

## Chapter 4: Abraham and the Historicity of the Bible.

Another week had passed. As the two boys stood outside the office door, Xiao Wang called “Professor Ho!” Recognizing his voice, Professor Ho replied brightly, “Hey! Xiao Wang, come in!” Xiao Wang and Xiao Li entered with the confidence of established acquaintance to find Professor Ho sitting as usual behind the now familiar clutter of books on his oversized desk. He didn’t bother rising, and the boys took their accustomed seats without waiting to be asked.

Xiao Wang spoke first. “I sent the whole week checking out the things you said last time about the age of the earth and the fossil record. [See chapter 3.] I agree that there really is nothing like an evolutionary succession among the fossils, despite what my textbooks claimed. And I agree that there is far more evidence for a ‘young’ earth than for an ‘old’ one. To use your metaphor, I’ve broken out of the prison house. I can’t be an atheist anymore. Atheism doesn’t make any sense! There has to be a creator.

“Every morning this week when I’ve gotten up and looked out the window, it’s been like seeing a whole new world! The trees, the birds, the people: I see now that they were designed—created, I should say. And it’s so much brighter, so much more beautiful! To think that someone is standing behind it all, that he prepared it all. It changes everything!” Xiao Wang’s eyes were shining and he was smiling without knowing it. Professor Ho was smiling too, etching all the wrinkles deeper around his happy eyes.

“But now I have another problem.” Xiao Wang’s face suddenly clouded over. Professor Ho’s expression followed, his eyebrows knit together in sympathetic concentration. “Who is this creator? Does he know about me? How can I find out?”

Professor Ho nodded emphatically. “Absolutely! Those are just the questions we must ask. If I remember correctly, that’s where we stopped last week. Nature show us there that there must be a supernatural Creator. But who is He? And how can we know?”

“How do you *know* that he’s the ‘Yahweh’ of the Bible?” Xiao Wang asked earnestly. Then he caught himself and added, “I mean, I don’t want to offend you, Professor Ho.”

“I think by now you know I’m not offended by people expressing doubts and questions!”

“Alright then,” Xiao Wang said with a sharp nod, “How do you know it’s your God and your Bible?”

Professor Ho searched among the folders on his desk and pulled out a well worn sheet and placed it on the desktop between them. “You might remember last time I said there was a three step proof of the truth of Christianity:

1. Nature demonstrates that a supernaturally powerful, non-material Creator exists.
2. History and archeology demonstrate that the Bible records are historically accurate and allow us to approximately date when the Bible was written.
3. Prophecies written in the Bible and fulfilled long afterward demonstrate that it is a revelation from God.

Step one, the testimony of Nature, has been given to all mentally competent human beings. We need only use the Reason God has given us to interpret the Nature God has placed us in, and then we can see it. But all it shows us is His existence, His power, and a little bit about His nature, that He’s not part of the material universe. Beyond that, Nature can also give us some idea about His character, at least that He cares about us—after all, the world and it’s ecosystem seem designed to enable us to live. The Bible points this out:

[A]nd yet He [God] did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. " (Acts 14:17 NAS)

That’s the most Nature can tell us: That God is powerful, that He’s fundamentally different from us, and that He’s beneficent. That’s a good start, but it’s not enough to let us really know Him. We need a communication, a word from Him that reveals to us more about His heart and character. That’s what the Bible is.

The first thing to realize about the Bible is that it’s primarily a book of history. It contains no myths. It’s action takes place in real human history, and it shows how God has acted throughout that history.”

“How can we be sure it’s true?” Xiao Wang wondered.

“We use the same methods we would use to examine the accuracy of any other historical document. We compare it to other historical documents and to the findings of archaeology.

“The historical evidence begins with chapter 11 of Genesis.” He held up a Bible in his right hand with the edge toward them. “Do you see how thick this book is? In Chinese, on average, it runs to about 1,200 pages.” He opened up the Bible on his right palm and held up the first ten pages. “This is the part for which we can’t get historical or archaeological confirmation: the first ten chapters of Genesis. All the rest of it” — he tapped on the remaining pages — “has or more or less historical confirmation available outside the Bible. Genesis chapter 11 ends at around 2100BC, the time of Abraham. From there on to about 1000BC,” — here he held up the next 250 pages — “you can use history and archaeology to corroborate the Bible’s mention of countries, cities, cultural customs, levels of material culture and specific words, including names commonly used in the period.”

“Is Abraham mentioned outside the Bible?” asked Xiao Li excitedly.

“Not that we can be certain of, but people with the same name are. For specific records from outside the Bible which confirm specific people and events in the Bible, you have to wait until about 1000BC, roughly the time of King David.” Here Professor Ho pulled up the last 950 pages of the Bible in his palm. “From there on to the end, you have increasing amounts of historical records and archaeological findings which mention the very same people, places and events recorded in the Bible.

“Let’s look at some of the history after the Flood.”

### The Tower of Babel and the Origin of Human Races and Languages

Professor Ho flipped back toward the beginning of the Bible in his hand and read:

11:1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. 2 And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. 7 "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:1-9 NAS)

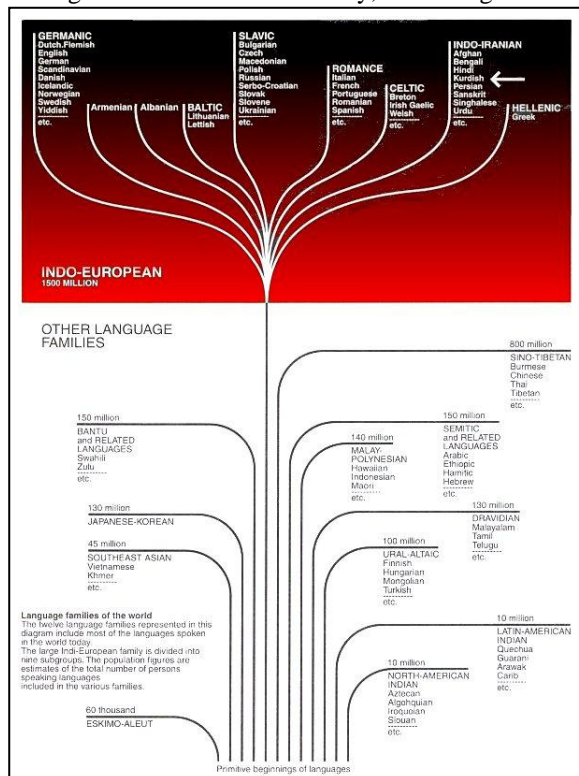


Reconstructed example of bricks with tar as mortar at Ur in southeastern Mesopotamia (called ‘Shinar’ in the Bible), c.2500-2000BC (much later than the Tower of Babel). These were common building materials in ancient Mesopotamia, a point accurately reflected in the Bible. See Note 1.

There are three lines of evidence which demonstrate the historicity of the events in this passage: the language families of the world, the different races of humanity, and the early emergence of cities in Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup>

### Linguistic evidence: The language families of the world

“The many different languages in the world today can be classified into families. For example, Chinese and Tibetan belong to the Sino-Tibetan family, while English and Russian belong to the Indo-European family. Modern linguistic



A classification of the languages of the world. Note how they all trace back to a limited number of unrelated languages in the past (about 12 in this estimate). This fact is in keeping with the Bible’s record of the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel. Diagram from Note 1.

research has demonstrated that all the different members of a given language family developed from the same original language. Because of the geographical separation of humans, through processes of linguistic change these several original languages developed into many different local languages, such as China’s countless different dialects.”

“Isn’t that just like evolution?” Xiao Wang asked.

“No, it’s just like variation among created kinds. The original ‘proto-languages’ were fully functional, complex systems. In many cases, their grammar was *more* complex than that of modern languages.”

“How many original languages were there?” Xiao Li wanted to know.

“There is no general agreement among linguists, but it may have been more than ten. These original mother tongues were all unique; no linguistic relationship can be found among them. There is no reason to think any one was derived from any other. This is an example of how the historical records in the Bible fit with evidences outside the Bible. The Bible says humanity’s countless different languages all originally came from a set number of unrelated languages. Modern linguistics agrees.

### Biological evidence: The different races of humanity

“The confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel also led indirectly to the development of different races. With their unity broken by their inability to communicate, humans began to scatter across the globe, doubtless divided according to languages. The result was geographical isolation and inbreeding of small groups. In just a few generations, this would allow certain minor traits, such as the color of eyes and skin or the shape of eye-

lids, to become completely dominant in certain groups.”

“How can that be?” Xiao Li wondered.

“Do you remember the different breeds of dogs we looked at couple of weeks ago? How did they develop?”

Xiao Wang answered for him. “By human selection forcing dogs with certain traits to interbreed.”

“Exactly. After a few generations, given traits are fixed in a given population of dog—it becomes a breed. Geographical separation can do the same thing. Perhaps by chance, the small group of people who moved from Babel into East Asia all had only genes for black hair—or at least the people with other genes failed to reproduce, and those genes were lost to the East Asian population. As a result, all Chinese have black hair. In contrast, the people who went from Babel to Europe had genes for a variety of hair colors, but they were cut off from the East Asian group. Thus despite all being descended from the same set of eight people who came off the ark, differences in hair color became fixed in different groups. The same process produced different skin colors and eye shapes.<sup>2</sup>

“Even in modern times, many people have looked down on those from different races as being somehow inferior or even sub-human. But the Bible has never allowed for racism. It clearly teaches that there is only one human race, all descended from Noah:

[A]nd He [God] made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, (Acts 17:26 NAS)

Here again, the Bible’s record of the events at Babel fits with the best findings of modern science: all human beings are closely related. Racial differences, like skin color, are actually trivial.”

“That’s great and I agree,” said Xiao Li with some impatience, “but it seems like we’re back to natural science. What about history?”

#### Archaeological evidence: The early emergence of cities in Mesopotamia

Professor Ho smiled. “Happy to oblige you! You remember Noah’s ark landed ‘upon the mountains of Ararat’ (Genesis 8:4), which is probably in the southeastern section of modern Turkey. Coming down from the mountains, they would have come to Mesopotamia in modern Iraq. Sometime afterwards, moving southeast, Noah’s descendents came to the ‘plain in the land of Shinar,’ that is, southeastern Mesopotamia not far from the Persian Gulf. From there they were scattered and began to spread out. Since humanity’s starting point was Mesopotamia, other areas would have been reached later. Logically speaking, the further away you go from the starting point, the longer it would take for a group to reach there and establish a sufficient economic and industrial base to allow them to build a large city. A process like that could be expected to take hundreds of years.

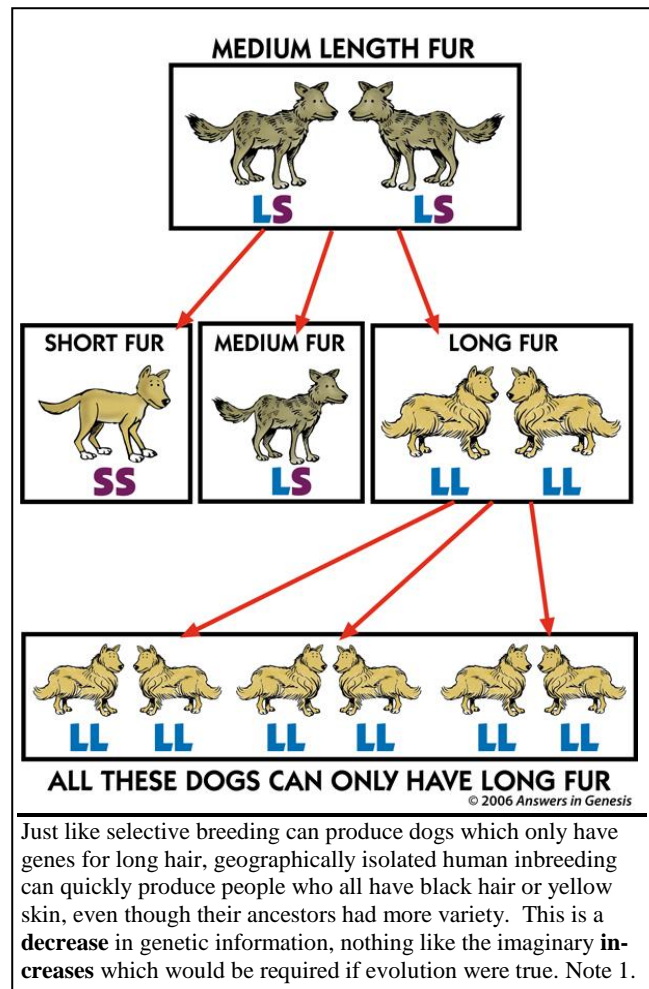
“Now a question. According to the Bible’s account here, where would you expect the world’s most ancient cities to be found?”

