THE PENTATEUCH PART I: GENESIS
LESSON 10: Genesis 18:1-21:14
The Apparition at Mamre, the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's Failure at Gerar, and Ishmael's Exile

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Beloved Lord,
Abraham and Sarah became models of virtue for both Old and New Covenant believers.  Their relationship with You, Lord, was not superficial.  They did not ignore You, only to call on You in times of distress, but throughout their long lives they journeyed with You in an intimate relationship that was to have a profound effect on all salvation history.  St. Peter held Sarah up as a model wife and mother, writing to Christians: *You are now her children, as long as you live good lives free from fear and worry* ([1 Pt 3:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter3.htm#v6)).  Strengthen our faith, Lord, so that we learn to trust You to guide our lives, through painful valleys and joyful heights, just as Sarah experienced both extremes in her faith journey.  We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen.

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*One should consider the fact that Abraham was uncircumcised when God called him, and he was still uncircumcised when he was promised a legitimate son as heir.  You are hereby invited to believe that he is not only the father of the Jews, as they claim, but the progenitor, through faith, of all believers.  Sarah also, before the circumcision of her husband and by the addition of one letter to her name, receives the blessing of no small gift, so that she might have the primacy of virtue and of grace.  God promises that from her nations and kings of peoples will come, so that in her might be established the type not of the synagogue but of the Church.* St. Ambrose, *On Abraham, 1.4.31* (quoted from *Ancient Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament vol. II,* page 58)

**Chapter 18: The Theophany at Mamre**

Abraham's Theophany of the Lord at the grove of Mamre was a visitation that had an impact on all of salvation history.  It was in this uniquely personal visit that Yahweh announced to his faithful servant that the time had come for the birth of the promised son ([Gen 17:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v19)).  The Catechism addresses these remarkable visual experiences with the Divine as markers that point to the coming of the Redeemer-Messiah: *Theophanies (manifestations of God) light up the way of the promise, from the patriarchs to Moses and from Joshua to the visions that inaugurated the missions of the great prophets. Christian tradition has always recognized that God's Word allowed himself to be seen and heard in these theophanies, in which the cloud of the Holy Spirit both revealed him and concealed him in its shadow* (CCC [707](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p1s2c3a8.htm#707))*.*

**Please read Genesis 18:1-8: The Visitation of the Lord
18:1*Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre while he was sitting by the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day.* 2*He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him.  As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance to the tent to greet them, and bowed to the ground.* 3*'My lord,' he said, 'if I find favor with you, please do not pass your servant by.* 4*Let me have a little water brought, and you can wash your feet and have a rest under the tree.* 5*Let me fetch a little bread and you can refresh yourselves before going  further, now that you have come in your servant's direction.'  They replied, 'Do as you say.'* 6*Abraham hurried to the tent and said to Sarah, 'Quick, knead three measures (seah) of the best flour and make loaves.'* 7*Then, running to the herd, Abraham took a fine and tender calf and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it.* 8*Then taking curds, milk and the calf which had been prepared, he laid all before them, and they ate while he remained standing near them under the tree.***

Chapters 18 and 19 should be viewed as a united narrative. The events of chapter 18 in the annunciation of the miraculous birth of Isaac are contrasted with the announcement of the death and destruction of Sodom in chapter 19.  The contrasting events are presented in an alternating pattern:

                 A. Arrival of the Lord at Abraham's tent

                                  B. Abraham greets the visitors

                                                   C. Abraham's hospitality to the visitors

                                                                    D. Announcement of the birth of Isaac

                                                                                     E. Sarah laughs

                                                                                                      F. Abraham intercedes with God for Sodom

                 A. Arrival of the Lord's messengers at Sodom

                                  B. Lot greets the visitors

                                                   C. Lot's hospitality to the visitors

                                                                    D. Announcement of the destruction of Sodom

                                                                                     E. Lot's sons-in-laws laugh

                                                                                                      F. Lot intercedes with the messengers to allow him to go to Zoar

The events recorded in Genesis chapter 18 took place shortly after the events in chapter 17.  In [Genesis 17:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v21) God told Abraham that Sarah would bear a son *at this time next year*, and in [18:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v14) God promised Abraham: *I shall come back to you at the same time next year and Sarah will have a son* (literally= "at the appointed time I shall return to you at the time of life and there shall be a son").

**Genesis 18:1:** *2 He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him.  Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre while he was sitting by the entrance of the tent...* After God promised Abraham all the land he could see from the height of Bethel ([Gen 13:14-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v14)), Abraham moved his tent to settle at the "Oak" (plural = trees) of the Amorite Mamre near Hebron where he built an altar to Yahweh ([Gen 13:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v18)). He was still living near the great trees at Mamre ([Gen 14:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v13)) when a survivor of the attack on Sodom came to tell Abraham and his allies that Lot and his family had been captured by the Mesopotamians.  In this part of the narrative Abraham was still living at the same grove of trees near Hebron when he saw "three men" standing near him'that the "three men" were "standing near him" as he sat by his tent was the equivalent of knocking on his door.  This is the third mention of the "trees of Mamre" ([13:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v18); [14:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v13); [18:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v1)). *during the hottest part of the day.* Abraham was a chieftain whose wealth was in his herds and flocks of animals.  Twice a year it was necessary to move his animals from pastures in the hill country to pastures in the Negev; Abraham lived the life of a pastoral semi-nomad.  Three men approached Abraham's tent at the hottest part of the day'at noon time when people sought shelter from the sun and usually took the main meal of the day. Like all men whose lives are regulated by the conditions of the natural world, Abraham's year was divided by the seasons and his day by the movement of the sun: dawn, noon, the cool of the day, and sundown.

**Genesis 18:2-3:** *As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance to the tent to greet them, and bowed to the ground.  'My lord,' he said...*    Running to greet his visitors, Abraham recognized the manifestation of the Lord and addressed the men in the singular "My Lord" instead of in the plural "My Lords."  The plural form is then used for the three visitors until [Gen 18:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v10) when the singular form is reintroduced and is used continually through verse 15.  The inspired writer makes it clear to the reader that Abraham did indeed see God by included the information at the beginning of the passage: *Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre...* Some of fathers of the Church (especially the Eastern fathers) have seen the visitation of the three "men" as a manifestation of the Most Holy Trinity (*The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch*, page 104) present and active in the annunciation of the miraculous birth of the child who was destined to carry the "promised seed" and whose sacrificial offering would foreshadow the sacrifice of the Redeemer-Messiah ([Gen 22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm)).([1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end1))

Throughout the narrative Abraham addressed the three men in both the singular, as though they were one person ([Gen 18:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v3)) and in the plural ([Gen 18:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v4)), as though they were three different men.  One of the three is clearly identified as God the Father ([Gen 18:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v1), [10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v10), [13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v13)).

**Question:** How was it that Abraham was able to recognize he was witnessing a manifestation of El Shaddai?  What did Jesus say about the ability of the faithful to recognize God?  See [Jn 10:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm#v27).
**Answer:** When you walk with God and live a blameless life before the Lord, you immediately recognize Him when He calls to you: *The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me* ([Jn 10:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v27)).

The Genesis narrative identifies the three men as the Lord who is accompanied by two other "men" who are messengers/angels ([Gen 19:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v1), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v15)).

**Question:** Bowing low before the Lord, a sign of great respect, how did Abraham identify himself?  See [Gen 18:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v3).
**Answer:** As the Lord's servant.

God, appearing in a visible human form and accepting the hospitality of a man will be repeated in the Gospels when God the Son, fully human and fully divine, eats and drinks with saints and sinners.  *Because Abraham believed in God and walked in his presence and in covenant with him, the patriarch is ready to welcome a mysterious Guest into his tent.  Abraham's remarkable hospitality at Mamre foreshadows the annunciation of the true Son of the promised.  After that, one God had confided his plan, Abraham's heart is attuned to his Lord's compassion for men and he dares to intercede for them with bold confidence* (CCC [2571](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p4s1c1a1.htm#2571)).

**Question:** What words in the narrative identify the quickness of Abraham's response to the visitation of his Lord (see [Gen 18:1-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v1))?
**Answer:**

* *As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance to the tent to greet them*
* *Abraham hurried to the tent*
* *and said to Sarah, 'Quick, knead three measures of the best flour and make loaves.'*
* *Then, running to the herd, Abraham took a fine and tender calf*
* *and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it.*

**Genesis 18:4-5:** 4*Let me have a little water brought, and you can wash your feet and have a rest under the tree.* 5*Let me fetch a little bread and you can refresh yourselves before going  further, now that you have come in your servant's direction.'  They replied, 'Do as you say.'*

It was the custom to provide water for a guest to wash his feet; it was one of the respectful signs of hospitality.  This was also the custom in the 1st century AD ([1 Tim 5:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1timothy/1timothy5.htm#v10)).

