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Q&A#149 Lot's Daughters Revisited

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Today's question: "What is the significance of Lot's daughters sleeping with their father after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? It is clear to me that this is not presented as commendable, but why is it included?"

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, what is the significance of Lot's daughters sleeping with their father after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? It is clear to me that this is not presented as commendable, but why is it included? This is a good question, and it's something I've commented upon at various points. I'm far from settled in my mind on this particular passage.

There are a lot of questions that remain for me, but here are some of the ways that I've knocked the problem down to size, or at least have some sort of idea of how it fits into the larger picture. First of all, we need to recognize that this story has within itself the story of chapter 19. It has certain symmetries.

So there are things to notice. There are two feasts. There's the feast that they invite the guests into, the two guests, and they become, they're taken into the house, and they have this feast of unleavened bread, et cetera.

There's sexual connotations in that story there. There's two references to lying down and references to knowing with sexual connotations. So there's that in both sides of the story, the events in Sodom and then the events later on in the cave.

The other thing to note is that there are references to the two daughters throughout. So you have the reference to the two daughters where Lot says that, I have two daughters in verse 8. I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you and do to them as you please.

Later on, you have reference to his two daughters in verse 14. And then in verse 15, take your wife and your two daughters who are here. And later on, you have a further reference in verse 30.

He lived in the hills with his two daughters for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. So the reference to the two daughters is throughout.

There seems to be a unity within this text that we're reminded of these two daughters on many occasions. And for that reason, it seems to be a unity. The fact that the two daughters have a focused part of the narrative later on and part of the narrative focused upon them would seem to make sense against the backdrop of what's happened earlier where they've often been highlighted.

There's two of these daughters and something troubling and unsettling happens when Lot offers to give them to the mob. Now we can debate whether they were actually there with him. And I've commented upon that before.

I'm not settled in my mind on that particular question. But one way or another, there seems to be an ironic reversal at the end of the chapter when the two daughters sleep with, have sexual relations with Lot apart from his will. So they were going to be thrown out to the mob.

At least it seemed that way. And now they have relations with, the mob was going to have sexual relations with them. Now they have sexual relations with their father apart from his will.

The fact that they have to get him drunk, I think, is significant here. This is something that presumably he would object to if he did have the opportunity to object. But they get him drunk and then they lie with him.

Now that unity within the text, I think, is important. It shows that the two daughters are a continuous theme throughout that particular chapter. And when we get to the end of the

chapter, there is a sort of ironic reversal on what's happened earlier.

What else is going on? Well, we need to read chapter 19 against the backdrop of chapter 18. In chapter 18, there are a very similar set of events. There's the event of the three visitors coming to Abraham in the heat of the day.

And he's seated in the tent door. He invites them in for a meal, bows his face to the ground, runs out to them, etc., bows his face to the ground, invites them in for a meal. And then there's a great feast prepared for them.

And you have a similar thing in chapter 19 when evening is coming and the two visitors, visiting angels, come to Sodom. Lot is seated in the gate of Sodom. So in the middle of the day, heat of the day, Abraham's seated in the tent door.

Towards the evening, Lot seated in the gate of Sodom. So similar, there are parallels, but there's also a juxtaposition. At the entrance to a particular place, at a particular time of the day, and visitors arriving, bowing face to the ground, inviting them in for a meal.

And all of this is playing out. Now, in chapter 18, that hospitality leads to significant events. There is the promise of a child, of fruitfulness.

And Sarah is listening in the tent door. The door is important again. And so in the tent door, she listens, and they're both old.

She says, she laughs to herself, saying, After I am worn out and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure? The Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son. So there is the promise of fruitfulness in the doorway. Now, we have another reference to the doorway in the story of Lot.

So there's a promise of a child to Abraham in the tent doorway, and that his wife will remain fruitful. At the door of the house, there is a threat to life. And it seems, for a time, that Lot's daughters might be thrown out of that, that he's going to be bereaved of his daughters.

And whereas Abraham is given life, as it were, from the dead, he's going to have a son, Isaac. In the case of Lot, he might lose his two daughters. And so there are similarities, but there are also juxtapositions.

We already see those in place with one in the heat of the day, the other in the evening, and the tent door, the city gate. These things are juxtaposed, but they're also similar. So as we read these two passages alongside each other, and we move towards the end, are there any clues that might help us to read the story of Lot's daughters? Well, first of all, we see Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt.

If there's anything that conveys barrenness, it's being turned into a pillar of salt. Abraham's wife is made fruitful when she was formerly barren. So there is another juxtaposition there.

Abraham ends up with two sons. Lot has two daughters. So there are similarities, but there are juxtaposed narratives here.

So the similarities invite us to reflect upon the differences. And whereas there is a promise of seed to Abraham that's a joyous one, and the tent door becomes a place of new life, in the story of Lot and Sodom, that door is something out of which people are cast or seem to be cast. And there's a threat to life and a collapse into death.

And the whole story is one of ending up in a cave. It's a tomb-like location. It's a location that is associated with death.

With the grave. And that movement in that direction is, again, it's contrasted with Abraham who's coming out of death into life. Lot is going down into death.

So I think there's some helpful clues for us there. But there are other similarities with other stories. I think one of the first that might come to mind for many readers is the story of Noah.

In the story of Noah, you have a cataclysmic judgment upon the people of the earth. And then in the wake of that judgment, there is an event on the mountain where there's the drinking of wine, there's uncovering nakedness, all these sorts of things. Now, the language of uncovering nakedness that we find in chapter 9 of Genesis is the language that we find in Leviticus concerning incestuous relationships.

