

DEAD SEA

The Dead Sea is 42 miles long and 11 miles wide (at the farthest points). It is mainly fed by the Jordan River, although a few wadis are also connected to it. This is interesting since the Jordan flows south from the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake with many kinds of fish and plants. The Dead Sea, known for its high salt content, has neither of these. Indeed, only a few microbes live there. There is no outlet from the sea, but its water levels have traditionally remained constant due to the high level of evaporation. However, since water has increasingly been diverted from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River in recent years, the Dead Sea has been shrinking.

The Dead Sea is located on a 4,000 mile fault line known as the Syro-African Rift. Its shoreline is the lowest point on earth (in regard to dry land), measuring about 1,300 feet below sea level. While an average of 7 million tons of water evaporate from the Dead Sea each day, the minerals are left behind. Estimates of the Dead Sea's salinity range from 25 to 36 percent. This is about 10 times as salty as the world's oceans. Only a few other bodies of water in Antarctica have a higher salt concentration.



Western Shore and the Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is divided into two unequal parts, with the northern section being much larger and deeper than the southern section. The peninsula that divides the sea—which is about ten miles wide—has grown significantly in recent times as the Dead Sea shrinks. A part of the peninsula that extends to the north is known as “the tongue” due to its shape.

The nature of the Dead Sea and its surrounding terrain at the time of Abraham were apparently much different than they are today. When the patriarch and his nephew were parting ways, Lot chose “the whole plain of the Jordan” because it “was well watered, like the garden of the LORD” (Eden). This desirable state was before God “destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah” (Gen. 13:10). Because of wickedness, he rained down burning sulfur on these cities and the entire plain with its vegetation (Gen. 19:24-25). Moreover, Lot’s wife was turned into “a pillar of salt” because of her disobedience; she looked back at Sodom (Gen. 19:26). A rock salt formation at the southern end of the Dead Sea is popularly called “Lot’s Wife.”

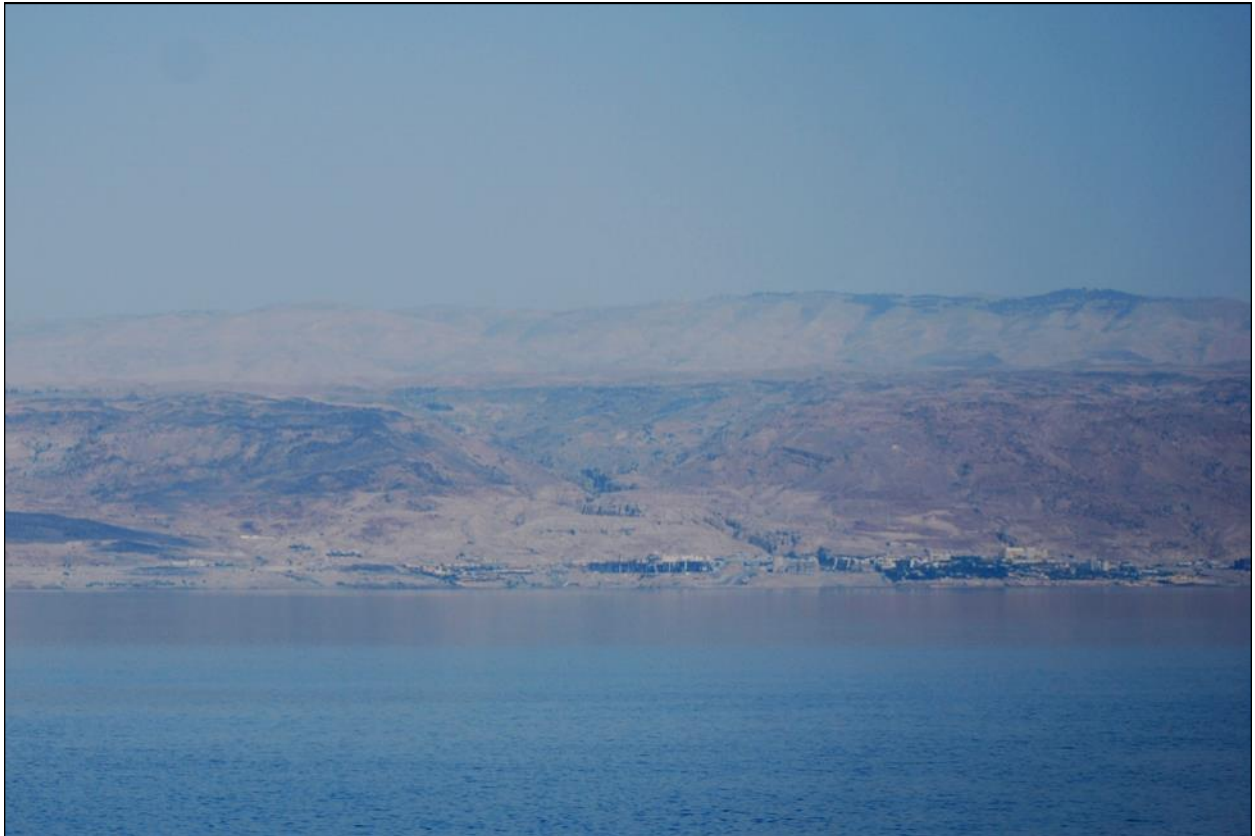
The name “Dead Sea” does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures, even though this designation is fitting. It does, however, appear in Jerome’s translation of Joshua 3:16 in the Latin Vulgate (*Mortuum*). One name found in the Hebrew text for this body of water is the “Salt Sea” (Gen. 14:3; Num. 34:3). Both of these names are related because the high *salt* concentration eliminates the existence of fish and plant life, causing it to be *dead*.



