

GENESIS

Lesson 36

The Aftermath

¹⁹ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶ But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. ²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. ²⁹ So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. ³⁰ Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. ³¹ One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. ³² Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father." ³³ That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. ³⁴ The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I slept with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." ³⁵ So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. ³⁶ So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today."

Genesis 19:23-38 [NIV]

In this lesson we will look closely at the aftermath resulting from God's judgment and how that judgment affected people and nations for centuries to come. It changed the landscape of the Jordan Plain. That geographical change will form the background for many of the biblical narratives, not only in the book of Genesis, but throughout the books of the Old Testament.

Specifically, we will be examining how the destruction of the cities of the plain affected Lot's wife, Abraham, Lot and his daughters, the Ammonites and the Moabites, and the Jordan Plain (and its role in future biblical narratives). We will conclude this study with a look at why God brought judgment on Sodom, Gomorrah, and their sister cities.

Lot's Wife

But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Genesis 19:26 [NIV]

There has been a wide range of speculation regarding the assertion that Lot's wife was turned into a "pillar of salt," but the reality is that no one knows anything more than what the biblical text tells us. Dr. Collins, the dig director at Tall el-Hammam, believes that when she stopped to look back, she was immediately covered with super-heated salt water from the Dead Sea as the air-burst event caused the Dead Sea water to spray up and move toward the shoreline where she was standing, thereby covering her in a layer of salt. There are others that believe the story is fiction, and many more have searched for a mound of salt representing the biblical event. Regarding the latter endeavor, it is likely that the pillar would have soon degraded into a heap of salt and ash that would eventually have been rained upon and eroded into the earth sometime after the event.

What is clear is that Lot's wife did not like leaving the lifestyle and the city that she loved. As a result, she was punished along with the rest of the citizens of Sodom. In stopping to look back, she demonstrated her lack of faith in the messengers and God's

protection. She chose the way of the world instead of God's way, and as a result she was destroyed. This example is something that we should all ponder seriously, as Jesus teaches us that we are to be in the world—but not of the world. (See John 18:36, 1 John 2:15-17, and Romans 12:2, for examples.)

Abraham

²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

Genesis 19:27-28 [NIV]

¹ Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar.

Genesis 20:1 [NIV]

Given the devastation and the "dense smoke rising from the land," Abraham must have believed that Lot and his family had all died in the judgment that God brought, and that God must not have found ten righteous people in Sodom. (See Genesis 18:32.)

The explosion, approximately twelve kilotons, along with the resulting intense heat, fires, and thick black smoke climbing perhaps miles into the air, made it possible for Abraham to see the devastation from south of Jerusalem at the Oaks of Mamre. Those of us who remember the "9-11" attack on the Twin Towers in New York City remember that the column of smoke and debris from those two buildings could be seen from miles away. The destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain was more severe and larger in scale, but it gives us a vision of what Abraham saw coming from the entire Jordan plain. That day, given what he saw and what he likely assumed regarding the fate of Lot and his family, Abraham moved to the Negev. The following year, his son Isaac will be born, giving Isaac a birth year between 1699-1649 BC (based on the estimated date of the destruction at Sodom, 1700-1650 BC). After this cataclysmic event, a new chapter will begin in the lives of both Abraham and Lot.

Lot and His Daughters

²⁹ So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. ³⁰ Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave.

Genesis 19:29-30 [NIV]

³¹ One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. ³² Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father." ³³ That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. ³⁴ The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I slept with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." ³⁵ So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

Genesis 19:31-35 [NIV]

In today's society, what Lot's two daughters did would be considered taboo. And as we have studied previously, even God said that incest was an abomination. However, with no husbands or other relatives to take them in and provide for them, they took matters into their own hands and decided to get pregnant by their father. These decisions, like the one their mother made by looking back, changed lives and changed countries forever, as we will discover in the section below.

The Ammonites and the Moabites

³⁶ So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

Genesis 19:36-38 [NIV]

If you look at a Bible map of Jordan, you will find that—following the destruction of Sodom and the birth of the daughters' two boys—the descendants of the two sons spread across the land. The descendants of Ben-Ammi spread to the north and the descendants of Moab spread to the south. Eventually, Isaac's son Esau will leave his family, and his descendants will cover the southern end of Jordan as the Edomites. We explore this further in future lessons.

While the borders have shifted back and forth over time, essentially the top third of Jordan was occupied by the Ammonites—the city of Ammon is the capital of Jordan today. The middle third of Jordan was occupied by the Moabites—this will be the land that Ruth will come from. The remaining southern third of Jordan was occupied by the Edomites—home of Petra. Additionally, Herod's lineage will come from the Idumeans, who settle in the southern area of Jordan and actually develop Petra.

