

A. Contending by the Herdsmen (5-7)

- Reason**
 -Genesis 36:6-8 "For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together."
 -James 1:9-11 - Wealth creates problems just like poverty
- Risk**
 -Welfare of the Flocks
 Fighting could provide an opportunity for those in the land to plunder the herds.
 -Witness of the Faith
 Mat 5:13-16 - Fighting would be a poor example to those already in the land.

B. Counseling by Abraham (8-9)

- Concern**
- Command**
 -2Ch 23:21 "the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death..."
 -Pro 11:10 "when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness."
- Courtesy**
 -Phi 2:2-4 "count others more significant than yourselves"

C. Choosing by Lot (12:10-13)

- Guide**
 -Luke 18:18-23 "he became very sad, for he was extremely rich"
 -1Ti 6:10 "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils."
- Gracelessness**

⁵And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,

Gen 12:5,16; 13:2

⁶so that the **land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,**

Reasons & Risks

How do the **reasons & risks** related to the **contention** between herdsmen relate to us in the Lord's Church today?

⁷and there was **strife** between the **herdsmen** of Abram's **livestock** and the **herdsmen** of Lot's **livestock**. At that time the **Canaanites** and the **Perizzites** were **dwelling in the land**.

⁸Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be **no strife** between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for **we are kinsmen**."

In the Direction of Zoar

-Location is unknown, but was apparently the southernmost end to the "Valley"
 -While many 20th century scholars placed the Cities of the Valley in the southern Dead Sea area, the most recent archaeological evidence indicates they may have possibly been northeast of the Dead Sea.
 -Previous name of Zoar was Bela (14:2,8)

⁹Is 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.**"

¹⁰And 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.**)

Gen 3:6 - Solemn reminder of the first look on such a garden land with intense desire; even more ominous with the parenthetical clause.

Lot Journeyed East

In this new territory, Lot becomes the father of the **Moabites** and the **Ammonites**, who are a substantial obstacle in Israel ultimately gaining possession of the promised land.

- Gen 19:37-38
- Num 22-25
- Deut 23:3-6
- Ezra 9:1

¹¹So **Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley**, and Lot journeyed east. Thus **they separated from each other**.

3. Guile

-Gen 13:12 "moved his tent as far as Sodom"

-Gen 14:12 "who was dwelling in Sodom"

-Gen 19:1 "sitting in the gate of Sodom"

-Gen 14 - Sodom
Plundered

-Gen 19 - Sodom
Destroyed

D. Confirming by God
(14-18)

1. Nature

-**Presence** - God's presence is proven by Him speaking directly to Abram.

*Psa 16:11 "in your presence there is fullness of joy"

*Jam 4:8 "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you"

-**Promise** - Expansion of previous promises God had given Abram

*Gen 12:2,7

2. Response

-**Walk** "moved his tent"
- Obeying God's command in v. 17.

-**Worship** "built an altar to the Lord."

*Gen 12:7-8; 13:4

¹²Abram settled in *the land of Canaan*, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and *moved his tent as far as Sodom*.

¹³Now *the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD*.

Foreshadows the events of Chapter 19

¹⁴The **LORD said to Abram**, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,

Canaan (v. 12)

¹⁵for all *the land* that you see **I will give to you and to your offspring forever**.

Acts 7:5 "Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child."

¹⁶I will make your *offspring* as the *dust of the earth*, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

¹⁷Arise, **walk** through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

¹⁸So Abram *moved his tent* and came and settled by the *oaks of Mamre*, which are at **Hebron**, and there he **built an altar to the LORD**.

The Land of Canaan

The land along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea all the way north to modern Lebanon and Syria, and inland to the boundary of the Jordan River.

Sodom

-The meaning of "Sodom"

(סֹדֹם, *sedom*) is unknown.

-The original name of the city may not have been Hebrew, but perhaps a presently unknown Semitic term from Canaanite, Amorite, or Akkadian.

Forever

-עולם עד ('ăd 'ô·lām)

-Existing for a long time

-For a duration, (i.e. an undetermined duration of time without reference to other points of time)

-To the end of the present dispensation, and the commencement of the new

Oaks of Mamre / Hebron

-22 miles southwest of Jerusalem

-Also called Kiriath-Arba (23:2)

-Much of Abram's time in Canaan is spent in the vicinity of Hebron.

-This area is also where he will buy a cave to bury Sarah (23:17).

Riches of Abram

Genesis 12:5 (ESV)

⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

Genesis 12:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Genesis 13:2 (ESV)

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Reason

Genesis 36:6–8 (ESV)

⁶ Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his livestock, all his beasts, and all his property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan. He went into a land away from his brother Jacob. ⁷ For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock. ⁸ So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir. (Esau is Edom.)

James 1:9–11 (ESV)

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Risk

Matthew 5:13–16 (ESV)

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Command

2 Chronicles 23:21 (ESV)

²¹ So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death with the sword.

Proverbs 11:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.

Courtesy

Philippians 2:2–4 (ESV)

² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Guide

Luke 18:18–23 (ESV)

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “**Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.** ²⁰ **You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’**” ²¹ And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “**One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**” ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

1 Timothy 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Garden of the Lord

Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Zoar

Genesis 14:2 (ESV)

² these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

Genesis 14:8 (ESV)

⁸ Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim

Journeyed East / Moabites / Ammonites

Genesis 19:37–38 (ESV)

³⁷ The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸ The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

Deuteronomy 23:3–6 (ESV)

³ “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵ But the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loved you. ⁶ You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.

Ezra 9:1 (ESV)

¹ After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Guile

Genesis 14:12 (ESV)

¹² They also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

Genesis 19:1 (ESV)

¹ The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth

Nature - Presence

Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

James 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Nature – Promise

Genesis 12:2 (ESV)

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Acts 7:5 (ESV)

⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

Land Forever

Forever = עולם עד (‘ăd ‘ô·lām)

6330 II. עד (‘ăd): prep.; ≡ Str 5704; TWOT 1565c—**1.** LN 84.16–84.28 **until**, up to, as far as, i.e., an extension up to or as far as a spatial goal (Ge 10:19; Ps 147:6); **2.** LN 67.118–67.135 **until**, up to, as far as, i.e., a continuous extent of time up to a point (1Sa 11:11); **3.** LN 67.136–67.141 **meanwhile**, i.e., an extent of time within another extent of time (1Ki 18:45); **4.** LN 78.51–78.53 **up to**, i.e., a degree extending to a certain point (Mal 3:10); **5.** LN 59.11–59.22 **much**, i.e., an extent of a quantity (Ge 41:49); note: oth parse Isa 33:23 as n.masc. 6331; note: further study may yield more domains¹

6409 עולם (‘ô·lām): adv. [oth n.masc.]; ≡ Str 5769; TWOT 1631a—**1.** LN 67.78–67.117 **everlasting**, forever, eternity, i.e., pertaining to an unlimited duration of time, usually with a focus on the future (Ge 3:22); **2.** LN 67.78–67.117 **ancient**, old, i.e., existing for a long time in the relative past (1Sa 27:8; Ps 119:52); **3.** LN 67.78–67.117 **lasting**, for a duration, i.e., an undetermined duration of time without reference to other points of time, with a focus of no anticipated end, but nevertheless may have limits (Nu 25:13; Jer 18:16), note: for MT text in 2Ch 33:7, see 6409²

5704. עד ad (723d); from 5710a; *as far as, even to, up to, until, while*:—account(1), afar*(1), after(1), all the way(1), along(1), before(7), before*(3), beside*(1), beyond(2), beyond*(1), both*(1), completely*(1), either ... or(1), equal(1), even(24), even including(1), exceedingly*(3), extremely*(1), far(131), far*(1), forever*(66), forevermore*(1), here*(2), how many*(2), including(1), like(2), little while*(1), long(23), long*(25), momentary*(1), never*(2), only(1), or(9), over(1), over there*(1), point(1), reaching(1), since*(1), so long(1), still*(1), there(1), threatened*(1), till(3), time(1), toward(1), unfathomable*(1), until(365), until the when(1),

¹ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

² Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

until*(43), utterly*(3), very(1), very*(2), violently*(1), when(1), when*(1), while(7), while i was still(1), within(1), without*(2), yet(1), yet*(1).³

5769. עולם *olam* or עולם *olam* (761d); from an unused word; *long duration, antiquity, futurity*:—ages(1), all successive(1), always(1), ancient(13), ancient times(3), continual(1), days of old(1), eternal(2), eternity(3), ever(10), Everlasting(2), everlasting(110), forever(136), forever and ever(1), forever*(70), forevermore*(1), lasting(1), long(2), long ago(3), long past(1), long time(3), never*(17), old(11), permanent(10), permanently(1), perpetual(29), perpetually(1).⁴

Clarke - To thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever - This land was given to Abram, that it might lineally and legally descend to his posterity; and though Abram himself cannot be said to have possessed it, [Acts 7:5](#), yet it was the gift of God to him in behalf of his seed; and this was always the design of God, not that Abram himself should possess it, but that his posterity should, till the manifestation of Christ in the flesh. And this is chiefly what is to be understood by the words for ever, אד עולם (*ad olam*), to the end of the present dispensation, and the commencement of the new. עולם (*olam*) means either Eternity, which implies the termination of all time or duration, such as is measured by the celestial luminaries: or a hidden, unknown period, such as includes a completion or final termination of a particular era, dispensation, etc.; therefore the first is its proper meaning, the latter its accommodated meaning. See the note on [Genesis 17:7](#). See the note on [Genesis 21:33](#).⁵

Coffman - Here is the famous "land promise" to Abraham and his posterity "forever." Does this give secular Israel in the 20th century any valid claim on Palestine? The answer has to be "No!" The ultimate nature of the promise is seen in the fact that Christians were promised by Jesus Christ that "the meek shall inherit the earth," and there can be no doubt that this must be considered the ultimate and spiritual fulfillment of this great promise. As far as the fleshly Israel is concerned, all of God's blessings upon them were contingent, absolutely, upon their acceptance of the rule of God and upon their following in the steps of Abraham's faith, which they resolutely refused to do. They formally rejected God's government in the elevation of Saul to the monarchy, and were ultimately cast off altogether as being God's Chosen People in any racial or secular sense. Every line of the O.T., as well as the N.T., confirms this. As Keil said:⁶

"This applied not to the lineal posterity of Abram, to his seed according to the flesh, but to the true spiritual seed, which embraced the promise in faith, and held it in a pure and believing heart. The promise, therefore, neither precluded

³ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

⁴ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

⁵ Clarke, Adam. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". "The Adam Clarke Commentary". <http://www.studydrive.org/com/acc/view.cgi?bk=ge&ch=13>. 1832.

