

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by continuing to look at external evidence that corroborates the Bible. Last time we finished examining evidence to corroborate the Genesis account of creation and you made the important point, Dr. Spencer, that the Bible is not the result of an evolutionary development of religion, starting with myths to explain nature and ending in a monotheistic religion.

Dr. Spencer: Right. And, in fact, people often go further than that picture with regard to Christianity in particular. I'm sure you've heard someone say that the God of the New Testament is a kindler gentler version of the wrathful God of the Old Testament.

**Marc Roby:** Unfortunately, I have heard that.

Dr. Spencer: And, of course, their point is that the evolution of religion continued and God, as a result got nicer. But, this view is completely wrong for at least two major reasons. First, as you just reminded us, we saw last time that the Bible, and more particularly, the Old Testament is not the result of an evolutionary process that begin with primitive myths and moved on to the monotheism of the Bible. And, secondly, the God presented in the Bible is absolutely the same throughout; he did not change. So, this view that the God of the New Testament is a kinder, gentler more evolved version of the God of the Old Testament is nonsense if you actually read the Bible carefully.

We will see later in our series of podcasts that, in addition to speaking of God's just wrath, the Old Testament is gracious from beginning to end. And, we will see, that in addition to speaking of God's grace, the New Testament speaks of his just wrath continuously. So, such a view is simply not consistent with the facts.

**Marc Roby:** Very well. So, we have concluded our brief look at the Genesis account of creation, and we presented some extra-biblical evidence for the flood and the Table of Nations. Is it safe to assume that we are now going to move on to the next major section of Genesis?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we are ready to move on. Remember that we are discussing the major divisions in Genesis as determined by the Hebrew phrase "These are the generations ...", which our listeners may remember was introduced last session and comes from the Old Testament Scholar E.J. Young's book *Thy Word is Truth*.<sup>1</sup>

Our previous discussion actually covered several of the headings, although I didn't say that at the time, so the next heading we come to now is in Genesis 11:27, where we read "This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot."<sup>2</sup> Now I suspect most of our listeners recognize the names Abram and Lot, although some may wonder why it says Abram and not Abraham.

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<sup>1</sup> E.J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957, reprinted by Banner of Truth Trust, 2012, pg. 121

<sup>2</sup> All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

**Marc Roby: Of course, the name Abraham is the name that God gave to Abram when he established the covenant of circumcision with him as we read in Genesis Chapter 17.**

Dr. Spencer: Right. This is the place in the Bible where God first calls out a special group of people, who will later become the nation of Israel. The name Abram means exalted father and the name Abraham means father of a multitude, so the name change is a reminder of God's promise to him, that his descendants will be like the stars in the night sky or the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17).

**Marc Roby: Alright. So, returning to the account of Terah that begins in Genesis 11:27, we have the biblical history of what are usually called the patriarchs, simply meaning the fathers of the faith. So, what external evidence do we have to corroborate this account?**

Dr. Spencer: There is one possible extra-biblical reference to Abraham in the topographical list of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shoshenq I, which many believe refers to "The Enclosure of Abram".<sup>3</sup> But, that is not agreed upon by all and we have no other direct evidence in the form of inscriptions or artifacts that can be clearly traced to individuals noted in the accounts of the Patriarchs, nor should we expect any from events so long ago.

Nevertheless, we have a great deal of important indirect evidence as we already briefly mentioned in Session 7. There we mentioned that the price of a slave listed in Genesis 37:28, for example, is consistent with the price known at that time from the code of Hammurabi. We also noted that in Genesis Chapters 21 and 26, we read about Abraham and his Son Isaac both making separate treaties with Abimelech, and the forms of these treaties agree with the form for early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. treaties known from extra-biblical sources. This evidence may not sound astounding at first blush, but I encourage the interested listener to consult the excellent book I've mentioned before, by Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*.<sup>4</sup> We have several extrabiblical documents from that period and both the process of enactment and the form of these treaties is consistent with the extra-biblical examples, and they are *not* consistent with examples from other periods of history. I must also emphasize yet again that because archaeology is a relatively new science, and people in the ancient world did not have access to historical documents like we do now, this information simply would not have been available to someone trying to write this history significantly after Abraham's time. So, there would not have been any way for a later writer to get such details right.

**Marc Roby: It is amazing to see that we have so much information available now about human history from 4,000 years ago. What other evidence do you want to cite?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, for one thing, the general social, geographic and political histories presented all fit the period and place too well to have been concocted by some later author. For example, the types of arranged marriage, the travel routes and times and so on all match.

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<sup>3</sup> K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, see pg 313

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp 323-324

One particularly interesting example mentioned by Kitchen has to do with the eastern alliance of Kings who attacked Sodom and Gomorrah and three other small kingdoms, defeated them, and carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his family. We read about this in Genesis 14. Kitchen points out that the names for the eastern Kings are all known names for the regions they ruled and also, very interestingly, this was the only period in history when an alliance of kings like this could have existed in that region. Not only that, but this is the only period in history in which peoples in that eastern region got involved with the politics of Mesopotamia. Kitchen concludes, "in terms of geopolitics, the eastern alliance in Gen. 14 *must* be interpreted seriously as an archaic memory preserved in the existing book of Genesis."<sup>5</sup>

**Marc Roby: Very interesting. While we are dealing with this account in Genesis 14, let me ask you a question. We are told, in verse 14 of that chapter, that Abraham pursued these eastern kings "as far as Dan", which some people have pointed out is an anachronism since the name of the town was Laish at the time of Abraham, and wasn't renamed Dan until the time of the Judges, hundreds of years later. Do you think that is a problem?**

Dr. Spencer: Not at all. Clearly Abraham himself didn't write anything with the name Dan, nor did Moses since the name was changed after his time. But a later copyist could easily, and reasonably, have changed the name to make it understandable to readers at a later date. We do the same sort of thing now. For example, if you were writing a story about the Apollo 1 fire on the launchpad, no one would accuse you of being anachronistic if you said that the launch pad was at Cape Canaveral, even though the Apollo 1 fire occurred during the ten-year period when Cape Canaveral was known as Cape Kennedy. Or, as another example, I've heard people refer to movies made by President Reagan, but he was most definitely not president when he made movies.

