

# **HESHBON IN THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

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## HESHBON IN THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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I have been asked to present my views on the topic "Heshbon in the Bible and Archaeology." It is only fair and justified to ask the original director of Andrews University's Heshbon expedition to present a summary of results accomplished and expectations realized after active excavations at the site have ended. Fifteen years have passed since the first archaeological expedition conducted by Andrews University was born and the site of Tell Hesbân in Jordan was chosen to be excavated. It was in 1966 that the board of trustees of this university, responding to an offer of several individuals to support an archaeological expedition, appointed me as director of this undertaking and instructed me to choose a site and organize the expedition.

Why was Tell Hesbân chosen? This is a legitimate question frequently asked and deserves a somewhat detailed answer.

Originally two other sites, one in western Palestine, the other in Transjordan, had attracted my attention. The site in western Palestine was Sheikh Abu Zarad, biblical Tappuah, about 9 mi. south of Shechem, which I had visited together with several other staff members of the Shechem expedition in the summer of 1964. A careful surface examination of the mound, and the pottery collected during that visit, led me to believe that the site offered exceptionally rich possibilities of providing a great deal of archaeological information pertaining to Old Testament history. On the other hand my favorite site in Transjordan was the Citadel mound of Amman, biblical Rabbath-ammon, the capital of the



ancient Ammonites. An opportunity to explore the feasibility of excavating one of the two sites mentioned came a few weeks after I was asked to head up an expedition by Andrews University in the spring of 1966, when I received a free round-trip ticket to Jerusalem from the Dutch airline KLM in connection with the inauguration of a regular Amsterdam-Amman flight service.

Being thus in Palestine unexpectedly for several days I used this opportunity to visit the two sites in which I was interested and to talk with the respective authorities. In the village of Yasuf, which owns the mound Sheikh Abu Zarad, biblical Tappuah, I found a strong hostility to the idea of seeing their mound being excavated for several reasons; therefore I had to give up any plans to excavate it. Furthermore, Dr. Awni Dajani, the director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, on whom I called in Amman, told me that the Citadel mound of Amman was not available to a foreign expedition but was reserved for future excavations to be conducted by the recently founded University of Jordan in Amman. With these two sites out of the picture I had to look for other sites.

For this reason I returned to Jordan in the early summer of 1966 and spent several weeks in the country, before conducting a Bible lands tour during that same summer, looking for a suitable site to be excavated. However, before making this reconnaissance trip I had consulted four eminent archaeologists, Professors W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, my former teacher, and G. Ernest Wright of Harvard University, under whom I had worked at Shechem, Martin Noth, the director of the German Palestine Institute in Jerusalem, and Père Roland de Vaux of the prestigious École Biblique in Jerusalem. The last two scholars mentioned I met during my brief stay in Jerusalem in

the spring of 1966. I had requested each of them to give me a short list of sites which according to their opinion should be excavated, sites which they would consider investigating if they would consider organizing an archaeological expedition themselves.

Since it was my intention to choose, if possible, a site east of the River Jordan, I had asked these men to include Transjordanian sites in their lists. The reason for this preference was the fact that most archaeological work carried out in the past had been concentrated in western Palestine while the areas east of the Jordan had been badly neglected although some startling inscriptional discoveries, such as the Moabite Stone, the Baluah Stele, and the Amman Citadel Inscription, seemed to indicate that a great wealth of untapped archaeological material was waiting to be brought to light in Transjordan. Yet this does not mean that in my search for a site I did not take into consideration also historical sites in western Palestine. In fact, I visited several sites and explored the possibilities of excavating them in the part of the country known since 1967 as the "West Bank," which in 1966 was still controlled by Jordan.

Armed with these lists I carried out my search in the summer of 1966. While several sites were attractive from historical or other viewpoints, I found obstacles in several directions. Let me mention a few of them. One site in which I was interested was owned by several families and a purchase or lease of the mound would have required both much money and time for negotiations; another site lay in a military restricted area; some sites were difficult to reach from existing roads, or had either insufficient water or labor available for large-size operations. But one site seemed to have many advantages over all other sites investigated--and that site was Tell Hesbân. It might be of

interest to hear that on three of the four lists mentioned above, Tell Hesbân appeared as one of the sites I was recommended to take into consideration in my search for a suitable site to be excavated by Andrews University.

Tell Hesbân was to a large extent owned by the government of Jordan, which would make it unnecessary to purchase or lease it if I would receive permission from the government's Department of Antiquities to excavate it. Since sites leased for the duration of an excavation's season usually must be restored to its owner with all holes filled in at the end of each season, Tell Hesbân as a government-owned mound attracted me also for posing no such problem, for I realized that I could leave the excavated areas open from one season to another. Furthermore, I found out during my visits that local labor and sufficient water for staff and workmen would be available at the village of Hesbân, for the villagers assured me that they would be happy to work for us and sell us cistern water in sufficient quantities. To my surprise I also found that easy access to the site had been made possible by a hard-top road constructed in the spring of 1966, just prior to the time when I spent several weeks in the country exploring the various sites that were on my lists as possible candidates for excavation. This was in contrast to my first visit, 13 years earlier, when we could reach the site only by means of a four-wheel drive car over impossible dirt roads that hardly deserved the name roads. Comparative proximity to Amman--15 road miles--a large modern city where supplies and housing facilities for the expedition could easily be found also played a role in my choice.

