

THE GREATEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

and Their Effects on the Bible

I

Introduction

Definition and Importance of Biblical Archaeology

The last 150 years have witnessed the birth, growth, and phenomenal development of the science of biblical archaeology. This new science has performed many wonders in furnishing background material and in illustrating, illuminating, and in many cases authenticating the message and meaning of the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Biblical archaeology may be defined as a study based on the excavation, decipherment, and critical evaluation of the records of the past as they affect the Bible. While the general field of archaeology is fascinating, much more so is the study of biblical archaeology, since it deals with the Holy Scriptures. This is the reason for the growing enthusiasm for biblical archaeology. The attraction lies in the supreme importance of the message and meaning of the Bible. The Scriptures, by virtue of their character as the inspired revelation of God to man and meeting man's deepest need, today as in the past, have naturally held a paramount place in the interest and affection of mankind. Biblical archaeology, illustrating the Bible in its historical background and contemporary life, attracts a measure of the interest that lies in the Bible itself. Accordingly, this science has a worthy ministry of expanding biblical horizons on the human plane.

No field of research has offered greater challenge and promise than that of biblical archaeology. Until the beginning of the 19th century very little was known of biblical times and biblical backgrounds, except what appeared on the pages of the Old Testament or what happened to be preserved in the writings of classical antiquity. This was considerable for the New Testament era but very little indeed for the Old Testament period. The reason for this is that Greek and Latin historians catalogued very little information before the 5th century B.C. As a result, the Old Testament period was very little known extrabiblically, and what was known was confined to what the Bible gave. This from the viewpoint of contemporary secular history was sparse. The result was that before the beginning of the science of modern archaeology there was practically nothing available to authenticate Old Testament history and literature. One can therefore imagine the fer-

vor aroused among serious Bible students by illuminating discoveries in Bible lands, especially from c. 1800 to the present. In fact, modern archaeology may be said to have had its beginning in 1798, when the rich antiquities of the Nile Valley were opened up to scientific study by Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition.

II

Foundational Discoveries of the Nineteenth Century

Although the most notable discoveries affecting the Bible and particularly the Old Testament were not made until the 20th century, foundational discoveries were made in the 19th century and prepared the way for the modern era.

1. The Rosetta Stone—Key to Egypt's Splendid Past

This very important monument was discovered in 1798 at *Rosetta* (Rashid), near the westernmost mouth of the Nile River, by an officer in Napoleon's Expedition to Egypt. It was a slab of black basalt trilingually inscribed, which may be said to be the key that unlocked the door to knowledge of the language and literature of ancient Egypt and turned out to be the inscription that opened the modern era of scientific biblical archaeology.

The three languages in which this monument was found to be inscribed were the Greek of 200 B.C., two forms of Egyptian writing—the older, more complicated hieroglyphic script and the later simplified and more popular demotic writing, which was the common language of the people. The Greek could at once be read and provided the clue to the decipherment of the other two ancient Egyptian scripts. Sylvester de Sacy of France and J. D. Akerblad of Sweden succeeded in unraveling the demotic Egyptian by identifying the Greek personal names it contained, namely Ptolemy, Arsinoe, and Berenike. Thomas Young of England then proceeded to identify the name of Ptolemy in the hieroglyphic portion, where groups of characters enclosed in oval frames, called cartouches, had already been surmised to be royal names. From this point on, the young Frenchman Jean François Champollion, 1790–1832, was able to decipher the hieroglyphics of the monument, show the true nature of this script, make a dictionary, formulate a grammar, and translate numerous Egyptian texts, from the year 1818 to 1832.

Champollion's achievement formally opened up the science of Egyptology. Scholars from henceforth were able to read Egyptian monumental inscriptions and reliefs. From that time forth the literary treasures of the Nile Valley have been opened to scholarly study. Today many universities maintain chairs in the language and culture of ancient Egypt. These studies have opened up vistas of history hitherto unknown so that, from the beginning of Egypt, c. 2800 B.C. to 63 B.C. when Rome took over, the entire history of the land of the Nile can fairly well be traced.

All of this has tremendous bearing on the background of the Bible. Egypt figures largely in the patriarchal narratives and the Book of Exodus and all through the Pentateuch. As a result, the background of the story of Joseph and of the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt, their deliverance under Moses, and much of their sojourn in the desert and later history in Canaan can now be set in the general framework of Egyptian history. It can be said that the whole context of Old Testament history, in its broad span from Abraham to Christ, is made immeasurably clearer because of the vast strides in our knowledge of Egypt. That great nation of antiquity interacted with the mighty Assyro-Babylonian empires on the Tigris-Euphrates and with the Hittite power on the Halys across the tiny bridge that was ancient Palestine.

2. The Behistun Inscription—Gateway to Assyrian-Babylonian Antiquity

This famous monument was the key to the languages of Assyria and Babylonia. It consists of a large relief panel containing numerous columns of inscription, which was boldly carved on the face of a mountain about 500 feet above the surrounding plain of Karmanshah on the old caravan route from Babylon to Ecbatana. Unlike the Rosetta Stone written in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, and later in popular demotic and in the Greek of the 3rd century B.C., the *Behistun Inscription* was written in the wedge-shaped characters of ancient Assyria-Babylonia. It contained about 1200 lines of inscription. The three languages in which it was inscribed were all written in cuneiform characters, consisting of Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian. The third language, the Akkadian, was the wedge-shaped language of ancient Assyria and Babylonia, in which thousands upon thousands of clay tablets discovered in the Tigris-Euphrates region are inscribed.

Early excavations revealed a mass of material on which this curious wedge-shaped Babylonian-Akkadian writing appeared. But it was an unsolved riddle. Practically no progress was made until a young English officer in the Persian army, Henry C. Rawlinson, in 1835 and the following years made the dangerous climb to the Behistun

inscription and made copies and plaster of paris impressions of it. Rawlinson knew modern Persian and set to work to decipher the old Persian, the cuneiform part of the inscription. After a decade of labor, he finally succeeded in translating the five columns, nearly 400 lines of the old Persian portion of the Behistun Inscription, and sent it to Europe in 1845. The text translation and commentary on it were published in 1847 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

In conjunction with the literary part of the monument was a life-sized figure with numerous individuals bowing before it. This person turned out to be Darius the Great (522–486 B.C.), the Achaemenid prince who saved the Persian Empire from a rebellion. The scene depicts the king, as Rawlinson's translation of the Persian portion of the inscription shows, receiving the submission of the rebels. The emperor is portrayed at the top of the relief accompanied by two attendants. His foot is placed upon the prostrate form of a leading rebel. The king's left hand holds a bow, while his right hand is lifted toward the winged disc symbolizing Ahura-Mazda, the spirit of good, whom Darius, an ardent follower of Zoroaster, worshiped. Behind the rebel stands a procession of rebel leaders, roped together by their necks. Beside and beneath the sculptured panel the numerous columns of the inscription appear, relating in three languages how Darius defended the throne and crushed the revolt.

Working on the supposition that the other inscriptions told the same story, scholars were soon enabled to read the second language, which was the Elamite or Susian. Then last, but most important, they could decipher the Akkadian or Assyro-Babylonian. This was a great discovery, for this wedge-shaped character of writing is recorded on numerous literary remains from the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. It opened up a vast new field of biblical background, so that today, as in the case of the Rosetta Stone opening up the science of Egyptology, the Behistun Inscription has given birth to the science of Assyriology. Moreover, both Egyptology and Assyriology offers great help in understanding biblical backgrounds and biblical history. No Bible dictionary, Bible handbook or commentary that is up to date can ignore the great findings of these sciences.

The task of deciphering cuneiform is increasing with every decade. Numerous cuneiform libraries have been discovered from antiquity. Two at Nineveh were unearthed. These contained thousands of clay tablets. *The library of Ashurbanipal* (669–625 B.C.) contained some 22,000 tablets. Among the tablets unearthed in this collection and sent to the British Museum were Assyrian copies of the Babylonian creation and flood stories. The identification and decipherment of these particular tablets by George Smith in 1872



A gateway into Nebuchadnezzar's Palace in Babylon.
Matson Photo Service

produced great excitement in the archaeological world.

Not only in Babylonia but in many other places large bodies of cuneiform literature have been uncovered. For example, the famous *Amarna Letters* from Egypt were discovered in 1886 at Tell el-Amarna about 200 miles south of modern Cairo. These Amarna Tablets proved to be diplomatic correspondence of petty princes of Palestine in the 14th century B.C. with the Egyptian court at Amarna. The Amarna Letters give an inside glance into conditions in Palestine just before the conquest by Joshua and the Israelites. Many scholars actually think that they describe aspects of that invasion. One of the documents from the governor of Jerusalem (Urusalim) tells Amenophis IV that the "Habiru" (perhaps the Hebrews) were overrunning many Palestine cities and could not be held back.

Other important bodies of cuneiform literature bearing upon the Bible have been retrieved from Boghaz-Keui and Kanish in Asia Minor. Others come from Susa and Elam, others from the city of Mari on the middle Euphrates, others from Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), mentioned in the Amarna Letters and located in North Syria. Others stem from various sites within and without Babylonia. Of first-rate importance then is the Rosetta Stone from Egypt and the Behistun Inscription from Babylonia. These two monuments may be said to have laid the foundation for the key discoveries of the 20th century.

3. The Moabite Stone—A Sensational Literary Find

This important inscription, found in 1868, offers another example of the discoveries of the 19th century that prepared the way for the great finds of the 20th century. The inscription dates from c. 850 B.C. It was erected by Mesha, king of Moab, and is often styled the *Mesha Stone*. It tells of the wars of Mesha of Moab with Omri, king of Israel, and Omri's successors. It also tells of Mesha's wars with the Edomites. The material recorded on the *Moabite Stone* parallels biblical history recorded in Second Kings, chapters 1 and 3. Numerous places mentioned in the Old Testament occur on the stele (inscribed monument). Among them are Arnon (Num. 21:13; Deut. 2:24), Ataroth (Num. 32:34), Baal Meon or Beth Baal Meon (Josh. 13:17), Beth Bamoth or Bamoth Baal (Josh. 13:17), Beth Diblathaim (Jer. 48:22), Bezer (Josh. 20:8), Dibon (Num. 32:34), Jahaza (Josh. 13:18), Medeba (Josh. 13:9), and Nebo (Num. 32:38).

This inscribed monument or stele measures 3 feet 8½ inches in height, 2 feet 3½ inches in width, and 1 foot 1¾ inches in thickness. Its 34 lines constitute the longest single literary inscription yet recovered extrabiblically dealing with Palestine in the period 900–600 B.C. It records that Moab had been conquered by Omri and his son Ahab but was set free from the Israelite yoke



A replica of the Moabite Stone. *Matson Photo Service*

by Mesha's god Chemosh. This deity is represented as commanding King Mesha to go to war against Israel, who, according to Second Kings 3:27, offered up his eldest son as a burnt offering upon the wall to propitiate the god Chemosh and to secure his favor.

The Moabite Stone is written in the language of Moab, which was very similar to the Hebrew of the time of Omri and Ahab. This inscription, therefore, has great value in tracing the development of early Hebrew through the centuries. When it was discovered, the Mesha Stone was not only the longest and oldest Phoenician-Hebrew inscription then in existence, it was the only one. Now the *Gezer Calendar* is known and it dates from c. 925 B.C. It is a school boy's exercise written in perfect classical Hebrew. This small limestone tablet, found at ancient Gezer, gives an incidental sidelight on Palestinian agriculture as well as on ancient Hebrew writing. Such discoveries as the Gezer Calendar and the Mesha Stone not only give glimpses into the background of the Bible but form important links in the culture and history of the people outside the pale of Israel.

III Great Discoveries of the Twentieth Century

Although such discoveries as the Rosetta Stone, the Behistun Inscription, the Mesha Stone, and the Siloam Inscription are important for their time and laid the foundations of scientific archaeology in the 19th century, it remained for the 20th century to produce the most thrilling and outstanding archaeological finds. During this period biblical archaeology came to be a refined and precise science, adding to the frontiers of biblical knowledge on the human plane and making tremendous contributions to the background, historical and cultural, of the written Word of God.

1. The Code of Hammurabi—Light on Mosaic Laws

A slab of black diorite, over 7 feet tall and some 6 feet wide, was discovered in 1901. This record of the past contains engraved upon it almost 300 paragraphs of legal provision dealing with the commercial, social, domestic, and moral life of the Babylonians of King Hammurabi's time (1728-1676 B.C.). A copy of this code was found by Jacques de Morgan at Susa in Elam, where it had been carried off by the Elamites from Babylon. At the top of the stele the king is shown receiving the laws from the sun god Shamash, patron of law and justice. At some time when Babylon was weak, an Elamite conqueror carried away the monument to Susa. Its finding was one of the most startling legal discoveries in history.

The code is important in furnishing background material for comparison with other ancient bodies of law. It is also natural that it should offer comparative data for the study of the laws of the Pentateuch. The fact that the code is older by over three centuries than the laws of Moses has disposed of some untenable theories of the critics and given rise to others. For instance, the old critical view that detailed codes of law like those recorded in the Pentateuch are anachronistic for such an early period has been exploded by the discovery of Hammurabi's laws and much earlier codes in Mesopotamia.

A discovery of this sort illustrates how archaeology purges out radical critical views, which used to place the origin of many of the laws ascribed to Moses to much later times, such as the 9th, 8th, and 7th centuries B.C., or even later. These erroneous theories had to be drastically revised or entirely rejected. On the other hand, the discovery of the early extrabiblical legal material has led many to adopt an equally faulty view that Hebrew legislation is merely a selection and adaptation of Babylonian law. The only position that is valid as the two bodies of legal material are studied is that the Mosaic code is neither borrowed from, nor dependent upon, the Babylonian. It is divinely given, as it claims to be, and unique in those features that met Israel's peculiar need as an elect, theocratic nation.

The resemblances between the *Mosaic laws* and the *Code of Hammurabi* are clearly due to similarity of antecedents and general intellectual and cultural heritage. It is natural that in codes dealing with peoples in somewhat similar conditions, related racially and culturally, there should be some likeness in the incidents leading to litigation and likewise in the penalties imposed for infringement of common statutes. A striking difference, however, is obtained. These clearly demonstrate that there is no direct borrowing and that the Mosaic law, although later by three centuries, is in no sense dependent upon the Babylonian.

The biblical law of divorce (Deut. 24:1), for instance, permits the man to put away his wife but does not extend the same right to the wife, as does the Babylonian code. Again the so-called *Lex Talionis* is a primitive Semitic law and would be expected to be reflected in various Semitic legal codes. Mosaic injunctions (Ex. 21:23-25; Deut. 19:21) state precisely the same principle of retaliation upon which a number of Hammurabi's laws are based, namely "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

The Mosaic and Hammurabi codes are *different in content*. The Hebrew code contains many purely religious injunctions and ritual regulations. The Code of Hammurabi, on the other hand, is civil.

However, the priestly laws of Leviticus contain many points of similarity with priestly ritual and practice in western Asia, whether in Canaan or Phoenicia or Mesopotamia. But this in no sense casts doubt on the fact that Israel's religious practices as recorded in the Pentateuch are divinely given and uniquely invested with significance to fit a nation divinely called to serve the one God. In some cases similar cultic practice among surrounding peoples was divinely given to Israel. But at the same time it was invested with a special significance for the worship of the Lord.

The two codes, of course, are *different in their origin*. The Babylonian laws are alleged to have been received by Hammurabi from the sun god Shamash. Moses received his laws directly from the Lord. Hammurabi, despite his reported reception from Shamash, takes credit for them in both the prologue and epilogue of the code. He, not Shamash, established order and equity throughout the land. Moses, in contrast, is only an instrument. The legislation is "Thus saith the LORD."

The two codes govern a *different type of society*. Hammurabi's laws are fitted to the irrigation

culture and highly commercialized urban society of Mesopotamia. The Mosaic injunctions, on the other hand, suit a simple, agricultural, pastoral people of a dry land like Palestine much less advanced in social and commercial development, but keenly conscious of their divine calling in all phases of their living.

The two codes *differ in their morality*. From the ethical and spiritual standpoint the Mosaic legislation, as would be expected, offers a considerable advance over the Babylonian code. Hammurabi's laws, for example, enumerate at least ten varieties of bodily mutilation prescribed for various offenses. If a doctor performs an operation that is unsuccessful, his hand is to be cut off. In the Mosaic legislation only one instance of mutilation occurs where a wife's hand is to be severed (Deut. 25:11, 12). Also in the Hebrew laws a greater value is set upon human life. A stricter regard for the honor of womanhood is seen and more humane treatment of slaves is enjoined. In addition, the Babylonian code has nothing in it corresponding to that twofold golden thread running through the Mosaic legislation, namely, love to God and love to one's neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).



Flushing Island seen from across the Nile. Modern Photo Courtesy

The Israelite Torah and the Babylonian code may be contrasted as follows: In the Babylonian code there is no control of lust, no limitation of selfishness. The postulate of charity cannot be found. The religious motif is absent, which recognizes sin as the destruction of the people because it is in opposition to the fear of God. In the Hammurabi code every trace of religious thought is absent. Behind the Israelite laws stands the ruling will of a holy God. The laws are stamped throughout with a divine character.

2. The Elephantine Papyri—Light on the Ezra-Nehemiah Era

Discovered in 1903 on the island of Elephantine at the First Cataract of the Nile in Egypt, these important documents give an interesting glimpse of one of the outlying regions of the Persian Empire in the latter part of the 5th century B.C. *The Elephantine Papyri* come from a Jewish military colony which was settled at that place. Inscribed in Aramaic, the language of diplomacy and trade throughout western Asia in the Persian period, and which was gradually replacing Hebrew as the everyday tongue of the Jewish people, the contents are varied, ranging from the copy of the Behistun Inscription of Darius to such a document as a Jewish marriage contract. The letters tell us about the sacking of a Jewish temple at Elephantine in an anti-Jewish persecution about 411 B.C. The Jews at this far-off colony worshiped the Lord whom they referred to by the name of Yahu.

Other letters from Elephantine which have in recent years become known and have been published by the Brooklyn Museum demonstrate that the temple was rebuilt after its destruction. They contain mention of Yahu as "the god who dwells in Yeb, the fortress." Compare Psalm 31:3. These new papyri demonstrate that Egypt was still under the authority of Persia in the first years of Artaxerxes II (404–359 B.C.).

The Elephantine Papyri therefore illuminate the general background of the period of Ezra-Nehemiah and the earlier Persian period. They shed important light on the life of the Jewish dispersion in a remote frontier place such as Elephantine in Egypt. They also are invaluable in giving the scholar a knowledge of the Aramaic language of that period, and many of the customs and names that appear in the Bible are illustrated by these important literary finds.

3. The Hittite Monuments from Boghaz-Keui—Mementos of an Imperial People

In 1906 Professor Hugo Winkler of Berlin began excavations at Boghaz-Keui, a site which lies 90 miles east of Ankara in the great bend of the Halys River in Asia Minor. It was discovered that this was an ancient Hittite capital. Numerous clay tablets were dug up written in texts containing six different languages. A large number of these were inscribed in the cuneiform characters of the Hittite language. Eventually deciphered through the labors of three men and particularly of the Czech



The city ruins at Ur. Matson Photo Service



The Ziggurat at Ur.

Matson Photo Service

scholar Friedrich Hrozný, this language proved to be the key to a great deal of background of interest to the biblical student.

Before the Boghaz-Keui tablets revealed the Hittites to be an ancient people, the biblical references to them used to be regarded in critical circles as historically worthless. In the five books of Moses, references to the Hittites as inhabiting the land of Canaan and as among those whom the Israelites drove out occur in several places (Ex. 33:2; Deut. 7:1, 20:17; Josh. 3:10, 24:11). In the various lists the order varies, and there is not an inkling that one reference might be the name of a powerful imperial people and the other a small local tribe. Less than a century ago the "Hittites" meant little more to the reader of the Bible than the "Hivite" or the "Perizzite" still does.

It was commonly known from the biblical record that when Abraham settled in Hebron he had Hittites as neighbors. It was everyday knowledge that one of David's eminent soldiers was Uriah, a Hittite. But who would have expected that "Hittites" were more prominent than "Gadites" or "Beerothites"?

Now it is known that two great periods of Hittite power are to be noted. The first goes back to c. 1800 B.C., and the second is dated from c. 1400–1200 B.C. In this latter period of Hittite supremacy the powerful rulers reigned at Boghaz-Keui. One of these was named Subiluliuma. This great conqueror extended his empire to the confines of Syria-Palestine. The great Rameses II of Egypt, in the famous battle of Kadesh, collided with Hittite power. A Hittite treaty of peace with the Pharaoh in the 21st year of the latter's reign was confirmed by a royal marriage.

About 1200 B.C. the great Hittite Empire collapsed, and the Hittite city of Boghaz-Keui fell. However, important centers of Hittite power remained at Carchemish, Sengirli, Hamath, and other places in north Syria. As a result of the excavation and decipherment of various Hittite monuments, the whole context of the ancient biblical world has been illuminated.

Because of this increased background knowledge, such allusions as those to the "kings of the Hittites" (1 Kin. 10:29; 2 Chr. 1:17) are much better understood. Also Ezekiel's reference to unfaithful Jerusalem as having an Amorite for a father and a Hittite for a mother (Ezek. 16:45) are now comprehensible. The manner in which archaeology has brought to light the ancient Hittites furnishes a good example of the way this important science is expanding biblical horizons.

4. The City of Ur—Abraham's Home

An important metropolis of the ancient world, Ur was located on the Euphrates River in lower Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq. Several centuries before Abraham lived there as a boy and grew up there as a young man, this place was a very important city under the 2nd and 3rd dynasties of Ur, an important line of kings. But the glory of the city was suddenly destroyed in the period from c. 1960–1830 B.C. Foreigners stormed down from the surrounding hills and took the reigning king, Ibi-Sin, a captive and reduced the capital city of Ur to ruins. So complete was the eclipse of the city that it lay buried in oblivion for centuries until, like Nineveh, it was resurrected in modern times by the work of archaeologists.

So thoroughly was the ancient city blotted out

that when it was referred to in Genesis 11:28-31 and 15:7 as Abraham's ancestral home and the place from which he started on his trek to Palestine, some scribe later had to append the descriptive phrase "*of the Chaldeans*" to the name of the city to give later readers some idea of where it had been located.

The long-lost and buried city was brought to the light of modern study by the work of numerous archaeologists, particularly by the work of Sir Leonard Woolley (1922-1934). Until the year 1854, the site of the ancient city was completely unknown. The Arabs used to call the location *Al-muqayyer*, "*Mount of bitumen*." It was a forbidding place in a climate of terrific heat and surrounded by intense desolation. In 1854, J. E. Taylor, an English archaeologist, assisted by others, made some preliminary excavations. Some cylinders turned up inscribed in cuneiform characters declaring that King Nabonidus of Babylon (556-539 B.C.) had restored the famous ziggurat of Ur-Nammu.

Later explorations were made by Campbell Thompson in 1918. H. R. Hall in 1918 continued other excavations, but it was left for the pivotal work of Sir Leonard Woolley, undertaken in 1922 as a joint expedition of the British Museum, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University Museum, to give a complete history and description of the city. The expedition completed twelve very successful archaeological campaigns, and by 1934 the long-lost and buried city of Ur, vanished from the pages of history, had become one of the best-known sites in all the ancient Near East.

Abraham's Native Town. Abraham lived in the city of Ur at the height of its splendor under the 3rd dynasty of kings. This is indicated if we follow the chronology of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible. According to this system of reckoning, Abraham was born c. 2161 B.C. and entered Canaan c. 2086 B.C. Under this time arrangement, the patriarch left the city when it was near the acme of its prosperity. He entered Canaan precisely when Ur reached the pinnacle of its power, for the 3rd dynasty of kings (c. 2070-1969 B.C.) lifted the city to great prominence.

The first king was Ur-Nammu. This monarch had the title of "King of Sumer and Akkad." He built a splendid temple tower or ziggurat at this site. Today this is still preserved as the best monument of its type in all the flat alluvial territory of Lower Mesopotamia, the basin of Tigris-Euphrates rivers. It was this structure that Nabonidus, the last of the Babylonian kings, restored in the 6th century B.C.

In the famous *monument of Ur-Nammu* there is extant a contemporary record of the construction of the ziggurat at Ur. This stele is a slab of white limestone measuring 5 feet across and 10 feet in height. At the top of the monument the king is

standing in an attitude of prayer. An account of the building of the monument is given, and scenes are inscribed denoting the actual construction. In the days of Ur-Nammu other buildings were built around the ziggurat, and the entire sacred area was dedicated to Nannar, the moon god (patron deity of the city) and his consort, whose name was Nin-Gal.

A king by the name of Dungi succeeded Ur-Nammu, whom Nabonidus declared completed the ziggurat. Dungi was a great ruler who built a magnificent mortuary temple and tomb for himself. His son Bur-Sin succeeded him. He was followed on the throne at Ur by Gimil-Sin and then by Ibi-Sin.

Ur and Abraham. When Abraham lived in the city before he left for Haran and Canaan, Ur was a center of religion and industry. The city was wholly given over to the worship of the moon god cult. The Babylonians were devotees of many deities. But at Ur the moon god Sin was supreme.

Sir Leonard Woolley's lengthy excavations in twelve highly rewarding campaigns have revealed the splendor and the size of the city and also have given details of the *temenos* or the religious section of the city. In other words, Abraham was surrounded on all sides by idolatry. This we have recorded in the Bible in Joshua 24:2. "Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served others gods."

The moon god Sin was given such epithets as "the exalted lord" and "the beautiful lord who shines in the heavens." The immense temple tower, built like a mountain with various stages, contained the holy chamber of Nannar on its uppermost level. Here in this lofty Babylonian temple mystic ritual in honor of the deity was conducted. In front of the immense ziggurat and on the lower level was an open court, a kind of holy market where the people brought their gifts and paid their taxes to the king, who was also their landlord. Accordingly, the city was a kind of theocracy centered in the moon deity.

The sacred area was called the *temenos*. In it were located other sacred buildings and shrines, including houses for the priests and priestesses of Nannar. To the west the river Euphrates flowed near the city walls, and there were canals running around and through the city. In Abraham's day instead of being a hot, forbidding, desert-like region, Ur was a flourishing and beautiful city because of irrigation and civilization. It was surrounded by fertile farms and a busy populace engaged in agriculture and in woolen and textile industries. All of this commerce was centered in religion.

The houses of Ur have been excavated and examined. It is conceivable that Abraham grew up

as a lad in one of these residences. There is presumptive evidence that Terah's father worshiped the moon god and was a devotee of Nannar and Nin-Gal. In one of the dwellings, there is a small domestic chapel with altar niche and family burial vault. It is very likely that Terah worshiped at such an altar.

It is out of this polluted atmosphere of polytheism that God's sovereign grace called Abraham to begin a new line that was to be separated from idolatry and through which Messiah was to come, who would deliver the world from sin and idolatry.

The City Before the Time of Abraham. Ur existed as a brilliant city many hundreds of years before Abraham appeared on the scene. The lower regions of the Tigris-Euphrates basin with its flat land and very fertile soil have been the seat of many ancient empires—Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria, and Chaldea. The first of these civilizations was Sumer, one of the oldest civilized countries in the world. Wrapped in obscurity is the story of the beginnings of Sumer. At least by 3500 B.C. the Sumerians, that is the natives of the flat, alluvial lower courses of the Tigris-Euphrates plain, were advancing in civilization.

In the next thousand years the *Sumerian Empire* diffused culture and civilization over most of western Asia. The extreme southern part of Sumer was called the land of Shinar. It was a flat, mud plain, immensely rich, formed by the sediment of the Tigris-Euphrates River. As these mighty streams flowed into the lower part of the Fertile Crescent, their current slackened, and they deposited huge amounts of a rich, sandy loam and formed a region which today is called Iraq, which is about as large as New Jersey.

With a network of canals running through this rich territory, this region blossomed like a rose.



The Euphrates River.

Matson Photo Service

More than 150 years ago, travelers began to wonder about the strange mounds or hillocks of earth which dotted this flat region. What could they possibly be? Now and then antiquarian bits of carved marble or other remnants of bygone civilizations were exposed by the weather. Archaeologists began to dig beneath the truncated hillocks, and it was discovered that they were long-lost and buried cities.

One of these mounds proved to be the city of Ur of biblical fame. From these regions many tablets have been resurrected with cuneiform or wedge-shaped writing on them. These tablets were made of soft mud from the riverbank and carefully inscribed with a flat pen and set out in the sun to dry, or put in the fire to bake in a more firm form. And so, under these truncated mounds were not only buried artifacts and remnants of ancient civilizations but, what is most arresting, there are vast quantities of practically indestructible materials, all inscribed on clay tablets. These have been the basis of resurrecting the history and the civilization of Bible lands in Lower Mesopotamia in the land of Sumer.

The First Dynasty of Ur. In an ancient list of kings called the Sumerian King List in *The Oxford Edition of Cuneiform Texts II*, 1923, by F. Langdon, an interesting story is told of the early rulers of Sumer. Among the line of kings who reigned at Kish, Uruk (biblical Erech, Gen. 10:10), Awan, Adap, Mari, and Akshak are listed several dynasties who ruled at Ur. The first kings at Ur witnessed the culminating phase of the early dynastic period in Mesopotamia (c. 2800–2360 B.C.).

The King List goes on to say, "Uruk was smitten with weapons. Its kingship was carried to Ur. Mes-Anne-pada became king and ruled 80 years. A-Anne-pada, a son of Mes-Anne-pada, reigned . . . years. Meskiag-Nanna, a son of Mes-Anne-pada became king and reigned 36 years. Elulu reigned 25 years. Balulu reigned 36 years. Four kings reigned 177 years. Ur was smitten with weapons."

This line of kings was very powerful and lifted the city-state, since Ur was more than a city, to a high level of culture. This is demonstrated in the discoveries of the royal tombs by Sir Leonard Woolley, dating from c. 2500 B.C. These consisted of rooms and vaults built of brick and stone. Among one of the most interesting finds was the tomb of an important lady named *Shubad of Ur*. Her name is identified by an inscribed cylinder of lapis lazuli. Near her hand was a gold cup. Her lovely artistic headdress contained 9 yards of gold band.

Another exquisite find was the so-called "*Standard of Ur*." This was a wooden panel, 22 inches long by 9 inches wide, skillfully inlaid with mosaic work on both sides depicting scenes of war and

peace. In the war panel the king is seen receiving captives. In another the phalanx of the royal army advances. Scenes of fighting with chariots and javelins are depicted. The panel of peace presents a royal family feast. Musicians entertain while servants wait in the banquet hall and bring in spoils captured from the enemy.

Certainly the archaeological resurrection of Abraham's ancient city of Ur has greatly illuminated the Bible references to the patriarch and given a much wider view of the historical horizons c. 2000 B.C. The early civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley is becoming better known year after year. Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, commentaries, and biblical works of every description are highly indebted to the restless and productive spade of the archaeologist. Certainly God has blessed, enabling scholars in our day to study these monuments and other remains of antiquity. The result is greater appreciation of the Bible on the human plane.

It must always be remembered that the Word of God is not only divine but human. It is God's Book for man. On the human side, God has so ordained that the horizons of biblical knowledge may be expanded and increased that we may on the spiritual plane better comprehend the Word of God. How unfortunate it is when the spiritual is divorced from the historical and archaeological, or vice versa, when the historical and archaeological are divorced from the spiritual. The two work hand in hand and help one another. Happy is the student of the Bible who will combine both of these disciplines in a better understanding of the Word of God.

5. The Religious Texts from Ras Shamra (Ugarit)—Canaanite Cults Exposed

One of the most important discoveries of the 20th century was the recovery of hundreds of clay tablets which have been housed in a library situated between two great temples, one dedicated to Baal and another dedicated to Dagon, in the city of *Ugarit*—modern *Ras Shamra* in north Syria. These clay tablets date from the 15th to early 14th centuries B.C. They are inscribed in the earliest-known alphabet written in wedge-shaped signs. Professor H. Bower of the University of Halle recognized this new writing as Semitic. Numbers of scholars such as E. Dhorme and Charles Virolleaud began working on the decipherment of this new Semitic language.

The tablets turned out to be religious and cultic in nature and inscribed in a dialect that was closely akin to biblical Hebrew and Phoenician. Although Semitic in form, this new writing displayed evidences of Akkadian influence, since Mesopotamians wrote on clay tablets with wedge-shaped characters from left to right. First intimations of the archaeological importance of the

ancient city of Ugarit, which was unknown until 1928, came in the spring of that year when a Syrian peasant plowing in his field a little north of present-day Minet el-Beida suddenly came across some antiquities. On April 2, 1929, work began at Minet el-Beida under the direction of Claude F. Schaffer. After a month's work he changed to the nearby tell of Ras Shamra. Only a few days' work demonstrated the importance of the new location. On May 20th the first tablets were uncovered. Schaffer continued excavations from 1929 to 1937. Between 1929 and 1933, the bulk of significant religious texts were recovered in the royal library in the area. Many of these were inscribed in an early Canaanite dialect, roughly contemporary with the Mosaic age.

The City of Ugarit. This flourishing second-millennium city, which had been known by scholars from Egyptian inscriptions from the *Tell el Amarna Letters* and *Hittite documents*, was located on the north Syrian coast opposite the island of Cyprus, about 8 miles north of Latakia and 50 miles southwest of Antioch. It was situated on a bay and had a port which could be used by seagoing trade ships. It was a harbor town known in Greek times as Leukos Limen, the white harbor. It is now called *Ras Shamra*, "hill of fennel," because fennel grows there.

The hill which comprises the ruin of the ancient city has the form of a trapezium with the long side about 670 yards north and south and the longer diagonal about 1,100 yards. The hill is about 22 yards high. The site was located on the important trade route along the coast from Egypt to Asia Minor, which was connected by a road with Aleppo, Mari on the Euphrates, and Babylon. The sea route from Ugarit to Alashiya—that is, Cyprus—was a short one.

Very early, Ugarit struck up a brisk trade with the Aegean Islands. It became an important harbor. One of the main exported articles was copper, which was used in the production of bronze. Copper was imported from Asia Minor and Cyprus. Bronze was produced in Ugarit. Being a Phoenician town, Ugarit, like its sister cities, delivered timber to Egypt. Not only cedars from the interior were exported but other kinds of wood as well. There were also purple dye factories, great heaps of murex shells indicate this. These shells, abundantly found along the east Mediterranean coast, produced a famous dye of antiquity.

Literary Importance of the Texts. After preliminary work by many scholars, Cyrus Gordon worked out a *Ugaritic Grammar* and later put out an edition of the texts called *Ugaritic Literature*. The decipherment of the texts showed the important parallels between Ugaritic and Hebrew literary style and vocabulary. By 1936 H. L. Ginsberg had made some far-reaching observations with regard to common structural elements. Ginsberg's

study showed that Canaanite poetry, like Hebrew, was basically accentual, that is, consisted of numbers of feet, each of which was accented. A good example of the survival of Canaanite literary elements in Hebrew religious literature is the following tricolon (unit of three lines) from the *Baal Epic of Ras Shamra*:

"Behold, thine enemies, O Baal;
Behold, thine enemies shalt thou crush;
Behold, thou shalt smite thy foes."

In *Psalms* 92:9 there is a striking parallel to this.

"For behold, Your enemies, O LORD,
For behold, Your enemies shall perish;
All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered."

The following tricolon occurs frequently in the *Aqhat Epic*:

"Do thou ask for life, O lad Aqhat;
Do thou ask for life, I'll grant it thee,
Eternal life, and I'll accord it thee."

A similar literary device is found in the *Song of Deborah* (Judg. 5:30).

"For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments,
Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed,
Two pieces of dyed embroidery
for the neck of the looter?"

Background material such as this is an invaluable aid in the study of Hebrew poetry and the general literary qualities of style and vocabulary in Old Testament Hebrew. Since the Ugaritic language is very closely connected with biblical Hebrew, much light has been shed upon Hebrew lexicography. Any recent lexicon of Hebrew must take into consideration the vocabulary used at Ugarit. Future Hebrew dictionaries will include many words hitherto misunderstood or only partially known.

For example, the word *beth-heber* (Prov. 21:9; 25:24) hitherto rendered "house" has been shown from Ugaritic and Assyrian to mean specifically "a storehouse." These verses must then be rendered "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a storehouse." It is of interest to note that the Egyptian proverbs of Amenemope, which have many parallels to the biblical Book of Proverbs, employs a word for "storehouse" in exactly the same sense.

Religious Significance of the Ugaritic Inscriptions. By far the most important contribution of the religious texts from Ras Shamra (Ugarit) is in giving the Bible student background material for the study of Old Testament religions. The epics set forth very clearly the *Canaanite pantheon*. We now know that this pantheon of the Canaanites was headed up by the god El, the supreme Canaanite deity. This is also a name by which God is known in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 33:20). This name, El, often occurs in Old Testament poetry

(Ps. 18:31, 32; Job 8:3). It occurs frequently also in prose in compound names, for example, El Elyon, the God Most High (Gen. 14:18); El Shaddai, Almighty God (Gen. 17:1); El Hai, the living God (Josh. 3:10). This, however, does not mean any connection, of course, with Canaanite mythology. El is simply the common Semitic word for God. In Ugaritic, El was a bloody, lustful tyrant. The description of him, as well as of other Canaanite gods, fully substantiates the testimony of the Old Testament with regard to the degeneracy and polluting influence of Canaanite religion.

Baal was the son of El. He was the active king of the gods in the Canaanite pantheon and dominated the entire list of gods. He was the deity of the storm and the rain. Thunder was thought to be the reverberation of his voice in the heavens. At Ras Shamra a stele was discovered depicting Baal holding a stylized thunderbolt. Three of the Ugaritic poems concern Baal. Baalism, the worship of this god, was one of the most debilitating and destructive influences which threatened the Hebrews in Palestine and against which they had to be continually on guard.

As the giver of rain and all fertility, Baal figures very prominently in Canaanite mythology. He struggles with Mot, the god of death and the god of drought. In the fight Baal is slain. As a consequence, the seasonal drought occurs from June to late October. Then Anath, sister and lover of Baal, goes out in search of him, discovers his body, and slays his enemy, Mot. Baal is then brought back to life, thus ensuring the revival of vegetation for a seven-year period. The great Baal Epic of Ugarit finds in this representation a central theme.

The Phoenicians at Ugarit not only had gods who were polluted and immoral but also goddesses. Three of these who are prominent are Anath, Ashtarte, and Asherah. They are patronesses of war and sex. Their character, like that of El and Baal, bears out the pollution and damaging effects of Canaanite religion, since they portray war in its aspect of violence and murder and sex mainly in its lustful connotation of indulgence.

The new knowledge of Canaanite religion aids the Bible student correctly to evaluate the testimony of the Old Testament to the Canaanites. Higher criticism has impugned the morality of the Old Testament writers in such episodes as the divine command to exterminate these cults. Examples are the extermination of the people of Jericho, Saul's extermination of the Amalekites and the driving out of the Canaanites in general. All of these examples appear in a different view when adjudged in the light of the vileness of Canaanite religion. In Genesis 15:16 the Lord declares, "the iniquity of the Amorites" was not yet "full" in Abraham's day. But archaeology shows Canaanite religious immorality was complete in

Joshua's day, 400 years later, and had to be destroyed.

Now, as a result of the Ras Shamra literature, the nature of Canaanite religion comes before the scholar in its real light. No longer do we have to rely on the witness of early church fathers such as Eusebius, who quotes an earlier authority, or Philo of Byblos, who in turn goes back to a much earlier authority named Sanchuniathon. No longer must we doubt the veracity of this extrabiblical witness or doubt the authenticity of the Old Testament witness. Now, as a result of archaeology, an independent witness to the effete and degenerate nature of Canaanite cults is available. No longer can critics isolate the Old Testament and accuse it of a low morality in ordering the extermination of the Canaanites. The truth is, archeology points out that the people had become so immoral, so honeycombed with the sins of violence and sexual immorality, that had Joshua and the children of Israel not appeared to take over the land, these people would have perished under the weight of their own iniquity.

"Like priest, like people" is an old adage. Never in all the annals of history was there such a mixture of violence and lust as was combined and made an intricate part of Canaanite cults. So the Scriptures stand as a warning, corroborated by archaeology, of the judgment of God falling upon apostate and sinful religionism. Archaeology helps us to see this in an entirely different light in regard to the Canaanites.

This is especially true when we consider the low moral tone of Canaanite goddesses and gods. El was a brutal and lustful tyrant who was guilty of incest and murder. Baal also was guilty of enormous crimes. How could people worship such deities and not themselves be polluted? No wonder the warning of God was issued again and again for separation from Baalism. No wonder the history of Baal contamination of Israel is a long story of woe and suffering, as God's people were trapped into complicity with Phoenician cults.

The era of Ahab and Jezebel, and the importation of Canaanite fertility cults and intermarriage with the Canaanites, show the devastating effect of such disobedience to the plain warning of God. Exterminating the Canaanite in the time of Joshua was not a question of destroying innocent people. It was a question of destroying or being destroyed, separating or being contaminated, being quarantined from the plague or having the plague destroy everyone.

Later Excavations at Ugarit. During World War II excavations at Ras Shamra were discontinued. They were resumed in 1948 and have been going on regularly. Work under the direction of C. F. Schaffer has been centered upon uncovering the great palace. The most important discoveries in connection with this structure were the

royal archives. These archives, discovered in the palace, were of a historical nature in contrast to the mythological ritual texts of the early years, 1929-1937. The archives in the west wing of the building contained administrative documents to a large degree relating to the royal estates. Those in the east wing had documents relating to the capital city. Those in the central archive were mainly legal finds. Almost all documents were inscribed in the common language of these centuries, namely Akkadian. A few were written in Hurrian and Ugaritic. The names of twelve Ugaritic kings were found in the documents which date from the 18th to the 13th centuries B.C. The seals of the royal acts are remarkable as they all are identical in design at the top, without regard to the name of the reigning king. The motif is well known from Babylonian glyptic art and shows homage being paid to the deified king.

Numbers of fine objects have been recovered from the palace, especially pieces from the king's bedroom. Especially noteworthy was the large ivory foot panel of the royal bedstead, perhaps the largest single piece of ivory carving yet recovered in the Near East. Another remarkable piece found in the campaign of 1952-1953 is the ancient Ugaritic alphabet of thirty letters. This piece is now housed in the National Museum at Damascus.

6. The Nuzi Tablets and the Biblical Horites

From this city east of ancient Asshur and a short distance west of Arrapkha, which flourished in the middle centuries of the 2nd millennium B.C., have come several thousand cuneiform texts. These texts have proved of immense value, illustrating the rise of the Hurrians and patriarchal customs. The present site of Nuzi is Yoghlan-Tepe. It is a mound 150 miles north of Baghdad near the foothills of southern Khurdistan. Nuzi was excavated in 1925-1931 by the American School of Oriental Research in Baghdad and Harvard University. The name "Nuzi" was used during its occupation by the Hurrians.

Before the time of the Hurrian settlement the site of Nuzi was occupied by a different ethnic group, called the Subarians. In this older period, the city bore the name of Gasur, and its earliest occupation goes back to prehistoric times. But the vital interest in the town stems from its occupation by the Hurrians and the cuneiform texts which have been excavated from it and from nearby Arrapkha, modern Kirkuk, some 9 miles to the east.

The Nuzi Tablets and the Hurrians. Modern archaeology has not only resurrected the ancient Hittites, who were for centuries practically unknown except for sporadic references on the pages of the Bible, but also the enigmatic Horites. In the books of the Pentateuch there are numbers of

references to a perplexing people called Horites. These people were defeated by Chedorlaomer and the invading Mesopotamian army (Gen. 14:6). They were governed by chiefs (Gen. 36:20-30). They are said to have been destroyed by Esau's descendants (Deut. 2:12, 22).

This unknown people used to be thought of as a very local, restricted group of cave dwellers. The name "Horite" was thought to be derived from the Hebrew *hor*, "hole" or "cave." Other than this etymological description the Horites remained completely obscure, not appearing outside the Pentateuch or in extrabiblical literature. Within the last 35 years, however, archaeology has performed a miracle in resurrecting the ancient Hurrians, the biblical Horites. They are known not to be a local, restricted group but to be a prominent people who took a preeminent place on the stage of ancient history. It is now known that they not only existed but played a far-reaching role in ancient Near Eastern cultural history. As a result of the discovery of the Hurrians, the popular etymology which connects them with "cave dwellers" has had to be abandoned.

The Hurrians or Horites were non-Semitic peoples who, before the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C., migrated into northeastern Mesopotamia. Their homeland was in the region south of the Caucasus. They appear first upon the horizon of history c. 2400 B.C. in the Zagros Mountains east of the Tigris River. In the period c. 2000-1400 B.C., the Hurrians were very common and widespread in Upper Mesopotamia.

The Nuzi Tablets and the Patriarchs. The main interest of the Nuzi Tablets lies in the illumination of patriarchal times and customs. In the patriarchal narratives, many local practices have been quite obscure to the modern reader. Numerous clay tablets from Nuzi and nearby Arrapkha have in many cases illuminated these customs, so that now we see them as they existed in the general historical background of the time. Although the Nuzi Tablets are to be dated in the 15th and 14th centuries B.C., sometime after the patriarchal period (c. 2000-1800 B.C.), nevertheless, they illustrate the times of the patriarchs. The reason is that when the patriarchs came out of Ur, they sojourned in Haran and mingled in west Hurrian society. But the same customs prevailed by extension among the west Hurrians as among the east Hurrians at Nuzi and Arrapkha. Hence, the results obtained at Nuzi are valid by extension for the west Hurrians, as well as for a period considerably later than the patriarchs.

In Genesis 15:2 Abraham laments his childless condition and the fact that his servant Eliezer was to be his heir. In the light of this situation, God assures the patriarch that he is to have a son of his own to inherit his property. The Nuzi Tablets ex-

plain this difficult matter. They tell how a trustee servant, an apparent outsider, could be heir. An ancient Nuzi, it was customary in Hurrian society for a couple who did not have a child to adopt a son to take care of his foster parents as long as they lived, take over when they died, and then in return for his filial duty to become their heir. But it is important to note that if a natural son was born, this agreement was nullified, at least in part, and the natural son became heir. Eliezer was plainly Abraham's adopted son. But the miraculous birth of Isaac, as the promised posterity, altered Eliezer's status as heir.

At Nuzi a marriage contract occasionally included the statement that a given slave girl is presented outright to a new bride, exactly as in the marriage of Leah (Gen. 29:24) and Rachel (29:29). Other marriage provisions specify that a wife of the upper classes who was childless was to furnish her husband with a slave girl as a concubine. In such a case, however, the wife was entitled to treat the concubine's offspring as her own. This last provision illuminates the difficult statement in Genesis 16:2 with its punning: "I shall obtain children by her," which means "I may be built up through her." It is interesting to note that the related law of Hammurabi, paragraph 144, offers no complete parallel. There the wife is a priestess and is not entitled to claim the children of the concubine for herself.

It is thus seen that in Nuzian law and society in which the patriarchs moved for a time, marriage was regarded primarily for bearing children and not mainly for companionship. In one way or another, it was considered necessary for the family to procreate. After Isaac's birth, Abraham's reluctance to comply with Sarah's demand that Hagar's child be driven out is illustrated by local practice at Nuzi. In the event the slave wife should have a son, that son must not be expelled. In Abraham's case, only a divine dispensation overruled human law and made the patriarch willing to comply.

Cases involving rights of the firstborn occurring in Genesis are also illustrated. In the Bible Esau sells his birthright to Jacob. In the Nuzi Tablets one brother sells a grove which he has inherited for three sheep. Evidently this in value is quite comparable to the savory food for which Esau sold his right.

In Hurrian society birthright was not so much the matter of being the firstborn as of paternal decree. Such decrees were binding above all others when handed down in the form of a deathbed declaration introduced by the following formula: "Behold now, I am old." This situation helps to illuminate Genesis 27, the chapter that tells of Jacob stealing the family blessing.

The obscure *teraphim* are also explained in Nuzian law. We now know that the *teraphim* were

small household deities. Possession of them implied headship of family. In the case of a married daughter, they assured her husband the right to her father's property. Laban had sons of his own when Jacob left for Canaan. They alone had the right to their father's gods. The theft of these important household idols by Rachel was a notorious offense (Gen. 31:19, 30; 35). She aimed at nothing less than to preserve for her husband the chief title to Laban's estate.

The texts from Arrapkha and Nuzi have at last supplied details for explaining these difficult customs. In special circumstances the property could pass to a daughter's husband, but only if the father had handed over his household gods to his son-in-law as a formal token that the arrangement had proper sanction.

Another custom illuminated is that found in Genesis 12:10-20; 20:2-6; 26:1-11, where the wife of a patriarch is introduced as his sister with no apparent worthy reason. The texts from Nuzi, however, show that among the Hurrians marriage bonds were most solemn, and the wife had legally, although not necessarily through ties of blood, the simultaneous status of sister, so that the term "sister" and "wife" could be interchangeable in an official use under certain circumstances. Thus, in resorting to the wife-sister relationship, both Abraham and Isaac were availing themselves of

the strongest safeguards the law, as it existed then, could afford them.

Critical Value. Discoveries such as those at Nuzi and Arrapkha are forcing higher critics to abandon many radical and untenable theories. For example, not long ago it was customary for critics to view the patriarchal stories as retrojections from a much later period and not as authentic stories from the Mosaic age, namely, the 15th century B.C. But now the question rises, How could such authentic local color be retrojected from a later age? The Nuzi Letters have done a great service to students of early Bible history in not only attesting the influence of social customs in the patriarchal age and in the same portion of Mesopotamia from which the patriarchs come, but also have demonstrated these narratives are authentic to their time. Such discoveries add greatly to our historical background and enable us in our modern day to reveal them in their genuine local color and historical setting.

7. The Mari Letters—Light on the World of the Patriarchs

One of the most historically and archaeologically rewarding sites that has been discovered in Mesopotamia and Bible lands is the city of *Mari*, modern Tell el-Hariri on the Middle Euphrates, about 7 miles northwest of Abu-



The excavated ruins of the capital city of Babylon.

D. J. Wiseman

Kemal, a small town on the Syrian side of the Syro-Iraq frontier. The ancient city owed its importance to being a focal point on caravan routes crossing the Syrian desert and linking the city with Syria and the Mediterranean coast and with the civilizations of Assyria and Babylonia. This site was further identified by William Foxwell Albright in 1932.

Mari began to be excavated in 1933 by Andre Parrot under the auspices of the Musee du Louvre. The results were the digging up of an ancient imperial city of great importance and splendor. World War II interrupted excavations in 1939, after six highly successful campaigns had taken place. In 1951 this work was resumed. After four further campaigns it was broken off in 1956, as a result of the trouble over the Suez Canal.

Among the most important discoveries at Mari was the great *temple of Ishtar*, for the Babylonian goddess of propagation, and a temple tower or ziggurat. The temple itself had courts of the Sumerian type, columns, and a cella. The ziggurat or temple tower was similar to that at Ur and other Mesopotamian sites. Statuettes were uncovered to illustrate the popularity of the Ishtar fertility cult. One of the palace murals depicts the fact that the ruling monarch at Mari was believed to have received his staff and ring, the emblems of his authority, from Ishtar.

Another important discovery at Mari was the *royal palace*. A sprawling structure contemporary with the 1st dynasty of Babylon, it was built in the center of the mound and contained almost 300 rooms. The throne room furnished some rare specimens of well-preserved wall paintings. This huge building with its beautifully colored mural paintings, its royal apartments, administrative offices, and scribal school is considered one of the best preserved palaces of the Middle East. The structure was built by later Amorites, who worshiped the deities Adad and Dagon. In the post-war campaign the excavation centered mainly around the older strata going back to buildings of the pre-Sargonic period from the time of the dynasty of Akkad.

The Royal Archives. The most interesting finds, however, were the so-called *Mari Letters*, some 20,000 clay tablets dug up and which have revolutionized knowledge of the ancient biblical world. These documents were written in the dialect of Old Babylonian. They date from the era of Hammurabi, c. 1700 B.C., the same monarch whose code was discovered in 1901 at Susa. These records constitute memoranda of the king and governors of the city-state of Mari, and belong to the time of the kings Yasmah-Adad, under whose reign the construction of the palace was begun, and Zimri-Lim, under whom it was completed. Some of the correspondence is that of King Yasmah-Adad with his father, the powerful empire

builder King Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria, as well as with the representatives of the provinces of his realm. King Zimri-Lim's correspondence also figures in exchanges of diplomatic correspondence with King Hammurabi of Babylon, as well as with the king of Aleppo and other vassals. Two letters dispatched from Aleppo to Zimri-Lim deal with prophetic utterances delivered in the name of the god Adad of Aleppo. The subject and tenor of these remind one of biblical prophecies.

Biblical Value of the Mari Texts. These records are of great value to biblical students because they stem from the region which was the home of the Hebrew patriarchs for a number of years before going on to Canaan. However, Abraham's migration from Ur, according to preserved biblical chronology, apparently took place some 400 years before the era of Zimri-Lim and the fall of Mari. At this time of the 3rd dynasty of Ur, Mari was ruled by the governors of the kings of Ur. Eventually, however, a prince of Mari, Ishbi-Irra, who had brought the city-state of Isin under his dominion c. 2021 B.C., was instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the city of Ur.

Nahor, which figures prominently in the patriarchal narratives (Gen. 24:10), is mentioned quite often in the Mari Letters. One letter from Nahor is sent from a woman of that town to the king and runs as follows:

To my lord say, Thus Inib-Sharrim, thy maid servant. How long must I remain in Nahor? Peace is established and the road is unobstructed. Let my lord write and let me be brought that I may see the face of my lord from whom I am separated. Further, let my lord send me an answer to my tablet.

The term "Habiru," very important since Abraham is the first individual in the Bible to be named a "Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13), is found frequently in the Mari Letters, as is also the case in the Nuzi Letters. In both instances the term apparently means "a wanderer," "one who crosses over," or "one who passes from one place to another." This explanation fits Abraham and the early patriarchs very well since they were nomadic travelers.

When Abraham left Ur in southern Mesopotamia to migrate to Canaan, he no doubt passed through the magnificent city of Mari. There can be little doubt that he and Terah with their families put up in one of the caravansaries there. Perhaps they spent days or weeks in the famous city and went sightseeing in the palace traces of whose grandeur are still visible to the eye of the modern archaeologist.

The city of Mari was idolatrous and in it there was the widespread practice of divination. A diviner was an important official in all phases of

daily life at Mari. People went to him for advice in ordinary difficulties of life. Commanders saw him for help in the movement of their troops.

The patriarchs were remarkably free from occult practices and contamination from paganism and divinatory phenomena in general. This fact is true despite the teraphim (household gods) of Rachel and despite the "foreign gods" which Jacob ordered put away and which he hid under a terebinth tree in Shechem (Gen. 35:2-4).

Interestingly, the Mari Letters refer to "sons of the right," that is, "sons of the south," since the directions were taken as one faced the east, and the south would be on one's right hand. These were a fierce tribe of wanderers and called Benjaminites, but they have no connection with the "Benjamites" of the Bible. The name "Benjamin," "son of the south," that is, "southerner," was a term suited to occur in various places, especially in Mari, where the parallel term "sons of the left," that is, "sons of the north," is found.

The Bible presents Benjamin as being of Palestinian birth after Jacob's return from Mesopotamia. He is set forth as never having been in Mesopotamia at all. Genesis 49:27 describes Benjamin as a ravenous wolf. This fits the description of the veteran tribe at Mari remarkably well. Any connection, however, is obviously dubious and purely imaginary.

Another interesting sidelight is the fact that the word translated "chieftain," with reference to the plundering Benjaminites, is *dawidum*, meaning "leader." This sheds light on the etymology of the name of Israel's most renowned king, who evidently had a name meaning "the leader."

