Old Testament Introduction
The Bible’s Buried Secrets
Chapter 9, Abraham

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/bibles-buried-secrets.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qalTJzk4kO0>

***About the Video***

What is for the most part an exact copy of the video script follows. There are a few places where individual speakers could neither be heard nor understood: for this we apologize. Every effort was made to be precise: there were just spots that defeated us. Since this is a quote in its entirety it seemed unnecessary to mark it with quotation marks. The notation for each speaker is tedious enough: Narrator, Reader, etc. If you discover bothersome errors, please reply to this website and point them out. You may verify the script more easily by starting to replay it where the “time” stamps indicate discussion begins. The second of the above links is free from advertising and thus easier to use.

***Overview***

The study of biblical archaeology based only on Egyptian and Palestinian artifacts with no regard whatsoever for the archaeology of Mesopotamia is a snipe hunt. The return to the life of Abraham has no benefit without considerable study of Mesopotamia. Moreover, it is impossible to develop the idea of covenant without such Mesopotamian artifacts. We have only scratched the surface here. Even so, the attempt to construct an idea of covenant without such study of Mesopotamia and the Bible results in a botched-up invention of man, without any regard to facts.

We are compelled ask, what is the purpose of discussing Abraham, out of juxtaposition with his natural environment? Abraham has nothing to do with Merneptah, which is, so far, all that we have really studied. Yes, we took a good long look at the Amarna letters; yet, we had to bring that subject to the table ourselves. We did a lengthy analysis of the chronology of Judges as well, no thanks to our video tutorial. So, why contrast Abraham with Merneptah?

If we are being driven to the conclusion that the Documentary Hypothesis is fact; the only reason for this abuse of Abraham, which we can see, is to set the stage for the false-idea that Abraham really came out of Babylon in 516 BC; or to create a fictitious background story for Jews coming out of Babylon in 516 BC; or for some other devious reconstruction of the evidence.

Other than that, dropping Abraham’s name at this point, only serves to further dramatize the account, to make it sound biblical; when, in fact, it is not close to being biblical. Whether we believe the Bible or not; it is a piece of evidence: evidence deserves greater respect than to be shredded, then reassembled at some “authority’s” whim.

***Script***

Abraham (time 10:20)

Quote:

N: The Hebrew Bible is full of stories of Israel’s origins.[[1]](#endnote-1) The first is Abraham, who leaves Mesopotamia with his family and journeys to the Promised Land, Canaan.[[2]](#endnote-2)

R: “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you. I will make your name great.’ ” — Genesis 12:1 and 2

N: According to the Bible, this promise establishes a covenant, a sacred contract between God and Abraham. To mark the covenant, Abraham and all males are circumcised. His descendants will be God’s chosen people. They will be fruitful, multiply, and inhabit all the land between Egypt and Mesopotamia. In return, Abraham and his people, who will become the Israelites, must worship a single God.

Unquote.

***Abraham***

We are unsure why *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* now returns to Abraham. Any person who reads the Bible realizes that the statement, “The first [of Israel’s origins] is Abraham,” is patently false. No serious student of Scripture could so heedlessly allow such a false claim to stand unchallenged. It is true that Abraham, Sarah, and Lot appear to be the first of the patriarchs and matriarchs to enter the Promised Land; yet, the record hardly begins there.

***Evidence from Mesopotamia***

We pointed out in a previous chapter that any intellectually honest person, who wishes to deal with this era, must give some attention to the broad archaeological material on the subject, mostly material coming from Mesopotamian sources that precede Egyptian sources. We surveyed some of the material related to the creation, temptation, and flood. All of this material deserves intense study before we begin to draw conclusions about the origins of Israel.

**Sumer**

Following the flood the whole Sumerian culture develops in Mesopotamia.[[3]](#endnote-3) A whole complex of city states arises there. The exquisite domestic slow-wheel pottery of the Ubaid period (5300 BC)[[4]](#endnote-4) is replaced by inferior mass produced fast-wheel pottery in the Uruk period (4100-2900 BC)[[5]](#endnote-5), which turns the whole theory of pottery dating on its head.[[6]](#endnote-6) In *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*[[7]](#endnote-7) there is a striking copy of what is clearly a Sumerian Phalanx.[[8]](#endnote-8) Military historians generally credit Alexander the Great with the invention of the Phalanx.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**Ur**

So, when we discuss Abram or Abraham (ca. 1960-1730 BC)[[10]](#endnote-10) and his departure from Ur of the Chaldees, together with Sarai or Sarah, Lot, and Terah, we understand that we are in the context of a highly developed and very sophisticated society: a society with advanced literature and art, complicated but artistically degrading pottery development,[[11]](#endnote-11) and well developed military tactics which will not be discussed by the Greeks for millennia.[[12]](#endnote-12)

**History**

We speed past the Early Dynastic Period (2900-2270 BC), the Akkadian Empire (2270-2083 BC), a Second Dynastic Period (2083-2047 BC), and the Sumerian Renaissance (2047-1940 BC), when we reach a period of decline, of reduced agricultural production, and mass migration to the north lasting until 1700 BC. In this period, Ur[[13]](#endnote-13) was sacked (circa 1940 BC).

