

The Historical Torah – The Patriarchs



History that is recorded in writing may have started in Sumer and Akkadia around 3500 BCE, but, for Scripture, it started in Ur of the Chaldees, located in the Southeast corner of the Fertile Crescent. This was the birthplace of Abraham

Biblical History In Historic Times

- The Fertile Crescent is the land that gave birth to a number of peoples and a number of cultures.
- The Fertile Crescent seemed to be a cradle of civilization, as was the Indus River Valley in India, the Nile River Valley in Africa, many river valleys in North and South America. We also know of the Yellow River Valley in Asia.
- Many of the people living in Fertile Crescent seemed to speak one form or another of a Semitic language.
- A diverse manner of living had developed in the region. Some clans ethnic groups were semi-nomadic herdsman, moving their flocks from pasturing land to pasturing land. Some raised crops instead of animals. Some lived in cities where the animals and crops could be traded or sold.
- Many trade routes crisscrossed the region. These routes brought goods from India and China to the Levant and Egypt. The Phoenicians took these and other goods and used their sailing skills to distribute these goods to lands around the Mediterranean (and beyond??)
- The Fertile Crescent is the land where three major world religions had their birth. This is the land in which biblical history had its start. This is the land in which Abraham was born.

Who Was Abraham?

Abraham, then called Abram, was one of three sons born to a man named Terah (sometimes spelled Thare). His brothers were named Nahor and Haran. Abraham was a descendant of Eber, from whom the Hebrew people derive their name (Gen.11:16-26).

Eber was the great-grandson of Shem who was one of the three sons of Noah. The Semitic people claim Shem as their ancestor (Semites/Shemites)

Terah gave the name Abram אַבְרָם to his son which means *exalted father*

Abram, son of Terah, was the grandson of Terah's father, Nahor. Nahor, was four generations removed Eber. Eber was three generations removed from Shem, after whom the Semitic people are named. Shem is one generation removed from his father Noah.

This all seems to indicate that Abram was 10 generations removed from Noah according to biblical reckoning (Noah, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor¹, Terah, Abram). The problem of course is that there is no standard measure at the time of the duration of a generation.

¹ This Nahor was Abram's grandfather. It seems clear that Abram's brother, also named Nahor was named after his grandfather (Gen. 11:10-26)

Why Is Abraham Important?

Abraham is considered the Patriarch of the Hebrew people through his son Isaac, born to wife Sara (originally named Sarai)

Abraham is considered the Patriarch of the Muslim people through his son Ishmael, born to his Egyptian slave girl, Hagar

Abraham is considered to be a patriarch of the Christian people via Isaac and Isaac's descendants leading to Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-34)

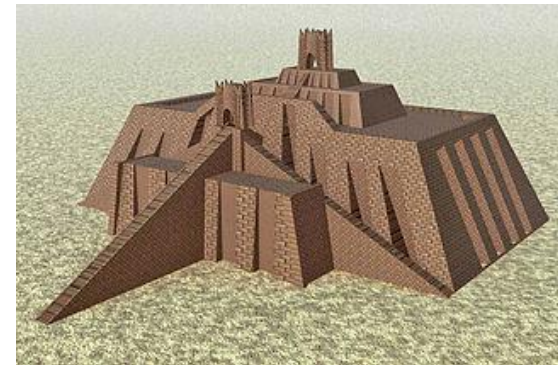
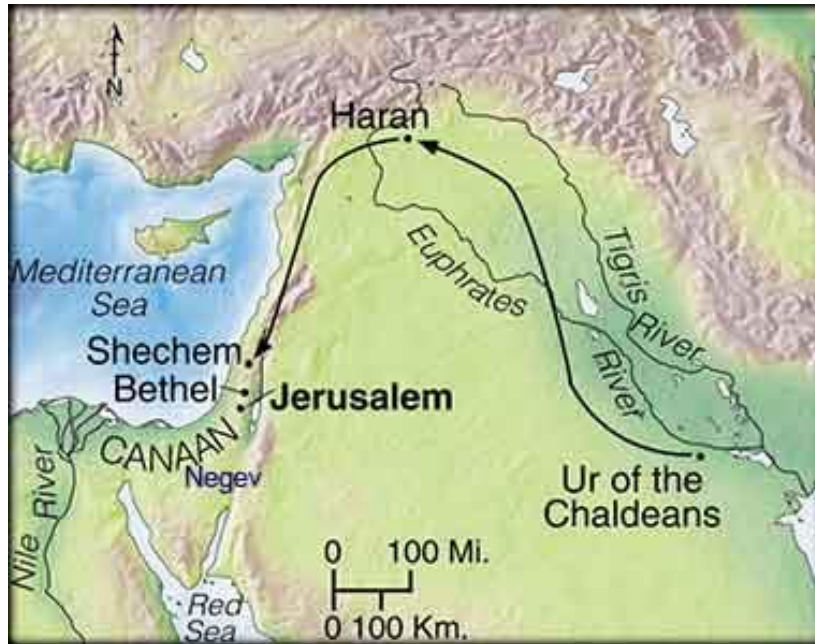
God changes Abram's name to Abraham (אַבְרָהָם) and his wife Sarai's name to Sara when he establishes his covenant with him. The meaning of the name Abraham isn't clear, but most likely means father of a multitude (Gen. 17)

