



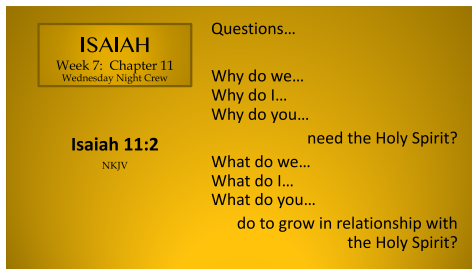
ISAIAH

Week 6: Isaiah, Chapters 3-5
Trusted. Obedient. Prophetic.
Winter 2023 w/Wednesday Night Crew

1/25 – Ch.1		4/19
2/1 – Ch. 2 Mill.Reign	3/15 -PO Ahaz	4/26
2/8	3/22	5/3 – Gone
2/15 – Gone PR ROBIN	3/29 – PR ROBIN	5/10 – Home night prior
2/22 – Home Tues. Gone?	Hezekiah	5/17
3/1	4/5	5/24
3/8 – PR M Holy Spirit(11&12)	4/12 – PR ROBIN Nation	5/31

RECAP:

SL#3 Thank to Pr Michelle – Holy Spirit



Ahaz was ruling during Hosea, Micah & Isaiah’s time.

Isaiah – King Ahaz

AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH

SL#4

(אָחָז, 'chz; shortened form of יהוֹאָחָז, yhw'chz, meaning “he [Yahweh] has held, grasped”).

- The 12th king of Judah.
- First bad king in Judah in about 100 years

Bowling, A. C. (2017). [2 Kings](#). In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (pp. 576–580). Holman Bible Publishers.

- Placed his trust in Assyria when faced with military threat.
- His actions led to divine judgment upon Judah.

Pettus, D. D. (2016). [Ahaz, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

SL#5

Where in Scripture:

2 Kings 15:38-16:20

2 Kings 17:1

2 Chronicles 27:9-28:27

2 Chronicles 29:19

Isaiah 7

Isaiah 14:28

Isaiah 38:8

Micah 1:1

Matthew 1:9

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SL#6 Who is Ahaz?

2 Kings 15:38-16:20 HCSB

³⁸ *Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of his ancestor David. His son Ahaz became king in his place.*

Judah's King Ahaz

16 *In the seventeenth year of Pekah (Israel's king) son of Remaliah, Ahazson of Jotham became king of Judah. ² Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God like his ancestor David ³ but walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. ⁴ He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.*

2 Chronicles 28:1-4 HCSB

28 Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the Lord's sight like his ancestor David, ² for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and made cast images of the Baals. ³ He burned incense in the Valley of Hinnom and burned his children in the fire, **imitating** the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. ⁴ He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

NOTE: Who is Ahaz?

- Was 20 when he became king.
- Reigned 735–715 BC
- Co-regent with Jotham (his father) for 4 years.
- Ruled Judah for 16 years.
- Shared the throne with Hezekiah (his son) (728/7-7/15 BC).
- Paid tribute to Assyria (Tiglathpileser III 733/32BC)

Pettus, D. D. (2016). [Ahaz, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

SL#7 **2 Kings 16:5-6** HCSB

⁵ *Then Aram's(Syria) King Rezin and Israel's King Pekah son of Remaliah came to wage war against Jerusalem. They besieged Ahaz but were not able to conquer him. ⁶ At that time Rezin king of Aram(Syria) recovered Elath for Aram and expelled the Judahites (JEWS) from Elath. Then the Arameans came to Elath, and they live there until today.*

In this verse the word *Jew* is used for the first time in the Bible. There are those who hold that *Jew* applies only to those of the tribe of Judah. However, notice that here it refers to folk in the northern kingdom of Israel—in fact, up on the border of Syria. As we shall see, all twelve tribes were given that name.

McGee, J. V. (1991). [Thru the Bible commentary: History of Israel \(1 and 2 Kings\)](#). (electronic ed., Vol. 13, pp. 239–241). Thomas Nelson.

NOTE: Who was Judah threatened by and why?

- Assyria: Resurging to enlarge their Empire (745–612 BC) in Mesopotamia – Tiglath-Pileser III needed to control those trade routes that ran through the fertile crescent.

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- Egypt wanted this to happen so they would have a buffer state between them and Assyria.
- Syria & Israel as they began to diplomatically and militarily posture themselves as they surrounded Judah. (They were already paying tribute to Assyria.)
- Some believe this posturing for Judah's allegiance began during Jotham's reign.
- When Jotham nor Ahaz would capitulate, they sought to remove Ahaz and replace him with Rezin's "own puppet" - Ben Tabeel (Isa 7:6).
- Believe this is when Ahaz offered his own son to a pagan god to "save his throne".

SL#8 2 Kings 16:3

³ but walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. HCSB

³ Instead, he walked in the ways of Israel's kings. He even burned his own son alive, imitating the detestable practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. CEB

SL#9 2 Chronicles 28:5-8 HCSB

⁵ So the Lord his God handed Ahaz over to the king of Aram. He attacked him and took many captives to Damascus.

Ahaz was also handed over to the king of Israel, who struck him with great force: ⁶ Pekah son of Remaliah killed 120,000 in Judah in one day—all brave men—because they had abandoned the Lord God of their ancestors. ⁷ An Ephraimite warrior named Zichri killed the king's son Maaseiah, Azrikam governor of the palace, and Elkanah who was second to the king. ⁸ Then the Israelites took 200,000 captives from their brothers—women, sons, and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder from them and brought it to Samaria.

NOTE:

- The coalition of Syria/Israel devastated Judah:
 - One year war
 - The enemy set up camp three days march from Jerusalem.
 - Israel took many Judaeans captives
 - The Philistines joined in and took the west of Judah.
 - The Edomites took the south.
 - ODED (prophet) intervened.

SL#10 vs. 9-12 2 Chronicles 28:9-15 HCSB

⁹ A prophet of the Lord named Oded was there. He went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, "Look, the Lord God of your ancestors handed them over to you because of His wrath against Judah, but you slaughtered them in a rage that has reached heaven. ¹⁰ Now you plan to reduce the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, to slavery. Are you not also guilty before Yahweh your God? ¹¹ Listen to me and return the captives you took from your brothers, for the Lord's burning anger is on you."

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¹² So some men who were leaders of the Ephraimites—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—stood in opposition to those coming from the war.

SL#11

¹³ They said to them, “You must not bring the captives here, for you plan to bring guilt on us from the Lord to add to our sins and our guilt. For we have much guilt, and burning anger is on Israel.”

¹⁴ The army left the captives and the plunder in the presence of the officers and the congregation. ¹⁵ Then the men who were designated by name took charge of the captives and provided clothes for their naked ones from the plunder. They clothed them, gave them sandals, food and drink, dressed their wounds, and provided donkeys for all the feeble. The Israelites brought them to Jericho, the City of Palms, among their brothers. Then they returned to Samaria.

Even after this intervention:

- Ahaz and the people of Judah were looking only at their resources for help.

2 Kgs 15:37, ODED:

Rezin and Pekah began pressuring for Judah’s allegiance as early as the reign of Jotham.

This tug-of-war went on over several years, peaking at the siege of Jerusalem.

The cause of the conflict was not an attempt to influence Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition.

Rather, it was essentially a struggle between Aram, Israel, and Judah for **control of the Transjordan**.

As part of Aramean territorial expansion, Aram and Israel attacked Jerusalem in 733.

The purpose was to replace Ahaz with Rezin’s own puppet, Ben Tabeel (Isa 7:6).

The plan was aborted because of Tiglath-pileser’s invasion.

Although Ahaz appealed for help and sent a bribe????, Tiglath-pileser was acting to fulfill his own objectives.

Thus the Syro-Ephraimite War was unconnected to Assyrian expansion, and the Assyrian campaign of 733–732 had no direct connection to the Syro-Ephraimite War (see Oded, “Historical Background,” 164–65).

IRVINE:

The Syro-Ephraimite War was the culmination of a long effort by Rezin to create a coalition of states to resist Assyria. Rezin applied pressure against Jotham and later Ahaz, but the Judaeans refused to cooperate, instead following the Israelite kings Menahem and Pekahiah. Once Pekah came to power, Israel joined the Aramean cause. The Aramean-Israelite attack against Ahaz was intended to enlist Judaeans support for the coalition. Rezin and Pekah besieged Jerusalem late in 734 or early 733, but the siege was aborted when Tiglath-pileser marched against the coalition. Ahaz submitted voluntarily to Assyria and paid tribute after the Assyrians arrived (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*, 101–9).

Riley, J. A. (2016). [Syro-Ephraimite War](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

SL#12 2 Kings 16:7-9

⁷ So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, “**I am your servant and your son**. March up and save me from the power of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me.” ⁸ Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the Lord’s temple and in the treasuries of the king’s palace and sent them to the king of Assyria as a gift. ⁹ So the king of Assyria listened to him and marched up to Damascus and captured it. He deported its people to Kir but put Rezin to death.

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NOTE:

- Was this the first-time tribute was paid to Assyria by Judah?
- OR was there already a relationship where Ahaz could signal and ask for help?
- How does **SL#13 Isaiah 7:1-9(10-12)** HCSB figure in?

This took place during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah king of Judah: Rezin king of Aram, along with Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, waged war against Jerusalem, but he could not succeed. ² When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

³ Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub

[a remnant will return. Pointing out Assyria as the real threat.]

to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Fuller's Field.

[as he was planning how to protect the water supply from Aram & Israel]

⁴ Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering stubs of firebrands, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah.

⁵ For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, ⁶ 'Let us go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's [the bad one] son as king in it.'"

⁷ This is what the Lord God says:

It will not happen; it will not occur.

[In this one long casually worded sentence, God has just promised Ahaz that Syria and Israel will NOT harm win.]

⁸ The head of Aram is Damascus, the head of Damascus is Rezin (within 65 years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),

⁹ the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all.

The headship of Judah would never belong to Ephraim, or Pekah. Then God, still speaking to Judah, said that if the people of Judah and Jerusalem did not "stand firm in [their] faith" (Heb. *ta'aminu*, "believe, trust, rely on, have faith") they would not "stand at all" (Heb. *te'amenu*, "have stability, remain, continue"). The Hebrew uses the hiph'il and niphal form of the verb *'aman* as a wordplay. The NIV brings out the pun well in the English translation. It emphasizes that their only hope of escaping the fate of Aram and Israel is to take a stand of faith in God, relying on Him alone. ¹ Horton, S. M. (2000). *Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary* (pp. 89–115). Logion Press.

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[Assyria wanted not Judah but Egypt. Did Ahaz need to “beat” these two little pesky nations that were harassing him? Assyria would bypass Judah, it was not worth going out of the way for, it was a waste of time. All Ahaz had to do was keep quiet and let God defend him.]

SL#14 The Immanuel Prophecy

¹⁰ Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask for a sign from the Lord your God—from the depths of Sheol to the heights of heaven.”

¹² But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the Lord.”

- WHY DID AHAZ SAY THAT?
 - Sounds “mature”. Like he knows scripture and doesn’t want to offend God.
 - But who was inviting him into this ask?
 - Religion v.s. Relationship – He was inviting Ahaz to SEE MORE OF HIM

What does disobedience breed?

Did this refusal lead to what happens next?

SL#15 2 Kings 16:10-16 (17-20)

Ahaz’s Idolatry

¹⁰ King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria. When he saw the altar that was in Damascus, King Ahaz sent a model of the altar and complete plans for its construction to Uriah the priest. ¹¹ Uriah built the altar according to all the instructions King Ahaz sent from Damascus. Therefore, by the time King Ahaz came back from Damascus, Uriah the priest had completed it. ¹² When the king came back from Damascus, he saw the altar. Then he approached the altar and ascended it. ¹³ He offered his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar. ¹⁴ He took the bronze altar that was before the Lord in front of the temple between his altar and the Lord’s temple, and put it on the north side of his altar.

[NOW THIS IS THE TYPE OF KING I WANT TO BE! I am going to be the HIGH PRIEST!]

NOTE:

- Ahaz liked being more than a king.

¹⁵ Then King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, “Offer on the great altar the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, and the king’s burnt offering and his grain offering. Also offer the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of sacrifice. The bronze altar will be for me to seek guidance.” ¹⁶ Uriah the priest did everything King Ahaz commanded.

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SL#16 2 Kings 16:17-20

¹⁷ Then King Ahaz cut off the frames of the water carts and removed the bronze basin from each of them. He took the reservoir from the bronze oxen that were under it and put it on a stone pavement. ¹⁸ To satisfy the king of Assyria, he removed from the Lord's temple the Sabbath canopy they had built in the palace, and he closed the outer entrance for the king.

Ahaz's Death

¹⁹ The rest of the events of Ahaz's reign, along with his accomplishments, are written in the Historical Record of Judah's Kings. ²⁰ Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Hezekiah became king in his place.

NOTE: Not buried in the tombs of the Kings.

Judah's King Ahaz

2 Chronicles 28:1-27 HCSB

28 Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the Lord's sight like his ancestor David, ² for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and made cast images of the Baals. ³ He burned incense in the Valley of Hinnom and burned his children in the fire, **imitating** the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. ⁴ He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

⁵ So the Lord his God handed Ahaz over to the king of Aram. He attacked him and took many captives to Damascus.

Ahaz was also handed over to the king of Israel, who struck him with great force: ⁶ Pekah son of Remaliah killed 120,000 in Judah in one day—all brave men—because they had abandoned the Lord God of their ancestors. ⁷ An Ephraimite warrior named Zichri killed the king's son Maaseiah, Azrikam governor of the palace, and Elkanah who was second to the king. ⁸ Then the Israelites took 200,000 captives from their brothers—women, sons, and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder from them and brought it to Samaria.

⁹ A prophet of the Lord named Oded was there. He went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, "Look, the Lord God of your ancestors handed them over to you because of His wrath against Judah, but you slaughtered them in a rage that has reached heaven. ¹⁰ Now you plan to reduce the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, to slavery. Are you not also guilty before Yahweh your God? ¹¹ Listen to me and return the captives you took from your brothers, for the Lord's burning anger is on you."

¹² So some men who were leaders of the Ephraimites—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—stood in opposition to those coming from the war. ¹³ They said to them, "You must not bring the captives here, for you plan to bring guilt on us from the Lord to add to our sins and our guilt. For we have much guilt, and burning anger is on Israel."

¹⁴ The army left the captives and the plunder in the presence of the officers and the congregation. ¹⁵ Then the men who were designated by name took charge of the captives and provided clothes for their naked ones from the plunder. They clothed them, gave them sandals, food and drink, dressed their wounds, and provided donkeys for all the feeble. The Israelites brought them to Jericho, the City of Palms, among their brothers. Then they returned to Samaria.

¹⁶ At that time King Ahaz asked the king of Assyria for help. ¹⁷ The Edomites came again, attacked Judah, and took captives. ¹⁸ The Philistines also raided the cities of the Judean foothills and the Negev of Judah and captured Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco and its villages, Timnah and its villages, Gimzo and its villages, and they lived there.

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SL#17 **2 Chronicles 28:19-27** ¹⁹ **For the Lord humbled Judah because of King Ahaz of Judah, who threw off restraint in Judah and was unfaithful to the Lord.**

- Who our leaders are matters.

What fed these decisions:

²⁰ Then Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against Ahaz; he oppressed him and did not give him support. ²¹ Although Ahaz plundered the Lord's temple and the palace of the king and of the rulers and gave the plunder to the king of Assyria, it did not help him.

²² At the time of his distress, King Ahaz himself became more unfaithful to the Lord. ²³ He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him; he said, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram are helping them, I will sacrifice to them so that they will help me." But they were the downfall of him and of all Israel. ²⁴ Then Ahaz gathered up the utensils of God's temple, cut them into pieces, shut the doors of the Lord's temple, and made himself altars on every street corner in Jerusalem. ²⁵ He made high places in every city of Judah to offer incense to other gods, and he provoked the Lord, the God of his ancestors.

Ahaz's Death

²⁶ As for the rest of his deeds and all his ways, from beginning to end, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ²⁷ Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried in the city, in Jerusalem, **but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel.** His son Hezekiah became king in his place.

APPLYING ISAIAH TO MY TODAY:

SL#18

ISAIAH:

- What was his biggest concern?
- Was he concerned about Assyria capturing their nation?
- Did Isaiah quit being Jewish due to his rotten King?
- He had other prophets to lean into (Obed) & kids & wife & school of prophets.

SL#19

Summation:

Who leads matters.

Whether I like it or not, God is in control. This is not Heaven.

Little obediences matter as they feed big obediences.

Loong, lifetime obedience matters. [70+ years Isaiah had in.]

Selfishness shows[...how?]

Courage shines. [How?]

Self-centeredness destroys → deconstructs.

Self-centered leadership displays a lack of conviction of the other. Displaying a lack of conviction period. Invitation for shadow systems of leadership. Invitation for revolt.

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SL#20 AHAZ:

- Faced a dilemma.
- Refused Wise Counsel.
- Made ungodly decisions.
- Opened himself and his nation to changes that were never intended.
[He lost their independence, risked their national identity as a whole.]

- He never trusted God.
Even when he had no other choices. Even when he needed rescue. Even when God invited Ahaz to “test” Him, Ahaz chose to not engage.
[What would have happened if Ahaz asked to see Isaiah’s vision? Chpt 6. Ahaz did not want what he could not control. (?)]

- Ahaz distanced himself from any community that could hold him responsible.
Priest. Prophets. Family. Other leaders.
No open honest input. Anywhere.
- He cannot trust the god he knows because “he” is not a god nor God.
What a time to find out your trust is leaning on the wrong god/God.

SL#21 MYSELF:

- When does MY human ambition get in the way?
a.) Hurts others. b.) Benefits only me. c.) Uses resources unwisely. d.) when I must compromise biblical ethics to accomplish it.
- When does human ambition turn evil?
a.) Cost others their life. b.) Compromise biblical principles/truths.
- How would I respond to my way of life being threatened? To my life being threatened?
- Would I trust my nation’s historical God? Would I trust a respected Prophet’s/Leader’s God?
- Calamity can drive us towards God but what if do not know Him. (Know of Him? Is that enough in hard?)

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NOtes:

2 Kings 17:1 HCSB

Israel's King Hoshea

17 In the twelfth year of Judah's King Ahaz, Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel in Samaria and reigned nine years.

2 Chronicles 29:19 HCSB

19 We have set up and consecrated all the utensils that King Ahaz rejected during his reign when he became unfaithful. They are in front of the altar of the Lord."

Isaiah 7 HCSB

The Message to Ahaz

7 This took place during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah king of Judah: Rezin king of Aram, along with Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, waged war against Jerusalem, but he could not succeed. **2** When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

3 Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Fuller's Field. **4** Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering stubs of firebrands, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. **5** For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, **6** 'Let us go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's son as king in it.'"

7 This is what the Lord God says:

It will not happen; it will not occur.

8 The head of Aram is Damascus,
the head of Damascus is Rezin
(within 65 years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),

9 the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

***If you do not stand firm in your faith,
then you will not stand at all.***

The Immanuel Prophecy

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¹⁰ Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ "Ask for a sign from the Lord your God—from the depths of Sheol to the heights of heaven."

¹² But Ahaz replied, "I will not ask. I will not test the Lord."

[Being more spiritual than God]

¹³ Isaiah said, "Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating butter and honey. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. ¹⁷ The Lord will bring on you, your people, and the house of your father, such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah—the king of Assyria is coming."

¹⁸ On that day

the Lord will whistle to the fly
that is at the farthest streams of the Nile
and to the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹ All of them will come and settle
in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,
in all the thornbushes, and in all the water holes.

²⁰ On that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—to shave the head, the hair on the legs, and to remove the beard as well.

²¹ On that day

a man will raise a young cow and two sheep,

²² and from the abundant milk they give
he will eat butter,
for every survivor in the land will eat butter and honey.

²³ And on that day

every place where there were 1,000 vines,
worth 1,000 pieces of silver,
will become thorns and briers.

²⁴ A man will go there with bow and arrows
because the whole land will be thorns and briers.

²⁵ You will not go to all the hills
that were once tilled with a hoe,
for fear of the thorns and briers.

Those hills will be places for oxen to graze
and for sheep to trample.

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SL#24

APPLYING ISAIAH TO MY TODAY:

Have I heard God's voice of HOPE? Have I heard God's voice of WOE?

How marvelous is the world God has created for us. How horrible is the world that man has made.

QUESTIONS:

- Do I see the earth as filled with the glory of God (6:3)?
- My life is filled with (idols 2:8):
- How does haughty and proud look and behave (2:11):
- How do we bow down to the "work of our hands" (2:8): (my accomplishments)
Do my accomplishments cause me to rely more on what I can do than on what God says should be done?
Do my accomplishments cause me to question God's abilities?
- Do I know WHO I AM ? [Are we as simple with insight with which even an animal is endowed – knowing whose he is] (1:3). IS IT BASED ON WHOSE I AM?
OR WHAT I DO? WHAT I OWN? HOW I LOOK?

