

#277 "Something Worse Than Sodom"

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It is easy to gloss over one's own depravity or to exalt a nation erroneously based upon a false view of its standing before God. The Bible holds up Sodom as an example of evil matured, and its divine punishment is meant to be a reminder for future generations. What is often forgotten, however, is that the Bible teaches that something worse than Sodom emerged after the time of Sodom. In fact, it happened to God's chosen nation, Israel, whom God referred to as Sodom's sister. God indicted Israel on various counts of evil before their exile, and the same patterns of evil are alive and well in our world and in our nation today. It is as God warned His people that deceivers and those being deceived would go from bad to worse as the end approached. Something worse than Sodom is here, and judgment, perhaps on earth but certainly in eternity, will follow for those who do wickedly and who reject the Son of God.

Part I: Sodom as an Example

The Bible says that Sodom was a prosperous land, well-watered, and even like the Garden of Eden (Genesis 13:10). It was a pinnacle of modernity, high culture, luxury, prosperity, and, unfortunately, immorality. Genesis 13:13 says, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord." In fact, when angels visited Lot to warn him to escape before the fire and brimstone consumed the city and all in it, the men of the city pounded on his door to try to have relations with the angels who appeared to them as men. Even after the angels blinded them, they still kept grasping at the door to gain entrance. They were driven and owned by their sin and lusts to the extent that not even blindness could stop their desire for lewdness and abominable acts (Genesis 19:1-11). Genesis 19:24-25, the account of God's judgment, says, "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground." All who dwelled there were killed, and even the plants on the ground were eliminated. Previously, Abraham had prayed for God to spare the city on account of Lot if only there were ten righteous people in it. God agreed, but there were not even ten righteous people living there (Genesis 18:22-33). Thus, the city was destroyed and made a Biblical symbol of man's wickedness and of God's righteous judgment (Jude 1:6-8).

Part II: Israel's Sin Greater than Sodom

Sadly, as the Scripture makes clear, the wickedness of man did not end with this dramatic overthrowing of Sodom. Even Israel, God's chosen nation, rebelled and adopted pagan practices and behavior in great arrogance. Lamentations 4:6 says, "*For the iniquity of the daughter of my people Is greater than the sin of Sodom, Which was overthrown as in a moment, And no hands were turned toward her*" (italics mine). Sodom is held up as the pinnacle of depravity in the Bible until it gets overtaken by Israel. Jeremiah 23:14 says, "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has

turned back from his wickedness. *All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah*" (italics mine). Isaiah 3:9 adds, "The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them!" (see also Isaiah 1:10).

While Jesus was on earth, He confronted Capernaum in Israel for their wickedness and hardness of hearts. Matthew 11:23-24 says,

"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you" (italics mine).

Jesus declared them more guilty because they had God in their very midst performing signs authenticating His deity, and still they blasphemed and rejected the Messiah. Thus the theme of something worse than Sodom continued through Jesus' time, and it will continue all the way until Christ returns and sets up His kingdom. Then, wickedness will be cut off in the kingdom, and Jesus will be King. But before that time, things will go from bad to worse with people deceiving and getting deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). During the time the antichrist is on the earth, even Jerusalem will be like Sodom. Revelation 11:8 says, "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."

Man has a serious problem, and he can't rid himself of it. This is why the Bible is brutally honest as to how sin continues throughout the Bible. Man's condition apart from Christ doesn't improve, but, if anything, it gets worse. It is imperative that people understand that, just as Sodom and Gomorrah were laid waste, judgment will come. Eventually, God's great patience and mercy will expire, and then the end will come.

Part III: The Sins of Sodom...and Israel...and Modern Culture

Calling Israel Sodom's sister metaphorically, God gave a stinging indictment against His people. In addition to lewdness and abominations (Ezekiel 46:58-59), Ezekiel 46:48-50 also says they were guilty of other things. The Lord says,

"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw *it*" (emphasis mine).

God says of Israel that "you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they" (v. 47b). Something worse than Sodom happened in Israel, and it is happening today as well, not unexpectedly.

Sodom was arrogant, for they had abundant food and careless ease. Yet they had no compassion to help the poor and needy. God says this contributed to their proud hearts and to their many acts of immorality and abominations. While sexual immorality was and is rampant, it is not the only sin that God is going to punish. Arrogance and selfishness breed further corruption as God gives hard hearts

over to evil passions, sexual immorality of the worst kinds included (Romans 1:18-32). But it starts with people who ignore the Creator, who then worship the creation, who exchange the truth for a lie, and who then can't even discern right from wrong any longer. Consumed with selfishness and disdain for God and others, they do not bow and thank God, but instead they worship the earth, themselves, their money, their land, their prosperity, their ease, their comfort, etc.

What else did Israel do that was worse than Sodom that garnered God's wrath? Israel 5:11-12 says,

"Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! Their banquets are *accompanied* by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, Nor do they consider the work of His hands."

Revelry, carousing, and drunkenness are mentioned also in 1 Peter 4:3 as sins to avoid, but they are not the only sins listed here. The people also failed to pay attention to the deeds of the Lord (such as what happened to Sodom), and they didn't consider the work of His hands (including the fire and brimstone). Isaiah 5:20-23 explains that they confused right from wrong willingly, yet they thought they were really clever in the foolish reasoning which they possessed (v. 20-21). They were experts at drowning their judgment in alcohol and perverting justice and oppressing the poor and innocent (v. 22-23). They were also into occult practices including consulting mediums and using spirit guides. Isaiah 8:19-20 says,

"When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? **To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn**" (emphasis mine).

Not having a dawn is a frightening picture, but it is the consequence for not going to the Word of God for advice and counsel (Luke 16:29-31).