**Mass Migration**

What we find here is that Abraham, Sarah, Lot, and Terah are part of a tide of Semitic and/or other refugees, fleeing north, to escape Amorite, Elamite,[[14]](#endnote-14) or Sumerian persecution, famine, or who knows what else. In spite of this pile of evidence, *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* regards Abraham as a non-historic person, whose escape from Ur will be considered the creation of priests during the Babylonian Exile (500 BC).

**Records**

Hammurabi[[15]](#endnote-15) (1792-1750 BC) will rise to power and restore some semblance of peace to the region. By this time, Abraham and his family are long gone, taking with them their memories of creation, temptation, flood, literature, law, and worship; which were very possibly less influenced by the old wives’ fables, and urban legends of the era. We have shown, and will continue to show that Abraham must have brought written records with him: it is simply unthinkable that the vital statistics of these great nations were administered by oral tradition: Abraham had tax records to keep. In any case, by walking with Yahweh, they were instructed in a better way, so there is every reason to believe that whatever Abraham preserved was more accurate than the exaggerated reports from which he walked away.

***Covenant***

**Haran**

At this point, *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* introduces the idea of covenant without examining it. By Genesis 12, before ever receiving the call of God, while he was still a young man, Abram had followed his father Terah to the north where they established a new settlement, which they named in honor of Haran, Abram’s departed brother and Lot’s father.[[16]](#endnote-16) It is not clear that the Nahor II clan(s) journeyed with them, or if they migrated at a different time, either earlier or later.[[17]](#endnote-17) We will eventually discover that all of the Terah clans have relocated to the north.[[18]](#endnote-18) So Yahweh’s first call to Abram in a vision occurs while Abram lives in Haran, which is a sorry model to impose on either the Exodus or the Babylonian Captivity.[[19]](#endnote-19) Since the idea of covenant returns us to the opening sentence of *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* we should examine it more closely.

**Brokenness**

Ostensibly, the Jews are discouraged because Yahweh broke the Covenant with them. It should be perfectly clear that if Yahweh has broken the Covenant, then God cannot be God, and this whole quest for monotheism is foolishness. Yahweh did not break the Covenant. The Israelites and Jews broke the Covenant. Breaking the Covenant with Yahweh involves considerably more than failure to perform a human contract. What is involved in breaking the Covenant?

**Uniqueness**

First of all, there are not several covenants between Yahweh and man; rather, there is only one such covenant which has a wide scope, a scope that is increasingly disclosed over time. From the human perspective, these covenant aspects appear to be breaches or brokenness, and they are broken, or breached. From Yahweh’s perspective, they represent maturity stages in the development of His disobedient created children.

**Eternality**

We begin with the idea that Yahweh’s Covenant is always everlasting. This raises a question concerning Adam and Eve. Were Adam and Eve under the Eternal or Everlasting Covenant before they sinned? Since the Bible offers no information on that matter, we will leave the question to the theologians.

**Noah**

The first mention of the Eternal or Everlasting Covenant of Yahweh occurs after the Flood.[[20]](#endnote-20) Note that, even though the Covenant is promised before the Flood,[[21]](#endnote-21) it is not given until after the Flood is ended.[[22]](#endnote-22) It should be equally clear that the Eternal or Everlasting Covenant of Yahweh creates a new beginning for all mankind, indeed for all the earth. Earth has been washed with a giant baptism. Noah receives the sign of the rainbow. Elsewhere this is related to the idea of grace.[[23]](#endnote-23)

