

THE LOST CITIES OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

It is early morning. The five cities of the Jordan Plain awaken.

The merchants are opening their shops. Men are going to work, children to school. Mothers are making beds, preparing laundry.

But suddenly, a hush falls over the countryside. The jubilant chatter of the birds and the boisterous crowing of the roosters is silenced.

A man named Lot, his wife and two unmarried daughters are literally dragged from the city of Sodom by the two strangers who arrived in the city the day before. The animals begin to stir uneasily. But no one notices the 'sense of impending doom'...

Without further warning, the sky darkens. To everyone's horror, balls of fire begin to fall. Myriads of them. The sound of a mighty wind is heard... and a tempest of fire begins to rain upon the cities and the surrounding plain.

In an instant, varying-sized missiles of burning sulphur cascade down upon the buildings, setting them ablaze.

The terrified screams of man and beast fill the air. But this continues only for a moment. After a few breaths, all life is asphyxiated.

Everywhere the fire-balls crash, they stick and completely consume whatever they fall upon. Within minutes the entire plain and the cities upon it are reduced to pure ash!

Background information

According to the book of Genesis five cities – Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoboim and Zoar - sat on a fertile, watered plain near the Valley

of Siddim (the present Dead Sea). In ancient times, the region was compared to the Garden of Eden. (*Genesis 13:10*).

There are recorded two interesting events:

1. A battle between these 5 cities and 4 other kings. *"Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar [bitumen] pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills"* (*Gen. 14: 10*).

2. The cities' destruction. *"The Lord rained down brimstone and fire [burning sulphur] upon them"* (*Gen.19:24*).

Lot, a nephew of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, moved into Sodom to live.

The afternoon before the fiery judgment, came two strangers. Lot invited them to lodge in his house overnight.

That evening they disclosed their errand and urged Lot to leave the city. A band of homosexuals banged on the door, demanding that the visitors be surrendered to them.

This fast-action account is charged with emotion. Lot's family has to be literally pulled out of the city for their own safety, leaving behind two sons-in-law, to whom Lot's pleadings are as from one gone mad.

The raining of fire and brimstone (sulphur), in which the land was "smoking like a furnace", utterly destroyed the cities and turned the countryside into desert.

The "Sin of Sodom"

Most people associate Sodom & Gomorrah with only one vice - that of sexual perversion. And they were guilty of that, as are a large number of people not only today, but down through the ages.

However, our most complete source of information about these cities, the Bible, states that their sin was something else:

"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"
(Ezekiel. 16:49, 50).

In the above passage, we learn that the root of their evil stemmed from their great wealth which led them to idleness and a disregard for those less fortunate than they. They were full of pride and haughtiness, thinking they were better than others.

Why were they so wealthy?

The mention of the "slime pits" may provide the answer, since it was a most valuable commodity in those days, being used extensively all over the ancient world. Not only was it used as a coating for burnt mud bricks (as a preservative), it was used in the mortar; it was used to provide a water-tight covering for things such as the famous "reed ark" Moses was placed in as a baby.

Even today, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "*In its various forms bitumen is one of the most widely distributed of substances*".

In the ancient Ebla tablets from Syria, one tablet listing some purchases and the price for each item in silver, shows that the highest price was paid for bitumen.

And the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had only to walk out in their "front yard" and gather it. They had no reason to engage in hard work. They had a "gold mine" there just for the taking. This also explains why the kings of other great nations wanted to make them vassals - to participate in their great wealth through the extraction of tribute in the form of bitumen.

Was this bitumen involved in the disaster?

This bitumen could also possibly have provided a hint as to a catalyst in the conflagration which occurred in this plain. Bitumen, or slime pits, result from an underground petroleum reserve oozing through to the surface. And all oil reserves have natural gas associated with them, which also can seep into the air.

All of this is speculation, but the region yields the elements and evidences of an extremely cataclysmic occurrence - one in which a lake was formed, blocking the river from its continued flow and which devastated the entire plain to the extent that nothing grows there.

The Dead Sea

This is the deepest spot on earth. It dips down between Israel and Jordan, some 1,300 feet (400 metres) below sea level, to what is known as the DEAD SEA.

In this lake no fish can live. The waters are 28 per cent salt, six times saltier than the ocean. Any careless fish that ventures from the River Jordan down into this evil lake chokes to death and is pickled.