Historical Value of the Mari Letters. These documents establish that Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria, who ruled c. 1748-1716 B.C., and Hammurabi the Great of Babylon, were contemporaries. With these facts and other details furnished by the Mari documents, the date of Hammurabi can be fixed c. 1728-1676 B.C. This and other evidence have forced scholars to give up identifying Hammurabi of Babylon with Amraphel (Gen. 14:1). The high antiquity of Genesis 14 has been vindicated, but archaeology has not yet succeeded in furnishing the background of the four Mesopotamian kings who invaded the Trans-Jordanic country in the days of Abraham.

Hammurabi was a strong military leader and a great administrator. He was a member of the strong 1st dynasty of Babylon which reigned from 1830 to c. 1550 B.C. The power of this dynasty reached its height under Hammurabi's rule. He was the greatest of all Babylonian rulers. Hammurabi defeated Rim-Sin of Larsa and established himself over all the city-states of Lower Babylonia. His expanding military machine enabled him to destroy Mari. It was his code of laws, as we have seen, that was discovered at Susa in 1901.

This famous codification has remained classic in illustrating and illuminating Israelite laws.

It was during the reign of Hammurabi that the Babylonian story of creation was composed. The poem glorified Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, whom Hammurabi established as the national god of Babylonia. In this period, the early Sumerian language became an antiquity and Semitic-Babylonian came into common usage.

The Mari Letters and the Amorites. About 2000 B.C. the Semitic-nomadic peoples, who lived along the desert fringes of the Fertile Crescent, invaded the centers of established civilization. Known as "Westerners," they are preserved in the Old Testament as "Amorites." Amorite states came into existence all over the Mesopotamian area. Nahor, Haran, Mari, Qatna, and Ugarit all appear as Amorite cities with Amorite kings. Babylon itself became the capital of an Amorite state under Hammurabi. This important historical fact is clearly reflected in the Mari Letters and in the peoples known as "Amorites" or "Westerners." In such a manner archaeology is slowly but surely outlining the historical framework of the patriarchal age. Such discoveries as the Mari Letters prove of incalculable assistance to the historian of the ancient biblical world.

8. The Lachish Ostraca—Jeremiah's Age Lives Again

In the excavations of Lachish, a southwestern Palestinian city, the most astonishing finds were some letters embedded in a layer of burnt charcoal and ashes. They were eighteen in number and were in Hebrew writing done in the ancient Phoenician script. Three more of these letters were discovered in later campaigns in 1938.

Almost all of the letters were written by one named Hoshiah, who was stationed at some military outpost, to Jaosh, who was evidently a high ranking officer in the garrison at Lachish. It was the era of the Babylonian overrunning of Palestine several years before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The Babylonians had attacked and partly burned Lachish some ten years before in the reign of Jehoiakim. These particular letters were in the layer of ashes which represent the final destruction of the city. Accordingly, they are to be dated from 588 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar was making the final siege of Jerusalem and also of Lachish and Azekah.

Identification of Lachish. This large mound, one of the largest occupied in Palestine, is located 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, 20 miles inland from the Mediterranean and 50 miles west of Hebron. It is mentioned in the Amarna Letters and in earlier Egyptian sources. Its strategic importance is attested by its being on the main route from central Palestine to Egypt. It overlooked the rich Shephelah (terrain which descended to the

coastal lowland). The fortress city was an ideal barrier between the Philistine plains and the elevated Judean country. It was one of the principal fortified cities of Judah and one of the bastions taken by the Israelites in their conquest of Palestine (Josh. 10:31–35). The site of Umm-Lakis was first thought to be Lachish. Then the location was sought at Tell el-Hesi by Sir Flinders Petrie, a pioneer archaeologist. William Foxwell Albright finally identified it correctly with the large mound of Tell el-Duweir.

Nebuchadnezzar captured Lachish in 588–586 B.C. (Jer. 34:7). Marks of a huge conflagration on the road leading up to the gate and on the adjacent wall display that the attackers relied largely upon fire, for which felled olive trees not yet harvested supplied the fuel.

Excavations at Lachish. The Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Expedition in 1933 commenced work there, under the direction of J. L. Starkey. In 1938 Starkey was killed by Arab brigands, and the work was carried on by Lankester Harding and Charles H. Inge.

The Results of the Excavation. Besides evidences of earlier occupation, Lachish disclosed settlement by the Hyksos c. 1720–1550 B.C. These people overran Egypt during this period. A typical Hyksos defense ditch or *fosse*, with a ramp of clay and lime that apparently provided an enclosure for their horses, was brought to light. In the fosse three Canaanite Egyptian temples built between 1450 and 1225 B.C. were excavated. A Persian temple of a much later period was also found. Cemeteries at Lachish yielded a great quantity of pottery, jewelry, scarabs, and skeletal evidence.

A well, 200 feet deep, was located within the city, the remains of a tremendous engineering excavation for water storage, which was not completed. A shaft about 85 feet terminates in a rectangle 80 x 70 feet cut to a depth of 80 feet. The aim was a water system which would have been much larger than that provided by Hezekiah for Jerusalem in the Siloam Tunnel and comparable to similar systems at Gezer and Megiddo.

A good quantity of inscribed material has been removed from the Lachish excavations. A bronze dagger from c. 1700 B.C. contains four pictographic signs, samples of the early script. A bowl and a ewer contain specimens of the same early writing as that found at Serabit el-Khadem. The name "Gedaliah" was found on a jar handle and may be the official whom Nebuchadnezzar set over the land after the fall of Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 40–42).

Contents of the Lachish Letters. But of all the epigraphic discoveries at Lachish, the most important are the Lachish Letters. These letters may be briefly described as follows: Letter 1 lists names, the majority of which are found in the Old



A clay tablet showing the colophon at the end of a typical Assyrian library tablet. Found at Ninevah. *British Museum*

Testament. Letters 2 and 5 consist largely of greetings. Letter 3, the longest, contains the most information. This concerns movements of Jewish troops and also makes an interesting note to an unnamed prophet and his word of warning. Letter 4 states that Hoshiah, though observing the signals of Lachish, cannot see those of Azekah. Azekah may well have fallen earlier, for this letter states, "We are watching for the signal station at Lachish according to all the signals you are giving, because we cannot see the signals of Azekah." Letter 6 contains the biblical expression, "to weaken the hands of the people." This recalls Jeremiah, who uses a similar expression (Jer. 38:4).

Historical Importance of the Letters. The Lachish Letters give us an independent view of conditions in Judah in the last days before the fall of Jerusalem. As the Neo-Babylonian army advanced, the doom of Jerusalem was sealed, in contrast to its deliverance under the Assyrian, Sennacherib, as Isaiah had predicted (2 Kin. 19:20, 32–36). Relentlessly, Nebuchadnezzar advanced on the city after a terrible eighteen-month siege, 587 B.C. The walls of the city were broken down, the houses and the temple burned, and the people carried away to exile (2 Kin. 25:1–12).

Jeremiah conducted his difficult ministry in these agonizing times. His reference to Azekah and Lachish is most interesting. "When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for *only* these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah" (Jer. 34:7).

Tell Zakariya in the Shephelah region has been identified as Azekah. In 1898 it was excavated by Frederick K. Bliss of the Palestine Exploration Fund. It had a strong inner fortress buttressed with eight large towers.

The Lachish Letters concern the time just prior to the fall of the city and present the same conditions of turmoil and confusion that are revealed in the Book of Jeremiah. Numerous place names that occur in the Bible are found in the letters, as

well as personal names. Hoshaiah appears in Jeremiah 42:1 and Nehemiah 12:32. God is referred to by the four-letter word YHWH, which are the consonants of the name "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." It is also interesting to note that many of the men's names have Yahweh endings. A prophet like Jeremiah is referred to in the letters. But this is most probably not Jeremiah himself.

So complete was the destruction by the Babylonians that it took many centuries for Judah to recover. The returned remnant was tiny and weak. The small Jewish state stamped its coins with the name "Yehud," that is, Judah, but not until after 300 B.C. do substantial archaeological remains appear, and then they are not abundant. Certainly the Babylonians did a thorough job of destroying Jewish power for many centuries.

The Paleographic Importance of the Letters. Being inscribed in biblical Hebrew, in which the Old Testament Scriptures were written, and with stylistic and vocabulary similarities to the Book of Jeremiah, these letters are of great paleographic importance. They help the scholar to trace the evolution of the Hebrew alphabet, noting the formation of the letters and their style. They also enable him to see how the Old Testament Scriptures, which were then written, appeared.

Surely research of this type, that makes it possible for the scholar to look back, to resurrect the past, and to see how the language of the Old Testament developed, is fascinating. Great strides are

being made in this field of enquiry. It is the one truly bright spot in original biblical studies. This type of study is of immense value in expanding historical backgrounds and illuminating Holy Scripture on the human plane.

9. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The middle of the 20th century saw the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. In 1947 a young Bedouin shepherd stumbled upon a cave south of Jericho, containing many leather scrolls of Hebrew and Aramaic writing and about 600 fragmentary inscriptions. Great excitement prevailed in the archaeological world. In 1952 new caves containing fragments of later scrolls in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic were found. These and other startling manuscript discoveries have been followed by news of additional manuscripts found in other caves in the Dead Sea area.

A. The Date of the Scrolls. After intensive study of the manuscripts from the Dead Sea area, scholars define three periods: 1. The Archaic Period c. 200–150 B.C. 2. The Hasmonaean Period c. 150–30 B.C. 3. The Herodian Period c. 30 B.C. to A.D. 70. The great majority originated in the 2nd and 3rd periods, especially the last half of the 2nd period and last half of the 3rd period.

Although attacks have been made against the antiquity and authenticity of these manuscripts, two lines of evidence substantiate their antiquity. **The evidence of radiocarbon count.** This scien-



The area near the Dead Sea where the Qumran scrolls were found.

Matson Photo Service

tific method of dating places the linen in which the scrolls were wrapped in the general era of c. 175 B.C. to A.D. 225. **Paleographic evidence.** Scholars conversant in this science date these documents by the form of the letters and the way they are written in comparison with other eras of writing. They are able to demonstrate that they come in the intermediate period between the script of the 3rd century B.C. and of the middle of the 1st century A.D. W. F. Albright observes, "All competent students of writing conversant with the available material and with paleographic method date the scrolls in the 250 years before A.D. 70."

B. The Contents of the Scrolls. The Dead Sea cave manuscripts contain material partly biblical and partly intertestamental. The biblical includes two scrolls of Isaiah, one complete, and most of the first two chapters of Habakkuk, and fragments of all Old Testament books except Esther. Large numbers of fragmentary manuscripts have been recovered from the Pentateuchal books and Isaiah. Fragments of Psalms, Jeremiah, and Daniel are numerous.

The scroll of *Isaiah*, in the initial finds from the site of Qumran, has remained the best known of the discoveries. It was the first major biblical manuscript of great antiquity to be recovered. It is earlier by a millennium than the oldest Hebrew text preserved in the Masoretic Hebrew Bible. This Masoretic Hebrew Bible is the basis of all recent translations and does not go back any earlier than A.D. 900.

This fact of the antiquity of the Hebrew text of Isaiah, dating as early as 150–125 B.C., constitutes these discoveries as the greatest of modern times. They are the oldest existing manuscripts of the Bible in any language.

In the original group of manuscripts of 1947 were a commentary on Habakkuk and so-called *Manual of Discipline* of pre-Christian Jewish sect of Essenes. Of unusual interest were manuscripts later purchased by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, containing a later Isaiah scroll more conformed to the traditional Hebrew, and a document of great interest called "*The War Between the Children of Light and Darkness*." This composition evidently issued from the Maccabaeen struggles against Greek paganism in 158–137 B.C.

In winter, 1949, the first manuscript-bearing cave was excavated by two well-known Palestinian archaeologists, Pierre de Vaux and Lankester Harding. Recovered were fragments of Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Judges with a fragment of Leviticus in Old Hebrew script. Nonbiblical finds included a fragment of the *Book of Jubilees*, a work related to the Enoch literature, and some unknown material.

C. Other Manuscript-Yielding Sites. In 1952 a

cave was uncovered at Murabbaat in another part of the desert. This yielded manuscripts chiefly from the 2nd century A.D. in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, including a few texts of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah. Several Hebrew letters were discovered from the period of Simon ben Koseba, that is, Bar Cocheba, who led the revolt in 132–135. A notable exception to the 2nd century A.D. date of this material is an archaic Hebrew papyrus piece, a palimpsest, a list of names and numbers, dated in the 6th century B.C.

In the same general area, other caves have been found, one group in Khirbet Mird, northeast of the monastery of Mar Saba. These contain Arabic papyri, Greek and Christo-Palestinian-Syrian documents, with fragments of biblical codices, all late Byzantine and early Arabic. Another group of manuscripts date from the period of the bulk of the Murabbaat material. Among them is a version of the minor prophets in Greek and a corpus of Nabataean papyri, both of great biblical and historical importance.

D. Excavations at Khirbet Qumran. Khirbet Qumran was excavated between 1951 and 1954. This Essene community, with the nearby caves, proved to be the richest manuscript-yielding center. Members of this Essenic community copied these manuscripts and preserved them by hiding them in the caves. The Essenes at Khirbet Qumran, 7 miles south of Jericho near the shores of the Dead Sea, were next to the Pharisees and Sadducees in importance in sectarian Judaism. This site has become one of the most publicized places in Palestine because of the phenomenal manuscript finds in the cave-dotted cliffs.

Excavations at Khirbet Qumran have fully authenticated this site as the center of Essenic Judaism. As the result of the recovery of coins, pottery, and architectural remains, the story of Qumran's occupation can now be told. Four periods in the later history of the site are traced.

Period 1 extends from its founding c. 110 B.C. under John Hyrcanus. Numerous coins of this ruler were dug up, as well as of other Hasmonaean rulers including Antigonos, 40–37 B.C., the last ruler of this line, to the seventh year of Herod, 31 B.C. At this time an earthquake apparently leveled the site. Indications are that during Herod's reign the place was abandoned because of his antagonism.

Period 2 at Qumran dates from rebuilding and enlargement c. A.D. 1 and Roman destruction in June A.D. 68. During this era in the lifetime of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the early Christian apostles, Qumran flourished, influencing Judaism and the early Christian church. Coins have been found dating from the reign of Archelaus, 4 B.C. to A.D. 6, and from the time of the Roman

procurators down to the second year of the first Jewish revolt in A.D. 66-70.

The Roman army, which took Jericho in June, A.D. 68, evidently likewise captured Qumran. One coin, marked with an X, belonged to the Tenth Legion. Iron arrowheads were found in a layer of burned ash in the excavation.

Qumran fell to Roman occupation. Some coins describe *Judaea Capta*. These date in the reign of Titus, A.D. 79-81, and mark Period 3 as the Roman occupation after Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70. Evidence that Qumran structures were converted into army barracks indicates that a Roman garrison was stationed there from A.D. 68-c. A.D. 100. At this time the site apparently was abandoned.

Period 4. Qumran is distinguished by reoccupation of the site during the 2nd Jewish revolt, A.D. 132-135. Coins dating from this era indicate that here the Jews made their last stand to drive the Romans from their country. After that Qumran sank into obscurity.

Architectural Remains at Qumran. The main edifice at Qumran is 100 feet by 120 and formed the communal center and hub of the complex. At the northwest corner was a massive defense tower with thick walls enforced by stone embankments. Some coins from the time of the 2nd Jewish revolt (A.D. 132-135) attest its use as a fortress against Roman power.

Alongside the general meeting room is the largest hall of the main building. Here was located the scriptorium. Several inkwells of the Roman period, and even some dried ink, indicate that the manuscripts had been copied by the community's scribes.

Also in the complex were two cisterns (artificial reservoirs) carefully plastered. There were installations for ablutions and baptisms. Of the possibly 40 cisterns and reservoirs, the bulk of them must have been used for storage of water in the very hot, dry climate.

Of great interest is the cemetery, containing about 1,000 burial places. De Vaux excavated many of these tombs. They are noted for their lack of jewelry and any evidences of luxury.

E. Khirbet Qumran and the Essenes. Not only do the excavations at Khirbet Qumran demonstrate that it was the headquarters of Essenic Judaism but three authorities who were contemporary witnesses attest the same fact, namely, Josephus, Philo, and Pliny. Pliny, for example, locates the Essenes at precisely the spot where Qumran is situated, namely, "on the west side of the Dead Sea." He also designates the town of En-Gedi as situated "below the Essenes."

Josephus relates their unselfish character, industry, and communal life. He extols their love for common toil, says they dressed in white, and de-

scribes their three-year probationary period before admission to the sect, and other phases of discipline. He also mentions their various lustrations and says that they numbered about 4,000. He comments on their celibacy, piety, convictions concerning immortality, and their belief in rewards for righteousness.

Philo gives a similar description of this group in Judaism. The library at Qumran attests their delight in the Bible and literature. This is reflected in information given by Philo and Josephus. The Essenes carefully copied Holy Scripture and took pains to preserve it.

There are difficulties in equating the Essenes at Qumran with the sect described by Philo, Pliny, and Josephus. Nevertheless, the likenesses far outweigh the differences. The evidence would seem to equate Qumran with the Essenes of the 1st century A.D.

F. The Essenes at Qumran and John the Baptist. Concerning John, Luke wrote: "So the child grew, and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Luke 1:80). The home of John the Baptist's parents was in the hill country of Judea (Luke 1:39, 40, 65). Although nothing is known definitely, it is easy to believe that John the Baptist did in some way come in contact with the Essenes. There are many characteristics in his own life that parallel theirs.

Both John and the Qumranites feature Isaiah 40:3 with regard to preparing "the way of the LORD." But John must have early realized that there were some features of the Essenes that were not conducive to preparing the nation for the advent of the Messiah, and so if he ever had a connection with them, he must have broken with them, giving himself to an active ministry of preaching repentance and baptizing in the Jordan Valley.

John's message featured repentance (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Repentance was also a vital note in Qumran theology. They belonged to a "covenant of repentance" and they called themselves "the penitents of Israel." The baptism of repentance, which John administered, was also paralleled by the Essenes who practiced water baptism. John's baptism was an outer indication of inward spiritual renovation, enabling the recipients to recognize the Messiah when He came.

Baptism among the Qumranites, however, was purely ritual, and the recipients were enjoined to separate themselves rigidly from any who did not belong to their community. The severe indictment of the Jewish nation, which was characteristic of John, was also characteristic of the Essenes. They looked upon those not belonging to their sect as "sons of darkness" connected with Belial. They regarded themselves as true Israel,

living in accordance with the law. For them alone the baptismal rite could have meaning.

John featured the baptism "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11), the baptism with fire being the judgment upon the unrepentant in an eschatological sense. Such judgment of fire is described in a Qumran hymn under the figure of a fiery river overflowing in wrath "on the outcasts" and in "the time of fury for all Belial."

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is prophesied by John to be the portion of those who would repent and receive the coming Messiah (John 1:33). In Qumran literature not only does God "sprinkle upon him," the Messiah, the spirit of truth as purifying water to cleanse Him from all abominations of falsehood and from the spirit of impurity, but the Messiah sprinkles His people with His Holy Spirit, constituting them His anointed ones.

John the Baptist was intensely missionary and evangelistic in his message. The Qumranites were self-centered, strictly sectarian, and did not spread their convictions. They did adopt children to train in their ways.

John the Baptist was vouchsafed the honor of preparing the way for the Messiah and being His forerunner. The Qumran community did not recognize the Messiah when He came. Their asceticism led to a deadend. It never conducted them to Him who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

G. The Essenes and Jesus the Messiah. Although the Qumran community had a messianic hope, it was strikingly different from that of the Old Testament. They could not comprehend the combination of King and Priest in *one* Person (Zech. 6:9-15). Neither could they comprehend in the union of the same Person the additional office of a Prophet, although they did feature in their writings the messianic prophecy of "a Prophet" (Deut. 18:18, 19).

Their great priest was Messiah of Aaron. Their great military leader, Messiah of Israel; their prophet comprehended in the rule of the community is set down alongside the "messiahs of Aaron and Israel," apparently as a separate messianic figure.

There are other similarities between the organization and teachings of the Qumran group and the teachings of Jesus and the formation of the Christian church. The passage in Matthew 18:15-17 has a striking parallel in Qumran literature.

It is easily seen that with this new material the background of the gospel stories is much more richly illustrated. The Last Supper, the Sermon on the Mount, and numerous other aspects of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus are fitted into a larger framework of historical background material, and to that extent are understood on the



Jerusalem Temple inscription warning Gentiles against intrusion and the burning of the Temple. Matson Photo Service

human side. However, it is transparently clear that the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus remain unique. Qumran literature in no sense casts any shadow upon the unique Person and work of Jesus Christ. Christianity stands as authentically growing out of the Old Testament and not connected with later Gnosticism in a post-apostolic era that would jeopardize its historic genuineness.

H. The Dead Sea Scrolls and Literary Criticism of the New Testament. The Dead Sea material has had a stabilizing effect upon New Testament criticism. In the light of the new material, the New Testament appears as a Jewish book with Christian theology with less Greek influence in formation than Jewish, and there is reason to date the *synoptic gospels*, beginning with *Mark*, between A.D. 60 and 65.

Especially interesting is the dating of the *Gospel of John*. A radical criticism customarily dated this Gospel about A.D. 150 or later. Thus it was removed from apostolic tradition and treated more as an apocryphal book. Now it is well known that the Fourth Gospel reflects the genuine Jewish background of John the Baptist and Jesus and not a later 2nd-century Gnostic milieu. This is clearly attested by the parallels to the conceptual imagery of John's Gospel in the Essenic literature from Qumran.

There is every evidence to believe in the authenticity of John's Gospel, and there is not the slightest reason critically to date the Gospel after A.D. 90. Indeed, it may be quite a bit earlier. The Dead Sea discoveries and the excavations at Qumran not only give additional background material to the inter-biblical and New Testament period but also help to stabilize higher criticism and purge out radical views that are now shown to be untenable.

The *Book of Hebrews* also is interesting. This is certainly to be definitely dated before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The treatise apparently was planned to offset the Essenic idea

"two anointed ones," one a prince and the other a priest. It was designed to present the Christian and Old Testament doctrine (cf. Zech. 6:9, 15; Ps. 110:1) that Messiah would be *both King and Priest in one Person*. Also the *Book of the Revelation* was doubtless penned toward the end of the 1st century, and, in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls, may now possibly be dated earlier, that is before A.D. 70. This conclusion is based on its Hebraic background, being illuminated by the evidence from the Dead Sea manuscripts.

