

Genesis 19: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Genesis chapter 19 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet, then you may rise up early and go on your way.

They said, No, we will spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, Where are the men who came to you tonight?

Bring them out to us that we may know them. Lot said, I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man.

Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof. But they said, Stand back.

[1 : 1 2] And they said, This fellow came to Sojun and has become the judge. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.

But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out, groping for the door.

Then the men said to Lot, Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place.

For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it. So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, Up, get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city. They seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.

[2 : 2 7] But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.

And as they brought them out, one said, Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away. And Lot said to them, O no, my lords, Behold, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life.

But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there.

Is it not a little one? And my life will be saved. He said to him, Behold, I grant you this favour also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.

Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there. Therefore, the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

[3 : 3 0] Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord.

And he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley. And he looked, and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

So it was that when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manna of all the earth.

[4 : 41] Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father. So they made their father drink wine that night.

And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose. The next day the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father.

Let us make him drink wine tonight also, then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father. So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him.

And he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab.

He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ami. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day. Genesis chapter 19 is a challenging and a troubling story.

[5 : 43] It begins with two angels arriving in Sodom. The two angels are two of the three characters that meet Abraham in chapter 18. The third of the figures that meets Abraham there is the Lord who goes his way at the end of the chapter after Abraham has interceded for Sodom.

The beginning of chapter 19 has a great number of similarities with the beginning of 18. You have the visitors arriving. You have Lot in the gate of the city as Abraham was in the tent door.

Significant time of the day. It's the evening. The earlier time it was in the heat of the day. There is a greeting and an invitation to have a meal and an insistence that they come in and enjoy hospitality.

In both of these cases we are seeing then a pattern playing out which invites us to hold these two stories alongside each other. To juxtapose. To compare and contrast.

To see the different elements and what we might learn by holding them alongside each other.

They're both stories of hospitality in some way. Hospitality and in the second case in chapter 19 failed hospitality.

[6 : 55] Lot makes a meal of unleavened bread. The details of this meal are significant. They're details that are connected later on with the Passover meal.

Or the celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Israel is brought out of Egypt and unleavened bread is an important part of that story. You have two visitors coming to the city or to the civilization to inspect it.

Moses and Aaron and there's judgment. And then there's a destruction of the city or destruction of the nation. In the case of Egypt. They are led out.

Brought to the mountain. And a new covenant is formed. In the story of the Exodus. Here there is an Exodus pattern but it does not actually arrive at a good solution.

At the very end we find Lot in a cave. Not on the mountain. As he should have been. Reading the story of Lot against the backdrop of the Exodus helps us to pick out certain details that we might otherwise miss.

[8 : 01] For instance why is there such an emphasis upon the threat at the doorway? In the story of the Exodus the people have to be gathered within the house to celebrate the Passover feast.

They have to put blood on the lintels and doorposts. And there is judgment upon those outside.

Here we see the same thing. People must be brought inside the house for safety.

If they are left outside they will be destroyed. They will be judged. And so these are Exodus themes pervading this chapter. Another thing to do is to read it against the backdrop of the previous chapter.

Where there is again an emphasis upon doorways. Abraham is seated in the tent door. Sarah hears the news or the statement of the Lord in the tent door.

And there the tent door is associated with birth and blessing. It's associated with bringing forth a new son. In the story of Lot in Sodom it's a different thing.

[9 : 04] The doorway is associated with death. It's the doorway that represents that boundary between the realm of destruction and the realm of temporary safety.

It's the doorway through which he seems to be willing to cast his daughters. And so he's prepared almost to lose his children for the sake of his life.

Whereas in the case of Abraham, in the doorway there is a promise of new birth. The story of Lot moves towards a position where his wife becomes a pillar of salt. Barren as a pillar of salt.

In the story of Abraham, Sarah is made fruitful. Holding these stories alongside each other then will help us to understand them. This is something that we see on many occasions in scripture.

Scripture has certain patterns that play out. And the patterns help us to recognize both significant similarities and significant differences. So it's not just playing out the same pattern again and again and again without variation.

[10 : 04] There are all these significant variations. And as we read the story of Lot against the backdrop of the previous story with Abraham and against the backdrop of the Exodus pattern, we will see a number of details that will help us to understand what's going on.

The men of Sodom are wicked. They are characterized by a rapacious and cruel character. They seek to rape the visitors that come to the city.

Now, the purpose of this is not primarily to satisfy their sexual desires, but as an expression of their power and dominance over these people who have come into the city.

This is a society that's turned in hostility towards anyone that needs help. These are people who are opposed to the outsider, the foreigner, to the stranger.

And Lot, although he has dwelt among them for a while and has begun to sit in the gate, he's someone who seems to have exercised some authority in the city, he ends up falling foul of them too.

[11 : 10] He's taken in these people, these visitors, shown them hospitality, and now he is threatened on that account. If Lot is going to save this city, he has to be secure within this city.

If they cast him out, then they will be destroyed. And also, on the other hand, if Lot casts out people within his house, the city won't be saved either. Against the events of chapter 18, we can see that there is a concern here.

