



Part 44 – The Kindness and Severity of God

Genesis 19:1-29

Things in Sodom and the other cities of the plain have gone far enough. The time for judgment has arrived. This passage can be divided into three sections: 1) The revelation of Sodom's wickedness (vv. 1-14), 2) The deliverance of Lot (vv. 12-22) and 3) God's judgment upon

Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 23-26). The passage also highlights the contrast between Abraham and Lot. While Abraham is the faithful pilgrim wholly devoted to the Lord, Lot, one of Sodom's leading citizens (vs. 1), "has become complete in his urbanity."¹ In contrast to the rest of Sodom, Lot does practice hospitality towards the Lord's messengers. Though compromised Lot still retains the vestiges of his righteous uncle. Nevertheless, the differences between Lot, Abraham and their families are striking. The section ends with Lot escaping but only as one through fire (**1 Corinthians 3:15**).

1. The Case for God's Judgment

Vv. 1-14

- Vv. 1-2 – That Lot was sitting at the gate suggests that he was, by this time, one of the leading citizens of Sodom. Lot recognizes that Sodom is a dangerous place, especially at night.
- Vs. 3 – Despite the many errors of his life Lot nevertheless retained a residue of righteousness which is demonstrated through his hospitality toward and concern for the Lord's messengers. Though failing badly, Lot has a sense of right and wrong and desires to do what is right. Indeed, the Apostle Peter tells us in his second letter that Lot was a righteous man though this probably has more to do with his relation to Abraham than his personal behavior.
- Vs. 4 – The entire population of the city was thoroughly corrupt. Ten righteous men could not be found.
- Vs. 5 – "Know" is used as a euphemism for sex. In the Old Testament, homosexuality is classed along with incest and bestiality and punishable by execution. This moral assessment of homosexuality is not changed in the New Testament where it represents the lower rungs of human degradation (**Romans 1:18ff**).
- v.8 – Lot's compromise with the world is seen in his tragically sinful offer of his daughters to the lust-filled men outside his door.
- Vv. 9-10 – Notice how the men of Sodom cry foul and accuse Lot of being judgmental. This is the daily accusation of the wicked against Christians. Even as they experience directly the judgement of God the men of Sodom continue to grope toward their sin.
- v.13 – It was now beyond doubt that Sodom should be consigned to destruction.
- Vs. 14 – After years of accommodation to life in Sodom, Lot had lost any moral authority even over his sons-in-law.
- It is clear from this section that God is righteous in his judgment. He has already given his people a pattern to follow of thorough investigation (**18:20-21**), the testimony of multiple witnesses (**18:20**), and the offer of clear warnings (**19:13**). The Judge of all the earth does indeed do what is right (**18:25**).

2. The Rescue of Lot and his Family

Vv. 15-22

- Vs. 15 – Even after the assault on his home and the promise of impending judgment Lot sleeps through the night. This is not the sleep of faith but the sleep of a callused conscience.
- Vs. 16 – Though he seemed to believe the warnings of the destruction of Sodom, Lot felt more secure in the city than outside it. This is the condition of vast multitudes in the world today: they may be concerned about the moral condition of the world but not enough to separate themselves from it.
- Vs. 17 – "The hills" would be the highlands of Moab to the east.
- Vv. 18-20 – Even in the face of destruction Lot tries to bargain with the Lord.

¹ Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A New Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) pg. 273

- Vs. 21 – Even in the face of Lot's pathetic duplicity God shows his kindness.
- Vs. 22 – Lot does not want to be sent to the country so he bickers over a place in a nearby town! Even at the most dangerous moment Lot is still thinking about his worldly comfort.
- "Lot tries to be a blessing but instead appears as a bungler and buffoon. He fails as a host, as a citizen, as a husband, as a father. He wants to protect his guests but needs to be protected by them; he tries to save his family, and they think he is joking; afraid to journey to the mountains, he pleads for a little town, but afraid of the town, he flees to the mountains. His salvation depends on God's mercy (vs. 16) and Abraham's blessing (vs. 29)."² Ultimately, Lot's compromises will lead to a cave and descendants through incest (vv. 30ff).
- The remarkable feature of this story of divine judgment – itself quite similar to that of the flood (the total destruction of the wicked, but the rescue of one man and his family) – is that Lot, survivor of the catastrophe, was so unimpressive. He was a man of faith. He knew that Sodom was wicked and sought to protect his guests from the evil of the place. Lot practiced hospitality as Abraham had done and was committed to the welfare of others. He desired to do the right thing. Though dim in his response, he believed the report he was given regarding the coming destruction of the city. But Lot was a world-class bungler and altogether too half-hearted. Abraham certainly had moments of failure. But Abraham was no Lot. He learned from his sins. He was both decisive and determined to follow the Lord without compromise. Abraham would never have chosen to make his home in Sodom.

3. The Sentence Carried Out

Vv. 23-29

- Vs. 25 – The Lord's judgment was either by direct or secondary means. If the latter, then the instrument of the destruction was likely an earthquake common in the great rift that goes down the Jordan valley in Palestine and then down into Africa. That rift had at times released heat and gases, especially sulfur. If this was indeed the means of the Lord's judgement, the burning sulfur would have been ignited by the heat from below or by lightning from above. Lightning is frequently present during earthquakes.³
- Vs. 26 – We know nothing about Lot's wife. She was likely a native of Sodom. This may explain why she, even more so than Lot, longed for the city. Her identification with Sodom, her unwillingness to leave the place, will also explain why her daughters behave so badly in the next episode. They too were people of the wicked city.
- Vs. 29 – Here we see the importance God places on family solidarity in the covenant of grace. Lot is delivered through the judgment based, at least in part, on the federal headship of Abraham.
- Lot's wife did not escape the judgment of God. In the end, she loved the world too much and Lot must answer for that. It was Lot's decision to keep his wife and daughters in Sodom. His sons-in-law perished in the flames as well and for that too Lot was partly to blame. Verse 14 indicates just how little these young men were influenced by the faith of their father-in-law. And to add further tragedy to the events, Lot's daughters would prove to have been thoroughly ruined by their life in Sodom. They proved to be daughters of Sodom, which is only to be expected when a father chooses to seek ease, pleasure, and prosperity for himself at the expense of the spiritual welfare of his family.
- What the final judgment day will reveal of Lot's life God alone knows. As hard as it is to reconcile, Lot was a "technically" righteous man. His decision to flee the judgement was surely grounded in his past in the hill country with Abraham and the lessons he had learned from the man of faith. Lot also reminds us of God's sovereignty in mercy. The Lord extended mercy to Lot's entire family including his sons-in-law.
- Lot's story is not meant to console us with the hope that we can live deeply compromised lives and still avoid the judgment to come. Rather, Lot's story is meant to solemnize us; to make us fear the consequences of worldliness. How Lot should have made other choices and taken greater care of his own heart and those of his loved ones! "He was saved – though as through fire – they were not. His salvation was bittersweet when it could have been altogether sweet! No man who is saved in the nick of time is ever glad he had to be!" (Robert Rayburn).

² Waltke, 274

³ N. Sarna *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society, 1989) p. 138