

Sodom—part 1

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An unresolved question has been where the biblical cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar were located. Arguments from the Bible and geography show that these cities had to have lain along the west side of the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea. This strip of land is shown by Google Maps to be a desolate wasteland even today, as predicted by Scripture. Arguments for other advocated locations can be shown to be flawed.

Various locations for the biblical cities of the land of Sodom have been claimed over the years, but there has been no consensus of opinion on any given site. In this paper we will examine Scripture¹ and other evidence, and will propose a new site for the land of Sodom.

When Lot looked eastward, what did he see?

In our search, we will start with Abraham and Lot, whose large herds of animals were causing friction between their respective herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham proposed a solution: they would separate. Lot would go in one direction and Abraham would go in the other. Generously, Abraham gave Lot first choice. According to Genesis 13:10–12, Lot “lifted up his eyes”² and chose the well-watered Jordan plain where the cities lay. To get there he journeyed eastward.

Abraham and Lot would have been standing not far from where their tents were pitched between Bethel and Ai³ (Genesis 13:3), as there is no indication in Scripture that they had travelled elsewhere. (Genesis 13:18 tells us that Abraham moved south to Mamre some time after this.) Those who have gone to that area and stood on all the hills around are in agreement that the maximum window of visibility that Lot and Abraham had, if they were on the highest mountain with an eastern view, was that shown in figure 1. Hills limited Lot’s view to the north and south along the Jordan when he looked eastward and saw the cities of the plain spread out below him.

We quote Collins⁴ on this window of visibility:

“I am intimately familiar with what can and cannot be seen from practically every vantage point between Ai and the edge of the Jordan Valley to the east. The southern Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea and the foothills on the eastern edge of the Jordan Valley are easily visible from that area. On a clear day, you can even see a portion of the northern end of the Dead Sea itself. But under no circumstances or by any stretch of the imagination can you see with the naked eye beyond that point to the middle (Lisan) regions or the southern end of the Dead Sea. The vantage point of the area of Bethel and Ai is a bit of evidence that

should not be passed over lightly.”

Harper⁵ also describes what Lot might have been able to see from his vantage point (italics are Harper’s):

“Lot, standing on the Bethel hill, ‘saw’ the Valley of the Jordan. From *no* hill there, except one called by the Arabs ‘the Hill of Stones,’ can any view of the Jordan Valley or Dead Sea be seen; and what can there be seen is the *northern* end of the Dead Sea, the Jordan Valley, and the river running like a blue thread through the green plain. The hills of Engedi shut out completely all view of the *southern* end of the sea; but, as I before said, the northern end, where the Jordan runs in, and about two or three miles of the sea, can be seen. I have wandered over all the Bethel hills and tested this question.”

We also have testimony from Ben-Artzi⁶ that the hills around Bethel are the highest in the centre of the land. These would offer the maximum view to the east, north, and south.

Clearly the cities of the plain of Jordan must have been at the north end of the Dead Sea, because most of the Dead Sea was not visible from where Lot stood. Also, the environs of the Dead Sea do not qualify as the plain of Jordan (see this expression in Genesis 13:10–11), in spite of special pleading from those who try to show otherwise. For example, Khouri⁷ speaks of “the cities of the plain” and “the Dead Sea plain” in order to support his belief that the cities were at the south-east end of the Dead Sea. This constitutes changing what Scripture explicitly says, which is that what Lot saw was the plain of the *Jordan*.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly how important this window of visibility is to our search for the cities.

The boundaries of the land of Canaan

The cities of the plain of Jordan are listed as part of the boundaries of Canaan in Genesis 10:19 (NIV): “and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha”.

From the context of this chapter on how the people of the earth spread out, we see that ‘borders of Canaan’ is an

expression that is meant to outline the territory of Canaan. The boundary line runs in a counterclockwise direction, starting with Sidon in the north (figure 2). The line goes southward (in the direction of Gerar) to the most southern point of Canaan at Gaza, forming the western border. It is possible that Gerar is mentioned because it was more important than Gaza at the time this was written.

As we have shown, Lot had to have seen the cities of the plain lying along the Jordan River at the north end of the Dead Sea. Because the boundary line is running counterclockwise, the four cities are therefore listed in Genesis 10:19 from south to north: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, strung out in a line along the Jordan River. This means that the boundary line ran from Gaza across and upward to Sodom at the north end of the Dead Sea, forming the southern border of Canaan. We will show shortly that these cities had to have been on the west side of the Jordan River.