**Abraham**

The next mention of Everlasting Covenant does concern Abram, but it is not found in Genesis 12. Genesis 12 is nothing more than the first call or promise of a covenant to Abram. Several events will take place in the life of Abram before the Covenant is actually given.[[24]](#endnote-24) Abram, along with Sarai and Lot have now migrated to the Promised Land; and during famine, into Egypt, where Abram has an altercation with Pharaoh. Returning to the Promised Land the growing clans of Abram and Lot experience additional strife and separate. Abram is forced to fend off an invasion of Mesopotamians in defense of his family, after which he meets and is blessed by Melchizedek.[[25]](#endnote-25) Yahweh now comes to Abram in a vision, where Abram is promised a son[[26]](#endnote-26) who will bring a vast family to him. This repeats the Covenant theme of a new beginning for all mankind in the multitude of Abram’s children. Abram responds to the vision by sacrificing animals, amid which Yahweh passes: this is the first known incidence of the Shəkinah motif.[[27]](#endnote-27) Abram has a false start with Hagar and Ishmael. Then, and only then, is the Covenant actually granted. Abram is renamed Abraham and is given the sign of circumcision. Elsewhere this is related to the idea of faith.[[28]](#endnote-28)

**Moses**

The next occurrences of Everlasting Covenant are associated with the Law of Moses.[[29]](#endnote-29) The first occurrence relates immediately to the Table of Show Bread, which foreshadows a distinctly liturgical motif. As strange as this must seem to us, the Covenant emphasis is not on the Decalogue itself, or on bloody animal sacrifice. The climactic event of Israel’s worship is the offering of bread. The second occurrence relates immediately to the Aaronic priesthood and the zeal of Phinehas, which is again a startling turn of events.

**Renewal**

Since *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* decided to open the topic of covenant, they should have at least pursued it through the Old Testament. This might be an exercise in futility, were it not for the rich background of Mesopotamian law, which is available, to which *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* also gives no time. None of this law code partitions law the way *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* will attempt to partition law. Experts in this field consider Deuteronomy to be a covenant renewal document, a standard practice in a situation where God, or a leader needed to deal mercifully with the progeny of an erring generation.[[30]](#endnote-30)

**David**

Samuel introduces the covenant made with David to us.[[31]](#endnote-31) The Davidic Covenant[[32]](#endnote-32) has direct tangencies with Abraham and with the Law.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Isaiah refers to the breach of covenant,[[34]](#endnote-34) and promises renewal[[35]](#endnote-35) over one hundred fifty years before Jerusalem’s destruction. This prophetic element in covenant is fatal to the theory supporting *The Bible’s Buried Secrets*. The Israelites and Jews knew exactly what was going to happen and refused to listen. Yet, it is this prophetic note that gives them hope in Babylon.

**New**

Jeremiah insists that this renewal will take the form of a new covenant.[[36]](#endnote-36)

In Babylon, Ezekiel makes further predictions.[[37]](#endnote-37) So the dire introduction of *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* is without biblical foundations.

**Messiah**

None of this reaches fruition in the Old Testament, so it is all either a big lie, or it is fulfilled elsewhere. In the New Testament, we finally read of the completion of this Eternal or Everlasting Covenant of Yahweh,[[38]](#endnote-38) where all the elements of the Everlasting Covenant are brought together in one final concluding Covenant renewal.[[39]](#endnote-39)

**Summary**

Breaking the Eternal or Everlasting Covenant of Yahweh involves nothing less than a major disruption in the world’s salvation history. Each time, God turned bad into good. He rescued us from the perils into which we got ourselves, and delivered us from the evil. With each new turn of an aspect of the Covenant, it got better, instead of worse. On the other hand, the suicidal loss of unbelievers was horrendous. As sad as this seems, God does not force people to love Him.

***Conclusion***

The study of biblical archaeology based only on Egyptian and Palestinian artifacts with no regard whatsoever for the archaeology of Mesopotamia is a snipe hunt. The return to the life of Abraham has no benefit without considerable study of Mesopotamia. Moreover, it is impossible to develop the idea of covenant without such Mesopotamian artifacts. We have only scratched the surface here. Even so, the attempt to construct an idea of covenant without such study of Mesopotamia and the Bible results in a botched-up invention of man, without any regard to facts.

[[40]](#endnote-40)

1. In this view, there is only one origin, that of 516 BC; all the others are inventions created to authenticate and legitimize the existence of the Jews. It’s the 516 BC equivalent of false identification: driver’s license, passport, social security card, and the like. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Thus Adam, Eve, Noah and his family, Heber, and a host of others, including JHVH are dismissed without even a breath. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubaid_period#/media/File:Frieze-group-3-example1.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Contrast the thickness of the clay.

