

# Faith and Doubt

Bible Background • GENESIS 18:16–19:29

Printed Text • GENESIS 19:1, 15–26, 29 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 17:22, 26–37

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXPLORE** the reasons the angels spared Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom, **IDENTIFY** with Lot’s fear of impending disaster, and **CELEBRATE** God’s deliverance from seemingly hopeless situations.

## In Focus

Charon and her husband Chauncey moved with their two children, Jesse and Bryan, outside of Pomona, California, into their dream home. Charon, who is an interior designer, and Chauncey, who is an independent contractor, had saved, made good investments, and worked hard to afford their custom-designed home. Although they never said it, they both knew the other was happy to have some time alone with their children in their sanctuary.

It was six months to the day when the raging fires began engulfing homes within 20 miles of their home. Fortunately, no one was killed, and there were only minor injuries. Although their home and lives were spared, it woke Chauncey and Charon up to a reality they had forgotten. They said a quick word of thanks to God for their new home and spent time praising and thanking God for their safety from the fire and the care of others. They decided that evening to pray with the children and give thanks unto the Lord. Charon and Chauncey reminded their children to always be thankful to the Lord and say, “Thank you” for protecting and caring for them and others.

*God’s protection comes in many ways. When have you forgotten to say, “Thank you,” to God? How do you, your family, or community praise the Lord?*

## Keep in Mind

“But God had listened to Abraham’s request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain” (Genesis 19:29, NLT)

## Words You Should Know

- A. Overthrow (v. 21)** haphak (Heb.) — To turn over, transform
- B. Brimstone (v. 24)** gophriyth (Heb.) — Sulfur, cypress resin

## Say It Correctly

Sodom. SAW-dohm.

Gomorrah. go-MORE-rah.

Zoar. ZOH-are.

## KJV

**Genesis 19:1** And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my LORD:

19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:

20 Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.

22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

## NLT

**Genesis 19:1** That evening the two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting there, and when he saw them, he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed with his face to the ground.

15 At dawn the next morning the angels became insistent. "Hurry," they said to Lot. "Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out right now, or you will be swept away in the destruction of the city!"

16 When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful.

17 When they were safely out of the city, one of the angels ordered, "Run for your lives! And don't look back or stop anywhere in the valley! Escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away!"

18 "Oh no, my lord!" Lot begged.

19 "You have been so gracious to me and saved my life, and you have shown such great kindness. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die.

20 See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don't you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved."

21 "All right," the angel said, "I will grant your request. I will not destroy the little village.

22 But hurry! Escape to it, for I can do nothing until you arrive there." (This explains why that village was known as Zoar, which means "little place.")

23 Lot reached the village just as the sun was rising over the horizon.

24 Then the LORD rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah.

25 He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, wiping out all the people and every bit of vegetation.

26 But Lot's wife looked back as she was following behind him, and she turned into a pillar of salt.

29 But God had listened to Abraham's request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Brimstone.** A sulfurous deposit in rock which is easily flammable. When brimstone catches fire, it melts the stone, releasing the terrible and possibly poisonous smell of sulfur into the air. Deposits of this stone are found around the world, especially around volcanoes, and famously around the Dead Sea.

## Background

In Genesis 18–19, Sodom and Gomorrah are facing impending judgment and destruction as a result of their wickedness. Genesis is not explicit as to which sins of Sodom and Gomorrah caused God to want to destroy the cities, but the Lord later tells Ezekiel some reasons as part of a prophecy against Jerusalem (Read Ezekiel 16:44–50). Abraham intercedes for the city, asking that the Lord spare the cities if there are only ten righteous people there (Genesis 18:16–33). The Lord agrees, but when the angels go to visit Lot, they find the outcries of wickedness to be true (Genesis 19:4–9). All the men of the city wanted to sexually assault the angels, and when Lot refuses to give them up, they promise to abuse him even worse. The angels blind the men of the city and protect Lot for the night and then tell him to take his family and flee the city. In contrast to Abraham's plea, there were not even ten righteous men, and the outcry of sinfulness in the city had reached God's ears. Lot tries to warn his other family members of the destruction, but they would not believe him (19:14). God's punishment and destruction was certain to happen, which is where verse 15 picks up.

### At-A-Glance

1. The Place of Destruction (Genesis 19:1, 15–17)
2. The Place of Safety (vv. 18–22)
3. Salvation from Destruction (vv. 23–26, 29)

## In Depth

### 1. The Place of Destruction (Genesis 19:1, 15–17)

Lot is sitting by the city gate when the angels of the Lord arrive from Abraham's house outside the city. He immediately offers them hospitality, which is customary in that culture. He not only welcomes them as all strangers should be welcomed with kindness and warmth, but he bows down to them, recognizing God has sent them. Next, the account contrasts the violence of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah with the hospitality of Lot (vv. 2–14). The angels protect Lot and tell him to take his family and leave town. From the angels' encounter with the men of the city, God has judged not even ten righteous people are in the cities, so they must be destroyed. Lot hesitates to leave, so the angels transport him and his family outside the city borders and tell them to run for their lives to safety in the mountains.

