

THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

These chapters reveal the Lord's faithfulness in keeping His promises. The Lord reappeared to Abraham to announce the birth of his long-awaited son which He had promised many years earlier (18:10, 11; cp. 15:4; 17:15-19). The Lord tested Abraham's faith concerning his posterity and corrected some misunderstandings he had, but it proved that Abraham's faith in Him was genuine (Rom 4:18ff).

The Lord also demonstrated that He was faithful in holiness by bringing judgment upon Sodom's sin. Although the main thrust of Genesis concerns the patriarchs, the episode of Lot in Sodom is recorded for at least three reasons. First, it demonstrates the Lord's hatred of sin and the need for its judgment. Second, it gives the origin of the Moabite and Ammonite nations, which would become thorns in the lives of Abraham's descendants (19:31-38). Third, it reveals the aggressive nature of sin which progressively deteriorates a man's life when he refuses to separate himself from it (19:14; 13:10-13).

After Sodom's destruction, God showed His faithfulness to Abraham in spite of His sin. Abraham once again lied about Sarah's relationship to him. He claimed she was his sister instead of his wife (20:1-2). As a result, Abimelech took Sarah to be his own wife, but God intervened so that Sarah was not defiled and she was returned to Abraham (20:3-18). After this episode, Sarah was blessed by God with her first child. At ninety years of age, she brought forth a son for Abraham as the Lord had promised (21:1-8; 17:17). Abraham faithfully reared Isaac according to God's standards (21:4; cf. 18:19). However, Sarah considered Ishmael a threat to Isaac as the sole heir of Abraham as long as Hagar and Ishmael remained in the home; she said they needed to be sent away. This was difficult for Abraham to do, but the Lord was faithful to Abraham when He told him that Sarah was right. The Apostle Paul used Hagar and Sarah with their two sons as an example of the flesh against the Spirit. (Gal 4:21-31).

I. The Lord's Appearance to Abraham — 18:1-33

A. Revelation Concerning His Son — 18:1-15

1. Abraham's visitors — 18:1-8

Abraham was in his tent near Hebron (about 25 miles SW of Jerusalem) when the Lord appeared unto him with two angels. The Lord was none other than Christ, the Son of God. He spoke of this occasion when He was debating with some religious leaders in Jerusalem (Jn 8:56-58). Abraham no doubt recognized the LORD since they just had a meeting earlier that year (17:15-19). But Abraham may not have known the other two men were angels, but he was quick to carry out all near-eastern customs. He was concerned that his visitors not bypass him without proper hospitality (v. 3). Abram immediately had a servant prepare a fine meal (vs. 4-8). This historical occasion became the New Testament basis for Christian hospitality (Heb. 13:2).

2. Sarah's response — 18:9-15

18:9 — One must remember that oriental customs prevented the wife from public observation; in fact, even today a Bedouin tent has a separate area for the wife. She was, however, able to listen to the conversation. The question concerning Sarah's whereabouts probably caused Abraham to be certain of his divine messengers.

18:10-15 — The Lord announced that the following year would bring about Sarah's birth of a son. Sarah, being 89 and still barren, laughed at the message. Either Abraham had not revealed the Lord's promise to her earlier or she did not have faith (vs. 11, 12). Naturally speaking she was "well stricken in age," or "worn out." But Abraham had faith in God's promise and did not doubt (Rom 4:20). Sarah's laugh was inward but the Lord knew (Prov. 15:3). He responded with a rebuke, "Is anything too hard for the Lord" (v. 14). Sarah denied her laugh, but the Lord corrected her. The Lord's rebuke cured Sarah's doubts and kindled true faith in the Lord so that she conceived and bore a son in her old age (Heb 11:11).

B. Revelation Concerning Sodom's Sin — 18:16-33

1. The Lord's justice — 18:16-22

18:16ff — Because Abraham was obedient to the Lord and trusted in His promises, there was fellowship between them (vs.18-19). Because of this, and for teaching others, God revealed to Abraham His plan to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were about 18 miles south of Hebron near the southern end of the Dead Sea as far as we can discern.

18:20-22 — God's justice is indicated because the text says He would examine the cities' wickedness and upon verification, they would be destroyed. The Lord probably revealed His plan to warn Abraham that when the principle of separation is violated, not only does the violator (Lot) suffer, but also all those related to him. This would help Abraham in warning his children (v. 19).

The two angels made their journey to Sodom (19:1) while the Lord remained to speak to Abraham.

