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Heshbon's History

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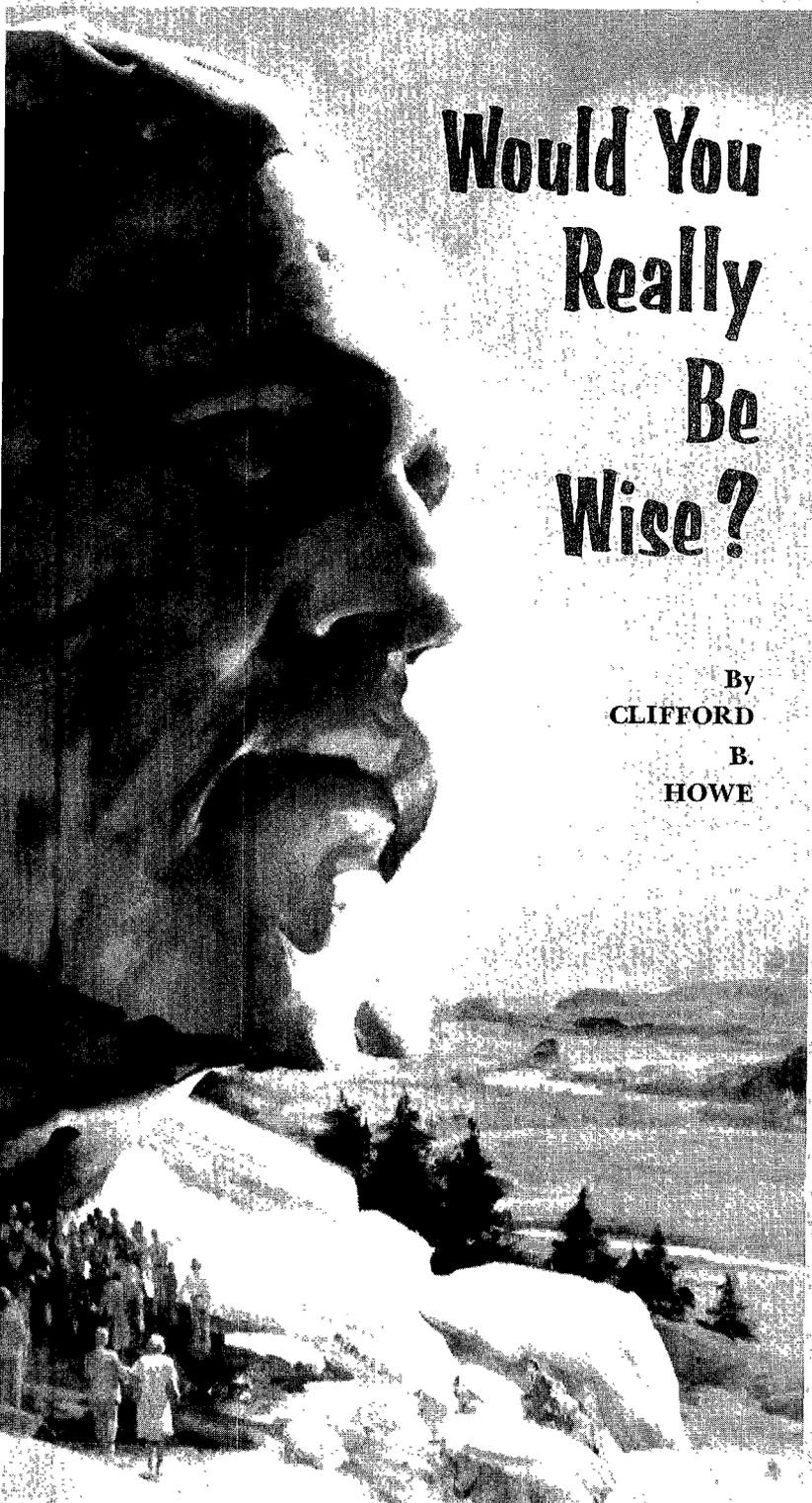


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Would You Really Be Wise?

By
**CLIFFORD
B.
HOWE**

If you were the world's greatest geologist and knew every rock and yet knew not Him who is the Rock of Ages, would you really be wise?

If you were the most brilliant botanist and knew every flower in the vast field of botanical science, and yet knew not Him who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley, would you really be wise?

If you were the most renowned astronomer and knew every star in the limitless reaches of space, and yet knew not Him who is the Bright and Morning Star, would you really be wise?

