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February 2023 “SODOM’S DESTRUCTION: TRUTH OR FICTION?”

Dear Friends,

Something that tends to irritate me is when Christians question the veracity of the Bible. Even though God has made it clear He cannot lie (Titus 1:2 & Hebrews 6:18), some Christians call into question whether some people identified in the Bible actually existed, or they doubt that certain events actually took place because science and research discount the possibility such events could happen. Christians who do this are elevating the human study of a fallen world above the pure Word of Creator God. In other words, they are calling God a liar.

One of the events dismissed as a fairy tale is the Bible’s account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis chapter 19). Secular historians have declared for years that destruction of that magnitude could never have taken place because there is absolutely no scientific or archaeological proof. However, I read an article not long ago explaining that multi-national teams of archaeologists, geomorphologists, mineralogists, paleobotanists, sedimentologists, geochemists, geologists, medical doctors and cosmic-impact experts had made some shocking discoveries in an area about seven miles northeast of the Dead Sea, the region where Sodom and Gomorrah existed.

I began doing my own research and found numerous references in both Christian and secular publications to what these scientists had found. Instead of paraphrasing their results, I have copied and pasted an entire article about their research in this letter. The article is from aish.com, which has no connection to my ministry, neither do I know enough about aish.com to endorse what they do. [Any of my additions to the article are in brackets.] I hope you will find this quite amazing and further proof that the Bible is 100% accurate in everything written in it.

Archaeology and the Destruction of Sodom

by Jonathan Sassen, February 22, 2022

<https://aish.com/archaeology-and-the-destruction-of-sodom/>

The description of the Biblical destruction of Sodom is supported by recent archaeological discoveries.

Dr. Steven Collins, a Christian biblical scholar and the Dean at the College of Archaeology at Trinity Southwest University, Albuquerque, New Mexico has been excavating an archaeological site called Tall el-Hamman (“TeH” for short) for the past 15 years. Dr. Collins collaborated with a wide range of scientific experts from diverse fields and employing the most advanced techniques to develop a comprehensive picture of the fate of TeH. His results were recently published in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature*.

The 64-page paper makes a highly credible and most astounding claim. TeH is located in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea and the site dates back to the Middle Bronze Age. This is precisely the time and place

where one would expect to find the ruins of biblical Sodom. Incredibly, the city unearthed at TeH was destroyed in a unique event that seems to match the biblical account Sodom's ruination.

Now called Tall el-Hammam, the city is located about 7 miles northeast of the Dead Sea in what is now Jordan. NASA, CC BY-ND

The Biblical account describes Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding area as being overturned at the same time by an act of God – a catastrophic rainstorm of fire and brimstone. Only Lot and his two daughters escaped.

In Genesis, Chapter 13 we learn that Abraham and his nephew Lot had pitched their tents between Beit El and Ai, which is north of Jerusalem. Their shepherds were not getting along with each other, so Abraham suggested to Lot that they part ways, and Lot should find somewhere else to live. At that point the Torah says:

“And Lot raised his eyes, and he saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that it was entirely watered; before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you come to Zoar.” (Genesis 13:10)

This is how Dr. Collins describes the plain north of the Dead Sea that the Jordan River flows through:

Located in a generally arid region, the Jordan Valley is one of the best-watered areas in all the southern Levant (Jordan, Israel, and Palestine). In addition to numerous springs created by a disgoring Transjordanian aquifer, the area had hydrological conditions for human habitation somewhat analogous to the Nile Delta region, which is also bordered by arid terrain. During the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) peak occupation, at least an estimated 50,000 people occupied three major cities, plus satellite towns, villages, and hamlets spread across ~400 km² [about 249 square miles] of the eastern Kikkar. TeH was the largest city located on a hill with a commanding view of the entire plain... At that time, it was 10 times larger than Jerusalem and five times larger than Jericho.

