

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 5, Religious Philosophy of Paganism

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This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 5, Religious Philosophy of Paganism.

Well, once again, welcome back. We've been tracing the development of the phenomena of centralization up to this point, and so we've gone from Sargon, who really never claimed divinization but who really turned the whole concept of centralization into something dramatically new. And we saw him do that, and then we saw Naram-Sin, who was two descendants after him, we saw him engage in full-blown self-divinization. So, we're almost at where we're going to go, which is to explain to you, through this phenomenon of royal divinization, how we can understand the core concepts of paganism.

Not paganism in our world, paganism in their world. And so, it's one of the most important concepts of our time together because when you read the pages of the Old Testament, the Israelites were really drawn; they were tempted, apparently, in powerful ways, by the Canaanite model. And I think we need to understand what that model is to understand our Bible, and then by understanding that model, we're more in a position to understand how paganism can tempt us today, given the fact that we look like we're completely different world settings.

So, I think this is really important, and I know it's a long time to ask you to wade through this material with me, but I think it's going to be helpful as we get to trying to absorb this model. And I might add, I think it's also a model for understanding eschatologically, what might be on the horizon when we think about a final era. And so, that's where we're going.

The last king of this period, the Sargonic period, is called the Old Akkadian period. And the last king of that period is Shar-Kali-Sharri. Shar-Kali-Sharri, believe it or not, is mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

Well, okay, so I'm being facetious. Shar-Kali-Sharri isn't mentioned as the person in the Book of Revelation, but Shar-Kali-Sharri's name means king of all kings. And we talked earlier about royal titles.

King of all kings is a royal title that is used of Christ in the Book of Revelation. So, it's a royal title. Here, it's the personal name of a king.

He ruled for 25 ineffective years. The evidence of his divinization is much more meager than that of Naram-Sin. There is a gradual breakup of his empire.

He appears to have been weakened by the infiltration of a group of people called the Gutti. After Elam, which is in southern Iran, not Iraq, Iran won its independence, and there was a rapid disintegration as cities claimed their own independence. With his assassination, chaos has now descended over Mesopotamia.

This is a paradigm that will repeat itself throughout the phenomena of empires in the ancient Near East. What we mean is this. I keep using the word centralization.

By centralization, what I'm talking about is the centralization of power in a person. What happens when you're profoundly centralized is these empires collapse like that, suddenly. That's what happens in the reign of Shar-Kali-Sharri.

Because it's centralized in him, if his leadership becomes ineffective, there's no appeal to anything else. It's just collapse. The Assyrian Empire collapsed quickly.

The old Babylonian Empire collapsed quickly. The Persian Empire collapsed quickly. The Greek Empire would be an exception. Although it collapsed quickly when Alexander the Great died, the empire split up.

But it's a phenomenon that is characterized by what we call over-centralization. So, just like that, this highly centralized empire comes to a sudden and dramatic end. Now, we're going to hurry a little bit here.

The period between the old Akkadian and the Ur III period. It's a time period in between, and it lasts several hundred years. The great Sumerian city, Lagash, reaches its pinnacle.

It kind of created an empire in the south under Sumerian leadership. However, we're not going to talk about that period in between, even though if we had the time to do it, I think I could make some interesting observations for you. But instead, we're going to talk about the Ur III period.

So, this Ur III period lasted about a hundred years, depending on which chronology you're following, from 2150 to 2050, or 2100 to 2000. But it's about a hundred years. It's called the Ur III period because the kings who are listed in the Sumerian king list are listed as the third dynasty of Ur, and so that's why it's called the Ur III period.

It's also known as the Sumerian Renaissance or the Indian Summer of the Sumerian civilization. Now, I don't know if you are aware, but I came from the Midwest, and there, we talked about Indian Summer. Indian Summer was a phenomenon in the fall when you'd get a last visit of summer before the winter kicked in.

