

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

O Lord, who brings calmness and strength to my soul,  
Give me patience to wait for answers to my prayers,  
Courage to face tough times and difficult choices,  
Perseverance to discover Your truth behind all things,  
And a heart that is always ready to call on You for help.  
Thank You Lord God Almighty: AMEN.

### Prayer Suggestions

**1. For yourself**

*Use the words of the Lord's prayers for your private prayers today, for example, by asking for the Lord's will to be done, for His provision, seeking forgiveness of sins, and the Lord's protection from temptation and evil*

**2. For your friends and family**

*In the same way, pray that God's will be done in their lives, ask for the Lord's provision, forgive those who have sinned against you, and ask for the Lord's protection*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that God's people do His work, that they will receive His provision, that forgiveness will be offered and received, and that the church will be protected from evil*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray also for God's will to come in the world, for His miraculous provision to be seen and received, for love and forgiveness, and for the defeat of Satan's powers*

### Meditation

Turn, O Lord, and save us: (Psalm 6:4)

Save this planet from the exploitation of its resources

From those who get rich by controlling Your gifts

At the expense of every one of us who pay the price

Save this world from teaching that is nonsense

From the idea that all religions are the same

And from spirituality that makes a god out of choice

Save us from the idolatry of 'today', and 'now',

From the destruction of dignity and ruin of respect

And from all that glorifies one against another.

Save us from these little, petty gods of self

That govern the worlds in which we choose to live

So that thinking we know all, we lose sight of everything

Re-create men and women, O Lord, for the sake of humanity!

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Genesis 19: 1-14

<sup>1</sup> The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting at the city gates. When he saw them, Lot stood up to greet them and bowed down to the ground, saying,

<sup>2</sup> 'My Lords, I ask you please to come to where I live where you can wash your feet and spend the night. Then you can be on your way in the morning.'

They answered,

'No, we will pass the night in the open market-place.'

<sup>3</sup> He strongly urged them to come with him until they went to his house, where he put on a spread of food for them with fresh unleavened bread; and they ate. <sup>4</sup> But before they lay down for the night, all the people of Sodom, every one of them, both young and old, surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup> They called out to Lot, shouting to him,

'Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out to us and we will have sex with them!'

<sup>6</sup> Lot went out to them through the door, shut it behind him <sup>7</sup> and said

'I beg you friends, don't be so evil. <sup>8</sup> Look, I have two virgin daughters, let me bring them to you for you to do as you wish with them. But don't do anything to these men who are in my house as guests.'

<sup>9</sup> They jeered,

'Get out of the way, foreigner! You can't tell us what to do! Now we will do what we want with you.'

They pushed Lot back and went to break down the door, <sup>10</sup> but the men reached out and pulled Lot back into the house with them and bolted the door. <sup>11</sup> They then blinded the men who were gathered at the door of the house, young and old, so that they could not find the door.

<sup>12</sup> The men then said to Lot,

'Gather everyone who lives here with you, your extended family and anyone else of yours in the city, and get out of here! <sup>13</sup> We are about to destroy this place. The Lord has heard the terrible accusations against these people and has sent us to destroy it.'

<sup>14</sup> Lot went and spoke to the young men his daughters were about to marry and said,

'Come on out of here, for the Lord is just about to destroy the city!'

But they thought he was joking.

## Review

The stories of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19 are a comparison between two men brought up in the ways of the Lord. One of them, Abraham, accepted the call of God and grew in faith and righteousness. The other, Lot, tried to maintain the principles of his heritage, but was attracted to the world, and the temptations of the city of Sodom. We have already heard that Abraham would become the father of a nation which would bring God's light into the world (18:1-15), and now we hear of Lot's path of life. With hindsight, we can see that things did not look good for Lot. He took the best for himself (13:8-18) which was hardly a moral highlight of the Bible, and Abram's rescue of him (14:1-16) during an unstable period of the history of the cities of the Dead Sea region merely exposed his vulnerability.

Lot pitched his tent in Zoar near Sodom (13:12) after he split with Abram when they came into Canaan. A few years later he had moved into Sodom (14:12), indicating that he was attracted by the city life of ancient times. By the time of this passage, he must have lived in Sodom for around ten years (using a timeline based on Abraham's ages, as quoted in 16:16 and 17:1). Lot had attempted to become a citizen of Sodom by this time, and our text has him sitting 'in the gate' of Sodom where the elders of a city would have gathered (19:1), with his two daughters betrothed to men of Sodom (19:14) and also calling the citizens 'friends' (19:7). It certainly appears that Lot had been successful in settling into the city life of Sodom; he was a 'pillar of the community'!

