

GENESIS

Lesson 32 w/Answers

Judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah - Genesis 18:16-33

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰ Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." ²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶ The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." ²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹ Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." ³³ When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home." Genesis 18:16-33 [NIV]

Abraham Intercedes with The Lord

Something that often gets overlooked in this lesson's and the last lesson's scriptural text is that Abraham had remained in Mamre for twenty-four years or so. While this might not seem remarkable in itself, it is a key indicator that Abraham and Lot were not nomads or "pastoralists" (as Bible critics would like to label them). These were people who put down roots, "planted a tree," if you will; and, as we will discover, Abraham's decision to live in Mamre and Lot's to remain in Sodom will each produce very different results.

We see Abraham interceding with the Lord on behalf of his nephew Lot and the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. Imagine the contrast between Abraham's and Lot's lives these past twenty-four years. Abraham chose to live near the Oaks of Mamre while Lot chose Sodom. Abraham's faithfulness resulted in unimaginable blessings, while Lot's decisions resulted in destruction and captivity. Lot ended up being saved by the Lord, through his uncle Abraham, coming to his rescue when the Kings of Elam captured the citizens of Sodom. In this lesson Abraham will ask the Lord to rescue Lot again, as he pleads for the Lord to have mercy on the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Lord Tells Abraham "What I Am About to Do"

As the visiting men get up to continue their journey toward Sodom, Abraham walks along with them.

We can see from the Lord's next question how much he cares for Abraham and the plans He has for him. (Genesis 18:17-19)

1. What was the Lord about to do, and why did He say that He didn't want to hide it from Abraham?
 - a. ANSWER 1: We first note that the Lord has already decided to "do" something. He is not just thinking about it, or pondering it; He has decided to do something. He is going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. He has decided to take a first-hand look at what is happening in these two cities by sending two angels, his representatives, to look at the situation in real time in Sodom. If the reports that He has heard are not as bad as He believes, then that will be that will be the end of the matter. However, if it is indeed that bad, then He will bring destruction on them.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The Lord also tells us why He wanted Abraham to know. He wanted Abraham to know that the Lord is right and just, and He wanted Abraham to direct his "children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." (Genesis 18:19) He also wanted Abraham to know that what he was about to do was just, and that the sins of these great cities had brought punishment on them.

The Lord then tells Abraham something that Abraham surely already knew, "that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous." Abraham knows from this that judgment, death, and destruction must be close.

Abraham proceeds to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah and asks the Lord a direct question.

2. What question did Abraham ask God? (See Genesis 18:23)
 - a. ANSWER: Abraham asks a very significant question for them, and for all of us who have put our faith Jesus, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"
3. What is significant about the Lord's answer to Abraham's question? (See Genesis 18:26)
 - a. ANSWER: The Lord's response is that he "would spare the whole place" for the sake of fifty—and ultimately, even only ten—righteous people living there. This demonstrates to us that God will preserve the wicked for the sake of the righteous.

God's response reveals a lot to us about the mercy and justice that God has for those who put their faith in Him. We know that His punishment is fair and His judgment righteous, and now we know that He will not punish the righteous in order to punish the wicked. Luke 12:5-7 tells us that God is sovereign over all of His creation. He knows when a sparrow falls, and He knows the number of hairs on our head—no detail is lost on God. It also tells us that the righteous fear the Lord and not man.

Jesus had something to impart to us on this topic as well. Read the referenced verses below and respond to this question.

4. What does Jesus reveal to us about judgment and separating the righteous from the wicked?
 - a. Matthew 3:12
 - i. ANSWER: Jesus revealed the following regard his Father, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."
 - b. Matthew 13:24-30
 - i. ANSWER: In this parable, we see that weeds, i.e., wickedness, has been sown among the wheat. When the servants ask the master if they should pull the weeds he replies, "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

In this lesson, we see God's principles of justice playing out, as Abraham tries to intercede for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. At the time of these events, it is estimated that about 20,000 people lived in and around Sodom, and even more at Gomorrah and in the cities of the plain. Abraham had rescued most of these people when the Elamites took them captive. He also knew that Lot was living among them, and believed there had to be some righteous people living there now, based on Lot's testimony and the Lord rescuing all of them from captivity. Abraham was bold, but humble, and compassionately sought mercy for all of them—even if there were only ten righteous people living there.

Now let's consider God's response.

5. How did the Lord respond to Abraham's intercession?
- a. ANSWER: He told Abraham that, "for the sake of the ten, I will not destroy it."

Believing that at least ten righteous people were now living in Sodom, Abraham returned home. We know of course today that the angels did not find ten righteous people living in Sodom. In fact, based on the judgment God brought on the cities of the plain, and the principles God uses in judging and punishing the wicked as we saw earlier, we can imagine just how wicked they all were—with not even ten righteous people living among them. This raises an important question: was Lot a righteous man?

Was Lot a Righteous Man?

Consider this question, as referenced in the verses below.

6. So, was Lot seen as righteous by God?
- a. 2 Peter 2:6-8
 - i. ANSWER: In these verses, Lot is revealed as a righteous man with a tormented, righteous soul.
 - b. Genesis 18:23
 - i. ANSWER: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham asked the Lord this direct question, and we learn from our current studies as well as from the next lesson on Sodom, that God would not do that. And in fact God did not do that, as Lot and his family were saved from destruction. God would not have saved Lot if he did not see Lot as a righteous man.

We can see from the verses above that Lot was seen as righteous, and, as a result, God's angels saved Lot and his family from destruction. God did not bring punishment on them—except for Lot's wife, who disobeyed and was killed instantly. God is righteous, and we discern from this lesson that we are to live a righteous and just life. We, like Abraham, are to be a witness for Christ to our children, our neighbors, our co-workers, and anyone we meet by living a righteous and forgiven life.

Abraham was satisfied that he had done all he could do in order to intercede for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, including his nephew Lot and his family, so he returned back to his home near the oaks of Mamre. Lot, unaware of these events, is going through his daily routine in Sodom, unaware that he will subsequently greet two very important visitors while sitting in the city's gateway.

Thanks for studying with us!

In Christ,

Wes