The Patriarchs from the book of Genesis Part 11 – September 17, 2023

With input from https://www.biblestudy.org/basicart/abraham-and-sodom.html; https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart\_don/faq/does-god-know-everything/09-did-god-consult-with-abraham-about-sodom-and-gomorrah.cfm; https://www.gotquestions.org/Abraham-Sodom-Gomorrah.html; https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/king-sodom#:

Last week we covered the historical importance of the oaks of Mamre. The most historical importance is that God himself met Abraham there. The two angels depart to go to Sodom and Gomorrah while God and Abraham continue a conversation.

**Genesis 18:20-33:**

*20 And the Lord said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done entirely as the outcry, which has come to Me indicates; and if not, I will know.”*

What the Lord says is ominous. The outcry against the peoples of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is grave. The language used is similar to what God said to Cain in Genesis 4:10, *"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."* In the same poetic sense, the cries of the victims of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah had reached the ears of God Himself. He was about to execute justice.

God's reason for revealing this to Abraham, in advance, seems to have several layers. First, since Abraham is meant to be the founder of God's chosen people, he needs to see that God's promises—all of His promises—are kept. This not only means the covenant with Abraham, but God's judgment of sin and wickedness. Also, the opportunity for Abraham to plead for the innocent of Sodom, of whom there are virtually none, highlights for Abraham just how depraved that culture had become. These combine to highlight God's perfect justice, which is something He wants His chosen people to understand.

*22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord.*

Notice in **chapter 19:1** *Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he stood up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.*

*23 Abraham approached and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous people within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?*

Now begins one of the most interesting sections of the Bible. On one side of the ensuing discussion is, of course, Abraham. The other person, however, is not a mere angel, or even one of the archangels like Gabriel or Michael. He is Jesus Christ, taking the form of a human before his birth through Mary, so that he can discuss something very important with his friend.

Bargaining for mercy:

Abraham decides to plead with God to possibly forestall any punishment. Although he is no doubt familiar with some of the grievous sins committed by the cities, his nephew Lot lives in Sodom. While he tries to strike a bargain with God in order to save the cities, God teaches him (and us) a valuable lesson about character and what it means to be perfect.

Abraham begins his bargaining to save Sodom by appealing to God's fairness and righteousness of not condemning the guiltless and innocent with those who are guilty and deserve correction.

"Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city. Will You (the Lord God of the Old Testament) also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous who are in it?

*"Far be it from You to act in this manner, to kill the righteous with the wicked. And far be it from You, that the righteous should be as the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* (**Genesis 18:24-25).**

The Lord replies to the negotiations not with wrath or with condemning Abraham for not trusting God's judgment. Instead, Jesus agrees that the reasoning used to spare the cities makes sense!

And the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (Genesis 18:26).

What is eye-opening is that Jesus does not stop Abraham as he continues to argue for lower and lower numbers of righteous needed to spare the cities. Will the cities be spared if forty-five Godly people are found? What about forty? How about twenty?

Abraham then makes his last appeal for Sodom. He is well aware that God has indulged his desire to be as merciful as possible. Prefacing his last argument with acknowledging God's graciousness toward him, a case is made to forestall total destruction if only ten righteous can be found.

And he (Abraham) said, *"Oh do not let the Lord be angry, and I will speak only once more. Perhaps only ten shall be found there." And He said, "I will not destroy it for ten’s sake"* (**Genesis 18:32**).

Most people know what happens next. Only one person, righteous Lot, whose uncle was Abraham, was found in the cities. He and his family are personally escorted out of Sodom before fire rains down from heaven and completely destroys the two sinful cities (Genesis 19:12 - 25).

**2 Peter 2:4-10:**

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;*

*7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. 10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.*

Lessons learned from Genesis 18:

God revealed that being perfect, especially in love, does not necessarily mean being unnegotiable and unable to change his decisions. He fully intended to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities if he saw the same sins that were reported to him by angels. He was, however, willing to listen to his friend Abraham and, for his sake, not destroy them if only ten righteous people existed!

*25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” 26 So the Lord said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the entire place on their account.” 27 And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am only dust and ashes.*

*28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the entire city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” 29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.” 30 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”*

*31 And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.” 32 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once: suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.” 33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place.*

How are we to understand this? Did God actually change His plans because of the influence of Abraham? Does this mean that we too can bargain with God and by doing so He will change His plans?

**Option 1**: Abraham Caused the Lord to Change His Mind

A literal reading of the account has Abraham actually changing the mind of the Lord. It has been contended that God’s plan was altered when Abraham convinced Him to reconsider what He was about to do. Instead of destroying the city outright, Abraham bargained with God to the point that if only ten righteous people were found God would not destroy these evil cities. While ten righteous people were not found this is not the issue. The fact is that God had decided to destroy the city but then agreed to spare it if some righteous were found. The number of the righteous started at fifty and was finally settled on at ten. Since the Lord agreed to everything Abraham had said it seems obvious that the plans of the Lord were not unalterable. This, it is argued, is another illustration of God being flexible with how He is working out His plan for time and eternity.

