

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon's lecture on Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, examines the archaeological evidence for the patriarchal period (Genesis 12-50). **The lecture explores** the challenges of verifying patriarchal narratives, citing differing scholarly opinions on their historicity. **Specific sites and artifacts are discussed**, including the Cave of Machpelah, the Abraham Path, and the Ebla tablets, along with their relevance to the biblical account. **The lecture also considers** the locations of Sodom and Gomorrah and the meaning of the Akedah. Finally, **the lecture uses artifacts** from the Horn Archaeological Museum to illustrate the daily life of the patriarchs.

2. 32 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Archaeology).



**Hudon_BibArch_Ses
sion11.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Hudon_BibArch_EN_Ses11.pdf," which is a lecture on Biblical Archaeology focusing on the Patriarchal period.

Briefing Document: The Patriarchs and Archaeology

Source: Excerpts from Dr. Jeffrey Hudon's "Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology" (2024)

Overview: This lecture explores the archaeological evidence related to the Patriarchal period described in Genesis 12-50, focusing on the challenges and possibilities of connecting biblical narratives with historical and archaeological findings. Dr. Hudon emphasizes the complexities and uncertainties surrounding the historicity of the patriarchs, while also presenting various pieces of evidence and arguments that lend some support to the biblical account.

Main Themes and Key Ideas:

1. The Cave of Machpelah:

- The lecture begins by discussing the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, a traditional burial site for the patriarchs.
- While the cave itself is ancient, the surrounding monumental structure was built by Herod the Great around 2000 years ago, demonstrating the site's enduring significance for multiple faiths (Muslims, Jews, and Christians).
- The structure features engaged pilasters, similar to those found on Herod's expansion of the temple platform in Jerusalem.
- The site's continued preservation is attributed to its sacredness across different religions.

1. Abraham's Journey:

- The lecture traces Abraham's journey from Ur of the Chaldees (likely in southern Mesopotamia, although a northern location is mentioned as a possibility) to Haran, then down through the Fertile Crescent to Canaan, and finally to Egypt due to famine.

- The Abraham Path, a UN Harvard program, is mentioned as a modern effort to trace and celebrate Abraham's journey through the Holy Land, highlighting the ongoing relevance of the patriarchal narratives.
- "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."

1. **Debate on the Historicity of the Patriarchs:**

- The historicity of the patriarchs is a debated subject, with some scholars (e.g., Tommy Thompson and John Van Seters) holding very skeptical views.
- Other scholars (e.g., John Bimson and K. A. Kitchen) have argued for the historicity of the patriarchal narratives.
- The lecture seeks to navigate this debate, presenting evidence and arguments for and against the historical accuracy of the narratives.

1. **Chronological Placement:**

- Dr. Hudon suggests that the patriarchal period, particularly Abraham, seems to fit best at the very end of the Early Bronze Age (c. 2100-2000 BC) or perhaps slightly later in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1550 BC).
- Pinpointing the patriarchs chronologically remains a difficult task and the time span is very wide.
- "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."

1. **Archaeological Evidence:**

- The lecture discusses the challenges of finding direct evidence for individuals like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as these were family histories, not accounts of royal dynasties.
- Archaeologists look for place names, names of kings, and events to link the biblical narratives to archaeological findings, but often these do not match what is written in the Bible.
- Examples of evidence include:

- Seals with the name "Jacob."
- An Israelite fort at the Karnak Temple possibly named after a patriarch ("Fort Abram").
- The Semitic name "Abimelech," though associated with a Philistine king, suggesting an updated name from an earlier Canaanite or pre-Philistine context.
- Mention of Semites in Egyptian records, but no specific patriarchs.
- "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."

1. **Patriarchal Customs and Practices:**

- The lecture notes evidence for specific customs described in Genesis, such as the role of a sister in marriage or a surrogate mother, and prices of slaves.
- "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."
- The Edomite king list in Genesis 36 is mentioned as important information as well.

1. **Ebla Tablets and Controversy:**

- The discovery of cuneiform tablets at Ebla (Tel Mardikh) sparked initial excitement with claims of references to Yahweh, Jerusalem, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the patriarchs. However, these claims were disputed and considered unsubstantiated due to political sensitivities.
- The Ebla controversy did lead to a consideration of redating the patriarchs to the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC).

1. **Jerusalem in the Patriarchal Period:**

- The lecture suggests that "Salem" in Genesis 14, referring to Melchizedek, might be an early name for Jerusalem.

