold)

*Mamre.* Here, too, as in 14:13, appears to be the Amorite who stood on a friendly footing with Abraham. Knowing what we do of Abraham, we conclude that this Amorite must have been of a nobler sort than the average run of his tribe. (Leupold)

*sat at the door of his tent* –During the hottest part of the day, the time of siesta, Abraham was sitting in the shade at the door of his tent. Perhaps he had dozed off, or perhaps he was deep in thought about the wondrous promise he had received from God. (PBC)

*the heat of the day.* Early afternoon. (CSB)

**18:2** *three men.*† At least two of the “men” were angels. The third was the angel of the Lord or the Lord himself (see vv. 1, 13, 17, 20, 26, 33; see especially v. 22). (CSB)

The Lord (the Son of God) and two angels appear in human form. Cyril of Jerusalem: “What strange thing do we announce in saying that God was made man, when (you Jews) yourselves say that Abraham received the Lord as a guest?” (NPNF2 7:76). (TLSB)

*standing* –The custom of the day required a traveler to stand at some distance from a nomad’s tent and wait to be invited in. (PBC)

Hebron was on the main north-south road that runs along the ridge of the Judean hills, and occasionally there were travelers who needed food. The custom of the day required a traveler to stand at some distance from a nomad’s tent and wait to be invited in. (PBC)

*he ran.* The story in vv. 2–8 illustrates Near Eastern hospitality in several ways: 1. Abraham gave prompt attention to the needs of his guests (vv. 2, 6–7). 2. He bowed low to the ground (v. 2). 3. He politely addressed one of his guests as “my lord” and called himself “your servant” (vv. 3, 5), a common way of speaking when addressing a superior (see, e.g., 19:2, 18–19). 4. He acted as if it would be a favor to him if they allowed him to serve them (vv. 3–5). 5. He asked that water be brought to wash their feet (see v. 4), an act of courtesy to refresh a traveler in a hot, dusty climate (see 19:2; 24:32; 43:24). 6. He prepared a lavish meal for them (vv. 5–8; a similar lavish offering was presented to a divine messenger in Jdg 6:18–19; 13:15–16). 7. He stood nearby (v. 8), assuming the posture of a servant (see v. 22), to meet their every wish. Heb 13:2 is probably a reference to vv. 2–8 and 19:1–3. (CSB)

**18:3** MY LORD – This was the polite thing to do and he also lowered his role to that of a servant.

YOUR SERVANT – Expressions of humility were normal, but Abraham recognized he had a special guest. (TLSB)

**18:4** At this lazy hour of the day Abraham’s household was suddenly transformed into a beehive of activity. Moses describes meal preparations that must have taken several hours. (PBC)

*water be brought* – This was a great relief to anyone traveling in this dusty and hot desert region. Not mentioned here but also a part of Near Eastern hospitality was to offer oil that would be poured on the head to bring relief from the heat.

*Wash your feet* – First step of proper hospitality. Because there were few inns, people placed high importance on hospitality. Neglect or mistreatment of travelers was regarded as a great social evil.

Ambrose: “A man ought therefore to be hospitable, kind, upright, not desirous of what belongs to another...Such is the favor in which hospitality stands with God, that not even the draught of cold water shall fall of getting a reward. You see that Abraham, in looking for guests, received God Himself to entertain” (NPNF2 10:59-60). (TLSB)

**18:5** *bring a morsel of bread* – This and the other items mentioned in verses 3 and 4 were the fundamental courtesies afforded any traveler. This was a lavish meal and compares somewhat to the meal prepared for the Prodigal Son. (CSB)

Abraham described his hospitality as meager, typical of humble Near Eastern manners. (TLSB)

Moses describes meal preparations that must have taken several hours. (PBC)

That extraordinary praise of hospitality which appears in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:2) had its origin in this passage. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” There is hospitality wherever the church is. For the church, if I may say so, always has a common treasury, inasmuch as it has the command (Matt. 5:42): “Give to him who begs from you.” And we must all serve the church and take care of it, not only by teaching but also by showing kindness and giving assistance, so that at the same time both the spirit and the flesh may find refreshment in the church. (Luther)

