



HITTITES AND HETHITES: A PROPOSED SOLUTION TO AN ETYMOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM

||| Expert - Nov 08, 2011 - by Bryant G. Wood, PhD

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The name Hittite(s) appears forty-eight times in contemporary English Bibles,[1] stemming from the reformation Geneva Bible published in 1560. All Eng. translations prior to the Geneva Bible had Hethite(s) rather than Hittite(s), based on the Latin Vulgate. The Roman Catholic Douay English translation of the OT is the only modern English version to retain Hethite(s) from the Vulgate.[2] Both names are Anglicized transliterations of the masculine singular gentilic **חֵטִי** (*ḥittî*) derived from **חֵט** (*ḥēṭ*). The two names also are used to represent the three additional gentilics of **חֵט** (*ḥēṭ*):

1. **חֵטִיָּה** (*ḥittîyâ*) (feminine singular)
2. **חֵטִיִּם** (*ḥittîm*) (masculine plural), and
3. **חֵטִיָּוֹת** (*ḥittîyōṭ*) (feminine plural)

Should it be Hethite(s), Hittite(s), or a combination of the two? We shall answer that question by examining the usage of the four gentilic forms of **חֵט** (*ḥēṭ*) in the Hebrew Bible. [3]

There was a time when historians scoffed at the name Hittite(s) in the OT since it was not known outside the Bible.[4] Archaeological discoveries in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Turkey and Syria from the early nineteenth century on, however, have revealed an Indo-European group scholars have dubbed “Hittites” (as opposed to “Hethites”), who established an empire in Anatolia that became a major power in the ancient Near East. But a serious problem remains. The Biblical references to Hittites living in Canaan appear to be unhistorical since there is no evidence—linguistic, historical, or archaeological—for a Hittite presence in Canaan. Kempinsky attempted to establish an early twelfth-century migration of Hittites to Canaan, requiring Abraham to be placed in the thirteenth-twelfth century BC.[5]

but this scenario finds little support in the archaeological record. Singer recently reviewed the finds and concluded:

the archaeological evidence seems hardly sufficient to prove a presence of northern Hittites in Palestine. After a century of intensive excavations, all that has surfaced is a handful of Hittite seals and about a dozen pottery vessels that exhibit some northern artistic influences. The seals may have belonged to Hittite citizens who passed through Canaan, and the vessels may have filtered gradually into Palestine through various Syrian intermediaries. The paucity of tangible evidence becomes even more conspicuous in the face of the absence of two salient features of Hittite culture—the hieroglyphic script and the cremation burial—both of which seem to have extended only as far south as the region of Hama in central Syria.[6]

As for the Biblical use of the term Hittite(s) for residents of Canaan, Singer subscribes to an anachronistic explanation. He believes the name came from the Assyrian period when the term *Ḫatti* was used for Anatolia, Syria, and Israel.[7]

The difficulty, which Gelb said was “a historical enigma,”[8] has been described succinctly by Ishida: “although the Hebrew Bible often mentions the Hittites among the original inhabitants of the Promised Land, we have had so far no definite evidence of a Hittite presence in Palestine in the second millennium B.C. Therefore recent studies are reluctant to regard biblical references to the Hittites in Palestine as historical.”[9]

The purposes of this paper are to clear up the confusion by sorting out the non-Hittites from the genuine Hittites, and offer a means to distinguish between the two.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND [10]

The origin of the Anatolian Indo-Europeans we call Hittites is unknown. They appeared in central Anatolia early in the second millennium BC and established a kingdom that lasted from the early seventeenth c. to the early twelfth c. BC. Their capital was at Ḫattusha, modern Boğazkale, in North central Turkey. Hittite history can be divided into two major periods, the Old Kingdom, ca. 1670–1400 BC, and the Empire, or New Kingdom, ca. 1400–1177 BC. When the empire disintegrated, its second most important city Carchemish, along

with other city-states in southern Anatolia and northern Syria, survived to become the Neo-Hittite states, which continued until the late eighth century BC when they were absorbed by the Assyrian empire.

With the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs by Champollion in 1823, ancient Egyptian inscriptions began to disclose contacts with a northern country called *Ḫ-tʿ*, Kheta, beginning in the reign of Tuthmosis III (ca. 1504–1450 BC). Egyptologists noted the similarity to **חֲתִי**, *ḫittî*, in the Hebrew Bible and so plucked the name Hittites from the KJV and applied it to the people of *Ḫ-tʿ*.^[11] Similarly, with the decipherment of cuneiform in the mid-nineteenth century, Assyrian texts spoke of a western area named *Ḫatti*, so Assyriologists followed their Egyptological counterparts and referred to the people of *Ḫatti* as Hittites.^[12] Even before the discovery of contemporary Hittite texts in Anatolia, sufficient information was available in the Egyptian and Assyrian records that William Wright, an early pioneer in the discovery of Hittite inscriptions, was able to write a rudimentary history of the Hittites in 1884.^[13] This was soon followed by updated treatments by Sayce in 1888 and following,^[14] and Garstang in 1910.^[15] Beginning in 1906, the Hittites came into the full light of history when a royal archive of over 10,000 clay tablets was excavated at Ḫattusha. In the texts, the kingdom was referred to as “the land of *Ḫatti*” and the citizens as “the people of *Ḫatti*.”^[16]

