

## Genesis 19 The Judgment of Sodom

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### Overview

#### **Abraham (my analysis, from notes on ch. 16; not in sermon)**

See Walsh for the best analysis of this section. I think the real key is seeing sections organized according to the two categories of promises in 12:1-3, land-seed vs. blessing to the nations.

A testing journey (choose God over ancestors/descendants)	12:1-9	22:1-19
Threats to promises of land and seed	12:10-13:18	20-21
Sarah compromised in strange land	12:10-20	20
Strife over land	13a	21:22-34
Separation from rival heir	13b (Lot)	21:9-21 (Ishmael)
Divine promise of land	13c	<<lacking>>
Divine promise of seed vindicated (Isaac born)	<<lacking>>	21:1-8
Blessing to nations: cities of the plain; covenant with gentile	14	18:16-19:28
Birth of rival heirs (Ammon and Moab)	<<lacking>>	19:29-38
Covenant: land and seed	15-16	17:1-18:15
Announcement of birth	16a	18:15
Birth of rival heir (Ishmael)	16b	<<lacking!!>>

Note the irregular distribution of references to the birth of possible heirs.

#### **Ch. 18-19 (Wenham; distinguish Monolog, Dialog, Narrative; note especially location)**

Go back to 18:16 to trace the movement in this chapter. The focus is on the announcement of judgment that the angels deliver to Lot in vv.12-13. The geographical movement of the narrative takes the reader into the city, into the heart of wickedness, and into the one house where there remains a shred of uprightness, then back out as judgment falls. The structure is a graphic means of picturing how God reaches down into Sodom and pulls Lot out. In the same way, he will reach into this wicked world and deliver us just before bringing his flood of judgment on the kingdom of antichrist (Rev 14:14-20, where the harvest of believers is completed before the winepress of wrath is trodden).

A look toward Sodom	Mamre	18:16 (N)	19:27-28 (N)
Destruction of Sodom contemplated and accomplished	Outside sodom	18:17-21 (M)	19:23-26 (N)
Pleading for a doomed city		18:22-33 (D)	19:17-22 (D)
Arrival in, and departure from, Sodom	City Gate	19:1-3 (N/D)	19:15-16 (N/D)
Rejection by Sodomites	In city, outside Lot's house	19:4-11 (N/D)	19:14 (N/D)
Destruction of Sodom announced	In Lot's house	19:12-13 (M)	

## ***Pairing of Noah with Lot***

### *Parallels in Genesis*

The NT frequently pairs this story with that of the flood:

- Luke 17:24-37, the suddenness of the Lord's return
- 2 Pet 2:1-10, the certainty of judgment on evildoers, and deliverance for the righteous
- Jude 5-7, also includes the judgment of Israel in the wilderness.

As we go through the story, we will note the parallels that motivate this comparison. Some are in the opening paragraphs of the chiasm:

- Abraham's walk with the Lord (18:16) recalls the statement about Noah (6:9)
- Divine self-reflection concerning coming judgment in 18:17-21 mirrors 6:5-8
- Same verb *šxt* used to describe the judgment in both cases: 6:13,17; 9:11,15; 18:28,31,32; 19:13,14,29. Of the 14 instances of this verb in Genesis, 6 refer to the flood, 7 to Sodom and Gomorrah, and only one in another context (38:9).

Several common themes demand our attention.

- Judgment is certain on those who reject God's law and refuse to walk according to it.
- In that time of judgment, God is able to preserve his own, those who trust in him.
- Most important, God is able to make the distinction between the two groups.

Recall 41:32, "for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass." The narrator's purpose in making these parallel in this way is to emphasize to us that this is God's character and his principle of dealing with his creatures.

## **1-3, Angels Arrive in Sodom**

"Two angels" should be translated "the two angels," the same two we have already met in ch. 18. They find Lot "in the gate," the place where the elders of the city meet to do business (cf. Ruth 4:1,2; Deut 22:15; 25:7; Josh 20:4; Lam 5:14). This shows two things:

1. He has become integrated into Sodom's society.
2. One must assume there would be other elders there, but no one else offers the angels hospitality.

