

Lessons from the Life of Lot

“As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.”

—*Luke 17:28-30*

LOT WAS THE SON OF Abraham’s brother, Haran. In the opening verses of Genesis, chapter 12, we read concerning the time that God spoke to Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham, and told him to leave his country and go to an unknown land to which God would lead him. Abram, his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and their entourage did as God instructed and eventually entered the land of Canaan. There God promised to give Abram and his posterity all the land, to the east and west, north and south, as his and their inheritance. Notice that God did not speak directly to Lot, Abram’s nephew, nor did he make any promises to him.—Gen. 12:5-7; 13:14-17

Abram and Lot became so prosperous that the land they were sharing was unable to sustain the

flocks and herds of both families, so Abram told Lot it was time for them to separate. Abram discussed the matter at length with Lot, recommending that they should not have any quarreling between them, nor between their herdsmen, and reminding him that they were kinsmen. He said, “Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left. Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, ... So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan.”—Gen. 13:9-11, *New International Version*

As the senior member of the family, Abram could have selected the best pastures for himself and sent Lot elsewhere. However, he relinquished his privilege and allowed his nephew to exercise first choice. It is no surprise that Lot would desire to have the prime land, but it resulted that this act of self-interest brought with it a costly price. He must live in close proximity to the wicked city of Sodom. Surely Lot was aware of the city’s reputation before he decided to take up residence there with his family, as well as his flocks and herds. Yet he moved there, and ended up paying an enormous toll for this decision.

Lot may have thought that he could rise above the evil influences of that city and its wicked people, and continue to worship God as he always had. At first, perhaps, he was able to accomplish this, but it became increasingly difficult to endure such sinful surroundings. In Genesis 13:12 we read that Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom.” In other words, he dwelt there. Before long, there was

even greater trouble. Marauding kings attacked, carrying off Lot and all his possessions. After a spectacular rescue by Abram and his army of servants, Lot returned to Sodom. (Gen. 14:11-16) There, he “sat in the gate of Sodom,” evidently serving in some official capacity for the city.—Gen. 19:1

Lot, we believe, did not make a wise choice in returning to Sodom. In fact, it would seem that God had given him the opportunity and incentive to choose a new location by allowing him to be captured and carried off, then rescued. Lot, however, did not see the leading of the Lord in this matter. He returned to Sodom despite the fact that by this time he was well aware of the terrible conditions there. (Gen. 13:13) Lot, who the Apostle Peter states was considered by God to be a righteous man, “was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard).” (II Pet. 2:7,8, *NIV*) Lot was surely distressed by the lives of those wicked people around him, and attempted to maintain, to the extent it was possible, his righteous standing before God. Yet, he chose to remain in the midst of that wicked and perverse city.

Abram, on the other hand, was content to live on the plains of Mamre, in the area of Hebron. (Gen. 13:18) Although it was not as fertile nor as easy to utilize as the more fruitful area of Sodom, it was quite adequate for Abram’s needs. He lived apart from the wickedness of the others and he was blessed, prospering abundantly.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM

Some period of time later, after God had changed Abram's name to Abraham, two angels appeared to Abraham and told him they were going to destroy Sodom because of the grievously sinful conditions existing there. (Gen. 18:20) Abraham was concerned that Lot would be swept away in the destruction along with everyone else and tried desperately to negotiate a delay from Jehovah. He began by asking God, "What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" (vs. 24, *NIV*) God assured him that the city would not be destroyed if there were fifty righteous dwelling there. Abraham continued, asking God if he would destroy Sodom if there were forty-five righteous—then forty, thirty and twenty. Each time, God replied that he would not destroy the city. Finally, Abraham reduced the count to just ten, and was still told that Sodom would not be destroyed even if only ten righteous were found.—vss. 26-32

Abraham may have believed that there must be at least ten righteous people in Sodom, thinking that Lot's example could surely have converted a few individuals to the path of righteousness. He knew, of course, that the immediate members in Lot's family numbered four, which was a good start toward the required ten. As it turned out, however, those were the only ones who eventually escaped from the city before it was destroyed.

After assuring Abraham that the city would not be destroyed if ten righteous could be found there, the angels left Abraham and went to Sodom. Lot, who was sitting at the gate, saw them coming toward

the city, not knowing that they were angels. He immediately invited them into his home in order that they would have safe shelter. However, the unrestrained wickedness of the men of Sodom was revealed when, violating all the rules of hospitality and even ordinary civilized behavior, they attempted to enter Lot's home by force and snatch the visitors from their refuge there. Behind this lawless conduct was the inconceivably barbaric purpose of doing them great bodily harm.—Gen. 19:1-7

The men of Sodom, of course, did not realize that they were dealing with spirit beings, who were well able to fend off their attacks. Immediately, the men were struck blind by the angels, who then warned Lot to flee at once because the city was going to be totally destroyed at any moment.—vss. 10-13

Lot was not able to convince his sons-in-law of the seriousness of what was about to occur, and, therefore, Lot, his wife and their two daughters were the only ones who obeyed the angel's urgent warning to escape from Sodom. The angels told them to go to the mountains, but Lot asked to go to the small town of Zoar, which finally the angels agreed would be acceptable. Then the dreadful destruction began. The Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah out of the heavens, and in this way he overthrew those cities, including all those who lived in them.—vss. 14-25

As Lot and his family neared Zoar, his wife, ignoring the angels' command, looked back, perhaps mesmerized by the horrifying scene, and she became "a pillar of salt." (vs. 26) Concerning this, it has been suggested that perhaps in her turning to look back, she possibly stumbled and fell, becoming mired in

the thick, noxious mixture of mud, sulphur and bitumen, or tar. Unable to rise, and rapidly overcome by the poisonous vapors and viscous liquid, she quickly died, and soon became encrusted with the salt crystals which even now are prevalent in the area of the Dead Sea.

As far as Abraham was concerned, this was not a case of unexpected destruction. He had been forewarned that it was going to take place through the ministration of the angels. Lot also knew in enough time to escape, but the people of the city did not know. Their minds and hearts were not touched with gratitude for God's provision of all their material needs, nor to worship him for his goodness. They did not even care how wicked their lives had become, living as though there would never be a day of reckoning. If anything, their destruction was long overdue, not only for the sake of others, but for themselves as well.

LESSONS FOR US

The Apostle Paul reminds us that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," and that the events recorded in the Old Testament were "for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition." (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11) Certainly, the experiences of Abraham and Lot are examples from which we may gather important lessons, as well as warnings.

It is not difficult to see that Abraham represents those who maintain their faithfulness to God throughout many difficulties and trials. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." (Gal. 3:9) Those who comprise the "little flock" of Jesus'

footstep followers do not exercise their own wills, but rather endeavor always to do the will of God. Since their goals are bent heavenward, they do not seek earthly advantage over neighbors, friends, relatives or business associates.

Are we always successful in suppressing our own desires and goals in favor of others' preferences and choices? Abraham, in our lesson, showed a righteous and humble character by gladly putting Lot's desires before his own, and he was greatly blessed because of it. He was a marvelous example for us to follow. In this regard, we are reminded of Paul's words, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."—Rom. 12:10

The impending destruction of Sodom was foretold, though the exact day was not known in advance. We believe from our understanding of prophecies now being fulfilled that the "present evil world" is similarly to be removed, and that the long-awaited establishment of Christ's kingdom, the "new heavens and a new earth," will soon take its place. (Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:11-13) However, the specific day and hour of the fulfillment of these events we do not know. Because of this, as followers of the Master, we are to have an ever greater desire to strive to be found faithful to our vows of consecration.

Lot, on the other hand, did not evidence very much concern about his relationship to God. He was blessed by God in general, but only because of his kinship to Abraham did he seem to enjoy specific blessings or protection. His decisions were based upon his preference for earthly prosperity and position for

himself and his family, rather than looking for the blessing of God through association with other godly people. He was a good man by ordinary standards. He had no desire to hurt anyone, and even risked his life to protect the angels. The Apostle Peter called him “righteous.” (II Pet. 2:7,8) Compromise with the world, however, always exacts its price. In the end Lot lost all that he valued—home, wife, position, everything except his life and that of his two daughters.

From the Scriptures we may understand that Lot is a fitting representation of the class described as a “great multitude” in Revelation 7:9, “clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” A few verses later it is said of these that they have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night.” (vss. 14,15) Being “before the throne,” they are righteous, but less faithful than those of whom the Lord speaks who will be granted to sit “with me in my throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Although we may view Lot’s life as representing a specific class as described above, it is important that we also look at his pattern of mistakes and poor decisions as object lessons and warnings, that we might avoid similar pitfalls in our Christian walk.

During the past two thousand years of the Christian age there have been individuals who have maintained their faithfulness to God in spite of the loss of their possessions, and even their lives, in God’s service. However, the great majority, we believe, have selected an easier course and have compromised with the world. They are, indeed,

fine citizens, but their careers, positions in the community, and opportunities for earthly prosperity, affect most of their decisions. As such, it is easy for them to be led away from a life of complete dedication to God.

The Apostle Paul says, "I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds." (I Cor. 3:10, *NIV*) The foundation, he goes on to explain, is Jesus Christ, and on this foundation one of two kinds of structures can be erected—by building either with gold, silver or costly stones, or with wood, hay or straw. The proving of each one's work will be by difficult experiences, "with fire," Paul says. "If what one has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (vss. 11-15, *NIV*) Those who "suffer loss" are like Lot. They build their Christian life and character mainly with "wood, hay, and straw," and in the end lose every earthly advantage they have sought so diligently. Only their lives and the small amount of building done with "gold, silver, and costly stones" remain after the fiery trials prove them.

Like Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord will bring to an end this "present evil world," sweeping away its corruption, pride and deceit. Then God's kingdom, with Christ as its righteous ruler, will be set up. This will be the answer to the Christian's prayer of the past two thousand years, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) Before this can take place, however, the last of the footstep followers of Jesus must complete their earthly walk, being found

“faithful unto death,” and receive the “crown of life” from their Lord.—Rev. 2:10

Abraham was called righteous, and he was faithful to God and his principles. He had few earthly ambitions, being content to live in tents as a pilgrim and a stranger. His hope, based on faith, was centered in “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham was blessed also with a faithful wife, Sarah. Together, they are mentioned among the Old Testament heroes of faith.—Heb. 11:8-11

Lot also was a righteous man in his heart, but his actions were self-centered. He began his stay in Canaan living in tents, but soon he moved on to a more prominent place in a very wicked city. He was not looking for any other city, for a righteous city. He seemed to be resigned to occupying a place among the wicked heathen. Lot also had a wife who stands to this day as an example of unfaithfulness. As they fled from Sodom, she turned to cast a look back at everything she was leaving. In that action, she lost her life, failing to achieve the escape which had been provided by God. With sobering words, Jesus tells us to “remember Lot’s wife.”—Luke 17:32

Let us strive always to live our lives after the fashion of righteous and faithful Abraham. At the same time, let us steer clear of the self-seeking actions we see in Lot’s example, and thus avoid the kinds of pitfalls into which he fell. May we prove faithful so that after this present evil world is brought to an end, we will have a part in the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Acts 3:25 ■