

SESSION 2

LGBTQ+ & THE BIBLE



GENESIS 18 & 19-SODOM AND GOMORRAH



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LGBTQ+ AND THE BIBLE

Session 2: Genesis 18–19 — Sodom and Gomorrah

What Was the Sin of Sodom?

Primary Scriptures: Genesis 18:16–33; Genesis 19:1–29

Additional Scriptures for Study: Ezekiel 16:49–50; Isaiah 1:10–17; Matthew 10:11–15; Matthew 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–37

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES THE STORY ACTUALLY SAY?

Few biblical stories have been used more frequently to condemn homosexuality than the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. For generations, the name *Sodom* has been associated with same-sex sexual behavior, and the word *sodomy* eventually became a legal and religious term associated with particular sexual acts.

As a result, many Christians have grown up believing that God destroyed Sodom because its inhabitants were homosexual. The story is often presented as one of the clearest biblical demonstrations of God's judgment against same-sex relationships.

But is that what the biblical account actually says?

When we read Genesis 18 and 19 carefully, we discover that the popular interpretation overlooks important details. God's decision to investigate Sodom's wickedness is announced before the incident involving Lot's visitors. The behavior of the crowd in Genesis 19 involves threats, violence, and an attempted assault against strangers. The surrounding narrative emphasizes the obligations of hospitality, while other biblical writers identify Sodom's sins as arrogance, injustice, neglect of the poor, and oppression of vulnerable people.

These details are essential for understanding the story. Rather than beginning with the assumption that Sodom was destroyed because of homosexuality, we need to examine the text in its proper sequence and allow Scripture to explain Scripture.

The question before us is straightforward: **What does the Bible actually identify as the sin of Sodom?**

1. BEGIN WITH GENESIS 18, NOT GENESIS 19

Read Genesis 18:16–21

Most discussions about Sodom and homosexuality begin with Genesis 19, where a crowd surrounds Lot's house and demands access to his visitors. But the biblical narrative begins its explanation of Sodom's judgment in the preceding chapter.

In Genesis 18, God speaks to Abraham about the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. The outcry against the cities has become so great that God announces an investigation into the seriousness of their wrongdoing.

This conversation takes place before the angels arrive at Lot's house and before the events involving the threatening crowd.

That sequence is important because it establishes that Sodom already has a reputation for serious wickedness. The incident at Lot's house does not introduce the city's sin or provide the original reason God becomes concerned about it. The city's wrongdoing has already produced an outcry demanding divine attention.

Genesis 18 does not identify homosexuality as the reason for that outcry. It describes widespread and serious wickedness that God intends to investigate.

Any interpretation of Genesis 19 must therefore begin by recognizing what Genesis 18 has already established.

2. THE OUTCRY AGAINST SODOM

The language of an outcry in Genesis 18 is significant. Throughout the Old Testament, an outcry can refer to the cries of people suffering under injustice, oppression, or mistreatment.

The text does not provide a detailed list of Sodom's offenses at this point, but it portrays a city whose wrongdoing has become so severe that divine judgment is approaching.

This is not a description of a private relationship between two consenting adults. It is a description of a community whose wickedness has reached a level that demands God's intervention.

Genesis 18 also places the account within a larger discussion of righteousness and justice. Immediately before announcing the outcry against Sodom, God speaks about Abraham's calling to direct his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.

The contrast is meaningful. Abraham is called to righteousness and justice, while Sodom is characterized by wickedness that has produced an outcry.

The narrative therefore invites us to consider the moral condition of an entire community rather than reducing the story to a single question about sexual behavior.

3. ABRAHAM'S CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Read Genesis 18:22–33

After learning of God's intention to judge Sodom, Abraham begins an extraordinary conversation with the Lord. He asks whether the righteous will be destroyed along with the wicked and appeals to God's justice.

Abraham begins by asking whether the city would be spared if fifty righteous people could be found there. God agrees that the presence of fifty righteous people would be sufficient to spare the city.

Abraham then continues, gradually reducing the number from fifty to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten. Each time, God agrees that the city will be spared if that number of righteous people can be found.

This conversation reveals something important about the nature of the coming judgment. The issue is the pervasive wickedness of the city and the apparent absence of a sufficient righteous community within it.

God is not portrayed as searching for a particular category of sexual orientation. The conversation concerns righteousness, wickedness, justice, and whether the innocent should suffer alongside those responsible for the city's wrongdoing.

