Episode Book

EPISODE #5801

Who Were the Canaanites, Hittites, and Israelites?

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SYNOPSIS

Canaanites, Hittites, Hebrews, Amorites, Philistines — the Bible and ancient histories crowd a dozen peoples into one small patch of the Levant, and most of us have never been clear on who was who. This episode untangles the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Levant, starting with the strangest case: the Hittites, where an Indo-European empire in Anatolia and a small Canaanite hill tribe with Semitic names share a single label that neither of them used for themselves. From there, the Canaanite-Israelite relationship comes into focus — and the older conquest picture falls apart. The scholarly consensus is that Israel developed in the land, not outside it, and that Israelite culture largely overlapped with and derived from Canaanite culture. The terms themselves tell the story: Canaanite becomes Phoenician, Hebrew becomes Israelite becomes Judahite becomes Jew. Same populations, different words, each one doing different work.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

Imagine a room where every single person has at least three names, and half of them are lying about which family they belong to.



Herman

That's the Late Bronze Age Levant in one sentence.



Corn

Which is exactly what Daniel wanted us to untangle. He wrote in about the sheer number of peoples the Bible and the ancient histories keep throwing at us. Canaanites, Hittites, Hebrews, Israelites, Phoenicians, Amorites, Philistines, Moabites, Edomites. All of them crowded into roughly the same patch of ground, sometimes at the same time. And he says he's never been clear on who was who.



Herman

He's in good company.



Corn

He specifically wants the Hittites, because they turn up constantly in biblical accounts, and he wants the Canaanite-Israelite relationship, because he suspects we might be applying different names to populations that shared most of their language, culture, and ancestry.



Herman

He suspects correctly.



Corn

And the thing he keeps coming back to is getting away from the picture of neatly separated nations with fixed borders. He wants to know what any of this would have meant to an ordinary person. Would neighbors have understood each other's speech? Worshipped some of the same gods? Married each other?



Herman

Yes, yes, and yes.



Corn

So the honest answer to his first question is that the map is far messier than the names suggest. And the names themselves are usually the problem.



Herman

Daniel asked for the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, so let's fix that. Late Bronze Age runs roughly fifteen fifty to twelve hundred before the common era. Early Iron Age, twelve hundred to a thousand. And the first thing to say is that when the Bible gives us a list of peoples, that list is doing theological work, not ethnographic work.



Corn

Give me the list.



Herman

The seven nations formula. Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites. It shows up repeatedly, it's a literary trope, it has a nice round number. And the terms inside it are used inconsistently. Amorite and Canaanite get used more or less interchangeably in some passages. That's not how you write an ethnic census. That's how you write a sermon about who was here before you and why you get to have it.



Corn

So the list is a claim, not a record.



Herman

A claim. And once you see that, the whole map loosens up. What the archaeology actually shows is a landscape of city-states and kinship groups. Not nation-states. There were no borders in the modern sense. There were walled towns, there were hinterlands, there were oaths of loyalty to whoever was strongest that month. Identity was layered and situational. You were a man of Shechem first, a Canaanite second, and a subject of Egypt when the tax collector came.



Corn

And often the label was applied from outside.



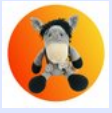
Herman

Almost always. Nobody in the ancient world woke up and said "I am a Canaanite." That word is used by Egyptians, by Mesopotamians, later by Greeks. It's a geographic and cultural shorthand for the people of that stretch of coast and hill country. The people themselves identified by city, by clan, by ancestor.



Corn

Three questions, then. The Hittite puzzle, the Canaanite-Israelite relationship, and everyone else in the neighborhood.



Herman

And the answer to all three is more connected than you think. Let's take the Hittites, because they're the strangest case.



Corn

The reason they're strange is that there are two entirely different peoples sharing one name, and one of those peoples didn't even call themselves that.



Herman

Right. The civilization we call the Hittites was an Indo-European people who settled in north-central Anatolia, modern Turkey, in the early second millennium. They built an empire centered on Hattusa from around sixteen fifty before the common era. It peaked in the mid-fourteenth century under a king called Suppiluliuma the First, and at its height it covered most of Anatolia plus chunks of northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia. It fell around eleven seventy-eight.



Corn

And they didn't call themselves Hittites.



Herman

They called their language nesili. The language of Nesa. And here's the part that still delights me. Nesili is the oldest attested Indo-European language. Older than Greek, older than Sanskrit in the written record. And they called their kingdom Hatti, which is a name they inherited from an earlier, non-Indo-European people who were already there. The Hattians.