- Would I define corrupt as:
Taking a bribe. Stealing from innocent.

Would I define corrupt as:

Ignoring what is right by not saying anything as I hate conflict.

Letting someone be a bit of bully to others instead of calling them out on it.

How easy is it to be corrupt, acquitting the guilty[BULLY] for a bribe[NO CONFLICT ENGAGEMENT] and depriving the innocent of their rights (5:23).

- Do we defend the fatherless? Stand up for the widow(1:23)?
Am I involved with loving children whose parents are not able to?
Do I have true invested friendships with single adults?
- How do I use the wealth the LORD has blessed me with?
Do I make excuses for what I have? Do I have enough? Do I see His wealth?
The people are being crushed by the elders and princes, while the mansions of the wealthy contain the spoils of the poor (3:14).

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Concept from: "The Prophets" by Abraham Joshua Heschel; Hendrickson Publishers, LLC. 6th Edition, 2021

2Kings 15:38 Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of his ancestor David. His son **Ahaz** became king in his place.

2 Kings 16:1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, **Ahaz** son of Jotham became king of Judah.

2 Kings 16:2 Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God like his ancestor David

2 Kings 16:5 Then Aram's King Rezin and Israel's King Pekah son of Remaliah came to wage war against Jerusalem. They besieged **Ahaz** but were not able to conquer him.

2 Kings 16:7 So **Ahaz** sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. March up and save me from the power of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me."

2 Kings 16:8 Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the Lord's temple and in the treasuries of the king's palace and sent them to the king of Assyria as a gift.

Ahaz's Idolatry

2 Kings 16:10 King **Ahaz** went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria. When he saw the altar that was in Damascus, King **Ahaz** sent a model of the altar and complete plans for its construction to Uriah the priest.

2 Kings 16:11 Uriah built the altar according to all the instructions King **Ahaz** sent from Damascus. Therefore, by the time King **Ahaz** came back from Damascus, Uriah the priest had completed it.

2 Kings 16:15 Then King **Ahaz** commanded Uriah the priest, "Offer on the great altar the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, and the king's burnt offering and his

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grain offering. Also offer the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of sacrifice. The bronze altar will be for me to seek guidance.”

2 Kings 16:16 Uriah the priest did everything King **Ahaz** commanded.

2 Kings 16:17 Then King **Ahaz** cut off the frames of the water carts and removed the bronze basin from each of them. He took the reservoir from the bronze oxen that were under it and put it on a stone pavement.

Ahaz's Death

2 Kings 16:19 The rest of the events of **Ahaz's** reign, along with his accomplishments, are written in the Historical Record of Judah's Kings.

2 Kings 16:20 Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Hezekiah became king in his place.

2 Kings 17:1

Israel's King Hoshea

In the twelfth year of Judah's King **Ahaz**, Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel in Samaria and reigned nine years.

2 Kings 18:1 Judah's King Hezekiah

In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of **Ahaz** became king of Judah.

2 Kings 20:11 So Isaiah the prophet called out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow back the 10 steps it had descended on **Ahaz's** stairway.

2 Kings 23:12 The king tore down the altars that were on the roof—**Ahaz's** upper chamber that the kings of Judah had made—and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courtyards of the Lord's temple. Then he smashed them there and threw their dust into the Kidron Valley.

1 Chronicles 3:13 his son **Ahaz**, his son Hezekiah, his son Manasseh,

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(1 Chron 8:35 Micah's sons: Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and **Ahaz**.)

2 Chronicles 27:9 Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. His son **Ahaz** became king in his place.

2 Chronicles 28:1 Judah's King **Ahaz**

Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the Lord's sight like his ancestor David,

2 Chronicles 28:5 So the Lord his God handed **Ahaz** over to the king of Aram. He attacked him and took many captives to Damascus. **Ahaz** was also handed over to the

2 Chronicles 28:16 At that time King **Ahaz** asked the king of Assyria for help.

2 Chronicles 28:19 For the Lord humbled Judah because of King **Ahaz** of Judah, who threw off restraint in Judah and was unfaithful to the Lord.

2 Chronicles 28:20-22 Then Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against **Ahaz**; he oppressed him and did not give him support. Although **Ahaz** plundered the Lord's temple and the palace of the king and of the rulers and gave the plunder to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. At the time of his distress, King **Ahaz** himself became more unfaithful to the Lord.

2 Chronicles 28:24 Then **Ahaz** gathered up the utensils of God's temple, cut them into pieces, shut the doors of the Lord's temple, and made himself altars on every street corner in Jerusalem.

Ahaz's Death

2 Chronicles 28:26-27 As for the rest of his deeds and all his ways, from beginning to end, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. **Ahaz** rested with his fathers and was buried in the city, in Jerusalem, but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. His son Hezekiah became king in his place.

2 Chronicles 29:19 We have set up and consecrated all the utensils that King **Ahaz** rejected during his reign when he became unfaithful. They are in front of the altar of the Lord."

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Isaiah 1:1 The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, **Ahaz**, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Isaiah 7

The Message to Ahaz

7 This took place during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah king of Judah: Rezin king of Aram, along with Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, waged war against Jerusalem, but he could not succeed. **2** When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz[Ⓜ] and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

3 Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Fuller's Field. **4** Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering stubs of firebrands, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. **5** For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, **6** 'Let us go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's son as king in it.'"

7 This is what the Lord God says:

It will not happen; it will not occur.

8 The[Ⓜ] head of Aram is Damascus,
the head of Damascus is Rezin
(within 65 years
Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),
9 the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you do not stand firm in your faith,
then you will not stand at all.

The Immanuel Prophecy

10 Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz: **11** "Ask for a sign from the Lord your God—from the depths of Sheol to the heights of heaven."

12 But Ahaz replied, "I will not ask. I will not test the Lord."

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¹³ Isaiah said, "Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you^u a sign: The virgin will conceive,^u have a son, and name him Immanuel.^u ¹⁵ By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating butter^u and honey. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. ¹⁷ The Lord will bring on you, your people, and the house of your father, such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah—the king of Assyria is coming."

¹⁸ On that day
the Lord will whistle to the fly
that is at the farthest streams of the Nile
and to the bee that is in the land of Assyria.
¹⁹ All of them will come and settle
in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,
in all the thornbushes, and in all the water holes.

²⁰ On that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—to shave the head, the hair on the legs, and to remove the beard as well.

²¹ On that day
a man will raise a young cow and two sheep,
²² and from the abundant milk they give
he will eat butter,
for every survivor in the land will eat butter and honey.

²³ And on that day
every place where there were 1,000 vines,
worth 1,000 pieces of silver,
will become thorns and briers.

²⁴ A man will go there with bow and arrows
because the whole land will be thorns and briers.

²⁵ You will not go to all the hills
that were once tilled with a hoe,
for fear of the thorns and briers.
Those hills will be places for oxen to graze
and for sheep to trample.

Isaiah 14:28 An Oracle against Philistia

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In the year that King **Ahaz** died, this oracle came:

Isaiah 38:8 I am going to make the sun's shadow that goes down on **Ahaz's** stairway go back by 10 steps." So the sun's shadow went back the 10 steps it had descended.

Hosea The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, **Ahaz**, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and of Jeroboam son of Jehoash, king of Israel.

Micah 1:1 The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Moreshite—what he saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem in the days of Jotham, **Ahaz**, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Mt 1:9 Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered **Ahaz**, **Ahaz** fathered Hezekiah,

AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH (אַחָז, 'chz; shortened form of יְהוֹאחָז, yhw'chz, meaning "he [Yahweh] has held, grasped"). The 12th king of Judah. Placed his trust in Assyria when faced with military threat. His actions led to divine judgment upon Judah.

Date: Chronology of Reign

According to 2 Kgs 16:1, Ahaz came to the throne at age 20 and ruled Judah for 16 years. He was probably co-regent with his father, Jotham, for four years before his solo reign began. Ahaz shared the throne with his son, Hezekiah, from 728/7–715 BC (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 353). The dates of his reign are circa 735–715 BC (House, *1–2 Kings*, 39–44).

The correlation of Assyrian and Mesopotamian records fixes the date Ahaz paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III as 733/32 BC (see Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*). The prophetic ministries of Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah took place partly during his rule.

Biblical References

The historical books and Isaiah portray Ahaz as an evil, wicked, idolatrous ruler. His sins and failure to heed God's warnings led to divine judgment upon Judah in the form of invasion by a Syro-Israelite coalition and subjugation to Assyria.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

When Ahaz ascended the throne, the nation of Judah was threatened by various military-political powers. These threats came from the resurgence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (745–612 BC) in Mesopotamia and the diplomatic-military posturing of the countries surrounding Ahaz's kingdom. After a lull in aggressive military expansion, Assyria, under Tiglath-Pileser III (named

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Pul in 2 Kgs 15:19), focused on asserting control over the lucrative trade routes that ran past Syria.

Tiglath-Pileser III had received tribute from king Rezin of Syria and king Menahem of Israel in 738–37 BC (*ANET*, 283; *COS*, 2:117A, 285). Rezin and Pekah—the new king of Israel—formed a coalition of nations in the area with the goal to challenge Assyrian hegemony. As punishment for Jotham’s refusal to join their anti-Assyrian coalition, Rezin and Pekah planned military incursions into Judah (2 Kgs 15:37).

While Ahaz was co-regent, Rezin and Pekah pressured him to join their coalition with the threat of military occupation. Isaiah notes that the coalition planned to replace Ahaz with an unknown ruler called the “son of Tabeel” who was loyal to the anti-Assyrian coalition (Isa 7:6b). This Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and Ahaz’s response became the defining event of his reign.

The crisis escalated into a war (735–734 BC) and the Syro-Israelite coalition devastated the nation of Judah. The coalition inflicted heavy losses, and Israel took many Judaeans captives. The Philistines to the West and the Edomites to the South also took advantage of their weakened Judaeans neighbor (2 Chr 28:5–8). In the midst of this catastrophic invasion, the chronicler records the gracious intervention of God through the prophet Oded. Oded persuaded Israel to release their Judaeans captives by reminding them of their kinship with Judah. He also warned them of God’s wrath if they failed to do so (2 Chr 28:9–15).

Earlier, Isaiah had advised Ahaz to trust in the Lord’s promise to deliver Judah (Isa 7:1–12) rather than joining the coalition or becoming an Assyrian vassal state. Ahaz did not realize that Assyria would have to deal with these nations on its own, and relief could come without the immediate necessity of a tribute payment (Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 380). Isaiah offered Ahaz the choice of any sign he desired to verify the divine promise, but Ahaz refused and appealed to Assyria for help.

Tiglath-Pileser III marched swiftly to quell the Syro-Israelite coalition. He invaded Syria, captured Damascus, and executed King Rezin (732 BC; 2 Kgs 16:9). In order to pay tribute to Assyria, Ahaz plundered the temple, his palace, and his nobles’ treasures. It still was not enough (2 Kgs 16:8; 2 Chr 28:21).

In spite of divine intervention through Oded and the guidance offered by Isaiah, Ahaz turned to the Syrian gods for deliverance. He may have reasoned that the Syrian deities had shown their superiority in their victory over Israel (2 Chr 28:23). After traveling to Damascus to affirm his loyalty to Tiglath-Pileser III, Ahaz replaced Solomon’s bronze altar in Jerusalem with a replica of the Damascene one. The people were to use this altar, while he reserved the bronze altar for his own private use. Ahaz then began to practice “extispicy,” the reading of animal entrails (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 175–76). Ahaz may have been forced to adopt the Damascene altar to show loyalty (see Heger, *Three Biblical Altar Laws*, 260). Ahaz shut down the worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple entirely and created altars to pagan gods throughout Jerusalem and Judah, “provoking the God of his ancestors” (2 Chr 28:26). Second Chronicles notes that Ahaz was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the tombs of the kings (2 Chr 28:27). His son, Hezekiah, attempted to reverse Ahaz’s political and religious policies.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

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The book of Isaiah contrasts the evil reign of Ahaz and the righteous rule of Hezekiah. Isaiah's condemnation of Judah's sins reflects the moral state of Judah's leaders and people during Ahaz's reign. Isaiah equates the rulers of Jerusalem to "rulers of Sodom" (Isa 1:10). The leaders neglect the defense of the widows and orphans, lead the people astray, worship idols, and depend on alliances and military might instead of God (Isa 1:23; 2:6–8; 3:12).

Isaiah 7 describes the prophet's attempt to persuade Ahaz to trust in the Lord during the Syro-Ephraimite War. When Ahaz refused Isaiah's offer to bring about any sign to assure him of God's protection, God offered His own sign instead. Isaiah reminded the king of God's covenant (2 Sam 7:12–16) with David, which ensured that He would protect and defend the reigns of David's faithful royal descendants (Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, 73). He stated that the king would see a child called Immanuel, meaning "God with us," born to a young "virgin" who would not reach the age of knowing right from wrong before this dangerous coalition would cease to be a threat (Isa 7:16). God also informed Ahaz that the Assyrians would become Judah's greatest menace (Isa 7:17–25).

Micah indirectly references Ahaz's wickedness several times in his prophecy. In his lament over the coming fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in Mic 1:9, he notes that Samaria's idolatry has infected the leadership of "my people in Jerusalem." In his lawsuit against Judah, Micah accuses the people and leadership of implementing the regulations of Omri and the wicked practices of Ahab. The prophet said this would lead to the judgment of Judah (Mic 6:16; Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 250; Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 21–25, 54–56, 119–20; Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, 52–53). Ahab's practices included child sacrifice (1 Kgs 16:34) and widespread Baalism (1 Kgs 18). Since Micah prophesies during the reigns of Jotham and Hezekiah and Samaria's judgment has not yet come, he is likely condemning Ahaz.

Other biblical references to Ahaz describe how the effects of his rule were reversed during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. God's healing of Hezekiah took place on Ahaz's stairs, where the shadow retreated 10 steps (2 Kgs 20:11). Hezekiah restored the temple worship his father had forbidden and purified the temple instruments Ahaz had removed (2 Chr 29:19).

In 2 Kings 23:10–12, Josiah destroyed the place of child sacrifice—Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom—where Ahaz and Manasseh had passed their sons through the fire. Josiah also eliminated the pagan altars constructed on the roof of Ahaz's upper room.

New Testament

Ahaz is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matt 1:9 as the son of Jotham and father of Hezekiah.

Extrabiblical Inscriptions

The first seal impression of a Hebrew king ever discovered reads "belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yotam, king of Judah." The king's name occurred on a clay "bullae," which was used to seal and validate documents on papyri (Torrey, "Hebrew Seal," 27; also Avigad below). Ahaz is also noted on a building inscription detailing Tiglath-Pileser III's actions during military campaigns in Syria and Palestine. He is listed among a group who paid tribute to the Assyrian king, and is called by his longer name (*la-u-ha-zi*) or Jehoahaz (ANET, 282–84).

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Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Kings and Chronicles evaluated the kings of Judah by two standards:

1. Their keeping of the covenant with Yahweh and encouragement of the people to foster the covenant established in the law of Moses (1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 17:15–16).
2. Their keeping of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7 (1 Kgs 2:4; 2 Kgs 16:2; 2 Chr 34:2).

Since Ahaz had led Judah into idolatry, failed to uphold social justice, and entered into godless political alliances, he failed according to these standards.

Ahaz's reign is set within the portion of 2 Kings that ends with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17). Ahaz is the first of Judah's kings to rule over the sole remaining kingdom occupied by the Davidic descendants. However, Ahaz committed the same sins which caused the exile of the northern kingdom. Just as Israel had, Ahaz drove God out from before his people (2 Kgs 16:3b; 17:8) and sacrificed on the high places (2 Kgs 16:4; 17:9b, 10)—Ahaz even sacrificed his own son. This was a condemned practice (Lev 18:21; Deut 18:10).

The narrator predicts that the future rulers of Judah will not fare any better than Ahaz (2 Kgs 17:19). The warning of coming judgment, however, is tempered by the reign of Hezekiah, whose faithfulness to Yahweh and the Davidic covenant results in God's protection and deliverance from the continuing Assyrian threat (2 Kgs 18–20).

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SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WAR (also “Syro-Ephraimite Crisis”). A conflict in the late eighth century BC between Judah and a coalition of Damascus (Aram, later called Syria) and Israel (Ephraim). The likely purpose of the conflict was to remove Ahaz as king of Judah and to pressure Judah into joining Damascus and Israel in opposing Tiglath-pileser III as he expanded the Assyrian Empire.

Biblical Sources

Overview

The conflict is directly described in several biblical texts: 2 Kgs 15:37, 16:5–9; Isa 7:1–9; 2 Chr 28:1–27. In addition, other passages provide a view of the political and international situation at the time (Amos 1:1–2:16; 3:9; 5:26–27; 6:1–7, 13; Hos 5:8–9; 7:3–6, 11; 8:3; 9:7–10; Isa 8:3; 9:7–10). A number of Neo-Assyrian inscriptions also provide information on Tiglath-Pileser (see below: “Neo-Assyrian Sources”).

A general picture emerges from the biblical narratives: As early as Jotham’s reign in Judah, a Syrian-Israelite coalition, led by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel, had begun to put pressure on Judah. After Ahaz succeeded Jotham, the coalition again applied pressure. This involved a military campaign into Judah, resulting in the sacking of several towns by the Arameans (Damascus) and an attempted march against Jerusalem to replace Ahaz.

Either the siege was stopped before it started, or it was ultimately unsuccessful. Regardless, Rezin and Pekah failed to convince Ahaz to join their cause. At some point, Ahaz reached out to Tiglath-pileser for help and paid him tribute (either as a bribe prior to the Assyrian campaign or as tribute afterward). It also appears that the Philistines and Edomites took advantage of the situation and invaded various cities and villages in Judah and the Negev. Ahaz ultimately became an Assyrian vassal, Damascus was destroyed, and Israel submitted to Assyria after Hoshea assassinated Pekah and claimed the throne (2 Kgs 15:30).

2 Kings

According to Second Kings 15:37, Rezin (king of Damascus) and Pekah (king of Israel) demanded that Judah join their coalition during Jotham’s reign (759–744 BC). The Syrian-Israelite coalition apparently was unsuccessful; thus, after Jotham died and his son Ahaz assumed the throne, Rezin and Pekah tried again to influence the Judaeian king through military force. Second Kings 16:5–9 reports that, at some point in Ahaz’s reign, Rezin and Pekah marched to besiege Jerusalem and fight Ahaz, but “they were unable to fight” (וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִלָּחֵם), *welo' yokhlu lehillachem*). During this invasion, Rezin recaptured territory that had formerly belonged to Aram. Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, requesting rescue from Rezin and Pekah. In an effort to persuade Tiglath-pileser to respond, Ahaz took silver and gold from the temple, as well as valuables from the king’s palace, and sent them to the Assyrian king as a bribe. According to the text, Tiglath-pileser “listened” to Ahaz and marched out against Damascus, captured it, carried its people away in exile, and executed Rezin.

There is some disagreement regarding the meaning of the verb לְהִלָּחֵם (*lehillachem*) at the end of 2 Kgs 16:5. The verb has been translated as “to overcome” (NASB), “to conquer” (NRSV),

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or “to overpower” (NIV). Although the verb simply means “to fight,” it appears to mean “to overcome” in Zech 10:5. It is often translated this way in Isa 7:1; however, the passage in Isaiah depends on 2 Kgs 16:5. The understanding of this phrase is important because it affects the overall interpretation of the actions of Pekah and Rezin in relation to the Assyrian invasion. If the phrase in 16:5 means that Pekah and Rezin were unable “to fight,” then the passage might suggest that the two kings never attacked Ahaz at Jerusalem, likely because they were inhibited by the Assyrian army. This would mean, then, that the Assyrians were already campaigning in Syria-Palestine by the time Ahaz reached out to Tiglath-pileser. If the verb means “to overcome,” then it is possible that Rezin and Pekah attempted to besiege Jerusalem but were unsuccessful. The conflict, then, could be situated before Tiglath-pileser’s campaign of 734 BC and may support the chronology given in 2 Kgs 16.

Isaiah

Isaiah 7:1–7 provides only a little more information regarding the conflict than 2 Kings. Isaiah 7:1 is apparently dependent on 2 Kgs 16:5 and repeats that during the reign of Ahaz, Rezin and Pekah marched against Jerusalem but were “unable to fight/overcome it” (וְלֹא יָכֹל לְהִלָּחֵם) (וְלֹא יָכֹל לְהִלָּחֵם, *welo' yakhol lehillachem aleiha*). According to Isa 7:6, Rezin and Pekah sought to replace Ahaz with a “son of Tabeel.”

