

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 19, Imperial Assyria

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This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 19, Imperial Assyria.

Even though we have an empire that lasted 300 years, we are trying to focus our comments as they cast light upon the Old Testament text.

So, we're not spending time doing an ancient history that would take us all the way through the Assyrian kings and the important events of each and every king. We're focusing ourselves instead on Assyrian history as it interfaces with the Hebrew Bible. What we want to do as we return to this concept that we started with, which was Assyria, is point out to you that there's a sense in which the king, like all the other nations around you, a warning that God gave them through Samuel, has as its paradigmatic example King Ahab.

Ahab was an internationalist, he was a materialist, he was a militarist, and God knows he certainly didn't make copies of the Mosaic Law. So, the only thing that Ahab had to qualify him as king was that he was a brother; he was an Israelite. But he himself was a failure, and I think the reason why the text emphasizes those three battles that I told you about in the last tape was to make the point that Ahab's way was so impressive that Ahab's family was the most impressive family that the Assyrians had in the whole West.

They made a tremendous impression on the Assyrians, but the fact of the matter is Ahab's policies were the ways of this world, and God had other ways that he wanted to relate with them. So, Ahab's death provides the impetus for explaining to the audiences, even if you don't say anything about it, that as Ahab chose to die a warrior's death by bleeding to death in the chariot, in fact, his real path was a failure. And so, I mentioned to us in our notes here that it would take Shalman Ezer multiple campaigns, but finally, in 841, he finally broke through the Western Wall.

So, the Western Wall consisted of, first, the Arameans, and then secondly, this coalition that we have seen form. And so, he smashed the army of Hazael, king of Damascus, in front of Mount Lebanon, and that Mount Lebanon was probably Mount Hermon and then ascended Mount Baal-i-Rasi, and there received tribute from the vanquished, and that was probably Mount Carmel. It was here that Jehu came to pay tribute, which is mentioned or pictured on the Black Obelisk.

I mention this for the simple reason that this is King Jehu, and as you can see, he's bowing before Shalman Ezer III, and you can see Shalman Ezer with his eunuchs and

notice how in the opulence of the royal kingdom; they shield him from the sun. You can see the military strength in the muscular picture of these, and then you can see Jehu, his nose to the ground, kissing the ground in front of Shalman Ezer to show his submission. This is an impactful picture for this simple reason.

Ahab never bowed his knee to the Assyrians. As a matter of fact, when Ahab died, he died undefeated by the Assyrians. Jehu, you might remember who was responsible for exterminating the line of Ahab; you remember that Jehu was the one who eventuated the death of Jezebel.

There Jehu is nose to the ground on Mount Carmel, and no doubt this was a picture that had an impact on Israelites in the know. If I can say to you 2,000 or 3,000 years after the fact, if I can say to you the policies of Jehu didn't really work, then that has the advantage of thousands of years to prove itself to be true. Jehu was an ardent Yahwehist, that is follower of the God of Israel, and there he is, nose to the ground.

So, for people who interpret God through contemporary events, it must have looked as if the path of Ahab worked and the path of Jehu didn't. It's very difficult for us to know what God is doing from the front page of the newspaper or watch him from the perspective of your morning chair while you watch the morning news. We're just humans, and we interpret imperfectly.

So, following 841, the northern kingdom of Israel is broken, and so Shalmaneser is able to turn his attention to the north, and here he turns his attention to Urartu. As you can see, the area in the green up here is the kingdom of Urartu, and as you can tell, that sits right on the northern border of Assyria so because of that, it's a sensitive area that the Assyrians want to reduce and conquer. So, he turned his attention north to Urartu, and this was, of course, a major power.

Urartu, at this time, would have been the most powerful opponent that the Assyrians had, and so you can see when you look at the statistics I've given you there, when in 828, after just one campaign, he claims to have captured 110,000 slaves and 82,000 killed, these are massive numbers reminding us the degree to which the Assyrian empire has reached so that this is war like the world had not seen. He claims to have captured 185,000 sheep, but what he didn't do was defeat Urartu completely. By 828, it would have appeared that the entire ancient world was ripe for collapse, but Shalmaneser died, so much for reading the front pages of the newspaper.