II. THE AUTOCHTHONOUS SONS OF HETH ^[17]

A number of scholars recognized the occurrences of Hittite(s) in the OT can be divided into two groups, those who were indigenous to Canaan and those from outside Canaan.^[18] Of the forty-eight references to Hittite(s) in the OT, forty-two are singular gentilics referring to the indigenous residents of Canaan. Of those forty-two, forty are masculine with a prefixed definite article, (ha ḫittî) **הַחֲתִי**, and two are feminine without the prefixed definite article, **חֲתִיָּה** (*ḫittîh*). Nineteen of the forty masculine singular gentilics refer to individuals (Ephron, Zohar, Beer, Elon Ahimelech, and Uriah), while the other twenty-one are used collectively in the lists of indigenous occupants of the land.^[19] The two fem. sing. gentilics were used pejoratively by Ezekiel concerning Jerusalem’s origins. We shall examine the contexts of these passages to determine what the OT has to say about the native “Hittites.”

1. *Abraham buys a family sepulcher (ca. 2085–2029 BC).*[20] The most instructive instance of חֲתִי (ḥittî) occurs in Gen 23:10, in the account of Abraham’s purchase of a cave in which to bury his recently deceased spouse Sarah.[21] He approached the בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) to enter into negotiations for the cave (v. 3). Abraham presented himself as “an alien and a stranger” (v. 4), suggesting the בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) were established inhabitants. This is confirmed in verse 7 where the בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) are referred to as “people of the land.” The term בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) occurs eight times in Genesis 23, as well as in 25:10 and 49:32. It is clear the בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) were the descendants of אֲדָמ (ḥēṭ), son of Canaan. But in verse 10 Ephron is called הַחֲתִי (ḥaḥittî), unmistakably an equivalent term for בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ). The same juxtaposition occurs in Gen 49:29, 30 and 32. The close association of חֲתִי (ḥittî) with בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) and חֲתִית (ḥittît) with בְּנֹת־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enôt} ḥēṭ) (see below) indicates the sing. gentilic forms חֲתִי (ḥittî) and חֲתִית (ḥittît) should be understood as ethnonyms, names applied to a group of people based on their ethnic identity or lineage.

Throughout the OT, הַחֲתִי (ḥa ḥittî) were seen as one of the native people groups of Canaan, already present when Abraham entered the land (Gen 15:20). They were located in the hill country (Num 13:29; Josh 11:3), specifically in Hebron (Gen 23:19), and perhaps in Jerusalem (Ezek 16:3, 45), and they appear in the lists of aboriginal peoples of Canaan, along with other sons of Canaan listed in Gen 10:15–17 = 1 Chr 1:13–15 (Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, and Hivites). Moreover, the two personal names of the בְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enê} ḥēṭ) in Genesis 23, Ephron and Zohar, are Semitic, not Indo-European.[22] Zohar occurs elsewhere in the OT as one of the sons of Simeon (Gen 46:10; Exod 6:15).

2. *Esau marries Judith, Basemath, and Adah (ca. 1966 BC).* When Esau was forty years old he grieved his parents Isaac and Rebekah by marrying Judith daughter of Beerî הַחֲתִי (ḥaḥittî), and Basemath daughter of Elon הַחֲתִי (ḥaḥittî) (Gen 26:34–35). Shortly thereafter, Rebekah expressed her displeasure to Isaac, calling these new wives בְּנֹת־הָאֲדָמִי (b^{enôt} ḥēṭ), and “daughters of the land” (Gen 27:46). Again we see חֲתִי (ḥittî) equated with indigenous descendants of אֲדָמ (ḥēṭ). In Esau’s genealogy a third wife is listed, Adah daughter of Elon הַחֲתִי (ḥaḥittî), one of the “women of Canaan” (Gen 36:2). The personal names listed in these passages, Judith, Beerî, Basemath, Elon, and Adah, are Semitic.[23] Other instances of these names in the OT are: Beerî father of Amos (Hos 1:1); Elon, son of Zebulun (Gen 46:14; Num 26:26), a town (Josh 19:43), and a judge (Judg 12:11, 12); and Adah wife of Lamach (Gen 4:19, 20, 23).

3. *David and Ahimelech and Uriah (ca. 1015–990 BC).*[24] Among David’s band of 600 “who were in distress or in debt or discontented” (1 Sam 22:2) was one Ahimelech אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî). When David prepared to enter Saul’s camp at the hill of Hakilah he asked Ahimelech אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother, “Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?” (1 Sam 26:6). While Ahimelech אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) failed to respond, Abishai accepted the challenge and went into Saul’s camp with David. Other than this fleeting reference to Ahimelech אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) nothing further is recorded about him in the OT. A more famous Ahimelech was the priest of Nob (1 Samuel 21–22). Once again we see that a אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) bore a Semitic name.[25]

The most famous אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) we encounter in the OT is Uriah, whose ethnonym is mentioned ten times.[26] In addition to being Bathsheba’s husband, he was one of David’s Mighty Men (2 Sam 23:39 = 1 Chr 11:41) and the only אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) to make it into the NT (Matt 1:6). Despite intense scrutiny, there is no clear evidence to suggest his name is Hittite.[27] The fact that there were two priests,[28] a prophet (Jer 26:20–23), and an official (Neh 8:4) bearing this name strongly indicates that Uriah, the consummate “Hittite,” had a Semitic *Yahwistic* name.

