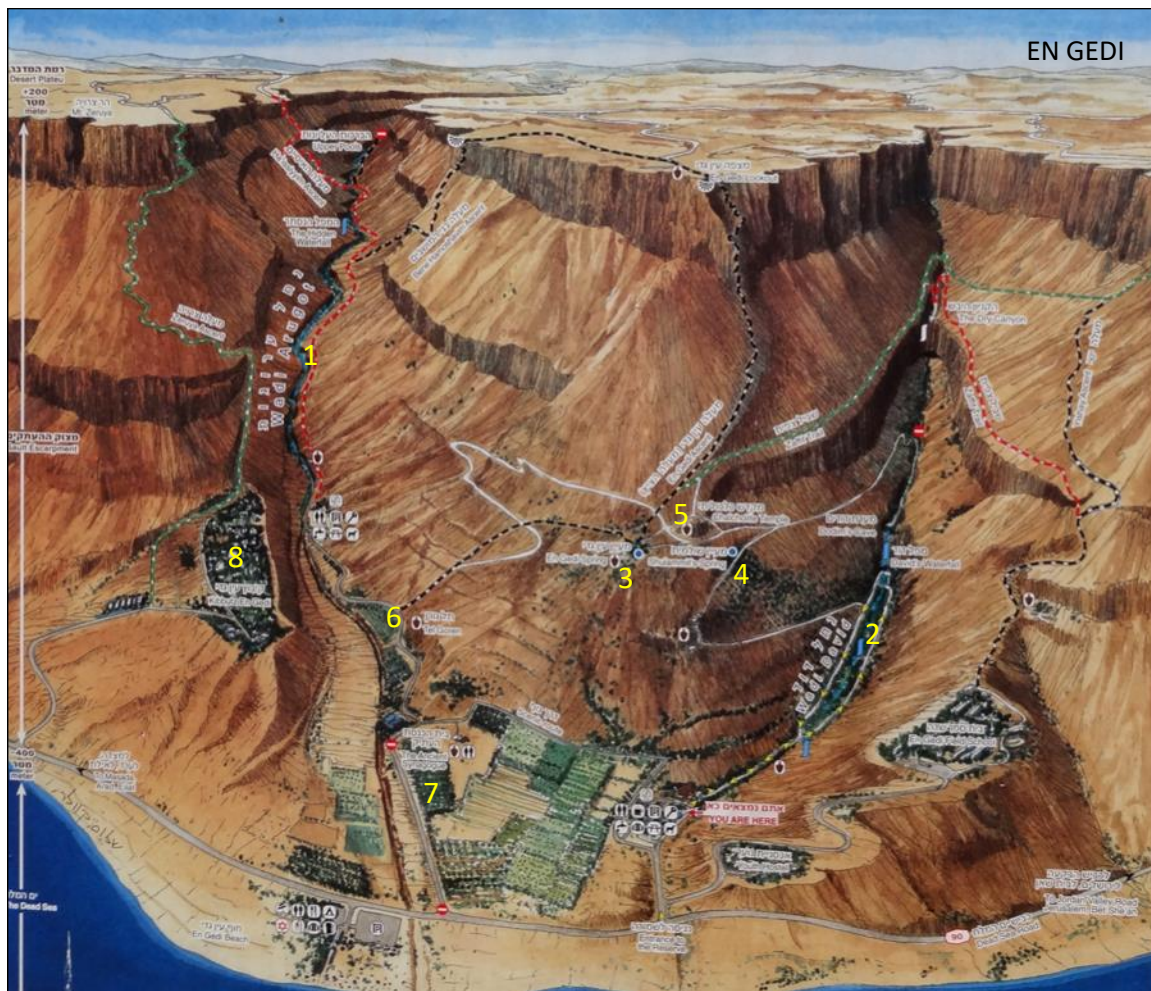


EN GEDI

Background. En Gedi is a green oasis in the desert wilderness located 30 miles south-east of Jerusalem on the western shore of the Dead Sea, south of Qumran and north of Masada. En Gedi is watered by four fresh water sources—Nahal Arugot, Nahal David, Shulamit Spring, and En Gedi Spring—and is the largest desert oasis in Israel at 250 acres. The fertile area is surrounded by mountains and cliffs and is full of rocks and caves. The town is also called the city of palm trees. In Hebrew, En Gedi means “fountain of the wild goat” or “the spring of the kid (goat).” Evidence suggests that ibex have always lived near the springs of En Gedi and they can still be seen there today.



- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Nahal Arugot | 5 | Chalcolithic Temple |
| 2 | Nahal David | 6 | Tel Goren |
| 3 | En Gedi Spring | 7 | Ancient Synagogue |
| 4 | Shulamit Spring | 8 | Kibbutz En Gedi |



David's Waterfall

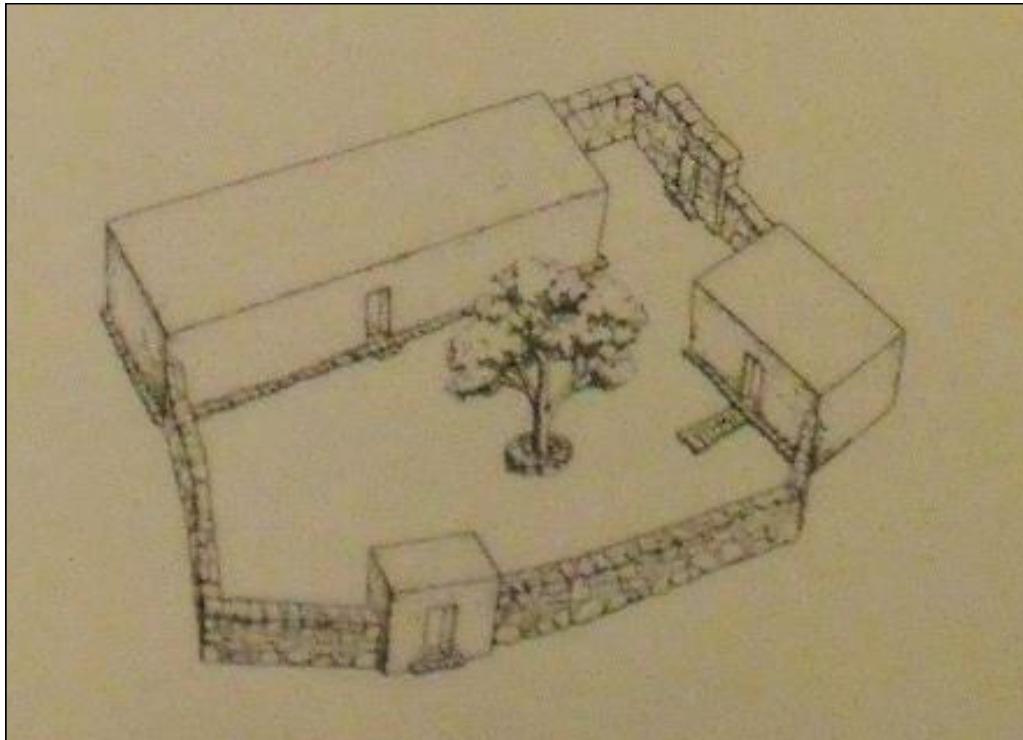


Ibex (Wild Goat)



Rock Badger
(Also Known as Hyrax or Coney)

Chalcolithic Temple. Most of the springs around the Dead Sea have a high salt content. Yet, the fresh water sources at En Gedi have allowed people to live in the area since the Chalcolithic period (4000-3150 B.C.). A temple was built above the springs at En Gedi during the fourth millennium B.C., probably serving as a worship center for nomadic tribes. This conclusion is based on the fact that no village was found near the sanctuary. The rectangular temple had a courtyard, which was accessed by a gate (a square chamber with benches). A sacrificial altar was also found, which had animal bones and ashes.



Artist's Reconstruction of the Chalcolithic Temple

Cave of the Treasure. A cave was found about six miles southwest of En Gedi above Nahal Mishmar containing treasures that were perhaps related to the temple at En Gedi and hidden for safe keeping. It is known as the Cave of the Treasure. The items discovered are sometimes called the Nahal Mishmar Hoard; they are on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Common artifacts that would have been used everyday include grinding and pounding vessels, flint arrowheads and cutting implements, bone awls, and necklaces made of bone, shell, and semi-precious stones. In addition, there were remnants of a loom, spindles, woven linen and wool, baskets, leather, and the sole of a sandal. The more valuable treasures are the more than 400 copper objects that were found in the crevice of a wall, being wrapped in a reed mat. These include mace heads and scepters. They had apparently been used about 3000 B.C.; thus they had been hidden for approximately 5,000 years.



