

## THE SIN OF SODOM REVISITED: READING GENESIS 19 IN LIGHT OF TORAH

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**Abstract:** *In recent years the rise of same-sex “affirming” interpretations of the Bible has forced “non-affirming” scholars to readdress the issue of same-sex teachings/prohibitions found within the Old and New Testaments. Without fail one of the first texts addressed in this discussion is that of Genesis 19:1–11, which deals with the sin of Sodom. Most “affirming” interpreters see in this account nothing more than an example of attempted gang rape and/or the contravention of hospitality. While these sins are indeed part of the overall problem with Sodom, what is overlooked within the discussion is the broader context of the chapter within the Torah and the immediate context which, includes the dysfunction of Lot’s family. This article examines the author’s rhetorical purpose for including this latter pericope as well as the role that Genesis 19 plays as a narrative commentary on the Torah teachings of Leviticus 18, 20, and Genesis 2 and 9. It concludes that reading Genesis 19 in tandem with these texts aids in interpreting the Sodom narrative. Broken marriage covenants, incest, and a rejection of God’s decrees all serve to reinforce the pervasive sin problem in Sodom, namely, infidelity in marriage, degrading sex acts, and a rejection of God’s moral standards.*

**Key Words:** *Genesis 19, Sodom, Leviticus 18, Lot, homosexuality.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the rise of same-sex “affirming” interpretations of the Bible within the evangelical church has forced “non-affirming” scholars to readdress the issue of same-sex teachings/prohibitions found within the OT and NT. Without fail one of the first texts addressed in this discussion is Gen 19:1–14 dealing with the sin of Sodom. Most “affirming” interpreters see in this account nothing more than an example of attempted gang rape and/or the contravention of hospitality.<sup>1</sup> While these sins are indeed part of the overall problem in Sodom, what is frequently overlooked within the discussion is the broader context of the chapter within Genesis as well as how the story of the dysfunction of Lot’s family noted in 19:15–

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 59–75; James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 268; and Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor’s Path to Embracing People Who Are Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender in the Company of Jesus* (Canton, MI: David Crumm Media, 2014), 56. For the rules of ancient hospitality, see Victor Matthews, “Everyday Life (Customs, Manner, and Laws),” in *Near Eastern Archaeology* (ed. Suzanne Richard; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 161–62.

38 informs one's interpretation in light of Torah teaching, namely, that of Leviticus 18.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this lacuna, in this paper I will examine three aspects of Genesis 19. First, I will look at the rhetorical role that the pericopae of Sodom and Lot's dysfunctional family play vis-à-vis Leviticus 18. Second, I will briefly examine the rhetorical function of Genesis 19 in chapters 4–20. Finally, I will demonstrate how the pericopae of Genesis 19 reveal blatant rebellion against God's moral decrees found within the Torah. I will conclude that Gen 19:15–38 sheds just as much light on the sin of Sodom as do the attempted rape of the angels and the refusal of hospitality. Broken marriage covenants, incest, and a rejection of God's decrees all serve to reinforce the pervasive sin problem in Sodom: homosexuality, which in this case is perpetrated against strangers, infidelity in marriage, and a rejection of God's moral standards.

## II. WHAT WAS THE SIN OF SODOM?

1. *The state of the discussion today.* Today one is hard pressed to find a good contemporary biblical commentator willing to point out the clear sexual nature of the sins enumerated in Genesis 19.<sup>3</sup> When the sin portrayed in that chapter is addressed, it is always presented as the horrific ancient custom of men demeaning men to show dominance.<sup>4</sup> Inevitably the discussion always comes around to Ezekiel 16:49 and Ezekiel's claim that Sodom was inhospitable. Many commentators then use this interpretation of the Sodom pericope as a basis to launch into a diatribe against the evils of the wealthy and their abuse of the poor. Now, to be sure, there are good reasons to address these issues, but Genesis 19 is certainly not the place for that discussion to begin. Perhaps Amos or Micah would be a good place to start? Typical of this kind of misguided interpretation is that of Miguel De La Torre who goes on for almost seven pages about the real "sin" of Sodom and Gomorrah as being inhospitality and oppression of the poor.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Even Robert Gagnon (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2001]), a leading "non-affirming" scholar, fails to draw clear connections between the two halves of Genesis 19 (except for a comparison between Gen 9:20–27 and Lot's actions in general; cf. pp. 70 and 74 n. 94 respectively). Note also the similar approach used by Donald Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 77–89. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, mentions 19:31–38, but only in a passing footnote (114 n. 8).

<sup>3</sup> As early as the mid-twentieth century, interpreters have tried to downplay the sexual connotations in the text. One author in particular actually argued that the Hebrew verb  $\text{יָדָע}$  (*yada'*) did not mean to have intercourse but rather to check the guests' credentials (i.e. to literally "get to know them"). See D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), 1–8. This position was later revived by John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93–94. Most people on both sides of the discussion have rejected this understanding.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (trans. Kirsi Stjerna; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 48–49.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre, *Genesis* (Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 192–98. Some of this understanding appears to have originated with rabbinic interpretation/commentary. *T. Sot.* 3:11 suggests that the affluent men of Sodom were trying to

Another aspect of this questionable hermeneutic can be seen in the scholarly penchant to link the sin of Sodom with the desire of the men of Sodom to rape angels in order to “subjugate the things of heaven to the will of humans.”<sup>6</sup> Predictably, this is then connected to the divine-earthly mingling often applied to Gen 6:1–4, 2 Pet 2:6, and Jude 1:7. However, the text says nothing about the men of the city *knowing* that the two men were angels.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Sodomites call them “men” (אנשים) when they approach Lot demanding him to send them out so they could “know them.”<sup>8</sup>

