

The Dead Sea in the Bible

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1 Introduction

The Dead Sea is an unpleasant, waste and extremely hot area, a region where nearly nobody wants to live. Surprisingly, there are many stories in the Hebrew Bible which are located in this territory. This paper will present an overview of these stories and the sites mentioned in these stories (Table 1; Fig. 1).

Before doing so we have to describe the area which we consider to belong to the greater territory of the Dead Sea. The shoreline of the lake changed often in antiquity depending on its actual water levels. However, these changes were limited in scope and relevant only in the southern part of the Dead Sea which is extremely flat and may dry out during low water levels. Alternatively, high water levels may shift the shoreline further to the south in the flat area of the Ghor. Therefore, settlements as far south as the prominent mining site of Feinan, the biblical site of Punon, are included in our research area. North of the Dead Sea the area of the oasis of Jericho is included because the settlers there definitely benefitted from the salt and asphalt found at the Dead Sea. On the eastern and western side, steep slopes border the Sea. Only these slopes and their upper edges are included in the summary table at the end of the text, while the territory on top of the hill country is not referred to.

Before taking a closer look at the Biblical stories, we also have to discuss the different names of the Dead Sea in the Hebrew Bible. The usual name is Salt Sea (Gen 14:3; Num 34:3,12; Deut 3:17; Jos 3:16; 12:3; 15:2,5; 18:19; Sir 39:28) because of its high concentration of salt. In 2 Chr 20:2 the lake is called Sea of Aram/Edom, most likely because the Edomites settled in the southern part of the Dead Sea area. The name Sea of the 'Arabah (Deut 3:17; 4:49; Josh 3:16; 12:3; 2 Kings 14:25) is connected with its position in the 'Arabah Valley. The name Eastern Sea (Ezek 47:18; Joel 2:20; Sach 14:8) is only meaningful if the writers lived west of the Jordan River, as most of the Biblical writers most certainly did. Diodorus Siculus (II,48,6–8; XIX,19,98–99) calls it *Asphaltitis lacus* on account of the asphalt sometimes found swimming on top of the water. Josephus uses the corresponding Greek expression (Ios. Bell. Iud. I,657; III,515; IV,437–438.453.455–456.474.476; VII,168.281; Ant. Iud. I,174; IV,85; IX,7.206; XV,168; c. Ap. I,174; cf. Tac. hist. V,6; Strab. XVI,2,42–43; Plin. nat. V,15,71–72). In 4 Esra 5:7 we find the name Sea of Sodom because this prominent site was situated at its shore. The name Dead Sea was not used before the 2nd century CE. The Arabs today call it Bahr Lut, Sea of Lot, recalling the well-known story of Gen 19.

The 'Arabah (Deut 1:1,7; 2:8; 3:17; 4:49; 11:30; Josh 8:14; 11:2,16; 12:1,3,8; 18:18; 1 Sam 23:24; 2 Sam 2:29; 4:7; 2 Kings 25:4; Jer 39:4; 52:7; Ezek 47:8), the valley in which the Dead Sea is situated, is also called either Valley of Siddim (Gen 14:3,8,10) or Valley of Salt (2 Sam 8:13; 2 Kings 14:7; 1 Chr 18:12; 2 Chr 25:11; Ps 60:2). This territory is also known as the Plain of the Jordan (Gen 13:10–12; 19:17.25.28–29; Deut 34:3; 2 Sam 18:23; 1 Kings 7:46; 2 Chr 4:17; Neh 3:22; 12:28; 2; Matth 3:5; Lk 3:3). The wilderness region around Jericho may be called the 'Arabah of Jericho (Josh 4:13; 5:10; 2 Kings 25:5; Jer 39:5; 52:8), while the Transjordanian wilderness north of the Dead Sea is called the 'Arabah of Moab (Num 22:1; 26:3,63; 31:12; 33:48–50; 35:1; 36:13; Deut 34:1,8; Josh 13:32) or the Fields of Moab (Gen 36:35; Num 21:20; Ruth 1:1,2,6,22; 2:6; 4:3; 1 Chr 1:46; 8:8). Sometimes the Dead Sea is regarded as the eastern border of Canaan (Num 34:12; Deut 3:17 and Ezek 47:18; cf. Ezek 48:28).

There also exist some specific names for the slopes leading down to the Dead Sea. Generally, the territory east of the Judean watershed is called only desert (Josh 15:61; 1 Sam 23:14; 25:4,14; 1 Kings

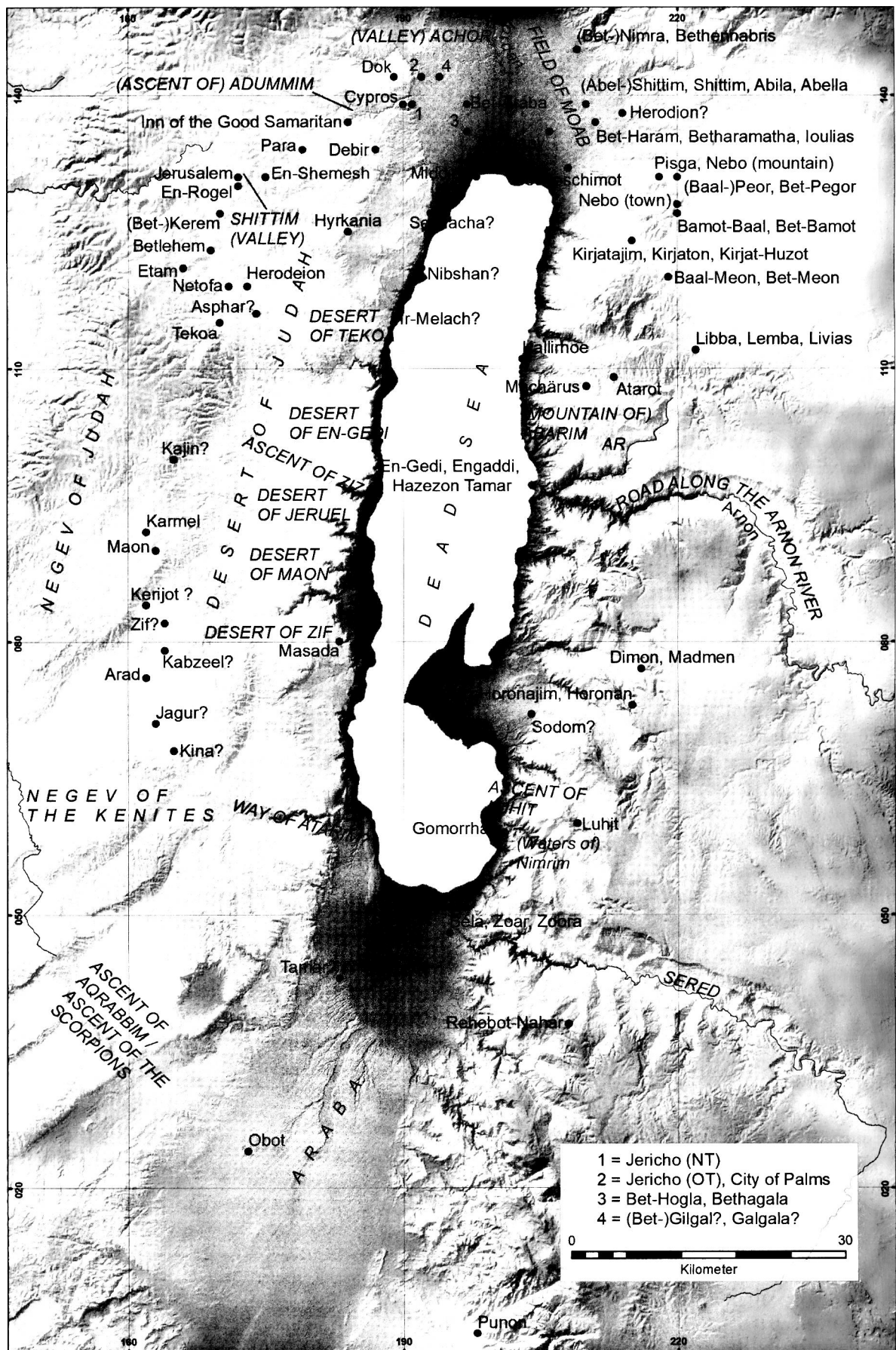


Fig. 1 Sites and landscapes around the Dead Sea according to Biblical texts and Flavius Josephus (© Wolfgang Zwickel).

