

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 18:16-33

“For the Sake of Ten”

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Verses 16-21

When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.¹⁷ Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.¹⁹ 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 and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”²⁰ Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous²¹ 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.”

- As the three visitors (see verses 1-15) were leaving, Abraham walked with them. They were moving toward the city of Sodom. As they walked, YHWH spoke repeating the promise to make Abraham a great nation through whom all the earth would be blessed.
- YHWH reminds Abraham to teach his children the ways of YHWH. They are to do what is right and just. Righteousness and justice are determined by the word of YHWH. He determines morality, not the individual or the culture in which one lives. Following the ways of YHWH is the pin upon which God’s promise to Abraham is hinged. If Abraham’s descendants do not follow the ways of YHWH, the promise is broken.
- Then, YHWH declares that the people of Sodom have not followed the way of the Lord. Their sins against God are grievous. YHWH is going to Sodom to determine what to do about the situation there. God knows what He is about to do to Sodom (see verse 17). Through the introduction of this situation, YHWH intends to teach Abraham a lesson about the ways of YHWH and God’s heart.

Verses 22-26

²² *The men turned away and went toward Sodom, 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."*

- Although no word has been spoken concerning God's disposition toward Sodom, Abraham knows God intends to destroy Sodom. He knows that God is pure and Holy and cannot abide sin.
- He also knows that his nephew, Lot, lives in Sodom (see Genesis 14).
- In a private conversation with YHWH alone (see verse 22), Abraham asks Him if He will destroy Sodom if there are 50 righteous people living there. Righteous people are those who live according to the ways of God. He begs God to spare the place if He finds 50 such people there.
- While God is righteous and cannot abide sin, He is also forgiving. YHWH agrees not to destroy the city if there are 50 people in it who live according to the ways of the Lord.

Verses 27-28

²⁷ *Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"*

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

- Very cautiously, Abraham asks YHWH if He will spare the city if He finds 45 righteous people there. Again, God promises that He will spare Sodom if He finds 45 righteous people there.

Verses 29-32

²⁹ *Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"*

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

³⁰ *Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"*

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹ Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

³² Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

- Abraham continues to negotiate with God until God agrees that He will not destroy Sodom and all its residents if there are 10 righteous people in the city. So, if God finds ten good people in the city, He will not destroy it.
- God has shown Abraham that He is righteous, merciful, and forgiving.

Verse 33

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

- Having shown His nature to Abraham the conversation ends. God leaves Abraham, and Abraham returns home.

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