

# No Escaping the World!

Genesis 19:30-38

The Pilgrims originally lived in Scrooby, England. They were also called Separatists because they wanted to separate from the society in which they lived. They felt the pressure of persecution and sought freedom. They did not come to America at first. Initially, they went to Holland, where they lived for more than 10 years. The people of Holland were welcoming. But life in Holland was difficult. And, when many of their children were being swept up by the loose lifestyle of the Dutch, they decided it was time to escape the corruption and start a new colony in America.

The story of the Pilgrims is part of our American Heritage. The faith of these men and women is inspiring. Their courage and bravery through terrible trials should be emulated by every American. But if some of those Pilgrims came to America to escape the evils of the world, we should learn from them that escaping the world is not possible, at least not geographically.

Every believer is called to be separate from the world around us. We are to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. We are to love Jesus more than the desires of this life, and to be separate from sin. At times we are even to flee temptation and that may mean physical removal from the temptation.

But Jesus' does not give us an escape plan from the world. His plan for us in this life is to be "in the world, but not of it."

Few people had witnessed the evils of the world as did Lot. It is only natural that after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah he would want to he would want to escape from this world altogether.

Read Genesis 19:30 - 38.

<sup>30</sup> Now Lot went up out of Zoar  
and  
lived in the hills with his two daughters,  
for he was afraid to live in Zoar.  
So he lived in a cave  
with his two daughters.

Before the wrath of God was poured out upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot was hesitant to flee to the hills. Before he watched his wife turn into a pillar of salt, the small town of Zoar seemed like a good compromise. But after watching these horrific events, Lot is now afraid to live in Zoar. His fear most likely stems from his observation of the ungodly lifestyles of the citizens of Zoar. It is very likely that Lot sees the same sort of sins in them that he saw in Sodom and Gomorrah. Whereas Lot had to be pushed out of Sodom by the angels, he now leaves Zoar of his own accord. Lot is fleeing the world.

Lot is willing to live in a cave rather than run the risk of being judged with the Zoarites. Little does Lot know that until the Final Judgment, there is no escaping the world.

Lot was told by the angels to flee to the hills. But I think that he goes too far in his commitment to live in a cave. Abraham was not told to hide in a cave. There was no command to avoid all contact with all people whatsoever.

Lot seems to be acting more out of fear than out of faith. God does not intercede to correct Lot. God might have let him know that living in a cave was too extreme. But God is strangely silent now that Lot has been rescued from Sodom.

Lot no longer has his wife, but he does have his two daughters. He is responsible for them. And so, they come with Lot to live in the cave. There is much that we are not told. We do not know how long they lived in this cave. We do not know how many conversations Lot's daughters might have had trying to convince their dad that total isolation from the world was not a good solution. Lot was not budging. He probably thought, "God could destroy the world at any moment. We just cannot risk it."

I have wrestled to try to see this situation through the eyes of Lot AND through the eyes of his daughters. This was not easy for obvious reasons. There are surely generational factors at play. Lot had lived his life. He had sought the pleasures of this life. He is now ready to just sit out life and wait for the judgment day.

But his daughters are young and have just been denied any chance of life with their fiancés. I can hear their arguments, "Dad, we agree that there is some risk to interacting with the world, but are we supposed to live forever in this cave? Are we to never have the opportunity to be married? Are we never to bear children?"

I do not know why they do not leave their dad. Maybe they are truly afraid of the world as well. Maybe they cannot think of leaving him to die alone in this cave. Maybe they understand that they are only alive because of their dad.

From the little that we are given, I do not get the sense that they are simply looking for hedonistic pleasure. Nor do I feel like they are acting out of hatred for their father. But they do not cry out to God. They do not take their fears, their pain, their loneliness to the God who has so graciously redeemed them from His righteous wrath. They do not seek Him in their dire need. And very much like Abraham and Sarah before them, they devise their own strategy to solve the dilemma in their hearts.

How often does our sin seem so rational in the moment and yet so foolish later on?  
It is the firstborn daughter who comes up with the plan.

31       And  
          the firstborn said to the younger,  
                  "Our father is old,  
                  and  
                  there is not a man on earth to come in to us  
                                  after the manner of all the earth.  
32                   Come, let us make our father drink wine,  
                          and  
                          we will lie with him,  
                                  that we may preserve offspring from our father."

