

ReGroups 1/14/24

Origin Stories: From Ashes - Genesis 19

We last left off with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the cities going up in smoke. The valley of Sodom was known for its salt mines, and the remnant of this once thriving civilization is believed to be beneath the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea is one of the most unique places in the whole world. Here's some interesting facts:

- It is ten times saltier than any of the oceans. This is because the Dead Sea is a literal dead end for the Jordan River. With no place for the water to flow, it is forced to evaporate. Due to the climate, the water is constantly being evaporated resulting in a solvent that is heavily concentrated with salt from the mines below.
- The name is appropriate considering that water flows in but not out and is also fitting considering its origin story. Ironically, the Dead Sea is actually known as a *healing reservoir*. The high salt content causes the solution to be soothing to skin and muscle conditions. It serves as a major tourist attraction, being the world's largest, natural spa. **How does this fact show how God has redeemed a bad situation for good?**
- The Dead Sea is the lowest point on the earth, being 1300 feet below sea level. **Considering what we learned about Sodom and Gomorrah, how does this add to the message that is continually proclaimed from this place and its story?**

The following pictures show the Dead Sea's location and offer some illustrations of the aforementioned facts:



Don't Soon Forget

Read **Genesis 19:23-29** for a reminder on how the story ended. Our two featured characters are both spotlighted for *looking back*. Lot's wife looks back in regret as her homeland was destroyed while Abraham looks back on God's faithfulness.

To this day, there is a unique and distinct pillar of salt on one of the high canyons. Many believe this is the remnant of Lot's wife as recorded in verse 26. **What do you think about this possibility (see image to the right)? What sort of symbolism is present in the story of Lot's wife being turned to salt?**



Read **Luke 17:28-33** and **discuss** how Lot's wife serves as the ultimate warning in Jesus' message. **What does Jesus equate to as "looking back" or "turning away" from God's work?**

It may not seem as if the sinful lifestyles identified in **Luke 17:28** are as bad as what we believed to went on Sodom and Gomorrah. **How do we make sense of this? What is Jesus saying is most threatening to our devotion to God and commitment to His Kingdom?**

Remember Lot didn't set his sights on Sodom because he wanted to get involved in immorality. He was chasing his dreams of success and prosperity. Jesus draws a line between Lot's pursuit of this world to our own entanglements. Similarly, the excuses made by people in **Luke 14:16-20** are not overtly sinful, but prove equally as devastating to their faith.

Switching our focus to Abraham - **what do you think this occurrence taught him about the importance and power of intercessory prayer? Genesis 19:29** emphasizes that God specifically acted in accordance to his promise to Abraham.

How does this motivate us to keep praying for justice and intervention on behalf of those who are suffering? Or for mercy and deliverance on behalf of those in sin? Read **James 5:16-20** and **discuss** how we can pray "fervent, effective" prayers. **Who do we need to pray for God to vindicate and deliver from evil? Who do we need to ask God to forgive and restore from sin?**

Another Dead End?

Read **Genesis 19:30-38** and see how Lot's story takes another unfortunate turn. It's hard to believe that his daughters would make such a shameful decision, but no doubt they had been exposed to a lot of bad influences in Sodom and Gomorrah.

As we discussed, the immorality of Sodom wasn't limited to homosexuality. There were breakdowns across the board - from infidelity within marriages to incest, nothing was really off-limits. This was the standard in most of the ancient, pagan world.

If not for Judaism and Christianity, there would honestly be no word spoken against these lifestyles. If you're curious as to why there are entire chapters of the Law dedicated to commanding the Jews to not partake in certain sexual lifestyles, it's because they would have been exposed to about everything imaginable in their world.

For example, **Leviticus 18** confronts all of the following: *extra-marital affairs, incest, homosexuality, and even bestiality*. While they may not seem equivalent to each other in terms of offense, they all reflect a fall from God's design for us to have one life-long partner in marriage.

Lot's daughters justify their actions as a way to preserve and prolong their father's house. Obviously this was misguided... But believe it or not, God would redeem this sin for His glory as well. One of the children born into Lot's family was named Moab and became the father of the Moabite people. Tying this lesson and our previous one together, you'll remember that Ruth was a *Moabite*.

God would choose a Moabite girl to bring our Savior into the world. *Can you believe that?* Well, it really should come as no surprise and proves that God really can make beauty from any ash heap.

Consider how all of this plays together though:

- God judges Sodom and Gomorrah for unlawful, sinful lifestyles running rampant. He spares Lot and his daughters, which leads to more sin and the birth of the Moabite family.
- Years later, a similar scene to that of Genesis 19 takes place just outside of Bethlehem. You could argue it's even worse than the sins of Sodom, because the young woman in that story is violently assaulted and cut into pieces.

- Everyone in Judea expects God to judge Israel more harshly than He did Sodom and Gomorrah, see **Judges 19:30**.
- He chooses not to however, because nearby in Bethlehem, the story of Ruth is taking place. God spares the sinful many for the righteous few, as He told Abraham He would always do.
- Everything comes full circle with Ruth the Moabite, from the family of Lot, becoming the matriarch in David's family. This proves that God can redeem anything for His glory.

Before you dismiss, discuss how this story tells of God's grace going to every extent to overcome the damage that our sin does. **What stands out to you the most about how Genesis 19's legacy ties in heavily to the Redemption Story as a whole?**