

# **Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 12, People Groups, Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru**

© 2024 Don Fowler and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 12, People Groups, Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru.

I feel compelled to explain that my last trip through the ancient Near East was a brief one and we were flying over the world of scholarship at about 40,000 feet in a cloudy day.

But it's important to remember that as we move further into the class, it's important to remember that harm can come to the biblical text by misusing ancient Near Eastern materials. And so, for those of us who believe in the Bible and would like to see the Bible proven, we also have to be careful that we don't lose our objectivity as we're utilizing the material. The material has a right to live on its own and it doesn't exist so that we can use it polemically for the Bible.

But ideally, we want to be able to conclude that archaeology is a friend of the Bible. But what you're hearing me talk about is what has largely been a misuse of the Bible down through the millennia, down through the centuries. I should say as if the purpose of the Bible is that it must be proven before it's believed. I truly have come to believe that if we can succeed in finding it since we just did the Gilgamesh Epic if we could conceive of the laughable situation of finding the Ark and entering into the recesses of the Ark, and there it turns out we have a message from Noah written in Akkadian, and in the message Noah says to us, I told you so, that isn't really going to solve the problem of unbelief.

And furthermore, it reminds us that archaeology always has limitations. Years ago, I had the privilege of sitting as a young faculty member listening to a series of lectures by Ed Yamauchi at Grace College, and I came to see him as a man of great humility, and thank God he's still alive today. But the limitations of archaeology were pointed out eloquently by Yamauchi in this statement.

One, only a fraction of archaeological evidence survives in the ground. Two, only a fraction of possible sites has been detected. Three, only a fraction of detected sites has been excavated.

Four, only a fraction of any ancient site is excavated. Five, only a fraction of what has been excavated has been thoroughly examined and published. Last, only a fraction of what has been examined and published makes a contribution to biblical studies.

Only a fraction. So, I think sometimes we have a sort of romantic view of what archaeology can do. I can remember being a young man hearing a young preacher from another school mount the pulpit and tell us that archaeology has proven the Bible.

Well, to anybody who has read archaeology, we laugh because while archaeology has lent general credibility to the Bible, at least in my evaluation, it has hardly proven it. And it's a misuse of archaeological evidence as far as I'm concerned to reduce archaeology to becoming a handmaiden of the Bible, to prove it as it were. So, that gets us into trouble when we take things out of their original context.

What we're going to do is shift the ground here a little bit and look at the background to the events from Exodus through Judges. I'm doing this to just remind us that the old Babylonian period came to an end in roughly 1620 or thereabouts. And it's not until another half a millennium that we have the next great empire, and it's going to be the greatest of these empires.

So, for a long period of time, we have a situation in which Mesopotamia doesn't really have a superpower. So, I'm just quickly setting the stage for the map to remind you that when the old Babylonian period comes to an end, Babylon is inhabited by a people called the Kassites. And they would rule Babylon longer than any other dynasty.

And so, when Babylon falls, a group of people migrate from the Kassite mountain regions to the Zagros mountain regions. They're called Kassites, and they've ruled in Babylon for centuries. But they did not leave us very much.

We have virtually no tablets written in Kassite, and we're not easily able to write a history of Babylon in the Kassite period. But they were ruling in Babylon even though they didn't rule all of the Mesopotamian basin. There's a second group of people called the Hurrians, perhaps what the Bible calls the Hurrites.

And the Hurrians are ruling in this region as well. You can see their homeland up here in the far northern part of Mesopotamia. And they too are a people who migrate into this region.

They are not native to it. Like the Kassites, they are not Semites; they are Indo-Europeans. And so, we want to say a few things about them.

They first appeared in written records as early as 2200, but they probably migrated into upper Mesopotamia in the years 2400 to 2200. By old Babylonian times, they were widely scattered. They were first mentioned as a people group at Mari.

By 1635, they're attacking southern Anatolia. By 1480, they're ruling in Kizzuwatna, which is in the area of New Testament Cappadocia. The Assyrians called it Kue, or classical Calicia.

