

A few things I missed the first time through on Chapter 17-18:

- 1) something unique in these last few chapters in all stories of ancient middle eastern religion (so I've been told): Hagar and Sarah are called by name and addressed by God. In all other literature women are never called by name and never addressed by the deity. Eve was spoken to, but these two, especially Hagar, are engaged in conversation just like the men.
- 2) in those days, a meal was more than just eating together, it was considered a bonding or sacred obligation between the parties. When Abraham fed the three visitors, this is the first time recorded in the Old Testament and one of the few times until Jesus comes in the New Testament where God eats a meal with someone.

Chapter 19

vs. 1-3

The two angels who'd eaten with Abraham now come to the gate of Sodom and meet Lot. The city gate is where the business took place and decisions were made and men came to chill and chat.

To put it in our terms, the city gate is where the squires heard cases and the rolling store stopped and where men came to hang out to whittle, spit and sit around the potbellied stove, play Rook and solve the world's problems.

Lot begs the men (angels) to spend the night at his house. They first decline, but he persists. Don't read too much into this, that's just the way that people talked back in those days, like people today fighting over the check when they go out to eat (except in North Carolina) or trying to buy something in certain parts of the world where they'd get mad if you paid the price they asked without haggling first.

Verse 3

Notice that Lot has not forgotten everything he learned from Abraham; he too provides a feast, and here's a "DING!" word.

What's a "DING!" word? It's time for another of our famous side trips, better known in education classes as a bird walk.

Let it not be forgotten that we're expected to view the five books of Moses as one work. That's not to say that they've not been edited and added to since the original account of Moses, but we're expected to view them as a unit and we're further expected to be familiar with them and there are words, phrases and entire narratives that are supposed to make us think to another portion of the work and make a connection between the two. This isn't always very easy to outside of the Hebrew because it uses the sounds, spellings and meanings of the words and even the construction of the passages in subtle ways that's often lost in the translation

One example of that is what I've termed a "DING!" word. That's a word or a phrase that is expected to ring a bell for us and help us make a connection to another place in the work to bring out a subtle or not-so subtle additional meaning. How many times in speeches do people use a word or phrase that's supposed to make us think of a connection to something else, like quoting a common phrase of Shakespeare or the Bible in the speech.

In the last chapter, when Abraham fed the three visitors, he told Sarah to make them עוגה (oog-gaw) or cakes. The connection we're to make is with the manna provided in the wilderness because the people made he out of the manna. So our connection is that the bread of Abraham is blessed and a gift from God just as the manna will be to the people of Israel.

By contrast, the bread of Lot served at his feast is מצה (mats-tsaw) or unleavened bread. The connection we're supposed to make is with the impending and rapidly approaching judgment, just as when the children of Israel were in a hurry when they ate unleavened bread of Passover.

The word for feast used here משתה (mish-teh') isn't the same word used for the Feast of the Passover. Instead it's the word used whenever there's a feast not of the Lord but one of celebration and

merriment.

In other words, Lot has some spiritual insight because he realizes enough to serve the מצה (mats-tsav) of God's impending judgment, but he's spiritually blinded enough to serve it at a משתה (mish-teh') of merriment and celebration in the face of that judgment.

While we're on the hike, let's also compare and contrast the two meals. Both Abraham and Lot bow to the ground for the visitors, but while Lot only arose to greet them Abraham ran to them. Abraham asks them to stay with him if he's found favor in their sight and they readily agree but Lot has to beg repeatedly like it was a business transaction instead of a social call, which is indeed the nature of this visit.

There's a long description of the preparation of the cakes of bread that Abraham served them as well as the rest of the meal, but Lot's meal is simply described as a merry-making feast and the bread is hurriedly prepared as unleavened bread is by its very description.

Overall, Lot does not do very well in his comparison with Abraham over their meals, and he's not going to get much better as the story progresses..

Verses 4-5

Now we should be getting a visual image of a lynch mob from Gunsmoke as the men of the town, young and old, mob the house to demand that the two men be given to them, not to lynch them exactly, but to, well, you know....

Verse 6

Say what you will about Lot, he's not exactly a coward. He steps outside to confront the angry mob and shuts the door behind him. Even Marshall Dillon usually just yelled through the window.

Verse 7-8

But Marshall Dillon would never have thought of this. Even Billy the Kid in Young Guns was loyal to his Indian friend Sanchez. Lot attempts to protect his guests by offering the rapists his two virgin daughters.

This is usually where people talk about how women weren't very highly regarded in that day, but that's not the Biblical way. We've already seen how Sarah was given an equal blessing and made a full partner in the covenant and how the runaway slave Hagar was addressed by God at a well (just like Jesus will talk to the woman at the well) and how Eve was created as the helper that would make Adam complete.

Two common mistakes in interpreting scripture is 1) to confuse the culture of the world that's recorded in the Bible with the standards of the Bible;

2) to smugly compare the shortcomings of their society with what we in our own arrogance consider to be the much more liberal and educated and evolved society of our own day and forget that our own society often falls far short of the standard set forth as God's ideal;

and

3) to judge the Biblical characters not by how they usually exceeded the cultural standards and expectations of their day but by how they compare to how we view ourselves in our very different culture.

Ponder this: the Biblical figures were at their best when they were at odds with their surrounding world and considered themselves more Godlike the more set apart they were. They did not conform to the world and created (with help) Judaism and Christianity.

Today the more we conform to the world and its beliefs then the more advanced and educated and wise and spiritual we consider ourselves to be. We tend to make our Christianity look like the world and embrace its values and standards and consider ourselves much more evolved and liberal and open-minded and ecumenical and socially sensitive than those prejudiced and narrow-minded people of Bible days.