Dr. Collins's excavations of the MBA city found evidence for high temperature burning of the city. Diamond-like carbon, melted construction materials, melted pottery, melted mudbricks, high-pressure shocked quartz, high-temperature melted minerals, melted nuggets of iridium, and many other metals in melt glass were found. All these show evidence of reaching temperatures greater than 1300 °C [2,372°F], with brief exposure to temperatures as high as 2500 °C [4,532°F], the melting point of Iridium.

These temperatures are way beyond what was possible from any man-made fire at that time, and there are no volcanoes in the area. In fact, the melted glass looks just like that made by an atomic blast over sand. Another major clue was that the TeH iron-dominant splatter closely matches some types of meteorites. There is though no sign of a meteor crater in the Jordan plain, so what happened?

By careful investigation of the city foundations, Dr. Collins was able to build up the following description of the city. TeH had a lower city surrounded by a defensive wall and within it a hill that was 33 meters [108 feet] high. On this hill was the upper city containing houses and the palace. The hill had formidable defenses that protected the palace: a rampart, a wall, and a monumental gateway. The rampart was constructed from millions of mudbricks and was as much as 30 meters [98 feet] thick at the base and 7–8

meters [23-26 feet] thick at the top, wide enough for military patrols. A 4-meter [13 feet] thick mudbrick defensive wall on stone foundations with towers lined the outer edge at the top of the rampart. The massive palace complex once had walls ranging from 1.0 to 2.2 meters thick and likely rising to 11–15 m in height, and a 2.2-meter-thick wall separated the raised palace platform from the rest of the upper city. The 4–5-story-tall palace complex (~ 52 m × ~ 27 m), with massive superstructures made of sun-dried mudbricks extended 11–15 meters above the top of the enclosing rampart. It's no wonder that Lot's married children in the city laughed at him when he told them it was going to be destroyed!

Today, almost no mudbricks remain on the stone foundations. All the walls are seemingly sheared off nearly level with the tops of the upper-city wall foundations. There is no evidence of collapsed walls across the entire city. There are almost no whole mudbricks visible anywhere, and instead, small fragments of bricks are randomly strewn around as infill within the churned-up, 1.5 m thick destruction matrix. It appears that most bricks were pulverized and blown off the site to the northeast. Millions of mudbricks are missing.

Diamonoids (center) inside a crater were formed by the fireball's high temperatures and pressures on wood and plants. Malcolm LeCompte, CC BY-ND

Most of the bones found had been shattered into small pieces and mixed into a matrix of pulverized mudbricks. The individuals represented by the bones were violently torn apart by a powerful explosion, leaving only a few hand and foot bones still articulated and unbroken. The circumstances and condition of the human bones and fragments suggest that at the moment of death, these individuals were going about normal activities when they were struck.

The three largest urban cities in the southern Jordan Valley, TeH, Jericho and Tall Nimrin were burned and destroyed simultaneously.

The destruction layer is marked by anomalously high concentrations of salt. Archaeologists excavating nearby sites noted what they termed the "Late Bronze Age Gap", during which about 16 cities and towns, including TeH, and more than 100 smaller villages were abandoned across the 30-km-wide lower Jordan Valley. This abandonment continued for the entire Late Bronze Age and most of the early Iron Age. Population levels are estimated to have plummeted from 45,000–60,000 people to only a few hundred nomadic tribespeople inhabiting the area following this destruction event. For TeH, the occupation gap is more than 600 years. In the Jericho area in the southwestern Jordan Valley, the archaeological record indicates a gap of approximately 300 years. It appears to have been a regional civilization-ending catastrophe that depopulated more than 500 km² of the southern Jordan Valley for between 3 and 7 centuries.

The words of the Torah echo these findings:

And the Lord caused to rain down upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire, from the Lord, from heaven. And He turned over these cities and the entire plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and the vegetation of the ground (Genesis 19:24-25).

Sulfur and salt have burned up its entire land! It cannot be sown, nor can it grow [anything], not [even] any grass will sprout upon it. It is like the overturning of Sodom, Gemorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overturned in His fury and in His rage (Deuteronomy 29:22).