Isaiah 9:8-10 explains how Israel rejected God's warning of impending judgment by just saying that whatever He brings against them they will fix. They were in denial concerning His wrath and their own strength and ability to withstand it and recover. They didn't take Him seriously as though they knew nothing of the story of Sodom (Isaiah 9:8-10). Their leaders led their people astray, and those who were supposed to be instructing the people in truth spread falsehood and fostered confusion (Isaiah 9:15-16). Even the weak, poor, and oppressed were equally guilty before God. Isaiah 9:17 says, "Therefore the Lord does not take pleasure in their young men, Nor does He have pity on their orphans or their widows; For every one of them is godless and an evildoer, And every mouth is speaking foolishness." Isaiah 29:13b says, speaking of why God will punish them, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*." God wants obedience and hearts devoted to Him, not empty religious acts and sacrifice. Isaiah 48:1b says that they invoked "the God of Israel, *But* not in truth nor in righteousness." **It is actually an abomination to speak of a nation under God or to call for His blessing while living against His every command at the same time.**

Israel also accused God of being absent and irrelevant. Isaiah 29:15 says, "Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the Lord, And whose deeds are *done* in a dark place, And they say, 'Who sees us?' or 'Who knows us?'" Furthermore, they had the nerve to tell their Maker that He didn't create them and that He was dumb. Isaiah 29:15 says, "You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, 'He did not make me'; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'" The sad irony is that the same people who called God stupid were the same ones who bowed down to idols that they crafted out of wood and stone (Isaiah 44:18-20), molten images that God called "wind and emptiness" (Isaiah 41:29). Yet modernity isn't so modern in the sense that people say the same things about God and worship nature instead of its Maker. Their hearts are deceived (Isaiah 44:20), and they cannot deliver themselves from their own lies (Isaiah 44:20), just like Israel. In Isaiah 59:3-8, God indicted Israel, saying that their hands were defiled and that they did not know peace because they ran to iniquity. He said that people couldn't even sue righteously, that no one pled honestly, and that they trusted in confusion. This speaks to corrupt justices, lying witnesses, deceiving attorneys, and spin and propaganda, among other things.

From the occult practices, to the greed and arrogance, to the disdain for the poor, to the corruption of people across the board regardless of economic level, to lying leaders, to people speaking foolishness, to alcoholism and sensual partying, to all kinds of sexual immorality, and to denying the relevance and authority of God and His Word, **all of these sins that God condemned Israel for which were worse than what Sodom had done are alive and well and worse than ever. The relevance of God's Word endures forever.**

Part IV: Judgment Will Come to the Unrepentant, but Mercy Will Come to the Repentant

Judgment may not be immediate, and it often is not. In fact, in a great many instances, people who commit evil get away with it in this unjust world (Psalm 73). But God will set all things right in eternity where eternal judgment by fire will ensue (Psalm 73:27, Revelation 20:15). Sometimes God does punish individuals (Numbers 16:32) and nations on earth such as with Sodom and Israel, and it is wise to be aware of His just nature. But the problem is not with God, for God will render to each according to His deeds (Romans 2:6). The problem is with man who continues to do what God hates and to spurn His commands and His name. Like Sodom, Israel's punishment came, and it was very real. Isaiah 66:3b-4 says, "As they have chosen their *own* ways, And their soul delights in their abominations, So I will choose their punishments And will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight." God makes things really simple, explaining why a punishment must happen (they loved and committed evil and ignored His hand of mercy) and what the consequences will be like (what they dread). God's punishments are always just and dreadful, but the modern world, like Sodom and Israel before them, brushes off the consequences of sin and ignores the vengeance of a holy God. This is a mistake of great consequence (Deuteronomy 32:35).

God is a merciful God, and He wants people to repent. He does not hide the remedy, but He pleads with people to take Him up on His offer of cleansing. He says in Isaiah 55:2-3,

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.”

God knows that sin does not satisfy, and He tells people to listen carefully to Him and to come to Him. Those who trust in Him to save them and forgive them will find that He makes a covenant with them to love them always and to keep shaping them into His likeness. He wants people to confront their sin and repent of it. He wants them to remember that the Lord is the one true God and to call to mind all the miracles that He has done and the prophecies which He has given which have come to pass (Isaiah 46:8-13). It is not a spurious faith which He desires but one based upon history, reason, logic, and the example of Sodom and Israel.

God’s patience toward the wicked does run out eventually. One day He will return, and it will be too late for sinners then. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” God can and will pardon the repentant spirit because Jesus bore the Father’s wrath on the cross. He extends compassion if only man will return to Him and forsake the wicked way. As Isaiah 1:16-17 says, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.” A redeemed heart is one that turns from evil and humbly lets the Spirit guide it into all truth and to do what is good. The redeemed life is a process, and there will be stumbles. **But the Spirit moves in the changed heart to stand up for righteousness and justice in the land, even if there aren’t even ten other righteous souls.**

Conclusion

2 Peter 2:6-9 says,

“And if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.”

Sodom is a picture, a theme, and an example for what happens to wicked people in the end. It is a reminder of God’s holiness, justice, and righteousness which requires that He must punish sin. The unrighteous will suffer eternally, but the righteous will be rescued by grace through faith. What is remarkable is how the world can continue to disregard God and pretend like His wrath is not something to be concerned with. They continue with their evil as if Sodom never happened and as if God never had to exile His own people. They joke concerning hell and do not fear the One Who has authority to cast them into it forever (Luke 12:5). But God knows every heart, and He sees through all people,

whether they acknowledge it or not. Genesis 18:20-21 says, "And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.'"

Something worse than Sodom is here, and the outcry to God's ears must be beyond exceedingly great. Given how the story of Sodom ended, people better start paying attention. May the righteous trust in their God to rescue them from temptation, and may the wicked turn to God before it is too late.