#  Abraham’s petition and the end times

 Let’s see a situation that happened in a story in the Bible that to me is having to do with the end times too. This is the story of Abraham through which we can learn a lot. He traveled and wondered trough different lands and places toward what God has promised to him. It was a tough road sometimes, but he obeyed and listened God’s voice. He departed from his homeland Haran with his nephew Lot. It happened that after a while they decided to depart from each other as the land wasn’t enough for both of their livestock and there was a strife between their herdsmen. Abraham let Lot to decide where he was going to head to, and he chose the best looking land without knowing that, that was the land of Sodom and Gomorrah who were exceedingly wicked and immoral. (Genesis 13:5-13)

 Now, it happened that after a time, the Lord decided to destroy that land because the outcry against it and its sin was great, and all of this had arrived to Him. He appeared to Abraham and said this to him.

 20And the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” Genesis 18:20, 21

 This is the part of the story having to do with the end times. Why? Because God is always the same. He doesn’t change. If He wasn’t able to bear certain things in that time and if there was a point to reach when His patience was eventually running out, so it is now. As 2 Peter 3:8,9 tells us.

 8But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

 When the people of this world ask why is it that His coming is delaying, we need to tell them that it is because of His longsuffering and patience. That means that He is having it now, but it will eventually run out. In the times of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sin was something so common in their lands. It was their style of life and considered as something completely common and normal. Time will come and in part it has started when what was considered as something wrong by the society, it will be all of a sudden something normal and a matter of choice to do or not. In nowadays you don’t have to hide anymore to do certain things that before were considered as taboo for example. They were not only considered taboo by the society but were also wrong in front of God. With time what was considered as evil has become good and accepted even by the law itself, and what was good is slowly becoming taboo, is slowly becoming something not common and pointed out as something wrong. (Isaiah 5:20)

 This is a danger. We see this drastic change in our society today. I am not going to list all the wrongs and the sins committed in today’s days, but you know well that your parents or grandparents didn’t even imagine all the things we as society today would accept and, in their days, those were scarcely seen. Speaking about divorces, about sex and relationships in disorder, about drug abuse, about the rebellion which is promoted amongst this society, and so the list is goes on.

 So, going back to our story about Abraham and Lot, we can see that the condition in which God found Sodom and Gomorrah was somehow similar to our now. And someone would say: “Yes, but why is it then that He is not coming yet? We keep on doing all of these things and no punishment or not even a bit of a sign or action that He disapproves this, is shown”.

 I would not agree with this, as yes, I think that He is showing His disapproval, but not in the way we expect Him to do it. We all expect to see Him coming now in the clouds and showing all of His majesty now. This will eventually happen, but it will be at the very end, and then it might be late for any other action or choice we need to make. He is showing His disapproval now in different ways, even through the nature itself. He is just not showing all of His discontent toward sin now, because He wants to give us still opportunity. The other reason which I can point to those asking why is it that He is not showing up and coming now, is that it hasn’t actually been a long time that we live in a such an extreme and immoral way. Immorality and wickedness have always been there in the world, but the Lord will actually come when this immorality becomes unsupportable and the one which we’ve been seeing and is on more extreme levels is been around for about 50 – 60 years. If we’ve lived a longer time in this exact way, then yes, I can consider a bit this point, for the people wondering about His coming, even if this is relative. It is not a question how long we’ve been living in this way, but that the society’s moral values are getting worse. As we said, there has always been immorality in the world, but when this is something generally accepted by the society and the ordinary way of life, it is something different.

 We can see other similarities in another story having to do with the end. The story of the Noah and the flood. There as well, the sin was so much that God wasn’t able to bear it anymore.

 5Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Genesis 6:5, 6

 My idea on this passage is that as people before the flood used to live for a longer time, which I think is due to the atmospheric conditions were there before and obviously because the Lord had decided so, they used to develop also the sin more in their life. In today’s days we see that older is someone, more he has advanced into sin and harder is also his heart toward God. Just imagine how it was when the persons used to live for a time over 300 years as the Bible says. What we nevertheless see in today’s days, is that even though man doesn’t live as long, he is still advancing toward sin, because of the knowledge he is having today and the overwhelming information he is surrounded with. I mean that he can access right in the place where he is, without many efforts from his side. The information we have today can be used for good, but also for wrong as it is done in general. Everything today is moving fast and in an accelerated way.

