

Lesson 2: The Patriarchs (Part I)

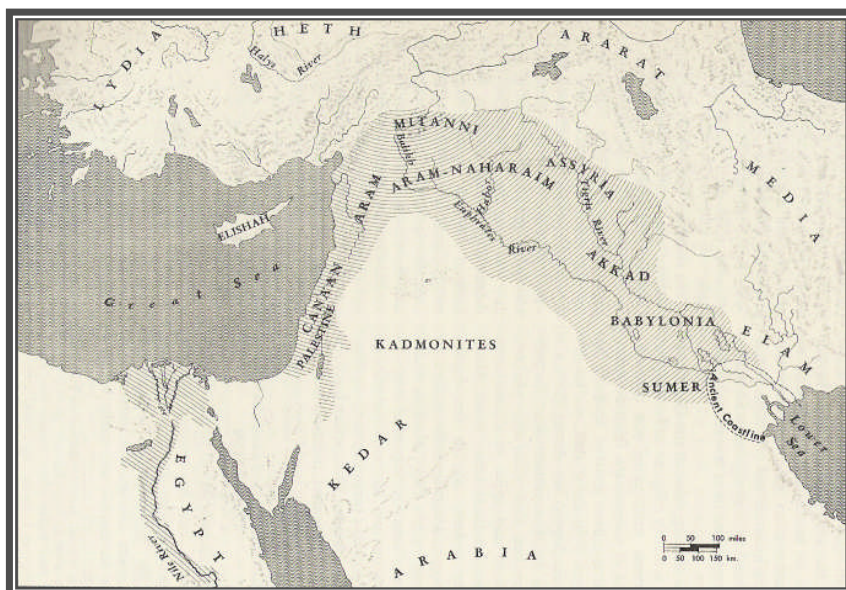


Fig 1. The Fertile Crescent

Though the beginning of Israel's history as a nation is usually placed at the time of her departure from Egypt, an account of her history must start with Abraham and the patriarchs. Only after Israel had moved across Egypt's border did she have size and identity with which other nations would have to reckon with, but she already had a history that stretched back through the years to her fathers, Jacob and Abraham. To Jacob the twelve heads of the respective tribes had been born, and to Abraham God had given His promise of a nation.

Archaeological discoveries in the Middle East support and illuminate

Scripture. Discoveries continue to fill in the picture of the ancient civilization in which the patriarchs lived. It may be that archaeology will never prove that Abraham really existed, but what we can prove is that his life and times, as reflected in the stories about him, fit perfectly within the early second millennium. Critics of the biblical account of the patriarchs are forced to accept the historicity of these accounts on the basis of finds at such places as Mari and Nuzi.

Historical Accuracy of the Patriarchal Narratives

There is a significant body of evidence on which to base an understanding of the patriarchal environment. There are four areas that evidence is found to support this period.

- Names:** There are numerous examples of names used in Genesis that are found outside of the Bible in extra-biblical texts.
 - **Abraham:** The name Abraham has been found in Babylonian texts of the sixteenth century and multiple times in the Mari texts.
 - **Benjamin:** The name Benjamin is found in the Mari texts.
 - **Jacob:** The name Jacob has been found in an eighteenth century text from Chagar-bazar in Upper Mesopotamia, identifying a person by that name. In a list of Thutmose III it designates a place in Palestine by that name. It is also the name of a Hyksos chief.



Fig 2. Abraham

- **Nahor:** The name Nahor, Abraham's brother, has been found in the Mari texts when referring to a city by that name.
- **Other Patriarchal Names Found:** In the Mari texts the names **Gad, Dan, Levi, and Ishmael** are all found. Assyrian texts refer to cities with the names **Terah** and **Serug**, Abraham's father and great-grandfather. There are names also found in the Ebla tablets for **Israel** and **Ishmael**.

While these texts do not refer to a specific biblical person or place, they do indicate that the names in Genesis were in common use at that time. Archaeological evidence of these names found at the time of the patriarchs affirms the historicity of the Biblical narratives.

2. **Customs:** Further evidence for the biblical account of the patriarchs comes from the customs of that time. The Nuzi tablets have significant parallels with patriarchal customs. Nuzi is situated just above Assyria. Nuzi is not a biblical site, but it was discovered in 1925 where over 1,000 different cuneiform tablets have been found. The tablets mostly deal with business and family affairs. The tablets are mostly written in Akkadian with some Hurrian words as well. Patriarchal customs that are supported include:

