

**Sodom's Final Dark Night
(Genesis 1:1-10)**

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The story of God's judgment on the people of Sodom is, without a doubt, one of the most solemn narratives in the whole of Scripture. It is a passage that is often avoided in the pulpit because of its exceedingly gloomy tone and shocking content; yet how desperately our nation needs to hear proclaimed God's message to mankind through this passage. If there is any passage of Scripture that is relevant in addressing the moral issues that our nation faces today, it is this passage. For as a nation, we have fallen into the very same sins that characterized life in Sodom-- two of the most glaring sins being our toleration of and celebration of sexual deviancy and immorality, and our callous indifference toward the weak, the vulnerable and the helpless. It is interesting to note that these glaring sins of our culture have the same root that they had in Sodom-- and that is, a hedonistic, self-pleasing, self-indulgent attitude stemming from excessive material abundance, luxury and idleness. These were the 'root sins' of the people of Sodom, and they are the root sins of our own culture, as well. The gross sexual immorality of the people of Sodom was simply the fruit of their general apostasy from God. So what we are seeing in our day, and in our own nation, is nothing other than history repeating itself. America has become Sodom.

The narrative in this chapter unfolds in three stages: first, we see God's two heavenly messengers arrive at the city of Sodom at the close of day, where they are greeted by Lot, who invites them to his home; this is followed by a horrendous scene in which the men of Sodom seek to violate the messengers of God; finally, we see God's messengers judge the men of Sodom by striking them with blindness, so that they cannot find the door of Lot's house.

I. God's Messengers Arrive in Sodom (vs. 1-3)-- We are told in opening verse of this chapter that the two men who had appeared earlier in the day to Abraham as he sat in the door of his tent at noonday came later in the evening of the same day to the city of Sodom. The Lord was not with them, as He had been with them in their visit to Abraham's tent, for the Lord's appearance to Abraham was a sign of His divine favor, but He had no favor to show to the inhabitants of Sodom. For that reason, these men, whom we are now told were angels, came to

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the city alone and entered through its gates as night was beginning to fall. .alone, which was an ominous sign.

When they came through the gates of Sodom, they found Lot sitting just inside the gates. What was he doing there? In ancient times, the city gates served as a focal point for much of the activity of the population. A number of rooms or public buildings were constructed just inside the gate to serve a variety of civic purposes. In times of war, those rooms were used to house soldiers who kept watch on the walls of the city. In times of peace, they were used classrooms for the city fathers to teach the younger population. They also served as the local court where city leaders would judge civil disputes.

The fact that Lot was "sitting in the gate of Sodom" suggests that he was there in some official capacity as a leader in Sodom. Leaders would regularly "sit in the gates" to decide matters and settle disputes between the citizens. They would also sit in the gates to get a good look at strangers entering the city, not just to greet them, but more importantly, to "size them up," to examine them or question them in order to find out something of their intentions and to insure they were not foreign spies.

What the text suggests is that Lot by this time had risen to a place of some prominence in the city of Sodom. He had been invested with some authority like that of a deputy or mayor. In other words, Lot had become a well-known figure in Sodom, a person of some renown with a responsible role to play in civic affairs. We might conclude from that that Lot had done pretty well in Sodom. He had gained a name for himself and the respect of the people.

But had he really done well? It all depends on the angle from which you view his life. Materially, he seems to have prospered in Sodom-- and that seems to be the whole reason he moved there in the first place. We see an interesting progression in Lot's relationship to the city of Sodom in Genesis. Originally, when Lot and Abraham decided to go their separate ways, Lot chose to settle in the plain of the Jordan River valley, where Sodom was located, because its lush fields seemed ideal for grazing his flocks. Lot seems to have had a great desire to prosper materially, and it was that desire which caused him to inch his way closer and closer to Sodom with the passage of time. First, we read in chapter 13 the he "pitched his tent as far as Sodom." Then, in chapter 14, we read that he "dwelt in Sodom," that is, he moved his family into Sodom. Since he had nothing in common with the inhabitants of that city on a moral or spiritual level, we can only conclude that his motive for moving into Sodom was for

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material or worldly gain. He wanted to advance the material interests of his family, to take advantage of all the benefits that life in a big city affords. So as time progressed, he became well-established in that city, rising to a place of prominence, so that we find him in the opening verse of chapter 19 "sitting in the gate of Sodom."