And of course, people who lived there recognized it because it came late and they knew it didn't last long, but it was wonderful. Well, Indian Summer means winter is almost here for these remarkable people called the Sumerians. And so, what that means is when this period is done, the end of Sumer has come.

These great people literally invented the vast majority of the things that made civilization great, and yet they're going to pass quickly now, and the Semites will triumph. So, with that in mind, we can see the founder of this dynasty. His name was Ur-Nammu.

He was its founder and was most famous for his law code. Now, it's not the first law code, but it is a law code, and we'll talk about laws as well later on. We have a picture of his ziggurat, and as you can see, the ziggurat was really quite large and beautifully done.

I can tell you that you tend to think that the temple part of the ziggurat would be at the top, but it wasn't. The temple was actually at the bottom, and so the reason for the structure being so high was theologically, and mind you, the way they thought is the gods are up there, and we're down here, and the way that these two connect is through a bridge. Do you remember the famous Tower of Babel? It wasn't a tower to reach into heaven.

It was a tower to connect heaven with earth so that there was a connection. You remember when Jacob in the book of Genesis has his dream, and he sees angels ascending and descending on a ladder? I don't know if you've ever thought about that, but ladders don't have multiple people ascending and descending. We know that ladders weren't even invented yet, and we know it wasn't a ladder.

It was a ramp, and that's what you have here in the ziggurat. If you look carefully, you can see multiple ramps, which are designed to provide the opportunity for the deity to come down the ramp and to enter into the temple at the bottom, where a room was kept by the god or for the god. The meeting place was really at the top, but the purpose of the top was to get the deity to come down to be able to enter into the temple.

This is a beautiful ziggurat of Ur-Nammu, and Ur-Nammu founds this new dynasty, but something ominous happens to Ur-Nammu that I need to tell you about, which has serious implications. He's killed in battle. Now remember, in the way the... well, of course, you wouldn't remember because I haven't taught you about it yet, but in the ancient world, bad things happened to people who did bad things.

Good things happened to people who could figure out what the gods wanted to be good. It was a cause-effect thing, and I'll talk at some length about this. So when Ur-Nammu dies in battle, then that is interpreted as he must have displeased the gods.

This would be particularly true because the last king of the old Akkadian period, you remember, Shar-Kali-Sharri, died and he was killed in battle as well. In the Old Testament, very few kings are killed in battle. Kings did everything they could to avoid being killed in battle because the theological implications of that were self-condemning.

So, kings would stay out of danger because to lose the battle was to lose the war. So, he himself founded the dynasty, but it's his son Shulgi who holds prominence. He ruled for 48 years, and this was a period of absolute monarchy, with Shulgi as the supreme example of this.

This is so centralized. The Ur-Three Sumerian civilization is now so centralized that there is no private land. The king owns everything.

This is what I mean about this ever-intensifying centralization of power. So, the king owns all the land. He is an absolute monarch, and the state is highly centralized.

In essence, when you look at all of this, what it tells you is that Shulgi does not reflect the culture of the Sumerians. In this kind of behavior, the culture of Sargon has triumphed. The centralization of power in the king and the ownership of all the land by the state is the triumph of Sargon the Great.

So, one of the interesting features of his reign is his unprecedented emphasis on self-divinization. Now, I'm going to go through my five points, but let me tell you where we're going. We're heading ultimately to this section of the class notes.

How can we explain divinization of kings? Why was it there? You're going to find this to be really interesting. But until we get there, we want to talk about the evidence of his king. No king in Mesopotamia was as divinized as this king.

Now, if you teach history badly, that's a history question you could ask. Good history questions address the issue of why was he so self-divinized? Good history questions ask, what was the purpose of this? Okay? So, I'm listing for you the evidence of his divinization, but they don't explain to us what was going on, and I will do that for you. I think this king used the divine determinative in front of his name more than all kings combined up to this point.

He made it crystal clear to the whole world that he was deity. So, one of the things that you see is you never see his name, or if you do, I don't know where the texts are at, you never see his name without the divine determinative in front of his name. Secondly, the royal hymnology reveals his deification.

