

Review

Last time, we examined the covenant of circumcision God established as an everlasting covenant with Abraham's descendants. A very short time later, three "men" visited Abraham's tent by the oaks of Mamre. Of course these weren't "men" at all. Two of them were angels and the third was God Himself as we shall soon learn. During that visit, God reiterated to Abraham His promise of an heir who would be born to his wife Sarah at about the same time the following year. We will find the culmination of this promise with the birth of Abraham's and Sarah's son Isaac in Genesis 21, but first the narrative takes a brief detour with the well-known story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham Negotiates with God

Recall from [our study of Genesis 13](#) that when Lot and Abraham separated at Bethel (then called Luz) following their return from Egypt, Lot moved eastward into the Jordan valley. As we shall soon learn, Lot eventually ended up living inside the city of Sodom itself. Meanwhile, Abraham moved south through the Judean mountains from Bethel and pitched his tent near Hebron under the oaks of Mamre (Abraham's later ally in rescuing Lot from the armies of Chedorlaomer). God met with Abraham at the oaks of Mamre several times. We now pick up the story as the three "men" who visited Abraham there when he was 99 were about to leave for Sodom.

16Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19For I have chosen ^[עֲדָה יָדָא - known] him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Genesis 18:16-19 (ESV)

It's a little confusing exactly what happened here. Abraham accompanied his three visitors part way as they continued their journey. As we shall soon see, the two servant angels pressed onward toward Sodom while God stayed behind a while with Abraham.

The statement at the end of Genesis 18:19 is intriguing. God clearly says here that Abraham needed to lead his household in godliness so God could fulfill the promises He had already made. This is somewhat disconcerting. Surely God is always faithful to fulfill His promises. Without such assurance, we might just as well abandon ourselves to worldly living and accept the inevitability of death in our sins without the hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus' Gospel.

Clearly though, God already knew that Abraham would lead his household in godliness. Indeed, many years before God had credited Abram's belief in His promises as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). But God also knew that Abraham needed His help along the way just as we all do.

There is an important aspect to this story we shouldn't miss. God revealed to Abraham just as much about His plans as Abraham needed to continue in the right direction. Consider how Abraham might have reacted if God had not forewarned him about the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. From his dwelling near Hebron, Abraham could see the entire Dead Sea valley. Surely, he couldn't have failed to notice the destruction of the cities of the valley. But if God hadn't told Abraham ahead of time what was about to happen, the cause of the devastation would have been a mystery to

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Abraham so he couldn't possibly have applied it as a life lesson on the importance of righteousness for himself. Furthermore, Lot and his family would likely not have survived as we shall see.

Today, God gives His followers this same "just enough and just in time" reassurance and guidance through His Spirit and His Word.

20Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." Genesis 18:20-21 (ESV)

Where did the outcry the Lord speaks of come from? Who was crying out against the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? I'm personally quite aggravated and even angered at the idea of anonymous complaints to third parties. Oftentimes brothers and sisters in Christ complain about each other to church leaders or pastors rather than taking the issues up directly with those with whom they disagree or who have hurt them in some way. This is especially aggravating if the person or persons who lodge the complaint aren't even willing to give their own name(s) or offer any specifics about the incident(s). How can they expect the person to whom they complain to take any helpful action in the matter if they aren't even willing to identify themselves or make a specific complaint? Furthermore, these shenanigans are in complete disobedience of a specific teaching from Jesus – a teaching which Christian fellowships throughout history have failed miserably to apply...

15"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)

Even worse, squabbling among us fails to reflect the love of Christ to the watching, lost, and dying world around us. The community around us looks at our behavior toward one another to learn how they might expect to be treated by us if they were to join our fellowships. In fact, such backbiting puts the souls of the lost surrounding us in mortal danger because they see our failure to obey Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves as proof that Jesus' Gospel is also invalid.