 So, by all these events we see that there is a limit in God’s patience. We can say that when nothing else can be done, when there is no possibility for the gospel and God to break through with His light, then the end will probably come. Obviously that God can do anything anywhere, and His light can penetrate in the deepest darkness, but He has also established things to be done in a certain way. We can see an example of this in Genesis 18:22-33 where Abraham conversed with the Lord after He told him that the end of Sodom and Gomorrah was coming.

 22Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. 23And Abraham came near and said, **“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?**24Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

26So the Lord said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

27Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: 28Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of* five?”

So He said, “If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it.*”

29And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose there should be forty found there?”

So He said, “I will not do *it* for the sake of forty.”

30Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?”

So He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.”

31And he said, “Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?”

So He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty.”

32Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten.” 33So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

 We see here that Abraham started conversing with the Lord if He was still going to destroy the city if there were found righteous men in.

 23And Abraham came near and said, **“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?** Genesis 18:23

After that he started to make a kind of a petition and to ask Him what He would do if there were fifty righteous persons in, and the Lord told him that He wouldn’t destroy the place, because of these men. Abraham kept on asking and from fifty, he started asking what was going to happen if there were forty, and then he kept on asking him, until he arrived at the number of ten (Genesis 18:32).

 For a long time when I read this story, I thought that when they conversed, they had arrived to the number of one righteous man only or they anyway meant that, but without mentioning it. Then I noticed that they had stopped at the number of ten, meaning that if there were at least ten righteous persons, God wouldn’t destroy the city. I also wondered why is that God did bring the end as there was at least one righteous man – Lot, but he was indeed only one and the last number they had stopped at, while conversing, was ten. There was only one righteous man and not ten. That was Lot. All of this means that if there are righteous men in a certain place, God wouldn’t bring the end there. The righteous men, the Christians preserve the earth, they are like the salt of the earth and what the salt does, is to preserve. This is one of the qualities for which it is used. As it happened in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah, so it will happen in these times. Until there are still righteous men on the earth, even few, God would not bring the end. Now, we need to see what few means. If in a place as a city such as Sodom, ten were enough and the last number through which the judgment could’ve been avoided, we need to see what that will mean speaking about the whole earth. Which would be the number?

 All of this means that until there is a hope, until there is potential for the gospel to be transmitted, so that more people can be saved, the end won’t come. People in nowadays don’t know what they are doing when inventing always new laws and obstacles through which the proclamation of the gospel is prevented. All of this is just causing the end to come sooner. The purpose of God is to reign in this earth, it is that the gospel could be proclaimed. And in which way it can be done if not through the Christians, as this is the way in which it needs to be done? While there are believers here, He can still reign on the earth and His kingdom can be seen through those who believe. Once that this becomes impossible, and the iniquity gets on a much higher level, He will have to finish everything and create a new earth on which His ultimate kingdom and justice would reign. But until then He wants to save as many persons as He can and that’s why He is withholding His ultimate kingdom and justice now, for the love of those who need to be saved. There will come eventually a time in which the gospel would not be available. It will be just hard to be preached and transmitted.

 The highest iniquity is not just expressed in certain crimes or immorality, but mainly in taking God completely out of the picture and replacing the good with evil or better said calling what is evil good and in this way somebody not to be able to see and acknowledge its own iniquity. It is good until the laws of God are still used in our moral codex, but when they will be removed and replaced with other ones, with our own way of seeing justice, it will be a problem. We can see the people in the past generations for example. Speaking in general, their morals were better than the people from these days. There was still evil and immorality, but the people had to hide to do certain things and were also ashamed of them if they did them, while today the same things are done openly without any shame or regret. They are just considered as something normal.

 I am not saying that the people from the past were saints. They were also sinners that needed to repent, but just their view on immorality was different. It was still something wrong. They knew when they were doing something wrong. That’s the difference. When you do something wrong you know that you have to repent, but when the wrong you are doing is considered as something completely normal for you and there is not a law or something to tell you that it is wrong, then that’s a problem. This is the attitude that God doesn’t accept. When people don’t feel ashamed of their condition.

15Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?
No! They were not at all ashamed;
Nor did they know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
At the time I punish them,
They shall be cast down,” says the Lord.

Jeremiah 6:15

 This will be the downfall of today’s society. When the knowledge of evil and good will be completely distorted. It is already going into that direction, but it will be a time when that will be complete.

