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Subject: FW: TeHEP UPDATE NEW YEAR'S DAY EDITION

Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project

Trinity Southwest University,
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA
in a Joint Scientific Project with the
Department of Antiquities,
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

TeHEP UPDATE

1 January 2010

An Exclusive Report for TeHEP Alumni, Financial Supporters, and Friends

IGLOSSARY OF CHRONOLOGICAL TERMS FREQUENTLY USED IN TeHEP UPDATES:

Chalcolithic Period = Copper/Stone Age, 4400-3300 BCE; EBA = Early Bronze Age, 3300-2350 BCE; IBA = Intermediate Bronze Age, 2350-2000 BCE; MBA = Middle Bronze Age, 2000-1550 BCE; LBA = Late Bronze Age, 1550-1200 BCE; IA1 = Iron Age 1, 1200-1000 BCE; IA2 = Iron Age 2, 1000-586 BCE; IA3 = Iron Age 3/Persian Period, 586-332 BCE; HP = Hellenistic/Greek Period, 332-63 BCE; ERP = Early Roman Period, 63 BCE-168 CE]

Hello All:

Four weeks down, four to go. It's almost hard to believe that we've hit approximately the mid-point in Season Five of the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project. Week four of year five. Wow! How did we get here? It seems like yesterday that my wife, Danette, and I, with Travis and Charity Jones, were walking over the top of Tall el-Hammam for the first time, the last in a series of ancient sites that we explored in the summer of 2002.

I remember the first time I walked out to the western end of upper Hammam. It had been the geography of the biblical text (Gen 13 specifically) that had brought us to the area of the eastern Jordan Disk. It was the precise location of the Cities of the Plain (Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim) that Lot had viewed from the vicinity of Bethel and Ai (WNW of Jericho on the top of the Central Highlands, 12 miles N of Jerusalem), and to which he had traversed an easterly course from Bethel/Ai until he reached Sodom.

From that moment, standing on the edge of the upper tall, that whole scenario made perfect sense. Genesis presented Sodom as the biggest Bronze Age city on the eastern Kikkar of the Jordan, and now I was standing at the highest point on the mostly-green Jordan Plain atop the biggest Bronze Age site in the region. Logically, it had to be Sodom. At that point I realized that every other geographical configuration relative to Sodom's location was distorted, wrenched out of its "natural" shape, a twisting of the facts that ignored the obvious.

I could sense that the last tooth of the geographical key had just engaged with its mirror-mate in the lock, full in. But would the key turn? Would the lock click open? I knew that the only proper way to open this door was by

science, by archaeology, not solely by geographical logic. Only an excavation could provide the final turn-and-push that might open the door to the city of Sodom.

As I continued to gaze out across the circular, verdant expanse of the southern Jordan Valley from atop this magnificent mound of ruins, I realized that I was alone. My companions had all headed back to the van parked about a quarter-mile to the E. I began walking slowly back across upper Hammam. I can still ‘hear’ the silence. With every step my boots made a crackly, crunching sound on the dry ground. But it wasn’t ‘ground’ in the normal sense. It was a gravelly matrix of brownish, decomposed mudbricks, an ancient city melted away by millennia of winter rains and summer winds. I stopped about halfway (today, our Field UC). My mind was churning, grinding, trying to process the implications of what I’d just come to understand.

I hadn’t come here looking for a reason to excavate. I’d come to get some firsthand experience with the geography of Genesis 13. Most contemporary scholars had put Sodom toward the southern end of the Dead Sea, while others were convinced that the Cities of the Plain were entirely mythical, nonexistent, the figment of an ancient-and-wild Jewish imagination. I knew now that both camps were wrong.

But how to prove that? Sometimes I hate logic. My life was busy as it was. “Dig.” That’s all I could hear in my head. Dig. Excavations are expensive, and fundraising is a drag. Dig. It was just too much work, too much time. Dig. Somebody else should do this, it’s too important, and who am I? Dig.

Oh....crud (OK, that isn’t what I really said). Dig. I’ll see what happens. Dig. I give up.