In this water you cannot sink. When you jump in, you feel as if you are being thrown out again.

It was too much of a temptation: I just lay back on the water like a floating cork, to read a book.

The scorching sun dries your skin almost at once. The thin crust of salt which the water has deposited on your body makes you look quite white. You must rinse this off quickly, or risk severe burning.

Virtually nothing grows here. The shore is utterly desolate... and in summer it bakes like an oven.

When I first saw this desert, the shallow water close to shore was choked with the stumps of ancient trees, encrusted in salt. There was a bizarre beauty about it.

It is hard to believe that this whole area was once like a beautiful garden, exceptionally fertile.

The cities lost

Tablets from Ebla dated to about 2000 BC named these cities and their kings.

The first century New Testament writer Jude wrote:

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”
(Jude 7).

The Greek word used in Jude's original letter and translated as "an example", is "deigma", which signifies "a thing shown", "a specimen". It comes from the root word "deiknumi", "to show". Jude was saying that the ruins were visible in his day.

Also in the first century, the historian Josephus wrote:

"The length of the lake [the Dead Sea] is five hundred and eighty furlongs, where it is extended as far as Zoar in Arabia; and its breadth is a hundred and fifty. The country of Sodom borders upon it..." He goes on to say that the lake *"throws up black lumps of bitumen in many parts of it. These swim at the top of the water..."* Then he adds: *"There are still the remainders [remains made of ash] of that divine fire; and the traces (or shadows) of the five cities are still to be seen..."* (*Wars of the Jews, Bk IV, ch. 8, Sec. 4*)

It appears that in Josephus' time the location of these dead cities was known and pointed to. But after the destruction of Judea and the dispersion of the Jews this knowledge was forgotten.

For centuries travellers passed through this desolate waste, oblivious to the fact that the shapeless ruins close by were those of a city, so thorough had been the destruction.

In search of the remains

In our day popular speculations have placed the ruins of these lost cities on the floor of the Dead Sea.

In 1960, an American explorer, with the friendly cooperation of the Jordanian monarchy, attempted to make a search of the north, middle and south end of the Dead Sea bottom.

He located, photographed and displayed a few poorly identifiable objects that he claimed to have found at depths and locations that are incompatible with the actual depths in the named locations.

The only certainties that emerged were that trees once grew on the land now covered by water. And there was no evidence of any remains of cities. But these efforts and published data have led many to incorrectly believe that the cities rest beneath the Dead Sea.

Another attempt has been made more recently, but with similar inconclusive results.

Not under the sea

However, the cities cannot lie under the sea. Here's why.

You recall that in his statement above, Josephus says that:

1. The ruins were **VISIBLE IN HIS DAY – ON THE BORDERS OF THE DEAD SEA**, not hidden under it!
2. The bitumen pits (of the old Vale of Siddim) were **SUBMERGED – BUT NOT THE RUINS OF THE CITIES**.
3. His description of the remains perfectly describes what can be seen in these five ashen sites. They are visible on land. They are all whitish in color; the shadows and shapes display all the visual characteristics of ancient cities and walls.

From surveying, mapping and dating the ancient shore lines in the salt caves of Mount Sedem [Mount Sodom], Hebrew University speleologist Amos Franklin concluded that the **SEA LEVEL** about 2,000 years ago was **HIGHER** than at present. (*A. Frumkin, Holocene Environmental Change Determined from Salt Caves of Mount Sedem, Israel. The Holocene, 1, 1991, pp. 191-200*)

The significance of that find is simply this: If the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah were visible in the first century (when the sea level was **HIGHER**), then the same remains **CANNOT** be underwater today, when the sea level is lower.

Under the drowned plain to the south?

So could the ruins be under the water of the drowned plain to the south of the Dead Sea?

The Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, but there is no outflow from the sea. Thus, after the destruction of the cities, the level of the sea rose and eventually covered the plain to the south. Scholars hopefully suggested that the cities lay beneath these shallow waters.

More recently, however, Jordan waters have been siphoned off for irrigation purposes. This lowered the lake level and largely exposed the southern plain. But there was no sign of any ruined cities there.

Or the ruins found to the east?

Could the remains of Numeira and Bab edh Dhra on the east side of the Dead Sea be the sites of Sodom and Gomorrah?

The remains of Numeira and Bab edh Dhra represent two of five ruined sites in that area.

