

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 8, The Geo-Political Arena, Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 8, The Geo-Political Arena, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Jeffrey Hudon's Biblical Archaeology course **focuses on the geopolitical context of the ancient Near East**, specifically exploring the impact of major empires—**Egypt and Assyria**—on the Israelites. The lecture **analyzes the Canaanites' contributions**, including their alphabet, and **examines the interactions between these empires and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah**, referencing archaeological discoveries like the Ugaritic tablets and the Merneptah Stele to support the analysis. Dr. Hudon also **highlights the brutality of the Assyrian Empire** and its lasting impact on the region. The lecture connects biblical narratives with archaeological findings, **providing a historical context for understanding Old Testament events**.

2. 34 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Archaeology).



**Hudon_BibArch_Ses
sion08.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Hudon_BibArch_EN_Ses08.pdf," which is a lecture by Dr. Jeffrey Hudon on the geopolitical context of the biblical period:

Briefing Document: Biblical Archaeology - The Geopolitical Arena, Part 1

Overview:

This lecture, Session 8 in a series on Biblical Archaeology, focuses on the broader geopolitical context in which the Israelites lived, emphasizing that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were small regional powers existing within the framework of larger global empires. The lecture primarily covers three major influences: the Canaanites, Egypt, and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, highlighting their impact on Old Testament history and the Israelite people.

I. The Canaanites: Local Levantine People

- **Indigenous Population:** The Canaanites were the indigenous people of the Levant, living in valleys and along the Mediterranean coast before the Israelites. They were a Semitic people, sharing linguistic roots with the Israelites.
- **Key Contribution: The Alphabet:** Their most significant contribution was the development of an alphabet with 30 symbols, a simplification compared to the thousands of cuneiform symbols used by Mesopotamian cultures. Dr. Hudon explains, "We can thank the Canaanites for developing an alphabet, which greatly simplified writing compared to cuneiform and pictographs." While their early writing also used cuneiform, the use of 30 symbols marked a significant shift.
- **Polytheistic Religion:** The Canaanites were polytheistic, worshipping a pantheon of gods and goddesses including Baal, El, Ashtar, and Molech.
- **Traders and Seafarers:** They were known as traders and merchants (the name "Ka'anan" means merchant), and were skilled sailors. Their settlements and influence extended throughout the Mediterranean, even to the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar). Phoenicians were essentially northern Canaanites.
- **Ugarit:** The city of Ugarit, discovered in the late 1920s at Ras Shamra in Syria, has been crucial to understanding Canaanite culture. The discovery of alphabetic cuneiform tablets there was key. As Dr. Hudon states, "the finds at Ugarit very much defined and shaped our understanding of Canaanite culture."

- **Influence on Israel:** Canaanite culture had a negative influence on Israel, particularly in matters of religion. The marriage of King Ahab to the Phoenician Princess Jezebel is a notable example of this detrimental influence.
- **Ugaritic Influence on the Psalms:** The Ugaritic language and literature have shed light on the Psalms, revealing similar language and poetic structures, with Yahweh taking the place of Canaanite deities. Dr. Hudon notes, "And we see the Book of Psalms using similar language, only instead of Baal or Molech or El, you have Yahweh doing these great things."

II. Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs

- **Geographic Isolation:** Egypt's geographic location, surrounded by deserts and the cataracts of the Nile, led to its isolation and unique development. It was called "the Black Land," with the surrounding desert area referred to as "the Red Land."
- **Upper and Lower Egypt:** Egypt was historically divided into Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Egypt, unified under Pharaoh Narmer, who is shown with the double crown representing unification.
- **The Nile's Importance:** The Nile River was the lifeline of Egypt, with arable land being only about 12 miles wide along its banks. Dr. Hudon points out, "Without the Nile River, Egypt was desert...it was vital to the economy and to the livelihood of the people."
- **Egyptian Chronology:** The lecture outlines key periods in Egyptian history: the Old Kingdom (age of the pyramids), First Intermediate Period (internal conflict), Middle Kingdom (age of patriarchs), Second Intermediate Period (rule by Hyksos, Asiatics), New Kingdom (age of the Exodus), and the Third Intermediate Period (decline).
- **Biblical Interactions:** Numerous interactions between Egypt and Israel are detailed: Abraham's sojourn in Genesis 12; Joseph's time in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (potentially); the Israelite oppression and Exodus during the New Kingdom; and references to Egyptian pharaohs like Shishak, who invaded and was named, while most are unnamed.
- **Unidentified Pharaohs:** The unnamed pharaohs in key biblical events (the Exodus, Abraham's encounter, and Solomon's marriage alliance) is a historical puzzle. Dr. Hudon suggests that the pharaoh of the Exodus may have been deliberately unnamed due to his "impotence" (as represented by the plagues). He states that "an impotent pharaoh is not worthy of a name."

