

# General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Family Ministries Department

## A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

BY JOHN NIXON, SR.

### THE TEXTS

Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:28

### INTRODUCTION

This is the story of two families and the similarities and differences between them. Both families faced crises from the outside world that put them under severe trial. The secularism of their time tested the spirituality of their homes. Both families shunned evil. Both families knew the true God and worshipped Him. But in the end, they fared very differently. The lesson of this story lies in the differences between them, why one family survived intact while the other family fell apart. Lot is the man who lost his family; Noah is the man who saved his family.

### COMPARISON OF SETTINGS

Both the world before the flood and the city of Sodom presented challenges of the most extreme kind to the believers of their time. In various places in the New Testament, the antediluvian world and the city of Sodom are each presented as eschatological signs of the final rebellion against God and its consequences. Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24 pointed to the time of Noah as the example of world conditions in the time just before His return.

**John Nixon, Sr, DMin**, is a recently retired church administrator, theology professor, and pastor who writes from Huntsville, Alabama, USA.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” – Matthew 24:37-39

Jude made an end-time connection with the city of Sodom.

“They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” – Jude 7

What’s interesting about both cases is that in the Old Testament, the stories of those times are told through the experiences of families. We see them from the inside. Both families were recipients of God’s grace amid devastating divine judgment (Genesis 6:8; Genesis 19:16). But only one family came through the crisis unscathed. The nature of a spiritually resilient family is revealed in their stories.

## I. THE DAYS OF NOAH

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” – Genesis 6:1-3

The downfall of humanity began when the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous dissipated. The sons of God chose wives based on the outward instead of the inward - physical beauty rather than character - and they took “any they wanted.” (New Living Translation)

Intermarriage between the “sethites” and the “cainites” caused a breakdown in the separation between them. The breakdown in separation then led to a breakdown in distinction. It is a principle of life, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Corinthians. 15:33). In the antediluvian world, righteousness and unrighteousness mingled together until the former assimilated to the latter and the knowledge of God began to be lost on the earth.

Noah was the patriarch of the first generation born after the death of Adam. For 900 years the world’s first man bounced his grandkids off his knee and told them the story of Paradise lost – of the beautiful Garden now guarded by a flaming sword - of the Tree of Life, now off-limits - of walking with angels and talking face to face with God - of the serpent and the Forbidden Tree and the gradual steps away from integrity that led to the curse of sin.

It was hard to deny the existence of God while Adam was on the earth. He could tell with true conviction what he had seen with his own eyes. He could show

the scar on his body from the divine surgery that brought Eve into existence. But with his death, the last natural barrier against

wickedness was lost and sin went on a violent rampage. The world had become so corrupt that only the most extreme language could be used to describe the depraved condition to which humanity had fallen, and the heartbroken grief of God.

“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.” – Genesis 6:5,6

This was also the time of the Nephilim, people of great size and strength who were “the heroes of old, men of renown.” (Genesis 6:4). Their descendants were the giants that intimidated the men Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:33). But the name Nephilim in Hebrew means “fallen ones”, suggesting that although they may have been renowned in the eyes of men, in God’s assessment they were sinners. The commentary from *Patriarchs and Prophets* bears it out, “their guilt in giving loose rein to iniquity was in proportion to their skill and mental ability.” Their wickedness “was open and daring” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 90,91).

“Men put God out of their knowledge and worshiped the creatures of their own imagination; and as the result, they became more and more debased” (PP 91).

This was the world in which Noah had to raise his family. He did not choose the conditions of society and he couldn’t control the world outside his doors. But he could control his own life and his own home and he did so with integrity and faithfulness to God.

## II. THE TIME OF LOT

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.” – Luke 17:28

While the Bible points to violence as the outward sign of the corruption of Noah’s time (Genesis 6:11), Sodom was known for its sexual immorality, and more than that, sexual perversion (Jude 7). But while the vilest and degrading practices were going on, life in Sodom continued from day to day as though it was nothing strange. Indeed, it had become ordinary, and this was the doom of Sodom.

When the men of Sodom tried to break down Lot’s door to sexually violate the two visitors in his home, it was “all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old” (Genesis 19:4). When sin is replete with no restraint, it is the sign that the Holy Spirit has been rejected and has completely withdrawn and the only thing left is divine judgment.

So, we see the similarities. Both Noah and Lot raised their families in conditions that were detrimental to godly family life, but they came upon those conditions differently.



## MATERIALISM OR SPIRITUALITY

“Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt . . . So, Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east.” – Genesis 13:10,11

When Lot decided where to raise his family, he made his decision based on the prospect of increasing his wealth, not realizing the effect it would have on his household. He did not consult the Lord. Lot exposed his family to evil. He made a materialistic decision and in so doing, set up his family to learn to value material things above all. These values became central to the disaster that befell his family when Sodom was destroyed.