If you were the best-informed scientific wizard in this marvelous, enlightened age of ours and knew all the laws of electronics, nuclear fission, and the complicated mathematical calculations of rocketry and space exploration, and yet knew not Him who is the Light of the World, would you really be wise?

If you were the most successful businessman and knew all the laws of world economics and the fine art of business administration, and yet knew not Him who made and owns the world, would you really be wise?

If you were the most famous and popular of all celebrities and knew the way to success, wealth, and fame, and yet knew not Him who said, "I am the way," would you really be wise?

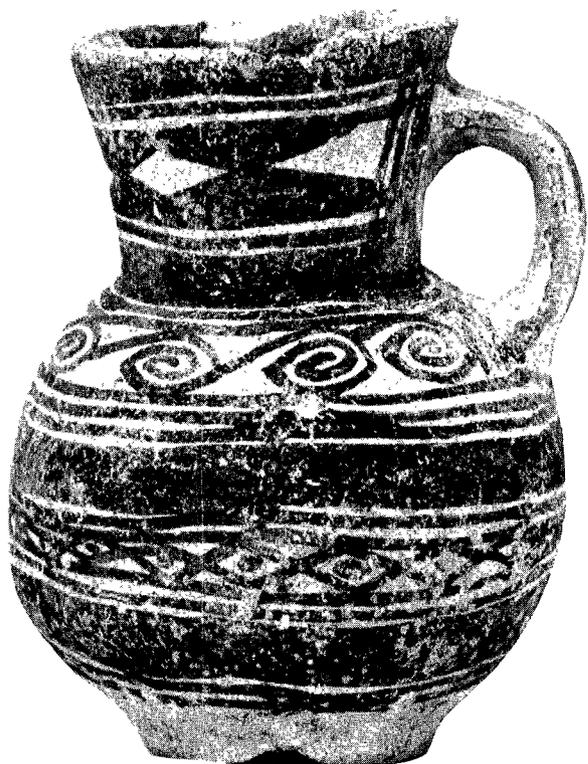
If you were the most noted linguist and knew every dialect and tongue spoken by man, and yet knew not Him who is the living Word, would you really be wise?

If you were the most authoritative sociologist and knew all the ills and problems of mankind and all the laws governing human behavior, and yet knew not Him whose name is Love, would you really be wise?

If you were the most eminent historical and archeological scholar and knew every king and ruler who ever lived, and yet knew not Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, would you really be wise?

If you were the most learned of all the world's sages and knew all the wisdom of the ages, and yet knew not Him whom to know, to love, and to fear is the beginning of wisdom, would you really be wise?

Would You?



AVERY V. DICK PHOTO

Heshbon's History

[This brief account of the history of Heshbon as known before excavations began is based on a B.D. thesis presented by Werner Vyhmeister and deposited in the James White Library of Andrews University. A condensation appeared in *Andrews University Studies*, July 1968, pp. 156-177.]

By SIEGFRIED H. HORN

HESHBON is mentioned first in connection with the Israelite invasion of an area in Transjordan some 40 years after the Exodus. At that time Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites. However, according to Numbers 21:26-30, Sihon had expelled the Moabites from Heshbon, hence the Moabites must have been in possession of that city prior to the arrival of the Amorites. This is further confirmed by the fact that in the writings of Moses (Num. 22:1; 31:12; 33:48; 36:13; Deut. 34:5, 6) the area surrounding Heshbon was called "the plain of Moab" or "the land of Moab." However, in Moses' time the northern border of Moab was the river Arnon, some 25 miles south of Heshbon.

When the Israelites arrived from Egypt they requested from Sihon of Heshbon permission to travel through his land. When Sihon denied this request a war ensued, which the Amorites lost. In the course of the war, Heshbon was taken and apparently destroyed; at least the Biblical record speaks of "the children of Reuben" as having built (or rebuilt) Heshbon after the city was allotted to them (Num. 21:21-26, 34; 32:37; Joshua 13:15, 17).

Later, the city seems to have changed hands, for according to Joshua 21:38, 39, it belonged to the Israelite tribe of Gad. The possession by Gad of the area of Heshbon is confirmed by an inscription of Mesha, king of Moab, who claims to have taken the territory north of the Arnon from the tribe of Gad who had occupied it (Moabite Stone, lines 10, 11). By the time of Judge Jephthah, Heshbon had been in Israelite hands for 300 years (Judges 11:26). It is also said to have been a city in which Levites dwelt (Joshua 21:39; 1 Chron. 6:81).

