

The Sin of Sodom

I. INTRODUCTION

Previously we saw Abraham bargaining with God to save the inhabitants of Sodom from God’s punishment. Abraham was especially interested in saving the righteous in Sodom, including his nephew, Lot, and his family. God would have spared the city if only ten righteous people could be found.

This shows how the salvation of many [even if they are sinners] can come through the faithfulness of a few. This prepares the way to see how the salvation of all mankind is brought about by the obedience of One Man alone, Jesus Christ.

The final outcome of this episode shows that, even though He destroys the cities, God saves the righteous that live in them. God does not punish the just man along with the sinner [Abraham had wondered about this aspect of God’s character].

A person is allowed to perish or be saved according to his personal behaviour.

II. TWO ANGELS VISIT SODOM

Read: Genesis 19:1-3

[1] The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth,

[2] and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street."

[3] But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

A. Lot’s Hospitality

Lot offers the visitors the same kind of hospitality that Abraham did. Although he may not know who they are, perhaps there is something in their appearance that makes Lot recognize that the streets of Sodom would not be a good place for them to spend the night. He seems to want them to be on their way quickly out of the city ("you may rise up early and go on your way," vs. 2).

This behaviour is an indication that Lot was not only aware of the wickedness of Sodom, he also resisted it. He seems to want to protect the visitors from experiencing it, which is noble.

Lot offers to take them into his house and treat them regally, but they refuse at first and say they will stay on the street.

[Note: "The 'street' was an open space within the city, and if a traveler were unsuccessful in finding hospitality, it would be quite the customary thing for him to settle down for the night within the protection of the city walls, but in the open air of this broad square]."

Although Lot probably doesn't know the identity of the visitors right away, his response to them suggests that he was a righteous man. Finally they enter Lot’s home at his insistence.

III. THE SIN OF SODOM

Read Genesis 19:4-5

[4] But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house;

[5] and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."

This biblical account has led to homosexual relationships being referred to as “sodomy.”

A. Sodomy

The sin of the men of Sodom was homosexuality. "Know" is the word Scripture uses for sexual intercourse; in fact, we use the term derived from the name of this city to refer to the sex act of homosexuals, which is "sodomy." Cultures given over to homosexuality are ones that are far advanced in rebellion against God and in rejection of His will for men (see Rom. 1:26-27 below).

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error [Romans 1:26-27].

“The gravity of this sin is emphasized here (in Genesis), and it is compounded, in this case, by the fact that it does violence to the right of asylum which Lot’s hospitality included. In Holy Scripture sins of homosexuality are portrayed as being very depraved: the Law of Moses punished them with death - see Lev 20:13. [The Navarre Bible; **Genesis**, pg. 108].

A. Catechism on Homosexuality

"Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures.

Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual *acts* as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual *acts* are intrinsically disordered. 'They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved....

Every sign of unjust discrimination in their [homosexuals] regard must be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are

Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection." (2357-2359)

IV. LOT TRIES TO PROTECT HIS VISITORS

Read: Genesis 19:6-14

- [6] Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him,
[7] and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.
[8] Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."
[9] But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door.
[10] But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door.
[11] And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door.*

Lot begs the men of Sodom not to act so wickedly, as they surround his house, demanding the appearance of the visitors. Instead, he offers his virgin daughters to the men. It isn't clear whether Lot knows the identity of the visitors yet. Still, his offer leaves us disturbed. Is it cowardice that makes him do it? He did at least try to send the men away, but he doesn't rise to heroic heights in his resistance.

The men at the door resent his judgment on their behaviour. Their anger is directed towards him not for denying them what they want but for daring to "play

the judge" among them, even though he is an outsider. This reveals the pride that lies at the heart of their wickedness.

Pride is a greater sin than lust. Lust is a disordered appetite; pride strikes at God's authority over us. "...hatred of God comes from pride. It is contrary to love of God, whose goodness it denies, and whom it presumes to curse as the one who forbids sin and inflicts punishments" (CCC 2094).

V. LOT WARNS HIS SONS-IN LAW

Read: Genesis 19:12-14

[12] Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place;

[13] for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."

[14] So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

The image of the sniggering sons-in-law becomes a picture of the moral climate of Sodom. Such indifference to the just judgment of God on wickedness grows out of advanced moral laxity. Grave sin causes spiritual blindness; the description of the men of Sodom struck blind by the angels makes that clear.

That the sons-in-law see in Lot's visit to them, in which he urges them to flee destruction, a man in some sort of charade can mean only one thing - they see without seeing. Theirs is the "sight" of the spiritually blind.

VI. SODOM AND GOMORRAH DESTROYED

Read: Genesis 19:15-38

[15] When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city."

