

Vayera (And he appeared)

by Mark Huey posted 14 November, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 18:1-22:24

Isaiah 40:27-41:16

“Righteous Lot Hesitates”

“When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot saying, ‘Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.’ **But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD *was* upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.** When they had brought them outside, one said, ‘Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.’ **But Lot said to them, ‘Oh no, my lords! Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; now behold, this town is near *enough* to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved.’** He said to him, ‘Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.’ Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar” (Genesis 19:15-22).

This week’s Torah portion, *Vayera*, is another peek into the exemplary life of the Patriarch Abraham. Strong emphasis is placed on how he conducts his life and handles some major challenges among the sinful people he encounters. In these five chapters, we read about the Lord appearing to Abraham in the form of three men, and how this episode depicts the hospitality that becomes a hallmark of his character. We also note that Abraham has such an intimate relationship with God, that he feels comfortable enough to implore Him for mercy for any righteous inhabitants living among the perversion found in Sodom and Gomorrah. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham’s migrations in the Negev desert and ultimate settling in Beersheba is chronicled with details about his interactions with Abimelech. During this time, we are told about the birth of Isaac, his circumcision on the eighth day, Sarah’s laughing reaction to the birth, and Sarah’s issues with Hagar, mother of Ishmael.

Most significantly, we are given the specifics about the binding of Isaac (commonly called the *Aqedah* in Jewish theology) that many commentators highlight because of its preeminence among the ten recognized tests of Abraham. Messianic Believers obviously make the connection between Abraham’s willingness to offer up Isaac, and our Heavenly Father offering up His only Son, Yeshua, for the sin of humanity. As you can imagine, there are some wonderful things to contemplate and meditate upon as we study the Torah this week.

While these passages are certainly instructional and uplifting if we are focusing on Abraham’s life experiences, there is, *providentially*, an entire chapter in this reading that is devoted to conveying the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. I believe this is important to consider this week primarily because of what is currently transpiring in our world. When you combine this week’s dispute over the planned Gay Pride parade in Jerusalem (12 November, 2006), coupled with recent revelations about an American congressman and a prominent evangelical leader pastor, you have to wonder if God is not trying to get our collective attention about the depravity of man by these timely examples of actual, or alleged, sexual perversion.

Clearly in Israel, the forces of evil are working overtime to discredit, denounce, and disgrace—if not destroy—what is supposed to be a Torah-centered Jewish culture. The debate over whether or not the homosexual community in Israel can rally this week occurs in proximity to a Torah portion that deals with the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. In a country that upholds the Hebrew Scriptures as some basis for its existence, what does this say about the Israelis? To an extent, it says that people who live in Israel are no different or less sinful than those

living in the Diaspora. The homosexual issue is fairly black and white when we read about it in the Scriptures, without room for any shrouded “gray” opinions. God does not mince any words when He declares that homosexuality is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22).

The great irony, in this clash of cultures that is epitomized by “sex preference” choices, is the challenge a pluralistic democracy has with the debate. If ten percent of the society adamantly believes that homosexual behavior is an abomination, and ten percent believes it is an acceptable lifestyle, then according to human law, it is up to the remaining eighty percent to decide what is acceptable to the society at large. This exposes the Achilles’ heel of a democratic society that is not based on God’s absolutes, but rather on human moral relativism and a media-promoted philosophy that what is done behind closed doors is private and should be tolerated as long as it does not hurt someone else. Both Israel and America, promoters of democratic principles, are currently struggling with this dilemma. The moral glue that has kept these societies strong is losing its adhesive qualities, as incessant attacks on religious Jews and Christians by homosexual activists is gaining media popularity and public support. The challenge for any Believer is that if homosexuals are not permitted to express their beliefs and views, then what will keep those who promote the gospel and a belief in Yeshua from being censored?

If you broaden your discussion to what is happening in America on the subject of alleged homosexual behavior by a political leader and a religious leader, you will note two distinct reactions. First, the political leader has chosen to not take personal responsibility for his actions, but has instead blamed alcohol and/or a childhood experience for his exposed perversion. On the other hand, the pastor has openly confessed his transgression to his wife, family, and congregation, albeit without all the lurid details to the public at large. The contrast is significant, because we can discern that the power of a forgiving God is at work within one, but not necessarily evident in the other. Needless to say, our prayers should be for both men as they individually struggle with choices that clearly have disrupted their respective careers.

