

## **Sodom and Gomorrah from an Eschatological Perspective**

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Eschatology is not found only in such Bible books as Daniel and Revelation. It permeates and dominates the entire message of the Bible, including Biblical narratives recording events in the history of Israel. Therefore, as T. Vriezen writes, “the true heart of both Old Testament and New Testament is the eschatological perspective.”<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Bible reader should try to understand what eschatological message these narratives convey beyond the historical information they provide.

This paper looks at Genesis 18-19 from an eschatological perspective. This will lead to the recognition of the common eschatological expression and climax conveyed by the selected passages.<sup>2</sup>

### **Brief Analysis of Genesis 18-19**

The narrative begins with the unexpected arrival of the three strangers. The visit of the messengers is of vital, decisive importance for the one visited. The messengers come from another world and have a message from it. This is the starting point of a progression in which one coming from afar sets an event in eschatological motion.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 123.

<sup>2</sup> Special attention will be given to Rev 14:6-12. Other passages briefly discussed are: Lam 4:6; Isa 1:9-10; 13:19-22; Matt 10:15. It may be asked why the Sodom narrative is a better paradigm of wickedness and destruction than the Flood story. The Flood story describes a total destruction of all the creation, and the process of destruction is described in much more detail. Following the Flood God promises that such destruction will never be repeated again (Gen 8:21-22; 9:8-17; Jer 31:35-36; 33:19-20). But it does not apply to Sodom, which is the best candidate pointing to the later destructions. Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 49-50.

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The visitors in Gen 18 and 19 are termed as *hammalākīm* (messengers) and *'anāšīm* (men). It should be noted that the three *'anāšīm* who are entertained by Abraham at Mamre are not called *hammalākīm* in the account of that event. Yet, he addresses only one of them in the following verse, as *'adōnāy* (My Lord, v. 3). Somehow Abraham has figured out that one of the three is YHWH. *wayyar'* (and he saw), *wayyārāš* (and he ran), *wayyištaḥû* (and he bowed himself/worshipped). Obviously we have here a worship motif. In the LXX Gen 18:2 reads *proskúnēsen*. Compare it with Rev 14:7d *kai proskunēsate to poiēsanti tou ouranōn kai tēn gēn kai phálassan kai pēgàs hudátōn* (and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water, NKJV).

The messengers play an important function in the development of the events and the communication of the message. They have not come to inspect whether the indispensable ten righteous actually continue living in the city.<sup>3</sup> Their forewarning (19:12-13) and their forceful withdrawal of Lot (19:16) illustrate that the destruction of the city is a predetermined and unavoidable decision.

The indictment of Sodom lies entirely in the moral realm. Gen 13:13 hints at the terrible fate of Sodom to be revealed in Gen 19. The phrase *ḥattāīm me'ōd* (great sinners) is used only here. The rare phraseology implies the extreme seriousness of Sodom's sin (Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:49). As the wickedness of the city appears to reach intolerable proportions, God personally investigates the situation.

The opening words of 18:21 contain an expression in the direct volative *'ēradā(h)-nā' we'er'e(h)* (Let me go down and see).<sup>4</sup> The divine "coming down" presupposes prior knowledge of human affairs from on high, and God's subsequent action testifies of His absolute sovereignty.

He already knows what to do with Sodom (18:17), and He knows about its sin (18:20). Yet He announces his intention to make a judicial inquiry about the state of affairs in the city (18:21). The matter of his investigation is *za'aqaṭ* (a cry, crying out, outrage, 18:21). YHWH's investigative judgment begins with a judicial inquiry and his intention to support that observation with a fact-finding mission (18:22-33), where Abraham plays the role of a witness and intercessor. T. J. Mafico points out that YHWH comes down "to make a judicial investigation for purposes only of assessing the punishment."<sup>5</sup>

The patriarch's plea that the innocent should not be made to suffer along with the guilty is clear enough. Abraham makes a six-fold plea for the city, each time accepted by the Lord. Each time he asks, "Suppose there were x righteous .

