

Genesis Chapter 18 Summary - John Karmelich

In this chapter, we're working up to a famous story of Abraham and Sarah having a son (God promised them, after she's well past menopause). If you're naïve, the main characters at this point in the book are Abraham (the first Jewish person and his wife Sarah). God called him to move to Israel and He said his descendants would inherit that land. However, they're now old, so the story of them having a child now at their age is significant. It teaches us to trust God when our situation is impossible! The birth of that son is in Chapter 19 (next lesson). This chapter leads up to that event. This chapter also is the home of another famous event, a haggling session that leads up to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. OK, why should we care? To answer, consider why these two significant events intertwine in this part of the book: Let me continue:

In this chapter, we'll get lots of trivial details about what Abraham did when angels came to visit. They came to deliver the baby news. The other major event here is a God and Abraham haggling session on the issue of how many people are spared: if there's "x" righteous people living where God will destroy! I remember having a business relationship with a religious Jewish man, who was going to Israel during a tough economic time. He was told no haggling as the locals were hurting economically. He said, "No haggling? How do I do that? Is there a 12-step program for that?" (After all these years I still think of that story when I hear people haggle!)

Still the main question I want to focus on (as I figured it's relevant to our lives as Christians) is why are these two stories intertwined and what is God trying to teach us with them? Then it occurred to me, I'm calling this lesson, "Why does God choose to reveal what He does?" In the bible there is lots of details to ponder! We can spend endless hours pondering why did God put this or that detail in the bible! You may recall God already told Abraham, he and his wife will have a son. Why have a detailed discussion over it? God could have just told Abraham, He'd spare Sodom for only 10 men, or not tell Abraham the plan at all!

With that said, remember that God dictated these stories to Moses, roughly 400 years later. So why are all the details here and how do they apply to our lives today? That's what I believe God is inspiring me to share with you. I don't claim to be wiser than great bible scholars. I just noticed a lot of details that are inspiring me to put this lesson together and hopefully draw each of us a little closer to God! Let me start by stating where we left off. In Chapter 17 was the story about the Jewish requirement that all the baby boys are to be circumcised on the 8th day of their life (and all Abraham's household at that time!) We also had God telling Abraham his wife will have a child and God "sealed the deal" by walking in a bunch of animal carcasses. It was an ancient way of saying, "I keep my word or I'll be dead like these!"

Chapter 18 opens with Abraham sitting by his tent. We get details that there were oak trees there as he was sitting at the tent entrance in the middle of the day! As we know, we can usually recall incredible details of something significant in our lives. So, whether this story was passed down to Moses, or if it was God recounting it, explicit details are given to set the scene as to remember the event specifically. The thing I want everyone to remember what that Abraham was a wealthy man. Two chapters back he went to war with his own (few hundred) personally trained soldiers. I mention this as Chapter 18 opens with three angels just appearing at Abraham's doorstep. No mention of guards or any warning, so I just figured Abraham realized they were God's messengers.

One of the things that fascinated me is Abraham worked fast to prepare them food and desired they are to wash their feet! It makes me wonder if Abraham knew they were angels, why feed them? I figured he just understood they were sent by God and maybe they were mortal! The point is Abraham got busy and told his wife to make three "measures" of bread. (To this day 3 measures is the symbol of what the hosts are to feed welcome guests). I am endlessly fascinated by if these were angels, it means they had the ability to taste and digest food. It also fascinates me it was a non-kosher diet as the meal included a portion of milk, butter and meat! I figured a long time ago that if we can eat in heaven, the food will go away before it hits the stomach, which is why I'd argue there are no toilets in heaven! We'll see!

While it was food prep time, it was time for the angels to state the purpose of their visit. I need to state at this point the leader is referred to as "The LORD" all in capitals which implies a preincarnate visit of Jesus (or Jewish people might argue the Messiah). That leads to the point of the visit: To announce to Abraham and Sarah that they'd have a baby a year from now. The text says in effect Sarah was too old for a baby (past menopause) but the LORD said, "Is anything too hard for God?" The pun here is Sarah denied she laughed at the thought and God said in effect, "I know everything, you laughed". The pun is the baby's name (Isaac) means laughter! So why does God want us to know all these details? So, we're realizing nothing is impossible for God! Obviously, we don't all get miracles. but I've seen my share of things I can't explain, and He works how He works, end of the issue!

Speaking of explaining things, it was time for two of the angels to head off to Sodom for a program for proof that God's rules are not to be messed with. The head guy of the three visitors who again, I would argue is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus, (debated, but that's that) will now haggle with Abraham on the topic of how many righteous people have to exist in a place to spare God's judgement. I'd argue the subject is relevant to us when we understand His judgment. It's also one reason why I believe a rapture of the church is necessary before the destruction of the world so the righteous (those who trust in Jesus for their salvation) can be spared! The point here is God will always spare those He called before there is any sort of judgment. That's the most important thing to get out of the Sodom story!

With that said, the last half of the chapter is a famous haggling session, where Abraham asks if the city of Sodom will be spared if there are 50 righteous people? God says yes. To make a long story short, it works it's way down to 10 people and Abraham was afraid to go lower. The question for Abraham was did Lot have much of an influence if only 10 were spared? Yes, I believe the answer can go to one, and I'd argue the only reason God hasn't destroyed say the United States for example is due to the righteous who trust in Jesus being here! Still, I don't mess with God and that's why I try to live as He desires as a witness for Him. By the way the other two angels left to go get Lot while this angel (who again I'd say is Jesus preincarnate but I've beaten that point to death!)

Obviously, God knew what He was going to do the whole time! The reason God agreed to haggle, was He wanted Abraham and us to understand the principal of who is saved. Was Lot a good witness to the people of Sodom? Apparently not as they were destroyed. as we'll read of Lot's mistakes in Chapter 19 (in the next lesson). A point for us is God decides who's saved and we simply realize He choose us and we simply accept that fact!

My underlying point of this lesson is God reveals details for us to contemplate and think about how the facts of this story affect our lives. It teaches us about salvation issues (being chosen) and even what we consider impossible God can always do (like give Abraham and Sarah a baby at any age). As far as the issue of angels eating and digesting food or even the non-kosher diet served, (the latter isn't an issue to a Christian), but some small mysteries are left for us to contemplate. Hope that helps and you enjoyed this little lesson on what God can and does teach us and why!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John