

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 16, Theology of Kingship 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 16, Theology of Kingship, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on Old Testament kingship argues that kingship, far from being inherently negative, was a crucial part of God's plan, fulfilling promises made to Abraham. The lecture analyzes the transition from the period of Judges to the monarchy, highlighting the Israelites' flawed request for a king "like all the other nations" in 1 Samuel 8. Fowler contrasts this with God's intention for a king who would serve God faithfully, ultimately culminating in Jesus Christ. He examines the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, using Solomon's rule as a case study of the dangers of imitating surrounding kingdoms. The lecture concludes by asserting that the failures of the Israelite monarchy demonstrate the importance of understanding kingship within its ancient Near Eastern context and God's overarching plan.

2. 24 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 16 – 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
16.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 16, Theology of Kingship

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on the Theology of Kingship:

Briefing Document: Theology of Kingship in the Old Testament

Overall Theme: Dr. Fowler argues that kingship is a crucial element of God's divine plan, not a concession to human weakness. He emphasizes that a proper understanding of ancient Near Eastern kingship sheds light on the biblical text and clarifies common misconceptions surrounding the establishment of monarchy in Israel.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. Kingship as Divine Fulfillment, Not a "Second Choice":

- Fowler challenges the common view that kingship in Israel, specifically the request for a king in 1 Samuel 8, was a sinful deviation from God's plan. He states that the narrative of the historical books, "has been moving us toward the concept of kingship as divine fulfillment."
- He posits that kingship is an essential component of God's plan for humanity, tracing its origins back to the Garden of Eden. He states, "Kingship is an essential part of God's plan, going right back to the Garden."
- He emphasizes that kingship is part of God's promise to Abraham, where God promised that "kings would come forth from him [Abraham]".
- He posits that the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants are all connected and find their continuation and fulfillment in the New Covenant.

1. Critique of the Period of the Judges:

- Fowler explains that the Book of Judges is not an ideal theocracy. Rather, it illustrates the consequences of two main issues: the lack of a king and the people's stiff-necked nature which lead to anarchy. He says, "When there is no king, then everyone does what's right...[which] resulted in anarchy."
- He identifies a third problem: "the problem that you have when the king that you do have is a bad king when he is someone who does not promote law and follow it and obey it and serve God."

- He suggests that the chaotic state of affairs in Judges sets the stage for the desire for a king in 1 Samuel.

1. **Ancient Near Eastern Understanding of Kingship:**

- He explains that in the ancient Near East, the king was viewed as a unique servant of the gods, ruling on their behalf. Fowler states, “the king is the unique servant of God. And that he is to rule on behalf of the God... and he is to be a sacral being because he's serving the deities.”
- This understanding contrasts sharply with the idea of kingship as a mere earthly institution. Fowler states that “kingship was universally thought of in positive terms...because kings in the ancient Near East were seen to be men whom the gods had chosen.”
- He uses this ancient understanding to frame how kingship is interpreted in the bible, where the king is really a “substitute for God.”

1. **The Abrahamic Covenant and its Importance:**

- Fowler highlights the Abrahamic covenant as foundational for understanding the entire Bible. He says, “the promises of the Abrahamic covenant give great cohesion to the rest of the entire Bible.”
- He identifies four key promises made to Abraham: numerous descendants, land, a blessing to the nations, and kingship.
- He argues that these promises are carried through subsequent covenants (Sinaitic, Davidic, and the New Covenant), expanding the reach and meaning of the initial promises.

1. **The Sinful Request in 1 Samuel 8:**

- Fowler clarifies that the sinfulness in the request for a king is not because kingship itself was bad, but because the Israelites asked for “a king like all the other nations.”
- This request demonstrates a desire to be like the pagan nations around them, rather than submitting to God’s leadership and being distinct. Fowler stresses, “What made their request sinful was less asking for a king and more asking for a king like all the other nations.”
- He notes that the corruption within Samuel’s sons was also a factor that drove the request for a king by the elders of Israel.

- He points out that God agrees to the request for a king, because “kingship is essential for God to keep his promises to Abraham.”

