

Zoar

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(Heb. צַעַר, [fully צוֹעַר, Ge 19; Ge 22; Ge 23; Ge 30], *smallness*; Sept. Σηγώρ, Ζογορ, or Ζόγορα'; Josephus 'Ζοώρ, τὰ Ζόαρα or Ζώαρα; *Vulg. Segor*), one of the cities of the Jordan and Dead-Sea valley, and apparently, from the way in which it is mentioned, the most distant from the western highlands of Palestine (13, 10). Its original name was BELA, and it was still so called at the time of Abram's first residence in Canaan (14, 2, 8). It was then in intimate connection with the cities of the "plain of Jordan" — Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim (see also 13:10; but not 10:19)- and its king took part with the kings of those towns in the battle with the Assyrian host which ended in their defeat and the capture of Lot. The change is thus, explained in the narrative of Lot's escape from Sodom. When urged by the angel to flee to the mountain, he pointed to Bela, and said, "This city is near to flee unto, and it is a *little one* (מַצְעַר). Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a *little one*?) and my soul shall live." The angel consented and the incident proved a new baptism to the place, "Therefore the name of the city was called *Zoar*," that is, "little" (5, 22). This incident further tends to fix its site, at least relatively to Sodom. It must have been nearer than the mountains, and yet outside the boundary of the plain or vale of Siddim, which was destroyed during the conflagration. It would seem from ver. 30 that it lay at the foot of the mountain into, which Lot subsequently went up, and where he dwelt. That mountain was most probably the western declivity of

Moab, overlooking the Dead Sea. In [De 34:3](#) there is another slight indication of the position of Zoar. From the top of Pisgah Moses obtained his view of the Promised Land. The east, the north, and the west he viewed, and- lastly "the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, into Zoar. This is not quite definite; but, considering the scope of the passage, it may be safely concluded that the general basin of the Dead Sea is meant, and that Zoar was near its southern end. Isaiah reckons Zoar among the cities of Moab, but does not describe its position. It would seem, however, from the way in which it is mentioned, that it must have been on the utmost border, ([Isa 15:5](#)). Jeremiah is the only other sacred writer who mentions it, and his words are less definite than those of Isaiah ([Jer 48:34](#)).

In early Christian times Josephus says that it retained its name (Ζοώρ) to his day ([Ant. 1:11, 4](#)), that it was at the farther end of the Asphaltic Lake, in Arabia by which he means the country lying southeast of the lake, whose capital was Petra ([War, 4:8, 4](#); [Ant. 14:1, 4](#)). The notices of Eusebius are to the same tenor the Dead Sea extended from Jericho to Zoar (Ζοορῶν; *Onomast. s.v.* θάλασσα ἡ ἄλυκή). Phseno lay between Petra and Zoar (*ibid. s.v.* Φινῶν). It still retained its name (Ζωαρά), lay close to (παρακειμένη) the Dead Sea, was crowded with inhabitants, and contained a garrison of Roman soldiers; the palm and the balsam still flourished, and testified, to its ancient fertility (*ibid. s.v.* Βαλά). To these notices of Eusebius, Jerome adds little or nothing. Paula, in her journey, beholds Segor (which Jerome gives on several occasions the Hebrew form of the name, in opposition to Zoora, or Zoara, the Syrian form) from Caphar Barucha (possibly Beni Naim, near Hebron), at the same time with Enigedi, and the land where once stood the four cities; but the terms of the statement are too vague to allow of any inference

as to its position (*Epist.* 108, §11). In his commentary on [Isa 15:5](#), Jerome says that it was "in the boundary of the Moabites dividing them from the land of the Philistines," and thus justifies his use of the *word vectis* to translate בריחה (A.V. "his fugitives," marg. "borders;" Gesen. *Fluchtlinge*). The *terra Philistiim*, unless the words are corrupt, can only mean the land of Palestine — i.e. (according to the inaccurate usage of later times) of Israel — as opposed to Moab. In his *Quaestiones Hebraicae*, on [Ge 19:30](#) (comp. 14:3), Jerome goes so far as to affirm the accuracy of the Jewish conjecture, that the later name of Zoar was Shallsha Bale primum et postea Salisa appellate. (comp. also his comment on [Isa 15:5](#)). But this is probably grounded merely on an interpretation of *shalishiyeh* in [Isa 15:5](#), as connected with *bela*, and as denoting the "third" destruction of the town by "earthquakes." Zoar was included in the province of Palestina Tertia, which contained also Kerak and Areopolis. It was an episcopal see, in the patriarchate of Jerusalem and archbishopric of Petra; at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) it was represented by its bishop, Musonius, and at the Synod of Constantinople (A.,D. 536) by John (Le Quien, *Oriens Christi*, 743-746).

⇒ [Bible concordance for ZOAR](#).