So, from the years about 1600 to 1400, these Hurrians were the major ethnic force in the great kingdom of Mitanni. Their capital, Washukanni, is the other major royal city that has not yet been found. Mitanni was the real power in the world scene until it was attacked by the Hittite king Suppiluliuma in 1370.

So, when I put this up for you on the map to show you the kingdom of Mitanni, here it's just called the Hurrites. But this kingdom of Mitanni governed the upper half of the Mesopotamian region for several centuries. And they were a major player until they were caught in a squeeze between the Hittites and the Mesopotamians.

The language of the Mitannian Empire was Hurrian, although interestingly enough, we know from studying the names of their leaderships that they were non-Hurrians. It may be that their leadership came from somewhere in Iran or even India. It seems that it was the introduction of horses on a large scale that led them to be a potent military power.

They are likely to be identified with the biblical Hurrites who are mentioned only in Genesis and Deuteronomy. It must be mentioned that they were the most widely dispersed of all the peoples who emigrated into Mesopotamia. In 1450, the Mitannian king Saustartar was defeated by Thutmose III, losing much of his Syrian territory.

Thutmose I, Tutankhamun, made a treaty with him and North Syria was returned to Mitanni. Both Saustartar and his successor Tushratta gave their daughters in marriage to the pharaohs. So the point in setting this up for us is that in the period right before the biblical Exodus, assuming the early date for Exodus, there were three great powers.

Egypt to the south, Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia, and the Hittites in what would be modern-day Turkey. After 1370, this was reduced to two because the Hittites had succeeded in bringing about the end of the Hurrian kingdom. So, as we just take a quick moment then to look at our map, if we look at a convenient map like this, this region here in multiple colors, salmon, purple, and green, this area here was the Hittite empire.

The Mitannian empire was this region to the north like this, and then the Egyptian kingdom was down here. After 1370, what we're saying is the Hurrian kingdom that was here was gone. And all we have is the Hittite empire.

The Hittites are, I find to be an interesting people group. I've given you, as I have in all of my introductory material, some reading material for you to choose at your own discretion should you want to follow up on it. It's not as current as it needs to be, but nonetheless, you can still learn what needs to be learned by following these bibliographical references.

When studying the Hittites, we have a problem because we have one word, the word Hittite, but as we saw in the word Amorite, that word can have multiple identities. So, the first term is that the word Hittite is used for the original inhabitants of Central Asia Minor, usually identified by creating a different spelling or pronunciation of the word Hittite. We call these original inhabitants Hattians.

The name of that area in Central Anatolia was called Hattiland. So, from time immemorial, that was called Hattiland, and therefore, these peoples before 2000 BC were called Hattians. Hattians is really the same thing as Hittite, but Hittite is an amorphous term. It can mean too many different things.

So, what we're going to say is that the inhabitants of Central Asia before 2000 BC were Hattians, and as far as we know, they were in that region of Central Anatolia from time immemorial. However, about 2000 BC, a second ethnic group emigrated into this region. They were a migration of Indo-Europeans into Central Asia Minor, and we have come to refer to them as Imperial Hittites.

A generation or two ago, they were sometimes called Neshites, but people don't seem to use that term anymore. From the years about 1700 to 1190, they were a major political force in the ancient Near East. As a matter of fact, there was a time period from 1370 until the end of the Imperial Hittite Kingdom, when the Egyptians and the Hittites simply divided the world among themselves.

This group, which would have been ruling during the time period of the Patriarchs, down to the middle of the book of Judges, therefore was the time period we call the Imperial Hittites. In about, just to give you a round date, in about 1200, the Imperial Hittite Kingdom imploded and came to an end. And when it imploded and just literally collapsed, then the inhabitants of that area, searching for a little better map, the inhabitants of that Central Asia Minor Kingdom, remnants of that, emigrated to the south here, and in far northern Syria, they established a confederacy of city-states, which are distinguished by historians by calling them Neo-Hittites.

