

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14, Sea Peoples Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14, Sea Peoples, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on Old Testament backgrounds explores the **Sea Peoples Movement**, a significant migration around 1250-1150 BCE that **reshaped the ancient Mediterranean world**. The lecture discusses the **challenges in explaining the movement's causes**, presenting **three competing theories**: catastrophic events, mass migrations, and climate change (specifically, a major drought). Finally, the lecture examines the **enigma of Philistine mentions in Genesis**, concluding that a satisfactory explanation remains elusive.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Old Testament Introduction → Old Testament Backgrounds).



**Fowler_OTB_Session
14.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14, Sea Peoples

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Fowler's lecture on the Sea Peoples:

Briefing Document: The Sea Peoples Movement

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on the Sea Peoples Movement, a pivotal event in ancient history, especially in relation to the Old Testament. Dr. Fowler emphasizes the movement's significant impact on the political landscape of the ancient world, and particularly its role in shaping the conditions for the rise of the Israelite monarchy. He notes that the evidence is often confusing and contradictory, and current theories are in flux, but he presents the main ideas and areas of debate.

I. The Significance of the Sea Peoples Movement:

- **Monumental Impact:** Dr. Fowler states that the Sea Peoples Movement was one of the most significant events in the history of the ancient world, rivaled only by the Exodus in its repercussions for Israel. He goes as far as saying, "there were hardly any events in human history of this part of the world that were more important than what's called the Sea Peoples Movement."
- **Unprecedented Scale:** The movement involved a massive transfer of people across the Mediterranean, lasting roughly from 1250 to 1150 BCE. It was a time of tremendous upheaval, with "much of the entire eastern Mediterranean... was in transit".
- **Collapse of Power Centers:** The movement coincided with the collapse of major political powers like the Mycenaean, Minoan, and Hittite civilizations. "What we are suggesting is that a good deal of the ancient world's power structures collapsed, and that led to the rearranging of the entire map of the ancient world."
- **Impact on Biblical History:** This period falls squarely within the time of the Book of Judges and directly precedes the rise of the United Monarchy of Israel, highlighting its importance for understanding Israel's historical context.

II. Origins and Nature of the Movement:

- **Mysterious Origins:** Despite its importance, the exact causes, origins, and pathways of the Sea Peoples Movement are still unclear, with "genuine confusion over how to explain the greatest transfer of peoples in the history of the world."
- **Multiple Tribes:** Various tribal groups were involved, with names derived from Egyptian records such as Shardana, Shekelesh, Teresh/Tursha, Luka, and Ekwesh (from Merneptah's reign) and later Danuna, Jecker, Weshesh, and Peleset/Palisade (from Ramses III's time).
- **Uncertain Homelands:** For many of these groups, their original homelands are unknown, or theories are contradictory, sometimes with possible connections to places like Sardinia, Sicily, Western Anatolia, and even possibly Greece. Dr Fowler admits, "we aren't sure...if the Shardana came from this region here or went back to that region."
- **The Philistines:** The Peleset/Palisade, known as Philistines in the Bible, were a key group. They originated from the Aegean region (likely Crete) but were settled by the Egyptians in Palestine after being defeated. The professor notes, "We know beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Philistines were Aegean."

III. Theories Explaining the Movement:

Dr. Fowler presents three main theories, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each:

- **The Catastrophic View:** This theory suggests a large-scale natural disaster (like an earthquake or tsunami) triggered the population movement. However, Dr. Fowler notes that "There is neither archaeological nor geological evidence of such a catastrophe."
- **The Migratory View:** This theory proposes that the movement of other tribes (like Illyrians) pushed existing populations southward, leading to a domino effect. The problem is that the movement was so haphazard and multi-directional and he notes that "we can't recreate it in any coherent fashion from archaeology."
- **The Climatic Argument:** This is Dr. Fowler's preferred theory. This proposes a major drought in the ancient Near East, supported by sediment analysis in the Sea of Galilee and dendrochronology (tree-ring analysis) in the Hittite region.
- **Evidence of Drought:** Multiple sources confirm the drought: "What all of the studies are showing and have shown for some time now is that this analysis of

sediment material at the bottom of things like the Sea of Galilee reveals that in the time period where we're at, there was a monumental drought. And that's not debatable." and "These tree rings or bristlecone pines in the Hittite region have revealed to us identical information to what we learned from the sediment analysis. There was a period of well over a century in which there was climate change. And there was a tremendous drought."

- **Drought as a Motivator:** The drought plausibly explains why many of the Sea Peoples moved towards Egypt, which was less impacted by drought because its agricultural system relied on the Nile's annual floods rather than rainfall. He states "Egypt was impervious to the drought. It did not matter whether it rained in Egypt and there was plenty of food in Egypt, and this provides a plausible explanation for why the Sea Peoples were making their way southward by land and also by sea to go to Egypt because the Egyptians had food."
- **Possible Causes of Drought:** Dr. Fowler presents other theories that are possibly also related: deforestation and the replacement of sheep with goats for herding.