 18Where *there is* no revelation, the people cast off restraint;
But happy *is* he who keeps the law. Proverbs 29:18

 Here we can see how a nation without a vision, without a guidance from God, perishes. We see how our society in these days is slowly removing and changing the original laws and principles was having, which were based on the laws of God. The role of the law is not to change anyone, because it can’t, but at least to show to people they are wrong, which can bring them to realization of their condition and repentance. But how are they going to realize it, if they grow and live in a society that doesn’t teach them what really is good and wrong, and is having for laws and principles something else, rather than what God states? How will they know it, if what is wrong, is considered as something good and vice versa?

 Going back to the story of Abraham and the questions he was making to the Lord concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we see that they stopped by the number of ten. We can compare this situation to the end times which are about to come as God is always the same and He will deal with situations similarly as He doesn’t change throughout the time. There are couple of points here and points of view which slightly differ from each other, as we also don’t know the exact way in which things will turn at the end times. It is not something simple we can discuss and take positions as Jesus Himself told us that there are things that we won’t be able to know. He told us to be watchful and ready, which was His main message and He told us that we won’t know the exact hour in which He will come.

 Many people are having different points of view concerning the end times and stick firmly to them. I personally don’t have strong and firm convictions on all the points. I am sure and firm on what He told us about His return and that we need to be watchful and ready, which is the most important, while I don’t know the exact way or time that will happen, as somethings are not meant for us to know, because the Bible states so and also because the most important is to be ready for it. We can know though if He is close as He gave us a comparison in Matthew 24:32-35 in which He says that the signs of His coming are as the leaves of a fig tree and the approaching of the summer. Same as the summer approaches when we see leaves appearing on the fig tree, so His coming is close when we see the signs.

 One of the points we can see that it probably doesn’t directly has to do with the events of the end times but is important in our Christian life and the way we can stay watchful, is the way a believer needs to live. We can see that Lot was the only believer there and if there were at least ten, God wouldn’t destroy the place. I think that Lot was having as a duty to transmit and to share to the others what he knew about the Lord. We can think that he probably did it, but nobody listened to him, and we can also think that he was probably a believer who didn’t pass much of his time trying to do that in his everyday life. Why? Because at the moment he tried to warn his sons-in-law about the coming end, they though that he was joking (Genesis 19:14). They were probably not used to hear him talking on that topic or either way his life was probably not representing this image.

 The other thing was that his wife looked like was so attached to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. We know it, because she looked back at the end and in this way turned into a statue of salt. It is not a question that she looked back but that she desired what was left behind. Ok, I know also that there are many believers that have families who don’t share their faith, and this is something that happens. These people are still faithful to God and do everything possible for the gospel. The situation of Lot looked quite different though. There was also the fact that he chose to live in places such as Sodom and Gomorrah. Yes, if someone stays in places which are ungodly and apart from the Lord with the purpose to bring a light there, is fine and this is what we are called to, to bring a light and to be a light, but Lot and his household had also probably other reasons which prevailed over God’s purposes. To all of these factors we can also add the behavior of his daughters with him after their escape (Genesis 19:30-33). We can see that they weren’t used to live in the right way, probably because they didn’t hear much about it and if they heard, it wasn’t transmitted to them as something of a primal importance. We can also say that they maybe heard about it but didn’t accept it. I am keen to think though that they didn’t hear much about it. By all of this we can see somehow plenty of coincidences that indicate that probably Lot was not performing his duties as a believer in the best way. Yes, he was a righteous man, but probably keeping this righteousness for himself alone. This is not what we are called to. We need to share it. The Bible speaks about people that build on the right foundation but use materials which perish easily, such as wood, hay, straw.

 12Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

 It looks like there are some persons who build with materials which endure fire and others not.

 They will be saved, but as through fire, same as Lot. I am speaking figuratively about the fire as a form of a trial. All of this brings consequences obviously. I know that today there are imperfections in my life, but I would like to trust in God for that. The greatest imperfection in Lot was not maybe in his life, but in the fact that he probably didn’t share what he knew about the Lord with the others.

 Going back to the topic of the end times, we can see that when there were not enough righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, its end came. We can compare it with the present situation. There are still righteous men on the earth, but one day when they will be no more, the end will come. It will happen when there will be no more possibility for the gospel. Now, if we look at the situation, there might be two ways in which there will be no more righteous persons on the earth one day. When I speak about righteous persons, I obviously speak about people being saved by the Lord.

