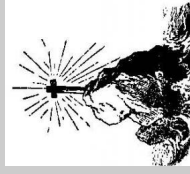


# THE WATERS OF HIS EARTH

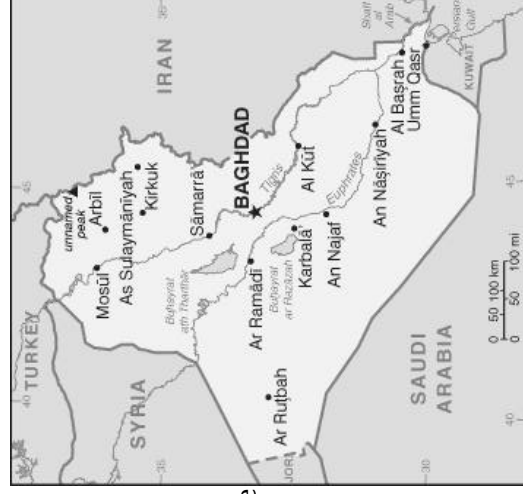
## Part V: Tigris and Euphrates



### The Rivers of Mesopotamia

**TIGRIS** – The rivers Tigris and Euphrates are the lifeblood of the region known as Mesopotamia. The rivers begin in modern day Turkey and flow southeast through Iraq to the Persian Gulf. The original name of the Tigris was *idigna* which roughly means “river that goes” because its water flows faster than that of its

counterpart, the Euphrates. The Tigris is about 1150 miles long and is joined by many tributaries during its course. Near the end of its run it joins the Euphrates to become the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway. The key city along its waters today is Baghdad, Iraq. In Bible times, the ancient city of Ninevah sat upon its banks. From the Persian Gulf to Baghdad the Tigris can be navigated with shallow-draft boats, but to go further upstream to Mosul requires rafts. Freight traffic on the river has slowed considerably since the arrival of rail to the region. The river is heavily dammed both in Turkey and in Iraq to irrigate the surrounding countryside. While there is controversy among environmentalists about some of the dams, they have helped keep Iraq from flooding when the snowmelt in the mountains of Turkey becomes too great.



*The Euphrates River in Syria*

**EUPHRATES** – The Euphrates is formed from two rivers in the mountains of Turkey, the *Kara* and the *Murat*. It's name means to *gush forth*. At 1730 miles, it is longer than the Tigris by a considerable amount. The river flows through present day Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The river can be navigated 1200 miles upstream to the city of Hit,

north of Ramadi. It is however, a very shallow river and barges are required. There is a canal that links the Euphrates to the Tigris to facilitate shipping. Like the Tigris, a system of dams and reservoirs control the flow and use of water on the river. Down by Basra the river used to divide into many channels forming a beautiful marshland until it was drained in 1990 by Saddam Hussein in order to put down Arabs in the region who were a threat to his rule. It is unknown whether or not it can ever be fully restored. Throughout history, important cities have been located on the Euphrates. The river valley formed the core of the kingdoms of Babylonia and Syria, both significant players in Bible history.

### Biblical Waters

These two rivers both have a place in Bible history. Both once watered the Garden of Eden. The locations of the Pishon and Gihon are unknown today, but apparently the Tigris and Euphrates had their source in Eden. Perhaps Eden was located near where the Tigris and Euphrates converge today in southern Iraq. As beautiful as Eden was, however, it was not to last. Adam and Eve's sin caused them to be driven from the place and nobody ever entered it again.

Gen 2:10-14 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 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.

\* \* \*

The story of Abraham in the Old Testament is the story of God keeping His promises, the most notable of which was the promise to send a Savior into the world through him. But God also promised land to Abraham and his descendants and the Euphrates marked the border of that land.

Gen 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt\* to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites . . .

\*Not a reference to the Nile River, but likely to the Wadi el-Arish in northeastern Sinai.

\* \* \*

The Assyrians and Babylonians were both significant civilizations that took up residence on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. God used both of these peoples to carry out His will in world history. The Assyrians were located on the northern portion of the Tigris. Their capital city was Ninevah and was known for its wickedness and corruption (remember the city of Jonah). But Israel (the northern tribes) had strayed so far from the Lord that He decided to bring judgment upon them by allowing the Assyrians to invade Israel and carry the people into exile. This happened in 722 BC under Shalmaneser and is recorded in the Bible.

2 Kgs 17:16-19, 23b They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They

practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced . . . So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.

The Babylonian kingdom was centered nearer the Persian Gulf along the Euphrates River. A little more than 100 years after the northern kingdoms were taken away, God allowed the Babylonians to invade Judah for Judah too had despised its faith and turned away from the Lord. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon carried Judah into exile (Psalm 137). But there was some good to come of it. During this time, the events of Daniel took place in Babylon and the promises of the coming Savior were likely shared with those people. Later, after the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the east would come from this region.

The exiles would return from Babylon, of course. They had to, because God needed to keep His promise that the birth of Christ would take place in Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Judah had to be restored and it was. Ezra and Nehemiah led the exiles back to Jerusalem some 70 years later. About 500 years after their return, Jesus was born. The Tigris and Euphrates had played their part!

## Resources

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tigris>  
[http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl\\_mesopotamia.htm](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_mesopotamia.htm)  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphrates>