

# STORIES OF CHALDEA, CHAPTER 4

By Edith Ralph

## OLD TABLETS—UR OF THE CHALDEES



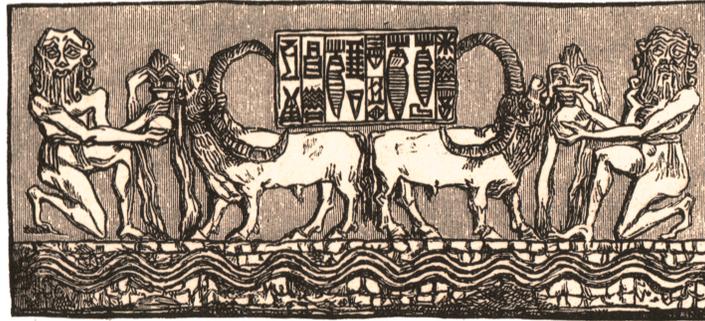
ZIGGURAT MOUNT IN UR

We can understand how impossible it is to have anything like a connected history of Chaldea, when we consider that thousands of the tablets, where alone it can be read, are undiscovered; while of those found, many are chipped and broken, with great pieces missing. Some of them, however, which have been brought to England, and with great labor deciphered by scholars, contain very interesting records, such as the Chaldean version of the Flood already mentioned; and another work speaks of a great tower, men built in their pride, to climb up to the sky, and tells how the winds blew it over and caused men to speak different languages. It is not difficult to see that this refers to the erection of the tower of Babel, as recorded in the Bible.

You may be sure that industrious search has been made for a reference to Adam and Eve among the old writings; so far, however, none has been met with, but something almost as good has come to light, and that is a picture which may well be a representation of what happened in the Garden of Eden. There is a tree in the middle, with a stool on each side; on one sits a man, reaching out his hand to pick fruit from the tree; on the other, a woman doing the same, while behind her stands a serpent, who seems to be whispering to her. Of course, we do not know for certain what was meant by the picture, but it looks very like the story of Adam and Eve.

One of the earliest Chaldean kings of which we have an account was named Sharrukin, or Sargon 1., whose city was Agade, sometimes called Accad, and was close to the Euphrates. He was a very powerful ruler and conqueror, judging by a statue erect

in his honor. On this he tells his own history, beginning with the rather boastful words, “Sharrukin, the mighty king, the king of Agade am I.”



CYLINDER OF SARGON I, FOUND IN AGADE

After mentioning that his mother was a princess he goes on to say: “She placed me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen (pitch) the door of my ark she closed. She launched me on the river, which drowned me not. The river bore me along; to Akki the water-carrier it brought me. Akki the water-carrier, in the tenderness of his heart, lifted me up. Akki the water-carrier as his own child brought me up. Aki the water-carrier made me his gardener. And in my gardenership the goddess Ishtar loved me,”—that is, made the gardening successful.

I wonder if this, like so many stories, was handed down from one generation to another, and whether long after, in Egypt, it gave Jochebed the idea of saving Moses’ life in the same way.

Gardening seems to have been a good preparation for the throne; for Sharrukin became a celebrated king, traveling and conquering far and wide during the forty-five of his reign. His image was carved on some rocks overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and he even crossed to Cyprus, besides journeying three times to the Persian Gulf.

If you look at a map of ancient Chaldea, you will see, marked on the river Euphrates, a long way from the coast, the famous city of Ur. Strange to say, in the time of Abraham, and long before, this town was a seaport! Merchants and sailors thronged the quays, where ships discharged their cargoes of foreign goods and set sail for more; and the people became very wealthy and numerous. Since those days, the Tigris and Euphrates have brought down such quantities of earth from the distant mountains that Ur has gradually been cut off from the sea by a long stretch of land, measuring in our time as much as a hundred and fifty miles, and no doubt it continues to extend.

As the importance of the city increased, so did the pride of the rulers, and it was a king of Ur who first ventured to call himself King of Shumir and Accad<sup>1</sup>—that is, king of the whole country, instead of only ruler of his own state. The name of this king was Urea, and the ancient seal he used to stamp his documents with has been found,

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<sup>1</sup> King Sargon I became the first king to rule all of Chaldea, when before it was a confederation of city states with the Sumerians located in southern Chaldea around Shumir and the Akkadians located in northern Chaldea around the city of Accad (more commonly spelled Akkad today).

and is now in the British Museum. It represents the moon-god sitting on his throne, and, like all Chaldean seals, is in the shape of a cylinder.

The oldest and most inferior bricks have Urea's name stamped on them, and judging from the number of places where they have been found, he must have built a great many cities. He lived long before Abraham, and in his day Babylon, a city we consider so ancient, had scarcely begun.

Years passed on, and at last a great trouble befell the Chaldeans. Their neighbors on the east, the Elamites, cast envious eyes on their fertile valley, and the king came with a great host, bent on conquest. He was only too successful, and to the old city of Erech he offered the crowning insult of carrying off their beloved goddess, Anat, or Nana, as she was sometimes called. Heathen kings always tried to take the idols of the nations they conquered, thinking that, deprived of their help, they would lose hope.

It is perhaps worth mentioning there that the theft was mourned by the Erechites for one thousand, six hundred, and thirty-five years, and then an Assyrian king, who made war on Elam, found the goddess and brought her back to her old home, the grateful priests of Erech, in return, making him a present of a number of old tablets from their library; and that is how these ancient writings found their way to Nineveh.

To return, however, to the Elamite invasion, the conquerors seem to have treated the inhabitants very harshly; for they always looked back on the period of their rule, lasting about three hundred years, as a time of national humiliation. The priests then wrote many beautiful psalms, used ever after in times of sorrow; and these remind us very much of the Hebrew psalms belonging to the later date and referring to the Jewish Captivity. Possibly they borrowed the idea of such sacred songs from old Chaldean traditions.

Here are some verses from one of them. *"I eat the food of wrath and drink the waters of anguish...O my god, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins...I transgress and I know it not. I sin and know it not. I wander on wrong paths and know it not. The Lord, in the wrath of his heart has overwhelmed me with confusion...I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I cry out and there is none that hears me. My god, who knowest the unknown, be merciful! I commit sins, turn them into blessedness...God, who knowest the unknown...forgive my sins."* You will see by this psalm that their religious thought was greatly advanced since the old Turanian days of magic.

It appears to have been during the Elamite rule that the patriarch Terah (Gen. 11:31), with his son Abram, his nephew Lot, their families and servants, set out from Ur to go towards the land of Canaan, and they took up their abode in Haran, a city in Syria belonging to Chaldea, and, like Ur, devoted to the service of the moon-god.

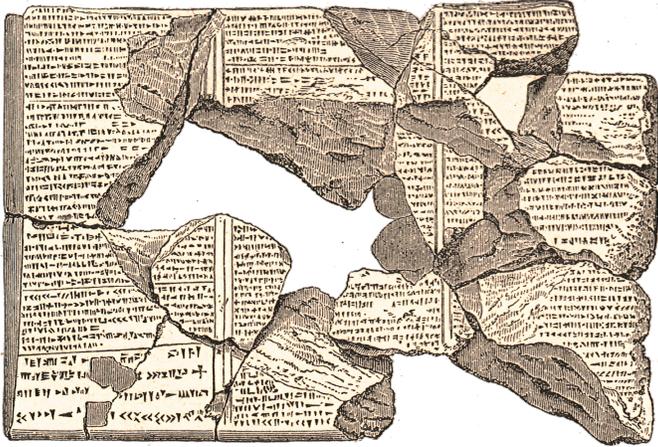
They may have been among those who encamped near Ur, and did not live in it; for they seem to have taken kindly to a wandering life, judging by the way Abraham and his tribe went up and down in the land of Canaan and to Egypt and back again.

Their great caravan journeying on day after day must have been a most imposing sight, for the tribe was rich in cattle. There would be "great flocks of sheep, long lines

of camels, asses, and oxen, laden with black tents; old men and women seated on the top of household goods, while children and young lambs reposed in opposite panniers of the same ass. Mothers carried babies on their shoulders, and colts and foals galloped about in the middle of the troop.”

Later on, we read that Abraham and his nephew Lot separated from the rest of the tribe, and, with their possessions, went southward to Canaan. Here they found the religion far grosser than the worship of Chaldea. This was, no doubt, why Abraham, later on, sent a servant back to the old tribe to fetch a wife for Isaac, and Isaac himself told Jacob to visit his relations for the same purpose, his brother Esau’s wives having turned out so badly. You probably remember how Rachel, unknown to her husband, brought away the small images of the gods she was accustomed to worship, knowing that she had by no means cast off the idolatrous habits that were originally observed by the tribe, as we know from Joshua’s words to the children of Israel (Joshua 24:2).

It has been remarked as an interesting fact, that the wanderings of Abraham took him into every land in which his descendants afterwards dwelt. Egypt, the scene of their slavery; Canaan, their home for so long; and Babylonia, or Chaldea, where they were carried captive—each in turn was the resting place of their great ancestor, Abraham.



CHALDEAN TABLET WITH FLOOD ACCOUNT