

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 3, Development of Cultural Essentials: Writing and Kingship

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This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 3, Development of Cultural Essentials, Writing and Kingship.

Well, I'm welcoming you back. In your mind, you perhaps haven't gone anywhere, but I have. And we're back to finish some comments on the topography. In a course like this, I have to speak in generalizations because I don't have a lot of time to develop things scholarly into areas and ways that are conclusive.

But in Genesis 1 and 2, when God created Adam and Eve and the ground on which they lived, he put them in charge of it. In a theological sense, it wasn't their ground, it was God's. And they were his representatives who were charged to take care of God's ground.

That has transferred into today's world in subject areas that we could call ecology. I would like to touch on something that I think is ecological: the condition of this land that God gave his people.

For millennia, the land that God was giving to Israel started out in one condition and ended up in quite another. So, here's where my thoughts are going as we get ready to leave the topography. The Bible speaks proverbially.

It's actually a Canaanite proverb: a land flowing with milk and honey. We have that phrase outside the Bible, and it describes the land in glowing terms.

And today, if you follow my advice and figure out ways to get to Israel and you go there, you might find yourself just shocked at how it doesn't look like it's flowing with milk and honey. You can find sections of the central hill country where you're driving along and it's just literally bare rock. And how can anything even grow there? So, I'd like to suggest to you what has turned it from being such a desirable place to a place that now has to be rebuilt.

The Israelis are doing a great job in this. Israel sits on a gigantic limestone dome, which means that the soil itself has a high mineral content directly connected to that limestone dome.

At some time after the flood, when things began to grow, maybe that dome was there before the flood, maybe not. We have no way of knowing for sure. But in the early years, that was an area covered with trees.

By Solomon's time, much of that land had been deforested. What they didn't know was that root activity was essential to keeping the soil from calcifying. Cutting down the trees and vegetation had enormous implications for the ground.

If I've spelled it correctly, there's a technical word for it: marl. This calcification produced a very hard rock-like cover that had once been topsoil.

I will never forget the first trip I made back in the 1970s when I had that experience of looking at this ground and wondering why anybody would fight over it. You could drive for 10 miles and never see anything growing. It was just astounding.

What happened in antiquity is the creation of this thick layer of marl, which I saw for the first time, to my amazement, in Jerusalem. I was there, and I happened to see a bulldozer working the ground, so I assumed that I was looking at bedrock. I wasn't.

I was looking at the top of the layer of marl. And this dozer began to move that ground, and to my amazement, the marl was so thick, and the bulldozer was scraping off the top of that marl. And then underneath that was the proverbial terra rosa, the red soil of this country.

When the tree roots were removed, that led to the development of this marl, and it was the loss of fertility. As a matter of fact, when I would watch the Israelis, you'd be driving along, and you'd just see, as far as the eye could see, just bare rock. And then all of a sudden, we'd see forests.

Well, what had happened is that the Israelis were trying to reclaim the land, and by drilling holes through the marl, they would plant young trees, and then those young trees would be breaking up the marl and recreating soil. So, the failure to take care, of course, the ancients did not understand this at all, but by cutting down the trees, they were doing substantial harm to the soil properties. And of course, then also, without the trees or some root formation to sustain the soil, then the soil ultimately would wind up not in its original location, which would be on the top of hills, but being washed away to the bottom.

At one time, this whole central hill country region was terraced, and there were large crop possibilities for this soil. But then, in post-biblical times, this terraced soil, the terraces broke down because of the loss of humans to take care of them. And so, all of that led to the tragedy of greatly hindering what God had created.

And to the Israelis, this is not just farmland that they want to farm; it's their homeland, and they're doing what they can to recover it. And it's an encouraging thing. So, when you go there, do be reminded that what was originally land flowing with milk and honey is being recaptured.

