

The Book of Genesis, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: The Lord Visits Abraham; Sodom Destroyed

Genesis 18:1–19:38

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These two chapters hold together the welcome of God, the promise of Isaac, Abraham's great intercession, and the judgment of Sodom with the rescue of Lot. Doctrinally, they reveal God's justice as the righteous Judge of all the earth, the power and privilege of intercessory prayer, God's intimate knowledge of our hearts (He heard Sarah's private laugh), His power to do the impossible, and His mercy in delivering His own even in the midst of judgment. Peter and Jesus both treat these events as real history and as a sober warning of the judgment to come.

Handle the mature content of Sodom with restraint appropriate to a mixed audience. The wickedness of Sodom was grave, pervasive, and included sexual immorality, but Scripture also names pride, gluttony, and callous indifference to the needy among its sins (Ezekiel 16:49). Teach the seriousness of the city's rebellion and the justice of God's judgment without dwelling on sordid details, and treat the disturbing episode involving Lot's daughters at the end of chapter nineteen briefly and soberly, drawing the lesson (the bitter fruit of Sodom's influence and of fear) without sensationalism. Keep the focus on the character of God: just, patient, merciful, and able.

Formationally, the passage calls students to bold and persistent prayer for others, to fresh faith in a God for whom nothing is too hard, to watchfulness against the gradual drift of worldliness that ensnared Lot, and to hearts that look forward in faith rather than back in longing for what God is calling them to leave. Lead them, finally, to hold God's justice and mercy together, finding in Christ the One who bore judgment so that we might be rescued, and living soberly in light of the judgment still to come.

Question 1

Student Question:

Abraham interceded for Sodom, appealing to God as "the Judge of all the earth" who will "do what is just" (18:22–33). What does this reveal about God's justice, and about the role and power of intercessory prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Abraham's prayer for Sodom is one of the great intercessions of Scripture. Having been told of the coming judgment, Abraham does not turn away in indifference; he draws near to God and pleads, with remarkable boldness and humility together, for the city to be spared. He bargains down from fifty righteous to ten, each time appealing to God's justice.

The heart of his appeal is the question, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' (18:25). Abraham rests his prayer on the character of God. He is confident that God will not sweep away the righteous with the wicked, because God is just. His intercession is grounded in who God is.

Draw out what this teaches about prayer. God invites His people into His purposes through intercession. Abraham's praying was not informing God of something He did not know, nor twisting His arm, but participating, as God's friend, in pleading for mercy. James says the prayer of a righteous person 'has great power as it is working' (James 5:16).

Note also the patience of God, who answers Abraham again and again, never wearying of his persistence. God is not annoyed by bold, persistent, humble prayer; He welcomes it. The episode reveals a God who is both perfectly just and genuinely open to the pleading of His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the just Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25).
- Intercessory prayer as participation in God's purposes.
- Prayer grounded in the character of God, not in twisting His arm.
- God's patience with bold, persistent, humble prayer (James 5:16).

Discussion Prompts

- On what does Abraham base his appeal to God?
- What does this teach us about the purpose and power of intercession?
- How does God's response model His openness to persistent prayer?

Question 2

Student Question:

Abraham pleaded earnestly for others, even for a wicked city. How faithfully do you pray for other people, including the lost, your community, and those far from God? What would it look like to grow into an intercessor like Abraham?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Abraham's intercession into a challenge to the student's own prayer life. Abraham pleaded earnestly even for a wicked city; many of us pray little for others, and even less for those far from God or hostile to Him.

Help students examine the breadth and earnestness of their prayers. Do we pray for the lost, for our community, for those who oppose the faith, for people we will never meet, or do our prayers rarely extend beyond ourselves and our circle? Intercession is a ministry every believer can exercise.

Cultivate the heart behind it. Abraham cared about Sodom enough to plead for it. Real intercession flows from love for people and confidence in God's mercy. We grow as intercessors as our hearts are enlarged to care about others as God does.

Invite a concrete commitment: a specific person, group, or place far from God that the student will begin to pray for regularly, following Abraham's example of bold, persistent intercession.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to intercede for others, including the lost and the hostile.
- The narrowness of self-focused prayer.
- Intercession flowing from love for people and confidence in God's mercy.
- Growing as an intercessor through regular, earnest prayer.