All right, well, that doesn't say very much, but that's because I'm hoping you'll listen while I explain it. I understand that in today's world, we're not used to listening to lectures, and of course, when we're teaching like this, it's kind of a dialogue because I don't get a chance to deal with your questions, but I put things in my class notes cryptically in order to give the student the general idea without giving them the whole idea. By royal hymnology, what we mean is this.

Shulgi has written a body of literature on his behalf for the female goddess Ishtar. She's known by her Sumerian name, Inanna, and it's highly erotic literature. This is the first. It's not as if there isn't some erotic stuff going on between Kings and Inanna up to this point, but he's got a whole library of documents that are written celebrating the sexual relationship that he has with Ishtar.

Highly erotic love. I've often wondered, I'm not prepared to give you an answer, I've often wondered if there's anything to do with this in the Song of Solomon in the Bible because even though that's not highly erotic, it is definitely clearly sexual. And so, I've wondered, but I don't have the expertise to answer that.

Third, he has regular offerings made to his statue. This is the first. Okay, let me explain to you what you mean.

So, you saw the ziggurat. I told you that the real temple section was at the bottom. There, a statue of the deity was placed, and then, in their theology, the deity would come down, inhabit the statue.

In that condition of coming down and inhabiting the statue, the statue would then magically, because magic was a big part of this, the statue would magically then eat the food that was offered to it, and the worshiper would please the god. Well, interestingly enough, Shulgi has his own statue put down there, and then receives worship as if he was the god. As a matter of fact, this statue of Shulgi could be sent upriver or downriver to various cities, and there the statue would receive worship.

And as a matter of fact, he was, for all practical purposes, a god incarnate. Fourth, after his death, he is declared to be a star of the calendar. Now that makes absolutely no sense.

So let me explain to you what I mean by that. Remember, we mentioned a little bit earlier that in the ancient world, they thought the stars were deities. If you've ever... who hasn't looked on a starlit night? It looks like the stars are twinkling like they're animated.

They understood that to be evidence that the stars were alive. And then, when you remember that stars also move depending on what season we're at, it looks like the star has made a journey across the horizon from one place to another. So, you

remember when I told you in the Sumerian king list, propaganda for kingship, that the gods lowered kingship from heaven as a gift of God.

What Shulgi is doing is reversing the procedure, because when he dies, and this is one of the things about the divinization of kings, that was the proverbial fly in the ointment. Since all kings die, how do you explain the fact that he died since he's a god? And the way they explained it was, Shulgi ascended probably up the ramp of the ziggurat, up the ramp into the heavens where he took his position as one of the stars and was now immortalized forever as a heavenly being, not just an earthly one. Fifth, his royal titles are those of the gods, and his name is used by others as if he was a god.

To try to illustrate what we mean by this, what I mean by this, we talked earlier about how all deities have royal titles. As a matter of fact, it's really fascinating. It's one of the things I wish I had done with my life.

I didn't have time to do it. But it'd be so interesting to compare the royal titles of the deities of Mesopotamia and to see how many of those are actually used for Israel's god since they're all royal titles. But the interesting thing about him is that he used his name as if he had his name used as if he was a god.

Let me illustrate. When I lived back in Indiana, I had an unusual relationship with the bank. I always wanted to spend more money on books than what I had.

And my wife can tell you that when we got married, we agreed that she would have the checkbook because otherwise, we would have, as she put it, all books and no house. So, I spent a tremendous amount of money at the First National Bank of Warsaw, Indiana. Well, I spent so much money that the guy that I became friends with decided to streamline the whole procedure.

And so, what I would do is I would literally call him on the phone, and I would say, Joe, as a matter of fact, his granddaughter was one of my daughter's friends, and I said, Joe, I need some money for books. And he just would say to me, how much do you need? And I'd tell him, well, I need \$500. And he'd say, okay, I'll have the check sitting on the desk.

