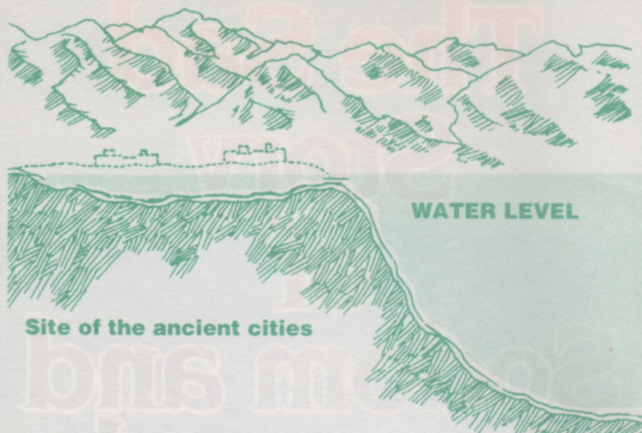


# The Sad Story of Sodom and Gomorrah

and the divine message  
of hope and salvation.

*"The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained  
fire and brimstone from heaven, and  
destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day  
when the Son of man is revealed" — Luke 17:29-30.*



**W**HAT is now the shallow bottom at the southern end of the Dead Sea was once the fertile valley of Siddim, where Sodom and Gomorrah were situated. Today, dead trees encrusted with thick layers of salt rise from the shallows, and at the great salt mountain at the southern end of the Sea one may still see formations reminiscent of the pillar of salt that Lot's wife became when she turned to look back at the city. But the lessons to be learned from this incident have a personal application to people desiring to escape from the impending judgment that overshadows this present generation. Learn of the circumstances that occurred 3,500 years ago, and of the warning that it provides for a civilisation that is repeating the same sad story. This booklet can give you hope and lead you to the only means of salvation. Please read it carefully, — then hand it on to your friends.

### **HERALD OF THE COMING AGE**

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# **The Sad Story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the divine message of hope and salvation.**

**T**HE terrible catastrophe that overwhelmed the historic cities of Sodom and Gomorrah nearly four thousand years ago, conveys a compelling warning to today's civilisation. The Lord Jesus Christ forecast a repetition of the shocking social crimes of Sodom. He claimed that at the epoch of his return to earth, the same crimes would be in evidence, incurring once again the wrath of Almighty God. Such a great judgment upon the world would be necessary to purge away the iniquities which would be so strongly and openly practised in that day. The fact that in these present evil times "sodomy" is not only accepted, but is endorsed by many church leaders, should warn concerned people that divine judgment is impending. The Bible declares that God will not be mocked, and that "whatsoever a man soweth, that he shall also reap" (Galatians 6:7). At the same time, if we are willing to learn the lessons from the dreadful fate of Sodom, we will discover that there is a way to salvation. Despite the wickedness of these days, God offers a wonderful hope for people who are prepared to follow the example of faithful men such as Abraham and Lot. An understanding of the dramatic story of Sodom and Gomorrah may open a way of understanding, which could lead the reader to an eternal inheritance in God's coming kingdom on earth.

Cover Illustration: Photo by E. Hubbard of the stark and sterile Dead Sea site of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. Taken from the western shore near Masada.

**T**HE people of Sodom and Gomorrah lived in luxurious self-indulgence. Vice and immorality was an accepted way of life, without any regard or respect for God or His ways. But it all came to a dramatic end. The inhabitants of these cities were destroyed, with the exception of only three people.

The Biblical record concerning the destruction of Sodom is found in Genesis ch. 19. However, it does not merely record an incident of Biblical history. The disaster of Sodom and Gomorrah is a geological fact, and references to it have become everyday expressions synonymous with evil and gross immorality.

The circumstances surrounding the divine judgment upon Sodom are recorded in graphic detail in the Old Testament, and are also mentioned later by Jesus Christ, and in the writings of Paul, Peter and Jude. They all draw lessons from this event, and taught that God is not prepared to forever tolerate the wickedness that man has perpetrated upon the earth.

Jesus Christ prophesied that at his second coming humanity would be intent upon "destroying the earth" (Revelation 11:18), and his words are being fulfilled by policies which corrupt the earth, morally, environmentally and politically.

