



No Laughing Matter

LESSON 8

Topic

Fear of God

Theme

God is to be feared because He is Who He says He is and He can do what He says He can do.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will identify which truths about God he needs to specifically apply to his life.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 10
- Marker
- Paper
- Tape

Scripture Focus

Genesis 18; 19

Summary

The Lord appeared to Abraham and announced that Sarah would give birth. He also shared with Abraham His intention to destroy Sodom. Abraham interceded for the righteous souls in Sodom, and the Lord dispatched two angels to warn Lot to get out of town and take his family with him. When judgment fell on Sodom, Lot's wife looked back at the city and became a pillar of salt. Later Lot's daughters conspired to become pregnant by their father.

Outline

I. God Visits Abraham (18)

- A. Abraham's hospitality (18:1–8)
- B. Sarah's doubt (18:9–15)
- C. The Lord's plan to judge (18:16–21)
- D. Abraham's intercession (18:22–33)

II. God Judges the Cities of the Plain (19)

- A. Sodom's wickedness (19:1–11)
- B. Lot's deliverance (19:12–29)
- C. Lot's daughters' shamelessness (19:30–38)

Memory Verse

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

GETTING STARTED

Living Fear Scale

Before class, make one sign for each of the following:

1. Extremely Fearful
2. Very Fearful
3. Somewhat Fearful
4. Not at All Fearful

Tape the signs in order on the floor of your classroom so the first sign is on one side of your classroom and the fourth sign is on the opposite side. Put the second and third signs between the first and the fourth to make a scale. Consider putting the signs along a wall if you don't have an open space on your floor.

Have the learners stand in the middle of your scale. Tell them what each sign says. Then read the following list of things that sometimes cause people to fear. Have the learners stand on the *scale* at the point that matches how fearful they would be when confronted with the items on your list. Point out any extremes they exhibit. If time allows, have the learner suggest a few more things that might make them afraid.

- Bees
- Sharks
- Dentists
- Heights
- Rollercoasters
- Taxicabs
- Escalators

Have the learners return to their seats.

ASK: Where might you stand on the scale if the Lord was the topic?

ASK: How is our fear of the Lord different from our fear of bees or rollercoasters? *Our fear of the Lord is based on respect and reverence rather than being scared and uncertain.*

Fear, or the lack of it, is apparent in the Bible accounts in this lesson. The passages will challenge us to fear God.

Fearful Visitors

ASK: Suppose a historical figure visited our classroom unannounced. Which historical figures do you think would cause you the greatest amount of fear? (Q1)

ASK: Why would you fear them? (Q2)

Visitors showed up unannounced in two different settings in our Bible passages for today. A lack of fear of God becomes apparent in both cases. The accounts will challenge us to consider our own fear of God.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

In Genesis 17 God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram and changed his name from *Abram (exalted father)* to *Abraham (father of a multitude)*. Circumcision would be the sign of the covenant. God changed Sarai's name to *Sarah (mother of nations)*. Sarah would be the mother of the Promised Seed and thus the mother of kings and nations. God did not bypass Ishmael either, for He made a great nation of Ishmael; but the Abrahamic Covenant was to be perpetuated through Isaac, not Ishmael. Thus Genesis 17 serves as an essential link to the rest of the history recorded in Genesis.

I. God Visits Abraham (18)

A. Abraham's hospitality (18:1–8)

After the Lord appeared to Abraham and reaffirmed His promise to give Canaan to his descendants, He appeared to him again, accompanied by two angels (18:1, 2). The visit was timely. Abraham was ninety-nine years old, but he still hadn't officially inherited any part of Canaan. A pilgrim and a stranger, he lived in a tent and looked for *a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Heb. 11:10).

Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent at noon, in the heat of the day, when three men approached. Looking up, Abraham saw them. Perhaps God's promise for a son was on his mind as he paused in the shade and rested. We do not know, but his hospitality seemed to be over the top. He ran to meet them, urged them not to pass by but to rest. He offered to get water to wash their feet, and he promised to *fetch a morsel of bread*. But the morsel turned out to be a feast of bread, butter, milk, and a calf tender and good (Gen. 18:4–7). It seems he believed the visit was providential, even if he did not know that one of the men was the Angel of the Lord.

ASK: How would you characterize Abraham's treatment of the travelers? (Q3)

ASK: Why would Abraham, God's specially chosen man, call himself a servant? What was he communicating about his attitude toward the visitors? (Q4) *He called himself a servant to show his submission to God. He communicated an attitude of humility and great reverence.*

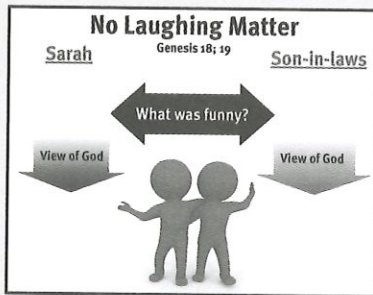
As the men ate, Abraham stood by them under a tree (18:8). He remained nearby to serve them well.