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Rabbinic tradition, the ten are: Lot, his wife, two unmarried daughters, two married daughters, and two sons-in-law (Gen R. 49.13).

<sup>4</sup> For the idea of God "going down" see Gen 11:5-7; Exod 3:8; Num 11:17; 2 Sam 22:10; Ps 18:10; Isa 63:19; 64:2; Mic 1:3

<sup>5</sup> T. J. Mafico, "The Crucial Question Concerning the Justice of God," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 42 (1983): 13. See also Exod 3:7; Judg 3:9, 15, etc.

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. . .” (18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32). Every time God answers, “If I find . . . I shall spare” (18:26, 28, 30), or “I shall not do it . . . for the sake of” (18:29, 31, 32).<sup>6</sup> Three times Abraham lowers the number of the righteous by five (50 to 45 to 40), and three times by tens (40 to 30 to 20 to 10). However, nowhere does Abraham challenge God’s evaluation of Sodom’s moral condition. That judgment is not up for debate any more, nor does he at any point turn to Sodom to urge repentance. Now events move rapidly toward a horrifying but retributive climax.

On one hand, Gen 18 reveals the fundamental principles of *sedāqā(h)* *ūmišpāt* (righteousness and justice, 18:19) which are characteristic to God himself and should be observed by his creation. On the other, it demonstrates this judicial investigation as a prototype of eschatological judgment

The commands given by the heavenly messengers to Lot and his family were both positive and negative. Positively, the messengers command Lot and his family to leave the city. Negatively, they are not to “look back.” Both commands are important in the development of the story. The obedience to the former command results in their rescue. The disobedience results in the death of Lot’s wife (Gen 19:26). Lot and his family are to be found first within the city.<sup>7</sup> However, almost immediately the narrative makes it clear that the city was not the safe place it normally should have been. The city becomes for Lot and his family the place of destruction, not only because of the threatening masses,<sup>8</sup> but because it stood under a sentence of destruction,<sup>9</sup> since *kī-gādelā(h)* *ša‘aqāṭām* *’et-penē(y)* *yhwā(h)* (for their outcry is great before YHWH, Gen 19:13).<sup>10</sup> Thus, Sodom was a place of danger from two standpoints: (1) wickedness of inhabitants, and (2) doomed future. Wickedness is the chief characteristic of the Sodomites as they are portrayed in Genesis 19:4-11.

Lot is instructed to flee to the mountains for safety.<sup>11</sup> The message the *hammalākīm* (messengers) convey to Lot is clear and unambiguous. Outside the

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<sup>6</sup>For elaborate information on this point see G. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> The use of *yōšēb beša‘ar-sedōm* in Gen 19:1, combined with the use of *yōšēbē* in Gen 19:25, 29, indicates that Lot had permanently settled in Sodom. Pasturing his herds, he reached Sodom and he built himself a house in Sodom and settled in it. See Bastiaan Jongeling, C. J. Labuschagne and Adam. S. van der Woude, trans., *Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, Semitic Study Series, 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), col. 21, 104-105.

<sup>8</sup> Often in the Bible a city is represented by its king, but in Gen 19 Sodom is represented by the mass of people who gather before the house of Lot.

<sup>9</sup> The status of the root *šht* in the Sodom story hints that it could be a heading for the whole story (Gen 18:28, 31, 32; 19:13, 14, 29). The word also occurs frequently in the flood narrative (Gen 6:11, 12, 13; 9:11).

<sup>10</sup> This phrase occurs only in 1 Sam. 2:17. The outcry is the protest to God made by others who are outraged at the Sodomites’ perverted and evil deeds.

<sup>11</sup> Mountains often symbolize protection, cover, and refuge.

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city you can be saved;<sup>12</sup> inside you will be destroyed together with its wicked inhabitants.

The verb the messenger uses for “flee” or “escape” is the Niphal imperative *himmālēt*, which comes from *mālaṭ*. It is used five times in this section (vs. 17 twice, 19, 20, and 22). The command to Lot not to look back as he flees seems to be, at the very least, in the nature of a prohibition of emotional attachment.<sup>13</sup> Safety requires total separation—both physical and emotional.

**Time Elements**

In the Sodom narrative time elements play a very important role. For example, the nuances given to the story by messengers’ coming to Abraham at noon *keḥōm hayyōm* (in the heat of the day, Gen 18:1) are absolutely different from the nuances imparted by the messengers who arrive at nightfall in Sodom. Chapter 19 not only begins with *bā’ereb* (in the evening), but it is continually punctuated by contrastive chronological notices,<sup>14</sup> which can be summarized under two general headings: (1) evening, night, darkness; and (2) dawn, sunrise, morning, light.

It is obvious that the events leading up the destruction of Sodom are linked with the temporal emphasis on night and darkness (19:1, 2, 3, 5, 33, 34). Dawn is highlighted (19:2, 15, 23, 27) only as a contrast with darkness or, simply, a period of transition from darkness to light (Gen 19:15-22).

The use of an evening/night background imbues the narrative with an evil foreboding, trepidation, anxiety, and fear. Night and violence, danger and darkness are inseparably joined together.<sup>15</sup> After Lot and the messengers have reached their destiny, all of a sudden out of darkness comes a wicked mob bent on disgusting immoral deeds.<sup>16</sup> The threatening atmosphere is enormously heightened by constant reminders that it is night—it is dark.

In contrast to this nighttime setting of the Sodomites’ threats and the events coupled with it, the narrative starts the rescue of Lot and his family from the condemned city and its destruction in daylight.

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<sup>12</sup> In both cases, the flood and the destruction of Sodom, the judgment was brought by a natural catastrophe. Here as there the salvation of a remnant is not due to merit on the part of the remaining survivors but to the grace of YHWH. The imagery of preserving life is an essential part of the future aspect of the remnant motif. Compare with Rev 14:12.

<sup>13</sup> Among the many explanations of the prohibition against looking back is the suggestion that Lot was attached to the city and looking back would show he wanted to return there. Rashi proposes: “You sinned with them but are saved through the merit of Abraham. It is not fitting that you should witness their doom while you yourself are escaping” (ad 19.17), but Ramban, following Pirke Rabbi Eliezer 25, submits that the punishment of Lot’s wife resulted from her seeing the divine presence (ad 19.17).

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 300-301.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 56-57. See also 1 Sam. 26:7-12, 30:17, 31:12; 2 Kgs 6:14, 8:21; Jer 39:4.

<sup>16</sup> The imagery of depravity turns up in one form or in another in each of the two passages being discussed here. Compare Gen 19:5, 8, 33, 35 with Rev 14:8.

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### Destruction of Sodom by Fire and Brimstone

It is not only the judicial investigation and the call to come out that contain the prototype of eschatological judgment. The destruction of Sodom by fire and brimstone also points to it. In the account concerning Sodom the destruction is clearly a punishment. As Alter points out, “this story of the doomed city is crucial not only to Genesis but to the moral thematics of the Bible as a whole...because it is the biblical version of anti-civilization, rather like Homer’s islands of the Cyclops monsters where inhabitants eat strangers instead of welcoming them.”<sup>17</sup> Such an antagonistic attitude toward the heavenly messengers at Sodom results in destruction by fire and brimstone.

The description of the burning devastation that visits both cities is so astonishing, unusual, unparalleled, and total<sup>18</sup> that later biblical accounts of destruction by fire are expected to remind the later generations of this significant obliteration.

No city is judged and destroyed by God in a more dreadful way than Sodom when fire comes down on it like burning rain, leaving no survivors. The choice of words used to depict the destruction is unique. It creates an impression of an extraordinary, shocking conflagration. Fire rains upon the cities *himeʿîr ʿal-sedôm weʿal-ʿamôrâ(h) gāp(e)rîṭ wāʿēš mēʿēṭ yehwāh min-haššāmāyîm* (Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens, Gen 19:24). A similar possible implication can be seen in the raining of thunder, hail, and fire on Egypt (Exod 9:22-24).

God sends upon the inhabitants of these destined cities ʿēš (fire) combined with *gāp(e)rîṭ* (brimstone, burning sulfur). The word *gāp(e)rîṭ* is rarely used in the Bible, occurring only on six other occasions (Deut 29:22; Job 18:15; Isa 34:9; 30:33; Ps 11:6; Ezek 38:22). Ps 11:6 and Ezek 38:22 reverse the order to ʿēš *gāp(e)rîṭ*. The rare use of the word, coupled with the fact that it serves as an especially graphic representation of the means of divine destruction, suggests that where *gāp(e)rîṭ* recurs it is reminiscent of the Sodom story in every case. The supernatural origin of the brimstone and fire, “from heaven, from God” is repeatedly emphasized, underlining its unique nature *mēʿēṭ yehwāh min-haššāmāyîm* (from YHWH out of heaven, Gen 19:24).

The destruction of Sodom is seen as prototype of eschatological divine judgment upon wicked cities, nations, or peoples with regard to its suddenness and spectacular manner, totality, and finality. There is no event in the whole of

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Alter, “Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative,” *Tikkun* 1 (1986): 30-38.

<sup>18</sup> Not only were the inhabitants of the wicked cities destroyed, but also all the plants. The destruction included even the *we šemaḥ hāʿadāmā(h)*. This is the only occurrence of this expression in the Bible, but it may be compared with the expression *wšmḥ hšdh* in Ezek 16:7, a chapter in which Sodom is also mentioned. *šmh* is a generic term for all kinds of vegetation.

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Genesis so frequently mentioned in the rest of the OT as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>19</sup>

Sodom the city, in its sin, in the images of its punishment and destruction, has become a universal symbol of rebellion, wickedness, and judgment. This narrative enshrines the nature of the fate of sinners who reject the way of YHWH (Gen 18-19), and incur the just wrath of the Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25; Rev 11:8).

### Intertextuality

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious, and the cities suffered total destruction for their wickedness (Gen 19:24-28). Accordingly, when the prophets pick up the imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah, in one way or another, they refer to the day of eschatological judgment.

For example, the condemnation of Jerusalem in Lam 4:6 emphasizes two aspects of the Sodom's destruction: 1) destruction came *suddenly* (*kemô-rāga'*, "in a moment") and 2) without human help (*welô'-ḥālû bāh yādāyîm*, "no hands laid on it"). The point made by the writer of the book seems to be that Sodom, while totally destroyed, was destroyed without any human efforts. The destruction was divinely initiated and divinely carried out.

The *totality* of destruction as divine judgment over Sodom is picked up by number of prophets and applied under various situations to the future (Isa 1:9-10; Hos 11:8; Zeph 2:9; Amos 4:11). Jeremiah employs Sodom as a prototype of destruction against Edom (Jer 49:18): *hinnē(h) ke'aryē(h) ya'ale(h) migge'ôn* (behold, as a lion coming up from the jungle). In fact, Jeremiah describes Edom's destruction in a similar way to that of Isaiah's description of the destruction of Babylon in terms of total annihilation (Isa 13:19-22).

Sodom as a prototype of the *finality* of destruction is found in Isaiah's description of the future destruction of Babylon. It is similar not only in regard to the totality of Sodom's destruction, but also similar to the finality of the destruction of Sodom (Isa 13:19-22): *kemahpēkaṭ 'elōhîm 'et-sedôm we'et-'amōrā(h)* (when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah).

The description of finality of the destruction of Sodom does not contradict the restoration promised by Ezekiel (Ezek 16:53; 47:8-12). Such total and final destruction clearly points to the fate of Babylon.

In Matthew 10:15 Jesus emphasizes that the wickedness of those who reject the message of the kingdom will be greater on the Day of Judgment than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. *En hēmēra kriseōs*, (in the day of judgment) clearly re-

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<sup>19</sup> In one way or another the following references contain allusions to the Sodom narrative: Gen 19:24; Deut 29: 22-23; Isa 1:7, 9; 13:19; 30:33; 34:9; Job 18:15; Jer 20:16; 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Ezek 16:46; 38:22; 50:53-55; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9; Lam. 4:6; Ps 11:6; Hos 11:8. NT references are found in Matt 10:15; 11:23-24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7; Rev 11:8.

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fers to the day of eschatological judgment.<sup>20</sup> Jesus strengthens His Judgment oracle by *amēn*, “verily, truly.” The final destruction will be much greater for those who have refused to accept the message of salvation. The same analogy, but mentioning Sodom only, is made later in reference to the unbelief of Capernaum (Matt 11:23-24).

Finally, the judgment upon Sodom in history has been paralleled, by its fate, to the final judgment. The saying is not designed to hold out hope for Sodom. Rather, it suggests that the present situation created by the coming of Jesus means that what is involved in rejecting his messengers and message is much more serious sin than the wickedness of Sodom.

#### Revelation 14:6-12

The structural parallels with the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative are especially intense in Revelation 14:6-12. We see, first, the parallels with the three heavenly messengers and their role.

Like Abraham, John sees three heavenly messengers: *állon ággelon* “another angel” (v. 6), *állos ággelos deuterós* “another angel, a second” (v. 8), and *állos ággelos trítos* “another angel, a third” (v. 9). Three *ággeloi* (Rev 14:6-12) form especially strong links with the LXX, where it also reads *ággeloi* (Gen 19:1, 15, 16), or, in Hebrew *hammalākīm*.

The three heavenly messengers of Rev 14:6-12 function similarly to those of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative. The theme of v. 7 is judgment, which confirms that the gospel announcement of v. 6 highlights the same message. Judgment involves an act of sorting out, and the one who does the sorting out is God, the Creator of heaven and earth (Ps 9:8; 110:5-6). This is “good news”<sup>21</sup> to the saints because it means the downfall of the ungodly system headed by the beast and ultimately Satan. The bad news is for the unrepentant who, just as in the Sodom’s narrative, do not “give God glory.”

In the vision “another angel followed” (14:8) with a declaration of judgment, which drew out more explicitly the judicial nature of the first angel’s announcement in vs. 6-7. Babylon has made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries so that they have become incapable of heeding the first angel’s declaration of the gospel.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See also Matt 11:22, 24; 12:36; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7.

<sup>21</sup> The “eternal gospel” is the final call prior to the judgment, directed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. This is a universal message. Fear God rather than the triumvirate of beasts. Give glory to him rather than to the transient glitter of culture. Worship him rather than the beast. The central issue is worship. It is similar to the summons issued by John the Baptist and by Jesus: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:1; Mark 1:14). Repent = fear God, give him glory, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand = for the hour of his judgment has come.

<sup>22</sup> The repeated verb “fallen” (*épesen*, twice) is an aorist functioning like a Hebrew prophetic perfect in expressing the future occurrence of Babylon’s fall as though it has already occurred. This futuristic use of the aorist underscores the prophetic certainty of Babylon’s future

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Like the first two, the third angel also announces judgment. He declares that if people give ultimate allegiance to the beast, they will suffer death. While the second angel pronounced a collective verdict against Babylon, the third angel warns individuals (“If anyone worships the beast...”). Worship is the issue. The punishment fits their crime.

Thus, the presence of the three heavenly messengers does not precipitate the destruction of Sodom or in this case Babylon, but it occasions the final demonstration of the depravity of the Sodomites (Babylon), which serves to vindicate the justice of God’s judgment upon it. The primary function of the three heavenly messengers is to announce and instruct.

**“Come out of her . . .”**

Intertextual parallels between the Narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah and Revelation 18 highlight another aspect of the context of the three messengers’ message.

