

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17, Kingship and ANE 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 17, Kingship and ANE, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on Old Testament backgrounds examines kingship in the Ancient Near East, contrasting the biblical portrayal with prevalent propaganda found in other ancient texts. He argues that **the biblical concept of kingship**, though often showing flaws in its human leaders like David and even Moses, reveals God's plan and is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The lecture further explores **the unique role of Moses**, proposing him as a key prototype of kingship and comparing his characteristics to those of other kings. Finally, the lecture **analyzes the rise of the Assyrian empire**, highlighting economic, psychological, ethnological, and geographical factors contributing to its dominance as a hyper-power in the Ancient Near East.

**2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17 – 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
17.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17, Kingship and ANE

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript by Dr. Donald Fowler on "Kingship in the Ancient Near East."

Briefing Document: Kingship in the Ancient Near East & the Old Testament

I. Overview:

Dr. Fowler's lecture challenges common interpretations of kingship in the Old Testament, arguing that it is a central and divinely intended concept, not simply a flawed human desire. He emphasizes that the biblical perspective on kingship differs dramatically from that of the Ancient Near East (ANE) and uses the figure of Moses as the true model of kingship, not David. The lecture also delves into the rise of Assyria as a "hyper-power" and its relationship to the unfolding of God's plan in the Old Testament.

II. Key Themes & Ideas:

A. Kingship as a Divine Concept: * **God's Promise and Integrity:** Kingship was part of God's promised blessing to Abraham, thus tied to God's integrity. It is not inherently bad; its failures stem from human flaws, not from the institution itself. * *"what we're trying to do is make the point that kingship is a subject area tied to God's integrity because God promised it as a blessing."* * **God's Chosen Means:** God chooses to work through kingship, though this will be interrupted during the exile. * *"kingship is the means by which God has chosen to work, but the time period will come when the promises that he made to Abraham won't be enforced because they'll be in exile."* * **Biblical vs. ANE Kingship:** Unlike ANE kingship, which was often driven by propaganda, biblical kingship is portrayed realistically, highlighting the flaws of even the greatest kings (e.g., David). * *"In the ancient Near Eastern perspective, virtually all literature was commissioned on behalf of the king. It was propaganda designed to convince the gods that the king was a good king... The biblical text does not contain pure propaganda."* * **Kingship Foreshadowed:** Kingship is not an afterthought. It is foreshadowed in the Abrahamic promises (Gen 17:6), reiterated to Jacob (Gen 35:11), and predicted for the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10). This counters the idea that the desire for a king in 1 Samuel 8 is solely a rejection of God. * **Moses as the True Model:** Dr. Fowler proposes that Moses, not David, is the real model of kingship in the Old Testament.

B. Moses as the Prototype of Kingship:

- * **Royal Call and Enablement:** Like kings of the ANE, Moses is divinely chosen, called, and enabled by the Spirit, as evidenced in Exodus 3-4, Numbers 11, and Deuteronomy 34:9. * *"He is divinely chosen, and the text goes on and on to make that point...Secondly, in Exodus 3-4, he is divinely called. That's a very important aspect of kingship, to be divinely called, both in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible."*
- * **Royal Symbols:** Moses' rod functions as a royal scepter, counteracting Pharaoh's authority. * *"Moses' rod is indeed a royal scepter and is the divine counterpart to Pharaoh's scepter."*
- * **Royal Titles and Actions:** Moses is described with royal terms: "God to Pharaoh," lawgiver, "king in Yeshurim", "faithful servant", and shepherd. His actions – leading, feeding, and herding – are also royal metaphors. * *"Moses is God to Pharaoh... Moses as lawgiver—well, there is hardly a more common royal metaphor than the king as lawgiver...Moses is pictured as my faithful servant."*
- * **Meekness as Royal:** The idea that Moses is meek does not diminish his royal status. Meekness is considered a known royal term in both the Bible and the ancient Near East. * *"when you study the word meek, it's a typical royal term, not only in the Bible but throughout the ancient Near East."*
- * **Intimate Relationship with God:** Moses' unique closeness to God makes him a prototype for how one should relate to God and be a king.
- * **High Standard & Failure:** Moses' failure, while seemingly small (hitting the rock twice), is a significant marker of his kingship. He is held to a high standard. This serves as a warning to all subsequent kings.