Failure to honestly and openly communicate with each other has led to untold devastation within church fellowships and within society at large. Yet we seem unable to learn this lesson and apply it even after thousands of years' experience.

But I digress...

Obviously, God didn't need to go down to Sodom to see if the outcry was valid. In fact, He already knew what was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah even before the outcry came to Him. In fact, He knew the people of Sodom and Gomorrah would eventually partake in these horrendous sins even before He created the universe! These verses are the Genesis writer's attempt to explain God's actions and thoughts in terms human beings can understand. Our limited minds and human language are totally incapable of truly coming to grips with God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.

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But here again I digress...

***22**So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. **23**Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? **24**Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? **25**Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”* Genesis 18:22-25 (ESV)

God must find it humorous and cute that His helpless children might undertake to “school Him” about something He’s determined. We find several examples in God’s Word. Moses did so several times. For example, while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law from God, the people fell into idolatry worshipping a golden calf that Moses’ brother Aaron made for them.

***9**And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. **10**Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”*

***11**But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? **12**Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. **13**Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”* Exodus 32:9-13 (ESV)

Moses interceded (or at least thought he did) for Israel again when they refused to obey God’s command to go up and take the Land of Promise.

***11**And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? **12**I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”*

***13**But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, **14**and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. **15**Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, **16**‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’”* Numbers 14:11-16 (ESV)

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Notice that Moses appealed to a characteristic common in prideful man but not present with God at all – concern about His reputation among the people of the world. Abraham’s argument was closer to the mark – appealing to God’s justice and righteousness. After all, God’s children receive our sense of justice from our Creator.

This whole concept of trying to convince God that our plans are better than His isn’t limited to the Old Testament. Shortly before He and some of His disciples ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus asked His disciples who they believed He was. Peter proclaimed, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” Jesus called Peter blessed saying, “**...flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.**” Yet shortly thereafter as Jesus was gently leading His disciples to the realization that He intended to go to Jerusalem, be crucified, and then rise from the dead, this same Peter tried to rebuke Jesus privately saying, “**Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.**” To this Jesus harshly rebuked Peter saying that Peter was a hindrance to Him and addressing Peter as Satan (Matthew 16:13-23). And this wasn’t the last time Peter tried to gainsay God (e.g. Acts 11:8). Nor was Peter the only one of the twelve who tried to dissuade Jesus from His mission. For example, when Jesus announced His intention to go to Judea after His dear friend Lazarus died, His disciples tried to talk Him out of it (John 11:7-8).

All these attempts to “correct” God’s course of action bear one error in common. We who are His created children don’t comprehend the eternally unchanging and unchangeable nature of our God. His plan of salvation for mankind and His means of carrying that plan to fruition through Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice on the cross have always been the same since before He began His work of creation and will remain so for all eternity. Praise God indeed that He remains the same yesterday, today, and forever! How fearful and sorrowful life would be if our God were capricious like the mythical gods of the ancient Greeks, making it impossible to follow and obey.

Yet God is patient with us – knowing our lack of understanding about His unchangeable nature – when we try to convince Him to do other than He has already determined. Even as Abraham sought to talk God out of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God already knew what He would do. He already knew the wickedness of the people of the cities of the plain. Yet God allowed Abraham to continue pleading their case.

²⁶And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³²Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” ³³And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. Genesis 18:26-33 (ESV)

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Whenever I read this passage, I'm always reminded of the scene about haggling in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n3LL338aGA>). But this destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is serious business, so let's press on.

God's Destruction of Sodom and Rescue of Lot

19:1 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth ²and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." ³But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Genesis 19:1-3 (ESV)

Look at the [Cities of the Valley map](#). Recall from our [study of Genesis 13](#) that when Lot and Abram separated after their return from Egypt, Lot moved at first into the fertile Jordan Valley somewhere east of Jericho near the Jordan's inflow into the Dead Sea. But Lot gradually moved closer and closer to Sodom until here in Genesis 19:1 he was living in the city itself.

