



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 24th March 2017

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Jude verse 7

Subject: Part 5 – Sodom and Gomorrah

“as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Sodom and Gomorrah are infamous cities today and are used as idioms in everyday language in reference to sinful places or particular sinful behaviours. Throughout the bible we can see this same pattern, for instance in Isaiah 3:9

“The look on their countenance witnesses against them, And they declare their sin as Sodom; They do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves.”

Jude’s emphasis in this letter was warning the church against immoral teachers, apostasy and alarming heresies which were endangering the faith of believers. Therefore, when he wrote concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, he was looking at these cities of the past in this light. Like the Israelites in the wilderness and the fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah walked after their own lusts which lead them into destruction and finally into judgement with God. Why did Jude bring the history of these cities before the church and why is it relevant for you and I today?

Maybe you already know the history, maybe you think you know and maybe you just don't know the history of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, but for us to understand the judgment of these 5 cities especially in the light of Jude's letter, it is important for us for to explore its history and the events that led up to the judgment. Than I am sure it will equip us to apply it to our own lives.

The History of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities.

Genesis 13 is the first biblical account that we encounter Sodom and Gomorrah, and in chapter 14 we see that those cities were allied with Admah, Zeboim and Bela (Zoar). These cities which were known collectively as the 5 cities of the plain and were located in the southern plains of Canaan. Genesis 13 is the account of when Lot split from Abram. Lot lifted his eyes and chose by sight not by faith, he chose the fertile plains where these cities were situated even though he knew of their reputation rather than God's direction. In chapter 14, we read of the first war recorded in the bible between the Kings of these 5 cities and the Kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and Tidal king of nations or also known as the 4 cities.

In verse 10 we see that in the Valley of Siddim which was full of asphalt pits, the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled from the opposing Kings who took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, including Lot, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods. When Abram (before he became Abraham) found out that Lot was taken, he marshalled his 318 armed and trained servants from his own household and attacked the four kings as well as pursued them and brought back all the goods that were taken, including Lot and his goods, as well as all the captive people. The King of Sodom met Abram in the Valley of Shaveh, after his return from the defeat of the kings of the 4 cities.

This is where it gets interesting, in verse 18, after they meet, Melchizedek King of Salem who was also the priest of God Most High, came out and brought bread and wine, and blessed Abram only. After Abram was blessed, in verse 21, King of Sodom said to Abram to take the goods for himself and if Abram would just give his people back to him, but then we read

"But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a

sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'

These cities of the plain were known to Abram and Lot before this event, even before Lot chose where to live. In Genesis 13:13

"But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord."

Hence why Abram didn't want to take anything from them.

The King of Sodom knew who Melchizedek King of Salem was and also knew who he worshipped. King of Sodom was fully aware of God, the Most High. They knew who God is, and his standards. They obviously once knew the truth but they were in open rebellion by the time Lot went to live in Sodom.

To underpin this fact, we need to understand how long after the flood that the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, took place. It was only between 300 and 400 years after the flood. Genesis 10 and 11 sets out the genealogies from Noah until the time of Abram. Abram was from the line of Shem and we can see clearly from this time scale that when Abram was born, Shem was still alive. Remember Shem was one of Noah's sons who was on the ark during the flood. Shem's brother Ham who was also on the ark was cursed by Noah in Genesis chapter 9 verse 25. Ham had many sons, one of which was Canaan and Cush. Sodom and Gomorrah came from the line of Canaan and Nimrod (Genesis 10 v 8) came from the line of Cush. These families are renowned for the rebellious ways and they brought destruction. Therefore, in light of knowing this, and that these people would have known each other, they were family after all! Genesis 6 was really not far back from Ham's son's Canaan and Cush.

From their history, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, would have known about the flood, what took place before and after the flood, just as much as how different languages were formed. It was not long since the tower of Babel and still, they rebelled against God, the Most Holy One.

Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities had traded the truth for their own wicked ways. Truth is so important and necessary to life, both spiritually and naturally. Solomon's admonition *"Buy truth, and do not sell it"* (Proverbs 23:23) reflects how precious truth is. Remember, it is by believing the truth that people are set free from sin and death (John 8:32). The New Testament reminds the people of God, time and time again, to know

the truth, to live the truth and to hold unto the truth, just like here in Jude's letter who is warning the believers of those who reject and malign the truth. Although God's people sometimes forget the importance of the truth, Satan never does. Ever since the fall, the father of lies has done everything in his power to destroy, hide, and twist the truth; constantly attempting to replace it with falsehood and deception, to lead people away from God and His freedom.

Ironically, his deadliest attacks do not always come from those who openly reject the truth, but rather from those who profess to know and believe it, but lie, sometimes little lies at a time.

So what was their sin?

Ultimately, their sin was complete rebellion. Rebellion of God's will, God's boundaries and God's standards. How was this manifested? Jude tells us in verse 6 –

“having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh”

Homosexuality was practiced widely in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities. Genesis 18 and 19 shows us that the society was accepting of their populations being given over to sexual immorality and of those who went after strange flesh. Their sins were equally as shocking and horrific as those of the fallen angels. They perverted God's intended design for them. We know that sin never stands alone. Ezekiel 16 verses 49 & 50 says

“Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.”

We can see from the Greek that Gross immorality is a compound word suggesting that their homosexual behaviour and attempted fornication was especially deviant from the God-ordained design for human sexuality (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:9-10). The people in these cities went after strange flesh which indicates that, like the apostate angels, the people of Sodom pursued creatures outside of what was proper for them. They intentionally refused to place any restraints on their fleshly desires or their sexual escapades. The reason for this unrestraint was that they had opened themselves to demonic activity. They were being controlled, rather than being in control.

This is shown to us clearly in chapter 18 and 19. Let's just review them.

Genesis 18 records the account of the Lord and two of his angels who are also referred to as men, came down to survey the facts of the outcry against these cities. The Lord came down not because He is not sovereign or not all knowing, however it was to show His mercy. In verse 20 and 21, the Lord and his angels went to Abraham saying;

“And the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”

The two men who were with the Lord when down to Sodom, while Abraham stood before the Lord pleading for Sodom. Abraham pleaded from 50 down to 10 people, if 10 righteous people were found that the Lord would save the city and the Lord agreed, how merciful is He! It reminds me of that verse in 2 Peter 3 verse 9:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

But there wasn't 10 found.

In chapter 19, the men went down to Sodom and met Lot. Once he saw them, he bowed down to them and invited them to go to his house so that they could spend the night under his protection, then they could rise early and go on their way. The men told Lot that they would spend the night in the open square but Lot strongly insisted so they went to his house. Lot was obviously aware of the serious problems in Sodom, not that these angels weren't.

Before they went to bed that night, the men of Sodom, both young and old, came from every quarter of the city and surrounded the house because they wanted to know the men carnally. Lot tried to dissuade them, even used his daughters as bait but needed to keep insisting that these men were under his protection. But the Men of Sodom told Lot to stand back and how dare he keep acting like a judge, (sound familiar), once they were finished with the visiting men they were going to sort out Lot in a worse way. Things got so bad, that the men who were in Lot's house reached out their hands and physically pulled him into the house and shut the door.

Even though the angels struck the men of Sodom with blindness, that didn't stop them in fact they became weary trying to find the door. This is not a natural reaction. The Men of Sodom

were driven surely by demonic activity as most people who are stuck blind would be more concerned about their eye sight rather than their desires.

Verse 12 tells us that the angels told Lot,

“It is then that the men said to Lot, take your son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city – take them out of this place!”

Once morning came, the angels urged Lot, his daughters and wife to hurry. Note that only his daughters and wife left with Lot because the others didn't take the warning seriously. We need to take the Word of God seriously for not only does God encourage us and comfort us from it but He warns us for our protection. If we don't take it seriously, we will be like those in Sodom who didn't take heed, and we will find destruction in our lives. If you read chapter 19, you will see that even Lot wasn't completely compliant and look for the easy way out, he asked to go to another city instead of following God's instructions. But God was merciful, for while Lot lingered, the men took hold of their hands and brought them outside the city. Verse 17 tells us –

“So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.”