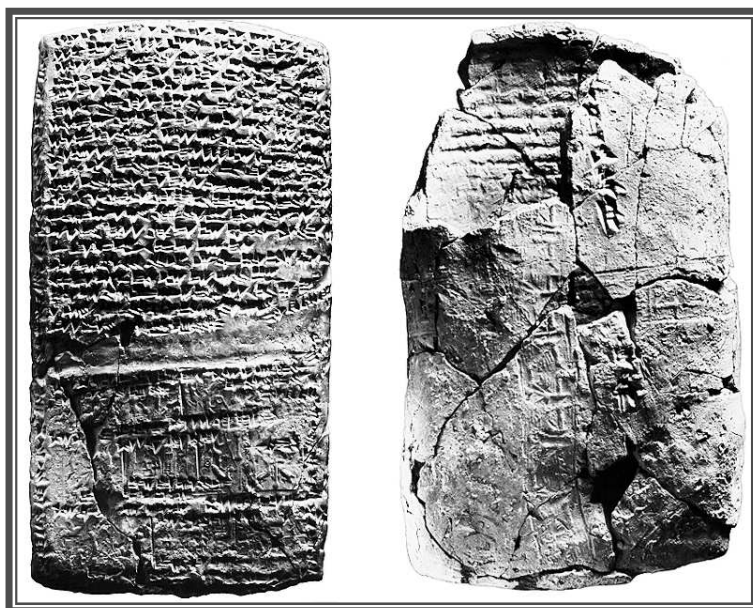


Fig 3. Nuzi Tablets

- Abraham was concerned that his servant Eliezer, not a son, was his heir ([Genesis 15:1-4](#)). The Nuzi tablets show it was normal for childless parents to adopt a servant as a son; he would serve then until they died and became their heir.
- In the case of a childless couple, the wife could locate another woman for the husband. One of the tablets state, "*If Gilimninu (the wife) will not bear children, Gilimninu shall take a woman of Lulluland as a wife for Shennma (the husband).*" In Genesis we see that Sarah provided Hagar to Abraham ([Genesis 16:3](#)) for the purposes of bearing children. Should the first wife later bear a son, he would rank over the son born to the second wife. Such was the case when Isaac was born in [Genesis 21:1-10](#).
- Adoptions were also used. A man could adopt a woman as a sister and agree to find a husband for her. A childless couple could adopt a slave, or a man lacking property. Possibly applying to the relationship of Abraham to Sarah ([Genesis 20:2](#)) and also that of Eliezer ([Genesis 15:2](#)) in Abraham's household. The adopted person was obligated to care for the needs, weep over, and bury them when they died.
- Fathers were not required to select the first-born son as the family heir. He could select any of his sons as he pleased. An example is Jacob's selection of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, in passing the right of inheritance as though they were his own.
[GE 48:5](#) "Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are."
[Genesis 48:5 \(NASB\)](#)

- A father was required to find a wife for his sons, ([Genesis 24:4](#)), and arrange marriage contracts for the daughters. If the parents died, the heir was required to arrange the marriage of his sisters. But in this case the heir had less authority as the sister had the right of refusal.
- Wills referred to the family gods as symbols of ownership and authority and were highly valued. This explains why Laban was so concerned that Rachel had taken the images when Jacob was fleeing Laban ([Genesis 31:19, 34, 35](#)).
- Tablets had also been found documenting that heirs could legally sell their birthright to a brother. This supports when Esau exchanged his birthright for a bowl of soup in a time of need ([Genesis 25:29-34](#)).
- Also found were tablets recording blessings pronounced by aging men just before an expected death. As Jacob did in [Genesis 48-49](#).

The parallels are so numerous and convincing that many of the recorded customs found in archaeology are demonstrated to be consistent with the biblical customs of the patriarchs.

3. Conditions in Palestine: General conditions in Palestine during the time of the patriarchs support the descriptions described in Genesis.

- Abraham's warlike behavior in [Genesis 14](#) fits with the picture of nomadic military engagements that are seen in the Mari tablets. This period in Canaan (c. 2100 B.C.) was one of sparse population consisting of weak minor kingdoms that would often times form alliances for mutual protection. [Genesis 14](#) is right in line with the description of the account of the invasion of the four kings.

[GE 14:1](#) And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim,
[GE 14:2](#) that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).
Genesis 14:1-2 (NASB)

- Like many that lived in that day the patriarchs are described as ordinary people. Landless, mobile, tent-dwelling, and living by means of herding and agriculture. The search for water, grazing land for flocks, and maintenance of peace with neighbors was a part of everyday life. Their comings and goings would not be recorded in any state archives. Where it is recorded, however, is in the Bible.
- Clarification of the nomadic lifestyles of the patriarchs is supported by descriptions found in the Mari Tablets. Jacob's taking up residence near Shechem ([Gen. 34](#)) and later near Hebron ([Gen. 37:12-18](#)) is similar to the practices of the leaders of nomadic tribes near Mari.

Keep in mind that the body of information available to modern scholarship is very small, almost non-existent. Since Genesis is our only ancient source for the lives of the patriarchs, it deserves the pride of place. Let the critics offer proof that Abraham did not exist. In the absence of such unattainable proof, it is only logical to admit the evidence of the biblical text, without the arguments from silence



Fig 4. Statue found at Mari

that always characterize attacks on Scripture. Archaeology still provides illumination for the patriarchal time period without being forced to bear the impossible burden of proving their existence.

