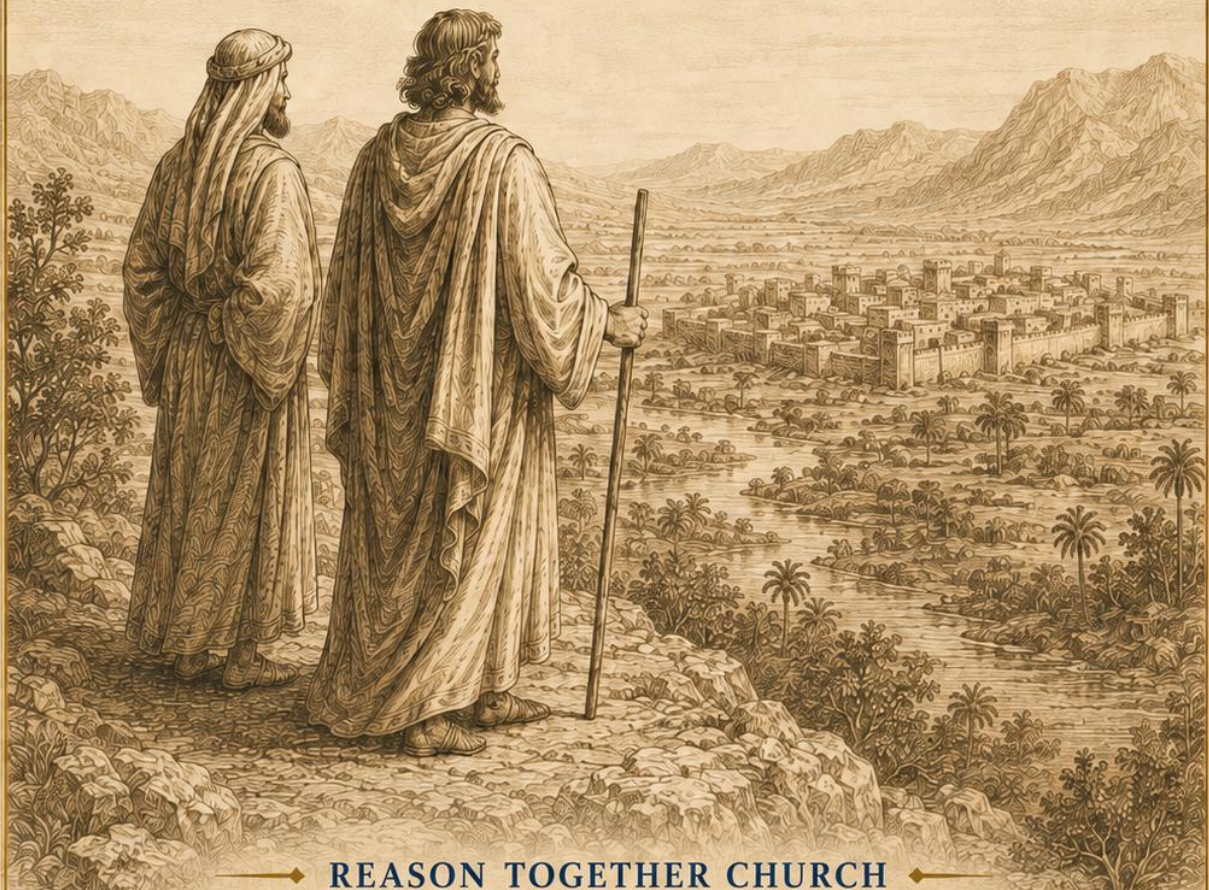


REASON TOGETHER STUDY

HAS SODOM FINALLY BEEN FOUND?

Genesis 13:10



REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

HAS SODOM FINALLY BEEN FOUND?

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Main Study Question

Has the exact location of Sodom and Gomorrah been found?

Primary Scriptures

Genesis 13:10-13 • Genesis 18:20-33 • Genesis 19:1-29
Ezekiel 16:49-50 • Matthew 10:14-15 • Matthew 11:20-24

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha,
and welcome to Reason Together Church.
Whether you are here with us for the first time,
whether you have been here before,
or whether you are joining us online,
I am glad that you are here.
At Reason Together Church,
we believe you ought to be able to bring your questions to church.
You ought to be able to ask difficult questions.
You ought to be able to ask questions that perhaps you have wondered about for years.
And then we do something very simple.
We open the Bible.
And we Reason Together through the Word of God.
Our invitation is always the same:
Bring your questions.
Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.
Before we begin today,
I also want to recognize any honored guests who may be with us.
Thank you for choosing to spend this time with us.
You are never an interruption here.
You are our guest,
and we are honored that you came.
And I want to remind our guests about something else.
We do not expect you to give anything today.
If you are a member of another church,
please continue supporting your home church.
For those who consider Reason Together Church their church home,
there is a giving box available in the back.
You can give there if the Lord leads you to do so,
and there are also ways to give online.
But there is never pressure,
never compulsion

and never an expectation placed upon our guests.
The Bible tells us that God loveth a cheerful giver.
So we want giving to be exactly that,
something done cheerfully,
freely
and as the Lord leads.
And after our time together,
please join us at the Reason Together Café.
The coffee is free.
The conversations are free.
And as we like to say,
there are free refills on conversations too.
Let us pray.
Father,
thank You for allowing us to gather together today.
Thank You for Your Word.
Thank You that we do not have to be afraid of questions.
Thank You that truth can withstand examination.
As we open the Bible today,
give us wisdom.
Help us distinguish between what we know,
what we think we know
and what we simply do not know yet.
Help us never twist evidence to make it say what we want it to say.
Help us never twist Scripture either.
Let Your Word speak.
Teach us.
Correct us.
Challenge us.
And above everything else,
help us see Jesus.
We ask these things in His precious name.
Amen.

I want to begin today with a city.

Actually,

two cities.

Cities so famous that people who have never carefully read the Bible probably know their names.

Sodom

and Gomorrah.

You know what happened to them.

At least you probably think you know what happened to them.

You know the story.

You know that God judged them.

You know about fire and brimstone.

You know about Lot.

You know about Lot's wife.

You may know about the angels.

You probably know something about the wickedness of the city.

But let me ask you a different question.

Where was Sodom?

Not approximately.

Not somewhere around the Dead Sea.

Where was it?

Could you put your finger on a modern map and say,

“There.

That is Sodom.”

For centuries,

people have tried.

Archaeologists have dug around the Dead Sea.

Biblical scholars have studied ancient place names.

Geographers have examined the wording of Genesis.

Different sites have been proposed.

And in relatively recent years,

one particular archaeological site received worldwide attention.

Some people became convinced that perhaps,

after all these centuries,

we had finally found Sodom.

That brings us to today's question:

Has Sodom finally been found?

And I want us to approach this differently than the sensational television program might approach it.

