

God, Avenger of Evil

Genesis 19, 20

Angels In Sodom

On that same summer's day of their visit to Abraham, the two angels arrived at Sodom, as travellers. It was evening, and still light, though darkness will have come soon afterward, as is shown by the following:

In Palestine, on June 21, the sun sets shortly after 7:00 o'clock, and rises just before 5:00 o'clock. On the shortest day, sunset is just before 5:00 and sunrise a short while after 7:00. Darkness follows within half an hour after sunset. If we may assume that it was summer (cf. 18:1), and consider the long distance from Hebron to Sodom, the time of arrival will probably not have been much before 7:00 o'clock, say between 6:45 and 7:00 o'clock.

In the gate sat Lot, enjoying the pleasant freshness of the evening. Behind the gate was the town square, which, as in all other cities, was the focal point of public life. The rolling fields stretched out in front of him.

He rose to meet the men, when he saw them, with the same hospitality and courtesy Abraham had shown, and invited them to spend the night with him: the evening had drawn too close for them to travel on. Although they declined, planning to sleep in the square (which was not uncommon: Judges 19:15), he insisted, until they accepted his invitation.

Having reached his home, he prepared a supper of unleavened cakes of bread (it was too late to still use leaven), and they ate. They will not have wanted to retire at too late an hour, like people who have just completed a long, tiring journey, but before they had the chance, the house

was surrounded by a crowd of male inhabitants of the city, both young and old. That the younger men are mentioned first will be because they took the initiative, as is usually the case, while the older ones helped, or looked on, approvingly. Then started the calling out to Lot, “Bring out the men who came to you tonight,” so, they said, “that we may know them.” See how far the sinfulness of those living in Sodom had progressed. They didn’t just satisfy their disgusting lust after men in secret, they publicly demanded strangers to do it! Scripture here reveals how just God was to burn away this rotten place on the earth, as one would do to the source of a plague. Herein the measure of this unnatural sin was complete and had reached its lowest point.

Lot, having gone outside, shutting the door behind him, in vain tried to change their minds, even offering them his two daughters, allaying his conscience with the thought that this way the evil done would not be as perverse, and because oriental hospitality did not allow harm to be done to guests. However, the rabble, not wanting to be criticized by Lot, a stranger, demanded that he stand back, threatening to deal worse with him than with his guests, and drawing near to break down the door.

Then the angels grabbed Lot, pulling him into the house, and struck the men of the city with blindness, so that though they could see, they could not find the door, and at last, weary, they dissipated.

Now the time had come for the angels to reveal to Lot that they had been sent by the LORD to destroy the city, because the outcry against it had become great in God’s ears; sin cried out for punishment.

Still, we see that God showed such great love to everyone belonging to Lot, that the angels asked him whom he still had in his house or in the city: he was allowed to warn them, for their lives’ sake. Scripture does not say whether there were in fact more than his two sons-in-law whom he went to call in vain. The fact that they were called his sons-in-law does not indicate that they were married: they still had to do so. By no means were they decent young men for they, too, were involved in the riot. Though Lot’s remark that his daughters were still virgins seems to point to a virtuous way of life, we should not forget that such men

usually have no need of women, other than for doing the daily chores. We may assume that, since Lot had come to live in the city, the evil had progressed from bad to worse, and that the whole younger generation was infected (something also to be seen in our own country, though, fortunately, to a much smaller extent. Some who could know better even excuse themselves by saying that they were made like this, as if God's wrath against Sodomitish sin didn't thunder through all of the Scriptures: Leviticus 18:22, Judges 19:22ff.; Matthew 10:15ff.; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude :7; also Romans 1:24-27, where this sin of the gentiles is called a punishment for their sin against the first and second commandments: God punishes sin with sin).

In the meantime, the night sped to a close, the light of the dawn already becoming visible. The angels urgently warned them to depart speedily. When Lot still lingered, they seized him, his wife, and his daughters by the hand, the LORD wishing to spare them, and led them out of the city. The angel who did the talking commanded him to flee for his life, not to turn and look back, not to stop anywhere, but to flee to the hills lest he also be consumed.

By now Lot understands how serious the situation is and, becoming afraid because the hills are so far away, he begs to be allowed to find refuge in the small nearby city of Zoar. He is granted this, but the angel adds: "Make haste, escape there, for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Then they disappeared, and if Lot already suspected that he harboured angels, this was the confirmation.

We should notice that the angels were not only bound to God to fulfill His command on time faithfully, but also to Lot. However, this also required faithful obedience on his part.

He arrived just in time in the city of refuge, that now was spared with Lot.

The sun was rising as Lot came to Zoar. According to our estimate, it was about 5:00 a.m.