It's just going to take a very long time to do it. All right, with that comment, I can move us along then to where we're heading next in our thoughts and in our notes. And by the way, this is a picture that you have in front of you of the terrain around the ziggurat at Uruk in southern Iraq.

And you can get a good picture of, at one time, this whole region would have been just green, surrounded by fields. And when you look at the area around the ziggurat, as you can see, it looks like the moonscape. And this, of course, is what happened with salinization of soil in Mesopotamia.

So human beings have been hard on the land. At any rate, this period that we've been talking about is dedicated to topography. We're going to look at the proto-literate period very quickly, which is the first writing period, 3400 to 29.

And what we just want to talk about is the development of new technologies that are directly tied to urbanization. You know, human beings are smarter than rocks. Now, sometimes you'd never know it because of how we treat the land.

But in fact, these urban centers, as the populations grew, this necessitated technologies that led to important new growth factors. New types of pottery, a fast potter's wheel, the cylinder seal, monumental architecture, stone sculpture, and above all, writing. This happened in a relatively condensed period of time.

And so how was this to be explained? And so some people would try to explain this on the basis of there must have been new migration of people into Mesopotamia. Others have pointed out that more than likely, this is just a development of technology that is need necessitated. And so whatever the explanation, the impetus for this development comes from an amazing people who are called Sumerians.

This is a word that appears in the Bible. They're called Sumerians, but sometimes they're also called the land of Shinar. And Shinar is a kind of Hebrew corruption of the word Sumer.

These were just remarkable people in the south. And we know that the Mesopotamian region had multiple ethnicities. Largely, the Sumerians controlled the south.

The central and northern sections were controlled by people called Semites. We know that there were other population groups there because we have cities named

that are neither Sumerian nor Semitic. At any rate, these Sumerians are the ones to whom this region owes its greatest debt.

Their contributions, even when not original, brought technical skills to a level not heretofore reached. The older work is by Samuel Noah Kramer. The Sumerians, as you can see from the date, 1963, that's heavily dated.

And there, of course, is much better things that can be read today. But this led to monumental architecture, which was the ziggurat. And here's a picture of the earliest ziggurat at Urk, how we think it looked.

But ziggurats are connected to temples. In its long history, the temple was a unique institution for which there is no exact counterpart. At a later date, the temple, which was a helpful source for the king's military, it fields archers, cavalry, and chariot crews, which fought as a unit on behalf of the king's professional army.

Its military could accompany the king, guard temple precincts, do police work, and protect laborers. In other words, the monumental architecture around which Mesopotamian culture originated was the temple or the ziggurat, which was associated with it. There's not a lot that I can do to correlate this to anything in the modern world, except to say that there was a symbiotic relationship between the cult, that is, temple structures, and the court, that is, the royal palace, that is both intimate and interreliant.

One wonders how much of this highly structured but indigenous religious, social phenomena can be replicated in the highly organized state of the Old Testament pictures on behalf of Solomon. But my point is asking us to consider this monumental architecture called the ziggurat, which was also connected to the temple. Ziggurats represent the earliest human effort to build multi-storied structures.

And to do that, then, you would have to construct bricks. This is a fascinating phenomenon because you would think that brick formation was a simple idea. Once you caught on to this, you would have thought that it would have happened quickly.

But in fact, I only cite it to you to show you mud brick technology is a phenomenon that covers thousands of years in Mesopotamia. So, here's what we'll point out. Mudbrick technology is a story all to its own, and we won't spend a lot of time on this.

What we do know is, to our utter amazement, the first bricks were not squared or rectangular. They were shaped like loaves of bread. And then positioned on top of one another in ways that, to you and me, just look completely counterintuitive.

These bricks could never have a structure that was firm or secure without substantial caulking. C-A-U-L-K, caulking. And that, of course, is exactly what happened.

They had to come up with serious caulking agencies in order to make a building built from these oval bricks work. And so, I'll talk about that caulking in a little bit. But secondly, even when they caught on to the insufficiency of these mud-shaped bricks, it still took hundreds of years of technological development so that they created bricks that were flat on one side, and as you can see in the second case, rounded on the top.

