

# GENESIS

## FOUNDATIONS



Studies in the book of Genesis  
**PART FIVE—Genesis 15:1-19:29**  
Group Applications  
Personal Study



**FOUR OAKS CHURCH**

We would like to thank our pastors and elders for their leadership,  
and the following people who contributed to the content and production of this booklet

**General Editor**

Bryan Zhang

**Authors**

Genesis 15 ..... Bryan Zhang (Midtown)  
Genesis 16 ..... Ginny Laffitte (Midtown)  
Genesis 17 ..... Paul Rezkalla (Midtown)  
Genesis 18:1-21 ..... Bethany Wester (Midtown)  
Genesis 18:22-19:29 ..... Zack Latham (Midtown)  
Discussion Questions ..... Scott Stake (Killearn)

**Copy Editor & Production**

Debbie Tanis

**Proofreaders**

Lori Ivarson (Killearn)  
Jeannie Pierce (Killearn)  
Judy Stringer (Killearn)  
Stephanie Pohler (Killearn)

**Cover Design by Forrest Hughes**

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# Genesis 15

*For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. —Galatians 3:10–14*

## The Promise of Faithfulness

Abram’s faith is a key theme in the Genesis narrative. God chose Abram to be the means through which all the families of the world will be blessed. He will be a major player in God’s plan to undo the effects of the fall. Our brief encounter with Abram up until this point paints a picture of an old man waiting for God’s promise to be fulfilled. God promised Abram a child despite his old age and the barrenness of his wife Sarai. When we encounter Abram in Genesis 15, he has been waiting for decades with no heir. The question we as the audience are faced with is this: Will God be faithful to Abram?

God reassures Abram in a strange manner. First, He tells him to look at the stars as a sign of His faithfulness. Abram will surely have as many offspring as dots in the sky. Second, God tells Abram to cut multiple animals in half. Why does He do this? God is enacting a covenant ceremony. In the ancient near east, kings would conquer lands and offer protection to their new subjects through a covenant. The king would call his subjects to bring animals, cut them in half, and walk through them as if to say, “If I do not swear complete loyalty to you as king, let what has been done to these animals be done to me.”





## Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a covenant and a contract? In our world, how would you say most people relate to one another? Give some examples.
2. Before God established his covenant with Abram, we find Abram wondering how God was going to fulfill his promises. What does God say to Abram (see verses 1-5)? How do you think these words encouraged him? How might they encourage you when you are tempted to fear and doubt?
3. When Abram heard the words of God, “he believed and [the Lord] counted it to him as righteousness.” This is the doctrine of justification. Explain this doctrine in your own words and why it is significant to believers (see Romans 4:22-5:3).
4. After Abram believes, God establishes a covenant with Abram. What are the obligations and promises found in this covenant? What is unique about this covenant (see verse 17 on who passed through the pieces)?
5. God not only makes a covenant with Abram, He also makes one with us through His Son Jesus. What is this new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13)? Why is it important for us to remember this covenant?
6. Do you relate to God more out of a covenantal or contractual relationship? How might this passage help you to live according to God’s covenantal love today?

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

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## Grow

1. What are some ways you fail to trust God?

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2. In what ways does Christ demonstrate God's faithfulness?

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## Go

1. How would most non-Christians describe God in the Old Testament?

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2. In what ways can you clarify the character of God for them in the Old Testament?

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## Additional Reading

From *Abram's Shield* by Ligonier Ministries<sup>1</sup>

Having finished our study of the various face-to-face encounters people had with Jesus, encounters like the one the Samaritan woman at the well had, we now return to Genesis. Recall that with Abram, God began in earnest to fulfill His promise to defeat the serpent (3:15), evidenced in His pledge to the patriarch (12:1–3) and the routing of his foes (14:13–16).

Today's verse introduces the meeting between God and Abram following his defeat of Chedorlaomer's forces in Genesis 14. The Lord comes to Abram and tells him to "fear not" (15:1), and it is no surprise God commands the patriarch to be free of anxiety. In the first place, any direct encounter a person has with the holy and sovereign King of creation would provoke awe and trepidation. Thus, we often see in Scripture God telling people to "fear not" when He condescends to meet them (for example, Rev. 1:9–20).

