

Faith and Weakness



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 16:1–19:38.

MEMORY VERSE: “Is anything too hard for me [God]? I [God] will return to you [Abram] at the appointed [right] time next year. Sarah will have a son” (Genesis 18:14, NIV).

THIS WEEK WE STILL FOLLOW ABRAM AND SARAI (SOON TO BE ABRAHAM AND SARAH). They are on a geographical and spiritual journey (trip). As they travel, we see their faith and their weaknesses against a world that had lost knowledge of God. The world was deep in sin and spiritual ignorance. Sodom and Gomorrah were a good example of being lost in sin.

A famous French writer once wrote: “Your main weaknesses are pride, which cuts you off from God, and love of flesh, which ties you to the earth” (adapted). People today are still full of pride. We have God’s grace. He loves even the proud and pleasure-lovers. His love will come through most clearly as we follow Abram and the sad and foolish story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In these cities, God shows His love and willingness to forgive. But pride and love of pleasure destroy these cities.

The Bible says, God is “not willing that any should perish [die]” (2 Peter 3:9). But some will perish. This is very sad. No one needs to die because Christ died for us. This week, we will study a sad example of people who did not accept Christ’s death for them.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 19**HAGAR AND ISHMAEL
(Genesis 16)**

Read again the promises that God had made to Abram: Genesis 12:1-3, 7; Genesis 13:15, 16; Genesis 15:4-6, 13. God tells Abram, again and again, that he will be a father of a great nation. Another promise is that out of “your own body” (Genesis 15:4, NIV) his child will come. But something is missing from those promises. None of the promises mentions Sarai, Abram’s wife. The promise is that Abram will father the nation. But it says nothing about who the mother would be. Sarai was Abram’s wife. So, we would guess that Sarai would have the child. But all the promises say nothing about who the mother would be.

Read Genesis 16. Why was it easy for Abram to have taken the course of action he did? Why was that course of action still wrong?

Ten years had passed since Abram had entered Canaan. Still there was no sign of a child. In normal human frustration, Abram wondered how he could have a child. Certainly not from old and barren Sarai. Nothing was said that Sarai would be the mother. So it is not hard to understand why Abram and Sarai acted the way they did. It was common for a man to have more than one wife during Abram’s

time. But still, this did not make it right to have more than one wife. As followers of the true God, both Abram and his wife should have known this was wrong. How often do we do the wrong thing because everyone else is doing it? And we know better, too!

When you read Genesis 16, you can see one important principle¹: If we break God’s law things will happen. What can we learn from Genesis 16 when we are tempted to break God’s law for a good reason? (After all, Abram and Sarai were only trying to “help” God fulfill a promise He made.)

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 20**THE COVENANT² REPEATED
(Genesis 17)**

Thirteen years had passed after Ishmael’s birth. God appeared to Abram again and repeated the covenant He had first made with Abram.

Contrast³ the earlier promises God had made to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; Genesis 13:15, 16; Genesis 15:4-6, 13) with what God said to Abram in Genesis 17:1-16. What points does God add in Genesis 17:1-16?

God tells Abram to be “perfect” before Him. This is a reminder that

¹principle—a basic rule of life upon which other rules and laws are based.

²covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

³contrast—show how things are different.

God's mercy⁴ and grace do not cancel the call to faithful obedience (Romans 5:20–6:2). God then gives Abram even more details of the same promise first made to him almost twenty-five years before. This included the need to circumcise⁵ all male babies.

Many people have been guessing over many hundreds of years about why circumcision would be the sign of the covenant. Circumcision was connected with the promise made to Abram about his children (Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:15, 16; Genesis 15:3, 13, 18; Genesis 17:7-10). Circumcision was to symbolize the relationship that God wanted to have with His covenant people. This was a relationship to be kept and continued by faith (Romans 4:11, 12). It was through this nation that God's truth was to be spread to the world. Through them the Messiah (Jesus) also would come. Physical circumcision also symbolized the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:29). With Jesus' coming and the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews), circumcision was no longer required (Galatians 5:6).

