

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

Fred H. Wight

Copyright © 1955

CHAPTER FOUR

DIGGING IN THE MOUNDS OF BABYLONIA AND PERSIA

ALTHOUGH THE CIVILIZATION of Babylonia goes back much farther than that of Assyria, the archaeological research of Babylonia developed a number of years later than that of Assyria. The Assyrian archaeologists quickly secured notable sculptures of stone for their work. But when the mounds of Babylonia were tried, the lack of stone finds discouraged the diggers. Babylonian buildings were constructed largely of brick. So the Babylonian field waited for more thorough and painstaking labor of the excavators of a more recent date. 1

UNCOVERING THE BABYLON OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

The gate and walls of Babylon. There has not been the uncertainty as to the site of the old city of Babylon, which was true of Nineveh. Several excavators had been doing some digging in that mound over a period of years with little results of value, but it was at the turn of the century that the first thorough work was undertaken. In 1899 the German Orient Society got together an expedition under Professor Robert Koldewey. These men used more scientific methods in their researches. They were careful to examine the architectural and social setting from which antiquities were dug. As a result of their work, it is now possible to get a fairly clear picture of what the great city of Nebuchadnezzar was like. The most spectacular disclosure which these men made was the remains of the Ishtar Gate. This was a double gate that passed through the double wall of the city's main fortification. The front of it and the passageways of it were lined with rows of dragons and bulls made of enameled brick of bright colors. A "reconstruction" of this gate has been made. The wall of Babylon was indeed formidable. There was an outer and inner wall with space between filled with brick rubble. The whole thickness of the structure was nearly 85 feet. The city would have been a difficult one to capture by an enemy. The Persians conquered it by entering the city through a water gate of the Euphrates River. 2

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon. There has been much interest in the Hanging Gardens of ancient Babylon, which Nebuchadnezzar built for his Median queen. They were artificial hills or terraces covered with greenery and trees. The German excavators believed they discovered some of the masonry that supported the Hanging Gardens, and they also found an old well that had an unusual device for providing a continuous flow of water to these gardens. 3

Magnificence of Babylon. The excavators have done their work so well that we can have a fair idea of the magnificent palace of the great Babylonian king, and we can appreciate the splendor of his great kingdom. 4

Daniel reported what the king said about this: **“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”** (Daniel 4:30). But Jeremiah the prophet predicted concerning the city:

“The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire” (Jeremiah 51:58).

The Tower of Babel. Today in the southern part of Babylonia there are ruins of old towers which the Babylonians called *ziggurats*. The word means: *“The Hill of Heaven.”* Even as the pyramids of Egypt were tombs of the kings of a certain period in that land, so the *ziggurats* were shrines of Babylonian gods or goddesses. Almost every large city had a temple in connection with which one of these towers was built. Most scholars agree that the Tower of Babel was located either in the city of Babylon or close to it. On the opposite side of the River Euphrates from the city of Babylon are the ruins of one of these temples and tower connected with it. It is called *Birs Nimrud* today. Some have thought that this was where the Tower of Babel was built. But more and more scholars are coming to believe that the ruins of the Temple of Marduk called Esagil, located inside the city of Babylon, is the real site for that tower. This ziggurat was rebuilt by King Nabopolassar at the command of the god Marduk, who ordered that its **“foundations should be firm, and that its top should reach to heaven.”** Later King Nebuchadnezzar restored it, and at that time said, “I raised the summit of the tower, so that its top reached to heaven.” The ziggurat at Ur is the best preserved of all the temple-towers of Babylonia, and gives us a good idea of what the Tower of Babel may have looked like. 5

EXCAVATING UR, THE CITY OF ABRAHAM’S YOUTH

Location of Ur. When Abraham lived there, the city of Ur of the Chaldees was located east of the River Euphrates and about one hundred miles from the Persian Gulf. Because the river has changed its course, and because the edge of the delta has kept encroaching on the gulf, the present site of Ur is about ten miles west of where the river now flows and 150 miles from the sea. 6

History of excavations at Ur. It was J. E. Taylor who discovered the site of the city in the year 1854. Taylor found some important clay cylinders, but did not do extensive work at the site. In 1918-1919 there was some digging done at the site, and one of the faces of the temple-tower was cleared.