The tragedy is that whatever Lot gained materially by his move into Sodom, those gains came at the cost of spiritual riches for himself and his family. Lot failed to advance spiritually in Sodom. The growth of his soul was stunted, and that is evident from the attitude we see in his wife and daughters, who had fully embraced the carnal outlook and worldly value system of Sodom. It is also evident from Lot's apparent weakness for strong drink, which we will observe later in this chapter. Lot is a classic example of the backsliding believer, who allows worldly influences in the culture around him to chill his love for the Lord, so that he ceases to watch and pray as he ought, and begins to conform in subtle and even not so subtle ways to the value system of the pagan society in which he lives.

Now, we must not conclude from the glaring weaknesses we see in Lot, that he was not a believer at all. No; the apostle Peter describes him as a righteous man. He tells us, in fact, that Lot was deeply distressed over the wicked lifestyle of the people of Sodom, which he was forced to observe on a daily basis. He tells us that "righteous Lot. . . was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" in Sodom, and that he "tormented his righteous soul from day to day seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:7-8). That is clearly not the attitude of a reprobate. It is only true of a believer. Lot mourned at the lawless lifestyle of his pagan neighbors of Sodom, and that tells us that he was a righteous man. At the same time, Lot was too caught up in desiring the material things of this world, and that desire hindered his spiritual growth. It cooled his zeal for the Lord, making him a "lukewarm" believer.

Lot is really a tragic figure, a sad, conflicted soul, who stands as a warning to all of us to be constantly on guard against the sin of double-mindedness. Lot wanted to live for God, but at the same time, he wanted to pursue all the riches this world has to offer; so he ended up in the futile position of trying to serve two masters at once, and ended up with nothing-- no house, no wife, no material possessions-- only the shame of having two unwed pregnant daughters, both of whom had gotten pregnant by their own father (as we shall see at the end of this chapter).

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Does Peter's assessment of Lot as a righteous man find any support in Genesis itself? Yes; his righteous character is shown in several ways. First, it is shown by the concern he demonstrates for these two strangers who enter the city. We read in verse 1 that "when Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face to the ground." He had no idea who these strangers were, but he greeted them with the lavish display of courtesy typical of the ancient Middle East. He not only bowed his face to the ground as a sign of respect; he addressed them with the title "lord" and invited them to his own house for lodging and a meal. "Here now, my lords," he said to them in verse 2, "please turn in to your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go your way." It seems that something about these two men-- their manner of dress, their look of authority-- impressed Lot and told him that these were men of high standing, not a couple rootless vagabonds, but dignitaries from some distant land whose regal bearing commanded his respect.

Lot was not the only one who noticed these two men, however. There were obviously others at the gate who took note of them, and were impressed by their handsome appearance, and before long, word spread throughout the town about the arrival of these men, and wicked plans began to form in secret concerning them amongst the morally degenerate male population of Sodom

Second, Abraham's righteous character is also seen in the way he insisted that these men accompany him to his home. Their initial response to his offer of food and lodging was to say, "No, but we will spend the night in the open square." Why were they reluctant to go with Lot? Perhaps they didn't want to inconvenience him or his wife on such short notice. Perhaps they felt that by staying in the square they were better situated to fulfill the mission that had brought them to that city-- namely, to observe the conduct of the people of Sodom, in order to confirm the report that had reached God's ears. I believe that the most likely explanation for their reluctance to go with Lot is that they were testing his character. If he was truly concerned about their safety, he would insist that they come under his roof. That insistence would show his sincerity and confirm Lot's righteous concern for the welfare of his neighbor.

Lot passed the test, because he adamantly refused to let them stay in the town square. He knew the character of the city in which he lived. He knew how utterly wicked were the inhabitants of the city and it frightened him to think of these two men being left alone at night in the open square. He shuddered to think of the way they might be mistreated by the populace. So with a tone of great urgency, we read in verse 3 that "he insisted strongly" that they come to

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his house. The third way Lot showed himself to be a righteous man was by the way he provided them a meal. We are told in verse 3 that "he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate." No doubt, Lot served them a generous meal with various foods; but the bread is mentioned here specifically to show the haste with which he fed his guests. Unleavened bread is the bread of haste; it takes only moments to bake, since you don't have to wait for the leaven to permeate the loaf. You simply thrown together some flour and water, mix it with a little oil, and pass it over the fire.