The distinction matters because it is the framework Genesis itself provides for understanding what follows.

4. WHY WAS SODOM DESTROYED?

The conversation between Abraham and God establishes that the city could have been spared for the sake of ten righteous people. The narrative proceeds toward judgment because the city's wickedness is pervasive and the conditions for sparing it are not met.

Genesis does not say that Sodom was destroyed because its population was homosexual. That explanation is frequently imposed upon the story, but it is not the explanation given in Genesis 18.

This does not mean that the incident in Genesis 19 is irrelevant. It becomes a vivid demonstration of the city's moral condition. The threatening behavior of the crowd exposes the kind of violence and contempt for others that characterizes Sodom.

However, we must distinguish between the city's already established wickedness and the particular incident through which that wickedness is revealed.

The destruction of Sodom is presented as divine judgment against a profoundly wicked community. To understand the nature of that wickedness, we must examine the cultural setting of Genesis 19 and then consider how the rest of Scripture describes Sodom's sins.

5. THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CODE OF HOSPITALITY

Before reading the events at Lot's house, we need to understand the importance of hospitality in the ancient Near East.

Hospitality was not simply a matter of politeness or social courtesy. In a world without modern hotels, transportation systems, or reliable public protection, travelers often depended upon the willingness of strangers to provide food, shelter, and safety.

Welcoming a stranger into one's home therefore carried serious moral and social responsibilities. A host was expected to provide for the guest's needs and protect the guest from harm.

This responsibility is sometimes described as the **protection of the roof**. Once a guest entered a household, the host assumed responsibility for that person's safety.

Hospitality served several important purposes. It provided assistance to travelers who might otherwise be vulnerable, established peaceful relationships between strangers, and created mutual obligations that helped preserve social order.

Violating these obligations was considered a serious offense because it threatened people who had placed themselves under another person's protection.

This cultural background is essential for understanding the confrontation between Lot and the inhabitants of Sodom.

6. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND SODOM

Read Genesis 18:1–8 and Genesis 19:1–3

The account of Sodom is preceded by a scene in which Abraham welcomes three visitors. Abraham offers them rest, water, and food, and he personally attends to their needs.

The narrative then moves to Sodom, where Lot encounters two visitors arriving at the city. Like Abraham, Lot welcomes them and offers hospitality.

Lot invites the visitors into his home, offers them the opportunity to wash their feet, and prepares a meal for them. When they initially suggest spending the night in the city square, Lot insists that they stay with him instead.

This parallel is important. Both Abraham and Lot respond to strangers by offering hospitality, but the surrounding communities are presented very differently.

Abraham's actions reflect the responsibility to care for those who enter his household. Lot attempts to do the same within Sodom, even though he is himself a relative newcomer to the city.

The narrative establishes the obligations of hospitality before introducing the crowd that will attempt to violate them.

Understanding this contrast helps us recognize that the events of Genesis 19 concern much more than the sex of the people involved.

7. LOT IS ALSO AN OUTSIDER

Lot's position within Sodom deserves attention. Although he lives in the city, he is not originally from there. He has come into the region through his association with Abraham and has established his household among the inhabitants.

This becomes important later when the crowd challenges his authority. They explicitly object to the fact that someone who arrived as an outsider is attempting to tell them how to behave.

Lot therefore occupies an uncomfortable position. He is a resident of Sodom, but the crowd still regards him as someone who does not fully belong.

His willingness to protect the visitors places him in direct conflict with the city's inhabitants. By honoring the obligations of hospitality, Lot challenges the crowd's determination to exercise power over vulnerable strangers.

The conflict is not simply between people with different sexual desires. It is between a host attempting to protect his guests and a crowd determined to violate that protection.

This distinction becomes even clearer as the confrontation develops.

8. THE CROWD SURROUNDS LOT'S HOUSE

Read Genesis 19:4–5

After Lot has welcomed the visitors into his home, a crowd gathers outside and surrounds the house. The narrative describes people from throughout the city participating in the confrontation.

The crowd demands that Lot bring out the visitors so that they may *know* them. Many English translations render the demand explicitly as a request for sexual relations.

Whatever translation is used, the surrounding circumstances make clear that this is not an invitation to a consensual sexual encounter.

The visitors are strangers who have accepted Lot's hospitality. They are inside his home and under his protection. A hostile crowd has surrounded the house and is demanding that they be surrendered.