Last but not least there were historical considerations that led me to choose Tell Hesbân as the site for our work. In its modern Arabic name one

easily recognizes the biblical name Heshbon, the name of a city that played an important role in the stories of the early phases of the occupation of the Promised Land by the Israelites. The city is mentioned in 21 Old Testament passages and ten of these 21 passages refer to its conquest by Israel under Moses' leadership.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of these texts commentators of all persuasions believed that Heshbon had been the capital of the Amorite king Sihon who tried by force of arms to prevent the Israelites from passing through his country, but who was defeated in battle. In this way his capital city and country passed into the hands of the victorious Israelites and they were later assigned to the tribes of Reuben and Gad as possessions.

Since Heshbon is thus intimately connected with the Exodus stories any archaeological evidence found in the excavations of the site could therefore be expected to shed light on certain problems of the Exodus. There was in the first place the date of the Exodus that had not yet been established to the satisfaction of all scholars. While hardly any Biblical historian doubts the historicity of the Exodus, they do not all agree with regard to its date. The majority of scholars date this event in the 13th century B.C., while certain chronological statements in the Bible and some historical considerations seem to point to a date in the 15th century B.C. for the Exodus, a date which I have always defended. In choosing Tell Hesbân, I therefore hoped that the excavations of this site would produce evidence that would bring us a little closer to a solution of this problem.

<sup>1</sup>Num. \*21:21-35; 323, 37; Deut. \*1:4; \*224-36; \*3:1-6; \*4:46; \*29:7; Josh. \*9:10; \*12:1-5; 13:8-28; 21:39; Judg. \*11:19-26; 1 Chron. 6:81; Neh. \*9:22; Songs of Songs 7:4; Isa. 15:4; 16:8-9; Jer. 48:2, 34, 45; 49:3. Passages that deal with Heshbon's conquest by the Israelites are prefixed by an asterisk.



Another intriguing problem was the following: Nelson Glueck who had made the first thorough archaeological survey of Jordan during the years preceding World War II had, in spite of careful examination of the mound of Hesbân on May 23, 1933, failed to find any pottery earlier than the Roman period with the exception of one lonely sherd of the Early Iron Age (12th century B.C.).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Bernhard W. Anderson reported in 1964 of having picked up nine sherds of that early period in the autumn of 1963, including the head of a figurine on the same site.<sup>3</sup> Was it possible that in the deeper strata of the mound, covered by the ruins and debris of later periods, remains of the Late Bronze Age were hidden? If the Iron Age remains had been elusive to Nelson Glueck in 1933, but were fully evident in the survey of Bernhard Anderson, carried out 30 years later, might we not experience a similar situation with earlier material? Questions like these went through my mind when I pondered my assignment to choose a site for excavations.

Ever since I had visited the impressive tell for the first time in 1953, a tell which is even a few meters higher than the famous neighboring Mt. Nebo, I was attracted to Tell Hesbân by a strange fascination. Here was a site never touched by the spade of an archaeologist, in which a famous ancient city was buried, the first city conquered by the Israelites, a site that seemed, as it were, to beg for an archaeological investigation. It was for these reasons that I returned to this mound repeatedly in the summer of 1966 during my search

<sup>2</sup>Nelson Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, I, "Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research," 14 (Philadelphia, PA, 1934), 6.

<sup>3</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, "Report on the Fall Field Trip Program of the School," *Archaeological Newsletter of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 3 (1963-1964), pp. 1-2.

for a site to be attacked by Andrews University and ultimately chose that site as is now well known.

Fifteen years have passed since that choice was made. Five successful seasons of excavations have been carried out--in 1968, 1971, 1973, 1974, and 1976--the last two seasons under the directorship of Dr. Lawrence T. Geraty.<sup>4</sup> But I should not fail to mention that we also had two failures when we were forced to abort our plans, first in 1967 when the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War broke out on the same day on which we were scheduled to start our excavations, and again in 1970 due to the outbreak of the civil war in Jordan, three hours after I reached Amman.

And what have been the results of our excavations which have gouged out of that ancient hill long trenches and deep holes in all directions and have considerably disfigured, in the process of our work, its outward appearance? Let me state right at the outset that to our great surprise we discovered that the site was occupied not earlier than the 12th century B.C. This result of our five-season work must be considered to be a fact. Sufficient and extensive areas of the ancient mound have been excavated down to bedrock to make it virtually certain that we have obtained a reliable profile of the history of this mound from its earliest occupation to its eventual and final abandonment in the Middle Ages. It is highly unlikely that any additional excavations would change the picture

<sup>4</sup>Extensive but preliminary reports of all five seasons have been published by staff members of the expedition in the *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (henceforth abbreviated *AUSS*), 7 (1969), 97-239; 11 (1973), 1-144; 13 (1975), 1-22, 101-247; 14 (1976), 1-216; 16 (1978), 1-303. Popular accounts appeared in the *Biblical Archaeologist* (henceforth abbreviated *BA*), 32 (1969), 26-41 and in *Archaeology*, 321 (Jan.-Feb., 1979), 10-20.



of the history of Tell Hesbân obtained by us during our five seasons of excavations.

