

We're in a series about Abraham, a man whose life is astoundingly instructive to ponder! A number of episodes back, we spoke about Abraham's nephew Lot—a man who brought much trouble into Abraham's life. We named that episode, "A Lot of Troubles." Today, we're going to expand on a particular story we just barely mentioned in that episode—the events encompassing the saving of Lot and his family in the midst of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why? Because it's so rich in perspective for us today.

We pick up the story in Genesis chapter 18, where the covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed and Isaac's birth was foretold. Then, in that same chapter, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was announced—and then that culminated with Abraham pleading for the righteous who might be living there.

Now you likely remember what's really interesting here—that Abraham boldly pleads with God to save the city if fifty righteous might live there. Then Abraham negotiates further, getting that number of the righteous down to ten. But here's the thing. Like Abraham's own righteousness, this righteousness for others who might live in a corrupt geographic area is happening *well before the Law of Moses has been given!* Again, Abraham is pleading on behalf of the righteous, yes, he's pleading *chronologically before the Law of Moses!* And God acknowledges that and promises that He will not act if ten righteous are there!

Then comes those powerful verses in the first portion of Genesis 19. You recall what happened—God honors Abraham and sends angels to warn Lot about the impending devastation of the geographic area where he and his family live. And after Lot's family had left the Sodom and Gomorrah area—yes, after "the sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar"—God rained sulfur and fire from heaven on those cities...its people and its land! But Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Yeah, Lot's wife had a heart problem, looking back at an unrighteous place where she lived, a locale unworthy of her adulation.

Hey, we might be tempted to think, "If only the people of Sodom had the Law of Moses, all would have been well!" Not so fast! *Many centuries after God gave the Law* and decades after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already fallen, a frightening word of the Lord came to Jerusalem via the prophet Ezekiel.

"And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters." OK, so God connects Jerusalem with Sodom! Then He said, "Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done." (Ezekiel 16:46-48)

So, Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, *was more corrupt than Sodom!* All that was centuries *after the law of Moses was given by God* and centuries *after God's continuing faithfulness to Jerusalem had been abundant and clear!* But why hadn't the Law of Moses worked?

Well, the Bible tells us that the law doesn't decrease sin—it *actually increases sin!* (Romans 5:20) And Romans 7:5 says that while we were living in the flesh, *our sinful passions are aroused by the law.* So, in Romans 3:10, the Apostle Paul quoted Psalm 14 from the Old Testament, "None is righteous, no, not one..." But just a few words later, in Romans 3:21-22, Paul wrote about this remedy: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Amazing!

So, are you trying to make your city, your nation righteous? That's awesome! But there's only one path for that, and it's *not* by installing better laws—remember, the law increases sin! And that path is *not* doing good works. The *only possible path* is clear: every person made a disciple of Christ, that each may be made righteous through Him! Still more burdens lifted at the Cross...yes, we're simply to be His ambassadors!

And Jesus gave us a report of His sending out ambassador-disciples on mission! Luke 10:1 (ESV) tells us that Jesus "appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town

and place where he himself was about to go.” He told them to “...heal the sick...and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” (Luke 10:9-12) Clearly implied in Jesus’s admonition to *any* unreceptive town is this: those who are unreceptive to Him cannot be declared righteous!

Still, after believers receive Christ’s righteousness by faith, just what are we to do with that? Do we use that righteousness to condemn other individuals...or other nations? That’s not God’s intent! Instead, we are compelled by Christ to offer that very righteousness through Christ to whoever would call upon the name of Jesus! As the Apostle Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus in Acts 20:24, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Yes, indeed, Paul is a trustworthy, persevering model for believers everywhere: testify to all of the gospel of grace!

But wait! Let’s remember a key point about the Sodom event and all other places after that! Yes, God destroyed the valley of Sodom and Gomorrah—sulfur and fire rained down on all the unrighteous. Yes, it was a really bad locale! But Ezekiel’s later word revealed that *even Jerusalem was more unrighteous than the “ungodly” locales that Judah looked down on*. Yes, in God’s eyes, both locales stood condemned!

And it’s like that today—cities and nations stand condemned before God. So, for serious believers, it’s *not fruitful* to claim their locale is more righteous than others—not even supposedly “Christian nations.” Hey, the truth is, only *individual* followers of Jesus are justified by faith in Christ! Salvation is by individual belief responding to the Gospel—*not* by extolling a “Christian heritage” of a city or nation, *not* by the mere churchgoing habits of the populace, and *not* by a futile pursuit of law-righteousness by a city or nation!

In fact, there are only two “locales” to distinguish in this New Covenant era—the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. We know from Colossians 1:13 that every believer is transferred to the Kingdom of God, the only “locale” where the imputed righteousness from Christ abounds. And every believer is an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)—yes, that’s God making His appeal through us, His followers!

OK...but just where *is* the *physical* locale of the Kingdom of God today? Well, it’s wherever there’s an ambassador for Christ! And those believers—all of us—are to be dispersed to and in every nation, making disciples of Jesus...regardless of the perceived or actual moral standing of the nation where our physical presence is! Yes, God’s judgment is coming to some horrible places, but His judgment is *also* coming to those places we think of as more desirable, too! You know...the ones in those beautiful travel brochures!

So, in and of itself, we are *not to fret agonizingly or even unduly* that we might reside in a corrupt earthly place...because all the kingdoms of this world do and will fall short! OK...so what’s the final word from Jesus here? In John 17:15-16, Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven about his followers, “[Father] I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” Yes, that is really clear: we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* it!

In quite a groundbreaking way, Abraham himself was a sort of an ambassador for God’s mercy...and God sent His angels to Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family—those who Abraham modeled faith to. Apparently, Lot’s family members were *the* specific righteous people that Abraham had in mind for God’s mercy—and they responded in faith, departing from the doomed area! Remember that Peter calls Lot the *righteous* one who was rescued...2 Peter 2:7! Perhaps *you* responded *in faith* after an ambassador for Christ proclaimed the Gospel to you and maybe even pleaded on your behalf when you were in jeopardy.

Here’s a direct-result bottom line of our faith: God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us! Stunning. But that’s not all: *believers are not bound to the destinies of unrighteous nations!* Now that’s crazy good!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you see the country you live in as clearly more righteous than other countries? Does *God* see the country you live in as clearly more righteous than other countries? Be clearly Biblical in your thinking and your measurements.
2. Many people, including many Christians who seriously focus on their personal holiness, base their moral “achievement” and righteousness on fulfilling the Law of Moses. But James wrote in James 2:10 that, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.” And Paul writes in Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” What is the practical way to think about and apply this truth? Be specific.
3. Do you believe that America would become more “godly” if Washington, D.C., adopted and expected compliance with the Ten Commandments...and perhaps adopted even more of Old Testament law, as some folks adopting so-called “dominion theology” assert? Whether you believe in that path or not, give specific New Testament references that support the direction of your reasoning.