2 Chronicles

According to 2 Chronicles 28, because of Ahaz’s sins, Yahweh delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram, who defeated him and carried away a number of captives to Damascus. In addition, Ahaz was delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who inflicted numerous casualties. Pekah slew 120,000 “valiant men” in one day, including Maaseiah, Ahaz’s son; Azrikam, the “ruler of the house”; and Elkanah, “second to the king” (2 Chr 28:6–7). Israelite forces carried away 200,000 women and children, took a large amount of plunder, and brought it all to Samaria. However, in response to a challenge issued by the prophet Oded, they fed, clothed, and led the captives back to Jericho, apparently releasing them. During the Aramean and Israelite military actions in Judah, Ahaz sent to the “king of Assyria” for assistance (2 Chr 28:16). The Edomites had already attacked Judah, as had the Philistines. Tiglath-pileser “came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him” (2 Chr 28:20 ESV). Apparently, Ahaz’s bribe did not help.

Neo-Assyrian Sources

Several Neo-Assyrian inscriptions also shed light on the larger context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. These annals and summary texts describe the military activities of Tiglath-pileser III in Syria-Palestine and other locations. Most of them are fragmentary and do not provide much amplifying information. Based on these texts, we can make the following conclusions:

- Several Syro-Palestinian states and peoples rebelled against Assyria, and Assyria attempted to suppress this rebellion between 734–731 BC. These participants include Rezin of Aram/Damascus, Hiram of Tyre, Pekah of Israel, Mitinti of Ashkelon, Samsi queen of the Arabs, and possibly Hanno of Gaza. Other biblical figures are also mentioned in these texts,

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including Jehoahaz of Judah and possibly Hoshea of Israel. Several texts also mention Beth-Omri (“House of Omri”).

- Rezin of Damascus apparently was a key leader of the rebellion.
- The Egyptian and Ethiopian kingdoms may have actively supported the rebellion. They would have had economic reasons to do so, since Assyrian control of Syria-Palestine would have negatively affected Egyptian and Ethiopian trade interests.
- In 734/3, the Assyrians responded to the revolt in Syria-Palestine and campaigned southward along the eastern Mediterranean coast. Ahaz submitted peacefully to Tiglath-pileser, along with several other rulers.
- Assyria campaigned in 733/2 and 732/1 in an effort to defeat or force the submission of Rezin, Hiram, and Pekah, who continued to resist for two years after the 734/3 campaign. Ultimately, Damascus was defeated and the rebellion was put to an end.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Stuart Irvine identifies the major critical questions surrounding this conflict as follows (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 101):

- What was the cause and purpose of the Syro-Ephraimite War?
- Did the Syro-Ephraimite campaign against Judah precede or follow the 734/3 Assyrian campaign into Palestine?
- Was Ahaz’s payment a bribe for help (as 2 Kgs 16:7–8 claims) or routine tribute paid to Tiglath-pileser after the Assyrians invaded and put down the revolt?

Among the conflicting interpretations are three major proposals (those of Joachim Begrich, Herbert Donner, and Bustanay Oded). Irvine summarizes these proposals, provides critique, and offers his own reconstruction (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 96–101):

Begrich argues that the conflict occurred before the Assyrian campaign in 734, as an effort to convince Ahaz and Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition. Ahaz refused to join the coalition, believing it had little chance of success. In 734, he appealed for help from Tiglath-pileser III, who subsequently invaded Palestine to put down the anti-Assyrian coalition. Later, in 733–732, Tiglath-pileser campaigned again in the west and defeated Damascus.

Donner claims that the Assyrians marched against Gaza in April/May 734. Rezin, Pekah, and Ahaz began negotiating after the Assyrians attacked Gaza. Ahaz refused to join the coalition, and the Aramean and Israelite leaders decided to invade Judah. As soon as the Assyrian army left in 734, Aram and Israel joined forces but delayed attacking Jerusalem for several months. In the spring of 733, Rezin and Pekah acted. However, before their armies reached Jerusalem, Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser to request help. The Assyrian king responded and moved against Aram and Israel, forcing the coalition to abandon the siege of Jerusalem. Between 733–732, Tiglath-pileser defeated Damascus, while Hoshea assassinated Pekah and submitted to Assyria.

Oded sees the Syro-Ephraimite crisis as an intra-Palestinian conflict. According to 2 Kgs 15:37, Rezin and Pekah began pressuring for Judah’s allegiance as early as the reign of Jotham. Thus, the Syro-Ephraimite War extended over several years and only climaxed in the siege of

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Jerusalem. The cause of the conflict was not an attempt to influence Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition. Rather, it was essentially a struggle between Aram, Israel, and Judah for control of the Transjordan. As part of Aramean territorial expansion, Aram and Israel attacked Jerusalem in 733. The purpose was to replace Ahaz with Rezin's own puppet, Ben Tabeel (Isa 7:6). The plan was aborted because of Tiglath-pileser's invasion. Although Ahaz appealed for help and sent a bribe, Tiglath-pileser was acting to fulfill his own objectives. Thus the Syro-Ephraimite War was unconnected to Assyrian expansion, and the Assyrian campaign of 733–732 had no direct connection to the Syro-Ephraimite War (see Oded, "Historical Background," 164–65).

According to Irvine's reconstruction, the Syro-Ephraimite War was the culmination of a long effort by Rezin to create a coalition of states to resist Assyria. Rezin applied pressure against Jotham and later Ahaz, but the Judaeans refused to cooperate, instead following the Israelite kings Menahem and Pekahiah. Once Pekah came to power, Israel joined the Aramean cause. The Aramean-Israelite attack against Ahaz was intended to enlist Judaeans support for the coalition. Rezin and Pekah besieged Jerusalem late in 734 or early 733, but the siege was aborted when Tiglath-pileser marched against the coalition. Ahaz submitted voluntarily to Assyria and paid tribute after the Assyrians arrived (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*, 101–9).

The Issue of Tribute

Ahaz's payment to Tiglath-pileser, mentioned in 2 Kgs 16:7–9 and 2 Chr 28:21, deserves further discussion. According to 2 Kings 16:7–9, Ahaz bribed Tiglath-pileser to influence him to rescue Ahaz from Rezin and Pekah. Second Chronicles 28 is not clear regarding the chronological relationship between the payment and Assyria's military action. However, Assyrian inscriptions mention Ahaz's payment as a routine tribute rather than a bribe. There are several reasons to doubt that Ahaz sent a bribe and that Tiglath-pileser took on such a campaign because of Ahaz's appeal and payment:

- Ahaz had not previously submitted to Tiglath-pileser and, at the time, was not a subject of Assyria who could appeal for help.
- Tiglath-pileser would not act as a mercenary and mobilize his forces simply because of a request for help and small payment.
- The much larger situation of rebellion was more than enough reason for Tiglath-pileser to campaign, and the military actions described in 2 Kgs 16 and 2 Chr 21 appear to describe one of the several Assyrian campaigns in the 730s.
- The order of events described in 2 Kgs 16 does not parallel the events reconstructed from the Assyrian sources. Thus, it is more likely that Ahaz's payment was tribute paid to Tiglath-pileser *after* the Assyrians campaigned in Palestine and defeated the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The statement in 2 Kgs 16:7–9 that Ahaz sent a bribe and a request for help to Tiglath-pileser may be a part of the later Deuteronomistic attempt to paint Ahaz in a bad light for bringing Assyrian subjection upon himself and Judah (Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 398).

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Selected Resources for Further Study

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JASON A. RILEY²

II. THE HOLY ONE EXALTED 6:1–12:6

A. Isaiah Called To A Difficult Ministry 6:1–13

After giving such a warning, Isaiah goes back to his inaugural vision and call to give his authority for declaring such a dark destiny. First he gives the time and place of the vision and its effect on him, then his commission, and finally the future results of his prophecy.

1. ISAIAH'S VISION OF GOD 6:1–4

⁴In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Some have suggested that Isaiah prophesied before this vision and that it was a confirmation of the call he had previously received. However, the Book of Isaiah is not strictly chronological, and there is no evidence that he prophesied before this time. McKenna suggests that "he summarized his prophecies and stated his themes in the first five chapters to *show the priority of the message over the messenger*.... Isaiah is not a prophet on an ego trip. He mentions his name only when it is relevant to a historical happening."

The vision probably came before King Uzziah died in 739 B.C. It was a critical time for both Israel and Judah. Tiglath-Pileser III had established the Neo-Assyrian Empire and was already focusing attention on the West. He would soon conquer northern Syria and make Israel submit. Uzziah, because of his presumption in going into the Holy Place of the temple, became a leper and his office was turned over to his son Jotham.

Isaiah was outside the temple, probably in its courts, when he suddenly saw beyond it. In a vision of the heavenly temple, he saw no curtain, or veil, that would cut off his view of the heavenly throne. The sight of the Lord (Heb. *'adonai*) "high and exalted" on His throne illustrated His sovereignty over all the kings, authorities, and powers in the universe. No one has seen God in His totality, for He is an infinite Spirit (John 1:18; 4:24). But God revealed himself here, possibly through the one Mediator between God and humankind—our Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah does not describe the form on the throne because it probably defied description. The glory of the Lord being so powerful and awesome, the only thing Isaiah could and did describe were the folds of the great flowing robe covering the floor of the temple.

² Riley, J. A. (2016). [Syro-Ephraimite War](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

Above the Lord, seraphs were flying. The name *seraph*, meaning “burning one,” may indicate the purity of such a being. They reflected the dazzling brilliance of the glory of God to such a high degree that they seemed to be on fire. They are not called angels, and Isaiah saw their faces, hands, and feet. Yet they also had wings: two continually covering the face to indicate their unworthiness to look on God or pry into His divine secrets, two covering the feet and lower part of the body to indicate humility and reverence, and two ready for instant and continual flight to do the will of the Lord.

³And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

We are not told how many seraphs there were, but there must have been several. They kept calling back and forth to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty [of hosts, or armies].” The threefold repetition of “holy” gives supreme emphasis to holiness as the central and most essential characteristic of the LORD. “Holy” has the basic meaning of being separated. He is separated from sin and evil. He is transcendent over His universe and separate from it. (This leaves no room for the concept of pantheism.) But He has also separated himself in a positive way—to carry out His divine plan and purpose of redeeming and restoring that will ultimately lead to a new heaven and a new earth. The seraphs proclaim that now His glory, including the manifestation of His power and His holy nature, fills the whole earth. It is also possible that the threefold “holy” reflects the Trinity. The seraphs surely would have known and understood there is a Trinity. John 12:41 speaks of Isaiah’s seeing the glory of Jesus. Certainly the Trinity was present in Isaiah’s vision, though the concept was never fully revealed in the Old Testament.

⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

As he listened to the seraphs, Isaiah saw the doorposts and thresholds of the temple shake. A fire on the altar began to burn at this point, indicating a sacrifice, and its smoke filled the temple. Smoke may also symbolize the wrath of God kindled against the people Isaiah must prophesy to. In any case, it probably veiled the One on the throne from Isaiah’s sight.

2. ISAIAH’S CONFESSION AND CLEANSING 6:5–7

⁵“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Isaiah was a young aristocrat who, some believe, was probably a little self-righteous, looking down on King Uzziah for his sins. Though unlike the king, yet in God’s holy presence, Isaiah suddenly realized he too was a sinner. His “ ‘unclean lips’ ” attest to an unclean heart and mind and is analogous to having “ ‘unclean hands’ ” (cf. Ps. 24:4). As Jesus said, “ ‘The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man “unclean” ’ ” (Matt. 15:18). His

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unholy lips could not utter a prayer for mercy. He was no different from the people around him, for they were all “people of unclean lips,” all unworthy to come into the presence of the holy LORD, (the true King).

The people thought it was impossible to see God and live, so Isaiah must have been filled with fear. Surely he never forgot this vision of God’s holiness, splendor, and glory. Isaiah’s repetition throughout the book of God’s name as “the Holy One of Israel” indicates he was always conscious of God’s holiness.

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

The live coal taken by a seraph from the altar was indeed hot, for the seraph took it “with tongs.” Yet when it touched Isaiah’s lips at the point of his confessed sin, it did not burn but cleansed, for atonement had been made for his sins—they were taken away along with his guilt. He now stood before the LORD as though he had never sinned. He received the full salvation that only God can give, the salvation that is ours through Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. God could give it to him because Christ was going to die and provide an atonement sufficient for all people of all time. But they must confess their sin and guilt as Isaiah had done (cf. Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:7, 9).

3. ISAIAH COMMISSIONED TO A DIFFICULT MINISTRY 6:8–10

**⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”**

Now that there was nothing between him and his Lord, Isaiah heard the words, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Some take “us” as the plural of majesty. More likely, it is a reflection of the Trinity. With his sins forgiven, a passionate fire took possession of Isaiah’s heart. He replied immediately, offering himself willingly without regard to the nature or difficulty of the mission.

⁹He said, “Go and tell this people: “ ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’

If Isaiah thought he was called to a grand ministry that would immediately move the nation toward God, he was going to be disappointed. “This people” is an expression that usually implies God’s disfavor. His message is a series of imperatives for them to keep hearing but “never understanding,” to keep seeing but “never perceiving.” In other words, Isaiah must boldly and repeatedly tell the people God’s messages of present judgment and future hope. But the people’s spiritual and moral condition will render them unable to obey God’s law, to receive His instruction, or to acknowledge His sovereign power and authority—even though they see His works which demonstrate that He alone is God.

People are still hardened by their sin (Rom. 3:23), and, as Jesus said, “ ‘Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil’ ” (John 3:19).

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Jesus also quoted Isaiah in order to warn His disciples of people's hardhearted resistance to the truth (e.g., Matt. 13:14–15).

¹⁰Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Instead of bringing present restoration, Isaiah's message will only harden the people further in their rebellion and unbelief. Isaiah will "make the heart of this people [Israel] calloused"—even more unwilling to receive God's message, their ears too dull or deaf to hear. He will close (Heb. *hasha'*, "smear over" or "stick shut") their eyes so they cannot see the truth being presented. Instead of making them realize their hardened condition, they will be hardened further. (This does not mean God purposely hardened their hearts. But Isaiah's preaching would cause their hardened hearts to be exposed and would vindicate God's judgment as just.) Repentance could avert the coming ruin, but the people will not repent.

4. LASTING UNTIL ONLY A REMNANT REMAINS 6:11–13

¹¹Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, ¹²until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

Isaiah realized his would be a difficult and unpopular ministry. He cried out in anguish, wanting to know "how long" he would have to endure this hardening of the nation. The Lord's answer pointed to a time when destruction would spread across the land, cities would be destroyed, fields would be left desolate, and people would be taken far away. This was fulfilled when Sennacherib destroyed all the walled cities of Judah (2 Kings 18:13) and, according to his records, took 200,150 people captive.

¹³And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

Sennacherib's destruction would leave a few. But even if only "a tenth" of the people are left, they should expect further destruction—probably meaning the future destruction by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The comparison of "the terebinth and oak" portrays the nation as a forest cut down with only a few stumps left. But an important stump will be left—"the holy seed," the remnant from which the new Zion will come.

Some take "the stump" to be the house of David that the Messiah will come from (cf. Isa. 11:1; 53:2). However, the meaning seems to be that though the judgment on sin and rebellion will be severe, there will be revival. Isaiah does not leave a hopeless picture. Israel was still the inheritance of the Lord and He will preserve it by His grace. A partial fulfillment came when the people of Jerusalem took a stand of faith in response to Isaiah's prophecy, and Sennacherib was kept from destroying Jerusalem. From that point on, Isaiah had a changed audience and he was able to give a new message, which appears in chapters 40 to 66. God had not changed His

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purpose. He would still use His covenant people in His great plan to bless all peoples on earth (see Gen. 12:3).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was Isaiah's response to his vision of God and why did he so respond?
2. How did God remove Isaiah's sin?
3. What would be the results of Isaiah's message?

B. Rebukes And Promises To Judah 7:1–9:7

Isaiah gave these prophecies during a time of political turbulence during the reign of King Ahaz (744–715 B.C.). Nations were rising and falling during this period (see 2 Kings 16:1–20). But God was still in control. Human ambitions could not stand against his power and rule.

1. KING AHAZ CHALLENGED TO TRUST GOD 7:1–16

a. Aram And Ephraim Allied Against Judah 7:1–9

¹When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.

King Ahaz "did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He ... made cast idols for worshiping the Baals. He ... sacrificed his sons in the fire" (2 Chron. 28:1–3; cf. 2 Kings 16:2–4). As a result God used the Arameans (Syrians) to defeat him and take prisoners to Damascus. King Pekah of Israel also killed 120,000 soldiers in Judah and took captives to Samaria (2 Chron. 28:5–8).

Israel and Syria (Aram of Damascus) had been enemies but the threat of Tiglath-Pileser's Neo-Assyrian Empire caused them to join in an alliance against him. Egypt encouraged this alliance because it wanted a buffer state between it and Assyria. Apparently, an attempt was made to get Judah to join the alliance, but Ahaz refused. So Rezin and Pekah marched against Jerusalem intending to force Ahaz to join. This attempt failed (2 Kings 16:5), though Judah suffered considerable losses.

²Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

The armies of Israel, which is called "Ephraim" after its leading tribe, and Aram regrouped and set up a camp in Israel near the border of Judah about three days' march from Jerusalem. When King Ahaz heard this, he and his people were panic-stricken. They had forsaken their trust in God and had been looking only to their own resources.

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The mention of “the house of David” is significant because the purpose of Pekah and Rezin was not only to make Judah join them, but to overthrow the dynasty of David, whom Ahaz was descended from. This would break the covenant God made with David (see 2 Sam. 7:4–17).

³Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field.

God then commanded Isaiah to meet Ahaz where he was looking over Jerusalem’s water supply, making plans for its defense during the siege of Aram and Israel. The presence of Isaiah’s son Shear-Jashub (Heb. *she’ar yashuv*, “a remnant will return”) was actually a keynote to Isaiah’s message, but it was here more of a threat than a promise. Ahaz needed to know that his real danger was not from Samaria or Damascus but from Assyria. Assyria would bring about an exile from which only a remnant, by the grace of God, would return.

⁴Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.

The LORD’s word to Ahaz was first to warn him to “be careful.” Ahaz was thinking of appealing to Tiglath-Pileser III to save the city from Rezin and Pekah, something God did not approve. Ahaz must “keep calm” and stop being afraid. That is, Ahaz should trust God, take no action, and the danger would pass. Even from a purely human standpoint this would have been wise.

Assyria’s goal was Egypt. Tiglath-Pileser III normally would take the main road down the coast, and if Jerusalem kept quiet, it would escape attention. But Ahaz panicked because of enemies swarming near Jerusalem. He could not see anything but the immediate threat from Rezin and Pekah. The fierce anger of those two kings made Ahaz think they were a dangerous fire. But God called them “two smoldering stubs of firewood” that could produce only a little smoke and would soon be extinguished. Indeed, Assyria conquered them soon after this.

⁵Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶“Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” ⁷Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “ ‘It will not take place, it will not happen,

God assured Ahaz that the plan to depose him would fail. These three verses are all one causal sentence. Rezin and Pekah were wrong in assuming they or anyone else could overthrow the Davidic line and put a puppet king in Jerusalem to cause Judah to join them against Assyria. Syria (Aram) and Ephraim (Israel) were working together, though the plan came from Syria. “Tabeel” (“the bad one”) is a Syrian name, so his son may have been a relative of Rezin or of the Tyrian king.

God, however, was in control—not Israel or Damascus. He declared that Rezin and Pekah would not be successful. Ahaz did not need to worry about his throne. But Judah’s only hope was to trust in the LORD.

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⁸for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.

Damascus is the capital of Aram, and its head is “only Rezin.” Rezin will never be the head over Jerusalem because the context reveals that Rezin can never be more than he was: Damascus would soon be destroyed by Assyria. Though Tiglath-Pileser III would not destroy Samaria, within sixty-five years Ephraim (Israel) would no longer be a separate people or nation. Samaria was destroyed in 722 B.C. by Shalmaneser V. And sixty-five years later, King Esarhaddon settled foreign colonists in Israel’s territory (Ezra 4:2).

⁹The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah’s son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.’ ”

The headship of Judah would never belong to Ephraim, or Pekah. Then God, still speaking to Judah, said that if the people of Judah and Jerusalem did not “stand firm in [their] faith” (Heb. *ta’aminu*, “believe, trust, rely on, have faith”) they would not “stand at all” (Heb. *te’amenu*, “have stability, remain, continue”). The Hebrew uses the hiph’il and niph'al form of the verb *’aman* as a wordplay. The NIV brings out the pun well in the English translation. It emphasizes that their only hope of escaping the fate of Aram and Israel is to take a stand of faith in God, relying on Him alone.

b. God Offers And Promises A Sign 7:10–13

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

When Ahaz did not respond, the Lord spoke to him again, possibly soon after the preceding warning. As a last attempt to make Ahaz heed this warning and exercise faith, God told him to “ask the LORD” for a supernatural sign. God was gracious in reminding Ahaz that He was his God. God had not yet abandoned Ahaz, and He put no limits on the nature of the sign. It could be anything, from the depths of Sheol to the height of heaven; that is, anything in all creation. What wonderful love God was showing!

¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

With mock piety Ahaz refused, pretending it would be against the Law, which forbids putting God “to the test”; that is, demanding God show His power without reason (Deut. 6:16). Asking God for a sign was not a test when God himself made the offer. Furthermore, Ahaz was not concerned about the Law, for he had already discontinued its public observance and closed the temple. His real reason for refusing was that he had already rejected the LORD and made up his mind to ask the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser, for help—which he soon did (2 Kings 16:7–9). Thus God was testing Ahaz, but with a desire to keep him from sinning (Exod. 20:20). However, because of his own plans, Ahaz was not ready to subject himself to God’s will.

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¹³Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?”

Inspired by the Lord, Isaiah then spoke to the entire Davidic dynasty, not just to Ahaz. The command here is plural. He returns to the singular in verse 16 because what follows it is again specifically directed to Ahaz. King Ahaz, as the current representative, had tested “the patience of men,” including Isaiah, and the patience of God as well. Note that Isaiah said “my God.” He could not say “your God” because Ahaz had rejected God and His word.

c. The Immanuel Sign 7:14–16

¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Commentators do not agree about the interpretation of this passage, whether it forms a “promise or a warning, or who is meant by the child Immanuel.” John Calvin, Bishop Lowth, and the Baptist John Gill were early writers holding a messianic interpretation. Because of the contemporary threat of Assyria, many commentators limit the fulfillment to the near future. Others propose a dual fulfillment, one contemporary and one referring to the birth of Jesus.³

In spite of Ahaz’s unbelief and his refusal to ask for a sign, the Lord will give a supernatural sign anyhow—but not to Ahaz. The particle “therefore” refers back to verse 13 and indicates God will give a different sort of sign than He offered to Ahaz in verse 10. It “is no longer a matter of invitation but of prediction.”⁶ The plural “you” means it will be a sign for the whole house of David. The sign refers not only to a supernatural birth, but to the conditions surrounding that birth as well.

The meaning of “virgin” (Heb. *’almah*) is disputed. It occurs only eight other times in the Old Testament (Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; 1 Chron. 15:20 [plural]; Pss. 46 [superscription; plural]; 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8). But it is never used of a married woman. For example, in Song of Solomon 6:8, its use is distinct from the Hebrew used for married women (“queens”) and “concubines” and can mean only “virgin.” Another word, *bethulah*, is used of virgins of any age. However, the word used here (*’almah*) seems to be specific to a virgin of marrying age.

The Hebrew particle *hinneh* (“Behold,” KJV) directs attention to the importance of the virgin and her son. She is called “the” virgin, indicating a specific virgin in God’s plan. She will call her son’s name “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us,” or “the with-us God.” Contrary to Jewish tradition no father is mentioned. Yet this omission fits with the fact that the child is virgin-born. Some commentators confine their attention to the immediate context and suppose the child was born to Ahaz or Isaiah. However, Immanuel could not be Hezekiah, for Ahaz appointed him coregent in 728 B.C. and he began his full reign in 715 when he was twenty-five years old, so he would already be alive at this time (732 B.C.). Neither could the virgin be Isaiah’s wife, since his sons are specifically named as his, and this is not said of Immanuel.¹⁴

Then, in 8:8, the land of Judah is identified as Immanuel’s land, which indicates the child Immanuel is the Messiah. In 8:10, Immanuel is the pledge of the survival of Israel. The same virgin-born Son is the wonderful Child in Isaiah 9 and 11. “The Immanuel prophecy comes to a

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greater fulfillment in the birth of the God-man, who is both the Protector Deliverer and the Divine Warrior. Matthew properly applied this prophecy to Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 1:23).” Note also that Matthew ends his book with Jesus saying, “And surely I am *with you* always, to the very end of the age” (28:20). He continues to be Immanuel, “God with us.”

¹⁵He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.

Eating curds (curdled goat’s milk) and wild honey shows that the child will be born into poverty. To Ahaz this should have been a warning that the house of David would be reduced to a lowly state as a consequence of Ahaz’s policies and those of future kings who followed his example. To the Child it meant that by the time He came to an age of accountability, He would be sharing in the reduced situation of His people.

¹⁶But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

The prophecy of the desolation of Damascus and Israel would be carried out as if the Child were born at that time. But the passage is flexible—the Child does not need to be present at the destruction Ahaz will witness. Some understand the passage to mean that Immanuel must actually be present to undergo the results of Ahaz’s refusal from that moment. Others think that the meaning is that Immanuel at maturity will refuse the policy of Ahaz and choose the way of His heavenly Father (as in the temptation of Jesus). Underlying this passage is the contrast between the Messiah and the degenerate condition of the house of David as embodied in Ahaz.

2. GOD WILL USE ASSYRIA TO BRING JUDGMENT 7:17–8:8

a. Assyria As God’s Razor 7:17–25

¹⁷The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”

The secession of the ten tribes was a terrible blow to Judah and the kings of David’s line. Now God is going to bring on an even worse blow. The Assyrians to whom Ahaz looked for help will eventually bring devastation to Judah.

¹⁸In that day the LORD will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria.

“That day” is the day of God’s righteous judgment on Judah. Some see the use of the flies and bees to refer to bee culture in Assyria and to the flies that settled on filth in Egypt. The point, however, is that God is in control of Egypt and Assyria. He only has to “whistle” for the Egyptian armies, which will be as ineffective as “flies.”

By this time (735 B.C.), Assyria was a dominant world power. God will “whistle” for the armies of Assyria to be His agents, and they will be like a swarm of bees settling down and desolating Israel and Judah. Egypt became the bait that lured Assyria, and Egypt proved to be powerless

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against them. In 701 B.C., Assyria defeated Egypt at Eltekeh, about thirty-two miles west-northwest of Jerusalem. Trusting in Egypt was also futile.

¹⁹They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thornbushes and at all the water holes.

Not even the most remote part of the land will be safe from the Assyrians. The rugged valleys and rock clefts, once strongholds for David, will be invaded by enemy forces. The thornbush hedges that protect the vineyards will be taken over, as will the sources of water.

²⁰In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also.

The king of Assyria will be like a barber's razor that will bring God's judgment. The Assyrian king will be "hired" because Assyria was not God's people in the same sense as Israel. "Hired" also indicates God would be using Assyria only temporarily.

The shaving of the head, the legs, and the beard was the greatest humiliation imaginable in those days. It indicates the complete disgrace and depopulation of all classes. While the "shaving" refers metaphorically to God's use of a foreign power to punish His people, it was also a literal humiliation of the men of Judah taken into captivity.

²¹In that day, a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats.

The remnant left will be able to maintain only a few livestock. The great herds will be gone, taken as spoil by the invading Assyrians.

²²And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey.

Isaiah's reference to an "abundance of ... milk" is ironic because it is relative to so few people being left to feed. And because there are so few people, vineyards cannot be maintained; the people will have to live on the more easily produced diet of "curds and honey."

²³In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briers and thorns. ²⁴Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briers and thorns. ²⁵As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briers and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run.

Because there are so few people to work the well-tilled vineyards with their many expensive vines, "briers and thorns" will take over. (Note that Jeremiah paid only seventeen shekels for a whole field, Jer. 32:9.) Wild animals will take over the cultivated areas, so they become a place for hunting.

Hills where grain and other crops were grown will be covered with briers and thorns so thick that people will be afraid to walk through them because of the danger of getting scratched and cut. The hills will not be able to grow anything; only cattle and sheep will be able to go there and find something to eat to keep themselves alive.

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The people of Judah paid a terrible price for the sin of Ahaz. But God was still faithful to the remnant who remained.

b. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz 8:1–4

¹The LORD said to me, “Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. ²And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah as reliable witnesses for me.”

After Ahaz refused to listen, God told Isaiah to take a large scroll (probably leather) and write a message on it with “an ordinary pen” in ordinary neatly-written letters that people could easily read. The words of the message mean “hurry-plunder-hurry-plundering.”²¹ The idea is repeated twice in different Hebrew words for emphasis. It implies that a lightning military campaign will take away the wealth and goods from Damascus and Samaria, though it may imply that Judah would also suffer. Isaiah probably explained this to the two “reliable witnesses,” so that when the prophecy was fulfilled they could confirm that the LORD and Isaiah were right. The first witness, Uriah, is identified by some as the one who made the altar for Ahaz patterned after one at Damascus (2 Kings 16:10–11). The second witness, Zechariah, may have been the father-in-law of Ahaz (2 Chron. 29:1, 13).

³Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, “Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.

Isaiah’s wife was a prophetess. Some suppose she was called this out of politeness due to her prophet husband, but there is no such custom in Hebrew culture. Indeed, there are prophetesses in both the Old and New Testaments (Exod. 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22; cf. Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5). The LORD told Isaiah to give the boy the same cryptic name that Isaiah had written on the scroll, so that his son would be a continuing witness to the truth of the prophecy. The boy is not identified with Immanuel (cf. 7:14). In fact, His fourfold name is in sharp contrast to the fivefold name of the Messiah in the next chapter (9:6).

⁴Before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.”

Now the LORD applies the meaning of the fourfold name. Before the boy could say the simplest words, probably within his first year, Assyria would pillage Damascus and Samaria. This parallels what was said of the virgin-born child and makes Isaiah’s son a sign—though not the supernatural sign that would be given to the whole house of David in the future.

c. Assyria To Come As A Flood 8:5–8

⁵The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶“Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah,

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God is patient and speaks again through Isaiah to the people after they refused to listen to the message of verse 4. The “waters of Shiloah” are probably the water that flows from the Gihon spring. Zadok the priest anointed Solomon there (1 Kings. 1:39). Rejecting the gentle waters of Shiloah probably meant rejecting God’s promises in turbulent times. The people were rejoicing over the deaths of Rezin and Pekah (both died in 732 B.C.) but still not relying on God.

As so often in Isaiah, Pekah is called the son of Remaliah to remind us that Pekah had no right to Israel’s throne. He had gained it by assassinating Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:25).

⁷therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River—the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks ⁸and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!

Judah refused the gently flowing waters of Shiloah. Now, like the mighty Euphrates (“the River”), the king of Assyria’s magnificent army would flood in with grandeur. Like a flood, he would overflow everything, including Judah. His army would reach “up to the neck.” It will not take the head, Jerusalem. Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 B.C. fulfilled this prophecy (see chaps. 36 and 37). Like a large bird of prey sweeping over the land, Assyria would destroy the whole of Judah. Yet the land is still Immanuel’s land. He guarantees that the land will be restored in the future. Some critics change “O Immanuel!” to mean “for God is with us,” but that does not fit the context. Immanuel is the Messiah; therefore, we have a link between 7:14 and chapters 9 and 11.

3. HOW GOD WAS WITH ISRAEL 8:9–18

⁹Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! ¹⁰Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

God will bring judgment on Judah, but that is not all He has planned. When Assyria conquered nations, it often allowed those who were conquered to join its army and recoup some of their own losses at the next place of conquest. Thus, the Assyrian army included troops from many nations. They were all raising the battle cry against Judah. Assyria’s army, however, would eventually “be shattered.” God would overrule their plan, “for God is with us,” which can be translated “on account of Immanuel.” The promise of the future Immanuel is the assurance that Jerusalem would survive and the nations who tried to destroy her would eventually fall.

¹¹The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said:

In the Old Testament, the LORD’s “strong hand” is often parallel to the Holy Spirit’s mighty power. With a mighty anointing upon him, Isaiah was warned “not to follow the way of this people,” that is, in their rebellion, unbelief, and distrust of the LORD. Only human, Isaiah must

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have felt the opposition of unbelievers and cynics. But God anointed and assured him. He must continue to declare the word of the LORD with courage.

¹²“Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. ¹³The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread,

Isaiah’s warning against alliance with Assyria, and his warning to Hezekiah not to break that alliance once made, were both considered treason, or “conspiracy,” by the war party in Judah.

The verbs here are plural and are addressed to Isaiah and those disciples who would listen to him. They are not to fear or dread what the unbelievers fear, which was the conspiracy of Pekah and Rezin. That was not the real danger for Jerusalem. They must regard the LORD as holy, and have the same kind of fear and respect that recognizes His awesome power and that confesses and forsakes sin.

¹⁴and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.

For those who will trust in Him and respect His holiness, God will be a refuge, a holy place set apart. This implies blessings of peace, joy, and fellowship with Him. But to those who refuse to trust Him, He will become a stumbling stone, causing them to fall.

The same defeat by Assyria awaits both Israel and Judah. Samaria fell in 722 B.C. during the fourth year of Hezekiah’s coregency with his father, Ahaz (2 Kings 18:9). Then in 701, the fourteenth year of Hezekiah’s full reign, Sennacherib destroyed all the cities of Judah except Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13). Jerusalem was trapped by the surrounding Assyrian armies until God delivered it.

¹⁵Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.”

“Many of them” probably refers back to both Israel and Judah (v. 14). Undoubtedly, men of Jerusalem were in the army that faced Sennacherib and some of them were killed or captured.

¹⁶Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples.

The “testimony” and the “law,” or instruction, are the written prophecies and teachings God gave Isaiah up to this point. They are to be bound up and sealed to indicate that events have already proved their truth. The binding and sealing would also protect the prophecies from unbelievers who might want to destroy the manuscripts or deny that Isaiah wrote them. Isaiah’s disciples were charged to preserve them.

¹⁷I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him.

Isaiah then declares that he will trust the LORD to carry out His plan. Though the LORD hides His face in displeasure “from the house of Jacob,” that is, from both Israel and Judah, Isaiah will

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look beyond the present circumstances and put his trust in God—thus honoring the promises of deliverance.

¹⁸Here am I, and the children the LORD has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Even though the LORD was displeased with Judah, He did not leave them without a witness: The names of Isaiah and his two sons had symbolic meanings that would continue to remind the people of both the promise of salvation and the warnings of judgments. They were given by the Almighty LORD of hosts (armies) to inform the people that His presence was still manifested in the temple on “Mount Zion.” (“Mount Zion” here means in Jerusalem, not simply on the Ophel hill, the Zion David conquered before the temple was built on the mountain to the north of it.) God was still able to fulfill His promises; He had not left His people. Thus, Hebrews 2:13 quotes from this verse and applies it to Jesus, who brings a greater fulfillment of God’s promises.

4. JUDGMENT ON SPIRITISM 8:19–22

¹⁹When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?

Moses’ law prohibited consulting “mediums and spiritists” (cf. Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:11). Yet, those who were probably pro-Assyrian and thus rejected Isaiah’s prophecies were putting increasing pressure on the people to do just that, instead of consulting God. How foolish to “consult the dead on behalf of the living.”

²⁰To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

“The law” (instruction) and “testimony” again refer to Isaiah’s prophecy and teaching (see 5:24). Only if they heed his words from the Lord will they find real light: The “dawn,” or future blessing, is only for those who accept God’s Word and reject pagan superstition, spiritism, and other idolatrous abominations.

²¹Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. ²²Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

The people who reject Isaiah’s prophecies will wander through the night of God’s judgment. The Assyrian siege will bring hunger. And because they have not trusted God, when the judgment comes, they will not repent. Instead, they will curse their king who has not defended them and their God who has not kept this judgment from them. When they look to the land (the mark of their blessing) and the material elements they have trusted in, they will see only hopeless “distress and darkness.” They will be driven away into the “utter darkness” and gloom of exile. Certainly this would mean an inner darkness as well.

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Sennacherib's records claim 200,150 of the people of Judah were taken away—an incontestable testimony to the certainty of the prophetic word.

5. HOPE FOR GALILEE 9:1–5

¹Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—

In contrast to the darkness mentioned in 8:22, a day will come when the gloom will be lifted from the lives of God's people. The territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, which is located between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea, had suffered greatly from Assyrian invasions from 734 to 732 B.C. (2 Kings 15:29). Tiglath-Pileser III made it an Assyrian province, took inhabitants into exile, and brought people from other nations to settle there. He also took Gilead, across Jordan, and annexed part of the plain of Sharon by the Mediterranean Sea. But Galilee, where God's judgment first humbled His people in Isaiah's day, would be honored in the future. This was fulfilled when Jesus ministered and chose His first disciples in Galilee—which was still despised by the people of Jerusalem.

The "way of the sea" was the highway that came southwest, from Damascus down through Galilee and then to the Mediterranean Sea and down the coast toward Egypt.

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Galilee, the darkest part of the land—whose future looked the darkest when Isaiah gave this prophecy (about 733–732 B.C.)—would see "a great light." There is an obvious connection between this verse and the "child" of verse 6. Jesus would bring the light of salvation to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

In contrast to the small remnant, the nation will be enlarged. Joy, prosperity, victory, and peace will come because the "light has dawned" (v. 2).

⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

The "day of Midian's defeat" refers to Gideon's defeat of the Midianites. God gave Gideon the victory after reducing his army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred (Judg. 7:2–25). Similarly the present deliverance from "their oppressor" will also be performed by the LORD, not by the numbers or ability of the people.

⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

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Uniforms and military equipment which shed blood in war will be cast aside and burned, for the LORD's victory over sin and its strife will be complete. There will be no more desire for war.

6. THE PRINCE OF PEACE 9:6–7

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Messiah will put an end to oppression and injustice. He will come as a child to us. But He will come first of all to the remnant of Israel who passed through darkness and who will be redeemed. "A son" refers back to 7:14, Immanuel, "God with us." Kingship was symbolized by a scepter on the king's shoulder. The government being "on his shoulders" means He will be king.

The names given indicate His essential characteristics. "Wonderful" and "Counselor" are not joined by ancient Hebrew scholars. "Wonderful" is a noun, and means He will be a supernatural wonder (cf. Exod. 15:11; Judg. 13:18). A counselor was a person with God-given wisdom. Jesus implies He is the "Counselor" when He calls the Holy Spirit " 'another' " Counselor (John 14:16).

Some critics wish to interpret "Mighty God" as a "divine" or "godly" hero. However, Isaiah uses the same phrase in 10:21 in a way that can refer only to God. This Son is a divine being.

"Everlasting Father" could be translated "Father [or, "Author"] of Eternity [or, "of the Universe"]." This fits with John 1:3, where the Living Word is the One through whom God made everything that was made (cf. also Heb. 1:2). It also speaks of His faithful, loving care that is everlasting.

He is also the "Prince of Peace," the One bringing true peace—which includes salvation, blessing, wholeness, harmony, and well-being—a peace Jesus gives now (John 14:27), and a peace that will be fully in effect in the Millennium.

⁷Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The kingdom reflects the character of the Son, given in verse 6. Because He is the divine King, "there will be no end" to His government and peace. It is true that Satan will be released for a short time after the Millennium (Rev. 20:7–10), but he will not be able to overthrow the Lord's kingdom—it will continue into the new heavens and the new earth, the New Jerusalem its eternal capital.

The Son's government will be established "on David's throne," fulfilling the covenant giving David's lineage the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–13; cf. Luke 1:32–33). Once the Son comes to reign as the longed-for, legitimate King, He will uphold it forever with divine "justice and righteousness."

The "zeal of the LORD" is the powerful expression of the love and determination that is part of His nature—a determination to fulfill His promises and covenants. Nothing will be able to stop

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Him, for He is the Almighty LORD of hosts with all power and with the armies of heaven at His command.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. For what purpose was Isaiah to take Shear-Jashub with him to meet Ahaz?
2. Why did Ahaz refuse to ask for a sign?
3. On what grounds can we apply the sign of the virgin-born child to Jesus?
4. What would be the result of God's using Assyria to bring judgment?
5. What is the significance of the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz?
6. Why did the people accuse Isaiah of conspiracy and treason?
7. What would keep Isaiah's disciples faithful to the Lord?
8. How is the "For" at the beginning of 9:6 related to the preceding verses?
9. What is the significance of each of the names given to the Son in 9:6 and how are they fulfilled in Jesus?³

ASSYRIAN RULERS

RULER	DATES OF RULE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Ashur-uballit I	1354–1318 B.C.	
Adad-nirari I	1318–1264 B.C.	
Shalmaneser I (Shulman-asharid)	1264–1234 B.C.	
Tukulti-Ninurta I	1234–1197 B.C.	
Ashur-dan I	1179–1133 B.C.	
Tiglath-pileser I (Tukulti-apil-Ešarra)	1115–1076 B.C.	
Ashur-rabi II	1012–972 B.C.	
Ashur-resh-ishi II	972–967 B.C.	
Tiglath-pileser II	967–935 B.C.	

³ Horton, S. M. (2000). [Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary](#) (pp. 89–115). Logion Press.

