

After the Flood

Albert O. Hudson



Preface

Albert Owen Hudson, of Milborne Port England, was a faithful Christian, Bible Student and Scholar of the twentieth century and the author of many books. He was born in 1899 and died in 2000 at 101 years of age. In his early years he worked as an Electrical Engineer for Standard Telephones. His aptitude for detail served him well in research Biblical details. He had access to the British Museum to reference ancient records in support of this and other studies.

The Bible Fellowship Union began publishing a journal in 1924 "*The Bible Students Monthly*". In 1935 the name was changed to "*The Bible Study Monthly*". The journal was headed by Albert O. Hudson since its inception, and included many of his articles. He had a scholarly approach to Bible study particularly Old Testament history and prophecy concerning God's Kingdom and the practical out-working of God's purpose. In 1942 Albert Hudson wrote a series of articles entitled "*Jacob's Trouble*" that appeared as a booklet later that year. There have been two editions and a reprint resulting in many thousands of copies being dispatched across the world. In 1989 he also published "*Bible Students in Britain — The Story of a Hundred Years*".

He had an exceptional memory but also a very methodical filing system to store the fruit of his extensive reading, research and studies. His knowledge of history and the ancient world was outstanding. He loved the study of the Scriptures and sought to clarify doctrinal aspects of the faith. He had a wonderful gift with words, particularly the written word. His treatises contained much valuable information and wisdom.

The following exposition comprised a series of articles in his journal from 1984-1986. In these articles he occasionally made reference to secular or archaeological dating. This differs somewhat from the strictly Biblical evidence in *Studies in the Scriptures*. We have appended a chart at the end of this manuscript with this dating of the Patriarchs for the period under consideration. A second chart displays the family tree from Noah to Abraham. A small asterisk [*] is occasionally placed in the text to point the reader to one of these diagrams.

AFTER THE FLOOD

Albert O. Hudson, 1899-2000



1. The Subsiding of the Waters

A little group stood on steeply rising ground, looking down at the wide plain below. From where they stood, a thousand feet above sea level, they could see the far horizon forty miles away; in between, there stretched a desolate expanse of mud. No trees, no grass, no movement and no living thing; just mud. Behind them, higher up the mountain-side, the trees still grew, clothing the rocky crags with green verdure. Up there, they knew, the birds still sang and flitted to and fro between the branches. A rushing stream, the one which today men call the Changulak, tumbled down the gorge leading from the mountains and flowed placidly across the plain to lose itself in the distant marshes. Right on the horizon they could just discern the sunlight glinting on the waters of a mighty river. Hiddekel it was called in the early days although now it is known by its modern name of Tigris, and they looked again across that wide expanse of mud and were silent.

The older man turned to his three younger companions. The four women, standing a little apart, listened. “My sons, the Most High God has delivered us from the evil world in which we were born and have lived our lives. He has broken the tyranny of those evil powers that have oppressed all men with so terrible an oppression and seduced them into sin so that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil, and that continually. Year in, year out, we told them that the judgment of God must surely come if they did not repent, but they heeded not. They went on with their eating and drinking, their planting and building, their marrying and giving in marriage, until the Flood came and took them all away, and we only are left”. His gaze wandered over the distant horizon, “And now, my sons, it is our mission to build a new world in this earth which has been swept clean by that judgment. Never more will you be oppressed by the powers of evil. They lie, with all their cities and all their works, under the sand and silt that this great Flood has carried in its wake to cover the world we knew. We shall see that world no more. The Most High has given us a new earth, a clean earth, an earth freed from evil, that you and your children may serve Him in obedience and

righteousness the days of your lives and become fathers of a race that will fulfil the wise and gracious purposes of our God". He looked again at the three young men and their wives, intently following his every word. "See then that you keep His covenant and obey His laws, for He has promised that He will no more destroy the earth with a flood, neither will He again blot out all flesh as He has done. But if your children depart from His ways, then His judgments will come upon them by famine, and by pestilence, and by the beasts of the earth, for no man can escape His justice. Teach them therefore that they serve the Most High all their days, that they train their children likewise; so shall it be well with them and theirs".

One of the other men – the serious, thoughtful looking one, looked out again across the barren plain. "How shall we fare for food? Nothing will ever grow in this inhospitable waste? Our stores will last us a little longer, but after that ... ?" His eyes sought his father's face.

Noah looked at his eldest son affectionately. "The birds of the air and the winds of heaven will bring the seeds from the mountains. The green grass will spring forth and the trees will grow. It will not be this year and it will not be next; for many years to come we must find our homes in the mountains and eat that which the mountains bring forth. Here must your children be born and here grow to manhood. But the day will come when that wide plain will be golden with com ready for harvest. There will your children's children build cities and learn the arts and crafts you knew in the world that has passed away. There will they worship God in spirit and in truth and serve him in sincerity." A shadow passed across his face. "Whether sin will invade again I do not know, for sin is subtle and the power of the Evil One is great". But the shadow passed and in his eyes there gleamed the vision of the prophet; he looked again at his eldest son. "But this I know, for this I have seen in the visions of the night." His gaze now was directed at the far horizon, beyond the distant shining river. "I see, beyond there, a city, and in that city a man of your seed, a man to whom God comes as He came to me, a man in whom the next great step in His mighty purpose is to be taken. As we, my sons", and now his gaze included them all, "are called upon to step out in faith to a new world, knowing not whither we go, to carry forward the Divine purpose, so will he be called to leave behind the land in which he will be born. He will go out in faith to a land that God will show him, that through his seed all nations of the earth may be blessed. I know not what the future holds of good or of evil", and again his eyes grew sombre, "but this I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God".

There was a long silence. At last the old man turned his back upon the plain below and faced the dark gorge leading up into the mountains. Up there, in the distance, lay a long, black shape, the great-enclosed vessel in which the eight had taken refuge to escape the flood-waters. It lay now, deserted, where the mountains had trapped it when the waters began to recede, mute witness to the faith of those who alone of all the world had heeded the signs of the times. They obeyed their Lord's injunction to flee the judgment that had to come upon the corrupt and fast dying race. He took a step towards it. "Come with me; we must renew our promise of loyalty to the Most High, with offerings for His acceptance, that this day of deliverance be a day to remember as long as we shall live." Silently, they followed, picking their way among the rugged rocks, climbing steadily upward until they reached the place where they would meet with God.



Some such scene as that must certainly have been enacted in the day that Noah and his family emerged from the Ark to face a world devastated. It must have been a harrowing experience. Everything they knew in life had been swept away; even the landscape had changed. They could not have known whether they were near their former haunts or in a different part of the world altogether. If the deductions to be outlined hereafter are anywhere near the truth they were probably not too far away from their former home; perhaps within five hundred miles or so. Even so the aftermath of the Flood would have presented so different a scene that they might as well have been on another planet. It is usually assumed that the antediluvian world was more or less in the vicinity of present-day Iraq simply because that is the scene of the earliest recognisable peoples, those of Abraham's day, in the Book of Genesis. There is however a logical basis for the conclusion. The early chapters of Genesis

bear internal evidence of having been committed to writing in Sumer not later than the Early Dynastic period, about six centuries before Abraham. The geographical indications appertaining to the Garden of Eden story are those appropriate to that period. The historian of those days visualised the site of Eden as an extension of their own plain of Shinar (Sumerian "Edinu") but lower down the river, halfway along what later became the Persian Gulf. On this basis the antediluvian world could be conceived as extending over all the low-lying eastern half of Arabia as well as into the later plain of Shinar (Iraq) all of which could have been overrun by the Flood. But the whole of this one-time fertile parkland was now covered with thirty to sixty feet of sand, clay and gravel, and all the works of man were buried beneath forever.

Of all the theories which have been advanced to explain the cause of the Flood, the one which best fits the Bible account, the Sumerian legends which come from the same sources as the Bible, and the geological evidences on site which still remain, is that the whole area of the Persian Gulf, from southern Arabia to northern Iraq, was swept by a *tsunami*, (more commonly called a tidal wave), of colossal proportions, coming in from the Indian Ocean, its originating force continuing so long that the water banked up in Iraq for five months before it began to recede. The immediate cause of such a tidal wave could have been, and probably was, the sudden descent upon earth at the poles of stupendous masses of water vapour and minute ice crystals. This according to many geologists from Liebnitz (1690) until the present day, had been thrown up in prehistoric igneous ages, circulated at high altitudes with gradually decreasing momentum, until gravity at length overcame that centrifugal force and they crashed on to the earth. Modern orbiting satellites do so today when they have run their course. The result would be a massive tidal wave originating at the poles and travelling across the ocean in every direction. The magnitude of a wave generated by such a happening cannot be estimated, but in the past two centuries waves started by submarine earthquakes or volcanic eruptions have travelled thousands of miles and flooded the land to depths of a hundred feet. The known record is one that devastated a section of northeastern Siberia in the 18th century; the water was 210 feet high when it crashed over the coast. It can be calculated that waves of this nature, starting in the Antarctic regions and reinforced for the Biblical forty days by the continuing descent of the "waters above the firmament" to which the Bible itself refers, could have sent a 100 foot wave up the Persian Gulf at 60 miles an hour, devastating the entire area over a terrain 600 miles wide, and bank up steadily in Iraq until the water was some 1000 to 1500 feet deep before it began to subside. Something like this might well have been the situation that faced Noah and his family in those stressful days.

Just as there have been theories as to the cause of the Flood, so through the ages there have been many claims made as to the identity of the mountain at which the Ark came to rest. The most familiar one to western peoples is Ararat in northeastern Turkey; this legend had its rise about the 13th century AD and was originated by the Armenian church in that area, but it rests upon no other basis and Ararat is certainly not the mountain. From the First Advent until then, and to the present as far as the Eastern churches and the Moslem faith are concerned, the claim is for Mount Judi, in southern Turkey. This was almost certainly a legend started by the captive Israelites of the Ten Tribes settled there by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC. But both the Bible and Sumerian legend, which are both much nearer to the event, place it in or near the Sumerian plain in which the sons of Noah afterwards settled – a much more likely and logical location. Reasons have been given previously in the BSM for identifying the mountain of the Ark with Mount Anaran (Lat. 33N. Long. 47E), east of Babylon, on the edge of the Zagros mountains bordering the plain. This was the "Mount of the East," sacred mountain of Sumerians and Babylonians, described in their ceremonial hymns of praise. Its position indicated by the orientation of the temple-towers in their two sacred cities of Babylon and Nippur, both of which point directly to Anaran, and physically so situated as to be suited in every respect to be the place where the Ark was stranded by the subsiding waters. There is every probability, that this is the mountain described by Sumerian legend; it is within the ancient land of Urartu (Biblical Ararat) as demanded by Genesis. Now at this end of the 20th century comes another line of testimony which may well assist in confirming that it was indeed in this area that Noah and his family first set foot on their new domain.

There was a flurry of archeological research commencing in 1978, connected with the Iraq Government's River Diyala irrigation project, which created a great lake where early remains are known to lie. This as revealed in the vicinity of Mount Anaran, hitherto unexplored village sites so early that they could well be the first to be instituted after the Flood. Before this the earliest evidences of human habitation in the world have been conceded by the best authorities to be at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, discovered and excavated by Braidwood and Howe in 1948-51. Now here on the mountain slopes between Anaran and the River Diyala there are similar villages, some of which are as old or older than Jarmo. When all that can be ascertained about these ancient sites have been published it may well be a reasonable conclusion that this is where life started again after the Flood.

This series is intended to bring together in proper relation all that the Scriptures have to say – admittedly very little – about that obscure period between Noah and Abraham. Such historical records of the period the sands of Iraq have yielded up during the last century, so these present findings are of more than casual interest. Here, perhaps, are the remains of those first villages in which the sons of Noah and their children lived after the Flood.

The subsidence of the waters must have seemed a slow process. If Chap. 8:14 is to be taken literally it means that the occupants of the Ark remained inside for seven months watching the waters subside to the level of the plain. From their position, say a thousand feet up on the mountainside, the water's edge in the vicinity of Mount Anaran would then be at least thirty miles away, almost out of sight. Perhaps, that is the meaning of the rather cryptic statement that on the first day of the first month the "*face of the ground was dry*" but that not until fifty-seven days later, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, was the "*earth dried*" (Chap. 8:13-14). At a constant rate of fall the water's edge on the first day of the first month would have been about ten or eleven miles from the stranded Ark, only halfway to the visible horizon. "*The face of the ground was dry*" in vs.13 is "*panim adamah charab*" meaning that the surface of the fields was dried, which in such case could mean the immediate vicinity of the Ark. "*The earth was dried*" in vs.14 is "*erets yabesh*", meaning that the earth or the land was destitute of water. Only when there was no visible sign of water over the land would Noah be sure that the Flood was gone; only then in obedience to the Lord's command did he come out.

There remained the mud. The water had gone, back to the ocean, but it had left behind a blanket of clay, sand and gravel much of which had been scooped up from the sea-bed – and salt! Not infrequently an extra high tide floods low lying farmland bordering the seas of this country; the water drains away in a week or so but the salt it leaves behind renders the land unusable sometimes for a year or more. This Flood lasted over twelve months and must have rendered the land completely sterile for decades or even centuries before rain and the annual river floods leached out the salt and agriculture became again possible. Some of the salt has not gone even yet. When the Iraq Government restored some of the ruined buildings of ancient Babylon to create a tourist attraction, one of the greatest handicaps that was encountered was the saline condition of the soil on which the city was built. This caused disintegration of the remaining ruins as soon as they were uncovered and exposed to the air. It was to be very many years before the children of Noah could descend into the plain and create their farms and pasture lands. In the meantime they must perforce remain in the mountains.

Reading Genesis 8 to 11 consecutively it is easy to assume that events followed each other in quick succession, that almost immediately after leaving the Ark the people came "*from the east*" (Gen. 11:1) into the Plain of Shinar and commenced their building operations. This could not possibly have been. Several centuries must have elapsed before the story of the Tower of Babel was enacted. Even after the Flood was ended and everything had returned to normal the head of the Persian Gulf was some three hundred miles north of its present position and formed an impassable barrier to Noah and his family up there in the mountains. Only in the course of time as the four great rivers, the Euphrates, Tigris, Kherkhah, and Batin (the Euphrates, Hiddekel, Pison and Gihon of the Eden story) brought down masses of silt to deposit every year over the plain did the land build up and drive the waters back to where they are now. By Abraham's day, a thousand years after the Flood, the head of the Gulf had

receded a hundred and fifty miles and Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's home town, was a seaport. Today the sea has receded another hundred and fifty miles from Ur. In all this waste of water and marshland there could be no home for man. Noah had perforce to look elsewhere.

The signs are that he went north-westward along the fringe of the mountains. To this day their lower slopes are thickly forested, harbouring wide terraces rich in pasture, and in ancient times wild grain. Here are the remains of these ancient settlements which subsisted as centres of human life for at least four or five centuries and were only deserted when the plain was at last free of water and the cities known to us in the Bible story – Ur, Erech, Babylon, Nippur, Nineveh, Larsa, Sippar – began to be built. The story of those early years is not recorded in the Bible, but nowadays it is beginning to be possible to trace its outlines in what those early settlers left behind them, to be brought to light in this our day.

2. The Family Grows and Spreads

“And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them ‘Be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth ... bring forth abundantly on the earth, and multiply in it’” (Gen. 9:1,7 RSV). The implication of Gen. 9 is that the present human race is descended from the sons of Noah; all others on the whole of the planet were blotted out by the Flood. It has been argued that the expression in vs19. *“These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled”* need only refer to that part of the earth with which the Bible historians were acquainted, and that other nations in other regions escaped the disaster. It is true that the Hebrew *‘erets* ‘the earth’, can and does in its various occurrences refer sometimes to the planet as such and sometimes to the particular part of the earth under discussion without necessarily involving the whole. A similar assertion is made in Gen. 7:21 that all animal life died that moved upon the earth, but this can certainly not be taken to refer to the entire earth for there are still many species of animals and birds peculiar to lands remote from south-western Asia, such as Australia, South America and certain tropical islands. All the evidence is that they have not migrated there from that centre. A more definite fact, one that is implicit in the Scripture account, is that, contrary to popular belief, no carnivorous animals (“beasts of the earth” in Bible language) went into the Ark at all. The herbivorous and the domestic animals were those gathered in by Noah; the lions and tigers and similar wild animals were left to roam the mountains and in many cases to survive the Flood and perpetuate their own kind when it was all over (compare Gen. 7:14, 8:17 & 9:10).

One thing is certain; the plains of south-western Asia were devastated by the Flood and no life there could have survived. If the Valian hypothesis as to the cause of the Flood is the correct explanation, the same must have been true of many other parts of the earth's surface. There is also another consideration so far as the human race is concerned, alluded to by the geologist Hugh Miller in his *“Testimony of the Rocks”* (1857). Miller refers to the evidences of progressive physical degeneration in peoples migrating outward to wild inhospitable habitats from an initially civilised centre. Bereft of cultural, religious or spiritual stimulus, such peoples eventually die out and become extinct. He points out that these were the conditions obtaining before the Flood and that in all probability the human race, after first spreading over the earth, had almost died out again by the time the Flood came. Jewish tradition, as exemplified in the *“Book of Jubilees”* (150 BC), certainly gives this same picture. It could well be, therefore, that God had intervened to preserve alive this small party out of what was, by now a fast disappearing world population with which to make a fresh start in populating the earth. The unbridled sin of the antediluvians had all but brought the actual suicide of the human race.

On this basis, this treatise is intended to demonstrate the practicability of the Genesis thesis, that all the present nations of the world owe their origin to the three sons of Noah. It relates the process of population growth to the span of time which appears to have elapsed from the day the little family emerged from the Ark to the beginning of recorded history so far as it can be deduced from the inscriptions and relics that have been recovered by archaeologists from the vanished settlements

of the oldest civilisation at present known. So, Sumer carries that story onward until Abraham left the Sumerian city of Ur to find the land to which God had called him, and Bible history really begins.

So the story returns to that moment when the little group of eight people stood on the slopes of that mountain in southern Iraq looking over the wide expanse of mud-covered plain a thousand feet below them. They knew that they must now find themselves a place where they could live, build their homes, tend their flocks and grow their crops. Most important of all they needed a place to raise children who would follow them in the ways of the Lord and create a new society upon earth in which the evil of the past bad old days would find no place. What kind of a life did these early pioneers experience in reality?

First, what were the physical conditions? What is known, in this 21st century, of the nature of the world in general, five thousand years ago, and of southern Iraq and northwestern Iran, where they found themselves? It would appear that they were living at a time of much more favourable climatic conditions than the world has known since. The leading authority on ancient climatic conditions is C.E.P. Brooks, who, in his *"Climate through the Ages"* (1970) says that between 5500 and 3000 BC the earth experienced what he calls a warm post-glacial optimum. In this period the seas and land were much warmer than now and there was no polar ice; the land was fertile and forest-clad up to the poles. At about 3000 BC there was a sudden and catastrophic change for the worse with abnormal volcanic activity over the next four centuries. This led to increasing cold and the onset of Arctic ice. The interest in all this lies in the fact that the Biblical indicated date of about 3300 BC for the Flood would imply that for three centuries the sons of Noah enjoyed unusually favourable conditions for human life. S.F. Markham, in *"Climate and the Energy of Nations"* (1942), had already pointed out that the most virile civilisations have always flourished in those parts of the world where the normal temperature at the time encompassed the 70°F (approx 21°C) mark. Brooks' work shows that this in fact was the case world wide at the time in question. The implication of this is that by Divine overruling in the processes of Nature, the world was in the best possible condition to facilitate the rapid increase of the human race.

In this connection there is an interesting point in Gen. 9:7. God told the sons of Noah to "be fruitful, and multiply". *"Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein"*. There is an emphasis here which is lacking in the similar injunction given to the first human pair in the story of Eden. The Lord merely told them (Gen. 1:28) to *"be fruitful and multiply"*. It is almost as if, in this later stage of history, there was an urge to a more than usual rapid increase in the growth of world population, to subsist at least until the emergent race had become sufficiently numerous to gain a good start, so to speak, in repopulating the earth. There is some correspondence here with the position of Israel in Egypt fifteen centuries later, when they also settled in the most fertile area in the land and increased so rapidly as to excite the alarm and resentment of the Egyptians (Exodus 1:7,12). Strangely enough, the same expression is used there. They *"were fruitful, and increased abundantly and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty, and the land was filled with them"*. In both cases it would seem there was an above normal and unprecedented rate of increase greatly assisted by the nature of the environment.

Nevertheless, it must have been a long time before there was any sizeable human community. Gen. 10 records the names of sixteen sons, leaving it to be inferred that there were as many daughters. It is most unlikely though, that there were no other children born to these three. Accepting the Scriptural statements that men at that time lived in the region of five or six hundred years it would seem that the period of fatherhood and motherhood must have been considerably in excess of the normal equivalent today and that families therefore were correspondingly larger. (It has already been shown in these pages that these apparently inordinately long lives recorded in Genesis are perfectly reasonable considered against relevant matters, one of which is the effect of the climatic conditions then obtaining). It can well be, that the compiler of chapter 10 of Genesis, (the famous "Table of Nations"), recorded only those names who were the ancestors of nations then known to exist. On this basis it could be two centuries before the community numbered as much as ten thousand men, women

and children. The children of Noah's sons would be born over the same period (out of the five or six centuries of the mother's life) with the parents taking longer to reach maturity than now. After that, matters would accelerate and in another century population could have reached a quarter of a million. In modern times parents who die at about a century have left as many as 250 descendants of five generations. The inference of data gleaned from Genesis is that successive generations then must have been in the region of at least fifty years apart. Modern parallels are probably of little use in forming an opinion. At any rate it is probable that the human population of the earth at the end of the first century did not exceed a few hundreds.

This implies a handful of village settlements. In all the excavations of primitive sites in the Iraq mountains the same general pattern is observed. As the community grows, sections 'hive off' and start new ones a distance away. In certain isolated areas people do exactly the same thing today. There is need to secure more land for food crops and farming stock, to find new sources of foodstuffs and an impulse to explore. These must have been important to Noah and his family. Such food stocks as remained in the Ark after twelve months afloat would have been quickly exhausted, and until a food-growing regime was established they must have relied on what Nature provided. Providentially, they were in the right locality for this. The Zagros mountains, that border the eastern side of Iraq, rise suddenly from the plain to twelve thousand feet or more, but at about a thousand feet there are wide terraces comprising grasslands and forest in which to this day there are abundant wild fruit trees such as figs, pomegranates, walnuts, almonds and grapes. Ghirshman in *"Iran"*, 1954, is one authority for this and the same is noted by Braidwood and Howe in *"Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan"* (1966). The latter asserts that the Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world.

This is an area which has received much attention in recent years. Some of the earliest sites show that the inhabitants lived exclusively on wild fruits and grains, wild sheep, goats, pigs and so on. Agriculture and stock-breeding had not yet developed. The evidence for this is in the types of implements discovered. Then came the first signs of cultivation and sheep and cattle rearing. Applying this to the present subject, by the time Noah's grandsons had children of their own, the increasing number of mouths to feed must have necessitated something more systematic than a sporadic wandering from one place to another gathering the bounty of Nature. So the nomadic style of life gave place to the settled agricultural one and villages began to be more permanent with houses built of sun-dried mud-brick and roofed with reeds and tree-trunks.

All this could have occupied a couple of centuries by which time some of the varied families and communities would have pushed many miles from the original landing place.

3. Noah's Vineyard

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard."

The transition from food-gathering to agriculture seems to be referred to in the rather strange narrative in Gen. 9:18-27. Vines grow plentifully in the Zagros mountains up to about three thousand feet (1000 metres) altitude, and the gathering of wild grapes had probably been going on since the beginning. But now they were producing the cultivated variety and probably appreciably improving the strain in consequence. Noah drank of the resultant wine, and was found by his youngest son Ham intoxicated and in a state of nudity in his tent. In consequence Noah uttered a curse against, not Ham, but Ham's son Canaan.

One might quite reasonably enquire why so apparently trivial an incident should share with the story of the Tower of Babel the distinction of being the only two important happenings in the twelve hundred years that elapsed between the Flood and Abraham. And why should Canaan, the son of Ham, be the recipient of Noah's curse when his father was the offending party? Read literally, as it stands in the Authorised Version, the story seems pointless and tasteless, having no conceivably useful purpose, and one is perhaps justified in wondering why it was there at all.

Commentators usually content themselves by suggesting that fermentation was unknown before the Flood and Noah did not know that the wine he had made would have an intoxicating effect. It is also suggested that in the East it is considered a serious misdemeanour to see one's father or ancestor in the nude. Canaan was cursed instead of Ham since the latter was one whom the Lord had saved in the Ark and thus to such extent had the Lord's favour, which seems a little hard on Canaan. All these are guesses without foundation and the commentators normally finish up with a little homily on the evils of strong drink which thus overcame even so godly a man as Noah and pass on quickly to the next subject. Nevertheless the story is there and from the historian's point of view at least, was recorded for a purpose. Something more fundamental than the apparent nature of the incident must lie beneath the surface and this needs to be elucidated. For this reason it must be examined in detail.

