

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 17, Kingship in the Ancient Near East

© 2024 Don Fowler and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 17, Kingship in the Ancient Near East.

Well, welcome back. We are continuing our thoughts on kingship. It's easy to be misunderstood. I know I mean well and I know I've been married 48 years.

I think I'm communicating, but I find out that I'm not. So, it's entirely plausible that you are maybe not really getting the drift of what we're trying to do. But 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.

And secondly, 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. And in exile, they don't have land or a king. Maybe they're a blessing to the nations in exile, but kingship is a most important concept.

If they were professionals and they were watching the tapes and they were hearing me, I'm sure that some people would be appalled because they would, well, I'm a great admirer of Walter Brueggemann's work. Brueggemann seems to think that centralizing power in a person is always a bad thing. He presents it as everything that is said about kingship is propaganda.

Well, his point is well taken. If you'll allow me to just sit back for a minute, we can visit. You can stop me and get a cup of coffee if you want. But when we start back up, let me make the point that it's a well-taken point.

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.

But let me make the point that the Bible's view of kingship is so radically different. The biblical text does not contain pure propaganda. Even the greatest of its royal heroes is tragically flawed.

God does not present kingship in the Bible as propaganda. God tries to show that any king who does not relate to God in theological terms that God propositions is a king who will be judged. All of Israelite kings are failures.

Even the great David is pictured as duplicitous, a liar, a murderer, and an adulterer. That does not sound like propaganda. So, what I would propose to you is kingship is a way central, one of the central qualities of how God unfolds his plan and his narrative.

But it is not kingship like all the other nations. Indeed, if we want a kingship model, then the real kingship model, and this is my judgment; I've been wrong before; I think the real kingship model is not really David, even though David, of course, had great qualities. The real kingship model is Moses.

Now that you have been seeing me use the class notes, they are available to you. I'm going to show you some information that comes from one of my other class notes for a class that I teach. I'm not going to go over it carefully because I can't let myself do that and get through the material.

But what I want to point out to you is how kingship is predicted. I am going to look at a few passages in Genesis so that I want you to read it because the standard approach is you come to 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites say, give us a king. Oh, those wicked Israelites, they want a king. They're rejecting God.

Well, of course they were rejecting God, but that's not kingship's fault. That's their fault. So, what I am proposing to you is that kingship is a central thesis so you can see kingship before Saul.

And so, I mentioned to you, number one, scholars pretty uniformly agree that in Genesis 1 and 2, Adam and Eve are being pictured in royal or quasi-normal terms. Secondly, note the important story of Melchizedek in Salem in Genesis 14 because Salem is, of course, maybe not exactly Jerusalem, but I think it was intended to have a connection to Jerusalem, and there you have Melchizedek, who you all perhaps know is used as a type of Christ in the epistles of the Hebrews. Melchizedek is a name that either means, my king is righteous or king of Sedek, but notice that he is an important person in the Genesis narrative, and he clearly is a king.

Abraham relates to him in ways that make us all think that this has something to do with kingship. And if the story occurs in chapter 14, then do be reminded that it's in chapter 17 that God promises Abraham about kings who will come from him. So in chapter 17.6, God promises kings will come from the line of Abraham.

And then, some verses that are not exactly well-known verses I turn your attention to Judges, I'm sorry, to Genesis; if you would read with me in chapter 35, just as God made promises about kingship to Abraham, he reiterated the same promises about kingship to Jacob. So, notice with me in Genesis chapter 35, verse 11, let's read verse 9. Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Aram. Isn't that interesting? Paddan Aram, of course, is in Northern Mesopotamia.

And he blessed him just as God blessed Abraham. And so, in verse 10, God said to him, your name is Jacob. Just like God said to Abraham, your name will be Abraham.

You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. In other words, it's a reiteration of Abraham in the person of Jacob. So, he called him Israel, and then God said to him, I am El Shaddai, be fruitful and multiply, the exact commands that God gave to Adam and Eve.