It was also at this time, as the Hebrew people prospered, that God made his promise to Abraham of a territory that the Hebrew people could call their own

Abraham's brother Haran died while in Ur. After his death, Terah took Abraham, his wife and his brother Nahor away from Ur. They traveled North. They reached a town called Harran (not to be confused with Haran which is a different word)

Terah gave birth to Abraham when he was 70 (Gen. 11:26). Abraham, listening to the call of God, left his father Terah and brother Nahor when he was 75 (Gen. 12:4).

The City of Ur



Genesis 11:28 tells us that Ur of the Chaldeans was the native land of Abraham's family. Ur is located at the southeastern end of the Fertile Crescent. Ur, at the time of Abraham was ruled by the Ancient Babylonian Empire (not the same Babylonians who took Judah into exile @ 1200 years later. The famous Hammurabi was one of their kings.

There was a famous ziggurat built in Ur that could well have been the famous Tower of Babel. Harran will come up several times more in Genesis as Isaac and Jacob seek wives. Was Abraham a nomad? While the Jewish people claim that the word Hebrew comes from Ebrim (the descendants of Eber), there is an Egyptian word a-pi-ru that means nomad. Some believe that is the origin of the name "Hebrew".

Is the phrase “Ur of the Chaldees” A Biblical Anachronism?



History confirms Genesis in stating that Ur was a city in the Ancient Babylonian Empire. This was the Empire of Hammurabi (@1800-1750 BCE). History also claims that there was no region called Chaldea nor people called Chaldeans during Abraham's time

The Chaldeans ruled the New Babylonian Empire more than a millennium after the time of Abraham. The phrase “Ur of the Chaldees” seems like an anachronism.

The Hebrew word translated as Chaldeans is כַּשְׁדִּים *Kasdim*.

The standard Hebrew-English Lexicon (Brown, Driver and Briggs) translates this word as Chaldeans. So, Archaeology agrees that a people of Chaldean origin did govern Ur at the time of the Babylonian Captivity (@580-510 BCE). There is no evidence that a people known as Chaldeans existed at the time of Abraham (@1800 BCE)

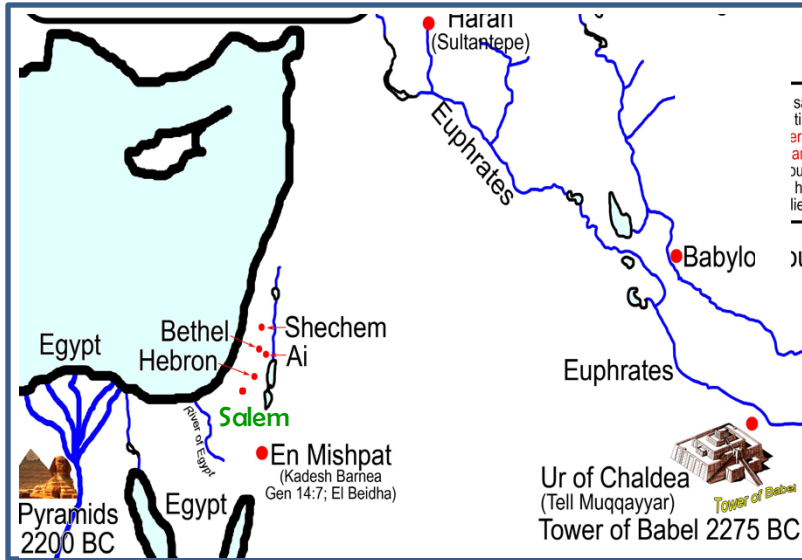
Why Are Abraham's Travels Important?

Abraham traveled the full length of the Fertile Crescent. He was a prosperous herdsman (a nomad? A semi-nomad?). But Abraham settled in the land of Canaan which later became known as The Promised Land, a land sacred to this day to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It's hard to imagine, but nonetheless true, that Abraham's travels almost four thousand years ago are still having a major impact on today's history

Many of the places where Abraham stopped for some period of time before settling down became major shrines for the people of Israel and, later, for Samaritan Jews, Christians and Muslims

Abraham is proof that one man can indeed change history.

What Were Some of Those Shrines?



