

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY AUGUST 24, 2025  
GENESIS 18:1-33

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## OAK TREES & JUDGEMENT



**Genesis 17:27-18:16** There are no chapter breaks in the original, so hear this as a continuous story from **chapter 17**. So since this is a continuous story from **17:26** then the events we just read about happen soon after Abraham and all his male household were recovering/healing from their circumcisions.

Let's paint this picture of what is happening here a little more clearly. Abraham in **verse 1** is sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. He's 99, and had a pretty eventful life already. Abraham moved his family from Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Canaan. His father died a long the way. He then moved to Egypt during a famine, and moved back to Canaan. He and his nephew Lot split up. Lot later is taken captive Abraham defeated a Babylonian King rescuing Lot.. Abraham has a son, Ishmael through his wife servant, and now Abraham just recently had a circumcision at age 99, that's a big event! And so in **18:1** we see Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent, somewhere mid-afternoon – the heat of the day.

That the author would want us to know that he is sitting at the entrance to his tent is interesting. The first two letters of Abraham's name are "Ab" – that mean "father". In Hebrew that is Aleph Bet. In ancient Hebrew the letter Aleph was the head of an ox – often used expressing the idea of strong, as in "strong as an \_\_\_\_ ox". And "Bet" was the floor plan of the common tent. Combined Aleph - Bet, "AB – father" means – "strength of the tent / household". In **verse 1** where is strong Ab-raham sitting? At the entrance of his tent. I imagine him sitting like this...

### *Aleph Bet*

In ancient Hebrew the letter Aleph was the head of an ox – often used expressing the idea of strong, as in "strong as an ox".

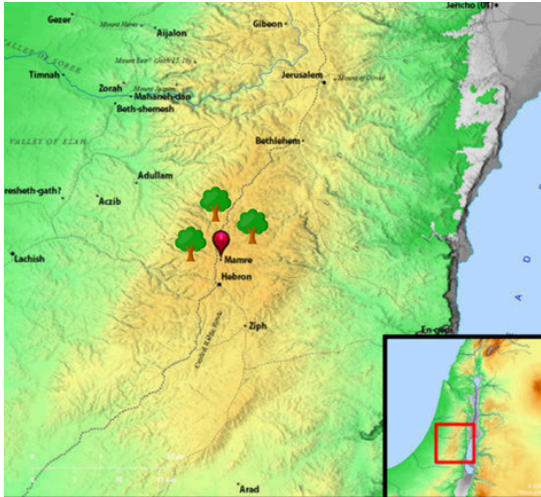


"Bet" was the floor plan of the common tent. Combined Aleph - Bet, "AB – father" means – "strength of the tent / household".



We also know from **verse 1** Abraham's tent is near the Oaks of Mamre. We are already familiar with this location from (13:18) which tells us that the Oaks of Mamre are close to Hebron. The Oaks of Mamre were a large grove of Oaks where Abram went to live after he and Lot's clan separated. And Mamre is also where Abram returned to live after his mighty defeat of the Babylonian King who had taken Lot captive. The word Mamre, similar to "Ab", also means "strength / vigor" and is often associated with fertility or reproduction.

The "Oaks" themselves are interesting. The word for "Oak" in Hebrew is "Elon" – interesting – and can also be used for "Terebinth trees". The first century historian Josephus commented on oaks at Mamre that were still there at his time and he wrote that the oaks were "as old as the world". Oaks are also known for their might and strength and are symbols of strength in Hebrew.



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The word for "Oak" in  
Hebrew is "Elon" and  
can also be used for  
"Terebinth trees". In  
Hebrew "oak" is  
synonymous with  
strength.

So let's put **verse 1** together: We have Abraham – "Ab- father"- "strength of the tent/household" sitting at his tent under Oak trees. "Oaks – Elon" -also means strength. And the Oaks are at "Mamre" which means "strength/vigor often associated with fertility". Three allusions to strength in one verse which is curious. But why such a strong emphasis on strength? Perhaps it contrasts with what Ab does next.