Hoard in the Cave of the Treasure







Caves at En Gedi. En Gedi was part of the territory allotted to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:62). It was one of the places of refuge for David as he hid from King Saul (1 Sam. 23—24). When Saul was told that David was in the wilderness of En Gedi, he took 3,000 men to pursue David; they looked for him “near the Crags of the Wild Goats” (1 Sam. 24:2). It was here that David cut off a corner of Saul’s robe as the king relieved himself in a cave (1 Sam. 24:3-4). In later times, En Gedi was the gathering place of Moabites and Ammonites who went up against Jerusalem (2 Chron. 20:2, 6).



Caves at En Gedi



Additional Caves



Tel Goren. A small settlement, known as Tel Goren, was established at En Gedi in the seventh century B.C. Houses were constructed close together, being built on terraces. Large clay vats were found that had probably been used for storing water. Other finds included royal seal impressions and a hoard of silver pieces.



Hoard of Silver Ingots from En Gedi
7th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

Archaeological evidence has found five periods of time at the tel, dating from the end of the Judean Kingdom to the Roman-Byzantine period. During the Hasmonean period, En Gedi became a royal estate. Excavators discovered about thirty cells cut out of stone from the Roman period; these may have been used by the Essenes. En Gedi was burned about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The city was pillaged by zealot Jews, who took the spoils from En Gedi to fill up the storehouses at Masada (Josephus *Wars* 4.7.2). The site was later used as an outpost by Jewish rebels during the Bar Kochba Revolt (A.D. 132-135).

Cave of the Letters. At Nahal Hever, south of En Gedi, a cave was discovered with artifacts (including letters) from the time of the Bar Kochba Revolt (A.D. 132-135). Many of the bronze vessels were of Roman origin, being taken by Jewish rebels in battle. Some of them were decorated with human images, which the Jews often defaced because they were prohibited by the law of Moses. In addition to vessels, there is also a belt, a pair of sandals, and a waterskin. These items are on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.





Waterskin

Oasis. The temperate climate and available springs made En Gedi successful in agriculture in ancient times. It was a symbol of beauty and fertility. The writer of Song of Solomon compared his lover to blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi (Song 1:14). Josephus referred to the palm trees and balsam of En Gedi (*Antiquities* 9.2). The area was prosperous in Hellenistic and Roman times due to lush vegetation, valuable persimmon oil, and balsam, which was used to make perfumes and medicines. A fortress and watch towers were built to protect this industry.



Palm Trees at En Gedi



Canopy over the Synagogue

The Synagogue. Excavations show evidence of a Jewish settlement, including a synagogue dating from the third to sixth centuries A.D. This synagogue is on the northeast side of Tel Goren. It was first built at the beginning of the third century A.D., having a simple mosaic floor. Several renovations took place in the fourth and fifth centuries, which expanded the structure and included more decorative mosaics. The synagogue has been completely excavated and nearby streets and buildings have been partially excavated. The Jewish synagogue and city were destroyed in a wave of persecution in A.D. 530.



Ruins of Buildings
Outside the Synagogue



Ritual Bath Outside the Synagogue (Two Views)



