

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 15, People Groups, Rise of Monarchy 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 15, People Groups, Rise of Monarchy, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler explores the historical and cultural context of the Old Testament, focusing on three key areas. **First**, it examines the Philistines, their Aegean origins, and their strategic placement by the Egyptians, highlighting their military prowess due to their mastery of iron weaponry. **Second**, it discusses the ancient city of Ugarit, emphasizing its importance for understanding Canaanite religion and its profound influence on biblical Hebrew language and literature. **Finally**, the lecture analyzes the period of the Judges in Israel, arguing against the traditional view of it as an ideal theocracy and instead portraying it as a time of chaos and tribalism, ultimately setting the stage for the rise of the monarchy.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 15 – 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
15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 15, People Groups, Rise of Monarchy

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

Briefing Document: Old Testament Backgrounds - Lecture 15

Overall Theme: This lecture explores the historical and cultural contexts surrounding two significant groups mentioned in the Old Testament, the Philistines and the people of Ugarit. It then examines the period of the Judges and introduces the transition towards the Israelite monarchy.

I. The Philistines:

- **Context within the Sea Peoples Movement:** The Philistines were a small, but influential, part of the larger Sea Peoples Movement. While the movement is obscure to most, the Philistines are well known, largely because of their biblical presence (e.g., Delilah).
- *"It's funny because in the audience, I would be surprised if only anything other than a very small percentage of you have ever heard of the Sea Peoples Movement, and yet almost everybody out there has heard of the Philistines."*
- **Post-Exodus Philistines:** The Philistines, often grouped generically with other Aegeans (Tjekker, Danuna, etc.) by the Old Testament, were settled by the Egyptians in strategic locations as vassals, including the Pentopolis (Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron). This was done to protect the land bridge to Egypt from Semitic groups.
- *"The Peleset were settled in the Pentopolis, the five cities that are mentioned in the Bible, Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. So those are the five cities."*
- **Strategic Settlements:** Besides the Pentopolis, Philistines were also settled south of the Sea of Galilee (guarding the Jordan Rift) and in Amman (controlling the eastern region).
- **Cultural Uniqueness:** The Philistines were clearly Aegean, evidenced by their distinct pottery, which was superior to Semitic pottery. They also had unique burial patterns with anthropoid clay coffins, resembling Mycenaean death masks.

- *"Even at this very early stage in Aegean presence, the fact of the matter is that the pottery of the Aegeans was superior to anything the Semitic world produced. So, they produced a very distinctive pottery."*
- **Military Power:** The Philistines held a significant advantage due to their monopoly on iron smelting technology, which provided them with superior weapons.
- *"What we know from 1 Samuel 13, 19 is that the Philistines enjoyed a monopoly on iron in the area...the Philistines had iron, and iron weapons in warfare gave them an unbeatable advantage."*
- **Impact:** Their impact was so great that the Romans eventually adopted the name "Palestine" from them. They also influenced Hebrew culture in various ways, good and bad.

II. Ugarit:

- **Discovery and Importance:** Ugarit, an ancient city discovered accidentally, was a major trading hub due to its strategic location on major trade routes. Its language and literature have been critically important for biblical studies.
- *"And Ugarit was a city about which we really knew nothing until it was accidentally found...And when you see the site, one of the things that strikes you is that it's a perfect trading location."*
- **Linguistic Significance:** Ugaritic is a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and is among the earliest alphabetic languages found. While not *the* earliest, Ugarit provided many written tablets (unlike other early alphabets) .
- *"One of the most interesting things about Ugarit is that it is among the earliest alphabetic languages ever found...But certainly, Ugarit provides us with many tablets, whereas none of these other proposed alphabets provide us with any tablets."*
- **Impact on Hebrew Studies:****Poetry:** Ugaritic poetic structure has validated the structure of Hebrew poetry, discrediting earlier attempts to alter the Hebrew text to fit Greek structures.
- *"And in fact, the Hebrew poetry that we have today fits very comfortably with the structure of the poetic prose of Ugarit."*

- **Grammar and Syntax:** Ugaritic has enhanced the understanding of Hebrew grammar and syntax.
- **Rare Words:** It has illuminated the meanings of rare or hapax legomena (words occurring only once) in Hebrew.
- *"It has been of tremendous value for the study of Old Testament syntax, Hebrew grammar, and hapax legomena."*
- **Canaanite Religion:** Ugaritic texts are the primary source for understanding Canaanite religion, their gods, beliefs, and practices. While the Old Testament states the Canaanite religion was bad, Ugarit provides context.
- *"...virtually everything that we know of consequence about Canaanite religion, we know from Ugarit...But we don't really know much about Canaanite theology from the Old Testament. We just know it was sinful...now we know what theology characterized Canaanite religious thought."*
- **Caution about Pan-Ugariticism:** The immense value of Ugarit led to a period where the entire Old Testament was interpreted through the lens of Ugaritic findings, leading to some errors.

