

Safe by Association

Genesis 18

INTRODUCTION: You're driving along, maybe even pushing the limit a little bit, when suddenly you see those little white crosses standing like silent witnesses. They're not there by accident. They mark the very place where someone's life was cut short. And in that moment, it does more than a posted number on a metal sign ever could. It sobers you. It slows you down. It makes you think, *"If it happened to them, it could happen to me."* I once heard someone say, *"No speed limit sign is as powerful as a white cross on the side of the highway."*

That's the power of consequences. Laws give instruction, but consequences give conviction. And that's what we see in Genesis — Abraham heeding God's covenant with seriousness, Lot drifting until the consequences came crashing down, and Sodom becoming a monument to what happens when sin goes unchecked.

CONTEXT: Years earlier, strife broke out between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot over grazing land. To avoid further conflict, Abraham graciously offered Lot the first choice of territory: *"If you go left, I will go right; if you go right, I will go left."*

Rather than seeking the counsel of the Lord or deferring to the wisdom of his elder uncle, Lot lifted his eyes and fixed them on the lush, well-watered plains near Sodom and Gomorrah. His decision was driven not by faith, but by sight — and that choice set the trajectory for his family.

By the time we reach chapter 18 — nearly twenty-four years later — the culture of Sodom had seeped into Lot's household. His compromise had become their condition. It is against this backdrop that God Himself appears to Abraham with a message of covenant and of coming judgment.

TEXT: Genesis 18:1–3 (ESV)

¹ And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

Abraham quickly instructs Sarah and his servant to prepare a fine dinner of veal for these heavenly visitors. Two, we are told, are Angels; their names are not given, but many speculate that one is *Gabriel*. The third guest is the Lord Himself; this is likely the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

He explains to Abraham that his 99-year-old wife, Sarah, will soon conceive a child, which causes her to laugh. The Lord, knowing all things, asked why Sarah laughed and reminded them that with God, all things are possible.

Genesis 18:16–22 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ Then the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave,

Sodom and Gomorrah are like twin capital cities. With dozens of smaller communities surrounding them and under their influence.

²¹ 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.” ²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.

So there we have two angels going to Sodom on a recognizance mission and the Lord here with Abraham. Keep in mind that God is not sending these angels because of His lack of information, but rather so that every fact may be confirmed by two or more witnesses and so that these angels, who would be responsible for executing Judgement, could see the need for it firsthand.

We are told that as the two angels went down to investigate Sodom, Abraham lingered before the Lord. He began to ask the Lord a series of questions. All have as their premise the *concept* of “**safe by association**”.

Genesis 18:23–33 (ESV)

²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” ²⁶ And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷ Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹ He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³² Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this

once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” ³³ And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

As we move into chapter 19, we get a glimpse of...

1. Sodom's Corruption

Genesis 19:1–3 (ESV)

¹ The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth ² and said, “My lords, please turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night *in the town square*.” ³ But he **pressed them strongly**; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Do you know places like that? Where would you just not take your mom? Or your daughter? That was downtown Sodom.

Remember, the Lord told Abraham, “The Outcry Against Sodom is great.” We are told that the offense of Sodom was so great that neighboring cities had cried out to God for their destruction.

Consider that for a moment.

- It is one thing to be **frustrated** with your neighbor.
- It is another thing to even **hate** your neighbor.
- But imagine praying to God for Him to pour out his **wrath** on your neighbor. Can you imagine how horrible they must have been? That’s a really bad HOA.
- And for God to respond and give it **serious consideration**? That was the case with Sodom. These people were so wicked that God would pour out His wrath in a localized manner on them.

What was the sin of Sodom? Well, we told in a number of places... one is Ezekiel 16.

A. Conceit -

Ezekiel 16:49–50 (ESV)

⁴⁹ Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had **pride**,

Can you imagine being so evil that your neighbors prayed for your destruction, and you sincerely being proud of that fact? When I hear that someone is upset with me, I cannot brush it off. I must talk to that person. I must ensure everything is in order. I cannot sleep without it. Sodom heard of her neighbors' distress, and she took pride in it.

B. Callousness -

Ezekiel 16:49b (ESV)

She had...excess food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

We are told that Sodom was marked by prosperity without compassion. Perhaps she believed that her prosperity was a mark of God's pleasure. However, God was not at all pleased. As a matter of fact, his sword was drawn.

C. Corruption -

Ezekiel 16:50

⁵⁰ They were haughty and did an **abomination** before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.

Something you need to know about the Bible text - it's modest. There are some things that are considered so perverse that the author brings a literary curtain over the scene so we will not see what is happening. I will go only as far as the text goes.

We are told in Jude 7 (ESV)

⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise **indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire**, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

The text gives us a few clues about the severity of its sin.

- **It was abusive -**

Genesis 19:4 (ESV)

⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, **both young and old**, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.

Now, the phrase young here is the term for adolescent children, typically between the ages of 10 and 15. 10-year-olds are involved in what's happening here.... What does that mean? That means that there was no boundary to their indecency. They would take advantage of the most helpless among them.

Folks, Jesus said, *"It would be far better for a 3-ton millstone to be tied around your neck and you thrown into the Atlantic Ocean than for you to harm a child".*

- **It was pervasive -**

Genesis 19:4 (ESV)

⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, **all the people to the last man**, surrounded the house.

