

THE PROBLEM WITH LOT

Lot can be considered a type of backslider, the Biblical account of his life has something to teach about this sad condition.

Lot's beginnings

Lot is first mentioned in Genesis 11:27, his father Haran was Abram's brother, Haran died in young age. When Lot's grandfather Terah decided to journey from Ur to Canaan, he took Abram, Sarai and Lot with him, they settled on the way in Haran and Terah died there. Lot had a brother, Iscah and a sister Milcah, Milcah married Abram's brother Nahor and became the grandmother of Rebekah who in turn became Abram's daughter in law when she later married Isaac. (Gen. 11:27-32).

Genesis 12 relates the account of Abram's call from the Lord to leave his country, family and father's house, and go to a land that the Lord would show him. Abram set out and took Lot with him, along with other family members and servants (Gen. 12:5).

Lot's privilege

Lot, though an orphan, had a privileged start to life, being adopted into his grandfather's and then into his uncle's families, as such, he was involved with the Lord's plans and no doubt heard and learned about the Lord from his Uncle Abram, he must have known his uncle as a man who heard and obeyed the voice of God. It is fair to assume Abram shared with those close to him about how God spoke with him, the direction that God was leading, and the promises the Lord gave him.

In some ways Lot relates to New Testament believers who, by faith, are:

- Adopted into a new family (Jn. 1:12,13; Rom. 8:15,23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).
- Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29; Rom. 4:11,18).

- Partakers of God's plans in this world (Jn. 15:15).

Lot's choice

As Abram and Lot journeyed together they grew in wealth, and as their herds and possessions increased tensions increased, and Lot's herdsmen fell out with Abram's herdsmen, so Abram met with Lot to try to find a solution (Gen. 13:1-8). Realising that there was not room for them both in the land, Abram suggested that they separate, and he gave Lot the choice of the land before them. Lifting up his eyes Lot saw the plain of Jordan, well watered, like Eden and chose it for himself.

The event says much about both Lot and Abram: Abram as head of the family, could have used his paternal right to take the best of the land for himself, but laying aside his right, he gave the choice to his nephew. Lot, for his part could have deferred the decision, and submitted to his uncle's wisdom and will in the matter, but he saw an opportunity to gain the best, and greedily took it. Abram shows great humility and trust in the Lord, a lack of selfishness, a confidence that the Lord will work things out. In Lot we see greed and desire for worldly things, a selfish man who jumps at an opportunity to make gain for himself. The world would likely acclaim Lot for his actions, his seizing of the moment to promote his agenda would be seen as wonderfully entrepreneurial, whereas Abram would likely be considered a weakling, giving away his rights and missing out on an opportunity for personal gain. Abram however, is the spiritual man of God, his actions are the actions of a true disciple, a man trusting his God and willing even to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, and give to him who asks (cf. Matt. 6:39-42). The effects of this moment had profound consequences for both and, contrary to worldly wisdom, actually prove Abram to be much the wiser of the two .

Lot, going on his way, dwelt in the plain of Jordan and pitched

his tent even as far as Sodom (Gen. 13:13), by this time the men of Sodom were “exceedingly wicked and sinful before the Lord” (Gen. 13:14). Lot went from living his life alongside a righteous man who was doing the will of God, to living among the most sinful persons on earth. James warns of the consequences of succumbing to worldly and fleshly desire:

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.” (Jms. 1:14,15).

Lot’s selfish desire for the good of the land took him to a very bad place!

If Abram, going on his way, had any lingering doubts or regrets over his decision to let Lot take the best of the land, he was soon relieved of them when the Lord met with him, and gave him wonderful promises concerning the land and his descendants (Gen. 13:14-18). Abram’s eyes were now firmly on his heavenly reward, and he was content to shun the uncertain riches of the world, and live as a nomad, dwelling in tents while waiting for the city that has foundations, his desire being for the heavenly country (Heb. 11:8-16).

Lot’s predicament

Genesis 14 includes an account of the first war recorded in the Bible, possibly the first war on earth. A coalition of four kings from the north and east fought with five others in the south (including the king of Sodom) and overcame them, the five kings served the four kings for 13 years, and then rebelled against the rule of the four. The five were defeated in battle at the Valley of Siddim, one result of which the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot, were

captured and taken away along with their goods.

