

Who were the Hittites?

Though rather obscure in the scope of world history, the Hittite nation played an important role in the history of the Old Testament, and has since helped verify the accuracy of the Bible. For many years, archaeologists and historians knew nothing of the Hittites, and critics of the Bible treated the Hittites as proof of the "mythology" contained in the Bible. The critics reasoned that, since they had no archaeological evidence of a Hittite civilization, it must never have existed, and the Bible must therefore be wrong. However, many archaeological discoveries, beginning in 1876, have since proved that the Hittites were a powerful people in the 15th and 16th centuries B.C.

The Hittites are mentioned more than 50 times in the Bible. They were descended from Heth, the son of Canaan (and great-grandson of Noah, Genesis 10:15). They ruled the area of Syria and eastern Turkey and battled with Egypt and Babylon for territory. Babylonian and Assyrian records refer to Syria and Israel as "Hatti-land," and Joshua 1:4 includes their territory as a great part of the Promised Land for Israel. Abraham was well acquainted with the Hittites, and he bought the burial cave for Sarah from them in Genesis 23. Esau took wives from among the Hittites (Genesis 26:34), and Uriah the Hittite was one of David's mighty men (2 Samuel 11:3). The Hittites are mentioned throughout the kingdom years and even after the Jews' return from captivity (Ezra 9:1). It is assumed that the Hittites were eventually absorbed into the surrounding cultures and lost their distinctive identity.

The religion of the Hittites was a pluralistic worship of nature. They believed in various gods over the elements of earth, sky, weather, etc., and these gods were often listed as witnesses on treaties and oaths. As in most other pagan societies, this nature

worship led to despicable practices which brought the wrath of the true God on them. When God delivered Canaan to the Israelites, one of the given reasons for destroying the inhabitants was to eliminate the pagan practices which would ensnare God's people (Exodus 23:28-33). God didn't want His people following the idolatry of the Hittites.

The descriptions of land transactions and personal covenants recorded in Genesis bear a strong resemblance to Hittite records discovered by archaeologists. King Telepinus was the greatest Hittite legislator, and his law codes bear a striking resemblance to the order and arrangement of the Law of Moses, although the subject matter is different. The discoveries concerning the Hittite kingdom have been a great support to the details recorded in the Bible.