I do not want to begin with archaeology.

I do not want to begin with somebody's documentary.

I do not even want to begin with somebody's theory.

I want to begin with the Bible.

Because if somebody tells me,

“We found Sodom,”

my first question ought to be:

Does the place they found fit the place the Bible describes?

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 13.

Abram and Lot have returned from Egypt.

Both men possess flocks,

herds

and tents.

They have so much that the land cannot comfortably support both households together.

The herdsmen begin having problems with one another.

And Abram,

wanting peace,

offers Lot a choice.

Genesis 13:9 says:

“Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

Abram says,

“You choose.”

And then we come to verse 10.

Listen carefully.

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where...”

Stop there.

That is not throwaway information.

Lot lifted up his eyes.

He looked.

And he could see something.

What could he see?

The plain of Jordan.

And what did it look like?

It was well watered everywhere.

Verse 10 continues:

“before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD...”

Do you see what the writer just told us?

He is describing the landscape before the destruction.

The person reading Genesis later knows that something happened there.

But Lot is looking at it before that happened.

And what Lot sees is beautiful.

Fertile.

Well watered.

Desirable.

It reminded him of the garden of the Lord.

If you knew nothing else about the story,

Lot's choice would make perfect sense.

He is looking at good land.

He is looking at water.

He is looking at opportunity.

He is looking at what appears to be the better choice.

Then verse 11 says:

“Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east...”

There is another clue.

He journeyed east.

Now think about what we have.

We have a general starting region.

Earlier in the chapter Abram has returned to the area around Bethel and Ai.

We have a visible plain.

We have the Jordan.

We have a direction.

East.

And we have Sodom associated with the region Lot chooses.

That does not give us latitude and longitude.

But it is considerably more information than simply saying:

“Sodom was somewhere near the Dead Sea.”

So before we ever put a shovel in the ground,

Genesis gives us a map of sorts.

Now for a long time,

many people placed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah toward the southern end of the Dead Sea.

There are ancient sites there.

Two names you may encounter if you study this subject are Bab edh-Dhra
and Numeira.

These are real archaeological sites.

There was ancient habitation there.

There was destruction there.

And scholars who support the southern location have reasons for believing that region fits the
Biblical account.

Then another proposed location began receiving considerable attention.

Tall el-Hammam.

Tall el-Hammam is located northeast of the Dead Sea,
on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley.

It was a substantial ancient city.

It had impressive fortifications.

It had a long history of occupation.

And excavators found evidence that the city experienced major destruction.

Now here is where things become particularly interesting.

Supporters of Tall el-Hammam as Sodom looked back at Genesis 13.

They asked:

Where was Abram?

Where was Lot?

What could Lot see?

Which way did Lot travel?

And they argued that this northern Jordan Valley location fit those clues remarkably well.

If you are in the central highlands around the Bethel and Ai region

and you look toward the Jordan Valley,

you can see the plain below.

And Tall el-Hammam lies across that valley toward the east.

Suddenly the words:

“Lot lifted up his eyes”

become very interesting.

Perhaps this is not merely literary description.

Perhaps Genesis is preserving an actual geographical memory.

A man standing in the highlands

looking over a well-watered plain

and choosing to move toward it.

Now,

before somebody says,

“Pastor, that's it.

We found Sodom.”

Not so fast.

This is Reason Together Church.

We do not turn possibilities into facts simply because we like them.

The exact place where Abram and Lot stood when they separated is itself debated.

And other passages in Genesis are used by supporters of the southern location.

So we have to be careful.

Tall el-Hammam may fit some of the clues extremely well.

That does not automatically mean the case is closed.

And here is something I want us to learn today,

not simply about archaeology

but about how we think.

A clue is not the same thing as proof.

Say that again.

A clue is not the same thing as proof.

Sometimes Christians hurt their own credibility because somebody discovers something that sounds Biblical,

and immediately we announce:

“They proved the Bible!”

Maybe they did.

Maybe they didn't.

Let's look first.

Let's ask questions.

Let's examine the evidence.

We do not need to be afraid of evidence.

But neither do we need to exaggerate it.

And Tall el-Hammam gives us a perfect example.

Because in 2021,

a scientific paper made an extraordinary claim.

Researchers argued that this ancient city had been destroyed around 1650 BC by an enormous atmospheric explosion,

something similar in concept to the famous Tunguska event in Russia.

They argued that evidence at the site pointed to tremendous heat,
pressure

and catastrophic destruction.

Now imagine being a Christian when you hear that.

An ancient city.

Near the Dead Sea.

A candidate for Sodom.

Destroyed suddenly.

Possibly by something exploding in the sky.

And then you read Genesis 19:24:

“Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.”

You can understand why people became excited.

You can understand the headlines.

You can understand the videos.

You can understand somebody saying,

“That's it.

Science just proved Sodom.”

Except there was a problem.

Scientists began challenging the conclusions.

Questions were raised about the methodology.

Questions were raised about the interpretation of some of the materials.

Questions were raised about the comparison with Tunguska.

And in April of 2025,

the journal formally retracted the paper.

The editors concluded that the claim that an airburst destroyed Tall el-Hammam was not sufficiently supported by the data.

Some of the original authors disagreed with that decision.

But the paper was retracted.

Now what do we do with that?

Do we panic?

No.

Do we hide it?

No.

Do we keep repeating the original claim because it makes a better sermon?

Absolutely not.

We tell the truth.

That particular scientific claim is disputed
and the paper that made the claim was retracted.

That is where the evidence stands.

And please understand something.

The retraction does not mean Tall el-Hammam disappeared.

The archaeological ruins are still there.

The city still existed.

The evidence of destruction still has to be understood.

The debate about whether Tall el-Hammam could be Biblical Sodom did not suddenly cease to exist.

What changed was the status of a particular scientific explanation for the destruction.

And I actually think that is good for us.

Because the Bible does not need us to rescue it.

God does not need me to stretch evidence so Genesis looks better.

If Tall el-Hammam turns out someday to be Sodom,
wonderful.

If it turns out not to be Sodom,
Genesis is still Genesis.

My faith is not built upon whether one archaeological mound gets the right name.

My faith is built upon Jesus Christ.

So where was Sodom?

We have candidates.

We have clues.

We have archaeology.

We have competing interpretations.

But now I want to ask a different question.

Suppose tomorrow morning you woke up,
turned on the television
and saw breaking news.

Archaeologists uncovered an ancient inscription.

And imagine,
just for the sake of illustration,
that the inscription somehow said unmistakably:
“This is Sodom.”

No debate.

No doubt.

Case closed.

What exactly would we have found?

A pile of ruins?

A destroyed city?

Some walls?

Some pottery?

Some ashes?

Because the really important question is not simply:

Where was Sodom?

The more important question is:

What happened there?