It is also likely Abram was having doubts about God's fidelity to His promise. Though he was victorious in the heated battle described in Genesis 14:13–16, the conflict would certainly have raised questions in Abram's mind about whether he would always be so successful should he face such a battle again. Moreover, much time had passed since God's initial promise that Abram's name would be great, that he would possess a land, and that he would have many sons (12:1–3). Abram may have doubted God's ability to give him these things, especially in light of the patriarch's later transgressions (chap. 16). Abram's vision serves, then, as an encouragement, much as God strengthens others by way of revelation (see Jer. 45).

Finally, just like Gabriel's speech to Mary in Luke 1:26–38, the Lord's injunction to Abram not to fear precedes His word of salvation. God promises to be his shield and to give him a great reward, which reminds us that His great redemption does not end in an ethereal, disembodied existence but in a tangible, physical inheritance. We will experience the fullness of salvation in a resurrected body, preserved by God forever to enjoy a reward we will taste, touch, hear, see, and smell, in a new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17–25; Rev. 21).

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<sup>1</sup> "Ligonier Ministries The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul." *Ligonier Ministries*, [www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abrams-shield/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abrams-shield/).



# Genesis 16

*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

*—Luke 12:6-7*

## God Hears

Have you ever felt small? When I was a little girl, one of my earliest school memories was of being part of the “tutor train” program. An honest attempt at helping tiny struggling readers, teachers would pull us out of class for extra instruction. While I am sure it was of benefit on the academic front, small children can be unkind. The face of the boy who called me “stupid” is burned into my memory. I wanted to shrink down and disappear right into the classroom floor. Perhaps you have felt that way browsing Instagram and seeing everyone else’s “perfect” life, or maybe the mundane realities of daily life have left you feeling burnt out and isolated.

At one time or another, everyone has been broken by someone’s words or actions, or simply felt alone in the world. In Genesis 16, we see the smallness of Hagar contrasted with the greatness (and nearness) of God. Commentaries on this passage are quick to remind us that polygamy was a cultural norm in Abram’s day. It would be easy to dismiss this story as a lesson in trying to circumvent God’s plan through our own futile means. Sarai was impatient and Abram consents to a wicked plan. They blame-shift and they mistrust God. However, God is giving us a much broader picture. The circumstances surrounding Hagar’s pregnancy feature many troubling details. Let’s consider the issues of great sin that were at play: Sarai’s obvious impatience with God, Abram’s capitulation, and the sin committed against Hagar. Though the text does not use the word rape, it is fair to assume that she did not have a choice in whether to participate in this half-baked plan. The text states that Hagar had contempt for Sarai, which would be a natural reaction to such a violation.

After Sarai “dealt harshly” with her, Hagar flees to the desert knowing that she and her baby face almost certain death. The prospects of a fugitive enslaved woman at that time





## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you or someone close to you made a foolish decision. What were the circumstances? What were the consequences? How did God use it for good?
2. Sarai and Abram made a foolish decision. What do you think were the reasons they made this decision? What were the consequences?
3. Sin often looks so promising, but it always leads to bad consequences. Where are you tempted to believe the lies of sin and overlook its consequences?
4. Even though there is great sin, God still mercifully responds to Hagar. How does He minister to her? What does He promise to her?
5. Hagar calls God “El Roi”, or the God of seeing. How might this name of God encourage your heart when you feel alone or in despair because of your sin?
6. How can your community group pray for you right now?

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

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## Grow

1. Think of a time when you cried out to God. What was the response?

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2. Why do you think of all the women in the Old Testament, God chooses to speak directly to Hagar?

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## Go

1. How does the way that God values us change the way we relate to/value others?

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2. Do you know someone in the midst of crying out to God? How can you come alongside them?