The line then ran on northward from Sodom to Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim; and finally up to Lasha in the north (also Laish or Leshem, later Dan) (see Joshua 19:47; Judges 18:29). This formed the eastern border of Canaan. The line would have continued from Lasha back to Sidon, forming the northern border. The identification of Lasha as Leshem/Dan makes geographic sense because we already have the north-west corner of Canaan as Sidon, the south-west corner as Gaza, and the south-east corner as Sodom; we would therefore expect that this last city in the list would be the north-east corner, which is where Dan is. That the early Genesis account would have a slightly different spelling of this city's name would not be unexpected, as we already have two other versions of it in Laish and Leshem. This view is supported by Wellhausen,⁸ for instance, who says that Lasha is Dan, and calls it

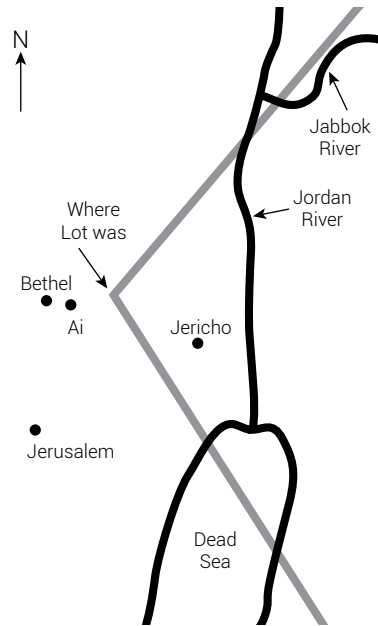


Figure 1. Map showing Lot's maximum window of visibility when he stood with Abraham at an elevation of about 900–1,000 m on a hill near Bethel and Ai, looking eastward. All the territory on the east side of the V-shaped line would have been what he might have seen. Mountains to his right and left would have limited his line of vision to the north and south. Note that at best only the north-eastern corner of the Dead Sea would have been visible to him. (After Collins⁴ and Harper⁵.)

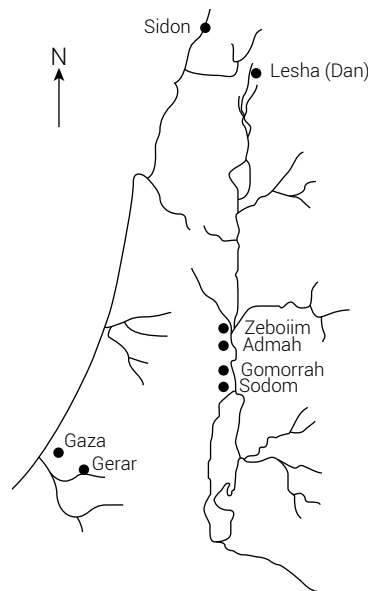


Figure 2. Map of Canaan showing the cities that defined its borders as described in Genesis 10:19 (A. Habermehl)

(translated from the German) the well-known border city in the north; he shows that only a minor emending of the Hebrew word is needed for this reading. Other writers throughout the 19th century had also believed that Lasha was Dan.⁹ The Wellhausen view has lasted right into modern times.^{10,11} I consider identification of Lasha with Dan to be a matter of simple common sense. However, some scholars debate whether Lasha could really have been the place known as Laish/Leshem/Dan, even though they do not have a suggestion for any other place.¹² In any case, Lasha has to mark the north-east corner of Canaan somewhere north of the Sodom cities. Whether or not Lasha is Dan does not affect our argument for the location of the cities of the plain.

There was one other city, Zoar, that was situated southward beyond Sodom from Lot's point of view (Genesis 13:10). It is possibly because Zoar was very small (Genesis 19:20, 22) that it was not mentioned in this early Genesis 10 listing. However, we know that Zoar was very close to Sodom. When the angels were pulling Lot out of Sodom, and trying to persuade him to go in the direction of the mountain, Zoar was "near to flee to" (Genesis 19:20). This will be a significant point later on when we are looking at various claimed locations for the cities.

Were the cities on the east or west side of the Jordan River?

Many writers claim that the Bible says that Lot crossed the Jordan River and pitched his tent on the eastern side.^{13–17} But what the passage actually says is:

"Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east ... Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:11–12).