So now, here is Lot, the man who chose the best for himself, and took himself off to enjoy life, but who now finds himself in a miserable situation, a prisoner, being taken far from his home to face a very uncertain future in a foreign land. This is a sad fall, from a privileged life with his uncle in the will of God, and under God's protection, Lot's selfish greed and worldly desire led him to this disastrous place. It is a picture of backsliding, and bears similarities to the parable told by Jesus of the prodigal son who, having left his father's house to live the life of his choosing ended up eating pigs' food (Lk. 15:11-32).

Lot was not a sinner as bad as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter notes that Lot was a righteous man who was oppressed and tormented in soul seeing and hearing of the lawlessness all around (2Pet. 2:7,8), and Lot does seem to have made some attempt to speak out about the wickedness of Sodom (Gen. 19:9). Lot was a man who knew about righteousness, but, for reasons of his own, he had chosen to make his dwelling amongst the wicked, the result was oppression and torment of soul, a condition he surely felt very sharply on that miserable trek as a prisoner of the foreign armies.

Proverbs 13:15 states that the way of the unfaithful is hard, this is profound comment on the state of the backslider, who having seen and then been lured by what appears to be promise of a better life, finds the truth that once worldly pleasures have been tasted, they soon lose their pleasant flavour. Backsliders find themselves in a nowhere land, where there is no satisfaction and no lasting fulfilment in life. Having once tasted the good and eternal things of the kingdom of God, the pleasures of the world being short-lived and cursory, fail to meet expectations and they live in this strange nowhere world, caught between two camps where demonic forces oppress them and strive to keep them from returning to the

kingdom of God, while their souls, having once tasted the good things of the kingdom and knowing righteousness, find no peace while dwelling amongst the sinful and partaking of their deeds. So, the backslider is torn between the two camps, and finds no peace until, like the prodigal, clarity returns to the mind, and the decision is finally and firmly made to return to the Father's household.

What is at the root of backsliding? It is unfaithfulness, a state of heart and mind that is unwilling to trust God and so fully accept His will and the constraints that attend it, and so looks elsewhere for satisfaction (cf. Heb. 3:1-12, where this state is called "an evil heart of unbelief"). This may be accompanied by fall into sinful behaviour, but not necessarily so, the heart can be far away from God even while the conduct appears righteous - such was the case with Lot.

Lot, being unfaithful, thereby succumbed to temptation and walked away from life alongside his righteous uncle Abram, thereby missing out on great blessing, because, "only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" and "those who of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 9).

The wars of the kings seem to have had no effect on Abram, walking in the will and purpose of God for his life, he was content to let the world go its way. The world is characterised by its lust, covetousness and murder, it fights and wars (Jms. 4:1-3), but the saint of God has no part in this; there is a sense in which he watches from the sidelines, aware of worldly events, and while grieving and praying for the misery he sees, refuses to get entangled, knowing his war is being fought in the heavenlies, and he cannot allow worldly events and concerns to distract him from his calling to serve his God (2Tim. 2:3,4; Eph. 6:12). Jesus reminds us of this when he said, "For you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." The world does its thing, warring and fighting, until the day

comes when Jesus returns and He, as Prince of Peace, sets up His kingdom of peace here on earth, to this end the true saint sets his stall.

But Lot has entangled himself in the world, and being so entangled ends up sharing in its woes, pains and miseries; for one who began in such a privileged and blessed position it is a sad fall into a sad and distressing place.

Lot's escape

How fortunate for Lot that news of his predicament reached the ears of his uncle Abram. This man of God loves his nephew, and on hearing the news of his capture, determines to go and rescue him. Taking with him 318 of his servants, and setting off from his place at Hebron near the Dead Sea in the south of Canaan, he travels over 300 miles to intercept the armies of the five kings at Hobah north of Damascus, where he defeats them, and rescues Lot and his goods along with all the other captives, and leads them back to their homes.

