

# Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8, Shepherd King Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8, Shepherd King, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler explores the Old Testament concept of the "shepherd king," **connecting the royal imagery of shepherding with the roles of provider and protector**. He examines biblical passages, particularly Isaiah 61 and Psalm 23, **interpreting the "shepherd" metaphor as a royal title reflecting God's kingship**. Fowler also **links this imagery to the ministry of Jesus**, shown through the use of similar language in Luke and John, thereby demonstrating the continuity between Old and New Testament themes. Finally, he highlights the **importance of understanding ancient Near Eastern kingship** to properly interpret biblical texts.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Old Testament Introduction → Old Testament Backgrounds).**



**Fowler\_OTB\_Session  
n08.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8, Shepherd King

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts by Dr. Donald Fowler:

#### Briefing Document: "Shepherd King" - Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 8

##### Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Don Fowler explores the significant metaphor of the "shepherd king" in the Old Testament and its connection to the concepts of release, messianic prophecy, and ultimately, the identity and ministry of Jesus Christ. Fowler emphasizes the importance of understanding ancient Near Eastern kingship practices to properly interpret biblical texts, particularly those using the shepherd imagery. He argues that the "shepherd" title is not primarily pastoral but royal, signifying the king's role as provider and protector. The lecture bridges the Old Testament concepts of release and the shepherd king with New Testament passages, particularly in the Gospels, to demonstrate the fulfillment of these concepts in Jesus.

##### Key Themes and Ideas:

#### 1. The Unfulfilled Concept of Release:

- Fowler begins by noting that the prescribed release (cancellation of debts, liberation of slaves) in the Old Testament was "never done" as intended (referring to 2 Chronicles 36:21). This leads to a discussion about how the prophets, acting as God's conscience, addressed this failure.
- **Quote:** *"So, it was never done...But what's important is for us to remind ourselves that God raised up a conscience for ancient Israel. That conscience for ancient Israel was the prophets."*

#### 1. Prophetic Adaptation of Release:

- Fowler highlights how prophets like Isaiah adapted the concept of release, connecting it to a coming royal "servant" figure. Isaiah 42 and 61 are crucial, as they use "release" (Hebrew: *deror*) and "liberty" terminology to describe the ministry of this servant who will bring justice, free prisoners, and proclaim the "favorable year of the Lord."

- **Quote:** *"Now, what Isaiah seems to have done here is a passage that's open to various interpretations, but what I think Isaiah seems to have done is to have utilized the vocabulary of the release to describe what the coming servant figure is going to do."*
- Fowler points out that the term "servant" in this context is actually a royal term in the ancient Near East, where kings often pictured themselves as servants of a deity when constructing temples. This contrasts with the modern, "ameliorating" view of servant as a low status.

#### 1. **Jesus as the Fulfillment of Prophetic Release:**

- Luke 4 is presented as a pivotal passage where Jesus, in his hometown of Nazareth, reads from Isaiah 61, applying the text to himself and declaring his role as the prophesied servant who proclaims release, recovery, and freedom.
- **Quote:** *"What Jesus seems to be saying here is a merger of the two concepts. On the one hand, the Messiah is here, and he's going to proclaim a cancellation of debts...He's merging the healing ministry of the Messiah with the royal ministry of ancient Israel's king..."*
- Fowler suggests that Jesus' announcement was of a release tied to his identity as the "incarnate God", not the typical seven-year release, and highlights the audience's mixed response, acknowledging him as king and simultaneously rejecting him.

#### 1. **Shepherd as a Royal Title:**

- Fowler emphasizes that the "shepherd" is a ubiquitous royal title in the ancient Near East, not primarily a pastoral image. He cites that kings often referred to themselves as shepherds in debt-release documents, highlighting the link between kingship and the ideas of provision and protection.
- **Quote:** *"Shepherd is one of the most common royal titles and or epithets in all of the ancient Near East...It is always a positive title...It's a term that is that is set aside to identify two great activities of kingship. In the shepherd title, he is a provider and a protector."*
- He points to Tim Laniak's book "Shepherds After My Own Heart" as evidence for this widespread usage, explaining the multitude of adjectives used with the title of shepherd.

- The lecture emphasizes the transition from the literal pastoral meaning of the shepherd to the Royal meaning, and gives an analogy with "pastor" as a church title, originally based on shepherds but now seen as a position of authority.

