

# **Answering a Homosexual Argument**

## **The Destruction of Sodom**

### **Genesis 19:4-9**

By Joe Dallas

**B**efore they [the angels visiting Lot to judge the wicked-ness of Sodom and determine whether or not to spare it] had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us *so that we can have sex with them* [lit., 'so we may know them']." Lot went outside to meet them...and said, " No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men...." ...And they said, "We'll treat you worse than them."

#### **Traditional Position:**

The men of Sodom were attempting homosexual contact with Lot's visitors. Sodom was subsequently destroyed for its great wickedness, homosexuality playing a major role in its destruction.

#### **Pro-Gay Argument #1:**

Sodom was destroyed because of the inhospitality of its citizens, not because of homosexuality.

Professor John Boswell, in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press 1980), supports this view, basing it on two assumptions: first, that Lot was violating Sodom's custom by entertaining guests without the permission of the city's elders, thus prompting the demand to bring the men out "so we may know them"; second, that the word "to know" did not necessarily have a sexual connotation.

The Hebrew word *yada* appears 943 times in the Old Testament; it carries a sexual meaning perhaps 10 of those 943 times. The argument, then is that the men of Sodom had no sexual intentions towards Lot's visitors.

#### **Response:**

The argument makes no sense in light of Lot's responses. His first response, "Don't do this wicked thing," could hardly apply to a simple request to "get to know" his guests. His second response is especially telling: he answered their demands by offering his two virgin daughters—another senseless gesture if the men wanted only a social knowledge of his guests. And why, if these men had innocent intentions, was the city destroyed for inhospitality? Whose rudeness was being judged—Lots', or Sodom's citizens?

The theory raises more questions than it answers. While Boswell and Bailey are correct in pointing out the seriousness of inhospitality in Biblical times, inhospitality alone cannot account for the severity of Lot's response to the men, or for the judgment that soon followed.

#### **Pro-Gay Argument #2:**

Sodom was destroyed for attempted rape, not homosexuality.

This argument is more common; it is proposed by lesbian author Virginia Mollenkott and others, and is far more plausible than the "inhospitality" theory.

"Violence-forcing sexual activity upon another—is the real point of this story," Mollenkott explains. Accordingly, homosexuality had nothing to do with Sodom's destruction; had the attempted rape been heterosexual in nature, judgment would have fallen just the same. Violence, not homosexuality, was being punished when Sodom fell.

## **Response:**

The argument is partially true; the men of Sodom certainly were proposing rape. But for such an event to include "all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old," homosexuality must have been commonly practiced. Mollenkott makes a persuasive case for the event being much like a prison rape, or the kind of assaults conquering armies would commit against vanquished enemies, but her argument is weakened by Professor Thomas Schmidt's cited evidence in early literature connecting Sodom with more general homosexual practices:

The second-century BC Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs labels the Sodomites 'sexually promiscuous' (Testimony of Benjamin 9:1) and refers to 'Sodom, which departed from the order of nature' (Testament of Nephtali 3:4). From the same time period, Jubilees specifies that the Sodomites were 'polluting themselves and fornicating in their flesh' (16:5, compare 20:5-6). Both Philo and Josephus plainly name same-sex relations as the characteristic view of Sodom.

## **Pro-Gay Argument #3:**

The real sins of Sodom, according to Ezekiel 16:49, were that it was "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." These have nothing to do with homosexuality.

## **Response:**

Again, the argument is partially true. When Sodom was destroyed, homosexuality was only a part—or symptom—of its wickedness. Romans Chapter One gives a similar illustration, describing the generally corrupt condition of humanity, while citing homosexuality as a symptom of that corruption. But Ezekiel also says of the Sodomites: "They were haughty and did detestable things before me" (16:50). The sexual nature of these "detestable" things is suggested in 2 Peter 2:6-7:

If he (God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men...

And again in Jude 7:

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Dr. Bruce Metzger of Princeton Theological Seminary mentions other references to Sodom's sexual immorality in 3 Maccabees 2:5: "the people of Sodom who acted arrogantly, who were notorious for their vices." And again in Jubilees 16:6: "the uncleanness of the Sodomites."

The pro-gay interpretation of Sodom's destruction has some merit: homosexual rape was attempted, and the Sodomites were certainly guilty of sins other than homosexuality. But in light of the number of men willing to join in the rape, and the many other references, both Biblical and extra-Biblical, to Sodom's sexual sins, it is likely homosexuality was widely practiced among the Sodomites. It is also likely that the sin for which they are named was one of many reasons judgment finally fell on them.

Reprinted from the *Journal of Human Sexuality* – George A. Rekus, Ph.D. Editor, published by Lewis & Stanley, 3440 Sojourn Dr., Suite 200, Carrollton, TX 75006 (972) 713-7130; Fax (972) 713-7670; e-mail: lewisstanley@clm.org

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**JPIC Editor note:** The Christians of the first three centuries believed that God destroyed Sodom and Gamorrah for homosexual sins. Send \$1 and ask for our "Apostolic Christianity" newsletter.