All you have to do is come by and pick it up. I never saw him, never did it, and I have never been late on a payment in my life.

We just had a great relationship. However, even though he trusted me completely, he always made me do something. He made me sign my name.

That's what made it legal. I literally could not have gotten the check without signing my name. Well, in the ancient world, when you were conducting a business transaction, they didn't sign their names.

What they did was they would take an oath in the name of a god, and that was as sacred as it gets because if you break the oath, you might upset the god, and then the god might take your life. That had always been something contracted in the name of a deity. Shulgi had his name used in those contracts as if he were a god.

It sure looks like Shulgi was claiming divinization on a level that is not fully there's nothing like it up to this point. In a minute, we're going to answer the questions about this and then use this as a springboard for the final lecture we have on this day here. That is, what is the theology behind all this? Before we do that, I want to talk with you briefly about the sacred marriage.

This was the most important event of the calendar, at least in the fourth and third millennium BC. In ancient Sumer, one goddess gained significance in Sumer's history. Her name was Inanna.

You probably know her better as Ishtar. She would identify with other female goddesses, such as the planet Venus, Ishtar in Mesopotamia, and Astarte in Canaan. This goddess appeared in myth as a sister, daughter, lover, bride, and widow but never as a mother or a wife.

Now, that's interesting, but we're not sure why. She was the titular deity of Uruk, the city of Uruk, whose ruler was the end priest who lived in the Gipar, a section of Inanna's temple where he probably served as her husband. The end, which is the Sumerian word for governor, was chosen because of some outstanding deed or accomplishment.

Later, Uruk's religious leadership changed in Nippur, which was ruled by Enlil, the storm god. When Sargon conquered Sumer, he ordered Enlil to raise up Inanna, the tutelary deity of his dynasty. Sargon elevated Ishtar to prominence.

This event paved the way for the sacred marriage that occurred later, the event when life was renewed at the turn of the year through a ritual marriage of the king and the goddess. That would be the priestess of Ishtar. The earliest evidence for this physical union was during the Uruk period when the king took on the role of Dumuzid, Inanna's husband, and the sacred marriage was performed at Uruk in Inanna's temple.

This reveals a shift in political realities in ancient Sumer from temple to palace and female to male. Inanna becomes the means by which kings of Uruk make their claim to rule Sumer as her chosen husband. She becomes the king's consort, representing

the political shift in power from female to male, that is, from deity to human royal power.

One further detail appears to accompany this role divinization. In order to assume his role as Inanna's consort, he must perform successfully on the battlefield. His victory there makes him desirable to Inanna, who is at her core a goddess of war.

Thus, the shift in religion from the old Akkadian period to Uruki means that power shifts to the king, as represented in the physical union of the king and Inanna. I say all of this to make the point for you. In this highly centralized world now, the sexual union of the king with the high priestess of Inanna was designed to bring fertility to the entire kingdom.

The reason they could trust this physical union to do that was because the king had demonstrated Inanna's love for him as her sexual partner by winning an important battle. I'd like to have that set in for you just a little bit because I said a lot there. It was a highly centralized culture.

In this centralized culture, the king could bring fertility for his whole land with a sexual union that occurred annually. But in order for that to get into a year-after-year-after-year sequence, the king would have to win a great battle. That's exactly what happened with .

The city of Akkad was delivered from an invasion. That's exactly what happened to Shulgi. The first 20 years of his 48-year rule were spent in battle.

So, what this is telling us is that this sexual union had become the theological... It's so strange for us to think about sex and theology in our culture, but this sexual union was the theologically monumental event of the calendar year. We think it started way back earlier, but now the king's place in it was centralized in the Uruk period. So how then are we to understand this? And here's where I would like to get to the core of how we understand the way the ancients thought, how we understand that it is both radically different but almost identical to the way we can think today.