**Question:** Can you recall two incidents of feet washing connected to Jesus?  What was the significance of these events?  See [Lk 7:38-44](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke7.htm#v38) and [Jn 13:5-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v5).
**Answer:**

1. St. Luke wrote of an incident that took place when Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a wealthy Pharisee.   At the dinner a sinful woman approached Jesus as He was reclining at the banquet table of His host: *She waited behind him at his feet, weeping and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair...  When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person it is who is touching him and what a bad name she has.'* Knowing what the Pharisee was thinking, Jesus chastised His host for his uncharitable thoughts and added: *'You see this woman?  I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair* ([Lk 7:38-44](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke7.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v38)).The washing of Jesus' feet by the sinful woman was a sign of her repentance.  The wealthy Pharisee did not show Jesus this sign of hospitality, an indication of his lack of respect for the Lord.
2. Jesus washed the feet of His Apostles at the Last Supper in a teaching that illustrated the humility necessary to serve as His emissaries in spreading the Gospel of salvation ([Jn 13:5-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john13.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v5)).

**Genesis 18:5-8:** 5*Let me fetch a little bread and you can refresh yourselves before going  further, now that you have come in your servant's direction.'  They replied, 'Do as you say.'* 6*Abraham hurried to the tent and said to Sarah, 'Quick, knead three measures (seah) of the best flour and make loaves.'* 7*Then, running to the herd, Abraham took a fine and tender calf and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it.* 8*Then taking curds, milk and the calf which had been prepared, he laid all before them, and they ate while he remained standing near them under the tree.*

Abraham's concern for the comfort of the visitors is a typical depiction of Middle Eastern courtesy: washing away the dust of the journey, providing hastily baked cakes of what was probably unleavened bread loaves, milk in two forms, and roasted meat (*The International Critical Commentary: Genesis,* page 300).  Notice the repetition of the number three: three visitors and three measures (*seah*) *of* flour.  The use of "threes" in the narrative points to something of importance and an event that will impact salvation history; it is also for Christians the number of Trinity. Text records the flour to make the bread measured literally three *seah*. A *seah* was a measurement equivalent to two gallons or eight liters of grain'3 *seah* was 6 gallons/24 liters of flour for bread; it is a super abundant amount of bread for just three visitors, suggesting that this is not ordinary visit.  The visitors ate the meal outside the tent under the tree while Abraham stood near by to attend to their needs.

**Please read Genesis 18:9-15: Sarah's Blessing
18:9*'Where is your wife Sarah? They asked him.  'She is in the tent,' he replied.* 10*Then his guest said, 'I shall come back to you next year, and then your wife Sarah will have a son.'  Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him.* 11*Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, and Sarah had ceased to have her monthly periods.* 12*So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, 'Now that I am past the age of childbearing, and my husband is an old man, is pleasure to come my way again?'* 13*But Yahweh asked Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?"* 14*Nothing is impossible for Yahweh.  'I shall come back to you at the same time next year and Sarah will have a son.'* 15*Sarah said, 'I did not laugh,' lying because she was afraid.  But he replied, 'Oh yes, you did.'***

**Question:** What rhetorical question did God ask Abraham?
**Answer:** He asked "Where is your wife Sarah?"'it is a rhetorical question because God knew that Sarah was in the tent.

**Genesis 18:10:** 18:10*Then his guest said, 'I shall come back to you next year, and then your wife Sarah will have a son.'*

Keeping the covenant promise He made to Abraham in part two of the three-fold covenant, God announced to Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son at this same time next year. The promise God made to Abraham in [Genesis 15:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v4) as well as the covenant commitment He made in [Genesis 17:16-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v16) has now escalated to being identified as a precise event.

**Question:** Where was Sarah and what was her response to God's announcement that she was to bear a child?
**Answer:** She was out of sight inside the tent, listening to the conversation.  When she heard she was to give birth to a son, she laughed in disbelief.

When God first announced Isaac's birth to Abraham in [Genesis 17:15-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v15), Abraham laughed.  St. Ambrose defended Abraham's laughter in [Genesis 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17): *The fact that Abraham laughed when he had been promised a son through her was an expression not of unbelief but of joy.  Indeed, he "fell on his face"'in worship, which means he believed.* St Ambrose, *On Abraham, 1.4.31* (quoted from *Ancient Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament vol. II,* page 58). St Ephraim also defended Abraham's laughter: *Now Abraham was not guilty of any doubt by his laughter, for he showed his love toward Ishmael in what he said.  He had clung to this hope for twenty-five years.  Abraham had manifested his faith in every vision that had come to him.  However great his contest with barrenness became, he manifested the victory of his faith.  But when old age was added to the barrenness, he laughed in his heart.  That his Lord would do these two things for him was a marvel to him.* St. Ephraim, *Commentary of Genesis 14.2* (quoted from quoted from *Ancient Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament vol. II,* page 58).

When Abraham laughed in [Genesis 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17) God did not rebuke him.  However, the Lord, aware of Sarah's interior response (she laughed to herself) as she was hidden and listening within the tent, rebuked Sarah for her laughter.  God's exchange with Sarah is not without an aspect of humor and is an example of how fruitless it is for a human to attempt to deceive an all-knowing God who is able to read hearts and minds.

Sarah was thinking to herself within the tent, but God interpreted her thoughts to Abraham and at the same time identified that the problem was Sarah's age and not Abraham's age:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sarah's #1 response to God's announcement**  | **God's #1 Response to Abraham**  |
| *So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, 'Now that I am past the age of childbearing, and my husband is an old man, is pleasure to come  my way again?'*  | *Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?"*  |
| **Sarah's #2 response to God**  | **God's #2 Response to Sarah**  |
| *'I did not laugh'*  | *'Oh yes, you did!'*  |

Laughter becomes the thread that links Genesis chapters 17, 18, 19, and 21:

1. Abraham laughed ([Gen 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17))
2. Sarah laughed ([Gen 18:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v12))
3. God questioned Sarah about her laughter ([Gen 18:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v13))
4. Sarah denies laughing ([Gen 18:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v15))
5. Lot's sons-in-law laughed\* ([Gen 19:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v14)).
6. Sarah comments on God causing her to laugh ([Gen 21:6a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v6)).
7. Sarah declares that all who hear of Isaac's birth will laugh with her ([Gen 21:6b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v6))
8. Ishmael laughed\* with Isaac ([Gen 21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9)).

\* = literal translation.  Isaac's name means "he laughed." There is a word-play on Isaac's name and the Hebrew word for "to laugh" (*saheq/ tsachaq*) in [Genesis 18:12-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v12) and [21:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v6) In [Gen 21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9) the Hebrew word is"laughter" (*me-saheq*),from Hebrew root "to laugh"; however, in the context of [21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9) this kind of "laughter" is understood to be mocking or malevolent (*Brown-Driver-Briggs,* page 850; Waltke page 274, 294).

**Question:** In His first response to Sarah's unvoiced thoughts after the announcement of the miraculous future birth of a son, God assured both Abraham and Sarah that "Nothing is impossible for Yahweh." When is this phrase repeated in the announcement of another miraculous birth in the New Testament?  See [Luke 1:37](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v37).
**Answer:** The angel Gabriel will repeat this phrase to the Virgin Mary after announcing the miraculous births of both Jesus and St. John the Baptist.  Like Isaac, St. John was born to elderly parents who had given up any hope of having children ([Lk 1:5-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v5)).

It will be in the Incarnation of the Son of God that the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled: *Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham, as the fruit of faith and of the power of the Holy Spirit.  In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This progeny will be Christ himself, in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."  God commits himself by his own solemn oath to giving his beloved Son and "he promised Holy Spirit...[who is] the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it"* (CCC [706](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p1s2c3a8.htm#706); with quotes from and references to: [Gen 18:1-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v15); [Lk 1:26-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v26); [Jn 1:12-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v12); [Rom 4:16-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans4.htm#v16); [Gen 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v3), [Gal 3:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v16); [Jn 11:52](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john11.htm#v52); [Eph 1:13-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ephesians/ephesians1.htm#v13); [Gen 22:17-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17); [Lk 1:73](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v73); [Jn 3:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john3.htm#v16); [Rom 8:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans8.htm#v32); [Gal 3:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians3.htm#v14)).