But in 1922 the British Museum and the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania sent a joint expedition to Ur which was headed by Sir Leonard Woolley. His series of campaigns there ran from 1922 to 1934. The results of this expedition were so important that they ushered in a new epoch in the archaeology of Mesopotamia. 7

The ziggurat of Ur. The ziggurat that was uncovered by Woolley at Ur was indeed a mountain of brick. It is the best preserved ziggurat in all Babylonia. This temple-tower stood on a walled platform or terrace, its base measuring 70 by 46 yards. It ascended in three stages, and the sides were made to slope inward. It had the appearance of a stepped pyramid. 8

In front of the ziggurat was a courtyard which was surrounded by many chambers. When this temple was in use, the citizens of Ur would bring their tithes and taxes for the moon-god in the form of barley, cattle, milk, cheese, linen, wool, copper, gold, etc. The priests would receive the goods and store them in the chambers, and give the people receipts for their goods, keeping duplicate copies as a record. Many of these receipts were discovered at Ur. 9

Excavation of the Ur cemetery. The cemetery at Ur was located outside the walls of the city. Actually there were two cemeteries, located one beneath the other. Most interest centered, of course, in the lower one which was the older, and this had two parts: the place where common people were buried, and the place where kings and queens were buried. These cemeteries were in use between 3500 and 3200 B.C. or before Abraham's day. 10

Death pits. Death pits were found at the Ur cemetery; a king who died would have at least three people entombed with him, 62 were in the death pit which adjoined. About 25 persons met their death for the burial of a queen. There was found no evidence of violence or terror, and it has been suggested that some sort of poisonous drug was taken by members of the court who met their death in order to accompany the royal person into the other life, to serve as attendants. 11

Important finds in the Ur cemetery. The excavators discovered some very valuable articles in the tombs of the kings and the queens and in the death pits.

- There was a dagger, with a blade of gold and a hilt of lapis lazuli.
- There was a standard made up of figures silhouetted in shell against a background of lapis lazuli, one of the panels in it illustrating Peace, and the other one representing War. Gold hair ribbons were discovered, and there were indications that some silver hair ribbons had been used.
- There was a magnificent specimen of a gold and mosaic harp.
- There was a helmet of beaten gold, which as an example of a goldsmith's work was a beautiful piece of art.

Other finds included an inlaid gaming-board, a set of gold chisels and a gold saw, and a woman's coned-shaped reticule containing a set of tweezers, lancet, and pencil—all of gold. All of these finds prove that there was a highly developed civilization in Ur in those ancient times. 12

The residential section of Ur. Excavators have revealed that the citizens of Ur in Abraham's day lived in houses of burnt-brick walls at the lower level, and mud-brick walls higher up. They were two stories high. There were 13 or 14 rooms arranged around an open courtyard. There was a fireplace in the kitchen, a reception room for visitors, and a room for servants.

We may be fairly certain that the kind of a house Abraham lived in as a boy bespoke comfort and perhaps luxury. 13

Such a house would have a chapel in connection with it where family gods were worshiped. Clay figurines used in this worship were called teraphim. They served as “guardian angels” of the home. When the father died, the oldest son inherited the family gods. When Rachel stole her father’s teraphim (Genesis 31:19) she was virtually stealing her brother’s birthright, and was thus seeking to make Jacob the legal heir to Laban’s wealth. 14

Public chapels in Ur. The city had many small chapels located at various places throughout the city. The gods and goddesses worshiped in these chapels were not major deities, but their worship was, nevertheless, considered important. The religion was one of fear, for a terra-cotta relief near the door represented a creature partly bull and partly man, holding a spear. He was supposed to counteract “the evil eye.” A statue of the god or goddess stood on a brick base, and a table or altar received the gifts brought by the people for their gods. 15

Three grades of gods in Ur. There were really three grades of gods or goddesses in the old city of Ur.

- First, the most important gods of them all were those to whom the great state temple or ziggurat was dedicated.
- Second, there were the gods of a lesser grade in whose honor the chapels by the roadside were erected.
- Third, there were the family gods that were worshiped in chapels located in the homes of the city. 16

Schools in Ur. The excavators discovered the kind of schools the city of Ur had when Abraham was a boy. Remains of boys’ schools were uncovered. Clay tablets were discovered containing lessons which were taught the boys of those days. There were lessons in vocabulary, in conjugation of verbs, and lessons in arithmetic. It is of interest to note that they also had tables of square and cube root. Practical geometry was given the boys, and along with this they were impressed with the importance of civic patriotism. 17

Flood deposits at Ur. When Woolley was excavating at Ur, he discovered a bed of clear clay 8 feet thick that had been deposited by water. Here was evidence of a flood never before paralleled in the history of that time, and he believed that this flood was that which is described in the Book of Genesis. 18

Professor Langdon, excavating at Kish, discovered a similar deposit, and this, together with the discovery at Ur, indicates a flood in the early history of ancient Babylonia, thus corroborating the Genesis account of the Deluge. 19

