



Lesson 8

“Living Righteously in a Wicked World”

Genesis 13-14; 18-19

Purpose: To strengthen our resolve to hold fast to righteous standards during times of increasing wickedness.

This is the story of Lot and his family; a family that found itself in wicked circumstances and yet there was that part that they did not want to leave. This is a story that faith in the future must outweigh the comforts of the present or the past. When our environment no longer allows us to hold fast to our principles and values, to enjoy the Holy Ghost in our lives and be enriched by the Spirit of Christ, we must exercise our faith in Him and without question, trust, follow and obey. Jeffery R. Holland at a Brigham Young University Devotional on January 13, 2009 said this, “Just what did Lot’s wife do that was so wrong? As a student of history, I have thought about that and offer a partial answer. Apparently, what was wrong with Lot’s wife was that she wasn’t just looking back; in her heart she wanted to go back. It would appear that even before she was past the city limits, she was already missing what Sodom and Gomorrah had offered her. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once said, such people know they should have their primary residence in Zion, but they still hope to keep a summer cottage in Babylon.

It is possible that Lot’s wife looked back with resentment toward the Lord for what He was asking her to leave behind. We certainly know that Laman and Lemuel were resentful when Lehi and his family were commanded to leave Jerusalem. So it isn’t just that she looked back; she looked back longingly. In short, her attachment to the past outweighed her confidence in the future. That, apparently, was at least part of her sin.”

Genesis

See supplement Lesson 6

Commentary:

Genesis

Chapter 13

- 1 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.
- 2 And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

The scriptures warn of the dangers of wealth so often that occasionally some people assume that wealth in and of itself is evil and that all wealthy people are automatically wicked. Without question, the temptation to set one's heart upon the things of the world is one to which many people succumb. But Paul taught that the "love of money is the root of all evil," not the money itself (1 Timothy 6:10; emphasis added).

Abraham provides an example of one who had great wealth (see Genesis 13:2) and yet was a man of great faith and righteousness. The incident between him and Lot provides an excellent insight into Abraham's Christlike nature. By all rights Lot should have insisted that Abraham choose first. Lot had been nurtured and protected by Abraham, and Abraham was the patriarch of the clan. Abraham could have taken his rights and given Lot what was left. Instead, his concern was only that "there be no strife" between them, so he gave Lot first choice (v. 8; see also vv. 9–10). Lot seems to have chosen the best land—the well-watered plains of Jordan—and yet there is not a trace of resentment in Abraham. In fact, in the next few chapters is recorded Abraham's intervention to save Lot's life. Here was a man for whom principles came first and material things second. It is not surprising that the Lord should renew the ancient covenant with him and make him father of the faithful.

3 And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai;

4 Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

The "south" is the desert area south of Canaan, the Negev (or Negeb; Heb., lit., "dry, parched"). Thus they traveled eastward from Egypt to get to the "south" of Canaan. Because Pharaoh sent them away with all their possessions, they left Egypt "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2; 12:20). The company doubtless hastened through the arid Negev and proceeded northward back to Bethel, to the altar Abram had made at first, to call again on the name of the Lord, as was his consistent practice (Gen. 13:4a-b). That was part of his mission, for the Lord had said, "Through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever" (Abr. 1:19).

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.

When conflict arose between the herders of the many flocks of Abram and Lot, a division of grazing land became necessary. Facets of the character of both men are evident in their actions (their status as "brethren" is explained in the commentary on Gen. 12:11-13). Abram stated his principles and made his offer, but Lot chose somewhat selfishly and unwisely (Gen. 13:8-13). He took advantage of Abram's generous offer and claimed what looked like a choice district for his livestock. Evidently climate and soil then were very different from what they were after the cataclysm that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) and different from conditions in that dry valley now.

14 And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

All those who "receive this Gospel shall be called after thy [Abraham's] name, and shall be accounted thy seed" (Abraham 2:10). Also, "the meek ... shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5) when the earth achieves its "sanctified and immortal state" (D&C 130:9) as the celestial kingdom. Thus, Abraham's seed (the faithful) will have the earth throughout all eternity as well as during mortality.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in ^Hebbron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

The Lord confirmed the promise of the land (Gen. 12:7), all around about where Abram stood, to become the first base of operations for him and his descendants. Recall the conditions under which Abraham's seed might possess the promised land "for ever"; it was not an unconditional grant (Gen. 13:15a; Abr. 2:6).

Mamre became Abram's home for some time. As was his custom, he built there an altar for worship (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:18c). Even today, visitors are shown the "Oaks of Mamre" or the "Oaks of Abraham" about a mile and a quarter north of Hebron.

