

OpenTheo

The Family of Abraham: Part 9—The Destruction of Sodom

March 18, 2019



Alastair Roberts

I discuss the destruction of Sodom and the deliverance of Lot.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:
<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account:
<https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Welcome back. Today I'm returning to my study on Abraham and his family. In this ninth study, we'll be looking at Genesis chapter 19, which is the story of Lot and Sodom.

I've discussed in the past the way in which Abraham and Lot were established, first of all, as father-son, and then later on as brother-brother. They are set up in that way as a sort of diptych. Two characters held alongside each other, and as we see them alongside each other, we'll understand them better as we view the similarities and the differences, as we see them juxtaposed with each other.

When we get to the beginning of chapter 19, we should read it in the context of what has immediately gone beforehand. There have been three angelic visitors to Abraham. Those angelic visitors foretold the birth of a child to Sarah, making her fruitful.

They have been the recipients of great hospitality, a feast, and all these sorts of things.

And then God, who was presumably the angel of the Lord, remaining with Abraham to talk about the fate of Sodom, while two of the other angels go on to the city itself to inspect it. Now, there are ways in which this helps us to understand what's taking place here.

First of all, the two angels have just come from being with Abraham. It says, now the two angels, we are supposed to know who these two angels are. We've been reading the story to this point, and so we have God remaining with Abraham, and then we have the two angels going on.

So there are three altogether. One remains with Abraham, the angel of the Lord, and two go on to inspect the city of Sodom. This theme of two going to the city I've mentioned before is connected with themes that we have more generally of inspection prior to judgment.

Christ sends out his disciples two by two to the towns and villages of Israel. We have two people going as spies into the city of Jericho. We have two people being sent by the angel of the Lord into Egypt, Moses and Aaron.

And in these sorts of cases, what we are seeing are two witnesses bearing witness to the wickedness of a particular place or the righteousness ready for judgment. We've also had this conversation between Abraham and God where God has negotiated or talked with Abraham about his plans for Sodom. And Sodom has, it has a great wickedness and the outcry against it is rising up to heaven.

But Abraham says, if there are however many righteous, 50 righteous, 45 righteous, etc., all the way down to 10. And I've suggested that the 10 figure might be related to Lot and his family. It's a possibility.

Now, the negotiation or the discussion there ends in a sort of abrupt way and they go their separate way. Abraham returns to his place. And now I think we have something that plays out.

The continuation of that. Can 10 righteous be found in the city? Can the house of Lot, household of Lot be gathered together in one place? Are they safe? And what we'll see is it does not, in fact, work out. There are parallels between the reception they get when they arrive in Sodom and the reception that Abraham gives them in the chapter before.

They arrive in the evening. Again, a contrast here. The contrast between arriving during the heat of the day, midday sun, when they arrive near Abraham.

And now it's near dark. The sun is going down and Lot is sitting in the gate of Sodom. So Abraham was sitting in the tent door.

Again, tent door, city gates. This is a site of judgment. It's a site where the people who

sit in the gates are the judges of the city.

These are important figures who will help to rule the city. And he bows towards them with his face towards the ground. That's exactly what we see in the previous chapter in the way that Abraham greets the three visitors.

And he presses them to stay with him. Please turn into your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise early and go on your way.

And these are very similar themes that we have from the previous chapter. In the previous chapter, we're told that Abraham says, please let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. So the offering of shade and the offering of water to wash their feet.

They say that they'll spend the night in the open square, but he presses them and says that they should go in to his house. They enter his house and he makes a feast. Now, we've had this description of a feast in the previous chapter, the feast, the bountiful feast that Abraham prepares for them.

Imagine they're stuffed by this point. But Lot offers a meal as well, a feast. But the feast that he prepares is significant.

He bakes unleavened bread. And this is an evening meal, a meal in haste. And we'll see as we go on that this is the first inclination, perhaps, if you've not been paying attention to certain other details, this might be your first inclination that something is going on here.

That there is some Exodus pattern being played out. Unleavened bread. This is the first occasion that we have unleavened bread mentioned in the Bible.

And there seems to be something going on here. He makes unleavened bread. It's an evening meal and they eat.

There are two visitors coming to the city preparing for judgment. This is a very similar thing to Exodus, particularly when you go back to the previous chapters and see the reference to the institution of circumcision immediately beforehand. And Moses was prepared to go into the city with Aaron.

He had to have his son circumcised. And this theme of circumcision to be prepared for the Passover, again, is important. There is this suggestion that the angels are going to pass by.