Some conclusions of the work, at Ur. The discoveries at Ur have definitely settled the question that the patriarchs were historical persons. From the point of view of archaeology it is no longer tenable to call them mythological characters. 20

Again, it is now proved that the Old Testament was produced by a cultured people. Long before Abraham’s day, civilization had reached a high standard. Abraham came from a city that was highly civilized. 21

As a result of these excavations we know the kind of idolatrous worship Abraham turned his back upon when he answered God's call to leave his native land. While living in the city of Ur, he would have been expected to be a follower of the moon-god. At Ur human sacrifice was practiced when a king or queen died. Because Abraham was familiar with this, he did not hesitate to offer his son Isaac when it was demanded by God. Also it is of interest to note that when Abraham's family left Ur, they first settled in Haran. Woolley tells us that Haran was the only other important town in Mesopotamia to have as its special patron the moon-god. Thus it would seem that the change of residence from Ur to Haran involved no transfer of allegiance. 22

DISCOVERING THE LONG LOST HORITES AT NUZI

Excavations at Nuzi. In the year 1925 the American School of Oriental Research at Baghdad began excavations at Nuzi (or Nuzu), located in northeastern Iraq. The expedition was directed by Professor Edward Chiera, and terminated its work in 1931. The most interesting of the discoveries was the unearthing of thousands of Babylonian clay tablets dating back to the fifteenth century B.C. These tablets were written by the Nuzians, who proved to be the Horites referred to in the Old Testament, and whose identity had long been lost.

The Horites of the Bible originally dwelt in Mount Seir and were destroyed by the Edomites (Genesis 14:6; 36:20, 21, 29; Deuteronomy 2:12, 22). It was revealed that many of the manners and customs of these people were similar to those of the patriarchs of the Bible. Therefore, the contents of these tablets have thrown light on certain passages in the Book of Genesis and also other sections of the Old Testament. 23

Nuzi customs and Abraham and Sarah. The Bible reveals that when Abraham first came to Canaan, his slave Eliezer was his heir (Genesis 15:2, 3). At Nuzi it was the habit of a childless couple to adopt a son who would serve them during their lifetime and bury them and mourn at their death. If after this young man was adopted, the couple should have a son of their own, then the adopted son would have to give way to the real son the privilege of being chief heir. Because Abraham and Sarah were at first without a son, they doubtless adopted Eliezer to be their son.

Then later on, Abraham said to the Lord: **“What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir.”**

God's answer was that he was to have a son of his own who would supersede Eliezer as heir. 24

The Nuzi marriage contracts could go so far as to require the wife who did not bear children to give her husband a handmaid who would bear them. This accounts for Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham, and Rachel giving Bilhah to Jacob. If, after doing this, the wife should afterwards have a son of her own, the Nuzi law forbade her to expel the offspring of the handmaid. When Sarah was going to expel Ishmael, she was going contrary to this old law, and only a dispensation from the Lord caused Abraham to allow Ishmael to be sent away. 25

Nuzi customs and Jacob and Esau. On one of the Nuzi tablets the account is given of a man named Tupkitilla, who sold his patrimony to a man named Kurpazah for the price of three sheep. A dire lack of food was probably the reason for such a transaction. This is a somewhat parallel case to Esau selling his birthright to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage. 26

Nuzi customs and Jacob and Laban. The information already given about Eliezer as heir of Abraham and the Nuzi custom of adopting a son throws light on the story of Jacob and Laban. It would seem that when Jacob first became a member of his uncle's household, Laban had no sons, but only daughters. It would also seem quite probable that Laban adopted Jacob when he married his daughter. This would have made Jacob the heir if no sons were born to Laban later on. But sons were born at a later date (see Genesis 31:1). Thus Jacob ceased to be the chief heir.

Under these conditions the Nuzi law was that the real first-born son should inherit the father's gods (teraphim) and become his successor, and not the adopted son. The one securing the father's gods became the new head of the clan at the father's death. Thus Rachel's theft of her father's teraphim was of great concern to him. Also when Laban claimed that Jacob's wives and children and flocks were his (Genesis 31:43), he was doing so under the custom of having patriarchal authority over an adopted son.

Under ordinary circumstances Rachel and Leah would belong to their husband, but because Jacob was an adopted son, they through their husband belonged to Laban. Therefore, neither Jacob nor his wives had a right to leave Laban's household. But Laban for religious or personal reasons allowed them to do so. 27

Nuzi customs and the legal use of shoes. Certain of these Nuzi documents have thrown light on the symbolic and legal use of shoes in the Old Testament. The giving of a pair of shoes was done to make a transaction legal (see Ruth 4:7). One illustration of this referred to on one of the tablets was the case of a man who received another man's daughter in return for a cloak and a pair of shoes. The cloak and shoes were no doubt token payments to give the transaction an appearance of legal business, for it was intended in this case that the daughter be an outright gift.

