

Catholic theologian acknowledges archaeologists found Biblical Sodom

ADAM ELIYAHU BERKOWITZ



In a [video](#) interview, Dr. John Bergsma, a professor of theology at Ohio's Franciscan University, [acknowledged that after meeting with researchers](#), he now acknowledges that the ruins of Tall el-Hammam in the southern Jordan Valley are most likely the site of Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. For the Catholic theologian, this marked a powerful turning point in his belief.

Dr. Bergsma described how he had always been skeptical of Biblical accounts that seemed too fantastic to be true.

“So Sodom and Gomorrah looks like one of those mythological stories out of the Bible, right?” Bergsma said. “Sure, fire comes from heaven. Tell me another one. And I'll be honest with you, when I was growing up and reading Genesis 19 and stuff like that, it was a challenge in my faith. This really happened, and are we supposed to understand this?”

His skepticism remained firmly in place until about 15 years ago when he was attending a Society of Biblical Literature conference in San Francisco and unintentionally wandered into a presentation by [Stephen Collins](#), Dean of the College of Archaeology and Biblical History at Trinity Southwest University, about his research into the Tall el-Hammam site.

“I started listening, and as I'm listening to this presentation, for about 45 minutes, near the end of it, I began to realize, ‘Oh my gosh, these people presenting think that they have found the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah’. That's what they're saying in a really roundabout, really understated way.”

Bergsma asked the researchers if they had found evidence of a battle that would explain the destruction they found. They replied that they had not found any evidence of a man-made catastrophe.

“So I'm curious, like, what destroyed these two cities that you guys think are Sodom and Gomorrah?” Bergsma said. “And so the researcher starts getting very bashful when I ask this question, he says, Well, I don't really want to go there. But all I want to say while we're recording this session is that it was a heat event.”

Collins displayed a piece of glazed pottery from the site. While the pottery itself was typical of the Bronze Age, glazing was invented about one thousand years later.

“That glass layer that you get when you basically set off an atomic bomb in the desert and it melts the glass and you get a kind of crystalline formation that’s called Trinity,” Bergsma said. “So this pottery was raised to over 4000 degrees Fahrenheit, for a brief moment at a time.”

“Well, long story short, they found massive evidence that a huge heat blast from the sky at about 25 degrees above the horizon incinerated these twin cities on the Jordanian side of the river just north of the Dead Sea. And they have the artifacts to prove it.”

“From a natural material explanation, this looks like a meteorite blast.”

From a theological perspective, Bergsma notes that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah play a key role throughout the Bible.

“This stuck in the cultural memory because this is a major world-historical traumatic event for us like the Twin Towers going down,” Bergsma said. “This was a major disaster where these two cities were entirely wiped out by a heat blast from the sky, by the hand of God as it were. But no historical source records this, even though Sodom and Gomorrah were arguably the two most powerful cities in that entire region.”

This realization that science had objectively confirmed through data analysis a fantastic Biblical event was a pivotal moment for the Catholic theologian.

“That really changed my perspective on the Old Testament map because what it pointed out to me was that things that sounded so outlandish to be history, that even I as a believer was tested and tempted to discount, were suddenly shown to be a historical event.”

Collins’s research is truly fascinating. Today, the region is intensely arid and the soil saline, making agriculture unsustainable. The site is

adjacent to the [Dead Sea](#), which has a 34 percent salinity. This unique feature coats the rocks on its shore in thick layers of salt. This is consistent with the Biblical account, which describes Lot's wife turning to a pillar of salt.

But one of the characteristics of Sodom mentioned in the Bible is the incredible richness of the area. Lot, Abraham's nephew who escaped Sodom when it was destroyed, chose the Jordan Valley for this particular trait (Genesis 13:10).

Research at the site in Jordan, about 14 kilometers northeast of the Dead Sea was completed in 2015 after ten years of digging. The city, with its massive walls, palaces, administrative buildings, and surrounding farm region, flourished and dominated the region for 3,000 years. The 15 square-mile circular Middle Ghor was a fertile plain, populated continuously for at least 2,500 hundred years. The city grew to be five to ten times larger than the other Bronze Age cities throughout the region. Based on evidence found at the site, sometime between 2000-1540 BCE, the entire area suddenly became uninhabited for over 700 years. But the archaeological team found no evidence of the reason behind this sudden and lasting desolation.

According to [researchers](#), an enormous explosion over the city, such as that caused by a massive meteor, would account for all the evidence. The evidence suggests an airburst. Researchers were faced with a 5-foot-thick layer of charcoal, ash, and melted bricks and pottery at the site which researchers called the destruction layer. The evidence of intense heat precluded a war or earthquake. They determined that the bricks melted at a temperature of 2,700 Fahrenheit, hotter than a volcano. The evidence of intense heat precluded a war or earthquake as the cause of destruction.

The [study](#) concluded that about 3,600 years ago an icy space rock measuring 50 meters across entered the atmosphere while traveling 38,000 mph. Lacking a crater to indicate an impact, the researchers concluded that the asteroid entering the atmosphere resulted in a massive fireball that exploded about 2.5 miles above the ground. The

resulting blast was about 1,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb and destroyed the region.

The event devastated the city, which had been settled since about 4,300 BCE. Air temperatures in the entire region rose above 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit, causing clothing and wood to immediately burst into flames. Mud Bricks and pottery began to melt, something even volcanoes do not do. Almost immediately, the entire city was on fire. The combustion was followed by a massive shock wave moving at about 740 mph. The upper 40 feet of a four-story palace were sheared off and blown into a nearby valley. All of the 8,000 people living in the city were killed in the event.

The storm traveled 14 miles across the valley, toppling the walls of the city of Jericho and burning it to the ground.

The devastating effects of the asteroid were so intense that the left behind shocked quartz, finely fractured sand grains that form at 725,000 pounds per square inch of pressure. The destruction layer also contained microscopic diamondoids transformed from the wood and plants by the fireball's high pressures and temperatures. Tiny spherules of vaporized iron and sand formed at about 2,900 Fahrenheit.

With such evidence indicating temperatures higher than man-made sources or volcanic activity, the researchers concluded that the only natural source that could account for the destruction was a cosmic impact.

At the [time of the catastrophe](#), roughly 50,000 people were living in the area of the Jordan Valley. The entire region, which had been fertile and heavily settled, supporting flourishing civilizations continuously for at least 3,000 years before the catastrophe, was abandoned after the asteroid strike for the next 600 years. 120 regional settlements within a 25-kilometer radius survived the impact but were abandoned. The report did not conclusively answer that question, but the researchers theorized that the explosion may have vaporized or splashed toxic levels of Dead Sea saltwater across the valley. Located in an arid

region, it would take several centuries until the minimal rainfall could wash away enough of the salt deposits to allow a return to agriculture.

Radiocarbon dating dates the destruction to within 50 years of 1650 BCE.

Clues to this mystery may also be found in the Bible narrative. The destruction of Sodom is described as God raining down burning sulfur, or, in other translations, fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24). At the Tall site, a layer of ash was discovered, and the remains of one palace are stained red from burning. In addition, pottery shards display signs of exposure to extremely high temperatures. Normally, evidence of fire at such sites results from a military action, however, a military conquest would usually be followed by an occupation, and it certainly would not account for 700 years of desolation.

Retrieved September 19, 2023 from [Catholic theologian acknowledges archaeologists found Biblical Sodom - Israel365 News](#)