4. *Solomon conscripts אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) (970–930 BC).* In order to carry out his ambitious building projects, Solomon conscripted אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî), along with other native groups, as slave labor (1 Kgs 9:20–21 = 2 Chr 8:7–8). He used them to build the temple (seven years), his royal palace (thirteen years), Jerusalem’s fortifications, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Upper Beth Horon, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, Tadmor, store cities in Hamath, and towns for chariots and horses (1 Kgs 9:10, 15–23 = 2 Chr 8:1–10).

5. *Ezekiel chastises Jerusalem (ca. 593–571 BC).* Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to deliver an allegory to Jerusalem concerning her unfaithfulness. It began with a reference to Jerusalem’s pre-Israelite origins: “Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites: your father was an Amorite and your mother a אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî)” (Ezek 16:3). Later in the message *Yahweh* continued, “Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ (ahittî) and your father an Amorite” (Ezek 16:44–45). In these two statements that Jerusalem’s mother was a אֲחִיעֶלֶךְ

(ḥittîṯ), we have the only instances of the fem. sing. gentilic of חִתִּי (ḥittî) in the OT. Here, the descendants of חֵת (ḥēt) are seen as pre-Israelite residents of Canaan who were part of the early settlement of Jerusalem, along with another branch of the Canaanites, the Amorites (Gen 10:16 = 1 Chr 1:14).

6. *Summary of חִתִּי (ḥittî) and חִתִּיָּת (ḥittîṯ) in the OT.* In this examination of the usage of the ethnonyms חִתִּי (ḥittî) and חִתִּיָּת (ḥittîṯ) in the OT it is readily apparent that they were autochthonous occupants of Canaan descended from חֵת (ḥēt), son of Canaan. There is no suggestion they came from outside Canaan. Their names were exclusively Semitic, including one *Yahwistic name*, and they were often associated with other sons of Canaan. No archaeological data has been found to suggest an enclave of Indo-European Anatolian Hittites resided in Canaan at any time in Hittite history. What is more, the Indo-European Anatolian Hittites did not exist as early as Abraham and Isaac.

III. WILL THE REAL HITTITES PLEASE STAND UP!

Only six of the forty-eight occurrences of the name Hittite(s) in our English Bibles pertain to the Indo-European Anatolian-Syrian Hittites of the second-first millennia BC. In these instances, the masc. plural gentilic of חִתִּי (ḥittî) with prefixed definite article, הַחִתִּיִּם (ha ḥittîm) (five times), and the feminine pl. gentilic of חִתִּי (ḥittî) without prefixed definite article, חִתִּיָּוֹת (ḥittîyōt) (one time), were employed. Of the five occurrences of the masc. pl., two of them relate to the period of the Hittite empire, referred to as אֶרֶץ הַחִתִּיִּם, ('ereṣ haḥittîm) "land of the Hittites." The remaining three, מַלְכֵי הַחִתִּיִּם, (malkê haḥittîm) "kings of the Hittites" (twice), and the fem. pl., denote the Neo-Hittite states. In addition, there are a number of instances where Neo-Hittite states were cited individually by name. These references indicate considerable contact between the United and Northern Kingdoms and the Neo-Hittite polities. We shall examine these references, plus one extra-Biblical source, to elucidate the relationship between ancient Israel and the real Hittites.

1. *Tidal king of Goiim (ca. 2085 BC).* A number of scholars have made a connection between Tidal in Gen 14:1, 9 and the Hittite royal name Tudḥaliya. Kitchen is firmly convinced of this link: "Tid'al is universally recognized as an early form of Tudkhalia, well known from the Hittite world centered in Anatolia."^[29] But this proposal has a serious chronological difficulty. Although there were two or three Tudḥaliyas in the late fifteenth and early

fourteenth century, and another in the late thirteenth century, it is questionable if there was an earlier king by that name.[30] After surveying the evidence, Singer is skeptical of the association: “The dispute over the existence of an Old Hittite king named Tudḫaliya will probably linger on until some binding evidence turns up (at Kültepe?), but its relevance to biblical Tid‘al is quite doubtful: needless to say, Tid‘al’s kingdom, Goiim, ‘Nations,’ has nothing to do with second-millennium Ḫatti.”[31] Even if evidence is found for an Old Hittite king named Tudḫaliya prior to the late fifteenth century BC, it would be irrelevant to Genesis 14, since the Biblical date for that event is in the twenty-first century BC, long before the founding of the Hittite empire ca. 1670 BC.