⁶ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". "<http://www.studydrive.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?bk=0&ch=13>". Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

the expulsion of the unbelieving seed from the land of promise, nor guarantees to existing Jews a return to earthly Palestine after their conversion to Christ.⁷

Calvin - *Lift up now thine eyes.* Seeing that the Lord promises the land to the seed of Abram, we perceive the admirable design of God, in the departure of Lot. He had assigned the land to Abram alone; if Lot had remained with him, the children of both would have been mixed together. The cause of their dissension was indeed culpable; but the Lord, according to his infinite wisdom, turns it to a good issue, that the posterity of Lot should possess no part of the inheritance. This is the reason why he says 'All the land which is before thee, I assign to thee and to thy seed. Therefore, there is no reason why thou, to whom a reward so excellent is hereafter to be given, shouldst be excessively sorrowful and troubled on account of this solitude and privation.' For although the same thing had been already promised to Abram; yet God now adapts his promise to the relief of the present sorrow. And thus it is to be remembered that not only was a promise here repeated which might cherish and confirm Abram's faith; but that a special oracle was given from which Abram might learn, that the interests of his own seed were to be promoted, by the separation of Lot from him. The speculation of Luther here (as in other places) has no solidity; namely, that God spoke through some prophet. In promising the land "for ever," he does not simply denote perpetuity; but that period which was brought to a close by the advent of Christ. Concerning the meaning of the word עולם (*olam*), the Jews ignorantly contend: but whereas it is taken in various senses in Scripture, it comprises in this place (as I have lately hinted) the whole period of the law; just as the covenant which the Lord made with his ancient people is, in many places, called eternal; because it was the office of Christ by his coming to renovate the world. But the change which Christ introduced was not the *abolition* of the old promises, but rather their *confirmation*. Seeing, therefore, that God has not now one peculiar people in the land of Canaan, but a people diffused throughout all regions of the earth; this does not contradict the assertion, that the eternal possession of the land was rightly promised to the seed of Abram, until the future renovation.⁸

Coke - And the Lord, &c.— No sooner was Lot separated from Abram, than the Lord appears again to him, both to console him, to renew his promise with him, and to assure him that his posterity should certainly inherit this country: accordingly, he commands him to look every way, *from the place where he was*, that is, most probably from the *mountain*, where he pitched his tent before he went into Egypt, ch. [Genesis 12:8](#). and to which he returned from thence, see [Genesis 12:3-4](#). and from which mountain he might command an extensive prospect of the country; all of which the Lord promises to *give to him and to his seed for ever*, [Genesis 12:15](#). But how was it given to Abram; when, as St. Stephen informs us, [Acts 7:5](#). *He (God) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on?*—But St. Stephen adds, *yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him*. How then was this promise fulfilled? We reply, 1st, that this promise gave to Abram an authentic right to all the land of Canaan; 2nd, that God himself explains, how it should be literally fulfilled, namely, *in the posterity of Abram, to thee and to thy seed*; that is to say, *to thee, even to thy seed*. The copulative particle has often this signification in the Hebrew. And it is explained ch. [Genesis](#)

⁷ C.F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 1*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 200

⁸ Calvin, John. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". "Calvin's Commentary on the Bible". "http://www.studydrive.org/com/cal/view.cgi?bk=ge&ch=13". 1840-57.

[15:18](#). where it runs, *Unto thy seed have I given*, &c. But it is farther asked, how was it given to Abram and his seed *for ever*? To which we answer, 1st, that the phrase *for ever* עד־עולם *ad-oulam*, is frequently used in the Old Testament only for a *long duration*, not for *eternity* strictly so called. 2nd, That the divine promise implies a tacit condition, that the posterity of Abram should continue to possess the land *for ever*, if they persevered in faith and obedience to God, [Leviticus 26:28](#). [Deuteronomy 4:25-26](#). [Isaiah 48:18](#); [Isaiah 19:3](#) rdly, While it is always to be remembered, that, under the temporal promises, the spiritual ones are immediately referred to: so that, when God promises Abram and his seed that they should *possess* that land *for ever*, the principal design is to make known, that all those children of his, who imitate his faith and holiness, shall, by the efficacy of *the blessed Seed*, even Christ, be introduced into the *everlasting* possession of the heavenly Canaan.⁹

Gill - *and to thy seed for ever*; the meaning is, that he gave it to his posterity to be enjoyed by them until the Messiah came, when a new world would begin; and which Abram in person shall enjoy, with all his spiritual seed, after the resurrection, when that part of the earth will be renewed, as the rest; and where particularly Christ will make his personal appearance and residence, the principal seed of Abram, and will reign a thousand years; see Gill on [Matthew 22:32](#); besides, this may be typical of the heavenly Canaan given to Abram, and all his spiritual seed, and which shall be enjoyed by them for evermore.¹⁰

Benson - *The Lord said unto Abram* — To comfort him after “Lot was separated from him,” and he was left alone, and in a less pleasant and fruitful soil than that which Lot had chosen; *Lift up thine eyes, all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it.* — But, how was this land given to Abram, when it is expressly said by Stephen, [Acts 7:5](#), “He (God) gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on!” The answer is, God gave him the right to it, though not the actual possession, until the time appointed, when the inhabitants of the land should prove themselves to be irreclaimable, and fully ripe for destruction. God explains it, “To thee and thy seed,” that is, to thee “in thy seed.” But how could it be said to be given them “for ever,” when, after a few hundreds of years they were turned out of it? To this it must be replied, that the promise was made to them, and intended to be fulfilled, upon condition of their obedience, as is often expressed in other places. And the expression עד־עולם, here rendered *for ever*, often signifies only *long continuance*, as is evident from many passages of Scripture, in which the subjects to which it is applied do not, in their nature, admit of an eternal duration. Indeed, when the word is applied to the Jewish rites and ceremonies, as it often is, it signifies no more than during the standing of that dispensation, or till the coming of the Messiah. And thus it may be here understood.¹¹

⁹ Coke, Thomas. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". Thomas Coke Commentary on the Holy Bible. "http://www.studylight.org/com/tcc/view.cgi?bk=ge&ch=13". 1801-1803.

¹⁰ Gill, John. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". "The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible". "http://www.studylight.org/com/geb/view.cgi?bk=ge&ch=13". 1999.

¹¹ Benson, Joseph. "Commentary on Genesis 13:1". Joseph Benson's Commentary. "http://www.studylight.org/com/rbc/view.cgi?bk=ge&ch=13". 1857.

Worship

Genesis 12:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

Genesis 13:4 (ESV)

⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.

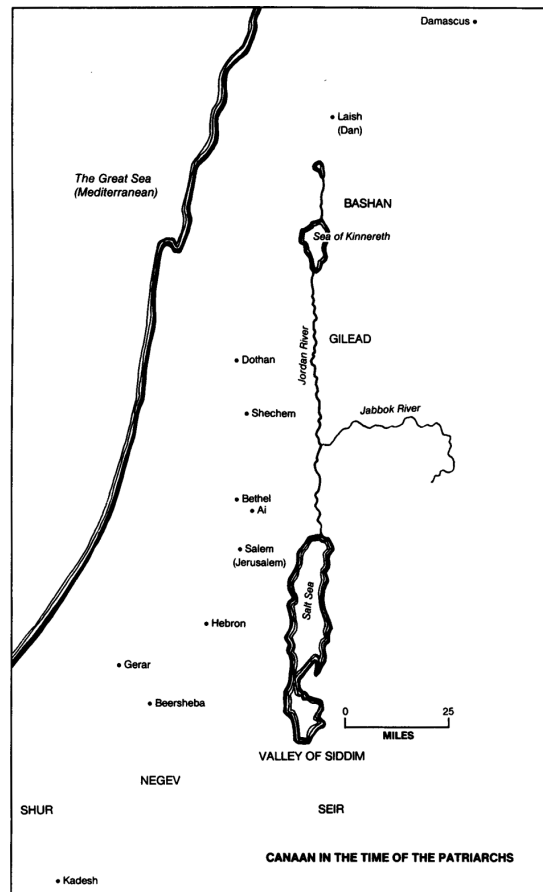
Hebron

Genesis 23:2 (ESV)

² And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Genesis 23:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over



Sodom and the Cities of the Plain (סֹדֹם, *sedom*; הַכִּכָּר נְרִי, *hakkikkar arey*). Infamous wicked city and its neighboring cities destroyed by Yahweh in the days of Abraham and Lot. Sodom and the Cities of the Plain (more specifically, Cities of the Kikkar) serve as a geographical center of the Sodom narratives found in Genesis. After their destruction, Sodom and Gomorrah became a potent biblical metaphor symbolizing the wrath of God.

[Note: This article uses dates, designations and abbreviations for archaeological periods from the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, Jordan. Also, due to spelling variations between scholars, place-names may differ slightly between text and references; e.g., some use “tall” (= ruin mound) instead of “tell.”]