Superficially, Lot's hospitality follows the same pattern as Abraham's, except that the guests here at first refuse. In the six instances of hospitality I have compared, only two other times does this happen:

- Judges 19a, when the Levite's father-in-law is overbearing in trying to keep his daughter home,
- 1 Kings 13, when the man of God has an order not to eat or drink.

What are their motives in this case?

- Given the inhospitable nature of the rest of the people of Sodom, they want to test whether Lot is being superficial or whether he really wants them to stay. Unlike Abraham, who recognized one of the visitors as the Lord, Lot and his family “entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2). He is genuinely concerned for the wellbeing of these strangers, an indication of the “righteousness” that the NT ascribes to him (2 Peter 2:7).
- The angels’ task, according to 18:21, is to verify the condition of Sodom. Perhaps they propose to do this by observing the city at night, a good time to detect its moral fibre.

## 4-11, Rejection by the Men of Sodom

On “from every quarter,” see Jer 51:31.

The men of Sodom, strangely absent when hospitality is called for, now emerge.

- v.4 emphasizes that the shameful behavior we are about to observe is universal: every age, every district of the city, “all the people” were involved.
- Their wicked interest is clear in v.5. “Know” is a euphemism for physical intimacy, as is made clear by Lot’s offer of his daughters.

The sin of the men of Sodom has several facets:

- They are inhospitable, violating one of the fundamental cultural norms of the near east.
- Their conduct here is attempted rape, clearly unacceptable.
- Some today argue that these offenses are all that is involved, and that their homosexuality is not condemned. To answer this, observe
  - Jude 7 condemns them not only for fornication but also for “going after strange flesh.”
  - The OT law is unequivocal on the lawlessness of this conduct: Lev 18:22-25; 20:13, 23.

The visitors, by their deliverance of Lot and blinding of the men of Sodom, make their supernatural powers known. V.19 echoes two instances in the flood story:

- 7:16, the Lord shut the door to protect Noah;
- 8:9, they put forth their hand as Noah did to bring the dove into the ark.

Spiritual lessons:

1. Hospitality is sacred. Lot must protect his guests, even at the sacrifice of his own household. We see this in how he goes out to confront the mob, shutting the door to cut off his route of escape, and in his willingness to offer his daughters to protect his guests.
2. But sacrificing his daughters isn’t right! We see here the dilemma of those who try to enjoy the friendship of the world: they are caught in moral dilemmas in which there is no way to live godly. Consider once again 2 Pet 2:7, which says that he was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” Vexation will be our lot as well if we allow ourselves to sympathize with the world.

3. v.9 shows that in the end, the friendship of the world is fickle. The moment he opposes their sin, they remind him that he is an immigrant. He may have sat in the gate as long as he agreed with them, but when he tries to uphold moral standards, they reject him. He can “be a judge” as long as he sides with the majority, but he cannot judge them. We should remember this if we are tempted to trust in the world’s methods to solve the world’s problems.
4. God can deliver even from hopeless situations. In spite of Lot's weakness, the angels deliver him supernaturally.

## 12-13, Announcement of Judgment

If Lot had any questions about the wickedness of the city, the events of the previous paragraph must have settled them. The sin of Sodom is now apparent to him, to the angels, and to the reader. Recall the Lord’s resolve in 18:21 to make disciplined inquiry into the condition of the city. The two angels now serve as the two witnesses required by the law to bring capital judgment, confirming the suspicions with their own testimony.

But Lot is to be spared. More than that, he is invited to bring with him any of his family whom he can persuade to come with him. Here is a lovely picture of our privilege and responsibility in evangelism. Warned of the coming judgment of God, we are invited not only to save ourselves, but to bring along other sons and daughters of Adam.

Note the sequence of events here as a pattern for godly evangelism:

1. Lot is made aware of the deep sinfulness of the society and the judgment that is impending.
2. By God’s grace, he is given the chance to flee,
3. and invited to bring others with him.

There is no talk here of the “love of God” or his “longing after sinners,” only a clear vision of sin and coming judgment and the gracious invitation to flee. In fact, the whole language of “salvation” only makes sense in the context of impending judgment. Whatever else we say to people, we are not preaching salvation unless we are telling them, “Judgment is coming; here is the way out.”

