

THE LOST CITY

GENESIS 19:1-38 FEBRUARY 2, 2022

Before us this evening is one of the most squalid stories in all the Bible. This is the kind of movie you walk out of. And yet, here it is. Why do we need to know about this infamous night? Well, God considers it necessary and profitable and instructive, that we might be trained in righteousness.

Based on what we know about Lot this passage should stop us dead in our tracks. Because the Bible tells us that Lot was a *righteous* man.¹ He *wanted* to do what was right. That is driven home by the many parallels Genesis gives us between Abraham and Lot. Moses goes to great lengths to connect them. Think about it: Both are shown sitting in the entrance of where they lived. Both had business dealings with the locals near them. Both go out to receive their guests. Both offer them washing and rest. Both prepare a feast. Both recognized the evil of the culture. But there is a profound and obvious difference between the *outcomes* of these two men. Abraham goes on to be the father of faith, while Lot presides over a horrifying night of ruin and failure.

We need to know what happened here, because we find ourselves in a culture very much like the one Lot was in. And if he, a "righteous" man can fail so terribly, saved as through fire, then we need to pay attention. This story is not persevered just to churn our stomachs or make us think, "I'm so much better than Lot." It's to caution us and help us ask the far more important question: *What can I do to avoid becoming like Lot?*

Lot is a display of what can happen to a person who loves the things of this world. As always, the lesson being given comes down to the heart. While both Abraham and Lot were believers, Lot's belief did not change his life. It did not motivate his decisions. Abraham's belief *did*. Lot had no interest in discovering *God's* way for his life or his family - he went *his own* way. Lot lived close to Abraham - just a few hours walk. But even though Lot was close, we find that he was *way off* course.

There's a rule of thumb in aviation called the 1 in 60 rule. It states that if you fly at just 1° off course, then every 60 miles you fly, you'll be 1 mile astray from your target. *"In 1979 a passenger jet...left New Zealand for a sightseeing trip to Antarctica and back. Unknown to the pilots, however, there was a 2 degree error in their flight coordinates. This placed the aircraft 28 miles to the east of where the pilots thought they were."* The flight was going fine until they struck Mount Erebus, which was now in their flight path.² All 257 passengers were killed in a completely avoidable tragedy.

Lot had gone down to see the sights of the plain of Zoar. And now he found himself right in the middle of a completely avoidable tragedy.

Genesis 19:1-3 - The two angels entered Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in Sodom's gateway. When Lot saw them, he got up to meet them. He bowed with his face to the ground² and said, "My lords, turn aside to your servant's house, wash your feet, and spend the night.

¹ 2 Peter 2:8

² <https://tandemfinancial.co.uk/tandem-thinking/the-power-of-one-degree-course-correction/>

Then you can get up early and go on your way.” “No,” they said. “We would rather spend the night in the square.”³ But he urged them so strongly that they followed him and went into his house. He prepared a feast and baked unleavened bread for them, and they ate.

Lot's story is about giving in to the seduction of the world. Bible teachers love to point out the progression Genesis gives us: First Lot *looked* on this area from afar and was enamored of it. Then he pitched his tent *toward* Sodom. Then he was living *in* the city.³ Finally, he's found here sitting in the city gate - the place where justice and business would be decided. It seems Lot was something like a city councilman. So, Sodom was not just a city to Lot, it was *his* city. He had found great success there, on the human level. But, he had *no* meaningful influence over those around him. He was no Daniel, shining as a beacon of righteousness and through whose witness the heart of Nebuchadnezzar was turned to God. Instead we see Lot giving up more and more to the world and its culture. He has abandoned his tent.⁴ He has arranged for his daughters to marry two local boys. All his business, his time, and his efforts, his affections are all attached to this city.

And yet, we see a flicker of righteousness, ever so small in this man's heart. He is concerned for these two travelers who have come through the gate. He knows they aren't safe and he wants to help them and then send them on their way - *early*. We can sense his double-mindedness. He *does* care about the welfare of these two fellows, but he also wants them to get going so that they don't find out just how sleazy his beloved town really is. He doesn't honestly warn them of the danger.

Genesis 19:4-5 - ⁴Before they went to bed, the men of the city of Sodom, both young and old, the whole population, surrounded the house. ⁵They called out to Lot and said, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Send them out to us so we can have sex with them!”

