

Lot

The Qur'an contains numerous references to Lot (or Lut in Arabic), as he is considered to be one of the prophets. The Bible never uses the word "prophet" in speaking of him, but it does present him as a righteous man, living among an extremely evil people—sexually perverse and in rebellion against God. In fact, Lot is especially remembered for the dramatic way in which God saved him when divine punishment came on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In spite of Lot's righteousness and the salvation that God granted him, there is a tragic side to his story.

LOT BECOMES A RESIDENT OF SODOM

Let us begin with an explanation of the way in which Lot came to live in Sodom. Previously we spoke of Abraham, whom God called, telling him to leave Mesopotamia to go to the land of Canaan. According to Genesis 12, Abraham took with him not only his wife Sarah but also his nephew Lot, the son of his brother Haran who had died. After some time in Canaan, a problem arose for Abraham. According to Genesis 13:5-13:

"Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents. But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, 'Please, let's not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives. Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left.' Lot looked out and saw that the entire Jordan Valley as far as Zoar was well watered everywhere like the Lord's garden and the land of Egypt. This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose the entire Jordan Valley for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other. Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived in the cities of the valley and set up his tent near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning greatly against the Lord."

This episode highlights the generosity and nobility of soul of the patriarch Abraham who allowed his nephew to choose first the territory that he wanted to take for his herds. As for Lot, one wouldn't say that he sinned in the choice that he made. It seemed logical to choose an area that could best support his herds. All the same he showed a kind of selfishness. In addition, he did not take into account the spiritual danger of an environment where, as the text says, "the men... were evil, sinning greatly against the Lord." In deciding to live near Sodom, Lot planted a seed that would later produce very bitter fruit.

In the following chapters, it is written that Lot lived in Sodom. He was no longer near Sodom nor encamped next to the city. He was now one of the inhabitants of the city. So when a foreign army attacked the city and took property and many prisoners, Lot and his family were found among the captives. When Abraham learned this news, he gathered 300 of his servants plus those of three chiefs with whom he was allied. They pursued the enemy army which was retreated to its own country, attacked them and recovered the booty as well as Lot, the women and other prisoners.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

In chapter 19, we find that Lot is still living in a house in the city of Sodom, when God sent angels to verify the wickedness of its citizens and to bring punishment.

"Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, 'Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.' And they said, 'No, but we will spend the night in the open square.' But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.'"

So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, 'Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.' And they said, 'Stand back!' Then they said, 'This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.' So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door." (Genesis 19:1-11)

(Before moving farther, let's point out that this story is one of many biblical passages that show God's attitude toward homosexual practices—He firmly condemns them. Many western societies and so-called Christians support homosexuality and certain churches go so far as naming leaders who openly practice this abominable sin. Don't draw the conclusion that this is the position of true Christianity, or that the Bible approves this immorality. These are people who completely turn away from the true teaching of the Word of God.)

To return to the story of Lot, the angels afterward told Lot to take his family outside of the city because God had sent them to destroy it. Lot went to warn the husbands of his daughters but they didn't believe what he told them. As Lot was hesitating "the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, 'Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed'" (Genesis 19:16,17). When they had left, "then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:24-26).

Why did Lot's wife look back at the city which had fallen under such severe judgment from God? Perhaps she was thinking of the loss of her house, their business, friends and lifestyle that would be no more. But this look back cost her her life. How dangerous it is to allow our hearts to be attached to this sinful world! When God takes pity on us and offers us eternal life, we should accept it with gratitude and never look back, sighing for the temporary enjoyments and pleasures offered by this world. These things would risk leading us back into condemnation.

THE ORIGIN OF THE MOABITES AND AMMONITES

The rest of the story of Lot is also sad. Having fled into the mountains, Lot and the two daughters who remained to him took refuge in a cave. The Bible says:

"Now the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, 'Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.' Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day." (Genesis 19:31-38)

Is it necessary to say that the years in Sodom had taught Lot's daughters this gross immorality? They probably would not have committed incest in other circumstances, but it is obvious that they had not taken to heart the lesson that they had witnessed about God's anger against immorality. They considered that the end would justify the means... that the desire to give an heir to their father justified the sin of incest. Unfortunately, the end does not justify sinful means.

The part of the story of Lot that we have just seen is not mentioned in the Qur'an, and some Muslims find it to be a scandalous lie. Here is the reaction of one of them:

"Islam violently condemns the sordid portrait of the prophet Lot made by the Bible. All of this story was invented by Jewish theologians with the intent of eliminating any noble descent outside their own, that is to say the descendants of Jacob. This grants them a privileged position which accords to them alone a promised land."

But this criticism of the Bible is not right. (1) First, we can see that the Bible does not in any way hide the unworthy actions of the notable ancestors of the Jews: Jacob used deception toward his father to steal the blessing that would have been granted to his brother. The fathers of the ten Israelite tribes, out of mere jealousy, sold their own brother into slavery. Levi, the father of the Jewish priesthood, massacred the men of an entire city for a crime committed by one young man. Judah, the ancestor of all the Jewish kings, fathered twins by his daughter-in-law. Among the ancestors of Jesus was one of those twins, a pagan prostitute named Rahab, the woman Bathsheba with whom David committed adultery and several kings the Bible accuses of idolatry. It was not out of racism or nationalism that the authors of the Bible told the truth about the origins of the Moabites and Ammonites. Otherwise they would have hidden all these nasty details of their own history.

(2) Next, we can observe that the Bible writers are not seeking a position that would give to them alone the right to a promised land. On the contrary, when the Israelites left Egypt and God led them toward the country that He had promised to their ancestors, the Lord clearly recognized the rights of the Moabites and Ammonites to their own territories. According to Deuteronomy 2:9, the Lord said, "Show no hostility toward Moab, and do not provoke them to battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, since I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot." Similarly in verse 19, "When you get close to the Ammonites, don't show any hostility to them or fight with them, for I will not give you any of the Ammonites' land as a possession; I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot."

LOT'S GOOD QUALITIES

Finally, we can see that the story concerning the shameful act of Lot's daughters does not constitute

condemnation of Lot himself. The Bible affirms that Lot, whose daughters made him drink, was not aware of their incestuous acts. No, Lot was a righteous man. Here is the description of him that we find in 2 Peter 2:7,8: "...and if He rescued righteous Lot, distressed by the unrestrained behavior of the immoral (for as he lived among them, that righteous man tormented himself day by day with the lawless deeds he saw and heard)." Besides it's certain that Lot is given to us as an example to follow in Hebrews 13:2: "Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it."

There is no reason to damage Lot's good reputation. Nevertheless, let us learn from the error he committed in settling down near Sodom, and let us be wary of the dangerous influence of this world corrupted by sin.