This helps us understand what the prophet Amos meant when twice he used the expression (Amos 2:6; 8:6), "**Selling the poor for a pair of shoes.**" The sin the prophet denounced was the sin of taking advantage of the poor, and then making use of the shoes to make what was done become legal, according to ancient custom. We would say today that a man may be legally right but morally wrong. 28

SOME BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTIONS THAT ARE OF INTEREST TO BIBLE STUDENTS

Babylonian Creation and Flood tablets. American excavators of the ancient city of Nippur found another library containing many clay tablets. Among these were included tablets that give the Babylonian version of the Creation of the world, and also their version of the Deluge. These have proved to be more ancient than the Flood tablets found in Assyrian mounds. They are interesting when compared and contrasted with the Bible accounts.

In the Babylonian account of Creation, it is the Babylonian gods, of course, who are said to have created man and the animals, whereas in the Bible the majestic Elohim of Genesis is Creator of the whole vast universe. The Babylonian Deluge story agrees with the Biblical account in these matters:

- (1) Man is warned of a coming flood.
- (2) He is told to build a ship.
- (3) A Deluge swept over the land.

Nobody can doubt the fact of a great Flood, even apart from the account given in the Scriptures.
29

Travel in Abraham's day as revealed by a Babylonian tablet. Men who have doubted the historic character of the patriarchs have questioned the migration of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan, and also the military expedition from Babylonia to Palestine as indicated in Genesis 14, because they have insisted that extensive travel was not known in that day. But Babylonian excavators have uncovered a tablet that shows there was much travel between these two lands in those days. This tablet is dated in the era of Abraham, and it was a wagon contract. The owner of the wagon leased it to a man for a year on condition that it not be driven to Kittim (i.e., the coast land of the Mediterranean Sea). Evidently, it was quite customary for men to drive their wagons over this route from Babylonia to Canaan or vicinity, and this owner stipulated that this should not be done with his wagon. This is clear evidence of wide travel between these two sections of the ancient world. 30

The Babylonian record of the collapse of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia. We could not expect the Assyrian records to give the story of the downfall of the Assyrian Empire. We must look to the Babylonian inscriptions, and in doing so we find material that gives a correct picture of what happened and so supplements and explains the Scripture account.

Three weak rulers followed successively on the throne of Assyria after the death of King Ashurbanipal, and so the empire began to decline. We are indebted to a tablet now in the British Museum, originally inscribed by Nabopolassar, king of Babylon from 625 to 605 B.C, for the story of the fall of Nineveh, the end of the Assyrian Empire, and the beginning of the Babylonian Empire which took its place.

Before Nineveh fell, the Medes tried to take that city and failed, but they did conquer Ashur. In 613 B.C. the siege of Nineveh was lifted because of a Scythian attack upon the Medes. But in the year 612 B.C. the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Scythians all pooled their military resources in a desperate effort to take the Assyrian capital. The defenses of the city collapsed and its king died. An Assyrian calling himself Ashur-uballit II managed to reign as king of Assyria for a few months at Haran. In 610 B.C. the Scythians captured this city. In 605 B.C. the critical Battle of Carchemish was fought. The remnants of the Assyrian forces fought with the army of the new Babylonian Empire. Babylonian King Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar II to fight the battle. Nebuchadnezzar won the battle and, upon receiving word of the death of his father, he returned home to become king of Babylonia. 31

The Babylonian account of King Pharaoh-necho and the Battle of Carchemish. Second Kings 23:29 says: **“In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him”** (see also II Chronicles 35:20-23).

King Pharaoh-necho was on his way to the Battle of Carchemish when King Josiah went out against him and lost his life at Megiddo. Then Pharaoh-necho went on to Riblah and here he deposed Jehohaz (II Kings 23:31f.) and put his brother on the throne of Judah. Following this, we learn from the Babylonian inscriptions that the Egyptian king went to join in the Battle of Carchemish, but on the side of the Assyrians and not against them, as the above Scripture would seem to indicate. The Babylonians won the battle, and the great Assyrian Empire disappeared altogether; Egypt was never thereafter a first-rate power.