# “Strength”

- Abraham – “Ab- father”- “strength of the tent/household” sitting at his tent under Oak trees.
- “Oaks – Elon” -also means strength.
- The Oaks are at “Mamre” which means “strength/vigor often associated with fertility”.



**Genesis 18:1** So while Abraham – the “strength of the household” is sitting at his tent, under strong oaks near the strong and vigorous Mamre, the LORD – which means YHWH, appears to him.

Pause there for a second. The LORD appearing to Abraham is exactly how the last story opened not that long ago ... the LORD appearing in **17:1**. But what the LORD looked like in **17:1** was different – or maybe how he revealed himself was different. The appearance of the LORD to Abraham in **17:1** was the LORD appearing in a form that could talk, listen and see – no other description given. In **16:7** the LORD appeared to Hagar as the angel of the Lord. In **chapter 15:7** the LORD appeared symbolically as a smoking firepot and flaming torch. In **chapter 14:18-19** the LORD appeared to Abraham in the wisdom and priest role of Melchizedek.

## Various ways the Lord appeared:



- **17:1** was the LORD appearing in a form that could talk, listen and see.
- **16:7** the LORD appeared to Hagar as the angel of the Lord
- **15:7** the LORD appeared symbolically as a smoking firepot and flaming torch
- **14:18-19** the LORD appeared to Abraham in the wisdom and priest role of Melchizedek
- **20:3** the LORD reveals himself through a dream
- **18:2** the LORD appears or reveals himself in yet another way to Abraham – the LORD appears in a group of three men

So in the previous four chapters there are four different ways the LORD appeared and revealed himself to Abraham. And jump forward to **chapter 20:3** the LORD reveals himself through a dream. And in our chapter in **18:2** the LORD appears or reveals himself in yet another way to Abraham – the LORD appears in a group of three men.

Why does the LORD reveal himself in various ways to Abraham and us the readers? One simple conclusion is that the LORD wants to be known by Abraham and us the reader. And it seems the longer Abraham walks with the LORD the more he is shown of who God is, all of which is to inspire trust, and trust leads to obedience.

Now it is commonly interpreted that the LORD was one of the three men, and this is supported by that seems to infer the other two men were the angels / men that rescued LOT from Sodom before the LORD rained down fire and brimstone. If you read ahead in **chapter 19** you’ll see it uses the words angels and men interchangeably. Just remember an angel in Hebrew means “messenger – or “one sent to complete a task”.

So back in **18:2 NASB** Strong Abraham, sitting at his tent, saw the three men that had appeared. Other translations say “raised his eyes and looked”. Of interest this “raised his eyes and looked” is the exact same phrase used in **22:13 NASB** right after the Angel of the LORD stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, it says Abraham raised his eyes and looked...and sees a ram caught in the thicket. The LORD allowed Abraham to see the LORD as provider – Jehovah Jireh – the LORD my provider. In other words Abraham’s spiritual eyes were open to see the LORD’s provision. That is exactly what happens to all of us at the moment of our salvation, our eyes see LORD providing salvation through Jesus. Here is in **18:2 NASB** when Abraham raised his eyes and looked – his spiritual eyes were opened and by Abraham’s actions we see that he recognized that these were not just ordinary men. It says he ran and bowed.

Ninety-nine year old Abraham running. Is that even possible? Orville Rogers ran competitively until 2019 when he passed away at 101 -holding 13 world records. So Abraham running at 99 possible? Yes. This is, after all, the same Abraham that at age 86 chased down and defeated a Babylonian King of kings that had kidnapped Lot, and that was a 250 mile chase one way. (first ultra marathon?) So yeah in this is Abraham running up to the three men.



And when Abraham gets to them, he, strong and mighty Abraham, bows to the ground. Who are these three men, greater than the strong, mighty warrior Abraham that Abraham would be compelled to bow to without hesitation?

