

Genesis 18-19 • The Lord Investigates

Introduction

The account of Lot is another one of those stories that we might have heard so many times in a watered down version at Sunday School that we might not truly understand it's full meaning. To place it in the proper scriptural context, we have to understand that this is a story about God's investigation of men and events on earth that begins first with Abraham and then extends to Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a lesson about Final Judgment.

^{18:1}Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. ²When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, ³and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. ⁴Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; ⁵and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant."

And they said, "So do, as you have said."

⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." ⁷Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. ⁸He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

[Read 18:1-8]

Q: What is indicated in these verses that most likely reveals that Abraham did not recognize the Lord as "the Lord" at first?

A: Whereas v.1 and the accompanying dialog use the word "LORD"—which is the specific name of God—Abraham addresses Him as "lord", a respectful term that could also be translated as "sir".

Q: Are the things that Abraham does for the visitors "strange" or out of the ordinary?

A: According to the customs of that time, travelers would set out as early in the morning as possible and then seek refuge and rest during the hottest time of the day. Abraham extended the hospitality often afforded travelers during that time of day.

Q: What is an indication that Abraham has recognized the nature and stature of his visitors?

A: In v.8 after serving them the meal, "he was standing by them under the tree as they ate". This is what servants of that day did, and Abraham being a very wealthy man, would most certainly have had servants available for this task; however, he serves and waits on them personally, an indication he has come to understand Who his visitors are and his own proper relationship to them.

Point: We know from reading the whole text that God is going to visit Sodom and Gomorrah and make a personal assessment of them. First, however, He does this to the righteous in His visit to Abraham. Without realizing it, Abraham passes the test. God's judgment always comes to His people/the church first before moving on to the wicked/unbelievers.

Application: Do we see every opportunity that we're in the presence of the Lord as an opportunity to serve Him? Are we aware that how we live the course of our normal life and treat others is actually an assessment of our faithfulness according to God's measure? Do we serve others with the same attitude and consideration as serving God?

⁹Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?”

And he said, “There, in the tent.”

¹⁰He said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. ¹²Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

¹³And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

¹⁵Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid.

And He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

¹⁶Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. ¹⁷The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? ¹⁹For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” ²⁰And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. ²¹I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”

[Read 18:9-15]

Q: What is the first thing about the future events of God’s will that is revealed to Abraham?

A: Specifically it’s the timeframe of when the promised child will be born, but in general terms God reveals His work for Abraham’s life.

Q: What is being taught by the fact that God responds to Sarah’s unspoken thoughts?

A: God not only judges one’s actions, but thoughts as well. The biblical definition of one who is “righteous” is someone who has brought their entire heart, soul and mind into obedient submission to God so that they are faithful not only in deed but thought.

Application: *What has God revealed to you as His will and work for your life? To what degree are you obedient or disobedient towards that end—in BOTH deed and thought?*

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.

2 Corinthians 10:5-7

[Read 18:16-21]

Q: For what purpose does God reveal to Abraham the situation with Sodom and Gomorrah?

A: So that the righteous will interpret God’s judgment and associated signs correctly, establishing that it is God’s decision alone as to the outcome of Final Judgment.

Q: What are the characteristics of the righteous as provided in God’s assessment of Abraham in v.19?

A: The righteous are “chosen” for the purpose of bringing others up in obedience to the ways of God.

Q: So how is the covenant between God and the righteous completed?

A: According to v.19, not just by living rightly of one’s self, but of teaching others the same.

Q: What is significant about God’s statement, “I will go down now...I will know”?

A: The righteousness of God’s judgment is the result of His personal investigation and assessment, and is therefore always right and fair.

Point: *In God’s visit to Abraham, He has first established that He knows first hand of the condition of the righteous.*

²²Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

²³Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

²⁶So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.”

²⁷And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. ²⁸Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

²⁹He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.”

³⁰Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.”

³²Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.”

³³As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

[Read 18:22-33]

Q: Where are the angels in relationship to the Lord and Abraham?

A: The two angels have left and are on their way to Sodom, on their way to deliver God’s judgment, so to speak. The Lord has remained behind to talk with Abraham. There is an “opportunity”, if you will, for the outcome to be changed as judgment is on its way but has not actually arrived yet.

Q: For whom does Abraham make an appeal and why?

A: Abraham makes an appeal for the righteous that are living in the presence of the wicked; he does **NOT** make an appeal on behalf of the wicked. Abraham is concerned not just for Lot’s physical safety but spiritual condition as well.

Q: Why doesn’t Abraham stipulate that a majority of the population has to be found righteous for judgment to be averted?

A: God is concerned more with quality than quantity. He repeatedly establishes through Scripture that it is the individual that will be held accountable.

Q: What might this teach us about Final Judgment?

A: It comes when all men have made their final choice for or against God and will not change no matter what.

