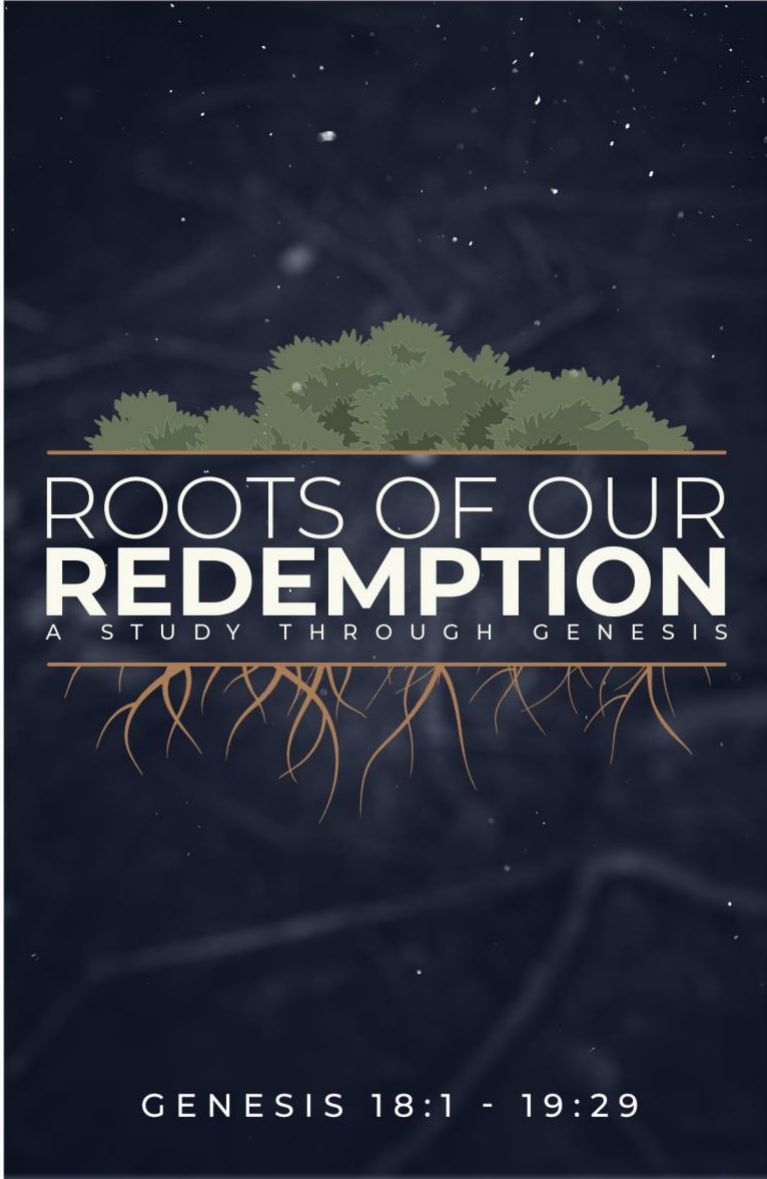




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 10 - 13

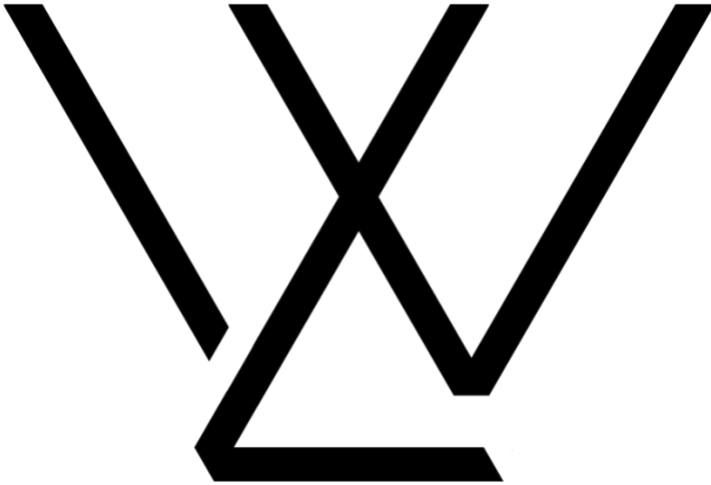


ROOTS OF OUR  
**REDEMPTION**

A STUDY THROUGH GENESIS

GENESIS 18:1 - 19:29





**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

### **Contributors**

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- **Question:** What do you notice about what Abram did for the men and how he went about doing it?
  
- **Question:** Focus on vv. 9-15. What do you notice about the interactions in these verses?
  
- **Question:** Sarah had a hard time trusting in the promised offspring that was going to be given. What do you think are some common factors in your life that have resulted in you distrusting the Lord also?



## **Week 10: Genesis 18:1-15**

### **Day 2: Quickly Responding to a Message from God**

**READ: Genesis 18:1-15**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In the text of Genesis 18, the Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. Abraham provided a good example we can follow when we encounter God's call in our lives. We are told that Abraham encountered the Lord in the heat of the day, but when he saw the three men he immediately ran before them and bowed. Let me (John Stone) ask you a few questions that come from this passage?

When God appears in our lives are we quick to recognize his actions in our lives? Are we quick to offer our humble assistance and show honor to God?

Abraham clearly did. He ran out in the heat of the day, bowed, and asked his Lord to please not pass him by. Is that the same way we treat our relationship with the Lord? Eager to be called upon to lend our talents, and running at every opportunity? Abraham provides a powerful example of heeding the call of God, but also of recognizing the Lord's presence in his life and rushing to lend his humble service.

I think that sometimes it is easy to miss God's call in our lives or to rely on others that we view as more spiritually gifted to answer the call. When we do this, we ignore Abraham's example of the willing servant and miss out on the ability to serve God to our full potential.

From Abraham's example we can learn to be diligent in seeking the Lord, so that we recognize his call. This means maintaining a healthy prayer life, as the Lord rarely appears to us as plainly as

he appeared to Abraham. It also means that we should seek opportunities to be in Christian fellowship with people who are good examples of faithfully answering the call of the Lord. This week as we read Abraham's story I want to encourage you to focus on listening for direction and opportunities to serve as Abraham modeled in Genesis 18 and was modeled by Christ in the Gospels.