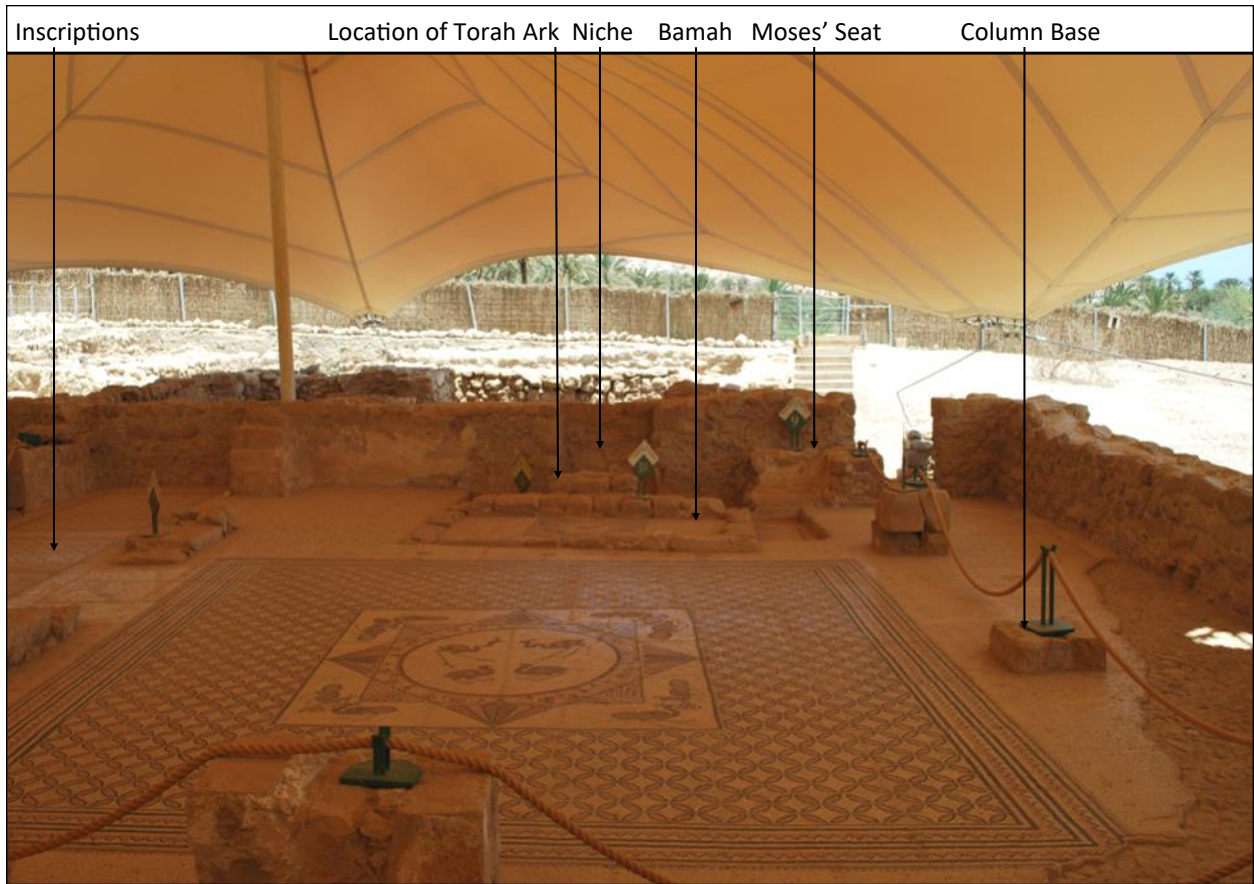


Synagogue Seating and Floor Mosaic



Floor Mosaic with Four-Petal Flowers
Featuring Birds (Center) and Peacocks (Corners)

This synagogue floor, which dates to the fifth century A.D., reflects a simpler, more conservative style than others in Israel which feature the signs of the Zodiac and the four seasons. Perhaps the peacocks were symbolic of eternal life, as in early Christianity. This association comes from the fact that the peacock sheds its feathers each year and then grows new ones.



The niche was where archaeologists found the synagogue's worn out scrolls, some bronze coins, a chalice, and a silver menorah. The Torah ark (8) would have been located in front of the niche and behind the platform; it would have stored the sacred scrolls that were in use at the time. The bamah (10) was the platform area where men would read from the Hebrew Scriptures.