Introduction

Sodom and the Cities of the Plain occupy the center of the patriarchal period geography from the Table of Nations (Gen 10) into the time of Abraham (Gen 19). The biblical formulation of the Cities of the Plain (כִּכָּר, *kikkar*; “disk” or “circle”) includes Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. They existed in the “Land of the Kikkar” (Gen 19:28), also described as the “Kikkar of the Jordan” (Gen 13:10, 11). While many 20th century scholars placed the Cities of the Plain in the southern Dead Sea area, the most recent archaeological evidence confirms their existence on the circular plain of the Jordan Valley (the Kikkar) immediately northeast of the Dead Sea. This was the location preferred by most of the 19th century explorer-scholars who followed the geography of Gen 13:1–12. Because of their wickedness, Yahweh destroyed the Cities of the Kikkar—with the exception of Zoar—by a fiery catastrophe “out of the heavens” (Gen 19:24) during the days of Abraham and Lot (Middle Bronze Age 2 [MB2], ca. 1800–1550 BC). After their destruction, Sodom and Gomorrah became a major biblical metaphor representing the wrath of God (Deut 29:23, 32:32; Isa 1:9, 10, 3:9, 13:19; Jer 23:14, 49:18, 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46–56; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9; and numerous New Testament references).

Locations and Etymologies. The location of Sodom and the so-called Cities of the Plain is a controversial matter among Bible scholars, archaeologists, and cartographers—and has been for over 150 years. While Sodom and Gomorrah rarely appear on Bible maps, when they do they are almost always accompanied by a question mark. From the mid-19th century to the present day, the focus of the debate has centered on whether the infamous cities were located at the northern or southern end of the Dead Sea. However, recent advances in the archaeology and history of the southern Jordan Valley, commonly referred to as the Middle Ghor, are providing new data strongly favoring the northern view.

Sodom. The meaning of “Sodom” (סֹדֹם, *sedom*) is unknown. It is unlikely that it might be related to סִדְדִּים (*siddim*) (as in Valley of Siddim). The original name of the city may not have been Hebrew at all, but perhaps a presently unknown Semitic term from Canaanite, Amorite, or Akkadian. This would explain our inability to decipher it. Textual evidence indicates that Sodom was the largest city in the Land of the Kikkar: Sodom is always listed first, and it is the only Kikkar city mentioned individually apart from the others. Bera, Sodom’s ruler, is the only Kikkar king whose voice is included in the narrative—Sodom was dominant. For many, Sodom bears most of the blame for bringing down the wrath of God upon the Cities of the Kikkar. Tall el-Hammam, a massive Bronze Age site eight miles northeast of the Dead Sea, and the largest ruin in the Jordan Valley, is the likely location of biblical Sodom.

Gomorrah (גְּמֹרָה, *amorah*) - might possibly be related to “overflow” or “inundation”—perhaps a reflection of the Jordan’s springtime floods—as it seems related to a similar word in modern Arabic. It is the second half of the geographical doublet, Sodom and Gomorrah. Since Gomorrah was always less important, it likely operated within the political sphere of Sodom, but had its own king (Birsha; Gen 14:2). Several Kikkar sites could qualify as Gomorrah, particularly Tall Kafrayn and Tall Iktanu, both within two kilometers of Tall el-Hammam and dating to the same period.

Admah (אֲדָמָה, *admah*) - appears in the text of Genesis as the second largest of the Kikkar cities, ruled by King Shinab. The term Admah is likely related to אֲדָמָה (*adamah*), translated “red earth.” This corresponds to the soils on the eastern side of the southern Jordan Valley which tend to be reddish brown in color as one approaches the hills defining the outer circumference of the Kikkar. This is where most of the cities and towns dating to the time of Abraham are located. The Bronze Age site of Tall Nimrin occupies a discreet territory with several “daughter” towns in close proximity. Thus, Tall Nimrin is a good candidate for Admah.

Zeboiim - occupies the second position in the Admah-Zeboiim doublet. Its name (צְבוִיִּים, *tsevyoyim*) refers to “gazelles,” and one could interpret its plural form as representing two or more towns. Under the hegemony of Admah, it retained its own king, Shemeber. If Zeboiim does include more than one town, then logically it follows that they would be geographically interrelated and yet possibly separated by a topographical feature that kept them from merging. Less than one mile to the northeast of Tall Nimrin are two sites, Tall Bleibel and Tall Mustah, separated only by the wadi (stream) running between them. The sites are so close together that many scholars have considered them one site, and the wadi might be the dividing element (Khouri, *Jordan Rift Valley*, 70–86). The sites are located on the eastern edge of the Kikkar, and are adjacent to the hills where gazelles were most common.

Zoar - possibly the locale of an influential clan of Bedouin (Shasu) or ‘Apîru tent dwellers (Collins, “Rethinking Zoar,” 3). Zoar (צֹאֵר, *tso’arah*) is frequently translated “small” or “insignificant,” perhaps indicating that it had no architecture. Zoar alone had a history after the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, and appeared several times in the biblical text as a geographical marker (Deut 34:3; Isa 15:5; Jer 48:34). In the Roman records the city appears as a deep-water port on the Dead Sea, as well as on the 6th century AD Madaba Map (Neev and Emery, *Destruction of Sodom*, 7, 109, 124, 129–32, 136–38, 150). Perhaps it was not technically one of the Kikkar cities, but only allied with them. Its likely location was on or near the Arnon Gorge (Wadi Mujib) to the south, where later it served as a border marker of the Reuben/Gad tribal allotment (Deut 34:3) (Collins, “Rethinking Zoar,” 1–5). Lot and his family fled to Zoar just prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Somewhere between Sodom and Zoar, Lot’s wife looked back toward the Cities of the Kikkar and became a “pillar of salt” (Gen 19:26). Lot appears to have found the people of Zoar unsuitable, and he left to live in a cave (Gen 19:30–38).

Evaluating the Evidence

There are three main approaches to identifying the locations of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim.

1. Geography—the salient biblical texts are rich with details regarding the cities’ whereabouts.
2. Chronology—the relevant biblical passages are generally clear on the historical timeframe of Abram and Lot.
3. Archaeological investigation—the ruins of such a prestigious cluster of ancient cities/towns

would certainly stand out on its given landscape, thereby providing data commensurate with the details of material culture, architecture, and destruction depicted in the Sodom narratives.

Each of these investigative tools requires an appropriate use of the biblical text in the proper Near Eastern context.

Along with these three main lines of evidence are data from geology and astrophysics, archaeoclimatology, and ancient Near Eastern history, culture, socioeconomics, and anthropology.

1. Geology and astrophysics—the terminal catastrophe which destroyed the Cities of the Plain may have left one or more detectible “fingerprints” on the landscape.
2. Archaeoclimatology—there is data embedded in the Sodom account, as well as in several physical sources in and around the Dead Sea area.
3. History—the story of Abram and Lot takes place over the entire length of the Fertile Crescent.
4. Culture—shows period-appropriate behaviors and customs woven into the Sodom narratives.
5. Ancient Near Eastern socioeconomics—textual evidence shows the Cities of the Plain, particularly Sodom, as playing a significant role in regional trade, politics, and balance of power.
6. Ancient Near Eastern warfare—an account of two international military campaigns occupies one of the principal Sodom tales.
7. Ancient Near Eastern anthropology—the relevant texts suggest interactions within and between tribes, clans, and families, as well as the intricate workings of (religious) rituals performed upon a sacred landscape.

This integrative approach to the identification of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain arises out of a dialogical approach to biblical archaeology. By linking biblical history to ancient Near Eastern history, multiple lines of evidence arise within the dialogue between the two disciplines. In order for this relationship to be fruitful, the text and the “ground” must interact. It is not appropriate to study the biblical text in isolation from other disciplines which potentially affect our understanding of the ancient world. It is also erroneous to ignore the biblical text in our pursuit of Levantine archaeology. Both text and ground, with all their approaches and dimensions employed, can give rise to a meaningful synthesis. Only then can an objective analysis provide a reasonable answer to the location of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain.

Four Major Views

Traditionally there have been four major views regarding the location of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain:

- locations at/near the southern end of the Dead Sea
- locations at/near the northern end of the Dead Sea
- under the waters of the Dead Sea
- in the realm of myth

However, based upon investigations in the 19th century, as well as the ongoing current excavations at Tall el-Hammam, the view that they are located northeast of the Dead Sea is once again gaining prominence.

Southern Sodom Theory. The southern Sodom theory (SST) identifies a string of ancient sites in the vicinity of the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea. The most prominent of these archaeological sites are Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira (Wood, “Discovery of Sodom,” 67–80; Howard, “Sodom Revisited,” 385–400; compare Collins, “Response to Wood’s Critique,” 217–52). They are located in the area east of the Lisan Peninsula stretching toward the southern end of the Dead Sea. The largest, Bab edh-Dhra, is most often identified with Sodom. Just to the south of Bab edh-Dhra lies Numeira, a candidate for Gomorrah. Also in the vicinity, a handful of smaller ruins exist. All of these date to various subperiods of the Early Bronze Age (EBA; ca. 3600–2350 BC) and/or Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA; ca. 2350–2000 BC) without any subsequent Bronze Age or Iron Age occupation (Schaub and Chesson, “Bab edh-Dhra” and an-Numayra,” 245–52). The SST, while less popular during the 19th century, became, by the 20th century, conventional wisdom. This change primarily occurred under the influence of Albright and his protégé, Wright (Albright, “Expedition to Moab and the Dead Sea,” 2–12; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 30). During the 1970s through to the 1990s, excavations at Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, performed by W. E. Rast and R. T. Schaub, imbued with speculation about Sodom and Gomorrah, fueled the SST (Rast, “Bab edh-Dhra’ ”). Some have entertained a combination view: Sodom and Gomorrah in the southern Dead Sea area; Admah and Zeboiim north of the Dead Sea (MacDonald, *East of the Jordan*, 45–61).

