

Following the Biblical Stream:

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Part LXXXVI

In our last segment, we did not really begin our look at Genesis chapter 19, in spite of the fact we had covered all the verses in chapter 18 by the end of the segment before. Instead, we went back and took a more contemplative look at what the last verse in chapter 18 tells us, as well as the overall conversation God had with Abraham about the decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Hopefully, that conversation will help us understand more about the direct story concerning the cities' destruction and God saving Lot from it, which is told to us in chapter 19.

Genesis chapter 19 verse 1 tells us two angels came to the city of Sodom, at evening. In this simple line there are two things we want to keep in mind. First, these are the same angels who stopped with God at Abraham's tent. Many would say this is easy to see, but let's not pass up the opportunity to again look at an example of how, if we allow chapters and verses to be more than reference points within the Bible or fragment the words we are told, one can easily misinterpret the overall story. I have spared no opportunity pointing out how much three men came by Abraham's tent that day but only two went on to the cities, which shows us the third man was God Himself Who stayed and talked with Abraham. Not only is this generally clearer when we do not separate the story of chapter 18 from where we begin chapter 19, but there is another fact in that the angels came at evening. This would make the timing about right. The three men came by Abraham's tent in the heat of the day and stayed to eat a meal. By the time the angels left and continued their travel in the same way any human would, it would be evening before they made it to the valley where the cities were.

The second point in this statement is that only the two angels came. This is not just to repeat God was the third "man," but to point out, while it was clearly God's intent to take a look at the cities from more of our perspective, and even converse with Abraham about the situation before passing the final judgment, God would not go into such a sin-filled place Himself. When we look at the fact God and the angels were walking as men in this instance along with the knowledge that God's presence is technically everywhere, and combine that with the thought of how Jesus came down in human flesh for the express purpose of God being able to freely and directly walk among sinful men, we have a conversation

that could take up many segments of this series. However, I will attempt to be basic about this here. We have talked often about God's presence being a matter of degree when it comes to the fact God's presence is everywhere. This is clearly shown to us as Israel travels the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the promised land. God's eye was always upon them; but He wished to be so directly among the nation, there is a physical manifestation of a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day upon the tabernacle, and which led Israel as they traveled.

This is certainly a more direct presence of God than we see in almost any other place for any prolonged period of time. However, this direct presence of God was not without its consequences. When Israel sinned, God's wrath, many times, came down on them very swiftly and consumed many people before actions could be taken to intervene and atonement made that stopped such events. The absolute Holiness of God is why God wants to be with us, but sin clearly prevents it from being as direct and physical as God showed us in the Garden of Eden He desired it to be. In the case of Jesus coming to the earth in actual physical form to live as we live, God was able to walk among us very directly; but remember, Jesus' walking among us as one of us was truly that! He was limited in the same way we are limited. He could only be in one place at a time. We are even told on more than one occasion Jesus physically needed rest. God truly became a man, even to the extent He could be challenged by the devil in the same way a human was/is. Jesus was vulnerable to sin by both the temptations the devil directly brings, as well as those faced in this life, regardless of the devil's direct actions. (I John 2:15-17)

There just are not words to really explain this in a shorthand way other than to say God allowed a part of Himself to be encapsulated in human flesh. During this time, Jesus was afflicted as we are by the reality sin brings. By taking on our same vulnerabilities to sin, Jesus stepped aside from being our judge and gained the ability to directly walk among us. (Heb. 2) However, the fact Jesus endured this trial only furthered God's righteous ability and responsibility to judge each and every one of us for our failures and our choices to do wrong! This is why I also take the opportunity, when it comes around, to point out the devil was not rejoicing as so many wrongly think he was when Jesus died on the cross. Better than almost any of us can, Satan understood that his failure to get Jesus to sin at any point in His life before Jesus' death, made Jesus' death on the cross the

ultimate victory for God, not Satan.

Now, when God came in the form of a man to Abraham, walking along with two angels, God was not encapsulated in physical form or vulnerable as we are in any way! God was simply appearing as a man, and even this was not as direct or - shall we say - intense a presence as the pillar of cloud/fire appearance was later among Israel. This allowed God to be with a man such as Abraham, but going into the cities would have demanded their more immediate judgment by God's Holiness, even in this form. As we touched on last time, God also did not desire to make any show of being willing to enter and tolerate such sin. At the time, this likely would only have meant something to Lot and Abraham, but in the long term, it allows us to have this conversation today. This is why God uses angels to walk among us on many occasions, and we use the word "angel" to describe these beings, because it simply means "messenger of God." It might help us understand this point to also remember Satan himself was an angel who did exactly this kind of walking among men. (Job 1:6-7) The reason he is no longer an "angel" is because he no longer works for God, in spite of the fact he still works to bring a part of God's plan to pass more than he would ever want to admit. If this was not true, God would not have allowed his continuance on this planet; and getting deeper into that would open yet another large discussion.