**BIG IDEA: Abraham was an eager servant to the Lord when the opportunity arose.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Are there any opportunities that you feel called to? Take some time this week to pray for wisdom and discernment as to how you can best deploy your spiritual gifts.
- **Question:** What can we learn from Abraham's example of how he was ready and eager to receive and serve the Lord when the opportunity arose? How can we model his example in the church today?

## Week 10: Genesis 18:1-15

### Day 3: Three Distinguished Guests

**READ: Genesis 18:1-19:3**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Our passage begins by saying the LORD appeared to Abraham and goes on to mention three men. Abraham treated the three men as distinguished guests, ran to meet them, bowed before them, and waited on them hand and foot.<sup>1</sup> The passage then narrates a discussion between Abraham and the LORD. It says the men “*went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD... And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham.*”<sup>2</sup> Finally, “*the two angels came to Sodom*” and were hosted by Abraham’s nephew Lot.<sup>3</sup>

It seems logical to me (Jonathan O’Neill) that two of the “men” who visited Abraham were the two angels who then visited Lot. Lot did not know they were angels since they appeared in human form. “*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*”<sup>4</sup> The eager hospitality shown by Abraham and Lot to these distinguished guests stands in marked contrast to the vicious hostility of the men of Sodom toward these foreigners. Abraham showed hospitality by providing water for their feet, slaughtering a calf, and standing at attention while his guests ate. In our culture, there are many less awkward ways we can hospitably welcome and bless others.

Since the men “*went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD,*”<sup>2</sup> the third “*man*” must have been the LORD

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<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 18:1-8 for reference.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis 18:22,33 for reference.

<sup>3</sup> See Genesis 19:1-3 for reference.

<sup>4</sup> See Hebrews 13:2 for reference.

Himself, also appearing in human form. Jesus said, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”*<sup>5</sup> John wrote, *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”*<sup>6</sup> Although God is an invisible spirit, he chose to appear to Abraham (and later, his grandson Jacob<sup>7</sup>) as man, made in God’s image.

It is appropriate that God would choose to appear in human form, since all humans bear God’s image. While these Old Testament appearances of God in human flesh were temporary, in the New Testament the Son of God permanently took on flesh. In the Old Testament, God occasionally appeared as a full-grown man; in the New Testament, God the Son entered the womb of a virgin as a helpless baby. Fully God and fully man, he was born and grew just like us, yet without sin. Christ entered so fully into our humanity that he actually died for our sins. Even death did not end Christ’s humanity, since he rose again in the flesh, never to die again.

**BIG IDEA: Abraham’s three guests were the LORD and two angels, appearing in human flesh.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Interpret John 8:56 and Hebrews 13:2 in light of Genesis 18-19.
- **Activity and Question:** Describe a time when someone treated you with hospitality. What are some ways that you can show hospitality?

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<sup>5</sup> See John 8:56 for reference.

<sup>6</sup> See John 1:14,18 for reference.

<sup>7</sup> See Genesis 32:24-30 for reference.

## Week 10: Genesis 18:1-15

### Day 4: God's Faithfulness

#### READ: Genesis 18:9-15

#### EXPLORE:

*"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you...."<sup>8</sup> "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>9</sup>*

Time and time again throughout the story of Scripture, we see God actively intervening in the midst of the sin of His people. He does so despite their transgressions and lack of faith. No greater moment is this seen than at the crucifixion of Christ. Although in a much subtler way, this is exactly what we see here in this passage with Sarah. Before we get into Sarah's sin in this passage though, let's briefly cover some context to provide us with insight as to Sarah's heart posture in Genesis 18 –

When God promised to give offspring to Abram he was 75 at the time. From then to the time of this passage, 24 years had passed, and still God had not yet provided the offspring. Not to mention that in that time, Abram had given Sarah over to pharaoh and even had a child with Hagar that still turned out to not be the child of promise! How do you think Sarah felt about all the waiting and all the disillusionment? She was understandably frustrated and had likely lost faith in the promise and the giver of the promise. This is where we find our matriarch of the faith in Genesis 18.

The Lord, knowing well that Sarah was listening, once more emphasized the promise that Sarah would, in fact, have a son within a year. Great news, right? The promise that God had made to Abraham and Sarah would be fulfilled, and soon! But what is Sarah's response? *So, Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"<sup>10</sup>* Sarah was so wrapped up in her lack of faith that she doubted and even scoffed at God. She did not see, understand, or have faith in the totality of God's promise and plan.

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<sup>8</sup> See Isaiah 42:6 for reference.

<sup>9</sup> See Romans 5:8 for reference.

<sup>10</sup> See v. 12 for reference.

Instead of rebuking Sarah, God asked about her response and proceeded to declare that all is possible with him. The promise would come to pass. Unfortunately, Sarah was not necessarily humble and contrite before God in asking for forgiveness immediately. She came forward from the tent in fear and essentially accused God of misrepresenting the truth, saying, *“I did not laugh.”*

The Lord did not meet Sarah’s sin with immediate consequence. Instead, He repeatedly dealt mercifully with her. He loved her. He had chosen her to bring about the fulfillment of what He promised. This is one of the many times that God showed His faithfulness, grace, and mercy despite the sins of His people. In His perfect wisdom and grace, the Lord became the perfect and spotless lamb to atone for sin for those who would repent and believe the gospel—His people of promise. No person in Scripture, except for Christ, is our ultimate exemplar. But thanks be to God that in His perfect will, He saves us, covers us, keeps us, and continues to use us for His Kingdom’s purposes.

**BIG IDEA: God’s gracious and truthful interaction with Sarah and Abraham are reminders of His faithfulness.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question and Activity:** Is there an area in your life that you are waiting on the Lord? Is there an area of confusion, brokenheartedness, frustration, or anger? I (Cody Ward) encourage you to humbly go to the Lord in prayer, repent, and ask the Lord for forgiveness. And then, once again, trust in His will and His timing.
- **Activity:** Have you forgotten or doubted the promises of God? Have you forgotten or doubted your identity as a chosen child of God? Search Scripture and be reminded of the Lord’s goodness.