Abram's actions typify God's saving actions:

- Abram loves his nephew, he is willing to risk his own life to go to his aid and rescue him, Jesus so loved the world he was willing to come and give his life for its salvation (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).
- Abram while not being part of the world, is willing to go into the world to rescue the lost soul. We see him as a type of Jesus, who came from glory to our world to seek out the lost (Mt. 15:24; Lk. 19:10); and as a type of the church, called by God to be separate from the world, but to go into the world with the good news of salvation, rescuing souls from the power of darkness (1Cor. 5:10; 2Cor. 6:17; Mk. 16:15; Jn. 17:18; Acts 1:8; Acts 26:17,18).
- Abram with his small army defeats the combined might of five

kings, showing how God takes that which the world regards as small, despised, weak and foolish to confound the wisdom of the world (1Cor. 1:27,28), as He did with Gideon, and at the cross, and with the church today through the preaching of the gospel.

Lot, began in a privileged place, through his own selfish greed and desire he fell into a bad place, now having come to a helpless place, he is rescued, and once more partakes of great privilege. Brought out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, his mouth ought have been filled with songs of praise, his heart ready to walk in the path of the Lord's choosing and blessing (Ps. 40:1-3), but ...

Lot's end

With Lot's rescue from the hands of the five kings the account should have a happy ending with Lot restored, and with a new determination to steer clear of the wicked and live a righteous life, secure under God's blessing and protection. However, the next mention of Lot in Genesis 19 finds him back in Sodom! What was it that lured him back there? Scripture does not tell us, but he could not stay away, the promise of something he deemed better, perhaps riches or some fleshly pleasure allured him, and he could not resist. His uncle had rescued him physically but in his heart there remained a yearning for some worldly "treasure" which he believed would be fulfilled in Sodom.

Sodom's wickedness continued unabated, and God determined he had no choice but to destroy it, Abraham interceded on its behalf, no doubt thinking of his nephew (Gen. 18:16ff). Lot had escaped one predicament at the hands of men, a far worse thing was about to happen, and he was now in danger of falling under the wrath of almighty God. But the Lord was very merciful to Lot (Gen. 19:16), sending the angels to rescue him and pull him from that place before it was too late. Abram's human intervention had failed to work a

complete deliverance from Sodom, so now God divinely intervened to effect Lot's rescue, and Lot and his two daughters escaped, though at great cost as members of his family and his wife perished in the judgment.

Was Lot now at last determined to stay away from wickedness and walk a righteous path before the Lord? It seems not, His refusal to obey the angels when instructed to go to the mountains, and his preference to go instead to a city of his own choosing suggests a rebelliousness, an unwillingness to obey, and a reluctance to make a complete break with the world. So Lot goes to Zoar, but becomes afraid there, and he flees to the mountains, and ends up living in a cave with his two daughters. There in that cave we find the last mention in the narrative of Lot's life, he is drunk and so insensible that he is unaware when he is raped by his own daughters; a sad, undignified end. A life that started so full of promise is brought to this miserable, inglorious and very pathetic end.

It all began to go wrong for Lot on that day when standing beside his uncle Abram, the sight of the good land beguiled him, falling for the temptation, he rejected the spiritual for the worldly. There is a stark warning to every believer!

Summary

What does the story of Lot teach us?

- It is a great privilege to be a member of the household of God, it is a place of great blessing, whether in the Old Testament as a descendant of Abraham or in the New Testament as a believer in Jesus Christ. There is peace, purpose and abundance of life for those who accept God's will for their lives.
- Temptations face every child of God, what begins with a look at what the world has to offer, becomes a taste, the taste becomes embroilment in the world and its sinful ways, the end is disastrous.
- The way of the unfaithful is hard: For the backslider, demons

oppress and the soul is tormented and finds no peace. There is knowledge of righteousness but a lack of conviction and strength to live righteously.

- The way out of the backslidden state is very difficult, Abraham went to rescue Lot, but how quick Lot turned back to the world. God divinely intervened, still Lot could not let go of his yearning for the world, and it brought him down to an awful undignified end. Once the prodigal son came to his senses he returned to his father's house: Human intervention will not bring the backslider back, there must be a convicting work of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual awakening and godly sorrow followed by deep and true repentance if there is to be full restoration (cf. 2Cor. 7:8-12).
- God is merciful to the backsliders, and will chastise and allow disaster upon disaster in order to bring them to their senses (cf. Isa. 1:2-17); He promises healing and full restoration for the truly repentant backslider (Jer. 3:12,13; Jer. 4:1,2; Hos. 14:1ff).
- There is no lasting, eternal fruit from backsliding. Lot's sons by his daughters brought forth the nations of Ammon and Moab. Ammon and Moab became enemies of Israel for which God judged them, and brought about their demise (Ezk. 25:1-11).
- The Day of Wrath is coming on all the earth (Isa. 13:6ff, Rev. 6:12-17), the wicked will perish, like Abraham, believers must be interceding for the lost and the backslidden, especially for their own whom they love.
- God's faithful servants shun the world and its alluring pleasures, their eyes are on heavenly treasures and they are content to wait for them.

