While everyone is entitled to their own opinions, everyone is not entitled to their own set of facts.

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Was Sodom and Gomorrah Wiped Out by a Comet?

*Genesis 19:24* Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

We think we know the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but is there a plausible explanation for what the Bible says happened? Does a story that tells of brimstone and fire falling from the sky and a woman becoming a pillar of salt have a scientific basis?

A number of astronomers believe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah involved comet activity. Dr. John S. Lewis, a retired professor of Planetary Sciences at the University of Arizona and Co-Director of the NASA Space Engineering Research Center at the University of Arizona, is one scientist who believes that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was caused by cosmic bombardment (*Rain of Fire and Ice: The Very Real Threat of Comet and Asteroid Bombardment*). *Genesis 19:24* says, “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” “Brimstone (burning sulfur) and fire raining down from heaven” could be a description of the break up and disintegration of a comet in the Earth’s atmosphere above these ancient cities, since large chunks of rocky and icy material falling from heaven would be seen as fire raining down from heaven. In addition, cometary material is rich in sulfur. Even a small meteor fall can produce a smell of sulfur that is so strong that it is almost suffocating.

Few Bible commentators have grasped the true meaning of what is being described in this phrase about fire and brimstone falling from the sky. (Volcanic activity cannot be used to explain the fire and brimstone, because there are no volcanoes or volcanic deposits in the region.) In an effort to explain this phrase, some have said that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was caused by an earthquake which somehow explosively ignited methane gas and sulfur found in the local tar deposits and shot it up into the sky. However, earthquake activity such as this is unprecedented and implausible in terms of geology. For those familiar with astronomy...
and ancient literature, the expression “fire falling from heaven” is not a cryptic expression nor a literary device
that needs some sort of fanciful explanation; it is a simple descriptive phrase. “Fire from heaven” is an accurate
description for cosmic material, either a meteor, asteroid, or comet, burning in the atmosphere (“fire”) as it comes
in to strike the Earth.

Further indication that a cometary bombardment took place during the destruction of Sodom and
Gomorrah comes from Genesis 19:28. This verse tells how Abraham “looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and
toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a
furnace.” The “smoke of a furnace” speaks of the rising smoldering cloud that appeared after the
explosive cometary impact. An earthquake opening a possible fissure would not produce a towering, smoldering
cloud nor create the nodules of sulfur encased in ash found in the area. The impact of even a small cometary
fragment over Sodom and Gomorrah could release energy equivalent to the explosion of many hydrogen bombs
and raise a mushroom cloud like that in nuclear explosions. Note that the Bible also uses the expression
“the smoke of a furnace” in Revelation 9:1-2, when telling how a star (a luminous heavenly body - a comet) from
heaven falls to the Earth, and opens a great pit (impact crater). It says smoke will arise out of the pit as the smoke
of a great furnace and the air will be darkened and the sun will be darkened by the smoke. Without a doubt all
of this describes an explosive cometary impact.

Knowing that a cometary impact is being described sheds a different light on what happened to Lot’s
wife. Genesis 19:23 says that Lot entered Zoar (the town of refuge agreed upon in verse 21) yet verse 26 says
Lot’s wife looked back. This is not an issue of Lot’s wife simply turning her head to look back. It is an issue of
her returning back in order to look. (In Luke 17:29-32 Jesus likens the day of his return to the day it rained fire
and brimstone on Sodom and says “he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife.”)

By returning back for a view of the impending destruction Lot’s wife was close enough to be “consumed”
(Genesis 19:17). Genesis 19:26 says “But his (Lot’s) wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar
of salt.” The Hebrew word translated as “salt” is the word malach (#4417 in Strong’s Concordance) which means
“powder” as in something “pulverized” like salt or dust. So Genesis 19:26 can be retranslated to read “But his
(Lot’s) wife (returned and) looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of dust.” Now this verse takes
on new meaning because comet impacts raise and produce vast amounts of dust. After an impact the atmosphere
rolls back, and then fierce winds containing superheated grains of dust shoot out from the impact site like the
“base surge” which rolls away from the site of a nuclear explosion at ground level. Genesis 19:17 NIV warned of
being “swept away.” Genesis 19:25 says all “which grew upon the ground” was destroyed. Anyone caught in
this surge at just the right distance could conceivably be suffocated and covered by hot dust and become a pillar
of dust after the dust cooled and hardened. This is remindful of those covered by ash and dust when a volcanic
eruption rained down on the Italian city of Pompeii.

