

# ZOAR AND THE SODOM QUESTION

## 2025 EXCAVATION REPORT

*2026 Prospects*

1



### OUR GOALS

- **Recovery project:** nearby Byzantine church.
- **Open a sondage** to determine the stratigraphic sequence beneath the large Byzantine church.
- **Expand excavation** squares to facilitate student research and reveal the church apse
- **Survey the surrounding areas** to assess the impact of looting

2

2

## Which Sodom? Which Zoar?

### Four Views

- Northeastern Dead Sea view: **(Tell el-Hammam)**.
- Under the Dead Sea view: **(submerged theory)**.
- Israelite/Western view: **(west bank marl formations)**.
- Southeastern view: **(Zoar + Bab edh-Dhra, Numera, Fifa, Khanazir)**.

3

## Biblical Location (Basic Hermeneutics)

### ✓ Genesis (10, 13, 14, 19)

*Location given in detail and in general proximity to the Dead Sea.*

"And the territory of the Canaanites extended from **Sidon**, in the direction of **Gerar**, as far as **Gaza**, and in the direction of **Sodom**, **Gomorrah**, **Admah**, and **Zeboiim**, as far as **Lasha**." (Genesis 10:19.)

### ✓ Isaiah 15:5 (as far as Zoar)

"My heart cries out for **Moab**; her fugitives flee to **Zoar**, to **Eglath-shelishiyah**. For at the ascent of **Luhith** they go up weeping; on the road to **Horonaim** they raise a cry of destruction."

### ✓ Ezekiel 16:46 (South of Jerusalem)

"And your elder sister is **Samaria**, who lived with her daughters to the **north of you**; and your younger sister, who lived to the **south of you**, is **Sodom** with her daughters."

### ✓ Summary

The five Cities of the Plain—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar—lay on the southern end of the Dead Sea. Genesis traces their border and destruction, with Zoar spared. Later texts place Sodom south of Jerusalem and Zoar south of Nebo, confirming their southern location.

### ✓ Dt 34:3 (Zoar South of Nebo)

"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo . . . And the Lord showed him all the land, **Gilead as far as Dan** . . . the land of **Ephraim and Manasseh**, all the land of **Judah as far as the western sea** . . . and the **Plain**, that is, the **Valley of Jericho**, the city of palm trees, **as far as Zoar**."

4



## Extra-Biblical Sources (Location)

### ✓ The Madaba Map (6th century AD)

- Clearly labels "Zoora" on the southern shore of the Dead Sea.
- Places Zoar near the mouth of the Wadi Hasa (biblical Zered).
- "wrath—"

### ✓ Josephus (1st century AD)

- *Jewish War* 4.483: Refers to Zoar as still inhabited in his day.
- *Jewish Antiquities* 1.11.4: Mentions Zoar in connection with the Genesis account.
- Places Zoar at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

### ✓ Pliny the Elder (1st century AD)

- *Natural History* 5.15.72: Lists Zoara as one of the cities around the Dead Sea.
- His order of listing suggests a southern location.

### ✓ Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century AD)

- *Onomasticon* (entry on "Zoara"): Describes Zoar as the only city of the plain spared and notes it was still inhabited in his time.
- Confirms its southern Dead Sea location.

### ✓ Inscriptions (Byzantine era)

- Funerary stelae and mosaics from Zoar itself (4th–7th century AD).
- Greek inscriptions from churches and tombstones explicitly mention Zoara/Zoar.
- Excavated by Konstantinos Politis at Khirbet Sheikh 'Isa (modern-day Safi).

### ✓ Islamic Geographers (7th–10th centuries AD)

- Early Muslim writers (e.g., al-Muqaddasi, al-Idrisi) mention Zoar (Zoar/Zoara, Sughar) as a settlement near the southern Dead Sea.
- Noted for agriculture, palm groves, and trade.

5

5

## Sign of Lasting Judgement

### ✓ Deuteronomy 29:23

"The whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of **Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zebolim**, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and wrath—"

### ✓ Jeremiah 50:40

"As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her."

### ✓ 2 Peter 2:6

"if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;"

### ✓ Isaiah 13:19

"And **Babylon**, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like when **God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah**."

### ✓ Jude 7

- "Just as **Sodom and Gomorrah** and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an **example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire**."

### ✓ Romans 9:29

"And as Isaiah predicted, 'If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like **Sodom** and become like **Gomorrah**.'"

6

6

## Evidence of Bab edh-Dhra & Numera

### ✓ Bab edh-Dhra

- Discovered by Albright (1924)
- Excavated by Lapp, later Rast & Schaub
- City walls, gates, collapsed mudbrick, charcoal. Dated ~2000 BC. Permanently abandoned.
- Massive cemetery also destroyed by fire and intense heat

### ✓ Fifa & Khanazir

- Surveys show fire destruction, deep ash layers, never re-inhabited.

### ✓ Numera

- Discovered 1973
- 6 miles south
- Severe fire destruction, never rebuilt.
- Massive cemetery also destroyed by fire and intense heat

### ✓ Pattern

- Four burned cities
- Never reoccupied
- Presence of Sulphur Balls
- Exactly as Genesis describes.

7

7

## DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF THE NORTHEASTERN VIEW

**With the northern view, biblical chronology collapses—as does the very purpose of lasting judgment.**

### Downstream Effects

Patriarchs pushed to 17th c. BC

Exodus cannot be 15th c. BC

Undermines biblical dates for conquest, and judges

The theme of judgment is lost, as the site shows occupation at every level

**Lesson: theory must not drive evidence**

If the northern view stands, biblical chronology collapses, discrediting Scripture's timeline and undermining biblical hermeneutics and archaeology.

8

8



## The Location of Zoar



9

## The Location of Zoar



10



11

## SONDAGE



- ✓ **Pottery Sherds**  
*Confirmed the existence of Middle Bronze Pottery Sherds*
- ✓ **Confirmed Nabataean Occupation**  
~1st Century BC – 1st Century AD  
No evidence of Middle Bronze Age occupation beneath Nabataean layers
- ✓ **Middle Bronze Occupation**  
*Sherds indicate Middle Bronze presence nearby*

12

12



## STUDENT SQUARES



### World Class Education

*Dr. Politis*

*Dr. Kennedy*

*Joel Kramer*



### 2-3 Seasons Equivalent Training

- Immediate Transfer of Classroom Knowledge
- Square Supervisors
- Documentation and Classifications



### Many Objects Discovered

Islamic Age – Bronze Age

- Marble collonnette fragment, engraved in Aramaic. 6th – 7th century AD
- Funerary sandstone stele engraved and painted in Greek. 6th AD.

13

13

## Survey



### Identified Middle Bronze Walls



### Middle Bronze Pottery Present



### Site Now Included In 2025/6 Permit

14

14



15



16





# THANK YOU!



*Clayton Schultz*



*[cschultz@shepherds.edu](mailto:cschultz@shepherds.edu)*



*307-760-3860*



*[shepherds.edu/biblical-archaeological-research/](http://shepherds.edu/biblical-archaeological-research/)*