

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35*

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## GENESIS 18-20

From Chapter 12 we have been on a journey with Abraham - from his response to the call of God to come out of his country, toward the culmination (still to come) of the son of the promise. We saw in the last chapter that Abraham had reached another high point in this journey, which culminated in a name change and circumcision – pointing to circumcision of the heart, when God placed something of Himself within Abraham and Sarah, denoted by the name changes.

### CHAPTER 18 – The Heavenly Visitors

*And the LORD appeared to him by the Oaks of Mamre<sup>1</sup>, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw: And Behold! Three men were standing over him...*

Why did the LORD visit Abraham? Three men! Who are the other two? ‘The LORD appeared,’ Yet there is no indication that He announces or does anything special as he has before (e.g., “The Lord appeared and said...”). Nor is Abraham doing anything special to warrant a divine appearance. He is just sitting in the tent door. ‘The day grew hot.’ Why is this apparently irrelevant detail mentioned? Although 18:1 is the opening of a new chapter, it reads as if it is continuing the previous story - the account of Abraham’s circumcision. The Rabbis ask many such questions of this text.

**What questions would you ask?**

**Read vs. 2-8** - Notice the many words indicating the haste Abraham used in greeting and preparing a meal for his guests (and not simply a ‘morsel of bread’). The first duty of the Jew is being hospitable to every person and that was a hallmark of Abraham, exemplified here in the exuberant welcome he shows to his three visitors – without any expectation or questions.

10. *And He said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening in the tent door. (Read v.11-15) “...Is anything too difficult for the LORD?*

*Vayomer - ‘and he said’* - This common grammatical structure indicates that it is the LORD who is speaking. The personal name of God is also used in vs. 1, so we are in no doubt as to who this is.

Abraham laughed when he was told this (17:17). Now it is Sarah’s turn to laugh. (Why hadn’t Abraham told her already?) The name Isaac - *Yitzchaq* - means “he laughs”.

### The Doom of Sodom

Attention quickly turns to Sodom – the angels were on a mission. It is intriguing to ponder why the heavenly visitors stopped at Abraham’s tent and delivered the sure promise of a son within one year, on the way to sealing the doom of Sodom. Could there be a connection between the two?

**READ v.16-22** - Abraham approached the God he knew to be both just and merciful and said:  
<sup>23</sup> *“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ...”* <sup>25</sup> *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!*

Abraham has now reached such a level of friendship with God that he can enter into this dialogue and intercession with uncommon boldness, because he knows His God - he knows that He is both

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<sup>1</sup> “Mamre” means ‘strength, ‘vigour’. The oaks of Mamre denote something strong and protective.

righteous and merciful – he also knows that Lot and his family are living in Sodom, and no doubt hopes that they found to be righteous.

## New Testament insight

Abraham is called “the Friend of God.” (II Chron. 20:7. Is. 41:8. James 2:23)

In the last days he spent with His disciples Jesus also called *them* his friends:

*You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (Jn. 15:14-15)*

This verse certainly resonates with the conversation between the LORD and Abraham.

### Q. What is the difference between a servant and a friend?

Do you see yourself as a servant and/or friend of Jesus – or something else?

## Digging Deeper

We might wonder why these three stories: the Heavenly Visitors; the rescue of Lot and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and the encounter with Abimelech, are embedded here. They seem to untidily interrupt the domestic drama of Sarah, Abraham and Hagar. When the Torah doesn't appear to make sense, we need to look more deeply. We can only really understand why, when we first remember that this continues to be a story about Abraham's upward spiritual journey. Abraham has received the amazing news that the son of the promise will come from the womb of Sarah, but .... the spiritual journey to fullness of faith is not yet over for Abraham.

The meanings behind the names 'Sodom' and 'Gomorrah' give us some clues:

Sodom means "burning"; and Gomorrah "submersion", which comes from a root word(עָמַר 'amar) meaning to "heap", figuratively, to chastise (as if piling blows); to gather grain:—bind sheaves.

By letting scripture interpret scripture, we are able to relate this to Matthew 3:11-12: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

Each and every one of us who surrender our lives to Yeshua, and are baptized with the Holy Spirit, will find our flesh life purified by the 'consuming fire' of the Holy Spirit.

Q. Can you identify with this as you have journeyed with Christ?

Q. Might there still be 'submerged' thought patterns in your life that need to be surrendered – perhaps some flesh life that you are not willing to part with?

**Can we pray deeply with David:** *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* (Ps.139)

## CHAPTER 19 - Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Lot was found at the gate of the city, indicating that he had become an elder of the city. He offered hospitality to the visitors, welcoming them and ensuring their safety, making a feast and baking unleavened bread, even preferring to give his own daughters rather than see his visitors assaulted. Whilst Lot and his family may not have partaken of the sins of Sodom, they were at least accustomed to living in the midst of it and were not in a hurry to heed the 'men's' warning to leave all behind. Verse 7 shows that Lot did recognize the wickedness of the men of the city – but he also calls them 'brethren'.

Apart from the obvious sexual nature of their sin, Ezekiel gives us another picture.

**Read Ezek. 16:48-50.** Gross sinfulness never has simply one facet.

At this point Lot does not seem to know that he is 'entertaining angels unawares'. Whilst he may have sat at the gate of the city and considered himself brethren of the inhabitants, they evidently held no respect for him. *But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them."* (v.9) Fortunately for Lot, his visitors were not merely men, and struck the assailants with blindness.