A nation and company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. So what God was promising to a descendant of Abraham, Jacob is the same promise to him that God gave to Abraham to be fruitful and multiply. Kings will come forth from you.

In verse 12, I will give the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac to you. I will give the land to your descendants after you. This is a virtual verbatim repeat of what God had originally said to Abraham.

So, and then in chapter 49, verse 10, kingship was specifically predicted for the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49:10. Indeed, in the book of Judges, whether we like it or not, the author of Judges makes the point repeatedly that it was the lack of kingship that was a part of the problem that Israel was facing. So having said that, I'm going to make a quick trip for you to Moses as the supreme example of the leader. And friends, here's part of where my thoughts are going.

There's no more... Okay, I want to say this. I think it's true. If it's not true, I'm only off by a little bit.

There is no person or thing more important for revealing the identity of Christ in the New Testament Gospels than the example of Moses. Most of us know that Jesus is the new Moses. He is the new Moses, better than Moses, but he is the new Moses.

So, in this, I'm going to go over these very quickly, because we don't have time to do it. Moses has one of the longest call narratives of any king in the Old Testament. 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. In the Ancient Near East, I can't tell you how many times the king would introduce his literary production with the great gods called me.

Moses is divinely called. In chapter 4, we read that he is divinely enabled. This is all kingship material.

I shouldn't do this, but I can't stop myself. Look at my first three points. He is divinely chosen.

Saul is divinely chosen. As a matter of fact, Saul is chosen multiple times to make the point that God has divinely chosen him. Secondly, the story is pretty clear that Saul is divinely called.

He is called through the person of Samuel, so he is divinely called, and then he is divinely enabled. The text makes a big point out of the fact that in chapter 10, God takes the spirit that was upon the prophets with Samuel, and he takes that same spirit and puts it on Saul, and Saul then is able to actually prophesy. The text is at great lengths and great pains to present the picture that Saul is the exact model king.

He is chosen, called, and enabled with the spirit. Well, the same thing is true of Moses. Moses is enabled by the spirit.

Note the important passage in Numbers 11, which highlights the spirit of Moses, as well as Deuteronomy 34.9, where the enabling spirit that was upon Moses is poured out on Joshua, and Moses is divinely privileged. He is the prototype in the Old Testament for closeness to Japheth. No other person in the entire Old Testament has the intimate relationship with God that Moses has.

We could talk about this for hours and hours and hours. Moses is the prototype, not just for a king, but how one can relate to God, face to face, person to person, presence to presence. All of that highlights how crucial Moses is as a rubric for relating to God and being a king.

So, I gave you four points there, suggesting that Moses is the supreme example of a central leader. Let me go to a second point in this, Moses, Israel's first king, textual evidences and echoes. Now, you are getting a decent camera shot of this, so even though this isn't in your course document, you should be able to retrieve this in your notes, so you can stop the video at any time, theoretically, and write these down.

It's not well known, but one of the enabling agencies that Moses has is a rod. And it's better known that this rod is used to accomplish many of the miracles. So, Moses' rod is indeed a royal scepter and is the divine counterpart to Pharaoh's scepter.

In other words, in Egyptian, the shepherd's staff, which looks something like this, almost like an English question mark, the shepherd's staff is the hieroglyphic sign for kingship. What this sign meant in Egyptian was to be king. So, when Moses, who is a shepherd, has in his hand a royal staff, God says, what is that in your hand? It is a staff.

God says to Moses, throw it down on the ground, and it becomes a snake. Well, I can't help but think that this is God combating Pharaoh's claims to be king because what does Pharaoh wear on his crown but an emblem of the snake, the symbol of Egyptian royal power? All right, well, we could talk about that for a long time, but we're just trying to, you know, you read Psalm 23, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Well, the fact that God works through Moses' staff is a remarkable confirmation of kingship.

Secondly, the root *mashach* occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in connection with Davidic kings. *Mashach*, which is the basis for the etymological basis for the name of Moses, is throughout the rest of the Bible when it refers to kings, used only of kings. Third, Moses is God to Pharaoh.