Why was Lot so adamant that the visitors not remain overnight in the city square? Could it be that he was fully aware of what was likely to happen to them at the hands of the city's wicked residents? Although Lot was Abram's nephew who had been raised by his uncle to fear the LORD, he was unable to isolate himself and his family from the city's sinfulness as we shall soon learn. This is reminiscent of Paul's sage words to the Corinthians...

³³Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." 1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)

⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. ⁵And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know [יִרְיָ יָאָדָּא] them." Genesis 19:4-5 (ESV)

Notice that verse 4 makes it clear that **all** the men of Sodom converged upon Lot's house. Thus, when God destroyed the city, He nevertheless remained faithful to His promise to Abraham that He would refrain from destroying the city if even ten righteous were found in it. This also implies that the entire population of these cities was culpable in the wickedness for which God condemned them – including the women and the children. The harshness and inflexibility of God's judgment in this matter may seem extreme. But remember that God is always **perfectly** righteous, and all-knowing. Who are we – sinful mankind – to gainsay His judgments. David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 states this plainly.

*⁴Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.* Psalm 51:4 (NKJV)

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Before we press on, take note of the Hebrew word **יָדָע** *yāda'* translated as “know” in Genesis 19:5. Of course, the English word “know” is a well-worn euphemism for sexual relations in older, more traditional English language translations. The Hebrew word **יָדָע** *yāda'* literally means to be aware of or to be acquainted with, familiar with, or aware of someone or something. But it is also used as a euphemism for sexual relations throughout the Old Testament. For example...

5For God knows [יָדָע yāda'] that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing [יָדָע yāda'] good and evil.” Genesis 3:5 (ESV)

...

17Cain knew [יָדָע yāda'] his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Genesis 4:17 (ESV)

We must rely on the Biblical context to determine (if we can) which sense of the word is intended.

6Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, 7and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” Genesis 19:6-8 (ESV)

Whenever I read this, it enrages me. Certainly, it would have been desperately wicked for the men of Sodom to seize and rape the two “men” Lot had taken in. Yet, Lot seemed to think it would be okay for them to seize and rape his own virgin daughters instead! Lot was no more righteous than they were. In God’s place, I would have destroyed Lot’s family along with the rest. Yet God had a better plan for them despite their unrighteousness – just as He has for **all** of sinful mankind.

9But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. Genesis 19:9 (ESV)

Lot’s despicable idea to offer up his daughters to be raped notwithstanding, his actions here in this passage are nevertheless a model and a caution for us. Standing up for what is right can be costly. Indeed, many Christians throughout the centuries since Jesus ascended back to His Father have been called upon to sacrifice their families, their worldly livelihood and possessions, and even their very lives for standing up to the wickedness of mankind in the Name of God. Even so, there is also great encouragement here as we shall soon see. Jesus promised we will never face such persecution for His Name’s sake alone. Furthermore, we can rest assured that God’s victory over wickedness and over mankind’s greatest enemy – death – has already been won by Jesus on His cross.

10But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. 11And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door. Genesis 19:10-11 (ESV)

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Here is another great encouragement for all who determine to honor God with our lives. He protects and empowers us to accomplish His purposes in and through us. Lot was a deeply flawed man as we have seen. Yet in his hour of crisis, Lot stood up for right against the wickedness surrounding him. God honored Lot's choice with His own protection and provision. We can trust God with the entirety of our lives. We owe Him nothing less, since God Himself gave us life and Jesus sacrificed His own life to purchase us back out of death in our sins.

12Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. 13For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.” 14So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. Genesis 19:12-14 (ESV)

How tragic is this story of Lot's prospective sons-in-law! They are the image of the world at large – most of whom hear the Gospel but don't believe, much less give themselves over to Jesus' lordship. Notice that Lot himself unquestioningly believed what the angels told him and immediately went out to warn his family. We who have trusted Jesus for salvation do the same. Indeed, we are compelled to do so. Consider the admonition of [Psalm 107](#).

