

Episode-214

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast, continuing our series of difficult passages or difficult topics in the Bible. Joining me again is Kevin, the Managing Editor of GotQuestions.org, and Jeff, the Managing Editor of BibleRef.com. In today's episode, we're covering a person per se than just one specific passage. We'll be covering the story of Lot in the Bible. Lot appears in the book of Genesis several times. In 2 Peter 2, verse 7, it says, referring to Abraham, If you rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the city. So, referring to the whole Sodom and Gomorrah situation and how Lot ended up there, it refers to Lot as a righteous man.

Shea Houdmann

Interesting thing about that, you read the Old Testament and the different times Lot is described, there's really nothing specifically that identifies him as a righteous man. On the contrary, there's several things that he does that are definitely unrighteous. It's kind of a brief survey. Early when Abraham arrived in the Promised Land and his crops and herds were, people working were starting to fight with Lot and his, they decided to split ways. So, Abraham, very generously, even though he was the leader there, offered Lot, where would you like to stay? Lot, apparently selfishly, chose what he thought would be the better part of the land. So, it describes a little bit of selfishness there. But then also you look at, he decided to set up his tents near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which even at that time were very well known to be unrighteous, very wicked cities. So, questionable judgment there.

Shea Houdmann

By the time we get to Genesis 19, where Lot is apparently living in Sodom, and when God sends the two angels to examine essentially the wickedness going on in the city, Lot meets them in the city square, has them come stay at his house, while the men of the city come to Lot's house and basically say, send out the two men who are visiting you. We want to have sex with them. Basically, forcefully raping these men who were staying in Lot's house. And Lot says something very unusual. He says, please don't do that. Here's my two virgin daughters. Why don't you rape them instead? Not exactly the acts of a loving father.

Shea Houdmann

Well, going through the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, eventually the angels talk Lot and his family into fleeing. Lot even seems a little hesitant at first, but

eventually listens to them, or possibly is dragged out of the city by them. Lot's wife ends up dying by looking back, apparently longfully, for what was going on in Sodom. Lot and his two daughters end up in a cave near Sodom and Gomorrah in a possibly unbelievable event, but true nonetheless. Each of Lot's daughters gets Lot so drunk that he passes out, and then they have sex with him and produce children through their own father. So nothing in the Old Testament talking about Lot refers to anything that we would consider righteous, and yet 2 Peter 2.7 says Lot indeed was a righteous man, that he was, one version says, vexed by the things that were going on around him.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff, how does this work out? What can we learn from the story of Lot, and what are some important truths that we need to realize when we're studying Lot in the Bible?

Jeff Laird

I would say one of the themes is that you can be a person who believes in God and follows God and still be an idiot. In other words, just because you have faith, even saving faith, does not make you immune from doing really, really dumb things and suffering the consequences. And that's not a minor thing when we talk about Scripture, because there's sometimes a caricature that says that if you really follow God, you're always going to do exactly the right thing, or that all of your mistakes are always going to be wiped away and everything is going to be great. Well, the relationship with God starts with eternal salvation, and a lot of what happens after that is up to us and the sorts of choices that we make.

Jeff Laird

My interpretation of this is that Peter is saying that Lot's righteous in the sense that God is seeing him as righteous for his belief, for his faith. And his life with Abraham would give me reasons to think that that's possible. So I can understand that kind of righteousness. Defining righteousness a little bit differently, we would definitely say no. Some of the things he did didn't make sense. And it's decisions that Lot is making that's getting him in trouble. When he had the choice to decide where to live, he chose to live closer to Sodom. And at the time that he made that choice, Abraham and Lot already knew that Sodom was not a good place. Genesis 13 talks about how already the wickedness of Sodom was known. Lot gets kidnapped. Abraham goes on a rescue mission with a small army. And after that, the king of Sodom wants to barter with Abraham. And Abraham just tells the king of Sodom flat out, I don't even want a thread from you. I refuse to let people know that you gave me anything.

Jeff Laird

And then we have Ezekiel, Jude, referring to things like lack of hospitality, not caring for people, pervasive sexual sin. We know what sodomy refers to in culture. So it's not like Lot didn't know, but somehow he went from living near Sodom to living in Sodom, to being so ingrained in the culture that he's described as sitting at the gate, which means he had some level of respect, authority, and all this. His daughters were marrying people of the culture, even though he knew, he knew that the place was bad news because he warned the two visitors, come spend the night at my house. They said, no, we'll sleep in the square. And Lot's going, no, no, you please, please come stay with, stay with me. He knew what was, what was probably going to happen in those circumstances. So we just see all these bad ideas.

