

# Bible Essentials

Scripture Passage: Genesis 18:20-19:29

As a group, share something about your past week. For example, share prayer requests and answers to prayer. Share the best and worst moments of your week (highs and lows). Write prayer requests here. Open with prayer for these requests and for God to open your hearts to this week's study.

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Tell about a time when you pleaded for something on behalf of something else. What was the end result?

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Read today's passage. Discuss your initial impressions of the passage. Write any major points here.

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Here is some context for Genesis 18:20-19:29.

*When we left off last week, Hagar, Sarai's servant, had just born Abram a son, Ishmael (Genesis 16). This son was not the son God had promised Abram, but Abram and Sarai had taken things into their own hands to get a son for themselves. This didn't go as expected, because human feelings and discontent created strife between Sarai and Hagar.*

*Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, God came again to Abram and again repeated his covenant to give Abram a son through Sarai (Genesis 17). God even changed their names to Abraham and Sarah. This time, God also established circumcision as a sign of his covenant. All males eight days old and older must be circumcised. So Abraham and all in his household were circumcised that day.*

*A short time later, while Abraham was still 99 years old, three men visited Abraham (Genesis 18). These were not ordinary men. One of them was the Lord, and the other two were angels. Abraham immediately invited them to rest, and he offered water to wash their feet and food to eat. He arranged for Sarah and his servants to prepare a feast for the men. They casually asked him where his wife Sarah was, and one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (Genesis 18:10). After almost 25 years of waiting, Abraham finally had a timeframe for when his son would be born! However, Sarah was in the tent nearby and overheard the conversation. Her response? She laughed! She was skeptical that this would or could happen. The Lord called her out on this and once again promised that Sarah would bear a son.*

*As the men got up to leave, they looked toward Sodom, and the Lord decided to reveal to Abraham what he was about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah. That's where we pick up the story today.*

What are your thoughts about the context? Discuss the context as a group. Write some key points here.

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Read the passage again. Use a different Bible version if you have one available. Have someone summarize the passage in their own words, and use this space to record that summary.

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Look closely at the passage and answer the following questions as a group. Write notes in the space provided.

What does the passage say about God?

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What does the passage say about people?

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What does the passage say about God's plan?

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What else strikes you about this passage?

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Understanding how a passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible is important.

*The story of Sodom and Gomorrah emphasizes two opposite but complementary characteristics of God that are displayed throughout Scripture: God's wrath against sin and his mercy and kindness toward the righteous. When God sees wickedness, he simply cannot tolerate it. We saw this on a large scale in the story of Noah and the flood, and here we see it on a small scale in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible reports many times when God sees wickedness or sin and steps in to punish those who do wrong.*

*On the flip side of God's wrath against sin is his mercy and kindness toward the righteous, toward those who follow him. God was willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, in spite of their wickedness, because Abraham pleaded with God. Abraham is God's chosen one who will be the father of the nation that would be God's holy people. God was also willing to spare Lot and his family due to his faithfulness to Abraham.*

*Throughout the Bible, we see this tug between God’s wrath and God’s mercy. Those who continue to live in sin and reject God will be the target of his wrath. But those who follow God and turn away from sin will be the recipients of God’s mercy. And in God’s justice and righteousness, he always knows which is which.*

*In God’s great mercy, he even did the unthinkable—he sent his son to pay the penalty for sin so that more people could receive his mercy and not face his wrath. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” What an amazing gift. God didn’t look at us and say, “Well, because they are righteous, I’ll send Jesus to die for them. They deserve it.” No, he looked at us and said, “They don’t deserve it. But I love them, so I’ll send Jesus to die for them anyway.” That is the height of God’s mercy and love for you.*

What are your thoughts on how this passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible? Discuss as a group. What questions do you have individually or as a group? Discuss potential answers.

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As a group, use the following questions to apply today’s Scripture passage to your life. How does this passage affect how you view God?

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How does this passage affect how you view yourself?

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How does this passage affect how you will live your life?

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Close in prayer, asking God to help you apply what you learned today.