



Genesis - Chapter Nineteen

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues)

II.a.x Genesis 18:1-19:29 - The Destruction of Sodom (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Nineteen

Following the events recorded in Chapter Eighteen, this chapter underscores the reason for Sodom's destruction. The men of Sodom are contrasted with Lot, who seeks to protect the two visitors from being sexually molested. Lot's hospitality toward the two men parallels that of Abraham.

The two angels facilitate the escape of Lot and his family from the city. However, Lot's wife disobeyed the instruction not to look back and she turned into a pillar of salt for doing so.

Lot and his two daughters eventually settled alone in the hill country. The daughters feared their isolation would leave them without husbands and childless, so they got their father drunk and each slept with him. These incestuous relationships led to the formation of two tribes from the resulting sons: the Moabites and the Ammonites. Both these tribes will feature significantly as adversaries to the Israeli nation.

II.a.x.3 Genesis 19:1-11 - The Depravity of Sodom

The two angels arrive in the city of Sodom and are met by Lot who offers them hospitality in his home. The two angels agree upon Lot's insistence and go to his home. The men of the city arrive at the house and demand that Lot give the angels, whom the crowd think are men, over to them for sexual exploitation. Lot offers his two daughters as substitutes but the crowd refuses and states they will do worse to Lot than to the angels. The two angels pulled Lot back inside his house and struck the men in the crowd blind so they could not find the door.

¹ The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² He said, 'Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.' They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the square.' ³ But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Genesis 19:1-3

The two angels. From the context, these are the two men who accompanied the Lord in Chapter Eighteen, but subsequently separated from him (18:22). There are several occasions in Scripture where angels work in pairs, two other significant occasions are: <<*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet*>> (John 20:11-12), and: <<*While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'*>> (Acts 1:10-11).

Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. The opening scene parallels the start of Chapter Eighteen, although the setting is now urban rather than rural. Subtle differences in the reporting of these parallel events may be significant. Like Abraham, Lot greets the two men by bowing before them and offering them hospitality. Since it is evening, he invites them to spend the night in his house. Lot, like Abraham, also provides a meal for the visitors, and there is no report of his wife assisting.

The gate of any city was considered a place of importance for social gatherings and commercial activity, and it was often the meeting place for the elders. This is confirmed by historic documents and by Scriptures such as: <<*So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, passed to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, in the presence of all who went in at the gate of his city*>> (Genesis 23:17-18), and: <<*No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.'* And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down>> (Ruth 4:1-2).

But he urged them strongly. The hospitality offered to the visitors was not unusual: <<*the stranger has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveller*>> (Job 31:32), but the urgency with which Lot offered it was.

Unleavened bread implies that it was baked in haste, for if leaven were added it would need time to ferment and rise. By resembling Abraham in his response to strangers, Lot demonstrates that he is righteous, unlike the men of Sodom, a theme developed in 2 Peter 2:7-8.

⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; ⁵ and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.’

Genesis 19:4-5

The men of the city. Every male in Sodom, both young and old, was involved in the assault on the two visitors. They had become a gang seeking an orgy of rape.

That we may know them. In Hebrew the verb ‘to know’, Hebrew *yada*’, sometimes denotes sexual intercourse, e.g. 4:1, 4:17, 4:25 and 19:8; and is confirmed explicitly in: <<*While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a depraved lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, ‘Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him’*>> (Judges 19:22). The context implies that the men of Sodom intended not to have homosexual relations with the two visitors but to rape them. Their actions here are the origin of the term sodomy. Lot’s earlier insistence (v.3) that the visitors should not spend the night in the square indicates that he feared for their safety, indicating that such activity may have occurred before to deter unwelcome strangers from coming to the city. By acting so wickedly against apparently defenceless strangers, the entire community invites divine punishment.

The purpose of the crowd’s actions here are not for sexual gratification, nor should it be seen to represent homosexuality as an act of bestiality. It is clear that the men intended to humiliate and psychologically destroy these two strangers through the actions of a power-crazed and degenerate act.

⁶ Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, ⁷ and said, ‘I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have not known a 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.’ ⁹ But they replied, ‘Stand back!’ And they said, ‘This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with

them.’ Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down.

Genesis 19:6-9

Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him. Lot’s readiness to protect the two men from the mob surrounding his house is commendable. In desperation he offers his two unmarried daughters as substitutes – a shocking, cowardly, and inexcusable act, even if he intended this only as a bluff, or expected the offer to be rejected. The reaction of the crowd only confirms the truly evil nature of their intentions. It further adds to the argument that their actions were not for sexual gratification but for the wanton destruction of these two strangers.

The actions of the crowd would again be repeated in the story of the Levite’s concubine in the town of Gibeah, wickedness that nearly brought about the destruction of the entire tribe of Benjamin. Refer to Judges Chapters 19-20.