Dig. I stood there for a few moments, then dropped down on one knee and dug my fingers into the brown soil, lifting a handful of the ancient matrix. Working the dirt in my hand, it sifted out from between my fingers and dropped back to the surface in multiple streams. As I watched the sand, pebbles, and tiny bits of pottery drain from my palm, I said, “Someday you’ll tell me what you know.” I stood up, clapped the remaining dust from my hand, and, as they say, the rest is history.

Fast-forward to November 2009, New Orleans, LA, the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research. At that meeting, I gave a paper recounting the discoveries from Season Four of the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project. While, by now, many scholars have moved in our direction vis-à-vis the location of the Cities of the Plain and Sodom, it’s interesting how many still believe that the story is fictitious. For example, at the ASOR “poster parade” (where large posters depicting various archaeological digs and projects were displayed) I was standing near our “Tall el-Hammam/Sodom” poster when Dr William Dever came over to me and said, “That’s the closest you’ll ever get to Sodom. It just doesn’t exist!” (Some of you may recall that he’s the same guy who said of me in a 2007 *Wall Street Journal* article, “No responsible scholar goes out with a trowel in one hand and a Bible in the other.”) Bill and I are pretty good friends, and still get along very well, but this simply shows that friendship doesn’t get in the way of a good anti-biblical bias!

A short while later, one of the editors of *Biblical Archaeology Review* stopped by at our poster. He’d actually written a pretty nice article for the *BAR* website that discussed our site and theory. One of our group that was there at the time asked him, “Why hasn’t [*BAR* editor/owner] Hershel Shanks, had Dr. Collins write an article for the magazine on Tall el-Hammam and Sodom?” He answered, turning to me, “Honestly, I think it’s because he thinks you use the Bible too much.” I had to laugh; then I said, “That’s pretty good coming

from a guy with a magazine called *BIBLICAL Archaeology Review!*"

All of us need to wake up and realize just how serious the erosion of confidence in the Bible has become in our society. Most biblical scholars, much less the more secular archeological community, no longer hold to the historical veracity of the Old Testament, particularly the Pentateuch (Books of Moses). This doubt, even derision, of the Bible has now permeated our elementary, middle, and high schools, our colleges and universities, and, yes, even most of our seminaries!

Now, let me give you a solid reason to give generous financial support to the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project. TeHEP represents the cutting edge of research into the historical factuality of the Bible. This research is (and will continue as long as we're able to fund the project) providing a foundation for confidence in the historical accuracy of Scripture. In a nutshell, here it is: As this and next generation perceives the historical credibility of the Bible, so goes Western Civilization. Are you getting this? We're in the throws of a culture-impacting, history-molding battle for the Bible that will determine what the future looks like for this planet.

Is this battle worth fighting? Is this battle worth funding? Is what the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project brings to this battle important? Absolutely, even uniquely. Never before has a scientific project been positioned in such a way that it can counteract the present consequences of higher biblical criticism in the way TeHEP can and is. If you don't believe that, then I challenge you to look some teenagers in the eyes and ask them if they have total confidence in the Bible. Gallup and other pollsters have done that recently, and found that less than half of evangelical Christian kids have that! That's right. Over half of the kids in so-called Bible-believing churches have lost confidence in that once-greatest-of-books.

I believe we can change this. I think we can have an impact on young minds through scientific facts that demonstrate the historical authenticity and accuracy of Scripture. But we haven't got long to do this. If we can't do something with the current generation, then the battle is likely lost. Now is the time to stand. Now is the time to give.

Today, on this first day of the New Year, 2010, I pray that each and every one of you will determine to stand with us in this all-important battle. With your financial support, we can make it through this season, and continue to make our case for the Book of books.

Digging the Bible,

Steven Collins, TeHEP Director

Dean, College of Archaeology, Trinity Southwest University

P.S. Please forward this to whomever you like!

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Donations can be mailed to: TSU; 5600 Eubank NE, Suite 130; Albuquerque, NM USA 87111.

For detailed information about the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, visit the official TeHEP website: www.tallelhammam.com.