Backsliding

Backsliding is generally reckoned where there is failure to attend regular fellowship, or when obvious serious sin takes place, e.g.

adultery, fornication, theft, murder, etc.

Backsliding should also be reckoned where there is a falling away, or a turning from true to false doctrine. The allure of false doctrine with its promise of something extra special for the adherent (whether that is wealth and health, special revelation, supernatural spiritual experiences, etc.) is claiming many in these days. Satan sends his ministers posing as angels of light to catch the unwary. It is just as difficult to bring the apostate back to true faith as it is to turn a sexually immoral person back to the Lord. To see how serious the Lord counts doctrinal apostasy look at 2 Peter chapter 2 and note the strong words used against those who teach false doctrine, they are considered to be walking according to the flesh (v. 10, 18) and to be entangled in the pollutions of the world (v. 20), whose end is worse than the beginning (v. 20), they turned from the way of righteousness (v.21). Those who have fallen into apostasy are considered to have suffered shipwreck concerning the faith (1Tim. 1:19) and to have strayed concerning the truth (2Tim. 2:18).

The root cause of backsliding begins in the heart where there is unfaithfulness toward God (cf. Jer. 3:6-13), that unfaithfulness can manifest itself in several ways, it may be in obvious sinful conduct, it may be in shunning fellowship, it can be in departing from doctrinal truth. Lot's story shows that the backslider is in a fruitless, dangerous condition from which restoration, though not impossible, is very difficult. Every believer faces temptations, Lot gives a warning to us to guard our hearts, to trust and accept God's dealings in our lives, to be alert to temptations and to resist and say "no" to all worldly and fleshly allurements.

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12).

APPENDIX

The following notes are offered to aid further study on the subject of backsliding:

1. The Biblical words for “backsliding”

(Reference to Strong’s Concordance, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, and Davidson’s Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon. Scripture refs are examples and not intended to be exhaustive).

A. Hebrew

i. Strong’s 4878, *mshubhah* (משבח), defection, apostasy, rebellious. (Jer. 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 8:5; 31:22; 49:4).

Usually translated “backsliding” or “turning away” - Prov. 1:32; Isa. 57:17; Hos. 11:7; 14:4.

From the verb, *shubh* (שיב), Strong’s 7725, meaning to turn back/away; to retreat, to return; to be converted. Describes repentance: Ezk. 14:6; 18:30; 18:32 (“turn”); 33:11ff; Isa. 55:6,7 (“return”). Usual translation = turn; repent; return.

ii. Strong’s 8582, *ta’ah* (תעה), verb, meaning to wander, go astray; to stagger through drunkenness; to err; to be deceived; to commit error; to be seduced.

Isa. 53:6 - We all like sheep have gone astray

Usual translation = to err, to go astray.

As a noun = error, apostasy.

iii. Strong’s 7686, *shaghal* (שגה), to slide back, to stray, to mistake, to reel drunkenly, to be enraptured, to sin, to wander - Ps. 119:10.

iv. Strong’s 5128, *noo’* (נוע) - to wander, go to and fro, agitated, shaken.

cf. Jer. 14:10 - “this people ... have loved to wander”.

v. Strong’s 5472, *sugh* (סוג), to flinch, slide back. cf. Prov. 14:14, “backslider in

heart" (לב גוי, *sug lebh*).

