

Haran

A city in the upper reaches of the Balih Valley, a commercial and cultural center from the 2nd millennium onwards. It lies on an ancient caravan route from Mesopotamia to Cappadocia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Terah, the father of Abraham, settled here with his family (Gen. 11:31), and it was an important center in the early history of the Hebrew nation. Abraham sent here to find a wife for his son Isaac (Gen. 24:4) and Jacob came here after escaping from Esau (Gen. 28:10).

Haran is mentioned in the Mari archives as a religious center for the West Semitic tribes, who worshipped at the temple of the moon god, Sin.

From the 15th to the 13th centuries bc Haran was part of the Horite kingdom of Mitanni; with the collapse of the kingdom it was conquered by Assyria

(c. 1270 bc). It was subsequently held temporarily by the Arameans and then recaptured by the Assyrians. When Nineveh was captured by the Medes (Madai) and the Chaldeans (612 bc), Haran became the capital of the kingdom of Madai for a brief period. At about this time it is mentioned by Ezekiel as one of the cities trading with Tyre (Ezek. 27:23). During the whole of this period it was a center for the cult of Sin. Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king, preferred Haran to Babylon and rebuilt the temple of Sin there. Some of Nabonidus' most important documents, as well as the autobiography of his mother, were found here.

Haran is identified with Sultan Tepe. Excavations made in the vicinity of the town have uncovered an important library of the later Babylonian period.