In 828, before he died, Shalmaneser had just given a terrible blow to Urartu, and the papers no doubt would be, I can just hear CNN or Fox or somebody telling us about the horrific rise of Assyria, and they'd be crying, Chicken Little, the sky is falling, you know, the stock market is crashing, and then Shalmaneser dies. And when Shalmaneser dies, then it will turn out that there is a great revolt that weakens

Assyria dramatically. This great revolt in 827 through 823 crippled Assyria for a generation and a half.

It was not until Shamshadad V secured for himself the throne that this was altered. Apparently weakened Assyria; this apparently weakened Assyria; it was not until the time of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 that he managed to reverse the decline. So, if you look at your statistics, from 823 to 745, 60 years, Assyria is asleep.

It's dormant, conducts few campaigns, and is really not a serious threat to anyone. Once again, if we draw our theology from contemporary events, I could just hear preachers on the ancient television of the surrounding neighbors telling the world that God has delivered them from Assyria.

I can see the books, I can see the articles, I can hear the news commentators. Assyria has been smacked down by the God or gods of whatever country you're from. And such is the way it looked, but that's not the way it was.

So, for imagine, if you will, imagine with me just like this, for 60 years, there is literally nothing, and then 745 happens. 745, out of nowhere, brings about an Assyrian king named Tiglath-pileser III. He just so happens to have been the greatest military warrior of the entire Assyrian period.

Tiglath-pileser bursts on the scene like a tornado that you didn't hear coming. And 20 years later, Tiglath-pileser has conquered pretty much the entire West. So, Shamshadad had to deal with 29 rebellious cities that supported his brother, so there was a great civil war fought over power.

The insurgents apparently wanted to strengthen the power of the king at the expense of nobilities. Shalmaneser refused to back his eldest son who was supported by the insurgents, and so we have a civil war. Shamshadad won, but the internal tensions were not resolved, and it was really not until 60 years later that these were resolved in the person of Tiglath-pileser III.

A very important chronological note can be made for those of us listening to the tape, and that is this. The 60-year period of dormancy that I described is the 60-year period that covers the ministries of the prophets Amos, Micah, and perhaps Jonah. Their writing ministries occurred precisely during this Assyrian weakness and may explain the refusal of their messages by the northern kingdom.

So, let's take note of this. We have 60 years of dormancy in which prophets like Amos come along and tell them, you're all going into captivity. Well, not known to the average listener out there is the fact that at the time Amos preached that message, nobody took whole people into captivity.

That was invented by Tiglath-pileser III. So, Amos' message understandably falls on deaf ears, but when prophets like Amos and Micah came to predict judgment and therefore repent, those messages occurred right in the middle of the dormancy. I can hear the pulpits in my the southern kingdom.

God has delivered his people. This is a tragic interpretation of the current situation. In reality, God was probably giving his people a grace period to repent, after which God would wreck judgment on the northern kingdom.

It also was during this time period that we have a story of the Moabite stela and as Ahab was drawing near to his death, Mesha, who was the king of Moab, Moab is directly. Perhaps I should just call it up and show it to you so if we look at this map, here's the Dead Sea, of course, and Moab is the area that would be right here. In between Galilee and the Dead Sea is the area of Moab, and so King Moab, who had been in vassalage, used the time of political weakness to break free from the northern kingdom's dominance so when he succeeded, he had this stela composed to celebrate the victory that he had won getting free from the power of the hated Israelite king. While Jehoram defeated them in battle, it was impossible to subdue them, so the Moabite stone commemorates the successful rebellion.

Now the reason why, I think there are multiple reasons why that is a helpful picture in front of you because if you could look carefully at the script, you would have a picture of what the Hebrew language looked like in, say, the 8th century BC. It does not look like the Hebrew that you might know of when you see Hebrew bibles today. It's much more cursive, but this is written in Moabite, which is a language very close to Hebrew, and it is the only Moabite inscription we have of any consequence, so notice the script.

