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Jewish and Christian traditions

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Sodom's Sin

Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretations

Edited by

Ed Noort

and

Eibert Tigchelaar



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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Abbreviations	xiii
Contributors	xvii

PART ONE

INTERTEXTUALITIES

For the Sake of Righteousness. Abraham's Negotiations with YHWH as Prologue to the Sodom Narrative: Genesis 18:16-33	3
ED NOORT	
Saul the Sodomite: Genesis 18-19 as the Opening Panel of a Polemic Triptych on King Saul	17
RAYMOND DE HOOP	

PART TWO

READINGS

Lot versus Abraham. The Interpretation of Genesis 18:1-19:38 in <i>Jubilees</i> 16:1-9	29
JACQUES VAN RUITEN	
Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scrolls	47
EIBERT TIGCHELAAR	
Sodom, Egypt, and the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:8	63
BERT JAN LIETAERT-PEERBOLTE	
Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim	83
FLORENTINO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ	
Lūt and His People in the Koran and Its Early Commentaries	97
FRED LEEMHUIS	

PART THREE

THEMES

- The Punishment of the Dead Sea: *Martyrdom of Pionius* 4.20 and its
Precedents in Ben Sira and Africanus 117
TON HILHORST

- Don't Look Back: From the Wife of Lot to Orpheus and Eurydice .. 131
JAN BREMMER

PART FOUR

SEXUALITIES

- Sodomites, Gays and Biblical Scholars. A Gathering Organized by
Peter Damian? 149
PATRICK VANDERMEERSCH

- Homosexuality in Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* 173
ELS JONGENEEL

- Bibliography of Genesis 18-19 and Judges Since 1990 189
ANNEMIEKE TER BRUGGE

- References to Ancient Texts 195

PREFACE

The famous story of the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah has generated a rich and diverse history of reception. Whereas the narratives of the Flood, in which the whole of creation reverted to chaos, offer only a very general terminological description of the reason why, the violence and the attempt at male rape in Sodom are explained extensively. The social sin of Sodom developed into a long and painful interpretation of homosexuality and only more recent exegesis has been able to read the texts without the blindfold of dogmatic interpretations of sexuality.

This volume presents aspects of the history of reception of this narrative. The papers collected here were presented at the Sixth Groningen Conference on *Themes of Biblical Narrative* held in June 2002. Every year the Research group Jewish and Christian Traditions of the University of Groningen Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, together with colleagues from other departments, study the history of reception of a narrative from the Hebrew Bible. Naturally, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the rich but cruel history of reception. We hope, however, that enough of the central aspects of the narrative have been treated here to give an impression of the texts interpreted in different times and by different groups.

The papers are arranged in four sections. Part One, "Intertextualities", deals with aspects of the history of reception within the Hebrew Bible. Part Two, "Readings", illuminates the use of the Sodom narrative in *Jubilees*, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Revelation, the Targumim and Early Jewish Literature. A survey of the figure of Lot in the Koran and early Islamic commentaries concludes this section. Part Three, "Themes", focuses on single motifs: the role of the Dead Sea and the command to Lot's wife not to look back. Part Four, "Sexualities", deals with the unholy legacy of the Sodom narrative in the discussion about homosexuality.

The first paper, by Ed Noort, "For the Sake of Righteousness", describes the dialogue and negotiations between God and Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 as the first commentary on the Sodom story. This part of the history of reception follows one line of thought: is God still a righteous God if he destroys wicked and righteous men together. It is not the prosperity of the wicked – as in many parts of wisdom literature – that is at issue here, but the punishment of the righteous. This problem culminates in the rhetorical question "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25). The problem of the relationship between God and evildoers is tackled by