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"It should be our aim to bring all the pleasantness possible into our lives, and to do all the kindness possible to those around us. Kind words are never lost. Jesus records them as if spoken to Himself. Sow the seeds of kindness, of love, and of tenderness, and they will blossom and bear fruit." — Ellen G. White, quoted in The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1118.
Story of the Heshbon Expedition, 1967-1974

The Heshbon “dig” is the first denominationally sponsored excavation in Palestine.

By LAWRENCE T. GERATY

FOR MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED years, Seventh-day Adventist Bible teachers, authors, and evangelists have used the data provided by archeological research in the Near East to illuminate, bolster, and defend the faith. However, only within the past forty years, have a few Seventh-day Adventist scholars been trained in Palestinian field archeology. First among these were Dr. Lynn H. Wood, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary’s first professor of archeology and the history of antiquity, who worked with Dr. Nelson Glueck at the Transjordanian sites of Khirbet Tannur (a Nabataean temple) and Tell el-Kheleifeh (Biblical Ezion-geber), and Dr. Siegfried H. Horn, Professor Wood’s successor at the Seminary, who received his field training under Dr. G. Ernest Wright at Balatah (Biblical Shechem). Largely under Professor Horn’s influence a number of younger Seventh-day Adventists then began their training in the field of archeology.

The coincidence in the mid-1960’s of this newly developed expertise along with a promise of substantial financial support enabled Professor Horn to lay plans for the first denominationally sponsored archeological excavation of a major Biblical site in Palestine. He finally chose to dig Tell Ḥeshbān for a number of important reasons:

(1) Since most Biblical sites chosen for excavation have been on the West Bank of the Jordan River, it seemed that a greater contribution to knowledge could be made by a dig in Transjordan. Of the unexcavated sites from which to choose, Tell Ḥeshbān was the most prominent and promising;

(2) A new hard-topped road made Tell Ḥeshbān easily accessible for the first time. Since the site is only half an hour’s drive from Amman, the modern capital of Jordan, it became possible, logistically, to field an expedition there;

(3) The most inviting portion of the mound for excavation was owned by the government of Jordan, which was eager to see the site dug and therefore cooperated in every way possible; this obviated the necessity of renting several plots of ground from local landlords. The village elders, too, assured Dr. Horn of their interest and support and promised to provide the necessary hired workmen;

(4) The modern Arabic name of this ruin mound (tell means ruin mound) apparently preserved the city’s ancient Biblical Hebrew name: Heshbon. This identification was supported by three inscribed milestones on the Roman road connecting Heshbon with the Jordan Valley as well as by the fact that the site was between Elealeh and Madeba—towns with which Heshbon was associated in the Old Testament. Furthermore, this location agreed with the information provided in the Onomasticon of Eusebius, a fourth century A.D. church father.

Heshbon in Literature

The earliest known explicit reference to Heshbon comes from Numbers 21, where the story of the Israelite conquest of Transjordan is told. There we learn (from a poetic war taunt) that before the Israelites took Heshbon from Sihon the Amorite and assigned it to the tribe of Reuben, the Amorites had won it from the Moabites. Joshua 21 indicates that Heshbon later became a Levitical city in the tribal territory of Gad—a fact confirmed by the famous Moabite stone found in the past century. By the time of Jephthah, Heshbon had been in Israelite hands for three hundred years (Judges 11:26). During the reign of Solomon it became part of a district organized to support the expenditures of the monarchy (1 Kings 4:19) and was famous for its pools (S. of Sol. 7:4). Sometime under the Divided Monarchy, Heshbon reverted to Moabite control (Isaiah 15, 16, and Jeremiah 48) and finally became Ammonite in the time of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 49).

The history of Heshbon from the late second century B.C. to A.D. 66 is touched on by the Jewish historian Josephus. After this, Esbus (as Heshbon was then
called) became part of the Roman province of Arabia Petraea. Just when Christianity came to Heshbon we are not sure, but from contemporary ecclesiastical sources of the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D., we know three of its bishops by name: Gennadius, who attended the Council of Nicea; Zozus, who attended the Council of Ephesus; and Theodore, whose orthodoxy was questioned by Pope Martin I.

The next clear historical reference to Heshbon does not appear until the medieval period when an Arab historian tells how Saladin camped at Ḥesbān in 1184 during his battles with the Crusaders. Another Arab writer in 1331 calls Ḥesbān the capital of Jordan’s Belka district, but its importance soon faded and literary sources are again silent about Heshbon until the nineteenth century when travelers and explorers described it as one of the many ruin sites of Transjordan.

Thus the situation remained until 1967 when Dr. Horn organized a qualified staff to begin excavating the site. It began to assemble in Jordan to begin work on June 5. Most readers will recall that on that day the Arab-Israeli “six day war” began. Naturally plans for the dig had to be canceled.

