

ASSYRIA

1. Origin.

- a. The Assyrians descended from Shem and Asshur. Like Israel, they were Semites.
 - (1) **Ge 10:21-22** 21 To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. 22 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram.

2. Geography.

- a. Assyria laid in the upper Mesopotamian plain, bounded on the west by the Syrian desert, on the south by Babylonia, and on the north and east by the Armenian and Persian hills. The most fertile and densely populated part of Assyria lay east of the central river Tigris. Its principle cities were Nineveh, Assur, and Calah. The location today is northern Iraq, Kurdistan.
- b. Though Semitic, the Assyrians lived in cities originally build by Nimrod, a Hamite.
 - (1) **Ge 2:14** 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.
 - (2) **Ge 10:6-12** 6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. 7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. 8 Cush fathered Nimrod. He was the first on earth to be a mighty man. 9 He was a mighty hunter before Yahweh. Therefore it is said, Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Yahweh. 10 The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and 12 Resen between Nineveh and Calah. That is the great city.
 - (3) **Mic 5:6** 6 ...They shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances, and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border....
 - (4) **Is 7:20** 20 In that day Yahweh will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.
- c. Assyria had no natural boundaries to protect it.

3. Culture.

- a. Assyria developed a strong agricultural economy.
- b. The Assyrians kept excellent military records on cuneiform tablets, obelisks, and steles.
- c. They excellent in production of military equipment—swords, lances, armour.
- d. They had a reputation for barbarity and impaling enemies on poles.
- e. They advanced mathematics (360 degree circle), navigation (longitude and latitude), and medical science.
- f. They traded regularly with Egypt via the Mediterranean.

4. Rise.

- a. Assyria gained its independence from the Mitanni in 1365 bc.
- b. They dominated northern Mesopotamia until 800 bc.

- c. Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-612 bc).
- (1) In 1120 bc, Tiglath-pileser I defeated the Hittites and captured Carchemish.
 - (2) Assyria's wars with Syria gave David and Jonathan the opportunity to expand into Syria.
 - (3) Ahab and Jehu are mentioned in Assyrian records.
 - (4) Assyria's power diminished from 824 to 744 bc. This led to the restoration of Israel under Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:23-29) and Judah under Uzziah (2 Ch 26).
 - (5) Tiglath-pileser III ([]) revived the Assyrian empire.
 - (6) His son Shalmaneser V ([]) captured Samaria and deported its population in 722 bc (2 Ki 17).
 - (7) Sargon II ([]) gave Judah some rest. But his successor, Sennacherib ([]), attacked Judah (2 Ki 18-19; 2 Ch 32; Is 36-38).
- d. Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah in about 763 bc.
- (1) Biblical record.
 - (a) **Jon 1:2** 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.
 - (b) **Jon 3:2-6** 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you. 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown! 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. 6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
 - (c) **Jon 4:11** 11 And should not I [Yahweh] pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?
 - (d) **Mt 12:41** 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.
 - (e) **Lk 11:30** 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.
 - (2) Archaeological confirmation.
 - (a) A text from Guzanu of the reign of *Ashur-dān* III records a total solar eclipse in 763 bc that was followed by flooding and famine. Such signs would be interpreted by the Assyrians as affecting the king who would temporarily step down from the throne (Jon 3:6). Such portents, including an earthquake about the time of Jonah ben Amittai (2 Ki 14:25), could well have caused the Ninevites to repent (Lk 11:30; Mt 12:41).¹
- e. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 bc).²

¹ D. J. Wiseman, "Nineveh," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 826.

² D. J. Wiseman, "[Tiglath-Pileser, Tilgath-Pilneser](#)," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1186-1187.

