

# Abraham Intercedes, but Sodom is Destroyed

Genesis 18:16-19:38

## Focus Verse

“So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.” – Genesis 19:29

- Abraham’s Intercession for Sodom – Genesis 18:16-33
- God’s Judgment on Sodom – Genesis 19

## Engage

As humans, we struggle greatly to understand all that God’s absolute holiness means. This is certainly true when we consider the reality that our holy God actively judges sin and sinners. The reality of God’s judgment can lead us in several directions. On one hand, we can be a little smug and even glad that God rights wrongs and that sinners get what they deserve. On the other hand, the reality of destruction and death at the hands of God can make us shudder. How can God be both loving and Judge? **The judgment foretold and enacted in Genesis 18-19 brings challenging questions to the surface.**

The account of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah stand before us. The cities were certainly entrenched in wickedness. Lot’s choice to live there definitely impacted his story. But rather than just dismiss Lot and these cities as the deserving recipients of God’s justice, we do well to consider God’s message to us. There is “a lot of Lot” in all of us. We are also greatly impacted by a world totally out of step with God and His standards. How do you live to make an impact, yet not be swept into the current of this world’s ways? Apart from salvation in Jesus, we deserve God’s wrath, just like Sodom and Gomorrah. God’s justice may shake us, but His grace to sinners should move us more. **God’s just judgment of sin is certain, but all can seek His mercy in Christ.**

## Abraham’s Intercession for Sodom – Genesis 18:16-33

God knows everything. But not only does He comprehend every fact about everything and everyone, He balances what He knows with complete understanding, wisdom and discernment. God acts with absolute perfection because He perfectly understands the deeper realities we cannot grasp. God never gets it wrong. The truth that God shares truth and a relationship with people should amaze us. God revealed to Abraham and Sarah that they would soon have a son. But God also shared some troubling news with His friend Abraham.<sup>1</sup> As always, God’s personal interaction aimed at the development of Abraham’s faith.

### God Revealed His Plans to Abraham – 18:16-21

In Genesis 18:1-15, Abraham showed hospitality to three heavenly visitors who delivered a timely message regarding Isaac’s birth. As Abraham walked with his guests as they prepared to leave, they stopped

and looked down on the city of Sodom. Verse 17 offers a glimpse into God’s heart toward Abraham. **God did not want to hide His plans to destroy Sodom from Abraham, the man He had chosen for a great destiny.** This sobering situation offered Abraham an opportunity to grow in his knowledge of righteousness and in reverence for God. Each phrase in verses 18-19 explains God’s relationship with Abraham:

- **“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation”** – What started small with Abraham would expand to great influence through his descendants.
- **“All nations on earth will be blessed through him”** – Many Bibles footnote an alternate translation based on Genesis 48:20, “all nations on earth will use his name in blessings.” Abraham and his nation would bless the entire world.
- **“I have chosen him”** – God chose Abraham as His appointed servant leader.

- **“So that he will direct his children and his household after him”** – Abraham had significant influence. His relationship with God would set the course for generations to follow.
- **“To keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just”** – The Lord was teaching Abraham His definition of what is right and just and how to follow His way by faith. In his prayer for Sodom following this news, Abraham praised God as right and just. He trusted God to deal rightly with every person for the sake of His Name.
- **“So that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him”** – Notice that the Lord, not Abraham’s contribution, would bring about the promised destiny.

God affirmed His commitment to Abraham. Then He spoke of the outcry of grievous evil rising from Sodom and Gomorrah. “I will go down and see.” God did not need to go to Sodom to discover facts; He knows everything. Just as with the Tower of Babel, God “came down” to the place and people awaiting judgment. **God’s personal involvement in executing judgment helps us understand the gravity of sin.** In these verses, God revealed to Abraham three key principles of His justice.

