

## **Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology**

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology.

Okay, we turn now to what archaeology can tell us regarding Genesis 12 through 50, the period of the patriarchs.

This is, again, a very controversial period in Israel's history and difficult archaeologically to glean much information, though we'll see what we can do here. First of all, I want to show a picture of the cave of Machpelah in our PowerPoint presentation. This is a cave that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite to bury Sarah, his wife, and later patriarchs are buried there as well.

And as it exists today, you see it's a monumental structure, stone structure around these caves. And that structure itself is very ancient. None other than Herod the Great built that enclosure to honor the Hebrew patriarchs and again to placate the Jewish population in his day.

Important thing here is not really an Old Testament observation, but a New Testament observation. You got engaged pilasters coming out halfway up the wall. This copies the temple platform that he expanded and built around the temple mount in Jerusalem.

There is very little evidence of engaged pilasters around the temple. Most of it has been destroyed and deconstructed, but here it is.

Because it is a tomb complex sacred to Muslims, Jews, and Christians, it has survived virtually intact all these centuries. So that's 2000 years old. It doesn't look like it from this angle, but it is a 2000-year-old enclosure.

Now, the crenellations here, the upper more roughly done parapet, as well as the Muslim prayer towers, of course, are later additions. But this again is in the city of Hebron which is the traditional site where these tombs of the patriarchs were located.

They weren't researched or studied until the mandate period when French scholars did a survey of this structure. And then, after the Six Day War, a very skinny Israeli girl got down and explored, able to fit through a very small hole in the floor, and got down and explored the subterranean complex where these tombs were originally.

Okay, so Abraham is called by God at Ur the Chaldees, called by God to go to a land that I will show you in Genesis 12.

And Ur is, again, the traditional site of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, ancient Sumer. Cyrus Gordon, whom we showed a slide of in an earlier PowerPoint, suggested an alternate location, Urrah, which is in northern Mesopotamia. That's again a possibility, but it specifically says Ur of the Chaldees, and that should be the southern location.

Now Abraham and Sarah and their entourage, Abraham was a very wealthy man and had lots of livestock and servants, moved up from Ur to Haran in northern Syria. And then down the coast, again, following that Fertile Crescent route down the coast into the Levant, southern Levant. And it was at that time that he, they had a famine in the land, much like the time of Jacob and his sons.

And so, they went on to go on to a city in Egypt, and to escape the famine that was afflicting Canaan. Now, one of the most interesting times I had personally in the Holy Land was participating in a UN Harvard program called Abraham Path. Now Abraham, again, is a figure revered by all three monotheistic faiths.

And so, we traversed with guides all over Transjordan, in the rural areas, walking through ancient vineyards and olive groves, walking through long, abandoned villages, eating lunch cooked out in the woods or in the fields that we were walking. We walked from the mountains of Gilead down into the Jordan Valley, and we had a wonderful time interacting with the terrain and topography of Jordan, as well as the local Jordanian people. And it's a great name for this.

But Abraham did indeed walk through this area of the Holy Land, and you can see some of these signs here that commemorate that. The Way of the Fathers, or the patriarchs, is what that says, or the patriarchs on these signs down to Egypt.

This is an old photograph of the well at Beersheba. You can see the grooves made by ropes over the centuries, pulling up water from the well below. The history of the patriarchs is a very controversial subject.

And there are varying opinions on the patriarchs. The two men to the left are very negative in their assessment of the historicity of the patriarchs. And Tommy Thompson and John Van Seters.

These are old photographs. They're quite very old right now. I believe both are still alive.

But those are also tempered by arguments for the historicity of the patriarchs. These most notably have been forwarded by John Bimson and K. A. Kitchen in essays in those two books on the right. And we'll unpack this.

The first question is, where do we place the patriarchs chronologically? They seem to fit, in my opinion, best in at least Abraham at the very end of the early Bronze Age, around 2100 to 2000 BC. Or perhaps slightly later in what we call the Middle Bronze Age, 2000 to 1550 BC. Notice the length of time here.

That's a tremendously wide span of time. And we really haven't had any difficulty getting it much narrower than that. Now, this bullet point here is very important for archaeologists.