The visitors have not expressed any desire to participate in sexual activity. Their consent is neither sought nor considered. The crowd's demand is coercive, threatening, and directed against people who are vulnerable because they are outsiders.

This is the context in which the proposed sexual act must be understood.

The central issue is not a loving relationship between people of the same sex. It is the threatened violation of strangers by a hostile group determined to exercise power over them.

9. DOES “ALL THE MEN” MEAN EVERY MALE IN SODOM?

Genesis 19 describes the crowd in sweeping language, referring to the men of Sodom from throughout the city, both young and old.

It is important not to treat this language as though it were a statistical description of the sexual orientation of every male inhabitant.

Biblical narrative frequently uses collective language to describe a community's participation in an event. Such expressions can emphasize the breadth of involvement without requiring the reader to imagine a literal census of every individual.

The Hebrew description identifies the people participating in the confrontation and emphasizes the widespread nature of the city's wickedness. It does not provide evidence that every male inhabitant of Sodom experienced exclusive same-sex attraction.

That distinction matters because the traditional popular interpretation often assumes that the crowd's behavior demonstrates that Sodom was populated by homosexual men.

But sexual violence does not establish the sexual orientation of those committing it. A group of men participating in an attempted sexual assault cannot simply be equated with a community of gay men.

The text describes a violent crowd, not a population defined by modern sexual identity.

10. THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW WORD *YADA*

The Hebrew word used in the crowd's demand is *yada*, commonly translated as “to know.”

This is an extremely common Hebrew verb with a broad range of meanings. It can refer to knowing information, recognizing someone, understanding something, having personal experience, or possessing an intimate relationship.

In certain contexts, *yada* functions as a euphemism for sexual relations. Genesis itself provides examples of this usage, including Genesis 4:1.

However, the word does not always have a sexual meaning. Its meaning must be determined by the context in which it appears.

Interestingly, the same Hebrew verb appears in Genesis 18:19, where God speaks of knowing or choosing Abraham in connection with Abraham's calling to teach his household righteousness and justice. There, the meaning clearly has nothing to do with sexual intercourse.

This demonstrates why it is dangerous to assign a single English meaning to a Hebrew word regardless of context.

In Genesis 19, the sexual interpretation of *yada* is supported by the surrounding narrative, particularly Lot's response and the crowd's subsequent threats. But recognizing a sexual meaning does not establish that the passage is discussing homosexuality as a sexual orientation or condemning consensual same-sex relationships.

The circumstances surrounding the demand determine the nature of the wrongdoing.

11. SEXUAL ASSAULT IS NOT SEXUAL INTIMACY

Even if we understand the crowd's demand as explicitly sexual, the situation described in Genesis 19 is unmistakably violent.

A group of people surrounds a house and demands access to unwilling strangers. When Lot refuses, the crowd becomes increasingly aggressive and eventually attempts to force its way inside.

This is not a description of mutual attraction, affection, commitment, or intimacy. It is an attempted assault.

Sexual violence has frequently been used throughout human history as a means of humiliating, terrorizing, and dominating others. In such circumstances, the sexual act functions as an expression of power rather than a demonstration of romantic or sexual affection.

The threatened assault in Genesis 19 fits that pattern. The crowd seeks to impose its will upon outsiders who have no meaningful ability to consent or defend themselves.

This is why equating the events at Lot's house with a loving same-sex relationship is such a serious interpretive mistake.

The presence of a threatened sexual act between males does not make the passage a description of homosexuality as we understand it today. The violence, coercion, and intended humiliation are central to understanding what the crowd is attempting to do.

Genesis 19 describes an attempted sexual assault, not a consensual relationship between people of the same sex.

12. WHY DOES LOT OFFER HIS DAUGHTERS?

Read Genesis 19:6–8

One of the most disturbing details in the narrative is Lot's response to the crowd. In an attempt to protect his visitors, he offers his two virgin daughters to the men outside.

This is a deeply troubling action, and it should not be defended as morally acceptable simply because Lot is attempting to fulfill the obligations of hospitality.

The ancient code of hospitality helps explain the cultural logic behind Lot's decision. A host's responsibility to protect guests could be understood in extraordinarily demanding terms. But explaining the cultural setting is not the same as approving Lot's willingness to sacrifice his daughters' safety.

The detail also raises an important interpretive question.

