

# Iraq My Handiwork

By Isam Ghattas and Ron Brackin

## The Garden of Eden

History begins with God. It is, says the old saw, “his-story.” The story of God’s relationship, or lack of relationship, with his creation.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Moses continues in chapter two to explain that “the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Just where was this awesome garden? Scripture provides us with a few tantalizing clues.

“A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin [bdellium] and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”

So far, so good.

*Unger’s Bible Dictionary* explains that the Pishon and the Gihon “were presumably canals (called “rivers” in Babylonia) which connected the Tigris and Euphrates as ancient river beds. Some scholars identify it with the Pallakottos Canal near the ancient Sumerian town of Eridu, not far from Abraham’s city of Ur” in southern Iraq.

Others, however, theorize that Eden was farther north, in Turkey. Still other scholars place it in Mongolia, India or Ethiopia (ancient Cush), in the belief that the Pishon and the Gihon were actually the Nile and the Ganges rivers.

A more recent Eden-hunter is Dr. Juris Zarins, of Southwest Missouri State University. Armed with an arsenal of scientific and historical disciplines, Zarins places Eden at the bottom of the Persian Gulf. One stone in his evidential foundation is a LANDSAT image that reveals a fossil river buried deep beneath the sand which flowed through a couple of dry beds known today as the Wadi Riniyah and the Wadi Batin.

Citing the biblical account, Dora Jane Hamblin writes: “this region was rich in bdellium, an aromatic gum resin that can still be found in north Arabia, and gold, which was still mined in the general area in the 1950s” (*Smithsonian Magazine*, Volume 18, No. 2, May 1987).

Speculation over the centuries, however, has focused on *where* Eden might have been. None has questioned *how big* the garden might have been.

# Iraq My Handiwork

By Isam Ghattas and Ron Brackin

It may help us to remember that, in addition to creating Adam, the Lord God “had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air” and “brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field” (Genesis 2:19-20).

If we believe in the accuracy of the Genesis account of creation rather than Darwinian Evolution or other theories, we are confronted with a host of critters – one of each gender – that would have occupied a vast and climatically diverse piece of real estate. Could it be, then, that *all* of the Eden theorists are correct, including Dr. Zarins? Could the Garden of Eden have covered Iraq *and* Egypt, Turkey *and* Ethiopia, India *and* Mongolia and even more?

Regardless, since Iraq is demonstrably what is referred to as Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent and the Cradle of Civilization and, since Eden was by biblical account God’s personal garden and therefore the most fertile and productive land imaginable, it is likely that at least part of Eden was in Iraq. (Modern tour agencies are quick to confirm this. One guide recently recommended that I visit “Qurna, where the Tigris meets the Euphrates. Qurna is said to be the site of the biblical Garden of Eden, where you can find Adam’s tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Are Western tourists really so gullible?)

Extending the postulation, we can say that Cain and Abel might well have been among the first Iraqis. But even if they were not, their lives provide a graphic portrait of the region’s history.

Cain, the bloody son. Abel, the son who pleased God.

Iraq has always been inhabited by men of blood – from Cain to Hussein – alongside those who pleased God. After the First Murder, Seth “had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26).

Not all, however, called on the Lord’s name. Many drifted farther and farther away from him and became intolerably corrupt, until man’s wickedness became so great “that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time,” and “the Lord was grieved that had made man on the earth.”

Like tears of grief flowing from the Throne, the heavens opened and a great global Flood thundered across the globe, wiping clean the slate and giving the earth a new beginning.

God started fresh with Noah’s family – his good wife, their sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their sons’ spouses. Eight people, judged by God to be righteous. These eight grew into clans and the clans into nations.

## The Tower of Babel

# Iraq My Handiwork

By Isam Ghattas and Ron Brackin

The Genesis account continues to describe a world that “had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there” (Genesis 11:1).

The plain of Shinar is in southern Iraq where, in Genesis 10, we are introduced to a very ambitious and talented man named Nimrod.

The account explains that “the first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar.” A quick geography lesson discovers ancient Erech on the left bank of the Euphrates, about 100 miles southeast of Babylon. Akkad was on the Euphrates, just southwest of modern Baghdad. No one is certain just where Calneh was, but Scripture places it in the same general area.

Here in southern Iraq, then, a terrible rebellion broke out against God. And to this day, you and I suffer its extraordinary consequences.

“Come,” said the ungrateful descendants of Noah, “let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

“But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’

“So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world” (Genesis 11:4-9).

Today, we take great pains to learn foreign languages in order to communicate with people of other nations or tribes. The confusion of languages resulting from that historic rebellion in Iraq continues to facilitate discord between people groups and impede the spreading of the gospel.