We now know that the earliest occupation at Tell Hesbân dates to the Early Iron Age, the 12th century B.C., which is the period of the biblical Judges. Furthermore, the site was inhabited during the period of the Hebrew Kings as well as in the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods, but certainly not in the time of Moses when the Israelites entered the land, regardless of whether one accepts the 15th century B.C. date for the Exodus or dates that event in the 13th century B.C.

This fact forces every Bible scholar interested in Old Testament history to reexamine his sources and see where his interpretation of the biblical texts needs either adjustments or corrections. It is only natural that one who has lived with Heshbon's investigation for a decade and a half, as I have, has spent a great amount of time and given serious considerations to alternate interpretations of the biblical texts relating to Heshbon and its early history. Several possibilities emerge from this process of reevaluation of the evidence.

One explanation which has been proposed by several scholars, from whom one at least has published his views, is that the whole story of the occupation of the Promised Land in which Heshbon plays such a prominent role, is unhistorical. I refer here to the work of John Van Seters who defended this view in an article published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.<sup>5</sup> To me as a conservative

<sup>5</sup>John Van Seters, "The Conquest of Sihon's Kingdom: A Literary Examination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (henceforth abbreviated *JBL*), 91 (1972), 182-197. But see also the negative response to Van Seter's thesis by John R. Bartlett, "The Conquest of Sihon's Kingdom: A Literary Re-examination," *JBL*, 97 (1978), 347-351, and Van Seter's reply in *JBL*, 99 (1980), 117-119.

student of the Bible this view is totally unacceptable. I simply cannot believe that the very strong Israelite tradition about the Exodus, desert wandering and occupation history is legendary. Therefore I reject the solution which Van Seters and some like-minded scholars have arrived at with regard to the problems created by our failure to find remains at Tell Hesbân of the biblical Heshbon from the time of Moses.

Another possible interpretation, perhaps the most attractive one at present, is that the city of Heshbon of Moses' time was located at another site in the vicinity of Tell Hesbân and that after its conquest by the Israelites and its assignment to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, one of the new owners, namely the Reubenites chose a virgin site to build a new settlement but took the old name along and transferred it to their new city.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>That the Reubenites rebuilt the city is specifically stated in Num. 32:37. Although this statement is found in the Pentateuch, seemingly indicating that the building of Heshbon by the Reubenites took place in Moses' lifetime, this passage must be a textual gloss by a later scribe just as Gen. 12:6b; 36:31-39; Deut. 34:1-12; and other passages are obvious glosses.

That the rebuilding of the city of Heshbon could not have been carried out in Moses' lifetime by the Reubenites is evident from the following facts. In the 5th month of the 40th year of the wilderness wandering the Israelites were still in the desert west of Edom, where Aaron died "on Mt. Hor" (Num. 33:38-39). Six months later Moses began his farewell addresses in the Plains of Moab after his military victories of Sihon and Og on the 1st day of the 11th month of the 40th year after the Exodus (Deut. 1:3). This means that the march around the territories of Edom and Moab, and the successful wars against the two Amorite kingdoms were all accomplished between the 5th and 11th months of that same year. About 70 days later, on the 10th day of the first month of the following year, the Israelites crossed over the Jordan to western Palestine (Josh. 4:19). During these 70 days Moses presented his several farewell addresses to his people, then ascended Mt. Nebo where he died, after which the Israelites mourned his death for 30 days (Deut. 34:8). It is obvious that this leaves no time for the Reubenites to have rebuilt Heshbon so that Moses could have included a record of it in his own memoirs. We are therefore forced to conclude that this state-



This phenomenon of moving city names from one place to another finds several examples in Palestine of which three may be given. For instance Old Testament Jericho was located on a mound now known as Tell es-Sultan. New Testament Jericho, however, the Jericho which Jesus knew, had been moved about 2 km. (1.25 mi.) to the southwest of Tell es-Sultan and straddled the Wadi Kelt, while modern Jericho occupies a site, which lies about 2 km. (1.25 mi.) east of New Testament Jericho and about 2 km. (1.25 mi.) southeast of Old Testament Jericho. Another example is ancient Lachish, the ruins of which have been rediscovered and excavated at Tell ed-Duweir, while the city's name moved in Roman times to a site 17.5 km. (11 mi.) to the west where it is now known as Umm Lakis. A third and rather famous example is Zion, which first was the name of the city of David (2 Sam. 5:6-10; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron. 11:4-9). Later the name Zion was transferred to the Temple mound in Solomon's time (Ps. 132:13; etc.). And finally Zion became the name of the western hill of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, a name it still bears, although that hill never even was part of the inhabited city of Jerusalem in biblical times.

It is for this reason that we have looked for a suitable site near Tell Heshbān which may be a candidate for the Heshbon of Moses' time. A large mound of 17 acres in size is Jalul, some 5 km. (3 mi.) east of Madaba, or about 9 km. (6 mi.) southeast of Tell Heshbān, which for many years has been known as a site that contains remains which reach back uninterruptedly to patriarchal times. Our Heshbon expedition conducted a very

ment of the building of Heshbon by the members of the tribe of Reuben (Num. 32:37) must be a later addition to Moses' narrative.

careful archaeological survey of this tell during the 1976 excavation season and found that about 9% of all pottery sherds picked up on the surface of the mound came from the Late Bronze Age (16th-13th century B.C.). But also sizeable numbers of sherds were found of the previous periods of occupation.<sup>7</sup> This would agree with the biblical information that Heshbon had a long history before it fell into the hands of the Amorite king Sihon, if Jalul is the site of the Amorite Heshbon that previously belonged to Moab before the Amorites conquered it (Num. 21:26).

