

WIVES OF THE BIBLE

A Cross-Section of Femininity

by

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CHAPTER THREE

SODOM'S POPULAR SOCIETY MATRON LOT'S WIFE

Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17: 32).

THE nineteenth chapter of Genesis records, with a good degree of fulness, the destruction of Sodom, and recites in that connection the incidents of its sinfulness, of Lot's escape with his two daughters, and of his wife's destruction.

The story, on its face, sounds incredible enough to unbelievers. To such, angel visitation is a mere vagary; divine judgment a meaningless phrase, and the reputed destruction, in any supernatural manner, incite only a scoff.

But, truth has a way of self-demonstration; and within very recent years the whole Sodomitish incident has been made to appear not only possible but practically certain, so far at least as the record relates to both its sinfulness and the sudden annihilation of the city.

President Joseph Kyle was my intimate friend and fellow in "**the faith once delivered.**" His brother, Dr. Melvin Kyle, was merely my acquaintance, but the subject of my admiration. His ability as an archeologist, his loyalty to God, and his familiarity with and faith in the Bible, made him a most outstanding man; just a decade ago he gave to the world a report of his work at the south end of the Dead Sea in which he said:

"This is a burned-out region of oil and asphalt. There is also a great stratum of rock salt underneath Jebel Usdum (the Mountain of Sodom) on the west shore of the sea. It is one hundred and fifty feet thick, and exposed for six miles; how much may be under the ground no one knows. This stratum of salt is overlaid with a stratum of marl, through which is mingled free sulphur in a very pure state.

"At some time, the geologists say, something kindled the gases which accumulate with oil and asphalt, and there was an explosion; the salt and sulphur were carried up into the heavens red hot, whence it literally rained fire and brimstone and utterly destroyed the cities and the whole plain and everything that grew out of the ground. The incrustation of Lot's wife with salt when she turned back is thereby explained.

“The great smoke like the smoke of a furnace which Abraham saw from far-off Hebron is explained when we remember the asphalt that is found in this region. Thus the remains of this region show that the catastrophe did take place exactly as narrated in Genesis.”

Truly the spade of the archeologist bears testimony to the truthfulness of sacred Scripture, and when we are told to remember Lot’s wife, it is no idle tale, no fictional story to which the Master refers.

The natural question is, “What shall we remember?” and to that there are three justifiable replies.

First, we might remember:

SHE WAS POSSESSED OF WEALTH

The Genesis account leaves little or no question on that subject.

Her husband was a financial “shark”

This is shown in his dealings with Abraham. All that he had and all that he was came in consequence of his uncle’s friendship and favor.

But, when the day fell out that Abraham’s servants and Lot’s servants quarreled over questions of pasture, and Abraham generously proposed a division of territory and, with an utter unselfishness, let Lot take his choice of the whole land, . . . **Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other** (Genesis 13:10-11).

The man who will take advantage of the members of his family to his own financial profit will play the game of gain against all comers! There is little doubt that when Lot retired from sheep-keeping to the city of Sodom “**his goats**,” as the Bible described them, “**were great**,” and Sodom was shortly compelled by equally sharp deals to make her contributions to his growing wealth.

After all is said that may be justly said of the possibilities of farming, and after such mental figments as “Uncle Bim” have been cartooned as the immeasurable millionaires, the fact remains that they are not made in the country; they are made in cities instead. They come as a result of congregated men, and often are the product of fleecing, not an individual, but a multitude.

Our own city of Minneapolis was treated to a taste of this in the Foshay Tower; but Chicago—a bigger city—and the sweep of the United States, gave to Samuel Insull his opportunity to handle millions upon millions of other people’s money, while the (Straws) Strauss Company, The Biltmore Company, and others caught “suckers” by thousands.

Newell Dwight Hillis tells us that in the olden times the wreckers went forth to kindle a fire at midnight on a rocky reef, that they might deceive the captain and lure the ship to destruction.

