

Genesis 18:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

Analysis

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous... This passage is part of the Abrahamic narratives which shift from universal human history to God's particular covenant people. The Abraham cycle (Genesis 12-25) demonstrates God's sovereign election, covenant faithfulness, and the development of faith through testing and promise fulfillment.

Central themes include God's unconditional covenant promises (land, descendants, blessing to nations), the call to faith and obedience, the testing of faith through delays and impossibilities, the contrast between divine promises and human schemes, and God's gracious persistence despite human failures. Abraham emerges as the father of faith whose trust in God's promises becomes the model for all believers (Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11).

Theologically, these narratives establish:

1. salvation by grace through faith rather than works
2. covenant as God's gracious initiative binding Himself to His people
3. the necessity of patient trust when promises seem impossible
4. the consequences of attempting to fulfill God's promises through human effort
5. the pattern of divine testing producing mature faith.

The Abraham cycle foreshadows Christ as the ultimate seed through whom blessing extends to all nations (Galatians 3:16).

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Divine Visitation emerge from this passage?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?

3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַר	יְהִי הָעֵקֶת	סָדָם	גַּעֲמָה	בָּהִיכָּה	גִּי
said H559	And the LORD H3068	Because the cry H2201	of Sodom H5467	and Gomorrah H6017	H3588 H7227

מִזְאֵד:	כִּי	כִּי	כִּי	כִּי	וּמְפַאַת מִ
and because their sin	H3588	grievous	is very		
H2403		H3513		H3966	

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 19:13 (References Lord): For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it.

Isaiah 3:9 (Sin): The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

Genesis 13:13 (Sin): But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Genesis 4:10 (Parallel theme): And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

James 5:4 (References Lord): Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.