

## Boom! The fall and fall of Lot: Citizen of Sodom

TITLE

### ON THE UP

Originally, I was going to call my talk today the Rise and Fall of Lot: citizen of Sodom, but on reflection, I think I prefer to call it the Fall and Fall of Lot: citizen of Sodom. His history is rather like Sodom's, a potentially great city, destroyed by his own desire to further himself, rather than recognise who God is and follow Him, and he ended up in a mess.

He just about had it all, having travelled from Harran through Canaan to Egypt and back to Canaan with his uncle, Abram. God blessed Abram and as a result, Lot was blessed too. He was a man at the peak of his game. As both men prospered, they needed to go their separate ways as their herds were competing for the same area of grass. Abram gave Lot first pick and Lot chose to leave Canaan, the land of promise, for the plain of the Jordan near Sodom.

### ON THE DOWN

That was Lot's first fall – one of altitude! From hilly Canaan to 300m below sea level! In past weeks we recalled how God continued to bless Abraham as he prospered and became a more powerful nomadic lord. For Lot, economically the first bit of down was good, or so it seemed. The grass was good, the trade was plentiful but what of Sodom and the other cities on the plain? Here's the description from Genesis 13. VERSE *Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.*

### ON THE DOWN - he sought his own gain

Lot was a God worshipper. How was he going to cope with the people of Sodom where he'd pitched up? Perhaps he thought he would be a good influence, after all he was rich and influential.

HOW BAD? Just how bad were the citizens of Sodom? There's not that much in Genesis on how bad they were, but in the rest of the Bible, there are no shortage of verses that hold Sodom up as the model of evil that no-one should want to ever emulate as it represents such evil that led God to take the exceptional action of wiping it and sister city Gomorrah off the face of the earth. Here is my summary of how the Bible describes the main sins of Sodom.

SLIDE

**They were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. EZEKIEL 16:49-50**

**Their deeds were lawless and ungodly. 2 PET 2:4-10**

**They sacrificed to false gods and rejected the authority of God. DEUT 32**

**They gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. JUDE :7**

Sodom and Gomorrah, the two largest cities of the plain were oppressive, unjust, corrupt, idolatrous, self gratifying, self-focussed and immoral. More on immoral later. They got rich on it too and as we saw back in Genesis 14, had designs on extending their power in the region.

I've put in some verses you can look at as part of our items for reflection and discussion. I've really got to say, as a member of a religious minority in a secular world, that there are so many elements of the sins of Sodom in our own society right now. In fact, our country was built on some pretty nefarious activities – a part of our history we rarely care to recall or teach.

And Lot got stuck into life in Sodom – he sold up his tents and lived in town. Perhaps he thought that with his money and status, he would be a good influence in an evil place – that people would look at him and recognise his God. There is even evidence that he may have been an elder who judged disputes at the city gates. Thoroughly community minded! That may be the reason why the mob in the reading said to him: *'This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them.'* In the end his status didn't seem to have helped him much!

Sodom is a warning to any who believe that prosperity equals the blessing of God. It's also a warning to us not to compromise on God's word, not to lessen our values to fit in and be popular in the community, not to think that people automatically will see God in us if we are do gooders but don't speak of Jesus. And even then, His name isn't good currency for many in our society any more. Being a Christian means that sometimes people will not understand us, will be appalled by our words, will insult, maybe even persecute us. The Roman society of Paul's day was much like Sodom and he said this of it. (This is from the Message Galatians 5:19-21)

*It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cut throat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community.*

When you put it like that, then we can see in our lives and in society, or media, and particularly social media all these elements. Welcome to Britain 2021! How much are these values in my life and yours? Ask the Spirit to open your mind and reveal those areas where you've have sold out yourself to that which is not of God, because I think they're part of us more than we realise.

## **AND DOWN**

Then came the Battle of Siddim and the sacking of the city by the Mesopotamian kings and Lot finds himself and all his wealth dragged off. When we choose to live life as we want it, there is no guarantee of protection from God or anyone else for that matter. In a world of self, we have to hang on to whatever and whoever we think we can trust. But what if it fails? Lot stood to lose everything, including his freedom, but God was gracious.

## **RESCUE**

He brought rescue, salvation and freedom in the form of his uncle, Abram. For the citizens of Sodom and the other cities, their rescue was nothing short of miraculous. In our EARLIER LIST we saw that Sodom was eventually destroyed because the people rejected the authority of God. How did they know about the authority of God? Because they saw it in the miraculous and astounding rescue by Abram. They experienced the power of God and heard Abram testify of Him to Melchizedek. They understood the integrity of Abram as he rejected his share the spoils. They knew that it was God who was responsible for the restoration of their freedom and wealth. It should have brought repentance from the king of Sodom downwards. It should have brought thanks and repentance from Lot. But all he did was return home to Sodom and resumed his life as a citizen of the most evil city in the land.

RESCUE

I praise God when I see someone come to faith or who recommits to the Lord after falling away. It's wonderful to see the power of God working in them, changing them and through their lives, changing others. But we need to ask God to hold us close to Him lest we put our lives into reverse and spurn the grace shown to us.

We have come through the last 18 months by the grace of God. For many of us there hasn't been loss, perhaps you've even gained something. How is God's grace going to change us from now on? How is His grace going to change the church? Are we just going to go back to what we were? Some of us have already understood that age, health, loss of some members and bits falling off the church ceiling have changed things here. Maybe you feel gloomy about that. The God of Abram, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, the God who saved you is still the same yesterday, today and forever. Things may be different, yes, but His power is the same and His power to use us remains the same? His power to change things, extend His kingdom and glorify Himself is still the same. Do you believe that? Then let's move with that in mind, and God will move us in the right direction!

### **AND DOWN AGAIN**

Lot of course just bumbled along in Sodom for a decade or two more. He probably became rich again but Sodom never changed. In Genesis 18 God told Abraham that he had heard the crying out from Sodom. It lead me to think, who was crying out? Those oppressed by Sodom? Or perhaps Lot? We don't know, but what we do know, is that God listens to those who cry out to Him about sin and about bringing salvation. In our post-covid world, I believe we should cry out all the more for the world, and for those who are still lost: our family, our friends, our workmates, our community, our nation, our world. If we are not sure where we are going from here, then we need to understand that God wants us to cry out to Him about that too, particularly as like Abraham we have the ear of God.

### **SALVATION**

God honoured Abraham's plea however badly he put it and saved Lot's family. Did Lot deserve it? By human reckoning, he certainly didn't. Even at the end he acted dishonourably. One of the big indicators of how bad it was in Sodom was the incident of the angels visiting Lot. Lot first got it right by welcoming them into his home. He knew who they were and the mob seems to as well. Who was this mob and what was their intent? They were all the males from the city, young and old and they intended to sexually assault the angels. It was an attempt at what we would call gang rape. It's what Sodom is remembered for where we get the words sodomy and sodomite. This was something that was encouraged and condoned by the local population. It was probably systematic in Sodom, evidenced by Lot trying to get the angels off the streets as soon as possible when they arrived.

It's an horrendous crime the mob were trying to commit. It's why Sodom is remembered as the lowest of the low. This was a society that condoned rape and even in our liberal modern society, the thought of society at large condoning this kind of sexual assault is met with outrage.

In ancient society (and in our modern world) this kind of community condoned sexual behaviour either homosexual or heterosexual found its source in idolatrous religion and those involved justified it by saying it was OK to do it, because their god said it was. What was different about Sodom was the attack being aimed directly at God's angels – the God who had saved their people from captivity and restored their wealth. It was an assault on God not just by individuals but by a

city, a whole society and it was not going to go unanswered. Even Lot had shut off his conscience: offering his virgin daughters to the mob. That's how low he had fallen.

Yet God was gracious to him and saved him and his family. God destroyed the cities so comprehensively that they disappeared without trace. We still don't know exactly where they were! We just have theories and some archaeological evidence.

MAP. Traditionally, they were believed to be to the south of the Dead Sea, but work on a site to the north of the Dead Sea since the 1970s has identified the site at PIC Tall El-Hammam, of a large city that flourished for over a thousand years but mysteriously became unoccupied and laid waste about the time of Abraham. The land around was also laid waste and remained unoccupied for over 700 years afterwards and debris indicates that it may have been victim of what's known as an airburst asteroid strike (an explosion a few miles up in the atmosphere but with no crater – everything is killed, flattened by the explosion and even burned). Economically, the region went backwards – just ripe for invasion by a nation like Israel to come along and tame it a few hundred years later.

### **REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE – don't look back**

How do I finish today? By saying that God is gracious. How many times like Lot, has God picked us up again when we have failed Him? Many times I'm sure. Abraham found that too, through his somewhat less dramatic failures. We have a God who leads us, walks with us, loves us and shows us grace. Not all four of Lot's family made it. Lot's wife disobeyed God and looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. In films and art it shows her stopping as Lot and their daughters walked on. Actually, the Bible says that they were in Zoar, not too far away when the cities were blown up. They would have needed to take cover, so if she wanted to look back she would have needed to actually go outside to look as the blast hit Zoar, which is why she turned to salt. Why did she go out and look? Everything she valued, the place she loved, was more important than her own safety and she couldn't stop herself looking back.

Are you trusting Jesus alone for your life and for your eternity? You should be. If not Jesus has a message for you: in Luke 17 He says.

VERSE

*'It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.*

*'It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.*

God is bringing a time of reckoning for all, have you trusted Jesus? Are you walking with Him? If you have God is there, keeping you, protecting you, leading you home.

### **SALVATION, ALBEIT BY FIRE...and then? On the down again!**

So Lot was saved, was he a changed man? He certainly didn't run out of salt! But there's no evidence of a great reunion with Abraham and a great new life. He lived out the rest of his days in caves in the mountains – no-one wanted to go to the devastated plains. He was saved but as Paul says in 1 Corinthians – he was saved as though by fire. And his legacy? No better for leaving

Sodom. His two daughters got him drunk and committed incest with him and from that came sons Moab and Ammon – two of Israel’s mortal enemy nations. Even the two surviving members of his family let him down.

As a Christian, what do you want your legacy to be, as someone who trusted God and despite the bumps and bangs you got in life, ended up like Abraham? Or like Lot who disobeyed God, needed rescuing on more than one occasion and died in obscurity? And what of the legacy of this Church? That’s the challenge the story of Lot, citizen of Sodom brings us.

Let’s pray and come in confession before God.

Father

we come to You this morning aware that through a difficult period of time that we have found ourselves having to take stock of our lives afresh. May your Spirit speak into our lives today as we consider our personal walk with You and our direction as Your church. Show us where our attitudes and values are conforming to the world, that we may lay them aside and walk only with You. Help us to live in a way that lights a spark in people’s lives. Help us to cast off behaviour that doesn’t honour You and brings the name of Jesus into disrepute.

Give us a burden to cry out for our world and to extend Your kingdom. Help us to look forward and not look back. Fill us with Your Spirit to do Your will more fully.

We ask this in Jesus’ name,  
Amen

Our closing song is a prayer to have mercy on our world as we see so many elements of Sodom in it: *O Lord, the clouds are gathering.*

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

*Read Genesis 19*

1. Take a look at these passages and see what you can work out what the sins of Sodom actually were: Ezekiel 16:44-52, 2 Peter 2:4-10, Jude verses 5-7, Deut 32:15-18, 31-33, Isaiah 3:9-16, Jer 23:14, Luke 17:28-37.
2. How do you think we can get the balance right between honouring Christ and not selling out to a sinful world? Have you personally encountered any hostility to your being a Christian? How did you deal with it?
3. What do you think are the best ways to deal any conflicts you have between your own morality and what society is saying in this generation? Do we need to search the Bible for new ways of interpreting things, or do we stick to our guns? How can we equip ourselves to deal with these issues. How does the gospel help us – take a look at 2 Peter 3:9.
4. Take time to pray, to cry out for our world, our nation, our community and those we love. Ask God to make a difference. Pray for yourselves, that the Lord will keep you from stumbling.

## Sodom: destroyed by an asteroid strike?

On 30 June 1908 at around 07:17 local time, Evenki natives and Russian settlers in the hills north west of Lake Baikal in Siberia observed a bluish light, nearly as bright as the sun, moving across the sky and leaving a thin trail. Closer to the horizon, there was a flash producing a billowing cloud, followed by a pillar of fire that cast a red light on the landscape. The pillar split in two and faded, turning to black. About ten minutes later, there was a sound similar to artillery fire. Eyewitnesses closer to the explosion reported that the source of the sound moved from the east to the north of them. The sounds were accompanied by a shock wave that knocked people off their feet and broke windows hundreds of kilometres away.

The Tunguska event 113 years ago caused devastation over an area 43 miles long and 34 miles wide after an explosion believed to be over 1000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. It was believed to have been caused by an asteroid or comet exploding in the atmosphere about 5-10 miles above the ground. Thankfully, it was a totally uninhabited area – what if had been a large city?

There are some who say that stories in the Bible are too fantastic to be true. Are we really expected to believe that fire came out of heaven and zapped two cities and all their inhabitants? Well that happened at Tunguska. The idea of cities being wiped out in minutes before anyone can escape is not a fanciful either. Pompeii was destroyed by an explosive eruption by Vesuvius in AD79. Most people died within minutes of the blast and it took nearly 1500 years before it was rediscovered.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was one of the great cataclysms of the Bronze Age: two significant cities destroyed in minutes, killing all inhabitants with very few survivors – only three we know of.

So complete was their destruction that we're not even sure where they actually were. Traditionally they were believed to have been on the coastal plain to the south of the Dead Sea and there's even a town in Jordan that advertises itself as having the ruins of Gomorrah.

But these were supposed to be significant cities? Surely there would be some trace. In the 70s at a site called Tall El-Hammam on the Jordan plain at the north end of the dead Sea was excavated. It looks as though it was a thriving city in the Mid Bronze Age but was suddenly abandoned about the time of Abraham. What's more, for some reason the fertile plain it stood on suddenly turned into a wasteland for nearly 700 years. Why? Some archaeologists have suggested that a Tunguska type event could best explain it as only a limited area was affected not the whole region and that the evidence suggests that the city they found was Sodom. The explosion was not as great as Tunguska, but every bit the size of Hiroshima, if not a little more.

It's nice isn't it when archaeologists and historians discover that the Bible is true and not just made up! I must say, that it takes a lot for God to rain down judgement on people in the dramatic way He did with Sodom and Gomorrah. They have to be bad beyond the point where no-one righteous can effectively stand against them.