

## THE DECLINE AND FALL OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN GENESIS 19

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Consider these three people whom I have known in other parts of the country from earlier in my ministry. Dan came from a Christian background. He trusted in Christ as his Savior when he was a teenager and spent a year at Moody Bible Institute. Later he married a pastor's daughter. He decided that he wanted to be a financial success. So he took on two jobs plus he joined the National Guard. He started drinking a lot with his National Guard buddies. His wife discovered that he was hooked on pornography. His church involvement decreased, and his family life suffered. The last that I knew Dan's life was not in good shape.

Jim did not have a Christian background. Through the influence of his wife he was converted to Christ and became a regular in church. He also had a drinking problem that he was unwilling to address. He and his wife came to me for marriage counseling for a while. But then Jim got involved with another woman, and his life got more complicated. He stopped coming to church.

Robin came from a Christian family. She was born again at a young age and was very involved in the life of the church in her growing up years. In her teen years she chose a boyfriend who professed to be a Christian but who had a wild streak. I couldn't understand it, but her parents seemed to encourage the relationship. By 17 she was pregnant. She chose to keep the baby. Life became challenging. In her twenties she couldn't understand why Christian guys would not become romantically interested in her. She was upset with God.

I suspect that most of you could add similar examples to the list. These are people who are truly Christians. They have recognized that they are sinners and that the only way to heaven is faith in Jesus Christ. They have been born again by trusting in Him. But somewhere along the line they got off track, and their lives seemed to spiral downward.

The passage before us this morning describes the decline and fall of a righteous man. Lot's experience does not make for a happy story. Martin Luther said that he could not read this chapter without a sense of revulsion. If we were to make a movie out of it, it would get at least an "R" rating. But the Bible is an honest book. It describes the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. Chapter 19 in Genesis has value to us because it describes what can happen when a believer gets off of the path of faith and how that can happen. There are lessons here that can be helpful in keeping us on the right path, or getting us back on the right path when we have messed up.

I.

From vv. 1-3 of Genesis #19 we are going to consider THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF LOT. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF LOT) Abraham's nephew truly was a believer in the God who is there. The Genesis account of his behavior might cause us to wonder about that, but he was. It did take faith on his part to leave the city of Ur to go with Uncle Abraham to the wild west. Lot also witnessed God's working in the life of Abraham and Sarah and the entire extended family. He recognized the hand of God in events that we have already studied, such as the defeat of the northern alliance by the much smaller force led by Abraham.

Lot also demonstrates a godly concern for his divine visitors in the beginning of #19. When they express an intent to camp out in the town square, he insists that they come to his home instead. According to v. 3 Lot prepared a feast for them.

Most importantly there is a New Testament passage that describes Lot's spiritual status before God. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 PETERS 2:7) In 2 Peter the Apostle writes, "... **and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (2 PETER 2:8) (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); (2 PETER 2:9) then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials...**"

Lot here is described as being "righteous." Peter also says that he was oppressed by sensual conduct and that his soul was tormented by the evil which he saw around him. In v. 7 of our passage Lot calls upon the men of the city not to act wickedly. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Why did the men of Sodom tolerate this foreigner in their midst who spoke out against at least some of their behavior? Because they owed Lot and his Uncle Abraham their lives. We saw a few chapters ago that Abraham had rescued the Sodomites from an invasion by a northern alliance of city-states. They recognized that they owed Lot's family something. Perhaps they also had a healthy fear of Abraham and his tribe who were able to pull off this military victory over a seemingly more formidable force.

Lot then in the eyes of God was a righteous man. If we were making a judgment on Lot's status before God on the basis of his behavior in this chapter, we might come to a different conclusion. But the Biblical testimony is that all of us fall short of God's standards of righteousness. The only righteousness that any of us can claim is an imputed righteousness. That is, we are declared righteous by virtue of our faith in Christ. Back in #15 we saw that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. It is only in that sense that Lot could be regarded as righteous. Unfortunately Lot did not continue in the path of faith. He began to deteriorate. His eternal salvation was not affected, but his life got messed up, and those closest to him were adversely affected.

II.

In vv. 4-7 we discover THE VOLITIONAL DETERIORATION OF LOT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE VOLITIONAL DETERIORATION OF LOT) We find here a deterioration of

Lot's will. He got started on the wrong path by making bad choices. Those bad choices began back in #13 when Abraham offered Lot the choice of where he wanted to live. The text said that Lot looked off to the Jordan Valley and saw water and green vegetation. It looked good to him, and he took it. He did not seek any guidance from the Lord or from Abraham. He did not turn to Abraham, the head of the tribe, and insist that he make the first choice. He did not consider the kind of people who lived in the valley. He did not consider the spiritual effect that living there might have on him or his family. Lot's only consideration seemingly was economic. He chose prosperity.

