

In Genesis 12-17, God made known... through Moses... that there were four different times when he spoke with or appeared to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1 – The LORD had said to Abram...

Genesis 13:14 – The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him...

Genesis 15:1 – After this the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision...

Genesis 17:1 – When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said...

There may have been other occasions... which we are not told of.
But what stood out about these four... is the length of time between them.

Between chapter 15 and 16, ten years went by.
Between chapter 16 and 17, thirteen years went by.
Why did God do this?

Long ago in the Garden, on that infamous day, when humanity spiritually died, and human nature was corrupted, the LORD committed himself to be humanity's Rescuer.

But his rescue would not just be from the power of sin and death, as wonderful as that would be.



The story of the Bible is that the LORD would rescue.... in order to bring us back into fellowship with himself; the fellowship that our first parents had lost. For God it is all about the relationship.

Something intriguing and different happened between Genesis 17:22 and 18:1. Instead of waiting years, God appeared again after an interval of days. One of the reasons for this short interval between chapter 17 and 18 had everything to do with Sarah's heart.

It had happened slowly.

But Sarah had convinced herself that her situation was beyond God's help.

This is why she laughed at the LORD's message to her.

And when God confronted her, she lied.

But God would not let her off the hook.

He called her out... and said... "Yes, you did laugh."

The LORD did this with Sarah because he is a good Father and good fathers step in when necessary.

From verse 16 through to the end of chapter 18, we discover another reason why the LORD had appeared again.

His visit had everything to do with the spiritual and moral condition of the cities of the plain.

God didn't need to let Abraham know what he was about to do.

But he did.

And we need to ask why.

The answer... teaches us of a significant role that the people of God have in this present time.

Read 18:16-21.

Who was God speaking to in these verses?

- Was he speaking to himself?
- Was he speaking to Abraham?
- Was he speaking to the two angels who were with him?

Based on what Abraham said to God in v.23-32, it is clear that Abraham heard what God had said.... so we know God wasn't speaking to himself.

Based on v.17, it is also clear that God was not speaking to Abraham.

This leaves us with but one option - God was speaking to the two angels... in the presence of Abraham.

The LORD is a God who makes himself known.

In the creation he has revealed his eternal power and divine nature.

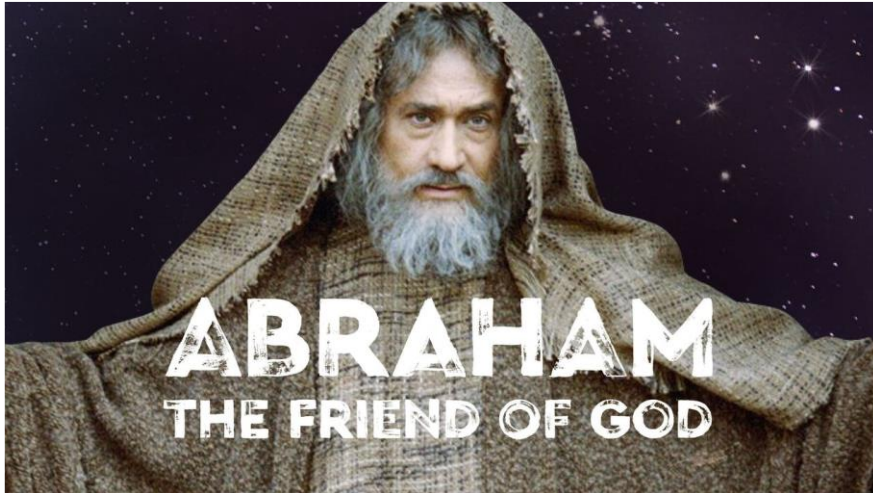
In the Bible he has made known his plans and ways.

In Jesus Christ, God exactly and perfectly reveals his magnificent character.

God's question is v.17 was not a question of uncertainty –

“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

With this question, the LORD was making known what it meant for Abraham to be in relationship with him.

