

Tall el-Hammam Is the Site of Ancient Sodom

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In his 2013 book *Discovering the City of Sodom* (Simon & Schuster 2013; written with Dr. Latayne C. Scott), Dr. Steven Collins set forth the hypothesis that Tall el-Hammam, a massive ancient ruin located near the Dead Sea, east of the Jordan River in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was the site of the ancient city of Sodom. He and his archaeological team had begun excavation at the site in 2005. For several years prior to that he had researched and explored the location and region comprehensively. Skeptics abounded when he first made this identification. But skepticism has given place to excitement as the data has poured in from the official field reports and early publications associated with the site.

Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira

Prior to Collins' book, the consensus of archaeological scholarship tended to see the location of the five cities of the plain (of which Sodom was one) on the southern end of the Dead Sea, with the two most probable locations for Sodom and Gomorrah being Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, respectively. But both of those sites were relatively small, there were no sister cities present, and evidence uncovered there evinced that they were destroyed hundreds of years before the Middle Bronze Age, the time of the biblical patriarchs Abram and Lot, in whose life-spans the events of their destruction were said to have occurred.

As strange as it may seem, these sites were satisfactory to the minds of many biblical scholars, in spite of their obvious inadequacies. This was so because they considered the story of the destruction of the cities of the plain to be legendary in the first place. They were thought to be mere etiological legends that had developed over time to explain the deadness of the

region at the south end of the Dead Sea, along with the few signs and remnants of ancient civilization that stood out in stark contrast to the lifelessness of the region. As far as some were concerned, there was not even a historical kernel to the story. So, any linkage to actual history was not needed, if at all welcome.

Therefore, if there was any historical reality at all to the Genesis narratives, and there is presently ample reason to say there was, those locations were impossible alternatives, and the sooner biblical scholars let go of them and investigate seriously other possibilities, the better. Someone has said that "old habits die hard," and no doubt this is the case, but at some point the facts and the science must take priority over a popular delusion, and those two sites have no more going for them than a long-held but mistaken consensus. The real evidence is on the side of Tall el-Hammam and Tall el-Kufrayn. They are in fact the locations of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain are there as well—Admah and Zeboiim.

It is my purpose in the present paper to make the case for this conclusion. I will do so in a simple manner. We intend to examine briefly both the evidence from the biblical narratives and the evidence uncovered after many years of archaeological work (fifteen years at time of writing) at the site of Tall el-Hammam and regionally at the other smaller sites proximate to the larger location. In my view, the evidence is overwhelming. It is time to give up the ridiculous notion that Sodom and Gomorrah were located at the south end of the Dead Sea. The case for that location has never been compelling. Now it has been rendered impossible by the facts of the case. There seems little reason at all to doubt the conclusion that the northern region (Middle Ghor) was not only the area where the ancient "cities of the *kikkar*" were located, but that Tall el-Hammam was, in fact, ancient Sodom.

What Do the Genesis Narratives Contribute?

The story of the fall of the cities of the plain in Genesis 19, including the largest one of the cluster of towns and smaller villages, Sodom, is not a "campfire bard's tale." Neither is it a biblical myth. Neither is it a fictional narrative invented by an imaginative ancient writer to explain a desolate region that looked like it was cursed, was formerly abandoned, and ultimately given up for dead for many hundreds of years. The following remarks by Gerhard von Rad are characteristic of this mindset:

Though the units of chapter 19 are very old and were combined relatively late into a larger story, there is no original independent tradition behind 13:1-10. The narrative is fictional and presupposes a connected story of Lot's fate (*Genesis*, 172).

Some variation of that conclusion has been drawn by a great number of modern biblical scholars, and they are, quite simply, dead wrong. This is not to say that we possess at this point the wherewithal to establish the historical reality of the entirety of the story of Lot and Abram, and of the divine intervention that the fall of the cities of the plain represented, for that will never be possible. It is not realistic ever to expect that sort of validation of any ancient historical narrative, whether it is in the Bible or in any other ancient documentary source, like Homer's *Illiad*, or the historical works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus, or Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The "behind the scenes" stories that were frequently recorded by these historians of the ancient world may well be historically true, but in almost all instances they are not historically verifiable. That is the nature of much historical writing of this sort. So, the Bible is not being singled out for special treatment in this respect. Modern critics are as cynical about other ancient story tellers as they are about the writers of the Bible narratives. But hard evidence changes minds, even when those minds are slanted in a certain direction.

As a matter of fact, this is almost always the nature of ancient literature. We may believe a narrative to be true, or we may deem it fictitious, but in the end the process will involve some element of personal subjectivity on the part of the analyst. In the case of the biblical narratives, it is "faith" that we sometimes allude to in such instances. We either have it or we do not. We either exercise it or we refuse to. Hence, we either believe a story or we do not. In either case some element of subjectivity is involved. That is just the way things are. And we may be certain that is the way things will always be.

Minimalist Presuppositions

To add to the difficulty of the situation, in recent years outright skepticism regarding the historicity of narratives found in the biblical materials is common among students trained in the methodologies of higher criticism. The quote from G. von Rad above is illustrative of thousands of comments that could be gleaned from the writings of critics across the

theological spectrum. Many elements of the patriarchal narratives have been called into question in large measure because of the tendency to view them all as having no root in actual history. This is precisely where subjectivity enters the picture. And if one has been trained to employ a methodology that considers every other statement found in the text to be dubious, then the outcome is unsurprising.

The stories regarding the "cities of the plain" have not been an exception to this spirit of historical agnosticism. It is the *zeitgeist* of our day. In fact, if anything, they have been among the patriarchal traditions that have received an undue amount of criticism, and this is especially the case in recent years with the popularity of issues associated with homosexuality. This has been a special target of the political and religious left because the story of the divine punishment meted out by the deity in the Bible against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah became illustrative elsewhere in Scripture of God's wrath against sin and sinners in general.

So, it is particularly irritating to some parties that the narrative appears in Scripture at all. To their way of thinking if it can be minimized or even tarnished by having its historicity remain an open question under the present circumstances, then all the better. But the matter of historical reality has nothing at all to do with hotly debated current issues. Whether it serves the purposes of one group or another is quite beside the point. If something happened, then that settles the matter. If it did not, then perhaps we should not give it another look. Playing it down or ignoring it will not change the fact of it.