Discussion Prompts

- How faithfully do you pray for others, especially the lost?
- What keeps your prayers from extending beyond yourself?
- Who will you commit to interceding for this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

When Sarah laughed at the promise of a son, the Lord asked, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (18:14). What does this question, and God's hearing of Sarah's private laugh, teach us about God's power and about how well He knows our hearts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Sarah overheard the promise of a son, she laughed to herself, an inward, private laugh of disbelief; she was long past childbearing, and the hope had died. And the Lord, who was not even facing her, heard it and asked Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh?' He had heard the laugh she thought was hidden.

This reveals two things. First, God's intimate knowledge of our hearts. Nothing is hidden from Him, not our words, not our inward thoughts, not the quiet doubts we never speak aloud. 'No creature is hidden from his sight' (Hebrews 4:13). God knew Sarah's secret laugh, and He knows ours.

Second, it reveals God's power, summed up in the question, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' (18:14). The laugh said, 'Impossible.' God's question answers, 'Not for Me.' This is the same God Almighty of chapter seventeen, who delights to act where human possibility has ended.

Help students feel both the searching and the comforting sides. It is searching that God knows our secret unbelief; it is comforting that He addresses it not with condemnation but with a

question that invites fresh faith. He knew Sarah's doubt, and He kept His promise anyway; she who laughed in disbelief would laugh again in joy when Isaac (whose name means 'he laughs') was born.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's intimate knowledge of our hearts, including our secret doubts (Hebrews 4:13).
- 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?': God's power over the impossible (Genesis 18:14).
- God addressing our unbelief with an invitation to faith, not only condemnation.
- God keeping His promise despite our doubt (Isaac, 'he laughs').

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God heard Sarah's private laugh?
- How does 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' confront our doubts?
- How does God respond to Sarah's unbelief?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where do you carry a secret doubt, a quiet "that could never happen," about something God might do in your life or in someone you love? How does "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" speak to that doubt?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to name their own 'Sarah's laugh,' the quiet doubt that something is simply impossible. We often hold such doubts about long-standing situations: a relationship beyond repair, a loved one far from God, a sin we cannot seem to overcome, a prayer unanswered so long we have stopped expecting an answer.

Help students bring these hidden doubts into the light. Like Sarah, we may keep them private, even from ourselves, while they quietly shape our prayers and our hope. God already knows them; naming them honestly is the first step toward fresh faith.

Apply God's question gently. 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' is not a rebuke that shames us for doubting but an invitation to lift our eyes from the impossibility to the God of the impossible. Faith does not deny the difficulty; it remembers the power of God.

Invite a concrete response: the secret 'that could never happen' the student most needs to surrender, and a renewed willingness to pray and hope, trusting God's power even where their own expectation has died.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming our hidden doubts about what God can do.
- How private doubts quietly shape our prayers and hope.
- God's question as invitation to fresh faith, not shame.
- Trusting God's power where our own expectation has died.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'that could never happen' do you secretly believe?
- How do hidden doubts shape your prayers and hope?
- How does God's question invite you to fresh faith?

Question 5

Student Question:

When judgment fell, "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" (19:29), and Peter calls Lot a righteous man whom the Lord rescued (2 Peter 2:7-9). What does Lot's rescue reveal about God's mercy and His care for His own, even in the midst of judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In the midst of Sodom's destruction, the text says, 'God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow' (19:29). Even as judgment fell, God acted to rescue Lot and his daughters, pulling them out, almost in spite of Lot's own hesitation, when the angels seized them by the hand.

Peter comments on this directly: God 'rescued righteous Lot,' and 'the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials' (2 Peter 2:7-9). Lot was far from a perfect man, deeply compromised by his life in Sodom, yet God counted him righteous and delivered him. This is mercy, grounded in God's faithfulness, not in Lot's flawless record.

Draw out the comfort. God's judgment is real, but His mercy toward His own is also real. He does not abandon those who belong to Him in the day of trouble; He knows how to deliver them. The same God who judges the wicked rescues the godly.

Note the connection to intercession: God 'remembered Abraham.' Lot's rescue is linked to Abraham's relationship with God and, by implication, his prayers. Our intercession for others is not in vain; God remembers, and He acts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's mercy in rescuing His own even amid judgment (Genesis 19:29).
- The Lord knowing how to deliver the godly from trials (2 Peter 2:7-9).
- Mercy grounded in God's faithfulness, not our flawless record.
- The link between Abraham's intercession and Lot's rescue.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Lot's rescue reveal about God's mercy?
- How can God call compromised Lot 'righteous' and rescue him?
- How is Lot's deliverance connected to Abraham?