Certainly economic impacts are valid considerations when it comes to life choices. But they should not be the only considerations and certainly not the biggest factor. Consideration of what most pleases God should be first. Tied in with this should be an evaluation of what the impact of life choices will be on others and on ourselves.

Lot eventually moved his camp close to Sodom. In #14 v. 12 we find that he moved out of his tents into the city itself. Tenting life got old after a while. There was this nice city nearby. After all, Lot had originally been a city dweller. This was an opportunity to return to the comforts of urban living.

Then in v. 1 of #19 we learn that Lot is not only living in Sodom, he is also a leader in the city. The gate of the city was the place where business and legal matters were conducted. It was where the elders of the city hung out. Lot's welcome of the visitors at the gate of the city suggests that he was one of the city elders. Perhaps he was given this position because of his Uncle Abraham's rescue of the city from the northern alliance.

Verses 4-7 reveal the kind of place to which Lot's choices have brought him. Verse 5 says that the men of the city want to "know" these visitors. In my podcast last week I talked about this Hebrew word which is used in v.19 of #18 and is translated in that verse usually as "chosen." Here this same Hebrew verb is a euphemism for having sexual relations.

So all kinds of men show up at Lot's house--- young and old, men from the north side and men from the south side. They are not showing up to hear a message from Lot's God. They are not showing up to show hospitality to a pair of divine visitors. They are not showing up to watch Monday night football on Lot's big screen plasma TV. They are there to have sex with these two intriguing visitors. There is not among them the slightest hint of hospitality or self-consciousness or self-restraint. The behavior of the men of Sodom has left them the legacy of being known for sodomy.

Our culture has obviously experienced greater acceptance of this behavior. Pope Frances recently approved blessing of same sex marriages. This is all contrary to what God says about this behavior. The Apostle Paul regarded the acceptance of this as a sign of cultural deterioration. In Romans #1 vv. 26 & 27 (ROMANS 1:26) he wrote, **"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (ROMANS 1:27)**

**and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”**

The situation in which Lot found himself and his family was the result of choices that he had made. It was not necessarily wrong to move to a city with a bad reputation. But it is wrong, and it is dangerous to move to a bad city when the motives are self-centered and economic in nature. Maybe there is also a bit of a desire to participate in some of these bad things. (PROJECTOR OFF) Lot did not move to Sodom to win the city to YHWH, the God of Israel. Lot moved there because he saw prosperity. He saw physical comfort. He saw security.

The decline and fall of a righteous man or woman begins at the level of choices of the will. The basic issue is: Who will be in charge of my life? Me or God? What is my goal in life? Money? Security? Fame? Pleasure? Power? Or will it be God's glory and the advancement of His kingdom? Will He and His word have first place? Will my concern be for the well being of my family and people around me?

The answer of the vast majority of people with whom we rub shoulders in the grocery store and the office and the classroom is: I'm going to be in charge. Self is on the throne. Self-fulfillment is the goal. It is not that these are all terrible, evil people. Many of them are nice, or at least they start out as nice. But their priorities are off. Their priorities are not God's priorities.

Living and working and going to school with these people poses the challenge of resisting their priorities and values. The temptation is to accept their way of doing things, to buy into their priorities, and to adopt their ethical standards.

III.

The next step in his downward path was THE MORAL DETERIORATION OF LOT. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE MORAL DETERIORATION OF LOT) We find signs of this in v. 8. Lot tells the men of Sodom who are gathered outside of his house and are demanding access to the two visitors, **“Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”**

It is difficult to understand how a “righteous” man could ever make such an offer. It is sad evidence of Lot's moral decline. There was a great stress placed on hospitality in the civilized culture of the Ancient Near East. Sodom was not reflective of that. But Lot's behavior was. A man was expected to protect a guest in his home, even if his life was endangered. Perhaps Lot thought that his guests would be killed if the Sodomites got to them, but his daughters would at least survive. In some parts of the world daughters today are sold to sex traffickers.

It was a despicable offer on Lot's part. His behavior reflects the influence of wrong thought patterns and the decay of morality. Lot's offer of his daughters was still rejected by the men of Sodom.

A pattern of decisions that puts self first will inevitably lead to a deterioration of moral standards. If money becomes my number one goal in life, I will stretch the truth on my 1040. I will cut the quality of my product for the sake of profit. I will participate in insider trading if I am reasonably sure that I will not get caught. I will fudge the truth on my expense reports or my time cards.