We reject those old-fashioned and quaint concepts in favor of our sophisticated wisdom and forget that old-fashioned values were radical and new and unheard of in their day, not because they were

the latest fad that can be easily replaced by our latest fad but because they were a return to the unchanging Word and Law of God that had been rejected and rebelled against from the Garden on to our day. Often what people consider to be new and improved thinking and values are nothing more than a restatement and reaffirmation of the old rebellion and wicked heart that the Bible has already dealt with and rejected as contrary to the eternal Word and Will of God who alone has the right to say what is fair, what is right, what is good, what is wrong, what is correct, what is sin, what will save and what will kill.

Now, that was a sanctimonious bird walk and a half!

I'm not even sure where we left off in the actual narrative. It was something about Lot and his daughters and Marshall Dillon

Verse 9-10

Notice that just because Lot was sitting in the city gate he wasn't considered a judge. The men address him here as a stranger and traveler in their midst who dares to lecture morality to them so they'll just ravage him along with the others. Do note that Lot shows some background in that he's blocking the door ready to take on the whole population until the angels open the door and pull him in.

Verses 11-15

The angels reject Lot's solution and strike all the mob with blindness. Even though the mob is so depraved and was already so blinded before it lost its sight that it groped around in the darkness still looking for Lot and the angels, they're no longer a threat and aren't mentioned again. In fact, Lot is able to go out to find his future sons-in-law and then Lot, his family and the angels wait at the house until morning. They must have been sleeping because it doesn't seem like they stayed up and made any preparations for their trip.

Lot tried to warn his future sons-in-law, but they thought he was an idiot, so he returns home empty-handed. Another contrast: Lot had selected husbands for his daughters from the men of the land, and evidently not Godly men at that. When Abraham needs a wife for Isaac, he rejects the people of the land and makes considerable preparation and expense to find a suitable wife.

Verses 15-26 – You just can't help some people.

When it is time to leave the next morning, they don't want to go and once again the angels have to lay hands on them and drag them out of the city.

When they're told to run for their lives and head to the hills and not look back, Lot decides that it's time to bargain. Once again, contrast that with Abraham. Abraham bargained with God for the lives of Lot and any other righteous who might be there; Lot bargains for his own convenience and preferences, saying that he's afraid to go to the mountains because something bad might happen to him there.

Lot's wife also refuses to not look back and pays the price.

The angel agrees to let Lot and his family flee to Zoar which they'll spare just for him. (Somewhere between there and Zoar, Mrs. Lot takes her final look). The angel also tells him to hurry because he can't do his work with Lot in the way and the text also points out that it's the middle of the day before Lot gets there.

Verses 24-25

With Lot finally out of the way, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and everyone and everything and all the plants in the plains of Sodom are destroyed, not by earthquake, not by volcano, but by fire and brimstone (sulphur) raining down from heaven and setting everything on fire (remember those plains of pitch) and killing everything.

Verses 27-28

The next morning Abraham goes back to the place where he and God talked and he looks down at the valley and sees all the smoke. Notice that we're left with more silence about the thoughts of Abraham, but we can deduce from what we know of his character that he's saddened by all this death and destruction and worried about Lot since he doesn't know if Lot and his family were still

righteous enough to escape since they obviously weren't righteous enough to save the city.

Verse 29 – a summary of what's just happened.

Verse 30-38 – the birth of enemies

Although Lot and his daughters made it to Zoar, they didn't stay there but did in fact head to the mountains and lived in a cave. You've seen enough war documentaries and disaster movies and nature shows to guess why. No doubt the smoke and fires were headed toward Zoar since they were obviously scared out of Zoar and the daughters assume that they're the only people left on earth when they come up with their scheme to use their father to repopulate the earth. What they come up with are the Moabites and Ammonites, who will be enemies of and problems for Israel for generations to come.

Just like Abraham found out with Ishmael, you can't take God's workings into your own hands. If you try to do good by breaking His law or standards, then you're headed for trouble no matter what your motives or good intentions.

By the way, ever wonder how they explained their pregnancies to Lot? Ever wonder how they felt when they discovered that they actually weren't the last people on earth?

But God can make good out of even the worst of mistakes. Remember Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ who has her own book in the Bible and who's is held up for special commendation by being one of the few women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy? She was from Moab.

Next Side trip: Back to Sodom today!

The most likely site of Sodom and Gomorrah is in the plains along the Dead Sea and at the foot of the Massada Fortress.

Some believe that the cities are actually beneath the Dead Sea today.

Josephus said that you could see the remains of the five destroyed towns that looked like shadows if you looked down on them. He also talked about some strange rocks that looked like fruits and the ashes.

If you go there today you can see a difference in this plain and the surrounding countryside. In the area of the cities there are ashes and drifts of ashes that are composed of sulfur and the burned rocks and ground materials of the area mixed with unburned rocks are lying in straight lines and right angles like they'd been part of buildings. Another neat thing are little rocks that are just shells with balls of sulfur inside. From the insides of the shells it looks like the sulfur was hot and burning and came down with such force that it burned its way inside the rock and then the rock sealed back over the sulfur, putting it out. This type of pure sulfur is not found naturally in the area or anywhere else in nature, but the area of the cities are covered in it but there is not anywhere else in the area.

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Another neat thing are little rocks that are just shells with balls of sulfur inside. From the insides of the shells it looks like the sulfur was hot and burning and came down with such force that it burned its way inside the rock and then the rock sealed back over the sulfur, putting it out. There's others that looks like the rock has melted around the sulfur and then hardened. This type of pure sulfur is not found naturally in the area or anywhere else in nature, but the area of the cities are covered in it but there is not anywhere else in the area.