Question 6

Student Question:

Lot's downfall began long before, when he chose to move toward Sodom and then settled into it (13:12; 19:1). Where might worldliness be quietly creeping into your life, a gradual drift toward what God would have you avoid? How does compromise usually begin small?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question traces the slow drift that ruined Lot. His downfall did not begin in chapter nineteen; it began chapters earlier when he 'lifted up his eyes' at the well-watered plain, chose it for himself, moved his tents toward Sodom (13:10–12), and eventually sat in its gate as a full resident (19:1). Step by step, he moved toward the world, and the world moved into him.

Help students see how compromise works: gradually, reasonably, one small step at a time. Rarely do we decide all at once to abandon God; we drift, choosing the convenient, the prosperous, the comfortable, until we are settled somewhere we never intended to live. Lot is a sobering case study in incremental worldliness.

Apply it to the student's own life. Where is the drift happening, in entertainment, relationships, priorities, habits, the slow accommodation to values that are not God's? The danger is precisely that it feels gradual and harmless until, like Lot, we are deeply entangled.

Offer the remedy: watchfulness and decisive course-correction. 'Do not love the world or the things in the world' (1 John 2:15). The time to address drift is early, before we have pitched our tent toward Sodom and then moved in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Compromise as a gradual, step-by-step drift toward the world.
- Lot's incremental movement toward and into Sodom (13:10–12; 19:1).
- The danger of accommodation that feels reasonable and harmless.
- Watchfulness and not loving the world (1 John 2:15).

Discussion Prompts

- How did Lot's compromise begin, and how did it progress?
- Where might worldliness be quietly creeping into your life?
- How can you address drift early, before it entangles you?

Question 7

Student Question:

As they fled, Lot's wife looked back toward the city she could not bear to leave, and she was lost (19:26); Jesus warned, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). What does her looking back reveal about a heart still attached to what God is calling us to leave behind?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the family fled, they were warned not to look back. Lot's wife disobeyed; she 'looked back, and she became a pillar of salt' (19:26). Her backward look was not mere curiosity; it expressed a heart still bound to Sodom, still longing for the life and things God was in the act of judging.

Jesus made her a permanent warning: 'Remember Lot's wife' (Luke 17:32). In the context of His teaching about the coming judgment, He uses her as a picture of the person who, when called to flee, cannot let go of the old life, and so is lost. The issue is the direction of the heart.

Draw out the principle. It is not enough to leave Sodom outwardly while the heart remains attached to it. God calls us to a wholehearted following that does not keep longing for what He has called us to leave. 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:62).

Help students see this is about love and longing, not just action. We can physically leave a sin or a former life while our hearts keep gazing back at it. Lot's wife warns us that a divided heart, half-fleeing and half-longing, is spiritually fatal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Looking back as the sign of a heart still attached to what God judges.
- Jesus' warning, 'Remember Lot's wife' (Luke 17:32).
- Wholehearted following that does not long for the old life (Luke 9:62).
- The danger of a divided heart, leaving outwardly while longing inwardly.

Discussion Prompts

- What did Lot's wife's backward look reveal about her heart?
- Why does Jesus use her as a warning about the coming judgment?
- What is the difference between leaving sin outwardly and inwardly?

Question 8

Student Question:

What are you most tempted to "look back" at, to cling to or long for, even though God is calling you to move forward and let it go? What makes it so hard to release?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the matter of 'looking back' into the student's life. All of us have something we are tempted to keep gazing at: a former relationship, a past pleasure, an old identity, a sin we have left but secretly miss, a comfort we resent giving up.

Help students name it honestly. The backward look is usually fueled by a belief that what we left behind was better, or that obedience has cost us too much. Naming the specific longing exposes it to the truth that God's call forward is always for our good.

Address why it is hard to release. We look back because we doubt that what lies ahead with God is better than what lies behind. The cure is a deeper trust in God's goodness and a clearer vision of what He is leading us toward, which is ultimately Himself.

