

Lessons from Bible Women 4 – Lot’s wife

Reading: Luke 17:32 “.... Remember Lot’s wife¹”

Introduction:

This lesson is a continuation of the series where we are looking at various women recorded in the scriptures, with the aim of learning some biblical lessons from either the women themselves, or events that occurred during their lives.

Has there ever been a time in your life where you started some sort of project or activity, but then, after most of the work had been done, you just gave it all up before it was actually finished? For example, maybe you had started on a complete re-paint of the house, but after 90% had been done, you never seemed to get around to doing the last 10%. And so the house did look unfinished.

Seeing a job through to the end can sometimes be difficult. Often we start off with lots of enthusiasm, but as we approach the end, that enthusiasm disappears, and the last little bit that needs to be done just doesn’t seem to be worth the effort anymore. Or maybe we become distracted; something else gets our attention, and all the good work that we had done previously simply goes to waste.

In today’s lesson, I want us to look at a woman who was on the path to “salvation”, but at the last minute, her attention was diverted and she paid a terrible price for it. We don’t know the woman’s name – we simply know her as Lot’s wife. In **Luke 17:22-36**, Jesus was teaching about the coming of the Son of Man (vs.30) and His kingdom (vs.20). In verse **32**, He said, “Remember Lot’s wife”. Therefore, if Jesus wants us to remember her, then we need to look at what the Bible says about her life so that we can learn from it.

LESSON

1) Background.

a) Lot’s journey that ended up in Sodom

There is very little said specifically about Lot’s wife in the Old Testament, so perhaps we need to start by looking at Lot himself.

Lot was a nephew of Abraham² (**Genesis 11:27**), and he went with Abraham from his native land in Ur of the Chaldeans (**Genesis 11:28**) to (initially) Haran, and then on to the land of Canaan (**Genesis 12:4-5**). They brought with them to Canaan all the possessions that they had accumulated, plus a number of people who they had acquired in Haran (**Genesis 12:5**).

Due to a famine in Canaan, Abraham spent some time in Egypt, but then they returned to Canaan (**Genesis 12:10 – 13:1**). But the flocks of both Abraham and Lot had grown so large that there were disputes between their herdsmen – the area where they lived wasn’t able to support the two groups together (**Genesis 13:5-7**). So Abraham gave Lot the first choice on where to move. Lot, seeing the well-watered plains of the Jordan valley, chose to go there (**Genesis 13:8-11**). Eventually, Lot pitched his tent to live near the sinful city of Sodom (**Genesis 13:12-13**).

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² Abraham was initially known as “Abram” until **Genesis 17:5**. Similarly, his wife’s name was “Sarai” until **Genesis 17:15**, where God changed her name to “Sarah”.

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Several years later, there was a war between the kings of the area around Sodom and Gomorrah, and the kings from the north (**Genesis 14:1-9**) – Shinar and Elam were in the Mesopotamia area, the border area of today’s Iraq and Iran. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost the battle and fled (**Genesis 14:10**). The victorious northern kings then took captive the people and possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot, and proceeded to take them up to the north (**Genesis 14:11-12**). Abraham got to hear about this and led a rescue party. He and his servants defeated the northern kings and brought back the people and their possessions, including Lot (**Genesis 14:13-16**). It would appear that Lot then continued to live in Sodom.

b) Lot, his wife, and his daughters flee from Sodom

We next hear from Lot in **Genesis 19**, after several years have passed – at least 14 years³. God is about to destroy Sodom and the surrounding area because of its wickedness (**Genesis 18:20-23**). Now while Lot may have made some unwise decisions in his life about where to live, *etc*, he is described in **2 Peter 2:7-8** as a righteous man, and so God wanted to spare him and his family. Two angels were sent to Sodom to get Lot and his family to leave before the destruction came (**Genesis 19:1, 12**).

