

Lot

A Vindication of a Righteous Man

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Introduction

There are some stories in the Bible that, at first glance, would seem obvious as far as their meaning. But when one studies it more, and digs around for other passages that may enlighten it further, it appears that what used to be obvious isn't obvious any more. We just may be guilty of applying our own preconceived notions to the text and making it say what it doesn't say at all. We especially have reason to suspect this is true when another passage of Scripture makes a point-blank statement about the first passage, and when the second passage's interpretation of the first directly contradicts our interpretation.

The story of Lot is a good example of this. I believe that too many Bible students have looked at the superficial aspects of the story and come away with a false interpretation of it; and what makes me feel this way is that the passage of 2 Peter 2:6-9 directly contradicts *their* interpretation of the story of Lot. All the signs point to something being wrong here.

What we want to do in this study, therefore, is examine the story of Lot in light of the Peter passage and see if we arrive at different conclusions than if we didn't have Peter's account. We will find, I believe, that it would be safer to pick on someone else in the Bible before calling Lot an unrighteous man, a sinner who didn't care about the sin of the Sodomites, who suffered the consequences of his sin – all of which students tend to find in this story. In fact, we have more hard proof of the sins of other Bible characters than we have for Lot!

If this premise is true – if Lot really is righteous and the usual charges against him are false – then why do people pick on him so much? I think that it's a classic case of going strictly by appearances instead of probing through the veil with God-given faith. If we start with only what we see, then our results will be what our common sense and reason tell us is true; if we start with revelation (which is God showing us what we would never have known otherwise) then we will get what the Scripture tells us is true – which is usually the opposite of what our reason would have found. Faith is the key to interpreting the Bible correctly, and “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

The reason we have to explore this issue about Lot and clear up the confusion is because of what I believe the story is about: God rescuing the righteous. Another word for “rescue” is “deliverance” – which is what the entire ministry of Christ is about. What we need is more encouragement to believe and hold fast to the Savior who will rescue us from sin and death. The Scripture is given to us to encourage us in this; the way it does it is to show us the Savior in action, and others getting saved. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Hebrews 12:1) The witnesses that it speaks of are those who have found the Lord to be a capable and faithful deliverer; Lot also found him to be the same thing in his situation. And we can't afford to ignore this story of deliverance, but rather we must pay attention to it and learn from it. “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3) Lot escaped from disaster, and we need to study his story so that we will also escape from the wrath to come.

Problems with Lot

People have had more problems with Lot than perhaps any other character in the Bible. It's always "open season" on Lot when students study the Genesis account of his life; he seems to do nothing right in their opinion. If the rest of Scripture was silent about him, we might just accept the fact that he was a failure and learn from his mistakes.

But the Bible isn't silent about Lot. It makes a paradoxical statement about him that forces us either to disagree or go back to Genesis looking for something that we must have missed. If we claim to believe what the Bible teaches, and if we want to be honest Bible students and find out exactly what it says apart from our own opinions, then we must find a solution to this problem about Lot. We can't afford to let this paradox go unsolved

First let's assemble all the problem areas in the story of Lot and see what we are up against.

What do people accuse him of?

According to most modern students, Lot committed just about every sin in the book. They claim that if Lot was really a child of God, it was only by the skin of his teeth – he certainly doesn't deserve God's mercy in light of the way he lived.

Let's list some of the sins that Lot was supposed to have committed:

Turning away from Canaan and the promise of God – The Lord gave his promises and covenant to Abraham; by being with Abraham, Lot was assured of the blessings of God. But he turned away from the covenant, and away from living with other believers, and therefore couldn't expect any of the things that Abraham enjoyed.

Lusting after this world's goodness – He saw the well-watered plains of the Jordan, and he turned and looked at the rugged mountains of Palestine, and then made up his mind: comfort, ease and prosperity, instead of wandering, opposition and hardship.

Making his home among the wicked – It says that "the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord." (Genesis 13:13) Yet Lot chose that place to live! How could he leave the company of the righteous and go to live with some of the most wicked people on earth?

Making his business his god – He obviously had an eye to expanding his business and increasing his wealth; he could do that most easily in an urban setting where there was plenty of opportunity for buying and selling and trading. He couldn't expect such great profits by wandering like Abraham!

Buying into the world's system by getting on the city council at Sodom – The text says that "Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city." (Genesis 19:1) In those days, the gate was where the leading elders of the city sat to discuss current events and decide the laws to govern the people. By being among them, we see that Lot was one of the

trusted leaders of the people – he surely must have compromised himself to get to such a position of trust with wicked men!

Failing to train his children the fear of the Lord – By the way the story of Lot ends, we can see easily enough that Lot’s children were just as reprobate as the Sodomites were. Obviously Lot failed in his duties as a father – perhaps his business was more important to him?

Failing to teach his wife about God and expecting godly submission from her – Again, the story bears out the point that Lot’s wife didn’t have the things of God in mind; she loved her city, and thought that the fear of the Lord was a small matter when she saw her beloved possessions destroyed. Lot obviously didn’t teach his family the truth about God.

Not finding godly sons-in-law for his daughters – They refused to listen to his plea to leave the city; if they were believers in God, and feared his Word, they would have followed the angels out of Sodom. Didn’t Lot care what kind of young men would marry his daughters? Shouldn’t he have discerned their unbelief earlier and forbade his daughters to be engaged to them?

Offering his daughters for illicit sex – Probably the most shocking part of the story. In order to “protect” the angels from the crowd of reprobates, he offers his daughters to them “to do what you like with them.” (Genesis 19.8) Every loving and responsible parent shudders at the thought while reading that.

Loving Sodom too much to leave – Even when the angels pled with Lot to leave Sodom, he found excuses not to go. They had to drag him out!

Arguing with the Lord – Instead of simply accepting the Lord’s command to go to the mountains, Lot argued with God – as if he knew better what was good for him! And he argued for what he wanted, his own desires, in the face of God’s expressed will. Is this the heart of a child of God?

Getting drunk – An obvious failure, where he drowns his misery in drink – which is all too common among those who rebel against God’s commands and end up paying the penalty for their sin.

Fathering his own grandchildren – As if trying to outdo their father in unthinkable family relations, his daughters plot how to further their own family lines and make Lot guilty of incest. Now, for the rest of his life he would have to live daily with these two reminders of his spiritual failures.

If only half of these things were true about Lot, we could hardly consider him a righteous man. We could justifiably say that the Lord gave Lot his due by bringing him into misery in the end.

That raises another perspective on the story of Lot. It’s obvious, isn’t it, that Lot consistently made bad decisions in life that ruined his end? He decided to part company with Abraham and therefore Abraham’s God, he decided to live with the wicked, he decided that his business was more important than fellowship with the saints, he decided it would be good for his business to be involved in the local government, he decided that it would be better to sacrifice his family for the good of the whole, he decided that living in towns was better than living in the mountains. Where did all these bad decisions get him in the end? A broken man,

penniless, no business or money left, wife and sons-in-law dead, nowhere to live and daughters committing incest! This shows without doubt that when a man decides his own way of living, he is going to find God twisting his path, making his way “a hedge of thorns”, and all will end in disaster.

You may wonder how anybody could think well of Lot, after reading about all these sins of his! But my main point is that *all this is a slander against a righteous man*. Lot doesn't deserve the bad reputation that he has gotten from the modern Church. There are many reasons why people think these things against Lot, which we will look at in a minute. But in light of what the final conclusion of the Bible is when it discusses Lot, we ought to be very careful what we say against him. What we think he did wrong may very well be *our* mistake. In fact, after careful study, we may wish that *we* were as righteous as Lot was!

I'm sure that when Christians step into Heaven and see Lot standing there, they are going to point their fingers at him and say, “What are *you* doing here?” We can't imagine that God would be at all happy with the way Lot lived in this world. But I believe that Lot will answer us with this: “The same reason *you* are here!” Our salvation depends solely on God's grace, and his grace works through our faith in him. Lot had no less faith in God than we have; in fact, according to the testimony of Scripture about him, he probably felt less at ease in the world he lived in than we do in ours.

Bad interpretations

It seems that when people read the story of Lot, they break every rule in the book trying to interpret what the Scripture says about him. Rules of interpretation are simply effective ways of getting at the truth of a passage. If you want to want to learn what a particular passage is teaching, then use these helpful methods to dig out the correct interpretation. Break these rules, however, and you are going to end up with falsehood instead of truth – you will miss what God wants you to learn from it.

For example, the most common rule that students break while working with the story of Lot is this: *don't read things in between the lines*. Too many times we come to a passage ready to read something that isn't there; we often find, when talking to others about it, that we *thought* that the passage says such and such when it really doesn't say any such thing. We *want* it to say something, it's obvious to us that it *means* that, so we claim that it *does* teach that.

People say that Lot decided to leave Abraham and go his own way. But he didn't decide anything of the sort! A careful reading will show you that *Abraham* decided to send Lot away. If anything, Abraham is at fault for the things that happened to Lot.

People say that Lot got drunk. But the text doesn't say that at all. He drank wine – that's all it says. The Bible says that Noah got *drunk*, that Nabal got *drunk*, that Uriah the Hittite got *drunk*, but it doesn't say that Lot got drunk. Yet sermons have focused on Lot the miserable old man drowning his misery with wine, something the Scripture doesn't teach at all.

People say that Lot knowingly went to live among the wicked men of Sodom. But the Scripture doesn't say at all whether Lot *knew* they were wicked. As we will see below, chances are good that he didn't know the extent of their sin and was simply settling down among people like you and I know – people who turn out, just like our neighbors, to be worse than we originally thought.

People say that Lot was motivated by his greed; that's why he left Abraham and the land of the Covenant. But the text doesn't say he was a greedy man, nor does it say that he put business ahead of spiritual communion with the faithful. In fact, it says that he moved to a community for the *same reason* that we ourselves make career and residence changes! If we blame him for that, we must also blame ourselves.

We could go on, but hopefully you see my point. We ought to be careful and read exactly what it says, not what we are hoping it says in order to support our own opinions.

Another rule of interpretation that students aren't careful to follow is that *Scripture interprets Scripture*. This means that the Bible has the right to say, before anybody else speaks, what the meaning of a passage is. If it takes advantage of that right and tells us how to read a story, then we must submit to its view and change ours if necessary. In fact, when the Bible tells us what to believe about a story, it's usually because we would never have got that meaning out of it ourselves.

The Bible does make use of its privilege in this case: 2 Peter 2:6-8. And its interpretation of the story of Lot is startlingly different than the one we would have come up with without divine help. We will see later how important this passage is when we try to understand Lot; but for now we must realize what the Bible is doing: it's setting the record straight, giving us the truth about Lot.

Remember that the Scriptures are "God-breathed" – the Word of God, not of man, and absolutely correct in all that it teaches. This is the Truth; all other views are only true if they conform to this standard. So when one passage makes a statement about some other passage, what it says is the only right way of interpreting the second passage. This is a cardinal rule to keep in mind when doing Bible study. "The Bible is its own best interpreter," goes the old saying.

One other rule of interpretation that students tend to ignore with the story of Lot is *comparing Scripture with Scripture*. One must use the same meanings of words, and the same spiritual principles, that are fully developed in the rest of the Bible. For instance, did Lot come to a miserable end? Isn't that proof that the Lord was simply paying him out for the bad decisions he made in life? Not so! There are other examples in Scripture of people who came to miserable ends and it was no fault of their own. Lazarus, for example, who lived and died miserably, yet was counted a righteous man for all that. (Luke 16:20-22) Other examples are the saints listed in Hebrews 11, who "were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." (Hebrews 11:39)

Jesus himself challenged the notion that people experienced physical disasters because of spiritual problems. (Luke 13:1-5) He told his disciples that a man who was born blind wasn't therefore proved to be a sinner; his blindness, instead, was for the purpose of glorifying God. (John 9:1-5) And in Ecclesiastes we read about "righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve" (Ecclesiastes 8:14) – a sobering principle in a world lacking meaning.

But probably the crowning injustice that people commit against Lot concerns his so-called "sin" of settling in Sodom. It usually goes like this: Lot sinned against God, against the light of truth that he had while living with Abraham, by shutting his eyes to the wickedness of that city and putting business goals ahead of the moral problems that he was bound to be exposed to by living there. At the very least, when he learned the full extent of the Sodomites' wickedness, he should have gotten himself and his family out of there. Then in the same breath, these people claim that we too live in a modern-day Sodom and we have to

“separate” ourselves from the surrounding wickedness. So, stay close to the Lord, and don’t live as our neighbors do.