“In Mesopotamia, obviously,” replied Xiao Wang.

“Yes, and it turns out that is exactly what archaeology has found. It is generally agreed that the earliest large cities in the world, cities with populations in the tens of thousands, were all in Mesopotamia and the nearby areas.<sup>3</sup> Other areas, such as India or China, or even Egypt, did not develop equally large cities until hundreds of years after Mesopotamia. This is an example of an archaeological finding which fits with the Bible’s historical record: material civilization first developed where the Bible says it began.”

Xiao Li wrinkled his forehead. “But I thought our civilization was as old as any in the world. It’s 5,000 years old!”

Professor Ho pursed his lips slightly and nodded. “We Chinese people, the descendents of Noah, have been living in China for a long, long time. However, archaeological discoveries so far have not shown single cities in China dating from, say, 3500BC, which had tens of thousands of inhabitants.<sup>A</sup> Our civilization is old, but it is not the first which de-



<sup>A</sup> The Liangzhu settlement site (良渚古城) is still under archeological investigation. It was probably not a ‘city’ in the definition given here.

veloped after the Flood. Our ancestors had to start from scratch too far away from the original starting point in Mesopotamia.”

#### Humanity quickly slides back into depravity after the Flood.

Professor Ho fell silent for a moment and gazed into the distance. Then he sighed out loud. “No, we were not the first post-Flood civilization, but we fell into the same sins as all the others, and just as quickly. The lessons taught by the Flood were forgotten!”

“Look at what humanity was thinking and doing at Babel. Like Eve, they wanted to be god themselves: ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into the heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name...’ (Genesis 11:4). They wanted glory for themselves, not for God. They were arrogant, worshipping human scientific and technological ability, worshipping themselves.

“In addition, it seems that they were also disobeying God’s commandment recorded in Genesis 9:1, ‘And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”’ It seems that they were unwilling to ‘fill the earth’ because they were afraid of being ‘scattered abroad over the face of the earth.’ God foiled their arrogant plan by confusing their languages, forcing them to scatter and thus ‘fill the earth.’ But we see their hearts were already in rebellion again. In fact, by the time of Abraham, around 2200BC, idolatry was the nearly universal religion of all humanity. They had rejected the truth.” Professor Ho flipped to another part of the Bible and read:

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.... (Romans 1:21-25 NAS)

That’s the picture of the post-Flood generations: a willful rejection of the truth they had known about God, to be replaced by false gods of their own imagining and false idols of their own carving. Our ancestors were a part of that process, sinking into idolatry and superstition.

“Then, when almost all the world was lost in hopeless darkness, God made His next move.”

#### Abraham in Ur

##### Abraham’s Life

- c. 2170 Abraham is born in Ur
- c. ? Move to Haran
- c. 2090 Move to Canaan
- c. ? Lot and Abraham separate
- c. 2080 Ishmael is born
- c. 2065 Sodom is destroyed
- c. 2065 Isaac is born
- c. 1990 Abraham dies

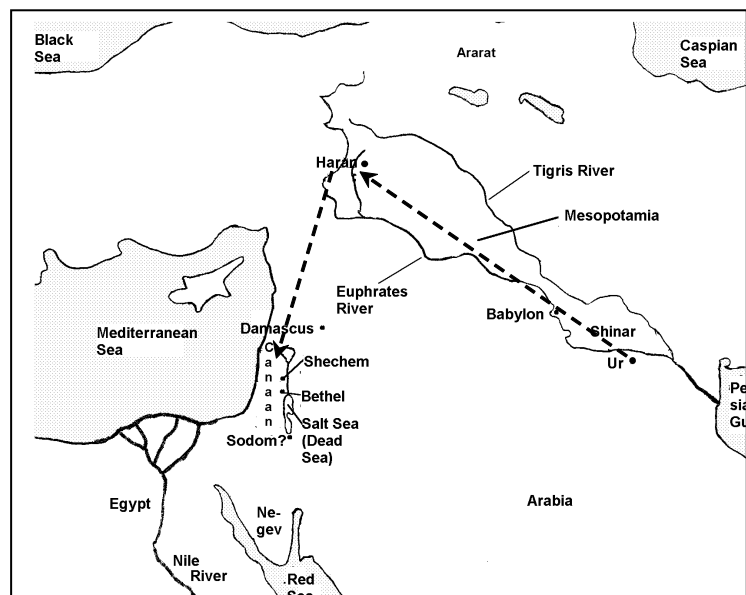
(All dates BC. These dates are estimates; actual dates could be as much as 200 years later)

27 Now these are *the records of* the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram [Abraham], Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. 28 And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram’s [Abraham’s] wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 And Sarai was barren; she had no child. (Genesis 11:27-30 NAS)

“Boys, you might remember that when God was pronouncing judgment on Adam and Eve He promised that a human offspring would come who would crush Satan and destroy his works (Genesis 3:15). That was a promise about Jesus, the redeemer of humanity. After the Flood, the next link in the chain of God’s plan to bring salvation was to start a unique, new people group: the Jews.

“The

Bible is so different from human myths and legends! Abraham did not leap down from the heavens in the misty past, like the legendary founders described in the mythology of many people groups. He came from a specific, famous city during a specific historical time period. How do we date him? Setting precise dates of ancient historical events is always difficult, especially for events before 1000BC. Based on synchronisms with Assyrian history, we can confidently say that the Bible portrays King David as on the throne in Israel in 1000BC.<sup>4</sup> When we count backward from there based on the Bible’s other chronological and genealogical data, we can likewise confidently say that the Bible presents Abraham as having been born within the time period 2200-2000BC. He was a resident of the city of Ur in southeastern Mesopotamia, which is in Iraq today



about 150 kilometers from the Persian Gulf.<sup>B</sup> This city has been extensively excavated by archaeologists.

That was the time of the third dynasty of Ur, it's 'golden age.'<sup>C</sup> It seems almost certain that Ur was the most prosperous and advanced city of it's day. The technological level was Bronze Age, while at the same time period, China seems only to have reached a late Neolithic technology. Note that despite the name, 'Neolithic' refers to a technology level, not a time period. The term was coined by evolutionists who thought that humans gradually evolved tool use. Actually, it just required time for technology to recover after the Flood. People groups who moved to distant areas after the tower of Babel needed more time to recover their technological base, and some of them fell backwards and never recovered. There are people today still using 'Stone Age' technology! It is not a time measure.

The population of the metropolitan area of Ur in Abraham's day has been estimated at 200,000 or more, with tens of thousands in the city proper. The city was an imperial capital controlling virtually all of Mesopotamia. Huge, state-owned factories sometimes employed hundreds or even thousands of workers producing leather, textiles, beer and other goods. The surrounding alluvial plain supported a flourishing irrigation agriculture with an intricate canal system which doubled as a transportation network.<sup>5</sup> Trade was carried on as far away as India.

An average house had two stories, with each level about 200 square meters. There were also palaces and temples,

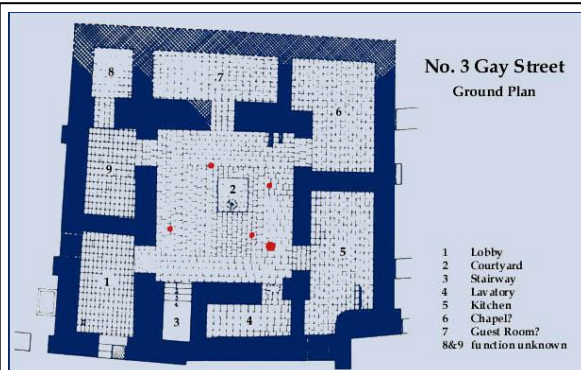


Ariel view of the site of ancient Ur. Note 1.



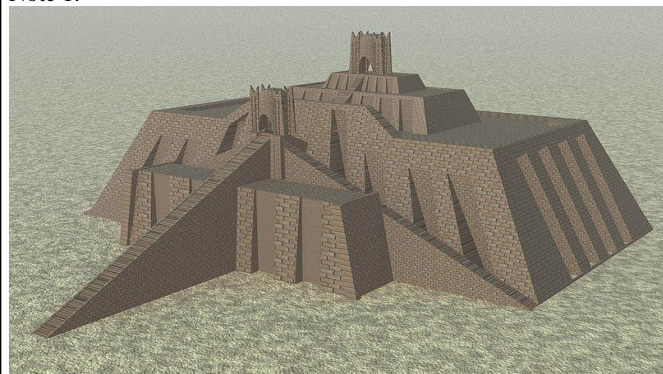
**Above:** This partially restored ziggurat at Ur dedicated to the moon goddess Nanna was originally built c.2100BC. Note 1.

**Below:** Reconstruction as it possibly looked in Abraham's day. Note 1.



**Above:** Floor plan of a typical house in the city of Ur. Note 1.

**Below:** Restored house from Ur of Abraham's day. Note 1.



Finely crafted artifacts from the royal tombs of Queen Puabi of Ur, c.2500BC. This was hundreds of years before Abraham. Note 1.

<sup>B</sup> Some have suggested Abraham was from another Ur in northeastern Mesopotamia, near Haran, but the evidence for that seems weak.

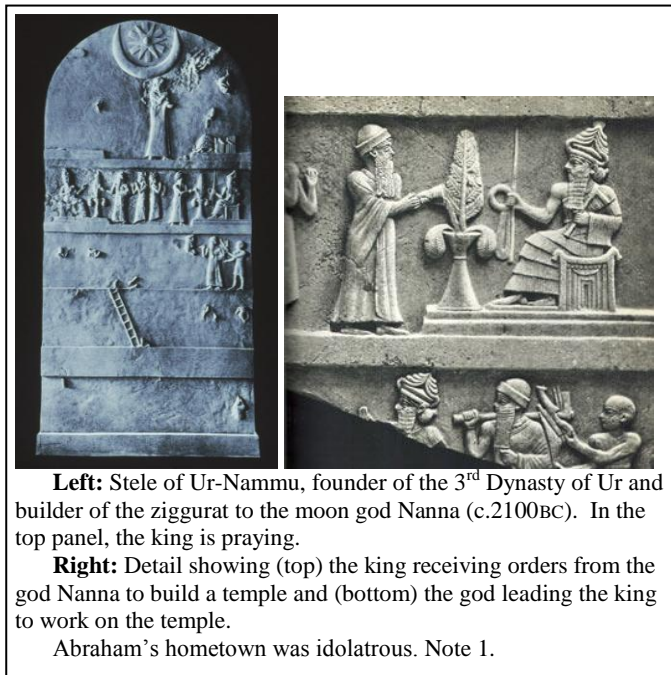
<sup>C</sup> The later date for Abraham's birth, c.2000BC, would place him just after Ur's 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty 'golden age,' but Ur continued to be a rich and important city thereafter.

including Babylonian style ziggurats. By the time of Abraham, writing had already existed for a long time, and their mathematics included cube roots and basic geometry. Many sons from rich families (which Abraham clearly was) attended schools.