Corn

So the Indo-Europeans moved in, took the name of the people they displaced, and their own name for themselves is a city.



Herman

It happens constantly. And then in the nineteenth century, archaeologists digging at Hattusa connected these Anatolian people to the Hittites of the Bible. That's the modern convention. The name "Hittite" is a scholarly artifact. It's not what they called themselves, and it may not even be the right identification.



Corn

Which brings us to the biblical Hittites. Who are they?



Herman

Two things at once, which is the problem. In the Bible they appear as bny-t, the children of Heth. And Heth is a son of Canaan. So right there, the biblical text places them inside the Canaanite family tree, living in or near Canaan from Abraham's time down to Ezra's. These are people with Semitic names. Ephron, Judith, Zohar. Ephron the Hittite sells Abraham the cave of Machpelah. That's a local landowner in a hill country town, not an Anatolian imperial official.



Corn

So the majority of biblical Hittite references are to a small Canaanite group.



Herman

That's Trevor Bryce's split, and it's the most cited resolution. He separates the references into two groups. The majority are that local hill tribe with Semitic names. A minority, and there are really only a couple, 2 Kings 7:6 and 2 Chronicles 1:17, refer to the kings of the Hittites as a great power, comparable to Egypt. That second group can't be a hill tribe. That has to mean the neo-Hittite kingdoms.



Corn

The what?



Herman

After the Anatolian empire collapses around eleven seventy-eight, you get a set of successor states in northern Syria. Modern scholarship calls them Syro-Hittite or neo-Hittite. They carry on Hittite royal names, Luwian inscriptions, that whole cultural inheritance, for another few centuries. And from the perspective of someone in the Levant in the ninth century, those are the Hittites. A real power up north.



Corn

So the Bible is using one word for two things several hundred years apart.



Herman

And that's before you get to the scholars who say the connection is wrong entirely. E. A. Speiser was blunt about it. He said it's most unlikely this group name has any direct connection either with the Hattians of Anatolia or with their Hittite successors. History and geography both argue against it.



Corn

But Hittite influence did reach the Levant.



Herman

It did, and this is the part that makes the biblical references less crazy than they first sound. Many kings of local city-states in the Late Bronze to Early Iron transition carry Hittite and Luwian names. Anatolian populations moved south into Canaan during the Sea Peoples migrations. The Amarna letters, which are the diplomatic correspondence from around thirteen fifty to thirteen hundred, report neighboring Amorites and Hittites capturing Phoenician cities. And the Battle of Kadesh, the Hittites against Egypt, happened in Syria. That's the Hittite empire at full stretch, fighting the other superpower to a draw on Levantine soil.



Corn

So the Hittites are real, they're nearby, they're a superpower, but the question of whether the biblical Hittites are them is...



Herman

Unresolved. And I want to be honest about that. There's no consensus. Bryce's two-group split is the most-cited, but Speiser and others reject any connection. And there's no evidence at all of a mass Hittite migration into Canaan in Abraham's era. Nothing in the written record, nothing in the ground. The Tyndale Bulletin piece is explicit about that. We have no sure indication that a sizeable group of Hattians or Luwians migrated into southern Palestine that early.



Corn

There's no way to say this that isn't disappointing, but there's no way to say it that isn't true.



Herman

The most likely picture is that the biblical Hittites are a mix. A local Canaanite group with a name that sounded Hittite to later writers, plus a memory of the neo-Hittite kingdoms up north, folded into one label by people writing centuries after the fact. Not the Anatolian empire. Two different things wearing the same coat.



Corn

And the reason this matters beyond the Hittites is that it's the pattern for the whole episode.



Herman

It's the pattern. The name is doing the work of a border, and there was no border. Which takes us to the question Daniel actually cares about most. What distinguished the Canaanites from the Israelites.



Corn

And this is where the older picture falls apart completely.



Herman

The older picture is conquest. Israelites arrive from outside, take the land, displace or destroy the Canaanites, and the two are separate peoples with separate origins. And the modern scholarly consensus is that this is wrong. The Israelites emerged from indigenous Canaanite populations and other peoples of the ancient Near East. They developed in the land, not outside it.



Corn

Christian Frevel's line is the cleanest version of that.