And even deeper than that:

What had Sodom become?

Turn to Genesis chapter 18.

Verse 20.

“And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;”

Notice the language.

Their sin is very grievous.

God does not say,

“One individual in Sodom committed a terrible sin.”

He describes the condition of the place.

There is also a cry associated with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Something is terribly wrong.

And then Abraham does something extraordinary.

He begins interceding.

He asks whether God will destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Suppose there are fifty righteous.

Will You spare the place?

Yes.

What about forty-five?

Yes.

Forty?

Yes.

Thirty?

Yes.

Twenty?

Yes.

Finally Abraham asks about ten.

Genesis 18:32:

“Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there.”

And God says:

“I will not destroy it for ten's sake.”

Ten.

If ten righteous people could be found,
the city would be spared.

Then Genesis 19 begins.

Two angels come to Sodom.

Lot is sitting in the gate.

He sees them.

He invites them to his home.

They initially say they will remain in the street.

Lot insists.

And eventually they enter his house.

Then comes one of the ugliest scenes in Genesis.

Verse 4:

“But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round...”

And look at what Scripture says next:

“both old and young, all the people from every quarter.”

That detail is horrifying.

Old and young.

Every quarter.

The writer is portraying a corruption that has spread throughout the city.

Verse 5:

“And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.”

There is no honest reason to pretend the demand is not sexual.

It is.

And there is more than sexual immorality here.

This is threatened mob sexual violence.

These men are strangers.

Travelers.

Guests in Lot's home.

And the crowd believes it has the right to seize them.

Whatever boundaries should exist in a functioning society
have collapsed.

Whatever concern should exist for a stranger
has disappeared.

Whatever restraint should exist
is gone.

Then Lot responds in a way that is itself deeply disturbing,
offering his daughters instead.

The whole scene is broken.

Everybody reading it should feel uncomfortable.

That is the point.

This place is broken.

And yet,

if we stop at Genesis 19,

we can make a mistake.

We can decide we already know the sin of Sodom.

Ask many Christians:

“What was the sin of Sodom?”

And you will get one answer.

But God gives us more information.

Turn to Ezekiel chapter 16.

Verse 49.

“Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom...”

Now pay attention.

If God says,

“This was the iniquity of Sodom,”

I think we should listen to His list.

What comes first?

“pride”

Then:

“fulness of bread”

Then:

“abundance of idleness”

And then:

“neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

That is interesting.

Pride.

Fullness of bread.

Abundance of idleness.

Failure to strengthen the poor and needy.

Then verse 50:

“And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

Now let's reason together.

Does Ezekiel cancel Genesis 19?

No.

Does Genesis 19 cancel Ezekiel?

No.

We put Scripture together.

Genesis shows us sexual depravity.

Genesis shows us violence.

Genesis shows us a mob.

Genesis shows us a society where basic moral restraint has broken down.

Ezekiel shows us pride.

Prosperity.

Idleness.

Haughtiness.

Indifference toward the poor and needy.

And abomination.

Do you see the larger picture?

Sodom was not merely a city where one category of sin happened.

Sodom had become profoundly corrupt.

And I think Christians should be careful here.

Because sometimes we like to define Sodom narrowly enough that we can comfortably point at somebody else.

We say,
“That's the sin of Sodom.
Those people over there.”
But then Ezekiel comes along and says:
Pride.
Well,
that gets closer.
Fullness of bread.
That gets uncomfortable.
Abundance of idleness.
Closer still.
Failure to strengthen the poor and needy.
Now we cannot keep Sodom at a safe distance anymore.
And then abomination.
The complete Biblical portrait forces us to look at the whole society.
Prosperity without gratitude.
Privilege without compassion.
Sexual wickedness.
Violence.
Pride.
Self-indulgence.
A society increasingly unconcerned with what God calls right.
That is Sodom.
And there is a phrase in Genesis 18 that I don't want us to miss.
“The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great.”
There were people suffering.
Sin is not merely somebody violating an abstract rule.
Sin hurts people.
Violence creates victims.
Pride creates victims.
Exploitation creates victims.
Indifference creates victims.
When people with abundance refuse to strengthen the hand of the poor and needy,

that matters to God.

God hears cries that prosperous societies learn to tune out.

Sodom was wealthy enough to have fullness of bread.

But something was terribly wrong.

That should challenge every generation.

Including ours.

Now Sodom disappears.

Fire and brimstone fall.

Lot is taken out.

His wife looks back

and becomes a pillar of salt.

The cities are overthrown.

You might expect the Bible to move on.

But it doesn't.

Sodom keeps coming back.

Centuries later,

prophets mention Sodom.

Sodom becomes shorthand for corruption and judgment.

Isaiah uses it.

Jeremiah uses it.

Peter uses it.

Jude uses it.

Second Peter 2:6 says that God,

“turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow...”

and then says:

“making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.”

An example.

The city is gone,

but the lesson remains.

Jude 7 says:

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner... are set forth for an example...”

Again,

an example.

Sodom becomes a warning.

Now let me ask you something.

Who would you expect to say the harshest thing about Sodom?

Maybe Moses.

Maybe one of the prophets.

Maybe Peter.

Maybe Jude.

But then Jesus says something about Sodom that is so unexpected that it should stop us in our tracks.

Turn to Matthew chapter 10.

Jesus is sending out His disciples.

They are going to preach.

Some people will receive them.

Some will not.

Some cities will listen.

Others will reject them.

Jesus tells His disciples in verse 14:

“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.”

Then verse 15:

“Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

Wait.

Read that again.

“It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha...”

More tolerable.

We just spent all this time studying Sodom.

God says their sin was very grievous.

Not even ten righteous people apparently could be found.

Genesis 19 describes a horrific mob.

Ezekiel adds pride,

prosperity,

idleness,

neglect of the poor,

haughtiness

and abomination.

God destroys the cities.

Peter calls them an example.

Jude calls them an example.

And Jesus says:

There are people for whom judgment will be less tolerable than Sodom?

How?

What could they possibly have done?

They refused to listen.

Is refusing to listen really worse than what happened in Genesis 19?

Now we have reached the question beneath the question.

And Matthew 11 helps us answer it.

Jesus begins rebuking cities where many of His mighty works had been done.

Chorazin.

Bethsaida.

Then Capernaum.

Matthew 11:23:

“And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell...”

And then Jesus says something absolutely remarkable.

“For if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Read that carefully.

Jesus says:

If Sodom had seen what Capernaum saw,

Sodom would have responded differently.

Think about that.

Capernaum had something Sodom never had.

Capernaum had Jesus.

They heard Him.

They saw His miracles.

They witnessed His ministry.

They were exposed to the Son of God Himself.

And many rejected Him.

Then verse 24:

“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.”

Now we understand.

Jesus is not saying Sodom wasn't wicked.