### Abraham goes to Haran

31 And Terah took Abram [Abraham] his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. 32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran. (Genesis 11:31-32 NAS)

Any place Terah would go from Ur would probably have been a step down culturally and economically. Why would the family head for Canaan? It's possible he wasn't even clear what it was like or where it was located. Archaeologists have demonstrated that it, in Abraham's day, Canaan was a much, much poorer place than Ur, and far less secure. In Genesis we aren't told why they went; it looks like Terah's initiative. But in the second part of the Bible, the New Testament, we are told the actual reason:



2 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'DEPART FROM YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' 4 "Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, *God* removed him into this country in which you are now living. (Acts 7:2-4)

God appeared to Abraham in a vision telling him to move to Canaan. So he left Ur and headed west."

"So Abraham and Terah still believed in the true God?" Xiao Wang asked.

"For Terah, at least, the answer seems to have been: Yes and no. The Bible later seems to imply that Yahweh was the God of Terah (Genesis 31:53), but also tells us plainly that he 'served other gods' (Joshua 24:2). This kind of mixed religion was often subsequently seen among Abraham's descendents, the Jews, but God hates it."

"Why did they stop in Haran?" asked Xiao Li.

"The text doesn't tell us, but some think it was because Terah wasn't willing to go on to Canaan. He certainly would have felt much more comfortable in Haran. The city of Haran<sup>D</sup> was in northwestern Mesopotamia. In Abraham's time it was an important trade city, being located at the crossroads of the east-west and north-south caravan trading routes, for example, the routes traveled by merchants taking goods from Babylon to Egypt. Haran wasn't Ur, but it was still a relatively rich city. It's been extensively excavated. When the Bible says there was a city at a certain place and time, you can be confidently sure that it existed! There's no mythology or mistakes in the Bible."

### Where's the evidence for Abraham?

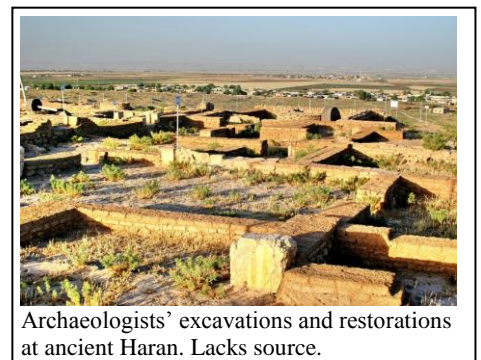
Xiao Wang wasn't satisfied. "But all you've done is shown that these cities existed!"

"Yes," agreed Professor Ho, "and existed at the time the Bible says they did."

"But that doesn't prove Abraham," Xiao Wang persisted.

"Of course not. The background I've given you just sets the stage for understanding the events described in the Bible. But what I want you to notice is, all the details fit with what the record in Genesis says. And there are many, many more like it. We don't have time today to go into it all, but before you go I'll give you additional document which lists a few of them. [See Appendix 4-1.]

"The argument works like this. If the history in Genesis were just made up legends from later periods, it would be full of historical inaccuracies. That's what anti-Christian scholars have claimed for over 200 years, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> cen-



<sup>D</sup> Note that one must distinguish the city of Haran from Abraham's brother who was named Haran (Genesis 11:31). In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament Bible, they are two different words.

tury. It was claims like that which made Karl Marx into an atheist. But as archaeology has advanced, claims of inaccuracies and anachronisms have repeatedly been refuted.

“The anti-Christian scholars claim that Genesis was stitched together from various traditions and legends sometime long after 1000BC. If that were the case, we would not expect it to accurately reflect the conditions of 2000BC, over a thousand years earlier. But it does! This provides strong evidence that it was composed much earlier.”

“You haven’t shown that!” Xiao Wang objected.

Professor Ho nodded calmly. “I know. Have a look at the document I’ll give to you [Appendix 4-1]; there you’ll begin to scratch the surface of the evidence. There’s tons more, if you’re willing to look it up. Check the references. Right now I’ve barely scratched the surface of the surface!”

“But our time is limited today. I still want to discuss two great prophecies made to Abraham which have been fulfilled in minutest detail—against all seeming odds!”

#### God’s call to Abraham

“God’s goal for Abraham wasn’t a comfortable life in Mesopotamia. After Terah died, he moved on to Canaan, in what we today call Palestine. There he became the founder of the Jewish nation.”

1 Now the LORD said to Abram [Abraham], "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. " 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. 6 And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land. 7 And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. 8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. (Genesis 12:1-9 NAS)

“Around 2090BC, responding to the voice of God, Abraham moved from Haran to Canaan. Notice the five great promises God made to Abraham in verses 2 and 3:

1. I will make you a great nation
2. I will bless you
3. [I will] make your name great
4. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse
5. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed

These five specific statements are both promises and prophecies. They are our starting point in assessing the third step of the proof of the Bible: ‘Prophecies written in the Bible and fulfilled long afterward demonstrate that it is a revelation from God.’ Every detail of the five prophetic promises listed above has been fulfilled in human history and continues to be in force all the way to the present.

“Let’s consider each point in turn.

“ ‘1. I will make you a great nation.’

“The first definition we might think of for ‘great’ is population. By 500 or 600 years after Abraham, the Jewish nation descended from him numbered several million. In ancient times, this rated as rather large. Across most of the past 3,500 years their total population worldwide has been at least that large, at least several million. In 2010 it was estimated to be as high as 17 million worldwide. That seems small to us Chinese, but as a group recognizing itself as descendants of one man after 4,000 years, it’s quite substantial.

“But the ‘greatness’ of the Jews is even more evident in their influence in the world. Their impact has been disproportionately great compared to their numbers. Just in the past 200 years they have produced Marx and Disraeli and Kinsinger in politics, Strauss and Mendelssohn in music, Freud in psychology, Weber in economics, Einstein and Bohr in physics, the Rothschilds in banking, Salk in medicine, and a host of other famous and influential individuals—both good and bad! Although Jews are less than 0.25% of the world’s population, they have produced 22% of the Nobel prize winners.<sup>E, 6</sup> Although they only make up about 2.5% of the population of the United States, more than 10% of the college professors there are Jewish—about 30% of professors at ‘elite’ universities.<sup>7</sup>

“Finally, consider the disproportionate influence that the tiny nation of Israel has in world politics. It’s population is only 7.5 million, not all of whom are Jewish. It’s total economy is about the size of the Hong Kong SAR—that’s smaller than Ireland or Portugal. But it’s impact on world politics is far greater than nations with ten times its population

<sup>E</sup> Counting those with at least ½ Jewish ancestry. Using stricter definitions, the number would still reach 15% or more.

and twice it's economy.

"Those who study culture often remark on the amazing concentration of talent, achievement and influence in this tiny people group. God's promise to Abraham continues to be fulfilled today.

" '2. I will bless you.'

"Abraham's greatest blessing was spiritual: he was 'the friend of God' [James 2:23]. But it is also true that he was very rich, and his descendants continue to be richer than average to this day. For example, in the U.S., where nearly half of the world's Jews live, they are far richer than the average. In 2008, 46% of American Jews had incomes of more than US\$100,000 per year, compared with 18% for the general U.S. population.<sup>8</sup>

" '3. I will make your name great.'

"Very few people from 4,000 years ago are still remembered. You might recall, Xiao Li, that you couldn't even tell me what your grandfather's grandfather's first name was! But Abraham is still remembered as the 'the father of faith.' In fact, for the past 500 years, the area where he is known has expanded steadily. Today, throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, India, North and South America, Australia, Oceania, and even many places in East Asia, there are people named Abraham in memory of this man. There is no one else from 2000BC of whom that can be said. And the range of his fame is continuing to grow as Christianity spreads throughout China. God is continuing to make Abraham's name great.

" '4. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.'

"History has countless examples showing that nations which oppress or oppose the Jews are subsequently punished, while nations which treat the Jews well prosper. Consider three recent examples.

"For an obvious contrast, compare the Nazi Germans and the Americans and British during World War II. The Nazis actually came very close to winning the war—but they also tried ruthlessly to exterminate the Jews. The Nazis went down in defeat and ignominy, while the U.S. and the U.K., both of which had large Jewish populations, were victorious and prospered.

"The Russian Czars often persecuted the Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their dynasty fell early in the 20<sup>th</sup>. The former Soviet Union at first was fairly good to the Jews and even supported the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. But they soon turned against Israel, supporting it's Arab enemies, and God broke up their nation in 1991, while the U.S. continued to prosper.

"The Arab nations surrounding Israel have always been it's implacable enemies. In total size, population, and combined economic power, they vastly exceed Israel. Yet they were repeatedly defeated in major wars against Israel in 1948-49, 1967, and 1973.

"Obviously you will say to me that there were many different factors involved in the defeat of the Nazis, the breakup of the Soviet Union, or the losses of the Arab nation."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Xiao Wang.

"Quite so," nodded Professor Ho. "But if you carefully examine history, you will find there is a recurrent theme: Be good to the Jews and prosper; hurt the Jews and you will suffer. It takes time, but God always follows up on His promise. In the years to come, you will continue to observe this principle in the Middle East, and it will provide you with more evidence.

"But the greatest promise to Abraham, and the one that matters the most to us, is the next one.

" '5. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

" '[A]ll the families of the earth' means all the different people groups and nations. Later God specifies that this blessing will come through Abraham's offspring:

15 Then...the LORD called to Abraham... 18 "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...." (Genesis 22:15, 18 NAS)

The fulfillment of this prophecy demands a worldwide influence. The influence of Abraham's offspring does not begin to spread all over the world until the Christian gospel begins to be preached to widely among non-Jews after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prophecy is fulfilled through Abraham's descendent Jesus Christ, the greatest Jew who ever lived."

Xiao Wang was puzzled. "You say that these prophecies have been fulfilled, right?"

"Yes," asserted Professor Ho, "have been and are being."

"Well how have 'all the families of the earth,' all the different people groups and nations, been blessed through Jesus?"

"In at least three ways," replied Professor Ho. "Moral improvement, scientific advance, and the hope of eternal life!"

#### The moral impact of Christianity on the world

"Tell me, boys, can your mothers read?" Professor Ho asked, seemingly casually.

Xiao Li and Xiao Wang were a little offended. "Yes," Xiao Li finally said, "Both our mothers are college graduates."

“And, tell me,” Professor Ho continued, “do they have bound feet?”

This time Xiao Li laughed out loud. “Of course not!”

“Do you know why?”

Xiao Wang replied promptly, “China threw off backward, feudal attitudes toward women a long time ago!”

“Yes, I know—though in fact it really wasn’t so long ago—but why and how did China change? The fact that your mothers can read and have normal feet is part of the blessing of Abraham coming to all the nations. It started from the influence and teaching of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian missionaries in China, who founded schools for both sexes and preached against foot binding, concubinage and slavery.”

Xiao Wang disagreed. “Those social developments followed the economic evolution of society,” he confidently asserted.

Professor Ho looked thoughtful and replied, “Yes, we have heard that economics determines the superstructure—that it determines everything, in fact! But few among us would say that today. In contrast, we have also heard that China was able to move from a feudal society directly into socialism because the Chinese people were enlightened and aroused—not simply because of slow economic evolution.”

“True...” admitted Xiao Wang.

“Then I think we can agree that a people’s ideology—their worldview, their basic outlook on life—will impact their social structure and their morality.”

“Obviously.”

“Well it was worldview changes that brought about major social changes in the West. First, we must remember that what we think of as Western culture did not produce Christianity or the Bible; rather, the Bible influenced and transformed an originally cruel, immoral and idolatrous Europe, changing the morality even of those who did not truly believe in Jesus. During the late Roman empire, Christianity gained a position of prominence in Europe and changed people’s basic worldview, including their understanding of human rights.