This is just a truly amazing technology that, all told, took nearly two millennia to go from the oval-shaped bricks on the top to the rectangular-shaped bricks that are listed as number five. All of this was something that took several thousand years to develop, and so we ask ourselves, how could it possibly have taken two thousand years to go from an oval-shaped brick to a rectangular brick? The answer to that is neither obvious nor certain. In Mesopotamia, you can think about history as something that goes like this.

In Mesopotamia, centuries are like nickels. You can just flip one with the end of your finger. It appears that the reason why this oval-shaped technology worked for so long is because it was the first thing they thought of, and in a culture as conservative as theirs, it continued for 1,500 years.

Then, when they caught on to the idea of making bricks that were flat on one side, it still took several hundred years to get to the rectangular bricks that they would have thought of first. This is fascinating, the development of mud brick technology. I guess it would be something like this.

These bricks were made by human hands, and it was much easier to make bricks in the shape of opaque surfaces than it was to make them squared with human hands. As a matter of fact, it was not until about 2200 BC that they caught on to the idea of mass-producing bricks by creating a wooden form. Six bricks at a time could be because they didn't have any wood.

They had to import wood in order to have wooden forms, but they then mass-produced these bricks, and then because they were not made with hands but were conformed to these wooden forms, it made sense to go to bricks. The interesting thing about Genesis to me is that the book of Genesis remembers part of this technology. When we go back to what would be arguably the most famous tower in human history, the Tower of Babel, it records this phenomenon.

So, if you would like to open your Bible to the book of Genesis, I think I can show you this story in Genesis chapter 11. It tells us this about early humanity. In Genesis 11, the whole earth used the same language and the same words.

And it came about as they journeyed east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar. That would be Sumer. And they settled there.

And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. Now, what this tells us is that the brick technology of Genesis 11 is not the earliest brick technology because they didn't invent the kiln until about 2200 BC. So the tower isn't the first tower, it isn't the first large structure, but it's the one that will result in the world's first true tower.

So, the text tells us that they used brick for stone and they used tar for mortar. Well, it's just fascinating to me that somehow Moses got his hands on this kind of information because there is no tar to be found anywhere in the promised land, but tar can be found in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. And so, what they did in this early formation of oval-shaped bricks is they combined for a caulking agency, mud, straw, and tar by tumen.

They put those three together and used them to caulk for a thousand-plus years. These ungainly structures were built around oval-shaped bricks. So that by the time we get to the Tower of Babel, whenever that was, they were using these and almost certainly this was not at the very beginning of the Mesopotamian experience, but somewhere after that. And so, they said, let us build a tower and then they said, let us build for ourselves a city in a tower whose top will reach into heaven.

Okay, so Genesis is reflecting a stage in mud brick technology that the Bible knew about. It knew about when they had to use tar to caulk the building of these first monumental structures which were the ziggurat temple structure. Later on, the Assyrians used stone because, in northern Assyria, they had access to limestone, whereas, in the central and southern parts, they didn't, so they just stuck with mud bricks.

It is fascinating because it gives us a picture that technology was developed slowly, but then when it began to speed up, it sped up quickly, and technology begets technology. And once they caught on to some basic ideas, then it really spread quickly. And so, this is called mud brick technology.

And so, it tells us that, no, the Egyptians didn't conceive of the idea of the pyramids and stone technology with help from aliens. As a matter of fact, you can trace the phenomena of learning how to use mud bricks, which then became stone bricks. And in the pyramids themselves, they actually copied the artistic work from these early technologies here.

So, technology developed slowly, but when it did develop, it really took off. So perhaps you might be interested in knowing that aliens were not responsible for the

brick technology that led to the building of these monumental architecture structures called ziggurats or temples. The next thing I wanted to talk with you about quickly is trade evidences.