Of course it was.

The comparison only works because everybody knew Sodom was wicked.

Jesus is teaching us something about accountability.

Greater light brings greater responsibility.

The more God reveals,

the greater the responsibility to respond.

Jesus gives a similar principle in Luke 12.

He speaks about servants who knew their lord's will

and servants who did not know.

Then He says:

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...”

Much given.

Much required.

That should make every person sitting in a church uncomfortable in a healthy way.

Because sometimes we imagine that greater knowledge of the Bible simply gives us greater spiritual status.

I know more verses.

I have been in church longer.

I understand doctrine.

I can answer theological questions.

Jesus says greater revelation also means greater accountability.

Sodom did not have Matthew,

Mark,

Luke

and John.

You do.

Sodom did not know about Bethlehem.

You do.

Sodom did not know about the Sermon on the Mount.

You do.

Sodom did not stand on this side of Calvary.

You do.

Sodom did not know that Jesus Christ was crucified,

buried

and rose again.

You do.

Sodom did not have a Bible sitting on a nightstand.

Many of us have several.

Sodom did not have thousands of sermons available with the touch of a screen.

We do.

Sodom did not have churches on practically every corner in many parts of our country.

We do.

And Jesus says:

Much given.

Much required.

Now suddenly this sermon is no longer about archaeologists.

It is no longer about Tall el-Hammam.

It is no longer about Bab edh-Dhra.

It is no longer about Numeira.

It is not even primarily about Sodom.

It is about us.

Because we began the morning saying:

Can we find Sodom?

And Jesus turns the question around.

What are you doing with what you have found?

You have found the Gospel.

What have you done with it?

You have heard about Christ.

What have you done with Him?

You know He died for your sins.

What have you done with that truth?

You know He rose again.

What have you done with that truth?

You have light Sodom never had.

What are you doing with it?

There is one more extraordinary detail in what Jesus says.

Matthew 11:23:

“If the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Jesus knows what would have happened.

Think about that.

Those mighty works were not done in Sodom.

That history never happened.

There is no alternate universe we can examine.

There is no archaeological layer showing us what Sodom would have done if Jesus had performed miracles there.

Yet Jesus knows.

Jesus knows what happened.

And Jesus knows what would have happened under circumstances that never occurred.

That should tell us something about the perfection of His judgment.

Sometimes people ask:

“What about the person who didn't know what I know?”

God knows.

“What about someone who had different opportunities?”

God knows.

“What about someone raised under completely different circumstances?”

God knows.

God does not need me to solve every hypothetical case before He can judge righteously.

He knows every circumstance.

Every opportunity.

Every heart.

Every piece of knowledge.

Every rejection.

Every response.

And apparently even what someone would have done under different circumstances.

There will never be a person standing before God who can say:

“You didn't understand my situation.”

He understood it better than they did.

His judgment will be perfect.

Now let's come back to our original question.

Has Sodom finally been found?

What should we say?

We should say:

Maybe.

There are serious archaeological candidates.

The southern Dead Sea sites have important arguments behind them.

Tall el-Hammam is fascinating.

Its location in the Jordan Valley makes Genesis 13 particularly interesting.

The words:

“Lot lifted up his eyes”

deserve our attention.

The direction:

“Lot journeyed east”

deserves our attention.

The archaeological destruction deserves our attention.

But archaeology has not reached a point where I think we can responsibly stand here and say:

“Case closed.

That mound is definitely Sodom.”

We should not say more than the evidence allows us to say.

And that is okay.

Because something wonderful happens when we admit what we do not know.

It makes what we do know even clearer.

I do not know the GPS coordinates of Sodom.

But I know Sodom existed.

I know what Scripture says happened there.

I know what God says was wrong there.

I know God judged it.

I know later Biblical writers remembered it.

And I know Jesus used Sodom to teach one of the most sobering lessons about judgment in all of Scripture.

So maybe archaeologists have located Sodom.

Maybe someday an archaeological discovery will settle the question more conclusively.

Maybe one of the current candidates will be confirmed.

Maybe a different site will emerge.

I would love to know.

I find it fascinating.

But I do not need to know exactly where Sodom was to understand why Jesus wants me to remember it.

And perhaps there is another lesson here.

Lot looked at that plain
and saw something beautiful.

He saw water.

He saw prosperity.

He saw opportunity.

He saw something that looked,
according to Genesis,
like the garden of the Lord.

What he could not see from the distance
was what the society had become.

That ought to preach all by itself.

Everything attractive is not good.

Everything prosperous is not righteous.

Everything that looks like opportunity is not where God wants you.

Lot looked at the outside.

God heard the cry coming from inside.

Lot saw the water.

God saw the wickedness.

Lot saw prosperity.

God saw pride.

Lot saw abundance.

God saw people who would not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

That is something worth remembering.

We are very good at looking at appearances.

God looks deeper.

And before we use Sodom as a weapon against somebody else,

we should allow Sodom to examine us.

Is there pride in me?

Is there abundance in my life with no gratitude?

Am I so comfortable that I no longer see people who are hurting?

Do I know what God says

and simply decide that I want what I want anyway?

Do I possess tremendous spiritual light

while doing very little with it?

Those questions are harder than locating an archaeological mound.

But they are far more important.

And if you are here today and you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior,

I want you to understand something.

The story of Sodom is a story of judgment.

We should not soften that.

God judged sin.

And the Bible teaches that God will judge sin again.

But the message of Christianity is not simply:

Judgment is coming.

The message of Christianity is:

God has provided a way of salvation.

Jesus Christ came into this world.

He lived the life you and I could never live.

He was without sin.

He went to Calvary.

He died for our sins.

He was buried.

And on the third day,

He rose again.

The Bible says:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

That includes the people of Sodom.

It includes the people of Capernaum.

It includes me.

It includes you.

The question is not whether you have ever sinned.

You have.

So have I.

The question is what you will do with Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:23 tells us:

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

A gift.

Not something you earn.

Not something you buy.

Not something religion gives you.

Not something church attendance purchases.

A gift from God.

And Romans 10:9 says:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior,
you can do that today.

You do not need special words.

You do not need my prayer.

But if you do not know what to say,

you can pray something like this from your heart:

Father,

I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins.

I believe that He was buried.

I believe that He rose again.

I ask You to forgive me.

I place my faith in Jesus Christ
and in Him alone for my salvation.

Thank You for saving me.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and genuinely trusted Christ today,
please speak with me afterward.

Not because I saved you.

I cannot save anybody.

But I would love to help you understand what the Bible says about the decision you have made
and help you begin walking with Christ.

And for those of us who already know Christ,

I want to leave you with something practical this week.

When you hear a claim about the Bible,
especially one that sounds spectacular,
do not be afraid to investigate it.

You hear:

“They found Noah's Ark.”

Look.

