

# GENESIS

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## Lesson 34

## The Coming Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Cities of the Plain – Genesis 19:1-23

<sup>1</sup> *The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.* <sup>2</sup> *"My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."* *"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."* <sup>3</sup> *But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.*

Genesis 19:1-3 [NIV]

In this lesson we will walk with the two messengers into the city gateway, and then with Lot as he escorts them back to his home. It is noteworthy that it has been approximately twenty-four years since Abraham and Lot came out of Egypt. Furthermore, it has been even less years since Lot was rescued and returned to Sodom. Surprisingly, we find that, in spite of all that Lot had experienced, he is not only still living in Sodom, but sitting in the king's court as well—and as an alien. (Genesis 19:9).

How remarkable is that! It makes you wonder why Sodom's King Bera would allow an alien, i.e., a foreigner, to sit in the gateway. The narrative does not provide us any background into what led up to Lot being in a place of honor in the king's court as a foreigner. However, given what we know today about the gods and religious practices of the pagan societies of Lot's day, one plausible explanation is that it was because Lot's uncle Abraham rescued them in such a heroic manner. I don't believe that it is a stretch to believe that King Bera saw that Abraham's God was strong, powerful, and protective of Abraham and Lot. I believe that Lot's status was elevated based on this event, and King Bera wanted him close in case any serious trouble arose again. This could certainly explain why a foreigner was sitting in the king's court in the gateway when the two messengers arrived.

Before we dig into the lesson, one other piece of insight is worth noting. Specifically, while Sodom possessed great wealth and influence, there was one thing that Sodom did not have: a clock. I know that this sounds trivial, but it is nevertheless worth noting. Their sense of time was totally different than ours today. They watched the stars, the moon, and the sun, and they had a general sense of seasonal changes and length of day, but no clock. Seasonally life revolved around pagan celebrations and sacred days, and the early and late rains which brought times of planting and times of harvest—but no clock existed to herald and mark these events. We will return to this topic, and its significance, later in this lesson.

So, Lot has graciously invited the two visitors to stay at his home and has successfully encouraged them to do so. Just as with his uncle Abraham, Lot prepares a meal for them. I wonder what that evening's meal and conversation were like. Have you ever thought about it? Did the two visitors tell Lot that they had visited with Abraham? If they did, I'm sure that Lot would have been interested in finding out about his uncle's family and how they were doing. Lot had not seen them for years—not since the time that Abraham rescued him and the rest of Sodom's citizens. We are not told what the conversation was like, but we can assume that Lot still had no idea what was coming and the real mission of the two visitors.

<sup>4</sup> *Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house.* <sup>5</sup> *They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."*

Genesis 19:4-5 [NIV]

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**Read Genesis 18:20-21 and respond to the following questions.**

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1. When the Lord and the two visitors told Abraham what was coming next, what did the Lord specifically say to Abraham?
2. Was God going down to destroy Sodom?

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I believe that the two questions above are important to consider, as we take a look at what happened at Lot's house late in the evening. Specifically, we should be aware of a few things:

- a. The visitors have not mentioned their mission nor the pending destruction of Sodom to Lot, up to this point in the narrative.
- b. The visitors came to see—and verify—if what God was hearing was true. The sins of Sodom were so great that God wanted first-hand witnesses before he brought judgment. He also wanted to rescue the righteous from that judgment.
- c. The two visitors, then, were there to see and report back if sin was indeed rampant, as well as to rescue Lot and his family.

Returning to the narrative, we observe a vicious thing occurring outside of Lot's house: "all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house." We are further informed that the men of the city wanted to have sex with Lot's two male visitors. While this is appalling, it was also a prevalent behavior in that day throughout many cultures. The scene that Lot is experiencing outside his home is even more troubling, as every male in the city, young and old, is demanding sex and creating a violent mob mentality. If we assume that Sodom had a population of approximately 20,000 citizens, then approximately half of that number would have represented young and old males. It would have been a huge crowd, and it would have demonstrated Sodom's evil heart to all the world, and to God and his two messengers.

*<sup>6</sup> Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him <sup>7</sup> and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. <sup>8</sup> Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."*

Genesis 19:6-8 [NIV]

Lot goes outside the house, closing the door behind him in order to protect his two visitors, and attempts to reason with the crowd.

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**After reading Genesis 19:6-8, respond to the following questions regarding this incident.**

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3. What can we learn about Lot from his appeal to the crowd? What does he call their actions?
4. How does Lot propose to satisfy the crowd and still protect his visitors?
5. Lot called what they wanted to do a "wicked thing." Was Lot aware of the many perversions that had become embedded in Sodom and Gomorrah's society, or was he just seeing it now? (See 2 Peter 2:7-8)

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<sup>9</sup> "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

Genesis 19:9 [NIV]

The crowd is not only rejecting what Lot is saying, they now despise him for being a foreigner and telling them how they should act. Worked into a fever pitch, the crowd is tired of waiting for Lot to move out of the way and bring out the two visitors. They take matters into their own hands and, "move forward to break down the door." In spite of Lot's pleadings, in spite of the door being closed, and even in spite of Lot's offer of his two daughters, the male citizens are so full of lust and rage that there is no reasoning with them. At this point, Lot has done all that he can to protect his visitors. James 1:15 reads, "*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*"

<sup>10</sup> But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. <sup>11</sup> Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door. <sup>12</sup> The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, <sup>13</sup> because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

Genesis 19:10-13 [NIV]

Lot's two visitors now intercede on his behalf, pulling him back into the house and closing the door. At this point we should note what happens next: The two men inside "struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door." Pay special attention to when the two men did this, i.e., after they had shut the door and were all safely in the house. They didn't use magic spells, or go outside and throw something in their eyes; they were indeed God's messengers and had the power to blind people outside the dwelling without leaving the house.