Herman

Israel developed in the land and not outside of it. In Egypt, in the desert, those are the settings of the story, not the setting of the people. Mark Smith puts it in cultural terms. The Israelite culture largely overlapped with and derived from Canaanite culture, and one cannot maintain a radical cultural separation between Canaanites and Israelites for the Iron One period. Twelve hundred to a thousand.



Corn

So the differentiation happened later, and it happened gradually.



Herman

It happened from the inside. Let's do the terms in order, because Daniel asked for that specifically and it's clarifying. Canaanite first. That word designates the Northwest Semitic people and culture of Palestine and western Syria before twelve hundred. And here's the thing almost nobody knows. Canaanite is historically, geographically, and culturally synonymous with Phoenician.



Corn

Wait. Say that again.



Herman

Same people. Same culture. The word changes after twelve hundred. Before twelve hundred, we call them Canaanites. After twelve hundred, we call them Phoenicians. Modern scholarship generally views the distinction as artificial. It's a Greek exonym applied to a people who still called themselves Canaanites and their land Canaan. They referred to themselves as Canaanites.



Corn

So the Phoenicians, the great maritime traders with the alphabet and the colonies, are the Canaanites with a rebrand they didn't choose.



Herman

And I should add the caveat, because Josephine Quinn at Oxford pushes back on how much even "Canaanite" was a self-description. She says there's very little evidence they used it as a collective self-designation at all. They identified by city. By family. A man was from Tyre, or from Sidon, or from Byblos. "Phoenician" is something Greeks needed to say about them, not something they needed to say about themselves.



Corn

Fine. Hebrew next.



Herman

Hebrew, ibrî, is generally treated as synonymous with Israelite. It denotes an Israelite of the pre-monarchic era. The period before the kingdoms of Israel and Judah arose in the eleventh century. So Hebrew, Israelite, these terms describe the same people at different stages. Hebrew is the earlier, more tribal label. Israelite is what you call them once there's a kingdom named Israel.



Corn

And Judahite?



Herman

Southern kingdom, after the split. And then the shift from Israelites to Jews, which is made explicit in the Book of Esther, fourth century, and which applies regardless of descent from Judah. So you have a chain. Canaanite, Hebrew, Israelite, Judahite, Jew. Same population, different words, each one true to its moment.



Corn

And what actually marked an Israelite out, if not blood?



Herman

Ritual and culture. Male circumcision, pork avoidance, Sabbath and Exodus-based timekeeping, four-room houses, and the worship of Yahweh. Those are the markers. And here's the honest complication. The first two, circumcision and not eating pork, were also observed by neighboring west Semites. Not the Philistines, but the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Phoenicians. So they don't separate you cleanly either. Intermarriage with other Semites was common. The markers are real, they're just not fences.



Corn

This is the point where someone says, "sure, culturally similar, but genetically distinct."



Herman

And that's the claim the DNA killed. The big one is the 2020 study in Cell, Agranat-Tamir and colleagues. Genome-wide DNA from seventy-three individuals across five Bronze and Iron Age sites in the southern Levant. And the finding is that individuals from all sites are highly genetically similar. Liran Carmel at Hebrew University put it plainly. The Canaanites, although living in different city-states, were culturally and genetically similar. The archaeologically and historically defined Canaanites correspond to a demographically coherent group.



Corn

Coherent. Meaning one population, not a patchwork.



Herman

One population. There's structure in it, and the ancestry is a mix of earlier local Neolithic people plus some Chalcolithic Iran and Bronze Age Caucasus coming in over time. Shai Carmi's suggestion is that this northeast migration may help explain why rulers of city-states in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age carry non-Semitic Hurrian names. But the continuity across the region is the headline. And then the Israelite and Judahite question specifically. A 2020 study found genetic continuity between the Bronze Age and Iron Age southern Levantines, explicitly including the Israelites and Judahites.



Corn

So the people who became Israelites were the same stock as the people around them.



Herman

The same stock. And the modern echo is even sharper. A 2017 study found that ninety-three percent of the genetic ancestry of modern Lebanese comes from Canaanites. The other seven percent is a Eurasian steppe population. Ninety-three.



Corn

That's not a diaspora. That's an unbroken line in one place for three thousand years.



Herman

It's one of the longest-running genetic continuities we can measure anywhere in the world. Which brings us to the founding story, and we should say it plainly because Daniel asked for the distinction between the Bible and what can be independently established. The Exodus as a mass event is not supported archaeologically. William Dever's verdict is that the archaeological investigation of Moses and the Exodus has been discarded as a fruitless pursuit.



Corn

And the united monarchy?



