

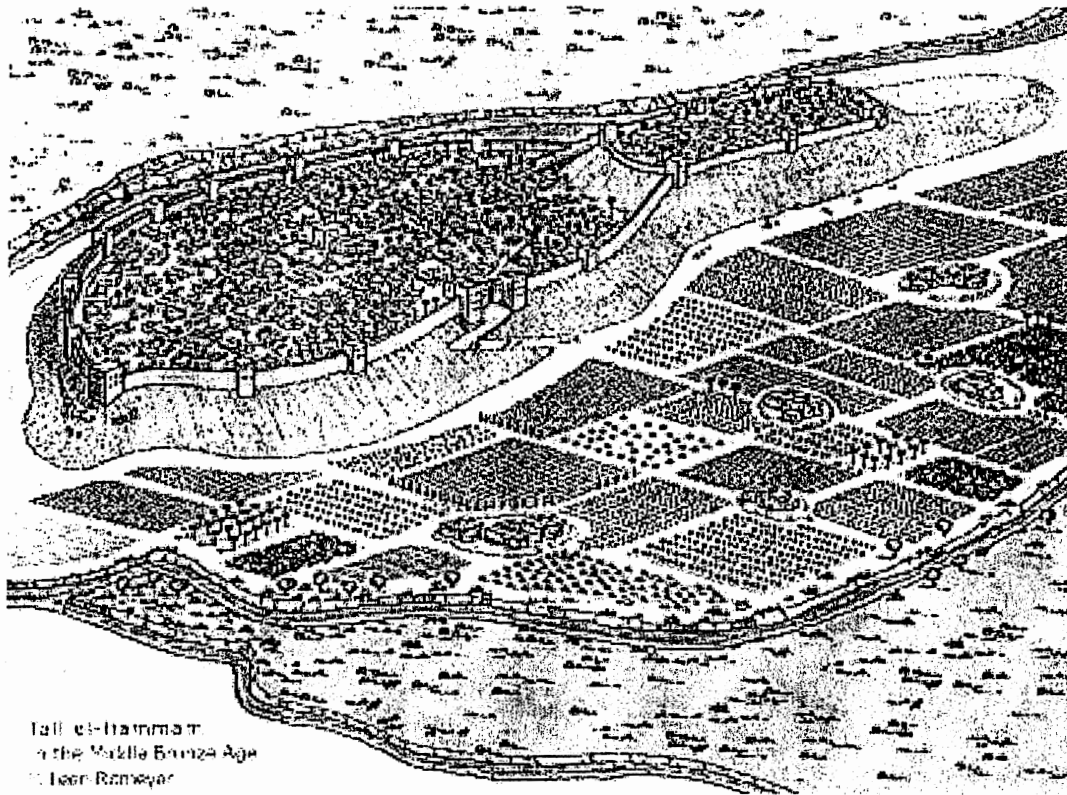
HAS SODOM BEEN FOUND?



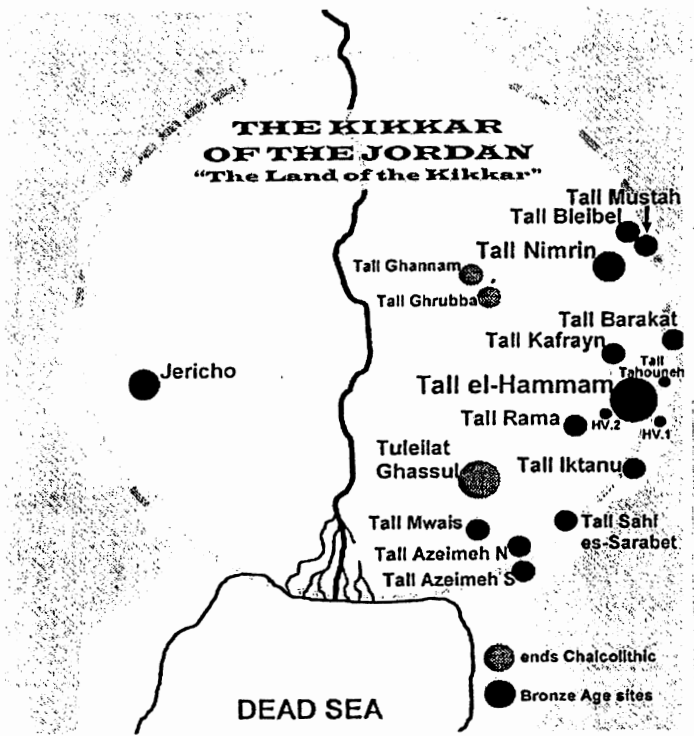
Manfred E. Kobler, Ph.D.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, recounted in the biblical book of Genesis, describes two wicked cities God destroyed with fire and brimstone (sulfur) for their extreme sinfulness, saving only Lot and his family (except his wife, who turned into a pillar of salt) as a symbol of divine judgment and warning against human wickedness in Abrahamic faiths, often interpreted as a story of divine wrath against severe immorality, sometimes linked to natural disasters like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions by scholars. ☺