Also of importance for understanding the sin of Sodom is the fact that the author used אנשים as opposed to the general term עם (*am* “people”) when speaking of the sin of the “men” of Sodom in 13:13 and 19:4. The use of אנשים instead of עם, which would include the women as well, seems to suggest that there was something particularly evil about the actions of the males of the city.<sup>9</sup>

In this regard, one must keep in mind that the overall tenor of Genesis 19, like that of Judges 19, is sexual in nature: men desiring men, or in the case of 19:30–38, daughters desiring their father.<sup>10</sup> In response to this fact, “affirming” scholars will point to the attempted “rape” portrayed in the text. However, both Richard Davidson and Victor Hamilton insist that it is misguided to conclude that ידע (*yada*) means rape in Genesis 19.<sup>11</sup> Normally when rape is referred to in the Bible a term showing a level of coercion accompanies the word ידע (e.g., עלל [*‘ala*], Judg 19:25) or completely different terms are employed (e.g. ענה [*‘anaḥ*] and לקח [*laqach*], Gen 34:2; ענה and שכב [*shakab*], 2 Sam 13:14; or חזק [*chaṣaq*] and שכב, Deut 22:25).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, שכב is the term used to describe the actions of Lot’s daughters when they, in a sense, “rape” their father (19:32–35)! We may preliminarily conclude from the grammatical analysis of ידע that the suggestion that the men of Sodom were only out to rape their guests is not necessarily the case. They may have desired merely to satisfy their sexual urges. Nevertheless, from the context it is clear that the Sodomites had no problem resorting to rape if needed (19:9).

The next major hermeneutical *faux pas* committed by many “affirming” interpreters is their failure to consider the immediate context. Long before the men of Sodom failed to offer hospitality to the angels/men, the reader is told twice by the author that the “men” (אנשים) of the city of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners (13:13), and that the cry of its people had come up before YHWH (18:20).

purposely mistreat strangers to discourage visitors from coming to the city. This was so they would not have to share their wealth with others. See Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 135.

<sup>6</sup> De La Torre, *Genesis*, 195. For an extensive bibliography on recent authors who have adopted this interpretation, see Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the OT* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 147 n. 65.

<sup>7</sup> So too the conclusion of Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 87–88.

<sup>8</sup> Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 146.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> So, too, Wold, *Out of Order*, 81–85.

<sup>11</sup> Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 148; Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34–35.

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis*, 34–35. For more on rape in the OT, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 503–42.

Thus, the sin was against God, not people *per se*.<sup>13</sup> Again, some might say that the oppression of the poor was this great sin of Sodom, something God would have found offensive. To be sure, this suggestion has merit.<sup>14</sup> However, one must ask the question of why<sup>15</sup> the author chose to tell the account of chapter 19 by highlighting so many sexual sins.<sup>16</sup> Inhospitality only comes into the picture *after* the men of the city refused to invite the angels into their homes (cf. Gen 19:2–3; Judg 19:20). Up to this point the author does not hint that inhospitality was the major sin of Sodom and the cities of the plain.<sup>17</sup> It is after hospitality was denied that the men of Sodom show their true intentions: to have sexual intercourse with the visitors. Inhospitality was merely a symptom of their greater evil: careless ease that fostered sexual deviance and oppression,<sup>18</sup> especially among the men of the city.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to Gen 13:13 and 18:20, we may ask, What about the other cities of the plain that were judged by God (cf. 19:25; Deut 29:23)? Was their sin inhospitality as well? The only hints that are given in these texts is that the men of Sodom were “wicked” (רע *raʿ*) and that they were “sinners” (חטאים *chatta'im* cf. 13:13; 18:20). Interestingly, whenever חטא is used in Genesis where God is the one being sinned against, it is always in the context of sexual sin (cf. 13:13; 18:20; 20:6; 39:9).<sup>20</sup> In every other case, חטא has the more general meaning of transgression/wrongdoing against a person (cf. 4:7; 20:9; 31:36, 39; 40:1; 41:9; 42:22; 43:9; 44:32; 50:17). This alone points in the direction of sexual sin long before the angels show up at Sodom.

Closely linked to the inhospitality argument is another common fallacy, which suggests that the prophets used Sodom and Gomorrah *only* as an example of the oppression of the poor, not homosexual acts.<sup>21</sup> Now while it is true that the prophets did use Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of oppression (Isa 1:10–17; Jer 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9), one must bear in mind that they also used it as an example for those who commit abominations, that is, sexual deviance (cf. Isa 3:9–16; Ezek 16:50; Jer 23:14). What is more, being likened to Sodom and Gomorrah was a means of the prophets shaming<sup>22</sup> their audience as well as showing what true destruction looks like when God acts against those who flout God’s moral

<sup>13</sup> James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 37.

<sup>14</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis*, 20–21.

<sup>15</sup> So, too, the conclusion of Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 148.

<sup>16</sup> Choon-Leong Seow, “Textual Orientation,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (ed. Robert L. Brawley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 21, is a clear example of those who note the previous indictments of Sodom in chaps. 13 and 18, but then fail to ask the obvious question about the author’s presentation in chap. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Some may point to the aforementioned “outcry” (זעקה *zeqaʿah*) of Sodom noted in Gen 18:20–21 as some form of oppression including inhospitality. However, the use of חטאת (*chattat*) in Genesis generally means sexual sins (see more below).

<sup>18</sup> So too Hamilton, *Genesis*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> So too Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 146.

<sup>20</sup> In Gen 20:6 and 39:9 the sexual sin noted is connected to adultery.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. De La Torre, *Genesis*, 192–93; and Seow, “Textual Orientation,” 22.