4. **Extensive Travel:** The Bible indicates the patriarchs traveled extensively. Abraham traveled more than 1000 miles moving from Ur of the Chaldees to southern Canaan ([Gen. 11:31 - 12:9](#)). Later he sent his servant Eliezer more than 400 miles north to Haran in Upper Mesopotamia to acquire a bride for his son, Isaac ([Gen. 24:1-10](#)). Jacob also traveled extensively.
 - Numerous texts from archaeological research show that travel of this kind was not uncommon during the patriarchal period. Letters from Mari indicate that envoys visited all the way from Hazor in Palestine to southern Mesopotamia and even Elam.
 - Cappadocian texts from Kanish in Asia Minor tell of extensive trade relations between the Hittites and Assur.

Date of Abraham

Both biblical and extra-biblical materials provide evidence in the dating of Abraham. Scholars have a variety of theories on the dating of Abraham from a date in the latter half of the 15th century to the 23rd century. Fortunately for us we have the Bible to guide our interpretation of the evidence. The Bible is the infallible Word of God and has always been, and always will be, supported by the evidence. Based on a conservative, literal interpretation, of the Bible, Abraham's birth is placed in the middle of the 22nd century.

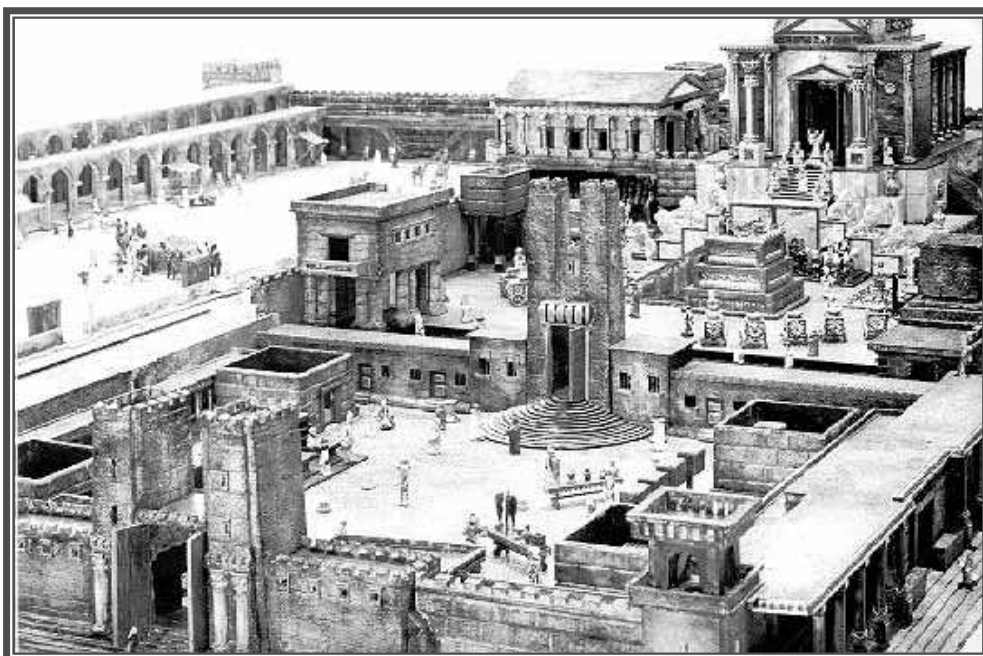


Fig 5. Jewish Temple

- It is important to first establish the date when Solomon began to build the temple, a date, which 99.9% of scholars can agree upon, which is **966 BC**.
- According to [1 Kings 6:1](#), the Exodus preceded the time when Solomon began to build the temple by **480 years**. This puts the Exodus at 1446 BC.

[1KI 6:1](#) Now it came about in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

1 Kings 6:1 (NASB)
- According to a literal reading of the relevant passages, Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born ([Gen.21:5](#)), Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born ([Gen. 25:26](#)), and Jacob was 130 when he went down into Egypt ([Gen. 47:9](#)), giving a total of **290 years**.

- Israel in Egypt (the Egyptian sojourn) lasted **430 years**. This is supported by [Exodus 12:40](#).

^{EX 12:40} Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

Exodus 12:40 (NASB)

This is also supported by God's prediction to Abraham in [Genesis 15:13](#), Stephen's statement in [Acts 7:6](#), and finally by the high improbability of Jacob's family multiplying in size to nation of over two million people occurring in less time.

Abraham's birth date can then easily be calculated through these literal interpretations of Scripture. Starting with 966 BC, the date when Solomon began to build the temple, add the following three periods of time:

1. 480 years
2. 290 years
3. 430 years

The resultant date for Abraham's birth is $(966 + 480 + 430 + 290) =$ **2166 BC**.