The lack of some fundamental resources in Mesopotamia seemed to have been at the heart of long-distance trade from the very earliest. And trade led to the diffusion of writing. And writing is probably the single most important human achievement simply because it sped up the ability to share technology.

And so, once the idea of writing was conceived of in Mesopotamia, within one or two hundred years, it had diffused probably through trade to Egypt and, within a relatively short period of time, had made it into Eastern Asia all because writing was something that could be transferred quickly. So, the invention of writing and its development is a fascinating subject area. What we're talking about, then, is writing as we know it.

It's not impossible that Adam and Eve were gifted by God to know how to write. It's not impossible that Noah knew how to write. If indeed those people knew how to read and write, that technology was lost and re-found.

You can see the development of writing in what I call the first step of a pictogram. Now, I want to qualify this because I may or may not be right. There's a pun for you if you can enjoy it at this hour.

It may or may not have been the first step. Some people argue that writing did not develop as a pictogram but developed in economic counters that occurred in clay balls in which impressions were made on the outside of the clay ball, and then the things that made the impression were sealed inside the clay ball and that this led to the earliest forms of writing which would have been pictogram since those impressions in the clay ball, these balls were about the size of a softball, and the impressions that were made on the outside of those may have been the first attempts at writing. There's no way of really knowing.

What we can say is that in Mesopotamia they were writing on the one medium that they had limitless supply of, which was mud. And so, it's very difficult to be artistic like in Egypt where they were writing on papyri. They could be artistic.

They could have beautiful forms of writing. In Mesopotamia they were writing on mud and that does not lend itself to aesthetics. As you can see in this chart that I have copied out for you, the very earliest forms go back to roughly 3000; we now think it was about 3200 or maybe a little earlier.

As you can see, these are pictograms. And so, as you look at this, this one at the top here is a picture of a head and the body of a man. And since, therefore, if you

wanted to communicate some aesthetic idea of a human being, you could picture him just as the head then instead of the whole body.

And if, of course, you wanted to talk about the person doing something abstract like eating, then what you would do is you would draw the same human head with a pictographic bowl, and you could picture the human being as drinking or eating from a bowl. If, for example, you wanted to talk about a human being drinking, well, here's the picture of a river, which was pretty much the only kind of water that they had. And so as you can see the image of the river here, it's a picture of a river.

But if you wanted to talk about a human being drinking water from the river, then you can go to an abstract idea in which they drew the human head, and then they drew the river sign, and they put them together, and that means you're drinking water. So, pictogram was literally picture writing, but since it was in mud, then it was not particularly aesthetic. So, in order to quit drawing in mud, these pictograms evolved into something called cuneiform.

A cuneiform stylus is a triangular piece of wood carved out so that there are three sides to the triangle. They learned to make abstract or quasi-abstract pictographic signs. I think the one that you can see best is the one here for water.

As you can see, the pictogram looks like two rivers, just exactly the way that this looks over here on the left. So, the cuneiform sign, which cuneiform is not a language, it's a writing system and it means wedge-shaped. So, they were writing with a wedge, and as I said, the wedge is shaped like a triangle.

This was originally pictographic, but as you can see, it's sort of an abstract form. If you look at the bottom one, you can see how an ear of barley looks over here on the side.

It looks like a pictogram that looks a bit like a barley, except that it just rotated on its side. So, in the earliest form of cuneiform script, believe it or not, it was still pictographic, but it would ultimately move away from the pictogram aspect. So, this cuneiform wedge or stylus was shaped like this.

And what that meant is that if you wanted to make a wedge, you just pressed one side of the stylus into the mud and then that gave you a wedge thing. If you wanted to scratch a line or to use the technical word in size, a line, then you could use any one of the three corners of your stylus. Thus, the Mesopotamians created a way of writing that would be current all the way through the period of the Old Testament.