And here I think that we see other relationships with Passover themes. The angels are associated with Moses and Aaron, but also in some senses with the destroying angel that we have in Exodus and the destruction of the city. Although the destroying angel is

probably the angel of the Lord that comes beforehand.

The people of the city press around, come around the house and press it from every quarter. And this is a large number of people, of the men of the city of Sodom. They're seeking to say, where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.

So we've already discussed the way that within the previous chapters, there's a great emphasis placed upon the taming of the sexuality of Abraham. And this contrast between the vicious, violent sexuality of the men of Sodom and the sort of sexuality that God is establishing in Abraham is an important one. It's connected with circumcision is something to do with the taming, the pruning of sexuality so that it's prepared for proper service.

So it's not wild and ruthless and violent in the way that it is here. And what we see here is a sort of the emphasis is upon the extremes of inhospitality. They want to violate these these men and they ask who the men are.

They may think that they're like spies that have come in. But this is a society that is so violent, that is so closed in on itself that it uses violence against anyone who comes in. And there is a very there are other things that might be going on here, such as they may have some sense that they are different, that they're not just regular men.

And there may be some theme of sex with angels here. I'm not sure, but it's worth bearing in mind that possibility. They want to bring them out and they want to have relations with to lie with them carnally.

And Lot goes out and shuts the door behind them. Shuts the door behind him and pleads with them, don't do so wickedly. And they get angry at him.

And he offers at this point, he offers his two daughters who have not known a man and that he can bring them out and they may do whatever they want to them. Now, this I've discussed in a previous video. It may not be what it all appears on the surface.

On the surface, there may seem to be innuendos going on in this chapter that suggest that Lot is as sexually corrupt as the people of the city. But it may be a twist in the tale, because later on we see the daughters are discovered. They seem to be discovered outside of Lot's house, so they weren't there and he may just be playing for time.

Whether that would work as a ploy or not, I'm not sure, but it's a possibility. George Athos has written a piece on this and I can link to that in the comments below. That he offers to bring them out and says that they can do with the two daughters whatever he wants, whatever they want.

But then they try and press on. They try and get into the city. They try and get into the

house.

They try and attack the angels and they say to Lot, this one came to sojourn and he keeps acting as a judge. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. So they press near against the man Lot and came near to break down the door.

Where have we heard this before? This is the way that the people speak about Moses, who set up this man as a judge over us. Lot has been within the door, within the gate of the city. He's been someone who's been judging within the city of Sodom and they are resenting him for that fact.

Not just resenting the people who are visiting from outside, but the sojourner within their gates as well. This is intensification of that inhospitality. Later on we'll see a very similar theme to this played out in the story of Gibeah.

Where the Levite and his concubine stay with the old man of Ephraim within the city of Gibeah. And again it's a sojourner within the city that gives them refuge. No one else in the city does that.

And in the same situation they say that we'll stay in the open square. But no, they press to stay with this man. And then in that situation he offers to throw out his daughter and the Levite's concubine.

And only the Levite's concubine is thrown out. There are interesting things going on there. I'm not sure what to make of that exactly.

But there's some sort of twist in the tale perhaps. And it's not certain who in fact is throwing out the Levite's concubine. Is it the old man of Ephraim or is it the Levite himself? We're not sure.

But the daughters are not in fact thrown out here. But there is something going on that I'll get to in a moment. The men reach out their hands and pull Lot into the house with them and shut the door.

Now the threat at the doorway, where does that remind us of? It reminds us of the events of the Exodus. That there is this threat at the doorway. That the blood has to be put on the doorpost.

People have to remain inside the house for being to be safe. We see the same thing in the story of Rahab. And in the story of Rahab they need to remain in the house.

They need to gather within their house to be preserved from the overthrow. Again two visitors coming to the city. And again the visitors going to the mountains.

Going to the mountain and other themes that we'll see appear within this chapter. Then they strike the men who are at the doorway of the house with blindness. Both small and

great.

So that they become weary trying to find the door. So it's not complete blindness. They dazzle them so that they don't recognise what they're seeing.

So they're seeing other things presumably. But they just can't recognise the door. And they're struggling to find it.

And this is something that we see elsewhere in scripture. When the men of Syria and the miracle performed with Elisha. I think there's something similar going on there.

Then they say to Lot. Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters and whomever you have in this city. Take them out of this place.

For we will destroy this place because the outcry against it has grown great before the face of the Lord. And the Lord has sent us to destroy it. And so Lot goes out and he speaks to his son-in-law.

