

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE are two methods which the Lord graciously adopts, in order to draw the heart away from this present world.

- The first is, by setting before it the attractiveness and stability of **“things above.”**
- The second is, by faithfully declaring the evanescent and shakable nature of **“things on the earth.”**

The close of Hebrews 12, furnishes a beautiful example of each of these methods.

After stating the truth, that we are come unto mount Zion, with all its attendant joys and privileges, the apostle goes on to say, **“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once I shake, not only the earth, but also heaven. Now this word once signifieth the removal of the shakable things, as of things that are made, that the unshakeable things may remain.”**

Now it is much better to be drawn by the joys of Heaven, than driven by the sorrows of earth. The believer should not wait to be shaken out of present things. He should not wait for the world to give him up before he gives up the world. He should give it up in the power of communion with heavenly things.

There is no difficulty in giving up the world when we have, by faith, laid hold of Christ: the difficulty would then be to hold it. If a scavenger were left an estate of ten thousand a year, he would not long continue to sweep the streets. Thus, if we are realizing our portion amid the unshakeable realities of Heaven, we shall find little difficulty in resigning the delusive joys of earth.

Let us now look at the solemn section of inspired history here set before us.

In it we find Lot **“sitting in the gate of Sodom,”** the place of authority. He has evidently made progress. He has **“got on in the world.”**

Looked at from a worldly point of view, his course has been a successful one. He at first **“pitched his tent toward Sodom.”** Then, no doubt, he found his way into it; and now we find him sitting in the gate, - a prominent, influential post.

How different is all this from the scene with which the preceding chapter opens!

But, ah! My reader, the reason is obvious. **“By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles.”**

We have no such statement in reference to Lot. *

*** It would furnish a very searching question for the heart, in reference to every undertaking, were we to ask, “Am I doing this by faith:” “Whatever is not of faith is sin;” and, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”**

It could not be said, *“By faith Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.”* Alas! No: he gets no place among the noble army of confessors, - the great cloud of witnesses to the power of faith.

The world was his snare, present things his bane. He did not **“endure as seeing him who is invisible.”** He looked at **“the things which are seen, and temporal”** whereas Abraham looked at **“the things which are unseen and eternal.”**

There was a most material difference between those two men, who, though they started together on their course, reached a very different goal, so far as their public testimony was concerned. No doubt Lot was saved, yet it was **“so as by fire,”** for, truly, **“his work was burned up.”**

On the other hand, Abraham had **“an abundant entrance ministered unto him into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”**

Further, we do not find that Lot is permitted to enjoy any of the high distinctions and privileges with which Abraham was favored.

- Instead of refreshing the Lord, Lot gets his righteous soul vexed;
- Instead of enjoying communion with the Lord, he is at a lamentable distance from the Lord; and lastly,
- Instead of interceding for others, he finds enough to do to intercede for himself.

The Lord remained to commune with Abraham, and merely sent his angels to Sodom; and these angels could, with difficulty be induced to enter into Lot's house, or partake of his hospitality: **“they said, Nay, but we will abide in the street all night.”**

What a rebuke! How different from the willing acceptance of Abraham's invitation, as expressed in the words, **“So do as thou hast said.”**

There is a great deal involved in the act of partaking of anyone's hospitality.

It expresses, when intelligently looked at, full fellowship with him. **“I will come in unto him, and sup with him, and he with me.” “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide.”**

If they had not so judged her, they would not have accepted her invitation.

Hence, the angels’ word to Lot contains a most unqualified condemnation of his position in Sodom. They would rather abide in the street all night, than enter under the roof of one in a wrong position.

Indeed, their only object in coming to Sodom seems to have been to deliver Lot, and that, too, because of Abraham; as we read: **“And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, When he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.”**

This is strongly marked. It was simply for Abraham’s sake that Lot was suffered to escape: the Lord has no sympathy with a worldly mind; and such a mind it was that had led Lot to settle down amid the defilement of that guilty city.

- Faith never put him there;
- A spiritual mind never put him there;
- **“His righteous soul”** never put him there.

It was simple love for this present evil world that led him first to **“choose,”** then to **“pitch his tent toward,”** and finally, to **“sit in the gate of Sodom.”**

And, oh! What a portion he chose. Truly it was a broken cistern which could hold no water,- a broken reed which pierced his hand. It is a bitter thing to seek, in any wise, to manage for ourselves; we are sure to make the most grievous mistakes. It is infinitely better to allow God to order all our ways for us, to commit them all, in the spirit of a little child, to him who is so willing and so able to manage for us, to put the pen, as it were, into his blessed hand, and allow him to sketch out our entire course according to his own unerring wisdom and infinite love.

No doubt Lot thought he was doing well for himself and his family when he moved to Sodom; but the sequel shows how entirely he erred; and it also sounds in our ears a voice of deepest solemnity,- a voice telling us to beware how we yield to the incipient workings of a worldly spirit.

“Be content with such things as ye have.”

Why?

- Is it because you are so well off in the world?
- Because you have all that your poor rambling hearts would seek after?
- Because there is not so much as a single chink in your circumstances, through which a vain desire might make its escape?

