

## 6. Abraham and Sodom

Old Testament Characters

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.

Alternate Question: Share your first experience of witnessing a fire.

<sup>16</sup>When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup>Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup>Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup>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.” <sup>20</sup>Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup>that 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.” <sup>22</sup>The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>What 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? <sup>25</sup>Far 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?” <sup>26</sup>The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” <sup>27</sup>Then 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, <sup>28</sup>what 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.” <sup>29</sup>Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.” <sup>30</sup>Then 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.” <sup>31</sup>Abraham 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.” <sup>32</sup>Then 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.” <sup>33</sup>When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home (Genesis 18:16-33).

### The State 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 that the

northern kings had taken from Sodom and Gomorrah and returned them, not desiring any of the plunder as spoils of war (Genesis 14:21-24). Lot, when given the choice by Abram, chose to graze his large flocks down in the Jordan Valley or the Salt Sea Plain (Genesis 13:11). Once he had made the decision to make the 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 that he is sitting at the gate of Sodom (19:1). This is significant because in ancient times the elders of the city, the government officials would meet and hold office at the gates of a city (Ruth 4:1). Lot had been lured over time to the things that are attractive to the base nature, commonly called the 'flesh' or 'sinful nature' in scripture. Unless we make better choices, choices that honor God and not pander to our flesh, we too, can be enticed to live lives that feed the lower part of our nature. The more that 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, but in our judgment 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. So 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, bit by bit, had led him to a place where he had lost his perspective. He had become hardened to the culture around him. Even so, Abraham has not given up on his nephew and Lot is still counted as righteous, along with his wife and two daughters. Abraham does not hesitate to intercede for Lot and all those who live in Sodom. He does not have a self-righteous attitude, but approaches the Lord with humility and asks for safety for their souls. This shows us the man that Abraham had become in his journey with the Lord.

### **The State of Sodom**

When the two angels depart for Sodom, Abraham is left alone with the Lord a little way from Sarah and the tents. They have just had dinner together and the LORD carries on a conversation with Abraham. God has given the land down in the valley where Lot has been given temporary residence in Sodom, to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 15:18-21). For that reason, God begins to tell Abraham what He must do, and the reasons for His action. The reason that is uppermost in the Lord's heart is because of the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and their sin that has become so serious to God.

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

<sup>49</sup>“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. <sup>50</sup>They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

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

I see 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, probably overweight. This also speaks of greed.

**3) They were Unconcerned.** Unconcerned about what, we may ask? This 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 was the sin of the Rich Man in Luke 16 that cared not for Lazarus that was 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 that were 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. We are told in scripture that sex between two men is displeasing to the Lord. This is a difficult topic for today, as the common opinion in our humanistic culture tells us that it is wrong to find fault with other'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 basic word (sodomy) for sins outside normal sexuality. But if we imagine the sins 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 was to rape the two angels who had lingered in the town square before Lot had 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 travelled 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 had 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 is 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 uses it to refer to the scream of terror by an individual or city when it is attacked (Jeremiah 18:22; 20:16; 25:36). Such an outcry is the miserable wail of the oppressed and brutalized.”<sup>1</sup>

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

### **The Culture of Sodom Affects Lot’s Values**

<sup>6</sup>Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him <sup>7</sup>and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. <sup>8</sup>Look, 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).

Lot! What were you thinking? How can a father of two girls even think of doing such a thing! This is a shocking example of how Lot had been 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 that are outside the door, but that is exactly what Lot was prepared to do to uphold the value of hospitality. He did not know that the two men he had given 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 that there was something different about the two men, but there is no indication of these men looking like angels with wings as some pictures portray angels. They appeared to be everyday normal men. To the men of the city they were simply “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 who God spared. Peter writes about the Lord delivering the godly from trials and speaks about him in this passage:

<sup>6</sup>if 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; <sup>7</sup>and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless <sup>8</sup>(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— <sup>9</sup>if 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 the apostle twice calls Lot a righteous man, and in another sentence also calls him a righteous soul. How does a righteous person get to the place where he is willing for his two daughters to be raped and put their lives in danger to uphold the law of hospitality?

We see here that over a period of time, the lifestyle of the city had seeped into his character and the character of his family. Even his daughters were betrothed to pagan Sodomites (19:14). When the angels told Lot to get his two sons-in-law that were betrothed to his daughters, the idea was so fantastic to the two men that they laughed it off as a joke (Verse 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, despite Lot's weakness, God still counts him as righteous. The mercy of God still included him. He is 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. In a very real way, 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 had been blessed by being part of the family of Abraham.

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

"Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." <sup>16</sup>When 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? (Verse 16). What do you think was holding him back?

Satan is busy trying to get men and women to delay departing from the things of this world. Delay is the strategy to ruin their souls. Procrastination puts many a person into hell. If salvation were 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 is met by the grasping of the hands by the angels. There is a sense of earnestness and persistence that is communicated by this action on the part of the angels. Often people don't see the true gravity of a situation until the one communicating 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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 reaching out our hands in urgency for their soul.

### **Abraham's Intercession**

Let's now turn to Abraham's boldness of prayer. When he walks with the Lord and the angels some distance in the general direction for the descent down to the Jordan Valley, the Lord begins to share with Abraham what He is about to do. The One that is speaking with Abraham we have already found out is YHVH, 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 YHVH (Genesis 18:1, 10, 13). Upon finding out about the outcry as to what is going on in the cities of the plain, Abraham begins 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 to teach 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 would become a major 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. We have already seen that Abraham was not perfect in his pursuit of God, but he chose to follow, talk with, and walk with the Lord.

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

Abraham becomes bolder and begins to go down by ten upon his third request. Abraham seems to stop at ten, perhaps thinking that there has to be at least ten righteous people in Sodom. God graciously receives Abraham's prayer and sends His two angels down to bring out those who are counted as righteous. There were not even ten to be found in right relationship to the Lord!

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, My Sermon Notes, Published by Baker Book House, page 11.

## The Contrast of Two Legacies

We have seen that both Abraham and Lot made 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 that God promised him. But what happened to Lot? What heritage did he leave behind? To find out, we have to look at the end of the story, starting with Lot's hesitation to leave. 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 as 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.’ ” (Genesis 19:17-20).

Lot was reluctant to trust God to lead him to safety. Again, he chose his own way, and his wife turns and looks back, in disobedience to the angel's command. Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt and does not escape judgment. It is incredible that after Lot has experienced the mercy of God in being led out of the city by angels, he does not trust that God can protect him. Lot preferred his urban lifestyle to a lonely lifestyle in the mountains, so he negotiates for an alternative escape, a little city nearby. The angel's reply (v.21) indicates that this city was included in the original judgment plan, but would be spared for Lot's sake. Once again, God answers with mercy. He paid a price however, as eventually he fled to the mountains from the small city of Zoar, since he was afraid to dwell there. It would have been better for him to trust God's original plan! As for Lot's wife, we may feel that 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 we are told that 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 tarried, 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 to Abraham's, and again his choices dictated the outcome. He did end 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 own father. They were virgins (Genesis 19:8), the men that they were betrothed to were dead (Genesis 19:14), and there were no men left for husbands (Genesis 19:25). In fearing 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 (Verses 37-38).

We do not know how different the story would be 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 trust God, not only in 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?" (Verse 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. As Abraham, we must make a choice to follow, even when the way ahead is not clear. In doing this, we will 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 are able to 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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