And so some have seen some sort of incestuous relationship thing going on there. Whether it's a relationship with Noah's wife, perhaps, because with their mother, you have that reference in the story of Leviticus where the uncovering of your mother is the uncovering of your father's nakedness. The other thing is uncovering your father's nakedness, there could be some reference to a homosexual relationship, some have suggested, between Ham and his father.

Now, I'm not convinced of that, but there are sexual connotations, and I think it's important to recognize how they're playing out in that story. Following that, his drunkenness, the uncovering of the father, and what happens then is judgment. And there's judgment upon this particular son, Canaan.

And Canaan is judged. Canaan is associated with the people that are in the land that will be punished. We have similar things in the story of Lot's daughters, that there is an event of drunkenness, two children uncovering their father's nakedness, in a more literal way in this situation, and children born of that that will be judged, that are associated with the Canaanite nations.

Ammon and Moab are associated with the Canaanite nations in various ways. They're not necessarily Canaanites themselves, but they are associated with those peoples. They're associated with those peoples in terms of their location, they're peoples in that general region, but they're also people who have a similar relationship to sexuality, to particular sins that they're given to, all these sorts of things, would seem to create an affinity between these characters.

Now that's not the only similarity that we see between these stories. We might think about the details where God destroyed the cities of the valley. When God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Now God remembering someone, that is very much something that recalls the story of Noah. Throughout the story of the flood, God remembers Noah at key points, and so I think there's something similar here. A further thing that I would add is the way that you have the drinking of wine, I've mentioned that, but the idea that there's no man left on the earth, that there is no person to go into, now there seem to be people in Zohar and other places like that, but this is treated like an absolutely catastrophic cataclysm, there's no one left, and they must sleep with their father.

Now that seems to be presenting the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in very similar terms to the judgment of the flood. A further thing just to note a connection with the story of Abraham, see, our father is old and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the man revolted. Our father is old, that reminds you of the statement of Sarah in the previous chapter.

And so there are these connections already there, connections within the chapter between the two scenes, the earlier scene and then that sort of ironic twist at the end, that ugly souring of the story, and then there's that connection with the previous chapter as those two stories are juxtaposed, and then there's the connection with the story of Noah. What else is there? Well, a further connection in the book of Genesis is with the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah, again, is a father figure, this time a father-in-law, who then needs to be a child for Ur to maintain Ur's name, and so Tamar, when her father-in-law is drunk, she comes to her father in, oh, she appears in a disguise and he comes into her, and then there are relations between them and he doesn't know what's going on.

There's a similar story there. She ends up having two children, Perez and Zerah, and so those two stories are similar to each other. There are events that maybe bring those things alongside each other.

Both cases, a woman initiating sexual relations with a father figure who does not know what's going on to preserve their name and their line lineage upon the earth. There are two male children born, Ammon and Moab, and then Perez and Zerah, and there's a sort of incestuous union. So those two stories would seem to have similarities too.

So we've got the Noah story, we've got the Abraham story, we've got the internal unity of the Lot story and the destruction of Sodom, and then we have those stories brought together in the story of Ruth. In the story of Ruth, you have Ruth lying down next to Boaz and all these sexual connotations in that threshing floor scene. The fact is the threshing floor itself is something that has lots of sexual connotations, as we'll see in the prophets and elsewhere.

The threshing floor is associated with sexual relations. It's associated with drinking as well. Boaz has seen he's drunk and he's refreshed and relaxed on the threshing floor, and then Ruth lies down at his feet.

There seems to be some symbolism going on there, if you think about the background of Deuteronomy. She lies down at her feet and then comes up in the morning and no one sees who she is. So that's very similar to the way that he did not know when she lay down or when she arose in the story of the birth of Moab.

So if you read the story of Ruth alongside the story of Moab, Ruth comes out as very much a Moabite, someone who has all these similarities to her foremother, to the mother that slept with her father Lot and had Moab through him. Now that story is one that plays out in the later story of Israel. It's one that is seen that Moab and Ammon are judged and they cannot enter into the assembly of God for over 10 generations.

It's the same thing that you find for the child that's born of incestuous union. It says, So these stories are connected with each other. First of all, we have the story of Judah and Tamar, which seems to be an inappropriate union.

It's a union under false pretenses again, and there is a limitation of Judah entering into the kingdom for 10 generations for this child born out of appropriate sexual relations. You have in the story of Ammon and Moab a similar thing. These people are held out of the congregation for over 10 generations.

Now, when you read the story of Ruth, it's playing upon all that background. Boaz is a descendant of Tamar, and you have Ruth is a descendant of the daughter of Lot. And in these, this union is playing out that background story.

It's playing out the story of Moab's mother lying with Lot. And so Ruth comes to Boaz in the middle of the night. She lies down at his feet.

She uncovers his feet. Again, there are sexual connotations there too. So there's all this passage that's laden with sexual connotations, as we find in the story of Noah, as we find in the story of Lot, as we find in the story of Judah and Tamar.

And all these stories are playing together. And then they meet at this point, and there's a redemptive union and a working through this event. And so at the end, you have a reminder of the story.

At the end of the story of Ruth, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman. So you have the Moabites, who's playing out the history of her foremother. And then you have Boaz, who's a descendant of Judah.

And in that union, there is a reminder of all that history. All that history comes to the foreground again. So I think that's part of the reason why it's there.

It's there in terms of the unity of the passage itself. It gives a balance to that passage. It plays off the previous passage.

It plays off the story of Judah and Tamar, where there are many similar themes playing out. It plays off the story of Noah as well, that there is this twist in the story of Noah at the end. There's this twist in the story of Lot and Sodom.

And then finally, it is something that has brought to a greater redemptive union in the story of Ruth, which, of course, leads into the story of David and the kingdom. I hope this is of some help. There's clearly not a complete answer to your question here, but hopefully this helps you work towards one.

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