



# Sodom and Gomorrah

## *Lesson Focus*

The Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham and announced judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sin and wickedness God saw there. Abraham pleaded not only for the cities but also for his nephew Lot. God must punish sin, but He had mercy on Lot and his family.

## *Key Passages*

Genesis 18:1–33, 19:1–29

## *What You Will Learn*

- That God's justice demands a punishment for sin.
- The sins that God hates.
- How God shows mercy toward sinners.

## *Memory Verse*

**Genesis 12:1–2** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

# Prepare to Learn

## Scriptural Background

The journey of Abram to Canaan is one wrought with detours and adventure. The Lord told Abram to leave the land of his family and settle in a land the Lord would show him. Abram was to be the head of a great nation, a blessing to many, and his name would be great (Genesis 12:1–3). Abram listened, obeyed, and left the land of Ur. God tells us that Lot, Abram’s nephew, was part of the company of travelers from the beginning of the journey. After settling first in Haran (Genesis 11:31), they proceeded at the Lord’s call to Canaan. Then there was another detour to Egypt because of a famine (Genesis 12:10). Through all of their wanderings, the Lord continued to increase their livestock until the land was no longer sufficient to support Abram, Lot, and all of their possessions (Genesis 13:5–7). This is when uncle and nephew parted ways—Abram to the land of Canaan and Lot to the cities of the valley—where sin and wickedness prevailed (Genesis 13:12–13).

God’s justice demands punishment for sin and wickedness, and He was soon to providentially bring an end to the sin that permeated Sodom and Gomorrah. In a meeting between Abraham, the Angel of the Lord (Jesus), and two angels, the Lord confirmed that Abraham and Sarah would bear a son (Genesis 18:14). He also revealed the plan to

destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20–21).

Abraham pleaded with the Lord to spare the city. However, God must punish sin; His justice demands that He punish those who turn from Him in wickedness. And evidently, there were fewer than ten righteous people in the city (Genesis 18:32). This account illustrates just how wicked men can be. Lot, too, had succumbed to the evil influence of the city as demonstrated when, in order to protect the angels, he offered his own daughters to the men of the city to satisfy their lusts (Genesis 19:6–8).

But God is also merciful. And His mercy was shown to Lot and his daughters. In spite of their own sinfulness, they were spared from the destruction of the city (Genesis 19:16).

This account is tragic. The sin of man is great, and God’s judgment is to be feared—not taken lightly. Lot’s wife did not learn that lesson. And it was only a short time after she was mercifully spared death in the city that she again blatantly disobeyed God during the escape—when she looked back at the destruction behind her (Genesis 19:17). For this she was judged and turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

The terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is an event referred to throughout Scripture to demonstrate the severity of God’s judgment:

Deuteronomy 29:23; Isaiah 1:9, 13:19; Jeremiah 50:40; Lamentations 4:6; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9; Matthew 10:15; Luke 17:28–29; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 1:7.

And yet God also revealed His mercy—by sparing Lot and his daughters. This is the mercy He provides to all sinners who in faith and repentance accept His forgiveness and turn to Jesus Christ.

## Historical/Apologetics Background

There are many who cannot believe that this account could possibly be true. What can we say to those blinded to the truth? First of all, the fact that this event is referenced so many times throughout Scripture (see above for list) verifies that there was never any doubt by these writers that this event occurred just as it was recorded.

We know that those who do not rely on the authority of God's Word resort to relying on man's "evidence." And there was no historical or archaeological evidence to corroborate the biblical account—until recently.

It is clear from various biblical passages that Sodom and Gomorrah should be located in the Dead Sea region. When Abraham and his nephew Lot parted ways (Genesis 13:8–13), Lot chose to settle in the Jordan Valley "in the direction of Zoar" and moved his tents to "the cities of the valley" as far as Sodom. According to Genesis 14, the cities of the plain, or valley, which include Sodom, Gomorrah, Zoar, Zeboiim, and Admah, joined forces to battle a coalition of Mesopotamian kings in the "Valley of Siddim" (Genesis 14:8)—that is, the Salt Sea. This is referring to the Dead Sea region.