**Please read Genesis 18:16-21: God Announces His Intension to Judge Sodom and Gomorrah
18:16*From there the men set out and arrived within sight of Sodom, with Abraham accompanying them to speed them on their way.* 17*Now Yahweh had wondered, 'Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am going to do,* 18*as Abraham will become a great and powerful nation and that all nations on earth will bless themselves by him?* 19*For I have singled him out to command his sons and his family after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing what is upright and just, so that Yahweh can carry out for Abraham what he has promised him.'* 20*Then Yahweh said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grave,* 21*that I shall go down and see whether or not their actions are at all as the outcry reaching me would suggest.  Then I shall know.***

Abraham accompanied his visitors as they traveled toward Sodom.

**Question:** How were the people of Sodom described in [Genesis 13:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v13)?
**Answer:** *Now the people of Sodom were vicious and great sinners against Yahweh.*

**Question:** How did the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel describe the crimes of Sodom and Sodom's allied "daughter" cities on the plain of Siddim?  See [Jer 23:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah23.htm#v14); and [Ez 16:48-50](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel16.htm#v48).
**Answer:**

* *But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: adultery, persistent lying, such abetting of the wicked that no one renounces his wickedness.  To me they are all like Sodom and its inhabitants are like Gomorrah* ([Jer 23:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah23.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v14)).
* *The crime of your sister Sodom was pride, gluttony, calm complacency; such were her and her daughter's crimes.  They never helped the poor and needy; they were proud, and engaged in loathsome practices before me, and so I swept them away as you have seen* ([Ez 16:48-50](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel16.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v48)).

**Question:** What contrast is revealed in this part of the narrative between Abraham and Sarah's promise of the birth of a son and the fate of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah?
**Answer:** This part of the narrative offers the contrast between the blessings of hope and life God gave Abraham and Sarah because of their faith and obedience with the judgment and curse of death for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness and rebellion.

The dialogue between Abraham and God in [Genesis 18:17-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v17) was for Abraham's benefit.  **Question:** Why did God tell Abraham about Sodom?  See [Amos 3:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/amos/amos3.htm#v7) and [Gen 20:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v7).
**Answer:** God took Abraham into His confidence, revealing his plan to His prophet and allowing Abraham, a trusted servant, to plead for mercy for people of Sodom: *No indeed, Lord Yahweh does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets* ([Amos 3:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/amos/amos3.htm#v7))

**Genesis 18:22-33: Abraham Intercedes for Sodom
18:22*While the men left there and went to Sodom, Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence.* 23*Abraham stepped forward and said, 'Will you really destroy the upright with the guilty?* 24*Suppose there are fifty upright people in the city.  Will you really destroy it?  Will you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty upright in it?* 25*Do not think of doing such a thing: to put the upright to death with the guilty, so that upright and guilty fare alike!  Is the judge of the whole world not to act justly?* 26*Yahweh replied, 'If I find fifty upright people in the city of Sodom, I shall spare the whole place because of them.'* 27*Abraham spoke up and said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord, I who am dust and ashes:* 28*Suppose the fifty upright were five short?  Would you destroy the whole city because of five?' 'No," he replied, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.'* 29*Abraham persisted and said, 'Suppose there are forty to be found there?'  'I will not do it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the forty.'* 30*Abraham said, 'I hope the Lord will not be angry if I go on: Suppose there are only thirty to be found there?'  'I will not do it,' he replied, 'if I find thirty there.'* 31*He said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord: Suppose there are only twenty there?'  I will not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the twenty.'* 32*He said, 'I trust my Lord will not be angry if I speak once more: perhaps there will only be ten.'  'I will not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the ten.'* 33*When he had finished talking to Abraham Yahweh went away, and Abraham returned home.***

**Genesis 18:22:** 18:22*While the men left there and went to Sodom, Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence.*

**Question:** Why did God send the two "men" to investigate conditions in Sodom?  See [Dt 19:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy19.htm#v15); [Mt 18:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew18.htm#v16); [26:60](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew26.htm#v60).
**Answer:** That God sent His two witnesses to Sodom to observe their behavior is consistence with the Law of the Sinai Covenant in which at least two witnesses were required to testify in a case that required capital punishment.

This part of the narrative presents the age old dilemma: Must the good suffer along with the wicked, must the innocent perish because of the guilty, and what about the question of individual responsibility versus collective responsibility?  God hears the cry of innocent blood, as he heard the blood of Abel ([Gen 4:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis4.htm#v10)), and He hears the distress of the suffering, as He heard Hagar ([Gen 16:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v11)).  He is always ready to withhold His judgment on the wicked for the sake of the righteous:

* *Rove the streets of Jerusalem, now look and enquire, see in her squares if you can find an individual, one individual who does right and seeks the truth, and I will pardon her, Yahweh says* ([Jer 5:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah5.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v1)).
* *The people of this country have taken to extortion and banditry; they have oppressed the poor and needy and ill-treated the settler in a way that is unjustifiable.  I have been looking for someone among them to build a barricade and oppose me in the breach, to defend the country and prevent me from destroying it; but I have found no one.  Hence I have vented my fury on them; I have put an end to them in the fire of my rage.  I have made their conduct recoil on their own heads'declares the Lord Yahweh* ([Ex 22:29-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus22.htm#v19)).

**Question:** Why did God tell Abraham He was sending His messengers to Sodom?
**Answer:** It was the suffering of the weak and the blood of the innocent to which God was responding in judging the wicked cities of the plain.  This was the "outcry" that God has heard'the cry of those who were suffering calling for God's justice ([18:20-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v21)).

**Genesis 18:23-25:** 18:23*Will you really destroy the upright with the guilty?* 24*Suppose there are fifty upright people in the city.  Will you really destroy it?  Will you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty upright in it?* 25*Do not think of doing such a thing: to put the upright to death with the guilty, so that upright and guilty fare alike!  Is the judge of the whole world not to act justly?*

The question of individual and collective responsibility won't be addressed in Scripture until the formation of the Sinai Covenant (see [Dt 7:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy7.htm#v1); [24:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy24.htm#v16); [Jer 31:29-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah31.htm#v29); [Ez 14:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel14.htm#v12); etc).  Genesis 18:23-32 is the longest speech Abraham makes in Scripture.  He bases his argument on God's concern for justice as he petitions God to spare the city if only fifty righteous men can be found.  God is always willing to temper His judgment with mercy.  God told Abraham that He was willing to spare the city if He could find fifty righteous men.

**Question:** Abraham was concerned with the lives of the innocent in Sodom, but was there someone in particular for whom Abraham was concerned?
**Answer:** Part of Abraham's concern must have been for his nephew Lot and his family who were living in Sodom.

Encouraged by God's willingness to spare the city if He can find fifty righteous men, Abraham began to negotiate with God.

**Question:** How many times does Abraham successfully convince God to reduce the number from total annihilation to a final minyan of ten righteous men?  A minyan is the minimum needed for a prayer group in the Sinai Covenant.  In Scripture it is the number of perfection of order.
**Answer:** From fifty to forty-five, to forty, to thirty, to twenty, and finally ten.  Six times the number is reduced from the possibility of total destruction.  Six is the number of man in Scripture, but it is also the number signifying man's rebellion against God.

**Question:** What do Abraham's pleas with God concerning sparing the innocent, and God's merciful response, point to?
**Answer:** The importance of intercessory prayer and the ministry of the saints.

**Genesis 18:33:** *When he had finished talking to Abraham Yahweh went away and Abraham returned home.*

**Question:** Why did Abraham go home?  Wasn't he concerned about the outcome of Sodom's judgment and the fate of Lot and his family?  See [Genesis 19:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v27).
**Answer:** He had done all he could do for Lot and his family.  He was prepared to accept God's righteous judgment.  He returned the following day, however, to see what had happened ([Gen 19:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v27)).

**Chapter 19: The Judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah**

**Please read Genesis 19:1-11: God's Messengers Search for Ten Righteous Men of Sodom
19:1*When the twoangels reached Sodom in the evening, Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom.  As soon as Lot saw them, he stood up to greet them, and bowed to the ground.* 2*'My lords,' he said, 'please come down to your servant's house to stay the night and wash your feet.  Then you can make an early start on your journey.'* 3*'No,' they said, 'we shall spend the night in the square.'  But he pressed them so much that they went home with him and entered his house.  He prepared a meal for them, baking unleavened bread, and they had supper.* 4*They had not gone to bed when the house was surrounded by the townspeople, the men of Sodom both young and old, all the people without exception.* 5*Calling out to Lot they said, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight?  Send them out to us so that we can have intercourse with them.* 6*Lot came out to them at the door and, having shut the door behind him,* 7*said, 'Please, brothers, do not be wicked.* 8*Look, I have two daughters who are virgins.  I am ready to send them out to you, for your to treat as you please, but do nothing to these men since they are now under the protection of my roof.'* 9*But they retorted, 'Stand back!  This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge.  Now we shall treat you worse than them.'  Then they forced Lot back and moved forward to break down the door.* 10*But the men reached out, pulled Lot back into the house with them, and shut the door.* 11*And they dazzled those who were at the door of the house, one and all, with a blinding light, so that they could not find the doorway.***

**Genesis 19:1a:** *When the two angels reached Sodom in the evening...* Note: walled cities closed and locked the city gate at sundown.