Jesus called us to be the lights of His Word amid the darkness of our fallen world.

14“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)

...

26“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. 28And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:26-28 (ESV)

So, we do as we have been commanded. God's Spirit dwelling within us compels us to share our testimony of His salvation – especially with our loved ones. Yet we quickly learn as Lot soon did that most of those to whom we proclaim the Gospel will not accept it as we have, dooming them to eternal separation from God in torment. Although their rejection brings us to tears and lies as a heavy burden upon our hearts day-by-day, this is the inevitable consequence of God's gift of free will to mankind. We trust that God's plan of salvation is perfect although in some ways it pierces us to our very heart. Furthermore, we know that where there is life, there is hope. So, we persevere in His calling.

15As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the

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punishment of the city.”¹⁶But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.¹⁷And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.” Genesis 19:15-17 (ESV)

Nevertheless, Lot’s story reminds us that some will be saved in accordance with God’s will. It is tempting for us to take Lot’s story as a proof text of the Calvinist idea that God has predetermined those who will be saved. Yet remember the story of Lot’s prospective sons-in-law. The angels mentioned them specifically in Genesis 19:12 as some whom Lot should warn to escape the city’s imminent destruction. Our righteous, loving, just, trustworthy, and holy God would **never** dangle the prospect of salvation in front of someone He had already determined to condemn!

In fact, the entirety of God’s Word is focused on proclaiming Jesus’ Gospel to the dying world. How cruel and unjust God would be if He proclaimed this Gospel in His Word without truly offering those who hear it any real option to accept or reject it. Indeed, if that were the case, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross would be rendered utterly pointless. In many ways, the Calvinist interpretation of scripture makes logical sense. Yet it flies in the face of what we know and trust about the character of God and the sense of justice and righteousness He has instilled in us who are created in His very image.

But again, I digress...

We can only guess why Lot lingered in Sodom the following morning. Indeed, he should have spent the night preparing for the journey to safety. Clearly, he had believed the warning given by the angels and warned his daughters’ prospective husbands about it. Yet he remained in the city the following morning after the angels told him it was time to go. Even so, God was merciful to Lot and his family for Abraham’s sake, even to the point of physically removing them from the city.

*¹⁸And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords.¹⁹Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.²⁰Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!”²¹He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.²²Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. [זֵרָא *zō‘ar* – insignificance] Genesis 19:18-22 (ESV)*

Look at the [Cities of the Valley map](#). We need to emphasize that the location of the Valley of Siddim containing these cities remains unknown and the focus of continuing archaeological research and dispute. The cities must have been clustered fairly close together with Zoar (זֵרָא *zō‘ar* – **insignificance**) being not more than a day’s walk from Sodom. We know this because Lot and his daughters were able to arrive there on the same day the angels escorted them out of Sodom.

Traditionally, it has been assumed the Valley of Siddim in which these cities were clustered was at the southern end of the Dead Sea as shown on this map. But others have proposed that Sodom in

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particular was located further north to the east of Jerico and the fertile valley of the Jordan into which Lot went down from Bethel when he and Abram parted company as we read in Genesis 13.

The location of Zoar also remains a mystery although it is shown on the [Cities of the Valley map](#) with no question mark. I must say that the relative locations for Zoar and Sodom on this map don't make a great deal of sense logically, since Lot protested to the angels asking to be allowed to flee to Zoar instead of into the mountains which are clearly much closer to the proposed location of Sodom. Strictly speaking though, Lot didn't protest about a longer distance but rather about the dangers he perceived in going to the mountains. Perhaps he'd experienced trouble in that area before.

One of the researchers involved in excavations at [Tall el-Hammam](#) wrote an interesting article about the possible location of Zoar which can be found along with some criticisms of his conclusions and his response to those criticisms at <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/archaeology-today/biblical-archaeology-topics/locating-zoar/>.

