

Baal threatened Elijah's life (1 Kings 18).

**Aramaeans and Chaldaeans**

Inland from Phoenicia, other related (Semitic) tribes had settled at the time when Israel was moving into Canaan. These were the Aramaeans (Syrians in the Authorized/King James' Version). We know some of their history from Hebrew and Assyrian records, and a few inscriptions written in Aramaic. There were several tribes, each centred on one city. They were scattered throughout Syria, across to Assyria, and down the River Euphrates into Babylonia where one branch became the nation of the Chaldaeans. Smaller kingdoms north of Galilee were soon absorbed by Israel and by the major Aramaean kingdom, Damascus.

In the reign of Solomon Damascus won independence from Israel, and a strong line of kings built up power there (see 1 Kings 11:23; 15:18). Until the Assyrians made Damascus a province in 732 BC its kings (including Ben-Hadad and Hazael who feature in the Bible stories) were often at war

with Israel and Judah, trying to control the roads to Egypt and Arabia. From time to time they were able to dominate their fellow Aramaean rulers to the north, and in the seaports.

□ **Aramaic**  
Because they were so widespread (this increased even more when Assyrian kings conquered and deported many of them to Assyria and Persia), their language – Aramaic – became the common language for diplomats and traders all over the Near East from about 750 BC. When King Sennacherib's Assyrian officials came to threaten Jerusalem, King Hezekiah's men begged them to speak in Aramaic. The decrees of the Persian kings were written in Aramaic. When the people living in the land had complaints against the Jews who returned with Zerubbabel, they wrote to the king in Aramaic. Part of the Book of Daniel is also in Aramaic.

After Alexander brought Greek to the Near East, Aramaic took second place for official purposes. But it remained the common language over a wide area and was spoken by the Jews in Israel in New Testament times. The New Testa-

ment contains several Aramaic phrases, for example: *talitha koum (cumi)*, *abba* (the everyday word for 'father'), and *Eli lama sabachthani* (Jesus' words from the cross). 2 Kings 18:26; Ezra 7:12-26; 4:7 - 6:18; Daniel 2:4 - 7:28; Mark 5:41; 14:36; Matthew 27:46

**Hittites**

Before the time of the Israelites and Aramaeans, Syria was controlled by the Hittites from Turkey. They were an Indo-European race who built up an empire which was very powerful from about 1600-1300 BC. Their capital city was Hattusha (now Bogazköy), near Ankara, the modern capital of Turkey. In its ruins the royal archives have been found. They are written in the Babylonian cuneiform script on clay tablets, but in the Hittite languages. Amongst the important documents are many treaties made with subject states. These follow a set pattern – the same pattern followed in Exodus and Deuteronomy, where God's treaties with his people, Israel, are set down.

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**Nations and Peoples of the Bible**