It's the kind of script that would have made up Hebrew in the time period of of the 8th century. You might also notice this section here which looks dark and somewhat damaged. This document survived antiquity up until about a century ago.

A century ago, a missionary named Augustus Klein found this tablet and began to study it, and of course, it did not take a degree in advanced archaeology even though it didn't exist in 1868. It didn't take a degree in advanced archaeology to know that he had found something very important, and so he started making copies of this so that he could preserve it and then, of course, translate it and so the document which is in front of us which had survived for thousands of years could not survive the contemporary world of Augustus Klein when the villagers in the area saw that this missionary was paying so much attention to this they assumed it must have had gold inside of it so they shattered the Moabite stela to get to the gold and of course, there was no gold, but it was then reassembled, and thus we have this very important stela written in Moabite celebrating the victorious war of liberation of Mesha king of Moab against the Israelite kings. So, war was vicious. When you read this, it's very

helpful because it gives you a picture of the kind of horrific military climate that occurred at this time of war.

So, at any rate we'll segue after those 60 years are done into the time period of Tiglath-Pileser III. He was not of royal blood, and he was a general. The dark clouds of destruction formed so quickly that no one seemed to understand what was happening, and so when the clouds burst forth, there was a downpour that flooded the entire western portion of the Assyrian empire.

His connection with the previous dynasty is obscure. In the Bible, Tiglath-Pileser has multiple names. He's called Paul, he's also called Pileser, and in 1st Chronicles 5.26, he is called Pul-en, Tiglath-pileser. Pileser is probably a misspelling of his name.

So, this greatest of all kings was militarily successful like few were before. He first moved to re-establish Assyrian dominance to the south in Babylon; then, he attacked the opponent to the north, which was Urartu. When he had covered his southern and then his northern flanks, he decided to come west.

Try to imagine it's been 60 years since the Assyrians have appeared in the west. They thought this had all passed. They thought Assyria was just a nightmare and that they had awakened from it, and it was over.

But no, it was not a nightmare, and it was to continue. So, he moved west to re-subdue the long-independent western tributaries. His first opponent appears to have been a coalition of Neo-Hittites and Arameans led by Mati'ilu of Arpad.

See the famous Sefire inscriptions where the curse formula in Mati'ilu's treaty bears remarkable resemblance to Isaiah 34 and Zephaniah 2. These powers had apparently been in vassalage to the Urartian king Sardu III. When Sardu tried to stop Tiglath-Pileser they met in battle and Sardu barely managed to escape with his life. So, in the following years all of northern Syria and Phoenicia are brought under his control.

By 743 in just two years Tiglath-Pileser had penetrated all the way to Israel where he received tribute from the Israelite king Menachem. And this tribute was very substantial, a thousand talents of silver. A thousand talents of silver is not an unprecedented sum, but for a country as small as the northern kingdom, this must have been very financially burdensome.

So, in all likelihood, this explains the reason why Menachem was so unpopular. He was assassinated after just two years. This was probably the result of his unpopularity because of his willingness to submit to the northern kingdom.

After all, if you put yourselves in their shoes I can hear the pulpits reading the front pages of the paper saying things like Menachem, God has delivered us from him

before. He defeated him at Qarqar, he defeated him in 849 and 848 and 845 and 841. Trust God now and he'll save us.

Well instead they simply assassinated him and Pekka who followed him adopted a strong anti-Assyrian policy by creating an alliance with Rezin, king of Damascus. So, let's point our map here against the Arameans. Seems like I've been through that before.

So, the Arameans of Damascus are here. Here's Damascus so here would be the Arameans. And so, Aram and Israel just as they did in Ahab's time, they formed an alliance to resist the Assyrians.

So Pekka and Razan thought to force Ahaz, king of Judah to join the revolt. But he appealed to Tiglath-Lezer for help, and Ahaz did, a request that was answered all too quickly. So, to set the stage for us, be reminded that Ahaz was king of Judah.

