

## **Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 12, People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, Habiru 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 12, People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, Habiru, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture** on Old Testament backgrounds examines the Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru, exploring their historical contexts and relationships with biblical narratives. The lecture cautions against misusing archaeological findings to prove the Bible, highlighting the limitations of archaeological evidence and the complexities of interpreting ancient texts. Fowler specifically addresses the ambiguous use of "Hittite" in the Bible and the debate surrounding the relationship between the terms "Habiru" and "Hebrew." The lecture also touches upon the structure of ancient Near Eastern treaties and their parallels in the Old Testament, such as Deuteronomy. Finally, Fowler discusses multiple interpretations of the term "Hebrew" and its origins.

**2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 12 – 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  
12.mp3**

### **3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 12, People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, Habiru**

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture transcript by Dr. Donald Fowler:

#### **Briefing Document: Old Testament Backgrounds - People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru**

##### **Introduction:**

This briefing document summarizes key points from Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture (Lecture 12) on Old Testament backgrounds, specifically focusing on the Hurrians, Hittites, and Habiru. Dr. Fowler emphasizes the importance of using ancient Near Eastern materials carefully when studying the Bible, urging caution against forcing these materials to "prove" the Bible. He also highlights the limitations of archaeological evidence. The lecture then shifts to examining these specific people groups and their potential relationship with biblical narratives.

##### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### **1. The Limitations of Archaeology:**

- Dr. Fowler stresses that archaeology should not be seen as a tool to "prove" the Bible, cautioning against "misusing ancient Near Eastern materials." He states, "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."
- He quotes Dr. Ed Yamauchi on the limitations of archaeology, noting that only "a fraction" of evidence survives, is detected, excavated, examined, or contributes to biblical studies.
- "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."
- Archaeology can provide general credibility to the Bible but should not be used to reduce archaeology to become a handmaiden of the Bible, to prove it as it were.

### 1. The Hurrians:

- The Hurrians were an Indo-European people who migrated into Upper Mesopotamia. They are possibly related to the biblical "Hurrites".
- They first appeared in written records around 2200 BC, and by 1600-1400 BC they were a major power in the kingdom of Mitanni.
- The Mitannian leadership may have originated from Iran or India. They were noted for using horses to create a potent military power.
- The Hurrian Kingdom was a major player in the ancient Near East prior to being conquered by the Hittites in 1370 BC.
- "They are likely to be identified with the biblical Hurrites who are mentioned only in Genesis and Deuteronomy."

### 1. The Hittites:

- The term "Hittite" has multiple meanings, creating confusion when referencing the biblical record.
- **Hattians:** The original inhabitants of Central Asia Minor (pre-2000 BC), also referred to as inhabitants of "Hattiland".
- **Imperial Hittites:** Indo-European migrants who arrived around 2000 BC, ruling from approximately 1700 to 1190 BC. They were a major political force in the ancient Near East during this time.
- **Neo-Hittites:** Remnants of the Imperial Hittite Kingdom who migrated to northern Syria and formed a confederacy of city-states after 1200 BC, resulting from the Sea People's Movement.
- The biblical text doesn't distinguish between these three groups; the Assyrians later used "Hattiland" to refer to anything west of Assyria, further complicating the matter.
- Example of the problem: Abraham buys a burial plot from Ephron *the Hittite*, but the timing means we can't definitively know if Ephron was a Hattian, an Imperial Hittite, or if it's a geographical term under Assyrian influence.
- Uriah the Hittite in David's army was most likely a Neo-Hittite, and this accounts for his mercenary status. "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."

- The vast majority of the Hittite archive is written in cuneiform script rather than hieroglyph.
- Bedrich Hrozný excavated the Hittite capital, Hattusha, and deciphered the language, which was Indo-European.

### 1. **Hittite Treaties and their Significance**

- Hittite treaties followed a specific structure with six major compositional characteristics: Preamble, antecedent history, a statement of substance concerning the future relationship of the two treaty participants, specific stipulations, an invocation of the gods as witnesses to the treaty, and curses and blessings,
- This treaty format is seen throughout the Ancient Near East including in parts of the Bible.
- "This observation led to the recognition that the same general concept governed, like the Book of Deuteronomy." 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."
- This similar treaty format found throughout the ancient near east indicates a new era of diplomacy.
- Though the Hittite format shares a common structure with Deuteronomy, "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."