We already know that when Abraham raised his eyes and looked that Abraham’s eyes were opened...he recognized the LORD. This is confirmed by what Abraham says in **verse 3** , **verse 1**.. Now still picture Abraham here bowed, face to the ground and he says “My Lord”. Note “Lord” here is not in all caps as in **verse 1** LORD. LORD in all caps means “YHWH” Jehovah. Rather this is Lord which in Hebrew is “Adonai” – meaning “Lord or Master”. A master makes decisions for you and tells you what to do. One who is your Master or Lord is greater than you, even greater than Abraham. We see this “greater than” even more clearly when Abraham refers to himself in **verse 3 NASB** as a servant who must find favor in his master’s sight. I like to think that this is an indicator of Abraham’s growth in recognizing LORD (all caps) YHWH as his Master (Adonai). How are you doing on that journey of recognizing the LORD as your master (Adonai)?

In **verse 4-5** Abraham offers hospitality to the three men, water to wash and then food – and they accept his offer. Now let me point out that in **verse 6-7 NASB** Abraham is hustling in his hospitality. Look at the words.. hurried, ran, hurried. So recapping here: strong & mighty Abraham sitting at his tent entrance, under the strong and mighty oaks, that are near strong and mighty Mamre, lifts his eyes and sees the Lord, then Abraham runs, falls to his face before the Lord, offers his guests water to wash and food, then runs and hurries to prepare it. (Boogety, boogety)

So in **verse 8** Abraham brings the roasted calf, and yogurt-ish dish, serves the three men and waits on them under the oak tree. This phrase “under the \_\_\_ tree” , whether it’s an oak, palm, tamarisk, or pomegranate, in the Old Testament implies a place of meeting where kings or judges sat – often judging people. This under the tree meeting is probably a foreshadowing of the judgement that is coming on Sodom and Gomorrah in the next chapter.



In **verse 9** – “they” plural- which is weird – ask Abraham “where” is your wife?

And getting past the “they” part, don’t miss that this is the LORD asking a “where” question one more time in Genesis so far. This is the same word “where” in Hebrew that was used in **Genesis 3:9** that showed LORD God expressing his dismay and sorrow that Adam wasn’t where he wanted him to be -walking with, trusting him, by his side. It’s also the same word “where” that the angel of the Lord asked the run-away-slave Hagar.. when the LORD also wanted Hagar to be walking with him, trusting him, at his side. And so in **18:9** when the LORD ask Abraham “where is your wife Sarah..” The LORD is also expressing dismay sorrow, wanting Sarah to be trusting him, at his side.

But it’s clear in the next couple verses Sarah is not at the point of trust in the LORD yet. Sneak preview ...it does happen, Sarah does get to that place of trust with the LORD, and it is a beautiful moment when it happens. Read ahead and see if you can find it. (Not now)

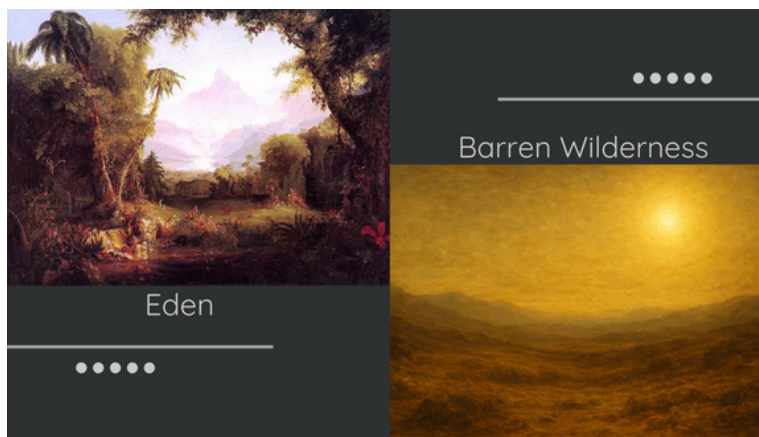
In **verse 10** the LORD tells Abraham about his coming son and tells him when it will happen. This phrase “about this time next year” was apparently used to describe the cycle of fertility. In **verse 11** the phrase “very old” in Hebrew is (you’ll like this) “heavy with years”. You are not old, you are “heavy with years”. My buddy Tim would tell me, no your just “heavy” period.

