

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 21, Neo-Babylonian Empire and End of Judah 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 21, Neo-Babylonian Empire and End of Judah, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Don Fowler's lecture discusses the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the demise of Judah. **He details the alliance** between the Babylonians and Medes that led to Assyria's downfall, focusing on key figures like Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar. **The lecture explores the events** surrounding Josiah's death and Judah's subsequent revolts against Babylon, ultimately resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and exile. **Fowler also examines the enigmatic reign** of Nabonidus and the pivotal role of Belshazzar, concluding with the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire and its significance as a non-Semitic power. **Finally, the lecture sets the stage** for a future discussion of Cyrus the Great.

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 21 – 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
n21.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 21, Neo-Babylonian Empire and End of Judah

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript by Dr. Donald Fowler:

Briefing Document: Neo-Babylonian Empire and the End of Judah

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Don Fowler's lecture on the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the end of Judah. The lecture explores the geopolitical landscape leading to the fall of Assyria, the rise of Babylon, the events leading to the destruction of Judah, and the subsequent Babylonian exile. It also introduces the Medo-Persian Empire, which followed the Neo-Babylonian period, and highlights the significant religious and cultural shifts that occurred.

I. Fall of Assyria and Rise of Babylon:

- **A Perfect Storm:** Fowler emphasizes that the fall of the Assyrian Empire was due to a "perfect set of circumstances," including its internal disunity and weakening.
- *"It could only have happened with a perfect set of circumstances."*
- **Alliance Against Assyria:** The Babylonians, led by Nabopolassar, formed a crucial alliance with the Medes and the Scythians to overthrow Assyrian rule.
- *"So, what we have is a sort of alliance that was able to bring down this mighty Assyrian Empire. And so, that alliance was the Babylonian power to the south in alliance with the Medes to the east."*
- **Babylonian-Assyrian Relationship:** The Assyrians respected Babylon for its ancient religious past, while the Babylonians harbored resentment for Assyrian dominance.
- *"The Assyrians regarded them apparently with some form of religious affection. They deeply respected Babylon's great religious past...So, they respected Babylon, but the Babylonians didn't really appreciate the Assyrians in a like fashion."*
- **Chaldea:** The southern Arameans, including Nabopolassar, were known as Chaldeans.
- *"So, Nabopolassar was of Chaldean extract, which is nothing more than southern Aramean."*

II. The End of Judah:

- **Egyptian Intervention:** As Assyria weakened, Egypt surprisingly allied with them against the Babylonians, sending an army through Israel. This unlikely alliance is noted as a "who would have thought moment".
- **Death of Josiah:** King Josiah of Judah, a highly religious and reformist leader, died attempting to stop the Egyptian army at Megiddo. Fowler notes that this event would have been deeply troubling to the faithful of Judah.
- *"It must have been troubling to the Orthodox religionists of Judah to see a king who had led Israel in the most, or I should say led Judah, who led Judah in the most thoroughgoing religious reform of the entire period of the Old Testament, to lose his life in battle against an Egyptian pharaoh."*
- **Josiah's Reform:** While Josiah initiated significant religious reforms, they didn't penetrate the social fabric of Judah and were perceived as being "imposed from the top".
- *"Unfortunately, Josiah's religious reforms did not penetrate the social echelons of his country, Judah."*
- **Babylonian Conquest:** After defeating the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC and Hamat soon after, Nebuchadnezzar solidified Babylonian control.
- *"Evidently, the Egyptians were routed, because another battle was fought at Hamat a year later, in which the Egyptian army was destroyed completely."*
- **Deportation of Judeans:** Following revolts in 597 and 587/586, Nebuchadnezzar deported many Judeans, including important figures like Daniel and Ezekiel, to Babylon. The revolts by Judah are termed "astounding" given the country's small size and military weakness.
- *"Judah is a tiny little country, not much larger than a county in a midwestern state...and to have them revolt against Babylon is truly astounding."*
- **Zedekiah's Fate:** King Zedekiah, knowing the futility of revolting, was overridden by religious nationalists. After fleeing, he was captured and forced to witness the execution of his family before being blinded by the Babylonians. This serves as an example of the high price paid for the revolt.