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## Additional Reading

From *God's Mercy in Messed Up Families* by Jon Bloom<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever noticed how hard it is to find an example of what we would call a “healthy family” in the Bible? It’s a lot easier to find families with a lot of sin and a lot of pain than to find families with a lot of harmony. For example, here’s just a sampling from Genesis:

- The first recorded husband and wife calamitously disobey God (Genesis 3).
- Their firstborn commits fratricide (Genesis 4:8).
- Sarah’s grief over infertility moves her to give her servant, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine to bear a surrogate child (Genesis 16). When it happens, Sarah abuses Hagar in jealous anger. Abraham is passive in the whole affair.
- Lot, reluctant to leave sexually perverse Sodom, his home, has to be dragged out by angels and then weeks later his daughters seduce him into drunken incest (Genesis 19).
- Isaac and Rebecca play favorites with their twin boys, whose sibling rivalry becomes one of the worst in history (Genesis 25).
- Esau has no discernment. He sells his birthright for soup (Genesis 25), grieves his parents by marrying Canaanite women (Genesis 26), and nurses a 20-year murderous grudge against his conniving younger brother.
- Jacob (said conniver) manipulates and deceives his brother out of his birthright (Genesis 25) and blessing (Genesis 27).
- Uncle Laban deceives nephew Jacob by somehow smuggling Leah in as Jacob’s bride instead of Rachel (Genesis 29). This results in Jacob marrying sisters—a horrible situation (see Leviticus 18:18). This births another nasty sibling rivalry where the sisters’ competition for children (including giving their servants to Jacob as concubines) produce the twelve patriarchs of Israel (Genesis 30).
- Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, is raped by the pagan, Shechem, who then wants to marry her. Simeon and Levi respond by massacring all the men of Shechem’s town (Genesis 34).

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<sup>2</sup> Bloom, Jon. “God’s Mercy in Messed Up Families.” *Desiring God*, 24 May 2013, [www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-mercy-in-messed-up-families](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-mercy-in-messed-up-families).

- Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, can't resist his incestuous desires and sleeps with one of his father's concubines, the mother of some of his brothers (Genesis 35).
- Ten of Jacob's sons contemplate fratricide, but sell brother Joseph into slavery instead. Then they lie about it to their father for 22 years until Joseph exposes them (Genesis 37, 45).
- Judah, as a widower, frequented prostitutes. This occurred frequently enough that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, whom he had dishonored, knew that if she disguised herself as one, he'd sleep with her. He did and got her pregnant (Genesis 38).

That's just the beginning. Time would fail me to talk of:

- Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10),
- Gideon's murderous son, Abimelech (Judges 9),
- Samson's un-Nazirite immorality (Judges 14–16),
- Eli's worthless sons (1 Samuel 2–4),
- Samuel's worthless sons (1 Samuel 8),
- David's sordid family (2 Samuel 11–18),
- Wise Solomon who unwisely married 1,000 women, turned from God, and whose proverbial instruction went essentially unheeded by most of his heirs (1 Kings 11–12),
- Etc., etc.

Why is the Bible loud on sinfully dysfunctional families and quiet on harmonious families?

Well, for one thing, most families aren't harmonious. Humanity is not harmonious. We are alienated — alienated from God and each other. So put alienated, selfish sinners together in a home, sharing possessions and the most intimate aspects of life, having different personalities and interests, and a disparate distribution of power, abilities, and opportunities, and you have a recipe for a sin-mess.

But there's a deeper purpose at work in this mess. The Bible's main theme is God's gracious plan to redeem needy sinners. It teaches us that what God wants most for us is that we 1) become aware of our sinfulness and 2) our powerlessness to save ourselves,

as we 3) believe and love his Son and the gospel he preached, and 4) graciously love one another. And it turns out that the family is an ideal place for all of these to occur. But what we often fail to remember is that the mess is usually required for these things to occur. Sin must be seen and powerlessness must be experienced before we really turn to Jesus and embrace his gospel. And offenses must be committed if gracious love is to be demonstrated. So if we're praying for our family members to experience these things, we should expect trouble.