But what about the Scripture that says Pharaoh-necho **“went up against the king of Assyria”**? Actually this verse can be translated differently so as to fit in with the facts of archaeology. In truth Pharaoh-necho went to the king of Assyria in order to help him, and not to fight against him. The Hebrew allows such a translation. These facts from the Babylonian inscriptions and the new translation of this Scripture throw light on Ezekiel’s lamentation over Egypt as found in chapter 31. Note especially verses 2 and 3: **“Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness? Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, etc.”** In this chapter Egypt is associated with Assyria and her fall. 32

Cuneiform tablets from Babylon mention King Jehoiachin by name. At the time the German excavators at Babylon were uncovering what they believed to be the substructure of the old Hanging Gardens, they found nearly 300 cuneiform tablets at the bottom of a stairwell, where they had probably fallen when the structure overhead collapsed. These tablets list ration payments of oil, barley, etc., that were made to men who were captives, and to skilled workmen coming from various nations, who lived in the vicinity of Babylon from 595 to 570 B.C. Among those listed was the name of Yaukin (Jehoiachin) king of Judah. This corroborates the Bible account indicating that Jehoiachin who had been in prison was free to live in Babylon and received rations from Babylon’s king (Cf. II Kings 25:27-30 with Jeremiah 52:31-34). 33

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BOOK OF DANIEL

The Image of Nebuchadnezzar. Archaeology has discovered that the king’s demand for public worship of his image, as related in the third chapter of Daniel, was part of a general policy he adopted in various places of his empire. Sir Leonard Woolley found an example of this new policy in his excavations at Ur of the Chaldees. It seems that when Nebuchadnezzar restored the temple worship at Ur by making over the building, he changed the old order of having the rites secret in the sanctuary, and made it so that great crowds could watch the priest as he made his offerings on an open-air altar, and even the image of the god could be seen through an open door behind him. Thus when the Bible says that this same king set up an image in a public place and demanded that everybody worship it, the king was carrying out the same policy as he did at Ur. What had previously been secret now became public. Other kings had set up images, but the new thing that Nebuchadnezzar did was to command general and public worship by everybody.

The three Hebrew children of the Book of Daniel refused to obey and so were thrown into the fiery furnace. 34

NOTE: Concerning the date of Daniel, see chapter 19.

NOTE: Concerning the use of Aramaic in Daniel, see chapter 5.

Babylonian fiery furnaces. Daniel's account of the three Hebrew children being cast into the fiery furnace has been called folklore by some Bible critics. They have implied that no such thing could have actually happened in those days. But the archaeologists have discovered actual proof that men had such experiences in the long ago. The early excavators at Babylon uncovered a peculiarly shaped building that at first seemed like a brick kiln. An inscription was found that specified the purpose of this building, and this is what it said: "This is the place of burning where men who blasphemed the gods of Chaldea died by fire." 35

That this method of punishment was in common use in earlier times is seen from an inscription of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal. It reads: "Saulmagina my rebellious brother, who made war with me, they threw into a burning fiery furnace, and destroyed his life." 36

Furthermore, a letter has come to light which indicates that a king of Larsa, a contemporary of King Hammurabi, gave sentence for a slave to be thrown into a furnace. 37

Nebuchadnezzar's madness. The Book of Daniel recounts how King Nebuchadnezzar "**was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws**" (Daniel 4:33).

Now we would hardly expect the Babylonian king to record this experience of his madness in his royal archives. But excavators have discovered an indirect confirmation of the event. The records of the king indicate a gap in the history of his latter years. A mutilated inscription has been recovered and Sir Henry Rawlinson has translated it. Part of this inscription follows:

For four years the seat of my kingdom in the city . . . which . . . did not rejoice my heart. In all my dominions I did not build a high place of power; the precious treasures of my kingdom I did not lay out, in the worship of Merodach, my lord, the joy of my heart, in Babylon the city of my sovereignty and the seat of my empire I did not sing his praises, and I did not furnish his altars: nor did I clear out the canals. 38

It seems quite possible that this period of inactivity of Nebuchadnezzar was the experience of madness told by Daniel the prophet. Daniel makes the length of time "**seven times**" whereas the period of time referred to by the king was said to be four years. It has been suggested that the "**seven times**" may not refer to years but to periods of summer and winter. If so there would be a close proximity to the four years of the inscription. 39

Belshazzar and the fall of Babylon. For years critics of the Bible accused the fifth chapter of Daniel's prophecy of being historically inaccurate in its statements. According to this chapter, Belshazzar was the last Babylonian king, and he was slain the night the city of Babylon fell.