Between 1973 and 1979, two archaeologists surveyed an area

southeast of the Dead Sea and located the remains of five cities. From north to south the cities are Bab Edh-Dhra (first discovered in 1924), Numeira, Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir. Could these be the five "cities of the valley" identified in Genesis?

The most remarkable feature of Bab Edh-Dhra is the number of graves. An estimated 20,000 tombs are located on the site. These family tombs held approximately half a million people with over three million pottery vessels. This was clearly a well-populated area in the past, and may well be the ancient city of Sodom.

The excavation of the city of Numeira exposed that this entire area was covered by the ashy debris of its final destruction, up to 16 inches in depth. This, coupled with the fact that the Arabic name for this city has similar consonants as the Hebrew name for Gomorrah, led biblical archaeologists to conclude that this could be the city of Gomorrah.

"Proof" is not necessary to verify God's Word. In fact, we need nothing more than the word of the one who ordained and accomplished this historical account. However, God allows for these confirmations so that we will be better equipped to defend our faith and the Bible

against the skeptics who attempt to dishonor and discredit it.

The biblical narratives of this time period also fit well with what we know from historical records left by other Middle Eastern societies. The customs, laws, legal agreements, and family arrangements match societies such as the Amorites, Sumerians, and Akkadians. For example, during this particular period in history in the Middle East, the role of the patriarch in family life was very important. Family structure included three levels: tribe, clan (family), and household (Joshua 7:14). The fundamental societal unit of the household included a patriarch, his wife, his sons and their wives, his grandchildren, and other dependents. These households often lived in a compound, with houses around a central courtyard, encircled by a low wall.

Abraham, as patriarch of his household, was responsible for the economic support, religious well-being, and safety of his entire household (Genesis 14:13–16). In Genesis 18 we see Abraham, as the patriarch, fulfilling his hospitality obligations to protect and care for sojourners or aliens (Leviticus 19:33–34). Hospitality was one of the most highly regarded virtues of the ancient world, and still is in many societies of the Middle East. Abraham showed his guests great honor by preparing them a meal.

Again, as we compare the History Book of the Universe with secular historical accounts, we gain confirmation and confidence that God's Word is true.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

## Studying God's Word

How can God be both just and merciful?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

**Genesis 18:1–33**

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## Respectable Sins

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and consider your own personal understanding of the nature of sin.

1. Look at the list of sins in verses 9–11. Which sin in each pair below would you consider worse? (Circle one.)
  - Adultery or theft
  - Homosexuality or drunkenness
  - Reviling (insulting someone) or coveting
2. Does this passage say that any of the sins is better or worse than the others?
3. Have you ever committed any of these sins? (Consider that looking with lust is the same as adultery [Matthew 5:28], and theft is theft, regardless of the value of the object.)
4. What is the punishment for committing even one of the sins? See verse 10.

5. Is there such a thing as an acceptable or respectable sin?
6. How does verse 11 give you hope in Christ?

## **God's Word in the Real World**

1. Abraham and Sarah both laughed at the idea of having a child in their old age despite God's clear promise to them. How does knowing that God was faithful to His promise to them encourage you in your walk before the Lord?
2. How does God's promise of the Seed of Abraham, Jesus, demonstrate His mercy?
3. If you were sharing the gospel with someone who claims to be homosexual, how could you use 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 to minimize some of the strong emotional reaction that comes with this issue?
4. Many people object, and say that eternal punishment in hell is not appropriate for the little sins that people commit on earth. Why is it just that any sin against God, from a lie to murder, is worthy of such strong punishment?

- Using the analogy of a criminal standing before a judge, how can we help others understand that God is both merciful and just?

## Prayer Requests

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