

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 23: Three Important Empires

INTRODUCTION OF THREE IMPORTANT EMPIRES

and their historical affects on the nations of Judah and Israel

It is confusing enough to have over forty kings in leadership of Judah and Israel during this time. Then add the prophets into the mix and it is impossible.

As I was working on my study of II Kings, studying the Chronicles, and looking ahead to the prophetic books, I realized that unless we understand the actions of three opposing powers we can never understand the flow of history covered in these books.

So, before we look at the OUTLINE OF II KINGS, I will try to sketch out the important rulers in the three important kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia and relate them to the Biblical account.

This information comes from secular history books, several Bible Handbooks, *The Bible as History*, *Exploring the Scriptures*, *The Bible Encyclopedia*, and *The Bible*.

I. ASSYRIA

1. Tiglath-Pileser (745-727B.C.)

The nation of Assyria was in decline when Jeroboam II came to power in Israel. He was an ambitious and ruthless king and ruled for over forty years, but just about the time he died an equally mighty king rose to power in Assyria.

Tiglath-Pileser led Assyria to become the foremost power of the day. He was even proclaimed king of Babylon early in his reign and is known in Scripture by his Babylonian name, Pal (II Kings 15 :19).

His advances into the west overshadowed the rules of Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea in Israel, and Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz in Judah.

He is the emperor to whom Ahaz, King of Judah, paid tribute and Israel was no more than his puppet state also paying taxes to him

2. Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.)

He followed Tiglath-Pileser to the throne and expected Israel to continue to pay tribute. Hosea believed Egypt when they promised to help against Assyria and stopped the flow of money to Assyria causing them to lay siege to Samaria.

This eventually led to the Assyrian captivity of Israel.

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3. Sargon II (722-705B.C.)

Samaria held out for three years but the death of Shalmaneser changed nothing, in fact, Sargon not only defeated Israel but began the terrible deportation of Jews to Assyria. He led Israel into THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY.

Judah, under King Hezekiah, also felt the sting of Sargon's wrath. It was at this time that the Prophet Isaiah walked the streets of Jerusalem "naked and barefoot" to illustrate the that Assyria would conquer Egypt and Ethiopia and warn Judah to look elsewhere for help--to the Lord (Isaiah 20).

4. Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.)

When Sargon died revolts broke out throughout Israel, Judah, and Assyria. In fact, Judah, under King Hezekiah escaped their yoke completely. This revolt is described in three places in Scripture: II Kings 18-19; II Chronicles 32; and Isaiah 36-37.

Sennacherib came against Jerusalem with a mighty army and laid siege to the city hoping to starve the people into submission and enslave them. He was an unbelievably barbaric, inhumane ruler who would have brought great suffering to Judah, but God defeated him supernaturally.

5. Esar-Haddon (681-669 B.C.)

He was one of the greatest of all Assyrian kings and extended their kingdom into Egypt. He is mentioned in Isaiah 19 and Ezra 4 and the account of his capture of King Manasseh is in II Chronicles 33.

6. Ashurbanipal (669-633 B.C.)

He finished the job his father started by subjugating all of Egypt. He is mentioned in Nahum 3 when he restored Manasseh to his throne, probably to help him keep the trade routes between Egypt and Assyria opened.

Trouble soon engulfed Assyria as the Median Empire grew stronger. When the Medes joined with Babylon in 625 B.C., Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father) led a combined force to drive Assyria out of Babylon.

In 612 BC. he destroyed Nineveh, weakening the Assyrian influence in Judah and making the religious reforms of King Josiah possible.

II. BABYLON

1. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B. C.)

He was a strong and brilliant military leader who, in one of histories most important battles, destroyed the armies of Egypt at Carchemesh in 605 B.C. Having driven Pharaoh Necho out of Asia, he returned to take the Babylonian throne when his father Nabopolassar died. He played a major part in Jewish history including invading Judah, laying siege to Jerusalem three separate times. He sacked the Temple, took the implements of worship, and subjugated the last three kings of Judah, bringing an end to the Hebrew monarchy, and causing THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

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Jerusalem has been under Gentile domination since that time.