The expression "Noah began to be an husbandman" (*ish adamah* – man of the land) means that the time of subsisting on the wild products of the mountains was giving place to the arts of agriculture – the planned growing of food. It is absurd to suppose that Noah was ignorant of the art; he must have been familiar with it in pre-Flood days and in fact Gen. 5:29 implies that fact. The position was that Noah and his sons now applied themselves to work on the land, and probably stock-breeding as well, to provide for their rapidly growing families. The time might have been any time during the first century after leaving the Ark.

The vineyard had been planted and the vines yielded their first crop. What more natural than that there should be a family celebration to mark the event? This was, after all, a major step forward in the programme of re-settlement. A number of children had probably already been born and the prospects were looking distinctly rosy for this new world of theirs. So the celebratory feast was planned.

As so often happens, things got a little out of hand. "*Look not on the wine when it is red*" said the Wise Man in Proverbs; "*at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder*" (Prov. 23:31-32). That is what it did on this occasion. Noah, we are told, was "drunken". The word is *sachar*, which means literally "to be drunken to hilarity", and is used in Gen. 43:34 where Joseph's brothers "*drank and were merry*". It is in the highest degree unlikely that Noah was the only one in this condition, but being more than five hundred years older than the others, he may have been more seriously affected, to the extent that he was no longer conscious of what was going on.

The next step was that Ham walked into Noah's "tent" (probably his house – *ohel* means either tent or house) "*and saw the nakedness of his father*" (vs.22). The key to the story lies in this expression. The Hebrew word for physical nudity is *'erom* as in the Garden of Eden story, with some twenty-four occurrences in the O.T. The word used here in Gen. 9 however, is not *'erom*, it is *'ervah*, which has a very different connotation. *'Ervah* in its fifty-nine occurrences, always implies sexual relations with a woman. When, as in this case, the expression is "the nakedness of his father", the reference is to that father's wife, as in Lev. 18:8 "*the nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness*", and in vs.16 "*you shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness*". The verb rendered 'saw' in this verse is *'raah* which has a wide range of meanings and is translated by many different words in the AV. Gesenius defines it, "to look at or to view with a purpose, especially to be pleased with the sight, as with objects of pleasure; to enjoy, or procure for oneself". In Eccl. 1:16 *'raah* is rendered "*my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*" and in 2:1. "*I said ... therefore enjoy pleasure*".

The implication is that Ham was guilty of incest with his mother following a general family partaking of wine to excess, and the birth of Canaan was the outcome. He might possibly have been somewhat inebriated and not fully conscious of the enormity of his action. Verse 22 goes on to say that he "told his two brothers outside" where 'told' is *'naged*, meaning to show, declare, confess, profess openly, to celebrate with praise. The use of this word could imply that Ham boasted of his deed to his two brothers. The consequent action of Shem and Japheth recorded in vs.23 could be a figure of speech indicating that they did what they could to "cover up" or conceal from Noah the wrong done to him, perhaps in the hope that nothing more would be known about it. If so, the hope

was frustrated by the eventual birth of Canaan, which would be when Noah found out about it (vs.25). The Douay Bible at this point has it “Noah ... when he had learned what his younger son had done to him, he said, *Cursed be Canaan...*”

If in fact this is how the matter went, it provides a reasonable explanation of the rather strange insistence in this chapter that Ham was the father of Canaan. No other names of the three patriarch's sons are so defined; the complete genealogy is left to chapter 10 which is probably a much later document. Here Gen. 9:13 reads “*And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the Ark, were Shem, Ham and Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan*”. Why pick out this one name from the four recorded sons of Ham, and the many sons of the other two, if there was not something special about the birth of Canaan? It is almost as if the historian, in recording the sons of Noah, was at pains to make it plain that Canaan was the son, not of Noah, but of Ham. There is also the fact that in vss.25-27 Noah refers to Shem and Japheth as being Canaan's ‘brethren’ (*achim*, normally used for brother or half-brother, as, compared with *ach ben*, brother's son or nephew). On this showing, of course, Canaan would be half-brother to the other two through their common mother, although nephew through their own brother.

Assuming this to be the true explanation of the story, there is no possible means of assessing the degree of culpability of Noah's wife or even if she was to any degree a willing party. One has to remember that the laws of Moses that regulated such relationships (as in Lev. 18) were still fifteen hundred years in the future. There is no doubt that the greater virility of the human race, so much nearer its commencement in the perfect first pair, detracted a great deal from the necessity existing in later times which led to those laws. Abraham and his brother Nahor more than a thousand years later, married their nieces without any thought of impropriety. In this case, it was the violation of the primal law instituted in Eden, that a man should cleave to his own wife, “and they two shall be one flesh” which led to Noah's words of condemnation and judgment.

The fact that Noah was five hundred years old before any of his sons were born may give colour to the supposition that his wife was very much younger, perhaps even a second wife, so that she could be considered a relatively young woman at the time of this incident. Ham could have been as young as 100 and his mother 200, equivalent to 20 and 40 respectively in more modern times.

The birth of Canaan brought the affair into the open. It is popularly supposed that Noah uttered a curse upon Canaan and doomed him to perpetual slavery – which would have been quite unjust since on any showing the child was an innocent party. Closer inspection of vss.25-27 shows that what Noah did do was voice a prophecy of things to come which were going to involve Canaan. It was not the displeasure of Noah that was at issue here; it was the displeasure of God. The Holy Spirit, through Noah, revealed something of what the future held for these men who were to be the progenitors of all who would later live upon the earth. It was the Lord who cursed and Noah only stated the fact as it was revealed to him.

The gist of the prophecy was that Canaan – in his descendants – was to occupy a position of servitude to his half-brothers, in their descendants. The people destined to spring from Japheth were to be ‘enlarged’, spread abroad in far distant lands, while those from Shem would have God dwelling among them. The true meaning of vs.27 is “*God shall dwell in the tents of, Shem.*” Shem, represented now chiefly by Jews and Arabs, has long been recognised to be the most spiritually perceptive and receptive of the three great races. It has given the world its three great religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Sons of Japheth, the Aryans, have spread all over the world and dominate it. Those of Ham, at first the most intellectual and artistic, founders of the first civilisations, have progressively changed as they migrated into the tropical and sub-tropical regions and to a great extent have been absorbed by Semitic peoples. The descendants of Canaan, a heterogeneous assembly of tribes collectively known as Canaanites, have ceased to be representative of their forefather. Noah's forecast of the future came to pass, even as he said.

So ended the first century after the Flood with perhaps a hundred grandchildren of Noah and possibly two hundred great grandchildren growing up in this new world, never having known the old

world of sin and death. They probably stayed near the mountain and built their first dwellings on its slopes, having no urge to explore farther until increasing numbers would make more living space desirable. The time was yet far distant when their descendants would find it possible to enter the Plain of Shinar as narrated in Genesis 11 and begin to enjoy its luxurious fertility.

4. The Plain of Shinar

Those first two centuries or so after the flood were stressful times for the little family. The wide plain of Iraq, later to be called the Plain of Shinar, was at that time occupied in part by the northern extension of the sea and for the rest by salt-laden mud and marshland. From their position on the mountain terraces, a thousand feet above the plain, they could see that for many years they must remain in the mountains. They must build their dwellings of forest timber and subsist on such wild berries, fruits and the flesh of small wild animals as the mountains would provide. Later as their children were born and their numbers increased, they would need to find land suitable for growing crops and keeping flocks and herds, to feed the increasing number of mouths. To the south of them the mountains closed in, dark and forbidding. To the north-west they opened out into wide terraces. These offered a mixture of grassland and forest, well watered by copious streams rushing down to the marshy plain below, as they still do today although that plain is now well drained and fertile. Here was the logical place for them to go and it may well be, the recently discovered remains of prehistoric settlements are the remaining evidences of their sojourn for some two centuries before they could *"journey from the east, and find a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwell there"* (Gen. 11:2).

Braidwood and Howe, in 1948/51, made some discoveries at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir about eighty miles distant from the settlements mentioned above, in the headwaters of the Diyala river system. This must have been the type of life of the sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of Noah to perhaps the fourth generation. The lowest levels show evidence that the villagers lived on wild wheat and barley, berries and fruits and the flesh of wild sheep, goats, and pigs. Then come the indications of agriculture and stock-breeding. Braidwood records (*Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 1966) *"The Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world This is a major landmark in human history Nowhere else in the world were the wild wheat and barley, the wild sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and horses to be found together in a natural environment. This meant an entirely new way of life for all mankind"*. This was said, of course, upon the popular assumption that mankind evolved from a long continued state of primitive savagery to the point where they began to cultivate plants and breed animals for themselves. The Genesis story contradicts this; the eight who survived the Flood were already civilised and knowledgeable and all the evidence is that they were brought out of the Ark and into the new earth by the providence of God in a locality where they could readily commence to apply the skills they already possessed, and after perhaps a relatively limited number of years begin to reap their own harvests and make use of their own flocks and herds.

Pottery at first was unknown; domestic vessels were made of wood but even the earliest ones were perfectly round as if turned on a lathe. The finest specimen of a wooden egg cup ever known comes from a house which must date to the time of Noah's grandsons. Stone was worked to produce bowls and tools.

No village has been found to exceed twenty to twenty-five houses, but there are always six or seven rooms which would seem to indicate large families; this would be essential to the rapid increase of the race from three principal forebears. This brings to the forefront a factor that has no parallel in subsequent times. Although children were born and grew to maturity and in their turn brought forth more children, there was no death! For some three centuries at least no one died! The ages of the patriarchs recorded in Genesis show that the normal span of life for those born after the Flood was at the first some five hundred years, lessening then in steps to about two centuries a thousand years later. If this unusual length of life betokened a corresponding increase of the childbearing period there would logically be a considerably accelerated growth in population. Even so, it must have been a

comparatively long time before the community springing from three brothers and their wives attained any appreciable number. If the span of life of those three and their wives was, as Genesis indicates, between five and six hundred years, the childbearing period would be as much as two centuries. If the children born reached marriageable maturity in something over fifty years of age, it would follow that at the end of two centuries there could be a population of some ten thousand or more living and no sign yet of any one dying. By this time men would have long since settled into a regime of agriculture and stock-raising and in consequence become organised into separate village communities, each at the centre of an area of farmland which sufficed for their needs.

With the third century after the Flood, there came a change. The population increase would be accelerating; there was still no death and the very genial climatic conditions would be conducive to a high birth rate. At least a quarter million could be expected by the end of the third century. The mountain slopes were proving inadequate. The many sites of prehistoric settlements in this area which have been discovered give testimony to the density of population which must have existed in those early times. It was time to find more living space.

Small detachments probably made their way up the river valleys leading into the Iranian Mountains, finding isolated spots where they could settle. This might well have been the time that some of the known mountain sites such as Qalal Jarmo and the half-dozen villages surrounding it, were established. Many of these show the primitive state of life that would be expected of the time concerned. Later on their descendants began to mine copper, gold and precious stones that exist in the mountains, and so became artisans and traders. But that lay several more centuries in the future. By far the greater proportion of the fast-growing community would look longingly at the spacious plain that lay to the west of their mountain home where once the waters of the Flood had extended but which now was in process of becoming fit for human habitation.

As they gazed across that plain from the mountains, a little above the latitude of the modern city of Baghdad, they would have seen, in the foreground, a wide stretch of water and salt marshland some forty miles wide. It was an apparently unassailable barrier, a remnant of the waters of the Flood three centuries earlier. Their scouts would have been out, and they would have reported that on the other side of that sheet of water the land had dried, the salt marshes had leached out into fertile ground and there the grass and wild grain was growing and the countryside was fit for habitation. They had but to trek around the northern end of the water and they could reach a plain that stretched for scores of miles to north and south and there they could find room for their villages and farms for generations to come. So the great migration began.

It was not likely to have been a mass journey similar to the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. Many of the older folk probably stayed where they were, preferring to keep to the mountain life to which they had been born and in which they had been brought up. The settlements that have been excavated in the Diyala river area bear witness to that; some of them were inhabited for many centuries. Bands of pioneers would strike out, each finding a suitable place in which to settle, spreading ever farther outwards, and onwards, so that as generation succeeded generation the plain became increasingly populated.

This is the event that is described in such brief and concise terms in Gen. 11:2. *“As they journeyed from the east, they found a place in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there”*. They came from the east, and they spread over a fertile country some seventy miles wide by two hundred long, traversed through its middle by the famous river Euphrates. Their children went out from there, to people every region of the earth. It has long been held by archeologists and anthropologists that the first inhabitants in the Iraq plains came from the east, from somewhere in the Iranian mountains. The story of the Flood and Gen. 11:2 confirm their findings.

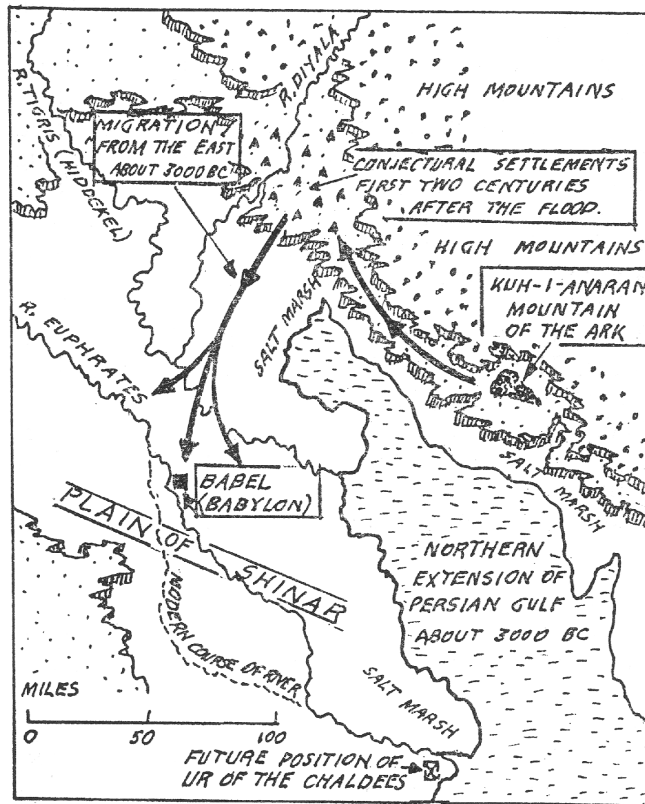
Of course it was not called Shinar at the time. The need for place names hardly existed. The word is the Sumerian term for the combined lands of Sumer and Akkad, the land of the Hamites and Semites, and did not come into use until the sons of Shem and sons of Ham had evolved into distinct nations many centuries later. A much later scribe, either author or copyist of Gen. 11, inserted the

word to explain to his own generation – and to us – just where the plain was situated on which the people settled. Thanks to him, we now know that they had come into the country, the capital and most famous city which was to figure repeatedly in the Bible – Babylon.

About this time the old patriarch Noah breathed his last. He had survived the Flood by three hundred and fifty years, living long enough to see his three sons grow into a company of a quarter million people. The impression given in Gen. II is that the community was living in a state of peace and harmony and one might be justified in thinking that he died happy in the thought that the world was being re-peopled by men and women who had regard for God and righteousness. He could have had no conception of the miseries that sin was to inflict upon the world in later days. Tradition says that he was buried on the mountain on which the Ark had landed but there is not likely to be much truth in that. The more significant thing is that in all probability his was the first death to occur in this new post-Flood period. For more than three hundred years there had been no deaths; now it was to begin to intrude its power upon mankind again. In another hundred and fifty years his eldest son Shem was to follow him to the grave.

Just how literate were these people back there three thousand years before Christ? No specimens of their writing, if they knew of writing, have survived. The earliest so far discovered dates from about four centuries later, when the cities began to be built and industry and trade began to flourish. But there must have been writing long before. E.J. Geib in *“A Study of Writing”* (1965) says that the structure of the Sumerian cuneiform writing (on clay tablets) indicates a long period, perhaps five centuries, of development. The earliest script which is known, earlier than cuneiform, is called ‘pictographic’, because the signs are obviously derived from pictures of objects, but no examples of the original picture-writing have ever been found. It is clear that other writing mediums were known before the use of clay tablets because the Sumerian word for tablets has a prefix indicating wood or vegetable substance. There were – and still are – no trees on the Euphrates plain and clay made into tablets and baked was the only possible writing material. The survival of words like Gis-sar, “to write”, and “Gis-gar”, a building plan, (*gis*’ being the prefix for wood or trees) indicates that before the people came down into the plain there was such a thing as writing on wood. Mallowan in 1953, excavating on the site of ancient Nineveh, found wax-covered wood panels, bound with gold hinges in the form of a book, bearing traces of cuneiform texts. It has often been remarked that the story of the Flood as narrated in Genesis bears all the hall-marks of being written by an eye-witness. It is most unlikely that the antediluvian world should have endured more than two thousand years without men having invented writing. The persistent Jewish tradition is that Enoch was the man who did so. There is every likelihood that these pioneers who came into the plain of Shinar carried with them, written in the picture-writing script which no modern man has ever seen, the stories of their ancestors which we now have as the first nine chapters of Genesis.

The plain was fertile and well watered, more so than the mountain regions from which they had come, but it lacked a good many of the things incidental to daily life to which they had become accustomed in the mountains. Up there they could quarry stone – granite, sandstone, limestone, sometimes even marble – and they had learned to make stone bowls and vessels and door-sockets of fine quality. Some of these have been found where they were thrown away and buried, five thousand years ago. Down here in the plain there was none of that, only clay, and so they learned to make their utensils and ornaments of clay baked into pottery, tablets for writing, and bricks for building. That is why the narrative of the building of the great Tower in Gen. II says *“bricks had they for stone, and bitumen for mortar”*. They were compelled to learn new building and new writing techniques.



Travels of Noah's descendants from the Ark to Babel.

Neither had they any metal. It was only after the dispersion, when the peoples began to separate, that the mineral wealth of the mountains was discovered and men began to fabricate those works of art which, brought to light in this modern age, have excited the wonder and envy of the present-day world. Nothing like them has been made since. The skill of the ancient Sumerians has never been surpassed. The finest works of art in gold, silver and copper which have ever been known were produced by craftsmen only seven generations removed from Noah and a couple of centuries after the dispersion from Babel. That scattering of the nations described in Gen. II was a blessing in disguise for the developing human race. It sent them into widely separated regions, in which they discovered all kinds of natural products which were going to prove necessary for the well-being of mankind as the human race increased. Without that dispersion they would have remained in the Stone Age much longer than they did.

These sons and daughters of Shem, Ham and Japheth to the fifth and sixth generations occupied the length and breadth of the Plain of Shinar. They all were there; none had yet died, and the three old patriarchs, nowhere yet near the end of their days, must have looked with pride, and thankfulness to God, upon the thousands of great-great-great-grandsons and daughters to whom they had given the spark of life. It is difficult to visualise the nature of society at that time. Three men, survivors with their father of the great Flood which had ended the lives of all others, could look upon a quarter of a million people and reflect that by the providence of God they had given life to all these. They must have remembered the admonition given them by the Lord when they came out of the Ark into this cleansed new world, *"be ye fruitful, and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein"* (Gen. 9:7). They looked now upon these teeming multitudes and they also looked out across the smiling cornfields and the luxuriant groves of date-palms. They remembered the harder times spent in the mountains where they brought up their first children in an environment hardly yet ready to provide them with the food they needed, and they must have bent their heads and given thanks to God.

There is an old Sumerian story, of which the earliest copies now in existence were written about eighteen hundred years before Christ. It may reflect this change in the fortunes of the human

community when they came into the Plain of Shinar, and, too, the beginning of the rivalry between the sons of Shem and the sons of Ham which probably lies behind the Tower of Babel story. The *"Epic of Emesh and Enten"* tells of the enmity of two brothers and its consequences, for which reason it is sometimes claimed by adherents of the "mythical" school that it was the original from which the Genesis account of Cain and Abel was derived. In fact this cannot be, for every element in the legend is as unlike the story of Cain and Abel as could be. It tells of a time when Enlil, the god of earth and heaven, found it necessary to produce fruit trees and grain to establish abundance in the land to meet the needs of his human creatures.

This at once looks like the time at present being considered, when the rapidly increasing human race moved into the Plain of Shinar to find living space and food. To this end Enlil appointed two men, Emesh and Enten, and assigned to them their duties. Emesh was to set up farmsteads, stables and sheepfolds, multiply the produce of the farms, cover the earth with cornfields and orchards and bring the harvests into the granaries and storehouses. Enten was to go out into the plain and gather in the wild goats, sheep, asses and so on. He was to make use of their fat and milk and their young as they were born, collect the fruit from the wild date-palms and vines and wild grain, and generally "live off the land". In all of this it is not difficult to see the distinction between the settled farming and industrial way of life which was characteristic of the descendants of Ham, the Sumerians, and the nomadic, wandering from place to place; a way of life that was the hallmark of the sons of Shem, the Semites. In the story the two brothers quarrelled and brought their pleas to Enlil in his holy city of Nippur. Enlil pronounced in favour of Enten and commanded that his decree be observed. Emesh accepted the verdict, was reconciled to his brother and thereafter they lived and worked happily together.

Emesh may have been a dimly remembered recollection of Ham and his descendants, who colonised the plain and remained there. Similarly Enten of Shem, who according to history very largely left the plain and migrated to the north, and after the lapse of centuries returned in force to mingle with the native Hamites and form one nation. If this is so we have here what might well be a dim recollection of the separation which occurred at Babel. Centuries later many of the Semites came back and fused with the Hamites who were still there, so that there were two peoples living side by side. In later times the Semites were known as the Akkadians and the joint country as the land of Sumer and Akkad. The Semitic element was the most spiritually minded and had the higher conception of God. In the story Enlil favoured Enten, the nomad. In the Bible (Gen. 9) God pronounced His blessing upon Shem, the nomad. And that is how it came about that, a thousand years after Babel, Abraham the Semite and his forebears were found living in the Sumerian city of Ur of the Chaldees.

Before this and perhaps three centuries* after the Flood and three thousand years* before Christ, there had occurred the first great crisis in the affairs of the new world. This was the separation that sent the sons of men wandering in all directions to repopulate the earth, the crisis that is recorded in Gen. 11 as the building of the Tower of Babel.

5. The Tower of Babel

"Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (Gen. 11:1-2 RSV).

This is the point at which the history of the "world that now is" really begins. In three centuries the population had grown to something like a quarter of a million people. What had started as a group of families closely knit by the bonds of common relationship was taking on the aspect of a company of tribes rapidly developing divergent interests. For the moment, though, there was no disunity. They had found this fertile plain, so much better adapted to their needs than the mountain terraces upon which they had been born and lived for anything up to three centuries and now by common consent they were on the move to a new home.

They were all “*of one language and one speech*” says the narrative. That means they shared one common vocabulary of words and one pronunciation, almost certainly the language spoken by Noah and his sons when they entered the Ark. The human community was united; there was as yet little or no tendency to separate such as became inevitable later on when numbers increased. There was still no death; no one had died since the Flood. Likewise loyalty to the Lord was universal; there is evidence that it was to be quite a few centuries before men began to worship false gods and the dark shadow of godlessness fell across the race of mankind. It is probable that these people enjoyed what amounted to almost Eden-like conditions with less evidence of the power and practice of sin than had ever been known since the beginning. The sun shone warmly down, the summer was almost perpetual, the land brought forth its increase and death seemed something that belonged only to the old world that had passed away. The first two or three centuries after the Flood must have resembled in many respects the terrestrial conditions of the still future Millennial Age to be established when our Lord takes His great power and commences His promised reign over the nations.

There are legends of old that appear to relate to this period. A thousand years later Sumerian scribes began to write histories of the early days of their nation. In one epic they spoke of a ‘Golden Age’ in which all peoples dwelt happily together in a land where there were no wild animals, the ground brought forth abundantly, there was no war or strife, and the whole world gave praise to God. Then came war and the harmony was shattered. In the “Pyramid Texts”, a collection of records found in pyramids of the 5th and 6th Egyptian dynasties, dating to several centuries before the birth of Abraham, it is stated that at the first there was no death. One early Pharaoh was assured by his god that he had been born before death began to come upon men. The Persians had a similar legend about their early days. “In the reign of Yima the valiant, there was neither heat nor cold, neither old age or death, nor disease.” It could well be that this recollection of those first three centuries of harmonious living together remained in the folklore of the nations after the separation. Their dispersal over the world ended that and when, a little later on, death began to make its appearance among the oldest of them it was almost like the end of an era.

So they “*journeyed from the east*”. The word is expressive. ‘Journeyed’ in this text means to pull up and move away, as the pulling up of tent-pegs when an encampment is being moved. Gesenius defines it as a verb of departure, a nomadic term for “breaking camp” and moving on. That was the position here, the abandonment of their mountain home for this much more desirable territory in the plain. It was probably over a term of years that the transfer took place, one village after another thrusting westward with their goods and chattels to take possession of unclaimed farmland in this rich alluvial well-watered plain where life could be easier and more pleasant.

