

Sodom and Gomorrah: Biblical Archaeology
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-teJabFF90>
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/sodom.pdf>

During the days of Abraham, the Bible says a cataclysmic event happened.

Several cities on a plain were utterly destroyed by fire raining down.

Today, we know this story as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, however, for years archaeologists searched for the cities of the plain with no luck.

So, many argued the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a mythic tale that never actually happened in reality.

However, new evidence has come to light that suggests the destruction was a real historical event.

The Biblical location of Sodom and Gomorrah was a matter of debate for years with mostly everyone agreeing that the cities, if real, would have existed around the Dead Sea.

Some propose that the cities should be located at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

Possible locations were found, and one site in particular showed signs it was abandoned and exposed to fire.

At first, it may have looked promising and some conservative archaeologists have promoted it as a satellite city of Sodom.

However, several studies have shown that this site was abandoned around 2350 BC, long before the time period of Abraham.

Even by very conservative estimates, the surrounding sites also did not seem to end at the same time period, with one coming to an end about 300 years earlier.

Thus, the southern sites could not be the cities of the plain.

Furthermore, the geographical location of Sodom seems to suggest a more northern location.

In Genesis 13, Abraham leaves Egypt and goes into Negeb, and then travels to a place between Bethel and Ai, after which Lot and Abram agree to split up so they don't fight over grazing grounds.

Then Abram said a Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen, is not the whole land before you?"

Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand then I will go to the left".

And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere, like the Garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar.

This was before The Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley and Lot journeyed east. Thus, they separated from each other.

Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

So, what we can see is, Genesis says that Abram and Lot were around Bethel and Ai and then Lot moved east and settled across the Jordan valley close to Sodom.

This suggests Sodom was across the Jordan river at the northern end of the Dead Sea.

Genesis 13 also refers to the area as a kikkar.

Nahum Sarna notes this word means round or oval-shaped which fits the description of the flat plane north of the Dead Sea where the Jordan river flows through.

One can also see extremely far across it, fitting with the description of Lot being able to see across the whole valley.

And the evidence suggests it is a well-watered region filled with several springs.

Later on, the Romans utilized these springs to bring water to various cities via aqueducts.

So the plain north of the Dead Sea fits the description of being a well-watered place as Genesis 13 records.

Genesis 14 also records the existence of bitumen pits around Sodom which fits with the northern end of the Dead Sea, as later cultures mined the area for bitumen.

Dr Leon Ritmeyer notes Genesis reference in chapter 14 to the valley of Siddim, that is, the Salt Sea, can also fit with the general area, where the armies of Sodom went out to fight the invaders .

In the Middle Bronze Age, a northeastern corner of the Dead Sea may have had a widened breach due to fluctuations of the sea level which can fit with a description of where the battle of Genesis 14 took place.

At times, various areas along the Dead Sea were open land and can fit nicely with a valley being nearby Sodom.

Thus, given all this data, the description of Genesis aligns quite well with the northern end of the Dead Sea.

Some suggest Sodom must be further south ,because Ezekiel 16:46 says it was south of Jerusalem but the word we translate as south doesn't actually mean that, it literally means to the right of.

In fact, in verse 46, the author is speaking from the perspective of the city of Jerusalem, it first mentions how Samaria is north of the city, then mention Sodom off to the right.

If you were in Jerusalem looking north, off to the right would be east, just north of the Dead Sea, which would fit with where Genesis 13 indicates that Sodom is.

Going on this information, archaeologist Stephen Collins began looking for Sodom in this area and working on earlier surveys, he came to a site called Tel el-Hammam, which was the largest Middle Bronze Age site in the Jordan valley.

To put it into perspective, Colin says 10 cities, the size of the City of David, would fit inside Sodom's city walls, with room to spare.

Excavations began on the site in 2005.

Initially, it was found that the site was suddenly destroyed and abandoned but the date of the destruction seemed to be too late to match the Biblical account as it fit with a date of around 1600 BC.

However, in 2013, new evidence came to light, after eight seasons of excavations and reading over 40,000 separate vessels, the massive destruction and sudden end of the occupation of the site happened right in the Middle Bronze Age 2, correlating with the time period of Abraham.

Collins notes the date of the destruction has been confirmed repeatedly from carbon dating testing.

Also, after the sudden destruction, the area was uninhabited until the Iron Age.

What is interesting is the massive site in the surrounding satellite cities, seem to have been suddenly destroyed by fire and extreme amount of heat.

Despite centuries of erosion, vast amounts of ash were found in the layer of the Middle Bronze Age that was associated with the end of the occupation.

Pottery that melted into glass, melted zircon crystals, mud brick structures blown off their foundations, and scorched foundation stones were all found in this layer showing there was a massive, fiery catastrophic event that suddenly ended the occupation of the site.

Collins says we have pieces of pottery melted into glass, some bubbled like lava found across the site.

We have burned foundation stones and bricks turned red or ceramic-like from extremely hot temperatures.

Most of the Middle Bronze Age 2 mudbrick superstructures are seemingly blown off their foundations.

It is a scene of utmost devastation and disintegration.

We have even documented pieces of desert glass, impact glass, strewn across the eastern kikkar created at temperatures exceeding 6000 degrees Celsius.

The most likely explanation for such extreme levels of heat would be a meteor blast similar to what happened in Russia roughly 100 years ago.

As Dr. Philip Silvia says, there is only one naturally occurring source of energy that is capable of producing the concussive force and thermal profile observed in the material evidence from Tel al-Hammam and its neighbors, namely a Tunguska class meteoritic airburst.

In 1908, scientists believe a meteor entered the atmosphere over Russia, but instead of hitting the surface, it disintegrated about 5 to 10 kilometers above the surface causing a massive air burst and igniting what was beneath it ~~on fire~~.

The energy released by the airburst was estimated at 20 megatons of TNT, at an altitude of 10 kilometers.

Trees were scorched, but not burned, except at ground zero where everything was totally destroyed.

A similar event is likely the explanation of what happened to the cities of the Middle Bronze Age 2 and archaeologists have used the Russian event as a model.

Sylvia reported signature features have been found at the site of Tel el-Hammam indicating something similar happened.

Samuel Gladstone has suggested based on known destruction extent, and levels found in the Jordan valley, a meteor would likely have exploded about one kilometer above the cities in the region.

The area would also have been uninhabitable for centuries, as fertile soil would have been stripped of its nutrients.

Which fits with the archaeological record, as the area was virtually abandoned until the Iron Age.

But, what is interesting, is that the destruction matches extremely well with what we find in Genesis, a fire raining down and totally destroying the area.

Thus, the authors conclude, the physical evidence from Tel el Hammam and it's neighboring sites exhibit signs of a highly destructive, concussive, and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19.

Therefore, it seems the authors of Genesis not only accurately recorded how the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah took place, but somehow managed to place it in the right time period when Abraham existed, correlating with several other things within Genesis which line up perfectly with the Middle Bronze Age 2.

If you were a Jew living in the Iron Age, it is unlikely you'd be able to fabricate an event that generally lines up with the later archaeological and scientific data.

Thus, it is far more likely the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a reliable account handed down to the Israelites of what took place during the lifetime of Abraham.