

Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18, Rise of Assyria Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18, Rise of Assyria, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Donald Fowler's lecture on the rise of the Assyrian empire explores Assyria's brutal yet effective military strategies and expansion from its origins to its ultimate downfall. The lecture uses **Assyrian king lists and eponym lists** to establish a chronology and details the reigns of significant kings like Adad-Nirari and Ashurnasirpal, highlighting their military campaigns and the extreme cruelty used to maintain control. **The lecture connects Assyrian history with biblical narratives**, particularly the story of Jonah and King Ahab's involvement in the Battle of Qarqar, analyzing the context of the biblical accounts within the larger historical framework of Assyrian dominance. The lecture emphasizes the **Assyrians' unprecedented level of violence** as a political tool, contrasting it with the violence depicted in the Code of Hammurabi, ultimately concluding with the complete and permanent disappearance of the Assyrian Empire due to the widespread hatred it inspired.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18 – 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
18.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18, Rise of Assyria

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Fowler's lecture on the rise of Assyria:

Briefing Document: Rise of Assyria

Introduction: This lecture focuses on the rise of Assyria as a major imperial power in the ancient Near East, particularly its impact on the surrounding regions and its interactions with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Dr. Fowler emphasizes the unique cruelty and military prowess of the Assyrians, as well as their sophisticated approach to empire-building. He frames this history within a larger theological context, considering the book of Jonah and its themes.

Main Themes and Key Ideas:

1. Assyria's Brutality and Success:

- Assyria is characterized by its extreme cruelty and its successful expansion. As Fowler notes, "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."
- Assyrian kings used terror as a political weapon, not just random acts of sadism. This included skinning people alive, impaling them, cutting off body parts, and other horrific acts, as detailed in inscriptions from kings like Adad-Nirari. Fowler emphasizes this was "a new political weapon... cruelty as a means of ruling."
- The Assyrian military was incredibly professional, unlike anything the ancient world had seen, with a powerful emphasis on power and displayed in their artwork, which Fowler at one point calls "almost pornographic in its worship of power".
- Examples of the cruelty include:
 - "I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted... and then I covered the pillar with their skin."
 - "Some I walled up within the pillar... Some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes."
 - "I made one pillar of the living and another of heads."
 - "Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire."

1. Historical Context and Chronology:

- Assyria initially emerged as a power after being freed from Mitanni control by the Hittites.
- The period of Imperial Assyria is dated from 911 to 612 BC. The rise of Assyria is seen as beginning in 911 BC with Adad-Nirari II. Fowler states, "it may be said when we look at the rise of Assyria that Assyria awakened in 911."
- Key sources for studying Assyrian history include the Assyrian King List and the List of Limmu (eponyms). These sources, especially the limmu list, provide a fixed chronological point based on a recorded solar eclipse.
- Ashurnasirpal is seen as the king who provided "the real impetus for empire" by launching aggressive campaigns.
- Ashurbanipal was the last king to rule a united Assyria; the subsequent kings were insignificant and oversaw a divided land.

1. Empire Building:

- Assyria's empire-building was sophisticated, evolving from supply dumps to fortified posts with governors who then became tax agents. "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."
- Kings like Ashurnasirpal built large palaces, such as the palace at Kalak (Nimrud) covering over six acres. Ashurnasirpal also threw a 10-day banquet for 70,000 people, which shows the unprecedented scale of their power.
- The Assyrians methodically and aggressively expanded their power, leading to conflict with numerous regional powers.
- The use of eunuchs as court officials was common.

1. Shalmaneser III and the Battle of Qarqar:

- Shalmaneser III expanded Assyrian power westward, conquering the Aramean city-state of Bit Adini. The fall of Bit Adini was an "epochal event that galvanized the entire West."
- This led to the formation of a large coalition to oppose Assyria, including the kingdoms of Damascus, Hamath, and Israel (under King Ahab).

- The Battle of Qarqar (853 BC) was one of the largest battles in antiquity. Ahab the Israelite contributed the most chariots, making him the likely leader of the coalition.
- Fowler argues that the Assyrians likely suffered a significant defeat at Qarqar, despite their claims of victory in their historical records because it took them 4-5 years to re-engage the coalition and the coalition remained intact over the next decade. As such, he posits, it is possible that Ahab and his coalition actually won that battle.
- Interestingly, this major battle is not mentioned in the Bible, which Fowler suggests may be because Ahab was victorious and this would be counter to the theological message of the Old Testament, where it is not military might, but it is Israel's God who gives victories.

