

Faith and Prayer

Abraham—part 10

Genesis 18:16-33

August 9, 2026

PRAYER BEGINS WITH GOD

DAY 1: Reaffirmation of the covenant to Abraham

1. We pick up the story from last week. Three travelers paid a visit to Abraham. Unbeknownst to Abraham, the three travelers are in “disguise.”

2. The incarnate Son of God is the lead traveler, while two angels in human disguise are the other travelers. The episode is a conversation between the travelers and includes Abraham.

Genesis 18:16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

3. We know they were on their way to Sodom. Archeologists have discovered the ancient ruins of Sodom under the waters of the Dead Sea. Abraham and the three visitors head east toward the Jordan River valley.

4. Before descending down the steep hill, they can look over the valley, to the other side of the river. There is the wicked city of Sodom. Tradition holds the location where Abraham prayed to God in today’s episode.

Genesis 18:17 Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

5. God is discussing His intentions with the other two “travelers,” the angels. As we’ll see shortly, God is going to discuss His intentions with (1) His covenant promise already given but with an additional note, and (2) what God will likely do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

6. He starts with the covenant promise with an addition.

Genesis 18:18 “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

Genesis 18:19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

6. The covenant sounds familiar—an heir, blessings to the nations all around the world.

7. What strikes you about...

a. Abrahams’ responsibility as he lives out the covenant, v. 19?

b. What strikes you about God letting Abraham on future divine events?

8. What is your take away from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Prayer: wrestling with God about what He is doing

1. We usually think of prayer as us giving God a laundry list of complains and desires. There is a place for that.

2, But prayer, especially in the book of Psalms, is also a place where we wrestle with God.

3, We wrestle to understand:

- Our world that is broken,
- Why human evil persists,
- What God is doing about problems and evil

4. Here, God initiates a discussion about these three issues and includes Abraham in the discussion!

Genesis 18:20 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.”

5. What initiated God getting involved in the problem of Sodom and Gomorrah? Vv. 20-21

6. Two items grabbed God’s attention. What were they?

7. God is omniscient, meaning, He knows everything. Why then, does the Lord say, “*I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me?*”

8. God is on a “fact-finding mission,” but the purpose is not for His benefit, but for Abraham’s (and ours!). Why?

9. In our secular culture, people reject the idea of God being a “God of judgment.” Some people flatter ourselves to be superior to those who do believe that God judges. But wait until evil and wickedness comes knocking on *your* door! You will be faced with an injustice or crime done against you that you cannot change and you, like those in the book of Psalms will cry out, “How long, O Lord, will you do nothing about this injustice? This evil?”

10. What we legitimately want is a justice that is just, that is not arbitrary, a “punishment that fits the crime.”

11. What we see in these verses is God’s way of letting us peek behind the curtain to see that when God brings judgment upon evil, it is not arbitrary or half-baked.

12. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: God's justice and mercy

Genesis 18:20 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."

1. This is the language of accommodation. God does not need to go on a fact-finding mission as He already knows the facts! He is omniscient. But so that we may know that God is impartial and careful in His justice, we have this "inside look."

2. These two verses give us amazing but very simple categories in which to think about human evil, God's mercy, and God's judgment.

3. In the world, human beings are both agents and victims.

a. Agents—People do bad stuff, we commit crime, we hurt people. We are responsible and culpable for our actions and how we relate to people.

b. Victims—Other people hurt us, commit crime against us, and treat us badly.

4. The first responsibility of government is to protect its people from others, both foreign and domestic (Romans 13).

5. God's fact-finding mission starts with the victims of sin and evil. God heard "the outcry" ... that is "... so great..." that it necessitated God's action.

6. God's fact-finding mission also involves the agents of sin, the perpetrators. Their sin is so grievous" that it necessitates this fact-finding mission.

7. In our current secular culture there is a movement people despise a "God of judgment" and insist on only a "God of love."

8. Consider this. What if the fact-finding mission reveals that the sin against people is so grievous and wicked that the perpetrators of evil are not dealt with and they are allowed to continue to in their pattern of sexual assault, rape, and murder of the victims?

9. What would a "loving God" do in that case? Is it loving to do nothing, to turn a blind eye, and let evil fester?

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Abraham and God “negotiate”

1. The three travelers are getting ready to leave Abraham’s tent and proceed toward Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham already knows what is going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. Unbridled lust, sexual perversity of all kinds, rape, sodomy, sexual assault and sexual abuse. And Abraham has a realization of what is likely to occur. The Lord will bring judgment upon a wicked city.

2. God invites to speak into God’s response to current events.

Genesis 18:22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 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.

3. What strikes you about God in this dialogue?

4. What strikes you about prayer in this dialogue?

DAY 5: God's mercy and justice

1. God is willing to delay justice, up to a point.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ^d

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.

2. God wants to show mercy on everyone, thus often delaying justice, but equally true is this: God has compassion on the victims of evil and those who have been raped, as we'll see in Sodom next week, or murdered.

3. In this country, you rarely hear the term "angel mom" on hardly any "mainstream" newscasts. Why? To protect the perpetrators.

4. One thing that is astonishing to me is that as God and Abraham converse, God is able to stir in Abraham God's own mercy and righteous judgment. It is as if God helps Abraham verbally process these great moral questions, not just in theory, but in real time with real people, considering both perpetrators and the victims.

5. And here is the conundrum which Abraham wrestled and with which our secular culture wrestles. You cannot say you're being merciful and compassionate to criminals and perpetrators without at the same time being hardened and unmerciful to the victims of criminals and perpetrators.

6. And conversely, you cannot say you're being compassionate to the victims of criminals and perpetrators without bringing some kind of punishment and justice upon those very criminals and perpetrators.

7. The passage in Genesis is meant to reveal God's character as He oversees a world that has both agents and victims.

8. The central lessons for us:

a. Allowing evil to continue without judgment is not "loving;"

b. Justice is needed in a fallen world, to punish evildoers and create a restraints on evil.

c. God's justice is not arbitrary. It is based on people's actual behavior.

What is your overall take away from this episode in Genesis?