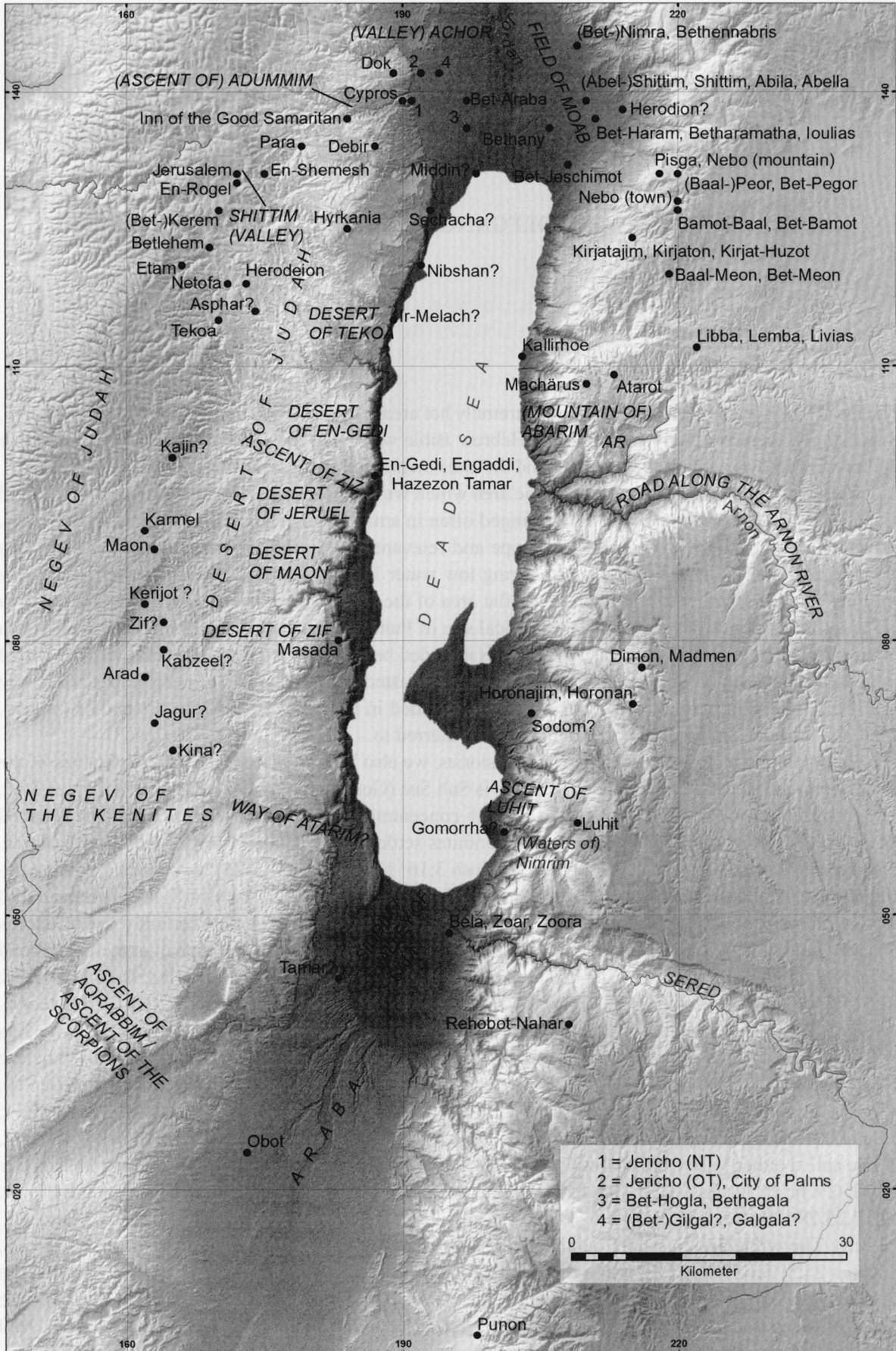


Fig. 1 Sites and landscapes around the Dead Sea according to Biblical texts and Flavius Josephus (© Wolfgang Zwickel).

2:34) or more specifically Desert of Judah (Judg 1:16; Ps 63:1). This desert is divided into different parts. The southernmost part is called Desert of Zif (1 Sam 23:14–15; 26:2). Unfortunately there are two sites with this name in Judah, one is in the first Judean district (Josh 15:24) situated in the south, the other one is located in the eighth district (Josh 15:55). Since the second site with this name, convincingly identified with Tel Zif (2 Chr 11:8; cf. also 1 Chr 2:42 and the many LMLK stamp seals mentioning this name; Palestine grid 162.048), is situated west of the watershed, it should not be connected with the Desert of Zif. It is more likely that the southern Zif should be associated with this desert, which would therefore refer to the very southern part of the Judean Desert. North of it lies the Desert of Maon (1 Sam 23:24–25; 25,1–2), followed by the Desert of Jeruel (2 Chr 20:16), the Desert of En-Gedi (1 Sam 24:2) and the Desert of Tekoa (2 Chr 20:20; 1 Macc 9:33).

2 Stories connected with the Dead Sea

As already mentioned we find references to the territory of the Dead Sea in many Biblical books. There are several references in the books of Genesis and Numbers of the Pentateuch, but also in the books of Joshua, Judges and in the David cycle in the books of Samuel. Surprisingly few references exist in the books of Kings. The prophets refer very often to this region, sometimes revisiting the stories of the Pentateuch. The following overview will present the main texts. There will be nearly no discussion of literary criticism (in the sense of German *Literarkritik*), but some remarks regarding the historicity and the date of writing the texts are added.

2.1 *The Lot saga*

A first cluster of references to this region is found in the Lot saga. Returning from Egypt into the central hill country near Bet-El and Ai (Gen 13:1–4), Abraham and Lot realized that their flocks had become too many to stay together. Lot decided to settle in the Jordan Valley including the whole area of the Dead Sea (Gen 13:10–11), while Abraham stayed in the hill country. The traditional Biblical story continues in Gen 18. Gen 14 is a young addition and will be discussed separately. Both chapters Gen 18 and 19 belong to the same redactional composition that compares the attitudes of Abraham and Lot and arranges them as counter-texts. Abraham offered excessive hospitality to the three men visiting him (Gen 18:2–8), just as Lot, a former nomad now living as a foreigner in the city of Sodom, did to the two men coming into his town (Gen 19:1–3). Hospitality is an indispensable duty for nomads. But the outrageous citizens of Sodom, not being familiar with nomadic traditions, tried to rape the guests of Lot. As a punishment for this attempt, God destroyed the whole area of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24–25). The explanation of the different ethics of nomads and citizens is only one aim of this story. It also wants to explain why the area around the Dead Sea is so desolate. God punished the people of the Dead Sea area for their bad behavior. It is likely that people from the 1st millennium BCE were aware of the ruins of important towns like Bab edh-Dhra' or Numeira, built up in the Early Bronze Age, and invented stories to explain their former existence in such an unfavorable territory.

