

## **LOT – a life in five acts**

The story of Lot is not a 'moral tale', or a parable or an allegory, He was a real person and he lived a complicated, messy life, as many of us do. He made some good decisions, some really bad decisions and some decisions that are hard to categorise. So do we.

We read his story in Genesis and have other clues about him in other parts of the Bible.

I see his life as a five-act play.

### **Act 1 Ur to Canaan**

We start in Ur by the R. Euphrates in Mesopotamia – modern Iraq. It was eight or nine long generations after Noah and the knowledge of the true God had become corrupted or lost and people worshipped false gods.

Lot's grandfather, Terah, a worshipper of false gods, decided to leave Ur and take his extended family to the land of Canaan over in the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

As well as grandson Lot and his family, Terah's clan included his oldest son, Abram and Abram's wife, Sarai.

They followed the river north-west along the Fertile Crescent, until they came to Haran, at which point they should have turned south, but instead they settled there.

While they were in Haran, they gained people, livestock and possessions.

Eventually Terah died in Haran.

We don't know how Abram came to hear of the one true God, nor how he recognised His voice, but he did and he had, at some point, received the instruction to complete the migration to Canaan, leaving the rest of Terah's family behind. Abram's nephew, Lot, decided to bring along his family.

Note that God sovereignly called Abram to leave his father's idolatrous clan – to separate himself from all that belonged to that old way of life in Ur and start a new life – a nomadic life – in Canaan.

So, Abram and Lot and their households travelled 400 miles south-south-west until they came to the land of the Canaanites and pitched their tents there.

God promised to bless Abram and make him a great nation through which all the nations of earth would be blessed. This, of course, reveals God's plan of salvation through Abram's descendant, Jesus of Nazareth.

God entered into a covenant relationship with Abram and changed his name to Abraham, 'Father of a multitude'

As they moved around and pitched in different places Abram built altars and called on the Name of the Lord, but we do not read of Lot ever building an altar or worshipping God. Abram consecrated himself to God; it seems that Lot did not.

This is not to suggest that Abram got everything right and Lot got it all wrong. On the contrary, Lot made some good choices and Abram made some really bad ones!

No, it was about having a relationship with God and being consecrated, set apart, to Him.

## Act 2 A big decision

They were so blessed by God in terms of livestock and people that the land where they were couldn't support them all and problems broke out between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. So, Abram gave his nephew a choice:

'We need to separate; If you choose to go left, I will go right; if you go right, I will go left.'

Lot looked and saw the plain of Jordan – well-watered, lush, reasonably easy living. And he chose that. Abram continued to live a nomadic life in Canaan and God promised to give him, and his multitude of descendants, all the land he could see.

Remember, at this point, Abram and Sarai had no children; Abram was receiving these promises and following God's instructions in faith.

But we are concerned with Lot.

## Act 3 Lot on the plain of Jordan

Lot's decision to move to the Plain of Jordan looks like a good one. There was plenty of grazing for the animals and he and his people were no longer competing with Abram's flocks and herdsmen. The snag was the people who lived in the cities on the plain were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

It seems that Lot gradually pitched his tent nearer and nearer to Sodom, until he actually left his tent and his nomadic life and moved into a house in the wicked city.

This was not God's intention for this burgeoning tribe. God had called Abram and his family to a nomadic existence within Canaan at this time. Now Lot, perhaps hankering after an easier, more settled, life, had established himself and his family in the wicked city of Sodom. Maybe, he hankered after the settled life he had known in Ur.

2 Peter 2 v 7, 8 refers to 'righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked, for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.'

It grieved Lot to see the filthy wickedness around him and it may be that he tried to rectify it because later, the men of Sodom said, 'This one' ie Lot, 'came in as a resident alien and he keeps acting as a judge.'

Lot was upright among the people of Sodom, but he was not **holy** i.e. separated from all that defiles and separated and set apart to God.

Peter calls Lot 'righteous' but not even good deeds and avoidance of bad ones can save anyone. We know that the only way to God is through faith in His grace and mercy. And we know that salvation is through the redeeming death of Christ on the Cross.

Do you know what God's verdict was on Sodom? Their sin was so great that he would destroy the city.

I wonder what God's verdict is on our nation? Our nation that flouts God's laws and where paganism, idolatry and false gods flourish.

God is righteous and just and the sin, rebellion and idolatry of our nation is grievous. I believe that, in His mercy, He is going to continue to allow this nation to be shaken until people turn to Him in repentance, so that He can bless us again.

What about us, his church? Are we grieved by the wickedness we see and hear of, or have we become hardened to it? Are we trying to be salt and light and to turn the tide? It feels as if, like Lot, we are failing to make a difference and the wickedness and lies are increasing daily.

#### **Act 4 Lot is captured and rescued**

It is indicative of the unrest and inter-tribal strife in that whole area, that Abram's herdsmen were also trained in battle. So, when an alliance of tribal kings attacked Sodom and took possessions and captives including Lot, and Abram heard of it, he was able to assemble an army of 318 of his men and go to the rescue. After a long pursuit, He rescued Lot and his family, as well as all the looted goods and people.