Isaiah had warned him, do not listen to this coalition. But Ahaz went ahead and appealed to, this is like inviting your neighbor's violent pit bull over for lunch. You're likely to end up being the main course.

So, in 734, Tiglath-pileser came west and moved south along the coast to cut off possible Egyptian aid to the revolt. Then, in 733, he marched into Israel, devastating much of Galilee, which is in the north, and deported many Israelites. Lastly, he moved against the real power, which was Damascus.

After devastating much of the countryside, he captured the city of Damascus, executed Razan as king, and sent much of the population into exile. Back in the northern kingdom, Hoshea had assassinated Pekah, so that he was accepted as the new king of Israel, but of course, a northern kingdom much smaller in size. It's as if as I watch this happening, it strikes me as seeing a losing battle of someone who's dying slowly of cancer in a hospital bed.

The victim just gets weaker and weaker. The northern kingdom gets smaller and smaller. So, at any rate, Hosea is the next king, and during the years 731 to 729, Tiglath-Pileser defeated an Aramean usurper to the throne of Babylon.

When he died in 727, the borders of his country were far greater than they were. So, if we look at the additions of Tiglath-Pileser, they're in light green, but they're actually even larger, I think than what it shows. So, as you can tell, the light green means the area of Urartu.

Tiglath-Pileser, for just about all practical purposes, put an end to the great kingdom of Urartu to the north. Then you can see that he conquered his way all the way south. He destroyed Damascus, and in effect, I might add, he also brought the

northern kingdom under control as well, so that in actuality, we would need to expand the green area even further south than what this map suggests.

So Tiglath-Pileser was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all the Assyrian kings. Poor little Israel in the north has no chance against such a monolith, but if I can hear the pulpits preaching the word back in the northern kingdom when he dies, it would be God working to save them. Well, let's take a look, if we can, let's take a look at the innovations of Tiglath-Pileser, because Tiglath-Pileser was not just a great king, but Tiglath-Pileser was also a genius at running an empire, and so we're going to take a look at his innovations, and so I have six of them, administrative and military.

You see, Tiglath-Pileser was a military genius. He fought battles that were very productive. He died without ever being defeated.

He secured the borders north, south, and west of his opponents. He was a great king, but the trouble with military accomplishments is that they're only good for a short period of time. What Tiglath-Pileser conceived of were the kind of innovations that would guarantee that the Assyrian Empire was going to last for a good long time yet.

So let me invite you to hear about his innovations. His first innovation that he did was he multiplied the districts, or we'll call them perhaps so you can understand the states. Try to think of Assyria as a country that had individual states.

Just as in our country, some states are powerful enough to be countries on their own. California. California is broke, but at least it's a big, broken country.

Well, in Assyria, in these states, there were powerful states, and they were a threat to the king. So Tiglath-Pileser did something that was really, I think, quite innovative, if not a stroke of genius. He multiplied the number of states.

In other words, he reduced a country like California into four or five smaller states, and thereby created a situation where there would be less threat to the power of the throne. Secondly, the real power of the Civil War was the conflict between the nobility, let's call them governors of the states. There was conflict between the state governors and the king because these nobles wanted more power.

They wanted the king to have less power. That's what the Civil War was about. So, what Tiglath-Pileser did was attack the power base of the nobilities by creating, in effect, more nobles.

If there were more nobles, they would have less power, and they would be, therefore, less of a threat to the Assyrians, which would be a very bright move on his part. Well, a third innovation of Tiglath-Pileser is the result of the size of this empire.

Guys, when we look at the size of this empire, let me just try to give you some points of comparison.

If you can look at this, this is about 300 miles from here to here. So, what that means is, from here to here, that is, when you start just walking around the contours of the borders of Tiglath-Pileser, it would have been several thousand miles to walk that. So, what that meant is, in practice, it would have taken weeks, literally weeks, for information about something that had occurred to be heard about.

If somewhere in the vast borders of this kingdom somebody rebelled, the king wouldn't know about it before a couple of weeks at the earliest. So, what he did was something of monumental significance, even though few people have heard of it. What he did is he created the equivalent to what we call in this country the Pony Express.