2. *Yahweh’s promise to Israel (1406 BC)*. In Josh 1:4 *Yahweh* promised Joshua Israel’s territory would extend to **כָּל אֶרֶץ הַחִיטִּים** (*kol 'ereṣ haḫittîm*) “all (the) land of the Hittites.” The region in view is north of Canaan since it included the area “from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates...to the Great Sea on the west.” Thus the land of the Hittites in this instance most certainly is the territory beyond northern Syria, i.e., Anatolia. Since we know from extra-Biblical texts the ancient name for Anatolia was *Ḫatti*, even before the Indo-Europeans arrived,[32] the plural gentilic forms **חִיטִּים** (*ḫittîm*) and **חִיטִּיּוֹת** (*ḫittîyōt*) should be understood as demonyms, names for a group of people based on the name of the region in which they lived. In the time of Joshua, the Hittite empire was in a transition from a decline in the sixteenth and fifteenth century, to a resurgence under Tudḫaliya I/II at the beginning of the Empire period.

3. *The informer from Bethel (mid-fourteenth century BC)*. Judges 1 describes the period after the death of Joshua (v. 1) and prior to the oppressions, when the tribes were securing their allotments. Although it is not possible to be precise about the date of this period, it was most likely a span of about ten years in the mid-fourteenth century BC.[33] In the account of the house of Joseph taking Bethel (vv. 22–26) we are told of a man who came out of Bethel and revealed to Josephite spies the way into the city. Bethel was subsequently put to the sword, and the informer and his family spared. The man from Bethel then emigrated to the **אֶרֶץ הַחִיטִּים** (*'ereṣ haḫittîm*) where he built a city which he named Luz (Judg 1:26), the old Amorite name for Bethel (Gen 28:19). Although no clues are given as to the location of **אֶרֶץ הַחִיטִּים** (*'ereṣ haḫittîm*) in this verse, the expression is the same as in Josh 1:4, suggesting the area of Anatolia.[34] The mid-fourteenth century is about the time

of the Hittite king Tudḫaliya III, when *Hatti* was being harried by attacks from the west and north.[35]

4. *David and Hamath (1010–970 BC)*. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem, he “assembled all the Israelites, from the Shihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath” to join in the celebration (1 Chr 13:5). Lebo (or “Entrance of”) Hamath was a geographical designation for Israel’s northern border.[36] The exact meaning and location of Lebo Hamath are unknown. Hamath, modern Hamāh ca. 180 km north-northeast of Damascus, was the southern-most of the Neo-Hittite city-states and is well attested from ancient texts and excavation.[37] David subdued Hadadezer king of the Aramean city of Zobah, located in the North Beqa Valley of Lebanon, as well as Damascus, and Hadadezer’s satellite towns Tebah and Berothai (2 Sam 8:3–8 = 1 Chr 18:3–8). When Toi, ruler of Hamath, heard of David’s victories he sent tribute to David by way of his son Joram (2 Sam 8:10)/Hadoram (1 Chr 18:10), possibly indicating Toi was subject to David.[38] Hamath was strategically important to David since it served as a buffer between Israel and the other Neo-Hittite states further north.

5. *Solomon and the Neo-Hittites (970–930 BC)*. Solomon expanded the relations David established with Hamath to other Neo-Hittite kingdoms. Among Solomon’s many achievements listed in 1 Kgs 10 was a lively trade in horses and chariots between Egypt and the Neo-Hittite states: “Solomon’s horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all מַלְכֵי הַחִתִּים (malkê haḥittîm) and of the Arameans” (1 Kgs 10:28–29 = 2 Chr 1:16–17).[39] In this case multiple Hittite kings are specified in the Hebrew text, indicative of the Neo-Hittite period. Earlier translators had difficulty with the Hebrew name קְוֵה/קֹוֹא (qowe), transliterated Kue in most modern translations. The translators of the Geneva Bible, and later the KJV, thought the word was a form of קו (qaw), “line,” and thus translated קְוֵה/קֹוֹא (qowe) as “linen yarn.” We now know קְוֵה/קֹוֹא was a Neo-Hittite kingdom in Cilicia in southern Turkey named Que in the ancient texts.[40] In addition, Solomon made political alliances with his neighbors by marrying foreign women, including Pharaoh’s daughter, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and חִתִּיּוֹת (ḥittîyōt) (1 Kgs 11:1), obviously a reference to foreigners, not the בְּנוֹת־הֵת (benōt-ḥēt). The Aramean state of Zobah, previously subdued by David, and the Neo-Hittite state of Hamath, likely subject to David,

revolted at some point because Solomon had to recapture them midway through his reign (2 Chr 8:3). He then established trading centers in the region of Hamath (2 Chr 8:4).