1. **Ahab and the Theological Significance:**

- The biblical depiction of Ahab focuses on his military successes and his relationship to God. Despite being a powerful military leader, Ahab is ultimately shown to be reliant on God's favor, not military prowess.
- Ahab's victories against the Arameans (Damascus) were attributed to divine intervention rather than military strength.
- Ahab's ultimate death in battle, despite being a great warrior, reinforces the point that worldly power is fleeting and that only God has the final say.
- Fowler uses Ahab's story to highlight the idea that it is "not military might, but it is Israel's God who gives victories."

1. **Jonah and the Assyrians:**

- The lecture connects the cruelty of the Assyrians to the book of Jonah. The brutality of the Assyrian empire provides background to understand Jonah's feelings about preaching to the Assyrians.
- Jonah's reluctance to preach to the Assyrians is understandable given their horrific actions over centuries.
- Fowler argues it's important to understand why Jonah felt the way he did, and not just dismiss his feelings as disobedience, acknowledging that Jonah's hatred had "a whole lot less justification than what Jonah had".

- Fowler concludes by emphasizing the radical grace of God, who is willing to forgive even the most violent and hated people.
- The message is a reminder that "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."

1. Assyria's Ultimate Fall:

- The Assyrian empire fell in 612-605 and never resurfaced as it was so hated throughout the world and in the region. "Such was the hatred that the Assyrians inspired among the world who had to experience their utter brutality."

Conclusion:

Dr. Fowler's lecture provides a detailed overview of the rise of Assyria, emphasizing not only their military and political achievements but also their extreme cruelty and its impact on the surrounding cultures. He connects these historical events to the biblical narratives and provides a theological reflection on God's grace in the context of historical violence. The lecture offers a balanced view of the Assyrians, acknowledging their power while condemning their brutality and setting up context for a deeper appreciation of the book of Jonah.

This document should provide a comprehensive summary of the key points of Dr. Fowler's lecture and can serve as a useful reference tool.

4. Study Guide: Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18, Rise of Assyria

The Rise of Assyria: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What was the significance of the Sea Peoples Movement for the rise of Assyria?
2. What two literary sources are crucial for understanding Assyrian history and chronology?
3. Describe the military tactics and policies of Ashurnasirpal, specifically focusing on his use of terror.
4. Why did Adad-Nirari establish supply dumps along his campaign routes, and what does this reveal about his ambitions?
5. What unique role did eunuchs play in the Assyrian court, and what does their presence suggest about Assyrian society?
6. Explain the significance of the Battle of Til-tuba and its impact on Shalmaneser III's campaign.
7. What was the motivation for the formation of the coalition against Assyria prior to the Battle of Qarqar?
8. Why is the Battle of Qarqar not mentioned in the Bible, and what conclusions does the lecture draw from this absence?
9. According to the lecture, what was the main message of Ahab's death in the chariot?
10. Explain the two ways that the Assyrian empire's cruelty was meant to function as a tool of warfare and governance.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Sea Peoples Movement destroyed the Hittite empire, which had previously held Assyria in check. This allowed Assyria to expand its power and become a major force in the region.