## 1. The Habiru:

- The term "Hebrew" is first used to describe Abraham in Genesis 14:13. "Then a fugitive came and told Abraham, Abram the Hebrew."
- Dr. Fowler questions the common explanation that Abraham is called a Hebrew because he is a descendant of Eber, citing several issues. First, in the lineage that is traced to Abraham, Eber is not that significant. "Did Eber do anything that was significant enough that Abraham should be called, it's literally, it's literally the Eberite?" Second, why is there a definite article before the term "Hebrew?" This is uncommon when discussing proper names.
- He rejects a theory that it meant "donkey driver."
- Dr. Fowler proposes that the term "Hebrew" (Ivri) is best related to the Hebrew verb meaning "to cross over." Abraham's great act of faith was crossing over from his homeland.
- "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."
- He then asks, are the Habiru the same as the Hebrews?
- The Habiru is an Akkadian term that is not a nation but a political phenomenon.
- Some evangelical scholars identify Habiru and Hebrew as the same people, because letters from the time of Joshua refer to the Habiru invading Palestine.

### Key Questions and Further Discussion (to be covered in the next lecture):

- What is the Akkadian meaning of the term "Habiru"?
- Do the terms Habiru and Hebrew refer to the same group of people?
- Does the use of the term Habiru in contemporary letters prove the conquest?

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Fowler's lecture provides a valuable overview of the Hurrians, Hittites, and the complexities surrounding the term "Hebrew" and its connection with the "Habiru." He emphasizes critical thinking and the careful use of ancient texts. The lecture sets the stage for further discussion about the identity of the Habiru and its potential significance for understanding biblical narratives, particularly the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive overview of the lecture's content and prepare you for further discussions on these topics.

## 4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 12, People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, Habiru

### Old Testament Backgrounds: People Groups Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What are the limitations of archaeology as it relates to proving the biblical text?
2. What is the significance of the Kassites in Mesopotamian history?
3. Who were the Hurrians, and what was their major kingdom?
4. Briefly describe the three different groups referred to as "Hittites."
5. What is the problem with the term "Hittite" in the biblical record?
6. Explain the significance of Ephron the Hittite in the book of Genesis.
7. How does the Hittite treaty format relate to the book of Deuteronomy?
8. According to Fowler, what is problematic about the common explanation that Abraham is called the Hebrew because he is a descendent of Eber?
9. What does Fowler suggest as the best explanation for why Abraham was called a Hebrew?
10. What is the connection between the Habiru and the biblical narrative of the Israelite conquest?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Archaeology has limitations because only a fraction of the evidence survives, sites are detected and excavated, and only a fraction of the excavated material is thoroughly examined and published. Therefore, archaeological findings alone cannot be used to "prove" the Bible.
2. The Kassites ruled Babylon for centuries after the old Babylonian period, but they left very few written records, making it difficult to write their history. They represent a significant period of rule in Mesopotamia but are largely undocumented.