- Archaeological evidence suggests Jerusalem existed as a town and settlement in the Rephaim Valley during the Early and Middle Bronze Age, coinciding with the time of the patriarchs.
- Houses excavated in the City of David with benches along the inner walls are noted as further evidence of human activity in the area.
- "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."
- The Execration Texts are mentioned as the earliest extra-biblical reference to Jerusalem as well as other biblical sites.

1. **Melchizedek:**

- The figure of Melchizedek, a king-priest who blessed Abraham, is discussed with theological implications, particularly the idea of a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.
- The location of their meeting is associated with the Vale of Shaveh (the King's Valley) which is possibly the Kidron Valley or the upper reaches of the Rephaim Valley.
- The connection of this meeting to a pre-fall Garden of Eden is also explored.

1. **Cities of the Plain:**

- The lecture discusses the search for the cities of the plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela/Zoar).
- Bab Edh-Dhra and other sites along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea are proposed as potential candidates but have issues with matching the biblical chronology.
- A recently suggested northern site at Tel Hamam, while intriguing, does not seem to fit the Genesis description of Abraham's view from Mamre.
- The lecturer still feels that Bab Edh-Dhra and the sites to the south, are the best guess for the location of the cities of the plain.

1. **The Akedah (Binding of Isaac):**

- The land of Moriah, where Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac, is associated with the later site of the Temple of Solomon and in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

- Child sacrifice, common in the region, was practiced by the Canaanites and pagan populations of the Iron Age and a Phoenician Tophet at Carthage was shown in the lecture.
- The lecturer mentions the Tayelet or Haas Promenade as an excellent viewpoint where the route of the patriarchs could be traced and Mount Moriah is visible.
- "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."

1. **Other Patriarchal Elements:**

- The area of Dothan, where Joseph was taken by Midianite traders, is discussed.
- The Egyptian name of Joseph is known, but no direct archaeological evidence of him serving as a vizier.
- The role of seals in identification is explored using the story of Judah and Tamar, and the lecturer notes that there are archaeological examples of seals that spell out the name Jacob.
- The location of Goshen in the Nile Delta, where the Israelites lived in Egypt, was highlighted using an image from the 19th Dynasty.

1. **Pottery and Artifacts:**

- Pottery forms from Bab Adra, possibly Sodom, are shown from the Horn Archaeological Museum, noting that they are hand-made from the early Bronze Age.
- "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."
- Basalt mortars found in tombs are another notable find.
- **Bedouin Tent and Culture:** A Bedouin tent is presented as illustrative of the types of dwelling that patriarchs like Abraham might have used in their travels. The materials and construction of the tent have remained relatively unchanged for thousands of years.

- "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."
- The tent's stripes also had cultural meaning denoting family or tribal identity.
- A variety of Bedouin items in the tent are described including a pounder for coffee, a camel saddle, a butter churn, a threshing sledge, and a Bedouin wedding robe.
- These artifacts help illustrate the lifestyle of the people at the time and in the area.

Conclusion:

Dr. Hudon's lecture emphasizes that the archaeological evidence for the Patriarchal period is complex and often indirect. While there is a lack of explicit textual evidence mentioning the patriarchs, there are archaeological finds, including artifacts, settlements, customs, and the context provided by the ancient Near East, that lend some support to the historicity of the Genesis narratives. The lecture does not seek to prove or disprove the narratives but aims to explore the intersection between biblical text and the material evidence of the ancient world.

4. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology

The Patriarchs and Archaeology: A Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. What is the significance of the Cave of Machpelah, and who constructed the monumental structure around it?
2. According to the lecture, what are the two possible locations for the biblical Ur from which Abraham originated?
3. Briefly explain the Abraham Path project and its purpose in relation to the biblical patriarchs.
4. What is the general time period (or periods) in which Dr. Hudon believes the patriarchal narratives best fit?
5. Why is it challenging to find archaeological evidence directly linking to the patriarchs?
6. What is the significance of the Ebla tablets, and what were some of the claims made about them?
7. How does the location of Salem relate to the city of Jerusalem, according to the lecture?
8. Describe the significance of the Execration Texts in the context of the patriarchal period.
9. According to Dr. Hudon, what is the most likely location for the biblical cities of the plain?
10. What are some of the significant features of the Bedouin tent described in the lecture and what is its connection to the patriarchs?

Answer Key

1. The Cave of Machpelah is the traditional burial site of Abraham, Sarah, and other patriarchs. Herod the Great constructed the monumental stone structure surrounding it to honor the patriarchs and appease the Jewish population.

