

January 29, 2017 - Gen. 19:1-38 - Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Torah Readings: Gen. 19:1-38 - Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Psalm 14

Haftorah - Isaiah 17:14-18:7 + 19:25

Judges 19:16-24 + 20:27

Genesis 19:1 - “And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground”

“Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.”

We get a mixed picture of Lot in the scriptures. His understanding of righteousness was not matched with the strength to resist Sodom’s value system either publicly or concerning his family.

Lot, after “pitching his tent toward Sodom” had become a citizen of Sodom, sitting with the elders “at the gate” - the place for news and business, the seat of justice and social intercourse.

As a relative of Abraham, who defeated the invading kings (Genesis 14), he would be treated with great honor. This personal respect had made him close his eyes to the sinfulness of the people, and he had consented to live inside the town, and even to let its citizens marry his daughters. Meanwhile all intercourse between him and Abraham apparently had ceased, and he had lost all share in the covenant of circumcision.

— Ellicott's Commentary

Yet, on the whole, as Peter observes, (2 Peter 2:8,) he “was a righteous man, and his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the filthy conversation” of that most abandoned place, “in seeing and hearing of their unlawful deeds.” — Benson Commentary

In Jewish tradition, the Sodomites waited at the gates for travelers and merchants to swindle or to torment.

Procrustes (whose name means “to stretch”) was a son of Poseidon with a stronghold on Mount Korydallos at Erineus, on the sacred way between Athens and Eleusis, according to the Greek myth. There he had a bed, in which he invited every passer-by to spend the night, and where he set to work on them with his smith's hammer, to stretch them to fit.

Jewish tradition describes a similar practice by the Sodomites. The supposedly would put a visitor on a bed, and either painfully stretch him to fit in it, or cut off his hands and feet if the bed were too small. The Jews had many stories of describing the greed, cruelty and uncharitable and inhospitable values of the Sodomites.

Remember, Sodom's sin at root was arrogance that led to greed, disregard of the poor and cruelty. It's full fruit was the sexual violence we see in the current passage:

Ezekiel 16:49-50 - "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "Sodom, your sister and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it."

Some traditions say Lot sat at the gates to intercept travelers and save them from the Sodomites' wickedness.

Public Faith

Previously, God said (**Genesis 18:26**) - "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" Abraham argues this down to 10 righteous men.

(Why no fewer than 10? Possibly because 10 is a minyan required to read from the Torah. Also, because Noah and his family numbered eight, and they were not enough to spare the world from the flood).

But Ibn Ezra points out that God specifies, "within the city."

The reason for the words 'within the city' implies that they fear the Lord in public, and for comparison Ibn Ezra cites **Jeremiah 5:1**:

"Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

The "streets" and "broad places" or plazas imply a public forum.

The few can turn the scales if the righteous individuals are exerting their influence in public life, rather than remaining in pious or fearful seclusion.

(Even so, God would still punish the wicked, but the place itself would be spared, along with the righteous in it, the Rabbis said.)

It is unclear whether Lot was publicly exercising his faith in this way or not.

Genesis 19:5 - "And they called to Lot, and said to him, Where are the men which came in to you this night? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."

Josephus supposes the angels were of beautiful countenances ('Ant.,' 1:11, 3), which excited the lust of the Sodomites. They were obviously planning violent sexual assault.

Isaiah 3:9 - "The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves."

Negotiating with Evil

Genesis 19:8 - "Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out to you, and do you to them as is good in your eyes: only to these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof."

Lot's daughters were apparently betrothed to husbands but not yet married (Josephus, Antiqu. l. 1. c. 11. sect. 4.), and still virgins, although later there is reference to the men as sons-in-law (Genesis 19:14).

Compare Abraham's "deal" with God for mercy with Lot's deal here. Why did Lot propose this?

Some explanations:

In his "mental disturbance" (Augustine) Lot chose the lesser of two evils (Ambrose), seeing he knew the angels to be extraordinary heavenly visitors under his protection (Chrysostom). Or, he might have hoped his suggestion would be turned down because everyone knew the daughters were already betrothed to fellow citizens.

Genesis 19:9 - "And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with you, than with them. And they pressed sore on the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door."

"This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge!" or "he is always acting like a judge!"- The men of Sodom were quick to remind Lot he was a stranger to the city originally, and is now becoming a judgmental, legalistic busybody. Perhaps Lot had previously argued against their wicked practices.

Genesis 19:11 - "And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door."

Not total blindness, but confusion (*sanverim*). The only other place the word is used is in 2 Kings 6 of Elisha and the Syrian army. The Rabbis called it "blindness of eye and mind."

2 Kings 6:18 - "When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, 'Strike this people with blindness, I pray.' So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha."

It was a picture of their utter moral blindness, and an omen of the coming judgment.

The Escape from Sodom

Genesis 19:15-16 - “And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, ‘Arise, take your wife, and your two daughters, which are here; lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city.’ And while he lingered, the men laid hold on his hand, and on the hand of his wife, and on the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful to him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.”

Onkelos paraphrases the words, "who are found faithful with thee." The sons-in-law apparently declined to leave.