The destruction of Sodom became the most prominent Old Testament story regarding God's punishment of human misbehavior. Sodom, sometimes also Gomorrah, are very often referred to by authors from all periods of the 1st millennium BCE (e. g., Deut 32:32; Isa 1:7,9,10). According to Deut 29:22, all the soil in the area of Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma and Zebojim – Adma and Zebojim are mentioned only here in connection with Sodom and Gomorrah (but cf. Gen 14:2) – was burned out during this destruction by sulfur and salt. Maybe during the time the writer wrote this text the southern part of the Dead Sea south of the Lisan Peninsula was still dried out.

The story of Lot's daughters becoming pregnant from their father (Gen 19:30–38) is traditionally connected with a cave near 'Ain 'Abata at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea. The Biblical text locates the scene in the Transjordanian hill country (Gen 19:30), where the Moabites and the Ammonites lived. This story was supposed to demonstrate that the Ammonites and Moabites were regarded as relatives of the Judahites even though the relation was problematic and shameful. Although the Ammonites and

Moabites on the one hand and the Judahites on the other hand both originated in the new political systems arising at the end of the Late Bronze Age, they were hostile to each other. The story thus wants to provide a fundamental reason for the hostility between these neighbors.

2.2 *Genesis 14*

Gen 14 is one of the youngest texts in the Pentateuch. In Gen 14:2,8, five kings from towns nearby the Dead Sea (Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, Zebojim and Bela/Zoar) are mentioned. Their enemies (Gen 14:1,9) are all fictive kings. Although their names can probably be connected with historical kings, they never ruled at the same time. In addition, the Valley of Siddim is mentioned. In Gen 14:3 it is identified with the Dead Sea, in Gen 14:10 it is full of asphalt pits – a main economic source for the people living at the shores of the lake.

2.3 *The Eastern Jordan passage on the way to the Holy Land*

The Israelites had to go around the Dead Sea on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land and traversed or bypassed the Edomite, Moabite and Ammonite area (Num 21:10–20; 33:37–49; Deut 2:1–2). Literary criticism has demonstrated that those texts envisage four different routes (Fig. 2; cf. ZWICKEL 2015a). The choice of a specific way always depended on the actual political situation of the storywriters. If there was a good relationship with the neighboring country, the Israelites traversed their territory; if the neighboring country was at war with Israel and Judah, the Israelites had to circumvent their territory. Finally the Israelites camped in the Plains of Moab opposite Jericho (Num 22:1; cf. 26:3,63; 31:12; 33:48–50; 35:1; 36:13; Deut 34:1. 8) until they crossed the Jordan River as described in the book of Joshua (but cf. the sites mentioned in Deut 1:1).

2.4 *The Bileam story*

The complex of the Bileam stories (Num 22–24) is connected with the aforementioned stay of the Israelites directly north of the Dead Sea. The Moabite king summoned the prophet Bileam to curse the Israelites, who instead blessed them repeatedly. The Biblical story of Bileam wants to demonstrate that foreign prophets were not able to harm Israel since Jahwe took care of his people. Only a few site names are explicitly mentioned in the Biblical story: Kirjat-Huzot (Num 22:39), Bamot-Baal (Num 22:41), Pisga (Num 23:14), Peor (Num 23:28) – all situated at the transition area from the Moabite hill country to the slopes falling down to the Dead Sea.

Connected with the site of Peor is the story of an Israelite misbehavior (Num 25:1–5; cf. Deut 4:1–4) which was admonished several times in later periods (Josh 22:17; Ps 106:28; Hos 9:10): Israel honored the god Baal of Peor. The historical context of this allegation is not certain at all. Peor is situated in the territory of the tribe of Ruben, and since the story referred to in this text cannot have happened during the unhistorical hike of the Israelites to the Promised Land, it must be connected with some later misbehavior of this tribe.

2.5 *Deuteronomy*

Deut 1:1 locates the speeches of Moses “opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Laban, Hazerot and Di-Zahab”. Paran is a landscape in Edom (Gen 21:21; Num 10:12; 12:16; 13:3,26; Deut 33:2; 1 Kings 11:18; Hab 3:3), the other sites are not exactly locatable (Di-Zahab is possibly connected with the Edomite name Me-Zahab mentioned in Gen 36:39). Generally, sites are not important in the book of Deuteronomy although there are some references to other biblical stories like Sodom and Gomorrah. Only at the very end, in Deut 34:1, a locality is mentioned again: before his death “Moses went up from the Plains of Moab to

