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## **Prayer Study 4 - Genesis 18: 1 - 33**

### ***Background***

In our previous studies on prayer, we looked at Daniel's prayer, the account of Hagar and Ishmael, and the Lord's prayer. In this study we return to Genesis once again to look at Abraham's prayer - his plea for Sodom.

Our account begins in Genesis 18, which is preceded by a number of significant events:

- the call of Abram (Chapter 12);
- the separation of Abram and Lot (Chapter 13);
- the rescue of Lot by Abram (Chapter 14);
- God's covenant with Abram (Chapter 15);
- the account of Hagar and Ishmael (Chapter 16); and,
- the covenant of circumcision (Chapter 17).

Have you ever experienced being 'burdened' by the Lord for something, or someone? Your heart is so heavy and moved you can't help but turn to the Lord in prayer, and continue prayerfully until the burden is lifted. This is at the heart of intercession, and the prayers from Abraham are perhaps amongst the most moving that we read of in Scripture.

With these events in mind, we shall continue our series of studies on prayer.

### ***The Message***

After Abram and Lot had separated, Abram "*moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.*" (Genesis 13:18) And so it is in Mamre some time later that the account in Chapter 18 begins - no longer simply Abram (exalted Father) at this point, but Abraham (father of many, with an honorific 'h') following the covenant the Lord has established with him (Genesis 17: 5). Here Abraham is visited by three men (v 2) and it seems evident that two of them were angels (Genesis 19: 1) and the third may have been the Lord himself (Genesis 18: 1, 13, 17, 20, 22, 26, 33). We know that hospitality is extremely important in the near-east, and Abraham demonstrates this by his response to the three men:

- He hurried from his tent to meet them (v 2);
- He bowed low to the ground before them (v2);
- He addressed one of his guests as 'my lord' (v3) and referred to himself as 'your servant' (v3, 5);
- He indicated that serving them would be an honour for him (v3);
- He arranged for water to be brought to allow them to wash their feet and rest (v4). This allowed the three men to prepare themselves for the meal that followed;



- He prepared a wonderful meal for them (fine flour for bread, a choice tender calf etc.) (v6 - 8);
- He did not join them in the feast, but stood near them under a tree, attentive to their every need (v8).

After this feast, the Lord blesses Abraham and Sarah - again promising them a son. Abraham was at this time ninety-nine years old, and Sarah was “*past the age of childbearing.*” (V 11) Whilst we may be surprised by Sarah’s reaction, we must remember how when the Lord first made the promise to Abraham (in Genesis 17: 16), Abraham’s response was also to laugh reflecting his disbelief (Genesis 17: 17). The Lord’s response is truly wonderful...“*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*”. What a challenge this is to us, and like the father of the boy with an evil spirit our reaction should be “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24)

It is at this point that the men get up to leave (v 16), and the extent of God’s blessing and favour on Abraham becomes evident. They are in fellowship:

*“Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?...”  
... “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””* (Genesis 18: 17, 20 - 21)

As we know from continuing in this chapter, clearly the Lord did not hide His plan and purpose from Abraham. His desire and intent was to ‘fellowship’ with Abraham and make His plans known. We sometimes fail to appreciate how much God desires to fellowship with us today, if we would just give Him the time of day. We must really take this message to heart, because sometimes we expect to come before God in prayer with a shopping list of our needs without coming forward from a place of fellowship. We need to dwell in Him, give Him our all, draw near to His heart and then beseech him in prayer.

There are perhaps many reasons why God chose to witness for Himself the extent of depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah. Obviously He would already have known this in full, and the outcry against these places had already reached Him. I think perhaps that much like the fellowship and intimacy that God originally had with Adam is once again seen in the relationship that developed between God and Abraham. And knowing something of the Lord’s plan and purpose for Sodom and Gomorrah, it is at this point that we begin to learn through Abraham’s action something of intercession...

*“And Abraham drew near and said, Is it so? Will You cut off the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city; is it so You will cut off and will not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous ones that are within it? Far be it from You to act in this way, to put to death the righteous with*



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*the wicked. Far be it from You. The Judge of all the earth, shall He not do right?"* (Genesis 18: 23 - 25)

This amazing account of the dialogue between the Lord and Abraham continues with God's response:

*"If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."* (Genesis 18: 26)

I find it incredible that Abraham had the boldness to approach God in this way. But note that Abraham 'drew near'. He entered into fellowship and dialogue with God, speaking from his heart and speaking of His understanding of God's compassion. And much like Job, God's response was not one of rebuke - but God's heart was moved.

What is even more incredible is the rest of this dialogue:

*"And Abraham answered and said, Behold, I pray, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I am dust and ash. Perhaps there will be lacking five from the fifty righteous, will You destroy all the city for the five? And He said, If I find forty five there, I will not destroy. And he continued still to speak to Him and said, Perhaps forty will be found there. And He said, I will not do it because of the forty. And he said, Please do not my Lord be angry, that I may speak; perhaps thirty will be found there. And He said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold, I pray, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord; perhaps twenty will be found there. And He said, I will not destroy because of the twenty. And he said, I pray, let not my Lord be angry that I may speak only this time; perhaps ten will be found there. And He said, I will not destroy because of the ten. And when Jehovah had left off speaking to Abraham, He was finished. And Abraham returned to his place"* (Genesis 18: 27 - 33)

From an initial position of 50 righteous people, Abraham has interceded with God such that God is prepared not to destroy Sodom if only 10 righteous people are there. No wonder that Abraham says 'I am dust and ash', and asks that God might not be angry.

Yet in all of this, I can't help but think that God was taking delight in the closeness of that communion. And in all of this, Abraham was filled with humility and speaking from his heart.

### **Questions**

1. Read Hebrews 13: 2. How does this and Abraham's account challenge our attitude towards hospitality?



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2. Have you ever laughed or expressed disbelief at one of God's promises given to you?
  3. What do you think was God's motive for wanting to see for himself the extent of the depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah, when as God He would have known already?;
  4. What insight of intercession does Abraham's prayer give you? Can you think of times when you have felt a burden to pray through intercession?