

The Biblical Story of Lot – An Analysis and Comparison with the Quranic Narrative

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

“...for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard...”

– 2 Peter 2:8

We recommend readers to read this article first, if possible, in order to provide them with important background before reading this article. ([The Prophets from the Perspective of the Corrupted Torah](#))

The story of Lot (Lut in Arabic) is one of the most well-known and controversial stories in the Bible. Yet, despite its controversial nature, it is still regarded as a historically accurate portrayal of actual events by most Jews and Christians. However, many people have questioned the historicity of the story, and for good reason, since a careful reading of the story will reveal inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as evidence of deliberate exaggerations by the author(s) of the story for political propaganda.

In this article, we will look at the evidence for the view that the Biblical story of Lot can at best be described as an artfully constructed narrative that still has internal contradictions and inconsistencies and was written to spread political propaganda against the enemies of Israel. [1]

After having finished this analysis, we will then compare the Biblical story with that of the Islamic one, as found in the Holy Quran. It is hoped that the evidence will show the reader that the Quranic story is much more credible than the Biblical version since it lacks the contradictions of the latter.

The Biblical Narrative

The main story of Lot in the Bible is found in Genesis 19:1–38. After having told Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) of His intention to destroy Sodom for its depravity, God sent two angels to warn Lot and his family of the impending punishment and to get them out of the doomed city.

The angels took the form of handsome young men, which led the wicked people of Sodom to demand that Lot release them into their custody. Pleading with the crowd, Lot instead offered his daughters and told them to “do to them as you please.”[2] When the crowd rejected Lot’s offer and continued to demand that the young men be handed over to them, they were struck with blindness by the angels.

As the hour of Sodom's destruction drew near, the angels ordered Lot and his family to leave the city. Failing to heed the angels' warning not to look back at the city while they were escaping, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt.[3] Hence, only Lot and his daughters survived the ordeal and fled to the nearby town of Zoar.

However, Lot and his daughters did not settle in Zoar, and before long, they left the town and settled in a nearby cave. This is where the more controversial part of the story is to be found. Wrongly convinced that they were the only people left in the entire world, Lot's daughters concocted a plan to get their father drunk on wine on successive nights in order to have sexual intercourse with him, so as to "preserve offspring from [their] father." [4]

And so it happened, that on two successive nights, the girls took turns to lay with their father to "repopulate" the world. The results of these incestuous acts would be two sons. The elder daughter bore a son named Moab, whereas the younger daughter also bore a son and named him Ben-Ammi. These two sons would be the ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites, respectively [5]

An Analysis of the Biblical Story

As stated above, despite its controversial nature, the story is widely accepted as a historical fact by most Jews and Christians. [6] However, after an objective analysis of the story, it becomes difficult to hold to that proposition. In this section of the article, we will see the evidence for why this story must be rejected as a pious forgery.

First and foremost, we must question why a supposedly "righteous" man such as Lot could be so easily taken advantage of by his daughters, who got him drunk on two successive nights and then committed incest with him. [7]

Contrary to apologetic claims, it is clear from the context that Lot was at least partially aware of what was happening after his eldest daughter had slept with him. The English Standard Version (ESV) and other translations claim that he was unaware when the elder daughter lay down with him or when she got up. [8]

However, according to the famous Jewish commentator Rashi, the Hebrew text (ובקומה) indicates that Lot was aware once the eldest daughter got up after having intercourse with him.

He stated that:

"[t]his word where it occurs with reference to the elder sister (Genesis 19:33) has dots above it (as though it is not written at all), implying that when she arose, he (Lot) was aware of it, and yet he did not take care on the second night to abstain from wine." [9]

This should lead us to ask some important questions. Since, according to the linguistic analysis of the Hebrew text, Lot realized that his eldest daughter had intercourse with him, he should have realized what was going on and been able to stop the younger daughter from also having intercourse with him. Yet, he did not. He got drunk again and slept with the younger daughter as well.

Hence, he was just as culpable as his daughters. Yet, this is despite the fact that Lot was supposedly the only righteous man in Sodom, a city infamous for its sexual depravity! This dramatic irony has not been lost on scholars.

As the late Professor Alan F. Segal observed:

“So Lot and his now reduced family settle in a cave, where the daughters commit incest by sleeping with their father. Strange that after saving us from one sexual misfortune, the characters wind up in another one so quickly.” [10]

Even if we ignore the textual evidence and assume that Lot was indeed unaware when each daughter laid down and rose, it needs to be pointed out that the text does not say that he was unaware during the shameful deed. In fact, it is highly unlikely that Lot would have been completely unaware of what was going on if he was able to get sexually aroused and also able to achieve sexual climax.