Like the messenger in the Sodom narrative (Gen 19:17, 20, 22), the messenger (*állon ággelon*) in Rev 18:4a<sup>23</sup> summons God’s people to flee, *Exélthate ho laós mou ex autēs*.<sup>24</sup> *Exélthate*, “come out,” is the second person plural aorist imperative. The command “come out of her” is followed by the reason for the command, namely, *hína mē sugkoinōnēsēte tais hamartíais autēs, kai ek tōn plēgōn autēs hina mē labēte*. (4c, “lest you participate in her sins and in her plagues lest you share”). Babylon has become the embodiment of the sinful place, forbidden desires, and wickedness, the epitome of all evil (Rev 18). The heavenly messenger urges God’s people to separate themselves physically, emotionally, and ideologically from it (compare with Isa 48:20; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 45). In spite of the fact that the events described in the book of Revelation are global, “coming out” also involves the “space” concept. Moreover, “safety” and “space” aspects are inseparable. Separation is vitally important because association with the doomed Babylon and its followers entails total destruction.<sup>25</sup>

Other intertextual bridges involving time elements should also be noted. Rev 14:9-11 contains such terms as *hēmeras kai nuktós* (“night” and “day”), as in the Sodom narrative. However, the context here is different, namely, the

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demise. Like in Sodom’s case Babylon’s destruction is decreed. From the perspective of heaven, it is an accomplished fact.

<sup>23</sup> The message of Rev 18:2-4, which is directly related to Rev 14:8, announces the complete downfall of Babylon and calls upon God’s people who are scattered throughout Babylon to separate from it. “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great” (18:2).

<sup>24</sup> Behind *Exélthate ho laós mou ex autēs* ( stands both the Old Testament motif of the departure of the righteous from Sodom (Gen 19:12-22) and Babylon (Jer 50:8; 51:6) and the early Christian apocalyptic tradition that commands flight from Jerusalem and Judea in view of the signs of the end (Mark 13:14).

<sup>25</sup> The Christians, as citizens and members of the city of God (Rev 21:2, 10), divorce themselves from the way of living of the evil city and, against every temptation to conform to it, remain obedient only to their Lord (Rev 14:4-5).

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torment of the worshippers of the beast with fire and brimstone. The time of day matters not; the torment is continuous. According to Aune, the terms form a hendiadys meaning a twenty-four-hour day, which by extension means “without ceasing” or “without interruption.”<sup>26</sup> Another term referring to time element is *hōra* (“hour”).<sup>27</sup> Rev 14:7 gives the reason why the inhabitants of earth should worship God, *hóti ēlthen hē hōra tēs kríseōs autou* (“because the hour of his judgment has come”). The urgency of the call for repentance, conversion, and worship of God in v. 7a implies that the “day,” “time,” “hour” of God’s judgment of the world has already arrived. *He hōra tēs kríseōs* refers to the final eschatological judgment.<sup>28</sup> The “hour of his judgment” has a beginning and end. In Rev 18:10 the kings of the earth are shocked at the sudden fall of Babylon: *hoti mia hōra ēlthen he krísis sou* (“in one hour your judgment came”).

### Destruction of Babylon by Fire and Brimstone

The major intertextual bridge between the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative and Babylon of Revelation is demonstrated in the destruction of Babylon by fire and brimstone.

The “destruction by fire and brimstone” motif is vividly described in Rev 14:9-11. When the third heavenly messenger (*állos ággelos trítos*) appears in the vision (Rev 14:9), like the first two, he also announces eschatological judgment. He declares that if people give ultimate allegiance to the beast, they will suffer a much worse death than that which the false prophet decreed for believers (Rev 13:15).

Very strong language is used in Rev 14:11: *Kaì ho kapròs tou basanismou autōn eís aiōnas aiōnon anabaínei* (“And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever”). According to Beale, this expression describes “eternal torment and suffering.”<sup>29</sup> However, the compound phrase, *eís aiōnas aiōnōn*, literally means “unto the ages of the ages,”<sup>30</sup> and the term *aiōnios* (“age lasting”) expresses permanence or perpetuity within limits.<sup>31</sup> The duration signified by the term *aiōnios* must, in each case, be determined by the nature of the person or

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<sup>26</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 302. See also Rev 4:8; 7:15; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10.

<sup>27</sup> “Hour” or “time,” not a literal hour. Compare this use of “hour” in John 4:21; 23; 5:25, 28; Rev 14:15. The phrase “hour of his judgment” is referring to the general time when the judgment takes place.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 751-753. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*. Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 827-828. See also Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:845-849.

