



## Zoar

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people which once ruled the land, is to support with the whole weight of their influence those projects for reform which at present seem to give the only hope of prosperity for the Holy Land.

C. R. CONDER.

## ZOAR.

WHERE was the *little city* to which Lot escaped from Sodom?

It may be visited from Jericho without much trouble, unless the rapid Jordan be swollen with water and Sheik Goblan with greed. Only a mighty man among the Gadites would defy both. (1 Chron. xii. 15.)

We propose to demonstrate the precise *position* of the long-lost survivor of the cities of the plain, grateful to the American Exploration Society for a *name* which is the very name we want, and hopeful that an intelligent traveller will carefully describe its *ruins*, of which we can speak only at a venture.

(A) As to the position.

The Biblical evidence is conclusive; it is, needless, therefore, to refer to Josephus, Jerome, &c. As camp-followers or prisoners, they are in this case but encumbrances.

Geological investigation has brought to light the fact that the Jordan, within historic times, can never have flowed into the Red Sea, but must have terminated in the Dead Sea, now 1,300 feet below the level of the ocean.

1. From the heights near Bethel, Lot "beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah," &c. (Gen. xiii. 10). As the southern end of the Dead Sea and the western side of the plain near Jericho are hidden from these heights by intervening mountains, we should be predisposed to think that Zoar near Sodom was at the *north* end of the Dead Sea and on the *eastern* side of the plain. The expression, "Lot journeyed east," also inclines us to infer the same.

Abraham, near Hebron, "*looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the plain*" (Gen. xix. 28). It is not said of him, as of Lot, that he *beheld* Sodom, &c., so that this passage is neutral in the controversy.

2. The four kings returning from Kadesh (from the south) "smote also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-Tamar"—which is Engedi (2 Chron. xx. 2). "And there went out the king of Sodom . . . and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim" (Gen. xiv. 7, 8). If the cities of the plain were at the south end of the Dead Sea, then the invaders must have marched half way up on its western side to Hazezon-Tamar, then turned back to Sodom, and then retraced their steps northwards once more. This is absurd; therefore we conclude that Zoar and the cities of the plain could not possibly have been at the southern, but, of necessity, at the northern end of the Dead Sea.

The Hebrew word for *plain* (*ciccar*) points to the same conclusion, being used topographically only of the valley of the Jordan.

3. The magnificent panorama visible from the top of Pisgah settles the question before us once and for ever. "The Lord showed Moses all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali; and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain (Heb., *ciccar*) of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar" (Deut. xxxiv. 1-3). Prof. Paine, the American explorer, correctly observes: "The order in the demonstration of the land was from a neighbouring district on the north to the extreme south, and round by a return to the nearest place in view, Jericho, and then naturally it went on to Zoar, a point nearer the land of Gilead, the place of departure. It would be unnatural and unaccountable to go back from Jericho to a point at the southern end of the Dead Sea, having once passed over that region, and then stop there. . . Let Zoar be in the plain on this (*i.e.*, east) side Jordan northward near the base of the mountains. It will then be in full view from Pisgah." Dr. Tristram ("Land of Moab," 333) had previously observed: "The narrative is describing the panorama from north to south, and ends by the feature nearest the spectator—*i.e.*, the city in front of him. Now we detected these ruins (Zi'ara) while standing on Nebo."

What Mr. Grove first, I believe, declared to be highly probable, these arguments, old and new, demonstrate to be perfectly certain—*viz.*, that the Zoar of the Pentateuch was at the north end of the Dead Sea, and on the east side of the valley. We are *sure* now of its *general* position; we have yet to discover the *very spot* where it once stood.

(B) As to the name.

"Zoar we seem to owe to Dr. Tristram," so wrote Lieut. Conder. But what is the force of "*seem*"? Does he question the identification or the identifier? To solve the mystery I referred to a "Land of Moab," unhappily mapless—or rather, happily so for Zoar.

It is identified with Zi'ara (p. 330), and (329) it is also stated: "The ground fell in terraces for 3,000 feet to the Jordan valley."

This identification is cruel, because it would compel poor Lot and his tender daughters to traverse at least four miles of dreary mountain, and climb some 3,000 feet in order to be safe, and all this in the short hour between "when the morning arose," and when "the sun was (just?) risen upon the earth." The angels first said, "Escape to the mountain." Lot then pleaded for something less; Zi'ara would require more.

Its elevation is too great, for Zoar was obviously one of the cities of the plain and *in* the plain.

For lack of the map in the "Land of Moab" I was driven to refer to that of the American Society, 1875, in the hope of first finding Zi'ara, and then some name at the foot of the mountains which might stand for Zoar.

The best I could find was Tell esh Shâghur, situated at the point where Wady Hesbân opens into the plain.

In Jer. xlviii. 34, we read: "From the cry of Hesbon *even* unto Elealeh, and *even* unto Jahaz, have they uttered their voice, from Zoar *even* unto Horonaim," &c.