Sons-in-law who had married his daughters. They say get out of this place for the Lord will destroy the city. Now the question is have these sons-in-law already married his daughters? Or are they just betrothed to be married? And is it the case that the daughters are with Lot? Or is it the case that the daughters are with the sons-in-law? This is one of the questions.

The key questions that the passage turns upon. And Athos' discussion of that I think is interesting. The sons-in-law think he's joking.

They don't take him seriously. Now within the story of the flood we have very similar themes. Noah, his sons and his daughters-in-law.

And they're all gathered within the ark. And the door is shut. They're protected.

But here we have his failure to gather together his sons-in-law and his sons. He's left with just his daughters and his wife. The morning's dawning.

And here we have again these themes of haste. The unleavened bread meal at night and then changing of fortunes in the morning. Like crossing over the Red Sea at night.

And then as the morning dawns it's at that point that the waters start to descend upon the Egyptians. We have a similar crossing of the water, for instance, and the sun rising in the story of Jacob later on crossing the Jabbok. We have the water or we have the sun rising at other points.

And the significance of the sun at the height in the story of Abraham beforehand and now. Midnight and all these threats at night and then the sun rising afterwards after the darkness. Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here lest you be swept

away or consumed in the punishment of the city.

Swept away, it's flood language. In the New Testament, there are several occasions there are connections between the flood and the destruction of Sodom. And we see this here that there is about to be a flood of destruction that will sweep away the city.

And there's the cutting off of flesh. Abraham had to cut off the flesh of the foreskin in preparation for this coming judgment. And now Lot has to cut off the flesh.

The flesh of Sodom is being cut off and Lot has to be removed. Lot has to be taken out of that place. And God shows mercy to him at this point.

There is a way in which Lot is, he seemed to be a very compromised figure. His offering of his daughters, even if a ploy, is something that does not sound good. It is a sign of he's reached the end of his rope.

There's no other possibility to save his skin and the skin of his guests. He's prepared to, he seems to be prepared to sacrifice his own family. And the question at the beginning of this chapter is can ten be gathered? And what we see here is no, they can't be gathered.

His sons don't seem to heed him. His daughters heed him, but his sons-in-law think he's just joking. That's tragic.

Why would they think he's just joking? Is Lot someone who they don't take as a very serious man? Or are they just people who are so inured to seriousness and gravity that they can't hear when someone is giving them a serious message? Something serious has gone on, one way or another. There's something very wrong here. And he cannot gather ten people.

In the end, he can only gather four. And that is part of the tragedy of Sodom. It's overthrown because ten cannot be found.

Ten cannot be gathered. And whereas Abraham is an influence and gathers people around him, a righteous core of people, and influences others within the land and gets others to worship, Lot cannot do that. And if God is going to preserve the righteous, it's going to be this lively seed that will gather others to them, that will rise up and form a new body of people and overtake the wicked and work through like leaven through these cities that are wicked.

But no, it can't be done. And so they must cut off the leaven of that city and they must leave and go to another place. He's told to escape to literally the mountain lest you be destroyed.

This movement towards the mountain is something that we see elsewhere in Scripture.

It's the spies go to the mountain after they flee from Jericho. Israel goes to the mountain, Mount Sinai, to worship as they leave Egypt.

And so the mountain is a significant site. Elijah goes to the mountain after the 40 days in the wilderness. All of these events might be connected in various ways.

He must escape for his life, not look behind or stay anywhere in the plain. And he asks if he can just stay in a small city that will not be overthrown. And just a little one and he shall live there.

And then they allow him to do that and he ends up settling in Zohar. And then the sun rises upon the earth as he enters Zohar and God rains brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. This is a signal judgment.

This is something that we see referenced throughout the New Testament and the Old Testament at various points. This judgment that is an example of final judgment to other places. The fate of the cities of the plain is a fate from which all other places should learn.

Their fate might be like that too if they reject the word of the Lord. God overthrows the cities, all the cities of the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities and what grows on the ground. It's just the whole area is salted and destroyed.

But the wife of Lot looks back and becomes a pillar of salt. Now, whether this is a miracle that she turns into salt or whether there's something that falls on her or whether something else happens, we don't know. But what is happening here? Well, read it against the background of the previous chapter.

We've been reading about the story of Abraham and the promise of dead flesh being made living. Abraham being made living, that he has the flesh cut off in circumcision and he's prepared to bear a child of promise. Likewise, Sarah is made fruitful.

