

Outline History of the Neo-Assyrian Period (745 – 612 BCE) **by Gordon College Faculty**

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Assyria was named after the god and city of Assur. Since pre-historic times it had been along with Akkad and Babylon, one of the three major powers in the Mesopotamian valley. By about 1700 BCE, Assur's influence had declined, and did not re-appear until the time of Shalmaneser I (1274-1245 BCE).

The "Neo-Assyrian Empire" began with the military expansionist policies of Ninurta II (890-885 BCE), and his son Ashurnasirpal II (885-860 BCE), who subdued Babylon and then moved west against Syria and Cilicia (Asia Minor). This expansion continued under Shalmaneser III (859-824 BCE), but suffered a major setback at the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE) when a coalition which included "Ahab the Israelite" who contributed 2000 chariots and 14,000 infantry (cf. ANET, p. 279), and eleven other small nations, effectively stopped the Assyrian expansion. A series of rebellions along the northern (Urartu/Ararat) and eastern (Media/Persia) frontiers and, in Babylon, effectively prevented further attention to the Syria/Israelite region until the 740's.

Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727), called *Pul*, began the new expansionist policies, by subduing Babylon. In 732, in alliance with Ahaz of Judah, Pul overran Syria and most of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Hoshea murdered Pekah, took the throne, and became a vassal of Assyria (cf. II Kings 15:19). His primary method of controlling his conquered nations was the practice of mass deportation and re-settlement of the conquered peoples.

Shalmaneser V (726-722) began a three-year siege of Samaria when Hoshea stopped paying him tribute. Hoshea, counting on Egyptian help which did not arrive, was taken prisoner. Shalmaneser died shortly before Samaria fell in 722 (cf. II Kings 17:1-6).

Sargon II (722-705) captured Samaria in 722, marking the official downfall of the Northern Kingdom. Sargon's "Assyrian Annals" say he deported to Upper Mesopotamia 27,290 citizens of the better classes. In succeeding years people were deported from Babylonia and elsewhere to resettle the regions around Samaria. Bringing their ethnic and religious customs with them, they eventually intermarried with the remaining Hebrew population, and their descendents became known as the Samaritans (cf. II Kings 17:24, 29-31; John 4:9). Sargon's greatest glory was the huge palace he built near modern Khorsabad.

Sennacherib (705-681) attacked Judah and Jerusalem in 701, during the reign of Hezekiah (cf. II Kings 18, 19 and Isaiah 36, 37). His Annals report he took 46 of Judah's walled cities and deported their inhabitants. The O.T. records his loss of 185,000 troops in Jerusalem because of the "angel of the Lord" (cf. Herodotus who says it was a plague spread by rats). Some scholars think he may have attacked Jerusalem a second time about 688. He was slain by two of his sons (Isaiah 37:38).

Esarhaddon (681-669), a younger son, claims to have destroyed his father's murderers. Assyria reached the zenith of its power under his rule. The city of Babylon and the temple-complex were rebuilt. The first Assyrian conquest of Egypt culminated in 671 with the capture

of the Egyptian capital, Memphis. Esarhaddon received tribute from “Menasi [Manasseh] of Judah” and eleven other “kings from the seacoast” (cf. II Chronicles 33:11). He died in 669 on the way to Egypt to subdue a revolt.

Ashur-Banipal (669-627(?)) was the last of the great Assyrian monarchs. Subdued rebellions in Babylon, Elam, Susa, Tyre, and Egypt (Thebes, cf. Nahum 3:8-10). Apparently he delegated the control of the empire to his sons after 632, so he could devote his attention to his literary interests. His great 20,000 tablet library excavated at Nineveh included creation and flood stories as well as many other literary documents.

Ashur-etel-ilani (632-628) and **Shin-shar-ishkun (628-612)**. During the last years of Ashurbanipal’s life, effective control of the empire was in the hands of his sons. With his death (sometime between 631 and 627) the empire disintegrated quickly. In 625, the Chaldean Nabopolassar took the throne of Babylon and began to expand first southward to the Persian Gulf, and then northward along the valley. In July 612, Shin-shar-ishkun was killed in the siege of Nineveh by a combined Median and Babylonian army. A remnant government under Ashur-uballit held out at Haran until 609 when Babylonian control over the whole territory was established (cf. Zephaniah 2:13-15; Nahum).