Western Shore and the Dead Sea



The Dead Sea and Northeastern Shore of Moab (Modern Jordan) Viewed from Kalia Beach



Using symbolic language, Ezekiel prophesied that the Dead Sea would be turned to freshwater one day with fish living in it and that fishermen would cast their nets along its shores. Various kinds of trees would also grow there (Ezek. 47:7-12). It would once again be like an Edenic paradise (see Gen. 13:10).

The Dead Sea has other names in the Bible, such as the “Sea of the Arabah” and the “eastern sea.” These designations are based on location, as the Dead Sea often serves as a boundary or geographical marker. The name “Sea of the Arabah” (Josh. 12:3) is based on the term “Arabah,” which refers to the desolate, dry area surrounding the sea. (In its broadest sense, the word can refer to the Jordan Rift Valley, which extends northward to the Sea of Galilee and southward toward the Gulf of Aqabah.) The name “eastern sea” is used in contrast to the “western sea,” that is, the Mediterranean (Joel 2:20; Zech. 14:8).

Other names have been given to the Dead Sea. In Jewish literature, it is referred to as the “Sea of Sodom” (4 Esdras 5:7) because of its proximity to one of the ancient cities that God destroyed. This body of water is also called the “Sea of Asphalt” (Josephus *Antiquities* 1.9) due to the tar or bitumen pits along the shore (Gen. 14:10). In the Crusader period, it was known as the “Devil’s Sea.” Those who live near the sea today sometimes refer to it as the “Sea of Lot.”





Kalia Beach on the Northwest Shore of the Dead Sea

Today, the Dead Sea is used for several purposes:

- (1) It is as a place for tourists to visit and enjoy floating on its dense waters. Beaches are found along the western shores of the sea, especially in the north. There are also a number of resorts and spas.
- (2) The area serves a medicinal purpose, offering at least three kinds of treatment:
 - (a) *Climatotherapy*—temperature, oxygen, humidity, and barometric pressure.
 - (b) *Heliotherapy*—biological effects of the sun’s radiation.
 - (c) *Thalassotherapy*—bathing in the Dead Sea water and mud compresses.
- (3) The sea offers a variety of valuable minerals. There are 21 in all, and 12 of these are not found in any other body of water. Potash is considered the most valuable mineral that is taken from the lake, and it is used in fertilizer. Two major companies extracting the minerals are Dead Sea Works and the Arab Potash Company. Mineral companies typically operate on the southern end of the sea.
- (4) Some minerals are used in cosmetic, bathing, and skin care products, such as those sold by Ahava.