2. The traditional location for Ur is in southern Mesopotamia (ancient Sumer), but Cyrus Gordon suggested an alternate location at Urrah in northern Mesopotamia.
3. The Abraham Path project is a UN Harvard program that involves walking through the Levant, exploring ancient sites and interacting with the local people, connecting modern experiences to Abraham's historical journeys.
4. Dr. Hudon believes the patriarchs, especially Abraham, likely fit at the very end of the Early Bronze Age (around 2100-2000 BC) or slightly later in the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1550 BC).
5. It's challenging because the patriarchal narratives focus on a single family, not a dynasty, making it unlikely to find the kinds of written evidence typically left by large political structures, and because of the antiquity of the period.
6. The Ebla tablets were a large collection of cuneiform tablets that were claimed to have references to Yahweh, Jerusalem, Sodom, Gomorrah, Zohar, and the patriarchs, though these claims were ultimately unsubstantiated.
7. Salem is considered to be a possible early name for Jerusalem, and excavations in the Rephaim Valley have uncovered settlements dating to the time of the patriarchs.
8. The Execration Texts are Egyptian texts written on figurines or bowls with the names of enemies, which would be ceremonially crushed to curse them. Some texts mention Jerusalem and other biblical sites, suggesting the cities were known entities.
9. Dr. Hudon suggests that the five sites located south of the Lisan Peninsula, starting at Bab Edh-Dhra on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, are the best current guess for the biblical cities of the plain.
10. The Bedouin tent is made of goat hair, is water resistant, and its stripes identify its family or tribe. The tents are comparable to those used by the patriarchs, although the patriarchs likely had larger ones with multiple compartments, demonstrating how they would move about the land.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges and limitations of using archaeological evidence to support the historicity of the patriarchal narratives in the Book of Genesis.
2. Analyze the significance of place names and geographic locations in understanding the historical context of the patriarchal narratives.
3. Compare and contrast the views of scholars who support the historicity of the patriarchs with those who are skeptical, referencing specific examples from the lecture.
4. Explain how archaeological discoveries, like the Ebla tablets and the Execration Texts, have contributed to (or challenged) our understanding of the patriarchal period.
5. Examine the role of material culture, such as pottery and Bedouin tents, in reconstructing the daily life and context of the patriarchs in ancient Israel.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Patriarchs:** The founding fathers of the Israelite nation, primarily Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as described in the Book of Genesis.
- **Ur (of the Chaldees):** The traditional city in southern Mesopotamia from which Abraham is believed to have originated.
- **Haran:** A city in northern Syria to which Abraham migrated before entering Canaan.
- **Fertile Crescent:** A crescent-shaped region of fertile land in the Middle East, stretching from Mesopotamia to the Levant.
- **Levant:** The eastern Mediterranean region encompassing modern-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.
- **Bronze Age:** A period in human history (roughly 3000-1200 BCE in the Near East) characterized by the use of bronze tools and weapons; divided into Early (c. 3000-2000 BCE), Middle (c. 2000-1550 BCE) and Late periods (c. 1550-1200 BCE).
- **Cuneiform:** An ancient writing system used in Mesopotamia, written on clay tablets using wedge-shaped marks.

- **Tel:** An artificial mound formed by the accumulation of debris from successive settlements over time, common in the Near East.
- **Epigraphic:** Relating to inscriptions on stone, pottery, or other durable materials.
- **Execration Texts:** Egyptian texts written on figurines or bowls with the names of enemies that would be smashed or destroyed to curse them.
- **Salem:** A possible early name for the city of Jerusalem, notably mentioned in the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek.
- **Rephaim Valley:** A valley near Jerusalem, the site of settlements dating back to the Early and Middle Bronze periods.
- **Lisan Peninsula:** A peninsula that juts out from the eastern side of the Dead Sea, near the location of the purported city of Sodom.
- **Bedouin:** Nomadic Arab people of the Middle East who traditionally live in tents and raise livestock.
- **Akedah:** The biblical account of the binding of Isaac, where Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah.
- **Moriah:** The area where the Temple of Solomon was later built, believed to be the site of the Akedah, and considered to be in the area around Jerusalem.