6. *Ahab and Irhulēni at the battle of Qarqar (853 BC)*. In the sixth year of the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) the Assyrian army marched west to engage a coalition of 12 kings at Qarqar, ca. 80 km north-northwest of Hamath. The coalition included Ahab king of Israel and Irhulēni king of Hamath. The most detailed account of the event is recorded on the Kurkh Stele.^[41] Qarqar is described in the stele as one of Irhulēni's "royal cities" and is known through texts and archaeology.^[42] The sizes of the various forces involved in the battle are recorded on the stele.^[43] The largest of the coalition forces was that of Aramean Hadad-ezer (Ben-Hadad II) king of Damascus who had 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry and 20,000 troops. Irhulēni of Hamath is credited with 700 chariots, 700 cavalry and 10,000 troops; and Ahab 2,000 chariots and 10,000 troops.^[44] Since Ahab's force appears to have been larger than Irhulēni's, it is plausible Irhulēni was subject to Ahab and the two joined forces, along with other states in the region, to combat a common enemy at Qarqar. Shalmaneser boasted a great victory, but that is doubtful. The coalition apparently was able to forestall the Assyrian advance, given Shalmaneser was obliged to return to the area to fight the same coalition in his tenth, eleventh, and fourteenth years.^[45] Since Ahab died in 853 BC, it would have been his son Joram (852–841 BC) who participated in these later engagements.

7. *Siege of Samaria during the reign of Joram (852–841 BC)*. Samaria came under siege by Ben-Hadad II (ca. 860–841 BC) during the reign of Joram. The siege was so severe the populace was reduced to cannibalism (2 Kgs 6:28–29). Relief finally came through an act of *Yahweh*: "the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, 'Look, the king of Israel has hired מַלְכֵי הַחִיטִּים (malkê haḥittîm) and Egyptian kings to attack us!' So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp and fled for their lives" (2 Kgs 7:6–7). The phrase מַלְכֵי הַחִיטִּים (malkê haḥittîm) again denotes the Neo-Hittite states, which most times were at war with the Arameans.

8. *Amos' woe against Zion and Mount Samaria (ca. 760–750 BC)*. Amos told those "who are complacent in Zion" and "who feel secure on Mount Samaria" (Amos 6:1) to "Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath...Are they better off than your two kingdoms?"

Is their land larger than yours?" (Amos 6:2). Calneh is Kunulua, capital of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Patina (Unqi in Assyrian texts), identified as Tell Tacyinat in the Plain of Antioch in southern Turkey. It is evidenced by texts and excavation.[46] Hamath, formerly a Neo-Hittite state, was taken over by Arameans in 796 BC.[47]

9. *The fall of the Neo-Hittites.* With the rise of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC), the political landscape in the Levant radically changed. He began a process of annexing the Neo-Hittite and Aramean states as Assyrian provinces, which was complete by the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 BC). As was their policy, the Assyrians removed the upper echelons of society and replaced them with captives from other areas. This brought an end to the Hittite civilization and culture, which was lost to history except for the few brief references preserved in the Hebrew Bible, including an echo of the fall of the Neo-Hittite states in Isaiah. In *Yahweh's* condemnation of Jerusalem (ca. 700 BC), he alluded to "the Assyrian, the rod of my anger" (Isa 10:5a) who bragged about the nations he had recently conquered, including two Neo-Hittite states:

I send him [the Assyrian] against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me...'Are not my commanders all kings?' he [the Assyrian] says. 'Has not Calno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad, and Samaria like Damascus? As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria—shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?'" (Isa 10:6a, 8–11).

Calno (= Calneh in Amos 6:2), Kunulua in the ancient texts, was capital of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Patina and annexed to the Assyrian empire by Tiglath-pileser III in 738 BC. [48] Carchemish, just inside the southern border of Turkey ca. 225 km north-northeast of Hamath, was the most important of the Neo-Hittite states. It is well known from texts and excavation.[49] Carchemish fell to Sargon II in 717 BC.[50] The Aramean states of Hamath, Arpad and Damascus were annexed by the Assyrians as well.

10. *Summary of חִתִּים (ḥittîm) and חִתְיֹת (ḥittîyōt) in the OT.* The demonyms חִתִּים (ḥittîm) and חִתְיֹת (ḥittîyōt) were used in the context of foreigners from the Anatolia-northern Syria region, unquestionably the people known from ancient texts scholars have labeled "Hittites." The Biblical usage is historically accurate and consistent with recovered evidence. The

descriptive construct אֶרֶץ הַחִיטִּיִּים ('ereṣ haḥittîm) was used for the Hittite empire at the beginning of the conquest in 1406 BC and in the early judges period in the mid-fourteenth century BC. A different construct, מַלְכֵי הַחִיטִּיִּים (malkê haḥittîm), was used for the Neo-Hittite states in historical contexts of the mid-tenth and mid-ninth century BC.[51] The fall of the Neo-Hittite states to the Assyrians in the late eighth century BC was alluded to ca. 700 BC.

From the brief references in the OT and several extra-Biblical documents, we learn Israel had considerable contact with the Neo-Hittites. Around 1000 BC, David received gifts from the king of Neo-Hittite Hamath, indicating Hamath was a vassal state, or, at the very least, on friendly terms with Israel. In the early tenth century Solomon seized Hamath, made alliances by marrying Neo-Hittite women, and carried on trade with Neo-Hittite states. In the ninth century Ahab, and later his son Joram, joined forces with Hamath and ten other kingdoms to temporarily halt the Assyrian advance into the region.