If the crowd were simply a gathering of men motivated by exclusive homosexual desire, why would Lot offer them his daughters as an alternative?

The narrative does not explain Lot's reasoning in detail, and his offer does not prove the sexual orientation of anyone in the crowd. Nevertheless, it complicates the assumption that the episode is fundamentally about homosexual attraction.

Lot's response is better understood within the conflict over hospitality, protection, and the crowd's determination to violate the people under his roof.

The entire scene is characterized by threatened violence and the vulnerability of people whom others are willing to sacrifice or abuse.

13. THE CROWD REVEALS ITS MOTIVE

Read Genesis 19:9–11

The clearest indication of the crowd's attitude appears when Lot attempts to intervene.

Rather than engaging in a discussion about sexual desire, the crowd responds by challenging Lot's standing within the community. They remind him that he came to Sodom as an outsider and object to his attempt to judge their behavior.

They then threaten to treat Lot even worse than they intend to treat his guests.

This response exposes the crowd's concern with power and domination. Lot has challenged their authority by refusing to surrender the strangers, and they respond by threatening him as well.

The issue is no longer confined to the visitors. Lot himself becomes a target because he is another outsider who has dared to resist the crowd's demands.

The men attempt to break down the door, demonstrating that they are prepared to use force to obtain what they want.

At this point, the nature of the encounter should be unmistakable. The crowd is not seeking a consensual relationship. It is asserting its power through intimidation and threatened violence.

The angels intervene, pull Lot back inside, and prevent the crowd from entering.

14. THE VIOLATION OF HOSPITALITY

The behavior of the crowd represents a direct violation of the ancient obligation to protect strangers.

Lot has welcomed the visitors into his home, provided food, and offered shelter. Under the expectations of hospitality, the visitors should have been safe within his household.

Instead, the inhabitants of Sodom surround the house and demand that the strangers be handed over for abuse.

The contrast with Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18 is striking. Abraham welcomes visitors and provides for their needs, while the people of Sodom seek to violate the visitors and punish the person who protects them.

The story therefore reveals a community in which vulnerable outsiders cannot expect safety, dignity, or protection.

This concern extends beyond the ancient world. Societies and religious communities reveal much about their moral character through the way they treat people who are different, unfamiliar, powerless, or dependent upon the goodwill of others.

The question raised by Genesis 19 is not merely what sexual acts a community permits. It is whether that community practices righteousness and justice toward people who are vulnerable.

15. SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

A foundational principle of biblical interpretation is that we should allow other passages of Scripture to help us understand the meaning of a particular text.

This is especially important when a familiar interpretation has become so deeply embedded in religious tradition that people assume it must be what the Bible teaches.

If we want to understand the sin of Sodom, we should examine how later biblical writers describe that sin.

The Old Testament prophets refer to Sodom in several contexts, often using the city as an example of wickedness and divine judgment. Their descriptions help identify the moral concerns associated with Sodom.

These passages are particularly important because they do not simply repeat the events at Lot's house. They interpret Sodom's wrongdoing within the broader theological concerns of Scripture.

Rather than relying upon the later association between Sodom and homosexuality, we should listen to the biblical writers themselves.

16. EZEKIEL IDENTIFIES SODOM'S SINS

Read Ezekiel 16:49–50

Ezekiel provides one of the clearest biblical descriptions of Sodom's wrongdoing.

The prophet identifies pride, abundance, complacency, and failure to help the poor and needy as characteristic sins of Sodom. He also refers to detestable conduct, but the specific offenses he explicitly names concern arrogance and disregard for vulnerable people.

This is particularly significant because Ezekiel is not merely retelling the story of Genesis 19. He is using Sodom as an example of a society whose prosperity was accompanied by indifference toward those in need.

The people of Sodom had resources, security, and comfort, yet they failed to use those advantages to care for others. Their prosperity contributed to arrogance rather than generosity.

This description fits the events at Lot's house. The city's inhabitants demonstrate contempt for strangers, disregard for their safety, and a willingness to exercise power over those who are vulnerable.

Ezekiel's interpretation therefore directs our attention toward injustice and the abuse of others rather than toward consensual same-sex relationships.

The prophet's message also creates an uncomfortable challenge for religious communities that have repeatedly used Sodom to condemn LGBTQ+ people while overlooking the very sins Ezekiel identifies.

If we want to take Ezekiel seriously, we must examine our own attitudes toward wealth, pride, hospitality, and the poor.