If it was not clear before, it was now—old Sarai was to give birth to the promised seed (child) (Genesis 17:15-19). If Abram needed faith before, he surely needed faith now!

Compare⁶ Genesis 17:15-19, and Abram's reaction to the promise of children through Sarai with Romans 4:16-25. What can we

learn from these verses about the meaning of righteousness (holiness) by faith? What hope can we get from these verses about God's faithfulness even when our own faith is not always strong?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 21

THE LORD ON EARTH (Genesis 18)

In Genesis 18, God again promises Abram a child. This time God made the promise to Sarai (Genesis 18:10). It was a promise that seemed impossible to fulfill (Genesis 18:11). But God shows us the answer, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). This is an answer that should stand today against all unbelief and doubt, even among those who have claimed to worship God.

What difference do we see in Genesis 18:16-21? How do we see in these verses what is really the basic division of all people? Also read Matthew 25:32, 33; Romans 11:26; 2 Peter 2:6; Revelation 22:14, 15.

Perhaps one of the most interesting parts of this story centers on who was speaking to Abram. The word translated "Lord" in some of the verses (Genesis 18:1, 13, 17, 22, 26) is the famous word translated as "Jehovah"

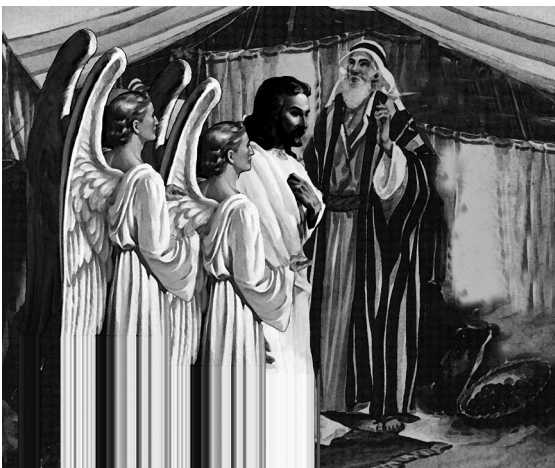
⁴mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

⁵circumcise—cutting the foreskin off a male's sex organ.

⁶compare—show how things are the same.

(YHVH). This is the sacred (holy) name for God the Father. It is the same word used in Genesis 4:1, 4; Genesis 6:5; Exodus 20:11; 1 Kings 9:1; Psalm 32:2 and thousands of other verses that talk about God.

Many hundreds of years before Jesus first came to earth in human form, God appeared on earth in a human form (see Genesis 18:1-8). We can see how even a long time ago, the Creator-God was close to His fallen people. Think about the size of the universe. No matter how big and complicated creation is, we have another example of the wonderful love God has for us. It is wonderful that He would show Himself in human form and talk to Abram, a sinful human. This is only an example of what would happen hundreds of years later in Jesus' life and ministry (work). Jesus became human and died for the sins of this fallen world. God is closer to people than most of us can begin to understand.



God appeared to Abram in human form.

How have you personally experienced God's closeness? In what personal ways has He touched your life? What might you need to do to experience His presence even more?

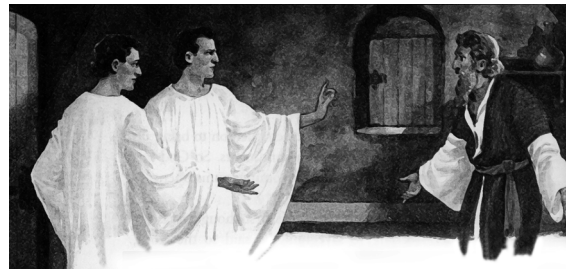
WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 22

ON THE EVE OF DOOM (Genesis 19:1-14)

What kind of picture does Genesis 19 give about the moral⁷ condition of Sodom? What does it mean that men came from “every quarter [corner]” of the city? What does that remind us of? Genesis 6:5.

Even today's standards⁸ are pretty low. But the Sodomites standards were terrible. How could they have become so morally low?