Dr. Geraty is planning to excavate Jalul, but it is uncertain whether it will be possible to prove that Jalul is the Heshbon of Moses' time, because only inscriptional material could actually provide such an incontrovertible proof, and such evidence is not often found. Archaeologists are not always as lucky as the excavators of Tell ed-Duweir who found during their work the famous Lachish Letters which contained inscriptional evidence that the site they were excavating was indeed Lachish.<sup>8</sup> Seldom have Palestinian sites provided such proof, though Lachish is not the only site where inscriptional material showed what the ancient name of the city which was being excavated really was. Arad, Beth-shean, Gezer, Gibeon, and Hazor are other biblical cities of which the identifications have been verified by inscriptions found at the sites mentioned.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Robert Ibach, Jr., "An Intensive Surface Survey of Jalul," *AUSS*, 16 (1978), 215-222.

<sup>8</sup>Harry Torczyner *et al*, *Lachish I* (London, 1938), p. 84.

<sup>9</sup>During the excavations of Arad, a bowl was discovered on which the name Arad was scratched seven times. Y. Aharoni, "Arad," *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (henceforth abbreviated *EAEHL*), 1 (Jerusalem, 1975), 82.

Two Egyptian steles found during the excavations of Tell el-Husn mention Beth-shean in Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions in a context which makes the identification of the mound with ancient Beth-

Even Tell Hesbân may have provided inscriptional proof that it was indeed Heshbon in the 6th century B.C. If professor Frank M. Cross' reading of the slightly damaged initial line of a 13-line ostrakon is correct. This ostrakon, discovered by Dr. Geraty in 1978 during clean-up operations at the pool of Heshbon, begins according to Cross' reading, "To Heshbon."<sup>10</sup>

If the site of Jalul indeed covers the site of the earliest Heshbon, then it must be assumed that after the rebuilding of Heshbon on a new site by members of the tribe of Reuben in the period of the Judges, the old city, called Heshbon up to that time, received a new name which has been lost since no biblical name, known to us, is recognizable in the name Jalul.

We should also consider the possibility that King Sihon's capital was not more than his royal residence, perhaps a small castle, although it is called an "city," in Num. 21:26, but so also is Gibeon of Saul (1 Sam. 20:42), the residence and capital of the first king of Israel, of which the

shean virtually certain. Alan Rowe, *The Topography and History of Beth-shean* (Philadelphia, PA, 1930, pp. 15, 28.

Gezer's identification with Tell Jezer is proved by several boundary inscriptions that have been found in an arc some distance from Tell Jezer. W. G. Dever, "Gezer," *EAEHL*, 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 428, 443.

Gibeon's identification with el-Jib was verified by the discovery of 31 jar handles inscribed with the name Gibeon during the excavations. J. B. Pritchard, "Gibeon," *EAEHL*, 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 446.

A cuneiform tablet, dated to the first half of the second millennium B.C., was picked up by a tourist at Tell el-Qedah. It contains the record of a litigation involving real estate in Hazor and confirms the identification of Tell el-Qedah with ancient Hazor. William W. Hallo and Hayim Tadmor, "A Lawsuit from Hazor," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 27 (1977), 1-11.

<sup>10</sup>Frank M. Cross, Jr., "An Unpublished Ammonite Ostrakon from Hesbân," forthcoming in *The Archaeology of Jordan and Other Studies* (S. H. Horn Festschrift).

excavations show that it was not more than a little fortress.<sup>11</sup> Our notion of the meaning "city" is influenced by the size of our modern western cities. Such comparisons easily mislead us in visualizing the real sizes of ancient cities. It is a fact, not realized by many, that the ancient cities of Palestine, including fortified towns, were extremely small settlements. Jericho had a size of 10 acres when it reached its largest size under the Hyksos during the 16th century B.C.<sup>12</sup> and it takes only a few minutes to walk around the whole ancient city. Famous Megiddo, the main fortress city of the Plain of Megiddo, of which Pharaoh Thutmose III said its conquest was like "the conquest of a thousand cities," had a size of 15 acres.<sup>13</sup> Only one city in ancient Palestine was really large: Hazor in Galilee which with a size of 175 acres was probably the largest city of ancient Palestine<sup>14</sup> for even Jerusalem reached only about one third of that size in its heyday in Old Testament times.<sup>15</sup> Hence we should not expect Heshbon to have been a large impregnable city in Moses' time, but perhaps only a small royal residence, the site of which has not yet been discovered.

Furthermore, the name Heshbon may have had a larger meaning than to have been the name of a city only. The term "Sihon, the king of Heshbon" which is frequently encountered in Scripture may

<sup>11</sup>Paul Lapp, "Tell el-Fûl," *BA*, 28 (1965), 1-4.

<sup>12</sup>Kathleen M. Kenyon, "Jericho," *EAEHL*, 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 554.

<sup>13</sup>Aharoni, "Megiddo," *EAEHL*, 3 (Jerusalem, 1977), 830.

