

The Significance Of Sodom And Gomorrah

Introduction. Jude 7 plainly says that Sodom and Gomorrah are a sign or symbol of eternal fire. The words “Sodom and Gomorrah” are used 38 times in the Bible and “Sodom” is used by itself 29 times in the Bible. These numbers are significant. How did these cities come to represent the horrible fate of eternal torment? How is this symbol used in the Bible?

I. How Sodom And Gomorrah Became A Symbol

- A. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah (Genesis 10:6-20, v. 19). Abraham lived about 1800 B.C. and descended from Noah’s son Shem. The journeys of Abraham carried him from Ur to Haran, to Bethel in Palestine, to Egypt, and back to Bethel. In this vicinity, Abraham and Lot, his nephew, prospered with their flocks and herds until it seemed necessary to separate. Looking toward the east from the higher ground of Bethel, one could see Sodom and Gomorrah in the plain of Jordan. The whole region was well watered, “as the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10). Lot moved into this region, “but the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (v. 13).
- B. Sodom and Gomorrah were located near and confederate with three other cities (Admah, Zeboim, and Bela also called Zoar), all in the vicinity of “the vale of Siddim,” which Moses said many years later “is the salt sea” (Genesis 14:1-3). King Chedorlaomer of Elam conquered these five cities. When they rebelled against him later, he raided them and took many spoils of war and many captives, including Lot. When Abraham heard of this, he led 318 of his men in pursuit of Chedorlaomer, caught up with him at Dan, and rescued all the possessions and people which had been taken (Genesis 14:1-16).
- C. When Abraham returned, he was met by the King of Sodom and his allies, and by Melchizedek, who was both the “king of Salem” and “the priest of the most high God.”
- D. In the presence of these kings, Melchizedek blessed Abram in the name of “the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies unto thy hand.” Abram gave to this king and priest “tithes of all” in his possession, i.e. God was honored with a portion of the spoil recovered. Abraham refused to accept from the king of Sodom “a thread even to a shoe latchet” lest the king should say, “I have made Abram rich” (Genesis 14:17-24).
- E. In spite of the exceeding wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, God manifested Himself through Abraham and Melchizedek, extended His patience, and provided an opportunity for these cities to repent.
- F. God sent angels in the form of men as messengers to Abraham, declaring His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah “because their sin is very great.” No doubt thinking of Lot, Abraham pled for God to spare Sodom if only 50 righteous people could be found in it. God finally agreed to spare the city if only ten righteous people were found (Genesis 18:16-33), but out of these two cities this was an impossible task!

- G. As recorded in Genesis 19, God sent the messengers to warn Lot in Sodom to escape for his life. Lot graciously received them, but the men of the city demanded Lot to relinquish his visitors to them for the purpose of abusing them in homosexual practices. The Sodomites were so perverted that they violently beat on Lot's door, threatened him, and then persisted in their demands even after the Lord struck them blind. Lot, his wife, and his two daughters believed the angels' warning that they had come to destroy Sodom, but "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law" (v. 14). Lot, his daughters, and his wife dreaded to leave their friends and loved ones behind when the time came, but the messengers persuaded them and literally pulled them by their hands to lead them out (v. 16).
- H. As the Lord rained brimstone and fire from Heaven (vv. 24-25), the angels granted Lot's request to spare the little town of Zoar, to which he fled. As he fled, his wife violated the angels' command that no one look back, "and she became a pillar of salt" (v. 26). We can only imagine what went through Abraham's mind when he looked off into the distance and saw the cities burning (v. 28).
- I. From that day until this day, Sodom and Gomorrah have symbolized God's fierce hatred of all immorality, especially the sin of homosexuality, and the horrible ruin brought on the sinner by God's wrath.
 1. The grave of Sodom and Gomorrah is not covered with fertile soil bearing grass, forests, and crops like other cities of antiquity. Its grave is covered by the Dead Sea.
 2. Where there was once a veritable garden of the Lord and a thriving population, now there are huge quantities of salt, with deposits of bitumen, sulphur, and nitre on the shores of the Dead Sea. This depression has the earth's lowest surface, 1290 feet below sea level, and the salt concentration reaches 25 percent, four times that of ocean water. Magnesium bromide prevents organic life; the climate is arid, and the heat extreme.

II. The Symbol In The Old Testament

- A. God has utilized this symbol of His wrath several times throughout the history of the world. Moses lived about 1400 B.C., 400 years after Sodom was destroyed. Through Moses God warned the Israelites that if they turned their backs on Him, the heat of His great anger would turn their land into another Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 29:23; 32:32).
- B. Amos prophesied in the mid-700s B.C. regarding the sin and approaching judgment of Israel. God had chastised Israel in several ways, such as by destroying some of its cities through wars or natural calamities. Israel must prepare to meet her God for a final judgment (Amos 4:11-12).
- C. About 700 B.C., Isaiah sorrowed over the apostasy of Judah, and said that the Lord had "a very small remnant" left who served Him, lest "we should have been as Sodom" and Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9). Isaiah then compared the bold wickedness of both the people and the rulers of Judah to the shameless conduct of Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:10; 3:9). Though God would eventually use Babylon to punish His own people, He would then punish Babylon for its pride and excessive violence "as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah

13:19). Sodom represents evil followed by the judgment of God from which none can escape.