The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you. Abram went as the LORD directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran (Gen 12:1-4)

- **Shechem** God appeared to Abraham at Schechem and promised the land to him and to his seed. Abram built an altar in Shechem in honor of God's promise (Modern Nablus)
- **Bethel/Ai** Abraham encamped at a place "east of **Bethel** and west of **Ai**". Abram again built an altar there to the Lord. (Modern Bethel is Baytin)
- **Egypt** Famine drove Abraham and his family into **Egypt** (the first story of Sara as Abram's sister). This trip first established a relationship between Abraham and Egypt that will play an important role in the history of his people
- **Hebron** Abraham next moved to "the terebinths of Mamre" in **Hebron** where he built yet another altar. It was here that Abraham was first referred to as a Hebrew (Hebron is still Hebron)
- **Salem** after a battle, Abraham met Melchizidek the King/Priest of **Salem now called Jerusalem**

Who Were Some of the People that Abraham Met?

- **The Pharaoh of Egypt**

Abraham wandered into Egypt during a time of famine. The Pharaoh found Sarah, Abraham's wife (now at least near 70 years old and pretending to be his sister) to be very beautiful and tried to take her into his harem. (Gen. 12:10-20)

- **Abimelech, King of the Philistine city of Gerar**

Abraham wandered to the Negeb desert and encamped at the city of Gerar. There Abraham made a treaty with Abimelech, a Philistine and the King of Gerar. Sarah, again pretending to be Abraham's sister, is once again taken into Abimelech's harem but God warned Abimelech in a dream. Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant of peace at Beer-shebah. Abraham remained in the land of the Philistines for a significant period of time. It's not clear if Abimelech is a name of a person or a title given to many kings in the region. *Abi* means "my father" and *melech* means "king". (Gen. 20)

- **Melchizedek, Priest-King of Salem**

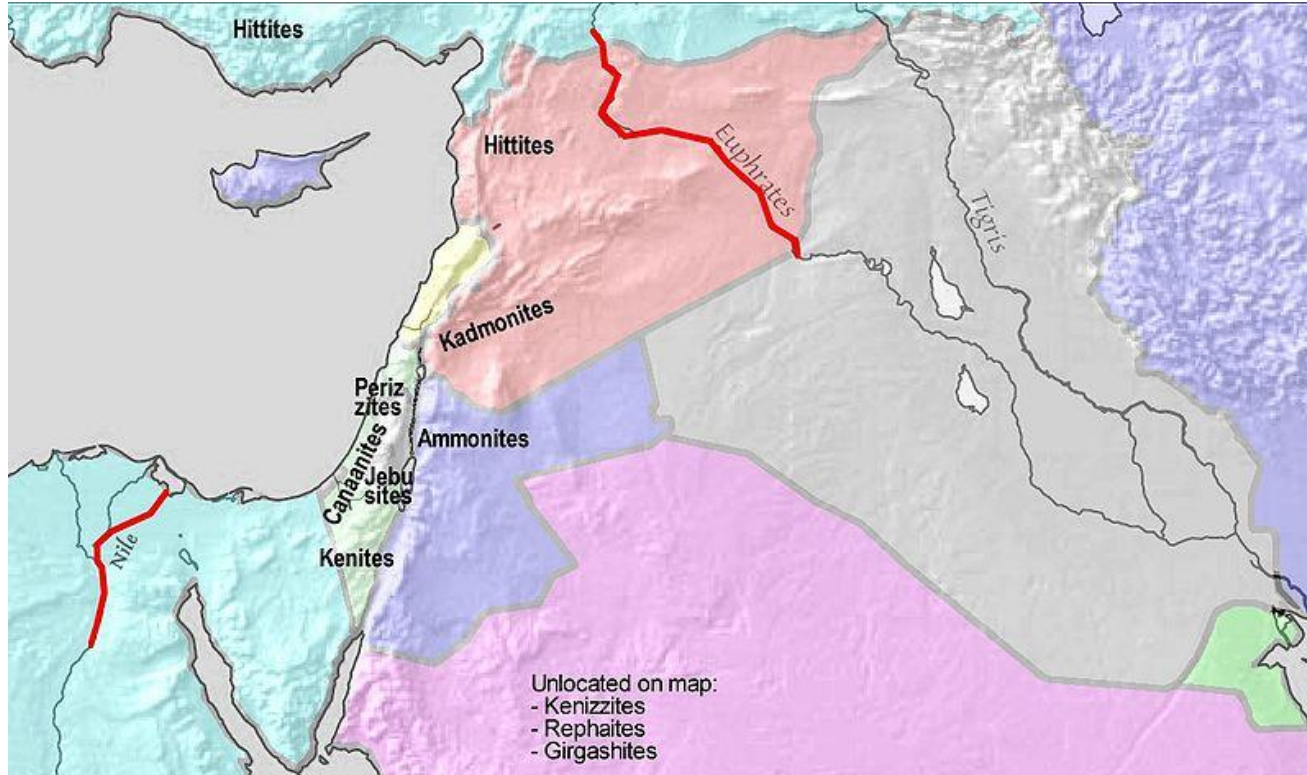
Melchizedek offered bread and wine to Abraham in the city that was later to become Jerusalem. Melchi means "my king". The name could mean "My king is righteous" or "My king is Zedek". Salem is later called Jeru-salem. (Gen. 14:18-20). The Jewish commentary on Scripture, the Talmud, claims that Melchizidek is either the person to whom the priesthood of Noah was passed through Noah's son Shem or was considered to be Shem himself (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 32b)