This is called spiritualizing a text because it’s convenient to do so. If the answer for Lot was to *get out* of Sodom, and we live in a Sodom too, then the answer for us is to *leave the country we are in!* Either the answer is spiritual in both cases, or the answer is physical in both cases; but we can’t have it both ways and be fair to the text – or to Lot. If we can live in a wicked society and stay separate from it, then so could Lot. And if Peter is right about Lot’s character, he probably did as well as, or even better than, we do in our situations. As we will see later, Peter didn’t spiritualize the text, so we don’t have the liberty to do that either.

Requires faith

Sometimes we get too sure of ourselves when studying the Bible. We think that this book is easy to understand, that it’s like any other book and can be understood with just a little effort on our part. We forget that this is mystery, a revelation of God and his ways, something that we wouldn’t otherwise know if God hadn’t bent down to our level and made it plain to our darkened minds.

Don’t be too sure of yourself when reading the story of Lot. You may have many neat categories of right and wrong that you can fit the details into, but you may be surprised at what God is doing in the story – and in your heart as you read. This book requires faith to get the point, not persistence or cunning or intelligence.

Faith is being able to see the things of God in spite of what the world puts up in the way. As Hebrews 11:1 puts it, faith is being “certain of what we do not see.” It’s not just *being certain* that makes true faith; it’s *what we are certain about* that makes us the faithful. Many people are sure of what *they* believe; but not many people are sure about what *God* says.

One area (we could discuss many here!) where we must approach something with faith is this matter of what the Bible teaches. You would think that it’s simply a matter of believing what it says and that is that! But it’s much more difficult than that. Many things stand in the way of believing the Bible: for example, tradition often teaches things contrary to what the Bible teaches, and tradition demands our loyalty. “This is what people have always believed and I must believe it also!” Another problem area is common sense: one meaning or interpretation makes more sense than another, and it would be foolish for me to believe something that doesn’t apparently fit in with the rest of my opinions (or systems of truth, as we proudly call them.)

The story of Lot suffers from both these approaches. To simply believe what Peter says about Lot, without discrimination, without even noticing that something may be wrong in his life, doesn’t square with common sense or traditional teaching. So we don’t believe what Peter says about him. We won’t baldly admit such a thing – we will say, instead, that Lot was righteous but only in a judicial sense of being forgiven, not in a practical sense – but the sum of it is that we don’t have the faith to believe what Scripture says about Lot.

Faith, instead, looks past what this world sees and finds a new world where God lives, where the ways of God are not our ways, nor do they make sense to us immediately. Faith believes the impossible. Faith accepts God’s statements without criticism; what worldly knowledge can prove God wrong in what he says? Faith will go back to the story of Lot, certain that Peter was right, and start looking for proofs of Lot’s righteousness instead of tripping over circumstances that could easily be interpreted either way.

Customs and culture

Remember that this story goes back 4000 years into a culture that we are strangers to. Not that God's rules of righteousness change from age to age, and are different from one culture to another; they don't and they aren't. But man changes very much, and when we read the stories of the Bible (especially of the Old Testament!) we are likely to miss the significance of what is going on, or get the wrong impression, simply because of the strangeness of the situation.

We simply can't understand the social customs of Lot's time by reading only the story in Genesis. The whole situation of Lot at the gate, welcoming the angels, them being in his home and eating with him, his reactions to the crowd gathering at his door – there were customs going on here, that the story doesn't spell out in detail, that would explain the whole mystery of why each person did what he did if we knew what they were.

We blame Lot for settling down near Sodom, yet we forget that we also settle down near large towns and cities and take advantage of large groupings of people – how would we get along without electricity or transportation or grocery stores? We close our eyes to the sins of the wicked around us while taking advantage of the business and educational opportunities that being close to a city affords us. Is this a fault on our part? Or is this simply deciding on the level of comfort that we need in life and finding a way of fitting into one's culture to get it? How, then, is Lot blameworthy for the same thing?

Most modern American Christians don't believe in drinking wine, yet it was customary in Bible times to drink wine; it was usually the only thing to drink. Jesus drank wine! Yet modern students blame Lot for drinking (let's let alone, for now, how much he may have drunk!) as if that were sin on his part, as if it proved that he was an immoral character for turning to drink. We simply can't apply our modern standards to these early cultures!

There were other cultural forces at work in this story that we would do well to learn before we pass judgment on a world we don't immediately understand and we would never have fit into ourselves. It's not fair to blame someone back then for not living up to *our* standards; so let's be careful to use only God's eternal standards to judge someone by.

Jumping to conclusions

Another problem in interpreting the story of Lot is jumping to conclusions that aren't necessarily true. Too often we judge a situation before we find out all the facts; and once we have our conclusion, no amount of facts are going to change our minds!

For example, we assume that he failed to teach his family about God and didn't order his household in God's ways. The reason we assume this is because his wife and daughters turned out so badly! But is that the only explanation for this turn of events? Let's look at our own lives for the answer. Do all children of believers turn out to be believers themselves? If they don't, is that always the fault of the parents? The story of the prodigal son, by that false doctrine, should have been named the "failure of a dad" instead – he had *two* wayward sons!

Even the Law of God recognized that some children make a fateful decision: they decide that the faith of their parents isn't for them, and they turn away from it. The remedy was to stone the wayward son! (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) We can't prove that Lot failed in his

duty; we can't prove that he put his business ahead of their spiritual condition. All we have are two facts: Peter claims he was righteous, and his family turned out wicked. What conclusions can we fairly draw from these facts alone?

Another false conclusion that students often draw from Lot's life is that he didn't mind living among the wicked Sodomites. Why else would he be there (instead of somewhere in Abraham's vicinity, for example) and why would he be on the town council? But again, we are assuming something that isn't true: we think that he winked at their wickedness in order to get along with them. But Peter boldly asserts the opposite: Lot was "distressed" at their wickedness. We are going to have to find another explanation for his being in the area; his feelings about their sin were holy and right.

Probably the biggest conclusion that people make about Lot is that he got what he deserved. How else can we explain the disasters that came upon him in his life? But this too is a false conclusion, based on assumptions that aren't true. We assume that those disasters were punishment for sin; but what sin was it a punishment of, if he was a "righteous" man as Peter claims? So we list his "sins" and show how they led to his downfall; but we will shortly look at those so-called sins and hopefully see that they weren't sins after all. Finally, were they punishments for sin? After looking at the passage in Peter, I'm not convinced that they were punishments – I'm more convinced that the punishments came on others, not on Lot, and that he escaped those disasters that others had to suffer. You see, it's all in how you look at it.

Start with false assumptions, and you'll arrive at the wrong conclusions; start with the truth, and you'll come to a different set of conclusions.

Is Lot the only sinner?

I'm reacting, I realize, to the sermons and lessons I've heard about Lot. But I have a feeling that the standard interpretation of the story of Lot is that he was a wretch who simply wouldn't live according to God's ways, so he paid the price. In fact, I have a feeling that most people, even when a little favorable to Peter's interpretation, will inevitably find something in Lot's life to condemn him for.

This reminds me of the old saying that people will tend to kick a man when he is down. There is something in human nature that likes to beat down the underdog. It doesn't matter how he got there – if he is down in the dust, he must deserve it! Somehow it makes us feel better. We end up kicking him even without good reason, as if we were more righteous than he is, as if we were his judges and are privileged to meet out justice to him.

But all good Christians realize that we are all guilty before God, that we are all sinners and deserving of his wrath and punishment. Only a fool depends on his own righteousness in the face of the holy God. That simply makes us the more pitiful looking when we viciously attack Lot for the very things that we ourselves do. Did Lot want to settle down in a nice area? So do we. Did Lot want to be near a city for the sake of making a better living? So do we. Did Lot live among a wicked people? So do we. Were Lot's family members unbelievers? So are ours. Was Lot taken advantage of, unknowingly by those he most depended on? So are we. So while we kick at Lot and accuse him of being a miserable spiritual failure, he writes our names in the dust (just as the Lord wrote the names of some Pharisees in the dust – John 8:1-11) as being no better off and having no better solutions to life's problems than he had.

Wasn't David an adulterer? Yet we give him more credit for being righteous than Lot, who would never do such a filthy thing. (Genesis 19:7) Didn't Peter deny Christ? Yet we accept him as a holy apostle and call Lot a sinner, who welcomed God's angels into his house in spite of the trouble it would bring him. (Genesis 19:1-5) We are quick to forgive the sins of other saints in the Scriptures, but we are not willing to give the benefit of the doubt to Lot that he may have been a saint after all – in spite of the glowing report we get from Peter's testimony about him.

Of course this makes me suspicious that there is something going on here that most people are missing, or perhaps avoiding. My suspicion is that we are afraid of finding *ourselves* in the story of Lot – which leads me to the next point.

Lot: the picture of the modern Christian

My point is this: the story of Lot is the story of a believer living in a wicked world. This is *our* story; in fact, we can easier identify with Lot than with Abraham! The lesson from Lot is something that we, especially in our modern day, must learn or we will go down the tubes with the wicked culture that we are a part of.

We will see all the Scriptural elements of struggling with the world in the story of Lot. Jesus taught the same things that we learn from Lot, and the apostles encouraged us with the story of Lot and others like him. The major Bible doctrines of sin are there, and of judgment, of salvation, of faith, of worship and duty toward God, of God's promises, of the trials and heartaches of mother against daughter and son against father, and “a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.” (Matthew 10:36)

The thing about this story that caught my attention is that we also live in a wicked world, among wicked people, and struggle against social sins, and get hurt in the battle. The resemblance is too close to ignore. Other passages teach us this very thing, and we mustn't miss the significance: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins *to rescue us from the present evil age*, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever.” (Galatians 3:3-5) Don't be too quick to condemn Lot; rather, see yourself in his shoes and hope for the same God who rescued a helpless Lot to come and do the same for you.

Peter's View: The Controlling Passage

We mentioned earlier that, if it weren't for what Peter said about Lot, we might read the Genesis story with a much different viewpoint and draw different conclusions than we otherwise would. That makes Peter's account an important witness in this problem about Lot. In other words, before we close the book of Genesis and decide that we have the final interpretation on Lot, we must first listen to the apostle's witness.

In fact, what we find in Peter is a paradox. We thought, after reading the Genesis story, that Lot was ungodly and wayward. Now Peter comes along and says the exact opposite! It makes us wonder if he has the same person in mind! Something is wrong: either Peter doesn't understand Lot, or we don't; but we have to solve the puzzle and get to the truth of the matter.

So we want to look at what Peter has to say and determine exactly what we must think about Lot. These kinds of problems in Scriptures are red flags, and we need to be careful when they happen. We can't simply ignore what apostles have to say when they contradict our own opinions; we may not understand their point and our point may make more sense, but it's not good to challenge an apostle! We must find out what the problem is and solve it so that our thinking fits in with the Spirit's thinking.

Here is the passage in Peter that we want to look at now:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to Hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) – if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. (2 Peter 2:4-9)

A control

Peter's testimony is a control on the story of Lot. A *control* is a fact or situation that affects how we must think about another fact or situation. It's an unchangeable fact in itself, and well understood; and because it's there, it forces us to think a certain way about new facts that we don't understand yet. Scientists use controls many times during experiments, to help them understand what happens, and to keep themselves in line with knowledge they already have.

For example, a doctor wants to test a new drug. He doesn't know what it will do yet. So he divides a group of volunteers into two groups – the test group (who will take the drug) and the control group (who won't take the drug, but just a sugar pill instead.) He doesn't know yet what will happen with the test group, but he is absolutely certain about how the

control group will act (in other words, *nothing* will happen to them – it's just a sugar pill). The differences between the two groups, then, he can assume came from the new drug.

Now let's apply the idea of a control to Bible study. Take two passages that talk about a subject. One passage is mysterious, confusing, open to different interpretations – if you read it with a certain point of view it seems to teach this, and from another point of view it could be teaching that. But the other passage – we aren't confused about that one at all. It's very clear, it leaves no room for various interpretations, it dictates what we must think about the subject. There is our control, that second passage. We understand it very well and we know what it's saying.

Now the purpose of the control passage is to help us understand the test passage. Take what you know to be true from the control passage and apply it to the confusing parts of the test passage. What we *know* will clear up what we *don't know*. And you certainly don't run this thing backwards! You can't let the confusing test passage convince you of things that contradict the control passage. You can't start with Genesis; instead you start with what Peter says, then move to the Genesis passage.

Peter knows something about Lot that we don't know; armed with this new knowledge, we must now return to the Genesis passage and re-read it, looking for evidence that Peter was right about Lot after all. We will find that the test passage suddenly takes on a different light, in view of the new facts.

Is this simply a way of making assumptions about the test passage that may not be true? No: the control passage is there for a reason; it didn't accidentally show up in Scripture. This is the way we *must* see the test passage if we want to know the truth about it. We aren't forcing false assumptions on the test passage when the control *tells* us to make those assumptions. The Lord gave us the control passage, in other words so that we can understand the more difficult passage. Without the control we are lost.

Someone might ask, what about other passages that could be controls on the test passage? Well, that's good – you're thinking now about controls, and how important they are as tools in Bible study. But don't get carried away with controls or you are going to have them contradicting each other! One Bible study tool is just as important as the rest, but not to the exclusion of the rest. Keep in mind, in this subject of Lot, that the control passage tells us what to think *about Lot* – which is the whole problem. Other control passages deal with general subjects that may apply in ordinary circumstances; but this Peter passage gives the answer to the problem about Lot in particular. Therefore this control passage takes priority over others.

There are a couple of reasons why Peter is a control passage on the story of Lot. If you were simply taking my interpretation of the story, for example, you may have good reasons not to believe what I say! But Peter is an apostle, sent by God with the eternal Truth, to enlighten the minds of ignorant men and bring them around to God's way of thinking. Now you just don't argue with an apostle! His teaching is the foundation of the Church, the rock-basis (*especially* Peter – remember Jesus' prediction about him!) upon which the rest of the Church will see and know the true God. The apostles played a unique role in the history of the Church (Ephesians 2:20); they will have an honored position in Heaven (Revelation 21:14), and they must be honored by Christians in this age for the part they have in building God's Kingdom. (Hebrews 2:1-4) The Lord Jesus had the words of life, and he passed those words on to his apostles and made them stewards of the Truth. Whatever *our* opinions on the subject may be, only the apostle is absolutely right.

Furthermore, this is the very Word of God, not simply the words of men. Paul claimed that authority when he wrote to the Thessalonians; he appreciated their response of faith when they heard his words:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, *but as it actually is*, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Peter himself says that the prophets spoke not their own words but the words of the Spirit, as the Spirit moved them to speak. (2 Peter 1:21) And Paul also taught that all Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) – in other words, coming from God and not from man. This means, of course, that the facts in Scripture are what God sees as the truth and must simply be believed, not doubted or played with.

For these reasons, what Peter says about Lot is a control on what to believe when we read Genesis. This is the truth, and this is where we must start. Whatever we may find elsewhere in Scripture, it must conform to what Peter teaches us.

Sterling character

Now let’s move on to what Peter actually says about Lot. Note his exact words:

Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) ...

For the moment put aside what you read in Genesis and the details that caused you problems. Assume that this is the first time you’ve ever heard about the man Lot; let Peter introduce him to you, and form your judgment of his character solely on the basis of the apostle’s comments about him. What, from this passage alone, do we learn about Lot?

For one thing, we find that he was a *righteous* man. That word is used three times about Lot in one sentence. In fact, there is nobody else in all of Scripture (except the Lord himself) that is described in such glowing terms! *Nobody*. Peter seems to be beside himself as he packs in the descriptive words *righteous ... righteous ... righteous* in his one-sentence description of Lot.

This three-time emphasis is a technique that the Lord used in his Word to impress us with the truth of what he’s talking about. It doesn’t occur often, but when it does then we need to sit up and take notice. For example, in Isaiah we read that “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:3) The Lord should be able to say something once and we get it; when he says it three times, he wants to overwhelm us with this truth – he wants to get it into the most hardened heart and convince the most stubborn doubters. In other words, he isn’t playing with us. So when he says that Lot was *righteous ... righteous ... righteous* – he means exactly what he says, in spite of what we think, and it’s time to listen for a change.

What made Peter think so highly of Lot? We don’t know, nor will we ever know until we get to Heaven and ask him. The Spirit obviously showed him something about Lot, something that convinced him that here was an amazingly righteous man, a man worthy to be used as a model for today’s Christians, a true man of God.

But we shake our heads in disbelief. Peter, we answer, surely you must be mistaken about this guy. Haven’t you read the story in Genesis? He did everything wrong! How can

you say he was righteous, let alone use him as a model of righteousness? Couldn't you have picked someone else as a better example? David, for instance, or even Abraham from the same book?

But Peter insists on using Lot as his example. He passes by Abraham the man of faith and focuses on Lot (the more problematic of the two!) instead. This is very significant, because it was Abraham who was counted righteous and the father of the faithful! (Genesis 15:6) What does it mean that Lot was righteous? Knowing what other Scriptures say about it, a person is righteous because he has faith in God. (Romans 1:17; Romans 4; Hebrews 11:6) Therefore, Peter is telling us that Lot trusted in God and pleased him by obeying his commands. Are we stretching the point here, to make these kinds of assumptions about Lot? Not at all! The Bible is very plain about what God calls faith, what kind of behavior that he is pleased with, and who he is willing to reward with the title "righteous." When Lot is called *righteous ... righteous ... righteous*, then we can only assume that he excelled in the qualities that God looks for in a believer. The rest of Scripture won't let us assume anything else.

Not only does Peter call Lot righteous three times, he goes even farther and tells us what Lot thought of the people he lived around: "who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ... was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard." In other words, he did *not* wink at their sin. If words mean anything at all, Lot had a righteous and holy attitude about the wickedness of Sodom. He hated it; it weighed heavily on his soul.

Now sin is rebellion against God and his Law. Obviously the Sodomites had no regard for God; as it says in Romans 1, they were so far gone in their wickedness that God "gave them over to shameful lusts." (Romans 1:26) It must have been a spiritual nightmare.

But Lot demonstrated, by his utter horror of the wickedness of Sodom, a love for God and his commands. That's the point! You either love God and obey him, or you hate him and rebel against him. You either long to honor him or you find ways to shame him and his Creation. While the Sodomites struggled to erase the mark of God's Creation in their souls by searing their consciences and ruining each other, Lot would have been struggling to glorify God and remind them of his reality.

Are we assuming too much about Lot, to think that he maintained a high level of spiritual worship in his heart and life? Not at all! The Bible teaches plainly that only those who love God will be distressed at sin; only those who worship God and spend time in his presence will be tormented by the spiritual rebellion of those around him.

For, as I have often told you before and now say again *even with tears*, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19)

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, *he wept over it* and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42)

Lot seems to be in good company, doesn't he? Only the best of God's people will weep over the sins of the wicked. Only the spiritual giants of the faith will agonize over the crimes of the wicked. Can we dare put Lot in this category? According to Peter, this was the kind of man he was.

The really pointed question to ask here, however, is this: What would *we* have done in his shoes? What if we were living in Sodom? Would we have kept our purity in such an

environment? Would we have kept our faith in God, with nobody else around to be an encouragement to us? Who else could have lived in such a wicked place as Sodom and still be called, when it was all over, *a righteous man!*

Faith

When we have read what Peter has to say, and are convinced that this is God's opinion of Lot, the next step is the hardest one to take. We have to believe it.

“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17) Faith happens after hearing what God has to say. He says the impossible, things contrary to human reason, what we would have least expected – but nevertheless it's truer than all of *our* judgments and opinions. He speaks because otherwise we would never know; it's a mercy that he tells us the truth! And faith is specially designed to take that truth of God, however unlikely and unlike what the world believes, and live by it.

Not everyone believes what God has to say, however. They see things the way the world sees things, and they don't know what it means to be led by the Spirit into the ways and world of God. They live by sight instead of by faith, in other words; they only know what their minds and senses tell them is most reasonable and true.

Now Christians have an important job to do. They are to learn the truth of God, get skilled in his ways that the Bible teaches them, and practice what they know in their daily lives. The key to all this, the beginning place of the entire process, is learning the truth: they must study the Word first before any of the rest will happen. And in order to truly understand what they read there, they have to approach it with faith that this is the way to look at things (not the way the world tells them) and this is what God wants us to build our lives upon. Even if they don't know *why* yet, they must trust God to know what he is doing. It will become plainer as time goes on and as they use the truth that God gives them.

Peter wants us to go back to the story of Lot and re-read it. He must have had a feeling that people would misinterpret the story (maybe he did himself before the Spirit taught him!) and he doesn't want us to miss out on something. There is something in this story of Lot that we must learn! That's the only explanation for Peter making such a fuss about a character that we were ready to write off as a failure.

But in order to go back to that story, we must take faith with us and be armed with a few facts that God will reveal to us. Without faith, and without the testimony of Peter, we certainly can't get anything different than what everyone else gets from the story. But with faith in God's Word and trust that the Lord knows what he is doing, we are going to get an entirely different picture of Lot than what others see. Some Scriptures require some faith to get the point, others require a great deal of faith; this one is one of the latter kind.

But then that's been true of the Bible since its beginning. Jesus pointed out to the Jews that they had been reading the Scriptures for centuries and they never saw Christ in them, even though he is all through the book. (John 5:39-40) Unless Paul had pointed out some critical doctrines in the Old Testament we would have missed them entirely – like Abraham being the father of all the faithful, Jew and Gentile alike, and Sarah and Hagar being like Heaven and the earthly Jerusalem. In mercy God has provided all these clues to enable us to go back and re-read the old stories, seeing them in a different light, finding life and hope in them instead of dullness and deadness.

Peter's point

It seems that when a preacher or teacher starts some lessons on Lot, they follow a standard procedure. First they list the things that Lot did, and then allegorize them so that he turns out to be a spiritual scoundrel, always choosing the world instead of God's treasures, and then they point out the failures in his life that we could have predicted. This outline must be written in some seminary textbook somewhere, for as faithfully as most teachers follow it!

But Peter gives us a different sermon outline, a different point to make about the story of Lot. When Peter looks at the life of Lot, this is what he sees: *Amazing rescues!* "... and if he *rescued* Lot ... then the Lord knows how to *rescue* godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment." (2 Peter 2:7,9)

In other words, he does *not* see an allegory here. An allegory is a story on a physical level with a totally spiritual meaning. For example, Paul says that the story about Sarah and Hagar represents Heaven (Sarah) and earthly Jerusalem (Hagar). (Galatians 4:21-31) Now when an apostle tells us that a story is an allegory, *then* we have the freedom to interpret it that way; they know what they are talking about. But Bible students soon start seeing allegories all over the Bible when there is no need to or, what is worse, when the text just doesn't teach that. Probably the single worst error they commit in this story of Lot is to turn it into an allegory: Sodom is the world, Lot is a lukewarm Christian, and the point is *to separate oneself from the world!* But that's *not* what Peter sees! To him, the story isn't an allegory; the point to him is that God can rescue his people from even the worst situations. Isn't that what he says about it?

What impresses Peter the most about Lot was the *way* the Lord rescued him from many potential disasters. The first one was the time the foreign kings defeated Sodom and carried Lot and his family away. Abraham came to the rescue (with just 318 men!) and rescued Lot and all that were with him. The second rescue is more subtle but perhaps even more miraculous: the Lord rescued Lot spiritually from the wickedness that gripped Sodom, down to the last man. There were not even ten righteous people in the entire city! (Genesis 18:32) Yet in the face of the incredible pressure of wickedness and potential persecution, Lot maintained his spiritual integrity to the point that Peter called him *righteous ... righteous ... righteous*. The third rescue, obviously, was the time the angels came in after him and got him out before the Lord destroyed Sodom.

What happened to everyone else? The Sodomites were defeated and killed in battle, they succumbed to unbelievable sin and destroyed themselves morally and physically, they lay helpless under the fiery judgment from the skies that God rained down on them, Lot's sons-in-law died right along with the Sodomites, Lot's wife disobeyed the Lord and died instantly, Lot's daughters committed incest – Lot was the only one who survived the whole crazy thing intact! Everyone else around him was falling like flies and *he alone escaped!*

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. If you make the Most High your dwelling – even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in

all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.” (Psalm 91)

If you look at the life of Lot from *this* angle, can you think of anybody in Scripture that is such a good example of what this Psalm teaches? You may answer, “But look at the misery Lot had along the way! Is this the Lord’s salvation?” But the Lord never promised laughs and good times; he did predict that “in this world you *will* have trouble.” (John 16:33) We *are* going to have burdens and trials the whole way. But when destruction comes – either from sin and its effects or from God’s judgments – he will snatch us up out of the way and the wicked will go through it without us. We will be safe in the Lord’s hands. That’s a principle we find throughout the Bible. And Peter was impressed so much with how the Lord rescued Lot over and over that he made it the point of this passage.