Jeff Laird

I don't particularly understand the thing with the daughters. I can't tell whether I want to interpret that as hyperbole, exaggeration. You know, like you may say something when, you know, somebody's over the house and they're like, I'm going to do this. And you say, no, don't, don't do that. Why don't you just, why don't you just kidnap my kids while you're at it? I don't know if he's being sort of sarcastic or if he's really trying to say that would be terrible, but this would be worse. He's got to get dragged out.

Jeff Laird

And then what happens to him afterwards is still a decision. It's not as simple as just saying, oh, a lot impregnated his daughters, but it's also not as simple as saying, well, there was nothing Lot could have possibly done about that. I find it, I would find it hard to believe that Lot's daughters were able to tie him down and force his mouth open and dump enough wine down his throat to make him drink. So choosing to begin to consume is in of itself a choice. What happens after that is unfortunately sexual assault and that's what happened to Lot.

Jeff Laird

So it's, it's sort of a sad example of a guy who lives with all these good examples, all these things he could have seen, could have known, could have done. And he just keeps making really, really stupid decisions and he suffers terrible, terrible consequences for it. Does that mean that Lot didn't really believe in God? No, I think he did. I think he had enough of a relationship that Peter's able to say righteous Lot. Did he have enough of a relationship that he saw what was going on inside of him and said, that's not right. This is not the way it should be. Sure. But he clearly didn't make the decisions he needed to separate himself from those things enough to miss out on the consequences. And I think that's one of the lessons is you can suffer a lot,

even if you know what's right and wrong, if you don't choose to separate yourself from it.

Kevin Stone

It's such a sad story. It's just a tragic story. The story of Lot, he started off rich. He had so much there when he was with Abraham. He ends up with absolutely nothing. He's living in a cave, having lost everything, including his family, and he's living in abject shame. That is the last we see of Lot in the Old Testament. It is a story of a downfall of this man. He made just a series of bad mistakes, a series of bad choices that kept snowballing into worse decisions, worse circumstances.

Kevin Stone

One writer by the name of Troy Lacy called Lot an ineffective leader, an indecisive family man, a comfort-loving hedonist, and a drunken dad. And that about sums it up, I guess. Just a tragic story.

Kevin Stone

We do have some glimpses of some of the good that Lot was doing, but you have to look hard to find it. Scripture says, and Peter says, that he was burdened and grieved over the sin that he saw around him. That did bother him, so that's a positive. He tried to call out the people of Sodom for their wickedness. He says, no, this is a wicked thing. Don't do this. When they were coming after the angels, whom they thought were men, and he tries to protect his angelic visitors. He doesn't try to protect his daughters, it doesn't look like, but he tried to protect the angels. But then there's, I mean, those are just little glimpses of his positive aspects of his character, but there's so much bad. We don't know a whole lot about Lot, but everything that we do know is pretty much bad. Some horrendous things that he was doing.

Kevin Stone

But then Peter says, righteous Lot. He says, Peter calls him righteous three times in that passage, that he was a righteous man. So how do we reconcile this? One mistake that people make is that they say, well, if Lot was righteous, then that must mean that God approves of his actions, all of his actions that we read in Genesis. And that, of course, is not true. God does not approve of that thing, of all those things. God saved Rahab out of Jericho, but that doesn't mean that God approved of Rahab's prostitution while she was in Jericho. No, he saved her out of that. God didn't approve of what Lot was doing and the choices that he was making, but God saved him out of that, saved him out of sin.

Kevin Stone

There are three different ways to look at the idea that Lot was a righteous man, as he's called in 2 Peter. One is that the righteousness of Lot is spoken

of in the context of the wickedness of Sodom. So there's a contrast going on. Compared to the wickedness of Sodom, Lot stood out as one who did not join in all of that wickedness. He was not evil. He was not extremely wicked, like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were. He was surrounded by just an extremely wicked society, and he separated himself from that lawlessness and that immorality and tried to make a difference. He was ineffective, it looks like, in making any kind of a difference, but it tormented him day by day that he lived in such a culture. It really did bother him.

Kevin Stone

Second way to look at it is that the righteousness of Lot came later in life. We don't know what happened after the cave experience in Lot's life. I would like to think that he went on and lived for God, and he repented of all the bad choices that he had made. He repented of his sin and became a man of God. Now, this is all speculation, but he is called righteous Lot. So somewhere there was repentance in his life. Somewhere there was faith in his life. 2 Peter 2 seems to indicate that there was some type of repentance.