In Solomon's time "the country of Sihon king of the Amorites," in which Heshbon was situated, is mentioned as belonging to one of the districts into which that king organized his realm (1 Kings 4:19). In the Song of Solomon "the fishpools of Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim" (chap. 7:4) are mentioned. Bath-rabbim seems to have been the name of a city gate.

For two centuries the Bible is silent about Heshbon, but in the time of the prophet Isaiah (*c.* 700 B.C.) Heshbon, together with Medeba, Elealah, and other cities, which had formerly belonged to Israel, appear to be in the hands of the Moabites (Isa. 15:2, 4; 16:8, 9). It is possible that the city fell into the hands of the Moabites as the result of Mesha's conquest of the Gadite territory described on the Moabite Stone, although Heshbon is not mentioned in that inscription. That conquest, described and discussed in three earlier articles (RE-

VIEW, Aug. 15, 22, and 29, 1968), took place in the second half of the ninth century B.C. and preceded Isaiah's prophecy by about 100 years.

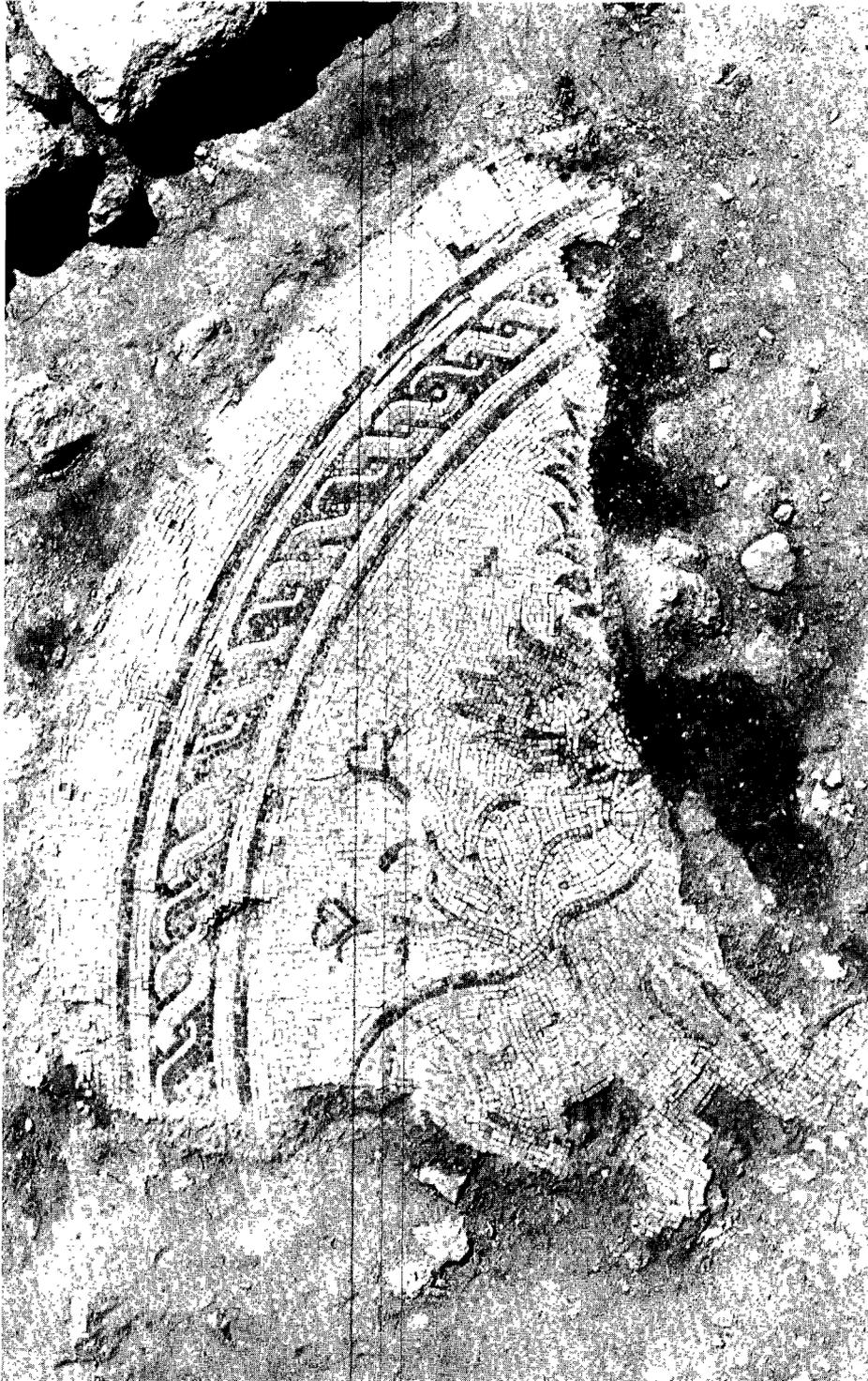
In a prophecy of Jeremiah (chap. 48:2, 34, 45) Heshbon shares the prophet's denunciation with other Moabite cities, indicating Moabite possession in the earlier part of Jeremiah's ministry. However, in a later oracle of Jeremiah (chap. 49:2, 3), Heshbon appears to be an Ammonite city, having apparently changed hands during Jeremiah's life. How and when this happened is uncertain, but it has been suggested that Ezekiel 25:9, 10 casts light on this event. This passage refers to an invasion of Moab by eastern tribes, in connection with which Heshbon may have fallen to the Ammonites.

