

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

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Welcome to our deep dive. We're going to be exploring the origins of the Hebrews using this lecture you gave us by Dr. Donald Fowler on Old Testament backgrounds. It should be really fascinating.

We've got some really cool questions to tackle today. Are the terms Hebrew and Habiru actually connected, and where did Abraham's journey truly begin? Good questions. So let's jump in.

Okay. You know, it's interesting because when I first heard the term Hebrew, I just kind of assumed it came from Habiru. That makes sense.

Yeah. But this lecture points out that that's not necessarily true. Yeah.

I think one of the most interesting things Dr. Fowler points out is that while many people assume Hebrew derives from Habiru, the evidence doesn't really support that. Right. It might just be a phonetic coincidence.

And he actually has some pretty good evidence to back that up. Oh, absolutely. Because the lecture highlights that Habiru shows up in all these Akkadian and Sumerian texts way before Abraham was even supposed to be around.

And in places far beyond Israel. Exactly. Like we're talking like 1800 BC with War Edson and Rimson and Mesopotamia.

Oh, wow. Yeah. And even in Nuzi around 1500 BC.

That's a long time ago. Yeah. So what does that tell us about this word Habiru? Well, it suggests that Habiru wasn't really an ethnic label.

OK. It was more of a social designation. Interesting.

Referring to people who lived on the fringes of society. Oh, I see. Maybe wanderers or outcasts, similar to how we might use the term gypsy today.

Oh, OK. Which is a bit of a loaded term, of course. Yeah.

But it gives you an idea. So basically, like outsiders. Outsiders.

Exactly. Not belonging to any particular group or place. Yeah.

I think everyone's felt like an outsider at some point, right? Oh, absolutely. So some Habiru might have been Hebrews. Sure.

But not all of them. Right. Not at all.

And maybe the connection is just like Dr. Fowler says, a phonetic accident. Exactly. Phonetic accident.

It's funny how many words sound alike. Right. But mean completely different things.

It can be confusing. Oh, totally. Like there, there, and there.

Oh, yeah. Those are classic. Always gets me.

Gets everyone. So if Hebrew doesn't come from Habiru. Yeah.

What does it mean? Good question. And that leads us to another key piece of the puzzle. The Arameans.

Oh, the Arameans. Yeah. They're super important for understanding the origins of the Hebrews.

Okay. So they're not just some random group then. No, not at all.

They actually raised some big questions about the historical accuracy of Genesis. Really? How so? Well, Genesis mentions the Arameans around 2000 BC. Okay.

But here's the thing. The first archaeological evidence for them as a distinct people doesn't show up until around 1100 BC. Whoa.

That's like a thousand years later. Right. A huge gap.

That's quite a discrepancy. It is. And that's where things start to get really interesting.

Okay. I'm intrigued. Dr. Fowler points out that the term Arameans appears much later.

Right. The word Aram shows up much earlier, primarily as a place name. Oh, so like a region or something.

Exactly. And we see this in a bunch of ancient documents like those from Narm Sim around 2300 BC. Oh.

Daram around 2000 BC, Mari around 1800 BC, and others. So Aram was like a well-established place way before the Arameans showed up as a people. It seems that way.

I'm a little confused. Yeah, it can be a bit tricky. So we have Aram, the place.

Right. And then much later we have the Arameans. Exactly.

Were the people who eventually became Arameans already living in Aram during Abraham's time? That's the million-dollar question. And unfortunately, Dr. Fowler doesn't give us a clear answer. Oh, bummer.

But he does make us think: if Aram was a known region for centuries, who was living there before the rise of the Arameans? Right. And how might those earlier inhabitants have influenced the people and culture of Aram during Abraham's time? OK, I'm following.

And that brings us to another crucial piece of the puzzle. The city of Ur. Oh, yeah.

Ur of the Chaldees. Right. The city everyone thinks of when they think of Abraham.

Exactly. But Dr. Fowler throws a wrench in our understanding here. Oh, how so? Well, he points out that the Hebrew text actually refers to Ur of the Chasdu.

Chasdu, not Chaldees. Nope, not Chaldees. Never heard that before.

And there's a reason for that. The term Chaldees doesn't appear until about 1000 BC. Whoa, that's way after Abraham.

Exactly. Long after Abraham's time. So are you saying that Ur of the Chaldees is a mistranslation? It seems likely.

So how did that happen? Well, think about it. The scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. OK.

The Septuagint. Right. The Septuagint.

They came across this term Chasdu, and they probably didn't know what it meant. Yeah, I guess that makes sense. So they probably thought, well, it must be that famous city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.

Right. The one that was called Ur of the Chaldees by their time. Exactly.

It was a logical assumption based on their own knowledge. OK, so they just filled in the blanks with what they knew. Pretty much.

But now, if we're following Dr. Fowler, that southern Ur can't be the place Abraham came from. Right. Because the term Chaldees didn't even exist back then.

Exactly. So if the biblical Ur isn't in southern Mesopotamia. Right.

Where was it? Well, that's where things get really interesting. Uh-oh, I sense an adventure coming on. You might have to go on a bit of a geographical treasure hunt.