**Option 2**: God Did Not Alter His Plan

The usual way of understanding this passage does not see the Lord as altering what He was planning to do. The fact that He agreed to spare the city if only ten righteous were to be found shows both His knowledge of all things as well as the specific nature of His plan. The Lord was determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil practices. He knew that there were not even ten righteous in the city. This is why He agreed with Abraham that He would spare the city if only ten were found. In the end, only four people left Sodom; Lot, his wife and their two daughters. Among other things, this shows that the destruction of these cites was justified; there were no righteous people dwelling there.

Consequently, this is not a case of God willingly consulting with humans to determine how He is going to work out His plan. Rather it is a case of the Lord knowing everything which will happen in the future. Thus, He agreed with Abraham that if a certain number of righteous were found He would not destroy the city. Yet, the Lord knew all along that this would never occur.

Since only four people actually left Sodom before the destruction it shows that the determination of the Lord to destroy these evil cities was never in doubt.

Furthermore, it was well-justified. Basically, there were no righteous people in either of these cities. Hence, the judgment of the Lord needed to take place. The planned destruction was never in doubt. Consequently, we should not view this episode as an example of God not knowing what the outcome would be.

When God revealed His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah due to the wickedness of those cities, Abraham asked God to spare the people. In fact, Abraham engaged in a lengthy conversation to mediate for the cities.

First, Abraham wanted God to spare the righteous people who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Second, Abraham’s nephew Lot lived in Sodom. God did spare Lot and his two daughters, perhaps as a direct result of Abraham’s request. Genesis 19:29 states, “So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.” Abraham certainly wanted to see his own extended family protected from God’s judgment.

Third, Abraham had compassion for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. While he understood God’s judgment of sin, Abraham asked God to spare the city even if there could be found as few as ten righteous people (Genesis 18:32). God agreed to spare the city for the sake of ten righteous people. Apparently, fewer than ten righteous were found, since God did destroy the cities, sparing only Lot and his two daughters. (God also planned to rescue Lot’s wife, but she died when she disobeyed God and turned back to look at the city as it was being destroyed.)

Abraham’s compassion for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals the heart of a man who cared greatly for others, including those who did not follow God. In fact, the angelic visitors who visited Lot were threatened by men of Sodom who desired to have sex with them. Though Sodom’s citizens were wicked, Abraham did not wish to see their destruction.

Like Abraham, we are called to have great compassion for others, including those whose lives do not follow God’s ways. Also, we must ultimately accept God’s judgments, even when His decisions are not our desired choices.

Abraham’s request for these cities to be spared was denied. God sometimes says “no” to our requests, too, even when we pray with good intentions. The Lord may have other plans that we do not understand, yet which are part of His perfect will.

Finally, consider how God did answer Abraham’s request by rescuing Lot and his daughters. Although Abraham’s mediatory work did not result in the sparing of the cities, it did bring about the salvation of Abraham’s nephew. Abraham’s prayers on behalf of others were important, just as our prayers are today.

But we also remember Genesis 14:17-24:

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).*

*18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,*

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,*

*Creator of heaven and earth.*

*20 And praise be to God Most High,*

*who delivered your enemies into your hand.”*

*Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

*21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”*

*22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, 23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ 24 I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”*

**Example**: A wealthy man once became frustrated with his elders’ refusal to follow his advice for running the church more efficiently. During the capital campaign for a new sanctuary, other members of the church were greatly impressed by his generous offer to fund the entire project. Their excitement turned to dismay when the elders rejected his gift, but the leaders feared he would use his philanthropy to influence the congregation unduly.

In today’s passage, Abram, for similar reasons, rejects a proposal from the king of Sodom that he keep the booty from his successful raid. The scene depicted in Genesis 14:21–24 is vital for grasping the meaning of this chapter as a whole, and it reveals what was most important to God in those days of mighty kings.

The king of Sodom is contrasted with the king of Salem in these verses, thus accentuating the faithfulness of Salem’s ruler. Sodom’s regent offers to share the spoils from the battle with Abraham, and unlike Melchizedek, he brings no blessing with him (vv. 17–20). If Abram were to accept this offer, the king could enhance his prestige, claiming that he enriched the patriarch. The fate that befalls Sodom (19:23–29) confirms his wicked motivations.

Plainly it would have been wrong of Abram to accept the king’s offer. For one thing, it would have threatened the Lord’s promise to make Abram’s name great. John Calvin perceptively remarks that if Abram had not refused the spoils due him, others would falsely accuse him of using the rescue of Lot as a pretense to get rich.

Secondly, to accept plunder from a defeated and jealous king would have taken glory from God. The Lord promised to reward Abram (12:1–3), and though He can do so through men, Abram knew that He had not chosen to use the king of Sodom for this purpose. Instead of attributing victory to Abram, the Lord’s man, the king greeted him with an ungrateful demand, grasping for his own glory and influence, something God-fearers do not do, **1 Thessalonians 2:4-5:** *We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.*

In refusing Sodom’s offer, Abram testified of the Lord’s mighty power, and left no doubt whose hand brought the triumph.