“There was no sign in the chill Eastern twilight that this day was to be unlike the other days. Lot has either formed, or is going to form, marriage alliances for his daughters with men of the city who are as black as the rest. Perhaps his wife, whom the story will not name, for pity or for horror, was a Sodomite. To escape meant to leave all this and his wealth behind. If he goes out, he goes out a pauper. So his heart, which is where his treasure is, makes his movements slow.” - McLaren’s Commentary

Compare Babylon in **Revelation 18:4-5** - “Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins or contract any of her plagues. For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. ...’”

Psalms 34:21-22 - “Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.”

Destruction and Judgment

Genesis 19:24 - “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;”

“The LORD out of heaven” - The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem both call him, “the Word of the Lord.”

The destruction of Sodom is archetypal picture of the final destruction of all rebellion against God. Without God’s mercy, we would all experience the same fate:

Isaiah 34:9 - “And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.” (But read the whole chapter!)

2 Peter 2:6 - “He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes as an example of what is coming on the ungodly.”

Isaiah 1:8-10

“The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the

LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah....”

Referenced by Paul:

Romans 9:29 - “And as Isaiah said before, Except the Lord of Hosts had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrha.”
(The “Seed” here is Christ).

Isaiah 13:19

“And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Jeremiah 49:18

"Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah with its neighbors," says the LORD, "no one will live there, nor will a son of man reside in it."

Amos 4:11

"I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

The Fate of Lot's wife

Genesis 19:26 - “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.”

This pillar of salt is mentioned in Wisdom 11:7 and by Clement of Rome as still in existence, and Josephus professes to have seen it. But this legend is probably based on the pillar-like lumps of salt, which are still to be seen at Mount Usdum (Sodom), on the south-western side of the Dead Sea.

In vs. 16, “the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife” - but God won't force us to obey him.

Lot's wife looked back longingly, lingering too long, perhaps with inordinate curiosity or grief, but without urgency, loitering instead of running with zeal and obedience. She is picture of what it means to be friends with the world.

1 John 2:15 - “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Luke 9:62 - “Then Jesus declared, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'”

Philippians 3:13 - “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...”

“look not behind thee” -

A similar story is found in a Greek myth of Orpheus. While walking in tall grass at her wedding, Eurydice, Orpheus' wife, was set upon by a satyr. In her efforts to escape the satyr, Eurydice fell into a nest of vipers and suffered a fatal bite on her heel. Her body was discovered by Orpheus who, overcome with grief, played such sad and mournful songs that all the nymphs and gods wept. On their advice, Orpheus travelled to the underworld. His music softened the hearts of Hades and Persephone, who agreed to allow Eurydice to return with him to earth on one condition: he should walk in front of her and not look back until they both had reached the upper world. In his anxiety, as soon as he reached the upper world, he turned to look at her, forgetting that both needed to be in the upper world, and she vanished for the second time, but now forever.

-- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus>

The Incest of Lot and his Daughters

Genesis 19:31 - "And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father."

Another situation like Noah's drunkenness in **Genesis 9:20-27**.

"That we may preserve seed of our father." — The need to carry on the lineage was a very strong feeling in ancient times, and affords the sole excuse for the revolting conduct of these women. - Ellicott's Commentary

Their solution was probably the result of their acculturation in Sodomite society.

Did they really think there was no one else alive? What about the inhabitants of Zoar? Perhaps they felt this city would also be destroyed soon.

The seed of Messiah, not Lot?

The Jewish commentators had a different idea (Bereshit Rabba, sect. 51. fol. 46. 1. and Midrash Ruth, fol. 35. 4.). They interpret "preserve the seed of our father" to mean Messiah: "It is not said a son, but seed, that seed, which is he that comes from another place: and what is this? this is the King Messiah."

Ruth, the Moabitess, who was of the race of the eldest daughter of Lot, stands in the genealogy of Christ, Matthew 1:5.

However, even the best and highest intentions, like Abraham and Sarah's seeking the Promised seed to come through Ishmael, do no good without waiting on the Lord, and instead bring great harm.

The incestuous offspring were Moab, signifying, "of my father," and Ben-Ammi, "the son

of my people.” From them came the Moabites and the Ammonites.

Moabites and Ammonites

Initially, God seemed to favor them, and gave them land east of Israel extending from the Jabbok River in the north to the Zered River in the south, with undefined eastern boundaries (See Deuteronomy 2).

But they usually they caused trouble for Israel (See Numbers 22 - 25).

Due to their hostility towards the Israelites, the Moabites and Ammonites were given fearful judgments by the prophets:

“I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land. Therefore, as surely as I live,” declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, “surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land” (**Zeph. 2:8-9**).

Ezekiel 25:9-10 - “Therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his cities which are on his frontiers ... To the men of the east with the Ammonites, and will give them in possession, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations.”

In **Jeremiah 48:47** the Lord promised one day to restore the fortunes of Moab, and in **Jeremiah 49:6** he made the same promise to Ammon. Many of the Moabites were afterwards restored to their country by Cyrus, as we learn from Josephus; but they never were restored to their previous national prominence; and perhaps their restoration in the latter days refers to the conversion of their scattered remnants to the gospel.

This is the last we hear of Lot and his daughters.