One other point made in this opening statement of chapter 19 is that the angels came into Sodom, but does not mention Gomorrah or the other city (possibly cities), which would all be part of the destruction to come. In this, remember two more points. First, the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah is like so many references to what we might call a major metropolitan area, where there are big cities that grow and merge with other cities both large and small. In these cases, we tend not to name each individual city unless we need to give a specific address inside one of them. We simply refer to them by one or two of the names of the biggest or most prominent cities the conglomerate consists of. This was the case with Sodom and Gomorrah, and part of the reason it was becoming such a festering mess of sinfulness that would infect the entire region! Like the draw to the city and tower man built after the flood, these kinds of places become not just places where many of the people of a particular region or larger area live, but they set the tone for what kind of lifestyle is considered "the norm," as we say.

The second point about only mentioning Sodom

is simply that Sodom is the city Lot specifically lived in. Why is this important? It's important because we need to be clear on the fact the angels' mission was not to evangelize the cities. Their mission was not the task Jonah was given when God, many centuries later, sent him to Nineveh! God had already made it clear in His conversation with Abraham how little hope there needed to be for just a few souls in Sodom and Gomorrah to be saved, in order for God to call the entire thing off. Thus, the only concern of these angels as they went was to ensure a safe opportunity for Lot to get out of this area before the destruction came. One should also note that the angels coming in the simple appearance of men foreshadowed no looming threat to the other people of the cities. There would be no stories or rumors about how two angelic or supernatural beings had come, which pagan minded people might quickly pick out as a "bad omen," of some sort. One last important point in this is, God was also leaving it up to Lot and each individual in his family as to whether they wanted to leave or stay. This point would become obvious in looking at the actions of Lot's wife later in the events. Simply put, even Lot's family was not compelled by the appearance of these angels that what they said was true, and this means they too would need a certain amount of discernment, or trust, in order to see these angels as anything more than just a couple of strangers passing through with a big story to tell!

With this, we can move on into the verse, because Lot's reaction to seeing these two men shows us, in spite of his living in these cities, he still had a certain amount of this discernment left in him. We are told Lot sat in the gate of the city as men of important stature, especially those who acted as judges among the people, often did so as to be accessible to the people. There should be no illusion here that Lot was the only such man at the gate these angels came to. What this means is that when we are told Lot gets up and goes out to meet them, bowing his face to the ground before them and calls them "Lord," he was not simply showing the kind of common courtesy afforded every stranger which happened to visit the city! As we covered in talking about Abraham seeing the three men coming passed his tent, these men were not glowing or dressed in a manner that indicated they were men of great importance, and they do not seem to draw the attention of anyone except Abraham as they pass by him. So too, here no one but Lot seems compelled to make a special effort to go to the angels. However, Lot not only is the one to greet them, but his reaction to them shows some similarity with that of Abraham.

In verse 2, we specifically see Lot inviting these men to come to his house in order to stay the night, even offering the customary amenity of washing their feet because that was something one wanted to do after traveling in sandals for any length of time. As verse 1 told us, it was evening, and it was customary for people to stay with someone in those days rather than look for an inn of some sort as would later become the norm. Again, only Lot seems to desire these men to do so, as there appears to be no other offers given to them. In spite of this, the men simply say no, but that they would stay in the street. This might seem odd in light of the fact we just talked about how these angels came specifically to warn Lot. However, God does not do things for no reason, and the purpose here would seem to be to begin this entire encounter with Lot having forefront in his mind just what a sinful place he lived in. One might want to attribute Lot's urging for them not to do such a thing as simply being like Abraham in that he too wanted these honored guests to stay with him, and while I will not dispute there was a certain amount of that, which is shown in the fact that once Lot had convinced them to stay with him he provides a feast, Lot also knew very good and well what came of people who stayed in the streets of such a place!

Verse 3 tells us the angels did, in fact, stay with Lot and eat with him, but in considering that they had first said they would stay in the streets that night, we should also keep in mind these angels wanted to emphasize they were not afraid to do such a thing. It is interesting how these kinds of interactions between men and God and/or His servants often go. Lot clearly seemed to recognize these two men as more than just men, but at the same time, he feared for their safety as much or more than he simply wanted their presence in his home. We often have trouble believing God hears us or that we are important enough for Him to care about, while at the same time when confronted by God, especially the more He comes to us on our level, we quickly lose track of the fact, He does not need our protection, understanding, etc., and nothing is hidden from Him. God desires to be with us and commune with us, but it is an understatement to say this relationship is like a parent wanting to be with their child.

