

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

Fred H. Wight

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CHAPTER SIX

DISCOVERING THE FORGOTTEN EMPIRE OF THE HITTITES

It is one of the major discoveries of archaeology in our own day that the Hittites once ruled over a wide stretch of country, and for a time rivaled the great empires of Assyria and Egypt. 1 —Sir Frederic Kenyon

THE STORY OF THE REDISCOVERY OF THE HITTITE EMPIRE

WAS THE BIBLE CORRECT ABOUT THE HITTITES?

For many centuries the Hittites were practically a forgotten civilization. In forty-eight references the Bible mentions them as a people in Old Testament times. 2

Because in years gone by these references were unsupported by mention of them anywhere outside the Scriptures, their existence as a people was declared to be non-historical. On the one hand, the Bible declared not only that there were Hittites but also that they were a very important people, whereas, on the other hand, many scholars laughed at the very idea that such a people ever existed or that such a language was ever spoken. 3

A. H. Sayce, of Oxford, was the first scholar to identify the Hittite people from the monuments. In 1876 he read a paper to the Society of Biblical Archaeology wherein he attributed certain inscriptions found in Hamath and at Aleppo to the Hittites. In 1879 he visited the Near East and in 1880 he read another paper to the archaeologists, asserting that the Hittites had lived in the mountainous country north of Mesopotamia and also in all of Asia Minor. In the meantime, the Tell el-Amarna Letters discovered in 1887 threw light on the Hittite people. These letters, written from Palestine to the Egyptian Pharaohs, mentioned the King of Hatti and something about what his armies were doing. One letter was written by the Hittite king to the Egyptian king. These letters indicated that the domain of the Hittite people was north of Palestine. 4

In 1892 Sayce published his *Story of a Forgotten Empire*, identifying the Hittites with discovered monuments in the Near East, but some scholars were slow to accept his conclusions. However, they did not have to wait very many years to receive convincing proof of his correctness. 5

Discovering a Hittite capital. In the year 1906 Hugo Winckler, representing the German Orient Society, undertook excavations at Boghazkoy, located in central Turkey. His discoveries were beyond all expectations. Something like ten thousand cuneiform tablets were unearthed, and it became evident that what he had found was a royal archive. Here was located the ancient capital of the Hittite Empire. It was called the kingdom of Hatti, the equivalent of the English Hittite. From the tablets discovered, Winckler was able to publish a list of the Hittite kings from the first half of the fourteenth century B.C., to the end of the thirteenth century B.C. 6

Unearthing the palace of a Hittite king. The British Museum began excavations in 1911 at the city of Carchemish, northeast of Aleppo. These continued under the direction of D. G. Gogarth, and then R. Campbell Thompson, and finally Sir Leonard Woolley assisted by T. E. Lawrence. This site proved to be a prominent center of the ancient Hittites. Near the gate of an old palace was found a statue of black stone, representing a Hittite god who was sitting upon lions. On a wall was the representation of the Hittite royal family going forth to meet a victorious Hittite army. 7

Phases in the history of the Hittites. The history of the Hittite people may well be divided into two parts.

The first part represents the period from about 1400 to 1200 B.C, when the seat of influence was centered in Cappadocia, from which they ruled over much of the territory from the Euphrates River to the Aegean Sea. At this time the Hittite kings rivaled the rulers of Egypt and Assyria. From 1200 B.C on, their center of activity shifted southward, Carchemish becoming their prominent center. This city was one of a number of small states, sometimes combining one against another, or against the common foe of Assyria, which finally overcame all of them. 8

Harmony of Bible picture of the Hittites and picture from the monuments. The Book of Genesis pictures the Hittites as one of the aboriginal tribes of people inhabiting the land of Canaan when the patriarchs first entered the land. Numbers 13:29 indicates that Hittites dwelt in the Judean Mountains.

The Bible does not say that these Hittites, dwelling in Palestine at the time, were a numerous people or a mighty empire. It seems most probable that they were emigrants from the Hittite Empire located to the north of the Promised Land. But at the time of the kings of Israel, the Hittites were mentioned as being foreigners, and it is clearly indicated that they were a formidable enemy. Second Chronicles 1:17 says that Solomon imported horses out of Egypt and sold some of them to “**the kings of the Hittites.**” In II Kings 7:6, 7 it is said: “**The king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians.**” Here the Hittites are classed along with the Egyptians in military importance. 9

Now the Bible picture of this people fits in perfectly with what we know of the Hittite nation from the monuments. As an empire they never conquered the land of Canaan itself, although Hittite local tribes did settle there at an early date. Nothing discovered by the excavators has in any way discredited the Biblical account. Scripture accuracy has once more been proved by the archaeologists.