So all the people, men, women, young, old, everybody was engaged in this perversion.

- **It was escalating -**

Genesis 19:5 (ESV)

⁵ And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? **Bring them out to us, that we may know them.**"

It seems that the people knew something was different about Lot's guests. They were a different race, even angelic. There is something about sexual immorality that escalates. Like a drug, you have to have new kinds and new amounts to get the previous fix. This city wanted to express its perversion in new ways.

- **It was Permeating -**
Jeremiah 49:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ As when Sodom and Gomorrah **and their neighboring cities** were overthrown, says the Lord...

So this sort of thing was affecting the cities around them. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. That shows the wisdom and even kindness of God in judging this city. If he had allowed it to continue, there would have been an end to the soul-damming effect of Sodom's sin.

So stop there for a moment and get the picture - Angels are in the home of Lot. Men are surrounding the home demanding that Lot send the angels out so that they could rape them. These angels have a commission from God to destroy this city... they only need to get Lot and his family to safety first.

But keep in mind, makes it clear that God will judge **Sodom's Corruption**, but it spends an equal amount of time on...

2. Lot's Compromise

Lot is the kind of man who never took ownership of his personal faith. He cruised behind Abraham.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever watched NASCAR? One car tucks in right behind another to "draft." By slipping into the slipstream, the back car saves fuel, conserves energy, and keeps up speed — but it isn't running on its own. That's Lot spiritually. He was drafting behind Abraham. He benefitted from Abraham's faith, Abraham's prayers, Abraham's covenant — but he never developed his own walk with God.

Notice the downward progression of the text: first, he pitched his tents *toward* Sodom (Gen. 13:12). Before long, he was *in* Sodom. Then, by chapter 19, he's sitting at the city gates — a position of civic leadership.

God had told Israel later to put His Word on their heads, their doorposts, and their **gates**. In other words, "*Let My righteousness shape your thinking, your home, and your politics.*" Lot instead let Sodom shape him.

Keep in mind, the NT tells us that Lot was saved. He had enough faith to be saved, but it never permeated him...

His ***hymnbook*** was right, his ***prayer book*** was right, but it never penetrated his ***checkbook***.

When Abraham turned down the riches of the king of Sodom — refusing to be indebted to a wicked ruler — Lot, by contrast, moved right into the city. Abraham lived by conviction; Lot lived by convenience.

2 Peter 2:7 tells us Lot was “oppressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked” (2 Peter 2:7).

That word “***oppressed***” literally means *to wear down*, like a man who’s worked overtime for weeks on end.

Every single day in Sodom took a toll on his soul. And yet — after 15 years in the city — not one friend was won.

Let me show you a very sad text -

Genesis 19:6–9 (ESV)

⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, ⁷ and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

That’s good, that’s truth - he’s speaking truth to them... but notice the next verse.

⁸ Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

Look how low his view of his own daughters had become. He objectified them; he didn’t lovingly protect them. This is so sad.

⁹ But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.”

Lot referred to them as brothers, they call him an Alien... after all these years, nobody won to Christ, no real friends built.

Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. ¹⁰ But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. ¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

¹² Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place.

¹³ For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.” ¹⁴ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Up! Get out of this

place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.” ***But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.*** ¹⁵ As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.”

¹⁶ ***But he lingered.*** So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. ¹⁷ And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.”

¹⁸ And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords. ¹⁹ Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. ²⁰ Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!”

And still, Lot hesitated. Even as angels dragged him out, he wanted to negotiate: “Please, not the mountains — let me stay in this little city of Zoar.”

That is what we do... Lord, let me keep just a little sin. But there’s no such thing as a “small Sodom.”

²¹ He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. ²² Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. ²³ The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴ ***Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.*** ²⁵ And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶ But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, ***behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.*** ²⁹ So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Judgment came at sunrise. We strike our enemies at night, but God strikes at dawn. His wife looked back — her heart was still in Sodom — and she turned to salt. His sons-in-law stayed behind. His daughters, so twisted by the culture, could not even imagine a normal marriage. From their drunken union with Lot came Moab and Ammon — peoples that later opposed Israel until they too were destroyed.

INVITATION:

What hope do we have who, like the heroes of this story, have also crouched toward Sodom? Then, our only hope is that we will be deemed **SAFE BY ASSOCIATION.**

- The Lord concedes to Abraham's request, and he says, "No, Abraham, if I find 50 righteous in the city, the 1000s who are guilty will be deemed **SAFE BY ASSOCIATION**.
- Well, Abraham gets to thinking about Sodom, and he realizes that 50 righteous may be hard to find... so he pushes it a little further - what if there are only 45? The Lord says, "No, Abraham, if I find 45 righteous in the city, the 1000s who are guilty will be deemed **SAFE BY ASSOCIATION**.
- Abraham continues until he gets down to 10 people.... What if there are only 10 righteous in the city? The Lord says, "No, Abraham, if I find 10 righteous in the city, the 1000s who are guilty will be deemed **SAFE BY ASSOCIATION**.
- It almost begs for him to go further....**What if there was only one?**

BTW, our entire faith is built on the concept of Safe by Association... because as we await the final Judgment, we can only survive if we are associated with the only true righteous one better than Abraham has come.