

Cry of the Lost 4-22-07

Genesis 18:16-33 (NIV)

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰ Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." ²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶ The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." ²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹ Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." ³³ When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

The first half of this chapter told us about Abraham's hospitality to these heavenly beings. We learned that one of them was Jesus, the visible manifestation of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15) The other two were angels. We saw Abraham's desire for another encounter with God, and Sarah's doubt that she would be the mother of the promised child. We focused on God's willingness to dine with us in the intimacy of a covenant relationship, and how He invites us to participate in what He is doing. (Revelation 3:20)

After the "men" finished their steak supper, they looked down toward Sodom. The traditional site of this event is a few miles east of Hebron, a mountaintop village called Beni Na'im. Looking down through the hills, the southern end of the Dead Sea can be seen. Abraham went with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" The LORD had entered into a

Commented [notes1]: 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. Col 1:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Rev 3:20 (NIV)

covenant relationship with Abraham. In spite of Abraham's mistakes, the LORD had committed Himself to Abraham and made him unconditional promises. (Genesis 12:2,3) That sounds a lot like our own lives. We became children of God by faith in what Jesus did for us and entered into a covenant relationship with God. In spite of our shortcomings, God continues to work with us. He has chosen us.

The prophet Amos picked up on these words from the LORD and wrote, ⁷ *Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.* Amos 3:7 (NIV) God will show His servants what He is about to do. I have read many testimonies of martyrs who somehow knew ahead of time that they were about to be called home. In the end times, the Apostle Paul tells us that the world will be surprised like when a thief breaks into a home, but that believers will know it is coming. (1Thessalonians 5:4) He doesn't hide from His own what He is about to do. You've surely heard of believers who have had premonitions not to go a certain way and later found out if they had not heeded the warning, they would have been killed. We each have a rendezvous with death, but it will not come before the time God has appointed. (Job 14:5)

The plan God revealed to Abraham was a reiteration of the covenant. He promised that Abraham would become a great nation and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. We have seen that the ultimate fulfillment of that was through a descendent of Abraham, Jesus of Nazareth. (Acts 3:25)

Look carefully at the next part of the LORD's words to Abraham. ¹⁹ *For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.* At first glance I thought that the LORD was saying that He chose Abraham so Abraham will direct his children and his household in contrast with Sodom and Gomorrah. That could be correct, but look more deeply. Is the LORD saying I have chosen Abraham's seed? The last verse ended, I will bless the world in or 'through' him. If the Lord is referring to the Promised Seed in Abraham, and the pronoun that follows is referring to that Promised Seed it would read quite differently. Then verse 19 would be referring to the Promised Seed. "For I have chosen him (Promised Seed, Jesus) so that He will direct His children and His household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, SO the that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what the Lord has promised him. (Romans 15:8,9)

In other words, God has chosen Jesus to be a descendent of Abraham because He will teach us how to follow God's ways, to do what is right and just (walking in the Spirit). (Acts 3:26) Turning us from our own ways is the blessing, which fulfills what God promised Abraham. The Israelites didn't become a blessing to the world because of their righteous lives. Looking back we can see that what God promised Abraham in this passage was none other than the blessing of the incarnated Son of God and the transformation salvation causes in our lives. (Galatians 3:14)

²⁰ *Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous* ²¹ *that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the*

Commented [notes3]: 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
Gen 12:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.
1 Thess 5:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 5 Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.
Job 14:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: Bible Explorer
Abraham
KJV
Ac 3:13
Peter rebukes them for crucifying Jesus Christ
13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

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KJV
Ac 3:25
Peter rebukes them for crucifying Jesus Christ
25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

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KJV
Ac 7:2
Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy
2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

... [1]

Commented [notes7]: 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs
9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."
Romans 15:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."
Acts 3:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.
Gal 3:14 (NIV)

outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."Where is the outcry coming from that has reached the LORD's ears? It could be angelic forces decrying the sin of the city. In Revelation we have examples of angels crying out against Babylon the Great because of the sins committed in it. (Revelation 18:2) But I think it is the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those who live in it are crying out against it because of the torment of sin. The LORD and the angels are going there to see if the outcry is as bad as what has come to Him. It is not only the pain caused by sexual sin and abuse, but as Ezekiel described (16:49) "she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."

