

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 18, Rise of Assyria

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This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 18, Rise of Assyria.

I would estimate because I've been teaching for 40 years, so I can't tell you specifically, but I would estimate I've taught this course somewhere around 75 to 100 times.

For years and years, I would teach it in the fall semester and in the spring semester. I've taught it occasionally in summer school. So, I've taught the course a lot.

But whenever I teach it, I always get a little sober as I think about the period of Assyria because they were so cruel, but they were also so successful. And so, this is a horrific time for their neighbors. They were hated like few other people in the ancient world.

So, setting the stage for the appearance of imperial Israel, Assyria. Assyria was hemmed in on all sides by potent adversaries. We mentioned that to you.

Originally, they were in vassalage to Mitanni, but were freed because of the work of the Hittite king Suppiluliumas. So, Assyria was then blessed with a number of effective kings, including Shalmaneser I, who was the greatest warrior of this period, Tukulti-Ninurta I, who is, I think, by the way, the one I was mentioning to you about the shepherd inscription that sounded exactly like Psalm 23. Well, he managed to raid as far west as Carchemish and ended Kassite dominion in Babylon.

He was the first Assyrian king to penetrate the Persian Gulf. Generally speaking, at this time period, 13, 1200, and 1100, Assyria was as strong as any of the other weaker powers. It must be remembered how crucial the Sea People's Movement was to the events that we're looking at.

It was the Sea People's Movement that destroyed the Hittites, giving the Assyrians a chance to become great. Imperial Assyria is a time period that we refer to as 911 to 612. Tiglath-Pileser I was the 87th king in the Assyrian king list and is the first from whom we have any inscriptions of any length.

He is also apparently the first Assyrian king to mention the Arameans, but he's not really a king whose effect was to make it clear that an era had arrived. Following the death of Tiglath-Pileser, there was a century or two of silence. But in 911, Adad-Nirari

took the throne, and it may be said when we look at the rise of Assyria that Assyria awakened in 911.

He loosened her from the grip of her enemies, particularly the Arameans, whom he pushed back across the Euphrates. He also campaigned in Kurdistan to the north and successfully annexed a large plot of land north of the Diyala River from the Kassites. That would be to the east and to the south of them.

It would now be 300 years, almost to the year, before the imperial power of Assyria ended. The evidence of the fact that Adad-Nirari was building an empire and not just a kingdom is the fact that he established supply dumps along the routes of his campaign. In other words, by building supply dumps, he was planning on coming back year after year, and this suggested that he intended on ultimately building not a kingdom but an empire.

So, Adad-Nirari was the king during whose reign this empire was started. There are two major extra-biblical sources of historical data for the study of the Assyrian empire. I should say, I probably should have said there are two literary examples.

The first is the Assyrian king list, of which there are three main copies. It began with a certain Tudiya and continued for 109 kings, including a total of 117 throughout the entire period of Assyrian history. Remember we talked with you some tapes ago about the importance of genealogy? We don't like genealogies, but in the ancient world they were important.

So, this is a major source of information for us in recreating Assyrian history. The second source of information is the list of limmus or eponyms of either the king or the high officials. Usually, in the first or second of his regno years, a name was assigned to the year, and since we have an eclipse that we can point exactly on the calendar mentioned in the reign of Ashurdan, we're able to pinpoint June the 15th, 763 as a fixed point in chronology.

So, then it becomes a simple matter of adding up the limmu. Well, that's maybe not simple, especially if I had to do it, but all one has to do is add up the limmu list in consecution, and then you have a chronology for the ancient period. So, these two literary sources were crucial for helping us control the chronology and personnel of the Assyrian period. The following chart will represent the kings that we will deal with.

Ashurnasirpal followed Adnan-Nirari, and then the subsequent kings that follow, Shalmaneser, Shamshiadad, Adnan-Nirari III, and so on, down to Ashurbanipal. Ashurbanipal was the last king who could be said to have ruled over a united Assyria. So, as you can see, Assyria has a great run of power covering three centuries.

