# Reasoning with God in Prayer

### Genesis 18:17-33

*God* and His friend Abraham once had an interesting con­versation about two cities that would become notori­ous—Sodom and Gomorrah. In this conversation, Abraham did something audacious. He *reasoned* with his all-knowing God.

When we read about this conversa­tion in Genesis, it becomes apparent that Abraham did not reason with God on the basis of his own knowl­edge. He knew, in fact, very little about the cities or what was going on there. Instead, he reasoned on the basis of God's character—for Abraham *did* know some things about the Lord. Amazingly, God accepted and responded to this reasoning.

**1. Abraham saw that God valued him enough to reveal what was going to happen in advance.** Consider this amazing statement from Gen. 18:17: "Then the lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'" The Lord had received an "outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah." He could have gone ahead with His actions without a word to Abraham. He chose, however, to let Abraham in on the secret.

**2. Abraham knew that God had established an everlasting covenant between Himself and Abraham's descendants** (Genesis 17). God referred to it in Gen. 18:18-19: "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 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." Abraham's knowledge that God held him in high enough esteem to make him the father of nations gave him the confidence to reason with God.

**3. Abraham understood that God was slow to act in anger.** The Lord revealed this by telling Abraham, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, 1 will know" (vv. 20-21). God did not owe Sodom and Gomorrah a personal visit. He went to them in order to base His response on firsthand observation. Abraham saw that the Lord was a God of action, not reaction. It gave him the courage to reason with Him.

**4. Abraham knew that God is "Judge of all the earth"** (v. 25). Abraham started by asking God, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" He might have been thinking of his nephew, Lot, who lived in Sodom. Lot is described in 2 Pet. 2:7 as "a righteous man, who was dis­tressed by the filthy lives of lawless men." Abraham's assumption was that God would save an entire city if there were enough righteous people living in it. Would God save Sodom for 50 righteous people? 45? 40? 30 or 20? How about 10? Apparently, there were not even 10 righteous people to be found, for God destroyed Sodom. He did, however, save Lot and his family because "he remembered Abraham" (Gen. 19:29).

The heart of Abraham's reasoning with God was, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Abraham was sure that God, as Judge, would deliver a just verdict. Justice would not be served, however, if God treated the "the righteous and wicked alike" (v. 25).

Abraham grasped hold of one of the deeper truths of God's nature: that He judges with utter fairness (Is. 11:3-4) and great love (Lam. 3:22) when we throw ourselves on His mercy.

### The Canaanite Woman

This is what the Canaanite woman did with Jesus in Mt. 15:22. She had a desperate need: her daughter's well-being. What made her persevere in pleading for Jesus' mercy, however, was not the depth of her need, but her faith in who He was. She believed Him to be the Judge of all the earth, not just of the Jews.

Abraham and the Canaanite woman both had a very large view of God. Believing in His abundant qualities, they were able to plead their cases before Him. When we have this grand view of Him in our own lives—a view of the encompassing greatness of who God is as He reveals Himself in Scripture—it emboldens us to reason with Him on that basis in prayer.

Is there an element of God's nature that you wish to appeal to right now? Maybe it's to the God who always keeps His promises. Or to the God of all hope or the God of all comfort. Or perhaps to the Protector of widows or the God who provides for our needs or the Champion of the poor. I have often reasoned with God on the basis that He is the God who does not want any­one to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Whatever it might be, if it's a quality or characteris­tic that God possesses, it's a basis for reasoning with Him in prayer.