This third group, the Neo-Hittites, were the result of one of the greatest events in the history of the world, the Sea People's Movement. So, these remnants fled to the Taurus Mountains in northern Syria, where they formed a confederacy of city-states that were called Neo-Hittite city-states. So, in order to give us a rough age for this third term, this third use of the term Hittite, we'll give them the dates from 1200 to just roughly 800.

Now, in the Bible, 1200 puts us in the middle of the Book of Judges and then takes us down into the period of the divided monarchy, when David and Solomon are dead, and the kingdom has split into two entities, the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. So, as we look at these three possibilities and compare them to the biblical record, what we would say is this. The original Hattians preceded even Abraham, but then the second group, the Imperial Hittites, covered the patriarchal period down through the middle of the Book of Judges, and then the Neo-Hittites covered the time period from the middle of Judges down to the divided monarchy, monarch.

Now, all of this has led to confusion in the Bible when we see the word Hittite, because we just have one word. The biblical record doesn't distinguish between the Hattians, the Imperial Hittites, and the Neo-Hittites, nor does it distinguish between the word Hittite as it came to be used by the Assyrians at a later date. The Assyrians simply called anything to the west of Assyria as Hattiland.

So, that has created a problem for us when we're reading our Bible. When I see the word Hittite, I'm dealing with a confusing chronological set of possibilities. Let's see if I can illustrate what I mean. When the beloved wife of Abraham, Sarah, dies down in the Hebron region, many of us in our English tradition call it Hebron.

Hebron is actually pronounced Hebron. And so, in our biblical tradition, in the Bible, Hebron is way down here in southern Judah. When Sarah died, Abraham needed a burial place, and so down in the Hebron region, Abraham bought a burial plot from an individual who is called Ephron the Hittite.

So, he buys this burial site from Ephron the Hittite, and so we're reading our Bible, and you've had this incredibly brief introduction to the Hittites, and so you realize now that you have to ask yourself the question, well, what Hittite is it talking about? Is it talking about the Hattians? Is it talking about the Imperial Hittites? Is it talking about Neo-Hittites? Well, so let's say that Sarah died roughly in 2000, just to give a rough date. Well, as you can plainly see, that's the marker date for the migration of the people who came to be the Imperial Hittites. So what this does is when it says Ephron the Hittite, it creates a question mark because we're not sure if this Ephron was somehow one of the original Hattians who made his way all the way down here to Hebron or whether he is part of the migration of the Imperial Hittite peoples who emigrated into Central Asia Minor, or is the biblical text referring to this as a geographical term, and if so, then that would be under the influence of the Assyrian use of the term, because if that fourth case is the possibility, then Ephron was not an ethnic Hittite at all, but the Genesis text is just saying he was a westerner.

So, as you can see, by the time we get to Abraham, and the text says Ephron the Hittite, we don't know, we don't have any means of determining his identity. In other words, if he is a Central Asian Minor inhabitant, we would ask ourselves the

question, what on earth is a Hittite doing this far south in the area we call Palestine? So, this is, I think, a modestly interesting test case for us. When we have Ephron the Hittite, who is he? And as you can see from the situations we're dealing with; we can't really answer that question.

There's another Hittite in the Old Testament. He is much more famous than Ephron, and his name is Uriah. Now, you might remember Uriah as the husband of Bathsheba.

The text tells us that Uriah was a Hittite mercenary in David's army. Now, David would have been roughly 1000 BC. I'm sorry, yes, 1000 BC.

So, as we look at Uriah at about 1000 BC, we can look at this and say David was, Saul was king from roughly 1050 to 1010. David would have been king from 1010 to 970. So, that meant that Uriah would have been someone who was alive.

Since Uriah would have been closer to 970 than to 1010, maybe we can put Uriah sort of in the middle. But we have the question: if he's a Hittite, what does that mean? Well, it means he probably, if not certainly, isn't connected to the original Hattians. It would mean he's probably not from the time period of the Hittite Empire.