Lot was already rich when he moved his family to Sodom (Genesis 13:5). He didn't need anything. And because of materialism, he lost both his family and his wealth. He “went into Sodom rich; he left with nothing” (*Counsels on Health*, 270). The first loss was by far the most devastating, but it was set up by the values that drove Lot's decision. Lot fell into a life of luxury and luxury ruined his faith.

“When Lot entered Sodom, he fully intended to keep himself free from iniquity and to command his household after him. But he signally failed. The corrupting influences about him had an effect upon his own faith, and his children's connection with the inhabitants of Sodom bound up his interest in a measure with theirs” (*Adventist Home*, 138).

For a family to thrive spiritually, decision-making must be based on spiritual values. As it was in the days of Lot, so it is today. The allure of materialism is all around us. The promise of personal wealth and the happiness it will bring is the essential feature of capitalism. The system, however, is driven by self-interest, private ownership for the sake of profit, and the acquisition of wealth as an end in itself.

As of 2021, there are more than a million millionaires in the United States, far more in fact. According to one report, a million new millionaires were created in the U. S. in 2021 alone. There are now 14.6 millionaires in America, with 2021 being “the strongest year ever for millionaire creation.”<sup>1</sup>

With so much wealth among us and the possibility of gaining it open to so much of the population it would be easy for us to fall into an attitude of “this world living.” But when we place material things at the center of our value system, we put our spiritual health and the health of our family at risk. In the experience of Lot and his family, “the result is before us” (*Adventist Home*, 138).

Conversely, Noah built his life and the interests of his family around the mission he had been given by God. His entire life was driven by it. The ark project demanded the use of all his gifts

and talents – the architectural ingenuity to plot God’s building instructions, the physical brawn to prepare and the place the construction materials, the leadership skills to organize the workers to make the most of their abilities and talents, and stamina of mind and body to keep at it every day until the mission was complete.

He even invested his personal assets. Noah poured his own money into the building of the ark until he had spent it all. He had no separation anxiety when he led his family into the ark because he was leaving nothing behind. The project also called for great faith on Noah’s part. He built a boat on dry ground in a world that had never seen rain. The scientists discredited him. The intellectuals demeaned him. The rude and irreverent mocked him. But Noah kept on building.

Noah’s entire life was driven by the character of his faith. In the end, he had to turn his back completely on the generation of his time as they continued to turn their backs on God. There was a clear choice between the values of the world he lived in and the values of the kingdom to which he had attached himself. And the result is before us.

### **DECISIVENESS OR VACILLATION**

One of the clearest signs of what happened to Lot’s faith as he lived in Sodom was his reaction when he learned his city was about to be destroyed. If he wasn’t sure his visitors were angels when he first took them in, the events at his front door made it perfectly clear.

“Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.”– Genesis 19:11

The angels’ warning was emphatic, as were their actions in defending Lot and his family from the depraved crowd. They didn’t just make an invitation of salvation to Lot, they gave the command they were instructed to give.

“Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.” – Genesis 19:12,13

The message was clear and the warning was immediate. There could be no doubt as to the urgency of the angels’ command, yet Lot did a strange thing. He hesitated.

“With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.’ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them

safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.” – Genesis  
19:15,16



## GOD'S GRACE TO LOT

In the same way that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8), Lot found mercy in the patience of the Lord. Here’s what I love about the Sodom story, Lot was an ordinary believer like you and me. He was no faith-giant like Abraham or great prophet like Moses. He was not called “perfect in his generation” the way Job was. Lot chose to live in Sodom, and he chose it for the wrong reasons. At first, he was on the outskirts of town, then he moved in. He remained there despite the conditions because he was living comfortably.

Lot did not partake of the sins of Sodom. The Sodomites hated him because he preached against their sins; he was not one of them. But he wasn’t a perfect servant either, yet God was determined to save him despite himself.

The destroying angels persisted in their mission to bring Lot’s family to safety. God was as determined to save them as He was to destroy the wicked, and more so, for He limited His power to destroy by the measure of His purpose to save.

The angels were instructed that they could do nothing until Lot and his family were safe (verse 22). But even then, while being led to safety by angels of God, Lot resisted salvation, so weak had his faith become. He didn’t trust God’s provision for his safety and pled to go to a safe retreat of his own choosing. The angels complied with his request, but it didn’t turn the way Lot expected.

