

But suppose that the whole world were of that sort, and only a small remnant remained with pure hearts and pure minds and pure bodies. Only one course could be safely pursued—the whole world must be quarantined and “boycotted” in days of peace, and exterminated on the first declaration of war. The agony of sufferers from God’s floods and fires and swords was small when compared with the agony which he prevented by the destruction of these corrupt races. After all, is it not the spectacular quality of these judgments of God which makes us shrink from them? When we realize the picturesque horror of a city doomed in one hour we forget for the moment that every citizen was doomed to death anyhow. Many a moral and physical wreck reels through our streets to-day of whom even we are ready enough to say, “Better he had died twenty years ago.” Do not doubt that God is tenderer-hearted than we. The destruction of Sodom was an unmixed blessing to the world.”

The opening portion of our chapter gives a beautiful picture of patriarchal hospitality. The venerable chief, resting beneath the shade of his tent sees three travellers approach. To him a stranger and a guest were the same. He hastens out to meet them and with the utmost courtesy, requests the honor of offering them some rest and refreshment. Nor does he delegate the duty of caring for them to menials. Sarai herself prepares the bread, and his own hand selects the fatter and tenderest of his herd. The host serves the meal and stands by to wait upon them while they eat. In thus shewing his wonted kindness he found himself entertaining angels unawares (Heb. 13: 2).

The strangers bring a blessing to the home in that they announce the speedy fulfilment of the promise given so many years before. When or how their true character was disclosed, we are not informed, but ere they part, Abraham recognizes in the principal Personage, the One who had already appeared to him at Ur, at Sichem, at Bethel and, on a previous occasion at Mamre.

LESSON PLAN. I. Abraham’s Intercession. vs. 22-26. II. Persistent Pleading. vs. 27-33.

I. ABRAHAM’S INTERCESSION. 22. The men—In ch. 19: 1 they are called two angels. Stood yet—i. e. remained in his presence, loath to leave until he had pleaded for the doomed cities. Before the LORD—In outward appearance as a man, (v. 2) but distinguished from the other two by superior dignity. Note other appearances of God in human form, to Jacob (ch. 32: 24-30), to Joshua (Josh. 5: 13-15). Compare Ek. 3: 2, 14 with Acts 7: 30, 38 and you will see that the “angel of the Lord” was Christ before his incarnation. The traditional spot commands a view of the Dead Sea and the adjacent plain (ch. 19: 27, 28). 23. Drew near—The word suggests boldness (Heb. 4: 16; 10: 22; 1 John 4: 18). He moved nearer in his earnestness, but spiritual approach is chiefly meant (Isa. 29: 13; Jer. 30: 21). This is the first prayer recorded in the Bible. Read Prov. 15: 3; Jas. 5: 16; Luke 11: 5-8; 18: 1-8. The righteous with the wicked—In the ordinary dispensations of Providence, and even in divine judgments, both suffer alike. But (1) there is often a share of the guilt to both; (2) what is punishment to one is fatherly discipline to the other; (3) God makes “all things work together for good to them that love him” (4) the apparent injustice here is fully compensated for hereafter; (5) as in this case the righteous do often escape the punishment meted out to the wicked. Compare the case of Korah (Num. 16: 22), of David (2 Sam. 24: 17), God never punishes one person for the sin of another (Ezek. 18: 4). The wicked are spared for the sake of the righteous (Matt. 13: 29; 5: 13; 24: 22). Note the following instances in which the presence of a good man was a source of blessing to others; ch. 19: 21; Acts 27: 24; 1 Kings 17: 15, 16. In this passage “righteous” has its ordinary meaning, upright and Godfearing. The New Testament sense of “accepted for Christ’s righteousness sake,” was unknown at this early stage in revelation. 24. Abraham had some idea of the moral condition of Sodom when he did not dare to begin higher than fifty. His intercession is not for Lot, but solely for the others who were not of the fifty. “His importunity was prompted by the love that springs from the consciousness that one’s own preservation and rescue are due to compassionate grace alone; love, too, which cannot conceive of the guilt of others as too great for salvation to be possible.” (Delitzsch). 25. God does not deal with both alike. Isa. 3: 10, 11; Job 8: 20; Ps. 58: 11; Ezek. 9: 4-6; Rev. 7: 3. 26. Compare Jer. 5: 1; Ezek. 22: 30; Matt. 24: 22; 2 Pet. 3: 9.

II. PERSISTENT PLEADING. 27. See the same self abasement in God’s presence, Job 42: 6; Isa. 6: 5. Dust and ashes—“Dust at first and ashes at last.” (Murphy). Burning the dead seems to have been practised in Abraham’s time. Compare similar de-