

THE UNRIGHTEOUS RIGHTEOUS LOT

Read Genesis 18:22-33

Lot averted his eyes from the sight of the smoke which was like the smoke from a furnace, mushrooming above the city he had recently evacuated; Sodom was aflame. Though he was old enough to be the father of two daughters of marriageable age, he pulled his younger daughter to a sturdy ridge of a mountain where they had fled. The mount promised protection against the onslaught of God's vengeance on the cities below, cities whose actions proved evil to God.

If he thought about the loss of his home, wealth, and business connections that had rewarded him with a position at the gate of the city, it was overridden by remorse for his foolish decisions. At first he had followed, wisely and without hesitation, Abraham and his God, even leaving--as Abraham his uncle had--family and homeland, in order to come to Canaan. His subsequent actions, however, proved disastrous. Lot shook a head, smudged with sweat and soot, as if willing the thoughts of those stupid choices away. But the stench of pungent burning only reminded him that his departure from Abraham was the first move toward his present situation.

He had disregarded the options his uncle had offered when their servants had squabbled over grazing land he considered inadequate. Rather than go to the left, north, or to the right, south, as Abraham had lavishly offered, he chose to go to the lush land far east of Abraham's tents. *It was a blunder I now regret*, he thought as his once rich linen robes swirled in the wind, flapping and then ripping against a jagged mountainside. *East!* he despaired within himself. It was the direction of Adam and Eve when they were hurried from the garden, the direction of wandering for Cain, and the direction taken by the people of Babel's tower. *Yes, journeying east, away from my uncle, was a mistake.*

Lot's unwise preferences did not cease after he moved east. Initially, he merely settled in the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom, an exceedingly wicked place. It was only natural that he began living within the city limits, followed by the purchase of a house and a place in the affairs of the city. *How did I become embroiled in the government and business trappings?* he marveled. *Perhaps I yearned for the notoriety of sitting at the gates of the city...the place where I first saw the messengers who warned me to escape.* Only the newly creased lines of his face gave away his grief as he peered through approaching dusk for a cave from which to begin a new life.

A perplexing puzzle may challenge the reader of 2 Peter 2:7-8. Lot is declared righteous; not just once, but three times! Within the span of two verses we learn that "God rescued **righteous** Lot," "Lot was a "**righteous** man," and Lot had a "**righteous** soul". Those who have followed Lot's biography may be baffled that Lot is designated righteous. Even the climax of his story is less than stellar—he gets drunk and sleeps with his two daughters! How, then, can Peter allege that the unrighteous Lot is actually righteous?

The answer is found by watching for the repeated word, "righteous," found in Genesis 18:22-33. According to Genesis 18, the Lord had "appeared to Abraham," revealing His plans to him: He will "go down" to discover if the sin of the city of Sodom is as great as its "outcry" implied (18:20). So Abraham began interceding for Sodom; his nephew lived there! Abraham inquired, "Will you indeed sweep away the **righteous** with

the wicked?” (v. 23). What if there are “fifty **righteous**?” Would God spare the city then? (v. 24). Abraham suggested that God could not “slay the **righteous** with the wicked, so that the **righteous** and the wicked are treated alike” (v. 25). The Lord conceded, “If I find in Sodom fifty **righteous** within the city, then I will spare the whole place” (v. 26).

Abraham was still troubled. Suppose there are five less than “fifty **righteous**,” would God “destroy the whole city because of five?” (v. 28). Painstakingly, Abraham whittled the number down to ten righteous people. But even that number was too large. Thus God, in mercy, reached into that wicked city to save Lot. In so doing He implied that Lot was righteous; God does not “slay the **righteous** with the wicked” (v. 25).

Peter can assert that Lot is righteous because he knows the first key to a dynamic Bible study: observing the repeated words. Peter must have noted that in Abraham’s plea for God to save the righteous, the word “righteous” is featured seven times. When we examine Lot’s life, aside from his initial Abraham-like faith in coming to Canaan, he does not seem to merit such a classification. Thus, we must conclude that unrighteous Lot was reckoned righteous and kept from destruction “not by works of righteousness which [Lot] had done, but according to God’s mercy” (Titus 3:5). Just like us.