

Who were the three men who appeared to Abraham? God comes to Abraham appearing as an ordinary man (a Theophany or Christophany), accompanied by two others who eventually are identified as angelic beings. Genesis 18:22 and 19:1.

What did Abraham offer to do for them? Wash their feet and feed them—typical of that hospitality-oriented culture.

Application: Is hospitality expected of us? In His parable of the final judgment in Matthew 25 Jesus commended those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited those who were in prison, saying, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). To us, serving mere human beings is quite different from serving God. But to God they are the same.

What was the purpose of this visit? What was God trying to accomplish? This visit was a sign of intimate fellowship in Abraham’s culture. God guaranteed/reaffirmed the arrival of the promised heir—adding a time frame. One of the purposes was to demonstrate and reinforce God’s faithfulness to His promises to the patriarch Abraham.

We may wonder why God repeated the promise again, so close to the time when He said it previously. Perhaps Abraham and Sarah needed this visit to be an encouragement for them. To remind them. To build their faith. It was a public versus a private proclamation.

Application: We need to hear God’s promises over and over again. This is one way God uses to encourage and develop our faith. Which of God’s promises would you most like to hear Him speak to you? Consider these examples of God’s promises.

- “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).
- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)
- Nothing can “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38)
- “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13)
- “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:8a)

God heard Sarah’s laugh even though she laughed within herself—not out loud. Why did God rebuke her? Sarah’s laugh sprang from a spirit of unbelief due to long disappointment as is clear from the Lord’s response to it. Sarah failed to comprehend how big her God was.

Why wasn’t Abraham rebuked for his laugh in Genesis 17:17? Abraham’s laugh seems to have been a joyful response to God’s promise—he fell facedown. The basis for this distinction is God’s response to the two laughs. Remember that in 1 Samuel 16:7b the Lord says “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Application: The words of our Lord in Genesis 18:14a speak as loudly to Christians today as they did to Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Is there anything in your life that falls into the “too difficult for God” category?

After both Abraham and Sarah laughed, God restated His promise to them (Genesis 17:19 and Genesis 18:4). We might think God would say, “I gave you this promise twice and twice you laughed at it. That’s it! No more promise. I’ll take it to someone who will appreciate it.” Instead, God responded by dealing with Sarah’s sin of unbelief, but not by taking away the promise.

What does that tell you about the character of God? If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He is not a performance oriented God. God is interested in His own glory.

Why did God address Abraham about Sarah’s laughter? Abraham was the head of his home and therefore responsible for his wife’s behavior.

Application: Men, as a mature Christian, you are responsible for the behavior of your wife and kids. “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:4). The best way to “manage” your wife is found in Ephesians 5:25-33. Love her as Christ loved the church.

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

Abraham’s appeal is based upon what character traits of God? The justice of God, plus His mercy, love, and compassion. From Abraham’s perspective, a just God would not allow the righteous to suffer the punishment due the wicked (verse 25). He could not treat the righteous and the wicked alike. The righteous did not deserve to perish with the wicked.

God has assured mankind, through His Word, that there will be a judgment day. Until then, His people have the responsibility of intercessory prayer for lost men and women, and of a consistent spiritual witness to them, warning them of the wrath to come. Nothing is so offensive to the unregenerate mind as a message of coming judgment for sin.

Who was Abraham asking the Lord to spare? *Both* the wicked and the righteous—if a sufficient number of the righteous were to be found.

Once Abraham’s request was granted, the bargaining began over how many righteous it would take to save the city.

Why did Abraham stop his request with ten righteous people? Probably he thought there would be at least ten righteous people. He overestimated Lot’s righteous influence over his neighbors. Perhaps Abraham felt Lot would surely have brought six people, beyond his own family, to God in his time in Sodom. Note that Abraham quit asking before God quit giving.

Application: God doesn’t lose patience with us for continued asking. We almost sigh with relief here, for one might fear that God would lose His patience with Abraham. This was no selfish petition by Abraham, but intercession for others.

What character traits of Abraham do we see here? Boldness, humility, persistence, compassion, and zeal. He was not proud or arrogant before the Lord, but he still continued to ask. It is impossible to miss the persistence of Abraham in intercession.

Application: Abraham asks an important question: Will a God who is just destroy the righteous with the wicked? In the light of mass casualty disasters (tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.), what do you think?

In contrast to chapter 16, chapter 18 is one of the high-water marks of Abraham’s life. While his faith was not flawless, it had grown. His attitudes and actions serve as an example of maturing faith.