From where Lot was standing with Abraham on that hill near Bethel and Ai, the cities of the plain lay to the east. Lot did not need to cross the Jordan to go eastward. What appears to give the impression that Lot went across the Jordan is the statement that Abraham dwelled in the land of Canaan while Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain. However, we have already seen that the cities of the plain were in Canaan.

The real question is where exactly the eastern border of Canaan was. For this we turn to Moses, who was speaking to the children of Israel when they were camped on the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan:

“When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan ...” (Numbers 33:51).

“When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan ...” (Numbers 35:10).

From these passages we see that the children of Israel would not arrive in Canaan until they had crossed over the Jordan to the western side. In other words, because the cities of the plain were in Canaan, they lay on the *west* side of the Jordan River. Lot did not cross over to the east side of the Jordan centuries earlier when he chose the plains of Jordan.

There is a historical witness who places Sodom on the west side of the Jordan. Josephus¹⁸ tells us that the mountain behind Jericho (i.e. on the west side of Jericho) runs from Scythopolis (ancient Beth Shean) in the north down *past Sodom* and on to the far southward limits of the Dead Sea. To make the geography of the area clear, Josephus then says that there is a mountain on the other (east) side of the Jordan as well; it begins at Julias in the north and goes southward to Somorrhon, which is the bounds of Petra in Arabia (i.e. in Edom). Note that Josephus only mentions Sodom when he describes the mountain on the west side behind Jericho.

The prophecy of Hosea

We now turn to Hosea to determine more exactly where the cities lay along the Jordan River. In Hosea 11:8 (NIV), the prophet says to Ephraim: “How can I treat you as Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim?” Note that only the two cities of Admah and Zeboiim are included in this prophecy. This is significant, because Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned more often in Scripture than Admah and Zeboiim.

To make sense of this mention of Admah and Zeboiim, we need to look at the map of allotments of land to the tribes of Israel when they entered the Promised Land (see figure 3). We see that Ephraim’s territory was directly north of Benjamin’s, and that both territories bordered on the Jordan River. Because the prophet was addressing Ephraim, we would expect that Admah and Zeboiim were in Ephraim’s allotment, north of the border with Benjamin. Therefore

Zoar, Sodom and Gomorrah in that order from south to north would be located south of the Ephraim-Benjamin line. This would result in the cities’ lineup as shown in figure 3.

Then Hosea says in 11:9 (NIV): “nor will I destroy Ephraim again”. Because this statement is in the verse immediately after the mention of Admah and Zeboiim, it would be logical to say that this reference is to the destruction of those two cities by fire and brimstone many centuries earlier.

Hosea prophesied in the era of the divided kingdom, over 600 years after the tribal allotments were made, but the line between Benjamin and Ephraim had remained the same. Benjamin had joined with Judah to form the southern kingdom, while Ephraim had joined the rest of the tribes that formed the northern kingdom (II Chronicles 11:1).

Significance of Zoar/Bela

Although Zoar was a very small city, it is of some importance in the story of the destruction. Zoar’s other name was Bela (Genesis 14:2,8). So which name came first? It is widely believed that it was originally called Bela, and then was called Zoar later on¹⁹. It is suggested here that Zoar was the original name of this little city, and that the biblical comment about why it was called this name is misread. The meaning of Genesis 19:22 would therefore be: “This city was called Zoar because it was a very little city.” This would make sense because Zoar was a very little city situated right next to Sodom.

If Zoar was its original name, then why might it later have been called Bela? If we look again at the allotments of the Promised Land, we see that Zoar was on the eastern

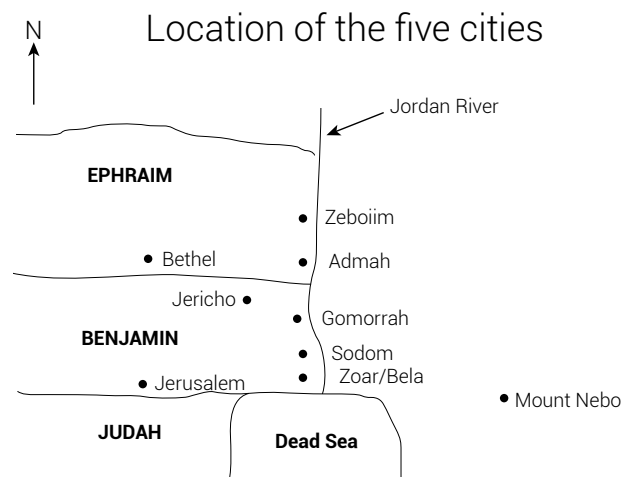


Figure 3. Partial map of the land allotments of the children of Israel, showing placement of the five cities of Zoar, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim along the west side of the Jordan River from south to north (A. Habermehl)