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek words, *mesos* meaning, "middle," and *potamos* meaning "river," which is known as the "land between two rivers." The two rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates. The word *Aram Naharaim* is also used to describe this area and is used in [Genesis 24:10](#):

^{GE 24:10} Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor.

Genesis 24:10 (NIV)

- The Mesopotamia region (see fig. 6 and 10) is about 300 miles long. The upper region is called *Akkad* and the lower region is called *Sumer*. The region is up to 250 miles wide at some points and narrows as the two rivers merge for the last 75 miles towards the Persian Gulf. The Euphrates River is on the west and the Tigris River is on the east. The source of these two rivers is in the present day Armenian mountains (the ancient kingdom of Urartu), which are referred to in the Bible as Ararat ([Genesis 8:4](#)). Ararat is a variation of Urartu. The Tigris River is about 1,000 miles long and has a fairly straight course. In the upper reaches of the Tigris River you have the great cities of Nineveh and Assur. The Euphrates is about 1,800 miles in length. Mari is located far up the Euphrates. These two rivers come to their flood stages in April/May and recede in June.

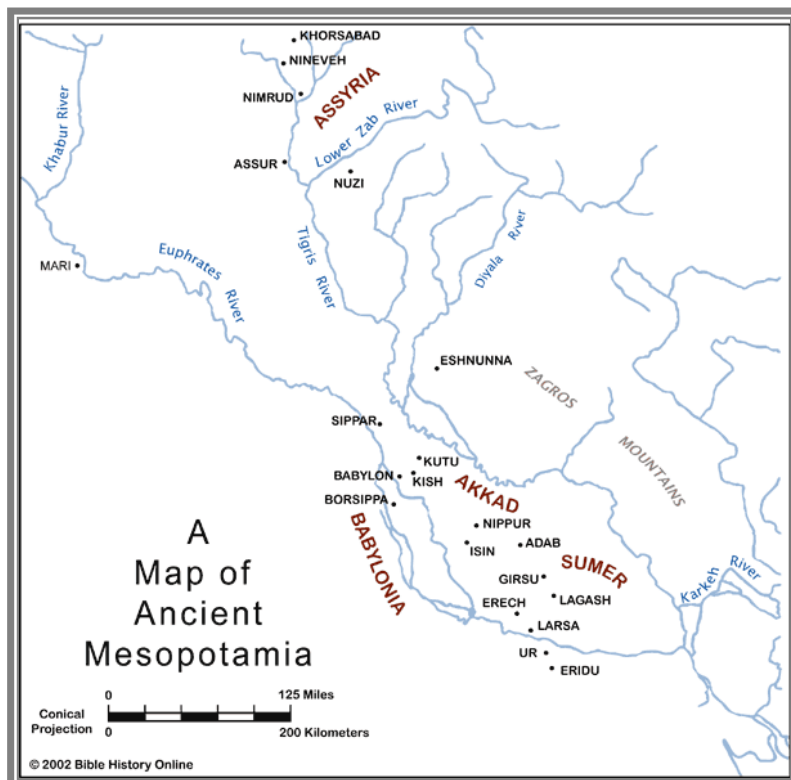


Fig 6. Map of Mesopotamia

- Temperatures vary; it can be in the 70's to 80's in the winter, and unbearable in the summer with temperatures reaching between 110 and 120. The area only receives on average 6 inches, or less, of rain in the lower area with a bit more in the upper area.
- People who live in Mesopotamia are people of the soil; their food comes from the soil, their cloths comes from the soil (making it out of flax), their pottery comes from the soil, and the tablets they write on come from the soil. Since there is very little rock, the buildings are built from clay bricks.
- The Mesopotamia area provides no natural barriers. Because it is a very fertile place different groups would invade in an attempt to take over. The archaeological evidence of the area shows constant change. There were the Babylonians in the very early days, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the Persians, and then the Greeks. One group was always supplanting the other.

Abraham's Country

God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees as seen in [Genesis 15:7](#) and [Acts 7:3](#):

[GE 15:7](#) And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." [Genesis 15:7 \(NASB\)](#)

[AC 7:2](#) And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, [AC 7:3](#) and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'

[AC 7:4](#) " Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. [Acts 7:2-4 \(NASB\)](#)



Fig 7. Ur Excavation Site

Ur of the Chaldees was always famous because of the Bible, but no one knew where it was until it was discovered around 1850. A ziggurat was being excavated when an inscription was found that said, "*This was at Ur.*"

- Ur is about 220 miles south of present day Baghdad, and is on the Euphrates River.
- In 1922 through 1934 archaeologist Leonard Woolley spent time excavating the city in a greater fashion.
- Woolley found the "*ram caught in the thicket.*" It was made out of gold and silver. From an inscription a date of 2500 BC could be determined. It took tremendous artisanship and it tells us that in the city of Ur was quite accomplished. (see fig. 8)



The city of Nippur was also discovered about 100 miles south of Baghdad between 1890 and 1900. It was not explored again until 1948 through 1958 when over 40,000 stone tablets were found.

