

**Title:** Sodom and Gomorrah

**Introduction:** Jigsaw Puzzles

- Shopping trip to Michael's for Avalee's Christmas present
- Youngest grandchild, 10<sup>th</sup> birthday last month, she has liked puzzles from an early age
- Looking at puzzle boxes for sale there, wanted to see number of pieces and age suggestion
- What else on the puzzle box cover is important besides number of pieces and ages?
- Picture of finished puzzle (Imagine garage sale, card table with items, large ziplock bag which contains a huge number of jigsaw pieces. The original box is not there.) Would you buy the bag?
- Yes? A true puzzle aficionado! No? Why not? (Besides the fact that you don't like jigsaw puzzles.) There's no picture of the finished puzzle. By the way, whether your answer is "Yes" or "No", there's still a likely problem. What is it? There are probably some pieces missing, which you wouldn't discover until you were putting it together.
- For those who answered "Yes", upon closer examination of the pieces inside the bag, you find that the size and thickness of the pieces varies from piece to piece, indicating that the bag contains more than one puzzle.
- So, what does a jigsaw puzzle have to do with Genesis chapters 18 and 19?
- Well, for me it relates to the process of preparing a message from any passage of Scripture, not just a message from Genesis.
- A given portion of Scripture contains a vast number of pieces of information: words, phrases, and sentence meanings, historical context references, grammar, theological implications, life application issues, etc.
- Last year, several of us from Parker Bible went through a training process at Countryside Bible that utilized very helpful videos by Pastor Tom on the Preparation and Presentation aspects of teaching from God's Word. We learned that effective study of a passage should identify a theme, and then identify which elements in the passage provide the details of that theme. I realized this week that those elements are like puzzle pieces, which I needed to identify, separate out, turn right side up, and then assemble in proper order for you to "see" and understand. Now the narrative account in two chapters of Genesis contains a lot of information, so let's get into the specific picture I pulled from that large bag of pieces known as Genesis chapters 18 and 19.

**Theme:** God provides grace-filled blessings for His people,  
and He brings justified wrath against His enemies

## **I. God's Blessings of Grace**

### **A. Abraham's Blessings (Genesis 18:1-8, 16-33) (James 2:23; Exodus 33:11; John 15:14)**

#### **1. The Lord took Abraham to a deeper level of personal relationship with Him**

Let's look at the first 3 verses in chapter 18. **READ vss 1-3.** Notice the word "appeared" in verse 1. The Hebrew word is "rah-ah", which means "to be visible". We heard the word "theophany" mentioned recently by one of our visiting pastors from Countryside. This is a word that theologians use to describe what is happening here in chapter 18. It is Greek in origin – "theo" means "God, "phania" means "to appear". Jesus is the only member of the Godhead whom man has seen functioning in a physical body. So when the Lord shows up physically in the Old Testament, we must presume that it is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. Now the Lord has been interacting occasionally with Abraham since chapter 12. (I counted 5 different occurrences.) Sometimes it says that "the word of the LORD" came to Abraham, sometimes he sees a vision, but two other times the Lord is said to have "appeared". Verses 2 and 3 seem to indicate that Abraham recognized the Lord in this physical visit, which would certainly be possible since he had seen the Lord twice before. But this entire visit was longer and different than the previous ones. Abraham directed Sarah and a servant to prepare food, which he then served to the Lord and His companions. Go to verse 4. **READ vss 4-8.** Let's look again at number 1 under **Abraham's Blessings. "The Lord took Abraham to a deeper level of personal relationship with Him."** Like some of you, Carole and I had many hours of phone conversation in the early days of our relationship. After high school, we wrote letters while separated in our first year of college. But the next two years in the same college provided much deeper relationship development as we saw each other frequently. We were much more ready for marriage after that complete 5 year process. Though the Lord's visit that day was only for an afternoon, that stretch of time included waiting for the food to be prepared, then the meal time itself. An after-dinner stroll toward Sodom provided the time for an in-depth, side-by-side conversation. This new level of contact and interaction surely gave Abraham greater confidence and strength for his walk by faith in the months and years that followed. That leads us to his next blessing.