Sodom Destroyed. Lot in the Hills

As Lot arrived in Zoar, the punishment was carried out. The LORD rained fire and brimstone from heaven; it came from the LORD; it was not an explainable natural disaster (which, of course, would not occur outside of His providential care either). This was a special judgment of God: it points to the end (Luke 17:29, 30). He overturned the cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, and the whole valley with all that grew on the ground, and all the inhabitants. Because an overthrow of the earth is mentioned, one might think of an earthquake and all its disastrous effects. Because the southernmost part of the Dead Sea is only a few metres deep, as compared to the rest which reaches at least two hundred, and in some places even four hundred metres, some have thought that this could be the previously inhabited, now flooded region, with the remains washed away by the rising water, but this is not certain. The heavy fog which rises from the surface of the Dead Sea, which is at the lowest point of the valley, sometimes unbearably hot amidst the surrounding mountains, does remind one of the smoke which once curled upwards from the land. Though the area was like the Garden of Eden, it has completely become a desert place, the ground full of tar and asphalt and to the north, a lot of salt. References to Sodom: Deuteronomy 29:22, 23; Isaiah 1:9, 3:9, 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; 50:40; Lamentations 4:6; Amos 4:11. The afterglow of Sodom can be seen throughout the Scriptures.

Lot's wife, too, perished. Following her husband, she stopped, looked back, still a certain distance from Zoar. She was unable to let go of her earthly possessions, and was disobedient. Jesus points to it in Luke 17:28-33 and warns us against attachment to this world and all earthly things: "Remember Lot's wife." Exit from Sodom is not yet entry into Zoar.

When, on the same morning, Abraham arrives at the place where he stood before God's face on the previous day, he sees the smoke going up like the smoke of a furnace. God had shown His righteousness in both ruin and salvation, for He remembered Abraham in saving Lot.

This was the end: the loss of everything, after a life of suffering under Sodom's immorality (2 Peter 2:7-9).

However, it was not without consequences: because Lot did not dare to live in Zoar, he went to the hills with his daughters, where he found a place to live in a cave. This does not necessarily indicate a dark and dingy hole; the caves on the Mount of Olives, for instance, are an area for well-to-do citizens, who, having built and furnished rooms there, enjoy a spectacular view; but this does not say that Lot had all the comforts of the time, at least at first. Still, this region being outside of the disaster area, it is not impossible that at least parts of his herds were saved.

Longing for a child, and being without a husband, the two daughters, after discussing with each other, gave their father so much wine to drink that they were able to commit the abomination of incest. When they each bore a son, the elder named her child Moab, meaning, “of my father,” and the other named hers Ben-Ammi, that is, “child of my people.” The boys became fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites respectively. Thus the shame of the mothers, as well as that of Lot, who abused alcohol in a terrible way, like Noah, became history.

Lot, who was daily distressed by the sinfulness of Sodom, found out that taking offence at another’s evil does not safeguard one from sinning oneself. He had to pay heavily for his choice of a place to live: the godless city, with all its results. Still, he was saved, which shows us that a person is not righteous before God on account of his deeds, but only through faith.

Lot’s generations were cut out of the Book of Life, although there were a few exceptions. This is the last of what is told in the history of Lot.

Abraham at Gerar

Probably not long after this, for an unknown reason, Abraham departed to the land of the Philistines, to Gerar, the residence of King Abimelech.

The story is very similar to that about Abraham in Egypt (Genesis 12). Once again, the Bedouin ruse is employed, namely, saying that Sarah is his sister; and once again, the LORD delivers him.

A difference is that in this case the LORD did not visit plagues upon the king, but in a dream threatened him, along with all of his people, with a

sure death. Also, God closed all the wombs, which may be taken to mean that He caused them to be sexually impotent. According to Scripture, this also applied to Abimelech, and perhaps to other men. In any case, the LORD prevented that Sarah would be defiled. Note that shortly afterwards Sarah would become pregnant by Abraham, for she would bear the child one year after the LORD had announced the birth of a son, and that year was now partially gone. God protected Sarah's purity in the face of this Satanic attack.

Abimelech, though, was friendlier than the Pharaoh had been. He gave Abraham livestock, male and female servants, and did not send him out of the country. For Sarah he gave one thousand pieces of silver in damages, to shield her from the mocking glances of those around her, as a veil shields the eyes. Thus he admitted his guilt.

Abraham, who is called a prophet, prayed to God, Who healed Abimelech and his people, so that they once again could bear children, something about which Abraham will have heard again later: compare Psalm 105:12-15.

The important thing here is the faithfulness of God in protecting Abraham and Sarah, and all that was theirs.

After this, Abraham remained in the area of Gerar for a considerable length of time.

Questions

1. Why did the angels refuse Lot's offer of a place to stay?
2. Was Lot right in offering his daughters to the Sodomites?
3. Why did Lot no longer dare to live in Zoar?
4. Why did he not go to Abraham?
5. What does the contrast between Genesis 18 and Genesis 19 teach us?