No doubt, Lot's plan was for his guests to eat quickly, get to bed quickly, and rise quickly, so they could skedaddle out of town at the crack of dawn before the streets filled up with people. He knew it was not safe for them to remain there. There is a sense of urgency about this meal, therefore, and I suspect that Lot felt nervous throughout the evening. He probably feared that something might happen, knowing the character of the townspeople. What Lot did not realize was the prophetic character of the meal he had prepared; for the unleavened bread eaten in haste foreshadowed the Passover meal that the Jews would eat later, on the very eve of their deliverance from bondage in the land of Egypt. God delivered Israel out of their slavery in a land of pagan darkness just after they ate the Passover; and God was just about to deliver Lot and his family out of the spiritually dark city of Sodom, before destroying the city. So although Lot could not have realized it, this meal was his Passover meal; it was a meal eaten in haste in preparation for the Lord's intervention in grace and judgment.

II. The Men of Sodom Attempt to Violate God's Messengers (vs. 4-9) -- Well, apparently, just after dinner, when the men had eaten and were about to lie down for the night, Lot's worst fears began to be realized. Everything seemed to be going well. Then suddenly, there was the sound of an approaching rabble outside. It got louder and louder, coming from all directions at once-- the unmistakable sound of a growing mob of people, multiplying in number and volume every second and surrounding the house of Lot. It must have been a terrifying sound, for the crowd encircled the house like a pack of howling wolves surrounding a flock of defenseless sheep. There was nowhere to run; nowhere to hide. Perhaps through a window, Lot could see flashes of light from burning torches, and in that flickering firelight, Lot could make out the seething, lustful gaze of all the men of the city, coming to assault the "new boys in town."

We are told in verse 4 that the mob was made up of all the men in the city, both the old men and the young men, and that they had come from every quarter of the city to participate in a gang rape. They had come there to violate

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the men whom Lot had brought as guests into his home. As we read in verse 5, 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?"

You can imagine how terrifying it would be surrounded by a lawless mob in this way, shouting, screaming, and bearing down on your house with unmistakably violent intentions.

It was a shocking scene; and frankly, it is a scene that would seem totally inappropriate to describe or even to mention in a church service, except for the fact that those who are called to preach the Word of God must be faithful in declaring the whole counsel of God to their hearers. They cannot edit the Word of God by cutting out the ugly or shocking parts so as not to offend delicate ears. Perhaps it is because too many preachers have avoided preaching on passage like Genesis 19 that our nation has fallen into the state of moral confusion that we now see. It is essential that we hear what God is saying through a passage like this, and proclaim that message to the people of our day. That is why, as shocking as this passage is, we cannot avoid speaking of these terrible events that took place on Sodom's final dark night.

So what is God saying through this passage? One of the things He is surely saying is that a clear sign of spiritual apostasy in any society is the open, public, and widespread practice of sexual perversion, and the complete lack of shame on the part of those involved in these practices. The practice of homosexuality had become so widespread in Sodom that all the men of the city, both young and old, were involved in that practice.

The fact that all the men of the city were given over to that practice says something very important, and that is that the human sex drive can become perverted through environmental influences. One of the biggest lies that people have swallowed in our day is that homosexuality is a genetic "orientation" that people are born with and can do nothing about. It is like being born with black or white skin or blue or brown eyes. It is a congenital condition written into a person's DNA, and for that reason, homosexuality must be respected as a part of a person's God-given make-up, just as we respect a person's skin color or eye color. That is the main argument that lies behind the current push in culture to change our marriage laws so that homosexual couples can obtain the same legal status and benefits as heterosexual couples. Our government tell us that we must be in favor of so-called "marriage equality" for homosexual or lesbian couples, or otherwise, we will be guilty of hateful bigotry. You have to respect

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people for who they are, for the way God made them. And God has obviously made some people gay and some people straight-- that is what the culture tells us now.

Now, I believe the passage we are looking at this morning presents a very different view of homosexuality. It gives no support to the view that people are "born homosexual," for whoever heard of a city in which the entire male population was born with the same congenital flaw in their sex drive? Clearly the behavior we witness in the men of Sodom was not the result of a shared congenital condition written into their genes, an inborn "sexual orientation"-- it was a learned behavior. The young men in that city had learned this behavior from the older men-- perhaps even through being sexually abused by them at a young age while they were still maturing emotionally and sexually-- and as a result, the vice of homosexuality had spread like a cancer throughout the entire male population of that city.

The example of the men of Sodom shows conclusively that the sex drive in human beings can become perverted through environmental influences. There is no support in Scripture for the idea that people are born with a genetic condition that compels them to engage in homosexual acts in order to "be who God made them to be" and to live happy, fulfilled lives in accordance with their genetic nature; that is what our culture wants us to believe; but it is an idea without any biblical or even scientific support. According to Scripture, homosexual behavior is learned behavior. It is not the result of an inborn genetic orientation, but the result of an acquired lifestyle orientation that a person develops through a learning process. That process very often, but not always, involves older men acting as mentors and models to younger men by teaching them perverted ways of thinking and lusting and living that twists a person's healthy sex drive out of shape, perhaps at a young age, so that they end up engaging in practices which God detests.