As the little family ran toward the place of safety Mrs. Lot gradually slowed her steps. Her pace slackened and her progress diminished. But it was not because of fatigue. The heat of the fire was at the backs of their necks and the wails of dying were ringing in their ears. In his haste and panic, Lot didn’t notice that his wife had fallen behind. She was conflicted and unsettled; her head was in a whirl.

Suddenly she stopped and took a backward look, and as her eyes beheld the city she loved more than anything else, she saw their last sight on this earth. Immediately she was frozen into a pillar of salt, a grotesque monument to the peril of a divided heart. She almost made it out, a few more steps and she would have been safe. Instead, she was lost on the brink of salvation.

This story frightened me as a child. I couldn’t understand it. Mrs. Lot was doing everything the angel told her to do. She only turned her head. Was this gesture deserving of death? Sure, the angel told her not to look back but maybe she forgot. With all that was going on, maybe she got confused. One head motion and she was dead! Is this the lesson of Lot’s wife?

Surely, it is not. If God wanted to destroy Lot’s wife, He would’ve left her in the city. God was trying to save Mrs. Lot. What we see on the plain in that pillar of salt is a woman refusing salvation because she didn’t like the cost of it. Lot’s wife disdained God’s deliverance because His judgment against Sodom included her wealth. Her home was ablaze back there. She hated God’s salvation because it did not

include her furs, her cash, her friends, and her wicked children who would not take the warning. “She felt she had been severely dealt with because the wealth it took her years to accumulate must be left to destruction” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 161).

It was not the backward look that killed Lot’s wife. The look was only a symptom. It was not what she did with her head that was her doom; it was what she had already done with her heart.

And the hesitation of her husband in fleeing the destruction of Sodom only weakened her resolve. The cost of his vacillation was her life.

The tragedy of Mrs. Lot reminds us of the biblical principle of detachment. The Bible does not teach that wealth is a sin or that material possessions are evil in themselves. Abraham was richer than Lot, but it did not cost him his spirituality. The danger of material possessions is not in what we have but in whether or not it has us. The Lot story reminds us of the importance of how we relate to our things.

Detachment means we turn our possessions over to God by covenant. We are ready to use them for His purposes or give them up at a moment's notice as He commands. And if our faith is what it should be, God may take our wealth without explaining Himself. Paul connects detachment with contentment.

["I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." – Philippians 4:12](#)

### **NOAH'S DECISIVENESS**

In contrast to Lot's vacillation, Noah's faith was demonstrated by his decisiveness. "By faith Noah, being warned about things not yet seen moved in holy fear and built an ark to save his family" (Hebrews 11:7). While Lot's faith weakened during the time he spent in Sodom, the faith of Noah remained strong when tested.

Faith in God is more than just the belief that He exists. Believing that God is, is just the entry step, the minimum requirement to knowing God (Hebrews 11:6). When faith is mature it goes beyond mere belief. It becomes the basis of a new worldview. The Bible is describing a mature faith when it states:

["So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." – 2 Corinthians 4:18](#)

The paradox of "fixing our eyes" on something that can't be seen points to the reality of the spiritual realm. When Jesus says, "my kingdom is not of this world," this is what He means. There is a worldview and a set of values that neither come from nor conform to the values of this world. There is a realm of reality that is unseen to the physical eye but seen by the eye of faith. It was this worldview that led to Noah's decisiveness in contrast to Lot's vacillation.

A recurring theme in the story of Noah's life was his immediate and complete obedience to God's commands. While Lot attempted to negotiate his salvation based on fear, Noah obeyed in faith. If either of them would be suspect of the means of escape God had provided, it should have been Noah – a boat against a deluge in a world where it had never rained. But Noah was strong in faith, and it showed in his actions.



“Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22).

“And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him” (Genesis 7:5).

“Male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah” (Genesis 7:9).

For 120 years Noah never wavered from God’s purpose for his life. He took the scorn and insult of his ministry without complaining and never asked for a different assignment. Babies were born, grew up, became adults, married, had babies of their own, who grew up, became adults, and had babies of their own, and Noah was still preaching. The influence of his actions was just as telling on his family as Lot’s influence was on his.

“As a rule, children inherit the dispositions and tendencies of their parents, and imitate their example” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 117). And as “Noah was the most pious and holy of any upon the earth” (*Story of Redemption*, 63), his family benefitted greatly from the influence of his faith and obedience to God.

When Noah’s sons were born, their father was already engaged in the ark project. They participated in it beside him as soon as they were old enough to hold a hammer. They contributed to the building of the vessel that would save their lives, under their father’s tutelage.

Ham, Shem, and Japheth watched their father as they were growing up and knew that he was for real. Noah was an example to his boys and the influence of his life made a deep impression on them.