The last four kings after Ashurbanipal are somewhat insignificant and did not rule over a united Assyria. So having said all of that, we're ready then to launch into the period of Assyrian history. Ashurnasirpal provides the real impetus for empire by launching aggressive military campaigns all over northern Mesopotamia.

He marched as far west as the Mediterranean and claimed the conquest of the whole region from the Tigris to Mount Lebanon, and the Great Sea as far north as the kingdom of Urartu. So let's see if we can pull up this and see if we have... So this color, I would want to call this salmon, represents the expansion of Ashurnasirpal in this salmon colored. So if you can follow my pen, then the color that we're looking at, which was added by Ashurnasirpal, is this region here.

This region was an important addition, and so Ashurnasirpal provided us with an almost endless succession of following kings, all of whom just kept expanding the empire. He built a new capital at Kalak, modern-day Nimrud, on the east side of the Tigris, whose tutelary god was Ninurta. The palace covered over six acres.

And if you remember earlier, we talked about the palace at Mari, which is almost three times larger. So, a palace of six acres tells you that things are bigger than what they had been. It's the best preserved of the Assyrian royal dwellings.

He hosted a banquet to the tune of 10 days, entertaining 70,000 people. So all of that little bit of biographical trivia there is designed to remind us things are different now than they have ever been. This is monarchy on the grandest of scales.

A palace is so large that it covers six acres. A banquet that is so large it feeds 70,000 guests. What this tells us is Assyria has entered into a royal and imperial quality that is going to be unique to the world, and that's not all that's unique.

More than any other Assyrian king, Ashurnasirpal boasts of his unusual, even by Assyrian standards, cruelty. It appears that he had inaugurated a new policy of ruling the empire through terror. I can show you some pictures of this, and they illustrate these kinds of art forms come to us from the period of Ashurnasirpal.

If you look at this register to the right, I'll grab my laser; they used to commit acts of terror to try to intimidate their enemies either to surrender or, if they had surrendered, to intimidate them so that they would never revolt. So, these individuals are people who have either been conquered or who are participating in a revolt against the Assyrians. So, what you can see is this individual here is staked out on the ground, and he is literally, you know, we have an idiom in English about being skinned alive.

Well, that's what's happening to him. He's being skinned alive, and so is this individual here. As a matter of fact, as you can see, this individual has been

beheaded, and they're carrying off the head to be used in other places in the city as part of the effort at ruling by terror.

The Assyrians were able to conduct warfare on a professional level that was unlike anything the ancient world had ever seen. And so, in this particular graph, we simply have a picture of Assyrian soldiers, and you can, one of the things that's so characteristic of Assyrian art is it is almost, it is almost pornographic in its worship of power. We're told that pornography is really not first about sex but about power.

Well, that's what you see in Assyria, and that's why people sometimes refer to it as pornography. If you look at the soldiers just and see their legs, the attention to detail showing the muscular qualities of the Assyrian men, you look at their arms, and you see them, the emphasis of, and of course, you see the male beards. It was a worship of power.

Even the horses are pictured in muscular detail. So, we'll talk more about this. I wanted to show you another one of these.

As you can see, there's a lower register of it, and here's the upper register. So here's the lower register, and what they're doing here to these individuals is they're cutting out their tongue, and of course, they are going to be skinned alive as well. So, what is happening here in both accounts is they're cutting out their tongue.

This individual has him secured by the ears so that he cannot resist. This individual is being held down by this helpful servant. So, in their artwork, this just went on almost endlessly.

The atrocities were unlike anything that we know of that was ever committed by any other power, and they were atrocities that were normative. The Assyrians would brag about this kind of behavior throughout their entire history, and so we would make the point then that, apparently, this is not cruelty for the sake of sadism. This is a new political weapon.

It's cruelty as a means of ruling. If you don't surrender, this is what will happen to you. If you rebel against us, this is what will happen to you.

So this was unlike anything that the world produced. Here's an inscription from Adad-Nirari talking about a city that he had conquered. I built a pillar over against the city gate.

Now, what he's talking about is something like this. So if you have a city like this, cities that were large cities would have multiple gates. It might have a gate here, a gate here, a gate over here.

And so, what he is saying is outside the main gate to the city, I built a pillar. Now, this is not a chimney. This is a pillar that would be built like this.