Now Sarah is at the tent listening to all of this and we get a window in **verse 12** into her inner dialogue, her self-talk. It is a gift in the scripture when we are given a window into a character’s inner dialogue. Here Sarah laughs (to herself) and questions whether this can come true? This is the Sarah “not trusting the LORD yet” part. Like Abraham laughed, Sarah laughs, but this is not the “laughter of rejoicing” as I think we saw with Abraham in **Genesis 17:17**. Rather Sarah laughs to herself in seemingly disbelief. And her question tells us why she laughed in the end of **verse 12**. The phrase “how can a worn out woman like me” in Hebrew is more like “how can a woman past the cycle of fertility” – meaning having gone through menopause – “enjoy such a pleasure?”

Scholars Mackie and others have pointed out that Sarah uses an interesting Hebrew word here for “pleasure”. It’s the word “Eden” – as in “Garden of Eden”, which means delight. Now because she used the word “Eden” I don’t think this is just about “pleasure” as in the “pleasure of intimacy” or “pleasure of being a mom”. I think it’s much bigger.



So engage your imaginations here. We know from **Genesis 12:30 NKJV** that Sarai was barren – meaning could not conceive. Think “barren” as in barren landscape.. barren wilderness, empty..dry - no life.... That’s what Sarai was for ninety years – “barren”. Now contrast the word “barren” to the word “eden”- “Eden” the protected garden, with a river that waters the garden and the whole world, and a tree of life, a whole garden that is bursting with fruitfulness – that’s “eden”. For ninety years Sarai, in some ways lived in the barren wilderness, and now the LORD is saying she is going to experience Eden..the Garden of Delight?



Sarah didn't believe it. Ninety years of barren could not conceive of Eden – even when the promise of Eden came from the mouth of the LORD. So she laughed to herself. But pause there for a moment, reflect on your own life, your own hard circumstances.. think of all of God's promises – can you conceive of Eden? Even if Eden comes after death?

In **verse 13** the LORD challenges Sarah's laugh – this is the LORD rebuking Sarah's question asked in disbelief. Yes the LORD rebukes disbelief. And what the LORD says in **verse 14** is not just for Abraham and Sarah, but I think this verse, these words from the LORD are for all of us who fail to conceive of Eden. Then the LORD repeats the promise to Abraham of having a son.


In **verse 15** we get to witness between Sarah and the LORD what all of us have done with the LORD... hiding our truth. Telling a lie is hiding your truth. Sarah said "No I didn't!" "Yes you did!". It also tells us that the LORD hears our inner dialogue.

Now the story could end there, lots of takeaways, but it doesn't. The rest of the chapter indicates that the three men, including the LORD were on a mission, headed somewhere else, and they happened to stop at Abraham's along the way. Let's read **18:16-33**. And see what the LORD reveals about himself to Abraham.

When I was in Jerusalem several years back I was shopping in the Arab district – tons of little shops – And I was looking for a scarf for my wife. Shop owners typically were in the doorway of their shops, calling out for attention of shoppers. One particular shop owner walked out to me as I was walking by, grabbed my arm and said, "I have scarf for you to see". I reluctantly engaged. He showed me a nice scarf, the price was \$100 and I turned around and walked out. He followed me, carrying the scarf, eventually asking me what price I would pay. I offered \$30, he told me I was insulting him and robbing his children of their inheritance. And after many rounds and rounds he finally agreed to \$30. He put it in a bag for me, then I told him I changed my mind and offered him \$20. He was mad, grabbed the scarf and stormed back to his shop. I walked away, feeling good about myself, which is probably disturbing to you as Americans and should be to me too but isn't, I grew up in bargaining culture. The shop owner then followed me again, and said "I'll take \$20". I handed him a \$20, he handed me the scarf, and he stormed away. It was still probably \$10 more than I should have paid. Bargaining is part of middle eastern culture – it's expected. In this continuation of **chapter 18** we see Abraham also bargaining with the LORD.