- A map of the city was found, which was a unique find. It was a complete map, which showed where the temple of Enlil, one of their chief gods, was. Tablets were found written in an Akkadian language and a few were found written in an even earlier Sumerian language.
- Also found were Nippur king lists, many of which showed ancient kings reigning for thousands of years before a worldwide flood. This is very similar to the biblical account of the long life spans of the antediluvian fathers.

Another city called Uruk, Erech in the Bible, was discovered in 1850. Additional excavations did not take place again until 1912 through 1914, then again in 1928 through 1939, and then again in 1954 through 1959. Erech is mentioned in [Genesis 10:10](#). A ziggurat was found there as well.

[GE 10:10](#) The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

[Genesis 10:10 \(NASB\)](#)

Not found at Uruk, but at Nineveh, were 12 stone tablets called the Gilgamesh Epic describing a worldwide flood similar to Noah's account in Genesis.

What evidence do we find at Ur during the 22nd century when Abraham would have been growing to adulthood?

- There is much evidence for The Third Dynasty of Ur (2130 – 2022). This dynasty lasted about 108 years and was the capital of lower Mesopotamia. This was the period of time the Sumerian culture reached its highest development.
- The names of the five successive rulers are: Ur-nammu, who ruled for 18 years; Shulgi, 48 years; Amar-sin, 9 years; Shu-sin, 9 years; and Ibbi-sin, 25 years. The city was sacked by the Elamites who came down from the Zagros Mountains near the end of Ibbi-sin's reign.
- The first ruler, Ur-nammu, is best known for his code of laws that have been found. The laws dealt with land, orphans, widows and fair measurement of weights. This indicates that Abraham lived in a society controlled by an established legal system.
- Also in Ur is a great Ziggurat, on which bricks have been found with Ur-nammu's name and title, stamped on them.
- Over one hundred thousand tablets have been found in the area detailing business dealings, such as transactions in grain, vegetables, fruit, cattle, and slaves. They detail prices and general business practices.
- Writing was common and there were schools. Tablets have been found that show reading lessons of hymns, and others with multiplication and division tables.

All of this comprised Abraham's world in Ur at the time he was called by God.

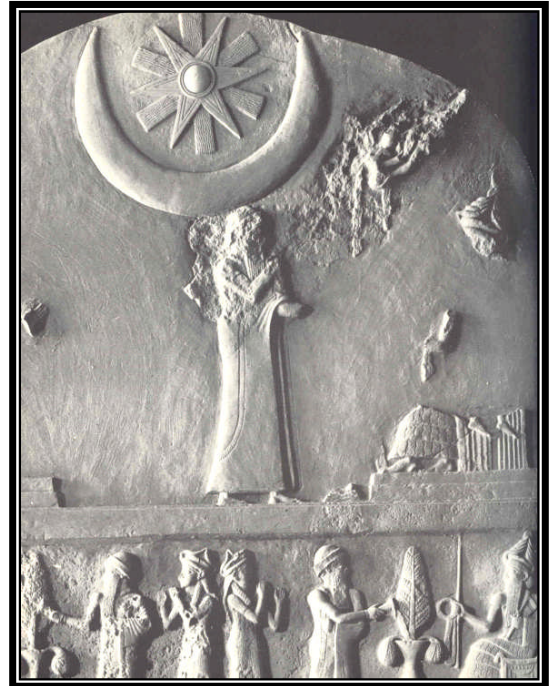


Fig 9. Ur-nammu Stele

Evidence

GILGAMESH EPIC: In 1853, the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard and his team were excavating the palace library of the ancient Assyrian capital Nineveh. Among their finds were a series of 12 tablets of a great epic. The tablets dated from about 650 BC, but the poem was much older. The hero, Gilgamesh, according to the Sumerian King List, was a king of the first dynasty of Uruk who reigned for 126 years. The 11th tablet tells of a great flood. The council of the gods decided to flood the whole earth to destroy mankind. But Ea, the god who made man, warned Utnapishtim, from Shuruppak, a city on the banks of the Euphrates, and told him to build an enormous boat:

*“O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!
Make all living beings go up into the boat.
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:
its length must correspond to its width.”*

MARI: An ancient city in Syria situated at the modern locality of Tell Hariri, on the western bank of the Euphrates river. It flourished from 2900 BCE until 1759 BCE, when it was sacked by Hammurabi. Abraham himself is thought to have passed through Mari on his way from Ur to Harran. Mari was discovered in 1933 on the eastern flank of Syria, near the Iraqi border. A Bedouin tribe was digging through a mound for a gravestone that would be used for a recently deceased tribesman, when they came across a headless statue. After the news reached the French authorities currently in control of Syria, the report was investigated and digging on the site was started on December 14, 1933 by archaeologists from the Louvre in Paris. Discoveries came quickly, with the temple of Ishtar being discovered in the next month. Mari was classified by the archaeologists as the “most westerly outpost of Sumerian culture.” Since the beginning of excavations, over 25,000 clay tables in Akkadian language written in cuneiform were discovered. Mari has been excavated every year since 1933 (except for the period 1939-1951). Less than half of the 1000 by 600 meter area of Mari has been uncovered as of 2005. Although archaeologists have tried to determine how many layers the site descends, it hasn’t proved possible. According to French archaeologist Andre Parrot, “each time a vertical probe was commenced in order to trace the site’s history down to virgin soil, such important discoveries were made that horizontal digging had to be resumed.”