In his poem, *Sermons We See* (in the public domain), Edgar Guest has a relevant line that reads: “For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give, But there’s no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.”

The grace of God to Noah was transmitted to his sons; they were saved by his example. Noah was sowing the seeds of salvation in his home by living as a man of God.

“As a reward for his faithfulness and integrity, God saved all the members of his family with him. What encouragement to parental fidelity!” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 98)

Every parent is a pastor, and the family is the first church. And here is a general truth I’ve learned over my years in the ministry, a woman in love will follow her man in doing right, and the children will come along. You often see women in church without their man, but seldom do you see a godly man in church without his woman and children beside him.

Mrs. Noah followed her husband into the ark because he was firm in his convictions, while Mrs. Lot did not follow her husband to safety because he was vacillating.

Here's a promise believing parents love to claim.

“But thus says the Lord: ‘even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you. And I will save your children.’ – Isaiah 49:25

It’s a beautiful promise and it gives us hope when our children go astray. But when we claim this promise we should remember it has conditions. It is presumption, not faith, for us to ask God to save your children without our participation. We must do our part as Noah did his part. Noah’s family was saved by God’s Spirit working through Noah.

“Noah’s experience was a noble example for Christians who know they are living in the time of the end and are preparing themselves for translation. Their greatest missionary work is to be done in the home.”<sup>2</sup>

A father’s greatest asset as the head of the home is not his harshness or his strictness. It is not how hard and military he can be in commanding his family to obey his orders. The strong father is not the one who can dominate everyone under his roof. It’s the father who by his example shows what it means to be a man of God.

It means something to have a father you can look up to, one whose life is founded on the character of Christ. It sets a standard for the children on the inside, an internal standard that they can never fully escape. Even when they don’t live up to it themselves, their consciences will ever be telling them that they should be better than they are; that they should be like dad. This is the kind of leader every head of a family should be.

### EXAMPLE

My wife and I were fortunate in our fathers - not highly educated men but hard-working honest men who were genuine in their faith. I’m not comparing them to Noah, whom the Bible calls a perfect man in his generation. They were not perfect by any means, and even as children, we could see their flaws. But what I’ve learned over the years is that children will forgive their parent’s shortcomings if they believe in them. They will excuse their parent’s faults, but they won’t excuse hypocrisy.

When our dads took us to church on Sabbath or picked up the Bible at home for evening worship, they meant every word they taught us to obey. They believed what they taught and lived it to the best of their abilities. This is what it takes to be a man of God and save your family; it takes everything. We must be determined and completely sold out for God.

### CONCLUSION

And now we have come full circle. The difference between the Noah and Lot’s families, and in particular the heads of those families, was the difference between being spiritually strong or





spiritually weak. The societal conditions around them were the same. The differences were inside, not outside. The differences were the reason one family stayed intact while the other was broken. It was the difference between spirituality and materialism and the power of decisiveness over vacillation. These characteristics are determined by the strength or weakness of our faith in God. As we grow in faith, we prove our love and trust to God and ensure our own happiness.

### ILLUSTRATION

There's a story of a dad who was awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of his son's voice, "Daddy there's a man in the house!" The father jumped up to see the shocking sight of a stranger holding a knife to his young daughter's throat. The intruder froze at the door as the father confronted him. The two men squared off without a word passing between them in a deadly stare down with everything at stake.

The dad felt the adrenalin rush and every sense heightened as he watches for his opportunity. The intruder turned his head for a second to get his bearings and the father took his chance. He leapt at the intruder and a desperate struggle began. The knife dislodged, the daughter escaped, and the intruder ran away. The father took his daughter and son into his arms. He had saved his family.

When the incident was over the father recounted what happened to the police. One of them asked, "what was going through your mind?" "As I stood there face to face with that man, his hands around my little girl's throat, I made a solemn promise in my mind there and then. No matter what happens to me, even if it costs me my life, that man is not leaving here with my daughter!"

### APPLICATION

An intruder has entered all our homes with murderous intent. He has his hands around our children's throats waiting for an opportunity to take them away forever. This is truer in our day than it has ever been. But there is no need for fear. The Lord is on our side, and He has provided a way of escape and a place of safety in His Son, Jesus. Christ is the Ark of safety for all who put their trust in Him. Lot or Noah? It is for us to choose.

### NOTES

- 1 Robert Frank, "A million new millionaires were created in the U.S. last year, and the richest got richer, report says", CNBC, March 17, 2022  
<https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/17/million-new-millionaires-were-created-in-us-last-year-report-says.html>
- 2 Francis D. Nichol, editor, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary in seven volumes (Washington, D.C., 1978), 1:254