This form of writing on mud continued in Mesopotamia right down to the time of Christ. The last cuneiform tablet was done in Mesopotamia, roughly at the time of Christ. It's another case of how conservative their culture was, so that even when

they had learned other forms of writing, just as they, for 1,500 years or so, made oval-shaped bricks, well, even after the alphabet was invented, they still employed this kind of writing, cumbersome as it was, because it worked.

It's a very conservative culture, unlike ours, particularly here at Liberty University, where if it's been a month since you visited campus, you haven't seen the newest building. And so we say about our university, the only constant is change. Well, in Mesopotamia, it was just the reverse.

Things were constant, sometimes for thousands of years, because that was the nature of their culture. So, this form of writing, which was cumbersome, nonetheless continued for a very long period of time. So, the first stage was pictograph, and as you can see, the pictures are still visible 1,100 years later, such is the culture of Mesopotamia.

Now, I don't think I will explain this to you, guys, because it's complicated, but pictograms did not stay the same. There was another quality to writing called logograms, or word signs, and so let's just see if I can draw you one. In other words, some of these logograms would continue.

So, here's what I'm talking about. Here is a cuneiform sign. All right, there's a logogram.

This logogram has two possible values. One is that it can represent a word. For example, this is the cuneiform logogram, or word sign, for the word God.

All right, and it started out as a pictogram. You can probably see it, because in ancient pictographic cuneiform, that was the sign for a star. Well, in the ancient world, they thought the stars were all deities.

So, this started out looking like this, and then it evolved into something that has a vague similarity to the original star. And so, this sign stayed as a logogram for the word God. When you saw this, what you would do is you would say elu.

That was the word for God. However, this language developed in a way that is very complicated, and if you don't understand it, don't worry, because we won't be with it too much longer. I think only when you know the language can you understand it.

But ultimately, this is what led to syllabification. So, if I wanted to create a word like illuminate, I could take the sound of the word God, and use this in multiple syllables to create a word like illuminate. So, as you can see, the sound, i-l-u, is a syllable, and has no connection whatsoever to the word God.

However, they ultimately reduced their spoken language to written form. This is called syllabification, and it started out by using the phonetic values of pictograms.

Syllabified in this fashion, they could then create a spoken language in written form. It's all very complex. We know, for example, that in the time period of, let's say, Abraham, a language that was emerging called Old Babylonian, and we know that in that time period, this is such a complex form of writing that there were 598 different cuneiform signs, each of which had to be remembered.

And each of those, the vast majority of those, had multiple syllabic values, depending on where they were in a word. So, let's just say, for the sake of illustration, if you have 598 different signs, and then most of those signs have multiple syllabic possible values, depending on where they are in a word, then you can literally have 5 or 6 or 7 thousand possibilities that need to be remembered. Obviously, this system was so complicated and so cumbersome that only professionals could learn to read and write.

To this very day, if you are becoming an Old Testament scholar, and you have to take Akkadian, that's the name of the language that we're talking about, if you have to take Akkadian, it is the most challenging aspect of your education, because it's a very difficult system to learn. In essence, this kind of writing system has so many difficulties that there's a sense in which it's a track to nowhere. I'm told that in Asia, the signs number up to 8,000 signs that have to be remembered in order to be able to use their equivalent system of sign language.

So, the point then that I would be getting across to you is the invention of writing was a fabulous step forward, but it was a step forward that was limited dramatically because only professionals could learn to do this. It was actually the invention of the alphabet that would lead to the dramatic invention of technological transfer. It was the invention of the alphabet that meant, theoretically, anybody, anywhere, could learn how to read and write in a relatively simple format.

So, here's a picture of what the earliest alphabet looked like in the Hebrew language. As you can see on the left, it, too, started out as pictographic. The ancient signs of Old Hebrew are actually signs that resemble things like animals and streams and so on and so forth.

