

# **Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 13, People Groups: Habiru, Arameans, 6-min. Video Overview**

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Alright, welcome to The Explainer. Today, we're doing a bit of historical detective work, digging into one of the most foundational figures in all of history, Abraham. So, let's jump right in.

Abraham's story is one that billions of people know. But what if two of the most basic facts we think we know about his life are actually wrong? We're going to investigate a couple of long-held assumptions about his origins, using clues from ancient texts to solve a pair of millennial-old puzzles. Okay, our first mystery kicks off with just one single word.

In Genesis, Abraham is called a Hebrew. Now, for a very long time, scholars thought, aha, that must connect him to this ancient group called the Habiru. So was Abraham a Habiru? And I mean, what does that word even mean, right? On the surface, it seems like a no-brainer.

The words sound almost identical. But, you know, when you actually start to dig into the historical record, this simple clue gets way more complicated. And here's where it gets really interesting.

That term, Habiru, was floating around for a thousand years before Abraham was even born, and it was used all across the ancient world. But here's the kicker. It wasn't an ethnic group.

It was a social label. It meant you were an outsider, a wanderer, someone living on the fringe of society. All right, so calling someone a Habiru back then was basically describing their status, not their bloodline.

It was a catch-all term for people who lived outside the established laws. Kind of like a transnational group that didn't belong to any one kingdom. So what's the verdict here? Well, it looks like it's just a phonetic coincidence.

A total historical accident. Sure, Abraham might have fit the description of a Habiru. He was definitely an outsider who lived on the fringes.

But the words themselves, Habiru and Hebrew, are most likely two totally different terms that just happen to sound alike. Okay, puzzle number one solved. But that brings us to our second and honestly even bigger mystery: the location of Abraham's hometown, the famous Ur of the Chaldees.

So where did Abraham actually come from? Because the place we've always been told he's from presents a massive geographical problem. The Bible says his family traveled from a city

called Ur to another city called Haran. Sounds simple enough, right? Well, not if you put Ur where tradition says it is, way down in southern Iraq.

That journey just makes absolutely no sense. I mean, just look at this route. To get from that southern Ur to Haran, you'd have to take this totally insane detour way, way up north.

It's a traveler's nightmare. You'd have to cross these massive rivers over and over again. Now imagine doing that with a huge group.

We're talking hundreds of people, all their livestock. This path would have been nearly impossible. It's a giant glaring red flag that something is wrong with our map.

So how do we solve this? Well, the key isn't actually on a map at all. It's been hiding in plain sight, inside a single word that was probably mistranslated thousands of years ago. And here is the big twist.

The original Hebrew text doesn't say Ur of the Chaldees. It says Ur of the Chasdu. Now, nobody could identify a place called Chasdu, so what did the early translators do? They made an educated guess.

And that guess may have sent us all looking in the wrong direction for centuries. So here's what likely happened. Back in the 3rd century BC, the scholars translating the Bible into Greek saw this weird word, Chasdu, and probably went, huh? They didn't know it.

But they did know about the famous city of Ur down south, in a region that in their time was called Chaldea. So they just swapped it in. But here's the thing.

A thousand years earlier, in Abraham's day, that southern city would have been called Ur of Sumer, and the term Chaldean didn't even exist yet. Okay, so if Ur of the Chasdu isn't in the south, then where is it? Well, all the evidence starts pointing overwhelmingly in one direction. North.

Way up north, in what is today northern Syria and southern Turkey. And when you start laying out the clues, the case for a northern homeland gets incredibly strong. First off, you've got family ties.

Abraham's relatives, guys named Sarug, Nahor, and Terah, all have names that are identical to ancient cities up in northern Mesopotamia. Coincidence? Hmm, that's a big one. Then there's the simple geography: a journey from Ur in the north down to Haran is a straight shot.

It makes perfect logistical sense. The Bible itself practically gives us GPS coordinates. When Abraham and Isaac need to find wives, where do they send their servants? To places called Aram Naharim, and Paddan Aram.

Both are, without a doubt, northern locations. And it doesn't stop there. The Bible flat-out calls Abraham's grandson Jacob a wandering Aramean, directly connecting the family to the Aramean people.

And to top it all off, we even have archaeological hints from the ancient Ebla tablets, which mention a village named Ur right there in that northern region. So what does this all mean? Well, solving this puzzle doesn't just move a pin on a map. It places Abraham's origins squarely in the Aramean heartland of northern Mesopotamia.

And that's not just academic trivia. It connects these biblical patriarchs to a specific real-world people and region, adding this rich, plausible layer of historical texture to their entire story. You know, it really makes you wonder, doesn't it? What other historical facts that we all just take for granted might be based on a simple ancient mistranslation? It's a pretty wild thought to chew on.

Thanks for joining us for this explainer.