So, what it means is that he would have been a Neo-Hittite, and that explains why he was a mercenary. Because, as we look at the term Hittite, what would have happened is this. In this region up here at the foothills where the Neo-Hittite city-states were, in the world following the Great Sea People's Movement, very likely Neo-Hittite Uriah had hired himself out as a mercenary to help the post-Sea People's World deal with the issue of a brand-new world following that catastrophic event of the Sea Peoples.

So, what it gives us is a methodology that's worth being aware of. We have a name, but we have to ask ourselves the question: how is that name used? So, in this particular case, Hittite, then, in the case of Uriah, would almost certainly mean that he was a Neo-Hittite. Imperial Hittite, that is the language of the Empire of the Hittite, was a language written in both cuneiform and hieroglyphic scripts.

The vast majority, however, of the Hittite archive is written in cuneiform script rather than hieroglyph. Hieroglyph doesn't mean Egyptian. It means artistic kind of script that looks like Egyptian script, but is really the Hittite language.

Most of the Neo-Semitic Indo-European language, a Czechoslovakian scholar named Bedrich Hrozný excavated the capital of the Hittite Empire, which was called Hattusha. There, he found what was the capital of the Empire and found the tablet. One of the goals, I suppose, of every archaeologist is to find the capital city, to find the palace, and then to find the royal archive.

So, Hroszy was fortunate enough to find that and then began to decipher the Hittite language because it's not Semitic; it's Indo-European. And so, there he began to decipher it, and thus, the hugely important Hittite tablets were put into an Indo-European language. The basic English translation of the laws was originally in Neufeld's translation, the Hittite laws.

Today, of course, we have the edition, the three-volume edition published by Brill, and edited by W. W. Hallo, and you can read the Hittite tablets in English translation in their most recent form in that volume edited by Hallo called *The Context of Scripture*. So, in any case, it was left to the German scholar Hroszy to note that in these Hittite tablets, there was a form to the various laws that repeated itself throughout these tablets into the Ancient Near East. Hroszy noted this form that was found throughout the rest of the Ancient Near East treaty tablets, and he suggested that there were six major compositional characteristics in these treaties.

He recognized there was a preamble to the documents. He identified an antecedent history, that is, a treaty between two powers, so he recognized that there was an antecedent history listed from the perspective of both. Third, there was a statement of substance concerning the future relationship of the two treaty participants.

Fourth, there were specific stipulations; we would call them laws governing the relationship. Fifth, since the treaty was a legal and official document, then there was an invocation of the gods as witnesses to the treaty. And then last, there were curses and blessings, blessings if the two participants were loyal to the treaty, curses if one of them was not.

Well, this observation led to the recognition that the same general concept governed, like the Book of Deuteronomy. One of the helpful works is by the German scholar Klaus Balzer, who originally published this document in German, but now it's available in English, although it's out of print, the last I heard. The covenant formulary.

In this, we can see that the same rough format appears in the Bible: the preamble, the historical prelude, the basic declaration, the more detailed conditions, and the formal endorsement by the vassal. In other words, when we apply it to Joshua 24, the same rough listing, which we would call a treaty format, appears in the Old Testament. You can see it in Joshua chapter 24, and you can see it in the book of Deuteronomy.

As a matter of fact, this same format has been applied to Deuteronomy. The great Presbyterian scholar at Westminster Theological Seminary recognized this same treaty format in the Book of Deuteronomy and wrote a wonderful book, it's now, of course, quite outdated, called *The Treaty of the Great King*. In this book, Kline

showed that the same treaty format, which was recognized in the Hittite treaties, fits the way the Book of Deuteronomy is written as well.

Now, we don't want to give the audience the impression that there was copying here. What has happened is that there was a diffusion all over the ancient world of a common way of doing treaties. And that diffusion was virtually found in every culture.

So, wherever there were treaties, they followed this rough general format. And so one of the things that we can see is that the ancient Near Eastern peoples followed a common treaty format that was revealing to us that the world was entering into a new golden era, an era of diplomatic relationships all over the Fertile Crescent, including treaty relationships with Egypt. So, Deuteronomy as a book can be understood as a document whose general outline follows the same treaty format.