THE CHARACTER OF THE HITTITE PEOPLE

Warfare between the Hittites and Egyptians, culminating in the battle of Kadesh. In the early part of the fourteenth century B.C, the Hittite king, whose capital was at Boghazkpy, became emperor of all Asia Minor and North Syria. His conquests extended to the frontier of Egypt's empire. From this time on, there was continual warfare between the Hittite kings and the Egyptian Pharaohs.

The army of the Hittite Empire had become strong through the development of a new weapon that made its appearance in western Asia around 1600 B.C, namely, the light, horse-drawn chariot. Speed became the determining factor in those ancient battles. It was inevitable that a decisive battle should be fought between the Hittites and the Egyptians. This battle took place in 1286 B.C. at Kadesh, the Amorite capital located in central Syria. The Hittite army concealed its position from the scouts of the Egyptians, and as the latter marched toward the city, the Hittite chariotry passed behind the city and fell upon the enemy with a terrible surprise attack. Help arrived from another direction or the Egyptian army would have been all but destroyed. The Egyptian account of the battle represents it as a victory for them, but impartial historians will rather give to the Hittites credit for a decisive victory.

Actually, however, the Hittites did not capitalize on their victory to any great extent, and not long after this, in the year 1269 B.C, a treaty of peace was made between the two great powers, which was followed by the marriage of a Hittite princess to an Egyptian Pharaoh. 10

One section of the treaty reads thus:

The great king, the king of the land of Egypt, has entered into a treaty [written] upon a silver tablet with Hattusilus, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, [his] brother, from this [da]y on to establish good peace [and] good brotherhood be[tween us] for ever. 11

Deciphering of the Hittite language. In 1906 and 1907, when Winckler discovered so many tablets at the Hittite capital in Asia Minor, some of them could be read right away because they were written in the well-known Akkadian language of Babylonia. But the majority were written in the ancient Hittite language which was at that time unknown. 12

No archaeologist could understand a single sign of it. As late as the year 1914, when Woolley was working at Carchemish, it was acknowledged that nobody could read a word of the Hittite language. But Professor Hrozný, a Bohemian from the University of Prague, had been working on the language, and in 1915 he announced he had found the key to unlock the Hittite language. It was later discovered that as early as 1892 Jensen, of Marburg, made the same discovery; now his claims were substantiated. 13

The Hittite Law Code. Among the Hittite tablets found by Winckler, those containing the Code of Hittite Laws are of great interest to the Bible student. They were in the Hittite language but in the Babylonian script. They resemble the Code of Hammurabi in some respects, and are dated about 1350 B.C, whereas the Babylonian Code dates about 2100 B.C.

The Hittite Code shows no traces of the old custom of blood revenge. Slaves had a higher monetary value among the Hittites than among the Babylonians. The Hittite laws are briefer than the Babylonian laws. There are some similarities between this Hittite Code and the Law of Moses, but the Law of Moses on moral issues is usually stricter than the Hittite Code. 14

The Hittite Religion. These tablets from Asia Minor reveal that the Hittite religion was very primitive and that it was grossly polytheistic.15

Although their gods were unseen and immortal, actually they were represented to be very human. Their behavior was very undignified. Part of the god's time was spent sleeping, amusing himself, traveling, or taking care of business. At such times those who worshiped him would call upon him to no avail. This reminds us of what the prophet Elijah said to the prophets of Baal about their god: **"Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked"** (I Kings 18:27). One of the interesting Hittite myths of deity is called "The Myth of the Missing God." A description is given of the paralysis of everything in Nature caused by the disappearance of the god of fertility. Search is made for the god, and when he is finally brought home, things in Nature take on new life as a result. 16

1. Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 81.
2. Harry Rimmer, *Dead Men Tell Tales*, p. 195.
3. T. Christie Innes, *Thrilling Voices of the Past*, pp. 107-109.
4. O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites*, pp. 2, 4, 5.
5. Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 125, 126.
6. Gurney, *op. tit.*, pp. 5, 6.
7. Kenyon, *op. tit.*, pp. 88, 89; C. Leonard Woolley, "Archaeology the Mirror of the Ages," *The National Geographic Magazine*, Aug. 1928, pp. 213-215.
8. Kenyon, *op. tit.*, pp. 91, 92.
9. Gurney, *op. tit.*, pp. 1, 2, 61, 62.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36; 110; J. A. Hammerton, ed., *Wonders of the Past*, ed. of 1937, pp. 727-746.
11. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 199.
12. Gurney, *op. tit.*, p. 6.
13. George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, pp. 138, 139.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-144.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
16. Gurney, *op. tit.*, pp. 183-189. For additional material on Hittites, see John Garstang, *The Hittite Empire*.

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