And this would be situated out here by the main city gate. So, he built this pillar of bricks and perhaps also limestone, sort of a plaster. And so then what he did is what we saw on the artwork there: I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted.

Flayed is a word that we don't use often, but it means I skinned. So, I skinned alive all of the chiefs who had revolted, and then I covered the pillar with their skin. It kind of reminds you of something that the Nazis did.

If you might remember, some sadistic concentration camp commanders would create lampshades of the skins of the Jews that they had killed. It's the violence is just too shocking for comprehension. So, I covered the pillar with their skin.

Some I walled up within the pillar. So as the pillar was being built, some of the captured soldiers would be placed inside the pillar alive while the pillar was then being built around them. And, of course, then they would die a slow death inside the pillar.

Some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes. And so, what they would do to radicalize the terror is they would build stakes like this, and then individuals would then be impaled on the stakes. Now, sometimes they would be impaled through the chest cavity since that would give them the physical property of having the body cavity secure the body on the pillar.

But sometimes, they would impale individuals through the rectum and then skewer them right through the entire body. And so, these pillars would be built, or these pillars, these posts would be built into the pillar and individuals then would be staked upon them, sometimes alive. Others, I bound the stakes around the pillar.

He says I cut the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. So, what he would do to punish them is cut off sometimes, maybe just their right arm, so that they could not be a soldier ever again. Sometimes, perhaps, they cut off all of their limbs.

Many captives from among them I burned with fire. So, in order to enhance the terror experience, I remember when ISIS did this to a Jordanian pilot that they had captured; his plane went down, and they made a spectacle of him. Some scholars have said that ISIS actually copies Assyrian atrocities because they understood that this was designed purposely for terror.

So, some of their soldiers would be just tossed alive in the fire. From some, I cut off their noses, some their ears, some their fingers. Of many, I put out the eyes.

I made one pillar of the living and another of heads. Now, living is not alive, but this is an older translation, and I should get you a more updated one. What he tells us is that sometimes, out the city gates, they would create two mounds.

One mound would be of the decapitated bodies that they would then just pile on top of one another, creating a horrific mound of deceased bodies. And next to it might be another mound just made up of heads of people who had been decapitated. So, this is what he means when he says I build up a pillar of the living and another of their heads.

He says I bound their heads to tree trunks around the city. So, when you saw in that first one, I showed you where the soldier was carrying off the decapitated head. This may have been a case where he was taking the head to be used as a garland around the city. So, what it was designed to accomplish is you could not go into or out of the city without seeing the remains of soldiers who were killed, decapitated, horrific atrocities.

And so, it was designed to be a perpetual picture to the inhabitants of what happens when you rebel against the Assyrians. He said their young men and maidens I burned in the fire so that if you rebelled, what it meant is your nobles probably, your noble young men especially, along with the young maidens, would be burned alive in the fire. He tells us that 20 men he captured alive and then immured them in the wall of his palace.

So, inside the city would have been the royal palace, and what he tells us is that inside the city then, he built a wall in which these 20 people would be bricked in alive, and there they would die the death of dehydration. After three days, they would probably die. And then lastly, the rest of their warriors, if anybody survived the battle and I didn't do these other atrocities, he said the rest of their warriors, I simply marched out into the desert of the Euphrates until they died.

This is so horrific that it's always depressing to go over it. This happened not just once but this happened repeatedly. In other words, as horrific as it is to read about, in fact, this was standard.

If they were conquering you and you did not surrender, this is what was going to happen. If you were conquered and you rebelled, this is what's going to happen. There had never been anything like this in antiquity.

When you read the Code of Hammurabi, which you might remember as being about 1700 BC, we have this picture of a violent world. If you stole a bottle of wine, you were killed, you were executed. So, it was a world that was incomprehensibly violent, but there is a big difference between being executed and being tortured.

To the Assyrians, torture was a standard part of their empire. This is how they ruled. Judging from the fact that this empire lasted three centuries, we would have to argue that it worked.