The AV margin suggests a variant rendering “*journeyed eastward*”, which has a precisely opposite meaning, that they came from the west. Geographically, that would be impossible; to the west lay what is now Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea, in the opposite direction altogether from the land of Ararat, which comprehended the Iranian mountains from which the settlers must perforce have come. Virtually every modern translation with the exception of Margolis and Leeser, maintain the accuracy of “from the east” and in fact the modern Hebrew Received Text has this; *mini-gedem* where “*min*” is the preposition ‘from’ or ‘out of’. ‘Eastward’ or ‘towards the east’ would have been *el-gedem*, ‘towards’, ‘to’ or ‘for’.

Modern research has confirmed this statement of Gen. 11:2. It is very generally agreed now by archaeologists that the earliest inhabitants of the Euphrates plains came from the east, from a source somewhere in the mountains of Iran. Frankfort in “*Birth of Civilisation in the Near East*” puts the source as the district marked by Tepe Khazineh near Susa, which is within a hundred miles of Anaran, where the Ark landed. Kramer in “*Sumerian Mythology*” speaks to the same effect; so does Seton Lloyd in “*Foundations in the Dust*”, and many other leading authorities. Genesis said it originally, nearly five thousand years ago.

So they settled and established themselves, creating villages surrounded by farmlands, growing their crops and keeping their flocks and herds, fishing in the shallow waters of the Gulf and its

surrounding marshes. Their numbers continued to increase, but not so rapidly as hitherto. There were several reasons for this. The basic one was that the climate was changing. The pleasantly warm and genial conditions of those first three centuries changed suddenly, and for the worse. Brooks has shown that at this time, about 3000 BC, there commenced a sudden period of abnormal volcanic activity all over the world which continued on and off for the next four hundred years. The effect was a steady climate deterioration to cold and wet conditions which of necessity had its repercussions on the emergent human race. The Paradise land they thought they had found began to change, as the years went by, to a land of floods and storms and incessant rain, and life became more difficult. It is significant that the three patriarchs living during this period whose life spans are recorded, Cainan, Sala and Heber, show a sudden reduction of length of life to 400 to 460 years as contrasted with their predecessors' 530 to 600 (See the Septuagint). Successive periods of further climatic degeneration in later centuries are matched by similar corresponding reductions in the span of life, and it is impossible not to see a connection between climate and life-span during those early years. Hence the period of fatherhood was proportionately shortened and the adverse climate must have played its part in hindering the rate of population increase.

There was still no death. Noah himself died about this time, three and a half centuries after the Flood, but his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, must have joined in the trek to Shinar, still hale and hearty. There was no war or violence, there may not have been any disease and it might well be that the only deaths were those due to accidents. Taking all these circumstances into consideration, it is possible that the estimated quarter of a million who had made the journey could have grown to seven millions in the next hundred years. In the emergence of this very considerable body of people spreading over the land and developing varied tastes and interests there reposed the seeds which blossomed into the situation described in the story of the Tower of Babel.

"Come, they said 'let us build a city and a tower whose top shall reach into the heavens, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth.'" The motive has not always been properly understood. At a much later date a copyist added his comment which forms vs.9, *"therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound all the languages of the earth"*. The word translated "confound" is the Hebrew *balbal*, which means mingling or confusion. It is really a pun upon the word Babel and not a very good pun at that. It could not have been written at the time of the original story for there was no Hebrew language then nor yet for many centuries thereafter. But this set the stage for the later Jewish tradition, carried over into Christianity, that the Tower was built as an act of defiance against God. Josephus, improving upon the tradition, asserts that its builder was the Nimrod of Gen. 10, and this name was identified with the Hebrew *ni-marad*, a form of the verb '*marad*', 'to rebel', having the meaning "he was rebellious". On this somewhat flimsy foundation Nimrod was credited with being a rebel against God and leading the project of the Tower. There is nothing in the Genesis narrative to associate Nimrod with the building of the Tower although there is plenty in Sumerian legend. That will be considered later on. The likelihood is that the motive for building the Tower was a good and praiseworthy one, but it went wrong.

Nevertheless the project was contrary to the will of God. That is evident from the sequel; the Lord came down and frustrated it. The situation is not difficult to visualise. The Lord had instructed the three sons of Noah to be fruitful, and multiply, and bring forth abundantly in the earth. The fulfilment of that injunction implied a scattering over the face of the earth, to explore and discover its resources and use them for the common good. This idea of concentrating the whole human community in one given area, however praiseworthy it might have appeared to the originators, militated against the proper development of mankind. There are no minerals in the plain of Shinar, no metals and no useful stone or rocks, no forests, no soil of the kind that would grow many of the products men would need in future days, cotton, rubber, rice, maize, fruit trees, timber bearing trees and much besides. The Sumerians lived on a staple diet of barley, pulse and dates, and little else. For men to exploit and put to good use the possibilities of this new post-Flood world they must scatter over the earth, and this they were refusing to do. So God came down to inspect the work they had undertaken.

Fifty miles south of the present city of Baghdad, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, there is a level stretch of country that those settlers in that day found ideal for their purpose. Here they would build their Tower, and around it would rise a great city, the first city of this new earth. In that city they would concentrate all their activities and all their learning, and no matter how far away other men might ultimately penetrate, here would be the centre, and, perhaps, rulership. Here they would make themselves a name that should endure forever. Nevertheless it is not to be inferred that their motives were altogether to be condemned. As is so often the case with the works of man, motives are mixed, and the evidence in this case is that the building of the Tower of Babel was in considerable degree incited by a desire to retain and perpetuate the worship of God.

This fact is established by the names given by the builders to the Tower, the city, and the land in which they dwelt. It must be remembered that there was as yet no idolatry among mankind, no worship of false gods. That came later. At this time the God of Noah was still the One venerated. The people still counted themselves as faithful to Him. It has to be realised that Shem, Ham and Japheth, were still alive and their influence must have counted for much. These people would have known the story of the Flood and of the mountain where the Ark came to rest. Some of them might well have made the hundred miles journey from the mountainous area where they had been born to see the place for themselves and view the remains of the Ark in which their fathers had been saved – there is nothing unlikely in that. That mountain became sacred to them and their descendants into future distant ages. It was never forgotten; it became a central feature in their myths and legends. And all the evidence is that the Tower of Babel had a direct connection with that mountain.

A distinguishing feature of all Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian cities, from their beginnings to their final end, was the “ziggurat”. This was the original Sumerian name and this is the name by which these structures or their remains are known today. The ziggurat was a pyramid built in stages, or steps, each stage smaller than the one below so that a concourse ran round the building at each stage. Stairways ascending the sides of each stage gave ultimate access to the level platform at the top, where was always erected a temple facing towards the east. The entire structure was solid, built of brick, usually sun-dried brick in the interior and furnace-baked brick on the outside. The ziggurat was the focus of religious ceremonies and worship, in latter days of the idol gods of the land. It also provided a useful means of astronomical observations; but its primary purpose was religious.

The Tower of Babel was a ziggurat. Its remains are still there today and it is known to have been, in its heyday, one of the greatest and most magnificent of such buildings. According to Strabo, the Greek geographer of our Lord’s day, it was six hundred feet high and its base platform was six hundred feet square. That is not to say it was that size when first built. Strabo and Herodotus both described it as it stood in the days of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar; it was common practice though for later kings to enlarge the ziggurats they inherited from earlier generations and archaeologists have found evidence of this in cities other than Babylon. Seton Lloyd in *“Foundations in the Dust”* (1955) says that the ziggurat of Babylon was about 250 feet high originally.

Now the word “ziggurat” in the Sumerian language means “mountain peak”. The ziggurat in each city was built as an artificial mountain peak to remind the people of the Mountain of the Ark from which their ancestors had come. In later times, knowledge of the location of that mountain was forgotten and lost, only that in a general sort of way it was “in the east”, for which reason they called it “the Mount of the East”. So, in the main, they built their ziggurats, with the front side facing northeast because that was the direction from which their ancestors had come when “journeying from the east.” But two noteworthy ziggurats are exceptions. One is at Babylon. The other was built not so very long afterwards by the Sumerians, after the dispersal, at their new holy city of Nippur, sixty miles south of Babylon. Both of these face directly to Anaran, the mountain of the Ark, so that a bearing taken from each intersects on the mountain itself. In no more convincing manner could these early settlers have demonstrated their regard for the salvation that came to their fathers at the hand of God on that mountain.

They called their Tower *E-temen-anki* which means “the house (or temple) of the foundation of heaven and earth”. By that they seem to have referred to what was to them, a very real “new heavens and a new earth” founded or laid down by the Lord after the Flood had swept away the old heavens and earth. “*The world that then was*”, says Peter in 2 Pet. 3:6 “*being overflowed with water, perished. The world that now is, is reserved to judgment; and we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*”. They perhaps thought that the new heavens and earth was here already, not realising that sin was shortly to enter their society again and create what Peter again calls “this present evil world”.

The city they called by a name which meant “the Gate of God”. It is noteworthy that the word is in the singular, not the plural, so supporting the evidence that as yet there was only one God known. In later times, when languages had differentiated, the sons of Shem, the Semites, from whom Abraham and Israel came, knew it as Bab-il, and the sons of Ham, the Sumerians, as Ka-dingir-ra, but both names mean the same, the Gate of God. At a symposium at Baghdad in 1979 organised by the Iraq government Department of Antiquities, dealing in part with the history of Babylon, it was stated that the original name was Bab-ila, given by a people before there was any distinction between Semites and Sumerians, whom the speaker named “proto-Euphrateans”. This definition exactly fits these people who commenced to build the Tower before the races separated.

Another name given to the city in association with Bab-il was Tin-tir-kj which means “the place of the forest (or trees) of life”. Does this mean that those settlers believed that in this new world of theirs the way to the Tree of Life (in Genesis it is composite, grove, or group of trees of life) barred from man since the expulsion from Eden, was to be opened again to them? Is this an indication of their failure to realise that sin had not yet been finally overcome. Were they like Israel at Sinai twenty-six centuries later who thought they could keep the perfect law of God not realising that no man can do that without a Redeemer? If so, it becomes easier to see why the Lord had to put a stop to this project without delay.

They called the name of the country Shumer, the Semitic equivalent being Shumeru, from which we have the modern English Sumer for the land and Sumerians for the people. Langdon in his “*Sumerian Grammar*” says the meaning is “*Place of the faithful lord*”. There is a note of reverence in this name; they apparently dedicated this new land of theirs to God and named it after him.

At a point of time which was probably about two centuries after the episode of the Tower two successive rulers of the country bore archaic names which Jacobsen in “*The Sumerian King Lists*” (1966) has interpreted as bearing the meanings “*reign of righteousness*” and “*God listens with gladness*”. Here again, it seems there is a note of reverence for one God. Even then, five hundred years after the Flood, the shadow of idolatry had not yet fallen upon the human race.

But the Lord had to act. The presumption of men, however well-meaning, had to be halted and the Divine injunction to fill the earth obeyed. “*The people is one,*” He said “*they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon the face of the earth; and they left off to build the city*” (vss.6-8).

It need not be thought that there was some kind of instantaneous bestowal of various languages. What is more likely is that differences of ideas, of wishes, of policies, of methods of working, arose among this great concourse of people which first hindered and frustrated the work and then brought it to a halt. It would be strange were it otherwise. There were by now far too many people to ensure unanimity. The obvious and natural result was that the grandiloquent scheme, was abandoned and the various communities began to drift away and re-establish themselves in new surroundings with those of like mind. That separation in itself sparked off the development of variant languages, a process that has continued as men spread over the world.

Later on, the project was resumed by those who remained in the land. The Tower was built, and stood for more than two thousand years. The city was built, and became one of the greatest and most magnificent cities the world has ever known. But they are all gone now and the site is rubble and broken bricks, desolate and barren. It started out to point the way to the true God of creation, but it quickly became the haven of false gods and the Lord abandoned it to its fate. And the sons of men spread outwards to populate the waiting earth.



6. The Dispersal of the People

The tenth chapter of Genesis is called the 'table of Nations'. It is the famous chapter in which the names of the immediate descendants of Noah to the second and in some cases the fourth and even seventh generation are recorded. There is an intimation that these became the names of the nations that sprang from them and the territories in which they lived. It has been argued that the reverse is really the case, that the names of existing nations and peoples have been applied to mythical ancestors and so written up in Genesis. This is a hypothesis having no logical foundation and is advanced in order to dispute the historical accuracy of the account. The rational explanation of the name of a people is that it was derived from the founder of that people just as the surname of a family is derived from the ancestor of that family in the male line. In fact many of the names in Genesis 10, crop up regularly in the later historical books of the Bible and in secular history as those of nations occupying the lands Genesis says they did. Some of the place names have endured into much later historical periods, even modern times.

The outward expansion of peoples from the originating centre at Shinar at the time of the episode of Babel, recorded in Gen. 11, was likely to have commenced round about 3000 BC. This follows from a comparison of the declared ages of the patriarchs succeeding Noah with what is known of earliest history and pre-history in the land of the Old Testament. Within the ensuing two centuries most of the so-called 'Bible lands' were occupied and being populated by their respective peoples. The principal basis for this conclusion is the probable time of the beginning of Egyptian and Sumerian civilisations. The time of the dispersal must have 'sparked off' the emergence of those civilisations. In

those two centuries the population could have grown to something like sixty millions, spreading over the present lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, an area of about three million square miles of which the population at the present time is about 80 millions.

The location of the various nations hearing these tribal names, the names of their first ancestors, is in most cases fairly attested by reference not only in the Bible but in the writings of ancient historians and also in the inscriptions and records left by those ancient nations themselves. The patriarchs must have had other sons, whose names are not recorded. Those that are known became the tribal names. One nation often dispossessed another of their territory or settled down beside them and eventually amalgamated, so that it is not possible to be too precise. Accepted history, however, leaves the general framework of the dispersal in little doubt.

The sons of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-8) appear to have left the plain of Shinar completely. They rarely appear in later Bible history. They migrated north and then west and east, moving up the valleys of the rivers Tigris and Diyala into the mountainous regions and beyond. Extensive remains in northern Iraq dated by archaeologists to what is called the Halafian period, from Tel Halaf where the first such remains were found by Baron von Oppenheim in 1914 and later by Mallowan in 1933 are perhaps due to their passage. Eventually they penetrated into what is now modern Turkey, whence they later advanced westward into Europe, and eastward into Siberia. Many centuries later in the days of Ezekiel some of their offspring, the tribes of Meshech, Tubal and Gomer, all names of sons of Japheth stormed down from their Siberian homes to invade the lands of the Middle East. But in these first two centuries of the dispersal, Turkey and northern Iran was probably as far as they got. Bible maps of the 19th century show them penetrating into southern Russia. During the 20th century, it was established that at the time in question the great Russian seas, the Black Sea, the Caspian and the Aral, were connected by an extensive sheet of water stretching far into Central Siberia, so the old maps are incorrect. The sons of Japheth had only the alternatives of turning east or west. It is generally accepted that Javan and possibly Tiras, and their sons, colonised Europe, and the others, Asia. The writer of Genesis 10 denoted both these continents by the expression 'the coastlands of the Gentiles' (Gen. 10:5), territories he knew very little about.

The sons of Ham went south, then west and east, in the opposite direction to that of Japheth. The descendants of Ham's sons Mizraim settled in Egypt, which thereafter bore his name (Misr) and the Egyptian language bears it still. Here was speedily set up the second great civilisation of the ancient world. Before another two centuries had passed away they were building the Pyramids and the glory that was Egypt was beginning to flourish. It is important to realise that they were already a civilised people and the rule of the Pharaohs commenced almost at once.

Canaan, son of Ham, did not go so far. His people reached the Mediterranean coast where Israel is now, built Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon and possibly Jericho. Sidon still exists. In later times they were overwhelmed and absorbed by descendants of Shem and after the conquest under Joshua lost their identity as a nation, surviving only as scattered tribes subject to the Israelites and others thus fulfilling Noah's prediction in Gen. 9:26. The settlement of the Canaanite tribes is detailed in Gen. 10:15-19.

Phut is the son of Ham of whom the Old Testament writers know little or nothing. Gen. 10 records neither the names of his sons nor where he went. It is evident that he and his descendants lost all contact with their fellows after the dispersal. The Old Testament mentions the Phutites only twice afterwards, in connection with matters two thousand years later, from which it appears they were celebrated as mariners and soldiers. It is known that the Phutites in after years, became a virile race of commercial traders ranging over the whole of North Africa from the borders of Egypt to the Atlantic. As late as the beginning of the Christian era they are noted by Roman writers. Their empire at its greatest extent included the whole of the Sahara desert, which four thousand years ago was a well wooded and fertile country with abundant animal life, capable of supporting a large population. It seems that the people of Phut made their way from Babel to northeastern Africa and thenceforward broke off all contact with the homeland, spreading over westwards as the centuries passed until they

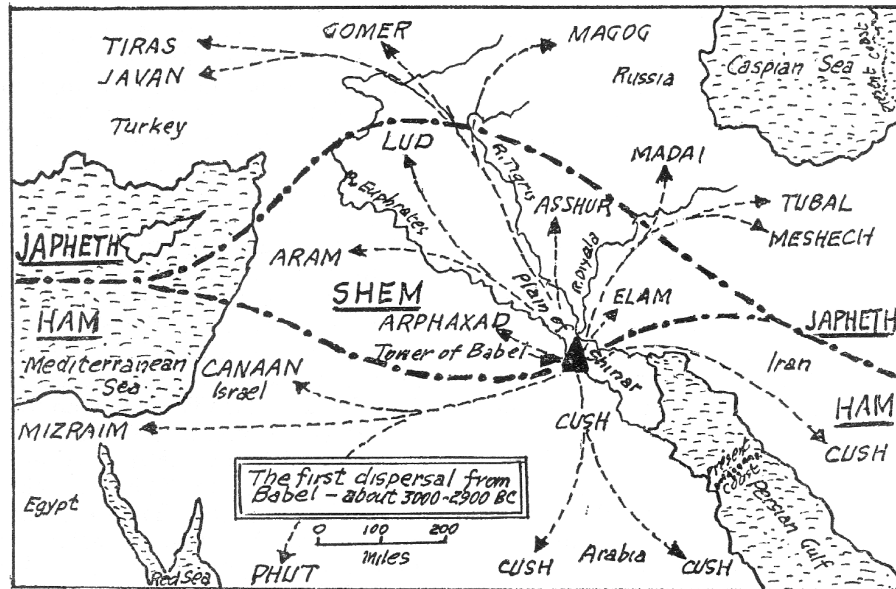
reached the Atlantic ocean. The Book of Jubilees (c. 150 BC) has a detailed account of the lands into which the grandsons of Noah migrated. A rather cryptic expression in Jub. 8.22 could be held to infer that the territory assigned to Ham's posterity extended across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea and by inference to the West Indian islands immediately beyond. 'Jubilees' was written about BC 150 and the Phoenicians were in continuous contact with the West Indies and South America as far back as 800 BC. It not unreasonable to suppose that the first mariners fulfilled this part of the mandate and crossed the Atlantic although it must have been many centuries after Babel. Another point of interest in 'Jubilees' is the assertion that Canaan was first allotted the far west of Africa on the Atlantic seaboard as his domicile, but refused to go so far west and settled instead in the land later known as Canaan, after his name.

The Hamites of greatest moment in Bible history are the sons of Cush. Cush, son of Ham, was the ancestor of the Sumerians who played so important a part in the early history of Israel. The descendants of Cush appear to have been by far the most prolific of the Hamites. Some went southwards into Arabia and colonised the whole Arabian continent, passing over the Red Sea in later centuries to establish a powerful empire in what is now the Sudan. (The 'Ethiopia' of the later Old Testament is the African Cush). From there they went on through the ages to colonise Equatorial and Southern Africa and most of the black races are their modern descendants. Another branch went down the other side of the Persian Gulf through modern Iran, by 2000 BC reaching northwestern India which maintained close commercial links with their brother Sumerians back in Iraq. That civilisation was wiped out by Japhetic invaders from Siberia a thousand years later and the remnant slowly spread across and populated in turn central India and Bengal, the far eastern countries and eventually Australia. (In 1961 some 400 rock carvings were discovered near Alice Springs so similar to Assyrio-Sumerian style that it was considered they must have been done by a people coming from the Middle East.)

But the flower of the Sumerian peoples remained in Sumer itself. Many of them did not leave Babel; they remained there and built what is universally considered the world's first and finest civilisation. It lasted a thousand years and in its development was set the pattern of future empires of mankind. Here the arts and sciences were born, reaching a level that in many directions has never been equalled. Their systems of measurement, of time, quantity, weights and measures, has formed the basis of all such systems in the world since then, until the modern introduction of the metric system. The degrees of the circle, the hours and minutes and seconds on our clocks, the days and months of our calendars, we owe to the Sumerian. The chariots gave us the width of our mediaeval farm cart tracks and therefore that of our present railway gauge. In almost countless ways the effect of Sumerian culture has survived five thousand years and remains with us today. Here, in this land, where the sons of Cush remained after the dispersion from Babel and multiplied and established their cities and their commerce, was the seedbed where the true faith of God lay dormant until many years later it found its most famous champion in the man God called his friend, Abram, the Semite, a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur. When Abram obeyed the Divine call to leave that shining civilisation and go out to a strange land that God would show him, Sumer had served its purpose. It gave way before its enemies and ere long the glory of Sumer was no more.

Abraham was a Semite, a descendant of Shem. The evidence is that most of the Semites left the land at the time of Babel. Many returned in later centuries so that by the time of Daniel, for example, the Semites were in the ascendancy. But here at this time they seem to have turned their backs on the land of Shinar and made their way, in the main, north-westward along the course of the Euphrates to find new homes. They did not go so far as the peoples of Japheth and Ham. Elam went eastward into the Iranian mountains and became a powerful nation inter-marrying with the Sumerians and becoming indistinguishable from them. Ashur went northward and survived into later times as the Assyrians. Aram finished up in modern Syria and southern Turkey and perpetuated his name to the present day in the racial division known as Arameans. No satisfactory identification of Lud seems to have been made. It has been suggested that the much later kingdom of Lydia in Asiatic Greece

stemmed from him but there is not much foundation for that although in all probability it is somewhere in what we now call Turkey this people did settle. The remaining tribe that of Arphaxad, is of the greatest interest since it is from this that Abraham, and ultimately Israel, were derived. The known territories of Semitic peoples in later time seems to justify the conclusion that the people of Arphaxad settled on the middle Euphrates a few miles to the north of Babel, to give birth several centuries later to the influential empire of Mari.



So within say two centuries from the first entry to the land of Shinar and the incident of the Tower of Babel, men had reached and populated a wide area reaching from Egypt to Iran west to east, and Turkey to Arabia north and south. These are the lands with which the Old Testament is mainly concerned, and in fact the further distribution of humanity after this time is barely noticed. It was, of course, to be a long time before the farthestmost recesses of the earth were reached; a coherent picture of the process is almost impossible of attainment, for the migration communities crossed and re-crossed each other's paths and settled in each other's territories so that there was continual intermarrying and cross-breeding with consequent emergence of new and differing racial types. Various types of climate and food played their part in this and all these factors worked together so fulfilling the Divine purpose to produce the varied types of people with which we are familiar today.

It may seem difficult to accept the fact that the many widely divergent types of men, in colour of skin and hair, tall and short, some suited to extremes of heat and cold, should be derived from three sons of one father so recently as five thousand years ago. There are several main races of mankind but there has been a bewildering number of permutations from a vast number of intermingling peoples of those races during the five thousand years. This might be expected but the rapid change in racial skin colour took place in less than a thousand years as attested by tomb paintings of the 7th Egyptian dynasty about 2100 BC. It is commonly held that the characteristic colours of different races are primarily due to the effect of food, climate and prolonged exposure over many generations to tropical, temperate and polar conditions. H. G. Wells in *'Outline of History'* (1930) cites anthropological thought of his time that the human race in its early days was more 'plastic' in its reaction to external conditions, so that it responded much more quickly to factors inducing physical changes than would be the case in later times. The same authorities contended that the original colour of the race tended to be dark rather than light. With respect to Noah's three sons, there were also three wives whose different characteristics may have affected the divergence of appearance of the races.

The foregoing cuts right across accepted theories of the origin of man and the time he has inhabited the earth. There have been many theories such as *'The Testimony of the Rocks'* by Miller concerning the degeneracy of the human race. What is known of the human race does not conflict

with the Genesis record, that in the 3rd Millennium BC it was wiped out and recommenced by three couples, and from them all now living are descended. Amid the changing theories and pieces of 'evidence' the Bible record remains consistent and unchanging.

The Genesis account indicates that about four centuries after the Flood, there was a concerted migration of peoples from the central homeland between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. These populated the Middle East that afterwards became famous as the lands of the Bible, those with which the history of Israel became bound up and subsequently with Christianity. That migration gave an impetus to the emerging nations that accelerated their development and then we pass to the sphere of recognisable history. We then can relate the continuing story of Genesis to the records and inscriptions that the archaeologists of the past two centuries have recovered in such profusion from the dust of long vanished cities of the ancients.

