

# In the House Of, Part 10 (Lot)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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There are two initials that have great meaning today; they are the initials O.S. Twenty years ago, I wonder who would attach significance to these two initials. My wife's computer wasn't working, so we took it to be repaired and when it came back the technician had written on the accompanying paperwork "restored o.s." These initials stand for "Operating System," referring to a computer's inner workings. Maybe you remember Microsoft's revolutionary "Windows 95." Then there was Windows 98, Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7. These are all Operating Systems that enable computers to work.

As far as the universe is concerned, there is only one Operating System, and that is compliance to divine law. The only way for peace and harmony to exist is for all of God's creation to live in accordance with His law. It is the Operating System by which God's inanimate creation function in harmonious relationship in the universe. Laws of gravity and motion maintain the peaceful relationship between the vast array of stars and galaxies. Divine law guides the planets and the intelligences of the universe.

This principle, the law of love; this Operating System was challenged by one of God's most gifted angels, Lucifer. He aspired to introduce another operating system, based on a "do it your own way" principle. He taunted those angels who remained loyal to God's way, the Operating System of obedience to Him, and said that they were in fact deluded slaves held captive by a tyrant. He offered "freedom" from law. He was successful in getting Adam and Eve to question the principle of obedience to God's law in the Garden of Eden. And so we find ourselves today on a planet in which there are two concepts at war with one another. Which is the Operating System that works? Is it obedience to God, or is it Do It My Way?

Through the ages Satan has busy in sending viruses that attack God's Operating System. The story of Cain, in offering his own fruit instead of obeying God's command to bring a blood sacrifice, is a case study in that conflict. Jesus came to this earth to proclaim that God's way was the best; the only way. Satan ingeniously infiltrated through the centuries and again found ways to challenge God's holy law. He inspired men to change it and put forward another day of worship instead of God's holy Sabbath as defined in the Ten Commandments. In this and many other ways the devil has attacked God's Operating System. Oh, that we would know for ourselves the wisdom of what

the Bible says, "Great peace have those who love Your law. Nothing causes them to stumble." Psalm 119:165.

Another case study in the concept of the two Operating Systems at war is the story of Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Today we're going to the home of Lot. Last week we visited the home of Abraham as recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis and saw three pictures of God's condescension. The Lord stooped low in the manner of His appearance to the patriarch; when Abraham looked up, his eyes saw what seemed to be three ordinary travelers. The Lord stooped low in His method of administering divine justice, speaking in language that we can understand saying, "I will go down now and see whether the cities have done according to the outcry that has come to Me." And the Lord stooped in allowing Abraham the opportunity to participate in the administration of His justice, as the patriarch negotiated for the salvation of the cities of the plain.

That brings us to chapter 19 of Genesis. "Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, 'Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.' And they said, 'No, but we will spend the night in the open square.' But he insisted strongly; so that they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate." Genesis 19:1-3.

Some similarities are seen in the narratives of the two chapters. What appear to be common travelers approach, even though they are in fact heavenly visitors. An appeal is made to accept hospitality. Food is prepared and eaten.

But there are also some great differences. Abraham resided in a tent in the highlands of Mamre. Lot was living in a house in Sodom. Those two differences speak volumes. Didn't they come from Ur together? How was it that they are now living apart? How is it that Abraham is breathing the pure air of the mountaintop while Lot is engulfed in the stifling atmosphere of Sodom? To get the answers to those questions, we have to slip back in Genesis a few chapters.

When the family left Ur of the Chaldees, it is true that they were together. But when their livestock had multiplied greatly, a separation was deemed necessary. "Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.' And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom."

Genesis 13:6, 8-12. Lot should have deferred to his elder and refused to make the first choice. That was his first mistake.

Here's something to think about. In their culture back then, as far as directions were concerned, a person oriented themselves as if they faced east. The word in the Old Testament most often translated "east" is *qadim*, meaning "what is before you." In facing east, the "Great Sea," the Mediterranean, would be behind you, south would be to your right, north to your left. What difference does this make? Just this: when Abram proposed a separation, he encouraged Lot to make a choice that would be either north or south; that is, staying in the mountain highlands. He said "If you go left (north) I'll go right (south), or vice versa," but notice that Abram did not give encouragement for Lot to go east. Abram encouraged Lot to stay in the highlands of Canaan, knowing the depravity that existed down in the valley of Jordan. "The men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD." Genesis 13:13.

But Lot was attracted by the lush scenery and quieted his conscience about living so close to evil. When he separated from Abram, he had no intention of becoming a resident of Sodom! Perish the thought! But he made a second mistake. He did something that seemed innocent at the time but proved fatal. He, in the words of the KJV, "pitched his tent toward Sodom." Thereafter, every time he looked out his tent door, his eyes fell on the sights of Sodom. By beholding, he became changed.