When the morning dawned these wreckers stripped the drowned mariners who drifted ashore and carried off the boxes and goods that had come in with them, or could be extracted from the sinking cargo. Thinking of this, Ruskin said: "Much of what society today calls the wealth of the individual, is the index of the ruin of the people, garments unwrapped from the bodies of young merchants slain, wedges of gold taken from heroes slain, in ambush, builded by industrial brigands."

Beyond doubt, Mrs. Lot's husband was among the early "fleecers" of his fellows.

Marcus Dod, in *The Expositor's Bible*, says of Lot: "He was swayed solely by the consideration of worldly advantage . . . He saw a quick, though dangerous, road to wealth . . . He shut his eyes to the risk, that he might grasp the wealth."

And the Genesis record justifies the remarks.

His method brought a fair fortune.

The Bible record does not indicate a Croesus or a John D. Rockefeller, but clearly suggests an abundance of silver and gold, and the corresponding social and political station suggested by his office as mayor, for Lot sat in the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1). That phrase, for his time, corresponded to the mayor's office in the city hall of the present day.

Wealth has always been a possible stepping-stone to political and social honors; and in hundreds of instances it has been so employed. A poor man seldom becomes the governor of a State, and still less frequently the ruler of a nation.

However, since I am speaking of Lot's wife, why this dissertation upon Lot's methods as a man? For the very simple reason that I now state—

She shared in all this without dissent.

We have a statement to the effect, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." We might, with justice, create a parallel, "The wife within the home determines the methods of the office downtown."

We admit that this is not always true; but we insist that in many cases it is quite so. The average business man is not conducting his business independently of a silent partner, and that silent partner is the mother of his children. Once in a while a woman will walk out on a man because his money methods are immoral; but in nine cases out of ten, the wife never quits the husband whose cash account is on the increase.

Some years ago I met a woman in the West who told me that she had divorced her husband—a gambler. She said, "I did not care to continue as a gambler's wife." But a further discussion revealed the fact that she quit him because fortune so often went against him, for she said, "I did not care to live in luxury one day—then fight starvation for the next week!"

It is my judgment, based upon a somewhat extensive observation through the many years God has given me, that the crookedness or correctness of the average business man's methods, is in no small degree the product of the wife's will; and certainly the record of Genesis never once records a protest against the former nor an admonition for the latter.

When Lot "did" his Uncle Abraham in the division, we hear no objection from the hearth-side. Believe it or not, I know men who pass in the social circle and the commercial mart as rather big men, who cannot make a subscription to their own church without the consent of the woman who not only rules the house, but who administers the office as well. When we have read Lot's history we have uncovered Mrs. Lot's character; and when we have studied his affluence, we have seen her influence.

But we pass from this subject of wealth to a kindred and often attendant one:

SHE WAS ENAMORED OF THE WORLD

Some time ago the *Associated Press* carried an article to the effect that chemistry was just about to make over the social order. Prof. James F. Norris, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, thought that, through the mastery of the atom, this would be the result. He said the atom is like a Jack-in-the-box! When we learn how to touch the button, energy will spring out of it, man's muscles will be liberated from slavery, and his life permitted its taste of ease and the joy of living.

A very fine philosophy; but we find it is not working well up to the present. Discovery has released nature's energies and indeed supplanted man's muscle by machinery, but it has not corrected the social order; it seems to be cursing it instead.

Our highest road official tells us that three fourths of the automobile accident deaths are caused by young men between seventeen and twenty-three. Too much leisure! Human sin, and human selfishness are better held in check by the law of the Lord, pronounced in Eden's garden: "**In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread,**" than by all the scientific discoveries made to date.

Lot's wife was Sodom's society matron.

Her hands were not soiled with dishwashing; her back never ached over the washtub; she had that abundance of time which the chemist thought would give opportunity for mental culture and social service; but so far as the record goes, she did not employ it that way.

The same archeological spade that has proved the truthfulness of Old Testament records, has, in more instances than one, demonstrated the social condition of the same age; and it was, to say the least, disgusting.