- (1) Tiglath-pileser III is known by several names: *tiġlat-pil' eser* (2 Ki 15:29; 16:7-10); Assyrian *Tukulti-apil-Ešarra* (“My trust is in the son of *Ešarra*”); the Aram. *tgltpł'sr* (Zinjirli Stele; Ashur ostracon); *tilgat-piln' eser* (1 Ch 5:6; 2 Ch 28:20; lxx *Algathphellasar*); and Pul (2 Ki. 15:19; 1 Ch. 5:26; Babylonian Chronicle (*Pulu*)). He was son of Adad-nirari III.
- (2) He introduced advanced civil, military, and political systems into the **Neo-Assyrian Empire**, improving its efficiency and security of the Assyrian government and creating Assyria’s first professional **standing army**.
- (3) He subjugated much of the **Near East: Babylonia, Chaldea, Arabia, Israel, Judah, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Urartu, Armenia, Scythia, Cimmeria**, the **Hittites, Cyprus, Syria, Tyre and Sidon, Persia, Media, and Elam**. Late in his reign he was crowned king in Babylonia.
- (4) He discouraged revolts by deporting thousands of people all over the empire. He is one of the most successful military commanders in world history, conquering most of the world known to the Assyrians before his death.
- (5) In 743 bc he attacked the northern Syrian city states under Urartian domination. During the three-year siege of Arpad, he received tribute from Carchemish, Hamath, Tyre, Byblos, Rezin of Damascus, and Menahem of Samaria.
 - (a) **2 Ki 15:19-20** 19 Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. 20 Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.
- (6) Tiglath-pileser III marched again to the west in 734 bc. The Phoenician seaports were plundered and heavy tribute imposed on Ashkelon and on Gaza, whose ruler Hanun fled to Egypt. Statues of the Assyrian king were set up in their temples. The Assyrian army marched all the way to the River of Egypt, imposing tribute on Rezin of Damascus, Ammon, Edom, Moab and (Jeho)ahaz of Judah (2 Ch 28:19-21). He march on Damascus late in 733 bc. When Damascus fell in 732 bc, Tyre also capitulated and Israel, including Ijon, Abel of Beth-Maachah, Janoah, Kadesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee and all Naphtali, was conquered. Excavations at Hazor confirm its attack.
 - (a) **Is 9:1** 1 In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.
- (7) At this time, Tiglath-pileser replaced Pekah (*Paqaha*) with Hoshea (Ausi').
 - (a) **2 Ki 15:30** 30 Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.
- (8) Ahaz paid for Assyrian help by becoming a vassal to Tiglath-pileser III. He probably required Ahaz to observe Assyrian religious practices (2 Ki 16:7-16).
- (9) Tiglath-pileser also extended his control over Arabia (Is 21:13-17).
- (10) With slave labour Tiglath-pileser III built himself a palace at Calah, from which have been recovered reliefs depicting the king himself and his campaigns.

(11) His conquests and reforms stabilised the **Neo-Assyrian Empire**. His administration and methods served as blueprint for future empires.

f. **Shalmaneser V** (I).

(1) Assyria conquered Israel in 722 bc and deported them east.

(a) **Is 50:17-18** 17 Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. 18 Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.

5. Fall.

a. Assyria had difficulty governing its conquered territories. The Babylonians became stiff competitors.

b. Nineveh fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 bc. When defeated at Harran in 610-09 bc, their empire ended.

(1) **Na 2:6-8** 6 The river gates are opened. The palace melts away. 7 Its mistress is stripped. She is carried off, her slave girls lamenting, moaning like doves and beating their breasts. 8 Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away. Halt! Halt! they cry, but none turns back.

c. As predicted by Nahum and Zephaniah, Nineveh is a heap of ruins even to today.

(1) **Na 3:7** 7 All who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh. Who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?

(2) **Zep 2:13-15** 13 [Yahweh] will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert. 14 Herds shall lie down in her midst, all kinds of beasts. Even the owl and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals. A voice shall hoot in the window. Devastation will be on the threshold, for her cedar work will be laid bare. 15 This is the exultant city that lived securely, that said in her heart, I am, and there is no one else. What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

(3) When Xenophon and the retreating Gk. army passed Nineveh in 401 bc, it was already an unrecognisable mass of debris.³

6. Archaeology.

a. We know a lot about Assyrian history from the Bible and extrabiblical sources.

(1) "Nineveh, with its many reliefs and inscriptions, has done more than any other Assyrian site to elucidate the ancient history of Assyria and Babylonia, while the epics, histories, grammatical and scientific texts and letters have made Assyrian literature better known than that of any ancient Semitic peoples except the Hebrews."⁴

b. Kurkh Stela.

³ D. J. Wiseman, "[Nineveh](#)," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 826.

⁴ D. J. Wiseman, "[Nineveh](#)," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 826.

- c. Black Obelisk.
- d. Assyrian Eponym List.

7. Today.

8. Future.

- a. In the future, Assyria will be a blessing in the midst of the earth.
 - (1) **Is 19:23-25** 23 In that day [the Messianic age] there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. 24 In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom Yahweh of hosts has blessed, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.
 - (2) Assyria's end is much different from Babylon's (see Re 17-18).