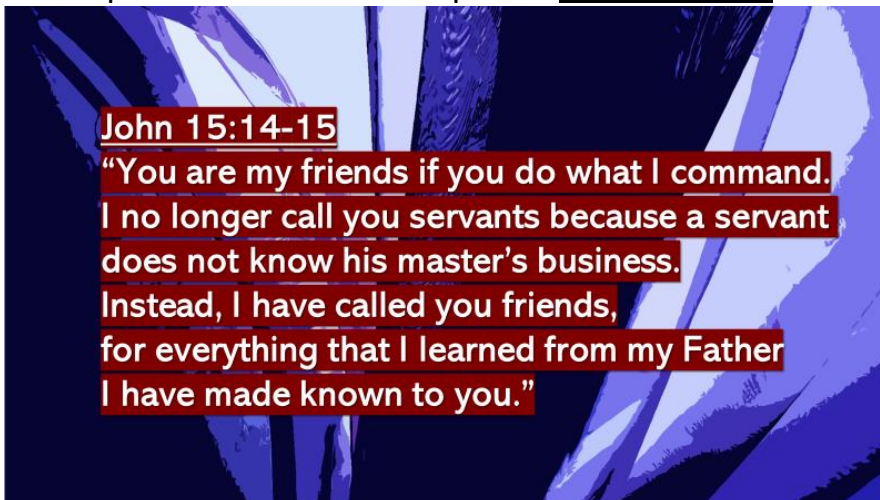


As Isaiah 41:8 so clearly stated.... Abraham was the friend of God.

This is incredible!

But as awesome as this reality was, Abraham was not the only one described as God's friend.

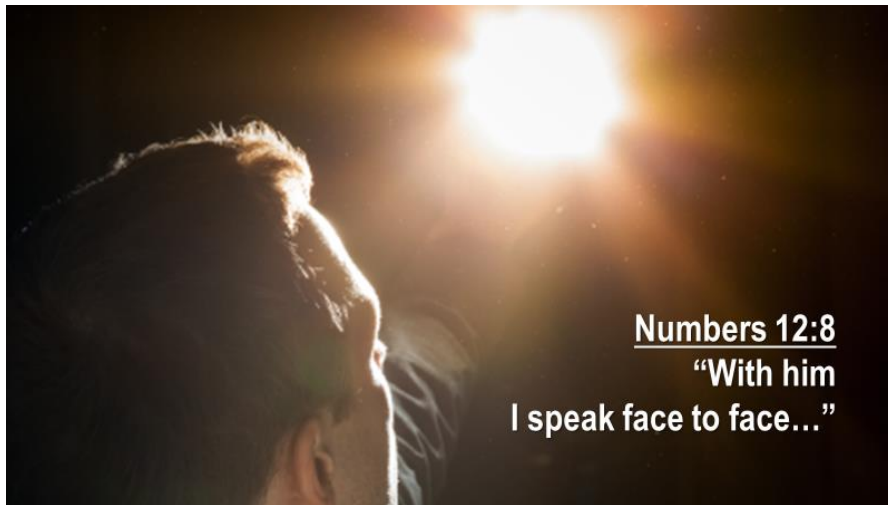
Jesus spoke of this to his disciples in John 15:14-15 –



To be in relationship with God is to be his friend.

And Jesus was abundantly clear - friends do not hide things from each other.

What Jesus said in John 15 is in line with what the LORD said about his relationship with Moses.



The LORD makes himself known to those who walk in relationship with him. This was his creation intent and the reason why he committed himself to save.

But it is important for us to take note - that it is also the will of God that those who are his friends, would obey him.

We are to remember and never forget Jesus' words:

“You are my friends if you do what I command.”

God granted to Abraham great privilege.

And with that great privilege came great responsibility.

Look again at what God required of him - **read 18:19.**

- Abraham was to direct his children and his household to keep the way of the LORD. How was he to direct?
- By teaching them. However, his goal in teaching was not simply a transference of information.
- The goal of Abraham's teaching was obedience – that his children and descendants would keep the way of the LORD; that they would do what was right and just in the eyes of the LORD.

We need to ask - was this requirement unique to Abraham?

We know the answer because of what Jesus said to his followers when he commissioned them to go into all the world, Matthew 28:18-20.

