

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 20, Demise of Assyria 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 20, Demise of Assyria, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler examines the demise of the Assyrian Empire, focusing on King Hezekiah's ill-advised rebellion against Assyria and the subsequent siege of Jerusalem. The lecture uses biblical accounts alongside Assyrian records to analyze the events, highlighting the contrasting perspectives and the resulting propaganda used by the Assyrian general, Rabshakeh. Fowler discusses the theological implications of Jerusalem's unexpected deliverance, particularly the emergence and dangers of Zion theology. The lecture concludes with the assassination of Sennacherib and the eventual fall of the Assyrian Empire, tracing its decline through subsequent rulers. Finally, it touches upon Ashurbanipal's significant contribution to preserving Mesopotamian history through his extensive library.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 20 – 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
n20.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 20, Demise of Assyria

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts:

Briefing Document: Demise of the Assyrian Empire

Overview: This lecture focuses on the decline and fall of the Assyrian Empire, exploring key events, figures, and theological implications, particularly in relation to the Old Testament. Dr. Fowler emphasizes the vast time scales involved and the challenges of understanding historical events from a distance, both temporally and geographically.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. **The Scale of History:** Dr. Fowler emphasizes the vastness of time when studying ancient empires, noting, *"When you're going through these empires like we're doing, it isn't like we're doing this from 40,000 feet. It looks more like we're actually on the moon looking at the earth."* He uses the analogy of "throwing centuries around like nickels" to illustrate the scale of the Old Testament period.
2. **Sennacherib's Campaign Against Judah (701 BC):**
 - **Hezekiah's Rebellion:** Hezekiah, king of Judah, foolishly joined a coalition against Assyria, despite the Assyrians' reputation for military dominance. As Fowler notes, *"You can be godly and dumb. This was a really dumb move."*
 - **The Coalition's Failure:** Most of the coalition, including Tyre, quickly abandoned the rebellion, leaving Hezekiah isolated. Egypt, likened by Isaiah to *"a crushed reed... it will go into his hand and pierce it,"* proved to be a weak ally.
 - **Assyrian Strategy:** Sennacherib's forces divided, with part besieging Jerusalem under the Rabshakeh while the main army defeated the Egyptians at El Teka.
 - **The Rabshakeh's Propaganda:** The Rabshakeh, an Assyrian official, delivered a powerful speech taunting Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. The speech challenged their reliance on Egypt and their God, asking *"Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?"*
 - **Hezekiah's Response:** Overwhelmed by the situation, Hezekiah seeks the counsel of the prophet Isaiah.

- **Divine Intervention:** The biblical account states that an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians overnight, devastating their army. Dr. Fowler suggests the number may include logistical personnel, and that the main army may have been more in the 30,000-40,000 range.

1. Theological Implications of Jerusalem's Deliverance:

- **Not Hezekiah's Righteousness:** Fowler argues that God delivered Jerusalem not due to Hezekiah's piety but due to the Rabshakeh's blasphemous words. *"God did not deliver Jerusalem because Hezekiah was so righteous... He sent the message to the world's greatest empire that when you blaspheme Israel's God, Israel's God has the power to destroy you."*
- **Zion Theology:** This event inadvertently fueled "Zion theology," the belief that Jerusalem is inviolable and that God would always protect it. Fowler calls this idea a "cancer" that led to misinterpretations of God's relationship with Israel. He notes, *"They seem to have come to the conclusion that since Japheth had kept Jerusalem from falling this time, then Japheth was going to do the same on behalf of Jerusalem at all times."*
- **God's Authority:** The story demonstrates that Assyria, despite its power, was ultimately under the authority of Israel's God. Fowler quotes Isaiah, *"Assyria is my rod,"* underscoring God's control.
- **The Danger of Alliances:** Hezekiah's attempts to form international alliances (with both Egypt and Babylon) are portrayed as disastrous. The king was not to be an internationalist or a militarist.
- **Losses Under Hezekiah:** Hezekiah lost 46 walled cities and had 200,000 Judeans taken captive as a result of his rebellion.

1. The Fall of Lachish:

- **Strategic Importance:** Lachish was the most important city in Judea at the time, controlling access to the coastal plain and generating revenue for the king.
- **Assyrian Siege:** Sennacherib's palace reliefs depict the siege of Lachish, showcasing the Assyrian siege engine and the capture of Judean women.
- **Hezekiah's Failure:** Hezekiah ultimately lost this critical city, further weakening his position.