- **God does not tolerate sin.** Adam and Eve’s sin shattered God’s creation, bringing pervasive damage and death.<sup>2</sup> The escalating evil in Sodom did not escape God’s attention, “The outcry ... is so great.” God hears both the boasts of evildoers and the cries of victims. He cannot ignore that His creation is held captive by sin’s degradation. God hears the pain caused by evil and judges with perfect wisdom and justice. Even when His judgment is delayed, it remains certain.
- **God tests faith and unbelief.** He tested Abraham by sharing His plan. Abraham responded with reverence and intercession, ultimately trusting the greater knowledge of God. He also gave the people of Sodom an opportunity to repent when the angels visited their city. However, they were so spiritually blind that not even physical blindness convinced them to repent (19:11). Final judgment became inevitable.
- **God’s mercy and patience are great.** He created, loves and longs to redeem humanity. He judges with perfect knowledge, declaring, “If not, I will know” (18:21). When the angels turned toward Sodom, the Lord remained with Abraham. God’s compassion for people and desire that people repent remain clear. He promised Abraham that for the sake of 50 or even as few as 10 righteous people, He would spare Sodom.

## Abraham Intercedes for the Sake of Sodom – 18:22-33

The two angels walked toward Sodom while Abraham remained in the Lord’s presence. Abraham’s open and honest dialogue with God reveals the nature of their relationship. God did not rebuke Abraham for asking questions. Sometimes people question God with no desire to surrender to Him. **But often, like Abraham, believers bring honest questions to God and ask Him for the wisdom and faith they lack.** Some questions will not have solid answers on this side of eternity. There are times we voice our questions and must trust God with what He understands that we do not. God is strong enough for your questions. Seek to know God’s heart and trust His ways.

Abraham asked the Lord if He would really sweep away the righteous with the wicked. **Though Abraham certainly felt concern for his nephew Lot, he expressed compassion for the entire city.** He could not imagine sin so great, so ripe for judgment that no one else in Sodom would seek God and be saved.

Abraham’s bold prayer rose from God’s revealed character and will – he knew God would not treat the wicked and righteous alike. Abraham asked God to spare the city if 50 people were found righteous. His question in verse 25 clearly states his trust in the righteous, holy and compassionate character of God: **“Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”** Abraham’s question reveals he knew God could be trusted. This very question helps us when life brings hard questions we cannot answer and things we cannot explain. We often cry out and ask God “why?”. When life’s questions exhaust your comfortable answers, this very question offers the most comforting place possible to land. God can be trusted with what you cannot understand. The Judge of all the earth always does what is right.

God agreed to spare Sodom for the sake of 50 righteous people. In humility, Abraham pressed on in heartfelt intercession before God. Would God spare Sodom for the sake of 45 righteous – just five less? As God responds to Abraham’s heart and prayers, his boldness increases. **He continues to pray until God agrees to spare Sodom for the sake of just 10 righteous people.** At this point, the Lord left, and Abraham returned home.

**Abraham knew, loved and trusted God.** He was humble enough to admit his limited knowledge of Sodom’s wickedness and submitted to God’s greater wisdom. He showed compassion for the people of Sodom. Abraham did not delight in God’s judgment but trusted His righteousness. He knew God would listen patiently and respond rightly to his prayers in His perfect way and timing. What a comfort this was to Abraham the next day, when he saw smoke rise from the cities of the plain. He knew God “does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked.”<sup>3</sup> He knew God had judged rightly.

## The Doctrine of the Wrath of God

**God's wrath is His righteous response to the wickedness of sin and all who defy Him.** His wrath is not an emotional response like human anger. God does not seek “payback” or “to get even.” Instead, God's wrath is His settled, holy and measured reaction to the evil that destroys the beauty and wholeness He created. Because God is holy, He cannot compromise with sin and look the other way. God's overwhelming passion for purity and all that is just and good moves Him to action. God exercises His wrath as a judicial act against rebellion and those who sin against Him (Exodus 15:7; Luke 21:22-24; Romans 1:18-20; 2:5-6; Revelation 6:16).

All people are born with a sin nature, and God's wrath “rests” on every person from birth. Because of our sin nature, God's wrath is the biggest problem people face, though most do not realize this. **Only those who believe in Jesus Christ escape God's wrath** (John 3:36; Romans 5:9; 8:1; Ephesians 2:3-5). Believers deserve God's wrath just like unbelievers but are rescued from wrath only because Jesus took the wrath that believers deserve.