Herman

Widely disputed. Unresolved. The existence of the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, by contrast, is widely accepted. There's a distinction there worth holding. Nobody serious doubts there were two kingdoms. Whether there was a single grand kingdom under David and Solomon before the split, that's the live argument.



Corn

So what would this have looked like to an ordinary person in the hill country around eleven hundred?



Herman

It would have looked like nothing much changing. That's the thing. You'd have farmed your terraces, you'd have gone to a high place to sacrifice, you'd have married someone from the next valley over. The 2020s archaeology has found something like three hundred new settlements appearing in the central hill country in Iron One. Twelve hundred to a thousand. Three hundred new villages. That's not a conquest. That's a population expanding into the hill country, clearing land, building terraces, and settling down.



Corn

And religion? Would they have noticed a difference?



Herman

Not at first. El, Baal, Asherah, Chemosh. These are shared gods across the region. Yahweh emerges within that world, and early Israelite religion draws on Canaanite forms. The language is the strongest evidence of how porous this all was. Hebrew, Moabite, Edomite, Ammonite, Phoenician. These are mutually intelligible Canaanite dialects. Dialects of one language, the way a man from Leeds and a man from Alabama are speaking dialects of one language.



Corn

So a farmer in Judah and a farmer in Moab could have had a conversation.



Herman

A conversation, a trade, a marriage, a lawsuit. The boundaries were porous. The divisions we care about were largely elite and scribal constructions. The scribes needed to say who was in and who was out. The farmers just needed the rain.



Corn

And the first external evidence that anyone outside had heard of Israel?



Herman

The Merneptah Stele, twelve oh nine before the common era. Egyptian inscription. "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not." And note that it calls Israel a people, not a state, not a land. It's a group in the hill country that an Egyptian pharaoh bragged about defeating. That's the earliest mention we have.



Corn

All right. So the Hittites are two peoples under one name, the Canaanites and Israelites are one people under five names. The obvious next move is to ask whether everyone else in Daniel's list fits that same pattern.



Herman

They do, and the Phoenicians are the clearest case because we've already half-covered them. They emerge directly from Bronze Age Canaanites. Same people, new Greek name. Their reputation is maritime traders, colonies across the Mediterranean, the alphabet that becomes our alphabet. But their culture, their language, their gods, all of it is Canaanite. The rebrand is entirely external.



Corn

Philistines next, and they're the ones who break the pattern.



Herman

They're the genuine outsiders in the list, and even they don't stay outsiders. They're generally identified with the Peleset, one of the Sea Peoples who fought Ramesses the Third around eleven seventy-five. Most scholars agree they're of Greek or Aegean origin, from Crete and the Aegean world. And the 2019 Ashkelon DNA study is fascinating. It found the Philistines derived most of their ancestry from the local Levantine gene pool, but with a certain amount of Southern-European-related admixture. Twenty to sixty percent similarity to ancient Cretan and Iberian skeletons.



Corn

Twenty to sixty is a wide range.



Herman

It is, and it's worth saying why. The early Philistine burials are the ones with the Aegean signal. Within two centuries, the European markers are dwarfed by the local Levantine gene pool. Dwarfed is the word in the study. Which tells you there was intensive intermarriage from very early on. And by the late fifth century before the common era, the Philistines have disappeared as a distinct group entirely.



Corn

So even the one group that actually arrived from somewhere else gets absorbed inside two hundred years.



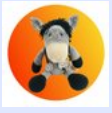
Herman

Aren Maeir's summary is the right one. These foreign components were not of one origin, and no less important, they mixed with local Levantine populations from the early Iron Age onward. Not one origin, and not staying separate.



Corn

Amorites.



Herman

Northwest Semitic Bronze Age people from western Mesopotamia. They show up in Sumerian records around twenty-five hundred before the common era. And they're not a footnote, they're enormous. They founded Babylon. The Old Babylonian Empire, Hammurabi's empire, is an Amorite dynasty. They were part of the Hyksos who ruled northern Egypt. And then from about twelve hundred onward, the Amorites disappear from the pages of history entirely. The name survives only in the Bible, where, and this is the detail I love, Amorite and Canaanite seem to be used more or less interchangeably.



Corn

So a name that once meant a Mesopotamian empire becomes a biblical synonym for the neighbors.



Herman

A label outliving its people by six hundred years, attached to whoever the writers needed to describe.



Corn

Moabites and Edomites.