NOTE – The existence of Zoar prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the fact that Zoar was not destroyed along with the other Cities of the Valley is not in dispute. Lot looked in the direction of Zoar when he decided to go into the Jordan Valley after he and Abram separated (Genesis 13:10). Recall from [our study of Genesis 14](#) that the king of Zoar (also called Bela) is mentioned in Genesis 14:2 and Genesis 14:8 as one of the kings of the valley who rebelled against Chedorlaomer. Just before he died, God took Moses up to [Mount Nebo](#) east of the northern end of the Dead Sea and showed him the land of Canaan as far west as the Mediterranean and as far south as Zoar (Deuteronomy 34:1-5). Zoar is also shown in the stone mosaic floor map dating from around 550 AD in the church of St. George at Madaba Jordan (see [our study of Genesis 15](#)).

23The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. 25And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. Genesis 19:23-26 (ESV)

Thousands of pages have been written attempting to explain the mechanism of God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in "scientific" terms. We won't add to that pile of "knowledge" here in this study. Instead, let's just simply look at what God's Word has to say in these four short verses. First, verse 24 clearly states that the fire of destruction rained down from heaven, so the destruction couldn't have come from an explosion of volatile petroleum gases originating underground although we know from Genesis 14:10 that the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits. Furthermore, we read that the destruction encompassed not only the cities, but the entire valley and all the plant life in it.

Certainly, very unusual chemical reactions take place wherever high-energy events like asteroid impacts and nuclear explosions occur, but to my knowledge, no one has ever attempted to come up with a "scientific" explanation of how Lot's wife could have been turned into a pillar of salt. The archaeological studies in the area around [Tall el-Hammam](#) show that agriculture was abandoned in the area for somewhere between 500 and 1000 years after the soil of the area became suddenly extremely salty about 3,600 years ago. Of course, the Dead Sea itself contains a higher salt concentration than any other water body on earth. But even with this high salt concentration at extremely high temperatures and pressures, it's hard to imagine a physical process that could instantly turn a person's body to salt.

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Much more important than **how** Lot's wife was turned to salt is **why** she was. That much is clear from the text. The angels specifically warned the whole family not to stop or turn to look back during their escape to Zoar. Clearly, Lot's wife disobeyed the command to not look back. We can only speculate what her other sins might have been. After all, we aren't even given her name. Perhaps she had been more deeply involved in the wickedness of Sodom than even Lot knew. She was therefore condemned along with the rest of the city's population. We'll likely never know the answer. We must simply trust that our righteous and loving God made a perfectly just judgment and condemnation in her case as always, and leave the matter at that.

27And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. Genesis 19:27-28 (ESV)

From his tent near Hebron, Abraham would have enjoyed a clear view of the entire Dead Sea valley. Although he might not have been able to discern the individual cities from that distance, he would most certainly have been able to see the smoke of the destruction rising up from the valley floor. Very likely, the rain of fire from heaven also set the many tar pits of the area ablaze, and the smoke from those secondary fires would have risen thousands of feet up from the valley floor regardless of where the cities of the valley were located specifically along the eastern shore of the sea.

29So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived. Genesis 19:29 (ESV)

Although God apparently didn't find the ten righteous necessary for Him to spare the cities, He did find Abraham's nephew Lot and spared him and his family from the destruction. It is important for us to note that God's mercy upon Lot wasn't due to Lot's own righteousness. We have clearly seen that Lot was a deeply flawed human being just like the rest of us. We read clearly here in Genesis 19:29 that God spared Lot for the sake of Abraham whose faith God credited to him as righteousness. This is an encouragement for us. Our God shows His great love and mercy to us based on our faith, not our actions or words which are never righteous on their own apart from God.

Looking Ahead

Next time, God willing, we'll look at some unsavory stories surrounding the lives of Abraham and Lot following the destruction of the cities of the valley. Then we'll finally read about the birth of Abraham's promised heir Isaac.