

## The Patriarchs and Contemporary History Part 2

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{Editor's note: Footnotes in the original printed edition were numbered 19–38, but in this electronic edition are numbered 1–20 respectively.}

### III. Abraham's Sojourn at Haran

Despite the remarkable discoveries made in the course of the systematic excavation at Ur, specially the royal tombs,<sup>1</sup> no direct evidence has been found of Abraham's residence there. And such evidence could scarcely be expected, since Ur was a very large city and Terah and his sons inconspicuous citizens, who emigrated from it. However, the case is quite different in the region of Haran to which the patriarch went. In this region of northwest Mesopotamia there is unmistakable evidence of extended Hebrew residence in the vicinity of the Balikh and Habur Rivers, two tributaries of the Euphrates east of the great bend south of ancient Carchemish.

The town of Haran (Gen 11:31; 12:5) is still in existence on the Balikh River sixty miles west of Tell Halaf. It was a flourishing city in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C., as is known from frequent references to it in cuneiform sources.<sup>2</sup> The name appears in Assyrian documents as Harranu ("road") likely because here the trade route from Damascus joined the highway from Nineveh to Carchemish. Singularly enough like Ur, Abraham's birthplace, it was also the seat of the worship of the moon-god from very ancient times. Whether Terah chose Haran as a place to settle because he had not made a clean break with the idolatry of his

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youth, or perhaps for commercial reasons, can of course only be surmised.

The city of Nahor, which was Rebekah's home (Gen 25:10), occurs often as Nakhur in the Mari tablets, discovered in 1935 and belonging to the eighteenth century B.C. To judge from the Mari references and Assyrian records of the seventh century B.C. where it occurs as Til-Nakhiri ("the Mound of Nahor"), it seems to have been located in the Balikh Valley below Haran.<sup>3</sup> Beside the definite location, of the patriarchal cities Haran and Nahor in northwestern Mesopotamia, hardly less clear indications of Hebrew residence in this region appear in the names of Abraham's forefathers, which correspond to the names of towns near Haran: Serug (in Assyrian, Sarugi), Nahor, and Terah (later Til-Turakhi, "Mound...

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