MESOPOTAMIA (Hebrew: **Aram-naharaim**; i.e., “Syria of the two rivers”): The first great civilization, located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was developed in 5000 B.C. Archaeologists and historians discovered this “cradle of civilization” buried under sandy mounds of the vast plain which were the remains of Ancient Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek words, *mesos* meaning “middle,” and *potamos* meaning “river,” which became known as the “land between two rivers.” Mesopotamia no longer exists today. It is now known as all the land in northern Syria, southern Turkey, and most of Iraq. Researchers believe the peoples of Mesopotamia influenced the development of the human race in many ways. Mesopotamia is the name given by the Greeks and Romans to the region between the Euphrates and the Tigris (Gen. 24:10; Deut. 23:4; Judg. 3:8, 10). In the Old Testament it is also mentioned under the name “Padan-aram;” i.e., the plain of Aram, or Syria (Gen. 25:20). The northern portion of this fertile plateau was the original home of the ancestors of the Hebrews (Gen. 11; Acts 7:2). From this region Isaac obtained his wife Rebecca (Gen. 24:10, 15), and here also Jacob sojourned (28:2-7) and obtained his wives, and here most of his sons were born (35:26; 46:15). The petty, independent tribes of this region, each under its own prince, were warlike, and used chariots in battle. They maintained their independence till after the time of David, when they fell under the dominion of Assyria, and were absorbed into the empire (2 Kings 19:13).

NIPPUR: Ancient city of Babylonia, a Northern Sumerian settlement on the Euphrates. It was the seat of the important cult of the god Enlil, or Bel. Excavations at Nippur have yielded the remains of several temples that date from the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. and were later rebuilt and restored many times. Over 40,000 clay tablets found there serve as a primary source of

information on Sumerian civilization. Assurbanipal erected a ziggurat in Nippur. Relics of the Persian and Parthian periods have also been unearthed at the site.

NUZI: Nuzi was a city in the Hurrian kingdom of Arrapha, whose capital is today buried under the Iraqi city of Kirkuk. It was founded by the Hurrians around 1500 BC. Arrapha was situated along the southeastern edge of the area under Mittanian domination. Babylonia lay to the south. To the west was Assyria, whose revolt against the Hurrian kingdom of Mittani probably led to Nuzi's destruction in the 14th century, and ultimately contributed to Mittani's collapse. The tablets, which are in Akkadian, reveal much about ancient laws and customs. Nearly 5000 tablets were found in the excavations at Nuzi, mostly business and legal documents, and they were located in both the palace as well as in private residences.

URARTU: An ancient kingdom in Asia Minor, centred in the mountainous region around Lake Van (presently in Turkey), which existed from about 1000 BC, or earlier, until 585 BC, and which, at its apogee, stretched from northern Mesopotamia through the southern Caucasus. The name *Urtu* is actually Assyrian, a dialect of Akkadian, and was given to the kingdom by its chief rivals to the south; it may have meant simply "mountain country." The kingdom was named **Biainili** by its inhabitants. The name Urartu corresponds to the **Ararat** of the Old Testament. Indeed, Mount Ararat is located in ancient Urartian territory, approximately 120 km north of its former capital.

UR: Meaning: light, or the moon city a city "of the Chaldees," the birthplace of Haran (Gen. 11:28,31), the largest city of Shinar or northern Chaldea, and the principal commercial center of the country as well as the center of political power. It stood near the mouth of the Euphrates, on its western bank, and is represented by the mounds (of bricks cemented by bitumen) of el-Mugheir, i.e., "the bituminous," or "the town of bitumen," now 150 miles from the sea and some 6 miles from the Euphrates, a little above the point where it receives the Shat el-Hie, an affluent from the Tigris. It was formerly a maritime city, as the waters of the Persian Gulf reached thus far inland. Ur was the port of Babylonia, whence trade was carried on with the dwellers on the gulf, and with the distant countries of India, Ethiopia, and Egypt. It was abandoned about B.C. 500, but long continued, like Erech, to be a great sacred cemetery city, as is evident from the number of tombs found there. Such a remarkable coincidence between the Biblical narrative and the evidence of archaeological research cannot be the result of chance. The narrative must be historical; no writer of late date, even if he were a Babylonian, could have invented a story so exactly in accordance with what we now know to have been the truth. For a story of the kind to have been the invention of Palestinian tradition is equally impossible. To the unprejudiced mind there is no escape from the conclusion that the history of the migration of Terah from Ur to Harran is founded on fact.

