

GENESIS Week 20, chapters 19 and 20

We have talked from time-to-time about the importance of bringing the Jewishness, and the Hebrew language and culture, back into Christianity, and back into the basic understanding of the Holy Scriptures; and here in the next few verses we get an example of why that is so important.

Let me preface this by saying something about the translator and writer of the Complete Jewish Bible that I read to you from: he is a Messianic Jew. So, while he brings the Jewishness back into the Scriptures, he also brings some Tradition with him that can swing the translation from having the typical over weighted “gentile” bent that we’re used to reading, to having a somewhat over weighted “Traditional Jewish” bent. And, it shows up here, because his Jewish background causes him to not use God’s name (Yahweh), and instead he substitutes the word Adonai or it’s English translation, “lord”; we’ll find that throughout the CJB.

RE-READ GEN. 19: 13-29

In verses 13 and 14, where my Complete Jewish Bible reads “Adonai”, and yours likely reads “Lord”, the actual original Hebrew was Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh.....Y-H-W-H, “Yahweh”. And, who is Yahweh? The Lord God Almighty is being referred to here, by his actual personal name, when the 2 angels explain that YAHWEH sent them, and YAHWEH has instructed them to destroy the city. A pre-incarnate Jesus didn’t instruct them; the Holy Spirit did not instruct them; God the Father, Yahweh, who gentile Christians call Jehovah, instructed them.

So verse 13 actually reads, “.....**Yahweh** has become aware of the great outcry against them, and Yahweh has sent us to destroy it”. Let me be very clear, since it is amazing what some people seem to think I mean by this: the word YAHWEH....the Hebrew letters Yud-heh-vav-heh....are actually, literally there. This is not speculation, this is not doctrine or tradition, this is not even in some ancient Hebrew manuscripts and NOT in others; the word Yahweh is actually, literally there in ALL original Hebrew manuscripts where our Bibles say Lord or God in the O.T.

A little further down in V18, Lot responds to the angels who were telling him to leave, by saying “Please, no my lord”. Now, did Lot think he was talking to God, Yahweh, or now aware that these men were not men, to the angels? The word, in this verse, used for “lord” is Adonai. And, as I’ve mentioned before, Adonai can be used to refer to God, or it can simply mean a generic lord or master.....a lord or master of any sort, human or spiritual. Here, the actual original text is “Please, no Adonai”. Within the context, it is not referring to God, its referring to the generic form of Adonai; Lot was responding to the angels; calling them Adonai, lords, masters; it was just a way of speaking that was a sign of respect and courtesy, and in this case recognizing their power and authority.

I wanted to point this out, not because the meaning in our bibles is necessarily wrong, but because when we understand the expanded meaning that Hebrew gives us, we understand what is going on so much more clearly. We can know more precisely which manifestation of God, now, that is speaking in Chapter 19. Some of you may be thinking, is this really important? Yes, it is. It is these bits and pieces that we can put together so as to understand the Scriptures more ACCURATELY. And, remember, at least half of the NT is OT quotes, and the book of Revelation is primarily a compiling of the OT prophecies and a putting of them into a chronological order. So, if we really want to understand what is happening in the NT, we need to get the OT right, first.

Anyway, Lot leaves, takes his wife and two unmarried daughters; but these so-called “sons-in-law” won’t go. They simply don’t believe what the angels said. They didn’t survive their skepticism, and neither did Lot’s wife. These so-called “sons-in-law” are a bit of mystery, mainly because the Hebrew is not clear here. That term could mean men to whom Lot’s two daughters were engaged, or more than likely it was that these were husbands to OTHER daughters of Lot. In either case, they would have been men of Sodom...pagans. Here’s a little clue when reading the Bible: if you see only a couple of children mentioned, it is probable that the couple had OTHER children as well...there just was not reason to speak of them. In the Biblical era, for someone to only have 2 or 3 children would have indicated either the deaths of other of their children, or that they were VERY young and just starting a family, or that there was something medically wrong with either the husband or wife. A minimum of 5 or 6 children would have been the norm. And, due to disease and other hazards, some of a couples children dying at young ages was usual and expected. So, you can draw your own conclusions about whether Lot had more children or not.