When the angels arrived, Lot was sitting in the gate of the city. This phrase, “*sitting in the gate of the city*” does not mean that he was simply resting there passing the time of day. Rather, in those times, it meant that he was one of the city officials. This is where the leading men of the city met together to discuss city business, and to investigate and welcome any strangers that arrived. This tells us that Lot, originally an “outsider”, had eventually come to a position of privilege and influence within Sodom.

The dawning of the next day is where we first see mention of Lot’s wife⁴ (**Genesis 19:15**). The angels exhorted Lot to take his wife, and the two daughters who lived with him, and hurry away from the city. They were told to flee, and not to look back lest they also be destroyed (**Genesis 19:17**). As soon as they had safely reached the nearby city of Zoar (vs. **20-22**), fire and brimstone rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. **24**).

But with salvation oh so close, Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt (**Genesis 19:26**).

2) The price paid for living in Sodom

Lot had been a wealthy man. The reason that he moved away from Abraham was because of the size of his flocks (**Genesis 13:7-9**). He moved to the well-watered, fertile plains of the Jordan where his flocks would have prospered even

³ At some point in time after Lot had been rescued (**Genesis 51:1**), Abraham fathered Ishmael when he was 86 years old (**Genesis 16:16**), and when he was 99 years old, he was told that he would have a son called Isaac by Sarah (**Genesis 17:1-19**).

⁴ If Lot was not married when he first came to Canaan, then he must have been married within the next few years after that. This is because in the 25 year period between Abraham coming to Canaan (**Genesis 12:4**), and the birth of Isaac (**Genesis 17:17**), Lot may have had at least 4 daughters – the 2 un-married daughters who lived with him (**Genesis 19:8,15**), plus at least two others that were married (**Genesis 19:14**), although some versions state in **Genesis 19:14** “.... *who were to marry his daughters*”.

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further. As time went by, he ended up not just living in Sodom (**Genesis 14:12**), but also becoming one of its elders (**Genesis 19:1**). His wife would also have shared and benefitted from this prosperity.

When Lot and those of his family who were living with him were forced to leave Sodom, they were not simply leaving all their possessions behind – they were also leaving behind at least two married daughters (potentially – see footnote 4) and their husbands. Lot tried to persuade his sons-in-law to leave Sodom as well, but they thought that he was joking about the coming destruction (**Genesis 19:14**), and so they remained behind.

So what caused Lot's wife to look back when salvation was within her grasp?

- was it the loss of the family members who refused to leave?
- was it despair at losing all their possessions?
- or was it the fact that they no longer had a prominent place in society?

It may well have been some or all of those things – we will never know. But whatever it was that caused her to look back, it was not worth disobeying the command from the angels, for ultimately it cost her her very life (**Genesis 19:26**).

3) Lesson for us regarding Lot's wife – being obedient only so far

a) The non-Christian – not fully obeying the gospel

God has given us a clear warning that one day Jesus will return and judge the world (**Acts 17:30-31**). Because everyone (of accountable age) has sinned (**Romans 3:23**), everyone needs to hear and respond to the gospel – that is why Jesus gave the commission to “... *go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (**Mark 16:15**). Those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel will incur His wrath on that day (**2 Thessalonians 1:8-10**).

The book of **Acts** gives us several examples of people hearing the gospel and responding to it – see Annex A. These examples show us the process involved in being cleansed of our sins and becoming a child of God. The final step is the act of baptism, where the penitent soul is buried in the waters of baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27**). The Lord then adds them to His church (**Acts 2:47b**).

Notice that the New Testament talks of only two spiritual states – the lost, and the saved (**Acts 2:40**); those who are under the power of darkness, and those who are in the kingdom of the Son of His love (**Colossians 1:13**)⁵. There is nothing in the scriptures that talk of someone being “half-saved”. It is possible for someone to be “almost” persuaded to be saved, *e.g.* King Agrippa, **Acts 26:28**. It is also possible for someone to be “near the kingdom”, *e.g.* **Mark 12:34**. But being *close* to the kingdom is not the same as being *in* the kingdom.

The lesson for the non-Christian is this: Lot's wife obeyed the angels in fleeing Sodom. She also obeyed the angels in going to the nearby city of Zoar.