ASK: The Lord came to Abraham during the heat of the day. The Lord had dirty feet and was in need of food and rest. Why would the Lord appear to Abraham under such conditions? (Q5) *Perhaps He wanted to communicate to Abraham how important His journey was. No one would walk a great distance in the heat of the day unless the reason for his trip was of utmost importance.*

The strangers had not seen Sarah, so they asked where she was (18:9). Abraham could not have known that the Lord was about to make a significant promise that directly involved Sarah. And Sarah would not have known that one of the visitors was the Lord.

B. Sarah's doubt (18:9–15)

Abraham told the three visitors that Sarah was in the tent. She was probably in her private compartment behind the tent flap, but she was listening to the conversation. No doubt she wanted to know why Abraham was creating such a fuss over the visitors.



RESOURCE: Display resource 10. **READ:** Genesis 18:10–12. **ASK:** What did Sarah think was so funny? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q6) *That she would have a baby in her old age.*

ASK: What does Sarah's reaction tell us about her view of God? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q7) *She saw God as less than He said He was and as able to do less than He said He could.*

Given Sarah's age of ninety, it is easy to see why she was so cynical.

ASK: Imagine a ninety-year-old woman nine-months pregnant. What thoughts come to your mind? (Q8)

Impossible! thought Sarah at the notion she would yet have a child. So she laughed silently, *within herself*. But the Lord, Who hears even our silent thoughts, heard. He asked Abraham why Sarah laughed. He stated, *Is any thing too hard for the Lord?* (18:13, 14).

Sarah must have been shocked to learn that her silent laughter and unspoken thoughts were heard by one of the visitors, especially since the visitors had to ask Abraham where she was. Even though she did not know that the Lord Himself was present, she had to be conscious of the supernaturalness of the event. Who but God could have known her thoughts?

READ: Genesis 18:15. **ASK:** Why did Sarah deny that she laughed? (Q9) *She was afraid.*

Sarah's fear was not a reverential, respectful fear; it was a cowering fear. She lied about her laughter because she was ashamed of it and fearful of what retribution it might bring. She thought denying her laughter would make it go away. That was a foolish thought, especially since the Lord had just demonstrated that He could read her mind.

How easy we find it to be deceitful! How hard it is to admit our sins and faithlessness! Self-defense more often than not is our immediate reaction. We are afraid to be honest with ourselves and with others. Sinful fear, therefore, is something to be afraid of. It led Sarah to deceit. It caused King Saul to compromise God's command to slay the Amalekites and their cattle—he feared his own people (1 Sam. 15). And fear betrayed Peter into denying his Lord. But God *hath*

not given us the spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). The Holy Spirit will enable us to say frankly and openly, *Yes, I did sin.*

Perhaps Sarah was also hoping that denying her laughter would cause the Lord to drop the subject. We do that too. We sometimes deny our sin or cover it up hoping others or even God won't bring it up. But God didn't do that with Sarah. The Lord rebuked Sarah, *Nay; but thou didst laugh* (18:15). But He did not cast her aside. God's grace and mercy abounded to her, as it does to us. Fortunately God doesn't give up on His people! In due time, Sarah would learn to have a reverential fear of God.

C. The Lord's plan to judge (18:16–21)

The men rose up . . . and looked toward Sodom (18:16). Sodom's hour of reckoning had almost arrived. God had been patient long enough. His forbearance is cause for amazement. Unfortunately, we humans often presume on God's patience. So it was with the inhabitants of Sodom. Judgment was near, but in Sodom it was just another day. There was no suggestion of impending doom. God had used Abraham to deliver the people of Sodom from the kings of the east, and they had heard the testimonies of both Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen. 14). The Sodomites were without excuse!

ASK: What do we learn from God's clear witness to the leadership and inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah? (Q10) *The people of the cities had value. God is long-suffering toward sinners, but will not let sin go unpunished.*

The men turned to journey toward Sodom and Abraham went with them. The Lord revealed to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He gave two reasons for doing so: (1) Abraham's children would become a great nation, and other nations would be blessed because of him. They would need to know that the cities of the plain were not destroyed by an accident but by an act of divine judgment. (2) Abraham would command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord. They would do what is right and just so that the Lord would bring about for Abraham what He had promised him. The Lord instructed Abraham for the sake of the faithful remnant who would follow Abraham's instruction.