 The first way in which things can happen, is that the laws and the ways of life will be changed drastically and as all godliness will be taken away completely, the righteous persons will become less and as in the days of Lot, he was the only one, so in that time, they will be very few and the Lord will take them, will rupture them and the end will come. We see in today’s days how the regulations prohibiting Christians to share the gospel with others are increasing altogether with the new age cultural movement and education, and the Christianity and God are just left aside. This idea supports the theory of post tribulation rupture, meaning that the Christians will go through the great tribulation and after that, when the immorality and the lawlessness will be at their pick, they will be taken. Their number will decrease because of the growing opposition toward the gospel. It will grow so much that God will not be able to bear it anymore. Then in this case the exit of Lot represents the rupture.

 I am supporting the idea of rupture as this is Biblical and I think it will happen, but I just cannot say which one will be – pre or post tribulation rupture? I don’t know, because God is the one that will decide when this will happen, and some things are hidden to us.

 The second idea is that the Christians will be ruptured first, and the great tribulation will start then. This is the pre-tribulation rupture. So, the decreasing of the righteous men on the earth and the cause of the end will happen because God will take them away. This is because He won’t let them go through the exceeding trials that will be on the earth. In both cases the end comes when there will not be righteous men anymore on the earth. Surely God wants to preserve his people from the judgment. The question is if they will be preserved from the great tribulation or the very end only. This is a mystery for us. What we need to do is to be ready and watchful, and to share the good news with the others.

 The comment we made before about the way Lot lived and what he was supposed to do, even though it seems to be a bit beside the main topic, which is the end times and the signs of them, is actually close to the matter. What we are supposed to do in these perilous times, is to share the gospel as much as we can, as the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

 As we said before, we don’t know, if this rapture will happen before the great tribulation, in the midst of it or after it. We don’t know as well if this refers just for the very last part of times and in what exactly is referred when is spoken about the wrath of God? Does it refer to the destruction and the very last times or also for the great tribulation? **To me this tribulation and the fact that God will not just end everything in a moment, means that He does it with a purpose that people can reflect on their condition and repent. This is what trials are for.** The ones that we are going now trough and those that have to come to the whole world, otherwise He would have end everything in a moment without any warning. But He is a God that has a compassion and warns about danger, He warns about things that could happen, because He doesn’t want us to perish. Unfortunately, as we read throughout the whole Bible, there will be people that won’t hear and pay attention to this.

 Maybe we are not meant to know exactly all things, but something will happen. When the few Christians will be left there and when they will be not able anymore to do much more for the Kingdom, because of the great opposition, then they will be taken. We are starting to see this opposition now anyway. We didn’t expect it right now in these times in which we are living with all of this freedom of speech and rights everyone is having. It results that the Christians don’t benefit these rights at their maximum as they are shut down and oppressed as all the rest of people are having freedom to express themselves. So, we don’t know how much more time is needed for the total opposition of Christianity to take place, but since these past years we can see things moving into that direction.

 As we said before, we don’t know the exact way this event will happen. We’ve seen movies about it, we’ve heard stories and opinions, but the question is not how exactly, but the purpose with which it will happen and for us is nothing else left, but to listen to the warnings in the Bible telling us to be always ready.

 “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. **Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”** Matthew 24:40-42

 Notice that these verses speak about persons that will be taken and others left behind. Exactly before the exhortation to be watchful, because we don’t know the exact hour in which He is coming. Now, we don’t know when exactly it will happen and in which way. It is wrong to say and define with precision the time and the way in which it will happen. Most of the people did a mistake when doing this throughout the history. God doesn’t want us to know all the things at ones and some things are not meant to know, exactly because they are meant to be taken by faith. Because a faith is needed for the salvation. We might have an imagination of how it could happen, but it doesn’t necessary mean that it will be in this way. The movies for example, that we watch about this event (about the rapture) have as a purpose to give us an idea and to warn us maybe to be ready, but what they are showing us, is just the way they imagine it could happen.

 The question is that people want this to happen tomorrow and when they don’t see it happening, they start to question the word of God. But Peter said it fine in His second epistle in chapter 3, verse 1 to 4

 “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: **that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”**  2 Peter 3:1-4

A bit further in v.8 and 9 it is said:

 “But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:8,9

 We see here the main purpose of God “delaying” His promise of coming back and redeeming finally His elect. It is because He still wants for people to know Him and get saved. He looks differently at time and His eyes see beyond and much further than what we can see or imagine. He sees the complete picture of our redemption. What an amazing God we have! The best thing we can do is to trust Him!