3. The Hurrians were an Indo-European people who migrated into upper Mesopotamia and established the kingdom of Mitanni. They were a major power until defeated by the Hittites and are sometimes identified as the biblical Hurrites.
4. The term "Hittite" refers to the original inhabitants of Central Asia Minor (Hattians), the Indo-European migrants who formed the Imperial Hittite Kingdom, and the Neo-Hittites, who formed city-states after the collapse of the empire. These three groups represent different periods and people within the same geographical area.
5. The biblical record does not distinguish between the Hattians, Imperial Hittites, and Neo-Hittites, creating confusion when the term "Hittite" appears. It also does not account for the Assyrian use of "Hittite" as a general term for those to their west.
6. Ephron the Hittite is mentioned in Genesis when Abraham buys a burial plot from him. It is unclear if he is a Hattian, an Imperial Hittite, or if "Hittite" is used as a geographic term, highlighting the complex use of the term.
7. The Hittite treaty format, which includes a preamble, historical prelude, basic declarations, detailed conditions, an invocation of gods as witnesses, and curses and blessings, is found in the book of Deuteronomy, suggesting a common treaty format used throughout the ancient Near East.
8. Fowler argues it's problematic to say Abraham was called "the Hebrew" because he was a descendent of Eber for two reasons: 1) that it's unclear what Eber did to merit this honor, and 2) that Hebrew, a proper noun, has the definite article in front of it.
9. Fowler suggests that Abraham was called the Hebrew because the root of the word "Hebrew" in Hebrew means "to cross over." He proposes this is why Abraham was called this, because he crossed over from his homeland in obedience to God.
10. Some scholars suggest the Habiru and Hebrews are the same, and that the letters from Palestine to Egypt requesting help from the Habiru are evidence for the Israelite conquest under Joshua. However, Fowler urges caution in making this conclusion before examining the Akkadian meaning of Habiru.



## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Consider the following questions and craft well-organized essays based on the source material.

1. How does understanding the cultural and historical context of the ancient Near East enhance our interpretation of the Old Testament, and what are the potential pitfalls of using this information?
2. Compare and contrast the roles of the Hurrians, Hittites, and Kassites in the ancient Near East, focusing on their political and cultural impacts.
3. Discuss the complexities surrounding the term "Hittite" in the biblical record and how understanding these complexities helps us interpret biblical accounts.
4. Explore the significance of the Hittite treaty format and its connection to the book of Deuteronomy. How does this understanding change the way we understand the Old Testament?
5. Analyze the various interpretations of the term "Hebrew" and evaluate the evidence for each position. How does this debate impact our understanding of the Old Testament?

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Akkadian:** An ancient Semitic language spoken in Mesopotamia. It is the language in which the term "Habiru" was written.

**Amorites:** A Semitic people group in ancient Mesopotamia, known in the Bible but with unclear ethnic boundaries.

**Cuneiform:** An ancient system of writing used in Mesopotamia, characterized by wedge-shaped marks on clay tablets.

**Habiru:** An Akkadian term referring to a social class of people without fixed residence. The meaning and connection to the biblical term "Hebrew" are debated.

**Hattians:** The original inhabitants of Central Anatolia, prior to 2000 BC, referred to in the source as distinct from the Imperial Hittites.

**Hattusha:** The capital city of the Hittite Empire, excavated by Bedrich Hrozný, revealing important historical texts.

**Hieroglyph:** An artistic script style, which is not exclusive to Egyptian culture. The Hittites also used this style of writing, but it is not in the Egyptian language.

**Hittites:** A people who formed an empire in Central Anatolia. The term can refer to the original inhabitants (Hattians), the Imperial Hittites, or the Neo-Hittites, leading to confusion in the biblical context.

**Hurrians:** A non-Semitic people from northern Mesopotamia who formed the kingdom of Mitanni.

**Indo-European:** A large language family that includes many languages of Europe and Asia, including Hurrian and Hittite.

**Kassites:** A group that migrated from the Zagros Mountains and ruled Babylon for several centuries after the Old Babylonian period.

**Mitanni:** A major kingdom in northern Mesopotamia during the 16th-14th centuries BC.

**Neo-Hittites:** Descendants of the Imperial Hittites who formed city-states after the collapse of the empire, notably in northern Syria.

**Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

## 5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 12, People Groups: Hurrians, Hittites, Habiru, [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### FAQ on Ancient Near Eastern Peoples and Biblical Connections

