

Genesis Lesson 13: Genesis 18:16 – 19:38

Lecture

- Let's begin with Genesis 18: 16 – 33.
 - What follows in this section is a fascinating pleading by Abraham to God. Abraham takes on the role of intercessor.
 - In Genesis 18:16-19, God considers hiding from Abraham what he is about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - This is a soliloquy; God is having a conversation with himself.
 - All nations on earth will be blessed through Abraham. This is a repetition of the promise of Genesis 12:3.
 - God has chosen Abraham to keep God's ways by doing what is right and just and to instruct his children and descendants in God's ways.
 - We have earlier discussed that in Genesis 20:7 God declares that Abraham is his prophet.
 - For these reasons, God decides to share his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham.
 - God's decision is consistent with Amos 3:7:
 - "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. "
 - Beginning in Genesis 18:20-21, God shares directly with Abraham what he plans to do – visit the cities to see if their sin is as great as he has heard.
 - Much like the blood of Abel cried out to God for justice (Genesis 4:10), those offended by the great sins of Sodom and Gomorrah cried out to God for justice.
 - Just like in the Tower of Babel passage, God has no need to "go down" to see what is going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. He can plainly see the evil for himself.

- What had God heard? We get an answer to that from the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 16:49-50:
 - “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.”
 - Jude 1:7 adds the following:
 - “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”
 - Victor Hamilton says that Sodom was guilty of social immorality as well as sexual immorality. John Walton expands social immorality to include the threats of violence against the visitors and the neglect of the hospitality norms of the day.
- Abraham must have had a sense about what God intended to do with Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - Psalm 146:8c,9c is foundational to all the Old Testament.
 - “the LORD loves the righteous... but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”
 - Notice that Abraham does not dispute God’s characterization of Sodom’s sinful activities. He also does not urge the citizens of Sodom to repent.
 - It is interesting that in Genesis 18:21, God leaves the door open for not acting against the cities. He says, “If not, I will know.”
 - It is this small hope which emboldens Abraham to intercede with God.
- Abraham must have known at this point that his nephew Lot and family had settled in Sodom.
- Abraham has certainly already discerned the character of God that he would not willingly punish the righteous with the wicked.

- Abraham also demonstrates compassion for the few righteous he believes may live in Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He refers to God as the Judge of all the earth.
- He pleads with God to spare the city of Sodom if 50 righteous people can be found, and God agrees.
 - We might ask ourselves a question at this point. Does Abraham consider Lot and his family righteous? Genesis 19 will soon tell us otherwise about this family. They are as wicked as the men of Sodom, but for different reasons.
 - Other questions we might ask are:
 - “What effect will the 50 righteous people have on the wicked people of Sodom?” The answer to this is none, since God knows there are not 50 righteous people in Sodom.
 - “Will the righteous be able to bring about substantive change in Sodom and how long will that take?” The answer to the first question is no and the answer to the second is that it will never happen.
 - “How much time is God willing to grant the righteous before he decides to take action?” The answer is less than 1 day.
- Abraham speaks up boldly again! Although, he adds humbly that he is no more than ashes and dust.
- He asks God to save Sodom if there are 45 righteous present and God agrees.
- Then Abraham pleads for the sake of the 40, and the 30 and the 10 and God agrees.
- God never responds to Abraham’s intercessions with anger but concludes the interchange after the agreement on 10 righteous people and he leaves.

- Where were Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar located?
 - Scholars disagree on the exact locations.
 - Some argue for the northern end of the Dead Sea.
 - Others argue for the southern end of the Dead Sea, based upon the bitumen pits in The Valley of Siddim (Genesis 14:10) and a 6th century AD Madaba (modern-day Jordan) mosaic map which contains a city named Zoara.

- Why does God save Lot and his family?
 - Genesis 19:29: “So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.”
 - God “remembered Abraham” may be a reference to Abraham’s pleadings the previous day.
 - Lot and his family are not spared on their merits. They are spared solely based upon Abraham’s intercession.
 - Nevertheless, God destroyed the 2 cities due to their wickedness.

- Why was Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt?
 - Genesis 19:17 states, “As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, ‘Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!’”
 - In his commentary, John Walton makes the following argument:
 - The prohibition “don’t look back” does not mean do not look at the destruction.
 - Anyone standing on the city walls of Zoar would have been able to witness the destruction.
 - Genesis 19:28 states that even Abraham could see the destruction from where he stood the next day.