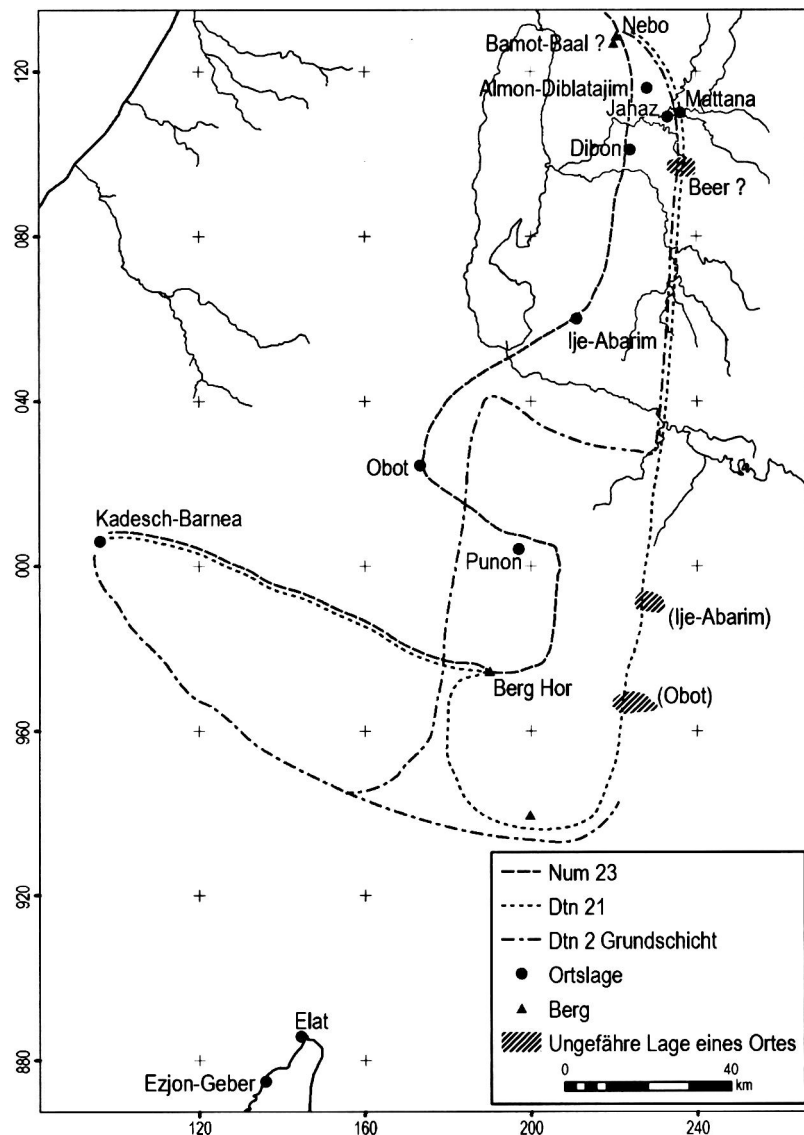


Fig. 2 Different passages of the Israelites
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Mount Nebo, to the top of the Pisga, which is opposite Jericho, and Jahwe showed him the whole land”. Mount Nebo is an excellent lookout. Sometimes the churches on top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem are visible, but it is completely impossible to have an overview over the whole Promised Land. Moses was buried opposite Bet-Peor (Deut 34:6), but the exact location of the tomb is unknown.

2.6 Israel's conquest of the territories west of the Jordan River

The area around the Dead Sea is of twofold importance in the book of Joshua. The texts in the beginning of this book are situated around Jericho and Gilgal, and the distribution of the land in Josh 13–19 specifies even the smallest settlements in this area.

The story of Joshua 1–6 certainly belongs to the best known Biblical stories. It is an old insight that the conquest of Jericho by the Israelites is not an historical report, but a relatively young text. According to this text the Jordan River marks the border of Israel, but before 733 BCE Israel also had territories east of the Jordan River. The border changed only after the Assyrian conquest of wide territories in Transjordan, which constitutes a necessary premise for the writing of this text. Therefore, the basic story of Joshua fighting the battle of Jericho must be younger than 733 BCE and was written at least 500 years later than the described events. In addition, this text underwent several redactional phases in the follow-

ing centuries. We do not need archaeology to understand such a late edition of this text. Archaeology does confirm, however, that Jericho was unsettled in the 13th century BCE – the time when Joshua reportedly conquered this town.

When Israel stayed in the Plains of Moab in Shittim (Josh 2:1), Joshua sent out scouts across the Jordan River to Jericho. They returned with the news that there was a good chance of conquering the territory because “Jahwe has given it into the hands” of the Israelites (Josh 2:24). Already at the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land the Bible informs the reader about the future success of the battles. Trusting in this promise the Israelites set out from Shittim (Josh 3:1) and crossed the Jordan River whose waters stood still (Josh 3:14–17). This story clearly recalls the crossing of the Sea of the Reeds (Ex 14), but also the crossing of the Jordan River on dry ground by Elija and Elisha (2 Kings 2:8). The Israelites took 12 stones from the riverbed (Josh 4:1–9) and placed them in Gilgal to remember the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh 4:19–24). Gilgal was an important sanctuary in Israel (e. g., 1 Sam 7:16; Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:12; Am 5:5), and this is the foundation legend of this cultic place. Josh 6 describes the Israelite procession around Jericho and the fall of the town without any military attack – the conquest of Jericho is nothing else than a gift of God! The following chapters Josh 7–10 do not describe a typical conquest, the Israelites only surrounded Judah along the borders of both Benjamin and Judah without entering the interior of the country. The Israelite troops finally returned to Gilgal (Josh 10:43). Only after Solomon’s death in 926 BCE did the tribes of Benjamin and Judah form a political unity. This fact, too, clearly demonstrates that the text must be significantly younger than the described event.

2.7 *The distribution of the Land*

Joshua 13–19 describes the distribution of the whole land to the different tribes. Concerning the tribes east of the Jordan River, there exist two lists which specify different borderlines for the allocated territories. The territory of Ruben is mentioned in Josh 13:15–23 and in Num 32:37–38, the territory of Gad is referred to in Josh 13:24–28 and Num 32:34–36. Less concrete is a third distribution text for these two tribes in Deut 3:16–17.

Of specific interest are the Cisjordanian distribution texts. The northwestern shore of the Dead Sea is assigned to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15) and especially to the 12th Judean district (Josh 15:61–62): “In the wilderness: Bet-Araba, Middin, Sechacha, Nibshan, Ir-Melach and En-Gedi.” The northern border of Judah is also exactly described:

“The boundary on the north side [of Judah] runs from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan River, and the boundary goes up to Bet-Hogla and passes along north of Bet-Araba; and the boundary goes up to Debir from the Valley of Achor, and so northward, turning toward Geli-lot, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim, which is on the south side of the valley; and the boundary passes along to the waters of En-Shemesh and ends at En-Rogel” (Josh 15:5–7).

The description of the borderline ends south of Jerusalem. North of the Judean territory is the area of Benjamin (Josh 18:11–28). The southern border of Benjamin is common with the northern border of Judah, but oriented from west to east, starting next to Jerusalem with En-Rogel and En-Shemesh and ending at the northern bay of the Dead Sea (Josh 18:15–19). The town list in Josh 18:21–24 specifies additional sites in this territory (“Jericho, Bet-Hogla, Emek-Keziz, Bet-Araba, . . .” – all other Benjaminite towns mentioned in this list are definitely or most likely situated in the hill country). The northern border of Benjamin north of Jericho (Josh 18:12) is common with the southern border of Ephraim (Josh 16:1; cf. 16:7), where Jericho is mentioned, too. Many years ago, Albrecht Alt has shown that the boundary lists in these chapters were written in the 10th century BCE during the reign of the kings David and Solomon, while the town lists derive from the 7th century BCE (ALT 1968). These lists allow us to reconstruct even the smallest villages around Jericho relatively exactly.

According to the book of Joshua, the eastern Jordanian tribes participated in the conquest of the west-Jordanian territories before settling east of the river. After the conquest of the territory west of the Jordan River, the tribes of Manasse, Ruben and Gad were dismissed by Joshua to return to their own territories (Josh 22:1–8). Before they left the west-Jordanian territory they erected an altar (Josh 22:9–11).

2.8 *The Dead Sea in the Deuteronomistic History*

The book of Judges includes stories about several heroes or local judges that were later compiled by a redactor in order to present a continuous list of rulers in Israel antedating the foundation of the kingdom. One of the stories is situated in Jericho. Eglon, the king of Moab, conquered this town but the Benjamite judge Ehud killed Eglon and freed Jericho (Judg 3:12–30). According to another story the sons of Hobab went from the City of Palms (= Jericho) into the Desert of Judah, which lies in the Negev near Arad (Judg 1:16).

The sanctuary in Gilgal was evidently very important in early times and is mentioned repeatedly in connection with the Benjamite judge Samuel and Saul, the king of Israel. Samuel (1 Sam 10:8), Saul (1 Sam 13:7–15) and the whole nation (1 Sam 15:21) gathered there to sacrifice and Saul was crowned king of Israel there (1 Sam 11:15). The spot also served as the central meeting point before a war in order to propitiate God with a sacrifice (1 Sam 13:7–15). Furthermore, the Amalekite king Agag was killed by Samuel in this sanctuary (1 Sam 15:33). Maybe there originally existed a cycle of legends connected with this cultic site.