For years, it seemed like Lot could have it all. He had his belief, insignificant though it was to his daily life, but he also had the luxuries of Sodom. Sure, he didn't *like* what they did, but that didn't really have anything to do with him. *Except that it did!* He thought he was able to walk this tightrope, trying to keep dual-citizenship in the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, but tentacles of perversion and greed had slithered around his heart and infected him.

Jesus was very clear:

Matthew 6:24 - ²⁴“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Lot faced a reckoning that night. But he had lived his life in such a way that, when the moment came, he was powerless to stand. He had no spiritual strength. He had no answers, no foothold.

³ Genesis 13:10, 13:12, 14:12

⁴ Warren Wiersbe *Be Obedient*

The demand of the Sodomites is shocking, but it shouldn't be surprising. This is what sin does. It enslaves us and rots us. This is how it effects hearts and people and civilizations. Human history is *full of this kind* of depravity and we should not try to sanitize sin in our thinking.

Genesis 19:6-8 - Lot went out to them at the entrance and shut the door behind him. He said, "Don't do this evil, my brothers. Look, I've got two daughters who haven't been intimate with a man. I'll bring them out to you, and you can do whatever you want to them. However, don't do anything to these men, because they have come under the protection of my roof."

There are a lot of bad dads in the Bible, but Lot's got a good chance at the title. Notice again his double-mindedness. We can see the flicker of righteousness, but his love for the world has completely short-circuited his mindset. It took *courage* to go out and talk to this mob. He preaches to them, maybe for the very first time, about the fact that they're doing evil. But then, we see that his fix for the situation is, "Go ahead and rape my daughters. That way we *all* get what we want!"

In New Testament terms, we would call Lot "carnal." We use the term "carnal Christian."⁵ It means a person who is saved, yet lives life indulging the flesh. Carnal Christians do not function properly. They're life looks like a house made with crooked measurements. There's great inconsistency in how they behave. Clearly, in Sodom there was nothing off-limits when it came to sexuality. But we see that Lot's daughters were virgins, while betrothed to be married. It seems that Lot drew a line and told his daughters, "It is *wrong* for you to have sex before you're married." And yet, in the same breath, he's ready to sign off on gang rape! How can there be such a disconnect? It's because apart from surrender to God there is no firm foundation for morality. Everything is relative as sin pollutes.

One writer points out that the angels did not act right away. They're there to rescue Lot, but first he must *choose* which kingdom he really wants to be a part of.⁶

Genesis 19:9-11 - ⁹"Get out of the way!" they said, adding, "This one came here as an alien, but he's acting like a judge! Now we'll do more harm to you than to them." They put pressure on Lot and came up to break down the door. ¹⁰ But the angels reached out, brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹ They struck the men who were at the entrance of the house, both young and old, with blindness so that they were unable to find the entrance.

Lot was not an *influence* of the people of Sodom, he was a *nuisance*. We live in a terribly sinful culture. It is a given that we'll interact with the world around us. But the purpose of our Christian life is not only to have personal beliefs, but to be salt and light. We're to *make disciples*. We're to be proclaimers of truth and agents of grace. We're to live in such a way that people are drawn to *our* kingdom, rather than us becoming entangled in theirs.

When the moment of testing came, Lot had *no* power. He reminds me of Steve Rogers before he took all his steroids in *Captain America*. On some level, he wanted to stand up to evil, but he was

⁵ Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 3

⁶ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

so weak and so contaminated, there was nothing he could do. Again, compare him to Daniel. We know what an impact Daniel had. Then we remember that Daniel was around 17 years old when his book begins! The difference was *he* was devoted to righteousness, and what a difference it made.

Notice the Sodomites' attitude toward Lot. They don't care about him. They've tolerated him for a little while, but we see now what they *really* think. The Bible is speaking frankly here. Look at what they're threatening to do to him. *That* is the heart of our enemy. He's a destroyer. When temptation comes along, we need to be honest about what's really being offered, what the end result *really* is.

Meanwhile, the *Lord* comes to us and says, "I want to be your Shepherd. I want to shelter you and guide you and fill you and help you. I want to transform you only for good. I want to enrich you in ways you cannot even imagine."

The world wants to harm you. It's ready to break down the door to destroy your life and your family. Meanwhile, Jesus *stands* at the door of hearts and knocks, waiting to be invited in so that He might have a loving, personal relationship with those who desire to know Him and follow Him.

