

Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 6, End of Royal Divinization, Amorites 6-min. Video Overview

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Welcome to The Explainer. Today, we're diving deep into ancient history to uncover a people who built a massive empire stretching all the way from Egypt to Babylon. And yet, you've probably barely heard of them.

We're talking about the Amorites. Okay, so here's our game plan. We're going to start with a really fundamental idea that drove the entire ancient world.

From there, we'll zoom in on this mysterious group of people, figure out who they were, how they rose to power, and uncover their massive and mostly forgotten impact on history. Alright, so to really get a grip on the ancient world, you've got to start with how they saw religion. And for them, it was way less about faith or worship, and a whole lot more about control.

Imagine this. For the ancients, reality was kind of split in two. You had the world of the gods up here, and the world of humans down here.

And between them, a giant, uncrossable chasm. So their whole religious system, their entire worldview, was about finding a way to bridge that gap. And at the absolute center of it all was one person.

The king. He was the key. He was the one who could bring the power of the gods down to earth.

And this is where it gets really fascinating. Their core philosophy was something called sympathetic magic. They believed you could actually force the gods to act.

So, you know, it wasn't about praying for a good harvest and hoping for the best. No. It was about magically creating that harvest through rituals, like the sacred marriage, where the king would literally act out procreation to make sure the land itself would be fertile.

It's a really subtle, but super important difference, right? This idea that your good works can somehow manipulate God. It totally blurs the line between religion and magic. And you can still see echoes of it today, in ideas like the prosperity gospel, where faith is sometimes treated like a direct transaction for divine rewards.

But, you know, there's a huge fatal flaw in this system of divine kingship. I mean, what happens when the king, the guy who's supposed to be a god, fails to deliver? Well, that's pretty much exactly what happened. Around 2050 BC, the incredible Sumerian civilization known as Ur III totally collapsed.

And when it went down, so did their belief system. The whole idea of the king as a living god who could magically control the world just vanished from Mesopotamia, leaving behind this massive power vacuum. So here's the big takeaway.

The whole model flips. They went from having a divine king, a man who is a god, to a sacred king, a man who was specially chosen by a god. He wasn't a deity anymore, just a regular human, but one who was set apart and uniquely holy.

Okay, so into this chaos, into this big power vacuum, a brand new and honestly, a really confusing group of people steps onto the scene. And it's a group you read about constantly in the Old Testament. The Amorites.

Now, here's where it gets tricky. The word Amorite itself was all over the place, even back then. Depending on who was talking, it could mean someone from the West or a specific ethnic group, or just a catch-all term for any foreigner.

And then in the Bible, it usually means the people living up in the mountains. So that begs the question, right? When the Bible talks about this powerful Amorite empire that God helped Israel defeat, who on earth are they actually talking about? And the answer, well, it's a name you probably know, but from a totally different story. And it reveals an ancient superpower that's basically been hiding in plain sight this entire time.

Get this: the biblical Amorites were the Hyksos. Now, Hyksos is what the Egyptians called them. It means chiefs of foreign lands.

And these were the people who did the impossible. They invaded and actually conquered the mighty Egyptian empire. This connection, it changes everything.

It means the Amorites from the Bible weren't just some local tribe, no way. They were part of a cultural and military wave that took over the world's greatest superpower. And part of what made them so dominant was just their size.

If you look at their skeletons, the average Amorite guy was about six feet tall. That's a good half a head taller than the Egyptians and Canaanites they were fighting. In a world of close-quarters combat, that is a massive advantage.

And this physical reality left such a huge impression that it's remembered hundreds of years later in the Amorites. But where they really outclassed everyone was with their tech. They brought three absolute game changers to the battlefield.

The fast horse-drawn war chariot, which was like the tank of the ancient world. The powerful composite bow that could shoot farther and hit harder than anything else. And a better dagger for when things got up close and personal.

They completely rewrote the rules of warfare. So let's put this all together. These guys, the Amorites, the Hyksos, were not talking about some little regional kingdom.

They built an empire that stretched from deep inside Egypt all the way across the Near East. And at the exact same time, another branch of their people became the ruling class in Babylon under famous kings like Hammurabi. They were basically running the ancient world.

And this is where it all comes together. Why does any of this matter? Because if you want to understand the world of the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you have to understand this forgotten empire. Think about this.

The word Amorite shows up 86 times in the Bible. And almost all of those mentions are in the earliest books, which just goes to show how incredibly important they were during that whole formative period of Israel's history. And it's not just a hunch.

The parallels are just wow. Their language was practically a sister language to Hebrew. They had cities named Haran and Nahor, the same names as Abraham's relatives.

They shared all sorts of social customs and get this: their economic laws were identical right down to the 20% interest rate limit you find in both Hammurabi's code and the laws of Moses. So with all this in mind, when you read about Joshua capturing the city of Hazor, he wasn't just taking another city. Hazor was the capital of this former Hyksos Amorite empire.

It was three times bigger than any other city around. Taking it down was a huge monumental achievement that signaled the end of an era. Which leaves us with one last really mind-bending question.

We're talking about a people who introduced world-changing technology, who simultaneously ruled the two great cradles of civilization, Egypt and Babylon. So how in the world did they basically vanish from our history books?