“Take the example of slavery. Slaves in the first century AD Roman Empire had absolutely no rights. They were sold like movable property. They could be, and often were, tortured and killed for any reason or no reason. And note that the overwhelming majority of them were of the same race as their masters, fellow Europeans. How did this change? It was not due to economic reasons. Rather, during the Middle Ages of Europe, the leaders of the Christian church began to teach that it was wrong. They reasoned this way. Everyone knew that they wouldn’t want to be a slave if they had the choice, and the Bible itself taught that enslavement was an undesirable status which one should get out of if possible [see 1 Corinthians 7:21-23]. Jesus had taught that we should do to others as we would want them to do to us. Furthermore, the slaves in Europe were nominally Christian and thus were regarded by the Church as brothers and sisters with their masters. Under the influence of this teaching, first the enslavement of fellow Europeans was ended in most of Europe by the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>F</sup> Finally, Western evangelicals worked from the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to outlaw enslavement of any people from any race in the countries under their control. This was not done for economic reasons; the slave trade of the British Empire was very profitable, or at least perceived to be so, when it was outlawed in 1807. In 1834, when slavery was completely outlawed throughout its Empire, Britain had to pay a fortune in reparations to slave owners, an amount equivalent to 40% of total annual government expenditures. Similarly, in the United States, slave owning was quite profitable for large southern landowners in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Abolitionists in the United States were explicitly motivated by Biblical arguments, not economic ones, and the struggle to end slavery finally resulted in a civil war in which about 2% of the entire population died. All this happened because these people believed God did not approve of slavery.

“Slavery was once a nearly universal cultural phenomenon. The eradication of sla-

very in most parts of the world did not even begin until Western nations colonized them and outlawed slavery. In China, with its semi-colonial history, it was clearly and unquestionably the impact of the Western nations and their Christian ideas which led to the end of slavery in the Nationalist period.

“Polygamy is another example. Most societies allowed males to have more than one wife, including in Europe. But the New Testament explicitly teaches that it is wrong [see 1 Timothy 3:2, etc.], and this transformed attitudes in Europe during the early Middle Ages. From the West, the idea of monogamy was transmitted to other nations, including China.



Yenching University, now divided between Tsinghua University and Beijing University. Picture shows entrance to the Women’s College. Note1.



Main church building in Lingnan University, now Sun Yat Sen University. Note1.



Church building in St. John’s University, now mostly divided between Fudan University and East China Normal University. Note1.

<sup>F</sup> Although actual enslavement of fellow countrymen was ended by then in most of Europe, the condition of serfdom, with peasants bound to the land, continued much longer. In addition, slavery of fellow countrymen persisted longer in eastern Europe and especially in Russia.

“Universal basic education, for females as well as males, was first promoted in China by the Christian churches long before it became government policy.

“To take another example, we usually think of Marxism as synonymous with atheism. But in some ways it’s an indirect, ‘illegitimate child’ of Christianity. Many ideas we associate with Marxism—the equality of humans, concern for the poor and oppressed, et cetera—was taken by Marx from his Jewish and Christian background.

“The overwhelming majority of Westerners in the 18<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries explicitly regarded themselves as part of a ‘Christian culture,’ despite the fact that the majority of them were not truly saved, born again Christians. They took these Biblical ideas with them wherever they went. China, with its semi-colonial history, was never actually forced by Western overlords to free its slaves or outlaw polygamy. But it did not even begin to move in that direction until impetus came from the West.

“The earliest conduit for these enlightened ideas to come into China was through the Christian missionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were the first to teach that a man may have absolutely only one wife, no concubines. They were the first to call for an end to female foot-binding. They were the first to promote female education and founded the very first girl’s school in China in Ningbo in 1844.”<sup>9</sup>

Xiao Wang was a bit surprised. “I didn’t realize these modern ideas had anything to do with religion. I always thought religion was usually a conservative, even a regressive force in society.”

Professor Ho shook his head. “I’m not talking about human ‘religions’; they are often harmful to society. I mean God’s truth as revealed in the Bible is the real source of what we sometimes call ‘modern’ moral advances. Human freedom, equality of women, universal education—the basis for these ideas came from the Bible, and they reached China through the missionaries first, and later through other Western businesspeople, educators and authors whose cultural background had been deeply impacted by the Bible.

“In China, Christian missionaries not only preached humanitarian ideas; they also put them into practice. They promoted medical care, usually free for the poor. The earliest hospitals in China were all founded by missionaries. There were 40 western medicine missionary hospitals in China by then end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the number reached 260 by 1936—all founded by Christian church groups. In 1937 in China, in the midst of a worldwide Depression, Christians were running over 140 medical training institutes. Those included what became most of today’s best medical schools, such as Peking Union Medical College, which was jointly founded in 1906 by several Christian missions boards. As late as 1949, 70% of the hospitals in China were run by Christians, and 90% of the nurses were Christians.”<sup>10</sup>

“The Christian missionaries were also the first to introduce modern style education in China, which theretofore was still dominated by reading the Confucian classics and producing eight-legged essays. By then end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were already about 2,000 schools of all levels run by Christians in China. According to one source I consulted, by 1937, Christian founded schools had up to one million students studying in them.”<sup>11</sup> It is not too much to say that Christian missionaries founded China’s entire modern educational system. That includes most of what we today regard as China’s best universities. Most of these are derived, wholly or partially, from universities founded by Christian missionaries, including Yenching University<sup>12</sup> (split into two parts and taken over by Beijing University and Tsinghua University after 1949), Lingnan University (combined with Sun Yat Sen University), St. John’s University (split up and mostly taken over by Fudan University and East China Normal University), and many others.

“The truth is, we Chinese like to think we’re a bit better than most other people because of our ancient cultural heritage. Our history books always seem to speak as though the evils of the ‘old society’ were overcome by the insight and efforts of the Chinese people alone. But the actual fact is, these enlightened ideas first came to China for the outside in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and first through the Christian missionaries. Then they gradually came to be accepted in our country.

“Why did these ideas start in the West? The answer is, they didn’t start in the West; they started in the Bible! All of humanity, every human culture, was lost and sunk in darkness and idolatry in the centuries after the tower of Babel. Then God once more revealed His truth, starting with Abraham. The changes which eventually came to China and other countries are the mercy of God, not the pride of man.

“Thus part of the blessing of Abraham to all nations was social and moral advancement under the influence, direct or indirect, of the Bible.

“But the Bible has also brought blessings to ‘all the nations of the earth’ in the material realm.”

#### The role of Christianity in the development of modern science

“First let me ask you a question.” Professor Ho leaned forward and looked very solemn. “Do you think that the rain god causes storms? Do you think the sun god makes the sun shine?”

Xiao Wang laughed aloud at Professor’s Ho seemingly earnest face. “Of course not! Those are old foolish myths. Modern science teaches us that those are natural phenomena.”

“And where did this ‘modern science’ come from?”

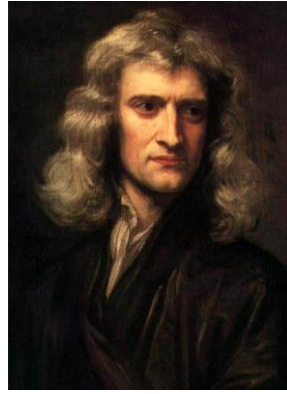
“Well, it started in the West...”

“And why did it start there? Why not in China, with our long history of scholarship and invention, our highly developed culture, and many periods of hundreds of years of stability and prosperity? Despite having long histories, stable cultures and political systems, flourishing economies, and highly developed academics, ancient Egypt, India, and China were all unable to produce modern science and technology. The ancient Greeks and medieval Arabs also failed. Why? Historians of science reply:

Although the Greeks, Chinese, Indian and Arabs all had what could be called “science,” their science soon

A few well-known creationists.

Kepler



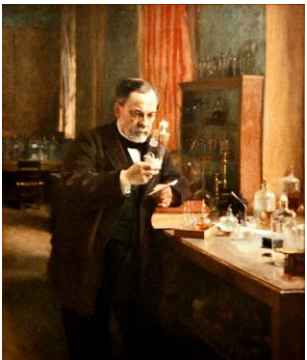
Newton



Pascal



Mendel



Pasteur



Copernicus



Galileo



Boyle

Picture sources: see Note 1.

fizzled out, clearly lacking the rigor and vigor that characterized Christendom's science from Galileo onwards.

The Duhem-Jaki thesis denies that sociological, materialist, externalist causes are *sufficient* conditions to create modern science. As Jaki (1988, p.35) says:

This historiography of science has still to face up honestly to the problem of why three great ancient cultures (China, India, and Egypt) display, independently of one another, a similar pattern vis-a-vis science. The pattern is the stillbirth of science in each of them in spite of the availability of talents, social organization, and peace...

Although all of these conditions may be *necessary* to allow a civilization to develop science, they are not sufficient. To explain why only *one* particular civilization generated a self-sustaining, modern science and not another, we must also look at their intellectual and philosophical climates.<sup>13</sup>

It was Christianity that provided the necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of modern science by changing the way people looked at the world. That is the most widely accepted conclusion among historians of science—and not just among believers. It is an historical fact that Christianity, not atheism or materialism, taught Western people to regard nature as material substances obeying consistent physical laws. Before that the common view in the West was the same as in ancient China: many natural phenomena were regarded as divine beings, or at least capriciously controlled by a variety of so-called 'gods.' First, the Bible taught Western people that Nature was solely created matter, and thus had nothing 'divine' about it. It also revealed that the Creator's own nature was logical, so His creation should be comprehensible. It encouraged studying Nature as a way to glorify God and obey His command to 'subdue the earth' (Genesis 1:28). It was not until this philosophical elements were in place that a sustained effort at scientific examination could be supported by the culture. That happened on a large scale when Europe was influenced by a return to the Biblical roots of Christianity during the Reformation:

"Strange as it may seem, the Bible played a positive role in the development of science. ... Had it not been for the rise of the literal interpretation of the Bible [during the Reformation period] and the subsequent appropriation of biblical narratives by early modern scientists, modern science may not have arisen at all. In sum, the Bible and its literal interpretation have played a vital role in the development of Western science"<sup>14</sup>

We need to understand that all of the early founders of science—including Kepler, Newton, Pascal, Mendel, Pasteur, Boyle, yes, even Copernicus and Galileo—all of them held a theistic worldview, and most of them were explicitly Christian creationists."

Xiao Wang broke in: "I've heard that Newton only starting going to church when he got old. I saw it on a poster in my high school."

Professor Ho frowned and shook his head firmly. "A bald faced lie! Check any major biography of Newton, or even his own writings. Newton explicitly wrote about glorifying God the Creator in his scientific writings. In his Optics he noted:

It is unphilosophical [unreasonable, unscientific] to seek for any other origin of the world [besides creation

by God], or to pretend that is might arise out of a chaos by the mere laws of Nature.<sup>15</sup>

He was a regular church attender and Bible reader all his life—he even took the trouble to learn Hebrew so he could read the Old Testament in the original language. The Bible formed the basis for the worldview of the founders of modern science, and thus the Bible was vital to the rise of natural science.<sup>16</sup>

“So you see, it was not Western culture that provided a basis for modern science, still less is it that Westerners are more intelligent than Chinese, but rather the philosophical outlook of the Bible provided the necessary preconditions for the scientific method. The reason that China was not the first to develop modern scientific research methods is because China had not been influenced by the Bible.”

“But didn’t Christianity oppose and persecute Galileo when he suggested the sun was the center of the solar system?” Xiao Wang asked.

“In a word, no. The Galileo affair has been distorted and abused by atheists to try to make him out as a martyr to the cause of ‘science’ against ‘religion.’ In reality, Galileo, while probably not a born again Christian, certainly was a young earth creationist who believed in the Bible. He felt the heliocentric hypothesis had no contradiction with Bible—and I agree! The first to oppose him was not the church, but the scientists of the day who held to the ancient geocentric system of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Later Galileo got caught in power politics of the thoroughly corrupt Renaissance Roman Catholic Church when he fell afoul of the Pope. Galileo was not even specifically accused of teaching against the Bible, but rather of disobeying a papal decree.”<sup>17, 18</sup>

“Far from repressing science, the Renaissance churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, actively promoted it. In fact, the Roman Catholic Jesuit monks of the period were accepting and teaching the Copernican heliocentric system. They were even teaching it in China!”