Heshbon From the Hellenistic Period

During Hellenistic times a strong Jewish population developed in the Transjordan region. In order to bring this region into the Jewish state founded by the Maccabees, their rulers—Jonathan in 147 B.C. and John Hyrcanus in 129 B.C.—annexed territories beyond the Jordan. The last mentioned king captured Madeba (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xiii.9.1), which lies south of Heshbon. Although Heshbon is not mentioned in the records dealing with these wars, there can be little doubt that it must have come into the possession of John Hyrcanus at that time, because it is listed among the cities of Moab that were in Jewish hands during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus, who ruled from 103-76 B.C. (*ibid.*, 15.5).

During the time of Herod the Great (40-44 B.C.), Esbus—as Heshbon was then called—became a fortress city guarding Herod's kingdom against the Nabateans in Transjordan. At the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war in A.D. 66 the city was sacked by the Jews (Josephus, *Wars*, ii.18.1), but it does not seem to have been held by the Jewish rebels for any length of time. After Emperor Trajan in A.D. 106 dissolved the Nabatean kingdom, Esbus became part of the Roman province Arabia Petraea. In the third century it was allowed even to coin its own money for a time.

At what time Esbus became a Christian city is not known, but that it was the seat of a Christian bishop in the fourth century is attested by the records of the Council of Nicea in 325, which repeatedly mention Bishop Gennadius of Esbus. Again the acts of the Council of Ephesus, held in 431, mention a bishop of Esbus whose name was Zosus. At that time the bishop of Esbus seems to



GEORGE T. UNGER PHOTO

Diggers on the AU archeological expedition at Heshbon this past summer found this fragment of a multicolored mosaic floor in what was the apse of an early Christian church.

have been subject to the patriarch of Antioch.

Soon after the invasion of the Arabs in the seventh century, Heshbon seems to have ceased as a Christian city. The last evidence of Heshbon's Christian character consists in a correspondence in the seventh century between Pope Martin I and Theodore of Ebus concerning the latter's orthodoxy. After this correspondence, the name Ebus disappears from the literary sources, reappearing only centuries later in its Arabic form *Hesbân*.

After the Arabic invasion a clear historical reference is not found until 1184, when Ed-Dîn, a biographer of Saladin, the great Moslem leader who defeated the crusaders, referred to *Hesbân* as a village. In his history of Saladin, Ed-Dîn says that the Franks, that is, the crusaders, had taken up positions at *el-Wâleh*, the Biblical Elealeh, while Saladin encamped close to a village called *Hesbân*, before advancing toward Kerak.

Another Arab writer, Abu el-Feda, who died in 1331, said that "the capital of the Belka is Husban." Also during the thirteenth century several other Arabic writers mention *Hesbân*. But after that there is complete silence with regard to this site until the nineteenth century, when, during the age of Near Eastern explorations, *Hesbân* is frequently described by travelers and explorers. However, they know it only as a ruin site, a desolate mound, void of inhabitants.

The present population of the village of *Hesbân* consists of four families who until a few decades ago were Bedouins. They were settled on the eastern slopes of the mound by the Nabulsi family, wealthy landowners who had moved to the *Hesbân* area from western Palestine toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is therefore obvious that the present villagers of *Hesbân* have neither a historical nor an ethnic connection with the people of ancient Heshbon, Roman Ebus, or even with the *Hesbân* of the early Arab periods.

