



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

Akkadian

IN 1933 ARCHEOLOGISTS began excavating at Tell Hariri, located in southeastern Syria just west of the Euphrates River. Here they discovered the long-lost city of Mari, a leading center of Mesopotamia over 4,000 years ago. However, in 1760 BCE the Babylonian king, Hammurabi, conquered Mari and demolished the city and its provincial towns of Harran and Nahor. The evicted inhabitants adopted a nomadic existence as the Habiru. This development coincided with the time and circumstances of Abraham and his family.

One archaeological finding at Mari was an elegant palace with colored frescoes on the walls. These frescoes pictured the enthronement of a king in a garden guarded by cherubim and watered by four streams. This is not only reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. It also reflects the later Hebrew myth that located Paradise in Jerusalem. The spring, Gihon, was located near the foot of the Temple mount, while the northern border of Paradise reached the Tigris (Hiddekel) and Euphrates, and the southern limit extended to the Nile (Pison) in Egypt. Later, in the culmination of the Christ event, John the Revelator is shown “a pure river of water of life . . . proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1, 17).

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Another significant finding in the palace at Mari was an archive of over 25,000 cuneiform tablets. About 8,500 of these have been translated. The available texts reveal numerous relationships with biblical Hebrew. There are striking similarities in royal protocol, in prophecy, in the codification of law, and in the sealing of covenants. In Mari royal protocol required a king to ride in a wagon or chariot, while tribal chieftains rode on a horse, a mule or a donkey. However, the prophet, Zechariah, departs from this protocol by declaring to Israel, “. . . [T]hy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having

salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9; cf. Matthew 21:1-5).

In Mari, treaties and covenants were typically sealed by the ritual sacrifice of “a colt the foal of an ass.” In explicit contrast, Jesus offered himself as the sacrificial confirmation of the covenant. “. . . and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Endnotes

1. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. Abraham Malamat, “Zionism.”
2. Hershel Shanks, “The History behind the Bible: BAR Interviews Avraham Malamat,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 40-44, 46.

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