Xiao Wang was silent for awhile. Then he sighed and said “I’ve been fooled. Again! It seems like I can’t trust anything I read in my textbooks.”

Professor Ho shook his head again, more gently this time. “You must not disbelieve everything, but you must think critically and carefully weigh what you hear to find the truth.

“The benefits of modern science have come about indirectly as part of God’s promise to ‘bless all the nations of the earth’ through Abraham’s descendent, Jesus Christ. But the greatest blessing is spiritual.”

#### The availability of salvation through Jesus Christ

“You mean the gospel!” interrupted Xiao Li.

“Yes, the gospel” Professor Ho nodded. “Our greatest need is to have our sins forgiven and to have the hope of eternal life in a new body. God had made this available to everyone in the world from every ethnicity by means of the death of the great descendent of Abraham, Jesus Christ. He is the only Savior for everyone, no matter what their cultural background or nation.

“We’ll talk more about that in a moment. But first, consider how amazing the fulfillment of these five promises

#### When were the promises made?

“God made His promises to Abraham around 2090BC. Even if our dating is off, it couldn’t have been later than a couple of hundred years after that. Moses completed the book of Genesis before 1400BC [see Chapter 5]. Again, at the very latest, it simply couldn’t have been later than 1200BC. Who could have foreseen all these things at that time? It would have seemed like an insane boast at that time to claim a worldwide influence for Abraham’s descendent!”

“How old are the oldest copies we have?” asked Xiao Li.

“Our oldest partial copy was discovered in 1948AD as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars—for the most part non-Christians, by the way—date it to 150BC or earlier, based on the form of the letters and other evidences.<sup>19</sup> But even the anti-Christian scholars agree that this is only a copy, and that the original Genesis dates from at least 450BC. I don’t accept that date, of course; I believe Genesis was very probably written by 1400BC, and I’m certain it was written before 1200BC. But even if we were to start from the unbelieving critics’ unreasonable date of 450BC, it would still show fulfillment of prophecy far beyond human ability to foretell the future.

“In 450BC—or even in 150BC!—hardly anyone in the world had heard of Abraham or the book of Genesis. Only the peoples living in the Middle East and Aegean areas had even heard of the Jews. Who could foresee that all of them would know his name and be blessed because of him? Who could have known that the influence of his descendent, Jesus Christ, would spread all the way to China in the east and Spain in the west, to frozen Scandinavia in the north and the tip of Africa in the south, and across the ocean to then unknown North and South America? Fulfillment of this prophecy didn’t even begin until the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, but it had already been written in the Bible over 1,000 years earlier. The gap between prediction and fulfillment is so long as to preclude mere human foresight, and the event is too unlikely to write off to chance.

“But I’ve skipped the clearest example of all of fulfilled prophecy in Genesis 12, namely, verse 7: ‘And the LORD appeared to Abram [Abraham] and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”’ God promised that Palestine would always belong to the Jews.”

#### God’s promise that Canaan (Palestine) would belong to the Jews forever

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram [Abraham] in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 And Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt

Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." ... 13 And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." ... 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite. " (Genesis 15:1-7, 13-16, 18-21 NAS)

Abraham had no physical children, so he was preparing to make Eliezer, who was apparently one of his servants, his heir. God promised him:

1. Abraham himself would have a son.
2. He would have countless descendants.
3. The land of Canaan would belong to them.
4. But they would first live in a foreign land (Egypt) for 400 years and be oppressed.
5. Afterwards they would come out and return to Canaan.
6. At that time, the wickedness of the Canaanites would have reached a level that God would have to punish, so God would drive them out and give the land to the Israelites.

In this passage, God lets Abraham know the next 500 years of history of his descendants, the Israelites, covering about 2050 to 1350 B.C. All of the prophecies listed above have already been fulfilled. First, Abraham and Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac. The second and third generations of Isaac's descendants, under the leadership of his grandson Joseph, moved to Egypt. They flourished in Egypt, becoming a nation of one or two million people. Later, they were oppressed by the Egyptians. Finally, under Moses' leadership, they left Egypt and returned to Canaan. Under the leadership of Joshua, they conquered the morally degenerate Canaanites who resisted them. [Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the details of these events.]

"In Genesis 17:8, God added a detail, promising that Canaan would **forever** belong to the Israelites:

And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:8)

We are watching the amazing fulfillment of this prophecy in our own time."

Professor Ho shuffled among the volumes on one of his crowded bookshelves and pulled out a cheaply printed paperback and began flipping through it. "Mr. Yan Wei was already a Christian in 1949. He lived through the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution, when Christianity was frequently held up to ridicule. Part of what probably kept his faith

strong was seeing how God's prophecies about Israel were being fulfilled in his own lifetime. Here's a quote from his 1996 book, Science and Faith:

<u>Early history of the Jews</u>
c.2091-2081 Vision and promise of Genesis 15
c.2067 Sodom destroyed
c.2066 Isaac is born
c.1991 Abraham dies
c.1885 Joseph becomes a high official in Egypt
c.1876 Israelites (i.e., Jacob's household) move from Canaan to Egypt
c.1876-1446 Israelites in Egypt
c.1526 Moses is born in Egypt
c.1446 Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt
c.1446-1406 Israelites journey in the wilderness
c.1406 Moses dies in the wilderness
c.1406 Joshua leads the Israelites into Canaan
c.1406-1385 Conquests in Canaan
c.1385 Joshua dies
(All dates BC. These dates are estimates; actual dates could be as much as 200 years later.)

Right now the greatest miracle in the world, which fully illustrates that the Bible is true and reliable, is the history of the Jews (Israelites). The World Knowledge Publisher of China recently [1987] published a book entitled *Israel* to introduce this Jewish country specifically. Its subtitle is *A Nation of Enigma*, because from the general historic point of view, Israel's history has been extremely peculiar and inconceivable. How could a weak and small nation such as Israel, having been subjugated for more than twenty-five hundred years (which corresponds to [since] the "Spring and Autumn" period in China), and having had its people driven away from their own land and dispersed to different places in the world for almost two thousand years, not have perished or been assimilated? Why did continuous calamities and catastrophes always cling tightly to this nation which is so small and weak but boasts of extraordinary achievements? How could such a despised and persecuted small nation rebuild its own country two thousand years after its original country perished and its people were driven away from their own land? How could such a small

country, surrounded and attacked by strong enemies and suffering from continuous wars, not have been destroyed? But on the contrary, how could it grow stronger and stronger through all the wars, and transform the desolate and barren land into fertile and well-cultivated farms, building up a country with modern industry and agriculture within mere decades? All these, from the viewpoint of man, are unbelievable miracles. However, seen from the perspective of the Bible, they are just facts which should definitely come true. All these events which happened to the Israelites in later years were clearly predicted in the Bible as early as two or three thousand years before. Of course, this goes far beyond the capability of man. That was the work of God, so it does seem miraculous in man's eye. The authors of the book *Israel* acknowledge that the Bible has made great contributions to human culture, but being constrained by prejudice, they do not believe that the Bible was the revelation of God, but merely consider it to be the traditional legends of the Jewish people. Therefore, they could never find the right answer, and that is why the book started with "enigma" and also ended up with "enigma." The Israelites have a special position in the Bible. They are called the "chosen people of God," and this is why they are different from all the others. If one does not know this, he can never understand the Israelites.<sup>20</sup>

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. "I don't think I could put it any better. That the Jews even survived as a people group during almost 1,900 years without a country is amazing. They didn't even have their own language anymore!<sup>G</sup> Their numbers in any given area were always a tiny fraction of the local population, but they weren't assimilated. They were persecuted everywhere they went, but they were never destroyed. And then, at the time God decided, they returned to their ancient land and reestablished their nation—despite virulent hatred and ongoing opposition from powerful foes. This fulfills God's prophetic promise to Abraham.

"Incidentally, the 1,900 years of the Jews being scattered all over the earth was also predicted. Perhaps we can discuss it another time." [See chapters 9 and 15.]

Xiao Li looked troubled. "But Professor Ho, aren't the Jews unfair to the Palestinians? Is that God's will?"

Professor Ho frowned and shook his head sharply. "It is never God's will for anyone to be unfair to or oppress anyone else, regardless of their ethnicity!"

"But it says God gave the land of Canaan, Palestine, to the Jews...."

"Yes, but God didn't say they should ignore the rights and the needs of the people who happen to have been living there when the Jews returned. In the beginning, when a few thousand Jews trickled back into Palestine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they purchased any land they took. It was only later, under conditions of warfare, that many Palestinians became refugees. The people we call the Palestinians are actually Arabs. They did not move into Israel in significant numbers until after the Romans drove out the Jews in AD 70-135. They aren't the original inhabitants of Palestine. But they have been there for a long time, and the Jews may not simply ignore the Palestinians' basic human right to a place to live and a means of livelihood.

"As a Christian, I do not take sides in this conflict. I am not saying that God approves of everything the Jews have done in the modern state of Israel. My only point is that what God said would happen, did happen. Even after 4,000 years, Israel belongs to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews. As always when He works in history, God made use of the free will choices of human beings, even their sinful choices, to achieve His own ends. But that doesn't mean He approves of their sins.

"In fact, the big problem is the same for all of us—Jews, Palestinian Arabs, Chinese—our big problem is we are sinners. Eventually we will die and have to face God's punishment. And it's right here in the Genesis chapter 15 that God tells us for the first time in the Bible how He will deal with the problem of our sin."

#### Abraham 'believed in the LORD and He reckoned it to him as righteousness'

Professor Ho shifted in his seat and pointed again to the open Bible in front of him. "Did you notice verse 6 here?"

6 Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6 NAS)

"Abraham heard God's amazing promise and chose to believe Him. As a result, God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness."

"But I thought Abraham was a righteous man," Xiao Li interrupted.

"Yes," agreed Professor Ho, "but not perfectly righteous. Abraham had sins, including telling cowardly lies which put his wife in danger.<sup>H</sup> The Bible is the world's most honest document, so it records the failings of even its heroes in unsparing detail. Although most of what we know about Abraham shows him to be good and faithful, he certainly had some sins. You see, as we talked about before, God is **completely** righteous and cannot tolerate **any** sin [see Chapter 2]. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were cut off from God and cursed. When the pre-Flood world sinned, they were destroyed."

"But we can repent! Then God will forgive us," objected Xiao Li.

<sup>G</sup> The Hebrew language was effectively a 'dead' language, not spoken by anyone but used only to read the Bible and recite religious rituals. A small group of Jews purposely revived ancient Hebrew as a spoken language in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and then expanded and developed it into modern Hebrew. This is apparently without parallel in the history of the languages of the world.

<sup>H</sup> See Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-18.

“Yes, isn’t that what you said was the main point of Christianity?” Xiao Wang added.

Professor Ho gave his characteristic vigorous nod. “Of course! And here, for the first time in the Bible, God shows us what we must do in addition to repenting, namely, believe.”

“Believe that God exists?”

“Yes, but not only that. We must also believe His promises.”

“But He hasn’t promised me a huge number of descendents or the land of Canaan,” Xiao Wang said doubtfully. “In any case, I’d rather have China!”

Professor Ho chuckled. “Yes, I like China better too! But there are other promises that God has given to all of humanity. We already saw that He promised to never send a worldwide flood again. An even more important promise to all humanity is the offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. You see, our problem is just like Abraham’s, and Adam and Eve’s: we all have sin. We have chosen to do what we know is wrong, and to neglect doing what we know is right. And we’ve done it often; every day, in fact. Therefore we deserve punishment. In fact, God must punish us, because He is a just judge. That was God’s problem: He loved sinners like you and me! How could He forgive us sinners and yet still uphold His own righteousness? God’s way of forgiving us was to have Jesus Christ come and be punished for our sins in our place.

“That still doesn’t seem fair to me,” objected Xiao Wang.

“No,” agreed Professor Ho, “as we discussed before, it’s not fair; but it’s just. It’s what the Bible calls grace. Our sin still gets punished, but not on us; on Jesus. Then we believe, and God ‘reckons it to us as righteousness.’ He regards us as though we had never done anything wrong, but had always done what is right, the way Jesus did. Jesus gets our record; we get His. All we have to do is believe. That’s what the Bible calls ‘justification by faith.’

