

## 8. Defining Abraham's Role as a Savior (Genesis 18–23)

When Paul says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3), we are reminded that the many ways in which Abraham exemplifies righteousness include submitting to God's will when an idolatrous priest attempts to sacrifice him (Abraham 1:12, 15), when Pharaoh takes his wife Sarah (Genesis 12:14–15), and when God commands him to offer up his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). His interceding with God on behalf of the righteous in Sodom (Genesis 18:20–32) results in the angels of God saving Lot for Abraham's sake (Genesis 19:11–25): “It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow” (Genesis 19:29). Because Lot was Abraham's nephew—the son of Abraham's brother Haran who had died—Abraham acted as a father to Lot and as his protector.

Abraham's role toward Lot, in effect, was that of a proxy savior, as was the case when “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” and delivered their descendants out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 2:24). Thus, while God delivered Lot for Abraham's sake, he delivered Lot's daughters for Lot's sake—Lot acting as *their* proxy savior. When the angels asked Lot whether he had any others whom he would like to bring—“whoever you have in the city”—they even left open the possibility that God would deliver others for Lot's sake as Lot was a righteous man for whom God had respect.

God's desolation of Sodom and Gomorrah by a hail of fire and brimstone wiped out all vestiges of human habitation in that place even to this day. Thereafter, Sodom and Gomorrah's fate would become synonymous with a curse God pronounces on any people whose depravity resembles theirs or those who institutionalize carnality in their culture.

God “turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, damning them by overthrowing them, hence making an example of them to those who live wickedly. And he delivered the just [man] Lot, who was vexed by the filthy conversation of the ungodly. For that righteous man, dwelling among them, seeing and hearing, was roiled in his righteous soul day after day by their lawless acts. The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and how to reserve the unjust to the Day of Judgment to be punished—those who go after the flesh in their defiling lusts and who despise self-discipline” (2 Peter 2:6–10).

Such depravity typifies Isaiah's end-time scenario. The Lord's calling his end-time people by the names Sodom and Gomorrah infers that they have become as ungodly as those cities' ancient inhabitants and will therefore suffer the same fate: “The look on their faces betrays them: they flaunt their sin like Sodom; they cannot hide it. Woe to their souls; they have brought disaster upon themselves!” (Isaiah 3:9); “Hear the word of the Lord, O leaders of Sodom; give heed to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!” (Isaiah 1:10). Because such wickedness by God's end-time people is the catalyst of a worldwide Sodom and Gomorrah type of destruction, they perish with Babylon: “And Babylon, the most splendid of kingdoms, the glory and pride of Chaldeans, shall be [thrown down] as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isaiah 13:19)..

Even though God delivers a righteous few among his end-time people as he did Lot and his daughters from Sodom and Gomorrah, many end up perishing in the inferno: “Wickedness shall be set ablaze like a fire, and briars and thorns shall it consume; it shall ignite the jungle forests [or cities], and they shall billow upward in mushrooming clouds of smoke. At the wrath of the Lord of Hosts the earth is scorched, and people are but fuel for the fire” (Isaiah 9:18–19); “Her streams shall turn into lava and her earth into brimstone; her land shall become as burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall ascend forever. It shall remain a wasteland from generation to generation; through endless ages none shall traverse it” (Isaiah 34:9–10).

Paul warns against God’s coming “day of wrath” (Romans 2:5), when those who knew God would fall away and willfully transgress with the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them . . . so that they are without excuse. Because when they knew God they glorified him not as God, nor were thankful but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image resembling corruptible man, birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things. . .

“Therefore, God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections, for even their women changed their natural use into what is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another—men with men, doing what is unseemly and receiving in their persons a fitting reward of their evil practices. And as they desired not to retain God in their awareness, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do things inexpedient, being filled with every [form of] unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18–29).

In the end-time version of these events, when wickedness among God’s people peaks as in Sodom and Gomorrah, God’s end-time servants deliver his elect while many of his people perish: “The sinners in Zion are struck with fear; the godless are in the grip of trembling: ‘Who among us can live through the devouring fire? Who among us can abide eternal burning?’ They who conduct themselves righteously and are honest in word, who disdain extortion and stay their hand from taking bribes, who stop their ears at the mention of murder, who shut their eyes at the sight of wickedness. They shall dwell on high; the impregnable cliffs are their fortress. Bread is provided them, their water is sure” (Isaiah 33:14–16); “The righteous disappear, and no man gives it a thought; the godly are gathered out, but no one perceives that from impending calamity the righteous are withdrawn. They who walk uprightly shall attain peace, and rest in their beds” (Isaiah 57:1–2); “Had not the Lord of Hosts left us a few survivors, we should have been as Sodom, or become like Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:9).