<sup>14</sup>Y. Yadin, "Hazor," *EAEHL*, 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 475.

<sup>15</sup>All estimates with regard to the size of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah when the city had reached its largest size in Old Testament times are uncertain. The map of *EAEHL*, 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 584, shows Jerusalem to have had a size of about 60 acres while the map of Benjamin Mazar's *The Mountain of the Lord* (Garden City, NY, 1975), p. 56, depicts a slightly larger city of about 64 acres.



be an indication that Sihon ruled over a land Heshbon just as the Amorite king Og is called "King of Bashan," where Bashan is obviously the name of a country. In some passages, such as Deut. 29:7 and Josh. 9:10 "Sihon, the king of Heshbon" and "Og, the king of Bashan" are put together in parallel phrases.

After all these preliminaries let me try to reconstruct what seems to have happened with regard to Heshbon before some members of the tribe of Reuben occupied the site in the 12th century B.C. and called their new settlement Heshbon, the site where Andrews University carried out archaeological excavations for the first time in modern history.

Either in the 15th century B.C., as I and some other scholars believe, or in the 13th century B.C., according to the majority of biblical historians, the Exodus occurred. The prophet Hosea expresses it in the poetic words, "When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1). This small, young nation, called in Deut. 7:7 "the fewest of all peoples," then lived and wandered in and around the Sinai peninsula for nearly four decades. As former slaves they were not trained in the art of warfare, for which reason Moses did not lead them to the Promised Land by way of the shortest route along the Mediterranean coast where they would have encountered settled and hostile nations (Ex. 13:17), but toward the south where in desert conditions they could develop into a force that would become confident to successfully meet their foes. There at Mt. Sinai they received the Decalogue, their Constitution as it were, and other religious and civil laws and there they constructed their portable tent-sanctuary, the Tabernacle, to be the center of their cult services.

Once during their early moves through the desert the Israelites came out on top in a military encounter with hostile desert folk, the Amalekites (Ex. 18:8-13), but when the Israelites a year later tried against Moses' advice to gain entrance to the Promised Land from the south by means of force they were thoroughly defeated near Hormah (Num. 14:45; Deut. 1:44). This is probably the large site of Tel Masos, 13 acres in size, 7 mi. east of Beersheba.<sup>16</sup> This painful experience was evidently repeated in the same general area at a later encounter with the forces of the king of Arad (Num. 21:1).

Finally, in the 40th year of their desert wanderings Moses considered the new generation that had grown up since the Exodus strong enough to enter the Promised Land and get at least a foothold in it, for their small number prevented them from occupying at once the whole land, a country of the size of New Jersey. For that reason the Lord told them that He would give them this country only gradually, since otherwise the wild animals would take over (Ex. 23:29-30; Deut. 7:22). Furthermore, having suffered two severe defeats in southern Palestine, it was evidently wiser to try to enforce an entrance to the country from the east--through Transjordan--which at that time was very sparsely populated as the archaeological surveys of Nelson Glueck and others have shown.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>On the identification of Tel Masos with biblical Hormah see A. Kempinski, *EAEHL*, 3 (Jerusalem, 1977), 816-817.

<sup>17</sup>Glueck states that his surface explorations showed that there was a "gap in the history of permanent settlement extending from the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 13th century B.C." Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (New Haven, CT, 1940), p. 149. Later discoveries have shown that this radical conclusion must be modified. See G. Lankaster Harding, *The Antiquities of Jordan* (London, 1963), pp. 32-33; J. Maxwell Miller, "Archaeological Survey of Central Moab: 1978," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 234 (Spring, 1979), p. 51. However, the survey of our



However, since the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, three tribes closely related by blood to the Israelites, controlled parts of the eastern country, the Israelites were not allowed to occupy any of their territories or even meet them in hostile fashion (Deut. 1:5-6, 9, 10). For this reason the Israelites were obliged to circumvent the areas controlled by the Edomites and Moabites through long detours around these tribal territories. The Ammonites posed no problem since their territory lay so far to the east that there was no danger of encountering them in battle or encroaching on their territory when the Israelites marched through Transjordan to reach the Promised Land that lay west of the River Jordan.

However, two territories were of a somewhat different nature, territories over which Amorite rulers held sway, first the area between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok (Num. 21:34), north of Moab, and second the territory farther north. The former area had evidently only recently been conquered from the Moabites by the Amorites under their king Sihon (Num. 21:26-30) who may have come to Transjordan from western Palestine while the latter area may have been under the control of the Amorite king Og for some time.

That Moses had no intentions of occupying eastern Palestine and evidently considered only western Palestine the "Promised Land" is evident from the fact that he sent an embassy to Sihon with the request to let the Israelites pass through his territory promising that they would stay on the "Kings' Highway" and would neither harm the crops

expedition of the Heshbon area has shown that Glueck's findings were more or less correct, although one cannot speak of a "gap in permanent settlement" but rather of a "sparsity of population" during the Middle and Late Bronze Age. Ibach, "Expanded Archaeological Survey of the Hesbân Region," *AUSS*, 16 (1978), 209-210, 212.

of the local population nor drink any of their water without permission (Num. 21:21-22). That Moses did not include eastern Palestine in the land which he considered to have been promised to his people by the Lord is also clearly evident by the fact that he felt denied an entrance to that land when he had to die east of the River Jordan on the summit of Mt. Nebo (Deut. 3:23-27).

