

MYSTERIES UNEARTHED

THE NUZI TABLETS

These tablets dating from the 15th century BC were discovered during the excavation of the ancient Hurrian town of Nusi, to the east of the Tigris River [modern Yorghana Tepe] in 1925. They were written by Hurrian scribes in the Babylonian cuneiform language, but with the occasional employment of native Hurrian or Horite words.

The tablets show very close parallels between the customs of this town and those found in society of the Patriarchs in the narratives of Genesis.

The town of Nuzi laid in the area of northern Mesopotamia, which was the home of Abraham for a considerable time. In fact, Haran where the Patriarch lived was predominantly Hurrian, or Horite. The Patriarchs maintained contact for many generations: Isaac found a wife here and Jacob lived here for 20 years. It is not surprising then to find that the laws and customs of Nuzi are paralleled in Palestine for bringing them with them they would have adopted them in their new home.

CUSTOM

1. ADOPTION

A childless couple usually adopted a freeborn person or a slave to look after them when they grew old, bury them when they died, and (in turn) inherit their property.

NUZI TABLET	GENESIS(Patriarchal) ACCOUNT
"The tablet of adoption belonging to Nashuri, the son of Ar-shenni he adopted Wullu, the son of Puhi-shenni. As long as Nashuri is alive, Wullu shall provide food and clothing; when Nashuri dies, Wullu shall become the heir."	"Gen. 15:2-4 "But Abram said, 'O Sovereign Lord ... I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' ... a servant in my household ..." (NIV)

2. MARRIAGE LAWS

a) A handmaid could be presented to the new bride.

b) A childless wife could provide her husband with a handmaid to bear children in her stead.

NUZI TABLET	GENESIS (Patriarchal) ACCOUNT
a) "Furthermore, Yalampa is given as a handmaid to Kelim-ninu."	a) Gen. 29: 24,29 "And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. "And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid."
b)"... If Kelim-ninu does not bear, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lullu as wife for Shennima (her husband), and Kelim-ninu may not send the offspring away.	b) Gen. 16:1-4 "Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him <i>no</i> children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai."

Similarly, Rachel and Leah gave their maids to -Jacob their husband (Gen.30:3,9).

3.THE TERAPHIM (family gods)

The possession of these household gods marked the person as the legitimate heir or implied the leadership of the family, and in the case of a married daughter assured her husband, the right to the property of her father.

NUZI TABLET a) “If Nashuri has a son of his own, he shall divide (the estate) equally with Wullu [the adopted servant-heir], but the <u>son</u> of Nashuri shall take the gods of Nashuri. However, if Nashuri, does not have a son of his own, then Wallu shall take the gods of Nashuri.	GENESIS(Patriarchal) ACCOUNT a) Gen.31:19,30,34 “And Rachel had stolen the images [‘gods’ and ‘teraphim’-marginal note] that were her father's ... and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.” [See Gen.35:2 for Jacob's reaction later.]
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NB. Rachel wanted to preserve for her husband the chief title to Laban's estate.

NUZI TABLET b) “Furthermore, he gave his daughter Nuhuya in marriage to Wullu, and if Wullu takes another wife he shall forfeit the lands and buildings of Nashuri.”	GENESIS(Patriarchal) ACCOUNT b) Laban's charge to Jacob (Gen.31:50) “ ... if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.”
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One or two other parallels are worthy of mention:

Esau sold his birth right to Jacob - Gen.25:33. One case at Nuzi explains how an older brother sold his rights of primogeniture to his younger brother for the payment of three sheep.

It was also common Hurrian practice for a man to become a servant on the condition that his now new master provided for him with a wife as agreed by their contract, Jacob worked for Laban for his wives. The list is long, drawing in many customs like the transferring of a sandal (Ruth 4:7.8), or the legal-binding nature of an oral blessing, or death-bed will such as that elicited by Jacob from Isaac, and so on.