This Biblical account of fire and destruction raining down from the sky to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah
brings to mind the eyewitness accounts of the large comet fragment that broke up in the atmosphere
over Tunguska, Siberia in 1908. Further, the concept of fire from heaven bringing destruction is also found in the
literature of the ancient Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, the contemporaries of the peoples of the Old Testament. In this literature we read about their (cometary) gods throwing down fire and firebrands from heaven to Earth, burning brought by “hailstones and flames,” and of the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 44:17-19 and 25) and her consorts “who rain flaming fire over the land” in contexts consistent with cosmic impacts.

More importantly, the Bible itself shows that the expression and concept of fire falling from heaven indeed pertains to cosmic material raining down from heaven because of the other times this expression or variations of it are used in the Scriptures in a context relating to cosmic impact. For example, see Exodus 9:23-25, Isaiah 30:3, Ezekiel 38:19-22, Revelation 8:7-10, and 9:1-2.)

The Bible reiterates the cometary nature of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Isaiah 13. Isaiah 13 describes what we recognize as cometary events, with comets coming in from “the end of heaven . . . to destroy the whole land,” heaven and Earth being shaken and the Sun and the Moon being darkened (Isaiah 13:5, 10, and 13). Then verse 19 says these events “shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” In Luke 17:26-29, Jesus likens the day of his return to both the day of Noah and the day of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In terms of catastrophe, the common denominator between all three events will be comet activity. [See my March 19, 2012 CP blog entitled - Noah’s Flood Was Really a Tsunami Caused by a Comet: A Retranslation of Genesis 7:11.]

Since natural phenomena can cause fire and brimstone to rain from heaven, the question is: Is there any scientific evidence to support the account of Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction—or is it just a morality tale regarding the wages of sin? At the southern end of the Dead Sea in an area characterized by tar pits and oases (Genesis 14:10) archeologists have found the ruins of two ancient Bronze Age cities (Genesis 13:12 and 14:3). Burnt and reddened bricks have been found. Both cities were destroyed by fire. Abundant potsherds indicate a dense population dating to a period between 2500-2000 BC that ended abruptly around 2000 BC.

It is also interesting to note that the surface of the Dead Sea suddenly dropped by several hundred feet around 2200 BC, and some have speculated that the whole southern part of the Dead Sea may be a very shallow impact crater that was caused by a cosmic disaster. A very shallow impact crater would be consistent with a comet fragment exploding in the atmosphere high above the ground. For example, the 1908 atmospheric impact above Tunguska, Siberia left no discernible crater.

The most definitive evidence for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would come from geological evidence associated with cosmic impact. Core samples from buried sediments dating to the time these cities were destroyed by fire should contain high concentrations of cosmic dust with very high concentrations of the elements iridium and nickel, and other materials created at impact. There could also be grains of shocked quartz, whose structure stems from the high pressures of impact or tiny spherules of fused glass-like material that stems from the high temperature of impact. While no formal scientific testing has been done yet, there is some geological evidence that indicates that a cosmic event took place. Dr. Benny Peiser, an expert on cosmic impact from Johns Moores University in England, reports that deposits of a form of calcite only found in meteorites has
been discovered near the sites. Then there is the sulfur found in the area. In gypsum deposits, sulfur occurs in small marble to palm sized nodules or balls. The sulfur is tightly compacted and over 95% pure. A glassy ash encloses the sulfur nodules indicating burning and vitrification from great heat. Several different amateur groups have filed reports about this sulfur and posted pictures of these unusual sulfur nodules on the web. Petrographic study of the sulfur could reveal its origins and how it came to form these unique nodules.

The bottom line is this: if the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was caused by cosmic bombardment as the Bible indicates, there should be more evidence waiting to be found. In a culture that generally believes that science and faith in the Bible are incompatible, what does it say if there is scientific evidence to support the Bible’s account of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?

In the Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah we have another incident like that of the Flood, where the God of the Bible said destruction was coming and behold, the destruction came in the form of cosmic impact. Since this happened on more than one occasion, it may not be a coincidence. We should give God’s description of His “ministers of flaming fire” a closer look for what we can learn about comets and what this means for mankind’s future.

To get the full analysis of each Bible catastrophe covered in THE COMETS OF GOD, the book must be read. A number of links to articles and reports about Biblical catastrophes can be found on my website www.thecometsofgod.com in the section marked "Interesting Links."

About the author:

An archeologist and a geologist, Dr. Goodman has devoted over twenty-five years to the study of the Bible. He holds a geological engineering degree from the Colorado School of Mines, a M.A. in anthropology from the University of Arizona, and a Ph.D. in anthropology from California Coast University. He also earned a M.B.A. from Columbia University Graduate School of Business. He was accredited by the former Society of Professional Archeologists. Goodman is a Messianic Jew who was saved in 1987.