Northern Sodom Theory. The northern Sodom theory (NST) was prominent among the explorer-scholars of the 19th century, many of whom spent much time and energy mapping the Holy Land. In the case of Sodom and Cities of the Plain, they mainly followed geographical clues in the biblical text, primarily Gen 13:1–12. They saw the geographical markers within the passage as describing the location of Sodom. They followed it to an area northeast of the Dead Sea on the alluvial plain of the southern Jordan Valley where they observed a large number of ancient ruins (Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 371–76; Tristram, *The Land of Moab*, 330–33). The NST became less popular during the 20th century due to Albright and Wright. However, many scholars continued to argue in its favor based on the textual analysis of Gen 13 (Culver, “Zoar”; Simons, *Geographical Texts*, 15, 224). From the 1960s until the late 1990s, the difficulty NST scholars faced centered on the lack of access to archaeological sites in the southern Jordan valley due to a strong military presence in the region. However, since 2001, exploration and excavations have flourished. These investigations have revealed the existence of a thriving Bronze Age civilization in the southern Jordan valley, and have made the NST prominent once again (Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, “Tall al-Ḥammām: Four Seasons,” 385–414).

Underwater Sodom Theory. The “underwater” theory has a long history, but is the least scientific of the three views on Sodom’s location. Most generally, it was revived in modern times by W. F. Albright. In his view, because the traditional southern sites—Bab edh-Dhra, Numeira and neighboring ruins—were destroyed hundreds of years prior to the time of Abram and Lot, they could not possibly have been the biblical Cities of the Plain. They were simply too early (on this, Albright was correct). However, even though he knew of no sites in the southern Dead Sea area that could possibly date the time of Abraham (MB2, ca. 1800–1550 BC), Albright still held to a southern location. The only conclusion left to him given his adherence to the SST: The ruins of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain must be under the shallow waters of the Dead Sea’s southern basin, south of the Lisan. That area, he hypothesized, must have once been a fertile plain which, after the destruction of its cities, sank in an earthquake and was covered by the waters of the Salt Sea (Albright, “Expedition to Moab and the Dead Sea,” 2–12; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 30). From Medieval times until the present, scholars and laymen alike have

postulated a similar scenario for the deep northern basin of the Dead Sea. (Categorically, the “underwater” theories are doomed by geology and archaeoclimatology, as demonstrated below.)

Mythical Sodom Theory. A large number of scholars believe that Sodom and the Cities of the Plain never existed at all, but comprise only a moralistic metaphor. They consider “the world of the patriarchs as a fiction, not reality” (Lemche, *Prelude to Israel’s Past*, 39). For such scholars, Sodom is an example of God’s wrath set within the context of Israel’s metanarrative. However, if the Sodom tales identify a location for the Cities of the Kikkar that was, in fact, populated by the ruins of significant Bronze Age cities dating to the time of Abraham, it would be difficult to dismiss such a correlation between text and ground as mere coincidence. Further, if archaeology should confirm that a violent conflagration destroyed those cities and towns during the time of the biblical patriarchs, then perhaps serious consideration should be given to the history behind the Sodom narratives.

Geographical Evidence

It is essential to identify the definitive biblical text(s) vis-à-vis the geography of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain. Hermeneutically, a “definitive text” is one written expressly for the purpose of directing the reader to Sodom’s location. It is also a hermeneutical requirement that such a text be historical in nature, i.e. in the tradition of the classic narrative, serial geographies of the Old Testament. Such serial geographies take the reader from “place to place” (compare Gen 13:3; also the exodus itineraries) as the story unfolds, not so much chronologically, but geographically.

On this basis, the narrative (serial geography) of Gen 13:1–12 is the only biblical passage that qualifies as a definitive text for the location of the Cities of the Plain. Ancient Near Eastern writers—Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, Canaanite, or Hebrew—did not invent fictitious geographies. Whether their characters and events were fact, fiction, or somewhere between, ancient authors layered their tales over a real-world geography with which they were familiar. The writer of Gen 13 knew the geography he represented as the world of Abram and Lot, and that is the primary reason why his description of the “way to Sodom” is quite easy to follow (Collins, *Search for Sodom and Gomorrah*, 15–21).

Getting to Sodom is a step-by-step process reflecting the authentic and accurate nature of the serial geography of Gen 13:1–12. Here is the essential “road map” to Sodom and the Cities of the Plain (author’s rendering of the Hebrew text with a few nongeographical elements removed for brevity):

“So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev ... and Lot went with him ... From the Negev he traveled from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai ... Lot lifted his gaze and saw that the entire Plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of Yahweh, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar [perhaps Zoan] ... So Lot chose for himself the whole Plain of the Jordan and made his way eastward ... Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the Cities of the Plain and pitched his tents in the vicinity of Sodom.”

One can easily sense the serial nature of the passage as the narrative moves from one geographical location to the next. The key term in the text is the one translated “plain” (“valley” in some versions). Of the main five or six words in Hebrew that carry the meaning of “plain,” “valley,” “bottom land,” “flat land,” and the like, the word translated “plain” throughout the Sodom tales—as in “Plain of the Jordan,” “Cities of the Plain,” “the Plain,” and “Land of the Plain”—is not one of them. In fact, it is not a geographical term, and does not mean “plain” at all. The Hebrew word is כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) (הַכִּכָּר, *hakkikkar*; with the definite article), and it is used 68

times in the Old Testament. Most of the time כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) means “talent” as in a talent of silver, gold, or other metal. The talent was a circular, flat disk of metal used as a medium of exchange and was one of the largest denominations of “currency.” Seven times in the Old Testament כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) refers to the traditional circular, flat bread (like the modern pita) ubiquitous to the ancient Near East. The word is used frequently in ancient Akkadian (*kakaru*), Ugaritic (*kakaru*), and Egyptian (*kerker*) texts, always meaning “talent” or “tortilla” (in modern Hebrew, כִּכָּר, *kikkar*; is the word used for a traffic roundabout). The fact is that כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) has no geographical application whatsoever beyond the thirteen times it is so used in the Old Testament.

Linguistically, the 13 geographical uses of כִּכָּר (*kikkar*)—seven times in the Sodom tales; once each in Deut 34:3, 2 Sam 18:23, 1 Kgs 7:46, 2 Chr 4:17, and Neh 3:22 and 12:28—represent what is, linguistically, called a *phenomenological secondary referent* (PSR). Simply put, a PSR is a regular word like “table” or “elephant” applied to another entity because that entity “looks like” it. For example, the term “boot-heel” of Italy refers to the shape of that particular piece of the Italian Peninsula. In the American Southwest, there is a place called Elephant Butte because a particular rock formation there looks (somewhat) like an elephant. Also, a flat-topped hill is called a *mesa* (the Spanish word for “table”). Similarly, the Hebrew כִּכָּר (*kikkar*), or חִכְכָּר (*hakkikkar*), refers to a geographical area that looks like a “talent” or “tortilla,” i.e. a flat, disk-shaped region called כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) because of its perceived shape.

That כִּכָּר (*kikkar*) refers to a formal geographical construct—on a par with such “capitalized” terms as Negev, Arabah, and Jordan—is not often recognized, though the term is used clearly seven times in the Sodom tales. In order to determine the precise location of the Kikkar, we need to find where Lot was standing when he “lifted up his gaze” to see “that the entire Plain/Kikkar of the Jordan was well-watered.” Genesis 13 indicates that Abram and Lot had traveled “to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai,” and they remained encamped at that location until Lot departed for Sodom (Gen 13:14–18).

The location of Bethel/Ai is about 14 miles northwest of Jericho and about 12 miles north of Jerusalem on the tallest hills of Canaan’s Central Highlands. Abram and Lot were grazing their animals in that area when they decided to part because of the growing size of their collective families, flocks, and herds. Thus, from the area around (likely east of) Bethel/Ai, Lot looked up and saw the well-watered Kikkar of the Jordan. What Lot saw was the southern part of the Jordan Valley that widens dramatically into a disk-shaped, alluvial plain, some 25 kilometers in diameter, where the Jordan (חַיְיָרְדֵּן, *hayyarden*) empties into the Dead Sea. Indeed, it was the “Kikkar of the Jordan” or “Disk of the Jordan.”

The Old Testament is quite precise as to the extent of the Jordan (חַיְיָרְדֵּן, *hayyarden*):

1. חַיְיָרְדֵּן (*hayyarden*) never refers to anything other than the fresh water system of the Jordan River proper.
2. חַיְיָרְדֵּן (*hayyarden*) never includes any part of the Dead Sea proper, because its southern extremity ends at “the mouth of the Jordan, at the bay of the Dead Sea, below Pisgah” (compare Num 34:12; Deut 3:17, 27; 4:47–49; Josh 15:5; 18:19).

While some commentators have attempted to include the entire Dead Sea valley in the Kikkar of the Jordan, that is a geographical impossibility, and it is categorically disallowed by the Old Testament geo-construct, חַיְיָרְדֵּן (*hayyarden*).

Two descriptors in Gen 13:10 confirm that the Kikkar geography is north of the Dead Sea:

1. The Kikkar of the Jordan was well-watered “like the garden of Yahweh.” This refers to an

earlier passage in Genesis where “a river watering the garden flowed out of Eden” (Gen 2:10). That is how the Kikkar of the Jordan is watered—by a single river, the Jordan, flowing right down the middle of it.

2. The Kikkar was watered “like the Land of Egypt.” This is a reference to the Nile’s annual overflowing—well known throughout the ancient Near East. The Jordan did the same thing in antiquity: in the spring, it overflowed its banks in the Kikkar. The Jordan’s annual inundation created new deposits of water-laden silt over a wide area, and local farmers planted their crops behind the receding waters. Hydrologically, the Jordan was a miniature Nile. No other piece of geography in the entire Rift Valley matches both of these descriptors.

It is impossible to see from the area of Bethel/Ai beyond the bare northern tip of the Dead Sea even on a clear day. It is easy to see the “entire Kikkar of the Jordan” with its great river, its many streams, and its verdant agricultural lands. Thus, what Lot saw was the “Land of the Kikkar” (Gen 19:28), encompassing the “Kikkar of the Jordan” whereupon sat the wealthy and powerful “Cities of the Kikkar.” He departed for these cities, going eastward until he “pitched his tents in the vicinity of (near) Sodom.” Lot traveled east from Bethel/Ai—this is the only directional indicator in the text, and it is hermeneutically absolute. מִקְדֶּמַּת (*miqqedem*, “forward,” “east”) only means east, and any other interpretation would be an unwarranted emendation of the text.