C. Hyper-Powers and God's Plan:

- * **Rise of Assyria:** Assyria is the first hyper-power, controlling the entire Fertile Crescent and beyond. Its rise is attributed to economic advantages (proximity to iron and timber), a unique worldview (war as religion), ethnological pressures (rivalry with Babylon and Aramea), and geographical exposure (needing to expand to achieve security). * *"Assyria is not just the first empire to rule the Fertile Crescent, it is that, but it is the world's first hyper-power."*
- * **God's Use of Hyper-Powers:** God uses these hyper-powers (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome) to further his plan for the world, despite their often violent and oppressive nature. * *"God will utilize, as we look at how we see history unfold before our eyes, God will use these hyper-powers to further what I would say is the divine plan for the whole world."*
- * **Israel's Small Size:** The contrast between Israel's small size and the vastness of these empires highlights God's power and ability to work through unexpected means. * *"How could God relate to such a massive military and political entity through this little 100-mile unit?"*
- * **Divine Plan:** Dr. Fowler stresses that God's plan is for the whole world (Genesis 12), not just Israel, even when Israel's perspective is myopic.

D. The Importance of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Context

* **ANE as Flashlight:** ANE material should be used as a light to illuminate the biblical text, rather than the foundation of biblical interpretation.

* _"I think of it more in terms of the ancient Near Eastern material being like a flashlight. It doesn't create the comparisons; it enables us to see the comparisons that are there." _

* **Missing Connector:** Dr. Fowler argues that the concept of kingship is a crucial connector for understanding the Hebrew narrative and a key revelatory metaphor for the being of God.

* _"I think kingship is indeed the single most important revelatory metaphor for the being of God." _

E. Failure of the Monarchy and Return to Tribalism: * **Solomon's Failure:** Solomon's reign marked a failure of kingship. * **Tribalism:** After Solomon's death, tribalism reasserted itself, leading to a divided monarchy. * **Assyria as a Threat:** The Assyrian empire quickly became the main threat to Israel, driving the policies of the Northern Kingdom.

III. Implications & Conclusion:

Dr. Fowler's analysis reframes the role of kingship within the Old Testament. It suggests that kingship itself was not a failure of God's plan, but a divinely intended mechanism that was corrupted through human failing. Moses is presented as a more accurate model of true kingship compared to David. The lecture also shows how God utilizes even the most powerful and seemingly cruel of empires to achieve his divine plan for the whole world. Understanding these ancient contexts, like the role of ANE kingship or the various hyper-powers, is crucial for a deeper appreciation of the biblical narrative.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17, Kingship and ANE

Kingship in the Ancient Near East: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does Dr. Fowler differentiate the biblical view of kingship from the typical Ancient Near Eastern view?
2. What is the significance of Melchizedek in the Genesis narrative regarding kingship?
3. What is the importance of Genesis 35:11 in the context of kingship?
4. According to Dr. Fowler, why is Moses a better model for kingship than David?
5. How does the role of the "rod" or "staff" connect to kingship in the example of Moses?
6. How is Moses a representation of God to Pharaoh?
7. Why does the speaker argue that meekness is a royal term?
8. What specific evidence suggests Moses was considered a king despite the lack of an explicit title?
9. What are the economic factors contributing to the rise of Assyria as a hyper-power?
10. How did the ethnological landscape surrounding Assyria contribute to its rise to power?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Fowler emphasizes that unlike the propaganda-driven kingship in the Ancient Near East, the Bible presents kings, even the greatest, as flawed individuals subject to God's judgment. The biblical narrative does not shy away from showing the failures of Israelite kings.
2. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, is a significant figure because he is identified as a king in the Genesis narrative and is also presented as a type of Christ in the New

Testament. His appearance suggests that kingship is important in God's plan from the beginning.