Genesis 19:12-14 - ¹²Then the angels said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here: a son-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of this place, ¹³for we are about to destroy this place because the outcry against its people is so great before the Lord, that the Lord has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were going to marry his daughters. "Get up," he said. "Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

The angels did not have a manifest with specific names on it. It reminds us of the that, in the grace of God there's *always* room for one more. *Anyone* could've been saved that night. They didn't have to be blood relatives. Had there been a Rahab in the city, the angels would have rescued them, too.

Lot makes a desperate plea to his sons-in-law-to-be. They thought he was joking - meaning that he must not have done any preaching to them before. Noah preached about the coming judgment and people scoffed because they did not believe. That's not what's happening here. Lot's message was so out of character and so without context, they had no reason to think he was being serious.

Peter tells us how Lot's righteous soul was "vexed" by the sin of Sodom. But his belief stayed in his mind and wasn't worked out in his life. He was distressed but *silent*. And because of it, he had *no* spiritual fruit to speak of. Compare his house to Abraham's - full of *hundreds* of people, dedicated and circumcised and ready to serve the Lord.

Genesis 19:15-17 - ¹⁵At daybreak the angels urged Lot on: "Get up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city." ¹⁶But he hesitated. Because of the Lord's compassion for him, the men grabbed his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters. They brought him out and left him outside the city. ¹⁷As soon as the angels got them outside, one of them said, "Run for your lives! Don't

look back and don't stop anywhere on the plain! Run to the mountains, or you will be swept away!"

Daybreak. The men of Sodom had come to Lot's house before bedtime. That means Lot spent hour after hour refusing to leave. Can you imagine the angels? How they must have kept looking at each other and saying, "Are you kidding me?" We see war between flesh and spirit in Lot's mind. He "believed" the city was going to be destroyed, but he loved the trappings of the world so much he just couldn't bring himself to leave. He's sitting down on his couch! The angels have to say, "GET UP!" They literally have to grab him and forcibly *remove* him from the city. And then we see Lot and family standing *just outside* the walls! The angels are begging them, "RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!"

Derek Kidner writes, "The grip of 'this present evil world'...is powerfully shown in this last-minute struggle."⁷ Temptation is real and we should expect it. But, the Lord promises that we will never be tempted beyond what we can escape as we choose to walk in faith. Unlike Lot, we're to *flee* idolatry. Run away from temptation.

Genesis 19:18-23 - ¹⁸ But Lot said to them, "No, my lords—please. ¹⁹ Your servant has indeed found favor with you, and you have shown me great kindness by saving my life. But I can't run to the mountains; the disaster will overtake me, and I will die. ²⁰ Look, this town is close enough for me to flee to. It is a small place. Please let me run to it—it's only a small place, isn't it?—so that I can survive." ²¹ And he said to him, "All right, I'll grant your request about this matter too and will not demolish the town you mentioned. ²² Hurry up! Run to it, for I cannot do anything until you get there." Therefore the name of the city is Zoar. ²³ The sun had risen over the land when Lot reached Zoar.

In 2019, *NPR* published a heart-breaking article about two Kurdish girls who were kidnapped by ISIS at ages 5 and 6. They were held captive for years and had completely forgot who they were before. They no longer knew their old language, their family or their own last names. The woman who had been acting as their "mother" would sell girls to be brides at around 12 years of age. Finally, they were rescued. When interviewed, the girls said, "I don't want anything except to go back."⁸ The man who rescued them set up a video call with the girls' true relatives. Afterward he asked one of them: "They love you and they want to talk to you, aren't they better than [your captors]?" The girl answered, "no."

These precious girls have an excuse. Lot does not. We see how addicted he is to his worldly life. He doesn't plead for deliverance, he whimpers for compromise. He's convinced he can't live without the city. "I'll die if I do what God has instructed me to do!" In the Hebrew (and perhaps in your translation) what he says there in verse 20 is, "Let me go to the little town...so *my soul will live*." If we want to *not* be like Lot we've got to keep watch on the affections of our hearts. What do we love? What invigorates our souls? The Bible commands us to set our hearts on heaven and on the Lord. We're warned against allowing our hearts to become polluted the way Lot's is here.

