

Facts and Fancy about the Bible - 21

The letter to the Hebrews was written to believers who were suffering persecution and in need of some encouragement. A good part of that was given in the list of Old Testament believers whose conduct was displayed as examples of steadfast faith in the face of adversity -

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” - Hebrews 11:8.

From this it is clear that the promises of God which Abraham espoused along that sojourn was of everlasting life on this earth. This divine plan is again expressed in that same symbolism in Revelation 21:2 “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Critics of the Bible have asserted that it is all a fanciful story, the product of ancient superstition, that the story of Abraham was not written by Moses, but fabricated many centuries after his time. However, the method which the critics used in testing the authenticity of these ancient records has been absolutely rejected by the highest legal authorities, to be inadmissible as evidence.

At the same time others have been applying the scientific methods of archaeology to evaluate the content of these same texts - a science which has branched out into bioarchaeology and osteoarchaeology, practiced by forensic archaeologists investigating crime scenes. The work of the Biblical archaeologist is in the same business of investigation of remains in order to determine the facts.

The record states that when Abraham was well advanced in age he sent his servant on a mission, “go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac” - Genesis 24:4. And so the servant 10 “arose and went to Mesopotamia Heb. Aram Naharayim = Syria of (the) two rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) , to the city of Nahor,” at the top of the fertile crescent where Syria on the west side of the crescent met Mesopotamia on the east side.

The place he ended up was at the home of Abraham’s nephew, “Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan Aram = the table-land of Syria” - Genesis 25:20, referring to the district just south of Haran (whose site is in the modern village of Harran, Turkey), at the headwaters of the Euphrates river. In that vicinity were preserved the names of two people who are mentioned in Genesis 11.

- The first commemorates Serug, great-grandfather of Abraham, Genesis 11:22-23 - the city of Suruc (now existing just inside the border of Turkey) was about 35 miles (56km) northwest of Haran, and began as a Sumerian settlement in ancient times.
- The second remembers Nahor, Abraham’s grandfather - Genesis 24:10 refers to the town called Nahor where Abraham’s servant sought a wife for Isaac. This was where the family of Nahor’s son Bethuel had settled. The remains of some commercial documents called the Cappadocian Tablets, were evidently left by Assyrian traders in ancient Kanesh (now an archaeological site called Kultepe, in central Turkey) in Anatolia about 1900 BC, which make reference to the patriarchal towns of Haran and also Nahor, location yet to be discovered.