

Life of Abraham - 2056 to 1881BC



Ancient Mesopotamia and Ur of the Chaldeans

The land between the Euphrates River and the Tigris River has been considered the first urban civilization, namely, the first society which has provided evidence of people deliberately living in close proximity to one another, with attendant social and economic structures to allow that to occur peaceably.

People speak of north and south Mesopotamia especially during the period from 3000-2000BC. The peoples of this time were very religious in that they worshipped many gods and in later years every town had its temples to their favorite gods.

These gods bound people together in their social groups and were believed to have provided what they needed to survive. At the time when Abraham was born here in 2056BC there were four dominant gods known as the four creator gods. These four Mesopotamian gods did not act alone, but consulted with an assembly of 50, which is called the Anunnaki. Innumerable spirits and demons shared the world with the Anunnaki.

These gods and goddesses were more concerned with their feasting, sacrifices (including their own children), drinking, fighting and arguing.

Into this background Abram was born in 2056BC. In Gen. 11 we read that his father was Terah. Through Terah, Abram's ancestry is traced back to Shem, and he is thus related to Mesopotamian and Arabian families that belonged to the "Semitic" race. He is further connected with this race geographically by his birthplace, Ur, and by the place of his pre-canaanitish residence, Haran in the Aramaean region.

The purely Semitic ancestry of his descendants through Isaac is indicated by his marriage with his own half-sister (Gen 20:12) and still further emphasized by the choice for his daughter-in-law, Rebekah, descended from both of his brothers Nahor and Haran (Gen 11:29; 22:22).

Abram's Calling

Abram, endowed with Jehovah's promise of limitless blessing, leaves Ur with his father, Terah, and all the family, and travel to Haran where they reside for a number of years

Harran (Haran)

Very little is known about Haran during the patriarchal period, but it is connected with the home of Laban, Isaac and Jacob. This was also the home of Isaac's wife, Rebekah. See Gen 31:38, 41) This city was the chief home of the

Mesopotamian moon god Sin, under the Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians/Chaldeans and even into Roman times.

Dates are unknown but Terah remains in Haran until his death. Abram leaves Haran with Lot, Sarai and all their establishment, and enters Canaan. Successive stages of the slow journey southward are indicated by the mention of Shechem, Bethel and the Negeb (South-country).

Driven by famine into Egypt Abram finds hospitable reception, though at the price of his wife's honor, whom Pharaoh treats in a manner characteristic of an Egyptian monarch, viz. "the Pharaoh takes away the wives from their husbands whither he will, if desire seize his heart."

After the famine Abram and his augmented train retrace their path back into Canaan to Bethel. At Bethel Abraham and Lot find it necessary to part company. Lot and his dependants choose the Great Jordan Valley. Abram follows the backbone of the land to Hebron, where he settles, not in the city, but before its gates "by the great trees" of Mamre. (See photo.)

Affiliation between Abram and the local Amoritish chieftains is strengthened by a brief campaign, in which all unite their available forces for the rescue of Lot (who was living at Sodom at this time) from an Elamite king and his confederates from Babylonia.

The pursuit leads them as far as the Lebanon region, then past Damascus. On their return to Mamre they are met by the king of Salem, Melchizedek, a priest. He blessed Abram, in his priestly capacity, which Abraham recognizes by presenting him with a tithe of the spoils.

Being impatient to have a son, Abram slept with Hagar who gave birth to Ishmael. His existence from his inception proves a source of moral evil within the patriarchal household. The sign of circumcision and the change of names (Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah) are given in confirmation of the covenant still unrealized, together with specification of the time and the person that should begin its realization. After this Abraham is granted the deliverance of Lot and his family from the impending destruction of Sodom by Divine action for the extreme evil going on in Sodom at the time. Only Lot's daughters join him to escape when given the opportunity.

Moabites and Ammonites are traced in their origin to these cousins of Jacob and Esau.

This was followed by a succession of more or less temporary resting-places in the South-country. The first one was Gerar, with whose king, Abimelech, Abraham and Sarah had an experience similar to the earlier one with the Pharaoh.

The birth of Isaac was followed by the expulsion of Ishmael and his mother, and the sealing of peaceful relations with the neighbors by covenant at Beersheba.

Even the birth of Isaac, however, did not end the discipline of Abraham's faith in the promise, for a Divine command to sacrifice the life of Isaac was accepted as real, and only the sudden intervention of a Divine prohibition prevented its obedient execution,

The death of Sarah became the occasion for Abraham's purchase of the first permanent holding of Palestinian soil, the nucleus of his promised inheritance and at the same time suggested the probable approach of his own death. This thought led Abraham to provide for a future seed to inherit through Isaac, a provision realized in Isaac's marriage with Rebekah, granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor and of Milcah the sister of Lot.

A numerous progeny unassociated with the promise grew up in Abraham's household, children of Keturah, a woman who appears to have had the rank of wife after Sarah's death, and of other women unnamed, who were his concubines. Though this last period was passed in the Negeb, Abraham was interred at Hebron, in his purchased possession, the spot with which Semitic tradition has continued to associate him to this day. He had lived a total of 175 years.



Picture of a Ziggurat built in the town of Ur of the Chaldeans



One of the great trees of Mamre that has survived to this day. Note how small the people look compared to the size of the tree!



Traditional mud brick "beehive" houses in Harran (Haran), Turkey



Ibrahim Mosque built over and around the Cave of Machpela



Natural cave entrance to the Cave of Machpela