But especially the strangers whose lot is rather hard should be received in a kindly manner, for Christ’s utterance on the Last Day against the inhospitable is clear (Matt. 25:35): “I was a foreigner or a stranger and you did not receive Me.” Also (Matt. 25:40): “Whatever you did to the least of Mine, you did to Me.” What greater praise can there be for this virtue than that those who are hospitable are not receiving a human being but are receiving the Son of God Himself? On the other hand, what is more hideous than inhospitality? By it you shut out from your house, not a human being but the Son of God, who suffered and died for you on the cross. Are you not willing to give Him the cost of one day’s support or so much space of your dwelling that He may lie down with you? What punishments do you suppose will follow this inhumanity or cruelty? Therefore let those who want to be true members of the church remember to practice hospitality, to which we are encouraged not only by the example of the saintly patriarch but by very important testimonies of Scripture. (Luther)

**18:6** *quickly* – Even though it was very hot Abraham mobilizes his household for activities that will take several hours.

*Three seahs* – Extremely large amount for only three men. (TLSB)

This was more than a bushel! There would surely be no shortage of bread at that meal. (PBC)

This simple food offered will be presented in lavish abundance. What is left over can be disposed of with ease by the servants of so large an establishment as the one Abraham had. (Leupold)

cakes. A plural word referring to round, thin loaves. (CSB)

Round, unleavened cakes (resembling pancakes) hastily baked on hot stones or on a metal “camp oven” that could heat up rapidly. (TLSB)

In the Orient bread is never prepared at any other time than immediately before it is eaten. (Leupold)

**18:7** *calf, tender and good* – The style of roasting is described by some as taking smaller portions and roasting them individually on skewers or small spits. Among people who ate meat but rarely such a dish is especially delectable. (Leupold)

**18:8** *curds, milk, calf* – This is a description, not of a royal banquet but of one that is truly divine. And if one were a dialectician or a rhetorician, there would be rich material with which to occupy oneself. Nor must these words be glanced at indifferently, since it is certain that these events are not recorded by the Holy Spirit without a purpose; they are recorded for oursakes. (Luther)

Curds are what we would call cottage cheese. (PBC)

*they ate* – What condescending love those two words describe! The three guests ate Sarah’s fresh bread and that tender veal. The scene reminds us of what Jesus did when he appeared to his doubting disciples a week after his resurrection. When those frightened men imagined they were seeing a ghost Jesus lovingly asked for something to eat and actually ate a piece of broiled fish. He was showing them there was no barrier blocking their fellowship with God. (PBC)

What a staggering thought! Abraham and Jesus’ disciples were to realize, and you and I are, too, that the almighty God wants to share our company as a friend. It is this down-to-earth, seeking, caring love of the Lord which melts down cold and stubborn human hearts and wins them over to Himself. WE long for fellowship like that which took place under the great tree at Hebron. And God promises that we can look forward to an intimate fellowship with Him when we eat and drink at the feast of the Lamb. (PBC)

After Abraham realizes that these three guests want to stay, he joyfully hastens into the tent and prepares a banquet. For he is sure that in these three guests he is receiving God Himself. It is faith, therefore, that makes him so eager and ready. (Luther)

*stood under a tree* – He assumed the posture of a servant who would be near by ready to render whatever service was needed. Much like a waiter at a fine restaurant.

Abraham honored his guests by waiting on them rather than sitting with them. (TL SB)

**18:9** *where is Sarah* – Just this simple question had a great deal of meaning to Abraham as who his guest might be: (1) Only people in authority would ask about the lady of the household, (2) This man knew the name change that Sarah had undergone and since this visit was about Sarah it probably had a specific purpose. (PBC)

This time, Sarah had to hear the promise “from the mouth of God Himself” (Luther AE 3:176). (TL SB)

*in the tent* – Women may have eaten separately, after the men, a custom still observed in some Near Eastern cultures. (TL SB)

**18:10** See 17:21. Paul quotes this promise of Isaac’s birth (see v. 14) in Ro 9:9 and relates it to Abraham’s spiritual offspring (see Ro 9:7–8). (CSB)