Her womb is no longer barren. But what we have here is the wife of Lot turned into the barrenness of salt. And the wife of Sarah, who was barren, made fruitful.

There's a juxtaposition between Abraham and Lot and between Sarah and Lot's wife. These two stories need to be read alongside each other. And there is a very significant ways that we can see these being contrasted with each other.

There are two daughters and then there are two sons. There is Ishmael and Isaac and two daughters of Lot. Now, they will read later on the tragic events that associate with them.

But there seems to be something between these two stories that helps us to understand what's going on. The destruction of daughters threatened in the doorway. And then the

birth of a son promised in a doorway.

We have the tent door at the beginning of chapter 18. And then we have the city gates at the beginning of chapter 19. And we have the promise of the child when Sarah is hearing that in the tent door.

And then we have the threat of the death of the daughters in the door of Lot's house. And then the closing of that door by the angels, just as God closed the door of the ark to destroy in the flood all the people outside. And then also the promise, the closing of the door around Israel during the Passover.

So the people outside that lose the firstborn, death of children and then life of children within the house. And there is a theme of new birth in that context. The doors of the house are associated with the doors of the womb.

And the blood on the doorpost is associated with the blood of birth as well. It's something that is an event that is about to take place of birth. We see that in the story of the Exodus where immediately before the crossing of the Red Sea and after the Passover events, there is this right given concerning the firstborn, the setting apart of the firstborn.

And this is associated with birth and doorways. And then there's the threat of the death at the doorway too. So here we see these two stories held alongside each other.

Give us themes of Exodus. There is a sort of Exodus that takes place here. Lot is truly, he's truly delivered and rescued from a city that's being overthrown like Egypt would be.

But yet there's a twist on it because the city he's delivered from, he's delivered from the city, but also he loses so much. This is not a story where he gathers together his whole house and escapes. And this whole new nation being formed in blessing and fruitfulness.

No, it's he's delivered, but he's scarred. He goes down in many ways to death. He doesn't go completely down to death, but there's a perversion of his life, a twisting of his life.

Something's gone very wrong. Something's misshapen in his story. And that play upon the Exodus theme is important.

It helps us to see positive dimensions, but also negative dimensions too. So the doorway is significant. The promise of birth in the doorway, the threat of death in the doorway, the event of judgment in the doorway.

Then we have the closing of the door by the angels just as God closed the door of the flood. We have the destruction of children, the birth of children. And what we see in the story as well is a playing out of something that we've seen before.

What happened after the flood? There was a story of drunkenness and an uncovering of the nakedness of the father. And this is something we see here. Lot goes out of Zoar eventually and dwells in the mountain.

And his two daughters go with him. He's afraid to dwell in Zoar. This is a very tragic story.

He ends up living in a cave. And that's a sign of death. It's the tomb-like place.

Now there are points where people go down to a cave in order to be lifted up again. But going into a cave is not a good thing. It's not somewhere you want to remain.

So David goes to the cave of Dullam and then eventually is raised up out of that to rule. But here we see Lot going down into the cave. The two daughters wonder, is there going to be any, is there anyone we can marry? Has the world, I mean we're living in this apocalyptic scenario.

It seems like the earth is completely destroyed. There's no man on the earth to come into us as is the custom of all the earth. We're the last survivors of this devastation.

What can we do? We're the survivors of the apocalypse. And so they make their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn goes in and lies with her father.

And he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. This is very similar to the story of Noah and Ham. It's a full story.

In the story of Noah and Ham, there is the planting of a garden, the vineyard, eating of the fruit, becoming naked and drunk, and then uncovered and shame and all these sorts of things, followed by judgment, sentences upon three people, positive ones on two, shame and japheth, and then a negative judgment upon Ham. So we are seeing a similar thing in this story. There is the judgment that occurs upon these later, the countries that arise from this particular event.

So the first night, one lies with her father. And he doesn't know when she lays down or rises up. And then the next time, next day, maybe not literal next day, the next occasion, as it were, the firstborn says to the younger, Indeed, I lay with my father last night.

Let us make him drink wine tonight also. And you may go in and lie with him. And so she lies with him as well.

And he doesn't know when she lies down or when she arises. And the daughters are born through this. Oh, the daughters of Lot have two children through this.

One is Moab and one is Ben-Ammi. And one gives right to the Moabites, the other to the Ammonites. Now, we see similar stories like this elsewhere in scripture.

I've already compared it to the story of Ham. It's also in some respects like the story that we have of Tamar and Judah. So Judah is presumably drunk.

