

Genesis 18:19 — For I Know Him: Covenant, Command, and the Unconditional Promises

Bible Study · Genesis 18

Verse 19 in Its Context — Looking Toward the Millennium

Genesis 18:18 stretches toward the millennium: Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. That has not been realized yet. Verse 19 appears to have the same millennial scope: the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. That includes the promises and the covenants — everything God had spoken of concerning Abraham — and all of that awaits the millennial reign of Christ for its fullest fulfilment. In between, there has been much failure among the literal seed of Abraham. But God is going to bring it all about, because He has said it.

That God then proceeds immediately to address the matter of Sodom is not a change of subject but a natural sequence. Before the millennium can come in, the world must be judged. The conditions at Sodom and Gomorrah, and the way their destruction is referenced throughout the Old and New Testaments, characterize the judgment that will precede the establishment of the kingdom. In the fifteenth chapter the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. Now the iniquity of Sodom is full. God does not judge prematurely. He allows things to ripen — and then He acts.

For I Know Him — Not, For I Know That

There is a word in verse 19 worth pausing over. God does not say, For I know that he will command his children. He says, For I know him. It is a statement of intimate personal knowledge. God knows Abraham. That is a privilege almost beyond expression: to be known of God. Paul writes in Galatians 4:9 of being known of God. Not only that we know God, but that we are known of Him — infinitely, completely, without reservation.

And this knowledge of Abraham on God's part is different in character from what is said about Sodom in verses 20–21. God does not say about Sodom, I know them. He says, The cry is great and their sin is very grievous — I will go down and see. The language of intimate personal knowledge is reserved for Abraham. It shows what kind of relationship exists between Abraham and God, and between God and the wicked. He knows those who are His. The other is a matter of judgment.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord. — Genesis 18:19

The Unconditional Covenant and Abraham's Responsibility

There are those who would appeal to verse 19 to argue that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional — that God's bringing upon Abraham what He has spoken is contingent on Abraham commanding his household aright. This reading is mistaken. The Abrahamic covenant and its promises are absolutely unconditional. God did not say, If you command your household after you, then I will bring upon you the things I have promised. He said, For I know him, that he will command his children. God is stating what He knows of Abraham. That is not a condition — it is a declaration of God's knowledge. And the source of that faithfulness in Abraham's household was God's own work in Abraham.

This does not mean Abraham has no responsibility. An unconditional covenant does not eliminate the obligation to walk with God, to command one's household,

to obey. Those are real responsibilities. But the fulfilment of the covenant does not depend on whether they are met. God knew Abraham. And God knew that the faith He had given Abraham would show itself in Abraham's life and household. We do not want to give Abraham credit for what God was doing in Abraham's family.

A contrast stands here with Eli. Eli's sons dishonoured God and Eli did not restrain them. What God said about the house of Eli was the opposite of what He says here about Abraham: that the iniquity of Eli's house would not be purged with sacrifice or offering forever. The character of a believing household is one of the most important realities in scripture. As one brother has said, if we did not know how to trust God for our children, we might well fear to bring them into the world at all. Scripture is filled with God's blessing going by households: come thou and all thy house into the ark; not a hoof shall be left behind. There is a household character to God's blessing.

Abraham Knowing God — the Intercession That Follows

The intercession of Abraham in verses 23–32 is itself evidence of what verse 19 says from the other direction. God says, I know him. And the intercession shows that Abraham knew God. He knew his own place — the way he addressed the Lord, repeatedly excusing himself (behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord which am but dust and ashes), was the mark of a man who knew who he was talking to. But he also knew God's character: shall not the judge of all the earth do right? That was not so much a question as a confidence. He knew the answer. He was not appealing to a God whose justice was uncertain. He was appealing to a God he knew to be perfectly just.

He came back to God again and again — six times — not with complaint but with a kind of bold tentativeness, each time drawing back a little from the previous position (fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten). That persistence in

coming back is itself evidence that he knew God and knew something of God's heart. The man who knows God will pray. The man who knows God's mind concerning judgment will intercede for the righteous who may be caught in the scope of it. Abraham was not interceding for Sodom; he was interceding for any righteous souls who might be there. That is the spirit of a man who knew God and was known of Him.

Galatians 3 and the Seed of Abraham Today

Galatians 3:7 connects what is said here with the present period: know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. The blessing for individuals today rests on the same foundation as the millennial blessing — the same seed of Abraham, Christ — but the mode of blessing is different. Today, those who are of faith are one with Christ, and by being one with Him who is the great seed, they are counted seed of Abraham. That is why there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile: neither Jew, Gentile, nor Church of God — we belong to the Church of God, and in Christ there is no Jew or Greek.

In the millennium, the church will have been completed and caught up. The earth will again see Jew and Gentile — two distinct classes, both saved, both blessed, but not one with Christ. The Gentile saints of the millennium will receive blessing through Israel, not directly as seed of Abraham. Israel will be in the land under the new covenant, in the full enjoyment of all the Abrahamic promises. This is the fulfilment of verse 18 looking forward — all nations blessed in him — with Christ as priest upon his throne, administering the Melchizedek priesthood whose character is founded on a once-for-all finished work.