III. The Period of Judges and the Rise of the Monarchy:

- **The Book of Judges as a Depressing Account:** The Book of Judges is described as a depressing book, not a time of national unity but rather a chaotic period.
- *"And when you read Judges, it is a depressing book...It's a book that's designed to tell us that things are really bad."*
- **Lack of National Unity:** Archaeology indicates the Israelites were not a nation but a collection of tribes with frequent conflict. The only time the tribes united was for a civil war against the tribe of Benjamin.
- *"What we see in judges, guys, is that they weren't a nation. There's only one time in the book of Judges when the people of Israel joined together completely, and that's to kill one another."*
- **Poverty and Chaos:** The period was marked by agricultural hardship, a lack of monumental structures, and political disarray, likely influenced by the Sea Peoples Movement.

- **The "Judges" as Leaders:** The term "judges" is a misnomer, as they were leaders, but not a defined political office. The book's actual title in Hebrew tradition is "It came about after the death of Joshua". Their role was primarily to deliver Israel from their enemies.
- *"...in the book of Judges, not one of the judges is ever called a judge...Instead, I have a suspicion that the way Israel was being ruled was not by the office of someone called a judge. Israel was being ruled by tribal elders."*
- **Tribalism as a Governing Principle:** The period was governed by tribalism, with a lack of cohesive national administration. There seems to be no single "judge" position, but rather local tribal leaders.
- **Rejection of Theocracy Model:** Dr. Fowler rejects the idea that the period of Judges is an ideal theocracy, as it is often portrayed. He argues that God was always the ruler and that the period of Judges is chaotic, not ideal.
- *"...what Judges is doing, in my judgment, in part...Judges is showing what happens when you are unwilling to follow the leaders that God raises up...Contrary to a few authors, Judges is not an ideal time, it's a time of great tragedy."*
- **Anarchy as a More Fitting Descriptor:** Dr. Fowler proposes that "anarchy" better describes this period due to the lack of leadership, religious apostasy, and societal chaos.
- *"It's not a theocracy, and it's certainly not a monarchy, but it is a period of anarchy."*
- **Judges as an Ellipsis:** The period of the Judges is presented as an ellipsis between the leadership of Moses and Joshua and the rise of the Israelite Monarchy, a time of deviation from the divine will.
- **God's Grace Despite Apostasy:** Despite constant sin and apostasy by the Israelites, God consistently shows grace by raising up deliverers, even though the people never truly repent. The entire book is considered a demonstration of God's grace despite the people's flaws.
- *"...what the book is showing us is that God will persevere to get them to the place where God can accomplish his desire for them."*
- **Purpose of the Period:** The chaotic period was ultimately to prepare Israel for the establishment of the Monarchy and godly kings such as David.

Conclusion:

This lecture lays out a compelling case for understanding the Philistines and Ugarit within their historical contexts, highlighting their importance in understanding the Old Testament. It also challenges traditional views of the period of Judges, portraying it not as an ideal theocracy, but as a chaotic time of tribalism, religious apostasy, and a lack of national unity, setting the stage for the Israelite monarchy.

This information is crucial for understanding the complex historical and religious backdrop of the Old Testament narrative.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 15, People Groups, Rise of the Monarchy

Old Testament Backgrounds: Philistines, Ugarit, and the Rise of the Monarchy

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why did the Egyptians settle the Philistines in the Pentapolis (Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron) and other strategic locations?
2. What cultural elements made the Philistines distinct from the Semitic peoples of the region?
3. What was the Philistines' military advantage over the Israelites?
4. How was the city of Ugarit discovered, and why is it considered a valuable archaeological site?
5. What was the significance of the Ugaritic language and its texts for Hebrew Bible studies?
6. What is "hapax legomena" and why is it important in the study of the Hebrew Bible?
7. According to the lecture, how has Ugaritic literature influenced the understanding of Hebrew poetry?
8. What was the state of the Israelite people during the period of the Judges, according to the lecture and archaeological findings?
9. What reasons are given in the lecture for why God may not have raised a leader to succeed Joshua?
10. What does the lecturer argue about the nature of the period of the Judges? Was it a theocracy?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Egyptians settled the Philistines in strategic locations, including the Pentapolis, as vassals to protect their land bridge from other powers, particularly Semites. They sought to create a buffer zone with strong Aegean warriors in locations that would guard against invasion.