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Ashur-dan II	935–912 B.C.	
Adad-nirari II	912–889 B.C.	
Tukulti-Ninurta II	889–884 B.C.	
Ashurnasirpal II (Ashurnasir-apli II)	884–858 B.C.	
Shalmaneser III (Shalman-Ashar-id II)	858–824 B.C.	
Shamsi-Adad V	824–810 B.C.	
Adad-nirari III	810–782 B.C.	
Shalmaneser IV	782–773 B.C.	
Ashur-dan III	773–754 B.C.	
Ashur-nirari V	754–745 B.C.	
Tiglath-pileser III (Tukulti-apil-Ešarra III, or Tiglath-pilneser, or Pul(u))	745–727 B.C.	2 Kgs 15:19, 29; 16:7–10
Shalmaneser V (Ululai)	727–722 B.C.	2 Kgs 17:1–6
Sargon II	721–705 B.C.	
Sennacherib (Sin-abho-eriba)	704–681 B.C.	2 Kgs 18–19
Esarhaddon	681–669 B.C.	
Ashurbanipal	669–633 B.C.	
Ashur-etil-ilani	633–622 B.C.	
Sin-shur-ishkun	621–612 B.C.	

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Ashur-uballit

612–608 B.C.

27:1–9 Jotham’s Success and Favor

Jotham (750–732 B.C.) was righteous like his father, but he did not act presumptuously by entering the temple proper in his reign. His conquest of the Ammonites was attributed to the favor God showed toward him (2 Chr 27:1–9; 2 Kgs 15:32–38).

BABYLONIAN RULERS

RULER	DATES OF RULE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Merodach-Baladan II (Marduk-apal-iddin)	721–689 B.C.	2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1
Nabopolassar	625–605 B.C.	
Nebuchadnezzar II (Nebuchadrezzar II)	605–562 B.C.	2 Kgs 24–25; Dan 1–4
Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk)	562–560 B.C.	2 Kgs 25:27–30; Jer 52:31–34
Nergal-Sharezer (Nergal-shar-usur, or Neriglissar)	560–556 B.C.	Jer 39:3, 13
Labashi-Marduk	556 B.C.	
Nabonidus (Nabu-na’id)	556–539 B.C.	
Belshazzar (Bel-shar-usur)	Co-regent with Nabonidus 556–539 B.C.	Dan 5; 7:1

28:1–27 The Wicked Reign of Ahaz

Chronicles, based on the report of 2 Kings 16:1–20, emphasized the wickedness of King Ahaz’s reign (735–715 B.C.). Ahaz was remembered for his practice of human sacrifice and Baal worship (2 Chr 28:1–4). The writer interpreted Judah’s war with Israel and Aram (Syro-Ephraimite war) in 732 B.C. as God’s judgment upon Ahaz (28:5–8; compare Isa 7). The Chronicler commended the victorious Northern Kingdom for obeying the prophet Oded and releasing the captured Judahites (28:5–15).

The LORD punished Judah further by pressuring it with the raiding armies of the mercenary Edomites and Philistines. Ahaz appealed to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.),

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who promptly obliged by marching west, destroying Damascus and conquering Samaria (732 B.C.). Ahaz failed at buying his independence with temple and royal treasuries. He became a vassal of the Assyrian king and bowed to the gods of Assyria. Second Kings 16:10–14 reports that Ahaz reproduced in the Jerusalem temple Tiglath's pagan altar which he had seen at Damascus. Ahaz eventually closed the temple and erected numerous idols in the land. Whereas the Chronicler tried to introduce something positive about each king of Judah, for vicious Ahaz there was nothing good to report.

29:1–36 Hezekiah's Restoration

Hezekiah's reign (715–686 B.C.) is given inordinate attention because of the prominence he gave to temple music and worship. Much of the Chronicler's account (chaps. 29–31) is not paralleled in Kings.

The neglect of the temple under Ahaz (28:24) prompted Hezekiah to order the Levites to consecrate themselves and begin repair of the sanctuary. After sixteen days the Levites completed the task and opened the temple once again (29:1–17). After the Levites had cleansed the articles of worship, the king led the congregation in worship through offerings. The musical guilds functioned again as David had intended and performed the psalms of David and Asaph (29:18–30). After the people had atoned for their sins, they offered burnt and thank offerings so numerous that the Levites were requested to assist the overburdened priests. The sight and sounds of the temple brought great joy to the congregation (29:31–36).⁴

K. Jotham (15:32–38)

15:32–35 The clock turns back to two kings of **Judah** who became king during the reign of **Pekah**. Again, Jotham's length-of-rule formula can be confusing. His **16 years** apparently did not include the 10 years of co-regency with Azariah nor did they include the three-year co-regency with Ahaz. He was a good king, except he did not close down the worship of Yahweh at the illegal shrines on the **high places**. He was the last of the four good kings from Joash to Jotham, and he was the only one who, as far as the Bible reveals, did not finish badly. An addition to the **temple** was his outstanding achievement.

15:36–38 The closing comments about **Jotham's** reign cast a cloud on the future in referring to the beginning of raids against Judah by **Rezin of Aram** and **Pekah** of Israel. Historians take this harassment as trying to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian coalition. By some datings, **Ahaz** may have been ruling as co-regent with Jotham during the invasions of Judah described in the next chapter (16:5–6; cp. Isa 7:3–6).

L. Ahaz (16:1–20)

16:1–2a The opening formula for **Ahaz** of Judah is not remarkable. However, its interpretation offers some challenges. The **seventeenth year of Pekah** (735 B.C.) would have been the beginning

⁴ Dockery, D. S., ed. (1992). [Holman Bible Handbook](#) (pp. 282–283). Holman Bible Publishers.

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of Ahaz's co-regency with Jotham. Ahaz's 16-year official reign began with his sole regency in 731 B.C. with Jotham's death. The data does not indicate the year in which Ahaz was **20 years old**.

16:2b–4 Ahaz was the first bad king of Judah in about 100 years. The phrase **way of the kings of Israel** could refer to paganism in general, particularly the worship of the Baals, since hostility with Israel would have hindered enthusiasm for the golden calves. Making **his son pass through the fire** showed the depths of Ahaz's paganism, but some suggest that this was a different offense than sacrificing the son in Baal's fiery arms. The king's **high places** included those for pagan deities. In pagan cults a **green tree** symbolized a goddess's fertility and sometimes represented the goddess consort of the fertility deity at a high place.

16:5–6 These verses understate the military pressure from Israel and **Aram** during Ahaz's reign. Likely, during the co-regency of Jotham and Ahaz (ca. 735–732 B.C.), both Aram and Israel invaded and devastated Judah in turn (2 Ch 28:5–6) and then put Jerusalem under siege. The goal was to force Ahaz into an anti-Assyrian alliance or to replace him with a king who would oppose Assyria. Although they seized valuable territory, including the port of **Elath**, they could not conquer Ahaz.

16:7–9 Ahaz then voluntarily submitted to **Assyria**, who would rule Judah as a vassal for the next century. The text seems to indicate that the Assyrians intervened only because Judah hired them. However, history shows that Isaiah's prophesied deliverance (Isa 7:7–9) might have come without Ahaz's meddling. Tiglath-pileser III had already planned to reconquer the region. The Assyrians would have been helped if Ahaz had just withheld support from the anti-Assyrian coalition. Shortly after Jerusalem was put under siege, Tiglath-pileser launched campaigns that conquered the Philistine coast, lifted the siege of Jerusalem, destroyed Damascus (732 B.C.), and reduced the size of Israel (15:29).

16:10–11 Ahaz's subjection to **Assyria** renewed the struggle between political prudence and loyalty to Yahweh. Though not always enforced, the general principle was that a vassal accepted the ruler's cultic symbols as signs of obedience to the ruling country and to its god. In this pagan worldview, Yahweh was treated as a local god, who, along with His country, also had submitted to Asshur—the chief Assyrian god—and was privileged to become a part of Asshur's divine council. Yahweh could even give oracles to the Assyrians, particularly when they suited Assyrian purposes (18:25). Unlike Amaziah's voluntary idolatry with the gods of Edom (2 Ch 25:14), Ahaz's idolatry was forced on him by his submission to Assyria. Ahaz's imported **altar** was the cultic symbol of his submission to Assyria's main god. The priest **Uria** represented the complicity of some priests and Levites in this religious corruption.

16:12–13 Ahaz entered into his religious responsibilities to Assyria's chief pagan god with diligence, though he also had time for other pagan deities as well (vv. 3–4). Ahaz, representing the Hebrew people, participated in the religious rituals at Asshur's altar. This contrasted with his failure to represent the people correctly before Yahweh, and it also contrasted with Solomon's early representation of the people (see note at 1 Ki 8:22).

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16:14–15a Perhaps at the suggestion of some visiting Assyrian official (cp. v. 18), Ahaz moved the original **bronze altar** of Yahweh to a less central place in the temple to give prominence to the altar of the Assyrian god.

16:15b–16 Ahaz, however, remained true to Yahweh in one activity. He designated the **bronze altar** of Yahweh as the king's private altar where he would seek guidance, presumably from the Lord. The traditional means of guidance was through the sacred lots, the Urim and Thummim, though some suggest that Ahaz used pagan divinations.

16:17 **Bronze** was a valuable commodity. So, as an accommodating subject, Ahaz stripped bronze off the sacred fittings of the temple and even sent the bronze from the 12 **oxen** of the bronze **reservoir** to Assyria as tribute. However, the valuable metal of Moses' bronze serpent was not sent to Assyria since it was still there years later (18:4).

16:18 The significance of removing the **Sabbath canopy** and closing the special **entrance for the king** is not clear. The only thing certain is that something in them offended the king of Assyria.

16:19–20 Ahaz's record closes with the typical formula statement.

M. Hoshea and God's Indictment Against Israel (17:1–41)⁵

AHAZ—2 KINGS 16; 2 CHRON. 28; ISA. 7:1 THROUGH 8:22; 735–716/15

B.C.

As we have seen, Judah, as well as Israel, experienced a period of prosperity in the mid-eighth century. Two things, however, threatened to alter Judah's future. The first was the revival of Assyrian strength under Tiglath-Pileser III; the second was King Ahaz's accession to the throne. Ahaz's legacy would be to change Judah's status from independence to foreign servitude. He would be known in the biblical account as one of Judah's most wicked rulers. How could he take Judah down this path of Assyrian servitude and leave such a legacy of wickedness? The answer may be found by examining the dilemma he faced, the counsel from Isaiah that he refused, the decisions he made, and the consequences of those decisions.

First, Ahaz faced both a political and a military dilemma in the mid-eighth century. Assyria was expanding westward under the leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III. Assyria wanted to occupy the smaller states of western Asia. It desired to incorporate them into the provincial structure of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria's objective would be accomplished in three stages. First, there would be a demonstration of Assyrian military might. Then there would be an immediate crushing of any

⁵ Bowling, A. C. (2015). [2 Kings](#). In E. R. Clendenen & J. R. Howard (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (pp. 398–399). Broadman & Holman.

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proven anti-Assyrian conspiracy. Finally, any king or state involved in rebellion against Assyria would be made an Assyrian province ruled by a governor. Assyria hoped that these measures would make conquered territories more governable.

During Ahaz's reign, a plot developed among some of the smaller states of western Asia. The key instigators of this plot were Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Damascus. They planned to unite to stop Assyria's advance. They tried to convince Jotham and Ahaz to join this plot. Ahaz refused, however. Pekah and Rezin, unwilling to have a neutral, potentially hostile power to the south, sought to force Ahaz and Judah into line. They invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5; 2 Chron. 28:5–8). This invasion is called the Syro-Ephraimitic War.

Edom had been subject to Judah for most of the eighth century. Now it saw Ahaz's dilemma as an opportunity to revolt and to seize Elath (2 Kings 16:6b; 2 Chron. 28:17). Similarly the Philistines raided and captured towns in the Judean foothills (the Shephelah) and the Negev (2 Chron. 28:18). Ahaz's dilemma intensified; he was invaded from three sides. Ahaz's throne and nation were endangered and helpless.

You would think Ahaz would turn to God and seek his help. Instead, he chose to appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III for aid. He reinforced his appeal with gifts from the temple and the treasuries of the royal palace (2 Kings 16:7–8; 2 Chron. 28:21). He hoped Judah would be spared.

This foreign policy decision was passionately opposed by Isaiah (Isa. 7:1 through 8:18). What did Isaiah say to Ahaz? Isaiah's counsel was to trust God and not to be alarmed (Isa. 7:4, 9). He told Ahaz to forsake any trust in human treaties. Ahaz was to rely solely on God's sovereign will and power. Isaiah's message, although divinely inspired and politically relevant, was too hard for Ahaz.

Unwilling to give up on Ahaz, God sent Isaiah to him with another prophetic word. In the form of a question, the prophet encouraged Ahaz to ask God for a sign (Isa. 7:11); God was willing to go beyond just words to strengthen Ahaz's faith. Pretending a piety he never possessed, Ahaz declined God's invitation (7:12). Isaiah, however, told him God would give him a sign anyway (7:14): A child would be born. He would grow up among the people of Judah in the midst of the Assyrian invasion, God's judgment on both Ahaz and Judah (7:18; 8:10). But in the child's name, "Immanuel" ("God with us"), there would be the constant reminder of God's faithful promise to David. God wouldn't annihilate his people. He would preserve and refine a remnant. Once the Assyrian yoke was removed, the meaning of "Immanuel" would be clearly understood.

Isaiah to Ahaz to Mary

Characteristic of God is his constant presence with us. So, hundreds of years later, another child was born to a virgin girl in Bethlehem. As this child grew, the people sensed in him the presence of God. Matthew, when writing his gospel, believed this promise made by Isaiah to Ahaz was fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He, too, is God with us. And so this prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz passed from the "was-ness" of eighth century fulfillment into the first century "is-ness" of fulfillment. We can be forever grateful it did!

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Ahaz wasn't concerned with God's words and signs, however. Two courses of action were open to Ahaz. One, he could surrender to Damascus and Israel and join their struggle against Assyria. Or two, he could enlist Assyrian aid against the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition. He chose the latter course. Though his actions saved Judah's national life, he paid a great price for them. Judah became a vassal state to Assyria. Excessive taxes drained even the temple of its wealth. The territory lost due to the Syro-Ephraimitic War and the Edomite capture of Elath were not regained. This crippled Judah's economy throughout Ahaz's reign. Further, his reign was characterized by a period of unparalleled idolatry in Judah (2 Kings 16:10–14; 2 Chron. 28:23).

Ahaz is remembered as one of the worst kings Judah ever had. He forsook God and led Judah further into the dark night of Assyrian oppression (Isa. 8:6–8). Ahaz was not buried in the royal tombs (2 Chron. 28:27). This showed Judah's resentment of his reign.

Judah would have continued its slide except for Hezekiah, Ahaz's son. Hezekiah had faith in God and was willing to listen to Isaiah, God's prophet. This moved God to extend the nation's existence for another hundred years.⁶

2 Kings

15:5–7 Perhaps out of deference to Azariah's generally positive character, the writer omitted the reason for Azariah's **skin disease**. Azariah became arrogant and performed a task that only priests were allowed to do (2Ch 26:16–19). The situation was so severe that Azariah finished his life in quarantine, and his son **Jotham**, the successor designate, governed the land in day-to-day matters. These were probably the years of Jotham's co-regency. The formal close for Azariah's reign is typical.

15:8–9 The opening for **Zechariah** of Israel, son of Jeroboam II and the last king of the dynasty of Jehu, is typical formula.

15:10–12 The closer of **Zechariah's** rule, however, is not typical. It is the record of a palace revolution. The meaning of **publicly** (Hb *qabal'am*) is uncertain. This sudden revolution, within six months of the death of the great Jeroboam II, showed how quickly both the throne and imperial power declined after his death. But God had kept his promise that four generations of Jehu's sons would rule **Israel** (see 10:30). Jehu's dynasty was the longest of the northern dynasties, enduring forty years longer than Omri's dynasty. Shallum's revolution was, formally, part of the record of Zechariah since it told how Zechariah's reign came to an end.

15:13–15 After a brief opener, the record of **Shallum** of Israel moves immediately to Menahem's revolution. Shallum's record ends with the note that his other deeds are recorded elsewhere in writings now lost to history.

15:16 Some historians see a geographical shift in the center of power in this revolution. **Tirzah** had once been the center of power before Omri moved the capital to Samaria. They then saw

⁶ Braddy, D. (2003). [Just Stayin' Alive: Judah from Rehoboam to Hezekiah](#). In W. C. Williams & S. M. Horton (Eds.), *They Spoke from God: A Survey of the Old Testament* (pp. 673–677). Gospel Publishing House; Logion Press.

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Menahem as returning to an old power base—the people of Tirzah—who apparently were glad to resume a position of prestige and leadership. The location of **Tiphshah** is uncertain. The Tiphshah on the Euphrates River was too distant to be a part of this struggle. Some read this name as “Tappuah” or “Tirzah.” This city resisted the revolution, so Menahem destroyed it. Whether because of his power base in Tirzah or because of his terrifying brutality to Tiphshah, he gained enough authority to rule for ten years.

shakav

Hebrew pronunciation	[shah KAV]
CSB translation	lie down, sleep, rest
Uses in 2 Kings	19
Uses in the OT	212
Focus passage	2 Kings 15:7, 22, 38

Shakav means *lie* (Jb 21:26) or *lie down* (Jdg 5:27). *Shakav* occurs (4×) with *yashen* (“sleep,” Ps 3:5), and *shakav* sometimes means *sleep* (Ex 22:27). People *stretch out* (Jnh 1:5), *go to bed* (Gn 19:4), or *stay in bed* (Pr 6:9). Someone ill *is laid up* (2Kg 9:16). Felled trees *are laid low* (Is 14:8). *Shakav* connotes sex as *sleep* with (Gn 19:32; Ex 22:16), *have sex* (Dt 22:22), or *have sexual relations/intercourse* (Ex 22:19). When sex is forced, *shakav* denotes *rape* (Gen 34:2). *Shakav* signifies *rest* (Pr 6:10); minds *rest* (Ec 2:23). Pains *abate* (Jb 30:17). *Lie down/rest with one’s fathers* involves dying (Gn 47:30; Dt 31:16). Causative verbs indicate *laying someone out* (2Ch 16:14), *enabling to rest* (Hs 2:18), or *making lie down* (2Sm 8:2). One *lays* or puts babies somewhere (1Kg 3:20). People *are laid to rest* (Ezk 32:19). Someone *tilts* jars (Jb 38:37).

15:17–18 The formal beginning of Menahem’s reign in **Israel** is typical.

15:19–20 In 743 BC, near the end of Menahem’s reign, Tiglath-pileser III (known in the Bible by his throne name *Pulu* or **Pul**) invaded the region. This created a new political situation since **Assyria** was now the enemy to the north and northeast. Thus the major internal struggle for most of the small kingdoms of Palestine and Aram was between the pro-Assyrian party that advocated peace with Assyria at any price and the anti-Assyrian party that advocated wars for independence at any price. Menahem purchased his throne by taking a pro-Assyrian stance and paying a huge tribute, **seventy-five thousand pounds of silver**. Menahem raised the tribute money by imposing a head tax on the **prominent men** of Israel. This tax alienated the anti-Assyrian parties in Israel.

15:21–22 The only thing noteworthy about the closing notices of **Menahem’s** reign is that he succeeded in leaving the throne to his son **Pekahiah**.

15:23–26 **Pekahiah** ruled only two years. Subsequent history indicates that the reason for his short reign could have been the dissatisfaction of the anti-Assyrian party in Israel. The leader of

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the rebellion was **Pekah**, who became the next king. The formal close reveals nothing new about Pekahiah.

15:27–28 The formal opening statements for **Pekah** indicate that he ruled for **twenty years**, a long and successful rule for this period, though his first twelve years were probably as an independent ruler in Gilead. Then he enjoyed eight years (740–732 BC) of rule over Israel until the Assyrians returned.

15:29 Israel had been briefly free from Assyrian invasion because **Assyria** was too busy elsewhere, so **Pekah** broke his treaty with Assyria. But then, in 734 BC, Tiglath-pileser returned, conquered, and annexed large portions of northern Israel. The area defined by the names in the text includes significant Transjordan Hebrew holdings and regions north of the fertile Plain of Esdraelon. This still left the king of Israel with the fertile heartland of the country and a reasonable hope of local, though not imperial, prosperity. The Hebrews in the annexed territories were **deported** to the east and—though not stated here—the Assyrians brought in new population to resettle the land.

15:30–31 **Pekah** was then deposed by a revolution led by **Hoshea**. It is not clear whether this was the work of a pro-Assyrian party or of an anti-Assyrian party that penalized Pekah for not being successful enough in his resistance to Assyria. Hoshea later conspired against Assyria. The closing comments for Pekah reveal nothing new.