How is this to be explained? In this deeply centralized culture, religion was now centralized in the person of the king. But what was that designed to accomplish? What I tell my students is that religion in the ancient world, unlike religion in our world, was functional. When Peg and I go to church, many times what we're looking for is a blessing.

What that translates out in our thinking to be is a moment of spiritual elevation. We're looking for a feeling of God that convinces us that God is present with us. It's deeply aesthetical.

It probably goes back in part to our European origins. In Europe, these cathedrals were built to be aesthetic masterpieces. To use a contemporary adjective, they had a nuclear effect.

You walked in and you came to your cathedral and the tower of the cathedral was many times taller than anything anywhere else in the country. You walked in and the structure was ornate with gold and everything imaginable to make it speak to your aesthetic needs. You heard a choir.

The choir was professional, designed to resonate almost supernaturally, the sound of deity. Can you hear those Gregorian sounds, those echo in these cavernous, all speaking as if God is with them? We have forgotten, perhaps, that in the origins of the way we do religion, the European experience probably replicated something far earlier than Europe, and that is this need to experience aesthetically. Well, I think human beings like aesthetics.

I think we like a spiritual sensation. But in the ancient world, religion needed to be functional. So, I'm not sure how much time I have left here today before I have moved beyond your listening powers, but what I would like to tell you is an important thing.

Religion was designed by the ancients to work, to create, to bring about. It's not exactly like religion in our culture. You know, I'm going to have a paycheck tomorrow.

Whether it comes from Liberty University or my social security account, I'm going to have a paycheck. In the ancient world, it didn't work like that. Their whole world revolved around danger.

We know from the skeletons that the average person may not have even reached the average lifespan may not have even reached 50. We know from the skeletons that roughly half of the children who were born died before they were five. They lived in a world where crop disease seemed to be ubiquitous, where catastrophe could occur in the sense of maybe too much rain or not enough rain, and where, for reasons completely mystifying to them, their animals might die.

They lived in this world in which they were seemingly just a day or two from demise, from death. Human beings don't like the concept that you can do nothing about that. So what they did is they created for themselves in the name of religion, a means by which that whole angst I just described could be under control.

So, what they needed in their world was prosperity or fertility. Try to imagine what the horror must have been like to be a farmer. You know, you don't have the means to store much food.

Try to imagine the horror of planting your field with barley and or wheat, especially in Mesopotamia, as the soil became more and more salinized. They planted more and more barley because barley is hardier than wheat. Try to imagine the horror of you planting all of that.

You used up your seed grain, and halfway through the season, you look out, and you see all of your field turning yellow. Or perhaps you look out, and you see your field being eaten alive because a horde of locusts has just blown through. All of a sudden, to put it in slang, you're toast.

There's no food bank. There's no place you can go to be delivered. You have to figure out some magical way to stay alive.

Well, the ancients lived with that daily. They had to have fertility, or they were going to die. If their animals didn't produce babies, then ultimately, the animal would die.

And then, ultimately, they would die. So what they were after was to try to make religion functional in giving them fertility and prosperity. Now, I would like to just extract a word here because I know in America right now, we have something called the prosperity gospel.

What we mean by that in our culture is that faith in God can make you rich. If you have enough faith, you can drive a Mercedes. That's not the way we're using the word prosperity here.

Prosperity here meant that maybe your animals might produce more than others or that you might have a bumper crop. But it's not rich. It's prosperity in the sense that you're being enabled to survive.

Secondly, the area of longevity. If the average age was somewhere to die, was somewhere between 45 and 50, you wanted to figure out how to live longer. After all, you can look over here at one neighbor and this neighbor might be 65.

By ancient standards, that would be unusual. So, you look at it, and you say that a neighbor of mine over here, look how old he is. We don't even know for sure if they kept track of their years, how many years.

But suppose he knew his neighbor was 67 years old. He might look at that. Of course, he would see that the way we think about everything today is scientific.

We would say, well, he's got good genes. Or he took care of himself. Well, that's not fun.