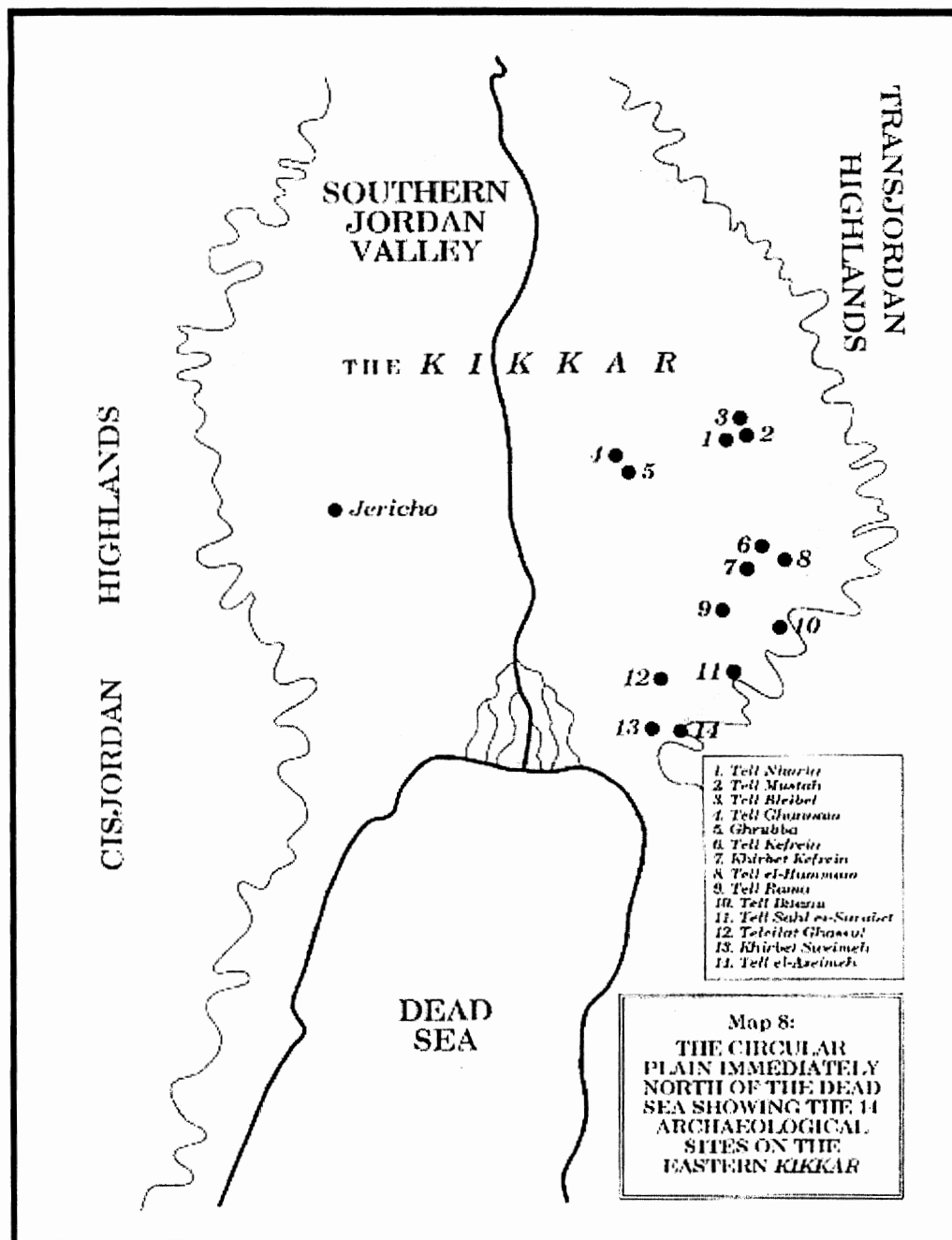




What Sodom looked like based on archaeology in the time of the Patriarchs before destruction (Gen 19).



Tall el-Hammam Excavation-Jordan Valley



Map of the southern Jordan River Valley, the area known as the *kikkar* ('the plain of the Jordan' - Gn 13:10) in the Hebrew Bible. Tall el-Hammam is number 8 on the map, a site which many scholars have suggested was Abel Shittim in the time of Moses and the TeHEP thesis is that the site might have been Sodom in Abraham's time). Note that the sites on the east side are a good distance from the Jordan River and close to the Jordan mountain range, east of the Jordan River Valley - suggesting a river flooding problem and the ancient roadway circling wide along the edge of eastern mountains. It would have been from these mountains that Balaam looked down on the Israelites and tried to curse them (Nu 22-24) and it was to these mountains that Moses ascended up to Mount Nebo and died (Dt 34). Credit: Trinity Southwest Seminary.

The Early Bronze Age: Tall el-Hammam and the Table of Nations

Tall el-Hammam

📍 JORDAN

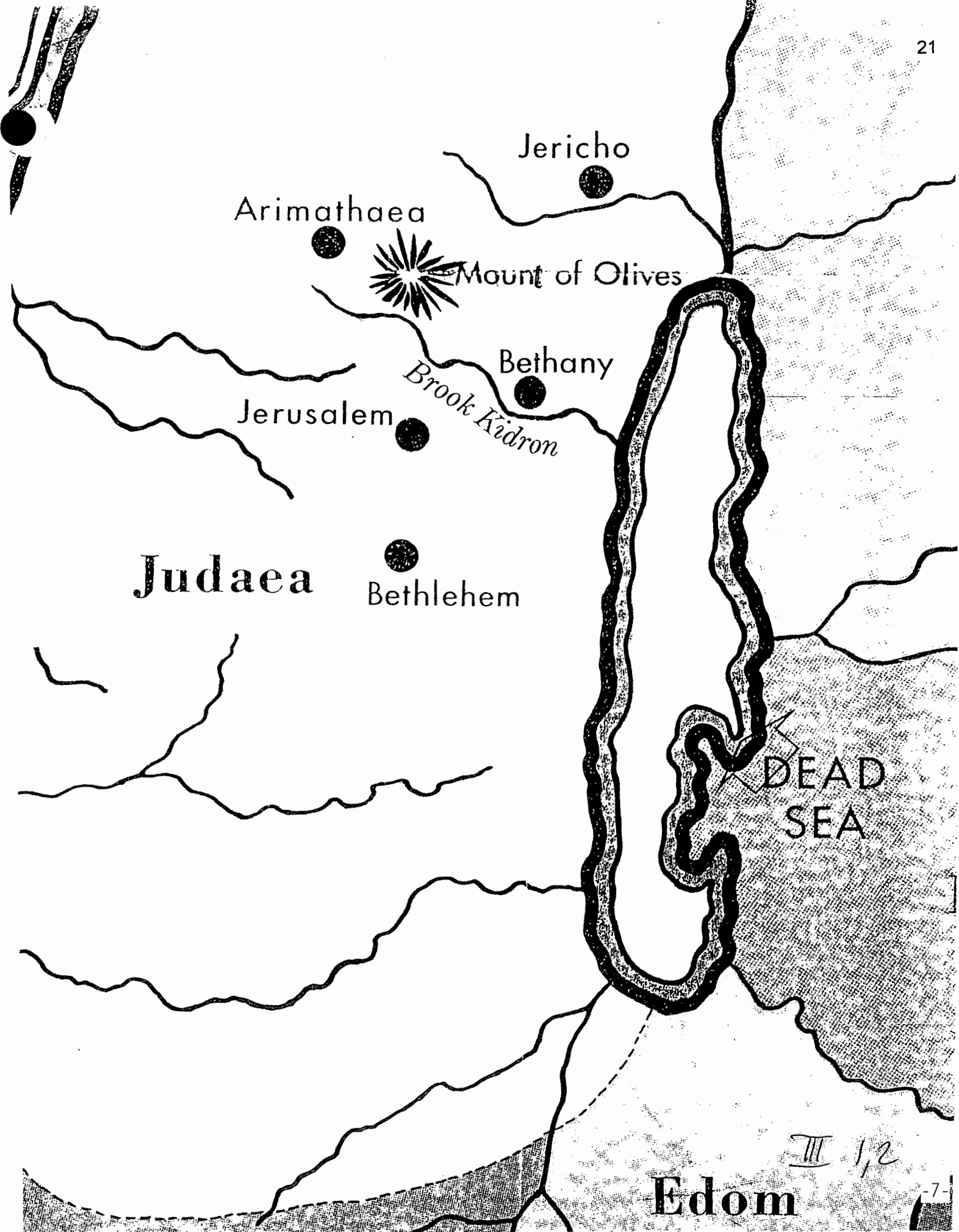


Sifting through the Sands of Sodom

Tall el-Hammam, located eight miles northeast of the mouth of the Jordan River as it enters the Dead Sea, was one the largest Bronze Age cities in the S Levant during the Bronze Age. It anchored a major city-state that is likely identified in the Bible as the Cities of the Plain (referred to as Kikkar in Genesis 13-19). Hammam is a perfect match for Sodom itself (see the March/April 2013 issue of **BAR**). Along with its extensive megalithic field of stone circles, menhirs, and dolmens, the landscape of Tall el-Hammam has also been identified as Abel Mizraim (Genesis 50:11) of Joseph's era, and Abel Shittim, the final camping sites of Moses and the Israelites before they crossed into Canaan (Numbers 33:49).