There are several reasons – if you believe the biblical account - that these sites do not qualify. The first reason is simply this - they are not "in the plain" but instead on the plateau, some 500 feet above the plain. When William Albright and Melvin Kyle discovered the site of Bab ed-Dra in 1924, they understood immediately that this site was not a candidate for Sodom, Gomorrah or any of the cities of the plain: *“It is most emphatically not a city, but rather a temporary encampment, like Gilgal, or perhaps rather like the somewhat shadowy Baal-peor of Moab. Since the plain of Bab ed-Dra is not suitable for cultivation, and is high above the gorge of the Seil ed-Dra, it would in any case be a very unsatisfactory place for a town. As a festival site for the inhabitants of the oases below it is admirable, since it is situated on the first convenient rise of terrain above the central oasis of el-Mezra'ah, some five hundred feet above the level of the Dead Sea.”* (William Foxwell Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, 1932, p. 136)

The **second** reason that these sites don't qualify as candidates for the cities of the plain is their size - the largest site, Bab ed-Dra is just 10 acres, while Numeira is only 2! Think about it - that's not large enough to even qualify as SMALL towns.

The evidence shows that these sites were indeed high places, or places visited by pilgrims.

The cemetery at Bab ed-Dra is said to contain over 20,000 graves which hold over 500,000 people. Could that many people live in a 10 acre town? Of course not. But that they may have been high places and cemeteries of the cities of the plain is a possibility.

With the cities completely destroyed, perhaps their cemeteries and high places were spared as a testimony of the fact that an extremely large population once lived in the area.

Thirdly, the apostle Peter mentions the condition of the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Christ:

“And 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” (2 Peter 2:6).

This passage tells us that the cities were ASHES.

Adherents to the theory of the five sites on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea (Bab edh Dhra, Numeira, etc) have failed to note that these are NOT ashen.

These sites do show evidence of being burned. Archaeologists unearthed a thick layer of black ash. But the sites are NOT ash, as the Bible says Sodom and Gomorrah were. They contain a large number of burnt artifacts but they also contain foodstuffs (including carbonised grapes which still have their skins) and other articles that are still intact.

Careful examination of the remains of these show them to be typical of those destroyed in war. Archaeologists have found wood and other flammable materials in VARYING STAGES OF DECAY.

This is not compatible with the destruction of the “cities of the plain” as described in the Bible! There is no evidence whatever that sulphur (brimstone) was involved in their overthrow! There is no evidence of fire from the heavens.

Fourthly, the land east of the Dead Sea was anciently known as Moab, Ammon or Seir (Edom).

Deuteronomy 2:8-12 states that the traditional inhabitants of Moab were Emims and those inhabiting Seir were a group called Horims, who were later dispossessed by the descendants of Esau.

Thus the lands bordering the east side of the Dead Sea were not Canaanite.

Now the “Cities of the Plain” were unquestionably Canaanite cities, since they are listed to define the borders of Canaanite territory (*Gen. 10:19*). The Canaanite territory was to the west of the Dead Sea.

The lost cities located

The identification was made in 1989.

There is a mountain called Mount Sodom. This long, narrow mountain is a salt dome - made entirely of salt. Behind it is the squarish shape of an ancient city. Since the mountain is called SODOM, could this city have been SODOM?

In this region are five sites which share one thing in common. In all the world, only these five sites share this common feature. Within their perimeters everything has been totally burned to ASH.

According to the Bible, five cities which lay in this region were destroyed by falling fire and brimstone (sulphur) and turned to ash.

Of these five cities, Sodom is always listed first. Presumably, it was the most important, or largest, of the five. And of the five sites we have found, the largest is adjacent to Mount Sodom.

Nearby is the smallest of the sites. The biblical record states that when Lot fled Sodom to escape its destruction, he wanted to go to Zoar, which was close by and was just "a little city". Again, this site has been totally turned to ash.

The second largest, as well as the best preserved of the sites, lies between Masada and the Dead Sea. Since Gomorrah was listed second in the biblical account, we conclude that these ashen remains qualify to be the remnants of Gomorrah.

This has to be the eeriest ghost town on earth. You would experience an oven by day, and at night the stark silence of death

This whole region reeks of some ancient curse.

I still remember vividly my first visit to this haunting place.