OK, I'm ready. Lead the way. Well, our compass seems to be pointing north.

North. North. And as we'll see, this shift in location has huge implications for how we understand Abraham's journey.

Oh, this is exciting. It is. And the origins of the Hebrews.

I can't wait to learn more. Me too. Let's dive in.

OK, so we're heading north to find Ur. That's right. What makes Dr. Fowler think this Ur of the Chaldees is up north? Well, he uses a bunch of different clues.

OK. First, he looks at the names of Abraham's relatives. OK.

Sarug. Nahor. And Terah.

Right. And, you know, it's interesting. Those names match cities in northern Mesopotamia.

Really? Yeah. So it's like they had family connections to the region. Mark does suggest that.

That's cool. I never would have thought to look at the names that way. Yeah, it's a good point that Dr. Fowler brings up.

So Abraham's family might have been from up north? Yeah. But what about the actual journey to Haran? Ah, yes. That's another important piece of the puzzle.

Doesn't Genesis say that Abraham traveled from Ur to Haran? It does. But if Ur is in southern Mesopotamia, like we always thought. Right.

Wouldn't that have been, like, a really difficult trip? Oh, absolutely. I mean, to go all the way from the south to the north with all his people and animals and everything? Exactly. It would have been a huge undertaking.

Yeah. Imagine all the rivers they would have had to cross. Multiple times, probably.

Yeah. It doesn't really make logistical sense. Right.

Makes way more sense if he started somewhere in the north. Right. Much closer to Haran.

And Dr. Fowler actually points out that Genesis supports this idea. Oh, how so? Well, chapters 24 and 28 of Genesis... Okay. ... mention specific places like Aram Naharam and Padan Aram.

Right. And those are both in northern Mesopotamia. Exactly.

It's like the Bible is saying, hey, this is where they were hanging out. That's a great point. So we have the names pointing north.

Yeah. The geography makes more sense if they're in the north. And the Bible itself mentions places in the north.

Right. That's pretty convincing. It is.

And there's one more thing. Oh, what's that? This is super cool. Archaeologists found a city named Ur in northern Mesopotamia.

Really? Yeah. These were recent discoveries from the city of Ebla in Syria. Wow.

That's amazing. It is. So it's not just a theory.

Right. There's actual archaeological evidence. Exactly.

A real place called Ur in the north. This is blowing my mind. I know, right? It really changes everything.

We started out thinking Ur was in the south. And now, looking at all this evidence, it seems like it was probably up north. It really does.

It's amazing how one little detail can totally change our understanding. Yeah. And this shift in location.

Right. It changes how we see Abraham's journey and the origins of the Hebrews. Instead of going south, they were up north the whole time.

Exactly. In the Aramean world. This is huge.

It is. And it leads us to a whole bunch of new questions. Okay.

Like what? Like, what if Abraham and his family were influenced by Aramean culture? Oh, yeah. What if their beliefs and practices came from the Arameans? That would totally change how we see the whole story. It would.

It's like we're looking at the origins of the Hebrews through a whole new lens. Okay. So we've debunked that whole Hebrew, Habiru thing.

Yeah. And we've seen some really compelling evidence for a northern Ur putting Abraham smack dab in the middle of the Aramean world. I mean, this changes everything, right? It really does.

Like, how do we even begin to understand the Hebrews now? Well, it means we have to look at them differently. Okay. How so? Instead of seeing them as this isolated group, we have to see them as part of this vibrant Aramean world.

So they were influenced by Aramean culture. Absolutely. And religion.

Most likely. I mean, it makes sense if they were living right there in the middle of it all. Exactly.

So, like the stories in Genesis, we can't just read them at face value anymore. Right. We have to consider the Aramean context.

Like all those covenants and promises and struggles. Right. Maybe they were shaped by Aramean tradition.

It's definitely a possibility. What if like some of the things we think are unique to the Hebrews actually came from the Arameans? That's a great question. Yeah.

And it's something scholars are starting to explore. It's wild. Like, what about their gods? Ah, yes.

The Aramean pantheon. Did that influence how the Hebrews developed monotheism? It's hard to say for sure. But it's worth thinking about, right? Absolutely.

Like maybe there was some kind of exchange or even syncretism. It wouldn't be surprising. It's like we're seeing this whole new layer of history.

It is. It's like peeling back the layers of an onion. We're going beyond the surface.

Yeah. We're getting to the heart of it. I love it.

It's like a puzzle. It is. And we're putting the pieces together.

This whole deep dive has been amazing. I'm glad you enjoyed it. We started with this lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler, and we just went on this incredible journey.

We did. We debunked myths. Yeah.

Uncovered evidence. Right. And came up with a full new understanding.

And I think the biggest takeaway for me is that we have to keep questioning. Absolutely. Keep digging and keep exploring.

There's always more to learn. So thank you to everyone for joining us on this adventure. It was a pleasure.

And keep those questions coming. Oh yeah. Keep them coming.

We'll be back next time with another deep dive. Can't wait. Into the fascinating world of ancient history.