The Judean Desert became once again famous in the stories of Saul who sought to kill his adversary David (1 Sam 23:14–26:25). In this context, 1 Sam 25 describes David as a merciless leader of mercenaries who controlled the territory with his troops. The transition area between the Judean hill country and the slopes bordering the west coast of the Dead Sea is ideal for pasturing flocks in winter. Even east of the watershed there is plenty of meadowland during the winter months. Only in spring when it becomes drier do the flocks return to the hill country. In this region near the site of Carmel, the Judean Nabal was tending to his sheep and goats (1 Sam 25:4,15) before the spring shearing, when David sent men to him in order to encash deliveries for the alleged shelter he provided (1 Sam 25). According to another tradition located in the area, David hid himself and his troops in the very south of the Judean Desert at the southern end of the Dead Sea, but the people of Zif (1 Sam 23:19,24; 26:1; Ps 54:2; 1 Sam 26 is a doublet to 1 Sam 23) went to Saul in order to betray David to him. Before Saul's troops arrived David marched north into the Desert of Maon (1 Sam 23:24–25; 25:1–2). The region of the Judean Desert (1 Sam 23:14; cf. Ps 63:1) and more specifically the Desert of En-Gedi (1 Sam 24:2) is also the setting for another story in this context (1 Sam 24). When Saul went to toilet in a cave, David had the opportunity to kill his enemy but spared his life. In all likelihood, this story is only a fictive unhistorical text to demonstrate the generosity of David. Benaja, one of the fighters of David, originated from Kabzeel situated at the slopes falling down to the very southern end of the Dead Sea (2 Sam 23:20; 1 Chr 11:22). His knowledge of the region and his contacts with local settlers were probably helpful for David during his time in the Judean Desert.

Generally, the Dead Sea is not a main setting in the Books of Kings. No cycle of legends is located in this area besides the Elisha stories, and the small number of citations seems to be congruent with the marginal political and economic importance of this territory. The site of Tamar, a small fortress guarding a trade route, was fortified by Solomon (1 Kings 9:18). Jericho was rebuilt during the time of Ahab (1 Kings 16:34), although archaeology clearly demonstrates that this was more of an enlargement rather than a re-foundation of the site which must have taken place at least 100 years before. During the reign of Jehu the territories east of the Jordan River were conquered by the Arameans (2 Kings 10:32–33) for a short while.

Remarkably, several Elisha stories are connected with Gilgal where the prophet had a meeting house for his disciples (2 Kings 2:1; 4:38), and he stayed several times in Gilgal nearby Jericho (2 Kings 2:4,5,18). Elija and Elisha also crossed the Jordan River on a dry bed (2 Kings 2:14). Gilgal was remembered in some texts, and this seems to be a historical information.

2.9 *The Dead Sea in the Books of the Chronicles and other late historical texts*

The so-called Ascent of Ziz (2 Chr 20:16) from En-Gedi to Tekoa is archaeologically confirmed by a chain of small resting places and was already used in the Iron Age I period (cf. KOCHAVI 1972; ZWICKEL 2015b, fig. 3). 2 Chr 11:6 testifies that Tekoa, situated at the upper end of the ascent, was fortified either

by the Judean king Rehabeam (so 2 Chr 11:6) or more likely in the 7th century BCE. This is the only period in which all sites mentioned in 2 Chr 11:5–10 were settled simultaneously.

According to 2 Chr 20:1–30 Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites collected their troops in En-Gedi in order to climb up the Ascent of Ziz to the Judahite hill country. The Judean king Josaphat fought a battle against this coalition and destroyed their armies with God's help (2 Chr 20:22) in the Desert of Tekoa (2 Chr 20:20). This story is not related in the Books of Kings, and its diction is typical for the Books of Chronicles, which was written in the late Persian and Hellenistic period. Even the political situation is typical for the postexilic period, when En-Gedi was the southernmost border town of Judah in the Judean Desert.

After 445 BCE the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt by the few people living in the town, assisted by settlers from all over Judah. Among them were people from Jericho and Tekoa (Neh 3:2.5.27). The Judean Desert east of Tekoa was always an ideal hiding place. The Maccabees Jonathan and Simon hid themselves in the Desert of Tekoa when they were pursued by the Seleucid general Bakchides (1 Macc 9:33) who also fortified the fortress of Jericho in 160 BCE (1 Macc 9:50). The Maccabean ruler Simon was killed in the fortress of Dok near Jericho (1 Macc 16:11–16).

2.10 *The Prophetic books*

Compared to the relatively few citations of sites around the Dead Sea in the historical books of the Bible there are plenty of citations in the prophetic books. On the one hand, the prophets draw on biblical stories like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:7.9–10; Jer 23:14; 49:18, 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46–56; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9), the sin of Peor (Hos 9:10; cf. Ps 106:28) and Bileam's blessings (Mic 6:5) as a warning to the faithless people. By contrast, the Valley of Achor (cf. Josh 7:24,26) becomes emblematic of the promising future of God's people (Isa 65:10; Hos 2:17). On the other hand, settlements and regions are mentioned in the oracles against Moab (Isa 15:1–9; Jer 48; Ezek 25:8–11). Finally the sanctuary of Gilgal is still referred to by the prophets of the 8th century BCE (Hos 4:15; 12:12; Amos 4:4; 5,5; cf. Hos 9:15).

A very hopeful text describes the Temple's fountain (Ezek 47:1–12): a fountain arises at the threshold of the temple in Jerusalem and runs down to the Dead Sea, the waters becoming deeper and deeper. This brook transforms the salty water of the Dead Sea into fresh water full of fish. Against the background of the desperate time of the Exile or the early postexilic period, this text wants to demonstrate God's ability to change the situation completely and to replace misery by a propitious future. Anyhow, the swamps and marches, which were important for the salt economy and by extension for the income of the settlers living along the shores of the Dead Sea, were supposed to survive (Ezek 47:11). In Joel 3:18 a similar situation is pictured: in a pleasant future, the Valley of Shittim north of the Dead Sea will be abundant with water.

2.11 *Additional texts*

A list not belonging to any of the sources of the Pentateuch mentions the Edomite kings (Gen 36:31–39). Adad, one of these kings, defeated the Midianites in the Plains of Moab (Gen 36:35; 1 Chr 1:46). Perhaps this text describes a territory at the southern end of the Dead Sea where Edomites and Midianites would have been in contact with one another. Ruth settled in the Plains of Moab when there was a famine in Judah (Ruth 1:1,2,6,22; 2:6; 4:3). In this text, by contrast, the expression most likely refers to the northern area of the Dead Sea (cf. also Num 21:20; 1 Chr 8:8). In Song of Songs 4:14, a text written in the Hellenistic period, the situation has already changed completely. Now the territory around En-Gedi is planted with henna plants and vineyards. In Sir 24:18, a text from the 2nd century BCE, the palm trees at En-Gedi and the rose plants in Jericho are referred to as the typical plants of this region. The region was cultivated again in the late postexilic period and became well known for its prosperous wine, henna, perfume and especially palm tree production (cf. the name "city of palm trees" for Jericho, Deut 34:3; Judg 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chr 28:15).