The crowd’s hostility is now directed at Lot. While he addresses them as my brothers, they see him and resent him as a foreigner who has become the judge. Moses was resented in a similar fashion: <<*But the man who was wronging his neighbour pushed Moses aside, saying, “Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?”*>> (Acts 7:27).

¹⁰ But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

Genesis 19:10-11

The men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. Having failed to persuade the mob, Lot himself needs to be rescued. The angels strike blind the men so they could not find the door to Lot’s house. This supernatural act now makes the men physically as well as morally and spiritually blind. Such intervention by God will be seen again: <<*The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness, and confusion of mind*>> (Deuteronomy 28:28), <<*When the Aramæans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, ‘Strike this people, please, with blindness.’ So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked*>> (2 Kings 6:18), <<*And now listen – the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand*>> (Acts 13:11).

II.a.x.4 Genesis 19:12-29 - Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Because of Lot's righteous acts of hospitality and his attempts to save the two angels from the mob, he and his family were to be saved from the coming destruction. However, when Lot told the two men who were betrothed to his daughters that they must flee the city with him, they laughed at him and would not comply.

The following morning Lot and his family were instructed to flee to the hills to avoid the coming destruction of the whole valley. Lot feared that he would not reach the safety of the hills in time so he negotiated a safe haven with the angels in the nearby town of Zoar.

The destruction began as the family fled with fire and sulphur raining down from heaven. Against the command of the angels, Lot's wife turned to look back at the destruction and was turned into a pillar of salt. Abraham was a witness to the destruction that was wrought on the whole valley.

¹² Then the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city – bring them out of the place. ¹³ For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.' ¹⁴ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, 'Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city.' But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

Genesis 19:12-14

Have you anyone else here? Angels are, of course, not omniscient and do not know everything. Therefore, they ask Lot if he has other family members in the city that he would wish to warn about the coming destruction.

For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it. The angels announce to Lot the imminent destruction of the city and instruct him to warn his relatives. However, his sons-in-law, the men betrothed but not yet married to Lot's two daughters, treat Lot's words as a joke or even as a lie: <<*They have spoken falsely of the LORD, and have said, 'He will do nothing. No evil will come upon us, and we shall not see sword or famine'*>> (Jeremiah 5:12).

¹⁵ When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city.' ¹⁶ But he lingered; so the

men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city.

Genesis 19:15-16

Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city. The two sons-in-law would be left behind as the angels urged Lot to escape the coming destruction that would bring judgement on Sodom. There will be similar responses as the Day of Judgement approaches: <<*Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities’*>> (Revelation 18:4-5).

He lingered. Even Lot is slow to grasp the seriousness of the situation. Of necessity, in a display of divine mercy, the men physically pull Lot and his family out of the city.

The men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city. In Chapter Eighteen Abraham asked God to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were ten righteous found there. Because there were not ten righteous people, God did not spare the city. But he still answered the heart of Abraham’s prayer by bringing Lot and his family out of Sodom, even if it was almost against Lot’s will. God is indeed merciful, forgiving and gracious: <<*The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation’*>> (Exodus 34:6-7), and: <<*Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine*>> (Psalm 33:18-19).

¹⁷ When they had brought them outside, they said, ‘Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed.’ ¹⁸ And Lot said to them, ‘Oh, no, my lords; ¹⁹ your servant has found favour with you, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. ²⁰ Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there – is it not a little one? – and my life will be saved!’ ²¹ He said to him, ‘Very well,

I grant you this favour too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.²² Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.’ Therefore the city was called Zoar.²³ The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

Genesis 19:17-23

Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain. The angels seemed far more urgent to rescue Lot than Lot and his family were to be rescued. This is strange, but common in spiritual things. Indeed, the prophet urges: <<***Flee! Save yourselves! Be like a wild ass in the desert!***>> (Jeremiah 48:6).

Since the entire valley will be destroyed, Lot is told to flee to the hills. He pleads, however, to be permitted to take refuge in a small city in the valley. His request is granted, a further indicator of God’s mercy in the context of extensive judgement. Jesus would later offer similar advice to those who would face the destruction of the great tribulation: <<***So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judæa must flee to the mountains***>> (Matthew 24:15-16).

I grant you this favour too. It is clear that God intended Lot to survive and he would have made the safety of the hills if he had trusted in God and gone there. However, in order to allay his fears, the angel was permitted to spare the city of Zoar from destruction and make it a safe haven for Lot. Granting a favour in these circumstances is the same as an answer to prayer: <<***So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer***>> (Job 42:9).

Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there. This answers the question: <<***Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?***>> (Genesis 18:25). God, bound by his own righteousness and honour, could not bring this judgement on Sodom until the righteous people were delivered.