#### 1. **God as Shepherd:**

- The lecture traces the usage of the "shepherd" title to describe God, starting with Genesis 48:15 (Jacob blessing Joseph's sons) and Genesis 49:24 ("the shepherd, the rock of Israel"). These examples show the royal imagery of God as a provider and protector, not merely a literal shepherd of sheep.
- **Quote:** *"So, when Jacob says, the Lord has been my shepherd all my life, he's probably, almost certainly, not talking about a shepherd in the pastoral sense. He's talking about it in the royal sense, where God was his provider and his protector."*

#### 1. **Reinterpretation of Psalm 23:**

- Dr. Fowler emphasizes that Psalm 23 needs to be interpreted through a royal lens rather than a literal pastoral one. He connects the ideas of provision in the first half of the psalm to God the king and protection in the second half to the same idea of God as King, and points out that the language is very similar to royal inscriptions of the time.
- **Quote:** *"So what Psalm 23 is really saying is the Lord is my king, and the first half of the Psalm is divided into telling us how God provides...In the second half, God is the protector."*
- He also alludes to a potential connection between Psalm 23 and the imagery of the Exodus wanderings.

#### 1. **Messianic Shepherd Prophecies:**

- Fowler connects the shepherd imagery to messianic prophecies, citing Micah 5:2-4, which describes a coming ruler from Bethlehem who will "shepherd his flock." He also points to Ezekiel 34 as a significant passage, where God declares He will raise up "my servant David" as the shepherd, uniting this coming shepherd and king with the presence of God himself.

- **Quote:** *"I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will feed them, he will feed them himself and be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them."*

#### 1. Zechariah's "Smitten Shepherd":

- The lecture highlights Zechariah's depiction of a coming shepherd who is also the "smitten" one, who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and is accepted by the people as king.
- **Quote:** *"Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey..."*
- This image, Fowler argues, is crucial in understanding Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, not as an anti-royal event, but as Jesus presenting himself as the shepherd-king, and the people reacting as such. He further emphasizes the idea that it was Jesus' failure to fit the worldly idea of a King that led to the rejection.
- **Jesus as the Ultimate Shepherd King:** Fowler concludes by explaining how Jesus embodies the ancient constructs of kingship to describe the nature of his kingship. While coming to provide and protect in ways understood by the Old Testament, he also does it eternally and provides for the eternal lives of his subjects.
- He references John 1 and the idea of Jesus as the new Moses, as well as God in the flesh. This builds the foundation for the discussion of John 10 in the following lecture, where Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
- Fowler briefly mentions the healing of the blind man in John 9 as a lead up to Jesus' presentation of himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, as well as referencing Isaiah 61.

#### Implications:

- **Holistic Biblical Reading:** Fowler argues for reading the Bible holistically, connecting Leviticus 25 (release), Isaiah 61 (prophetic adaptation), and Luke 4 (Jesus' fulfillment) to gain a deeper understanding. He believes that failing to do this impoverishes the message of the Bible.
- **Importance of Cultural Context:** The lecture underscores the crucial role of understanding the cultural and historical context of the ancient Near East to

properly interpret the Bible, especially regarding terms like "servant" and "shepherd."

- **Jesus' Royal Identity:** By examining these Old Testament themes and imagery, the lecture provides a deeper understanding of Jesus' identity and mission as the ultimate shepherd king, who fulfills the ancient hopes of release and establishes an eternal kingdom.

**Future Directions:** The lecture concludes by setting up the next session, which will dive deep into John 10 and the Good Shepherd passage.

This briefing document provides a thorough summary of the key themes, facts, and ideas presented in Dr. Fowler's lecture. It is designed to be used as a reference for understanding the core arguments and connections made within the session.

## 4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8, Shepherd King

### Shepherd King: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Fowler, who were the "conscience" of ancient Israel and what role did they play?
2. How does Isaiah utilize the concept of "release" in Isaiah 61? What specific Hebrew word does he use?
3. What does Dr. Fowler say about the term "servant" in the ancient Near East, especially when used by a king?
4. What is significant about Jesus' use of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4?
5. How does Dr. Fowler connect the ancient practice of "release" with the identity of God in Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4?
6. According to the lecture, why is the title "shepherd" significant for ancient Near Eastern kings?
7. How does the understanding of the title "shepherd" shift from pastoral to royal, according to Dr. Fowler?
8. How does Dr. Fowler interpret Psalm 23 and what is its connection with the ancient Near East?
9. What is significant about the shepherd imagery in Micah 5 in relation to the coming messianic figure?
10. According to the lecture, how does John present Jesus in chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, and what is significant about his use of "tabernacle"?

