

17-18 Bible Study #26

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Genesis 17-18

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- **Genesis 17:12-14**

- This became the foundation for the *Judaizer* controversy in the 1st century
- We believe that Jesus, through baptism, was the fulfilment of the promise to *Abraham* through which all the nations will be blessed
- If true, how can we not agree that all Christians should be circumcised and keep the Kosher laws?
- This question was initially resolved in **Acts 15** at the Council of Jerusalem

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- The Judaizers problem was the major issue in Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans where he pointed out that circumcision was not the cause of Abraham's righteousness *₃
 - Circumcision was the sign of the old Covenant, and Christians were being called to enter the new Covenant
 - Also, that circumcision cannot cause righteousness because if it did Abraham would not have been seen to be righteous in **Genesis 15**
 - Further, the Kosher laws do not come onto the scene until 450 years later on Mt Sinai
- Paul pointed out that the descendants of *Abraham* at this point in the story were purchased or born into his family
- But he said the Gentiles seeking Baptism were not in this same category as were the "sojourners" or "God fearers" of the Old Testament

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- From the **Exodus** we find that the “sojourners” and “God fearers” were **not required to be circumcised or keep all the Kosher laws**
- That is why James (Bishop of Jerusalem) at the *Council of Jerusalem*, did not require the Gentiles to become Jews before becoming Christians
- Father Sebastian pointed out that this is why it is so important for us to know the Old Testament like the back of our hand
- Otherwise there is the possibility for a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding as happened with Luther

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- **Genesis 17:15-17**

- Look at the parallelism and contrast from what happened here vs what happened in **Genesis 17:3** where **Abram** fell on his face
- Here Abraham fell on his face and **laughed**
- Knowing how the author works, we can see that this is another **framing device** and hinge to the next story
- The frame is the use of the term “**laughter**”
- In fact “**Isaac**” means, “**he who laughs**”
- How could a 100 year old man and a 90 year old woman bear a child?

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- **Genesis 17:18-27**

- What does God mean when he says “No” to *Abraham*?
- It would appear that *Abraham* requested that God would somehow make *Ishmael* a descendant of the covenant
- God says “No”, because only *Isaac* would become his son
- *Sarah*, his wife, was going bear a son and he will call him *Isaac*

Genesis 17 (Cont)

- This can be seen in two ways:
 - Some can read this as questioning the power of God
 - Others see it as a bewilderment at the wonder and power of God

Genesis 18

Genesis 18

- **Genesis 18:1**

- The region between *Bethel* and *Ai* is arid and very hot
- Both then and today many people attempt to avoid going outside between 11 AM and 3 PM
- People often start their day very early in the morning before the sun rises and then retire to their tent when the temperature rises in the late morning
- They often take a nap during the hot period and then return to work after 3PM until it gets too dark to see
- Here we see *Abraham* in his tent during the heat of the day

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:2-10**

- These *Hebrew* statements are very short and in rapid succession
- Also the tenses goes back and forth between singular and plural
- The arrival of these three “men” has often been depicted in art

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- Most likely you are aware of the *Rublev* icon related to this story and perceived to represent the “Trinity”
- His icon, however, is based on earlier icons described as “*Abraham’s Hospitality*”
- These depict three “angels” or winged men and appear to be based on this passage
- The problem with the interpretation of the *Rublev* icon is that the concept of the Trinity only arises in the New Testament with the Baptism of Christ

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- These earlier icons present three figures with the one in the center to be seen as God providing a blessing using a sign often attributed to Christ
- This was seen as a special blessing (for *Abraham*) by God
- On each side of the central figure (God) are two “angels” serving as His attendants

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- Often when God was depicted in the Old Testament, He was accompanied by two angels
 - Two angels guarded the gate of the *Garden of Eden*
 - There are two cherubim on the top of the *Ark of the Covenant*
 - There were two cherubim in *Solomon's* temple
 - The cherubim throne was guarded by angels
- Thus, in this story we are seeing God coming to *Abraham* accompanied with His two angels

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- After the initial encounter with *Abraham* these two angels were going to *Sodom* to check on the situation there
- The Old Testament gives us some shadowy images that point to the Trinity but the official church teaching is that the Trinity is introduced only in the New Testament
- But we must be extremely careful or we will misread the text

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:11-12**

- “It has ceased to be with *Sariah* after the manner of a woman” indicates that she was no longer menstruating
- This was also a play-off on the idea of her being able to conceive
- “pleasure” does not necessarily mean sexual pleasure
- The Hebrew word “*eden*” can mean “joy”, as seen in the Garden of Eden or paradise
- So the question is, “shall I have the joy of having a child?”

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:13-14**

- We can see that *Sarah's* question about this whole thing was a baited question about whether or not God was really Almighty? (*El Shaddai*)
- Was He really all powerful?
- Here we can look back at when *Abraham* laughed in **Genesis 17:17**

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:15**

- Obviously *Sarah's* laughing can be seen as a negative laughter
- As she was expressing a doubt in God's power
- Some commentators have seen in her laughter the possibility that *Abraham's* earlier laughter was also expressing doubt in the power of God

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:16-21**
- Next, we see all three figures walking off toward *Sodom* with *Abraham* walking with them
- Then God began a dialogue with *Abraham* while the two men (angels) moved toward *Sodom* (**Genesis 18:18-33**)
- It would appear that the two angels were going down to check out what was going on in *Sodom*
- God had to decide whether or not He was going to share the bad news with *Abraham*

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- God decided to tell *Abraham* of his plans concerning *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* to insure that his children did not end up like those folks in *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* who were about to be destroyed
- Let's briefly look at **Genesis 19:1** where it says that, "the two angels came to *Sodom* in the evening"
- Obviously, these were the same two angels who were with God and *Abraham* in the previous scene

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18:22-25**

- The angels went down to *Sodom* while *Abraham* was with the Lord
- *Abraham* then began a dialogue with the Lord (who obviously was righteous) asking if God would destroy people in the two towns who had done nothing wrong

Genesis 18 (Cont)

- **Genesis 18: 26-33**

- The dialogue begins with 50 righteous being found in the city and goes all the way down to only 10
- This is about the mercy of God who would not kill the wicked if only 10 righteous people were found in the city
- Suddenly the Lord finished speaking with *Abraham* and leaves
- The reason Abraham was concerned about the righteous was because *Lot* and his family were living in *Sodom*
- *Abraham* was asking if God would kill his relatives living among these wicked people
- Make a note for yourself to **Genesis 19:29**