



This is the second ever issue of **Deeperstudy Newsletter**! If you have subscribed, **Deeperstudy Newsletter** will reach you every other Tuesday. Each issue will have two or three of the following regularly recurring features:

- **Thirsting for God** - short devotionals that are Bible-centered and Christ honoring
- **It's all Greek to me** - insights from the original languages of the Bible
- **Light from Within** - difficult passages cleared up by examining the context
- **Light from Without** - difficult passages illuminated by examining the cultural/historical background
- **A Helicopter View** - overviews of biblical books
- **Bible Atlas from Space** - a sequence of photos and/or diagrams moving from a satellite view of a biblical site to views close up
- **21st Century Psalmist** - original poetry intended to draw the human heart closer to its Lord
- **The Bible and the News** - current news items connect with relevant Scripture

In addition to these regular features, **Deeperstudy Newsletter** will also provide links to interesting parts of [deeperstudy.com](http://deeperstudy.com) website. I will also include news about seminars I am scheduling and give special discounts on the books and e-books I have written.

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### **Bible Atlas from Space: Mesopotamia**

If you see the phrase, "Bible land," what do you think of? Chances are it will be what is now Israel. But did you know that what is now Iraq has a legitimate claim to the phrase as well? The Bible has a number of names for that region, including "Padan-Aram," "Assyria," "Babylonia," or simply "Beyond the River" (the river being the Euphrates). Events occur in this region from such books as Genesis, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, and Nahum.

Abraham himself came from Ur, a Mesopotamian city of some renown. During patriarchal times the Old Babylonian kingdom flourished. Its most famous king, Hammurabi (c. 1800 BCE), provided his people with a legal system, now known as the Hammurabi Code (HC), mainly enforced by monetary fines. Some of the customs reflected in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are illuminated by HC and other early legal codes of Mesopotamia or northeastern Syria. Want to go deeper?

After the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE), the Assyrians rose to power, with Nineveh as the empire's capital. Assyria expanded southwest toward Egypt as well as southeast

toward the Persian Gulf. In its southwestern expansion, it successively conquered Syria (Damascus fell in 732), the northern nation of Israel (Samaria was destroyed in 721), and all of the walled cities of Judah except Jerusalem (701). Sennacherib, the king of Assyria at the time, was prevented from also conquering Jerusalem only by God's direct intervention, responding to Hezekiah's prayer by sending His angel to kill 185,000 of the Assyrian army in one night (2 Kings 18; 2 Chron. 32; Isaiah 36–37).

Jonah resisted but finally obeyed God's call to warn Nineveh that she would be destroyed. The reformation resulting from his preaching in the streets of the "great city" prompted God to spare the Assyrian capital for more than 100 years. A later prophet, Nahum, however, once more predicted the city's fall, and this time, nothing prevented the prophecy from finding fulfillment in 612 BCE.

The Neo-Babylonian empire conquered the Assyrians, inheriting and then expanding their territorial limits. The great king Nebuchadnezzar served as God's instrument to punish Jerusalem and the people of Judah by killing many of them and sending the rest into exile. Ezekiel and Daniel tell of the experiences of the exiles living in Babylonia, far from their native land. It was there, in their grief, that the Jews hung up their lyres on the willows and refused to sing the songs of Zion, the Lord's songs, in a foreign land (Ps. 137).

Daniel 5 reports the transition to the Persian empire, including the last night of the Babylonian regime, Belshazzar's drunken feast that was interrupted by the famous "writing on the wall". The Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates around Babylon and entered the city without firing a shot by passing under the walls through the water channel (see Herodotus 1.189-191; see also Xenophon 1.7).

One of the greatest rulers of this fourth empire, Cyrus, was the man Isaiah named in prophecy as God's anointed (Isaiah 44-45). He was the man who issued the decree for God's people to return to Judah. Later rulers, such as Artaxerxes, assisted the returning exiles in restoring their homeland, as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah.

In intertestamental times (400 BCE to around 50 BCE), Mesopotamia changed hands several times, going from the Persians to the Greeks, who lost it to the Romans, who lost it to the Parthians.

This issue's Bible Atlas from Space shows the Fertile Crescent as seen from space and then demonstrates how its boundaries changed through the years. Click on the titles of the kingdoms to move from one to the other. (We'll add the Roman/Parthian map later.)

## 21st Century Psalmist: Lazarus at Triumphal Entry



Detail from "The Raising of Lazarus" by Rembrandt (1630)

I just know you want to hear this, but there isn't much to tell.  
I'm not sure that it was heaven, but I'm sure it wasn't hell.  
All around me there was feasting; Father Abraham was host.  
We were having quite a party, one of which a king could boast.

Then a voice boomed out of nowhere; quite familiar was the shout.  
In three words I knew its owner, . They were, "Lazarus!" and "Come out!"  
I just had to leave the party. I was drawn into the gloom  
And the darkness of a cave my sisters chose to be my tomb.

I was tied about my hands, around my feet, and chin to head,  
Sitting up was quite a challenge for a man now four days dead.  
Hopping out was even harder, very little could I see.  
But the gasping of the crowd, I knew, was all because of me.

Now I join in the hosannas, hallelujahs, and the rest,  
For the One we celebrate today is certainly the best.  
But I wonder what my Friend has risked to raise me back to life  
So close by the Holy City where they're sharpening the knife.

I believe they're out to get Him, so say those who ought to know.  
And I think they'll stop at nothing to give Him the fatal blow.  
Soon my friend might join the party I so recently have shared.  
He would be the guest of honor; no expenses would be spared.

Just how long would the grave hold Him--maybe three days, maybe four--  
'Til a heav'nly power got there to annihilate Death's door?  
You could say I am an infant; You can count my age in days.  
Yet I know I'll soon be dying, with no Friend, this time, to raise.

You yourself, you know, are mortal. Soon, you see, you'll meet with Death.  
He will steal your heart's last beating; he will rob your lungs of breath.  
But that Voice that called me earthward, one great day will call to you.  
Then, "Come forth!" he'll say, and name you, and your body he'll renew.

I just hope he'll seem familiar, when he draws you through the gloom  
And you'll recognize a Friend it is who pulls you from the tomb.

—Steve Singleton

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