Addressing the Issues Evidentially

However, it should be observed that when evidence enters the picture which suggests that certain elements of the story cannot be otherwise than historically, geographically, temporally, and circumstantially accurate, that gives us pause. In this instance that is precisely what has come to light over the last couple of decades with respect to the narratives about Sodom. There is in fact every reason to believe from evidence garnered in recent years that the city of Sodom actually existed, that it was the chief city in a Middle Bronze Age city-state, and it had in its retinue a number of other minor cities and towns, among them being Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim. Zoar (Bela) was also a part of the coalition of cities, even though it stood a

greater distance off from the others (cf. Gen. 19:5, 23). A considerable number of other much smaller and less populous villages probably also existed at the same time in the general area and looked to Sodom for protection and needed supplies as well as other manufactured products and specialty services not available in these tiny hamlets.

From the information we glean from the Bible and the recent evidence that has come to light, it can be confidently stated that Sodom was a city of great size and influence, and it was the lead military power of the region. It is always mentioned first when the cities of the *kikkar* coalition are referenced to, and it is the only city in the coalition that is mentioned on its own. Sodom is listed as one of the great cities of the ancient world in Genesis 10, along with Babel, Erech, Accad, Calnah, and Ninevah (Gen. 10:19). Too, when a group of kings from Babylonia (Shinar; most likely then comprising Sumer and Accad) moved their armies into the *kikkar* to go to war with the important towns of the region because they had refused to pay up in the thirteenth year of their pre-arranged financial relationship (cf. Genesis 14), it is Bera, the king of Sodom who takes the lead in the battle.

And even though he and his minions are routed in the subsequent altercation, it is clear who the leader of this federation of cities is. It is the king of Sodom, named Bera at the time. Apparently the cities of the area were expected to pay tribute to their sovereigns in Mesopotamia, as was the custom in the ancient Near East at the time, probably years before being forced to submit to the terms of a suzerainty treaty of the sort that was common throughout the ancient world for many centuries. When the price of this agreement became onerous, and they felt that they were sufficiently strong to resist, they refused to pay the tribute and the inevitable result followed.

Considering the circumstances, is it not interesting that this confederacy in the *kikkar* thought that it was strong enough, and thus capable of pulling off a rebellion against such a major coalition of powers as those from Mesopotamia? They would only have attempted such a thing if they believed that in concert with mighty Sodom, they had the military might and the strength of resolve to repulse the inevitable invasion that was to follow. And although in the end they overestimated their capacity to take on an army of the size and military experience of their enemies, their confidence going into

the foray suggests that their pride was based on capabilities that they possessed. Later, after their humiliating defeat, when Abram and his league of servants and shepherds attacked the winners by night and recaptured the hostages and recovered the spoils of the war, it is the king of Sodom who approached Abram to get back what had been his previously (vv. 21ff). Abram's ability to overwhelm the victors with such a meager band of attackers suggests that the victors in this fight must have taken some very substantial losses themselves. Does the expression "Pyrrhic victory" come to anyone's mind?

Clearly then, in every respect Sodom's king is to be viewed, in the narratives of Genesis, as the leader of this league of cities. More than this, the king of Sodom is the principal figure in the confederacy of the *kikkar*. No doubt he was also the biggest loser in the fight. He lost some prestige among his peers and a great number of people as well as considerable treasure. But, of course, he had the most to lose. And, it should also be noted that, even after the defeat, he is clearly the major player in the area. Hence, it is fair to surmise that Sodom was both the preeminent city of the region population-wise as well as the most powerful in terms of military and industrial might. It is not out of place to draw these inferences from the text.

This being true, let us make several points about the question of whether Tall el-Hammam meets the essential criteria to in fact be the site of ancient Sodom.

Does Tall el-Hammam Meet the Criteria?

1. *Given the foregoing facts of the case, as they are revealed to us by the biblical text, it is obvious that what we must look for in order to find the location of ancient Sodom is a very large ancient site.* A small site will not do. Relative to the other potential city-sites in the area, it must be the largest. In fact, that is precisely what we have in the instance of Tall el-Hammam. Not only is it a larger site, it is the site of what was once the largest city in the southern Levant. Excavation at this mound and its neighboring towns has determined it to be the largest of the ones in the area, and not only is this so, but at the time of its preeminence in antiquity, it was the biggest one in the entire region. The sheer size of Tall el-Hammam should get the attention of anyone who is interested in the study of the Bible Lands.

How large was it? It was extremely large. It was over ten times the size of nearby Jericho at the apex of its

habitation. Excavators have observed that the place was truly massive, having a “sprawl” of over 200 acres, with approximately 62 acres within the city walls. (The southern location, on the other hand, presents only a relatively small site having a footprint of approximately 12 acres, fairly large, but not a very impressive size at all.) A city of its immensity must necessarily have been referred to at some point in Scripture. What was the name of the place? In our view, it could be none other than Sodom.

2. *The later names the place was given is evidence it was the site of some sort of horrific tragedy.* Scholars now recognize that in its later reality, after the destructive event that brought it to its end, Tall el-Hammam was called Beth-jeshimoth and Abel Shittim, named in relation to the camping area of Moses and the Israelites in the “plains of Moab” (Num. 33:49). Both names are indicative of locations where something extremely tragic had occurred previously. Jeshimoth is from the Hebrew verb *shamam*, meaning to “be desolated, appalled” (BDB, 1030), so the first expression means “desolated house,” or “house of desolation.” Also, the most common usage of the term *Abel* is “mourning” (BDB, 5), although it can also mean “meadow.” And, although some readers of the Hebrew text wish to take the word as meaning “meadow” in this instance (so, “Acacia Meadow”), the best case is to be made for reading it as “mourning” in the present context. Rather than “meadow of acacias,” then, it should be taken to mean “mourning acacias.” Both of these intriguing names indicate that the pall of death and destruction hung about the place for many centuries. (At the time when these names were used for the place, the terminal event was hundreds of years previous.) These are perfect names for the location of ancient Sodom in its later reality, long after the destruction of the once proud municipality.

It is also interesting to note that an isolated, solitary Late Bronze Age (14th c. BC) house stood atop the MBA ruins, probably a “public” building where tolls or tariffs were likely collected by the Moabite overlords of the time (multiple ancient roadways met there). It was solidly built with massive beams, wooden chairs, and scales for weighing, all discovered *in situ* by the archaeologists, burnt as from an ordinary incineration (not of the type that demolished and swept away the Middle Bronze architecture). The mound of Tall el-Hammam during that period presented an overlook permitting the occupants (the local taxing authorities)

to view the trade routes as they converged there from several different directions. Caravans and traders could not pass by that way without detection and payment of the required toll. Dr. Collins has surmised that this building was destroyed by the Israelites during or at the end of their encampment there. Certainly, it fell into ruin during that era.