7. The Beginning of Empires

Between the dispersal of the tribes at Babel and the beginnings of recognisable history there lie two or three centuries of which Genesis tells us nothing, and archaeology only a score of semi-mythical legends behind which lurks some basis of fact. Genesis 10 shows the peoples, sons of Shem and Ham and Japheth, making their way from the common centre at Babel into the surrounding lands and creating their village-settlements wherever each party came to a stop and forming the nucleus of future nations. Two centuries later, these villages had grown into cities; not cities in the modern sense of the term but at least built-up towns of anything up to twenty thousand inhabitants living an orderly and civilised communal life. This is where ancient secular history begins to take definite shape and it is at this point that the first written records begin to appear and yield some definite information as to what life was like in those far-off days. Set against the Old Testament background this period is probably that of the early lifetime of the patriarch Eber, fifth in descent from Noah (Gen. 11:14 Sept.) about the time of the death of Shem, Noah's eldest son. Shem must certainly have witnessed the developments that led to the first abortive attempt to build the Tower of Babel, and the separation of the peoples as they began to migrate in various directions to distant lands. He would perceive in this the hand of the Lord moving to the fulfilment of the injunction laid upon them when they came out of the Ark *"be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ... and bring forth abundantly therein"* (Gen. 9:1, 7).

Although from this point of time the affairs and histories of each emerging nation began to run in separate tracks, the background of Genesis and the story of the patriarchal line from Noah to Christ remains in the land of Babel, the Plain of Shinar, until the days of Abraham. That was a thousand years in the future. It may come as a surprise to realise that this is the period of time that separates Gen. 11:1 from Gen. 12:1. Throughout all this time the only records of events are those preserved in very imperfect form, in the inscriptions which have been recovered by painstaking investigators from the sands of Iraq. But the only lucid and reliable history of man from the very beginning up to the time of the Flood is that which was preserved through those years by the forebears of Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees. The sacred records must have come with him giving the dated line of his ancestors back to the first man and this gives us the earliest chapters of the Bible we know. If the confused and mutually contradictory accounts of the period between the Flood and Abraham which are all that the Sumerian and Babylonian tablets give us can be taken by experts as a guide to the events of those days, then certainly the much more precise and definite account in the Bible should be accepted as authoritative.

But before tracing out the history and developments of those days in the land of Babel with which the descendants of Noah were to be so intimately involved, a glance at the progress and welfare of at least two of the peoples who migrated over the earth is necessary. The nation that made the most rapid advance at this time was Egypt, the children of Mizraim or Misr, son of Ham. They may well have been the largest body of migrants to separate at Babel and seek for themselves a home in the far

west. So they set out. Climbing steadily, from the pleasant valley in which stood the half-built Tower, ascending the three thousand feet slopes to the highlands of the present Syrian desert, they faced a long and arduous journey. Egypt is nearly a thousand miles from Babylon, and it may be conjectured that the migrants were unlikely to have got so far in so short a time. The answer probably lies in the nature of the intervening terrain. Between Babylon and Egypt lies the great Syrian desert, an elevated rocky plateau having no rivers and on which nothing grows. Braidwood and Howe, in *“Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan”*, have stated that in ancient times this whole area was covered with luxuriant oak forests, but even so it was no place for permanent settlement. The scouts must have been out in front and eventually reported the discovery of a fertile arable land with a mighty river, (the Nile), adequate for all their needs for generations to come. Unlike the sons of Shem and of Cush, they left no settlements in their passage, but attained and colonised the land of Egypt as one body. To this day that Syrian desert contains no relics of ancient cities and habitations as do the countries round about.

Here, in this fertile territory, watered by the Nile, they found a home every bit as desirable as the one they had left. Here they rapidly built up the second great civilisation of the ancient world, that of Egypt. They entered Egypt, a neolithic (stone-using) people, having nothing in the way of metals or tools; within a few centuries they were building the Pyramids. Casson, in *“Ancient Egypt”* (1969) says *“Within a century after the first Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom had ascended his throne, Egyptian builders had graduated from sun-dried bricks to highly sophisticated construction in stone within two hundred years or so Egypt’s builders had so mastered the new material that they had finished the Pyramids at Gizeh”*. This means that technical progress was, extremely rapid, much more so than the scholars and experts of today care to admit.

The usual view of Egyptian history, shared by most scholars, considers that human settlement commenced at an extremely distant date and that men evolved only slowly from a state of primitive savagery to the highly civilised position which is revealed by the extant remains. Thus the periods of development before the first Pharaoh, which are known as the Tasian and Badarian eras, (from the names of villages where remains were first found) is pictured as being immeasurably long. If in fact, as indicated in Genesis, the first Egyptians were already civilised when they entered Egypt, this hypothesis is unnecessary. From the entry into Egypt to the first Pharaohs need only have been a matter of two or three generations, say a century, and this would bring the early history of Egypt into line with that of Sumer. After all, if one compares the fantastic progress of human achievement during the last hundred years, in science, invention, technology and exploration, there is nothing unreasonable in thinking that the first civilisations; Egypt and Sumer, should have developed in something like two or three centuries.

One factor which led to exaggerated ideas of the antiquity of Egyptian history was the 19th century scholars’ habit of taking the records of kings’ reigns and dynasties as strictly consecutive, and stringing them all in succession, failing to recognise that ancient men, like modern ones, are only human and apt to exaggerate their terms of years to increase their own importance. It has been realised in the 20th century that many of these dynasties overlapped so that sometimes two or more kings reigned simultaneously in different places. Hence the scale of Egyptian history has been considerably reduced in more recent years. Just to illustrate this point, here is a list of some dates formerly believed to have marked the accession of Menes, the first Egyptian Pharaoh. In 1867 Breckh gave it as 5702 BC. In 1903 Petrie gave it as 4520. In 1919 Breasted gave it as 3400. In 1942 Albright gave it 2900 and in 1967 a Biblical archaeologist established it at 2850 BC. The latest dates arrived at by the experts line up very well with the chronology of Genesis as given in the Septuagint. They support the view that the story of the Tower of Babel recounted in Gen. 11 should be placed at about 3000 BC and the accession of Menes about 2800 BC.

They arrived in Egypt a civilised, knowledgeable and God-fearing people but they arrived with nothing beyond a few flocks and herds and seed for their hoped-for crops. This latter is known because wheat grain found in ancient tombs of this period has been analysed and found to be of a type which is native only in Euphrates territory. But with their boundless energy it could well have been

no more than a century before their first primitive culture had developed into one in which towns were being built with permanent houses and temples. Egypt's first Pharaoh, Menes, was on the throne at a little settlement that later on became the famous Memphis, capital city of Egypt in after times. Within another century they had devised a calendar and begun to devise the famous hieroglyphic writing, and had even produced a treatise on surgery. A further hundred years and they were mining copper and precious stones in Sinai, near the mountain afterwards made famous as the place of the Mosaic Law, getting gold from Sinai and East Africa, and cultivating the native river-reeds to produce papyrus for writing material – the plant name from which we have our modern word “paper”. Not long after that, about 2600 BC * they were building the Pyramids.

The early Egyptians were deeply religious and at this time had not developed the pantheon of gods for which Egypt afterwards became notorious. They brought with them from Babel the original worship of the God of heaven. Some of the sacred texts, recovered from tombs of a not much-later time, testify to this. They speak of the Most High as *“the only true living God, self-originated, who exists from the beginning, who has made all things, but himself was not made”*. *He is “the God who has existed from old time; there is no God without Him. He is not visible, nor carved in marble. There is no shrine with painted figures of Him; there is no building that can contain Him. He does not manifest His form”*. There is nothing in this from which any Christian or Jew would dissent; here, clearly, is a written expression of the faith which the sons of Noah must have brought with them from the antediluvian world and planted in this new world they were building. At this point the Egyptians pass out of Bible history, not again to be noticed until a thousand years later when Abraham, followed by Jacob and Joseph, came to sojourn in that land. After that the destinies of Israel and Egypt were intertwined but by then the Egyptians had a thousand gods to worship and temples in the land innumerable.

The other party to depart from Babel whose going was to have significant consequences for Israel in later days was that of Asshur, grandson of Shem, and the ancestor of the Assyrians (“Assyria” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Asshur”; the nation was named after its founder). The origin of the Assyrian is accorded a brief notice in Gen. 10 when Asshur is said to have left Babel and built Nineveh and other cities. Gen. 10:11-12 says *“Out of that land”* (i.e. Babel) *“went forth Asshur, and built Nineveh and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; the same is a great city”*. One immediately has visions of a mighty concourse of people armed with all the necessary implements and materials to set about the building of those magnificent cities for which Assyria afterwards became famous, but in fact there was nothing of the kind. Many generations had to pass before the sons of Asshur got around to building permanent cities: at the start they were nothing more than herdsmen living in tents. In the advance of technical progress the Assyrians lagged well behind the Sumerians and Egyptians and it was getting on for a thousand years before they had any real cities. At this time it was more like a migration of perhaps twenty or thirty thousand people under the leadership of their patriarch Asshur making their way three hundred miles northward along the course of the river Tigris until they came upon the rolling grass lands and low foothills of Northern Mesopotamia and here they called a halt and began to erect their tents and a little later on mud-brick houses in little villages around which stretched their farmsteads and pastures. All over this land that eventually became the Assyria of the Old Testament there are the remains of literally hundreds of these settlements bearing evidences of habitation at this early date. They were much more primitive than their neighbours the Sumerians in the south and the land they occupied was not so congenial. The summer there is not so long and the winters are often bitterly cold. But there they settled and there, in the course of time, they built their cities and at last Nineveh was their capital and for a time the world's most magnificent city. They increased in military might and became the scourge of the nations.

But when Asshur led his people into that grassy plain all these glories were in the distant future. It is known that Nineveh was founded at this early date. One of the greatest of 20th century archaeologists, Sir Max Mallowan, conducted extensive researches on the site of the ancient city and

probed its past right back to the time when it was no more than a village settlement of mud huts. That could well have been when Asshur entered the land. Calah, the Assyrian name of which was Kal-hu, is about twenty miles from Nineveh, and was in Ashur's time doubtless a similar village. Resen is still unknown and undiscovered; it may never have attained city status or it may have survived, into history under another name. Various suggestions emanating from early medieval writers hazard the idea that it is represented today by a 'village near' Nineveh called Rash-al-am, meaning 'the fountainhead' but since this Arabic name is fairly common over all Mesopotamia there is not much reliance to be placed on that. Resen is defined in this verse "a great city"; more properly it should be rendered "a strong city", as though it was some kind of fortress offering protection. A modern suggestion is that it may have been the notable city a few miles to the south of Calah called Asshur, which itself was the capital before Nineveh. This was in later times a fortress city guarding the Assyrian dominions from the incursions of invaders from the south. No one really knows for the name Resen has not survived.

The general picture then is that of a group of villages comprising Nineveh in the centre, Rehoboth-ir, *"the suburbs of the city"*, the open spaces around and Calah a little way off. Surrounding these main centres were the smaller settlements and farmlands that ultimately grew into the sovereign State of Assyria. There has been preserved lists of the kings who ruled from the first but it is known that the early so-called "kings" were in actual fact petty tribal sheikhs living in tents; the days of palaces and royal thrones came much later.

The AV margin has an alternative reading; *"out of that land he went forth into Assyria"* implying that it was the hero of Gen. 10, Nimrod, who built the northern cities as well as his own, not Asshur the Semite. It is not likely that this is correct; it is based on the existence of a personal pronoun in the phrase, so that the expression runs *"from this land he went Asshur"* but there is no preposition of motion governing Asshur and the pronoun could equally well be masculine or neither so that the phrase could well be *"Out of that land one went forth Asshur"* and so refer to Asshur anyway. Nimrod as a Cushite is hardly likely to have gone north into Assyria which was a Semitic stronghold. The verse is much more likely to indicate that Nimrod went south and Asshur went north in this matter of city building and took the lead in setting up the separate Sumerian and Semitic communities.

The narrative was not written in Hebrew; it first saw the light at the very beginning of writing, in the early Sumerian pictographic script of which few examples are as yet discovered. What is known of the language, however, shows that the grammatical forms are very elementary; there were no pronouns or conjunctions and a literal representation of what is likely to have been the original account would run something like "from land went Asshur built Nineveh". All things considered, it seems that Gen. 10 is telling us that Asshur went north and Nimrod went south.

This latter name is that which has next to engage attention. Nimrod, the "mighty hunter before the Lord" who is credited in legend and folklore from that day to this in the doing of great deeds and the execution of mighty works. Who was this man, mentioned only by name in Genesis but remembered in the Arab world to this day?

8. Nimrod, Leader of Men

The most famous name in Middle Eastern folklore and legend, whether Jewish, Arab or Persian, is Nimrod. This legendary hero of five thousand years ago is the subject of countless stories, songs and even books, recounting his deeds of daring and his mighty achievements. The Arab world, through the repetition of the Hebrew form of his name in the Koran, knows him as well as do the Jews from the Old Testament. A notable Arab work of unknown age, the *"Kusset el Nimroud"* (Stories of Nimrod) was still, in the late 19th century, regular winter's evening reading and reciting by Middle East Arab villagers.

The Rabbis of pre-Christian Israel blamed him for the first great rebellion against God after the Flood. Christian writers of this Age, taking the cue from them, have fastened on him responsibility

for the system of paganism and idolatry which commenced in Babylon, later permeated the Aramaic, Greek and Roman worlds and subsists in another form in our own day. The fact that the historical figure upon whom all this has been blamed lived long before there was any paganism or any rebellion, simplifies the task of disentangling religious prejudice from sober enquiry and endeavouring to discover just what can be known of this man and his deeds.

The Old Testament is the basis of investigation. What the Sumerian and Babylonian legends have to say about Nimrod was written down round about 1800 BC and the Book of Genesis was in existence long before that. But the Genesis narrative is tantalizingly brief. After recounting the names of the sons of Ham, Gen. 10:8-10 says "*Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said 'Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord'. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar*".

That is all, but the passage, brief as it is, makes it possible to locate Nimrod approximately on the stream of time. The cities mentioned are well known to archaeologists; the Hebrew text in the phrase "the beginning of his kingdom", is more accurately rendered "*his kingdom was the beginning of Babel and Erech*" which means that he lived at the time these places first appeared as small villages at the very beginning of Sumerian settlement. This in turn must have been within a couple of centuries from the dispersion at Babel so that Nimrod must have lived at about that time.

This leads to consideration of his genealogy. Vs.8 says that Cush "begat" Nimrod, but he is not included among his sons and grandsons as in vs.7. The inference is that he was a lower descendant of a later generation. If he flourished soon after the time of the dispersion of Babel he could have been anything between the 3rd to 6th generation from Cush.

He is distinguished as having been "*a mighty hunter before the Lord*". This word "before" means "in the presence of", and infers a creditable rather than discreditable position. At this point in time, it must have been that Nimrod stood with his fellows in that what he did, he did as unto the Lord. "Hunter" is '*tsayid*', which indicates a man of the field, like Esau, who was adept at hunting game for food or dealing with wild animals. The same word is used for providers of food, which would stress the close connection that must have subsisted in those days between the hunt for food animals and the provision of food for the growing community. This Nimrod must have attained fame and approbation as a skilled and successful exponent of the art of the chase.

So one comes to his name. If this man really did live and Genesis 10 asserts that he did, can he be found in ancient history outside the Bible? Here one comes up against a real obstacle. The earliest writers of history or legend, so far discovered, did not live until something like eight centuries after the time indicated in Genesis as that of Nimrod's life. But the old-time legends they recorded do tell of a great hero of ancient time who in the interim had become a god. This god, the special patron god of the city of Babylon in later times, amongst other great exploits, was accredited with having built the Tower of Babel. Here, then, is a point of contact. The name of that Babylonian god, Marduk, when translated into Hebrew, is the Nimrod of Genesis.

Marduk, in the year 2000 BC, was the name of the Sun-god, son of the God of heaven, proclaimed as the "Word of God", by whom all things were made, the executor of the Divine work of creation, the protector and redeemer of mankind. (More can be said about this later when the translation from monotheism to polytheism, the worship of one God to that of many gods, comes to be discussed). The name "Marduk" was the Babylonian equivalent of the Sumerian "*Amar-utu*" which means "wild ox of the sun-god". The wild ox (Sumerian *am*, Hebrew *reem*, translated "unicorn" in the AV, and now extinct), was the most powerful and ferocious beast known in the ancient Middle East. As such, the name could well mean "Champion fighter for the sun-god". There was, however, no sun-god in the earlier days of Babel, and it is not surprising therefore to find that the earlier Sumerian name was "*Amaraduk*" which means "wild ox of God". Going back even earlier, to about 2500 BC,* a temple at Lagash has the name "*Nimaraduk*" which can be interpreted as "chief champion fighter for God". This name might well be set against the Genesis "*mighty hunter before the Lord*".

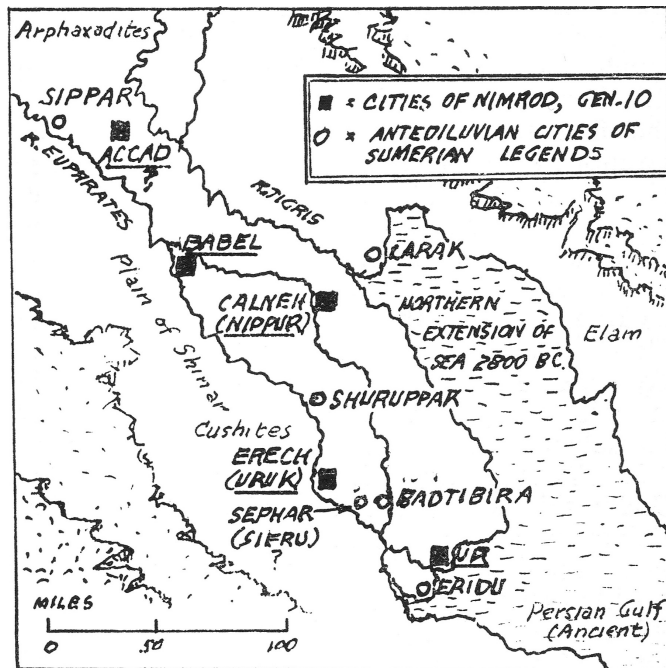
(There are grounds for thinking that it was about this time, 2500 BC,* that Genesis was first committed to writing in the Sumerian language).

It is this name Ni-marad-uk which was transliterated into the Hebrew language at the time of Moses in Egypt more than a thousand years later. Conscious perhaps of the later association with the sun god, the Divine suffix “uk” was dropped and the name left as Ni-marad. Centuries later the Rabbis could not resist the temptation to re-interpret the meaning of the name. Israel had contact with Babylon throughout history, culminating with the days of Daniel. Their knowledge of the alleged pagan exploits of the sun god Marduk – Nimrod, had left its mark. In Hebrew, “marad” is a verb meaning “to rebel” and when expressed grammatically in the 3rd person singular passive, is spelt ‘Nimarad’, meaning ‘he was rebellious’. This, of course, was too good to miss, and so Josephus in his history of Israel followed the Rabbis’ example with a full description of Nimrod’s rebellion at the time of the building of the Tower – all quite imaginary. Whether the historical Nimrod did or did not apostatise from his allegiance to God at some time in his later life may be a debatable point; there is nothing in the Genesis account to say one way or the other. It is quite feasible though, that the later Sumerian legends which assert that he was the leading spirit in the second, and successful, building of the Tower, after the dispersal of the peoples, rest on a basis of truth, and that this led by successive steps to the introduction of paganism several centuries later. The true position is that he was a leader among men who was deified after his death to the status of a god – no uncommon thing in those early stages of the world’s history.

The statement that *“his kingdom was the beginning of Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar”* indicates, first, that he was an acknowledged leader among men, and second, that he exercised his influence at the time the Sumerian cities began to come into existence. These and other cities commenced as hamlets and villages at a time very soon after the dispersal at Babel. Within two centuries of that event they were in process of becoming “city-states”, each exercising royal authority over an area of territory around them. In such case the second – and this time successful – attempt to build the Tower of Babel must have been little more than a century after the first. With this there began the rise of the Sumerian civilisation, which led to the universal worship of the one Most High God becoming superseded by an increasing array of “gods many and lords many”, thus creating the idolatry for which Babylon in after years became notorious.

The cities of Nimrod were to the south of Babylon. At the dispersal from Babel the sons of Cush went south. Calneh (Nippur) was the holy city of the Cushite Sumerians, sixty miles south-east of Babylon. Erech (Uruk) was fifty miles farther on. Accad (Agade) was, on the other hand, about sixty miles north of Babylon; it was so thoroughly destroyed by invaders from Iran seven centuries later that its site has never been satisfactorily determined, although the Iraq State Antiquities authorities stumbled upon what they believe is all that is left of the city. There is just the possibility though that where Gen. 10 says “Accad”, it is the city of Ur that is meant. Accad first appears in history several centuries later. It was a Semitic and not a Sumerian stronghold and being to the north and not the south of Babylon not so likely to have formed part of the domains of the Sumerian Nimrod. It so happens that the archaic native names for both these places in the Sumerian language is the same – *uri-ki*. If this name appeared in the early or original version of Gen. 10 later copyists or translators may well have been uncertain which city was intended and in the upshot have picked the wrong one. The point is of little importance but it is more likely to have been included in Nimrod’s sphere of influence than Accad, even if the latter did exist in his day.

If, then, Nimrod did extend his influence over the south and the first four settlements were those named, then Gen. 10 is in full accord with the known facts. Babel, Calneh (Nippur), Erech (Uruk) and Ur were all in existence as incipient centres of habitation within a century or so after the Dispersal, four settlements strung along the then course of the Euphrates over a distance of less than a hundred and fifty miles, all destined eventually to grow into powerful and influential city-states. This was the sphere of Nimrod’s influence and this, perhaps the first attempt at rulership and empire-building.



There were other settlements which probably came into existence at much the same time. The legends and inscriptions tell of five cities, – Eridu, Badtibira, Larak, Shuruppak and Sippar (possibly Sephar) – which existed “before the Flood” and that Eridu was the first of these and the first to be built in the land. Modern discovery tends to dispute this; Frankfort in *“Earliest Civilisations of the Near East”* gives reasons for placing Nippur (Calneh in Gen. 10) as the first in the south country and it is becoming increasingly accepted that the initial settlement at Babel, originally a priestly centre, was first of all, as is indicated in the Bible.

Nimrod was the man who taught them how to make the best use of what they had and maybe the rapid rise of their civilisation from that time onward might well have been in no little degree due to his insight and organising genius. A thousand years later an epic poem described him as the one who had given them their world. The likeness of it to the creation story in Genesis is apparent as is its local setting in the land of Shinar. The Genesis story had existed in written form for at least eight hundred years when this epic was composed. That much can be deduced from the archaic Sumerian word-forms that are still embedded in the later Hebrew text. So much for the oft-repeated assertion that the Bible account of creation was derived from the Babylonian legends. In actual fact the reverse is more likely the case. One of the most famous epics, the *“Enuma Elish”* (meaning *“When in the height”* the opening words of the first stanza) of about the same date, 18th century BC, shows vividly how the people of later generations came to exalt Nimrod among the gods as idolatry grew and prospered.

So the people of the land praised their hero and it is not surprising that a few centuries later Abraham, the “father of the faithful,” found himself alone in the land in his possession of faith in the One God. Neither is it surprising to read the words of Joshua to the hosts of Israel at the beginning of their occupancy of the land of promise. *“Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood”* (the river Euphrates) *“in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods”* (Josh. 24:2). The immediate forebears of Abraham were idol worshippers – of Nimrod. That true understanding of God which must have been possessed by the immediate descendants of Noah had by the time of Abraham been submerged in the new worship of this man who by his prowess and enterprise had won the allegiance of the masses. It was left to Abraham to spearhead that return to God that has been marked in subsequent ages, first by the development of Israel and its emergence during the five centuries before Christ as a truly monotheistic people in a polytheistic world and then by all that Christianity has meant to the world during the past two millenniums.

All that is left of the great Temple of Marduk in Babylon, and its mighty Tower, the Tower of Babel of the Bible, is a few lines of mouldering brick-work, rotting away in the middle of a marsh inhabited only by wild creatures. The cities, the temples, the canals, which at one time made this land the zenith of world civilisation have all gone. The name of Nimrod is remembered but all his exploits are in the past. Nothing has remained. He was not a god after all; he was only a man. And he has been dead for more than four thousand years.

