

## Genesis 18

Recap:

So far we have looked at the account of creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, the flood, God's covenant, the Tower of Babel, how nations were formed and the move that would bring Abram from the mouth of the Euphrates, to Canaan. We saw how Lot and Abram parted, and how Abram rescued Lot when the kings from the north attacked. We then saw how God specifically repeated his covenant with Abram. We then looked at the birth of Ishmael, the covenant of circumcision, and the renaming of Abram and Sarai.

First read Genesis 18 1-15

*1 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.*

Mamre was the highest point on the ridge route. You could see approaching travellers from miles away. This would give you sufficient time to prepare to meet them – whether friend or foe.

*2 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.*

Normal housing in those days was a tent. These were probably similar to the tents still used by the Bedouin today, a roof made of woven goat's hair, supported on strong poles and sides which can be opened as required. These tents can be any size and are extendible as the family grows!



<http://commondatastorage.googleapis.com/static.panoramio.com/photos/original/10243935.jpg>

Abraham was outside, but sitting in the shade given by the tent. Something caused him to look up, and there nearby were three men, standing. They didn't walk up, they appeared (verse 1).

This is the first time we come across the phrase 'looked up'. There are many places in the bible where on 'looking up' someone suddenly sees something which had not been there before – often God's miraculous provision.

*(An interesting study in its own right! As we walk, do we constantly look down – for hazards to avoid, or do we look up, scanning the distance for new delights? Have we ever missed out on a blessing from God by not by 'looking up'? – some references are given in the appendix at the end of this study)*

<http://www.tribes.co.uk/countries/jordan/indigenous/bedouin> states: Many of the characteristics of the Jordan and Arab society are found in their strongest form in Bedouin culture. Bedouins are most famous for their hospitality or *diyafa*. It is part of their creed – rooted in the harshness of desert life – that no traveller is ever turned away. Any stranger, even an enemy, can approach a tent and be sure of three days' board, lodging and protection after which he may leave in peace. Bedouin will always offer their guest a rich meal, even if they have to slaughter their last sheep or borrow from neighbours to do it. Their honour is bound by their hospitality and lavish generosity.

So it was in the time of Abraham – but here he also recognised the presence of the Lord:

*3 He said, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 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.'*

Abraham, a man of high standing, here recognised the superiority of his visitors and therefore humbly asked permission to offer them hospitality.

**Who were these three men?** (see v22, and 19:1)

*6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. 'Quick,' he said, 'get three seahs (about 35 pounds) of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.'*

*7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 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.*

**What do we know about 'The great trees of Mamre'?**

Great trees were a valuable feature in the landscape. Too mature to cut down for fuel or tent poles they stood as a significant feature, recognisable from some distance away, and a useful signpost for the long-distance traveller. Mamre was 'out-of-town' from Hebron, a crossroads where the road from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea crossed the main Ridge Route from North to South.

Trees on high places were used as shrines, here Abram also had built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 13:18) after he and Lot had separated. And it was here that he had settled. It was the highest spot on the ridge and from here you had a commanding view for miles around.

**Why did the three travellers choose this spot to commence their descent to Sodom?** (They didn't need food, or rest, nor did they need to spy out the land – it could only be that they needed to speak with Abraham and Sarah)

*9 'Where is your wife Sarah?' they asked him.*

*'There, in the tent,' he said.*

*10 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.*

*11 Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'*

### **Why did Sarah laugh?**

Sarah had got used to the idea that her (adopted) teenage son was to be their heir. She had been barren all her life, and was now well beyond childbearing age. And she had heard it all before. Several times the Lord had spoken to Abraham to tell him that he was to have countless children. But she had accepted it would not be through her. The whole idea was laughable.

*13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?"'*

When the Lord makes a statement, it is a very foolish person who thinks that what he says is laughable. Faced with the Bible, many laugh rather than accept the truth. There is no third option – either the word of God is true, or it is so false it can be treated with derision.