1. The End of Sennacherib:

- **Assassination:** Sennacherib was assassinated by his sons in 689 BC, a sign of the internal problems within the Assyrian empire.
- **Contradictions:** This leads to scholarly debate as Isaiah had written he would die in his own land but it didn't happen for 12 years, leading some scholars to suspect a second campaign of Sennacherib.

1. Esarhaddon and the Expansion of Assyria:

- **Ascension:** Esarhaddon, though not the heir apparent, came to power after his brothers killed their father and were then defeated by Esarhaddon.
- **Conquests:** He expanded the Assyrian empire into northern Egypt, capturing Memphis.
- **Tirhakah:** The black Egyptian pharaoh Tirhakah presented a formidable challenge to the Assyrians.

1. Ashurbanipal and the Height of Assyrian Power:

- **Long Reign:** Ashurbanipal reigned from 668-627 BC.
- **Greatest Extent:** Under his rule, the Assyrian empire reached its greatest extent, including Elam and Egypt.
- **Military Campaigns:** Ashurbanipal conducted numerous campaigns, and he crushed internal revolts from his brother who wanted to become king.
- **The Library of Ashurbanipal:** Ironically, Ashurbanipal's greatest legacy is his vast library of clay tablets which preserved Mesopotamian history and literature, including the Gilgamesh epic. He sent out archaeologists to find ancient tablets and had them translated into Neo-Assyrian, preserving them for history. Fowler notes, *"How ironic, isn't it, that these peoples who destroyed so much, murdered so many people, tortured so many people, how ironic that Ashurbanipal would leave the world a treasury greater than all of Assyria's gold because he left his world knowledge."*

1. The Rapid Collapse of Assyria:

- **Internal Strife:** Following Ashurbanipal's reign, the Assyrian empire quickly crumbled due to internal strife and civil war. The final events cannot be recreated due to a lack of records.
- **Medes and Babylonians:** The Medes captured Ashur in 614 BC, and Nineveh, the capital, fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC.
- **End of the Empire:** By 609 BC, the Assyrian Empire was entirely destroyed, a testament to the hatred it had inspired. It was a 300 year old empire that was suddenly destroyed.
- **Babylonians Prevail:** The Babylonians gained control, finally having their own empire.

Conclusion:

This lecture highlights the rise and fall of the Assyrian Empire, emphasizing not just the military and political events, but also their impact on Israel's history and theology. The story of Hezekiah and the siege of Jerusalem serves as a case study in the complexities of faith, power, and divine intervention. The lecture also offers a reflection on the irony of Ashurbanipal, a brutal king whose legacy includes the preservation of ancient knowledge through his library. The rapid demise of such a powerful empire is a reminder of the transient nature of earthly power and the enduring power of historical memory.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 20, Demise of Assyria

Demise of Assyria: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. What was the key factor that led to Sennacherib's campaign against the West, particularly Judah?
2. Describe the coalition that Hezekiah joined against Assyria and why it was ultimately ineffective.
3. Explain Sennacherib's military strategy regarding Jerusalem and the battle at El Teka, according to Fowler.
4. Summarize the Rabshakeh's speech to the people of Jerusalem, highlighting its purpose and key points.
5. How did God intervene to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian siege, and what is the significance of this event?
6. What is Zion theology, and why did Fowler suggest it was a misinterpretation of the events surrounding the Assyrian siege?
7. What were the consequences of Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria, both in terms of territorial and political losses?
8. How did Ashurbanipal contribute to the preservation of ancient Mesopotamian literature and culture?
9. What were the key factors that led to the downfall of the Assyrian Empire?
10. Briefly describe the roles and interactions of Esarhaddon, Tirhakah, and Ashurbanipal.

Answer Key

1. Sennacherib's campaign against the West was primarily due to a rebellion led by Tyre and Egypt, in which Hezekiah foolishly joined, after initially refusing to join a revolt against Sargon. Hezekiah's removal of the king of Ekron, Padi, who refused to join, prompted Sennacherib's march to the West.
2. The coalition against Assyria included Tyre, Egypt, Byblos, Arpad, Moab, Edom, Ammon, and Ashkelon, which were mostly cities. It was ineffective because the

cities quickly abandoned Hezekiah once Tyre fell. Egypt was a weak ally, and Hezekiah was ultimately left to resist alone.