The overriding desire is to have children, but not for the reasons we usually think. It is not merely the emotional pleasure of bonding with their children that drives the girls. They want to preserve their line, their people. The thought of being entirely wiped out probably reminds them of the complete annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Add to this that they were the lone survivors of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Had God saved them from that destruction only to leave them to die childless in a cave?

They cannot see any other solution than to use their dad as a surrogate father. They know that their dad will not agree to this. They may not even want him to agree to it. It is possible that they want to absolve him of the moral guilt that they are willing to bear. So, they use deceit and cunning to trick him. This plan seems unthinkable to us. And it is clearly wrong on many levels. Instead of escaping evil, they have brought it with them to the cave. But I suspect that they might look at our commitment to abortion as even more unthinkable.

I am not trying to excuse the daughters. I am simply trying to better understand them. Their sin has many parallels to Sarah offering Hagar to Abraham. In both situations there is a desire to seek blessing apart from faith in God's powerful hand. Faith is removed from the equation. Fear is the driving motivation. And not fear of God.

We are told that their plan works. It works so well that they repeat it again the next night with the younger sister.

33           So they made their father drink wine that night.

          And  
          the firstborn went in and lay with her father.

                          He did not know  
                                  when she lay down  
                                  or  
                                  when she arose.

34       The next day,

          the firstborn said to the younger,  
          "Behold, I lay last night with my father.  
          Let us make him drink wine tonight also.  
          Then you go in and lie with him,  
          that we may preserve offspring from our father."

35           So they made their father drink wine that night also.

          And  
          the younger arose and lay with him,

          and  
          he did not know  
                  when she lay down  
                  or  
                  when she arose.

36       Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.

If Lot thought that by hiding in a cave he was going to "escape from the world" he was sadly mistaken. The world is not something that is "out there". The world is also "in here". We take the world with us, even to the isolation of a cave in the hills. Not only is the initial scheming of the girls accomplished without Lot's awareness, but both sisters are able to become pregnant.

The irony of this strikes me. Sarah desires to bear a child for 25 years with no success. Lot's daughters have no trouble whatsoever. The providence of God is filled with irony!

In a day where we are often taught that unwanted pregnancies will ruin one's life, the daughters of Lot would surely have an opposite reaction. They would have seen God's blessing in their becoming pregnant. And I believe that it is right to see these children as a blessing.

There was a time when illegitimate children were themselves viewed as cursed. I am glad that this is no longer the predominate view. The descendants of Lot's daughters are not automatically cursed because of this beginning.

Moses does want his readers to connect this story to their present situation. And they are to make a contrast between this story and the miraculous birth of Isaac. But if it were simply to condemn all the offspring of Lot and his daughters, we would expect God to tell Israel to crush these descendants like they were told to destroy the Canaanites. But when Moses leads the Israelites through their lands, God gives very different commands concerning the descendants of Lot.

Here in Genesis, we are simply told that the offspring of the firstborn daughter are the Moabites. And the offspring of the younger daughter are the Ammonites.

37           The firstborn bore a son  
                  and  
                  called his name Moab.

                  He is the father of the Moabites to this day.

38           The younger also bore a son  
                  and  
                  called his name Ben-ammi.

                  He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

The phrase "to this day" refers to the time just before the Israelites would go into the Promised Land under Joshua. For most of us, the names Moabite and Ammonite sound very much like all the other names of the Canaanites. What is the difference between an Amorite and an Ammonite? To us today, not much. But to the Israelites, there is a huge difference. Listen to how God expects His people to treat the Amorites, who were of the Canaanites.

**Deuteronomy 7:1-2** "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

That is very strong. It is hard to swallow. But God has His purposes. The sins of the Canaanites have reached their fullness. God prophesied their destruction to Abraham but told him that destruction had to wait 400 years because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." (Gen. 15)

But as Joshua goes into the Promised Land, they act as God's hand of judgment. This is not easy to accept, but it is true. God is foreshadowing that in the final judgment, His people will participate. I do not know how this will play out. But I accept it as true. We belong to the army of the Lord.

All this being said, God gives very different commands concerning the Moabites and the Ammonites. These are found in Deuteronomy 2. (See Map of the Region.)

In this chapter Israel must travel through the nations of Edom, and Moab, and Ammon.