17. ISAIAH USES SODOM AS A WARNING ABOUT INJUSTICE

Read Isaiah 1:10–17

Isaiah also invokes Sodom and Gomorrah when confronting the religious and moral failures of God's people.

In this passage, the prophet challenges a community that continues to participate in religious worship while tolerating injustice and oppression.

God's concern is not that the people have abandoned religious activity. They continue to offer sacrifices and observe religious practices. The problem is that their worship has become disconnected from righteousness.

Isaiah calls them to turn away from wrongdoing, pursue justice, correct oppression, defend the vulnerable, and care for those who lack protection.

The reference to Sodom therefore becomes part of a prophetic indictment of religious hypocrisy and social injustice.

This is consistent with the concerns expressed in Ezekiel. Both prophets associate Sodom with a failure to practice righteousness toward others, especially those who are vulnerable.

The significance for our study is considerable. When later biblical writers use Sodom as a warning, they repeatedly emphasize arrogance, oppression, injustice, and neglect of those in need.

Those are the themes Scripture itself places before us.

18. HOW JESUS USES THE EXAMPLE OF SODOM

Read Matthew 10:11–15

Jesus also refers to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the context of His reference is especially revealing.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends His disciples into surrounding communities to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He instructs them to seek hospitality in the places they visit and to remain with those who receive them.

He then warns that communities refusing to welcome His messengers and receive their message will face serious judgment. Jesus compares that judgment with the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The connection is unmistakable. Jesus invokes Sodom in a discussion about the treatment of visitors and the refusal to receive those who come bearing God's message.

He does not use Sodom here as an illustration of homosexuality. His concern is the response of communities toward strangers and messengers who arrive among them.

This is particularly important because Jesus could have used the story of Sodom to make a statement about same-sex relationships if that were His purpose in this passage. Instead, He connects it to hospitality and the rejection of those who come seeking a welcome.

His interpretation reinforces the themes already visible in Genesis and emphasized by the prophets.

19. THE COMMON THREAD THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

When we place Genesis 18–19 alongside Ezekiel 16, Isaiah 1, and Matthew 10, a consistent pattern emerges.

Genesis describes a city whose wickedness has produced an outcry and whose inhabitants attempt to violate vulnerable strangers. Ezekiel identifies pride, prosperity without compassion, and neglect of the poor. Isaiah uses Sodom as a warning against injustice and religious hypocrisy. Jesus invokes Sodom when warning communities against refusing hospitality to those sent among them.

These passages do not all emphasize precisely the same aspect of Sodom's wickedness, but they share a recognizable moral concern. Sodom represents a community characterized by arrogance, injustice, hostility toward outsiders, and disregard for vulnerable people.

That pattern is not accidental. It reflects the larger biblical emphasis upon righteousness, justice, mercy, and the responsibility to care for others.

The popular claim that God destroyed Sodom because its inhabitants were homosexual does not adequately account for this biblical evidence.

It overlooks the fact that judgment was already approaching before the confrontation at Lot's house. It misidentifies a threatened sexual assault as though it were an expression of consensual same-sex intimacy. It also neglects the explicit explanations provided by the prophets and the way Jesus Himself uses the story.

A responsible interpretation must consider the entire biblical witness rather than allowing later terminology and assumptions to determine the meaning of Genesis.

20. THE CONNECTION TO THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

Read Matthew 22:34–40

Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. He then identifies the command to love our neighbor as ourselves as equally important, explaining that the Law and the Prophets depend upon these commandments.

This teaching provides an important perspective on the story of Sodom.

The people of Sodom demonstrate a profound failure to love their neighbors. They threaten strangers, disregard their dignity, and attempt to exercise power through violence. Their conduct stands in direct opposition to the righteousness and justice God expects from His people.

The prophets likewise condemn communities that neglect the poor, tolerate oppression, and fail to defend those who are vulnerable. These are not peripheral concerns within Scripture. They belong to the heart of biblical morality.

Jesus' teaching reminds us that genuine obedience to God cannot be separated from the way we treat other human beings.

This is particularly relevant when the story of Sodom is used to justify hostility toward LGBTQ+ people. If the biblical account condemns the abuse and mistreatment of vulnerable outsiders, using that same account to excuse cruelty or humiliation toward others reverses its moral force.

The lesson of Sodom should lead us toward greater righteousness, justice, and compassion rather than providing religious justification for exclusion.

21. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND A LOVING RELATIONSHIP

One of the most serious problems with using Genesis 19 as a condemnation of homosexuality is the failure to distinguish sexual violence from consensual intimacy.

The crowd in Sodom is not portrayed as seeking companionship, mutual affection, or a committed relationship. Its behavior is coercive and threatening. The men demand access to unwilling strangers and attempt to force their way into Lot's house when their demands are refused.

A loving relationship between consenting adults is fundamentally different from an attempted sexual assault.

This distinction should not be difficult to recognize. We would not use an account of a man sexually assaulting a woman as a condemnation of all heterosexual relationships. We would recognize that the wrongdoing lies in the violence, coercion, and violation of another person.

The same interpretive principle should apply to Genesis 19.

The fact that the threatened victims are male does not transform the incident into a description of homosexuality as a sexual orientation. The defining features of the event are the absence of consent, the intention to humiliate, and the use of threatened sexual violence as a means of domination.

To treat this passage as though it describes a faithful same-sex relationship is to ignore the actual circumstances of the narrative.

22. WHAT THE STORY SHOULD TEACH THE CHURCH TODAY

The story of Sodom remains a serious warning, but perhaps not the warning many Christians have been taught to hear.

It challenges communities that become arrogant because of their prosperity, indifferent to the suffering of others, and hostile toward people who do not belong to their familiar social group.

It challenges those who possess power but use that power to intimidate rather than protect. It challenges religious communities that claim righteousness while failing to practice mercy and justice.

The ancient obligation of hospitality also raises important questions for contemporary Christian communities. How do we respond when unfamiliar people enter our churches? Are those who are different from us treated with dignity and respect? Do we protect vulnerable people, or do we contribute to the circumstances that make them vulnerable?

These questions are particularly relevant for churches considering their treatment of LGBTQ+ people.

A congregation may sincerely believe that it is defending biblical morality while simultaneously creating an environment in which LGBTQ+ people experience humiliation, rejection, or fear. Genesis 19 should cause such a congregation to examine whether its conduct resembles the righteousness of Abraham and the hospitality of Lot or the hostility of the crowd outside the house.

The biblical warning against Sodom should never become an excuse to reproduce the very arrogance and mistreatment of outsiders that Scripture condemns.

23. WHAT GENESIS 18–19 DOES NOT TEACH

After examining the narrative and its wider biblical context, several conclusions become clear.

Genesis 18–19 does not describe a committed, loving, consensual same-sex relationship. The sexual element of the narrative involves an attempted assault against unwilling strangers.

The text does not identify the sexual orientation of Sodom's inhabitants. The participation of men in threatened sexual violence does not establish that they were homosexual in the modern sense of the word.

Genesis 18 does not identify homosexuality as the reason God announces judgment against the city. Instead, it describes pervasive wickedness and an outcry that has already reached God before the events at Lot's house occur.

The prophets do not reduce Sodom's wrongdoing to homosexuality. Ezekiel emphasizes pride, complacency, and neglect of the poor, while Isaiah associates Sodom with injustice and oppression.

Jesus likewise invokes Sodom in connection with the refusal to welcome and receive those sent among a community.

Taken together, these observations demonstrate that the familiar claim that Sodom was destroyed because of homosexuality is not a faithful summary of the biblical account.

The story condemns serious wickedness, including violence, arrogance, injustice, and the mistreatment of vulnerable people. It does not provide a biblical description of the loving same-sex relationships being discussed in contemporary Christian conversations.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Before studying Genesis 18–19, what had you been taught was the primary reason God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah?
2. Why is it important to begin reading the story in Genesis 18 rather than starting with the confrontation at Lot's house in Genesis 19?
3. What does Genesis 18:20–21 tell us about the city's wickedness before the angels arrive?
4. What does Abraham's conversation with God reveal about righteousness, wickedness, and divine justice?
5. Why is it significant that God agrees to spare Sodom if ten righteous people can be found there?
6. How does the ancient Near Eastern understanding of hospitality help explain the events of Genesis 19?
7. What similarities do you see between Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18 and Lot's hospitality in Genesis 19?
8. Why is Lot's status as an outsider important to understanding the crowd's response to him?
9. What does the crowd's demand concerning Lot's visitors reveal about its attitude toward strangers?
10. Why should the description of the men of Sodom not be treated as evidence of the sexual orientation of every male inhabitant?
11. What does the Hebrew word *yada* mean, and why must its meaning be determined by context?
12. How does the use of *yada* in Genesis 18:19 illustrate the danger of assuming that a Hebrew word always has the same meaning?
13. What distinguishes the threatened sexual assault in Genesis 19 from a loving, consensual relationship?
14. Why is Lot's offer of his daughters disturbing, and how does the ancient code of hospitality help explain the circumstances without justifying his action?
15. What does the crowd's response to Lot in Genesis 19:9 reveal about its desire for power and domination?
16. How does Ezekiel 16:49–50 describe the sins of Sodom?
17. What connection does Isaiah 1:10–17 make between Sodom and the practice of injustice?
18. In what context does Jesus refer to Sodom in Matthew 10:11–15, and why is that significant?
19. What common themes emerge when Genesis, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Matthew are read together?
20. How does Jesus' teaching about loving God and loving our neighbor help us understand the moral concerns reflected in the story?
21. Why is it an interpretive mistake to use an account of sexual violence as though it were a description of consensual same-sex intimacy?