3. Sennacherib split his army, sending a part to besiege Jerusalem led by the Rabshakeh while he himself led the main force down the coast and defeated the Egyptians at El Teka. Afterward, the main force joined the siege.
4. The Rabshakeh's speech aimed to demoralize the people of Jerusalem, using propaganda to highlight their isolation, the weakness of Egypt, and the futility of resisting Assyria, and taunting their faith.
5. God delivered Jerusalem by having an angel of the Lord destroy the Assyrian army's logistical support system. This event was significant because it demonstrated the power of God against the world's greatest empire.
6. Zion theology is the belief that Jerusalem, as God's chosen city, is inviolable and will never be destroyed. Fowler suggests it was a misinterpretation as it led the people of Judah to believe they would always be saved regardless of their actions.
7. As a result of Hezekiah's revolt, Judea lost 46 walled cities, 200,000 people were taken into captivity, and Judea's territory was drastically reduced. Hezekiah was forced to send tribute to the Assyrian king.
8. Ashurbanipal, an antiquarian, commissioned the collection, translation, and preservation of numerous clay tablets from ancient Mesopotamian libraries. This effort resulted in the first great library, securing vast quantities of ancient knowledge.
9. The downfall of the Assyrian Empire resulted from a combination of internal strife, civil war, and external pressures. Specifically, the Medes and Babylonians captured its key cities, ending its 300-year reign.
10. Esarhaddon became king after his brothers assassinated their father, Sennacherib. Tirhakah was a Nubian pharaoh who opposed Assyria. Ashurbanipal expanded the empire, but is remembered for his library.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of both human decisions and divine intervention in the events surrounding Sennacherib's campaign against Judah. How does this narrative challenge or reinforce common understandings of history and faith?
2. Discuss the significance of the Rabshakeh's speech as a piece of propaganda. How does this episode illustrate the psychological warfare tactics used in ancient conflicts, and what does it reveal about the perspectives of both the besiegers and the besieged?
3. Evaluate the theological implications of the delivery of Jerusalem, considering the arguments presented by Fowler about Zion theology and the purpose of God's actions. How might this interpretation affect one's understanding of divine justice?
4. Compare and contrast the roles of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal in the history of the Assyrian Empire. How did their actions and interests contribute to both the empire's power and its eventual demise?
5. Assess the legacy of the Assyrian Empire, considering both its brutality and its cultural contributions. How did this empire shape the ancient Near East, and what lessons can be gleaned from its rise and fall?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Sennacherib:** King of Assyria (705-681 BC) known for his military campaigns, including his siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC.
- **Hezekiah:** King of Judah (c. 715-686 BC) who initially wisely refused to join a revolt against Sargon, but foolishly joined a later coalition and subsequently faced the siege of Jerusalem.
- **Rabshakeh:** A high-ranking Assyrian official sent by Sennacherib to Jerusalem to negotiate its surrender.
- **El Teka:** A coastal location where Sennacherib fought a major battle against the Egyptians during his campaign against Judah.
- **Zion Theology:** The belief that Jerusalem is the dwelling place of the Lord and will never fall to an enemy.

- **Lachish:** An important Judean city that was under siege by Sennacherib and represented a strategic point in Judea.
- **Ashurbanipal:** The last great king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (668-627 BC), known for his extensive library at Nineveh.
- **Esarhaddon:** Son of Sennacherib and king of Assyria (681-669 BC), known for expanding the empire into Egypt.
- **Tirhakah:** A Nubian pharaoh of Egypt (c. 690-664 BC) who resisted Assyrian domination.
- **Nineveh:** The capital of the Assyrian Empire, and the location of Ashurbanipal's library, fell to the Medes in 612 BC.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 20, Demise of Assyria, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Demise of Assyria and Related Events