As Elealeh is north of Hesbon, and Jahaz apparently south, it was easy to conjecture that "*from Zoar even unto Horonaim*" was a line from *west* to east, and the map gave Tell esh Shâghur as nearly *west* of Hesban. This was another point gained.

The LXX (with but one exception) render Zoar, by the word Σηγόρ (Segor), a still nearer approach to Shâghur. But the last shadow of doubt as to the fact that Tell esh Shâghur really means the "Hill of Zoar" seems to vanish, when we find that the Hebrew equivalent for Z becomes at times in Arabic Sh—*e.g.*, Shûfa, derived from Zophim (*Quarterly Statement*, 1877, p. 39), and the equivalent for "A" in Zoar becomes Gh in Arabic—*e.g.*, Azzah (Hebrew for Gaza) becomes the modern Ghuzzeh.

It seems, then, to me that in Tell esh Shâghur, happily marked on the American map, we have the very site and name of ancient Zoar. The native name clings to the neighbourhood. Mr. Finn speaks of Um Sheggar; Dr. Tristram of M'Shuggar; the American map also gives Mushâqqâr.

Sodom must have been near Zoar on the west, and there are other Tells in that direction. "The vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea," is, as the words stand, a geological impossibility, if "*which*" refers to the "*vale*." But as the doctors (Aben Ezra, Genesius, &c.) disagree as to the meaning of "*Siddim*," why not maintain that "*which*" explains "*Siddim*" as being the "*Salt Sea*," so called in the language, it may be, of the Emims (Deut. ii. 11), or else if Sidd means a cliff, translate "the valley of the cliff of the sea"—*i.e.*, the salt sea, if such a rendering be possible. Siddim can hardly be an Hebrew word, from the difficulty there is in dealing with it. When a great thinker ventures to hold the New Testament responsible for monkish tradition—*e.g.*, in regard to the place of the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch ("Supernatural Religion," vol. iii.), surely it is better not to maintain a geological impossibility in the Old Testament by continuing to assume that "*which*" refers to "*vale*," and not to "*Siddim*," or its last syllable "*im*."

With Zoar is associated the ascent of Luhith. Isa. xv. 5, states: "His fugitives shall flee unto Zoar . . . for by the mounting up of Luhith," and Jer. xlviii. 5: "In the going up of Luhith" (see lxx. 4, 5). I believe nothing whatever has been known about Luhith.

At Tell esh Shâghur begins the ascent of the pass to Hesbon.

Consul Finn travelled this way in May, 1855, and reports ("Byeways in Palestine," p. 11):—

"Our road lay up the hills, constantly growing more steep and precipitous, and occasionally winding between large rocks, which were often overgrown with honeysuckle in full luxuriance. The Arabs scrambled like wild animals over the rocks, and brought down very long streamers of honeysuckle—*Luwáye*h, as they call it—which they wound round and round the necks of our horses."

Shall we hesitate to see in the name Luwayeh the modern representative of Luhith, and to believe that the pass derived its name from the honeysuckle, in which it doubtless abounded then, as now?

Just as in the English Lake District a natural object has given us the Kirkstone Pass, so another gave to Palestine the "Honeysuckle Pass."

Luhith is commonly derived from a Hebrew word meaning "boards," but from the above coincidence I suspect it really comes from another very similar word signifying to weave or twist as a crown or garland.

(C) As to the ruins.

Tell esh Shāghur is merely marked on the American map as a hill, just on the south bank of Wady Hesbān, near the foot of the mountains, a mile east of Tell er Rāmeḥ. No description is given of it, as far as I know.

It seems to me, however, so extremely probable that Canon Tristram ("Land of Moab," 347) unconsciously describes Zoar (or else its cemetery), that at the risk of being wrong I transcribe his words. He had been descending Wady Hesbān on its south side, and (on the same side, we may hope), to use his own words, "We descended on the edge of the Ghor Seisaban and entered on an open, undulating plateau.

"On the last rocky eminence which pushed forward into it were the most perfect primæval remains we had found in the country. Round the slightly-elevated crest at the western end of the ridge was a perfect circle of dolmens, each composed of three upright and one covering stone. Several of them had fallen, but the stones were in their places, and it was clear that they had been arranged in a circle round a great cairn, or central pile of stones, which crowned the "tell," and doubtless marked the burial-place of some hero, famous in his day, but who lived before Agamemnon."

If this hill should indeed prove to be Tell esh Shāghur, then the Gospel harmonists will perhaps hereafter allow that our Lord previous to *passing through Jericho* may have beheld these very monuments of ancient Zoar or at least the plain of Sodom while he uttered those solemn words, "Remember Lot's wife."

W. F. BIRCH.

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## TRANSFERENCE OF SITES.

TALKING the other day about the traditions of the Holy Sepulchre, and that many of them were traditions which belonged originally to the Temple Mount, it was suggested that a few notes on the Transference of Sites would be interesting. On considering the subject, it is doubtful if this is a correct title to express in all cases the true idea relating to this matter; Transference of Tradition would be even more doubtful. Identity of Tradition attached to Sacred Sites comes nearer, and the question of transference would be thus left out, or at least would not be