III. Babylonian Exile and Its Significance:

- **Loss and Opportunity:** The loss of land, temple, and kings forced the Judeans to redefine their identity. The exile is described as an "opportunity to be a blessing to the nations."
- *"...the land has been lost, the temple has been lost, the kings have been lost, and so now they have a rare opportunity to be a blessing to the nation because they will be in Babylon for seven decades."*
- **Survival and Identity:** The Judeans, unlike other captive peoples, preserved their unique identity during exile, which Fowler views as a remarkable event in history.
- **Shift from Temple to Law:** In Babylon, the Judeans shifted focus from temple rituals to an emphasis on the law of Moses (the Torah).
- *"So,, what we have in the exile is the emergence of a new emphasis. Slowly but surely, the Israelites, or the Judeans, rebuilt their religious platform as a people, and they rebuilt it not around temple ritual, because they didn't have one, but around emphasizing the law of Moses."*
- **Formation of Identity:** The exile was formative, forcing them to turn toward the texts. Despite not having books, they shifted to emphasizing law over ritual.
- *"But it seems like in the Babylonian exile, they shifted from temple to text, from ritual to law."*

IV. Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus:

- **Nebuchadnezzar's Reign:** A great king known for military victories and extensive building projects in Babylon.
- *"So, Nebuchadnezzar shows himself to be a man of great courage and great energy; he's known for his military victories, but he's actually perhaps better, should be better known for his tremendous building activities in the great city of Babylon."*
- **Nebuchadnezzar's Hubris and Illness:** The Bible describes Nebuchadnezzar's fall due to pride, resulting in a period of illness where he is described as having "bovine qualities." Following that, he seemingly has an awareness of God and his power.
- **Nabonidus's Eccentricity:** Nabonidus was an obscure and controversial king who had an unusual devotion to the moon god Sin. He abandoned his throne for a decade to live in the Arabian oasis of Tima, building a temple and city wall.

- *"For a decade or more, he abandoned his throne in Babylon and moved out into this desert area of Tima."*
- **Theories on Nabonidus's Behavior:** Fowler presents three views:
- **Devotee View:** He was a religious ascetic devoted to Sin.
- **Religio-Political View:** He tried to unify his empire under the moon god Sin because it was more widely worshipped than the Babylonian chief god Marduk.
- **Geo-Economic View:** He tried to create new trade routes to counter inflation and the growing power of the Medo-Persians.
- Fowler admits that no single view adequately explains Nabonidus's behavior.

V. Fall of Babylon and Rise of the Medo-Persian Empire:

- **Belshazzar's Banquet:** Belshazzar, Nabonidus's son, is famous for his banquet, during which God intervened by writing a cryptic message on the wall, interpreted by Daniel.
- *"And so, he orders those to be brought out as drinking vessels. Well, in the middle of the party, God intervenes and suddenly begins to write cryptic words in a divine hand upon the wall, and this would definitely rearrange the mood of a party."*
- **Handwriting on the Wall:** The message (Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin) was interpreted to mean Belshazzar's kingdom was numbered, weighed, and would be divided, with a pun indicating it would go to the Persians.
- *"And what he tells them is, Belshazzar, your days are numbered. Your behavior is weighed out... And this is the word from which we get the word Pharisee, the root from which we get it."*
- **Sudden Fall of Babylon:** Immediately after Daniel's interpretation, Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians. The Neo-Babylonian period came to a sudden end.
- **Shift to the East:** The rise of the Medo-Persian Empire marked a shift in power away from the Fertile Crescent to the east.
- *"So quickly, as we begin to draw near to the end of this hour, let me tell you that the center of world history was always the Fertile Crescent. With the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire, the Fertile Crescent will never be the center of power again."*

- **Indo-Aryans:** The Medo-Persians were Indo-Aryans, not Semites, representing a significant cultural and religious shift. They had different languages, religions, and worldviews.
- *"This east is a dramatic change for our interests because these Aryans are not Semites; they're Indo-Aryans."*
- **Medes and Persians:** The lecture identifies the five great tribes including the Medes and the Persians, the Parthians, the Arachosians and the Bactrians. The Medes initially dominated, but power shifted to the Persians under Cyrus the Great.