- D. The prophecies of Zephaniah (c. 630-625 B.C.) foretell God's universal judgments against many nations, including His own people (Zephaniah 2:9). Sodom and Gomorrah represent the horrible punishment brought about by sin.
- E. During the late 600s and early 500s B.C., when Judah was collapsing and going into Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah said her prophets committed immorality, walked in lies, and caused the people to persist in sin. Such prophets are like Sodom, and the people like Gomorrah (Jeremiah 23:14). The sin and punishment of Jerusalem was greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown "in a moment" (Lamentations 4:6). Thus, Sodom symbolizes sudden and divine punishment. God likens His judgments against Edom and Babylon to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jeremiah 49:18; 50:40).
- F. Ezekiel prophesied as Judah went into Babylonian captivity. He emphasized the shame of Judah's sins by saying she was the sister of Samaria and Sodom, but her sins were worse than theirs (Ezekiel 16:44-59). Sodom reminds us that such sins always lead downward to destruction.

III. The Symbol In The New Testament

- A. Jesus taught that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a literal, historical event, not a myth, parable, fable, or fairy tale. When Jesus stressed the importance of being watchful and prepared for God to exercise judgment, He referred to the historical events of "the days of Noah" and of "the days of Lot" (Luke 17:28-29).
- B. Then, He added, "Remember Lot's wife" (v. 32). Jesus referred to the destruction of Sodom on a specific day, by a specific means, and with a specific result. Jesus used Sodom to reinforce the lesson that men must take seriously God's warning of judgment.
- C. When Jesus sent His disciples on the limited commission, He said of those people who refused God's word, "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matthew 10:15; cp. Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12). Jesus made the same statement concerning cities which heard His teaching, saw many "mighty works" which confirmed the truth of His teaching, and still "repented not." Capernaum would be brought down from its exalted position to the suffering of the wicked in Hades, just as Sodom was (Matthew 11:20-24).
 - 1. Sodom had heard the truth, and seen it confirmed through Abraham and Melchizedek. This opportunity should have brought Sodom to repentance, but the people of Capernaum had heard the truth, had seen it confirmed by Jesus Christ Himself, and yet had hardened their hearts. In rejecting the fuller revelation and greater blessings of the gospel, they made themselves worse than Sodom. Such comparisons were designed to impress the people with the shame and disgrace of their sins, and with the certainty of God's judgment against them.
 - 2. Notice that Jesus taught that the people of Sodom were not annihilated. They are in Hades, awaiting the final judgment. They will be raised from the dead

- to give an account of themselves “in the day of judgment.” The people of Capernaum will be there. We will be there (Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
3. When Jesus says, “It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city,” He does not mean that the Sodomites will be excused and exonerated, nor that Hell will be cooler or shorter in duration for them than for others. Sodom is symbolic of the certainty of God’s wrath against sin, and of the utter and awful punishment brought about by sin, no matter which sin is committed (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
 4. Jesus came to warn of judgment to come, but also to save us from it. He told His apostles to preach salvation from sin and eternal torment (Mark 16:15-16). “He that believeth not shall be damned” means that Hell is real.
- D. When Jude warned against the subtle and corrupt influence of apostates and their doctrines, he also warned that they lead men to destruction in the day of judgment. He underscored the certainty and the severity of divine judgment with three examples: the Jews “that believed not” during the wilderness wanderings, the angels who fell and who are “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day,” and finally Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 4-7; cp. 2 Peter 2:1-8).
1. When God rained “brimstone and fire” on Sodom, He literally turned the city “into ashes” (Genesis 19:24; 2 Peter 2:6). This demonstrated that this fire came from God, not man. Whether men like it or not, God destroyed Sodom in such a way as to memorialize for all time His hatred of immorality, especially homosexuality.
 2. Furthermore, He sent such a horrible, unrelenting, unquenchable fire as to necessarily imply “the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). The fire of God’s anger pursued the Sodomites on earth, still torments them in Hades, and will punish them throughout all eternity.

Conclusion. Whether you refuse to obey the gospel, you are indifferent to real devotion to God, you enjoying committing the works of the flesh, or you follow the doctrines and commandments of men, you will be judged and will experience the condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The spirit of Sodom is still alive, but is doomed to defeat. In establishing the church, God sent men to reveal the gospel and to spread it throughout the world. In an effort to destroy the church, Satan killed many of these faithful witnesses of the gospel. John pictured the scene of this slaughter (Revelation 11:8). The city which serves Satan is immoral and obstinate like Sodom, binds people in sin as Egypt bound the Jews, and rejects the truth and its author. Christ conquered His enemies, and the city fell.

Whether the lusts of Sodom attract us, or its wickedness afflicts us, remember that it is “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). It is the sign and symbol of eternal torment.

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