[16] But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two

daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city.

[17] And when they had brought them forth, they said, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed."

[18] And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords;

[19] behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me, and I die.

[20] Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there -- is it not a little one? -- and my life will be saved!"

[21] He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.

[22] Make haste, escape there; for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

[23] The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

[24] Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

[25] and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

[26] But Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

[27] And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD;

[28] and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

[29] So it was that, 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 dwelt.

[30] Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters.

A. Lot’s Character

In this account of Lot's deliverance from Sodom and destruction, it is hard to avoid feeling a certain distaste for him. He does not fall into the category of "wicked," since he does try to protect the visitors from any contact with the Sodomites. He is willing to rebuke them for their behaviour. He listens to the angels' warning to flee, but in the last moment, he hesitates. He is dragged out of the city, by God's mercy (see 19:16).

B. Driven by Fear

Once out of the city, Lot seems to cave in to fear. He will not go to the mountains, as the angels instruct him, but he requests instead to be allowed to go to Zoar, a small city in the valley. He dreads that in the mountains, he might be overtaken by some "disaster." But even in Zoar, he still lives in fear, so he flees to a cave with his two daughters.

After the incestuous incidents with his daughters, we don't hear about Lot again in Genesis. He leaves us shaking our heads.

When we recall our first real introduction to Lot, we remember that Abraham offered him the first choice of land in order to settle a family dispute. Lot picked for himself what looked like the best land, well-watered and lush.

C. Influence of Environment

Lot spent many years living in a place of renowned wickedness. Presumably he married a woman from Sodom. Did he have much contact with Abraham? Probably not, although his uncle valiantly rescued him when he got into trouble.

When we meet him again in this chapter, he seems to be a man whose righteousness is weak and tenuous. The New Testament describes him as one who was righteously indignant over the wickedness of Sodom (see 2 Pet. 2:4-10), and we have seen evidence of that.

Yet his cowardice shows him to be somewhat lacking in virtue.

We have to wonder what effect living in Sodom had on him. In a culture given over to sensuality, as that one certainly was, does it become harder to exercise

self-denial? It seems that the fear that may have prompted Lot to take the best land for himself when he was younger was one that came to rule his life. Apart from God's mercy, at work through the intercession of Abraham, that fear might have cost him his life.

D. Lot’s Wife

The story of Lot’s wife is a warning not to turn back once one has set out on one’s way. Once we have set out on the way of righteousness there should be no turning back.

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" [Luke 9:62]

VII. A TALE OF INCEST

Read: Genesis 19:31-38

[31] And the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to 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 offspring through our father."

[33] So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

[34] And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father."

[35] So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

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

[37] The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day.

[38] The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

A. Lot’s Daughters

To Lot’s two daughters, lost in a cave far from anyone else, it seemed like their father was the last man on earth. So they came up with a wicked scheme. They got their father drunk and tricked him into fathering their children. The results of these two incestuous unions were sons who would be the fathers of two more nations, the Moabites and the Ammonites – hated enemies who would try to destroy Israel at every opportunity.

Abraham and Abimilech – Chap 20

I. INTRODUCTION

Abraham's life as God's covenant-keeper has been a story of growth in faith and in virtue. When three mysterious visitors showed up at his tent, he offered them selfless hospitality. When God revealed His plan to judge Sodom for its wickedness, he urgently interceded on Lot's behalf, obtaining mercy for him and his family. Because of his love of righteousness and justice, Abraham appeared to be a man after God's own heart.

A. Are God’s Friends Perfect?

Perhaps at this point in the story, we will want to ask, "Are God's friends perfect?" Abraham seems to have such an intimate relationship with God that he would not be a man subject to doubts, fears, and missteps.

If that were the case, it would be difficult for him to be an example for most of us, since we often shock ourselves with how fickle and inconstant we are in our walks with God. If we are not shocked by our own weaknesses, we are certainly shocked by the weaknesses of others, especially those in positions of authority.

In this section we will see what effect a stumble has on Abraham's relationship with God.

We will also see the long-awaited birth of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah. The birth of this boy will be the cause of deep joy for his parents, but it will be joy tinged with some pain. The consequences of an earlier lapse will finally have to be faced.

How do friends of God behave in circumstances like these? We shall see.

II. ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND ABIMILECH

Read: Genesis 20:1-18

[1] From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.

[2] And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

[3] But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife."

[4] Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, "Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people?"

[5] Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this."

[6] Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

[7] Now then restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours."

[8] So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid.

[9] Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done

to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."

[10] And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?"

[11] Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, "there is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."

[12] Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

[13] And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, `This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.'"