Now, we all know that Moses wasn't God. In fact, he would have been very careful to make that point, but he was God to Pharaoh. In other words, in royal language, Moses, the chosen king of Israel, was the representative of God to Pharaoh.

That's how kingship was thought of. Fourth, Moses as lawgiver—well, there is hardly a more common royal metaphor than the king as lawgiver. So, the tremendous emphasis that we have on Moses as a lawgiver is a royal phenomenon.

Fifth, Moses is likely called king in Deuteronomy 33:4-5 in Yeshurim, to quote the text, which is likely Jerusalem. So, one of the common criticisms of Moses being considered as king is that he was never called king. Well, if somebody was called king in Deuteronomy 33, and it's either the Lord or Moses, I think it's a better choice to say that Moses was called king there.

Sixth, the root *Yashar* is used by Moses, and it has many royal counterparts. When everyone does what's right in his own eyes, that's the root of *Yashar*. So, note that there is a connection between the root *Yashar* and *Mesharim*, which is the word for the release, one of the words for release.

Well, forgive me for hurrying, but you can get these points down and then study them out on your own. I have a number of them listed here. In Numbers 11-12, Moses is commanded to carry them in your bosom as a nursing father carries a suckling child.

Believe it or not, carrying them in a bosom like a suckling child is exactly what said of Hammurabi in his epilogue, in a law code, which, of course, is the context of how it appears here. Eighth, Moses' supreme meekness. Most of the time, when this gets preached in the pulpits, it's always pictured as if Moses is not royal.

When in reality, when you study the word meek, it's a typical royal term, not only in the Bible but throughout the ancient Near East. For a fuller explanation of this

powerful image of the king as meek, I suggest you see Good's work on Jesus the meek king, and see also the Messianic Psalm, Psalm 45, and Zechariah 9:9. So, what we're proposing to you is that meek, which seems counterintuitive, like it's not a royal term, actually is a well-known royal term, not only in the Bible, but throughout the ancient Near East. Ninth, servant.

We mentioned to you earlier that slave is actually a royal term; it's a royal title. Dozens of ancient Near Eastern kings used the term, I am the slave of such and such a deity. Moses is pictured as my faithful servant.

Ten, Moses is the royal representation in giving the covenant, a royal phenomenon in that the king presents the gods in treaties and represents the gods in treaties. Notice also that Israel is called his people, and he leads them out of Egypt. Terminology leads them out of Egypt, friends; that's shepherd terminology, and it is royal.

He acts as a shepherd, leading them out of Egypt. So, in number 11, Moses appoints his successors in Joshua. He appoints a man to go out and come in, which is the royal language for shepherding.

The second point is that Israel will not be like sheep, which have no shepherd; that's royal language. Joshua is prepared for kingship by receiving the spirit that was upon Moses. In other words, Moses is central to the transfer of leadership to Joshua.

Moses puts his honor in Numbers 27:20; when we say Moses puts his honor, it's the Hebrew word *hod*, and that word is always okay; this is a strong statement. In every other place in the Hebrew Bible, *hod* is a royal term, and it is here. He puts his *hod*, his royal honor, on Joshua.

Moses is faithful in all my household. That's a royal title. Perhaps Moses' shining face is a sign of royalty because you go to Lippit Ishtar, and he is the hero with the shining countenance. I mean, I could just go on and on.

In addition, there was a constellation of vocabulary that is royal but goes without notice, namely, words as he led, he fed, he herded, he shepherded, and dozens of terms that are not recognized. So, what we're suggesting to you then is there is a constellation of evidence that Moses was royal. One of the reasons why it is not stated in more explicit royal terminology is that the divine plan originally was for Moses to lead them into the promised land and that when Moses got them into the promised land, they would have Jerusalem as their royal city, and that Moses would then be the king of Israel with a royal capital sitting on the throne.

So, I think God's plan for Israel from the beginning then in the covenant was that kingship would be the central factor. Now, contrary to any other king in the Old Testament, Moses' failures are much more human, and Moses was such a success as

king that God holds him to a high standard. So, all Moses has to do is misuse his rod one time, and he is disqualified from going into the promised land.

