



URBAN CURRENT

Abraham the URbanite

Abraham! Isn't he the guy that lived in a tent, the Bedouin always on the hunt for the best grass or pasture? We generally don't think of Abraham as urban. The fact is, he lived the first third of his life in one of the greatest urban centers of the ancient world. His mind, his world view, his habits were all molded and shaped in the streets and markets of this dynamic, colorful Mesopotamian metropolis. Ur, with a population of approximately 300,000, was a city of considerable sophistication. Amazing archeological discoveries have told just such a story. Ur was a primary city in Mesopotamia, claimed by some to be the capital of the world at least three different times in its history that stretches almost 4,000 years.

Location. Location. Location. Ur, sprawled on the banks of the Euphrates on the coast of the upper end of the Persian Gulf, was the meeting of land and sea routes. A city of industry, trade, and advanced literacy, Ur was not only a center of government and religion but finance and art. Elaborate artifacts rescued from the middle-eastern dust and sand indicate a large community of skilled artisans.

From the hundreds of private graves and tombs excavated, including 16 royal tombs, much can be learned. While nearly all the royal tombs were plundered, the remaining gold and silver vessels, jewelry, and other richly inlaid furniture testify to the skill of the ancient craftsmen and to the wealth and power of the aristocracy.

Archeologists are convinced that one of the buildings they have unearthed was the treasury building. Many private residences have been excavated giving insight into daily life in this huge city. Maybe Abraham lived in

one of these very houses.

In the period 2112-2095 B.C., Ur-Nammu erected the oldest surviving ziggurat. The ziggurat has three levels or stages connected by stairways. The base of the structure is approximately 200 feet long and 170 feet wide. Three massive stairways of 100 steps each lead upward to a tower. Smaller stairways lead from the tower to the second and third levels. A temple to the moon god Nanna was built on top of the third level. Apparently, trees were planted on the terraces of the ziggurat. Surely this structure dominated Ur. Abraham may have worshipped there. It's just wild to think that your eyes can rest on this partially restored structure, which Abraham saw with his own eyes every day.

Luke reminds us with Stephen's words that God appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. See God at work in this ancient godless city. See God sovereignly singling out a man. See God calling a moon god worshipper. In the city of several hundred thousand people God foreknew Abraham, predestined Abraham, called Abraham, justified Abraham, and surely, glorified Abraham. God called a man out of the mass to launch a plan having global reach and eternal impact. It reminds me of the Lord talking to Paul about Corinth, "I have many people in this city." God has been at work in cities since there were cities. Surely, God's eyes are on the cities of our contemporary world with populations amassed, thronged, yes, divinely gathered. Surely God is still calling people to Himself out of heathen post-modern cities.

God led Abraham on a journey. Undoubtedly he left Ur following the established trade route that led to Haran. God was taking the

gospel on the road. From this early capital city God worked his plan and spread his news. He moved the gospel to the far corners. This makes me think of the gospel on Roman roads. Highways already there, channels of transportation and communication already formed by people in search of power, money, and discovery became the routes by which God would spread his truth. God has always used established channels, paths, routes, highways. Man creates these with his own plans in mind. We know there is a master planner. Think of all the contemporary means of communication and transportation. Every one of them is opportunity for the gospel to travel to places and people in need.

The songwriter said, "Little is much when God is in it." We ought never despise small beginnings. We ought never demean the role of one disciple. We should never discount the potential of one church member. The power is supernatural. Our God is the God who is able to do abundantly above all that we could ask or think. Think of it! Abram, young heathen urbanite transformed by God's call, later described as father of all the faithful. From that young man in a city of moon worshippers has come the message of Christ, permeating every continent and almost every people group in the world. The impact of the man from Ur is astonishing.

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