And then this chart demonstrates to us how it evolved, and it evolved from these pictograms here on the left, ultimately to the squared writing that we recognize from our Bible. This squared writing really goes back to about the 2nd or 3rd century BC and then became fixed into the modern form that we know of, which would be this section here, which is post-biblical. This was a monumental achievement because by memorizing 30 or fewer alphabetic pronunciation symbols, you could reduce your whole spoken language in a matter of minutes to an alphabet.

This was arguably, I have no way of knowing with certainty, but I would say arguably this was the greatest human invention because what it meant is that every spoken language can follow the same alphabet, and you can use the same alphabet, so that every spoken language can be put into print form. This is the ultimate technology transfer system. It meant that every language not only can be reduced to a written form, but that every person can memorize the forms in a relatively short period of time.

Somebody with a good memory, especially somebody who's had Greek, can memorize the Hebrew alphabet in a matter of a few hours. Instead of spending a lifetime working with this cumbersome cuneiform system, you can do it in a very short period of time. The impetus for writing seems to be tied directly to the temple's need to inventory its stock.

It was temple personnel who were to form the first great scribal schools. So as far as we can go with this thought, the greatest economic entity of any early city was the temple. The temple was the combination of the university, the bank, the government, all of the stuff that we think about was originated with the temple.

And these great scribal schools then revolved around the temple. It was the greatest economic entity of activity. It cannot be stated, however, too strongly that geography is the ultimate factor in the development of writing and civilization.

We have no way of knowing how long it would have taken if we had to wait for the development of writing in, say, Syro-Lebanon or Lebanon and Israel. But the development of urban centers led to monumental architecture. Monumental architecture developed first in the temples.

The temples were the great centers for learning and propagation. And ultimately, this system that we call pictographic writing ultimately led to the alphabet, which then led to the phenomenal transfer of technology in ways that used to take thousands of years. Now, it could just take one lesson from some informed scribe.

This is something that God conformed himself to. And here's what I mean when I say God conformed himself. A sovereign God created the world in such a manner in accord with his divine will, so this led to the development of writing, which ultimately led to the development of the alphabet, which ultimately led to the development of God to speak to human beings in ways that were unique.

So, if there's something I've said in this whole thing about writing that I think is important, it would be this. The writing, the alphabetic system, led to God being able to speak to human beings in a written form theoretically that was able to be

mastered by anybody with ordinary intelligence. It's not an accident that Moses appeared at just the time that the alphabet first appeared.

If the early date for the Exodus is correct and Moses led Israel out of Egypt in 1446, we now know that the earliest forms of the alphabet appeared just two to three centuries before Moses. And so, what this is doing is demonstrating to us that God chose to reveal himself to the people we call Israel at almost the exact time that the alphabet was invented. That allows me to theorize that God, in his insertion of the divine narrative into human experience, chose the exact time when the alphabet had been invented.

Moses on Mount Sinai could have written down the law in an alphabetic format that virtually any trained person could have read. And so, it ties revelation along a divine timeline that is tied directly to the invention of writing. So, let's summarize this, and then we'll move along.

What we're summarizing is this. As early as 3200 BC, the earliest forms of writing occurred. In typical Mesopotamian fashion, it would take 11 or 1200 years or more to invent the alphabet.

The alphabet was invented perhaps around 1700 BC somewhere up in modern-day Lebanon or Syria. And then that just exploded technology into the world of the Bible. And that led to God being able to reveal his more complete word to the Israelites.

I could not exaggerate, therefore, the importance of the invention of the alphabet for God to reveal his divine word to human beings. And here we are today, still studying the Hebrew language in a very similar alphabet to the one that Moses would have used on Mount Sinai. The impact of writing for world literature and the Bible is, therefore, substantial.

And even if we don't master the whole process because it's complicated, at least we can tell you on a timeline that Moses on Mount Sinai appeared at just the right time in the divine plan for Moses to be able to write in a language that anybody theoretically could have understood. All right? That all leads to still another period that we're moving quickly toward the time period of Abraham. The time period following the proto-literate period is called the early dynastic.