**Verse 16** tells us the three men that were Abraham's guests rose from eating and looked toward Sodom. So we know where they were headed when they stopped at Abraham's place – Sodom. We know about Sodom already from **chapter 15** – Sodom was a city in the Salt Valley – the south end of the present day Salt Sea. "Sodom" means "burnt/scorched" which seems to be a foreshadowing for what happens in next weeks chapter. Interesting some suggest that Sodom is from the semitic word "sadam" which means "oppression/cruelty" which also fits. And the city of Sodom had an King - Bera- whose name means "son of evil".



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"burnt/scorched"


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*Bera*

.....

*King of Sodom*

the name "Bera"  
means "son of evil"



Sodom is often paired with Gomorrah as in **verse 20**. Gomorrah was a neighboring city-state -. Gomorrah means "overwhelming ruin" and its King's name was "Birsha" that meant "in wickedness".

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So the three men are on a mission to Sodom, and in **verse 17** the LORD asks the question – meaning "shall I tell Abraham or not about our mission in Sodom?" In **verse 19** we see an indicator of what truly matters to the LORD regarding how God's new chosen family through Abraham are to conduct themselves towards others. God wants Abraham to teach his household and descendants how to "keep the way of the LORD". "Keep the way of the LORD" What does that mean? The text tells us in **18:19**, "by doing righteousness and justice".

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"Keep the way of the LORD". What  
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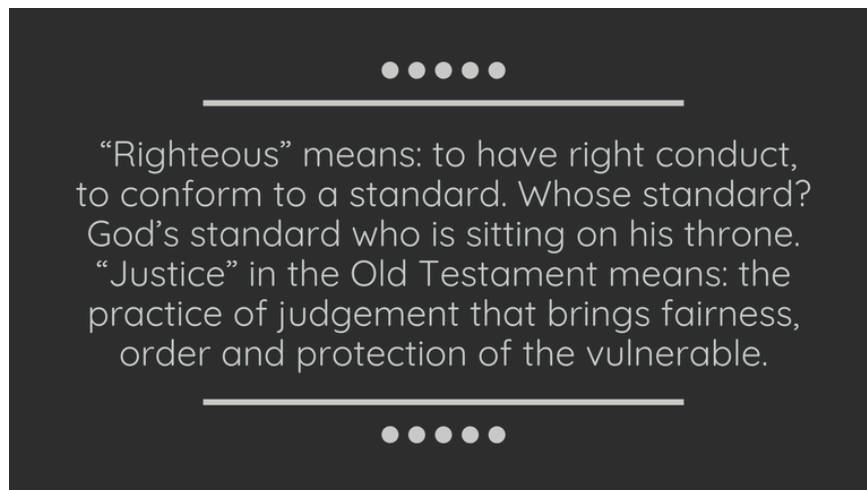
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This is the first time this pairing of words, righteousness and justice occurs in the Old Testament, and this pairing of words occurs more than 25x in the Old Testament. This pairing of words is foundational in understanding who God is and understanding his actions. So important are this pairing of words that **Psalms 89:14** says righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne. God sitting on a throne, the throne sitting on righteousness and justice.



Thrones have to do with ruling and judgement - let's define righteous and justice in that light. "Righteous" means to have right conduct, to conform to a standard. Whose standard? God's standard, who is sitting on his throne. "Justice" in the Old Testament is the practice of judgement that brings fairness, order and protection of the vulnerable.



And where righteousness and justice are lacking - **verse 20** there is the word "outcry" 2x. So where there is not righteous "conduct towards others, according to God's standard, and where there is not justice that brings fairness and order and protection for the vulnerable, there is the "outcry" of those not being treated as God wants them treated.

We saw the same crying out in **Genesis 4:10** where Abel's blood cried out to the LORD for justice. We see this also in **Exodus 3:7** when the Israelites were oppressed, the LORD heard their cry. So the outcry of the oppressed, the victims of violence, injustice are heard by the LORD, and the LORD acts. In **18:21** the LORD has heard the outcry and is acting - he goes to see it firsthand.

Abraham doesn't have to guess what the LORD is going to do to Sodom & Gomorrah - he knows about the unrighteous acts and injustice, after all his nephew lives there.