*14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'*

Neither of them had really grasped that the Lord of creation could effortlessly do what he wanted to. He who had created the universe and everything in it was perfectly able to do this small thing. Note that he will be present for this act of creation (even though his presence is not mentioned in Genesis 21:1-7)

*15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.'*  
*But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'*

Now the reality of what she has done hit Sarah. So often we will try to deny our faults: 'It wasn't me'. Again, Sarah still hadn't understood that the Lord of creation even knows our innermost thoughts. He didn't condemn Sarah, but he did suggest that he is not to be trifled with. That is for us too, when sometimes what he says may cause us to be afraid.

### **How would we have reacted?**

*16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 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.'*

The Lord had promised Abraham that the land was to be his, but there were things about it that Abraham must know. I'm sure he knew what Sodom was like – he may have visited Lot from time to time, and rumours were bound to have reached his ears. But Abraham and his descendants had been charged with the task of *'doing what is right and just'* (V19) and the Lord was about to demonstrate what that will involve. 'Doing' requires action, not passive acceptance of the evils around us.

**Are there areas over which we have influence where we have accepted wrong practices? (Nationally or personally)**

*20 Then the Lord said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 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.'*

*22 The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.*

Abraham knew full well that the report the Lord had received was true and it was now obvious to him that something terrible was going to happen to the wicked people of Sodom, and he was afraid for Lot and his family.

*23 Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 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? 25 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?'*

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

*27 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, 28 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.'*

*29 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.'*

*30 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.'*

*31 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.'*

*32 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.'*

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

**We know, and the Lord knew, that there were not ten righteous people in Sodom and the surrounding towns. So why was this scene played out?**

Note that Abraham did not ask for the wicked to be spared for their own sake, rather he is concerned that there may be other righteous people, like Lot, who would also perish.

This passage has been described as the first prayer recorded in the Bible. And so it is: man speaking to his God. **So what can we learn from this prayer?**

- **V23 'Then Abraham approached him'** For our prayers to be effective we first have to draw near to God
- **V25 'Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'** It is right to plead for that which we know to be in accordance with God's character
- **V27 'though I am nothing but dust and ashes'** As we draw near to God it is right to recognise his awesome greatness and our unworthiness
- **V32 'May the Lord not be angry'** Actually God would never be angry if we are prepared to wrestle with him in prayer
- **V32 'let me speak just once more'** Recognise when it is time to stop praying and wait for the Lord to reply

Note that it was *'when the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham'* that he left. Abraham might have thought that this incident had been prompted by himself, but perhaps many of our prayers are actually prompted by the Lord! **What could we learn from that?**

## APPENDIX

### Looked up – Opened Eyes

Genesis 3:5-7

5 “For God knows that when you eat of it **your eyes will be opened**, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.<sup>7</sup> Then **the eyes of both of them were opened**, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Genesis 13:10

10 Lot **looked up** and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, towards Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

Genesis 13:14

14 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “*Lift up your eyes* from where you are and look north and south, east and west.

Genesis 18:2

2 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.

Genesis 21:19

19 Then **God opened her eyes** and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

Genesis 22:4

4 On the third day Abraham **looked up** and saw the place in the distance.

Genesis 22:13

13 **Abraham looked up** and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Genesis 24:63,64

63 He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he **looked up**, he saw camels approaching.<sup>64</sup> Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel

Genesis 31:10-12

10 “In the breeding season I once had a dream in which I **looked up** and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted.<sup>11</sup> The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’<sup>12</sup> And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.

Numbers 22:28,31

28 Then the LORD **opened the donkey's mouth**, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

31 Then the LORD **opened Balaam's eyes**, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face down.

Joshua 5:13

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he **looked up** and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

2 Kings 6:17

17 And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so that he may see." Then **the LORD opened the servant's eyes**, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all round Elisha.

1 Chronicles 21:16

16 David **looked up** and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell face down.

Ezekiel 8:5

5 Then he said to me, "Son of man, look towards the north." **So I looked**, and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar I saw this idol of jealousy.

Also Daniel 8v3, 10v5, Zech. 1v18, 2v1, 5v1, 5v5, 5v9, 6v1

Luke 24:31

31 Then **their eyes were opened** and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.

John 9:25,26

25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? **How did he open your eyes?**"

Acts 3:4-6

*4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!'*

*5 So the man **gave them his attention**, expecting to get something from them.*

*6 Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'*