He's celebrating in the sheep shearing season. And then Tamar goes in and lies with him. And he doesn't know who she is.

And eventually raises up seed for his house that seems to be devastated. His sons are dying or have died. Ur and Onan have already died.

And Shelah isn't being given to Tamar. And so it's a similar sort of situation, the house going down to death. And then the daughter, in that other case, the daughter-in-law going in to lie with her father to raise up seed in that desperate situation.

So it's like the story of Ham and the rebellion against the father. It's also like the story of Tamar and Judah. Now, think back through the story.

Lot had offered or seemed to offer at the very least his daughters to the men of Sodom to lie with. And there is a sense in which there's a sort of poetic justice here. That the way of Sodom has been taken with these daughters.

These daughters bring with them the way of Sodom. Just as Egypt is represented in Hagar being part of the ongoing story. She brings part of Egypt with her.

These bring daughters bring part of Sodom with them. And we'll see that connection with Moab and Ammon and Sodom in Zephaniah chapter 2. For instance, in 8 verses 8 following. And the remnant of my people shall possess them.

This is a similar account. And here I think that you have this connection between the people of Sodom and the daughters of Lot. Elsewhere, we'll also see something similar to this.

As a descendant of Tamar and a descendant of the oldest daughter who gave rise to Moab come together. That's in the story of Ruth. And Boaz is asleep on threshing floor and his feet are uncovered.

And there is a all sorts of sexual connotations within that story. And we're supposed to see those sorts of sexual connotations. Not as a sexual event taking place.

But as an allusion back to these previous stories. To the story of Tamar and Judah and to the story of Lot and his daughters. Here is the descendant of Moab, a Moabites, who goes into a descendant of Tamar and Judah and lies at his feet.

There's all sorts of sexual connotations there. And it seems they're replaying these themes that we have in this story. These stories that come earlier.

And in both cases, the bastard child is held out of the congregation. The offspring are

held out of the congregation for 10 generations. Likewise, the descendants of Moab.

And so we have a reversal of that, a healing of two wounds in that story of Ruth. There's a lot going on there, but could maybe do that some other time. I've discussed that in various places.

Anything else going on in the story? The two daughters and the two sons. There might seem to be a natural connection between. Again, this is paralleling the story of Ishmael and Isaac and the story of the two sons of Lot.

And within these stories, we're seeing the way in which Lot and Abraham finally part ways. I mean, Lot could have gone back to Abraham at this point. He doesn't.

This is his last chance in many ways to go back to Abraham. And he doesn't take that opportunity. Abraham is at this point he's mentioned within this story.

He goes early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord in the discussion of chapter 18. And he looks towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the plain. And he saw and behold the smoke of the land, which went up like the smoke of a furnace.

This is a great sacrificial judgment on the place. And it's similar to the sorts of judgments that have to be carried out on the wicked cities in the destruction of Canaan. These are stories that resemble each other.

And they're stories that help us to interpret what happens later. But particularly in this context, the important thing is to see Lot and Abraham compared and contrasted. The hospitality that both show, which is a great similarity between the two.

They have a family likeness there. They have similar contexts of events. There's a feast.

There's events at a doorway. But then there's reversals as well. The feast is a midnight feast, a feast that's associated with unleavened bread, a feast in haste.

It's connected with deep inhospitality and the failure to gather people together. And Lot is losing people from his family. He loses his, almost loses his daughters.

He loses his sons-in-law. He loses his sons. He ends up losing his wife and his daughters turn against him or have relations with him in a way that dishonours him.

And in all these ways, we see his story unravelling while Abraham's is being built up. Well, Abraham seems to be barren as salt and his wife, her womb is barren as salt. We see them brought to life.

And on the other hand, we see Lot and his family brought down to death. This story also helps us to see more clearly the significance of circumcision in relationship to being

prepared for judgement. There is a flood here, a flood coming off to cut off all flesh.

And those who do not have their flesh cut off are not prepared for it. Whereas Abraham is prepared for it, there is a cutting off of the flesh of others. And Sodom is brought with Lot and his descendants.

In the story of Moab and Ammon, we see it being played out. Many other things that could be said about this passage that is so dense with meaning and significance and connections with other passages. I hope what I have said has been helpful though.

If you have any questions about this and other passages, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and other videos like it, please consider doing so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts. And if you find these videos helpful, please tell other people about them and spread the news.

Lord willing, I will be back again tomorrow. God bless and thank you for listening.