Now, in archaeology, you look for place names, you look for names of kings, you look for events that maybe could be proven by archaeological excavation, or determine where and when things happen. These cities and towns are mentioned, as well as the names of four kings from the east that attacked the cities of the plain in Genesis 14. However, these names are unattested in other sources.

They are, by their style and construction, apparently from Mesopotamia, East Semitic names, but nothing can be absolutely certain. Semites are mentioned in Egyptian records at this time, but there is no specific mention of any of the patriarchs by name. There are tantalizing clues from other sources.

We have seals with the name of Jacob on them, Yaakov, and an Israelite fort from the Karnak Temple, an Israelite fort, apparently named Fort Abram, perhaps named after one of the patriarchs by either Solomon or one of the other kings of Israel or Judah. The only other king named is a Philistine king with a Semitic name, Abimelech. Okay.

Again, this could be dynastic, some might say anachronistic because the Philistines did not arrive in strength until the 12th century BC. Abram was clearly before that period. So, we have a problem here.

Perhaps it's an update of the name because Gerar was in the realm of the Philistine Pentapolis or the area that the Philistines controlled. So, it could be an updated name, but the name itself, Abimelech, is not Philistine. It is Semitic.

So, it was probably a Canaanite king or chieftain that dealt with Abraham and Isaac. The lack of outside information is not at all surprising because we have to understand that we are reading a history of a single family, not a dynasty of kings. And so the chances of finding evidence, certainly written evidence, at that early time of Abram or Isaac or Jacob or any of their family is extremely, extremely unlikely.

However, with all this taken into consideration, we feel that the very early first half of the second millennium seems to fit the Genesis account quite well. Another hint from evidence in the biblical text. The cities of the plain and the names of the kings at war.

We mentioned that. The cities of the plain, the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the others are certainly something to consider and to look closely at. Equating place names with known sites.

Salem or Shalem is possibly an early name for Jerusalem. Dan, Damascus, Moriah from Genesis 22, Shaveh, Beersheba, etc. Amorites, Canaanites, Philistines, Hivites, and Hittites, etc.

are mentioned. Patriarchal customs, Sarah as a sister, Hagar's role as a surrogate mother, and, again, identification of kings. And one thing that I haven't mentioned yet is the Edomite king list in Genesis 36, which gives some important information as well.

K. A. Kitchen used the prices of slaves. Now, when Joseph was sold as a slave in Genesis 37, he was sold for 20 silver shekels. Kitchen did studies regarding slave prices for young males throughout the ancient Near East in different periods, and 20 silver shekels seem to be consistent with the price of a young male slave in the early second millennium BC.

Treaties and covenants that are in Genesis, and then of course, epigraphic material, which we already mentioned above. In addition to this, in the 1970s, an Italian expedition excavated a site near Aleppo called Tel Mardikh. This is a site known as ancient Ebla.

And they found a cache of 20,000 cuneiform tablets made out of clay. And their epigrapher claimed that these tablets contained tantalizing references to Yahweh, Jerusalem, Sodom, Gomorrah, Zohar, and the patriarchs themselves. Now, the director disputed these claims.

And since this was in Syria, the Syrian government got involved. And this was a very, very, very, very hot potato, so to speak, politically, considering the political climate at that time, and which continues today between Syria and Israel. So, the claims were found ultimately to be unsubstantiated and apparently false.

However, due to the fact that these date to the early Bronze Age, the early or the late second or third, rather third millennium BC, redating the patriarchs to the early Bronze Age was seriously considered and written about during this time when these tablets were being discussed. Now, the term Salem, again, this is Genesis 14,

Abraham's visit or interaction with Melchizedek. Is this an early word for Jerusalem, an early title for Jerusalem? It could be.

It seems to be. And excavations in the Rephaim Valley, again, that valley that comes up to Jerusalem and then slopes down to the west, becomes part of the Sorek Valley. And the city of David has uncovered the site of Salem.