Outline History of the Neo-Babylonian Period (612-539 BCE)

Babylon, like Assyria, had long been a significant power in the ancient Near East. From about 1894 BCE until 1595 BCE, Babylon was led by a dynasty of Amorite kings, of whom Hammurabi (1792-1750) is the best known. He effectively controlled the southeastern end of the Fertile Crescent from the Persian Gulf to Mari.

Between 1595 and 1175 BCE, the Mesopotamian Valley was nominally under the control of the Hittites from Asia Minor, and the Kassites who appear to have been from the eastern mountain area. During this period, however, there were many times of relative independence and areas of local control.

During the Assyrian period, Babylon never lost hope of independence. In the confusion following the death of Ashurbanipal (sometime between 631 and 627), Nabopolassar, who had been an Assyrian-appointed governor in the Persian Gulf area, declared himself king. He occupied the throne of Babylon on November 22, 626 BCE.

Nabopolassar (626-605) was the founder of the independent Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Empire. In alliance with the Medes, and with the help of his brilliant son Nebuchadnezzar (Nebuchadnezzar), he captured and destroyed Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. In 609, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt on his way to help the defeated Assyrian army was challenged by Judean forces under King Josiah at Megiddo. Josiah was killed in the battle, and Neco proceeded to Carchemish on the Euphrates River where he joined the remnants of the Assyrian power. In 605, the Babylonians attacked, and in a crucial battle finally defeated the Egyptian/Assyrian coalition. With this defeat, Assyria passed away forever, and Egypt never again became a dominant power. Neco returned to Egypt, defeated, but on the way took Jehoahaz as prisoner, and put Jehoiakim on the Judean throne as his puppet king.

Nebuchadnezzar (Nebuchadnezzar) (605-562) became king on the death of his father on August 15, 605. He built Babylon to the height of its splendor as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, employing many artisans and craftsmen on vast building projects. He led three attacks against Jerusalem: (1) In 605 he forced Jehoiakim to change his allegiance to Babylon, took some of the temple treasures and numerous captives including Daniel and his three companions to Babylon (II Kings 24:1; Daniel 1:1-8). In 601, an indecisive but bloody battle between Egypt and Babylon resulted in the return of the Babylonian army to Babylon. This withdrawal was probably the cause of the Judean switch back to an Egyptian alliance (Jeremiah 27:9-11; II Kings 24:1-7). A series of Babylonian-supported raids on the tribes around Judah (Jeremiah 49) prepared the way for Nebuchadnezzar's second attack on Jerusalem. (2) By 598 Babylon was ready to resume the pressure on Judah and besieged Jerusalem in early autumn. Jehoiakim died on December 7, 598, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar on March 16, 597. He was taken captive to Babylon along with Ezekiel, all the nobles and craftsmen, over 10,000 leading citizens, and all that remained of the temple treasures. (II Kings 24:10-17). Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's uncle, was placed on the throne in Jerusalem. (3) In 587, Zedekiah rebelled, and on July 19, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, burned the city, and took Zedekiah and others captive to

Babylon. A local governor, Gedaliah, was put in charge of the Judean territory. This date marks the final overthrow of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Evil-Merodach (562-560) “Man of Marduk,” assumed the throne on the death of Nebuchadnezzar. He was an unimportant king who was assassinated by Nergalsharezer, Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law.

Nergal-Sharezer (560-556) not important.

Labashi-Marduk (555) son of Nergal-sharezer reigned nine months before he was assassinated by Nabonidus. Not important.

Nabonidus (555-539) Usurped throne. He was a devotee of the moon-god Sin, and introduced many religious reforms in Babylon that were unpopular with the people and lost him popular support. He lived ten years in the desert city of Tema. He engaged in literary pursuits and religious reforms, leaving his son Belshazzar as co-regent (and effective king) during most of his reign (Daniel 5). Babylon fell to the Persians under Cyrus in 539).