A friend from Western Australia had just been with me to an archaeological site in Turkey. We were now bound for Israel. Since Trevor's air ticket was with Jordanian Airlines, he was obliged to travel via Amman, in Jordan, and come overland to Israel by means of the Allenby Bridge.

I promised to wait in Jerusalem for two days. We would then travel to the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah.

So Trevor flew to Amman, then boarded a bus that would take him to the River Jordan.

There he attempted to cross the border into Israel. But the border was closed! It was a Jordanian holiday. The next day he made another attempt to cross the border - and the border was closed. It was an Israeli holiday. He tried for a third day to cross over the border... and once again the border was closed.

Poor Trevor! ...another Jordanian holiday.

I would have appreciated Trevor's company for exploring inside some of the structures at Gomorrah. My idea had been to tie a rope around my waist, with Trevor holding onto the other end. Since the formations were of ash, it might well be dangerous to enter any of them alone. Who knew whether, after these 4,000 years, a ceiling might suddenly collapse? In that event, Trevor might (hopefully) find me quickly and help get me out.

Not so! With Trevor delayed and my schedule tight, I went to the site alone.

It was two hours before sunset. The lengthening shadows accentuated the shapes of ashen formations rising above the desert. One could make out outlines of walls.

From the start, I was struck by the contrast between brown, stony desert and the white of a city that had been turned to ashes. They were separate and most distinct from each other.

The eeriness

After a preliminary exploration, I located a spot on the ashes to lie down and sleep.

That night, one might have been in a tomb – it was so deathly silent. Time after time I would drop off to sleep, only to almost immediately reawaken. The silence wakens you.

Each time I would stare at the sky overhead and note that the stars seemed hardly to have moved. Eventually the moon peered up above the horizon and crept slowly higher over the Dead Sea.

It was now casting eerie shadows on the remains around me ... structures composed totally of ash. It felt weird, all alone under a full moon in this city of the dead. I could hardly wait for sunrise!

The sun popped up from behind the Jordanian hills, blazing hot. In no time I was perspiring. Soon the plain was a furnace. In this desert the temperature could soar to 49 degrees Celsius in the shade.

This time of the year, the maximum time one could explore would be a mere 30 minutes. Dehydration was quick.

This Dead Sea Valley is an immense oven, in which many have died of thirst in a matter of hours.

I would soon find myself searching for the rare spot of shade - a place to sit down... and drink... drink... drink...

And it might be all of another half hour before one was ready to brave the direct sun again.

Heat reflected up from the ashes.

Structures

There was distinct form here. Remains of buildings, one of them five stories high. All ash now. This place had suffered tremendous destruction.

Periodically there were openings in the walls, entrances to the city, where you see actual "streets".

These wide avenues had buildings on both sides, and led to other side streets. The large piles of ash made walking difficult down these streets.

Sodom and Gomorrah were Canaanite cities, according to the Bible. And the cities of the Canaanites were constructed with double walls, with buildings atop them.

And were these shapes once windows? One became aware that nothing one's eyes saw was stone... or earth... or sand. Not any more. I was looking here at ash - ash from a tremendous fire.

And there it was - the city wall - a double wall, with buttresses coming out from it at right angles. These had been built to strengthen the wall.

There were traces of sphinxes. And close by the clear remains of a ziggurat, or stepped pyramid. This was built upon a rectangular platform, just as were the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia.

One of the interesting features of these sites is the layering present in ALL of the ashen material. Hundreds and thousands of layers are present, none very thick. In very high temperature fires, and/or in very hot flames containing alkali metals or alkaline-earth materials (for example, sodium and calcium) the positive and negative ions attract and repel, resulting in this layering effect.

We know the flames had to be extremely hot in order to completely burn stone and metals; and we know there is a tremendous amount of sodium (salt) in the region - the Dead Sea has the highest concentration of salt of any body of water on earth. And the largest salt dome, Mt. Sodom, is also in the area.

Mary Nell Wyatt reports:

“In 1989, we visited the site just below Masada and took samples of the whitish material which we all discovered broke right off in our hands and disintegrated into particles the consistency of talcum powder. It certainly LOOKED like ash! But what to do about this information was a puzzle. After all, these sites have been right out in plain sight since their destruction in about 1897 BC.

"Samples taken for testing DID prove to be ASH! We were convinced, but we knew there had to be better evidence than just this - evidence that would convince a skeptical world. We began to pray that the Lord would help us to find this (unknown) evidence.”