When Lot was safe, the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, overthrowing those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. Nothing escaped the punishment of God, only those who God showed mercy to. God is a just God, and He gives appropriate judgement. Often we may look at these punishments from a human perspective, but when you take into consideration the whole story, we can see that God is long suffering and does not make emotional judgment but judgment based on facts. There was one person who did leave with Lot, but didn't make it because she looked back and that was his wife. Why did she look back? Curiosity or emotional ties? Do you think that we as believers can be like this, looking back to the world, back to our lives before God gave us his freedom in Christ? Do we ever listen to the lie that it was easier then, life was more pleasurable?

Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities are referenced 47 times in the bible. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah are exhibited as an example that God will certainly and severely punish rebellion as well as apostates (Matthew 11:23; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter

2:6; Isaiah 1:9-10; Amos 4:11). They rejected God, his purpose and plan as well as his boundaries, instead their lives were characterized by unrestrained indulgence and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 John 3:4). Jude referenced them in the light of apostasy because they once knew the truth but gave it up for their rebellious lifestyle and culture that they wanted to enjoy.

What can we learn from this?

It's amazing to think that Shem and Ham (as well as Noah and the other brother) both had a life changing experience due to the Flood. They knew exactly who God is and what he can do and also that he is faithful in all things including keeping his judgments. Yet we see that these two brothers both had personal experiences yet seemed to translate differently to their heirs. Their experience of God's judgement and power, even their children's experience of God's judgement and power, didn't necessarily impact their lives positively. Doesn't it just go to show us that experience, no matter how wonderful, amazing or even if it belongs to someone you know, that experience is short lived and that it can never replace the steadfastness of God's Word or of God's truth which is unchanging, the same yesterday, today and forever!

God's truth is meant to effect the way we live and inform our lifestyle and behaviours. God never intended us to live immoral or in perversion. God intended man to live on a high plain, in fellowship with Himself. This is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit as we walk in obedience to God. Remember the corrupt knowledge that the Devil imparts with the sweeteners so to entice mankind into a disaster, a crisis of mind and heart.

Romans 8:5-8 tells us

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

These verses are an example of the Holy Spirit's plea to us, not to go in the way of the flesh. Sure it may be easier but it's far more dangerous, both in this life and the next. Compromise starts in the heart and makes its way into the mind, and if not checked or dealt with, it will manifest itself in our lives. It has a start, a progression and a price.

2 Peter 2 deals with false teachers, apostates and rebellious people in the same light as Jude. Let's turn to it, 2 Peter 2 verses 1-11.

“And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

⁴For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; ⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— ⁹then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

A person may claim to be God's spokesman, but if his life is characterized by corruption, lust, and immorality, it proves that he is actually a fraud. We are not talking about someone who makes a mistake, or falls into sin but someone whose live style is distinguished by these things. The Bible is clear that most people follow the broad way that leads to destruction than adhere to the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14; 24:10-12). Just like in the cities of the plain, it was only 4 people that left while all the others remained.

In-part, credit is due to false teachers for the popularity of the “wide road,” as they usher people onto the broad way and encourage them not to look back, they make the broad way acceptable to most people, they sell it well. Their message of independence, personal freedom, and self-exaltation is inherently appealing to the fallen human hearts, who would rather serve themselves than submit to Christ. Sodom and Gomorrah is the kind of society that we see today. It is not just in the world around us but also in the so called ‘church’. There are many ‘churches’ who say they follow Christ but they have no problem with their congregation or even their ministers practicing sexual immorality including homosexuality. They love their popularity more than they love these individuals who need to know what they are doing is not right before God.

Jesus declared, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter”* (Matthew 7:21).