The Edomites – Descendants of Esau.

**Deuteronomy 2:3-12** <sup>3</sup> 'You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward <sup>4</sup> and command the people, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. <sup>5</sup> Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.

Israel is not allowed to fight with the Edomites at this time. Why? Because God has given this region to them "as a possession."

Next, the Israelites approach the kingdom of Moab. Moab is the kingdom descended from Lot's oldest daughter.

<sup>8</sup> So we went on, away from our brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber. "And we turned and went in the direction of the wilderness of Moab. <sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession.'

God explicitly states that He has given this land to "the people of Lot for a possession." Therefore, the Israelites are not to conquer the Moabites, but seek to pass by them peacefully. This is not an argument that the Moabites are God's Promised People. Nor is it a statement that they are a good people. But God has his purposes for their existing as a people.

Next in the line of march is the Ammonites.

**Deuteronomy 2:16-19** <sup>16</sup> "So as soon as all the men of war had perished (First generation of Israelites) and were dead from among the people, <sup>17</sup> the LORD said to me, <sup>18</sup> 'Today you are to cross the border of Moab at Ar. <sup>19</sup> And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession.'

Here we see that the same treatment is to be given to the Ammonites as was given to the Moabites. Here we are told that the LORD fought for the Ammonites to give them their land.

**Deuteronomy 2:20-22** <sup>20</sup> (It is also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there- but the Ammonites call them Zamzummim- <sup>21</sup> a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim; but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place, <sup>22</sup> as he did for the people of Esau, who live in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites before them and they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day.

But as soon as Israel passes by the Ammonite kingdom, new orders are given.

Deuteronomy 2:24-25.

<sup>24</sup> 'Rise up, set out on your journey and go over the Valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle. <sup>25</sup> This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.'

God desires that the Moabites and the Ammonites remain as intact kingdoms. What purposes might God have for this? There are at least two answers to this question.

1. God is being merciful to the descendants of Lot.

As long as they continue to exist, there is the possibility that God may call some of them to Himself. The sins of these nations have not yet reached their full. They are not yet brought to the point of God's final wrath, like Sodom and Gomorrah. It does not mean that these nations are to not fear God's judgment. But in God's mercy they still have time to turn to the true God. Ruth is a shining example of one Moabitess who turns to the Lord. By the grace of God, Ruth leaves her false gods and submits to Yahweh as her God. She tells Naomi, "your God will be my God."

The final judgment of God against sinners is terrible to consider. There is no longer room for repentance and faith. We must remember that until that final day, God is still working to mercifully save people from the world around us.

It is easy when we see the evil around us to be driven by fear to escape. This is not all bad. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We should take seriously the possibility of our being judged with the world.

But we should balance these thoughts with the truth that God may use us to pluck others out of the world. Ask God to give you His love for the sinners around you. Remember that you too are a sinner that has been plucked from the fire by God's mercy.

How much more effective might have Lot been as a light to the people of Zoar after witnessing the destruction of Sodom? I am not trying to judge Lot. I cannot imagine being in his shoes. I am just convinced that escaping to a cave was not the answer, for him or for us.

2. God is using these peoples, and their continued embracing of false gods as a test to his people.

During the time of Israel's journey through the land of the Moabites, some terrible things occurred.

**Numbers 25:1-3** While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. <sup>2</sup> These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. <sup>3</sup> So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

This takes some explaining. God may not want Israel to destroy the Moabites, but that does not mean that He wants them to join with them either. The Moabites worshipped false gods, Baal of Peor being one. And the Moabites proved to be too tempting for the Israelites. Their daughters were enticing. And so were the false gods of the Moabites.

The bottom line was that Israel was too weak to not be lured into false worship. But if God knew this to be the case, why would God not tell Israel to destroy these kingdoms. Why would God leave such a strong source of temptation so near to His people? It just so happens that God gives us an answer. Turn to the book of Judges. This is the period when Israel is living in the Promised Land, but before the time of the Kings. And even though Israel was commanded to destroy all the Canaanites, they had not done so. They failed because of their own weakness and lack of faith and compromise. But all of these reasons were under the hand of God's sovereign providence. And at the point of Joshua's death, God tells His people that He will no longer work to drive out all of the Canaanites. Listen to the purpose for His not doing this.

