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Q&A#16 Why is Lot Called 'Righteous' When He Offered His Daughters to the Men of Sodom?

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My new Soundcloud account is here: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>.

Today's Question: "How are we to interpret Lot's offering of his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom when they surround his house and demand that he brings out his guests so that they may have sex with them in Genesis 19? Was it such an unthinkable breach of hospitality to let his guests be molested in this way that he desperately resorted to a lesser of two evils? Or was the offer simply a stalling tactic as he knew that the men of Sodom would not accept it anyway? How does 2 Peter 2:7 control our interpretation of the passage and of Lot's life in general?"

The George Athas article I reference can be read here:

https://www.academia.edu/28365744/Has_Lot_Lost_the_Plot_Detail_Omission_and_a_Reconsideration_of_Genesis_19.

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

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is as follows. How are we to interpret Lot's offering of his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom when they surround his house and demand that he brings out his guests so that they might have sex with them in Genesis 19? Was it such an unthinkable breach of hospitality to let his guests be molested in this way that he desperately resorted to a lesser of two evils? Was the offer simply a stalling tactic as he knew that the men of Sodom would not accept it anyway? How does 2 Peter 2.7 control our interpretation of the passage and of Lot's life in general? Within 2 Peter 2.7, we have the description of Lot as a righteous man who is vexed by the behavior of the men of Sodom and his righteous soul being vexed as he spends his time there.

Elsewhere, even within Genesis, we have Abraham pleading for Sodom in chapter 18 that even if there were 10, that the city would be saved, 10 righteous men. And Lot is taken out of Sodom, he's delivered. And then we have the events that follow after that where his daughters cause him to drink wine and sleep with him.

And the children that are born to them lead to the nations of Moab and Ammon. As we read the story of Sodom, one of the first things that we should notice is just how deeply embedded it is within the context and then how broad and extensive the resonances that it has with other parts of the Old Testament are. So if we look, for instance, in the story of the Exodus, we can see lots of similar themes.

There's two people that are sent as messengers that are to bring a message of judgment, Moses and Aaron. There is a threat at the doorway. They have to stay within the house.

There's the meal of unleavened bread. There's the being led by the hand and brought out of the city prior to its destruction. There's the protection of the righteous and then the judgment of the wicked as the sun arises and going to the mountain.

And all these themes that are familiar to us from that particular, the broader Exodus pattern. But beyond that, there are other things to notice. So the relationship between Noah and his daughters, Noah and his sons, between Noah and Ham, after the flood, on the eating of the, drinking of the fruit of the vineyard, becoming drunk and his

nakedness being uncovered by Ham.

Now there are sexual connotations to the idea of his nakedness being uncovered. We don't know whether Ham committed a sexual act upon his father, that's unclear. And there is a possibility of that, but uncovering nakedness is very much sexual language within the book of Leviticus, for instance, to uncover your father's nakedness is to have sex, or your mother's nakedness, for instance, is to have sexual relations with your mother.

There are connotations to that particular expression that suggests that maybe there's something more than just uncovering his physical body, but there are sexual, there's some sexual import to the act that's being committed. Later on, after a similar sort of catastrophic judgment, and we have the association between the days of Sodom and Lot and the days of Noah and the flood and the men before the flood, we have those things paralleled in the New Testament. And then when we have this episode that follows, the similarities between those episodes are noteworthy.

The relationship between Tamar and Judah, again, the deception of the woman and sleeping with her father and the birth of two sons, in both cases, kept out from the congregation of Israel. Moab and Ammon could not enter into the congregation of Israel for 10 generations, and those born of an unfaithful, of harlotry or of illegitimate children could not enter into the congregation for after 10, for 10 generations. And we have that as a theme behind the book of Ruth, because Ruth is a Moabites, and her husband, Boaz, is a descendant of Perez, who's a son of Tamar.

And so we have these themes playing alongside each other. This story is a significant one with lots of resonance elsewhere in scripture. And so for instance, Ruth uncovering Boaz's feet, again, sexual connotations there, uncovering his nakedness, similar questions that arise.

Is this a sexual act that's being spoken of? What is the significance of what is taking place here? So as we look through the story, there's a lot of things going on. One of the things, when I read this story in the past, I assumed that Lot was straightforwardly offering his daughters to the crowd. And one of the things that led me to such a conclusion was the parallels with the story of Gibeah.

In Judges 19, the Levite who goes after his concubine, who's committed the harlot against him, carries in her father-in-law's house for a long period of time, keeps being told to tarry. And there's something uncomfortable about this, this tarrying. There's something wrong.

There's a sense of foreboding that comes with it. This is a similar pattern that we saw with Jacob in Laban's house. And then finally, they get on their way and they stay in the city of Gibeah for the night.