2.12 *New Testament*

The New Testament refers only to a few sites in this area. Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned several times as an example for the sinful actions of human beings (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Lk 10:12; 17:29; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7; Rev 11:8). On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus healed two blind men in Jericho (Matt 20:29–34//Mark 10:46–52//Luke 18:35–43). Also, Zacchaeus, a tax collector living in Jericho, met Jesus at this site (Luke 19:1–10). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) takes place on the desert way leading from Jericho to the temple in Jerusalem. Evidently an inn existed along this route (Luke 10:34). Besides the Q-material concerning the healing of the two blind men, only Luke knows stories situated in Jericho, while John does not mention the town at all. He only refers to nearby Bethany where John the Baptist was baptizing (John 1:28). According to Josephus, *Ant. Iud.* XVIII,119, John the Baptist died in the fortress of Machaerus on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, while the New Testament (Matt 14:6–12; Mark 6:21–29; Luke 3:19–20) does not present any data for the site of his death.

3 Roads in the Dead Sea area

The roads on the eastern and western side of the Dead Sea are both very recent and were built only in the last decades. This was also true for the Biblical period. Archaeological sites in this area inform us about road systems. Two small roads are attested in the northwestern part of the Dead Sea. One ran for a distance of approximately 20 km directly along the shore, ending in Ain et-Turabe (Palestine grid 188.112). The other one ran about 5 km further to the west through the Buqei'a Valley ending in Ain et-Turabe, too. Both roads were used to collect asphalt and salt from the Dead Sea and to transport the goods to the major center Jericho to the north of the Sea.

The other roads used in antiquity all led down from the western or eastern hill country to the shores of the Dead Sea. The course of the few existing roads can be exactly described. In the north the Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7; 18:17) connected Jerusalem and Jericho. This road was changed into a Roman road. The Ascent of Ziz (2 Chr 20:16), archaeologically confirmed by many resting places from the Iron Age, connected Tekoa with En-Gedi. Another small road connected Arad with the Dead Sea shore, ending finally south of 'En Boqeq. Some forts were built along this road as a shelter for traders. The so-called Ascent of Aqrabbim (or Ascent of the Scorpions; Num 34:4; Josh 15:3; Judg 1:36) is found further to the south, connecting the Beersheba Valley with the site of Tamar. Some archaeological remains indicate the existence of another road at the southern end of the Dead Sea, running from the Negev to the site of Obot.

Only few Iron Age sites are known on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, yet some road connections are confirmed by literary and archaeological sources. Mesha from Moab built a road along the Arnon River (Mesha Stela line 26). We also know the Ascent of Luhit (Isa 15:5; 48:5) connecting the Moabite hill country with the southern end of the Lisan peninsula. It is likely that a road ran from the area south of the Dead Sea to the northern territories of Edom, crossing the Desert of Edom (2 Kings 3:8,20). Further in the south, another road certainly led from Feinan up to the Edomite hill country. Only in the Hellenistic and mainly Roman period more roads were established on the eastern slopes of the Dead Sea.

4 Sites situated around the Dead Sea

On the whole, the Old and New Testament as well as other important texts from the Biblical period mention a surprisingly high number of sites around the Dead Sea, which is quite impressive in view of the unpleasantness of the territory. This demonstrates that the area was settled and well known in Biblical times. Except of few sites like Jericho, En-Gedi or Sodom, all these settlements were relatively small, partly consisting of no more than a single farmstead with only a few people living there. The area, however, was an economic niche used in specific periods either to collect salt and asphalt, to cultivate balsam, wine and date palms, or to produce perfumes. In addition, the area served as a retreat in times of danger where people hid themselves and their treasures like, for example, the scrolls in the Qumran caves.

The following table lists the names of these sites from north to south, the citations, a proposal for the identification of the site and the coordinates.

Table 1: Biblical sites and landscapes in the Dead Sea area.

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Bet-Nimra	Num 32:36; Josh 13:27	Tell Nimrin	209.145	31.89696, 35.62167
Nimra	Num 32:3	Tell Nimrin	209.145	31.89696, 35.62167
Bethennabris	los. Bell. Iud. IV,420	Tell Nimrin	209.145	31.89696, 35.62167
Jericho (OT)	Num 22:1; 26:3,63; 31:12; 33:48,50; 34:15; 35:1; 36:13; Deut 32:49; 34:1,3; Josh 2:1–3; 3:16; 4:13,19; 5:10,13; 6:1,2.25–26; 7:2; 8:2; 9:3; 10:1,28,30; 12:9; 13:32; 16:1,7; 18:12,21; 20:8; 24:11; 2 Sam 10:5; 1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 2:4–5,15,18; 25,5; 1 Chr 6:63; 19:5; 2 Chr 28:15; Esra 2:34; Neh 3:2; 7:36; Jer 39:5; 52:8; Jdt 4:3; Sir 24:18; 1 Macc 9:50; 16:11,14; 2 Macc 12:15	Tell es-Sultan	192.142	31.87108, 35.44399
City of Palms	Deut 34:3; Judg 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chr 28:15	Tell es-Sultan	192.142	31.87108, 35.44399
Dok, Dagon	1 Macc 16:15; los. Bell. Iud. I,56; Ant. Iud. XIII,230	Jebel Qarantal	189.142	31.87039, 35.42077
Bet-Gilgal	Neh 12:29	Ard el-Mefjir?	194.142	31.87032, 35.46304
Gilgal	Deut 11:30; Josh 4:19–20; 5:9,10; 9:6; 10:6–7,9,15,43; 14:6; Judg 2:1; 3:19,(26); 1 Sam 7:16; 10:8; 11:14–15; 13:4,7–8,12,15; 15:12,21,33; 2 Sam 19:16,41; 2 Kings 2:1; 4:38; Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:12; Amos 4:4; 5:5; Mic 6:5; (1 Macc 9:2; read Galilee), cf. los. Ant. Iud. V,20	Ard el-Mefjir?	194.142	31.87032, 35.46304
Jericho (NT)	Matt 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 10:30; 18:35; 19:1; (Heb 11:30); several citations in los. Bell. Iud. and Ant. Iud.	Tulul Abu el-Alayik	191.139	31.85144, 35.43646
Cypros	los. Bell. Iud. I,407,417; II,484; Ant. Iud. XVI,143	Tell el-Aqabe	190.139	31.84334, 35.42071
Bet-Araba	Josh 15:6,61; 18:18,22	En el-Gharbe	197.139	31.84320, 35.49466
Abel-Schittim	Num 33:49	Khirbet el-Kafren	210.139	31.84278, 35.64256
Schittim	Num 25:1; Josh 2:1; 3:1; Hos 5:2; Joel 4:18; Mic 6:5	Khirbet el-Kafren	210.139	31.84278, 35.64256
Abila (Adida)	los. Bell. Iud. II, 252; IV,438.486; Ant. Iud. IV,176; V,4	Khirbet el-Kafren	210.139	31.84278, 35.64256
Abella	Zenon 59004 I 5	Khirbet el-Kafren	210.139	31.84278, 35.64256
Herodion	los. Bell. Iud. I,419	el-Habbassa?	214.138	31.83365, 35.67421
Inn of the Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25–37	–	184.137	31.816357, 35.358931