2. Abraham's intercession — 18:23-33

18:23ff — The verb "draw near" connotes a mind and heart reaching out to God in worship and confession (Ex 30:20; Isa 29:13; Jer. 30:21; Heb. 4:16). Abraham was concerned lest God destroy the righteous with the wicked (Ezk. 33:11). Abraham was not only concerned about Lot, his nephew, but others whom Lot should have influenced to righteousness. Abraham reduced the number of righteous needed to save the city from 50 to 10. It is important here to notice that the man who wanted to save Sodom was not Lot, but Abraham. Lot had infiltrated the city but had no power with God to save the city; Abraham remained separated from the city, but had power with God to intercede for the city.

II. The Lord's Judgment of Sodom — 19:1-38

A. Sodom's Wickedness — 19:1-14

19:1-3 — The two angels who had visited Abraham proceeded to Sodom to verify its wickedness and rescue Lot. Recall that Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom" suggesting his desire to do business with the people in that city (13:12, 13). That was a bad decision. Lot later moved into the city because he was one of the captives when the city was defeated by King Chedorlamer (Gen 14). Now, Lot is seen in a dignified role in the city (19:1). "In the gate" is a phrase indicating prominence, for many public affairs occurred there (2 Kgs. 7:1; Neh. 13:19; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh 20:4; Ruth 4:1; 2 Sam 19:18). A believer is warned by the example of Lot's wrong decisions. The blackest of sins were repulsive to him, but by gradual acceptance, he tolerated them (2 Pet 2:7) and ruined the spiritual life of his family. However, he was careful to provide oriental hospitality like his uncle Abraham (19:2, 3).

19:4, 5 — This section indicates how sinful man had totally perverted the God-given monogamous sexual relationship (Rom 1:24-27). The men of the city desired to participate in homosexual relations with these visitors.

19:6-11 — Lot, desiring to protect his visitors, offered his two virgin daughters for these men to fulfill their wicked desires. One would wonder if Lot could possibly be a believer were it not for Peter's commentary (2 Pet 2:7). He is a picture of the modern Christian who has salvation, but fails to hate the sins of the unrighteous and be separated from their lifestyle (2 Cor. 6:17). Only the intervention of the angels preserved Lot and his daughters. They struck the homosexual perverts with blindness (cp. 2 Kings 6:18).

19:12-14 — Lot was immediately instructed to gather his family together and escape because Sodom's destruction was imminent. However, when Lot attempted to get his sons-in-law to heed the warning of judgment, they thought he was jesting. They did not believe any judgment would destroy the city.

B. Sodom's Destruction — 19:15-29

1. Delayed momentarily — 19:15-22

19:15-16 — The next morning, the angels literally pulled Lot and his family out of the city. They were attracted and attached to the things of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17) yet God was merciful to them (19:16).

19:17-22 — The angels told Lot to flee to the mountains but Lot objected because his fellowship was with people, not with the Lord, as Abraham's was. Therefore, he asked to go to at least a small city called Zoar. Zoar was exempted from destruction because Lot went there for a short time.

2. Destroyed magnanimously — 19:23-29

19:23-25 — The Lord caused the wicked cities to be destroyed. Geology suggests that it may have been caused by an earthquake and that the fire and brimstone rained down on these cities were caused by igniting gases that escaped as a result of the fracturing of the earth's surface. Maybe God simply used a miracle. We are not told how it happened, but we are told that it did happen. Sodom and Gomorrah have not been identified, but it is believed they lie under the water at the southern part of the Dead Sea.

19:26-28 — Lot and his family had been told to make a complete break from the ways of Sodom; Lot was told not to look back at Sodom (19:17, 26). A look back would indicate a desire for its lifestyle. Lot's wife disobeyed and became a pillar of salt. She became a symbolic object lesson of the cost of disobedience. She may have become a pillar of salt by being encrusted with the salty residue falling from the heavens. This happened to those who lingered at the destruction of Pompeii. It is a lesson for modern day Christians to flee the lusts of the world (Lk. 17:31-33; Heb. 10:38, 39). When Abraham looked toward Sodom that morning, he saw the smoke of the city and knew that God had destroyed it.

19:29 — God heard Abraham's prayer by saving Lot and his two daughters. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16b).

C. Sodom's Influence—19:30-38

19:30ff — Lot soon moved out of Zoar because he feared to dwell there and he moved into the mountains. Perhaps he feared the people would kill him or maybe he feared Zoar also would be destroyed like Sodom. The wicked, sensual, humanistic philosophy of Sodom was dreadfully engrained in his daughters. They had well observed the close relation between wine and illicit sex. From an incestuous relationship with their father, two sons were born that became the fathers of two nations, the Moabites and Ammonites. These nations became perpetual enemies of God's people. Dreadful consequences followed Lot's sinful decisions made earlier in his life (Gen 13:5ff).