Can you imagine, or have you ever considered, what it must have been like for Lot's wife and two daughters to be in the house with the two visitors, God's messengers, and hearing all that was happening outside? I would imagine that they were frightened, scared, and felt helpless at first, until they realized the two visitors were there to protect them.

The narrative now shifts to inside the dwelling. The blinding of the men at the door has scattered the crowd, who must be in fear themselves, having seen the lead men of the mob blinded in an instant. Inside, Lot is now aware that these two visitors are more than simply visitors. Then the two men ask Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you?"

As God's messengers they of course already knew the answer to their question, but they needed Lot to focus, and I believe that they would have protected even Lot's sons-in-law had they believed Lot. It is at this point, late in the evening after the angels have witnessed first-hand how cold, angry, and full of selfish desires are the citizens of Sodom, that they tell Lot why they have come and what God is about to do through them.

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**Regarding God's use of angels in history, referring to the scripture passages below, respond to the following question.**

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6. Does God use angels to bring judgment?
- Isaiah 37:36
  - Psalm 35:4-6
  - Psalm 78:49
  - Genesis 19:13

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<sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

Genesis 19:14 [NIV]

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**Respond to the following regarding Genesis 19:14 and Lot's sons-in-law.**

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7. Have you ever considered Lot's sons-in-law? Where had they just been prior to Lot coming to their home or homes in the middle of the night? (See Genesis 19:4-5)

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<sup>15</sup> With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." <sup>16</sup> When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.

Genesis 19:15-16 [NIV]

Earlier in the lesson I mentioned that one thing that they did not have in the Middle Bronze Age was a clock, and now we see a second reference to time, "with the coming of the dawn." A previous reference to time occurred when it was noted that the two visitors arrived in the gateway "in the evening." And now we know that it is early the following morning; we don't have a specific time, but we do know that it is early. It has been a long ten or twelve hours since the visitors first arrived at Lot's home. Lot, his wife, and their two daughters have experienced terror and fear. They have witnessed Lot offering up his two virgin daughters as well as a miraculous blinding of their attackers. This is all capped off with Lot's sons-in-law laughing and mocking him regarding his warning to them that God was preparing to destroy the city. Lot and his family have truly had an unimaginable experience, and their reaction to the two visitors' early dawn directive was also unimaginable. The text tells us that Lot "hesitated." After all that they had been through, coupled with the two visitors' warning that if they didn't flee, they would "be swept away when the city was punished," Lot was still hesitant to leave. Can you believe it?

Lot hesitated. Was he in shock? Did he not believe them? Or did he assume that the destruction would come later, and that he and his family had time to pack? We don't know, however, Lot and his family had certainly seen and experienced much in the past ten or twelve hours; so it simply could have been too much for Lot to process. But thankfully, "the Lord was merciful to them," and the angels literally took them by the hand and "led them safely out of the city."

*<sup>17</sup> As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" <sup>18</sup> But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! <sup>19</sup> Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. <sup>20</sup> Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." <sup>21</sup> He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. <sup>22</sup> But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) <sup>23</sup> By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.*

Genesis 19:17-23 [NIV]

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***As we begin to look at Lot's flight to Zoar we first need to note something in this passage.***

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8. When would the two visitors destroy Sodom and the surrounding cities?

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For us to understand the timeline of the events about to unfold, we need to know a few underlying facts. First, the Dead Sea has a long cycle of rise and fall in its water level. In fact, present-day's historic low water level of the Dead Sea is very similar to the level that it would have been in Lot's day. This is important to note, as at this low water level, a flat shoreline is formed around the Dead Sea. As such, this would have enabled Lot and his family to flee the city of Sodom, drop south to the shore of the Dead Sea, and hurry along its eastern shoreline down to Zoar. It also means they would have had to pass along the salty Dead Sea coast for much of the trip before going up to Zoar. When we look at the ultimate destruction of Sodom, this will also play a role in the narrative.

Second, we need to know the distance from Sodom to Zoar further south. There has been much debate regarding where Zoar was located and the distance that Lot's family had to travel. Archaeological discoveries and research by Dr. Steven Collins, the Dig Director at Tall el-Hammam (biblical Sodom), has established that the route along the eastern shoreline of the Dead Sea and up into Zoar would have been twenty-seven miles. You can read his article in *Biblical Archaeological Review* (BAR), "Where is Sodom?" in the March/April 2013 issue. BAR has also published a letter between Dr Collins and Bill Schlegel focused specifically on the location of Zoar, January 04, 2022.

We now have the information we need to fully understand the day's challenge for Lot and his family: (1) a twenty-seven-mile walk beginning just before dawn, and (2) the restriction that the two visitors cannot bring about the destruction of Sodom until Lot and his family have arrived in Zoar. If you do a simple search on the internet, you will discover that a healthy walker who exercises regularly can walk 27 miles in approximately eight hours. Most of us who do not work out regularly would struggle to do 20 miles in a day, however, two more things to consider: (1) Lot and his family are running for their lives, and (2) the people of Lot's day walked constantly; it was the primary means of getting anywhere. They were generally much more active, given that they did not have the conveniences of our day. For example, women often walked a mile or more just to bring back a heavy jug of water.

Finally, we see that when Lot and his daughters reach Zoar, "the sun had risen over the land." This phrase indicates that the day is fully lit, and in fact is already starting to head into early evening. From this description, we can see that Lot's family had from dawn until dusk to make the journey to Zoar.

In the next lesson, we will encounter the judgment that comes to Sodom and the Cities of the Plain.

Thanks for studying with us!

In Christ,

Wes