The location of the Kikkar of the Jordan and the Cities of the Kikkar is north of the Dead Sea, visible from the area of Bethel/Ai, and accessed via the major trade route leading eastward from Bethel/Ai and crossing the Kikkar to its far side where Sodom dominated the ancient landscape. Collectively, Genesis 10, 13, and 14 indicate that Sodom was the largest among the Cities of the Kikkar for at least three reasons:

- Sodom is always mentioned first.
- Sodom is the only one of the cities mentioned by itself.
- King Bera of Sodom is chief among the other kings from the Land of the Kikkar—he alone has a voice in the story, and he alone accompanies Abram to meet with Melchizedek of Salem (Jerusalem).

Thus, according to the geographical parameters of Gen 10, 13, and 14, Sodom was the largest city in the Land of the Kikkar during the time of Abraham and Lot. This fact plays strongly in favor of the NST, while militating against the SST: If, as the SST demands, the Kikkar of the Jordan included the entire valley surrounding the Dead Sea, then Sodom must have been the largest of all the cities that existed during the time of Abram (the Bronze Age by all counts) in the southern Rift Valley, regardless of location. This can be only one site: Tall el-Hammam, located eight miles northeast of the Dead Sea. Bab edh-Dhra, the largest of the southern sites and a favorite “Sodom” of SST advocates, occupies just over five hectares (about 12 acres) (Schaub and Chesson, “Bab edh-Dhra” and an-Numayra,” 245–52). The footprint of the walled city at Tall el-Hammam is approximately 36 hectares (over 85 acres) with its general occupation spreading up to 100 hectares (240 acres) (Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, “Tall al-Ḥammām: Four Seasons,” 385–414). Further, it is now known that Tall el-Hammam was the nucleus of a major city-state encompassing about half of the eastern Kikkar, with numerous towns and villages within its territory (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 19–21).

The geographical data from Gen 14 is also relevant, although it is not as important as Gen 13. Kedorlaomer’s coalition army marched from Mesopotamia southward into the Levant along the King’s Highway (on the Transjordan Plateau), into the Wilderness of Paran, then back north

to Kadesh, continuing north to Hazazon Tamar (En Gedi; compare 2 Chr 12:2), and finally engaging the Cities of the Kikkar forces in the Valley of Siddim just prior to plundering Sodom and Gomorrah. Kedorlaomer was moving northward from En Gedi (Hazazon Tamar) toward the Cities of the Plain. This is supported by the meeting of Abram, Melchizedek of Salem, and Bera of Sodom, in the Valley of Shaveh (Gen 14:17) after Abram defeated Kedorlaomer's forces near Damascus (Gen 14:15).

The valley probably lies somewhere between Sodom and Salem (Jerusalem), and was a suitable meeting place for both kings and Abram. This was probably on the east–west trade route leading across the Kikkar from Sodom to Jerusalem. If Sodom were in the south, Kedorlaomer's route would need to be unnatural and convoluted, with greater distances. It is about 35 kilometers from Tall el-Hammam to Jerusalem along one of the region's best traversed routes—a same-day journey. The travel distance to Jerusalem from Bab edh-Dhra is over three times farther regardless of which route one takes. Jerusalem and Tall el-Hammam were neighbors with line-of-sight communication from the very next hill east of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives. Bab edh-Dhra was neither visible nor accessible from Jerusalem (or the reverse) apart from a journey of two or three days.

Thus, the biblical geography consistently favors the northern Sodom theory over the SST.

Chronological Evidence

Chronologies—both ancient Near Eastern or biblical—are difficult to work with. There is no general consensus regarding the chronology of the ancient Near East or of the first six books of the Bible (the “Bronze Age Scriptures”). There are high, middle, and low chronologies for Egypt and Mesopotamia with a half-century margin of error for most time frames. As for the biblical chronology, the exodus is variously dated to the 15th century BC, the 14th century BC, and the 13th century BC—a margin of over 200 years. The late (13th century) date is certainly the majority view today, with the rest of scholarship divided between the early and middle dates. Regardless, Abram must have lived somewhere in the beginning, middle, or end of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA; ca. 2000–1550 BC).

Depending on whether one holds to a long (430 years) or a short (215 years) Israelite sojourn in Egypt (from Jacob in Egypt until the exodus), the dates for Abram and Lot fall either in MB1 (ca. 2000–1800 BC) or MB2 (ca. 1800–1550 BC). Since the vast majority of the evidence supports a short versus a long Israelite sojourn in Egypt (including Paul in Gal 3:16–17, Josephus in Ant. 2.15.2, all versions of the LXX, and the Samaritan Pentateuch), the most likely chronological placement of Abram and Lot is during the MB2 period. Further, if the patriarchal lifespan numbers can be taken in a formulaic or honorific manner rather than as literal, base-10 arithmetic values, then the timeframe of Abram would be even more ambiguous. It would still belong to the MB2 period, as indicated by specific cultural elements such as covenant/treaty structures (Abram) and the price of slaves (Joseph) (Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 313–372).

Given that the story of Abram and Lot occurred during the second half of the Middle Bronze Age (MB2, ca. 1800–1550 BC), any site suggested as Sodom or one of the Cities of the Plain must have been occupied during that period. In other words, if a site does not sport an MB2 stratum (time of Abram and Lot), then that site cannot be one of those cities.

Also, the Cities of the Plain—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim—are also prominently featured in Gen 10 in the pre-Babel world, long before the time of Abram. There are only four city-strings mentioned in this “Table of Nations” passage—two in Mesopotamia and two in the southern Levant. The two Mesopotamian strings include such famous and powerful cities as

Babylon, Akkad, and Nineveh. The two Levantine strings mark out the geographical extent of the Canaanite clans, with the second string consisting of the Cities of the Plain, plus Lasha (= Laish = Dan; compare Judg 18:29). These four city-strings are the only ones in the Gen 10 layout of ancient Near Eastern geography as the ancient author perceived it. The writer mentions no others—this shows their prominence in the ancient world.

The Cities of the Plain were important in the patriarchal world—the text implies that they were among the first city-centers of the Fertile Crescent. This coordinates well with the initial period of urbanization, the Early Bronze Age (EBA, ca. 3600–2350 BC). During this time, large cities and city-states sprang up all over the Near East. After this, the EBA urban centers collapsed, likely due to severe climate change. The next period was the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA, ca. 2350–2000 BC). During this, cities and towns across the entire Fertile Crescent dwindled and died. Thus, the IBA cannot possibly be the world envisioned in Gen 10. The correct chronological spread for Sodom and the Cities of the Plain must include at least the Early Bronze Age (the rise of urbanism), the Intermediate Bronze Age (a time of decline), and the Middle Bronze Age (the golden age of Canaanite city-state culture), with a final destruction in the time of Abram and Lot during MB2.

This chronology contradicts the southern Sodom theory. As Albright recognized over half a century ago, all of the southern Dead Sea sites like Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira date to the EBA, hundreds of years before Abram was born. While some survived for a while as small, unwallled IBA settlements, they were all dead and gone by 2200 BC, still before any timeframe that one could associate with Abram and Lot. One must also realize that Numeira—often touted as the Gomorrah to Sodom/Bab edh-Dhra—ended around 2600 BC, 250 years before Bab edh-Dhra's demise. Not only do both of them date too early to intersect with the patriarchal narratives, but also a quarter millennium separates their respective terminal dates—unlike the simultaneous annihilation described in Gen 19. Unfortunately for the SST, there are no Bronze Age sites in the southern Dead Sea area dating beyond 2200 BC.

These chronological issues support the northern Sodom theory. The cities, towns, and villages of the eastern Kikkar—with Tall el-Hammam as the giant among them—have a convergent, continuous chronology beginning (at least) during the Chalcolithic Period (ca. 4600–3600 BC). They last through the EBA (ca. 3600–2350 BC), IBA (ca. 2350–2000 BC), and MBA (ca. 2000–1550 BC), terminating toward the end of MB2 across the entire Kikkar. If one insists on the earliest imaginable chronology for the career of Abraham—birth, 2166 BC; into Canaan, 2091 BC—then the dating of the Kikkar sites including Tall el-Hammam is problematic (compare Wood, "Locating Sodom," 78–84). A middle date of 1816 BC for Abram's entry into Canaan gets much closer to synchronicity (compare Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 358–59), but is still tricky to reconcile. However, if one adopts a late date for Abram's arrival in Canaan, ca. 1680 BC (compare Mazar, *Archaeology*, 225), the timing is right. Also, the patriarchal life numbers were probably formulaic (symbolic) conventions based on "honorific" numerical equations (Collins and Moore, "Abraham: Chronology," 95–96). This removes any chronological difficulties, and the embedded culturally specific elements of the story indicate that it was from the MB2 (ca. 1800–1550 BC; Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 313–72).

Simply put, the landscape of the Jordan Disk northeast of the Dead Sea contains the ruins of many Middle Bronze Age cities dating to the time of Abram and Lot, the occupations of which ended abruptly toward the end of MB2. After this, what had been the most luxuriant area in the region—the eastern Kikkar—remained without cities and towns for the next six to seven centuries (Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, "Tall al-Ḥammām: Four Seasons," 385–414; Flanagan, McCreery, and Yassine, "Tell Nimrin: 1993 Season," 205–44; Flanagan, McCreery, and Yassine,

“Tall Nimrin: 1995 Excavation,” 271–92). Later, when Moses and the Israelites camped on that same territory before crossing over toward Jericho, the eastern Jordan Disk is described as “the valley in Moab where the top of Pisgah overlooks the wasteland” (Num 21:20). This, in itself, is another remarkable similarity between the text and the ground.

Archaeological Evidence

Given that the proper location for Sodom and the Cities of the Plain is the Kikkar of the Jordan northeast of the Dead Sea, and that the MB2 period (ca. 1800–1550 BC) is the appropriate timeframe for the story of Abram and Lot, the archaeological record of the eastern Kikkar provides a remarkable picture of ancient Sodom (Tall el-Hammam, TeH) and the area for which it served as the urban hub.

The civilization of the eastern Kikkar which gave rise to the formulaic geography of the biblical Cities of the Plain began during the Late Neolithic Period (ca. 6000–4600 BC) and extended through the Middle Bronze Age (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 14–19; Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, “Tall al-Ḥammām: Four Seasons,” 385–414). The population of the area grew during the Chalcolithic Period at sites like TeH and nearby Teleilat Ghassul (ca. 4600–3600 BC). However, the people of Ghassul suddenly lost their on-site water supply, perhaps because of tectonic shift (Levy, “Tuleilat el-Ghassul,” 506–11). After this, the population probably moved quickly to nearby Tall el-Hammam. This city then became the dominant population center of the eastern Jordan Disk. About the beginning of Early Bronze 2 (EB2; ca. 3000 BC), TeH built fortifications for the first time, and then (probably after an earthquake) improved them significantly during EB3 (ca. 2700–2350 BC). TeH’s EBA fortifications were impressive, but its MBA defensive complex was at or near the pinnacle of defensive architecture in the southern Levant (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 10–11, 22–23).

Genesis 19:1 states that “Lot sat in Sodom’s gateway.” This is a clear indicator that Sodom was a fortified city—the general meaning of Hebrew *יר* (*ir*). The massive MB1–2 defensive systems at Tall el-Hammam are a dramatic confirmation of this biblical datum. TeH/Sodom had both an inner/upper and outer/lower city. The 36° sloping mudbrick rampart surrounding the upper city rises 33 meters (100 feet) above the lower city, and required approximately 75 million mudbricks in its construction. The lower-city defenses are even larger than those of the upper city, consisting of a 4 meter thick city wall with a substantial stone foundation and mudbrick superstructure, contiguous with a mudbrick and stone rampart. The width of the lower-city defenses ranges from 33 meters (100 feet) to 50 meters (150+ feet) from the inside face of the city wall to the bottom of the rampart’s outer slope. Recent excavations reveal that a significant portion of TeH’s defenses remain intact (Collins, Hamdan, et al, “Tall el-Hammam 2010 Excavation,” 10–11, 22–23; compare Burke, “Walled up to Heaven”).

Excavations at TeH have also unearthed a large (100 × 100 meters) sacred precinct at the geographical center of the lower city, including a Canaanite-style temple and an associated administrative complex dating to the Middle Bronze Age. The temple’s load-bearing walls are 3 meters (10 feet) thick and 22 meters (nearly 70 feet) long. One associated monumental building measures 20 × 60 meters. A large palace structure exists on the upper tall, overlooking the entire city—perhaps the palace of Bera, King of Sodom (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 20).

Besides the defensive and monumental architecture at TeH, domestic structures reveal a vibrant, prosperous lifestyle that endured for over 2,500 years. Indeed, the archaeological evidence at TeH shows that the city experienced unbroken occupation from the Chalcolithic

Period through the Middle Bronze Age. This occupational profile is also reflected collectively in the Kikkar sites surrounding TeH—tells Iktanu, Adeimah, Mwais, Rama, Kafrayn, Tahouna, Barakat, Nimrin, Bleibel, Mustah, and many smaller sites. Indeed, the Land of the Kikkar was the best-watered area in the region (Gen 13:10). This makes it significant that its entire civilization ended abruptly toward the end of MB2.

While the Bronze Age continued unabated in the lands to the east, west, and north of the Kikkar, the Kikkar cities and towns themselves went down in what can only be described as a fiery catastrophe—an ecological disaster of biblical proportions (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 11). The destruction of the MB2 Kikkar sites represents a “hole” punched in the Bronze Age, whereupon the area remained unoccupied for the ensuing six to seven centuries. [The excavators of Tall Nimrin called it “the Late Bronze Gap” (Flanagan, McCreery, and Yassine, “Tell Nimrin: 1993 Season,” 205–44; Flanagan, McCreery, and Yassine, “Tall Nimrin: 1995 Excavation,” 271–92).] The unusual nature of the Kikkar’s six century (or more) abandonment after its MB2 terminal event is even more remarkable when one considers that fact that the area’s EB3 sites did not go down in ca. 2350 BC when practically every site in the Levant did. When the EBA climate took that turn for the worse, the Kikkar sites continued to thrive because of their abundant water resources.

That such a civilization—built upon one of antiquity’s best-watered areas at the crossroads of the region’s main north—south, east—west trade routes—collapsed suddenly and disappeared from history is a phenomenon that requires an explanation. The ash and destruction debris from Tall el-Hammam’s terminal MB2 stratum ranges from half a meter to more than two meters thick over both the upper and lower tells. Embedded in those layers are broken and tumbled mudbricks, smashed and charred pottery vessels, and a typical assortment of day-to-day objects—all violently churned into a telltale, ash-filled matrix. In the 2011 season at TeH, excavators discovered the first human remains associated with the MB2 destruction layer—skeletons covered by architectural debris, limbs twisted out of normal positions, some thrown on their faces with hyperextended joints, and surrounded in the matrix by human bone scatter such as pieces of ribs, the ends of long bones, and skull fragments (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 11).

TeH/Sodom suffered a violent end. What appears in the excavation is out of character for an earthquake—more than the lurching and collapse of structures resulting in the burial of contents and inhabitants. Also, if an earthquake had destroyed the city, it would have been rebuilt as it had been after previous quakes. Cities on crossing trade routes with abundant water and arable land were almost always rebuilt after earthquake or military destruction. Instead, this was the utter annihilation of an entire civilization and one of the mightiest city-states in the southern Levant for more than 2,000 years.

The archaeological evidence is clear that the Kikkar remained without cities and towns from the time of its MB2 destruction all the way down to the beginning of Iron Age 2 (ca. 1000 BC)—except for Jericho. Jericho, opposite Hammam on the western Kikkar, was rebuilt and reoccupied around 1400 BC after a 200-year occupational hiatus. It was then destroyed again, perhaps by Joshua.

Significant evidence that the ancient Kikkar cities and towns, and their terminal destruction, served as the historical and geographical backdrop for the Sodom tales continues to emerge from the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project (Jordan). There is an excellent match between the archaeology of the eastern Kikkar (especially Tall el-Hammam) and the biblical accounts of the Cities of the Plain.

Corroborative Evidence

In addition to the geographical, chronological, and archaeological evidence for the Cities of the Kikkar, several other lines of evidence converge to corroborate the NST and the identification of Tall el-Hammam as Sodom: geology and astrophysics, archaeoclimatology, and ancient Near Eastern history, culture, socioeconomics, warfare, and anthropology.

Geology and Astrophysics. There is no detectible, terrestrial-based geological event to account for the disappearance of the Bronze Age civilization in the Land of the Kikkar. That some kind of destruction took place is an obvious feature of the area's archaeology. What this was remains undetermined. It was not any kind of volcanism—there has been no such activity in the Rift Valley within the framework of historical times (Frumkin and Elitzur, "The Dead Sea," 43–50). The most common suggestion concerning Sodom's destruction—particularly for the SST—is an earthquake accompanied by natural gas or bitumen spewed into the air from a bedrock fissure which somehow ignited and fell upon the cities (compare Neev and Emery, *Destruction of Sodom*). However, there is no evidence of such "pressurized" gas or bitumen deposits in the Dead Sea area, much less such a geological scenario that might destroy cities. There is evidence of some smaller scale burning at the southern EB sites, but this probably was accomplished by military attack or other ordinary causes. Further, the language of the text works against such an interpretation. The Old Testament writers accepted the possibility of the ground opening up and causing destruction (Num 16:28–34). However, Genesis 19:24 specifically states that the burning matrix came "from Yahweh out of the heavens." This indicates an astrophysical, not a terrestrial, event.

At least one reasonable scientific theory exists which matches the biblical account of the destruction recorded in Gen 19:24–28: that of airbursts or so-called "cosmic bombs." The most commonly studied airburst event in modern history occurred near Tunguska, Siberia in 1908, incinerating 2,000 square kilometers of dense forest in an instant (Gasperrini, Bonatti, and Longo, "The Tunguska Mystery," 80–86; compare Longo, "The Tunguska Event"). This phenomenon occurs when a piece of space debris—a comet fragment, small asteroid, or other object—moving at a high velocity, penetrates the Earth's atmosphere, and disintegrates before impact, leaving no crater. What, in fact, strikes the surface of the Earth is a "flash" of super-heated plasma which not only vaporizes and/or burns up everything on the landscape, but also creates a distinct plume of smoke, dust, and debris "sucked" back into space through the pathway of entry (Boslough and Crawford, "Low-Altitude Airbursts"). The result is a column of "smoke" (Gen 19:28)—many times larger than the mushroom cloud of a nuclear detonation—visible for hundreds of miles.

This is consistent with Abram's experience when, from the hilly terrain near Hebron over 30 miles away, he "looked toward the area of Sodom and Gomorrah and to all the locale of the Land of the Kikkar, and he saw an amazing sight: dense smoke rising from the Kikkar, like smoke from a furnace" (Gen 19:28; author's translation). Scientists have studied the Tunguska event over the past several decades without finding solid evidence of what happened there only a century ago. A similar but smaller airburst event over the Jordan Disk would probably not leave traces detectible after several thousand years. The kind of destruction found at MB2 Kikkar sites like Tall el-Hammam and Tall Nimrin and the entire area's centuries-long occupational gap, lines up with what is known about cosmic airbursts. Scientists associated with the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project continue to collect and analyze high heat indicators such as "desert glass" and other materials from across the Kikkar. Perhaps a cause for the Kikkar destruction and occupational gap will surface from this research.

