

Study 5

REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

Genesis 18-19

Bible Talk Discussion

What insights or observations from Sunday's talk did you find helpful, interesting or confusing? Note down any questions and see if you can answer them along the way.

Can you remember a time when you've successfully haggled/negotiated for a much better price on something? Tell the group about it.

Growth Group Discussion

So far in our exploration of Abraham's journey of faith, we've seen that God's covenant to Abraham is one-sided ie. it's unconditional on God's part. Remember that after Abraham's strange trance-like experience when he saw the smoking fire pot pass between the cut up animals, we were told that God reaffirmed his promises to Abraham - *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your offspring I give this land...'* (Genesis 15:18).



As the journey of Abraham has gone on, we've also started to see that there is a conditional aspect to receiving the blessings promised by the covenant. That is, if blessing is to come to the world through Abraham and his offspring, they need to be a transformed people so they can bring blessing to others! In

Genesis 17:1, we were told, *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'*

God's absolute, everlasting faithfulness to his people should produce a response of faithful and righteous living. And in the section we're looking at today, the often flawed and doubting Abraham, does in fact walk closely with his LORD.

Unexpected Visitors

Read Genesis 18:1-15

We're reminded in this section that Abraham is a pilgrim on a journey. He doesn't live in a home or even in a town (unlike Lot in Genesis 19). He lives in a tent. This land has been promised to him and his offspring, but right now he lives by faith not by sight. He is a camper!

1. Who visits Abraham in the hot part of the day?

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2. How would you describe Abraham's actions towards these visitors?

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Abraham and His World

Providing hospitality is a real feature of the events in Genesis 18-19. It's been pointed out that in the way Abraham responds to the three men, he is the ultimate host in the middle-eastern bedouin way. Notice that the three men appear in the hot 'siesta' part of the day (v1), but in no way does Abraham treat their arrival as an inconvenience. Abraham does all that he can to serve them. He rushes to them and bows low to them and humbly asks that he might be allowed to provide some refreshment (v2-3). Notice the modest way he refers to the meal he might provide (v4) but in reality he is determined to lavish them with a great banquet (v6-7). And as they eat, he humbly stays apart from his guests, in the manner of a servant, so that they might enjoy their meal in peace (v8).

In fact there are many comparisons going on between Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18-19, including in the area of hospitality. For example, the men encounter Lot while he is sitting at the gate of the city (Abraham was sitting at his tent). Lot presses the visitors to spend the night with him (Abraham begged that he might offer refreshment to them). But as with everything else, Lot never measures up to Abraham. Notice that with Abraham he wanted the 'finest flour' used for his visitors (18:6), but with Lot he cooks quickly and cheaply made 'unleavened bread' (19:3).



How often is the thought of visitors an inconvenience for you? Abraham is in the background for the Christian virtue of hospitality. We're told this in the New Testament: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13:2.

3. Does anyone want to share an experience of what it was like when unexpected visitors have come to your place and how you responded, good or bad?!

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4. How would you describe Sarah in this moment?

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You might like to check out the similarities between Sarah’s response in Genesis 18:11-12 and with Abraham in Genesis 17:17-19.

At Journey’s End



The LORD’s messengers appear to Abraham and Sarah to announce this miraculous birth. And so once again, the LORD is showing them that offspring of Abraham won’t come through the child of Hagar, their previous short-cut approach to producing offspring. In God’s plans, this child will be the result of God’s own choosing and God’s own miraculous intervention. Even though Sarah has been ‘barren’ (11:30) all her married life and is now very, very old, God has his own plans to bring about a nation of people who will belong to him. The New Testament takes up the example of Abraham and Sarah to tell us what it means to be a Christian today.

Read Hebrews 11:1-12

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see....⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

5. How is the faith of a Christian related to the faith of Abraham and Sarah?

6. What does the way Abraham and Sarah respond to God's promises tell us about faith?

Negotiating With God?!

Read Genesis 18:16-33

7. In verses 16-21, the LORD seems to have this dialogue with himself about whether or not to share with Abraham what he is about to do. What do you think is going on here?

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8. What sort of a person does the LORD intend Abraham to be?

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Genesis 18 presents to us one of the most extraordinary conversations in all of the bible. This is a conversation almost comes across like it's a negotiation between two 'partners'.

9. What is Abraham seeking to know from his LORD?

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10. How does Abraham come across throughout this conversation? How does the LORD come across throughout this conversation?

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11. Why do you think Abraham stops after asking question about ten people and doesn't keep pushing in his very careful and reverent negotiation over the extent of God's justice? (v32)

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Have a look at the map on the following page to see where Sodom and Gomorrah were located. An outcry (18:21; 19:13) had gone up to God because of what was going on in these cities. Later on in the Old Testament, we told more of what brought about this outcry - *"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.* Ezekiel 16:49-50

What an extraordinary thing is revealed about God in this conversation. In his justice, it's not what we might naturally think, that God will simply save *the righteous people out of the city* that is going to come under His judgement. It is in fact that God in his justice will save *everyone in the city* because of a few righteous people who are in it. Abraham presses the LORD, (at the LORD's own invitation) to show that God's justice also involves God's mercy.

12. In God's everlasting covenant to Abraham, he has promised that Abraham will bring blessing to the nations through a life of righteousness and justice (Genesis 18:19). How is Abraham demonstrating that he's living out this life of righteousness and justice in this incredible conversation that he's having with God?

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THE JOURNEY OF ABRAHAM

At Journey's End



It's as if the LORD has challenged Abraham to play the role of righteous judge. He's invited Abraham in to know his plans and then the Lord lets himself be interrogated by Abraham so that he might respond to Abraham's righteous plea for justice. Abraham here is like a prophet and priest. He's in intimate relationship with God, interceding on behalf of others for their merciful salvation. Does this remind you of anyone? Discuss.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Our focus this week hasn't been on the events of Genesis 19, that is, what happens with the events surrounding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But if you have time, your group might like to read the chapter discuss it together. One question would be: Why you do think it doesn't turn out the way that the Lord said it would? That is, 'If I find fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten....righteous people in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake'



Pray

In the light of Abraham's actions, here's some things to pray for:

- Pray that God would give us the faith of Abraham and Sarah, a faith that isn't necessarily perfect, but is set on the promises of God – faith that through Jesus we are saved from destruction, and will have an eternal blessing.
- Give thanks that we have Jesus, who is our righteous and perfect priest. Give thanks that through his perfect obedience that took him to the cross, and through his intercession on our behalf, our sin is dealt with and we are made righteous.

Upcoming Events

JUNE 3

Working Bee



JULY 21-23

Men's Winter Camp

