

GENESIS

Lesson 35

The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Cities of the Plain

²³ *By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.* ²⁴ *Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens.* ²⁵ *Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.*

Genesis 19:23-25 [NIV]

Over the course of this lesson, my prayer is that the Lord will open your eyes in ways that you have not imagined, as we study what we now know about the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain. Having been involved, both directly and indirectly, for a long number of years with the excavation of the site of Sodom—called "Tall el-Hammam" in Jordan—I can tell you first hand that the judgment and destruction God brought upon Sodom and its sister cities was total devastation like none has seen before or since.

Read the verses below and note that they tell us about God's judgment and wrath.

1. What do Isaiah 10:5, Romans 1:18, Romans 2:2, and Hebrews 4:13 tell us about God's judgment and His wrath?
 - a. Isaiah 10:5
 - b. Romans 1:18
 - c. Romans 2:2
 - d. Hebrews 4:13

As we look at the evidence and the reality of the biblical story of the destruction, I would encourage you to check out two great internet resources:

- YouTube: Troweling Down (<https://www.youtube.com/@TrowelingDown>)
- Destruction of Tall el-Hammam (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-97778-3>)

In the first link above, Dr Steven Collins and Dr Gary Byers, Director and Co-Director of the Sodom excavation, talk about the size and power of the destruction of Sodom and the evidence for the reality of the biblical account. Check out Episodes 20, 21 and 22 in their series titled "Troweling Down."

The second link, from Nature/Scientific Reports, is a lengthy scientific report covering the independent analysis of the physical evidence. Led by Dr Phil Silvia, it represents the collaboration of 22 independent scientists and researchers from a variety of fields and is available to download as a free resource.

From these sources and the biblical text, we can know for sure that the destruction was real and occurred between 1700 BC and 1650 BC.

To date, all of the evidence suggests that God hurled down "burning sulfur" on the cities and the Jordan plain, which is also confirmed in the analysis. In order for us to completely understand what happened, we should examine the known data on

airburst events—as the destruction as Sodom appears to exhibit all of those characteristics. As a reminder, an airburst event occurs when a piece of rock, meteor, etc. breaks off and enters the atmosphere at very high speeds and explodes, or impacts, the earth violently. Only a couple of these events are known to have occurred. Two notable ones were the Tunguska airburst in 1908 in Siberia and the Chelyabinsk meteor in 2013 in Russia. The scientific report on Tall el-Hammam compares those events, especially the Tunguska event, with the evidence at Sodom and concludes that the results were almost identical. Man would describe it as an airburst event. It was described in Genesis as "the Lord rained down sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens" (Gen. 19:24), which is exactly what occurred.

Further, in addition to the Nature.com Scientific report, you can check out the Wikipedia.com references below that contain a brief summary of the Tunguska airburst as well as video of the event. You can also check out the Chelyabinsk event.

- Tunguska Event (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunguska_event#)
- Chelyabinsk Meteor (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chelyabinsk_meteor)

It is estimated that within a flash of time, the airburst destruction was immediate. For instance, the temperature at Sodom at the time, referred to as the ambient temperature, went from normal to well over 30,000 degrees Fahrenheit and back to ambient in an instant.

To put this in context, the average temperature for cremating human remains is approximately 1,650 degrees Fahrenheit; the heat generated by the Space Shuttle on re-entry is approximately 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit; and Sodom, Gomorrah, and the sister cities experienced ten times that amount of heat in a flash. In addition, the force of the shockwave combined with the heat and the super-heated plasma material that rained down on the entire plain, destroyed everything instantly. Described by the Nature Scientific report as a 12-megaton airburst, they characterize it as something similar to the Tunguska event:

"‘There’s evidence of a large cosmic airburst, close to this city called Tall el-Hammam, of an explosion similar to the Tunguska event, a roughly 12-megaton airburst that occurred in 1908, when a 56-60-m meteor pierced the Earth’s atmosphere over the Eastern Siberian taiga,’ Professor Kennett said."

Genesis 19:25 points out something else that was totally destroyed. It says that the event resulted in "...destroying all those living in the cities—and **also the vegetation in the land.**" (Emphasis mine.) We know today, based on all of the evidence, that God’s judgment not only destroyed the people of Sodom (who numbered well over 20,000) and all of the physical structures, but that God also destroyed the vegetation itself, in some areas down to bedrock—just as the biblical text recorded—(We will discuss this further in next lesson, entitled "The Aftermath.")

In summary then, just as recorded in the Bible, in a flash God destroyed all life in a 400 square kilometer area, including plant life. The cataclysm was so hot that it burned off the top soil and, in some areas, burned the dirt off down to bedrock. The earth, like the other physical debris, was heaved up by the superheated air and shockwave high into the sky, then falling back to earth creating what is known as a debris matrix. The area would have burned for a very long time, forming a thick, very black, and very high column of smoke and debris that would have been visible for a long distance in any direction. Today, the site contains a destruction matrix of debris and very fine ash that measures over a meter and half deep.

In current times, no matter where you are excavating at Tall el-Hammam, you are slowed by having to remove earth that is pure ash and debris running well over four feet deep in most locations. In the first photo below, as I was excavating a building foundation’s perimeter wall, I had to trench through the thick ash and debris layer, pictured on my left. It was an incredible experience, as I could still smell the burning ash thousands of years later.



Dr. Husted Standing in the Destruction Matrix (to his left) at Tall el-Hammam (*photo by Wes Husted*)

I have also included a photo of the excavation work in the gateway area where Lot would have been sitting when the messengers arrived. The contrast between what Sodom looked like on that day, and what it looks like today tells the whole story. The biblical count is real, historical, and factual. God totally destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain, along with all of the vegetation. No living thing survived the judgement, except Lot and his family.



Excavating the Gateway Area of Tall el-Hammam (*photo by Wes Husted*)

In the next lesson, we discuss the "pillar of salt" event and the aftermath of Sodom's destruction.

Have a great week, everyone!

In Christ,

Wes