The Clinching Evidence

Both American explorer Ron Wyatt and myself had separately encountered this experience of going in, not seeing it... then praying...

and going back, quite separately, to find that RAIN HAD JUST FALLEN!

In the desert? Yes, rain is a rare occurrence in this area. There is as little as $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch of rain a year (or 6.25 to 12.5 millimeters).

The rain had splashed away the thin film of ash that normally blows on top of the evidence, concealing it from sight.

But now, there they were: embedded in the ash were balls of burnt sulphur - brimstone - probably millions of them! Here was actual evidence that fire and brimstone once rained upon this area!

As I bent to pick up a block of ash, I noticed small yellow balls embedded in it. Each ball was (or had been) surrounded by a black crystalline shell, and around that was a reddish-black ring in the ash.

Prying one of these out, I recognised it as sulphur. Smelling it, I KNEW it was sulphur. Here was the physical evidence. All through the ashen remains were round balls of sulphur encapsulated in burnt (crystalline) sulphur.

As we scanned the site, at first not knowing what to look for, we saw these sulphur balls literally everywhere.

Before, we hadn't been able to see them because the loose ash had covered everything. But now the rain washed away the loose ash and caused a section to fall away, revealing these sulphur balls embedded through the ashen material.

The reddish-black crystalline material surrounding the sulphur balls showed that they had once been on fire.

It happened for me on more than one expedition. Of my eight expeditions to Gomorrah, I believe it was the fifth one that I took some professional cameramen in with me. I wanted so badly for the world to see these unique sulphur balls. And, since I knew that prayer worked – for me it had worked on many occasions – I had prayed again before leaving Australia. This would also be my wife Josephine's first visit. I so much wanted her to see them, too!

It was dark... and about 9 pm. Our 4-wheel drive bumped its way across the desert and entered the ruins. We turned right into a cul-de-sac and stopped.

I was seated next to the driver. In the darkness, I threw the door open and slid to the ground. From her seat behind me, Josephine did likewise. She had a flashlight in her hand. She shone it straight down and screamed!

“Look! It’s been raining! See the impressions in the ash?”

Then she shone the light between my feet.

“There it is! A sulphur ball?” Was she excited!

The cameramen got out and ran around to our side. I picked up the sulphur ball – about the size of a kid’s marble – and examined it.

“Does anyone have a spoon?” I called. Brett the driver fumbled in his bag and handed me one.

“Matches, anyone?” They came fast. Everyone was so-o-oh excited. This was everyone else’s first expedition.

I placed the sulphur ball on the spoon. And struck the match. A purple-bluish light began to grow bigger. It lit up the area around so we could lay out our ground sheets.

Here was something that long, long ago had come out of the sky burning. The ash had then smothered the ball and the fire had gone out. And now 4,000 years later here we were re-igniting and finishing off the fire.

It seems that as these burning balls of brimstone fell from the sky, they set everything ablaze. And they burned right through everything. And as they burned, after a while, molten material surrounding the sulphur cut it off from the oxygen, preserving it in the interior of the ashes.

What we call a "burn ring" surrounds each capsule -suggesting that the ash itself was vitrified.

It appears that as the ashen material erodes and these sulphur balls become exposed to the surface, they fall out of their capsules. Thus they can be found lying all over the ground. However, we were not able to see them before because they had been covered with the loose layer of ash.

The biblical report claims that "the Lord **rained brimstone** and fire" on the cities. And we might ask, how does rain fall? In drops, of course!

And this burning brimstone DID fall in drops, which landed in the pattern that rain would fall.

This burned sulphur covers the remains of the five cities discovered.

Of course, anyone can deny a find like this, but that does not alter the fact that Ron Wyatt and team have discovered the ashen remains of what must be the cities of the plain - and Jonathan Gray and team have in person confirmed this discovery.

The clinching evidence, I believe, is the pressed powder balls of brimstone inside burn capsules, and surrounded by burn rings embedded in ash – a phenomenon which, as far as can be determined, is found **NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.**

So it was that as the sun arose for the last time upon the cities of the plain, the people thought to commence another day of debauchy and riot. All were eagerly planning business or their pleasure, and the messengers who had visited to warn them were derided for their fears and their warnings. Like a thunder peal from an unclouded sky, fell fire on the doomed capital.

Which accords with the fact that we have balls of brimstone.

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