What Abraham has to contend with though is: How the LORD will determine the fate of the righteous amid divine judgement. The fate of the righteous amid divine judgement echoes Noah's story and is the theme of the bible where the righteous in Christ are saved from divine judgement.



# *Abraham's Dilemma:*

How the LORD will determine  
the fate of the righteous  
amid divine judgement.

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And so Abraham in **verse 23** boldly enters into a discussion with the LORD to see how the LORD will determine the fate of the righteous amid divine judgement. And he asks the LORD... His concern is of course for his nephew Lot.

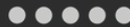
Notice in **verse 23** that Abraham defines those who don't do righteousness and justice as "wicked" – "ra-sha" which shares the root word of evil – "ra". So the "wicked" are those who do evil rather than doing what is right and just. This means that the sin that the LORD has issue with in Sodom and Gomorrah is not primarily their wicked sexual sin, but rather how they oppress the vulnerable. **Ezekiel 16:49-50** supports this.



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Abraham's contention with the LORD is whether the LORD will sweep away the entire wicked city of Sodom even if there are righteous living in it. Abraham goes as far as arguing that the LORD sweeping away the righteous with the wicked would actually be an act of injustice and says at the end of **verse 25**.. Should not the judge of all the earth do what is right (just)?

So Abraham then asks the LORD five times in a row, the same core question "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Meaning what happens to the righteous amid divine judgement? Each of the five times Abraham asks the question Ab uses a different number of righteous. He seems to be bargaining with the LORD. He starts at 50 and ends at 10. But I think Abraham is determining the character of God by God's response. So the LORD answers the question the same time every time. He says, "I will not destroy the city on the account of the righteous" – the whole way down to even if there are only ten.

What do we learn about the LORD from this? Exactly as Abraham asked in **verse 25** the LORD is the Judge of all the world and is just. The LORD has a plan to save the righteous amid divine judgement. (theological truth that is foundational for gospel)

For your meditation and application.

1. We saw the LORD reveal himself in **chapter 18** differently than the various ways he revealed himself to Abraham **chapter 12-17**... This means that the LORD wanted to be known by Abraham and wants to be known to us the reader. Read this book! It reveals who God is. This story also seems to suggest that the longer Abraham walks with the LORD the more he is shown of who God is. Keep walking.

2. When Abraham saw the LORD, Abraham ran to him and bowed. We need to be like Abraham, run to the LORD, fall on our face before him acknowledging that he is the master and we are the servant, and then do whatever the LORD wants, quickly.

3. RE: righteousness and justice. What the LORD cares about most is our conduct towards others. Is it righteous, just? Or does it result in cries of oppression? And when we hear cries of oppression do we respond?

4. The LORD is the Judge of all the world and He is just. He has a plan to save the righteous amid divine judgement. And that plan is the righteousness of Jesus that he freely gives to us.

# SUPPLEMENTAL

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## NOTES:

1. Why no chapter break between **17** & **18** in original? From **17:27-18:5** Abraham's name is not mentioned in the original, the text says "him". The first five verses of **chapter 18** builds off the previous mention of Abraham's name in **17:26**. While this continuous text is hard to see in modern translations, it's more obvious in Hebrew.
2. Joke: If you eat a lot of mushrooms does that make you a fungi? (fun guy)?
3. Josephus on Oaks of Mamre: War of the Jews, Book IV, Chapter 9.7
4. The Oaks of Mamre is significant throughout Abraham's life time and later becomes a family burial site for he, Sarah, and Isaac.
5. Mushroom Fun Fact: Fungi are more closely related to animals than to plants. Even though mushrooms grow like plants, at a genetic level, fungi share more similarities with animals. For example, both fungi and animals use chitin (the same material in insect shells) in their structure, whereas plants use cellulose.
6. Under the tree – place of judgment for Kings and Judges. See also **Judges 4:5**, **1 Kings 13:14**, **1 Samuel 22:6**, **1 Samuel 14:2**. Interesting in the New Testament Nathaniel in **John 1:46** is under a tree. Hrmm...I'm still thinking about that one.
7. Abraham bargaining. In **chapter 23** Abraham bargains again. He bargains to pay verses something being free.