Instead of hitting the rock once, he hits it twice. I think a case could be made, an argument could be made, that the rod is the emblem of kingship, and by misusing the rod, God is making the point that Moses is, therefore not permitted to come into the land as a homily to all subsequent kings, that when you violate kingship, you will be disqualified. I'm sure your eye could tell as we were going through that information that these thoughts are, therefore, connected to the concept of kingship in the ancient Near East.

By going to royal examples, so, if we took the number thousands upon thousands, I gave you only one or two examples. If I were to devote my life to extrapolating from the ancient Near East, all the examples that correlate to kingship in the ancient Near East and in the Bible, I would have needed thousands and thousands. I just have given you a very, very small number.

So, my proposal to you is that kingship is crucial because God promised it. Kingship is crucial because God can show that human leaders are regularly failures, even the greatest of them, as in the case of Moses, but that God can use all of that to show you that the promise to Abraham is fulfilled, not in Moses but in the Messiah, in the Christ. So, to my way of thinking, this whole concept of kingship is one of the most missing foundational connectors to the Hebrew narrative.

It is not the only theology that makes its way throughout the entire narrative, but it is theologically one of the most important. I would propose to you that I think kingship is indeed the single most important revelatory metaphor for the being of God. So that's our proposition to you as we present this information to you on kingship as embodied in 1 Samuel 8. You know, it all seems so simple to me, but it reminds me of one of the things about life that surprises me.

I think I'm being persuasive and perfectly clear, only to find out that my world fails to recognize my greatness. So, I have no doubts that there will be disagreement among individuals over what I have been proposing. So, I can only invite you to look at the evidence, think about it, and realize that just because you've heard sermons on this doesn't mean the sermons are right.

My approach is, I think there is enough. I think of the ancient Near Eastern material not as the foundation of a building. 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.

You're shining light on the biblical text, but you're not providing its foundation. The foundation in the biblical text is clearly the revelation about God himself. Having said all of that, I'm ready to return to my class notes.

This is where we stopped with the seven points that all demonstrate Solomon's failures. With Solomon's reign failing, Israel returns to the state it was in in the book of Judges—a state governed at its core by tribalism. The ten tribes are jealous of the two tribes.

The two tribes are Judah and the tiny tribe of Benjamin, which has largely swallowed up Benjamin's territory. So, you have the tribal jealousies, just as we had in the book of Judges, that result in division. And so, what we have at the death of Solomon and the rise of Rehoboam is the return of tribalism, and it's a problem that is never really conquered or mastered in the Old Testament story.

So, what we have then is the period of the divided monarchy, which begins with the death of Solomon and the return of a divided Israel. We all know that story, of course, about Rehoboam. They come to Rehoboam and make him an offer that he can refuse, and so he rejects their offer, and just like that, the one kingdom is now two.

So, the prime enemy throughout this period was, of course, Assyria. It was recognized early as an adversary to be feared, as evidenced by the policies of the Omri dynasty. Omri was the father of Ahab, and they created the greatest dynasty in the north. Ahab and his followers recognized early on that Assyria was a power to be feared.

Egypt continued to play a role, but Egypt was never a hyper-power; it was never a super-power; it was just a neighboring power after the Sea People's Movement. Following the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Assyrian Empire collapsed and was replaced in the west with that of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and it was the latter nation that ended the period of the monarchy. So let me just take a moment and show you a map of Assyria.

This is an interesting map because it shows us the world's first, I'm going to use the term, first, first, first term, hyper-power. You see, Sargon's kingdom, or the kingdom of Ur III, was a great kingdom, but follow my cursor, or better yet, let me grab my marker, the kingdoms that were there before were kingdoms that ruled this Mesopotamian basin. That's as great as they were.