Kevin Stone

I compare this to Paul in 1 Corinthians. Paul just goes through this long list of sins, that some of them are pretty horrible sins, and then Paul says to the Corinthian church, such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. So God saved the Corinthian Christians out of that culture. He saved them from their sin. They were this way, and I think maybe the same thing with Lot, right? He used to be this way. God saved him out of that, and he is now called righteous Lot.

Kevin Stone

A third way to look at it is, this is not exclusive to the other two. There's some overlap here, but the righteousness of Lot is based on Lot's faith in the Lord. Abraham was justified by faith. Genesis 15, verse 6, Lot justified the same way. In fact, all of us justified the same way. We are justified by, through faith. We are saved by grace through faith. To be justified is to be declared righteous. Oh God, when he justifies a person, he declares them righteous. God says that Lot was righteous, then Lot must have been justified by God. God saw Lot's heart, something that we cannot see, and saw that Lot believed in God. He had faith in him. He trusted in God's promises, and God credited that faith for righteousness.

Kevin Stone

So, do righteous people ever do unrighteous things? Well, yes, they do. David did. Moses did. Noah did. Lot did. And we do too, even after we've been

justified by grace through faith. We still mess up. We still do things that are not... Christians do unchristian things sometimes.

Kevin Stone

So, I think in 2 Peter 2, God's not focusing on Lot's sin. He is focusing on the fact that Lot is forgiven. He is justified. He is declared righteous. So, God's focusing on Lot's faith, which results in righteousness. Maybe you guys have noticed, God saves sinners. He doesn't save perfect people. There are no perfect people to save. He saves sinners, and he saved Lot. After that salvation, because of Lot's faith, he was called truly righteous.

Shea Houdmann

I look at a passage where Paul says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. I think that's a great illustration also of the life of Lot. Looking back, I'm sure Lot had a ton of regrets, but that never changed the fact that he had faith, that he was trusting in God to be a Savior. Whatever revelation of how God was going to provide salvation that Lot had at that time, he was trusting in that.

Shea Houdmann

You look at Genesis 12, where the first invitation that God tells Abraham, move you and your family to the land of Canaan. Lot, apparently, willingly chooses to go along with Abraham. Abraham was his uncle, not his father, so in no sense would Lot have been obligated. Lot, along with Abraham, was stepping out in faith and following God's command. There's that example. Lot was trusting the word of the Lord.

Shea Houdmann

Even in Genesis 19, in the midst of a chapter that's all about the wickedness of these cities, at one point, the men of Sodom basically say, who are you to question our behavior? They viewed Lot as a holier-than-thou type of attitude. Even despite Lot's multiple failings, even the men of Sodom could tell, he's not fully engaging in everything that we're all about. There is something different. He's judging us here. So yeah, even in the midst of a whole lot of depravity, mistakes, stupidity, there are a few little examples of Lot showing himself to— his faith is coming through in his actions. So yeah, there's a lot of bashing of Lot we can do for the questionable decisions for the downright ungodly decisions to the downright disgusting decisions that he made in his life, but that doesn't change the fact he did have faith.

Shea Houdmann

But this gives an example of that even when we have faith, we are saved, we do know God, we can make mistakes. We can make pretty horrible mistakes that does not terminate our relationship with God, but is an opportunity for repentance, for following God's commands, in which we hope, as Kevin, as

you said, that Lot later in life, hopefully he did turn things around, got out of Sodom, got out of what, 1 Corinthians 15, I think 33, it says, bad company, corrupts good character. Hopefully once Lot got out of Sodom, he was able to turn his life around with God's help. Don't know, but that's our hope.

Shea Houdmann

But the story of Lot is tragic, but it's also a reminder that if you're a child of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, sin does not terminate relationship. Rather, sin is the opportunity to make things right through confession, through repentance, through commitment to, wow, I blew it. I'm never going to make that mistake again, type of thing. So there's things we can learn positively from Lot in addition to learning several decisions. No, that's not a decision you should ever make.

Jeff Laird

A lot of humility, hopefully that comes along when we look at some of what happens to Lot because he made decisions and some of the decisions he made were very, very impactful and not in a good way. But, you know, to what you were talking about, Kevin, is we don't really know what happens to Lot after we see him in that cave. And to be fair, we really don't know a whole lot about him. We've basically, in the first several minutes of this podcast, we explained everything we know about Lot.

Kevin Stone

Right.