Family harmony is a good desire and something to work toward. But in God's plan, it may not be what is most needed. What may be most needed is for our family to be a crucible of grace, a place where the heat of pressure forces sin to surface providing opportunities for the gospel to be understood and applied. And when this happens the messes become mercies.

My point is this: if your family is not the epitome of harmony, take heart. God specializes in redeeming messes. See yours as an opportunity for God's grace to become visible to your loved ones and pray hard that God will make it happen.



# Genesis 17

*In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. — Colossians 2:11-12*

## Does Circumcision Save?

Circumcision is weird. Why would God institute a bizarre practice like this as a sign of his covenant with Abraham? And more importantly, what was its function? Were the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) saved by circumcision?

As a Christian living with the benefit of hindsight and the information provided in the New Testament, it may be tempting to argue that circumcision saved people in the Old Testament. Circumcision saved in the old covenant and Christ saves in the new covenant, right? Well, not quite.

Paul argues that circumcision did not save people even in the old covenant (see Romans 2:25-29). So if circumcision did not save people even in the Old Testament, then what was it for? Well, circumcision was a sign of the old covenant—it served to distinguish God's people from the rest of the world. To be circumcised was to tell the world that you were in a covenant with God similar to how a wedding ring tells the world that you are in a marriage covenant with your spouse. But, does wearing a wedding ring necessarily mean that you are upholding your marriage covenant? Of course not. You can wear a ring and be unfaithful to your spouse. The wedding ring is not the marriage covenant, it's simply a sign that you have made a covenant.

It's the same with circumcision. Being circumcised simply told the world that you were in a covenant with God, but that alone does nothing to ensure that you are keeping the covenant. For that reason, circumcision did not save the Israelites—only those who, by God's grace, trusted in the promises of God were saved.





## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you wore a sign to show your allegiance. What was it? How did people respond?
2. In this passage, God restates his covenant with Abram in greater detail. Do you notice any differences from what God had revealed before?
3. To signify this covenant, God gives Abram a new name and a physical sign. What is significant about both of these?
4. As members of the new covenant, what sign does God give us? Take some time as a group to share baptism stories and why it was special.
5. Abraham obeyed God by circumcising every male in his household. What is a particular way God is calling you to obey Him today to show your love for Him?

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

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## Grow

1. What does this passage tell us about God's intention for the covenants with Abraham and Moses?

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2. Is everyone in the church circumcised in their hearts?

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## Go

1. What are some common misconceptions that Christians have about the old covenant (or the Old Testament in general)?

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2. How can we think better about the relationship between the old and new covenants that God has made with people?

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## Additional Reading

From *Against the Heresies* by Irenaeus<sup>1</sup>

For all the apostles taught that there were indeed two testaments among the two peoples; but ... it was one and the same God who appointed both ... the first testament was not given without reason, or to no purpose, or in an accidental sort of manner, but ... it subdued those to whom it was given to the service of God for their benefit (for God needs no service from men). It exhibited a type of heavenly things, inasmuch as man was not yet able to see the things of God by way of immediate vision. It foreshadowed the images of those things which exist in the Church, in order that our faith might be firmly established. It contained a prophecy of things to come, in order that man might learn that God has foreknowledge of all things.

From *Miscellanies* by Clement of Alexandria<sup>2</sup>

If ... the Law of Moses had been sufficient to confer eternal life, then there would have been no purpose for the Savior himself to come and suffer for us and to live the whole course of human life from his birth to his cross. And it would have been to no purpose for him [the rich, young ruler; Mark 10:17-31] who had done all the commandments of the law from his youth to fall on his knees and beg for immortality from someone else.

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<sup>1</sup> "IV:32:2." *Against the Heresies*, by Irenaeus et al., Newman Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> "IV:21." *Miscellanies Book IV*, by Clement et al., Garland, 1987.