IV. Consequences of the Movement:

- **Geopolitical Shift:** The Sea Peoples Movement drastically reshaped the political map, with old kingdoms destroyed or weakened and new ones emerging. "The old kingdoms are gone, and new kingdoms appear. Old cities were destroyed, new cities appear."
- **Israel's Opportunity:** The weakening of regional superpowers created a power vacuum, allowing Israel to rise to its greatest political prominence under David and Solomon. "Not being surrounded by superpowers means that David and Solomon can have an empire...This is Israel's golden period."
- **Limited Window:** This "window of opportunity" was temporary, as the rise of Assyria soon followed. This implies a sense of divine orchestration in the timing of events. He notes that "God is giving Israel a unique window of opportunity...It is a unique window of time in all of history."
- **Lost Opportunity:** Unfortunately, the Israelites missed the opportunity to remain faithful to God and fell into decline after the reign of Solomon.

V. The Problem of the Philistines in Genesis:

- **Anachronism:** The mention of Philistines in Genesis (before the Sea Peoples Movement when they arrived in Palestine) presents a significant problem. He asks, "How is it that they can be mentioned as present in Genesis? If Abraham was 2100 BC, and the Sea Peoples' Movement was 1100 BC, how can we bridge a thousand years like that?"
- **Possible Explanations (all rejected):** That the Philistines adopted the name of the land: Dr. Fowler states that this theory is "virtually impossible" since the area was never called this prior to the Philistines.
- That it is an anachronism or scribal gloss: Possible, but no proof.
- That they represent an earlier Aegean migration: Problems include that the Philistine tribes are not known in the Aegean at this time and the Philistines in Genesis are not in the right place for trade and the king has a semitic name.
- **Unresolved Issue:** Dr. Fowler concludes that there is currently no satisfactory explanation for the Philistine presence in Genesis and notes "I just don't think we have a plausible explanation for the Philistines in Genesis, and we should probably just say we don't know."

Conclusion:

The Sea Peoples Movement was a complex and transformative period in the ancient world. While its exact causes remain debated, Dr. Fowler strongly emphasizes the evidence for a major climate shift, specifically a severe drought, as a key factor. The movement had profound consequences, not only reshaping the political landscape but also creating the conditions for Israel's rise to power, although that period of success was ultimately temporary. The lecture also highlights unresolved issues, such as the appearance of Philistines in the Book of Genesis. This reminds us that despite all the progress in our knowledge of ancient history, some questions still remain unanswered.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14, Sea Peoples

The Sea Peoples Movement: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What was the primary significance of the Sea Peoples Movement in relation to the Israelite monarchy?
2. What are the approximate dates of the Sea Peoples Movement, and what major power centers collapsed around the same time?
3. Where does the name "Anatolia" come from, and what does it mean?
4. Name three specific groups of Sea Peoples mentioned in the text, and include a detail about each.
5. According to the text, what is a possible etymological connection between the Ekwesh and the Achaioi/Achaeans?
6. What is the connection between the Sea Peoples called the "Palisade" and the name "Palestine"?
7. Describe the "catastrophic view" of why the Sea Peoples Movement occurred and a major problem with this theory?
8. How does the "climatic argument" explain the movement of people toward Egypt?
9. According to the text, what was the first major consequence of the Sea Peoples Movement?
10. What are two possible explanations for why Philistines are mentioned in Genesis?

Answer Key

1. The Sea Peoples Movement had a significant impact on the Israelite monarchy because it led to the collapse or weakening of major powers surrounding Israel. This created a power vacuum that allowed the Israelite monarchy, under David and Solomon, to achieve a golden age of influence.

2. The Sea Peoples Movement took place roughly between 1250 and 1150 BCE. During this time, major power centers like Mycenae, Minoa, and the Anatolian vassal states collapsed.
3. The name "Anatolia" comes from the Greeks and means "sunrise". It refers to the region east of Greece, which is roughly what we now call Turkey.
4. The Shardana may have originated in northern Syria and some believe they are connected to the island of Sardinia. The Shekelesh may have been connected to the Sycals of Sicily. The Teresh may have been connected to the Etruscans in upper Italy.
5. The Ekwesh and the Achaioi/Achaeans may be related etymologically because of a shift in the pronunciation of the "G" sound, making them possibly the same people coming from the Aegean region.
6. The Sea People group called the Palisade, also known as the Philistines, are believed to have given their name to the region of Palestine because the consonants in both names are the same.
7. The "catastrophic view" argues that a large-scale natural disaster, such as a giant earthquake or tsunami, displaced populations and triggered the movement. There is no archaeological or geological evidence to support such a catastrophe.
8. The "climatic argument" posits a severe drought in the region. This drought would have compelled people to move toward Egypt because the Nile's annual floods made it impervious to the effects of the drought and a consistent source of food.
9. The first major consequence of the Sea Peoples Movement was that it led to the destruction or permanent weakening of all of the major superpowers of the ancient world at the time.
10. One explanation is that the mention of Philistines in Genesis is an anachronism or scribal gloss that was added later to the text by a scribe. A second explanation is that an early Aegean migration occurred long before the Sea Peoples Movement.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Write a detailed essay that addresses the following questions.