<sup>22</sup> So, too, Wold, *Out of Order*, 89.

standards (cf. Amos 1–2)!<sup>23</sup> Finally, most Jewish writers, prophets included, would have highlighted the portion of the Sodom account that was relevant to their audience. Robert Gagnon says it well when he notes: “If same-sex intercourse were not an issue among their readers, there would have been little need to address it explicitly.”<sup>24</sup>

2. *Sodom’s sin as noted in Ezekiel 16:49–51.* As noted above, the most oft-quoted prophetic text trotted out in support of the inhospitality reading is that of Ezekiel 16:49. Characteristic of this trait is Martti Nissinen who quotes the verse and then concludes that the prophets used it as a “synecdoche for the violence of the Sodomites.”<sup>25</sup> It is this type of disingenuous handling of the text that has created an entire generation of poor exegetes who marshal this text in support of their erroneous conclusions. The reality is that Ezekiel *does* mention the sexual practices of Sodom in the very next verse (rarely noted by these interpreters). The key aspect of the discussion is Ezekiel’s use of the term תועבה (*to‘eval*), which means an “abomination.” The NASB translators, perhaps following the plural ἀνομήματα (*anomēmata*) in the LXX, confuse the translation by rendering תועבה in the plural. However, it is in the singular, which corresponds to the singular use of תועבה in the sex laws of Leviticus 18. In Leviticus 18, it is only the sin of homosexuality that is referred to as an “abomination” in the singular (Lev 18:22; cf. Lev 20:13; for the plural see Lev 18:26, 27, 29, 30).<sup>26</sup> What is also of importance is the fact that sexual sins are the focus when Ezekiel uses the singular תועבה in 22:11 and 33:26. One must also remember that Ezekiel was a priest and would have been familiar with the Holiness Code of Leviticus.<sup>27</sup> Some may argue that in verse 50 תועבה is merely an encapsulating term for all the listed sins that come before it. This argument falls flat when we read on to verse 51 and see that Ezekiel uses the plural of תועבה to do that very thing for the totality of Jerusalem’s and Sodom’s (implied) sins. Thus the singular of תועבה means something distinct. This is bolstered by a similar use of the singular and plural forms of תועבה in Ezekiel 18:10–13.<sup>28</sup> Therefore we may conclude that Ezekiel makes it clear what the sins (more than one) of Sodom were: it is not a matter of pitting inhospitality against homosexual activity; it is, as Davidson puts it, not “either-or” but “both-and.”<sup>29</sup> Put simply, at the heart of Sodom’s actions was “human arrogance in relation to God.”<sup>30</sup> We will return to this below.

<sup>23</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 47. Nissinen is actually quoting Daniel Boyarin, “Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality?’,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 350.

<sup>26</sup> So, too, the conclusion of Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 83–84.

<sup>27</sup> See Brian Neil Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context: Ezekiel’s Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs* (PTMS 182; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 63–66; and Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 297–375. So, too, the conclusion of Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> So too Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 162–63; and Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 82–83.

<sup>29</sup> Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 85.

Of course this does not even take into consideration the explicitly sexual nature of Ezekiel 16, which is all about sexual deviance in the context of marriage.<sup>31</sup> Verse 43 also connects Jerusalem's sins with sexual debauchery by the use of the word זמה (*zimmah*). As Donald Wold rightly points out, this term "refers to premeditated sexual crimes (Lev. 18:17; 20:14; Judg. 20:6; Ezek. 16:27, 58; 22:9; 23:27, 29, 35, 44, 48; 24:13),"<sup>32</sup> a situation similar to that depicted in Genesis 19 and Judges 19. We may conclude that those who highlight inhospitality as the only sin of Sodom in Ezekiel 16 are not presenting the entire picture.

3. *Sodom's sin as highlighted in other text traditions.* Aside from the numerous comments made by the early Church Fathers concerning Sodom's sin as homosexuality (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* iii.8; John Chrysostom, *Stat.* xix. 7; Augustine, *Civ.* xvi.30; Const. Ap. vii.2),<sup>33</sup> Jewish authors also interpreted Sodom's sin as sexual. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha both deal with it (e.g. Sir 16:8;<sup>34</sup> Wis 10:6–8; 19:14–17; 2 *En* 10:4; *T. Levi* 14:6; *T. Benj.* 9:1),<sup>35</sup> as do Philo (*Abr.* 135–36; *Spec.* 3.37–42; *Contempl.* 59–62) and Josephus (*Ant.* 1.194–204; *Ag. Ap.* 2.199). Rabbinic literature also interpreted Sodom's sin as deviant sexual actions. These include *Gen. Rab.* (XLI.7; L:7),<sup>36</sup> and the commentaries on Gen 13:13<sup>37</sup> found in *Tg. Ps.-J.*,<sup>38</sup> *Tg. Onq.*,<sup>39</sup> and *Tg. Neof.*<sup>40</sup> While "affirming" interpreters acknowledge the comments of these and other texts of the period, they counter these texts by noting the late antiquity of the Sodom=homosexuality interpretation (i.e. late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). They thus conclude that the sin of homosexuality was only a later interpretation *imposed* upon the text, and not an original one. This line of argumentation actually undermines their own position, namely, it has only been within the last few decades that scholars have sought to reinterpret this text as *only* homosexual rape or inhospitality! This accusation aside, it may very well be that the debased sexual acts common during the Greco-Roman period may have caused Jewish interpreters to take another look at Genesis 19 and see in this text a parallel with

<sup>31</sup> S. Tamar Kamionkowski ("Gender Reversal in Ezekiel 16," in *Prophets and Daniel* [ed. Athalya Brenner; Feminist Companion to the Bible: Second Series 8; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 177–79), notes of Ezek 16:17 that Jerusalem is so hyper-sexualized (in the spiritual metaphor) that she makes dildos for herself to penetrate men or even other women (178 n. 27)!

