

Lesson 5:

Archaeology and the Bible:

Sodom and Gomorrah



Slide 1

Question - What do you think of when you hear the words, “Sodom & Gomorrah?” Did they literally exist and are they anywhere to be found? Did event take place and if it did, how did it all happen?

Read Genesis 13

Lot did not choose to go to the land of Canaan, but instead went to the cities of the plains to locate. There were five cities called the cities of the plains. What is specifically said about the character of Sodom when Lot moved there?

Read Genesis 14:1-12

So we see, these cities where Lot found a home were:

1. Sodom
2. Gomorrah
3. Zoar
4. Admah
5. Zeboiim

The kings of these cities had been subject to the Kedorlaomer, King of Elam. He was part of a coalition of Mesopotamian kings who ruled over the Kings of the cities of the plains in the third century BC. The kings of the five cities took it for 12 years. In the 13th year they began to rebel. Finally in the 14th year the Kings of the Sodom and Gomorrah, Zoar, Admah and Zeboiim gathered together for a war against the coalition of Mesopotamian kings that were ruling over them.

Question - What do we learn about the results of their war efforts? *(They drew the battle lines in the Valley of Siddim, which was full of tar pits. The Scripture says the Kings were fleeing, some men fell in the tar pits and others ran for the hills. Sodom and Gomorrah's goods were seized and they and Lot were taken away for captivity. The Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah get away and go back but they've lost their riches. Later the statement about the tar pits is going to prove valuable in discovering more insights from archaeology.)*

Here is another interesting fact about Lot. Abraham gets word of Lot's capture. He takes 318 trained men and chased the army that had Lot all the way to Dan. They attacked them at night and finally the fight ended north of Damascus. Lot, all the women and the other people were freed from slavery, thanks to Abraham.

Read Genesis 19:1 – Where is Lot living after Abraham freed him?

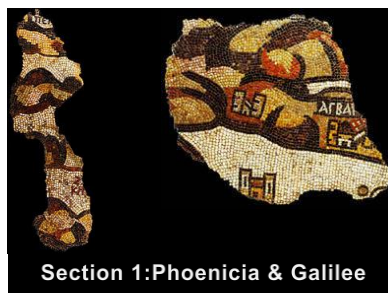
Question – Before we dive more deeply into this story, let's answer this question. Is this just a tall tale or did these cities exist. They have not been seen throughout the centuries, or have they?

Slide 2



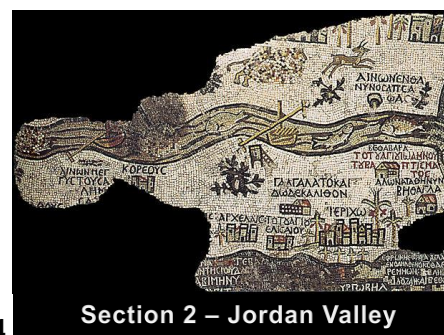
The Madaba Map was discovered late in 1896, during an excavation and reconstruction of a mosaic floor in St George's Church in Madaba, Jordan. It is the oldest map discovered so far of the Holy Land and is dated to the middle of the 6th century AD. The mosaic is a detailed map of Jerusalem as it appeared at the height of the Byzantine period. The map depicts some famous Old City structures such as the Damascus Gate, St. Steven's Gate, the Golden Gate, the gate leading to Mount Zion, the Citadel (Tower of David), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Cardo Maximus. This map is one key in developing scholarly knowledge about the physical layout of Jerusalem after its destruction and rebuilding in AD 70.

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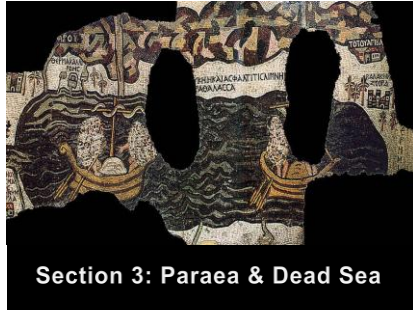


Section 1: Phoenicia & Galilee

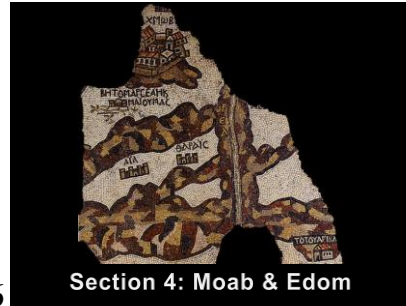
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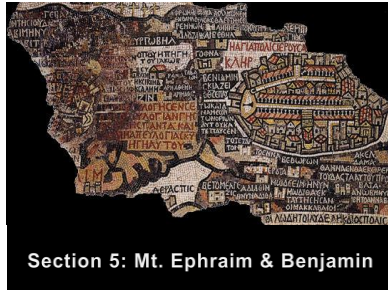
Section 2 – Jordan Valley