How does Ezekiel 16:49, 50 help us understand what happened in Sodom? Why would these things lead to Sodom's low moral condition? What lessons can we learn from this?



Lot was kind to the strangers who were really angels.

⁷moral—knowing the difference between right and wrong; leading a righteous (holy) life.

⁸standards—rules for living.

According to 2 Peter 2:7, 8, Lot was a righteous (holy) man. He was hurt by the sin in Sodom. But he probably could not avoid being influenced by these sins. (John the Baptist had to live in the wilderness to escape the sins around him.) Perhaps that helps explain why Lot was willing to give his daughters to the mob so he could protect his guests (Genesis 19:8). It might be hard for us to understand Lot's action. But it does show us how seriously he accepted the mob's threat. Lot clearly knew what these people could do. As Genesis 19:9-14 show, the two angels had to act to save Lot from the mob.

The pride, the food, the wrath certainly did not quickly change the Sodomites into the raging mob in Genesis 19. Change takes time. Look at your own life and at the direction you are moving in. Are you moving toward the Holy City (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2) or toward Sodom? Do you judge the direction you are going by the Bible's standards or the world's standards?



It is a sin not to help people in need.

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 23

SODOM DESTROYED (Genesis 19)

How do we see in Genesis 19:12-29 even more examples of God seeking to save people?

Did Lot's conflicting example weaken the result of his pleas? Not even the angels' midnight visit made a difference. Lot's children "laughed at what they called his foolish fears. His daughters were influenced by their husbands. They had money. They were comfortable. They could see no danger. Everything looked just the same. They had property. They could not believe it possible that beautiful Sodom would be destroyed."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 160.

What principle is shown in Genesis 19:15 about the destruction of sin? Focus on the wording, "if you don't [do not] you will be swept away when the city is punished" (NirV). What message is in that for us?

Jesus came to destroy sin, not sinners (1 John 3:5). Jesus came to save the world, not to destroy it (John 3:17). Jesus came to destroy the devil and his works, not humans (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

Salvation depends on the removal of sin, not the removal of people. In the story of Sodom, God was trying to save Lot from the destruction that will

fall upon all wicked people. The only way for us to be saved from that destruction is to turn away from sin and to hold on to Jesus our Savior in faith and obedience. We need to claim His sinlessness and perfection for our own benefit. At the same time, we need to put away all sin in our lives (Romans 6:12; 1 Peter 4:1, 2). In the end, sin will be removed, once and for all. The good news of the gospel is that we do not have to be removed with it.



Flee from sin. Your life depends on it.

Notice the phrase “and God remembered Abraham” in Genesis 19:24-29. Write a paragraph explaining how that is a symbol of the salvation we have in Jesus. Also explain how only because of Him can we be saved. Be prepared to share your paragraph with the class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “After the Flood,” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 137–144, 156–170; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1,

comments on Genesis 16–19.

“Living in that wicked city (Sodom), Lot’s faith had grown weaker. The Prince of heaven (Jesus) was by his side. But Lot pleaded for his own life as if God, who had showed such care and love for him, would not still save him. Lot should have trusted himself fully to God’s Messenger (Jesus). Lot should have put his will and his life into the Lord’s hands without a doubt or a question.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 161.

“Our Savior warned His disciples that just before His Second Coming, the conditions would be almost the same as the conditions before the Flood. There would be too much eating and drinking, and the world would be given up to pleasure. These conditions are happening now. The world is largely given up to the habits of eating, drinking, and having pleasures which make slaves of us. These habits will make us more and more like the doomed people of Sodom. I have wondered why the people of the earth were not already destroyed, as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were. I see reason for plenty of moral wickedness in the world. Blind lust controls people’s better judgments. Their noble thoughts are sacrificed to lust.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White and James White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 53.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Read aloud the paragraphs you

wrote for the question at the end of Thursday's lesson. Discuss your answers.

② What are some moral questions facing your society? How does your church deal with these questions? How can Christians encourage peo-

ple to be more righteous (holy)?

③ Is there someone you know struggling with a sin that is destroying his or her life? What can you do as a class to encourage that person as he or she tries to gain victory?