All right? And we won't be too much longer, and we're ready to move on to another section of our lecture system. But the early dynastic period is a fancy way of saying early kingship. All right? So, in the chart that I put on the board for you about typography leads to irrigation, irrigation leads to urbanization, urbanization leads to centralization, centralization leads to kingship, what we see now is that these cities, as they appeared, these cities were moving toward a new sociology, sociology built not primarily around the temple, but built primarily around the palace.

This is a change of literally monumental consequence. We'll talk about this as it unfolds the divine plan by pointing out that this is the early dynastic period. It's a time period when kingship had been developing, but now it is dynastic because we're going to see kingship passed on biologically from father to son to grandson to great-grandson.

And this, too, brings about a dramatic change in human history, one that is all over the pages of the Bible as well, since Jesus himself is presented dynastically as the son of David. Well, all of that starts right here in 29 to 2400 BC. So that leads us to the earliest historiography, the Sumerian king list, which is the earliest listing of dynastic succession that we have to this very day.

So, it's called the Sumerian king list because it's a list of Sumerian kings. And if you can bear with me, we are just laying the groundwork for getting into dramatic connections between the Bible and the ancient world. And so, the Sumerian king list is a document that is divided into two parts.

The first list of five cities at which kingship was first experienced before the flood. In other words, the Sumerian king list is a listing of kings, supposedly kings before the flood, then there was the great flood, and then kingship was lowered again from heaven after the flood. In this list of kings from five cities before, there were a total of eight antediluvian kings who, if we count up the numbers mathematically, wrote for 241,000 years.

Well, we all know that that's complete mythology, and it may not be what was intended by the numbers anyhow. We have no confidence in the Sumerian king list before the flood. As it lists out kingship, we think that it's just a myth.

But the second part of the Sumerian king list is a little different story. The second part speaks of another start for the experience of kingship after the flood. All right.

Let me see if I can make the point. Maybe I'll pause here since I don't know that I want to get started with this. It gets stuck right in the middle of the lecture.

This happens all the time in the classroom, where you get right in the middle of a lecture and the bell rings. Well, the bell doesn't ring here, but you remember in school when the bell used to ring, literally, and then you're stuck until the next class period. So what I'll do is introduce this, and then maybe we can go ahead and pause.

What it's telling us is that the earliest historiography is built around issues of kingship. And so, the second part of the Sumerian king list, it's a listing of kings, it starts not with what we might have started with. Okay, so if the whole flood is

destroyed, how did humankind start out? How did humankind develop? How did humankind survive? It has none of those concerns.

Instead, the Sumerian king list starts out with the first event after the flood is when the gods lowered kingship from heaven and gave it as a gift to humankind. It's an interest level that is different from those of us in the Bible, or at least until we know what the Bible is actually teaching us. The text tells us that the Sumerian king list tells us that kingship was first experienced, that is, lowered from the heavens to the city of Kish.

For many years, it was thought that this was all mythological. Now, however, we know that there is some interesting connection between the city of Kish in southern Mesopotamia and the first experience of kingship. So, we're going to go ahead and take a bit of a pause here, but as I get ready to do that, let me make the point. The earliest interest of the Mesopotamians in their writing revolved around kingship.

Kingship was central to their culture, and what I'm going to propose to you as we get into the biblical record is that kingship was central to the plan of God as well in the Bible. So, it's something that's a little different twist, but I trust that you'll find it interesting. Kingship in the Sumerian king list then was a gift from the gods to humanity.

Because of our democracy, we're not used to thinking about kingship as a gift. We see ourselves as gifted because we were rid of the king of England. In the ancient world, democracy didn't exist.

They thought kingship, and they were trained to think that kingship was a gift from the gods. I think with that, maybe we can pause for now, and we'll pick this up in our next lecture.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 3, Development of Cultural Essentials, Writing and Kingship.