

St. John's Lutheran Church Winter Bible Study
"The Bible and Homosexuality"
Session Three – Sodom and Gomorrah

Please note that these biblical stories contain graphic content.

The Story of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-11) & the Story of Gibeah (Judges 19:16-30)

These stories are remarkably similar

- ~ visitors to a city are offered hospitality by a 'foreigner' (Gen 19:1-3, Judges 19:16-21)
- ~ the "men of the city" surround the house and demand to "know" [have intercourse with] the host's male guest(s) (Gen 19:4-5, Judges 19:22)
- ~ the hosts says, "do not act so wickedly," and seeks to protect his male guest(s) by offering the mob his own virgin daughter(s) (Gen 19:6-8, Judges 19:23-24)
- ~ in Gibeah, the Levite throws his concubine out to the mob, they abuse her, and she dies (Judges 19:25-30); in Sodom, the male guests, who are angels (Gen 19:1), rescue Lot and his family from the mob (Gen 19:9-11)
- ~ Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed (Gen 19:12-29); the Benjaminites and Israelites go to war, with thousands of casualties (Judges 20-21)

The sexual violation in these stories is rape (or attempted rape), not homosexuality

- ~ the "men of the city" are (likely heterosexual) men seeking to subjugate and humiliate strangers in their town – men seeking to dominate men (and women) through sexual violence
- ~ if these "men of the city" are homosexual, why would the hosts offer them women?
- ~ if "all the people to the last man" (19:4) in Sodom are homosexual, does that mean there were no heterosexual men in Sodom?
- ~ while utterly reprehensible behavior to us today, the hosts offered their daughter(s) and/or concubine to the mob because in a patriarchal society, "men held greater worth, and thus their violation was viewed as a greater offense than violating a woman" (Gushee, page 62)
- ~ the "men of the city" demonstrate a shocking violation of the sacrosanct value of hospitality in ancient Near Eastern culture
- ~ "The stories speak only to the sin of homosexual rape and say nothing at all about consensual relationships between persons of the same sex" (Powell, page 23)

The Sins of Sodom and Gomorrah

Throughout Scripture, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are never spoken of as same-sex interest or behavior, but rather idolatry, injustice, inhospitality.

- ~ “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!...learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” (Isaiah 1:10, 17, also 3:9, 15)
- ~ “But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a more shocking thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. (Jeremiah 23:14)
- ~ “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.” (Ezekiel 16:49-50, also 16:59)
- ~ Jesus said to the disciples, “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.” (Matt 10:11-15, also Luke 10:8-12)
- ~ Other verses (e.g., Gen 18:30, Deut 29:23, Rom 9:29) do not indicate a specific sin.

According to the biblical narrative, the sins of Sodom & Gomorrah are not homosexuality or same-sex relations. Why not affirm that these passages are an indictment against sexual violence and do not address publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships?

Jude 1:7 & 2 Peter 2:6

Two passages in the New Testament conflate the story of Sodom and Gomorrah – where the visitors the men attempt to rape are “angels” (Gen 19:1) – with the story of when “the sons of God [angels] went in to the daughter of humans” and had children (Gen 6:1-4), after which the Lord “saw the wickedness of humankind” and brought the Flood (Gen 6:5-8:22):

“Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” (Jude 1:7)

“...and if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example of what is coming to the ungodly.” (2 Peter 2:6)

Jude places this in the context of “angels who did not keep their own position” (1:6) and Peter places this in the context of “God did not spare the angels when they sinned” (2:4) – *the textual context indicates the “sexual immorality” and “unnatural lust” Jude mentions is sexual intercourse between humans and angels, not between two humans of the same sex.*