Is this to be the ground of our contentment? By no means.

What then? **“For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”** Blessed portion!

Had Lot been content therewith, he never would have sought the well-watered plains of Sodom.

And then, if we need any further ground of inducement to the exercise of a contented spirit, truly we have it in this chapter.

What did Lot gain in the way of happiness and contentment? Little indeed. The people of Sodom surround his house, and threaten to break into it; he seeks to appease them by a most humiliating proposition, but all in vain.

If a man will mingle with the world for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, he must make up his mind to endure the sad consequences.

We cannot profit by the world, and at the same time bear effectual testimony against its wickedness.

“This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge.”

This will never do. The true way to judge is to stand apart, in the moral power of grace, not in the supercilious spirit of Phariseism. To attempt to reprove the world’s ways while we profit by association with it, is vanity; the world will attach very little weight to such reproof and such testimony. Thus it was, too, with Lot’s testimony to his sons-in-law; **“he seemed as one that mocked.”**

It is vain to speak of approaching judgment, while finding our place, our portion, and our enjoyment, in the very scene which is to be judged. Abraham was in a far better position to speak of judgment, inasmuch as he was entirely outside of the sphere thereof.

The tent of the stranger at Mamre was in no danger, though Sodom was in flames. Oh, that our hearts longed more after the precious fruits of a realized strangership, so that instead of having, like poor Lot, to be dragged by main force out of the world, and casting a lingering look behind, we might, with holy alacrity bound forward like a racer towards the goal!

Lot evidently longed after the scene which he was forced by angelic power to abandon; for not only had the angels to lay hold of him and hasten him away from the impending judgment, but even when exhorted to escape for his life (which was all he could save from the wreck) and flee to the mountain, he replies, **“Oh! not so, my Lord: behold, now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me and I die: behold, now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: oh, let me escape thither, (is it lot a little one?) and my soul shall live.”**

What a picture! He seems like a drowning man, ready to catch even at a floating feather. Though commanded by the angel to flee to the mountain, he refuses, and still fondly clings to the idea of **“a little city,”**- some little shred of the world.

He feared death in the place to which God was mercifully directing him,- yea, he feared all manner of evil, and could only hope for safety in some little city, some spot of his own devising. **“Oh, let me escape *thither*, and my soul shall live.”**

How sad! There is no casting himself wholly upon God. Alas! He had too long walked at a distance from him; too long breathed the dense atmosphere of a **“city,”** to be able to appreciate the pure air of the divine presence, or lean on the arm of the Almighty. His soul seemed completely unhinged; his worldly nest had been abruptly broken up, and he was not quite able to nestle himself, by faith, in the bosom of God.

He had not been cultivating communion with the invisible world; and, now, the visible was passing away from beneath his feet with tremendous rapidity. The **“fire and brimstone from heaven”** were about to fall upon that in which all his hopes and all his affections were centered. The thief had broken in upon him, and he seems entirely divested of spiritual nerve and self-possession. He is at his wits' end; but the worldly element, being strong in his heart, prevails, and he seeks his only refuge in **“a little city.”** Yet he is not at ease even there, for he leaves it and gets up to the mountain. He does through fear what he would not do at the command of God's messenger.

And then, see his end!

His own children make him drunk, and in his drunkenness he becomes the instrument of bringing into existence the Ammonites and the Moabites,- the determined enemies of the people of God.

What a volume of solemn instruction is here! Oh, my reader, see here what the world is! see what a fatal thing it is to allow the heart to go out after it! What a commentary is Lot's history upon that brief but comprehensive admonition, **“Love not the world!”**

This world's Sodoms and its Zoars are all alike. There is no security, no peace, no rest, no solid satisfaction for the heart therein. The judgment of God hangs over the whole scene and he only holds back the sword, in long-suffering mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

- Let us, then, seek to pursue a path of holy separation from the world.
- Let us, while standing outside its entire range, be found cherishing the hope of the Master's return.

May its well-watered plains have no charms for our hearts. May its honors, its distinctions, and its riches, be all surveyed by us in the light of the coming glory of Christ. May we be enabled, like the holy patriarch Abraham, to get up into the presence of the Lord, and, from that elevated ground, look forth upon the scene of wide-spread ruin and desolation,- to see it all, by faith's anticipative glance, a smoking ruin. Such it will be.

“The earth also, and the things that are therein, shall be burned up.”

All that about which the children of this world are so intensely anxious after which they are so eagerly grasping - for which they are so fiercely contending - all - all will be burned up. And who can tell how soon?

Where is Sodom? Where is Gomorrah? Where are the cities of the plain,- those cities which were once all life, and stir, and bustle?

Where are they now? All gone! swept away by the judgment of God! Consumed by his fire and brimstone!

Well, his judgments now hang over this guilty world. The day is at hand; and, while judgments impend, the sweet story of grace is being told out to many an ear. Happy they who hear and believe that story! Happy they who flee to the strong mountain of God's salvation! who take refuge behind the Cross of the Son of God, and therein find pardon and peace!

God grant that the reader of these lines may know what it is, with a conscience purged from sin, and his heart's affections purged from the defiling influence of the world, to wait for the Son from Heaven.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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