That appears to have been the way that homosexuality became so rampant in Sodom. Just as child born into a family of thieves is likely to become a thief, or a child born into a family of liars is likely to become a liar, so children brought up by people engaged in sexually deviant behaviors are at great risk to engage in those behaviors themselves. Why? Because children learn by example, and because the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

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The good news is, precisely because homosexuality is an acquired lifestyle, it is a lifestyle from which people can repent and be cleansed by the amazing grace of God. Writing to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul pointed out that some people in that congregation, in their pre-Christian life, had been involved in the practice of homosexuality, just as some had been involved in the practice of fornication and idolatry and adultery and thievery and drunkenness and extortion. He affirms that people who continue in these practices without ever repenting of them will be excluded forever from a place in God's kingdom. But then he makes this glorious announcement-- "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). What Paul is saying is that there is no reason a person has to go on living a homosexual lifestyle, any more than a person has to go on living in fornication or adultery or drunkenness. People can put away those evil practices through the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; they can be cleansed of past involvement in sexual perversion, thoroughly washed in the blood of Christ and made a new creation in him.

That does not mean that the former adulterer or fornicator or homosexual or drunkard will never be tempted again to return to their former lifestyle. After all, the new birth does not bring with it immunity to all temptations to sin. Very often, those who have been given over to certain sinful practices in their pre-Christian past experience a formidable struggle in learning to put off old patterns of conduct and to put on new ones. But they will learn, because the new birth brings with it a new power, the power of the Holy Spirit, whose indwelling presence enables the believer to flee sin and pursue righteousness. Through the power of the Spirit, we are strengthened to put to death sinful desires that wage war against the soul, while at the same time we cultivate in positive ways the grace of holiness. Praise God that no Christian ever has to say, "My genes compel me to live in a manner that violates the Word of God." What a terrible lie of Satan that is; and how it has blinded the minds of millions of people in our society.

Unfortunately, the men of Sodom were so hardened in their sin; they refused to repent of it, no matter how earnestly Lot pleaded with them. The fact is, Lot's way of pleading with these aggressors was, in itself, sinful. We read in verse 6 that "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

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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!" We can hardly believe our ears when we hear Lot offer his own daughters to these men to gratify their lust. We think to ourselves, how could a man of God possibly utter such words? How could someone who knows the Lord, instead of defending his daughters' virtue and protecting them from bodily harm, actually offer them to a mob of revelers to use as sex objects for their own pleasure?

I believe this offer of Lot shows us to what depths even a true believer can sink when he leaves off prayer, leaves off cultivating a close relationship to God, and succumbs to a spirit of panic and fear in a moment of desperation. Lot was caught off guard by circumstances that he did not anticipate; and as result, he spoke like a man who has taken leave of his senses and doesn't know what he is saying. Didn't he realize that his disgusting offering put the life of his daughters in jeopardy? They could have died as the result of a gang rape, which is what happened later on in Israel's history to a poor woman in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Judges.

No doubt, Lot felt that his top priority was to protect the guests he had invited into his home, since the rules of hospitality in the ancient Middle East placed the protection of invited guests even above the protection of one's own family members. Some commentators try to put the best light on Lot's words by saying he did not intend for people to take him literally; he was using irony to put to shame these wicked men, the way a man might try to shame a creditor who is threatening to take away all his possessions to pay off a debt, "While you're at it, why don't you take my children, too?" The man does not mean for his words to be taken literally; he is shaming the heartlessness of the creditor. In like manner, say these commentators, Lot did not expect the crowd to take his daughters, for they were betrothed to men in that town whom everyone knew. He was saying to them, in essence, "I would as soon have you violate my own daughters as I would have you violate these men who have come under my roof." It was a way of shaming them. Whether or not that be the case, Lot's words were inexcusable. He showed no love to his daughters or to the men of Sodom by uttering such foolish words.

As it turned out, the men had no interest in his daughters. Their perverted desires were focused only on the anonymous guests in his home. And as they came against Lot to push him aside and break through their door, their utter contempt for him came out at last. "Stand back!" they cried; then added, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as judge; now we will deal worse

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with you than with them." In other words, they despised Lot because, despite the fact he was an alien and stranger living in their midst, he tried to impose his moral value system on them. He spoke as if their actions violated an absolute moral standard.