He ate right; he exercised, and he ran up mountainsides. See, in their world, they would have looked at that as the gods had granted him that long life. So, imagine this, whereas in my world, I tend, if you would get inside my psyche, not the way I'm supposed to talk, but inside of my psyche the way I talk.

So, I think of myself as stick boy. This is me. So, as I think about my well-being, I think in scientific terms.

I think of myself as lose 20 pounds, maybe 30. I think of myself as exercise or all kinds of bad things are going to happen sooner rather than later. I think of things to avoid.

I don't smoke cigarettes. I don't do drugs. I think of things that I should avoid.

Do you see how I'm thinking about my well-being? I'm thinking in modern categories. When I go to the doctor, even though I have a Christian doctor, my wife has a Christian doctor, I don't go to my doctor and say, oh doctor, what is the secret of God giving me long life? I go to my doctor, and even though he's a Christian, he tells me to eat right and exercise, and pray for good genes. No, he doesn't say it.

See how I think within myself? I think within myself completely. I really have to remind myself of the truth that I could die on the way home in a car wreck today. I have to remind myself of that.

I think I'm in control. Okay, guys, they knew they weren't in control. What a phenomenal difference in the way they thought.

They knew they weren't in control, and so their concept was 100% heaven-oriented. Remember the star? They understood that the secret to prosperity and longevity was the gods. Okay? Thus, for example, for them, I think of medicine as the way to prosper, good doctoring.

They thought in terms of deity. You see, what we're pointing out is that, excuse me, in their culture, they saw prosperity and longevity and good things as completely in the realm and in the domain of the gods. All right? I can't exaggerate how important it is.

When you read the Old Testament, this is how God talks to them: If you keep my laws, I will give you good crops, I will protect your crops from crop disease, and I will send rain. In other words, God speaks to them in these categories.

It's interesting when you get to the New Testament, you don't have much of this, but you have it all over the Old Testament. All right? So what we're pointing out is the phenomenon that everything comes from the gods, good or bad. So what that led them to deal with is this phenomenon, cause-effect.

It led them to conclude this important phenomenon that for every effect, there had to be a cause. Okay? In other words, while they might have somewhere in their thinking embraced the concept that you and I know about called chance we use the word chance, they would have thought in terms of cause-effect. So that made religion for them. I hope that all of you are following this because I can't answer your questions, but that made them think of religion as something functional because religion could unleash the cause to get the desired effect.

So, the desired effect is prosperity, fertility, and longevity. Religion can unleash that cause, and so then here is the gigantic thing about religion: what's the cause? Can we, as humans, function in such a way that we can create the cause that brings about the desired effect? See how different this is from religion here in the West in this era? Its functionality is designed to bring about actively what humans can't get naturally. So, all religion has to do is to answer the question, Mark, what is the cause? What is the thing that brings about the gods to act on our behalf? What is the thing to get the gods to act on our behalf? You have to remember in the ancient world, everybody thought the same way as far as we know. The gods were capricious. They didn't care about you, they didn't care whether you were sick or healthy, they didn't care about whether you were hungry or full, the gods were capricious, they lived in godland up there.

So, in their thinking, what we are after is trying to get the gods to respond to your needs and that was truly a question mark for which there was no single answer. What we have seen is part of their answer was a sacred man for the king to be so holy that his activity could bring about the desired effect. So that's part of what we have seen is the unique place that the king could have, and if I may say so, we see this a little bit in the pages of the Old Testament because we clearly have cases, especially, I think in the reign of David, where David takes a census against God's will, and 100,000 people die.

David does good things, and God enables him to conquer his world. So, the king, even in the Bible, there are cases where the king can bring about good or bad depending on the king's actions. So, here's part of what we have spent all this time on then up to this point with showing you how we see this evolution of kingship from somebody who is more like a governor to somebody who is an incarnate god like Shulgi.