Note the different levels of response from the members of Lot's family: His sons-in-law thought he was joking and mocked him, and presumably his married daughters went along with them; Lot and his wife lingered and had to be taken by the hand, along with their two younger daughters; Lot pleads: *"Indeed now, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die."* He pleads for more mercy to be allowed to stay in Zoar<sup>2</sup>, a 'little city' on the plain saying, *"Let me escape there and my soul shall live."*<sup>3</sup> By grace, this is allowed and as soon as he arrives, fire and brimstone rain down, destroying all life ... but his wife looked back and became a pillar of salt.

**Q. Discuss the various responses. Can we relate them to our life experience?**

*30. Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains, and his two daughters were with him; for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.*

Considering that the name Lot means *veil/covering*, it appears that the veil was still in place. Lot was rescued but we read nothing more about his fate, except for the indiscretion of his daughters in ensuring their father had an heir. This produced the Moabites<sup>4</sup> and the Ammonites<sup>5</sup>, who became the sworn enemies of Israel. Maybe Abraham shouldn't have interceded for him after all?! It is amazing what our selfish and faithless acts can lead to.

**Read 19:29 - Why was Lot saved from the judgment that fell on Sodom?**

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the adjacent cities of the plains also seems to prophetically encapsulate the Day of Judgement. Jesus makes the shocking statement that the ancient towns of Sodom and Gomorrah — bywords for every gross immorality — would find the Judgment more bearable than certain towns of Judea in which He taught. *"It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town [that is, the town that didn't welcome the disciples]"* (Matt.10:15).

To put into context just how startling Jesus' statement was, let's see what Jude has to say about Sodom and Gomorrah:

*And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.* (Jude 6-7)

In describing the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18, John says: *"Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues ... her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire: for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."*

Indeed, we need to be careful not to be desensitized to the surrounding culture, but remember that 'we are in the world but not of the world.' (Jn.17:14-16)

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<sup>2</sup> Zoar = "insignificance", "brought low".

<sup>3</sup> He is not ready to go higher spiritually.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth, the Moabite, becomes the great-grandmother of David.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 2:9 & 2:19 give a very interesting follow-up to this story.

## CHAPTER 20 – Abraham and Abimelech (Abimelech means “my father is king”)

**READ verses 1-8** Moving south, Abraham stops in Gerar, and we read that he again claims: “She is my sister” - and consequently *Abimelech sent and took Sarah*. Sarah is 90 years old at this point!! God speaks to him through a dream, saying: 3. *Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife*. But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, *“Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?”* 8. *the people were very afraid* – there was ‘fear of God’ in this place.

**We see a clear comparison here with the people in Sodom. DISCUSS**

**Read verses 10-18 carefully & discuss in your group**

Abraham put up three arguments to justify himself: 1) “I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place...”; 2) She is truly my sister after all ...well, my half- sister anyway; 3) When God caused me to leave my father’s house, I had to protect myself .

**Q. What is your response to Abraham’s reply?**

- Is he too quick to justify himself before considering how he might be culpable?
- Did Abimelech’s probing questions bring conviction to his heart?
- Did confession of his own motives bring him to a necessary place of humility?

v.16 *Behold I have given your brother (not your husband) a thousand pieces of silver<sup>6</sup>. Behold, it is to you a covering of the eyes to all that are with you, (this is the Hebrew way of saying: “This vindicates you”). Thus she was rebuked.*

Abimelech exemplified grace and mercy in his response. He ladens Abraham with gifts, and restores his wife to him. We might also note that his offer for them to stay in the land and settle is in stark contrast to their previous sojourn down to Egypt, when Pharaoh ordered them out for their own protection. Nevertheless Abimelech was culpable even though he believed himself to be the wronged party.<sup>7</sup> Whilst he leaves no stone unturned to right the wrong he did, there was still the matter of the curse: *So Abraham prayed to God: and God healed Abimelech ... then they bore children, for the LORD had closed up the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham’s wife.*

His prayer not only lifts God’s judgment from Abimelech and his household, but leads immediately to Sarah’s conception of the promised son. Are we therefore to conclude that these events were necessary to break the curse of barrenness on Sarah’s womb?

Some thoughts and questions to ponder:

- Did their agreement (see v.13) to hide their married status place a curse on Sarah’s womb? This seemed to be the ‘card Abraham kept in his pocket’ in case God failed to protect them so Abraham still had some unbelief/flesh left in him and therefore could not give birth to the promised seed. (consider this in terms of your own faith life)
- Did he first need to fully own her as his wife, i.e. ‘one flesh’, in every circumstance?
- Did God graciously bring him to this place of humility so that he could finally own his own sin in the barrenness of Sarah’s womb?
- Why do we never hear a word from Sarah, nor do we hear any concern for Sarah from Abraham during the whole incident – nor indeed when they went down to Egypt in chapter 12?

It is only when God comes down to us and humbles us, that He can then raise us up and lead us on to victory. Being first humbled by God and then being raised up is basic to our spiritual progress.

<sup>6</sup> A thousand pieces of silver represents fullness of redemption.

<sup>7</sup> Good intentions do not purify a wrong deed. Lev.4:27ff states that if anyone sins unintentionally and it comes to his knowledge that it was wrong, he needs to bring an offering. The priest makes atonement for him and it is forgiven him.