Can ten people be found? Can Lot's house be sufficient to save this city? Will the city retain Lot's house within it, or will they destroy Lot's house or cast them out?

And can Lot hold his household together? And in both cases, we see that the answer is no. There is a crisis moment where there is not hospitality shown to the righteous within the city, and the righteous are failing.

They are falling into the patterns of the city round about them, and they are giving way, and the ground is slipping, and there must be an escape at that point. And so, the angels, with a great urgency, call Lot to gather his family together and to flee from the city.

[12 : 24] But yet Lot is not believed. When he speaks to his sons-in-law, they ridicule him. Now, the sons-in-law may suggest that the daughters were not in the house. Later on, it says that the daughters have been found.

Now, that may be a suggestion that there was a ploy that he did not actually have his daughters with him, and he wasn't going to cast them out. It was just a means to gain a few moments of time. That's an interesting theory. There may be some truth to it. I'm not entirely convinced, one way or another. It told to escape, and as he escapes, he pleads that he might go into the small city of Zoar, and the city is named according to this.

The other thing that's interesting about this is, Lot is interceding for a city. Abraham interceded for a city. Sodom, the previous chapter. And so, again, we're seeing parallels between the two stories. But something goes wrong. Lot can't stay in Zoar. He comes to Zoar. The sun rises on the earth, and the city of Sodom and the city of Gomorrah are destroyed with sulfur and fire from heaven.

[13 : 36] But Lot ends up moving on from Zoar. He can't stay there. And he ends up living in the hills with his two daughters as he's afraid. And he lives in a cave, isolated from everyone else, cut off from society.

This is a great apocalypse that has occurred. And he doesn't go to be with Abraham again. That's one thing he could have done. Maybe he thinks that Abraham is dead. One way or another, he goes off to live in this cave with his daughters, by themselves.

And in that context, we see the other tragic twist of this tale. The daughters that seemingly he was prepared to throw out to the crowd to have their way with them, now they have their way with him when he's unawares of what's happening.

So there is a plot between the two daughters. The firstborn seems to be the instigator, saying to the younger, Our father is old. There is not a man on earth to come into us after the manna of all the earth.

Note again the parallels with the case of Abraham. Abraham is old, and Sarah is old. They're not going to bear children. And it's a similar situation here.

[14:46] And so it's an attempt, last-ditch attempt, to maintain the family line, to make sure that not everything dies out with Lot. And so the daughters lie with Lot.

They make their father drink wine and uncover their father's nakedness, in some sense. We can see the parallels between this and the story of Ham. And there, I think, it's important to notice that the children that arise from this are associated with the Canaanites in various ways.

The ways that the daughters act is characterised by Canaanite practices. By the same sort of relationship to sexuality that we see within Sodom. Now, why it was Lot and his wife and his family told not to look back.

In part, because they had grown so close to the society of Sodom. They'd become so entangled and enmeshed within it, that if they looked back, they would be too closely associated with it, and they would fall under its judgement.

The story of Lot's wife is a warning for this reason. That Lot's wife, looking back, had too close of an association with the city. Only by making that radical, extreme break, and not looking back for a moment, would they be able to be saved from its destruction.

[16:04] We can think about the way that we can so often be drawn back into the ways of the world. And like Lot, sometimes we may be led by the hand, instructed never to look back in any way at all, and to flee from our lives, like Christian, for instance, from the city of destruction.

This story, then, is one that is used in many occasions in the Old Testament as an example of a great judgement, a signal judgement, something that anticipates final judgement, and the danger of being found unprepared or too entangled in the things of the world when the day of judgement arises.

The plan between the two daughters is something that maybe has similarities with the story of Tamar and the way that she takes the initiative in raising up seed for Judah.

See a similar thing in the background of the story of Ruth, the Moabites, who plays a similar sort of pattern in the relationship to Boaz, plays it out but doesn't actually enact it in the same way, but recalls the events surrounding Lot and her foremother, who slept with her father.

There are ways in which we see this history being recalled and redeemed in that story of Ruth as an ancestor of Boaz is Judah and an ancestress of Ruth is the mother of Moab.

[17:34] These two people brought together are redeeming the legacy of their forefathers and foremothers. Two questions. First, looking at the story that ends this chapter with the two daughters of Lot, we can see similarities but also differences between the two daughters.

What are some of the ways in which we can see differences between the older and the younger daughter and the way that they speak about their relationship with their father? A second question. The story of Abraham and the story of Lot are entangled until this point in Genesis. There are many ways in which they are playing off each other as characters. We can see that Lot is the nephew of Abram early on.

He's the one who seems to be bearing the legacy of him. He's the one that's most well situated to making his name great. And then at other points, he's described as if he's the brother of Abraham. At this point, we see the last appearance of Lot within the story. And there is, once again, a key relationship with Abraham that's being explored, a juxtaposition between the two.

[18:44] reflect upon some of the ways in which the contrast and the similarity between Lot and Abraham helps us to understand the key details and character of both persons' lives.