⁵ Another way of putting it is to say that there are those who are “*inside*” the kingdom, the church, and those who are “*outside*” – **1 Corinthians 5:12-13**.

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But doing just those two things were not enough to save her. She also had to obey the angel’s command not to look back. Being saved involves following all the steps that God requires of us, not just some of them.

b) The Christian – turning back after having fully obeyed

In **Luke 9:62**, Jesus said;

“No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus was not talking about agricultural practices here. Rather, He was saying that once we have given our lives to the Lord, we should not look back and have desires for the world again. The apostle John wrote;

¹⁵*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

¹⁶*For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.*

¹⁷*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”. (1 John 2:15-17)*

Following Jesus involves a cost (**Luke 14:25-33**). It involves a change in priorities in our lives. Christ and His kingdom are now to come before anything else (**Matthew 6:33**). For example, God requires us to have more allegiance to Him than even to the members of our own families (**Matthew 10:37**). This doesn’t mean that family members are not important, for they are⁶. When dying on the cross, Jesus was still concerned for His mother’s welfare (**John 19:25-27**). But if there are times when we have to choose between family and Jesus, then Jesus is to have our first priority.

Following Jesus may also involve leaving behind some things of the world that we considered enjoyable and desirable (e.g. **1 Peter 4:1-3**). But when times get tough as a Christian, we can tend to be like the Hebrews in the wilderness wanderings. Whenever a problem arose, they ignored the blessings that they received from God and cried out for the “good old days in Egypt” (e.g. **Exodus 14:10-12; Numbers 11:1-6; 14:3**) – they wanted to return to their past lifestyle. But because of their rebelliousness, God prevented that generation from entering the promised land (**Numbers 14:20-23**).

We too should not pretend that the “grass was greener” in our former lives before we became a Christian. Back then, we were dead spiritually (**Colossians 1:21-22**), but now, we have been made alive in Christ (**Romans 6:11**), blessed with every spiritual blessing (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). Looking back, desiring to be part of the world again, is to trample the Son of God underfoot, and to count the blood of the covenant as a common thing (**Hebrews 10:26-29**).

Lot’s wife had obeyed the angels to the extent that she had reached the point of safety in Zoar. But some desire caused her to turn her eyes back to where she had been previously. It was a fatal move. For us, turning back to the world, would be just as fatal spiritually (**2 Peter 2:20-21**).

⁶ For example, **Mark 7:9-13; 1 Timothy 5:8**.

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ANNEX A - Examples in Acts of those who obeyed the gospel

In the book of Acts, we have an historical record of people becoming Christians in the first century. In the following table, we see examples of people being converted, *i.e.* people hearing and obeying the gospel in order to be saved. Read each of the scriptures, and note what action is *specifically* mentioned in the verses. You will notice that baptism consistently occurs.

NB: Some of the actions (not ticked) are implied from what the verses say, but this exercise is to note what actions are explicitly mentioned.

Scripture	Hear	Believe	Repent	Baptised
Acts 2:36-41, 42 Jews on Pentecost	✓ 37	implied	✓ 38	✓ 38, 41
Acts 8:5-13 People in Samaria	✓ 5	✓ 12-13		✓ 12-13
Acts 8:26-39 Ethiopian Eunuch	✓ 35	✓ 37		✓ 38
Acts 9:10-18 Acts 22:10-17 Saul / Paul	✓ 16			✓ 9:18 ✓ 22:16
Acts 10:24-48 Cornelius & friends	✓ 34-44			✓ 48
Acts 16:13-15 Lydia	✓ 13			✓ 15
Acts 16:25-34 Jailer	✓ 31-32	✓ 34		✓ 33
Acts 18:5-8 The Corinthians	✓ 8	✓ 8		✓ 8
Acts 19:1-5 ⁷ The Ephesians	✓ 4-5			✓ 5

⁷ This passage teaches us that baptism needs to be done in the right context, and with the recipient having the right understanding of what it is about.