#### Conditions in the World Today are Like Those of Sodom

The word *Sodom* now stands as a symbol for widespread behaviour seen in a way of life which knows no moral restraint or spiritual values. Blatant, evil works are an affront to God's dignity and righteousness. The corrupting influence of the Sodomite spirit is permeating into almost every avenue of society. Divine judgment must inevitably follow in due time.

These destructive influences at work are not limited to moral issues which resulted in the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Many voices are now being raised against the irresponsible treatment and physical abuse which is being meted out against a suffering environment. In a special issue of *Time* magazine entitled "*Endangered Earth*" the writers commented: "How long (the earth) endures and the quality of life it can support does not depend alone on the immutable law of physics. For man has reached a point in his evolution where he has the power to affect, for better or worse, *the present and future state of the planet...* The reason is not so much the sheer numbers, though



40,000 babies die of starvation each day in the third world countries, but *the reckless way in which humanity has treated its planetary host*".

We should be warned. God's judgment, as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, are soon to be unleashed upon a thoughtless, unsuspecting, godless world. Then, God will remove forever those who uncaringly "destroy" and "corrupt" His earth.

#### **The Voice of Hope in a Despairing Age**

The signs are clear and ominous. This generation is headed for disaster in many different ways. It is therefore encouraging to know that God is deeply concerned about the future well-being of His earth. He offers hope to those who are distressed at declining moral and spiritual values, and the increasing rape of the earth as a result of greed and indifference.

The Bible reveals God's purpose with the earth; it can give us peace of mind for the present and a glorious and satisfying hope for the future. It contains the promise that God will send His Son back to this earth, to bring "times of refreshing" (Acts 3:19-21) to this perishing civilisation. Christ will introduce a New World Order, resulting in the rejuvenation of the earth itself, and humanity which depends upon it for existence.

#### **A Second Great Catastrophe in Human History**

Because of the great wickedness of mankind, the catastrophic flood which occurred in the days of Noah resulted in the destruction of all human life, save only for eight people.

However, the new environment into which Noah and his family emerged after the flood did not continue indefinitely. In fact, the destruction of Sodom, because of its terrible wickedness, took place only four hundred years later. Mankind has a natural inclination to reject divine commandments in favor of exercising their own will, irrespective of God's wise counsel. Man prefers an independence which absolves him — in his own eyes — from any responsibility to God. It is this attitude, unrestrained by God's guiding Word, which has resulted in ever-increasing problems for humanity. So complex are the worldwide difficulties facing the nations, that they appear to be unsolvable.

So many ask: "Why doesn't God do something about it? Why does He not intervene in human affairs to correct the dreadful and frightening conditions which exist upon the earth?"

The Bible answers these three questions. It tells us that God

will intervene by sending His Son back to the earth to restore that which has been lost, and to provide solutions for all the perplexing problems facing humanity. In addition, He will bring true enlightenment and understanding to the nations so that they will learn the truth about God and His purpose, and come to depend upon Him. God created this earth in the very beginning that it might reflect to His glory, and this purpose will soon be fulfilled through the work of His exalted Son (Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). He has consistently pleaded that men and women should become educated in righteousness; developing godly, wholesome and peaceful ways toward Him and each other. His appeal is that people should turn from their own designs and seek eternal salvation which is only found through the means which God has provided. For example, during a period of great wickedness within the nation of Israel, God reminded them that He desired to see them reveal a repentant attitude: "Since the days that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all My servants the prophets, *daily rising up early and sending them*: Yet they hearkened not unto Me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers" (Jeremiah 7:25-26). Without the discipline of God's Word, mankind — like the nation of Israel — continues to deviate from the standards of the righteousness He requires. They do "worse than their fathers".

Such an attitude is evident today. The collapse of moral and spiritual standards this century has been unparalleled since the days of Noah and Lot. A mere fifty years ago, public endorsement of vile and immoral practices would have been unthinkable. Such activities as homosexuality, abortion, sexual relationships outside of marriage, would not have been subjects for public discussion, let alone approval. Today, every form of vice and perversion, whether through the print or film media, theatre or other public venues, is readily available; in many cases even endorsed by the law of the land. Ungodly practices between "consenting adults" together with other forms of depravity are accepted in the community as an "alternate lifestyle".