## 2. **Abraham's role in the plan of God brought him special revelation**

Let's go down to verse 16. I know, I just jumped over Sarah, but we'll come back to her in a little bit. **READ vss 16-19.** As the four men leave the tent and start walking toward Sodom, we are given access to the Lord's unspoken thoughts in verses 17 through 19. We see that He intends to reveal his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham. God has chosen Abraham to have a crucial role as the patriarch of a chosen people who will ultimately bring a Savior who will reach a lost and dying world. He wants Abraham to educate his descendants about God's purposes for them and God's call on their lives to live as His righteous and just people. In view of this special call, the Lord shares His thoughts with Abraham. Look at verses 20 and 21. **READ vss 20-21.** The Lord shares the reason for His visit that day, and Abraham rightly infers that it could mean bad news for the Twin Cities. This conversation could also have affected Abraham in affirming the deeper nature of his relationship with the Lord. James 2:23 says "... the Scripture was fulfilled that says 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as

righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." Can you think of anyone else in Scripture, after Abraham, whom the Lord called His friend? (Moses in Exodus 33:11, His obedient disciples in John 15:14)

### **3. Abraham successfully interceded for some in Sodom to be spared**

Let's go to verse 22. **READ vss 22-25.** Abraham made his appeal to the Lord to spare 50 people, likely with at least Lot and his family in mind. Notice that as part of this first request he calls upon God's character to properly deal with those who are righteous.

**Here's a note for us to heed – When we pray and ask the Lord to do something, do we bring His character and/or His Word into view as part of the basis for our request? We should emulate Abraham in this way.**

And why did Abraham think he could make this request? Because the Lord is the righteous Judge, capital J Judge, of all the earth, and His wrath was about to fall on Sodom due to the extreme wickedness of the people there. In Abraham's understanding, the righteous should not have to suffer along with the unrighteous. So God says "OK" to his request. In verse 26, **READ vs 26.** I'm not sure why Abraham did this, but his initial success caused him to enter into a negotiation process whereby he made the same request 5 more times, changing only the number of people to be saved. But before he started making these additional requests, he acknowledged, with humility, his position before the Lord. In verse 27, **READ vs 27.** Then, immediately in verse 28, his requested number dropped from 50 to 45, then to 40, then to 30, then to 20 and finally to 10. **Now, typically in human negotiations, immediate success prompts one side to push for more, not less. Why do you think Abraham kept reducing his number? (PAUSE)** He finally stopped at 10, perhaps thinking that at least Lot and his family would be saved if there were no other righteous people in Sodom. You can see that process in verses 28 through 32. Verse 33 closes out this chapter's detail on letter **A, Abraham's Blessings.**

## **B. Sarah's Blessings (Genesis 18:9-15)**

### **1. Sarah was healed from her lifelong barren condition**

Let's go to verse 9. **READ vss 9-11.** Now the problem for Sarah wasn't just that she was past childbearing age. She had been barren for the entire span of her teenage and adult life. A couple can be referred to as "infertile" when they don't produce children and no testing has been done on either the husband or the wife. But the unfortunate incident with Hagar had already proven that Abraham could in fact father a child. Ishmael was growing up right before her eyes, and was likely a painful, daily reminder for Sarah that she was the problem, not her husband. The culture of that day would have presumed that her God (or her gods) had cursed her. And now that she was 90 years old, God's promise to Abraham seemed less and less likely to ever be fulfilled. Sarah was only a short distance from the visitors, but she was hidden behind the tent flap. It was perfect for

eavesdropping. One of the strangers predicted that when he returned in a year, Sarah would have a baby boy. Don't you wish we could see a video of her face when the Lord uttered those words? We are told of her response in verse 12. **READ vs 12.** She made no sound, but her response of inner laughter was one of either bitter cynicism or surprised, hopeful joy. The word "pleasure" creates a bit of uncertainty among interpreters in regard to her response. The Hebrew word is "eden", as in the Garden Of – Eden – certainly a delightful place. So sometimes that word "eden" can be translated "delight" or "delightful". So -- was she cynical because their ancient bodies would prevent proper sexual intimacy and the physical enjoyment, pleasure, thereof, or would really and truly having a baby produce unspeakable delight and joy within her and even for them as a couple? But suddenly, her presumed privacy behind the tent flap evaporated and blessing #2 took place.

