



11

Sodom and Gomorrah

Key Themes

- God judges sin.
- God is merciful toward sinners.

Key Passages

- Genesis 18:23–33, 19:1–29

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize that God's justice demands a punishment for sin.
- Describe God's mercy to Lot and to us.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "How can God be both just and merciful?"

Have students use bookmarks to mark Genesis 19:1 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

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The Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham and announced the 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.

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Study the Prepare to Share section. | <input type="checkbox"/> Go Before the Throne. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Print one Cities of the Plain Map from the Resource DVD-ROM. | <input type="checkbox"/> Print one Abraham Pleads for Sodom Script from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. |



Activity: Respectable Sins

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Students will take time to reflect on some sins that are often considered "acceptable" and compare them to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Guides | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils |
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Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare your heart and mind for this week's lesson, read Genesis 18:1–2, 18:16–33, 19:1–29; Luke 17:28–30.

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 and 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 and the land they traversed was no longer efficient 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 plain—where sin and wickedness prevailed against the Lord (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 with 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 wickedness 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 there were fewer than 10 righteous 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 he offered his own daughters to the men of the city to satisfy their lusts and protect the angels (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—and not taken lightly. Lot's wife did not learn that lesson. And it was only moments 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; Mark 6:11; 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 a picture of the mercy He provides to all sinners who in faith and repentance receive His forgiveness and turn to Jesus Christ.

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 plain” as far as Sodom. According to Genesis 14, the cities of the plain, 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 plain” 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 disonor and discredit it.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The biblical narratives of this time period in terms of customs, laws, legal agreements, and family arrangements fit well with what we know from historical records left by other societies of the Middle East, such as the Amorites, Sumerians, and Akkadians.

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, 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, too (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.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Lord, you are truly a God to be feared. You must punish all sin and your punishment is serious as demonstrated in this account of Sodom and Gomorrah. I marvel at your patience with the world today. You are mocked, ignored, cursed, and blasphemed by so many—yet you wait patiently. And you continue to offer a way for sinners to be reconciled to you. Help my students to see the gravity of their own sinfulness against you. And give me wisdom, Lord, to clearly explain the mercy and forgiveness you offer through Jesus Christ. Open their eyes to see that you alone can offer forgiveness—and you have done that through Jesus Christ.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Review

? In last week's lesson, we looked at the covenant God made with Abraham. What made that covenant different from a typical covenant made between two people? *God made a unilateral promise that was not based on Abraham's performance, but on God's promise alone.*

The New Testament confirms many times that it was not Abraham's good works that made him righteous.

? Knowing that it was not from his works, where did Abraham's righteousness come from? *It was righteousness from God through faith. Ultimately, it is Christ's righteousness that is imputed to all who trust God for salvation.*

As God made promises to Abraham, He promised to make Abraham a great nation and that all of the nations of the world

would be blessed through him. The son of promise, Isaac, was to come from Sarah, and through Isaac the Messiah would eventually come. The blessing to the nations was the good news of salvation in Christ. This salvation was made available to both Jews and Gentiles, and was not based on the works of the law given to Moses, but solely in what Christ did. All of this is founded in God's faithfulness to keep His promises. We can proclaim the gospel of forgiveness, knowing that God will show mercy to those who call on Him.

Today, we will continue looking at Abraham's life and examine the judgment of God against sin.



► Write on the board, "How can God be both just and merciful?"

► Have students use bookmarks to mark Genesis 19:1 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Before we begin reading, let me give you a little background. First of all, when Abraham left his hometown of Ur, he took his family, including his wife Sarah and nephew Lot, as well as all of his possessions. As they traveled, the Lord continued to bless them by increasing their livestock. There came a time when Abraham and Lot had to part ways because their herds were so great, the land could not support them. Abraham allowed Lot to choose the land he wanted. So Lot chose to live in the comfortable cities of the east. He took all of his animals, herdsmen, possessions, and tents and separated from Abraham. Abraham remained in the countryside of Canaan.

One day, Abraham and Sarah had some very special visitors. The Lord came to see them, and He brought two angels with Him! The angels and the Lord appeared to Abraham as men. The Lord told Abraham that He had seen that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were extremely wicked. Their sin was so great that the Lord was going to judge the sin by destroying the cities and all the people in them.

