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THE WITNESS

OF EGYPTIAN AND BABYLONIAN RESEARCH TO THE VERACITY OF THE PENTATEUCH

A Course of Addresses Delivered in St. Peter's Cathedral by Rev. T. H. Hunt, M. A., B. D.

THE PATRIARCHS.

In the last two addresses of this course I have tried to give you some notion of the state of Canaan, its inhabitants, its civilization and its foreign relations in the period before the time of Moses. Now it was during the latter part of that period, i. e. 500 years before Moses or thereabouts, that the events described in the history of the Patriarchs took place in Canaan and the neighboring countries. Tonight I want briefly to review this history and to show you how it fits in with what we now know independently of the Bible, about those lands and times.

Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees. This town is now identified by Prof. Sayce with some ruins in southern Babylonia west of the Euphrates. Thence, we read, he went to Haran in Mesopotamia. Now in the old language of Chaldaea, Haran meant "road" and in fact it was on the high road from Babylonia to Syria. Like Ur it was dedicated to Sin, the Moon god. When Abraham went to Haran he would still be in an atmosphere quite familiar to him. The religion of the people at large was the same, and although the people were of different nationalities, yet the civilization of the place was Babylonian. His next move was to Canaan. Now it seems to me that we generally think of Abraham as going into a country where all was strange, and yet his intercourse with the people there, as told in Genesis, seems quite free from any difficulty. We hear of no trouble from a strange language nor of any clashing of customs, ways of speech or ways of living. Abraham seems, as far as we can gather, perfectly at home in Canaan. And as a matter of fact we know now that he must have been so. When he came into Canaan he came to a land where the language of Babylonia was quite familiar to educated people and very likely to some extent to all. He found there libraries written in the characters which he had most likely learned in his old home. He found a country which had more than once been overrun with Chaldean armies and which even then was claimed as part of the empire of Babylonia. This is not guess work; it is founded as I have already shown you, on certain facts. "It was not therefore to a strange and unexplored country that Abraham had migrated." The land to which he had come was full of Babylonian traders, and most likely soldiers and officials as well, from the same country. Abraham was no wild nomad wandering in unknown regions among a people of alien habits and foreign civilization. We know now why he took the road which we know he followed; why he was able to make allies; why he understood the language. He was almost like an Englishman emigrating to a British colony.

Later on we find him visiting Egypt. Egyptian history explains why he and his immediate descendants received no favourable reception there. The race of kings then in power in northern Egypt were of Asiatic blood,—perhaps a branch of the race to which he himself belonged, and the wealthy stranger would naturally be a welcome guest. We find among the animals of which his wealth consisted mention made of camels. This animal was not used in Egypt in ancient days but was common in Arabia. The old language of Chaldea called it the "animal from the Persian Gulf." It would therefore be only natural that it should form part of Abraham's train.

It may be noted that while in Abraham's time we find no biblical record of horses, we find them mentioned and apparently abundant in the story of Joseph. Now the earliest known mention of horses on the Egyptian monuments is about the time when the Syrian kings were driven out, i. e. during the stay of the Israelites in Egypt. On the other hand, asses which formed part of the present given to Abraham by the Pharaoh were very abundant in Egypt from exceedingly ancient times.

I pass on to the time of the blessings of Melchizedek. In a former address, I have shown you, from letters recently discovered in Egypt, that there was a city called Jerusalem or Salem, and that even after the country had become (later than Abraham) an Egyptian province, there was a king there who claimed to have received his throne, not from his ancestors, but from "the mighty king" i. e. not the Egyptian Pharaoh, but the god of the city; in fact a priest king just such as Melchizedek is represented as being in Genesis. I do not intend to dwell any further on this point except to refer to the payment of tithes to Melchizedek by Abraham. The inscriptions of Babylonia show that this was a well known custom in that country, and ages before Abraham their temples were largely supported by the

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titles which was payable by all. The custom lasted down to the destruction of the power of Babylon by the Persians, and even Cyrus, as we learn from the inscriptions, paid tithes to the temples of the conquered country.

Later on, if the narrative is in strict order of events, Abraham is found in the south. Here he lived at Gerar, now identified with a heap of ruins called Umm el Jerar which lies south of Gaza. This place is described as between Kadesh and Shear. Kadesh, as I have said before, is now known to have been among the mountains south of the desert of Beer-Sheva and Shear is the so-called "wall" of Egypt. Gerar is also said in Genesis to have been in the land of the Philistines. So it was when the book was written or compiled, but probably not in Abraham's day. It is called the land of the Philistines just as we call the whole country Palestine, which means the same thing, as a well known name the country afterwards received. The Philistines who are called the Pulistia in the Egyptian monuments seem to have formed part of the hordes who swept down on Syria and the valley of the Nile at the decline of the Egyptian empire. It seems probable that they were settling in the coast cities in the south of Palestine just about the time of the Exodus.