Parallels with Noah:

1. The characteristic verb “destroy,” used six times of the flood, seven of Sodom, and only once elsewhere in Genesis
2. The warning to prepare for the coming judgment comes before the actual command to depart (15-16)
3. The inclusion of his family; cf. 6:13-21; 7:1-4.

## 14, Rejection by Sons in Law

Lot is faithful to the angelic command, and seeks to warn his sons in law. The timeline requires that he goes out that very night. They leave the next morning as soon as the horizon begins to glow. He does not hesitate in his duty. Those who have been delivered from great danger owe it to their fellows to share the good news. Compare the lepers in 2 Kings 7:9.

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This action may furnish another parallel with Noah. Although Genesis does not mention it, his actions in building the ark must have attracted the attention of his contemporaries, leading him to warn them of the coming flood. 2 Pet 2:5 calls Noah a “preacher of righteousness.” Other Jewish writers at the same time drew the same conclusion. Josephus (*Antiquities* I.74) wrote, “Noah, indignant at their conduct and viewing their counsels with displeasure, urged them to come to a better frame of mind and amend their ways.” Here Lot fulfills the same role. Note his message: Judgment is coming, and you need to flee. “Good news” can be very grim. Its goodness is in the salutary effect it brings, not in its inherent cheerfulness.

“Married” may mean either that these daughters were already out of the house, or that they were engaged to the two daughters who were in the house and left Sodom with him. Probably they were already married, since v.15 distinguishes the two daughters who left with him as those “which are here.” Thus Lot’s extended family includes at least eight people: himself, his wife, two daughters at home, at least two married, and their husbands. This may have been the grounds for Abraham’s plea for ten.

“He seemed as one that mocked”: They do not take him seriously, a familiar experience to believers in their witness today. Compare Paul’s assessment of the gospel as “the foolishness of God” in 1 Cor 1:25; cf. 1 Cor 3:18, we are to become fools in the world’s eyes for the sake of Christ. They do not believe either

- the seriousness of their sin,
- the fact of the coming judgment, or
- the nature of the escape that God has provided.

In fact, they *cannot* understand either unless the Lord removes the blindness that is on their eyes (2 Cor 4:4). The carnal Christian will respond to this rejection with fear and withdrawal; the mature believer, with compassion and pity.

### 15-16, Angels and Lot Leave Sodom

Parallel with Noah: the family is delivered along with the righteous head of the household.

Parallel with the first half of the chiasm:

- entering vs. leaving the city
- when the angels came in, Lot had to “press upon them” to get them to stay with him; now they “hasten” him awake and out of the city.

The angels arouse Lot early the next morning, when the sky is beginning to lighten, but before the sun has arisen; cf. 15 with 23, which indicates that Lot had arrived at Zoar before the sun was up.

“While he lingered”: at the last moment even he, who has risked his life to protect his guests and gone to persuade his sons in law, hesitates. How pervasive is sin and the love of the world.

“The men laid hold” of him, his wife, and his daughters by the hand. Each angel has two in tow, one in each hand, like little children who must be led across the street lest they scamper away.

How would you feel if you were Lot at this point? Rudely awakened, urged to hurry up, and finally dragged by the hand out the door, through the streets of the city, and out the gate. If I try

to use these tactics to get my family to an appointment on time, I am viewed as an ogre! But note Moses' commentary on the whole episode: "The Lord being merciful." At the time it happens, we do not often recognize the Lord's constraints as his mercy on us. Lot may have been miffed at being so unceremoniously hurried out of the city, but seeing the whole picture, we understand how gracious God is being to him.

This scene reminds us of what Ben and Gene have called the "Jerusalem" method for the spreading of the church: divine use of opposition. Calvin: "For so it is often necessary for us to be forcibly drawn away from scenes which we do not willingly leave. If riches, or honors, or any other things of that kind, prove an obstacle to any one, to render him less free and disengaged for the service of God, when it happens that he is abridged of his fortune, or reduced to a lower rank, let him know that the Lord has laid hold of his hand; because words and exhortations had not sufficiently profited him."

### **17-22, Lot Pleads for Zoar**

Parallel with Noah: with 19:19 "find favor in [God's] sight," cf. 6:8.

