

Truth for Today

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The appearance to Abram (Abraham)

Introduction

Before we commence considering chapter 18 and this amazing event where the LORD appears to Abraham, we must consider the background of events, which lead up to this chapter. There are two reasons for the LORD appearing at this time. First, it is in connection with a son and heir for Abraham and Sarah. Second, is the sad situation of the cities Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding area whose immoral activity had come to the attention of the LORD! Indirectly Abraham is involved in this second reason because his nephew Lot now resides in Sodom. Throughout this talk I will refer to Abram and Sarai as Abraham and Sarah, although their names were not changed until chapter 17.

Background relating to a promised heir

We are first introduced to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 11 as part of the genealogy showing Abraham's family line back to Noah. Sarah, is introduced as Abraham's wife, but she was not able to have children, verse 30. From chapter 12 through to 17, the LORD makes promises on various occasions to Abraham that he would have a son even though there were impossible physical difficulties. This was a long test of faith for this godly couple in their spiritual journey; it was to last for 25 years! If we are being tested, let us take encouragement, that some situations require long patience with a loving God who understands, cares, and will eventually bring His own solution to us.

For much of the time when the LORD communicates with them it appears to be with Abraham only, but no doubt he shared the news and promises with Sarah. It is not until chapter 18, that Sarah is specifically mentioned as being present at the conversation between the LORD and Abraham.

In chapter 12, there are a number of promises made to Abraham. I will mention three of them.

Verse 2, "I will make you a great nation".

Verse 3, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed".

Finally, in verse 7, "To your descendants I will give this land".

There are great spiritual blessings for all who carefully study these and the other promises made to Abraham in this chapter. The three that I highlight all depend upon a son and heir.

After a time in Egypt, Abraham returns to the "Land of Promise". In chapter 13 the LORD again strengthens His promises in verses 14-17, "The LORD said to Abraham, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.'" The promise that Abraham's descendants would be numerous has been fulfilled in two ways: the nation of Israel and in all those who have faith in God. This second fulfilment is explained in Romans 4:9-16.

Chapter 15 opens with Abraham struggling in his faith, as he communicates with the LORD, verse 2, "I go childless". Let us read part of verses 4-6 which give the LORD'S response and the strengthening of Abraham in his faith. "And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, '... but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

The LORD removes the fear that Abraham's heir was to be an adopted child. The child and heir would be his own and his seed as numerous as the stars of heaven. Although Abraham is strengthened in his faith, there are still further trials on the journey of faith. We too, may go through a number of difficult times before we arrive, in our spiritual journey, where our loving heavenly Father wants us to be.

The communication that Abraham received, that it would be his child, is no doubt communicated to Sarah. From chapter 16 we see that Sarah is a woman of action. If this is what the LORD has said, then Sarah has a solution. Sarah has an Egyptian maid servant, a slave girl probably purchased in Egypt when Abraham and Sarah lived there. Let us read verses 2-4, "So Sarah said to Abraham, 'See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.' And Abraham heeded the voice of Sarah. Then Sarah, Abraham's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abraham to be his wife, after Abraham had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived; her mistress became despised in her eyes."

This action gives rise to another difficulty. Hagar now considers that she is a better woman than Sarah and Hagar despises her mistress. The fact that she is a slave wife is no hindrance to the thoughts of the flesh. After Hagar's son, Ishmael, is born, until the next time the LORD appears to communicate to Abraham, thirteen years elapse. A long silence between God and this man of faith. Chapter 17 commences with Abraham aged 99 and still the promise of an heir has yet to be completed. But chapter 17 is full of promises linked to a son of both Abraham and Sarah. It is in this chapter that their names are changed to Abraham and Sarah, meaning respectively, "Father of a multitude" and "Princess". For Abraham, this change emphasises the promises that the LORD has made repeatedly. As for Sarah the name change is more subtle, no longer "My princess" but simply "Princess". I believe we have in this new name an indication of dignity as the mother to be of the nation of Israel.

Now, before we consider chapter 18 it will be as well to say a little about Abraham's nephew, Lot.

Background connected with Lot

Abraham was called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldeans to journey to a new land. We see from Genesis 11:27 to 12:5 that Lot's father had died early in Lot's life and an attachment had grown between him and his uncle. Lot goes with Abraham and during the initial years follows Abraham. It is not until both had grown extremely rich with much livestock that we read of Lot making a decision. It was not a very good decision. Eventually it would prove to be disastrous for him and his family. Lot decides to move near the city of Sodom and later into the city.

In chapter 14, we read of the defeat of the king of Sodom, which results in many people taken captive, including Lot, his family and possessions. In chapter 14, we read about Abraham rescuing Lot and all the others by defeating the aggressors. However, Lot does not take this as a warning that he is in the wrong place; he goes back to live in Sodom. We do not even read that he thanked his uncle for the rescue and recovery of his possessions!

We know from 2 Peter 2:4-9 that Lot was a righteous person but he lacked the conviction to live a righteous life. From his actions, he preferred riches and an influential lifestyle. By the time we read of Lot at the end of chapter 19, he is a drunkard, has lost all his possessions and his wife and most of his family are dead. Lot's two surviving daughters have an immoral outlook on life and are prepared to commit incest with their father. Lot brings to us a salutary lesson, that even as Christians we need to make the right choices in life.