In this case, in Deuteronomy, the treaty is between the Great King, Japheth, and the Israelites. Moses would have been the individual who was officially making the treaty with Japheth. So, Deuteronomy seems to follow, generally speaking, this same format.

Now, if the imperial empire of the Hittites came to an end in 1200, and Moses wrote his document in 1400, then some have tried to use those dates as an argument to prove that Moses was writing early, rather than critical theory, which has him writing late if indeed he wrote at all. We would probably be better off not to try to use those dates to try to prove the early date for Moses, because, in effect, the treaty format that we showed you is pretty well timeless. And so, it isn't useful to try to argue an early date for Moses on the basis of those phenomena.

But we can say that Moses was the king of Israel who made a treaty with the Lord. And so, the Hittite documents have been very helpful in giving us the earliest peak at an international treaty. If I could shift to another people group, I would like to talk with you about the Habiru.

I know from teaching this in the classroom that this is one of the hardest subject areas for my students to master. A few of them have even had Hebrew. And, of course, when they've had Hebrew, they get it a lot quicker than those students who haven't.

So maybe I could use this opportunity to share with you in the audience and say there is no biblical reason why you can't study Hebrew. As a matter of fact, to put it in more positive terms, in today's world, friends, you can go to places like Zondervan, and you can buy online material that enables you to use Hebrew grammar, and you can study Hebrew right in your living room. And so, or wherever you have your computer.



So, I would, I would encourage you to aim high. I would encourage you to be able to study, to be able to study the Bible using Hebrew and Greek. You know, when Martin Luther was alive, he taught his world that there was no substitution for studying the Bible in the original languages.

And I think that's still true today. So, as we get ready to talk about the problem of the Habiru, I would like to suggest to you there's no reason why many of you could not, using your computer, use the numerous materials that are out there to enable you to study Hebrew on your own. Well, why are the Hebrews called the Hebrews? In chapter 14 of the book of Genesis, Abraham is called the Hebrew.

This is the first time we have used the term. In chapter 14, verse 13, then a fugitive came and told Abraham, Abram the Hebrew. Well, in Genesis 14:13, we ask ourselves the question, why was Abram called the Hebrew? What does it mean there? Well, let me just write on the board for you the way that we would do this.

Now, you'll notice this I. You all know that the Old Testament is filled with ites. Canaanites, Parasites, Hittites, Israelites. Well, in Hebrew, none of those ites exist.

Perhaps that comes to us from the Septuagint, but all of those people we call ites are all people who end with the sigla I. It's really Canaanite, not Canaanite. It's really not Israelite, and it's Israeli. So, or B'nai Israel, the children of Israel.

The Hebrews are actually called the Ivri. So, we're going to ask ourselves the question, why is Abraham called the Hebrew in chapter 14, verse 13? There are multiple explanations—there are always multiple explanations.

I find it to be just comical. When I was a 20-year-old, we used to say, now there are two views for this. Today, with all the new information that we have found, what we would say to you is, actually there are 10 views for this.

Such as finding information. The more information we find, we simply have more possible explanations. So, as we try to answer the question, why is Abraham called the Hebrew? There are various explanations.

A relatively popular one is that Abraham is called the Hebrew because he had a forefather named Eber. In chapter 10, verse 24, in Hebrew, this word appears like this with different vowels, Eber, but it's the same word. Here, it's spelled a little bit differently with different vowels, but it's the same root consonants in Hebrew.

In other words, the same root consonants that these share is this rough breathing mark, the B, and the R. Those are three consonants that these two share in common.

Evri and Eber share three consonants. They're spelled differently with vowels, but they share three consonants.

Okay? So, if you go to your English study Bibles, there are, what, 20 or 30 different English study Bibles out there now? One of the more common explanations for why Abraham is called the Hebrew is because he's a descendant of Eber. Eber, I mention in our notes, was the son of Shelach, son of Arpachshad, son of Shem, father of Peleg, grandfather of Reu, great-grandfather of Serug, who begot Nahor, Abraham's grandfather. Well, I don't know, but I would ask myself the question in that paragraph.