Parallel with 18:22-33, the righteous pleads for a doomed city.

The conversation has three steps.

**17, Instruction by the Angel.**—One of the two gives Lot four instructions and a motive.

The instructions in turn are chiasmically arranged as commands and prohibitions: "Escape ... look not behind ... neither stay ... escape." The first two emphasize their separation *from* Sodom, while the next two tell them their *destination*.

1. "Escape for thy life." Blessing does depend on what we do! A sense of urgency on our part is not contrary to belief in the Lord's sovereignty.
2. "Look not behind thee." This would cause further delay, and would be symptomatic of refusing to abandon the sinful city.
3. "Neither stay thou in all the plain." No place in the valley will be safe for them.
4. "Escape to the mountain." From the vantage point of the Dead Sea, the mountains rise very abruptly on either side. Which mountain shall he choose? The western highlands where Abraham dwells, or the eastern ones that he has never seen? In the event, he appears to head east. Delivery from Sodom does not assure his reunion with his uncle; forgiveness is not the same as sanctification.

The motive: "Lest thou be consumed."

**18-20, Lot's Intercession.**—It is not wrong for Lot to turn to the Lord for reassurance in a time of great confusion. But it is wrong for him to go beyond the word that has been revealed to him (Calvin). He accepts the first two of the four commands, but argues with the last two. His prayer is an example of carnality.

- 18 shows two errors:
  - Superficiality. "Lord" here is the term "sovereign Lord" that Abraham used in his own prayer in 18:22-33. At this point, Lot apparently concludes that the angel

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who has taken the lead is in fact the Lord, in spite of the angels' indication that they are only the servants of the Lord (19:13). He is not paying attention.

- Rebellion. Given that he does think he is talking with the Lord, his statement is incongruous: "Not so, my Lord." Compare Peter, Acts 10:14; Matt 16:22. How can you acknowledge the Lord as sovereign and yet disobey him? Abraham uses this title when expostulating with the Lord, Gen 15; 18:30,32, but there the issue is his understanding, not his obedience.
- 19, Lack of trust. The three clauses of v.19 are similarly incongruous. The first two confess God's grace (compare Noah in 6:8) and mercy, while the third immediately doubts that the Lord knows best for him. With such ample evidence of the Lord's good will toward him, why does he doubt the Lord's care in smaller matters? Yet we are not immune from this failing, against which the NT warns twice.
  - Rom 8:32, having not spared his own Son, God will surely give us what we need.
  - 1 John 5:13; those who have believed on the name of the Son of God (for salvation) should believe on him (for lesser needs as well).
- 20, Selfishness in intercession. His prayer is motivated by his own convenience, not the Lord's glory. Superficially, the petition resembles that of Amos 7:2,5, based on the weakness of the one for whom petition is made. But in fact, Lot's prayer is more of the form, "It won't matter if you let this city survive, because it is so small it won't hurt anything." His concern is neither for the Lord's glory (as was Abraham's) nor for the people of the city (like Amos), but simply for himself.

Compare his prayer with that of Abraham in 18:22ff.

	Motive	Effect
Abraham for Sodom (18:22-33)	God's honor	Sodom destroyed, Lot saved
Lot for Zoar (19:18-20)	His own convenience, and the smallness of the city (20)	Zoar spared, Lot compromised

**21-22, The Angel's Response.**—In spite of the carnality of Lot's prayer, it is graciously granted. How wonderful it is that God is so tolerant of our lapses in prayer! Note the angel's focus: "I have accepted thee." Our dealings with God are not on the basis of the logic of our arguments, but because he has accepted us and delights to care for us and bless us.

"I cannot do anything" shows once more that the angel is not the Lord, but a ministering spirit sent forth to deliver Lot and then to destroy the city.

"The name of the city ... Zoar": "Zoar" means "small, little."

### 23-26, Sodom Destroyed

Parallel with 18:17-21, fulfillment of what God there contemplated.

**Time note, 26.**—Compared with 15, this indicates how early the angels got him on his way.

**The judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, 24-25.**—Notice its *source*, its *nature*, and its *extent*.