ASK: Why would it be beneficial for Israel to know that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah when they wouldn't even be in the land for hundreds of more years? (Q11) *So Israel would have an illustration of God's judgment in action; so that they would be deterred from committing similar sins against God.*

The testimony of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah remains today through the account in Scriptures.

ASK: How do people try to explain away God's judgment on the specific sins associated with Sodom and Gomorrah? (Q12) *Some explanations are that the judging God of the Old Testament is the loving God of the New Testament; God's judgment doesn't apply to today; God wants us to love people rather than judge them.*

God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because, as He explained, their cry

was great and their sin *very grievous* (18:20). In other words, He heard the strident cry of their iniquity calling for judgment. He told Abraham that He would go down and see the greatness of Sodom and Gomorrah's iniquity. The Lord knew it, of course, but He was informing Abraham that He would judge the cities according to full knowledge of their sins.

D. Abraham's intercession (18:22–33)

The Lord dispatched two angelic messengers to Sodom (18:22), but He remained with Abraham, who drew closer to the Lord to plead for Sodom. Although the city was too evil for Abraham to want to live in it, he was concerned about it. He was especially concerned for the righteous who might be destroyed with the wicked, even though the righteous should not have been there. Would the Lord not spare the city for fifty righteous people? he wondered. Abraham overrated Sodom.

Abraham knew that it was wicked, but he did not know that it was so wicked that not even fifty righteous people could be found in it. Abraham based his prayer on the holiness of God. It would not be righteous to destroy righteous people with wicked ones, would it? And surely the Judge of all the earth would do what was right (18:25).

Abraham soon discovered that not even ten righteous people lived in Sodom. He quit praying, because he was convinced that the cities of the plain were ready for judgment. The wicked cities were doomed.

II. God Judges the Cities of the Plain (19)

A. Sodom's wickedness (19:1–11)

In the meantime, Lot sat in the gate of Sodom (19:1). Since the city gate was the place judges sat to decide judicial matters, it seems that Lot was one of Sodom's chief magistrates. He had been accepted and exalted by the wicked Sodomites. It is no honor, however, to be honored by the wrong crowd. Those who witness to the truth and live godly lives will surely not be applauded and favored by the wicked. Darkness is incompatible with light, and the children of the night will inevitably cross swords with the sons of light.

As the two angels entered Sodom, Lot welcomed them. He urged them to lodge with him that night and to leave early the next morning. He knew the character of the men of Sodom; they were homosexuals who would violate the men if they could. Lot attempted to protect the two men, for he was genuinely concerned. And his concern was justified. Before Lot's guests could retire for the night, the men of Sodom, old and young, surrounded the house and demanded that Lot deliver the visitors to them so they could have sex with them (19:1–5).

Lot the compromiser tried to offer a compromise to the lustful crowd of degenerates who were pounding on his door. Would the men be satisfied with his two virgin daughters? They responded with anger and threats of violence.

ASK: What kind of a person does it take to offer his own daughters to a group of lustful, wicked men? (Q13) *One that does not fear God and that has a utilitarian outlook on life. Lot was always interested in what would benefit him and alleviate trouble.*

The Sodomites who had honored Lot turned on him and treated him with contempt. Lot discovered belatedly that one cannot condone sin and then condemn it. In jeopardy of his life, Lot was rescued by his heavenly guests, who blinded the Sodomites and thwarted them. The blindness was most likely confusion of their ability to recognize where they were and what was what. What they saw was not reality, so the Sodomites could not even find the door to Lot's house (19:6–11).

B. Lot's deliverance (19:12–29)

The angels asked Lot if he had any other relatives in the city. They urged him to take his family out of Sodom because they would destroy it. Although Lot warned his future sons-in-law, they laughed, thinking he was joking (19:12–14).

RESOURCE: Display resource 10. **READ:** Genesis 19:12–14. **ASK:** What did the sons-in-law think was so funny? (Reveal or record answers.) (Q14) *That God would destroy their city.*

ASK: What do the sons-in-law's reactions tell us about their beliefs concerning God? (Reveal or record answers.) (Q15) *They thought God was a joke. They had no fear or respect for Him because they didn't believe He was real.*

The word used for Sarah's laughter is the same word used for the sons-in-law's laughter. Both focused on the ridiculousness of the message.

The angels tried to hurry Lot, his wife, and their two daughters out of the city early in the morning. All of them were reluctant to leave; they felt secure in their house and in the city. Lingered, they hesitated until the angels took each of them by the hand and led them all out of the city. They were rescued, not because of Lot's goodness, but because of God's mercy (19:16).