**18:11** *old, well advanced in years* – Sarah could no longer conceive children. (TL SB)

**18:12** *laughed*. In disbelief, as also Abraham had at first. (CSB)

Of having her own child. Though she laughed in doubt, she later believed. Cf Heb 11:11. (TL SB)

Abraham had laughed too (17:17) in a moment of unbelief but had soon turned and begun to rejoice. Sarah's laugh was an expression of unbelief, but when confronted, too repented. It is interesting that Isaac means "he laughs" (21:3) (Cf Heb. 11:11)

**18:13** *why did Sarah laugh* – Imagine the astounding nature of this revelation to Sarah: her secret thoughts have been correctly read; the very motive she had referred to, namely that she had grown old, is also displayed to her. (Leupold)

**18:14** *Is anything too hard for the LORD?* The answer is no, for Sarah as well as for her descendants Mary and Elizabeth (see Lk 1:34–37). Nothing within God's will, including creation (see Jer 32:17) and redemption (see Mt 19:25–26), is impossible for him. (CSB)

Tertullian: "For a barren woman to have a child against nature was no difficulty with God; nor was it for a virgin to conceive" (ANF 3:605).

Numbers 11:23 "The Lord answered Moses, 'Is the Lord's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true to you.'" (Moses was worried about feeding the Israelites in the desert.)

Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." (This is the context of Jeremiah buying a field which was a symbol of belief that God's people would come back and resettle Israel.)

**18:15** *no, but you did laugh* – The Lord kindly but decisively rebuked Sarah. (TLSB)

**18:16** *went with them* – Hebrew implies that Abraham accompanied them for quite a while. (TLSB)

**18:17** Abraham was God's friend (see v. 19; 2Ch 20:7; Jas 2:23; see also Isa 41:8, but see note there). And because he was now God's covenant friend (see Job 29:4), God convened his heavenly council (see note on 1:26) at Abraham's tent. There he announced his purpose for Abraham (v. 10) and for the wicked of the plain (vv. 20–21)—redemption and judgment. He thus even gave Abraham opportunity to speak in his court and to intercede for the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was later called a prophet (20:7). Here, in Abraham, is exemplified the great privilege of God's covenant people throughout the ages: God has revealed his purposes to them and allows their voice to be heard (in intercession) in the court of heaven. (CSB)

**18-19** God chose Abraham to establish true religion through him and to fulfill the messianic promises. (TLSB)

**18:18** *a great and mighty nation ... blessed in him.* God graciously promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation. From this nation would come the Messiah, from whom all nations can receive God's blessings through faith in Him. (TLSB)

**18:19** *chosen.* Lit. "known" (as in Am 3:2). (CSB)

**18:20** *outcry.* A cry of righteous indignation (cf. the blood of Abel, 4:10) that became one of the reasons for the destruction of the cities (see 19:13). (CSB)

Sodom's wickedness already well known, cried out for God's judgment. (TLSB)

The situation is altogether awful. Fifteen years had not yet gone by since the people of Sodom and their neighbors were defeated by the four kings and led away captive but were later freed by Abraham through

a marvelous victory and were returned to their homes. Thus God revealed Himself to them in a twofold manner. By the captivity He showed that He hates sin and surely wants to punish it, but by the deliverance He showed that He wants to forgive and help the penitent. But neither the punishment nor the benefit had any effect. The very people who had seen these events with their own eyes forgot and relapsed into the awful abyss of sins, since they had completely discarded their fears of God. This was the beginning of their downfall, as Solomon says (Prov. 16:18): “The beginning of one’s downfall is to be proud and fall away from the Lord.” Where there is contempt for the Word and ingratitude toward God, there order also and good manners break down. These fruits result only from the seed of the Word of God. After the downfall of the church came the downfall of the government. (Luther’s Works – Volume 3 Pages 226-27) – Finally some situations become so bad that everyone around raises objections and a cry of indignation over the disgrace that is taking place.