## **Week 10: Genesis 18:1-15**

### **Day 5: Humble Hospitality**

**READ TOGETHER: Hebrews 13:2, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Hebrews 11:11**

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#### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

It seems clear that Abraham is ready to meet with God. Abraham has just recently had his whole household circumcised in obedience to the Lord. An experience like circumcision would indicate to you how serious God is taking this matter and Abraham also responds in a serious manner. He is on the lookout for the Lord.

When his guests do arrive, he treats them with a considerable amount of hospitality. His first action of hospitality is his greeting and respect. Abraham, who is old, is willing to run and bow down before them. He is a man with many servants, but to these men he calls himself their servant. He offers the men to wash their feet, sit in the shade, and have some refreshments for their journey. He gets his wife Sarah involved as a cook and baker and he becomes their waiter. The question on the table is, did Abraham know that this was the Lord? I don't think he could have been certain at first, but I think he was anticipating an appearance from the Lord. We also ought to anticipate and expect communion from the Lord. The Lord rewards those who diligently

seek Him. Abraham's acts of generosity are reciprocated by the three men.

The three men reciprocate Abraham and Sarah's kindness with a message from the Lord. At this point it becomes clear to Abraham that these men are not just normal passersby's because they Sarah by name. After the men make clear this message is for both Abraham and Sarah, they give the message that in a year's time the Lord will visit, and they will have a son. Sarah doubts this message and laughs to herself. I (Sabino) love how the Scriptures explain why she laughed. Sarah gave a normal human response. She was not only barren, but she was also past the age of childbearing. Nothing is too hard for God, but she needed to hear those words herself to have faith in the promises of God. The three men returned the favor of hospitality with their own kindness and generosity.

**BIG IDEA: We are to treat all strangers well because we never know who we may be entertaining.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Write down a list of ways your whole family can be hospitable to a guest in your home.
- **Activity:** Correction helped Sarah to have faith in God's promises. Name a time correction helped you to have faith in the promises of God.





- **Question:** Verse 19 mentions doing both “*righteousness and justice...*” In your own words, how are those two terms different and yet connected?
  
- **Question:** Verse 19 includes two crucial words that read “*so that.*” Do those two words mean that the Lord is only able to bring about what is promised based upon Abram’s faithfulness? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** If God knows all things (is omniscient), why is it important for us to read about Him going down to Sodom and Gomorrah to see their actions Himself?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Genesis 18:21 for reference.

## Week 11: Genesis 18:16-21

### Day 2: The God Who Makes Himself Known

**READ: Genesis 18:16-21**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When was the last time you struggled to know what someone else was thinking? Maybe it was in an argument or in a simple conversation, but this all-too-familiar reality still remains. Some people are really hard to read. Certain people have unclear facial expressions and others may be relatively unwilling to divulge what they are thinking. In contrast, the Scriptures are clear that God is not this way. The biblical text does not present God as one who is hard to read, always illusive, or perpetually unclear. I (Stephen) think that the fact that God reveals Himself often is perhaps the most profound and often overlooked blessing made visible in the Scriptures. God delights to make Himself known. We cannot afford to take divine revelation for granted.

We can see this truth in the story of Genesis 18:16-21. The narrator takes the reader into the thoughts and words of the Lord toward Abraham and the evil unfolding in Sodom. The narrator records the Lord's Word, *"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."*<sup>12</sup>

It should fill us with gratitude and humility when we actively work to remember that God desires to reveal not only His plan *for* us, but also His nature *to* us! Think about it... Genesis 18 takes us into the mind of the powerful creator God. God's purposeful self-disclosure is not just astounding for us today, it would have been radically counter-cultural within the ancient contexts and their conceptions of gods. To put it plainly, the fact that the God of the Bible reveals Himself so clearly and so lovingly toward humanity would have been totally unlike the other

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<sup>12</sup> See Genesis 18:17-19 for reference.

religions in the Ancient Near East. The fact that God loves to make Himself known is not just visible in Genesis 18, it is visible throughout the Scriptures.

We need to remember that after Adam and Eve departed from God's good design in Genesis 3, they broke intimacy with their creator and hid themselves from the presence of God.<sup>13</sup> Even still, God has graciously continued to reveal Himself to rebellious humanity throughout time. In light of this profound truth, there are two straight forward points of conclusion. First, we need to actively seek the God who makes Himself known on His own terms and according to His Word. Many have tried to gain knowledge of God through subjective intuition in ways that do not accord with Scripture. Second, we need to realize that we can suppress the truth and God's revelation because of our unrighteousness. In light of this, our response needs to be repentance and the active pursuit of wise counsel.

**BIG IDEA: God delights to reveal His nature to us and His plans for us.**

**APPLY:**

- **Questions:** Genesis 18 is a reminder that God willingly reveals Himself. Do you think you take God's self-revelation for granted? Why or why not? When and how do you believe God has revealed Himself to you?
  
- **Question:** God doesn't just reveal His plans, but also his nature/character to us. Why do you think it is significant that both of these go together?

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<sup>13</sup> See Genesis 3:8 for reference.

## Week 11: Genesis 18:16-21

### Day 3: The Value of Active Direction

**READ: Genesis 18:16-21**

#### **EXPLORE:**

I (Stephen) don't know about you, but when I hear the word "command" or "commander" I am not immediately left with overwhelmingly positive connotations. Those are strong words. Those are clear words. Those words are not passive; they're active. Genesis 18:19 is abundantly clear. Abraham was chosen by God to *command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice*. The Hebrew word that is often translated into English as either "direct" or "command" are verbs of deliberate intentionality. The truth is that the Scriptural world is a lot more comfortable talking about being commanded than we are today.