⁷ Derek Kidner *Genesis*

⁸ <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/19/733729625/i-want-to-go-back-the-yazidi-girls-who-did-not-want-to-be-rescued-from-isis>

Proverbs 4:23 - ²³ Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.

Note also how we see a flexibility in the providence and will of God, here. The destruction of Sodom was certain and inevitable. And yet, the gears of judgment slowed down due to Lot's hesitation. The angels say, "We will change part of the plan and not destroy Zoar." And they say, "We can't start until you're safe." God's work has both certainty and, at times, flexibility depending on the choices and actions of human beings.

Genesis 19:24-26 - ²⁴ Then out of the sky the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah burning sulfur from the Lord. ²⁵ He demolished these cities, the entire plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and whatever grew on the ground. ²⁶ But Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt.

When the angels told them to not look back the term they used was one of "intense gazing, not a passing glance."⁹ It wasn't a Medusa thing, where anyone who happened to see her turns to stone. Abraham is going to look out over the city. It's a *heart* issue. And Mrs. Lot reveals her heart. In that moment, God gives her her desire. It's been said that we can either bow before the Lord and say, "Thy will be done," or, in the end He will sadly look at us and say, "*thy* will be done." To Mrs. Lot, life wasn't worth living without Sodom. And so, the Lord honored her choice.

Genesis 19:27-29 - ²⁷ Early in the morning Abraham went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the plain, and he saw that smoke was going up from the land like the smoke of a furnace. ²⁹ So it was, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham and brought Lot out of the middle of the upheaval when he demolished the cities where Lot had lived.

We don't know how long it took Abraham to find out Lot had survived. There's no indication that the Lord came back by to give a report. Yet, Abraham could *trust* the Lord. He knew God was a rescuer. He knew He was gracious. He knew He was just. He is *still* all of those things today.

This must've been a tough morning for Abraham. Remember, he had gone to *great* trouble and risk to save *these very people* who had been swept away. It would've been hard to not feel like it was all for nothing. But it wasn't a waste. Three *were* saved. And countless millions have been ministered to because of what Abraham did in chapter 14.

Our efforts for the Lord may *seem* wasted sometimes, but trust the increase to Him and do not grow weary in doing good.

I wish this story couldn't get worse, but it has an epilogue and it does.

⁹ NET Study Bible Notes

Genesis 19:30-38 - ³⁰ Lot departed from Zoar and lived in the mountains along with his two daughters, because he was afraid to live in Zoar. Instead, he and his two daughters lived in a cave. ³¹ Then the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man in the land to sleep with us as is the custom of all the land. ³² Come, let's get our father to drink wine so that we can sleep with him and preserve our father's line." ³³ So they got their father to drink wine that night, and the firstborn came and slept with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she got up. ³⁴ The next day the firstborn said to the younger, "Look, I slept with my father last night. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight so you can go sleep with him and we can preserve our father's line." ³⁵ That night they again got their father to drink wine, and the younger went and slept with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she got up. ³⁶ So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The firstborn gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ The younger also gave birth to a son, and she named him Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites of today.

Lot is yet another example of the Biblical principle: You reap what you sow. He sowed worldliness and now he reaps it. What had he taught his daughters? Act like the world. That's how you get ahead. His daughters do preserve their father's legacy: That of surrendering to the flesh rather than the Spirit. Lot ends his story getting blackout drunk - twice - while sin continues its vile corruption.

It's sad - after all Lot had gone through, he's worse off than ever. In this epilogue he's paranoid and withdrawn. He gives into fear, which drives him first to Zoar, then to this cave. He gives into shame, which keeps him from returning to Abraham. He seems to not let his daughters leave the cave, but he's sure to keep the barrels of wine full.

His lifestyle of indulging the flesh rather than following the Lord completely ruined his testimony, his family, his mentality. He was a man who *should've* been a source of hope and truth and justice - a man who should've been a rescuer and a blessing like his uncle. Instead, *this* is his story. He had the desire, but he wouldn't yield to the Lord. Rather than crucify his flesh, he was a slave to it. Lot was not a victim of his circumstances. This was the inevitable result of a life lived in submission to the flesh. It did not have to happen to him and it certainly doesn't have to happen to any of us.

The Apostle John wrote to believers living in "the last hour" before the coming judgment. Here's what he says to us:

1 John 2:15-17 - ¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.