Do our ears hear the outcry in our city? (Isaiah 5:7) Those without Christ can put on a front that their soul is satisfied, but the deeper they are in sin, the greater the grief in the heart. The outcry is all around us if we have ears that are willing to hear it. It comes from the lonely alcoholic whose mate died. It comes from those in false religions who are trying to be god but have nowhere to turn when they face the emptiness within. It comes from those who are addicted to trying to please their flesh with this world's pleasures but only find themselves desperate for more, and it comes from those who thought they found a soul mate, only to discover the person is just as selfish as they are. It comes from the laborer who cannot earn enough to properly care for his family, and the widow who cannot pay her property taxes. There is pain all around us. May the Lord help us to have a heart that is willing to hear it! (John 4:35)

Isn't the LORD omniscient (possessing all knowledge)? Why did He say He had to go down and see if it was that bad? Throughout Scripture, God uses anthropomorphisms to help us relate. He describes Himself as a man. God is a Spirit. He can't turn His face away from us, and yet He uses that description so that we can relate. (Ezekiel 7:22) The LORD didn't have to physically go there to see it, but we need to understand that He sends His judgments with full knowledge of all the details. The only way we can really relate is if He says He is going to see it personally up close.

The enemy of our soul entices us to sin by promising we will find pleasure in it. He is the master liar. (John 8:44) We do find a short-lived pleasure in some sin, but then we face the painful consequences. God asks us not to do those things because of their destructive results in our lives. When we sin, we are saying that we believe the enemy of our soul rather than God. We think God is withholding something good. The first sin was a model of all sin that followed. That fruit looked good. Satan promised it would deliver something they were missing. (1John 2:15-17) It was pleasant at first. Then the horrible consequences came, consequences that the first couple could not even imagine the depths of, consequences that are continuing to this day. (Romans 5:12) Most sin tempts us with the same deceitful promises. We give in to one and the next is easier to give in to. The grievous consequences become compounded until we are in utter torment and our cry goes up to the heavens. Such was the situation of those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah.

I've seen it in so many lives including my own. We've all experienced it to some extent. We have that feeling inside that our choice is wrong, that God is not pleased with it, but we justify it and pretend it isn't so bad. That one wrong step leads to

Commented [notes10]: 2 With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. Rev 18:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 49 "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. Ezek 16:49 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. Isaiah 5:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. John 4:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 22 I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it. Ezek 7:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-- Romans 5:12 (NIV)

another and then another. Soon we are so mired in the situation we wish we had never considered that first step. If we don't forsake that sin and turn around our attitude toward it, we end up like those in Sodom, crying out in anguish of soul. Death sounds better than continuing on. That is the enemy of your soul's goal, your destruction. (John 10:10) If he can't get you to take your life, he tries to get you to the point of irrevocable hardness so that God's justice must end your life. As long as there is life and some openness to God then there is hope. God can help you turn around if you are willing. Sodom and Gomorrah were not willing.

Commented [notes18]: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 10:10 (NIV)

23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? As I read this passage, I wondered how Abraham knew the LORD was going to sweep it away. The LORD had said He would reveal what He was about to do. He said He was going down to see. My suspicion is that Abraham knew how bad it was and knew that was the only just sentence. Was he afraid to ask about saving Lot and his family because he wasn't sure about Lot's righteousness?

We had a guest recently, someone that had been set free from an ungodly situation and alcohol abuse. They had moved to a city in California and were staying on track, truly letting the LORD transform their life. But their description of the people of the city and the immorality that is so rampant, made me recall Sodom and hope that the righteous of that city can offer hope to those crying out in the pain of destructive lifestyles.

Abraham began with an interesting theological point. Would a just God bring calamity on a city when there are righteous people that would suffer with the rest of the city? The same question comes up every time there is a large natural disaster. Is God just? Did He allow it? And if so, what about all the good people who suffer because of it? The question is sometimes phrased as the mystery of evil. Why does God allow evil? This week the question is raised again with the Virginia Tech murders.

We always end up coming back to the "What if He did not?" question. We could all be robotic like creatures, not allowed to make destructive or harmful decisions. Would there really be love for God or man since there would be no other option? Because there must be the freedom to choose, man's choices will harm others. That is easy to see. But what about acts of God (as the insurance companies call them), tornadoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis? Has God just let the fallen cursed world go its own way?