This is the world's first hyper-power because, as you can see, it rules the Fertile Crescent in its entirety, all of the Fertile Crescent, and more. It rules up into Anatolia, roughly half of Anatolia, and as you can see, it rules all of Egypt, and it rules to the

east, the historic neighboring domain of Iran. Assyria is not just the first empire to rule the Fertile Crescent, it is that, but it is the world's first hyper-power.

It will not be followed by a second hyper-power. As you can see, in the case of the Neo-Babylonian, the first Neo-Babylonian empire, which is pictured for you in purple, this is the empire that followed. This is the empire of the famous Nebuchadnezzar.

This empire was much smaller. It did not rule Egypt except for a very short period of time, and even though this map, which comes, by the way, from the Moody Bible Atlas, this map, as you can see, has it ruling Egypt. It did not really rule Egypt per se.

So, if you want the real borders of the Babylonian empire, the Neo-Babylonian empire, because the Neo-Babylonian empire is the successor to the old Babylonian empire, except that there are a thousand years separating them. The old Babylonian empire was by Hammurabi. The Neo-Babylonian empire is by Nebuchadnezzar.

So, the real Neo-Babylonian empire ruled the Fertile Crescent, but that's about all it ruled, the Fertile Crescent. So, it was not a hyper-power. But as we look at what's coming next, the greatest of the hyper-powers was Persia.

This map, which is not, is kind of disproportionate because it makes it look smaller than what it is. If you could see with me, this is India. The Persian empire, at its greatest, ruled all the way over into India.

It ruled up here into what we call Pakistan. It ruled up here into the Persian empire. It ruled all the way up into the Caucasus mountain regions into what we call Russia.

It ruled all the way to Traca, which is modern-day Romania and Bulgaria. It ruled all the way down to the Arabian Sea, all the way into Egypt, and all the way over to Libya. At its greatest, this was the greatest land mass of any empire.

This phenomenal land mass probably did not rule as many human beings as the Roman empire, but it ruled a larger land mass. This was the largest empire of all antiquity. There was no empire larger than this until the British Empire came into existence.

The Persian empire was a hyper-power. Then, of course, there was the subsequent empire to the Persians, and that was the empire of Alexander the Great. We don't really want to talk about Alexander the Great as having a hyper-power for the simple reason he died.

No sooner than he got it conquered, he died. He never ever put it together. Literally, the year that he died, the thing broke up into multiple political entities.

The so-called empire of Alexander, as you can see, it replaced that of the Persians, except that it added Macedonia and Hellas here. It really wasn't a true empire. As we walk our way through all of this, we're trying to show you about the successor empires.

This is the last empire in history, the Roman Empire. As you can see, it was the last of the hyper-powers.

It ruled in a circle around the entire Mediterranean Sea. As you can tell, this was a massive empire as well, probably ruling over more human beings than any empire of all of ancient history. As we have done our walk through these, let me just tell you, buy the Moody Bible Atlas.

There are a number of good ones. Zondervan has a good Bible Atlas. Carta, C-A-R-T-A, Carta Bible Atlas.

Buy yourself a good Bible Atlas. I believe every Bible student needs one. With these wonderful maps from the Moody Bible Atlas, I've been able to show you that the first of the hyper-powers is Assyria.

That's where we're going. 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. As early as Genesis 12, God reveals that he is a God of the whole world and that Abraham is to be a blessing to the whole world.

Contrary to the way the Israelites came to think about him, God was a God of all nations. God was a God of the whole world. Part of that whole world phenomenon then is the rise of the first world hyper-power.

Of course, if I could just pause to laugh just a little bit, look at the size of this empire, stretching for probably 1,500 to 2,000 miles. Huge. Then look at Israel.

Watch the color of the laser. Here is Israel. See that little 100-mile dot? That's Israel.

2,000 miles of power. It looks hopeless, doesn't it? How could God relate to such a massive military and political entity through this little 100-mile unit? As they say in the Olympics, let the games begin. It's not a pretty story at all times, but it is a story that if you believe in the Bible as a divine book, it's a story that reveals how God used the people in a very small area to change the entire globe.