If he was apparently so drunk that he was completely unaware of what was happening, how was he able to impregnate both daughters? Sexual excitation would require awareness and attraction, but if Lot was unaware, he would not have been able to achieve either excitation or climax.

Not only that, but scientific studies have shown that alcohol can cause erectile dysfunction and delays in ejaculation. [11] So, even if Lot was aware (which is likely), it is probable that he would not have been able to impregnate either daughter.

Another question one must ask is why weren't Lot's daughters punished or rebuked by God for doing something as depraved as getting their father drunk and taking turns having sex with him, even if it was out of concern for the extinction of the human race?

Why were they even led to believe that “there is not a man on earth...”? [12] After all, God could have easily sent the same angels that had led Lot and his daughters out of Sodom to intervene and tell them that they were not the only ones left and that there were plenty of men in the world!

Yet, for some unfathomable reason, God did not intervene and prevent this horrible sexual immorality, which happened to occur shortly after the destruction of Sodom for its sexual immoralities! This confusion is perhaps what led the church father Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202 CE) to surmise that the entire incident occurred due to “divine arrangement” (i.e., God arranged the incestuous relations in order to give rise to two nations):

“This had happened without Lot's knowledge and without his having been a slave to pleasure; it was accomplished wholly by divine arrangement, through

which the two synagogues born from one and the same father, without carnal pleasure, were evoked. For there was no one else who could give them vital seed and the fruit of children, as it was written.” [13]

The Jewish commentator Bahya ben Asher (d. 1340 CE) also indicated that God had provided a “divine assist” to Lot’s daughters by providing wine for Lot, echoing the statements of “the sages”:

“...the Torah should have written בלילה הוא instead of בלילה ההוא. The absence of the prefix ה suggests that the word הוא is a reference to G’d, i.e., that it is one of G’d’s names. This is why the sages said that Lot’s daughters enjoyed a divine assist in their undertaking. The wine itself was found in their cave. They had not brought it with them. G’d had provided it to make their undertaking easier.” [14]

We also have to wonder what Lot’s reaction was when he found out that he had impregnated his daughters! How would that have affected his relationship with his “sons”/“grandsons”?

The Biblical text unfortunately does not offer any insight and the answers to these questions are not easy to come by. It is up to Jews and Christians who believe in the literal reading of this story to answer these questions.

In addition, Lot’s behavior towards his daughters even before the embarrassing incest episode leaves little doubt as to his true character. When the people of Sodom were demanding that Lot hand over the visitors to them so that they “may know them”, [15] which obviously meant to be able to have sexual intercourse (i.e., to commit homosexuality with the men), Lot attempted to reason with the men and urged them not “act so wickedly”. [16]

However, he then tried to persuade them to commit a different act of wickedness: the rape of his daughters! He urged them to do to his daughters “as you please”! Not only that, but according to Genesis 19:14, Lot had “sons-in-law”, which means that his daughters were either engaged or already married. What kind of a man was this? How can he be rightly called “righteous”?

Moving on, let us consider some internal contradictions and inconsistencies in the story. As we have already seen, Lot’s daughters believed that there was no man left on earth other than their father. But how could this have been true when just a few verses earlier, we were told that Lot and his daughters had fled to the nearby town of Zoar, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah began?

“The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” [17]

Are we supposed to believe that there was not one man in Zoar? Also, did Lot’s daughters conveniently forget about Abraham, their great-uncle, and the many men that were part of Abraham’s settlement? [18] Does it not seem that Lot’s daughters were conveniently ignoring reality?

As such, perhaps it was not ignorance that drove them to commit incest but something far more sinister. If that is true, they should have been punished severely for committing the sin of incest, yet the text offers no answers. [19]

Another question to ask, and which the text does not answer, is where did the family get the wine from? It seems far-fetched to say that in the chaos and confusion of their exodus from Sodom, they would have remembered to pack enough wine.

If they got it from Zoar, then it only proves that Lot and his daughters had spent some time there before retreating into the cave. His daughters would have come across many men as a result, and hence could not have believed that Lot was the only man left on earth.

But since the Bible states that they were oblivious to this fact, they clearly could not have gotten the wine from Zoar. So, if they didn't get the wine from Sodom or Zoar, then where did it come from? Rashi offered an interesting and disturbing suggestion:

"Wine was made available to them in the cave, to make it possible for two nations to emerge from them." [20]

This would suggest that God deliberately gave them wine, knowing that Lot's daughters would sleep with their father and thus give rise to the Moabites and the Ammonites, two nations that would conveniently become Israel's greatest enemies in the future. In other words, God encouraged the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters! As shown above, Irenaeus and Bahya ben Asher also held this view.

This brings us to a possible motive for this story. Is it a mere coincidence that the Bible provides such an embarrassing story for the origins of Israel's great enemies, the Moabites and Ammonites?

Is this story not only a pious forgery but an ancient propaganda tract, designed to demonize and malign the people with whom the Israelites were often at war? Indeed, this is exactly how many Biblical scholars have interpreted the story. The 19th-century scholar Amos Kidder Fiske observed:

"There was no doubt of the kinship between the tribes of Israel and the Moabites and Ammonites of that region, or Moab and Ammon, as they were called. But a keen hostility was felt toward them on account of old conflicts when the Israelites were struggling for the possession of the land of Canaan, and the marauding attacks to which they continued to be subject, especially from the Ammonites on their borders.

On account of this state of feeling the makers of the ethnic myths would not allow that Moab and Ammon were direct descendants of their great ancestor Abraham, and not only set them off on a collateral line, but have them an incestuous origin, and covered the name of Lot and his daughters with eloquy. [...] The phrase 'unto this day' also plainly indicates an imaginative dealing by the writer with a remote past." [21]

Similarly, the contemporary scholar Kenneth C. Davis has stated:

"[f]or the Israelites, this story, adapted from an old Canaanite folklore, mockingly explains the origin of two neighboring tribes. It also establishes that these tribes were not descended from Abraham and had no divine claim to the Promised Land." [22]

Additionally, Alan Segal explains that:

"[t]his polemical myth is a way to justify the conquest of Moab and Ammon. The story admits a relationship between the Israelites, the Moabites, and the Ammonites, by making their ancestors 'cousins,' but also suggests that they are not worthy of being within the Abrahamic covenant. What is particularly telling is that we cannot find evidence of Moabite and Edomite habitation during the patriarchal period.

These stories are not from that period at all. Rather, these stories function in a polemical way during the monarchy, not during the patriarchal period, and they also developed secondary significance during the Persian and Hellenistic periods..." [23]

Finally, echoing this idea, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman state regarding the patriarchal stories in general (including the story of Lot and his daughters):

"...that they offer a colorful human map of the ancient Near East from the unmistakable viewpoint of the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. These stories offer a highly sophisticated commentary on political affairs in this region in the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. Not only can many of the ethnic terms and place-names be dated to this time, but their characterizations mesh perfectly with what we know of the relationships of neighboring peoples and kingdoms with Judah and Israel." [24]

Finkelstein and Silberman also identify the story of Lot as originating from the "J" or "Yahwist" source. [25] In other words, there is little doubt that the story of the origin of the Moabites and Ammonites is a myth invented to demonize two nations that were often at war with the Israelite monarchy. It is not a historically accurate origin story.

Lastly, what should we make of the incident of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26)? While it could simply be explained as a miracle and not need a naturalistic explanation, it is also possible that it was the result of later traditions, possibly influenced by geographic anomalies in the Dead Sea region, and was possibly originally meant as a symbol to identify the area with punishment. The late Jewish commentator, Nahum Sarna (d. 2005) seemed to suggest as much. He stated:

"Radak notes that Lot's wife would thus have suffered the same fate as the other inhabitants. 'She wholly disappeared in a blanket of salt; yet popular notion has her body turning into salt and still recognizable,' writes Bekhor Shor. This idea must have been suggested by some grotesque salt-rock formation in the vicinity of the Dead Sea.

The pre-Christian book, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (10:4), says, 'A pillar of salt stands as a memorial to an unbelieving soul'; and Josephus (*Ant.* 1.203) claims to have seen it in his day. The origin of the salt tradition must lie in the presence of Mount Sodom (Jebel Usdum), the base of which is a ridge of rock salt that extends for about five miles (8 km.). The salt, too, may have a symbolic function; in the ancient Near East, a site was strewn with salt as a mark of eternal desolation in punishment for disloyalty and a breach of a treaty (e.g., *Judg.* 9:45)." [26]

Also noting the presence of salt formations in the region (see Figure 1), other scholars have suggested an "etiological" motive for the story.

David Carr comments in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*:

"[t]his text turns salt formations in the Dead Sea area into a testimony to the truth of the story, asserting that one of those formations was Lot's wife, who disobediently looked back at the cities God was destroying. Such etiological notes (accounts of origin) are common in the Bible, especially in Genesis." [27]

Thus, perhaps Lot's wife did not literally turn into a "pillar of salt" but was symbolically representing God's punishment on a sinful city.

Figure 1: This rock formation near the “Sanctuary of Agios Lot” near the Dead Sea is venerated by some people as Lot’s wife as a pillar of salt
(Source:

In closing, we have now seen that the Genesis account of Lot suffers from serious flaws, bringing into question the historicity of the story. Not only is the story riddled with contradictions and controversy, but Jews and Christians must also admit that the main purpose of the story was simply to serve as a propaganda tool against two of Israel’s greatest enemies.

God-fearing Jews and Christians should also ask a very important question: why would God have encouraged incest between Lot and his daughters by deliberately providing them with wine to help Lot’s daughters bring their severely misinformed plot to fruition?

The Quranic Narrative

It behooves us to analyze the Quranic account of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah since both it and the Bible mention the story. It must be stated outright that the Quran does not attribute to the Prophet Lut (peace be upon him) or his daughters the abhorrent sins of drunkenness and incest.

In contrast to the Bible, the Quran provides a much more positive, albeit brief, account of the blessed prophet, and with none of the inconsistencies that litter the Biblical version. In fact, Lut (peace be upon him) is mentioned along with other prophets as an honored servant of God:

“We also guided Ishmael, Ilisha, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people of their time.”[28]

“And to Lot We gave wisdom and knowledge, and delivered him from the society engrossed in shameful practices. They were certainly an evil, rebellious people.”[29]

On the other hand, despite the obvious differences between the Biblical and Quranic versions of the story, there are of course some similarities as well. For example, both narratives state that Prophet Lut (peace be upon him) lived among sinful and depraved people. The Quran also states that Lut (peace be upon him) had preached to his people to repent to God and to reform their evil ways.[30]

Both also state that God sent angels to lead Lut’s family out of the town before the destruction came upon the sinners. They also state that Lut’s wife did not survive, though only the Bible claims that she was turned into a “pillar of salt”.[31] In fact, the Quran declares Lut’s wife to be a sinner who is doomed to Hell:

“Allah sets forth an example for the disbelievers: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. Each was married to one of Our righteous servants, yet betrayed them. So their husbands were of no benefit to them against Allah whatsoever. Both were told, ‘Enter the Fire, along with the others!’”[32]

But that is pretty much where the similarities end. The Quran does not mention what happened to Lut (peace be upon him) and his family after the destruction of Sodom. His story is mentioned not as a single historical narrative, but instead as separate passages interspersed throughout the Quran.

It serves as an example of God’s swift justice as well as His favors upon His righteous servants. But what is left out is just as telling as what is mentioned. As already stated, the Quran does not attribute any flagrant sexual deviancy to Lut (peace be upon him) or his daughters. Upon comparison to the Biblical story, which is full of inconsistencies, we find the Quranic story to be consistent throughout.

In addition, Prophet Lut’s righteousness and uncompromising opposition to the wicked people of the city can be seen by his attitude toward his daughters. In contrast to the Biblical story, where Lot shamelessly tried to placate the crowd by offering his daughters to them to do with as they pleased, Prophet Lut (peace be upon him) attempted to reason with the crowd by urging them to engage only in lawful acts with his “daughters” in marriage:

“And the men of his people—who were used to shameful deeds—came to him rushing. He pleaded, ‘O my people! Here are my daughters for marriage—they are pure for you. So fear Allah, and do not humiliate me by disrespecting my guests. Is there not even a single right-minded man among you?’”[33]

However, by “daughters”, he may not necessarily have meant his biological daughters, but rather, the women of the nation. Both interpretations have been suggested by commentators.[34] However, Suzanne Haneef notes that the “majority of classical commentators” interpreted it to mean the women of the nation.[35] Thus, in this case, Prophet Lut’s reference to his “daughters”:

“...has been understood as a means of calling his people’s attention to their suppression and abandonment of their women, who were his daughters-in-God.”[36]

In any case, Prophet Lut (peace be upon him) was trying to persuade the evil men of the town to take lawful wives from among females (“they are pure for you”) and to shun the evil act of homosexuality.

We can see why Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) wanted to save this righteous man, while it is strange that in the Bible, it seems □he only reason the wicked Lot was saved was because of his association with Abraham, not because he was necessarily a righteous man,[37] though in the New Testament, he was explicitly called a “righteous” man (see note #7).

Conclusion

In this article, we have analyzed the Biblical and Quranic stories of Lot, respectively. After a summary of the Biblical narrative, we proceeded to discuss the glaring contradictions and inconsistencies in the story.

With undeniable evidence of serious flaws in the story, we came to the inevitable conclusion that the story was artfully (or not) crafted to serve as a propaganda tool against the enemies of Israel (the Moabites and Ammonites), by attributing to these nations a most embarrassing and shameful origin.

We then compared the Biblical story with the Quranic one, ultimately concluding that the latter story is far more consistent and lacks any of the controversial and downright false aspects of the former. Jews and Christians are urged to consider the evidence from an objective point of view.

And Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) knows best!

Allah Knows Best.