Before I leave this, then, what I would say is to all of our viewers, you have the important historical advantage now of reading Jonah and its story sympathetically. If you were in a world in which your enemy around you was doing something like this, and then God said, go preach to them, you might well, like Jonah, rather say, as Jonah said I would rather be dead than to see these people spared. I'm not bothered by preaching, which points out Jonah's disobedience, Jonah's hatred, and Jonah's spiritual frailty, but I am bothered that we preach the book without, or we read the book, without working to understand why Jonah felt the way that he felt.

Jonah would have been a man a century and a half or so after these events that I'm picturing to you here. So, what has happened by the time of Jonah is centuries of this kind of horrific behavior and abuse. Centuries of terror, torturing.

Is that an excuse for Jonah? No. But let's be reminded that we hate. We hate in our world with a whole lot less justification than what Jonah had. And so if we can't keep that distinction, then we're not really doing justice to Jonah.

And may I suggest to you before I leave the thought we're not doing justice to the magnitude of God's grace because it is the grace of God that said through Jonah, I will forgive anyone anywhere who is willing to repent. The Christian message is a great deal more radical than what we give it credit for. God's grace is given not just to terrorists in extreme cases; God's grace is given to every sinner, sinners like all of us.

All of us have been recipients of the amazing grace of God and have no right to tell God how to distribute his grace in a historical world. So, the Assyrians were a people whose violence made them uniquely successful and uniquely hated. The fact of the matter is that when Assyria fell in the years 612 to 605 when Assyria fell, it never resurrected.

It disappeared. It disappeared immediately, and it disappeared forever. Such was the hatred that the Assyrians inspired among the world who had to experience their utter brutality.

You can see what I mean by the point I made earlier about factors in the rise of Assyria. The Assyrians seem to have thought that this cruelty was pleasing to their gods. With that, we can move further along in our discussion.

Another important step towards empire, and by empire what I mean is ruling beyond Assyria, is that just as Adad-Nirari created supply dumps, he fortified the original supply dumps and then staffed them with governors to collect annual tribute. This is once again a point of trivia, but it's making the point that the Assyrian empire evolved. First, there were supply dumps.

Then, the supply dumps were placed inside the walls. Then governors ruled over the supply dumps, and then those governors became tax agents, and thus, we have an empire happening right before our eyes. Here we have an example of an Assyrian war chariot and accompanying archers.

This is kind of a helpful little picture because you can see, first of all, I can point out to you, look at the almost—it's almost dominant. You see the powerful leg muscles that appear here. And if we had a blow-up of this, you could see the same kind of emphasis on power in the muscles that are in the horses.

But also, you can see what an Assyrian helmet looked like. You can see that Assyrian warriors could be dressed in floor-length dress-like objects. You can see that some soldiers were in shorter garments only because they needed greater mobility.

You can also see the picture of Assyrian soldiers shooting their arrows. So, we have a very interesting picture showing the Assyrian war machine. In the register below, we have a couple of interesting figures.

They're valuable because the picture of them is clearer than the one above. But as you can see, these individuals, they're interesting to our eye because they don't have a beard. As you can see, they're obviously well-to-do.

They've got long earrings showing their wealth. They're well-to-do. They're well-dressed.

Their garments are embroidered, which is a sign of money. They have embroidered garments, so they're obviously wealthy.

They are eunuchs. This is the picture of Assyrian court officials, and we can tell that these are castrated males. I know they have long hair, but they're males.

You can see that they're eunuchs because they don't have a beard. They've been castrated, so they can't grow a beard.

So, these are eunuch court officials. This phenomenon of ruling through eunuchs was a common thing in antiquity. Before I leave it, I'd like to just make a little comment because my wife and I went to a very conservative Bible college, and we were always

taught that men should never dress as women and women should never dress as men.

And to put it in Bible times, as you can plainly see, men had long hair. They wore jewelry. They wore dresses.

So, the concept that men should wear trousers and women should wear dresses because those are proper male-female attirement, that's a modern invention. That's a modern thing. In the ancient world, men and women didn't have trousers.

They wore dresses. Now to be sure, they would have been embroidered in different ways, but it's a wonderful picture to help us see how men looked versus how women looked. So they had similar dress wear.