My understanding of the Scriptures is that God is involved in all the details. Catastrophe may come because of the fallen condition of our planet, a result of our rebellion, yet God is sovereign over it all. That tsunami will strike and God will work in the midst of the suffering to reveal Himself to men. In India where the tsunami hit, there have been great opportunities for the gospel to reach people. Some of the areas in Indonesia were very restricted or closed to the Gospel. After the disaster Christian relief workers came pouring in both with physical and spiritual assistance, while others tried to gather orphans and sell them into the sex slave trade. In every disaster we hear of God working in the lives of individuals and turning it into an opportunity for souls to be saved, and of evil men exploiting the situations.

Abraham started with 50. He asked if there were 50 righteous people wouldn't God spare the city? Righteous people are simply those who believe God and have faith in Him as Abraham knew so well. (Genesis 15:6) Their righteousness is from God. God promised if there were that many, He would spare the whole city. You see, if there are that many, there is hope for a city. That many dedicated lovers of God can turn a city around. Their influence can lead people out of their destructive lifestyles and see lives transformed. (Philippians 2:14-16)

Commented [notes19]: 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Gen 15:6 (NIV)

I think Abraham started thinking about how many he knew that might be considered righteous, and decided he better bring the count down. The more he thought, the lower the number, 45, 40, 30, 20 and finally 10. Yes, even 10 can offer hope to a city saturated with immorality. (2Corinthians 9:10)

Commented [notes20]: 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. Phil 2:14-16 (NIV)

Is God just? Who are we to even ask? Justice is only justice when it lines up with the perfect character of God. If mankind had not sinned, we'd still be in Eden's Garden. There would be no injustice. The earth would not be under a curse. There would be no death. It is our wicked hearts that brought about all the destruction and pain we see. Yet, we dare to ask if God is just? The curse became necessary because we need dire situations to get us to turn from our complacency with rebellion and to turn back to God. (James 5:5) Yet we ask, "God, won't you be just?"

Commented [notes21]: 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 2 Cor 9:10 (NIV)

Well, there weren't 10, but God took care of the one that was righteous and his family, at least He offered to. Even then, one of them turned back, defying the angel's warning. Abraham's intercession did save Lot and Lot's daughters. (Genesis 19:29) Believe in the power of intercessory prayer for your loved ones! We need not fear. We are in God's hands whether we live or die. The psalmist declared that even when the mountains fall into the sea and the waves of the sea surge, we will not fear. (Psalm 46:1-3)

Commented [notes22]: 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. James 5:5 (NIV)

Abraham's premise that the just cannot be caught in the judgment of the ungodly is not true. We have the advantage of the rest of the Scriptures and Jesus' teaching that rain falls on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45), and those on whom the tower of Siloam fell were not the worst of sinners in Jerusalem. (Luke 13:4,5) But I believe Abraham's heart was right in the concern for the people of the city. The chapter that follows shows that they had gone to the point of irrevocable hardness. The only thing that could stop an increase of torment was the destruction of the city.

Commented [notes23]: 29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. Gen 19:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah Psalms 46:1-3 (NIV)

Some tourists come to this city and see all the false religions, all the cults and materialism, and wonder if God is going to deal with this city in some way. How many righteous are here? Are there 10? Are we offering hope to those in the bondage of rebellion toward God? Is our light shining brightly enough so that they can see there is a way out of the agony of their souls? (Matthew 5:16) Can our presence turn around a city that seems hopelessly lost? Not only can it, but I think we are beginning to see signs of the tide beginning to turn. If we will hear the cry of those in agony of soul and respond with the love of Jesus there is hope for them, and hope for the city, one soul at a time. May the love of Jesus fill our hearts so that we reach out to them while there is still hope!

Commented [notes25]: 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Matt 5:45 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Luke 13:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matt 5:16 (NIV)

Bible Explorer
Abraham

KJV

Ac 3:13

Peter rebukes them for crucifying Jesus Christ

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

KJV

Ac 3:25

Peter rebukes them for crucifying Jesus Christ

25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

KJV

Ac 7:2

Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy

2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

KJV

Ac 7:8

Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy

8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

KJV

Ac 7:16

Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy

16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

KJV

Ac 7:17

Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

KJV

Ac 7:32

Stephen, permitted to answer the accusation of blasphemy

32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

KJV

Ac 13:26

Paul, at Antioch, preaches Jesus as Christ

26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

NIV

Ac 3:13

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

NIV

Ac 3:25

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'

NIV

Ac 7:2

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

NIV

Ac 7:5

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

NIV

Ac 7:8

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

NIV

Ac 7:16

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

NIV

Ac 7:17

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased.

NIV

Ac 7:32

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

NIV

Ac 13:26

In Pisidian Antioch

26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.