

Who is Lot?

Genesis 11: 27

Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot.

וְאַלְהָהּ תוֹלְדֵת תֶּרַח תֶּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט:

QUESTIONS

- How many 'stories' are there about Lot in Torah?
- WHY does Lot matter?
- Resonances with other stories within Torah a) narrative b) thematic? – see below
- Victim of circumstance? Greedy fool? Abused or abuser? What do the Rabbis have to say about him?

Genesis 12: 4-5

Abram went forth as [יהוה](#) had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן:

Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan.....

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרָי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

Genesis 13: 1

From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot.

וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לּוֹ וְלוֹט עַמּוֹ הַנִּגְבָּה:

Genesis 13: 5-7

Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together.

וְגַם־לְלוֹט הָיָה צֹאן־וּבָקָר וְאֹהֲלִים: וְלֹא־נִשְׂאָא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשִׁבְתָּ יַחְדָּו כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רַב וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשִׁבְתָּ יַחְדָּו:

And there was quarrelling between the herders of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle —The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

וַיְהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־לוֹט וַהֲכִנְעֻנִי וְהַפְרֹזִי אֲזִי יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ:

Genesis 13: 8-11

Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herders and yours, for we are kin.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־לוֹט אֵל־לֹט אֵל־נָא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין רֹעֵי וּבֵין רֹעֵיךָ כִּי־אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אָנַחְנוּ:

Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north."

הֲלֹא כָל־הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֶיךָ הַפָּרָד נָא מַעְלִי אֶם־הִשְׁמָנָאֵל וְאִמְנָה וְאֶם־הִימִין וְאֶם־מֵאִילָה:

Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before [יהוה](#) had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of [יהוה](#), like the land of Egypt.

וַיִּשְׁאֲלֹט אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־כָּל־כֶּכַר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כָלָה מִשְׁקָה לִפְנֵי שְׁחַת יְהוָה אֶת־סֹדֶם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה כְּגִן־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶכָה צֹעַר:

So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other;

וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל־כֶּכַר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִקְדָּם וַיִּפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו:

Genesis 13: 12-13

Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.

אַבְרָם יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּעָרֵי הַכֶּכַר וַיֵּאָהֶל עַד־סֹדֶם:

Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against [יהוה](#).

וְאֲנָשֵׁי סֹדֶם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַיהוָה מְאֹד:

Lot – the less familiar part of the story

Genesis 14: 12-14

They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom.	וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־לוֹט וְאֶת־רֶכֶשׁוֹ בֶן־אָחִי אַבְרָם וַיֵּלְכוּ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בְּסֹדֶם:
A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies.	וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיַּגֵּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי וְהוּא שָׁכֵן בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא הָאֹמְרִי אָחִי אֲשָׁכֵל וְאָחִי עֲנֹר וְהֵם בְּעַלֵי בְרִית־אַבְרָם
When Abram heard that his kinsman's [household] had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.	: וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד־דָּן:
At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.	וַיַּחֲלֹק עֲלֵיהֶם לַיְלָה הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו וַיִּכּוּ וַיִּרְדֹּפֶם עַד־חֹבֹבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָאל לְדַמָּשְׁק:
He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.	וַיָּשָׁב אֶת כָּל־הָרֶכֶשׁ וְגַם אֶת־לוֹט אָחִיו וְרֶכֶשׁוֹ הַשֵּׁיב וְגַם אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הָעָם:

Genesis Chapter 19

Link to this chapter on the Sefaria website:

https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.19.2?ven=english|THE_JPS_TANAKH: Gender-Sensitive_Edition&lang=bi&aliyot=0

'Do not look behind you'

Midrash Rabbeinu Bahya: The reason the angels forbade Lot to look back was that he would see the presence of G'd as it was pouring sulphur and brimstone on the valley. Such a vision would prove fatal for him. Irith, Lot's wife, had feelings of compassion for her married daughters whom she had left behind, and this is what caused her to turn around. She wanted to see if these daughters now followed them. She beheld the שכינה instead and turned into a pillar of salt.

Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer: Lot's wife looked back to see whether her married daughters were following her and laid eyes on the back of the Shechinah....

Rashi: You have participated in their wickedness, but you are being saved by virtue of your relationship with Abraham. It is not right for you to watch them being punished when you yourself are escaping.

Kimchi: ...this would have delayed their escape

Nachmanides: Seeing the air filled with plague and contagious disease would be harmful – it would infect them too...That is why Lot's wife 'turned into a pillar of salt' when she saw 'sulfur and salt'...the destruction came into her mind and seized hold of her....

Abarbanel: The men of Zoar certainly looked at the destruction and nothing happened to them. This was not a natural plague of the kind that could be contagious. There was nothing wrong with looking. The expression meant "Forget about the past. You are leaving it behind".

Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 51:5 "His wife looked behind him, [and she became a pillar of salt]" – Rabbi Yitzhak said: This was because she sinned with salt on that night that the angels came to Lot. What did she do? She went to all her neighbours and said to them: 'Give me salt, as we have guests,' and her intention was that the residents of the city should become aware of them. That is why "she became a pillar of salt."

Lot's Legacy

Deuteronomy 23: 4-7

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of יהוה ; no descendants of such, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of יהוה,	לֹא־יָבֹא עַמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בִקְהַל יְהוָה גַּם דּוֹר עֲשִׂירִי לֹא־יָבֹא לָהֶם בִּקְהַל יְהוָה עַד־עוֹלָם:
because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.—	עַל־דִּבְרֵי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קָדְמוּ אֹתְכֶם בְּלַחֵם וּבִמֵּי בְדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁר שָׂכַר עֲלֵיךְ אֶת־בִּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר מִפְּתוֹר אֲרָם נְהָרִים לְקַלְלֶךָ:
But your God יהוה refused to heed Balaam; instead, your God יהוה turned the curse into a blessing for you, for your God יהוה loves you.—	וְלֹא־אָבָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִשְׁמָעַל בְּלַעַם וַיִּהְיֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת־הַקְּלָלָה לְבִרְכָּה כִּי אָהַבְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
You shall never concern yourself with their welfare or benefit as long as you live.	לֹא־תִדְרֹשׁ שְׁלָמָם וְטִבְתָּם כָּל־יְמֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם:

Ruth 1: 1-4

Rabbi Dr Nicola Feuchtwang

In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab.	וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים שֶׁפָּטוּ הַשְּׂפָטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וִילָד אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לְגֹרֶם בְּשָׂרֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:
The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.	וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִמֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָעֳמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שָׂדֵי-מוֹאָב וַיְהִי-שָׁם:
Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.	וַיָּמָת אֱלִמֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נָעֳמִי וַתֵּשֶׂא אֶת שְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ:
They married Moabite women , one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years.	וַיֵּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֵאֲבוֹת שָׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת וַיָּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים:

Jewish Women's Archive

[https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/lots-daughters-midrash-and-aggadah#:~:text=Lot%20is%20indicted.-Midrashic%20Perspective%20of%20Lot,midrash%20\(Aggadat%20Bereshit%20%5Bed.](https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/lots-daughters-midrash-and-aggadah#:~:text=Lot%20is%20indicted.-Midrashic%20Perspective%20of%20Lot,midrash%20(Aggadat%20Bereshit%20%5Bed.)

According to the Midrash (*Tanhuma, Vayera 12*), Lot, from the outset, decided to dwell in Sodom because he wanted to engage in the licentious behavior of its inhabitants. His negative behavior comes to the fore when the townspeople mill about his door, demanding that he hand over the angels, and he instead offers his daughters to the mob. The Rabbis observe that a man usually allows himself to be killed in order to save his wife and children, while Lot was willing to allow the townspeople to abuse his daughters. In response to this, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to Lot: By your life, the improper act that you intended to be done to your daughters will indeed be committed, but to you. This midrash sharply focuses the reversal between these two episodes. In the first event, in Sodom, Lot was ready to force his daughters, against their will, to engage in sexual relations with the townspeople. In contrast, in the second episode, which takes place after the upheaval of Sodom, Lot's daughters engage in relations with their unwitting father. Consequently, these acts of incest are Lot's punishment for his unseemly behavior.