Moses' Seat for Leader/Teacher
(Mt. 23:2)



Small Menorahs



View from the West Side of the Synagogue

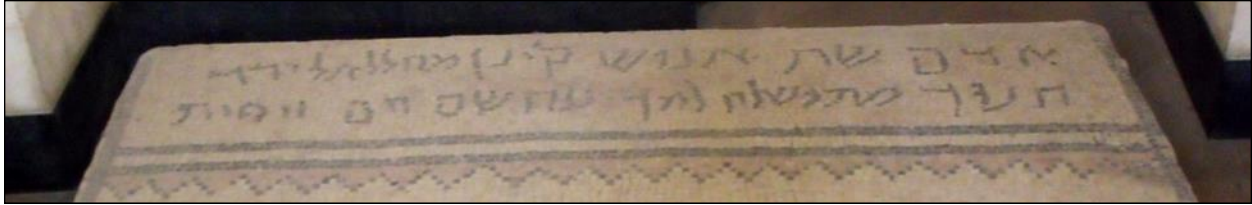




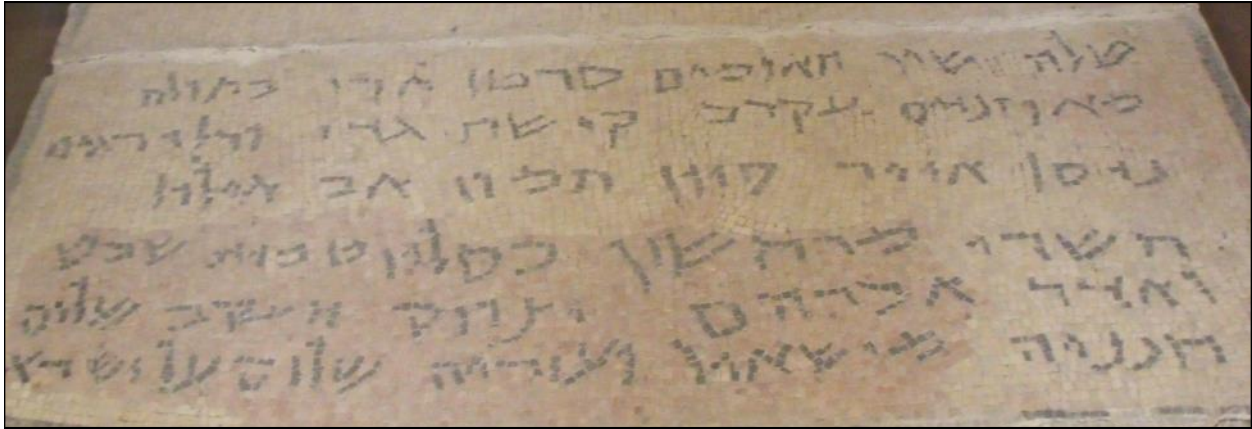
Replica Mosaic Inscription at En Gedi Synagogue



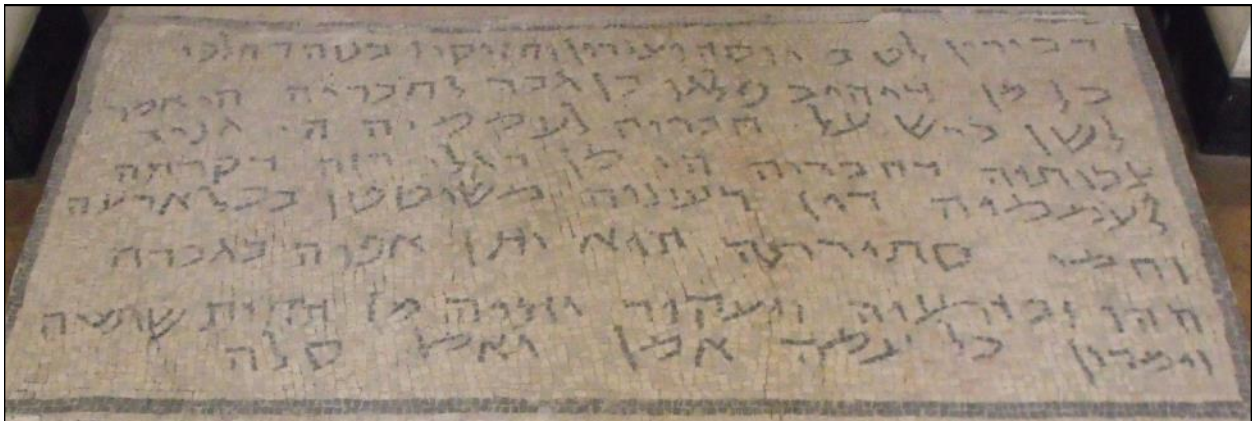
Original Mosaic Inscription from En Gedi Synagogue (Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem)



