

Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 17, Kingship in the Ancient Near East, 6-min. Video Overview

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Hey everyone, and welcome. Today, we are jumping into one of the biggest and honestly most misunderstood topics in the entire Bible: kingship. We all kind of think we know the story, right? Israel demands a king, and it's a disaster.

But what if that's not the real story at all? What if it's actually about a hidden promise? So let's start with the big question. Give us a king. We've all heard that this was Israel's greatest sin, that when they said this, they were flat-out rejecting God.

But you know, is it really that simple? Was asking for a king actually the problem? Okay, so the very first thing we have to get our heads around is this pretty wild idea. Kingship was never a mistake. In fact, if you look at the text, it was actually a promised blessing.

It was an idea so central to God's whole plan that you could say his own integrity was riding on it. Yeah, this wasn't some sudden rebellious tantrum from the people. The promise of having a king is woven into the biblical story right from the beginning.

Back in Genesis, God literally promises Abraham that kings will come from his family line, and then he turns around and makes that exact same promise to his grandson Jacob. It was always, always part of the plan. So if kingship was God's idea all along, what on earth went wrong? Well, it turns out the Bible presents a type of king that was just radically different from anything else in the ancient world.

On one side, you had all the literature from Israel's neighbors, and it was pure propaganda. I mean, it was all designed to make their king look absolutely perfect, but the biblical text? Whoa, it does the exact opposite. And this quote from Dr. Donald Fowler just nails it.

Think about it. The Bible's greatest royal hero, King David, is shown with all of his tragic flaws on full display. As Dr. Fowler says, that is the furthest thing you can get from propaganda.

The text isn't trying to sell you on some perfect human king. It's telling a much bigger story about God working through some seriously imperfect people. Okay, so that raises a huge question, right? If even the best of the best, like King David, were such massive failures, what was the model for kingship even supposed to look like? Who was the real propaganda-free ideal? And here is the twist.

The ultimate model for a biblical king? It isn't who you think it is. It's not David with the crown and the throne and all that. No, the true template, the ideal leader that the text holds up for everyone else to follow, is Moses.

Now, I know that might sound a little strange at first, but the biblical authors are incredibly intentional. They embed this whole constellation of royal language and imagery right into the story of Moses. Let's actually break down the case for King Moses.

See, back in the ancient Near East, for a king to be seen as legitimate, he had to be three things. Divinely chosen. Divinely called.

And divinely enabled. And Moses, he checks every single one of those boxes. The text goes out of its way to show that God specifically chose him, that he had this massive call story at the burning bush, and that God's spirit was placed on him to lead.

These are all hallmarks of a king. And get this, it's all in the symbolism. What does Moses carry around? A simple shepherd's staff.

Well, guess what the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for king was? A shepherd's staff. So when Moses walks in to confront Pharaoh, it's not just a shepherd versus a king. It's a battle of two scepters, two competing claims to royalty.

It's amazing. And what about his character? The Bible says Moses was the meekest man on earth. And of course, we hear meek, and we immediately think weak, but that's a total misunderstanding of the word.

In the ancient world, meekness was a royal virtue. It meant that a king understood that his power came from God and he acted with humility. It was the sign of a good king.

And it's the same thing when the Bible calls Moses God's servant or even his slave. That's not a put-down. It's a royal title.

Dozens of ancient kings proudly called themselves the servant of their God. It was a title of incredible honor. It meant they were God's chosen representative on earth.

So when you put it all together, here's the bottom line. Moses is portrayed as a lawgiver, a shepherd, and as the one who transfers royal honor. The Hebrew word is horde to his successor, Joshua.

The text is just saturated with language that is deliberately painting Moses as Israel's first and ideal king. Okay, so we've got this blueprint for what a king should be. But this story doesn't happen in a vacuum, right? Let's zoom way out from this tiny little nation and its leader and look at the massive geopolitical stage of the ancient Near East and the rise of the world's first hyperpowers.

First up, meet Assyria. This wasn't just another kingdom. This was the world's first true hyperpower.

We're talking about an empire that stretched nearly 2000 miles, just swallowing up everything in its path with this absolutely brutal military machine. And then you've got Israel, a tiny little strip of land, maybe a hundred miles long, if you're being generous. I mean, on a map, it's barely a speck next to the colossal Assyrian empire.

It just looks completely and utterly hopeless, which is exactly what Dr. Fowler is getting at here. How in the world could God possibly enact his global plan through this tiny, insignificant nation against that kind of massive force? It seems impossible. And yet, this is exactly where the Bible sets its main drama.

Let the games begin. And this right here brings us to the very heart of the Bible story of kingship. This incredible, almost comical imbalance of power.

It wasn't some historical accident. It was the entire point. It was the stage God chose to demonstrate something profound about where real power comes from.

You see, God's promise to Abraham was never just about creating one little nation. It was about blessing all the nations of the world. The rise of these massive global empires created the perfect stage for that.

By putting tiny Israel up against them, God was showing the whole world that his power and his plan were never, ever dependent on human strength or military might or the size of a kingdom. And that's really the main takeaway here. The entire story of kingship from those first promises way back in Genesis to the selfless ideal of Moses to the spectacular failures of David and this impossible clash with giant empires.

It's all pointing forward. It's building this one consistent narrative that human power will always fail. And it's setting the stage for a totally different kind of king and a different kind of kingdom.

Which leaves us with one last thought to chew on. The biblical story again and again reveals God's greatest power in moments of profound human weakness and what looks like total insignificance. So the question for us then is, if that's true, where should we be looking for real power and real change in our own world today?