In other words, all the way throughout the kingdom, he established administrative centers where there was a stable of horses manned by servants of the king, and so when news needed to be transmitted, he could send a fast horse from one stable to the next, and in as fast as was humanly possible at this time, then he could hear what was happening throughout the kingdom. This was powerfully effective because what it meant was that people who tried to rebel against the Assyrians only had a few days to pull it off before the news would get back to cities like Nineveh. So, this was a brilliant move on his part.

Now I say his part, we don't know who thought of this, whether it was Sardur tried to stop Tiglath-Pileser or some sharp advisor, but if Sardur tried to stop Tiglath-Pileser didn't invent the concept, he had the good sense to see that the concept was necessary. So, he established a Pony Express system. His last administrative reform is that he annexed the conquered territories directly into the Assyrian Empire.

Now, if you want to read about what it meant to be annexed, underneath these reforms, I have a list of situations explaining what it meant to be annexed. What it meant is that the power that was conquered lost its independence. It was allowed just sort of a form of government that was a puppet government.

In reality, when you read the situations, they had become conquered and garrisoned territories and had really lost their independent freedom. So, he employed all of these things to describe what it meant to be annexed. And so, what it meant is that what was a freestanding state basically became a state garrisoned by enemy troops, ruled by enemy political figures, with just a puppet government.

This also guaranteed that it would be very hard to rebel against the Assyrian state. Going back above, we can see that I have set aside two military innovations. These are splashier than the administrative ones.

I'm really unsure whether they're more or less important. What Tiglath-Pileser did was to innovate a concept of deportation. The Assyrians, for a century, more than a century, had been plagued with constant rebellions.

And Tiglath-Pleaser knew the history of empires. He had many scholars who educated him and told him about how this had worked throughout history. And what he had seen is that for all of the empires about whom they could talk historically, what he had seen is empire meant one revolt after the other, literally for the entire history of the empire.

Well, Tiglath-Pleaser was apparently advised by his counselors that the real reason there were revolts was because of people's ties to their homeland. After all, theologically, they thought their homeland was where their god lived. And certainly, it's where their families lived.

So Tiglath-Pleaser was advised by someone, or else he saw it himself, that a good way to deal with the problem of incessant revolts is to simply deport entire populations. When the smoke settled from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser, by his figures, he had deported over 400,000 people from their homeland. This had a powerful effect in putting down rebellions because it made it extremely difficult to revolt when you were in a foreign land without your home network of friends and alliances, and acquaintances.

So, this was literally a stroke of genius. By deporting entire populations, he could make it very difficult for captured people to revolt. 400,000.

What we know is that Sennacherib, a king yet to come, would deport more people than anyone else. Sennacherib adopted the policy. He deported a half a million people from their homeland.

Busenai Odad has written a book in which he kept tabs of all of the figures. What he has found is that during the time period from Tiglath-Pileser to the fall of the Assyrian Empire, about 100 years ago, the Assyrians deported four and a half million people. One of the reasons why the Assyrian Empire lasted so long, in spite of how hated they were, was because of this policy of deportation.

It literally made it the next thing to impossible for conquered people to revolt. That takes us to the last of his military reforms and the last of his innovations. That is to say, to come back to our map, if we're looking at the map, we could conclude that the Assyrians are ruling over perhaps several million people.

I don't know that I've ever heard a statistic on how many people would have been in the Assyrian Empire, but perhaps several million. Well, Assyria itself is a relatively,

and I say relative, relatively small area. It's a lot bigger than Israel, but it's a relatively small area.

So, to put it like this, there are simply not enough Assyrians to be able to staff the army that was necessary to rule this monstrous amount of territory. So, what he learned is something that all subsequent empires would have to copy. When you're ruling over people who greatly outnumber your kingdom, you have to make your army, you have to build your army and make it consist of conquered peoples from your empire.