*Why do we sometimes hesitate to follow God's call or instructions?*

### 2. The Place of Safety (vv. 18–22)

Lot makes another request of the Lord. In the midst of the Lord's provision for protection, there is still space for conversation through prayer. Lot actually negotiates with the angel of the Lord. Lot first thanks the Lord for His grace and mercy in saving his life and his family. But he has an important concern. Lot felt that if he retreated to the mountains, they would not be safe very long because of the dangerous terrain that had fewer resources and people. He could be vulnerable to attack from animals, bandits, or some other sort of disaster. But instead he wants to be safe in a nearby village, which had all of the comforts and familiarity of civilization. Surprisingly,

the angel of the Lord grants Lot's request. But Lot must be obedient to get there quickly and follow directions so that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah does not reach him. The village Zoar (which means "little") receives its name through this encounter.

*Lot has already received great grace from God and yet asks for more and receives it. What does this teach us about God and our relationship with Him?*

### **3. Salvation from Destruction (vv. 23–26, 29)**

Lot travels during the night from the edge of the city of Sodom toward Zoar and reaches the village just as the sun is dawning. The Lord waits for him to arrive to the place of safety before destroying Sodom, Gomorrah, and every other city in the plain. The destruction is total as fire rains down from heaven. The destruction may have been a volcanic eruption or a special phenomenon from God; in either case, the fire and sulfur burn up people and vegetation. Yet in the midst of the fires, Lot is protected. Unfortunately, his wife looks back to the city as they are fleeing and turns into a pillar of salt. The Scripture does not indicate why she turns back or why she turns into a pillar of salt as a result. Still, Lot and his daughters miraculously make it to safety as a result of Abraham's earlier intercession (Genesis 18). The prayers of Abraham, the righteous man, availed much (cf. James 5:16), and his nephew and his great nieces are saved.

*How do we feel when we survive or succeed in the face of destruction or failure all around us?*

#### **Search the Scriptures**

1. How did Lot respond when he encountered the angels? What does it say about his character?
2. Why does Lot desire to go to the village instead of the mountains? What happens to the village as a result?

#### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. People often read Genesis 19 and get caught up trying to define the sins of Sodom, which happen before the institution of the Law of Moses, instead of focusing on God's desire to save Lot and those who listened. Why do we sometimes focus more on the sins of others instead of the salvation of God?
2. The angels are willing to transport and then wait for Lot to be safe before they execute judgment on the cities because Abraham intercedes for him. What does this teach us about God's faithfulness?

#### **Liberating Lesson**

Hospitality matters to God. Perhaps Lot was spared because he welcomed God's messengers. Presently, we live in a shut-down, shut-out society that encourages keeping immigrants out and practices exclusion rather than building relationships with others. God's destruction of Sodom is a reminder that He is not pleased when we shut people out or devise schemes to abuse others. Lot stood up against the men of Sodom who desired to abuse God's messengers. We must pray for protection of those who suffer injustice. We are challenged in this moment to intercede in prayer and in action so that God's will might be accomplished in our world. His will is that none should perish and all should know Him.

#### **Application for Activation**

This is one of the most powerful stories about intercession in the book of Genesis. God is listening to those who seek Him and is willing to respond to their requests, even in the midst of turmoil. Abraham intercedes not just for himself, but for his family members who are in harm's way. Lot does not just try to save himself, but tells everyone close to him that judgment is coming. God responds to their requests with protection and salvation. Take the opportunity this week to pray for someone who may be in a destructive situation. Although God may not always answer the way we anticipate, He will answer. A person's response to God's invitation is ultimately their choice. But as the story shows us, sometimes our prayers are the vehicle God uses for the salvation of others.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Genesis 19:1, 15–26, 29

The “why” of Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction is debated. Yet, Ezekiel 16:44–50 highlights reasons Sodom is destroyed. Violating hospitality is a critical part of this, as Jewish scholars note. Sodom and Gomorrah’s lack of caring for strangers and strange practices against those who do, only heighten their destruction. The lack of hospitality includes such offenses as lying, pride, sexual abuse, and blasphemy. Read Genesis 19:4–10 to see how the men of the town demand to have sex with God’s messengers, strangers, and how the messengers and Lot respond. Our text today focuses on God’s faithfulness and how Lot and his family are delivered.

**1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;**

The men who were sent by God to tell Abraham of God’s promise of a seed (Genesis 18:2–15) are the same who journey to Sodom during Abraham’s exchange with God (Genesis 18:1–15). They are now identified as two angels (one fewer than the three men who visited Abraham earlier). Given Yahweh’s intent to discern Sodom’s injustice, readers may interpret He sends the men to Sodom to test the city (Genesis 18:21). Lot is present, sitting at the entrance or gateway of Sodom, which may be symbolic of Lot’s leadership and authority in Sodom and also his welcoming hospitality. Upon noticing the men, Lot arises to greet them and bows to honor them.