**Question:** What is the symbolic contrast between the time of day the three "men" visited Abraham and the time of day the two messengers visited Lot at Sodom?
**Answer:** The three "men" visited Abraham at the height of the day's light, but they visited Lot in Sodom in the afternoon (their "evening" is our afternoon since the day ended at sundown), when the light was waning, symbolizing the difference in the lives of the two men and their relationship to God'Abraham lives in the "light" and Lot in the approaching "darkness" of Sodom.

**Genesis 19:1b:** *Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. As soon as Lot saw them, he stood up to greet them, and bowed to the ground.*

The gate of an important ancient city was an impressive edifice.  It was much more than a simple entrance way into a walled city, it was also a public space where the elders and officials of the city sat on stone benches along the entry way or in side chambers discussing legal matters and making decisions on local affairs.([2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end2))  Lot's position at the city gate and the way he addressed the men of Sodom as "brothers" in Genesis 19:7 suggests that he had become a respected citizen of Sodom, perhaps an indication that Abraham's liberation of the people of Sodom from the Mesopotamians fifteen years earlier had given Lot respected status as a citizen.  As soon as Lot saw God's witnesses, he greeted them with respect, but he only recognized them as human visitors to his city and not as messengers of God.

**Genesis 19:2-3:** 19:2*'My lords,' he said, 'please come down to your servant's house to stay the night and wash your feet.  Then you can make an early start on your journey.'* 3*'No,' they said, 'we shall spend the night in the square.'  But he pressed them so much that they went home with him and entered his house.  He prepared a meal for them, baking unleavened bread, and they had supper.*

**Question:** Why did God's messengers initially refuse Lot's invitation?
**Answer:** They have come to observe the people of the city.  Staying in the city square would allow them a good vantage point from which to judge the behavior of the Sodomites.

Like Abraham, Lot extended his hospitality to his visitors, making them an evening meal of unleavened bread, the customary bread that would be made in haste when entertaining unexpected guests.  His offering cannot compare, however, with the feast of the fatted calf that Abraham offered his guests, but the last meal of the day was typically a small meal.

**Genesis 19:4-8:** 19:4*They had not gone to bed when the house was surrounded by the townspeople, the men of Sodom both young and old, all the people without exception.* 5*Calling out to Lot they said, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight?  Send them out to us so that we can have intercourse with them.* 6*Lot came out to them at the door and, having shut the door behind him,* 7*said, 'Please, brothers, do not be wicked.* 8*Look, I have two daughters who are virgins.  I am ready to send them out to you, for your to treat as you please, but do nothing to these men since they are now under the protection of my roof.'*

The people of Sodom came demanding that Lot give them the visitors for their sexual pleasure.  The Hebrew text reads: "that we might know them."  Scripture records that all the people, both men and women, were in the crowd:*the house was surrounded by the town's people, the men of Sodom both young and old, all the people without exception.* Lot tried to placate their wicked demands, calling them "brothers" he offered his own betrothed virgin daughters ([Gen 19:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v14)), an immoral choice that showed he foolishly valued hospitality as a greater virtue than the protection of his own children.  A betrothed virgin was the sacred bearer of God's image; therefore, the violation of a betrothed virgin under the Laws of the Sinai Covenant was death by stoning ([Dt 22:23-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy22.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v23)).

**Question:** Can you define the sins of the Sodomites under two major categories of sin?
**Answer:** Violation of the rights of others and the sin of sexual immorality.  God created man in His image and likeness, and He gave man and woman the blessing of transmitting His image to the next generation. Any abuse of God's blessings is a grave sin.

Homosexuality was a capital offense under the Laws of the Sinai Covenant ([Lev 18:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v22); [20:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus20.htm#v13))'the sin of the citizens of Sodom, however, was the worst form of sexual perversion'the desire for homosexual gang rape.  The *Catechism of St. Pius X* calls homosexuality *a sin that cries out to Heaven for vengeance.*Sexual intimacy between a husband and his wife was a gift from God in which the two became one flesh and entered into the mystery of creation ([Gen 2:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v24)).  The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses the topics of chastity and homosexuality in citations [2357 – 2359](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s2c2a6.htm#2357).  Citation [2357](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s2c2a6.htm#2357) cites the teaching on homosexual acts based on Sacred Scripture and 2000 years of Catholic tradition: ... *Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."  They are contrary to the natural law.  They close the sexual act to the gift of life.  They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.  Under no circumstances can they be approved.* For verses in Scripture that condemn homosexual acts and other sexual perversions see [Lev 18:22-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v22), [Dt 22:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy22.htm#v5); [Rom 1:24-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans1.htm#v24); [1 Cor 6:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians6.htm#v10); [1 Tim 1:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1timothy/1timothy1.htm#v10); [2 Pt 2:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2peter/2peter2.htm#v6).

**Question:** What was the reason God gave Israel for driving the Canaanites out from the Promised Land, and what warning did He give to Israel concerning sexual perversion? See [Lev 18:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v2), [24-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v24).  What is the connection to the judgment on Sodom and the other cities of the plain?
**Answer:** God told Moses to address the descendants of Abraham who were the bearers of the "promised seed": *Speak to the Israelites and say: "I am Yahweh your God: You must not behave as they do in Egypt where you used to live; you must not behave as they do in Canaan where I am taking you, nor must you follow their laws.  You must observe my customs and keep my laws following them. I Yahweh, am your God: hence you will keep my laws and my customs.  Whoever complies with them will find life in them.  I am Yahweh* ([Lev 18:2-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v2)). The nations mentioned in this passage were the descendants of Ham and his son Canaan ([Gen 10:6-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v6), [15-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v15)).  This announcement was followed by a list of sexual prohibitions including homosexual acts: *You will not have intercourse with a man as you would a woman.  This is a hateful thing* ([Lev 18:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v22)).  The list of sexual prohibitions was followed by this warning: *Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these practices, for it was by such things that the nations that I am driving out before you made themselves unclean.  The country has become unclean; hence I am about to punish it for its guilt, and the country itself will vomit out its inhabitants.  You, however, must keep my laws and customs and not do any of these hateful things; none of your citizens, none of your resident aliens.  For all these hateful things were done by the people who lived in the country before you, and the country became unclean.  If you make it unclean, will it not vomit you out as it vomited out the nations there before you?  Yes, anyone who does any of these hateful things, whatever it may be, any person doing so, will be outlawed from his people...* ([Lev 18:24-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v24)).  The judgment on Sodom was a warning to the other peoples of Canaan and a precursor to the conquest of Canaan by the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob/Israel.

**Genesis 19:9-11:** 19:9*But they retorted, 'Stand back!  This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge.  Now we shall treat you worse than them.'  Then they forced Lot back and moved forward to break down the door.* 10*But the men reached out, pulled Lot back into the house with them, and shut the door.* 11*And they dazzled those who were at the door of the house, one and all, with a blinding light, so that they could not find the doorway.*

Lot's attempt to reason with the men of Sodom only resulted in their rejection of his appeal to righteousness.  They had apparently forgotten that they owed their freedom to Lot's uncle who rescued them from Mesopotamian slavery fifteen years earlier.  The angel witnesses intervened, recuing Lot by blinding the crowd with a "dazzling light."