In that paragraph of forefathers of Abraham going back many generations, I read that, and I ask myself the question, did Eber do anything that was significant enough that Abraham should be called, it's literally, it's literally the Eberite? Why would Abraham be called the Eberite? Because if you go back to Genesis 14 and this starts to get confusing, so you just stop me with your questions. Well, wait a minute, we can't do that because this is online. I wish you could stop me so I could re-explain it where necessary because it's really confusing.

In the original Hebrew language, what we have here is the definite article. The. So, if Abraham is the Eberite, we should ask ourselves the question, what in that list of names did Eber do that was so important that Abraham would be called the Eberite? I would have expected him to be called the Shemite since Shem is far more important than Eber.

Or even Peleg. But we look at that and ask ourselves the question, who is Eber that he should be called the Eberite? So, my first question in answering this would be, who is Eber? And secondly, why the definite article? Now, Hebrew and English don't share a lot of things in common. But both languages share a very, very minor thing in common.

You don't put the definite article on proper names. Because they're automatically definite. My wife is Peg.

I don't say "the Peg" because she's Peg. That's automatically definite. So, in Hebrew, you virtually never put the definite article on a proper noun.

Whether it's the name of a country or whether it's a personal name, you virtually never put the definite article on a proper noun. Now, we now have a president who, prior to his election, was referred to as the Donald. But as far as I know, he's the only person I've ever heard of in my lifetime who had the definite article put in front of his name.

So, we ask ourselves the second question. Why if Hebrew is a proper noun, does it have the definite article in front of it? It's virtually unprecedented. So, these are two problems that I have with explaining Eber as the forefather of explaining why Abraham is called the Hebrew.

So, hopefully, you can get this then. It's not too bad yet. A problem with this then is why is he called the Eberite? Because who was Eber and what did he do that would make Abraham called the Eberite? And two, why does it have the definite article? So, I think these are problems with the first explanation for why Abraham is called the Hebrew even though it's probably the common explanation in study Bibles that Abraham is called the descendant of Eber.

So, if I can, I'm going to erase these and look at a second explanation for this. The very famous scholar William Albright proposed a generation and a half ago that Abraham was called the Hebrew because the word Hebrew is to be related to an Akkadian root meaning which was translated donkey driver. In other words, growing up in the era I did, which was when Hollywood produced westerns more than they produced dramas, Abraham was a mule skinner.

Now, today, whenever I say that in my classroom, my students look at me with complete blank expressions because they've never heard the term mule skinner. But when I was a kid, mule skinner meant that you know, that you used donkeys to haul things. You were a donkey driver.

Well, this was an interesting proposal, but apparently Albright died without anybody ever adopting his suggestion. I myself have never read in print anywhere where Albright adopted, excuse me, where anybody adopted Albright's proposal, but what he was suggesting that Abraham was called the donkey driver because when Abraham came west, he had a very large number of people and he would have had therefore, a very large number of donkeys and so he was so named because these donkeys, which perhaps would have been in the hundreds if not larger, characterized his movement. But there really isn't any evidence to suggest to us that this is the correct explanation for why Abraham, because after all, if he was called the donkey driver, why then were all subsequent generations of the Israelites called Hebrews? Why did this name stick if it was just related to Abraham's employment of large numbers of donkeys? The third view is drawn from the meaning of the verb, and this view, I think, is the best answer.

In Hebrew, theoretically, all roots, all root words in Hebrew have three consonants. If they have more than three consonants or less than three consonants, they're probably loan words. Hebrew is mathematically a language in which all words, unless they're loan words, have three consonants.

So, these three consonants, remember that this looks like a comma, but it's what we call a rough breathing mark, it's a ch. So, these three consonants in Hebrew come from a root which means to cross over, to cross over. and so what I would suggest as the explanation for why the Hebrews came to be called the Hebrews is because Abraham's great act of faith was crossing over.