Herman

Both real kingdoms, both with their own inscriptions and material culture. Moab is in Transjordan, modern southern Jordan, capital at Dibon. The Mesha Stele from the ninth century is the star exhibit. King Mesha describing his victory over a son of Omri of Israel. That's a Moabite king writing about an Israelite king in a Moabite inscription. It's the kind of thing that makes a text like the Bible feel less like a solitary voice and more like one instrument in a loud room.



Corn

And the language?



Herman

Moabite is a Canaanite language closely related to biblical Hebrew, Ammonite and Edomite, written in a variant of the Phoenician alphabet. Edomite is most similar to biblical Hebrew and Moabite. So you have four or five kingdoms across a couple hundred miles all writing the same script in the same family of dialects. And here's the payoff on Edom. Herod the Great was of Edomite origin. Idumaean. The man who rebuilds the Temple and rules Judea under Rome is, by ancestry, one of the neighboring peoples the biblical text treats as a separate nation.



Corn

From separate nation to king of the Jews in about eight hundred years.



Herman

Which is the whole episode in one biography.



Corn

Arameans.



Herman

The last of the list, and the least coherent as a category. Tribal Semitic people, first documented in the late twelfth century. Homeland in central Syria. But the scholarship is blunt that they weren't a single nation or group. One paper says it's almost impossible to establish a coherent ethnic category of Aramean based on extralinguistic identity markers. Meaning: you cannot define an Aramean by what he looked like, what he built, or what he ate. You can only define him by the language he spoke.



Corn

And that language won.



Herman

Aramaic became the lingua franca of the entire Near East. It's the language of the Babylonian Talmud, the language Jesus spoke, the administrative language of the Persian Empire. A people who never coalesced into a nation gave the region its common tongue for a thousand years.



Corn

There's a line that ties all of this together, and it's from Jonathan Tubb.



Herman

Ammonites, Moabites, Israelites, and Phoenicians undoubtedly achieved their own cultural identities, and yet ethnically they were all Canaanites. That's it. That's the episode. The identities are real. The cultural achievements are real. The languages, the kingdoms, the gods, the inscriptions, all real. And underneath, one population.



Corn

Not one nation. One population that keeps reinventing how it describes itself.



Herman

Daniel asked what this meant for ordinary people. The answer is that it meant very little most of the time. You traded with your neighbors. You married them. You understood them when they spoke. The lines were drawn by scribes and kings and priests, and they were drawn for reasons of tax and tribute and legitimacy, not because anybody on the ground could tell the difference.



Corn

There's a jar in my hand.



Corn

I've been holding it for the whole last ten minutes and I have no idea why. Daniel's question about how easily someone could move between these societies. The answer is as easily as we're about to move into a certain producer's turn.



Hilbert

It's two hundred and thirteen.



Corn

What is?



Hilbert

The number of years. You said the Philistines disappeared as a distinct group by the late fifth century. From eleven seventy-five that's nearer two hundred and twenty, and the last identifiable Philistine material is a bit later than you made it sound. Anyway. I've got something. You spent twenty minutes on the Hittites and not one of you mentioned the seal.



Herman

What seal?



Hilbert

I own a Hittite seal. Bought it off a dealer in the late two thousands, said it had come out of the ground near Hattusa. Small clay tablet, cuneiform on both faces. He wanted four hundred and fifty for it. I paid three twenty. It's in a shoebox under the boiler in my mother's flat, because it's too big to keep anywhere sensible.



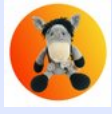
Corn

How big is it?



Hilbert

It's a clay tablet, Corn. It's about the size of a paperback. The point is not the size, the point is that I took it to a man I know who actually reads the stuff, and he looked at it for a while and told me the cuneiform is the word "sheep" eleven times. That's the whole document. Sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep. Administrative record. Somebody was counting sheep in the second millennium and somebody has now sold that to me for three hundred and twenty pounds.



Herman

That's a Hittite inventory.



Hilbert

That's exactly what I told him. He said I'd been taken. I said an inventory of sheep is still an inventory. It's still somebody's day at work in Anatolia three thousand years ago. He said that's not how value works. I said it's how it works for me.



Corn

That's why it's in a shoebox.



Hilbert

It's in a shoebox because the certificate of authenticity is the problem. The dealer gave me one. Beautiful thing, handwritten, said it vouched for the seal in Luwian script. I kept it in the box with the tablet. Years later I'm going through the box looking for a warranty and I read the certificate properly. It's a parking ticket from Ankara airport. Same shoebox. Somewhere along the line the certificate and this parking ticket switched places and I never noticed for probably a decade.



