

# September 1 Lesson 1 (NIV)

## FAITHFUL DURING DISTRESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 17:22, 26–37  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 18:16–19:29

### GENESIS 19:1, 4, 5, 15–26, 29

<sup>1</sup>The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

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<sup>4</sup>Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup>They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.

.....  
<sup>15</sup>With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”

<sup>16</sup>When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. <sup>17</sup>As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”

<sup>18</sup>But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please! <sup>19</sup>Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. <sup>20</sup>Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”

<sup>21</sup>He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. <sup>22</sup>But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)

<sup>23</sup>By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. <sup>24</sup>Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. <sup>25</sup>Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. <sup>26</sup>But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

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<sup>29</sup>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.

KEY VERSE

*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.—Genesis 19:29*

## RESPONDING TO GOD’S GRACE

### Unit 1: God Is Faithful

LESSONS 1–5

#### LESSON OUTLINE

##### Introduction

- A. No “Fair Weather” God
- B. Lesson Context
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  - B. Lot’s Hesitation (vv. 18–20)
    - The Small-Town Ideal?*
  - C. Angelic Determination (vv. 21–23)
- II. God’s Judgment (GENESIS 19:24–26)
  - A. Upon Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 24, 25)
  - B. Upon Lot’s Wife (v. 26)
    - Part of the Landscape*
- III. God’s Mercy (GENESIS 19:29)
  - A. Remembering Abraham (v. 29a)
  - B. Rescuing Lot (v. 29b)

##### Conclusion

- A. Mercy in Judgment
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

#### HOW TO SAY IT

GomorrahGuh-*more*-uh.

SodomSod-um.

ZoarZo-er.

#### Introduction

##### A. No “Fair Weather” God

A farmer built a new barn on his property, and on the roof he placed a weather vane. Below the weather vane he attached a sign that read “God Is Love.” On more than one occasion, someone

passing by would see the weather vane and ask the farmer, “Are you saying that God’s love changes with the wind?”

“Oh no,” replied the farmer. “I’m saying that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love.”

A similar statement can be made regarding many of God’s qualities, including his faithfulness. He is always faithful, regardless of which way life’s winds may blow. God is faithful not only in displaying his grace but also in carrying out his judgment on humanity’s sin.

## **B. Lesson Context**

Lot was a nephew of the great patriarch Abraham. Lot is first mentioned in the Bible in the genealogy of Abraham’s brother (Genesis 11:27). Lot accompanied Abraham and his household when they journeyed from Ur to Canaan (11:31). Following a brief time in Egypt, the family returned to an area south of where the tribe of Judah eventually settles centuries later (13:1, 3). When land disputes broke out, Abraham allowed his nephew to choose the land he wanted for pasture (13:8, 9). Lot saw that the territory in the vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah was especially desirable, so he settled nearby (13:10, 11).

The exact location of Sodom and Gomorrah is uncertain; some scholars place them within what later came to be the territory of Moab (Isaiah 15:5; Jeremiah 48:33, 34). Along with Zoar, Sodom and Gomorrah are listed as cities located on the Jordan plain (Genesis 13:10–12; see also 14:2, 8). Genesis 13:13 offers an ominous assessment: “The people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.”

Lot is a puzzling figure in the Bible. He perhaps understood from his uncle Abraham something of the Lord’s righteous standards. Indeed, the New Testament depicts Lot as someone deeply troubled over the wickedness in Sodom. Second Peter 2:7 says that the Lord “rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless.” Verse 8 describes Lot as a “righteous man,” who “was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.” However, Lot also seems to have become attached to life in Sodom despite the tension between his righteousness and the wickedness of the city.

Genesis 18 begins with an account of the Lord’s visit with Abraham. He was one of three “men” who came to Abraham (Genesis 18:2). After confirming the Lord’s promise that Sarah would conceive and bear a son (18:10), the three “looked down toward Sodom” (18:16). The Lord told Abraham of his intention to discover more about the extent of the sin within both Sodom and Gomorrah (18:20, 21). Verse 22 records that “the men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.” At that point the exchange between the Lord and Abraham about sparing the righteous in Sodom occurred. Because the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah became “so grievous” in the Lord’s sight (18:20), he determined that judgment must be carried out on them. Despite Abraham’s intercession and God’s willingness to relent from judgment, both cities would be destroyed for lack of 10 righteous people (18:22–33).

## **I. God’s Warnings** **(GENESIS 19:1, 4, 5, 15–23)**

### **A. Angelic Visitation (vv. 1, 4, 5, 15–17)**

#### **1a. The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening,**

The *two angels* are generally taken to be two of the three men who had visited Abraham (Genesis 18:2). The third of those three “men” is thought to have been the Lord in temporary human form (18:33). This may imply that the Lord is not directly present with Lot in the ensuing discussion.

**1b. and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.**

That *Lot sits in the gateway of the city* may indicate that he holds a leadership position in Sodom. The gateway or gates of a city is the place where important decisions are made (Deuteronomy 16:18; 21:18–21) and business is transacted (example: Ruth 4:1–11). Given the reaction of the men of the town (Genesis 19:9), Lot is more likely there on business.

**1c. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.**

Lot greets his two guests in a manner similar to how Abraham greeted his three guests (Genesis 18:2). In the verses not in today’s text (19:2, 3), Lot eagerly invites the two visitors to spend the night at his house. At first they decline, saying that they will spend the night in the street. But Lot, aware of the wickedness that permeates the city (see the Lesson Context), convinces them.

**4, 5. Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.**

If this is what happens when innocent people are behind locked doors, imagine what would have happened if the visitors were still out in the street! Two intended sins are in view: those of homosexual behavior and rape (compare Romans 1:24–27).

In the intervening verses not in today’s lesson text (Genesis 19:6–14), Lot tries to dissuade those who surround *the house*, even offering his two daughters instead. The reply he receives promises that he too will be abused. At this, the two angelic guests pull Lot back into the house and strike the hostile crowd with blindness. The pair then plead with Lot to leave the city in order to avoid the judgment that is imminent. Lot begs his two sons-in-law to flee, but they treat his words as a joke.

**15. With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”**

As dawn approaches, the urgency of the angels’ appeal intensifies. Note that the terms *angels* and *men* are used interchangeably of the two individuals throughout this account (Genesis 19:1, 10, 15, 16). The likely speaks both to their appearance as men and their function as messengers, a common usage of the word in both Old and New Testaments. Note that the word translated “angels” here is rendered “messengers” in Genesis 32:3, 6; likewise in the New Testament, see Matthew 11:10 and 2 Corinthians 12:7.

**16. When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.**

We are not told why Lot resists leaving Sodom. Is he hesitant to leave the wealth he has accumulated? Is he unsure about where he will live next? Later he will try to negotiate with one of the angels as to where he should go (see commentary on 19:18–20).

Whatever the reason, the angels know they cannot wait any longer for Lot to act. They take the foursome by their hands and lead them out of Sodom. The reason for their deliverance is stated plainly: the Lord is being *merciful* (compare Revelation 18:4, 5). The word translated *merciful* is rare in the Old Testament, occurring only here and in Isaiah 63:9.

**17. As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”**

The reason for the instruction *Don’t look back* isn’t entirely clear. Perhaps it is meant to prevent those fleeing from getting caught in the shock wave since looking back implies slowing down to do so. Another possibility is that looking back would signal a desire to remain in the sinful environment of Sodom (compare Luke 9:62). Another possibility is that those fleeing are not to stop to engage in any smug satisfaction or gloating that those who may have troubled Lot’s family are “getting theirs” (compare Proverbs 24:17). In any case, what will be descriptive when Jeremiah 46:5 is written later is prescriptive at the moment.

The Hebrew word translated *mountains* is actually singular; but since the singular can refer to “hill country” in general (Numbers 14:45), a specific mountain may not be intended. Of primary importance is that Lot and his family move a safe distance away from the judgment that is about to be poured out on two wicked cities.

### **B. Lot’s Hesitation (vv. 18–20)**

**18. But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please!**

As Lot addresses the angels, he uses the same terminology as when he first encountered them at the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:2). It is a term of respect and does not necessarily imply an acknowledgment of divinity.

**19. “Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die.**

Lot’s response to the angels’ urgent plea leaves a reader baffled. Three times he has been warned about the destruction coming on Sodom (Genesis 19:13, 15, 17), and Lot himself has urged his sons-in-law to leave the city (19:14). Lot readily admits that he has been the recipient of *favor* and *great kindness*, yet he fears going *to the mountains* (see commentary on 19:17, above) lest this disaster *overtake* him!

Consider the irony: Lot is more fearful of a disaster that *could* happen than of one that is clearly going to happen—and soon! Thus Lot reveals his lack of confidence in God’s deliverance. How can Lot think God is rescuing him from Sodom only to allow him to die before reaching safety?

**20. “Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”**

Lot suggests an alternative as a place of refuge. The name of the town is not given yet given (see commentary on verse 22, below), but Lot twice makes a point of the fact that the town is *small*. Perhaps his attitude is that a small place cannot be a sin-filled place, or perhaps that a small sinful place can be overlooked by the Lord.

Abraham’s negotiation with God regarding Sodom has already been noted (Genesis 18:22–33; see Lesson Context). Lot is now engaging in his own brand of negotiation. But the motivation of Abraham and Lot could not be more different. Abraham was concerned that others be spared from judgment. Lot, in contrast with Genesis 19:14, seems interested only in self-preservation. He uses the pronouns *me* and *my* but says nothing about his wife or his daughters. That the three women in his life should also be spared is an afterthought, if any thought at all.

### C. Angelic Determination (vv. 21–23)

**21. He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of.**

The angel agrees to Lot’s request; Lot is granted permission to flee to *the town*. That the angel promises not to *overthrow* it implies that the town was intended to be included in the impending judgment. Now it will be spared so Lot and family can take refuge there.

