

Abraham Intercedes

18: 22-33

DIG: Why is Abraham so bold when speaking with the Lord? Why is he so concerned about Sodom and Gomorrah? What part did Abraham have in this intercession? What part did the Lord have? In Avraham's intercession, what do you admire enough to imitate? When God replies to Abraham, what do you find comforting? Discomforting?

REFLECT: Can righteous people make a difference in the world? For whom is the Lord calling you to intercede as Avraham did? Can you choose to believe in the righteousness of ADONAI even though your circumstances don't seem to give evidence to your belief? How so?

This is the first, and perhaps the most remarkable example of intercessory prayer in the entire Bible. Abraham was no doubt concerned about his nephew Lot and all the people he had rescued from the four kings who lived in Sodom (see Ec - **When Abram Heard Lot Had Been Taken Captive, He Went in Pursuit as far as Dan**). Although he was well aware of their spiritual condition, he hoped that they would repent and turn to the Lord.

The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Avraham remained standing before the Lord in human form (18:22). Then Abraham intercedes for the righteous in Sodom. He approached the Lord and said to Him, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked" (18:23)? Abraham's great character is revealed by his intercession. It is striking that he does not mention Lot at all, but only prays for all the righteous in Sodom and on the plain. Earlier he had personally rescued these people, now he pleaded for them with the same boldness and urgency with which he had fought for them.

Avraham's philosophical discussion with the Lord jars some readers. But his requests, though bold, were made with genuine humility and profound reverence.³¹⁰ He asked: 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 (18:24)?

The reason Abraham can appeal to the Lord's righteousness is because he knows God's character. He said: 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! This was really bothering him, and he finally asks the question we all ask at some point in our lives: Will not the Judge of all the earth do right (18:25)?

We all know the Bible doesn't answer every specific question in our lives. Should we buy this house? Whom should I marry? What occupation should I pursue? And our theology does not provide answers for every question. But where the Bible is silent and the logic of our theology fails us, we still have a choice. We can choose to believe in the righteousness of **ADONAI**. **Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is righteous?** Of course **He** will. That is where our faith begins, **being certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1b)**. We will never have all the information, and even if we did, we are not wise enough to apply it correctly to every situation. We need to believe, and let **God** be **God**.

Here **Abraham** appeals to the **Lord** of righteousness, rather than His mercy. **The Lord** did not challenge the basis of His argument, but said to **Abraham**, **"If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake"** (18:26). If **Messiah** did indeed spare the city, it would only be for a time. *The purpose for the delay would be to see if a righteous minority could have an impact in the city and turn it around.* How small could the minority be and still have an impact? If **Abraham** is to be a channel of blessing to the world, could it not start here? **The Lord** agreed, **"All right Abraham, you have made your point"**. Six times **Avraham** intercedes for the wicked cities. **He** pleads again and again. Six times **the Lord** responded to His servant's request.

But, can the righteous make a difference in the world? Some people say, "What can I do, I'm a nobody!" However, the fact is, righteous people have always been and will always be a minority. Still, individually and as the body of Christ, the Lord expects us to have an impact for righteousness in the world. There are plenty of examples. From Rabbi Sha'ul, to Martin Luther, to Mother Theresa, there are those who have refused to think they were too insignificant for God to use. Their impact came not because they were full of self-importance and thought themselves capable of big things, but because they humbly did what needed to be done. Understanding the task at hand, they boldly went about doing what the Lord led them to do. In most cases, an impact is not accomplished amidst great fanfare and does not necessarily enjoy popular support. Mother Teresa worked in virtual anonymity in the squalid conditions of the diseased and the destitute for decades before gaining the popular recognition and acclaim that she received in her last years. Martin Luther and other Reformers were met with official resistance that threatened their lives, their health and their welfare.³¹¹ But they continued on and made a difference and so can you.

ADONAI knows our needs before we ask. But **He** has set up the universe with this principle; we are to ask with the right motives and **He** will answer. **You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with**

the wrong motives (James 4:2-3a). He wants a relationship with us, and that includes our prayer life. Jesus said: **Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened** (Mattityahu 7:7-8).

But Avraham suspects that there may not be fifty there so he spoke up again. He had a profound respect for ADONAI when he said: **Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord. And even though he is God's friend, he never allows himself to forget his true position of dependence on Him. Abraham acknowledges that he is nothing but dust and ashes (18:27).** In Hebrew the phrase **dust and ashes** is a word play because they sound so much alike; **dust** is *aphar*, and **ashes** is *epher*.

Nowhere does Abraham challenge the Lord's evaluation of Sodom's moral filth. That was not up for debate. Nor at any time does he turn to Sodom to urge repentance.³¹² *But he sure was persistent when he asked: What if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?* The preincarnate Christ replied: **If I find forty-five there I will not destroy it (18:28).**

Once again Avraham was very specific when he reduces the number further and said to Him, **"What if only forty are found there?"** The Lord responded and said: **For the sake of forty, I will not do it (18:29).**

Then Abraham, who really has some *chutzpah*, reduces the number by ten saying: **May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?** Yeshua answered: **I will not do it if I find thirty there (18:30).**

Avraham, with a sense of earnestness, reduces the number again by ten and said to Him, **"Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there."** Messiah replied to him, **"For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it" (18:31).**

Then Abraham made one last effort to reduce it by ten more and said: **May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?** And the preincarnate Jesus answered positively: **For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it (18:32).** **The rabbis teach that Abraham did not ask about a lesser number because, he argued, there were eight righteous persons at the Flood.** It is important to remember that Avraham stopped asking before the Lord stopped giving.

Abraham thought **he** knew of at least **ten righteous people in Sodom**. There was Lot, his wife, their two sons (19:12), two married daughters and their husbands (19:14), and two unmarried daughters (19:8), a total of **ten**. Since these people were in only one **city**, perhaps **Avraham** reasoned that there would be the same number in each of the other four **cities**; so **he** interceded with **the Lord** to spare **the cities** if **He** could find **fifty righteous people** living in them. When **He** agreed, **Abraham** continued to pray, first for **forty-five**, then **forty**, then **thirty**, then **twenty**, then down to **ten**, the size of Lot's family.

There is no way of knowing whether **the Lord** would have spared **the city** for, say, only four people, the number that actually was taken by the angels out of **the city** before fire fell from heaven. **Abraham** may not have been close enough in fellowship to Lot to realize that his own family members were largely unregenerate and were themselves part of the problem in **Sodom**. Or perhaps **he** did know this, and felt that **his** prayer would become totally selfish, focusing only on Lot himself if **he** carried it any further. At any rate, **when the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, He left, and Abraham returned home (18:33)**. **Abraham** assuredly did know that **the judge of all the earth would do right**.³¹³

In the end, **the Lord** answered **Avraham's** prayer, though not exactly as he had prayed it. He did destroy **Sodom** and **the cities** of the plain with **the people** in it. **Ezekiel** was right: **The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:4b)**. But **the Lord** remembered **Abraham** when he rescued Lot (19:29), and the reason **He** rescued Lot was because of Lot's relationship to **Avraham**. So sometimes **ADONAI** will not respond to our specific prayer requests, but **He** will respond to the desires behind those prayer requests.

Three important principles of righteousness become clearly evident from **Chapter 18**. First, the **righteous** will practice and teach the righteousness of **ADONAI (18:19)**. Secondly, the basis for the request was the **righteous** character of **God**, not selfish aggrandizement (18:25b). And thirdly, a small number of **righteous** believers can have great influence. Only ten people would have been necessary to save an entire city (18:32). Let no one think his or her ministry is useless, regardless of how small a number is reached for **the Lord**.