More History of Abram/Abraham

- Ten years after Abram's return from Egypt, his wife Sarai was well beyond the years of conception. Sarai encouraged Abram to sleep with her Egyptian slave, Hagar. Hagar gave birth to a son, Ishmael
- Thirteen years later, God made a covenant with Abram and promised him the entire land of Canaan
 - God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah
 - God required circumcision as a sign of the covenant
 - Abraham had all the males in his household circumcised including Ishmael
 - God promised Abraham a son through his wife Sarah, despite her age
 - The next year, Sarah gave birth to Isaac
 - Sarah found it difficult having Hagar and Ishmael around so Abraham banished them from his household. Yet God promised Hagar that Ishmael would beget a great nation of his own (Gen. 17:20). Islam claims Arab descent from Abraham through Ishmael
- Abraham wandered to the Negeb and encamped at Gerar.
 - There Abraham made a treaty with Abimelech, a Philistine and the King of Gerar. The two made this covenant of peace at Beer-shebah. Abraham remained in the land of the Philistines for a significant period of time.

What Was God's Promise to Abraham?

“On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites’.” Gen. 15:18-21



Interestingly, the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon expanded to almost exactly fit the dimensions of this promise. This led some modern scholars to speculate that the dimensions of the Promised Land were inserted into Genesis some time between the time of David and the end of the Babylonian captivity.

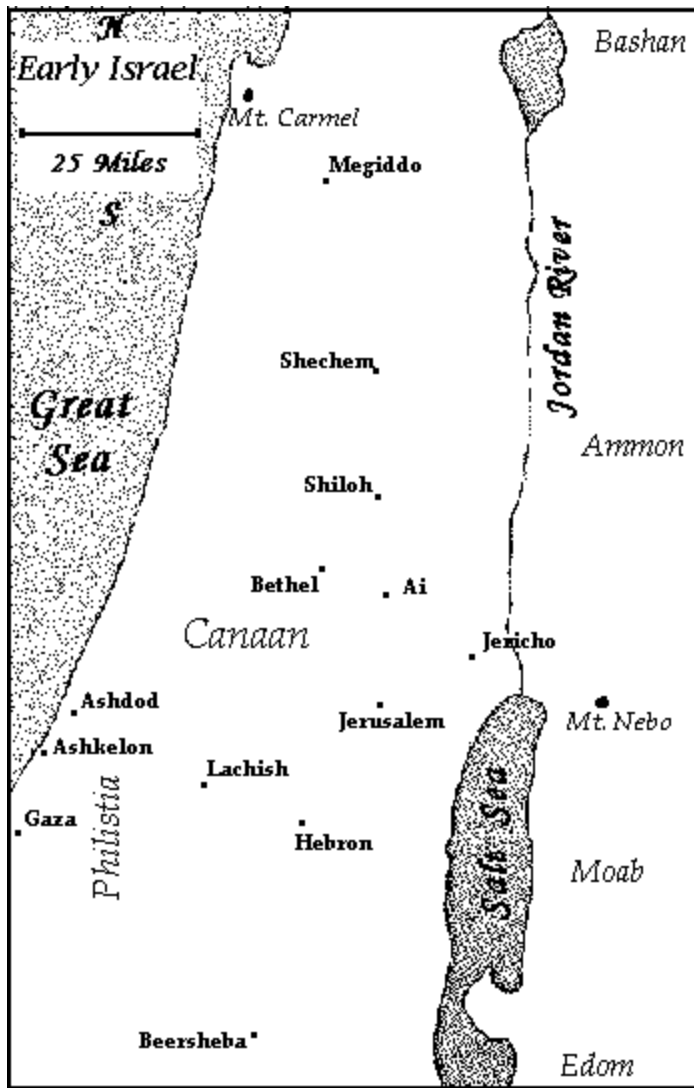
Who were “the Hebrews”?