15:32–35 The clock turns back to two kings of **Judah** who became king during the reign of **Pekah**. Again, Jotham's length-of-rule formula can be confusing. His **sixteen years** apparently did not include the ten years of co-regency with Azariah, nor did they include the three-year co-regency with Ahaz. He was a good king, except he did not close down the worship of the Lord at the illegal shrines on the **high places**. He was the last of the four good kings from Joash to Jotham, and he was the only one who, as far as the Bible reveals, did not finish badly. An addition to the Lord's temple was his outstanding achievement.

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16:1–2a The opening formula for **Ahaz** of Judah is not remarkable. However, its interpretation offers some challenges. The **seventeenth year of Pekah** (735 BC) would have been the beginning of Ahaz's co-regency with Jotham. Ahaz's sixteen-year official reign began with his sole regency in 731 BC with Jotham's death. The data does not indicate the year in which Ahaz was **twenty years old**.

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16:19–20 Ahaz's record closes with the typical formula statement.

17:1–2 The formulaic opener for **Hoshea** reveals that he was not as bad as his predecessors.

17:3–4 Hoshea was appointed king about 732 BC over an Israel greatly reduced by Tiglath-pileser III (15:29). At some point when **Assyria** was distracted elsewhere Hoshea declared his freedom. The identity of **So** among known Egyptian Pharaohs is uncertain. When Hoshea withheld tribute from Assyria, the end came. Tiglath-pileser died before he could return to Samaria, but his son, Shalmaneser V, invaded Israel (725 BC). After a three-year siege, he captured Samaria, imprisoned Hoshea, and deported the Hebrew population to Assyria (722 BC). Verse 4 seems to indicate that Shalmaneser arrested Hoshea before besieging Samaria. It is unlikely that the city would have resisted after Hoshea's arrest. It is easier to take vv. 4–6 as topically structured. The topic of v. 4 is Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser **arrested** (confined by siege) and then **put ... in prison** after the siege ended.

17:5–6a Shalmaneser **besieged** the city for three years and then **deported** the population to points north and east of Israel. Sargon II, the next king of Assyria, may have expedited some of the deportations.

17:6b The Assyrians deported the Hebrews to several different areas. **Halah** was in the general area of Gozan. Some were settled along the **Habor** River, a tributary of the Euphrates that flowed south from the region of Haran and Gozan to the Euphrates. This region was only about four hundred miles northeast of Israel. However, other Israelites were settled in the territory of the **Medes** in mountain country east and northeast of the plains of Babylon and Assyria. These exiles were almost a thousand miles from home.

17:7–20 These verses contain one of the great theological statements of the OT—God's accusation against the Israelites for their covenant faithlessness and that of their kings. It also expresses the climactic moral statement of the Deuteronomic History. This condemnation covered both Judah and Israel, although Judah's doom was still about 130 years in the future. The author gave a grief-filled statement of why this tragedy happened. The notes below recognize the major themes of this theological statement.

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17:7 This verse repeats three fundamental truths of Israelite life that are repeated over and over again in OT theology. First, they **sinned against the LORD**. Second, this was the God who, by bringing them **out of ... Egypt**, had made them his possession. Third, the people **worshiped other gods**.

17:8 The Hebrews were so perverse in their idolatry that they, like King Amaziah (2Ch 25:14–15), adopted the gods who were incapable of defending their people against **the nations**.

17:9–10 The Israelites built numerous **high places**, at first **secretly** and then openly. The typical high place installation consisted of (1) a **sacred** stone or **pillars** for the male fertility deity, usually some Baal; and (2) a sacred pole or a **green tree** for the female consort of the Baal. The latter often represented the consort goddess or **Asherah**.

17:11–12 Then the message becomes a piling-on harangue that lists the discouraging catalogue of evils committed by the people. There are both general statements—**they did evil things**—as well as more specific practices—**they burned incense**.

17:13–15 In spite of their sins, which deserved immediate judgment, God sent prophets to warn them. **But they would not listen**. Verse 15 makes explicit a general principle that we become like what we worship: **They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves**.⁷

Ahaz

Ahaz has the dubious distinction of being one of the worst apostate kings in Jewish history. In 735 BCE, at the age of twenty, he assumed the throne of Judah after several years as co-regent with his father **Jotham**.

Ahaz reigned during one of the most critical times in the history of Judah, yet he was not a strong king, tending to vacillate and be indecisive in the most crucial situations.

When he ascended the throne, he was invited to join an alliance with the kings **Pekah** of Israel and **Rezin** of Syria, in the hope of presenting a strong enough front to hold back the advancing Assyrians. Fearing that they intended to annex Judah into Israel, Ahaz refused, and he was immediately attacked by Israel and Syria, who tried to dethrone him and replace him with a puppet king who is known only as “the son of Tabeel” (Isa. 7:6). This occasioned one of Ahaz’s first atrocities. Ahaz was an idolater, and in a desperate attempt to save his throne he offered his own son to the pagan gods as a burnt sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3).

Being also threatened by raids by the Edomites and Philistines, Ahaz finally appealed for help to the Assyrian emperor **Tiglath-pileser III**. The prophet **Isaiah** tried to dissuade him from this alliance, pointing out that the survival of Ahaz and Judah depended not on the strength of armies but on faith in God. Ahaz rejected his prophecy, however, and allied with Assyria. In 734 BCE Tiglath-pileser immediately moved west and took Damascus, then conquered Philistia, devastated northern Israel, and subdued all of Transjordan. Ahaz then met Tiglath-pileser in Damascus and as a tribute turned over to him the treasure of the temple and the palace.

⁷ Bowling, A. C. (2017). [2 Kings](#). In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (pp. 576–580). Holman Bible Publishers.

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While Ahaz was in Damascus he was very impressed with the temple there, particularly the altar. He ordered the high priest Uriah to build a replica of it in the temple in Jerusalem, and upon returning to Jerusalem Ahaz offered a sacrifice on it to the pagan gods of Syria (2 Kings 16:10ff.). He set up pagan shrines all over Jerusalem, ordering sacrifices to the gods of Aram.

Throughout Ahaz's reign Judah was in political, moral, and religious chaos. Not only was it constantly besieged by raids from all its enemies, but at the hand of Ahaz paganism had infected Judah as thoroughly as it had done in Israel under Ahab and Jezebel. Upon his death in 715 BCE, his son **Hezekiah** ascended the throne, and he turned out to be as good and righteous a king as his father Ahaz had been incompetent and apostate.⁸

X. King Ahaz of Judah (Chap. 16)

Ahaz the son of Jotham was king of Judah for twenty years (735–716/15 B.C.; cf. 2 Chron. 28).

16:1–4 Ahaz was coregent with his father for perhaps twelve years. The name Ahaz is a contraction for Jehoahaz. It is by the latter name that the king is known on Assyrian inscriptions. The prefix “Jeho-” stands for Jehovah, and doubtless the Holy Spirit omitted it purposely because Ahaz was an apostate. He followed **the kings of Israel** in his idolatry, even making **his son pass through the fire**. In the worship of Molech, it is believed that children were passed between the red-hot arms of the brass idol, signifying cleansing from evil and dedication to the god. Sometimes the children were actually killed and burned (Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 16:21).

16:5–9 In order to force Judah to join them against Assyria, and to install a vassal king on the throne of Judah (Isa. 7:6), **Syria** and **Israel** united to attack **Jerusalem**. At the same time **Syria captured Elath** and planted a colony of Syrians there. In his distress, **Ahaz** sent a call for help to **Assyria**, accompanying it with **silver and gold** treasures from the temple and the palace. **Tiglath-Pileser** complied by capturing **Damascus** and killing the king of Syria. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. But God would make the Assyrians a curse to Judah (Isa. 7:17–25).

16:10–16 On a trip to **Damascus** to visit **Tiglath-Pileser**, **Ahaz ... saw** a heathen **altar** and decided to build one like it in Jerusalem. So he sent a model of it to **Urijah the priest**, and **Urijah** in turn had the **altar ... built ... before King Ahaz** returned. **Ahaz** offered various **offerings** on his new altar (all but sin and trespass-offerings) and then **commanded Urijah** to use it henceforth instead of **the bronze altar**. The last clause in verse 15 seems to suggest that Ahaz would use the **bronze altar** for divination. However, it may also be understood to mean, “As for the bronze altar, it will be for me to enquire (or consider) what I shall do with it.” **Urijah the priest** sinfully obeyed **King Ahaz** in his sacrilege instead of fearlessly rebuking him. Uriah (the same as Urijah) is mentioned favorably in Isaiah 8:2, but this was before the attack on Jerusalem. His wicked acquiescence to the demand of Ahaz to build the altar took place at a later date.

16:17–20 **Ahaz ... removed** certain furnishings from **the temple** area, perhaps for fear that the king of Assyria might take them if he ever captured Jerusalem. Some think he used them to pay tribute. Second Chronicles 28:24 tells how Ahaz closed the temple entirely toward the end

⁸ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 22–23). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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of his reign. Like other apostate kings before him, Ahaz was not buried in the royal tombs (2 Chron. 28:27) but **was buried with his fathers in the City of David.**⁹

AHAZ [A haz] — the name of two men in the Old Testament:

1. A son of Jotham and the 11th king of Judah (2 Kin. 15:38; 16:1–20; Achaz, KJV). He was an ungodly king who promoted the worship of Molech, with its pagan rites of human sacrifice (2 Chr. 28:1–4).

The reign of Ahaz probably overlapped the reign of his father Jotham and possibly the reign of his own son Hezekiah. His age when he became king was 20 and he reigned for 16 years, beginning about 735 B.C.

Early in his reign Ahaz adopted policies that favored Assyria. When he refused to join the anti-Assyrian alliance of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria, they invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem, threatening to dethrone Ahaz and replace him with a puppet king (Is. 7:1–6). Pekah and Rezin killed 120,000 people and took 200,000 captives. However, through the intervention of Oded the prophet, the captives were released immediately (2 Chr. 28:5–15).

In view of his precarious circumstances, Ahaz requested help from Tiglath–Pileser III, king of Assyria, offering him silver and gold. At first the plan worked, and Assyria invaded Israel and Syria (2 Kin. 15:29). Ultimately, however, Assyria “distressed” Ahaz, demanding excessive tribute (2 Chr. 28:20–21).

Spiritually, Ahaz stopped following in the ways of the four relatively good kings who had preceded him (Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, and Jotham). He made images of Baal, offered infant sacrifices in the Valley of Hinnom, and sacrificed on the high places (2 Chr. 28:1–4). He came under further pagan influence at Damascus where he had gone to meet Tiglath–Pileser III. Seeing a pagan altar there, he commanded Uriah the priest at Jerusalem to build a copy of it. He then installed it next to the bronze altar in the Jerusalem temple.

It was to King Ahaz that Isaiah’s announcement of the promised Immanuel was made (Is. 7:10–17). The prophet Isaiah sent a message to the terrified Ahaz, but Ahaz would not turn to God and trust Him for deliverance. Instead, he plunged deeper into idolatry and selfdestruction. Ahaz’s conduct brought divine judgment to Judah in the form of military defeats. Edom revolted and took captives from Judah. The Philistines invaded Judah, capturing several cities. Rezin of Damascus seized control of Elath, Judah’s port on the Gulf of Aqaba (2 Kin. 16:5–6).

At his death, Ahaz was buried without honor in Jerusalem. He was not deemed worthy of a burial in the royal tombs (2 Chr. 28:27).

2. A Benjamite and descendant of King Saul. Ahaz was a son of Micah and the father of Jehoaddah (1 Chr. 8:35–36; 9:42).¹⁰

AHAZ REIGNS OVER JUDAH

⁹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; pp. 409–410). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father.

But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel [2 Kings 16:2–3].

Pekah reigned twenty years before he was murdered. In the seventeenth year of Pekah's reign in Israel, Ahaz began his reign as king of Judah. Ahaz was not a good king.

And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree [2 Kings 16:4].

He walked in the wicked ways of the kings of Israel. He did the terrible thing of offering children as sacrifices to heathen gods—probably to Merodach (Marduk) or to Baal. This practice was about as low as a person could sink spiritually, and this is the thing Ahaz did. We are told that he “sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.” In other words, Ahaz went the whole route into idolatry and pagan and heathen worship.

Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him [2 Kings 16:5].

In the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 7, there is an extended section on this. It is a very important section, because in it is the prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah is prophesying to this man Ahaz who will not listen to God. So Isaiah challenges him to trust God. Then Ahaz appeals to Assyria for help. This opens the door for Assyria to come down and ultimately take the northern kingdom into captivity.

At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drave the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day [2 Kings 16:6].

“Unto this day” means, of course, up to the time that this record was written.

In this verse the word *Jew* is used for the first time in the Bible. There are those who hold that *Jew* applies only to those of the tribe of Judah. However, notice that here it refers to folk in the northern kingdom of Israel—in fact, up on the border of Syria. As we shall see, all twelve tribes were given that name.

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath–pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.

And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria [2 Kings 16:7–8].

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And so the Assyrians are bribed. They come to Ahaz' aid first by attacking Damascus in Syria and then by taking the city.

And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath–pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof [2 Kings 16:10].

He wanted this altar copied and erected in the temple of God. All the while Isaiah was prophesying to him and against him for what he was doing.

And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones [2 Kings 16:17].

Ahaz is showing his utter disrespect for the temple of the true and living God.

And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria.

Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead [2 Kings 16:18–20].

Ahaz mutilated the house of God and seems to have stripped it of its elaborate ornamentation.

The chapter concludes with the death of Ahaz and the record of the fact that his son Hezekiah reigned after him. It is an amazing thing that a godless man like Ahaz would have a son like Hezekiah, the story of whose reign we shall see in a following chapter.¹¹

The wife of Ahaz and mother of King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kgs 18:2).

Ahaz, King of Judah

AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH (אַחַז, 'chz; shortened form of אֱחָזְיָהוּ, *yhw'chz*, meaning "he [Yahweh] has held, grasped").

Date: Chronology of Reign

According to 2 Kgs 16:1, Ahaz came to the throne at age 20 and ruled Judah for 16 years.

Date: Chronology of Reign

Ahaz shared the throne with his son, Hezekiah, from 728/7–715 BC (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 353).

Date: Chronology of Reign

¹¹ McGee, J. V. (1991). [Thru the Bible commentary: History of Israel \(1 and 2 Kings\)](#) (electronic ed., Vol. 13, pp. 239–241). Thomas Nelson.

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The correlation of Assyrian and Mesopotamian records fixes the date Ahaz paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III as 733/32 BC (see Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*).

Biblical References

The historical books and Isaiah portray Ahaz as an evil, wicked, idolatrous ruler.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

When Ahaz ascended the throne, the nation of Judah was threatened by various military-political powers.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

These threats came from the resurgence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (745–612 BC) in Mesopotamia and the diplomatic-military posturing of the countries surrounding Ahaz's kingdom.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

While Ahaz was co-regent, Rezin and Pekah pressured him to join their coalition with the threat of military occupation.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Isaiah notes that the coalition planned to replace Ahaz with an unknown ruler called the "son of Tabeel" who was loyal to the anti-Assyrian coalition (Isa 7:6b).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

This Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and Ahaz's response became the defining event of his reign.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Earlier, Isaiah had advised Ahaz to trust in the Lord's promise to deliver Judah (Isa 7:1–12) rather than joining the coalition or becoming an Assyrian vassal state.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Ahaz did not realize that Assyria would have to deal with these nations on its own, and relief could come without the immediate necessity of a tribute payment (Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 380).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Isaiah offered Ahaz the choice of any sign he desired to verify the divine promise, but Ahaz refused and appealed to Assyria for help.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

In order to pay tribute to Assyria, Ahaz plundered the temple, his palace, and his nobles' treasures.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

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In spite of divine intervention through Oded and the guidance offered by Isaiah, Ahaz turned to the Syrian gods for deliverance.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

After traveling to Damascus to affirm his loyalty to Tiglath-Pileser III, Ahaz replaced Solomon’s bronze altar in Jerusalem with a replica of the Damascene one.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Ahaz then began to practice “extispicy,” the reading of animal entrails (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 175–76).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Ahaz may have been forced to adopt the Damascene altar to show loyalty (see Heger, *Three Biblical Altar Laws*, 260).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Ahaz shut down the worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple entirely and created altars to pagan gods throughout Jerusalem and Judah, “provoking the God of his ancestors” (2 Chr 28:26).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

Second Chronicles notes that Ahaz was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the tombs of the kings (2 Chr 28:27).

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

His son, Hezekiah, attempted to reverse Ahaz’s political and religious policies.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

The book of Isaiah contrasts the evil reign of Ahaz and the righteous rule of Hezekiah.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Isaiah’s condemnation of Judah’s sins reflects the moral state of Judah’s leaders and people during Ahaz’s reign.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Isaiah 7 describes the prophet’s attempt to persuade Ahaz to trust in the Lord during the Syro-Ephraimite War.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

When Ahaz refused Isaiah’s offer to bring about any sign to assure him of God’s protection, God offered His own sign instead.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

God also informed Ahaz that the Assyrians would become Judah’s greatest menace (Isa 7:17–25).

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Isaiah and Other Prophets

Micah indirectly references Ahaz's wickedness several times in his prophecy.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Since Micah prophesies during the reigns of Jotham and Hezekiah and Samaria's judgment has not yet come, he is likely condemning Ahaz.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Other biblical references to Ahaz describe how the effects of his rule were reversed during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

God's healing of Hezekiah took place on Ahaz's stairs, where the shadow retreated 10 steps (2 Kgs 20:11).

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Hezekiah restored the temple worship his father had forbidden and purified the temple instruments Ahaz had removed (2 Chr 29:19).

Isaiah and Other Prophets

In 2 Kings 23:10–12, Josiah destroyed the place of child sacrifice—Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom—where Ahaz and Manasseh had passed their sons through the fire.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

Josiah also eliminated the pagan altars constructed on the roof of Ahaz's upper room.

New Testament

Ahaz is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matt 1:9 as the son of Jotham and father of Hezekiah.

Extrabiblical Inscriptions

The first seal impression of a Hebrew king ever discovered reads "belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yotam, king of Judah."

Extrabiblical Inscriptions

Ahaz is also noted on a building inscription detailing Tiglath-Pileser III's actions during military campaigns in Syria and Palestine.

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Since Ahaz had led Judah into idolatry, failed to uphold social justice, and entered into godless political alliances, he failed according to these standards.

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Ahaz's reign is set within the portion of 2 Kings that ends with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17).

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Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Ahaz is the first of Judah's kings to rule over the sole remaining kingdom occupied by the Davidic descendants.

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

However, Ahaz committed the same sins which caused the exile of the northern kingdom.

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Just as Israel had, Ahaz drove God out from before his people (2 Kgs 16:3b; 17:8) and sacrificed on the high places (2 Kgs 16:4; 17:9b, 10)—Ahaz even sacrificed his own son.

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

The narrator predicts that the future rulers of Judah will not fare any better than Ahaz (2 Kgs 17:19).

Selected Resources for Further Study

Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis.

Selected Resources for Further Study

Torrey, C.C. "A Hebrew Seal from the Reign of Ahaz." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 79 (1940): 27.

Ahaz, Son of Micah

AHAZ, SON OF MICAH (אָחָז, *achaz*).

Aramaic Inscription

If this fragment refers to the Syrian king Hazael and states that he killed [Jeho]ram, king of Israel and [Ahaz]iah of Judah, the inscription and the biblical witness apparently conflict.

Old Testament

King Ahaz also installed a new altar in the temple court.

Old Testament

Manasseh erected an altar to Baal and other deities in Jerusalem, just as Ahaz had done in Samaria (2 Kgs 21:3–5).

Aram in the Old Testament

However, Ahaz of Judah appealed to Assyria for aid and protection against Israel, Tyre, and Aram.

The Fate of the Ark

Ahaz (2 Chr 28:24) and Athaliah and her sons (2 Chr 24:7) also removed or damaged items from the temple, suggesting they may be connected with the ark's disappearance (see Ehrlich, "The Disappearance of the Ark").

The Fate of the Ark

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This suggests that Shishak, Jehoash, Ahaz, or Athaliah were not involved in the disappearance of the ark.

Azrikam the Commander

Commander of the palace of King Ahaz of Judah (2 Chr 28:7).

Baal Worship in Judah

A number of the kings of Judah, such as Ahaz and Manasseh, may have even burned their children in these sacrifices (2 Chr 28:2–3, 33:6; see also 2 Chr 36:14).

Beth-Shemesh of Judah

Less than 100 years later, the Philistines captured Beth-Shemesh during the reign of Ahaz (2 Chr 28:18).

David and the Davidic Kings

Some kings forsook proper worship and followed other gods (e.g., Ahaz, Manasseh), while other kings were faithful and restored proper worship when it had been forsaken (e.g., Hezekiah, Josiah).

Divided Monarchy

Ahaz

Damascus and the Near East

The invasion almost destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and Ahaz petitioned Tiglath-pileser of Assyria to defend Judah from the attack.