We leave the reign of Adad-Nirari, or excuse me, Ashurnasirpal, and we go to Shalmaneser. Shalmaneser, who ruled from 858 to 824, he was also extremely militaristic. Let's see if our chart here has any expansion.

So here is the expansion of Shalmaneser. As you can see, Shalmaneser's expansion was to the west, and it's in the yellow. And as you can see, and this is important information because in a short period of time I'll connect all of this with King Ahab.

As you can see, if this is Tyre, Shalmaneser's military exploits take him all the way down to the verge of the northern kingdom. So, in a very quick period of time, the Assyrians have penetrated all the way down well on their way to capturing the Fertile Crescent in its entirety. So, if you are a king of Israel and Judah, you look at this and you say to yourselves, if we don't stop them, they're going to rule all the way down here and we will be controlled by Assyria.

Literally a fate that could be worse than death. So Shalmaneser is moving Assyrian power to the west and south. He continually attempted to press westward.

In 858 at the Battle of Til-tuba, he met and was defeated by a north Syrian confederacy of Samal, Hattinah, Carchemish, and Bit Adini. With characteristic tenacity, he continued to attack and finally subdue the great Aramean city-state, Bit Adini. So impressive was the fall of Bit Adini that it is mentioned in three different places in the biblical text.

So, this means that I need to show you about the region that he was conquering. So, you can see up here the territory. Here it's spelled Beth Eden.

One of the problems with Eden is it makes us think of the Garden of Eden. The house of Bit Adini, the house of Eden, is this important territory. So, guys, right here is Assyria.

Right here is Bit Adini. And out of all of these Aramean kingdoms, Yaidi, Yachan, Hattinah, Hamat, Carchemish, Zobah, Damascus, out of all of these Aramean political entities, Bit Adini was the greatest. So, when Bit Adini fell, I just can't exaggerate to you how we need to lose the idea that the ancients were primitive.

They were not primitive. Because they didn't have cell phones doesn't make them primitive. The fact of the matter is they were very sophisticated.

They knew how to survive in a world without all of our luxuries. And so, here's what happened. When Bit Adini fell, when that fell, the whole ancient world down here knew that the world is in trouble.

When Bit Adini fell, this was an epochal event that galvanized, are you ready for this? It galvanized the entire West. The entire West looked at the map and said, these people are so powerful that the only way we have a chance is if we form a gigantic coalition to try to stop them before they just grind their way to the South. This is the world's worst nightmare.

So, he continued to press his way West. Bit Adini fell. He captured its capital Til Barsip and renamed it Kar-Shalmanu-Ashardo.

So now what we have is a battle that is going to emerge that is one of the great important battles of antiquity. And that battle is the Battle of Qarqar. All right, so we're not too far removed from our next break, bear with me.

So here is a map. Here is Assyria. Over here is Bit Adini.

Everybody down here knows when Bit Adini fell, everybody knew something must be done or they will destroy everyone. So, they formed a coalition. The coalition consisted of important and powerful Aramean entities, Damascus, Hamat, lesser kingdoms like Aram, and Israel, Ahab the Israelite.

So, we have lesser powers like Amman, Arabia, Sianu, Arvad. Here's Arvad. But the main powers, as you can tell, are Damascus, Hamat, Israel, and Irkinada.

All right, so this is a great coalition that was formed. And the reason it was formed, because they now know they are not powerful to resist Assyria successfully individually. I would invite you to notice the numbers with me.

Damascus contributed 1,200 chariots with 20,000 infantry. Hamat is up here. Hamat contributed 700 chariots and 10,000 infantry.

Notice who contributed the most chariots. Ahab the Israelites contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry. What that is telling us is that out of all of the kings here,

Ahab was the most powerful, contributed the most to this battle, so that if we add up the figures, there are a little more than 50,000 infantry and 4,000 chariots.

This is a substantial military force. If the force that met Shalmaneser was 50,000 to 60,000 infantry, and if it's literally 4,000 chariots, this is the largest battle in the history of the world. And it was led by the Israelite king Ahab.