22. How might the story of Sodom challenge churches that treat LGBTQ+ people with hostility or contempt?
 23. What contemporary examples can you identify of communities failing to protect or care for vulnerable outsiders?
 24. How has your understanding of Sodom and Gomorrah changed after examining the broader biblical context?
 25. If someone told you that God destroyed Sodom because its inhabitants were homosexual, how would you explain what the biblical text actually says?
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KEY TAKEAWAY

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is frequently presented as evidence that God condemns homosexuality. However, a careful reading of Genesis 18–19 and the wider biblical witness reveals a very different picture.

God announces an investigation into Sodom's wickedness before the events at Lot's house occur. Abraham's conversation with God focuses on righteousness, justice, and whether the city contains even ten righteous people. The narrative does not identify homosexuality as the reason for the coming judgment.

When the angels arrive in Sodom, Lot welcomes them according to the ancient obligations of hospitality. The city's inhabitants respond by surrounding his house and threatening the visitors with sexual violence. Their behavior is coercive and intended to intimidate and dominate vulnerable strangers. The crowd's hostility becomes even clearer when it threatens Lot for attempting to protect his guests.

The Hebrew word *yada*, used in the crowd's demand, can refer to sexual relations, but its meaning must be understood within the surrounding narrative. Even when the demand is understood sexually, the circumstances describe an attempted assault rather than consensual intimacy. The story therefore cannot reasonably be treated as a description of a loving same-sex relationship.

Other biblical writers reinforce this understanding. Ezekiel identifies Sodom's sins as pride, complacency, and neglect of the poor and needy. Isaiah invokes Sodom while condemning injustice and oppression. Jesus refers to Sodom in a discussion about communities refusing hospitality to those sent among them.

The consistent biblical themes are arrogance, violence, injustice, domination, and the mistreatment of vulnerable people.

Genesis 18–19 does not condemn loving, consensual same-sex relationships. It condemns a community whose wickedness is demonstrated through its contempt for others, particularly strangers who should have been protected rather than abused.

The lesson for Christians today is therefore not to use Sodom as a weapon against LGBTQ+ people. It is to examine whether our own lives and communities reflect the righteousness, justice, hospitality, and love that God expects from His people.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of righteousness and justice, thank You for giving us Your Word and for inviting us to examine it carefully. Help us approach Scripture with humility, recognizing that familiar interpretations are not always the same as the meaning of the biblical text.

Forgive us for the times we have accepted religious assumptions without examining them and for the ways Scripture has sometimes been used to condemn people without understanding the circumstances of the passages being quoted. Give us wisdom to distinguish between what Your Word actually teaches and what later traditions may have added to it.

As we reflect upon Sodom and Gomorrah, remind us of Your concern for righteousness, justice, and the protection of vulnerable people. Guard our hearts against arrogance, indifference, and the temptation to exercise power over others. Teach us to practice hospitality and to treat strangers with the dignity and compassion that reflect Your character.

Bring healing to those who have experienced rejection or condemnation because this story was used against them. Help them discover that Your Word deserves to be read with care and that the message of Jesus is rooted in truth, grace, and love.

Make our churches places where the vulnerable are protected, strangers are welcomed, and every person is treated with dignity. May our understanding of Scripture lead us toward greater compassion, deeper faithfulness, and a more authentic expression of the love of Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.