When the two angels came to Sodom however, Lot's world was turned upside down. His offer of hospitality went badly wrong and for some reason it offended his fellow citizens who formed a mob who threatened his whole household. It is possible that the people of Sodom had become culturally and socially insular within their city and resented Lot's show of hospitality to people they regarded as strangers. Lot showed rather too much of his nomadic and Bedouin roots through this offer of hospitality and this was not appreciated from a man of his supposed standing; and a crowd surrounded the house (19:4).

In what happened next (19:5-11), the decisions Lot made about both his daughters and the protection of his guests were as heinous as the crimes of those who bayed at his door. The citizens of Sodom sought to sexually abuse the two visitors, and eventually attacked Lot and his household (19:9). The two angelic men, as we saw in yesterday's study, were witnesses who reported personally to the Lord, and their spiritual testimony and firsthand knowledge of what had happened in Sodom was sufficient for God's judgement and the destruction of the city. Nevertheless, they told all this to Lot (19:12-14), and attempted to gather his small family so that they could flee the city and its coming judgement. Apart from the pathetic comparison between the wealth Lot possessed when he first went to Sodom (see 13:5ff) and the tiny household he now mustered, the tragedy of his circumstances was complete. Even his family could not add up to the ten 'righteous' people Abraham bargained for with the Lord when appealing for the salvation of the city!

Although Lot and his wife and daughters were saved from the city, I am not sure that scripture presents them as righteous or as worthy of being saved on their own account. Lot was saved because of the spiritual cover of his older relative, Abraham, who had both bargained for Sodom and interceded for the city just previously (18:23-33). He was not saved because he had done anything 'right', and I do not think that the hospitality he showed to the two men counts as righteousness before God, when he had brought the situation on himself by his general collusion with the evil citizens of Sodom. Our story today is awful and tragic, but it does illustrate the words of James: 'The prayer of the righteous (Abraham) is powerful and effective' (James 5:16).

## Going Deeper

- Entertaining angels!
- Lot in the gate of Sodom
- The mob at Lot's house
- Get out of the house!

The details of this story are at times unpleasant, and yet they are told to us as a specific warning of the kind of behaviour which humanity is capable of when left to its own devices. In some ways, this reminds us of the lists found in Paul's letters of the vices of humanity, such as the 'works of the flesh' (Gal 5:17f.). God sees everything people wish to hide from Him, and all of them will bear their own fruit!

### ***Entertaining angels!***

If 'entertaining angels unawares' (Heb 13:2) proved to be for the benefit of the righteous Abraham, then this passage shows that for those who are consumed by their own ambitions, such angels come with the awesome potential of judgement by Almighty God. When we read this story, we are immediately shocked by the unpleasant implications of the story, in particular the offer of Lot to put his daughters outside the house and expose them to sexual abuse (19:7). However, the wider scheme of scripture tells us that the people we should be looking at are the angels, who were God's eyes and ears in the midst of the shocking situations, for what they saw and experienced directly influenced God's judgement. In the story of the Lord and Abraham, these two angelic men were present but had no role, because Abraham fulfilled God's expectation by acting with righteousness even in his bargaining prayers (18:16ff). In this story they do have a role because Lot had lost contact with his God. His ambitions had lured him away from a close relationship with the God of his fathers by the attractions of the city, so he was not in a position to talk to God directly, and the angels therefore had to convey the reality of what was happening back to the Lord.

### ***Lot in the gate of Sodom***

It was the gates of a city where, in ancient times, the elders gathered to discuss matters and pronounce judgement when called upon so to do. The evidence was that Lot had been attempting to become more closely involved with the affairs of the city and was sitting 'at the gates' when the visitors arrived. A number of scenarios are possible for what happened next. We know that firstly, Lot offered hospitality and the angels refused, but after persuasion agreed to come with him. If Lot had spoken to the visitors at the gates when other elders were present, then he would be usurping their prior privilege of offering hospitality; a move that was likely to provoke wrath, which could explain the riot which followed (19:4ff). If, however, there was no one in Sodom except Lot to offer this hospitality, then that was itself an indictment of the city. Either is possible; but whichever it was, Lot was uncomfortable about the strangers staying in the city market square at night. He knew the evils of the city at night.

In contrast to Abraham's sumptuous banquet provided earlier (18:5ff), the Hebrew indicates a modest 'spread' (as I have translated it) which was accompanied by hurriedly made unleavened bread. Although Abraham's meal was prepared with due haste, it did not spare the luxuries of fully raised, yeasted bread, which Abraham asked Sarah to prepare.

### ***The mob at Lot's house***

The appalling consequences of whatever happened are graphically described in the following verses (4-11). The whole riot brought to a head the sins of the city, which included at least the abuse of hospitality (18:9), sexual abuse and deviance (18:5ff), and violence (18:9,10). Any who have to deal with the worst of human depravity will recognise the traits of mob abuse and violence. Most of this is contrary to any kind of moral law, but the sin we now call 'sodomy' was the one that was originally threatened (18:5) and was later forbidden in Israel (Lev 18:22, 20:13). It was also anathema to the early church (Rom 1:26,27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10).