#### Answer Key

1. The prophets were the conscience of ancient Israel. They were mediators from God and successors to Moses, designed to speak about the law and address issues like the release that was not being done.

2. Isaiah adapts the vocabulary of "release" to describe the coming servant figure's ministry. He uses the Hebrew word *deror*, typically used for the seven-year release, to describe the liberty the servant will bring to captives.
3. In the ancient Near East, kings would often use the term "servant" or "slave" to describe themselves in relation to a deity. This was done when building or refurbishing temples to a deity as a way of expressing humility.
4. Jesus uses Isaiah 61 in Luke 4 to proclaim himself as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy and to declare a release. In so doing he merged the royal practice of canceling debts with the Messiah's ministry of healing.
5. Jesus uses the ancient royal practice of "release," associated with the king canceling debts, to identify himself as God. This implies that Jesus is announcing not just the seven-year release but a much grander release bound up in his divine identity.
6. The title "shepherd" was a very common and positive royal title in the ancient Near East. It signified that the king was the provider and protector of his people.
7. The title "shepherd" originally had a pastoral connection, but over time, it became a primarily royal title. It moved from the imagery of shepherding and sheep to the royal act of kings providing and protecting.
8. Dr. Fowler interprets Psalm 23 not as a pastoral psalm, but a royal one. It describes God as the king who both provides (first half) and protects (second half), similar to how ancient Near Eastern kings were viewed as shepherds.
9. In Micah 5, the prophet describes a coming figure from Bethlehem who will be born of a woman, and he will shepherd his flock. This is seen as the first messianic use of the word "shepherd," connecting it directly to the coming king.
10. John presents Jesus as the new Moses and God in the flesh. The word "tabernacle" is used as a verb ("tabernacled") to show that the Word, who is God, made his dwelling among people, echoing the glory of the tabernacle of Moses.



## Essay Questions

1. Discuss the concept of "release" in the Old Testament and how it is adapted and used in Isaiah and Luke. How does this relate to the understanding of kingship and the Messiah?
2. Explore the significance of the title "shepherd" in the ancient Near East and its connection to the role of kings. How is this understanding relevant for interpreting the Old Testament and New Testament texts that utilize the metaphor?
3. Analyze how the metaphor of the "shepherd" is developed in the Old Testament, specifically in the passages from Genesis, Psalms, Micah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. What are the main themes and how do they build upon each other?
4. Discuss the ways in which Jesus uses the shepherd metaphor in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of John. How does this imagery connect with the Old Testament understanding of God and kingship?
5. Synthesize how the concepts of release, shepherd, and kingship are brought together in the person of Jesus Christ according to the lecture. How does he fulfill the roles described in the Old Testament?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Aphesis (ἀφεσις):** The Greek word used in the New Testament for “release,” and related to forgiveness, salvation and cancellation of debts.
- **Deror (דִּרְוֹר):** A Hebrew word meaning "liberty," a release, or freedom, often associated with the release that occurs every seven years as described in the Old Testament.
- **Hosanna:** A Hebrew term used as a shout of acclamation to welcome a king and praise God.
- **Jubilee:** The 50th year described in Leviticus 25, in which all land was to be returned to its original owners and all slaves were to be set free.
- **Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ):** Hebrew for "anointed one," referring to a future king and savior of Israel, the same word from which we get the English word Messiah,
- **Prophets:** Individuals in ancient Israel who were believed to be messengers of God, speaking about the law and delivering God's message to the people.
- **Release (Shemita):** A concept rooted in the Old Testament law in which debts were cancelled every seven years.
- **Shepherd:** A common royal title and metaphor in the ancient Near East used to describe kings as providers and protectors of their people.
- **Servant:** In ancient Near East culture, sometimes a royal term used by kings to describe their role as subservient to a deity, particularly when building or refurbishing temples.
- **Tabernacle (verb):** As used in John’s Gospel, the act of God making his dwelling among his people.