- **Egyptian Influence on Israel:** There are traces of Egyptian influence on the Old Testament: Egyptian names (Moses, Hophni, and Phinehas), parallel proverbs, and the depiction of Canaanites in Egyptian art (as seen in the tomb painting of Sesostris).
- **Avaris and the Second Intermediate Period:** The city of Avaris, capital of the Hyksos, yielded evidence of a vizier's tomb (possibly connected to Joseph, although that's speculative), and provided a glimpse of how Egyptian officials might have appeared.
- **Monotheistic Experiment:** The reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), who worshipped Aten (the sun), is mentioned. He moved the capital to Tel El Amarna, establishing his new city where the mountains frame the sunrise and sunset.
- **Tel El Amarna Letters:** The discovery of Akkadian cuneiform tablets (diplomatic correspondence) at Tel El Amarna provides valuable insights into the geopolitical situation in Canaan around the time of the Exodus and conquest. As Dr. Hudon states, "These...tell very, very dramatically what this geopolitical situation is in various areas of Egypt, and more importantly in the Levant."
- **Merneptah Stele:** The Merneptah Stele is the first extra-biblical mention of Israel. It details his attacks on various cities and peoples, including Israel. The stele states: "Israel is laid waste, and his seed is no more." While likely hyperbole, it places Israel in the hill country at this time.
- **Possible Egyptian Temple in Jerusalem:** There is speculation, based on artifacts and the place name "waters of Nephthoah" (possibly linked to Merneptah), that an Egyptian administrative center and temple existed north of Jerusalem.
- **Biblical Perspective on Egypt:** The book of Hosea views Egypt as a place of both oppression (the Exodus) and refuge (Jesus' infancy). Later, the prophets critique reliance on Egypt as a "broken reed," reflecting its decline in power.

III. The Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Brutal Power

- **Expansion and Brutality:** The Neo-Assyrian Empire was a highly militaristic and brutal empire that expanded to include Mesopotamia, parts of Anatolia, and the Levant. They were masters of psychological warfare, terror, and deportation.
- **Key Assyrian Kings:** The lecture highlights kings such as Shalmaneser III (Battle of Karkar), Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II (fall of Samaria), Sennacherib (attack on Jerusalem), Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal.

- **Deportation Policy:** A key tactic of the Assyrians was the deportation of conquered populations to break their identity. Dr. Hudon explains, "That way, it would separate the people from their land, from their homeland, and after a generation or two, they would essentially be loyal Assyrian subjects."
- **Battle of Karkar:** Shalmaneser III fought a major battle against a coalition of kings (including Ahab of Israel) at Karkar in 853 BC, though not a clear victory for the Assyrians.
- **Jehu's Submission:** Jehu of Israel submitted to Shalmaneser III in 841 BC, as depicted on the Black Obelisk.
- **Destruction of the Northern Kingdom:** The northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II, who destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and deported most of the inhabitants.
- **Sennacherib's Attack on Judah:** Sennacherib's attack on Judah (701 BC) led to the destruction of many cities, but Jerusalem was miraculously spared. It is claimed 200,000 Judeans were deported.
- **Depictions of Atrocities:** The lecture includes graphic depictions of Assyrian atrocities, such as impalement and the butchering of pregnant women, reflecting their reputation for cruelty.
- **Legacy of Assyria:** Isaiah uses Assyria as an example of God's "rod of anger," highlighting the complex relationship between divine judgment and the actions of powerful empires.
- **Modern Assyrians:** The lecture also notes that modern Assyrians are Iraqi Christians who have faced persecution and displacement.

Conclusion:

This lecture underscores the importance of understanding the broader geopolitical context to fully appreciate the history of Israel in the Old Testament. It reveals that the Israelites were not isolated but were deeply impacted by the rise and fall of the Canaanites, Egypt, and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, both positively and negatively, showing how they were players on a larger global stage. This understanding is further enhanced by the use of archaeological discoveries and textual analysis. The lecture also emphasizes the brutality of ancient empires and God's use of these empires to enact his judgment, showing a complex relationship between political history and the actions of the Divine.

4. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 8, The Geo-Political Arena, Part 1

Biblical Archaeology Study Guide: The Geopolitical Arena, Part 1

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. How did the geographic location of the Levant affect trade and commerce in the ancient world?
2. What was the significant contribution of the Canaanites to writing? How did it differ from other contemporary writing systems?
3. What is the significance of Ugarit in understanding Canaanite culture and the Old Testament, particularly the Book of Psalms?
4. How did the Egyptians describe their land, and how did the Nile River affect their civilization?
5. Explain the division of Egypt into Upper and Lower Egypt and their eventual unification.
6. Briefly outline the various periods of Egyptian history, emphasizing the Intermediate periods and their impact on Egyptian power.
7. What is the significance of the Amarna Letters, and what insights do they provide into the geopolitical landscape of Canaan?
8. Describe the significance of the Merneptah Stele concerning its mention of Israel, and what can be concluded from its findings?
9. Explain the methods used by the Assyrians in managing their conquered territories and how this impacted Israel.
10. Describe the Battle of Karkar and its significance, and what later actions did the Assyrians take against the northern kingdom of Israel?

Answer Key

1. The Levant was located on the coast, making it a crucial trade route. Because the desert was nearly impassable, all travel and commerce had to go along the coast.

This allowed the people of the Levant to become important merchants and sailors, who traveled and traded all along the Mediterranean.

2. The Canaanites developed the alphabet, which used only 30 symbols. This was a significant simplification compared to other contemporary writing systems like cuneiform and hieroglyphs, which used thousands of symbols.
3. Ugarit was a major Canaanite city where numerous cuneiform tablets were discovered, revealing the Ugaritic language. These tablets provided insight into Canaanite culture and a language very similar to Hebrew, which enhanced our understanding of the poetry and imagery in the Book of Psalms.
4. The Egyptians called their land the "Black Land," referring to the fertile soil along the Nile River. The Nile was vital to Egypt because it was the source of life, providing water for irrigation and making agriculture possible. Without the Nile, the area would have been desert.
5. Upper and Lower Egypt had independent kings, which were eventually united by Pharaoh Narmer. Lower Egypt was in the north, following the river down stream, and Upper Egypt was in the south. This unity created a more powerful kingdom.
6. Egyptian history includes periods of strength like the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, during which they had strong central rule. These were interrupted by First, Second, and Third Intermediate Periods, times of internal strife and/or foreign rule that weakened Egypt. The New Kingdom was the most powerful.
7. The Amarna Letters were a collection of diplomatic correspondence discovered in the Egyptian foreign office. They provided a detailed look into the geopolitical landscape of the Levant during the 14th century BC, shedding light on the rivalries and interactions among the various Canaanite city-states and the Egyptian empire.
8. The Merneptah Stele is significant because it is the first clear extra-biblical reference to Israel. It was a victory monument by an Egyptian pharaoh. The text suggests Israel was in the hill country, confirming some biblical narratives about their location.
9. The Assyrians used terror tactics and mass deportations to control conquered lands. They would remove populations from their homeland and resettle them in different parts of the empire, replacing them with foreign peoples in the newly conquered area. This helped break the people's local ties and weaken their resolve for revolution.

10. The Battle of Karkar was a major conflict in 853 BC between the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III and a coalition of regional kings led by Ahab of Israel. Though the Assyrians claimed victory, they withdrew from the area for a number of years. Later, under kings like Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and deported much of the population.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the impact of the Canaanite culture, particularly their religious practices, on the ancient Israelites as detailed in the biblical text and archaeological discoveries.
2. Discuss the role of the Nile River in the development of ancient Egyptian civilization, considering both its benefits and challenges.
3. Evaluate the relationship between Egypt and the Israelites, detailing the various periods of interaction and their impact on both societies according to both biblical and extra-biblical sources.
4. Compare and contrast the methods of control and expansion employed by the Egyptian and Assyrian empires in the ancient Near East.
5. Examine the archaeological evidence for the power, influence, and cruelty of the Assyrian empire, particularly in light of its interactions with the kingdom of Israel.

Glossary of Key Terms

Canaanites: The indigenous people of the Levant who lived along the shoreline and in the valleys before the arrival of the Israelites, known for their alphabet.

Ugarit: An ancient Canaanite city-state located on the Mediterranean coast of modern Syria where numerous cuneiform tablets were discovered.

Levant: The geographic region along the eastern Mediterranean coast, encompassing present-day Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and parts of Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula.

Mesopotamia: The ancient region located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, known for the development of early civilizations and empires.

Nile River: The major river in Egypt that was crucial for agriculture, economy, and the development of Egyptian civilization.

Upper Egypt: The southern part of ancient Egypt, located upriver along the Nile.

Lower Egypt: The northern part of ancient Egypt, located downriver along the Nile Delta.

Hyksos: Foreign rulers, primarily Asiatics, who controlled Lower Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period.

Amarna Letters: A collection of diplomatic correspondence from the 14th century BC found at the Egyptian capital of Akhetaten, providing insights into the geopolitics of the Levant.

Merneptah Stele: An ancient Egyptian victory stele that contains the first known extra-biblical reference to the nation of Israel.

Assyrians: An ancient people and empire centered in Mesopotamia, known for their military prowess, terror tactics, and their eventual conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Karkar: An ancient city and location of a major battle between the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III and a coalition of regional kings, including Ahab of Israel.