And this old man of Ephraim who lives in the city of Gibeah tells them to come into his house and not to stay in the open square, perhaps because there's some threat to them within that location. And so they're brought into his house and the men of the city surround, saying that they want to know the man that has come and to his house. And he said, no, that would be terrible, but he's come under his protection.

But he has a virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine were offered to them. And then the man's concubine is offered to them. And then the man takes his concubine.

And there's ambiguity here. Is this the old man of Ephraim taking the Levite's concubine or is it the Levite himself taking his concubine and giving her to the crowd? And they abuse her and leading to the episode where in the morning she's found to be dead and her body is cut up, sent throughout all the parts of Israel. And Israel is appalled by this.

No act of this, no sin of this magnitude had been committed prior to that point. And so it leads to the virtual extinction of the tribe of Benjamin. As we read that story, there are a lot of parallels with the story of Sodom.

There's the evening meal, there's the two visitors coming, there's the offering of the two women in exchange for the guest. There's the fact that the person who offers hospitality is a stranger within the, a sojourner within the city, not one of the people who are native to the city. So he's an old man of Ephraim, whereas Lot does not come from the city.

He's a sojourner and they, when they see him protecting the people that have come to visit, they are seeking to

destroy him too. Another question is the relationship between this and spy narratives. So two people come to a city and they seek for someone to find shelter and the men of the city seek to know who these people are.

That story is a similar one to, for instance, the story of Rahab and the two spies that are given refuge within her house. And the men of Jericho come wanting to know the men and know within that context to just know their identity, presumably. Whereas that ambiguity is within the text.

They want to know the men that have visited Lot and Lot settles that ambiguity for us, making clear to us that they don't just want to find out the identity of these people, see whether they're not spies. And indeed they are spies of a sort on a reconnaissance mission to see whether the sin of the city really is as great as has been told. And so at that point, there is ambiguity and then Lot settles it by saying the suggestion that they are doing something of great wickedness and offering the virgin daughters instead.

It settles the ambiguity. But there's ambiguity about Lot too. When they first visit, he offers to wash their feet.

Again, this is languaged with sexual connotations. Uncovering feet, as in the story of Ruth, that has sexual connotations. Uncovering nakedness, as in the story of Noah, that has sexual connotations.

And washing feet has sexual connotations. The question is, what is Lot offering? Is he offering sexual favors to them, maybe from his daughters? Is he offering that to his guests? Or is he just offering that their feet should be washed? Earlier in the passage about Abraham and the three guests, which is parallel to this in various ways, significant events happening at the doorway. It's juxtaposed and contrasted because Lot's wife, turns into a barren pillar of salt, whereas Abraham's barren wife is turned fruitful.

So there are contrasts that take place. What we see in that particular story is, there is the washing of the feet offered, but very literally in terms of bringing water. Whereas here, it's not entirely clear.

Has Lot taken on the ways of Sodom? And this reading was suggested to me by, I first learned this reading by George Athos, an article by him that I came across on Mike Bull's blog. And I give the link to that, but it's very helpful in helping to unpack some of the questions here. And some of the ambiguities within the text.

So the ambiguity about Lot's character, when he offers hospitality, what exactly is he offering? And then later, when he offers his virgin daughters to the crowd, to the mob, that is a significant action, because it settles the ambiguity for us. It makes for us at that point, it is clear that Lot has taken on the ways of Sodom, that he's willing to accept the lesser of two evils, as he sees it, approach to this. He's going to protect his house guest, but he will offer his daughters to do it.

And he will throw them under the bus, in order that he might get free. Now, that reading that seems clear to us, and it was clear to me for quite some time, and I saw the later event as a sort of poetic justice, that Lot would end up being raped by his daughters, that he was prepared to give to the mob to rape. Now, that reading, I think is unsettled in various ways by Athos's approach, which reveals that there are questions that rise within the text itself.

I mean, we have questions like that within the story of Gibeah. Why is it only the Levites concubine that is given to the mob? The man offers his virgin daughter as well. Why is she not given? It suggests perhaps that the man of Ephraim took the concubine and just threw her out.

And did not actually give his daughter, but he took the other man's concubine for their safety. Within this story, there are interesting questions that arise, particularly when you get to the point where Sir Lot went out and spoke to his son's-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "'Get up, get out of this place, "'for the Lord will destroy this city.' But to his son's-in-law, he seemed to be joking." This is in verse 14. And if he has two virgin daughters, why is he talking about his son's-in-law, that his daughters have married? That is a striking thing in the context.