<sup>32</sup> Wold, *Out of Order*, 88. Note also Lev 19:29; Job 31:11; Jer 13:27; Ezek 22:11; 23:21, 49. Prov 21:27 and 24:29 actually use *to'evah* and *zimmah* in parallel lines.

<sup>33</sup> As noted in Bailey, *Homosexuality*, 25–26.

<sup>34</sup> Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 85. Gagnon (p. 86) also notes that Sirach 10:12–18 appears like a commentary on Sodom's sin whereby pride is the ultimate evil; "the rejection of the Creator, and the divinely sanctioned order of creation." See also a similar conclusion by James B. De Young, "A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," *BSac* 147 (1990): 439–42.

<sup>35</sup> See also De Young, "A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations," 437–54.

<sup>36</sup> See Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary on the Book of Genesis A New American Translation* (BJS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 2:94–95.

<sup>37</sup> Bailey, *Homosexuality*, 24, consigns this text to the realm of inhospitality.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Maher, trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 89.

what was going on in their own era.<sup>41</sup> In this case, it would not necessarily be a “late” interpretation as much as it is a later application. One must also keep in mind that for the observant Jewish community, especially with Leviticus 18 and 20 in view, homosexuality certainly was not as dominant as it was in Hellenistic and Roman contexts.

We may conclude this first major portion of our paper by noting that the language used by the author of Genesis points to the sin of Sodom as something that had sexual connotations. Moreover, the prophets, especially Ezekiel, recognized this sexual component and drew upon it in their books. Finally, this same understanding was reiterated by a number of later Jewish writers, no doubt as a means of highlighting the similar sexual degradation of the Greco-Roman world in which they lived.

### III. THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS 19

1. *Genesis as Torah.* Many look at the text of Genesis as a prehistory and family background for the Israelites. This approach has a tendency to bifurcate the messages/teaching found there from the rest of the Torah. When this text was first read/heard by the ancient Israelites they would have taken from the text not only an understanding of who God was and a prehistory of their people, but also the moral instructions God had set in place for his people, which were also incumbent upon the nations (cf. Gen 9:8–17). For example, God’s instructions to Adam concerning eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:9–3:24) had instructive and teaching implications beyond the immediate context. For the first readers/hearers of this text the message was clear from a Torah perspective. God had granted Adam and Eve//Israel a good garden//land (i.e. Canaan). They had a choice: obey the commands//laws of God and not eat of the “tree” (for Israel, namely, the sins of Canaan) or be cast out of the Garden//land (i.e. Canaan). The choice was clear; yet Adam and Eve chose the latter and lost the beauty and comfort of their God-given home, as did Israel when they were exiled to a foreign land.

Where this becomes applicable for the account of Genesis 19 is in the warning it gives to Israel in light of the Holiness Code, namely, Leviticus 18. Again the message is clarion: do not engage in these types of sexual deviance or you will be destroyed—you and your city! Indeed, the prophets highlighted the sexual deviance of Israel prior to their being cast out of the land and before Jerusalem was destroyed.<sup>42</sup> With this in mind, one must remember to keep the entire Torah, especially its legislation, in view when reading Genesis 19. This will aid in one’s understanding of what sins are actually being highlighted by the author for special atten-

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<sup>41</sup> So, too, Bailey, *Homosexuality*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. going after a neighbor’s wife (Ezek 18:6, 11, 15; 22:11; 33:26) and adultery in general (Jer 5:8; 13:27); sexual abominations (all-inclusive; cf. Jer 13:27; Ezek 16:22, 43, 47, 58; 6:9 [implicit]; 18:12–13; 22:11; 23:36; 33:26); incest with one’s daughter-in-law and sister (Ezek 22:11); and harlotry and adultery (Hos 4:13–14).

tion. Genesis 19 in many ways becomes a narrative commentary on the sexual laws of Leviticus 18.

2. *The sexual laws violated in Genesis 19.* When the entire chapter of Genesis 19 is taken into account it is surprising how many of the sexual laws from the Pentateuchal law codes are violated. These include: sex between men (cf. Gen 19:5//Lev 18:22; 20:13); marital unfaithfulness/adultery (cf. Gen 19:4–5//Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; Deut 5:18); proposed defilement of betrothed women (i.e. a form of adultery; cf. Gen 19:8, 14//Deut 22:23–27); rape and attempted rape (cf. Gen 19:5, 31–36//Deut 22:25);<sup>43</sup> and incest (Gen 19:30–35//Lev 18:6–18; 20:11–12, 17–21; Deut 27:20, 22–23).<sup>44</sup>

When this list of sexual sins from Genesis 19 is placed beside the sexual code of Leviticus 18 some interesting parallels emerge. First, Leviticus 18 deals with sexual laws in the following order: incest (18:6–18); sex with a menstrual woman (18:19); adultery (18:20); homosexuality (18:22); and bestiality (18:23). What the author of Genesis 19 does is reverses this order (removing bestiality and sex with a menstrual woman) by dealing with homosexuality, adultery (both real and proposed), and finally incest.<sup>45</sup> Even though all of these sins were punishable by death, one could argue that the author was handling these in a descending order of deplorability.<sup>46</sup>

In the Genesis 19 narrative, the notation that the men of the city “from the young man even to the aged” (מִנֶּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן) came out to have homosexual relations with the visitors is important. Even if one argues for the hyperbolic nature of the use of this catchall phrase, a good number of these men would have been married. And although ANE customs may have been ambivalent toward the practice of a married man having sexual relations with another man, as was the case in the later Greco-Roman world, in God’s eyes they were not only practicing deviant sexual activity, they were also practicing a form of unfaithfulness to their wives.

<sup>43</sup> Lot’s daughters’ actions toward their father were not only incest but also a form of rape.