1. Compare and contrast the three major theories attempting to explain the Sea Peoples Movement: the catastrophic view, the migratory view, and the climatic argument. Which view do you find most compelling and why?
2. Discuss the effects of the Sea Peoples Movement on the political landscape of the ancient world. How did this period of upheaval lead to the emergence of the Israelite monarchy?
3. Analyze the various tribes and groups of people associated with the Sea Peoples Movement. What do the origins and migratory patterns of groups like the Shardana, Shekelesh, and Philistines suggest about the complexity of this event?
4. Evaluate the historical and textual challenges that the biblical references to the Philistines in Genesis create. How do the proposed solutions attempt to harmonize seemingly contradictory information?
5. Explore the interplay between environmental factors and human migration during the Late Bronze Age. How might the drought have influenced the collapse of major empires and the movements of the Sea Peoples?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Sea Peoples Movement:** A period of significant migrations and cultural upheaval in the Eastern Mediterranean, roughly 1250-1150 BCE, involving various tribal groups.
- **Mycenae:** A powerful civilization on mainland Greece that controlled trade in the eastern Mediterranean before the Sea Peoples Movement.
- **Minoa:** A civilization on the island of Crete that had an important trade network in the eastern Mediterranean, collapsing at the time of the Sea Peoples Movement.
- **Anatolia:** The name given to the region of modern-day Turkey, meaning "sunrise" in Greek, and the home of the Hittite Empire.
- **Hittite Empire:** A powerful empire in Anatolia that collapsed in the Late Bronze Age, partially due to pressure from the Assyrians and the Sea Peoples Movement.

- **Shardana:** A group of the Sea Peoples, possibly from northern Syria, who went to Cyprus and possibly connected to Sardinia.
- **Shekelesh:** A group of Sea Peoples, possibly connected with the Sycals of Sicily.
- **Teresh/Tursha:** A group of Sea Peoples, possibly from western Anatolia, and possibly connected to the Etruscans of upper Italy.
- **Luka:** A group of Sea Peoples, possibly from southwestern Anatolia, who were known as fierce pirates.
- **Ekwesh:** A group of Sea Peoples, possibly connected to the Achaioi/Achaeans of Greece.
- **Danuna:** A group of Sea Peoples, possibly from North Syria, with no clear connection to the biblical Danites.
- **Jecker/Tjekker:** A group of Sea Peoples from the Troad, by way of Cyprus, who settled in Palestine at Dor.
- **Weshesh:** A group of Sea Peoples about whom almost nothing is known.
- **Palisade:** A group of Sea Peoples who are believed to be the Philistines, and gave their name to Palestine,
- **Philistine:** A people from the Sea Peoples Movement who settled in Palestine, particularly along the coast.
- **Catastrophic View:** A theory explaining the Sea Peoples Movement that argues a major natural catastrophe, such as an earthquake or tsunami, caused the migrations.
- **Migratory View:** A theory explaining the Sea Peoples Movement that argues that waves of migration from the Balkans and the Russian steppe led to widespread displacement and conflict.
- **Climatic Argument:** A theory explaining the Sea Peoples Movement that posits a significant drought and subsequent climate change as the root cause of the migrations and collapse of empires.
- **Dendrochronology:** A method of dating based on the analysis of tree rings, which can reveal past climate conditions and periods of drought.

- **Anachronism:** An object or person that is placed in a time period where it does not belong. In biblical studies, it is a term used to describe something (such as a name or event) that does not fit chronologically with the text.
- **Gloss:** In textual analysis, a gloss is a brief explanation of a difficult word or passage in the margins or between the lines of a manuscript. It can also be a change made to the original meaning of a text.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 14, Sea Peoples, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Sea Peoples Movement