IV. THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

We have seen that the singular gentilics חִיטִּי (ḥittî) and חִיטִּיָּת (ḥittîyâ) were used in the OT exclusively for the descendants of the eponymous ancestor חֵט (ḥēṭ), who were indigenous residents of Canaan from pre-Abrahamic times. The plural gentilics חִיטִּיִּים (ḥittîm) and חִיטִּיָּוֹת (ḥittîyōt), on the other hand, were used in the OT exclusively for the Indo-Europeans who resided in Anatolia and northern Syria ca. 1670–717 BC.[52] That two different groups were in view also is seen by the use of two different terms in the same chronological-historical context in the books of Joshua, Judges and 1 Kings/2 Chronicles.[53] Early translators failed to distinguish between the two groups and rendered both the singular and plural gentilics by the same anglicized transliteration Hethite(s) or Hittite(s).

When references to the people of *Hatti* were encountered in Egyptian texts in the first half of the nineteenth century and Assyrian texts in the mid-nineteenth century, the KJV name "Hittites" was applied to them. As a result, researchers have been misled by English translations and have assumed the Bible writers had the Indo-Europeans in mind for both the indigenous descendants of חֵט (ḥēṭ) and the citizens of *Hatti*. This has resulted in a great deal of confusion and misconceptions in the scholarly literature. What to do about this conundrum and etymological morass?

McMahon hit upon the key to the solution, but failed to prosecute his observation to its logical conclusion. He wrote:

These five references to the Hittites which on the basis of context may be understood as the Hittites of north Syria, that is, Neo-Hittites,[54] are also the only five occurrences of the plural form *hittîm* in the OT. This may mean nothing, but it could be some indication of a distinction made in the text between the Hittites of Palestine, descendants of Heth, and the Hittites of Anatolia and north Syria, the men of Ḫatti.[55]

The problem is one of semantics and terminology. As the term Hittites for the Indo-Europeans of Anatolia and north Syria is firmly embedded in the scholarly and popular literature, that name cannot be changed.[56] Because the Bible writers distinguished between the two groups, this should be reflected in our English translations. I suggest an ecumenical solution to the problem. Since the demonyms חִתִּים (*hittîm*) and חִתְיֹוֹת (*hittîyōt*) refer to the Indo-Europeans of Anatolia and northern Syria, I propose retaining the Protestant term "Hittites" for those entities. For the ethnonyms חִתִּי (*hittî*) and חִתְיֹוֹת (*hittîyōt*), on the other hand, the Roman Catholic term Hethite(s) is the correct choice, since חִתִּי (*hittî*) is synonymous with בְּנֵי־חֵת (*bēnê ḥēt*) and חִתְיֹוֹת (*hittîyōt*) is synonymous with בְּנוֹת־חֵת (*bēnōt ḥēt*). If these changes were incorporated into future translations of our English Bibles, it would clearly distinguish the indigenous descendants of חֵת (*ḥēt*) from the people of Ḫatti and alleviate present misunderstandings.

Table 1. Proposed Translations for Hebrew Ethnonyms and Demonyms Currently Translated “Hittite(s)”

Ethnonyms	Translation	Relevant Passages
הַחִתִּי	Hethite	Ephron: Gen 23:10; 49:29, 30; 50:13 Zohar: 25:9 Beerli: 26:34 Elon: 26:34; 36:2 Ahimelech: 1 Sam 26:6 Uriah: 2 Sam 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12: 9, 10; 23:39 (= 1 Chr 11:41); 1 Kgs 15:5
הַחִתִּים	Hethites	Nation lists: Gen 15:20; Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11; Num 13:29; Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10; 9:1; 11:3; 12:8; 24:11; Judg 3:5; 1 Kgs 9:20 (= 2 Chr 8:7); Ezra 9:1; Neh 9:8
הַחִתִּית	Hethite	Mother of Jerusalem: Ezek 16:3, 45
בְּנֵי־חֵת	Sons of Heth	Gen 23:3, 5, 7, 10 (2), 16, 18, 20; 25:10; 49:32
בָּנוֹת־חֵת	Daughters of Heth	Gen 27:46 (2)
Demonyms		
הַחִתִּים	Hittites	Land of: Josh 1:4; Judg 1:26 Kings of: 1 Kgs 10:29 (= 2 Chr 1:17); 2 Kgs 7:6
חַתִּית	Hittites	Wives of Solomon: 1 Kgs 11:1

The occurrences of the names related to חֵת (hēt) and *Hatti*, along with recommended translations, are summarized in Table 1 below ([click here to enlarge](#)).