3. Genesis 35:11 reiterates God's promise of kingship to Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, confirming that God's intention was for kings to come from Abraham's lineage. This verse reinforces that kingship was part of God's plan and wasn't a later development with the establishment of the monarchy in Israel.
4. Dr. Fowler suggests that Moses is a better model for kingship because he embodies divine choice, divine calling, divine enabling, and has an intimate relationship with God. In contrast, even though David had great qualities, he was also tragically flawed in ways that undermine his kingship.
5. Moses' rod is not just a shepherd's staff, but also a royal scepter, a divine counterpart to Pharaoh's scepter, and is used to perform miracles. This demonstrates how God works through Moses' staff to affirm Moses' position as a leader and royal figure.
6. Moses acted as God to Pharaoh in that he was the representative of God, communicating God's will, and possessing authority delegated by God. Kingship was thought of as a representation of God in the ancient world.
7. Meekness, often misunderstood as weakness, is actually a term that has connotations of power under control. The Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts use it to describe rulers who are strong yet humble, acting in the best interests of the people.
8. Moses embodies several royal traits such as being divinely chosen, divinely called, divinely enabled, acting as a lawgiver, and being described with royal terms. Although not explicitly called "king," Deuteronomy 33:4-5 may refer to him as king and also numerous descriptions use royal language.
9. Assyria, despite not having great agricultural advantages, benefited from its proximity to iron deposits in Anatolia and timber resources which became the essential components of empire-building during the Iron Age. The decline of other economies in the south also gave Assyria a chance to rise.
10. Assyria was surrounded by people who were viewed as both religious and political threats that forced it to expand or be conquered by surrounding areas. This included Arameans to the west and a constant rivalry with Babylon to the south.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the concept of kingship in the Ancient Near East with the biblical understanding of kingship as presented in the lecture.
2. Analyze the significance of the passages in Genesis (1, 2, 14, 17, 35, and 49) in establishing the idea of kingship in the Old Testament narrative, especially before the formal establishment of the monarchy in Israel.
3. Assess Dr. Fowler's argument that Moses is a model for kingship, explaining both the strengths and potential weaknesses of his perspective.
4. Discuss the factors (economic, psychological, ethnological, and geographical) contributing to the rise of Assyria as a hyper-power, and analyze how these factors intersected.
5. Explain how Dr. Fowler uses the concept of a "hyper-power" as a means to interpret the flow of biblical history.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Ancient Near East (ANE):** A historical and geographical region encompassing the area of the modern Middle East, from Egypt to Iran, that is the context for understanding the Old Testament.
- **Hyper-power:** A term used in the lecture to describe an empire that has unprecedented political, military, and cultural influence and control over vast geographical regions.
- **Propaganda:** Information or material used to promote a particular political cause or point of view.
- **Mashach:** Hebrew word with a root meaning "to anoint," referring to a ritual act associated with the appointment of kings in Israel and is the basis for the name Moses.
- **Meekness:** In the context of kingship, a characteristic of a leader who has power under control and acts in the best interests of their people.
- **Yashar:** A Hebrew root word referring to "rightness or straightness." It is associated with justice and proper conduct in the Old Testament.

- **Hod:** A Hebrew word that signifies glory, splendor, and especially royal honor, often used in connection with kingship in the Old Testament.
- **Sea Peoples Movement:** A period of migrations and upheavals in the Eastern Mediterranean region that weakened existing powers, creating a power vacuum in which new empires rose.
- **Shepherd (as a metaphor for kingship):** A common Ancient Near Eastern metaphor for a king or leader who is supposed to guide, protect, and care for his people, similar to a shepherd caring for his flock.
- **Fertile Crescent:** A crescent-shaped region in the Middle East known for its fertile land, spanning from Mesopotamia to the Levant.
- **Assyria:** An ancient Mesopotamian kingdom that rose to become the first hyper-power.
- **Neo-Babylonian Empire:** A Mesopotamian empire succeeding the Assyrian Empire, led by Nebuchadnezzar.
- **Iron Age:** A historical period characterized by the widespread use of iron tools and weapons.
- **Ethnological:** Relating to the study of different peoples and cultures.
- **Subartu:** An ancient name for the region of Assyria proper.
- **Aramea:** The region west of Assyria and source of the Aramean kingdoms.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17, Kingship and ANE, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Kingship and Power in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East