[14] Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him.

[15] And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you."

[16] To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted."

[17] Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.

[18] For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

A. Abraham Deceives Abimilech

Note: Abraham and Sarah lived a semi-nomadic existence, moving from place to place. Abraham apparently had a "policy" of claiming Sarah to be his sister, which was half-true (vs. 12). Some scholars believe this episode to be a duplication of the one recorded in 12:10-20.

Yet the details of this incident are not exactly the same as that one, most notably the location in Canaan rather than a sojourn into Egypt. There is no compelling

reason to see this as a repetition of the earlier story, although some of the details are similar.

We know that Abraham was deceptive about his true relationship with Sarah out of fear for his life (see 20:11). He must have known, from his previous experience, that this behaviour was wrong. Why do you suppose he resorts to it again?

B. Abraham’s Fear and Presumption

We do know that fear gripped Abraham, and he resorted to the most expedient way of preserving his life. What might have been going through his mind? "Surely God knows why I have to do this. Surely He will forgive me for it. He doesn't want me dead! I'm sure He'll understand." Any of us who have done what we know is wrong to do, even in a small thing, will be familiar with this line of thinking.

It is the beginning of presumption, which, when it starts small this way, is always at its most lethal. Those in positions of authority, those with superior knowledge and experiences, and those who have been abundantly blessed by God are perhaps those most vulnerable to it.

The problem with even small episodes of presumption lies in the devious and subtle nature of sin. We always believe we have control over it and can break out of it when we want to. "Just this one time" reflects that kind of gullibility.

C. The Power of Sin

But St. Paul accurately describes the power of sin as that of a slave master. When we give into it, we lose our freedom from it. "What then? Are we to sin because we are...under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:15-16). The power of sin to enslave is formidable.

III. GOD PROTECTS ABRAHAM'S MARRIAGE

Again, God steps in and rescues Sarah from Abimelech. Although Abimelech suggests that his hands are entirely clean, God reminds him that it took a special intervention to prevent "a near occasion of sin" from turning into actual sin.

And how did Abimelech position himself to this near occasion of sin? It was by his abduction of Sarah from Abraham. Why take even a "sister" from a "brother," if not for selfish purposes? Abimelech has no claim on Sarah. That was his offense.

God promised Abraham that within a year a son would be born to Sarah. Any sexual contact that Sarah has with anyone other than Abraham might cast doubt on the legitimacy of that birth. God does not let that happen. He preserves His plan to give Sarah a son from Abraham.

D. Abraham Prays for Abimelech

Abimelech has legitimate anger against Abraham for his deception, since it was the cause of his illness and the threat of death. It wouldn't have been unreasonable for him to think, "Can't God find better quality people to do His work?" Imagine having to ask for prayers that will save your life from the very one who got you into trouble in the first place.

Yet God tells Abimelech that Abraham is a "prophet" (the simplest meaning of the word "prophet" is "one who speaks for God") and that healing will be mediated through the prayers of this prophet, flawed as he is.

This episode is the first example in Scripture of how God continues to work His will through weak and even sinful humans if they have been chosen by Him to be in positions of authority, as Abraham clearly had. The work that He does through them is for the sake of others; it does not cancel out their responsibility for their own choices.

Summary

1. God announced His plan to visit Sodom and test it. Abraham seemed to know that He would find great wickedness there, worthy of destruction. He boldly stepped in to suggest that to destroy the righteous along with the wicked would give the appearance of injustice and was not in keeping with His character as the just Judge of all. God accepted his proposal to let the righteous spare the wicked, even if only ten were found.
 2. In fact, not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom. Lot, his wife, and his daughters escaped the destruction, but barely. Lot's wife did not fully realize her deliverance; she looked back at the city and was turned to salt.
 3. In this deliverance, God proved His justice and His mercy. He had been willing to spare the whole city for ten righteous souls. When He didn't find them, He didn't condemn the righteous to destruction along with the wicked. Because of the prayer of Abraham, which loosed God's mercy, Lot was saved.
 4. When Abraham and Sarah resumed their wandering in Canaan, Abraham repeated a strategy of deception about his relationship to Sarah that he had used earlier in Egypt. This led to the abduction of Sarah by a man named Abimelech. God caused this man to become gravely ill, so that he could not have sexual relations with Sarah. Then God visited him in a dream, urging him to restore her to Abraham and to have Abraham pray for his healing.
 5. God showed in this episode that His work on behalf of people is not put in jeopardy by the weakness and failure of those through whom He works, if He has placed them in positions of authority. He healed Abimelech through the prayers of Abraham.
 6. Sarah's chastity and reputation were preserved.
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Questions

Preparation