“You see, it’s so different from human devised religions. All of humanity’s religions throughout history tell people that they can establish a right relationship with God and go to heaven by their own efforts. Some emphasize good works: living a moral life, turning over a new leaf if you haven’t, and doing good to make up for your past mistakes. Others center around religious observances: burning incense, saying prayers, going to services. All human religions always assert that, although people have sin, by relying on your own efforts, you can achieve salvation. In contrast, the Bible says all ‘doing good’ is simply what you ought to do, and it cannot ‘make up for’ for any ‘mistakes’ which we have committed in the past. Worse than that, we don’t do much good! We are so corrupt that we do not even attain to our own, rather low, personal moral standard, much less do we live a life in accordance with God’s righteous demands. Tell me, boys, would either of you dare to say you have gone a month in the past year without doing anything you know was wrong?”

Both boys were silent. Xiao Wang dropped his eyes to the desk. A few weeks ago Xiao Wang might have said ‘yes,’ but lately he had been thinking about right and wrong more than ever before in his life and his view of himself had changed.

Professor Ho smiled sympathetically. “I can see you’ve been thinking about things, Xiao Wang. Human religions offer no way out of our sin problem. The Bible reveals to us that the only way to escape God’s judgment is by believing in Him and accepting the grace He freely offers us.

“‘Justification by faith’—humanity would never have come up with this idea, because it cuts too deeply against our foolish pride. The concept is so foreign to human thinking that some have even taken it as additional evidence that the Bible is a revelation from God, not something thought up by humans.”

At the mention of evidence, Xiao Wang looked up. “Professor Ho, you said you had an article giving more details from archaeology which prove the Bible. Can I have it?”

“Certainly.” Professor Ho dug through the piles on his desk and handed a photocopied document to Xiao Wang. “Here you are. But remember, I didn’t say, that these evidences **prove** the Bible; I said they show the history of Abraham in the book of Genesis fits with what we find in other ancient historical and archaeological records.”

#### **Appendix 4-1: Professor Ho’s document: A small sampling of archaeological evidence supporting the historical accuracy of the Biblical record about Abraham.**

Most of the events in Genesis from chapter 12 onward are the family history of one man, Abraham, and his immediate descendents. Israel had not yet become a large nation at that time. Furthermore, our historical materials from that period are fragmentary and limited; we would hardly expect to find specific notations about Abraham’s family. Instead, we can test the accuracy of the history in Genesis by comparing the host of background circumstantial details recorded there with the findings of archaeological and historical research. When we do, the Genesis account rings true everywhere we can test it.

Below is a small selection of details from Genesis chapters 13-24. They are concerned with a wide variety of historical details:

1. Ancient people groups (Genesis 15, 23)
2. Patterns of settlement (Genesis 13, 14)
3. Geography and transportation (Genesis 14)
4. Geology and the destruction of cities (Genesis 18-19)
5. Housing construction (Genesis 19)
6. Social customs (Genesis 16, 21)

### 7. Use of camels (Genesis 12, 24)

For each of the above examples, the account in Genesis will be found to accurately reflect the conditions prevailing at the time of Abraham (c.2000BC in the Bronze Age). This provides strong circumstantial evidence that Genesis is history, not a gradually developed legend or a fabrication put together hundreds of years after the time indicated in the book.

#### 1. Ancient people groups: Genesis chapters 15 and 23, the Hittites

In Genesis chapter 15, God promised Abraham his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Palestine), which was then inhabited by a variety of people groups, including the Hittites:

18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite." (Genesis 15:18-21 NAS)

Later, Abraham buys a tomb from a member of the Hittite ethnicity:

...[Abraham said] approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site. " 10 ... Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham...saying, 11 "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." (Genesis 15:18-21 NAS)

The Hittites<sup>21</sup> are mentioned over fifty times in the Old Testament. They were a minority group in Canaan, but the Bible portrays their homeland as a major regional power which engaged in large scale foreign trade and political alliances with the kingdom of Israel in c.950BC (see 1Kings 10:29—11:1). They were a potential military threat as late as c.800BC (see 2Kings 7:6).



Lion Gate at the entrance to the Hittite capital of Hattusha (modern Bogazkoy). Note 1.

#### *The critics' claim: No such people group*

Up to the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was common for unbelieving critics to claim that there was no evidence for the existence of a 'Hittite' people group, at least not as a major power.

#### *The archaeologists' findings: A major regional empire in the Ancient Near East*

In 1906, a German archaeological dig in what is now Turkey found the massive imperial capital of the ancient Hittites, Hattusha. Its royal archive yielded over 10,000 clay tablets. From then on it became increasingly clear the Hittites had ruled an important empire. Dozens of other Hittite cities were excavated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the work continues. All this had been overlooked and forgotten for thousands of years.<sup>22</sup>

If the Bible says a nation existed, start digging!

#### 2. Patterns of settlement: Genesis chapter 13

Please read Genesis 13:5-13.

Abraham took his nephew Lot to Canaan. Because they had too many cattle, they separated. Lot went to "the valley [or plain; literally 'circle'] of the Jordan" (Genesis 13:20), a term apparently including the southern part of the Jordan river valley and the area east and southeast of the Dead Sea. Eventually he moved into the city of Sodom.

#### *The critics' claim: barren wasteland*

The Bible says that at the time of Abraham and Lot, this area was well-watered and attractive to a large-scale herdsman. But the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century unbelieving scholars denied the accuracy of the Bible, because by that time it was extremely hot and sparsely populated.

#### *The archaeologists' findings: lots of cities*

Beginning in the 1920s, archaeological expeditions in the southern Jordan valley and along the east side of the Dead Sea discovered that this barren area had once been densely inhabited. The remains of scores of cities dating from the third and second millennium BC were found.<sup>23</sup> Many of these in the area southwest of the present Dead Sea had well developed irrigation agriculture.<sup>24</sup> It did not become a wasteland until later in history.

#### 3. Geography and Transportation: Genesis Chapter 14

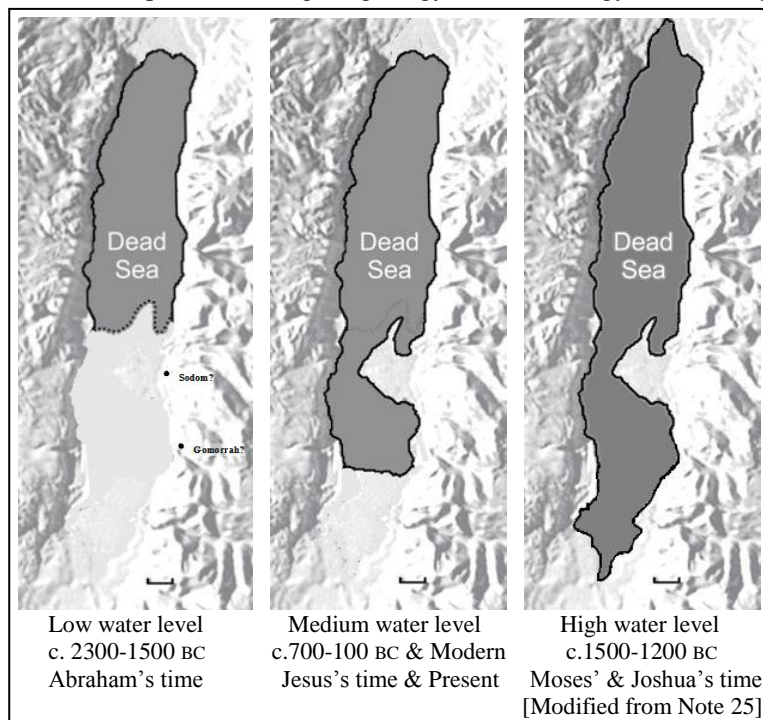
Please read Genesis 14:1-16. Four kings (listed in v.1) came from Mesopotamia and conquered southern Palestine, probably forcing the city-states there to send tribute. After 12 years of this, the Palestinian city-states banded together and rebelled against their Mesopotamian overlords. In particular, five kings (listed in v.2) banded together to resist

them. The following year, the four Mesopotamian kings launched a punitive expedition against southern Palestine. They first made a wide semi-circle around the area of the five allied kings (vv.5-7). Perhaps they were cutting off and destroying actual or potential allies of the five Palestinian kings before facing them in the main battle. Finally, the two armies faced off in “the valley of Siddim” (vv.3, 8-10). The five Palestinian kings were defeated, some or all of their cities were looted (v.11), and many people were taken captive (vv.12, 16, 21). Abraham organized a small strike force and attacked the unprepared camp of the victorious Mesopotamian kings by night, rescuing Lot and the other captives from Sodom and Gomorrah and bringing back the booty (vv.13-16).

This brief account of an ancient battle contains a wealth of details which demonstrate its historical authenticity.

#### *The location of the battle: Changes in the Dead Sea.*

First, we need to understand the Dead Sea, a very unique body of water. The southern half of the Dead Sea is very shallow, so it is liable to drying up if the Jordan River has low water levels due to climatic changes. As a result, the water level and area covered by the Dead Sea has fluctuated considerably across the past four thousand years. The past water levels and area of the Dead Sea were calculated by two Israeli scholars. They used both geological and archaeological methods.<sup>25</sup> Any such ‘scientific’ findings are subject to error and revision, of course, but it is fascinating to note how the independent findings of geology and archaeology fit with the geographical records in the Bible.



The Old Testament accurately reflects the changes in the Dead Sea. In the time of Abraham (c.2000BC), the southern Dead Sea area was dry and could be used as a battlefield (Genesis 14:3, 8, 10). But by the time that Moses was writing the book of Genesis in c.1450BC, the same area was under water. Note how the biblical text accurately reflects the differing conditions of different times:

All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ... and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, ... four kings against five. (Genesis 14:3, 8, 9 NAS)

At the time of the battle, c.2000BC, the area was dry and was called “the valley of Siddim.” When Genesis was written by Moses, five hundred years later, the area had been under water for some time, so he clarified its location for his readers by adding the phrase “that is, the Salt Sea.”

Time Period	Geological findings about Dead Sea Level / Size	Biblical History
2300-1500BC	Dead Sea lower and smaller than present. Southern part dry.	Time of Abraham. Bible says the “Valley of Siddim” (Genesis 14:3, 8), i.e. southern part of modern Dead Sea, was dry and a battle fought there. Many cities in area.
1500-1200BC	Dead Sea higher and larger than present.	Time of Moses and Joshua. “Valley of Siddim” was under water and referred to as “the Salt Sea” (Genesis 14:3). Tribal allotments seem to presuppose a larger Dead Sea than present (compare Joshua 15:5-6 to Joshua 18:18-20).
1200-700BC	Dead Sea lower and smaller than present. At least parts of southern part dry.	Time of David. The term “Valley of Salt” is used in Biblical history dating from c1000-775BC (2Samuel 8:13; 2Chronicles 25:11), very possibly referring to the dry southern half of the Dead Sea.
700-100BC	Dead Sea about the same level and size as present.	

#### *The tar pits.*

Genesis notes:

Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. (Genesis 14:10 NAS)

The area southeast of the Dead Sea has naturally occurring asphalt (bitumen).<sup>26</sup> This detail helps us to fix the location of Sodom and Gomorrah and perhaps to understand the cause of their subsequent destruction, as we will see when dis-

cussing chapters 18-19 below.

*The critics' claim: You can't get there from here.*

It used to be asserted by 19<sup>th</sup> century 'scholarly' critics that a major military expedition from Mesopotamia to southern Palestine could not have been undertaken at so early a time.

*The archaeologists' findings: Coming and going for centuries.*

In c.2300BC, Sargon, king of the city of Akkad (near Babylon) recorded invading and defeating the Amorites of Syria and Palestine.<sup>27</sup> This event occurred several hundred years **before** the events of Genesis chapter 14. Obviously Sargon failed to consult the critics of the Bible before he wrote his annals!