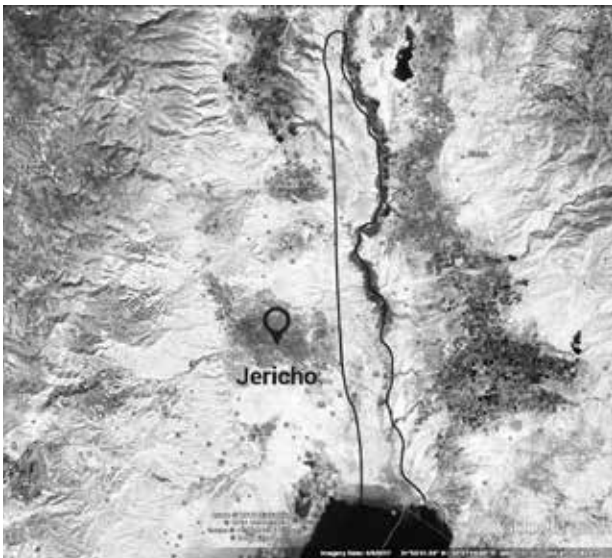


Figure 4. Google map showing the narrow strip of wasteland along the west side of the Jordan River (see drawn outline) where the land of Sodom would have been. Its maximum length would have been about 28 km and maximum width, about 3 km.

border of the territory of Benjamin. Bela was the name of the oldest son of Benjamin (I Chronicles 8:1); therefore this city was probably renamed after this tribal father at the time of the conquest. We note that almost two thousand years after Sodom’s destruction Josephus²⁰ says “king of Bela”, and not ‘king of Zoar’. This would support Bela as the later name.

From Mount Nebo God showed Moses the Promised Land in a counterclockwise direction ending at “the plain of the valley of Jericho ... unto Zoar” (Deuteronomy 34:1–3). This appears to be the last mention of Zoar/Bela located on the Jordan plain north of the Dead Sea in Scripture. It is probable that all references to Zoar in later historical times refer to the city of Zoara at the south end of the Dead Sea (today called Safi). Josephus²¹ says that the Dead Sea extends as far as “Zoar, in Arabia”. This is often mistakenly quoted to ‘prove’ that Josephus thought the cities of Sodom were at the south end of the Dead Sea²². (We will look at two Scripture references to Zoar/Zoara in Isaiah and Jeremiah later on.)

We are making the point here that Zoar/Bela at the north end of the Dead Sea and Zoar/Zoara at the south end of the Dead Sea were two different cities and we must not confuse them.

Josephus²³ said that in his day, two thousand years ago, “the traces (or shadows) of the five cities are still to be seen”. We might wonder why he said ‘five’ when, in fact, we know that only four cities were destroyed by fire and sulphur. This would appear to imply that by Josephus’ time Zoar/Bela had also been destroyed.

What would the cities’ territory look like today?

It was not only the actual cities that were destroyed, but also the land around them, as we see in Genesis 19:25: “and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground”.

There are two verses that describe the land of Sodom as we would expect to see it today. The first is Deuteronomy 29:23 (NIV):

“The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger.”

This is part of Moses’ speech to the children of Israel before his death, outlining curses that would come on them if they did not follow God. Sodom’s desolation was to be a picture of what might happen to the land. When Moses said this, the destroyed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah would have been just across the Jordan River opposite the people, and the children of Israel may well have been able to see them.

The second is Zephaniah 2:9: “Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation”.

This prophecy spoken against Moab and Ammon²⁴ would have described the territory around Sodom and Gomorrah at the time of Zephaniah in the 7th century BC, over 1,200 years after the destruction. Note that this state of desolation for Moab, Ammon, Sodom and Gomorrah was to last forever. We would therefore expect the site of the kingdom of Sodom to look desolate even today, with nothing green growing on it.