Abraham is seen as the Patriarch of the Hebrew people but just who are these Hebrews? They are Semites, that is, descendants of Shem, one of Noah’s sons

Some linguists think the word Hebrew comes from an Egyptian word a-pi-ru which means ‘nomads’

The origin of the word that is most accepted for ‘Hebrew’ is the word עִבְרִי (Ib-ri). The word means “descendant of Eber (עֵבֶר), a child of Shem (Gen. 10:21-25). The name Eber is related to the Hebrew verb a-bar (עָבַר) , to pass over or travel across. The name could imply that the people of Eber originally came from across the Euphrates River

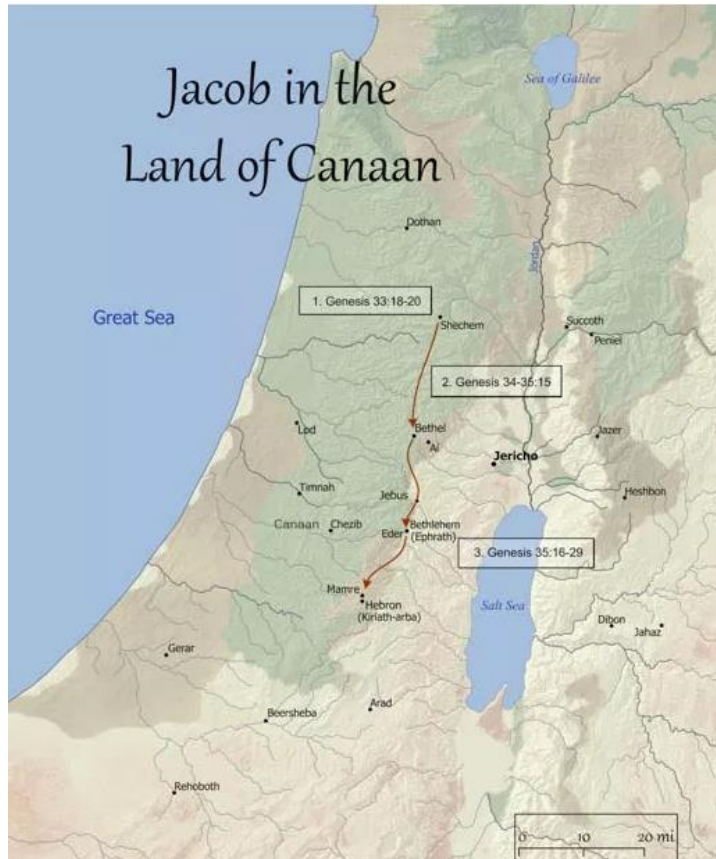
A question can be legitimately asked if calling Abram a Hebrew meant that he was seen as a one of the semi-nomads or that he was a descendant of Eber or...that the Egyptians came to refer to all semi-nomadic peoples as descendants of Eber



“A survivor came and brought the news to Abram the Hebrew”

Gen.14:13

Who Were the Canaanites?



- The Canaanites were the original inhabitants of the Promised Land when Abram/Abraham first arrived in the region
- Though linguistically a Semitic people (sons of Shem), the Canaanites are said to be descendants of Noah's son Ham (Gen. 9). Ham was cursed by Noah when he failed to cover Noah's nakedness. Noah went on to say, ***"May God give Japheth dwelling-space, and let him share the tents of Shem, but let Canaan be his slave."*** Hamites are usually associated with Egypt and Africa. Some speculate that, since Egypt dominated the region from time to time, the Canaanites became associated with them
- The Canaanites worshipped Baal, the son of El, their supreme creator god. The name Baal was not the actual name of the god but a substitution that meant something like 'Lord'. The name of the god himself was probably Baal Hadad (akin to the Akkadian god Adad)
- The Canaanites remained in conflict with the descendants of Abraham both politically and religiously for many centuries

Who Were The Hebrew Patriarchs? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

- We know who Abraham was. Isaac was his son. Isaac was the boy that God told Abraham to sacrifice on the heights of Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-19)
- Abraham's surviving brother, Nahor, was still living in the city of Harran. Nahor had a family of his own including a granddaughter named Rebekah. Abraham sent Eliezer, his chief servant, to his relatives in Harran to seek a wife for Isaac
- Eliezer met Rebekah at a well (where Jacob would meet his wife and where Moses would meet his wife) and then Eliezer met with Rebekah's brother Laban
- Laban agreed to allow Rebekah to return with Eliezer to become Isaac's wife
- Isaac had since moved his own encampment to Beer-Lahai-Roi where he met Rebekah for the first time. He later made her his wife. Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau came out of the womb of Rebekah first but Jacob, with Rebekah's help, gained the patrimony by trickery. Jacob fled back to Harran to escape Esau's wrath.
- Jacob also sought a wife while in Harran. En route, Jacob stopped at Bethel where he had a vision of a ladder to heaven. God renewed the covenant promise He made to Abraham to Jacob
- Esau sought his own wife from the family of Ishmael. Red-haired Esau then lived in the red clay land of Edom. In Roman times, Edom was called Idumea, the birthplace of the family of Herod. In a sense, Esau reclaimed his birthright two millennia later when Herod the Great became king in Jerusalem