URUK: (Sumerian *Unug*, Biblical *Erech*, Greek *Orchoë* and Arabic *Warka*), was an ancient city of Sumer and later Babylonia, situated east of the present bed of the Euphrates, on the line of the ancient Nil canal, in a region of marshes, about 140 miles SSE from Baghdad. The modern name of Iraq is derived from the name Uruk. It was one of the oldest and most important cities of Babylonia. Its walls were said to have been built by order of Gilgamesh who also constructed, it was said, the famous temple, called Eanna, dedicated to the worship of Inanna, or Ishtar. Its voluminous surviving temple archive, of the Neo-Babylonian period, documents the social function of the temple as a redistribution center. In times of famine, a family might dedicate children to the temple as oblates. Uruk played a very important part in the political history of the country from an early time, exercising hegemony in Babylonia at a period before the time of Sargon. Later it was prominent in the national struggles of the Babylonians against the Elamite Empire up to 2000 BC, in which it suffered severely; recollections of these conflicts are embodied in the Gilgamesh epic, in the literary and courtly form in which it has come down to us.

People ^(3 & 4)

ELIEZER: GOD IS MY HELP. *Abraham's chief servant*, and "son of his house," that is, one of his large household. He is named "Eliezer of Damascus" probably to distinguish him from others of the same name (Gen. 15:2; 24). There can be little doubt that the Damascus Eliezer is the nameless servant Abraham sent to his own country and kindred to secure a bride for Isaac, his son of promise. Of the search of Eliezer, Dr. C. I. Scofield says that the entire chapter (Genesis 24) is highly typical, and then he gives us this most helpful outline:

I. Abraham—type of a certain king who would make a marriage for his son (Matt. 22:2; John 6:44).

II. The unnamed servant—type of the Holy Spirit who does not speak of or from himself, but takes of the things of the bridegroom with which to win the bride (John 16:13, 14).

III. The servant—type of the Spirit as enriching the bride with the bridegroom's gifts (1 Cor. 12:7-11; Gal. 5:22).

IV. The servant—type of the Spirit as bringing the bride to the meeting with the bridegroom (Acts 13:4; 16:6, 7; Rom. 8:11; 1 Thess. 4:14-17).

V. Rebekah—type of the Church, the *ecclesia*, the "called out" virgin bride of Christ (Gen. 24:16; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32).

VI. Isaac—type of the bridegroom “whom not having seen” the bride loves through the testimony of the unnamed servant (1 Pet. 1:8).

VII. Isaac—type of the bridegroom who goes out to meet and receive His bride (Gen. 24:63; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

JACOB: HE THAT SUPPLANTETH or FOLLOWETH AFTER. *The second son of Isaac and Rebekah*, and a twin brother of Esau. Jacob appeared a short time after Esau and is therefore called the younger brother. Isaac was sixty years old when Jacob and Esau were born. Jacob is an outstanding illustration of the presence and conflict of the two natures within a believer. Jacob is good and bad; he rises and falls, yet in spite of his failures was a chosen instrument. Jacob’s character then, is full of interest and difficulty because of its weakness and strength. His is not a life to be described by a single word as, for example, the *faith* of Abraham or the *purity* of Joseph. Jacob seemed to have a many-sided life. He was a man of *guile*, yet a man of *prayer*. Inconsistencies are everywhere. His life began with a prophetic revelation of God to his mother, but Jacob’s early years were a singular mixture of good and bad—the bad being very bad.

I. Jacob was the victim of his mother’s partiality. “Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). This fault must be kept in mind as we judge his character.

II. Jacob was selfish. When his brother came in from the fields faint with hunger, Jacob would not give him food without bargaining over it.

III. Jacob was naturally crafty and deceitful. He violated his conscience when he allowed his mother to draw him away from the path of honor and integrity. He practiced deception upon his blind father with the covering of kid skins. Then he told a deliberate lie in order to obtain a spiritual blessing. He further sinned upon most sacred ground, when he blasphemously used the name of the Lord to further his evil plans.

The thoroughness with which he carried out his mother’s plan is one of the worst features in the life of this misguided son. “Had it been me,” says Martin Luther, “I would have dropped the dish.” It would have been better for Jacob had he dropped that dish of venison. But his proficiency in evil doing is to be despised.

In the life of this sharp trader who mended his ways, for there were two remarkable spiritual experiences in his life—at Bethel and Peniel—the preacher might find the following points suggestive: Jacob cheated (Gen. 25:29-34); deceived (Gen. 27:1-29); was compelled to flee (Gen 27:43; 28:1-5); was brought on to a higher level (Gen 28:10-22); had a romance spoiled, and was paid back in his own coin of deception (Gen. 29:15-30); was affectionate (Gen. 29:18); was industrious (Gen. 31:40); was prayerful (Gen. 32:9-12, 24-30); received a divine call to the promised land (Gen. 31); was disciplined by God through affliction (Gen. 37:28; 42:36); was a man of faith (Heb. 11:21); was blessed with sons who became the foundation of a nation. The Hebrew nation is spoken of as “the sons of Jacob” and “the children of Israel” (Gen. 48; 49; Num. 24:19).