To test this thesis, let us look at the south end of the Jordan River via Google Maps. On the Google Maps website we type ‘Jericho’ into the locator slot. The Google world map will turn and bring up the strip of land along the Jordan River where we are looking for the cities of the plain (figure 4). On the west side of the Jordan River there is a sand-coloured strip where nothing is growing; this strip stretches from the north end of the Dead Sea up to just north of modern Gilgal (near Fasa’il). It is about 28 km long x 3 km wide. You can zoom in this area as close as you like, until individual buildings show up elsewhere on the map—there is *nothing* there. If this strip is the land of Sodom, the prophecies are correct even today in their assessment of its state of desolation.²⁵

Because the cities’ destruction occurred very early in history, they would not necessarily have been situated on mounds formed from previous layers of occupation (called tells), as is commonly the case in the Near East. Indeed, if there were previous layers, it is possible that the fierce fire of God burned not only the current cities of Abraham’s time,

but also any earlier layers beneath. However, we have no way of knowing any of this unless the sites are located and excavated. (There is another example in Scripture of fire from the Lord in I Kings 18:38, when Elijah called on God to send fire as a witness. That fire burned not only the sacrifice and wood, but also the stones, dust and water in the trench, clearly not a normal fire.) We also quote II Peter 2:6: “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes. . .”

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan to the western side, they did not stop at the edge of the river, but instead camped further on at Gilgal, east of Jericho (Joshua 4:19). In this spot they would have been just west of the strip of wasteland that had been part of the country of Sodom.

Fraas²⁶ reports that there was an unusual “sulphur ground” along the west side of the Jordan, north of the Dead Sea. Sulphur balls encased in lumps of clay were spread over quite a large area. At the time, there were those who suggested that this could have been from the Sodom destruction event, but Fraas did not accept this explanation “for geological reasons”. Whether or not these sulphur balls had anything to do with the destruction of the cities we cannot say. But they are an interesting phenomenon and they are located where we are looking for the land of Sodom.

Where did Abraham stand to view the rising smoke of the destroyed cities?

Many sources incorrectly claim that Abraham saw this sight from his tent in Mamre²⁷. But this is what Scripture says:

“And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he 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” (Genesis 19:27–28).

This place where Abraham had stood with the Lord the day before was where the Lord, the two angels and Abraham had paused after leaving Abraham’s tent. As a good host, Abraham had insisted on seeing the men on their way toward Sodom after the meal (Genesis 18:16 and 19:27–28). The two angels then parted from the Lord and Abraham and went toward Sodom, but Abraham “stood yet before the Lord” (Genesis 18:22). After that conversation, “Abraham returned unto his place” (Genesis 18:33).

We do not know exactly where this spot was, where Abraham had stood before the Lord. We know only that from it he could see the smoke from the plain of Sodom.²⁸ With Sodom placed at the northern end of the Dead Sea, Abraham would have headed northward from Mamre and would have stood at a spot along the spine of the mountain west of the Dead Sea to gaze toward the north-east at the smoke. It must

have taken him some time to get there, because he rose at dawn and the fiery rain of destruction had already taken place when he arrived at this vantage point.

Criteria for location of the Sodom cities

Below we list the biblical criteria derived above:

1. Lot had to be able to see the cities from the Bethel/Ai area (Genesis 13:10–12)
2. The cities were located in the plain of the Jordan River (Genesis 13:10–12)
3. The cities were situated north of the Dead Sea (Genesis 13:10–12)
4. The cities were in Canaan (i.e. west of the Jordan River) (Numbers 33:51; 35:10)
5. Their correct order from south to north along the Jordan River was Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim (Genesis 10:19)
6. Admah and Zeboiim lay along the eastern border of Ephraim’s land allotment (Hosea 11:8–9)
7. Sodom, Gomorrah and Zoar/Bela lay along the eastern border of Benjamin’s land allotment (this was directly south of Ephraim’s allotment)
8. Zoar/Bela was very near to Sodom (Genesis 19:20)
9. The territory where these cities lay remains a wasteland today (salt, sulphur, nettles) (Deuteronomy 29:23; Zephaniah 2:9).

Keeping these criteria in mind, we will now look briefly at some of the places that have been promoted as cities of the plain over the years. The much-touted site at Tall el-Hammam, east of the Jordan opposite Jericho, will be discussed in part 2.

The Madaba Map and Zoora

Many scholars believe that the ruins of the cities lie south or south-east of the Dead Sea. Some hang their arguments on an ancient sixth-century mosaic map in a church in Madaba, Jordan, not too far from Mt Nebo²⁹ (figure 5—map of Madaba).

This map is mentioned so much in the literature sources that we might think that it must have something authoritative about Sodom on it. It does not. What it has is a city called ‘Zoora’ located at the south-east end of the Dead Sea. This name appears to be the Semitic equivalent of Zoar in Hebrew.³⁰ Today this city is called ‘Safi’ or ‘es-Safi’ in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; the name of the ancient archaeological remains there is Khirbet Sheik ‘Isa.^{31,32} ‘Lot’s Cave’ is also marked on this ancient map near Zoora, presumably because the monks believed that if Zoora was Zoar/Bela of the land of Sodom, Lot’s cave had to be nearby. The Madaba map was made about 2,500 years after the

destruction of Sodom, giving plenty of time for Sodom traditions to have moved to the south-east of the Dead Sea. As discussed earlier, Zoar in the land of Sodom was not the same city as Zoora in south Moab. It is not surprising that more than one city might be called Zoar/Zoora, because the meaning of the word is ‘smallness’.³³ Any very small city could have had this name.

We noted earlier that Zoar/Bela of the land of Sodom does not appear to have been mentioned in Scripture after Moses’ view of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 34:1–3. However, there are two references to a place called Zoar in the prophets:

“... his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar” (Isaiah 15:5).

“... from Zoar even unto Horonaim” (Jeremiah 48:34).

Because of the geographical context of the other nearby cities mentioned in these verses (Luhith and Horonaim in Moab), these two references to Zoar would have to be to this Zoora at the south-east side of the Dead Sea^{34–36} and not to the Zoar of the land of Sodom north of the Dead Sea.

Bab Edh-Dhra, Numeira, Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir

These five ancient ruins, lying along the south-eastern side of the Dead Sea in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, are currently identified by Steve Austin of The Institute for Creation Research (ICR) and Bryant Wood of Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) as the sites of the cities of the plain (figure 6).^{37,38} Their reason for choosing these cities is that they believe that Zoora/es-Safi at the south-east end of the Dead Sea is Zoar of the land of Sodom; therefore other ancient sites in the vicinity must be the other four cities.

These sites do not qualify as cities of the plain under most of the above criteria:

- They are not lying in Lot’s visibility window because they are much too far south³⁹
- They are not situated along the Jordan river, and therefore are not in the plains of the Jordan
- They are not north of the Dead Sea
- They are not in Canaan (i.e. they are not on the west side of the Jordan River)
- They are not in the right order from south to north
- Feifa (“Admah”) and Khanazir (“Zeboim”) are not in Ephraim’s allotment
- Safi/Zoora (Zoar), Bab Edh-Dhra (“Sodom”) and Numeira (“Gomorrah”) are not in Benjamin’s allotment
- Safi/Zoora (Zoar) is about 28 km from Bab Edh-Dhra, too far from Sodom.

It is most unlikely that Lot and his family would have rushed the 28 km from Bab Edh-Dhra/‘Sodom’

past Numeira/‘Gomorrah’ to get to Safi/Zoar, while the angels waited impatiently to start the destruction. Lot had told the angels that “this city is near to flee unto” (Genesis 19:20), and it does not strike me that 28 km is ‘near’. Also the rain of sulphur fire from heaven would have had to be split into two separate segments, because Zoar/Zoora, which did not get destroyed, was geographically situated in the middle of the line of five cities. This split would have additional implications if the destruction was the result of an earthquake or other natural disaster, as some claim, rather than being a purely supernatural event.

Proponents of these sites also have to interpret Genesis 19:23 to say that the sun was high overhead when the destruction started, to allow enough time for this 28 km dash to Safi/Zoar. Based on this interpretation, Austin claims that Lot had six hours to get to Zoar from Sodom before the destruction started.⁴⁰ However, the Septuagint (NETS) says “The sun came out on the earth, and Lot entered into Segor (Zoar)” (Genesis 19:23), which would appear to indicate that the sun had just risen. Also Abraham, having gotten up early in the morning, reached the place where he had stood before the Lord the day before, and the destruction was already over (Genesis 19:27–28).