Invite a concrete step: the specific thing the student is tempted to cling to or long for, and a renewed resolve, by God's grace, to keep their face turned forward, trusting that the God who calls them on is leading them to something far better.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming what we are tempted to cling to or long for.
- The backward look fueled by doubt that obedience is worth it.
- Trusting God's goodness about what lies ahead.
- Keeping our face turned forward in wholehearted following.

Discussion Prompts

- What are you most tempted to 'look back' at?
- Why is it so hard to release it?
- What would help you keep your face turned forward?

Question 9

Student Question:

In these chapters God is revealed as the righteous Judge of all the earth, displaying both His justice (in the destruction of Sodom) and His mercy (in the rescue of Lot), and Jesus says the days of Lot are a warning of judgment still to come (Luke 17:28-30). How should the reality of God's judgment, held together with His mercy, shape the way we live and the way we view those around us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point, and it requires holding two truths together: God's justice and God's mercy. In these chapters God is revealed as 'the Judge of all the earth' (18:25), and that judgment is no abstraction; it falls on Sodom in fire. The city's wickedness was great, pervasive,

and unrepented. Scripture treats this as a real, historical act of God's justice (2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).

Teach the seriousness of the sin with restraint. Sodom's wickedness included grievous sexual immorality, seen in the mob's assault, but Scripture also names its pride, its excess, and its callous indifference to the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49). The point is not to dwell on lurid detail but to see a society thoroughly given over to evil and rightly judged. God is not indifferent to persistent, defiant sin.

But hold the mercy alongside the justice. In the same event, God rescues Lot. The destruction of Sodom and the deliverance of Lot are two sides of one act of God, displaying both His justice toward the wicked and His mercy toward His own. A God who only judged would be terrifying; a God who only spared would not be good. The God of the Bible is perfectly both.

Then make the forward-looking application that Jesus Himself makes. 'As it was in the days of Lot... so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed' (Luke 17:28-30). The judgment of Sodom is a preview and a warning of the final judgment. This should sober us: judgment is real, it is coming, and now is the time to flee sin and to be found in Christ.

Land it in the gospel. The good news is that at the cross, Christ bore the judgment our sins deserve, so that we, like Lot, might be rescued, not by our own righteousness but by God's mercy. The right response to this passage is not smug security but humble gratitude and sober watchfulness: gratitude that we are spared through Christ, watchfulness that we not love the world that is passing away, and compassion for those still in the city, for whom we, like Abraham, are called to pray.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the righteous Judge of all the earth, whose judgment is real and just (18:25; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).
- The seriousness of Sodom's pervasive sin, taught with restraint (including pride and indifference to the needy, Ezekiel 16:49).
- God's justice and mercy displayed together in one act (Sodom judged, Lot rescued).
- The judgment of Sodom as a preview and warning of the final judgment (Luke 17:28-30).
- Christ bearing judgment so that we are rescued by mercy, not our own righteousness.
- Sober watchfulness, gratitude, and compassion (interceding for those still in danger) as the right response.

Discussion Prompts

- How are God's justice and mercy both displayed in these chapters?
- How does Jesus use Sodom as a warning about the future?
- How should the reality of judgment, held with mercy, shape how we live and how we view others?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to respond, whether in bold prayer for others, fresh faith in His power, watchfulness against compromise, or a heart that no longer looks back.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to bring the passage's many threads to a personal point. We have seen the welcome of God, His knowledge of our hearts, His power over the impossible, the privilege of intercession, the slow danger of compromise, the warning of looking back, and the God who is both Judge and Rescuer. The question is what God is forming in this student.

Press for the specific. For one it is bold prayer for a lost person; for another, fresh faith that nothing is too hard for God; for another, watchfulness against a creeping compromise; for another, a heart that finally stops looking back.

Close in the gospel and in hope. The God of Sodom is the God of the cross, who judged sin in earnest and yet reaches down to rescue. To be formed by this passage is to live soberly and gratefully: praying for those in danger, trusting God's power, refusing to love the world, keeping our faces forward, and resting in the mercy that pulled Lot, and pulls us, out of the fire through Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bold prayer, fresh faith, watchfulness, and a forward-facing heart.
- The God of judgment and mercy revealed fully at the cross.
- Sober, grateful living in light of the judgment to come.
- Resting in the mercy that rescues us through Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Which response is God most calling you to: bold prayer, fresh faith, watchfulness, or letting go?
- How does the cross show God as both Judge and Rescuer?
- How will you live this week in light of God's justice and mercy?