2. The Philistines were culturally distinct due to their Aegean origins, which was evident in their pottery, burial patterns using anthropoid clay coffins, and superior craftsmanship. These differed significantly from the Semitic cultures of the region.
3. The Philistines held a military advantage due to their monopoly on iron technology, allowing them to create superior iron weapons. This gave them an edge over the Israelites and other peoples who did not possess the technology.
4. Ugarit was discovered accidentally when a local farmer's plow uncovered an artifact. The city's location as a trade hub made it a significant site for its diverse literary texts.
5. The Ugaritic language, being a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, provides invaluable insights into Hebrew grammar, syntax, and understanding rare words or phrases (hapax legomena). The texts also shed light on Canaanite religion.
6. "Hapax legomena" refers to words that appear only once in a written text. They are important in studying the Hebrew Bible because Ugaritic texts and similar language studies can help determine their meaning.
7. Ugaritic literature, with its poetic prose, revealed a structural alignment with Hebrew poetry. This has lead scholars to largely abandon alterations of the Hebrew text to try to match it to Greek poetic structures.
8. According to the lecture, during the period of the Judges, the Israelites were not a unified nation but a collection of tribes marked by internal strife and religious apostasy. There is little evidence of monumental structures or prosperity.
9. The lecture suggests that God may not have raised a successor to Joshua because the Israelites demonstrated a consistent unwillingness to follow the leaders God had provided. This was demonstrated through the Israelites' actions with both Moses and Joshua.
10. The lecturer argues that the period of Judges was not a unique theocracy. He argues that the word theocracy is not biblical. He posits that the period was characterized by anarchy, marked by religious apostasy, national dissolution, and the absence of cohesive leadership.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the impact of the Sea Peoples movement on the socio-political landscape of the ancient Near East, focusing on the Philistines' role and the period of the Judges.
2. Compare and contrast the cultural and religious practices of the Philistines and the Israelites, highlighting the impact of their interactions on the course of early Israelite history.
3. Analyze the significance of the archaeological discoveries at Ugarit for the understanding of the Hebrew Bible. How did these discoveries change the way biblical scholars viewed the text?
4. Critically evaluate the arguments presented in the lecture regarding the period of the Judges. Was it a theocracy, a period of anarchy, or something else? Support your position with evidence from the lecture.
5. Explore the role of divine sovereignty and human agency in the Book of Judges. How does the recurring cycle of sin, oppression, cry for help, and deliverance demonstrate God's character and intentions for Israel?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Aegeans:** People from the Aegean Sea region, including the Philistines.
- **Anthropoid Clay Coffins:** Clay coffins shaped like humans, used by the Philistines for burial.
- **Canaanites:** Inhabitants of the land of Canaan, often in conflict with the Israelites in the Bible.
- **Cuneiform:** A system of writing using wedge-shaped characters, used in ancient Mesopotamia and Ugarit.
- **Hapax Legomena:** Words that appear only once in a written text, often posing challenges for interpretation.
- **Hesed:** A Hebrew word often translated as "grace" or "loving-kindness," significant in covenant theology.
- **Hyksos:** An ancient people group who gained control of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period.

- **Iron Smelting:** The process of melting iron to make tools and weapons, a technology mastered by the Philistines.
- **Judges:** A period in Israelite history after the death of Joshua and before the monarchy, marked by tribal leadership and frequent apostasy.
- **Monopoly:** The exclusive control over a supply or trade in a commodity or service.
- **Pentapolis:** The five major cities of the Philistines: Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.
- **Philistines:** An Aegean people group who settled in the coastal areas of Canaan, frequently in conflict with the Israelites.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God; literally "rule by God."
- **Torah:** The Hebrew word for "law" or "teaching," referring to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Ugarit:** An ancient city-state located in modern-day Syria, known for its rich collection of texts, including religious and literary texts.
- **Vassal:** A subordinate state that is obligated to support a more powerful state.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 15, People Groups, Rise of the Monarchy, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Philistines, Ugarit, and the Period of the Judges