1. **The Corruption of the Priesthood in 1 Samuel:**

- The lecture highlights the dire situation prior to the request for a king.
- The tabernacle and the priesthood were corrupt. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, are engaging in sexual activity in the Tabernacle with women who came to worship, and are using the Ark of the Covenant as a pagan totem in war.
- The text implies that the problems of Israel are worse than the times of Judges. Fowler states, “the effect of what it's pointing out to us is... that things in 1 Samuel 1:1-3 are even worse than judges... the very tabernacle, the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, has been turned into a Canaanite religious sanctuary.”
- This corruption further justifies the need for leadership change in Israel.

1. **Warnings about Kingship Like the Other Nations (1 Samuel 8):**

- Samuel warns the Israelites about the negative consequences of having a king like all the other nations.
- These consequences include the creation of a standing army, confiscation of land, heavy taxation, and the imposition of corvée labor (forced labor).
- Fowler highlights that these are the things that pagan kings of the ancient Near East would do.

1. **The United Monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon):**

- Fowler briefly introduces the period of the United Monarchy as a “golden period in Israelite history” where Israel reached its greatest extent.
- He describes how the reign of the first three kings are “presented in the biblical text almost as if they fulfill God's promises to Abraham.”

1. **Solomon as a Model of Kingship Gone Wrong:**

- Fowler details how Solomon’s rule was characterized by violations of the ideal kingship. Fowler states, “Solomon is pictured as the quintessential king like all the other nations.”
- These violations included political alliances with foreign nations through marriage, religious syncretism, gerrymandering of the 12 administrative districts,

a proliferation of state bureaucracy, lavish building projects with forced labor, influx of pagan ideology and international trade, and the revolt of satellite states.

- Fowler states that, "It became not kingship but kingship like all the other nations. Therein was simply the transfer of tribalism as a bureaucratic phenomenon that doesn't work to kingship as a bureaucratic phenomenon that doesn't work."
- Ultimately, Solomon's kingdom fell apart in the same way as other over-centralized kingdoms did.

Quotes:

- "Kingship is an essential part of God's plan, going right back to the Garden."
- "When there is no king, then everyone does what's right...[which] resulted in anarchy."
- "the king is the unique servant of God. And that he is to rule on behalf of the God... and he is to be a sacral being because he's serving the deities."
- "the promises of the Abrahamic covenant give great cohesion to the rest of the entire Bible."
- "What made their request sinful was less asking for a king and more asking for a king like all the other nations."
- "the effect of what it's pointing out to us is... that things in 1 Samuel 1:1-3 are even worse than judges... the very tabernacle, the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, has been turned into a Canaanite religious sanctuary."
- "kingship was universally thought of in positive terms...because kings in the ancient Near East were seen to be men whom the gods had chosen."
- "Solomon is pictured as the quintessential king like all the other nations."
- "It became not kingship but kingship like all the other nations. Therein was simply the transfer of tribalism as a bureaucratic phenomenon that doesn't work to kingship as a bureaucratic phenomenon that doesn't work."

Conclusion:

Dr. Fowler's lecture presents a nuanced perspective on kingship in the Old Testament. He argues that kingship is not inherently bad, but rather part of God's plan from the very beginning. The problem arises when the institution is modeled after the corrupt practices of other nations, instead of functioning as a reflection of God's righteous rule. Fowler frames the kingship in the bible as a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, culminating in the ultimate king, Jesus Christ. He also shows how kingship was a needed progression in Israel, since the time of the judges was corrupt and chaotic. The lecture underscores the need for understanding the historical and cultural context of the Old Testament to interpret the text correctly.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 16, Theology of Kingship