**Please read Genesis 19:12-22: The Warning to Flee from Sodom
19:12*The men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here?  Your sons, your daughters and all your people in the city, take them away,* 13*for we are about to destroy this place, since the outcry to Yahweh against those in it has grown so loud that Yahweh has sent us to destroy it.'* 14*So Lot went off and spoke to his future sons-in-law who were to marry his daughters.  'On your feet!' he said, 'Leave this place, for Yahweh is about to destroy the city.'  But his sons-in-law thought he was joking [laughed at him].* 15*When dawn broke the angels urged Lot on, 'On your feet!  Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.'* 16*And as he hesitated, the men seized his hand and the hands of his wife and his two daughters'Yahweh being merciful to him'and led him out and left him outside the city.* 17*When they had brought him outside, he was told, 'Flee for your life.  Do not look behind you or stop anywhere on the plain.  Flee to the hills or you will be swept away.'* 18*Oh no, my lord!  Lot said to them,* 19*'You have already been very good to your servant and show me even greater love by saving my life, but I cannot flee to the hills, or disaster will overtake me and I shall die.* 20*That town over there is near enough to flee to, and is small.  Let me flee there'after all it is only a small place'and so survive.'* 21*He replied, 'I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the town you speak of.* 22*Hurry, flee to that one, for I cannot do anything until you reach it.'  That is why the town is named Zoar.***

Lot must have finally realized his visitors were more than ordinary men.  By this time the angel witnesses have seen enough and are ready to deliver God's judgment on Sodom.    God's messengers gave Lot enough time to warn his future sons-in-law, but they laughed (literal translation) at him, showing no respect for the man who was to be their father-in-law, uniting themselves to the action of the crowd of wicked men from the night before (Gen 19:4) and thereby sealing their fate.  And yet, even with the angel's urging and the knowing that the city was doomed, Lot hesitated to leave this den of inequity.  The angels had to take hold of Lot and his family to take them to safety, out of the city.

**Question:** What was the significance of Abraham's laughter when Isaac's birth was announced ([Gen 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17)), Sarah's laughter when she heard she was to have a child ([Gen 18:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v12)), and the sons-in-law of Lot's laughter when they were warned of God's judgment on Sodom (Gen 19:14)?  What is the irony?
**Answer:** Laughter is the thread that links the narrative to its climax in the birth of the promised child, Isaac, whose name means "laughter."  Ironically his birth, which will make possible the birth of the nation of Israel, is framed by the faith of his parents and the judgment on residents of Canaan, a land promised in the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant that will be continue through Isaac ([Gen 26:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v3)).

**Question:** Why did Lot hesitate to leave Sodom?
**Answer:** Despite the city's wickedness, Lot was loathed to leave.  Lot may have been repelled by the sinfulness of the citizens of Sodom, but he was still attracted to life in the midst of sin.

**Question:** Where did the angels tell Lot to take his family?  What was the direction?  What were the angels really recommending to Lot in sending him that direction (spiritual significance)?  See [Gen 13:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v11).
**Answer:** Lot was told to flee to the hills, which was to the west toward Abraham.  To send Lot to the west was in essence to urge Lot to repent his sins and to live in righteousness, following the example of his kinsman Abraham.

**Question:** Rejecting their advice, what request did Lot make of the angels?  Was this a wise request?  What does his request symbolize?
**Answer:** Foolish Lot asked to remain in the plain and to be allowed to escape to the near-by city of Zoar, also known as Bela ([Gen 14:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v2)), using the excuse that he might die if he tried to go into the hills. Lots decision to remain in the plain was in essence a refusal to renounce his sins/ his attraction to sin, and it was a rejection of the gift of salvation.

**Question:** What was ironic about Lot's request and his excuse?
**Answer:** He said he feared death if he fled to the hills and yet, ironically "life" with God was in the hills to the west, not in staying in the cesspool that was the sin of the plain.  His foolish decision was ironically fulfilled in a failed life.

Lot may have been like many people who fear that a commitment to God will deprive them of their "freedom" to experience life. Like Lot they reject the truth that life without God ends in death and loss of all freedom.  Freedom is not license to do whatever one wants to do despite the consequences: *The exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything.  It is false to maintain that man, "the subject of this freedom," is "an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods"* (CCC [1740](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c1a3.htm#1740)).

**Question:** What is the source of genuine freedom? See [Rom 5:15-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans5.htm#v15); [Gal 5:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians5.htm#v1); CCC [1740-42](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c1a3.htm#1740).
**Answer:** Real freedom comes through being freed from bondage to sin and death through the gift of life in Jesus Christ: *By his glorious Cross Christ has won salvation for all men.  He redeemed them from the sin that held them in bondage. "For freedom Christ has set us free."  In him we have communion with the "truth that makes us free."*  *The Holy Spirit has been given to us and, as the Apostle teaches, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."  Already we glory in the "liberty of the children of God"* (CCC [1741](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c1a3.htm#1741); quoting [Gal 5:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians5.htm#v1); [Jn 8:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v32); [2 Cor 17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2corinthians/2corinthians17.htm); and [Rom 8:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans8.htm#v21)).

**Genesis 19:20-22:** 19:20*That town over there is near enough to flee to, and is small.  Let me flee there'after all it is only a small place'and so survive.'* 21*He replied, 'I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the town you speak of.* 22*Hurry, flee to that one, for I cannot do anything until you reach it.'  That is why the town is named Zoar.*

There is a word play on the name Zoar (*soar*) and the Hebrew word for "small" (*misar*); see other references to Zoar in [Dt 34:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy34.htm#v3); [Is 15:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah15.htm#v5); and [Jer 48:34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah48.htm#v34).

**Question:** Why did Lot emphasize the smallness of Zoar in his plea to the angels?  What does his plea to escape to Zoar suggest? Where was Zoar mentioned before?
**Answer:** He pleaded with the angels to spare Zoar; his argument may be that since it was so small there must only be a small amount of wickedness.  His refusal to return to Abraham and his argument in favor of Zoar show a lack of spiritual discernment and an attachment to the sordid life provided by the cities of the plain.  Zoar was one of the cities in alliance with Sodom against the king of Elam.  In the list of the five cities of the plain in [Gen 14:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v2) Zoar is the only city not to have its king named, suggesting his lack of status as ruler of such a small place.([3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end3))

**Question:** How is Lot's response to God's messengers different from Abraham's response?  How are they alike?
**Answer:** Both men were generous in their hospitality, but while Abraham was quick to respond to his guests Lot hesitated'he hesitated to leave the city and then he resisted the command to go to into the hills to the west.

**Question:** What is ironic about Lot's statement: *Let me flee there'after all it is only a small place'and so survive.'*
**Answer:** Ironically, he will "survive" but he will not live in righteousness.

**Question:** Why do the angels permit Lot to escape to Zoar instead of making him go west into the hills, returning to Abraham and to God's altar?
**Answer:** The angels directed him toward the hills because that was the direction of his salvation, but God does not force His blessings or his gift of salvation on anyone.  When someone persists in willful and persistence rebellion, God honors their free-will decision.

**Please read Genesis 19:23-29: The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
19:23*The sun rose over the horizon just as Lot was entering Zoar.* 24*Then Yahweh rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire of his own sending.* 25*He overthrew those cities and the whole plain, with all the people living in the cities and everything that grew there.* 26*But Lot's wife looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt.* 27*Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before Yahweh,* 28*and looking towards Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole area of the plain, he saw the smoke rising from the ground like smoke from a furnace.* 29*Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he did not forget Abraham and he rescued Lot from the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities where Lot was living.***

19:29*Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he did not forget Abraham and he rescued Lot from the midst of the overthrow...* God saved Lot for Abraham's sake and not for any act of righteousness on Lot's part.  But Lot's wife, despite the angel's warning, was still drawn to sinful Sodom.  Lot did not recognize her danger and did not intervene to save her.  In looking back to that which was lost, she lost her life.([4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end4))

**Please read Genesis 19:30-38: Lot's Sin and the Origin of the Moabites and Ammonites
19:30*After leaving Zoar Lot settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he dared not stay at Zoar.  He lived in a cave, he and his two daughters.* 31*The elder said to the younger, 'Our father is an old man, and there is no one here to marry us in the normal way of the world.* 32*Come on, let us ply our father with wine and sleep with hm.  In this way we can preserve the race by our father.'* 33*That night they made their father drunk, and the elder slept with her father though he was unaware of her coming to bed or of her leaving.* 34*The next day the elder said to the younger, 'Last night, I was the one who slept with our father.  Let us make him drunk again tonight, and you go and sleep with him.  In this way we can preserve the race by our father.'* 35*They made their father drunk that night too, and the younger went and slept with him, though he was unaware of her coming to bed or of her leaving.* 36*Both Lot's daughters thus became pregnant by their father.* 37*The elder gave birth to a son whom she named Moab; and he is the ancestor of the Moabites of our own times.* 38*The younger also gave birth to a son whom she named Ben-Ammi; and he is the ancestor of the Bene-Ammon of our own times.***

After the destruction of the other cities of the plain, Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar.  He may have been blamed by its citizens for the destruction of the other cities, he may have been refused refuge in Zoar (after the destruction of the plain, food was probably scarce), or the lawlessness after the disaster may have made Zoar unsafe.  He moved into the hill country, where the angles told him to go in the first place, but he did not return to Abraham.  Lot's daughters devised a sinful plan to secure children through incent with their drunken father.  The elder daughter named her son *me'ab =* "my father," while the younger daughter named her son *ben ammi =* "son of my kinsman," which is associated with *bene ammon,* "the sons of ammon." Scripture records that these men were the physical fathers of Israel's enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites, who occupied territory on the eastern border with Israel.  The hostility of these tribes to Israel during her forty years of desert wandering rendered God's judgment against them.  The Moabites and the Ammonites were not to be admitted to the Sinai Covenant until the tenth generation ([Dt 23:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy23.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v3); [Neh 13:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/nehemiah/nehemiah13.htm#v1)).

**Question:** What is ironic about Lot's sin with his daughters?
**Answer:** The sin he was willing to allow the crowd of Sodomites to commit by violating his virgin daughters he has now fulfilled himself.

**Question:** What Moabitess will play an important role in salvation history?  See [Ruth 1:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ruth/ruth1.htm#v4); [4:13-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ruth/ruth4.htm#v13); [Mt 1:5-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v5).
**Answer:** Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David and the ancestress of Jesus of Nazareth.

Lot wasn't a wicked man; he wanted to be righteous, but he was foolish and lacked the spiritual qualities necessary to lead a fully righteous life.  Most of us do not have the spiritual strength to "go it alone" without the support and good example of fellow Christians in a faith community that is orthodox ("right belief") in its teaching.

**Question:** Lot's series of bad decisions and tolerance for sin led to his downfall.  Can you identify the series of four progressions that identified Lot more and more with Sodom and the final three steps led to Lot's total disgrace (for a total of seven)?  Hint: the first is in [Genesis 13:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v11) and the last in [19:31-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v31).
**Answer:**

1. Choosing to move east toward Sodom'away from Abram and God ([Gen 13:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v11))
2. Camping near Sodom ([Gen 13:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v12))
3. Living in Sodom ([Gen 14:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v12))
4. Returning to Sodom after his liberation from the Mesopotamians ([Gen 19:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v1), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v6))
5. In the destruction of Sodom he refused the angel's command to flee to the hills (to the west) in the direction of Abraham; instead he went (east) to Zoar ([Gen 19:17-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v17))
6. Instead of returning to Abraham, he settled in a cave in the hill country ([Gen 19:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v30))
7. He became drunk and incestuously fathered Moab and Ammon ([Gen 19:31-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v31))

It is ironic that the more Abraham grew in his faith and trust in God, and as a result, received greater blessings, the more Lot failed.  Having been raised by Abraham ([Gen 12:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v4)), he knew what it meant to live by righteousness, yet in the foolish choices he made Lot failed as Abraham's kinsman, he failed as a host, he failed as a role model for his city, he failed as a husband, and he failed as a father.

Like Abraham's intervention with God for the sake of Lot, a Christian can successfully petition God for the safety of loved ones, but ultimately receiving God's gift of salvation must be each individual's decision'to accept God's the gift of salvation and eternal life or reject the gift and fail at life as Lot failed ([Ez 14:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel14.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v12), [18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel14.htm#v18)).  St. Peter's mention of Lot in [2 Peter 2:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2peter/2peter2.htm#v7) renders a merciful account of the man: *He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by reducing them to ashes as a warning to future sinners; but rescued Lot, an upright man who had been sickened by the debauched way in which these vile people behaved'for that upright man, living among them, was outraged in his upright soul by the crimes that he saw and heard every day.*

**Chapter 20: Abraham's Failure at Gerar**

**Please read Genesis 20:1-7: Abraham's Deception at Gerar and God's Intervention to Secure Sarah's Deliverance and the Protection of the "Promised Seed"
20:1*Abraham left there for the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur.  While staying in Gerar,* 2*Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister,' and Abimelech the king of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.* 3*But God visited Abimelech in a dream one night.  'You are to die,' he told him, 'because of the woman you have taken, for she is a married woman.'* 4*Abimelech, however, had not gone near her; so he said, 'Lord, would you kill someone even if he is upright?* 5*Did he not tell me himself, "She is my sister"?  And she herself said, "He is my brother."  I did this with a clear conscience and clean hands.'* 6*'Yes, I know,' God replied in the dream, 'that you did this with a clear conscience and I myself prevented you from sinning against me.  That was why I did not let you touch her.* 7*Now send the man's wife back; for he is a prophet and can intercede on your behalf for your life.  But understand that if you do not send her back, this means death for you and all yours.'***

**Genesis 20:1:** 20:1*Abraham left there for the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur.* Abraham left the area of Hebron and took his herds and flocks south into the Negeb.  The Negeb is the southern region of Israel that is sandwiched between the hill country of Judah to the north, the deserts of Zin, Shur, and Paran to the south, and the Dead Sea region to the east.  This open and rugged region has brush but no forests, mild winters, followed by periodic rains, and hot, dry summers. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who lived a semi-nomadic existence, probably grazed their livestock in the desert-like Negeb during the winter, migrating north to the hill country around Bethel, Hebron, and Shechem in the summer.  In Jesus' time the Negeb was known as Idumea (Edom).  It was the homeland of Esau's descendants and the birthplace of Herod the Great, who was an Idumean and not a Jew.

**Question:** Abraham had grown in his faith and in his trust of the Lord, but he still had moments when his trust in the Lord failed. What previous mistake did he repeat while living in Gerar?  What was the result of his failure?  See [Gen 12:10-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v10).
**Answer:** For the second time he claimed that Sarah was sister instead of acknowledging her as his wife.  Sarah was taken into the harem of King Abimelech of Gerar.

Abimelech was the king of Gerar, a city which was located in the Negeb between Kadesh-Barnea and the desert of Shur.  The Hebrew word *abimelek,* which means"[my] father is king," may be a throne-name passed down to the sons who succeeded their fathers in a dynastic line of kings who ruled Gerar.  Isaac will have a similar encounter many years later with another man who is called King Abimelech of Gerar.([5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end5))  Like the earlier incident with the Egyptian Pharaoh, Sarah was selected for harem duty, a great honor for most women of this era.  A woman chosen for a king's harem could look forward to a life of security and luxury, and she might be lucky enough to bear the heir.  Even at eighty-nine Sarah was evidently still a beautiful woman.  Some of the Church fathers speculated that when God restored her fertility He also restored her youth.

**Question:** How did God intervene to save Sarah and to preserve the legitimacy of the son who was destined to carry the line of the "promised seed" and through whom the Abrahamic Covenant was destined to continue?
**Answer:** God revealed the truth of Abraham's relationship with Sarah to Abimelech in a dream and warned Abimelech if he failed to return Sarah it would mean death for him and for all those of his household.

**Question:** What information did God offer to Abimelech as incentive for right action?  What else did God do to encourage right action from Abimelech?  See [Gen 20:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v17).
**Answer:** God told him Abraham was a prophet who could intervene on his behalf.  God caused all of the king's wives to become infertile.

**Question:** Was Abimelech an honorable man?  Is there any proof that he was honorable?
**Answer:** He answered God honestly, protesting his innocence.  God was protecting Sarah, but He told the king that He was also protecting him from sinning by revealing the truth because Abimelech's conscience was "clean."

**Please read Genesis 20:8-18: Abimelech's Response to God's Warning
20:8*Early next morning, Abimelech summoned his full court and told them the whole story, at which the people were very much afraid.* 9*Then summoning Abraham, Abimelech said to him, 'What have you done to us?  What wrong have I done to you, for you to bring such guilt on me and my kingdom?  You had no right to treat me like this.'  Abimelech then said to Abraham,* 10*'What possessed you to do such a thing?'* 11*'Because', Abraham replied, 'I thought there would be no fear of God here and that I should be killed for the sake of my wife.* 12*Anyway, she really is my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's, besides being my wife.* 13*So when God made me wander far from my father's home I said to her, "There is an act of love you can do me: everywhere we go, say of me that I am your brother."'* 14*Abimelech took sheep, cattle, men and women slaves, and presented them to Abraham, and gave him back his wife Sarah.* 15*And Abimelech said, 'Look, my land is open to you.  Settle wherever you please.'* 16*To Sarah he said, 'Look, I am giving your brother a thousand pieces of silver.  This will allay suspicions about you, as far as all the people round you are concerned; you have been completely vindicated.'* 17*Abraham then interceded with God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave-girls, so that they could have children,* 18*for Yahweh had made all the women of Abimelech's household barren on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife.***

Abimelech's sense of outrage led him to lecture Abraham on his deception and to demand an explanation for his behavior.

**Question:** What was Abraham's explanation?
**Answer:** That he was afraid and that Sarah was his half-sister.  It is also interesting that he admitted that he convinced Sarah to comply with his scheme by telling her that her lie was "an act of love."

