

# Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4, Divinization of Kings Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4, Divinization of Kings, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Don Fowler's lecture** on Old Testament backgrounds explores the **divinization of kings in Mesopotamia**. He traces the historical development of kingship, starting from its origins in Kish and the Sumerian King List, showing how the role of kings evolved and centralized over time. The lecture highlights the shift from a focus on temples and priests to a focus on palaces and kings, culminating in kings like **Sargon**, who established the first Mesopotamian empire, and **Naram-Sin**, who **declared himself a god-king**. Fowler connects these historical developments to the understanding of kingship in the Old Testament, emphasizing the importance of understanding the historical context to interpret biblical texts accurately.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Old Testament Introduction → Old Testament Backgrounds).**



**Fowler\_OTB\_Session  
n04.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4, Divinization of Kings

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Fowler's lecture on the Divinization of Kings:

#### **Briefing Document: Divinization of Kings in the Ancient Near East**

**Main Theme:** This lecture traces the development of kingship in ancient Mesopotamia, culminating in the divinization of kings, and argues that this background is crucial for understanding the world of the Old Testament and how humans think about power and religion.

#### **Key Ideas and Facts:**

##### **1. Shift in Religious Centrality:**

- The lecture begins by noting a significant historical shift: "That epochal shift is away from the centrality of religious entities like temples and priests to quasi-religious entities like kings and palaces."
- This shift is presented as a foundational change that impacts understanding not just the Old Testament but also human thought itself.

##### **1. The Importance of Kish:**

- The city of Kish is identified as the place where kingship was first experienced after the flood, according to the Sumerian King List: "...Kish was the city where after the flood, kingship was supposedly first lowered..."
- Kish was a prominent city in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC. The first royal palace was found there.
- The title "King of Kish" was the most prestigious of early royal titles, even when rulers were not actually kings of Kish: "royal inscriptions always utilize the title king of Kish as the most prestigious of earthly titles".

##### **1. Sumerian King List and Historiography:**

- The Sumerian King List is the earliest form of historiography (how history is written) known to us.
- Ancient historiography centered on kingship. This can be seen in the Sumerian King List and also in the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10.

- Genealogies were a primary way history was preserved in the ancient world, possibly because they were easily memorized. This supports similar structures in the Bible: "in the way the ancients thought about writing history, genealogies were the primary way in which history was preserved."
- The Sumerian King List demonstrates the ancients' ability to preserve information over very long periods.

#### 1. **Emergence of Early Empires and Kings:**

- The dynasty of Lagash is the first place where detailed inscriptions for rulers and economic archives allow for the study of the state. Ur-Nnanshe was the founder.
- Kings were primarily responsible for warfare, echoing the Israelites' request for a king in 1 Samuel 8, a king "who will fight on behalf of them".
- Aconitum of Lagash created a hegemony over Sumer and was known for his "Stele of Vultures," one of the earliest treaty formats (stipulations and curses for violations). This format is mirrored in the Mosaic Law, suggesting ancient treaty-making was already established: "This is one of the earliest treaty formats characterized by long stipulations followed by curses if the stipulations are violated... this is the way God gave his treaty with Israel."
- Uruk-Haganah is identified as a "reformed king" who tried to limit royal power over city gods, the state bureaucracy, and taxes. He even attempted a limited abolition of debts, a possible forerunner of the biblical Jubilee. He tried to reverse the trend of growing kingly power.

#### 1. **Centralization of Power and Usurpation:**

- Lugal-Zage-Si of Uma conquered Sumer and was the first to usurp titles of city gods, centralizing royal power: "When Lugal-Zage-Si captured these Sumerian cities, he took the royal titles that had belonged to those kings and appropriated them for himself."
- This was a foreshadowing of the process of divinization, where royal power would become increasingly concentrated.

#### 1. **Sargon of Akkad: The First Mesopotamian Empire:**

- Sargon, the first king of the Akkadian Empire, was a highly significant figure. He set the stage for divinization of kings.

