

Ur of the Chaldees

Ur was very ancient city in southern Babylon; identified with Tell Muqayyar, close to the right bank of the Euphrates, half-way between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Terah and his sons were born there (Gen. 11:26–8) and set out from there for Haran (Gen. 11:31).

At the center of the mound of Ur remains of a huge tower were discovered in the middle of the 19th century. This was the temple of the Moon God and excavations have brought to light Babylonian inscriptions which prove that this was Ur. Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king, rebuilt the city in about 550 bc. In ancient times it occupied a great stretch of land along the Euphrates. The inscriptions record a populous city, inhabited by artisans and merchants, frequented by numerous strangers, since all the important trade routes of the ancient world, running from Elam, India and southern Arabia to the countries in the north and west, converged there.

Ur had a history of about 3,000 years. The Sumerians arrived there in about the 4th millennium bc, driving out a more ancient culture and turning it into a center of their own. The remains of the 1st Dynasty of Ur belong to the 28th century bc. The great richness of this culture is displayed in the royal tombs, where the king, his queen and their attendants and slaves lay amid numerous beautifully made objects fashioned in gold and precious stones. The heyday of Ur, however, came during the 3rd Dynasty (end of 3rd to early 2nd millennium bc), whose influence spread over Ashur and Haran. The code of laws of Ur-Namm, a copy of which was found in the excavations, probably formed the basis of Hammurabi's code. Remains of this large city were discovered in the excavations.

from the Thompson Chain Reference Bible

Ur of the Chaldees, now known as Tell Mugheir (Mound of Bitumen), lies 140 miles south of the site of ancient Babylon and 150 miles northwest of the Persian Gulf. Its principal ruins, which cover

150 acres, were excavated by J. E. Taylor (1854), H. R. Hall (1919), and C. Leonard Woolley (1922 to 1934).

Taylor uncovered portions of a great temple-tower, or ziggurat (The Mountain of Heaven) which ascended in three stages to a height of 70 feet. In each of its four corners was a niche in which were inscribed cylinders or “cornerstone” records giving the name of the city, its founder, and those who had rebuilt the ziggurat from time to time. In the rubbish-piled room of a nearby temple was discovered a hoard of cuneiform tablets, in one of which King Nabonidus (556 to 536 BC) told of the building and repairing of the great ziggurat; then records a prayer to Nannar, the moon god, for himself and for his eldest son, Belshazzar, that he would be “kept from sin” and “be satisfied with the abundance of life.” The and other inscriptions confirmed the biblical account of Belshazzar.

Hall cleared the southwest face of the mighty ziggurat, and exposed more of the temple area. Woolley completed the excavations about the great ziggurat and temples in the sacred area, then continued until he had laid bare four square miles of the city of Abraham's time. He found extensive quays, many commercial buildings, and numerous two-story homes with courts, fountains, fireplaces, and sanitary systems. Chapels for worship were scattered throughout the residential area, as well as school buildings with clay books showing that they had taught reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and history. A large archive of temple records was found, which revealed that religion, including the temple services, was supported by the tithes of the people and by commerce.

Sensational discoveries were made in the cemeteries. The royal tombs contained a wealth of useful objects made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and other less precious metals. In some tombs there were as many as 60 to 80 skeletal remains of escorts, guards, musicians, and retainers who had marched into the extensive death pit and died sacrificial deaths that they might accompany their king or queen into the

afterlife.

The most significant find for Bible students was an eight-foot water-laid strata of clean clay and sand, with signs of occupation above and below, showing a “definite break in the continuity of the local

culture.” Of this the excavator said, “No ordinary rising of the rivers would leave behind it anything approaching the bulk of this clay bank...the flood which deposited it must have been of a great magnitude unparalleled in local history.