But concerned men and women can escape from all this. "God is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Peter 3:9). God calls

upon men and women to repent, and to seek His saving grace (Matthew 7:7-8; Ephesians 2:8). Apart from such an offer, mankind is bereft of any hope for a life beyond the grave (Acts 4:12; 10:34-35).

That principle is dramatically illustrated in the divine judgment that completely destroyed Sodom 3,500 years ago.

#### Lot Makes a Foolish Choice

Lot was Abraham's nephew. He had travelled with his uncle from their original home in Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:27-31). In response to a summons received from God, they had travelled north to Haran, then south into the land of Canaan (part of which is today known as modern Israel). Both men had acquired large flocks and herds. Unfortunately, strife occurred between the two groups of herdsmen, and it was decided that they should separate. Abraham offered Lot a choice. He could move to whichever part of the land he chose. This was a testing time for Lot. Had he exercised wisdom, he would have remained in close proximity to his uncle, Abraham — for Abraham, whose wisdom and guidance would have been of great benefit to Lot (Genesis 13:7-11), was a man with great faith in God.

Lot made a hapless decision: "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere". It appeared to Lot to be a pleasant and profitable choice. He would have gained the best pasture land; and perhaps this necessity influenced his choice — but he should have considered other more important aspects of the problem.

The record continues: "Lot *dwelled* in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent *toward* Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (vv. 12-13). Lot's priorities were out of order. He had become naive, deluding himself into believing that he could involve himself in such a wicked environment without harm. How wrong he proved to be! He was *drawn toward* an evil and ungodly situation, which proved disastrous. Conversely, we must be prepared to separate from all influences which could draw us away from God, that we might dedicate our lives to Him (2Corinthians 6:14-18).

Note the graphic language which describes the deterioration in Lot's position: "He beheld... chose... journeyed... separated... dwelt... pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:10-12). Before long he found himself actually *dwelling in* Sodom (ch. 14:12).

Sodom was known for its easy and comfortable way of life; its fleshly indulgences; and especially the immoral deviations which had become the hallmark of life in that dreadful city. Having made his abode within Sodom, Lot was subjected to many forms of pressure. He would have been wise to have withdrawn himself from that place whilst there had still been some hope for his family and companions. He failed to do so.

#### The Wise Choice of a Man of Faith

Lot's choice was a marked contrast to that made by Abraham. Having earlier turned his back on Ur of the Chaldees, a land of idolatry, Abraham had followed God's counsel and separated himself with his family, from the ungodly ways of an evil world. He did not delight in cities which were monuments to man's pride, greed and pleasure. As a man of faith "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). This is a city of the future, to be built according to God's design and purpose. It will be an edifice more majestic than the world has ever seen: a "house of prayer for all people", a magnificent building to be erected on the site of Jerusalem (Isaiah 56:7; 2:2-3; compare Jeremiah 31:38-40 and Ezekiel chs. 40-48).

Because Abraham was willing to look beyond the immediate present — which could only offer him transitory satisfaction — he dedicated his life in service to God, knowing that he could obtain an *eternal* reward. He elevated God to the centre of his life; therefore God made a great and wonderful promise to Abraham: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Genesis 13:14-15).

God did not promise Abraham that his life would be easier because of this covenant. Nor was Abraham promised a place in heaven. He was assured of an eternal inheritance upon the earth, for God would raise him from the dead to fulfil this promise (see Hebrews 11:8,13,39,40). This promise will be fulfilled at the second coming of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:1-2; 1Corinthians 15:1-23).

But what of our choice? It should be one of obedience to God, as was Abraham's. We can claim to "walk with Abraham" when we study God's Word, discover what faith in God really means, and then set our course in life to follow the moral princi-



ples which God requires of us. By this means we will recognise the evil environment of the world about us, and repudiate such influences in favor of the wise teaching and guidance found in God's Word. At times it might not be easy to follow this path. But was it easy for Abraham? Was life easy for God's Son, Jesus Christ? Yet consider the ultimate reward, for "we must through much tribulation (literally, *pressure*) enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

#### Promised Relief for the World

God will do everything possible to ensure our eternal salvation. At the same time, He must maintain His total integrity and justness. He will not tolerate a stubborn, rebellious attitude, as manifested in the life of an unrepentant, unchanging sinner. God warned Israel: "I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of *them that hate Me*, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that *love Me and keep My commandments*" (Deuteronomy 5:9-10). Although God is a God of love, He is also a God of judgment: "Behold therefore the *goodness and severity of God*" (Romans 11:22).