---

## [FACTOID]

### How many languages resulted from the Babel Rebellion?

There are today 13,511 distinct languages and an estimated 30,000 dialects on earth!

*World Christian Encyclopedia*, Barrett, David B. and Johnson, Todd, Eds.  
(Oxford University Press 1982, 2001) ISBN 0 10 572435 6.

---

Unfortunately, that same rebellious spirit continues to rule over Iraq. We have heard its hoarse echo up the millennial corridors and out of the mouth of Saddam Hussein who isolated Iraq from the rest of the world. Who punished any Iraqi suspected of opposing him with prison, torture and/or death (Appendix IV). Who identified himself with Stalin,

# Iraq My Handiwork

By Isam Ghattas and Ron Brackin

Nebuchadnezzar and Saladin. Who sacrificed anyone or anything in order to make a name for himself.

---

**[BOX with photo of Iraqi flag]**

## The Iraqi Flag

The Lord was not left without a witness during Saddam's regime. In addition to a faithful Christian remnant, God left his mark even on the Iraqi flag. The design consists of three equal horizontal bands of red, white and black (top to bottom) with three five-pointed stars centered on the white band. In 1991, during the Persian Gulf crisis, Saddam ordered the phrase *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great!), to be added to the flag in green Arabic script, bracketing the middle star. It is a popular misconception that *Allah* is the name of the god of Islam. Allah is simply the Arabic word for God, and you will frequently hear Arab Christians say, "In-sha-allah," translated "if God wills" (see James 4:15).

---

## Abraham

Genesis, chapter 12, continues in Iraq, in a city known as Ur of the Chaldeans, where we meet a man of nearly inconceivable faith.

Stepping back one chapter, we find the account of Noah's son, Shem. One of Shem's descendants was named Nahor. When Nahor was 29 years old, he became the father of Terah who, as a septuagenarian, became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran was born in Ur, sired Lot, Milcah and Iscah, and died in Ur. All we are told about this second Nahor is that he seems to have married his niece, Milcah. Enough said.

Abram married a woman named Sarai, and around 2100 B.C., they left Ur in southern Iraq to go to Canaan in what is now Israel. They got as far as Haran in modern Turkey, on the Belikh River 60 miles from where it emptied into the Euphrates in modern Turkey. Abram and his wife settled there for a time and then moved on to Canaan.

There, the happy couple became rich and grew into a huge tribe, so huge that he and his nephew Lot had to separate. Abram stayed where he was, and Lot chose to move to the infamous city known as Sodom.

Life went on until Genesis 14, where we find the account of a battle between the four kings (of Elam, Goiim, Shinar and Ellasar) and the five kings (of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela/Zoar).

The four kings beat the five kings and "seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom" (verses 11-12).

But Lot was kin, so Abram marshaled the 318 fighting men of his vast household and pursued the four kings, beating them and recovering the booty and captives, including Lot and his household.

# Iraq My Handiwork

By Isam Ghattas and Ron Brackin

Of interest to our purposes is that two of the four kings were Iraqis – Arioch, king of Ellasar, and Kedorlaomer king of Elam. Ellasar was a chief city of Babylonia, serving as the center of the worship of the sun (Shamash) in the south. Elam was a powerful and aggressive city in lower Babylonia and a frequent thorn in the side of Assyria.

---

[BOX with photo of ruins: *Reconstruction of a burial shaft at Ur, showing the queen's retinue and the ox drivers* (A. Forestier, 1928)

<http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/resources/image/large/com9314a.jpg> ]

## Discovering of the Ruins

According to The British Museum, English geologist William Kennet Loftus saw the ruins known as Tell el-Muqqayar in 1849 and suspected that they might contain what was left of Ur of the Chaldeans. Seventy-three years later, Leonard Woolley led a joint expedition of the British Museum and the University Museum, Pennsylvania. During the next dozen years, Woolley and his team unearthed a wealth of artifacts, including thousands of clay tablets that added greatly to our knowledge of the city and its people.

---

Iraq appears once more in the Book of Genesis, in chapter 36, verse 37 (repeated in 1 Chronicles 1:48). Among the kings of Edom listed here, succeeding Samlah, we meet “Shaul from Rehoboth on the river.” Rehoboth was in Iraq. Therefore, an Iraqi once ruled over Edom (or Idumaea, south of the Dead Sea in modern-day Jordan).

From Abram and Shaul, we jump ahead – past Egypt and the Exodus, past Joshua and the Judges, past David and Solomon and the Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah – to a cruel and bloody group of northern Iraqis.