Apparently Lot still didn’t recognize the nature of the danger or the imminence of what was about to occur. The Angels told Lot to hurry up and leave, but he just didn’t get it. He apparently was taking his time, packing up and making sure he didn’t forget anything of importance. One of the Angels intervened and literally grabbed him by his hand, then grabbed his daughters’ hands, and dragged them outside the city walls.

Here we should remember a type that is being established: recall that upon the Angels arrival...only a few hours earlier... Lot made Matzah, unleavened bread, for them to eat. And, now, he has to hurry to leave. You can bet, though it’s not stated, that the food that he took with him was that unleavened bread that had been made the evening before the morning he was about to flee. And, of course, that type is carried forward several centuries later to the making of unleavened bread before Israel hurriedly left Egypt.

The Angels instruct Lot to flee to the safety of the nearby hills; but the ever-reticent Lot says, no, I’d rather go to a city. Lot liked his comforts. Recall that when he and Abraham parted ways, and Abraham gave Lot the choice of what part of the land he preferred for himself and his flocks, he chose Sodom. And, the next thing we see is Lot living in a city. Lot obviously didn’t have a taste for the life of a nomad, or a shepherd. He wanted to reside in a more refined city atmosphere and the comfort and security and easier life that it afforded him. That he was living in Sodom makes it clear he had turned his back on his

heritage and way of life in favor of the way of the pagans. In many ways, Lot was a shadow of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel who turned their backs on their own heritage, in favor of taking on the lifestyle of their gentile neighbors.

Keep in mind, though, that nowhere do we see Lot renouncing his faith in the God of Israel; Lot was not a bad man. It's just that Lot was weak, and prone to succumbing to the everyday temptations of the world. Lot's life is a very good illustration of what we today refer to as "a carnal Christian". As weak as was Lot's faith, and as apparently unusable Lot was for God's good purposes, God still saved him for Lot was, after all, one of His. But, what a sad epitaph and summary we get of Lot's existence on earth.

Lot asks to be sent to a small, nearby city. In fact the city is so small, that its name is Tzo'ar, which in Hebrew, MEANS small. Actually, what we're witnessing here is a name change; the city was originally known as Bela...now it is Tzoar. Lot and his family arrive there, and quickly the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are obliterated. The smoke was so thick, and it rose so high, that Abraham, standing on a hill in far off Hebron, was able to see it. Then we find out exactly why God saved Lot: in V29, we're told it was because Abraham had asked him to. It was because the righteous Abraham had pled for the life of Lot. Something we parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters need to keep in mind. The prayers of a righteous person, and if you're saved you're righteous before God, can lead to saving the unsaved, or even rescuing the saved but weak. I have no doubt that my father's prayers are all that stood between me and the oblivion I deserved and was moving rapidly towards, many years ago. Perhaps the only thing that can deliver, or even sustain the life of our children or grandchildren, is our prayers. And, I have no doubt that Lot was oblivious that it was Abraham who had interceded for him and kept him from destruction.

But, the ever-weak Lot wasn't satisfied with his safe haven in Tzo'ar. Behaving as a carnal Believer, and in yet another bad judgment, Lot left the place God had prepared for him, and took his two daughters with him, and they moved into a cave up in the hill country. Lot, because of his fears and lack of obedience and discipline and faith, had put his daughters in a terrible predicament. They were now in a remote location and far from any husband prospects; archeology has shown that the area to which Lot and his 2 daughters migrated was utterly barren and without population centers during this era. His daughters, physically mature enough to bear children, would have been terribly ashamed for NOT having children, because that was the primary duty of a woman in those days. So, now without husbands and apparently yet to bear children, the sisters made a pact with each other: they were going to get their father drunk, and have sex with him so they would have children. This seemed perfectly fine to their twisted little minds, for they had been raised up in the city of Sodom where this wicked act would have been par for the course. But, this was NOT normal, not even for Biblical times. A man, fathering children by his own daughters, was looked down upon. And, the result of this abomination was two children who would go on to become the founders of the nations of Moab and Ammon: two archenemies of Israel, and therefore, of God. It is amazing what our selfish and faithless acts can lead to.

RE-READ GEN.19: 23-end

We now come to the Bible story that has gained such universal and legendary status: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is really rather odd, I think, is that where one would expect that a long and agonizingly detailed account of this cataclysm would be left for us to read...one so horrific that we would pay very close attention and do what we could to avoid the same fate...we have but 4 or 5 total verses! To say detail is lacking is an enormous understatement. All we're told is that the destruction came from the sky; it came down like a rain of fire and brimstone (burning sulfur). It is an interesting choice of words: for burning sulfur was used to destroy the garbage dumps located just outside the city walls of ancient cities. Once lit, sulfur burns with a high heat, and emits such a strong and definite odor that it could mask the foulest of other common odors. And, of course, the fire purged pests and diseases. We're also aware that fire, in the Bible, is symbolic of purging evil and refining precious metals. God destroyed what He saw as a garbage heap of perverted humanity, using a method sure to be understood by all who knew of this judgment.

Rather than focus on the horror and death and divine retribution, the Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah focuses on the moral aspects that CAUSED the destruction; the destruction itself is almost incidental.

Now, what do we make of this phrase in verse 26, whereby Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, because she looked back as she was fleeing? The Hebrew term "not looking back" is an idiom; it simply means to dally or to hesitate. What appears to have actually happened is that Lot's wife didn't heed the warnings and lagged behind. The Angels, along with Lot and the two daughters who were still living at home; pulled her outside the city but she must have stopped just outside the walls. The indication is that IMMEDIATELY upon Lot and His family stepping outside the city walls, the destruction began. Lot's wife suffered the same fate as the other inhabitants of the district.

It has long been thought that this tradition about her becoming a pillar of salt was a redaction sometime after the time of the Jewish exile to Babylon. The oldest traditions did NOT seem to acknowledge this part of the story. We'll not linger here, because it's a riddle that is not likely to be answered.

In verse 27, Abraham is re-injected into the continuing Torah saga; he awakens, stands on a high place, and sees the smoke of the district of Sodom rising far off into the distance, like a furnace, it says. I wonder, did Abraham have faith that God would save Lot from this now completed destruction? We're not told. While Abraham had bargained with God that if 10 righteous people remained in that wicked place, He would not destroy Sodom, Lot was never mentioned by name. We can safely assume Abraham was bargaining for Lot's sake; but can we so confidently assume that Abraham felt certain Lot would be saved? I doubt it. I think the hope was that IF Lot had remained "righteous"..... something which Abraham would not have known for sure..... would God spare Lot and his family. And, Yahweh's answer was yes. WAS Lot still righteous in God's eyes? That was another matter. I cannot know for sure, but as we have watched Abraham's life, we

do know that he was just a man; and who would not have wondered if Lot had died amidst the ruins of Sodom, or survived?

Who among us with children and grandchildren don't watch them and wonder at times: are they saved? Will they BE saved? Will the ones who seem to have wandered so far away from the ways of the Lord be rescued from the coming time of eternal destruction? We can hope, but often we cannot know for sure. All we can do is pray..... which is really what Abraham was doing in his bargaining session with the Lord.....praying for the survival of the righteous..... and the rest is in God's hands.

The last 9 verses of Genesis chapter 19 are historically quite important; they chronicle the birth of two nations that will become enemies of Israel.....Moab and Ammon. And, if we could sum this up in a sound byte, it would be that Moab and Ammon were BORN of sin, and so sin was their destiny.

