

Genesis 19:30-38

Depravity and its Consequences

Scripture clearly teaches that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Yet we can often think of that as mere exaggeration. We all sin, and yet we do not die. But Scripture is not to be tossed aside so flippantly. We do die spiritually, and we do die physically. And in the meantime, while God’s grace works in us to sanctify us, there are often very practical consequences for our sins.

This particular episode is disturbing and uncomfortable to read. Yet it is required reading, for if the narrative had ended with Lot fleeing Sodom to reside in Zoar, the reader would have little information about this branch of the family tree. After all, Lot, too, was a participant in the covenant promise. God wisely included this sordid narrative in the account of Lot so that Scripture would finish the narrative about Lot and his family.

An interesting historical dynamic is to consider that this particular narrative cannot have been very popular among the Moabites and Ammonites themselves. No culture wants its beginnings to be the consequence of incest. Neither is this a matter of anti-Canaanite propaganda. This is less political commentary, than an exposition on the consequences of sin.

The Problem

Early in the morning, Lot arrived in Zoar. At the urging of the angels, he had fled Sodom that morning. They had wanted him to take his family to the mountains, but he refused and bartered for sanctuary in the small town of Zoar instead. Thus the people of Zoar were spared, and Lot and his family arrived among them.

There is no time frame for how long Lot remained in Zoar. We can hope that he grieved for his wife, who had died in the infernal deluge that destroyed Sodom. Perhaps he already knew some of the people there. It was a small town, but it was one of the cities of the valley, and Lot may have done business with some of its residents.

However long he made his abode there, eventually Lot left Zoar. “Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him” (v. 30). But why did Lot leave the valley? Scripture indicates that Lot “was afraid to stay in Zoar” (v. 30). Did Lot fear that Zoar would be overthrown? Did he fear that the people of the city might sexually abuse him as the men of Sodom had threatened? We can wonder what story Lot had told upon his arrival as to the cause of the destruction the survivors in Zoar must have witnessed. Perhaps the debris and smoke from the devastation was too much. It may have been that the environmental damage was such that perhaps Lot did not think he could prosper in the valley.

Lot had needed to be physically removed from Sodom before. Now on his own he determined to leave Zoar for the mountains. Interestingly, this had been God’s original plan for Lot. “When they had brought them outside, one said, ‘escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the

valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away” (Genesis 19:17). Previously, Lot had been saved by the hand of God. Now he did not trust God to keep him safe.

So, Lot left Zoar and “he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters” (v. 30). There was no other place to go. The valley had been destroyed, except for the little village of Zoar which Lot had just left. He had no recourse but to flee to the mountains. One might wonder why he did not return to Abraham. Perhaps he was ashamed. We must remember that Lot had lost everything. His home. His possessions. His wife. His business associates. His friends. He had gone from the tents of Abraham to a house in Sodom. And now he dwelt in a cave.

From the daughters perspective, the destruction of Sodom had been as in the days of the Flood. It seemed as if all of humanity had been destroyed. As the elder daughter stated, “our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth” (v. 31). Yet they had been at Zoar, so we must take this statement as hyperbole. But it is curious to see what each member of the family was most concerned about. Lot was concerned for his safety. His daughters were concerned for their family name. Apparently, they did not think their father would remarry, since he was so advanced in age. Or perhaps they believed that there were no women left outside of Zoar either.

It is sad to compare Lot in his latter days with Abraham. Lot lived in a cave with his incestuous daughters. Despite being much older, Abraham was ‘blessed’ by God and even fathered another family. “¹Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. . . . ¹Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah” (Genesis 24:1; 25:1-2).

The Plan

To solve their apparent problem, the elder daughter proposed a plan. “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father” (v. 32). As bizarre as this suggestion seems, we must remember that it was no more troubling than the scene in which Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom as sexual partners. Or, we can also recall the time when Abraham offered his wife to Pharaoh by representing her as his sister (Genesis 12:10-16). As we will see next time, things do not improve for the family in this regard.

On a side note, one of the many arguments of the authority of Scripture is that if Scripture were simply a series of narratives written by men to explain their history and faith, they would not include such episodes of evil. Abraham and his family are represented in their true, and therefore fallen and wicked, humanity. A mortal would know better than to write such things.

The first night the elder daughter took advantage. “They made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose” (v. 33). Scripture emphasizes that Lot was an unwilling, or at least unaware, participant. The following night, the sordid event was repeated by the younger daughter. “³⁴On the following 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 our family through our father.’ ³⁵So 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” (v. 34-35). The daughters intentionally encouraged their father to overindulge in alcohol for the purposes of having sexual intercourse with him. Clearly, the daughters knew that their actions were wrong. And they also knew that their father would never have done such a thing had he not been under the influence of alcohol.

When Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom, it was for sexual pleasure. In this case, the pleasure of sex was irrelevant. Reproduction was all that was required. And it could be argued that both Lot and his daughters had noble motives. Lot sought to protect the guests under his roof. His daughters wanted to keep the family name alive. Yet, in neither case can the behavior be excused. It was night in the cave. That was about as dark a place as can be imagined. Their actions serve as a vivid illustration of the biblical truth that “men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Some details of the narrative are omitted for the sake of propriety. Others are more curious. Some have wondered where did the daughters get the wine. Surely Lot had been in Zoar long enough to acquire some provisions, and no doubt took them with him when he left the city.

Scripture emphasizes that Lot was unaware of that was happening. He must have been very drunk indeed for that to be the case. The play on words through the entire Sodom and Gomorrah narrative is intriguing, though. The men of Sodom wanted to ‘know’ Lot’s visitors. Now, Lot does not ‘know’ when his daughters are using him for sexual purposes.

We are never told how the daughters planned to explain their pregnancies. Nor are we told Lot’s response when he realized what had happened. Was he angry like Noah, upon finding out that Ham had shamed him (Genesis 9:25), or did he accept some responsibility like Juah did when he had sex with Tamar (Genesis 38:26). Or perhaps, he never knew.

The Consequences

The plan worked. ³⁶Both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. ³⁷The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day” (v. 36-38). We have moved in the narrative from the loss of life to the creation of life.

Did the daughters remain in the cave of the nine months of pregnancy? Nothing is related of the intervening time. The earlier part of the narrative covered the events of an afternoon, evening, and morning. Now in a few verses we cover nearly a year.

The elder daughter named her son Moab, the younger named hers Ben-ammi. The names themselves kept alive the memory of this wicked affair. Moab is derived from Hebrew words meaning “from their father” and Ben-ammi means “son of my kinsman.” Thus embedded within each name is a tawdry double entendre.

The two sons provide an etiology for the people groups Moabites and Ammonites. Ironically, just as Lot had escaped destruction through no effort of his own, now he became the ancestor of the Moabites and Ammonites through no effort of his own. And other than the briefest of references, nothing more is recorded of Lot in Scripture. We do not know how he spent his remaining days, or whether they were many or few. We do not know if he ever regained his wealth and economic status, or if he wandered from cave to cave, a vagrant in a hostile land. It is sad to think that this is the note on which the narrative of Lot terminates.

But this is a continuation of the theme of the narrative - that the guilty are spared because of the righteous. To had been spared because of Abraham. Zoar had been spared because of Lot. Now these two people groups, who will cause much trouble for Israel, are spared because of their relationship to the nephew of Abraham.

Regardless of the method of their conception, the children born were sons of Lot and therefore descendants of Abraham. Thus these descendants of Lot were granted privileges by the Israelites. When about to enter into the land of Canaan, God told Moses to tell the people to not harm these two peoples.

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘do not harass Moab, nor provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot as a possession’” (Deuteronomy 2:9).

“When you come opposite the sons of Ammon, do not harass them nor provoke them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot as a possession” (Deuteronomy 2:19).

But these two peoples were never included in the nation itself. “³No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, ⁴because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

Such tolerance came at a cost. It was the elders of Moab who hired Balaam (Numbers 22-25). This was remembered by the prophet Micah.

“My people, remember now
What Balak king of Moab counseled
And what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
And from Shittim to Gilgal,
So that you might know the righteous acts of the Lord.” (Micah 6:5).

Later during the time of the judges, again there were trials.

“¹²Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. ¹³And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. ¹⁴The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years” (Judges 3:12-14).

“⁶Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him. ⁷The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. ⁸They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. ⁹The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed” (Judges 10:6-9).

Despite the joining of the two lines with the marriage of Ruth the Moabitess to Boaz of Israel, this tension continued during the time of the monarchy, as can be seen in the narratives of 1 Samuel 11, 2 Samuel 10, and 2 Kings 3.

And this treatment even continued after the exile.

“⁹Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel. . . . ¹⁹when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, “What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” (Nehemiah 2:9-10, 19).

The treatment received by the Israelites from their cousins became notorious.

“⁵For they have conspired together with one mind;
Against You they make a covenant:
⁶The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites;
⁷Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
⁸Assyria also has joined with them;
They have become a help to the children of Lot” (Psalm 83:5-8).

“¹³Thus says the Lord,
‘For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead
In order to enlarge their borders . . .
¹For three transgressions of Moab and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime’” (Amos 1:13, 2:1).

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all took turns pronouncing judgment upon Moab and Ammon for their sins against the people of God (Isaiah 15-16; Jeremiah 48-49; Ezekiel 25). Zephaniah offered the most direct analogy.

““⁸I have heard the taunting of Moab
And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,
With which they have taunted My people
And become arrogant against their territory.
⁹Therefore, as I live,’ declares the Lord of hosts,
The God of Israel,
‘Surely Moab will be like Sodom
And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah -
A place possessed by nettles and salt pits,
And a perpetual desolation.
The remnant of My people will plunder them
And the remainder of My nation will inherit them’” (Zephaniah 2:8-9).

Takeaways

Though righteous (2 Peter 2:7-8), Lot’s behavior throughout his life caused him great harm. He ruined his testimony before the men of Sodom. He lost his wealth and possessions. His wife perished. His daughters committed incest with him while he was too drunk to know what was happening. His legacy was that of peoples who acted contrary to the word of God and were hostile to the people of God. We must take to heart the lesson from the life of Lot, that even those of us called by God and considered righteous have an accountability to live righteous lives. If we do not, we will reap the consequences.