On leaving Gerar, Abraham dwelt at Beersheba where he planted a tree. This is another touch which shows the truthfulness of the story. In the East a tree in the desert had a sacred character and to this day not even Mohammedanism has been able to destroy the reverence paid to such trees.

The sacrifice of Isaac is another point which brings us into close contact with the ways of the Canaanites and Syrians. The temptation of Abraham in this matter was a trial of his faith, but besides this it was a lesson, teaching him, in the most forcible form, that human sacrifice was displeasing to God. It was not a needless lesson. Phoenician legend told how the god El had robed himself in royal purple and sacrificed his son in time of pestilence. The history of Carthage was stained with sacrifices of the first-born. Even in an ancient Babylonian text we read "He gave the off-spring for his life, &c." The more precious the offering the more acceptable to God—the child died for the sins of his people. Such was the belief. But God taught Abraham better things and provided a ram as a substitute. Curiously enough we are told in later days the Phoenicians used to sacrifice a ram instead of a human being.

Later, again, we find Abraham buying a cave to bury his wife's body. This he buys from Ephron, the Hittite. You may remember that on a former occasion I described the Hittites to you and said that they had settlements apparently as far south as Hebron, where this buying of the cave took place. The care taken in making this purchase takes on a new interest, when we remember that contracts and formal deeds of this and even earlier ages have been found in Babylonia.

I can only glance at points here and there in the later history of the Patriarchs. Isaac, we are told, dug wells at a place which he called Rehoboth. This is probably referred to in the book of travels lately found in Egypt (of 300 or 400 years later) under the name of R-hoburta. Next, let us take a glance at Jacob's vision at Bethel, or at his action after it. We read that when he realized that "God was in the place," he took the stone which had been his pillow and set it up and poured oil upon it and called it Beth-el, "the house of God."

Now the Semitic world was full of such Bethels. They are referred to in the literature of ancient Babylonia and have been found in northern Arabia. They are said to have abounded in Phoenicia. The ancient Semite looked upon the solitary rock in the wilderness as in some way the dwelling place of the Deity. Later it became an altar, and in the Assyrian sculptures it becomes a portable altar connected in some way with the symbol of the goddess Asherah.

Another name connected with Jacob's history which shows a similar connection with the uses of other ancient nations is Peniel the place where he wrestled with the angel. There were other places in the Semitic world so called for Peniel or Peniel means "the face of God," and at Carthage a goddess was known by the name of Peni-Baal.

As to the name Jacob, itself, several modern scholars assure us, that it has been found in Egyptian inscriptions, in one place forming part of the name of a town in Palestine. This need not mean that it had any connection with the patriarch but simply that the name was used in that age and country.

The next striking incident in the history of the Patriarchs was the going down into Egypt and the long stay there until the days of Moses.

As I have already said in the case of Abraham, Jacob and his family went to a country ruled by men partially, it seems, of the same race as themselves. There would not be anything very remarkable in a Hebrew of striking ability, such as Joseph, rising to high position under the foreign kings of Egypt, themselves of Syrian descent. The Egypt into which Jacob went was the Egypt of the Hyksos conquerors whose capital was Zoan in northern Egypt and whose people were the slaves of a stranger from Asia. The Egypt which his descendants left was one which had driven out the strangers and had, in the meantime, conquered Canaan and lost it again. When Jacob left Canaan it was practically, even if not politically a province of Babylonia, from which it had derived its civilization and probably much of its religion. The Canaan of Moses' time had been for many years a province of Egypt, and had adopted many of the customs of that country, although politically the power of Egypt over it was gone. Here I leave the story of the Patriarchs. It was not to be expected that the history of a family of little account, as men count greatness, should be found in the scanty

records of the past which have as yet been discovered. All I have been able to do is to take some salient points in the Bible history and to show that they are thoroughly consistent with what we know and are continually learning about those far-off ages of the world.

Underground Flow of Rivers.

F. R. Spearman writes of "Queer American Rivers" in St. Nicholas. Speaking of the rivers of the western plains Mr. Spearman says: The irrigation engineers have lately discovered something wonderful about even these despid rivers. During the very driest seasons, when the stream is apparently quite dry, there is still a great body of water running in the sand. Like a vast sponge the sand holds the water, yet it flows continually, just as if it were in plain sight, but more slowly, of course. The volume may be estimated by the depth and breadth of the sand. One pint of 1 will hold three-quarters of a pint of water. This is called the underground flow, and is peculiar to this class of rivers. By means of ditches this water may be brought to the surface for irrigation.

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A Slave to Duty.

"I intend to show you, sir," said the judge, as he put the limit of fine on the gentleman who had been mauling his wife, "that wife beating, in this country, is an expensive pastime." "I didn't do it for pastime, your honor," pleaded the culprit. "I only done it as a duty."—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Effects of Age.

"Age," remarked the observer of men and things, "makes us wise and others obstinate."—Detroit Journal.

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