- **What are some of the limitations of using archaeology to understand the Bible?**
- Archaeology has several limitations, including the fact that only a small fraction of the total archaeological evidence survives in the ground, only a fraction of potential sites have been discovered, and even fewer of the detected sites have been excavated. Furthermore, even among the excavated material, only a fraction has been thoroughly examined, published, and is useful to Biblical studies. Archaeology provides general credibility but shouldn't be used as the sole basis for 'proving' the Bible. Additionally, archaeological evidence has its own context, and should not be reduced to a mere handmaiden of the biblical text.
- **Who were the Hurrians, and what role did they play in the ancient Near East?**
- The Hurrians were an Indo-European people who migrated into upper Mesopotamia around 2400-2200 BC. By 1600-1400 BC, they formed the major ethnic force in the kingdom of Mitanni, which was a major power in the region. They are likely the same people as the Biblical "Hurrites." The Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni was eventually caught between the Hittites and the Mesopotamians and was destroyed by the Hittites around 1370 BCE.
- **How does the term 'Hittite' apply to different groups of people, and what is the significance of that in the Bible?**
- The term "Hittite" is used to refer to three distinct groups: the original inhabitants of Central Asia Minor (Hattians) before 2000 BC, the Imperial Hittites who migrated into the area around 2000 BC and formed a major political power until about 1200 BC, and the Neo-Hittites who were remnants of the Imperial Hittites and formed city-states in northern Syria after 1200 BC. The Bible doesn't distinguish between these groups, leading to confusion when the term 'Hittite' is encountered. For example, when Abraham purchased a burial plot from Ephron the Hittite, we cannot determine which group Ephron belonged to and when Uriah the Hittite was a mercenary, he would have been a Neo-Hittite not connected to the Empire. This reveals the need for careful contextual analysis of the term "Hittite."

- **How do Hittite treaties help us understand the book of Deuteronomy?**
- Hittite treaties followed a particular structure that included a preamble, an antecedent history, a statement of future relationship, specific stipulations, an invocation of gods as witnesses, and curses and blessings. This same structure can be seen in the book of Deuteronomy, where the covenant between God and Israel is presented in a similar format. This suggests a shared way of creating treaties throughout the ancient Near East. However, the fact that this treaty structure appears in both Hittite documents and Deuteronomy should not be used to argue for an early date for Deuteronomy since this type of treaty format was widespread.
- **Why is the term "Hebrew" a complex concept to understand in the Bible?**
- The term "Hebrew" is complex because it may derive from multiple sources. One common explanation is that the term is related to Eber, a forefather of Abraham. However, this explanation is problematic due to the presence of the definite article "the" before the word "Hebrew" in Hebrew scripture, as the definite article is not typically used with proper names. Another explanation suggests it is linked to an Akkadian word meaning "donkey driver," which is not widely accepted. A third, and better, explanation links "Hebrew" to the Hebrew root word meaning "to cross over," referring to Abraham's faith act of leaving his homeland to go to Canaan.
- **Who were the Habiru, and how are they sometimes connected to the Hebrews?**
- The Habiru were a political group, not a nation, mentioned in various ancient Near Eastern texts. They were a group, often described as mobile or displaced, not tied to a single nation. Some evangelical scholars suggest that the Habiru and Hebrews are the same group because letters from around the time of Joshua's conquest mention the Habiru coming into Canaan. However, this remains an area of debate. The text has not yet defined the Akkadian meaning of Habiru to understand if it can properly be associated with the Hebrews.

- **Why is it important to study the Bible in its original languages (Hebrew and Greek)?**
- Studying the Bible in Hebrew and Greek, is important for a more thorough and accurate understanding of the text. Translations can sometimes obscure the original meaning, and exploring the nuances of the original languages can provide a deeper understanding of the text's intention and cultural context. The use of Hebrew opens up the richness of the Hebrew text, which includes cultural references that can be missed in translation. This is in line with the teachings of figures such as Martin Luther, who emphasized the importance of reading scripture in the original language.
- **What does the text say about the relationship between the Old Testament and archaeological findings?**
- The text presents a nuanced perspective, stating that archaeology can be a "friend" to the Bible by lending general credibility, but also warns against the misuse of archaeology to "prove" the Bible, since the purpose of the Bible is not that it must be proven before it is believed. It emphasizes that archaeology has its own limitations, such as incomplete records and a focus on only a fraction of available sites, and that archaeological finds must be interpreted within their own cultural context rather than trying to force it to fit a specific narrative or agenda. Therefore, the findings should be used with caution and interpreted without imposing preconceived notions.