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/image_archive/ue/pottery05.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. One of the basic assumptions of pottery dating is that pottery becomes more artistic, beautiful, complicated, and sophisticated with the passage of time: this evidence is the reverse of that. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. ANEP: Pritchard, James B., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, second edition with supplement (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1969: 396 pages)

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-ancient-near-east-james-b-pritchard/1116828799?ean=9780691147253>

ANET: Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, third edition with supplement (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1969: 710 pages) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Stele of the Vultures (2600-2350), ANEP: pages 95, 96, 284; plates 300, 302

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele_of_the_Vultures#/media/File:Stele_of_Vultures_detail_01-transparent.png>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanx#/media/File:Stele_of_Vultures_detail_01a.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The same picture of a Sumerian phalanx is included in this article. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanx>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele_of_the_Vultures> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. We avoided putting a sharper date on Abraham without much additional research. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Meticulous art is giving way to mass production as the fast-wheel replaces older methods. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. All of this fits well with a post-flood era. Ever increasing population in limited space makes time necessarily more precious. One simply has no time for art when lots of babies are around. As congestion increases exponentially, conflict and strife increase accordingly. Cities are built, crime increases, oppression develops: these are all part of the normal consequences of exponential growth. It is not difficult to show that population growth follows an exponential pattern: overall babies are born at a steady rate, while the elderly die at a steady rate. Baring a major disaster, like flood or famine, population growth is exponential. At only 1% growth, the population of Sumer will double every 70 years. If the Sumerians began with only eight people, in a period of only 1400 years the population of Sumer would have exceeded eight million: people were compelled to migrate (8 \* 2 ^ 1400/70 = 8 \* 2 ^ 20 = 8,388,608. As the population density increased, irrigation also increased due to the growing demand for food. Before long the land became useless, salt poisoned the soil, and panic set in. Ur would become a worthless desert. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ur>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ur_Ka%C5%9Bdim>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibbi-Sin>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_King_List#Dynasty_of_Isin> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elam> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammurabi>

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Code-de-Hammurabi-1.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haran\_(biblical\_place)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haran_%28biblical_place%29) [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Genesis 11:27-32 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Both Isaac and Jacob married related Mesopotamian wives. Rebekah, granddaughter of Nahor II is from Nahor (Genesis 24:10). Leah and Rachel, Laban’s daughters are from Padan-aram (Genesis 31:18). Both of these places appear to be in the general vicinity of Haran.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahor>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aram-Naharaim>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paddan_Aram> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Later on, *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* will seek to impose the Ur model and the Exodus model on the Babylonian Captivity as non-historic events that justify the return of the Jews to Jerusalem around 516. But, Abraham did not simply depart from Ur, the model of Babylon: Abraham departed from Haran. If we are creating a fictitious literary parallel, Haran is unnecessary. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Genesis 9:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Genesis 6:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Genesis 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Genesis 6:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Genesis 17:7, 13, 19 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Genesis 14:18-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The promise of the Son is the most critical of the elements of the Everlasting Covenant. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. NB that the promise extends all the way from the Euphrates to the Nile. In the New Testament, we find that the covenant/promise has enveloped all of earth. Genesis 15:17-18; Ephesians 6:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 13:27; Acts 1:8. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Belief or faith or trust is the outcome of a considerable, lengthy, often painful walk with Yahweh. Genesis 15:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Leviticus 24:8; Numbers 25:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. We encourage interested readers to undertake the arduous task of studying every occurrence of the word covenant or testament in the Bible. Experts in the field such as Meredith Kline (1922-2007), *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eerdmans) and *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* are very informative also. Perhaps, we shall find time for such extended discussion in a future article.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meredith_Kline>

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/277439.The_Structure_of_Biblical_Authority>

<http://www.amazon.com/Treaty-Great-King-Deuteronomy-Commentary/dp/1610976983> [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. 2 Samuel 23:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. The psalter explores the full gamut of the Covenant. Since the Psalter is in its essence a collection of hymns or odes dedicated to Torah, we ought not miss the connection between Covenant and Law. Psalm 25:10, 14; 44:17; 50:5, 16; 55:20; 74:20; 78:10, 37; 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 103:18; 105:8, 9, 10; 106:45; 111:5, 9; 132:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. 1 Chronicles 16:16-22; Psalm 105:10-45 [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Isaiah 24:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Isaiah 55:3; 61:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Jeremiah 31:31; 32:40 [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ezekiel 16:60; 37:21-28, especially verse 26 [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Hebrews 13:20-21 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 1:27; 22:20; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Romans 9:4; 11:27; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:25; Galatians 3:15, 17; 4:24; Ephesians 2:12; Hebrews 7:22; 8:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13; 9:1, 4, 15-20; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20; Revelation 11:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)