- John Walton proposes that the command sequence should read: “Get out of here;” “Don’t turn back;” and “Don’t stop before reaching your destination.”
 - This is supported by Jesus’ comments in Luke 17: 28-32 when he is comparing the destruction of Sodom to Christ’s second coming:
 - “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.³⁰ “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.³¹ On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything.”
 - Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt during the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because she turned back towards the cities.
- What is the point of the final story about Lot and his 2 daughters?
 - The story explains the genealogy of the Ammonites and the Moabites.
 - During the time of Moses, the Jordan Valley was occupied by the Ammonites, the Amorites, and the Moabites.
 - The territory occupied by the Ammonites was between the Arnon and Jabbok River Valleys. This territory is in modern-day Jordan.
 - The ancient Iron-Age capital of the Ammonites was Rabbah or Rabbath-Ammon, now the site of the modern-day capital of Jordan, Amman.
 - The Moabite territory was originally on both sides of the Arnon River and east of the Dead Sea. At some points in its history, the Amorites captured the territory north of the Arnon river. Moab had 2 capitals: Karak and Dhiban.
 - Today, this land is the southern-most part of modern-day Jordan.
 - Both the Ammonites and Moabites had a long history of animosity against Israel.

- God clearly must have finally had enough of the evil doings of the Ammonites for he pronounced judgement against them in Jeremiah 49:1-6:
 - Concerning the Ammonites. Thus says the LORD: “Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why then has Milcom dispossessed Gad, and his people settled in its cities? ² Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will cause the battle cry to be heard against Rabbah of the Ammonites; it shall become a desolate mound, and its villages shall be burned with fire; then Israel shall dispossess those who dispossessed him, says the LORD. ³ “Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste! Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah! Put on sackcloth, lament, and run to and fro among the hedges! For Milcom shall go into exile, with his priests and his officials. ⁴ Why do you boast of your valleys, O faithless daughter, who trusted in her treasures, saying, ‘Who will come against me?’ ⁵ Behold, I will bring terror upon you, declares the Lord GOD of hosts, from all who are around you, and you shall be driven out, every man straight before him, with none to gather the fugitives. ⁶ “But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites, declares the LORD.”
 - This passage shows both the justice of God and the mercy of God.
 - He must punish the Ammonites for all their wars against the Israelites, for occupying the land belonging to the tribe of Gad after they were taken into Assyrian exile, and for turning away from God and worshipping Molech (Milcom). This worship included child sacrifice.
 - In the same paragraph he demonstrates his mercies that he will restore them to greatness, perhaps in the Last Days.
 - Jeremiah has a similar oracle against the Moabites in Jeremiah 48: 46-47:
 - “Woe to you, Moab! The people of Chemosh are destroyed; your sons are taken into exile and your daughters into captivity. ⁴⁷ “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,” declares the LORD.”

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 1:7

1. Read Genesis 18:16-21.

a. What does the Lord consider hiding from Abraham?

The Lord considers hiding from Abraham what he plans to do with Sodom and Gomorrah.

b. Why?

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.” Genesis 18:18-19

c. What has the Lord heard about Sodom and Gomorrah?

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.” Genesis 18:20-21

d. How do you think the Lord heard about Sodom and Gomorrah?

- Perhaps Abraham had been praying about the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The Lord may have heard about Sodom and Gomorrah from other nations.

e. How does Ezekiel 18:23 add context?

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? Ezekiel 18:23

2. Read Genesis 18:22-33.

- a. How do you know that God revealed his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham?
Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Genesis 18:23
- b. What concern did Abraham raise to God?
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?” Genesis 18:23-25
- c. Whom may Abraham have been thinking about?
Abraham was thinking about Lot and his family, who lived in Sodom.
- d. Why does Abraham feel that he can challenge God’s decision?
- Abraham felt comfortable challenging God’s decision because he was in a right relationship with the Lord; he trusted God.
 - Further, Abraham knows that God is a just God.
- e. How many righteous people must God find in Sodom to spare it from destruction?
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.” Genesis 18:32
- f. Where do Abraham and God go next? (Hint: see also Genesis 18:21.)
Abraham returned home and God went to look down upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. Read Genesis 19:1-29.