Some dismiss God's wrath as a “hellfire and brimstone” message intended to scare people into loving God. **Most people reject or ignore the reality of God's wrath and judgment.** The thought that God would stand against people He created offends many. When Abraham heard of the grievous evil in Sodom, he struggled with God's plan to destroy the city. When we fail to believe in God's wrath, this wrong thinking leads to a casual approach to God and sin. In our culture today, many people will not call anything wrong, much less sinful. Public opinion scoffs at the idea that God even cares about what people do. People reject the gospel because they fail to believe that personal sinfulness deserves God's holy judgment. This is a serious, fatal and eternal error.

**The reality of God's wrath may not be pleasant, but awakens us to the seriousness of rejecting God's offer of grace and rescue through Jesus Christ.** Discomfort with this truth does not make it less true. Does the reality of God's wrath motivate you to pray for unbelievers and to share the gospel? Understanding God's wrath helps you recognize the seriousness of sin and its offense to Holy God. Believing we deserve God's wrath elevates the wonder of salvation in Christ. The depth of this truth should be intensely personal. How incredible that God would love, seek and save ME, a rebel! Habakkuk prayed, “LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath, remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:1-2). If I am in Christ, though I deserve wrath, I receive mercy. What a wonderful, merciful Savior!

## God's Judgment on Sodom – Genesis 19

### Lot's Hospitality and Sodom's Hostility – 19:1-11

The angels approached Sodom and found Lot seated at the city gate, indicating he held a position of leadership within the city (19:1). Genesis 13:13 first records the historic wickedness of Sodom: “Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.” Lot settled in Sodom when he separated from Abraham. Abraham had rescued Lot and the people and wealth of Sodom from capture by invading kings. Even this rescue did not seem to bring any reformation or worship of God to Sodom. **Lot had clearly integrated into city life and been elevated to a noteworthy position in their social structure.** The angels who came in holy judgment met Lot as they arrived at Sodom.

Lot greeted the two angels with humility, bowing before them. He invited them into his home to “spend

the night and then go on your way early in the morning.” The angels wanted to spend the night in the city square, but Lot prevailed, insisting they come to his home. **Lot's urgency seems to be an attempt to protect his guests from the evil environment of the city.**

**Lot's wariness of evil and sense of righteousness indicated his internal struggle living in wicked Sodom.** Only God accurately reads people's hearts. Judging Lot's heart condition based solely on his actions could leave us wondering about him. 2 Peter 2 tells us that the outright wickedness of Sodom warred against Lot's sense of right and wrong. Three times in the space of two verses God inspired Peter to confirm Lot's righteousness. As Peter explains,

*“If [God] 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; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man,*



*who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) – 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.”<sup>4</sup>*

**Lot struggled inwardly but also outwardly, as the evil in the city greatly jeopardized his own family.** A lifestyle of sensuality and sexual immorality filled the culture of Sodom.<sup>5</sup> The pervasive homosexuality within Sodom gives evidence of the moral degradation of the society.

The men of the city, young and old, surrounded Lot’s house, demanding his two visitors come out to have sex with them. Lot’s attempts to protect his visitors led him to a terrible offer of his virgin daughters to these sinful men. We read this account and shudder at the harm this offer could have inflicted. Yet what many deem as acceptable today continues to destroy lives. God deems such behavior as sinful and worthy of judgment. Lot received mercy and was counted righteous by God’s grace alone, despite his reckless and sinful offer of his daughters to spare the angels.