9. Eber, Man of God

The passing of the period of Nimrod saw the emergence of another figure, one of greater significance to later generations, for to him, in all probability, must be given credit for the compilation of the first ten chapters of the Old Testament in the form we now have them. Eber, great-great-grand-son of the patriarch Shem, was born some four hundred years after the Flood and grew to manhood during the days of Nimrod. He lived to within four hundred years of the birth of Abraham and so came just about halfway between Noah coming out of the Ark and Abraham leaving Ur for the land of Canaan. Nothing is said about him in Genesis, save his place in the descent from Noah to Abraham and the reason for the naming of his son Peleg, but it was this man who gave his name to a numerous race of descendants which included many Arab peoples and also the nation of Israel. The term 'Hebrew' is derived from Eber and it is from him that the chosen people traced their pedigree. Anything else that can be suggested as connected with the life of Eber has to be inferred from what is known of the history of the times in which he lived. They were times that saw the rise of the Sumerian civilisation and the commencement of a series of events that was to lead to Abraham, to Moses and eventually to Christ.

The later part of Eber's life of four hundred years is likely to have spanned a hundred and fifty year period, the beginning and ending of which were, marked by two disastrous floods. When he was about a hundred and eighty years old the south country, in which stood Ur, Erech (Uruk), Calneh (Nippur), and Eridu, suffered a widespread overflow of the Tigris and Euphrates which flooded the entire country and, according to Woolley, wiped out many of the country-folk, leaving mainly city-dwellers to survive. This was the flood of which evidence was found by Woolley during his excavations at Ur of the Chaldees in 1930, when he uncovered a bed of water-laid clay ten feet thick with human remains, above and below. (At that time this discovery was thought to be that of the Flood of Noah's day and even today it is sometimes thus quoted. It was established after examination, that it was in fact a much later and lesser flood.) A hundred and fifty years later there was a second similar flood. This time it was in the northern part of the land in the area of Babel, and this time it was the important city of Kish, near Babel, the capital of the entire country which suffered most. The city was completely destroyed. According to Langdon and Watelin, who excavated Kish in 1924-30, the calamity *"definitely marked the end of an era"*.

Between these two major floods there were several lesser ones, affecting various parts of the land. It was probably this, occurring as it did during the latter part of the life of Nimrod, which led the Sumerians to commence work on the comprehensive system of canals that in after years regulated the floodwaters. This also gives credence to the legends asserting that Nimrod himself took the initiative in leading men to the harnessing and restraining the floods. There is one Biblical allusion that connects all this with Eber. The genealogy of Abraham's forefathers related in Gen. 10 contains a rather obscure remark. Verse 25 says *"And unto Eber were born two sons, the name of one was Peleg, for in his days was the earth divided"*. This word 'divided' means to cut a channel, watercourse, canal, and 'earth' (*erets*) equally means the land. The Genesis chronology places the birth of Peleg at just about the beginning of this "flood" period and just when the evidence points to the digging of canals in Shinar. Here is an incidental testimony to the historical accuracy of Genesis.

Another evidence confirming the above comes from the climatologist, C.E.P. Brooks writing on world climate in ancient times. Referring now to this period 2800-2600 BC, Brooks shows that

in 2800 there occurred another sudden and drastic degeneration in the climate conditions of the earth leading to two centuries of abnormally wet conditions. Such a change could well account for the widespread floods in Iraq in the days of Eber. The cold increased the annual snowfall in the Armenian mountains which fed the two great rivers and so flooded the Iraq plains from time to time, causing these precise conditions indicated as at the time of the birth of Peleg.

It is to this period in the middle of the life of Eber, that the rapid increase of the Sumerian cities must be credited. Over the short span of less than two centuries the land became dotted with settlements that quickly grew to sizeable communities of anything between five and twenty thousand inhabitants each. Of these, the two most important politically in those early days were Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10) and Kish. In these two cities the concept of kingship and kings commenced, although perhaps in a rudimentary fashion. Kish was situated about eight miles from Babylon. It was the first city to exercise political control and for the whole of this period, the latter part of Eber's life, about a hundred and fifty years, it had rulers who ruled over the whole land of the Semites and Sumerians. There is evidence that at this time Babylon (Babel) with its Tower, was a purely religious centre, devoted to the worship of the one true God, and Kish the political capital. The remains of Kish, excavated in 1924-30 reveal it to have been a city of crude and primitive construction but built by a knowledgeable and civilised people. The houses stood along well-planned straight streets and had a good sanitary system of drains and water supply. Their metal was copper, but of this they made carpenters' tools – saws twenty inches long and chisels, table cutlery and polished mirrors twelve inches across with handles. Four-wheeled chariots with leather furnishings drawn by horses traversed the streets, and craftsmen made fine coloured pottery and life-like copper ornaments. The inhabitants were agriculturists and shepherds. There was no evidence of warfare or of warriors. They seem to have been a peaceful people, living chiefly on fish, fruit, grain and vegetables. The population was definitely a mixed one, Semitic and Sumerian, sons of Shem and of Ham (Oxford University Museum possesses the skeletal remains of seven of these people, contemporaries in their lifetime of Eber and Peleg). Two dynasties of 'kings', more properly city governors, reigned simultaneously, one over the Semitic element and one over the Sumerians and it was two of the earliest Semitic rulers whose names reveal their worship of the one true God. One remark of Watelin (*'The Excavations at Kish.'* Vol. 4) in this respect is illuminating. In discussing their burial customs he says "*the rituals which attended the burials reveal belief in a future life*". It is so often claimed by supposed authorities that early man had no belief in resurrection or a future life. This testimony to their understanding of the doctrine at so early a date, nearly three thousand years before Christ, is valuable.

It is quite possible that Kish was the hometown of the patriarch Eber. Genesis gives no clue whatever in respect to any of the patriarchs until it comes to Abraham six centuries later living in Ur of the Chaldees, a hundred miles to the south. But in Eber's day the people of Shem were hardly likely to have got so far south as Ur. At the dispersal from Babel, Arphaxad, son of Shem, migrated with his people some hundred miles northward where they eventually founded and developed the city and nation of Mari, which was coming into existence in Eber's time. But some of them were continually trickling back into the Plain of Shinar and Kish was at least fifty per cent Semitic, of Arphaxad. There is one very good reason for associating either Eber or his son Peleg with the city of Kish. It is, in all probability, the city where the stories of Eden, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel were first written down in the form in which we have them today. No one is more likely to have been the writer than one or other of those two men.

Kish is the place where the oldest writing at present known has been found. Several other places, Uruk, Shuruppak, Elam, run it close but Kish does seem to be the oldest. It was a long time before the knowledge and practice of writing penetrated to the Semites of the north. The wise men of today declare that this is when writing was invented; at no previous time did man know how to write. From the Bible point of view this may be questionable. Gen. 5 speaks of "*the book of the generations of Adam*" which seems to imply the practice of writing, it has often been remarked that the narrative of the Flood bears all the signs of having been written by an observer at the time of the

event itself. It is hardly conceivable that the human race should have endured the two thousand years before the Flood without learning how to record its thoughts on paper or its then equivalent. On the other hand the early form of writing found at Kish and elsewhere is elementary and immature, without grammatical distinctions, or many of the parts of speech which are necessary to a valid written language. It was another four centuries before the Sumerians arrived at that stage in their inscribed clay tablets and so far as the present store of knowledge is concerned no one could be blamed for asserting that this is where writing originated.

Does the answer to the conundrum lie in the circumstances of the early post-Flood world? Noah and his sons, emerging from the Ark, may well have possessed the art of writing but in the new world numbers were few, all of one family. There was a need of labour to obtain necessities of life and there would be no urgency, time, nor inclination to practise the art of writing. After several generations it might easily have happened that none, or at least but a few, knew how to write or read. So the art was lost, to be recovered in the days of Eber when men were multiplying fast, trade developed with distant peoples and need for writing became evident.

A much more recent instance may serve to illustrate this point. In the fifth century AD, Romans withdrew from Britain, after a period of rule of some five hundred years. The declining power of the Roman empire led to the recalling of the legions leaving Britons and the Roman civilian farmers to their own devices. They left behind them an orderly and civilised country, the population of which was literate, everybody could read and write. The Saxons, Angles and Jutes, illiterate barbarians from the Continent, overran the country and destroyed the British-Roman civilisation they supplanted. For another five hundred years ordinary people became illiterate, unable to read and or write. The only places where literacy survived were the monasteries and abbeys where the monks, secluded from the world, preserved the ancient books and the ancient knowledge. Not till the Norman conquest did literacy return to Britain.

Did something like this happen in the days after the Flood, and was it the generation of Eber, five hundred years later, which saw the first attempts at reviving the lost art? In such case, just as the monks of the fifth century AD preserved the old writings until better days should come, so it may be surmised, did some line of reverential men preserve the ancient records handed down from the days of Noah and the antediluvians. No line would be more appropriate and none more probable, than the line of Shem which led eventually to Abraham and then to Israel, to whom says Paul, "*were committed the oracles of God.*" (Rom. 3:2). Hence at the period in question, Eber could be the one having custody of these priceless records, and on him would fall the task of editing and arranging – perhaps translating – them into the form which later on became the early part of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

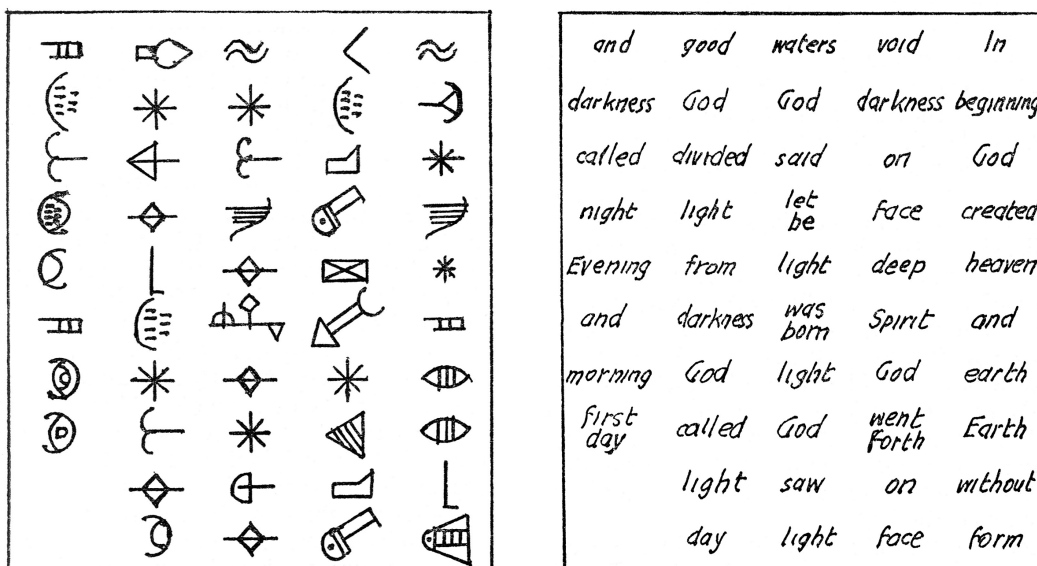
There is some internal evidence in these early chapters of Genesis to support this view. The tenth chapter, the famous 'Table of Nations' goes as far as the twelve sons of Joktan, son of Eber, and there stops. For details of subsequent patriarchs down to Abraham one has to go to Gen. 11:10-32 which clearly was written six hundred years later, after the death of Terah. This looks as though the early record up to chap. 11:9 was brought to an end by someone unable to go beyond Eber's grandsons, the presumption being that this author was Eber himself. A further evidence resides in the geographical names appearing in Genesis. Some are known from cuneiform inscription of 2000 BC; others are so archaic that they had passed out of use by 2000 BC or at least do not appear in any known tablets. Thus Hiddekel (river Tigris) and Euphrates have survived as names of the two chief rivers of the land. 'Eden' is the Sumerian '*edinu*', meaning 'the plain' and was applied to the whole land of Shinar and Sumer. 'Ararat' meaning 'the highlands' was the name (despite popular impressions) of the mountainous land to the east of the plain (now in Zagros mountains of N.W. Iran) and only in later days extended northward into present day Kurdistan and Armenia. (The whole of this area was still called the land of Arat as late as the 13th century of the Christian era, as witness the narratives of travellers such as Rabbi Petachiah of Ratisbon). The land of Nod of Genesis 4 was the Sumerian Noada, halfway down the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf where the river Mande still preserves the

name. The land of Havilah (properly Khavilah) of Genesis 2 has been identified as lying between Iraq and the Caspian Sea. Until the middle of the Christian era that sea was still called the Sea of Khavilah – but that name for the territory does not appear in the tablets and is superseded by the only recently identified city-state of Aratta which was probably founded towards the end of Eber’s life. The land of Cush with its river Gihon (modern Batin) in northeastern Arabia became known as Dilmun by 2400 BC and here the later Sumerians fixed the site of the Garden of Eden. It follows from all this that the first few chapters of Genesis must be dated to at least as early as 2600 BC,* within the lifetime of Eber.

The archaic semi-pictographic writing of symbols appears to have been derived from pictures of the objects represented. Only a very limited number of tablets have been recovered from Kish, Uruk and elsewhere and any reconstruction is largely conjectural. Nevertheless the basic principles can be discerned. Thus the symbol for “foot” is a crude representation of a human foot and the symbol serves to indicate the ideas of ‘to walk’, ‘to go’ and ‘to stand’. It also stands for the preposition ‘on’; the human foot of course is ‘on’ the ground. Likewise the symbol for the ‘sea’ or ‘water’ is two wavy lines and also does duty for the preposition ‘in’, on the principle of being ‘in’ the water. The writing was arranged in vertical columns and the reader started at the top right-hand corner, reading from top to bottom and from right to left. Four centuries later this type of writing was superseded by the more familiar ‘cuneiform’ (wedged-shaped) characters which were more easily impressed upon the clay tablets that had become the only writing material available. So the old ‘semi-pictographic’ writing disappeared.

Is this, the possible connection of Eber with the preparation of the beginning of the Bible, the reason for his apparent special status in the genealogical line of patriarchs between Noah and Abraham? This man may have been notable among his fellows in the things of God, a champion of righteousness standing rigidly for the God of Noah, and was known to immediate later generations as the one who preserved the ancient writings and rendered them into the current tongues. If so it may be easier to understand why Eber and not Abraham was regarded as the ancestor of the later people of God, so that even Abraham himself came to be referred to as ‘Abram the Hebrew’.

It might be that in that dim far-off time when the post-Flood world was young, there were two figures noted among men: Nimrod the Cushite who admittedly achieved great things in the material building of the new world, and Eber the Semite who cared more for the things of God. It was he who began to blaze the trail of written history that led to the story of Sinai and of Israel and the coming of Christ, and eventually to the New Testament. And the work of Eber has survived where the achievements of Nimrod are dust.



10. End of the Golden Age

The latter part of the lifetime of Eber the man who is most likely to have first committed to writing the early chapters of Genesis as they now appear, witnessed a rapid and substantial increase in population. Some six hundred years had elapsed since the Flood, and the posterity of the sons of Noah was beginning to penetrate territories far distant from the first settlements in the “Plain of Shinar”, the Euphrates-Tigris valley. Archaeologists have remarked on the evidences of this population increase at this time in this land itself, and with it the indications of peoples in faraway areas with which trade, the exchange of goods and materials, was beginning to develop. The human race was beginning to spread over the wider world.

Egypt, of course, had been settled for nearly three centuries and was already on the way to becoming a powerful force in world affairs. There was close contact between them and their fellows in Sumer (Shinar); they were at this time beginning to adapt the recently introduced Sumerian writing to form their own characteristic script, the well-known Egyptian hieroglyphics which adorn so many of the Egyptian tombs. It is established by scholars that the writing of Egypt was derived from that of Sumer, as was, in fact, every other kind of writing the world has known. At this time, also, the Great Pyramid was built, enshrining the geophysical and astronomical knowledge which the Egyptians had acquired. But now other influential nations that figure in later Bible history were in process of formation.

The most significant of these from the point of view of Bible history and the affairs of the future nation of Israel would be the people known as the Canaanites. At the time of the dispersion from Babel it would seem that the sons of Canaan, son of Ham, made their way by easy stages to the land which was afterwards called by that name. Following the Euphrates northward and then striking west across the plains they came to the Mediterranean Sea coast and there they settled to become farmers and traders. They built towns on the coast – Sidon of the present day is one of them – and Joppa. Striking inland they founded Gaza and Damascus, Jerusalem, Jericho, Sodom and Gomorrah. Other centres known only to archaeologists and long since passed out of existence appeared in later years but were probably started by the Canaanites. One of these was Ugarit, better known today as Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast, discovered in 1929; others were Alalakh in Syria, and Ebla, located and excavated in the 20th Century. They seem to have established and maintained a network of trading connections with their Sumerian and Egyptian counterparts and rapidly grew in power and influence. The Canaanites were still there when Abraham entered Canaan but by then there had been a great deal of immigration by Semitic peoples more or less kindred to Abraham. These mixed and intermarried and so gave rise a thousand years later to the celebrated nation of sea-going traders known as the Phoenicians. By that time their ships were making regular trading journeys to Britain, the Mediterranean countries, the West African coastlands, the West Indies and Central America. In the days of Eber, however, the farthest they appear to have penetrated was the area of the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, Crete, Greece and Egypt.

The Canaanites seem to have abandoned the recognition and worship of God more quickly than did the Sumerians or Egyptians. Their religious practices became debased at a very early stage, so much so as to become proverbial in the ancient world. The Phoenician historian Sanchuniathan was regarded by experts as mythical until the Ras Shamra tablets were found in 1929. He wrote about a thousand years before Christ, in the time of King David, who had a great deal to do with the Phoenicians of his day; Hiram, king of Tyre was their ruler. He said that in the earliest histories of his country, the Deity was known as the Most High God, the same term as used by the Sumerians of the same period. Perhaps even the depraved Canaanites were sincere worshippers of the true God when first they settled in the land, before its luxuries and pleasures turned their hearts to gross idolatry. The same thing happened to Israel in the same land a thousand years later. There are evidences that the worship of the true God endured at least among some of the Canaanites. When Abraham entered Canaan six hundred years after the time of Eber he found the Jebusites of Jerusalem a Canaanite tribe, ruled by the Priest-king Melchisedek, “the Priest of the Most High God”. Another of the same period

was Abimelech, king of Gerar, near Gaza, also with his people acknowledging the God of Abraham. But in the main the Canaanites seem to have been apostates almost from the start.

North of the Canaanites, the Arameans were settled, men of Aram and to some extent Arphaxad, sons of Shem. They had made their way up the Euphrates river and found the wide plains of what is now northern Syria and southern Turkey admirably adapted for their nomadic habits. Here they could tend their flocks and herds, moving their encampments from place to place as necessity dictated, with none to say them nay. Much later, as they increased in number and the land became more densely populated, they had to establish farmsteads and grow crops to feed themselves and their animals, but that was in the future. They eventually built towns and Haran was one of their chief centres. Abraham went to this town when he left Ur of the Chaldees, and he sent his steward there to find a bride for Isaac. When Jacob set out to get away from his brother Esau, this is the land to which he came. This land of Aram-Naharaim, “the land of the two rivers”, was to be closely associated with Old Testament history.

Away on the eastern side of the Plain, beyond the Tigris river, lay the mountains from which the early descendants of Noah first came into the Plain of Shinar. Now they began to go back, contingents of men and women seeking living space, hardy men and women not afraid of the rigours of a mountain habitat. They called themselves Elamites and they were, in the main, descendants of Elam, the son of Shem. Once established in the mountains they speedily found that they had entered a land which yielded metals and precious stones – gold, silver, copper, rubies, emeralds, and the greatly prized blue-green mineral called lapis-lazuli. Building stone could be quarried in abundance, granite, limestone, sandstone and a wondrous polished black stone which used to be called diorite but has now been found to be limestone impregnated with carbon under heat and greatly to be desired for the making of statues and images. Forests of cedar, rivalling the famed cedars of Lebanon, of oak and of fir trees were there, providing unlimited supplies of timber for building. None of these things existed in the Plain itself. So it was not long before the Elamites up in the mountains and the Sumerians down in the Plain were engaged in an intensive and expanding trade with each other and so the famous era of Sumerian artistic manufactures in metal and stone began.

Although bearing the name of Elam the Semite, the probability is that this people was a fusion of both races, Semitic and Sumerian, of Shem and Ham. Their national characteristics tend to show this. Their commercial and artistic qualities betraying Sumerian ancestry and their ferocity in war their Semitic. But this latter emerged later; at this time they lived at peace with their fellows although in later centuries they became a scourge to the more peaceable inhabitants of the plain.

The land of Havilah (Khavilah) of Gen. 2, south-west of the Caspian Sea, was probably an Elamite colony. So also was the city-state of Aratta, the existence of which was unknown until the 20th Century. This was a time of population expansion when groups of pioneers set out in all directions to find hitherto uninhabited lands in which to settle. Their children upon attaining maturity would set out still farther and so the world became populated. Within the next three or four centuries the Cushites had colonised the whole of Arabia and penetrated Iran and into Pakistan where by the time of Abraham a second extensive Sumerian civilisation existed on the plains of the river Indus. The descendants of Phut, son of Ham, had colonised North Africa over the area of the present Sahara desert, which in their day was fertile and forested, and those of Japheth had reached half-way across Siberia on the one hand and half-way across Europe on the other.

And while all this was going on the people in the Plain were quietly building their cities and organising their lives together, without acrimony and without war, still serving and worshipping the God of their forefather Noah. Here was the seed-bed in which was nurtured and carried through from generation to generation the Seed of Promise, that line of descent protected and guided by Divine Providence which was to lead first to Abraham and finally to Christ. Eber, at this time the custodian of the Divine oracles, must soon relinquish his charge to his son Peleg, and he in the fulness of time to Reu, and so on for three more generations and then to Abraham. That is the point at which the story of the out-working of God’s Plan of redemption really begins. Perhaps that is why what may be

termed comprehensive Bible history, there has its commencement. From that time God began actively to work in the world of men to bring them back to Himself.

The latter part of the life of Eber saw the birth of the conception of kingship. The first kings – little more than tribal chiefs – were at Kish, eight miles from the Tower. For nearly two centuries they held sway over all the settlements in the land, according to the old legends. Their rule was kindly and beneficent. The name of the third king of the dynasty, Palakinatim, living during the lifetime of Eber, means “reign of righteousness” and of the fourth king, Nangish-lishma, “may God listen with gladness”. The second monarch was a woman whose name incorporated a suffix indicating loyalty to “the most high God”. Such engravings as have been found have no indications of war; they depict only scenes of the hunting of food animals and the arts of the agriculturalist and the shepherd. Farming, fishing and trade with the mountain-dwellers to the east and with Egypt and Canaan in the west filled their life. The Most High God was worshipped by the Semites at Babel and at Nippur by the Sumerians and all creation seemed to be at peace. A Sumerian poet of six centuries later said of this period *“There was a time when the cities of Shubur and Hamazi, the many cities of Sumer, the land of kings, Divine laws, and of all that is good; the land of Martu living in security; the whole universe, the people in unison, to E’nlil (‘lord of the heavens’) in one tongue gave praise”*. Another of the same period described the time in the distant past when the wild animals were tame and submissive to man. Then there was no strife or rivalry between men, the land brought forth its crops and the rain came in its season and the sun shone warmly always and there was peace amongst men.

But changes were on the way. Towards the close of Eber’s life a new power began to rise in the south to challenge the rulership of Kish. The little settlement at Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10:11) was becoming an influential centre and beginning to manifest ambitions for dominion. According to the “King Lists” compiled some eight centuries later, the first man recorded as asserting himself as ruler was one Meskiag-gashir, and of this man two curious and unexplained things are recorded. The first is that he was *“the son of the Sun God”* and the second that he *“crossed the sea and ascended the mountain”*. Now at the time the “King Lists” were compiled the Sun-God was Marduk, and the origin of Marduk was the Biblical personage Nimrod. Does this suggest that this first recorded ruler of Uruk was in fact the actual son of Nimrod and perhaps succeeded his father in the rulership of the Sumerian south country? The timing could be right. Nimrod is most likely to have lived during the early part of Eber’s life and this postulated son in the latter part. If the case is indeed so, then it is possible to link Nimrod with the annals of history outside the Bible. The second expression is more obscure. Why attach special significance to his crossing the sea to ascend a mountain? One immediately thinks of the sacred mountain which they all revered as the “Mount of the East” where their fathers emerged from the Ark and toward which their temple-towers at Babel and Nippur pointed in recognition of its sanctity. In later times that same mountain was to become the mountain of the gods, the centre of the world and the entrance to *Arallu*, the nether-world of the dead, but at this time it was sacred to the Most High God, the God of Noah and his sons. Is this expression a reference to some kind of pilgrimage to the mountain? One of his descendants, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk a century or so later, is recorded as having done the same thing. A glance at a map, will show that to reach the mountain Kuh-i-Anaran in Lat. 32N, Long. 46E from Uruk, the traveller would have either to cross the then existing northern extension of the Persian Gulf or make his way around its northern end. The latter course would involve travelling through the home domains of Kish and it might be that relations between Semites and Sumerians were already becoming strained and so the pilgrim elected to follow the sea route.