Yet Sihon either did not trust the assurances of Moses that the Israelites would peacefully cross his country or wanted to destroy this migrating little nation for fear that it sooner or later might pose a possible danger to his kingdom. Whatever his reasons were he is said to have "gathered all his men together, and" that he "went out to Israel in the wilderness and came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel" (Num. 21:23).

Unfortunately Jahaz has not yet been identified although it is both mentioned in the Bible and on the 9th-century B.C. Moabite Stone of King Mesha. Some scholars have suggested identifying Jahaz with Jalul<sup>18</sup> which I rather want to identify with the earlier Heshbon as I have already explained, while others have suggested Jahaz to be Khirbet et-Teim, a site one mile west of Madaba.<sup>19</sup> I would rather look for a site further south for Jahaz, namely for a site somewhere near the River Arnon, the Wadi Mojib, which formed the southern border of Sihon's kingdom, for it is reasonable to assume that he would have wanted to prevent the Israelites from entering his territory while they were still waiting for his answer to their request to cross it peaceably. Another reason for looking for Jahaz near the River Arnon is the statement of

<sup>18</sup>F.-M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine*, II (Paris, 1938), 354.

<sup>19</sup>E. D. Grohman, "Jahaz," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (Nashville, TN, 1962), 788.



King Mesha of Moab, that he conquered Jahaz and attached it to Dibon.<sup>20</sup> Dibon lies about 5 km. (3 mi.) north of Arnon.

Anyway, it came to a battle in which Sihon was so decisively defeated that he lost both his capital city and all places in his kingdom that were inhabited, which as archaeological investigations in the country have shown were very few indeed at that time.<sup>21</sup> Hence the whole territory which Sihon controlled, namely from the Arnon in the south, the Wadi Mojib, up to the River Jabbok in the north, the Wadi Zerka, fell at once like a ripe apple into the lap of the Israelites (Num. 21:24-25). Before Moses' death, within a few months or even weeks after the battle at Jahaz, he assigned this territory to the tribes of Reuben and Gad at their request (Num. 32:1-32). If Jalul or another Late Bronze-Age site of that area was the site of Heshbon at Moses' time this town or its ruins were then occupied by the members of the tribes of Reuben or Gad until it was decided to rebuild Heshbon on a new site in the 12th century B.C., namely at the site of our excavations at Tell Heshbân. The statement of Num. 32:37 that "the sons of Reuben built Heshbon" must refer to this re-settlement and new founding of the old city at a new site, for the name was evidently transferred from the old city to the new settlement at that time.<sup>22</sup>

This move of the Reubenites away from the old Heshbon and the founding of a new Heshbon at a new site may have been the result of friction

<sup>20</sup>See W. F. Albright's translation of the Moabite Stone inscription in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, NJ, 1950), p. 320.

<sup>21</sup>See note 17.

<sup>22</sup>See also note 6.

between the two tribes Reuben and Gad which had received the territory of King Sihon as a common possession from Moses. Frictions and even warfare between various Hebrew tribes occurred so frequently in Old Testament history that it needs no documentation. However we can only guess what the reasons may have been for the move of the Reubenites away from a city possessed in common with the Gadites. The fact that Gad later appears as the possessor of Heshbon (1 Chron. 6:80-81; Jer. 49:1-6), and the tribe of Reuben almost disappears from biblical history also supports the suggested view that life between the two tribes was not always harmonious and that one, namely Gad, in the end gained supremacy over the other.

Let us hope that the excavations of Andrews University, scheduled to begin at Jalul in the summer of 1982, will shed light on the earlier history of Heshbon.

However, I want to voice a word of caution in order that our expectations may not be shattered by the results of these future excavations. I have already mentioned that we know that Jalul was an inhabited site at the time of Moses. This has been established beyond any doubt by the large number of Bronze-Age pottery sherds already picked up during our surface survey work. Excavations will undoubtedly produce building remains of that time although it may take several seasons of work before they come to light, because they may be covered by the remains of the Iron Age and later periods which must first be excavated, studied and removed before the architectural remains of the Late Bronze Age (1600-1200 B.C.) will come to light. Furthermore, the highest part of the mound of Jalul, the acropolis, will be inaccessible to archaeological work because it is covered by a Moslem cemetery, and it is exactly this area on



the mound where one would expect to find the remains of the ruler's residence if the ancient city of Jalul was the capital of a kingdom. Nevertheless, we all look forward with keen anticipation to see what the excavations of this site will produce.

So far I have dealt with the biblical Heshbon of the time of Moses, the city which we have not yet discovered. Now I want to speak about the biblical Heshbon which we did find and excavate at Tell Hesbân. While there is no question in my mind that Tell Hesbân is the site of Heshbon built by the Reubenites (Num. 32:37), as well as the Heshbon which the author of Song of Songs had in mind and whose doom the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah pronounced, it is a fact that the post-biblical builders at the site, namely the Romans, Byzantines and Moslems from the Umayyads to the Mamluks disturbed and destroyed the earlier building remains. For example all remains of the Iron Age that once covered the highest part of the mound, which we call the acropolis, were removed and in part at least used to fill in a leaky open-air pool of earlier times, when the Roman temple was built on the mound's summit. This monumental structure is depicted on coins that were minted in Eshbus, the name of Heshbon in Roman times. This temple, according to the Heshbon coins, had four frontal columns, a roof that was constructed either in the form of an arch or dome, and possessed the statue of a god or of the emperor in its cella. The image seems to have been visible from the outside. During our excavations we found the stylobates and other parts of the foundations of this temple underneath the ruins of the Christian church of Byzantine time. Furthermore, we discovered that the Romans had laid the foundations of their temple on bedrock after having removed all earlier debris and remnants of buildings which they may have found on the summit of the mound.