Chapter 14

5 And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

6 And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

7 And they returned, and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.

In this listing of conquests by the alliance of five kings, it must be remembered that anciently the most typical political entity was a small city-state wherein the king presided over one major city and the surrounding area. This territory was sometimes expanded, but kings in those days did not rule over large countries or kingdoms. Sodom had a king, Gomorrah a king, and so on.



12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Lot had made a self-serving choice in taking the green valley of the Jordan and an unwise choice in pitching his family's tents near Sodom. The first of two misfortunes befell him when four allied Mesopotamian kings raided the lower Jordan valley, taking people and goods from the five kings of the area. Lot and his family and all their possessions were taken. Had his uncle Abram not rescued him, Lot's progeny would probably not have been known thereafter in Genesis.

13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.

14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

Genesis 14 is the first chapter in the Bible to use the patronymic identification of Abram as a descendant of Shem through Eber, or Abram the Hebrew (see commentary on Gen. 10:21-30). Eber, or Heber, was one of Abram's ancestors in the patriarchal line who was still alive at this time, although he was five generations older than Abram. Thus Abram could be called a "Heberite," or Hebrew, as one in the clan of Heber at the time.

The last phrase of Genesis 14:13 could be more literally rendered from the Hebrew as "These were possessors of a covenant of Abram"; it would be interesting to know what their covenant included. It is evident from the action of the men who accompanied Abram and his troop to rescue Lot that they felt some loyalty and commitment to him.

15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

When Abram heard that his "brother" (that is, his nephew; Gen. 12:5) was in trouble, he did not hesitate to form a small attack force of his three hundred eighteen servants and his neighbors (Gen. 14:13, 24). They pursued the captors and captives nearly two hundred miles. Near Damascus, they divided their group, attacked at night, and recovered all the captive people and goods. It was a miraculous victory for Abram, and he gave God credit for it upon returning home (Gen. 14:20).

17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, Possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And lessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

The kings of the cities involved went out to meet Abram on his return (Gen. 14:2). Among them was a most noteworthy king, Melchizedek, a high priest, king of Salem (later called Jerusalem), prince and king of peace, king of righteousness (Gen. 14:18a-d; Heb. 7; Alma 13:14-19; D&C 107:2-4; Ps. 110:4). Melchizedek had ordained Abram to the high priesthood (D&C 84:14-17), and to him Abram paid a tithe of the goods God had blessed him to regain (Gen. 14:20).

The bread and wine (Gen. 14:18) were a ceremonial meal, elements of which were later used in the Passover and transmuted later still by Jesus into symbols of the salvation with which he has blessed all mankind.

The place of meeting, "the king's dale," may have been in either the Kidron or the Hinnom valleys, near the city of Salem. Salem, or Jerusalem, was called Uru-salim in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, and the name can be translated "City of Peace." This meaning harmonizes with a Book of Mormon statement that "Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem" (Alma 13:18; BD, "Melchizedek"; "Melchizedek Priesthood").

In contrast to that great priest-king, the earthly king of Sodom also went out to meet Abram. He must have been among those who had not fallen into the bitumen pits but rather had fled to the mountains (Gen. 14:10). He met Abram on his return (Gen. 14:17), and, with gratitude for the rescue of his people, offered him all the goods retrieved. But Abram had vowed to the Lord that the campaign was not for self-aggrandizement; therefore, he accepted compensation only for the supplies they had eaten and the service given by his three confederates from Hebron (Gen. 14:13, 24). The account of this historic event displays well the character of Abram.

Chapter 18

- 1 And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,
3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:
4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:
5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.
6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth.
7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.
8 And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

*In a quite extraordinary visitation, three men and the Lord next communicated with Abraham. The "three men" (Gen. 18:2) were addressed as "brethren," according to the inspired revision of the account (Gen. 18:3a). It was those three whom Abraham courteously addressed and for whom he and his wife prepared food, which they ate (Gen. 18:8, 22a; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954], 1:16-17). Only after Abraham and Sarah took care of the duties of hospitality was the purpose of the visit made known, which was to reassure them concerning the promise of a son (Gen. 17:17).*

- 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.
12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?
13 And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?
14 Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.
15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

Sarah's laughter in response to the surprising promise that a child would be born to her in her old age corresponds to that of Abraham earlier (Gen. 17:17-19); hence the child's name means either "he laughs" or "he rejoices" (Gen. 21:6a). The Lord's response to Sarah's laughter was a mild rebuke, and a truth was taught by a question, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14).

- 33 And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

The statement of the Lord indicating why he could trust Abraham and why he desired to let him know about the catastrophe coming to Sodom and Gomorrah is an impressive indication of God's esteem for that good man (Gen. 18:16-19).