- a. Whom did the Lord send to Sodom to look for righteous people?
The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. Genesis 19:1

- b. What happened when they arrived in Sodom?
“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”
“No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.”
³ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom —both young and old—surrounded the house. Genesis 19:2-4
- c. What did the men of Sodom want with the visitors?
They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” Genesis 19:5
- d. How did Lot respond?
Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷ and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.” Genesis 19:6-8
- e. What do the words in Lot’s response to the men of Sodom suggest about his relationship to these men?
Lot called the men friends; Lot knew the proclivities of the men of Sodom.
- f. Would you consider Lot’s response a righteous act? Why or why not?
No, it was not a righteous act. He was willing to sacrifice his daughters to the mob, which was a truly despicable proposal.
- g. What did the men of Sodom reply?
“Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. Genesis 19:9
- h. How did the 2 visitors protect Lot and his family?
But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. ¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door. Genesis 19:10-11

- i. What did the 2 visitors tell Lot?
The two men said to Lot, “Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here,¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.” Genesis 19:12-13
- j. How did Lot’s sons-in-law react?
So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, “Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city! ” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. Genesis 19:14
- k. How did the 2 visitors protect Lot and his family a 2nd time?
With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished. ”
¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!” Genesis 19:15-17
- l. What did Lot protest?
But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please!¹⁹ Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. ²⁰ Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.” Genesis 19:18-20
- m. Why do you think Lot protested?
Lot had gotten used to city living. He did not want to go back to a nomadic lifestyle.
- n. What was the compromise?
He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. ²² But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.) Genesis 19:21-22
- o. What specific instructions were given to Lot and his family?
Flee quickly to Zoar, don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain.

- p. Who ignored the instructions? Why? What was the result?
- But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. Genesis 19:26
 - Lot's wife wanted to see if the destruction would be as complete as they had been told. Perhaps she also regretted the loss of her lifestyle.
- q. How did the Lord destroy Sodom and Gomorrah?
- Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. Genesis 19:24-25
- r. What do you think Abraham was thinking when he saw smoke rising from the land around Sodom and Gomorrah?
- Abraham may have been worried that Lot and his family had been destroyed.
- s. How did God show mercy to Lot?
- So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. Genesis 19:29
- t. Why did God do this?
- God showed mercy to Lot for Abraham's sake.

4. Read Genesis 19:30-38.

- a. Where did Lot and his 2 daughters settle?
- Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. Genesis 19:30
- b. Why do you think they chose this location?
- Lot may have been fearful of the reaction of the people of Zoar to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- c. What concerns did Lot's 2 daughters have?
- One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. Genesis 19:31

d. What was their solution?

Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father." Genesis 19:32

e. What 2 nations resulted?

So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today. Genesis 19:36-38

f. How does Zephaniah 2:8-11 add context?

"I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land. ⁹ Therefore, as surely as I live," declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, "surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land." ¹⁰ This is what they will get in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking the people of the LORD Almighty. ¹¹ The LORD will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the earth. Distant nations will bow down to him, all of them in their own lands. Zephaniah 2:8-11

Genesis Lesson 13
Genesis 18:16–19:38

God's Plans for Sodom and Gomorrah

- Abraham Takes on the Role of Intercessor
- God Considers Hiding from Abraham What He Is about to Do to Sodom and Gomorrah
 - A Soliloquy (God Talking to Himself)
 - All Nations on Earth Will Be Blessed Through Abraham; Repeat of Genesis 12:3
 - God Has Chosen Abraham to Keep God's Ways and Instruct His Descendants in God's Ways
 - Genesis 20:7: God Declares Abraham Is His Prophet
 - So, God Decides to Share His Plans with Abraham
 - Consistent with Amos 3:7

God's Plans for Sodom and Gomorrah

- God Will Visit the Cities to See if Their Sin Is as Great as He Has Heard
- Much Like the Blood of Abel Cried out to God for Justice (Genesis 4:10), Those Offended by the Great Sins of Sodom and Gomorrah Cried out to God
- Just Like the Tower of Babel, God Has No Need to "Go Down" to See the Evil of the People