2. The two main literary sources are the Assyrian king list, which provides a record of Assyrian rulers, and the list of limmus (eponyms), which allows for the creation of a detailed chronology, particularly when fixed to the solar eclipse on June 15, 763 BC.
3. Ashurnasirpal was known for his extreme cruelty, using torture, skinning, and impalement as a means of terror to intimidate enemies and prevent revolts. This policy of ruling through terror was a political tool aimed at maintaining control.
4. Adad-Nirari established supply dumps to support his continued military campaigns, indicating he planned to return year after year. This demonstrates a shift in purpose from building a kingdom to building an empire with long-term goals and administration.
5. Eunuchs served as court officials, and were specifically chosen because their lack of male progeny meant they would not challenge the king. Their presence underscores the importance of royal loyalty and control in Assyrian society.
6. Shalmaneser was defeated by a coalition at the Battle of Til-tuba, but the battle highlights his persistence in his military goals. He would eventually subdue Bit Adini, a result of which reverberated throughout the ancient world.
7. The coalition was formed because the smaller kingdoms, including Aram and Israel, recognized that they could not resist Assyria individually after the fall of Bit Adini. This coalition was a strategic move to create a larger force and prevent further expansion of Assyria.
8. The lecture suggests the Battle of Qarqar is not mentioned in the Bible because Ahab, who led the coalition against Assyria, may have won, but ultimately his policies were not in line with God. The Bible emphasizes God's power over military might, not the greatness of Ahab.
9. The main message of Ahab's death is that military strength and power is nothing compared to God's will. Even a skilled warrior like Ahab could be brought down by a random arrow guided by God.
10. The cruelty of the Assyrian empire functioned as both a pre-emptive strike designed to intimidate their neighbors into submission, and a brutal form of punishment for those who rebelled against their rule. They openly bragged about it to spread fear.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions in essay format.

1. Analyze the evolution of Assyrian power from its vassalage to Mitanni to the establishment of its empire, emphasizing the key figures and policies that contributed to its rise.
2. Discuss the use of terror as a political weapon by the Assyrians, exploring specific examples and how it influenced their empire's expansion and control, considering both its effectiveness and its long-term consequences.
3. Compare and contrast the historical account of the Battle of Qarqar with the biblical narratives about Ahab, focusing on what these differences reveal about the perspectives and purposes of each source.
4. Evaluate the role of the Assyrian military, considering its technology, tactics, and the social structures that supported its effectiveness. In what way did it dominate the ancient world?
5. Assess the long-term impact of the Assyrian empire on the ancient Near East, including its legacy and the reasons for its eventual decline and disappearance.

Glossary

Adad-Nirari: Assyrian king (911-891 BCE) who is credited with starting the Assyrian Empire through aggressive expansion and establishing supply dumps to support continued campaigns.

Ashurnasirpal: Assyrian king who established a new capital at Kalak and was known for his extreme cruelty and use of terror as a means of control.

Ashurbanipal: The last Assyrian king who ruled over a united Assyria. His reign represents the peak of Assyrian power.

Bit Adini: A significant Aramean city-state whose fall to Assyria catalyzed the formation of a large coalition against them.

Carchemish: An ancient city located on the Euphrates River. It was conquered by Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria and was later part of the northern Syrian coalition against Assyria.

Eunuch: A castrated male who held positions of power in the Assyrian court, known for his unwavering loyalty due to a lack of family ambitions.

Fertile Crescent: A region in the Middle East spanning from the Nile to Mesopotamia; it was contested by various ancient powers, including Assyria.

Hittites: An ancient Anatolian people whose empire was destroyed by the Sea Peoples, indirectly aiding the rise of Assyria.

Kalak (Nimrud): The new capital city built by Ashurnasirpal, featuring a large royal palace.

Limmu (Eponym): An Assyrian official whose name was assigned to a specific year. The lists of limmus are crucial for establishing Assyrian chronology.

Mitanni: A kingdom that controlled Assyria before the Hittites freed them.

Qarqar: A major battle in 853 BC where a coalition of Western powers, led by Ahab of Israel, fought against Shalmaneser III.

Sea Peoples Movement: A period of migration and invasion by various maritime groups that contributed to the destruction of many Bronze Age civilizations, including the Hittites, creating a power vacuum in the region.

Shalmaneser I: An early Assyrian king credited with significant military victories.

Shalmaneser III: Assyrian king who expanded the empire westward and fought against the coalition at the Battle of Qarqar.

Supply Dumps: Stockpiles of resources established by Adad-Nirari along campaign routes, an indication of an intention to return to regions for extended domination, not just conquest.

Tiglath-Pileser I: The first Assyrian king from whom there are extensive inscriptions.

Til-tuba: The location of a battle in which a coalition of north Syrian powers defeated Shalmaneser III, though this loss was not permanent.

Tukulti-Ninurta I: An Assyrian king known for expanding Assyrian territory and for a shepherd inscription that parallels Psalm 23.