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# Genesis 18:1-21

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.... By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. –Hebrews 11:1, 11*

## Sarah Laughs

Throughout Scripture, Abraham is held up as a model of faith in God's promises. When we first meet Abraham, God is promising to make a great nation of him (Gen. 12:1-3). Then He promises a specific land for those numerous future offspring (13:14-18). God reiterates the promise of a son, the beginning of a nation (15:1-6), then institutes circumcision as a physical sign of the everlasting covenant and changes Abram's and Sarai's names (17:1-21). These were monumental moments in the beginning of God's redemptive plan.

Abraham believed and obeyed, and Sarah joined him in following an unseen God into the unknown. From a merely human perspective, none of this made sense, yet they followed, imperfectly but persistently. Still, they had no child who would be the first of the promised multitude of offspring. Sarah was the first woman recorded in Scripture to suffer infertility. For Sarah, pain in childbearing was in its lack. Other women--Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, Hannah, Elizabeth--could all draw from Sarah's story, but Sarah had no frame of reference, no hope for a child coming from a barren womb. While they had witnessed miracles, like plagues on Pharaoh's household when Sarah was in his harem, none of their story that Moses recorded to this point completely defied the natural order. Then comes Genesis 18. Abraham and Sarah welcomed three visitors to their home, one of whom Abraham identified as divine. They put on a lavish meal, and wealthy, distinguished Abraham waited tableside as a servant. The visitors inquired after Sarah, who was eavesdropping at the tent door, and the Lord promised to return a year later, when Sarah would have a son.

A post-menopausal woman conceiving and delivering a baby? At ninety? It just doesn't happen. God had recently given Abraham this same promise (17:15-21), and Sarah reacted exactly as her husband had. She laughed. It was outrageous. They weren't

naive; they knew how babies were made. But they were old, and Sarah was well past the age of childbearing. Decades had passed, month after month with no sign of a baby, then came physical certainty that the opportunity was lost. It wasn't that Sarah doubted God's promise to make Abraham the father of many nations; she just logically concluded that the offspring wouldn't come through her body. Barrenness became a birthplace of disbelief. Natural conception didn't happen, so she attempted to control the situation through Hagar and only met with strife and heartache.

No wonder she chuckled at the Lord's proclamation. Even though Sarah laughed "to herself," God heard and asked, "Why did Sarah laugh?... Is anything too hard for the LORD?" A choice lay before Sarah: trust God or trust her own understanding. Was God powerful enough to fulfill His promise to Abraham in this astounding way? In fear, Sarah denied laughing, but the Lord knew the truth: "No, but you did laugh." Sarah was thinking in merely human terms. With man, this was impossible, but for the Lord, who spoke creation into being and breathed life into the first human, nothing was impossible.

Did God really say...? It is the question that has troubled mankind since the Fall. We are tempted to question God's character, faithfulness, and power. Will He really work all things, even this thing, for my good? Is His grace sufficient? Am I truly a new creation? Can I be sure He loves me? Sarah, in her fear, lied about her skepticism when the Lord questioned her. In our pride, we don't want to admit our doubts, but in His grace, God is still faithful. He promised elderly Sarah a son. He had ordained her future and was true to the new name He had given her, "princess," a mother of kings.

God was unfazed by Sarah's laughter or her lie. He immediately reemphasized His promise to Abraham, saying he will "surely become a great and mighty nation" because God had "chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him" (vv. 18-19).

The Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how or when Sarah fully believed God's promise of a son, but the writer of Hebrews assures she did: "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore" (11:11-12). God's promise is life. He created life in Sarah's barren womb, and He raises us, who were dead in our sins, to life in Christ.







## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you did not believe God. What was the situation? Why did you lack faith?
2. In this passage, the LORD appeared to Abraham and Sarah. Why is this significant? How do Abraham and Sarah respond to this visit?
3. When the LORD makes His promise once again, why do you think Sarah laughs? How does the LORD respond?
4. Like Sarah, in what situation are you tempted to believe that it is too hard for God?
5. Even though Sarah lacks faith in this passage, we see in Hebrews 11:11 that “she considered him faithful who had promised.” How might you ask God to grow your faith in His promises? Spend some time as a group praying for one another.

