

277.1: Hospitality amongst Angels and Sinners (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 8 Updated)
[Living Righteously in a Wicked World](#)

Remember order of operations? It is especially important in this lesson. If we understand that these stories are not meant to be interpreted literally, we gain the most benefit from the lessons these texts can inspire. But if we focus on the questions of how a human can actually turn in to a pillar of salt, or what motivated Lot's daughters to seduce him, we will not only miss these lessons, we will come away from the text with the wrong idea!

Productive Sunday School

1. **It is ok to say this is not ok...even when talking about the Bible.**
2. **Living righteously in the midst of wickedness**
3. **Learning from Abraham:**
4. **What was the "Sin of Sodom"?**
5. **Remember Lot's wife.**
6. **A comment on Lot's daughters.**

Productive Sunday School

1. **It is ok to say this is not ok...even when talking about the Bible.** Getting real with the scriptures (Morals and the moral of the story. One significant strength of the scriptures is that they present life and human nature in all its complexity. When we pay attention, we notice that even the prophets are flawed. These stories resonate with us because we too, every single one of us, is complex, neither angel nor demon, but human. Light and dark, noble and not, good and evil within us. Scripture can become a problem when we forget that the descriptions of God and morality were *also* recorded by flawed and fallible humans. Human limitation goes all the way down in this rabbit hole. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but what does that mean? I personally believe it means that the Bible is worth engaging deeply and seriously, and that engagement includes understanding that the Bible was written and put together by inspired individuals who lived long ago in a different culture with their own limitations. Mormonism does not require us to believe in Biblical infallibility. This insight improves especially important in the next lessons, but also many lessons in the Old Testament. Take home message: I hope we all feel comfortable in our Sunday School lessons or other contexts to say "I'm troubled by this passage and wonder how we can engage with it constructively."

Living righteously in the midst of wickedness (we also need to remember that very few if any of us are in Sodom-level communities. It's easy to caricature the world's wickedness. That said, all of us experience challenges to our covenants and values. We are faced with temptations to compromise our character. Often we are our own worst enemies, when we fail to hold ourselves to the standards we believe in. This story teaches us the power of having only "ten righteous souls" around us. Our friends matter. We should surround ourselves by those who inspire the best in us, hold us accountable, while

also showing up and loving us no matter the kind of day we are having (and we need to be worthy of such friendships).

One of my favorite Joseph Smith quotes: *let me be resurrected with the Saints, whether I ascend to heaven or descend to hell, or go to any other place. And if we go to hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven of it. Where this people are, there is good society. **What do we care where we are, if the society be good?** (Joseph Smith, History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 Vols. 5:517)"*

- 2.
3. **Learning from Abraham:** Negotiating with God (Don't necessarily take the first answer, really dig in and wrestle when things are important to us.

What was the "Sin of Sodom"? This is perhaps the most interesting point, because with the way these chapters are written, it is easy to get the exact wrong idea. This story has satire in it, which is essential to realize to get the right message. **The sin of Sodom is hospitality failure**, not caring for those you invite into your home. The problem is that Lot goes overboard, and in attempting to protect his holy visitors, he offers his daughters up to the sinful crowd (The JST addresses this problem). This disturbing passage invites us to ask ourselves: How can we honor and protect and care for both our guests (which includes friends and wider community) and our family members and loved ones? More challengingly, are there ways where our zealotry over a principle leads us to harm our loved ones? Do we do this in our lives, offer our children up to abuse by having the wrong priorities, even an extreme version of a virtue? For example, do we alienate our children because we are so focused on looking good to our ward members or "doing the right thing?" Jesus' ministry welcomed those struggling and rejected by those who thought themselves righteous and holy)

Ezekiel 16:49-50 "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.

JST, Genesis 19:9–15. [Compare Genesis 19:8–10](#)

Lot resists the wickedness of Sodom, and angels protect him.

9 And they said *unto him*, Stand back. *And they were angry with him.*

10 And they said *among themselves*, This one *man* came in to sojourn *among us*, and he will needs *now make himself to be* a judge; now we will deal worse with *him* than with them.