According to secular history, Nabonidus was the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and he was made a prisoner when Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonians. Who was right, Daniel or the secular historians? Archaeologists have provided the answer to this question. 40

In 1854 J. E. Taylor found at the site of Ur of the Chaldees several cylinders which had been placed there by King Nabonidus, the Babylonian king. Among other things found in these cylinder inscriptions, the king has a prayer for the blessing of the gods upon his son Belshazzar. This settled the question that there actually was such a person as Belshazzar and that he was the son of King Nabonidus. 41

But this only partially settled the difficulty. Why did Daniel call Belshazzar king? Other inscriptions have answered that question also.

Various inscriptions made by King Nabonidus have come to light which declare that Belshazzar as the crown prince became administrator of government in Babylonia when his father was absent in Arabia. During the latter part of his reign, he often made these trips. Actually Belshazzar was entrusted with the kingship in his father's absence, although his father still was considered first ruler of the empire. Belshazzar was second ruler of the land. Therefore, Belshazzar would have power to make Daniel "**third ruler in the kingdom**" (Daniel 5:29). 42

Tablets from Erech have been examined, wherein a contract was entered into, and the two parties took their oath in the name of Nabonidus as king and Belshazzar as king's son. The name of Belshazzar was thus associated with his father as being in the same class as the king. Actual kingship is involved. 43

Critics of Daniel have often complained that no mention was made of King Nabonidus in the fifth chapter of Daniel, where the account of the fall of Babylon is given. We now know why his name was left out of the story. A tablet of King Cyrus has been found that makes it clear that King Nabonidus was not in Babylon when the city was captured by Cyrus. He had been a prisoner in the hand of the Persians for a period of four months. Was this not sufficient reason for omitting his name? 44

Now we find Bible scholars declaring that the fifth chapter of Daniel excels most of the secular historical writings in giving the important facts of history concerning the fall of the Babylonian kingdom and the rise of the Persian Empire. 45

The very facts Daniel included in his account many other writers omitted. Formerly, he was criticized for including these facts; now he is praised because he included them!

Babylonian and Persian dens for wild beasts. The story of Daniel being cast into a den of lions has been classed by critics as folklore and not historical. But again, the excavators have proved that just such punishment was often inflicted upon men in those long-ago days. The excavator, Dieulafoy, was working one day among the ruins of Babylon when he fell into what looked like a well.

He was rescued by his fellow workmen, and then it was their purpose to determine what the place was. On the curb was an inscription which said: "The Place of Execution where men who angered the king died torn by wild animals." 46

When the palace at Shushan was being excavated, a record was discovered that gave a list of 484 men of high rank who had died in a lions' den. 47

An inscription of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal indicates the same custom was in vogue in his day. "The rest of the people who had rebelled they threw alive among bulls and lions, as Sennacherib my grandfather used to do. Lo, again following his footsteps those men I threw into the midst of them." 48

LIGHT FROM THE INSCRIPTIONS ON THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY UNDER KING CYRUS

On a broken cylinder discovered at Ur, Cyrus is recorded as having said: "Sin [the moon-god], the illuminator of heaven and earth, with his favorable sign delivered into my hands the four quarters of the world, and I returned the gods to their shrines." This recalls to mind the proclamations of II Chronicles 36:22, 23 and Ezra 1:2, 3. It would seem, then, that what Cyrus conceded to the Jews was not an isolated action on his part, but rather it was part of a policy of conciliating his new subjects by being favorable to their religions. What he did for Jerusalem, he did for Ur and also for other centers of religious worship of various lands. 49

EXCAVATIONS AT SUSAN, THE CITY OF QUEEN ESTHER

History of Susa. Susa was the capital of the land of Susiana. The Biblical name for Susa was Shushan, and for Susiana, Elam. In Genesis 14 it is recorded that Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, raided Sodom and Gomorrah and took Lot as a prisoner until he was released by Abraham. In a vision Daniel was transported to Shushan (Daniel 8:2). Nehemiah was in the court of King Artaxerxes, the Persian king whose palace was at Shushan (Nehemiah 1:1). And most of the events in the Book of Esther took place within the palace walls of the city of Shushan. 50

The first expedition at Susa. The first archaeological work done at Susa was by an English expedition under W. K. Loftus. He began work there in 1852. He located bases of the columns and substructure of an ancient building, and discovered cuneiform inscriptions which made it possible to date the building. This building had been erected during the reign of Darius Hystaspes (521-485 B.C). It was later partially destroyed and then rebuilt by a later monarch. 51

Uncovering the palace of Queen Esther. During the years 1884-1886 a French engineer architect, M. Dieulafoy, excavated at Susa. He uncovered the remains of the very palace connected with the story of Esther, which was the great palace of Artaxerxes. Great treasures were unearthed here and taken to the Louvre at Paris. Dieulafoy made a model of the old palace, based on his discoveries at Susa. The throne room with its 36 fluted columns, 67 feet high, had a flat cedar-wood roof, materials for which came from Phoenicia.