No wonder Lot was powerless to influence or deter the crowd. The men of Sodom scoffed at Lot, calling him a foreigner who had no right to judge them. Their demands grew violent as they moved to break down Lot’s door. **The angels saved Lot, striking these violent men with blindness.**

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### **The Angels’ Announcement and Warning – 19:12-14**

The angels warned Lot to get his family out of Sodom, as the city would soon be destroyed due to the outcry of its wickedness. Lot believed the warning and sought to get his family to safety. Lot’s sons-in-law, the men pledged to marry his daughters, thought he was joking. **Lot lost spiritual influence even within his own family.** The passage does not tell us that Lot or the people knew the two visitors were angels. But the next verses in 2 Peter 2 describe the foolish boldness of people who rebel against God:

*“This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord.”<sup>6</sup>*

Lot chose to live in a very wicked city. Even though his spirit struggled against the outright evil in Sodom, he stayed. The corruption of the city compromised Lot and harmed his family. While it is easy to criticize Lot for his folly, all believers face the same challenges. Like Lot, widespread cultural acceptance of sin grieves anyone who loves the Lord. We live in a world that celebrates sin and personal “freedoms.” In our culture today, God’s standards are constantly portrayed as

old-fashioned and restrictive. How do you live a godly life and stay close enough to secular culture and its people to bring godly influence? How do you recognize when the world’s influence jeopardizes your spiritual vitality? Sometimes God calls believers to intentionally live in a hostile environment for the sake of the gospel. But more often, we live with one foot in the world and allow the world to steal God’s best from us. We are not to love and share the practices of the world, but we must love and share God’s heart for the people of the world, even our enemies.<sup>7</sup> Where are you compromising in ways big and small? **The battle to be “in the world” but not “of the world” is real but believers have the victory through the power of the Holy Spirit because of Jesus Christ!**<sup>8</sup>

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### **Lot’s Way of Escape – 19:15-23**

At dawn, the angels moved Lot’s reluctant family to action – “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back ... don’t stop anywhere ... flee to the mountains” (19:17). Lot fearfully pled to stay in one of the small towns of the plain (afterward known as Zoar, which means “a little one”). So great is the Lord’s mercy that He permitted Lot to choose his destination. **The Lord held back the destruction until Lot safely entered Zoar.**

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### **Sodom’s Fall – 19:24-29**

**God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, raining burning sulfur from the heavens.** Lot’s wife looked back at Sodom and became a pillar of salt. The ancient classics from many cultures, such as the histories of Tacitus (Roman), Sanchuniathon (Phoenician) and Josephus (Jewish), speak of this disaster. The Lord Jesus used Sodom’s sudden, violent end to warn of the suddenness of judgment at His Second Coming. People will live life as usual, unaware that God’s judgment draws near.<sup>9</sup>

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### **Lot’s Family’s Sins – 19:30-38**

Lot’s story ends with tragic consequences. “God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”<sup>10</sup> Lot separated from Abraham, not just geographically but also in terms of his life pursuits. Lot tolerated sin and reaped sin’s consequences in his last days – fear, shame, insecurity and misery. The depraved standards of Sodom corrupted the choices of Lot’s daughters. Justified by their desire to bear children, they got Lot drunk and committed intentional incest with their father. They immortalized their sin in the names they gave their sons. Moab means “from father” and Ammon means “son of my people.” Lot’s descendants numbered among Israel’s enemies for their unbrotherly conduct.<sup>11</sup> Yet God’s great grace triumphed even over this sin. Ruth, a Moabite, became one of God’s own people by faith. The Lord Jesus Christ is her descendant!<sup>12</sup> **God’s just judgment of sin is certain, but all can seek His mercy in Christ.**

## Hold Fast

God called Abraham to personal faith and to a very important role in His plan to redeem His people. But to God, Abraham represents more than a chapter in His story. He was a friend of God. God personally walked and talked with Abraham, addressing his doubts and building his faith. When Sodom's sin reached its peak, God did not hide the distressing truth from Abraham. Abraham humbly and compassionately pled with God to save the righteous in Sodom. In the same way, Jesus Christ says to His disciples, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends ..." <sup>13</sup> The fact that God makes a way for sinful people to relate to Him only magnifies His grace. **God shares His secrets with His people, calling them to personal faith and important roles in His Kingdom.** <sup>14</sup>

In mercy, God delivered Lot, but not without the sad consequences of a wasted life and the moral degeneration of his descendants. God counted Lot as righteous, one of His people, by His grace alone. Lot

did not earn his righteous standing before God by his own behavior. God declared him righteous because He knows His own and keeps them eternally safe by His power. **Lot represents believers who experience the eternal loss of a wasted life, though they are saved.** <sup>15</sup>