Endnotes:

1. Excepting the instances where English translations have rendered הֶתִּי (ḥēṭī), “Heth,” as Hittites (Gen 10:15 = 1 Chr 1:13), בְּנֵי־הֶתִּי (bʿnê ḥēṭī), “sons of Heth,” as Hittites (Gen 23:3, 5, 7, 10 [2], 16, 18, 20; 25:10; 49:32), and בָּנוֹת־הֶתִּי (bʿnôṭ ḥēṭī), “daughters of Heth,” as Hittite (Gen 27:46 [2]).
2. Translations in other languages based on the Vulgate had a form of Hethite(s) until relatively recent times; e.g., German at first had Hethiter, later changed to Hetiter, and French Hétheien(s), became Hittite(s).
3. The passages where these terms are found are listed in Table 1 at the end of the article. Heb. grammars only mention the masculine sg. gentilic. Gogel gives the feminine sg. and masc. pl. suffixes, both based on the masc. sg., as is the fem. pl. not listed by Gogel (Sandra Landis Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998] 181).
4. For convenience, I shall use Hittite(s) to represent both Hethite(s) and Hittite(s) in our English translations, until the end of the article when I shall separate the two.
5. Aharon Kempinski, “Hittites in the Bible: What Does Archaeology Say?” *BAR* 5.5 (1979) 20–44, esp. pp. 30–44.
6. Itamar Singer, “The Hittites and the Bible Revisited,” in *I will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times: Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday 2*, (eds. Aren M. Maeir and Pierre de Miroschedji; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 754.
7. Id. 756; as Van Seters (John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975] 46). Billie Jean Collins relates the use of “Hittite(s)” in the OT to the Assyrian rhetoric of Sargon II against the Neo-Hittite cities of northern Syria: “the Jerusalem-based biblical authors of the late 8th century incorporated the Hittites and other groups into their foundational story of Israelite origins. The presence of Hittites in the narratives of Israelite beginnings is thus rhetorical and ideological rather than

historical.” (“Hittites,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* 2, [ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007] 843; cf. id., *The Hittites and Their World*, *Archaeology and Biblical Studies* 7 [Boston: Brill, 2008] 197–213).

8. Ignace J. Gelb, “Hittites,” *IDB* 2.613.

9. Tomoo Ishida, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel: Studies in Biblical Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 15.

10. For recent treatments of Hittite history, see Trevor Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); id., *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, new ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Collins, *The Hittites and Their World*. A useful compendium of the peoples and places of ancient Anatolia and northern Syria is Trevor Bryce, *Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia: From the Early Bronze Age to the Fall of the Persian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

11. Heinrich K. Brugsch, *A History of Egypt Under the Pharaohs Derived Entirely from the Monuments* 2 (London: Murray, 1879) 2. Technically, this is an invalid association since הִתִּי (ḥittî) was an ethnonym for descendants of הֵתִי (ḥētî), who lived in Canaan (see below), whereas Ḫattî was the ancient name of unknown origin for Anatolia.

12. Oliver R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 2; Hans G. Guterbock and S. David Sperling, “Hittites,” 2nd ed., http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09061.html. (offsite link).

13. *The Empire of the Hittites* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1884).

14. Archibald H. Sayce, *The Hittites: The Story of a Forgotten Empire* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1888; 2nd ed. 1890 and 1892, 3rd & enl. ed. 1903, 5th ed. 1910, 4th rev. & enl. ed. 1925).

15. John Garstang, *The Land of the Hittites: An Account of Recent Explorations and Discoveries in Asia Minor, with Descriptions of the Hittite Monuments* (London: Constable, 1910), updated as *The Hittite Empire, Being a Survey of the History, Geography and Monuments of Hittite Asia Minor and Syria* (London: Constable, 1929).

16. Bryce, "Handbook" 297, 314; Gregory McMahon, "Hittites in the OT," *ABD* 3.232.
17. Heth is the Anglicized transliteration of ḥēṯ, son of Canaan (Gen 10:15 = 1 Chr 1:13). The name occurs in isolation only in Gen 10:15 = 1 Chr 1:13, but some twelve times in combination with בְּנֵי (benê) and בְּנוֹת (benôṯ). Editors note: Autochthonous means "indigenous, native".
18. Collins, "Hittites," 842–43; Gelb, "Hittites" 614; Gurney, *Hittites* 1–2; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "Hittites," in *Peoples in the Old Testament World*; (eds. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 152–53; id., "Hittites," *OEANE* 2.84; Gregory McMahon, "The History of the Hittites," *BA* 52 (1989) 75; id., "Hittites" 233.
19. On the lists of indigenous peoples, see Tomoo Ishida, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel: Studies in Biblical Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 8–36.
20. The chronology for the patriarchs used in this paper is based on an exodus date of 1446 BC (Rodger C. Young, "[When Did Solomon Die?](#)" *JETS* 46 [2003] 589–603; Bryant G. Wood, "[The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory](#)," *JETS* 48 [2005] 475–89) and a sojourn of 430 years (Paul J. Ray Jr., "[The Duration of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt](#)," *AUSS* 24 [1986] 231–48).
21. In the early days of Hittitology a number of scholars argued for a Hittite background to the negotiations described in Genesis 23. Today, this association largely has been abandoned. Hoffner writes, "it is quite unlikely that genuine Hittite land tenure laws underlie this story" (Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "Some Contributions of Hittitology to Old Testament Study," *TynBul* 20 [1969] 37). Singer agrees, stating Genesis 23 does not "reflect an intimate knowledge of Hittite legal procedures, as had formerly been claimed" ("Hittites" 728).
22. Hoffner, "Contributions" 32.
23. Ibid.
24. The dates for Israelite kings in this paper are from Rodger C. Young, "[Tables of Reign Lengths from the Hebrew Court Recorders](#)," *JETS* 48 (2005) 245–46.