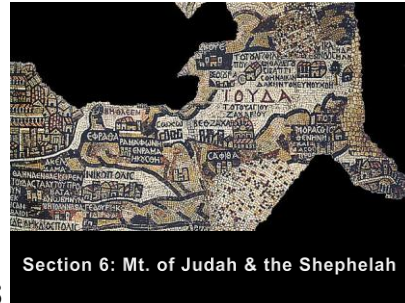
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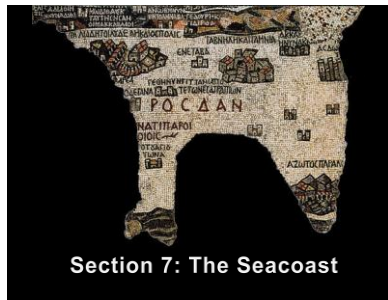
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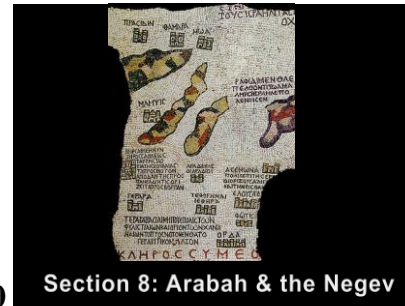
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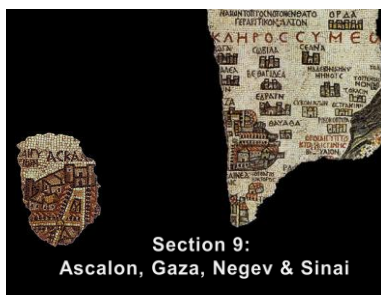
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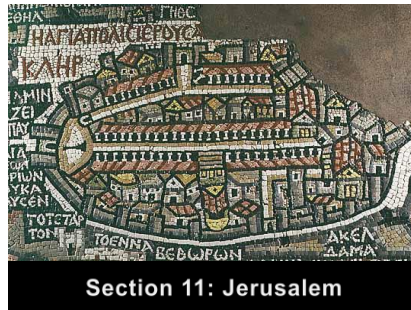
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Slide 12



Slide 13



Slide 14

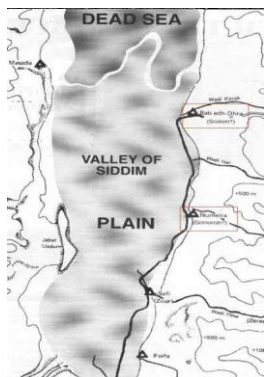
Read Genesis 19:30

After Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by the Lord, the Scripture tells us that Lot and his daughters go live in a cave in Zoar. Finding Zoar was a major starting point in discovering evidence of this event in history. This part of the Mosaic is a fantastic discovery because it contains a location for the city of Zoar and for Lot's Cave.



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This shows the excavation site of the known traditional location of the "Sanctuary of Lot" in the hills above the indicated site for Zoar.



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One popular theory for a long time was that the cities were located in the plain south of the Dead Sea and later covered by the waters as the Dead Sea water level has changed over time. The level of the waters has receded in recent years and search of the area has located no evidence to verify this location. Searches starting in 1973 began to discover evidences of occupied cities in the area southeast of the Dead Sea, most of them located so as to obtain the benefit of water flow from the many Wadi's of the area. This map shows the the proposed locations of the five cities of the Plains.

To date there has been located only evidence for two of the five Cities of the Plain, but they are proposing that the evidence is strong that the two most important cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have been found. That being the evidences found of destruction by fire at each site due to the layers of ash found in the digs by archaeologists.

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Bab edh-Dhra (Sodom) is the largest of the two sites, the 23 feet city wall enclosed 9-10 acres with gates located at the west and the northeast. The northeast gate had two flanking towers with massive stone and timber foundations, possibly the gate in which Lot sat (Genesis 19:1). Estimated population at the time of the destruction was between 600-1200.

The Scriptures say that Abraham looked and saw "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace" and does not seem to mention a quaking, but does use the Hebrew term for "overturning" in Deuteronomy 29:23. Possibly this is an indication that the earthquake proposal is valid. Changes of elevation of up to 164 feet have been noted which caused a change in direction of the Wadi Numeria at the site, which is believed to be the event that caused the destruction. Also found were evidences that the residents hastily fled the site and buried skeletons of those who were caught in the destruction. All across Bab edh-Dhra archaeologists found evidence of a fiery destruction, such as this layer of ash in the western temple. Tumbled walls attested to an earthquake as well.

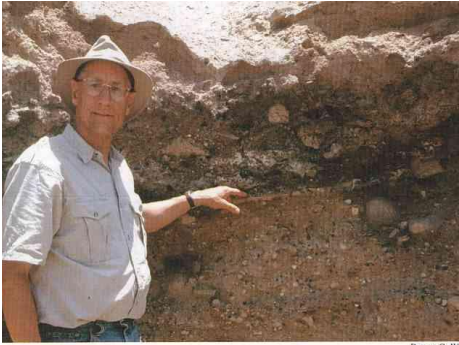


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In the final phase of occupation Bab edh-Dhra, the dead were buried in mud brick buildings called charnel houses. Five examples were excavated, and in each case they were destroyed at the same time the city was destroyed. Excavation of this charnel house at Numeira (Gomorrah) revealed that the fire started in the roof and spread to the interior when the roof collapsed. Pottery evidence indicates that some of the residents of Numeira buried their dead in this cemetery. It appears that Numeria was in existence for only a short time, possibly less than 100 years. Paleobotany investigations indicated that a rich diversity of crops were

grown in the area including barley, wheat, grapes, figs, lentils, flax, chickpeas, peas, broad beans, dates, and olives.