Conclusion:

This lecture provides a detailed overview of the Neo-Babylonian period and its impact on the history of Judah. It highlights the sudden changes in power, the end of the Davidic monarchy, and the formative experiences of the Jewish people during the Babylonian exile. It also introduces the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire and the significant cultural and religious shifts that accompanied it. The lecture ends by setting the stage for an exploration of the unique reign of Cyrus the Great.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 21, Neo-Babylonian Empire and End of Judah

Neo-Babylonian Empire and the End of Judah Study Guide

Quiz

1. What were the key factors that led to the downfall of the Assyrian Empire? The Assyrian Empire was weakened internally due to disunity, and an alliance between the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians was able to successfully overthrow them. The Medes were especially key to bringing about the end of Assyrian domination.
2. What was the significance of the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE? The Battle of Carchemish saw the defeat of the combined Egyptian and Assyrian forces by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, ending Egypt's hopes of maintaining influence in the region and cementing Babylonian dominance. This battle was essential to establishing the Babylonian empire.
3. Why did King Josiah of Judah lose his life, and how was this event interpreted by some of his contemporaries? King Josiah was killed at Megiddo while trying to prevent the Egyptians from aiding the Assyrians. This death was troubling for some because Josiah's religious reforms were seen as a sign of God's favor, and his death seemed to challenge this.
4. What were the two major revolts against the Babylonians by the kingdom of Judah, and what were their outcomes? The first revolt in 597 BCE resulted in the Babylonians taking about 10,000 Judeans into captivity. The second revolt in 587-586 BCE, which was led by Zedekiah, resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the monarchy, and the deportation of the remaining population to Babylon.
5. How did the exile in Babylon shape the religious identity of the Judeans? The exile led the Judeans to shift their religious focus from temple ritual to the study and practice of the Mosaic Law, which became the foundation of their identity in the absence of the Temple. They developed into a people who could maintain a national identity even without a country.
6. What were some of the notable building projects undertaken by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon? Nebuchadnezzar was known for his massive building projects in Babylon, including significant portions of the city's visible ruins that remain today,

showcasing his desire to mirror the great kings who came before him. He built grand structures throughout Babylonia.

7. What are three possible explanations for Nabonidus's unusual behavior, including his extended stay in Tima? The three explanations are a religious devotion to the moon god Sin, a religio-political move to unite the empire under Sin, and a geoeconomic strategy to restructure trade routes due to economic problems in Babylon. Nabonidus's extended stay in Tima was part of the implementation of each of these views.
8. How does the story of Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel illustrate the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire? Belshazzar's story showcases the Babylonian Empire's end through a banquet during a Persian siege, where divine writing predicts his downfall. The book of Daniel uses wordplay to suggest the Persians will take over his kingdom and the Babylonian empire.
9. How did the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire represent a significant shift in global power? The Medo-Persian Empire marked the first time that power shifted away from the Fertile Crescent, which had always been the center of the world. Power would move east to the Indo-Aryans.
10. What were the five key tribes that made up the Persian peoples, and what was significant about them? The five tribes were the Medes, Persians, Parthians, Arachosians, and Bactrians. These tribes were all Indo-Aryans, who did not share the same Semitic history, culture, religion, and language of the peoples of the Fertile Crescent.

Answer Key

1. The Assyrian Empire was weakened internally due to disunity, and an alliance between the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians was able to successfully overthrow them. The Medes were especially key to bringing about the end of Assyrian domination.
2. The Battle of Carchemish saw the defeat of the combined Egyptian and Assyrian forces by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, ending Egypt's hopes of maintaining influence in the region and cementing Babylonian dominance. This battle was essential to establishing the Babylonian empire.
3. King Josiah was killed at Megiddo while trying to prevent the Egyptians from aiding the Assyrians. This death was troubling for some because Josiah's religious

reforms were seen as a sign of God's favor, and his death seemed to challenge this.