The people of Sodom delighted in vice and depravity, and God was utterly revolted by their conduct and philosophy of life. Lot, who "went down into" this evil city found himself under tremendous personal strain: he heard the blasphemous, flagrantly gross language of the people; he saw iniquitous practices on every hand; he experienced the distressing pressures of the perversions which were everywhere evident.

The Bible describes his unhappy state: "For that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, *vexed* his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2Peter 2:8 — the Greek word rendered "*vexed*" means to be afflicted with pain). He could not avoid their odious presence, nor close his eyes to their loathsome activities. He constantly urged them to desist from the evil of their ways; but to no avail. Even members of his own family were affected by the immorality of Sodom. So perverted were the people that they were incapable of responding to Lot's warnings. His appeals remained unheeded.

Therefore God took action for He could no longer tolerate such a society. He buried Sodom, with all its iniquity, under a stratum of rubble, destroying the city with fire and brimstone:

"Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Genesis 19:24-25).

#### **Righteous Judgments to Rid the World of Evil**

God's judgments are thorough, and should be respected. At Christ's return, He will unleash divine judgment upon today's society which, like Sodom and Gomorrah, rejects His Word and His ways. Paul warned that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire *taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2Thessalonians 1:7-9).

When God's judgments are implemented at the return of Jesus Christ, they will not be administered without justification (Psalm 82:8; Acts 17:31). The prophet Isaiah declared: "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (ch. 26:9). When all nations have been brought into subjection to His will, a "time of refreshing" will become a reality, both for the earth, and for its surviving inhabitants (Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:10). It will be a time of release and reward for all who have understood God's true message to mankind, and who, like Abraham, have dedicated their lives to honouring God and walking in His ways.

#### **God Offers Opportunity for Salvation**

He has always provided every opportunity for mankind to seek the knowledge of His Word. His mercy is evident even in the circumstances which resulted in the destruction of Sodom.

God informed Abraham of His intention to destroy the city. Abraham pleaded with God: Would He destroy the city if fifty righteous people could be found within Sodom? God replied that He would not. Abraham besought God again: If there were only ten worthy individuals in the city, would He destroy it? Again, God responded in the negative (Genesis 18:23-32). Although it is obvious that Lot had journeyed down to Sodom with a comparatively large contingent of men, women and children, it is sadly evident from God's reply to Abraham's final question that not even ten people had remained faithful. Had there been a few, as God indicated to Abraham, He would have withheld His hand of judgment.

It was a sad moment for Abraham. He realised that many who had once shared his association and faith had been so affected by the pressure of their evil environment that they had capitulated and lost their faith. God knew that unless He brought judgment against Sodom and the other cities of the plain, such blatant wickedness as they practised and fostered, would spread further afield. Evil is like the power of leaven: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1Corinthians 5:6).

#### **Wicked Cities Destroyed, but Evil Influence Continues**

Sodom and her sister-cities of the plain were doomed. There was no reason to save them, and God sent His angels to destroy them. Having visited Abraham to inform him of their intention, two of the angels then approached Lot in Sodom. They told him that the city was to be destroyed.

But while they were in Lot's house, "the men of Sodom compassed the house round, both old and young, all the men from every quarter; and they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to you this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may *know* them" (Genesis 19:4-5 — the word rendered "know" is often used to denote sexual relations, lawful or illicit. See also Genesis 4:1; 19:8; Numbers 31:17,35; Judges 11:39; 21:11; 1Kings 1:4). God has retained this record in Scripture to verify the depravity which existed in Sodom. Such revolting behaviour was, and is, abhorrent to God. And He destroyed them all. Only Lot and two of his daughters escaped the wrath of God's judgment.

The way of life which resulted in the extinction of Sodom is now spread widely throughout the earth. Immorality of the vilest sort has become commonplace. People no longer appear to be shocked by such conduct. In many places, sodomy and lesbianism are considered to be normal and legitimate forms of behaviour.

In such circumstances some are concerned for the future well-being of their children and future generations. They feel unable to change the course of events which indicate the impending disintegration of civilisation.

