

Abraham Intercedes with the Lord for Sodom

Genesis 18:16-33

Genesis 18:16-33 - *"Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on their way. ¹⁷ And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, ¹⁸ since 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 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." ²⁰ And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ 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."
²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ 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? ²⁵ 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." 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 speak: 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." ³³ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place."*

Background Notes

Sodom was a wicked city. It was under the judgment of God, and it was about to be destroyed. The two angels who had accompanied the Lord on his visit to Abraham now headed towards Sodom, but the Lord remained with Abraham. But Abraham's nephew Lot and his family lived in Sodom, so Abraham began to intercede for the righteous people in Sodom. Verses 23-25 are a great example of intercessory prayer: *"And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 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? 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?"

What a great example of intercessory prayer! Notice that it was based on biblical principles, and on the attributes that God had revealed of Himself. Will not the Judge of all the earth do the **right** thing? What's the answer? Yes, He will do what is right - even if it means judgment! In fact, that's exactly the point in verses 20-21: *"Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 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."*

The fact that the Lord said He would go to Sodom to *"see what they have done"* doesn't mean that the Lord didn't know what was going on in Sodom! No, He was emphasizing to Abraham that He was a "just" God, and that He would not judge Sodom unfairly. God never judges unfairly.

Notice, too, that God said He would hold back His judgment for the sake of even a few righteous people. The Lord responded to Abraham in verse 26: *"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."*

Encouraged by this response, Abraham began his intercessory countdown. Did you ever wonder why didn't Abraham continue to bargain with the Lord down to five righteous people, or even to one? Maybe Abraham thought Lot had been able to spread his righteous influence! On the other hand, maybe the answer is that the Lord stopped the conversation. *"So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham."*

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord enjoys close fellowship with believers.

The two angels went on to Sodom, but the Lord stayed to share His thoughts with Abraham. The Lord enjoys close fellowship with believers! Having a meal together in Genesis 18 emphasizes this point. Their "communion meal" may be another reason why the Lord chose to visit Abraham at dinnertime! Notice that the Lord shared His plans with Abraham: *"And the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?' (v17). Amos 3:7 says, 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.'" The Lord enjoys close fellowship with believers, and He shares His plans with them.*

The Lord wanted to share His ways with Abraham so Abraham could pass the lessons on to His children. *"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..." (v19).* A godly heritage for our children is one of the blessings of close fellowship with the Lord.

In Revelation 3:20 the Lord said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* We often apply this verse to unbelievers, in reference to salvation. However, look at the context – it’s written to **believers** in the church at Laodicea. The Lord wanted to dine with them - because the Lord enjoys close fellowship with believers!

Do you enjoy close fellowship with the Lord? The Lord wants to have close fellowship with you. Maybe you haven’t opened the door and asked Him to come in and commune with you. You may have opened your “heart’s door” for salvation, but what about the “door of fellowship?” In my personal experience, my closest times of fellowship with the Lord have been when I am studying or meditating on His Word. Being immersed in God’s Word certainly opens the door for close fellowship with the Lord. The Lord enjoys close fellowship with believers.

2. The Lord encourages believers to pray for others.

It’s interesting that the Lord permitted Abraham to go through this process of reducing the quota of righteous persons in Sodom. Some commentators have said that this was an example of “Bedouin bargaining” or haggling. But this was not a bargaining process – it’s a wonderful example of the Lord encouraging intercessory prayer.

In fact, this is the first intercessory prayer in the Bible. Abraham was concerned for his nephew Lot, and Lot’s family, and the people of Sodom. Abraham was beseeching the Lord on behalf of others. The Lord didn’t rebuke Abraham, but rather He encouraged Him. And the Lord answered Abraham’s prayer of concern for Lot, when the two angels rescued Lot and his two daughters from Sodom (Genesis 19).

The Lord encourages us to pray for others. Did you ever analyze your prayer life? Chances are that we don’t pray enough, or we pray most when we have a serious concern. And when we do pray, we don’t pray enough for others. What percentage of your praying is for others?

At the time of Samuel’s great prayer for the people, he said to them, *“far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you...”* (1 Samuel 12:23). So not praying for others is sin! We **should** pray for others - certainly for fellow believers, and certainly for people who are not saved. The lost condition of unsaved people should motivate us to have care and compassion for their souls, and to pray for them.

Do you pray for your unsaved family members and neighbors? Do you pray for the unsaved people you work with or go to school with? 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* 1 Timothy 2:4: *“[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

Yesterday we got a call from a Christian woman whose unsaved brother was assaulted and beaten, and was hospitalized. She asked if we would pray for his recovery, and especially for his salvation. You'd better believe we will! The Lord encourages believers to pray for others.

Practical Application

Are you a friend of Jesus?

Did you know that Abraham is called "the friend of God" three times in the Bible? (2 Chronicles 20, Isaiah 41, James 2.) He's the only believer in the Bible who is referred to as "the friend of God." This relationship between the Lord and Abraham was emphasized when the Lord visited him, and shared a meal with him, and stayed on to personally commune and share His thoughts with Abraham.

Why was Abraham in this privileged position, to be called the friend of God? It was because Abraham **believed** God - and he **obeyed** God. He wasn't perfect, but his life was characterized by faith and obedience. In John 15:14 Jesus said, "*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*"

Are you a friend of Jesus? Don't say "yes" unless you're willing to obey Him - in your personal life, in your relationships, in your marriage, in your family, and even your thought life. Jesus said, "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*"
Are you a friend of Jesus?