

## WHERE WICKEDNESS RULES

Genesis 18:20-25; 19:12-16

Many of us heard about the US Army soldier in Iraq who roughed up an Iraqi police official because he had been abusing young boys and had assaulted the mother of one of the boys when she complained. The soldier was reprimanded and his military career was terminated because it was “Army policy” to not get involved in such matters that were accepted by the local culture. Since when is the “local culture” the standard of what is good and evil?

This “political correctness” is what inevitably happens in a world that rejects God and the word of God. This is the outcome of the original sin in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When people want to determine for themselves what will be the standard of right and wrong, then morality will take the course of least resistance and just as water runs downhill so does morality. The lowest levels of morality are evident when a people embrace and applaud what is evil and reject and ridicule what is righteous.

If we just look around us at what is happening in Iraq and other parts of the world we are shocked by the depraved behavior and blatant exploitation of those who can’t defend themselves and no one seems to be able to do anything to stop it. We are also dismayed by abnormal behaviors that people engage in willingly. It used to be that those kinds of things happened in far away places with strange sounding names, but we are seeing more and more of this in what we used to call Christian America. It is at our doorstep and it desires to gain control of the life of our nation and cause us to become a place where wickedness reigns.

Historically, such conditions have happened and we should be able to learn from the mistakes of others in the pasts. A classic example of a society or culture gone bad is captured in the account of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah.

The background of this account is related to a visit that Abraham experienced from three heavenly visitors who had the appearance of men. We have heard the details of the account (in the first eight verses of Genesis 18) of how these three appeared near Abraham’s tent in the heat of day and how Abraham did all he could to show them the best hospitality since he realized that they were not ordinary men. Abraham had assumed that they were passing through and would go on their way. We read in verse five that he said “so you can be refreshed and then go on your way.” The account shows that Abraham was personally attentive to the preparation and presentation of the food provided. He even stood by to minister to his guest while they ate.

As the account of this visit unfolds, we see that these three heavenly visitors were two angels and the Lord, Himself. In addition to passing through the area, the Lord gave a reaffirmation of the message regarding Sarah having a child that He gave to Abraham during their last encounter. This time the Lord wanted to make sure that Sarah heard the message that a son would be born to her. Do you think that Abraham had failed to tell her that she was to bear a son within the next year?

The main reason for the Lord and the two angels to be in the area was not directly related to the covenant that God had with Abraham except that God wanted Abraham to know what and why things were happening in the land.

### Man’s Sin – 18:20-21

<sup>20</sup> And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. <sup>21</sup> “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” Genesis 18:20-21 (NASB95)

This is another example of God (and what he does) being presented in terms of how we might expect a person to act. God in His omniscience certainly already knew what was happening in the physical world. The account given helps us understand the circumstances of what was happening and God's response.

The fact there was an "outcry" or protest of what people were doing in these cities would make us think that not everyone nor everything was in agreement of what was happening. If we start asking the question of "who was making the outcry," then we might think that there were some victims of the aberrant behavior of the people of that area.

Who might be victimized by such behavior? The first thing that comes to mind might be the children who were born into such a society. Others could be those who became participants because of the pressure of the culture. If there were slaves who were owned by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah or even travelers who happened to encounter the people of these towns, then they could be counted among the victims.

Another possibility of the source of the outcry was that their behavior was "unnatural." There are behaviors that no one should have to tell us "this is wrong!" Just as with the death of Abel, God told Cain the blood of Abel cried out from the ground, we could state that nature itself cried out that what was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah was "exceedingly grave."

The statement that God was to go down and confirm the reports or the validity of the outcry, tells us that God is careful in the responses He takes. We should take great comfort that God is not like many people who will take action based on rumor or unconfirmed reports. This is why the actions of Satan in being an accuser of the brethren should not be of any concern to us. God knows everything and since we know that He is righteous, then that should give us great confidence regardless of what is happening in our lives and what others are saying.

#### Abraham's Intercession – 18:22-25

<sup>22</sup> Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" <sup>24</sup> "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?" <sup>25</sup> "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" Genesis 18:22-25 (NASB95)

After the meal and the reaffirmation of the promise of a son to be born to Sarah, the three visitors got up to leave and they looked down toward Sodom. Abraham was seeing them off and it was at that time that the Lord asked the rhetorical question "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" In his humility, Abraham had not asked the Lord why He was in the area. Since God had promised to do great things through Abraham, then God concluded that those in positions of great responsibility and blessings needed to know what and why things happen. The account does not tell us the specifics of what God told Abraham, but it was enough for him to know that these cities would be swept away.

