

Lesson 36
Belief And Unbelief Within The Covenant

Genesis 18:1-19:38

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Genesis 18 and especially 19 are two of the most terrible chapters in the Bible, and they are reminders of the hideous possibilities of sin, and the extent to which evil can take hold of human nature.

B. These two chapters are also a picture of the devastating effects of unbelief for a true believer within God's covenant. The great contrast in these chapters is "believing Abraham" over against "unbelieving Lot."

II. ABRAHAM VISITED BY GOD 18:1-14

A. God appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, which means "wealth or fatness." Abraham was in fellowship with his God. Because he is in fellowship, the Lord appears unto him (cf. John 14:21).

B. Three men visitors appear to Abraham. He calls one "Lord," indicating that one of the visitors was the pre-incarnate Christ and the other two were angels. It is the Lord who speaks to them in context (18:13-14, 17, 20, 22b, 26, 33). The visitors appear as men, but since every visible representation of God in human form is the second person of the Trinity, it may be concluded that one of the visitors is the pre-incarnate Christ.

C. Abraham shows wonderful hospitality towards them and they became Abraham's dinner guests.

III. SARAH'S UNBELIEF 16:9-15

A. When Abraham is in fellowship, God appears to him and reaffirms His Covenant that Abraham will have a promised son through Sarah. Sarah, who was behind the tent door listening, laughed when she heard this, for both she and Abraham were past the age of sexual reproduction. She was 90 and Abraham was 100 years old. NOTE. Sarah received this message with the utter astonishment of unbelief. She could not conceive the possibility of it. This is only one out of several incidents that indicated that Sarah's spiritual kinship with Abraham was not very close, and that she had never really risen with him to his clear faith in God.

B. Sarah's laugh (Isaac) was one of unbelief. She did not believe that God was omnipotent and was a miracle-working God, for "is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah also learned about the omniscience of God, for He knew all about her laughing even though she denied that she had laughed. NOTE. Unbelief is questioning God's ability. God can do the impossible. Also it never pays to lie for God knows all about us and we must answer to Him and not to men.

IV. ABRAHAM'S PLACE OF FAVOR 18:16-22

A. The Lord and the two angels looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah, for they saw the terrible wickedness of these cities. Abraham went with them to direct the way.

B. God makes a special revelation to Abraham of His intended visitation of judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham gets insight into God's plans because he was in fellowship with his Lord. This revelation of judgment was given because Abraham was important in God's plan (19:18) and it would be a powerful example to Abraham's household concerning God's attitude and action toward sin (18:19).

C. The two angels go on to Sodom and Gomorrah but the Lord stays behind with Abraham. Now Abraham has a chance to talk privately with the Lord.

V. ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS 18:23-33

A. Abraham, upon hearing of the judgment of Sodom, becomes very concerned about his cousin Lot who lives in that city. Abraham's attitude could have been, "It serves Lot right for he should have never been in Sodom." Yet Abraham was in fellowship with his God and had concern for all true believers in Christ no matter what their spiritual condition may be.

B. Abraham sets forth his case before God: will God destroy the righteous with the wicked? He asks successively whether or not God would spare Sodom for 50 righteous persons, then 45, 40, 30, 20, and 10. NOTE. Actually Abraham was bargaining with God, for he was only sure that Lot was true believer with positional righteousness before God. Abraham had great confidence that "the Judge of all the earth will do right.

C. God's answer to Abraham is that He would not judge Sodom if He could find 10 righteous persons. However, He could not find even 10 people. God spared Lot because he was righteous before God (2 Pet, 2:7), for he believed and his belief was counted to him for righteousness (Rom. 1:16-17, 4:3). Apparently Lot had two virgin daughters that were believers for they were spared from the judgment. Lot's wife, his two married daughters and his son-in-laws were not believers and they all perished in the judgment.

D. God answered Abraham's prayer but not exactly like Abraham had petitioned. His petition was that the righteous would be spared and the city not destroyed. God destroyed the city and spared all the righteous. Abraham's desire was answered but not his entire petition.

VI. LOT'S CARNALITY 19:1-11

A. The two angels came to the home of Lot in Sodom. Lot showed them warm hospitality and invited them to stay. But they insisted that they "abide in the street all night." Lot, knowing the terrible lawlessness in Sodom, would not let them stay in the streets and practically forced them to stay in his house.

B. A throng of wicked men in Sodom made insistent demands that Lot bring out the two guests that they "may know them." The Sodomites were inflamed with ugly lust to "know them" (19:5) which is to sexually abuse them by the practice of homosexuality.

NOTE. There have been other cities in history that prided themselves in homosexuality. Two of these were Pompeii and Herculaneum and both of these were destroyed in similar ways to Sodom and Gomorrah. Pompeii was covered with lava from a volcanic eruption. NOTE: The depraved condition of Sodom is set forth in Romans 1:24-32. The debasing sins of Sodom are appearing in our contemporary society at an alarming rate. This is according to prophecy (2 Tim. 3:1-8).

