

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Charles Dickens' classic novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, opens with these memorable lines:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.¹

Best, worst. Light, darkness. Hope, despair. How could such extremes coexist? And yet, they do! Accounts of good and evil, triumph and tragedy stand side-by-side in every era from Dickens' day to our day.

The best and worst of times existed together in the ancient tale of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Humanity's worst acts of wickedness cried out for justice (Genesis 18:20), and when the judgment of God finally fell, the *wail of two cities* echoed across the plain. But at just the right time, angelic hands of mercy ushered Lot and his family out of harm's way. It's a tale of God's best existing alongside humanity's worst—God's light of grace penetrating sin's darkness and hope rising from the ashes of despair.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin this study, meditate on the following verse and write down the hope it gives you:

“For the LORD will vindicate His people,
And will have compassion on His servants,
When He sees that their strength is gone,
And there is none remaining, bond or free.”
(Deuteronomy 32:36 NASB)

Quotable

There comes a time, finally, when God declares, in no uncertain terms, “That is enough.”

— Charles R. Swindoll



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In prayer, tell the Lord that your hope is in Him, and ask Him to reveal His grace from Sodom and Gomorrah's devastation.

Read Genesis 19:15–29. Look for the angels' urgent words of hope and compassion, and write them down here.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

Read God's Word with your heart, not just with your mind. Our minds gather information when we read, but our hearts yearn for connection with God. In this story, we see who God is and what He is like by watching Him relate to Lot and his family. Even a tragic story of judgment such as the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah can bring us nearer to God, which is the ultimate purpose of studying His Word.



Observation: A Theological Truth and a Historical Event

The pages of Scripture are like windows into heaven through which we admire the resplendent attributes of God—His abilities, values, and character. Of all His attributes, observes Chuck Swindoll, we tend to “overlook the quality of divine justice.” He continues:

We prefer to avoid the theological principle that God's tolerance and patience have a limit. His mercy comes with an expiration date. There are occasions when God says, “That's enough. That's it. No more.”²

Perhaps Lot overlooked God's justice because he assumed God's patience would stay judgment indefinitely. However, would God be *truly* just if He never held evil to account? Certainly not! Sin's victims cry out for vindication, and a holy God *will* put a stop to evil. The angels knew that, and they also knew, as surely as night gave way to day, God's patience would give way to justice. Dawn would signal the day of reckoning for Sodom and Gomorrah.



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Grace: An Answer to Prayer—Genesis 19:15–22

In the chart below, summarize the drama and include what you think was the *reason* each character said or did what they did. For example, why were the angels “insistent” (Genesis 19:15)? They knew that Lot and his family would perish if they didn’t leave now!

Passage	Words and Action	Reason
Genesis 19:15		
19:16		
19:17–20		
19:21–22		

Judgment: A Consequence of Wickedness—Genesis 19:23–26

The judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was cataclysmic. What do you observe in the description of the scene (Genesis 19:23–26)?



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Correlation: Flood, Fire, and the End Times

What similarities and differences do you see with this judgment and the judgment of the flood in Genesis 7:1–12?

Write down what you notice about obedience in Noah's story versus the resistance in Lot's story.

How did Jesus use the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as an illustration of complacency at the end times (Luke 17:28–35)?

What does Peter teach about God's patience and the sudden nature of judgment (2 Peter 3:5–10)?

This sobering review of God's judgment past and future causes us to pause and reflect—just as it caused Abraham to do the same when he awoke that morning to smoke rising from Lot's hometown.



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Reflection: A Lesson on Holiness—Genesis 19:27–29

Where was Abraham and what did he see (Genesis 19:27–29)?

Abraham's overlook was near the place where he had built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 13:18), received word of Lot's capture (14:13), and entertained the angels (18:1). What may have Abraham reflected on as he viewed the fiery judgment of Sodom from this location?

As we leave Abraham on the crest of the hill pondering the fate of his nephew and the awesome power of God, we step into the next phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* study: interpretation.



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Story

What lessons did the author of Genesis, Moses, intend to teach God's people (including us) regarding the following elements of the account of Sodom and Gomorrah?

God's Unavoidable Justice

God's Rescuing Grace



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Lot's Hesitation and Resistance

Lot's Wife's Inability to Let Go

Lot was attached to the highlife in Sodom like an addict attached to a drug. The angels had to conduct an intervention! They had to grab him by the hand and force him out of the city. “Hurry,” they urged frantically (Genesis 19:15). “Run for your lives! And don't look back!” they shouted (19:17). Still, Lot resisted and bargained like an alcoholic clinging to his bottle.

Lot's wife could not pull herself away and, as a result, was transformed into a pillar of salt—a memorial to the consequences of a hardened heart. She became an enduring illustration of Jesus' warning: “If you cling to your life, you will lose it” (Luke 17:33). Thankfully, however, Jesus offered this hopeful corollary: “If you let your life go, you will save it” (17:33).



Application: Reminders We Dare Not Ignore

The key to letting go is to *take God seriously*. God's holiness demands judgment for sin. But there is a way of escape! “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

In the space below, acknowledge to the Lord the things of this life to which you're clinging that are not of God. See these earthly distractions for the harm they cause you and those you love. Release these things in prayer, and proclaim your desire to follow Jesus without resisting, bargaining . . . or looking back.



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What other applications can you draw from the principles in this study? And how can you put into practice this week what you've learned?

Close your study thanking God, who sent His best—Jesus Christ—to rescue us from the worst of times.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that You are Holy God, and I stand in respect and awe of Your glory. I acknowledge, Lord, that You have every right to do with me as You please. In the me-first age in which I live, I proclaim that You are first in my life. Thank You for intervening, for saying, "That's enough," and for pulling me to safety. May You always be my Lord and Master. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1902), 3, accessed on Google Books, Dec. 18, 2017.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 134.



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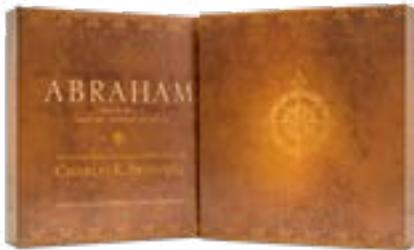
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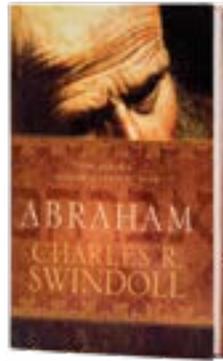
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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