We face the same charges from the pagan world in our day, don't we? Whenever Christians take a bold stand for righteousness and truth in our own culture permeated with an attitude of moral relativism-- whenever we speak out publicly against glaring evils in our society like the normalization of homosexuality in our culture, we are accused of being "homophobes" or "hateful bigots." It is the very same complaint that the men of Sodom brought against Lot: "Who are you to call us wicked? Who are you to act as our judge?" Yet we must speak, for that is our calling in Christ-- not only to avoid conforming to the wickedness in our society, but to expose its true nature publicly as willful rebellion against God. As the apostle Paul told the Ephesians, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). When we do that, we will feel the heat of the world's ire. The world will condemn us as "judgmental," because we expose the wickedness of its dark deeds.

With regard to the sins of sexual perversion being promoted in our day, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs to speak out with clarity, even at the risk of offending people. We cannot allow the devil's lies to be trumpeted in the public square without raising an even louder clarion call for God's truth. "We need to speak out for the holy purposes the Creator had in mind when he planted the sex appetite in people," says John Jeske. "We need also to ask: Am I, like Lot, becoming insensitive to the obvious abuse of God's gift of sexuality? Is it possible that I appear to approve of conduct I should be reproofing? When in our day homosexual behavior is defended as an 'alternate lifestyle,' God's people need to let God's voice be heard." We mustn't let the devil's voice be the only voice heard in our land.

III. God's Messengers Judge the Men of Sodom (vs. 10-11)-- That brings us to the third stage in the narrative, in which God's messengers judge the men of Sodom by blinding them. When the men of Sodom threatened to violate Lot himself, pressing hard against him and threatening to break down the door, we read in verse 10, "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 with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door."

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By rejecting Lot's faithful rebuke, the men of Sodom sealed their doom. It was clear now beyond all question that they were completely hardened in their sin and utterly unwilling to repent of it. They adamantly rejected Lot and the God He represented. They adamantly rejected the moral standard he used to judge their actions. God's patience and longsuffering toward the inhabitants of Sodom had therefore run out. Now, nothing was left but for judgment to fall.

That judgment began as soon as the angels dragged Lot back inside the house. A blinding stroke from God fell on the men gathered around the house and left them all visually disabled, so they could not find the door of the house. This was not an ordinary blindness that involves a total and permanent loss of sight, but a temporary visual impairment, sort of like what happens when you look at a flash bulb go off in a dark room. The blinding flash makes you unable to see temporarily; it impairs your vision. This appears to be the idea suggested by the verb; their eyes were dazzled by a blinding flash or stroke from God, so that they could not see where they were going and could not find the door to Lot's house. Yet here is the amazing thing; instead of being concerned for their loss of sight, they were still obsessed with their own lust, so they kept stumbling around, trying to satiate their desire until "they became weary trying to find the door."

Geoff Thomas points out that what we have here is a horrifying picture of hell; for in hell, people still have lust, but they cannot gratify it; they have eyes, but they cannot see. They are filled with darkness within and darkness without, and in that misery of total darkness, they are filled with insatiable desires and cravings that will never be met throughout the whole of eternity. Because they have rejected the fountain of living waters, and have hewn for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water-- they will be left with those broken cisterns and the frustration that idolatry always brings, unable to quench their thirst forever. What an unspeakable tragedy that any person made in God's image would come to such an end!

Yet the good news is that the God of grace calls to us in the gospel and assures us that we do not need to despair of hope, if we will turn in faith to the Savior whom God has sent into the world, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ can save from the most degrading vices and enslaving sins. There are no chains so thick that Christ cannot break them. There is no yoke so heavy that Christ cannot free us from its crushing load. There is no desire so dark or twisted that Christ cannot free us from its life-dominating control. It makes no difference what your background has been, how sullied your past, how grievous your transgressions

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against the law of God. The Lord will receive you, and He will cleanse you of all our sins and give you a new heart and a new life, if you will go to Him and lay hold of Him by faith to be your Savior and your Lord.

May God cause the dreadful fate of the people of Sodom to be an awakening word to those who are yet sleeping in their sins. May it stir them to seek the Lord while He may yet be found, and to call upon Him while He is near. May it move them to forsake their own way and their unrighteous thoughts and to return to the Lord for mercy and pardon. May Sodom's fate instill in all of us a sober awareness of the awesome holiness of God, and the righteousness of His judgments. May it serve to deliver us from the lies of our culture and fill us with a holy zeal to reach those in our culture who are living in spiritual darkness with the light of God's saving truth. Amen