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Bet-Haran	Num 32:36; Josh 13,27	Tell er-Rama	211.137	31.82474, 35.64247
Betharamptha/ Betharanphta	Ios. Bell. Iud. II,59; Ant. Iud. XVII,277; XVIII,27	Tell er-Rama	211.137	31.82474, 35.64247
Ioulias/Julias	Ios. Bell. Iud. II,252; IV,438; Ant. Iud. XVIII,27; XX,159	Tell er-Rama	211.137	31.82474, 35.64247
Betanien	John 1:28 (cf. 3:26)	Tell el-Kharrer	206.136	31.81589, 35.58963
Bet-Hogla	Josh 15:6; 18:19,21	Der Hajla	197.136	31.81614, 35.49457
Bethagala	Ios. Ant. Iud. XIII,26	Der Hagla	197.136	31.81614, 35.49457
Para	Josh 18:23	Khirbet En Fara	179.134	31.82544, 35.30448
Debir	Josh 15:7	Toghret et-Debr	187.134	31.79829, 35.38893
Bet-Jeschimot	Num 33:49; Josh 12:3; 13:20; Ezek 25:9	Tell el-Uzeme	208.132	31.77975, 35.61059
En-Shemesh	Josh 15:7; 18:17	En el-Hod	175.131	31.77135, 35.26220
Middin	Josh 15:61	Rujm el-Bahr?	198.131	31.77137, 35.51250
Pisga (mountain)	Num 21:20; 23:14; Deut 3:17,27; 4:49; 34:1; Josh 12:3; 13:20	Ras Sighara	218.131	31.77036, 35.71612
Nebo (mountain)	Deut 32:49; 34:1	Ras Sighara	218.131	31.77036, 35.71612
Peor	Num 23:28; 25:18; 31:16; Josh 22:17	Khirbet Uyun Musa	220.131	31.77028, 35.73723
Baal-Peor	Num 25:3,5; Ps 106:28; Hos 9:10	Khirbet Uyun Musa	220.131	31.77028, 35.73723
Bet-Pegor	Deut 3:29; 4:46; 34:6; Josh 13:20	Khirbet Uyun Musa	220.131	31.77028, 35.73723
En-Rogel	Josh 15:7; 18:16; 2 Sam 17:17; 1 Kings 1:9	Bir Eyyub	172.130	31.76234, 35.23053
Nebo (town)	Numb 32:3,38; 33:47; 1 Chr 5:8; Isa 15:2; Jer 48:1,22; Mesha-stela line 14	Khirbet el-Mukhayyat	220.128	31.74984, 35.74393
Bet-Kerem	Neh 3:14; Jer 6:1	Khirbet Salih	170.127	31.73984, 35.21618
Kerem	Josh 15:59	Khirbet Salih	170.127	31.73984, 35.21618
Sechacha	Josh 15:61	Qumran?	193.127	31.74173, 35.45944
Bamot(-Baal)	Num 21:19-20; 22:41; Josh 13:17	Khirbet el-Quwejiye	220.127	31.73420, 35.73702
Bet-Bamot	Mesha-stela line 27	Khirbet el-Quwejiye	220.127	31.73420, 35.73702
Hyrkania	Ios. Bell. Iud. I,161.167.364.664; Ant. Iud. XIII,417; XIV,89; XV,366; XVI,13; XVII,187	Khirbet Mird	184.125	31.71716, 35.35712
Kirjatajim	Gen 14:5; Num 32:37; Josh 13:19; Jer 48:1,23; Ezek 25:9	Khirbet el-Qureya	215.124	31.70735, 35.68413

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Kirjaton	Mesha-stela line 10	Khirbet el-Qureya	215.124	31.70735, 35.68413
Kirjat-Huzot	Num 22:39	Khirbet el-Qureya?	215.124	31.70735, 35.68413
Betlehem	Gen 35:19; 48:7; Jos 15:59; Judg 12:8,10; 17:7-9; 19:1-2,18; Ruth 1:1-2,19,22; 2:4; 4:11; 1 Sam 16:1,4,18; 17:12,15,58; 20,6,28; 2 Sam 2,32; 21:19; 23:14-16; 23:24; 1 Chr 2,51,54; 4:4,22; 11,16-18,26; 2 Chr 11:6; Ezra 2:21; Neh 7:26; Jer 41:17; Mic 5:1; Matt 2:1,5-6,8,16; Luke 2:4,15; John 7:42	Bet Lahm	169.123	31.69921, 35.19887
Etam	Josh 15:59; 1 Chr 4:32; 2 Chr 11:6	Khirbet el-Khokh	166.121	31.68116, 35.16724
Nibshan	Josh 15:62	Mazin?	192.121	31.68093, 35.44384
Baal-(Baal-) Meon	Numb 32:38; Josh 13:17; 1 Chr 5:8; Ezek 25:9; Mesha-stela line 30	Main	219.120	31.67111, 35.72612
Bet-Meon	Jer 48:23	Main	219.120	31.67111, 35.72612
Herodeion	Ios. Bell. Iud. I,265.673; III,55; IV,518.555; VII,163; Ant. Iud. XIV,360; XVI,13; XVII,199	Jebel el-Furedis	173.119	31.665833, 35.241389
Netofa	2 Sam 23:28-29; 2 Kings 25:23; 1 Chr 2:54; 9:16; 11:30; 27:13,15; Ezra 2:22; Neh 7:26; 12:28; Jer 40:8	Khirbet Badd Falukh	171.119	31.663130, 35.219970
Asphar	1 Macc 9:33	Bir el-Khashm?	174.116	31.63807, 32.25764
Tekoa	Josh 15:59; 2 Sam 14:2,4,9; 23:26; 1 Chr 2:24; 4:5; 11:28; 27:9; 2 Chr 11:6; 20:20; Neh 3:5.27; Jer 6:1; Amos 1:1; Ios. Bell. Iud. IV,518; Ant. Iud. VIII,246; 9,12; XIII,15; Vita 420	Khirbet et-Tuqu'	170.115	31.62706, 35.20942
Ir-Melach	Josh 15:62	En el-Ghuwer?	189.115	31.62690, 35.40968
Libba/Lemba	Ios. Ant. Iud. XIII,397; XIV,18	Khirbet Libb	222.112	31.59883, 35.75734
Kallirrhoe	Ios. Bell. Iud. I,657; Ant. Iud. XVII,171	'Ein ez-Zara	203.111	31.59051, 35.55711
Atarot	Mesha-Stela line 11	Khirbet Attarus	213.109	31.57215, 35.66238
Machaerus	Ios. Bell. Iud. I,161.171-172; II,485-486; III,46; IV,439.555; VII,164.168.170.210; Ant. Iud. XIII,417; XIV,83,89,94.96; XVIII, 111-112.119	Khirbet el-Mukawir	210.108	31.56324, 35.63074
Kajin	Josh 15:57	Khirbet Yaqin?	165.100	31.49176, 35.15680
En-Gedi	Josh 15:62; 1 Sam 23:29; 24:1-2; 2 Chr 20,2; Cant 1:14; Ezek 47:10; Sir 24:18	En-Gedi	187.098	31.46459, 35.38830
Hazon Tamar	Gen 14:7; 2 Chr 20:2	En-Gedi	187.098	31.46459, 35.38830
Engaddi	Ios. Bell. Iud. III,55; IV,402; Ant. Iud. IX,7.11	En-Gedi	187.098	31.46459, 35.38830
Karmel	Josh 15:55; 1 Sam 15:12; 25:2,5,7,40; 30;29	Khirbet Kirmil	162.092	31.41958, 35.12530