11 *Wherefore they said unto the man, We will have the men, and thy daughters also; and we will do with them as seemeth us good.*

12 *Now this was after the wickedness of Sodom.*

13 And Lot said, Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, *plead with my brethren that I may not* bring them out unto you; and ye *shall not* do unto them as seemeth good in your eyes;

14 *For God will not justify his servant in this thing; wherefore, let me plead with my brethren, this once only, that unto these men ye do nothing, that they may have peace in my house;* for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

15 *And they were angry with Lot* and came near to break the door, but the *angels of God, which were holy men,* put forth their hand and pulled Lot into the house unto them, and shut the door.

When do we entertain angels? (Hebrews 13:2 seems to have this story in mind “Don’t forget to welcome strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it) I love the idea that when we care for each other, we are welcoming angels and even the Savior and God (Matthew 25; Mosiah 2:17). We also become the angels and more like God. It is a beautiful cycle.

4. **Remember Lot’s wife.** (Luke 17:32) Remember, don’t get lost in the literal. Jesus brings up Lot’s wife in the context of a disaster situation where we need to flee, and should not go back and try to save what we left behind. This reminds us to keep our priorities clear, to care for what is most valuable to us, to be in a place where we can leave the clutter behind. Are we ready for an emergency? Metaphorically the story also tells us not to live in the past, not to look back longingly at habits we have left behind. Stay present in a healthy now and prepare for a better future.
5. **A comment on Lot’s daughters.** We are ending with a “this is not ok” example. From a literary perspective, this is an origin story (etiology is the fancy word) for some of Israel’s enemies (Moabites and Ammonites, Canaanite cultures at tension with Israelite culture). This is basically a bad joke. We could take the lesson from it that focusing too much on the short term situation or feeling panicked can lead us to make poor decisions.

Take seriously Abraham's plea... what can we do with 10 righteous souls in a city? Mormon teaches us the same lesson... how to live righteously and lovingly and serve diligently even in the midst of wickedness (at the same time, our eyes need to be open to the good in our communities... I would bet there are few cities in the world that are irredeemably wicked, however easily we throw around Sodom comparisons)

Touch on Lot's offering his daughters up (Joseph changed this, but let's wrestle with the text.

Lesson 9

The sobering truth is there are times where our misunderstanding of God does lead us to nearly sacrificing our children (explore the different ways we do this)

(briefly bring up triangulation) When we focus on the problem we actually increase it, but when we ally ourselves with our loved ones against the problem (we are on their team), we most effectively address those problems.

277.2: Hospitality amongst Angels and Sinners (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 8, Sunday School)

(Remind listeners that all of these discussions are from last cycle, so four years ago)

Expectations in Most Wards

What Can We Learn From the Characters

Literary Intent and Obedience Culture

Righteous in a "Wicked" World

Real Negative Influences in the World

Maintaining Integrity in and Adversarial Environment

Overcoming BIG Obstacles

277.3: Hospitality amongst Angels and Sinners (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 8, Study Notes)

III. Critical and Ethical: Study Notes

“Challenge and be challenged by”--ethical critique of the characters in these chapters. What do we make of Abraham’s behavior?

- What conclusions can we make about scripture from these chapters? (Bible and **JST**) (save this for Part II)
- Larger issue of how we ethically evaluate scripture and its characters (if we let scripture be flawed and messy it can be used for good, vs. assuming all scripture is good and coming to horrific theological conclusions)

What is “wickedness/sin”? What is “living righteously”? (touch on Euthyphro’s dilemma) (Is whatever God commands good, or does God command what is good?)

How is the world doing? (In what ways do we live in a “wicked world”?)

Homosexuality in historical and social context

What factors influence our ability to “live righteously”? (Psychological/physiological, social, environmental)

We dig deeper into the nature of scripture, the question of what is right and wrong, and explore how we can live well even in the midst of opposition. I think this will prove one of the best episodes of Engaging Gospel doctrine because it provides so many resources and ideas on how to live authentically and well.