“They found Pharaoh's chariots.”

Look.

“They found Sodom.”

Look.

You are not dishonoring God by asking whether the evidence is actually good.

Truth has nothing to fear from honest questions.

But apply that same standard to yourself.

Do not only investigate archaeological claims.

Investigate your own heart.

Ask:

What has God shown me that I have not acted upon?
What truth do I already know that I keep postponing?
Where has God given me light
but I continue walking as though I had never seen it?
Maybe that is the real lesson Jesus wanted us to learn from Sodom.
And when you leave here today,
share the question.
You do not have to preach the whole sermon to somebody.
Just ask them:
“Have you heard that archaeologists think they may have found Sodom?”
I promise you,
that will start a conversation.
Then ask:
“Do you know the Bible actually gives geographical clues about where Sodom was?”
And perhaps eventually you can tell them the part of the story that surprised you most.
Maybe it is Ezekiel's description of Sodom.
Maybe it is the archaeology.
Maybe it is the disputed airburst claim.
Maybe it is Lot's view from the hills.
Or maybe it is the thing Jesus said:
“It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom...”
Use the question to open the door.
Because Reason Together Studies are not supposed to end when the sermon ends.
Take the question with you.
Talk about it.
Open your Bible with somebody.
Reason Together with them.
And perhaps somewhere in that conversation,
you will have an opportunity to point them to Jesus.
So,
has Sodom finally been found?
Maybe.
We may be looking at it.

We may have identified the correct region.

One of the existing candidates may eventually prove to be the Biblical city.

But today,

the evidence is not strong enough for me to tell you that the exact location has been settled beyond reasonable dispute.

And I am perfectly comfortable saying:

I don't know.

There is nothing wrong with those words.

Sometimes they are the most truthful words we can say.

But here is what I do know.

Sodom was real.

Its sin was grievous.

Its corruption was broader than the one sin people usually associate with its name.

God heard the cry.

God saw the pride.

God saw the abundance.

God saw the neglect.

God saw the violence.

God saw the abomination.

And God judged it.

Then centuries later,

Jesus looked at people who had received more light than Sodom ever received and said:

You are more accountable.

So perhaps we came here wondering whether we could finally locate Sodom on a map.

But the greater discovery is this:

You do not need to know exactly where Sodom was

to know exactly what Jesus expects you to do with the truth He has given you.

Much has been given to us.

Much is required.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Father,
thank You for Your Word.
Thank You for the clues that make us think.
Thank You for discoveries that cause us to look again.
Thank You even for unanswered questions,
because they remind us to remain humble.
Protect us from exaggeration.
Protect us from sensationalism.
Protect us from using uncertain evidence as though it were certain.
But also protect us from ignoring the clear truth You have already given us.
Help us remember the lesson of Sodom.
Help us examine our own pride.
Our own comfort.
Our own treatment of people in need.
Our own obedience.
And above all,
help us remember the words of Jesus.
We have been given tremendous light.
May we respond faithfully to it.
For anyone who came today uncertain about salvation,
continue working in that heart.
Help them understand that salvation is found in Christ alone.
And as we leave this place,
give us opportunities to take the questions we have studied
and use them to open conversations with others.
Thank You for every person who came today.
Bless them.
Protect them.
Use them.
And bring us together again,
ready to open Your Word
and Reason Together.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

Thank you again for being with us today.

Please stay for a cup of coffee,

meet somebody you did not know when you arrived
and continue the conversation.

And remember,

if a question came to your mind during today's study,
write it down.

Bring it back.

There is a pretty good chance that your question is something somebody else has wondered about
too.

Until we meet again,

may the Lord bless you,

may the Lord keep you,

may He give you wisdom as you study His Word

and may He give you courage to follow the truth wherever His Word leads.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S

COMMENTARY

HAS SODOM FINALLY BEEN FOUND?

Has the Exact Location of Sodom and Gomorrah Been Found?

Genesis 13:10-13; Genesis 18:20-33; Genesis 19:1-29; Ezekiel 16:49-50; Matthew 10:14-15; Matthew
11:20-24 KJV

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan...” Genesis 13:10

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION The exact archaeological location of Sodom and Gomorrah has not been established beyond reasonable dispute. Tall el-Hammam is a serious northern candidate whose geography has attracted attention because Genesis 13 places Lot in relation to the Jordan plain and says that he journeyed east. Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira remain serious southern candidates connected with a long-standing Dead Sea interpretation. None of these identifications has produced the kind of direct evidence that would permit the church to announce, “Case closed.”

The study is especially useful because it demonstrates how Christians should handle evidence that appears to support Scripture. The 2021 Scientific Reports article proposing that Tall el-Hammam was destroyed by a Tunguska-sized cosmic airburst was formally retracted in April 2025. That retraction does not erase the archaeological site, does not prove that no catastrophic destruction occurred and does not by itself disprove the Tall el-Hammam identification. It does mean that the particular airburst explanation should no longer be preached as established scientific confirmation of Genesis 19.

Biblically, the study moves well beyond archaeology. Genesis 18 calls Sodom’s sin “very grievous.” Genesis 19 depicts sexual wickedness, threatened mob sexual violence and a society in which ordinary moral restraints have collapsed. Ezekiel 16 adds pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, neglect of the poor and needy, haughtiness and abomination. Scripture therefore presents a broad pattern of corruption rather than a one-sin caricature.

The theological climax comes from Jesus. In Matthew 10 and 11 He says that judgment will be more tolerable for Sodom than for cities that rejected greater revelation. Capernaum had what Sodom did not have: the direct presence, words and mighty works of Christ. The study therefore ends not with a map but with accountability. The greater question is not merely whether we can identify Sodom’s ruins, but what we have done with the light God has given us.

1. The Title and the Real Question

The public title, “Has Sodom Finally Been Found?”, is deliberately stronger than a generic title such as “Where Was Sodom?” It acknowledges the long search and the recent publicity surrounding archaeological proposals while preserving the question mark. The title creates curiosity without promising a conclusion the evidence cannot support.

The official study question is more precise: “Has the exact location of Sodom and Gomorrah been found?” The word exact matters. Archaeology has identified ancient settlements and destruction

horizons around the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley. The harder question is whether any one of those sites can be securely named as the Biblical city.

2. A Bible-First Archaeological Method

The study begins with Genesis rather than with an excavation report. This is not because archaeology is unimportant, but because the question being asked is specifically whether an archaeological site corresponds to a Biblical place. The Biblical description therefore supplies the criteria that proposed sites must be tested against.

This method prevents a common apologetic error: finding a dramatic ruin and then forcing the Bible to fit it. The better sequence is text, geography, archaeology and then conclusion. When the evidence remains incomplete, the conclusion should remain appropriately limited.