That's what's been happening. We are going to pick it up at Genesis 18:23–33. I need three volunteers to read this script and I want the rest of you to follow along. I'll be asking questions and will want you to circle the answers on your scripts as we answer them. Pass out the Abraham Pleads for Sodom scripts to all the students. Choose volunteers to read the three parts.

EXAMINE THE WORD

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

Observe the Text

- ? First of all, who are the characters in these verses? *Genesis 18:23, 18:26. The Lord and Abraham.*
- ? The Lord told Abraham His plan to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- ? When did this event take place? Refer to the Seven C's Timeline to show the historical context.
- ? Someone read Genesis 18:25 again. In your own words, what was Abraham's reaction? *He was hoping that the Lord would spare the cities. Abraham hoped the Lord wouldn't destroy the righteous at the same time He was destroying the wicked.*
- ? What does Abraham mean by righteous people? Allow for answers.
He was referring to the people in the cities who feared God, loved Him, trusted Him, and were obedient to Him.
- ? What did Abraham ask in Genesis 18:24? *What if there are fifty righteous? Will you destroy it?* Circle "fifty" on your scripts.
That's right. Abraham thought surely the Lord would save the cities if there were fifty good people.
- ? What did the Lord say? *Genesis 18:26. If there are fifty righteous, I will spare the city.* Circle the Lord's answer.
- ? Continue to read down the script. What did Abraham continue to do as he asked God for mercy on the cities? *He kept lowering the number of righteous that God might spare.*
- ? So tell me, which numbers did he bring up to the Lord after fifty? *Genesis 18:28—forty-five; 18:29—forty; 18:30—thirty; 18:31—twenty; 18:32—ten.* Have the students circle the numbers on their scripts.
- ? What was the Lord's response each time? *I will not do it for the sake of [number].*
Genesis 18:26—fifty; 18:28—forty-five; 18:29—forty; 18:30—thirty; 18:31—twenty; 18:32—ten. Have the students circle the answers on their scripts.

Discover the Truth

Well, that is pretty interesting. Abraham humbly implored the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, if He could find fifty righteous people in

them. And before the Lord even left him, he was down to ten. Abraham asked, "What if ten people are righteous in the city? Will you spare it?" Abraham's nephew Lot and his family lived in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham wanted the Lord to spare the cities and spare his nephew.

However, I don't think that Abraham or the Lord thought there would be very many righteous people in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. That's why Abraham kept lowering the number. He knew how wicked the cities were, and he didn't want everyone to be destroyed.

The Lord also knew about all their wickedness, and He had come to destroy them. There comes a time when the Lord must judge sin. He is very patient and gives us time to repent of our sins. But He will judge those who continue to sin and ignore Him.

Remember when Adam and Eve sinned? He judged them by sending them out of the garden. When the people of Noah's day sinned, God flooded the earth, and everyone but Noah and his family died in the Flood. And when the people at Babel sinned, God confused their language and scattered them all over the earth. *Refer to the Seven C's Timeline to review these judgments from the Lord.*

- ?
- So, let's see what happened this time—with Sodom and Gomorrah! Do you think the Lord found 10 righteous people? *Allow guesses. Answer will be revealed later.*



READ THE WORD

Now turn in your Bibles to Genesis 19. We'll continue there. The Bible says the two angels who visited Abraham with the Lord went into Sodom and Gomorrah. They were disguised as men. Abraham's nephew Lot met them, and he urged the angels to stay with him. Remember, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were very great. And the angels told Lot and his family that they must run from the city because God was going to judge it and all the wicked people who lived there. Let's see what happened. Follow along in your Bible as we read Genesis 19:1–29 together. *Choose volunteers to read.*

Genesis 19:1–29

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now let's ask some questions and see if we can tell what God's Word is saying to us.

Observe the Text

- ?
- What do we learn in verse 1 about the two men who were with the Lord at Abraham's place? *They were angels.*

- ? How did the men of the city respond to the visitors that Lot took into his house for the night? *They demanded Lot hand them over so they could have homosexual relations with them.*
- ? What clue to Lot's character is given in verse 9? *He had been acting like a judge, so he must have pointed out their sinful acts in the past.*
- ? How did the angels protect the household of Lot? *They blinded all the men of the city.*
- ? When morning came, what command did the angels give to Lot? *To flee the city with his family (verses 12–13) and to not look back toward the city (verse 17).*
- ? What did the angels tell Lot to do in Genesis 19:15? *Hurry, take your daughters and go.*
- ? Why were they to run? What was going to happen? *Genesis 18:15. The people in the cities were going to be consumed by the punishment.*
- ? What does the word “consumed” mean here? *Allow for answers.*

Consumed means destroyed—the angels were telling Lot to hurry, so he and his family would be spared the punishment God was bringing.