Whether you realized it in the first and second days of this week's study, you are reading one of the most profoundly foundational texts in the Old Testament. It is clear that Abraham was chosen so that he could purposefully train and actively direct those who would come after him. It should not surprise us then that the pedagogical practices of training in the ancient Israelite contexts were intentional and strict.

Those who came after Abraham and rightly understood God's Word in Genesis 18:19 would've realized that unplanned leadership is unbiblical. Passive parenting is poor parenting. Lazy training is not training at all.

The biblical model for creating a legacy of faith that we can see in God's call of Abraham is abundantly clear. Assertive leadership and purposeful direction are not new concepts; they are deeply biblical. From the very beginning of time, God intended to have His good design be passed down within the loving and nurturing dynamic of families.

To be clear, this does not mean that parenting and directing ought to be devoid of relational connectivity, joy, or humility. Our biblical understanding of parental direction cannot excuse our own pride or lack of sanctification. Scripture exhorts parents to encourage, to pray, to

build relationships, and to not actively provoke their children. This conception of godly leadership is clearly explained in Deuteronomy 6 wherein parents are encouraged to maximize daily activities and practices to diligently teach their children to know and love the Lord God. These are the marching orders for Abraham, for his descendants, and for God's people today!

God desires His people to live their whole lives in conformity to Christ. The actively intentional direction of godly mentorship and/or parenting is a wonderful blessing toward that end. This Word to Life is a rallying cry for my heart and yours to not shy away from the uncomfortable realities of being led, directed, and even commanded in the ways of godliness.

**BIG IDEA: As with Abraham, God commissions leaders to personally embody and actively direct others toward righteousness in conformity to Christ.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Abraham was told to command his children in the ways of justice and righteousness. Do you think that "command" has a negative connotation or not? In your own words, explain any relevant positive and negative aspects of the idea of being "commanded."
  
- **Question:** Today's Word to Life talked about how leadership and parenting are supposed to be active and not passive. How have you seen the negative effects of passivity in life and leadership?

## Week 11: Genesis 18:16-21

### Day 4: God's Love in Action Against Sin

**READ: Genesis 18:16-21 and vv. 22-33**

#### **EXPLORE:**

"God's justice is His love in action against sin..." Although I (Stephen) do not remember the first time I heard this expression, it has never escaped my mind. In a simple, yet profound sentence, you have a potent reminder that a holy, powerful, and loving God must do something about the evil which actively works to distort, distract, or destroy His good design. It is the goodness of God that leads to His justifiable actions against evil.

God's words and actions in Genesis 18 give us a chance to explore the implications of this reality. The Scriptures records the Lord's words, writing, *"Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."*<sup>14</sup>

There are two important things we need to notice.

First, God is revealed as One who investigates before He judges.<sup>15</sup> Before He renders judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, he examines purposefully. God does not judge impulsively or irresponsibly. Even though the Scriptures present God as One who knows all things (omniscience), the Lord is clearly portrayed in Genesis 18 as one who earnestly searches and meticulously observes. God's judgments are clear, purposeful, and accompanied by warnings beforehand.

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<sup>14</sup> See Genesis 18:20-21 for reference.

<sup>15</sup> See vv. 16 and 21 for reference.

Second, the fact that Abraham is involved with and ultimately able to observe this scene is no small thing. Abraham experiences God's holiness, His justice, and His heart for mercy. In the section we will study next week,<sup>16</sup> we can see how God responds to earnest intercession without compromising His own holiness. The demise of Sodom and Gomorrah was a foundational moment for Abraham and his descendants who would become the people of God.

Ultimately, Genesis 18:16-21 stands as a reminder that God's justice is His love in action against sin. There is no greater expression of God's justice than the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, for our sin, in our place. A theologian named John Stott summarized this idea, writing, "When we look at the cross, we see the justice, love, wisdom, and power of God. It is not easy to decide which is the most luminously revealed, whether the justice of God in judging sin, or the love of God in bearing the judgment in our place, or the wisdom of God in perfectly combining the two, or the power of God in saving those who believe."<sup>17</sup>

**BIG IDEA: God's justice is His love in action against sin.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** If God knows everything, why did He communicate that He was going to go down to see their actions firsthand?
  
- **Question:** Sometimes it can be hard for people to understand how God's judgments are justifiable. Why do you think that is the case?

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<sup>16</sup> See vv. 22-33 for reference.

<sup>17</sup> *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott, 274.



## **Week 11: Genesis 18:16-21**

### **Day 5: Friend of God**

**READ TOGETHER: Exodus 14:24, Psalm 25:14, Matthew 13:12, John 15:15**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Let me (Sabino) let you in on a little secret. I want to tell you something I haven't told anybody else...

These two sentences pique our interest, make us happy, and tell us that we are trusted. Secrets are only shared with those whom we are close to. God is letting Abraham in on a hidden matter. Abraham's relationship with God is one that is growing and developing.

The three men were quickly off to their second assignment after completing their first one. Abraham, as a good host, walked alongside them to set them on their way. The proximity of Abraham caused the Lord to share with him His plans. The Lord also grounded his reasoning with two characteristics of Abraham. First, Abraham must know because of the great promises made concerning him. God is going to make him into a great nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. If Abraham's calling concerns all nations, then surely, he can be let into what God was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah. Secondly, God knew that Abraham would be faithful to teach his household the

ways of God. As a faithful man, Abraham could be trusted with the plans of God.

The secret God shared with Abraham was the outcry concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. The fact that God was visiting Sodom and Gomorrah, and sharing this with Abraham indicated that judgment was at the door. God, of course, knew exactly what was going on, but what this passage teaches us is how fair and judicious God is. He does not simply rely upon man's word of a situation, but He investigates it Himself. God never does anything in half measure or without full knowledge. We can trust Him to always make the right judgments and that there will be times that we do not understand because we do not have the same complete knowledge that He does.

**BIG IDEA: God doesn't hide from Abraham His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Name some other people or places in the Bible that were met with swift destruction.
  
- **Question:** Nothing can be hidden from God. How does this Christian truth help and encourage you?



- **Question:** Abraham appeals to God's character of justice as reasoning for his actions. When do you think it can be most challenging to actively remember God's attribute of perfect justice?
  