Now why don’t we see the same thing? Why do our lessons on Lot focus on Lot the sinner, yet Peter’s lesson focuses on God rescuing righteous Lot from disaster? On one side of the street you have some preacher pounding the pulpit, condemning Lot for everything he did. On the other side in another church you have the apostle Peter preaching the amazing salvation of God, using Lot as an object lesson. It’s startling how different these two points are! It leads me to believe that something is wrong in our world view, that there are certain flaws in our system of beliefs that prevent us from seeing the truth about God and his works. One flaw, I believe, is that modern Christians don’t like the picture of God sending his wrath on anybody, no matter how much they might have deserved it! And they also don’t believe strongly enough that God saves those he sets his love on (not because they deserve anything from him) or that he is able to keep them from falling along the way. There may be other flaws in our thinking as well, but these two are fatal enough.

Now what?

Now we must return to the story of Lot and re-read it. This time we are going to be sensitive to what Peter said about the man, and look for good things instead of bad things. This isn’t putting blinders on, either, because now we have reason to believe that Lot was more righteous than we gave him credit for. We had blinders on *before* now, when we were looking for sin in Lot’s life. Peter, however, has corrected our thinking and we hopefully will see what is actually there in the text instead of what we wanted to see there.

The Story of Lot Examined

Let's look at the story of Lot now very carefully, looking for things that will support Peter's view. Not that we are going to be dishonest with the text; on the contrary, we want to be very fair with the text. The problem about many passages of Scripture is that they can be looked at from different directions and made to say different things, so much so that one would think that some of the interpretations we hear have come from different Bibles!

But the Bible only has one meaning, it has many applications. The story of Lot only has one meaning; what we have to do is use Peter's clues on how to read it, so that we get that one true meaning. God is not a God of confusion but a God of truth. He wants us to get the point, whatever it is, and then get busy building it into our lives to become more profitable servants.

Abraham and Lot separate

In Genesis 13 we read about Abraham and Lot moving away from each other. Read that chapter carefully and then note the following things about it:

Lot knew about Abraham's God: We first read about Lot in Genesis 11, when he set out with his uncle Abraham from Ur and traveled west. At Haran a large part of the clan settled down, but Abraham and Lot went on to the land of Canaan because of the promise of God. Does this tell you anything about Lot's hopes and faith?

Lot was with Abraham from his calling all the way up to the initial tour through Canaan, the trip to Egypt, and then back again to Canaan. He was with Abraham when he twice built an altar to worship God, and another time when it says that Abraham "called on the name of the LORD." (Genesis 13:4) Nobody else of Abraham's immediate family was with him during these travels, and nobody else seemed interested in Abraham's God, except Lot. I believe we can safely assume that he not only knew about the God of Abraham, he was ready and willing to follow the Lord, with his uncle, into this new land and life.

He was still new to the area: Notice when the separation occurred: they had just come through Canaan for the first time, on a tour you might say, looking over the place. They did not travel by way of Sodom, remember; it says that they went *through Canaan*. Then they went on to Egypt, because of the famine. Right after they came back from Egypt they separated to their own ways. There is no reason to believe that Lot knew much about the local peoples and the extent of their wickedness. The writer of Genesis knew (after the fact), and we know, but Lot didn't necessarily know. When he chose the land around Sodom to settle down, all he might have known about them was that they were about the same as the Canaanites (who, we might add, were very wicked people in their own right, and Abraham lived among *them!*). Put yourself in his shoes: do you know everything about your neighbors when you move to a new neighborhood? Especially when you are from out of town? Of course not! They aren't going to come out and tell you right away how wicked they are!

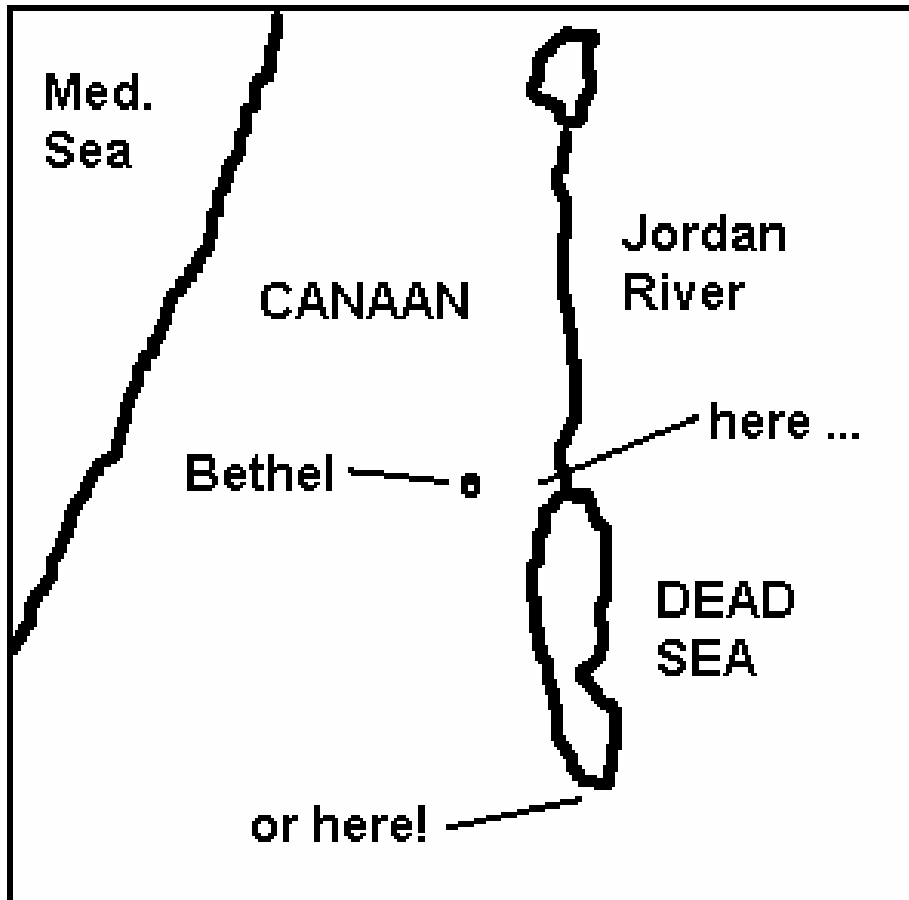
They had to do something: The story makes it plain that something had to be done. Abraham and all his people, and Lot and all his people, simply couldn't coexist in the same area anymore. "But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together." (Genesis 13:6) This isn't condemning anybody; it's just a fact. Their herds probably numbered in the upper thousands, and you need a certain amount of grassland to take care of all those animals. The argument that Lot should have stayed with Abraham doesn't hold water; it just wasn't possible anymore.

Abraham suggested the split: Notice who made the suggestion that they part company. It wasn't Lot's idea! Abraham was the head of the clan, and Lot would have submitted to his elder's decisions – even if Abraham was gracious enough to "discuss" it with his nephew. Abraham, in effect, sent his nephew away. If anybody has to take the blame for what happened to Lot, perhaps we need to look to his uncle!

We mustn't forget how society worked in those days. The oldest male member of a family clan was the highest authority. Survival was hard enough in those days; the importance of a chain of command can't be emphasized enough. Abraham's "suggestion" meant that something, in his opinion, had to be done, and Lot (regardless of whether he wanted to go) did what his uncle wanted out of respect for the elder man.

Besides, Lot wasn't moving away from covenant protection. That viewpoint simply ignores the rest of the story! Abraham both rescued him and prayed on his behalf. The Lord's protection very definitely covered Lot in all his troubles.

Where was this place? Scholars just aren't sure where Sodom was located. There are two possibilities: on the north end of the Dead Sea, or on the south end. Here is a rough map of the area:



I realize that's quite a range, but there are good arguments for either place. For instance, the tar pits that Genesis 14:10 mentions are located on the south end of the Dead Sea; that's one argument. But it doesn't say that Sodom was located there – it only says that the battle occurred there. On the other hand, Abraham “looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah” and saw them burning. (Genesis 19:28) You can't see to the south end of the Dead Sea from where Abraham was standing, which is near Bethel in the mountains above Jericho.

Wherever the city was located, it was within range of Abraham's watchful eye – which Lot had plenty of reason to be thankful for!

New neighbors: As we saw above, it's not fair to Lot to accuse him of purposely closing his eyes to the wickedness of the Sodomites for the sake of improving his business possibilities. Although the text says, “Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD” (Genesis 13:13), that doesn't necessarily mean that Lot or Abraham knew that. Don't you think that Abraham would have had something to say to his nephew (for whom he felt responsible, as we will see when the story unfolds) about moving to such a place – if they would have known?

We know they were wicked – but then we are after the fact. So was the writer of the book of Genesis. But Lot was a newcomer to the area and probably didn't hear much about what they were like, especially since he was a wanderer with Abraham and didn't get a chance to lean over some fence and chat with the neighbors. And when he moved there, he certainly would have begun to see their sin – but probably not on moving day, since, at first, people like to put on a good show to each other. Their bodies didn't appear as monsters, you know! They looked just like people that you and I know. Wicked hearts show up in the behavior, and *that* is only seen over time.

Chose a good land: “Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar.” (Genesis 13 :10) Remember that he had just come back from Egypt (after seeing the Nile River and its irrigation systems). After wandering through some pretty bleak country (the Negev was desert) the sight of good pasture and plenty of water must have impressed him.

There is nothing wrong with wanting a nice place to live! People jump on Lot for making this choice, as if he was supposed to pick a more difficult and forlorn place to live! Look at the possibilities: either he could choose Canaan, which was mountainous (he just traveled through the length of it) and full of wary and antagonistic Canaanites who were sitting on the good pasture land (Genesis 13:7); or he could choose the plain along the Jordan River, which was flat and made up of rich grasslands, and had plenty of elbow room for everybody. He made the natural choice, the one we all would have made in his place. We make that same kind of decision many times in our own lives as we choose jobs, neighborhoods, schools, friends, hobbies, entertainment, and so on.

The point of this story isn't the fact that he chose the wrong place to live because of his greed. The point is that even though a place looks good, there may very well be trouble lurking there, unknown to the chooser. Of course this was true about the area around Sodom. Should he have known about Sodom? Not reasonably. So instead of blaming him, we need to be looking for a hidden agenda in the writer's mind.

This was covenant land too: Did you know that this entire area was part of the land that the Lord promised to give Abraham and his seed? Lot wasn't moving out of

Abraham's jurisdiction; he was moving to the eastern end of the covenant land! Notice the promise that comes again to Abraham: "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, *east* and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever." (Genesis 13:14- 15) Lot moved east; the Lord promised that to Abraham also. If you remember when the twelve tribes returned from Egypt and where they settled, you will know that the land where Lot lived was settled by Judah and Benjamin on the west and north of the Dead Sea, and Reuben on the east side. The whole area belonged to Abraham! Abraham got the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3) and Lot got the land "well watered like the garden of the LORD." I don't see where Lot was doing anything wrong.

Set-up for a rescue, not a statement on sin: As we saw above, the writer is obviously setting up something here. Although the land looks good, there is trouble here – unknown to these two newcomers. Notice how he puts together the pieces of the picture: Abraham needs room and sends Lot away; Lot picks, ironically, the very spot where there will be trouble; Abraham is going to have to come rescue his nephew soon. The story is set up for a rescue; it's not an examination of Lot's heart and motives. To get the point of the passage you have to back up and see the whole picture, the whole context, especially in light of what happens before and after the story.

The rescue from the kings

In Genesis 14 we read the story about Lot being taken captive, and Abraham rescuing him from his captors. The story line is this: the king of Sodom and several other kings decided that they didn't want to pay tribute anymore to the kings who held the power over this area of the country – Kedorlaomer and his gang – so they rebelled. The four ruling kings decided to come out and teach the Sodomites a lesson. They met near the tar pits of the Dead Sea, where many of the Sodomite army got stuck and killed. The king of Sodom and his allies, of course, lost the battle, but many escaped with their lives.

Lot, unfortunately, was right in the way of the battle and the victorious kings picked him up and took him along, with all his people and possessions. Abraham, when told of what had happened to his nephew, set off with a band of his own men (318) in hot pursuit. They caught up with Kedorlaomer and his gang, drove them away, and returned Lot and his possessions safely home. There is the additional story of the king of Salem – Melchizedek – to whom Abraham gave a tithe of everything he picked up in the rescue. When the king of Sodom offered to reward Abraham for his act of heroism, Abraham refused to take anything from him, saying he didn't want to be accused of becoming rich at Sodom's expense.

