

Genesis, Session 14: Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18–19)

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Abstract

This session by Dr. Kenneth Mathews explores the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18–19, focusing on the themes of God's justice and mercy, Abraham's close covenant relationship with God, and his role as an intercessor. The lecture contrasts the exemplary hospitality and righteousness of Abraham with the spiritual and moral compromises of Lot, who became deeply integrated into the wicked city of Sodom. Through the accounts of Sarah's laughter, Abraham's bargaining for the innocent, the dramatic angelic rescue of Lot's family, and the tragic legacy of Lot's descendants, the lesson illustrates how God maintains the moral equilibrium of the world. Ultimately, the text highlights the distinction between the enduring legacy of faith through Abraham and the tragic consequences of compromise seen in Lot.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genesis 18–19: Sodom and Gomorrah

- A. Overview of three primary focus areas
 - 1. The deepening relationship between God and Abraham
 - 2. Abraham's role as an intercessor on behalf of others
 - 3. The demonstration of God's justice and mercy
- B. Historical context of hospitality in antiquity

II. Abraham's Hospitality and the Identity of the Three Visitors (Genesis 18:1–15)

- A. Abraham's reception of the wayfarers
 - 1. Humility, promptness, and provision of water, comfort, and a meal
 - 2. Contrast with Lot's later reception of the angels
- B. Identity of the three visitors
 - 1. Manifestation of God as a man (theophany, not incarnation)
 - 2. Identified as "men," with one specifically revealed as Yahweh
 - 3. Two of the visitors identified as accompanying angels

C. Sarah's laughter and the promise of a son

1. Sarah's physical impossibility (menopause) and laughter
2. The divine response: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
3. Comparison to Abraham's laughter in Genesis 17
4. The requirement of faith and co-ownership of the covenant promises

III. God's Judgment of Sodom and Abraham's Intercession (Genesis 18:16–33)

A. Abraham as a confidant of God

1. God's decision to reveal His plans to His "friend"
2. Connection to the covenant blessings and the "way of the Lord"
3. The "school of discipleship" and Abraham's growth in trust

B. The investigation of Sodom and Gomorrah

1. Outcry against the cities' grievous sins
2. God's non-capricious, investigative approach
3. The theological implication of divine plurality within unity

C. Abraham's bargaining and intercessory prayer

1. Pleading for the righteous (innocent) from 50 down to 10
2. God's justice: not sweeping away the righteous with the wicked
3. God's "third option": executing judgment on the wicked while rescuing the innocent

IV. The Deliverance of Lot and the Destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:1–29)

A. Contrasts between Abraham and Lot

1. Physical settings: Hebron outside the city vs. Lot at the gateway of Sodom
2. Temporal and behavioral contrasts: day vs. night, running vs. sitting

B. The confrontation with the men of Sodom

1. The wicked demand to sexually violate the visitors
2. Lot's extreme compromise: offering his virgin daughters
3. Angelic intervention: blinding the mob and urging escape

C. The escape and judgment

1. Lot's hesitation and the extraordinary angelic mercy in pulling them out
2. The command not to look back (symbolizing rejection of Sodom's life)
3. The destruction of the cities by sulfur and fire
4. The fate of Lot's wife: looking back and becoming a pillar of salt
5. God sparing Lot because He "remembered Abraham" and His covenant

V. The Sordid Legacy of Lot's Descendants (Genesis 19:30–38)

A. Lot as a compromised recluse

1. Flight from Zoar to a cave in the mountains out of fear
2. The moral consequences of compromise and isolation

B. The incestuous relationships of Lot's daughters

1. The daughters' plot to preserve the family line through drunkenness
 2. Contrast and parallel with Noah's drunkenness
- C. The origins of Israel's enemies
1. The birth of Moab (Moabites) and Ben-Ammi (Ammonites)
 2. Their historical roles as traditional adversaries of Israel

VI. Conclusion and Theological Reflections

- A. Deepening fellowship between God and His people
- B. The active ministry of intercession and compassion
- C. The harmonious balance of God's justice and mercy
- D. Stark contrast between the legacy of faith (Isaac) and the legacy of compromise (Moab/Ammon)