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# LIVING RIGHTEOUSLY IN A Wicked World



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*Like Abraham, we can choose righteousness in every part of our lives.*

As a businessman, I often traveled to China, where celebrating deals typically included drinking alcohol. My colleagues were concerned that not partaking might offend. Explaining that I didn't drink would often lead to strong persuasion from our hosts that toasting each other was an important, one-time ceremony.

I would respond that one of the principles of my religion is to not drink alcohol. I made it clear I wanted to join in the celebration but would ask for water in the toasting glass. I always received not only strong support but also respect. I learned that we can make righteous choices even when the world suggests otherwise.

## Consistent Choices

The Old Testament story of Abram and Lot reminds us of the importance of choices. Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham, consistently chose to live righteously in a wicked world.

After the death of Abraham's father in Haran, the Lord invited Abraham to relocate to Canaan. Abraham took with him his wife, Sarai (her name was later changed to Sarah); his nephew Lot; and Lot's wife, whose name is not given. As they traveled, the Lord appeared to Abraham, who then built an altar to recognize the sacredness of the place. Abraham also chose to go into "a mountain on the East of Beth-el . . . and there he [built] an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 12:8).



Abraham's obedience in moving to Canaan and living righteously there did not eliminate adversity. A grievous famine forced Abraham and his family to relocate to Egypt, where we can assume he was prompted by the Spirit to protect his family. After Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's house, the Lord sent plagues to afflict Egypt. Eventually Pharaoh responded by granting freedom to Abraham and Sarah. (See Genesis 12:10-20.)

Back in Canaan at "the place of the [first] altar," Abraham again "called on the name of the Lord" (Genesis 13:4). Abraham's and Lot's families prospered. Their flocks and herds grew so substantially, in fact, that it began to cause contention (see Genesis 13:5-7), so "Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy

herdmen; for we be brethren.

"Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (Genesis 13:8-9).

Abraham consistently chose righteousness. He followed the Lord's prompting to move to Canaan. He built altars, worshipped, and offered thanks on arrival. He went into the mountains to pray. He followed inspiration that saved his family. Faced with conflict, he sought resolution by suggesting that his family and Lot's family physically distance themselves from each other.



We all face challenges. After seeking the Lord's guidance about employment or other family issues, we may feel prompted to relocate. We may also find that following the Lord's promptings does not guarantee freedom from adversity. But if we pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, He will consecrate our performance for the welfare of our souls (see 2 Nephi 32:9). Often, when we look back on adversity, we recognize its value in helping us become who we need to be.

*When faced with conflicts, we can seek resolution rather than escalation.*

Abraham consistently gave priority to seeking the Lord's help and guidance through prayer. We can follow his example by also going to the mountains of the Lord—His sacred temples—to worship, serve, and seek revelation.

Like Abraham, when faced with conflicts in our families, Church assignments, or employment, we can seek resolution rather than escalation.

### Evaluating Opportunities

After surveying the land, Lot chose to live on the plains near the city of Sodom. The land, well watered and beautiful, appealed to him. Perhaps symbolically, Lot pitched his tents toward Sodom, where the people were "sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13). Lot later moved into Sodom and, during a war amongst local kings, was taken captive.

In our lives, we are also presented with new opportunities. They can appear well watered and beautiful. These opportunities may be exactly what we need, providing wonderful blessings. But some options may have a significant downside. We need to carefully evaluate and consider all aspects of the change:

- Will we be able to contribute to the work of salvation?
- Will we be free to worship?
- Will family members be able to build faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
- Will family members be exposed to increased wickedness and temptation?

Lot's experience reminds us of the need to periodically consider allegiances and priorities. Are our symbolic tents pitched toward the Lord's house or toward the seemingly enticing pleasures of the world?

### To the Rescue

When Abraham "heard that his [nephew] was taken captive, he armed his trained servants" and rushed to save him. "He brought back . . . Lot, and his goods, . . . and the people" (Genesis 14:14, 16).

After the rescue, Abraham met with the king of Sodom and later with Melchizedek, king of Salem. The king of Sodom offered Abraham some of the spoils of war, but Abraham refused to accept even a thread. "I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I [the king of Sodom] have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:23).

In contrast, Melchizedek "brought forth bread and wine." Abraham recognized him as "the priest of the most high God" and willingly "gave him tithes of all" (Genesis 14:18, 20).

Abraham demonstrated his love for the Lord and his brethren. On learning of Lot's capture, Abraham did not say, "[He has] brought upon himself [these trials]" (Mosiah 4:17). Instead, he responded with love.

When family members, friends, or associates in our ward or branch lose their way, we, like Abraham, can rescue. In some cases, they may be in captivity through addictions or poor choices. We can help them to find a way back and let them know that Heavenly Father loves them.

We may also be offered "spoils of war," that is, gain or increase from activities that are inappropriate. In these cases,

we can refuse to accept even a thread. We can also avoid purchasing inappropriate material or attending movies or shows that do not uphold our standards.

The Lord's invitation to "let virtue garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly" brings with it a glorious promise: "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God" (D&C 121:45).

### Despite Warnings

When the Lord told Abraham of His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah "because their sin is very grievous," Abraham asked if He would spare the city if 50 righteous souls could be found. Abraham continued asking—45, 40, 30, 20—finally asking if God would spare the city for the sake of 10 righteous souls. We see the Lord's love for individuals when He confirms that if 10 can be found, "I will not destroy it." (See Genesis 18:20–33).

Abraham must have known that Lot and his family had returned to Sodom. Perhaps responding to the pleas of a righteous Abraham, the Lord sent two angels to warn Lot about the pending destruction. Lot was told to warn his extended family, but "he seemed [to his sons-in-law] as one that mocked" (Genesis 19:14).

Lot had made his choice to live in Sodom, and the influence of the wicked city was taking its toll on his family. Despite repeated warnings, Lot was slow to respond. "When

the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters . . . ; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city" (Genesis 19:15).

Finally, while Lot still lingered, "the [angels] laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city" (Genesis 19:16).

The angels instructed Lot to "escape for thy life" and to "look not behind thee" (Genesis 19:17). But Lot's wife looked back and "became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26).

What a tragedy! Lot's choices—to live near Sodom, pitch his tents toward Sodom, move into Sodom, and return to Sodom after being rescued by Abraham—had taken their toll. Even after being warned by angels, Lot could not convince his sons-in-law and his daughters of the pending

destruction. Lot's wife seemed so connected with life in Sodom that she could not resist the temptation to look back.

Although the Lord and Abraham clearly wanted to help Lot and his family, Lot's choices, made over a long period, left his family weakened and unable to respond.

### We Can Choose

Like Abraham, we can choose to live righteously. The Lord has provided stakes of Zion as places of refuge for Saints to gather. He has provided ordinances and covenants that protect and strengthen us. He has blessed us with temples where we can draw closer to Him and perform sacred work in behalf of our ancestors.

In my experience, a key to survival in a wicked world is letting our friends and work associates know what we believe. I have been protected and defended many times by friends who know I am a Latter-day Saint and know what I stand for.

All of us struggle to cope with negative influences of the world. From Abraham and Lot we can learn the power and protection of choosing to live righteously, of choosing to avoid places where we or our families may be subject to great wickedness or temptation, and of choosing to always keep our tents facing toward the temple. ■

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