Jeff Laird

You know, it takes about two minutes to explain everything we know about him. We really, we don't know what he was like. For all we know, he was a very, very godly, pious man. Maybe even in Sodom, he was, maybe he was attempting to preach and they just thought he was cute and didn't feel like they needed to throw him out. We don't know.

Jeff Laird

Clearly there's, there's bad decisions. There's things going on. You don't become an elder in a city like that and respected unless you're, you're tolerating things enough that you've been ingrained yourself in it. You're letting your daughters marry into it. You're, you're having a hard time moving out of it, but it's, it's tough sometimes to think of how people are going to judge us just by the most famous things we've been involved in. You know, that's one of the neat things about reading biographies or historical things. There's a very famous musical from the recent couple of years, Hamilton, where you get a chance to see that this is a, this is a figure who's complicated. There's a lot of ups and a lot of downs to what's happening there. You know, and sometimes you see the same things even with people that we define as

wicked or evil. You look at them and you go, yeah, I still think all the things that I know them for were evil, but I recognize that this is also still a human being. So we are all in that same sort of status or stature where, you know, there's as believers, the Holy spirit is leading us one way. The flesh is pulling us another way. We're going to do good things. We're going to do bad things. And it's, it's worth remembering that when we think we can boil somebody else down to a 10 second soundbite, you know, we wouldn't want the world to do that with us.

Jeff Laird

Thankfully, God doesn't need to do that because he knows everything about us and chooses to forgive us anyway. But I think it is fair to bring up that these things that we talk about with lot are sort of just a low lights, unfortunately for him, that's all that wound up in scripture. So we really don't know what else was going on outside of those.

Kevin Stone

I would hate to have my biography published after I'm gone. And it only has all the bad stuff I did. That would be horrible, but that's kind of what we have with lot, but it was recorded for us for our learning. Scripture says that the things that were recorded in, in scripture and the old Testament were recorded for, uh, for our benefit that we would learn from them. And in Lot's case, I guess it's more of, we're learning from a negative example, you know, hit the slippery slope that he went on. When he, he looked toward the plain of Jordan, he saw that it was well watered. It was like the garden of God when he was looking at that. And he said, that's lush. And I like lush. And he chose that direction.

Kevin Stone

But then before you know it, he's, he's inching towards Sodom. And then next time you see him, he's, he's living in Sodom and he is, he seems to be totally absorbed in the culture and definitely his, his daughters who had married the people of Sodom, they, they were ingrained in the culture. They did not, they did not leave when it was time to leave. His wife, of course, had her heart in Sodom, even as she was being dragged out of the city. So just that slippery slope is one of the many lessons we can learn from Lot. Things aren't always what they seem. Appearances are deceiving. We can't always base our decisions on what looks good. I think that was one of Lot's basic mistakes.

Shea Houdmann

Question that comes to mind is we kind of conclude here. Saw a question in the system the other day about at what point do you start questioning someone else's faith based on their behavior? Because I think anyone who is attending one of our churches who is doing anything even remotely similar to

what Lott was doing, we would have some serious questions. Obviously the Bible tells us that Lott was a righteous man who knew God. So I mean, that could be our closing application point. Like I know ultimately only God knows the heart. Ultimately only God knows whether this person is truly trusted in him, in Jesus Christ, for salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But also the Bible tells us to be discerning based on works. Like Kevin, the passage you mentioned earlier, and that is what some of you were. Past tense, not are. So when we see someone who claims to be a Christian, who we even believe to be a Christian, making terrible decisions, sinful decisions, at any point, does it become this person needs the gospel rather than this person needs a brotherly rebuke? I mean, how do we discern the difference there? Jeff, how would you respond to that?

Jeff Laird

Processing it as you're talking about it, I think that we definitely need to be careful. I mean, 1 Samuel 16:7 says, we look at the outside appearance, God knows the heart. And scripture does tell us that we're supposed to examine ourselves. We're supposed to look and see, am I in the faith? Am I really doing the things I'm supposed to? It's sort of like symptoms. If a person's got cough, fever, chills, aches, you know, even if I haven't done a viral test, I've got reasons to think they have the flu. Maybe they don't, but I've got reasons to suspect that if they have zero symptoms, I don't have any reason to think they have the virus. Maybe they do, but it's all about what's reasonable.