Somewhere about this time the city and land of Kish suffered a major disaster. A colossal flood completely destroyed the city and its surroundings, and drowned most of its inhabitants. An abnormal quantity of water carried down by the great rivers built up in the level plain and brought the peaceful life of the people to an end. It was a long time before Kish recovered – probably several generations. Langdon says (*“The Excavations at Kish,”* Vol. 4) *“This flood definitely marked the end of an era. It covered uniformly and for a long time all that remained of the civilization of Kish. This*

flood layer marks a complete separation between the types which we have now left behind, the industries of the potter, founder, sculptor, and the types of industries which will be found above it". The physical remains show this; the evidence of a highly sophisticated civilization below the "flood layer" is replaced by a considerably less cultured one above, and in some respects Kish never recovered its former grandeur. It might well be this event which gave the rising power of Uruk the opportunity to take the initiative and make its bid for the leadership of the country. In another sphere of life, it might also have been the reason for the migration of the family of Shem marked out in the Bible – Eber, his son Peleg, and his grandson Reu. All these might well have been alive at this time – from the Kish-Babel area to the southern city of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham, great-great-grandson of Reu, is found living four centuries later. A rather flimsy evidence to this effect is found in the Gen. 10 statement that the sons of Joktan, son of Eber, made their dwelling in an area which although at present very uncertain, was most probably in the south country and in the vicinity of Ur.

But Langdon's statement above quoted to the effect that this Kish flood *"definitely marked the end of an era"* has proved true in more senses than he could have realised in 1924. The discoveries of the 20th Century have established that it was at about this time that three great evils affecting mankind had their rise. They are evils that have afflicted men ever since and will inevitably continue so to do until the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From the time of the Flood until this time, the evidence is that men lived peaceably with each other in the reverence and worship of the one true God, the God of Noah their common ancestor. In all the remains and relics that have been discovered there are no warlike weapons; in such admittedly scanty records as exist there are no references to man fighting man, and no evidence of worship offered to false gods. But now there came a great change.

Those three great evils that brought this "Golden Age" to an end were commercialism, war and paganism. It is a remarkable fact that all three made their debut into the world together, as though they were interdependent. Men were penetrating fast into the outer world and discovering all kinds of exciting materials and products. Trade between the peoples developed in consequence and that gave rise to greed and selfishness and so eventually to war. With the loss of high moral values men lost faith in the Most High God and began to imagine lesser gods, gods made in their own image and likeness, and so a pattern was set which all generations have followed to this present day. In the days of Eber the old order passed away and life was to be very different thereafter.

11. The Coming of the Gods

With the deaths of the patriarchs Eber and his son Peleg within a century of each other, the Golden Age of the sons of Noah ended. For more than eight hundred years the people of Shinar had remained faithful to the God of Noah. The evidence ties in the form of innumerable inscribed clay tablets that have been unearthed and deciphered. Those which are later than about 2000 BC, roughly the times of Abraham, abound with references to the names of the many gods of Babylon, anything up to a hundred in number. Tablets earlier than that date refer to fewer and fewer names of gods, the farther one goes back in time, until by some four centuries earlier there are only three gods worshipped. Before that for as far back – as any written records exist there is only one God known – they called him An, the God of heaven, the Most High. Even in the later days of many gods An was always the supreme God, the creator and controller of all things. Strangely enough, the same tablets reveal no signs of war or warlike weapons until this same period. The evidence is that paganism and war came into the world together.

One of the leading archaeologists of the last century, Stephen Langdon, expressed this fact in his book *"Semitic Mythology"* saying *"both in Sumerian and Semitic religions, monotheism preceded polytheism and belief in good and evil spirits. The evidence and reasons for this conclusion, so contrary to accepted and current views, have been set down with care and with the perception of adverse criticism ... the history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to*

extreme polytheism". Writing during the early years of the last century, Langdon – who died in 1937 – never knew of the many modern finds which have confirmed his deductions. In the 19th century it was fashionable to insist that monotheism, the worship of one God, developed from preceding belief in many gods and is still asserted by many text-books which have failed to keep up with research. Today, there is abundant documentary proof, which cannot be denied, to the contrary. One of the most telling evidences in this connection is due to excavations in 1930 at the ancient 25th BC century city of Eshnunna, not far from Baghdad, by Frankfort. He found a mass of inscribed tablets and cylinder seals, some from the temple and some from private houses, which, he says "*can all be fitted in to form a consistent picture in which a single god worshipped in this temple, forms the central figure ... At this early period His various aspects were not considered separate deities in the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon*" (*Excavations at Tel Asmar-Eshnunna*). In other words, the various attributes of the Most High, His love, justice, wisdom, and His methods of operation in the powers of Nature, the sunshine, the storm, the seasons, and so on, were gradually viewed in separation and personified under individual names. In this manner men became accustomed to the idea of a plurality of gods. Almost every modern excavation of 3rd millennium BC sites is now providing confirmation of Frankfort's findings.

The taint of idolatry affected the line of Abraham. Joshua, addressing Israel just before his death, told them that their fathers dwelt beyond Euphrates in the remote past, and "*served other gods*" (Josh. 24:2). The "*Book of Jubilees*" declares that Serug, Nahor and Terah were all idolaters; this might be an old legend without foundation, nevertheless these are the only three before Abraham who could thus have worshipped pagan gods. This brings us to the introduction of those gods amongst men. Like so many later human philosophies, the development of the gods was inspired by a desire to explain the unrevealed things of God by means of human analogies. The first was an endeavour to explain how the world was created and life arose upon it. Genesis chapters 1 to 9 were certainly in existence in written form for two centuries before mythology began. There have been claims that certain Babylonian and Sumerian legends preserve the Bible story of creation but as yet this cannot justly be maintained. What is more apparent is that these legends are a fusion of original creation with events occurring after the Flood in the early days of the Sumerians and in the present state of knowledge the task of disentangling is impossible. But throughout mythology there are thoughts that suggest the remains of an earlier clear understanding of the Divine Plan.

So how did God bring life to the earth? Eve said when her first son was born: "*I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord*" (Gen. 4. 1) Next there had to be defined the power by which the earth itself, with all its vegetation and its animal wealth, was brought into being. Genesis says "*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*" and the work of creation proceeded apace. Just so, said the Sumerians and the Semites of Serug's day; the invisible power of An, the Most High, a silent and unseen energy like the wind, executed His commands. In their language that power was denoted by the word *lil*, that meant wind, breath, spirit, exactly as does the Hebrew '*ruach*' and the Greek '*pneuma*'. So the unseen power of the Spirit of God became personified under the name of Enlil, meaning Lord of the Spirit, or Lord of the air. This conception first arose in the Sumerian holy city of Nippur. Enlil became Says the special god of that city.

Enlil in later times was depicted as a fatherly, beneficent god, always solicitous for the welfare of his creatures. He gradually assumed the prerogatives of An his father, so that An the Most High God receded into His heaven but Enlil was more immediately at hand to see to man's interests. One of the hymns of praise chanted in his honour says "*without Enlil, no cities ... no sheep folds, fish would lay no eggs, birds would not build nests, plants and herbs would fail to grow ... grain would fail to flower, the trees would not yield their fruit*". Enlil became a manifestation of the Most High God in so far as his creative spirit was concerned.

Down in the south country, on the shores of what is now the Persian Gulf, men's minds were working in a different manner. Men of Eridu and Ur of the Chaldees were traders, merchants, seafarers, artisans. Their ships went as far east as India and Ceylon and down the coast of East Africa

and brought the products of those countries back to their own. They were practical, hard-headed, men of the earth rather than the heavens, and they began to think of God in more concrete terms than the more visionary form of Enlil. So just as Enlil was the god of the spirit, of the air, and eventually of heaven, so now men in the south began to talk of God manifest in a more practical manner as the god of earth, sea and the world of the dead. They called him Enki, the lord of the earth and they too made him the son of An the supreme god.

In the days of Serug there were four gods instead of one and in later days were known as “creative gods”. But Enki was not pictured as a benevolent, fatherly deity like Enlil; he was a rather brusque and short-tempered god, usually taking up an antagonistic attitude to Enlil. He was credited with inventing more than a hundred laws by which the civilised life of the community was to be regulated, and responsible for the development of agricultural and mechanical devices wherewith life became easier and the community richer. In these two deities, thinking men saw the two spheres of Divine power extended towards man. One, the spiritual and the other earthly, practical. That is how it must have been in the beginning; only later did they take on the form of distinct personalities.

The process did not stop there. Men were looking for something visible to the natural eyes in which the invisible God could be manifested. Men have been doing that ever since and this is the source of all idolatry. Faith in the unseen things does not come easily to the natural man. So they turned their attention to the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and planets, and pictured them as the eyes of the Lord, watching everything that takes place on earth. In a fanciful way they considered those heavenly bodies as attributes of Deity and before long were venerating them as manifestations of the personal unseen God. So they gave Enlil five sons: Nannar, the Moon; Nebo, Mercury; Nergal, Mars; Niburu, Jupiter; and Adar, Saturn. Then they credited Nannar the Moon-god with a son and daughter, Utu, the Sun, and Inanna, Venus. These seven were termed the “immortal gods”, the “watchers”. They formed a second level of gods, whose duties were generally to oversee matters occurring on earth. A remarkable reference to the continuance of this belief into future ages is provided in the Book of Daniel (4:17). Nebuchadnezzar the king, recounting his dream of the tree to Daniel, says that *“a watcher and a holy one”* came down from heaven to declare the decree and told him *“this matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the intent that the King may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men...”* Here is a singular evidence that the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, two thousand years after the emergence of idolatry, accepted the existence of the seven “watchers”, their overlords, the “creative gods”, the “holy ones” and above them all, the Most High God who, worshipped since the days of Noah, still retained His position as the supreme God of heaven. Even the Jews in later time were not immune from the same failing; Jewish legend had it that there were seven archangels in attendance upon God, overseeing various departments of world affairs. Michael – the only archangel mentioned as such in the Bible – was the champion and defender of Israel and Gabriel the messenger of God, just as Utu was the champion of the Sumerians and Nebo the messenger of An; and there were five others.

It would seem there are no bounds to the ingenuity of men once they begin to depart from the living God. Tablets belonging to a couple of centuries later begin to reveal new gods, one after another, lesser gods, each devoted to the welfare of one particular sphere of human activity or one particular calling amongst men. Thus there suddenly appears Kulla the god of the brickbuilders, Ninkurra of the stonemasons, Ninilda of the carpenters; Adad the god of rain and storms; Ninurta of war; Arazu of prayer; Symugan of cattle and vegetation; Ninkurra of medicine and healing. There were fifty of these altogether, known as the “great gods”, all created by An. The individual citizen was expected when in difficulty to go to the appropriate god for help and only when that failed to go higher up the scale to one of the “watchers” or even to Enlil or Enki or An as a last resort.

As if this motley crowd of gods and goddesses was not enough, there next came, on the fourth level, three hundred spirits of earth and three hundred spirits of heaven, together with a multitude of fiends and evil spirits bent on harassing and persecuting defenceless humans. Much of the said humans’ time was spent in supplicating the gods for deliverance from these terrors.

The decline from monotheism into paganism was remarkably rapid. A matter of two centuries saw the entire pantheon of gods established: temples and ziggurats (temple-towers) which had been sacred to the Most High God from their foundations were re-named and made sacred to one or another of the new gods. For another five hundred years the system grew increasingly elaborate and complex to the point where every city and community had its own system of gods. This occurred to an extent that modern investigators are in despair endeavouring to make some sense of the often mutually contradictory beliefs of the ancient peoples. Eventually, a little before the time of Abraham, Marduk the deified Nimrod was introduced as the son of Enki and became particularly associated with Babylon, which by that time had become the capital of the whole country. Marduk was hailed as the world's redeemer and champion of all men and eventually superseded most of the others, except An the Most High. Millenniums later, a century before Christ, when the glory and power of Babylon had passed away and the great city lay in ruins and deserted, travellers found a decaying priesthood in the ruined Temple of Babylon continuing a ritual honour of An and Marduk. The Most High God of Noah was never completely forgotten.

It is possible that this incursion into idolatry did not go unchallenged. There must have been some who, like Eber and his fellows, would have none of it. In the 22nd BC century, by which time idolatry was firmly established – and the birth of Abraham was to be only two more centuries away – there began to appear in all the city-states of Sumer an element of the Semitic part of the population known as Hebrews. They were notably conspicuous as merchants and traders and this at a time when communication with countries was opening up and goods being transported and exchanged meant they became well known throughout the Middle East. Students of Genesis will of course recognise them as descendants of Eber, from whom they derived their name. Abraham, one descendant of his, is referred to in Gen. 14:13 as *“Abram the Hebrew”*. Now people in that 22nd century BC and onwards referred to God as *“El”* a word which in the Hebrew language means powerful or mighty. It is derived from the Semitic *ilu* which from earliest times meant ‘God’. The Sumerian proper name *“An”* (Semitic ‘Anu’) for the Supreme Being was derived from the conception of His being the God of Heaven – the Sumerian word for heaven or the sky is also An. This name ‘El’ for ‘God’ is found to have been in general use among the Canaanites of Canaan up to the time Joshua and his hosts entered the land a thousand years later, and is in fact the same word that denotes God in Arabic today – Allah. The expression *‘el elion’* – ‘God Most High’ occurs in Genesis and again in the Psalms. Perhaps this had its origin at this time in an effort to maintain the authority of the One True God of Noah against the rising tide of “gods many and lords many” which was being created by the ingenuity of man.

But the odds were too great. The number of false gods continued to increase and the corruption of their religion multiplied, until the Lord looked down from heaven much as He had done in the days before the Flood and knew that the time had come to intervene. In Abraham He found the man whose faith would set in motion a chain of events which at the end would bring about the execution of His purpose.

12. The Captains and the Kings

“There always have been wars, and there always will be wars”. So runs the old cliché, repeated every time anyone talks of ways and means to end wars. The assertion is born of ignorance and it is untrue. There will be a time in the developing purposes of God when He *“maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth”* (Psa. 46:9). That will be in the day of Christ’s reign over the world, the Millennial Age. There is no doubt about that. Likewise there was a time when war was unknown among men; all nations lived in peace and harmony. Whilst in the past that ancient “Golden Age” was known only by tradition and legend the wise men of this world dismissed the whole concept as mythical and unreal. Now that the discoveries of archeologists have confirmed the truth of the old legends the lofty dismissal begins to look a bit hollow. So far as present discoveries can show, war arose between the primitive nations more or less simultaneously with the worship of pagan deities

beginning to supersede the worship of the One God, at a time which looks to be about twenty-five centuries before Christ.

Before looking at the evidence for this conclusion, let the conditions which could conceivably have given rise to the emergence of such unhappy condition be examined. There were probably two factors. In the first place, the family relationships which existed between men when they were relatively few in number and congregated over a fairly small area were disappearing as men pushed farther afield and became separated into distinct nations. Communities of men became strangers to each other and jealousies and rivalries began to develop. Greed for the acquisition of land or crops or products possessed or produced by one led to attempts by another at forcible seizure and so fighting for offence or defence began to break out. In the second place, contributing to the first, was that unpredictable element, the weather. By this time, according to Brooks, the world was already a century into that sub-boreal cold and dry phase which was to continue for another three centuries. The warmth and rains of the immediate post-Flood centuries which had nurtured and stimulated the early descendants of Noah had given way to a period of cold and drought which made life arduous and tempted men to satisfy their own shortages at the expense of others. It is significant that the very earliest armed conflict between communities of which there is at present any concrete evidence arose out of a dispute regarding water supply – in a land which up to that time had consisted largely of watery marshlands continually supplied by three major rivers. The city-states of Lagash and Umma, between the Euphrates and the Tigris, went to war over the possession of a waterway which both sides coveted and claimed. The ruler of Lagash, Eannatum, defeated his opponents and erected an obelisk to mark the agreed boundaries between the two lands, an obelisk which still survives, part in the British Museum and part in the Louvre at Paris. This obelisk displays the earliest known representation of soldiers on active service, marching men armed with pikes and bodyshields. War was a primitive and simple occupation in those days; there seems to have been involved only about six hundred men on each side, although it has to be admitted that, emboldened by his success, Eannatum went on to wage offensive war against others of his neighbours and finished up temporarily as ruler of all Sumer.

It is quite a remarkable thing that, according to the apocryphal *“Book of Jubilees”*, written about 150 BC, all this happened in the days of Serug the great-grandfather of Abraham. The relevant passage in *“Jubilees”* asserts that it was in the days of Serug that men first began to worship false gods and to make war one upon another, and this is just the time which modern discovery places as the beginning of war and paganism. *“Reu took himself a wife and she bare him a son, and he called his name Serug ... and the sons of Noah began to war on each other, to take captives and to slay each other, and to shed the blood of men in the earth, and to build strong cities ... and to go to war, people against people, and nation against nation, and city against city, and all began to do evil, and to acquire arms, and to teach their sons war ...”* (Jub. 11.1-4). According to the chronology of Genesis the early years of Serug coincide with the beginning of what archaeologists call the “Early Dynastic” period, which saw the onset of paganism and war among these people. But how did the writer of *“Jubilees”* in 150 BC know this? The Sumerian language had been dead for two thousand years, their records buried in the sands of Iraq, only to be recovered and deciphered in the late 19th and this 20th century. In a great many respects it has been noted that *“Jubilees”* exhibits a more detailed knowledge of events before and immediately after the Flood than is contained in the Hebrew Bible; this may conceivably have come from old Jewish legends, but there is also growing agreement in recent years that there must have been at least three differing versions of the Hebrew Scriptures extant in the centuries immediately before Christ, all of which disappeared after the standard “Masoretic” text was established in the early AD centuries and that one or more of these might well have contained data which formed the basis of the passages now preserved in *“Jubilees”*.

It must have been about this time that the hackneyed phrase “the fortunes of war” was coined. Before thirty years had passed the troops of Umma – all six hundred of them – had invaded Lagash, killed the reigning king and seized back the canal which had been the cause of the original trouble. This, of course, could not be tolerated and so within a further twenty years, the next king, Entemana,

gathered his troops together and fought Umma on their own ground and so got his canal back. By now the pattern was getting well established. If the people of any one city-state wanted something another city-state possessed, they just sent their warriors in and took it – if they could. Some of the older men among them, veterans of the days of Eber and Peleg, must have sighed for the old peaceful days when all men worshipped the one God and lived in peace and harmony, but they of course were old-fashioned and out of date and would soon be in the grave anyway. Knowledge and discovery was increasing daily; new lands and hitherto unknown products were being discovered to the advantage and enrichment of life; one cannot halt progress and if that progress involved fighting to get possession of what one coveted, well, war was inevitable and only impracticable idealists imagined there was any alternative. So went the reasoning. All the modern arguments were in all probability first thought out and advanced, there in the land of Sumer, four thousand years ago.

So the sorry tale unfolded. Uruk fought Kish and prevailed, and the supreme rule passed from north to south. Then the Elamites up in the mountains took a hand in the game. There were rich pickings of grain and food crops to be had in the plains and they sent their army to see what could be done about it. The men of Sumer chased six hundred of them into their own mountains and brought back five hundred and forty of them as prisoners to be slaves. Thus was born another fruit of war, the institution of slavery.

Then, less than two centuries after war first appeared among men, there appeared on the world stage the man who has been called the first great military conqueror of history – the renowned Sargon of Agade. Serug was still alive and Nahor, the grandfather of Abraham, had just been born. Rising from humble beginnings to an important position at court – cup-bearer to the king of Kish, the chief city of the Semites, Sargon rebelled against his overlord and set up a rival centre in the hitherto insignificant city of Akkad, where he speedily gathered an army of determined followers. Sargon was not a Sumerian; he was a Semite, of the sons of Shem, a hardy fighter like all the Semites, and he straightway embarked upon a career of unashamed conquest.

This Sargon was a far-seeing man. His capital city of Akkad lay astride the trade routes which had grown up between south and north. The Sumerian cities to the south were now engaged in active trade with many lands verging on the tropics. From Elam in the Iranian mountains they drew supplies of metals, building stone, timber and precious stones, all necessary for the exploitation of their artistic skill. From farther afield, at the other end of the Persian Gulf, they imported copper, and from greater distances still, on the east coast of Africa and the west coast of India, all kinds of tropical products of utility and luxury. The Semitic peoples to the north, descendants of Arphaxad and Aram, sons of Shem, carried these goods overland to the Canaanites in what is now Syria and Lebanon, and from there across the sea. Sargon realised that an empire, including all those lands, of which he could be the undisputed head was an empire worth creating, and he set about doing so. Over the short space of fifty years his army of five thousand four hundred men, the largest army the world had seen so far, ranged from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, far into what is now Turkey, and, probably, across the sea to Cyprus. By the time he had finished all these lands were united under the rulership of one man, Sargon, and all the trade of the then known world was under his control. As later empires went, it was not a very large empire; it did cover all of what today is known as the Middle East and it was certainly the first serious attempt at building a world empire.

Then Sargon died, and immediately his empire began to fall to pieces. Ravaging tribes from the mountains swept down to loot and destroy the cities and towns. Uruk and Ur revolted and carved up the south land of Sumer between them, developing between them a revival of the Sumerian supremacy. The powerful state of Mari, the people of Arphaxad to the north, grasped independence and control of the trade routes. Sargon's capital city of Akkad, which he had hoped to make the capital of the world, was destroyed so utterly that only in quite recent years have men located what is thought to have been its site.

He did leave behind him a map of the world, his world, one of the earliest maps ever discovered, in the form of an inscribed clay tablet, which is now in the British Museum. It is more like

a diagram than a map, made to record the area of his military campaigns, from the southern sea to the northern mountains and showing the encircling ocean which at that time was believed to encircle the entire land mass of the world. That and a quantity of inscribed clay tablets recording his victories constitute all that is left of the great Sargon, the world's first military dictator.

The coming of war to the other great power of these ancient times, Egypt, is more difficult to locate. Unlike Sumer, whose records were enshrined on indestructible baked clay tablets which survive to our own day, those of the Egyptians were written on papyrus, a paper-like vegetable product which decayed in time so that no ancient records exist, and all that is known of ancient Egyptian history is derived from the early tomb paintings. The Egyptians were a peaceable people without tribal animosities and they were, geographically, far removed from the political and commercial animosities of the Semites and Sumerians. Not until they came in contact, in later times, with Cushite colonists who had crossed the Red Sea at the tip of Arabia and were pushing up from what is now the Sudan is there any evidence of warfare and that was almost at the time of Abraham. About the only earlier evidence of warlike behaviour is on a painting of the time of Sneferu, first king of the 4th Dynasty, who is seen smiting a luckless captive with a mace, but since the setting is in the Egyptian copper-mining district of Sinai, there is equal likelihood that the incident depicts nothing more than the punishment of a recalcitrant miner criminal. All this would seem to infer that warlike activities were unknown to the Egyptians, as to the Sumerians, at least until the 24th or 25th centuries BC.

The Phoenicians did not go to war; they were too busy trading and making profit. Neither were the Phutites, blood-brothers of the Sumerians. They were by now strung out across North Africa, in the area at present occupied by the Sahara Desert, as far as the Atlantic coast, and they too were traders and merchants. In their day what is now the world's largest desert was thickly forested and replete with wild animals and game, a fitting home for a virile increasing race of men. It was war which put an end to that. The Romans started cutting the forests down at the time of the Punic wars in the Third and Second centuries before Christ for fuel and battleship building. As the trees disappeared their humidifying effect on the ground disappeared and the sun beat down on the bare earth; the population turned increasingly to sheep and goats grazing on what was left of the greenery and so the terrain turned to dry sand – the process has continued ever since and the Sahara is spreading steadily southward year by year. Northern Africa began to die on that day two thousand years ago when Rome declared war on Carthage. The whole world is dying today largely because of mankind's persistent proclivity to war, to inter-nation strife motivated by selfishness, greed and lust for power. It started back there in the 25th century BC among the Sumerians. It will cease when the Prince of Peace takes his great power and commence his reign over the earth, when men shall *“beat their swords into pruning-hooks”* when *“nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:4).

13. Twilight Before Dawn

The time had come, round about this twenty-fourth century before Christ, for the world of men to take on its present familiar aspect of war and strife, greed and injustice, idolatry and godlessness, which have been its characteristics ever since. For nearly a thousand years since the Flood mankind had been tolerably free from these evils, and Sumerian poets of six or seven centuries later wove into their poems and legends stories of that long-past “Golden Age”. There is no doubt that there was such a Golden Age and it was the onset of idolatry and of war between communities which brought it to an end. The world from now on was destined to witness great changes.