There's the story. It's about a rescue, about people in trouble and a concerned relative successfully getting them out of trouble. It happened all the time back then. Yet people have found things to blame Lot for in this story too! Let's look at some of the details and see if we can learn what actually happened:

This happened all the time: Life was cruel and harsh in those days, a fact that we modern Americans don't often consider when reading these stories. Bands of thieves and roving armies made constant raids throughout the countryside; it was common for people who didn't get to protection in time to get completely wiped out. Remember there was no United Nations to punish those marauders! They simply raped, robbed and murdered at will and then went away, if they got away with it. Most people lived behind stout city walls, because it would be suicide to live outside the walls, given the situation. You really ought to pick up a history of the Ancient Near East and do a little

reading on what life was like in those days, if for no other reason than to appreciate your life of ease today.

Was Lot inside the city of Sodom when this battle happened? We don't know. But even those inside the city were taken captive by Kedorlaomer and his allies. Their fate, according to how things went in those days, was this: the women (married and unmarried) would become concubines for the victorious soldiers; the children may or may not be spared to live as slaves, and the men (those who weren't killed because of being potential threats to the captors) would be sold as slaves to surrounding kingdoms. This happened if the raiders were feeling particularly good that day! Otherwise nothing breathing would survive, they would all be put to death, left to rot on the ground, and only their possessions would be taken. It was a rough world.

So we can't blame Lot for living so close to danger. *Wherever* he lived, he would have been exposed to this kind of thing. The whole country was full of roving bands doing particularly horrible things to whoever didn't have exceptional defenses in place. So the writer of the story isn't showing us how Lot was getting his due, sinner as he was; we are missing the point if that's what we get out of it. Rather we learn about how Lot was rescued from something that many people had to go through in those days, and what most people didn't escape from alive.

An innocent bystander: There is absolutely no mention of any good reason why Lot would have been picked on by the invading armies, other than he happened to be in the way. So the point isn't that he should have stayed away from Sodom; what it's addressing is that we often get into trouble unjustly in this world – and what are we going to do when that happens?

A miracle: One important point to remember about culture in those days was that “kingdoms” were usually pretty small. When someone was called a “king,” that may have meant no more than he was the head honcho of a small town; his “kingdom” extended around the town, including the farmland that the townspeople worked, for only a few square miles. It was a rare kingdom that was large enough to impress us moderns.

In this instance four kings got together for a raid, and after terrorizing the neighborhood first they then turned their attention to the kingdom of Sodom and its allies. We aren't talking about millions of men here. A few thousands, probably, at the most. But they were enough to successfully accomplish all they had set out to do.

Abraham, however, only had 318 men on his side. He followed them north, caught them where Dan is located, and in the middle of the night attacked and sent the enemy running. So even though he had a smaller force, through persistence and surprise he won the encounter and rescued Lot.

I believe we have good reason for saying, however, that under normal circumstances such a rescue was highly unlikely. First of all, Kedorlaomer certainly had more than 300 men on his side! He couldn't have pulled off the entire campaign with a tiny force. Second, the text says that *the Lord* won this battle:

Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
 Creator of Heaven and earth.
 And blessed be God Most High,
 who delivered your enemies into your hand.

The credit for the victory went to God, not to Abraham. We give God credit for things because he can do what we can't do on our own; that's why we need him. This is what we call a "miracle", when God steps in and does something contrary to normal circumstances.

Scripture enjoys showing God off, so to speak. It tells us stories of the Lord's victories, how he wins the battle through his amazing strength and overpowering wisdom. It takes all the opportunities available to "glorify" the Lord so that we will learn who this God is that we follow. Don't miss the point! The Bible is again teaching us about God in this story of the rescue of Lot, not sub-plots that we think we can find if we look hard enough between the lines.

For instance, it shows us that God uses only a few to do his work, and they always succeed because he fights for them. (A principle that is well-developed in other stories throughout the Bible.) It teaches us that God takes care of his own; he cares for them, and through his servants he will rescue them. It teaches us the doctrine of rescue (or deliverance), one of the five main themes of the entire Bible (study this out!) which is what his people are constantly in need of. We could go on, but I'll let you look for God in this passage. You miss the point of Scripture if you don't see God in every story.

The responsibility of the clan leader: The reason that Abraham went after Lot was because of his responsibilities as leader of the clan; he was the oldest male member, and therefore the "boss" and spiritual head over the entire family. It didn't matter that they split up earlier; Abraham still had a responsibility to take care of his nephew when necessary.

Notice who did the rescue: A further dimension in this story is something that we mustn't forget or fail to appreciate. Abraham was the father of the faithful, the receiver of the Covenant, the spiritual head of his family. It was through him that the Lord would bless his people. Here is an instance of that promise at work. God promised Abraham that "All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3), and he is going to start in his own family. So it's a mistake to focus on Lot's troubles here; we all have troubles! "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) But who is so fortunate as to have an uncle Abraham, a favorite of God, to rescue them from that trouble? Not many. "But take heart! I have overcome the world." That, I believe, is the point of this story. All the other details support that point.

The rescue from Sodom

Now we move to another rescue. Before the actual deliverance takes place, however, we are allowed into God's war council – the war preparations before the battle. In Genesis 18 we read about three angels who visit Abraham: first to promise him a son (Genesis 18:1-15) and then to talk about the problem of Sodom. (Genesis 18:16-33)

There are two important elements in this story that we must look at. First, Abraham prays for the righteous of the city. It's not Sodom itself that he's concerned about, but the righteous who are living there.

Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:23-25)

There's no question that the Lord will do the right thing; he doesn't treat the righteous like the wicked, and he will rescue the righteous from disaster. The story that follows this discussion proves that point. The question is this, however: *are* there any righteous people living in Sodom? Will the Lord find at least ten righteous people in Sodom? Who are the righteous?

Remember that this is Abraham asking this question, the man who was counted righteous because of his faith. (Genesis 15:6) He understands what righteousness is all about. So he is asking the Lord for a head count, so to speak, a census of people who may be living in Sodom with a righteousness beyond what this world counts as "goodness" – a living faith in the true God, resting in his Word, following him in all his will. The quest is on, and the angels will go to Sodom to see if there are any people living there with this kind of righteousness.

Second, Abraham is doing his covenant thing. He really set the Lord up with this question! Who else but Lot would have this kind of righteousness? Perhaps he was hoping that Lot would have been able to influence other Sodomites to believe in God, and so by now there would be ten righteous people living there. Whatever may have happened, Abraham knew Lot would qualify, and he was concerned for his safety in case the Lord destroyed Sodom. In other words, he was doing his covenant duty – being father of the faithful, getting blessings from God for the benefit of his spiritual family. Isn't it true that the "prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"? (James 5:16) Especially *this* righteous man! This ought to remind us of Moses, who often stood in the gap for the people of Israel and got God's blessings for them.

Now let's look at the elements of the story recorded in chapter 19 and learn more about Lot and his behavior:

The search of the two angels: We have to keep in mind what these two angels are here for. They are looking for righteous people: if they find, according to the discussion with Abraham, at least ten righteous people in Sodom then they won't destroy the city. They aren't going to be impressed with low-level definitions of righteousness, either! This is God's special work, this business of judgment, and he is going to find those who are really righteous. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Angels also have another purpose. The name "angel" means "messenger", and in this case they have two messages to deliver from the Lord: one to Lot, to flee from the wrath to come, and one to Sodom, a message of death.

Lot sitting in the gateway: It's true that the elders of a city sat in the gate in those days, and there is where the current events were discussed and problems solved. Just by him being there, we get the idea that Lot was important enough to the people of the city to be wanted in on the discussions. It doesn't tell us anything about his intentions, however.

Don't we have Christians in our government? Do they necessarily agree with the wickedness that goes on there, even the wicked decisions that are made? Just by being

involved in government functions doesn't mean that they agree with everything that happens! We can't accuse Lot, either, of being so wrapped up in the affairs of Sodom that he couldn't discern their wickedness, that he actually approved of their behavior. Just the bare fact of his being in on the governing body doesn't tell us a thing about his thoughts.

We have to surmise his intentions from what we *know* about him, not from conclusions that we may jump to when we see him sitting there at the gate. If he was a *righteous ... righteous ... righteous* man, and if he was under the covenant of God (which we've seen proof of already), what can we safely assume about his involvement with the Sodomites? Only this: he was probably the only good influence on the city council! If he was truly distressed at the wickedness of the city, would you be impressed to find him trying to counter-act that wickedness? In fact, wouldn't you expect that from a righteous man? Although the story doesn't tell us what he was doing there, knowing his character would lead us to believe that he was doing all he could to influence events for the better. In fact, we *do* see him doing just that, later in the story – Genesis 19:7-8. He never was considered one of them (as we see in their remark in Genesis 19:9), so his being around them must have been a matter of his intentions to change *them* rather than them appreciating him.

Welcoming the angels: We too easily miss the significance of this part of the story. In those days it was an unwritten social rule that you should welcome strangers into your home. There were no hotels or motels, and travel was long, tedious, difficult and expensive. It was considered nothing short of rudeness to refuse a passing traveler food and rest; later the Law of Moses would make provision for taking care of passers-by. (Deuteronomy 10:18, Matthew 25:35) In other words, this was a test of character: how do people treat others in their need?

If nobody offered a stranger a place to stay for the night, they would have to stay in the town square all night, perhaps cold and hungry, and they would inevitably pass on a bad report to other cities and travelers about this inhospitable place they met with on their travels. At the very least that meant that the city's business would drop off as a result; at the most, as in this case with Sodom, it would mean their lives!

Notice who offered the strangers a meal and bed! Lot immediately responded to their needs; he was the only one to do so. According to the Law of God, here was a righteous man; his actions proved the condition of his heart.

The meal he prepared: The Hebrew word is “feast” – he really went all out to entertain his guests. When you do this for someone, you are showing them how special they are to you. Did he know that they were angels sent by God? Probably not, since they didn't reveal themselves to him until later in the story. But Lot is doing something that few people are willing to do. He is spending his wealth and time on men he doesn't even know. How many people do you know who would spend their time and money on even their relatives, let alone perfect strangers! Yet this is a mark of a righteous man, that he extends his help willingly to those in need. (Matthew 25:34-40)

Besides, Lot may have discerned these men's righteousness – he probably did! – and it was a breath of fresh air to entertain good men for a change. Being distressed at the Sodomites' constant wickedness more than likely made Lot all the more enthusiastic about spending the night in the company of men who understood the fear of the Lord; he no doubt looked forward to hours of holy and wholesome conversation with them.

Notice, however, that he did the very same thing that his uncle Abraham did just days before this: these very same angels showed up at Abraham's tent, and he too went all out to feed them and make them comfortable. Isn't it remarkable that the very law that proves that a man is righteous is done both by the father of the faithful and his nephew? Can we draw conclusions about how much like Abraham that Lot is?

There is one more fascinating tidbit about this meal. Notice what he served them: unleavened bread. This is not something that we would have expected to see, long before the story of Passover and unleavened bread; yet it's highly significant in the context of the entire Bible. It was very appropriate to serve these angels bread without yeast since it was the symbol of redeemed Israel and a life without sin (as Jesus explains in Matthew 16:12 and Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Somehow Lot was enabled to see the symbol of holiness, of not being saturated with sin like the Sodomites, of presenting to God an acceptable sacrifice of a holy and clean life. This is the kind of thing the angels were looking for.

All the men of the city: Here is how verse 4 reads in the Hebrew original: "The men of the city ... the men of Sodom ... both young and old ... all of the people ... to the last man." We get the idea that the writer wants us to know that *all* the men of the city came out and surrounded Lot's house! There is a reason for this, of course: the angels came to see if there were any righteous men in the city, and here they are presenting themselves for inspection! It will be an easy matter to look over the crowd and pick out the righteous ones; all they had to do was count heads and see if they could find at least ten.

Notice too how the count went. All those outside the house (the entire city) were demanding the right to commit wickedness. And all those inside the house (Lot) were appalled at such wickedness. The angels didn't have to spend much time figuring out the situation.

Lot and the crowd: In Hebrew it says that he called them "my brothers," which naturally distresses us because we hate to hear him call them this. But it may be nothing more than the proverb of "turning away wrath" with a gentle answer; he was appealing to them as fellow citizens, in a way that should remind them of his sitting with them at the gate and helping them to see God's ways and give up their wickedness. There's nothing wrong with being politic in a volatile situation.