The past eight seasons have revealed a vast history of continuous occupation beginning from the Neolithic Period and extending well into the Middle Bronze Age. An Iron Age II walled town was later built on the upper tall, including monumental towers and gateway. Previous work on both the upper and lower tall has exposed impressive architecture including an *immense* Middle Bronze rampart system constructed entirely of mudbricks, an Early Bronze III blocked gate, a sacred precinct area, and an emerging Middle Bronze gateway and tower complex. Our goals for season nine are to continue work on the Middle Bronze gateway and gatehouse, resume efforts in the temple administrative and domestic areas, and continue a new area begun in season eight that has revealed Neolithic through Iron II material and architecture.

Located in a scenic spot in the southern Levant, Tall el-Hammam is a strategically located site set 500 feet below sea level. Volunteers stay at the new Best Western Grand Hotel in Madaba, located 39 minutes from the site.



Jericho

Arimathaea

Mount of Olives

Bethany

Jerusalem

Brook Kidron

Judaea

Bethlehem

DEAD SEA

Edom

III 1,2


eugene merrill tel hammam



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AI Overview

Eugene H. Merrill is a prominent Old Testament scholar who **disagrees with identifying Tall el-Hammam as biblical Sodom**, primarily because its destruction date (Middle Bronze Age, ~1650 BCE) conflicts with his interpretation of biblical chronology, which places the patriarchs much earlier (around 2100-1700 BCE). Merrill argues that Tall el-Hammam's destruction doesn't align with the biblical timeline for Abraham, though other scholars, like Steven Collins, propose that a late Bronze Age dating fits better with broader historical evidence, suggesting Merrill's adherence to a strict, literal biblical chronology is the main point of contention. 

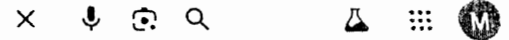


Key Points of the Debate:

- **Merrill's View:** Believes the destruction date for Tall el-Hammam is too late for Sodom, as it pushes the patriarchal era too far forward, and he favors an earlier dating for Abraham.
- **Collins' View (and others):** Argues that evidence from archaeology, history, and climate supports a later Middle Bronze Age destruction for Tall el-Hammam, aligning with the period after 1800 BCE, and suggests Merrill's chronological approach is too rigid.
- **Archaeological Evidence:** Tall el-Hammam shows signs of a catastrophic destruction around 1650 BCE, possibly from a cosmic airburst, with the region remaining desolate for centuries, which some see as confirmation of the biblical account.
- **Biblical Chronology:** The core disagreement lies in interpreting the biblical texts about the patriarchs' lifespans and when they lived relative to the destruction of the cities. 

In essence, Merrill uses traditional biblical timelines to question the identification of Tall el-Hammam as Sodom, while proponents of the identification use archaeological findings to support a later dating that challenges traditional chronology. 

eugene merrill sodom and gomorrah



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Arguments Against Locating Sodom at Tall el-Hammam

Dec 10, 2024 — The proposal that Tall el-Hammam is Sodom fails on at least two counts, and these are helpfully summarized by two experts in their respective subjects. Read more

AI Overview



Eugene H. Merrill, a respected Old Testament scholar, critiques the identification of Tall el-Hammam as Sodom, arguing the proposed destruction date (around 1600 BCE) conflicts with the biblical timeline for the Patriarchs (circa 2100-1700 BCE). While acknowledging potential archaeological links to the Dead Sea region, Merrill emphasizes the biblical chronology, suggesting Sodom and Gomorrah were likely near the southern Dead Sea, challenging theories placing them at Tall el-Hammam and questioning if cities like it were truly "found".

Merrill's Stance on Sodom & Gomorrah:

- Chronological Disagreement: Merrill contests the Tall el-Hammam theory due to timing issues, aligning biblical events (like the Patriarchs' era) differently than archaeological proponents suggest for the city's destruction.
Biblical Location: He leans towards the traditional view that Sodom, Gomorrah, and other cities of the plain (like Admah, Zeboiim, Zoar) were located in the southern Dead Sea area, near the Lisan Peninsula.
Biblical Narrative: He sees the Genesis account as containing kernels of historical truth, though interpreted through faith, rather than purely myth, and supports the idea of a real catastrophic event.

Context of the Debate (Tall el-Hammam):

- The Theory: Some archaeologists propose Tall el-Hammam in Jordan as Sodom, citing evidence of a massive explosion (like a cosmic impact or volcanic event) destroying the city around 1600 BCE, potentially linking to the biblical "fire and brimstone".
Merrill's Counter: He finds this inconsistent with established biblical chronologies, which place Abraham and the Patriarchs earlier.
Scholarly Debate: The location of Sodom and Gomorrah remains a significant debate, with some scholars arguing for different sites or questioning if the cities were ever real locations, while others find evidence supporting the Tall el-Hammam theory.

In essence, Merrill champions a traditional, biblically-focused chronology, disagreeing with newer archaeological interpretations that place Sodom at Tall el-Hammam and shift its destruction date.

Arguments Against Locating Sodom at Tall el-Hammam

Dec 9, 2024 — Johnson says
September 11, 2023 at 11:50 am.

Biblical Archaeology Society



SODOM AND GOMORRAH AND PLATES TECTONIC ...

Jun 14, 2018 — However Professor Eugene H. Merrill (Merril, 2012).

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Dive deeper in AI Mode



Texts, Talls, and Old Testament Chronology: Tall Hammam as a Case Study

Eugene H. Merrill

Old Testament scholarship across the spectrum of theological and ideological persuasion is committed to the notion that a realistic picture of ancient Israel's life and times is best recovered by careful attention to both the biblical narrative and to archaeological data when both are subjected to proper methodological analysis and interpretation. The conservative will, of course, tend to give more attention to the text than to archaeology as a base of authority whereas the critical (liberal) scholar will allot primacy of place to archaeology. At the extremes of both respective positions are (1) those who are persuaded that archaeology is a tool of the devil that has no constructive role to play and (2) those who view the Bible as a collection of mere myth, fable, and legend, with little or no value to the serious historian.

