



GENESIS

The Continued Story of Abraham (Genesis 16-20)

“The promise of God is not made void by the unbelief of man, nor does divine faithfulness fail because human faith grows weary.”

— Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*

Covenant Impatience and God’s Kindness (Genesis 16)

Sarai shows her impatience with God’s timing to bring about His promises, the result is not ideal, and yet God shows his kindness and redemptive power.

1. Abram and Sarai act outside of God’s instruction when the promise of offspring does not arrive on their timeline. Though the action is permitted by God, it isn’t presented as the promoted or prescribed route of God’s blessing.
2. God’s response reveals remarkable grace. He shows kindness to Hagar and Ishmael both here and later (17:18–21), demonstrating that His compassion extends even to those affected by broken covenant decisions.
3. God’s command for Hagar to return to Sarai is difficult, yet the narrative emphasizes that God is with her. Divine presence does not eliminate hardship, but it assures that God will ultimately make things right.

Key covenantal themes/issues:

- Description versus prescription in biblical narrative
- Impatience with delayed promise
- God’s kindness to the marginalized
- Grace working through human failure

Scriptural parallels:

- Genesis 21:8–21
- Psalm 145:9
- Romans 8:28
- Galatians 4.21-31

“God requires obedience not because He needs it, but because through obedience the faithful learn trust, and through trust they learn love.”

-John Chrysostom

Physical, Covenantal Test (Genesis 17)

God changes Abram’s name to Abraham (Father of Many) and instills the covenant reminder of circumcision.

1. In Genesis 17, the Lord appears (הָאֱלֹהִים) to Abram, emphasizing divine initiative and relational presence.
2. God calls Abram to walk before Him and be blameless, presenting life with God as continual proximity leading to godly transformation.
3. The covenant promises are reaffirmed—relationship, offspring, nations, land, and blessing to the world.
4. Abram’s responsibility is covenant faithfulness, expressed through circumcision as a sign of distinction, a physical reminder, and an ongoing test of obedient trust—even at great personal cost.

Key covenantal themes/issues:

- God’s presence preceding transformation
- Covenant signs as reminders and tests of faith
- Obedience flowing from relationship
- Promise expanding from family to nations

Scriptural parallels:

- Leviticus 14:44-45 / 1 Peter 1:16
- Deuteronomy 10:16
- Acts 15
- Romans 2.25-29, 3.27-31, 4:9–12
- Galatians 3.27-29, 5.1-12
- Philippians 3.2-11

“God draws Abraham into His counsel not to increase His own knowledge, but to instruct His servant in the rule of righteousness and the exercise of mercy.”

-John Calvin

Sodom and Gomorrah: The Depravity of Sin and God’s Response (Gen. 18-19)

The wickedness of humanity of full display. Yet, God’s mercy still shines through.

1. The theme of laughter returns in Genesis 18, revealing human limits to fully rest in God’s divine timing.
2. God’s decision to reveal His plans to Abraham functions as an act of discipleship, drawing Abraham into God’s purposes.
3. God’s investigative language does not imply ignorance but highlights teaching, mercy, restraint. God does not delight in judgment, allowing space for repentance while revealing His justice to Abraham, future generations of Israel, and the surrounding nations. See Exodus 9:15–17.
4. Abraham’s humility before God—confessing himself as dust and ashes—mirrors the posture of faith found throughout Scripture (IE - Job). The passage affirms that God’s graciousness endures longer than His judgment.
5. Genesis 19 is intentionally unsettling, revealing the depth of human wickedness and the seriousness of divine judgment. If the reader is offended, the text suggests God is more so!
6. Lot is portrayed as deeply compromised, yet he is rescued through God’s covenant faithfulness to Abraham. The angels’ intervention highlights divine rescue despite human failure, and Genesis 19:29 explicitly states that God saved Lot because He remembered Abraham. See appendix: *What to Do with Lot*.
7. The origins of Moab and Ammon demonstrate that depravity carries long-term consequences that extend far beyond the moment.

Key covenantal themes/issues:

- God’s patience before judgment
- Intercession as covenant participation
- Justice rooted in God’s character
- God’s judgment against extreme wickedness
- Rescue grounded in covenant faithfulness
- Grace amid moral compromise
- Enduring consequences of sin

Scriptural parallels:

- Exodus 9:15–17
- Exodus 20:5-6, 34:6–7
- Deuteronomy 2:9, 19
- Luke 17:27–32
- 2 Peter 2:1–8

“God sometimes saves those who scarcely deserve it, in order to magnify the grace by which He saves all.”

-Thomas Aquinas

Covenant Protected by God’s Sovereign Intervention (20)

Abraham again uses the card of calling Sarah his sister. God shows his kindness to a sinful, innocent king.

1. Genesis 20 mirrors earlier covenant threats as God intervenes to protect the promised seed.
2. God’s kindness to Abimelech reflects His compassion toward those who haven’t heard the truth or have been unjustly treated (Hagar and Ishmael, dreams to reveal himself, sending messengers, etc.). This reiterates that He holds people accountable according to what they know (Romans 1-2).
3. God’s use of dreams demonstrates His sovereign activity beyond Israel and reminds readers that God often works in unseen and unexpected ways to preserve life and accomplish His purposes.