Yet we did discover disconnected architectural remains of the Iron Ages I and II, the periods of the Judges and of the kings of Israel, in at least two sectors of the mound, namely on the western slope, our Area C, and on the shelf south of the acropolis, our Areas B and D. Our most impressive and welcome discovery in this respect was a large open-air water reservoir in Area B, of which I want to say something more since this reservoir is a structure that is undoubtedly referred to in Song of Songs 7:4 where the author compares the eyes of his beloved with the "pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim." The location of this pool in the city at a gate, specifically mentioned by name, makes it virtually certain that he is referring to one or more actual open-air water reservoirs.

The Bible mentions pools in connection with five cities, Gibeon, Hebron, Jerusalem, Samaria, and Heshbon. The "Pool of Gibeon" (2 Sam. 3:13) can be dismissed from this list, since it may have been located somewhere outside the city of Gibeon, because a combat of the forces of Israel and Judah took place there. This leaves open-air reservoirs in four cities. The "Pool in Hebron," referred to in 2 Sam. 4:12, has not yet been identified, while the "Pool of Samaria" (1 Kings 22:38) and two pools in Jerusalem, mentioned in Scripture are known. The pool of Samaria was found by the Reisner expedition. It was located in the northern part of the palace enclosure within the casemate wall and had a size of 32.5 x 17 ft.<sup>23</sup> Its precise depth is unknown because only the lower parts of the retaining walls had been preserved. Two pools are mentioned in the Bible that were located within the city walls of Jerusalem. There is first the "Pool of Siloam," which was built originally

<sup>23</sup>J. W. Jack, *Samaria in Ahab's Time* (Edinburgh, 1929), pp. 13, 23.



by King Hezekiah between the two walls at the southern end of the tunnel that bears the king's name (2 Kings 20:20; Isa. 22:11; John 9:7). This pool has been rebuilt a few times in its history of over two and a half thousand years, but it is still in use at the present time.<sup>24</sup> Second there is the Pool of Bethzatha (Bethesda) of John 5:2 which lay in the northern part of the city of Christ's time. This pool has been excavated by the White Fathers of Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

This leaves the "Pool in Heshbon." It was during our third season of excavations, in 1973, that the first indications were found that we had discovered the bottom floor and part of the eastern retaining wall of a 7 m. deep open-air reservoir of the Iron Age within the ancient city.<sup>26</sup> The excavations of the years 1974, 1976 and 1978 confirmed the initial conclusions drawn from the evidence dug up at the 1973 season.<sup>27</sup> This large pool was nearly square, 17.5 m. (57 ft.) on a side and 7 m. (23 ft.) deep. Covering 3,250 sq. ft. it was nearly six times as large as the pool in Samaria which covered only 552 sq. ft. The Heshbon pool could hold about 2,200,000 liters (about 500,000 gallons) of water. Its floor consisted of three layers of plaster with a total thickness of about one foot laid on bedrock. This plaster was about as strong

<sup>24</sup>Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>25</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Rediscovery of Bethesda* (Louisville, KY, 1966).

<sup>26</sup>Roger S. Boraas and Siegfried H. Horn, "The Third Campaign at Tell Hesbân (1973)," *AUSS*, 13 (1975), 107; James A. Sauer, "Heshbon 1973: Area B and Square D.4," *AUSS*, 13 (1975), 161, 164-167.

<sup>27</sup>Boraas and Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Fourth Campaign at Tell Hesbân (1974)," *AUSS*, 14 (1976), 9; Sauer, "Heshbon 1974: Area B and Square D.4," *AUSS*, 14 (1976), 59, 60; Boraas and Geraty, "The Fifth Campaign at Tell Hesbân (1976)," *AUSS*, 16 (1978), 12, 13; Sauer, "Heshbon 1976: Area B and Square D.4," *AUSS*, 16 (1978), 47, 48.

as cement and both so watertight and airtight that even plant materials embedded in it had retained their shape, color and composition. The eastern retaining wall, the only one of the four walls excavated by us from corner to corner, consisted in part of a wall of well-dressed stones laid in header-stretcher fashion with its inner face covered by a thick layer of plaster and in part of the original rock of the mound, cut into a vertical wall so that it would form one continuous line with the stone wall, the two parts having a total length of about 17.5 m. (57 ft.).

The date for the construction of this pool was provided by a few 9th/8th-century sherds discovered behind the eastern retaining wall.