- ? What was happening in Genesis 19:16? *Lot and his daughters were taking their time—lingering. The angels took their hands and brought them out of the city.*
- ? What attribute of God do you see being displayed in Genesis 19:16? *Allow answers.*

God was showing His mercy. Now, what does that mean—merciful? Take a look at the Attributes of God poster if you don't know. *Kind to those in misery, distress, or suffering.*

- ? What directions did the angel give Lot and his family, once he got them out of the city, Genesis 19:17? *Escape for your life; do not look behind you; escape to the mountains.*
- ? Did you notice what time of day this was? *Genesis 19:23. Morning—the sun had risen.*
- ? Were there at least 10 righteous people in the city? *No, or God would not have sent the judgment.*
- ? And how did the Lord destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? *Genesis 19:24. With brimstone and fire from heaven.*
- ? What is brimstone? Anyone know? *Allow for answers.*

Brimstone is like a rock that catches on fire easily. So when the Lord sent the fire and the brimstone down from the sky, you can just imagine the destruction it brought. The Lord meant business!

- ? What does Genesis 19:25 tell us was destroyed? *The plain, the inhabitants, and what grew on the ground.*

Consumed:
destroyed

MERCIFUL

(Refer to Attributes poster)

Brimstone: a type of rock that catches on fire easily

All the people living in those cities were all destroyed by the fire and the brimstone.

- ? What was Lot's wife's reaction? What did she do according to Genesis 19:26? *She looked back.*
- ? And what happened to her? *She became a pillar of salt.*
- ? Now, why do you think God did that to her? Look back in Genesis 19:17. *The angel told them not to look back.*

That's right. The angels gave them specific directions. Lot's wife did not obey. She looked back. And for that, she was destroyed—turned into a pillar of salt.

Discover the Truth

- ? Well, now we have all the information we need to answer the question we had earlier. Was God able to find just 10 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah? *No.*

Sadly, no. That should give us an indication of just how bad things were in those cities.

- ? How did God judge Sodom and Gomorrah? *With fire and brimstone that rained down from heaven.*

- ? Why did God do that? *Because of their sin. The people were wicked.*

That's right. Sodom and Gomorrah—and three other cities in the plain—were destroyed by fire and brimstone, burned up completely. And everyone who lived there was destroyed with the cities.

Wouldn't you think that in the midst of that judgment, Lot's family would have been thinking that they were never going to disobey God ever again? But instead, we see Lot's wife directly disobeying the angel's instruction not to look back.

- ? What happened to her? *She was turned to a pillar of salt.*

God is holy. Because He is holy, He must punish sin. And although God is also patient when it comes to our sin, He will eventually judge all people. That's what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah. I'd like for you to take a look at the Attributes of God poster for a minute. God reveals several of His attributes in this account, doesn't He?

- ? What do I mean when I say God is holy? *He cannot sin and hates all sin.*

What do I mean when I say God is just? *He is fair according to who He is; He must punish sin.*

- ? What do I mean when I say God is omnipotent? *He is all-powerful to do whatever He wants.*

HOLY
JUST
OMNIPOTENT

(Refer to Attributes poster.)

That's right. All of these attributes of God can be seen in the biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is holy, God is just, and God is omnipotent. Because He hated the sins of the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah, He punished them. He showed His amazing power by sending fire and brimstone from the sky to destroy the cities completely.



Respectable Sins

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

In our culture, people typically identify certain sins as more significant than others. There is no doubt that some sins are more apparent and even carry stronger consequences for individuals and societies, but is homosexual behavior a more damnable sin than gossip or anger? We need to make sure that we are examining these ideas from a biblical perspective. *Pass out the worksheets.*

I am going to ask you to stop and do some personal reflection about your attitude toward sin—not in others, but in your own life. There are two portions to this activity. We are going to look at the first two questions today, and then you can continue this reflection at some point later in the week. We will come back together in a few minutes and discuss the questions.