**15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. 16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.**

The angelic messengers announce to Lot that God has heard the cries of wickedness in Sodom and they have been sent to destroy the city. Lot receives his first warning to gather his “son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city” and flee (Genesis 19:12–13). Since there is no other reference to sons that Lot might have, and they certainly do not escape with him, one can assume the angels are guessing he might have sons when he did not. Only God is omniscient. Lot approaches his sons-in-law with the warning he received, but they think he is joking (Genesis 19:14–15). It can be hard to understand that Lot has sons-in-law when he just said his daughters were virgins (v. 8). It is possible the Lot has more daughters than just the two who escape with him. Some scholars suggest these men might have been future sons-in-law, engaged to marry his daughters.

Lot then hesitates and does not heed the advice of the messengers by leaving Sodom immediately. In the morning, the messengers give Lot a second urgent warning to take his wife and daughters and leave the city. Lot hesitates, and the messengers spare Lot again by grabbing Lot, his wife, and two daughters by the hand and leading them outside the city. This is to show God's mercy, not only to Lot who directly benefits from this escape but also to Abraham, who prayed that God would spare the city where his nephew lived.

**17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. 18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my LORD: 19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: 20 Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. 21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. 22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.**

Once outside the city, the messengers give Lot and his family a third warning to save themselves by not looking back and escape to the mountains (Genesis 19:17). Lot hesitates again by pleading with the men not to escape to the mountains, where the destruction could consume him and his family, but to a small city named Zoar. Zoar (also known as Bela) is a small city that will be spared. Though small in size, Zoar was a flourishing city because of its location beneath the mountains of Moab where it received flowing waters. It was also a place where trees blossomed and plant life flourished. The city of Zoar is spared because Lot boldly asks to seek refuge there instead of where the angels told him to go. The city is a reminder that God prepares a place for the righteous. One of the messengers instructs Lot to hurry there and that the city will be spared once Lot and his family arrive.

**23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. 26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.**

Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed with "brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven." Brimstone is a form of sulfurous, flammable rock. Both cities lay entirely in ruins with many lives lost, as well as plants and animals completely devastated. An image in the word "overthrow" (Heb. haphak, haw- FACK) is that of flipping over a hand or flat bread. Everything in Sodom and Gomorrah is turned upside down in this destruction, so much so that the word "overthrown" becomes entwined with the cities (cf. Lamentations 4:6; Amos 4:11).

We can only speculate why Lot's family is spared and other families are not. Sadly, this is not the first time that Lot and his family are caught in a bad situation and spared since they also had been taken captive by kings (Genesis 14). This is a sad story that does not have a fairy-tale ending. The first mention of Lot's wife is as she looks back and turns into a pillar of salt (v. 26). No name of Lot's wife is given. No sense of her disposition or an account of what she meant to her family is told.

**29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.**

Perhaps you have heard the gospel song, "Somebody Prayed for Me." For Lot that somebody is Abraham. The final verse of our passage points back to Abraham's conversation with God. It could be that Lot's life was spared, not because of his good works or fortune, but because Abraham interceded for Sodom. God spares Lot's life on several occasions because of Abraham. Though Abraham did not mention Lot's name in his exchange with God, one could interpret that Abraham's plea was on behalf of seeking justice for the righteous of Sodom

and his kin. The theme of being spared because of connection emerges again later with the story of Rahab whose whole household was spared because of her hospitality to the Israelite spies (Joshua 6:25).

In some traditions, believers are taught not to question God. Abraham's exchange with God in Genesis 18 is part of what spares Lot and his family. God remembers Abraham's petitions and ensures that Lot and his family are spared from the destruction. Perhaps this is a reminder to believers to take a stand before God with all of our issues and intercessions because God is just and able to handle whatever inquiries we bring. If there is any good news in the passage, it is that God remembers (Genesis 19:29).

God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah because of their injustice. Reading Genesis 18 and 19 together, readers may interpret that Yahweh did not find enough righteous people to spare these cities, even though Abraham had persuaded Him down to only needing to find ten righteous people. Lot's hospitality to the messengers to bring them into his home separated his family from the men of the Sodom. God shows His faithfulness to His chosen people by saving Lot, both because of Lot's honest hospitality and Abraham's bold love for his kin.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

Remember Lot's Wife  
(Luke 17:22, 26–37)

### **TUESDAY**

Abraham and Sarah – Becoming Parents  
(Genesis 18:1–15)

### **WEDNESDAY**

Concerned about the Family  
(Genesis 18:16–21)

### **THURSDAY**

Pleading Justice for the Righteous  
(Genesis 18:30–33)

### **FRIDAY**

God Rescues the Godly  
(2 Peter 2:4–10)

### **SATURDAY**

Sodom's Sin Revealed  
(Genesis 19:2–14)

### **SUNDAY**

The Family Escapes Successfully  
(Genesis 19:1, 15–26, 29)