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- 24 emphasizes the divine *origin* of the judgment: it was “from the Lord,” “out of heaven.” The church fathers saw a reflection of the Trinity in the repetition of the “Lord”: God the Son caused the judgment to fall from God the Father. This would be consistent with the role of the Son throughout Scripture in revealing the Father to men (John 1:18), and also with the role of the Son in executing judgment (John 5:22).
- As in the flood (7:4) the judgment takes the *form* of a rain from heaven. This time, the rain is not water, but burning sulfur—exceedingly hot (sulfur melts at 112 C, and boils at 444), and of acrid smell.
- Verse 25 notes the *extent* of the judgment.
  - The cities were destroyed.
  - The plain was overthrown—by being deluged beneath the waters of the Dead Sea.
  - All the inhabitants were killed.
  - The plant life was destroyed, and remains so to this day.

**26, Lot’s Wife.**—She was already lingering “behind him.” We can imagine that the instant Lot entered the gate, the judgment fell, and she, a few steps back, turned for one last look before entering Zoar. Outwardly, she obeyed by following Lot out of Sodom. Inwardly, she longed to remain there. Her last mourning glance over its destruction reflects the sorrow of those who profited from Babylon in Rev. 18:9, 11, 15, 17, when she is overthrown, and reveals the true state of her heart.

Calvin: “If the severity of the punishment terrifies us; let us remember, that they sin, at this days not less grievously, who, being delivered, not from Sodom, but from hell, fix their eyes on some other object than the proposed prize of their high calling.” Our calling is Col 3:1-4.

### 27-29, Viewing Sodom from Mamre

Verses 27-29 complete the chiasm that began when Abraham and his guests looked out over the valley in 18:16.

The time reference reminds us that the events of ch. 19 all transpire the evening of the day on which Abraham entertained his guests, and the next day. This is “the morning” after Abraham has interceded with the Lord, the same morning in which the angels hasten Lot out of Sodom and into Zoar. Abraham has prayed, and now wants to see the effect of his prayer.

There are two lessons here for us regarding prayer.

1. Abraham got up early to see if the Lord had done as he asked, and spared the city. He is burdened over the fate of the city, and arouses himself specifically to see if his prayer has been answered. How often do we pray for things, and then when they happen, neglect to recognize it or to thank the Lord for them! Too often we are like the nine lepers in Luke 17:12-19.
2. Contrast what Abraham must have thought with what actually happened.
  - Abraham was asking for the city to be spared on account of Lot and others like him. When he saw the smoke, he may have thought that God let him down; that the judge of all the earth had not after all done right.

- But in fact God did not destroy the righteous with the wicked. He answered Abraham's prayer, though not as Abraham had anticipated. Verse 29 summarizes the entire episode with the explanation, "God remembered Abraham," showing that Abraham's prayer was in fact effective.

"God remembered Abraham" offers another parallel with Noah (8:1, "God remembered Noah."). But an exact parallel here would be "God remembered Lot," since Noah and Lot are the ones delivered from their respective disasters. The change is extremely important theologically. Noah is delivered for his own righteousness, but Lot is delivered because of the righteousness of another, his uncle Abraham, the one through whose seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Thus Abraham's intercession serves as a model for the ongoing ministry of his greatest descendant, the Lord Jesus; we are delivered daily from our sins because "God remembers his son."

*Structural note: v.29 is transitional. Grammatically, the introductory wayyihy sets it apart from what precedes, and the waw-consecutive at the start of v.30 argues against a break between 29 and 30. Just as clearly, the subject matter is a recap of the section marked as unified by the overarching chiasm.*

### **30-38, Lot and his Daughters, the Sodom Within**

This section is here for two reasons.

1. Though the chiasm has finished, this section still recalls Noah, whose final days were marred with intoxication and sexual impropriety. Like that section, it sounds the warning that when God brings judgment and delivers a remnant, sin still lives in the flesh of that remnant, and arises again to repeat the cycle of rebellion.
2. One important function of Genesis is to show how the nation Israel originated in the context of its neighbors. Two important neighbors are Moab and Ammon, and this story describes their origin and relation to Abraham.