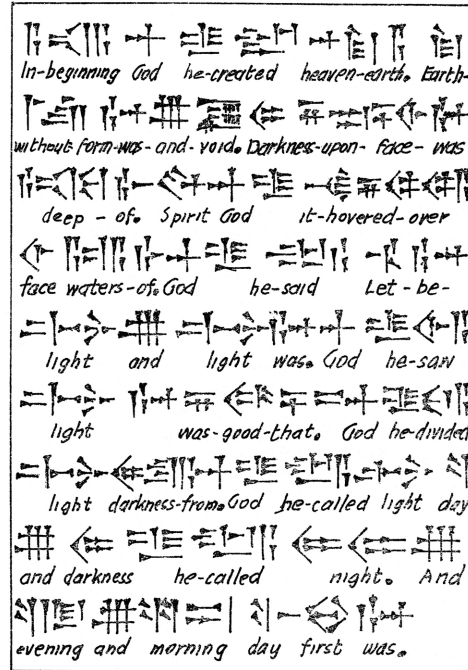
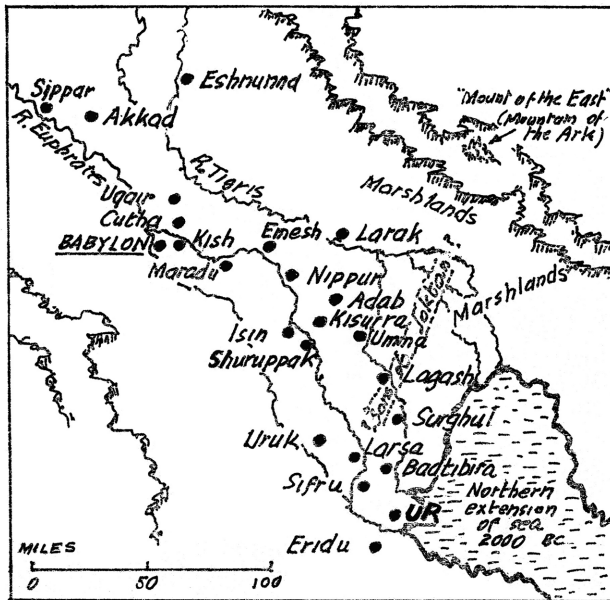
These two centuries, noteworthy for the birth of Nahor and Terah, grandfather and father of Abraham, saw the peak of the civilisation that had been built up from the days of Nimrod something like six centuries earlier. Now, with the death of the military dictator Sargon of Agade and the rise of the famous Third Dynasty of Ur, with its energetic and able ruler Ur-Nammu, the balance of power swung again from the Semitic Akkadians in the North to the Sumerians in the South. Ur,

Lagash, and Uruk, with two new city-states, Isin and Larsa, were the dominant centres of political power and all of them active in the still increasing hubbub of trade and industry consequent upon expanding knowledge of the wider world which the continuing increase of the human race was bringing into view. By this time the sons of Japhet had penetrated most of Siberia and reached the borders of China: those of Cush had set up a second Sumerian civilisation in north-western India and were pressing down that land's western coast and in the west were spreading over equatorial Africa. Most of central Europe was occupied by Japhetic tribes. The peoples of the Middle East were at the centre of a complex system of world trade that extended over most of Europe and a considerable part of Asia and Africa.

It was probably at this time that the reference to the sons of Joktan in Gen. 10:30 applies. It seems such an irrelevant little remark that one wonders why it was inserted at all. The reason for the genealogy leading from Shem to Peleg is obvious enough; it is to point out the line from which Abraham the father of the people of Israel, was derived. But having arrived at Peleg, five generations before Abraham, the narrator breaks off to tell us that Peleg's brother Joktan had thirteen sons who dwelt, according to the AV, "*from Mesha as you go to Sephar a mount of the east*". Why such an apparently unnecessary piece of information should be included in the Genesis account is at first sight not at all clear; yet there must have been a purpose. The AV rendering is inaccurate – Middle East geography was not the 17th century translators' strong point – and a closer examination of the text reveals what may have been purpose in the plan. The RSV has it "*the territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east*" which is more lucid but still does not tell us where these places were situated. A literal rendering of the Hebrew is more like "*from Mesha, toward Ephar, to the Mount of the East*". One of these locations is definitely known – the "Mount of the East". As previously said, this was the mountain on which the Ark landed and was sacred to the Sumerians and Semites and is now shown on maps as Kuh-i-Anaran, in the Zagros mountains a hundred and fifty miles east of Babylon. Sephar could be either the Semitic city of Sippar in the north or the Sumerian one of Sifru in the south not far from Ur of the Chaldees. Sippar, so far as is known, was not in existence at so early a period and the balance of probability is that Sifru is meant. The location of Mesha is not known. Place-names in the Middle East have a habit of surviving through the ages and there is an area between Ur and the "Mount of the East", still largely marshland, where a number of localities bear names which could well derive from Mesha. If this deduction is justified, this would then define a broad band of territory stretching from Ur and Sifru in the west, across the marsh lands to the "Mount of the East". This, with the progressive drying up of the Gulf, that had been going on since the Flood, would only have become available for settlement about this time. It might well be that these numerous tribes, descended from Joktan, as the years passed and they multiplied, found that the only territory available to them was this Marshland revealed by the receding waters. In after times they spread into Arabia and their tribal names have persisted in history as those of Arab peoples to this day.

With a rapidly increasing population and expanding world trade, life began to be more hectic; as with the modern world during the last half-century, there was a great increase in knowledge and invention, in industry and commerce, and everything had to be done more quickly than before. The old pictograph writing that had served the needs of less sophisticated generations in the past gave way to cuneiform (arrow-headed) which simplified the picture-symbols into wedge-shaped signs. These could more easily and quickly be impressed on the soft clay tablets which was the writing material of the times. This meant among other things, that the stories of Eden, the Flood and of the Tower of Babel, which had already existed in the written form for several centuries, had to be translated into the new form, probably the first Bible translation ever made. The sketch below shows what the first five verses of Genesis must have looked like. Cuneiform was the script in which Abraham, later on, first read the Genesis narratives and incidentally the script from which Moses and his fellows translated the early part of Genesis into the Hebrew language, for this cuneiform writing remained the medium of all written records up to the time of the Exodus and the emergence of the Hebrew language. Despite its apparently complicated nature, a surprising amount of information could be compressed

into a very small space. A tablet found at Nippur, written in the time of Abraham, measuring only four by six centimetres, proved to be a library catalogue containing the titles of no less than sixty-two literary works. From this time onward the legends and history of past generations began to be written down – with embellishments – and these “epics” are now one of the sources of our information regarding those days.



Beside the historical tablets, which form only a small proportion of the tens of thousands of clay tablets discovered, there are others which deal with industry, medicine, science and mathematics – for the people of Heber’s and Abraham’s day were superb mathematicians and diligent astronomers. They had calculated the distance from the earth to the sun with accuracy not equalled until the year 1920. At a somewhat later date they had recorded observations of the four largest moons of the planet Jupiter, invisible today to the naked eye. No one since then knew that Jupiter had any moons until Galileo invented the telescope in AD 1610. Was the eyesight of the ancients so much better than that of modern man or did they invent the telescope first? Correctly made glass magnifying lenses have been found in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. In the field of medicine there is a tablet listing the methods of preparation of five hundred herbal remedies. Sumerian surgeons carried out surgical operations with copper instruments. In the province of industry, there is in the British Museum a tablet giving a process for glazing earthenware inscribed in ciphers so that no competitor could understand it. When the Sumerian language died out a few centuries later the secret was lost until Assyrian craftsmen “cracked” the code in the 7th century BC but with the fall of the Assyrian empire the secret was lost again until in the 19th century the tablet was found, translated and submitted to British cipher experts who “cracked” the code once more and so enabled modern industrialists to try out the process, and find it successful. In Ur of the Chaldees coppersmiths had discovered how to temper copper to yield a cutting edge like steel – another secret lost until modern times. Time was measured by means of a water-clock in which one talent of water (about six gallons) ran out of an enclosed vessel and the diminishing water level operated a pointer which registered the complete day, divided into hours and minutes. In the Museum of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities in Baghdad there are earthenware jars with copper rods and traces of chemicals nearly five thousand years old. Technical experts today consider these could only have been some form of electric battery, which if true would raise the question what kind of electrical device did the battery operate? A century or so after Abraham had migrated to Canaan the whole of this complex and advanced civilisation disintegrated into what their own historians called “the times of confusion” in which they were overrun by invading peoples of lesser culture. Had this not happened the explosion of knowledge and

scientific achievement which characterised the 20th century might have come there and then, and history would have been very different. But that was not to be; the Divine Plan included many features of great moment for mankind and not until God's own due time could knowledge be allowed to be increased to the extent it has done today.

By this time there were colonies in distant parts, set up by Sumerian merchants who traded local products with the homeland. Dilmun, four hundred miles down the Gulf where Bahrein is now, was an important staging port for ocean-going merchant vessels. Magan, which is now Oman at the mouth of the Gulf, was a busy copper mining area. Most important of all was Melukkha, on the river Indus in modern Pakistan, a territory larger in extent than the homeland of Sumer itself. It stretched from the vicinity of Bombay to the headwaters of the Indus, an area eight hundred by three hundred miles, furnished with cities strangely resembling modern ones in facilities and amenities. Built in the style of Ur and Uruk and Babylon, they had straight streets, forty-five feet wide with main drains having branches into every house, separate underground culverts five feet high for carrying off rainwater, evidences of a virile industry in the manufacture of pottery and textiles – the earliest cotton in the world's history was grown and woven here – and brisk trade in all kinds of tropical products carried on by means of ships which unloaded their wares at Ur of the Chaldees. In the other direction Syria and Canaan boasted the cities of Alalykh and Ebla and Catal Huyuk, and Tyre and Sidon on the sea coast, all links in the network of trading centres which by now had knit the far-flung sons of Noah together. Trade was booming, and the world was a very busy place.

But behind all this passion for progress and discovery and achievement there did repose, in the hearts of these early descendants from Shem and Ham, a love of righteousness and justice and the higher values of life. Says Kramer (*From the tablets of Sumer*) "*they cherished goodness and truth, love and order, justice and freedom, righteousness and straightforwardness, mercy and compassion. The gods were extolled as good and just*". After all, they had only recently abandoned the true God of their fathers and commenced to make for themselves false gods, alien gods who were now leading them into war and violence and every kind of villainy. For the moment there was still the recollection of the Golden Age they had rejected only a couple of centuries ago to keep their standards relatively high. It is probable that when Abraham came on the scene a little later, although he must have shrunk from the idolatry and moon-worship of Ur and its citizens, there was still much in their characters and their lives that he would applaud. It might not have been altogether without reluctance that he parted from them in obedience to the Lord's injunction.

There is an example of what have been called the "penitential psalms" which demonstrate the sentiments of the devout Sumerian, whether worshipper of one God or many. Because their paganism always preserved the worship of the Most High God of heaven, superior to all the other gods, there is a kinship of sentiment which reveals that these men and women of four or five thousand years ago were not so very different from we ourselves in our reverence for the Lord.

"O my god, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins. I transgress and know it not. I sin, and I know it not. I wander on wrong paths, and I know it not. I feed on transgressions and know it not. The Lord, in the wrath of his heart, has overwhelmed me with confusion. I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I am silent and in tears and none takes me by the hand. I cry out, and there is none that hears me. I am exhausted, oppressed and none releases me. My God who knows the unknown, be merciful Lord, thou wilt not repulse thy servant. In the midst of the stormy waters, come to my assistance, take me by the hand. I commit sins – turn them into blessedness. I commit transgressions – let the wind sweep them away. My blasphemies are very many – rend them like a garment, God, who knows I knew not, my sins are seven times seven – forgive my sins!"

"God knewest I knew not!" Whether the prayer went up to An the Most High God, or to Enlil or Enki the lesser gods, who could doubt that the cry reached the courts of Heaven and was heard by the One who truly gave life to all men. It may be that the time was not yet ripe for the answer to come. The once for all offering of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sin of man was still three thousand years in the future, and until that offering was consummated on the cross, there was nothing that could

be done. But Jesus did say that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were to stand in the resurrection to find an opportunity for repentance and everlasting life. That is sufficient assurance that these reverent and penitential Sumerians, living at the same time, five hundred miles from Sodom, will enjoy the same favourable opportunity. If there was any sincerity at all in those prayers, then surely it can be expected that they will be answered in that coming day.

One man, at least, emerged from that welter of true worship and false worship, of one God and many, of light and darkness. The time was at hand for the Lord to take a hand in the affairs of men and commence the outworking of His purpose. A man was soon to be born in the city of Ur in preparation for the Divine call. Time was ripe, the world was ready; it remained now for the Lord to set the stage for a chain of events which must centre upon one new city in one new land. This should then and for all time become the land and the city upon which the Lord would set His Name. A land as yet unpolluted by idolatry, by war, by commercialism; a land as yet without cities, inhabited only by a few simple pastoral folk, fitting home for the people for his purpose which God planned to call into being. One such land existed, surrounded on all sides by the civilisations which had grown up through the centuries, Egypt to the south, commercial Canaan to the north, Sumer and Elam to the east; one such land lying by some mysterious Divine foresight in the exact geographical centre of the earth. There the Lord determined to build his Holy City.

14. Citizens of Ur

Twelve centuries had passed from the day that Noah and his family stepped out of the Ark, twelve long centuries since the little family had grown into an assembly of nations that was now spreading far over the earth, from Western Europe to China, from Britain to Equatorial Africa and India. The children of Noah were to be found living under varied circumstances and already differentiated by colour and culture. Some led a settled industrial life in built-up cities, some as nomads roaming the wide pastures of their native plains, some advancing in knowledge and achievement, some degenerating into barbarism and savagery. The world was fast taking the shape it has been ever since, although there were as yet still vast areas unknown to and untouched by man.

At the centre of this teeming world lay the land of Sumer, where it all began. Here was the beginning of all that had been achieved, and here still was the repository of knowledge and science, of trade and industry. Here, at the then head of the Persian Gulf, leading up from the Indian Ocean, lay the busy city of Uri-ki, Ur of the Chaldees, a place of twenty-four thousand inhabitants, mostly engaged in merchant shipping and trade or in manufacturing industry. The city was wealthy and prosperous, the houses ornate in appearance and luxuriously appointed, the citizens sleek and well fed, and apart from occasional military raids by the Elamites from the distant mountains, and the enmity of the neighbouring city-states of Isin and Larsa, life was good and seemed likely to remain so. The lofty temple-tower, surmounted by its sanctuary to the patron god of Ur, Nannar the Moon-god, rose into the skies, and ships in the harbour rode quietly at anchor as industrious labourers unloaded rare metals and timber, exotic goods, animals and birds, brought from far-away India and Africa. In the schools, the children sat at their lessons, carefully copying on soft clay tablets the examples set them by the master, committing to memory the five hundred different cuneiform symbols which made up their 'alphabet', and learning the intricacies of mathematics and geometry which they were going to have to use in later life in a society in which these arts occupied so prominent a place. The school – *e-dubba*, literally 'tablet house' was the most important institution in Sumer and the pupils, from early youth to late teenage, were compelled to attend from sunrise to sunset, a twelve hours per day inculcation of lessons. Woe betide the inattentive. One tablet discovered is evidently part of the rule-book. It runs *"If the student at the e-dubba has not recited his task correctly the senior student and the teacher will beat him"*. No nonsense about the evils of corporal punishment in the school of ancient Sumer. One is reminded of the maxim inculcated by Solomon a thousand years later in Prov. 23:13-14 *"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not*

die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell". The beneficent effect of the education they did receive is shown by the vast array of school exercises, some showing correction marks by the tutor that have been discovered. Many of them are lists of equivalent words in two or even three languages and have been of incalculable value in modern times as aids to the decipherment of those languages. Dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, painstakingly impressed on clay tablets by the schoolchildren of Ur and other towns, have been of enormous help to modern scholars.

In the Temple precincts the scribes were busy composing the great epics which enshrined all that history and legend had to tell them about the days and lives of their ancestors who had founded this land – and in the process got legendary and historical events so thoroughly mixed up that these epics have been the despair of modern scholars trying to piece together a coherent story of the times. And so, on the whole, life was good for those citizens of Ur, way back two thousand years before Christ.

Abu-Ramu was one of those citizens. He is referred to in the Book of Genesis as Abram. Abu-Ramu was not a Sumerian; he was a Semite, descended from Shem through Arphaxad, but his family had lived in Ur for probably three or four generations. He was married to his niece Sarratu, daughter of his brother Harannu, sixty years older than himself and now dead. His remaining brother, Nakhur, about twenty years his senior, was married to Sarratu's sister Malkata. Together with the sisters' younger brother Lu-utu they all lived together in a house of Abu-Ramu's father Tarakhu.

This was a common practice in Sumerian cities. The general procedure was to add rooms as the demand arose, and the ruins of some of the dwellings excavated by Woolley in 1930 have as many as twenty or thirty rooms. They were not like modern houses. The exterior presented the appearance of a blank wall without windows. The visitor, passing through the entrance, found himself in a kind of reception hall, a door on the farther side giving access to a patio open to the sky around which was grouped a number of rooms, perhaps eight to ten, in the form of a square. Each one had its own doorway opening from the patio, and in some cases communicating doors between. A gallery approached by staircase, ran round the sides of the square at first floor level and from this gallery, the first floor doors opened. The roof, which projected over the gallery, was made of reeds and sun-dried clay made watertight with bitumen, and the centre of the patio was open to the sky so that daylight penetrated into all the rooms. Doors and windows faced the patio and the outside walls had no breaks save the main entrance. The residential part of the city must have presented a rather drab vista of sheer brick walls. But as if to make up for the sameness of brick-work in the streets, the public buildings of Ur were ornate and magnificent, often decorated with brightly coloured tiles and enamelled bricks and coloured representations of lions, bulls and dragons, or flowers and date palms in relief. Statues of gold and copper representing the gods or commemorating some military victory stood here and there and in the centre of the city the imposing edifice that was the pride of Ur, the Temple of the Moon-God.

The imposing building, the *'ziggurat'* of Ur – the best preserved of any of the hundreds of such in Iraq today – was first excavated in the late 19th century but much more thoroughly and scientifically in 1930 by Leonard Woolley. Sacred to the moon-god, it consisted of a series of seven stages surmounted at the top by the idol sanctuary. Abram and Sarai, in their walks through the city, or as they went about their business or met their friends, must often have stopped to gaze upon its magnificence. If as is probable, they were followers of the true God, it is not likely they set foot in its precincts. But its worship and its ceremonial must have been very familiar to them, and on the great feast days they might have watched their friends and neighbours setting out to join in the services and climb the great Tower that dominated the Temple area. They might have stood and watched the people thronging the Sacred Road that led up to the double gateway straddling the outer court. Through that gateway they might perchance catch a glimpse of the two sanctuary buildings, both built in the honour of Nannar, the Moon-god, both closed, their inward mysteries concealed from the public gaze. On feast-days the people were not concerned with the priestly ritual and priestly service; they pressed through the portals of *dublal-makah*, the Great Gate, gaining access to the elaborated

terrace on which stood the 'Hill of Heaven' the great brick 'tower', two hundred and fifty feet square and seventy feet high, planted on all its terraces with trees and flowers, and at its top the gleaming gold and silver of the holiest shrine of all.

The internal appointments of the residents' houses were in keeping with the prosperity of the city. From the relics found by Woolley, lying where the owners left them when the city was deserted and buried in sand millenniums ago it is evident that luxury was the keynote. The furniture in Terah's house might well have been made from tropical woods – sandalwood and teak from India and mahogany from Africa. He would possess chairs and tables, strikingly like our modern ones, elaborately carved and ornamented, the work of craftsmen. At night the family took its repose on beds formed of cord networks stretched across wooden frames, covered with cushions and having raised ends decorated with pictures or designs. Specially shaped receptacles of earthenware held clothing and household linen; weaving was a well understood art and was employed for the making of clothes as well as carpets and cushions further to advance the comfort of the home. The majority of household utensils were of pottery or copper; if Terah was a reasonably wealthy man, tableware such as forks and spoons would be of silver or gold. Knives were made of copper, for the people of Ur, like all the ancients, held the secret, lost for thousands of years afterward and only rediscovered during the twentieth century, of so tempering copper that it could be used for cutting edges as today we use steel. Elaborate musical instruments, libraries of clay tablets containing literary works, religious exercises, commercial documents, even medical treatises and school lessons, all betoken a civilised and knowledgeable people replete in this world's goods and loyal in their devotion to their Deity.

It was in this city and this kind of house, and in this way of life, that Terah and his family lived. And they were all idolaters. That this was so is demonstrated by the names of the members of the family. They are all idolatrous names connected with one or other of the many gods of Sumer. There is also the testimony of Joshua, speaking to the people of Israel at the time of the entry to the land, when he told them *"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (river) in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and of Nachor, and they served other gods!"* (Josh. 24:2). In addition there is a passage in the Apocryphal Book of Jubilees (150 BC), which declares that Terah, his father and his grandfather were all idolaters (Jub. 11.4-16). But the real evidence lies in the names, all of which are recorded in their Hebrew form in Genesis, although it has to be remembered that they were actually Sumerian names.

"Abram" is the Hebrew form of the Sumerian "Abu-Ramu", meaning "Ramu, my father". (The Hebrew language normally omitted the final 'u' when translating Sumerian words, or else replaced it with 'a' or 'i'.) Ramu or Adad was the storm-god. 'Sarai' is 'Sarratu', a name current in the country of Haran for the wife of Nannar the Moon-God. Her sister 'Milcah' is 'Malkatu', also a name in Haran for the goddess Inanna or Ishtar (Venus). 'Nahor' is "Nakhur", Nannar the Moon-god; "Haran" is "Harranu". "An, my mountain" probably "An (the supreme god) is my strength"; "Terah" is "Tarakhu", the sacred gazelle of the Moon-god, and "Lot" son of Haran, is "Lu-utu", "man of the sun-god". The names are mingled Sumerian and Semitic and most of them resemble the local names of the gods current in the northern town of Haran (also dedicated to the Moon-god) rather than the purely Sumerian town of Ur, from which fact it has been suggested that the family originated several generations earlier from Haran.

From all this it is clear that Joshua was correct; Abraham's father Terah was an idolater and named his family accordingly. (At a later date in Canaan God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah to remove the pagan stigma). Terah's father and grandfather must have worshipped idols also, but that is as far back as the apostasy would have gone, for the grandfather, Serug, lived at the time when paganism had its rise. It follows therefore that the true faith was preserved in the family to within two centuries of the birth of Abraham so that quite reasonably the old writings, the stories of Eden, the Flood, and Babel, as we have them in Genesis – and probably much more were preserved and handed down until they came into the possession of Abraham himself: so the early Bible history was saved. Jewish tradition has it that Terah was in business as a

manufacturer of *teraphim*, the miniature idols used in private homes to protect the inhabitants. It may be remembered that in later years Rachel his great-granddaughter was involved in some rather shady business concerning the theft of her father Laban's *teraphim* to the displeasure of her husband Jacob (Gen. 31:30-35) so the legend may well rest on a basis of fact.

The conversion of Abram and Sarai to the true faith and renunciation of idolatry must have been at an early stage of their lives. There is some evidence that his brother Nahor shared in that conversion (Gen. 31:53). Various legends existed in later times purporting to tell the story of that conversion but they are but legends. In practice it is tolerably certain that the line leading from Shem to Abraham was faithful to the true God for the major part of its existence; the preservation of the early Bible stories is evidence of that. It is probable that Abraham, accustomed from youth to those stories, saw more in them than did his father and grandfather, and glimpsed something in them of an outworking of the Divine purpose which led him to realise that this was indeed the very Word of God, and set himself to follow the light he thus received. So the Lord looked down and saw the man who would be the man of his choice and in the fulness of time revealed Himself.

It was about this time the name of a new god began to be made known among the people. Marduk the god of Babylon had not been one of much consequence in past times but Ur was now becoming increasingly dominated by Babylon and the claims of Babylon's god were being pressed. Marduk was not like the other gods, a personification of one or another attributes of the Most High God; he was a personification of a famous man of nearly a thousand years earlier, Nimrod, the celebrated hero who had taken the lead among their ancestors of early days. Now the priests and scribes got busy extolling his praises and writing epic poems about his mighty deeds. At first he was claimed to be the son of Nannar the Moon-god; later they gave out that he was the son of Enlil the son of the Most High and then they went further and made him the son of An the Most High himself, and wove wondrous legends about his becoming man's redeemer by dying and going into the grave and then rising from the dead and returning to the earth with gifts for men, all of which causes one to wonder how much early man, in the days of Eden and the Flood, did have revealed to them something of God's purpose of salvation, for that is where it must have come from at the first. An elaborate ceremony lasting a week was held every year in Babylon in the month Nisan to picture this legend. Eventually Marduk came to supersede all the other gods, as the hero of the people. The cult of Marduk became a kind of national obsession; the poets and scribes began to weave his personality into their epic poems and he became the symbol of all that was great and spectacular in the national life. More than any of the other gods Marduk was the most prominent god of Sumerian paganism and set the pattern for all paganism in all the world since. Under his Semitic name of Bel he became Baal to the Canaanitish nations and so was worshipped by Israel in her more decadent days. The greatest of all Sumerian epics, the *"Enuma Elish"* written two centuries or more after Abram left Ur, is a long recapitulation of all his alleged mighty deeds, among the gods and among men. In the end the identity of Utu, the sun-god, became absorbed into that of Marduk. It might well have been the rising power of this cult which led Abram to welcome the opportunity the Lord gave him to abandon Ur with its paganism and go to the new land which He promised to show him.