Application: *What is your burden for believers in mostly hostile environments or even societies? Do we actively seek God’s protection for those we know to be devoted to Him but in the closest proximity to those on the road to incurring God’s wrath?*

^{19:1}Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ²And he said, “Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant’s house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.”

They said however, “No, but we shall spend the night in the square.”

³Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

⁴Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; ⁵and they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.”

⁶But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, ⁷and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. ⁸Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

⁹But they said, “Stand aside.” Furthermore, they said, “This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.” So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. ¹⁰But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway.

[Read 19:1-3]

Q: How does Lot compare to Abraham?

A: They are both found righteous in their treatment of others.

Q: Like Abraham, does Lot recognize the visitors’ true identities right away?

A: No. It’s an indication that his righteousness is sincere, extending to others without regard to their status or station.

[Read 19:4-11]

Q: According to 8:21, God said “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry...and if not, I will know.” How do we know that Sodom HAS “done entirely according to its outcry”?

A: “...the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter”. (v.4) With the sole exception of Lot, it is 100% corrupt.

Q: How do we know what it was like for Lot to live in this situation, that he was truly the lone, righteous man in this city?

and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

2 Peter 2:7-9

Q: How do they respond to Lot’s appeal and what does this teach?

A: They don’t just reject Lot but turn on him. The wicked will turn on anyone that attempts to interrupt their pursuit of pleasing themselves.

Q: How did the people respond to the miraculous sign of blindness? What does it teach about the wicked?

A: It didn’t change them in any way whatsoever; they continued to seek to do what they wanted in spite of the circumstances or the presence of two who performed miracles on behalf of God. This teaches something about the Last Days and how that those devoted to pleasing themselves never allow even the greatest of signs to give way to the authority and place of God.

¹²Then the two men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; ¹³for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”

¹⁴Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city.” But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

¹⁵When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.” ¹⁶But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.

¹⁷When they had brought them outside, one said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.”

¹⁸But Lot said to them, “Oh no, my lords! ¹⁹Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; ²⁰now behold, this town is near enough to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved.”

²¹He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. ²²Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar.

[Read 19:12-14]

Q: Why don't the angels take immediate action?

A: They provide Lot with the time necessary to make a final appeal to those that might still be willing to do what is necessary to avoid Final Judgment.

Q: Why would the sons-in-law think Lot is crazy or joking?

A: Because they've never actually taken anything Lot has said or stood for seriously. It's a lesson that “death bed” conversions are not typical, that how a person has lived and devoted their life is how they will react and choose things in the very face of Final Judgment.

[Read 19:15-22]

Q: Why do you suppose that Lot hesitated?

A: In v.12 the angels mention that Lot not only has a wife and daughters, but a son-in-law and sons. This means he had a lot more family in the city but at that instant only his wife and two daughters were available to be rescued. The two daughters were only a part of Lot's overall total number of children.

Point: *Even the righteous may experience hesitation during Final Judgment, but God provides for their rescue even in spite of themselves!*

Q: How do we know for sure that God provides a sure escape for the righteous?

A: Because in spite of hesitating and having to be pulled outside the city, and in spite of the negotiation to go to Zoar instead of the mountains, the angel states in v.22, “Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” God's judgment is tempered by His grace allowing the righteous to be redeemed before it descends on the wicked.

Q: How does Genesis 18-19 compare to Final Judgment?

- God's assessment and judgment comes first to His own house before passing to the next.
- The righteous and the wicked are judged by the same standards.
- God sends two witnesses who perform signs but are ignored by the wicked.
- The righteous are “raptured” or provided an escape from Final Judgment.
- Every opportunity for repentance is provided, even down to the very last seconds.
- Fire is the main tool of Final Judgment.
- List others?

²³The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, ²⁵and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷Now Abraham arose early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before the LORD; ²⁸and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace.

²⁹Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.

[Read 19:23-29]

Q: What is the lesson for us provided by Lot's wife?

A: One must be fully committed to God's ways and path and cannot live with even one foot in the old life. Where God is concerned, it's all or nothing.

Q: How is God described in relation to fire?

*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
Deuteronomy 4:24*

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29

Q: How are prayers and sacrifices offered by the righteous often submitted and described?

A: Being burned with fire or accompanied by incense, they are often described as "a smooth aroma" to God.

Point: *What is used for the purposes of Final Judgment on the wicked is used entirely differently by the righteous in the course of service and commitment to Him.*

Overall Application

- *Why is any pursuit to please one's lust, flesh, self, etc. incompatible with the life of a true follower of Christ? Do you realize that in keeping some of these desires active that you might be like Lot's wife, unable to focus on the full work of salvation because you've still got one foot in the world behind?*
- *How are Abraham and Lot examples to us of living a Christian life 24 hours a day and not just on Sunday morning? Do we understand that how we treat and interact with others is one of the key tests of the quality of our faith?*
- *Where is our burden for our fellow believers? Where is our concern for the environment we choose to live in and its influences? How are we preparing those around us in addition to ourselves?*