25. Hoffner, "Contributions" 32.
26. 2 Sam 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9, 10; 23:39 (= 1 Chr 11:41); 1 Kgs 15:5.
27. Hoffner, "Contributions" 32; Singer, "Hittites" 745.
28. 2 Kgs 16:10, 11, 15, 16; Isa 8:2; and Ezra 8:33; Neh 3:4, 21.
29. Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *BAR* 21.2 (1995) 56–57.
30. Singer, "Hittites" 729–30.
31. Id. 730.
32. Bryce, *Handbook* 297.
33. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1987) 147–48.
34. Boling understands אֶרֶץ הַחִיטִּים ('ereṣ haḥittîm) as being Anatolia (Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, AB 6A, 59), as does Singer ("Hittites" 726).
35. It is not yet possible to assign accurate dates to the Hittite kings. Synchronisms with Egyptian history, however, indicate Tudhaliya III ruled ca. 1370?–1350 BC (Bryce, *Handbook* 299).
36. Num 34:8; Josh 13:5; Judg 3:3; 1 Kgs 8:65 (= 2 Chr 7:8); Ezek 47:16; Amos 6:14.
37. Bryce, *Handbook* 282–84; Rudolph H. Dornemann, "Hama," *OEANE* 2.466–68.
38. This possibility is strengthened by the apparent changing of the prince's name from Aramean Hadoram, "Hadad is exalted," to Heb Joram, "Yahweh is exalted." Thiel believes Joram to be a scribal error since the LXX at 2 Sam 8:10 has essentially the same form of the name as in 1 Chr 18:10 (Winfried Thiel, "Joram," *ABD* 3.953). However, this simply may be a case of harmonization by the LXX translators.
39. For a detailed study of this passage, see Yutaka Ikeda, "Solomon's Trade in Horses and Chariots in Its International Setting," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (ed. Tomoo Ishida; Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982) 215–38.
40. Bryce, *Handbook* 583–84.

41. Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 116–19.
42. Bryce, *Handbook* 576–77; Rudolph H. Dornemann, “Qarqur, Tell,” *OEANE* 4.370–71.
43. There is some question about the credibility of the numbers in the Kurkh Stela (Shigo Yamada, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (859–824 B.C.) Relating to His Campaigns in the West* [Boston: Brill, 2000] 161–62). Even so, the relative sizes of the armies provide useful information.
44. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Shalmaneser III (2.113): Kurkh Monolith (2.113A),” *COS* 2.263.
45. For these campaigns only the kings of Damascus and Hamath are named in the available sources. The formulaic phrase “Hadad-ezer (Adad-idri), the Damascene, (and) Irḫulēni, the Hamathite, together with twelve kings on the shore of the sea, trusted in their combined forces” is used to describe the coalition (Younger, “Shalmaneser III” 264–70).
46. Bryce, *Handbook* 386–87; Timothy P. Harrison, “Neo-Hittites in the ‘Land of Palistin’: Renewed Investigations at Tell Taʿyinat on the Plain of Antioch,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 72 (2009) 174–89.
47. Bryce, *Handbook* 284.
48. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Tiglath-pileser III (2.117): The Calah Annals (2.117A),” *COS* 2.285.
49. Bryce, *Handbook* 146–50; John D. Hawkins, “Carchemish,” *OEANE* 1.423–24.
50. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Sargon II (2.118): The Annals (2.118A),” *COS* 2.293.
51. Conversely, these constructs were not used in association with the indigenous חֵטִי (ḫittî).
52. Where pl. gentilics would be expected when referring to the descendants of חֵטִי (ḫēt), the constructs בְּנֵי-חֵטִי (bēnê ḫēt) and בְּנוֹת-חֵטִי (benôt ḫēt) were used instead. While the similarity of Hatti and ḫittî no doubt lies behind the usage of the pl. gentilics of חֵטִי (ḫittî) for the people of Hatti in the Hebrew Bible, the linguistic details of this association are beyond the scope of the present paper.

53. חִתִּי (ḥittî) occurs in Josh 3:10; 9:1; 11:3; 12:8; and 24:11; as opposed to חִתִּים (ḥittîm) in 1:4. חִתִּי (ḥittî) is found in Judg 3:5 contrasted with חִתִּים (ḥittîm) in 1:26. In 1 Kings, חִתִּי (ḥittî) appears in 9:20 (= 2 Chr 8:7) and 15:5, while חִתִּים (ḥittîm) is in 10:29 (= 2 Chr 1:17), and חִתִּיֹּת (ḥittîyōt) in 11:1.

54. I would argue the references in Josh 1:4 and Judg 1:26 are to the Hittite empire as I would place these allusions in a historical context prior to 1177 BC.

55. McMahon, "Hittites" 233; cf. id., "History" 75.

56. The Anatolian Indo-Europeans properly should be called "Hattians," but that name has been reserved for the pre-Indo-European population of Anatolia (Gurney, *Hittites* 13; Guterbock and Sterling "Hittites;" Hoffner, "Hittites" 85).

This article was originally published in the June 2011 issue (54.2) of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.