5. FAQs on Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 11, The Patriarchs and Archaeology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Archaeology and the Patriarchs

1. **What is the Cave of Machpelah and why is it significant?** The Cave of Machpelah in Hebron is believed to be where Abraham buried his wife Sarah, and where other patriarchs were later buried. The site is enclosed by a monumental structure, built by Herod the Great around 2000 years ago, featuring engaged pilasters similar to those he used around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This site is considered sacred by Muslims, Jews, and Christians and survived virtually intact for centuries, partly due to its holy status. The cave itself has been explored in modern times, revealing a subterranean complex of tombs.
2. **What do we know about Abraham's journey and what is the 'Abraham Path'?** Abraham's journey began in Ur of the Chaldees (likely southern Mesopotamia), from where God called him. He traveled with his family and livestock to Haran in northern Syria, and then down the Fertile Crescent to the Levant. He faced a famine, forcing him into Egypt, similar to the experience of Jacob and his sons. The "Abraham Path" is a modern project, traversed by a UN Harvard group, that retraced the route taken by Abraham across Transjordan, allowing participants to connect with the land and its people. This path recognizes the importance of Abraham as a figure in the three monotheistic faiths.
3. **What is the controversy surrounding the historicity of the patriarchs, and how does archaeology try to address it?** There are conflicting views on the historicity of the patriarchs. Some scholars, like Tommy Thompson and John Van Seters, are very negative in their assessment. Others, like John Bimson and K.A. Kitchen, have argued for their historicity. Archaeology attempts to provide context by looking for place names, names of kings, and events mentioned in Genesis 12-50. These include cities, towns, and four kings from the east who attacked the cities of the plain. However, none of these are clearly attested in sources outside the Bible. There are a few tantalizing clues, such as seals with the name Jacob, an Israelite fort named "Abram" at the Karnak Temple and a Philistine king with a Semitic name, Abimelech, but these cannot definitively prove the existence of the patriarchs.

4. **What timeframe do archaeologists and scholars assign to the patriarchal narratives?** Based on the evidence, scholars tend to place the patriarchs, particularly Abraham, at the very end of the Early Bronze Age (around 2100 to 2000 BC) or perhaps slightly later in the Middle Bronze Age (2000 to 1550 BC). While there is some debate on the exact timeframe within that range, it seems to correspond well to other evidence in the biblical text such as slave prices mentioned in Genesis, and treaties and covenants.
5. **What are some of the potential archaeological confirmations of the Patriarchal period, and what are some complications?** Archaeological evidence such as mentions of the cities of the plain, which might include Salem/Shalem (possibly early Jerusalem), Dan, Damascus, Moriah, Shaveh and Beersheba are considered. Additionally, the patriarchal customs, like Sarah being passed off as a sister, and Hagar's role as surrogate mother, along with identifications of certain kings, like those mentioned in Genesis 36's Edomite king list, are also useful. The 20 shekel price for Joseph corresponds to slave prices of the time. Also, Ebla tablets may have contained references to biblical place names and patriarchs although those claims are controversial. Further evidence was found in the Rephaim Valley near Jerusalem showing that a settlement existed during the time of Abraham. The complexity arises when exact chronological matches are difficult to confirm, or there are differing interpretations of artifacts and texts, such as the timing of occupation of the cities of the plains.
6. **What was the significance of the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, and what is the connection to the Garden of Eden?** The meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek in the Vale of Shaveh is significant because Melchizedek is described as both a king and a priest, and this is understood by some to prefigure Jesus Christ. Melchizedek blesses Abraham and receives a tithe. The brief encounter in a well-watered plain is thought by some to harken back to the pre-fall Garden of Eden, where there was direct interaction between God (represented by Melchizedek) and man (represented by Abraham).

7. **What is the significance of the cities of the plain, and what are the main archaeological difficulties associated with them?** The cities of the plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, Zeboim, and Bela/Zoar) are mentioned in the story of Lot, and various expeditions have sought to identify them. Bab Edh-Dhra, on the Lisan Peninsula on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, is often identified with Sodom, along with four sites further south. However, the chronological match between these sites and the biblical narrative is not perfect, as occupation times at each site are different. This makes definitive identification of these five cities challenging. While more recently there have been arguments that Tel Hamam, a northern site, might represent Sodom, it does not match the geography of the Genesis story which describes Abraham seeing them from the Oak of Mamre.
8. **How did the patriarchs live and what does the Bedouin tent exhibit reveal about their lifestyle?** The patriarchs lived a nomadic lifestyle, using tents made of goat hair. These tents were waterproof and portable. The stripes on the tents indicated family or tribal affiliations. The tents were likely much larger than the one exhibited, having multiple compartments for women, food preparation, hospitality, and sleeping. Artifacts like pounders for coffee, camel saddles, butter churns, and threshing tools are illustrative of tools used during this time. The Bedouin tent and its accoutrements display how the patriarchs managed to travel long distances between Ur, Haran, the Holy Land, and Egypt with their families and livestock.