## 5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 8, Shepherd King, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on Kingship, Release, and the Shepherd Metaphor in the Old Testament

1. **What was the significance of the "release" concept in ancient Israel, and why was it important?**
2. The "release" concept, as outlined in Leviticus 25, was a system designed to periodically cancel debts, release indentured servants, and restore land to its original owners. It was intended to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, ensuring social and economic equity. However, the historical record suggests it was rarely if ever implemented, leading to the prophets calling out Israel for failing to uphold God's laws. The failure to observe the release had consequences, as highlighted in 2 Chronicles 36:21.
3. **How did the prophets function in ancient Israel, and what role did they play in relation to the "release"?**
4. The prophets served as the conscience of ancient Israel, acting as mediators between God and the people. They were successors to Moses, charged with speaking about the law and holding the people accountable. In cases like the failure to observe the release, the prophets addressed these issues, reminding Israel of their covenantal obligations and calling for repentance and justice. Isaiah is a key example, using the release concept to speak of a coming servant figure who would bring justice and freedom.
5. **How does the concept of a "servant" figure in Isaiah relate to kingship and the idea of release?**
6. In Isaiah, the "servant" figure is portrayed as one who will bring justice, open blind eyes, and release prisoners. While the word "servant" might seem to denote a low status, in the ancient Near East, kings would often refer to themselves as servants of their deity as a way of demonstrating their commitment. Thus the servant was not an anti-royal figure, but a royal one. This coming servant would embody the ideals of kingship by providing and protecting the people. Isaiah also connects this servant's work with the "release" concept, suggesting that the coming figure would bring about an ultimate liberation not just materially but also spiritually. The language of "liberty" (*deror*) in Isaiah 61 directly references the release vocabulary of Leviticus.

7. **How does Jesus connect with the Old Testament prophecies of a coming servant and a coming King in Luke 4?**
8. In Luke 4, Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, and he announces that this prophecy is fulfilled in himself. He proclaims release (Greek *aphesis* – which is linked to the concept of salvation) to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. By doing so, Jesus aligns himself with the Old Testament's image of the coming servant-king who brings justice and liberation. Jesus also merged the concept of healing and deliverance with the royal ministry, claiming the role of Messiah, and declaring a kind of release that went beyond the seven-year cycle described in the Mosaic Law.
9. **What is the significance of the "shepherd" metaphor in the context of kingship in the ancient Near East, and how does it connect to God?**
10. The term "shepherd" was a ubiquitous and positive royal title in the ancient Near East. Kings used it to emphasize their roles as providers and protectors of their people. This wasn't a pastoral image at its core, but primarily a royal one. God uses this same metaphor, portraying Himself as the provider and protector of Israel, as seen in Genesis, and later in the Psalms. It is a way of connecting God as King and His royal functions.
11. **How does the understanding of the "shepherd" metaphor as a royal term change our understanding of passages like Psalm 23?**
12. Psalm 23 is traditionally interpreted as a pastoral scene of a shepherd caring for his sheep, but understanding "shepherd" as a royal term reveals that the Psalm is not ultimately about sheep and literal shepherds. Instead, it depicts God as the King who provides and protects his people. The first half of the Psalm focuses on God's provision (green pastures, quiet waters), while the second half emphasizes God's protection in the face of enemies, as a king is meant to protect his kingdom and subjects. The imagery of a table prepared in the presence of enemies highlights the king's triumph and provision for his people.

**13. How does the Old Testament connect the shepherd motif with the coming Messiah?**

14. Passages like Micah 5 and Ezekiel 34 present the coming Messiah using the language of the shepherd, combining the royal and protective roles. In Micah 5, a coming ruler from Bethlehem is described as the one who will “shepherd his flock”. Ezekiel 34 portrays the Messiah as a new David who will be the people's shepherd and prince, unifying the roles of king, shepherd, and divine presence. Zechariah's prophecies focus on the coming king who would ride in on a donkey as a sign of kingship and also would be a "smitten" shepherd, combining royalty with suffering. These are clear Messianic passages within the Old Testament.

**15. How does the Gospel of John use the shepherd metaphor, and what does it reveal about the nature of Jesus?**

16. The Gospel of John presents Jesus as both the new Moses and God incarnate. John uses the “I am” statements to identify Jesus with the name of God. Jesus is the divine Messiah, and John draws upon images of the Exodus story as a background for his ministry. This is further clarified through the shepherd metaphor in John 10. John depicts Jesus as the good shepherd who provides for his sheep and is willing to sacrifice himself for them. Jesus's use of the shepherd metaphor reinforces his claim to be the true king of Israel and a provider and protector of his people in a way that transcends any earthly king. In John, this is connected to his healing of the blind man in the previous chapter, highlighting his divine authority and mission.