

6. Abraham and Sodom

Abraham's Growing Faith
Genesis 18-19

Warm-Up Question: Has there ever been a time in your life when you were rescued from danger? Briefly share your experience.

¹⁶When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹For 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" (Genesis 18:16-19).

The Character of Lot

Before we look at Abraham's intercession for Sodom, it would be helpful for us to consider his reasons for prayer. Abraham had come to the help of the king of Sodom in his battle with the four kings of the north. He had rescued Lot and all the plunder the northern kings had taken from Sodom and Gomorrah and returned them, not desiring any of the spoils of war (Genesis 14:21-24). When given a choice by Abram, Lot chose to graze his large flocks down in the Jordan Valley or the Salt Sea Plain (Genesis 13:11). Once he decided to make a move down to the Jordan Valley, we find that he settled his tents near the city of Sodom. The next reference finds Lot living in Sodom (14:12), but in chapter nineteen we see him sitting at the gate of Sodom (19:1). Sitting at the gate was significant because in ancient times the elders of the city, the government officials would meet and hold office at the gates of a town (Ruth 4:1). Lot was lured over time to the things that are attractive to our base human nature, commonly called the 'flesh' or 'sinful nature' in Scripture.

Unless we make better choices, we too can be enticed to live lives that feed the lower part of our nature. The more we choose to feed that part of us, the more the lusts of the flesh grow until we find, not only that we are living in a Sodom-like culture, we are making allowances for it. In Sodom, Lot turned his energies to the pursuit of wealth and social status instead of his walk with the Lord. He stayed in Sodom, even though wickedness was a hallmark of the region (Genesis 13:13), making his home there (Genesis 14:12). Did Lot know how bad things would get in Sodom? It is likely that his senses were slowly dulled. One compromise after another led him to a place where he lost his perspective. He became hardened to the culture around him. Even so, Abraham did not give up on his nephew and Lot was still counted as righteous, along with his wife and two daughters. Abraham did not hesitate to intercede for Lot and all those living in Sodom. He approached the Lord with humility asking for their safety. This intercession by Abraham shows us the kind of man he had become in his journey with the Lord.

The State of Sodom

When the two angels departed for Sodom, Abraham was left alone with the Lord a little way from Sarah and the tents. They have just had dinner together, and the LORD carried on a conversation with Abraham. God has given the land to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 15:18-21). For that cause, God began telling Abraham what He must do, and the reasons for His action. The thought uppermost in the Lord's heart was because of the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and their sin that had become so serious to God.

²⁰Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." ²²The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." ²⁹Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." ³⁰Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." ³²Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." ³³When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home (Genesis 18:16-33).

What do you think was causing the outcry and why do you think their sin was so grievous to the Lord?

⁴⁹"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

If this was the sin of Sodom in God's view, how similar is the state of the world today in your opinion? □

There were six things in Ezekiel's history lesson about the state of Sodom when it was destroyed:

1) The Arrogance of the People. What is it to be arrogant? Roget's College Thesaurus gives this definition of the word: to be haughty, self-important, prideful and insolent. It means to

portray the illusion of being better than someone else. We must be careful before God, whatever the country you live in, of saying such things as “we live in the best country in the world.”

2) They were Overfed. They had an abundance of everything they needed and had become overfed, and probably overweight. □

3) They were Unconcerned. Unconcerned about what, we may ask? This lack of concern for others is a state of mind. To be unconcerned is to think of the world as it related to them. There was no thought that maybe their riches were for more than themselves. Those who are rich in this world’s material goods have a responsibility toward others that do not have enough. This attitude of the heart is what led to the fourth sin of Sodom.

4) They Did Not Help the Poor and Needy. If they did look at the needs of those around them, they took no action. This indifference to the needs of others was the sin of the Rich Man in Luke 16 shown in his lack of care for Lazarus, the beggar at his gate. Those of Sodom and Gomorrah took no action to help and come alongside those who had little and were needy.

5) They had a Haughty Attitude Towards Others. There was a lack of true humility and grace in the people. They had contempt and scorn for others not like themselves.

6) They did Detestable Things Before God. Their immoral lifestyle was only one part of their detestable sin before God. The worst was that they corrupted others and sought to persuade them to take part in doing the same things they did. Scripture tells us that sex between two men is displeasing to the Lord (Leviticus 18:22). Our humanistic culture tells us it is wrong to find fault with other people’s lifestyle choices. However, this is not a personal interpretation or opinion; the Scripture states clearly how this was viewed by God in this passage: **“Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable (Leviticus 18:22).** The name Sodom provides the primary word (sodomy) for sins outside normal sexuality. But if we imagine the crimes of these cities only in sexual terms, we will miss the depth of their depravity. We see further on in Genesis 19:5 that the motives of all the men of the town were to rape the two angels who had lingered in the town square before Lot invited them into his home. Can you imagine a more detestable response to messengers who had been sent by God? Furthermore, the men of the town physically threatened Lot when he would not release the two men into their hands.

