

# GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 15

Friend of God

Genesis 18

## Recap

God initiated the covenant with Abraham in Gen 15, confirmed that covenant in Gen 17, and now their relationship of walking together is shown in Genesis 18.

## Part 1 of 4: Hospitality

### Genesis 18:1-8

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

**1) a) Reflection question. According to the video lecture, Gen 18:1-8 and Hebrews 13:1-3, God values hospitality. The ancient middle-eastern culture have a four-step hospitality culture of invitation-screening-entertainment-departure. Have you shared your home with fellow Christians and what is your home's hospitality culture like?**

Quick Verse Reference

Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

**b) Reflection question. Abraham was described as a friend of God in James 2:22-23. Do you feel like God is a friend to you?**

Quick Verse Reference

James 2:22-23

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

Part 2 of 4: God Deals with Sarah

Genesis 18:9-15

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

**2) Discussion question. According to the video lecture, what should we make of God's interaction with Sarah?**

Sarah has a personal encounter with God, no longer a second-hand encounter through Abraham. He invites her to wonder at His grace where He can do more than she can imagine.

Part 3 of 4: God Shares His Plans with Abraham

Genesis 18:16-19

When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

**3) a) Discussion question. According to the video lecture and John 15:12-15, why did God want to share His plans with Abraham?**

Gen18:19 Because God has chosen Abraham. Also for Abraham to know how to command his children in keeping the way of the Lord. Sharing a plan also implies God wants Abraham to know God's character as a person. Abraham is considered God's friend, to know what He (God) is doing.

Quick Verse Reference

John 15:12-15

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

**b) Objective question. Select the most appropriate statement about God as a friend.**

A. Friendship with God involves love, evidence of obedience (we listen to friends), and honest sharing (disclosure and candor)

B. Friendship with God means we only love them if there are blessings and obey when there are benefits

Part 4 of 4: Abraham the Praying Priestly

Genesis 18:20-33

Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and

not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

**4) a) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, what are the points of the following verses?**

Verse	Points
Gen 18:22-23	Prayer is initiated by God. It is a response to God’s sharing of his intentions. God incites Abraham into a partnership.
Gen 18:24-26	Specific and Persistent
Gen 18:25	Prayer has a theological basis
Gen 18:27-33	The prayer is bold and powerful
Gen 18:27	The prayer is passionately humble

Gen 18:28

Prayer is for the unbelieving city

**b) Discussion question. According to the video lecture, what are three possible reasons for stopping at 10?**

**#1 God had finished speaking and Abraham took the hint**

**#2 God demonstrated he will care for the righteous**

**#3 10 is the minimum number of adults for a synagogue (believing community)**

**c) Reflection question. Regarding people who are angry at God's decision on suffering, Dr. Peter said "If you believe God is powerful enough to prevent it, but didn't. Isn't He powerful (and good) enough to have a good enough reason to have allowed the event?" Share if that statement helped you to wrestle with the issue of suffering.**

#### Take Away

Part 1 of 4: Hospitality

Part 2 of 4: God Deals with Sarah

Part 3 of 4: God Shares His Plans with Abraham

Part 4 of 4: Abraham the Praying Priest

#### Case Study

##### Case 1 – Faith and Works

Lucy attended a church where the grace of God through the blood of Jesus was very much at the forefront of all the preaching and teaching. They were taught to reject legalism and just rely on the grace of God for the forgiveness of sin.

There is no cell group system in the church where believers gather to study the Word. There is a prayer meeting that is focused on worship. Believers are told to just trust in the grace of God, to let go and let God transform them. They are focused on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and healing which then draws many to their church. There is no emphasis on personal bible reading, personal prayer, or discipline because these things are based on the law and will not save them. It is grace and grace alone.

**1) a) Discussion question. What do you think about this kind of church and its teaching?**

Model Answer

Obviously in error because it is lopsided in teaching, emphasizing grace over works and discipline. The grace that brings salvation to us also disciplines us. It does not do one without the other.

**b) Discussion question. What are the dangers involved here?**

Model Answer

The danger is producing false disciples who believe that all that is required is to receive forgiveness on the cross and then focus on living our lives according to our own desires. There is no conscious desire or will to have grace produce a reciprocating effort to live according to His law.

God is primarily interested in righteousness and justice as we see in Abrahams's time. He is not saving us to do as we wish but saving us like Abraham to form an alternative society or culture that mimics His character.

**c) Discussion question. How should we balance grace and the law? Faith and works?**

Model Answer

Grace should be reciprocated by a love that motivates us to obey Him. We strive to obey His law, to know Him personally, and yet depend entirely on His power and His Spirit to enable us to obey the law. Hence this entails resting on the grace that is in the gospel and preaching that to ourselves every day, as well as deciding to study His Word to grow in the knowledge of Him and to serve Him. We discipline ourselves to do this and yet are dependent on Him for the strength to keep up to these disciplines.

**Case 2 – Prayer**

Casey was very much set on a career as a concert pianist ever since he was a child. He wanted to be like Beethoven or Mozart, his heroes and with great diligence and expense managed to finish his degree in music at 35 years old.