Therefore the city was called Zoar. Zoar means small or insignificant. It was the little city Lot bargained with the angel over.

²⁴ Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the LORD out of heaven;²⁵ and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

There is an map showing the locations of the various cities involved in the destruction and the likely route taken by the two angels from Mamre to Sodom.



Genesis 19:24-25

Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. These words emphasise the divine nature of the punishment, the consequence of which is the total destruction of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding area with all its vegetation and presumably the livestock. The theme of universal destruction echoes the flood story. This judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah, the flood of Chapters 6-9, and the later destruction of the Canaanites when the people of Israel entered the Promised Land: *<<But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the LORD your God has*

commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God>> (Deuteronomy 20:16-18), and the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of the exile, which Jeremiah likened to Sodom: *<<For the chastisement of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, though no hand was laid on it>>* (Lamentations 4:6), all vividly demonstrate God's righteous wrath against sin, his mercy in rescuing the godly from destruction, and the certainty of the final judgement to come, as confirmed in 2 Peter 2:4-10.

²⁶ But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Genesis 19:26

Lot's wife disregards the angel's instruction not to look back (v.17) and is transformed into a pillar of salt, engulfed perhaps in the fiery matter raining in molten lumps from the sky. Jesus' warning on obedience is simple but profound: *<<Remember Lot's wife>>* (Luke 17:32).

²⁷ Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; ²⁸ and he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the Plain, and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace. ²⁹ So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled.

Genesis 19:27-29

Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. The narrative jumps away from Lot to focus briefly on Abraham, reminding the reader of his intercession for Lot and his family, and indeed for any that God would spare from the coming destruction (18:20-33).

He looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the Plain, and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace. When Abraham saw the smoke of these cities and their destruction: *<<When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss>>* (Revelation 9:2 NIV), he could know that his request was answered. God delivered Lot before the destruction came.

The utter devastation that was wrought on this community in righteous judgement provides a lesson to the whole world of what it will be like for those

who do not repent of their sin and return into a righteous relationship with their creator, a relationship that is offered freely through Jesus Christ.

II.a.xi Genesis 19:30-38 - The Shameful Origin of Moab and Ammon

The last unsavoury episode in the life of Lot describes how he becomes the father of the Moabites and Ammonites. It has a number of parallels with the last episode of the flood story (9:20-27).

³⁰ Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters.

Genesis 19:30

Although Lot had asked to escape to Zoar, the destruction of the valley fills him with such fear that he leaves the city and moves away to live in the hills. There he and his two daughters inhabit a cave. Archæological surveys have revealed that caves around the Dead Sea often served as places of refuge, especially for those fleeing danger: <<*Meanwhile, these five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah*>> (Joshua 10:16), <<*When the Israelites saw that they were in distress (for the troops were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns*>> (1 Samuel 13:6), <<*Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Now Obadiah revered the LORD greatly; when Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water)*>> (1 Kings 18:3-4), <<*They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground*>> (Hebrews 11:37-38), and: <<*Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb’*>> (Revelation 6:15-16).

³¹ And the firstborn said to the younger, ‘Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world.

³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.’ ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

³⁴ On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, ‘Look, I lay last

night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.’³⁵ So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.

Genesis 19:31-36

Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world. Lot’s two daughters fear that the isolated location chosen by their father will prevent them from having husbands. Having lost everything else, Lot may have wished to protect his daughters. They, however, devise a plan whereby they will have intercourse with their father in order to have children. Consequently, Lot is manipulated by his daughters, who make him drunk. Ironically, although they have intercourse with him on consecutive nights, Lot has no knowledge of this taking place.

Let us make our father drink wine. The narrative does not inform the reader as to where this wine came from. They may have brought it with them from Zoar or, if a sufficient amount of time had passed between their departure from Zoar and this account then it is possible that Lot may have produced his own wine just as Noah had done: <<*Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard*>> (Genesis 9:20).

³⁷ The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day.³⁸ The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day.

Genesis 19:37-38

This unseemly episode explains the origin of the Moabites and the Ammonites. These two tribes would become enemies of Israel just as the descendants of Ishmael would. One of the many prophecies against these two nations links their fate back to their origin: <<*Therefore, as I live, says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Moab shall become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt-pits, and a waste for ever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them*>> (Zephaniah 2:9).

Despite the opposition that would always exist between the Israelites and the Moabites there is one person that stands out. Ruth was a Moabite who would become the great grandmother of King David and thus is included in the human genealogy of Christ.

Thus Lot's life ended in ruin, losing his vast herds and flocks in the destruction of the valley and his reputation because of the actions of his daughters. Would any of this had happened if he had not been greedy when Abraham offered to share the land with him?