So, when we look at Abraham, Abraham leaving Ur, I happen to think Ur was up here close to Charon, up in northern Mesopotamia, so Abraham's great command from God for which he found saving faith was that he had the faith to believe in God, to leave his homeland, and to literally cross over. He crossed over hundreds upon hundreds of miles, but he also crossed over multiple rivers. Here he crossed over the Balak River, and here he crossed over the Euphrates River.

Abraham was called the Hebrew, I would propose, because he literally crossed over from his homeland to come to the land that God gave him. This also explains to us why we would have the definite article because the definite article in Hebrew would be spelled with an H, and so this is here spelled Ivri, now it's Ha-ivri, and Ha-ivri is where I think the word Hebrew came from. So, the Hebrews I'm proposing to you are called the Hebrews because Abraham's great act of faith was crossing over from his homeland in obedience to God.

Thus, in chapter 14, verse 13 of Genesis, Abraham is, in essence, called the one who crossed over. So, in my way of thinking, that is that is the correct explanation. Now I would be quick, I should be quicker to tell you that I may or may not represent a majority view on this.

Some of my closest friends do not accept this proposal. So what it amounts to is you really have two to choose from. One he's called the Ebrite and two he's called the one who crosses over.

So, you can have your choice, but as far as I know, those are your two choices about why the Hebrews came to be called the Hebrews. Now, maybe you got that. Maybe that's not too confusing, and maybe we can, most of us still feel a sense of community.

We understand one another. We we're glad for this opportunity to be together but now I'm going to continue the discussion and in the tradition that I came from in Christianity I'm going to quit preaching and go to meddling. Because it gets much more complicated when we realize that in the ancient world there was a phenomena called the Habiru.

I started our discussion here with the Habiru term. So, as we look at our discussion what we're going to say is we have two words that look a lot alike. The two words are Habiru and Hebrew.

And so, the question that we're asking is do these two things mean the same thing or do they mean different things? That's the question that we're going to ask. So, as we look at this we'll tell you a popular suggestion is the suggestion by some evangelical scholars that these two words mean the same thing. Habiru and Hebrew are the same thing.

Again, I have friends who hold to this. So, this view argues that Abraham was called a Hebrew because he was actually a Habiru. So who on earth are the Habiru? I'm not sure we can get this answered in the time we've set aside for this tape so this discussion may bleed over into the next tape.

My cameraman will tell me when I need to pack this in. Habiru is a term, it's an Akkadian word, not for a nation but for a political phenomenon, a geopolitical phenomenon. right? Now, why would evangelicals want to use this term? Well, it's because, at the time period roughly when Joshua was bringing the Israelites into the land, we have letters found in Egypt, we have letters found in Egypt in which various kingdoms in Palestine were writing letters to the Egyptian king saying the Habiru are coming, send troops.

Okay? Let's just put it like this. So, from about 1370 for the next 20 years or so, Joshua is leading the military forces of Israel into conquering the land, and while he's doing that, there are, as a matter of fact, we actually have the king of Jerusalem, it was called Jebus then, but we have the king of Jerusalem writing letters to the Egyptian pharaohs saying the Habiru are coming, send troops. So evangelical scholars have found it attractive to argue that Habiru and Hebrew are, therefore, the same thing and that what is happening is that the Hebrews are coming into the land, and we have archeological evidence now to prove that the Hebrews are coming into the land because the resident kings are asking for help from the Habiru.

All right. So, I hope that I somehow made that clear. If I haven't, I don't know what to do about the problem since we're just doing a lecture and not an interaction.

But we're going to pause the discussion because what we need to do before we start drawing happy faces is to embrace the question mark. So, what we're going to do is to take a look at the Akkadian word Habiru and see what the word means in Akkadian before we allow ourselves the luxury of concluding that Habiru and Hebrew are the same thing. So, this looks like to me a good place to pause our discussion, and then when we come back, what we're going to do is look at the Akkadian meaning of Habiru, and then when we understand that, we can draw our conclusion about whether we have proof of the conquest or whether we don't have this proof of the conquest.

That's hopefully a good place to pause our discussion.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 12, People Groups, Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru.