
Vayera

Welcome to Our City

Angels play a central role in this week's portion. First, they go to Abraham to tell him he is to have a son, Isaac. Then they go to Abraham's brother, Lot, to warn him to flee Sodom, the town in which he has been living with his family. We've retold the Biblical story of the angels arriving at Lot's house from the perspective of Lot's daughter.

Dad's been at the gate of the city all day. As I look out of the door of our tent, I see him coming home with two guests - strangers. This isn't going to go down well with the neighbours. We are the only people in Sodom who invite guests into our tent. 'Quick,' says Dad, as he comes through the door, 'Help them wash their feet, get them inside before anyone sees.'

Dad's nervous. We haven't been in Sodom long ourselves, and while we don't behave anything like as badly as the other residents, there's no point in annoying them.

‘They were going to sleep in the open?!’ Dad said. ‘They must be crazy. It’s not safe in the open, it’s barely safe here. Get some food ready. They are our guests now. We have to feed them.’

We’re running low on food. Mum tells me to go next door to the Gomers and borrow some. The Gomers aren’t the worst people in the city, but they are pretty nosy. Mrs Gomer will lend me some flour and salt, but she wants to know everything; who are the guests, what do they want, why have they come to Sodom? I know I’m not supposed to say anything, but I can’t lie either. I try to sound vague and mumble a bit, but the Gomers know what’s going on.

As I head back home, I see Mr Gomer heading off in the opposite direction, spreading the news – Lot’s family have taken in guests.

Within an hour, there’s a mob at our door demanding that Dad hands over our visitors. He goes outside to try to calm down the crowd. From inside the tent, I can only hear muffled voices and see shadows, but the voices are getting louder, angrier and more insistent. I can feel the crowd pushing forwards,



forcing their way into our home.

Suddenly, one of our guests reaches outside. He pulls Dad out of the way of the crowd and I see a flash of light outside the tent. It's so bright the men outside are blinded and stumble away, cursing and promising to come back to get us. The guest speaks: 'We are here to warn you of the destruction of this city. You and your family need to leave, first thing tomorrow. Don't look back.' Our time in Sodom is over.

QUESTIONS:

What is the problem with strangers arriving in a city? Why does it make people feel uneasy? Why do people object so much to sharing their city?

How should we treat strangers arriving in our city? What difference should it make why they have come, where they came from or how they behave once they arrive?

Has your family (or ancestors) moved from one city or country to another? What prompted that move? Did you, or they, find it easy or difficult to adjust?