



Materialism and greed: the true sin of sodomy

Ezekiel 16.⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰

As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. 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. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

(Let the reader be aware that the following homily, consistent with the tone and imagery of the prophet, contains adult language and content that some might find offensive.)

Through the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament—men such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, etc.—Yahweh levels some blistering attacks upon Israel and Judah. But none are more blistering than that found in the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. Though the King James translation conceals it, so riled up is the prophet that he resorts to truly graphic and pornographic imagery to portray Judah's sin and the consequences that that sin will bring upon the nation.

In Ezekiel's imagery, Judah was born to an Amorite father and a Hittite mother.¹ In Ezekiel's view, then, there was nothing particularly noble about Judah's ancestry. It was, in fact, rather common.. For whatever reason, the female babe, Judah, was unwanted. Upon birth, the infant was taken out into the countryside and abandoned. Left to die.² This reflects the practice of infanticide, the ancient world's common, less humane version of the modern day abortion. But Yahweh found the unwanted babe and took her in, nourishing her until she grew into a

¹ Ezekiel 16.³

² Ezekiel 16.⁴⁻⁵

young woman,³ at which point, seeing her beauty, he married her, and provided for all her needs.⁴

But Judah was unfaithful to her husband, Yahweh. In her infidelity, she became the strangest sort of prostitute.⁵ Rather than accepting payment from her “johns,” she paid those who agreed to have sex with her. Her lovers included idols of gold and silver. These, rather than providing for her needs, she dressed and ornamented with the finest in gold and silver and linens, etc. She slept with them in Jerusalem’s temple and in other idolatrous shrines. She paid the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians to sleep with her, enjoying, especially, the Egyptians due to their large, hard erections.⁶

In doing all this, Judah was following the pattern set by her older sisters, Israel and Sodom. In fact, Judah was more imaginative and worse in sinning than either of her older sisters had been.⁷ Due to the gross and repeated nature of Judah’s infidelity, her punishment, Ezekiel warned, would be severe.⁸ She would be publicly stripped naked, and gang raped. She would see her home and all that she loves burned. When her tormentors finished torturing her body and soul, they would stone her to death.

Ezekiel 16 is the sort of passage, among many, many others, that we gloss over and avoid like the plague. We gloss over this one to our own detriment. Glossing over sections of scriptures such as this sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel is precisely why our American society, with American Mormons in the thick of it, is plagued by the mad state of rebellion in which we find it. It is precisely these kinds of texts that must *not* be glossed over, but must, instead, be shouted from the house tops with a voice, not still and small, but thunderous. Our day calls for Ezekiel style boldness and clarity that cannot be ignored, for, you see, America is the youngest of a family of sister prostitutes that include Sodom, Israel, and Judah.

³ Ezekiel 16.⁶⁻⁷

⁴ Ezekiel 16.⁸⁻¹⁴

⁵ Ezekiel 16.¹⁵⁻³⁴

⁶ Ezekiel 16.²⁶

⁷ Ezekiel 16.⁴⁴⁻⁵²

⁸ Ezekiel 16.³⁵⁻⁴¹

Now, how's that for an introduction? I'll wager that you've never heard a sermon like that before! Well, we're just getting started.

In charging that Judah's sin is worse than that of Sodom, Ezekiel decides that it might be useful to catalogue the older sister, Sodom's, sins

“Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom...”

If we have, by chance, chosen not to avoid Ezekiel's sixteenth chapter, and have gotten this far without glossing over the ugly parts, it is at this point that we so often go off the rails and make a complete mess of things. It is truly extraordinary and thoroughly embarrassing. Most often, too often, we latch on to Ezekiel's concluding charge against the people of Sodom: they “committed abominations before me.” Next thing you know, we're off on some homophobic rampage (If you don't believe me, just note the footnote in the LDS Bible: “TG Homosexual Behavior”).

Sodom's great sin, we are told was homosexuality! This, in spite of the fact that among Judah's many, many sins catalogued by the Hebrew prophets—over and over and over again—there is not one reference to homosexuality. Not one.

And, no, Ezekiel's reference to Sodom's “abominations” isn't one.⁹ I mean, let's be real here! Ezekiel has already criticized the *female* Judah, so like Sodom, of being the sort of prostitute who is particularly appreciative of Egyptian lovers with big erections! In other words, the female Judah prefers men. This is, if anything, an extremely revved up heterosexuality, far from any hint of homosexuality.¹⁰

⁹ “Abomination,” Hebrew, *tô 'ēbâ*, loathsome, abhorrent behavior, runs a whole gamut of sins from murder, to idolatry, to the use of false weights and measures, to lying, to lapses to dietary rules, to remarrying an ex-wife, to any and every variety of sexual perversion, and a host of other violations of God's expectations for those who would be his disciples.

¹⁰ I am always intrigued to witness the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction turned into a story about homosexuality. All because the men of Sodom wanted to “know” the strangers who had entered Lot's home. But, Sodom, like all societies—including today's America with its scapegoating of

Ezekiel’s concluding “and committed abomination before me,” is just that, a concluding statement. It is a catch-all conclusion that Ezekiel uses to encapsulate all of Sodom’s sins. And what are those sins? What are the sins that brought the society to its dramatic and violent end? Each of them is related to the others and each deserves its own meditation.

