

# Bible Background Notes

## The Problem in Sodom

## Genesis 19: 1-29

- \* This story about the destruction of Sodom has led to the terms, “sodomite” and “sodomy.”
  - Sodomite is defined as “perverse sexual acts” in many modern English dictionaries.
- \* Sex is never explicitly mentioned in these verses.
- \* Lot’s faith (Law of hospitality) required him to give food, water and shelter to those traveling.
  - Plus, these visitors had just come from his aunt and uncle, Sarah and Abraham.
  - These are the same messengers from God that tell them they will have a child (Sarah laughed)
- \* The people of Sodom were angry with Lot for breaking their law.
  - It was illegal to entertain guests if you were new to town (resident alien)
  - Only long-term residence could invite strangers into their home without announcing them.
  - Lot was an alien, and thus, in their minds, endangered them by welcoming strangers.
- \* Most likely, they surrounded Lot’s home to demand the visitors be “made known” and thrown out.
  - Some translations say, “all people from every quadrant” were around Lot’s home.
  - Doesn’t say the gender of the crowd -never says all men. Sounds like a lot of people though.
- \* Many translations say, “bring them out so we may know them.”
  - Hebrew for “know” is “Yadha” which means to meet or greet.
  - Same as expression “yadha, yadha, yadha” (entire episode of *Seinfeld* based on this expression)
  - Yadha, with a modifier, can be slang for “to know sexually” but there is no modifier here.
- \* Sodom was already condemned before this event happened.
  - According to the Prophets, this text is about corruption or privilege, and lacking compassion.
  - Neither reference mention gender identity or expression.

**Ezekiel 16:49** – “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

**Jeremiah 23:14** – “But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a more shocking thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.

## The Law of Moses

- \*There are 613 Laws given by God, even though we tend to focus on the first 10.
- \*The Law developed over time, but the Biblical account is that it was received in the wilderness
  - Hebrews making a generational trek to “the Promised Land”
  - Keeping around a million people alive across uncompromising terrain
  - Laws related to dietary, hygiene, farming, religious rituals, and community relationships
  - Consistency is lacking in much modern application and interpretation

**Leviticus 18:22** – “...you shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.”

**Leviticus 20:13** – “If a man lies with a male as with woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

**Leviticus 19:19** – “...you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.

**Leviticus 21:11** – “[priest] shall not go where there is a dead body; he shall not defile himself even for his father or mother.”

**Deuteronomy 14:29** – “The Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.”

## David and Jonathan

\*Before David was king, he was a servant of King Saul, and close to Saul's son, Jonathan.

\*This relationship is regularly dismissed by those who don't want to see it, but it's there.

**1 Samuel 18:1-3** – “When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

**1 Samuel 20:30** – “Saul's anger was kindled towards Jonathan. He said to him, “you son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?”

**1 Samuel 20:41-42** – “As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.’” He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.

**2 Samuel 1:26** – “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

## New Testament

\*Jesus says nothing about the issue, one way or another

\*Paul regularly feuded with temple worship and issues of idolatry that are often misinterpreted.

\*We can see bias of modern English translators with use of the word “sodomite.”

\*2 Greek words are important to understand.

**1 Corinthians 6:9** – “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites...”

**1 Timothy 1:10** – “fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching

\**Malokos* is often translated as “male prostitute” – it means “soft”

-Paul was often writing about temple worship this could be the reference here.

\*Ancient Rome also had a practice of using pre-adolescent boys in sex trade.

-It was bad luck to send women into a military arena, but men were gone years at a time.

-Young boys would be sent to care for the sexual needs of soldiers.

-This is something we can all agree is an abusive practice and akin to slavery.

\*Paul could have been writing about temple massages, temple prostitutes, or child sex slaves.

-All of these understandings are more in line with Paul's broader battle with idolatry.

\**Arsenokoites* is a compound word translated in this passage as “sodomite.”

- No use on record before Paul's writing – it was a new word from Paul or in his time.

- Could literally be understood as “man – bedding”

- Philo, an ancient Jewish writer used the word in 35 A.D. to talk about temple prostitutes.

- Vulgate (Latin) Bible translated it as “*masculorum concubitoribus*”- male prostitution.

- Joannes Jejunator (Patriarch of Constantinople), used it in reference to rape or power in 500s.

- Luther translates into German as “*Knabenschänder*” = pedophilia.

- U.C. Irvine's Greek database has 78 uses, often referring to sex with unfair power dynamics.