

BBS#5 • Archaeology & The Patriarch Era

library in Bogazkoy, Turkey (about 90 miles east of Ankara) in 1906 A.D.. (The Lion Gate, Bogazkoy (or Hattusas) is pictured on p.7).

The following edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica contained lots of information about this people! On Monday, 6 September 2004, Channel 5 TV (England) ran an hour-long documentary titled, 'The Lost Civilisation - The Hittites.' The Hittite's rule extended to Syria and Lebanon.



Finding the Hittite's empire forced that claim to be withdrawn and supported the biblical record. The find also helps explain the language, history and literature of people who appear in the Old Testament and ruled in the 2nd millennium B.C. ... **The Bible was right all along!**

BASIC BIBLE STUDY

An Introductory Guide To Understanding The Scriptures

PART FIVE (Supplement)

Archaeology & The Patriarch Era



"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path"
PSALM 119:105

ARCHAEOLOGY & THE PATRIARCH ERA



'THE SPADE SPEAKS!'

What has Archaeology contributed to our understanding of the period of the Patriarchs?

Not content with their efforts to kill God, it seems that some in our society must also kill off everyone else related to the biblical narrative.

Each person mentioned in the Bible is scrutinised and criticised, their very existence doubted. Everyone from Adam, through Abraham, to the Lord Himself has been questioned and at some point declared mythical, fictitious, or allegorical.

The opening chapters of Genesis have often been accused of being mythical by Bible critics - yet thousands of cuneiform tablets have been found in different places in the middle east that date to the time covered in Genesis.

• The Ebla Tablets

A particularly large cache of 20,000 tablets found in northern Syria, in the 1970s - more tablets than all of the excavations to that point had produced! These tablets are from the Empire of Ebla dating from around 2,250 BC (pre-dating Moses' writings by 800 years).

The Ebla Tablets not only make reference to the flood and the tower of Babel, they contain **a detailed description of creation** – written 800 years before Moses penned the Genesis account! Significantly, the

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uted to a search for copper in the large deposits of Palestine (Hoerth, 1998, p.96). It has even been shown that the name "Abraham" was not novel in that ancient environment (Finegan, p. 61). The Bible is a precise record!

• **Second, some critics have contended there was no Eastward line of march at the time of Abraham;** thus, they have alleged that the Mosaic narrative is erroneous in this descriptive. The famous archaeologist, W.F. Albright, admitted that he "formerly considered this extraordinary line of march as being the best proof of the essentially legendary character of the narrative" (p. 142). But Albright's discoveries in this region forced him to revise his opinion of the Genesis text.

Professor Stephen Caiger, who was not a strictly conservative scholar, nonetheless stated that: "[T]here seems [to be] no reason to question a factual basis of Genesis 14" (p.34).

(d) THE HITTITES.

The Bible mentions a nation called the Hittites (**Genesis 15:20, 23:10** ... in fact the OT mentions them 47 times!). For hundreds of years, archaeologists and historians said: "The Bible's wrong. It cannot be God's book because here's an obvious, glaring mistake. There's no evidence at all of there ever being a people called the Hittites." Even the Encyclopaedia Britannica had no information about the Hittites.



Then, an archaeologist discovered the Hittite capital city and its

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Genesis 31:30 ff. records Laban's anguish because his teraphim had been stolen. The incident seems to have little significance except for the increased tension between Jacob and Laban. However, as a result of the Nuzu tablets we now know why the tension was increased and, more importantly, why Rachel risked possible injury or death in taking these images. Ancient law among the tribes dictated that whoever owned the family gods inherited the family estate, or in other cases, became the recognised head of the clan. Rachel was therefore seeking to protect her own and Jacob's just inheritance.

(cf. Walter G. Williams, 'Archaeology in Biblical Research' (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1965; pp.17-18).

William F. Albright, the famed archaeologist of the Bible lands, remarked: "It is now becoming increasingly clear that the traditions of the Patriarchal Age, preserved in the book of Genesis, reflect with remarkable accuracy the actual conditions of the Middle Bronze Age, and especially of the period between 1800 and 1500 B.C." (as quoted in Unger, p.121).

(c) THE MESOPOTAMIAN KINGS.

After Abraham settled in the hill-country of Hebron, and Lot, his nephew, pitched his tent in the vicinity of Sodom, a confederation of Mesopotamian kings invaded the region of Sodom and Gomorrah taking numerous captives, including Lot (**Genesis 14**).

The Genesis record reveals that when Abraham heard of the tragedy, he, along with 318 servants from his household, pursued the eastward-bound hostile armies. The patriarch attacked the pagan forces and rescued his nephew, taking considerable booty in the process (**Genesis 14:1ff**).

The accuracy of the scriptural account has been questioned in several particulars.

• **First, the historicity of the names of the opposing kings (Amraphel, Chedorlaomer, Arioch, and Tidal) has been disputed.** It has been documented, however, from Mesopotamian inscriptions, that these names were common to this time period in the Tigrus-Euphrates region, and that they are not "fictional forms" (Vos, p. 69). Their invasion of Palestine can be reasonably attrib-

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people of Ebla also believed in creation from nothing (**Psalms 33:6; Hebrews 11:3**).

They also contain extensive trade records and confirm many details found in the Biblical stories about the Patriarchs.



• The Nuzu Tablets

Nuzu is an ancient Mesopotamian city, located southeast of Kirkuk, Iraq. Excavations between 1925 and 1941 uncovered more than 4000 cuneiform tablets, mostly written in Akkadian. These clarified many difficult passages in the contemporary Patriarchal narratives of the Book of Genesis.

• Other Supporting Documentation

Other archaeological evidence to emerge in support of the Bible include **The Moabite Stone, the Code of Hammurabi, The Rosetta Stone, The Mari Letters, and the extensive Sumerian Literature**, in addition to many **Sites, Monuments and Artifacts** that are identified with Biblical events.

(a) NAMES FROM PATRIARCH ERA.

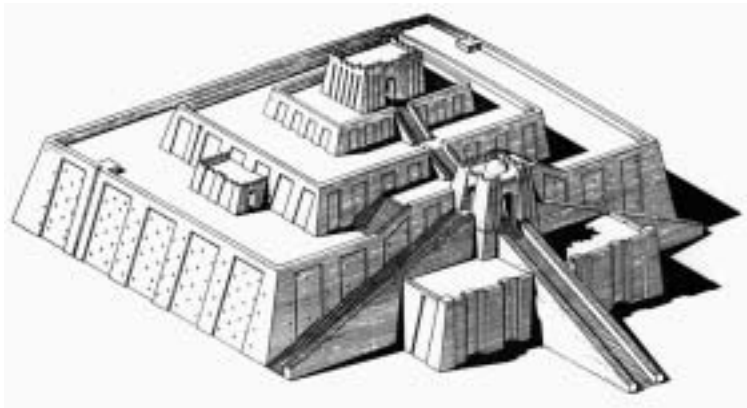
The Ebla documents demonstrate that **personal and place names** in the Patriarchal accounts are genuine. They mention Abraham, Ishmael, Israel, Esau, plus Saul and David. They also refer to many of the places visited by the Patriarchs (e.g. Canaan, plus Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain).

'Fort Abram'

The earliest reference to Abraham may be the name of a town in the Negev listed in a victory inscription of Pharaoh Shishak I. This campaign occurred in about 925 B.C.E. during the reign of Rehoboam (**1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chronicles 12:2-12**). A place name in the Negev section of the inscription is pa'hca-q-ru-a 'i-bi-ra-ma, which is best read "the fortification of Abram," or, more simply, "Fort Abram."

Haran – The City Of Abraham, Home of the Patriarchs

A village of Harran (Haran) exists in Turkey today, and has been found to stand atop the ancient one from the Old Testament. Also found near Haran are villages that still bear the names of Abraham's great-grandfather and grandfather, Serug and Nahor, as mentioned in **Genesis 11:22-26**. Haran was the father of Lot (**Genesis 11:27**).



The cities of Ur and Haran both had the moon god as their main deity (reconstruction of Ur Ziggurat shown above). Terah, father of Abraham, worshipped "other gods" (**Joshua 24:2**) and moved his family from Ur, in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq today), to Haran in the north (**Genesis 11:27-31**).



Sodom And Gomorrah

Ebla Tablets reveal that all five cities of the plain were centres of

commerce and geographically situated as the Scriptures say (**Genesis 13:10-12; 14:2&3**).

In addition, geological evidence in this area points to tremendous earthquake activity, with layers of sedimentary rock moulded together by intense heat. One startling discovery archaeologists made in a cemetery (at Bab edh-Dhra, thought to be Sodom) is that buildings used to bury the dead were burned by a fire that started on the roof (cf. **Genesis 19:24**).

(b) CUSTOMS FROM PATRIARCH ERA.

Many customs recorded in Scripture puzzle us, or at least are not fully understood because the customs are unknown in modern cultures. Sometimes a Bible writer included an explanation because customs had already changed in his own day.

For example, **Ruth 4:7** explains the significance of drawing off the sandal to indicate renunciation of one's rights. But even if the author had not given us an explanation we would now know the significance of the custom because of the work of the archaeologist. Tablets have been recovered from near Kirkuk (ancient Nuzu), Iraq, which explain this particular practice.

These **tablets of Nuzu** also lends credence to many practices that are documented in the Patriarchal story.

For example:

- When Abraham and Sarah realised that they were barren and unable to produce an heir, Abraham adopted his slave, Eliezer of Damascus (**Genesis 15:2**). This was common practice for a childless couple in ancient Middle East.
- For the same reason, Sarah encouraged her husband to take a female servant, Hagar, as a wife, in order that he might produce a son. Though God did not approve of this arrangement, it was a standard practice according to the Nuzu documents (Unger, 1973, p.122).
- Also, the Nuzu Tablets reveal the true value of the teraphim (family idols / household gods) stolen by Rachel from her father Laban.