Figure 5. A reproduction of the famous sixth-century mosaic map of the Dead Sea area is displayed in front of the Church of Saint George in Madaba, Jordan. The actual conserved mosaic is on the floor of the church inside; the missing parts have been damaged and lost over the years. The map is displayed with north to the left, so that the Dead Sea lies in a horizontal direction, with the Jordan River entering it from the left. (A. Habermehl).

Other claimed locations for the cities

A search for information on the cities of the Jordan plain retrieves many people who have made claims about various locations over the years. We will touch on only a few here; anyone interested can easily find others. Application of the criteria listed above will show why none of these other suggested locations could be seriously considered.

The famed W.F. Albright theorized in the 1920s that the cities must be under the south end of the Dead Sea.³¹ This belief was widespread for many years, and I grew up believing that if only the Dead Sea would go down far enough, the missing cities would certainly be found. Although the Dead Sea has now lowered to its minimum level in history, and the section south of the Lisan Peninsula is nothing but evaporation pools, the cities have not appeared. Unger⁴¹ was quite certain that the cities were in the Vale of Siddim under water at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Sarna⁴² shows just three of the cities (Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar) under water south of the Lisan peninsula, on the eastern side. (Where Admah and Zeboiim were is a question that he leaves up in the air.)

The Sodom-underwater belief lost popularity when, in the mid-70s, Rast and Schaub⁴³ (1974) proposed that the cities were actually on land along the south-eastern side of the Dead Sea. These sites are called Bab Edh-Dhra, Numeira, Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir today, and are the same ones that Austin and Wood are currently promoting, as discussed earlier.

The geologists Neev and Emery⁴⁴ believed that the cities were located around the edge of the south end of the Dead Sea, but had their own take on the subject. First, they said it was a mistaken belief that Zoar/Zoora was es-Safi, and instead they placed biblical Zoar at Bab ed-Dhra (!). They put the city of Sodom near Sedom at the south-west corner of

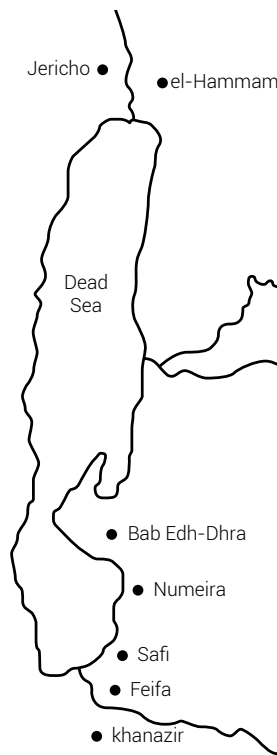


Figure 6. The five locations of ancient ruins at the south-east end of the Dead Sea are identified as the cities of the plain by Austin and Wood. North of the Dead Sea, opposite Jericho, is el-Hammam, identified as Sodom by Collins and Byers, to be discussed in part 2. (A. Habermehl).

the Dead Sea. This meant that Lot and his family had to rush 25 km across the south end of the Dead Sea flats, a feat that Neev and Emery deemed possible because they believed that the south end of the Dead Sea was dried up at that time. Their chart of historical fluctuations of Dead Sea levels shows a couple of minimums that could have produced this dry land.⁴⁵ This chart, however, does not account for timeline revision, a subject that will be discussed in part 2.

Ron Wyatt, who found vast hills of sulphur west of the Dead Sea, claimed that these were the destroyed cities.⁴⁶ He had the right idea: he lined them up correctly from south to north, and showed them as a border of Canaan. He also showed Zoar close to Sodom. But he forgot that Lot could only see the most northern one, Zeboiim, and possibly Admah, and that the cities should all be spread out along the Jordan River, and not along the Dead Sea.

Summary

It is most likely that the ruins of the cities of the plain are located along a narrow strip of wasteland on the west side of the Jordan River, just north of the Dead Sea. This conclusion is arrived at mainly from the various mentions of the cities from Scripture. It is shown that other claimed locations around the Dead Sea cannot be Sodom.

References

1. A straightforward interpretation will be taken of Scripture, according to the principles laid out in Habermehl, H. A., *God Has Spoken But What Has He Said? A coherent guide to interpreting the Bible for yourself*, Antiphon Books, Cortland, New York, 1995.
2. All biblical references are from the KJV unless otherwise stated.
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24. Moab and Ammon are part of what is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan today, and having been there, I can confirm that this territory is totally desolate.
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