Another midrash (*Aggadat Bereshit* [ed. Buber] 25:1) regards the daughters' act as punishment for their father's own sexual promiscuity. Lot thought that if he were to dwell in Sodom, he could engage in licentious behavior without anyone's knowledge. He accordingly was punished by his daughters engaging in intercourse with him; this episode became common knowledge and is read each year during the public Torah reading of the verse: "Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father" (*Gen. 19:36*). R. Nahman adds: "Whoever is driven by his hunger for transgression will eventually be fed from his own flesh" (*Tanhuma, Vayera 12*). Lot was eager to engage in promiscuity; in the end, his daughters played the harlot with him.

Another Rabbinic view was that Lot secretly lusted after his daughters. He was intoxicated when the elder sister lay with him, but he was sober when she rose, as is indicated in the Torah by the dot over the word *u-ve-komah* ("when she rose"). Despite his knowledge of what had transpired, he did not refrain from drinking wine the next night as well, and lying with his younger daughter (*Gen. Rabbah 51:8–9*).

Lot's daughters, in contrast, are treated sympathetically. The midrash observes that, by strict law, the daughters deserve to be burnt by fire for having lain with their father (*Aggadat Bereshit* [ed. Buber] 25:1), but the Holy One, blessed be He, who knows man's thoughts, judges them by their thoughts and not their deed. The daughters' true intent was not to lie with their father, on whom they had no sexual designs, but to save the world from total devastation. The daughters thought that the entire world had been laid waste, as had happened during the Flood, since they saw no living souls wherever they went; they did not know that only Sodom had been destroyed. They said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, has rescued us so that the world will exist through us, so that the human race shall continue." The Holy One, blessed be He, knew their honest minds and good thoughts and rewarded them for their actions. Accordingly, when he commanded "no Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord" (*Deut. 23:4*), this prohibition against intermarriage applies only to the males, and not to the females (*Pesikta Rabbati 42*).

Rashi on Genesis 19:26 (citing Genesis Rabbah)

מֶלַח AND SHE BECAME A PILLAR OF SALT — By salt had she sinned and by salt was she punished. He (Lot) said to her once: "Give a little salt to these strangers" and she answered him, "Do you mean to introduce this bad custom, also, into our city?" (*Genesis Rabbah 50:4*).

Ibn Ezra on Genesis 19:26

A PILLAR. *Nitziv* (pillar) means the same as *matzevah*. Her bones were burned by brimstone and she was encrusted in salt, for it is written, *brimstone, and salt...like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim* (*Deut. 29:22*). This verse also shows that Zoar was not destroyed. The latter is also borne out by the words of the angel.

Lot's Wife – from R. Shulamit Ambalu 7.11.2025 (*with permission*)

In a fast moving situation, it can be very difficult to stop and reflect. I find myself thinking about how well I reacted to the challenges of Covid as well as how have come through the past two years. There are many things I would have done differently; but that is the benefit of hindsight.

Someone else looks back in the part of the Torah we will read this week. Abraham, Lot and his family are fleeing the destruction of S'dom, brought about by God. They are told to run, and not look back. Lot's wife does, and she becomes a pillar of salt. It is usual to understand this as her punishment. The Women's Torah Commentary points out that "she is reluctant to ignore what happens to those she leaves behind, and this cost her her life". I can also understand her act of stopping to look behind her as a moment of afterthought, of gaining perspective on the wicked city.

The trouble is that this crystallises her, it freezes her in place. Or does it? The word for *pillar* [*netziv*] is built upon the same root as a memorial at a burial place [*matzeva*]. It is as if Lot's wife becomes a literal monument to the burning city. She becomes the boundary marker between hope for the future and grief for the past; a reminder that it is through the act of turning back, genuine grief, and boundary marking, that new life, ethical life, becomes genuinely possible.

POSSIBLE RESONANCES

Noah?

Judah?

Jonah?

Judges chapter 19-20 ?