- Sargon was a usurper, possibly of illegitimate birth: "He called himself a true king because he was a usurper." His origin story involves being set adrift on the Tigris River, a story that has some parallels with the biblical story of Moses but also clear differences.
- Sargon created the first Mesopotamian empire, covering much of modern-day Iraq and Syria. He used innovative strategies to maintain control, including:
  - Garrisoning cities with loyal troops.
  - Appointing Semitic officials alongside Sumerian ones.
  - Taking political hostages to ensure the loyalty of city officials.
- Sargon made it clear that all of the state was subordinated to him and the royal palace.
- He built a new capital city, Akkad or Agade. This mirrors David's capture of Jerusalem as his capital.
- He adapted cuneiform for the Akkadian language.
- Sargon changed how temples functioned, making them financially dependent on the king: "No longer was the temple a financially independent institution, it was supported now by the wealth of the king fully."
- Sargon also centralized religious power by installing his daughter as the high priestess over the whole land.
- Dr. Fowler argues that Sargon is an "epochally important individual" due to his innovations and the direction his reign set for centralization.

#### 1. **Naram-Sin and the Divinization of Kings:**

- Naram-Sin was the first Mesopotamian king to declare himself a god.
- Evidence of this claim includes:
  - Using the divine determinative in front of both names, Naram and Sin: "he had the divine determinative drawn in front of both names so that the audience would understand that he's not just Naram-Sin because of Sin, he is the god Naram-Sin."
  - Employing the title "king of the four quarters," meaning king of the universe.
  - Calling himself "husband of Ishtar," the most important female deity.

- Representing himself as larger than all the other figures in his art and wearing a horned helmet: "The second thing is, and I'm not sure that you can see it, but the second thing is, he's wearing what's called a horned helmet...This is the sign of deity."
- The horn is a sign of deity, and is the root of the word *charon* which is used in Hebrew to mean both horn and crown.
- The Sacred marriage rituals changed to include the king as the sexual partner of the high priestess, moving from the deities Dumuzi and Ishtar.

#### 1. Theological Underpinnings:

- The move towards divinization was driven by theological changes rather than simply philosophical shifts.
- Ancient theology was central to the worldview.
- Dr. Fowler also notes that it is essential to understand the concept of kingship in order to properly understand the Bible and how it relates to Jesus as king.

#### Conclusion:

Dr. Fowler's lecture demonstrates how the centralization of power in ancient Mesopotamia gradually led to the divinization of kings. This process, starting from a focus on temples and priests, transitioned to powerful earthly rulers who eventually claimed divine status. Sargon's innovative strategies paved the way for this development, with Naram-Sin ultimately taking the leap and proclaiming himself a god-king. This background is essential for understanding the complexities of power, religion, and kingship both in the Old Testament and in the ancient world more broadly.

## 4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4, Divinization of Kings

### Divinization of Kings: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Why is the city of Kish significant in the context of ancient Mesopotamia?
2. What is the Sumerian King List, and what makes it an important historical document?
3. How does the concept of "historiography" as practiced by the Sumerians differ from modern historiography?
4. Describe the reforms of King Urukagina.
5. How did Lugal-Zage-Si's actions foreshadow the divinization of kings in Mesopotamia?
6. What is the significance of Sargon's claim that he was found floating down the Tigris River as a baby?
7. Describe three political precedents that Sargon established in his empire.
8. How did Sargon alter the relationship between the king and religious institutions?
9. What is the significance of Naram-Sin declaring himself a god-king?
10. Explain the use of the divine determinative in the name of Naram-Sin and what that signifies.

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Kish is considered the city where kingship was first experienced after the flood, according to the Sumerian King List. It also has the earliest clear instance of a royal palace and was the most prestigious of early royal titles.
2. The Sumerian King List is an early form of historiography that records the rulers of Sumer. It's important because it provides insight into how the ancient Mesopotamians understood and recorded their history, particularly concerning kingship.