What *is* interesting, however, is the fact that he closed the door behind him when he went out to address the crowd. This is just a little icing on the cake that showed Lot's heart. He was too embarrassed over the open immorality of the Sodomites to let his guests see or hear what was going on; he took the sordid job upon himself and tried to insulate his guests from the wickedness. He, of course, thought that they couldn't hear; but they, being angels, knew what he was going through on their behalf outside the door. It's a good thing they could hear through walls!

Offering his two daughters: Up until this part of the story Lot has done absolutely nothing that can even be construed into something wrong. Now, however, we run into a hitch. Why in the world did he offer his two daughters to the crowd, to "do what you like with them" (Genesis 19:8)?

Let's analyze the situation, keeping in mind Lot's performance up until this point. First, this was an extremely dangerous and touchy situation. The men of Sodom were about to do something, there was no mistaking that. Lot had seen enough of their

behavior in the past that he was alarmed at what was about to happen. At a time of crisis like this, anything could happen, people lose their heads, and it is extremely difficult to do the right thing – there isn't much time to think.

Second, the rules of social behavior dictated that Lot protect these strangers with his life. Being a righteous man, he would have spent the rest of his days in infamy if he would have let the Sodomites molest the guests in his house. (Genesis 19:8) We underestimate the strength of this unspoken principle in their society; we don't really have anything that corresponds to it in ours, being individualistic as we are and having ready recourse to police and courts and insurance claims. And perhaps we would have done differently, stepping aside and allowing the crowd to do what they wanted with people we don't really know and care little for, but Lot just couldn't do that to these holy men.

Third, he at least offered a better solution than what they were demanding! It would have been bad enough for them to have his daughters; it was unthinkable, however, if they would have committed homosexuality. These Sodomites were not only wicked, they were *unnaturally* wicked – as Paul describes in Romans 1. Such things shouldn't even be mentioned, let alone done! Sex is something between man and woman, not between man and man. This, I believe, is what Lot's point was here. Love for family took second place to love for God's Law. I'm afraid that we don't have many people of that spiritual caliber today even among dedicated Christians. Lot was willing to give up his most precious possessions for the sake of God's righteousness.

Given the circumstances, then, we can say this at least: it was a crisis, and it's difficult to be cool, calm and collected in such a situation. And the Sodomites were obviously going to do something. If Lot couldn't protect his family, he at least could make a statement about God's Law, which is a higher standard in life and must not be violated at all costs, even at the cost of his family.

When the angels saw that he was ready to give up his family for their sake, they immediately pulled him inside and revealed their plans to him. This incident makes me think that they felt they had finally found their righteous man.

Finally, wasn't Abraham called upon to put *his* son to death? And if God would not have stopped him, he would have plunged his knife into Isaac's throat and we moderns would have been horrified! The parallel is too significant to ignore here: many things that the elder does, the nephew also does, although in different forms. They must have had the *same faith*, in other words.

The testing of Lot: The first third of this passage describes how the angels tested Lot. Remember from Genesis 18:16-33 that the Lord promised, because Abraham pressed him for the promise, that he wouldn't destroy the city of Sodom if there were ten righteous people in it. So before the angels can do the work of punishment, they have to find the righteous people.

Lot immediately showed his colors when they arrived in town. When he insisted that they stay at his house, despite their protests to the contrary and in spite of the fact that it might bring trouble to him, he scored one point – a righteous man does such things for travelers and strangers. The meal was the second point scored: it was an amazing act of faith for Lot to serve these angels (still unknown to him) unleavened bread. It was an appropriate thing to do, in light of the fact that they were looking for *holy* men, and leaven is the Bible's symbol of wickedness.

He scored another point when he put himself between the wicked men of Sodom and the strangers. Not only was it a courageous thing to do, but custom demanded that a host do whatever necessary to protect his guests. Since the Sodomites wanted to commit sexual immorality with the angels, Lot showed his colors again in refusing them any opportunity for such wickedness.

It was then that the angels were satisfied that they had a righteous man on their hands. But notice how they determined all this: they watched Lot's *actions*. They could see that he did righteous things, and they could also see that his faith motivated him to do these righteous things. It was obvious that Lot believed in God in such a way that it moved him to do those things which most pleased God, even though he may not have been aware of the fact he was being watched. This is a good example of what the apostle talks about in James 2:14-26.

Lot's family problems: He certainly had these! As the story progresses we are amazed at how his whole family turned out so badly. Poor Lot struggled all along with family problems, as if he needed this extra burden when he had to deal with the Sodomites. There have been many who faulted Lot for how badly his family turned out – his sons-in-law refused to leave the city with him, his wife loved the city too much to leave it, his daughters committed incest with their father. It's easy to blame him for not instructing them in the ways of the Lord.

But it may not be all his fault. We don't have the license to assume that Lot didn't train them in the ways of the Lord; does it *say* that about him? Since Peter calls him a righteous man, can we fairly assume that in this area he was unrighteous? Because they turned out badly, is that reason to assume that he fell down on his job? Aren't there other alternatives?

It's entirely possible that he *did* try to instruct them. His sons-in-law would take their own counsel and not necessarily feel obligated to listen to him. His wife, as many people in history can testify to, decided for herself what she wanted in life, and she obviously didn't share her husband's view on things. It's unfortunate but true that many families are divided when it comes to the things of the Lord, through nobody's fault in particular. His daughters – well, we will look at their story in a minute; but we can safely assume that they learned their ways from their wicked neighbors. Children don't always turn out right, in spite of all efforts to the contrary.

It could very well be that Lot was the *only* righteous person in Sodom! This story isn't making a statement about Lot's style in conducting his family affairs; it's simply showing you who are the righteous and who are the wicked. You would miss its point if you pushed it further than that. How these people came to be wicked, we can only guess, but we *know* that Lot is not one of them. Just remember that you and I are in the same boat – we are surrounded by a wicked world, wicked neighbors, and perhaps (though we dread the thought) wicked family members. What has the Lord enabled us to do in our predicament?

Then why did he live in such a place where his family would be exposed to, and fall to the temptations of, the prevailing sins? We've already seen, however, that he probably didn't know how wicked this place was when he moved there. Second, the city did afford him a living, which is the same motivation for us staying where we are, although we also have to put up with things around us that aren't right. Third, he could very well have done his best, as we do, at shielding his family from his city's

wickedness; don't we see this inclination of his heart in how he tried to shield his guests from the Sodomites?

Finally, this is a sobering example of what the Lord was doing in the entire story: separating out the righteous from the wicked. Not only did he separate Lot from the Sodomites, but he separated out the wicked in his family as well. You see, the Lord doesn't play favorites; just because the head of the family is righteous doesn't mean that wicked family members will be protected from God's judgment.

Why did he hesitate? Actually the translation is misleading here: the original Hebrew (and the KJV) says that he "lingered", not "hesitated." "Hesitated" sounds as if he piddled around and took his time getting ready to go, as if he didn't want to go. But it's not that he didn't want to go with the angels or didn't believe their story. Of course he believed it – that's why he pleaded with his sons-in-law to leave.

But he was wondering what to do with his family; some of them weren't coming. And he didn't realize that the disaster was waiting on *him*! The angels were under strict orders from God to hold back the disaster until Lot was safely out of range. So they were understandably urgent with him and kept trying to hurry him up. Lot, on the other hand, couldn't have known yet about the Lord's pact with Abraham, and he simply didn't know that he was the only reason Sodom still existed. This is an entirely reasonable ignorance. And if the facts were known, we might ourselves be amazed at the way God withholds his fury at our own world simply because *we* are still in the way. He will not strike the wicked if there is a chance that his precious children would be hurt in the process, even though it needs to be done.

Separating out the righteous: Again, we have to get a hold of the point of this story. The angels came to Sodom, they found the righteous and counted heads, and determined that the city was not worth saving. So before God raised his hand in wrath to destroy them, he removed his people out of the way, so that they would not share in the punishment of the wicked. If you lose sight of this then you lose the point of the whole story.

I don't know how people can miss this. It's not as if Lot was righteous only judicially, being otherwise unrighteous in his acts. The angels were sent to find the *truly righteous* in Sodom and Lot was the only one they found. And they determined that by watching him *in action*. The facts are there. Peter saw the point too, and he doesn't marvel at the fact that God saved a man who didn't deserve it, but that God knows how to save *his righteous ones* from the punishment due to the wicked.

Lot's wife: Lot's wife is a tragic example of what often happens. If she would have continued in her husband's care, and taken advantage of her husband's faith – even though her heart led her back to Sodom – she would have been spared. But the Lord's judgment found her out and she ended up sharing the fate of the rest of the wicked. She was not a righteous one, she didn't deserve to be treated as one, and she was destroyed along with the rest. The Lord knows not only how to save the righteous from disaster, but also how to bring disaster on those trying to flee from it and use someone else's righteousness as a cover.

Where to go next? There was some question as to where Lot should go next. The angels told him to flee to the hills because they had every intention of sweeping away every habitable place in the entire plain. "Don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" (Genesis 19:17) But Lot didn't want to go

to the mountains, probably because he was more used to living in an urban area, and he figured mountain life would be the end of him. (Genesis 19:19)

So he asked that the Lord let him stop at a town near there instead – a small one, which he figured wouldn't be any problem to the Lord. Notice that the Lord made a change of plans especially for Lot: "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of." (Genesis 19:21) It seems that, if Lot hadn't gone there, it would have been destroyed too! People should have realized what an important and valuable man Lot was to have around.

Because the Lord granted his request, we must assume that it was fine to ask for it. Nobody can fault Lot for something that he asks of God, if God gives it to him. He doesn't give us things to hurt us but to help us. Again, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16) You can't argue with results. And the point here isn't that Lot argued with God; rather that destruction can't happen where the righteous live. The details and wording in the story point to this lesson.

Abraham saw the destruction: The next morning Abraham went out and looked down at where Sodom and Gomorrah used to be, and saw the belching smoke of destruction instead. He no doubt remembered the promise that the Lord had given him, and he must have assumed the obvious: there evidently weren't even ten righteous people in Sodom. He knew his God.

And the Lord knew that Abraham was watching. (Genesis 19:29) He had already tested Abraham's faith and would test it even more with other issues. He delivered righteous Lot from the disaster, just as he promised he would. But the lesson here was that God doesn't play around: rebellious sinners would do well to take the threats of God seriously, because one day he will pour out his wrath on them, and nobody will be able to help them.

But the point about the righteous still stuck in Abraham's mind. If he knew his God as well as we might expect, he knew that his nephew was safe somewhere – the righteous *are* delivered from the punishment poured out on the wicked. We aren't told if they met up again; but it's likely that Abraham's faith in God was confirmed at some future date by hearing about Lot's miraculous escape from Sodom.

The Bible's theme of deliverance: Please don't miss the significance of this passage of Scripture. Its point is this: **the Lord knows how to deliver his people from the wrath that comes down on the wicked.** Peter told us what to see in this story, and if we read it with that in mind (not for other issues, which complicate the point and tend to steer us off into unprofitable speculation and even wrong interpretations) then we will learn what God wants us to learn from it.

The doctrine of deliverance, or the Lord rescuing his people, is one of the major doctrines of the entire Bible. For instance, here are some of the better known rescues recorded in the Old and New Testaments:

- *the Israelites rescued from Egypt*
- *the twelve tribes rescued from their pagan neighbors through judges*
- *David rescued from King Saul*
- *Hezekiah and the Jews rescued from Sennacherib*

- *the woman caught in adultery rescued by Jesus from the Pharisees*
- *Peter rescued from prison by the angel*
- *Paul rescued from the Jews who were trying to kill him*
- *and, of course, all Christians rescued from sin and death by the blood of Christ*

If we could state the doctrine of deliverance more precisely we might say it like this: The Lord rescues, and he rescues a helpless people, from some situation which would otherwise be the end of them. Lot fits this category nicely; he therefore should take his place alongside the more famous rescues of God's people recorded in the Bible – and Peter makes sure that he does in *his* book.

The daughters' incest

The last part of Lot's story is told in Genesis 19:30-38. The gist of it is this: after fleeing from Sodom's destruction, Lot and his two daughters end up living in the mountains in a cave. The girls lost their chance to marry, so they decided that they mustn't let their father's line die with them. They took turns laying with their father (after getting him to drink wine) and both became pregnant. The two boys were named Moab and Ammon, and they became the fathers of those nations that the Bible talks about later.

This really unfortunate turn of events is probably the one thing that has convinced people today that Lot's life ended in miserable failure. But I believe that we can't draw the curtain on Lot's life until the Lord does – and as we shall see, he wasn't done with Lot yet!