C. Lot rebukes these perverts for their wickedness and then stoops to a pathetic offer. As a device to protect the two guests, he proposes the wrong of substituting his

virgin daughters for the men to abuse. NOTE. This may have been an accepted social practice in Sodom (new morality) but it shows how twisted the backsliding believer's attitude can get when he is out of fellowship with the Lord.

D. The angels intervened and foiled Lot's plan by making the men of Sodom blind so they could not find the door. NOTE. Had Lot been in fellowship he would have trusted God to solve this problem in a way that would have brought glory to God. He should have asked the angels to help.

E. POINT: Lot was a very worldly believer but he was not a happy person. Lot had a "vexed soul" (2 Pet. 2:8) and was miserable. The true Christian out of fellowship is the most miserable person in the entire world. Lot was a backslider, an awful failure. His soul was saved but his life was lost. Furthermore, the Christian out of fellowship will be disciplined for his carnal mindedness. Lot lost all of his possessions and most of his family. Little did Lot realize the terrible price he would pay when he innocently decided to pitch his tent towards Sodom.

VII. LOT'S INEFFECTIVENESS 19:12-22

A. The angels warned Lot of the judgment to come and told him to gather all his family and flee from the city. Lot warned his two married daughters and their husbands, but they just laughed at him, for "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law". NOTE. Lot had no testimony in Sodom and no one listened to him because of the low moral condition of his life. He had lived so long with the world that world lings would no longer listen to him.

B. The angels told Lot to flee to the mountains but Lot wanted to debate with the Lord. It was God's direct will for him to flee to the mountains but he wanted to go to a small city. God, in His permissive will, allowed Lot to go to Zoar. God could not bring judgment on the city of Sodom until every believer was removed from it (19:22). NOTE. We will never know for sure but had Lot fled to the mountains as he was commanded he may not have had the scandalous affair with his two daughters (cf. 19:29-38).

VIII. MRS. LOT'S HESITATION 19:23—29

A. God judged Sodom and Gomorrah by bringing down brimstone and fire from heaven. Every inhabitant perished in the judgment.

B. Mrs. Lot hesitated and looked back towards Sodom, indicating that her heart was really in that wicked city. She was covered by lava and turned into a pillar of salt. NOTE. Genesis 14:10 says that this area was "full of slime (asphalt) pits." Archeology shows the entire region is on the long fault line along the Jordan Valley, Dead Sea, and area below the Dead Sea. Earthquakes have disrupted the land throughout history. Thus geological activity could have been used by God but activated at His precise time. Henry Morris comments,

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by the raining of fire and brimstone (sulfur) from the sky sounds much like volcanic eruption, supposition which is amply supported by an examination of the region formerly occupied by these cities, on the shores of the Dead Sea. The large quantities of sulfur and bitumen, as well as the volcanic rocks and the sulfurous gases generated in the soil all point back to some tremendous holocaust of the past. Even the case of Lot's wife becomes clearer in the light of these facts. It is likely that she lagged behind (the probable meaning of "looked back," and was overcome in the catastrophe. There are huge beds of salt in the region, and it may be that she was buried by a mass of salt thrown in the air. The word translated "salt" does not necessarily denote sodium chloride, but might mean any crystalline chemical compound. It is conceivable that she was buried by the lava and later, through the years and by the ordinary forces of nature, became petrified or fossilized, thus actually turning into "salt." This very thing is known to have happened to a great many individuals in the volcanic destruction of the Roman city of Pompeii. Furthermore, archaeological explorations at the site prove definitely that the region was inhabited during the time of Abraham, but immediately thereafter became

barren of inhabitants and remained so for about two thousand years. (*The Bible and Modern Science*, p. 91)

C. Lot was spared because God remembered Abraham (19:29). Abraham's prayer moved God to action. God is faithful to His word and will not fail His people.

IX. LOT'S DAUGHTERS' WICKED ACTS 19:30-38

A. Lot finally went to the mountains to live for he feared living in Zoar. He and his two daughters dwelt in a cave. Because his virgin daughters escaped judgment, we surmise that they were true believers. However they panicked and were smitten with fear that they were never to have offspring to carry on the family name. These girls devised an evil plan to make Lot, their father, drunk and lie with him so they could become pregnant and carry on the family NOTE. These girls rationalized this act to be right. They were out of fellowship with the Lord and were operating on the worldly thinking they had learned while in Sodom. Had they taken this matter to the Lord in trustful prayer, He could have given them children later through a proper and blessed relationship.

B. The two daughters were guilty of incest and did become pregnant. From them come Moab and Ammon, which developed into the Moabites and the Ammonite people. The Ammonites and Moabites would prove to be long-standing enemies of Israel. NOTE. Little did these daughters know the far-reaching consequences their sin would have against the Jews, the people of God. Carnal reasoning on the part of Christians can produce problems that are real messes!