

## ReGroups 1/7/24

### Origin Stories: The Great Escape - Genesis 19

Our study in Genesis finally brings us to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. We've heard about these twin cities in the Battle of Kings back in chapter 14 and were clued into the outcry against them in chapter 18. Now we come to the point of no return for this kingdom steeped in sin and unbelief.

In this lesson, we will carefully navigate this text, breaking down the reasons given for judgement and seeing how God shows mercy to a chosen few. We'll then cross reference with other passages in the Bible, one that informs us more about Sodom and Gomorrah and then another that is very similar in premise, yet ends much differently.

#### ***Writing On The Wall***

In our most recent study, we read about Abraham's intercession for Sodom, rooted in his concern for Lot and his family. Back in **Genesis 18:20**, God tells Abraham that He is about to bring judgment against the region and explains His reasoning:

##### 1) **"The outcry against it was great"**

This is a key piece of context for understanding why God was moved to do *anything* to Sodom and Gomorrah in the first place. Obviously, He knows and sees all sin that takes place on the earth, whether or not there is any bit of outcry against it.

It's fairly easy to assume that there were many places in the world that were engaging in sins similar to those found in Sodom and Gomorrah. After all, a vast majority of the world were either given over to pagan religions (which excused most immorality) or were completely godless. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah weren't exclusive to their people, but rather people were crying out to God for justice and vindication in response to their sin in particular.

This phrase "*outcry against*" is a single Hebrew word, which is used throughout the Old Testament when an oppressed people were begging God to move on their behalf. We read these same words in **Exodus 2:23-25**, where Israel cried out against Egypt's for their bondage and abuse.

So, we can conclude that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were being especially oppressive towards those without a way to defend or speak for themselves.

We know from history that these cities were a type of insiders-only club. In a world where people often wandered from town to town, Sodom and Gomorrah was totally unwelcoming to outsiders. If a stranger so much as stumbled through their gates, it would likely end very tragically. Visitors weren't just unwelcome, but they would rarely make it out alive.

A deeper read of the Old Testament shows that God always placed great emphasis on how Israel treated outsiders, strangers, and immigrants who came looking for a better life. While Israel had laws that were expected to be kept by everyone, even non-citizens, they were to always remember to be open, inviting, and welcoming to strangers, see **Exodus 22:21** and **Leviticus 19:33-34**.

Genesis 19 will graphically detail how Sodom and Gomorrah was treating strangers and visitors of their land, which leads us to...

## 2) **"Their sin was very grave"**

Obviously the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was not unfounded or mysterious. **Genesis 19:1-13** paints a clear picture of what kind of sins were being practiced in the cities, which we can assume was most commonly committed against outsiders. **Read** and **discuss** this atrocious scene.

In the ancient pagan world, people were totally given over to their fleshly, carnal desires. On every man's mind, at all times was a drive for pleasure and lust. There were hardly any areas off-limits and no remorse in anyone's heart. Men held all the power and used it to take advantage of *whomever* they wanted, *however* they chose. This was on display most egregiously through immorality and infidelity. Men of power in these times saw women as commodities and eventually resorted to using *other men* for sexual pleasure. Strangers and immigrants were targeted specially as a way for prominent men to both use for their own pleasure and belittle/humiliate them in the process.

**Romans 1:24-32** details how the ancient world fell completely into indecency, debauchery and moral decay. Make no mistake, this pathway is not just one taken by the ancients, but one that has been tread by people across every generation. **How does this passage describe Sodom and Gomorrah? How does it describe civilizations throughout history, including our own?**

Consider our current world, where our entire society is based on a quest for pleasure. Our world today is totally obsessed with obtaining and maintaining self-glory and engaging selfish senses. We don't have to be as overt and oppressive in our quests today, although many still are.

Our society is has taken perversion to a whole new level with sexual promiscuity being the norm and things pornography diluting the sanctity of sexuality. On top of that, there are ample vices - from passive entertainment to addictive, mind-numbing substances - which are more available than ever. To list all of the ways that we attempt to escape reality through, whether mentally or physically, would take forever. **In what ways does this reflect our rebellion against God?**

This isn't to excuse the sins of Sodom, but meant to create a burden within all of us. What makes our generation different from those of old is that the outcry against sin and oppression has grown *almost obsolete* and the acceptance of these destructive choice and lifestyles have become the norm. Read **2 Timothy 3:1-7** and **Jude 1:4, 7-8** for a word against our own generation.