Outline History of the Persian Period (539-331 BCE)

Cyrus II (559-529) "Cyrus the Great," became king of the small nation of Elam in 559, but rapidly expanded his territory by conquering Persia, Media, and Lydia. In 539 he conquered Babylon and was welcomed as a supporter of the true faith of Marduk, Babylon's traditional god. Babylonian domination of the ancient Near East came to an end. Within a year, he had issued his decrees allowing the restoration of regional worship in the empire. II Chronicles 36:22-23 preserves the Hebrew version of these restoration decrees (cf. Jeremiah 25:12-14; Isaiah 44:28-45:7). About 536 Zerubbabel led Return No. 1 with about 50,000 Jews to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6) to rebuild the temple. Work progressed slowly and then stopped because of the lethargy of the Jews and the opposition of the Samaritans.

Cambyses II (529-522) expanded Persian Empire into North Africa, conquered Egypt in 525. It was probably during his reign that the Samaritans were able to order a work-stoppage on the temple in Jerusalem.

Darius Hystaspes (522-486) (He is not Darius the Mede of Daniel 5:30). During his reign Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the Jews to complete work on the temple. After four years work, the completed temple was dedicated in 516. Darius's "Behistun Inscription," a multilingual monumental record, was the inscription which provided the key to deciphering cuneiform writing for modern scholars. His only major defeat was at the hands of the Greeks at Marathon in 490.

Xerxes I (486-465) is identified with King Ahasuerus of Esther. Persepolis, his capital was a major building project during his reign. Malachi's reforms probably occurred during this period. He challenged Greece, but was beaten at Salamis in 480.

Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) (464-424). Ezra the priest led return no. 2 in 458 (Ezra 7-10) to seek religious reform. In 445, Nehemiah, the appointed governor, and former cupbearer to Artaxerxes, led return no. 3 to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-7). Later, about 433, Nehemiah returned from Persia to Jerusalem to carry out certain reforms. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, says the Old Testament canon was complete during the reign of Artaxerxes.

Events Leading up to the Babylonian Captivity

Under Assyria, the city-state of Babylon had long been a strong power. With the death of Ashurbanipal (ca. **627**) a series of local rebellions broke out. Then Nabopolassar, a local Babylonian leader, was crowned king on **November 22, 626 BCE**.

By **622**, Nabopolassar had captured Nippur. He gained control of the whole lower end of the Tigris/Euphrates valley and the traffic on the river.

614. Nabopolassar forced the Assyrians back to Assur. Assyria appealed to Egypt for help, and then dug in on the west bank of the Euphrates.

612. The Babylonian army, with support from the Medes, destroyed Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. The remnants of the Assyrian army retreated westward to Haran. Assyrian king Ashur-u-ballit appealed again to Egypt, but Pharaoh Neco II (610-595), was slow responding.

609. The Babylonian armies, under crown-prince Nebuchadrezzar (Nebuchadnezzar), launched a surprise attack on Carchemish in late May. The Assyrian/Egyptian coalition was badly defeated, and Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon gained control of the whole western end of the fertile crescent. Nebuchadnezzar took hostages and temple-treasures to Babylon (Daniel 1:1; II Kings 24:1). Jehoiakim became a Babylonian vassal. On August 15, 605, Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylon. He returned to the city, leaving Palestine and Egypt free of serious interference for six or seven years.

598. Jehoiakim unwisely decided to withhold the annual tribute payment to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar returned and put Jerusalem under siege (II Kings 24:1-6). Jehoiakim died on December 7, 598, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin. By mid-winter, the situation in Jerusalem was desperate, and on March 16, 597, Jehoiachin surrendered. He was taken captive, along with 10,000 of the leading citizens, and much booty from the temple. He was exiled to Babylon in chains (II Kings 24:7-17). His uncle, Zedekiah, was made king as a Babylonian puppet.

588. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and Jerusalem was again besieged on January 15 (Jeremiah 52:1-4; II Kings 24:18-25:2).

587. July 19, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem. Zedekiah escaped through the royal garden (Kidron?) but was captured near Jericho, blinded by his captors, and taken in chains to Babylon. On August 15, the temple was burned, and the sacrifice ended for 70 years until the rebuilding and rededication in 516 (II Kings 25:3-21).