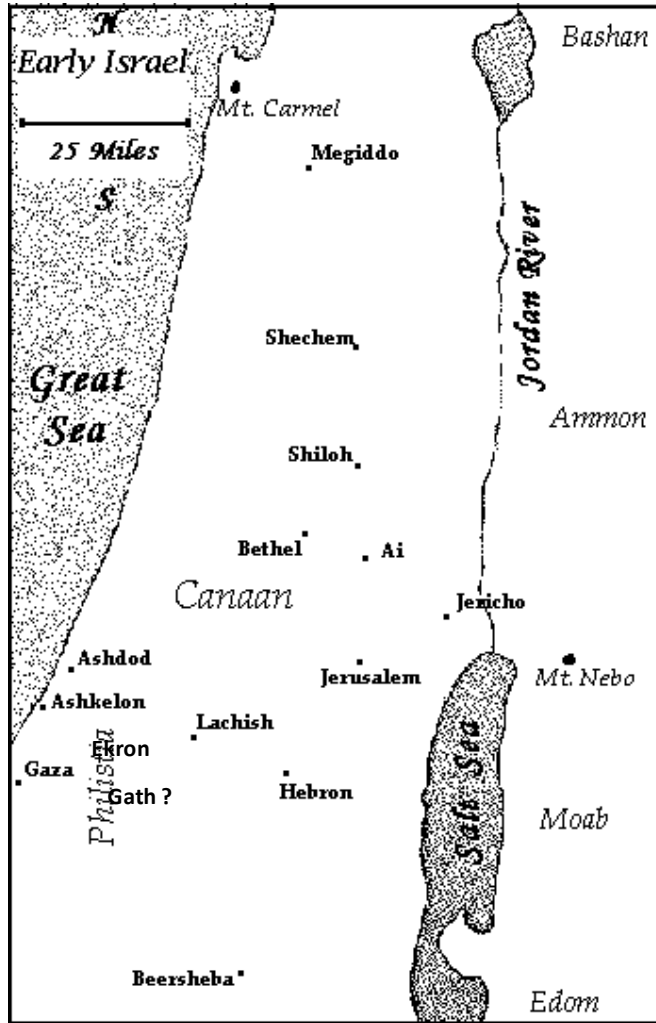
Is Genesis Genuine History?

- The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob take place in historical times.
- They involve places that can be found even today
- They mention peoples about whom much is known
- While Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in historical times, the context of those times as explained in Genesis has raised a number of questions among scholars;
 - Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees. We have already seen that there wouldn't be Chaldeans in Babylon for another millennium
 - We have seen that the Promised Land was inhabited by Canaanites
 - We have been told that Abraham encountered a Philistine King of Gerar. Who were these Philistines and where did they live?
 - We were told that Abraham encountered Melchizedek. Who was he and where was Salem, the city which he ruled?

We'll examine these last two questions in the next slides

Who Were the Philistines?

Part One

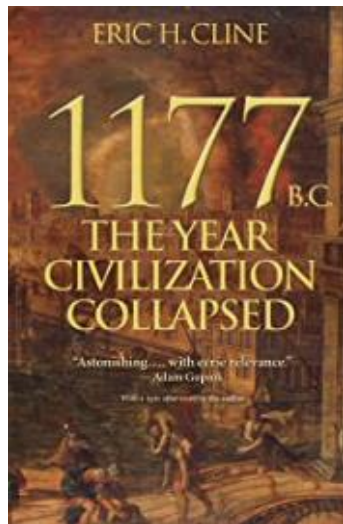


- Though Genesis says that, at the time of Abraham, the Hebrews were at peace with the Philistines, they would later battle them over the course of many centuries. Since Palestine basically means land of the Philistines, one could say that the battles continue
- The Philistines are first mentioned in Genesis (10:13-14) which says that they originated from the *Caslu chim*, a people descended from Ham the son of Noah and his son Mizraim. Mizraim is a Hebrew term for the Egyptians
- No one knows exactly who these *Caslu chim* were but there has been some speculation that they could have been Mycenaean Greeks. Philistine pottery has been found in the area that is Mycenaean in style but the clay used to make the pottery was from Canaan.
- The serious debate is whether the Philistines were in the area at the time of Abraham. Historians tend to place the time of their arrival in that region at around the time of the Exodus, six hundred years later. However...