This Genesis record is a revelation of the depths to which society had descended. Even angels in Sodom were no more safe from the lusts of the men of that city than are the young women in Minneapolis, walking the streets, alone, after midnight.

Such, indeed, were their iniquities that to this day when one wants to describe the most sinful and low, he speaks of it as Sodomitish. Lot's proposal of submitting his own daughters rather than surrendering his heavenly guests is a suggestion of that fact that he and his had felt the degrading levels to which Sodom had succumbed. And yet from this distinguished woman of the city, there is no record of dissent, but a clear indication of consent.

Goethe said, "Tell me with whom thou dost company and I will tell thee what thou art." Aesop's story created the old adage, "A man is judged by the company he keeps." Judged after that manner, Mrs. Lot was no saint!

Society itself is not saintly. Minneapolis at this moment is not much better than were these cities of the plain. Cigarette smoking, cocktail drinking, midnight dancing on the part of matrons, are exactly such as moved through Sodom five millenniums ago, and the daughters brought up by such mothers have close kinship with those that were reared under Mrs. Lot's hands.

The fact that God was known in Lot's house was not to her an obstacle to union with Sodom men of means and social standing. If she was like the present-day Mama, and doubtless she was, she probably employed a few feminine arts to make the daughters' debuts affairs of moment, and attractions to men of Sodom of means and station and doubtless decorated her person, her daughters, her home, on more than one occasion; and there is no hint in this record that she failed to see that her children found first place in Sodomitish society, and were well received, as the world counts such matters.

However, our century is not in any position to throw stones at Sodomitish society! Not even our church men, nor our church women, demand Christian husbands for their professed Christian daughters. Money and social station outweigh every moral consideration. The word of the Lord, Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, has slight significance when it is pitted against PROPERTY and POSITION!

The fact that Vassar and Smith Colleges long since adopted and permitted smoking and drinking, and when there was a proposal made in the New York Legislature to compel all students in colleges supported by the State, to pledge allegiance to the Federal Constitution, girls modishly attired came from these schools and swept into the State Capitol to protest against it, does not affect mothers of means when the question of where to educate their children comes up. "Social standing" —that is the phrase for which even morals must stand aside.

The fear of the Lord was not before their faces.

When at midnight before that day of dark disaster, Father Lot pounded on their doors and cried Up, get you out of this place for the Lord will destroy this city. He seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law; and there is no hint whatever that the married daughters took alarm! They trusted their husbands and perhaps joined with them in a laugh at poor old Dad's alarm.

Beyond all question, the potent influence of every home is the mother's influence.

Again and again I have seen godly fathers attempt to bring up a household for Christ; but I do not recall a single instance in which they succeeded without the mother's sympathy. It may occur, and sometimes does, that a single child will be influenced by and accept father's precepts and example, and faithfully honor his God, but even that experience is rare.

I have known mothers by the score, who without a father's cooperation, brought their children to Christ and kept them faithful to Him. The character and conduct of children reflect the mother!

This, in my judgment, is due to two circumstances. First, it is after all, the mother's blood that flows in their veins; and, second, it is her intimate influence by the daily contact through all their earlier childhood, and even her more intimate fellowship with their adult youth than the father can experience, that are reflected in the children.

A Catholic priest is reported to have said: "Give me a child for the first seven years of his life and you will never destroy my influence over him," and certainly for the first fifteen years of life the child is largely in the mother's hands. It is within her power by precept and example to bring the children to God, and it is equally within her power to destroy that faith which is natural to youth and send them into the world skeptics, if not scoffers.

I have often said that when at last the saints gather in heaven there will be more people who will joyfully assign their presence there to a mother's sweet and sacred influence than to any other single cause, Christ and the Bible excepted.

Now I want to state the opposite. When hell is full, for many there be which go in thereat (Matthew 7: 13), if Satan ever calls for a testimony-meeting and asks the question, "What single influence accounts, as no other, for your presence here?" the answer will be in the same word—"Mother's."