1. **How does the biblical view of kingship differ from that of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures?**
2. While kingship was common in the Ancient Near East and often presented as propaganda to elevate the king and demonstrate their favor with the gods, the biblical perspective is radically different. The Bible does not shy away from depicting its kings, even the most revered like David, as flawed individuals with serious sins like adultery, murder, and deception. This contrasts with the propaganda found in other ancient literature. The Bible emphasizes that a king's worth is tied to his relationship with God and that any king who fails to align with God's theological propositions will face divine judgment. All Israelite kings are shown as failures in the text, underlining that the biblical view of kingship is not about human power but about covenant fidelity to God.
3. **Why does the lecture suggest Moses as a model of kingship, rather than David?**
4. While David is often seen as the ideal king, the lecture proposes Moses as the supreme example. Moses' life mirrors key elements of kingship: he is divinely chosen, called, and enabled, much like kings of the Ancient Near East, and he had a unique intimacy with God. He is also depicted using royal language and symbols, such as the rod as a scepter. Furthermore, he acts as a lawgiver and shepherd. The lecture argues that Moses is central for revealing the identity of Christ in the New Testament and suggests his actions and relationship with God are the true model, a king whose primary focus was always on God's will, not personal power.

5. **How does the lecture support the idea that kingship was part of God's plan from the beginning?**
6. The lecture argues that kingship was not an afterthought but a central element of God's plan from the start. It points to Genesis 1-2, where Adam and Eve are depicted in royal terms. It also highlights the mention of Melchizedek as a king in Genesis 14 and the promise of kings from Abraham in Genesis 17. Furthermore, God reiterates the promise of kingship to Jacob in Genesis 35 and explicitly predicts kingship for the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49. Even the book of Judges suggests that the lack of kingship was part of Israel's problems, further suggesting that God intended a form of kingship for his people. Thus, these passages indicate kingship was central to God's unfolding narrative from the beginning.
7. **How is the concept of "meekness" related to kingship in the biblical text?**

The lecture challenges the common perception that "meekness" is the opposite of kingly behavior. Rather, it posits that the concept of "meekness" was a well-known royal term in the Ancient Near East as well as the Bible. When used to describe a king, "meekness" signifies a righteous leader who does not wield power for selfish purposes, but for the good of their people. This is shown by the description of Moses as meek. This perspective is also exemplified in Messianic prophecies such as Psalm 45 and Zechariah 9:9, where the king is depicted as meek. Thus, meekness is not weakness but a form of powerful and just leadership.

1. **How does the lecture explain the failures of even the greatest kings in the Bible, like Moses?**
2. The lecture highlights that even the greatest of biblical leaders, like Moses, are shown to have failures. These failures are not presented as propaganda to diminish their reputation, but rather to emphasize that no human king can attain perfection. Moses' inability to enter the promised land after striking a rock is attributed to a misuse of his rod, a symbol of kingship. This act demonstrates that even kings are held to a high standard and face consequences for abusing their authority, even once. These failures are designed to demonstrate that the true fulfillment of God's promises cannot come through any human king, but only through the Messiah.

3. **What are the economic, psychological, ethnological, and geographical factors that led to the rise of Assyria as a hyper-power?**
4. The lecture posits that several factors contributed to Assyria's rise. Economically, Assyria was near sources of iron and timber, giving it a strategic advantage over others weakened by soil depletion. Psychologically, Assyrians had a unique culture that viewed war as a religious act, leading to constant expansion. Ethnologically, Assyria was surrounded by rival political entities, such as Babylon to the south and Aramean kingdoms to the west, which created a "conquer or be conquered" situation. Geographically, Assyria's exposed position at the northern edge of the Mesopotamian basin required it to expand its borders in all directions to ensure its own safety and survival.
5. **How did the Sea People's Movement contribute to the rise of both Israel and Assyria?**

The lecture proposes that the Sea People's Movement, by destabilizing the region and causing the collapse of existing major powers, created a power vacuum. This allowed both Israel and Assyria to emerge as significant powers. For Israel, this meant an opportunity to settle in their land without as much political opposition, while for Assyria, the absence of powerful neighbors in all directions allowed them to expand and become the first hyper-power of the region. Thus, the disruption of existing powers due to the Sea People's movement created a new context for these new powers to take root.

1. **How does the lecture view the importance of understanding the Ancient Near East in the study of the Bible?**
2. The lecture emphasizes that the Ancient Near Eastern context should not be seen as a foundation but rather as a "flashlight" for understanding the Bible. It argues that the historical and cultural background can illuminate the biblical text, making comparisons and seeing themes more clearly. However, the ultimate foundation of the biblical narrative remains the revelation of God himself. Ancient Near East context is not about reinterpreting the scriptures based on other cultures but using external material to understand biblical claims more completely.