

# **BFFs FOREVER**

## Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 18:16-33

Topic

Abraham's prayer for the righteous within Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of what Jesus meant when He encouraged His disciples left in the world to "Occupy till I come"

Title

*"Occupy All Streets"*

### Introduction

C.S. Lewis called it 'the problem of pain.' One author captures the sense of the 'problem' in the following description of our world:

We live in a world in which a child dies every five seconds of starvation. Every five seconds. Every minute there are twenty-five people who die because they do not have clean water to drink. Every hour 700 people die of malaria. **Where is God in all this?**

We live in a world in which earthquakes in the Himalayas kill 50,000 people and leave 3 million without shelter in the face of oncoming winter. We live in a world where a hurricane destroys New Orleans. Where a tsunami kills 300,000 people in one fell swoop. Where millions of children are born with horrible birth defects. **And where is God?**

That particular author goes on to describe how he abandoned his faith. Others raise the specter of pain and suffering to keep them from having to think about God, reasoning that if there was a God, He would intervene to stop pain and suffering.

By the way, I don't see how eliminating God helps resolve the problem of pain. If there is no God, the problem remains and it is squarely on us. It's not only our fault as human beings but without God there is no reasonable hope we will ever resolve it because there is no power greater than

ourselves. Take God out of the picture and all you do is magnify the problem of pain.

For me, the answer to the problem of pain is captured in one word from one verse of the New Testament. The word is “longsuffering” and the verse is Second Peter 3:9,

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is **longsuffering** toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The bigger context of that word and that verse is that judgment is coming, judgment from God, upon sinners who perpetrate the evil that gives rise to pain and suffering. The apostle Peter describes how God has intervened in history before in judgment and that He will do so again in the future. Mean time He is longsuffering, giving men and women opportunity to repent and receive eternal life.

One of the times God intervened in history, in judgment, was at Sodom and Gomorrah. We'll see it in chapter nineteen.

First, at the end of chapter eighteen, we get a lesson on how we ought to live in a world filled with pain and suffering as we await the judgment of God upon sinners.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 If You Listen With The Lord You Will Hear The Outcry, and #2 If You Are Likeminded With The Lord You Will Influence The Outcome.

#1 If You Listen With The Lord  
You Will Hear The Outcry  
(v16-21)

Sodom and Gomorrah were real cities. Archaeologists have found them, only they call them Bab edh-Dhra, thought to be Sodom, and Numeira, thought to be Gomorrah. Both places were destroyed at the same by a catastrophe.

What brought about this awful calamity? Startling discoveries in the cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra revealed the cause. Archaeologists found that buildings were burned by a fire that started on the roof. *Fire rained down on those cities!*

We will get an insider's view of the destruction next week. Mean time, as Abraham looks down upon those cities with the Lord, **we** are being instructed how to look upon our world - a world very much like those cities.

Genesis 18:16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

You learn in the first part of chapter eighteen that one of them was Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnation appearance. In chapter nineteen you'll see that the other two were powerful angels.

Genesis 18:17 And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,

Genesis 18:18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

Jesus gives two reasons why He revealed to Abraham what He was about to do.

The first reason has to do with Abraham becoming a great nation that will bless all the nations of the earth. It was part of the unconditional promise God had made to Abraham that theologians call the Abrahamic Covenant. But *these* two 'nations,' Sodom and Gomorrah, were going to be removed.

Did that nullify God's promise? No, it put Abraham on notice that the ultimate blessing was yet future. Abraham's descendants, the Hebrew people, would produce the Savior of the world Who would ultimately be the fulfillment of the promise that all nations would be blessed.

The second reason God gave for revealing to Abraham what He was about to do was so that Abraham would include it in his homeschool curriculum. While God's promise to Abraham was unconditional, his descendants

would enjoy the blessings of it only if they kept “the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.” They weren’t going to get a pass. God would judge them, too, if they sinned, although ultimately He would preserve a remnant throughout history.

Genesis 18:20 And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave,

Genesis 18:21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

Twice the Lord used the word “outcry.” It may be the most important word in this section. He doesn’t just say, “their sin is very grave,” though it was. No, Jesus was personally aware of the effects of sin upon individuals. He heard their “outcry.”

Have you ever been oppressed? Have you ever been abused? Have you been a victim of violence? Has evil been perpetrated upon you?

If so, it generated an “outcry” and Jesus Christ heard it from Heaven.

This is where it gets difficult for some. Some respond to the fact Jesus hears the “outcry” by blaming Him for doing nothing when He could have intervened.

The best way I know of putting this into perspective is to encourage a person to look at their own life. Somewhere along the path of your life **you** caused someone to suffer. **You** perpetrated some violence - either great or small. **You** oppressed someone. **You** abused someone.

If those words seem too harsh, look at it this way. Somewhere along the path of your life **you** lied or cheated or stole. At the very least, **you** coveted something or someone. Doesn’t matter how minor; it was wrong, it was sin against someone.

If God had immediately intervened, judged you for your sin, you’d have died before having the opportunity to have your sins forgiven at the Cross of Jesus Christ. God’s longsuffering **with you** was so you would repent and not perish.

The problem of pain and suffering is our fault. It's because Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Like it or not, when he sinned he represented all his offspring. You and I have sin imputed to us, we inherit a sin nature, and we commit individual acts of sin.

God immediately resolved the sin issue. Right there in the Garden, while Adam and Eve were yet sinners, He promised to come and to take their place and bear the judgment for their sin and the sin of the entire human race.