**22. “But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)**

Once more the angel urges haste. The promised judgment will not occur until Lot has reached *the town* to which he has asked to flee. The name of the town, *Zoar*, comes from a Hebrew word that can indicate small size or insignificance (Judges 6:15; Zechariah 13:7). Perhaps today we would call it something like Smallville.

Ironically, Lot and his daughters will later leave Zoar and live “in the mountains,” where the angels had first commanded him to go (Genesis 19:30).

**23. By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.**

Dawn was approaching when the angels urged Lot to leave Sodom (Genesis 19:15). Now *the sun* is fully up as Lot enters his city of refuge, *Zoar*.

## II. God’s Judgment

(GENESIS 19:24–26)

### A. Upon Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 24, 25)

**24. Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.**

The promised destruction of both *Sodom and Gomorrah* begins as *burning sulfur* rains down *from the Lord* on the thoroughly corrupt cities (compare Job 18:15; Psalm 11:6; Isaiah 30:33; 34:9; Ezekiel 38:22). The names of Sodom and its twin city Gomorrah became synonymous with human depravity and the outpouring of God’s wrath as a result (Jeremiah 23:14; Zephaniah 2:9; Jude 7).

**25. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.**

When Lot first viewed Sodom and its territory, he had found “the *plain* of Jordan” to be “well watered, like the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10). Now nothing is spared from the wrath of divine judgment; the *cities*, their inhabitants, and all plant life is gone.

### B. Upon Lot’s Wife (v. 26)

**26. But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.**

To this point in the record, little has been said regarding *Lot’s wife*. When she has been mentioned previously, their daughters have been included as well (Genesis 19:15, 16). Now this woman looks *back*, perhaps out of a wistful longing to gaze one more time on the city where she has resided. Or, more distressingly, maybe she desires to return. The result of such disobedience of a clear command from the angel (19:17) is immediate: she is turned into *a pillar of salt*.

Some have noted the presence of salt formations found along the shores of the Dead Sea, near which Sodom and Gomorrah were likely located. Lot’s wife thus becomes a kind of monument to

the high price of disobeying God. Unlike other monuments, however, she blends in with the surrounding territory and is lost; not even her name is remembered.

Centuries later, Jesus will allude to this incident in warning people to be prepared for his return. The verse is short: “Remember Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:32). This suggests that Lot’s wife lost her life because she was unprepared to accept the mercy extended to her (17:28–31). The folly of Lot’s wife illustrates other teachings of Jesus, including trying to save one’s life and losing it (Matthew 16:25; Luke 17:33) and his warning not to put one’s hand to the plow and look back (Luke 9:62).

### **III. God’s Mercy** (GENESIS 19:29)

#### **A. Remembering Abraham (v. 29a)**

##### **29a. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham,**

When God is said to remember, it signifies that he is committed to acting on a person’s or group’s behalf in fulfillment of his word. Previously, God remembered Noah and protected him and his family from the flood (Genesis 8:1). Later, God will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:24) and provide deliverance for his suffering people. This same sense is intended when God’s people are commanded to remember his acts or laws (Exodus 20:8; Numbers 15:39, 40; Deuteronomy 7:18; 16:12; etc.). Lot’s deliverance is attributed not to anything he did but to Abraham.

#### **B. Rescuing Lot (v. 29b)**

##### **29b. and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.**

The implication is that Abraham’s intercession in Genesis 18:16–33 results in Lot’s rescue. The Lord didn’t find 10 righteous people there, such as would spare the city (18:32). But he did find one.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Mercy in Judgment**

On hearing the names Sodom and Gomorrah, most people think immediately of God’s wrathful, fiery judgment that befell those cities. God’s mercy, however, is also evident when we read of Lot’s rescue. Lot acknowledged that he had been shown grace and kindness in being spared. Even so, he still wanted to negotiate regarding the place to which he could flee (Genesis 19:19). Rather than losing patience with Lot, the angel granted his request.

The flaws in Lot’s character seen in this account should not draw our attention away from the strength of God’s character. Lot’s behavior may puzzle us, but God’s behavior shouldn’t. The goodness of his mercy and the terror of his judgment both stand out. We are to be genuinely grateful that on the cross Jesus took the judgment that we deserved so that God could display his mercy to us.

Like Lot, we too may be disturbed by the godless trends of our culture (compare 2 Peter 2:6–10) and the increasing contempt we see for the Bible and for Christian faith. But we can also

become very attached to the pleasures of this world, which, as Jesus noted in the parable of the sower, can choke the spiritual life from us (Luke 8:14).

### **B. Prayer**

Father, both your judgment and your mercy are revealed, not only in this account but throughout your Word. May we give thanks that in the cross of Jesus “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

What happened to Sodom illustrates God’s  
mercy even in judgment.<sup>1</sup>