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Maon	Josh 15:55	Main	163.090	31.40155, 35.13583
Kerijot	Josh 15:25	Khirbet el-Qaryaten?	162.084	31.34743, 35.12279
Zif	Josh 15:24; 1 Sam 23:19,24; 26:1; Ps 54:2	Khirbet et-Tayyib?	164.082	31.32214, 35.13433
Masada	los. Bell. Iud. I,237–238.264.266.286.292–294.303; II,408.433.447.653; IV,399.404.504.506.516.555; VII,252.275.407; Ant. Iud. XIV,296.358.361–362.390–391.396–397.400.413; XV,184	es-Sabba	183.080	31.31131, 35.34599
Kabzeel (Jekabzeel)	Josh 15:21; 2 Sam 23:20; 1 Chr 11:22; Neh 11:25	Khirbet et-Tayyibe?	164.079	31.30247, 35.14181
Dimon	Isa 15:9	Khirbet el-Kharaziya	216.077	31.28342, 35.69250
Madmen	Jer 48:2	Khirbet el-Kharaziya	216.077	31.28342, 35.69250
Arad	Num 21:1; 33:40; Judg 1:16; Josh 12:14; 1 Chr 8:15	Tell Arad	162.076	31.27527, 35.12543
Horonajim/ Oronas	2 Sam 13:34; Isa 15:5; Jer 48:3.5.34; los. Ant. Iud. XIII,397; XIV,18	Ed-Der	215.073	31.24738, 35.68182
Horonan	Mesha-stela line 32	Ed-Der	215.073	31.24738, 35.68182
Sodom	Gen 10:19; 13:10,12,13; 14:2,8,10–12,17,21–22; 18:16,20,22,26; 19:1,4,24,28; Deut 29:22; 32:32; Isa 1:7,9–10; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46,48,49,53–56; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9; Sap 19:13; Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Luke 10:12; 17:29; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7; Rev 11:8; los. Bell. Iud. IV,453.483.485	Bab edh-Dhra'?	204.072	31.25392, 35.53418
Jagur	Josh 15:21	Khirbet Sumra?	163.071	31.23620, 35.13698
Kina	Josh 15:22	Khirbet Ghazze?	165.068	31.20313, 35.15697
Luhit	Isa 15:5; Jer 48:5	Katrabba	209.060	31.13497, 35.62604
Gomorrah	Gen 10:19; 13:10; 14:2,8,10–11; 18:20; 19:24,28; Deut 29:22; 32:32; Isa 1:9,10; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9; Matt 10:15; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7	Numeira?	201.059	31.13158, 35.52939
Bela	Gen 14:2,8	Khirbet esh-Shekh Isa	195.048	31.01347, 35.47124
Zoar	Gen 13:10; 14:2,8; 19:22–23,30; Deut 34:3; Isa 15:5; Jer 48:34	Khirbet esh-Shekh Isa	195.048	31.01347, 35.47124
Zoora	los. Bell. Iud. IV, 482; Ant. Iud. I,204; XIII,397; XIV,18	Khirbet esh-Shekh Isa	195.048	31.01347, 35.47124
Tamar	1 Kings 9:18; Ezek 47:18–19; 48:28	En Arus?	183.043	30.97758, 35.34552
Rehobot-Nahar	Gen 36:37; 1 Chr 1:48	Ras er-Rihab	208.038	30.91224, 35.54214
Obot	Num 21:10–11; 33:43–44	En Husb	173.024	30.80955, 35.24391

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Punon	Num 33,42–43 (cf. Gen 36:41; 1 Chr 1:52)	Feinan	198.004	30.62556, 35.49106
Landscape names (in alphabetical order)				
(Mountain of) Abarim	Num 27:12; 33:47–48; Deut 32:49; Jer 22:20			
(Valley) Achor	Josh 7:24,26; 15:7; Isa 65:10; Hos 2:17			
(Ascent of) Adummim	Josh 15:7; 18:17			
Ar	Num 21:15,18; 22:36; Deut 2:9.18.29; Isa 15:1			
Araba	Num 22:1; 26:3,63; 31:12; 33,48–50; 35:1; 36:13; Deut 1:1,7; 2:8; 3:17; 4:49; 11:30; 34:1,8; Josh 3:16; 4:13; 5:10; 8:14; 11:2,16; 12:1,3,6; 13:32; 18:18; 1 Sam 23:24; 2 Sam 2:29; 4:7; 15:28; 17:16; 2 Kings 14:25; 25:4,5; Isa 33:9; Jer 17:6; 39:4–5; 52:7,8; Ezek 47:8; Amos 6:14; Job 39:6			
Ascent of Aqrabim/Ascent of the Scorpions	Num 34:4; Josh 15:3; Judg 1:36			
Ascent of Luhit	Isa 15:5; Jer 48:5			
Ascent of Ziz	2 Chr 20:16			
Atarim	Num 21:1			
Beracha (valley)	2 Chr 20:26			
Desert of En Gedi	1 Sam 24:2			
Desert of Jeruel	2 Chr 20:16			
Desert of Judah	Josh 15:61; Judg 1:16; 1 Sam 23:14; 25:4,14; 1 Kings 2:34; Ps 63:1			
Desert of Maon	1 Sam 23:24–25; 25,1–2			
Desert of Tekoa	2 Chr 20:20; 1 Macc 9:33			
Desert of Zif	1 Sam 23:14–15; 26:2			
Fields of Moab	Gen 36:35; Num 21:20; Ruth 1:1,2,6,22; 2:6; 4:3; 1 Chr 1:46; 8:8			
Jordan area (hebr. kikkār)	Gen 13:10–12; 19:17.25.28–29; Deut 34:3; 2 Sam 18:23; 1 Kings 7:46; 2 Chr 4:17; Neh 3:22; cf. Matt 3:5; Luke 3:3			
Road along the Arnon River	Mesha Stela line 26			
Shittim (valley)	Joel 4:18			
Siddim (valley)	Gen 14:3,8,10			
Rivers				
Arnon	Num 21:13–14,24,28; 22:36; Deut 2:24,36; 3:8,12,16; 4:48; Josh 12:1–2; 13:9,16; Judg 11:13,18,22,26; 2 Kings 10:33; Isa 16:2; Jer 48,20			
Jordan	Many references			
(Waters of) Nimrim	Isa 15:6; Jer 48:34			
Sered	Num 21:12; Deut 2:13–14			

Ancient Name	Citations	Modern Name	Palestine grid	WGS 84
Not identified sites (in alphabetical order)				
Adma	Gen 10:19; 14:2,8; Deut 29:22; Hos 11:8			
Beer-Elim	Isa 15:8			
Beon	Num 32:3; (1 Macc 5:4?)			
City in the Valley	Josh 13:9,16; Deut 2:36; 2 Sam 24:5			
Di-Zahab	Deut 1:1			
Eglajim	Jes 15:8			
Eglat-Shelishija	Isa 15:5; Jer 48:34			
Emek-Keziz	Josh 18:21			
En-Eglajim	Ezek 47:10			
Gelilot	Josh 15:7; 18:17			
(Gibea) Hachila	1 Sam 23:19; 26:1,3			
Hazerot	Deut 1:1			
Horesh	1 Sam 23:15,16,18,19			
Laban	Deut 1:1			
Rocks of the Wild Goats	1 Sam 24:3			
Seira	Judg 3:26			
Stone of Bohan	Josh 15:6; 18:17			
Suf	Deut 1:1			
Sufa	Num 21:14			
Tofel	Deut 1:1			
Waheb	Num 21:14			
Zebojim	Gen 10:19; 14:2,8; Deut 29:22; Hos 11:8			
Zeret-haSchachar	Josh 13:19			

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