Needless to say, I am frequently reminded that what God is instructing us about in these weekly Torah portions will frequently have current real life examples to prompt our reflection and study. Rather than consider some of the actions of Abraham, I would like to take a brief look at what transpires in Genesis 19. Perhaps we can all learn something about our current walk with the Lord from Abraham’s nephew Lot, who the Apostle Peter actually refers to as “righteous Lot”:

“[A]nd if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:7-10).

It seems that the more you study the history of humanity, and particularly the Patriarchs of the Bible, it is reasonable to conclude that every generation from Adam and Eve onward has a degree of wickedness and perversion that continues to be passed down and compounded generation after generation. Consider the fratricide of Cain (Genesis 4:8), the devolution of humanity’s reason to always think evil (Genesis 6:5) that precipitated the Flood, the rebellion of Nimrod at Babel (Genesis 11), and many other sins that are too numerous to list. It is understandable that many theologians and Bible teachers have agreed that the “original sin” of Adam and Eve resulted in the “total depravity” of mankind.

As you can imagine—and hopefully have personally understood prior to your conversion—being totally depraved because of the inclinations of the flesh creates some severe problems. In fact, before a holy and righteous God, every human being since Adam and Eve is totally bankrupt in his or her own strength, and is incapable of pleasing Him. This ancient dilemma is specifically described by the Apostle Paul as he addresses not only human depravity, but some of the Sodom-like inclinations in his prologue to the Romans:

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are

without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. **Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.** For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. **For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.** And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them**" (Romans 1:20-32).

When you read this passage, you understand that from the Creation of the world and the Fall of man, the problems with "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16), are inherent in all. But when you consider some of the behavioral byproducts of the human sin nature, it is easy to conclude that *every* generation since the beginning is, from God's perspective, absolutely wicked. Abraham and Lot, Yeshua and the Apostles (Luke 11:29), just like us today, resided in evil generations.

By the time we consider Genesis 19 and the actions that take place in Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot and the angels who visited him, it is not surprising that the wickedness of homosexual activity was described as almost universal among the men of Sodom:

"Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them'" (Genesis 19:4-5).

It is difficult to imagine that all the men from the city gathered to have relations with "the strangers." The Hebrew describes this as *kol ha'am m'qatzeh* (כָּל־הָעָם מִקְצֵהָ) or "all the people from the extremity" (YLT). Whether this represents *all* of the men in Sodom going to Lot's house, or men from *all sectors* of Sodom really is unimportant. The fact of the matter is that when the messengers arrived at Lot's house, word got out that some newcomers were in town, and this spread all throughout the city. A huge mob of sexually debauched men were ready to encroach upon them, screaming "Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them!" (NLT).

In Genesis 18, significant detail is given about Abraham beseeching the Lord for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to be spared on behalf of any righteous numbering from fifty to forty-five, to forty to thirty, to twenty, and finally to ten. Obviously, the reputation of Sodom was known in the area. Abraham was hoping that there were some that could be considered "righteous." Undoubtedly, Lot was not persuaded or tempted to become a homosexual during his tenure in the area. This is noted by a comment that comes forth from the lusting crowd as Lot prepares to protect his guests:

"Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.' But they said, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore, they said, 'This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.' So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door" (Genesis 19:8-9).

Apparently, Lot's relatively new residency in Sodom allowed him to still be considered an "alien" or "foreigner" (HCSB) in the community. Despite the threat of physical harm, Lot stood his ground and protected his visitors. Oddly, Lot was willing to sacrifice his two virgin daughters rather than allow the strangers to be sexually violated. The morning after Lot protects his visitors, they tell him that the city will be destroyed and that Lot is to take his family away from the city in order to avoid certain death with the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. At this point, we find that "righteous Lot" *actually hesitates* before departing:

"Then the *two* men said to Lot, 'Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring *them* out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.' Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, 'Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city.' But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting. **When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.' But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD *was* upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.** When they had brought them outside, one said, 'Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.' But Lot said to them, 'Oh no, my lords! Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; now behold, this town is near *enough* to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved.' He said to him, 'Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.' Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar. The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar" (Genesis 19:12-23).

We find that Lot not only hesitates when warned to flee, but that the messengers actually have to grab his hand and the hands of his wife and daughters in order to lead them away from the city. How could "righteous Lot," who so bravely protected these men from certain rape by the men of Sodom, been reluctant to leave Sodom? Is it possible that despite the obvious perversion of the Sodomites, Lot had become comfortable or tolerant of their abominable acts? Or is there something else we can conclude from the opening of Genesis 19? Here we find that when the messengers arrive in Sodom, they find Lot in the gate:

"Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them and bowed down *with his* face to the ground" (Genesis 19:1).