Theology of Kingship Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to the lecture, what is one of the main problems that the book of Judges highlights? The book of Judges demonstrates the chaos that results when there is no king in Israel, leading to a state of anarchy where everyone does what is right in their own eyes. It also highlights that the Israelites are a stiff-necked people who do not always follow leadership well.
2. How does the lecture describe the role of a king in the ancient Near East? In the ancient Near East, the king was viewed as a unique servant of the gods, ruling on their behalf and acting as a sacral figure. They were meant to promote law and order according to the will of their deity.
3. What are the four promises God made to Abraham, according to the lecture? God promised Abraham numerous descendants, land (from the Euphrates River to the Brook of Egypt), that his descendants would be a blessing to the nations, and that kings would come from him.
4. How does the lecture connect the Abrahamic covenant to later covenants? The Abrahamic covenant is seen as the foundational covenant whose promises are echoed and developed in subsequent covenants such as the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants, which focus on progeny, land, and kingship.
5. Why does the lecture suggest that Moses was the first king of Israel? The lecture proposes that Moses was the first king, a complex argument, and that there was a dynastic succession from Moses to Joshua, though this is interrupted by Israel's disobedience.
6. Why was the Israelites' request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 considered sinful? Their request was sinful not because kingship itself was bad, but because they asked for a king "like all the other nations." This meant they were rejecting God's unique kingship and desiring a king like the pagan nations around them.
7. What was the state of the Tabernacle during the time described in 1 Samuel 1-3? The Tabernacle was in a state of corruption. The high priest's sons engaged in

Canaanite sexual fertility practices and turned the Ark of the Covenant into a magical totem, reflecting a deep religious and ethical decline.

8. Describe the major issues with the actions of Hophni and Phinehas? Hophni and Phinehas engaged in Canaanite fertility practices within the tabernacle and treated the Ark of the Covenant as a magical totem, carrying it into battle instead of relying on God. This was worse than anything described in Judges.
9. What are the four ways Samuel warned the Israelites about kingship “like all the other nations”? Samuel warned the Israelites that a king would create a standing army, confiscate their land, impose heavy taxes, and force them to perform corvée labor.
10. According to the lecture, how did Solomon violate God’s ideal for kingship? Solomon violated the ideal by forming political alliances through marriage, practicing religious syncretism, realigning tribal territories, developing state bureaucracy, using slave labor, embracing pagan ideologies, and increasing taxation, thus creating kingship like all the other nations, which was what God warned against.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the theological argument that kingship is an essential part of God's plan, as presented in the lecture, and discuss the significance of connecting it to the Abrahamic covenant.
2. Compare and contrast the leadership styles and failures presented in the book of Judges with the corruption and problems in 1 Samuel 1-8. What does this comparison reveal about the need for a divinely appointed leader?
3. Discuss the complex relationship between Israel’s request for a king and God’s overall plan. In what ways is the request sinful, and in what ways does it align with God’s intentions?
4. Explore how the lecture uses Solomon’s reign as an example of kingship gone wrong. What specific actions led to the negative characterization of his rule, and how do these actions illustrate the dangers of kingship “like all the other nations”?

5. Explain how the lecture connects Old Testament concepts of kingship with the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament. How does the idea of a royal messiah fit into the theological framework of kingship outlined in this study guide?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Anarchy:** A state of disorder due to the absence or nonrecognition of authority, which is what results in Judges when “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”
- **Covenant:** A sacred agreement or pact, often between God and his people. The lecture focuses on the Abrahamic, Sinaitic (Mosaic), Davidic, and New Covenants.
- **Corvée Labor:** Forced, unpaid labor demanded by a ruler or state.
- **Dynastic Succession:** The passing of power and authority within a family, typically from father to son, which God established with David, but not Saul.
- **Syncretism:** The merging of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. In this context, it’s the intermixing of Hebrew religion with pagan Canaanite practices.
- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god, a form of government that the book of Judges is often mistaken for, according to the lecture.
- **Sacral:** Relating to religious or sacred rites and duties. The king, in the Ancient Near East, was viewed as a sacral being serving the gods.
- **Stiff-necked People:** A term used in the Old Testament to describe the Israelites, meaning obstinate and disobedient to God.
- **United Monarchy:** The period in Israel's history during which the kingdom was united under the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon.
- **Vassal:** A subordinate ruler or state that pays tribute to a more powerful one. In the context of the lecture, the earthly king of Israel is a vassal to God, the true king of Israel.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 16, Theology of Kingship, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Old Testament Kingship

