

## Abraham becomes God's Confidante

This encounter that Abraham had with God is a continuation of the house visit God had made to speak personally with Sarah and that mission has now been completed. However, we were left dangling in Sarah's ambiguity that God knows her thoughts and that she had lied out of fear of having laughed at God's promise she would have a son in about a year's time.

With that, the scene changes immediately as the men stand up to leave, looking toward Sodom as the direction they intended to go.

*<sup>16</sup> When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.*

What we see next is a significant further deepening of the relationship between God and Abraham that God is wanting to bring him into. God's approach was based on the promises that he would become a great and powerful nation and that all nations on earth will be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:4-7; 17:1-16).

So, as the founder of many nations yet to come, God was drawing him into the place of a confidante, where God begins to reveal his larger purposes for his creation to him so that Abraham can begin to comprehend that this is not just about him, but ultimately involves the whole of humanity.

*<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'*

This is an amazing statement by God the Creator of the universe, and is an indication of the value and potential that God holds his image reflectors in.

This reminds us of what David mused about in Ps 8:3-8 (read only)

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? <sup>5</sup> You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup> You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: <sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, <sup>8</sup> the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*

The original intention for humanity was always to be his co-regents over his creation, to manage it on his behalf and through his grace and love. Much of that capacity was lost in the fall, but that is still God's intention for his people, to be brought into its fulfilment in the resurrection and the new creation.

What we see beginning to emerge in Abraham's experience is the foreshadowing of God's eternal purpose through his covenant people, Abraham was becoming the forerunner of this

new expression of God's covenant people that will find its fullest expression in the new covenant established by Christ and finally in his new creation – the new heaven and earth.

God then goes on to give us an insight into how this works out:

*<sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right (right actions coming out of his right relationship with God) and just (right decisions; wise judgements), so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.'*

He provides the basis for bringing Abraham into his circle of shared understanding.

God says, 'for I have chosen him' (NIV) – that is an OK translation in intent, but the Hebrew actually says 'I have known him that he will direct his children' – God is relational to his core, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is on the basis that God knows Abraham that he has chosen him, because he knows how Abraham will respond, which, in fact, Abraham has been confirming, since having left Ur, by the general movement of his actions.

The relational nature of God's rationale comes through all the way through here – chosen because he knows beforehand Abraham will do what is right – the Hebrew word here means 'doing right' (the right thing) on the basis of his right relationship with God (righteousness); and doing what is just – the Hebrew word here means 'right decisions' or 'wise judgements'.

From there God says, because of Abraham's 'right responses', that will enable God to bring about the fulfilment of His promises to him.

What follows on from it, relates to the potential outcomes for those who are not repentant for their sins but persist in their sin, which results in dishonouring God and fellow humans, given that we are all created in God's image and are all accountable for our actions before God.

*<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.' <sup>22a</sup> The men turned away and went towards Sodom,...*

This is not to suggest that God did not already know what was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah, of course, he did, he is all-knowing. But it does indicate that God is an inherently relational being and he gives us as his image bearers the opportunity to 'show our colours', so to speak, through our actions. This is one practical reason why God had to come in the human flesh of Jesus – to personally experience our world for himself.

What happens next gives us an amazing insight into both God's gracious relational heart and the growing understanding within Abraham of the nature of the relationship that God had been bringing Abraham into.

*22b ...but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 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? 25 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! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'*

*26 The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'*

This is a remarkable account of Abraham taking up the role of an intercessor on behalf of both Lot and his family and the whole city. He has grown in his understanding that God has brought him into the special role of knowing what God is planning in order to plead their case before him, the righteous God – pleading the case of the many guilty for the one righteous.

This theme was picked up by the prophet Amos: *7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.* Amos 3:7

We know that Abraham continued to press God bringing the number down to 10 righteous people for which he would not destroy the city. The point is not that we can bargain with God to try and get a better deal!!!

The point is God's amazing grace toward a fallen and broken world, which is revealed in his preference to forgive rather than condemn to death. Nonetheless, the persistently unrepentant will not escape punishment – God is no sugar-daddy – justice needs to be done!!!

We too have been given this ministry of reconciliation and intercession for the lost around us: 2Cor 5:16-21

*16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

(2Cor 5:16-21)

This is our challenge as much as it was Abraham's challenge!!!

*33 When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*