Damascus and the Near East

Ahaz visited Damascus to establish the alliance with Tiglath-pileser who had defeated the Syrians and brought an end to the Syrian kingdom.

Damascus and the Near East

Ahaz then made plans to copy an altar from Damascus and place it in the Jerusalem temple.

Damascus and the Near East

He sent the plans to Uriah the Priest, who built an identical altar; Ahaz offered sacrifices there (2 Kgs 16:6–12).

Jeroboam II and Fall

On the call for help from Ahaz, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria came and destroyed Syria in 732 BC (2 Kgs 16:9).

Edom and the Kings of Israel

However, by the late sixth century under the rule of Ahaz (735–715 BC), Edom regained control of Eilat (2 Kgs 16:6).

Old Testament References

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Jehoram, Amaziah, and Ahaz all had conflicts with Edom for various reasons during the period of the divided monarchy (e.g., 2 Kgs 8:20–22; 2 Chr 25:14–20; 2 Chr 28:17).

Elkanah the High Official

Next in authority to King Ahaz of Judah.

Background

King Ahaz of Judah became a vassal to the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in his effort to save his kingdom (2 Kgs 16:5–18).

Biblical Relevance

The Edomites reclaimed the region during the reign of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:6).

Gederoth

A town in the lowland (גֵּדְרוֹת, *shephelah*) of Judah that the Philistines seized from Ahaz (Josh 15:41; 2 Chr 28:18).

Gehenna

Jeremiah began to associate the place-name with God's divine wrath and judgment (Jer 7:32, 19:6) because Kings Ahaz and Manasseh began sacrificing their children to Molech there (2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6).

Old Testament

It took on theological significance when Ahaz (2 Chr 28:3) and Manasseh (2 Chr 33:6), kings of Judah, began to sacrifice their children to pagan gods (2 Kgs 23:10).

Gimzo

A town of Judah captured by the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz (2 Chr 28:18).

Valley of Hinnom

In the Valley of Hinnom, King Ahaz and King Manasseh offered their sons as sacrifices to the gods of Baal and Molech (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; 2 Kgs 16:3).

Assyrian Vassals

During the campaign of Tiglath-pileser III in the south, King Ahaz of Judah submitted to Assyrian authority (2 Kgs 16:7–8).

Assyrian Vassals

Hezekiah likely did not abandon this loyalty until the death of Sargon II in 705 BC (Na'aman, "Ahaz's and Hezekiah's Policy," 5–30).

Selected Resources for Further Study

"Ahaz's and Hezekiah's Policy toward Assyria in the Days of Sargon II and Sennacherib's Early Years." *Zion* 59 (1994): 5–30.

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As a Religious Reference

- Second Kings 16:4 states, “And he [King Ahaz] sacrificed and offered in the high places, and on the hills, and under every leafy tree” (JPS)

In Uninhabited Hills in Palestine

King Ahaz of Judah sacrificed and made offerings on the high places that were “on the hills and under every green tree” (2 Kgs 16:4).

Biblical Significance

Second Chronicles records kings Ahaz and Manasseh burning incense and offering their children to Molech in Hinnom (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6).

Date

During his lifetime, Syria and Israel joined forces against Assyria, and tried to compel Ahaz of Judah to join them.

Date

- Ahaz (742–727 BC);

Hoshea, King of Israel

Hoshea was the 19th king of Israel and, according to 2 Kgs 17:1, a contemporary of Ahaz, the 12th king of Judah (Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross*, 227).

Biblical Significance

In Isa 7:14, “Immanuel” is a symbolic name given to a child who was to be born in the reign of King Ahaz of Judah.

Historical Context

In 734 BC, the neighboring nations of Syria (also called Aram) and Ephraim (the northern kingdom, Israel) pressured Ahaz of Judah to join a military coalition in response to a threat from the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, who wanted to create an empire out of surrounding states.

Historical Context

Ahaz refused to join the coalition, and instead appealed to Tiglath-pileser to support him by invading his aggressive neighbors’ territory, voluntarily pledging his allegiance to the Assyrian king.

Historical Context

Ahaz thus provided the aggressor with a legitimate pretext for invading Syria and Palestine.

Literary Context

The first response mainly addresses King Ahaz, while the second has the people in view.

Isaiah 7:1–17

In Isaiah 7:3–9, Yahweh commissions the prophet to confront King Ahaz as he was inspecting the water supply just outside Jerusalem (in anticipation of a siege).

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Isaiah 7:1–17

In Isaiah 7:10–17, God gives Ahaz a message of positive assurance (Isa 7:11–16), in which he promises “the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Isaiah 7:1–17

This sign was confirmation that God would rescue Ahaz and his people from the threat of the other two kings.

Direct Prediction of Mary and Jesus

- Ziegler observes that the LXX also understood Ahaz to be the father because it went on to translate “and you will call” by vocalizing וְקָרְאתָ (*wqr't*) as וְקָרְאתָּ (*weqaratha*) instead of the masoretic וְקָרְאתְּ (*weqarath*), meaning “and she will call” (Ziegler, *Isaias*, 147).

A Royal Interpretation

“Immanuel” may have been the son of King Ahaz—specifically Hezekiah, his successor (Clements, “Immanuel Prophecy,” 70–77).

A Royal Interpretation

Clements argues that it announces the arrival of a successor to Ahaz.

A Royal Interpretation

- Part of the design of Isa 1–39 was to contrast bad King Ahaz with good King Hezekiah (Isa 36–39), of whom 2 Kgs 18:7 states “The LORD was with him.”

A Royal Interpretation

- The phrase “house of David” features in Isa 7:2, 13 (compare Isa 7:17), referring to Ahaz as dynastic representative whose behavior put the royal line at risk.

Date

- Ch. 7—735/734 BC: This passage mentions a battle in King Ahaz’s life which can be dated to around this time (2 Kgs 15:37–16:8).

Date

Because of this, Isaiah regularly interacts with Ahaz and Hezekiah (both kings of Judah) about the war and the plans they should (and should not) execute (see Irvine, *Isaiah*).

Date

Isaiah 1:1 states that Isaiah prophesied during the days of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah,” kings of Judah.

Date

Second Chronicles 26:22 mentions that Isaiah recorded “the rest of the acts of King Ahaz.”

Location and Audience

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The text records several instances of the prophet addressing the kings of Judah (Ahaz, 7:3–13; Hezekiah, 37:2–7; 21–35; 38:1–8; 39:3–8).

Selected Resources for Further Study

Irvine, Stuart A. *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*.

Diachronic

Both are narratives portraying the prophet's confrontation with a king (Ahaz the bad king and Hezekiah the good king).

Overview

When Shear-jashub accompanied Isaiah to visit Ahaz, his name suggested that the invaders of Judah would be defeated and only a remnant of the enemy forces would return.

Overview

3. Ahaz (741–736 BC as coregent; 736–725 BC as sole ruler);

Overview

1. Ahaz, during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and fallout (732–722 BC);

Overview

The conflicts with Assyria in the book of Isaiah are most prominent in terms of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Jarah

A son of Ahaz and a descendant of Benjamin (1 Chr 9:42).

Jehiel, Son of Heman

Jehiel and his brother Shimei were among those who assisted in cleansing the temple after its desecration by Ahaz (2 Chr 29:14–19).

Jehizkiah, Son of Shallum

A chief of the tribe of Ephraim who opposed the enslavement of the Judahites who were taken captive by Pekah in the war against Ahaz (2 Chr 28:12).

Jehoaddah, Son of Ahaz

JEHOADDAH, SON OF AHAZ (יהוֹאֲדָה בֶּן־אֲחָז, *yeho'addah*).

Jehoaddah, Son of Ahaz

A descendant of both Benjamin and Saul through Ahaz (1 Chr 8:36).

Selected Resources for Further Study

“Royal Inscriptions and the Histories of Joash and Ahaz, Kings of Judah” *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 3 (1998): 333–49.

Selected Resources for Further Study

ISAIAH

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Etz, Donald V. "The Genealogical Relationships of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 71 (1996).

Tel Dan Stele

However, the alignment of a king of Israel with a name ending "rm" and a king of Judah with a name ending in "yh" historically correlates best with restoring the sentence: "[I killed Jo]ram son of [Ahab] the king of Israel, and I killed [Ahaz]iah son of [Jehoram kin]g of the House of David." William Schniedewind suggests that the fragmentary closing lines of the inscription (lines 11–12) should be reconstructed "and Jehu ruled over Israel" (Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 78).

Immanuel

"Immanuel" is a symbolic name given in the Old Testament (Isa 7:14; Isa 8:8; Isa 8:10) to a child who was to be born in the reign of King Ahaz of Judah.

Chronological Conflict

Another possibility is that Jotham was still alive for four years or more after his son Ahaz came to the throne (in contradiction to 2 Kgs 15:38, 2 Chr 27:9; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 64).

Outline of 1–2 Kings

- 2 Kgs 15:13–17:4—Final rulers of Israel: Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea; rulers of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz

Proper Worship

Judean rulers—such as Asa, Joash, Ahaz and Hezekiah—also make a habit of doing so in order to give tribute to foreign powers such as Aram and Assyria (1 Kgs 15:18; 2 Kgs 12:17–18; 16:8; 18:15).

The Reliefs as Portrayals of Jerusalem

For example, 2 Kings 18:7 indicates Hezekiah had *rebelled* against Assyria, implying that Judah was already in vassalage to Assyria, likely as of the rule of Ahaz (see 2 Kgs 16; Isa 7–8).

In the First Temple

The apostate king Ahaz "cut off the side panels" from the laver stands and took the lavers off them; he also removed the 12 oxen from under the bronze sea and placed it on a stone pedestal (2 Kgs 16:17).

Maaseiah, Son of Ahaz

MAASEIAH, SON OF AHAZ (מַעֲשֵׂיָהוּ), *ma'aseyahu*).

Maaseiah, Son of Ahaz

A son of Ahaz, king of Judah; he was killed by Zichri of Ephraim during the Syro-Ephraimite war (2 Chr 28:7).

Manasseh and Child Sacrifice

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Biblical texts tend to associate these offerings with Molech (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5; 1 Kgs 11:7; 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35) and the Valley of Ben-Hinnom (2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 7:31–32; 19:6; 32:35; see also Barrick, *King and the Cemeteries*, 81–103), and Ahaz and Manasseh are the only kings accused of burning their sons as sacrifices (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6).

Isaiah 7:14

Serra suggests that the young woman referred to in Isa 7:14 is Abi, the wife of Ahaz, who gave birth to Hezekiah ca. 733–732 BC.

Micah, Book Of

Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—kings of Judah.

Eighth-Century Setting

Micah's superscription contains similar information, "The word of the LORD came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Mic 1:1 NIV).

Micah the Prophet

The superscription to the book of Micah also places him in the earlier reigns of Ahaz and Jotham, making him a contemporary of Isaiah (compare Isa 1:1).

Molech and Child Sacrifice in Israel

The kings Ahaz and Manasseh are said to have made their own sons "pass through the fire" (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6 LEB).

Pekah's Rise to Power

Pekah and Rezin attempted to coerce Jotham of Judah (2 Kgs 15:37) as well as Jotham's son and successor, Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:5; 2 Chr 28:5–8; Isa 7:1), into joining this confederacy against the Assyrians.

Pekah's Rise to Power

Rezin and Pekah were intent on replacing Ahaz with someone more sympathetic to their cause, a "son of Tabeel" (Isa 7:6).

Pekah's Rise to Power

This "son of Tabeel" was likely anti-Assyrian (as was Jotham) and thus a perfect candidate to replace Ahaz, who had become king upon his father's death and adopted a pro-Assyrian policy.

Pekah and the Syro-Ephraimite War

According to Isaiah 7–8, Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III for assistance in battling Rezin and Pekah, despite Isaiah's exhortation to wait on the deliverance of the Lord and his prophecy that foretold of the destruction of these two kingdoms.

Pekah and the Syro-Ephraimite War

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In response to Ahaz's request, Tiglath-Pileser campaigned in the Levant in 734–732 BC, first subjugating Philistia and Tyre, who had also rebelled, and then turning his attention to Damascus and northern Israel.

Conflict with Israel

For example, King Uzziah of Judah conquered Gath, Ashdod, and other Philistine territories, but Ahaz lost territory to the Philistines (2 Chr 26:6; 28:18).

Isaiah 1–39

God sent Isaiah to King Ahaz of Judah with instructions to wait in faith and not capitulate to them.

Isaiah 1–39

He then instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign.

Isaiah 1–39

When Ahaz refused, God gave him one anyway: The child of a pregnant young woman would soon be born and would represent God's promise to protect Jerusalem.

Micah

According to Micah 1:1, he ministered in Judah during the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Rezin the King

King of Aram (later called Syria) ca. 750–732 BC, during the reigns of Ahaz of Judah and Pekah of Israel.

The Syro-Ephraimite War and the End of Rezin's Reign

This left Judah as the sole Assyrian appeaser in the region, leading the Aramean-Israelite coalition to invade Judah in hopes of deposing King Ahaz and replacing him with the "son of Tabeel" (Isa 7:6; possibly Hiram of Tyre—see Miller and Hayes, *History*, 329).

The Syro-Ephraimite War and the End of Rezin's Reign

The prophet Isaiah encouraged Ahaz, king of Judah, to resist the Aramean-Israelite alliance, believing that Yahweh would deliver them (Isa 7:3–9).

The Syro-Ephraimite War and the End of Rezin's Reign

Rather than trusting in Yahweh, Ahaz instead called on Assyria to aid him in battle.

References in the Historical Books

In this passage, the canopy which was built for the Sabbath is removed during the reign of Ahaz (circa 735–715 BC).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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Irvine, Stuart A. *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*.

Shear-Jashub, Son of Isaiah

Yahweh told Isaiah to take Shear-jashub with him and go out to meet Ahaz (Isa 7:3).

Kinship and Covenant

- In 2 Kings 16:7 King Ahaz of Judah acknowledges his treaty with Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria by saying, “I am your servant and your son” (ESV).

Deuteronomistic History

In general, Josiah seems to be undoing the religious practices that Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:10–15) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:5) had adopted.

Syro-Ephraimite War

The likely purpose of the conflict was to remove Ahaz as king of Judah and to pressure Judah into joining Damascus and Israel in opposing Tiglath-pileser III as he expanded the Assyrian Empire.

Overview

After Ahaz succeeded Jotham, the coalition again applied pressure.

Overview

This involved a military campaign into Judah, resulting in the sacking of several towns by the Arameans (Damascus) and an attempted march against Jerusalem to replace Ahaz.

Overview

Regardless, Rezin and Pekah failed to convince Ahaz to join their cause.

Overview

At some point, Ahaz reached out to Tiglath-pileser for help and paid him tribute (either as a bribe prior to the Assyrian campaign or as tribute afterward).

Overview

Ahaz ultimately became an Assyrian vassal, Damascus was destroyed, and Israel submitted to Assyria after Hoshea assassinated Pekah and claimed the throne (2 Kgs 15:30).

2 Kings

The Syrian-Israelite coalition apparently was unsuccessful; thus, after Jotham died and his son Ahaz assumed the throne, Rezin and Pekah tried again to influence the Judaeen king through military force.

2 Kings

Second Kings 16:5–9 reports that, at some point in Ahaz’s reign, Rezin and Pekah marched to besiege Jerusalem and fight Ahaz, but “they were unable to fight” (וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִלָּחֵם), *welo' yokhlu lehillachem*).

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2 Kings

Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, requesting rescue from Rezin and Pekah.

2 Kings

In an effort to persuade Tiglath-pileser to respond, Ahaz took silver and gold from the temple, as well as valuables from the king's palace, and sent them to the Assyrian king as a bribe.

2 Kings

According to the text, Tiglath-pileser "listened" to Ahaz and marched out against Damascus, captured it, carried its people away in exile, and executed Rezin.

2 Kings

If the phrase in 16:5 means that Pekah and Rezin were unable "to fight," then the passage might suggest that the two kings never attacked Ahaz at Jerusalem, likely because they were inhibited by the Assyrian army.

2 Kings

This would mean, then, that the Assyrians were already campaigning in Syria-Palestine by the time Ahaz reached out to Tiglath-pileser.

Isaiah

Isaiah 7:1 is apparently dependent on 2 Kgs 16:5 and repeats that during the reign of Ahaz, Rezin and Pekah marched against Jerusalem but were "unable to fight/overcome it" (**וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִלָּחֵם עִמָּהּ**, *welo' yakhol lehillachem aleiha*).

Isaiah

According to Isa 7:6, Rezin and Pekah sought to replace Ahaz with a "son of Tabeel."

2 Chronicles

According to 2 Chronicles 28, because of Ahaz's sins, Yahweh delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram, who defeated him and carried away a number of captives to Damascus.¹² In addition, Ahaz was delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who inflicted numerous casualties.

2 Chronicles

Pekah slew 120,000 "valiant men" in one day, including Maaseiah, Ahaz's son; Azrikam, the "ruler of the house"; and Elkanah, "second to the king" (2 Chr 28:6–7).

¹² [Abi, Daughter of Zechariah](#). (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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2 Chronicles

During the Aramean and Israelite military actions in Judah, Ahaz sent to the “king of Assyria” for assistance (2 Chr 28:16).

2 Chronicles

Apparently, Ahaz’s bribe did not help.

Neo-Assyrian Sources

Ahaz submitted peacefully to Tiglath-pileser, along with several other rulers.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Stuart Irvine identifies the major critical questions surrounding this conflict as follows (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 101):

Scholarly Reconstructions

- Was Ahaz’s payment a bribe for help (as 2 Kgs 16:7–8 claims) or routine tribute paid to Tiglath-pileser after the Assyrians invaded and put down the revolt?

Scholarly Reconstructions

Irvine summarizes these proposals, provides critique, and offers his own reconstruction (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 96–101):

Scholarly Reconstructions

Begrich argues that the conflict occurred before the Assyrian campaign in 734, as an effort to convince Ahaz and Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Ahaz refused to join the coalition, believing it had little chance of success.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Rezin, Pekah, and Ahaz began negotiating after the Assyrians attacked Gaza.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Ahaz refused to join the coalition, and the Aramean and Israelite leaders decided to invade Judah.

Scholarly Reconstructions

However, before their armies reached Jerusalem, Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser to request help.

Scholarly Reconstructions

The purpose was to replace Ahaz with Rezin’s own puppet, Ben Tabeel (Isa 7:6).

Scholarly Reconstructions

Although Ahaz appealed for help and sent a bribe, Tiglath-pileser was acting to fulfill his own objectives.

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Scholarly Reconstructions

Rezin applied pressure against Jotham and later Ahaz, but the Judaeen kings refused to cooperate, instead following the Israelite kings Menahem and Pekahiah.

Scholarly Reconstructions

The Aramean-Israelite attack against Ahaz was intended to enlist Judaeen support for the coalition.

Scholarly Reconstructions

Ahaz submitted voluntarily to Assyria and paid tribute after the Assyrians arrived (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 101–9).

The Issue of Tribute

Ahaz's payment to Tiglath-pileser, mentioned in 2 Kgs 16:7–9 and 2 Chr 28:21, deserves further discussion.

The Issue of Tribute

According to 2 Kings 16:7–9, Ahaz bribed Tiglath-pileser to influence him to rescue Ahaz from Rezin and Pekah.

The Issue of Tribute

However, Assyrian inscriptions mention Ahaz's payment as a routine tribute rather than a bribe.

The Issue of Tribute

There are several reasons to doubt that Ahaz sent a bribe and that Tiglath-pileser took on such a campaign because of Ahaz's appeal and payment:

The Issue of Tribute

- Ahaz had not previously submitted to Tiglath-pileser and, at the time, was not a subject of Assyria who could appeal for help.

The Issue of Tribute

Thus, it is more likely that Ahaz's payment was tribute paid to Tiglath-pileser *after* the Assyrians campaigned in Palestine and defeated the Syro-Ephraimite coalition.

The Issue of Tribute

The statement in 2 Kgs 16:7–9 that Ahaz sent a bribe and a request for help to Tiglath-pileser may be a part of the later Deuteronomistic attempt to paint Ahaz in a bad light for bringing Assyrian subjection upon himself and Judah (Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 398).

Selected Resources for Further Study

Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis.

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Historical Tenability

Crawford suggests that if the Jerusalem temple was a model for the tabernacle, the remodeled temple of King Ahaz was the source, since the number of parallels significantly increase after this period.

Tiglath-Pileser III

The king of Assyria during the reigns of King Ahaz in Judah and King Pekah in Israel.

Syro-Ephraimite War

As a result of this attack—and against the advice of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:1–25)—King Ahaz of Judah sent messengers to the king of Assyria, requesting his protection from Israel and Aram.

Syro-Ephraimite War

Tiglath-pileser III conquered Aram and killed King Rezin in response to the gifts and request of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:9).