So what was the outcry that had reached the ears of the Lord to the point that His justice and compassion was aroused? I think it was the innocents that had also traveled through Sodom and Gomorrah. It was not just the one sin of sodomy; it was the many sins against the poor and needy of the area, and the fear by many mothers in the whole region that their children would be corrupted by the sins of Sodom. The sinfulness of the people spread like an epidemic to the point where it would have been fatal to let it continue. In God’s judgment, we also see His mercy. Commentator R. Kent Hughes says,

“The Hebrew word for "outcry" is used in Scripture to describe the cries of the oppressed and brutalized. It was used for the cry of the oppressed widow or orphan (Exodus 22:22, 23), the cry of the oppressed servant (Deuteronomy 24:15), and the cries of the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 2:23; 3:7, 9). Jeremiah used the phrase to refer to the scream of terror by an individual or city when attacked (Jeremiah 18:22; 20:16; 25:36). Such an outcry is the miserable wail of the oppressed and brutalized.”¹

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Genesis, Beginning and Blessing, Published by Crossway Books, Page 263.

No wonder the Lord said that the sin of Sodom is grievous.

The Culture of Sodom Affects Lot's Values

⁶Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. ⁸Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof” (Genesis 19:6-8).

What was Lot thinking? How can a father of two girls even think of doing such a thing! This kind of sin is a shocking example of how Lot was corrupted by the immoral lifestyle of the cities of the plain. Anyone with a sense of decency would not give up their daughters to a mob of lustful people outside the door, but that was what Lot was prepared to do to uphold the value of hospitality. He did not know the two men he gave hospitality to were angels; otherwise, he would have turned to them to do something. They had not yet told him of their mission to bring out the righteous ones before the Lord destroyed the city. Lot might have thought there was something different about the two men, but there was no indication these men looked like angels. They appeared to be everyday ordinary men. To the men of the city, they were merely "fresh meat." Lot acted in fear. He sought to protect the men but was willing to sacrifice his daughters to the mob outside his door.

More than three thousand years later, Peter, the apostle wrote about Lot. We don't know at what stage of Lot's life Peter refers to, but perhaps it was before the incident of the destruction of Sodom. Lot is remembered not for his weakness or failures, but as one whom God spared. Peter wrote about the Lord delivering the godly from trials and spoke about him in this passage:

⁶if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:6-9).

Peter twice called Lot a righteous man, and in another sentence also called him a righteous soul. How does a moral person get to the place where he was willing for his two daughters to be raped and put their lives in danger to uphold the law of hospitality?

Over time, the lifestyle of Sodom had seeped into his character and the character of his family. Even his daughters became betrothed to pagan Sodomites (19:14). When the angels told Lot to get his two sons-in-law that were due to be married to his daughters, the idea was so fantastic to the two men that they laughed it off as a joke (v. 14). Such is the deception and bondage of sin. The idea that God would bring judgment because of sin is fantastic to the deceived heart. People scoff at the thought that God will intervene in the affairs of men even today. The encouraging thing is that, despite Lot's weakness, God still counted him as righteous. The mercy of God

always included him. He was Abraham's family. Scripture tells us that Lot was distressed by the sin around him, even though he chose to make his home in Sodom. Lot was "playing with fire" by the choices he made, yet God answered Abraham's prayer and spared him. In the same way that Abraham's blessings extended to Lot and his family, we can be a blessing to those around us. Lot knew the ways of God and was blessed by being part of the family of Abraham. □

Later on in Genesis 19:16, Lot and his family had to be urged by the angels to leave their homes so that they may be saved. There is passion in the words of the angels as they urged Lot, saying,

¹⁵"Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." ¹⁶When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them (Genesis 19:15-16).

What was going on inside Lot's mind at that moment when the passage describes him as hesitating? (v. 16). What do you think was holding him back?

Satan is busy trying to get men and women to delay from departing from the things of this world. Delay is the strategy to ruin their souls. Procrastination puts many a person into hell. If God's salvation was put off today, what would make it a better day to receive Christ? We must implore people that there might not be another day. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). The hesitation by Lot and his family was met by the grasping of the hands by the angels. There is a sense of earnestness and persistence communicated by this action on the part of the angels. Often people don't see the real gravity of a situation until the one delivering the message expresses a sense of urgency. There is the story by C.H. Spurgeon:

"Brother," said a dying man, "why have you not been more pressing with me about my soul?" "Dear James," replied the brother, "I have spoken to you several times." "Yes," was the answer, "you are not to blame; but you were always so quiet over it; I wish you had gone on your knees to me or had taken me by the neck and shaken me, for I have been careless, and have nearly slept myself into hell."²

Our lost friends and relatives are asleep to the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes our earnestness is what is needed to wake them up to the need of their souls. Many will sleep themselves into hell if we don't shake them by earnest prayer and boldly reach out our hands in urgency for their soul.

Abraham's Intercession

Let's now turn to Abraham's boldness of prayer. When he walked with the Lord and the angels some distance in the general direction for the descent down to the Jordan Valley, the Lord began to share with Abraham what He was about to do. The One speaking with Abraham is YHWH, the Almighty God in human form. Many, including myself, believe it to be a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus before His birth by the Virgin Mary. Moses, the writer of the book of Genesis, three times calls this person by the divine title of YHWH (Genesis 18:1, 10, 13).