He told them that they were to make disciples by

...teach[ing] them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

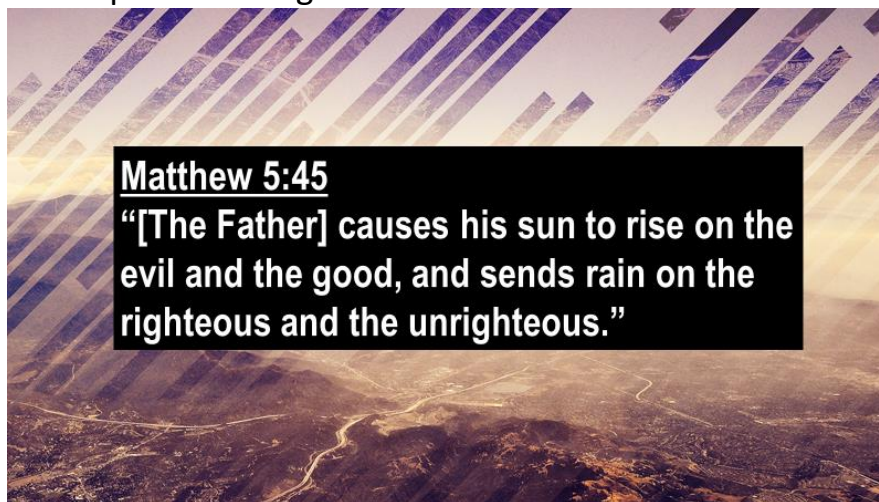
Obedience lives in agreement with, in line with... what God says is right and just.

In Abraham's hearing, God promises him that if he will obey and direct his children and his household to do what is right in God's eyes... God in turn will bring about for Abraham what had been promised to him.

In this passage we are reminded that some of God's blessings are conditional.

There is grace by which God blesses all people whether they love him or not; whether they obey him or not.

Jesus spoke of this grace in Matthew 5:45.



But throughout the Bible we read of other blessings... which God gives only in response to obedience.

Having said these things about Abraham to the angels, the LORD then turned the conversation to the issue of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Read 18:20-21.

Back in Genesis 15 the LORD had told Abraham that neither he nor his descendants would possess the land of Canaan for another four hundred years. Do you remember the reason given by God for this delay?

Genesis 15:16
...for the sin of the Amorites
has not yet reached its full
measure.

Based on what God said... what conclusion are we able to make about Sodom and Gomorrah?

Their sin had reached its full measure.

We can further conclude that these peoples had been granted by God an extended opportunity to repent of their sin.

We know of one such opportunity.

Years earlier, the residents of these cities had witnessed the power of God demonstrated through Abraham, when he, with 318 men, went in pursuit of the five kings from Mesopotamia, who had taken captive Lot and the peoples of Sodom and all their possessions.

The combined strength of the peoples of the plain and their kings had not been able to defeat these five kings from Mesopotamia – but Abram and the 318 men with him had been successful.... Because... God had helped them and given them victory.

The king of Sodom, Bera, had stood in the presence of King Melchizedek, and had heard with his own ears the spoken truth of who the LORD is – he is God Most High, the Creator of heaven and earth.

But rather than repenting of his own sin and leading his people to align their lives with the LORD, king Bera and the peoples of the plain had persisted in their sin.

The Bible teaches us that God does not change.
Always and forever, he is who he is.

When Moses went up on Mount Sinai, a second time with two stone tablets, Exodus 34 says that the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with Moses and proclaimed his name.

Exodus 34:6-7

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

After the days of Abraham, God did not change and become someone different. Always and forever, he is who he is.

This is who he was in the days of Moses; this is who he was in the days of Abraham, and who he is in our time.

The LORD is compassionate.

The LORD is gracious.

He is slow to anger.

The LORD abounds in love and faithfulness.

The LORD forgives sin but punishes the guilty.

Once the two angels left, Abraham, who had been silent, began to speak with the LORD.

18:23-25.

We need to be clear as to what Abraham was asking of God.

“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”

Abraham was not asking... the LORD to change his mind about sin.

He was not asking... the LORD to allow the behavior of those who lived in the cities of the plain to go unchecked.