A hundred miles. I live here in Lynchburg, Virginia. From Lynchburg, Virginia, in Lynchburg from Charlottesville, which is the location of the University of Virginia, go on 29 South, reach Lynchburg, go another 15 miles to Alta Vista, and here in

Lynchburg we have a picture of the size of Israel, stretching from Charlottesville to Alta Vista.

How on earth could such a small piece of ground support a story that would change the whole world? Well, that's because God is the God of the whole world. Let's be reminded that it's just as true today as it was then, even if we can't always figure out how the story is unfolding. How did Assyria become a hyper-power? I have four suggestions: economic, psychological, ethnological, and geographic.

The first of these I call economic considerations. If we went back to our map and looked at it, the heart of ancient Assyria is right here in this one little section like this. In ancient times, it was referred to as Subartu, but today, it's called Assyria.

In this small little section, we have a region where economics played an important part in the development of this great hyper-power. You know, there's a way in which we can perhaps think about it. Assyria proper was a region that had just enough good farmland to support a population that was just large enough to have a chance, and then put those together and just the right circumstances occur, and this smaller region could become greater than greater regions.

So, to the south, what we have seen is that the ancient economies have been weakened because of the gradual loss of fertility of the soil, because of the decline of the cities and the city-states that had been down there, so that as the economies down here began to decline, that gave the Assyrians a chance for their economy to begin to play a part. And the economy of Assyria had a few advantages that the economies down here in Sumer and Akkad didn't have. What would those advantages be? Well, with the rise of Assyria, we're in the Iron Age, and the advantage that Assyria had in the Iron Age is that it was an immediate neighbor to the iron deposits that were found up here in what we call Turkey, at this time we'll just call it Anatolia.

One, Assyria is proximate to the iron deposits, which counts for something, especially when there's no longer an Anatolian kingdom to stop them. Secondly, Assyria is proximate to the timber that can be gotten both from Anatolia up here as well as the Zagros, so Assyria is in a little better condition than the other political entities of the region because of its proximity to timber and to metal. Now, it does not, of course, have the great granary-production qualities that we have in the south, but then what has happened in the south is that the south and central sections have lost a certain amount of their granary-producing qualities.

That's what we mean by economic considerations. Assyria is closer to the sources of empire, the essentials of empire, so that was our first point then. The second point is what I call psychological considerations.

I always have to make fun of myself when I use the word psychology since I know virtually nothing about psychology. Peg and I went to a Bible college, and we had a teacher who taught us a psychology course. What I remember so vividly about that psychology course is that I didn't learn a single thing about psychology, but I learned that this was a woman who really hated men. So, I don't know anything about psychology. Maybe I should have searched for another term.

When I say psychology, maybe I could have used the word worldview. One thing we can observe about the Assyrians is that all of their major deities were war deities. Right from the beginning, it's clear that Assyria emphasized warlikeness that was different from that of its neighbors.

In other words, all of their major deities are war deities, that's different from Mesopotamia. And secondly, they have this peculiar picture that seems to lead us to think that war to the Assyrians was an act of religion. I can show you pictures if I had time, which, of course, the lack of time is the problem, but I can show pictures of you in which you can have an Assyrian king in his military gear with his bow drawn like this and then in perfect silhouette behind him is the war deity.

And so, in their way of thinking, Assyria was sort of the God's choice to conduct war on behalf of given deities. In other words, this seems to be an emerging different concept that leads us to conclude war to the Assyrians was an act of religion. This may be the closest to the earliest account we can get of what we could call holy war.

To the Assyrians, war was an act of religion, and a king's religious fidelity is measured by asking how many campaigns did you conduct. If a king went to battle every year, then he was a religiously holy king. So, at this point, we're just saying the Assyrians had a unique perspective on war. To them, warfare was a religious act, and that drove them to conquer in ways that I think were somewhat different from anything before them up to this point.

Third, I draw your attention to what I call ethnological factors. What I mean by that is Assyria is surrounded by people who are not religious. They are political entities that lead to this political reality.