So, what Tiglath-Pileser did that was such a stroke of genius is the Assyrian Empire now, the army of the Assyrian Empire now, would have been made up largely of conquered soldiers from conquered territories. Almost certainly officered by Assyrians, but the ordinary Assyrian soldier would no longer have been an Assyrian. And oftentimes at this stage in class, I have a student ask me, how did this work? Because you'd think that that would be dangerous.

You'd think that there would be a rebellion. But in fact, where was, if there's going to be a revolt of these foreign troops, where are they going to go? They have no homeland to go to. They have no way of pulling off a coup.

So, in effect, it really wasn't much of a threat as long as they weren't officered by foreigners. And we know from history, we know that the Romans conquered their empire with Spanish soldiers. Now, that's an exaggeration, of course, but it's meant to show you that, in effect, you can force soldiers from other territories to fight on behalf of the state.

It started with Tiglath-Pileser III. It went on throughout the next century, and it worked. You know, you can forget because you don't normally read the Bible carefully, but David himself, the great king of Israel, David himself had foreign troops in his military.

His personal bodyguard consisted of Carithites, which is another term for Aegeans. David had his own personal military bodyguard, that is to say, that group of soldiers who guarded the most sensitive portion of David's empire; his palace was made up of foreign soldiers, Aegeans. David had mercenaries in his army.

Remember, Uriah the Hittite? So, what Tiglath-Pileser conceived of, however, is making the standing army consist in the main of non-Assyrian troops. You know, by now, friends, that had become something of an essential because the kind of casualties that the Assyrians had been suffering for a century would have crippled their sociology. Okay? So, from the time of Adad-Nerari down to the time of Tiglath-Pileser was a time period of almost two centuries.

Now, not quite, but almost two centuries, that's a time of unending warfare. So, for two centuries, the Assyrians have been taking casualties. And that is debilitating to a culture.

Every one of those Assyrian soldiers who was killed would have left behind a widow and probably children. How were those cared for? What did that mean about the social fabric of Assyria? What we postulate or guess in the absence of any specific information, two centuries of taking casualties was hard on the sociology of the ancient Assyrian people. So, they now can transfer the phenomena of casualties to the soldiers who staffed their armies, but they're not Assyrians.

It explains in no small part why they were so successful in perpetuating their army or their empire for all these years. Well, so when the smoke settled, Tiglath-Pileser was a general of monumental importance, but it probably was these innovations that were the best contribution that he made to all subsequent kings. So, as we move toward the end of the Northern Kingdom, we see that Shalmaneser V becomes the next king.

So is the Egyptian king, and he conspires to create a rebellion in Palestine. The great prophet Isaiah warned Hezekiah about such alliances, but Hosea, king in the Northern Kingdom, was not as wise. Maybe that's because Hosea was simply more desperate.

Hosea rebelled, and in 725, Shalmaneser besieged Tyre and Samaria. In September of 722, it fell, that is, Samaria fell, and 28,000 people were deported from the city. The following king, Sargon, later claimed to have taken the city himself, but according to the biblical text, as well as a Babylonian chronicle, the city was actually captured by Shalmaneser.

Isn't that just amazing? Here's the end of the Northern Kingdom, the loss of the land of the ten tribes, and it just had such a small grave marker. 722, it's over. The ten tribes disappear forever.

Ten lost tribes were never found. They went into captivity, and they were swallowed up, and just like that, we had the end of the Northern Kingdom. Sargon followed Shalmaneser V. Sargon had opposition from at least three major areas of interference.

I mentioned the Elamite interference, so now what we're trying to point out to you is that the Assyrians are starting to have some attempts to finish them off by coalitions. During the reign of Sargon II, you can see that his rule was, that his part of the country expanded in the dark green. So, as you can tell, in the reign of Sargon II, Assyria just got bigger.

See how all along the arc, he expands it. So, Sargon was a very successful king militarily, and so he is successful, and this happens in part because he's opposed by Elam here, the Elamite interference. So, I mentioned to you in my notes about conquering Elam, at the Battle of Durr, he met Humbanigash of Elam and Marduk-apla-iddina, who in the Bible is called Merodach-Baladan.

