

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 12: The Lord Visits Abraham; Sodom Destroyed -- Genesis 18:1-19:38

It is the hottest part of the day, and Abraham is sitting in the door of his tent when he looks up and sees three men standing nearby. He does not know yet that he is entertaining the Lord Himself. He only knows the desert code of hospitality, and so the old man runs, an old man runs, to welcome strangers. He bows, he begs them to stay, he rushes to fetch water and bread and a tender calf, and he stands by while they eat under the tree. And in that ordinary act of welcome, heaven sits down to lunch in Abraham's tent.

Over the meal comes the promise, now with a date attached: this time next year, Sarah will have a son. And Sarah, listening at the tent door, laughs to herself, the quiet, bitter laugh of a woman whose hope died decades ago. And the Lord hears that laugh, the laugh she thought no one heard, and asks the question that hangs over this whole chapter and over your life too: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Then the visitors rise to go, and the Lord turns toward Sodom, and tells Abraham what He is about to do.

What follows is one of the most remarkable prayers in the Bible. Abraham does not argue for himself; he pleads for a wicked city, edging closer and closer to God with holy boldness: Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty? Forty-five? Forty? Down to ten. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And God, patient and gracious, answers him every time. Here is a man who has learned that the God of judgment is also the God who listens, and who stands in the gap for others.

But Sodom has no ten righteous. The next chapter is hard to read: a city so given over to evil that it tries to assault the very angels sent to rescue it, and a judgment of fire that leaves the plain a smoking ruin. And yet, even here, mercy threads through the wrath. God remembers Abraham, and pulls Lot and his daughters out by the hand, almost against Lot's own reluctance, while his wife, looking back, longing for what God was destroying, becomes a pillar of salt. Jesus would later say simply, "Remember Lot's wife." Read this passage soberly. It shows us a God who welcomes, who hears our secret laughter, who answers prayer, who judges sin in earnest, and who still reaches down to rescue. The question is which way our own hearts are facing.

Group Discussion: Abraham pleaded with God for the city of Sodom, asking, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (18:25). What strikes you about Abraham's boldness and persistence in praying for others, and what does his example stir in you about your own prayers for the people and places around you?

Personal Reflection: Sarah laughed quietly to herself when she heard God's promise, certain it was impossible, and the Lord heard the laugh she thought was hidden (18:12-15). Where in

your own heart is there a quiet doubt or disappointment about what God can do, something you have stopped believing He could change?

Read Genesis 18:1–19:38

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 17:28–32, the days of Lot and the warning, “Remember Lot’s wife”; 2 Peter 2:6–9, Sodom condemned and righteous Lot rescued, the Lord knowing how to deliver the godly; Hebrews 13:2, hospitality, by which some have entertained angels; James 5:16, the powerful prayer of a righteous person; 1 John 2:15–17, not loving the world or the things in the world.