Leaving Zoar: We can make a guess as to why Lot left Zoar. Remember that the Lord granted Lot's request to go to Zoar instead of going to the mountains. He said then that "I will not overthrow the town you speak of." (Genesis 19:21) It seems that if Lot would not have gone there, the town of Zoar was doomed with Sodom and would also have been destroyed. While Lot was in Sodom, the Lord "cannot do anything" (Genesis 19:22); while Lot is in Zoar, that town was safe too.

But since the Lord seemed to *change* his mind about destroying Zoar for Lot's sake, we can suppose that the people who lived there actually deserved to be destroyed as much as the Sodomites. Probably Lot found this out after being there a short time; and after what he just saw in Sodom he probably felt that Zoar was next on the list! So he decided that perhaps the mountains weren't such a bad idea after all.

Living in a cave: It seems strange to us that Lot and his daughters would live in a cave; it sounds as if they were destitute, had nothing left in life, and were only waiting for the end. But think about the situation: destitute people don't have plenty of food, nor do they have luxuries such as wine sitting around. Although he probably lost his entire business back in Sodom, he obviously found something to live on after the disaster. After all, they did continue to live *after* this (we're not sure where) and the daughters evidently had what they needed to raise their sons. In other words, the story doesn't tell us everything about what happened to Lot. It's only telling us the parts that pertain to the point it's making. We can't simply assume that he died penniless and forlorn.

The importance of descendants: Since we live in an age when people are deliberately killing their offspring, it's hard to describe how important the children were to people in Bible times. Women were desperate to have children; it justified their existence in a world where possession and power and inheritance meant everything. Men wanted sons to carry on their name and honor, to work in the fields, and to keep the inheritance in the family.

The fact was, if nothing was done then Lot's name (or family, in other words) would die out immediately. It would be as if Lot had never lived, and that was unacceptable. Actually the girls were right: there probably *weren't* any men around who were decent enough to marry! If the Sodomites and Canaanites were representative of what kind of characters lived around there, there were no options for a husband there. Going back to Abraham's camp wouldn't help either, because Lot was a nephew of Abraham and the uncle had no more sons for Lot's daughters. He had servants, but they wouldn't have been socially acceptable for Lot's daughters (we can't forget about their culture).

So it *was* true that unless something was done, Lot's line would die out forever.

Drinking wine: We mentioned before that the text doesn't say that Lot got drunk. I don't believe that this is splitting hairs, either. Other Scriptures don't hesitate to tell us if someone got drunk; if Lot did the same, I believe that it would have used the word and not spared him either. But evidently it's being very careful about how it says things, so that Peter can continue to make his claim about Lot's character, and the passage won't contain anything that obviously contradicts him.

It only says that the daughters "got him to drink wine." That can mean a whole range of things, from a little to a lot. Unfortunately many modern Christians think that drinking *any* amount of wine is getting drunk! That's simply not true; the Bible doesn't teach any such thing. The Bible does warn, however, against getting *drunk*. (For example: it may interest you to know that during Passover meal the custom was for everyone to have at least three good sized cups of wine; they were consumed at various parts of the meal, according to ceremony, and nobody got drunk from it.) At any rate, it's a mistake to focus on the wine when the passage is trying to tell us something else.

Whatever you may think about drinking wine, someone would have to prove that Lot was drunk to convict him of sin, and this passage has no proof in it. One might say, "Doesn't the fact that he didn't know what his daughters were doing prove he was drunk?" Not so: even a little alcohol will make one sleep pretty deeply the first couple of hours. But, if you think about it, the daughters probably wouldn't have achieved their goal if Lot was genuinely drunk!

Lot would never have done it: One of the most important points of this passage seems to have escaped people studying this story. Unless his daughters tricked him, Lot would *never* have done such a thing. Awake and conscious, the thought would have been repulsive to him, since he was a *righteous ... righteous ... righteous* man.

Why do we consistently focus on Lot the sinner when it was everyone else who was sinning? Is it that Peter's enigmatic statement about his righteousness angers us and we're trying to prove otherwise? Was this ugly incident Lot's fault? He had no conscious part in it! It was foisted upon him by his daughters, completely against his wishes and without his knowledge. Was he at fault for their wickedness in any way? Couldn't he have taught them better than that? But that's the point: he probably did! If he wouldn't have done such a thing consciously, then he surely would have taught

his girls better morals. Just because children turn out badly doesn't mean the parents failed. Many times that does happen; but not always. For all we know, he did his best teaching his family the fear of God. We simply have no text saying either one way or the other except the constant testimony from Peter about Lot's righteous character. Why, then, are we ready to condemn Lot for things we have no proof for?

Incest: There's no question that what the girls did was detestable in God's sight. There were Laws given to Israel against this very kind of thing. It was a bad solution to a serious problem.

You will also notice a peculiar thing about a few other Laws that Moses gave Israel. Some of them condemn the Patriarchs themselves! For example, one law (Leviticus 18:18) forbids a man to sleep with his wife's sister while still married to his wife; both, it says, must be put to death for such an abomination. The trouble is, Jacob himself did this while married to Leah – he also married her sister Rachel and had children by her too. Do we therefore shun him? Another example in Leviticus 18:9 – it says not to sleep with one's sister, even a half sister. The problem is, Abraham himself did this: he married his half-sister Sarah. Neither of these men were condemned by posterity for what they did. Not that we're making a point to ignore the Law, but in God's providence he sometimes does things in our lives that, in themselves immoral, turn out to further *his* purposes. So although what Lot's daughters did was wrong, the Lord certainly overruled their intentions and brought about a remarkable turn of events that he had planned for a long time.

Judgment: One interesting thing about this story is that the Lord doesn't seem to be done with judging people yet. "Judgment" means to discern the truth of a matter, like a judge in a courtroom. The Lord judged Sodom, through the fact-finding mission of the angels, to be a wicked city and deserving of destruction. He uncovered the heart of Lot's wife and she fell to the same destruction as the city she loved. Now he is uncovering the hearts of Lot's daughters: children of a righteous man, they nevertheless show their true colors by doing what is an abomination to the Lord. When we would think that all is well, the Lord knows better and promises to expose our hearts to the light so that all can see.

And what is more remarkable, who keeps coming out clean in spite of our most rigorous examination, in spite of the wickedness all around him, in spite of the attempts to involve him in everyone else's wickedness and punishment? This is clearly the hand of the Judge of all men, when a man survives the most determined attempts of generations of critics to ruin his character and yet not a single "fact" will stand up in court to condemn him. Instead of criticizing and kicking at Lot, we should be hoping for such a watertight testimony for ourselves – in spite of what others see in our lives to the contrary!

Somewhat of a miracle: It has been noticed that it would be quite remarkable for even one of the girls to get pregnant from this single incident, since a woman has to be at a certain point in her reproductive cycle in order to conceive. For *both* of them to get pregnant is quite amazing! One wonders how much of a hand in this that God himself had, especially in light of what we will see in the next point.

The remarkable outcome: This is one of those situations where a man or woman does something for one purpose and the Lord overrules for another purpose. The daughters wanted to perpetuate their father's line (a worthy enough goal) and turned to incest to do it (an unworthy means of reaching that end). The Lord also wanted to perpetuate Lot's line, but what an outcome!

Notice one of the sons – Moab. He was the father of the Moabites, who will often have dealings with Israel through the rest of the Old Testament. In fact, both nations from these two boys were pretty much trouble for the people of God as time went on. But one exception stands out like a brilliant ray of light from Heaven: Lot was the father of Moab, and Moab was the forefather of Ruth, who was the wife of Boaz, who was the great grandfather of King David! What is even more amazing is that David is the direct ancestor of Christ – which makes Lot *the forefather of Jesus Christ!*

I'm sure that neither the daughters nor Lot realized the incredible insight behind those fateful words – “... and preserve our family line through our father.” (Genesis 19:32) This situation wasn't the only time that Christ's less illustrious ancestors fell “accidentally” into the Family which brought forth the Savior. For example, there is the ugly situation between Judah and Tamar which resulted in the birth of Perez, another of Christ's ancestors. (Genesis 38) (By the way, notice how the Bible genealogies all capitalize on Christ being “of the tribe of Judah” – even in light of how it happened! This points to the fact that the Lord's eternal purposes are more important than the local circumstances. God is big enough to handle the problems involved.) But the Lord with his wisdom works wonders through unsearchable providence; what starts out as a blemish in a righteous man's life helps to bring about the greatest event in the history of mankind. Christ certainly realized his humble beginnings; but Lot would have been humbled at the thought that his own blood would run through his family's tree to eventually rise in the greatest life ever given for the sins of man.

The Modern Believer

Probably the most important reason for being careful when interpreting the story of Lot is that we must draw the correct conclusions from the story. If we assume the wrong things about Lot's character, then we are going to come up with applications of his story that the Bible doesn't want us to come up with! But if we are careful to look at it as Peter looks at it, then we will find applications in it that, surprisingly, we can use in our own lives. In fact, we have this story in order to teach us something about God that *we* need desperately in *our* age.

Wrong interpretations

First, let's look at what people usually find in this story. If you assume that Lot was a scoundrel (at worst) or a backslidden believer (at best) then you are going to come up with the following applications:

Stay close to God's people. Don't do like Lot did and count fellowship with the saints something you don't need. He should have stayed close to Abraham, not gone off to live among the pagans with the excuse that he needed to improve his business. In the same way, we need to put the Church first and matters of this world second.

Choose Heaven's riches instead of this world's wealth. Don't lust like Lot over the wealth and riches of this world. He saw how favorable a place the Jordan plain was to live, and with this glitter in his eyes he went off into trouble. Choose the treasures of Heaven instead and shun this world's goods.

Don't be friends with this world. Certainly Lot did wrong by spending his time with the Sodomites. What fellowship has light with darkness? Even if we have to work among them, don't make friendships with the wicked that you are going to regret later.

Take care to train your family in the ways of the Lord. Take a lesson from Lot's failure as a father and husband and give your family the spiritual teaching and leadership they need.

Get out of Sodom. Lot should have gotten out of Sodom long before he did. Separate yourself from the world, don't live among the wicked or take part in their sinful activities. You have to get away from them before they cause you to fall asleep spiritually, and you end up caught in the same punishment they receive.

Don't argue with the Lord when he tells you something. Look what happened to Lot when he argued against God's wisdom. If God tells you to go to a certain place, or do a certain thing, trust him to know what he is doing and obey him without question.

A life of sin will end in misery. Old Lot paid the price for a life of rebellion and spiritual backsliding. Your sins will eventually trip you up, and you will have to pay a penalty for disobeying God's Word – even if you do find forgiveness in his grace.

All these points are valid in general, as far as they go. The problem, however, is this: does *the story of Lot* teach us these things? We can certainly find proofs from other Scriptures that these are important principles of Christian living, and we do well to teach them. But I believe that we have seen that Lot *wasn't* like this. We do him an injustice to accuse him of these wrongs. We are reading these sins into the story, assuming that they are there (in an effort to explain the strange events) when they really aren't.

These are not valid applications to make from the story of Lot. If you need to prove these general points, it's much easier to find someone else in the Bible as an object lesson, in light of what the passage in Peter tells us about Lot's character. If you can't see anything good in Lot then you must wait on the Lord to show you, to give you the faith you need, until he teaches you the truth about it and you finally agree with Peter's interpretation.

Besides, when we interpret the story of Lot in this way and draw these conclusions from it, we actually miss out on the real point of the story. By allowing ourselves to judge Lot and accuse him of improper behavior, we close our eyes to the truth: that this is *our* story, the application is about us in our world. We are more like Lot than we care to think, and our options are about the same as his. The question is whether we will turn out as well as he did.

An interpretation more to the point ...

Remember that the point of Peter's lesson on Lot was that the Lord knows how to rescue the righteous from the day of destruction. Now let's look at our own situation, and see if these two things are true: 1) that we live in the same predicament that Lot lived in, and 2) that we need the same salvation that Lot received from the Lord.

Making a living: Although we like to think that we are so spiritual that we are doing all that we can to get ready for Heaven, in fact we spend *most* of our time making a nest for our (short) stay in this world. We can hardly blame Lot for looking after his business when we ourselves plan for college training, set our hopes on specific careers, move to areas where there are jobs available, buy houses in areas that we like the best, involve our children in wholesome entertainment and find friends and activities for them, and many other things that make living in this world more enjoyable and comfortable.

Not that any of this is wrong; the Lord put us where we are, created us with physical needs, and made us social creatures that need interaction with others. Life is necessarily filled with concerns of this world. But if that is OK for us, why not for Lot? Was he supposed to choose a tougher place to live, a place with more hardship involved? If so, why don't we?