3. Genesis 13 Establishes the Geographic Frame

Genesis 13 places Abram in relation to Bethel and Ai after his return from Egypt. The narrative then says that Lot “lifted up his eyes” and saw “all the plain of Jordan.” It describes the region as “well watered every where” before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and then says that Lot journeyed east.

These details create a geographic frame: a highland setting, a visible Jordan plain, a fertile pre-destruction landscape and eastward movement. They do not yield modern coordinates, but they are substantial enough that any proposed location should be compared with them.

4. What Does “Lot Lifted Up His Eyes” Contribute?

The phrase is important because it describes perception from a location. Proponents of the northern theory argue that from the Bethel/Ai highlands Lot could look eastward over the Jordan Valley toward the area of Tall el-Hammam. This makes the northern proposal visually compelling.

The caution is equally important. Genesis does not give the latitude and longitude of the exact spot where the separation occurred. The narrative setting supports a highland-to-plain movement, but the sight-line cannot by itself prove that one specific mound is Sodom.

5. The “Well Watered Every Where” Description

Genesis portrays the region before the destruction as unusually attractive and fertile, comparing it to the garden of the LORD and the land of Egypt. This detail helps explain Lot’s choice and also tells the reader that the landscape known after the destruction differed from what Lot saw.

The sermon correctly uses this as both geography and theology. Lot evaluates the region by visible prosperity. God, however, hears the cry rising from the cities. What looks desirable from a distance may conceal profound moral corruption.

6. The Southern Dead Sea Proposal

Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira are among the best-known southern candidates. They lie southeast of the Dead Sea and have long been discussed in connection with the cities of the plain.

Archaeological work has documented ancient occupation, destruction and abandonment in the region.

Supporters of a southern identification appeal to traditional geography, the Valley of Siddim in Genesis 14, the Salt Sea and the bitumen-rich character of the area. The church should not dismiss these arguments merely because a newer northern theory has received more media attention.

7. The Northern Proposal: Tall el-Hammam

Tall el-Hammam is a large archaeological site in the southern Jordan Valley northeast of the Dead Sea. Excavations have revealed substantial Bronze Age occupation, fortifications and a dramatic destruction horizon. Its size and location have made it the centerpiece of the modern northern-location argument.

The strongest Biblical argument offered by proponents is the Genesis 13 geography. Tall el-Hammam lies across the Jordan Valley generally east of the Bethel/Ai highlands and within the broad region associated with the Jordan plain. This makes it a serious proposal, but serious is not the same as proven.

8. Why Chronology Matters

Location is not the only issue. Candidate sites must also fit a plausible chronological framework for the patriarchal narratives. Southern candidates are commonly associated with Early Bronze Age

destruction, while Tall el-Hammam's key destruction horizon is usually placed in the Middle Bronze Age.

Chronological models for Abraham differ substantially among interpreters. Because the Bible does not provide a modern archaeological date label for Sodom's destruction, chronology can support or challenge a theory but does not currently settle the debate for all scholars.

9. Genesis 14 and the Valley of Siddim

Genesis 14 adds another geographical datum: the kings of the cities meet in the vale of Siddim, "which is the salt sea," and the valley is described as full of slimepits. This passage has been especially important for southern-location arguments.

The Commentary should preserve this text because the northern case cannot be evaluated fairly by Genesis 13 alone. A responsible study asks which reconstruction best harmonizes all relevant passages, not merely which verse most strongly supports a preferred theory.

10. What Archaeology Can and Cannot Identify

Archaeology can establish that a settlement existed, estimate its occupational periods, examine fortifications, recover pottery, analyze destruction layers and reconstruct aspects of environment and economy. It can sometimes identify a site directly when inscriptions or securely transmitted place names survive.

What archaeology cannot do automatically is attach a Biblical name to every destroyed city. A major ruin near the Dead Sea is not Sodom merely because it burned. Identification requires a cumulative case involving geography, chronology, textual compatibility and, ideally, direct naming evidence.

11. The 2021 Cosmic-Airburst Claim

In 2021 a Scientific Reports paper proposed that Tall el-Hammam had been destroyed by a Tunguska-sized cosmic airburst. The authors interpreted melted materials, mineral features and patterns of destruction as evidence of extreme heat, pressure and blast effects.

The proposal drew enormous attention because Genesis 19 describes brimstone and fire "from the LORD out of heaven." It was easy for popular Christian media to move from "a team has proposed an airburst" to "science has discovered how God destroyed Sodom." That second sentence was never warranted by the evidence.

12. The 2025 Retraction Must Be Included

On April 24, 2025, Scientific Reports formally retracted the airburst paper. The journal stated that concerns about methodology, mineralogical and geochemical analysis and comparison with Tunguska undermined confidence in the published conclusion. Several original authors disagreed with the retraction.

This update is essential because sermons can preserve obsolete scientific claims long after the scientific literature has changed. A Reason Together Study should be willing to revise its evidentiary language when the status of a source changes.

13. What the Retraction Does Not Mean

The retraction does not mean Tall el-Hammam is imaginary. It does not mean the city was never destroyed. It does not establish that Tall el-Hammam cannot be Sodom. It addresses the reliability of the published cosmic-airburst interpretation.

This distinction should be stated clearly because overcorrection is as misleading as exaggeration. The proper conclusion is not “the whole Tall el-Hammam theory was disproved.” The proper conclusion is that the dramatic airburst claim no longer carries the status once implied by publication in that journal.

14. A Clue Is Not the Same Thing as Proof

This sentence is one of the study’s governing reasoning principles. Biblical geography may create a clue. A destruction layer may create another clue. A particular mineral pattern may create a clue. The strength of a case depends upon how independent clues fit together and how well alternative explanations have been excluded.

The same principle applies beyond archaeology. Christians should neither fear evidence nor inflate evidence. Confidence in Scripture should free the church to say “possible,” “probable,” “uncertain” and “I do not know” when those are the most accurate words available.

15. Genesis 18 Changes the Question

Once the location issue is established, the study asks what kind of city Scripture tells us to look for. Genesis 18:20 says that the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and that their sin was “very grievous.” This introduces a moral condition before Genesis 19 supplies a particular scene.

The language is corporate and severe. The city is not presented as basically righteous with one notorious criminal episode. Something pervasive has reached a point at which divine judgment is imminent.

16. The Meaning of the Cry

The text says that a cry associated with Sodom and Gomorrah had come before God. Similar Biblical language can be associated with suffering, oppression and injustice. The sermon appropriately uses the phrase to remind hearers that sin creates victims and that God hears what prosperous societies may ignore.

The Commentary should not overdefine the cry beyond the text. It is enough to say that God is not responding to rumor or prejudice. The narrative portrays Him as perfectly informed concerning the wickedness and suffering connected with the cities.