4. The first revolt in 597 BCE resulted in the Babylonians taking about 10,000 Judeans into captivity. The second revolt in 587-586 BCE, which was led by Zedekiah, resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the monarchy, and the deportation of the remaining population to Babylon.
5. The exile led the Judeans to shift their religious focus from temple ritual to the study and practice of the Mosaic Law, which became the foundation of their identity in the absence of the Temple. They developed into a people who could maintain a national identity even without a country.
6. Nebuchadnezzar was known for his massive building projects in Babylon, including significant portions of the city's visible ruins that remain today, showcasing his desire to mirror the great kings who came before him. He built grand structures throughout Babylonia.
7. The three explanations are a religious devotion to the moon god Sin, a religio-political move to unite the empire under Sin, and a geoeconomic strategy to restructure trade routes due to economic problems in Babylon. Nabonidus's extended stay in Tima was part of the implementation of each of these views.
8. Belshazzar's story showcases the Babylonian Empire's end through a banquet during a Persian siege, where divine writing predicts his downfall. The book of Daniel uses wordplay to suggest the Persians will take over his kingdom and the Babylonian empire.
9. The Medo-Persian Empire marked the first time that power shifted away from the Fertile Crescent, which had always been the center of the world. Power would move east to the Indo-Aryans.
10. The five tribes were the Medes, Persians, Parthians, Arachosians, and Bactrians. These tribes were all Indo-Aryans, who did not share the same Semitic history, culture, religion, and language of the peoples of the Fertile Crescent.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the political and military factors that contributed to the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and analyze how this rise impacted the kingdom of Judah.

2. Analyze the ways in which the Babylonian exile served as a transformative period for the religious and cultural identity of the Judeans, including the shift from temple to text.
3. Compare and contrast the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus, and evaluate their respective contributions to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, its successes and shortcomings.
4. Discuss the geopolitical significance of the Medo-Persian Empire, examining how it differed from previous empires in the region and the implications of this shift in power.
5. Explore the validity of the different explanations for Nabonidus's behavior, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the devotee view, the religio-political view, and the geoeconomic view.

Glossary

- **Neo-Babylonian Empire:** The empire that succeeded the Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia, ruling from 626-539 BCE, with Babylon as its capital.
- **Medes:** An ancient Indo-Iranian people who inhabited the region west of the Zagros Mountains and were key allies with the Babylonians in defeating the Assyrians.
- **Scythians:** Nomadic horsemen from the Russian steppe who allied with the Babylonians and Medes to overthrow the Assyrian Empire.
- **Nabopolassar:** The Chaldean king of Babylon who founded the Neo-Babylonian Empire after the collapse of Assyria in 626 BCE.
- **Carchemish:** A city located on the Euphrates River, site of a decisive battle in 605 BCE where the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians and Assyrians.
- **King Josiah:** The king of Judah who led a thoroughgoing religious reform but lost his life at Megiddo, trying to stop the Egyptians from aiding the Assyrians.
- **Nebuchadnezzar:** The son of Nabopolassar, he was the king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire who conquered Jerusalem and deported many Judeans to Babylon.

- **Babylonian Exile:** The period from 587-539 BCE when many Judeans were forcibly deported to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem.
- **Zedekiah:** The last king of Judah, who rebelled against Babylon, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and his own capture and brutal punishment.
- **Law of Moses:** The religious and moral code of the ancient Israelites, central to their identity and increasingly emphasized after the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Nabonidus:** The last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, known for his unusual devotion to the moon god Sin, and his long absence from the capital.
- **Belshazzar:** The son of Nabonidus, who was in charge in Babylon during the time of the siege by Persia. He is most notable for the story of his banquet and the handwriting on the wall in the book of Daniel.
- **Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin:** The cryptic words written on the wall during Belshazzar's banquet in the book of Daniel; Daniel interprets the words to mean that Belshazzar's kingdom will be overthrown by the Medes and the Persians.
- **Fertile Crescent:** A region in the Middle East, including Mesopotamia, known for its rich soil and historical importance as the cradle of civilization.
- **Medo-Persian Empire:** The empire founded by the alliance of the Medes and Persians, with Cyrus the Great as its founder; it marked a shift in global power away from the Fertile Crescent.
- **Aryans:** Indo-European peoples who migrated to the Iranian plateau around 1000 BC, giving rise to the Medes, Persians, and other tribes.
- **Tima:** An oasis in Arabia, where Nabonidus built a temple to the moon god Sin and spent a significant amount of time away from Babylon.
- **Marduk:** The chief deity of the city of Babylon.
- **Sin:** The moon god, worshipped by Nabonidus.
- **Arameans:** A Semitic people who were part of the Chaldean culture and lived north of Chaldea.
- **Chaldea:** The southern portion of Aramean territory in Mesopotamia.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 21, Neo-Babylonian Empire and End of Judah, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the End of Judah