- Abraham knew, as he stated in v.25, that God Most High is the Creator of heaven and earth – and... the Judge of all the earth.
- Abraham knew that...

The moral code for all human beings
is determined by the LORD Most High.

By virtue of who the LORD is,
he alone determines what is right
and what is wrong.

- Abraham knew that as the Judge... every person is accountable to the LORD for what they do and say and think.
- Abraham knew that as the Judge... the LORD... will reward every person according to their deeds.

What Abraham grappled with... on that particular day... was whether in judging the wicked, God's wrath might spill over onto the righteous.
And if it did, in Abraham's mind the implications would have been devastating.

Let's read the conversation that followed.

As we do so, keep in mind that as Abraham intercedes, in his mind's eye, he saw the face of Lot.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 18:25. | Will you spare the place for the sake of fifty righteous people? |
| 18:26. | Yes, I will spare the whole place for their sake. |
| 18:28a. | What if the number of the righteous is 45? |
| 18:28b. | If I find forty-five there, I will not destroy it. |
| 18:29a. | What if only forty are found there? |
| 18:29b. | For the sake of forty, I will not do it. |
| 18:30a. | What if only thirty can be found there? |
| 18:30b. | I will not do it if I find thirty there. |
| 18:31a. | What if only twenty can be found there? |
| 18:31b. | For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it. |
| 18:32a. | What if only ten can be found there? |
| 18:32b. | For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it. |

Having agreed upon the number ten, the LORD then left Abraham and Abraham went home.

Let's consider four connections to our own lives, that come out of this passage. Why did God allow Abraham to negotiate with him?

- 1. I believe the LORD allowed Abraham to do so because he desired Abraham to learn how great his mercy was, which went so far beyond what Abraham could have ever imagined.**

Is this not what the numbers teach us?

50
45
40
30
20
10

- 2. We learn from God's response... to Abraham ... that the LORD would have his people be bold in their requests of him.**

Psalm 138:3

"When I called you answered me; you greatly emboldened me."

As God's followers speak with him and he answers them... and we ask and he answers.. and we ask and he answers... the Lord makes...

Psalm 138:3

When I called you answered me; you greatly emboldened me.

Proverbs 28:1

The righteous are as bold as a lion.

There is a boldness that is sin-energized.
You see it in those who boast in themselves, rather than in the LORD.
And it is offensive.

But there is also a godly boldness that when coupled with humility... pleases God.
We see this boldness and humility four different times in our passage.

18:27. "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the LORD, though I am nothing but dust and ashes...."

18:30. "May the LORD not be angry, but let me speak."

18:31. "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the LORD...."

18:32. "May the LORD not be angry, but let me speak just once more."

The LORD had just assured Abraham that nothing is too hard for him.
God does not change.
This is who he is with us.

This is why it is so important that you and I regularly draw near to the LORD and listen carefully and intently and with faith to his words.
Our hearts need to be enlarged and enflamed by God's majesty.

This is what happened to William Carey.
And this is what he said having been in the presence of God...



If nothing is too hard for the LORD, then yes, you and I...
...are to ask for great things from God...
...and to expect great things of God...
...and to attempt great things in the name of the LORD.

3. As God's people grow in faith, their heart will be drawn to others who are in need of the LORD.

This is not to say that our heavenly Father doesn't want us to come to him with our own needs... he does.

Jesus taught, Luke 11:9-10:

Luke 11:9-10
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;
and he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks,
the door will be opened.

And when he taught his disciples to pray, Jesus told them to ask the Father for their daily bread.

But if the Spirit of God is transforming us to be like Jesus, and this is what he is doing... then like Jesus... the Spirit will teach his followers to intercede to the Father on behalf of others.

4. Our boldness is to be influenced by love.

In spite of his complicated history with Lot, Abraham nonetheless loved him. But as much as Abraham loved his nephew, God loved Lot even more.

The LORD wasn't able to answer Abraham's request... because there were not 10 righteous people in all of Sodom.

But he did answer the intent behind Abraham's prayer.

As we shall see – he did not sweep away Lot with the wicked.

As God grows us up... he teaches us... to trust him in those times, when his answer looks different than we requested.

The Judge of the earth always does what is right!