How did it happen that Lot, living on the mountain top in a tent, became Lot living in a house in Sodom? Like most things of that nature, the answer is "little by little." How did it happen that the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments was changed to another day? Little by little. What a sermon there is in the migration of Lot from Bethel to Sodom! Satan sucked him into the radius of its attraction, its sphere of influence, and the next thing you know Lot is in the middle of it. Oh, my friends! I could tell you of things that used to be in my life that parallel this story all too closely! The Chinese proverb "A journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step" has profound spiritual application! Beware the allurements of Sodom! Don't "pitch your tent" toward the ways of the world! You may think that you're strong enough to resist the temptation, but the Word says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." I Corinthians 10:12. One thing will lead to another, as it did in Lot's life. One small step toward sin makes the next step easier. What about the things that you allow to enter the doors of your soul? Are they the sights and sounds of Sodom? Is your tent pitched toward Sodom?

But God's love still reached out to Lot and the others in this wicked city. God's love in Genesis 19? Yes! Yes, it's there! But we must understand things from His point of view. Sin is a deadly cancer that, if left alone will destroy. Satan has put forth his ideology that sin is harmless and that God says "No" because He doesn't want us to be happy. Not true! God does want us to be happy, and because of this He counsels and commands us to stay away from sin. Was Lot happy in Sodom? No, the Bible says that his righteous soul was "vexed" with its wickedness. II Peter 2:8. Yet he seemed paralyzed to leave its woeful environment.

God has to deal with sin. Satan would portray God as an indulgent grandfather who never punishes. Not true! For the safety of the universe, God must deal with sin. The sins of Sodom had reached the point that they posed a threat to this “new world,” just a few centuries this side of the flood. What were the sins of Sodom? Clearly, as the story of Genesis 19 illustrates, their sins were in the category of immorality. There’s a reason that we have a word in our English vocabulary taken directly from the name of that wicked city.

Homosexuality represents a deviation from the divine plan, a change from God’s operating system. For the protection and safety of the family, which is the nucleus of society, God designed marriage to be a life-long bond between one man and one woman. Marriage was instituted even before sin, in the Garden of Eden. The Lord Himself performed the first wedding service. Satan has attacked that institution from the very beginning, inducing infidelity, divorce and polygamy. He invented same-sex relationships, contrary to God’s law. In language that cannot be misunderstood, same-sex relationship is defined to be abomination by both Old and New Testaments. Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26, 27. Never forget that God’s power is stronger than sin, and He can bring change into our lives no matter what the sin might be.

Jesus said that in the last days it would be like Sodom and Gomorrah. Does anyone doubt but that His words have been completely fulfilled? Yes, there has always been homosexuality, but the flagrancy of the practice today is unprecedented, even claiming the right to apply the word “marriage” to a same-sex union. This has never happened before in history! The media, the commercials, the school textbooks are now presenting this alternate deviant lifestyle as completely acceptable. Anyone who would raise an eyebrow would be considered prudish or as hateful as someone discriminating on the basis of skin color. Now this week, not surprisingly, President Obama has announced that he considers DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act, saying that states are not required to recognize the gay marriages of other states) indefensible and unconstitutional.

How did all this happen? The answer is, “Little by little.” In the space of one generation, one lifetime, we’ve traveled from a society which knew this was sinful and wrong to one in which it is totally acceptable. Shocking! You’ve seen the changes. It’s a sign of our age; a sign of the times. Satan’s attack against God’s institution of marriage has been put into overdrive.

As grievous as this was, this wasn’t the only sin of Sodom. We may placate our consciences and say we have nothing to do with the sins of Sodom, but listen to these words God spoke to His people. “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister, Sodom; She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me.” Ezekiel 16:49, 50. If you look, you can see a parallel between this text and the indictment that Jesus will give to the ones on the “left,” the “goats” when He returns. See Matthew 25:41-46.

Despite their sins, true to God’s gracious nature, there was going to be an opportunity for salvation. That’s always the highest priority in God’s plan. In comparing a number of examples in

Scripture, it is clear that the Lord's first attempt is to save the "whole," but if that isn't possible, due to the obstinacy of sinners, He will make every attempt to remove and save from the cleansing destruction those whose hearts are true to Him. Isn't that the story of Noah's ark? Isn't that the story of Jericho, a city which had 4 centuries to heed the Gospel, but chose not to listen? The city came tumbling down when Israel entered Canaan, but there was salvation in Rahab's house! Isn't that the story of Jerusalem? They were given a prominent place in God's plan, but refused to comply and crucified the world's Redeemer, yet when the city became ripe for destruction by the Romans, a door of escape was opened to those who had listened to the Savior.