However, the God of all creation abhors and rejects such wickedness, and will not forever tolerate the repudiation and perversion of His laws (Leviticus 20:13; 18:22; Deuteronomy 23:17; Romans 1:22-28).

### **Has It Always Been Like This?**

Let the Lord Jesus answer this question. He stated that at the epoch of his second coming, the world would be engulfed in a destructive and immoral environment such as existed in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-30). These present degenerate and wicked times parallel those far off days when God intervened in human affairs to destroy civilisation by a flood, and to annihilate Sodom and the cities of the plains.

Most people today, like Lot then, choose a way of life which they assume will bring comfort, luxury, pleasure and contentment. Generally they are deluded, failing to find real happiness through these things. Families are disintegrating; discontent is evident on every hand; people lack wise direction and guidance; true moral and ethical foundations have been largely discarded in the pursuit of humanistic ideals. And people are fearful. In most cities, as in the days of Sodom, it is dangerous to walk on the streets, especially after dark. People live in fear of violence. In large cities, multiple murders occur overnight.

Yet for all this, the world is not bereft of hope.

### **A Saving Hand is Still Extended**

God is willing to assist people to find Him. In the days of Sodom, He reached out to save Lot: "while Lot lingered, the men (angels) laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth and set him without the city" (Genesis 19:16).

That same saving hand is today found in the pages of God's inspired Word. It shows the means by which we can change our way of life to become a follower of Christ. There is nothing more worthwhile in life, and the benefits will be eternal. Those who accept God's invitation to associate with His Son will be given the great honor of assisting Jesus Christ at his return, to completely change the way of life upon earth, ridding society of all that is evil, detestable and God-dishonoring.

However, it is necessary to prepare today for Christ's coming. This requires a sound knowledge and belief of the true gospel followed by a commitment and vow of obedience in baptism. These steps will set you upon a path whereby your character can be developed upon the great example of God's own Son (Acts 8:12,27-39; John 14:14; 15:14; Matthew 6:33).

Christ's followers may not be exempt from the trials and dif-



ficulties of life, but their expectations are in the joy that lies before them: "If we suffer, we shall also *reign with him*" (2Timothy 2:12).

#### Further Biblical Warnings for Wise People

Many passages draw upon lessons to be learned from the catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah. We should note their grave warnings, given for every generation:

- Isaiah 3:9 — "*They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not*". The prophet indicates that the inhabitants of Sodom felt neither shame nor embarrassment at the evil in which they so openly indulged. Instead, they blatantly boasted in their immorality. Such "alternate life-styles" are today given wide exposure and publicity in the news media.

- Jeremiah 23:14 — "*I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto Me as Sodom*". Not only did people vaunt their sinful practices, they openly supported those who committed perversions and ungodly actions.

- Ezekiel 16:49 — "*Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy*". Human pride dispenses with God and removes all need of Him. Luxurious, easy living caters for the wants and desires of sin-prone human nature. "Idleness" leads to uncontrolled exercise of the human mind which becomes a fertile breeding ground for devious thoughts.

- Luke 17:28 — "*Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded*". Life in Sodom was not measured in terms of holiness or righteous living, but by materialism, possessions or covetousness. Life revolved around self-indulgence and self-gratification. God was not present in their thoughts.

- 2Peter 2:6 — "*Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly*". The people of Sodom had no redeeming features in their life-style. What can be gained today from following a way of life which God considered fit only to be turned into "ashes"? The warning is clear: all who continue to manifest such a way of life will

receive the same reward: eternal death.

• Jude v. 7 — *“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh (every form of sexual perversion was practiced: see Romans 1:27) are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”*. Paul makes it clear that “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). Flagrant rejection of God’s will must inevitably lead to eternal destruction.

#### **The Environment of Sodom**

Deep in the earth, below Sodom and the cities of the plain, were deposits of the various substances which would be the means of their destruction. Oil, bituminous materials, sulphurous matter and gasses, were ignited. The entire plain was shaken by a mighty eruption. Fire and brimstone were forced out of the earth. Soaring high into the air, rocks of all sizes, together with other stratified matter, rained down upon the cities, pulverizing them into oblivion as they sank beneath the inrushing waters from the Dead Sea. Flames and gasses choked and suffocated all who may have survived the onslaught from the sky. “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24).