Neb. was also involved in the famous siege of Tyre in 586 BC., when the citizens moved to an island off the coast and deprived him of any spoil. Two things made this event important in history. One was the prediction that Tyre would be utterly destroyed, and the second was predicted by Ezekiel who said he would fail to sack the city, but also promised Egypt would be his as his reward (Ezk. 26-29).

The Book of Ezekiel should be read with an eye on Nebuchadnezzar's military campaigns. He also figures prominently in the book of Daniel.

2. Evil-merodach (562-560 B.G)

He is remembered primarily because of his kindness to Jehoiachin during the 37 years of his captivity mentioned in 2 Kings 25. He was murdered by his own brothers in a coup attempt.

3. Neriglissar (560-556 B. C.)

Nothing of consequence took place during his short rule, except he lost his throne while fighting Cilicia to stop the encroaching Lydians.

4. Labashi-Marduk (556 B. C.)

He was placed on the throne while still a boy, ruled for nine months and was murdered ending Nebuchadnezzar's influence.

5. Nabonidus (556-539 B. C)

He was neither a good general nor statesman and, because of a strange set of beliefs and superstitions, he did not even live in Babylon. While he reacted to threats in Syria and northern Arabia, he left his son, Belshazzar as regent in his place.

Trouble also fermented in the north as the Medo-Babylonian alliance started to crumble at the death of Nebuchadnezzar. In order to protect his empire he instituted political reforms bringing harsh restrictions on his own people and causing him to have enemies without and face revolts within his kingdom. His fall is of course, the last fall of the Babylonian Empire.

6. Belshazzar (553-539 B. C.)

During the absence of his father, Belshazzar was virtually the king in Babylon. He was, of course, the king involved with Daniel and the interpreting of the writing on the wall presenting the final message of the judgment he had already predicted to Nebuchadnezzar when he interpreted his dream of the giant statue.

Of course, that very night, the Babylonian Empire fell to the Medes and Persians. The empire had lasted about the same length of time as did the Jewish captivity, seventy years.

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III. PERSIA

1. Cyrus, the Great (550-530 B. C.)

The Medes were the uncontested masters of the Persians until Cyrus succeeded his father to the throne in a small Persian kingdom named Anshan in 559 BC.. Soon afterward he led a rebellion against the Medes, and by 550 B.C. he had united the Medes and Persians under his own rule.

In 539 BC. he captured Babylon and made Persia a world power that was over three thousand miles long from east to west. He permitted the Jews to return to Palestine and rebuild the temple as prophesied in Isaiah 45. This story is featured in Ezra and Nehemiah.

2. Darius, the Mede (539-525 B. C.)

Darius was made king in Chaldea after Cyrus captured Babylon (Dan. 5:31, 9:1) He probable held this kingdom in trust for Cyrus while he extended his kingdom.

3. Smerdis (521 B.C.)

He reigned only seven months and is only important in that he is thought to be the Artaxerxes in Ezra 4.

4. Darius I (521-486 B.C.)

The building of the Temple in Jerusalem had stopped when he came to the throne, but he allowed the work to continue and it was finished (Ezra 5-6). We meet the prophets Haggai and Zechariah during his rule.

5. Xerxes (486-464 B. C.)

The king AKA Ahasuerus was the one who married Esther about 478 B.C.. He was a cruel, vindictive, sensual and fickle man.

He was famous in history for his many wars with his arch rival Greece. Eventually a much smaller, but better trained fleet of Grecian ships defeated him soundly at sea at Salamis. A year latter they also beat his land forces and he was murdered by a courtier in his own palace.

6. Artaxerxes I (464-423 B.C.)

This king was a friend of the Jews and allowed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. He is mentioned in Ezra 7, Nehemiah 2 and 5. He also appointed Nehemiah governor of Jerusalem Neh. 5).

7. Darius III (336-331 B.C.)

This was the last king of Persia and his kingdom was defeated by Alexander the Great. The throne of world empires passed from Asia to Europe.