The 1968 Expedition. Undaunted, Dr. Horn rescheduled the expedition for the following summer. This time he met with success, and during July 15-August 30, 1968, a specialized staff of 47, assisted on the mound by 130 local workmen, opened up twelve squares, or trenches, in four areas on the mound’s summit. Excavation was purposely concentrated on or near the acropolis because most important structures were built on a city’s high point in ancient times. In Area A, the foundation of a Byzantine (Christian) church, which had been in use from the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D., was uncovered. It had obviously been the seat of the three bishops already mentioned. Of particular interest were two well-preserved patches of mosaic flooring, both of which were carefully lifted for preservation in the regional archeological museum.

Of greatest interest from Area B was the corpus of (Ammonite) seventh/sixth centuries B.C. pottery shards previously known only from a few tombs and subsequently published by Edward Lugenbeal of the Geo-science Research Institute and James Sauer of the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman. One of these shards contained an Ammonite inscription from about 500 B.C. whose most striking feature is its mixture of names: two are West Semitic, one is Egyptian, and one is Babylonian. A person is reminded of a similar situation among contemporary Jews who had just returned from Babylonian exile. According to Ezra and Nehemiah, many of them, too, bore foreign names.

Most of the discoveries in Areas C and D in 1968 came from the Arab periods of the site’s occupation.

With the task of elucidating the history of Heshbon only just begun, plans were laid for a second season of digging in 1970. Once again, as the opening day drew closer and the expedition’s staff began to assemble from around the world, severe fighting broke out—this time between Palestinian commando groups and the Jordanian army. The excavation was called off a second time.

The 1971 Expedition. By the summer of 1971, the government of Jordan was again in firm control of internal security, enabling a growing staff of 52 volunteer members and 140 local hired workmen to complete a second successful season at Heshbon between July 5 and August 20, 1971. They continued work in nine of the original twelve squares that had already been begun, as well as opening up nine new ones—all eighteen of them on the acropolis.

It became evident that the Area A church was constructed in the style of a typical basilica: a wide nave flanked by two aisles leading to the apse that was oriented toward the east. The aisles were separated from the central nave by stylobate walls, each provided originally with at least five columns. Beneath a large...
portion of the church was an unusual cave that had its own gate; apparently it had been used primarily during the Roman period.

Another ostracon (potsherd with writing on it) of special interest was found in Area B. It registers the earliest, extra-Biblical reference to (southern) Gebal, an Edomite town mentioned in Psalm 83:7.

**Roman and Byzantine Tombs**

In addition to the work on the mound’s summit, excavation in 1971 was expanded to include the investigation or clearing of 13 tombs in cemeteries E and F. All of them dated to either the Roman or Byzantine periods. One unrobbed tomb provided more than a hundred objects from the first century A.D., thus illustrating the range of household goods in Christ’s time. A Roman tomb was closed by an impressive single-slab stone door that still swung open on its stone pivots, much like its parallels in the more famous Sanhedrin tombs in Jerusalem or the Jewish tombs at Beth-Shearim.

The tomb that most impresses visitors to the site, however, is another first century A.D. family tomb that was originally sealed with a huge rolling stone undoubtedly similar to the one that was rolled away from the entrance of Jesus’ tomb on the morning of His resurrection. In the Heshbon example one also has to stoop to enter (cf. John 20:5). About nine feet square, inside it contained twelve burial niches—several with the skeletons and burial goods in place. A few such tombs are well known west of the river Jordan (the “Tombs of the Kings” and “Herod’s Family Tomb” in Jerusalem, as well as tombs at Abu-Ghosh or Biblical Kirjath-jearim, Nazareth, and Deir Dibwan near Ai), but this was the first tomb sealed with a rolling stone that thus far has been found east of the river Jordan.

**The 1973 Expedition.** The third expedition to Heshbon took place June 20-August 14, 1973, shortly before the October war again threw the region into political strife. This time the staff had grown to 57 and the group of hired local workmen to 150. Together, they continued excavation in 15 of the 21 previously opened squares in addition to opening up 5 new ones, again all on the acropolis.

In attempting to find the narthex of the Christian church and thereby complete the excavation of Area A, archaeologists digging on the western edge of the summit discovered an Islamic bath complex from the Middle Ages. The sophisticated structure included the bathroom itself, whose tiled-floor was heated, over a brick stoke hole, plastered water tanks from which the water flowed on demand through ceramic pipes to the bathing basin, and a large stoke room.

In Area B, the most noteworthy discovery was the remnant of what appeared to be a huge water reservoir from Old Testament times. A 45-foot-long, continuously plastered retaining wall constructed from both cut bedrock and quarried stones was found, and, about 25 feet away, a three-layer cementlike floor that apparently belonged to it. We immediately thought of Song of Solomon 7:4, “Thine eyes [are] like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim.” Out of the fill from this reservoir came yet another important Ammonite ostracon whose script was Aramaic; its eleven-line inscription lists the rations for the royal household.

**Locally Minted Coin**

Though many coins are found each season on a “dig,” one from Area B proved particularly important because it was one of only a handful known to be minted in Esbus (Roman Heshbon) during the years A.D. 218-222, when Emperor Elagabalus allowed Heshbon the honor of having its own imperial mint.

Along with Areas A and B, Areas C and D produced either soil layers or architecture (sometimes both) for several periods for which previously no evidence had been found: Iron I or the period of the Biblical Judges, Iron II or the period of the Divided Monarchy, the Hellenistic Period, and the Abbasid Period. This came...
about partly through expansion of our work, but primarily through deeper penetration in existing squares.