We know from the narrative that Lot is an older man, and that the family of 3 was now living in a cave in the hills to the East of the Dead Sea. Obviously some time had passed; for the 2 daughters of Lot were becoming concerned that they would not be able to fulfill the entire purpose that women of that era believed they were put onto this earth: to give birth to the next generation.

I don't think we need to think too far out-of-the-box to understand from the statement in verse 31 that ".....our father is old and there is no man on earth to come in to us in the manner customary in the world"..... this family was convinced that they were as Noah and his small family were..... the only people left on planet earth as a result of God's judgment on the world. The two girls apparently did not understand that what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah was but a localized disaster; and it would seem that neither did Lot.

We have watched Lot become more and more fearful, less interested in facing the world, and more interested in just assuming there was little left to do but eke out a meager existence and die when it was his time. Quite literally, the 3 remaining family members of Lot thought they had witnessed the end of the world. Does faith bring fears of this kind? Heavens no! Are you living in a constantly fearful state? I can assure, that fear is NOT from God, nor does it have anything to do with being God-fearing.

The two daughters ply their father with wine, get him drunk, and then have sex with him in order to get pregnant. The older daughter was the first to bear a child....Moab.....and then the younger produces Ammon. These verses and others in Deuteronomy and the Psalms attest to the kinship of the people of Moab and Ammon to Lot. Sometimes Moab and Ammon are referred to as brothers, but that was just a common way of speaking, as we speak of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is interesting that in Deuteronomy two nations are singled out as being those with which intermarriage to Israelites may not take place: Moab and Ammon. And, we know from archeology that Moab and Ammon were well-established nations long before the Exodus.

Here is the last we will hear of Lot; what an inglorious epitaph is written for him. What an unsavory last chapter of his life is left for posterity. How long he lived, we don't know. What he did from this point forward, we don't know. We only know that he lived anything than a victorious life.

READ Gen. 20 all

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham again becomes the focus. Here we find him on the move for generally the only reason that a pastoralist moves: to find fresh water and grazing land for his flocks and herds, because where he was had been used up. There is no reason to assume from anything the Bible has told us that he had moved beyond the hill country of Hebron, until now.

Moving south, Abraham stops in Gerar, inland in an area that would in the not too distant future become known as Philistia.the land of the Philistines. In fact, it is entirely possible that the king of Gerar, Abimelech, was in fact an early Philistine settler.

As it helps a great deal to understand the geography to understand the event, it is pertinent to our study to know that the Kadesh spoken of here is the same as the Biblical Kadesh-Barnea. It was some kind of a cult site, and as it was a little distance into the barren Sinai, and had good water, it was undoubtedly a place where the Bedouins came from time to time to trade, worship their gods, get supplies, and so on. The place called Shur is actually in Egypt (Shur is just the Hebrew form of the Aramaic word Shur-a, which means "a wall"). Centuries before Abraham, the Egyptians had built a fortification wall roughly along the line of the modern day Suez Canal. Its purpose was to protect itself against those hordes of Asians to the North of them that constantly pestered Egypt. As we'll see in a few chapters, eventually those Asians would overrun Egypt and actually rule Egypt for more than a century.

There is reasonable evidence that the wall existed about 400 years before Abraham, as in ancient Egyptian archives there is a document that scholars have dubbed "The Prophecy of Nepherti" dated to that time; and in that document, there is already talk of the Wall of the Ruler that was built so that the Asians could not come into Egypt.

There was a trade route that wound it's way from Kadesh to Shur, and it ran through Gerar, later part of Philistia. You know..... sometimes we get this idea that all these Bible characters were the equivalent of Lewis and Clark, blazing new trails to new destinations, where people had never been before. That was not the case at all. ALL of our Bible heroes moved to known places, traveling long established trade routes. It is no different here in Genesis.