

Archaeology and the Patriarchs

TEXT: “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

THESIS: To relate the biblical narrative of the patriarchs with the accent of archaeological insights.

INTRODUCTION:

1. When we consider Archaeology, it is defined as a, “Branch of knowledge which takes awareness of past civilizations and investigates their history in all fields by means of the remains of art, architecture, monuments, inscriptions, literature, language, implements, customs and all other examples which have survived.”
 - a. Archaeology is the key to our understanding the past.
 - b. The reason we study archaeology is because it is a science.
 - i. And, those items which have been found,
 - (1) Go through evaluation.
 - (2) Confirms the Bible.
 - (3) Reaffirms the Bible.
2. Now, geography, archaeology and sacred history combine to tell a fuller, value-added biblical narrative.
 - a. Archaeology confirms the biblical narrative or message where both conclude to say the same thing.
 - b. Also, archaeology helps the Bible student understand better the recipients of the biblical message and how they would have understood God’s revelation at that time.
3. Now because of this reason, contemporary men can more easily make the correct biblical application today.
 - a. And, an added benefit is that combining geography and archaeology with sacred history makes the biblical message more alive and interesting.
4. Take for instance:
 - a. The city of Ur.
 - b. The call of Abraham.
 - c. Isaac, Jacob and Esau.

DISCUSSION:

- I. THE CITY OF UR
 - A. It’s general location, geographically, is in southern Mesopotamia
 1. The land between the rivers: Tigris & Euphrates rivers to be exact.
 2. It is what we know today as Iraq.
 3. It is about 110 miles NW of the Persian Gulf and is on the south bank of

- the Euphrates River.
4. Ur had a population of around 200,000 which was a very large city in that day.
- B. Now, Mesopotamia is the undisputed site of the origin of human civilization on earth.
1. This has been dated back to about 3,000 B.C.
 2. And, the Mesopotamia region is the probable site of the Garden of Eden.
 - a. We say this because the Euphrates river which is 1,780 miles long (from Belle, MO. To Los Angeles, CA), and the Tigris (Hiddekel) River 1,060 miles long, ran through the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:14).
 3. Mesopotamia is about 600 by 300 miles and the terrain of Mesopotamia gently rises from sea level to 1,000 feet above sea level at Haran, 600 miles NW of Ur.
- C. Now, the use of metal, tools including the wheel, writing, language and musical instruments were first used in Mesopotamia.
1. A universal parent language is thought to have begun in Mesopotamia.
 2. And, languages are believed to have had one common origin, which concurs with the biblical record.
 - a. “And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” (Gen. 11:1)
- D. Now, let us observe Ur and its inhabitants in Abraham’s day.
1. The typical home was about 40x50 feet and was normally two stories.
 - a. It had a drain in the corner of the lobby along with a container of water which gave visitors an opportunity to wash their feet upon entrance to the home.
 - b. They had cooking areas, guest rooms, servant’s quarters, and a wooden balcony about three foot in width that went around the small courtyard in the middle.
 - c. Several generations would live here.
 2. Ur’s citizens enjoyed an extensive education.
 - a. If you had ever thought that Abraham was a farmer who lived in a tent, we can know that he started his life as an upper class family member.
 - b. No doubt he went to school.
 - c. And, in these schools, people would study to become governors, ambassadors, temple administrators, accountants, tax officials and many other things.
 - d. The goal of course was to train scribes for the temple and palaces.
 - e. They were further taught botany, zoology, mineralogy, geography, theology, cuneiform writing, multiplication, division, square and cube roots and geometry.
 - (1) And, Abraham was very likely to be one of these students

who could read and write.

- (2) Thereby, he was likely able to read historical accounts and commit to writing contemporary information of his associates and generations to come.
3. Now, among excavated documents in Abraham's era and in southern Mesopotamia is a bill of lading.
 - a. It tells of a two year cruise after which a cargo was obtained including copper ore, gold, ivory, hardwoods for cabinet making and various stone suitable for making statues.
 - b. Additional documents recovered include other bills of lading, invoices, letters of credit, court cases and tax records.
- E. So, their society was much like ours today.

II. THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

- A. The move from Ur to Haran
 1. Terah, being the father of Abram, moved his family 600 miles to Haran in northern Mesopotamia.
 - a. "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." (Gen. 11:31)
 2. But later, God called Abram to leave Haran.
 - a. ". . . Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee . . ." (Gen. 12:1ff).
 3. And so, Abram left behind, among other things, the idolatry that his family and perhaps even he had practiced in Mesopotamia.
 - a. For it is written in Josh. 24:2, "Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods."
- B. So, Abram, Sarai and Abram's nephew, Lot, traveled into and through Canaan, and because of famine, they went into the land of Egypt (Gen. 12:10).
 - a. Abram was 75 years old and Sarai was 65 years old.(Gen. 12:4).
 2. Now, archaeological discoveries confirm that people from Palestine and Syria were coming to Egypt in Abraham's day.
 - a. This is confirmed in tomb painting that we find on the Egyptian walls.
 - b. And, these were called the Hyksos people, who not only introduced the horse and chariot to Egypt, they also ruled Egypt for a time.
 3. Now, Abram took with him to Egypt, among other animals, camels.
 - a. Critics claim that in that era camels were neither found in Palestine

nor Egypt.

- (1) However, archaeological evidence confirms camels were contemporary in Palestine and Egypt with the age in which Abraham lived.
 - (2) In addition to this, figurines, plagues, rock carvings, drawings and even bones of camels and camel hair rope have been unearthed, dating to the time and places of the account concerning Abraham.
4. Now, sometime after Abram's return to Canaan, and after Lot separated himself and his stuff from Abram, Lot was taken hostage by the army of four Mesopotamian kings.
- a. In Gen. 14:8ff, "there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same *is* Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five . . . (vs. 11-16) they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these *were* confederate with Abram. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained *servants*, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued *them* unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which *is* on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people."
 - b. Abram raised an army from his household (servants), pursued and conquered the marauders and rescued Lot.
 - c. The names of the Mesopotamian kings coincide with archaeological confirmation that those names were in use in Abraham's day.
5. Later, Sarai giving her servant woman, Hagar to Abram to father a child for Sarai which concurs with prevailing custom of their day (Gen. 16).
- a. Archaeological evidence in the form of the Code of Hammurabi (which governed the Babylonians) affirms this practice.
6. Still later, God required Abraham to circumcise males in his household.
- a. Archaeology again confirms an early practice of circumcision in the days of Abraham.
 - b. Circumcision is also depicted in Egyptian beliefs and is evident on Egyptian mummies.

7. Then there's Lot (Gen. 19), who was at the gate of Sodom when angels came into the city.
 - a. Palestinian cities often had stone benches built into the gate.
 - b. There, legal matters, commerce and news were attended, according to archaeology.
 - c. In this era, cities had strong walls and heavy gates because Palestine was comprised chiefly of city-states with no central, far reaching government.
 - d. In the period of the kings, walls and gates built were not as strong.
8. According to the Jewish historian, who lived in the 1st century A.D., the remains of the "five cities" destroyed in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were visible at the southern end of the Dead Sea.
 - a. Apparently at that time the Dead Sea did not extend as far south as it does now.
 - b. The ruins of Sodom and Gomorah are thought to be under water in the southern portion of the Dead Sea.
9. At the death of Sarah (age 127, the only woman whose age is recorded in the Bible), Abraham weighed out 400 shekels of silver.
 - a. "And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current *money* with the merchant." (Gen. 23:16)
 - b. Evidently, in that era a shekel was a weight and not a minted coin.
 - c. Abraham was not merely a nomad, living solely off the land.
 - (1) Formerly, he raised a mighty army.
 - (2) Plus, the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah for a burial site indicates that Abraham was wealthy and powerful.

III. ISAAC, JACOB AND ESAU

- A. When we consider the wife for Isaac, she was from the Mesopotamian city of Nahor.
 1. The Bible states that, "the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master *were* in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor." (Gen. 24:10)
 2. This city is confirmed as a real city of that era from its appearance in the Mari Tablets.
- B. Now, Isaac and Rebekah's sons were Jacob and Esau.
 1. And Esau as we know, sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for some stew in Gen. 25.
 - a. Archaeological evidence in the Nuzi Tablets, found in Mesopotamia and dating to Abraham's era, confirms this practice.
 2. Now in his old age, Isaac was tricked into bestowing his oral blessing on Jacob instead of Esau (Gen. 27).

- a. The Nuzi Tablets also acknowledges that patriarchal oral blessings were legally valid even in a court of law.
- b. The phrase, “Our word is our bond.”
- 3. In Genesis chapters 28-31 we have the chronicles of the flight of Jacob from Esau, Jacob’s 20 year sojourn in Mesopotamia and Jacob’s departure from Mesopotamia.
 - a. But, I would like to notice something in Gen. 31:19-32.
 - (1) Here we see Jacob’s father-in-law, Laban, pursued Jacob and his family with an army for seven days.
 - (2) But why?
 - (a) Yes, I understand that some of it was because of his daughters (vs. 28), but the main reason was that Laban was concerned about his missing “teraphim.”
 - (b) What’s a teraphim?
 - i) It was a family idol or god (vs. 30).
 - (3) “. . . Rachel had stolen the images that *were* her father’s” (vs. 19).
 - (4) Jacob said, “With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live . . . For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them” (Vs. 32).
 - (5) And we see that in vs. 33-43, Laban destroys Jacobs’s house looking for this god and tells Jacob that everything is his still.
 - b. The Nuzi Tablets indicate that the possessor of the family idol had legal claim to one’s entire estate so if Laban lost his idol, he could claim nothing.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. We can learn that when the biblical record and archaeological discoveries address the same events, the Bible and archaeology agree.
 - a. Archaeological evidence is an external witness to the reliability of the Bible.
 - b. And, in areas which the Bible can be tested by external evidences (e.g., astronomy, geography, topography and other areas of true science), the Bible is uniformly shown to be accurate, well in advance of man’s independent discoveries.
 - c. It is reasonable, then, to believe that the Bible is equally reliable in both other physical matters that have yet to be satisfactorily tested and in spiritual matters.
- 2. Invitation
 - a. You know, the “call of Abraham” about which we talked for a little while involves “spiritual matters” besides the physical things noted.
 - i. God initiated his promise with Abram in Genesis 12-22.
 - ii. And, the promise was three-fold:
 - (1) Land promise.

- (2) Many descendants promise.
 - (3) Spiritual promise (in which all classes of mankind would be blessed — pertaining to Christ and redemption)
- b. The Christ, who brought the Gospel (John 1:17) and who is the subject of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4), is the fulfillment of the spiritual promise to Abraham.
 - i. To receive that spiritual blessing, you must accept God's gift on his terms:
 - (1) Hearing and faith (Rom. 10:17; Mark 16:16).
 - (2) Repentance (Acts 2:38).
 - (3) Professing Christ (Rom. 10:9-10).
 - (4) Immersion in water (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16).
 - (5) Faithfulness (Rev. 2:10).
 - (6) Prayerful penitence for the erring child of God (Acts 8:22).
- c. When is the accepted time to be saved?
 - i. Now (2 Cor. 6:2).