Key covenantal themes/issues:

- God’s protection of the covenant line
- Accountability relative to revelation
- God’s mercy toward outsiders
- Divine sovereignty over human ignorance

Scriptural parallels:

- Genesis 12:10–20
- Job 33:14–18
- Romans 2:14–16

Special Note: Seeing the Lord, the Angel of the Lord, and Triune YHWH

1. Throughout Genesis, especially in Genesis 16–19, God is repeatedly described as the One who *appears*.
2. Hagar names God El-Roi, the God who sees her, emphasizing divine awareness and care.
3. The Lord’s appearances to Abraham (17:1; 18:1), the presence of three visitors in Genesis 18, and the physical acts of eating, walking, and conversation prepare the biblical imagination for later Trinitarian revelation while maintaining God’s transcendence.
4. We will pick this theme up in a special lesson on the Trinity in Genesis on Wednesday night, April 1.

Appendix 1: What to Do with Lot

1. The Tension We Feel Is the Point

Genesis wants you bothered by Sodom and Lot's behavior. The text intentionally shows moral compromise.

2. Righteous by Allegiance, Not Heroism

Genesis portrays Lot as tragic and conflicted: choosing Sodom for gain (Gen 13), offering his daughters (19:8), hesitating to leave (19:16), and living in fear (19:30–38). His story is not heroic. Yet, Lot is rescued for Abraham's sake (Gen 19:29). Like many biblical figures, he is righteous by association to the covenant and God's kindness, not by exemplary behavior.

3. The Offer of His Daughters Is Not Endorsed

The text does not approve Lot's action. Ancient hospitality codes valued guest protection, but the Bible merely describes this action without condoning it. Angels intervene, highlighting divine rescue despite human attempts to respond to situations imperfectly.

4. "Righteous" in 2 Peter ≠ Moral Perfection

2 Peter 2:7–8 calls Lot "righteous," meaning he aligned with God. Lot welcomed and "protects" the messengers and did not approve of Sodom's wickedness. He may in fact have been drawn into the brokenness and its temporary attractiveness, but was tormented by their lawlessness. Biblical righteousness often means covenant loyalty, not flawless ethics.

5. The NT Message About Lot is Rescue, Not Role Models

2 Peter uses Lot to argue that God rescues the godly from catastrophic environments. Jesus also uses Lot in eschatological teaching (Luke 17.26-33). Lot symbolizes God's distinction and salvation in the midst of judgment.

6. Lot Illustrates Covenant Mercy

God rescues flawed people because of His own faithfulness. Lot shows that God distinguishes His people not because they are impressive, but because He is merciful. This anticipates justification by faith. Lot is called "righteous" not because he is morally admirable, but because he is associated with the covenant of Yahweh, distressed by wickedness, and rescued for the sake of God's covenant. His story highlights God's grace toward compromised believers.

Appendix 2: Sodom and Gomorrah in Scripture

Reference	Mentions	Context Summary
Genesis 10:19	Sodom & Gomorrah	Territory boundaries of Canaan's descendants.
Genesis 13:10	Sodom	Land around Sodom well-watered before destruction.
Genesis 13:12–13	Sodom	Lot settles near Sodom; city noted for wickedness.
Genesis 14:2, 8	Sodom & Gomorrah	Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah in regional conflict.
Genesis 14:10–12	Sodom	Sodom plundered; Lot taken captive.
Genesis 14:17, 21–22	Sodom	King of Sodom negotiates with Abram after Lot rescued.
Genesis 18:16–33	Sodom & Gomorrah	Abraham intercedes with God to spare the cities.
Genesis 19:1–29	Sodom & Gomorrah	Angels visit Lot; cities destroyed by divine judgment.
Genesis 19:30–38	Sodom	Aftermath with Lot and his daughters.
Deuteronomy 29:23	Sodom & Gomorrah	Covenant curse imagery likened to Sodom's ruin.
Deuteronomy 32:32–33	Sodom	Israel compared metaphorically to vine of Sodom.
Isaiah 1:9–10	Sodom & Gomorrah	Judah compared to Sodom in moral corruption.
Isaiah 3:9	Sodom	Bold sinfulness compared to Sodom.
Jeremiah 23:14	Sodom	Jerusalem's prophets likened to Sodom in wickedness.
Jeremiah 49:18	Sodom & Gomorrah	Edom's judgment likened to Sodom and Gomorrah.
Jeremiah 50:40	Sodom & Gomorrah	Babylon's ruin compared to Sodom and Gomorrah.
Ezekiel 16:46	Sodom	Jerusalem called sister of Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:48-50	Sodom	Sins of Sodom listed (pride, excess, neglect of poor).
Ezekiel 16:53-56	Sodom	Sodom used ironically in restoration comparison.
Amos 4:11	Sodom & Gomorrah	Israel warned via comparison to Sodom's judgment.
Zephaniah 2:9	Sodom & Gomorrah	Moab and Ammon to become like Sodom and Gomorrah.
Matthew 10:15	Sodom & Gomorrah	Judgment more bearable for Sodom than rejecting towns.
Matthew 11:23-24	Sodom	Sodom would have repented if seeing Jesus' miracles.
Luke 10:12	Sodom	Judgment imagery similar to Matthew 10.
Luke 17:28-32	Sodom	Days of Lot and Sodom used eschatologically.
Romans 9:29	Sodom & Gomorrah	Paul quotes Isaiah about destruction without mercy.
2 Peter 2:6	Sodom & Gomorrah	Cities made example of judgment for ungodly.
Jude 1:7	Sodom & Gomorrah	Example of sexual immorality and eternal fire.
Revelation 11:8	Sodom (symbolic)	Jerusalem figuratively called Sodom for spiritual corruption.