Geological research conducted in the area fully endorse the Biblical account of Sodom and her sister-cities.

Archaeological sources have stated: “A careful examination of the literary, geological and archaeological evidence leads to the conclusion that the cities of the plain lie in the area which is now submerged beneath the slowly rising waters of the Dead Sea, and that their destruction came about through a great earthquake which was probably accompanied by explosions, lightning, and issue of natural gas and general conflagration”.

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, mentions the “Lake of Asphalt”; and Greek writers commented on the presence of poisonous gasses which were reported as rising from all parts of the sea. In classical and New Testament times the ruins of Sodom were still visible, not yet being covered by the waters of the Dead Sea (Tacitus, *History* V:7; Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* IV, ch. VIII, section 4).

The Dead Sea remained somewhat of a mystery until geologist W. F. Lynch commenced an expedition in 1848 to examine

the Sea. He found the source of the Sea in the snows of Mt. Hermon, and, following the Jordan River down to the Dead Sea, was amazed to find a descent from 520 metres at the source to minus 393 below sea level at the mouth of the Dead Sea in just over 190 km. For 22 days the American expedition investigated the Dead Sea. They tested the water and took numerous soundings. For the first time the world learned that the Dead Sea had, in earlier times, reached a depth in excess of 390 metres. The bottom of the Sea had therefore originally been nearly 800 metres below the level of the Mediterranean.

Archaeologists later began their quest for the vanished cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It has now been established that these cities were situated in the Vale of Siddim, and that this area, now covered by water, was at the southern end of the Dead Sea. (Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, p. 133).

The southern end of the Dead Sea is harsh and desolate. Landscapes and mountains grow stark and forbidding, hills stand silent and deserted, their scarred and ragged slopes stained with salt. Everywhere there is salt. The unparalleled disaster which once took place here, has left an indelible and lasting mark. Along the southern shoreline, blocks of salt rise from the shallow surface in odd, distorted shapes; further along there are salt encrusted tree stumps. The traveller walks upon a carpet of salt.

The "Dead Sea" is aptly named. It is utterly lifeless. The slow accumulation of minerals carried southward by the Jordan have made its water twenty times saltier than the Mediterranean; salty enough to force even a non-swimmer to float effortlessly on its surface. The Sea is rich in mineral content — in both volume and worth. Estimates claim 22 billion tonnes of magnesium chloride, 12 billion of common salt, 6 billion of calcium chloride, 1 billion of magnesium bromide, plus significant quantities of sulphates, calcium, cobalt, lithium, rubidium and manganese.

The exploitation of these natural resources is of prime consideration on the western shore. Close to the spot where God rained fire and brimstone on Sodom, mining and industrial technology is at work, extracting the riches from the Sea. The area where the cities of the plain once flourished is now covered by a glittering mineral flat, criss-crossed with an intricate system of dykes and evaporation pans.

### Lessons From the Dead Sea

There are two seas in Israel.

In the north there is the Sea of Galilee: fresh, alive, prolific with fish and other forms of sea life. Splashes of color from prolific trees and shrubs adorn its banks. Its refreshing waters satisfy the thirst of many forms of plant and animal life. It is vital to the well-being of the people of Israel. Children play happily along its shores, where, nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth walked and conversed with the people. He was drawn to this area as a place for peaceful and quiet meditation.

But the Dead Sea contains no life. No fish are to be found swimming there; the rich verdure found in the north is lacking; its waters cannot satisfy the thirst of any creature or plant life. It has nothing to offer. It appears to be identifiable only with death.

Why is there such a contrast between these two seas?

The Sea of Galilee is a living sea, fed by the fresh waters of the Jordan from the snows of Mt. Hermon in the north. The waters continue onward into the river at the Sea's southern extremity.

But the Dead Sea is quite different. The Jordan flows into the Dead Sea and goes no further. The living water of Jordan enters the Dead Sea, and becomes dead! Whilst the Sea of Galilee symbolises *life*, the Dead Sea, with countless numbers of dead buried beneath it, typifies *death*. To this day, the Dead Sea remains a stark testimony to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah — cities whose people were judged worthy of death because of their vices, immorality, greed and corruption.

We are unwise to ignore the lessons God is endeavoring to teach us in these matters. We are wise to develop a reverential respect for God's Word which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). We must therefore come to understand the saving message of divine truth found in His Word. These are matters of eternal life or eternal death.