Verse 4 begins the story that shows us just how much Lot, as a man, had reason to fear if these men truly had no more capability than your average person in defending themselves. It also shows us just what a wicked place this city was. It would seem that while these men had no reason to be individuals anyone would interpret as being a bad omen, the word had spread that

they had come to the city, and now the men of Sodom surrounded the house in order to demand Lot allow them to see the strangers for themselves. This part of the story has many aspects to it, most of which pivots around the question of what motivated the men of the city to make this demand. In most people's mind it is easy enough to relate this to their desire to have physical relations with these men in an abusive manner. This thought comes because the men of the city tell Lot they want to "know" these visitors, and when phrased in the way it is here, it is often a word used to describe physical acts. The thought this is what they wanted also seems to be confirmed by Lot's offer to give them his daughters instead. However, before simply going with this thought, let's acknowledge that the "know" here is still a very general word.

This is true not just in the English, but also in the original language from which this comes. In the original language, the word is a root word, and it doesn't get more general than that. It would seem that we should get more out of this than just the thought the men of the city wanted to abuse these two men staying with Lot. If we stop to examine it, we should also consider the simple fact Lot was particularly interested in these men, which was witnessed by the others who set at the city gate as they came. This brought concern to those who lived in the city because no doubt Lot, while not being as righteous as Abraham, was known to the people of the city as not being one of them either. Lot had made a foolish choice in even wanting to take his possessions into the valley where these cities were and live in his tent there; but by this time, Lot had not only moved into a house in Sodom, but his being at the gate indicated he was taking part in the municipal affairs of the place. It is easy to judge Lot for his foolishness, but let's take a look in the mirror as we do so.

A story I have related at other times and/or in other writings is the fact, my parents worked hard to put us in private Christian schools, even turning to home school for myself long before homeschooling was as accepted as it is today in the U.S. They did this for various reasons, but their main reason was so we could learn in an environment more inline with our values and beliefs. At the time, myself and my family were subjected to criticism for doing this. There were, of course, the ridiculous accusations that my parents thought we were just too good to go to public school; but the one I find most interesting was being told it was wrong for "good people" to take their children out of a place where they could be a witness among their peers. First, we did not go to prestigious private schools.



Instead of being pampered like rich brats, we learned how much our education really cost! As to the second argument, this is an attitude I find hard to grasp as to why so many people fall into the trap. I often wonder if this is not one of the most believed, and therefore, at least close to the top of the devil's most dangerous and destructive list of lies!

In truth, I've never really believed that most people buy into this lie as much as it gives them a righteous sounding excuse to do something that is convenient for them, and/or involve themselves in something they know they should not be involved in. This has been confirmed to me as in the course of being a minister I have seen people use this very same excuse in churches. Especially when an organization of men begins to go wrong. Whether it be a church or entire denomination, you will hear people say things such as, "If all the good people pull out there will be no one to correct the situation, and it will surely fail." This makes me feel like using a line similar to a character that within the context of the story is very mean spirited, for it comes from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"; and that is, "Then let them die and decrease the surplus population!" Now, I am in no way saying this is true of any individual, but when it comes to groups and organizations established by men, we can only hope they die when they turn from doing good and become bad!

My real point is, far too many people have drowned in this sinful world with the excuse they were trying to be a witness to a dark world in a dark place where they had no business being and/or remaining. Am I suggesting believers become isolationist? Absurd! We are in this world, and doing that is almost an impossibility in any case. However, the Bible tells us there is a time and a season for everything. (Eccl. 3:1-8) When we send our children to school to learn, it is not for the sake of making them missionaries to the lost, it is so they may learn reading, writing, arithmetic, etc. What we seem to forget is that this basic knowledge, which we all need to function in this world, is not as separated from knowing the right way to live before God as many believe! I must say, at those times I was in a secular school, I believe I learned very little. There was so much to be fought against in what was being taught, and it was only with God's help that I knew enough to fight it instead of simply accepting much of it. You see, there is a time for learning and a time for social interaction for the sake of witnessing to others. In short, if God calls you into a place to do the work of the ministry, then go; but making the choice to involve yourselves in worldly activities and exposing yourself to sin-filled

environments, with the excuse your very presence will make a difference, is foolish!

Again, I fear I have opened another subject on which I could easily write a book, but this is what we are seeing in the circumstances of Lot's life. When Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen found themselves fighting for resources, Abraham proposed they split up so as to not interfere with each other all the time. Abraham was gracious and gave Lot the choice as to which land he wanted, and it was Lot who did not simply pick a location so they may be far enough apart to stop the interference, but specifically used the opportunity as an excuse to move to the most rich land of the region, which took him near these cities. It was Lot's desire to be a part of the affairs of these cities, which caused him to move into town instead of simply remaining in his tent outside the cities. To blame any of where Lot had come to on the excuse he was trying to be some kind of missionary to the lost, is something most people would accept as very ignorant. However, I propose that the kind of thinking I just covered had a lot to do with how Lot justified in his mind the choices he had made to end up in the position he faced that night the angels came to him, and the wicked men of the place surrounded his house demanding he turn over the two strangers to be "known"!

Lot had held on to enough of his Godly character that the people of the city knew him as a man who was not exactly like them, or at least in total agreement with them. The fact he had so eagerly took these men into his house is what made them a point of interest to those in the city. No matter what the word "know" was intended to mean, Lot understood it was not good. He implores the men not to do this wicked thing; and while I agree they wanted to physically abuse the men, if for no other reason than to show Lot he did not demand the kind of respect he might have believed he had in this place, Lot offering his daughters was an attempt to entice them to go off and have a good time, in a way they would no doubt have found appealing, rather than do anything to the two men. Lot was in the middle of this snake pit, and showing his immediate understanding of how wicked these people were, proves he had no success in "winning the lost" by choosing to live where he did; and thus, no justification for his continuing to be there. This is why I say, if God sends you, then go without question, but if He does not, then do not, especially without asking God if He will give you the means, and if it is worth risking your very soul to be exposed to such wickedness. It might be that just as it was in Lot's case, you are simply sending yourself and/or

your children into a place so wicked God has already marked it for destruction or, at the very least, turned it over to a reprobate mind. (Rom. 1:24-32)

Again, we should remember God did not send these angels to the cities to attempt one last evangelistic push to save their souls, and what the men of Sodom desired shows us why. We are told this was not some small renegade group of the city's population, this was all the men from every part of the city who came that night, and both their desires, as well as what Lot offers them as a compromise, is nothing short of sickening! Lot might have been known to be a man not after the same mold as those living here, but the idea he would offer his daughters as appeasement to these men shows us another incredible part of just how little Lot understood the power of God, and the corruption he himself had suffered. If Lot knew these men were so important that allowing them to be abused by the people of the city was something that needed to be avoided at any cost, even the lives of his daughters, then why did he not understand how much God had sent these men to take care of him, not the other way around? If Lot had studied to show himself approved, instead of indulging himself on a daily basis in the amenities living in such a place could offer, he would have known the right thing to do was turn to these angels for help. When we see Lot does not have that wisdom, we must ask, who's the missionary and who is the one in need of a missionary?

Fortunately for Lot, God had sent these angels to him because God in his determination to destroy these cities had also determined Lot was one man for whom there was still hope. God's solution was not to spare all the people for Lot's sake, which God had told Abraham He would do for only ten, but to remove Lot from the situation he had gotten himself into. This brings us to another point which is true, but at the same time so often gets overstated we do not see the other facets of what we are being shown. Lot was no doubt being spared because Abraham had basically taken charge of Lot upon his father's death, and Abraham prayed to God everyday for his nephew. This is not to say Lot was Abraham's responsibility, especially by this point in time, but it's true Abraham would have been very crushed to see him perish along with the wicked cities. That being said, this story is not just about Abraham, but about God's overall plan, and the fact there was hope for Lot and his descendants. As the nation God wanted to bring through Abraham came back to this land from Egypt, we find Lot's descendants were by no means a righteous group of people. However, they did serve as a stopgap to the growth of the Canaanites whom God knew would one

day need to be totally wiped out, and this story gives us a very early example of where the Canaanites were headed.

This is not to suggest God did not care about individuals among Lot's descendants and was just using them as pawns in His greater plan. We know God cares about individuals, for, again, Abraham showed us God would have spared these cities if there could have been found just ten righteous. Then there is the great example among Lot's descendants themselves which shows us how much God cares about any individual who seeks and desires Him. Two Moabite woman, who lived far into the future from Lot's time, were following their Israelite mother-in-law as she returned to Israel. All three had at this point lost their husbands, and the mother-in-law told her two daughters-in-law not to follow because there was no future she could offer them. While one would turn back, Ruth does not. Instead, she tells her mother-in-law that where she goes she would follow, and the God whom she served, Ruth would serve. (Ruth 1:14-17) This, Ruth said not just out of a love for her mother-in-law, but in abandoning all in order to join a nation from which the family Ruth had married into had originally left, due to the hardship there. Ruth saw, in what they believed, something that lacked in her own people.

Ruth did not desire to turn back in order to be a witness to her own people, she desired to be a witness by coming out from among them and living for God among the chosen nation of God. This she chose, no matter how much more comfortable it might have been to return to her own people, and no matter what lay ahead for the two childless widows in Israel. How did that turn out for her? Well, the fact she ended up being the great-grandmother of King David would say enough, but the fact that truth also put her in the direct family line that led from Abraham to The Messiah, is an honor above any even most of those born into the chosen nation could have only hoped for!

Until next time, Shalom!