But what does it say about Lot that he returned to live in Sodom, that wicked city?

Lot was in Sodom, but the real problem was that Sodom was in Lot.

Centuries later, Abraham's descendants experienced God's amazing deliverance. They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and their enemies drowned behind them. As they travelled through the wilderness on their way to the land promised to Abraham so long before, they had God's visible glory before them to guide, day and night.

And they grumbled! Life was difficult, they missed the life they had in Egypt –even slavery seemed better than this harsh wilderness! They looked back.

The Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt, but Egypt was still in their hearts.

If we have asked the Lord Jesus to forgive us and give us new life, we are delivered from slavery to sin. As the old song says: 'This world is not our home, we're just a-passing through!'

We belong to another kingdom – the Kingdom of God; but Is the kingdom of the World still in our hearts? Are we holy – set apart to God?

Holiness is not just good behaviour; to be holy is to be set apart from the filthiness of the world and set apart for God?

We live **in** the world, which is largely opposed to God, but we are to be **of** the Kingdom of God. Our allegiance, our heart, must be for the King of Kings. We cannot serve two masters.

It seems that Lot knew about God but didn't really know Him. Just as I know about the Queen and believe she exists, but I don't really know her. To really know her, I would need to spend time in her presence.

We can know about God and believe He exists, but to really know Him we need to be in relationship with Him and spend time with Him – reading His word, listening for His voice, talking to Him.

#### **Act 5 Lot is delivered reluctantly Part 1**

We must move back to Abraham's camp, now. He has continued to be blessed by God as He lives his nomadic life among his flocks.

One day three men come to his tent. As is proper, Abraham, gives them hospitality and accompanies them a little way as they go on towards Sodom.

They are in fact two angels and the Lord Himself, appearing in human form and, as the two angels go on, the Lord remains to tell Abraham that the cities of the plain are so wicked that He, in His justice, sees no option but to destroy them.

Sometimes a tree is so diseased that there is no option but to cut it down; sometimes a beloved pet is so sick, it must be euthanised; sometimes a wild animal is such a danger to human life, it must be shot. I think we see in the Lord's conversation with Abraham an unwillingness to destroy the cities of the plain, if there is any hope of cure.

How amazing, that God, in His mercy, came in person, in a form that Abraham could relate to! How amazing that, a couple of thousand years later, God came again, in human form, to live among people and to give Himself as a sacrifice for us!

Abraham, no doubt with Lot in mind, intercedes with great humility and persistence – what if there are 50 righteous? Will You spare the city if there are fifty righteous people in it? – 45?, 40? 30?, 20?, 10? - and eventually the Lord agrees that if ten righteous people are found in Sodom, He will spare the city. Then the Lord leaves, and Abraham returns to his camp.

We will pause here as the angels make their way to Sodom..

## **Genesis 19 v 1-38**

### **Act 5 Part 2**

What a sorry tale! Even when angels came to rescue him, Lot was reluctant to leave. He must be dragged out of the city. His sons-in-law mock and refuse to believe the danger. His wife, fails to fully grasp the danger and longingly looks back at her home – where her heart is – and is destroyed.

The scripture makes it clear that it wasn't Lot's righteousness that saved him, but Abraham's intercession. Even when he was clear of Sodom he wanted to go to another city, Zoar, 'It's only a little one'. How often do we say that to the Lord, 'It's only a little compromise.'? God is so gracious that he spared Zoar for Lot's sake.

But in the end, Lot realised he needed to head for the mountains; he had lost everything but his unwed daughters. And in the post-script to his story, which you can read for yourselves, we see how his daughters' values and morals had been corrupted by Sodom.

**Lot's tragedy was that Sodom was in his heart. He wanted to be part of that city, rather than follow God.**

Oh, my friends, we need to repent – the world is too much in us – we are not set apart from it and to God. We can't go on like this.

I love the church; it has been central to my whole life, but so much of the church has been, and is, conformed to the world – shaping and reshaping itself to be acceptable, to be liked by the world. I want to be acceptable and liked by the world. It won't do!

When God moves to purify His church, as I pray He will, will we be like Lot, reluctant to let go of what we've got and built up – our buildings, our style of worship, our hymns and songs? What if our denomination closes? Where is our heart?

Are we willing to follow Christ, even though the path may be through unfamiliar ways, and we have to leave precious things behind?

Are we willing to be followers of Christ, even though He was, and is, despised and rejected by men?

In this world there is no real security; we have had decades of peace and prosperity here in the UK, but we can see now that things are changing, and we cannot rely on what we once thought so unshakable. Lot wanted the security of the city, even though it wasn't secure and twice he lost everything.

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through...

And yet there is that in us that wants to be settled here.

This is no time for pious platitudes; You can see the state of the nation and the signs of the times as well as I can; we need to raise our eyes to the heavens, buckle on our heavenly armour, grip the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word, and take our stand.

Let's have done with half-heartedness and worldliness and determine to stand with Christ, the Victor.

Romans 12 v 1, 2

1. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.
2. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.

Lord, increase our trust so that our lives may be in the centre of Your will and You may direct our steps and surround us with Your blessing. Amen