<sup>29</sup> Beale uses this text as one of many to prove “a real, ongoing, eternal, conscious torment.” See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 763.

<sup>30</sup> Compare with Matt 18:8; 19:16, 29; 21:19; 25:41, 46; Mark 3:29; Luke 1:33, 55; Rom 1:25; 11:36.

<sup>31</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-1957), 5: 513.

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thing it describes.<sup>32</sup> We note in particular that the fire that annihilated Sodom and Gomorrah completed its work. When all that could be burned up had been burned up the fire went out. That fire has long since ceased to burn, but its effect will continue throughout eternity. It is in this sense that these cities were destroyed by “eternal fire” (2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7). Thus, the figure *eis aiōnas aiōnōn in tēis chase* in this case denotes complete and final destruction (Mal 4:1).

As it was emphasized earlier, usually the expression *gāp̄(e)rīt wā’ēš* refers to the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative. Therefore, there is a high degree of probability that the context in the book of Revelation in which Greek translation of these terms is employed (*theon*, “sulphurous,” and *pur*, “fire,” Rev 9:17) will also be allusive to Sodom: “...fire, smoke and brimstone” (*pur kai kapnōs kai theion*), “...fire, smoke, and brimstone” (*ek tou purōs kai tou kaprou kai tou theiou*, Rev 9:17-19), “burning brimstone” (*pur kai théō*, Rev 14:9-10), “the fiery lake of burning brimstone” (*tēn límnēn tou purōs tēs kaloménēs en theiō*, Rev 19:20), “the lake of burning brimstone” (*tēn límnēn tou purōs kai theiou*, Rev 20:10), “the fiery lake of burning brimstone” (*en tē límnē tē kaiménē puri kai theiō*, Rev 21:8).

Thus, the theme of future divine punishment was best described in terms of the most spectacular destruction of all time, namely, the total annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah by a deluge of fire and brimstone. The situation of Lot and his family is typical of the situation of Christians living in the final evil days before the Parousia.

Finally, the Sodom narrative serves as an archetype of wickedness and prototype of eschatological judgment which transcend historical reality and provides a tool to prefigure the depth of sin into which the peoples had sunk and the severity of the punishment they would receive.

Two related passages containing the Sodom and Gomorrah imagery are Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6. In both cases the context speaks about false teachers. However, in both texts outrageous sexual lust is a major issue, and in both cases it is related to the Sodomites.

2 Peter 2:6 reminds us, *kai póleis Sodómōn kai Gomórras tephōsas [katas-trophē] katékrinen hupodeigma mellóntōn asebé[s] in tepheikōs* (“he reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes and condemned them to extinction. Making them an example of what is going to happen with the ungodly”). *Hupodeigma* means a “warning example,” “copy,” “image.”

Jude 7 contains the term *deigma* (“That which is shown,” “proof,” “example”). Both texts serve as prototypes of an eschatological judgment. Undoubt-

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<sup>32</sup> In the New Testament *aiōnios* is used to describe both the fate of the wicked and the future state of righteous. Accordingly, the reward of the righteous is life to which there is no end, and the reward of the wicked is death forever (John 3:16; Rom 6:23). In 2 Thess 1:9 the wicked are said to be “punished with everlasting destruction.” The expression does not signify a “process” that goes on forever, but an act whose “results” are permanent.

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edly the author sees the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire as a pattern for the fiery judgment of the ungodly at the *Parousia* (2 Pet 3:12).<sup>33</sup>

In summary, Sodom, in its sin, in the images of its judicial investigation, in the coming out of a remnant, and in the destruction of the city by fire and brimstone, has become a universal symbol of rebellion against the Judge of all the earth, of wickedness, of judgment, and of salvation of the remnant.

The study of intertextuality shows that when the prophets pick up the imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah, in one way or another they refer to the day of eschatological judgment. However, Sodom as a prototype of the suddenness, totality, and finality of destruction is best seen and understood and reaches its eschatological expression and climax in Rev 14:6-12.

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<sup>33</sup> Jude 7 speaks about "the neighboring towns." Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, but Zoar was spared the judgment (Gen 19:20-22).