The Table [at Mamre] of Abraham: Loving the Stranger
Genesis 18:1–8

BIG IDEA: Because God loves the stranger, His people should demonstrate His character by welcoming, protecting, and caring for those He brings into their midst.

Hospitality does not replace proclamation of the good news; it creates a setting in which that proclamation can be heard, questioned, observed, and believed.

1. GOD LOVES THE STRANGER (Deuteronomy 10:17–19)

Israel's practice of hospitality was grounded in the character and actions of God. He "loves the stranger" and provides for him. Principle: **God loves the stranger → Israel knew what it was to be a stranger → Therefore, Israel must love the stranger.**

Leviticus 19:33–34 goes even further: Israel must treat the stranger residing among them **"as the native among you"** and **"love him as yourself."** Biblical hospitality is therefore more than social courtesy. It is an expression of God's own character.

Interestingly, the Greek word translated "hospitality" in the New Testament combines *philos* (love or affection) and *xenos* (stranger or foreigner) to form φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*, which literally means "love of strangers." We often think of hospitality as entertaining our friends and family. But **biblical hospitality** begins with a willingness to welcome those who are not already part of our familiar circle. And that is precisely what we see Abraham doing in Genesis 18.

2. ABRAHAM WELCOMES THE STRANGER (Genesis 18:1–8)

Abraham does not passively tolerate the arrival of strangers: **He sees → runs → invites → provides → serves.**

His hospitality is:
Willing — the visitors are not treated as interruptions
Generous — he gives considerably more than the minimum
Personal — Abraham himself participates in serving
Sacrificial — hospitality costs time, food, effort, and privacy

Cliff McManis describes Abraham's example as **"a model of godly hospitality for the ages."**
—*What the Bible Says About Hospitality*, 30

Abraham's open tent illustrates an important principle for our witness: **genuine welcome creates space for meaningful encounter.**

3. SODOM THREATENS THE STRANGER (Genesis 19:1–11)

The movement from Genesis 18 to Genesis 19 is striking. The same visitors who experienced Abraham's welcome now enter Sodom.

Abraham welcomes → Sodom threatens
Abraham serves → Sodom seeks to exploit
Abraham protects → Sodom endangers

Lot himself practices hospitality, but the city surrounding his home represents its horrifying opposite. The issue is certainly greater than mere failure to observe social conventions. Sodom's attempted sexual violence reveals profound moral corruption. Yet **the treatment of vulnerable strangers provides the narrative setting in which that corruption is exposed.**

4. GIBEAH BECOMES LIKE SODOM (Judges 19:10–30)

The Levite deliberately refuses to spend the night in Jebus because its inhabitants are foreigners. He expects something different among his fellow Israelites. Instead:

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- **No Benjaminite initially welcomes him.**
- An Ephraimite sojourner finally receives him.
- **The men of Gibeah reenact the wickedness of Sodom.**
- The tragedy is not simply that Gibeah fails to practice hospitality.
- **God's covenant people have begun behaving like Sodom.**

GENESIS 19 AND JUDGES 19
Hospitality, Hostility, and the Moral Condition of a Community

Genesis 19 — Sodom	Judges 19 — Gibeah
Two travelers arrive **in the evening** (19:1)	Travelers arrive **in the evening** (19:14)
Visitors are found near the **city gate**	Visitors settle in the **city square**
Lot is himself an **outsider/sojourner** in Sodom (cf. 19:9)	The old man is an **Ephraimite sojourning** in Gibeah (19:16)
Lot notices the strangers	The old man notices the strangers
Lot urges them **not to remain outside**	The old man warns, **"Do not spend the night in the square"**
Lot brings them **into his house** (19:3)	The old man brings them **into his house** (19:21)
A meal is prepared	Food and drink are shared
The men of the city **surround the house** (19:4)	The men of the city **surround the house** (19:22)
The mob demands the male visitors for sexual abuse	The mob demands the male visitor for sexual abuse
Lot calls their proposed action **wicked**	The host calls their proposed action an **outrage/disgraceful act**
The host shockingly offers women instead of his guests	The host shockingly offers women instead of his guest
The visitors are ultimately **rescued by divine intervention**	The concubine is **surrendered, abused, and dies**
Sodom, a notoriously wicked Gentile city, fails the stranger	**Gibeah, an Israelite city, has become like Sodom**

THE SHOCK OF THE COMPARISON: Judges intensifies the Genesis story in several ways.

The Levite expects Israel to be different.
He bypasses Jebus precisely because it is a city of foreigners: "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel" (Judges 19:12).

The stranger shows Israel how to welcome strangers. The only man who initially offers hospitality is himself an Ephraimite temporarily residing among the Benjamites (19:16).

A. Gibeah repeats Sodom's sin.
The verbal and narrative parallels invite the reader to recognize what Israel has become.

B. Gibeah is, in one respect, even more horrifying than Sodom.
In Genesis 19 the visitors are rescued. In Judges 19 the woman is actually surrendered to the mob and dies as a result of the night's abuse.

The two narratives present opposite ways of regarding the stranger.

Hospitality says:	**Hostility says:**
You are vulnerable; come inside.	*You are vulnerable; I can exploit you.*
You are a stranger; I will welcome you.	*You are a stranger; you do not belong.*
You are my guest; I will seek your good.	*Your presence gives me no obligation toward you.*

The contrast exposes a sobering biblical principle: **The way a community treats the stranger can reveal something about that community's relationship to God.**

5. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST BE PEOPLE OF WELCOME (Lev 19:33–34; Heb 13:1–2)

Biblical hospitality intentionally makes room for people outside our familiar circle. But hospitality is not itself the message of salvation. **A.** Welcome opens the door. **B.** Hospitality creates trust. **C.** Proclamation communicates truth. **D.** God brings people to faith.

For Jewish evangelism, hospitality must never become a technique for manipulating someone into hearing a presentation. We genuinely love our Jewish friends because God calls us to love them. Yet genuine love also refuses to hide the greatest truth we know: **Yeshua is Israel's promised Messiah.**

FOR REFLECTION: 1. When Jewish people enter our homes, congregations, and ministries, what does our treatment of them communicate about the God and Messiah we proclaim? **2.** Are we merely friendly to those already like us—or are we intentionally making room for the stranger? **3.** When God gives us that relational opportunity, are we willing not only to **show** His love but also to **speak** His truth?

Hospitality creates the setting; proclamation communicates the good news.