Concerning the proposed cause of the destruction, they are proposing that it was the result of an earthquake that forced combustible material to the surface and into the atmosphere. Surveys have located bitumen, petroleum, natural gas and sulfur in the area. And to the east of the Dead Sea is a major fault line and these cities are located exactly on this fault line. Remember the mention of the tar pits the kings armies fell into? The area was built on a bed of combustible fuels for God to use along with the fault line.



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The archaeologist is pointing to a burn layer at Numeira proving that a fiery destruction overcame the city at the end of the Early Bronze III period, 2700-2200 B.C. Like Bab edh-Dhra, there was evidence of a violent earthquake that occurred with fire. Both cities are located on the eastern fault line of the Jordan rift valley. Geologists theorize that an earthquake caused pressure on subterranean petroleum deposits which were forced out of the ground, ignited, and fell back down on the Cities of the Plain.



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Here's is an aerial photo that allows us to see where Sodom and Gomorrah were located and the possible locations of the other three Cities of the Plains.

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Halite is the mineral form of sodium chloride, commonly known as **rock salt**. This geological rock formation currently stands overlooking the Dead Sea at Mount Sodom. It is called "Lot's Wife" because of the shape and location of the feature.

Around 194-195 AD Josephus wrote:

Now, about this time the Sodomites, overwhelmingly proud of their numbers and the extent of their wealth, showed themselves insolent to men and impious to the divinity, insomuch that they no more remembered the benefits that they had received from him, hated foreigners and avoided any contact with others. Indignant at this conduct, God accordingly resolved to chastise them for their arrogance, and not only to uproot their city, but to blast their land so completely that it should yield neither plant nor fruit whatsoever from that time forward. But Lot's wife, who during the flight was continually turning round towards the city, overly curious about it, notwithstanding God's prohibition of such action, was changed into a pillar of salt. I have seen this pillar, which remains to this day.

--Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*

Obviously, this isn't really Lot's wife, but it is a stark reminder of the reality of this event that God is God of all Creation and will not permit evil to reign on earth.

Now let's examine a totally different and very strange chunk of information. A Cuneiform clay tablet which for over 150 years defied attempts at interpretation has now been revealed to describe an asteroid impact which in 3123 BC hit Köfels, Austria. This event happened about 800 years before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. However, it does tell us about the reality of this kind of destruction.



Slide 22 - The "Planisphere" tablet - inscribed around 700 BC - was unearthed by Henry Layard in the remains of the library of the Assyrian royal palace at Nineveh, close to modern-day Mosul, Iraq. It's a copy of the night diary of a Sumerian astronomer containing drawings of constellations and "known constellation names", but it required modern computer tech to finally unravel its exact meaning.

When deciphered by a computer program it revealed the planisphere described "events in the sky before dawn on the 29 June 3123 BC", with half of it noting "planet positions and cloud cover, the same as any other night". The other half, however, records an object "large enough for its shape to be noted even though it is still in space" and tracks its trajectory relative to the stars.

That a large body had impacted at Köfels had long been suspected, the evidence being a giant landslide 500m thick and five kilometres in diameter. The site had no impact crater to back the theory, but the researchers now believe they have a plausible explanation for that.

They said, "The incoming angle was very low (six degrees) and means the asteroid clipped a mountain called Gamskogel above the town of Längenfeld, 11 kilometres from Köfels, and this caused the asteroid to explode before it reached its final impact point.

"As it travelled down the valley it became a fireball, around five kilometres in diameter (the size of the landslide). When it hit Köfels it created enormous pressures that pulverised the rock and caused the landslide but because it was no longer a solid object it did not create a classic impact crater."

The back plume from the explosion (the mushroom cloud) would be bent over the Mediterranean Sea re-entering the atmosphere over the Levant, Sinai, and Northern Egypt. The ground heating though very short would be enough to ignite any flammable material - including human hair and clothes. The tablet is object number K8538 in the British Museum collection.

This isn't Sodom and Gomorrah but it shows us that historically events have happened like this. God can and has used nature's power to make a statement on evil.

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In Acts 2 we read where people were in Jerusalem at Pentecost. One of the regions they say they are from was Cappadocia. In the heart of the Cappadocia region is Göreme in modern day Turkey. 2,000 years after the eruption of Mt. Erciyes, the lava. The people realized the soft rock could be easily carved into houses, churches and monasteries. From the 4th century on the people began to form churches in the rocks. The sanctuaries were decorated with frescoes. These works of art developed in detail continually throughout the 11th century.

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