After God shared the objective of the mission to the area of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham found that he needed some clarification of his understanding of the character of the Lord and how decisions were made. The initial question that Abraham raised was one that should be on the minds of every Christian in the world today. We know that we are living in a world that is abounding with evil and wickedness seems to be in control of everything in the world system. We also know that God will judge the world and we are concerned about how those who belong to the Lord will be affected since we are physically in the world.

Through a series of questions related to how many righteous would be required to spare

an area from the punitive judgment that was going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah, we see Abraham trying to calibrate his understanding of what would cause God to initiate such a judgment on a group of people or city. The bidding started with fifty righteous and eventually stopped at ten as God (each time) agreed with Abraham that it was not in His character to destroy the righteous with the wicked in such a sweeping judgment.

This exchange between the Lord and Abraham was needed in that it helped Abraham to understand the grace of God and His care for those who acknowledge Him by living righteously. We get some insight into how God uses happenings in the physical realm as instruments of judgments that have purposes other than destruction. For example, when the outlaw gangs attacked the cities of which Sodom was associated, that could have been interpreted as a redemptive judgment on these cities that was for the purpose of getting their attention so that they might examine what they were doing and then to choose to do what was right and proper. Obviously, that did not happen and the wickedness had gotten to the point that their iniquity was “full” and other actions were needed to bring justice and to help others learn the consequence of such grave sinfulness.

It appears that God uses what we might call tribulations to bring redemptive judgments on nations or even individuals as a means to warn and motivate repentance. In such cases, we may see the righteous being impacted as was the case of Lot being captured in the raid that had happened earlier in that area. If such redemptive judgments are ignored and rampant iniquity continues, then that can lead to the wrath of God being carried out.

Another insight that we can glean from what would happen is that when judgment is inevitable that God provides a warning and an opportunity for the righteous to separate themselves from the destruction that would happen. We see this in the account of what happened to Lot and his family before destruction occurred.

#### God's Grace – 19:12-16

<sup>12</sup> Then the *two* men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring *them* out of the place; <sup>13</sup> for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.” <sup>14</sup> Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city.” But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting. <sup>15</sup> When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.” <sup>16</sup> But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD *was* upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. Genesis 19:12-16 (NASB95)

We have skipped over the gross account of what the men of Sodom wanted to do to the two angels who went into the city and were invited to spend the night in Lot's house. The actions of the Sodomites confirmed their total depravity and the attempted intervention of Lot to offer his daughters to these perverted people showed how much he had been affected in his lack of ability to make proper moral judgments in the face of adversity. The angels were able to take care of themselves by causing the attackers to be blinded.

Since the agenda for the destruction of the area was underway, the last minute details were being set in motion. Even though God's judgment was about to destroy this city, provision was made for anyone whom Lot might convince to escape even though they might not be righteous or a believer as was Lot. In response to this provision of mercy, Lot went to those whom he thought would be concerned enough to leave and escape the coming destruction. He went to his sons-in-law and warned them. They failed to take Lot seriously and perished in the destruction that would come the next day.

Some interpretations and commentaries treat the relationships of the daughters of Lot with the sons-in-law as that of betrothal rather than already being married. This interpretation is used to explain why the daughters were still living in the household of Lot. Another possible interpretation is that Lot actually had four daughters. Two were married and they were impacted by the decisions of their husbands and two were unmarried and they still lived with Lot and his wife.

The application for us is that in the light of our knowledge of the impending judgment of God on the world, we should be warning those we know and care about regarding what is coming. There was no distinction made of whom Lot should warn and the same should apply to us. We sometimes limit our concern and warning to those who are believers but Lot was free to tell anyone. We should be telling all who will hear especially as the time grows near.

The next morning, there was an immediate urgency to leave the city since the destruction was about to begin. The angels urged them to leave at once and save themselves from the destruction, but there was hesitation in them actually leaving. The Biblical account tells us that they had to be literally led out by the angels. Matthew Henry described Lot's rescue in spite of his reluctance to leave as "gracious violence" in that the angels did not give Lot, his wife and his two daughters any choice. They were literally pulled out of the fire. This was God's mercy in action and we need to be aware of the fact that God shows His mercy to us as we often fail to show urgency in doing what He tells us to do to escape the ruin of destruction that impacts a world where wickedness tries to rule.