**Judges 2:21-23** <sup>21</sup> I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup> in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not. <sup>23</sup> So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

**Judges 3:1-2** Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. <sup>2</sup> It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.

It is not God's plan for his people to simply escape the world. God doesn't intend the victory of His people to be quick or easy. It is God's plan that we struggle over time to overcome the world. God wants us to know war. It is not a physical war with guns that we are fighting. It is a spiritual war against evil. And we need to remind ourselves when we grow weary of fighting and only want to escape, that it is not God's plan that we escape – not yet anyway.

God leaves these ungodly people in the midst of Israel as a continual test for His people. I believe something similar is going on with the Moabites and the Ammonites. They will both be an ongoing temptation to the Israelites. They will be "neighbors" who are constant thorns in the flesh of Israel. In fact, while God wants the Ammonites and Moabites to exist as neighbors to Israel, He explicitly tells Israel that they are not to intermarry with them or to embrace their gods.

**Deuteronomy 23:3-6** <sup>3</sup> "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, <sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. <sup>5</sup> But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. <sup>6</sup> You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.

The reason for not intermarrying with the Moabites and the Ammonites has nothing to do with their origin in Genesis 19. The fact that Ruth is an ancestor to David, and Jesus, proves this point. It has everything to do with their present worshipping of false gods. And it has everything to do with their unwillingness to leave those false gods to embrace the truth. As Israel passed through their land, they might have taken hold of the true God of Israel. Instead, they led many of God's people away from the truth. God does not take this lightly.

Jesus taught, "Temptation must come, but woe to him through whom it comes."

Ruth is an example of God bringing a Moabite to himself.

But most Moabites continued to mock God's people. When Israel was cast into Exile for her sins, the Moabites and the Ammonites had no mercy. Instead, they mocked and ridiculed God's people in their defeat.

**Zephaniah 2:8-10** <sup>8</sup> "I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites, how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory. <sup>9</sup> Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them." <sup>10</sup> This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts.

God will eventually bring destruction on the Moabites and the Ammonites, but not for their beginning. It will be because they refuse to embrace Yahweh. And it will be because they treat God's holy people with contempt. It will be due to their own pride and wickedness.

The lesson is not that God will get them in the end, but because we have a better heritage we will be fine. Jeremiah makes this very clear.

**Jeremiah 9:23 - 26** <sup>23</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." <sup>25</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh- <sup>26</sup> Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."

"all who are circumcised merely in the flesh"

Jeremiah presumably lists pagan kingdoms who had some connection with circumcision. Ammon and Moab are included. Then Jeremiah says that these nations are in truth “uncircumcised” and deserving of wrath. But he does not stop there. He ends with these words, “and all the house of Israel who is uncircumcised in heart.” In other words, the great heritage of the Israelites will not stop God from judging them if they do not “practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.”

So, the lesson comes full circle. Every generation must learn to fight to overcome the world, within and without. It is a war we cannot escape. And it is a war that we must win. We do not win it by removing all evil. We do not win by never losing individual battles along the way. We win because we are joined together with Jesus Christ, our King.

Brothers and sisters, you are locked in a lifelong war against sin. It does not feel good. There are days where you need to run to Jesus as your “strong tower” where He can give you rest for your soul. But God does not intend that you live out your days in the tower. Even if you did, you would not escape the evil. It would come with you because it lives in your heart.

The desire to escape the world is real. Who would not want the war to be over? But it is God who decides when our warfare is ended. It is our task to engage in the battle. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus. And we are to daily fight against our sin. And we are to seek God’s mercy upon those who are still lost.

God does not intend that His people simply avoid sin. He does not simply want us to escape from the world. His plan is for us to share in His overcoming the world. God does not give us evil desires. But neither does God remove all temptation from us.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We are to acknowledge that temptation is too much for us. We are to acknowledge our weakness. But we are also to ask God for grace to overcome sin.

The fight against sin is lifelong. As Christians we sometimes fail. We are encouraged to take our sins quickly to Jesus looking for forgiveness and cleansing. But we are not failures. We are united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. He supplies us with continual grace to continue in the battle and to overcome sin.

We are not to find a cave in which to escape. Instead, we are to engage ourselves in building the Church. Because it is the Church and all who live in her, who will win.

**Matthew 16:18** <sup>18</sup> (Jesus says to Peter and the disciples) “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

