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HOPE FOR THE SODOMITES

– *MARCH 9. – GENESIS 19:12-17,23-29. –*

"Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing." – 2 Corinthians 6:17. (R.V.)

WHEN ABRAHAM was ninety-nine years old – about the year 1900 B.C. – his encampment was at Hebron. There the Lord and two angels appeared to him as men. He knew them not, but entertained them, and they did eat and talk with Abraham. St. Paul, noting this, urges that the Lord's people should be hospitable to strangers, and reminds us of how Abraham entertained angels unawares. – Hebrews 13:2.

The one in this case called the Lord was doubtless the [R5179 : page 44] Logos, chief Messenger of Jehovah, who subsequently was made flesh that He might be man's Redeemer and Restorer. The Lord on this occasion told Abraham that Ishmael would not be the heir of the Promise, but that very shortly Sarah would have a son, notwithstanding her advanced age. Isaac was born the next year.

It was as Abraham walked with his angelic visitors a little distance that he learned who they really were, and that the destruction of Sodom was imminent. Nobly and generously the heir of the Promises petitioned God's Mercy on the Sodomites, to spare them from destruction if there were fifty, forty, twenty or even ten amongst them doing as well as they knew how. The Lord gave assurance that if there were ten in the city thus righteous it would be spared.

THE WICKEDNESS OF SODOM GREAT

God's policy has been to allow mankind during this reign of sin and death to try their hand at self-government, etc. He has interferred to cut off with destruction only those whose iniquity became very

pronounced and whose fond enjoyment of life's privileges would be injurious to themselves and others. Thus of the Sodomites and the antediluvians God made illustrations of the great lesson, "All the wicked will He destroy."

We are to remember, however, that these are not illustrations of eternal torment, but illustrations of destruction. We are to remember, also, that these merely passed into destruction a few years sooner than they would ordinarily have done. We are to remember, further, that the death sentence was upon all of Adam's race from the time when he was cast out of Eden.

We are to remember, further, that Christ Jesus, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man; and that in Him all the families of the earth will be blessed. This means that all of Adam's children, under the reign of sin and death and the weaknesses of heredity, will eventually come forth from the tomb through the merit of Christ's sacrifice. And that sacrifice included the Sodomites as truly as it includes any of us, as this lesson will show.

"AND DELIVERED RIGHTEOUS LOT"

The Apostle Peter informs us that Lot was not in sympathy with the evils of Sodom, in the midst of which he lived. (2 Peter 2:7,8.) His family apparently had been all girls. These, except two, had intermarried with the Sodomites. Quite possibly it was the thought of marrying the daughters to prosperous husbands that, under the guidance of the mother, induced the family to settle in Sodom. How many others like Lot and his wife have made the serious mistake of claiming more for the physical and temporal interests of their families than for their intellectual and moral welfare! The story of the flight of Lot, his wife and two unmarried daughters is simply told in our lesson.

Geologists declare that the region of the Dead Sea, the former site of Sodom and Gomorrah, was a gas and oil and asphalt deposit,

with a deep crevice which led down to subterranean fires; and that the connection established between these by an earthquake or by a lightning bolt would have resulted in the manner described as the experiences of Sodom. The gas, throwing burning oil and asphalt into the air, would have produced a rain of fire and brimstone – a death-dealing terror. But had there been no such reservoir of inflammables, the Lord would have been quite able to accomplish the same results by other means, or in such a case perhaps accomplished the destruction in another way.

The intimation of the 29th verse is that God's Mercy toward Lot was because of his relationship to Abraham. This view is consistent with all the Bible statements. Adam's entire race was condemned to death because of his disobedience. Hence Divine Justice owed nothing to any of them. Divine Mercy entered into a special Covenant of favor with Abraham, after he had demonstrated his faith, loyalty and obedience; but the Covenant did not extend to any others except to his seed. There was therefore no reason why Lot should be considered more than others except as stated – that God would show favor to him because of his relationship to Abraham.

"THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY"

This does not signify that God is merciless to our race, but merely that, having provided a way, or channel, through which He will exercise His Mercy, He will but rarely exercise it outside of that foreordained channel.

The channel of all of God's Mercy is Christ Jesus, who declared, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Of Him also St. Peter said, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under Heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.) Since no one could be saved except through Jesus, it follows that no one was saved before Jesus came. To some this may at first seem astounding, until they **[R5179 : page**

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In proof of this, note St. Paul's words respecting the salvation which God has sent to mankind through Jesus. He says, "Which salvation began to be preached by our Lord and was confirmed unto us by those who heard Him." (Hebrews 2:3.) Again, we read that Jesus "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." – 2 Timothy 1:10.

Abraham and all the Hebrews had the intimation of coming blessing through the promises made to Abraham; but an intimation is one thing, and the blessing itself another. The Promise said that the people's blessing would come through Abraham's Seed. (Galatians 3:16,29.) Hence it could not come before. We should rid our minds of the thought that Abraham, Moses, David and others of the holy ones of the past went to Heaven, and the remainder of mankind to eternal torture. The Bible most distinctly declares that the ancients, good and bad, were gathered to their fathers and slept with their fathers. They are sleeping still, waiting for the time when Abraham's Seed will be complete, and will set up God's Kingdom in the earth, overthrow all the powers of sin and death, and deliver all the captives from the prison-house of the tomb.

THE FIRST, OR CHIEF RESURRECTION

The First Resurrection began with our Lord Jesus and is not yet completed, because all of the faithful Elect Bride class are called to share in His sacrificial death, and to share also in His glorious Resurrection to the Divine nature. All sharing in that First Resurrection, the Bible declares, will reign with Christ a thousand years, and as the Seed of Abraham, fully empowered, will bless all those redeemed by the precious blood of Calvary. – Rev. 20:4.

St. Paul emphasizes this point in Hebrews 11:38-40, declaring that, while Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the holy ones of the past

received indications of God's favor, nevertheless that favor can come only through Christ. Consequently they cannot reach perfection in the flesh and everlasting life until the Body of Christ, the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, shall be completed – "that they, without us, should not be made perfect." Jesus also attested that the Ancient Worthies had not gone to Heaven, saying, "No man hath ascended up to Heaven." (John 3:13.) St. Peter specializes in the Prophet David's case, and declares, "David is not ascended into the Heavens." – Acts 2:34.

HOPE FOR THE SODOMITES

The hope for the Sodomites is exactly the same as the hope for all the remainder of Adam's race, except a few who, during this Gospel Age, have come into relationship with Christ as members of the Spiritual Seed. The hope of all the world is the Messianic Kingdom, and the deliverance from the power of sin and death which it will effect. With the setting up of that Kingdom the work of salvation will begin, so far as the world is concerned, for the salvation of the Church to a Heavenly condition is a separate salvation from that which God has provided for the world in general. The sacrifice at Calvary, however, is one sacrifice for all – the basis of all our hopes. We were all condemned to death through Adam; and justification to life can come to none except through the Redeemer.

Jesus tells us that it will be more tolerable for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment (the thousand years of His Messianic reign) than for the people of His day who heard His Message and rejected it – the people of Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin. (Matthew 11:20-24.) It will not be intolerable for the people who rejected Jesus; but it will be more tolerable, the Master said, for the Sodomites, because, He explains, "If the mighty works had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented," and would not have been overwhelmed.

This shows us clearly that the eternal fate of the Sodomites is not sealed. When we turn to the Word of the Lord through Ezekiel the Prophet, 16:46-63, we have abundant testimony that the Sodomites will not only be awakened from the sleep of death, but when awakened will be brought to a knowledge of God and to an opportunity of obtaining everlasting life, through The Messiah, by willing obedience.