Either conquer them, or they will conquer you. Now, friends, the historic political entity to the south has always been the great peoples of Sumer and Akkad. Well, by now, Sumer is gone, but there is a permanent people power to the south of Assyria that is always pointed just like a dagger.

To choose a term from Churchill in World War II, it is a permanent dagger pointed at the underbelly of Assyria. So, what would that underbelly be? It is Babylon. For all of subsequent history, Babylon continues to be a rival to Assyria.

Assyria kind of regarded Babylon as a cousin. Well, the Babylonians did not regard themselves as cousins. They hated the Assyrians.

They wanted to have Babylon rule Assyria. So, to the south, you have the knife pointed at Assyria's underbelly, what Churchill called the Balkans campaign; he always wanted to invade Germany from the Balkans, not from France. Well secondly, they faced the ethnological factor that to their immediate west, they had another ethnological threat to the existence of Assyria, and that was the threat of the pugnacious entity of Aramea.

You see, with the rise of Assyria, we also have the rise of these Aramean kingdoms to the west, and just as Assyria is seeking to expand its influence, so the Arameans are seeking to expand to the east. Assyria is either going to be conquered by the Arameans, or Assyria will conquer the Arameans. Now what that leads to is the phenomena that Assyria recognized it was going to have to make war to the south and to the west.

So that's what I mean about ethnological factors. It was crystal clear to them from the long history of Assyria that Assyria either conquered them or they were going to conquer Assyria. That's the ethnological factors.

The last of the four factors that I mentioned about the rise of Assyria I called the geographical factor. We'll explain this, and then we'll probably put a close on this particular video and go to our next one. The geographical factor is this.

Unlike Sumer to the south and Akkad in the center, Assyria sits at the northern extreme of the Mesopotamian basin. What is less visible is that this land bridge up here, the Caucasus, was the land bridge through which migrating peoples moved to make their way into either Anatolia or the fertile crescent or sometimes down here. Israel was geographically exposed.

When those groups emigrated in, once they got past the mountainous regions of the eastern section here, Assyria took the first hit. Assyria was geographically exposed. As a matter of fact, there's a sense in which political entities are rarely ever really safe from the possibilities of geographical harm.

They were exposed to the north. They were exposed, as I mentioned to you, from the west. They were exposed from the south.

So what my point is about Assyria's geography is there is nothing about the geography of Assyria proper that makes Assyria safe. Now, you might think that that would make Assyria weak, but if it's properly handled, then the reality is the lack of safe borders means that the political entity of Assyria will expand its borders to be safe. In other words, for the historic political entity of Assyria to be safe, it must

conquer in all four directions, south, and north, east and west, so that the geographical exposure of Assyria required it to conquer or to be conquered.

One of the things that I find most ironic about what we're pointing out to you right now is that Assyria had never been a great power. It had not necessarily been a weak power. Assyria in 1200, 1250, and 1000 BC, it had been an important political entity, but it had never been a great power.

Following the Sea People's Movement, Assyria entered a period of immediate weakness, and when it emerged, it surprised the entire world. So, our last thought on this tape will be something like this: In a very real fashion, the Sea People's Movement was responsible for the vacuum that allowed Assyria to rise and fill the vacuum.

Without any great powers to stop it, Assyria, for the first time in history, could become a great power. So, just as the Sea People's Movement created a vacuum for Israel to become an important power, it also created a vacuum for Assyria to become a power. For the first time in a thousand years, there was no great power to the south. There was no great power to the north, and Egypt was weak.

That just created a vacuum that fed oxygen to what would be the next great power, which would be arguably the most cruel, vicious, horrifying people of all of antiquity. Kind of a bad place to stop, but a good place because we're about to enter into the Assyrian period, and there's a sense in which this was a nightmare period of over three centuries. Assyria was one of the longest lived of all of the Mesopotamian empires.

So, with that, we'll go ahead and pause and then pick this up and start our next tape, looking at the historical material of the Assyrian empire as it interfaces with the biblical text. Thanks.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 17, Kingship in the Ancient Near East.