1. **Why did King Hezekiah of Judah revolt against the Assyrian Empire, despite their seemingly invincible reputation?**
2. Hezekiah's decision to revolt was arguably unwise and against the counsel of the prophet Isaiah. He joined a coalition led by Tyre and supported by Egypt, despite the Assyrians never having been decisively defeated in battle. The lecture suggests Hezekiah may have been swayed by the idea that the Assyrian empire was weakening, though this was likely not the case. His revolt was a gamble that ultimately put Judah in a precarious position. He also forced the king of Ekron, Padi, to join the rebellion, and that act appeared to provoke Sennacherib to invade the West.
3. **How did Sennacherib's campaign against Judah unfold, according to both biblical and Assyrian accounts?**
4. Sennacherib's campaign was triggered by the rebellion led by Tyre, which Hezekiah joined. Sennacherib first captured Tyre, then defeated the Egyptians on the coast. He sent a portion of his army, led by the Rabshakeh, to besiege Jerusalem while he himself defeated the Egyptians. Biblical accounts focus on the Rabshakeh's taunts and the subsequent divine intervention, while Sennacherib's own accounts emphasize his victories and the tribute paid by Hezekiah. The two accounts of the campaign against Judah differ, making it difficult to piece together an exact narrative.
5. **What was the significance of the Rabshakeh's speech outside Jerusalem during the siege?**
6. The Rabshakeh's speech was a calculated act of propaganda intended to demoralize the people of Jerusalem and convince them to surrender. He mocked Hezekiah's reliance on a weak Egypt, questioned the power of the Judean God, and emphasized the unmatched strength of the Assyrian Empire. The speech highlighted the impossible military situation that Hezekiah's foolishness had created for Judah. Rabshakeh argued that no god of any nation had ever been able to rescue a people from the Assyrians, so why should the people of Judah expect their God to be any different. The speech is noted for its preservation as a rare example of foreign communication to a people during a siege.

7. **How was Jerusalem saved from the Assyrian siege, and what were the consequences?**
8. The biblical account describes the city's deliverance through divine intervention, with an angel of the Lord killing a significant portion of the Assyrian army overnight. While the lecturer posits that the number was likely exaggerated to 30 or 40 thousand soldiers, plus logistical personnel. Following this event, Hezekiah, realizing the Assyrians would inevitably return, chose to pay a massive tribute to Sennacherib, including temple treasures, and other valuable resources, as well as women and musicians. Hezekiah also sent a list of everything he surrendered to the Assyrian king. Although the city was saved from destruction in that moment, the lecturer contends that this victory led to a misconstrued theology that wrongly assumed that God would always defend Jerusalem, called "Zion theology".
9. **What is "Zion Theology", and what role did the deliverance of Jerusalem play in its development?**
10. "Zion Theology" is a belief that because Jerusalem is the dwelling place of God, it is inviolable and can never fall to an enemy. The miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BC was misinterpreted as evidence of God's unconditional protection of the city, leading to this problematic theology. The lecturer argues that this theology, instead of being a sign of faith, contributed to later rebellions as the people of Judah mistakenly believed that God would never let them be conquered.
11. **What was the legacy of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria, particularly in relation to historical knowledge?**
12. Despite his reputation as a brutal king, Ashurbanipal's greatest contribution was his establishment of a vast library. This library housed countless clay tablets from throughout Mesopotamia, and he commissioned scholars to translate them into Neo-Assyrian. This effort has preserved much of the ancient history of Mesopotamia, including the Gilgamesh Epic, making him ironically a key figure in preserving knowledge, despite being one of the most brutal kings in history.

13. How did the Assyrian Empire ultimately fall, and what were the key factors contributing to its demise?

The Assyrian Empire, after reaching its peak under Ashurbanipal, collapsed rapidly. The records of the last 20 years of the empire are incomplete, but it appears there was internal strife and possibly civil war. The Medes, under Cyaxares, captured the Assyrian capital of Ashur in 614 BC, and in 612 BC, the great city of Nineveh fell to a combined force of Medes and Babylonians. By 609 BC, the Assyrian Empire was completely extinguished, due to its extreme violence, cruelty, and paganism.

1. How does the story of the Assyrian Empire and its interactions with Israel provide a lesson about God's power and the nature of human kingdoms?

The narrative demonstrates that even the most powerful human empires are ultimately under the authority of God. The lecturer emphasizes God's power to intervene and deliver, but also warns that such actions are not based on human righteousness but rather his own divine purposes. The story teaches that no empire, even one as seemingly invincible as Assyria, will last forever. It demonstrates that God ultimately uses human kingdoms for his own purposes. The story reminds the reader that Israel was also subject to God's judgment and not inviolable, despite what Zion Theology falsely taught.