In the Bible, the "world" often refers to the present system of society that lives without acknowledging or surrendering to God. <sup>16</sup> Lot lived so entrenched in the world that he offered no redeeming influence on those around him. But this world offers what it cannot deliver. Lot suffered loss of his livelihood, home, possessions, wife and his dignity. Life in Sodom tormented him and robbed him of the peace God intended. As a believer in Christ, when do you feel both pulled toward and troubled by the world? 1 Peter 2:11 urges believers, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul." **The world wars against our souls, but God fights for us.** <sup>17</sup>

## Apply It

**The atoning work of Jesus Christ allows God's enemies to become His friends.** Former rebels, who deserve only judgment, can enjoy deep, daily fellowship with God. The depth and intimacy of the personal relationship we can have with our Creator should continue to amaze us. Abraham approached God with appropriate reverence. He honestly and openly poured out his concerns to Him, without fear of rebuke or rejection. Do you cry out to God, utterly confident that He hears and accepts you? How have you experienced the steadfast commitment God has made to you – a friend who will never leave you or forsake you? Do you recognize that God has opened your heart and ears to understand and value what the world cannot understand?

Every day we wake up surrounded by things we can

touch, taste, smell and experience. **So many times, worldly pleasures seem more real than the eternal treasures we cannot see or touch.** The normal duties and cares of life and family take time and focus. Necessary work, such as paying bills, preparing food and pulling weeds, can block our view of what God is doing. Lot was distracted by the glitter of Sodom and lost sight of the gold of eternity. How will you maintain your eternal equilibrium in a world that intentionally throws you off balance? What is causing you to be distracted from the glory of eternity? How can you love the people in the world without loving the practices of the world? Ask God to show you what you value most. This life is short and eternity is forever. Are you living your life with eternity in view?

God rained judgment on Sodom. The Bible teaches that

in a coming day, the Judge of all the earth will rightly bring just consequences on all who reject Him. God's righteous judgment of sin, in His appointed time and way, gives Him glory. **The shocking truth is not that God judges sin, but that He provides a way of escape from the wrath we deserve.** His perfect Son Jesus bore our wrath so we could experience the fellowship with God that we have not earned. Are you confident that in Jesus you are no longer an enemy of God but His friend? BSF provides a helpful tool, *Am I Sure?*, to study what Scripture says about finding confidence in salvation. Abraham's question in Genesis 18:25 offers a resting place for the hard questions you may have about the ways of God: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Yes, He will!

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

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| <b>1: God's friend Abraham:</b> 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23  | <b>10: Mocking God:</b> Galatians 6:7   |
| <b>2: Sin kills:</b> Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:22                           | <b>11: Lot's descendants:</b> Deuteronomy 23:3-5; Numbers 25:1; Zephaniah 2:9       |
| <b>3: Death of the wicked:</b> Ezekiel 18:23                                | <b>12: Ruth the Moabitess:</b> Ruth 1:4; 4:13, 17; Matthew 1:5-6                    |
| <b>4: Day of judgment:</b> 2 Peter 2:6-9                                    | <b>13: Friends:</b> John 15:15  |
| <b>5: Sexual sin in Sodom:</b> Jude 1:7                                     | <b>14: God's secrets revealed:</b> Deuteronomy 29:29                                |
| <b>6: Fate of the arrogant:</b> 2 Peter 2:10-11                             | <b>15: Wasted life:</b> 1 Corinthians 3:15  |
| <b>7: God's heart:</b> Luke 6:27; John 3:16                                 | <b>16: The world:</b> Colossians 2:8; James 4:4                                     |
| <b>8: Not of the world:</b> Matthew 5:14-16; John 12:25; 15:19; 1 John 2:15 | <b>17: God fights for His people:</b> Exodus 14:14; 2 Chronicles 20:17; Psalm 60:12 |
| <b>9: Second Coming and judgment:</b> Luke 17:28-35                         |   |