III. The Lord's Protection of Sarah — 20:1-18

A. Abraham's Sin — 20:1-2

20:1, 2 — No reason is indicated but shortly after Sodom's destruction Abraham migrated to Gerar in southern Israel. One cannot dogmatically say Abraham sinned in moving, but he did sin in lying about his wife. This was the second time he sinned in this manner (cf. 12:11-20). This text is a real tribute to Sarah's beauty at 89 years of age. Satan took advantage of Abraham's weakness and used it in trying to destroy the messianic line from its very outset, which continued when he was born (see Rev 12:3, 4).

B. God's Intervention — 20:3-7

20:3ff — Abraham must be condemned for his sin but God intervened to protect Sarah's purity. God did not punish Abimelech for Abraham's sin. Note that God used Abimelech to rebuke His own chosen servant. Abraham is called a prophet (v. 7) because he was a spokesman for God, not necessarily in the prophetic sense, however.

C. Abimelech's Rebuke — 20:8-13

20:8ff — Even at this time Abraham was not fully mature in his faith. His excuse for lying was that he did not believe the fear of his God was in that place. For Abraham to resort to human reasoning, which was contrary to clear Scriptural commands, was a great sin. It assumed that God had allowed him to get into a situation where He could not honorably deliver him.

D. Abimelech's Generosity — 20:14-18

20:14-16 — Abimelech wanted to correct the wrong he had done. In that society, the sanctity of marriage was highly esteemed, even in pagan cultures. The gifts of silver given to Abraham were for a "covering of the eyes" (v. 16), that is, to appease the wrong he had done in taking Sarah.

20:17, 18 — God did not punish Abimelech for his sin was done in ignorance. However, the Lord did seal up the wombs of Abimelech's household. Abraham, exposed and rebuked, then interceded to God for Abimelech's household and he was heard.

IV. The Lord's Gift to Sarah and Abraham — 21:1-34

A. Isaac's Birth — 21:1-8

21:1, 2 — God miraculously caused Sarah to be able to bear a son. The word "visited" is used in a negative sense in Scripture to judge (Jer. 9:25; Hos 12:3) and in the positive sense to bless (Ruth 1:6). God was faithful to His promise.

21:3-8 — Abraham's son was named Isaac which means laughter. "Laughter" indicated Abraham and Sarah's unbelief (17:17; 18:12) but now a laugh of joy. Abraham was careful and wise in rearing his beloved son (18:19; 21:4). Isaac's weaning probably occurred when he was three years old (v. 8).

B. Ishmael's Expulsion — 21:9-21

21:9-11 — Isaac's birth was the result of Abraham's faith but his earlier fleshly attempt to provide himself an heir became a thorn in the flesh. Ishmael was now 14 years old (Gen 16:16). According to 21:9, Ishmael was mocking (ridiculing) Isaac. Nuzu customs indicate how Abraham had had three heirs: first, he had Eliezer (15:2); then he had Ishmael, who replaced Eliezer (16:1ff); and finally he had Isaac, who replaced Ishmael. Sarah then wanted Hagar and Ishmael expelled.

21:12-14 - God assured Abraham that it was right for Sarah to ask for him to expel Hagar and Ishmael (even though it was contrary to customs). It was difficult for Abraham to do it and he was careful to give Hagar provisions for her journey. Paul used this for a commentary to illustrate the difference between the two covenants of law and grace, of bondage and liberty (Gal 4:21-31).

21:16-21 — Hagar began her journey to Egypt but soon her provisions were expended. In her weakened and famished condition, God reappeared unto her to provide for her and Ishmael's physical need and promised her that Ishmael would become a great nation. Hagar later took a wife of Egypt for her son and he became the progenitor of the Ishmaelites.

C. Abimelech's Covenant — 21:22-34

21:22 — In the time intervening between Ishmael's expulsion and Isaac's near sacrifice, we learn more of Abraham's influence in his day. This is the same Abimelech spoken of in Genesis 20. Disputes arose over the valuable water sources of the area so these two men made a covenant to avoid conflict. Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewes to confirm the covenant. Beersheba received its name perhaps from a double significance, the number seven meaning a well of seven and (or) a well of swearing.

21:33, 34 — Abraham planted a tamarisk tree (not a grove - KJV) to indicate his appreciation for God's blessing upon his life. There he communed with his God, the everlasting God, the God who will yet fulfill every part of the unconditional covenant that He made with him (cf. Gen 15:7-21).