Two further examples can be taken from a slightly later period. Archaeologists have discovered a cart rental contract in Babylon. The contract explicitly forbade the renter to drive the cart to the Mediterranean coast. Naturally, there would have been no need to forbid what could not have been done! The approximate time of the contract was 1800-1600BC. Around 1850BC, a king of Elam named Kudur-Mabug claimed to be ruler over "the land of Amurru," probably including Syria and Palestine.<sup>28</sup> Although these two examples come from after Abraham's time, they demonstrate that at a very early period there was commercial and military commerce between Mesopotamia and Palestine.

*The critics' claim: No through road!*

The text of Genesis 14 shows the Mesopotamian kings passing to the east of Palestine as they moved southward, rather than taking the well-known coastal route along the Mediterranean (see map). Up through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was asserted that there had been no significant route east of Palestine suitable for an army to travel at such an early point in history.

*The archaeologists' findings: Well worn path.*

In fact, there was an accessible east of Palestine. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century archaeologist who first discovered it originally had not believed the account in Genesis:

Evidence concerning the line of march to the east of Palestine was discovered by the American archaeologist W.F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University. He says he "formerly considered this extraordinary line of march as being the best proof of the essentially legendary character of the narrative."<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Albright's mind was changed by the facts he discovered on the ground. A route existed in the time of Abraham.

*The critics' claim: Fictitious names.*

It was also formerly claimed that the names of the Mesopotamian kings were fictional or unhistorical.<sup>30</sup>

*The archaeologists' findings: Every Tom, Dick and Harry.*

The names of the five kings are Hebrew spellings of foreign names. Amraphel may equate to the a Babylonian name Amud-pi-el. Chedorlaomer is composed of two words from the language of Elam. Tidal may be equivalent to the Hittite Tudhalias. Arioch may equate to Arriwuk, a name known from the Mari tablets. Although identification with any specific kings named in other historical documents is still tentative, it is completely clear that these were all legitimate names in ancient near eastern languages at the time of Abraham.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Geography, geology and the destruction of cities: Genesis chapters 18 and 19

Please read Genesis 18:16--19:29.

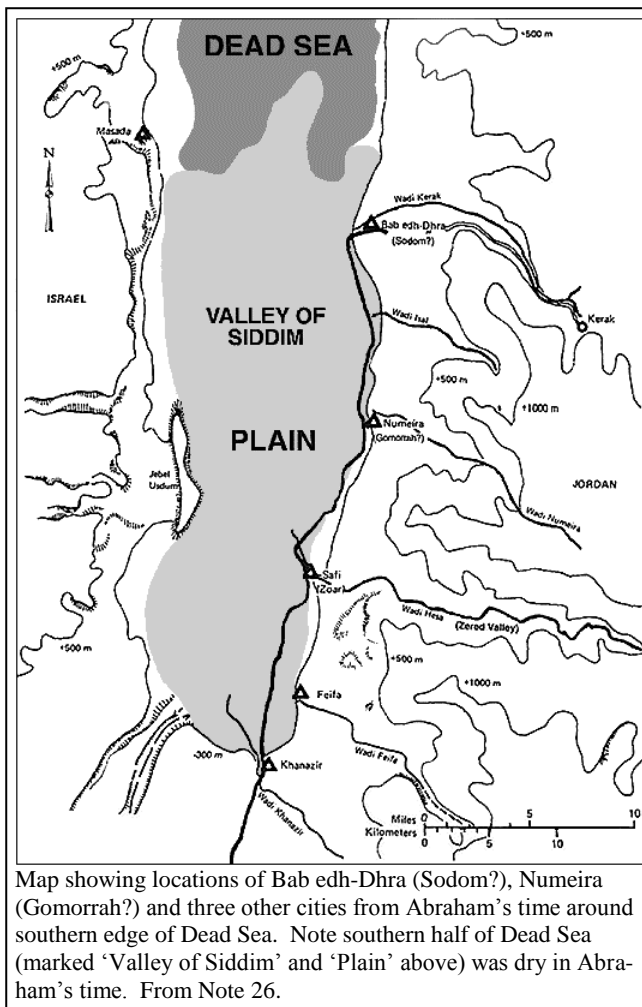
These two chapters describe the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain south of the Dead Sea. We will first examine the historical and archaeological evidence, then the spiritual meaning.

As expected, unbelieving critics have attempted to relegate the entire event to the realm of mythology. Even as late as the 1990s one scholar describes the very cities as "legendary"<sup>32</sup> In reality, however, the events described in the Bible fit the geological facts of the region and might already have archaeological confirmation.

*Geological evidence.*

Although there has been some debate, it is virtually certain that Sodom and Gomorrah were located near the southern portion of the Dead Sea basin, the part which has been dry at some points in history.<sup>33,34</sup> Among the evidences is Genesis 14:10's mention of "tar pits." The unique geology of this region probably sheds light on the method God used to destroy these cities. There are subterranean deposits of natural asphalt (bitumen), sulfur, petroleum and natural gas under and around the southern Dead Sea basin. Even today, natural asphalt and petroleum compounds seep up from cracks in the earth. The region is a fault zone where earthquakes frequently occur. God probably started the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with a divinely timed earthquake. The rock layers were split open, shooting asphalt, sulfurous petroleum, and/or natural gas, into the air which then fell down onto the cities of the plain. This inflammable mixture could have been ignited by earthquake friction, lightning, or human fires on the surface. This interpretation is based on geologists' research:

After surveying the geology of the district [in the 1930s, geologist] Clapp concluded that combustible materials from the earth destroyed the cities. He found bitumen and petroleum in the area. Natural gas and sulfur, which normally accompany bitumen and petroleum, are also present. These combustible materials could have been forced from the earth by subterranean pressure brought about by an earthquake resulting from the shifting of the bounding faults .... Geologists who have studied the area in recent times [the 1990s] agree with



Clapp's reconstruction....<sup>35</sup>

The Biblical account does not demand that God used what we would call a supernatural act to destroy Sodom and Gomorra [see chapter 5 for a discussion of how God acts on earth using both 'supernatural' and 'natural' methods]. If God used an earthquake, the miracle in the event was both the prophetic warning from the angels as well as the ultra-precise timing and location of the earthquake, which occurred only after Lot had escaped and did not destroy the nearby Zoar. At the same time, the region's extremely unique geology provides circumstantial confirmation of the Bible's record.

#### Archaeological evidence.

We recall from Genesis 14 that there were a total of five cities associated with Sodom and Gomorra. Interestingly, archaeologists have discovered the remains of five Bronze Age settlements along the southeastern edge of the Dead Sea, adjacent to the area which would have been dry during Abraham's time (the Valley of Siddim). Each one is located near a perennial stream which would have guaranteed a water supply.

Two sites, Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, have been extensively excavated and have been tentatively identified as the remains of ancient Sodom and Gomorra. Evidence includes:<sup>36</sup>

1. Both cities are located directly over the fault line which runs along the east side of the Dead Sea basin.
2. Both cities showed evidence of earthquake activity in their final destruction.
3. Both cities were destroyed by fire. At Numeira (Gomorra?), the better preserved of the two sites, ash was present everywhere, sometimes up to 0.4

meters thick.

4. Pottery at the two sites shows the inhabitants of the towns associated together. The people of Numeira (Gomorra?) apparently even buried their dead in the cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra (Sodom?).
5. Both cities were destroyed in the same timeframe

At Bab edh-Dhra (Sodom?), huge cemeteries were discovered. These contained 'charnel houses,' above ground burial buildings with walls made of mudbrick walls and roofs made of wood beams, reed mats and mud. These were located over 100 meters outside the city, but they were also destroyed by fire in the same time period as the city. Evidence from the largest charnel house excavated shows the fire began on the roof and then spread into the building as the roof collapsed inward. This fits with Genesis's description, "the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorra brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven" (Genesis 19:24). It would have been unusual, perhaps unprecedented, for an invader to purposely burn tombs, especially considering the universally held superstitions about the spirits of the dead afflicting the living.

In addition, both cities gave evidence of having been at least partially destroyed and substantially rebuilt not long before their final destruction. At Numeira (Gomorra?) archaeologists estimated this earlier destruction occurred a little more than 20 years before the city's final doom. It has been suggested that these earlier, partial destructions were caused by the invasion of the four Mesopotamian kings described in Genesis 14. The data in the Bible fix the invasion at 14 to 24 years before the final destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, which fits the independent estimate made by archaeologists at Numeira (Gomorra?).

The precise destruction dates of the cities are still a matter of dispute and investigation, but the cities clearly belong to Early Bronze period and could have met their ends in Abraham's time.



Numeira (Gomorra?). Two skeletons found lying in ashy debris of the final destruction layer. They were found buried under collapsed stones from the adjacent tower. Note 26.

### 5. Housing construction: Genesis 19, the door of Lot's house

Sometimes even the tiny details of the Bible show its accuracy. Genesis 19:6, 9 implies that the door of Lot's house was very sturdy. It did not immediately give way under the pressure of an angry crowd. They would have had to "break the door" before they could enter the house.

While excavating the city of Debir on the west side of the Dead Sea (formerly called Kirjath-Sepher in the Bible; see Joshua 15:15, etc.), archaeologists discovered several layers of remains from different time periods of occupation. In the period c.2200-1600BC, they found that the walls of the houses were thick and the doors strong. This was the time of Abraham and Lot, when there was no protection from a central government. By Early Iron II period (c. 900-600 B.C.), however, archaeologists found very few door sockets. The houses merely had arched doorways, which seemed to have been covered by door curtains. This was the period of strong Israelite government which was able to protect the public peace.<sup>37</sup>

Unbelieving scholars think Genesis was not written until 900-700 B.C. If that were so, how could the author have guessed that, a thousand years earlier, doors in that place were very thick, unlike the door curtains of his own time? Was he an ancient archaeologist, who excavated the remains of Sodom? If it really were a story fabricated so late, it is very difficult to explain such accurate details.

### *Spiritual lesson of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah*

The people of Sodom were completely depraved. In the Chinese Union version, Genesis 19:5 is not translated very well: "let us do what we want with them." The original language is very clear; their meaning was: Let us have sexual relations with them. The New Chinese Version more correctly translates this verse as "we want to have sexual relations with them." As soon as the men of Sodom heard there were a couple of unattached travelers staying in their town, they intended to commit homosexual gang rape. The cowardly Lot understood their meaning perfectly clearly, which is why he offered them his two virgin daughters as sexual playthings place of the angels. On the one hand, Lot feared being responsible for harm befalling the men—perhaps he already knew they were messengers sent by God. On the other hand, he did not trust God enough to simply refuse the mob's sexual demands.

How did the Sodomites become so depraved? 1,500 years later, the prophet Ezekiel explained:

... this was the guilt of...Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me [God]. Therefore I removed them when I saw it. (Ezekiel 16:49-50 NAS)

The people of Sodom were rich, but arrogant, and not concerned about the poor. They indulged their own lusts and became corrupt. The example of Sodom is a warning to all humanity: God hates all sin and will certainly punish everyone who is not willing to repent. This includes people who, on the surface, have not committed sins as severe as the people of Sodom—God will punish each individual according to the sins of each individual.

God's punishment of Sodom is an example of judgment on people who do not believe and repent. Therefore God saved Lot, who was a believer. But Lot was an extremely bad believer who conformed to a corrupt society—note in 19:8 how he was willing to make use of own his daughters! While Abraham continued to live in a tent, covetous Lot moved to rich and seemingly secure Sodom, despite it's wickedness. Subsequently he was influenced by the Sodomites and was himself half corrupted.



Replica of top of Hammurabi's Stele. King Hammurabi on left receives the law code from a god seated on the right. Text of law codes is carved below. Note 1.

### 6. Social Customs: Genesis chapters 16 and 21

*A wife using a personal maidservant to secure and heir*

Please read Genesis 16:1-16.