### ***A Closer Look***

While homosexuality is often cited as the only reason God chose to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, it's clear that these immoral practices and behaviors were really a symptom of a much deeper problem. By no means does this decrease the severity of the gross perversion on display in Genesis 19, we *can* gain a better understanding of how the people got to such a depraved place.

Read **Ezekiel 16:46-50** and hear the prophet bring a word of condemnation against Israel. In this text, God is comparing Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah and warns them of a similar future if they do not repent. The sins cited as reasons for Sodom's judgment may surprise you, as there is no mention of any kind of immorality. This isn't a contradiction to the Genesis account, but *a closer look* at and more clear diagnosis of the heart of the people.

What led to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah giving themselves over to lewd and perverse lifestyles? They were *first* filled with pride and selfish ambition. They had more than they needed and saw their prosperity as a means to their own end, rather than leveraging it for those in need around them.

It should be eye-opening that the Bible always brings us to this place where we see the dead-end of a life that is aimed entirely for its own self-interest. From Old to New Testament, God makes it clear how we were made to participate in His Kingdom and spend our lives for His glory and others' good.

To ignore this call over our lives - *the way that Jesus demonstrated* - is to ignore God's greater purpose and to risk being caught in the devil's ensnare. **How should we respond to Ezekiel's word?**

Sodom and Gomorrah are a picture of a society that blasted through every speed-bump laid down by God and had a total disregard for our God-given accountability and responsibility. None of us are beyond falling into this trap and Sodom should be a sobering warning for us all, see **Romans 13:11-14**.

Read **Genesis 19:14-29** and see how God saves Lot from the city, but enacts His word of judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. The oppressed and abused people were vindicated as the billows of smoke covered the valley.

### ***Haven't We Read This Before?***

There is a story in the book of Judges that is eerily similar to what we just read in Genesis 19. It takes place during Israel's lowest point, where much of the nation had embraced idolatry and forsook God's law.

On one occasion a Levite, who had walked away from serving God in the Tabernacle, went into the land of Judah with his mistress - *You can probably already sense how well things were going for Israel by this premise alone, right?*

Anyways, this Levite was going to spend the night in the town square. Unlike in and intentionally in contrast to Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel's town squares were normally well-lit and safe for strangers to rest from their travels. However, the Levite quickly finds that things had become almost as dangerous and corrupt in Israel as anywhere ever before had witnessed...

Take turns reading through **Judges 19:16-30** and make note of how it is similar to what we read in Genesis 19. **What is stands out as the same and/or different?**

In the following chapter, word spreads about this terrible event and the elders of each tribe of Israel assemble to discuss what might happen next. Everyone expects God to judge the nation, as He had Sodom and Gomorrah before. The leaders of Israel decide that they must declare war on the people of Benjamin in order to bring justice to this young woman and to hopefully prevent God from judging the land. It was a very grave time for land and people of Israel and the morale of the nation was as low as it could ever be.

## ***Saved By Grace***

However, the next chapter isn't a story of God's judgment, but rather the exact opposite. Judges concludes with a defeated outlook about the future of Israel, but right after comes *the story of Ruth*. Her story goes on to highlight how God intervened at Israel's lowest and began setting the stage for redemption.

Read **Ruth 1:1-4** and **4:13-17**. **How does Ruth's story stand in contrast to what was going on in the land around her?**

Had God destroyed Judah for the sins of Judges 19, there would have been no story of Ruth. The town of Bethlehem would've been wiped out alongside the cities of Benjamin. Remember God's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 18:32**? "For the sake of ten people", God said He'd spare Sodom and Gomorrah. In spite of their awful sins, God was willing to err on the side of grace.

In the case of Israel, that's *exactly* what He did. God spared Judah because of the righteous remnant, particularly because of Ruth and Boaz. Again, this isn't to excuse the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but to *magnify* the grace of our God.

Before you close, take some time to recap what we've learned and discussed. **What stands out the most to you from these stories and the lessons they've taught us?**