Geology also disproves many claims about Sodom’s location proposed by pseudoarchaeology, including the notion that some perfectly natural formations are the remnants of the Cities of the Plain. For example, the “buildings” (including “ziggurats”) allegedly “visible” in the landscape below Masada have been touted as Sodom. But, in fact, they are merely eroded Dead Sea marl deposits with natural sulfur “pills” as inclusions (which are common around the entire Dead Sea area). There never were any cities in this area, and these geological formations were not Sodom. Others (most recently a Russian team in 2011) have suggested that the Cities of the Plain might be underneath the waters of the Dead Sea’s deep northern basin. However, geological studies of the Dead Sea show that it has been approximately what it is today—and up to 130 meters deeper—for at least the past 15,000 years, and certainly throughout all of recorded human history (compare Frumkin and Elitzur, “The Dead Sea”; compare Neev and Emery, *Destruction of Sodom*). Today, at -432 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is at, or near, its historic low. Thus, it is not possible that any kind of settlement—much less a group of cities—could be underwater, below the historic low-water mark. Several Medieval maps of the Dead Sea do show the Cities of the Plain *in* the lake, but these map makers knew nothing of geology and few had ever been to the Holy Land.

Archaeoclimatology. The analysis of Dead Sea sediment cores, pollen studies, and a variety of other research methods have given us a picture of climate fluctuations during the biblical periods—the Bronze Age and Iron Age. For example, the first half of the Middle Bronze Age (MB1; ca. 2000–1800 BC) saw the rise of the great Canaanite city-states during a wet period, signaled by the rising of Dead Sea levels (Broshi and Gophna, “Middle Bronze Age II Palestine,” 73–90). However, during MB2 (ca. 1800–1550 BC) a dry period ensued that resulted in the migration of large numbers of Asiatics (Canaanites) from the Levant into Lower Egypt. By about 1700 BC there were so many of them in the Nile Delta region that they were able to rise up and take control, ruling Lower Egypt as the Hyksos (as Menetho called them) until they were expelled in ca. 1550 BC by the Theban Pharaoh, Ahmose, first king of the 18th Dynasty (Grimal, *History of Egypt*, 185–186).

These facts aid in dating the patriarchal period from Abram through Joseph. Severe famine in Canaan is a feature of the stories of Abraham (Gen 12:10), Isaac (Gen 26:1), Jacob and Joseph (Gen 41:50–42:1ff) (Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 52–76; Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, 147–76). Because of famine in Canaan, Abram spent time in the Nile Delta to survive, and Jacob’s family relocated permanently to Egypt where Joseph successfully managed the regional drought situation for Pharaoh. There was no famine in Canaan during the wet period prior to 1800 BC, and the patriarchs, who frequently experienced famine, do not fit well within that timeframe. The previous dry period was ca. 2400–2100 BC, which brought about the demise of kingdoms and cities across the entire Near East (Richard, “Rise and Collapse of Urbanism,” 22–43). That disastrous dry regime began to reverse just before 2000 BC, a positive climate change that precipitated the flowering of Canaanite civilization in the southern Levant, during which the population grew (Finkelstein, “Settlement History,” 120–31). After 1800 BC, the agricultural lands of Canaan had a difficult time supporting a large population, and the situation forced many into Egypt. It is clear that the Abram—Joseph famine scenarios fit the MB2. This supports a later chronology more in line with the archaeological record of Kikkar sites like Tall el-Hammam.

Ancient Near Eastern History. Ancient near eastern history hints at the Genesis patriarchs (Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 313–72), including reflections of the terminal demise of Tall el-Hammam and its neighbors. If, as the evidence suggests, Tall el-Hammam was the

Sodom of the MB2 story of Abram and Lot, then the site's post-destruction name from the time of Joseph (end of MB2) and during the Late Bronze Age (LBA; ca. 1550–1200 BC) (the time of Moses and Joshua) may indicate that the area was, in fact, without functioning cities or towns, and associated with death. Even after agricultural production began to recover on the eastern Kikkar during Joseph's lifetime, perhaps the expansive ritual landscape associated with Tall el-Hammam/Sodom—including hundreds of dolmens, menhirs, stone circles, and standing-stone alignments (Collins and Aljarrah, "Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation," 13–14)—still haunted the Hyksos' Canaanite consciousness as a place of solemn recollection.

Although the occupation at Tall el-Hammam terminated toward the end of MB2, afterward it carried a dramatic place-name both in the Egyptian records and in the Bible: Abel (אַבֵּל, *avel*) = "mourning," i.e. Place of Mourning. After Jacob died in Egypt, Joseph transported his body back to Canaan via a longer route, purposefully visiting Abel Mizraim (אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם, *mitsrayim avel*; = Egyptian Mourning Place; Gen 50:11), identified by most scholars as the massive ruins of Tall el-Hammam (Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary," 54–62). It is likely that Joseph lamented the death of Jacob at Abel Mizraim because it was then a traditional place of mourning in an area controlled by the Hyksos Pharaoh. This is historically accurate—Tall el-Hammam was under Hyksos hegemony when it was destroyed. The place was not so named because Joseph mourned there. Rather, Joseph mourned there because it was a high-profile place of ritual grief. The Egyptians/Hyksos were Canaanites familiar with local Canaanite lore. Indeed, TeH's many tombs and funerary monuments formed a unique feature of the southern Levant, and continued to possess ritual significance long after the destruction of the Cities of the Plain.

This area was also the same as the Plains of Moab where the Israelites encamped before crossing the Jordan: Abel Shittim (אַבְרָם שִׁטִּים, *hashshittim avel*; = Acacias of Mourning; Num 33:49; today Tall el-Hammam is still surrounded by acacias). Most scholars identify TeH as Abel Shittim (Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary," 54–62). This identification is confirmed by 18th and 19th Dynasty Egyptian map-lists from the reigns of Tuthmosis III and Rameses II which represent the Transjordan road from Egypt by locations along the route (virtually identical to the same itinerary described in Num 33): Yam Ha'malach (south end of the Salt Sea), Iyyim (mod. Ay), Heres/Hareseth (mod. Kerak), Aqrabat (mod. el-Aqraba), Dibon/Qarho (mod. Dhiban), Iktanu (Tall Iktanu), Abel (Tall el-Hammam), and Jordan (the Jordan River) (Simons, *Topographical Lists*, 111–15, 157–59, 174; Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, II, 260, 15n10–13; Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary," 54–62). Although uninhabited during the LBA, Abel (Tall el-Hammam) was the last major landmark before that road turned to intersect with the Jordan River. Once again, the visually powerful ritual landscape of Tall el-Hammam continued to carry its post-devastation name, Abel, Place of Mourning.

When the ancient Near Eastern and biblical histories are tied together, the resultant narrative surrounding Tall el-Hammam/Sodom looks like this: Yahweh destroyed the Hyksos-controlled Cities of the Plain, notably its most powerful city, TeH/Sodom (the biblical reason was entirely lost on the Hyksos, who considered themselves as Egyptian as any Theban). Lower Egypt mourned the sudden, catastrophic loss of this important commercial and cultural center. The impressive ruins of TeH/Sodom, surrounded by its sacred landscape, remained visible to all who passed through the Kikkar. The Egyptians kept TeH/Sodom on their maps leading to the Jordan River, but now called it Abel, Place of Mourning. TeH/Abel and its thousands of megalithic monuments had served over two thousand years of death rituals at the crossroads of regional trade. This was the place Joseph chose to mourn and memorialize his father, Jacob, before burying him in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron. After the exodus and wilderness wanderings, Moses brought the Israelites to TeH/Abel Shittim where the acacia trees grew

among the ruins of once-great TeH/Sodom. Neither Joseph nor Moses encountered cities or towns on the Kikkar, only the Place of Mourning. Sodom and the Cities of the Kikkar were gone. For the Israelites, the area was now “the Kikkar of the Valley of Jericho, City of Palms” (Deut 34:3).

Ancient Near Eastern Culture. After Abram’s defeat of Kedorlaomer’s coalition forces, Abram, Bera of Sodom, and Melchizedek of Jerusalem observed a ceremony together (Gen 14:17–24). During the proceedings, Abram “the Hebrew” refused remuneration from Bera, King of Sodom, and instead paid a percentage of the war spoils to Melchizedek of Jerusalem (Gen 14:22–24; 14:20). While there is considerable controversy over the relationship between the terms “Hebrew” (עִבְרִי, *ivriy*) and ‘Apîru (Akkadian for “marauding wanderers”), there is little room for doubt that the Bronze Age city-dwellers of Canaan would have labeled Abram and his multiethnic band of seminomads as ‘Apîru (Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge*, 88–89; compare Waterhouse, “Habiru,” 31–42).

During the ancient Near Eastern Bronze Age, ‘Apîru/Habiru were nomadic to seminomadic mixed ethnic bands who lived on the margins of ancient urban society. Individual groups could number in the hundreds or thousands, each led by what today one might call a “warlord.” They did anything they could to survive—caravan running, herding, perhaps even seasonal farming; but they were always able and ready to move on if warranted. Often, they allied themselves with city-states as mercenaries providing a military front line of defense for their urban hosts. Such is clearly seen in the 14th century BC Amarna Letters in the relationship between Lab’ayu, King of Shechem, and the ‘Apîru with whom he had formed an alliance (according to his nervous accuser, Abdu-Heba of Jerusalem) (Moran, *Amarna Letters*, particularly EA 237, EA 244, EA 245, EA 246, EA 249, EA 250, EA 252, EA 253, EA 254, EA 255, EA 263, EA 280, EA 287, and EA 289).

