

# Ur

The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature. James Strong and John McClintock; Haper and Brothers; NY; 1880.

Ur the name of a place and of a man. There is apparently no direct connection between the titles, perhaps not even kinship of dialect.

**1.** The original seat of Abraham's family, whence he set out for Canaan ([Ge 11:28,31](#); [Ge 15:7](#); [Ne 9:7](#)). *SEE ABRAHAM.*

**I. The Name.** — This is invariably "Ur of [the] Chaldees" (אֲרַם כַּשְׁדִּים, *Ur Kasdim*; Sept. ἡ χώρα τῶν Χαλδαίων; Vulg. *Ur Chaldceorum* [but in Nehemiah *ignis Chaldceorum*]). The oldest derivation of the word **1.** is from the Heb. אֹר, or אֶר, *light*, in the sense of *fire* (so the Targum and Jerome). This derivation is no doubt connected with the legends in the Koran and Talmud, which represent Abraham as escaping by miracle from the flames into which Nimrod or other idolatrous persecutors had thrown him (see Wagner, in the *Thesaur. Theol. philol.* 1, 173). Various other etymologies have been proposed: some taking the word as אֶר, *a mountain*; some as denoting the *east*, or the *light giving region*; while Ewald, from the Arabic, makes it "place of sojourn," and others look to the Zendic *vara, afolrt* (Gesén.), or the Sanscrit *ur*, *a town*, or even the Heb, עִיר *a city* (Bonomi, *Nineveh*, p. 41). The name, however, was probably indigenous, and belongs to the old Chaldee of the first empire, the Assyrian *Uru*, and the cuneiform *Hur*.

⇒ [Bible concordance for UR.](#)

## II. Sites Proposed. —

**1.** One tradition identifies Ur with the modern *Oifch*, in the north-west part of Mesopotamia. There is some ground for believing that this city, called by the Greeks Edessa, had also the name of Orrha as early as the time of Isidore (B.C. cir. 150); and the tradition connecting it with Abraham is perhaps not later than Ephraem (A.D. 330-370), who makes Nimrod king of Edessa, among other places (*Comment. in Genesis*, in *Opp.* 1, 58, B.). According to Pococke (*Description of the East*, 1, 159), that Ur is Edessa or Orfah, is "the *universal* opinion of the Jews;" and it is also the local belief, as is indicated by the title "Mosque of Abraham," borne by the chief religious edifice of the place, and the designation "Lake of Abraham the Beloved," attached to the pond in which are kept the sacred fish (Ainsworth, *Travels in the Track*, etc., p. 64; comp. Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*, p. 330).

⇒ **Definition of ure**

**2.** A second tradition, which appears in the Talmud and in some of the early Arabian writers, finds Ur in *Warka*, the Ο'ρχών of the Greeks, and probably the Erech of Holy Scripture (called Ο'ρέχ by the Sept.). This place bears the name of *Huruk* in the native inscriptions, and was in the country known to the Jews as "the land of the Chaldaeans."

**3.** A third tradition, less distinct than either of these, but entitled to at least equal attention, distinguishes Ur from Warka, while still placing it in the same region (see *Journal of Asiatic Society*, 12:481, note 2). There can be little doubt that the city to which this tradition points is that which appears by its bricks to have been called *Hur* by the natives, and which is now represented by the ruins at *Mugheir*, or *Umgheir*, on the right bank of the Euphrates, nearly opposite to its junction with the Shat el-Hie. The oldest Jewish tradition which we possess, that quoted by Eusebius from Eupolemus (*Prcep. Ev.*

9:17), who lived about B.C. 150, may be fairly said to intend this place; for by identifying Ur (Uria) with the Babilonian city, known also as Camarina and Chaldaeopolis, it points to a city of the Moon, which *But was Kamar* being "the moon" in Arabic, and *Khaldi* the same luminary in the Old Armenian.  
⇒See also the [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#).