<sup>44</sup> While not a sexual sin per se, the implicit divorcing of the betrothed daughters by their future husbands in Sodom did present the circumstances which led to incest. By not leaving with Lot, they were in essence dissolving the marriage contract that must have been in place. On the topic of divorce by stating the phrase “she is not my wife and I am not her husband,” see C. Kuhl, “Neue Dokumente zum Verständnis von Hosea 2,4–15,” *ZAW* 11 (1934): 102–9; G. H. Gordon, “Hos. 2, 4–5 in the Light of New Semitic Inscriptions,” *ZAW* 13 (1936): 277–80; Raymond Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (AFO Beiheft 23; Horn: Ferdinand Berger & Söhne, 1988), 69, 80.

<sup>45</sup> Leviticus 20 has a somewhat random order. It begins with adultery (20:10), whereas homosexuality (20:13) and bestiality (20:16) are encapsulated within the incest legislation (20:11–12, 17–21). The inclusion of homosexuality and bestiality within family legislation perhaps reflects the possibilities of these practices within the family unit.

<sup>46</sup> I am not trying to diminish the gravity of these sins by “ranking” them. However, adultery and incest are sins practiced by Israelites (e.g. adultery by David in 2 Samuel 11, and incest by Amnon in 2 Samuel 13). Moreover, prior to the Mosaic legislation, Abraham married his half-sister (Genesis 12; 20), Jacob married sisters (Genesis 30), and Judah had sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38). This is perhaps the reason why the author of Genesis does not make any explicit evaluative comments about the actions of Lot’s daughters even though the implicit negative assessment is deafening! On the other hand, despite feeble attempts by affirming interpreters to make the Bible say otherwise, same-sex acts receive *only* negative attention in the OT.



The concept of adultery is also addressed when Lot offers his daughters to the men of Sodom, which the men reject. We know from 19:14 that at least two of Lot's daughters were betrothed, if not already married. Based upon the grammar we cannot be certain whether the two daughters who were with Lot were the ones who were to be married to the "sons-in-law" spoken of in verse 14 (cf. NASB) or whether these men were married to two other daughters of Lot.<sup>47</sup> If it is the former, as most assert, then both ANE law (e.g., Eshnunna 26; Hammurabi 130)<sup>48</sup> and biblical law (Deut 22:23–24 cf. Gen 38:24) are clear that when someone violates a betrothed woman, they are guilty of adultery.<sup>49</sup> Here the men of the city were willing, as was Lot, to violate marriage law and the law of God.

Also, in many ANE cultures adultery was not only a sin against the husband but also against the gods (cf. Num 15:30).<sup>50</sup> There are numerous examples of this in the OT: Abimelech with Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 26:6–11); Pharaoh with Sarah (Gen 12:10–12); and David with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12; Ps 51:4). Moreover, sins such as bestiality and incest in the ANE were seen as polluting the land.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the men of Sodom, even though the ancient world did not see same-sex acts as "adultery" per se, or as polluting the land, in God's eyes these acts were both an affront to the marriage covenant and a means of defiling the land.

Finally, the incestuous actions of Lot's daughters are disturbing to say the least. As noted in our introduction, rarely do scholars include this pericope in the discussion of the Sodom event. However, structurally and rhetorically it plays a very important role in showing the possible intentions of the author to juxtapose the sins of Sodom, and Lot's daughters, with the prohibitions within the Holiness Code and specifically Leviticus 18. This rhetorical focus helps to define more clearly what the sin of the Sodomites was. If the incest and adultery portions are clear vis-à-vis Leviticus 18, that leaves homosexual acts (in whatever form they took) as the logical choice as the main sin of Sodom. According to Lev 18:3, and 27–30, these sexual sins were enough to bring about the destruction of the Canaanites and the punishment of the Egyptians. Thus the account of Genesis 19 becomes para-

<sup>47</sup> So A. E. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 140. For a refutation of this, see Sarna, *Genesis*, 137; and Hamilton, *Genesis*, 39–41.

<sup>48</sup> Raymond Westbrook, "Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law," *RB* 97 (1990): 571; and J. J. Finkelstein, "Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws," *JAOs* 86 (1966): 355–72. For the Eshnunna Laws, see Reuven Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 59.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Walter Kornfeld, "L'adultère dans l'orient antique," *RB* 57 (1950): 93–96; H. McKeating, "Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, with Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of OT Ethics," *JSOT* 11 (1979): 52–72; A. Phillips, "Another Look at Adultery," *JSOT* 20 (1981): 3–25; Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *Yehezkeel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume* (ed. M. Haran; Jerusalem, Magnes, 1960), 12–13.

<sup>50</sup> Westbrook, "Adultery," 566–69, 576; and Greenberg, "Some Postulates," 11–13.

<sup>51</sup> Westbrook, "Adultery," 568; J. J. Finkelstein, "The Ox that Gored," *TAPS* 71/2 (1981): 28; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399–414, esp. 406–9. According to Westbrook ("Adultery," 555), in Hittite law (187–88), bestiality was punishable by death unless commuted by the king.

digmatic of the corruption of Canaan—the land of promise (Gen 13:14–17)—and as such had to be punished. This becomes even more pronounced when one views the macro-structure of Genesis 4–20.