But it would take time for the Lord to be born into our history, die on the Cross, rise from the dead, and return. Mean time, yes, there is incredible pain and suffering. But it's not to be compared with the suffering of eternal torment in Hell.

Pain and suffering are our fault. It doesn't help to blame God and eliminate Him because He should stop it. He will stop it, one day. The judgment that rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah is coming to the entire earth. Just like the Lord told Abraham what He was going to do, He has told us.

2 Peter 3:12 ... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

What should we do about it?

1. Like Abraham, we ought to understand that it is God's desire to bless all the nations of the world with a knowledge of their Savior. Thus we want to be about the spiritual business of building His church, making disciples, and evangelizing the nations.
2. Like Abraham, we want to raise a godly offspring. As one author put it, we want to raise right-way kids in a wrong-way world.

#2 If You Are Likeminded With The Lord  
You Will Influence The Outcome  
(v22-33)

Abraham seems to bargain with the Lord. As we read it, note Abraham's familiarity with Jesus. He was indeed God's friend.

Genesis 18:22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.

Genesis 18:23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Genesis 18:24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?

Genesis 18:25 Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Genesis 18:26 So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Genesis 18:27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

Genesis 18:28 Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."

Genesis 18:29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

Genesis 18:30 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

Genesis 18:31 And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty."

On what basis would he think there could be fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, or twenty believers in Sodom and Gomorrah?

Lot was a believer. We see him as carnal, as fleshly, as backslidden. Nevertheless the apostle Peter three times describes him as "righteous." Even in his carnal condition Lot had a testimony in Sodom. In chapter nineteen, at one point, the men of Sodom will say to Lot, "... This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge..." (v9).

The men of Sodom were convicted by Lot's witness - even though by any reasonable standards Lot was blowing it!

It isn't to be used as an excuse for living carnal, selfish, materialistic lives, but even the marginal believer can have an effect on the nonbeliever. Perhaps Abraham was giving Lot the benefit of the doubt by thinking he had converted folks in those cities. "Love believes all things."

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Genesis 18:32 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."

Genesis 18:33 And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

Why stop at "ten"? Some have suggested that Abraham knew there were ten members of Lot's family:

- Lot and Mrs. Lot make two.
- Their two unmarried daughters make four.
- Scholars claim that when, in chapter nineteen, we read of Lot's "sons-in-law," it is a kind of plural form that indicates more than two and probably three. So that would mean three more daughters and their husbands, six people, bringing the total number to ten.

It could also be argued that the number "ten" represents completeness or fullness. In the New Testament parable of the ten silver pieces, a woman loses one of the ten. She searches for it until she finds it. This is numerical symbolism which shows the believer's search for lost souls representing those who are to be saved. When we have found what was lost, the batch will be a full or complete treasure. The number ten signified the fullness of believers.

I don't know why Abraham stopped at "ten." More to the point was his understanding that God would not "destroy the righteous with the wicked."

The "righteous" is a synonym for "believers." They are all those whom God declares "righteous" based on their believing in Jesus Christ.

That is not to say that the "righteous" do not or will not suffer. Of course they do; of course we do. Jesus Himself told us in the world we would have trouble.

Think of the context. God was about to totally destroy *everyone* in these cities. He was about to judge them for their sin. Now in that context, where the righteous are living alongside the wicked, He must first do something to

deliver the believers. Believers have already had their sin judged and God's wrath against them poured out upon Jesus on the Cross.

In our future God will remove the church before He brings the Great Tribulation to bear upon this planet in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. We cannot be the subjects of His wrath since Jesus has already born it for us.

The thing that really gripped me in reading this text this week was the realization that **I might have prayed very differently from Abraham.**

Here are two ways I might have prayed:

1. "Lord, deliver Lot and the believers from Sodom and Gomorrah before you rain fire down upon their heads."
2. "Lord, strengthen me go get Lot and the believers out of Sodom and Gomorrah before you rain from down upon their heads."

Christians tend towards the kind of praying I just described. I've heard more than once in messages about Sodom and Gomorrah that "if God doesn't judge America, then He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology." It presumes that we see others as ripe for judgment. Every natural disaster, e.g., a tsunami or earthquake, some Christian leader will proclaim is God's judgement upon the wicked.

Is that how Abraham prayed? Here is what he said: "...would You also destroy the place and not **spare it** for the fifty righteous that were in it?" (v24).

Abraham was willing for God to "spare" the cities for the sake of the "righteous" that were in them. *Spare the wicked!* That's amazing to me.

I suggest that he was likeminded with the Lord. He was not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance and be saved. He understood that a final judgment would eliminate all possibility for those wicked men to receive eternal life, and it concerned him more than the "outcry" from their victims.



Was Jesus longsuffering with those cities? Those cities had a long testimony of His love, mercy and grace.

- In an earlier episode, Abraham - the man of God - had rescued the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- At their rescue we were introduced to Melchizidek, a priest of God. We know, therefore, that Sodom and Gomorrah were familiar with him.
- And as I just pointed out, Lot was living in Sodom and provided a witness to them. We think Lot had been there at least twenty years.

Jesus was, indeed, longsuffering with them, not willing any should perish.

The application for our lives is two-fold:

1. First, hear the “outcry” just as the Lord hears it and act to do something about it. What did the Lord do? He came to live among us, amidst the pain and suffering, in order to minister salvation.
2. Second, we should be longsuffering with sinners believing that they may repent and be saved before the longsuffering of God ends and He returns to resurrect and rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation.

There is an “outcry.” What part of it do you ‘hear?’ What touches your heart that makes you want to help in any way you can to bring the Gospel to bear upon it?