

## Genesis 18

Chapter 18 consists of two very different stories, with two very different agendas, connected by the presence of “the men.” Each story has a tale to tell that is critical for us to hear.

The first story is contained in verses 1-16. This story can be summed up by the question one of “the men” asks, “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” But to understand that question, we need to return to our story. We have been following the adventures of Abraham and Sarah. They have been promised a child together (a child who would carry the promise of God’s creation-rescue work into the future), but that child had not yet arrived. They are both now too old for the natural course of baby-making to occur. Yet, one day, some men arrive at their tent and the natural order of things is called into question.

When the men arrive, Abraham demonstrates the hospitality of the desert by inviting them in for a meal. The men are given water with which to wash their feet, bread and meat are prepared for a meal, and Abraham stands and watches as the men consume the food that was set before them. So far so good and so ordinary. But then the ordinary becomes the extraordinary.

The men tell Abraham, with Sarah listening from behind the tent, that when the men return at this same time next year, Abraham and Sarah will have a child. This is the second time that Abraham hears this declaration, but it is the first for Sarah. In response, Sarah laughs, just as Abraham had done on the previous occasion. The men ask Abraham why Sarah laughed and disbelieved. Before an answer can be given, one man asks the central question, “Is anything too wonderful for God?” This question does not receive an answer as the text moves on to the second story.

The second story is contained in verses 16-33. This is an odd story about Abraham, God and the city of Sodom. As mentioned earlier, the only connection between the two stories is that the men move on toward Sodom under Abraham’s guidance. This leaves time for God and Abraham to engage in a conversation about the city. The context of this conversation is that God, because of Sodom’s sins, is going to judge the city. Abraham needs to know about this coming judgment because Abraham and his offspring are to be those who do “justice and righteousness” as the agents to God’s creation-rescue operation. What occurs next is a remarkable demonstration of what justice and righteousness look like. Abraham bargains with God to save all the persons in Sodom if God can find even ten righteous men. This negotiating session is told as if Abraham and God are bargaining in the market. While God, as the holy one, must judge, Abraham wants to save as many people as possible, even the guilty ones.

**Reflection:** The question posed by the men in the first story, “Is anything too wonderful for God,” and its answer, will resonate throughout the entire Biblical story. It will be asked by the people of God in the wilderness when they are hungry and thirsty. It will be answered by the gift of bread and manna. It will be asked by the Hebrews when they are oppressed by the Philistines. It will be answered by the judges and kings God sends to liberate them. It will be asked by the Jews in exile in Babylon. It will be answered by the Persian King Cyrus who will free them and send them home. It will be asked by First century Jews who were oppressed by the Romans. It will be answered by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Whenever it appears that all is lost, God does the wonderful in order that God’s creation-rescue operation continues.

### Questions:

1. When was a time in your life when you thought God had given up on you? What was that like?
2. How did God fulfill God’s promise to be alive and active in your life in a wonderful way?
3. What do you make of Abraham’s bargaining with God? Would you ever bargain with God?