Superficial, insincere claims to be followers of Christ are meaningless; only those who fully submit to His lordship and obey His will, demonstrate that they truly belong to Him (John 15:14-16; James 1:22-25; 1 John 2:3-6; 5:1-5). Remember, God gave us boundaries so that we can flourish as people with a divine purpose.

To counter these relentless, satanic efforts, the church must be doctrinally pure, and Christians must live the kind of righteous lives that make the transforming power of Christ believable. With this in mind, the apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians,

“Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15; Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Titus 2:5,7,14; 1 Peter 2:9-12).

By their deceptive teaching and immoral behaviour, false teachers have maligned, literally blasphemed, slandered or defamed, the gospel. Of course, their mode of operation is consistent with Satan’s mission. On the one hand, he seeks to undermine the church from the inside, by introducing deceptive heresies and false doctrines. On the other hand, he seeks to tarnish the church’s reputation from the outside, by periodically unmasking false teachers before a watching world and pushing for believers to fall. When unbelievers associate the conduct of false believer with the practice of the true church, the name of Christ is inevitably defamed.

The way of the truth refers to right doctrine and the accurate proclamation of the gospel (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22; Matthew 7:14; John 14:6; Acts 16:17; 18:25-26). But because of false teachers, and the spiritual wreckage they leave behind, the biblical message has often been reproached in the eyes of the world.

Jude’s summary –

When we look at verses 5,6, and 7, we can see the tightly knitted relationship between the three accounts.

Firstly, the account of the wayward Israelites, who knew God but they ongoingly rebelled against Him because of doubt and they didn’t exercise Faith, yet God dealt with them graciously because they were his people.

Secondly, the fallen angels who not just knew God but saw God yet with resolution, rebelled against him because of their pride and ambition. God sealed their faith unto punishment.

Then lastly, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities who, regardless of their history and previous knowledge of God, they indulged themselves in sexual immorality and deviant practices and God wiped them out.

They all crossed God's boundary and rebelled, regardless of the truth they knew and they all suffered the consequences. There is the just judgment of God upon sin no matter if its man or angel. Be it in Heaven or Hell, God's justice is without partiality.

This powerful passage, with its three dramatic illustrations of apostasy, is a sobering reminder of the ultimate fate that awaits those who defect from the faith. As such, it provides a fitting motivation for believers as they continue to contend for the truth. It also serves as a solemn warning to anyone who knows the truth, but for whatever reason, is inclined to walk away from God - Hebrews 6:4-8:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.”

If Jude's admonition is ignored, the consequences are terrifying:

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:29-31)

Thus the severest eternal suffering will belong to those who know and reject the truth. Even more terrible will judgment be to those who, having done that, go on to teach demonic lies as if they are true - James 3:1:

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

The older we get as Christians, the deeper and more secure our faith should become. Churches need the deep and abiding faith of more mature Christians in order to prevent false teaching from infiltrating today as it did in the time of Jude.

In our postmodern culture, in which truth is considered relative and tolerance is prized above all else, Jude’s eloquent plea for doctrinal purity is particularly applicable. As Thomas R. Schreiner noted:

“[Jude’s] message of judgment is especially relevant to people today, for our churches are prone to sentimentality, suffer from moral break-down, and too often fail to pronounce a definitive word of judgment because of an inadequate definition of love. Jude’s letter reminds us that errant teaching and immoral living have dire consequences. (Jude, The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003], 403-4).”

We need to be mindful of our ways and not just what is being taught. We are called to be a learnt people, continual growing in the grace of God as well as the Knowledge of God.

Let me just conclude with the words of John Bunyan, from his book *The Pilgrims’ Progress*:
From This World to That Which Is to Come -

“Mr. Worldly-Wiseman is not an ancient relic of the past. He is everywhere today, disguising his heresy and error by proclaiming the gospel of contentment and peace achieved by self-satisfaction and works. If he mentions Christ, it is not as the Saviour who took our place, but as a good example of an exemplary life. Do we need a good example to rescue us, or do we need a Saviour?”

Amen.