**Marc Roby: I see your point, it does look like a non-issue.**

Dr. Spencer: As are most of the so-called errors in the Bible. As just one more example to bring up here – since it also comes from the Book of Genesis, some people have also accused Genesis of being anachronistic because it refers to Philistines in Genesis 21 & 26, even though the name Philistines was not used until hundreds of years later. But, this is again the case of a later copyist changing the reference to fit then-current usage. I think Kitchen gives a great modern example here. He notes that "we would say 'the Dutch founded New York' although they did so as New Amsterdam, the present name replacing the former under their British successors."<sup>6</sup> We may get into more of these supposed errors in the Bible in later podcasts.

**Marc Roby: OK, that gives us something to look forward to. What else do we have in the way of evidence to corroborate the patriarchal times?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, since you've mentioned this reference to Dan, or Laish, it might be good to point out that Laish was clearly a prominent town at the time of Abraham. The archaeological evidence from there is extensive and includes a well-preserved arched gate into the city that is

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 321

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 340

sometimes called Abraham's gate, although it may not be quite old enough to have been there at the time of Abraham.

**Marc Roby: Very well, what else do you want to mention from this period?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, returning to the social customs, it is interesting to note that the story of Abraham and his heirs fits into this historical period quite nicely, even though such social norms have changed through time. Before Abraham had any children, for example, we read in Genesis 15:2 that he complained to God, saying "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" In other words, he was intending to adopt this member of his household and make him his heir, which was a common practice in that time and place.

Then, further, when Sarah remained childless, she gave her maidservant Hagar to Abraham in order to produce an heir. This practice was also common at the time. Finally, when Sarah herself had Isaac thirteen years later, the Code of Hammurabi did not give her the right to send Hagar and her child away,<sup>7</sup> which explains, in part, Abraham's reluctance to do so. He only did so when God told him it would be alright and he would make Ishmael into a nation as well (Gen 21:12-13).

**Marc Roby: I'm amazed that we can say so much, even in terms of indirect evidence, for the life of someone who lived roughly 4,000 years ago.**

Dr. Spencer: I share your amazement. And, we have to remember that most, if not all, of this information was not available to someone who lives anywhere from a few hundred years after Abraham all the way up to about 150 or 200 years ago.

**Marc Roby: That is astounding, and certainly puts the lie to the idea that the biblical accounts were created much later. How about Abraham's descendants, do we have any more evidence for Isaac and his sons, Esau and Jacob?**

Dr. Spencer: We already mentioned in Session 7 that the price paid for Joseph, when his brothers sold him into slavery in Genesis 37, is accurate for that time. In addition, we have more evidence of the same sort that we've gone over for Abraham in the sense that the travels, marriages, names of towns and people and so on are all historically accurate as far as we know.

**Marc Roby: Alright, what about the use of camels? I've heard some claim that the use of camels, as described in the patriarchal narratives, is anachronistic. How do you respond to that?**

Dr. Spencer: I've heard the same thing, but I would respond that they are simply in error. First of all, the biblical accounts of the patriarchs mention camels, but not as a common means of travel. Second, we do have evidence that camels were in use at this time. Kitchen lists a number of pieces of evidence.<sup>8</sup> For example, some bones from excavations for that time, a figurine of a kneeling camel from that time period, a cylinder seal from this time period with a picture of deities on a camel, mentions of camels in a Sumerian lexical work of the period, a figure of a kneeling camel loaded with jars and so on. His conclusion is worth quoting. He wrote that "the examples just

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<sup>7</sup> The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Zondervan, 1976, Vol. 1, pg. 24

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., pp 338-339

given should suffice to indicate the true situation: the camel was for long a *marginal* beast in most of the historic ancient Near East (including Egypt), but it was *not* wholly unknown or anachronistic before or during 2000-1100. And there the matter should, on the tangible evidence, rest.”

**Marc Roby: Do you have anything that you want to add about this period?**

Dr. Spencer: We could say more, but I think we’ve said enough. The point is clear that even though we do not have a great deal of direct evidence for the Genesis history, we do have some direct evidence and a great deal of indirect evidence.

I find the indirect evidence conclusive that the Genesis account had to have been written at the time of the events. It is inconceivable that anyone writing at a much later time could have gotten all these details right. So, at a bare minimum, what we have, as I claimed back in Session 7, is significant evidence that the Bible itself is the best archaeological treasure we have. We can learn a great deal about the people of the ancient Near East. But, far more importantly, we see that it is a reliable document and should be listened to when it tells us about the God who created the heavens and the earth and before whom we will all, one day, have to give an account. The silly notions about the Bible being the end of some evolution process of human-contrived religion is simply nonsense that should not be accepted by anybody.

**Marc Roby: I think that wraps up our time for today.**