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

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## Grow

1. When have you had trouble believing God's promise because your circumstances seemed insurmountable?

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2. How has God surprised you by His faithfulness?

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## Go

1. How could you use Sarah's story to present the gospel to an unbeliever?

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2. How would you counsel an unbeliever or a new believer who doubts God's faithfulness, love, power, or existence because of disappointing circumstances?

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## Additional Reading

From “Divine Promises,” in *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*<sup>1</sup>

Glorious Jehovah, my covenant God,  
All thy promises in Christ Jesus are yea and amen,  
and all shall be fulfilled.  
Thou hast spoken them, and they shall be done,  
commanded, and they shall come to pass.  
Yet I have often doubted thee,  
have lived at times as if there were no God.  
Lord, forgive me that death in life,  
when I have found something apart from thee,  
when I have been content with ephemeral things.  
But through thy grace I have repented;  
Thou hast given me to read my pardon in the wounds of Jesus,  
and my soul doth trust in him, my God incarnate,  
the ground of my life,  
the spring of my hope.  
Teach me to be resigned to thy will,  
to delight in thy law,  
to have no will but thine,  
to believe that everything thou doest is for my good.

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<sup>1</sup> “Divine Promises,” *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. ed. Arthur Bennet. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011. p. 130.

Help me to leave my concerns in thy hands,  
for thou hast power over evil,  
and bringest from it an infinite progression of good,  
until thy purposes are fulfilled.

Bless me with Abraham's faith  
that staggers not at promises through unbelief.

May I not instruct thee in my troubles,  
but glorify thee in my trials;

Grant me a distinct advance in the divine life;

May I reach a higher platform,  
leave the mists of doubt and fear in the valley,  
and climb to hill-tops of eternal security in Christ  
by simply believing he cannot lie,  
or turn from his purpose.

Give me the confidence I ought to have in him  
who is worthy to be praised,  
and who is blessed for evermore.

# Genesis 18:22-19:29

*Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."*

—Matthew 11:20–24

## Sodom and Gomorrah

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is the inverse of the book of Jonah. Both Nineveh and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were full of wealth, violence, cruelty, and perversion. However, whereas Jonah desired the destruction of Nineveh, Abraham pled for God's mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah. In a twist of bitter irony, Abraham stood on a hill overlooking the valley and witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, while Jonah stood on a hill overlooking Nineveh and witnessed the city's salvation. Jonah preached a message of judgement to Nineveh and they turned in repentance, while angels visited Sodom and found themselves threatened by rape from ungodly men. Nineveh repented, but Sodom and Gomorrah only delayed the inevitable.

The comparison between these two cities shows us that the rejection of the gospel is worse than ignorance of it. Sodom and Gomorrah knew God but refused to obey Him. Nineveh refused to obey out of ignorance. Both are sinful, but to reject the knowledge of

God is far worse. Sodom and Gomorrah witnessed the power of Abraham’s God when He rescued Lot from the four kings in Genesis 14. The king of Sodom himself witnessed Abraham being blessed by the King-Priest, Melchizedek. This meant nothing to them. They were blinded by their evil hearts and rebelled against the Lord. They were like Pharaoh—hardened in heart and focused on their own sinful gain.

Humanity’s sin sinks to the deepest levels of our hearts. We can know the work of the Lord, we can know His character, and we can acknowledge His power, but our knowledge is not enough to overcome our slavery to sin. There is no hope for any of us apart from God’s mercy. Genesis 18 warns all those who are self-assured in their safety and provision based upon their own authority that they are in danger. God is not mocked.

However, God’s rich mercy extends to the worst of sinners. God spares Lot and Lot raises two children by his daughters who become the ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The Moabites and Ammonites become sworn enemies of the Israelites in the wilderness. Yet even in this, God’s mercy shines through, for hundreds of years later a young Moabite woman without hope turns to the true and living God. Her name is Ruth. She becomes the ancestor of a young shepherd named David. King David is descended from sinners stretching back to Genesis 18. Despite David’s sinful lineage, God brought forth the greater David, Jesus Christ, the true king, to win salvation not only for Israelites, but all Moabites, Ammonites, and people of all tongues and nations who trust in His name. Indeed, God is merciful, patient, and full of abounding and steadfast love.