God's Plans for Sodom and Gomorrah

- What Had God Heard?
 - Ezekiel 16:49-50
 - Jude 1:7
- Victor Hamilton: Sodom Was Guilty of Social and Sexual Immorality
- John Walton: Social Immorality to Include Threats of Violence Against the Visitors and the Neglect of the Hospitality Norms of the Day

Abraham Intercedes

- Abraham Must Have Had a Sense of God's Intentions
- Psalm 146:8c,9c
- Abraham Does Not Dispute God's Characterization of Sodom and Gomorrah
- Abraham Does Not Urge the Citizens of Sodom to Repent
- Genesis 18:21: God Leaves the Door Open for Not Acting Against the Cities
- This Small Hope Emboldens Abraham

Abraham Intercedes

- Abraham Must Know Where Lot Has Settled
- He Has Discerned That God Would Not Willingly Punish the Righteous with the Wicked
- Abraham Demonstrates Compassion for the Few Righteous He Believes May Live There
- He Refers to God as the Judge of All the Earth
- He Pleads with God to Spare the City if 50 Righteous People Are There; God Agrees
- Does Abraham Consider Lot and His Family Righteous? Genesis 19 Will Tell Us They Are Wicked Also

Abraham Intercedes

- Other Questions:
 - What Effect Will the 50 Righteous Have on the Wicked of Sodom?
Answer: None; There Are Not 50 Righteous
 - Will the Righteous Bring About Change and How Long Will That Take? Answers: No and It Will Never Happen
 - How Much Time Is God Willing to Grant the Righteous Before He Acts? Answer: Less Than 1 Day
- Abraham Speaks Up Boldly Again, Yet with Humility
- Abraham Pleads for 45, 40, 30, and Then 10 Righteous; God Agrees
- God Never Responds to Abraham's Intercessions with Anger

Locating Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar

- Scholars Disagree on the Exact Locations
- Some Argue for the Northern End of the Dead Sea
- Others Argue for the Southern End of the Dead Sea
 - Genesis 14:10; Bitumen Pits in the Valley of Siddem
 - 6th Century AD Madaba Map Which Names Zoara

Locating Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar



Zoara on the Madaba Map



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Sodom and Gomorrah Today



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Why Did God Save Lot and His Family?

- Genesis 19:29
- God “Remembered Abraham” May Be a Reference to Abraham’s Pleadings the Previous Day
- Lot and His Family Are Not Spared on Their Merits
- They are Spared Solely Based Upon Abraham’s Intercession
- Nevertheless, God Destroyed the 2 Cities Due to Their Wickedness

Lot and His Family Flee Sodom



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Lot's Wife

- Genesis 19:17
- John Walton: "Don't Look Back" Does Not Mean Do Not Look at the Destruction
 - Anyone Standing on the Zoar City Walls Would Have Seen It
 - Genesis 19:28: Even Abraham Could See It the Next Day
 - Proposed Sequence: "Get Out of Here"; "Don't Turn Back"; "Don't Stop Before Reaching Your Destination"
 - Luke 17:28-32
 - Lot's Wife Turned Into a Pillar of Salt During the Destruction Because She Turned Back Towards the Cities

Lot and His Daughters



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Lot and His 2 Daughters

- The Story Explains the Genealogy of the Ammonites and the Moabites
- During the Time of Moses, the Jordan Valley Was Occupied by the Ammonites, the Amorites, and the Moabites
- Ammonites Occupied the Territory Between the Arnon and Jabbok River Valles; In Modern-day Jordan
- Ancient Iron-age Capital of the Ammonites was Rabbah or Rabbath-Ammon; Now the Capital of Jordan, Amman
- The Moabite Territory Was on Both Sides of the Arnon River and East of the Dead Sea; Now in Southern Jordan
- Moab Had 2 Capitals: Karak and Dhiban

Ammon and Moab



Ammonites and Moabites

- Had a Long History of Animosity Against Israel
- 2 Passages Demonstrate Judgment Against the Ammonites and Moabites as Well as God's Restoration
- Ammonites: Jeremiah 49:1-6
 - Wars with the Israelites
 - Occupying the Territory of Gad
 - Worshipping Molech (Milcom); Child Sacrifice
- Moabites: Jeremiah 48: 46-47
 - Worshipping Chemosh