3. Sumerian historiography centered around kingship, using genealogies and preserved historical information over long periods of time, unlike modern historiography, which is focused on exhaustive facts, impartiality, and is secular.
4. Urukagina attempted to limit the powers of the king, state, and bureaucracy. He also tried to put the temple back on equal footing with the palace, and to limit taxes, and instituted an abolition of debts.
5. Lugal-Zage-Si usurped the titles of the city gods for himself when he captured Sumerian cities. This action foreshadowed the later divinization of kings by demonstrating a centralization of power that would eventually lead to earthly rulers claiming divine status.
6. Sargon's story of being found floating down the Tigris River was likely a fabrication that served as propaganda. It was designed to legitimize his claim to the throne by suggesting he had divine favor by having his life spared by the gods and that the gods guided him to Kish.
7. Sargon established the practice of garrisoning cities with military troops to prevent revolt, appointed Semitic officials to govern alongside Sumerian administrators, and took political hostages from royal families to ensure compliance.
8. Sargon centralized the religious offices somehow in himself, and then claimed divine justification for this. He positioned himself as the center of the national cult and made the temple financially dependent on the king rather than an independent institution. He installed his own daughter as high priestess over the whole land.
9. Naram-Sin declared himself a god-king, the first Mesopotamian king to do so. He was the first to use the divine determinative, calling himself the "king of the four quarters," and the "husband of Ishtar," signifying he saw himself as a deity on Earth.
10. By having the divine determinative placed before both names, "Naram" and "Sin," Naram-Sin signified that he was not merely beloved of the moon god Sin, but was himself divine. This was a clear claim to deification.

## Essay Questions

1. Analyze the evolution of kingship from the early city-states of Mesopotamia to the divinization of kings, as exemplified by Naram-Sin. Discuss the key factors that contributed to this transition.
2. Compare and contrast the political strategies employed by Sargon of Akkad with those of earlier Sumerian rulers. How did Sargon's innovations lay the groundwork for the development of empires in Mesopotamia?
3. Discuss the role of religion in the development of Mesopotamian kingship, focusing on the relationships between the king, the temple, and the city gods. How did these relationships change over time?
4. Compare the significance of the Sumerian King List and the Sargon myth as examples of ancient historiography. How do these texts reveal the values and beliefs of their respective cultures?
5. Analyze the ways in which the divinization of Mesopotamian kings might have influenced the development of political and religious thought in the ancient Near East, as well as in the Old Testament.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Divinization of Kings:** The process by which earthly rulers were elevated to the status of gods, claiming divine attributes and authority.
- **Kish:** An ancient Mesopotamian city considered the birthplace of kingship according to the Sumerian King List; used as a prestigious royal title.
- **Sumerian King List:** An ancient text that lists the kings of Sumer, often blending mythological and historical figures and providing insights into early Mesopotamian conceptions of kingship and history.
- **Historiography:** The study of how history is written. In this context, referring to the manner in which the ancient Mesopotamians wrote and recorded their history.
- **Genealogies:** A record or table of a family's descent, used in ancient historiography to preserve the continuity of royal lineages and historical memory.
- **Lagash:** A Sumerian city-state known for its detailed inscriptions and economic archives, which provide valuable information about the development of kingship and statecraft.



- **Urukagina:** A Sumerian king known for his reforms aimed at limiting royal power and restoring a more traditional balance between the palace and the temple.
- **Lugal-Zage-Si:** King of Umma who captured all of Sumer. He usurped the titles of the city gods for himself, a major step towards divinization of kings.
- **Sargon of Akkad:** The founder of the Akkadian Empire, known for his military prowess, political innovations, and centralization of power, a precursor to royal divinization.
- **Old Akkadian Period:** The historical era marked by Sargon's empire and Akkadian dominance in Mesopotamia.
- **Semitic:** Belonging to a language family, including Akkadian, Hebrew, and Arabic; refers to a cultural or linguistic group in the ancient Near East.
- **Garrisoning:** The practice of stationing troops in conquered cities to maintain control, a key element of imperial rule.
- **Akkad/Agade:** The capital city of Sargon's empire, a symbol of centralized power and a new cultural center.
- **Cuneiform:** A system of writing developed by the Sumerians, using wedge-shaped marks on clay tablets.
- **Naram-Sin:** An Akkadian king who declared himself a god-king, utilizing the divine determinative and the title "king of the four quarters" as signs of his divinity.
- **Divine Determinative:** A symbol used in cuneiform writing to indicate that a word refers to a deity, used by Naram-Sin to assert his divine status.
- **King of the Four Quarters:** A title claimed by Naram-Sin to signify he was king of the universe.
- **Husband of Ishtar:** A title taken by Naram-Sin that was previously reserved for a god, indicating his claim to divine status and union with the goddess Ishtar.
- **Ishtar:** The most important female deity in the Mesopotamian pantheon.
- **Sacred Marriage:** An annual religious ceremony that symbolically reenacts the sexual union of Ishtar and a god (originally Dumuzi, later the king) to ensure the fertility of the land.
- **Charon:** Hebrew word meaning horn or crown.