So, Jerusalem was a city of houses and settlements in the Rephaim Valley, dating to the early Bronze and Middle Bronze Period. So, Jerusalem existed as a town and settlements near Jerusalem, the Rephaim Valley, existed during the time of the patriarchs and specifically the time of Abraham. Now, what is the Vale of Shaveh in Genesis 14? This could have been the Kidron Valley or the upper reaches of the Rephaim Valley, the modern Beqa neighborhood in West Jerusalem.

Adonai Zedek was a Jebusite king of Jerusalem, as mentioned in Joshua 10. Notice the term or the name Zedek part again, and then Melchizedek in Genesis 14. There could be some sort of dynastic reflection here and a dynastic name.

We simply don't know. Houses during the time of Abraham had benches around the inner part of the houses and inner walls of the houses, and those were found in houses excavated in the 1970s in the city of David. So, we have, again, clear evidence that there was activity, human activity, and housing in Jerusalem at this time.

Now, the earliest known reference to Jerusalem outside of the Bible is a series of Egyptian texts called the Execration Texts, and these were basically a kind of way of putting an evil spell on your enemies. The enemies of Egypt would be written on either figurines or on bowls, and then the figurines and or bowls would be ceremonially crushed or smashed, and that would, of course, be symbolic of the crushing of their enemies. Again, Jerusalem and other biblical sites were found, and their names were found in these Execration Texts.

We've seen this slide before, but this is, again, a tomb painting from Benny Hassan, roughly dated to the time of the Patriarchs, maybe slightly later than Abraham, but showing, clearly, Asiatics, people from Canaan, Canaanites, or perhaps even early Israelites themselves, Hebrew people, coming to Egypt and trading both livestock and metal for other goods. So, this is a very, very important archaeological find that clearly shows the interaction between Canaan and Egypt, which clearly fits the Genesis narrative. The figure of Melchizedek, going back to the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, of course, is very interesting and kind of a fascinating topic to study.

Melchizedek, of course, the name is King-Priest, and this obviously has connotations that this could be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Melchizedek blesses Abraham and receives a tithe from Abraham. The Valley of Shaveh, again, as we

mentioned before, could be the upper reaches of the Rephaim Valley or the Kidron Valley, the King's Valley, which is just east of Jerusalem.

And we'll talk about that more later. Now, later on in the Old Testament, Solomon had his royal gardens in the Kidron Valley, a series of terracing, the Shadot, that is mentioned in the Book of Kings. It's interesting, I think there's a lot of theology here aside from the person of Melchizedek.

The meeting, brief meeting, in the Vale of Shaveh or the King's Valley in Genesis, now in the Genesis Apocryphon, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, you've got, it's also a third name called the Valley of Bet HaKerem. But this brief meeting between God and Abraham in a well-watered plain or valley seems to harken back to a pre-fall Garden of Eden. And the fact that God and man, God in the form of Melchizedek, the King of Salem, and man in the form of Abraham, the patriarch, the father of the Jewish people, seems to look back as well as forward to the birth of Christ and his atonement and ultimately our reconciliation to God.

Another factor to consider when you look at the archaeology of the patriarchs is the cities of the plain, the fabled cities of the plain, mentioned in the story of Lot and his wife and their daughters. Again, these have been vigorously searched for by various expeditions. There are indeed five sites starting opposite the Dead Sea on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, the Lisan Peninsula, which juts out from the eastern side.

The base of that peninsula is a site by the name of Bab Edh-Dhra. And many archaeologists and biblical historians suggest that it probably represents biblical Sodom. Farther south, there are four other sites that all exhibit early Bronze Age occupation.

The problem here is that the chronology of these sites doesn't necessarily match. Some are later than others. Some don't seem to be occupied, while others do it at various times.

So, the cities in Genesis, Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, Zeboim, and Bela or Zoar still are an open question. Even though these sites are all generally the same period and seem to be in line with what we read in the passage of Lot, Lot's story and Lot's escape from Sodom, there are still issues. Now, more recently, a Christian archaeologist has argued for a northern site, a place called Tel Hamam.

And that is on the edge of the Kirkar har Yarden, kind of a circular plain just to the north of the Dead Sea. But there are problems with that site as well. First of all, in the Genesis narrative, you have the three angels visiting Abraham at his tent, and we'll see a similar tent in a future video.

