

# Section 9 – Patriarchal Monotheism

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## The Resurrection cycle: descent and ascent

Despite the fact that resurrection is played down in Hebrew Scripture, there is one obvious example of it. In Genesis, Abraham the patriarch and his nephew, Lot, decide to part company and Abraham gives Lot the choice of territory. Lot picks the best, ‘well watered everywhere...even as the garden of the Lord’ and ‘pitches his tent’ towards Sodom.<sup>1</sup> Although Lot is just and ‘righteous’ and troubled by the way the local people lived, he settles there, becomes a citizen, and eventually the mayor.<sup>2</sup> He is treated with respect because he is related to Abraham, who had saved Sodom from an Elamite invasion. He marries a local woman and by her he has two daughters, whom he permits to be married to local men.

Jahweh decides to destroy Sodom, but is persuaded by Abraham to refrain, on condition that ‘ten righteous men’ could be found there.<sup>3</sup> Only Lot can be found, so Jahweh sends two angels to warn him and tell him to flee.<sup>4</sup> This story is a parallel to that of Noah, in which one ‘righteous’ man was given a warning of the impending destruction. That story itself is a parallel to, or may have been directly derived from, the Sumerian tale of Atrahasis, who was warned by Enki that the deities intended to destroy humanity.

The angels are welcomed into Lot’s house overnight, at which point a gang of men appear and demand that the angels be handed over to them. Lot, bound by the rules of hospitality that oblige him to protect his guests, refuses, instead offering his virgin daughters.<sup>5</sup>

In the morning the family members are so reluctant to leave that they have to be bundled out of the city by force. They are given an injunction not to look back as volcanic fire and sulphur

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 13:10.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 2:7-9.

<sup>3</sup> This is one of the examples of Jahweh in anthropomorphic form, where he can be reasoned with by mortals; also note that only men are to be counted. The patriarchy was well established here.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 19:1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Two injunctions are made clear in this story. The first is against breaking the law of hospitality, which had grown out of the harsh desert conditions of that region. Strangers were to be made particularly welcome (Lev. 19:34). The second illustrates the patriarchy’s hostility towards sexual acts between men. Anal sex was expressly forbidden in this conservative culture. As in most patriarchal cultures, only the male/female binary model was accepted. Sodom is portrayed as a vile, evil place, and the idea that the men of Sodom would come to Lot and ask him to hand over his guests for such sex was an affront to both the law of hospitality and the idea of decency. The shock value of this outrage has led the English-speaking world to invent the term ‘sodomite’ to describe, in a pejorative manner, any who participate in acts of anal penetration.

obliterate the city, but Lot's wife, who was walking behind her husband, does so and is turned into a pillar of salt.<sup>6</sup>

This story bears unmistakable similarity to the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in its references to 'looking back' and to the woman being behind the man. We have already seen how the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is a patriarchal development of similar descent and ascent myths from all over the region, and how they fit into a timeline. These myths all derive from the Sumerian Inanna's Descent into the Underworld, or perhaps a precursor to it. The story of Lot is a further development of this, but not substantively different.

Sodom and Gomorrah are a metaphor for the Underworld. To live there is to die before Jahweh, to be estranged from him. Therefore, when Lot leaves the city and returns to the land of Jahweh, he is being reborn. Here the metaphor is subtly reworked. This myth is saying that the condition of being 'unrighteous' is equivalent to being dead and because Lot's wife, who is not named, has the pleasures of the city in her heart she is not righteous and must die.

The tale celebrates the simple rural life and condemns that of the cities, a theme oft-repeated in Hebrew Scripture as cities are cast down, their walls destroyed and their populations slaughtered. It is the voice of a poor people, living in a barren, infertile land, who were profoundly jealous of the great civilisations around them. The writers of Hebrew Scripture, who so coveted yet condemned the richness and luxury of city life, sought to destroy them, if not in truth then at least in fiction.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Note that Lot's wife was walking behind him; this is common in cultures where the most aggressive forms of patriarchy exist. In Genesis 19:8 the men of Sodom gather around Lot's house, threatening his guests. Lot offers the mob his two virgin daughters, saying 'I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes.' Lot is still considered worthy of being saved from the destruction of the city in spite of offering his daughters for gang rape because of the low status of women; Hebrew Scripture sees nothing immoral about rape providing the woman's legal owner – in this case her father – sanctions it. In a later passage, the daughters seduce their father in order to get pregnant and ensure the continuation of patriliney. Even incest is permissible in the name of the patriarchy.

<sup>7</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman have demonstrated that the many destructions of cities claimed in Hebrew Scripture simply never happened; they were all invented as part of a greater story. (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002.)