3. *The larger context.* To begin, one of the major problems with modern interpretations that negate any aberrant sexual interpretation of the Sodom account is the failure to consider the larger context within which Genesis 19 is situated. Several motifs found in Genesis 4–9 and 12 are repeated in chapters 16–20.<sup>52</sup> These repeated motifs help to demonstrate that the author of Genesis did in fact have sexual deviancy in mind for Genesis 19, not simply inhospitality. These motifs include:

- (1) The non-elect line is mentioned: Cain//Ishmael (Genesis 4//16–17)
- (2) The elect line is mentioned: Seth//Isaac (Genesis 5//18:1–15)
- (3) The earth//Sodom and Gomorrah are corrupted by deviant sexual behavior (and/or marital impropriety) and violence (Gen 6:1–11//19:1–11)
- (4) One man (Noah//Lot) and his family escape (Gen 6:18//19:15–16). Even though Lot is saved, God did it for the sake of Abraham. Note especially the phrase in both the Flood and Sodom accounts: “God remembered” ( **וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים** *vayyizkor 'elohim*) Noah//Abraham (Gen 8:1//19:29; cf. 30:22 and Exod 2:24)
- (5) Following the judgment of God, we see an example of sexually deviant behavior in the form of incest involving the aggression of a child against a drunken father (Gen 9:21–23//19:31–38)
- (6) After that encounter, offspring (Canaan//Moab and Ammon) are/will be “cursed” (Gen 9:25–27//19:37–38; cf. Deut 23:3–4)
- (7) A threat to the promise through unintentional adultery follows (Gen 12:10–20//20:1–18)

The greater importance of these parallels is that sexual deviance/marital impropriety is at the heart of the judgment on both the world in Noah’s day and Sodom during Abraham’s era. God would not allow this type of behavior to contaminate the land of promise, whether it is the earth in general or the land of Canaan. This interpretation is strengthened by the acts of sexually deviant incest, which follow the destruction of the earth//Sodom. If Ham’s sin was in fact homosexual in nature, then this strengthens the connections with the Sodom pericope.

Narrowing the focus to the immediate context of chapters 18–20, scholars have long noted the parallels of Abraham’s hospitality vis-à-vis Sodom’s treatment of the angels (Gen 18:1–8//19:1–11). Furthermore, James De Young aptly notes that one cannot truly appreciate the rhetorical intent of the author unless chapters 18–20 are read as a unit vis-à-vis God’s promise to give Abraham a son (Gen 18:10). What is more, the Sodom pericope, Lot’s daughters’ abuse of their father, followed by Abimelech’s taking of Sarah all show a theme of “illicit sexual enjoy-

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<sup>52</sup> The list that follows handles specific motifs. A number of broader ones could be listed (e.g. rebellion, judgment, etc.).

ment or opportunism. ... Each one poses a threat to propagation and survival and a just society.”<sup>53</sup> One also must not miss the intercessory role that Abraham plays for Sodom and Abimelech’s household (Gen 18:23–33; 20:17–18), which encapsulates these three pericopae. He is thus the righteous and faithful man through whom God will bless society at large (Gen 18:18–19; cf. 12:2–3), the epitome of which is realized in Abraham’s descendant, Jesus. In the same way that the sin of the world before the flood threatened the succession of a righteous and a “just society,” so too Sodom’s sin and example of an unjust society could not be allowed to flourish in the land that would one day belong to Abraham’s seed (Gen 13:14–17). A society that undermined Genesis 2 and the very process of propagation through unsanctioned coitus could not stand.

Into this mix the account of Lot’s daughters’ “rape” of their father fits the propagation motif. Lot’s daughters recognize the need to “preserve their family” (Gen 19:32). Yet their means of doing so was morally reprehensible. Also, Abimelech threatened Abraham’s progeny by taking Sarah as a wife—an example of (attempted) adultery. Even though he entered into relationship with Sarah innocently, God still held him accountable (Gen 20:3). Finally, the words of Abimelech “Lord, will you kill a nation, even *though* blameless?” (Gen 20:4 NASB) recalls those of Abraham to God concerning Sodom in Gen 18:23: “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (NASB). The difference is that Abimelech repented and was spared; Sodom refused and was destroyed.

We may conclude our second section by noting that when viewed in light of the overall context of Torah teaching vis-à-vis Leviticus 18 and Genesis 4–20, Sodom’s sin in Genesis 19 was indeed sexual deviance. In fact, in chapter 19 homosexual acts, adultery, and incest all highlight the different forms by which this sexual deviance was expressed. All of these sexual sins were a direct affront to God’s laws, none more so than the breaking of the creation model of Genesis 2, which is highlighted by the Sodomites’ sin.

#### IV. GENESIS 19 AS EVIDENCE OF THE REJECTION OF GOD’S DECREES

1. *The actions of the men of Sodom as an example of rebellion against God’s decrees.* Throughout the ANE homosexual activity appears to have been tolerated in at least some forms (e.g. with temple prostitutes or to humble an enemy soldier in battle). There is no evidence of laws prohibiting homosexual acts in the law codes of Ur-Nammu, Eshnunna, the Code of Hammurabi, ancient Hittite law, Western Semitic literature (i.e. Ugarit), or Egypt.<sup>54</sup> The only legal text that prohibits homosexual activity is from the Middle Assyrian Laws (second millennium BC). While some

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<sup>53</sup> De Young, *Homosexuality*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Unlike Greek art, Mesopotamian art does not depict homosexual acts. So Wold, *Out of Order*, 50–60. There are numerous texts in Egypt dealing with homosexual acts (mostly in a negative sense, i.e. showing domination of some sort or pederasty) but none that fall under the category of legal texts. Cf. *ibid.*, 56–59.

argue that MAL §A20 (*ANET* 181) deals with homosexual rape, Wold insists that the law in question made *all* homosexual conduct illicit within society and carried the penalty of sexual penetration followed by castration.<sup>55</sup> Also, MAL §A19 (*ANET* 181) seems to imply that even slandering someone about alleged homosexuality was a punishable offence with severe retribution (castration).<sup>56</sup> One must also keep in mind that limited examples of homosexuality in ANE literature may reflect, as in ancient Israel, the importance of the nuclear family, progeny, and the blessings of the gods. Indeed, a central belief was that one's children would care for your grave after your death. Just as important was the need for a son to take over the father's property and carry on the family lineage. In this way, a father "lived on" even after death. An exclusive homosexual lifestyle would undermine all of that.<sup>57</sup> Barring the two MA laws noted above, we may conclude that Hebrew legislation against homosexuality was in many ways unique to them. Israelite law was rooted in biblical guidelines for the sexes (i.e. Genesis 2), and the impurity that sexual sins brought upon the land.<sup>58</sup> As part of the Primeval History, the legislation of Genesis 2 was binding upon all peoples as were the sexual laws of Leviticus 18.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, even though the men of Sodom may have thought their sexual behavior was acceptable, the reality is that their actions were rebellion against God's decrees not only according to the creation narrative (Gen 2:20–25) and Levitical law, but also against nature itself (cf. Rom 1:18–32).

