



STEP 9: HEED THE WARNING SIGNS

Deitrich Boenhoeffer, the pastor who was involved in plots to undermine the Third Reich and even take out Hitler, once said, "If you board the wrong train, it's no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction." I.e. when you take a wrong turn it means you have to be willing to make some drastic changes.

And today's chapter illustrates just that – and should carry its own parental advisory sticker!

Genesis 19

Historically, this has been seen as a statement regarding homosexuality. And in a way, it is.

But Ezekiel 16:49-50 paints a broader picture:

"This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned: they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before Me. Therefore I did away with them, as you have seen."

I.e. the city of Sodom was an example of a society that makes human desire the acid-test of what is right and wrong. So yes, there was an obsession with sex – in all its forms. It was even a part of Phoenician religious practice (the 'detestable things' of vs50). And once you're on that slope, you end up with the moral madness you find here.

But equally, there was an obsession with wealth and prosperity. Sodom was part of a trade-network involving various cities – it even gets a mention, along with the other cities of the plain, in the *Ebla* tablets from NW Syria – and yet the rich, who lived inside of the city, were indifferent to the plight of the poor, who had to live outside of it.

In both respects, it's a stark warning to the West today.

However, important though that is, the main message is about – and to – those who are supposed to be a part of God's people, i.e. Lot and his family. Because the most disturbing part of this story is the choices made by *them*.

So, what faith lessons do we learn here? There are 4:

1) Watch Your Step. When the visitors arrive, where do they find Lot? In the city gate, an ancient way of saying he was a man of influence. Lot had gone from living in a tent with Abraham, to living near the city of Sodom, to living *in* the city of Sodom, to being a *leader* of the city of Sodom.

I.e. just like his uncle, Lot had been on a journey – but in the wrong direction! And I'm sure he had his reasons: "But life is so much easier now ..." But still the wrong direction.

Now this was a gradual progression / regression over 24 years – compromise doesn't happen overnight. It happens slowly, like the waves eroding a cliff-face. How do we avoid it? By being watchful. And by asking the right questions:

"Am I drawing closer to You, Lord? Or am I drifting away?"

2) Guard Your Heart. Men from every part of the city surround Lot's house in order to gang-rape the visitors, and Lot has to physically hold them off. However, the worst infiltration had already taken place – in his own heart. Lot wasn't just living inside the city; the city was living inside of him. You can see it in his treatment of his daughters (offering them to the mob) – and in their treatment of their father (getting him drunk and ... well, you know the rest).

The point is: if we fill our eyes and our ears with the ways of this world, it *will* have an effect. On us, on our children. Hence judgement lasting to the third and fourth generations. It's subtle, often imperceptible (to us at least).

But it can have devastating consequences for the future.

3) Run From Evil. The angels / messengers strike the mob with blindness – an external symbol of what was already an internal reality. Then they urge Lot to find his sons-in-law and warn them – to no avail. Finally, they command Lot and his wife and daughters to? "Run! Don't stop, don't look back – just *run!*" But notice how, even then, Lot and his family are reluctant. Compromising. Finding alternatives to God's commands. Making excuses.

Had you been walking around in 2020 and heard someone cough, you'd have given them a wide berth, right? And God tells us to treat evil – both immorality and idolatry – in the same way. Because in some way, judgement is coming. But as this story shows, evil is a judgement in itself.

So, run!

4) Don't Look Back. As they're fleeing, Lot's wife looks back, and 'becomes a pillar of salt' (or gets blasted in the stuff). She is literally consumed by the city's prosperity.

This 'looking back' is really a desire for something else – for security. You can see it in Lot's decision to move to Sodom; you can see it in the Israelites and their demand to return to Egypt after the exodus. And it's something that Hebrews 11 picks up on, too. If guys like Abraham were looking for the security that comes from the earthly, they could have got it anytime. Instead, they chose God.

As Jesus Himself said, remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32) – don't look back! To what you were, what you had, where you came from, to the values of this world.

Look *forward!*

Ka-Boom!

How does the story end?

- **For the cities of the plain** (with the exception of *Zoar* or 'small one' in Hebrew): geological disaster. And the evidence can still be seen today: scorched ruins SE of the Dead Sea; human skeletons warped by an intense heat; balls of sulphur to be found for miles around.
- **For Lot and his family:** moral disaster. As a survival tactic the daughters commit incest with their father and become the mothers of the Moabites and Ammonites. And it's a warning to us all of what can happen when *our* desires become the driver, rather than God.

But there is a glimmer of hope. Because God would eventually show His grace to Moab – via Ruth, who would go on to become an ancestor of? Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 1:5).

It is often said of Abraham that he was a sojourner in the land, i.e. he didn't belong to it. Not as it was, anyway. And the same is also said of us. So, if you feel like you don't belong here, it's because, well, you don't! Conversely, if you feel like you do, perhaps you need to stop and think.

Am I an Abraham? Or a Lot?

The Israelites needed to hear this message, as they were going to transition from being desert-nomads to land-owners – and neighbours with the Canaanites. And we need to hear it, too. There are too many Christians in recent years who have lost their way and shipwrecked not only *their* testimonies, but the testimonies of others.

May we stay close to Jesus.

And heed the warning signs.