And that gives me occasion to put this query to every woman here present to whom God has given children, "What direction are you lending to their lives? Which way do your own conduct and character point—heavenward or hell-ward?"

Finally,

SHE BECAME AN ETERNAL WARNING

"Remember Lot's wife."

And what shall we remember about her? We may forget, if we will, the wealth that she enjoyed; we may ignore, if we like, the world that enamored her, but we dare not forget three facts, and they are these:

Her disobedience brought swift judgment; her immorality was forever memorialized; her mistakes may be avoided.

Her disobedience brought swift judgment.

And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed . . . Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground, but his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:15, 17, 24-26).

There are plenty of people who do not believe in judgment; who do not think it is ever passed; who have no fear of its execution! But history is replete with illustrations of it. In fact, very few of those who are disobedient to God's plain Word get by without it. They may go on for a few years and, like the wicked, may seem to flourish as a green bay tree, but while judgment is sometimes slow (God's patience being great) it is certain!

When Daniel Webster was once asked what was the most overpowering thought that had ever filled his mind, he answered, "God's judgment."

Even if one should escape, and all things should prosper up to the last day—as with Lot's wife—even then it is not well to forget—**And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment** (Hebrews 9:27).

Her immorality was forever memorialized.

Someone says, "But there is no charge of immorality in the Genesis account."

No; no direct charge. The marriage of her daughters to Sodomitish men indicated low ethical ideals and low moral standards. The fact that her husband was willing to submit the unmarried daughters rather than permit the violation of his heavenly guests, is a further proof; but disobedience to the Divine Voice is immorality, and when one finally faces that fact he will feel the strength of that truth.

Louis Albert Banks, in his volume, *Christ and His Friends*, tells this story:

"Some years ago a gentleman from New York was traveling in the South, when he met a young girl of great beauty and wealth and married her. They returned to New York City and plunged into a mad whirl of gayety. The young wife had been a gentle, thoughtful girl, anxious to help all suffering and want, and had never dreamed of living other than a Christian life. But in her new sphere she had troops of flatterers, and her soul was carried away with the intoxication of society. She lived for the one object of enjoyment. She dressed and danced, hurried from ball to reception, from dinner to opera. Scores of young girls supposed her to be a proper object of envy, and that her life was without a care and the most desirable to be imagined. But on her return from a trip to California an accident occurred on a railroad train and she received a fatal injury. She was carried into a wayside station, and there, attended only by a physician from a neighboring town, she died.

“The physician afterward declared that it was the most painful experience of his life. He had to tell her that she had but an hour to live. She was not suffering any great pain; her only consciousness of hurt was that she was unable to move, so it was no wonder that she found it hard to believe him.

“I must go home to New York,’ she said, imperatively.

“‘Madam,’ said the doctor, ‘it is impossible. If you are moved it will shorten the time you have to live.’

“She was lying on the floor. The brakemen had rolled their coats to make her a pillow. She looked about her at the little dingy station. ‘I have but one hour, you tell me?’

“The doctor was greatly moved by her anguish but was compelled to say sadly, ‘Not more.’

“‘And this is all there is left me of the world? It is not much, Doctor.’

“The men left the room, and the kind-hearted physician locked the door that she might not be disturbed. She threw her arms over her face and lay quiet a long time; then she turned on the physician in a frenzy—

“‘To think of all that I might have done with my money and my time! God wanted me to help the poor and the sick; it’s too late now. I’ve only an hour.’

“She struggled up wildly.

“‘Why, doctor, I did nothing—nothing but lead the fashion! Great God! The fashion! Now, I’ve only an hour! an hour!’

“But she had not even that, for the exertion proved fatal, and in a moment she lay dead at the doctor’s feet.

“The physician declared that he never heard a sermon like that woman’s despairing cry, ‘It’s too late!’”

I am pleading, tonight, solely that you make your peace with God, make your calling and election sure, before such an experience will come and the words, “too late” are forced from your lips.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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