- **How did the Philistines become so prominent in the Biblical narrative, given they were part of a much larger migration?**
- The Philistines, though a small fraction of the larger "Sea Peoples Movement," became prominent because of their strategic settlement and military power. The Egyptians, seeking to protect their land bridge to the Middle East, strategically placed these Aegean warriors in five cities (Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron) along the coast, as well as other critical points further inland. This allowed the Philistines to become a significant force and thus a frequent antagonist to the Israelites, leading to many interactions that are recorded in the Old Testament.
- **What made the Philistines such formidable opponents to the Israelites?**
- The Philistines possessed a significant technological advantage: they held a monopoly on iron smelting. This allowed them to create iron weapons, superior to the bronze tools and weapons of the Canaanites and Israelites. This technological edge, combined with their warrior culture, made them a dominant military force in the region.
- **What is the significance of Ugarit for biblical studies?**
- Ugarit, an ancient city discovered in the early 20th century, has proven to be incredibly significant for biblical studies for several reasons. First, the Ugaritic language is a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, offering insights into its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Secondly, the abundant textual discoveries at Ugarit, including a variety of tablets, have illuminated Canaanite culture and religion, providing a crucial backdrop for understanding the Old Testament's perspective on those elements of ancient life. Ugaritic texts contain poetic forms very similar to those found in Hebrew psalms and other Hebrew poetry, which has helped scholars better understand the form of Hebrew poetry, and understand rare and unusual words in the Hebrew Bible.

- **How has the discovery of Ugarit changed our understanding of Hebrew poetry?**
- Before the discovery of Ugarit, scholars often attempted to force Hebrew poetic structures into Greek literary patterns, assuming the Hebrew text was corrupted. However, the poetic texts of Ugarit revealed striking similarities to Hebrew poetic structures, demonstrating that Hebrew poetry should be read in its own original context, rather than being forced into another tradition. This has led scholars to accept the integrity of the Hebrew text and has revolutionized the interpretation of Hebrew poetry.
- **How has Ugarit helped us understand the Hebrew Bible?**
- Ugarit has been incredibly significant for understanding the Hebrew Bible in a variety of ways. The Ugaritic language is closely related to Hebrew, and has helped provide better translations of unknown words in the Hebrew Bible, known as *hapax legomena*. The Ugaritic language is similar in grammar and syntax, helping to translate texts more clearly, but also the texts of Ugarit have illuminated the religious and cultural backgrounds of the Canaanites, giving readers a much clearer understanding of the challenges faced by the Israelites in the Old Testament. Ugarit has allowed for a better understanding of Hebrew poetry, and revealed important cultural and religious practices that allow for clearer interpretations of the Bible, especially the Old Testament.
- **How does the period of the Judges contrast with the periods before and after it in Israel's history?**
- The period of the Judges, which followed the death of Joshua, contrasts sharply with both the leadership of Moses and Joshua and the later United Monarchy under kings like David and Solomon. Under Moses and Joshua, there was central leadership and a focus on keeping the law of God, as well as some notable military successes. The Judges period, however, was marked by a lack of unified national leadership, frequent apostasy, and societal chaos. Rather than a unified nation, it was primarily a time of loose tribal confederation, as demonstrated by a significant lack of cooperation between tribes. Additionally, the period was also marked by significant religious apostasy. It should be seen as a period in between other important periods of leadership, a period in which divine will was actively disobeyed.

- **Why is the term "judges" potentially misleading for this period in Israel's history?**
- The term "judges" is somewhat misleading because, unlike a specific political office, the leaders during this time, while they were seen as deliverers from enemy forces, did not have a consistent and continuous office in the way that the word *judge* is commonly understood. The leaders are not even called *judges* in the Hebrew text. Their actions were primarily to deliver Israel from their enemies. The book of Judges seems to be less about a specific political office, and more about the lack of national cohesion and the actions of tribal leaders. The term "judges" was used by the Greek translation of the Old Testament, or Septuagint, rather than a term from the Hebrew text, as is common for Old Testament books.
- **What is the significance of the repeated cycles of sin, oppression, cry for help, and deliverance in the Book of Judges, and does that mean that the period of Judges was an ideal period of theocracy?**
- The repeated cycle of sin, oppression, crying for help, and deliverance in Judges showcases both Israel's consistent apostasy and God's unwavering commitment to his covenant. This pattern highlights the people's inability to stay faithful and their continued need for God's grace, even while they do not repent of their sins. It makes it clear that this was not a period of ideal theocracy, but rather of chaos and anarchy. The lack of adherence to divine will and the lack of unity make the period far from ideal. God shows grace by rescuing the people despite their lack of repentance. The period reveals a broken and chaotic time, but also demonstrates God's grace and perseverance to bring about His ultimate will.