This is the second of the three parallel episodes in Genesis that concern the peril of a bride of the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac.  In each case she is the woman who will bear a child that will continue the line of the "promised seed" and whose descendants will establish the salvation-kingdom of Israel, precursor to the salvation-kingdom of the Catholic (universal) Church:

Episode #1: Sarah's abduction by Pharaoh ([Gen 12:10-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v10))
Episode #2: Sarah's abduction by King Abimelech of Gerar ([Gen 20:1-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v1))
Episode #3: Rebekah's thwarted abduction by King Abimelech ([Gen 26:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v1), [7-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v7))

Each story has the same 5 elements:

1. A migration ([Gen 12:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v10); [20:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v1); [26:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v1))
2. An abduction or threatened abduction ([Gen 12:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v15); [20:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v2); [26:8-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v8))
3. God's intervention ([Gen 12:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v17); [20:3-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v3); [26:2-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v2))
4. A deliverance ([Gen 12:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v19); [20:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v14); [26:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v11))
5. A conclusion ([Gen 12:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v20); [20:15-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v15); [26:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v12))

These three events point forward to a significant event in salvation history: the preservation of the "promised seed" when the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt and God intervened to rescue His Bride, who would one day bring forth the "promised seed": the Redeemer-Messiah.

There is a link in the narrative between God's intervention with Lot and God's intervention with Abimelech.

**Question:** Compare and contrast King Abimelech's response to God's intervention with Lot's response to the angels?  How did the relationship/lack of relationship with Abraham impact their lives?  See [Gen 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v3); [19:15-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v15); [17-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v17), [30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v30); [20:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v3), [14-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v14); [21:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22).
**Answer:** Both men received a divine warning concerning the consequences of sin.  Lot was rescued from danger, but not by his immediate obedience to God's warning (the angels had to forcibly take him out of the city).  Then, when Lot was told what he must to do be saved, he hesitated to accept the angel's direction and proposed his own plan.  In contrast, Abimelech not only listened to God but immediately heeded the warning and even went beyond what God told him to do in seeking divine approval.  Lot is an example of one who resists complete submission God's will for one's life.  Such willful disobedience to turn away from sin can destroy a life.  Abimelech, on the other hand, is an example of a man who turned away from sin and was righteous in his obedience to God's commands.  Abimelech will be blessed through his continuing contact with Abraham, while Lot, in refusing to return to his kinsman Abraham, lost the blessings that would have been available to him.

**Question:** Do we have a covenant kinsman through whom His blessings flow out to those of us?
**Answer:** Yes, Jesus Christ is our kinsman-Redeemer and God pours blessings and graces out upon those who are bound by that relationship.

**Chapter 21:1-14: The Birth of the Promised Child**

**Please read Genesis 21:1-7: The Birth of Isaac
21:1*Yahweh treated Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her.* 2*Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time God had promised.* 3*Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.* 4*Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.* 5*Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.* 6*Sarah said: 'God has given me cause to laugh! All who hear about this will laugh with me!'* 7*She added: 'Whoever would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children!  Yet I have born a son in his old age.'***

Faithful to His promises ([Gen 15:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v4); [17:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v16), [19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v19), [21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v21); [18:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v10)), God gave Abraham and Sarah a son.  They named him "Isaac," which means "he laughed," as God had commanded them ([Gen 17:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v19)), and the child was circumcised on the 8th day according to the covenant obligation ([Gen 17:9-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v9)). Making a word play on her son's name, Sarah praised God for giving her cause to "laugh," including that all who heard about this miraculous birth will "laugh" with her.

**Please read Genesis 21:8-14: The Crisis with Ishmael
21:8*The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham gave a great banquet on the day Isaac was weaned.* 9*Now Sarah watched the son that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, playing (laughing) with her son Isaac.* 10*Drive away that slave-girl and her son.' She said to Abraham, 'this slave-girl's son is not to share the inheritance with my son Isaac.'* 11*This greatly distressed Abraham, because the slave girl's child too was his son,* 12*but God said to him, 'Do not distress yourself on account of the boy and your slave-girl.  Do whatever Sarah says, for Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on.* 13*But the slave-girl's son I shall also make into a great nation, for he too is your child.'* 14*Early the next morning, Abraham took some bread and a skin of water and, giving them to Hagar, put the child on her shoulder and send them away.***

This part of the narrative completes the repetitive thread of the word "laugh/laughed" that began in [Genesis 17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17) with Abraham's laughter when God first promised him a son from Sarah.  The thread of "laughter" that began in Genesis [17:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v17) continued through [18:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v12), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v13), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v15); [19:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v14); [21:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v6) (twice), and [9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9).

The key to understanding this passage is in identifying what Sarah saw that so distressed her.  What could it have been that would have caused God to allow Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away?  This episode took place immediately after Isaac was weaned.  It was common for women to nurse their children for about three years.([6](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end6))

**Question:** How old was Ishmael at this time?  See [Gen 17:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v21) and [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v25).
**Answer:** Ishmael was 13 years old when he was circumcised, 14 when Isaac was born, and in this part of the family drama he would have been about 15 or 16 years old, approaching manhood.

**Genesis 21:9-10:** *Now Sarah watched the son that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, playing (laughing) with her son Isaac.  Drive away that slave-girl and her son.' She said to Abraham, 'this slave-girl's son is not to share the inheritance with my son Isaac.'* The literal translation of Genesis 21:9 is that 16 year old Ishmael was "laughing" with the 2-3 year old Isaac on the special day in which Isaac was being honored by his father and the whole community.  Some Bible scholars interpret the laughter as mocking or malevolent'that Ishmael, like his mother who distained Sarah ([Gen 16:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v5)), was ridiculing his brother (Waltke, page 274, 294).  Isaac will become a Christ-like figure in chapter 22 and the connection could be made to Jesus' "brothers"/ Jewish kinsmen laughing and scorning God's righteous Son ([Mt 9:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew9.htm#v24); [Mk 5:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark5.htm#v40); [Lk 8:53](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke8.htm#v53)).  Other scholars have suggested something much more sinister.  In ancient Near Eastern literature "laughter" can be a euphemism for sexual foreplay or the sexual act.  They suggest that Ishmael was attempting to molest his brother, demeaning him to the community in an attempt to secure Isaac's place as the favored son just as Absalom took physical possession of his father's concubines in order to usurp his father's leadership ([2 Sam 16:21-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel16.htm#v21)).

**Question:** Whatever the "laughter" pointed to, what did Sarah seem to identify as the danger to her son in Genesis 21:9-10 and what was her solution to the problem?  Notice Sarah never says Ishmael's name.
**Answer:** She saw Hagar's teenage son as a danger to Isaac's position as the heir.  Her solution was to have Hagar and Ishmael expelled from the community.

**Genesis 21:11-13:** 21:11*This greatly distressed Abraham, because the slave girl's child too was his son,* 12*but God said to him, 'Do not distress yourself on account of the boy and your slave-girl.  Do whatever Sarah says, for Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on.* 13*But the slave-girl's son I shall also make into a great nation, for he too is your child.'*

If the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (c. 2000 – 1700 BC) reflected social customs in Abraham's time and region, it was forbidden for a chief wife to expel a slave and her child if the child was her husband's (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* edited by J. Pritchard, 3rd edition, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969*,* page 172).

It was not within Sarah's power to expel Hagar and Ishmael. She knows that Abraham must be the one to give Hagar her freedom and send her away with her son.

**Question:** How did God intervene in this family crisis and what was the result?
**Answer:** God told Abraham to send them away and promised to bless Ishmael.  Abraham complied with Sarah's demand, gave Hagar her freedom, and sent Hagar and her son into exile.

 Abraham's action, at God's prompting, in protecting the inheritance rights of Sarah's son by giving Hagar her freedom and sending Hagar and Ishmael away may be reflected in another ancient Near Eastern collection of codified laws, the Law Code of Lipit-Ishtar (c. 1875).  A clause in the Lipit-Ishtar law code stipulated if a man granted freedom to a slave and her children by him, "the children of the slave shall not divide the estate with the children of their (former) master" (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts* page 160 no. 25).