Steven Collins is a committed Evangelical scholar with impressive experience in Near Eastern archaeology, especially at Kh. Al-Maqatir (Ai?) and Tall Hammam (Sodom?).¹ The former is in the so-called West Bank some 10 miles north of Jerusalem and a mile east of Ramallah. The latter is in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, just across the Jordan River from Jericho and four miles from the northeast curve of the Dead Sea. Since 2006 Professor Collins has been excavating Hammam, the site he prefers over Bab ed-DraU/Numeira as the proper location of ancient Sodom. His arguments as to the location of the "cities of the plain" (Heb $\text{U}^*r? \text{h}^{\wedge} \text{KK}] \text{KK} "r^2$; Gen 13:12) and Lot's choice of land as "all the Plain of the Jordan" ($\text{q}^{\wedge} | \text{K}] \text{KK}^{\wedge} r \text{h}^{\wedge} \text{Y}^{\wedge} r \text{D} @ n$; Gen 13:11) seem attractive enough, and the enormous size of the urban area so far uncovered at Hammam seems to fit other biblical descriptions of a city commensurate with the archaeological coordinates (Gen 14:2; 18:22-33; 19:4; Ezek 16:48, 55).³

However, both archaeological and biblical chronological data rule out Hammam as a candidate for patriarchal Sodom. After a great deal of analysis Collins has concluded, based on stratigraphy, pottery assemblages, destruction layers, and architectural features, that the evidence points to the late MB2 period (ca. 1600 BC) for the cataclysmic overthrow of the site, thus necessitating a date for the Abraham-Lot narrative at the same time. But it is precisely at this

¹ For his reports and other publications on Hammam, see Collins in *Biblical Research Bulletin* VII 1 (2007); VII 3 (2007); VII 4 (2007); VII 7 (2007); *Bible and Spade* 15 2 (2007); *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 53 (2010): 385-414.

² The Hebrew term is usually glossed "disk" or something disk-shaped such as a loaf of bread (Exod 29:23; 1 Sam 2:36), a metal shaped in the form of a disk (2 Sam 12:30; 2 Kgs 5:22; Est 3:9), or, indeed, "the wide southern part of the Ghor (1 Kgs 7:46; Neh 12:38; thus Ludwig Kochler and Walter Baumgartner, ed. *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vol. One. Leiden: Brill, 2001, p. 473). A glance at a map of the lower Jordan Valley just north of the Dead Sea does indeed reveal a half-moon shaped and flat region about 10x10 square miles in extent. See R. L. W. Cleave. *The Holy Land Satellite Atlas*. Vol. 1. Nicosia, Cyprus: Rohr Productions, 1999, Map 1 LT-B, p. 35.

³ For a recent restatement of the traditional view that locates Sodom at the southeast curve of the Dead Sea and therefore the corollary rejection of Hammam as such, see Clyde E. Billington, "Tall el-Hammam Is not Sodom," *Artifax* 27/2 (2012): 12-14.

point that Hammam must, on biblical chronological grounds, be precluded from being a candidate as one of the cities of that narrative. The following considerations with subsequent supporting documentation decisively undermine the possibility of the Collins hypothesis:

1. The chronological system of the Hebrew Masoretic text places the era of the Patriarchs between ca. 2100-1700 B. C.⁴
2. All subsequent biblical historical accounts no longer jibe with each other or fit the periods to which a 1600 date assigns them.
3. Besides the dismantling of the biblical chronological schemes and the rendering of their data as incorrect and/or meaningless, other numerical features such as the life spans of the patriarchs must also be discarded or radically reinterpreted.
4. Most serious of all—to the conservative scholar at least—is the methodological fallacy of testing and assessing biblical information in light of presumed archaeological primacy and the necessary shift of the ground of authority from text to tell.

*The Chronology of the Old Testament and Its Basis*⁵

In the modern period, attempts to determine the dates of Old Testament events commenced notably with Archbishop James Ussher of the Anglican Church of Ireland (1581-1656). By methodically adding up the years attributed to various biblical persons and events, all the while making due allowance for concurrences and discordances, he concluded that the exodus took place in 1492 B. C., Abraham flourished at the beginning of the second millennium (1997-1822), the Flood ca. 2350 B. C., and creation at 4004 B. C.⁶ The early Enlightenment of the same period generated a great deal of skepticism about such matters as the historical and chronological reliability of the Old Testament, and subsequent developments in the fields of the natural sciences added to this skepticism by positing the beginnings of the earth millions of years earlier, the non-existence of a universal flood, and, in biblical critical scholarship, the denial of the historical reality of Old Testament persons and events such as Noah, Abraham, and even Moses.

⁴ For detailed discussion of this scheme, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests. A History of Old Testament Israel*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008, pp. 83-96.

⁵ *Inter alia*, see Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *BSac* 137 (1980):141-151; "The Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Transition and the Emergence of Israel," *BSac* 152 (1995): 145-162; "Chronology," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Ed. T. Desmond Alexander & David W. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: 2003, pp. 113-122; "Archaeology and Biblical History: Its Uses and Abuses," *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*. Ed. David M. Howard Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003, pp. 74-96.

⁶ See conveniently Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*. Rev. ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998, pp. 403-405. It should be noted that Ussher was no dilettante in such matters; in fact, he was a brilliant classicist at home in Greek, Latin, and other languages. See Charles Richard Elrington, *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher, D. D.* Vol. 1. Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847, pp. 266-267.

With this worldview in place, even some conservative scientists and theologians adopted the skeptical mind-set and methods of the age in both secular and biblical studies.⁷

Currently, critical scholarship ranges from the moderate stance of the so-called “Albright school” that is willing to entertain a highly nuanced notion of historical patriarchs to a radical minimalism that denies any substantial historical reliability to the Old Testament pre-exilic narratives. On the other hand, inscriptions from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant have provided significant chronological data to which the Old Testament can be compared. These, with the internal dating schemes of the Bible itself, have enabled more modern scholars—especially evangelicals—to (re)construct a near consensus template against which biblical history at least as far back as Abraham can be dated with near precision. Given astronomically derived dates from various sources, especially those that refer to biblical persons,⁸ careful application of these to the Hebrew texts yields the following important set of data: (1) Abraham was born in 2166 B. C.; (2) the descent of Jacob into Egypt was 1876; (3) the exodus occurred in 1446; (4) the United Monarchy began ca. 1050; (5) the division of the kingdom between Israel and Judah took place in 931; (6) Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722; (7) Judah went into Babylonian exile and the temple was destroyed in 586; (8) and the exiles returned to Judah in 538 and thereafter.⁹

At the same time, archaeological evidence has convinced many evangelicals that the exodus occurred not in Dynasty 18 of Egypt but in the mid- to late 13th century (ca. 1250) of the so-called Ramesside 19th Dynasty. For this view there exist two subsets: (1) a 215 year sojourn preceded by a 215 year span back to the making of the Abrahamic covenant (1680) and (2) a 430 year sojourn preceded by the age of Jacob when he descended to Egypt (130) plus the years back to the Abrahamic covenant when Abraham was 85 years old (1885 B. C.). Position (1) thus dates the destruction of Sodom at 1665 and position (2) at 1871. However, position (1) rests upon two untenable supports: a 215 year sojourn and a late exodus date and position (2), though more acceptable, is itself flawed by the late exodus date. If the generally superior MT text is taken at face value, the destruction of Sodom took place in 2067, the sojourn was 430 years, and the exodus was in 1446 (see preceding paragraph),.

To return to Steve Collins’s hypothesis based on the archaeological data, his proposed date of the destruction of the city of Sodom ca. 1600 is still some 65 years too late for proposal (1) and 355 years too late for proposal (2). The date in the best manuscripts and the most sound hermeneutic demands the overthrow of Sodom at 2067 B. C., completely removing Tall Hammam from consideration as the location of Sodom.