5. FAQs on Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Session 18, Rise of Assyria, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Rise of Assyria

- What made the Assyrian Empire unique in the ancient world?** The Assyrian Empire was unique for its unprecedented scale of cruelty and its use of terror as a systematic method of control. They were not just executing their enemies; they were torturing them in gruesome ways to intimidate populations into submission, a practice that was both widely publicized in their artwork and boasted about in their inscriptions. Additionally, the empire's size and the logistical prowess necessary to sustain its military campaigns and expansion set it apart. Finally, their military was professional and extremely powerful, leading to successful conquests.
- How did the Assyrians establish and expand their empire?** The rise of Assyria involved several key factors. Initially, they were freed from Mitannian vassalage by the Hittites. They then had a succession of effective kings like Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I, who expanded their territory. The Sea Peoples' movement also weakened their regional rivals, allowing them to grow. However, the real start of the imperial expansion happened under Adad-Nirari II, who used established supply dumps along campaign routes, which indicates long-term imperial ambition. This was further solidified by Ashurnasirpal II who initiated extremely aggressive military campaigns and expanded the empire west, building a new capital at Kalhu (modern-day Nimrud). The Assyrian military was characterized by professionalism and a ruthless approach to warfare. Following Ashurnasirpal, a succession of kings further expanded the empire's reach.
- What are the primary sources historians use to reconstruct Assyrian history?** There are two main literary sources: the Assyrian king lists, which cataloged the rulers starting with Tudiya, giving a 117 king history in total, and the lists of limmus or eponyms, where each year was named after a king or high official. The limmu lists, in conjunction with a confirmed eclipse date, allow historians to construct a reasonably precise chronology of the Assyrian period. These sources provide critical insights into the order and personnel of the empire.

- **How did the Assyrians use terror as a tool of governance?** The Assyrians employed systematic and horrific acts of violence and terror to maintain control over conquered peoples. This included skinning enemies alive, impaling them on stakes, beheading them, cutting off their limbs, noses, ears, and fingers, gouging out eyes, and burning people alive, including young women and children. They also created pillars of the skinned, immured people in walls, and built mounds of heads and bodies outside of city gates, all to serve as constant reminders of the consequences of rebellion. This cruelty was not random but a calculated strategy to inspire fear and prevent revolts.
- **What was the significance of the Battle of Qarqar, and who was involved?** The Battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE was a major military clash where a large coalition of Western powers, including Damascus, Hamath, and Israel (led by King Ahab) confronted the Assyrian forces led by Shalmaneser III. This coalition was formed in response to the Assyrian conquest of Bit Adini. Ahab of Israel contributed a staggering 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry making him the leader of the coalition. Although this was the largest battle the world had ever seen up to that time, it is not explicitly described in the Bible.
- **Who likely won the Battle of Qarqar?** The outcome of the Battle of Qarqar is debated since neither side claimed a decisive victory in their reports. However, the fact that the Assyrians needed four years to return and attack the same coalition again suggests that the Assyrians suffered a serious defeat and needed significant time to rebuild their military. Additionally, the continued solidarity of the coalition for over a decade indicates that they effectively pushed back against the Assyrians, supporting the idea that they won a significant, if temporary, victory.
- **How was the biblical King Ahab involved in the geopolitics of the region?** King Ahab of Israel was a significant figure in the coalition against Assyria, notably contributing the most chariots to the Battle of Qarqar. Ahab's participation suggests that he was a powerful, if internationally minded, ruler of his time. However, despite being the leader of the alliance at Qarqar, the Bible does not record his involvement there because Ahab represents a perspective of worldly power and militarism. In contrast, the Bible emphasizes Ahab's battles with Damascus, which he won through divine intervention, highlighting that victory comes from God, not from military strength or political alliances.

- **What is the ultimate fate of the Assyrian Empire and what are its lasting lessons?** The Assyrian Empire ultimately fell between 612 and 605 BCE and never resurrected, demonstrating the level of hatred it had engendered. Its fall served as a testament to the long-term consequences of its brutal tactics, which left a legacy of fear and loathing among its contemporaries. The study of Assyria also provides insights into the nature of power, violence, and the importance of divine grace. The example of Jonah's reaction to the Assyrians offers a glimpse into the moral complexities of the time, and highlights the importance of seeing all people (even enemies) as potential recipients of grace.