Have the students answer the questions in their Student Guides as a personal reflection.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As you consider the idea of different levels of sin, do these passages put the sins described into different categories? *No, they are all listed together.*

Although each of us can find our own sins in these lists, do any of you tend to think of some as “acceptable” and others as absolutely detestable? *Allow for various answers.*

Lot had been surrounded by people who were engaged in a lifestyle of gross sin. Many Christians tend to make lists of sins that they tolerate and those that make them cringe. This can be a dangerous attitude when it comes to our own growth to be more like Christ. I hope you will take some more time to consider if your view of sins is in alignment with what Scripture reveals.

Jesus did not pay more on the Cross for homosexuality or murder than He did for gossip or lust. All sin is treason against God, but we cannot forget that His justice has been satisfied by the merciful act of the Son on the Cross. Though Christians deserve the wrath of God for their sin, Christ has paid the penalty and God’s mercy is shown to sinners. Are you living in light of the mercy of God?





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We learned a lot about God in this lesson. One of the important truths is that God has to judge sin; He can't just let it go. As we've studied the Bible, we've seen many examples of God judging sin. Haven't we?

- ? What are some examples of God's judgments before Sodom and Gomorrah? *He judged Adam and Eve for their sin by sending them out of the garden; He judged the people of Noah's day when He flooded the earth and everyone but Noah and his family died; He judged the people at Babel when He confused their language and scattered them all over the earth.*

In today's lesson about Sodom and Gomorrah, we saw God's justice again. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities full of wicked people who were living in rebellion against God. And God judged their sin.

- ? But, remember, God also showed His mercy. In what ways did He show mercy? *He sent His angels to the city to warn Abraham's nephew Lot. Not only did the angels warn them, but they took them by the hands and brought them safely out of the city.*

Like those in Sodom and Gomorrah, we deserve God's punishment because we are sinners. God does not take sin lightly, does He? We are all accountable for our sins. Eventually, God will judge every person.

But God is also merciful. God became a man, Jesus. He came to earth and never sinned. He lived a perfect life. He was crucified, even though He had done nothing wrong. And He did that so we would have a way to be forgiven. Jesus said that whoever would believe in Him—that means believe that He lived, died, and rose from the grave, and put their trust in Him—would be saved from God's judgment. He took the punishment for the sins of all who would turn away from their sins and put their trust in Jesus. God's justice is satisfied through Jesus for all who believe. That is the ultimate example of God's justice and mercy.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

There are many who don't believe this account about Sodom and Gomorrah. What can we say to them? First of all, you should know that this event is referred to at least 13 different times in the Bible—in both the Old and New Testaments. This confirms to us that the writers of the Bible believed 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 support the biblical account—until recently.

The location of Sodom and Gomorrah, based on various biblical passages, should be the Dead Sea region. When Abraham and his nephew Lot parted ways, Lot chose to settle in the Jordan valley “in the direction of Zoar.” He moved his tents to “the cities of the plain” as far as Sodom.

Between 1973 and 1979 two archaeologists surveyed an area southeast of the Dead Sea and located the remains of five cities. Could these be the five “cities of the plain” identified in Genesis? *Show Cities of the Plain Map.*

The most remarkable feature of one of these cities, Ben Edh-Dhra, is the number of graves. An estimated 20,000 tombs holding approximately half a million people and over three million pottery vessels were found at the site. This was clearly a well-populated area in the past, and may well be the ancient city of Sodom.

The excavation of the nearby city of Numeira revealed that this entire area was covered by the ashy debris of its final destruction. In some places the ashes were up to 16 inches in depth!

- ?
- Why do you think the ash is significant? *Because the Bible says God rained down fire and brimstone on the cities. So it would have burned down, leaving ash.*

This information has led biblical archaeologists to conclude that this could be the city of Gomorrah.

- ?
- Do we need proof like this to cause us to believe events such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah really happened? *Allow answers.*

“Proof” is not necessary to verify God’s Word. In fact, what more do we need than the very Word of the one who was there and who caused this event to happen? But isn’t it great that God allows man to find confirmations like this? They help us to be better equipped to defend our faith and the Bible against the doubters who attempt to question it.



MEMORY VERSE

Acts 17:26–27 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His unchanging character.
- Thank God for His justice and mercy toward sin.
- Ask God that each person would have boldness to share the hope of Christ with others.

Notes