**4.** An opinion unsupported by any tradition remains to be noticed. Bochart, Calmet, Bunsen, and others identify "Ur of the Chaldees" with a place of the name mentioned by a single late writer (Ammianus Marcellinus) as "a castle" existing in his day in Eastern Mesopotamia, between Hatra (El-Hadhr) and Nisibis (Amm. Marc. 25:8). The chief arguments in favor of this site seem to be the identity of name and the position of the place between Arrapachitis, which is thought to have been the dwelling-place of Abraham's ancestors in the time of Arphaxad, and Haran (Harran), whither he went from Ur.

**5.** It may be added that Tuch regards Ur as a Median town called Οὐῆρα by Strabo (11, 523), a view followed to some extent by Ewald, Lengerke, Ritter, and Knobel,

**III. Probable Identification.** — It will be seen that of the four or five localities thought to have a claim to be regarded as Abraham's city, two (or three) are situated in Upper Mesopotamia, between the Mons Masius and the Sinjar range, while the other two are in the alluvial tract near the sea, at least four hundred miles farther south. Let us endeavor first to decide in which of these two regions Ur is more probably to be sought.

That Chaldea was, properly speaking, the southern part of Babylonia, the region bordering upon the Gulf, will be admitted by all. Those who maintain the northern emplacement of Ur argue that, with the extension of Chaldean power, the name traveled northward, and became coextensive with Mesopotamia; but, in the first place, there is

no proof that the name Chaldea was ever extended to the region above the Sinjar; and, secondly, if it was, the Jews at any rate mean by Chaldea exclusively the lower country, and call the upper Mesopotamia, or Padan-Aram (see [Job 1:17](#); [Isa 13:19](#); [Isa 43:14](#), etc.). Again, there is no reason to believe that Babylonian power was established beyond the Sinjar in these early times. On the contrary, it seems to have been confined to Babylonia Proper, or the alluvial tract below Hit and Tekrit, until the expedition of Chedorlaomer, which was later than the migration of Abraham. The conjectures of Ephraem Syrus and Jerome, who identify the cities of Nimrod with places in the upper Mesopotamian country, deserve no credit. The names all really belong to Chaldmea Proper. Moreover, the best and earliest Jewish authorities place Ur in the low region. Eupolemus has been already quoted to this effect. Josephus, though less distinct upon the point, seems to have held the same view (*Ant.* 1, 6). The Talmudists also are on this side of the question; and local traditions, which may be traced back nearly to the Hegira, make the lower country the place of Abraham's birth and early life. If Orfah has a Mosque and a Lake of Abraham, Cutha, near Babylon, goes by Abraham's name, as the traditional scene of all his legendary miracles. Again, it is really in the lower country only that a name closely corresponding to the Hebrew  $\text{אֱוֵר}$  is found. The cuneiform *Hur* represents  $\text{אֱוֵר}$  letter for letter, and only differs from it in the greater strength of the aspirate. Isidore's Orrha ( $\text{Ὀρῶα}$ ) differs from Ur considerably, and the supposed Ur of Ammianus is probably not Ur, but Adur. The Orchoe ( $\text{Ὀρχοή}$ ) of Southern Mesopotamia (Ptolemy, *Geogr.* 5, 20; comp. Strabo, 16:1, 6), noted by later writers (Cellarius, *Geogr.* 2, 760; Bonomi, *Nineveh*, p. 41, 399), is probably different from the  $\text{Ὀϋρη}$  of Josephus and the  $\text{Ὀϋρίη}$  of Eupolemus. The argument that Ur should be sought in the neighborhood of Arrapachitis and