- **Activity:** Read Exodus 32:11-14 and compare that passage with Moses to the actions of Abraham here in Genesis.
  
- **Activity:** Abraham intercedes actively on behalf of Sodom. Read the texts included below and write down what you notice about Christ's intercession on our behalf.
  - Romans 8:34
  
  - Hebrews 7:25
  
  - Isaiah 53:1-12 (Focus on vv. 11-12)

## **Week 12: Genesis 18:22-33**

### **Day 2: The All-Knowing, Unchanging, Sovereign God**

**READ: Genesis 18:22-33**

#### **EXPLORE:**

I (Cean) recently became a certified real estate negotiator. Sounds cool, right? During the class time, I learned the “ins and outs” of negotiation tactics, something beneficial when trying to represent the best interests of all parties involved. Interestingly, negotiation isn’t entirely about getting what you want, but also about allowing both sides to walk away feeling they have gained something important.

In this section of Scripture, Abraham and God seemed to be in negotiation over the fate of Sodom and the neighboring city, Gomorrah. We get to witness mastery of God in negotiation, as He revealed the most important thing was not only the judgement of sinners, but the sanctification of His saint. He was interested in the heart of Abraham, as well as, the hurt of the people crying out against injustice. Ultimately this negotiation resulted in both parties walking away with a closer relationship to one another. Win-win.

During the course of the conversation with Abraham, it seemed God moved from wanting to destroy everybody to agreeing to destroy nobody. Did He change His mind? Sometimes we come across scriptures that say, God regretted, relented, or changed his mind, (Gen 6:6-7; Ex 32:12; 1 Sam 15:11, 35; Ps 106:45). How can we reconcile these ideas to a God who is omniscient and sovereign?

It is important to remember the various literary styles found throughout the Bible especially when trying to interpret what the text is saying. Didactic passages are clear passages of teaching. For example, “God is not a man that He should repent (Num 23:19)”, but there are also phenomenological passages, such as we have here. These are narrative passages written from the human perspective. It is a descriptive anthropomorphic way of speaking. In other words, God *appears* to be changing His mind, because He is changing His action, i.e. agreeing with Abraham to stay judgement. However, God, being omniscient, always

knew the conversation would take place. There are no surprises to Him. He declares the end from beginning (Isa 46:10). Therefore, we can conclude with certainty that God does NOT literally change His mind (1 Sam 15:29). He will never 'learn' something new that would result in Him changing His decision if given another opportunity. He lacks nothing and He alone declares the future (Isa 44:6-8).

Yet, God often wants to involve humans in His plans! He uses us to accomplish His will. This is for our benefit, not His. You see, God planned to have this negotiation take place. Just as Abraham approached the Lord as a compassionate individual concerned with justice and mercy, God wants us to enter into prayer and dialogue with Him about the sins of others as well. This scene is a beautiful way to foreshadow of what is to come, because just as Abraham acted as the mediator between God and the wicked men of these cities, Jesus is the ultimate mediator between God and wicked men of the world. This is God's design. Put your trust in Jesus Christ and like the result of a good negotiation, both sides will have gained something of great value.

**BIG IDEA: God's ways are higher. He sees all, knows all, and is in control of all things.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Would God still be God if He changed His mind like we do?
  
- **Question:** What do you think the negotiation taught Abraham about God? What did the negotiation show God about Abraham?
  
- **Question:** What benefit do you get from trusting in Jesus? What benefit does God get?

## **Week 12: Genesis 18:22-33**

### **Day 3: Mercy Amidst Judgment**

**READ: Genesis 18:22-33**

#### **EXPLORE:**

One of the great books I (Stephen) have had the opportunity to read in the past few years was titled *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund. There were so many “aha moments” in the book, but I think that one of them stands out from the rest. Ortlund writes, “Unlike us, who are often emotional dams ready to break, God can put up with a lot. This is why the [Old Testament] speaks of God being ‘provoked to anger’ by his people dozens of times. But not once are we told that God is ‘provoked to love’ or ‘provoked to mercy.’ His anger requires provocation; his mercy is pent up, ready to gush forth.”

I am not sure why I resonated with this notion among so many other noteworthy ideas. Perhaps it was because the truth was so profound, yet so overlooked in my reading of Scripture. For all the times that we are told that God is slow to anger, we are never told that He is slow to love. He seems eager to extend mercy and is long-suffering in His acts of right judgment. As we zoom in on the dialogue of Abraham’s intercession, we can see this principle readily on display.

The centerpiece of the back-and-forth between the Lord and Abraham is about whether God would be willing to avoid destroying the two cities if a minimal amount of righteous people were found therein. After the many numerical decreases in Abraham’s intercession, we encounter a resounding truth. God is willing to spare the righteous when he judges a certain place. Certainly, righteous people still undergo immense pain as a result of sin on this side of eternity, but the gracious character of God

which is visible even in a the historical milieu of Genesis 18-19 serves as a reminder of the certain hope which is to come.

When we see God's justice on display, we often miss how His mercy is also visible. In Joshua 2, Rahab was spared when Jericho was destroyed. In Jonah 3, God saw how the people of Nineveh turned from their evil and He relented from the disaster that would have overcome them. There are numerous examples in Scripture in which God provides warnings, exhortations, and time before He carries out judgment.

In Luke 13, Jesus spoke directly about the interaction between repentance and destruction. Twice He repeated the phrase, *"Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*<sup>19</sup> James 2:10-13 reads, *"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."* Regardless of what difficulties we may endure in a world beset with sin, we can have hope that as we repent and believe the gospel we can be saved by grace through faith.

**BIG IDEA: We are often quick to anger and rash in our judgments. God is longsuffering even as He is just.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Read and prayerfully meditate upon James 2:10-13.

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<sup>19</sup> See Luke 13:1-4 for reference.