So, at last, the word of the Lord came to Abram *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation"*. (Gen. 12:1-2). And Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.

15. Journey to Haran

And now the time had come for a great step to be taken in the active development of the Divine Plan for human salvation. This world of sorrow and death was already nearly half-way through its long history; it was time for the downward trend to be reversed and man to be shown the way upward. As a means of pointing that way God purposed first to develop a people, a nation, that would exemplify his standards and be his witness to all the world. That nation must needs have a progenitor,

one man who would be a worthy ancestor of such a people, one who could become known in after times as the “father of the faithful”, celebrated for his sterling faith and inflexible loyalty to the Most High God, in the midst of a world given over to idolatry. So the Lord looked down upon the earth, and he found his man.

Abu-Ramu (Abram), youngest son of Tarakhu (Terah) was of Semitic stock in lineal descent from Shem, son of Noah. Married to his eldest brother’s daughter Sarai (a common thing in those days and in that culture), ten years younger than himself, he was a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur at the then head of the Persian Gulf. His vocation in life is unknown, but since Ur was a thriving seaport and industrial centre he is almost certain to have been in industry or commerce. Born and brought up in the world’s most advanced civilisation, he would have been well educated and probably reasonably wealthy. From the everyday point of view there would seem to be no reason why he should not expect to continue through life in the manner of his fellows and eventually die, respected by all who knew him, in the fulness of days, which at that time was in the region of two centuries. But God had other plans.

Abram worshipped and served the true God, probably one of very few in Ur of the Chaldees who did so. According to Jewish tradition his father was an idolator, carrying on a profitable business in the manufacture of idols and images of the gods – with sixty-one major gods and a vast number of minor deities his business could not have lacked variety and most certainly would have been brisk. How Abram came to separate himself from the worship of the land and yield his allegiance to the One God is also not known – some streak of intelligent piety transmitted from earlier ancestors of four or five generations back who never had wavered in their own loyalty might well have risen to the surface in his case.

The Talmud has a legend – probably purely imaginary – of the manner in which he first came to God. *“When quite a child, beholding the brilliant splendour of the noonday sun and the reflected glory which it cast upon all objects around, he said ‘Surely this brilliant light must be a god; to him will I render worship’. And he worshipped the sun and prayed to it. But as the day lengthened the sun’s brightness faded, the radiance which it cast upon the earth was lost in the lowering clouds of night; as the twilight deepened the youth ceased his supplications saying ‘No, this cannot be a god. Where then can I find the Creator, He who made the heavens and the earth?’ He looked towards the west, the south, the north and the east. The sun had disappeared from view, nature became enveloped in the pall of a past day. The moon rose, and when Abram saw it shining in the heavens surrounded by its myriads of stars, he said ‘Perhaps these are the gods who have created all things’ and he uttered prayer to them. But the morning dawned, the stars paled, the moon faded into silvery whiteness and was lost in the returning glory of the sun. Then Abram knew God, and said ‘There is a higher Power, a Supreme Being; these luminaries are but his servants, the work of his hands’. From that day, even until the day of his death, Abram knew the Lord and walked in his ways.”*

It was very likely not at all like this. Without any doubt he had access to – probably possessed – written records dating from five centuries earlier, stories of the days when men knew only one God and worshipped him alone, stories not only of Eden and the Flood and the Tower of Babel more or less as we have them now in the Book of Genesis, but other stories of ancient times which have not survived and are unknown to us. Relics of these other stories passed into the legends of Israel and reappear in apocryphal books such as the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. The days of Abram were days of intense literary activity and every Sumerian city had its library to which its citizens could repair and consult the writings of past times. The student could, if he wished, take the tablet of his choice from the shelf, impress its number and his personal seal on a clay tablet to acknowledge receipt, leaving that with the librarian to ensure the tablet’s return, and take his selection home to read at leisure precisely as do readers in a public library today; for there is nothing new under the sun. The likelihood is that Abram, of studious mind, had read those ancient stories and looked behind the idolatry of his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, and took as his heroes his forebears of earlier time such as Peleg and Eber and Salah, men who served and revered the Most High God in the

days before idolatry came into the world. He might well have been fully aware of the promise that was made right at the beginning, that the Seed of a woman would one day undo the work of the serpent, and wondered in a vague sort of way how that would come about, and who was the man by whom it would be fulfilled. He might not have been altogether surprised when, one day, in the quietness of his room, alone in communion with God, he became conscious of a Voice, a Voice impressing itself upon his mind even although he could not be sure it was sounding in his ears.

“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”.

Long and earnestly must Abram have pondered that Call. Where would the Lord send him? In what other land would he be able to serve the Lord better than in Ur? They were all equally idolatrous lands, all serving the Sumerian gods. Would it be Dilmun, halfway down the coast of the Gulf, or Magan, at its exit to the Indian Ocean, or far-away Melukha where Pakistan is now? Or would it be northward to Mari, the land of his own ancestors the Semites, sons of Shem, or to Aram, where stood Harran the other city of the Moon-God, a kind of twin-city to Ur? There was no clue, no intimation, no revelation; only the realisation that God was calling him, Abram the Hebrew, to play a part, a great part, in the outworking of his Plan of Salvation. Perhaps it was at this point that Abram realised idolatry would not subsist for ever, that one day God would restore the ancient Golden Age of which the old stories had spoken, and all men worship God in spirit and in truth. Much later on Jesus was to say to his contemporaries *“your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad”*. The more that Abram thought about it, the more he must have realised that this was a turning-point in his life. God had spoken to him; God had called him; God wanted him for an, as yet, unrevealed purpose, a purpose which would culminate in the blessing of all families of the earth. What should he say? What could he do? ... There was no other possible reply!

“Here am I Lord. Send me”. And so Abram left Ur of the Chaldees to follow the Lord’s leading, not knowing whither he went.



Abram did not go alone. His wife Sarai accompanied him, and his nephew Lot, and his father, Terah. In fact the implication of the narrative is that it was Terah who took the initiative. *“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his grand-daughter, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan, and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there”* (Gen. 11:31). One might ask why Terah, the idolater, already probably well and comfortably settled in Ur, should be inclined to join his son Abram in what must have seemed to him a particularly foolhardy enterprise. The answer probably lies in the political situation of the times. The independence of Ur was being seriously threatened by the power of Elam in the east and Babylon in the north. Terah’s father had known Ur at the peak of its power and magnificence at the time of the famous Third Dynasty, but other powerful states had been rising during Terah’s lifetime to challenge the power of Ur. Isin, Larsa, Eshnunna and particularly Elam and Babylon, became serious threats. It is very possible that Terah saw the “writing on the wall” and decided to get out while the going was good. In such case Harran in the north, well away from the conflicts of the Euphrates valley, was the obvious choice. A city very much like Ur, where he could still carry on his business manufacturing idols, a mixed Sumerian-Semite population much like that of Ur, and what Abram did with himself after they got there could be left in the laps of the gods. So Terah decided to go to Harran with Abram and Sarai. Nahor, his other son, stayed behind in Ur – although he did follow later on.

Terah’s instinct was right. Almost immediately Ur passed under the domination of Elam, and then a little later, together with Elam and the other city-states, under that of Babylon. The migrants got out just in time.

So it came about one day, as dawn was breaking over the cornfields surrounding the city and the sunlight glistened on the blue waters of the Euphrates, the north gate opened to allow the egress of the usual caravan of merchants and traders setting out on their customary thousand miles journey to the northern lands and eventually to the Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean sea-coast, a journey which would take them many months. Among them were travellers, men whose business took them to other cities of the empire, government officials on various political missions, migrants seeking their fortunes in far-away places. There could have been a hundred or more men and women in that company, with camels, asses, mules and lumbering four-wheeled wagons, all loaded with merchandise and food for the journey. Progress was slow; about fifteen miles or less a day and an encampment for the night. With them went Terah and his family, with all their worldly possessions, setting out to find a new home in a strange land, for them a journey that would take seven or eight weeks to accomplish.

Three days travel brought the convoy to Uruk, the “Erech” of Gen. 10:10, one of the cities with which the name of Nimrod was associated, now a powerful city-state like Ur. Three more days and the travellers reached Shuruppak, renowned in the legends of Abram’s day as the home of the hero of the Flood and the place where he built the Ark. Abram, in his day, so much closer to the event, may have known much more about that matter than we can hope to know today. He might well have reflected, as the caravan left Shuruppak to continue its journey north, that just as Noah was delivered from a corrupt old world to initiate a new era in a cleansed earth where God could again be worshipped in spirit and in truth, so now he was being delivered from the corruption of an idolatrous land to initiate a new era in the development of the Divine Plan in a land which God would show him, and because God was to lead him to the land He had prepared, it must once again be a land in which God would be worshipped in spirit and in truth. So passed another five days journeying until Abram lifted up his eyes and beheld in the distance the high walls of the greatest city in the land-Babylon.

That must have brought his mind back to the present with a jolt. Even though he was to be led to a land where he and his could worship and serve God without the discordant voices of idolatry around him, paganism and corruption would still be present in the world. Here, in this city Babylon, resided its source and its strength. This, whose first name in the days of its founding was the “Gate of God” was now known as the “Gate of the gods”. Marduk, the deified Nimrod, the Sun-god, was the patron deity of this city where once the Most High, the God of heaven, was the sole object of worship. As the caravan passed into the city through the Gate of the Air-god and came to rest in the broad spaces of *Gan ba*, the great market where all the traders were assembled awaiting their coming, Abram could have turned his gaze to the west and there beheld, rising to a vast height above the houses, that great tower which men had built in olden time, when God came down and scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth. He saw it now, rising stage upon stage, seven stages in all, and at its top, scintillating in the afternoon sun, the ornate temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon, looking eastward directly to the sacred mountain, the “Mount of the East” a hundred and fifty miles away, where once their ancestors had emerged from the Ark which preserved them in the time of the great Flood. Perhaps Abram took heart at that recollection, and realised that what God had done once He could surely do again. In a day yet to come God would cleanse the world of its evil, cleanse it so thoroughly that evil would never rise again.

So, a couple of days later, he and his passed out of Babylon through the Gate of the Moon-god in the northern walls, still heading north. What lay before him he knew not, only that God would be there waiting when he arrived.

Now, for something like a fortnight, the migrants traversed that territory which was the glory of ancient Sumer, the great wheat belt. A flat, treeless plain, watered by innumerable canals and irrigation channels, the river Euphrates meandering through its centre, vast areas of wheat and barley gleaming golden in the sunshine, orchards of figs and olives and peaches and apricots, fields of vegetables, a vast store of foodstuffs which made Sumer the granary of the ancient world. Here, in the area between the Euphrates and the Tigris, their surveyors had discovered and mapped out an extensive natural depression in the land, a huge valley nearly a hundred miles long by thirty-five wide, and had

turned it into a vast reservoir, into which by means of an intricate system of canals, weirs, sluice-gates and locks, the winter flood-waters of both rivers could be diverted and stored until the summer, and then released and sent to whatever part of the land needed water. By this means and with the aid of the everlasting sunshine they could produce three crops of grain each year. Abram might well have wondered, as the caravan traversed its leisurely way through the smiling cornfields and the shady orchards, crossing and recrossing the winding river from time to time, what country could possibly be more desirable than this pleasant land, what more suitable place it could be to which the Lord was leading him; and then would come the old realisation that this was after all but a “fair show in the flesh” and that in reality the heart of this people was waxed gross and the sooner he was away from them and in the place where the Lord wanted him to be the better. So he took fresh heart of courage and pressed forward.

Now they were leaving the land of Sumer behind. Before the caravan, as it still wended its way northward, rose the foothills of the mountains of Syria-Aram as it was then called. Here dwelt racial kinsmen of Abram, Semites like himself, descendants of Shem’s sons Aram and Arphaxed, but worshippers still of the idol gods of Sumer. Mari, they called their land, and Mari their capital city. The fact that such a people had ever existed was quite unknown until this present century; only now has their city, its palaces and buildings, its inscriptions and writings, been unearthed and deciphered. Under its enterprising kings of the period, Yasmah Adad and Zimri-Lim, Mari had become an important trading centre, and the caravan must have halted here for a few days at least whilst business was transacted, sufficient time for Abram to make some contact with men whom he must have recognised as his own kith and kin. Was it to be here, among the sons of Shem the God-fearing patriarch, that the Lord intended to place him in order to fulfil the promise? After all, the true faith and the records of that faith had been preserved in the line of Shem since the days of that patriarch twelve hundred years earlier. It was perhaps with intense interest that Abram explored the stately buildings and the magnificent temples and royal palace of the city of Mari, wondering if this was indeed the place.

It was not to be. No sign came, no word from the Lord impressed itself on his mind. He was to continue still, *“not knowing whither he went, seeking a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:8-10). Before long the cortege was on its way again, climbing now into the mountains, still following the course of the Euphrates, now no longer a placid meandering river, but a tumultuous stream rushing through defiles and splashing over rocks. And now the way was headed north-westward, well on the way to the sea-coast.

This was the most arduous part of the journey. Day after day, seemingly without end, they climbed a constantly ascending trackway running alongside the river as it foamed and sluiced its way in its channel. On either side rose the mountains; the only way was forward, ascending the narrow valley. The distance traversed each day became less, the halts became longer. The traders and merchants were used to this; they had traversed this way many times before. To Terah and his family it must have been a time of sore trial. As they encountered each little ravine in the mountains, carrying a tributary stream to the river, they had to scramble down the track, ford the stream and climb painfully up again the other side; this repeated itself time and time again with no alternative way to go. Did Abram think then of his old comfortable home and life in Ur of the Chaldees, and wonder if it was all going to be worth it, and wish he was back again in Ur?

Until, one day, two months or so after leaving Ur they rounded a spur of the mountains and espied before them, in the distance, lying along the hillside at the head of a wide plain, the walls and buildings, towers and pinnacles and temples and palaces, of a city, a magnificent city built in the shape of a vast crescent moon. The afternoon sun glistened on its white buildings and golden pinnacles resplendent in their proud beauty, and the spectators caught their breath as they gazed upon its loveliness.

“What city is that”? asked Terah of one of the muleteers.

The man looked across the valley with a gaze which had in it something of reverence.

“That is Harran, the city of the Moon-god” he said at last, “we lodge there tonight”.

“Harran!” repeated Terah. “Twin-city to Ur, sacred, like Ur, to Nannar the Moon-god”. He turned to Abram. “This is our destination, my son. Here shall we settle and live on our lives far from the tumult of Sumer?”

Silently, Abram went on his way beside his father. He knew before leaving Ur that this was his father’s goal. He knew also that Harran was just as idolatrous a city as Ur and that in no way could he expect this to be the land the Lord would show him. But for the present he was content to go with his father and await an indication from the Lord as to his next step. He did not know where the promised land was but he knew that the Lord would guide him there in his own due time. For the present he would wait.

“And they came unto Haran, and dwelt there” (Gen. 11:31).

The length of the sojourn in Harran is not stated in Genesis, but by comparison of the few relevant facts which are given, coupled with the implications of Gen. 22:20-24, it would seem to have been about twenty years, long enough for Abram to engage in some kind of business and get a household of his own together.

“And Terah died in Haran” (Gen. 11:32).

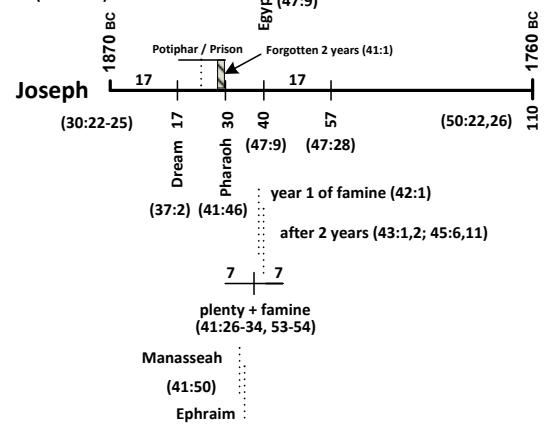
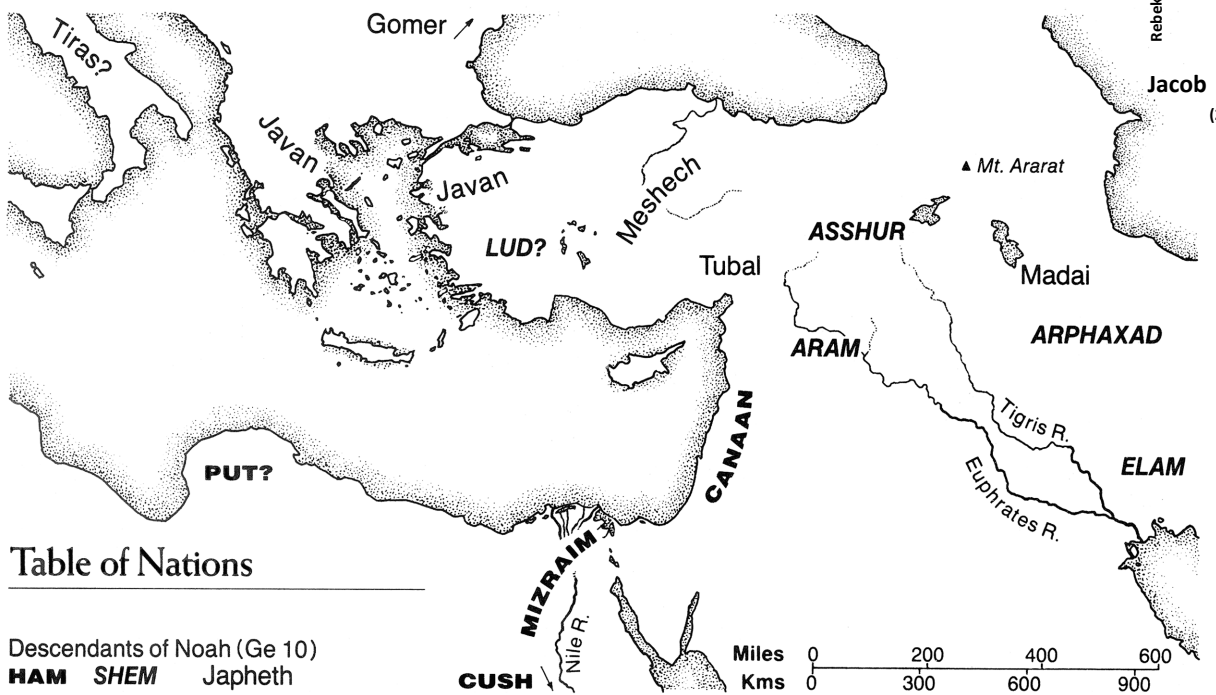
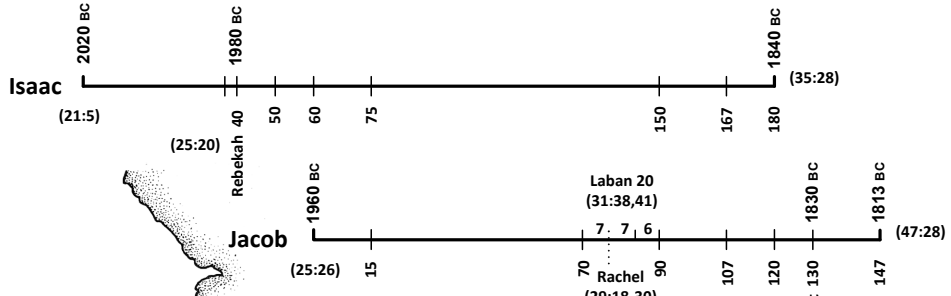
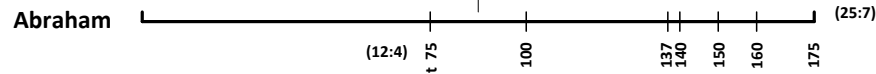
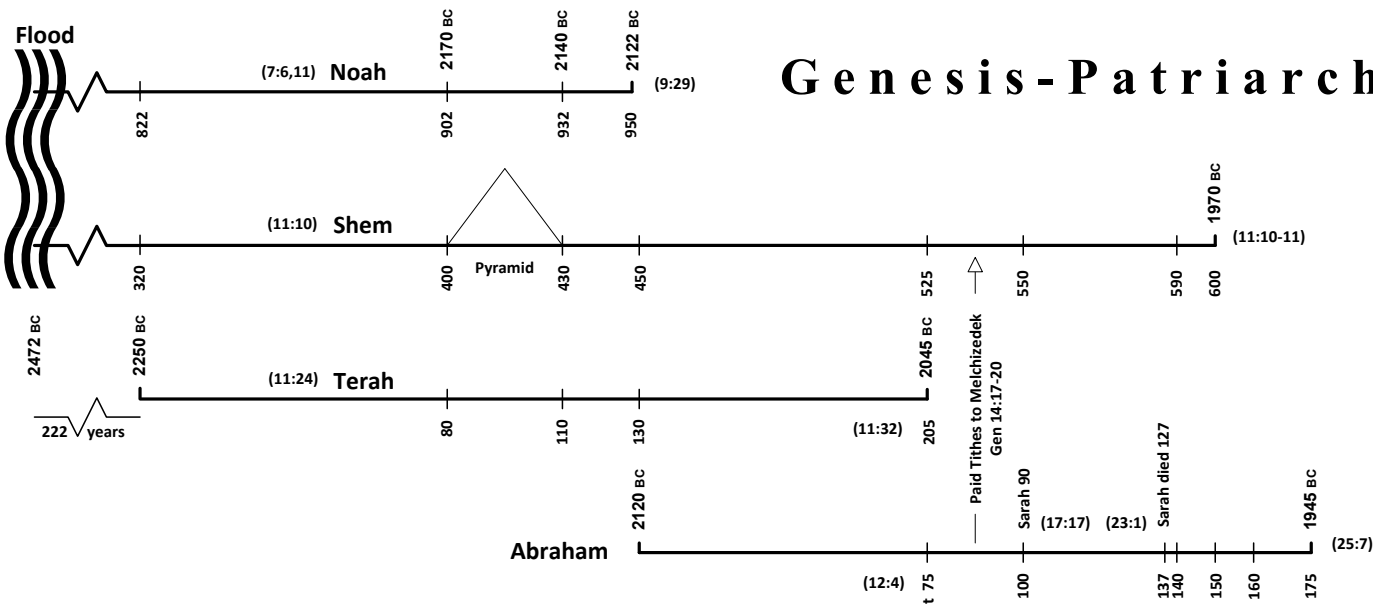


With the death of Terah the post-Flood era which began with Shem at the exit from the Ark came to an end. It began, as did the world before the Flood, with one man and his immediate descendants loyal to God and serving him in sincerity. It ended, as did that world, with the sons of men forsaking the true God and descending into all kinds of idolatry and iniquity. Now, once again, God was to make a new start with one man, Abraham. Once again the torch of Truth was to be held aloft to enlighten the world. The story of Abram who was renamed Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and the nation of Israel, is that story. It led eventually to One who became the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

THE END.



Genesis - Patriarchs



Genesis 10-36 (NAS Spelling)

NOAH

SHEM

Elam
Asshur
Arpachshad

Shelah

Eber

Lud
Aaram

Uz
Hul
Gether
Mash

Peleg

Rehu

Serug

Nahor

Jokton

Almodad
Sheleph
Hazarmaveth
Jerah
Hadoram
Uzal
Diklah
Obal
Abimael
Sheba
Ophir
Havilah
Jobab

Terah

Haran

Lot

Moab
Benammi

Iscah (Sarai ?)

Nahor + Milcah

Uz
Buz
Kemuel

Aram

Chesed
Hazo
Pildash
Jidlaph
Bethuel

JAPETH

Gomer

Ashkenaz
Riphath
Togarmah

Magog
Madai
Javan

Elishah
Tarshish
Kittim
Dodanim

Tubal
Meshech
Tiras

J A C O B

LEAH

ZILPAH

BILHAH

RACHEL

RUBEN - behold a son
SIMEON - hearing
LEVI - joiner
JUDAH - praise

ISSICHAR - reward
ZEBULUN - habitation
(DINAH) - vindication

GAD - troop
ASHER - happy

DAN - judged
NAPHTALI - wrestling

(Canaan) JOSEPH - increaser
BENJAMIN - pain/sorrow

Abram + Sarai

Isaac + Rebekah

Jacob + Rachel

Joseph
Benjamin

Esau

Eliphaz
Reuel
Jeush
Jalam
Korah

Ruben
Simeon
Levi
Judah
Issichar
Zebulun
Dinah

Abram + Hagar

Ishmael
Nebaioth
Kedar
Adbeel
Mibsam
Mishma
Dumah
Massa
Tema
Jetur
Naphish
Kedemah

Abraham + Keturah

Zimran
Jokshan
Sheba
Dedan
Medan
Midian
Ishbak
Shuah

HAM

Cush

Seba
Havilah
Sabtah
Raamah

Sheba
Dedan

Sabteca
Nimrod

Mizraim

Ludim
Anamim
Lehabim
Naphtuhim
Pathrusim
Cusluhim (Philistines)
Caphtorim

Put

Canaan
Sidon
Heth