Finally, as touched on above, it is clear that adultery was not viewed in a favorable light across cultures of the ANE.<sup>60</sup> This is evinced in the law codes of Ur-Nammu (7), Eshnunna (28), and Hammurabi (129), as well as the Middle Assyrian Laws (13–16, 22–23), the Hittite Code (197–98), the putative priestly legislation (Lev 18:20; 20:10), and the laws of Deuteronomy (22:22).<sup>61</sup> For example, in Middle Assyrian law, if a married woman entered the house of a man and they had sex,

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. This would of course preclude same-sex acts in a cultic setting and during war. For the text and comments, see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 160.

<sup>56</sup> Wold, *Out of Order*, 46. Wold (p. 47) goes on to note that this is not figurative (i.e. to be cut off from one's people; cf. Exod 12:15, 19), but rather castration. On the other hand, Roth, *Law Collections*, 159, understands the concept of "cutting off" in this text as being related to the "cutting off" of one's "hair" or "beard," not castration.

<sup>57</sup> Wold, *Out of Order*, 50–51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>59</sup> Lev 18:3 and 26–30 make it clear that these laws were not just taboo for Israel, but were binding on all peoples.

<sup>60</sup> Westbrook, "Adultery," 543, does point out that there is no explicit evidence from Egypt on this topic. This may have to do with the fact that no extant law codes from Egypt have been found (Wold, *Out of Order*, 43). See comments by Kornfeld, "L'adultère," 105–7, where he gives examples of the death penalty for women taken in adultery. Unfortunately, no texts deal with what happens when a man is found guilty of adultery. The closest that we have are the statements made by men from the Book of the Dead that they were not guilty of adultery.

<sup>61</sup> Westbrook, "Adultery," 542–43; Sophie Lafont, *Femmes, Droit et Justice dans l'Antiquité orientale* (OBO 165; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 244–46. For further Sumerian legal practices, see Finkelstein, "Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws," 355–72.

both suffered the death penalty.<sup>62</sup> The same was the case in ancient Hatti.<sup>63</sup> By the late Babylonian period adultery was punishable by death with the iron dagger.<sup>64</sup> Once again, even though the men of Sodom may not have viewed their actions as adultery, according to God's law, their actions did in fact fall into that category.

2. *Lot as an example of rebellion against God's decrees.* Lot shows a general propensity to follow his own paths despite cultural norms and God's commands. The first example falls outside of Genesis 19 when Lot chose for himself the better land, leaving his elder, Abraham, to take the less-fertile highlands (Gen 13:10–11). Next, he moved his family into Sodom even though the city was wicked. What is more, he actually became one of the leaders of the city by sitting in the gate (Gen 19:1). During his flight from the doomed city, Lot failed to give serious attention to the words of the angels (Gen 19:15–16). In fact, the angels had to forcefully (צִקַּח *chazaq*) take him and his family by the hands and escort them from Sodom (Gen 19:16). Lot then rejected the command of the angels to go to the hills, opting rather for Zoar (Gen 19:17–20). And as bad as it was that Lot rejected the angel's original command to go to the hills he also rejected this concessionary word from the angel and desired to move to the hills. The text says that Lot feared (יָרֵא *yare'*) for his safety in Zoar even though the angel had told him he would be safe there (Gen 19:21). Once again Lot rejected the word of the angels/God.<sup>65</sup> These examples show a pattern of Lot's flouting of God's commands.

In many ways the fate of Lot mirrored the fate of Sodom. With the exception of his life and the life of his two daughters, Lot lost everything. A man who had flocks, herds, servants, and position (Gen 13:8–11; 19:1) was reduced to living in a cave; the dwelling of refugees and the place of burials (Gen 25:9; Josh 10:16; 1 Sam 13:6).<sup>66</sup> As Gordon Wenham notes, "His ruin can hardly be more complete."<sup>67</sup> Lot's final state reflects his arrogance and his desire to do his own thing despite God's plan and word. Here the author draws upon the motif of pride and self-direction, sins that were characteristic of the men of Sodom.

3. *Lot's wife as an example of rebellion against God's decrees.* The people of the cities of the plain were not the only casualties noted in Genesis 19. On the contrary, Lot's wife disregarded the commands of the angels/God when she turned and

<sup>62</sup> MAL A13. Cf. Elisabeth M. Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 135. See also Roth, *Law Collections*, 158; Godfrey R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), 36–39, 42, 386–87.

<sup>63</sup> Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment*, 184.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 111, 112. For marriage laws and punishments for adultery in the Neo-Babylonian era, see also Martha T. Roth, "She Will Die by the Iron Dagger: Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage," *JESHO* 31 (1988): 186–206; *idem*, "Marriage and Matrimonial Prestations in First Millennium B.C. Babylonia," in *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (ed. Barbara S. Lesko; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 245–55; *idem*, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements 7<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries B.C.* (AOAT 222; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994), 60.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. See also the conclusion of Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 315.