## Week 12: Genesis 18:22-33

### Day 4: So, doc, how bad is it?

**READ: Genesis 18:22-33**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Aristotle defines justice as getting what is his/her due. While I (Sarah Wilson) believe this is close to a viable definition, the world has many other persuasive definitions concerning all kinds of justice. Aristotle was not a believer, but he stated that God was a holy being. The problem with other worldviews definitions of justice is that they don't have a great understanding of God's supremacy.

In today's passage, Abraham tried to piece together what justice should be. Whether He knew that Lot was residing in Sodom, his compassion for the city was pure. When He found out what was going to happen, he bargained hard. He made a rhetorical yet correct statement, God would not punish a righteous person as He would the wicked. He is the judge of *all* the Earth.

God has set standards, is unwavering, and always acts. It is important to understand this in a world where there is much chaos. Why? The more our hearts and minds begin to feel overwhelmed, the more they are prone to wander. It is hard when chaos ensues not to listen to what the world says should or shouldn't happen, but one thing is for sure, things happen according to the will of God. We must learn, know, and follow God's stance on justice. Thankfully God speaks clearly on this in the Bible.

For the amount of great news about God's judgment, there is equal if not more bad news. Abraham pleaded with God to do what is *right*. God said, "I will." What Abraham did not understand was that no one is righteous, no not one. From scripture we also know that God really would have done what is right. What God says, He will do. This is good news, yet it also potentially bad repercussions.

As a medical professional and also a cancer patient, I know there are two kinds of doctors, those that lead with the good news and ones that lead with bad news. I prefer the latter so as to place my faith in the good. While God *is* definitely all-loving, all-merciful, all-kind, He is also holy, and will not be mocked. Scripture tells us all are sinners. The prognosis? Well, it's only a matter of time until we face God's Justice. Bad news bears. What can be done?! The scriptures tell us what is needed, prescribed by the Good Physician, see Deuteronomy 10:12-13. The cost? Your life surrendered. To the world, this is the most ludicrous thing they have heard of and refuse to pay the cost. But why not cash in your already dying body for one that will be healed and receive new life, provided by God who paid the price on our behalf?

The good news is this: righteousness is given to those who place their faith in Jesus and are saved from God's wrath. As Sodom and Gomorrah was full of wickedness, so is this earth. One day, He is coming back to clean house. The *best* news is this: God promised Abraham He would spare the city for a few righteous people; God already spared you by Jesus's death on the cross. The question is, how will you break the news to the millions of sick and dying around you.

**BIG IDEA: God's judgment is always right, and we are made righteous if we place our faith in Him.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Is your current view of justice molded more by what you glean from the Scriptures, or molded by your own emotions and experiences?
  
- **Challenge:** Tune in to the news or read a few articles twice this week and see if you can identify the contorted views of justice. Pray that we (the church) would see these things and only view it from God's perspective.

## **Week 12: Genesis 18:22-33**

### **Day 5: Negotiating with God**

**READ TOGETHER: Hebrews 4:16, Job 34:10-11, James 5:16**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Most of us are probably not fans of negotiation. I (Sabino) don't like negotiating for a car, house, or any other product, but it is also something that must be done. Imagine having to negotiate with God? This is exactly what Abraham chooses to do. However, we can also call this prayer. Abraham is simply talking to God and anytime we talk to God we are praying.

Abraham is a friend of God and when he found out what God was planning on doing to Sodom he drew near. He came boldly and asked God a rhetorical question. Abraham knows that God doesn't sweep away the righteous (consider Noah) with the wicked. Abraham goes on to ask God if He will spare the city if there are 50 righteous living in it. Now, we are all probably surprised at the boldness of Abraham and would never think to question God in a similar manner. However, we must keep in mind that Abraham is appealing to the character of God, and he trusts that the judge of all the earth will do what is right. Abraham also demonstrates the well-known principle of hating the sin and loving the sinner. He understands well that Sodom is a wicked city, but he is still willing to pray for mercy on their behalf.

Unsurprisingly, Abraham is also concerned for his nephew Lot who is living in Sodom.

We also notice Abraham's humility in his negotiating. He confesses that he is just dust and ashes who is speaking to the eternal God. He also requests that the Lord not be angry with his further appeals. He proceeds lightly and never takes it for granted that he is privileged just to be speaking with the Lord of hosts. I think it is important to point out that at no point does the Lord get angry with him. The Lord delights in the prayers of the upright. The Lord knew this negotiation was coming and he wants Abraham to see just how far Sodom and Gomorrah had fallen.

**BIG IDEA: God wants us to pray boldly and humbly to Him.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Describe a time where you prayed in a similar manner to Abraham.
- **Question:** Do you think God would have destroyed the city with 5 righteous people? Why or why not?

## Week 13: Genesis 19:1-29

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ: Genesis 19:1-29**

#### **EXPLORE:**

**DISCLAIMER:** *this week's biblical text has some mature themes and may not be suitable for families who are reading the Word to Life studies with children. I have worked with our team to handle these topics carefully, but parents are encouraged to use discretion. -Pastor Stephen*

Instructions: Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about the angels' actions and Lot's requests?
  
- **Question:** Verses 4-10 tell of a truly grotesque and terrifying scene. How do you think this scene answers the lingering dialogue/questions we studied last week in Genesis 18:22-33?

- **Question:** Lot was incompetent and overwhelmed in his ability to protect not only his angelic guests, but his daughters. How was his ineptitude contrasted with the angels' power?
  
- **Question:** How did Lot's sons-in-law react to his pleas? What do you think their response teaches us?
  
- **Question:** This biblical passage continually unfolds into deeper tragedy. If you were asked to summarize the significance of this story in a sentence or two for us today, how would you do it?

## **Week 13: Genesis 19:1-29**

### **Day 2: A Story of Sin and its Effects**

**READ: Genesis 19:1-29**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The opening words in our text this week are a tragic reminder of just how bleak the story of Lot has become. At first, Abraham's nephew chose to pitch his tent near the city. When Genesis 19 begins however, we find Lot sitting in the gate of Sodom and making his home amongst her people.<sup>20</sup> In the scene that follows, the desperation only becomes worse.