Seruj, because the names Arphaxad and Serug occur in the genealogy of Abraham (Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, 3, 366, 367), has no weight till it is shown that the human names in question are really connected with the places, which is at present assumed somewhat boldly. Arrapachitis comes probably from *Arapkha*, an old Assyrian town of no great consequence on the left bank of the Tigris, above Nineveh, which has only three letters in common with Arphaxad (אַרְפַּכְשָׁד); and Seruj is a name which does not appear in Mesopotamia till long after the Christian era. It is rarely, if ever, that we can extract geographical information from the names in a historical genealogy; and certainly in the present case nothing seems to have been gained by the attempt to do so. On the whole, therefore, we may regard it as tolerably certain that "Ur of the Chaldees" was a place situated in the real Chaldea the low country near the Persian Gulf. The only question that remains in any degree doubtful is whether Warka or Mugheir is the true locality. These places are not far apart, and either of them is sufficiently suitable. Both are ancient cities, probably long anterior to Abraham. Traditions attach to both, but perhaps more distinctly to Warka. On the other hand, it seems certain that Warka, the native name of which was *Huruk*, represents the Erech of Genesis, which cannot possibly be the Ur of the same book. See [ERECH](#). Mugheir, therefore, which bore the exact name of "*Ur* or *Hur*", remains with the best claim, and is entitled to be (at least provisionally) regarded as the city of Abraham. If it be objected to this theory that Abraham, having to go from Mugheir to Palestine, would not be likely to take Haran (*Harran*) on his way, more particularly as he must then have crossed the Euphrates twice, the answer would seem to be that the movement was not that of an individual, but of a tribe traveling with large flocks and herds, whose line of migration

would have to be determined by necessities of pasturage, arid by the friendly or hostile disposition, the weakness or strength, of the tribes already in possession of the regions which had to be traversed. Fear of Arab plunderers ([Job 1:15](#)) may very probably have caused the emigrants to cross the Euphrates before quitting Babylonia, and having done so, they might naturally follow the left bank of the stream to the Belik, up which they might then proceed, attracted by its excellent pastures, till they reached Harran. As a pastoral tribe proceeding from Lower Babylonia to Palestine *must* ascend the Euphrates as high as the latitude of Aleppo, and perhaps would find it best to ascend nearly to Bir, Harran was but a little out of the proper route. Besides, the whole tribe which accompanied Abraham was not going to Palestine. Half the tribe were bent on a less distant journey; and with them the question must have been, where could they, on or near the line of route, obtain an unoccupied territory. They could not directly cross the open desert between Babylonia and Palestine. Even caravans traveling from Bagdad to Damask's are obliged to take the route by Harran.

**IV. Description of the Modern Locality.** Ur or Hur, now *Mungheir, or Uin Jugheir*, "the bitumened," or "the mother of bitumen," is one of the most ancient, if not *the* most ancient, of the Chaldean sites hitherto discovered. It lies on the right bank of the Euphrates, at the distance of about six miles from the present course of the stream, nearly opposite the point where the Euphrates receives the Shat el-Hie from the Tigris. It is now not less than 125 miles from the sea; but there are grounds for believing that it was anciently a maritime town, and that its present inland position has been caused by the rapid growth of the alluvium. The remains of the buildings are generally of the most archaic character. They cover an oval space 1000 yards long by 800 broad, and consist principally

of a number of low mounds enclosed within an *enceinte*, which on most sides is nearly perfect. The most remarkable building is near the northern end of the ruins. It is a temple of the true Chaldean type, built in stages, of which two remain, and composed of brick, partly sun-burned and partly baked, laid chiefly in a cement of bitumen. It is in the form of a right-angled parallelogram, the longest sides of which are the north-east and south-west. One angle points due north. The lower story is supported by buttresses thirteen inches deep, and, with the exception of those at the angles, eight feet wide. The building measures 198 feet in length and 133 in breadth. The lower story is twenty-seven feet high, and has but one entrance, which is eight feet wide. The outer surface is faced with "red kiln-baked bricks" to a thickness of ten feet; but the whole interior is of sun-dried bricks. In each of the angles of this building, six feet inward, near the foundation, an inscribed cylinder was discovered, which appears to have served the same purpose as the documents at present deposited beneath the foundation stones of our great buildings. These cylinders are now in the British Museum. The bricks of this building bear the name of a certain *Uruk*, who is regarded as the earliest of the Chaldaeans monumental kings, and the name may possibly be the same as that of Orchamuis of Ovid (*Afetzam*. 4:212). His supposed date is B.C. 2000, or a little earlier. Ur was the capital of this monarch, who had a dominion extending at least as far north as Niffer, and who, by the grandeur of his constructions, is proved to have been a wealthy and powerful prince. The great temple appears to have been founded by this king, who dedicated it to the moon-god, *Hurki*, from whom the town itself seems to have derived its name. Ilgi, son of Uruk, completed the temple, as well as certain other of his father's buildings, and the kings who followed upon these continued