If power becomes my goal, I will do what is necessary to gain or stay in power. I will weaponize the Justice Department against my political enemies. I will deny the outcome of elections that I lose. I will manipulate people to further my career goals. If comfort and pleasure are my driving goals in life, I will quickly drop my standards to what society regards as acceptable.

In Sodom the low moral standard was especially evident in the area of sexuality. Lot had apparently not bought into the homosexuality, but he was willing to offer his daughters to the men of the city.

In our culture who would have imagined thirty or forty years ago that we would be legalizing homosexual unions and even marriages. It has happened. The number of heterosexual couples living together without benefit of marriage has also multiplied in recent years. A decade ago the NFL did not tolerate advertisements about gambling and even prohibited commercials about tourism in Las Vegas during Super Bowl telecasts. Now we are hosting the Super Bowl, and sports gambling commercials are a regular feature of football game telecasts. All of these cultural changes pose a challenge and a temptation to the Christian community.

IV.

Volitional deterioration leads to moral deterioration which leads to spiritual deterioration. Thus in vv. 9-27 we find evidence of THE SPIRITUAL DETERIORATION OF LOT. (IV. THE SPIRITUAL DETERIORATION OF LOT) In vv. 9-15 the angels rescue Lot from the mob outside of his house. The Sodomites are blinded. It has become apparent to Lot by now that his visitors are messengers from God. Lot is warned that the city is about to be destroyed. So Lot heads out at night to warn his two daughters' husbands or fiancés that the destruction of Sodom is imminent. But these two men do not take Lot seriously. They think that he is jesting. That is how warnings of divine judgment are usually taken today.

On the next morning the two angels tell Lot to take his wife and two remaining daughters out of the city. In #18 Abraham pleaded with the Lord to spare the city for the sake of ten righteous people. He thought that surely there were at least that many people who followed the true God in Lot's extended family and among his former herdsmen. But now there is only Lot and his wife and their two daughters.

Lot's spiritual deterioration is evident in v. 16 where we are told, "**But he lingered.**" Lot had difficulty in obeying the Lord's command. There was no doubt about what God wanted him to do. But he lingered. His house was in Sodom. He had invested time and energy and money in that building. He had relatives in Sodom. Probably some of the shepherds who worked for him lived there. Probably he had a few people there whom he regarded as friends. Lot was attached to Sodom. Perhaps he also had doubts about the urgency of the warning of the divine visitors. How could the whole city be destroyed? A loving God would not do such a thing. God had saved the city a few years ago.

So the angels dragged Lot and his three family members out of the city and commanded them to flee. In v. 18 Lot objects, "**Oh, no, my lords.**" Now he is openly protesting God's will. In v. 19 it seems as though he does recognize that destruction is coming. Perhaps it is beginning to take place. Lot still wants to argue. He objects that he can't make it to the mountains. The angels graciously grant his request to flee to the nearby town of Zoar.

Volitional deterioration leads to moral deterioration which leads to spiritual deterioration. A pattern of bad choices in a child of God leads to a decline in moral standards which in turn leads to a decline in one's spiritual life. Our spiritual interest and commitment decline. We stop reading our Bible. We stop praying. Our church attendance declines, or perhaps we stay in church and become a thorn in people's sides. We become a complainer and a nagger and a critic. Meanwhile the quality of our marriage and family life declines.

Verses 23-29 describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the valley. Verses 24-26 tell us, "**Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.**" Perhaps the burning sulfur fell on her as it did on the wicked inhabitants of the city for her violation of the divine command not to look back at the city.

We are not told exactly how this divine judgment happened. There is no evidence of volcanic activity in the southern Dead Sea region. The entire Jordan Valley is located on a huge fault line. Some have theorized that an earthquake may have been involved. There are also significant sulfur and asphalt and oil and natural gas deposits there.

The exact location of Sodom and its sister cities is also unknown. (SODOM AND GOMORRAH) Some scholars think that the cities are under the southern end of the Dead Sea. The southern end is only a few feet deep. In the first century AD it was dry land. About 100 AD the Roman historian Tacitus wrote, "**Not far from the lake [i.e. The Dead Sea] is a plain which, according to report, was once fertile and the site of great cities, but which was devastated by lightning; and it is said that traces of this disaster still exist there; and that the ground looks burnt and has lost its fertility.**"

(SODOM--- BAB ED-DRHA) Other researchers have suggested that a site at Bab ed-Drha to the east of the Dead Sea was ancient Sodom. Still others point to a site further north (SODOM--- BAB TEL EL-HAMMAM) called Tel el-Hammam as the site of ancient Sodom. The entire region around the Dead Sea looks like a wasteland. Excavated ruins in the area suggest that it was a more inviting place at some time in the past.