Why was such a large pool built near the summit of the mound and how could it be filled with water? Since the area of the mound above the pool amounts to about 4,500 sq. m. (about 50,000 sq. ft.), the average annual rainfall of 400 mm. (about 16 in.) could have produced about one million liters (about 250,000 gallons) of water, or only half the amount needed to fill the pool. This figure takes no consideration of evaporation, collection of water in other cisterns or pools, and general run-off, which means that the open-air reservoir, that could hold 500,000 gallons of water, could not even have received half the amount of rain water to fill it. Hence it must have been filled by a large train of donkeys, and must have served a military purpose, namely to provide sufficient water for a fortress under siege. Dr. Larry Herr suggests therefore that it was constructed under a strong government when Heshbon was a border fortress, either by one of the Omride kings of Israel to protect Israel's possessions in Transjordan against incursions from Moab, or by King Mesha of Moab after his rebellion and conquest of the



area of Heshbon to protect his northern border against Israel, his former overlord.<sup>28</sup>

I do not need to emphasize the importance of this discovery for the identification of Tell Hesbân with the post-Mosaic biblical Heshbon. Pools in Palestinian cities were rarities because the extremely small sizes of these cities left not much space for luxuries such as open-air water reservoirs. As already stated the Bible speaks of only four cities having had pools within their confines. In three of these four cities, Heshbon included, and nowhere else such pools have been rediscovered by modern excavations. Hence there can be no doubt that Tell Hesbân is the site of the city of Heshbon which the author of Song of Songs had in mind when he compared the eyes of his girl friend with Heshbon's pools.<sup>29</sup>

The identification of Tell Hesbân with the Heshbon of Song of Songs naturally has a bearing on the prophesies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, two prophets who lived a hundred years apart, but who pronounced the doom of Heshbon in similar terms

<sup>28</sup>According to Larry Herr's unpublished summary of his final report of the Iron-Age remains at Tell Hesbân, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>29</sup>A construction date of this pool in the 9th century B.C., a hundred or more years after King Solomon's reign, raises questions about the date of Song of Songs, which is apparently attributed to that king in ch. 1:1. Three possible solutions to this difficulty may be suggested: First, the author, whose name is given as Solomon may not be the king by that name who reigned in the 10th century, but a private individual with the same name living at a later time. Second, the pool excavated by the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition may have had a predecessor, which was destroyed when the later, perhaps larger pool was constructed, whose remains we found. Third, the introductory words, "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (ch. 1:1), may not refer to all the poetical pieces found in the eight chapters but only to some of them. Many commentators have recognized that the book is not a unit, but a collection of several poems that seem to deal with different people and occasions. It is quite possible that some Solomonic poems and some later pieces were combined in post-Solomonic times to form one book.

(Isa. 15:4; 16:8-9; Jer. 48:2, 34-35; 49:3). In the time of these prophets the city belonged to Moab, ever since Mesha's rebellion against Israel in the second half of the 9th century B.C. (2 Kings 3) resulted not only in Moab regaining its independence from Israel which it had lost in David's time, but also in the conquest and retention of much Israelite territory as described on the Moabite Stone. However, during the time of Jeremiah's ministry, namely in the last years of the 7th or the first years of the 6th century B.C., the Ammonites must have come into possession of Heshbon, since it appears as an Ammonite city in that prophet's oracle of doom recorded in Jer. 49:3.

How Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophesies found their fulfillment is not known. Since practically all Iron-Age structures that had existed in the areas excavated by us had been removed already in ancient times by subsequent building operations, we do not know whether Iron-Age Heshbon was destroyed by military action or by an earthquake. The absence of pottery of the Late Persian period, from ca. 500-200 B.C., indicates that the city had ceased to exist at about 500 B.C. and that it then had lain in ruins and remained unoccupied for some three centuries. Hence we can date the fulfillment of the prophesies of doom of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah to a catastrophe of an unknown nature that must have occurred at about 500 B.C.

It was in the Hellenistic period that the mound once more attracted people who started to reoccupy the ruins of the former city. From that time on it grew gradually into an impressive city in Roman times, a period, which lies outside of the subject with which we are concerned in this essay that deals only with Heshbon in Old Testament times, for Heshbon is never mentioned in the New Testament.



You can thus see that five seasons of archaeological exploration at Tell Heshbân have provided us with both negative as well as positive evidence for a reconstruction of biblical history as far as Heshbon is concerned. We know now that King Sihon's residence and capital city, if it can be called that, was located not at Tell Heshbân, but somewhere else, perhaps at Jalul, six miles to the southeast of Tell Heshbân, but that the settlement which members of the tribe of Reuben built in the period of the Judges and to which they attached the name Heshbon, the name of Sihon's former residence, was certainly located at Tell Heshbân. We can also state with confidence that the city mentioned in Song of Songs, Isaiah and Jeremiah is the site excavated by the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition. The discovery of the exceptionally large open-air water reservoir in the ancient city, to which Song of Songs unquestionably refers, has provided the strongest evidence for the identification of Tell Heshbân with biblical Heshbon since it is extremely rare to find such structures in the small cities of ancient Palestine. At the same time this discovery was a welcome verification of a biblical passage.

Let us look forward to the upcoming excavations of Jalul. I as the first director of the Heshbon expedition wish Dr. Geraty and his associates much success in the new project. I hope that he, at the end of perhaps another five seasons of excavations at Jalul may be able to fill in the gaps which still exist in our understanding of the occupational history of the country in the time of Moses, or that he may even be able to correct some of my suggested interpretations of the present archaeological evidence as well as the interpretations of certain biblical passages referring to Heshbon.