After the angels immediately refused to stay in Lot's home, he invited them once again. In fairness, Lot's restated offer is not abnormal. It would have been customary for an initial request to be refused and then followed up with a reissued invitation. Moreover, it would have been relatively common for travelers to stay in a public square which could have been preferable to the open and unprotected countryside. This was certainly not the case in Sodom and Lot seems to know that truth well.

As we observe the story closer, it becomes clear that Lot was well-acquainted with the rampant corruption and perversion in Sodom. Lot knew the intentions of the those in the city would not result in the well-being of his guests. He knew the evil of what had now become his home and yet he chose to remain. As the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Lot was reluctant to leave a place that was filled with all forms of violence and sexual perversion.

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<sup>20</sup> See Genesis 13, 14, and 19 for details on this tragic progression in Lot's life in greater detail.

It's hard to find examples of healthy families in the Bible, but Lot's family might be the most dysfunctional. He was apathetic when he should have fled, he was cowardly when he should have protected, and ultimately his legacy comes to an end in a drunken act of shame.<sup>21</sup> My (Stephen's) guess is that, by now, you've got the point. Genesis 19 is profoundly tragic and almost unspeakably messy. As students of God's Word, we need to ask the question, "Why?" Why is this story in the Bible and what is the point?

It was these questions from this exact Scripture that were rattling around the mind of a man I knew many years ago. He read Genesis 19 and, like many of us, he couldn't comprehend the perversion, violence, and cowardice of this story. Like it was yesterday, I can remember him, with tears swelling in his eyes, coming with all of his doubts to talk to me. I had been a pastor for only a few years. I admired the way he wrestled with the passage, but I was not envious of how much pain it caused him. Although it would be neither appropriate nor possible to detail that conversation fully here, I can say that the conversation went well, and we were led to one resounding conclusion. Because of our sinful rebellion against God's authority and design, humanity is capable of and trapped by an incredible amount of evil. The root of our perversion and sin is founded in our utter inability to embrace the fact that God is God.

Lot's story is a potent reminder of how destructive sin truly is. You may not have experienced darkness like Genesis 19, but a right view of God and an honest view of our world ought to remind you that sin is serious and its consequences are disastrous. Left on our own, we would have remained enslaved in sin and destined for destruction. Praise be to God that He was, is, and will be about the business of redeeming rebellious humanity into loving relationship with Himself through Christ.

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<sup>21</sup> See Genesis 19:30-38 for this story.



**BIG IDEA: Apart from God's redeeming grace, humanity is dead in sin.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Sin wreaks havoc not only through the wrongs we have done, but also in the wrongs that have been done to us. Spend time in prayer using the prompts below.
  - Confess your sins and ask the Lord to forgive you where you have turned away from His leading (1 John 1:9).
  - The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and He is just. Ask the Lord to give you peace, to provide you with healing, and to help you to forgive as necessary (Psalm 34:8-22).



## Week 13: Genesis 19:1-29

### Day 3: Righteous Lot?

**READ: Genesis 19:1-29 and 2 Peter 2:1-9**

#### EXPLORE:

As we've explored over the last two days, Genesis Chapter 19 opens with a shocking display of human depravity. From verse 4 we know that this wickedness was pervasive throughout the city, and sadly, Lot appears comfortable living deeply entrenched in its midst.

Lot's prior bad decisions have now led him into a dire no-win situation. His past sin has led him deeper and deeper into a compromised position, where he no doubt begins to lose sight of right from wrong while rationalizing the sinful choices he makes. This should serve as a stark warning to us. Sin begets ever growing sin. Perhaps a simple, familiar example of this is the little white lie that requires another lie to cover up the first, then another, and so it snowballs. How easy it can be to get ourselves into worse trouble, and how important it is to guard ourselves against rationalizing sinful behavior or allowing ourselves to be willfully ignorant of it in these types of circumstances.

Lot, for his part, appears for a moment to turn a corner in verse 7 when he calls out the wickedness of the lustful mob. He does recognize sin for what it is. But then, with his very next breath, he horrifically offers his two daughters, in essence sanctioning their rape (and perhaps even worse if we're to learn anything from the gruesome story of Judges Chapter 19). Lot's behavior rightly disgusts us, as it would have the original Israelite audience reading Genesis for the first time. How then, when we turn to the New Testament, can Peter call him "*righteous Lot*"?<sup>22</sup> Are these really the actions of a righteous man? Is Lot really righteous?

The simple answer is yes, but not on account of his appalling actions. Not because he was quick to leave Sodom at the first opportunity (in

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<sup>22</sup> See 2 Peter 2:7-8 for reference.

fact, we're told he "*lingered*"<sup>23</sup>). And not because he displayed a healthy appreciation of the gravity of sin (begging to live in the "*little*" city of Zoar only reveals Lot's mistaken view that less cumulative sin in the small city somehow makes the sin of individual inhabitants more excusable and less worthy of judgement<sup>24</sup>). Lot is righteous, not because of anything he does, but in spite of his actions, by the same means that you and I can claim righteousness — faith in God's promise. We're blessed on this side of the cross to see that promise realized in Christ's atoning sacrifice. But verse 29 gives us a clue that this same gospel is what saves Lot, as "God remembered Abraham." Or, perhaps more directly, God remembered the covenant promise he made to Abraham, that Lot presumably put his faith and trust in also.

2 Peter 2 warns of coming judgement — for all sin — and we can't save ourselves, for "*all fall short of the glory of God*".<sup>25</sup> Lot, mired in his own sin, tragically missed an opportunity to witness to his family, his city, and all who read his story. But like us, through faith and repentance he finds rest in God's righteousness even as he fails, ultimately pointing us to our need for, and the sufficiency of, our savior Jesus Christ.

**BIG IDEA: We must guard against sin subtly growing in our lives, but our hope is secure in the righteousness of Christ graciously given to all those of faith.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Has there been a time in your life when a bad choice led to more bad choices? Looking back on that, what could you have done to break the cycle? How could Lot have made different decisions to avoid his own cycle of sin?
- **Question:** Are there sins that you view as unforgivable? How should we view this in light of Lot's righteousness?

