

Lesson 6: Exploring Sodom

Time needed: 90 minutes

Recommended age range: Adults

Objective: To explore biblical and rabbinic perspectives on Sodom and the nature of its “sin”

Materials: Copies of the text, one per each pair of participants



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Lesson 6, Text Study 1

Genesis 18:20-21

And the LORD said: The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has reached me, and if not, I will know.

בראשית יח: כ-כא

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה, וַעֲקַת סְדֹם וְעִמֹרָה כִּי-רַבָּה; וְחַטָּאתָם--כִּי כְבֹדָה, מְאֹד. כֹּא אֶרְדֶּה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה, הַכְּצַעְקוֹתֶיהָ הַבְּאֵה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ פְלֵה; וְאִם-לֹא, אֲדַעָה.

Discussion Questions

1. Do we have any indication of the nature of the sin of Sodom from this text?
2. Both *za'akah* and *tz'akah* are Hebrew words for “crying out” or “outcry”. What kind of cry do you think is meant by this? Does the cry help us understand what kind of sin the text is describing?



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Lesson 6, Text Study 2

Genesis 19:1-13

ויבאו שני המלאכים סדמה, בערב, ולוט, ישב בשער-סדם; וירא-לוט ויקם לקראתם, וישתחו אפנים ארצה. ב ויאמר הנה נא-אדני, סורו נא אל-בית עבדכם ולינו ורחצו רגליכם, והשפממם, והלקחם לדרךכם; ויאמרו לא, כי ברחוב נליו. ג ויפצרו-בם מאד--ויסרו אליו, ויבאו אל-ביתו; ויעש להם משתה, ומצות אפה ויאכלו. ד טרם, ישכבו, ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו על-הבית, מנער ועד-זקן: כל-העם, מקצה. ה ויקראו אל-לוט ויאמרו לו, איזה האנשים אשר-באו אליך הלילה; הוציאם אלינו, ונדעה אתם. ו ויצא אליהם לוט, הפתחה; והדלת, סגר אחריו. ז ויאמר: אל-נא אחי, תרעו. ח הנה-נא לי שתי בנות, אשר לא-ידעו איש--אוציאנה-נא אתהן אליכם, ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם; רק לאנשים האל, אל-תעשו דבר, פי-על-כן באו, בצל קרתי. ט ויאמרו גש-הלצה, ויאמרו האחד בא-לגור וישפט שפוט--עתה, גרע לה מהם; ויפצרו באיש בלוט מאד, ויגשו לשבר הדלת. י וישלחו האנשים את-ידם, ויביאו את-לוט אליהם הביתה; ואת-הדלת, סגרו. יא ואת-האנשים אשר-פתח הבית, הכו בסגורים, מקטן, ועד-גדול; וילאו, למצא הפתח. יב ויאמרו האנשים אל-לוט, עד מי-לה פה--חתן ובניך ובנותיך, וכל אשר-לה בעיר: הוצא, מן-המקום. יג פי-משחתיים אנחנו, את-המקום הנה: כי-גדלה צעקתם את-פני יהוה, וישלחנו יהוה לשחתה

19:1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2: And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. 3: And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. 4: But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

5: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. 6: And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, 7: And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. 8: Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. 9: And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. 10: But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. 11: And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. 12: And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: 13: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it; and

the men turned and went to Sodom while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. [Translation by Rabbi Steven Greenberg]

Discussion Questions:

1. What does this text suggest about the nature of the sin of Sodom?
2. Are the motives of the mob made clear in this text? What are the potential motives they may have?
3. When Lot offers the mob his daughters, what do you think Lot understands their motive to be?
4. In verse 9, the mob speaks of Lot's judgment of them. Why might they say this at this point?



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Lesson 6, Text Study 3

Ezekiel 16:49-50

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: Arrogance, she and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. In their haughtiness they committed abomination before Me.

יחזקאל טז : מט-נ

הִנֵּה-נָה הָיְתָה, עֶוֹן סֹדֶם אָחֹתֶיהָ: גָּאוֹן שִׁבְעַת-לֶחֶם וְשִׁלּוֹת הַשֶּׁקֶט, הָיְתָה לָּהּ וְלִבְנוֹתֶיהָ, וַיֵּד-עֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן, לֹא הִחְזִיקָה. וּתְגַבְהִינָה, וּתַעֲשִׂינָה תוֹעֵבָה לְפָנָי;

Discussion Questions:

1. Ezekiel has a particular take on the sin of Sodom. Do you think it fits?
2. While Sodom is identified in Western culture with sexual sin, Ezekiel gives us no sense of that association. How do you think he might interpret the words “bring them out unto us, that we may know them”?

Lesson 6, Text Study 4

Tosefta Sota 3, Sanhedrin 108a

The men of Sodom only became haughty on account of the bounty with which the Holy One, blessed be he, had endowed them....They said: Since gold and silver flows from our land what need have we of travelers? We do not require any visitors since they only come to diminish our substance. Come let us cause the foot of the traveler to be forgotten from our land.

תוספתא מסכת סוטה (ליברמן) פרק ג הלכה יב

אנשי סדום אמרו הואיל ומזון יוצא מארצנו וכסף וזהב יוצא מארצנו ואבנים טובות ומרגליות יוצאות מארצנו אין אנו צריכין שיבאו בני אדם עלינו אין באין עלינו אלא לחסרנו נעמוד ונשכח את הרגל מבינותינו אמר להם המקום בטובה שהשפעת לך אתם משכחין את הרגל מביניכם אני אשכח אתכם מן העולם.

Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer, 25

Rabbi Yehudah said: They issued a proclamation in Sodom saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit, the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When she ascertained the facts she brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne of glory. In that hour the Holy One said, "I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come to me" — according to their cry is not written, but according to her cry.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר (היגר) - "חורב" פרק כה

ר' יהודה אומ' הכריזו בסדום כל מי שהוא מחזיק בפת לחם עני ואביון ישרף באש, פליטת בתו של לוט היתה נשואה לאחד מגדולי העיר וראתה עני אחד מדקדק ברחוב העיר ועגמה נפשה עליו, שנ' עגמה נפשי לאביון, מה עשתה בכל יום היתה יוצאה לשאוב היתה נותנת בכד שלה מכל מזון ביתה ומאכלת לאותו עני, אמרו אנשי סדום העני הזה מאין הוא חי וכשידעו בדבר הוציאו אותה להשרף, אמרה רבון כל העולמים עשה משפטי ודיני מאנשי סדום, ועלתה צעקתה לפני כסא הכבוד, באותה שעה אמר הב"ה ארדה נא ואראה אם כצעקת הנערה הזאת עשו אנשי סדום אהפוך יסודותיה למעלה ופניה למטה, שנ' ארדה נא ואראה הכצעקתה הבאה אלי עשו כלה הכצעקתם אין כתיב כאן אלא הכצעקת

Sanhedrin 109b



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If a poor man happened to come there, every resident gave him a *dinar*, upon which he wrote his name, but not bread was given him [for his money]. When he died, each came and took back his [coin].

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף קט עמוד ב
כי הוה מתרמי להו עניא יהבו ליה כל חד וחד דינרא, וכתיב שמיא עליה, וריפתא לא הוו ממטי ליה. כי הוה מית - אתי כל חד וחד שקיל דידיה

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think is the relationship between the wealth of Sodom, and their decision to restrict travelers? What effects might wealth have on a community?
2. Why do the people of Sodom experience visitors and travelers as threats?
3. What do you make of the lengths to which the people of Sodom go to retain their wealth?
4. How do these texts challenge the popular interpretation of Sodom as a licentious place?

This text study was created by Rabbi Steve Greenberg for Keshet. We encourage you to download this resource and share it with others, as long as you credit Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Keshet.



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