I mean, they obviously have known a man, they're married, and yet he's offering them. And then why is he going out to see these people? Obviously, the coast is now clear because the Sodomites cannot find the door, but why is he going out? If these people are within, if his daughters were within his house, then you'd presume the son's-in-law would be there too. But then if the son's-in-law live outside in another location in the city, we would expect that the daughters are also with the son's-in-law.

In the next verse, we read, "When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, "saying, arise, take your wife and your two daughters "who are here, or who, more literally, "who have been found, lest you be consumed "in the punishment of the city.' And the angels earlier ask, "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?' That they have to be found. The daughters apparently are not with Lot, which suggests that there was deception taking place here. First of all, they are not virgins.

They have known a man, and they are not actually with Lot in the house. It's a ploy and a way of stalling for time, and it fails. And God has to intervene.

The angels blind the people of Sodom. But there is something here that suggests that Lot's offer should not be taken at face value. Lot's offer was not what it appeared to be.

And we see similar forms of deception used to protect against the violence, sexually motivated violence of that surrounding culture elsewhere within Genesis. As Abraham and Isaac go to different countries and pretend to be their wives' brothers. Now, why did they do that? They do that in order that they might protect their wives from the imminent threat to, or that they might protect themselves from the imminent threat to their lives on account of their wives.

Now, it puts their wives into greater danger, but at the same time, it saves them and the wider people that have surrounded them within their sheikdom. The danger is that if they are seen as the husband, they will be killed because they are the obstacle to the wife. If they are seen as the brother, they will be seen as the mediator to the wife.

And so they can negotiate and they can stall for time and they can have ways of ploys to spare themselves, their people, and save time and work with the situation with their wits. And in all those cases, the ploy fails. Here, the ploy is not sufficient either.

Now, whether this was a wise ploy or not, or whether it's justifiable, I'm not going to get into here, but there is certainly a realistic threat that these people want to seize the wives of the patriarchs and either they will kill the patriarchs to get to them or they will save them or they will leave the patriarchs as they are seen to be the brothers of their wives. So there's a real threat. And here we have a similar thing, that there's a real threat and there's a ploy used where the woman is apparently put into danger.

And here the question is, are they really being put into danger? Are the virgin daughters, are their virgin daughters and are they actually in the house with Lot to be offered? Or is he really thinking of a ploy to escape? Some form of deception, some ruse that will enable him to buy time. And I think it's the latter. And as we go through the story, how then do we read the final events that occur when the daughters sleep with their father? Well, we've seen similar thing within the story of Noah.

Righteous Noah, who's delivered from the flood and his story being paralleled with Lot in various ways. He drinks of the fruit of his vineyard, associated again with a mountain. And he has, he becomes naked and his nakedness is uncovered by his child, his son Ham.

And here we have a similar thing. There's a violation of the father by the child or by the children. And that violation is not actually proof of the unrighteousness of the father.

The father is seen as a righteous figure. In Noah is a righteous man, but he's violated by his son. And here we have Lot ostensibly is a righteous man.

He's a complicated man. We don't know exactly why he does the actions that he does but he's presented as a righteous man. One who's delivered from the city and he is not taken in to its downfall.

And so he's not rebuked for his actions. The angels don't present themselves as opposing Lot too. They deliver Lot and they save him.

So it seems that his action is not presented as a cause for condemnation immediately within the narrative itself. In the epilogue, that's where we might think that there is some sort of poetic justice being worked out here. Athos

suggests that it's different.

And I think he's probably right on that point. And the parallel with Noah would suggest that this sort of violation is not necessarily to be read as poetic justice. Rather he thought that they had escaped Sodom but his daughters have retained the ways of Sodom.

And so whereas he might think that the pregnancies that his daughters bear are from their husbands, his sons-in-law who've died with Sodom, that these are children of Sodom. They're in fact children of Sodom in a deeper sense in that they are children of the ways of Sodom as his daughters know him, rape him in much the same way as the men of Sodom would have considered doing in the earlier part of the chapter. And so the people of Moab and Ammon are later on seen as continuing the ways of the Sodomites that they are associated with that land and with that city and its perverse sexual ways, which gives us a greater sense of how to read something like the story of Ruth and some of the things that are going on there or the significance of Numbers 25.

There are more things I could go into here, but I think suffice it to say that Lot's actions are not as clear as they immediately appear. He may not be offering his daughters at all. He deceives the men of Sodom concerning the fact that they are virgins, they are not virgins and they have husbands elsewhere in the city.

They are outside the house presumably and the suggestion is they have to, Lot has to go out and find them. And so it seems to be a ploy that he's using to buy time. So when we read in the New Testament that he is a righteous man, we should take that at face value.

He's not just a righteous man who committed a horrific act, but was saved despite it. He's a righteous man who tried to use deception and it failed. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account or maybe also in the comments to these videos, but preferably in the Curious Cat account.

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