10. Jerusalem

Probably no excavation ever carried out has been as important as that carried on by Israeli institutions at the western and southern walls of the temple mountain in Jerusalem. The actual steps and entrances of Herod's temple have been uncovered as have the tiny shops and narrow streets where the merchants must have hawked their wares. The giant stone blocks from the top of the wall, which were thrown down into the streets by Titus' troops in A.D. 70, were found where they fell. In a grave in another part of the city was found the remains of a Jew who had been crucified by the Romans, the first physical evidence of this form of execution ever found. So extensive were these finds that it will be a generation before they are all deciphered and integrated into the historical framework of the Roman Age.

11. Ebla

The modern Arabic name for this 140-acre mound in the Northwest corner of Syria is Tell Mardikh. Archaeologists of the University of Rome began digging this mound in 1964 and found an inscription in 1968 that identified this site as ancient Ebla. They uncovered portions of impressive *buildings from the time of the biblical Patriarchs* (1900–1700 B.C.); and beneath these were palaces and temples of the Early Bronze Age (2400–2250 B.C.). This was the discovery of an early but advanced civilization which was previously unknown.

In 1974, 1975, and 1976, three rooms of one palace yielded almost 7000 well-preserved *clay tablets* and about 13,000 fragments of other tablets *with cuneiform writing on them*. This archive of *ancient Sumerian and Canaanite literature* is very important. The tablets contain economic, political, and legal records of Ebla. (Understanding the cultures of Israel's neighbors aids biblical interpretation.) They show that Ebla was a merchant empire. Its rulers controlled trade routes that reached into the Mesopotamian Valley, into the mountains of modern-day Turkey, and to the edge of the Nile Valley.

But more importantly, some tablets are *dictionaries*—the earliest known—providing the

meanings of words used in both the Sumerian and early Canaanite (Eblaite) languages. (Languages help archaeologists understand the cultures.) Many Canaanite words at Ugarit and *Hebrew words in the Old Testament* can be understood more accurately because they also occur on these early tablets.

Many *place names* occur in the Ebla records, including those familiar to readers of the Bible: Haran, Damascus, Hazor, Beth-shan, Shechem, Joppa, Eshkelon, Jerusalem, Dor—and some scholars believe also Sodom and Gomorrah. Since the Bible itself presents these as real places, the Ebla tablets help support its historical reliability.

About 10,000 names of people are found on the tablets. Among them are *biblical names* such as Adam, Eve, Noah, Jubal, Abram, Ishmael, Hagar, Keturah, Bilhah, Israel, Micah, Michael, Saul, David, Jehorah, and Jonah. Although these names do not refer to the biblical personages, they establish that the names in Scripture are authentic.

Sometimes, however, the tablets contain mythic and legendary stories which conflict with the Scriptures (e.g., different creation accounts). Such cases illumine the biblical authors' polemics against pagan worldviews.

The excavation project continues until the present and may be expected to cast more light on the Bible's meaning and reliability.

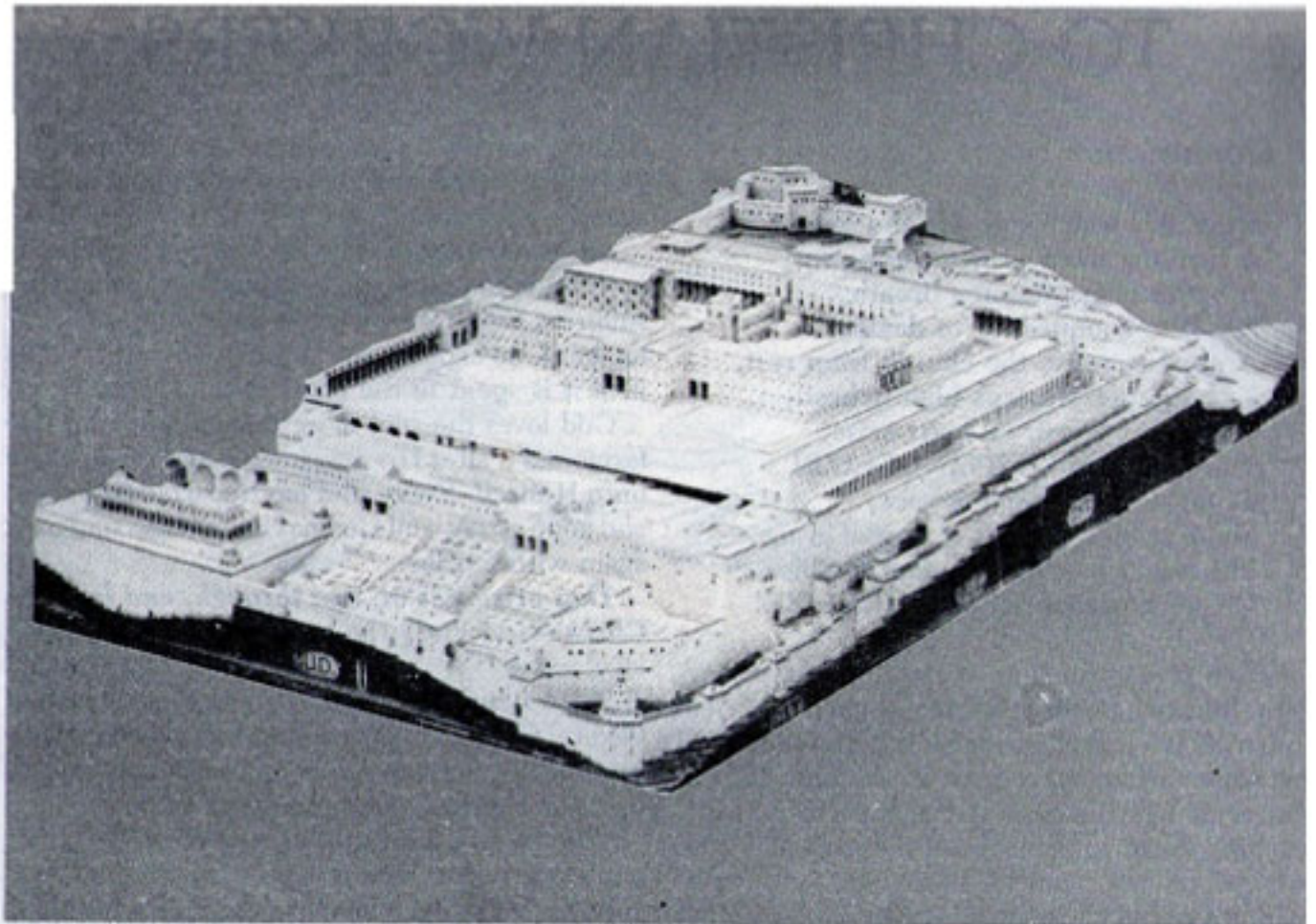
The thrilling story of biblical archaeology is not yet completed. Other great discoveries as a result of continuous research in Bible lands promise even greater contributions to biblical studies in future years. For example, the recovery of thirteen Coptic codices from Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, since 1945, have almost rivaled the Dead Sea Scrolls in actual biblical importance. These even include the apocryphal "Gospel of Thomas" and are of inestimable value, especially from a critical standpoint in dating New Testament literature.

What new and exciting discovery affecting the Bible may we not expect the archaeologist's spade to turn up next? The prospect should engender a love for the Scriptures and a desire to study them employing history, linguistics, and archaeology as the means under the Holy Spirit to a more accurate understanding of the Bible's message to mankind.

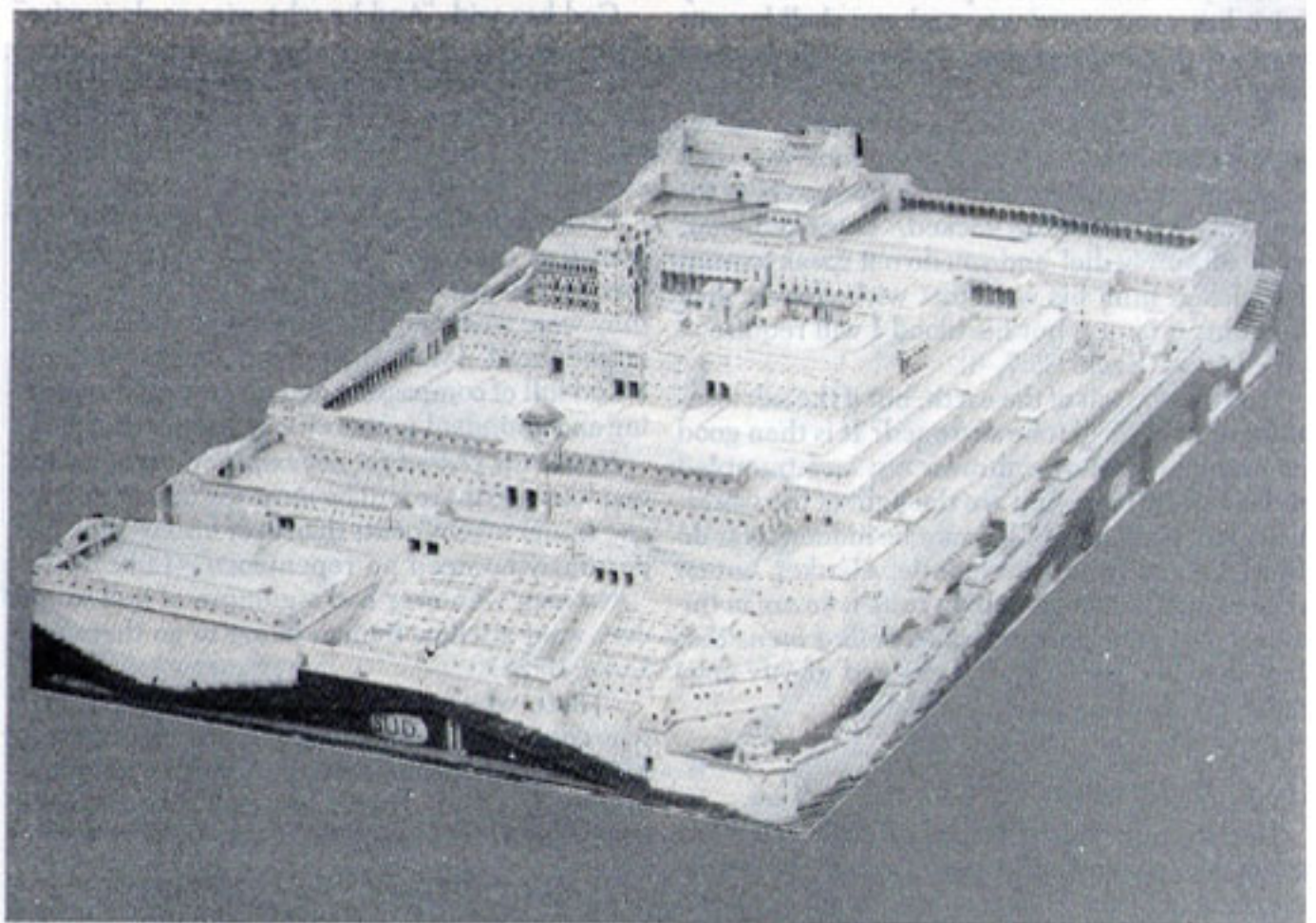
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Model of the Temple of Zerubbabel in Jerusalem. *Matson Photo Service*



Model of the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem. *Matson Photo Service*