

Nothing New Under The Sun

By
Inez Comparet



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PROFESSOR ANDRE PARROT, THE WORLD FAMOUS FRENCH ARCHAEOLOGIST HAS SAID, "How can we understand the Bible unless we see it in its proper chronological, historical and geographical settings?" Archaeology not only confirms but also illuminates the historical situations out of which the Old Testament and the gospels grew. I think you will be interested in seeing how modern they were centuries before the Christian era, and how fitting the title, "Nothing New Under the Sun".

It was Solomon who said in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "Whatever has been is that which will be; And whatsoever has been done is that which will be done. And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, Lo, this is new? It was already in existence in the ages which were before us."

Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees and lived there until he was about 50 years old. Then with his father Terah, his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot, they moved to Haran and remained there until Terah died. Yahweh said to Abram in Genesis 12:1-4, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee; And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great: --- And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Because we believe the United States is one of the great nations promised to Abraham's seed, this becomes our history. Just at the time the higher critics had about convinced everybody that Abraham was just a legendary figure, the archaeologists began proving the Bible to be true. Thousands of our books have become worthless and ancient history had to be rewritten.

The earliest history begins in Mesopotamia, a Greek word meaning the land between the rivers. The Euphrates River was on the west and the Tigris River on the east, in what is now called Iraq. This country, from time immemorial, had two major political divisions. One of these divisions was Assyria, occupying the northern part, having its capital at Ninevah. The other group was Babylonia, which occupied the southern part with Babylon as its capital. The southern part of Babylonia, which touched the Persian Gulf, was also known at different periods of its history as Sumer, Shinar and Chaldea. One of the oldest cities in this southern part of Babylonia is Ur. It is located 150 miles from Babylon and in the zenith of its history, was a seaport at the mouth of the Euphrates River, where it emptied into the Persian Gulf. Ur is now 130 miles inland and for many centuries the river has been ten miles to the east, but the piers and docks are still there.

Before 1919 little was known about Ur. Mr. J. E. Taylor, the British consul at Basra, was the first to dig there and he brought to light enough inscriptions to convince the most sceptical that the great mound covered the Biblical Ur of the Chaldees. In 1922 Dr. C.I. Wooley, field director for the joint expedition of the British museum and the University of Pennsylvania museums took up the work at Ur. He worked for twelve seasons, during the four or five months when the weather permitted, with 200 workmen under him.

Dr. Wooley discovered that Chaldea, at that time, was a rich agricultural district. Ur was a manufacturing city of busy looms, factories and shops where skilful artisans produced a wide variety of clothing, household articles, metal utensils, jewellery and numerous musical instruments, harps, lyres, flutes, etc. At that time music was regarded as a health and life giving art. Today we have again found that same truth. The streets of Ur were named and some of them were paved. There was a sewage system. The walls of the city have been traced for two and a half miles; the wall was 80 feet high and 70 feet wide, made of adobe brick.

The houses were built with only a door on the street side. The houses were built around a paved central court and they were large houses, containing from 13 to 22 rooms. The first story was built of burnt brick

and the second story of adobe brick, and then this was plastered and whitewashed. The stairs to the upper floor went up from the central court. Behind the stairs was the bathroom. Each house had a library with books containing their genealogies. Hymnbooks were found here as well as in the temples. There were archaeologists among the people also, for copies of inscriptions on and in old buildings were found.

The people wrote with a stylus on tablets of moist clay that when dried and baked, the tablets became almost imperishable. So, we have a complete record of their life. In the time of Abraham, and centuries before his day, Ur had ceased to be the political capital but was the religious capital. Ur was a city of libraries, schools, art museums and all the refinements known to human society.

There was no illiteracy in Ur, in the time of Abraham. Every man, woman and child over 7, was compelled to learn to read and write. Society was so constituted, in its everyday activities, that such knowledge and skills were necessary. The schoolbooks consisted of texts in mathematics, astronomy, history and medicine. There were grammars with the full conjugation of verbs in two languages, Sumerian and Hebrew, there were even forms for extracting both square and cube roots.

There is one clay tablet 3 by 22 inches, that is a contract between a landowner and a tenant farmer. The landowner agreed to provide the land, seed and the animals to work the crops. The tenant farmer affirmed that he would prepare the land, plant the crops, work it, and market the produce for 2/3rds of the proceeds. Sounds modern doesn't it? Then each signed the agreement and in addition one took hold of one corner of the tablet, and the other the diagonally opposite corner, thus sealing the contract with his thumbprint. We thought we had discovered something new in finger printing.

There was a postal system established by Naram-Sin about 3750 B.C. The routes extended from the Euphrates to the Nile. It wasn't just official correspondence. One husband wrote to his wife. "Do not neglect the house. Have a look at things. Pray to the gods on my behalf. Let me hear through some message what you are thinking of."

Another message thanks a friend for sending him his physician. There was one to a lady Kasbeya from Gimil-Merodack. "I am living at Babylon, but have not seen you, which troubles me greatly. Send me news of your coming to me, so that I may be happy." The one I like best is the one from a son urging his father to send him some money, there is no change there!

One tablet gives a payroll for seven months. Another almost identical tablet was found written two years later three changes had taken place. One man's salary had been raised, that of another reduced and a woman had taken a man's position, receiving the same salary. That isn't always done today!

Among the professions of ancient Babylon, money lending held a foremost place. In some instances, the moneylenders founded businesses, which lasted for generations and brought a large part of the property of the area into their possession. One archaeologist said they were the Rothschilds of the ancient world. Sometimes the interest charged was 10% sometimes 16 2/3%. There are even records of buying and selling on the instalment plan. There is a contract around Abraham's time, about the rental of a wagon with the stipulation that it may not be driven over to the coast. So our car rental is nothing new either.

King Hammurabi was a contemporary of Abraham. He is the king the Bible call Amraphel, you find him mentioned in the 14th chapter of Genesis. He had 283 sections in his law codes regulating almost every conceivable incident and relationship of life.

Irrigation laws provided that if land is not cultivated, the holder must give account and pay compensation. The laws covered canal and water rights, the fees and responsibilities of builders and boatmen. It fixed the charges of physicians and surgeons and even veterinarians. Other laws dealt with the duties of tax collectors; yes they had tax collectors even then.

This is a little of what civilized man has achieved in earlier ages. I think that you will agree with Solomon. "Whatever has been is that which will

be; And whatsoever has been done is that which will be done. And there is nothing new under the sun."



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