He prayed to the Lord diligently all the time bringing before Him his desires. He would pray at least 4 times a day with his request and once a month would spend a whole afternoon in prayer. He believed that God would bless him as God had said that if he prayed in faith and is persistent and bold like Abraham, he would get what he wanted. The basis of his intercession is that playing well will glorify God's name.

His playing was mediocre and no one attended his concerts. However, he did not give up praying and trying as hard as he could, spending money on extra courses and traveling

overseas to work with famous musicians. He could not spend much time at church activities as he had to practice 5 hours/day every day and was exhausted. His wife had to work to support the family.

**2) a) Discussion question. Casey prayed boldly, persistently, and candidly before God and he had a good theological basis for his prayer, so why wasn't it answered?**

Model Answer

He is doing it because he wanted to be famous and have the kind of glory Mozart has. Sure, he can glorify God by playing the piano but there are so many other areas in life he can glorify God as well. The key is understanding his true gifting and in this case, given his poor progress, he probably does not have the musical gifting to be a concert pianist. The distribution of gifts itself will let us know God's will for us. Boldness and persistence are useless if the prayer is not according to His will ultimately.

**b) Discussion question. How can Casey modify his prayer to improve his results? Should he pray more? Should he co-opt more friends to pray for him?**

Model Answer

No amount of persistence or ramping up the prayer time will help him. He should pray for wisdom to ask if this is what God really wants for him. He should ask other Christian musicians to honestly tell him if he is really gifted. He should spend more time listening to God and reading the Word to understand Him and grow rather than be obsessed with his ambitions.

**Case 3 – Judgment of a Nation**

Ronald attended a church in Bangsar which was very much into social action. The pastor lamented the deteriorating conditions of the society where religious freedoms were being curtailed as well as increasing intolerance.

Corruption was at epidemic proportions at all levels and the pastor commented that it was only a matter of time before God would judge the nation.

He then referred to the example of Abraham and asked his church to pray like Abraham so that the nation will be spared judgment.

**3) a) Discussion question. Look at the case of Abraham. Compare it with Jer 5:1, Jer 31:29-30, Ezekiel 14:12-23; 18: 2-4. Will God save Malaysia from judgment on the basis of the presence of the church and prayers of the righteous? What do you think?**

Model Answer

As you can see the verses are varied. There is a sense in which God will spare a nation for a few righteous but there is also a sense in which every man will have to answer for his own sin. The presence of the righteous cannot mitigate the judgment. It is best left to God.

**b) Should we be praying for the nation like Abraham then?**

Model Answer

Yes, we should as we are asked to love our nation and pray for its preservation and that the gospel will transform the community.

**Case 4 – Repentance**

Alphonsus and Lydia had been married for the past 5 years and the marriage had been undergoing rocky times. They were both in their 50s when they got married and were fairly set in their ways. Alphonsus had an explosive temper and was quick with his tongue. Lydia was quite a headstrong woman with her own ideas on everything. They often quarrel when Lydia complains that Alphonsus is not making enough money to support the family or when she cannot afford the many things that her friends have like holidays overseas. She regretted marrying him.

When they quarreled, Alphonsus was abusive verbally and physically. Later on, when confronted with his actions and with threats from Lydia to leave him, he was quick to apologize, and very soon he was back to his old habits again.

Every time Lydia questioned the authenticity of his apologies, Alphonsus is quick to point out that Christianity was all about grace and forgiveness and as long as he apologized she must forgive him. Lydia was very despondent and even blamed their church which had emphasized grace and forgiveness but had not set its standards of moral behavior. She wanted the elders to talk to her husband and emphasize better behavior that he has to adhere to.

**4) a) Discussion question. How genuine are Alphonsus's apologies or statements on repentance?**

Model Answer

They are not genuine because he is basically sorry for the consequences of what he had done

and he is not really sorry for what he has done. The abuse and the threat of his wife leaving causes discomfort and self-pity, but once that threat is removed, he is back to his old habits because he really doesn't feel he has done anything wrong.

**b) Discussion question. Will the Elders outlining a whole set of rules and regulations on anger management to Alphonsus make a difference in his behavior?**

Model Answer

Alphonsus is using grace in the gospel as an excuse for sin. Having the elders outline a set of behaviors for him to comply with is simply an extension of legalism and this will not change him as it only addresses external behavior and not the state of his heart.

**c) Discussion question. What should his leaders do then?**

Model Answer

They should really take him aside and point out the actual basis of his explosive anger at his wife. Her complaints actually strike at the very heart of his self-esteem as a husband. She implies that he has failed as a man and as a husband which he obviously prides himself in. He needs to understand that he has to find acceptance and sufficiency in Jesus.

Lydia has to learn not to verbalize hurtful comments that strike at the very center of her husband's self-esteem. She needs to focus away from materialistic desires that push her to keep up with her neighbors.

The leaders need to point out that just because he had apologized, did not necessarily mean he was sorry for what he had done. Grace was not a license to sin. The fruits of repentance must accompany true repentance.

He also needs to find it in his heart to forgive his wife for undermining him.