Section 1. “Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mehalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methusaleh, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” (The thirteen ancestors of humanity; 1 Chron. 1:1-4.) [Hebrew]



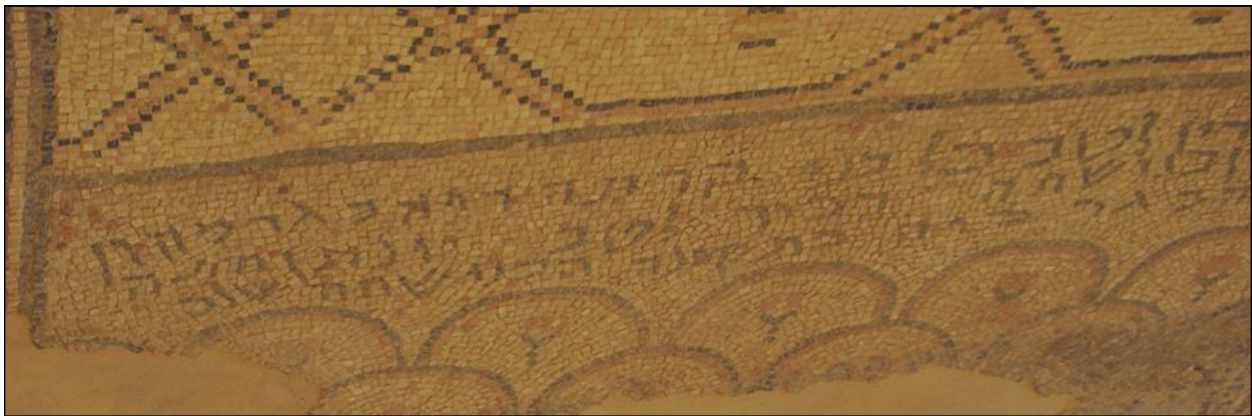
Section 2. “Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces.” (The twelve signs of the Zodiac.) “Nisan, Iyyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, Elul, Tishri, Marcheshvan, Kislev, Tebeth, Shebat, and Adar.” (The twelve Jewish months.) “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Peace.” (The three patriarchs.) “Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Peace on Israel.” (Daniel’s three friends.) [Hebrew]



Section 3. “May they be remembered for good: Yose, ‘Ezron, and Hiziqiyu, the sons of Hilfi.” (A blessing, probably on donors to the synagogue.) “Anyone causing dissension between a man and his friend, or whoever slanders his friend before Gentiles, or whoever steals the property of his friend, or whoever reveals the secret of the town to Gentiles—he whose eyes roam the entire earth and who sees what is hidden, he will set his face against that man and his seed and will uproot him from under the heavens. And all the people said, ‘Amen and Amen Selah.’” (A curse; “the secret of the town” probably refers to the extraction and preparation of balsam resin.) [Aramaic]



Section 4. “Rabbi Yose the son of Hilfi, Hiziqiyu the son of Hilfi, may they be remembered for good, because they did a great amount in the name of the Merciful Peace.” (A blessing, probably on donors to the synagogue.) [Aramaic]



Section 5. “May all the villagers be remembered for good . . . Jonathan the Hazan. . .” (A blessing on those who funded the repairs to the synagogue.) [Aramaic] The photo here is of the replica at En Gedi. The original, which was a later addition to the synagogue, is on display at the Hecht Museum in Haifa, along with the menorah and bronze chalice found in the niche of the synagogue.

Kibbutz En Gedi and En Gedi Nature Reserve. An Israeli kibbutz was established at En Gedi in the 1950s on the southern bank of Nahal Arugot. It is the home of a large botanical garden. The area was declared a nature reserve in 1972, serving as a sanctuary to plants, birds, and animals. Today, En Gedi has an international reputation as a health spa with hot springs, mineral waters, mud baths, desert climate, and bromide-filled air. One popular event that begins in this area is the En Gedi Race (which includes the Shalom Marathon and the Dead Sea Half Marathon).



Bitter and Poisonous Sodom Apples