Who Were the Philistines? Part Two



I had originally thought that the meeting between Abraham and any Philistine was an anachronism. Then I read this book. It was written by Cyrus Herzl Gordon who was then considered a 'rogue scholar'. He suggested there was a huge trading network throughout the Middle East and that trading bases had been established all along the Mediterranean Coast (and perhaps well beyond). All this may have existed well before Genesis was written. So, Abraham may have met Philistines who lived in a coastal trading colony rather than an actual kingdom as we understand the term today.



Dr. Eric Cline, another scholar, wrote a book called "1177 B.C. The Year Civilization Collapsed." In this book, he describes this same kind of trading network that existed before the Exodus. He then described a collapse of many of the Kingdoms that existed at that time including the Myceneans, the Cretans, the Hittites and several others.

That collapse caused a lot of tribes in the region to come to Egypt and Canaan no longer as traders but invaders. Egyptian historians of the time said that the Peleset (Philistines) were among those invaders. The Egyptians managed to fend them off, but the Canaanites were not so lucky. The Philistines managed to establish a colony along what we know know as the Gaza Strip and established five major cities there; Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath (future home of Goliath) and Gaza.

Just Who Was Melchizidek?

- His name in Hebrew is מֶלְכִּי-צֶדֶק (Mal-chi-tze-deq) translated as “My King is Righteous”. It could also mean “My King is Tzadoq (Zadok)”. Hundreds of years after Abram/Abraham, during the time of Joshua, the King of Salem (later known as Jeru-Salem) was named Adonizedek (My Lord is Righteous or My Lord is Zadok). Interestingly, the name of the High Priest when David ruled from Jerusalem was Zadok from which the word Sadducees is derived.
- Some scholars claim that Zedek/Zadok was the name of a local Jebusite deity and that Melchizidek really means “Zedeq/Zadok is my king”.
- Melchizidek brought bread and wine and blessed Abram and the “God Most High” **עַל עֲלִיּוֹן El Elyon**. It is not surprising that Melchizidek, who rules a city in Canaan uses a generic Canaanite name for God **עַל (El)**. But *El* was more than simply a generic name for God among the Canaanites. *El* was the chief God of the Canaanite people, the father of *Baal Hadad*. It is also said that *El* was the head of a council of Gods (*Elohim* ??)
- Scholars asked why was this meeting even mentioned. We’ll look at some of their answers later. Talmudic scholars (see the Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 32b) associate Melchizedek as being in a priestly line with Noah’s son Shem. Some say that Shem passed the priesthood of to Melchizidek or may have been Shem himself. Some scholars today think the story was inserted into Genesis during David’s time to justify his decision to make Jerusalem his capital city

The Second Patriarch: Isaac, Abraham's Son

Isaac seems to be almost a transitional or bridge character between Abraham and his grandson Jacob (next slide). Isaac does not seem to act very much. In fact, Isaac is almost always acted upon. Yet Isaac plays a serious role in the history of Judaism

- The story of “The Binding of Isaac” may have symbolic importance to both Christians and Jews”
 - For Jews, the occurrence took place on a mountain the region of Moriah. **“Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah “ (2 Chron. 3:1). Consider the importance of this story in the days after Solomon**
 - Given that the word used to describe Isaac (נִעֹר) (Naar) could mean any age from youth to age 37, Christians could easily see Isaac as a prefigure of Christ. Christians could see him as “the lamb God would provide” (Gen. 22:8) at age 33.
- Isaac does not find his own wife. Abraham’s servant is sent back to Harran to acquire a wife (Rebekah) from his family back in Harran. This contrasts with Isaac’s son Jacob who acts on his own behalf in Harran and winds up with two wives
- Isaac is tricked by Rebekah to ensure that Jacob, not Esau, receives the birthright that by custom belonged to Esau. This story in Genesis describes an early relationship between the people of Edom/Idumea and the Hebrew people. This relationship, sometimes friendly and sometimes hostile, becomes important in the century before the birth of Jesus

The Third Patriarch: Jacob.

- OK, Jacob is Abraham's grandson and Isaac's son. But there is also a son named Israel. Who is Israel and what is Israel's position in the generation of Jewish Patriarchs? Israel is a name given by God to Jacob.
- Thanks to his mother's help, Jacob succeeded Isaac as the leader of his people. He, too, returned to Harran to find a wife and there, as a result of Laban's trickery, Jacob married Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rachel
- Jacob later attempted to reconcile with Esau. En route, he struggled with an angel and the angel told Jacob that he will be called by a new name, Israel
- Jacob/Israel did reconcile with Esau. They parted in peace. Jacob then traveled back to **Shechem** where Abraham had set up an altar to God. Isaac later died in **Hebron**. Both Jacob and Esau returned to Hebron for his funeral
- Jacob went on to father twelve sons; six by Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun), two by Leah's maidservant Zilpah (Gad and Asher), two by Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin) and two by Rachel's maidservant Bilhah (Dan and Naphtali). These twelve became the patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Jacob also had a daughter by Leah. Her name was Dinah
- Genesis ends with tales of events that happened to these children of Jacob. These include specific incidents that happened to Dinah and to Joseph.