Viewing the reconstruction, one can locate “**the king’s gate,**” where Mordecai worried Haman; the “**inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house**” (Esther 5:1), where Esther appeared without being bidden by the king; “**the outward court of the king’s house**” (6:4), where Haman came to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged; “**the palace garden**” (7:7) where the king went to cool off his anger against Haman.

Thus can the surroundings of the Book of Esther be restored, and it may now be declared that the setting of that book is true to Persian institutions and customs as discovered by the archaeologists. 52

Among the treasures the French excavator dug from the mound of Susa was the die used by the ancient Persians to determine the time of events. This die throws light on the method that Haman used when he fixed the date for the destruction of the Jews. The die found was a quadrangular prism with the numbers one, two, five, six, engraved on the faces. When the die is thrown, it stops on an odd or even number.

Certain critics of the Bible have said that the story of Esther is unreasonable because of the long time that elapsed before the Jews were to be executed (cf. Esther 3:7, 12, 13). But a test of one of the dies indicates that one might throw it scores of times before it would stop at a desired number. The date which Haman fixed was left entirely to the die to determine; it was most certainly not the date he would have fixed by personal choice. The word used anciently for die was *Pur* (Esther 3:7). 53

Discovery of an ancient law code. There was a French expedition at Susa in the years 1897-1912 under Jacques De Morgan. His work took him to a lower strata of the mound, and many ancient objects were found. In December, 1901, and January, 1902, his workmen came upon three fragments of black diorite stone, and when these were placed together, they formed a slab 7 feet 4 inches high, 6 feet 2 ½ inches to 5 feet 4 ½ inches wide.

It proved to be one of archaeology’s greatest discoveries, being the Law Code of Hammurabi, who was the sixth king of the first Babylonian dynasty. It is believed to have dated back to the days before Abraham, or about 2100 B.C. But the question is naturally asked: Why was this stele containing the Law Code of the Babylonians found in the land of Persia? It was originally set up in Babylon at the Temple of Marduk, but when the Elamites overran the land this inscribed slab was taken hundreds of miles to Susa as a special prize of war, and it was found here by the excavators. 54

There is a bas-relief at the top of the stele with a representation of the sun-god, giving the laws to King Hammurabi. The code has 282 statutes, of which 248 are well preserved. They were written in Semitic-Babylonian language, and have to do with civil and criminal law rather than religious or ceremonial. 55

The laws in this famous code were arranged in a definite and logical system. The following subjects were dealt with:

Witchcraft, witnesses, judges; concerning offenses involving the purity of justice, as tampering with witnesses, jury, or judge; crimes of various sorts, as theft, receiving stolen goods, kidnapping, fugitive slaves, burglary; duties of public officers in their administration; laws relating to landlords, tenants, creditors, debtors; canal and water rights, licenses, messengers, herdsman, gardeners, slander, family relationship, marriage, divorce, desertion, breach of promise, adultery, unchastity, concubinage; rights of women, purchase money of brides, inheritance, adoption, responsibility for all kinds of assaults; fees of surgeons, branding of slaves, fees and responsibilities of builders and boatmen, hiring of boats; agricultural life, etc. 50

Value to Bible students of the Code of Hammurabi. Destructive critics of the Old Testament used to deny the possibility of the existence of a code of laws like the Mosaic Code at the early date indicated when Moses lived. They even questioned whether the art of writing had developed sufficiently at that date to make this possible. The finding of the Code of Hammurabi has forever silenced such criticism, and now archaeologists have proved that civilization including the ability to write goes back centuries before Abraham. 57

The superiority of the Mosaic Code over Hammurabi's Code. But the discovery of this ancient law code has caused some Bible critics to change their attack on the Bible; they now say that the Mosaic laws of the Bible were largely derived from the Code of Hammurabi. It is true that there are a number of similarities between the two great law codes. This is to be expected. But on the other hand, many of the provisions of the Code of Hammurabi have no parallel in the Mosaic Code and vice versa. Scholars are becoming more and more convinced that the Hebrew laws could not have been derived from the Babylonian laws. 58

The superiority of the Hebrew Code over the Babylonian Code is plainly seen. The Mosaic Law gives strong emphasis to the recognition of sin as being the cause of the downfall of a nation. Such a thought is entirely lacking in Hammurabi's Code.