<sup>67</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 60.

looked back at the burning cities.<sup>68</sup> While some have performed midrashic-like interpretations of this passage making Lot's wife a specimen of materialism who "spent lavishly and entertained elaborately" and who "prod[ded] her husband to greater wealth at any cost"<sup>69</sup> there is nothing textually to prove such claims. What is clear is that even having heard the commands of God and no doubt hearing the destruction of the cities and maybe even feeling the heat of their flames, she still turned back to look (cf. Luke 17:28–33, esp. v. 32).<sup>70</sup> And contra B. Essex and De La Torre, who both assume that the command not to look back was only addressed to Lot, the text clearly implies that the command not to look back was directed at Lot's entire family (19:16–17).<sup>71</sup> Here the actions of Lot's wife, a direct affront to God's decrees, brought swift judgment. Even more so, it caused a breakdown in the family structure now that Lot was without a wife. This, in turn, created the circumstances for Lot's daughters' actions against their father; another breach of God's laws.

4. *Lot's daughters as an example of rebellion against God's moral decrees.* Source theorists hold that Gen 19:30–38 hails from the putative J source and was written in the Solomonic era as a means of demeaning Moab and Ammon.<sup>72</sup> While some scholars have struggled with the purpose of the narrative,<sup>73</sup> in its present context, as Von Rad rightly notes, it is a negative portrayal of Lot and his family.<sup>74</sup> It also shows the desperation of Lot's daughters because they have seemingly been deprived of their ability to have a legitimate marriage. After all, Lot was old and obviously could not perform the duties of finding a husband for them (cf. Gen 24:1).<sup>75</sup> The text also shows the irony of Lot offering his daughters to be raped, but in turn being raped himself by his daughters.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, there is a breakdown in the family unit (much like the actions of the men of Sodom). The obvious question again is where did the daughters learn such tactics? And what made them think such sexual deviancy was okay? Sodom's influence comes immediately to mind.<sup>77</sup> In both cases the participants wanted to abrogate social mores. Ironically, while the men of Sodom

<sup>68</sup> Contra Barbara J. Essex, *Bad Girls of the Bible: Exploring Women of Questionable Virtue* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1999), 18–19, who accuses God of murder for not telling Lot's wife directly. See also a similar conclusion by De La Torre, *Genesis*, 201–2; and Deryn Guest et al., eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2006), 38.

<sup>69</sup> Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 17, 19. See also the comments by Essex, *Bad Girls of the Bible*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> So too Essex, *Bad Girls of the Bible*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*; De La Torre, *Genesis*, 199. De La Torre asserts that the author's use of the second masculine singular verb (actually in the imperative) was addressed to Lot only. However, in Hebrew when a man is present with one or more women, the verb always appears in the masculine; and often in the singular (e.g. Gen 3:22).

<sup>72</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 224, argues that this is a Moabite tradition which was not a negative thing but a celebration of Moab's and Ammon's matriarchs. See similar comments by Sarna, *Genesis*, 139.

<sup>73</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 139.

<sup>74</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 224–25.

<sup>75</sup> So Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> De La Torre, *Genesis*, 205; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 51.

<sup>77</sup> So, too, the conclusion of Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 64.

failed in their attempted sexual deviancy against Lot's guests, Lot's daughters succeeded. Moreover, much like the men of Sodom's lack of respect for Lot, Lot's daughters no doubt came to have little respect for their father, who had offered them to the men of the city to be raped.<sup>78</sup> Social mores are abrogated in both pericopae as the men of Sodom stoop to the level of desiring anal intercourse with strangers, and Lot's daughters, after being rescued from the Sodomite mob, give up their virginity and their father's honor for the purpose of having children.<sup>79</sup>

ANE customs forbade incest as did the Mosaic Law (Lev 20:12).<sup>80</sup> And the fact that Lot's daughters used alcohol to achieve their outcome proves they knew it was wrong as well.<sup>81</sup> While Jewish tradition does not berate Lot's daughters per se,<sup>82</sup> this may have more to do with keeping David's (see the book of Ruth) and Abraham's family from derogatory language (e.g. *Zohar* 1.110b; *Gen. Rab.* LI:8, 11). Furthermore, the understanding that Lot's daughters slept with their father because they thought everyone on earth was dead does not hold up textually because we know they left Zoar, which was still intact.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, this pericope shows that the sexual depravity of Sodom had infected Lot's family. Indeed, this is the last portrait of Lot we find in the narrative; a drunk, wifeless man who had been raped by his own daughters. What is even more troubling is the fact that Lot gives no evaluation of the actions of his daughters.

## V. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper I have demonstrated that the central problem for the men of Sodom and Lot's family was their failure to abide by God's divine decrees, especially those related to God's moral standards. Nowhere are these decrees clearer than the presentation of Leviticus 18. As Torah, the author presents Genesis 19 as a narrative picture of what happens to a society that breaks these laws—death, destruction, and familial chaos. The account of Lot's family serves to reinforce this picture. This is made even clearer by the larger context of Genesis 4–20. We may conclude that when Sodom's sin is viewed within both the immediate and larger contexts, sexual depravity best defines the reason for their destruction. In the same way that sexual depravity was the impetus for the Canaanites to be destroyed/spewed out of the land (Lev 18:3, 26–30), so too the Sodomites lost their land and their lives predominantly due to the one sexual sin singled out as an abomination—homosexual acts.

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 191.

<sup>79</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 61.

<sup>80</sup> Lafont, *Femmes, Droit et Justice*, 173–236, esp. 181–90 for father-daughter incest legislation.

<sup>81</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> *Gen. Rab.* LI:8–11 and *Zohar* I.110b–111a. In the latter text, God is said to have provided the wine in the cave for the daughters to get their father drunk. See also, Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 172. Nevertheless, *Gen. Rab.* LI:9 does record the rabbinic struggle with the act of incest and fornication present within the text.

<sup>83</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis*, 51.