The Identification of the Site

Frequently the question is asked: How do you know *Tell Hesbân* is the site of ancient Heshbon? Fortunately the evidence is rather strong.

First, there is the perpetuation of the ancient city's name. It is true that occasionally a site loses its name or that the name moves to another site, but it is a recognized fact that the Biblical names of many cities have tenaciously clung to their sites even after long periods of desolation. And so we find that Old Testament Heshbon became Ebus in Greek times, but reverted to *Tell Hesbân*

in the Arabic period, with alternative spellings of *Hisban* and *Husban*.

Then there is the association of Heshbon with Elealeh, another Biblical city. In the Old Testament the two cities are always mentioned together where Elealeh occurs (Num. 32:3, 37; Isa. 15:4; 16:9; Jer. 48:34). Elealeh is now *Tell el-'Al*, a mound lying two miles northwest of *Tell Hesbân*. Also Biblical Medeba is associated with Heshbon in Joshua 13:9, 16, 17, and this city, now the flourishing town of Ma'dabâ, is found some six miles south of *Tell Hesbân*.

Furthermore, there is the statement of Eusebius, the third-century church father and church historian, a Palestinian by birth, and bishop of Caesarea. Well acquainted with the Holy Land, he describes numerous Biblical cities and their sites in his book *Onomasticon*. Of Heshbon he says (84:1-6) that it was "now called Ebus,"

and that it was "an important city of Arabia," 20 miles from the Jordan River, lying in the mountains in front of Jericho. Furthermore, he located several other known towns and villages in that area by giving their distances in Roman miles from Ebus. The site of these towns helps, in turn, to determine the site of Heshbon.

Finally, there are three Roman milestones in existence, erected in the second and third centuries of the Christian Era, as their inscriptions show, that stand on the remains of the Roman road built by Emperor Hadrian. These milestones connect Heshbon with Livias, Jericho, and Jerusalem.

There is thus no reasonable doubt that *Tell Hesbân* is the Biblical Heshbon. This is the site we excavated in the summer of 1968. Subsequent articles will describe our work. ♦♦

(Continued next week)



A Successful Secret

By MARGERY WILSON

MISS BARTON smiled as though she had a secret when the class read the morning worship text together: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Robin smiled at the teacher because he was the only one who knew the secret, but he certainly wouldn't tell.

It had all begun one day when Miss Barton was busy with the third grade and had asked Robin whether he would empty the wastebasket for her.

He hoisted the big basket to his fourth-grade shoulder and quickly disappeared. As he dumped the contents into the incinerator he noticed that it was still warm.

Suddenly an idea popped into his blond head. A sly voice seemed to whisper, "Wouldn't it be fun to watch this trash burn? Teacher would never know the difference."

But then another voice seemed to say, "You know the rule about students' using matches at school. And even if Miss Barton didn't ever find out, Jesus would know that you had been disobedient. And so would you."

While Robin stood hesitating, the first voice spoke again. "By burning the papers you would be helping someone. How can anyone call it disobedience when you're helping somebody? And besides, Miss Barton will never know."

A moment later Robin was going to the

principal's room. A tall man responded to the boy's timid knock.

"Ah-er-ah—Miss Barton would like some matches to burn our trash, please," said Robin. He dug his toe into his shoe feeling rather guilty about telling a lie, but he was glad that he had remembered to say, "Please."

Soon the principal returned with the matches.

A few minutes later Robin was watching the flames lick up the paper inside the incinerator. He thought it was funny that he didn't have the good feeling he usually had when helping people. He knew that he had been disobedient and he had lied to the principal. After the flames died down Robin picked up the big gray wastebasket and hurried into the schoolroom.

But somehow he couldn't concentrate on his lessons the rest of the day. He didn't even enjoy music class and he was sure that the teacher noticed it. Alternately squirming and gazing out the window, he waited until school was out.

Robin played on the teeters and swings until most of the children had gone. When he was sure no one was around he got the little box of matches from under the back step where he had hidden them. But it wasn't any fun. The little box seemed to burn his pocket, and he wanted to get rid of it, but he couldn't let teacher know that he had it either.

Suddenly he brightened and hurried down the long hall. "I'll return them to the principal." But his feet grew heavier with each step.

Before he knew what had happened, Robin stood in front of his own classroom door and opened it. Miss Barton was busy putting new pictures on the bulletin board. Robin went to her side and blurted out the whole story.

Angels in heaven rejoiced with Robin and his teacher as they walked toward the principal's office to return those matches.