Chapter 18

Let us now consider the chapter before us today. We will look at the chapter under four headings.

Verses 1-8 Visitors and hospitality

Let us read the first eight verses, "Then the LORD appeared to [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, 'My Lord, if I have now found favour in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.' They said, 'Do as you have said.' So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.' And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate."

It was an ordinary afternoon for Abraham and Sarah who were resting during the heat of the day when travellers appear at the encampment. Three strangers had appeared and, from verse 3, we get an understanding that Abraham perceived that at least one of them was no ordinary traveller. We should remember that this was not the first time the LORD had appeared to Abraham, see 12:7 and 17:1. Immediately, as according to custom, Abraham offers hospitality, water to wash their feet, a place to rest in the shade of the trees and the provision of food. The offer is gratefully acknowledged and accepted. Abraham hurries to organise the preparations. First, to Sarah, to organise the baking of

bread that is required for the meal. Then, to the herd to select a suitable animal to be slain, prepared and cooked for the meat dish. Eventually all the food is ready and, in verse 8, Abraham is personally involved in the serving of the refreshments for the visitors. Verse 8 states, "He stood by them under the tree as they ate." Abraham did not eat with them, but waited in attendance just in case anything further is required.

Although we can read this whole event in about one minute, the actual lapse time would be an hour or two. The care of strangers and hospitality was an important social activity and it was not undertaken lightly. In many countries today hospitality is still important and among Christians the Scriptures would encourage this kind of fellowship, both planned and unplanned. Those that take a responsible place in Christian fellowships must be hospitable as we read in 1 Timothy 3:2: "The overseer then must be irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, discreet, decorous, hospitable, apt to teach" (JN Darby Translation). However, in other Scriptures all Christians should be hospitable, as we read in Romans 12:13: "given to hospitality". Such kindness strengthens the bonds between believers and often has unexpected rewards. When a stranger, individual or family on holiday, arrives at your fellowship would you invite them home for lunch or tea? Being hospitable is not just being friendly and welcoming to your church service, it goes beyond as Abraham did with these three strangers. As we leave this section let us remind ourselves what Hebrews 13:1-2 (Authorised Version) says about this service, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Verses 9-15 The first reason for the Lord's coming to Abraham

Let us read verses 9-15, "Then they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' So he said, 'Here, in the tent.' And He said, 'I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.' (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' And the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh!'"

There are a number of important issues raised in these verses, as well as the fact that the LORD is now definitely giving a time for the birth of Isaac. There will be no further re-affirming of this promise, The event will now take place although there is to be still a further lapse of time. Chapter 21 commences with the simple statement, "And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." God always fulfils His promises, sometimes quickly and sometimes after long delays.

As the LORD confirms what is going to happen relatively soon, Sarah laughs within herself and in her mind contradicts the LORD. The physical reality is that they are old and naturally speaking Sarah was long past the stage of child bearing. At this point, Sarah's faith is constrained by her physical age. She needs a faith to go beyond the natural realm and see that God is able. What does Hebrews 11:1(New International Version) say, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The LORD knew what Sarah was thinking and challenges her through Abraham. At this point Sarah speaks but denies again because she is afraid. The LORD re-affirms that she did laugh. It is a serious thing for a believer to contradict the Lord Jesus Christ. Such an attitude is the work of Satan in our hearts, making us think that we know better than God! (See Matthew 16:23).

Verses 16-21 The second reason for the LORD's coming

Another reason for the LORD appearing to Abraham is the pressing situation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Let us read from the above verses, "Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?' ... And the LORD said, '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 three men prepare to leave and Abraham goes with them for a little way to set them on their journey. It is at this point the LORD decides to share with Abraham about the problem of Sodom and Gomorrah. We are told initially why the LORD has confidence in Abraham:

- Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation
- all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him
- 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.

When we understand the confidence, then we see how the LORD is able to make known the second reason for appearing on earth in this way. There is an outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. So great is the outcry, it has gained the attention of the LORD and He has come down personally to see for Himself. Judgment is God's work, which is executed righteously.

Verses 22-33 Abraham's intervention for the righteous

Due to the lack of time, I will summarise verses 22-33. Because the LORD made known to Abraham about the serious situation of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham realises that his nephew and family are in great danger. Abraham starts interceding for the righteous in the city. Abraham commences with 50 and gradually reduces to 10. We are not told why Abraham started at 50 or why he stopped at 10. We can only surmise that possibly there were 50 people associated with Lot and possibly 10 in his immediate family. Abraham's great concern was for the righteous that they might not perish with the wicked.

Do we have the interest and wellbeing of fellow believers at heart? Are we concerned for a world of lost sinners who must surely come under the judgment of God? Do we pray for them?

By now, the two other men (angels) were approaching Sodom. By the next day judgment fell, fire coming down from heaven. The angels remove Lot, his wife and daughters from Sodom, but his wife perishes soon after due to disobedience. The rescue shows the kindness of the LORD to both Abraham and Lot. Though Abraham stopped at ten, one righteous person was rescued as we discover in 2 Peter 2.

Conclusion

Who would have thought that Lot was righteous? He showed no interest in spiritual things and it would appear that he taught his family nothing of the ways of the LORD. Lot was the total opposite to Abraham and yet they both started out together with the same opportunities.

Dear believer, do not waste your life! Live for your Lord and Saviour making every moment count!

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