The Jordan Plain

²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.

Genesis 19:25 [NIV]

The Jordan Plain, the *kikkar* in Hebrew, lost all of its topsoil—perhaps down to bedrock. As a result, it took hundreds of years before anyone would be able to permanently settle or grow crops in the area. It is estimated that the vegetation was so thoroughly destroyed that it took many hundreds of years just to get basic vegetation to grow. It took even longer for new topsoil to develop before crops like barley could be grown. In the intervening period, one of the earliest plants to grow there were the acacias—a spikey, thorny-like bush or tree. Prior to that, nothing would support life for many centuries. A collection of these acacias, located in the land of Moab, were found growing in the area of the ruins of Sodom near the Jordan river. This area is referred to in the Bible as Shittim, specifically Abel-Shittim.

In Numbers 33:49 and Joshua 2:1, we read that at the end of the Exodus, "There on the plains of Moab they camped along the Jordan from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Shittim." Furthermore, we are told that Joshua "...secretly sent two spies from Shittim. 'Go, look over the land,' he said, 'especially Jericho.' So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there."

Today, the Jordan plain has recovered from the destruction and is once again home to farmers and Bedouin shepherds with their flocks of goats and sheep.

Understanding Why God Judged Sodom, Gomorrah and the Cities of the Plain

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood judgments in the Bible is the complete destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain; and this misunderstanding continues today. The vast majority of folks who are aware of the biblical story assume that God destroyed these cities because of their homosexual lifestyle. (See Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6-9, for examples.) It is often quoted as a biblically-sound reason for God's judgment, but that explanation creates even more questions than answers. The reality is that homosexual lifestyles, in their many forms, existed long before Sodom; and these lifestyles were widely held as acceptable custom in many places. So, if that is true, then why didn't God destroy all of those who practiced homosexual, lesbian, and pederastic lifestyles—rather than just targeting Sodom and its sister cities?

While it is clearly true that the Bible condemns this lifestyle as an abomination, it is also true, as we studied previously, that *many* behaviors are an abomination to God, including prostitution, for example—and yet how did Jesus judge the adulteress in John 8:1-11? Instead of stoning her to death, which was the punishment that was customary for the times, he told her to change her life. Specifically, he said, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

I believe that we need to reexamine how we look at the story of Sodom and look deeper into God's Word for the real reason he destroyed these specific cities and the land that they were occupying. If we look into the biblical text, God tells us specifically why he brought that judgment— and we see why that judgment is relevant even today.

⁴⁹ *"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen."*

Ezekiel 16:49-50 [NIV]

The people of Sodom and the cities of the plain were devoid of love—that was at the core of why God destroyed them. Today we would call them self-absorbed, cold-hearted, and evil—doing whatever pleased them with no regard for the needs of those around them. Their own selfish desires and lusts placed them above God and above the people who passed through their area. Sodom and its sister cities were devoid of love. God's Word is crystal clear: They were consumed by their own world, doing "detestable things," and not helping the poor and needy. They were "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned." They were "haughty," and they did "detestable things before God."

We see this aptly demonstrated in the behavior of their King Bera, the king of Sodom. When his people and their possessions were rescued by Abraham, he told Abraham that he and his men could keep their possessions. All that he wanted was his people back. (See Genesis 14:21.) But King Bera didn't care about his citizens; he just wanted someone to rule over. Cold and without love, King Bera was the fitting king for the citizens of Sodom and its sister cities.

Jesus, on the other hand, desires love and faith. He commands us to put others first, to live a disciplined life, avoiding "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (See 1 John 2:16.) He specifically teaches us that faith, hope and love are to be the most important aspects of our lives, and in particular, "the greatest of these is love." (See 1 Corinthians 13:13.)

The biblical text is clear with respect to the behavior and lifestyle that God desires—and the lifestyle and behavior that God finds to be an abomination. However, as followers of Christ we are to love everyone, because all of us have sinned. Thus, we have all been an abomination in God's eyes—all of us. What we learn from Sodom is that judgment will come to all those devoid of God's love, and not because of a specific behavior. We need to be careful when we judge, understanding that scripture tells us that "all have sinned," and it does not distinguish between your sin and someone else's. Living a Godly, Jesus-centered life is what we are called to do.

Let's pray that we may never be as the people of Sodom and her sister cities were: "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me."

¹³ *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*
Matthew 9:13 [NIV]

In Christ,

Wes