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *My Sermon Notes*, Published by Baker Book House, page 11.

Upon finding out about the outcry as to what was going on in the cities of the plain, Abraham began to intercede for the city starting at fifty people.

[Why does the Almighty YHVH share with Abraham what He is about to do?](#)

Did you know that Abraham was the only person in the Old Testament to dine with the Lord? He was also given the title “friend of God” (James 2:23). Servants may not know their master’s purpose, but friends do. So, as God’s friend and conduit of blessing to the whole world, it was essential that Abraham knew what was going down in respect to the neighboring cities where his nephew Lot dwelt. In addition to this, Abraham was also responsible for teaching righteousness and justice to his offspring. God desired that His covenant people be a people who were righteous and just to everyone regardless of who they were. This kind of care for others would become a significant purpose of the law—to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18, Galatians 5:14). It is here that Sodom and Gomorrah provide the starkest, darkest contrast because their lifestyle was the absolute opposite of righteousness and justice. When God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, their ruins would become a powerful teaching tool to Abraham and his descendants. God shared with Abraham as one would share with a friend.

[If Abraham hadn’t prayed for Sodom, do you think Sodom and Gomorrah would have been destroyed with Lot and his family still inside?](#)

Abraham became bolder and dropped ten upon his third request. He then stopped at the count of ten, perhaps thinking that there had to be at least ten righteous people in Sodom. God graciously received Abraham's prayer and sent the two angels to bring out those counted as righteous. Unfortunately, there were not ten found in right relationship to the Lord!

The Contrast of Two Legacies

We have seen both Abraham and Lot make grave mistakes in their life journeys. However, the big difference we see again and again is that Abraham trusted God. Abraham's descendants did form a nation, and he was rewarded in his old age with the heritage God promised him. But what happened to Lot? What legacy did he leave behind? To find out, we have to look at the end of the story, starting with Lot's hesitation to leave Sodom. The angels had to grasp the hands of Lot and his family and lead them out of the city. They were told not to look back at the city was being destroyed. □

“As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said ‘Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!’ But Lot said to them, ‘No, my lords, please! Your servant has found favor in your eyes and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains, this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it- it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.’” ²¹He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of” (Genesis 19:17-21).

The lure of Sodom was so strong that Lot's wife turned and looked back, in disobedience to the angel's command. She was turned into a pillar of salt and did not escape the judgment (v. 26). It is incredible that after Lot has experienced the mercy of God in being led out of the city by angels, he did not trust that God can protect him. Lot preferred his urban lifestyle to a reclusive lifestyle in the mountains, so he negotiated for an alternative escape, a little city nearby. The angel's reply (v. 21) indicates this city was included in the original judgment plan but would be spared for Lot's sake. Once again, God answered with mercy. Lot still had to leave that city, though, for he was forced to flee to the mountains from the small town of Zoar since he was afraid to dwell there (v. 30). It would have been better for him to have trusted God's original plan.

As for Lot's wife, we may feel the consequence of looking back was very great, but let's consider the reasons for her actions. First of all, this was not a momentary glance, because the destruction of the city did not begin until Lot was safely in Zoar. She may have longed for her possessions, her relationships, or perhaps she questioned whether the destruction would take place. Her doubt and disobedience turned her into a monument. The historian Josephus claimed to have seen the pillar in his day. How do you think this happened? It is possible that as she hesitated and looked back, she succumbed to the sulfurous gases. And then as her corpse lay exposed, it was encrusted in salt and debris so that she became a pillar of salt. Whatever the exact details, her example was meant to instruct us.

Lot's legacy was much different from Abraham's, and again his choices dictated the outcome. He ended up fleeing to the mountains where he lived with his two daughters. Verses 31 to 36 show us how the immoral philosophy of Sodom and Gomorrah had so corrupted the thinking of Lot's daughters that they plotted to be impregnated by their father. They were virgins (Genesis 19:8), the men they were betrothed to were dead (Genesis 19:14), and there were no men left for husbands (Genesis 19:25). For fear they would have no children, they concocted this gross plan. The two sons born of incest became the forefathers of Moab and Ammon, Israel's longstanding enemies (vv. 37-38).

We do not know how different the story would have been if Lot and his wife would have trusted God, but we can see how a series of decisions can affect the destiny of an entire nation. Abraham chose to believe God, not only in his actions but to trust the nature of God himself. Abraham had absolute confidence in the righteousness of God and said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" (v. 25).

Do you trust that God will do what is just in your life? How about when things happen that seem unfair or cause you to question His goodness? We all have doubts and struggles when we see suffering in this life. Like Abraham, we must make a choice to follow, even when the way ahead is not clear. In doing this, we choose safety for ourselves, and leave a legacy of faithfulness. □

He is the Rock, his work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Prayer: Father, thank you for your mercy and grace to those who have entered into covenant relationship to you, by the sacrifice in our place of your Son, the Lord Jesus. We are amazed as

we see again and again how you can deliver those who are in right relationship to you. For those who are hesitating today to leave sin, we pray that you would stress upon them the matter of time. Today is the day of salvation. May all who read these words reach out to you in repentance and trust. Amen!

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