

SODOM, GOMORRAH, AND A WOMAN WHO TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT!

Presented by

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In Genesis 19:1-27 there is an interesting account about a man by the name of Lot who lived in the city of Sodom. Although Lot was a righteous man who loved and obeyed God, the citizens of Sodom—and its neighboring city of Gomorrah—were quite evil. On one occasion, two angels—disguised as men—were sent by God to visit Lot. During their brief visit, the angels struck several men blind because of their great wickedness. The angels then told Lot and his family to leave the city quickly because God was angry and was going to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sin in the two cities.

And destroy them He did! The Bible says, “The Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground” (Genesis 19:24-25). Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced to ashes. Some have suggested that the story in Genesis 19 is like a Mother Goose fairytale—fun to read, but not really true. That cannot be correct, however, because ancient historians like Tacitus and Josephus said that the ruins of the two cities still could be seen during their day. Furthermore, on several occasions both the Old and New Testaments refer to the destruction of what Genesis 19:29 called “the cities of the plain.” Isaiah 13:19, Jeremiah 49:18, Amos 4:11, and Zephaniah 2:9 all speak of the time “when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” In 2 Peter 2:6 the apostle Peter said that God “turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes.” In Matthew 10:15, Jesus Himself even referred to their destruction. Christ and the biblical writers wanted people to know that God will not tolerate wickedness, and they used the destruction of the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to prove their point.

But what, exactly, destroyed the cities? “Brimstone” is an ancient word that refers to sulfur—a yellow, crystalline material that burns easily when ignited. Genesis 19:24 says that the brimstone and fire came “from the Lord, out of the heavens.” The area around the Dead Sea where Sodom and Gomorrah were located has a great deal of sulfur, as well as bitumen (which is a naturally occurring, petroleum-based, tar-like substance that also burns fairly easily). When fire fell from heaven, the sulfur and bitumen probably ignited, causing even worse fire and more-extensive damage. It is interesting to note that this is not the only time God sent fire from heaven. When the prophet Elijah was on the top of Mount Carmel with the false prophets of Baal, he asked the Lord to send fire to ignite the wood on an altar he had built in God’s honor—and according to 1 Kings 18:38, God did just that!

Some have suggested that perhaps an earthquake also was involved in the cities’ destruction since the Bible says that “the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace” (Genesis 19:28). It is true that the cities were near a geological fault line, and that earthquakes have sometimes been fairly common in that region. If an earthquake did occur, it could have thrown up large masses of combustible material that ignited the sulfur and bitumen already present in the area.

The point is that while God **could** have employed any, all, or none of these **natural** means to accomplish His purpose and destroy the cities, His timing was strictly **supernatural**. This was no routine, everyday event; rather, it was a divine judgment from God sent to punish evil people who lived in daily defiance of their Creator. Many years later, the prophet Jeremiah, speaking for God, said of some of the wicked people who inhabited the city of Jerusalem, “No one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah” (Jeremiah 23:14). The fate that befell Sodom and Gomorrah was used by later prophets, and even by Christ Himself, to remind people that **no one disobeys God and gets away with it!**

But there is something else interesting about the saga of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the angels told Lot and his family to leave Sodom because God was going to destroy the city, they said, “Escape for your life! **Do not look behind you...**lest you be destroyed” (Genesis 19:17). Once Lot and his family were safely out of Sodom, God “rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah” to destroy the two cities. But, as Genesis 19:26 tells us, Lot’s wife “looked back...and became a pillar of salt.” Many years later, Christ Himself referred back to what had happened on that occasion when He said simply, “**Remember Lot’s wife!**” (Luke 17:32).

Today, we should learn well the lesson from God’s destruction of two entire cities. God will **not** tolerate disobedience. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah paid for their disobedience with their lives, and today the names of those two cities stand as synonyms for evil deeds that were punishable by death at the hand of God. The Lord’s phrase, “Remember Lot’s wife!,” is good advice for us, too, is it not?