Sin number one: “Pride.” This is the same pride that is represented by Lehi’s “great and spacious building”—the “pride of the world.”¹¹ This pride is not personal arrogance. It is taking pride in the things of this world. It is the love of, taking pride in, and giving priority to the god, “Wealth/Power/Prestige.” The pride of the world represents these things in which the world takes pride.

Sin number two: “Fulness of bread.” This sin, of course is related to the first sin. Because of Sodom’s perverted priorities and its putting the idolatrous god above all else, it became wealthy. Now, before we embarrass ourselves and say something stupid like, “Oh, but it is righteousness that produces wealth” we should just remind ourselves that the Hebrew prophets saw things quite differently. In this world, with its rules and its twisted priorities, it is the wicked who most often win the world’s game of life.

immigrants—was suspicious of foreigners. They were often viewed as spies or as seeking to pilfer economic resources that were the natives’ highest priority. Thus, it is no surprise that the Sodomites wished to “know” or discover the foreigners, interrogate them as to their intentions and expel them—again, just like the U.S.

Lot, radically true to the time-honored custom of serving and protecting the stranger who has entered the shelter of one’s home, seeks to deliver the foreigners. The manner he uses to protect them is surprising in a number of ways. First, we are surprised that he would offer up his own daughters in leu of total strangers—in our own day, we have witnessed the surprising ways that Afghani hosts have protected the stranger, even when it meant harm to themselves. But we are doubly surprised if we think that Lot is faced with an angry mob of homosexual men, horny for foreigners. How could he imagine that two *females* would appeal to a mob of homosexual men? Lot was prepared to allow the Sodom’s residents—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or transexual—to sexually abuse his daughters in order to save the foreigners from being interrogated and expelled, perhaps killed.

As no end to Jewish Rabbis and scholars have observed, this narrative is anything but strong evidence of Sodom’s heterosexual leanings or God’s response to homosexuality.

¹¹ See my two meditations on 1 Nephi 11.³²⁻³⁴, as well as my homily, “The Great and Spacious Building.”

“For among my people are found wicked men:

they lay wait, as he that setteth snares;

they set a trap, they catch men.

As a cage is full of birds,

so are their houses full of deceit:

therefore they are become great,

and waxen rich.

They are waxen fat, they shine...”¹²

“As the partridge sitteth on eggs,

and hatcheth them not;

so *he that getteth riches,*

and not by right,

shall leave them in the midst of his days,

and at his end shall be a fool.”¹³

This led to sin number three: “abundance of idleness.” Just to clarify, Sodom’s “abundance of idleness” is a reflection of its “peaceful and carefree” life. Only the wealthy have the luxury to live the easy, unconcerned, carefree life. The poor must work themselves to the bone, never sure whether they will have enough food to survive, much less thrive. The Psalmist complains about the easy life the wicked live.

For I was envious at the foolish,

when I saw *the prosperity of the wicked.*

For *there are no bands in their death:*

but their strength is firm.

They are not in trouble as other men;

neither are they plagued like other men.

¹² Jeremiah 5.²⁶⁻²⁸

¹³ Jeremiah 17.¹¹

Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;
violence covereth them as a garment.
*Their eyes stand out with fatness:
they have more than heart could wish...*¹⁴

These, like the people of Sodom could feel and say,

“I shall not be moved:
for I shall never be in adversity.”¹⁵

And this brings us to sin number four: “neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” Now, it would be one thing if Sodom was criticized and finally destroyed because it actively “oppressed” the poor. But Sodom’s sin, as Ezekiel sees it, is found in the fact that it did not actively seek to help the poor and needy. Latter-day Saints were reminded of this principle early on. It is not enough to not ignore the poor, we must be actively and energetically searching for those to help.

“And the bishop, Newel K. Whitney, also should travel round about and among all the churches, searching after the poor to administer to their wants by humbling the rich and the proud.”¹⁶

It is these four things that constitute the “haughtiness” and “abomination” with which Ezekiel concludes his cataloguing of Sodom’s sins: “And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me.”

In his sixteenth chapter, Ezekiel means business. His critique of Judah’s society is as brutal as they come. Though married to Yahweh, Judah has acted the part of a prostitute. Her prostitution is worse than any that had come before—including that of Sodom, who had

¹⁴ Psalm 73.³⁻⁷

¹⁵ Psalm 10.⁶

¹⁶ DC 84.¹¹²

previously held the number one spot for self-corruption and defilement. Judah's prostitution is also unique. Rather than being paid for her service, she pays those whom she services.

The false gods with whom she prostitutes herself and the sins of which she is guilty are predominantly economic: Abundant wealth that brings a luxuriant and carefree lifestyle and a disregard for the poor and needy. The lifestyle and attitudes that flow from wealth are an abomination. We could say all too accurately and truly, and without irony or exaggeration that Sodom's lifestyle and attitudes flowing from wealth is a form of the vilest Sodomy.

If Ezekiel's list of societal abominable traits looks familiar, it should. It could hardly be a better description of today's America. And today's America and Americans couldn't be better examples of the sort of private and public attitudes and behaviors that bring societal collapse and destruction—whether there are individuals openly expressing their sexual preferences or not.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!