⁷ As conservative as he was in general, the notable theologian A. H. Strong (1836-1921) readily adopted biological evolution as the best way to account for both biblical and scientific evidence. *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia: Judson, 1907, pp. 392-393. For an excellent overview of the pernicious effect of evolution on Christian thought even before Darwin, see Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point*. Green Forest, AR (Master Books, 2004), pp. 19-54.

⁸ Most important are the Assyrian eponym lists of years and the royal inscriptions that both inform them and are informed by them. Conveniently, see Alan Millard, “Assyrian King Lists,” *The Context of Scripture*. Vol. 1. Ed. W. W. Hallo. Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 463-466.

⁹ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 41-48, 74-80, 166-170, 337.

Conclusion

Though the Collins construal is attractive in certain respects, it is bound up in its own cocoon by postulating the following criteria that must be met if it is to stand:

- The late MB date of Sodom's destruction, driven by archaeological considerations, must be the iron-clad standard against which the biblical chronology is ascertained.
- This date demands a birth date of Abraham about 1699; since he was 175 when he died, that occurred in 1524, 76 years after the destruction of Sodom.
- Isaac's lifespan is 1599-1419 and Jacob's 1539-1392!
- Even a 215 year Egyptian sojourn must cover the years 1415-1200, requiring the exodus to be in 1200 and the conquest, 40 years later, in 1160-1150.
- The various judges and the reign of Saul must be compressed between 1150 and 1010, the established date of the commencement of David's reign.
- The only way out of the conundrum if Hammam is Sodom is to (1) disregard the biblical figures for the ages of the patriarchs; (2) jettison or greatly reduce the 215-year sojourn; and (3) minimize the length of the ministries of the judges and the reign of Saul nearly to the vanishing point. The following chart is a possible scenario illustrative of the drastic measures required to fit the narrative of Sodom between 1600 and 1010 B. C. If this is not the correct one, there must be one like it.

1. Abraham was **75**¹⁰ at the 1600 date of Sodom's destruction; therefore, he was born in 1675.
2. Isaac was born in **Abraham's 50th** year—1625.
3. Jacob was born in **Isaac's 30th year**—1595.
4. Jacob moved his family to Egypt in his **60th** year—1535.
5. The sojourn lasted for 215 years—1535-1320.
6. The exodus took place in 1320.
7. The Sinai wanderings took **20** years—1320-1300.
8. The conquest took 10 years--1300-1290.
9. The administration of the judges lasted for 250 years—1290-1040.
10. Samuel's tenure was 10 years in length—1040-1030.
11. Saul reigned for **20** years—1030-1010.
12. David ascended to the throne in 1010.

A hypothetical scheme like this could provide the necessary correlation but for one bothersome fact: These numbers are arbitrarily chosen *in order to achieve the desired harmonization*. That is,

¹⁰ Embolded refers to data that are flatly contradicted by explicit biblical numbers.

text has had to be distorted in order to allow tall to triumph.¹¹ The price is simply too high to pay!

¹¹ Applying the biblical chronology in a strict and literal sense yields the following picture:

1. Abraham's lifespan was 2166-1991
2. Abraham was 99 when Sodom was destroyed in **2067**
3. Isaac's lifespan was 2066-1886
4. Jacob's lifespan was 2006-1859
5. Jacob's descent to Egypt was in 1876 when he was 130 years old
6. The sojourn was for 430 years—1876-1446
7. The exodus occurred in 1446
8. Sinai wandering took 40 years—1446-1406
9. Conquest took ca. seven years—1406-1400
10. The judges era was at least 300 years-1400-1100
11. Samuel ministered for ca. 55 years—1080-1025
12. Saul reigned for 40 years—1051-1011
13. David ascended to the throne in 1011

See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 31, 40, 146-151, 192-194.

TALL EL-HAMMAM IS NOT SODOM

By Clyde E. Billington, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

A line in an old Stuart Hamlin song says: "I overlooked an orchid while searching for a rose." Its relevance to the search for Sodom will be disclosed below.

This past November my friend Steve Collins gave a presentation on Tall el-Hammam at the annual meeting of the Near East Archaeological Society [NEAS] in San Francisco. Steve has repeatedly claimed in his NEAS presentations for several years that Tall el-Hammam, a site he is excavating in Jordan, is the biblical city of Sodom. I have just as consistently argued that Tall el-Hammam is not Sodom.

Before beginning my criticism of Steve's position on the location of Sodom, let me express my appreciation for his work in archaeology. He is one of the most dynamic archaeologists that I have ever met and his energy level would wear out the Energizer Bunny. I also consider Steve Collins a personal friend.

THE LOCATION OF TALL EL-HAMMAM

Tall el-Hammam is located about five miles northeast of the site where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea, beside an ancient road. This east-west road led from the north-south King's Highway across a ford of the Jordan River to Jericho. This is the ford of the Jordan that Joshua and the Israelites used. Tall el-Hammam's location is key to its proper identification.

I believe that Sodom and Gomorrah were located at the southern end of the Dead Sea and not the northern end. Steve argues that a southern Sodom cannot be seen from Bethel—where Genesis 13 reports that Abraham and Lot decided to split into two groups. Tall el-Hammam *can* be seen from Bethel.

However, Genesis 13:10 does not state that Abraham and Lot saw Sodom from Bethel but rather it says that they saw "all the valley of the Jordan." Genesis 13:12 then states: "Lot settled in the cities of the valley (Hebrew: *kikkar*), and moved his tents as far as Sodom." It should be noted that Lot first pitched his tents near cities other than Sodom and then moved to Sodom. The phrase "as far as Sodom" suggests that Sodom was not located close to the "cities of the *kikkar*" at the northern end of the Dead Sea.

Lot's movements from city to city along the Jordan River and the Dead Sea with his tents and flocks fit well with what is known from ancient sources. There was a symbiotic relationship between ancient farmers and shepherders. After grain crops were harvested, farmers allowed shepherders to graze their animals on the stubble left in the fields. This benefitted the farmers in two ways, first by helping to clear the fields for replanting and second by providing natural fertilizer for next year's grain crops.

Shepherders would move their flocks from one farmer's field to another, and this is exactly what the Bible says Lot was doing. Lot was grazing his animals on farmers' fields from the Jordan Valley in the north to the city of Sodom in the south. Genesis 13:18 relates that Abraham himself moved south from Bethel to the oaks of Mamre near Hebron. Both Lot and Abraham seem to have moved their flocks south from Bethel; Lot went to Sodom and Abraham went to the oaks of Mamre.

Later, when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot had stopped traveling with his flocks and living in tents. Genesis 19:2-11 relates that Lot was living in a house in Sodom. Lot had become wealthy enough to give up the hard life of a nomadic shepherd. In contrast, Genesis 18:1-2 relates that Abraham continued to dwell in a tent near his flocks at Mamre.

THE LOCATION OF SODOM

First among my reasons to believe that Sodom was located at the southern end of the Dead Sea is Genesis 14:3, which states that Sodom and Gomorrah were located "in the valley (Hebrew: "emeq") of Siddim, that is the Salt Sea." Genesis places Sodom in the "valley of Siddim" and not in the "valley of the Jordan." Note the phrase: "that is the Salt Sea." The biblical connection of Sodom with the Dead Sea does not fit well with Tall el-Hammam, which is located five miles northeast of the Dead Sea.

Second, Genesis 14:10 states that the "valley of Siddim" was full of tar (Hebrew: "chemer") pits. There are no tar pits at Tall el-Hammam. On the other hand, globs of tar have in past centuries frequently risen to the surface at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Ancient sources mention these globs of tar and state that they were collected by the locals and sold; some into Egypt where the tar was at times smeared on wrapped mummies to seal and protect them. About 40 years ago, modern Israeli oil drillers reported finding a layer of oil sand at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Sodom's tar was unquestionably petroleum based. This can be seen in Exodus 2:3 which has the mother of baby Moses waterproofing his basket with "tar (Heb. "chemar" — probably imported from the Dead Sea) and pitch" before placing it in the Nile River.

Third, the American archaeologists Rast and Schaub several decades ago excavated villages near the southern end of the Dead Sea. While Steve Collins rejects this evidence, these villages were all destroyed by a "fiery conflagration" at the same time. The largest of these villages was Bab edh Dhra, which was only about 10 acres. I do not believe that any of these villages were Sodom or Gomorrah, but they were almost certainly ancillary villages that belonged to Sodom, Gomorrah, and also to the other three cities mentioned in the Genesis account. It is true that Rast and Schaub dated these villages to ca. 2350-2300 BC, and it is also true that Abraham and Lot date closer to ca. 2100 BC, but this dating discrepancy can be easily explained, i.e. not all Early Bronze Age cities fell at the same time in Canaan as is generally assumed.

Fourth, Rast and Schaub found two massive cemeteries — later a third was also discovered — near the southern end of the Dead Sea. They estimated that over a million people had been buried in these cemeteries over a period of about 1,000 years. These are the largest ancient cemeteries ever discovered in the Middle East. The cemeteries clearly indicate that at one time there were large cities located nearby. This fits well with the Genesis story which indicates that a large allied army from southern Mesopotamia attacked Sodom and Gomorrah just prior to their destruction. Incidentally, biological materials found in these tombs provide strong proof that the area at the south end of the Dead Sea was once lush and well-watered.

And fifth, tradition has for centuries placed Sodom and Gomorrah somewhere at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Zoar—a city allied with Sodom—is located at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Zoar was the city to which Lot fled at the time of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The famous cave of Lot has also been traditionally located at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Tradition can be wrong, but it should only be ignored when there is irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

THE HEBREW WORD KIKKAR

Steve Collins frequently cites the Hebrew word "kikkar" in the phrase "valley (kikkar) of the Jordan." It is true that Sodom and Gomorrah are said in Genesis 19 to be on a "kikkar" which some English translations render as "plain" and others as "valley." Steve assumes that this kikkar of Sodom and Gomorrah is the same as the kikkar of the Jordan. However, kikkar is also used for other locations; for example note the "kikkar of Jerusalem" which is mentioned in Neh. 12:28.

Genesis 19:28 states that, at the time of their destruction, Abraham: "looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley /kikkar." Abraham was living near Hebron when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, and the shortest route from Hebron to the Dead Sea comes out on the Dead Sea near Ein Gedi. From this location Abraham could probably see the general areas of both the southern and northern ends of the Dead Sea, but his best view would have been the general area of Bab edh Dhra on the Lisan Peninsula, a village with proven evidence of a massive fiery destruction.

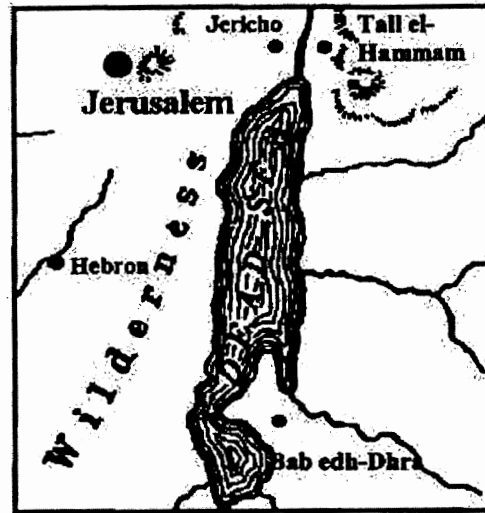
TALL EL-HAMMAM IS NOT SODOM

I believe that Steve Collins's own excavations at Tall el-Hammam are disproving his theory that it is the site of ancient Sodom. While he has found "ash and destruction layers," he has not found evidence that a massive fiery conflagration destroyed the entire site of Tall el-Hammam and its surrounding villages at the same time. His evidence indicates that military conquest ended the Middle Bronze Age city of Tall el-Hammam.

Steve has himself reported finding sling stones and other evidence of a military conquest. He has suggested that this military conquest is evidence of the attack on Sodom and Gomorrah that was made by the coalition of four kings from southern Mesopotamia which is mentioned in Genesis 14. But, if Tall el-Hammam is Sodom, there should be a thick sulfuric/brimstone burn layer over the entire site, and this burn layer should be on top of the evidence of military conquest.

Steve Collins has also found pottery at Tall el-Hammam which he himself dated in his 2011 NEAS presentation ca. 1650 BC and which he also said matches MB2 pottery found in the destroyed city of Jericho IV. Bryant Wood has proven with pottery, Egyptian scarabs, and carbon 14 that the destruction of Jericho IV dates to ca. 1400 BC. Steve has apparently misdated the military destruction layer at Tall el-Hammam by 250 years.

Not only does Steve's date of 1650 BC for the destruction of Middle Bronze Age Tall el-Hammam not match the archaeological evidence at Jericho IV—which unquestionably dates to ca. 1400 BC—but it also forces him to re-date Abraham and Lot to 1650 BC. To be blunt, 1650 BC is a biblically impossible date for Abraham and Lot. If Steve is correct and if Tall el-Hammam is Sodom, then the chronologies given in the Old Testament would have to be not just revised, but totally trashed.



WHAT WAS THE ANCIENT NAME OF TALL EL-HAMMAM?

Tall el-Hammam was clearly once a very large and important city. And, as was noted above, Tall el-Hammam is located along the ancient road that the Israelites traveled while moving west from the King's Highway to the "plains of Moab." Numbers 22:1 places the "plains of Moab" east of the Jordan River "opposite" the city of Jericho. Tall el-Hammam is also located "opposite" the city of Jericho.

Since the Israelites passed right by Tall el-Hammam, it is a site that should be mentioned in the Old Testament. Moses kept good records of the travels of the Israelites during the Exodus. Why does he not mention Sodom, if Tall el-Hammam was Sodom?

I believe that the archaeological and biblical evidence strongly indicates that Tall el-Hammam is the ancient Bronze Age city of Heshbon, the capital city of the Amorite King Sihon who was defeated by none other than Moses himself. In searching for the rose of Sodom, Steve Collins has overlooked the orchid of Old Testament Heshbon. While not as famous as Sodom, in many ways, Old Testament Heshbon is probably even more significant for Biblical Archaeology than is Sodom.

Admittedly there is a problem in my identification of Tall el-Hammam with Heshbon. Almost any map of the Old Testament world places Heshbon at the site where the road eastward from Jericho connects with the King's Highway; about 12 miles directly to the east of Tall el-Hammam. For clarity's sake, I will refer to the Heshbon at the intersection with the King's Highway as "eastern Heshbon" and Tall el-Hammam in the Jordan Valley as "western Heshbon." I believe that there were two Heshbons.

As archaeologist Efrain Velazquez II pointed out in his 2011 presentation at NEAS, the famous Seventh Day Adventist archaeologist Siegfried Horn excavated extensively at eastern Heshbon for years, but did not find any archaeological strata dating earlier than the Iron Age. There is no doubt that eastern Heshbon was called Heshbon/Eshbus in the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Muslim Periods, but it cannot be the Heshbon mentioned in the Old Testament since it clearly is not old enough. Seventh Day Adventist archaeologists are now

looking at other sites near eastern Heshbon in hopes of finding Sihon's Heshbon.

I believe that Tall el-Hammam—western Heshbon—was the original city of Heshbon that was captured by Moses, and that eastern Heshbon was built in the Iron Age and named after it. As nearly all archaeologists know, it was not unusual for the names of cities to move from site to site in the ancient world. This is even true for the modern world. Note that there are cities named after the original city of Rochester in England to be found in New York, Michigan, Minnesota, and Oregon.

It is even possible that the families of the two and a half tribes who remained east of the Jordan River stayed in fortified Heshbon/Tall el-Hammam for protection while most of their men went on to fight in Canaan as they had promised Moses. However, the ancient Israelites, who were animal herders, had no long-term need for a large, heavily fortified city like Heshbon/Tall el-Hammam and in time abandoned it. Steve Collins has found only minimal Iron Age evidence from the Israelite period at Tall Hammam.

Nearly everything that Steve Collins and his archaeological team have found at Tall el-Hammam fits perfectly with biblical Heshbon. The Israelites under Moses and Joshua would have had to pass within meters of Tall el-Hammam and through its territory in order to move west from the King's Highway to the plains of Moab. The plains of Moab are located on the eastern side of the Jordan River "opposite Jericho" (Num. 31:12), and were almost certainly once controlled by the nearby city of Tall el-Hammam.

Second, the Israelites could not have camped on the plains of Moab unless Tall el-Hammam had either consented or been neutralized militarily. Numbers 21:23-24 indicates that the Amorite King Sihon foolishly led his army out of his fortified capital Heshbon to attack the Israelites on open ground at Jahaz. Sihon's defeat at Jahaz allowed the Israelites to easily take the weakly-defended western Heshbon and other Amorite cities belonging to it. Numbers 21:30 has the Israelites stating in a proverb: "*But we have cast them down, Heshbon is ruined as far as Dibon, Then we have laid waste even to Hophah, Which reaches to Medeba*" [ASV]. The people of Jericho appear to have learned from Sihon's mistake since they decided to use their army to defend its walls rather than to risk a confrontation with the Israelites on open ground. But God foiled their plans by causing the walls of Jericho to fall down before Joshua.

Third, according to Steve Collins himself, the terminal Middle Bronze Age 2 pottery which his team has found at Tall el-Hammam matches pottery at Jericho IV. This indicates that Tall el-Hammam fell at the same time as Jericho IV. If Jericho IV fell to Joshua—then Tall el-Hammam must be the city of Heshbon that fell to Moses.

And fourth, Mount Nebo, from which Moses saw the Promised Land, is located less than two miles southeast of Tall el-Hammam. To reach Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab, Moses would have journeyed right past Tall el-Hammam. Moses' journey to Mount Nebo gives proof that the Israelites had gained control over the entire area north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan River. Steve Collins will probably argue that, since Tall el-Hammam was Sodom, it was in a state of destruction when Moses conquered the entire area of the "Kikkar of the Jordan." But I believe that identifying Tall el-Hammam with Sihon's capital city of Heshbon best fits both the biblical and archaeological evidence.

CONCLUSION

Which of us is correct about Tall el-Hammam? I think that Steve himself already has the answer to this question in his possession. Steve has reported in his NEAS presentations that he has found a number of Egyptian scarabs.

The backs of ancient scarabs were carved in the form of a sacred dung beetle, while their stomachs were often inscribed with the names of Egyptian pharaohs. The names of these pharaohs can be easily identified and very accurately dated by Egyptologists. Steve has stated that he has not yet had an Egyptologist date these scarabs. He should do so immediately.

Let me make a prediction. Steve will find that some of his Egyptian scarabs from Tall el-Hammam date to the 18th Dynasty in the New Kingdom Period and more specifically to the 15th century BC. If the scarabs date to the 15th century BC, then Tall el-Hammam cannot be Sodom.

Heshbon is at least as important an archaeological site as Sodom, and probably even more significant. I consider Tall el-Hammam to be one of the most significant excavations—if not the most significant—in Biblical Archaeology that is now taking place in the Middle East; it is even more significant than Hazor and Gezer. Only Mazar's excavations at the City of David in Jerusalem can rival it.

Since Sihon was an Amorite and since the Amorites under Hammurabi once ruled Babylon, Sihon and the Amorites at Heshbon probably kept records in the Akkadian language on clay tablets. It is likely that Sihon's palace and his royal diplomatic archive are located in the immediate area of the main gate. If the royal archive of Heshbon can be found, it will be one of the greatest discoveries ever made in Biblical Archaeology.

Let The Stones Speak



The Madaba Map

< Prev • History • Next >

The Madaba Map was found in 1884 in an old Byzantine church, now named The Church of the Map. The local Christians had decided to build the present Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, which is now located beside the ancient church. The map is dated to the sixth century, during the time of Emperor Justinian (527 - 565). It is the oldest known map of Palestine and is the source of some fascinating historical data. It has survived, despite damage over the years by fire and the collapse of the original church. The church faces east, so the map places the viewer in the Mediterranean Sea looking east at the Holy Land. In the center of the map is the Dead Sea with the Jordan River running into it on the left. On the right is the Nile River.