Jeff Laird

Part of what's going through my mind is the idea that I think in our culture. Now we can still see possibilities where we could do the things Lot did or make the mistakes Lot made or have other people unfairly put us in that category. I know for a fact that there are cities and States in the United States that people have certain persuasions are going to point to and say, that's like the modern day version of Sodom and Gomorrah. But I know that there's born again, believers who are living in those places. Do we look at those people and say, well, you're like Lot, is it as easy as just saying, look, if you really cared, you would do anything it took to get out of there and get away. Maybe it's because they don't notice. Maybe because they don't care. Maybe because they just see it as this is where God's called me to be. We can see it with places that people work. You know, somebody might say, well, why would you work for a company that does this bad thing or treats its workers this way or makes this product and all the levels that you could have with something like that.

Jeff Laird

It's easy for somebody to say, my personal conviction with that says that if you're doing that, I don't think you're spiritual enough. Maybe that's a problem. Maybe it's not, but you can also see that if somebody who's living in one of those cities gets ingrained into negative aspects of what happens in that culture and chooses to act and live in ways that entangles them with that, and then their family suffers the consequences, or somebody does choose to work at a business that does some things that are sort of unethical. And then they do get tied up in those things. Then you can look at those and say, look, I don't know that I can question your faith, but I can definitely question your wisdom and your discernment.

Jeff Laird

So I think the ultimate thing for us is just caution. We have to be careful to remember that we are not God. It's okay for us to look at something and say, that doesn't look like the kind of thing I would expect a believer to say or do or want, but I got to be really careful not to put myself on that throne and, and claim that I'm the one who's going to make that decision.

Kevin Stone

That's true. There are behaviors that we probably need to address. If the behavior is specifically defined as a sin in scripture, and we have somebody claiming to be a believer who is practicing that, then we need to address it. And I think Jesus really helps us out in Matthew 18, when he goes through the whole thing of church discipline. And Jesus gave us a process step-by-step. It's one-on-one dealing with the behavior. And then if, if the one who is caught up in the sin will not listen, will not respond, then you take two or three witnesses with you, you know, the process continues. And then if the sinner will not hear that, then you take it to the church. And then if they will not hear the church, and so this is, this is the third rejection.

Kevin Stone

Then Jesus said, you treat them as a publican and an unsaved person, basically. So there's a whole process there, and we're not, we're not judging the heart through any part of that process. We're looking at behavior, but through that process, you know, three or four times of just hard-hearted, I will not listen to you. I will not change this behavior. They're starting to show symptoms of not being born again, not being a child of God. And Jesus said, that's then how you would move forward from there. You would just treat them as if they were not a child of God.

Kevin Stone

And so we don't judge the heart. Only God can see the heart, but there, there are things that we need to deal with. In, in a church context, and there comes

a point where somebody just makes it very obvious that they are, they, they have some, the Holy Spirit needs to do a work in their lives.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. I look at this and to me, it's, it's humbling. It's a reminder, but for the grace of God, there go I. I mean, not to the same exact mistakes that Lot made, but other sins that I would be more prone to giving into. And if you were to observe my life in a short period of time, a few snippets here and there, some people would probably think I don't know the Lord, that I'm not trusting in Christ, that I'm not living for Christ. Let's not judge Lot just based on the very few things, like Jeff said, like the two minutes of snapshot of his life that the Bible gives us. But it was on the Lot. What according to scripture was a believer. He was righteous, was trusting in God for salvation. So therefore these sins, these mistakes that he made are aberrations of what a follower of God should be like, rather than something that identified as the entirety of his life. So can a Christian sin and devastating and abhorrent ways? Clearly, yes. Does that mean that person doesn't truly know the Lord? No, it doesn't. It means that be humble to recognize that we have not arrived. We are still vulnerable to huge mistakes, huge sins in our life and to trust God for the big things and the little things for the power, for victory over sin. And ultimately that was Lot's downfall on that. He was for whatever reason, making very poor decisions that if he had sought the Lord, sought the Lord's guidance, he would have been in a different place.

Shea Houdmann

And so let that be a lesson to all of us. Like Kevin said earlier, that the negative examples of Lot we can learn from those just as we can positive examples from other people in scripture. So that's what I'm kind of taking away from this as humble as like, Lord, please protect me from never being in a place where I could be possibly tempted to make huge mistakes like Lot did.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast on the story of lot. How could Lot be considered a righteous man based on what everything else scripture tells us about him. Hope our conversation today has been edifying, encouraging to you, right? Just study God's word. You'll find all about lot in Genesis chapters 12, 13, especially chapter 19, where you can read these stories. And again, second Peter two sevens, the verse describes him as a righteous man who was vexed by what was going on around him. Got questions, the Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.