All this can be explained by one event – a cosmic airburst.

There are two types of objects that occasionally hit our planet. The most common are stony or metallic meteors. The vast majority of these are small and so burn up in the atmosphere. Occasionally one is large enough to make landfall, and every few thousand years on average one is so large it can make a lot of destruction and leave a crater. Very rarely Earth gets hit by a comet. These are best described as loosely held together dirty snowballs. They are mostly ice with lots of stones mixed in. Typically, objects hit our planet travelling at incredible speeds - tens of thousands of miles per hour. The intense heat and turbulence generated by friction with the atmosphere at these speeds will rapidly break up the comet and vaporize the ice to a gas. When a solid very rapidly turns into a gas, that is called an explosion. When a comet explodes in the atmosphere, it is called a cosmic airburst.

All the data suggests a cosmic airburst occurred a few kilometers southwest of Tall el-Hammam causing, in rapid succession, a high temperature thermal pulse from the fireball that melted all exposed materials. This was followed by a high-temperature, hypervelocity blast wave that demolished and pulverized everything across the city, leveling the city.

Dr. Collins speculates that at the same time the airburst above the Dead Sea (with ~ 34 wt.% salt content) may have thrown into the atmosphere large quantities of hypersaline water that fell across the lower Jordan Valley. After 300-600 years, the high salt concentrations were sufficiently leached out of the salt-contaminated soil to allow the return of agriculture.

The archaeological findings plus modelling of the airburst give us a good description of what possibly happened on that day. Christopher R. Moore, an archaeologist and Special Projects Director at the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program and South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, described it like this in his article:

A giant space rock demolished an ancient Middle Eastern city and everyone in it – possibly inspiring the Biblical story of Sodom. A 75-meter diameter rock exploded in a massive fireball about 2.5 miles above the ground, causing a blast around 1,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb. Air temperatures rose above 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit (2,000 degrees Celsius). Everything either burst into flames or melted.

Seconds later, a massive shockwave smashed into the city, demolishing every building. Moving at about 740 mph (1,200 kph), it was more powerful than the worst tornado ever recorded. They sheared off the top 40 feet (12 m) of the 4-story palace and blew the jumbled debris into the next valley. The ground-hugging blast wave from an airburst/impact would be laden with high-velocity missiles, including sand, gravel, pulverized mudbrick, plaster fragments, potsherds, broken branches, and shattered timbers. These hot missiles would incinerate and strip all flesh and crush all bones. The human mortality rate at TeH was 100%, the bodies of the people and animals were torn apart, and their bones blasted into small fragments.

It isn't surprising that Lot's daughters hiding in a cave thought the world was now uninhabited. The smoke could even be seen 40 miles away near Hebron:

And Abraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. And he looked over the face of Sodom and Gomorrah and over the entire face of the land of the plain, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the earth had risen like the smoke of a furnace (Genesis 19:27-28).

Some additional takeaways:

1. This is the only such event of this size known in recorded history that happened over an inhabited area. There has been one other large recorded cosmic airburst though. In 1908 over the Tunguska River in Siberia a cosmic airburst destroyed millions of trees over 2150km [1,336m²].
2. Carbon dating and archaeological dating gave the same date for the destruction as the traditional Jewish chronology. (Abraham was born in 1948 [BC]. He was 99 years old when Sodom was destroyed. =3735 years ago, or 1714 BCE. The article claims 1700-1600 BCE for carbon dating and 1750–1650 BCE for dating based on pottery).

Jonathan Sassen has a degree in Metallurgy from Oxford University. He has worked for over 30 years in electrochemical research, developing next generation batteries for Epsilon-Electric Fuel.

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I sincerely hope anyone reading this who has questioned the reliability of scripture realizes that whatever is recorded in the Bible is true. Yes, some of the events in the Bible absolutely defy natural physics; but they do not defy the physics of God’s Kingdom. God’s Word endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). God’s Word is true, reliable, and the standard that will carry us into eternity...Praise His Holy Name!

In His Grace,

Jim

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