In addition to these areas on the acropolis, four smaller soundings were made farther south on the mound; but none revealed evidence from periods not already represented. Eight new tombs were also explored or cleared, either Roman or Byzantine.

In order to set Heshbon in its proper archeological context, we decided methodically to survey all the territory within a six-mile radius of the site. This was begun in 1973 when 103 archeological sites were discovered within this limited region! And, through it, from the Jordan Valley in the west to Heshbon itself, the Roman road built in the second century A.D. by the Emperor Trajan was traced by means of milestones, road stations, and guard towers.

The 1974 Expedition. Though Dr. Horn's original plan called for only three seasons of excavation at Tell Heshban, it was clear after the close of the 1973 season of work that at least two further summers would be necessary properly to investigate the many new opportunities that had arisen. Given his increased responsibilities as Dean of the Seminary, however, he decided he could no longer serve as the expedition's director. In the fall of 1973, the Andrews University Board of Trustees appointed the writer to that responsibility.

Our plan had been to return to the site every second summer, thus giving us adequate time both for study and publication of the preceding season's results and for raising funds to support the succeeding season. However, for a number of reasons we decided to return the following summer (1974) for our fourth season of excavation: among these reasons was the generous offer of substantial financial assistance from the Kyle-Kelso Archaeological Fund, the presence in Jordan that summer of three key staff members (whose transportation costs would thus be saved), and the favorable political climate in Jordan.

Thus during June 26-August 14, 1974, a staff of 75 specialists and 150 local hired workmen continued excavation in 17 of the 26 squares already opened up in Areas A-D, as well as beginning four new ones. In addition to this work in the four areas on or near the acropolis, eleven soundings were carried out both on the slopes and at some distance from the tell, four tombs were cleared in Cemetery E, five caves were explored in the valley on the mound's western side, and the archeological survey within a six-mile radius of Tell Heshban was completed.

The forthcoming three articles in this series will deal with the 1974 results in greater detail.

Cold Water People

COLD WATER has many therapeutic uses. It also has many other uses. When you're exhausted and per- 
spiring freely on an extremely hot day, a tall glass of plain cold water is refreshing. And when you just can't seem to wake up in the morning, cold water applied liberally to the face—or, for Spartan souls, a complete cold shower—gets the blood to singing through the veins. (Well, moving through, at least.)

But figuratively, cold water is unpleasant. I've been thinking lately about a group of people I've started calling "Cold Water People"—because—well, that's what they are.

These people have a liberal supply of figurative cold water always handy. And they never hesitate to use it at the slightest opportunity. For instance, a travelog motion picture has been announced. You're looking forward to it, because you genuinely like to see how other people work and live. In lieu of visiting all other countries and cultures yourself, it's the next best thing.

One of the C. W. Persons comes by. You make the mistake of giving voice to your enthusiasm. "That's going to be a fun experience!" you exclaim. "I just love pictures." A moment of silence ensues. The C. W. Person looks at you as though you ought to be impaled on a pin, fastened to a board with other strange species of insect life. "Personally, I'm always bored stiff by pictures," he says, proving his assertion by a prodigious yawn. "I can't imagine anyone's wanting to go see them."

And you feel diminished and somehow just a bit of the joy of anticipation has left you. Is there something wrong with me? you ask. Even though you're confident that there surely are a few others who share your viewpoint, you're still shivering from that cold water dousing you just got. However, it seems to me that C. W. People are at their most magnificent when something new is being planned. Let's say that you're on a committee to raise funds for a mission project, or for a campus or church project. The committee agrees that this time you just must do something different. At least you think the entire committee agrees. Not so. After the long discussion, when you're firming up your plans, here it comes. "That really is the most absurd idea I ever heard," says the C. W. Person who's been sitting there just waiting to pounce. "No one will come, and the whole thing will be a dismal failure."

Everyone glances around at everyone else, feeling let down and uncomfortable. Things had been going so well. The chairperson clears his/her throat. "Well, do you have some other plan to suggest?" he/she inquires of C. W. Person.

"Not really, but I know what you're talking about won't work," is the airy response.

That seems to be another characteristic of C. W. People. They seldom have any positive suggestions to make; they just have that limitless supply of cold water with which to douse even the tiniest, faintest flicker of enthusiasm. It's as though enthusiasm were some sort of cardinal sin in their book.

Their tribe seems as numerous as the sands of the sea. If you're sightseeing, and truly impressed with the grandeur before you, a C. W. Person murmurs, "I don't know what all the publicity for this place is about. It's just a big hole." (He's referring to the Grand Canyon.) Or, "I don't see anything graceful about THAT."

"(It's only the Eiffel Tower.) "What's all the excitement about?" (The Taj Mahal.)

Sometimes I think that C. W. People would even be tempted to pour cold water on the magnificent plan of salvation. Pouring cold water has become a habit with them.

Will there be any room in the New Earth for unenthusiastic saints? Well, the Lord is the One who makes that decision.

As I said in the beginning, cold water is wonderful for lots of things, but not for dousing enthusiasm.