B. Greek

i. Strongs 4105, *Planao* - to (cause to) roam, err, wander, lead astray (from safety): Mt. 22:29; Heb. 3:10; Jms. 1:16, 5:19

cf. Vine and related words:

- Deceiver (*planos*, Strongs 4108): 1Tim. 4:1; Mt. 27:63; 2Cor. 6:8; 2Jn. 7.
- Deceive (*planao*): 1Pet. 2:25; Heb. 11:38 (wander); to deceive by leading into error (i.e. to seduce), 1Jn. 2:26; Rev. 2:20. Rev. 12:9, the devil, "who deceives".
- Deceit (*plane*, Strongs 4106), wandering: Eph. 4:14, 1Thess. 2:3; Jude 11; Jms. 5:20; 2Pet. 2:18, 3:17; 1Jn. 4:6; Rom. 1:27.
- Wander(er) (*planetes*, Strongs 4107): Jude 13.
- To cause to err (*apoplanao*): Mk. 13:22; 1Tim. 6:10.

ii. Strongs 795, *astocheo*, (see: Vine, "err"), to miss the mark: 1Tim. 1:6; 6:21; 2Tim. 2:18 ("strayed" NKJV; "swerved" KJV).

Note: Repent = Gk. *metanoia* (*n*); *metanoeo* (*vb*); to perceive after = a change of mind / purpose.

2. Causes of backsliding:

Note Ps. 95:10: When there is an "erring" (*ta'yi* from Hebrew: *ii above*) in the heart, the sheep go astray (see Ps. 119:176; Isa. 53:6).

The cause of this erring can come from outside sources or from within oneself:

i) By others (especially religious leaders, and by demonic influences):

- 2Chron. 33:9 - Manasseh made the inhabitants ... to err and to do worse than the heathen
- Jer. 23:13 (:32) - the prophets of Samaria ... caused my people Israel to err.
- Jer. 50:6 - My people have been lost sheep, their shepherds have led them astray.
- 2Pet. 2:1ff .. there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly

bring in destructive heresies ... they will exploit you with deceptive words (:3) ... they have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam (:15) ...

- Rev. 2:20 - you allowed that woman Jezebel ... to teach and seduce My servants
- The Hebrew and Greek contain the thought of being deceived/ seduced: The devil is the deceiver of the world, his demons seek to seduce the church (1Tim. 4:1; Rev. 12:9; 2Jn. 7; 2Cor. 11:1ff) - there is a concerted demonic effort to deceive and lead believers astray, which will increase in the last days (Mt. 24:24).

ii) By ones' own fleshly inclinations or by ignorance of Scripture:

- Amos 2:4 - they have despised the law of the LORD .. their lies caused them to err.
- Isa. 53:6 - All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one, to his own way.
- Isa. 28:7 - they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way.
- Mt. 22:29 - Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.
- Jms. 1:14 - Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.
- 1Tim. 6:10 - For the love of money ... for which some have strayed from the faith ...

3. Scriptural helps in keeping oneself from going astray:

- Ps. 119: 65-72 - Accept the Lord's dealings in ones' life- even if it should mean affliction - knowing His good purpose is being worked out.
- Heb. 3:12 - Beware of the evil heart of unbelief: exercise faith, be faithful, trust the Lord, believe His word, learn to recognise and obey His voice.
- 2Thess. 2:10 - Develop a "love of the truth": Note that Paul does not say, "knowledge of the truth"; it is not intellectual/academic knowledge in view here, for no one can know all the truth; it is the

heart attitude that is important, a love for God and a willingness to submit to His truth which is a mark of a true disciple of Jesus and brings blessing (cf. Jn. 8:31,32). In contrast note that those who do not have the love of the truth are given over by God to delusion, and those who twist the Scriptures do so to their own destruction (2Pet. 3:16).

- 2Tim. 1:13 - Hold fast the pattern of sound words, (2Tim. 3:14ff); i.e. acknowledge and uphold the importance of sound Biblical doctrine.
- Mt. 7:21-23; 1Jn. 4:1- Test the spirits, be alert to the danger of false prophets and teachers, be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in this respect (1Jn. 2:26,27); especially so as the day of the Lord's return draws ever nearer.

4. Remember the Lord holds high regard for faithfulness:

- Mt. 25:14-30 - The talents - the "good and faithful servant" is rewarded.
- Lk. 12:35-48 - Be like men who wait for their master - who is that faithful and wise steward?
- Lk. 16:1-14 - He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.
- 1Tim. 1:12 - And I thank Christ Jesus ... who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.

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