In the inspired version of the account, the Lord sent the three "angels which were holy men" to Sodom to see that the iniquities of the people of that place were duly punished. They went to do so while Abraham conversed with the Lord (Gen. 18:22a; JST Gen. 18:19-23).

Consider why the Lord let Abraham go through the long process of pleading on behalf of those wicked places, knowing (as Gen. 19:29 implies) that it was Lot's family Abraham wished to save when he asked that the places be spared even if only as many as ten righteous could be found in them (Gen. 18:23-32). Evidently the Lord lets us exercise our intelligence and agency in order to develop, for if all

things were done by the Divine initiative alone, there would be no challenges to help us grow in faith, hope, charity, intelligence, and judgment.

Chapter 19

1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,

7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

9 And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.

10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.

11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

Many scholars have tried to justify Lot's shocking offer of his daughters as substitutes for the men on the basis of the strict laws of hospitality and protection that prevailed in the ancient Middle East. The Joseph Smith Translation, however, records that when Lot refused to allow the men of Sodom to satisfy their evil and depraved desires, they became angry and said, "We will have the men, and thy daughters also." Then the comment is added, "Now this was after the wickedness of Sodom" (JST, Genesis 19:11–12; see also vv. 13–15).

12 And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:

13 For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.

In the Genesis account it is clear that the people of these two cities had become extremely immoral, engaging in homosexuality and other abuses. But the prophet Ezekiel gave greater insight when he said, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." (Ezekiel 16:49–50.) James said that pure religion was to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep [oneself] unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Sodom and Gomorrah not only had partaken of the filthiness of sexual immorality but had rejected their fellow men in need.

26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

The account of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt has puzzled many commentators. Was this event a literal thing, or was it figurative? There are two indications in the scriptures that the phrase "looked back" was an idiomatic way of saying "she turned back" or "returned to Sodom." When warning the disciples of the destruction which was going to come upon Jerusalem, the Savior warned them to flee without delay, not even going into the house to get their possessions. Jesus said, "And he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:31–32; emphasis added). He then admonished them that he who seeks to save his life will lose it, and he who loses his life will find it. Elder Bruce R. McConkie paraphrased those verses in these words:

"Look not back to Sodom and the wealth and luxury you are leaving. Stay not in the burning house, in the hope of salvaging your treasures, lest the flame destroy you; but flee, flee to the mountains.

"Seek temporal things and lose eternal life; sacrifice the things of this life and gain eternal life." (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 1:645.)

The implication is that Lot's wife started back to Sodom, perhaps to save some possessions, and was caught in the destruction.

In the Doctrine and Covenants is a scripture that uses the same terminology as Genesis 19:26. After warning the Saints to flee spiritual Babylon, which is wickedness, the Lord says, "He that goeth, let him not look back lest sudden destruction shall come upon him" (D&C 133:15; emphasis added). Again, the implication is that of a return to wickedness.

Most scholars agree that the most probable site of Sodom is now covered by the southern part of the Dead Sea, a body of water with a high salt content. If Lot's wife returned to Sodom, she would have been caught in the destruction. Her becoming a pillar of salt could be a figurative way of expressing this outcome.

But whatever it was that happened to Lot's wife, it is clear that she perished.

27 And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

When the three messengers arrived in Sodom (Gen. 19:1a-b; JST Gen. 18:19-23), they found evils there were indeed rampant—and were soon directed even against them (Gen. 19:5). A shocking problem is evident in the text that reports the conversation about the virgin daughters of Lot (Gen. 19:7-9); important corrections of that text are given in the inspired revision of it (Gen. 19:8a).

The crass condition of the men of Sodom and the spiritual lassitude of some members of Lot's family make it evident why mercy must not overrule justice and permit the wicked to escape the fruits of evil-doing. The besitant family of Lot could not justly be saved without some test of their faith and worthiness. Some did not accept the warning, and even Lot's wife looked back in spite of being led out by the hand and being duly warned (Gen. 19:14, 16-17, 26). She perished in the holocaust with the others who refused to heed. Jesus used this lesson in his prophecy about the end of our wicked world (Gen. 19:26; Luke 17:31-32); it concludes: "Remember Lot's wife."

30 And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

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

32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

33 And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

34 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

35 And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day.

38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-ammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

Lot's daughters' rationalizing their incest makes it appear that they too may have been imbued with the ways of Sodom. Their purpose could not justify such a means, for it was not a righteous way nor was it likely the only way.

Some commentators have supposed this account of illicit acts was contrived to impugn the Moabites and Ammonites; but that is a poor argument, for equally scandalous stories are preserved later concerning even the royal line of Judah. Doubtless such accounts were kept to provide vicarious experiences that should help others avoid such rationalization. There is, of course, no implication that because prominent people of the Bible did such things their actions were approved.

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