Some people in the past thought that if they beat their bodies and go without food and water, they would draw closer to Heaven and please God more. But the Lord enjoys blessing his people with the good things of life; there's nothing sinful about being a creature and living in this world as comfortably as possible. The sin comes in when people forget God in the midst of their good life:

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will

forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deuteronomy 8:14)

Evidently Lot remembered the Lord and did what pleased the Lord, even while living in Sodom, taking care of his business affairs, and taking advantage of city benefits. The Lord saved him, didn't he? He promised Abraham that he would save the *righteous*; and he rescued Lot; so we have to assume that Lot didn't forget the Lord.

We should hope to do as well – in our lives which are so full of affairs of this world and matters of comfort that too often crowd out spiritual matters.

Learning about the wicked: I believe that you have found this to be true, that your neighbors turn out to be worse than you thought when you first met them. People almost never come up to you and tell you what scoundrels they really are! They try to make you think well of them from the start; if you go by first impressions, almost *everyone* you meet is a good person – at least by *their* standards! Most people aren't purposely trying to spread around a bad reputation of themselves.

But after a while you find yourself in a difficult situation. Their definition of what is good ends up to be quite different from yours, and you gradually find yourself at odds with them over many issues. Most of the time you don't even have the chance to talk about things with them; they simply do their wickedness and all you can do is watch in distress. They have a feeling that you don't approve, so they won't discuss it with you; but that doesn't stop them from doing it.

Isn't this usually how things go? Was it your fault that your neighbors turned out so badly? Does your presence among them change their behavior? And yet for some reason we blame Lot for not knowing the hearts of the Sodomites (something only God can know) before he moved there. Even if he had heard a rumor about their activities (which I doubt he heard much, given the circumstances of his moving around with Abraham) where would he go and not find sinners in abundance? The Canaanites, whom Abraham lived among, were just as bad!

No, I believe that Lot innocently thought that he could live there as well as anywhere else, and he just took things as they came. I believe that the Sodomites were just as deceitful as all other wicked people are, showing a good face and defending their actions with claims of "righteousness". I believe that over time Lot found out that their claims didn't match with their actions, and that proved to be very distressing to him.

Our challenge is to be just as distressed with the people we have settled next to. Have our friendships compromised our firm stand on God's Word? Over time, as our friends and neighbors show their true colors, are we distressed at their filthy lives and reluctant to relate to them at all? Will our attitude toward them change – or will we want to keep the peace and give them the benefit of the doubt? If so, they are changing us to their standards (as usually happens) instead of we changing them to our standards.

Our witness among the wicked: We saw that Lot had a place among the elders at the gate of the city. We didn't read how he got that place; but we mustn't slander his righteous character by assuming that he got it by going along with their wickedness. We must be ready to assume that he got it by being such a witness among them, and a help to them in their darkness, that they (reluctantly) needed him. The ways of God

are life, even though the wicked hate to admit it; and they will let us help them as long as they think it serves their purposes.

The only thing that will keep our society from falling apart is our righteous lives among them. “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.” (Philippians 2:14-16) We have to keep telling people that there is a God, that they will be held accountable for their actions, that the wages of sin is death. We have to show them, by our own way of living, how God wants all men to be. Lot, a righteous man who was distressed by their wickedness, surely stuck out like a sore thumb among his sinful neighbors; he was no doubt the subject of ridicule and scorn as he kept himself blameless and pure among them.

That in itself is a major spiritual victory, and one that we continually fail in ourselves. If the truth were told, modern Christians are difficult to spot in our society; they fit right in with the modern way of living; they don't live by faith; they can get upset with national politics but they don't do anything to stir up the consciences of their neighbors; they are just as busy making this life more comfortable as anybody else is; although they go to church and prayer meetings, their religion doesn't change the way they live to the point that they are a constant “stench” in the nostrils of the wicked (who, incidentally, live and work right beside us every day – they don't look *like* monsters!)

Leave or stay? I find this the most incredible application that people make of Lot's story. If Lot should have left Sodom on his own, as his critics say, long before the Lord brought destruction down on the city, then the application for us also is *to leave the country we are in!* Some people do this; they wander from country to country trying to find a place where they can live to themselves and not get involved with the local affairs. But most of us don't intend to leave! We have no intention of following our advice to Lot.

Instead of leaving, however, we feel that it is sufficient to stay out of the affairs of the wicked. We live among them without living like them. But if this is sufficient for us, why not for Lot? If we can live in a wicked society and mourn over its wickedness, keeping ourselves as clean as possible from the filth surrounding us, then why can't we give Lot the benefit of the doubt that he could and did the same thing? In fact, this is exactly what Peter said he did! “Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) ...” (2 Peter 2:7-8) What we hope to do, he did. We can only hope that, after living among such wickedness as our country is filled with and bombards us with daily through the media, we will still be called “righteous” as Lot was.

Besides, none of us like the thought of going off into the wilderness and living without the comforts of civilization. Pioneers have to do without electricity, cars, grocery stores, fuel oil, and all the other “necessities” of life. Very few of us could live in such conditions; we weren't raised without them and we probably wouldn't survive long without them. Yet we blame Lot for choosing a populated area, for being too soft to wander with Abraham in the wilderness!

The point, I hope you see, is that the Lord knows how to keep the righteous safe in his hands even in the middle of a difficult situation. The Lord Jesus' solution was not for everyone to leave where they live and go out somewhere in the wilderness. “My

prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15) God protected Lot successfully from the wickedness of Sodom; he will also protect us in our modern day Sodom. That’s the point of this story.

The Lord’s destruction: God destroyed Sodom because of its wickedness, and we all agree with his judgment. Such a place shouldn’t be allowed to exist. But (because we are often too comfortable in using double standards) we don’t want God to destroy the Sodom that *we* are in! We can’t imagine why he can’t work with the situation and redeem our land. Hasn’t he done that in the past with other wicked societies?

He has, but he doesn’t owe anybody anything. He doesn’t share our patriotism and he isn’t obligated to keep our country on the map. He has completely destroyed other countries in past ages – not quite like Sodom was destroyed, but they are still gone nevertheless. And he could do the very same thing to us.

Now what will happen to us if he does? We don’t like to think about such things, mainly because we will lose everything in the process: we could lose our money, our jobs, our homes, our families, our entertainment and hobbies, our rights, everything that we think we need to get along in life. In fact, the end could come slowly for us – we could lose these things over a long painful period of time and suffer a great deal.

People have pointed at Lot losing his entire business in the holocaust of Sodom and said, “Serves him right! He should have known better than to settle down in Sodom. Now he lost everything because he didn’t obey God.” But is that fair? Will we appreciate his position more if *we* lose everything because we live in this country that is so ripe for destruction? If times get harder, and it gets more difficult to feed our families, and work becomes scarce, are we going to want to hear someone blaming us for living here? Or are we going to want to hear a message of hope, that God knows how to save the righteous? Though we lose everything in this world, we know that our treasures are in Heaven; and because of that inheritance God saves us from the wrath that the rest of the hopeless world undergoes.

So the point is this: do we have an account in Heaven that shows that we are righteous in God’s eyes? Will we have hope when our neighbors shoot themselves in despair? Will we weather the storm, knowing our God will preserve our lives at least, while our society struggles with sin and death? That was Lot’s position, and his faith proved that he was safe spiritually though he did lose everything else. Will our faith enable us to walk away from our Sodom, our homes and businesses and pleasures, knowing that we have a better inheritance? That’s going to be harder to do than you think! Jesus knew what is in our hearts; he warned us not to be like Lot’s wife (he did not, you will notice, use Lot himself as the bad example!) who couldn’t leave it all behind. (Luke 17:32)

The problems with family: It’s this part of Lot’s story that makes me wonder the most if his critics are really awake. How many of us are in the same predicament! How many of our families share our spiritual concern with what is going on in our land? Who among us have our entire families dedicated to God’s service? Probably very few, yet we blame Lot for not having brought his entire family around to God’s ways.

We know better than this. We have probably not even tried our hardest to teach our families the fear of God, nor taken every opportunity to speak to them about eternal matters. We haven’t been faithful to witness to them about our God, nor have we stood solidly on God’s truth when family problems come up. Yet we blame Lot

for his family problems. I don't think there is a single one of us who hasn't felt the pain of not being able to get through to our families, and wondering all the time whether it was something we did wrong – or didn't do right! – that makes it so difficult for our family to see what we see.

Family is probably the most difficult group to witness to, and we all know that. Our families know us all too well; Jesus spoke the truth when he said “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” (Matthew 13:57) They know that we are sinners, and our witness to them sounds more like hypocrisy than anything else. They don't see or understand that God changes people, that he re-makes them to be in the image of Christ. All they see is the same old you trying to tell them to be better people. Of course this offends them.

If our families believe the message of the Gospel it will be because of the same miracle of grace that made us believe. Imagine this: if the Lord told you that he was going to destroy your home town, and you went to your family to warn them, do you think you would get any farther than Lot did? It's doubtful! Yet the Lord *has* told us about the wrath to come on Judgment Day, and commissioned us to go out and warn sinners of its coming. We have more reason to fear this second day of wrath than ever the Sodomites did their day! But very few will listen to our message, for all that. We few who believe will barely escape with our own lives.

So perhaps Lot's family problems are more characteristic of our own family problems than we would like to admit. And perhaps we have as much hope of changing our situation as Lot did, unfortunately, because it doesn't take a love for one's family to see the truth about God, but a miracle of grace. Jesus did warn us that, far from uniting families, the Gospel is going to divide them:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.” Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:34-37)

A double standard?

After thinking about the way people attack Lot, and then noticing how similar his situation is to ours, it seems to me that we've been guilty of holding to a double standard. We examine his heart and motives minutely, with a magnifying glass, assuming that he's a sinful character and attributing his troubles to his rebellion against God. We are so confident that we know what he should have done.

On the other hand, we resent anybody pointing out that *we* have the very same situation in our own lives. If anyone suggests that we ought to follow our own advice, we think that's ridiculous, our situation is much different, we claim. Yet the parallels are astonishing! We surely live in a modern-day Sodom, surrounded by wicked people who every day openly defy the Lord of Heaven, and our Christian witness is getting more difficult to support. We need the *same kind* of deliverance that Lot experienced. And we are hoping that, when all this is over and the Lord judges our hearts, we will also be pronounced *righteous ... righteous ... righteous* in spite of the tremendous difficulties of living in a wicked society like ours.

We wouldn't like anybody to criticize us for simply being part of this society, which some Christians from other lands often do when they come over here and watch us rich American Christians "suffer" for the cause of Christ – that is, "struggle" with 5 digit incomes, nice homes and two cars. We have bought into this system more than we are willing to admit. If we are too free in criticizing Lot for living in Sodom, then we need to put the spotlight upon ourselves for the same fault. If, on the other hand, the Lord honored Lot by preserving him in a tough environment and then delivering him from disaster – if *that* is the real point of this story – then we had better pray that the Lord is disposed to treat us with the same favor, or we will find ourselves sharing the Sodomites' fate rather than Lot's.

So in order to be fair to Lot – and to ourselves – we have to either apply to ourselves the severe standards we have burdened Lot with, or we have to give him the benefit of the doubt that he was in a predicament much as we find ourselves in. Considering what Peter has to say about the story of Lot, we would be better off taking the second approach, especially in light of the fact that we may be needing just as miraculous a rescue to get out of the way of God's wrath upon this evil generation of ours.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study wasn't to paint a picture of Lot as a perfect man, as if he were on the level of Christ! We are all sinners, and the best we can ever say is that the Lord is gracious to us and saves us from our sin. We don't want to overreact to the typical view of Lot and make him out to be better than we are.

But that's exactly the point: we want to restore his character to what Peter claims it is. He was righteous because of his faith in God; and God proved his own love and faithfulness by separating Lot out from the wicked and delivering Lot from the wrath poured out on the Sodomites. He was saved by the same process, according to the same Biblical principles, that we all are.

The story of Lot is *our* story. This is the same situation that we find ourselves in. What we need to do, when reading the story, is not to find fault with Lot, but to eagerly find out what God will do for any of his people who are in the same predicament. Out of all the characters in the Bible, Lot is one of the best models for the twentieth century man, who lives in a place much bigger than Sodom, perhaps filled with much more wickedness, and finds it increasingly difficult to live a consistent Christian testimony. We need the same God, the same mercy, the same answers, the same deliverance before we get caught up in the coming disaster. Peter got a lot of encouragement from reading the story of Lot, and we show that we understand the point of God's Word when we find hope in it too.