Lot faced the baying mob. Was he brave? Maybe; but in these life-threatening circumstances, whilst he appeared to show due respect for the hospitality of the strangers he was expected to defend as sacrosanct, he also demonstrated the terrible spiritual compromises he had entered into in order to pursue his ambitions. He called out to his fellow citizens, who were described as all being present in the mob at his door, as 'friends!' He then offered to hand over his virgin daughters to the crowd if that would keep them happy (19:8).

This last act is one that strikes us as too disgusting to contemplate, and means that the whole story is rarely given much attention. There is no defence for Lot, even within the morality of his day (which some commentators try to explain by saying, wrongly, that hospitality was more important than the sexual abuse of the daughters). It seems clear from the wider perspective of scripture that Lot's actions were not approved of, even though he may have only used them as a threat, and even though the daughters were probably betrothed (see 18:14) to some of the men in the crowd (and what would they have done in these circumstances?) The whole story is undoubtedly told with the tenor of disgust. Finally, the actions of the visitors saved the day (18:10) after the mob had rejected everything Lot said and stood for, by dragging him inside the house, confusing the mob through blindness (the scriptures say 'dazzled') and barricading themselves in, before attempting to leave in a hurry the following morning before the mob could rise from sleeping off their riotous behaviour (18:12-14).

### ***Get out of the house!***

It is tempting to wonder whether this mob of citizens remembered that the uncle of the man whose house they were attacking and whose visitors they wished to sexually abuse, was the man who had rescued them from Mesopotamian domination and exile a decade previously (Gen 14). Nevertheless, Lot was forced to leave Sodom for the second time (see 14:12).

The evidence of the two angelic visitors had produced the imminent judgement of God, and they urged Lot to gather all he could of his family. Some commentators try to make out that Lot had a number of daughters, and he must have left the two betrothed daughters in Sodom because of family obligations, but such conjecture is too far distant from what scripture actually says. Lot is only ever mentioned as having two daughters; they had endured the terrible night of violence and the threat of being 'thrown to the mob' which, according to the literal description of scripture (18:4,7,14), must have included their fiancés. They had nowhere to go except to follow their father, and it is worth considering (as we shall in the study after next) whether this incident affected the daughter's relationship with their father. This is the singular subject of the closing verses of chapter 19 (19:30ff)

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## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

This story of Lot in Sodom contrasts dramatically with the righteous faith and deeds of Abraham (ch 18). It continues the theme of the path of faith which leads to life, as seen in Abraham, and the path of compromise with the world which leads to destruction, as seen in Lot. I find it amazing that most commentaries I have read say quite categorically that Lot was saved from Sodom because of his righteous actions in providing hospitality to the angelic visitors. Their opinion is coloured by 2 Peter 2:7 which suggests that Lot was 'righteous', which may have been the judgement of later generations who could assess Lot in the light of the righteousness of Christ (as a study of 2 Peter would show), but was not the judgement of Genesis. The first book of the Bible reserves the title 'righteous' for Noah and Abraham alone (not even Isaac or Jacob); moreover, the hospitality he offered was a pale shadow of that they had received from the truly righteous Abraham.

The message we need to take from this terrible incident is that Lot's compromises with the world in which he lived led to bad decisions and his eventual downfall (see 19:30ff); it is not helpful if commentators or anyone else dilute this message. Drifting away from God over a long period of time, within a world and society which seems to offer so much more than Christian discipleship, is one of Satan's prime methods of oppressing God's people today, particularly in the West, where the distractions from faith are not far different from those

of Sodom. The technique has not changed for four thousand years or more! For this reason we should not be surprised at it! The only defence against the disease of the soul which afflicted Lot is not to try and sort out Sodom, or re-invent religion in a new social context (as is fashionable today) it is to live the life of Abraham which is utter dependence upon God alone and a trust in His miraculous power to both save us and make us part of His great work.

### Questions for groups

1. Which, for you, is the most disturbing feature of the story today? What does this feature teach us about faith and righteousness?
2. What is similar between the world of Sodom and the world today?
3. How can Christians make sure that they do not compromise the standards of their faith within the society in which they live?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Pray and ask yourself whether the situation of Sodom and Gomorrah is one which could arise in our own times. The cities of our world are places where great good and great evil come together. How can the church make a difference?*
- *In what ways can you pray and intercede for the nations and the cities of the world or work in mission to make a stand for good against the evils of the cities of our world? Discuss this with others.*

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## Final Prayer

Lord of all, carry away the burdens of our sin, we pray. Take them far from us and remove them to where they will no longer tempt us. We ask this boldly, knowing that Jesus died because of our sin, and confident in the knowledge that this work is Your saving will, Lord God. AMEN

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