**Genesis 21:14:** 21:14*Early the next morning, Abraham took some bread and a skin of water and, giving them to Hagar, put the child on her shoulder and send them away.* The Hebrew passage is ambiguous; it literally reads: *bread and a skin of water he gave unto Hagar.  He set upon her shoulder, the boy [*or*, and the boy] he sent her away* (*Interlinear Hebrew-English Bible,* page 48)*.* It could have been the water bag and a bag of the bread that was placed upon her shoulders or it could be that her grieving son leaned on her shoulder.  With the meager provisions of the bread and a skin of water, the grieving Ishmael and Hagar are sent away.  Abraham's only consolation was his faith and trust in God's promise concerning Ishmael.  From this sad story we can take comfort in the knowledge that even when children leave the family, God will continue to bless the child/children through the parents' prayers and their continued faithful obedience to Him.

**Questions for group discussion:**

**Question:** Compare Lot's decisions to the decisions made by those in covenant with Christ though His salvation-kingdom, the Catholic Church.  How is it that some professing Catholics are like Lot: acknowledge God's intervention in their lives and His commands to follow the right path to salvation but still persisting in determining for themselves what is right, just as Lot was determined to go to Zoar instead of to Abraham.  What sorts of choices do some professing Catholics make that are like choosing to go "east" (moving away from God) as opposed to "west" (practicing the obedience of faith and walking with God in a "blameless" life = repentance of sins and reconciliation with God)?

**Question:** How is Lot's fate compared to the life of his kinsman Abraham illustrated in the words of the Psalmist in [Psalm 1:1-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm1.htm#v1)?
**Answer:** Lot's choice to live with the wicked instead of with the righteous sealed his doom.  It is sobering to consider that his choices not only affected Lot personally, but future generations of his descendants who did not have a share in the salvation-kingdom of the Promised Land.

The prophet Ezekiel listed Sodom's crimes and the crimes of her "daughter" cities: *The crime of your sister Sodom was pride, gluttony, calm complacency; such were her and her daughter's crimes.  They never helped the poor and needy; they were proud, and engaged in loathsome practices before me, and so I swept them away as you have seen* ([Ez 16:48-50](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel16.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v48))*.* St. Paul wrote of those, who because of their wicked practices and rebellion against God,were abandoned *to their unacceptable thoughts and indecent behavior. And so now they are steeped in all sorts of injustice, rottenness, greed and malice; full of envy, murder, wrangling, treachery and spite, libelers, slanderers, enemies of God, rude, arrogant and boastful, enterprising in evil, rebellious to parents, without brains, honor, live or pity.  They are well aware of God's ordinance that those who behave like this deserve to die'yet they not only do it, but even applaud others who do the same* ([Rom 1:28-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans1.htm#v28)).

**Question:** Are any of these practices prevalent in our culture?  Discuss what you can do to protect your family from the external influences of the wickedness and perversions of our modern culture.  What are there dangers?  Discuss both the subtle and more obvious dangers.  What did St. Paul mean by *yet they not only do it, but even applaud others who do the same*? How does one "applaud" wicked behavior?

Endnotes:

[1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note1). The Jewish tradition is that the other two men were simply angles who accompanied God on his visit to Abraham and Sarah; however, the theophany of the Holy Trinity at Mamre has long been the subject of Eastern Rite iconography.  Forbidden to make an image of God, iconography frequently represents the Holy Trinity in the form of the three "men" who visited Abraham by the Oak of Mamre.  They are usually depicted in the icon as three angels sitting at Abraham's table, their wings showing that they belong to the heavenly world. They sit at the table, side by side, as equals in rank, each holding identical staves in their left hands and holding their wings in identical positions, emphasizing the single nature of the Most Holy Trinity.  Often there is a window with the tree of Mamre visible outside the room in which the angels are sitting.  The icon of the Theophany at Mamre symbolically reveals the unity of the Trinity of the Godhead by showing God's triune action in the world.

[2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note2). The city gate was the most vulnerable point in a city's defenses.  During the Middle Bronze Age the city gate designed most favored by cities had narrow, three-pierced passageways that forced an attacking army to break through several barred doors to gain access to the city.  Some gate systems featured a sharp turn just inside the entrance called a "bent-axis" design.  The purpose of this design was to prevent the enemy from making a straight assault at the gate's outer door.  The city gate was where the main action of the day took place with people and caravans coming and going.  City life was therefore centered on the gate area.  Side chambers were often built next to the gate for the night-watchmen or as city council chambers.  A less prosperous city with a more modest gate design might have built-in stone benches inside the gate to accommodate the city elders and king.  These areas became the city court when elders or rulers heard people's legal disputes or discussed city and regional politics.   The city's market was usually an open courtyard area just inside the gate (*Archaeology and the Old Testament,* page 97).

[3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note3). Zoar, also called Bela, was located to the east of Sodom.  After an earthquake flooded the town in the Roman occupation period it was rebuilt at a higher location and was continuously inhabited until the Middle Ages (also see [Dt 34:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy34.htm#v3); [Is 15:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah15.htm#v5); [Jer 48:34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah48.htm#v34)).  After the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that destroyed the plain, the Jordan River was blocked and filled the plain, forming the Dead Sea, a body of water located between Israel and the West Bank to the west and Jordan to the East.  The "sea" is an inland lake fed by the Jordan River to the North but with no outlet to the South.  It is 1,385 feet below sea level and 378 feet deep at its deepest point.  It is the deepest hyper saline lake in the world.  The Dead Sea is 42 miles long and 11 miles wide at its widest point (*Archaeology and the Bible,* page 23; *International Encyclopedia, vol 6,* "Dead Sea").

[4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note4). In 1924, archaeologists W. F. Albright and M. G. Kyle discovered five oases at the SE corner of the Dead Sea, made by fresh water streams on a small plain 500 feet above the level of the Dead Sea.  At this site, called Bab-edh-Dra, they found the remains of an impressive fortified enclosure which was evidently used as a pagan worship site (a "high place:" [Lev 26:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus26.htm#v30); [Num 33:52](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers33.htm#v52)).  It may have been a part of the city of Sodom or it may have been a "high place" used by all five cities of the plain.  The expedition dated the numerous potsherds, flints, and other artifacts from between 2500BC to 2000 BC.  The abundance of artifacts pointed to a densely populated and prosperous area.  To support such a large population the region must have had a mild climate and fertile soil, like "a garden of God" ([Gen 13:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v10)).  There was also evidence that the occupation of the site ended abruptly circa 2000 BC in a fiery catastrophe.  The entire region was so profoundly devastated by some great cataclysm that the conditions of the entire region's water supply, climate, and soil abruptly changed.  The once fertile plain became a dead lake formed by the run off of the Jordan River which no longer had an outlet. Vast beds of asphalt have been found on both sides of the Dead Sea.  Asphalt (bitumen) is a naturally occurring, flammable petroleum product.  The asphalt deposits are more abundant at the south end of the Dead Sea and there are great masses of it at the bottom of the Dead Sea which rise to the surface during earthquakes.  The mountain on the SW corner of the Dead Sea is named Mt. Usdom (notice the similarity to the word "Sodom").  Under this mountain there is a stratum of salt 150 feet thick and above the salt deposits there is a stratum of marl and free sulphur.  Mixed with deposits of gases in an earthquake, these deposits are capable of erupting in explosions that could hurl red hot salt and sulphur skyward, which would indeed rain down fire and brimstone ([Gen 19:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v24)).  A more recent excavation of the Bab-edh-Dhra site has uncovered evidence of several early Bronze Age occupations levels and a large ancient cemetery (pointing to a sizeable population occupying the area) which was covered by a thick layer of ash.  See *Halley's Bible Handbook,* pages 98-100; *Archaeology and the Bible,* pages 23, 32; *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, pages 96-99).

[5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note5). Excavations at Tell Jemmeh, ruins about 8 miles south of Gaza, are believed to be the site of ancient Gerar.  Archaeologists uncovered six levels of occupation dating from the 14th century to the 5th century BC.  Isaac called it a Philistine city ([Gen 26:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v1)).  Gerar was probably an early Philistine colony in the time of the Patriarchs.  The Philistines who came into the Levant in great numbers in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (c. 1500 - 1200 BC) were probably refugees from the fallen Mycenaean city states of Mediterranean islands and mainland Greece.  There was a great natural disaster in which violent earthquakes destroyed the island nation of Thera (c. 1500 BC) and resulting tsunamis and additional earthquakes devastated the Minoan civilization on Crete and coastal city-state on mainland Greece.  Natural disaster and the resulting refugee situation caused instability in the entire region and the migration of large numbers of peoples which the Egyptians called the "Sea Peoples." The artifacts excavated at Tel Jemmeh show evidences of strong Egyptian and Mediterranean influence.

[6](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22note6). 6. See 1 Sam 1:22-25; 2 Mac 7:27. The Egyptian document Instruction of Any, 7.19, records that the normal time for nursing an infant was three years *Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 2: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, M. Lichtheim, University of California Press, 1975.