**30, Lot's Flight to the Mountain.**—At the end of the day, Lot, who didn't want to go to the mountain under God's direction, ends up taking himself there. Perhaps he saw the corruption of in Zoar and feared that a judgment like that of Sodom would fall on it as well. Thus the Lord often lets us have our way, that we might realize that his instruction was better after all.

It's interesting to consider the implications of living in a cave. In the Bible, caves are mentioned:

- as the burying place of Sarah and the patriarchs, Gen 23:9ff;
- where the kings of the south hid at Joshua's invasion, and where they were buried, Josh 10:16ff;
- as a place of refuge for David in fleeing from Saul, 1 Sam 22:1;
- as a latrine, 1 Sam 24:3;
- where Obadiah hid the prophets of the Lord in the days of Jezebel, 1 Kings 18:4;
- where Elijah took refuge after fleeing from Jezebel, 1 Kings 19:9;
- as the tomb of Lazarus, John 11:38.

Caves are places of corruption and oppression, tombs and latrines, where only a desperate refugee would think of residing. Lot was once a wealthy nomad with flocks so numerous he could not coexist with Abraham. Now he is reduced to living as a fugitive. If Zoar were too corrupt for him, he could have returned to Abraham, but his pride is too great.

**31-36, The Daughters' Actions.**—Though they have escaped the judgment that fell upon Sodom and even on their own mother, their actions show that they have been tainted with the city's influence. Like their father's reasoning in 19:8, the motive is good but the logic tainted with the world.

Their good motive is the desire that their father's line should not die out. Lack of offspring is a tragedy in biblical thought. The barrenness of Abraham and Sarah is one of the main themes on which their whole history turns. So it is not wrong for these girls to desire that their family line should continue. But the method they choose, like that of Sarah and Abraham in ch. 16, is wrong.

"Our father is old".—Too old to take a wife and perpetuate his own line; too old to go get them husbands so that they can have the fulfillment of motherhood.

"There is not a man".—Clearly an overstatement. They were just in Zoar, where there surely would have been men; they could even have encouraged Lot to rejoin Abraham and find husbands there. We see here the element of their own lust coming into the picture.

"After the manner of all the earth".—Literally, "the way of all the earth." Here is a major contrast between the two families. The children of the godly should seek to follow "the way of the Lord" (18:19), not "the way of all the earth." The daughters of Lot are either ignorant of the way of the Lord or simply don't want to be bound by it, and they take their guidance from what everyone else is doing. Cf. 1 Sam 8:5, 20, "like all the nations."

Our Lord spoke of these two ways when he taught (Matt 7:13,14), "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Every generation must make this crucial choice, and the examples of Abraham and Lot show the tremendous influence of the parents in the choice of the next generation. Compare also Joshua's exhortation (Josh 24:15): "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

It is noteworthy that Lot, who had kept his purity while living in Sodom, now while master of his own cave falls into incest with his daughters. This observation leads to two lessons.

1. The danger of self-confidence, 1 Cor 10:12. Calvin: "Whence did he keep such a cleanness in Sodom, else than through the knowledge of the evil, that surrounded him, which made him worried and careful? ... When we think the least about it, an invisible enemy stretches snares for us. ... Adam was deceived in Paradise."
2. The danger of failure to "command one's family." Had Lot given proper attention to instructing his children, they would not have led him astray in his later years.

**37-38, Offspring.**—The daughters, far from being ashamed of what they have done, actually commemorate their incest in the names of their children: "Moab" = "From the father" and Ben-Ammi = "son of my people."

## Degrees of Faithfulness

We often talk about “mixed marriage,” and tend to think in binary terms about believers and unbelievers. There is a great distance between the two, but there are other degrees as well. Note the several degrees of faithfulness that may exist within the same family. We can align these with the four soils in the Lord’s parable.

Parable of the Soils (e.g., Mark 4)	Lot’s family
Wayside; the word cannot take root.	Married daughters and their husbands mock at the warning.
Rocky soil: fall away in time of temptation	Lot’s wife turns back
Thorns: cares and lusts choke the word	Lot’s unmarried daughters, careful for seed and lustful
Good soil	Lot himself, declared “righteous” in the NT

Bottom line: do not be too quick to conclude that someone is saved. Only those who bear fruit can enjoy the assurance of God’s salvation in their lives. We need to assess those around us by this guide.