1. **Why is the concept of kingship so important in the Old Testament?** The concept of kingship is crucial because it is central to God's plan, as seen from the promises made to Abraham. Kingship is not an afterthought or a concession to human weakness, but a key element in fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham. God's promises to Abraham included progeny, land, being a blessing to the nations, and kingship, all of which are progressively realized throughout the Old Testament narrative. Therefore, the establishment of kingship in Israel is portrayed as a step towards fulfilling God's divine plan.
2. **How does the book of Judges illustrate the need for a king?** The book of Judges demonstrates what happens in the absence of a righteous and effective leader. It highlights two main problems: firstly, without a king, everyone does what they see as right, leading to anarchy and chaos. Secondly, even when leaders (judges) are present, the Israelites are portrayed as being "stiff-necked," or disobedient to God and their leaders. The negative state of affairs in Judges underscores the necessity of a king who is obedient to God and upholds justice.
3. **Was the request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 inherently sinful?** While the request itself was not inherently sinful, the *motivation* behind it was. The Israelites desired a king "like all the other nations." This desire stemmed from a lack of faith and a rejection of God's direct rule. Instead of seeking divine guidance and relying on God to deliver them, they wanted a king who would look and act like the kings of the surrounding nations. Thus, it was not the desire for a king *per se* but their desire to be like the pagan nations that was sinful.

4. **What warnings did Samuel give about kingship, and what did they signify?**

Samuel warned the Israelites that a king "like all the other nations" would introduce a standing army with conscripted soldiers and a class of elite warriors. A king would confiscate land for his personal use and to reward his loyal servants. A king would impose heavy taxes to fund his administration and military. Lastly, a king would subject them to corvée labor, which is forced labor, for part of the year. All of these were standard practices in the ancient Near East but were against God's covenantal design. Samuel's warnings highlighted the dangers of adopting a pagan-style kingship, where the king had absolute power and was not accountable to God.

5. **What is the significance of the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic Covenants in relation to kingship?** The Abrahamic covenant promised land, progeny, blessing to nations, and kingship and served as the foundation for subsequent covenants. The Sinaitic covenant dealt with land and progeny. It was a reaffirmation of the promises to Abraham with the setting at Mount Sinai. The Davidic covenant, established through the line of David, promised dynastic succession. All of these covenants highlight the progressive fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, leading to the ultimate fulfillment of the kingship promise in Jesus. The Abrahamic covenant introduced the concept of kingship while the Davidic covenant established a royal line that anticipated the ultimate King.

6. **How did Solomon's reign exemplify the dangers of kingship "like all the other nations?"** Solomon's reign, though initially marked by prosperity, gradually devolved into a manifestation of kingship as practiced by the nations around Israel. This included forming political alliances through marriage, which led to the introduction of foreign religious practices; religious syncretism, which merged pagan and Hebrew religious practices; administrative restructuring that ignored tribal boundaries; the proliferation of a costly state bureaucracy; heavy taxes and conscription for building projects, requiring forced labor; and an influx of foreign ideologies through international trade. Solomon became the epitome of a king who focused on worldly power rather than on God's law, thereby embodying the dangers Samuel warned about.

7. **How does the New Testament fulfill the promises of kingship and other elements of the Abrahamic covenant?** The New Testament expands and fulfills the promises made to Abraham. The promise of progeny expands beyond Israel to include all believers worldwide. The promise of land is reinterpreted to include not just the physical land but also a heavenly home that Jesus prepares for his followers. The blessing to the nations comes to fruition as the Gospel spreads to all corners of the world. Kingship is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is presented as the ultimate King of Israel and the world, thus concluding and consummating God's promises to Abraham.
8. **What was the significance of the Tabernacle and its corruption in 1 Samuel?** The Tabernacle's centrality in 1 Samuel underscores the crucial nature of God's presence in Israel's life. However, the corruption of the priesthood, particularly through Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas, demonstrates that the priesthood could not resolve the nation's fundamental problems. These priests abused their sacred roles, turning the Tabernacle into a center for pagan practices. They treated the Ark of the Covenant as a magical object rather than a symbol of God's presence. This corruption, worse than the anarchy in Judges, demonstrated a need for both a more righteous leader and for the direct presence and rule of God himself which is later fulfilled by Jesus.