The Lord Jesus pressed home this lesson in a very simple, yet dramatic, statement: "**Remember Lot's wife**" (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife left the city of Sodom with her husband, but instead of turning her back on that evil place once and for all, she had second thoughts. She stopped, and turned to gaze back towards the city. It was as though she was of two minds, and could not commit herself to do that which was right. She hesitated too



long, and "became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26). She was caught in the choking sulphurous gasses which settled upon the plain. She was covered in the volcanic salt which rained down from the sky.

So Christ taught: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33). He teaches that if we set our hearts and ambitions upon the materialism and self-gratification which this world offers, we cannot hope to please God. On the other hand, if we repudiate the wickedness and humanistic philosophies which are so prevalent today, and dedicate our lives in obedient service to God, we live in hope of gaining eternal salvation at Christ's second coming.

We must make a choice! We look longingly at modern "Sodom" and choose to selfishly serve our own personal interests — like Lot's wife. Or we can follow Lot as he walked out of Sodom, and trust God to guide us to a better way of life. Despite the trials of life, we will never be the losers if we place confidence in the God of all creation.

#### A Changed World — A Better Society

The story of Sodom has not yet ended. A physical transformation of that area is imminent causing tremendous changes to occur throughout the world. The Bible prophesies that a great earthquake will erupt in the rift valley of the Jordan at Christ's return: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west... And it shall be in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea (*the Dead Sea*) and half of them toward the hinder sea (*the Mediterranean*)" (Zechariah 14:4-8). Clear, life-sustaining waters will flow from Jerusalem to heal the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:8-10).

Similarly refreshing changes will occur throughout the earth. Physical, political, moral and spiritual improvements will take place when Christ is again back in the earth. All human governments will be removed, and Christ will reign over all nations from Jerusalem. He will have the power and authority to introduce the changes so desperately needed for life upon earth to survive. Nations will benefit from his wise but firm rule, and

they will learn to value the true purpose of God in creation (Psalm 72; Isaiah 2:2-4; Jeremiah 3:17).

#### What We Should Do at this Hour of Crisis

Consider the state of society as the twentieth century approaches an uncertain close. Two-thirds of the world's population go to bed hungry every night. 40,000 children die every day through malnutrition or preventable diseases. Since the end of World War II terror and violence have continued daily. The nations spend more than one million dollars a minute on weapons. Vice, immorality and drug abuse is killing people and breaking up families as never before. As in the days of Noah, "the earth is filled with violence" (Genesis 6:13).

Vast and urgent changes in the whole fabric of society have become matters of absolute necessity. Yet this is certainly beyond the scope of mankind. Nothing less than God's intervention will solve all the problems facing humanity. Thus, He "will send Jesus Christ" and through him will "judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 3:20; 17:31).

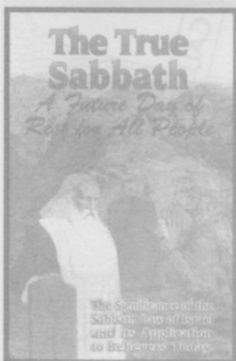
The Bible offers both a warning and a hope. "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God" (1Corinthians 6:9-11, NIV). God urges us to recognise the deficiencies in our lives, and to develop godly characteristics which will prepare us for an inheritance in His kingdom at Christ's coming.

We must make a choice. Let us exercise wisdom and make the **only right choice**. "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD will inherit the earth... the meek shall inherit the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:9-11).

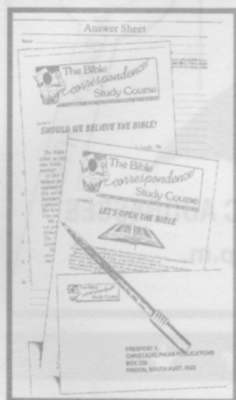
— Stephen J. Mansfield

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**T**HE SABBATH LAW required every Israelite to put aside his daily occupation on the seventh day of each week and devote it to worship. *Unfortunately, the law was generally misused.* Most religions today reject the sabbath principle; but a few insist it be scrupulously maintained as a seventh day observance, and make it a matter of salvation. Both attitudes are wrong. The Truth about this important principle is outlined in this interesting booklet.



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