The use of Sarah's servant girl Hagar to produce an heir for Abraham and Sarah was a sin not initiated or approved by God. It was in accordance with the legal and social customs of their homeland in Mesopotamia, however, once more demonstrating the authentic historical background of Genesis.

Sarah and Abraham's actions follow rules later codified in the famous Code of Hammurabi.<sup>38</sup> Although the Code of Hammurabi itself dates from 200-300 years after Abraham, it is mostly a codification of laws and practices which had been in force for generations. For example, many similar laws were found in the Lipit-Ishtar law code, which is two centuries earlier than Hammurabi's.<sup>39</sup>

2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. (Genesis 16:2-3 NAS)

This follows Hammurabi's Code #146, permitting a wife to use her own personal maidservant to produce children for her husband. Sarah

had probably owned Hagar before she married Abraham and had sole rights over her.

4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms; but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. (Genesis 16:4-6 NAS)

Here Sarah and Abraham also followed Hammurabi's Code #146, which further stated "if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves."<sup>40</sup> Formerly Hagar had held the highest position a slave could have, personal maidservant to Sarah the mistress of the household. Sarah demoted her down to being a common slave girl, but could not sell her.

#### *Status of children born to a maidservant*

Please read Genesis 21:1-21.

God had never intended for Abraham and Sarah to use an adulterous shortcut to produce an heir. God eventually enabled Sarah to birth an heir, Isaac. For more than a decade, the Abraham's son by the Hagar, Ishmael, had been regarded as Abraham's sole heir. Now suddenly Sarah had a child, which naturally produced friction.

8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. (Genesis 21:8-11 NAS)

Abraham was distressed, no doubt, due to his natural parental affection for Ishmael. But he also knew what Sarah wanted to do would be considered wrong. Hammurabi's Code #170 specifically dealt with situations like this. It did allow the extra share of inheritance due to the first-born son to go to the son of the official wife, even though he was born later. But it specifically mandated an inheritance share for the children of the slave girl, if the master had ever acknowledged them as children, which Abraham certainly had done with Ishmael.

Sarah was breaking the rules, and insisting that Abraham follow Hammurabi's Code #171, which was for cases when the master had **not** acknowledged the children of the slave girl. In that case, the slave and her children were simply to be set free (cf. Sarah's "Drive out this maid and her son") but had no inheritance rights (cf. Sarah's "the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son"). This was an abuse of the rules, which added to Abraham's distress.

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. 13 "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Genesis 21:12-14 NAS)

God had to intervene and made a special allowance and promise of protection before Abraham was willing to send off Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael were thereby freed in accordance with Hammurabi's Code #171 which did not permit them to be inherited by Isaac or sold. In this way God demonstrated that He did not approve of any kind of polygamy, no matter what the legal customs of Mesopotamia said. At the same time, God loved and took care of Hagar and Ishmael.

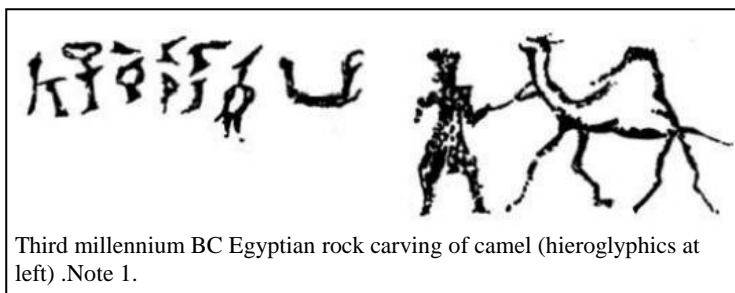
Although these events show the sin and failure of Abraham and Sarah, they make sense when understood against the cultural and legal background of Mesopotamia in the period 2100-1700BC. The Israelites' Law of Moses, which came 500 years later, did not have these rules. The rules which form the background to Abraham's and Sarah's actions belonged to an earlier time and a different culture.

#### 7. Use of camels by Abraham: Genesis chapters 12 and 24

In Genesis 12:16 and throughout Genesis chapter 24 reference is made to the use of camels by Abraham and his household. For one hundred years critics have cited this as an 'error' in Genesis.

*The critics' claim: No domestication of camels until c.1100BC.*

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, unbelieving critics were asserting that there was no evidence of the domestication of camels until nearly a thousand years after the time of Abraham.



Third millennium BC Egyptian rock carving of camel (hieroglyphics at left). Note 1.

camels until nearly a thousand years after the time of Abraham. Thus the mention of camels in Genesis was obviously anachronistic, a mistake made by a much later writer who lived after 1000BC. This imagined 'late writer' made the mistake of projecting the conditions of his own time back into his legend about the ancient patriarch Abraham. The critics based this assertion on an argument from silence: the supposed 'ab-

sence' of historical and archaeological evidence for the domesticated use of the camel until about 1100BC.

*The archaeologists' findings: In use long before Abraham.*

This erroneous early 20<sup>th</sup> century claim was overturned by archeologists' findings showing that camels were in use by humans in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia during the time of Abraham. One prominent Egyptologist gives a very partial listing of the findings, including:

...from Egypt, a camel skull from the Fayum, "Pottery A" stage of occupation, within circa 2000-1400[BC]; from Byblos, a figurine of a kneeling camel, hump and load now missing (originally fixed by a tenon), about nineteenth/eighteenth century [BC]; from Canaan, a camel jaw from a Middle Bronze tomb at Tell el-Far'ah North, circa 1900/1550 [BC]; from north Syria, a cylinder seal of the eighteenth century [BC] (of deities on a camel)...; and from mentions of the camel in the Sumerian lexical work HAR.ra-*hubullu*, going back in origin to the early second millennium [BC].

...

There are other traces of camels much earlier, e.g., in Egypt and Arabia in the third millennium [BC].... But the examples just given should suffice to indicate the true situation: the camel was for long a *marginal* beast in most of the historic ancient Near East (including Egypt), but it was *not* wholly unknown or anachronistic before or during 2000-1100[BC].<sup>41</sup> [Emphasis in original.]

Other scholars have cited evidence showing domestication of camels was practiced in the Ancient Near East by 2500BC or earlier, hundreds of years *before* Abraham's time.<sup>42, 43</sup> These include various depictions of camels, one of which shows a man leading a loaded camel.

Although the patriarchal narratives [i.e., Genesis], the Exodus, and the Judges accounts are often accused of being historically inaccurate, in light of the archaeological and textual evidence pertaining to early camel domestication, this alleged anachronism is instead an historically accurate detail. For those who adhere to a 12<sup>th</sup> century BC or later theory of domestic camel use in the ancient Near East, a great deal of archaeological and textual evidence must be either ignored or explained away. Bones, hairs, wall paintings, models, inscriptions, seals, documents, statues, and stele from numerous archaeological sites all suggest the camel was in use as a domestic animal during the third millennium BC in the ancient Near East.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly most of these archaeological findings were available by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, unbelieving critics still repeat the claim that camels were not in use in the time of Abraham.<sup>45</sup> If nothing with regards to Biblical history were at stake, scholars would probably agree that the evidence is excellent for the camel having been at least sporadically domesticated prior to 2000BC. But anti-Biblical prejudices prevent them from accepting the evidence.

### Conclusion

Obviously we cannot use history and archaeology to absolutely prove the Biblical record about Abraham. But what we can do is test whether or not it agrees with other, independent sources of information about the period. And whenever we do, we find Bible's record fits with the actual conditions of the times when and places where the events are said to take place. As one mid-twentieth century archaeologist put it,

To see the situation clearly, we must distinguish two kinds of confirmation, general and specific. General confirmation is a matter of compatibility without definite corroboration of particular points. ... The picture fits the frame; the melody and the accompaniment are harmonious. The force of such evidence is cumulative. the more we find that items in the picture of the past presented by the Bible, even though not directly attested, are compatible with what we know from archaeology, the stronger is our impression of general authenticity. Mere legend or fiction would inevitably betray itself by anachronisms and incongruities.<sup>46</sup>

Myths are set in imaginary places, or mention cities before they existed or after they were abandoned. But when the Bible talks about Hittites, they turn out to be real. Legends have purportedly early characters referring to customs which are known to have arisen much later. But Sarah, Hagar and Abraham followed the customs of Bronze Age Mesopotamia, not the 1,000 year later Iron Age Israel. In matters as small as Lot's heavy door in Sodom and as large as the fault lines and tar and sulfur deposits around the Dead Sea, the details in the Bible's history are confirmed by scientific investigation. The characters and events fit the time they are claimed to belong to.

We have surveyed just a small selection of the archaeological and historical evidence that can be brought to bear on just 14 chapters (12-24) from just one book (Genesis) of the Bible. The amount of evidence increases as we move onwards in time from Abraham. From about 1000BC onwards, it is often very specific: names of kings and records of battles in the Bible are explicitly confirmed in the histories of other nations. We will see this in subsequent chapters.

Why must we go to such lengths to demonstrate the historicity of the Bible? It must be remembered that for two to three centuries critical scholars have been arguing vehemently against the historicity and authenticity of the book of Genesis. The critics approach has been: The Bible is guilty unless proven innocent! They uniformly claim that it is a compilation of accreted legends, an edited fabrication which was not written until long after 1000BC, over a thousand years after the purported time of Abraham. As proof of this, they claimed that the Bible is filled with inaccuracies and anachronisms. Yet no one has ever conclusively demonstrated a historical error in the Bible! Instead, the critics have

had to steadily give ground as evidence from archaeology mounted.

Almost all the unbelieving critics' claims were in place before systematic archaeological investigations in the Middle East began around 1850. At that time the ignorance was so deep that claims like 'Moses couldn't have written Genesis because writing hadn't been invented yet in 1450BC' were common. Now, of course, we know that writing existed in 3500BC, but this could not be proven in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Regrettably, the erroneous concepts of the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century were widely disseminated, first in Germany and the European continent, then spreading to England and its colonies, and finally to the United States. These erroneous ideas misled many scholars and eventually the common people, causing Western culture to reject the Bible as its basic belief and to begin to decay. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these ideas influenced Marx when he went to college, causing him to turn from his nominal acceptance of the Bible as a teenager to atheism as a young adult. The idea that the Bible is unhistorical is common in China, too. But the facts of archaeology refute the philosophies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**For more information and examples of how archaeology supports and illustrates the historical accuracy of the Bible, please see:**

**[www.BibleArchaeology.org](http://www.BibleArchaeology.org)**

**The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell**

**Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs by Howard F. Vos**

**Archaeology and Bible History by Joseph R. Free and Howard F. Vos**

<sup>1</sup> Pictures downloaded from:

Reconstruction at Ur : Use with permission from Artak Davtian, flickr.com/photos/artak/2385291058/in/set-72157

Language families chart downloaded from: [anglophone.nl/Hoofdframebestanden/Language%20Families.htm](http://anglophone.nl/Hoofdframebestanden/Language%20Families.htm).

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Artifacts from tombs of Queen Puabi of Ur, PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ur-head;

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Ur aerial view: [www.setterfield.org/abrahamse.html](http://www.setterfield.org/abrahamse.html)

Floor plan of a typical house in the city of Ur: [www.setterfield.org/abrahamse.html](http://www.setterfield.org/abrahamse.html)

Ur\_ziggurat CC-BY Headfasten.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient\_ziggurat\_at\_Ali\_Air\_Base\_Iraq\_2005.jpg

Reconstruction of the Ur Ziggurat PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ziggurat\_of\_ur.jpg

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Mendel: PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gregor\_Mendel.png

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Lion Gate : (c) Stephen Eric Wood [gallery.hd.org/\\_c/places-and-sights/\\_more2003/\\_more08/Turkey-Hattusha-Hittite-capital-world-heritage-site-Lion-Gate-2-SEW.jpg.html](http://gallery.hd.org/_c/places-and-sights/_more2003/_more08/Turkey-Hattusha-Hittite-capital-world-heritage-site-Lion-Gate-2-SEW.jpg.html)

Hammurabi Tablet: PUB-DOM

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