Neo-Assyrian Empire: The renewed Assyrian empire from the 9th to the 7th centuries BC, known for its expansion and brutality.

5. FAQs on Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 8, The Geo-Political Arena, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Geopolitical Context of the Old Testament

- **What major empires influenced the history of the Israelites, and how did they interact?**
- The Israelites, despite having small, regional kingdoms, existed within the sphere of influence of major global empires. The primary empires that shaped their history were Egypt and the Mesopotamian empires (Assyria, Babylon, and Persia). These empires, particularly Egypt and Assyria, often exerted control or hegemony over the Israelite people. The interaction between these empires and the Israelites is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament narrative.
- **Who were the Canaanites, and what is their historical significance?**
- The Canaanites were the indigenous Semitic people of the Levant, who inhabited the valleys and coastlines before the Israelites. They made a major contribution to history with the development of the alphabet, which simplified writing considerably compared to cuneiform and pictographs. The Canaanites were polytheists, worshipping a pantheon of gods like Baal and El, and were known for their trading and seafaring skills. Their culture, as found in cities like Ugarit, significantly influenced the language and literature of the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Psalms, although they were also seen as a negative influence, for example with the story of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.
- **What role did the discovery of Ugarit play in understanding the Old Testament?**
- The archaeological discoveries at Ugarit, an ancient Canaanite city, yielded numerous cuneiform tablets written in an early alphabetic script. This discovery provided a new language similar to Hebrew. The Ugaritic texts have given unique insights into Canaanite culture, religion, and language, allowing scholars to make connections between Canaanite literature and the poetic passages in the Old Testament, notably in the Book of Psalms. The similarities show how the Israelites adapted and reinterpreted many existing concepts.

- **How was ancient Egypt geographically and politically structured, and how did this affect its interactions with the Israelites?**
- Ancient Egypt was defined by the Nile River, with arable land (the Black Land) surrounded by desert (the Red Land). It was politically divided into Upper and Lower Egypt until they were united by Pharaoh Narmer. The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt, crucial for its agriculture and economy. Egypt's geographical isolation allowed it to develop largely independently. In the context of the Bible, Egypt played a critical role in the stories of the patriarchs (like Abraham and Joseph), the Israelite sojourn, the Exodus, and even in the New Testament with Jesus' early life. There was a period of Hyksos (Canaanite/Asiatic) rule in Egypt which some believe to be linked to the story of Joseph in Egypt.
- **What is the significance of the Egyptian pharaohs and their interaction with the Israelites, as depicted in the Old Testament, even though their names are often not mentioned in scripture?**
- Egyptian pharaohs are major figures in the Old Testament, notably in the narratives of Abraham, Joseph, and the Exodus. However, the Bible rarely names the specific pharaohs involved, and the lack of naming continues to pose a debate for historians and Egyptologists. Some believe this naming absence was done theologically, for example with the pharaoh of the Exodus being considered unworthy of being named. Despite the missing names, interactions with pharaohs drive critical events in the Israelite story, including the oppression leading to the Exodus. The Merneptah Stele mentions an Israelite people for the first time in a non-biblical source.
- **How did the Assyrian Empire impact the northern kingdom of Israel, and what were its methods of control?**
- The Assyrian Empire was a brutal force that exerted significant influence over the Levant, including Israel. The Assyrian kings employed terror tactics and psychological warfare, as part of which they deported conquered populations to distant parts of their empire and imported foreigners into conquered lands to quell dissent and prevent future revolts. These tactics resulted in the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and the deportation of its people, which scattered them and prevented them from being a distinct entity again.

- **What major events and interactions are detailed with the Assyrian kings within the Bible, and what is their historical significance?**
- Several Assyrian kings are mentioned within the Bible, and they all left significant impacts on the Israelites. Shalmaneser III fought a major battle with Ahab of Israel in 853 BC. Later, Jehu had to bow before Shalmaneser III to become a vassal. Tiglath-Pileser III reasserted Assyrian control over Israel and Judah, while Shalmaneser V and Sargon II completed the destruction of the northern kingdom. Sennacherib attacked Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem, but his army was defeated and Jerusalem was not taken. These interactions highlight the power dynamics and conflicts of the region.
- **What is the legacy of the Assyrian Empire and what evidence is there for the cruelty of its conquests?**
- The Assyrian Empire left a legacy of brutality and control, as it used violence and terror as tools to subjugate and control their subjects. The biblical prophets described them as the "rod of God's anger," used to punish Israel for their disobedience. Archaeological finds, including reliefs, tablets, and victory steles, confirm these brutal tactics, like ripping open pregnant mothers and impaling people for trying to flee. Additionally, the legacy of displacement continued within the practices of ISIS in the modern day. However, the Assyrians also left behind impressive architecture and artwork, highlighting the complex nature of this historical empire.