3. *The location of Sodom must be found due east of Bethel and Ai and in the plain of the Jordan River.* Why is this so? Because the Bible tells its readers that this is the direction that Lot travelled in order to go to the place when he left Abram (Gen. 13:11). It does not say that Lot made his way south to get to Sodom, as would be required by anyone who decided to travel to the southern end of the Dead Sea. It does not say that he went away from the Jordan, but that he “chose for himself all the Jordan Valley.” This makes perfect sense, because the Jordan Valley is indeed due east, not toward the south.

The Bible simply says, “and Lot journeyed east.” Moreover, from that location between Bethel and Ai, the southern portion of the Dead Sea cannot be seen. Yet, the Bible says that Lot was able to view the whole *kikkar* of the Jordan where the cities were from that vantage point (Gen. 13:10). Tall el-Hammam can, in fact, be seen from the vicinity of Bethel and Ai, along with the entire Jordan Valley, which the word *kikkar* was intended to denote. Therefore, accepting the southern location creates a biblical contradiction. Evangelicals who claim that they are being true to Scripture when they argue on behalf of a southern location for Sodom and Gomorrah are gravely mistaken. They are in fact ignoring the very words of the Bible itself in order to make their case for this southern alternative.

Now it seems from the conversation, that his uncle Abram had intimated that he should go either to the north or to the south, whichever one he selected, thus avoiding the dreaded cities of the *kikkar*. But that was not Lot’s choice. This was not where the best grazing was to be found. The best pasturage was obviously to be found in the vicinity of Sodom and the towns of the *kikkar*. So, Genesis says he travelled to the east. But, again, traveling eastward does not take one to the south end of the Dead Sea. Interestingly, when traveling to the east from the area of Bethel and Ai, one arrives at the site of Tall el-Hammam. Moreover, when one gets to Tall el-Hammam one finds oneself on the edge of a

virtual bowl, circle, or disk (a *kikkar*, as the Hebrew word implies) that encircles the Jordan River, with mountains to the east and west, the river itself descending from the high ground north into that bowl, and the Dead Sea at the bottom of the bowl. The disk is about 18 miles (30 km) in diameter.

The Bible also uses this identical term to describe what it calls “the *kikkar* of the Valley of Jericho” (Deut. 34:3). This is also an important clue that directs us to the same conclusion, and thus, to the identical location. The city of Jericho is almost directly to the west of Tall el-Hammam, on the other edge of the *kikkar*. Additionally, the statement that King Solomon cast the bronze vessels for the Temple “in the *kikkar* of the Jordan Valley, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea” (2 Chron. 4:17) implies that the northern shore of the Dead Sea is the southern extremity of the *kikkar*. Selah Merrill was right to observe, in what has come to be a famous quotation:

I think it is to do violence to the language and to the facts of the case to attempt to make the phrase “all the plain of the Jordan” include the salt marsh at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which is fifty miles from that river, and has nothing to do with it [“Modern Researches in Palestine,” *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 9 (1877), 117].

Thus, Tall el-Hammam is found precisely in the *kikkar* of the Jordan where the Bible says Sodom and its smaller companion cities were to be found. And surrounding the ruin of this enormous ancient anchor city is a cluster of smaller cities and towns with the identical archaeological profile as this one. What is more, the cities in the immediate vicinity of the place fit the biblical profile of the cities that were destroyed in the narratives: Gomorrah, Admah, and the double town of Zeboiim (the term is a Hebrew plural). There is a point at which it becomes extraordinarily difficult to resist the temptation to identify these as “the cities of the plain”! But that is not all; there is much more to consider.

4. *The location of Sodom and its sister cities was a well-watered agricultural “Eden.”* Such language cannot be dismissed arbitrarily. There are basically three reasons why Tall el-Hammam fits this description exactly. First, it sits in a bowl or basin (Hebrew word is *kikkar*, “circle”; Gen. 13:10, 11, 12, 18; 19:28, 29; it should be noted that in Gen. 14:13 a different word for “plain” is selected by the author as ordinarily elsewhere). The

consequence of this is that water flows down to the area from the surrounding hills and mountains. Natural hydraulic forces make it rich in groundwater, from an aquifer of permeable rock below the ground, which today provides drinking water throughout the region. Secondly, the river Jordan flows down into the area from the upper country north to south. Prior to modern times (when the river became a source for the two countries involved to utilize for municipal water and irrigation purposes) annual flooding occurred and the inundation brought both moisture to the land along with beneficial sediments that were deposited in the lower areas. It was much like “the land of Egypt” with its annual inundations (Gen. 13:10). Thirdly, numerous springs were found there from ancient times to the present day. Tall el-Hammam gets its name from the Roman “bath” (*hammam*) that is still visible on the edge of the lower tall.

So, when it was needed, as it is today, water was plentiful. It could be piped or channeled (remains of stone channels are still visible at the base of the tall) to the agricultural areas that surrounded the city. No doubt wells were probably also dug in the area because the water table is relatively close to the surface, as is common to regions with many artesian springs coming to the surface of the ground. It was therefore an ideal location for agriculture, very much “like the garden of the Lord” (Gen. 13:10). Anyone who has visited the southern area where some think Sodom was located, knows that there is nothing there which comes close to what is presented in Genesis 13. That is also a major problem for the southern option as to location. Basically, the Genesis 13 description rules it out. The place is desolate and barren. Some may argue that before the destruction of that area it was well watered and agriculturally could have been compared to the Garden of Eden, but there is no evidence for this. There is certainly evidence there that it once had water resources enough to sustain a sizeable population, but to say that it was like the garden of Eden would require more proof than is currently available. Tall el-Hammam, on the other hand, fits the description exactly.

Some authors have attempted to make the case for the southern location because of the presence of “bitumen pits” in Genesis 14:10 in relation to the city of ancient Sodom. One writer says it is determinative: “it tips the scale in favor of a southern location” [cf. B. G. Wood, “Discovery of the Sin Cities,” *Bible and Spade* 12 (No.

3; 1999), 67; “Locating Sodom: A Critique of the Northern Proposal” *BS* 20, (No. 3; 2007), 78-79]. But a careful analysis of that text will not support this theory. That passage is describing the location of the battle that took place between the Mesopotamian kings and the rulers of the *kikkar* pentapolis. It is not necessary to conclude that this military altercation took place in the immediate vicinity of the cities themselves. Rather, the skirmishes represented may have been extensive and may have covered a wide area of ground. Like many wars, it probably started at one place and ended up somewhere else over the space of time and distance as the war raged. What war does not do this?

The passage in question seems to suggest that the kings of the pentapolis fled to that area for refuge, but then found themselves entangled and overcome because of the bitumen pits and the rough terrain. If anything, the description of that area given to the reader in Genesis 14:10 is exactly the opposite of what we read elsewhere about the *kikkar*, i.e. a place lush with vegetation and well-watered. The battle may have begun in the *kikkar*, but it is certain that is not where it ended up. Assuredly, it is fair to say that the depiction given is not consistent with what we read of the location of Sodom and its sister cities in Genesis 13:10!

5. *Tall el-Hammam bore the after-effects of some sort of catastrophic event.* Our minds are immediately struck by these observations about the lushness of the area, given that Tall el-Hammam suits perfectly each of these details of the biblical text. Immediately after the destructive event the place was no doubt a wasteland for many years. But that was a long time ago. Nature has reclaimed what the catastrophe took away. Today it is again well-watered and extraordinarily productive agriculturally. In such a dry and arid region, a plentiful supply of water is much to be treasured. If one group of residents gave it up, you would think that another group would quickly snatch it up and make their residence there immediately. But, that was not so in this instance. Why then is there clear evidence at the site, obvious everywhere, that there was a very long hiatus of civilization at the spot, and that it was virtually abandoned for around 700 years? Seven hundred years passed without any indication that anyone wanted to live in the place, even with its beautiful situation, its fertile land, and its plentiful supply of water. Interesting indeed, is it not?

A location so well-watered and agriculturally rich was surely an ideal place for later generations to settle, raise their crops and their families there, and rebuild on the ruins of a previously well-ordered city. The ruin itself must have provided a bountiful supply of stone and basic building materials for reconstruction. The element of shallow topsoil left throughout the region because of the blast event that destroyed it, must have contributed to the look and feel of desolation there. But that was probably short-lived. Within a few hundred years or so the alluvial plain should have been reclaimed by the natural processes of erosion, wind and rain, and the yearly soil deposits left by the Jordan’s flooding. Why, then, was it not resettled almost immediately, or even eventually? Why was it so long before the place was rebuilt? Seven hundred years is a very long time in anyone’s estimation. Most productive sites like this one are resettled almost immediately, or if not, within a short space of years. Why not this unusual locale?

I believe that the answer to this is so obvious that it slaps one in the face. It was not rebuilt immediately because it was considered by the people who lived close by to be a place that was cursed and haunted by the presence of evil. The ghosts of an ancient act of divine wrath haunted the location for hundreds of years. No doubt, the evidence of it was on the ground for a very long time afterward and the smell of it was in the air and on the wind for centuries. The remains of shattered and cremated human beings and animals were strewn about like an atomic bomb had exploded there. Stones and building materials were blown in all directions, scattered about for miles. Burnt ash and destruction debris littered the region, thick and dark and foul-smelling. The scent of death could not be avoided.

So, people were afraid to live there. The place itself was avoided almost altogether. Seemingly, it was no more a desirable vicinity to move one’s family to then than it would be for someone to buy a “haunted house” today. We have all heard the stories of people who had to demolish a home because of the evil that was perpetrated there. The house of John Wayne Gacy in Chicago is illustrative of this. After the gruesome murders and hasty burials of 29 people on the premises, the house was demolished. The lot remained mostly barren for many years afterward. It was rumored that not even grass or weeds would grow on the property. At that location only 29 people were killed! The stories

about the barrenness of the place may be a popular legend, but that this was said to be true is the whole point of my illustration. Where legendary evil abounds, legends and scary tales proliferate. On the *kikkar* of the Jordan an entire civilization vanished in a single moment. And its reputation for wickedness preceded its demise. The place where that sort of thing happened would surely earn a “bad reputation” of the most sordid kind possible. Most of us would not want to move to that neighborhood until what happened there was long ago erased from popular memory! In our own lifetimes, we would never be motivated to do so. And that is precisely what happened to the neighborhood of Tall el-Hammam.

6. The Middle Bronze Age (c. 2100-1600 BC), being the time of the biblical patriarchs, the proper location for Sodom and the other cities of the Jordan plain must provide significant evidence of human occupation during that historic era. Too, there must be present in situ a terminal destruction layer that shows an ending to the city during the MBA, not before, and not after. Absent such evidence only two conclusions are possible; and the two are mutually exclusive. Either Sodom and Gomorrah and their kindred towns never existed at all, or else their location must be found elsewhere. It is really that simple. If, on the other hand, there is evidence to be found elsewhere (let us say, at Tall el-Hammam), then the difficulty is resolved, and the mystery disappears. Where those elements of proof come together, that is the place where it all happened.

In this instance I begin with an assumption, namely that the period of the biblical patriarchs was the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2100-1600 BC). So, I should explain myself about this assumption. This is not agreed to by everyone, of course, but it is assuredly the broad consensus of biblical scholars. In fact, most conservative evangelical scholars and biblical maximalists agree that Abram and Lot lived during that period. This determination is made not so much by archaeological evidence as by correlating characteristics in the biblical text with the cultural markers of the Middle Bronze periods and the indicators that are associated with them. Essentially, it compares the text of the book of Genesis and the patriarchal narratives with what we have learned from external sources.

The following are some of the most important considerations that have played a part in this almost

universal view: the price of slaves, covenant and treaty structure, prevailing customs, geopolitical conditions, Hyksos in Egypt, the date of the Exodus, Beni Hasan mural, Egyptian chronology, Amorite hypothesis, Mari/Nuzi archives, etc. [cf. Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21:2 (March/April 1995), 1-22]. The process itself is very complicated, and too much so for me to begin to discuss it here. But suffice it to say, when all these indicators are brought together, they lead to a consensus that centers on either Middle Bronze I (2100-1900 BC) or Middle Bronze II (1900-1600/1550 BC), at any rate, sometime within the Middle Bronze Age. The idiosyncrasies of the final judgment of any scholar on the question of which of the two is chosen are thorny and have been at times argued frenetically by certain writers, but the timing is not all that far apart when the dust has settled. And, given that carbon dating and pottery reading both have a plus or minus factor involved, and students of the Bible have not always played fair with all that is to be found in the various texts involved, those dates could end up being even closer than they have been adjudged to be at times.

My own tendency, personally, has been to “wait and see” on many of these timing issues and not to be too overly dogmatic about them. I consider this to be the safest course. Time will tell, the data will gradually come out more fully, and the methodologies involved will be refined beyond our present limitations, and then, who knows? We may all settle very comfortably on dates and times that will suit us all. That may not be probable, but who knows? As for now, I think it best to withhold judgment on some of the more precise “timing” questions we may not be able to settle to the satisfaction of everyone.

At the same time, we ought to be ecstatic, all of us, at what the Collins team has discovered! It is “mind-blowing” (as a younger generation tends to say). It disturbs the Bible minimalists beyond description. They have a hard time taking it too seriously. But it has become more and more difficult for them to ignore it. As the evidence mounts and the excavation and scientific reports continue to filter back in, their world is being shaken to its core. At Tall el-Hammam we are looking at a treasure-trove of findings that should excite the heart of every believer in the historicity of the biblical narratives. Who would have believed, just a quarter-century ago, that we would possess such a rich collection of materials and data that seem, at this

point at least, to confirm in a most profound way the historical reality of one of the most phenomenal events of biblical history? And thus far the spade of the archaeologist has tended to corroborate at every turn the ancient text of Genesis. Take a deep breath and enjoy the moment! Please do not spoil it by quarreling over “jots and tittles”!

As regards the southern location, namely at the sites of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, it has long been known, and conservative biblical scholars have long been painfully reminded, that there is no evidence at all there for a Middle Bronze Age occupation of these sites. Liberal theologians have held it up as proof that the biblical record was mistaken about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah during the age of the patriarch Abram. It is also known that the two places were not contiguous. They were destroyed or else abandoned at different times, about two and one-half centuries apart. Bab edh-Dhra does not provide evidence of being destroyed by a significant fire, and it is estimated that town life there ended about 2500 BC. Numeira ended much earlier, c. 2700 BC. Both ended in the Early Bronze Age (3500-2500 BC), not the Middle Bronze Age of the patriarchs.

Both incidences are far too early to approximate the period of the patriarchs. That, in and of itself, is a most significant challenge to the theory that these were the cities of Abram’s time. They could only be so if the stories are mere legendary tales, lacking a historical kernel. Additionally, archaeologists who worked at the location could find no evidence at all for a major conflagration such as is described by the author of Genesis. If they were destroyed in a military conquest, as is often surmised, they represent two distinct events, and evidence for the violent destruction for either one of them is not overwhelming. Some have not only denied a fiery end for the towns but have even argued that the area was simply abandoned because of draught or climate change in the region. There is precious little that can be said against that view, archaeologically speaking.

It is still being argued by some writers that the two cities fell together. How is this possible? The initial approximations of the dates involved (by Rast and Schaub, 1977) suggested that the two settlements were destroyed at about the same time, and so these initial reports are at times still being quoted. But archaeology not being an “exact science,” those earlier judgements

were eventually rejected by later investigators. There was initial difficulty with the C-14 samples and the calibrated dates, but over time the original excavators and others continued to re-examine the evidence, and their opinion of the matter changed as time wore on. In 2007 Schaub and Chesson reached the conclusion that it was an earthquake that brought about the end of ancient Numeira in 2600 BC (now 2700 BC as a result of even more recent radiocarbon studies). This separated the fall of the two cities by 200 years.

So, if Bab edh-Dhra is Sodom, then Numeira cannot be Gomorrah, and vice versa. In addition, the EB I-III period sites of es-Safi, Feifa, and Khirbet al-Khanazir, at first thought to be the other cities of the pentapolis, are, in fact, nothing more than ancient cemeteries. They have no architectural structures or domestic settlements associated with them. They were never cities at all. To say the least, this is problematical for the southern theory of the five cities. For this to be the location of the “cities of the plain,” there must be a cluster of at least four of them situated in proximity to one another, or else we are looking in the wrong place. It appears to me, therefore, that we are looking in the wrong place for those cities when we look toward the south of the Dead Sea.

As a consequence, evangelicals who have attempted to make the case for this southern area being the location of the cities of the plain have set themselves up to be victims of several devastating arguments against their position (and along with their position the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the biblical record). The first is that this area provides no evidence of Middle Bronze Age occupation. The places were long abandoned before the age of Abram and Lot. Second, there is no evidence of a devastating fiery conflagration such as is depicted in the biblical record (Gen. 19:24ff). Third, it is also problematical that the two places saw their demise, not at the same time, but centuries apart. That is a huge problem, speaking from the perspective of the archaeology of these sites! Fourth, the sister cities of the plain are missing entirely. There is nothing left of them. It is as if they never existed at all. If it is argued that they were swept away entirely by the heavenly event described in the Bible, then why were cemeteries left there? And if the main offenders were Sodom and Gomorrah, why were they left standing and the other small towns obliterated? There are no good answers to these questions. To my way of thinking, therefore, it is impossible to make the case for Sodom and Gomorrah

on the southern end of the Dead Sea on account of these missing elements of evidential support. They just do not exist. So, either the story about the fall of these cities is a mere myth, or else the true location is to be found somewhere else.

My position is that the location *is* to be found somewhere else, namely at Tall el-Hammam at the north end of the Dead Sea and on the eastern edge of the *kikkar* of the Jordan, *precisely where the Bible consistently says Sodom should be*. Moreover, evidence of a massive city and several other neighboring cities (Tall Al-Kafrayn, Tall Nimrin, Tall Mustah, Tall Bleibel, Tall Rama, Tall Iktanu, Tall Mwais, Tall Azeimeh, Tall Tahounah, Tall Barakat, etc.) that thrived during the Middle Bronze Age of Abram and Lot is spectacularly plentiful in the region. Interestingly, a city stood, and seemingly flourished, continuously at the site of Tall el-Hammam for about 2,500 years, and most importantly, throughout the Early Bronze Age, Intermediate Bronze Age, and most of the Middle Bronze Age, with no cessation. This assuredly confirms the very real possibility that Tall el-Hammam could be the city of Sodom.

But there is more. The city that stood at that location ended suddenly in the Middle Bronze Age, a victim of some fiery event from the heavens. Key researchers, experts in meteoric airburst science, are concluding that Tall el-Hammam and the *kikkar* towns ended by means of an “airburst phenomenon” comparable to the one that struck Tunguska, Siberia in 1908. What the archaeologists have found at Tall el-Hammam (and the neighboring sites mentioned above) over fifteen excavation seasons plus additional investigations) is entirely consistent with that theory. Evidence to confirm the hypothesis is being collected and analyzed as this essay is being written (thus far, a four-year focused investigation). No matter how that works out, something quite out of the ordinary happened there near the end of the historic period called Middle Bronze II. Massive mudbrick buildings were wiped off their stone foundations as if struck by something more powerful than a nuclear blast. Walls were obliterated. The violently deposited destruction layer found *in situ* is beyond phenomenal (I have personally examined it). It is a meter, sometimes more, thick. The like of it is found nowhere else in any other archaeological excavation in the holy land to date. This is a unique condition that prevails only at Tall el-Hammam and other excavated cities and towns on the eastern side of

the *kikkar* of the Jordan. Human and animal bone scatter is littered throughout the depth of Tall el-Hammam’s MB II destruction layer. In the debris layer everything has the semblance of what has been sent through a blender, or a wood-chipper. The rich topsoil built up over millennia, was blasted from off the surface of the ground making the area worthless as agricultural land, until it was eventually replaced to a depth once more capable of producing crops; it took a long time to accomplish that. And even afterward, it was avoided by humans, for some unexplained reason. There was something that happened there which made it undesirable for human habitation.

Nothing this-worldly in the Middle Bronze Age could replicate this kind of phenomenon on a massive scale such as what has been unearthed there. There seems little doubt that what we have in evidence in this case is precisely what is described in Genesis 19. Dr. Collins observed regarding these findings:

The violent conflagration that ended occupation at Tall el-Hammam produced melted pottery, scorched foundation stones and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart...The terminal destruction layer at Tall el-Hammam lies across both the upper and lower tall and consists of a heavy, dark ash mixed with fragments of pottery, mudbricks, a wide range of object fragments and human bone scatter. Numerous pottery fragments of this matrix lie across the site that have outside surfaces melted into glass, with some bubbled up like “frothy magma,” indicating that they were burned in a flash heat event (called vitrification) far exceeding 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The conflagration must have yielded extremely high heat and effected catastrophic damage [“Where Is Sodom? The Case for Tall el-Hammam,” *BAR* (March/April, 2013), 39:2, 70].

Trinitite, or “clinkers” as they are sometimes called after their discovery at nuclear bomb sites, have also been discovered at Tall Mweis nearby, indicating that it was destroyed at the same time by some very intense heat and blast source too. Dr. Phillip Silvia and his team of researchers mentioned the find at Tall Mweis and a particular “melt rock” they had analyzed:

A large (672g) “melt rock” (MR) was found in 2010...at Tall Mweis, about 8.5 km SW of Tall el-Hammam. The MR is an agglomeration of three different lithologies (mineral compositions) that appear to have been slammed together while in a

semi-melted, plastic state. Melting of the entire mass continued long enough to coat the assemblage with a layer of glass. One of the lithologies—composed mostly of fused quartz granules—contains melted zirconium crystals with numerous tiny bubbles lined with brown-colored glass. These features led the research teams at NAU and NCSU to conclude that the MR was exposed to a temperature profile of about 12,000 degrees centigrade for at least a few seconds....

The physical evidence from Tall el-Hammam and neighboring sites exhibit signs of a highly destructive concussive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19. The soil/ash samples gathered from Tall el-Hammam contain evidence of top-soil destruction and sub-soil contamination with Dead Sea salts that would have prevented the cultivation of crops for many centuries following the event, which explains (in part, at least) the long occupational hiatus (Silvia, et al, “Civilization-Ending 3.7KYrBP Event: Archaeological Data, Sample Analysis, and Biblical Implications,” 3).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that there are no Late Bronze Age cities present in that area. Every single one of the towns and cities of the region was wiped out and was not again settled and lived in for a very long time. They were all destroyed at the same time, and surely it is safe to say, by the identical cause, whatever that may have been. [“Material from the LBA are systematically absent from the tall proper. However, LB2 pottery vessels were found in a nearby tomb containing vessels dating from the Chalcolithic Period through the Iron Age. Thus, some kind of LB2 presence in the area can be surmised; however, no architecture from that period is known in this vicinity of the valley E of the Jordan River” (Collins, et al, “Tall el-Hammam Season Eight, 2013), 13]. Taken together, this evidence is formidable both as proof the region was suddenly devastated by an unusual cosmic phenomenon, and that it happened exactly at the right time to be understood as being that specific event depicted in the Genesis 19 narrative.

Believers would say that the God of Abram was responsible for it. Others would not be so inclined. Ultimate causation is a matter for the theologians and the philosophers to wrestle with and settle between them (if that is possible). But the bare fact of the event itself is another matter. It is no longer in question. Civilization in the eastern *kikkar* ended violently and

suddenly, and for some people inexplicably, and that much seems now to be safely out of the realm of speculation or even of faith. It happened. That much is certain. And the work that has been done at Tall el-Hammam for fifteen seasons has provided the proof of it.

7. *The Sodom of Lot's day was a walled, heavily fortified city. This we know because Scripture says that Lot sat in the gate of the city (Gen. 19:1).* Gates in ancient times were not constructed as open-air decorations to beautify the metropolis. They were for protection against invasion. They were intended to help repulse enemy attackers in case they were able to approach near enough to the place to try to enter without permission and for less than peaceful purposes. City gates, then, were built as entrances through the (sometimes) massive walls of a fortified city. That much is not contestable. Such gates and walls are found everywhere throughout the ancient Near East and its excavations, especially in the great cities and anchor cities of city-states.

Moreover, gates and walls are important for biblical archaeology. They tell excavators many things about the nature of the city and of its population. Archaeologists define the limits of a city by its walls, determine the probable population numbers by the extent of the walls, suggest whether a city is rich or poor by the thickness and quality of the walls and gates, and frequently they also read the evidence of the breaching of walls and gates as conclusive as to how a city met its end. So, even though there is little detail about the gate of Sodom in the Bible, the biblical description of Lot sitting in the gate of the city tells us something very important about the ancient city where Lot lived: it was well fortified. It was not an easy prey.

Tall el-Hammam was a mightily fortified city, complete with at least one main entrance gate during the time of Abram and Lot, the Middle Bronze Age. In the year 2012 a large gate was discovered by excavators. Further analysis led the team to the conclusion that this was the main gate, and perhaps the only one the city had. It was impressive indeed, and the style of it was completely unique in Holy Land excavations. More about that later. The Early Bronze Age perimeter walls about the city were massively thick, and inside them a Middle Bronze Age wall was built, also impressively thick. Watch towers stood next to the gates and others were constructed at various

points around the walls. It was reported in *BAR* as follows:

During the Middle Bronze Age, Tall el-Hammam was protected by an imposing rampart fortification system that greatly enhanced the already substantial defensive wall that surrounded the site during the Early Bronze Age. Excavations across the site and near the city's main gate revealed a sloped earthen rampart system constructed with millions of mudbricks built against the earlier city wall, producing fortifications that measured more than 100 feet thick. Positioned at regular intervals along the rampart were large square towers that likely stood to a height of 50 feet or more. Two of these towers flanked the multi-storied gatehouse of the city's main entrance, thereby creating a monumental gateway and spacious exterior plaza that brings to mind the gate where Lot is said to have first greeted his angelic visitors (Gen. 19:1) (*Ibid.*, 38).

Thus, once more, Tall el-Hammam meets the necessary criteria essential for fitting the biblical description of ancient Sodom.

7. Discoveries at the site of Tall el-Hammam have accomplished what is always hoped by biblical scholars that archaeological work will be able to do: it fills in some of the blanks and solves some of the riddles, the "whys" and "wherefores," of the Bible's narratives. However, this can only be so if the Tall el-Hammam location is *really* the site of ancient Sodom. I am happy to report that this is indeed the case. In fact, on this account it is undoubtedly the case. Let us begin with some observations about the city gate mentioned above.

Examination of its design features have opened an entirely new chapter in the study of the location as well as our understanding of the Genesis narratives. The large opening in the wall that was clarified in 2012 was of a construction type that was unknown in the archaeology of the region before this excavation. The monumental gateway's features were like no other ever seen anywhere else in the land of Canaan. And, it is dated to the Middle Bronze Age of Abram and Lot. Inside of it, pillared, Minoan-style architecture was found. This shocked the excavators. Columned halls were not characteristic of Canaanite gateways. Prior to its discovery at Tall el-Hammam, this style of architecture had only been seen in Minoan Crete. In his

Season Eight report, Dr. Collins described what was found:

With this widening of the trench several penetrations through the MBA city wall were observed. We soon determined that these penetrations represented not only the main entry to the city through a large gatehouse with towers, but also one of (likely) two flanking monumental towers creating a gateway system of significant proportions. During Season Eight we identified most of the structures associated with the city wall and external portions of the gateway system, and began excavating on the inside of the gate passage in order to determine the structure of the gatehouse. We were expecting to find a four-piered or six-piered gatehouse (Burke 2008). What we unearthed was unexpected – and unprecedented.

...the perimeter foundation wall (1.6m thick) of the gatehouse emerged virtually complete on the left side (relative to entrance from outside the gate passage) and for much of the width of the structure across the 'back'. (Thus far the back-right corner and right wall foundations seem to be missing, but perhaps portions will be found at a deeper level.) But there was no straight-access entry, and no piers. Instead, there were at least three rows of pillar-bases (upon which large wooden pillars once sat). Two of the rows aligned with the exterior wall foundation, but a third 'row' did not.

Remnants of an earlier foundation seem to align with the 'stray' row of pillar-bases, suggesting that an earlier pillared building sat inside of, and separate from, the EBA/IBA city wall, and was used – as a storage room or military barracks? – up to the time of the construction of the MBA fortifications (ca. 1900 BCE). When the MBA city wall and gateway system were built, the previous pillared structure was deconstructed and repositioned in order to attach it to the new city entrance as a gatehouse. The pillared gatehouse – with a bent-axis requiring a right turn to enter the city – seems to have been an attempt to preserve the previous gate system. It seems as if it was more important for Hammam's MBA inhabitants to preserve the pillared-style construction they had inherited from their forbears than to adopt the piered-style gatehouse employed at most MBA cities in the southern Levant. What was this seemingly-relentless cultural propensity that gave Tall el-Hammam a pillared building (EBA/IBA) and a pillared gatehouse (MBA)? Our initial research suggests that the influence was derived

from Minoan Crete. Not a few archaeologists working in Jordan have already suggested that at least a segment of the ancient cultural milieu of the Transjordan during the EBA through MBA evinces a greater affinity to Crete than to Egypt or Mesopotamia (Philip 2008). Ceramic motifs at Hammam also seem to point in this direction (Collins, et al, "Tall el-Hammam Season Eight, 2013," 8, 9).

Even though this architectural anomaly was extraordinary, this is not to say that Aegean influence was not known in the excavations of the region. Work at Tel Kabri in northern Israel in 2005 and 2009, just three miles east of the Mediterranean coast, (the ancient name of the place is yet unknown) under Aharon Kempinski had produced a two-story palace that featured colorful frescoes and ornaments in Minoan style. As well, at Alalakh (Tel Atkana) on the plain of Antioch near the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, just north of Syria, Minoan frescoes were also found. Since both locations were close to the coast, it is clear that in ancient times (ca. 18th/17th century BC) they were involved in trade with Crete or Thera/Santorini, the home of Minoan culture. It is likely that Minoan artisans were used to produce these intriguing artistic works.

But why were Minoan-style gates present so far inland at ancient Sodom? That question is not easy to answer, but perhaps there is a clue available from the general situation of the city at the time. As we noted earlier, the metropolis was situated at the juncture of several trade routes, making it perfect for collecting tolls and tariffs from traders who ventured through the region to get to their destination and buy or sell their products. So, the fashions and styles from all over the world would have traveled through the *kikkar*. This would not explain the construction of city gates and gate houses after the fashion of Minoan cities located on the faraway island of Crete, however. Only the actual presence of settlers who had come from that Aegean island and settled in the place would explain the fact that such cultural icons appeared at the entranceway of the city. Visitors would not have the influence to suggest an architectural oddity the like of which we see at Tall el-Hammam. It is evident then, that this had become the home of Minoan settlers from the Aegean, either through regularly trading in the area, or else on account of some cultural link that drew them there and caused them to stay.

It is important to say, though, that however they ended up there, they brought with them from Crete more than just a distinctive gate design. They had cultural affinities with the Cretans as well. Minoan artistic motifs and architectural features discovered at the site, when linked with the story of the attempted abduction of the angels by the "young and old men" of Sodom in Genesis 19, suggest an affinity to the formal cultural institution of *paiderastia* found on Bronze Age Crete, including a unique feature, namely ritual kidnapping for sexual purposes (see Strabo *Geography* 10.21.4). Minoan society encouraged this unusual practice. It was a social institution that endured among the male population of society for hundreds of years at least. As Collins observed, "Hammam's intriguing Minoan connection provides an extraordinary backstory for the attempted abduction of Lot's angelic visitors" ("Tall el-Hammam is Still Sodom," 1). Further,

We know that the people of Tall el-Hammam (Sodom) weren't just any old garden-variety Canaanites. What is significant is that the Mycenaean culture was known for its "institutional" practice of the Minoans, including the time-honored and accepted practice of ritual kidnapping...The Minoan *paiderastia* was, in fact, the very structure of society by which boys were raised into men. It was the rule, not the exception. Each boy, at age twelve, was taken as an *eromenos* ("beloved") by a twenty-two year old *erastes* ("lover") to be raised for eight years in a male-male sexual bond. It was usually initiated with a ceremonial kidnapping performed by a gang of ritual abductors sent by the older male. The practice was formalized and ubiquitous across Minoan culture. Boys couldn't be considered properly trained male citizens unless they submitted to this process. They then repeated this "societal norm" with their own *eromenos*. Generation after generation. On Crete, the women and/or wives often lived separately from the men and boys. It was a thoroughly male-dominated homosexual culture in which the narrow role of women was to bear and raise children. There were additional formal Minoan institutions developed to promote and sustain their androphile model of social organization...the more we research into this, the clearer the Crete-Sodom connection becomes. I'm sure even the Canaanites were shocked by the presence of this culture in the southern Jordan Valley! (Collins, *TeHEP Update Newsletter*, April 22, 2014).

This is a case where archaeology has revealed secrets of the biblical reality that we would never have been able to know otherwise. Who would have guessed that there was a relationship between Crete and Sodom? Who would have thought, prior to the work at Tall el-Hammam, that what went on in front of Lot's house that night was an attempted ritual kidnapping? The avid Bible student is genuinely helped by knowledge such as this, and future generations will continue to be blessed by what we have been able to learn from the work done and the incredible discoveries made at Tall el-Hammam. Students of Scripture will owe a debt of gratitude to Steven Collins' and his team as long as the world stands.

Conclusion

The case for the location of the cities of the plain at the southern end of the Dead Sea must be deemed to be completely without merit at this juncture. In truth, it always has been. Basically, on the part of some scholars it was attempted out of a sense of desperation, as a sincere effort to give some credence to the biblical narratives about the cities. For others the very emptiness of the venture was an encouragement. This is so because of the basic failings of the archaeological information discovered at the southern locations to give any solace at all to the theory that these were the cities of the plain or that they fell in a momentous fashion. For others it seemed to lend some support for their view that the stories were manufactured in order to explain the barrenness of that region, and the fact that there seemed to have once been a considerable population of people who had made their home there, but had long ago disappeared leaving hardly a trace. Both these perspectives have now been shown to be utterly meritless. Excavations on the eastern edge of the *kikkar* of the Jordan, and especially at Tall el-Hammam, have sealed the fate of both views. They have no credibility at all. The stories in Genesis are another matter.

The biblical narratives, it now seems, have taken on a new air of credibility and believability based on what has been found there. The one thing that must be accepted going forward is that the biblical record must not ever again be passed off as unbelievable or dismissed as incredible. Now, do not misunderstand what I am saying. Some of the details of what is depicted in the Genesis stories are probably beyond proving. The notion that there was a man whose name was Abram and that another was named Lot cannot be

substantiated at the present time and probably never will be. As Kenneth Kitchen said, though, "the absence of the names of the patriarchs in the extra-Biblical historical record is, in itself, inconclusive: Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. What the future will bring we cannot know, except that it will be full of surprises, as the recent discovery of the House of David inscription attests" ["The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *BAS* 21:2 (March/April, 1995), 1]. The fact that angels visited Sodom and stayed at Lot's house will likely never be shown to have happened, historically or archaeologically speaking (frankly, we cannot conceive of a way that might be demonstrated, anyway). The most we can probably hope for is what we have already found: the gate of Sodom where Lot was sitting when they came to the city. And of course, there is the city itself. It cannot be proven that God was behind the awesome event that wiped out a population of between 40,000 to 65,000 human beings and erased a civilization that had stood for some 2,500 years. That is not the point.

What archaeology does do, though, is critical to the way we view the text of the Bible, not in terms of specificities and idiosyncrasies, but in creating for the reader an atmosphere of believability. It therefore performs a singularly important function in biblical studies. That it does by marking some of the historical realities concerning the biblical characters and their times, the places and events of their special moment in time and space (geography), the cultural and ethnic particulars of a world that is very different from our own, etc. The biblical world, in spite of what some may tell us, was a world of reality, not one of fantasy; the places of the Bible world were real places that can be found on a real map and physically visited if we can but locate them.

Now, we may not be able ever to find them all, for some of them may prove exceedingly elusive. For a long time, Sodom was such a place. But it seems certain now that *we have found one of those places* that a mere two decades ago, we were still looking for in earnest, and were seemingly frustrated on every hand in our search. All the while, we were frustrated because we were looking in the wrong place, even though the Bible told us where to look as clearly as it is possible for it to have done so. That place is Sodom. Tall el-Hammam is the location of the biblical city of Sodom. That is a virtual certainty. Excavation at the site has tied up so many loose ends in this regard that it staggers the imagination

at times. And the work is not finished yet! Remember Kitchen's tantalizing remark: "What the future will bring we cannot know, except that it will be full of surprises." We need to remember that it is now a matter of record that we have Dr. Collins and his team to thank for all that we have gained thus far.

It is time to celebrate that virtual certainty to which we referred above, just as we have done with so many other cities with far less evidence than we have in this case. At this point quibbling over fine points of dating is of little to no value. If you wish to argue with Professor Collins about the details of the dating process, feel free to do so. But as for me, I plan to revel in this moment of incomparable discovery. Since I read his book and began to follow his writings and the reports from the field, I have not been able to stifle my excitement.

This year (winter, 2020) I went to Jordan to help with the excavation there. I did so because I wanted to contribute some of my time to the amazing work that is being done at the site of ancient Sodom. I wanted to be a part in what I consider to be one of the most important archaeological excavations of the last century. It will go down in history as just that. You can count on it! My advice to those of you who are physically and financially capable of doing so, is this: plan to spend two or more weeks with the team in Jordan next year. If you cannot do that, then make a financial contribution to the effort. History is being made there. Be a part of it!