**September 9, 2020 | A Study on Chapter 18 of the Book of Genesis**

**The Three Visitors**

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2). These words were written in the last chapter of Hebrews as part of some instructions for Christian behavior. In chapter 18, Abraham shows hospitality to 3 visitors. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent near Mamre which was located just north of Hebron between Jerusalem and Beersheba. You might say that Abraham was sitting on his front porch ready to engage travelers as they passed by. Unfortunately, the front porch has gone missing as homes now are set well back from the street resulting in less interaction with neighbors. While it is not clear if Abraham recognized the 3 men initially, he certainly knew who one of them was by the end of the visit. The 3 men were Jesus in another preincarnate appearance in the company of 2 angels. Some believe that the 3 visitors are the Holy Trinity but that is not supported by Scripture (John 1:18). The purpose of the visit is representative of the dual roles of Jesus providing resurrection to the believer and judgment to the lost. Jesus is there to announce new life to be born from the dead womb of Sarah and proclaim a death sentence for the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham humbles himself first by bowing down to the visitors then by personally attending to them rather than assigning that task to a servant. He prepares a large meal for them and they eat which creates for us an interesting question. Do angels have human bodies which have normal physical requirements such as food? Angels are described as spirits (Heb. 1:14) and as such they do not have physical bodies although it appears that they take on bodies when they interact with humans. They also appear in other forms as noted in Zechariah, Ezekiel and Revelation. Jesus is different from angels since he actually took on the body of a human when he was born as an infant. He experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2, 21:18), weariness (John 4:6) and slept (Matt. 8:24). We have previously discussed Christophanies which are preincarnate appearances of Jesus, most recently last week (17.1). Abraham also met Melchizedek (14:18) which was almost certainly another Christophany. There is nothing to suggest that the physical appearance of Jesus would have to be the same in each instance so Abraham may or may not have recognized Jesus at first.

Jesus asks Abraham “Where is your wife, Sarah?” knowing that she was in the tent within earshot. For her benefit, Jesus promises to return in one year at which time Sarah will have a son. Sarah’s response was like that of Abraham, laughter although her laughter could only be construed as doubt. Notice that she laughed to herself, not out loud and her doubt was only a thought, not spoken. Imagine her surprise when Jesus read her mind and asked “Is nothing too hard for God?” It is little wonder she was afraid and denied laughing which prompted a gentle rebuke from Jesus.

As the visitors prepare to leave, Jesus considers what he should tell Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah. Matthew Henry wrote that Jesus may have had 2 reasons to tell Abraham. 1. God had given the land of Canaan to Abraham so he may have decided that Abraham needed to know what was about to happen in his territory. 2. Jesus knew that Abraham would instruct those in his household about the ways of the Lord, including judgment. Although Abraham was aware of the rampant sin in Sodom and Gomorrah, he believes there are righteous living there and asked Jesus to spare the cities for their sake. He was certainly thinking about Lot and his family but probably hoped that there were others as well who could be saved. A question often raised is why did Abraham stop at 10 righteous people. Would the cities have been spared if Abraham asked if only 1 righteous person could be found? Henry wrote that either Abraham believed the cities deserved to be destroyed if there were less than 10 righteous people there or that God restrained his spirit from asking further. As we will study next week, 10 righteous people could not be found and the cities were destroyed.