

Genesis – Lesson 16

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Read Genesis 18:1-15.

1. (a) Compare 18:33 to 19:1. What do you discover *about* the men of 18:2? Who *were* they?

Three angels in the form of human beings came to Abraham at the beginning of chapter 18, and Abraham welcomes them into his tent (see 1b below). However, according to 18:1 (and a comparison of 18:33 to 19:1), it would appear that one of the men (i.e. angels) was actually *God*, who had come down to speak to Abraham about Sarah's impending pregnancy and the situation in Sodom. The other two angels (i.e. men) were probably just angelic beings in human form who had traveled with God to see Abraham, and then were sent by God on to Sodom to announce his judgment upon that city.

- (b) Why did Abraham *respond* to these men as he did when they first arrived?

Such a response of *hospitality* would have been completely normal in that culture: to serve traveling guests and give them a place to rest is endemic to the Semitic peoples. This explains Lot's response to the angels in 19:2, and also his response to the people of Sodom in 19:6ff.

- (c) In 18:12, why did Sarah "*laugh*" about the prediction that she would have a child?

Sarah laughed for the same reason that Abraham laughed in 17:17: she simply could not believe, in a humanly *rational* way, that what God had said would happen or *could happen*. After all, she was barren and well past child-bearing years; such a statement (by anyone, even God) would provoke such a response in those who are not yet fully convinced that God is able to do *anything*.

- (d) What are some ways that we "laugh" at the promises of God today?

To laugh at God's promises is to *question* the veracity of what God says will happen. In our *minds*, we might believe that anything is possible with God. But, in our *actions* or *beliefs*, we often (either) take for granted what God has promised, or we shrug off the promises of God as something for others or for later. For example, how many Christians actually believe that the Spirit of God has been sent to remind them of *everything* that Jesus said? How many Christians believe that that the *truly* abundant life is a life of *self-sacrifice* and humility, and that in humility (and weakness) God *promises* to work out his strength? How many Christians believe that the work of satisfying the demands of God upon them has been *completely* accomplished by Christ? Or, how many Christians claim the promise of Romans 8:28 in that God works *all things* together for the good of those who he has called to himself, both *good and bad*?

2. What was *required* from Sarah for this great promise to unfold in her life? What does this say to *us*?

Nothing more than the *normal* intimate relationship that she already had with Abraham! God was going to work through the *normal* course of human interaction to bring about a child. Her womb would be opened and she would become pregnant just as women have been throughout the entire course of human history (with one exception!). God would work *sovereignly* through the normal course of events in her life, *just as he does in ours*. When we speak of God's sovereignty, we are *not* saying that God does *exceptional things* in the world in order for his plans to come about (although he *sometimes* does). No, God orders the *normal* course of events for his purposes, using *everything* in history to accomplish his purposes. Therefore, *nothing* is too hard for God because he is determining the beginning from the end in everything under his sovereign purposes.

Read Genesis 18:16-33.

3. (a) List several reasons *why* God decided to share His plans regarding Sodom with Abraham.

First, Abraham was God's *friend*, and God shared his plans with him because he had a close relationship to Abraham. Second, Abraham was the instrument through which God's promises of a chosen people would come; God shared his plans so that Abraham would know that the judgment about to come would *not* destroy those plans. Third, God desired for the children of Abraham to walk in righteousness before God, so he shared his plans to demonstrate before Abraham what would be required of those people; the judgment that would fall upon Sodom would be a good *object lesson* for Abraham. Fourth, God shared his plans with Abraham to allow Abraham an opportunity to *plead* on behalf of the people; Abraham's *character* would show as he interceded for the people in that city in the same way that he had interceded for Lot in chapter 14. God's choice of Abraham as the instrument of his promises would be vindicated in all of these reasons (see 3b below).

(b) What *attitude(s)* did Abraham bring before God in asking Him to spare Sodom? What do you learn about *prayer* from this discussion?