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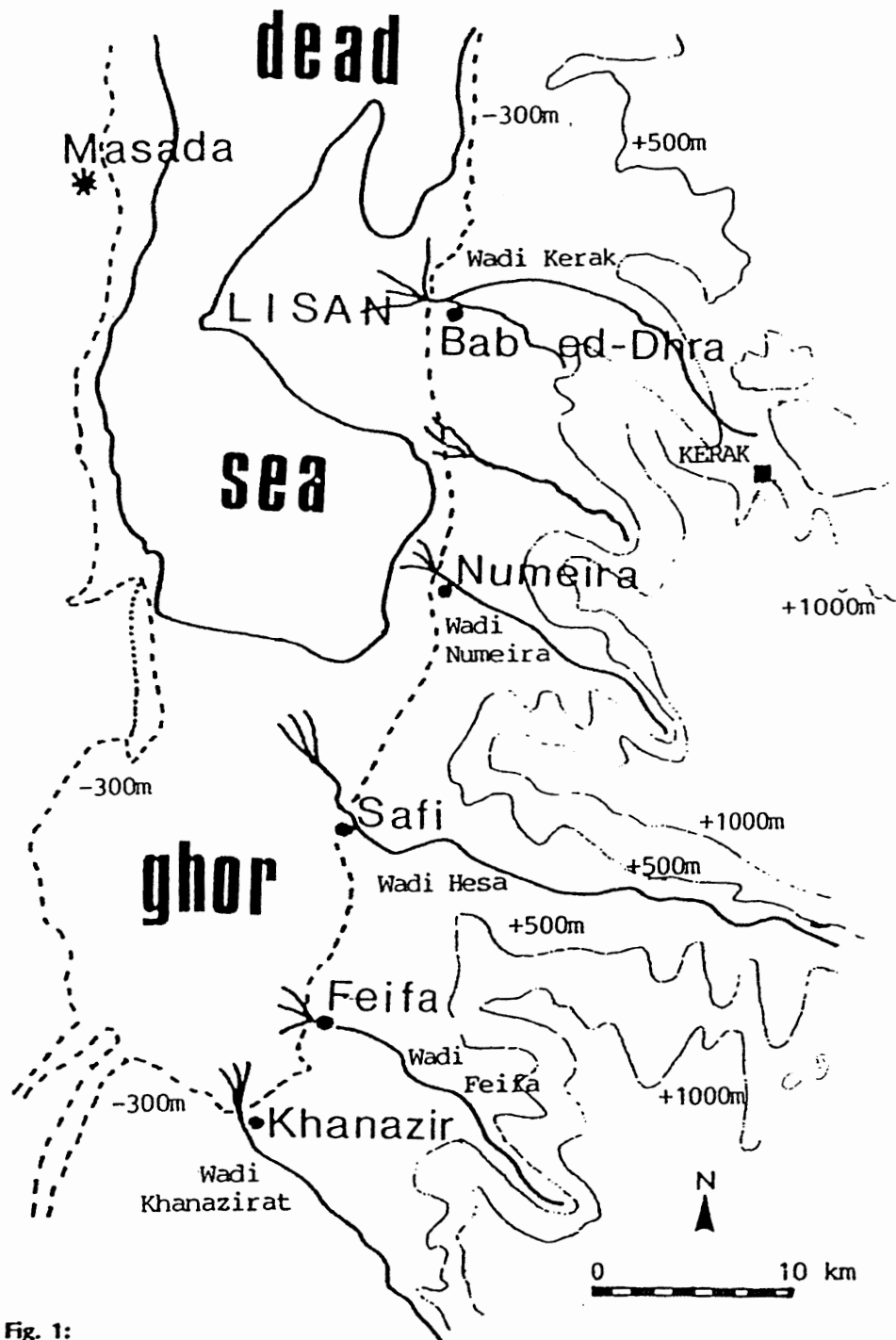


Fig. 1:
 Map showing the location of the five Early Bronze Age towns sited on the eastern edge of the Ghor (Dead Sea plain), which may be Sodom and the other cities of the plain of the Bible.

BURIED HISTORY

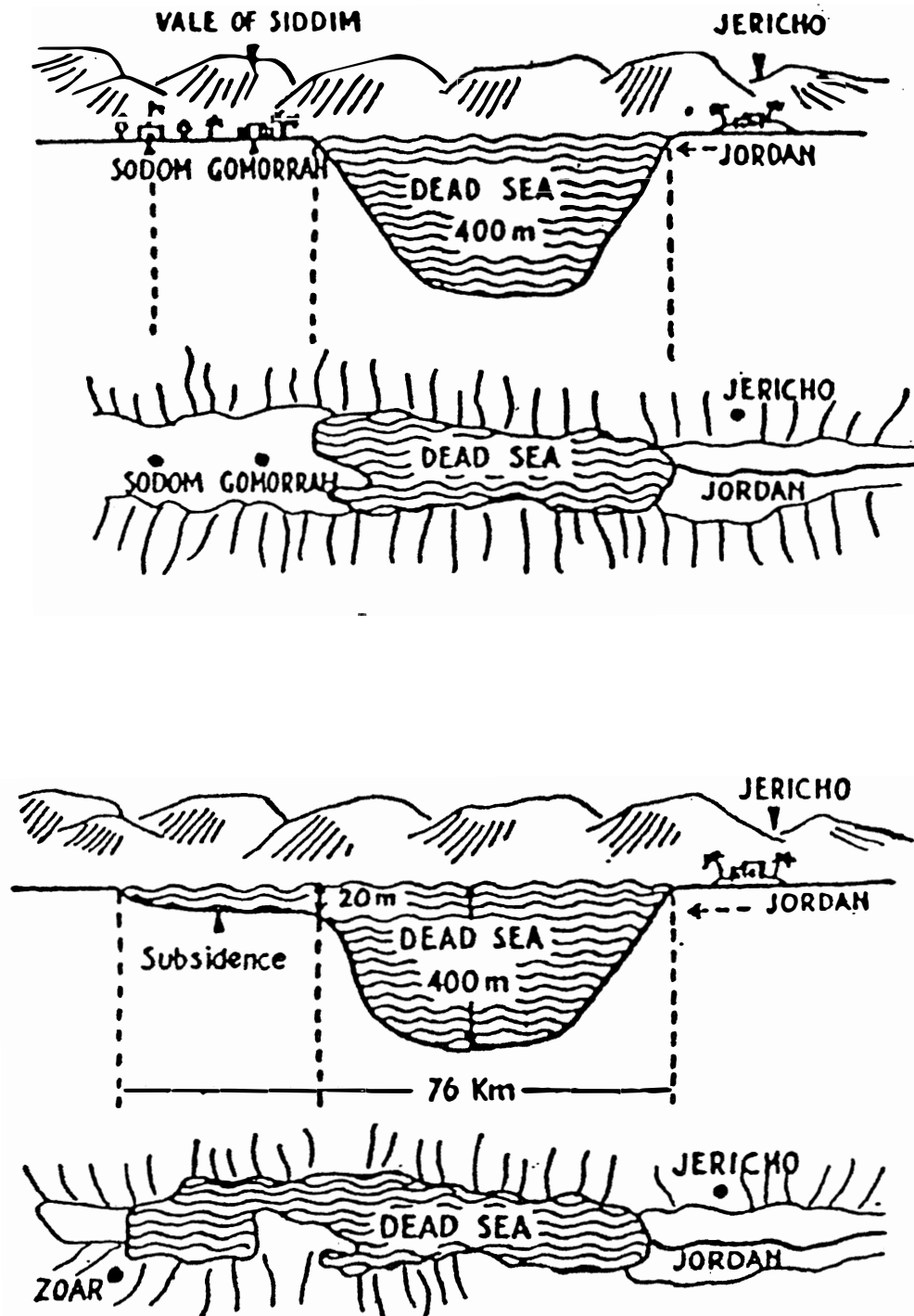


Fig. 12. The Dead Sea (a) in 2000 B.C. before the end of Sodom and Gomorrah, (b) in 1900 B.C. after the disaster.