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<sup>23</sup> See Genesis 19:16 for reference.

<sup>24</sup> See Genesis 19:20 for reference.

<sup>25</sup> See Romans 3:23 for reference.

## Week 13: Genesis 19:1-29

### Day 4: Tough Questions from Sodom and Gomorrah

**READ: Genesis 19:1-29 and Romans 1:21-27**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Word to Life Studies enable our community to study aspects of the Scriptures which might otherwise remain unexplored in a weekend sermon. This is a good discipline, and we are going to implement it.

#### **Question One: What was the primary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?**

Orthodox Jews and Christians have historically believed that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of homosexuality. Recently, some have asserted that these cities were destroyed for other reasons. Instead of seeing the destruction of these cities linked to homosexuality, some contemporary liberal interpreters have asserted that the destruction occurred because of violence, rape, and inhospitality. Initially, it is not hard to see how this understanding of the story makes sense. Certainly, the men of Sodom were lustful, inhospitable, and prone to sexual violence. The existence of these previously mentioned sins does not mean that we can omit the presence of homosexuality, however. When the Bible continues to expound on the subject, it is clear that homosexuality was an outward sin for which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.<sup>26</sup> Truly, at the root of their lust, violence, and inhospitality was a sinful pride that refused to embrace the authority of God.<sup>27</sup> With this in mind, we need to make a few summary points.

First, all sin is destructive to humanity and abhorrent to God.<sup>28</sup> A proper reading of Genesis 19 should not lead us to a proverbial finger-wagging toward others, but to an honest assessment of our own sin and pride. The grace of God made available in Christ is fundamentally transformative. Believers are invited to be uncomfortably transformed

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<sup>26</sup> See Jude 1:7, Leviticus 18:22, and Romans 1:18-32 for some of the references.

<sup>27</sup> See Ezekiel 16:49-50 for an example of how pride fuels all sin.

<sup>28</sup> See Galatians 5:19-24 for reference.

to become more like Jesus. May God forgive us for all the time we see sin in others and not in ourselves. Second, God is right in His wrath and justified in His judgments. God delights to forgive and to rescue, but He is not weak in His administration of justice. Genesis 19 stands as a reminder that sin's consequences are severe. The cross of Christ and the empty grave remind us of the greatness of God's grace overcoming the gravity of our sin.

***Question Two: How did fire and sulfur rain from heaven?***

Many thoughtful readers of Genesis 19 have asked, "How did sulfur and fire rain down from heaven?" Some people have concluded that this story must be mythological or metaphorical. Others have taken more scientific approach to understanding the text without compromising its language. For example, the disastrous events that unfold on Sodom and Gomorrah have often been connected to earthquake type phenomena. The idea is that when various chemical reactions occurred, they could have spewed into the air through fissures in the ground, thus raining down from the sky. Lightning which often accompanies earthquakes could have easily ignited various gases and bitumen. Therefore, a scientifically minded interpreters who aim to affirm the truthfulness of Scripture, have come to some feasible explanations. As with the first question, a few summary points are necessary.

First, scientific study is a wonderful thing. As Christians, our world is meant to be explored and studied as a means of further understanding God and the intentionality of His design. Second, because we believe that God is the creator of space, time, and matter, we should be willing to embrace supernatural phenomena. We ought to be free to look for explanations under the premise of God as a designer, but we should be quick to remember that God can and does use both natural and supernatural means. Regardless of whether Genesis 19 included natural events, the text is clear that God was active in His judgment because of His justice. Third, the text is not unclear about the fact that real and historical events occurred in Genesis 19. Finally, it is paramount that we remember that our faith is based on a historically credible supernatural event and accomplishment: THE RESURRECTION.

**BIG IDEA: Genesis 19 raises intricate, but answerable questions.**

**APPLY:**

- **Optional Activity:** Below you will find some helpful articles that continue to expound on the subjects addressed today. These online resources are free.
  - [What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? by Greg Koukl](#)
  - [10 Concise Pieces of Evidence for the Resurrection by George Sinclair](#)
  - [Resurrection of Jesus as Christianity's Centerpiece by The CS Lewis Institute](#)
  - [How do you explain Miracles? by William Lane Craig](#)





## **Week 13: Genesis 19:1-29**

### **Day 5: God Rescues Lot**

**READ TOGETHER: 2 Peter 2:6-8, Romans 1:26-27, Jude 1:7**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Is Lot the luckiest man on earth? First, he was saved by Abraham after he was captured by the four kings. Now he is being rescued by angels. Of course, I (Sabino) ask this question tongue in cheek. Lot is not lucky, but he does receive mercy in a more dramatic fashion than most.

One of the first interesting things about this passage is how similar Lot treats the two angels as Abram did. He is just as hospitable if not more. Lot is truly a righteous man as Hebrews tells us. I think sometimes it is easy for us to simply shake our head or wag our finger at Lot, but we also don't want to miss his positive traits. Lot also graciously pleads with the men of Sodom not to act so wickedly against his guests. However, Lot's suggestion to allow the men to degrade his two daughters instead of mistreating the men was completely unadvised and shameful.

The men of Sodom's actions gave conclusive evidence that the outcry of the city was justified. These men were not only willing to forcibly commit vile acts, but they were also unwilling to receive any form of gracious correction.

Think about this. Even after being struck with blindness, they still groped for the door.

Before destroying Sodom, God was exceedingly merciful to Lot. He allowed Lot to see if any additional relations would go with him. The two angels seized him by the hand when he was lingering. He allowed Lot to change the escape plans. He waited until Lot arrived in Zoar before raining down sulfur and fire. God was indeed longsuffering with Lot and his family.

Abraham went out early in the morning to see what would become of Sodom. After seeing the smoke, Abraham now knew that there were not ten righteous people in Sodom. There were not ten righteous people in Sodom, but there was one merciful God to both Abraham and Lot.

**BIG IDEA: God is both merciful and just.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** List some ways that God has mercifully rescued you.
- **Question:** Sodom was destroyed for sexual immorality. What lessons can we learn from this story and our modern-day sexual immorality?



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