You notice there's no mention of Judah in this battle. The southern kingdom is not mentioned. Now, maybe because Ahab contributed 4,000 chariots, maybe some of those chariots are the contribution of the Judeans, but it doesn't say that.

So here we are at the great battle of Qarqar, and here's Qarqar. So one last time, let me point out then, Bit Adini has fallen. In 853, Shalmaneser does what Assyrian kings do, he simply comes back to fight the next year, and the next year, and the next year.

In succession, and so after 854, in 853, Shalmaneser is met at the great battle of Qarqar by this coalition, and it seems likely that Shalmaneser was outnumbered in both infantry and chariots. This caught him by surprise because this is sophisticated. This kind of coalition could not have been put together in a year's time.

No doubt this coalition, Ahab, who was the leader of it, Ahab down here in Samaria, Ahab no doubt had been building this coalition for a number of years. In the years up here, when the Assyrians started their attacks on Bit Adini, I think Ahab may well have looked at this and said, oh my, if we don't do something, we're next. And so, this coalition that was put together would have taken several years to successfully get this kind of military force.

So, we have what is the greatest battle in antiquity up to this point. A military force consisting of almost 4,000 chariots, 60,000 infantry, and almost 2,000 cavalry. I am absolutely sure that Shalmaneser had little idea that a coalition like this could be put together so quickly.

And so, it led to the greatest battle in the world up to this time, a battle led by Shalmaneser for the Assyrians and Ahab, probably the dominant leader from the coalition. Well, the battle occurred, and if you knew about battle reports, I like to make fun of the ancients in this section because after all, kings controlled, kings controlled the publication. So, what we see in antiquity, whether it was the Egyptians or the Hittites, whether it was the Babylonians or the Sumerians, no king ever lost a battle.

Every battle was a win. And so, we have here a gigantic battle. How do we know who really won the battle? Because you can't believe the kings, they're going to lie.

So, we have three arguments to suggest that the Assyrians won the battle. And the first of which is a series of dates that I have in front of you, a series of dates in consecutive order, a series of dates, all of which describe the subsequent years in which the Assyrians reappeared. So, notice with me, the Assyrians came back to fight the coalition in 849, 848, 845, 841.

So, what that is telling us is that in 853, this great battle of Qarqar occurred, and there were a total of five consecutive campaigns by Shalmaneser to the west. All right? This suggests to us that the Assyrians lost the battle because from 853 to 849 is four to five years, and that is a very likely indication that the Assyrians needed those years to rebuild their military forces. You need to be reminded that we put ourselves, the whole world put itself at terrible extremity in the years 1938, 1939, 1940, because it simply refused to believe that there was going to be a second great war.

Had it not been for the American military production that was unique and the willingness of the Russians to suffer military losses of 10 or 20 million men, World War II would have been lost because of the lack of preparation. You can't throw a military force together in the matter of a year. And here it took the Assyrians four years to rebuild their army because you, first of all, you have to secure the horses to replace the lost horses.

Then you have to also, you have to bring into your country the iron and the bronze and the wood to rebuild chariots. You didn't just rebuild a chariot in a matter of a few months. First of all, you had to mine the iron, then you had to ship the iron in, then you had to melt the iron, and then you had to build the chariot.

All of that sort of thing took years to do. And so, notice with me, very likely the Assyrians suffered what probably was their worst defeat ever, this defeat that occurred at Qarqar in 853. All right? The fact that it took four more years for them to come back is an indication, I think, that this was a serious military loss.

Secondly, notice with me that you have four consecutive battles after Qarqar with the same coalition. That, too, suggests that the Syrians lost Qarqar. Coalitions in history are fragile things, and if they don't work, they fall apart relatively quickly.

If you read much on the coalition that started World War II between the British and the French and the Russians and so on, you would find, if you read on that, there was constant tension between the coalition partners throughout the entire war. Coalitions are fragile, and so the fact that this coalition holds together for 12 years and fights five major battles is a suggestion to us that the coalition must have been working, and that coalition no doubt dealt the Assyrians a pretty serious blow at Qarqar. Well, in my notes, I have a third suggestion, and this one is a little bit more controversial, although I really don't think it's controversial.