The laws of Moses put the responsibility on the individual for his own deeds in a way not true of the laws of Babylonia. Also the great fundamental principle of the laws of God in the Hebrew Bible may be summed up in the words: "**Be ye holy, for I am holy.**" Such a principle as this was utterly unknown to the Babylonians as seen in their law code. 59

The Babylonian Laws and the Patriarchs. But the student of the Bible is interested in the Babylonian Law Code because of the light it throws upon customs among the patriarchs. Having grown up under the Laws of Hammurabi, it can be understood now why Sarah and Abraham acted as they did concerning their maidservant Hagar when Sarah was childless; and Rachel was acting according to Babylonian custom and law in giving her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob for wife. The purchase of the cave of Machpelah by Abraham as a burial place was according to the legal basis of the Babylonian Code. 60

1. Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, pp. 106, 107.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 126; James Bakie, *The Life of the Ancient Past*, p. 232; J. A. Hammerton ed., *Wonders of the Past*, ed. of 1937, p. 904.
3. Hammerton, *ibid.*, pp. 898, 698.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 898.
5. George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, pp. 81, 82.
6. C. Leonard Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, p. 13; C. Leonard Woolley, *Abraham Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins*, pp. 63, 68.
7. Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-131.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 133; Woolley, *op. cit.*, *Abraham*, 79-81; Ur, 120-121.
9. Woolley, *Abraham*, pp. 83-85.
10. Woolley, *Ur*, pp. 33, 35.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 59, 60.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-36, 42, 47, 48, 62-68, 76, 81-87.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-169.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 169, 170; Woolley, *Abraham*, pp. 164, 165; Barbara Bowen, *The Bible Lives Today*, pp. 70-71.
15. Woolley, *Abraham*, pp. 108, 105, 107.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103.
18. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, pp. 29-31; T. Christie Innes, *Thrilling Voices of the Past*, pp. 45-46.
19. Innes, *ibid.*, p. 45.
20. Woolley, *Abraham*, pp. 12, 259.
21. James C. Muir, *His Truth Endureth*, p. 30.
22. Woolley, *Abraham*, pp. 195-196.
23. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Feb. 1940, pp. 1-2.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
27. Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Story of Jacob and Laban in the Light of the Nuzi Tablets," *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*, April, 1937, pp. 25-27.
28. E. A. Speiser, "Of Shoes and Shekels," *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*, Feb. 1940, pp. 15-20. For additional material regarding the Nuzi Tablets, see Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Living Past*, ch. VIII, "Private and Public Life in Nuzu," pp. 156-178.
29. Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-114; George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (ed. of 1937), pp. 332-336.
30. Barton, *ibid.*, pp. 346, 347.
31. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 183-185.
32. W. H. Boulton, *Archaeology Explains*, pp. 66-69.
33. W. F. Albright, "King Joiachin in Exile," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, V, No. 4, Dec. 1942, pp. 51, 52; Finegan, *op. cit.*, pp. 188, 189.
34. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, pp. 195, 196.
35. Harry Rimmer, *Dead Men Tell Tales*, p. 325.
36. S. L. Caiger, *Bible and Spade* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), p. 176.
37. John B. Alexander, "New Light on the Fiery Furnaces," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXIX, Part IV, Dec. 1950, pp. 375, 376.
38. A. Rendle Short, *Archaeology Gives Evidence* (Tyndale Press, London, 1951), p. 46; T. W. Fawthrop, *The Stones Cry Out* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1937), pp. 89, 90.

39. *Loc. cit.*
40. T. Miller Neatby, *Confirming the Scriptures*, p. 113.
41. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible*, pp. 68, 69.
42. Raymond P. Dougherty, Nabonidus and Belshazzar, pp. 134, 137, 196; Finegan, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.
43. Ira Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (ed. of 1925), p. 366.
44. Neatby, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
45. Dougherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.
46. Rimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
48. S. L. Caiger, *Bible and Spade* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), pp. 176, 177.
49. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, p. 141; cf. Boulton, *Archaeology Explains*, pp. 77-80.
50. Hammerton, *Wonders of the Past* (ed. of 1937), pp. 581-585; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401.
51. Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (ed. of 1907), p. 249.
52. Price, *The Monuments and the New Testament* (ed. of 1925), pp. 409-411; see also Kenyon, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
53. Price, 1925 ed., *op. cit.*, p. 408.
54. Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120; Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 66; George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, p. 87.
55. Robinson, *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
56. Albert T. Clay, *Light on the Old Testament From Babel*, pp. 205, 206.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
58. Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125.
59. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Clay, *op. cit.*, pp. 232, 233.
60. Clay, *ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