Herman

But you've never been to Ankara.



Hilbert

I have never been to Ankara in my life. And I've told the dealer that. He's dead now, which he would say is convenient for me. But I've told people. That parking ticket did not get into that shoebox on its own. Somebody put it there.



Corn

Who?



Hilbert

The same people who keep moving my recycling bin. Every week it's out on the pavement by six and by half past six it's four doors down. Every week. I've stopped reporting it. They know I know.



Herman

Hilbert, the council moves your bin.



Hilbert

The council doesn't take it four doors down and leave it, Herman. The council takes it away. This is a placement issue. And before you ask, no, I haven't been back to the dealer, and yes, the seal has been nothing but good to me since. My neighbour's cat used to sit on my car every morning, scratched the bonnet to bits. Since the seal came into the house, that cat has not sat on my car once.



Corn

That's correlation.



Hilbert

That's a three-thousand-year-old piece of clay and an animal that knows better. I don't need a study. The levels are fine, by the way. You came in hot on the Merneptah section, Herman, I've pulled it back two and a half. And the two of you pronounced Suppiluliuma four different ways in one segment, so I'll pick one in the edit and you'll live with it.



Herman

Fair.



Corn

The seal is the only object in the history of the ancient Near East whose provenance is a parking fine.



Hilbert

The seal is in my mother's flat and the parking ticket is in the shoebox and that is the state of the evidence.



Corn

I want to go back to something Hilbert left on the table, which is the question of how you'd even know. If you dug up a village in the Judean hills in eleven hundred, how would you tell an Israelite house from a Canaanite house?



Herman

You'd look at the pottery, the house plan, the bones. Four-room house is a marker. No pig bones is a marker. Collared-rim jars are a marker. But every one of those markers shows up in contexts that aren't Israelite too. Collared-rim jars turn up in Moab, in Ammon, in the coastal plain. Four-room houses show up in Transjordan. The material culture bleeds across every boundary the texts draw.



Corn

The archaeology refuses to draw the line.



Herman

The archaeology refuses, the linguistics refuses, the genetics refuses. The only thing drawing the line is the text. And the text has its own reasons, which are theological and political, not ethnographic. Which doesn't make the text worthless. It makes it a source, not a witness. It tells you what the writers believed and what they needed you to believe, and that's valuable information. It's just not a census.



Corn

There's one more piece I want to put on the table, and it's the piece that rarely makes it into the popular telling. The bit of the research that didn't fit anywhere else.



Herman

Go on.



Corn

In the Amarna letters, from around thirteen fifty to thirteen hundred, there's correspondence reporting neighboring Amorites and Hittites capturing Phoenician cities. And the tellers of that news are the local city-state kings. Little kings, writing to the Egyptian court, saying the Hittites and the Amorites are taking our towns. And they're doing it in Akkadian, because that's the diplomatic language. So you have a Canaanite ruler in a Phoenician city, writing in Mesopotamian cuneiform, to an Egyptian pharaoh, complaining about an Anatolian power and a Syrian people. Five identities in one letter, and nobody in the letter thinks that's strange.



Herman

That's the whole thing in one document.



Corn

The reason I wanted to end there is that it's the least abstract version of Daniel's question. It's not a taxonomy problem. It's a Tuesday morning in the thirteenth century, and a man is dictating a letter about his neighbors, and every one of the categories we'd reach for to describe him is wrong somewhere.



Herman

The open question, if there is one, is whether the united monarchy ever existed as the text describes. That's the dispute that hasn't resolved and probably won't. The Exodus as a mass event isn't supported archaeologically, the relationship between the biblical Hittites and the Anatolian ones has no consensus, and whether David and Solomon ruled one kingdom or two is still argued. What is settled is the bigger picture. Continuity, interconnection, absorption. The people of the Levant were one population with many names, and the names were mostly applied from outside or backward from later.



Corn

Which means the mental map Daniel wanted is not a map of borders. It's a map of a single crowded room where everyone is related, everyone speaks a version of the same language, and the walls only exist in the documents of the people who needed them to.



Herman

The best possible ending for a question about who was who is the discovery that the question was harder to ask than to answer.



Corn

That's the episode. Thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop, who produces this show from a desk covered in parking tickets. This has been My Weird Prompts.



Herman

If this untangled anything for you, leave us a review and subscribe. It helps other people find the show.



Corn

We'll be back soon.

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