V.

This is not the end of the story. Verses 30-38 describe THE EMOTIONAL DETERIORATION OF LOT. (V. THE EMOTIONAL DETERIORATION OF LOT) Morally and spiritually Lot has been compromised by the evil influences around him. He has seen his home destroyed. He has seen his business go up in smoke. Some of his relatives have been killed. Lot's wife has been turned into a pillar of salt. Now he emotionally falls apart.

Verse 30 says that he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He heads to the mountains. In v. 17 the angels urged Lot to go to the mountains. My interpretation is that the angels told him to go west to the central highlands of Canaan. That is where Abraham and his family were. He would have had support and comfort there. This is where Lot should have gone. But it seems likely that he headed to the high ground to the east. For it is there that his daughters claim that they are all alone.

Lot retreats to a cave with his daughters. He gets drunk, and he has sexual relations with them. The two sons who result from that union become the ancestors of nations that will one day harass Israel (MOAB AMMON MAP) They will occupy territory to the east of Abraham and the promised land.

Many--- not all, but many--- of the emotional problems and breakdowns that Christians experience are the result of having followed the downward path that Lot followed. (PROJECTOR OFF) Fear and irrational behavior and emotional collapse can become the end product of a believer's failure to put Christ first.

David Larson was a psychiatrist by training. He did research for the federal government in his early career. For the last fifteen years of his life he studied the relationship between religious faith and health. In one article he wrote, "**We know that it is extremely unhealthy to have conservative religious beliefs and not be going to church. It is also unhealthy to have strong religious convictions but not have those convictions actually producing concrete changes.... A disjunction between belief and practice can make people sick, emotionally and physically.**" (*Christianity Today*, 11/23/1992)

In her recent book *The Toxic War on Masculinity* Nancy Pearcey says, "...**nominal Christian men** [By that she means men who profess to be Christians but don't go to church and don't follow Christian standards very well.] **have the highest rates of divorce and domestic violence--- even higher than secular men.**" (p. 230) But then

men who regularly go to church have the lowest divorce and domestic abuse rates of any demographic group in the country.

Lot was a true believer. But he made serious mistakes. Those mistakes began with decisions of the will that left God out. He made choices where he put “me” first. This volitional deterioration in turn led to moral deterioration--- to a compromise of standards. This resulted in a spiritual deterioration. He hesitated and then objected to the direct, specific commands of the Lord and his representatives. The downward slide finally ended in an emotional collapse. We find Lot huddled in a cave with his two daughters--- a sad, drunken wretch of a man. Even the material prosperity and security that he sought was lost to him.

The story of Lot serves as a warning to us living in the 21st century. When we make a series of choices that put God on the back burner and the values and standards of the world on the front burner, we are in danger of a serious slide. Investing our top priorities in the world system about us is ultimately unwise. Lot’s city was burned up. The world around us will likewise one day be burned up.

Jesus spoke of His return to earth in Luke 17:28-30. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 17:28) There he is recorded as saying, **“Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot— they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, (LUKE 17:29-30) but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— 30 so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”** Notice that Jesus took this story literally. In v. 32 Jesus adds, **“Remember Lot’s wife.”**

One of my seminary professors commented, **“No good can come of loving a society so morally bankrupt that it awaits the swift judgment of God--- if not in a temporal judgment, certainly at the end of the age.”**

So what should be our attitude toward the world system around us? How should we respond to the standards and priorities and ethics of a non-Christian society? Should we find a cave somewhere and live like hermits? Should we try to escape from the world?

No. Jesus has commanded us to be salt and light in the world. (BLACK FLY) A female black fly lays its eggs in plants by streams and brooks and rivers. Typically the eggs, which develop into larvae, end up on the bottom of the stream. The larvae change into pupae. (BLACK FLY PUPAE) The pupae become inflated with air. As the adult fly emerges, the skin pops open and the fly floats to the top inside a bubble of air. It is in the water, but it never gets wet. We Christians are to be like those black flies, in our relationship to the world.

Our goal is to be immersed in the world but not corrupted by it. In order to do that we have to be enveloped with a commitment to God. That means living by faith in Him and obeying His directions to us. Abraham did that, and Lot did not.



Abraham, like us, was by no means perfect. He had major mess-ups in his life. But when he got off the path of faith, he learned to get back on it. Thus it is that we read in the New Testament in the Book of Hebrews (HEBREWS 11:8), **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (HEBREWS 11:9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land...”**

In order to avoid the decline and fall of a righteous man or woman we likewise need to live by faith in the God who is there. That begins by making sure that we have put our trust in Jesus. It continues by depending upon the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life.