READ: Genesis 19:16. **ASK:** How do you think Lot would have responded to the urging if he had had a healthy fear of God? (Q16) *He would have been the one urging his family to hurry. He would have been the one grabbing family members to get them out of town.*

One of the angels said in effect, *Escape! Don't look back! Don't stop in the plain; escape to the mountain, or you'll be destroyed!* (19:17).

Lot protested: *Oh, not so, my Lord. . . . I cannot escape to the mountain* (19:18, 19). Lot begged to have Zoar spared so he could have a place to live. He was worried that an evil would overtake him in the mountains. Apparently he didn't think the evil in Zoar was risky. God granted Lot's request so Lot could learn by experience that Zoar was no place for him (19:20–23).

After removing Lot from Sodom, God rained fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain (19:24, 25). Disobeying the angel's command and obviously still not fearing God, Lot's wife looked back to Sodom and became a pillar of salt. The memory of what happened to her stands as a warning to us: *Remember Lot's wife* (Luke 17:32).

C. Lot's daughters' shamelessness (19:30–38)

Lot did not live long in Zoar because he was afraid to live there. Perhaps the

The sons-in-law were probably espoused to be married to Lot's daughters. The language allows for such an interpretation. And that would explain why Lot's daughters were still virgins (19:8).



residents resented his connection to the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and threatened him. He fled to the mountains, where he lived in a cave with his two daughters (19:30).

Lot's daughters had lived in Sodom long enough to have no scruples about questions of morality. They did not hesitate to get their father drunk so they could try to become pregnant by him. They were more concerned about having children and preserving the family line than they were about the immorality of fornication and incest. Of course Lot was not blameless; he was guilty of being led into drunkenness two nights in succession (19:31–36).

The two sons born to Lot's daughters were Moab and Ben-Ammi (19:37, 38). They were the ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites, who caused the descendants of Abraham incalculable trouble and who frequently warred with Israel in later years. Eventually God judged both nations severely.

Lot made bad choices when he decided to choose the well-watered land for his herds and then pitched his tent toward Sodom. He had chosen to make himself wealthy at the expense of his own spiritual good. As a result, he lost everything except his life. Lot did not consider God in his progressively bad choices because he did fear God. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction* (Prov. 1:7). Lot was a foolish man.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Our Lives, Not Our Lips

What we believe about God is revealed by our lives, not our lips. Anyone can say they believe God is Who He says He is and does what He says He can do. But those who fear God will live what they say they believe about God.

ASK: What do you say you believe about God? (Q17)

Encourage your learners to review the truths about God they have learned about so far from Genesis. Challenge them to consider whether they are giving lip service to those truths or if those truths have affected their lives.

ASK: What does your life say you believe about God? (Q18)

Obviously this is a question that takes a lot of thought and prayerful consideration. The point is to get your learners thinking about their fear of God. Do they respect Him enough to live in light of Who He is?

Personal Application

When we learn truths about God, we need to consider those truths on a personal level. That is part of our fear of God. We take the knowledge about God and adjust our lives accordingly.

Have the learners name some of the truths they have learned about God and then give ways those truths should affect their lives. Have them consider which truths about God they need to specifically apply to their lives now. (Q19)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 8 or use the following: Fear God.

Encourage learners to memorize Proverbs 1:7. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

| Responding to God & His Plan | | 8. Fear God. |
|---|-----|--------------|
| 1. Understand and enjoy God's revelation of Himself through creation. | 9. | |
| 2. Recognize Christ as the only solution to sin. | 10. | |
| 3. Take sin seriously and share God's grace. | 11. | |
| 4. Submit to God's sovereign plan for your life. | 12. | |
| 5. Be faithful in response to God's faithfulness. | 13. | |
| 6. Focus your affections on God. | | |
| 7. Trust God for He knows all and can do all. | | |

Tests of Faith



Topic

Faith

Theme

The Lord tests and rewards our faith.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will accept tests of his faith and will endeavor to grow through them.

Materials

- Resources 1, 7, and 11
- Paper and pencils

Scripture Focus

Genesis 20–23

Summary

Isaac, the promised son, was born when Abraham and Sarah were very old. His birth brought them joy, but it also stirred up conflict between his parents and Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham expelled Hagar and Ishmael from his home. Later the Lord tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Eventually Sarah and Abraham died and were buried in the cave of Machpelah in the Promised Land.

Outline

I. Abraham's Faith Lapses (20)

II. God Rewards Abraham's Faith (21:1–7)

III. God Tests Abraham's Faith (21:8–23:20)

- A. The Ishmael test (21:8–21)
- B. The Isaac test (22:1–14)
- C. The land test (22:15–23:20)

Memory Verse

"Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).