The Sodom tale of Gen 14 finds Abram living in Canaan’s Central Highlands at the Oaks of Mamre near Hebron. However, Hebron likely operated within the hegemony of the Jerusalem city-state ruled by Melchizedek. Abram often ran his flocks and herds between Bethel/Ai in the north and Hebron in the south, all in territory controlled by Jerusalem. It is possible that Melchizedek and Abram had entered into a contract (covenant) allowing Abram to graze his animals on Jerusalem lands. In turn, Abram would provide protection for Jerusalem with his guerilla forces and those of associated clans, if the occasion arose. It also seems that part of the contract called for Abram to pay Melchizedek a percentage (tithe) on any war spoils that the Hebrew clan-head might acquire in conflicts against other city-states or people groups.

When Abram discovered that Kedorlaomer’s army had captured his nephew, Lot, and were headed back toward Mesopotamia (Gen 14:11–12), he immediately went into action with a force of 318 fighting men from his own household and, no doubt, similar numbers from his Amorite allies Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner (v. 13). Having defeated Kedorlaomer just north of Damascus and captured a large quantity of war spoils including people (taken as slaves), Abram returned to meet up with the king of Sodom (v. 17). In the record of that meeting, provisions of Abram’s treaty with Melchizedek—sworn before Yahweh (v. 22)—are played out (vv. 18–20), including the contractual tithe payment to the King-Priest of Jerusalem. Note that when King Bera attempted to reward Abram with the goods taken from Sodom, Abram refused him with the words, “... so you will never be able to say, ‘()I made Abram rich.’” If, which seems obvious, Abram was covenant-bound to Melchizedek, then to take payment from the king of Sodom would have been a conflict of interest. Abram made it clear—in front of both Melchizedek and Bera—that he was loyal to the king of Jerusalem, not the king of Sodom, and that his war efforts were motivated by the capture of Lot, not out of any relationship with Bera. This certainly would

have pleased Melchizedek.

Such relationships between city-states and seminomadic clans were common in the ancient Near East, and this may be an excellent example.

Ancient Near Eastern Socioeconomics. If the biblical Cities of the Kikkar are the Bronze Age sites of the eastern Jordan Disk, then it is no wonder that the Genesis writer gives them such a prominent role (Gen 10–19). Indeed, the (likely) two city-states on the eastern Kikkar—one centered at Tall el-Hammam and the other at Tall Nimrin—were a regional socioeconomic powerhouse. The TeH city-state was an economic force in the southern Levant for over 2000 years, with no gaps visible in the archaeological record (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 14–19; Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, “Tall al-Ḥammām: Four Seasons,” 385–414). By comparison, the largest of the southern Dead Sea sites, Bab edh-Dhra, was a relatively small, marginal economy that failed to survive the climate change at the end of the EBA (ca. 2350 BC). At its peak, Bab edh-Dhra was neither prominent nor influential in the region. It was a fraction of the size of Tall el-Hammam, eking out a living amid an arid, agriculturally marginal landscape. Tall el-Hammam and the cities of the Kikkar, however, not only survived through the EB3 climatological calamity, they thrived through the IBA (ca. 2350–2000 BC) and most of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2000–1500 BC) until they came to a catastrophic end. The prosperity of the biblical Cities of the Kikkar goes hand in hand with the wealth and longevity of Tall el-Hammam and associated sites.

Ancient Near Eastern Warfare. The Cities of the Plain played a central role in two major military campaigns recorded in Gen 14. The Elamite king, Kedorlaomer, and his allies targeted the copper industry in the desert south of the Dead Sea (Morgan, “Geography of Kedorlaomer’s Campaign,” 415–91). Along their southward route, the King’s Highway (Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 102), they plundered several towns in order to feed and water their troops and animals before entering the southern desert. From the Desert of Paran going northward, they eventually wound up at a major waterstop, Hazazon Tamar (= En Gedi; 2 Chr 20:2) halfway up the western shore of the Dead Sea. (They completely avoided the southern Dead Sea area because there had been no cities there for several hundred years.) Their final objective before heading back to Mesopotamia through Damascus was Sodom and the Cities of the Plain. No doubt they needed to take on the provisions necessary for the long journey, and that would come from plundering one or two “fat” targets on the way northward. The allied Kikkar army was no match for the forces of the four Eastern Kings, but neither does the text say that Sodom was in any way destroyed by Kedorlaomer. Nonetheless, it was plundered, and many of its people taken captive. It is interesting to consider that Sodom’s defenses may simply have been too strong for Kedorlaomer to take the city by force (recall the proportions of Tall el-Hammam’s fortifications). However, in order to avoid a lengthy siege, Bera of Sodom may have decided to pay him off in goods and people, particularly those who were not members of Sodom’s original ethnic clans—people like Lot and his family (Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 69–71). There are many military analogs to Gen 14. For instance, war records such as Tuthmosis III’s Battle of Megiddo have a quite similar scope and strategy (Redford, *Wars of Thutmose III*, 16).

Ancient Near East Anthropology. The two city-doublets in the Land of the Kikkar—Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim—are probably ancient geographical formulas signifying two city-clusters or perhaps two city-states. The first in each doublet is the central, controlling urban center, and the second represents either the next largest city/town in the cluster or its satellite towns collectively (note that Zeboiim is plural). The formulaic doublets are separate because

each cluster or city-state occupied a discreet area of land defined by visual boundaries. This is precisely the case with the eastern Jordan Disk, which is clearly divided into a north and a south district, separated by a line of low hills descending from the Transjordan highlands. Tall Nimrin and its satellite towns occupy the northern area. Tall el-Hammam and its satellites occupy the southern area.

There were two city-clusters or city-states on the eastern Kikkar according to Genesis, and there is a linguistic indicator in Gen 19:28 that the southern Jordan Valley had a distinguishable ethnic (perhaps even ethnolinguistic) population. That key phrase is “Land of the Kikkar” (הַכִּכָּר הַיְרֵאָה, *hakkikkar erets*). This formula appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament to identify a particular ethnogeographical entity with sociopolitical implications. Here are a few from Genesis: Land of Nod (Gen 4:16), Land of Shinar (Gen 10:10), Land of Canaan (Gen 11:31), Land of Egypt (Gen 13:10), Land of the Philistines (Gen 21:32), Land of Moriah (Gen 22:2), Land of Seir (Gen 32:3), Land of Edom (Gen 36:16), Land of Temani (Gen 36:34), Land of the Hebrews (Gen 40:15), Land of Goshen (Gen 45:10), and Land of Rameses (Gen 47:11). There are more throughout the Old Testament. In almost each and every instance of the “Land of ...” formula, the meaning is more than a description of geography. The formula describes an area or region dominated by a particular clan, tribe, ethnolinguistic group, language group, sociopolitical entity, or national entity. Indeed, there were lands within lands (the Land of the Perizzites was a subset of the Land of Canaan), but all carried a distinction beyond the nature of the local terrain.

Therefore, while one could argue that several of the geographical formulas involving כִּכָּר (*kikkar*)—Cities of the Kikkar, Kikkar of the Jordan, the Kikkar—are more or less descriptions of the disk-shaped area of the southern Jordan Valley immediately north of the Dead Sea, the formula “Land of the Kikkar” (Gen 19:28) implies something greater in terms of the human component. This opens up the possibility of raising our understanding of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain to another level altogether. Exploration, excavation, and research currently occurring on the eastern Jordan Disk—particularly centered at Tall el-Hammam—are providing a composite, holistic picture of civilization in the Land of the Kikkar unprecedented in southern Levantine archaeology. Archaeological and anthropological researchers are assembling data from Tall el-Hammam, and from across the 200+ square kilometers of its associated territories. These data show how the Sodom city-state used and altered the landscape in support of its citizens, providing a greater understanding of what ancient life was like in this area, and why the Cities of the Plain played such an important role in the stories of the patriarchs (Collins and Aljarrah, “Tall el-Hammam: 2011 Excavation,” 19–21; Collins, Hamdan, and Byers, “Tall al-Hammām: Four Seasons,” 385–414).

Before these discoveries, Sodom and the Cities of the Plain had been lost to history. Even their whereabouts was in question, and no details were known about their place in the larger history of the region. Now there is much information about the Land of the Kikkar—its urbascap (city-centers), agriscap (agricultural lands and installations), sacrescap (religious dimensions of urbascap and landscape), necroscap (utilization of the landscape in funerary rituals), and infrascap (roads and avenues connecting all the elements of the city-state). This supplies a glimpse into the world of Abram and Lot in a manner previously unimaginable.

Summary

The location of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain is no longer a mystery. The Bronze Age civilization of the eastern Kikkar was very likely the source of the biblical tradition concerning the Cities of the Plain and the backdrop for the Sodom tales. The Bible represents Sodom as the largest Bronze Age city on the Kikkar of the Jordan, and this must be Tall el-Hammam. TeH was

the largest Bronze Age city in the region—larger by several orders of magnitude than Jericho, Jerusalem, and every other site in the southern Jordan Valley.

The Land of the Kikkar was home to a spectacular civilization for more than 2,500 years; but all of it came to a violent termination toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age, the time of Abram and Lot. The Jordan Disk remained without cities and towns for the next six to seven centuries, and Sodom became Abel, the Place of Mourning. Joseph mourned Jacob there. Later Israelites would see the Kikkar as the place where “Pisgah overlooks the wasteland” (Num 21:20), and call it Abel Shittim, Acacias of Mourning.

After their destruction, Sodom and Gomorrah became one of Scripture’s principal metaphors for the wrath of God. Archaeology has confirmed that the Cities of the Plain met a fiery end and remained uninhabited for centuries. If the text of Genesis does preserve factual information about this event, an explanation is possible. Toward the end of MB2, some horrific, fiery event burned up everything on the Kikkar, including cities and towns, crops, and natural vegetation. The event was remembered in local lore attributing the destruction to the locals’ gods. After several decades—or perhaps more than a century—the area recovered its natural vegetation enough to support agricultural activity once again. But then the folklore prevented anyone from building permanent settlements there even after agriculture again became possible. Locals saw the area as “cursed by God,” and a palpable fear kept people away, except for intrepid farmers who worked the land after the spring inundation of the Jordan.

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