The angels came to Sodom and proposed to remain in the city's courtyard during the night. Lot knew this was dangerous and unwise and urged his guests to come to the safety of his house. The disgusting details of the assault by the men of the city, upon learning where the visitors had found shelter, only confirms the justice of the divine sentence. If there had been any question as to whether the city deserved punishment, it would have been removed by the conduct of the deviant townsmen. This is Revelation 20 in miniature. If there is any question as to the guilt of the unsaved when they are brought back to life after the 1,000 years, their attempted attack against the City of God would serve to remove it. Revelation 20:7-9.

The angels then disclose to Lot their true identity and their mission. They give Lot an opportunity to work in behalf of the salvation of his friends and relatives. "Then the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.'" Genesis 19:12, 13.

Yes, God's love is here even in Genesis 19. A door of salvation was graciously opened. The sinner would argue, "Why can't God just let us alone and live the way we want? It is our right to live the way we choose." Not really. We don't have life in ourselves. All life comes from God. He is gracious to lend us life and the opportunity to make choices during our time here. Hopefully we make choices that agree with His Operating System, the system of the divine law of love, because that is the only Operating System that works. But God is completely within His authority and the bounds of justice to curtail life when in His wisdom it reaches beyond the limit of forbearance and poses a threat to the rest of His kingdom. Sodom had reached this point. The angels said, "We have come to destroy this place," and they did; yet Sodom destroyed itself. It pushed the Life-giver away and reaped the consequences of its choice.

When Lot attempted to warn his friends and relatives, to his sons-in-law, "he seemed to be joking." Genesis 19:14. "What? This place is going to be destroyed? Look around, Lot. Things are great! You must be crazy, old man! I always thought you were a little strange." To the person of the world, the truths of divine revelation make little sense. They are incomprehensible. They are the words of a deluded fanatic. "Go to bed, old man and sleep it off. Tomorrow's going to be another day just like today." Wrong!

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” To the one whose vision is opened to see God’s reality and has a different view of life, God’s Book, the Holy Bible, His Law, the Ten Commandments, His agenda of dealing with the sin problem occupy the central place in thinking. He or she understands that life must be seen through the lens of God’s great plan for Planet Earth. To the one whose mind is closed against the Spirit’s counsel, as were the sons-in-law of Lot, these things seem like preposterous nonsense. Yet, whose picture of life was more accurate, the sons-in-law or Lot? Who had the truth? We might ask, Is there a truth for today that is available? Is the world ready to receive it?

In the end, the angels had to place their hands on Lot and his family and lead them out of the city. “While he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.” Genesis 19:16. Despite this act of mercy, Lot wanted to argue with the angels. Not a good idea! The counsel was “Escape to the mountains; do not look behind.” But Lot declined the heavenly wisdom and proposed that they take refuge in nearby Zoar. “Is it not a little one?” That was another mistake. When you go half-way in following God’s counsel, bad things happen.

When the fire and brimstone fell, Lot’s wife disregarded the command and “looked back.” It was more than a passing glance. It was a longing stare that said that her heart was really left in Sodom. Had Lot heeded the advice of the angels and fled far away, Lot’s wife might have been spared. We’re told that she “became a pillar of salt,” the word *pillar* meaning “heap or mound.” No doubt lingering behind, she became engulfed in the saline mud that rained down from the destructive explosion.

The Bible uses this story to illustrate God’s way of dealing with sin. Luke 17:29. God’s love is eternal, but it cannot countenance sin. In His love and mercy He must deal with sin. We’re told that God’s presence is like fire. We have a choice in regard to this. Two different adjectives will bring the choice into focus. God’s power can be exercised toward us a refining fire, as the Scripture points us to in Malachi 3:2, purifying us from sin, or it can be a consuming fire if we cling to sin. Those are the only two choices. We can ask Him to cleanse us from all iniquity, and He will. Or we can choose to not let sin go, in which case we will be destroyed with it. God will have a universe free of sin, because His Operating System is holy, and there is no place for sin in it. Today in this life, we can allow Him to refine us as metal is refined by fire and take from our hearts all self-love, all taint of Satan’s system of “I’ll do it my way.” His power is sufficient to accomplish this work, if we will ask Him to.

In Genesis 19, God sent two angels to warn and to save. They came to demonstrate mercy and to proclaim that the hour of judgment for Sodom had come. Two angels bearing messages of life and death. God has sent a warning to this world to alert everyone that time is short, that we are now living in the “hour of His judgment.” This warning is encased in what Revelation calls the Three Angels’ Messages, messages which are the centerpiece of our church’s teaching and mission to the world. Notice this comparison: the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14 are typified by

the “Two Angels’ Messages” of Genesis 19. Do you see the similarity? Messages containing the Gospel, messages warning of divine judgment and offering a path to safety.

Today, as we see the world on the very verge of collapse, as the signs of the times are shouting, “He is coming,” let us confess our sins to Him. Let us plead with Him to remove all iniquity from our hearts and prepare us for the times ahead. Soon our blessed Savior will appear in the clouds. We want to be among those who look up and say, “This is our God! He will save us!”