Among the statements of mediaeval travelers there are two remarkable ones —

(1.) Brocardus (cir. A.D. 1290) the author of the *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, the standard "Handbook to Palestine" of the Middle Ages, the work of an able and intelligent resident in the country, states, (c. 7) that he leagues (leuca) to the south of Jericho is the city Segor, situated beneath the mountain of Engaddi, between which mountain and the Dead Sea is the statue of salt. True, he confesses that all his efforts to visit the spot had been, frustrated by the Saracens; but the passage bears marks of the greatest; desire to obtain correct

information, and he must have nearly approached the place, because he saw with his own eyes the "pyramids" which covered the wells of bitumen, which he supposes to have been those of the vale of Siddim. This is in curious agreement with the connection between Engedi and Zoar implied in Jerome's *Itinerary of Paula*.

⇒ See also the [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#).

(2.) The statement of Thietmar (A.D. 1217) is even more singular. It is contained in the 11th and 12th chapters of his *Peregrinatio* (ed. Laurent, Hamburg, 1857). After visiting Jericho and Gilgal, he arrives at the "fords of Jordan" (11, 20), where Israel crossed and where Christ was baptized, and where then, as now, the pilgrims bathed (22). Crossing this ford (33), he arrives at "the field and the spot where the Lord overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." After a description of the lake come the following words: "On the shore of this lake, about a mile (*ad miliare*) from the spot at which the Lord was baptized, is the statue of salt into which Lot's wife was turned" (47). "Hence I came from the lake of Sodom and Gomorrah, and arrived at Segor, where Lot took refuge after the overthrow of Sodom; which is now called in the Syrian tongue Zora, but in Latin the City of Palms. In the mountain hard by this Lot sinned with his daughters (12, 1-3). After this I passed the vineyard of Benjamin (?) and of Engaddi... Next I came into the land of Moab and to the mountain in which was the cave where David hid, leaving on my left hand Sethim (Shittim), where the children of Israel tarried.... At last I came to the plains of Moab, which abound in cattle and grain.... A plain country, delightfully covered with herbage, but without either woods or single trees; hardly even a twig or shrub (4-15). After this I came to the torrent Jabbok" (14, 1).

Zoar is very distinctly mentioned by the Crusading historians. Fulcher (*Gesta Dei*, p. 405, quoted by Raumer, p. 239) states

that, "having encircled (*giitato*) the southern part of the lake on the road from Hebron to Petra, we found there a large village which was said to be Segor, in a charming situation, and abounding with dates. Here we began to enter the mountains of Arabia." The palms are mentioned also by William of Tyre (22, 30) as being so abundant as to cause the place to be called *Villa Palmarum*, and *Palmer* (i.e. probably *Paumier*). Abulfeda (cir. A.D. 1320) does not specify its position more nearly than that it was adjacent to the lake and the Ghor, but he testifies to its then importance by calling the lake after it-Bahretzghor (see, too, Ibn-Idris, in Reland, p. 272). The natural inference from the description of Fulcher is that Segor lay in the Wady Kerak, the ordinary road, then and now, from the south of the Dead Sea to the eastern highlands. The conjecture of Irby and Mangles (June 1, and see May 9), that the extensive ruins, which they found in the lower part of this Wady, were those of Zoar, is therefore probably accurate. The name *Dra'a* or *Dera'ah*, which they, Poole (*Geogr. Journ.* 26:63), and Burckhardt (July 15), give to the valley, may even without violence be accepted as a corruption of Zoar. The ruins have likewise been described by De Saulcy (*Journey, 1*, 307).

M. de Saulcy himself, however, places Zoar in the *Wady Zuweirah*, the pass leading from Hebron to the Dead Sea. But the names *Zuweirah* and *Zoar* are not nearly so similar in the originals as they are in their Western forms, and there is the fatal obstacle to the proposal that it places Zoar on the west of the lake, away from what appears to have been the original cradle of Moab and Ammon. If we are to look for Zoar in this neighborhood, it would surely be better to place it at the *Tellum-Zoghal*, the latter part of which name is almost literally the same as the Hebrew *Zoar*. The proximity of this name and that of *Usdulm*, so like *Sodom*, and the presence of

the salt mountain to this day splitting off in pillars which show a rude resemblance to the human form, are certainly remarkable facts. Other writers locate Zoar in the plain at the northern end of the Dead Sea. An insuperable objection to this is that in that case Lot must have crossed the Jordan in his flight; for Sodom was on the west side of the plain, and Zoar on the east. Mr. Birch (in the *Quarterly Statement* of the "Palest. Explor. Fund," Jan. 1879, p. 15 sq.) is confident that the name and site are those of *Tell es-Shagur*, at the foot of Wady Hesban; but his arguments lack weight. Tristram's attempt (*Land of Moab*, p. 343) to identify Zoar with *Ziara* on Mount Nebo is based upon an error as to the latter name, which is properly *Siaghah*; the position on a mountain, moreover, is preposterous. For the different views held regarding the site of Zoar, see Robinson, *Bibl. Res.* 2, 517; Reland, *Palaest.* p. 1064; De Saulcy *Travels*, 1, 481; Tristram, *Land of Israel*, p. 360; *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1868, p. 136 sq. [SEE SODOM.](#)