The third point that I invite you to remember is that this is the greatest battle in the history of the world up to this time. When Thutmose III took his military forces all the way from Egypt up to the Euphrates River and then crossed it, the army was small, maybe six or eight thousand men. Just a half a millennium later, you've got armies of 60,000 men with 4,000 chariots.

This is the greatest battle in history up to this point, and here's my point. Amazingly, this battle isn't mentioned in the Bible. Maybe it's not mentioned in the Bible because Ahab won the battle.

You see, Ahab promoted militarism, and he promoted, as you can plainly see, internationalism. And so, because of this emphasis, we are making the point that, plausibly, the reason the battle is left out of the biblical text is because Ahab won the battle because the Bible wants you to know that Ahab's policies didn't work. As a matter of fact, the Bible records three different battles that Ahab fought, so it's not as if the Old Testament is unwilling to tell us about Ahab, the warrior, but it doesn't tell us about Qarqar.

It tells us instead about the battles that Ahab had with the Assyrians. And so, here's what it tells us. Excuse me just a moment here.

Well, perhaps it's not worth pointing out to you, but what I wanted to show you is a graph about Ahab fighting the Arameans of Damascus. And so, well, we'll leave it and go to another map that we can show you what happened. So, here is a picture of what Ahab did do.

He had an enemy, and the enemy was Damascus. And so, here would be the northern kingdom, right down here, and here is Damascus. And so, Ahab had an uneasy alliance with the Arameans of Damascus, but they fought one another substantially.

So, Ahab fights a battle against the Arameans because they invade Israel, and God speaks to Ahab and tells him he's going to win this battle, and he does. But when he wins the battle, the Arameans conclude, well, we made a theological mistake. We invaded the hill country, and from their perspective, Jaffa is a god of the hills.

So, they concluded they lost the battle because God is a god of the hills. So, they invade a second time, and in the second time, they lose the battle the second time. And so, this time, they come up with another theological explanation, and Ahab wins this battle.

And when you read the biblical account, Ahab wins because God is enabling him to win. There is a third battle that it records of Ahab, and in this battle, Ahab is in

alliance with Judah. So, do remember that Samaria is here, Judah is here, so Ahab has created an alliance against the Aramean king of Damascus.

So, Ahab wants to go up to battle, so naturally, kings did this. He called all of his prophets together, and he asked his prophets, should I go up to battle? Well, one prophet with a perfectly good orthodox name, named Hananiah, says, go up to battle, you're going to win. Jehoshaphat, who is the Judean king, says to him, huh, isn't there a prophet of the Lord that we can ask? Ahab says, I do have one of them, but I don't like him, because every time he prophesies, he prophesies bad things.

So, Ahab instead says, well, bring him out, and he asks Micaiah the prophet, should I go up to battle? And Micaiah says, sure, you're going to win. And Ahab looks at Micaiah in one of the funnier places of the Hebrew Bible and says to him, how many times must I tell you to tell me the truth? Micaiah looks at king Ahab and says, truth? You want the truth? You're going to die. Well, all of that theological material is designed to give the reader the point that it's not military might, but it is Israel's God who gives victories.

So, Ahab manages to get Jehoshaphat to go into battle against the Arameans, dressed in his royal garments. Ahab goes into battle dressed in simple chariot fashion, and the text tells us that a certain unknown Aramean archer shot an arrow, and God guided the arrow right to a chink in Ahab's armor, and Ahab had himself propped up in his chariot so that his men wouldn't think he was dead. And there this great military warrior bled to death, and the message is Ahab was the greatest warrior of his lifetime apart from Shalmaneser, but it was all for naught because Israel's God could guide the arrow shot at random directly into the armor of Ahab, and he, this great warrior, would die in the chariot.

Evidence from God's perspective do not put your trust in military might. Qarqar, a fabulous victory for Ahab, literally meant nothing against the long run of history. He won the battle of Qarqar.

He lost the war for eternity. That strikes me as a good place for us to pause as we finish this tape that is showing you the inexorable march of Assyria to conquer its whole world. We'll continue this in the next tape.

Thanks for your attention.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament Backgrounds. This is session 18, Rise of Assyria.