In verse 25, Abraham's attitude shines forth: he recognizes the *holy* nature of God alongside the *merciful* nature of God, and he *intercedes* for the people. Abraham had an attitude of *reverence* for God, along with an attitude of *hope* for the people of Sodom. These two attitudes stand at the *core* of intercessory prayer: when we come to God in prayer, we must *always* remember that God is holy and just, and that he is right to judge the wicked (i.e. all of us). We must stand in *perfect awe* of who God is, and never *presume* upon God for anything. Yet, we must also come before God *in hope*, that God is not only just, but merciful, and that we can intercede for ourselves and others before him. To pray for others before a holy God is to *know* that he is a God of mercy, for we have been the *recipients* of that mercy ourselves, and it is to seek his face for mercy *in the hope* that he will do for others what he has done for us. Such a balance is what Abraham exhibited, and it flowed from the relationship of *mercy* that God had had for him.

(c) How *many* righteous people were in Sodom (compare 18:32 to 19:13)? What does this *tell* you?

Given that God promised Abraham that he would *not* destroy the city if 10 righteous people could be found there, and yet the judgment of Sodom fell anyway, it seems obvious that less than 10 righteous people were living in Sodom. Other than Lot, no one else seems to have found the favor of God, and so God rescued Lot from the city and destroyed it. This tells us that *judgment upon the wicked is inevitable*, regardless of the number of righteous people that are living among them. Certainly God does not desire to destroy the righteous, but in his sovereign purposes, *evil cannot be overlooked*. Thus, although God will sometimes rescue those who are his own, this does *not imply* that when judgment comes, the righteous will *always* be rescued. We live in a day of wickedness, and the judgment of God is *already upon us*. Though there are many who call upon the name of the Lord, the evil of our day cannot be overlooked. In any case, we who know the Lord must simply trust him to do what is right and holy, even if that means that we are swept up in that judgment.

Read Genesis 19:1-38.

4. (a) What *position* did Lot hold in Sodom (see 19:1)? Did this position have any *influence* there?

Like Abraham in 18:1ff, Lot is sitting at the "door" and welcomes these guests to his domicile. It seems likely that Lot held the position of a *guard* or *greeter*, stationed at the gate to either assess or welcome guests. However, it is also *possible* that Lot held the position of a local *judge* (or elder), who sat in the gate and handled disputes (see Deuteronomy 25:7 and Joshua 20:4). In either case, it seems *unlikely* that Lot held any *real* influence, given the way the city reacted to the men who came to his house; his position had no *real* effect on their thinking (see also 4b below).

(b) What do you learn *about* Lot from 19:6-8? From 19:13-14? From 19:15-16? From 19:18-20?

These passages seem to indicate that Lot was a man with *very few moral convictions*. In vv. 6-8, he is more concerned about the visitors that are in his house than he is for his own daughters. In vv. 13-14, his sons-in-law think he is jesting about the judgment of God he is warning them about. In vv. 15-16, he lingers after the angels pronounce their judgment, and has to be dragged out of the city. And in vv. 18-20, he does not seem to have the fortitude to flee to the hills, and wants to remain in a city close by. Even when the judgment is about to fall, he shows *no backbone* in standing up to the evil of his city or in taking his family and fleeing to where they can all be safe (i.e. back to Abraham). His convictions are weak, and it costs himself and his family dearly.

5. (a) From 19:14, 26, and 30-38, list all the *family members* of Lot and the effects of God's judgment on each of them. What does this tell you about the *influence* of Sodom on his family?

Lot has a wife, two daughters, and two potential sons-in-law (who were about to marry his daughters). His wife failed to follow Lot all the way to Zoar; she turned back and was overcome by the destruction. His sons-in-law apparently perished in Sodom, for they think that Lot is jesting with them, and they are not a part of the shameful act of Lot's daughters in vv. 30ff, who decide to sleep with their drunken father in order to have children after they have fled from Sodom. All of this seems to indicate that the evil of Sodom had *severely damaged them morally*; they had become a *part* of the evil of that city.

(b) Why does Moses include the *genealogical* information of 19:36-38 in this story?

Because the Israelites would encounter both the Moabites and the Ammonites as their enemies, Moses accounts for where they came from. Their heritage as the incestuous children of Lot also accounts for their distance from God and their general wickedness. Thus, when the judgment of God would fall upon them, it would be *deserved*, and the Israelites would see in them a *warning* to remain faithful to their holy God.