The results of the battle are listed from all three participants, and happily, no one lost. But it was something less than an Assyrian win, since Merodak-Baladan continued on his throne of Babylon for another 11 years. It was not until 708 that he finally recaptured Babylon.

So, when we looked at the map, the Elamites had interfered with the reign of the Assyrians, but Sargon is successful in defeating them and bringing the prodigal child Babylon back under control. In the west interference, after the Battle of Durr, Sargon faced a rebellion led by Yabidi of Hammat. Various other city-states join in, including Damascus, Samaria, Arpad, Hatarika, and Samaria.

The strongest forces were those of the king of Gaza and the commander of the Egyptian army. Sargon was successful in this battle, which is why, when we look at our map, we see Sargon's power extend all the way down to the... there are no cities. Do you see where it's green here? There are no cities south of that other than Gaza.

So, Sargon is able to conquer the coastal plain all the way down to Gaza. So, this is a tremendous victory in the south. This string of victories was so impressive that I mentioned to you in our notes, it seemed to serve as the prototype for the listing of nations in Zechariah 9, in 1 through 5. It was not until 712 that Sargon had to come west again to quell a revolt, this time led by Ashdod.

The northern interference, of course, was Urartu. In 719 through 18, he was forced to turn his attention to Urartu. Only partially successful, he returned in 714 and captured its most sacred city, Mut-bisir, and carried off the national god, Haldia.

He continued to be opposed by Mita, king of Mushki, which seems to be mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and 39. So, in reality, when we look at the map, Sargon is giving everyone a bitter pill of divorcement, not divorcement, a bitter pill of depression, because everywhere on the peripheries of this entire kingdom, it keeps expanding. If you want to understand the dynamics of these empires, it works something like this.

Everybody in the audience has seen a balloon being blown up. You know, you can blow it up, and it can get bigger, and it can get bigger, but every balloon has its limits, and when it explodes, that's it. And that's exactly what's happening with the Assyrian Empire.

Right now, it just looks inexorably unstoppable, and it just keeps getting larger. Happily for the rest of the ancient world, the time is not much farther down the road when it will collapse. So, Sargon is a very successful king, and so he moved his capital from the city of Ashur, a historic capital, to Kalak, moves it again to Nineveh, moves it to Dur-Sharrukin, from which many examples of Assyrian art and construction have been found.

He had scarcely occupied his new palace when he died fighting in 705 against Tabal, Tabal mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Just to make the point about Ezekiel 38 and 39, in the listing of all of the nations there, every last place on the map is known, every last place except for Gog and Magog. Gog and Magog, the last time I counted, there are 13 or maybe 17 different guesses about who Gog and Magog are, but all of the other nations listed in Ezekiel 38 and 39 were known on the map of the world of Ezekiel.

So, with that, Sargon's rule comes to an end, and he is followed by Sennacherib. Sennacherib is a name that you might remember from what I had told you in the past. The S-E-N of Sennacherib is the moon god Sene, and the Cherib, you might recognize, is a Cherib.

So, what his name means is the moon god Sene is a Cherib or a religious, mythical figure. In the reign of Sennacherib, there appeared to be a new emphasis with less campaigning. He only conducts eight campaigns in 24 years.

That's not how Assyrian kings functioned. He also built much more, especially at Nineveh. He first moved south and removed Merodach-Baladan from the throne of Babylon.

He then moved east against the Kassites and the Zagros and claimed to have received tribute from the Medes. That's the first time we've mentioned them this semester. It is, however, his third move, which is of most biblical importance.

And I think this is going to be a good place for us to stop because it takes me too long to describe Sargon's invasion of the southern kingdom to finish it on this tape. So, what we're going to do is pause here and then come back to one of the most interesting of all the events in the entirety of the Old Testament. Sargon invades Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah.

And we'll talk about that as we try to explain this confusing campaign of Sargon. So, with that in mind, we'll take a break and then come back.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 19, Imperial Assyria.