## Sermon Notes

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## Discussion Questions

1. When have you pleaded with God to do something? Share the situation and how God responded?
2. Abraham loves Lot and intercedes for him. When have you interceded for someone in this way?
3. In this interaction between Abraham and God, how are God's justice and mercy on display? Where else have you seen God show both His justice and mercy—either in the Bible or in your personal life?
4. Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 tell us that Jesus intercedes for us. How might this encourage your hearts today? What might He be praying for you right now?
5. Remember back to Lot's decision in Genesis 13. What are the consequences of that decision and his continued rebellion (on him and his family) found in this passage?
6. Sin has devastating effects on us and many around us. What sin do you need to confess and repent? How might your group help you?
7. Despite Lot's great sin, God rescues him and shows that we're never too far from the reach of God's grace. How might this encourage you today?

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

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## Grow

1. What does Genesis 18 teach us about God's holiness?

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2. What does Genesis 18 teach us about God's mercy?

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## Go

1. What do you think modern audiences would find offensive about this passage?

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2. How would you explain some of those offensive aspects to a modern audience?

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## Additional Reading

From *Far Be It From You* by Ligonier<sup>1</sup>

Having determined to reveal His plans for Sodom to Abraham, the Lord turns to the patriarch and announces His other purpose for visiting this region. A great outcry has arisen regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, and God voices His intent to see if those cities have done as wickedly as reported (Gen. 18:20–21).

The language here is figurative. It is not as if God was unaware of how evil the cities were. Actually, His going to investigate the claims against Sodom and Gomorrah is for our benefit, not His. Much as God's descent to examine the tower of Babel's progress showed Yahweh's greatness and the insignificance of man's effort (11:1–9), His actions in 18:20–21 highlight an essential aspect of the divine character. Our Lord is just and righteous (Ps. 11:7), and He does not arbitrarily pass sentence. He knew before leaving Abraham's home that Sodom and Gomorrah deserved destruction. But in going to view the cities, Moses' writing teaches us about God's unwillingness to pass judgment until man's rebellion is fully examined by the Almighty.

This righteousness of God has penetrated Abraham's heart and motivates his response to the Lord. Since he knows no one in the cities would escape the coming wrath, Abraham argues for justice on behalf of the righteous. Convinced that their fate must not be determined by deeds of the wicked, Abraham proposes that God not punish the holy along with the rebels. The patriarch knows Yahweh's holy character demands justice, and it would be unjust to kill the upright along with the evil-doers: "Far be it from you!" he says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:23–25).

To express such an intimate knowledge of the Lord's character reveals not impudence, but humble faith. Thus, Abraham's speech reveals it is appropriate to invoke God's nature when we pray (see also Ps. 69:13). It is on the basis of His sovereignty, goodness, and omnipotence that we approach Him at all, and so it is entirely fitting to call upon Him to act according to His character. Of course, God cannot do otherwise, since He always acts according to His nature, even if His actions are sometimes beyond our understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ligonier Ministries The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul." *Ligonier Ministries*, [www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/far-be-ityou/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/far-be-ityou/).









# FOUR OAKS CHURCH

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## **Killearn Congregation**

4500 W Shannon Lakes Dr





[www.fouroakschurch.com/killearn](http://www.fouroakschurch.com/killearn)

@fouroakskillearn    

## **Midtown Congregation**

526 E. 8th Ave

[www.fouroakschurch.com/midtown](http://www.fouroakschurch.com/midtown)

@fouroaksmidtown    

## **East Congregation**

650 Trojan Trail

[www.fouroakseast.com](http://www.fouroakseast.com)

@fouroakseast  

850.385.0004 | [fouroakschurch.com](http://fouroakschurch.com) | [info@fouroakschurch.com](mailto:info@fouroakschurch.com) |

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