Bad Things Happen to Joseph and Dinah

- **Genesis 34 tells of the rape of Dinah. Dinah, Jacob's daughter, was visiting friends when Shechem (a person, not the place), a Hivite prince, saw her and took Dinah to bed. Jacob was angry but his sons were away. Just as his sons were returning, Shechem's father brokered a deal with Jacob. that would promise that all Hivite men would be circumcised if Jacob would permit Shechem to marry Dinah. Jacob agreed but shortly after, while the Hivite men were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, took their swords and slew every Hivite male including Shechem and his father and brought Dinah home**
- **Genesis 37 tells how Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Joseph irritated his brothers, so they sold him off and told Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast**
- **Scholars questioned the purpose of each story. Some scholars speculate that the story of Dinah was told to explain why, in later times, the tribe of Simeon all but disappeared and the tribe of Levi never received lands of their own in the Promised Land. Being the priestly tribe, they would need to serve all the tribes. The story of Joseph was told as a means of explaining how the Israelites wound up in Egypt setting the stage for Moses**

What Was The Testament of Jacob?

- The Book of Genesis ends with the Testament of Jacob (Genesis 49) and the story of the death of Jacob and of Joseph (Genesis 50). With the end of the Book of Genesis, the Hebrew Scriptures have taken us from the time of creation through to the time of the Patriarchs. As Genesis ends, the Israelites have settled in Egypt under Pharaohs who have welcomed them.
- The Testament of Jacob was a series of statements that Jacob issued regarding each of his sons. These statements were like a series of predictions about each son. The statement that Jacob gave concerning his son Judah was most important, *“Judah is a lion’s cub, you have grown up on prey, my son. He crouches, lies down like a lion, like a lioness—who would dare rouse him? The scepter shall never depart from Judah, or the mace from between his feet, until tribute comes to him and he receives the people’s obedience. (Gen 49: 9-10)*
- Was the Testament regarding Judah another literary device designed to justify the leading role of Judah in the Kingdom of David and Solomon? Perhaps. The rest of the Torah will explain how the Hebrew people left Egypt and established themselves in Canaan. Our next section will deal with Moses and the Exodus

Is Genesis Historically Accurate (I) ?

- The best answer to that question is the repetition of the old saying:
Much of Genesis takes place in historical times. It speaks of events some of which actually happened and of people who actually lived.
- No fully written copy of Genesis has survived until the translations offered by the LXX in 200 BCE. Scholars speculate that devices can be found in Genesis that suggest that it was told and retold as an oral tradition before it was put into writing. These devices helped the story-teller to remember what, when and where events happened. They also helped to keep the attention of those who listened to the stories. Here are a couple of examples.
- There is the humor of a pun in the story of Joseph. In Hebrew, Joseph means “to increase”. Gen. 37:5 tells how the anger of Joseph’s brothers *josephued* (increased) over time. The pun only makes sense in Hebrew
- There are also literary doublets; 1) There are two stories of Creation (Gen. 1:1- 2:3 and Gen. 2:4-25) 2) two genealogies of Adam (Gen. 4:17-26 and Gen. 5:1-32) and two stories of Abraham passing off his wife Sarah as his sister (Gen.12:10-20 and Gen.20:1-18). Isaac does the same thing with Rebekah in Gen. 26:7-11

Is Genesis Historically Accurate (II) ?

Genesis does mention people and places that actually existed. But some of those people and places seem out of date in the historical context in which they are placed.

Genesis lists a number of places where Abraham encamped and/or set up shrines. Just like modern places became famous because George Washington might have slept there, ancient places might have become famous because of their association with Abram/Abraham. Or inversely, perhaps this was an attempt to give Abram/Abraham greater status by associating him with important towns and places. We do something akin to that today. Remember the phrase “George Washington Slept here”. That does allow a place that makes that claim some level of notoriety. Did George Washington sleep in all those places that make such a claim?

Did the dimensions of God’s gift of the land to Abram/Abraham mentioned in Genesis just happen to fit the Kingdom of Israel at the time of David and Solomon or were they inserted into Genesis to justify the occupation of those lands by the Israelites at the time of David?

Similarly, was the Testament of Jacob written to justify the kingdom being ruled from a city in Judah and was the story of Melchizidek written to justify Jerusalem as being the city where the Ark of the Covenant was positioned, and the Temple was built?

All of us have to answer these questions for ourselves. What can be said is that it is easier to speculate when no written text has survived and when other supporting evidence is sparse. One thing is certain. The people to whom these writings are sacred are still around.