

Thou shalt not rape angels: Sodom and Gomorrah.

How many times must the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis be mistold before The Bible is allowed its integrity, and the LGBT community is allowed its dignity?

Lets try an examine the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with clear eyes for a moment – to read it as if we had never heard it before or had no idea as to it's antecedents.

Here is a slightly paraphrased version of the story courtesy of Rev Dr Jeff Miner in his Book *The Children are Free: Re-examining Biblical Evidence on Same-sex Relationships*

'Abraham had a nephew named Lot who moved to Sodom. At the time, Sodom was considered a comfortable, modern, sophisticated city, and Lot thought it would be a better place to raise his family than out on the plains with Abraham, who was a nomad. Unfortunately, the city was also full of wickedness, and God told Abraham that it would soon be destroyed. Two angels were sent to assess the situation in Sodom, and when Lot saw them in the town square, he invited them to his house for dinner and lodging. He did not recognize they were angels. He seems, however, to have felt a responsibility to be hospitable to strangers — perhaps because he remembered having been a stranger himself.

That night, when the city dwellers learned Lot had welcomed two strangers into his house and into their city, all the people gathered at his door. They demanded that Lot deliver the two men to them so they might "know them." (Genesis 19:5) (The Hebrew word translated "know" in this passage is sometimes used in Scripture to mean sexual intercourse, and given the context of the passage, that is probably what it means here. Lot pleaded with his neighbors not to do such an evil thing. In a despicable act, he even offered them his virgin daughters instead, but the men persisted. Finally, the angels struck all those outside with blindness and warned Lot and his family they should leave the city because God would soon destroy it for its wickedness. The very next day, fire came down from heaven and destroyed the city and all its inhabitants.'

There are several points for consideration.

- God had already chosen to destroy Sodom before the confrontation between the men of Sodom and the angels.
- Lots guests were angels not men.

- All the men of Sodom came to demand the strangers.
- There are 20 references to the sin of Sodom in The Bible and not one mentions same sex sexuality.

The fact that God had already chosen to destroy the city renders the story of the attempted rape indicative, not causative. It was not the rape attempt that caused the destruction of the city, but rather may have modeled the general wickedness of the place and the need for its purging.

As regarding the presence of Angels and their significance, Rev Miner links this to Jude 8, where the 'strange flesh' reference has been misinterpreted as homosexuality.....

'Going after strange flesh (Jude 7)

The second of the clobber passages is another reference to Sodom and Gomorrah. In the King James Version of the Bible it reads:

"Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7)

When we read this verse in modern America, having been raised in a culture that despises gays and refers to them as "queer," it is easy to assume Jude's reference to "going after strange flesh" must mean homosexuality. For many heterosexual people, it seems unnatural or strange for a person to desire intimacy with someone of the same sex. However, well-informed theologians will tell you this is not what Jude was talking about.

At the time the book of Jude was written, many believed some of the women of Sodom had engaged in intercourse with male angels. This belief was probably derived from Genesis 6:1, 2 and 4, where we are told the "Sons of God"(angels)

took the daughters of humans as wives. This was the final act which brought God's judgment on the earth in the form of a great flood. And it seems some Jewish writers believed this was also the sin which sealed Sodom's fate.

According to first century legend, some of the women of Sodom (and other wicked ancient cities) were thought to have had sex with beings who were made of different flesh — angelic flesh. This is what Jude was referring to when he talked about "going after strange flesh." He was referring to heterosexual sex between male angels and human women, not homosexual sex between humans. Many theologians, including many conservatives, interpret the passage this way.'

This is a very peculiar world view to us, but let us not simply discount it because it is peculiar – the belief systems of the ancient near east were VERY peculiar in some respects, and we cannot assume common ground without properly investigating the historical reality.

Our third bullet point is fairly plain – apparently the whole male population of Sodom was to have joined in on this gang rape. It is beyond reason that the whole male population was gay; not only would the city have soon dwindled away, but Lot offers them his daughters in a reprehensible act of desperation (indicative of the low value placed on women). Offering a hoard of gay men your virgin daughters would not seem an eccentric gesture at best. It suggests that Lot knew the motivation of the mob; it was the well attested and widespread use of male rape to humiliate and subjugate those in a position of weakness – the stranger, the outsider, and the defeated. It has been recorded from the Egyptians through the ancient Greeks to the Romans, Vikings and up to the present day. It is a brutal way of neutralizing and emasculating one's enemies, and it no more indicates the sexuality of the rapist than saying 'F**k you!' indicates sexual interest.

To come away from a brutal and bizarre story like Sodom and Gomorrah believing that it has anything to do with loving, committed same sex relationships

is like attempting to ban heterosexuality because the same story is told in Judges 19 using a female concubine as the victim!

To conclude with our final point, If we were in any doubt as to what the sin of Sodom was, there is not shortage of sources in The Bible that tell us exactly what it was. There are twenty references in the Bible, and The Babylonian Talmud, a major source of contemporary Jewish scholarship goes into great detail – they all agree with Ezekiel 16:49-50:

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. They were haughty and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. (Remember, abomination refers to the ritually impure, which may have been many dozens of different failings). Again I quote Rev Miner to conclude.

It is clear from this passage (and others like it) that the abomination of Sodom, according to the Old Testament prophets, was that they behaved with callous indifference toward the weak and vulnerable — the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers in their midst.

The Children are Free: Re-examining Biblical Evidence on Same-sex Relationships by Rev Dr Jeff Miner.