UR-NAMMU: king of the ancient city of Ur, sometimes called Zur-Nammu or Ur-Engur. He founded a new Sumerian dynasty, the third dynasty of Ur, which lasted about a century. Ur-Nammu was the promulgator of the oldest code of law yet known, older by about three centuries than the code of Hammurabi. It consists of a prologue and seven laws; the prologue describes Ur-Nammu as a divinely appointed king who established justice throughout the land. This code is of great importance to the study of biblical law, which it predates by about five centuries. The two most famous monuments of Ur-Nammu’s reign are the great ziggurat (temple) at Ur and his stele, of which fragments remain.

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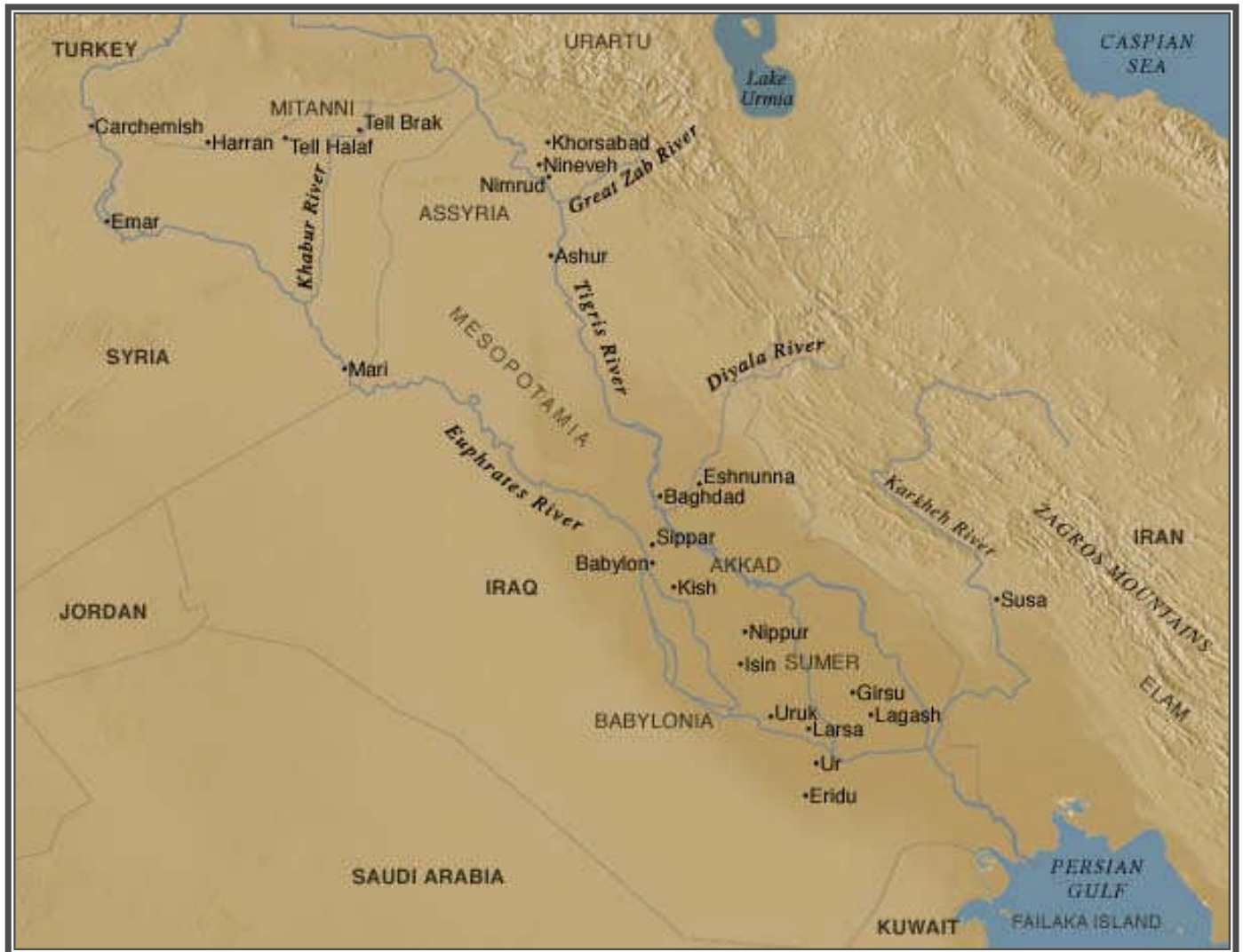


Fig 10. Map of Mesopotamia