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Reuters/CNS

An Iraqi man prays April 15 beside a U.S. Army roadblock near Ur, the legendary biblical birthplace of the prophet Abraham, as Iraqi delegates discussed the role of religion in the future government and ways to rebuild the country.

Salvation story began in Iraq

Coalition forces occupying a nation that played prominent role in Scripture

If it weren't for the Sumerians, an ancient people who inhabited what is now Iraq, you might not be reading this article — or anything else, including the Bible.

Cuneiform, an ancient form of writing, was invented by the Sumerians, early inhabitants of Mesopotamia, which was located in much of what is now called Iraq. And the ancient history of Iraq, itself founded in 1932, is deeply rooted in the history found in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

As soon as the invasion of Iraq was launched on March 19, coalition tanks began rolling through lands that had given rise to

the earliest seeds of human civilization as well as the earliest seeds of the Bible. Those sites included the traditional "home" of the Garden of Eden and the legendary birthplace of Abraham, patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Ancient history experts, archaeologists and scholars of all types watched the war in Iraq with great trepidation, for fear that stored artifacts would be stolen or destroyed in the process — a fear somewhat realized in the extensive looting that has taken place. One such expert was the Rev. Richard A. Henshaw, an Episcopal priest and a retired professor of the Old Testament at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

Rev. Henshaw lived in Iraq in 1972 and worked at the Iraq National Museum, which was looted during the fall of Baghdad. He noted that ancient history scholars like himself hope that those

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Story by Rob Cullivan



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