1. **What was the Sea Peoples Movement, and why is it considered so significant?**
2. The Sea Peoples Movement refers to a period of large-scale migrations and displacements in the Mediterranean region, roughly between 1250 and 1150 BCE. It is considered a pivotal event, arguably the most significant event in the ancient history of the region (outside of the Exodus for the Israelites), because it led to the collapse of major power structures, including the Mycenaean, Minoan, and Hittite empires, and drastically reshaped the political and cultural landscape of the ancient world. It also created a power vacuum that allowed Israel to flourish for a brief time under David and Solomon.
3. **Where did the Sea Peoples come from, and what caused their migration?**
4. The origins of the Sea Peoples are complex and remain a subject of scholarly debate. Some groups, such as the Shardana, may have originated in or returned to Sardinia, while others like the Shekelesh might have connections to Sicily. The Teresh may have links to the Etruscans in Italy, and the Luka to southwestern Anatolia. Some, like the Ekwesh, may be connected to the Achaeans of Greece. The Danuna's homeland is unknown. The Jecker are thought to have come from the Troad. The Weshesh remain completely unknown. The Philistines (Palisade) were Aegean, and likely stopped in Caphtor (Crete) before settling in Canaan. The reasons for their movements are not definitively known, but three main theories exist: a catastrophic event (like a massive earthquake or tsunami, which lacks evidence), large-scale migrations (though these movements seemed too haphazard and complex to fully explain the effects), and a major climate change marked by a prolonged drought which resulted in mass movements of people seeking food, particularly towards Egypt. This drought has been supported by multiple pieces of evidence, including sediment analysis in the Sea of Galilee and tree ring studies in the Hittite regions. The increased use of goats which pull up vegetation by the roots also likely further destabilized the land.

5. What were the major consequences of the Sea Peoples Movement?

6. The primary results of this movement were the destruction or weakening of major superpowers and a complete rearrangement of the political map of the ancient world. This created a power vacuum which allowed for the rise of Israel, under David and Solomon, to a position of temporary regional prominence. The Sea Peoples also established themselves in new areas, notably the Philistines along the coast of what would become Israel, giving their name to the region of Palestine. The Philistines were an Aegean group that settled in Canaan and were a constant problem for the Israelites, due to their better warriors and militaristic strengths. The Sea Peoples also seemed to be behind a rise in lawlessness and piracy due to the collapse of central authority.

7. Who were the major groups involved in the Sea Peoples Movement, and where did they settle?

8. Several tribal groups were involved, including the Shardana, Shekelesh, Teresh, Luka, Ekweh, Danuna, Jecker, Weshesh, and Palisade (Philistines). Some of these groups settled along the coast of what is now Israel, notably the Philistines, Jecker, and some groups that were settled by the Egyptians after their defeat. The Philistines are also known to have settled in the Jordan area and in Beit She'an. Other groups moved further west in the Mediterranean basin. The locations of the Danuna and Weshesh remain unknown, and other groups had vague connections to Western Anatolia. The connections of the groups mentioned by the Egyptians, and their connections to the various islands in the Aegean Sea and Anatolia are also unclear. Sometimes it isn't even clear if they migrated to or from a given place.

9. How did the Sea Peoples Movement affect the rise of Israel?

10. The weakening or disappearance of Egypt and the Hittites due to the Sea Peoples Movement created a power vacuum in the region that allowed Israel to rise to its greatest political power under David and Solomon. The period following the Sea Peoples Movement was Israel's only period of political strength until modern times. God's blessing provided Israel with a unique window of opportunity to fulfill the promises made to Abraham. However, by failing to remain faithful, they ultimately lost God's blessing and began a long period of decline.

11. What is the significance of the Philistines in the Sea Peoples Movement, and how do they relate to the Bible?

12. The Philistines, originally from the Aegean region, were a major group within the Sea Peoples Movement who settled in Canaan and gave their name to the region of Palestine. The Bible mentions Philistines before the time of the Sea Peoples movement in Genesis and Deuteronomy. These early mentions are problematic because the Philistines as a known people were not in that area prior to the migrations. While the Bible may have been using the Philistine to refer to some other group or perhaps it was a later addition, the early references to Philistines are likely an anachronism, or a scribal gloss. They are not the same group as the later Philistines. There are many reasons to reject alternate theories regarding the Philistines mentioned in Genesis.

13. How was the Sea Peoples Movement related to the Philistines that are talked about in the Bible?

The Philistines are a group of Aegean people who were part of the larger Sea Peoples movement, and were the ones who settled along the coast of Canaan and are constantly in conflict with the Israelites. They were a source of constant conflict during the period of the Judges, and into the period of the monarchy. They were settled by the Egyptians in multiple locations, and their strength as warriors was a constant source of problems. The name Palestine is derived from one of the names of the tribes within the Sea Peoples, specifically the Palisade, which became Philistine to the Israelites.

1. What are the key theories explaining the causes of the Sea Peoples Movement and which one is most likely?

2. There are three primary theories about what caused the movement: the catastrophic view (a major natural disaster), the migratory view (the movement of other peoples displacing various groups who move into other places), and the climatic view (a long period of extreme drought). The most likely is the climatic view, which is supported by sediment analysis in the Sea of Galilee and by the study of tree rings. While other theories may have played a role, the climatic view is the most supported by the evidence, and is likely the primary driver behind this movement.