17. Abraham's Intercession and the Ten Righteous

Abraham moves from fifty righteous to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty and finally ten. At each stage God states that He would spare the place for the sake of the righteous. The sequence reveals both Abraham's intercession and God's willingness to distinguish the righteous from the wicked.

The narrative never contains the sentence "there were fewer than ten righteous people," but the subsequent destruction strongly implies that the condition was not met. The sermon should preserve the distinction between direct statement and narrative inference.

18. Genesis 19 Must Not Be Sanitized

The men of the city surround Lot's house and demand that the visiting men be brought out "that we may know them." Context makes the sexual intention clear. The event is also threatened gang sexual violence against strangers under Lot's protection.

Any treatment that reduces the scene merely to poor hospitality is inadequate. Hospitality is certainly violated, but the threatened act is much more severe. At the same time, the sermon should describe the passage carefully rather than using it as an excuse for inflammatory rhetoric toward modern people.

19. “Old and Young, All the People from Every Quarter”

This wording is one of the strongest narrative indicators of pervasive corruption. The writer deliberately portrays participation across age groups and neighborhoods. It communicates breadth rather than one isolated offender.

The phrase should not be forced into a mathematical claim that every human being in the city without exception stood at Lot’s door. Its literary function is clear without such overstatement: the moral disorder is socially widespread.

20. Lot’s Own Conduct Is Part of the Broken Scene

Lot’s offer of his daughters is morally disturbing. The text reports it without presenting it as a model for righteous behavior. The scene should not be cleaned up simply because Lot is later called righteous in 2 Peter.

The narrative demonstrates that living within a corrupt environment can distort judgment even in a man whom Scripture distinguishes from the surrounding wickedness. Righteous status does not mean every recorded decision was righteous.

21. Ezekiel 16 Prevents a One-Sin Caricature

Ezekiel 16:49-50 explicitly names pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, failure to strengthen the hand of the poor and needy, haughtiness and abomination. These verses must be allowed to expand the church’s mental picture of Sodom.

The result is not to replace Genesis 19 with a social-justice-only interpretation. The result is to let both texts speak. Sexual wickedness, violence, pride, self-indulgence, neglect and abomination belong to one cumulative Biblical indictment.

22. Pride and Fullness of Bread

“Fullness of bread” describes abundance rather than hunger. The city’s prosperity did not produce humility, gratitude or generosity. Instead, abundance existed alongside pride and indifference.

This is pastorally significant because prosperity can tempt a congregation to distance itself from Sodom while sharing some of the moral conditions Ezekiel names. Scripture does not permit us to condemn only the sins that are easiest to locate in other people.

23. Abundance of Idleness

The KJV phrase “abundance of idleness” is stronger than the mere existence of leisure. In Ezekiel’s indictment, abundant resources and ease have become part of a culture detached from righteous responsibility.

The application should not condemn rest, recreation or legitimate enjoyment. The issue is comfort becoming self-absorption while moral and human obligations are neglected.

24. Failure to Strengthen the Poor and Needy

Ezekiel’s inclusion of the poor and needy is indispensable. God regarded the city’s failure to strengthen vulnerable people as part of its iniquity. This keeps Biblical morality from becoming selectively sexual while ignoring economic indifference and lack of compassion.

The sermon can make this point without transforming the passage into a modern political program. The text itself is enough: abundance creates responsibility, and God notices whether people with resources strengthen those in need.

25. Haughtiness and Abomination

Ezekiel 16:50 joins haughtiness with abomination. The passage therefore does not end with social neglect. It moves toward a comprehensive moral revolt before God.

The term “abomination” should be allowed to retain its Biblical seriousness. The study does not need to identify one single act as the entire content of the word. The point is that Sodom’s life had become offensive to God across multiple dimensions.

26. Isaiah and Jeremiah Keep Sodom Alive as a Warning

Isaiah addresses Judah with the shocking labels “rulers of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah.”

Jeremiah compares corrupt prophets in Jerusalem with Sodom. In both cases the physical cities are gone, but their names remain moral categories.

This is important for the sermon because it shows that Scripture itself reuses Sodom typologically and prophetically. The city becomes a warning to people who believe they are spiritually secure.

27. Peter and Jude Treat Sodom as Historical Example

2 Peter 2:6 says that the cities were turned into ashes and made an example to those who afterward should live ungodly. Jude 7 similarly presents Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities as an example of judgment.

The theological use depends upon the reality of judgment. These texts do not invite voyeuristic fascination with ancient wickedness. They use the event to confront later hearers with the certainty that God takes sin seriously.

28. Jesus Introduces the Most Unexpected Comparison

Matthew 10:15 says it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for a city that rejects the disciples' witness. The statement is intentionally shocking because Sodom already functioned as one of Scripture's classic examples of wickedness.

Jesus does not minimize Sodom. He intensifies accountability for those who reject greater revelation.

29. Matthew 11 Explains Why

Jesus tells Capernaum that if the mighty works done there had been done in Sodom, Sodom would have remained until that day. Capernaum had received direct revelation in the ministry and miracles of Christ.

The principle is therefore not that refusing a traveling preacher is outwardly more grotesque than Genesis 19. The issue is response to light. Greater revelation creates greater responsibility.

30. Degrees of Accountability

The phrase "more tolerable" indicates that judgment is not described as identical in every case. Luke 12:47-48 reinforces the principle by distinguishing servants according to knowledge and responsibility.

The Commentary should stop where Scripture stops. It is legitimate to teach differing accountability. It is not necessary to construct a detailed speculative chart of punishments in order to make the point Jesus makes.

31. Jesus Knows What Would Have Happened

Matthew 11:23 contains an extraordinary counterfactual statement: if the mighty works had been done in Sodom, it would have remained. Jesus knows not merely actual history but the outcome of a circumstance that did not occur.

The sermon uses this observation only to magnify the perfection of Christ's knowledge and judgment. It should not become a technical debate over competing philosophical systems of divine knowledge.

32. The Archaeological Answer Must Remain Modest

The approved answer is: possibly, but not conclusively. That wording is not weakness. It is the strongest statement justified by the present state of evidence.

Tall el-Hammam deserves serious attention. The southern sites deserve serious attention. The church should be ready for new evidence without tying Biblical truth to the success of one excavation team or one chronology.

33. Why "I Don't Know" Belongs in Christian Teaching

Pastors sometimes feel pressure to supply certainty where none exists. This study deliberately models another approach. Saying "I do not know" about an unresolved archaeological identification can strengthen rather than weaken trust because it distinguishes faith from bluffing.

Scripture is certain where Scripture speaks clearly. Archaeological reconstruction is appropriately tentative where the evidence remains incomplete. Those are compatible commitments.

34. The Sermon's Turn from Sodom to the Listener

The sermon begins by asking whether we can locate Sodom. It ends by asking whether we have responded to Christ. That movement prevents the study from becoming an intellectual museum tour. Jesus' use of Sodom places the greatest warning upon people with greater light. Modern hearers who possess complete Bibles, access to preaching and knowledge of the cross and resurrection cannot use ancient ignorance as an excuse.

35. Lot Saw Prosperity; God Heard the Cry

This line summarizes one of the most useful pastoral contrasts in the sermon. Lot saw a well-watered plain. God heard a cry. Lot saw opportunity. God saw corruption. Visible success is not a reliable measure of spiritual health.

The application can reach individuals, churches and societies without becoming partisan. Prosperity can coexist with pride, injustice and rebellion, and God sees beneath appearances.

36. Pastoral Guardrails

- Do not say that archaeologists have conclusively found Sodom.
- Do not say that the Tall el-Hammam cosmic-airburst theory remains established science.
- Do not say that the 2025 retraction disproves Tall el-Hammam as a possible Sodom candidate.
- Do not dismiss the southern Dead Sea proposal as obsolete or unserious.
- Do not turn the Genesis 13 sight-line into modern GPS certainty.
- Do not reduce Sodom to one sexual sin, and do not use Ezekiel 16 to deny the sexual and violent content of Genesis 19.
- Do not identify a modern salt pillar as Lot's wife.
- Do not claim Scripture specifies the natural mechanism by which the fire and brimstone occurred.
- Do not make Sodom primarily a weapon against outsiders. Jesus uses it to confront people who have received greater light.
- Keep the central reasoning rule visible: a clue is not the same thing as proof.

37. Questions and Clarifications

Has Tall el-Hammam been proven to be Sodom?

No. It is a serious proposed identification, not a settled archaeological fact.

Did the 2025 retraction prove no airburst occurred?

No. It means the journal no longer had confidence that the published evidence sufficiently supported that conclusion.

Does the retraction hurt the Bible?

No. Genesis never depended upon a 2021 scientific paper. The Biblical account stands independently of one proposed mechanism.

Are Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira definitely Sodom and Gomorrah?

No. They remain important southern candidates, but the identifications are also debated.

Was homosexuality the only sin of Sodom?

No. Genesis 19 clearly contains sexual wickedness, but Ezekiel 16 explicitly broadens the indictment to pride, abundance, idleness, neglect of the poor and needy, haughtiness and abomination.

Why did Jesus say judgment would be more tolerable for Sodom?

Because cities such as Capernaum received far greater revelation through Christ and still rejected Him.

Does “more tolerable” imply degrees of judgment?

It at least implies meaningful differences in accountability or severity. The sermon should affirm what Jesus says without speculating beyond it.

Can archaeology prove a miracle?

Archaeology may recover effects, locations and historical context. It cannot by itself establish the full theological cause asserted by Scripture.

38. Gospel and Ministry Application

Sodom teaches the seriousness of judgment, but the sermon must not end with judgment alone. The same Jesus who spoke of Sodom went to Calvary. The Gospel invitation is therefore not an artificial appendix; it is the answer to the accountability the sermon has established.

The hearer is not saved by knowing the correct archaeological site. Salvation is not found in Tall el-Hammam, Bab edh-Dhra, Numeira or any other ruin. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried and rose again.

For believers, the ministry application is equally direct: do not merely accumulate Biblical knowledge. Greater light means greater responsibility. The appropriate response to truth is obedience, humility, compassion and faithful witness.

39. Final Pastoral Summary

The study should leave the congregation interested in archaeology but anchored in Scripture. It should increase confidence without manufacturing certainty. It should broaden the Biblical understanding of Sodom without evading Genesis 19. And it should allow Jesus to have the final word.

The safest final formulation is this: We may eventually know exactly where Sodom stood. We already know why Scripture remembers it. God judges wickedness, God sees the full condition of a society, and those who receive greater revelation are accountable for what they do with it.

40. Claims Discipline: What Can Be Said with High Confidence

- Genesis 13 associates Lot’s choice with the plain of Jordan, a well-watered pre-destruction landscape and eastward movement.
- Tall el-Hammam is a large Bronze Age archaeological site in the Jordan Valley with a significant destruction horizon.
- Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira are major archaeological sites in the southern Dead Sea region long proposed in discussions of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The 2021 Scientific Reports cosmic-airburst article was formally retracted on April 24, 2025.
- Genesis 19 depicts sexual wickedness and threatened mob sexual violence.
- Ezekiel 16 explicitly includes pride, fullness of bread, idleness and neglect of the poor and needy in Sodom’s iniquity.
- Jesus states that judgment will be more tolerable for Sodom than for some cities that received greater revelation.

41. Claims Discipline: What Must Remain Conditional

- Tall el-Hammam is Biblical Sodom.
- Bab edh-Dhra is Biblical Sodom and Numeira is Biblical Gomorrah.
- The precise viewpoint in Genesis 13 can be identified on a modern map.
- A cosmic airburst caused the destruction of Tall el-Hammam.
- A particular geological mechanism explains the “brimstone and fire” of Genesis 19.
- One present chronological reconstruction of Abraham is definitive.

42. Claims Discipline: What Should Be Rejected

- “Science has proven Sodom.”
- “The retracted airburst paper proves archaeology cannot support the Bible.”
- “The only sin of Sodom was homosexuality.”
- “Ezekiel proves Genesis 19 was only about hospitality or poverty.”

- “Every person in Sodom without exception stood at Lot’s door.”
- “A modern salt formation has been proven to be Lot’s wife.”

43. Source Notes for the Pastor

The controlling authority for every theological conclusion is the King James Version of Scripture. Archaeological and scientific sources serve only to inform geography, excavation history, chronology and the status of modern claims.

Key external research for the archaeology section includes representative presentations of the Tall el-Hammam northern proposal, representative critiques defending a southern Dead Sea location and the publication/retraction record in Scientific Reports. The pastor should identify scholarly disagreement openly rather than implying unanimity.

For the airburst issue, the current publication status is decisive: the original 2021 article is retracted. If future peer-reviewed work rehabilitates, revises or replaces the airburst hypothesis, the Vault and Commentary should be updated before the claim is used publicly.

44. Final Commentary Conclusion

The archaeological search for Sodom is worth pursuing because Genesis presents real places, movements and geography. The evidence is sufficiently intriguing to create a strong Reason Together investigation, but not sufficiently decisive to justify claiming that the exact city has been found.

The stronger certainty lies in the Biblical witness. Sodom was prosperous and deeply corrupt. Its wickedness included sexual violence and abomination, but also pride, self-indulgence, idleness and neglect of the vulnerable. God judged it, later Scripture remembered it and Jesus transformed it into a warning about the responsibility created by greater revelation.

The final pastoral line should therefore remain larger than archaeology: We may still be searching for the exact ruins of Sodom, but no one hearing the Gospel can claim that God has left us without light. The decisive question is what we will do with Jesus Christ.