

Salt or Dead Sea

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Dead Sea

(*mare mortuum*, Justin, 36:3, 6; θάλασσα ἡ νεκρά, Pausan. v. 7, 3; Galen. *Simpl. Med.* 4:20), a name applied since the second century to the *Asphaltic Lake* (ἡ Ἀσφαλτίτις λίμνη, as Josephus, *Iodorus Siculus*, and Ptolemy, v. 16, 3, call it; or simply ἡ Ἀσφαλτίτις, *War*, 4:8, 2; more distinctly λίμνη ἄσφαλτοφόρος, *Ant.* 17:6, 5; Pliny's *Asphaltites lacus*, or simply *Asphaltites*), from its supposed noxious properties. In the Bible it is called *the SALT SEA* (יַם הַמֶּלַח, [Ge 14:3](#); [Nu 34:12](#), etc.), the Sea of the Plain, or *Arabah* (יַם הָעֲרָבָה, [De 3:17](#); [De 4:49](#), etc.), or the Front (Eastern) Sea (יַם הַקִּדְמוֹנִי, [Eze 47:18](#); comp. ver. 8; [Joe 2:20](#); [Zec 14:8](#)). By the Arabs it is termed *Bahr Lut*, "the Sea of Lot" (Abulfeda, *Tab. Syr.* p. 156). It is the remarkable lake or internal sea formed by the filling up of the old basin of the Vale of Siddim ([Ge 14:3](#)), on the south-east border of Palestine ([Nu 34:3,12](#); [De 3:17](#); comp. [Jos 12:3](#)), especially in the same quarter of the tribe of Judah ([Jos 15:2,5](#)) into which the Jordan empties (in, 16), 300 stadia from Jerusalem (Joseph. *Ant.* 15:6, 2). Josephus (*War*, 4:8, 4) gives its length as 580 stadia, or about 38 miles; its breadth as 150 stadia, or about 15 miles; and its circumference as 6 days' journey (see Setzeen in Zach's *Monatl. Corresp.* 18:440; the estimates of Pliny, v. 15, and Diod. Sic. 19:98, are erroneous). It is long and necked or sickle-form at the southern end, with a peninsula at the eastern side. *SEE BAY*. The east and west shores are steep with naked limestone, *SEE ENGEDI*, but the

southern shore ends in a marsh. On the south-west is a range of salt hills, and on the southeast a considerable plain. *SEE SALT, VALLEY OF*. The water, which lies far below the level of the Mediterranean, is clear, but uncommonly salt and bitter, and of great density (Joseph. *War*, 4:8, 4; Jul. Afric. in Canisii *Lectio. Antiq.* 2:1; Pliny, v. 15). It contains no living creature, neither fish, shells, nor seaplants, and when fishes from the Jordan get into it they die and float upon the surface (Diod. Sic. 2:48; 19:98; Jerome on *Ezekiel* 47:9; Cotovic. *Itin.* p. 312). The shore is covered with a dark offensive mud, upon which a strong saline incrustation forms, and is occasionally interspersed with lumps of bitumen, broken off from the cliffs or disgorged from the bottom (Burckhardt, 2:664). A pretty thick fog has been observed, especially in the morning, by travelers (Shaw, p. 297; Volney, 1:240), as enveloping the lake (comp. Wild. 10:7; Philo, *Opp.* 21:143); but, situated as it is in a deep caldron-like spot, the air is usually excessively sultry, and so filled with saline effluvia as to banish vegetation (Philo, *Opp.* 2:21); and although it is not so detrimental to animal life (Tacit. *Hist.* v. 6) as has sometimes been represented (Maundrell, p. 116), a solemn stillness reigns around, unbroken by wind, wave, or animated cry.' The marks of volcanic agency are strewn about (Felsecker, Palst. 2:353), which, with the warm springs on the shore, *SEE CALLIRRHOE*, the asphaltic vapors and floating substances (Strabo 16:764), give evidence of the plutonic catastrophe (comp. *Ge* 14:10) which covered the guilty cities of this plain (Genesis 19); and it is popularly believed that these ruins may still be discerned beneath its waters (Joseph. *War*, 4:8, 4), though now sunk below their former level (Reland, *Paloest.* p. 254 sq.). *SEE SIDDIM*. It was anciently believed that the immense volume of water poured in by the Jordan found an outlet by subterranean canals into the Mediterranean (Diod.

Sic. 19:98); but it is now ascertained that this is impossible, and that evaporation is sufficient to account for the maintenance of the usual height in the lake (Bachiene, I, 1:121). See generally Fabri, *Evagat.* 2:155 sq.; Oedmann, *Samml.* 3, 125; Hamelsveld, 1:447; Busching, *Erdbeschr.* V, 1:322 sq.; Waihner, *De Mari Asphalt.* (Helmst. 1712); Michaelis in his *Comment.* 1758-62 oblat. (Brem. 1774), p. 61 sq.; Mannert, *Geogr.* VI, 1:332; Ritter, *Erdkunde*, 16:331 sq.; Schwarz, *Palest.* p. 41; Thomson, *Land and Book*, 2:449; Kelly's Syria, p. 393; J. Kempe, *De indole Maris Mortui* (Holm. 1751). *SEE SEA.*