And they look out over the cities of the plains, particularly Sodom. And this is from the Oak of Mamre in Hebron. And if Sodom was located to the north at Tel Hamam, that is way too far north for them to walk to the edge of their camp and look down into the Rift Valley and see that far north.

It's simply impossible. So, there are issues with that, with all of these, and really no strong resolution. But I think the five cities, Bab Edh-Dhra and the cities to the south, and the sites to the south, probably represent our best guess to this day as far as the cities of the plain, the cities that are mentioned in Genesis.

Okay, the Akedah, the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22, mentions the land of Moriah. Moriah was a land, Eretz Moriah, but Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son on what apparently was the later land of Israel. This was the site for the Temple of Solomon.

And it was a three-day journey from Beersheba to this site when he lifted his eyes and saw the site far off. But this would, again, correspond with the vicinity around Jerusalem. Now in Abraham's day, child sacrifice was commonly practiced and that continued into the Iron Age among Canaanites and pagan populations around Israel.

And this is, again, a marker for the Tophet. This is where these human sacrifices were done. This is at Carthage, one of the Phoenician sites west of modern-day Tunisia to the western part of the Mediterranean.

Now today you can go to a place called the Haas Promenade or Tayelet. It's a beautiful park and a promenade that kind of curves around the Talpiot neighborhood. And you have beautiful views of the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in particular.

And knowing where the Route of the Patriarchs went, which follows modern Hebron Road, where Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off, had to be in this vicinity where you can see the golden dome of the Rock, which is built atop Mount Moriah. Again, Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, and Jacob had twelve sons. And these sons, as we know, became the twelve tribes of Israel.

This is a beautiful depiction of those on the Hadassah Hospital windows in Ein Kerem, which one can visit today. We mentioned the Valley of Dothan before. This, again, is the area where Joseph was taken by the Midianite traders from his brothers and taken to Egypt.

That's in this general vicinity, this valley to the north of Samaria. Again, as we saw in an earlier slideshow, there is no clear evidence of Joseph serving as vizier of Egypt. We have his Egyptian name preserved in Genesis.

But that's clearly understandable, considering the fact that the later pharaohs oppressed and enslaved Joseph's descendants. And again, this burial monument and this mass statue, the head of the bust of the statue, may represent somebody like Joseph or Joseph himself that was founded of ours. The account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 gives kind of an account of how men identified themselves.

And what did she do? She requested his staff and his seal. We do have seals, as I mentioned earlier, that spell out the name of Jacob from the second millennium. And so, this, again, is an insight of the time of the patriarchs, the second millennium BC.

And we have again seals to show that. We don't have Judah's seal, obviously, but similar ones and ones that do mention the name Jacob or Yaakov. Of ours, we talked about as possibly being where Joseph served as first a slave under Potiphar and then ultimately as vizier under Pharaoh.

And then, of course, the end of the book of Genesis ends with Jacob and the other brothers moving to Egypt and being given the land of Goshen, which is this dark area, the Nile Delta. In antiquity, there were seven branches of the Nile Delta that fanned out over that shaped outlet into the Mediterranean. Today, there are only two but very rich lands.

Here, you can see this picture with the base of a statue, probably of the 19th Dynasty. And you can see the rich land there. And that's where the Israelites moved to and set up their lives and prospered until a new dynasty came to power and the oppression began.

Thank you. In this case, in the Horn Archaeological Museum, are pottery forms from roughly the time of Abraham. These were taken from tombs at the site of Bab Adra in Jordan.

Bab Adra, again, from our previous lecture, is the probable site of biblical Sodom. Now, one of the interesting features of this pottery is that they are hand-made. This is before the introduction of the fast potter's wheel.

So, these were all made by hand, hand-formed using coils, and then wrapping them around and smoothing them out by hand. So, if you look carefully, they are not perfectly symmetrical, but still very nice forms, mostly bowls we have here and small jars. Notice, too, on the forms, some of them have what are called ledge handles.

This is characteristic of the early Bronze Period, which lasted from 3100 to about 2000 B.C. Now, Abraham would have lived the very end of that period, if not later. But these are characteristic forms and pottery forms from, again, roughly the time of Abraham from the site of what we believe is biblical Sodom. In the back, one can view a basalt mortar, and this is for grinding grain.