The fact that Lot was "sitting in the gate" of Sodom is significant. In ancient times, the gate of a city was where the elders or leaders of a community customarily spent their time discussing various political, economic, judicial, military, and possibly other matters. Of course, in the Ancient Near East all of these matters were closely entwined, as each city was generally responsible for protecting itself from marauders from without and dissension from within. Here at the gate, the well being, and if necessary, the survival of the city was debated and discussed, and decisions were agreed upon.

Since the text mentions that Lot was actually sitting at the city gate of Sodom, it is fair to conclude that Lot was among the leaders of the city, and in some way trying to reform it by his testimony of the Living God that he served. No doubt, Lot would have naturally received some respect among his peers from the incident that had transpired a number of years earlier when Sodom was overrun by the allied kings, who plundered the city (Genesis 14). One notable event took place after Abram had rescued Lot and his family from the ransacking armies. Abram tells the king of Sodom that God was responsible for delivering Lot:

"The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.' Abram said to the king of Sodom, '**I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor**

of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, "I have made Abram rich." I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share" (Genesis 14:21-24).

Whether this testimony to the king of Sodom elevated Lot in the eyes of the Sodomites is not known, but the record remains that Lot was among those gathered at the gate of Sodom when the angels arrived. I think that it is possible that Lot was doing his best to communicate the holiness of the Most High God to his neighbors. Perhaps Lot already had a history of demonstrating righteousness when he was condemned for being a judge over the Sodomites. He was certainly advocating heterosexual unions as his daughters were betrothed to two of the young men of Sodom. When you combine these insights with the fact that Abraham's request for salvation for the righteous of Sodom with results in only Lot's family being spared, the natural conclusion is what Peter writes about. **Lot was righteous, although it appears, a bit hesitant.**

So what does this all mean for us today who live in societies where sexual mores are being assaulted on so many different levels? How are we to respond to the growing number of men and women who are proudly declaring to willing media outlets their deviant sexual preferences? While the Scriptures testify that this is not a new thing among humans, **what should we be doing in the various "gates" where the Lord has us uniquely positioned in this wicked generation in which we live?**

The only answer I can give you—beyond maintaining our own personal integrity—is to simply point people to the forgiveness that is found only in Messiah Yeshua. We must demonstrate this by our faithfulness to the Lord and to His ways every day. **Our prayers should be for those who are turned over to the lusts of their flesh, rather than to harshly condemn their actions.** When I read the continuing words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, after his explanation in Romans 1 about people being turned over to their reprobate minds, I can only conclude that our approach to homosexuals should be one of love and forgiveness:

"Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, **for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.** And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:1-4).

Let me recommend that we do not judge or condemn the homosexuals in Jerusalem, or the congressman or pastor of recent note, **but rather that we pray for their salvation and complete repentance**—and be thankful that we do not give hearty approval to their actions. We have to believe that our prayers and our personal testimonies will make a difference. After all, when you review the list of offenses that Paul states **God has turned people over to**, you just might honestly recall a time in your life, or at the very least "thought-life," when you were personally guilty of one or more of these violations before a righteous, all-knowing God:

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all **unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;** and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32).

We need to be mindful that *if* we have a tendency to judge others, when we have a log in our own eyes (Matthew 7:1-5), the Lord just might decide to let us fall away from the pursuit of righteousness and be overcome by something that defiles us. If that might happen, Peter reminds us that the final state is much worse than the former:

“For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; **for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Yeshua HaMashiach, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them” (2 Peter 2:18-21).

This is a sobering reality that everyone should consider as we look at the life of Lot, who despite his vacillations, is still considered righteous. Lot was in a place that few of us will ever find ourselves in. If we think ministering to those who have “lustful thoughts” may be a problem, consider Lot’s neighbors who were ready to break down his door to grab a hold of his guests!

Let us not hesitate when it comes to pursuing righteousness! And, let us never forget that our righteousness is only found in our constant belief in the sacrificial work of Messiah Yeshua! On this belief we should *never* hesitate! Remember that the same laws that protect homosexuals also protect us as Believers. We have something much greater and much more significant to offer the world. Let us not be willing to hide it—but let it shine forth!

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