*sin is very grave.* The sin of Sodom (and probably of Gomorrah as well) was already proverbial (see 13:13) and remained so for centuries (see Eze 16:49–50). (CSB)

**18:21** *I will go down.* The result would be judgment (as in 11:5–9), but God also comes down to redeem (as in Ex 3:8). (CSB)

*see.* Not a denial of God’s infinite knowledge but a figurative way of stating that he does not act out of ignorance or on the basis of mere complaints. (CSB)

The concept of going down to look is also found in the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). This is not to infer that God does not know all, but shows the great mercy and patience of God in that he does not act rashly. These sins like those in the Tower of Babel must have been especially bad to deserve such special attention.

**17:15–18:21** Divine messengers, on their way to Sodom to deliver judgment, visit Abraham and Sarah to announce that Sarah will bear the child of promise. Like Sarah, we may doubt and even laugh at God’s purposes for us. Despite such moments of weakness, the Lord reassures His saints not only of His omnipotence but also of His forgiveness, as Sarah realized when she gave birth to Isaac in her old age. • Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, nothing is too hard for You. Thank You for patiently bearing with us and forgiving us when we are of little faith. Amen. (TLSB)

*Abraham Intercedes for Sodom*

**22** So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. **23** Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? **24** Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? **25** Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death 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?” **26** And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” **27** Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. **28** Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” **29** Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” **30** Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” **31** He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” **32** Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He

**answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” 33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.**

**18:22** *Abraham remained standing before the LORD.* Both illustrate the mutual accessibility that existed between God and his servant. (CSB)

**18:23** The second time Abraham intervened for his relatives and for Sodom (see 14:14–16). (CSB)

Abraham correctly guessed that the Lord planned to destroy Sodom. He pleaded for mercy on behalf of the few righteous people there. (TLSB)

**18:24-31** *suppose* – Abraham’s requests do not seem to try the patience of God. So our frequent prayers also are not anointing to him.

**18:24** *fifty righteous* – Already a small number given that there were five cities associated with Sodom. Cf 14:8 (TLSB)

**18:25** Abraham believed there was greater injustice in destroying even 50 righteous people than in sparing a great multitude of the wicked. Abraham appealed to justice, knowing that the Lord is perfectly just. (TLSB)

*Judge of all the earth.* Abraham based his plea on the justice and authority of God, confident that God would do what was right (see Dt 32:4). (CSB)

Unlike other religions, whose tribal gods were limited in power or extent of dominion, Abraham confessed God as Lord of all. (TLSB)

**18:27** *Lord.* Abraham used the title “Lord,” not the intimate name “LORD,” throughout his prayer. He was appealing to God as “Judge of all the earth.” (CSB)

*dust and ashes.* In contrast to God’s exalted position, Abraham described himself as insignificant (see Job 30:19; 42:6). (CSB)

Abraham spoke with full realization of his sinful; his origin, dust; his destination, ashes. Gregory of Nyssa: “Dust and ashes seem to denote what is lifeless and barren; and so there arises a law of faith for the life to come, teaching those would come to God, by this history, that it is impossible to draw near to God, unless faith mediate, and bring the seeking soul into union with the incomprehensible nature of God” (NPN2 5:259). Luther: “Consider this example whenever you pray, and learn that persistence is needed in praying. It does not offend God; it pleases Him” (AE 3:236). (TLSB)

**18:32** *I will speak again.* Abraham’s questioning in vv. 23–32 did not arise from a spirit of haggling but of compassion for his relatives and of wanting to know God’s ways. (CSB)

*ten.* Perhaps Abraham stopped at ten because he had been counting while praying: Lot, his wife, possibly two sons (see 19:12), at least two married daughters and their husbands, and two unmarried daughters (see 19:8). (CSB)

Perhaps considering that God had not spared the world from the flood for the sake of eight people (Noah’s household), Abraham did not press his defense further. (TLSB)

**18:33** *his place*. To Mamre (see v. 1). The next morning Abraham went back to see what God had done (see 19:27). (CSB)

**18:22–33** Abraham begs the Lord to spare the wicked cities for the sake of the righteous. The evils of Sodom remind us of our own time, with evil that also cries out for divine intervention. Intercede in prayer for those who have not yet repented of their wickedness. Take comfort in the truth that God spares the wicked for the sake of one righteous man—Jesus Christ. • O Lord, spare us who live in this world of wickedness, for Jesus' sake. Amen. (TLSB)