## 5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 4, Divinization of Kings, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ: The Evolution of Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia

1. **What was the significant shift in human experience discussed in the lecture, and why is it relevant to understanding the Old Testament?** The lecture highlights a crucial shift from the centrality of religious entities like temples and priests to quasi-religious entities like kings and palaces in Mesopotamia. This is essential for understanding the background of the Old Testament, particularly its portrayal of kingship and how ancient people viewed religion and power. It also provides context for understanding how we as humans have thought about power and religion throughout history.
2. **Why is the city of Kish considered so important in the history of kingship?** Kish is considered the city where kingship was first experienced after the flood, according to the Sumerian King List. It was also the city where the first royal palace was discovered in Mesopotamia, adding to its historical importance. Royal inscriptions often used "king of Kish" as the most prestigious earthly title, even if a king did not actually rule Kish, indicating the city's perceived prestige and significance in the development of Mesopotamian kingship.
3. **How does the Sumerian King List contribute to our understanding of ancient historiography, and what are some key characteristics of this early historical record?** The Sumerian King List is the earliest form of historiography, which is the way history is written. Unlike modern history, it centers around kingship. It also primarily uses genealogies to record history, highlighting how ancient people preserved historical information, especially in an oral tradition. This is significant because it shows us that genealogies were not always a late feature of historical writing, as some modern scholars might assume, but an early and key way to record history.

4. **What are some of the ways that Sargon of Akkad revolutionized the concept of kingship and empire?** Sargon created the first Mesopotamian empire, which was distinct from a kingdom as it involved the forced subjugation of people. He implemented several innovations to maintain his empire, including garrisoning cities with loyal troops, appointing Semitic officials alongside Sumerian administrators, and taking political hostages from the royal families of conquered cities. He also centralized power in himself and his palace, making it clear that everything in the state was subordinate to the king and his interests. His daughter was made high priestess to centralize religious power in himself. Sargon also created a new capital city, Akkad, that replaced Kish as the sacred city and power center.
5. **How did the economic and religious status of temples change under Sargon's rule?** Before Sargon, the temple was the primary economic entity in ancient cities, but Sargon shifted this by having the state support the temple financially, making the temple dependent on the king rather than independent. Additionally, the king himself became the center of the national cult by positioning his daughter as the high priestess, which further centralized religious power in the hands of the royal family.
6. **What does the term “divinization of kings” mean and how did it manifest in ancient Mesopotamia, particularly with Naram-Sin?** The “divinization of kings” refers to the process by which earthly rulers were declared to be gods. Naram-Sin was the first Mesopotamian king to declare himself a god. This is evidenced by the use of the divine determinative before his name, the title “king of the four quarters” (king of the universe), his title as husband of Ishtar, and the artistic depictions of Naram-Sin as significantly larger than other figures while wearing a horned helmet, which was a symbol of divinity.
7. **What evidence suggests that Naram-Sin was claiming divine status?** Several forms of evidence point to Naram-Sin’s claim of divinity: First, he added a divine determinative to his name in writing, signifying his status as a god. Second, he called himself “king of the four quarters,” which was an ancient way of asserting rulership over the entire universe. He also took the title of “husband of Ishtar,” a major goddess in the Mesopotamian pantheon. Additionally, he was depicted in artwork as being much larger than others and wearing a horned helmet, which was a traditional sign of a deity.

8. **Why did the divinization of kings occur, and what were the theoretical underpinnings for this dramatic shift?** The divinization of kings resulted from a significant centralization of power from the temples to the king's palace. This centralization of power and the increasing authority of earthly kings led to a radical shift in religious thought, where earthly kings began taking on titles, roles, and divine imagery previously reserved for the gods. The logic was that since the kings were clearly successful through the power of the gods, then they must in some way represent them, and ultimately, be one of them. This shift was deeply rooted in the religious and theological views of the ancient Mesopotamians rather than simply a power grab by the rulers.