## **2. The Lord revealed to Sarah that He knew her heart, and He did not condemn her**

Go to verse 13. **READ vs 13.** "Uh-oh", thought Sarah. "How did he know that? I'm in trouble now." But then come verses 14 and 15. **READ vss 14 and 15.** The Lord then repeated His specific promise regarding a baby. But Sarah was afraid about her inner heart attitude being exposed, so she resorted to the tried and true human response – "I didn't do it!" It's like she didn't even hear the Lord repeat His promise. But there was no rebuke from Him about her response to either the first time or the second time He promised that her baby would come soon. He only gently reminded her that He knew everything that went on in her mind and in her heart, and He voiced no condemnation.

**What about you and me? Does the Lord have constant awareness of what goes on in our heart and mind? Of course He does.** If our inner life is operating in ungodly ways, does that begin to press on our conscience? It should. But that 's normal. It's called conviction of sin, delivered to you personally by the Holy Spirit. If you haven't committed your life to Jesus Christ, your ungodly inner life will bring both condemnation and eternal judgment by God. But His forgiveness is available for the unbeliever who will ask. Jesus died on the cross, paying the penalty for sin, and He was resurrected to eternal life, providing victory over death for anyone who will trust Him. But for the believer who sins, there is no condemnation, only the call to confess that inner life sin (or outer life sin) and receive the forgiveness He already has waiting. That will restore both your fellowship with Him and your inner peace.

One more comment on verse 14. The Lord starts His repeat of the promise with what may be the greatest rhetorical question ever asked. "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Reminder – a rhetorical question is one intended to make an assertion of affirmation or denial. An answer by the hearer is not expected because the condition has already been declared in the question itself.) There are obviously things that the Lord cannot do – commit sin, for example. But He can do anything possible within the range of His infinite

attributes, and He wanted Abraham and Sarah to build their faith on that fact and on His revealed plan for them.

**All right, we're ready for chapter 19. We'll put it in 5<sup>th</sup> gear and move quickly!**

## **II. God's Justified Wrath**

### **A. Before the Destruction (Genesis 19:1-23) (2 Peter 2:6-9)**

#### **1. Lot provided hospitality and safety to the unknown visitors**

Let's look at the first three verses. **READ vss 1-3.** Lot. Hoo-boy, Lot. Some time has passed since we saw him choose the lush, green, Jordan Valley for his flocks and herds. You may remember the application point from that incident – that the most attractive option may not be the best choice? Chapter 19 will demonstrate that in Lot's life. We first see in this chapter that Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. This was significant in that day and time. Most cities had high, thick walls surrounding the community for protection from wild animals and invaders. The main gate was an important location for observing commercial activity and the coming and going of people. The leading men of the town were usually from the business or governmental or religious groups. They would gather there as part of their function in the community. So why was Lot, this itinerant, tent-dwelling, monotheistic rancher from another part of the world, sitting there as one of the civic leaders in Sodom? He no longer lives in a tent, but in a house large enough for his family and for visitors. How did he attain this status? As you might expect, such a change occurred gradually. Henry Morris describes it effectively. **READ section on p. 304.**

We see in verses 2 and 3 that he wanted to provide overnight accommodations and food to these two strangers. He was also concerned about their safety, though he may not have explained that issue to them. But it was not going to be a nice quiet night of rest in the guest bedroom. Verses 4 and 5. **READ vss 4-5.** There was a mob surrounding the house, and their intention was to obtain sexual gratification by physically abusing the two visitors. To a reasonable, moral person, this seems like madness. And it is a form of insanity. The power of the flesh that is enabled through unrestrained sexual desire and gratification is fearsome. **(REPEAT prior sentence)** Years ago I knew a man who had a nice wife, healthy kids, a good job, and a nice home. But he became physically attracted to a co-worker's wife, and began to pursue a relationship with her. She was an easy target, having already been involved with men other than her husband. The fire was lit, and it began to burn intensely. I call his final condition insanity because his wife and co-worker became aware of the problem, but he wouldn't or couldn't relent. He was willing to sacrifice everything in his life – his wife, kids, job, home – to continue on his insane path. The mob around Lot's house represents something of that condition. Only one thing is important, and they will get it. Terrifying.