for several generations to adorn and beautify the city. The tablets of the Chaldaeans discovered at Mugheir are among the most interesting ever brought to light. These records bear the names of a series of kings from Uruk (B.C. 2230) to Nabonidus (B.C. 540), the last of the series. Among others is that of Kudur'mapula, or Chedorlaomer ([Ge 14:1](#)). The temple was dedicated to *Sin*, or "the moon," which element was preserved by the Greeks in the name *Mesene*, applied by them to the surrounding region. The cylinder inscriptions of Mugheir are invaluable documents in confirming the authenticity and truth of Scripture. They not only inform us that Nabonidus, last king of Babylon, repaired the great temple of the moon at Hur, but they also explain who Belshazzar was, concerning whom the early Bible critics have in vain endeavored to reconcile conflicting statements. In the book of Daniel ([Da 5:30](#)) he is alluded to as the king of the Chaldees when Babylon was taken by the united armies of the Medes and Persians. The account of Berossus does not, however, agree with that of Scripture. It states that Nabonidus, after being utterly routed in the open plain by Cyrus, shut himself up in the city of Borsippa, but was soon obliged to surrender his person to the conqueror. From Daniel, therefore, we are led to conclude that Belshazzar was the last Chaldaean monarch; while Nabonidus is represented in the same capacity by Berossus... Sir Henry Rawlinson's reading of the Mughieir cylinders entirely reconciles these discrepancies. The records distinctly state that *Belshazzar was the eldest son of Nabonidus*, and that he was admitted to a share of the government" (Loftus, *Chaldea and Susiana*, p. 13; comp. *Journal of Asiatic Society*, 15:260 sq.). **SEE [BELSHAZZAR](#).**

Ur retained its metropolitan character for above two centuries, and even after it became second to Babylon was a

great city, with an especially sacred character. The notions entertained of its superior sanctity led to its being used as a cemetery city, not only during the time of the early Chaldean supremacy, but throughout the Assyrian and even the later Babylonian period. It is in the main a city of tombs. By far the greater portion of the space within the *enceinte* is occupied by graves of one kind or another, while outside the enclosure the whole space for a distance of several hundred yards is a thickly occupied burial-ground. It is believed that Ur was for 1800 years a site to which the dead were brought from vast distances, thus resembling such places as Kerbela and Nejif, or Meshed All, at the present day. The latest mention that we find of Ur as an existing place is in the passage of Eupolemus already quoted, where we learn that it had changed its name, and was called *Camarina*. It probably fell into decay under the Persians, and was a mere ruin at the time of Alexander's conquests. Perhaps it was the place to which Alexander's informants alluded when they told him that the tombs of the old Assyrian kings were chiefly in the great marshes of the lower country (Arrian, *Exp. Alex.* 7:22). The mounds that mark the site of its great temples are bare; the whole country around it is a dismal swamp. In regard to Ur, as well as to Babylon, the words of Isaiah are true, "The beauty of the Chaldees excellency shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (13, 19). See Loftus, *Chaldea*, ch. 12; Rawlinson, *Ancient Monarchies*, 1, 15 sq., 27, 108, 153; *Jour. Royal Geogr. Soc.* 27:185. *SEE CHALDEA.*

**2.** (𐤆𐤍, *Ur*, *light*; Sept. Ὠρὰ v.r. θύρο [φάρ], etc.; Vulg. Ur.) The father of Eliphal or Eliphalet, one of David's warriors (1Ch 11:35). B.C. ante 1043. In the parallel list of David's warriors (2Sa 23:34) we have the son's name thus stated, "Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the-son of the Maachathite," or the Maachathite simply, as it should doubtless be made to read;

while the above passage still more corruptly gives two persons, "Eliphal the son of Ur, Hopher the Mecherathite," which should probably be corrected so as to refer to one individual, either by the rejection of the name Hopher altogether, or its identification with one of the preceding; for the personages named before and after these in the two accounts are evidently the same, and the subjoined sum is full by counting these as one.