What's been happening is that the king has, century after century after century, he has been receiving more centralization in how religion works, and so this sexual union between the king and Ishtar then becomes the key or one of the major keys for religion in what it's supposed to accomplish. That's where we're at in the reign of Shulgi. The king has assumed this position.

Now there are other things that I can tell you about this and I'm not sure how much time that we have left, but what we want to focus on next is the phenomena of what we'll call magic. As I use the term magic, I live in a world where I think of David Copperfield. I think of guys who make a living by doing Houdini, by doing things that seem to defy the laws that we live by.

Most of us know that there's nothing supernatural. Most of us know that it's trickery. It's visual deception, and we enjoy it because it's good.

It's nicely done. That's a modern understanding of the term. That's not the ancient understanding.

What we know about the ancient understanding is they believed in the intersection of the divine and the human when magic could occur. But remember what we're telling you is how. How does that work? That's the question about religion that permeates the ancient world.

It was rarely, I'm not saying, never, but it was rarely designed to speak to your aesthetic inner being. Religion was designed to function for you. So, this is around us, of course, even today.

And I will probably end up working some more on this in our next lecture. But to put it in Freudian terms, there was a magic totem. In other words, the magic can happen if it's done by the right person in the right way.

Scholars refer to this sometimes as sympathetic magic. Sympathetic magic is a psychological phenomenon where people truly believe that a representative of what you want to have happen when magically endowed can make magic things happen. Who in our audience has never heard of black magic witchcraft? Thus, for example, you create an image of what you want to have to happen, oftentimes harmful, and then you say magical words over the image, and then you destroy the image.

Maybe you stick pins in it or maybe you just crush it or whatever. This magically creates the desired effect. We see this all over places like Africa and Haiti, where this kind of phenomenon exists even to this day.

But I might tell you that it was known all over the ancient Near East as well. What religion needed was a magic totem and that's where we're at now in human history. The king is the magic totem.

He is the living image who can bring about prosperity for his people. There's a high price to be paid for that kind of centralization because at some time or another, it will become evident that the king isn't working. The ancients, whatever they were, they weren't stupid.

They could read things clearly and so as long as the king could convince his people that he was being effective as this magical agency, then he had them. But when it became apparent that it wasn't working and they weren't experiencing prosperity and so on and so forth, then the king lost currency. Thus, we have the unique place that the king had in the religion of the ancient world at this time, but it's also a window into the thought world of every person who was alive in this time.

Magically, you could bring the gods to you, and you could go to them through the agency of a totem. But I can't emphasize enough the point that it was functional, not at all as far as I can see, like the way we do this sort of thing in our religious world today. It... So, in every case that there was an event, there had to be a cause.

And so, the idea was to try to figure out what is the cause then. If my neighbor over here had a great crop and I didn't, there's a cause. I have to figure out what that is that I might bring.

So what paganism is then at its core, and this is probably the last thought that we'll get out today or at least in this lecture, is that human beings are in control. What the Bible makes crystal clear is that God is in control. That can bring us some troubling conclusions if what has happened to us is undesirable or seemingly bad.

But what God does is say to us, in effect, I am the agency for cause. What paganism says, basically, is that you, as a human, are in control of the gods. This is, to me, really profound.

Paganism says you are in control of the gods because you can manipulate them to do what you want. You just have to know what the god wants. How can the god be pleased? How can the god be bought? How can you anger the god? What... you know... So, in paganism, we have keywords like control, manipulation, and magic.

And so, in paganism, in the thought of paganism, you can manipulate the gods and therefore control the outcome. In Christian thought, what we see is that God is the source of all good and that only by obedience and trust can we receive his blessing. So, this is, I think, one of the core issues that we deal with in pagan religion.

As we start our next lecture, we'll do a three-minute warm-up of this subject area and then go on to a few other examples of how this works in contemporary cultures and thought. But maybe that looks like a good place to end this lecture. Thank you so much for your attention.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 5, Religious Philosophy of Paganism.