## 2. Lot tried to intervene and was then helped by the angels.

We're down to verse 6. **READ vss 6-8.** To use the current vernacular, **WAIT!!! WHAT???** His two virgin daughters? How can this be? Shocking!!! It's commendable that he tried to stop the men, but this was his solution? Horrible torture and likely death for his two daughters? Perhaps by then he had discovered that his guests were angelic messengers and he felt that he must protect them at all costs. Or perhaps the situation was so intense that his desperate mind was unable to think of any reasonable way out. Lot's easy, worldly life is collapsing all around him. Derek Kidner provides this commentary on the scene. "Trying to do his best, Lot has jeopardized his daughters, enraged his townsmen, and finally required rescue by those he was trying to protect. The angels' visit has shattered the uneasy peace in which he has lived for too long." His spiritual failures became obvious. But God's Word won't allow us to completely write Lot off as a useless failure.

Let's look at 2 Peter 2:6-9. " <sup>6</sup>and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; <sup>7</sup>and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men <sup>8</sup>(for by what he saw and heard, *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), <sup>9</sup>then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from <sup>la</sup>temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment ..."

So here we get a sense of Lot's predicament. His life choices placed him in a difficult situation. He enjoyed the business success and comforts of pagan city life so much that he was fully invested in them. He couldn't find his way out. But the constant, pervasive and perverse immorality tormented his soul every day. What a miserable life he had.

But Abraham had interceded for him and his family, so the angels sprang into action. They pulled Lot inside and supernaturally disabled the mob. Verse 9. **READ vss 9-11.** Then they warned Lot what was about to happen, and encouraged him to let his future sons-in-law know so they could escape. Verse 12. **READ vss 12-14.** Lot's influence on these two men was so weak that they couldn't believe that what he was telling them was really true. Then Lot himself began to wonder if their warnings were really true. Verse 15. **READ vss 15-16.** Lot hesitated. The angels had four hands, so they used all of them to forcibly remove Lot and his 3 family members from Sodom. Once outside the city, there were instructions for the refugees. Verse 17. **READ vs 17.** But Lot couldn't accept living away from the comfort of a city. Verse 18. **READ vss 18-20.** The Lord, through the angel, graciously allows them to go to Zoar instead of the mountains. Verse 21. **READ vss 21-23.** The time had come for God's wrath to fall on the Jordan Valley.

## **B. The Destruction and its Aftermath (Genesis 19:24-38)**

### **1. God's destructive wrath was poured out on those wicked residents and their towns**

Fire and burning sulfur consumed everything on the ground in the area except for the smallest town, Zoar. God had completely destroyed everything else. Verse 24. **READ vss 24-25.** But despite the angel's warning, Lot's wife couldn't quite let go of everything she had loved about her home in Sodom. Verse 26. **READ vs 26.** She became a monument to her own disobedience. One geologist has commented that salt is quite common in the ground structures of that area, with some deposits in column-like form. It's ironic that some of those columns have been named "Lot's Wife" by the locals. When she looked back toward Sodom, if she was wishing she could have remained there, in a way, she did. She and her husband were also memorialized by Jesus in Luke 17:28-33, where He teaches on some of the hard life lessons demonstrated by Lot and his wife, especially verse 33 – "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

### **2. From a distance, Abraham observed the smoking ruins**

Verse 27. **READ vss 27-29.** This could have been an emotional time of reflection for Abraham. The Lord had promised that He wouldn't destroy Sodom if 10 righteous people were there. Obviously there weren't 10. But perhaps Lot and some of his family had been protected. The Genesis record doesn't say that Abraham and his nephew ever saw or knew about each other again.

### **3. The sad story of Lot's foolish daughters**

Lot's life degenerated into living in a mountain cave with two foolish daughters, his own damaged conscience, and a supply of wine. We'll not cover the details today, but you should read the account in verses 30 through 38. His legacy? A life showing the bad fruit of living of the world while living in the world. His only two descendants, through his two daughters, were the fathers of two tribes -- the Moabites and the Ammonites, who plagued Israel as enemies in the centuries that followed.

## **Personal Implications**

- Seek every opportunity and means to deepen your personal relationship with the Lord
- Follow the example of Abraham and Jesus to be a strong intercessor for the needs of others
- Mention God's character and promises as the basis for your prayer requests
- Pursue a mind and heart environment that the Lord is pleased to know about and dwell in
- Be aware that a lack of urgency to obey God is a sure sign of compromise and rationalization
- Ask the Lord to help you recognize when you are becoming shaped by the fallen world we must live in but not be in love with