A pestle would have been used with that to grind grain or spices to make dishes or stews. And, of course, this one has a chip out of it, but it was found, as it is today, in a tomb buried with the occupants of the tomb. Okay, welcome to the Horn Archaeological Museum.

What we have before us is an authentic Bedouin tent. And unlike tents today, which are made of synthetic materials, this is real goat hair that is woven together to make this tent. Why do they use goat hair? Well, goat hair is impervious to water, and when water touches goat hair, it swells up and becomes a leak-proof shelter for you when you're in the desert.

The style of these tents has remained unchanged for thousands of years, and when we think of the patriarchs and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and their moving from place to place, this is what they would have used. However, there is one caveat here: their tents would have been much, much larger, probably four or five times the size, if not larger. I want to point out a few things about these tents, though.

And one is the stripes that you see on the wall of the tent. That's simply not only for decoration, but it also tells people who are approaching the tent from a distance what family, tribe, or kinfolk are here. You may be approaching a tent like this out in the Holy Land somewhere, in the Levant, and those designs on the side of the tent may be something that you recognize as an enemy of your family, an enemy of your tribe, and so you want to turn your horse or camel or donkey around and get out of there.

Or it could be a welcome sign of an ally or a family member or a clan member that you trust and have a good relationship and that you want to enter and be given hospitality. Now, tents, again, the larger tents that Abraham and Sarah would have used would have had multiple compartments, perhaps one for the women, one for food preparation, one for hospitality, and then another for sleeping. These can be set up and broken down very quickly, and the back could be rolled up so you have a breeze.

If there was a breeze, you could have cross-air ventilation. They were simple but very, very useful. And in our excavations in Jordan, to this day, some of our workmen are Bedouin, and they come to the site every morning after living in tents like this.

Like I said, some things never change. Now, this tent here has some accoutrements, some artifacts with it, and let's look at those in turn. Right below me here is a pounder that grinds or breaks up and smashes coffee beans for making Bedouin coffee.

This wooden constructed object here is a camel saddle. And, of course, the single hump of the camel would ride in the center there. This would be covered with leather and blankets, and you would sit on that and ride the camel.

As you can imagine, this is very uncomfortable, and I can attest I rode a camel for 45 minutes and was in constant pain. So, I don't know how they do it, but the Bedouin and those who ride camels every day develop an ability to do this and to stand the pain. Over here is a skin of a goat, and that is set up here as a butter churn.

And what you would do is you pour in milk that you've milked from your sheep or goats and sit and talk and visit and swing that back and forth, and pretty soon it becomes yogurt and ultimately, if you keep on doing it, butter. And that, of course, is one of the staples of people's food in the Middle East to this day. Over here, we have a threshing sledge and a winnowing fork.

These two objects were found and purchased in Jordan, northern Jordan. And you can see you have pieces of basalt stone embedded in this threshing sledge. Excuse my slurring there.

These, of course, were pulled around a threshing floor to break the grain stalks from the grain kernels. And threshing floors were almost always on hilltops where there was a nice breeze. Once those were broken down by the sledge, then the winnowing fork is used, and when there's a breeze, you throw everything up in the air.

The chaff or the stalks blow away. The seeds drop since they're heavier, and you've got your grain to process and grind for your bread. Over here, the last thing we'll talk about is this beautiful costume here.

This was a Bedouin wedding dowry robe that was spent an untold number of hours, spent to hand embroider all of this for a daughter. A mother would have done it for her daughter before her wedding. The sad story is this was purchased by William G. Dever, a well-known archaeologist, he in turn donated it to our museum.

This was purchased shortly after the 1967 war on a road north of Jerusalem. Obviously, if it's purchased, if it was for sale, there was probably a very sad ending to the story. A wedding didn't take place, or either the groom or the bride passed away.

So, this, again, gives a good indication for us of how the patriarchs lived and how they managed, without building permanent houses, to travel back and forth from Ur in southern Mesopotamia all the way to Haran and then back down to the Holy Land and then to Egypt. It's a long, hundreds of miles of travel, but this is how they lived during that time. Thank you.

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