- 1. What events led to the downfall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire?** The Assyrian Empire, a dominant power for three centuries, was weakened by internal disunity. This created an opportunity for a powerful alliance to rise against it. The alliance was formed primarily by the Babylonians to the south and the Medes to the east, along with the Scythians, fierce horsemen from the Russian steppe. The Babylonians, who had a long history and culture that the Assyrians respected, had always had friction with the Assyrians. This perfect storm of weakness and a strong alliance led to the Assyrian empire's collapse. Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, seized the opportunity and eventually cleared the Assyrians out of Babylonia with the help of the Medes.
- 2. How did Egypt get involved in the conflict between Assyria and the Babylonians, and what was the outcome?** When it became clear that Assyria was in trouble, Egypt surprisingly allied with the Assyrians against the Babylonians and Medes. This was unexpected because the Egyptians had no previous allegiance to the Assyrians, but they saw an opportunity to stop Babylonian expansion. The Egyptians sent an army through the area of Israel to assist the Assyrians. However, they were defeated by the Babylonians at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, and further routed at Hamath a year later, which ultimately diminished their power in the region.
- 3. What was the significance of King Josiah's death in the context of the fall of Judah?** King Josiah, a godly king of Judah, attempted to stop the Egyptian forces from going to assist the Assyrians at Megiddo. However, he was killed in the battle. This was troubling for the Orthodox religionists in Judah because Josiah had led a thorough religious reform in Judah, yet his reforms ultimately did not prevent the demise of Judah. His death was a sign of the instability and uncertainty of the times and highlighted the limitations of a reform that was not deeply rooted in the population. Josiah's death also served as the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Judah as they became under the control of other powers, with the Egyptians first placing Jehoiakim on the throne.

4. **How did the Babylonian exile impact the religious identity of the Jewish people?** The Babylonian exile significantly reshaped the religious identity of the Jewish people. Prior to the exile, the emphasis was heavily on temple rituals. However, with the destruction of the Temple, they had to find a new way to practice their faith. The exile period saw a shift from temple-based ritual to a focus on the Law of Moses and the biblical text. They were in a unique situation as the exile did not end for most Judeans, and this period prompted them to create an identity in exile which helped them survive for 2500 years. This is a formative period where they began to turn their attention toward their texts in a way that was never possible before.
5. **Why did Judah revolt against Babylon and what were the consequences of their rebellions?** Judah revolted against Babylon twice despite being weak and significantly smaller. The first revolt in 597 BCE resulted in about 10,000 Judeans being taken into captivity, while the second revolt in 587-586 BCE led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of a significant portion of the population to Babylon. The second revolt was fueled by religious nationalists who believed God would deliver them despite the warnings of Jeremiah. The revolts led to the land being lost, the temple being lost, and their kings being lost, all of which ended the Kingdom of Judah as it had been.
6. **Who was Nebuchadnezzar and what were some of his key accomplishments?** Nebuchadnezzar was a king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire known for his military victories and, perhaps more significantly, for his extensive building projects in Babylon. He ascended to the throne after his father's death and made Babylon a magnificent city. However, he is also presented in the Biblical text as someone who was humbled due to a mental illness caused by his hubris. The remains of Babylon seen by visitors today are largely a result of Nebuchadnezzar's building efforts. He also played an important role in bringing people like Daniel and Ezekiel to Babylon as hostages to be educated in Babylonian ways.

7. **Who was Nabonidus and why was he considered an unusual king?** Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, was considered unusual due to his religious devotion to the moon god Sin. He abandoned his throne in Babylon for a decade or more and relocated to the desert oasis of Tima in Arabia, where he built a large temple for Sin. This behavior was strange and unprecedented and has multiple theories for explanation including him being a religious ascetic, trying to unify the empire under one god, and trying to re-create trade routes in the face of inflation in Babylon. His absence left his son Belshazzar in charge of Babylon, making Nabonidus a controversial figure in history.
8. **How did the Neo-Babylonian Empire fall to the Medo-Persians and what marked a change in the center of world power?** The Neo-Babylonian Empire fell when the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon while Belshazzar was ruling, during a banquet at which he was disrespecting the temple artifacts. A cryptic message written by a divine hand was interpreted by Daniel to mean the downfall of Belshazzar's kingdom. This marked a change in the center of world power shifting from the Fertile Crescent, which had always been the center of power, to the east with the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medes and Persians were Indo-Aryans, not Semites, marking a cultural and religious shift that would have lasting impacts. This shift to the east from Mesopotamia represents the last time Mesopotamia would be the center of power as the power would shift west from there.