Israel

Thus, even though Isaiah was highly critical of Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser, this diplomatic move saved Judah from destruction at the hands of the Assyrians and allowed him to keep his throne until his death (Dubovský, "Tiglath-pileser III's Campaign," 157).

Timnah of the North

Taken by the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz.

Biblical Relevance

For example, the Judaeen kings Ahaz and Manasseh are critiqued for making a son "pass through fire" (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6)—the exact practice associated with Topheth in 2 Kgs 23:10 (see also Deut 12:31; 18:10; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Ezek 20:31).

Uriah the Priest

A priest who lived during Ahaz's reign (ca.

Uriah the Priest

Ahaz commissioned Uriah to build a second altar in the temple that was modeled after an altar Ahaz saw in Damascus (2 Kgs 16:10–16).

Virgin, Virginitly in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism

The mother of Immanuel in Isaiah's famous oracle to Ahaz (7:14) is a special case.

Virgin, Virginitly in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism

Similarly, the basic connotation of **עַלְמָה** (*almah*) (παρθένος, *parthenos*) in Isaiah's sign to Ahaz (7:14) carries a heavy symbolic weight, representing the hope that in less than nine

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months, the oppressive situation in Judah would change in such a way that a child would be given the name of Immanuel, “God is with us.”¹³

16 Ahaz of Judah

Cf. 2 Chronicles 28 and Isaiah 7.

One of the few kings of Judah condemned by the author, Ahaz makes human sacrifices of his own sons (v. 3; cf. 17:31; Lev. 18:21). During his reign, Judah loses control of Elath, and the Edomites and Philistines plague his kingdom (2 Chr. 28:17–18).

Military pressure from the allied kings Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus—probably intended to force Ahaz to join their anti-Assyrian league in resisting the rapidly rising Mesopotamian superpower—eventually prompts Ahaz to do the opposite—appeal to Assyria for help. In doing so, Ahaz rejects the counsel of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7). The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III responds by conquering Damascus and executing Rezin (732), but Judah has paid heavy tribute for the favor and also lost a good measure of independence. After meeting Tiglath-pileser in Damascus, Ahaz installs a foreign-style altar in the Jerusalem temple and eventually turns to worshipping Syrian gods (cf. 2 Chr. 28:23).

17 Hoshea and the Fall of Israel

Assyrian records reveal that Tiglath-pileser III appointed (or confirmed) Hoshea to the Israelite throne. Hoshea makes a catastrophic mistake in trying to defy the new Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser’s son Shalmaneser V, by withholding the annual tribute and appealing to the now relatively powerless Egypt for help in freeing his kingdom from Assyrian domination. Israel pays dearly. Under Shalmaneser and his successor, his brother Sargon II, the Assyrians invade the entire northern kingdom, conquer its capital after a three-year siege (722), depose and imprison Hoshea, deport a large part of Israel’s population to far-off northern and eastern parts of the Assyrian empire, and repopulate Samaria and significant areas of the new Assyrian district with conquered foreigners from Mesopotamia. By creating dependency on Assyria, this consistent wartime strategy of population reorganization reduced the likelihood of revolt.

The text makes clear that Israel itself bears the responsibility for its misfortune. As a nation, the northern kingdom has repeatedly and flagrantly disobeyed the covenant with Yahweh, consistently disregarded God’s warnings through his prophets, and forsaken its mighty deliverer from Egypt for all manner of foreign gods (cf. Lev. 18:3, 24–28, which forewarn exile). The high places, made illegitimate by the Jerusalem temple, have continued in use, and the worship of the Canaanite fertility gods Baal and Asherah has flourished. The Israelites have even practiced child sacrifice (v. 17; cf. v. 31).

Verses 21–22 blame the first northern king, Jeroboam, for starting Israel down the path of disobedience (cf. 1 Kings 12–14, esp. 14:15–16). Significantly, however, God does not destroy his people but instead merely “remove[s] them out of his sight” (v. 18) and denies them participation

¹³ Riley, J. A. (2016). *Syro-Ephraimite War*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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in the landed inheritance promised to Abraham and his descendants. That Judah has followed in Israel's footsteps serves as an omen of disaster to come for the remaining southern kingdom (v. 19).

God sends lions to attack Israel's new inhabitants, thus prompting the Assyrian king to bring back one Israelite priest to instruct the people in proper worship. Still, God becomes just one of many gods served by Judah's new neighbors (vv. 35–39).

18 Hezekiah Faces Assyrian Invasion

Cf. 2 Chronicles 29–32; Isaiah 36; Mic. 1:10–16.

Hezekiah restores pure Yahwistic worship and in so doing at least partially and temporarily reverses Judah's political fortunes. Thus far the only king who measures up to David's standards, Hezekiah rids Judah of Canaanite worship, destroys Moses' bronze serpent that had come to be revered as an idol (cf. Num. 21:8–9), regains Philistine territory conquered by the Assyrians, and otherwise defies Assyria. (Verses 9–12 summarize Israel's fate for the same failed attempt; contrast Ahaz's actions in ch. 16.)

Hezekiah's rebellion brings an unwanted but probably not unexpected contest with Sennacherib, successor to Sargon II, who finished off the northern kingdom. When in 701 the new Assyrian king captures Judah's outlying fortified cities, Hezekiah loses his nerve. (Stone-carved reliefs, found in the ruins of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, depict the siege and conquest of Lachish, 30 mi. southwest of Jerusalem.) The Judean king hopes to divert the Assyrian army away from Jerusalem by stripping the temple and palace of their gold and silver as an offering of tribute to Sennacherib, but this strategy fails. Sennacherib sends his three top army officials to intimidate the king and inhabitants.

The chief Assyrian field commander, Rabshakeh (a military title), uses the common Hebrew dialect, rather than the international diplomatic language of Aramaic, to make sarcastic fun of Judah's own military (v. 23). He belittles her only hope for an ally (Egypt; cf. Isa. 30:1–5; 31:1–3); asserts Assyria's divine warrant to conquer the southern kingdom (v. 25); warns of the starvation that will result from a siege of Jerusalem (v. 27); seeks to undermine Hezekiah's reliability (vv. 29–32); promises the good life in exchange for surrender (v. 32); and boasts of Assyria's past military success (vv. 33–35). The Rabshakeh's discrediting of Judean hope for help from God, however, goes too far, and the Assyrian army will pay for overstepping divine bounds.

Some scholars believe that vv. 13–16 deal with Sennacherib's 701 Judean campaign, while the confrontation at Jerusalem refers to a later military effort. The Assyrian Taylor Prism records Sennacherib's boast that he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage," but it makes no mention of the Assyrian disaster recorded at the end of ch. 19.

19 Disaster for the Assyrians

Cf. 2 Chr. 32:9–23; Isaiah 36–39.

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Hezekiah reacts to the report of the Rabshakeh's message in the same way as his representatives—in an outward display of mourning. The prophet Isaiah now appears. (Isaiah 1:1 indicates that he had been a prophet since the reign of Azariah/Uzziah.) He delivers a message of hope for deliverance without military engagement.

God causes the blasphemous Sennacherib, now attacking Libnah 10 miles north of Lachish, to respond to reports of a pressing military threat by the Nubian Tirhakah (later pharaoh of Egypt; cf. v. 9). Before departing from Judah, Sennacherib warns that he will return, but Isaiah prophesies the king's violent death in his own land.

Hezekiah's prayer concerning Sennacherib's threat wins for Judah a divine promise of deliverance. The Judahite king acknowledges God's enthronement above the cherubim, guardians of holy places whose wings overstretched the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (v. 15; cf. Exod. 25:17–22). Verse 28 pictures God humiliating the prideful Assyrians as they themselves did conquered kings, that is, by treating them as beasts through whose noses they would drive a ring as a lead. God determines to accomplish the victory for the sake of his own reputation and for the righteous King David, to whom he promised an enduring dynasty (v. 34).

The angel of the Lord miraculously causes the Assyrian army to die off overnight (cf. Exod. 12:29; 2 Sam. 24:15–17). Sennacherib returns home in disgrace and meets with death by the sword (2 Chr. 32:21; Isa. 37:36–38). Two of his own children figure as the assassins, and they escape to Ararat (modern Armenia).

20:1–11 Hezekiah Wards Off Death

Cf. Isaiah 38.

God's promise to deliver Judah from Assyria (v. 6) indicates that Hezekiah's fatal ailment occurs at least before the events at the end of chapter 19. Through earnest prayer, Hezekiah wins divine healing through a fig poultice—the standard ancient folk treatment for skin ulcers—that Isaiah applies to Hezekiah's infected boil. The miraculous directional reverse of a shadow cast on a stairway offers the sign of Hezekiah's restored ritual cleanliness so that he may resume worship in the temple.

20:12–21 Hezekiah Entertains Babylonian Well-Wishers

Cf. Isaiah 39.

No doubt in hopes of gaining an ally in Judah, the king of Babylon sends his envoys to the ailing Hezekiah from his fledgling kingdom south of Assyria. That Merodach-baladan ruled in Babylon prior to Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem also places this account before events recorded at the end of chapter 19. Isaiah's anxiety over how much of Jerusalem's treasures Hezekiah has shown to his Babylonian guests suggests that the extent of their viewing will affect the degree to which Babylon will eventually conquer the southern kingdom. The guests have seen it all, and the disapproving Isaiah thus prophesies Judah's complete conquest by the rising Mesopotamian power. Hezekiah responds that at least his hospitality will bring peace with

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Babylon during his own reign. The prospect of his own sons' deportation and the end of the Davidic dynasty seems not to bother him.

Verse 20 refers to Hezekiah's (Siloam) tunnel, an underground conduit that supplied ancient Jerusalem with water (cf. 2 Chr. 32:30).¹⁴

King Ahaz

(2 Chronicles 28:1–27)

When Ahaz succeeds his father Jotham, he continues the royal line of David. However, his sixteen-year reign falls far short of the righteousness and justice of his great ancestor.

Under Ahaz, pagan worship becomes rife in Judah. Ahaz himself offers sacrifices to the ancient Baal-gods, even to the extent of burning his own sons. The people of Judah are now behaving in the same way as the Canaanites whom they originally drove from the land.

God's judgment falls on Ahaz in the form of heavy defeats, first by the Arameans (Syrians) and then by the Israelites from the north. The king of Israel, Pekah, takes a terrible toll of human life and seizes a huge number of prisoners.

As the Israelites return to Samaria with their captives, they are met by a prophet named Oded. Oded declares that they have gone far beyond God's will with their atrocities, and commands that the survivors be sent home. These captives are their brothers and sisters, and fellow members of God's people.

The prophet's words are echoed by the leaders of Ephraim. The soldiers give up their prisoners with great grace and generosity. They provide them with food and clothes, put balm on their wounds and transport them back to Jericho on donkeys. Here is the act of kindness to enemies which will one day inspire the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33–34).

Ahaz continues to suffer defeats, but they don't make him turn to the Lord. Instead, he appeals to the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser, for help. Tiglath-Pileser merely adds to Ahaz's humiliation by taking his treasures while giving nothing in return.

Ahaz tries worshipping the gods of Damascus, because they have helped Syria defeat him. Finally, he shows all-out defiance of the Lord by closing down the temple and setting up pagan altars on every street corner. When Ahaz dies, he is not buried with the kings of Israel, because he has not been God's king for God's people in any true sense.

Ahaz's reign has been a disaster for Judah. The Chronicler shows how God punishes disobedience with defeat and captivity—and in so doing gives a hint of what is to come. In the past it has been the northern kingdom which has abandoned its loyalty to God; now the southern kingdom is as bad.¹⁵

AHAZ

¹⁴ Fee, G. D., & Hubbard, R. L., Jr., eds. (2011). *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (pp. 255–257). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

¹⁵ Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., p. 190). Augsburg.

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1. King of Judah (735–715 BC) who was especially remembered for his apostasy. The name Ahaz (Mt 1:9) is a shortened form of Ahaziah or Jehoahaz. The three main accounts of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16; 2 Chr 28; Is 7) treat him as one of the most evil rulers of the southern kingdom of Judah. Consequently, his burial was relatively dishonorable (2 Chr 28:27). He was succeeded by his son Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1).

There is little agreement on the chronology of this section of the OT. The chronological system that seems to have the fewest problems would place Ahaz's accession in 735 BC. If he first came to the throne as co-regent with his father, Jotham, from 735 to 732 BC, his entire reign covered a span of approximately 20 years, ending in 715 BC.

Ahaz reigned over Judah during a critical time in the history of the ancient Near East. The Assyrians were pushing westward, threatening the Syro-Palestinian area. Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, adopted a policy of resistance against the Assyrians and invaded Judah in order to effect a solid coalition by deposing Ahaz.

Blatantly revealing a lack of trust in God, Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian king, for help. That appeal brought the wrath of the prophet Isaiah upon Ahaz. The ensuing encounter (Is 7) led to Isaiah's prediction of the birth of Immanuel as a sign of the dissolution of the countries of Israel and Syria. Those two kingdoms were ultimately destroyed by Tiglath-pileser in a campaign that lasted about two years (734–732 BC).

AHAZ'S LACK OF FAITH

Ahaz's lack of trust in God seems to have stemmed from his complete rejection of the Mosaic or traditional Jewish faith rather than from the dangerous political situation. The book of 2 Chronicles describes him as erecting images for the Baals (deities who represented the god Baal, a Canaanite fertility deity). Ahaz is also described as engaging in human sacrifice by offering his sons in pagan worship. The chronicler cites such practices as God's reason for the invasion by Israel and Syria (2 Chr 28:5).

Before the two kingdoms to the north were conquered by Assyria, their invasion of Judah caused great turmoil (2 Chr 28:8). The invaders not only carried off much spoil but also attempted to depopulate portions of Judah by taking 200,000 people captive to Samaria. That attempt was protested by a prophet in Samaria named Obed, who condemned the act of slavery and ordered the captives returned (v 9). He was joined by several leaders of Israel (v 12), who succeeded in having the captives returned to Jericho with provisions from the spoil that had been taken.

During that time, the kingdom of Judah may have been threatened from the south as well. The Edomites, who had long been under the domination of Judah, may have taken advantage of Judah's growing internal weakness to assert their independence. The Masoretic Text of the OT refers to an invasion of the seaport town of Elath on the Red Sea by Aram, the Hebrew name for Syria (2 Kgs 16:6). The name Aram is quite similar to the name Edom in Hebrew, however, so many scholars think that invasion was actually by Edomites.

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By virtue of the alliance he had made, Ahaz placed his country in a dangerous position of dependence on Assyria. The kingdom of Judah became essentially a vassal state under the tacit control of Tiglath-pileser. Ahaz went to Damascus, the capital of fallen Syria, to appear before Tiglath-pileser, possibly to assure his allegiance to the king to whom his nation had become tributary (2 Kgs 16:10).

While in Damascus, Ahaz saw an Assyrian altar, a model of which he sent back to Judah. Under the direction of Uriah the priest, a similar altar was built in Jerusalem, replacing the original bronze altar. Several other alterations were made in the temple by Ahaz, all indicating his turning away from Jewish religion.

The “dial of Ahaz” (2 Kgs 20:11; Is 38:8) later figured in a sign given to his son Hezekiah; the Hebrew word actually refers to a flight of stairs, no doubt built by Ahaz and used to tell time by the movement of a shadow across it.

See also King; Kings, Books of First and Second; Israel, History of; Sundial; Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament).

2. Micah’s son and Jehoadah’s father, a descendant of Saul, otherwise unknown (1 Chr 8:35–36).¹⁶

4. The Reign of Pekah in the Northern Kingdom (15:27–31)

COMMENTARY

27–31 The chronology of Pekah’s time is beset with serious problems. To Pekah is attributed a twenty-year reign, beginning with the end of the fifty-two-year reign of Azariah of Judah. Further, v. 30 indicates that his reign was terminated by Hoshea’s conspiracy in the twentieth year of Jotham’s rule. Verse 33, however, indicates that Jotham reigned but sixteen years. Moreover, v. 32 notes that Jotham himself began to rule in Pekah’s second year. Further synchronisms occur in v. 8, where the thirty-eighth year of Uzziah is marked as Zechariah’s accession year; in 16:1, where the seventeenth year of Pekah and the accession year of Ahaz are equated; and in 17:1, where the twelfth year of Ahaz is given as the first of Hoshea’s nine years.

Because, on the basis of both biblical and secular history, the fall of Samaria can be assigned confidently to 722 BC, and because Azariah’s fifty-second year can be shown to be 740 BC, it would appear that there is no room for a twenty-year reign by Pekah. Further, due allowance must be made for the reigns of Zechariah (six months), Shallum (one month), Menahem (ten years), Pekahiah (two years), and Hoshea (nine years) in the same interval of time.

The resolution of these data, while difficult, is not impossible. Probably because Pekah carried out a consistent anti-Assyrian policy, the chronicles of the southern kingdom gave full credit to Pekah’s regnal claims. It would seem that already at the death of Zechariah in 752 BC, Pekah had

¹⁶ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (pp. 23–24). Tyndale House Publishers.

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claimed the kingship and was recognized as king in Transjordanian Gilead; however, the swift action of the Israelite military forces through Menahem prevented Pekah from furthering his aspirations for the next decade. In 742, when the powerful Menahem died, the problem of Pekah again surfaced, with Pekahiah solving the problem by bringing Pekah into a position of prominence. After two years, Pekah was able to find an opportunity to dispose of Pekahiah and rule in his own right over all Israel until the troublesome international events associated with Tiglath-Pileser III's second western campaign (734–732) forced his demise at the hands of a pro-Assyrian faction led by Hoshea (732).

Allowing for the differing accession systems in Israel and Judah, the various dates and data can be harmonized as follows:

753/752 BC: Uzziah's thirty-eighth year (including coregency), the year of Shallum's usurpation and of Menahem's seizing the throne of Israel, the year of Pekah's "rule" in Gilead

742 BC: The death of Menahem, the accession of Pekahiah

740/739 BC: The assassination of Pekahiah and the accession of Pekah, the death of Uzziah in Judah and the accession of Jotham (already a coregent since 752/751) in the "second year" of Pekah's independent rule

736 BC: The year Jotham gave the reigns of government over to Ahaz (= Pekah's "seventeenth year")

732/731 BC: Hoshea seizes power (= Pekah's "twentieth year" and the twelfth year of Ahaz (who apparently had been appointed crown prince and heir designate by his father in the crisis during Tiglath-Pileser III's first western campaign in 744)

732/731 BC: Jotham's twentieth year (Jotham had apparently lived for four years beyond the relinquishment of his throne to Ahaz)

Pekah's stormy beginning was to characterize his short independent rule. In 734 BC Tiglath-Pileser III swept out of Assyria on a second western campaign that was to break the anti-Assyrian coalition headed by the Aramean king Rezin and Pekah of Israel. By 732 the alliance was thoroughly broken and Damascus had fallen. All the western Fertile Crescent, from the Taurus Mountains on the north to the border of Egypt on the south, lay in Assyrian hands. The Syrian states were divided into five provinces, Israel into three.

The battle against Israel centered in Galilee: Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor—all known Galilean cities. The text also adds significantly that Tiglath-Pileser III penetrated into Pekah's center of power, Gilead. Because the cities lay in a general north-south direction, the biblical account may well preserve the Assyrian king's line of march. The mention of Janoah may indicate that after the victory over Kadesh, Tiglath-Pileser divided his forces, half proceeding southward against Hazor and on to Gilead, and the other half moving southwest to Janoah and then on to Phoenicia.

With the loss of Galilee and Gilead and with the presence of Assyrian troops all along Israel's western frontier, it seemed evident that Pekah's anti-Assyrian policy had brought Israel to the point of extinction. Accordingly, while Tiglath-Pileser was concluding the siege of Damascus in 732 BC, Hoshea succeeded in defeating and displacing Pekah. That insurrection cost the

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controversial Gileadite his life. With the dispatching of Pekah and submission to Tiglath-Pileser, the ultimate demise of Israel was postponed for a decade. But its end was sure, for its corruption was total, having permeated all levels of society.

NOTES

27 For details relative to the intricate chronological problems of this period, see H. Stigers, "Pekah," *ZPEB*, 4:669–71; H. Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Ashur: A Chronological-Historical Study," *JCS* 12 (1958): 22–40, 77–100; Thiele, 77–140; Payne, *ZPEB*, 1:839–42; Hobbs, 204–5.

29 For information relative to Tiglath-Pileser III's second western campaign, see Hallo, 171–74; Aharoni and Avi-Yonah, 94–95. It is, of course, possible that the biblical record simply summarizes the account of Tiglath-Pileser III's campaign against Israel, with no conclusions drawn as to the order of his plan of attack. Bright, 217, suggests a coastal attack in 734 BC, the Syro-Israelite thrust in 733, and the taking of Damascus in 732. For the Assyrian text, see *ANET*, 283–84.

30 Tiglath-Pileser III claims that the Israelites "overthrew their king Pekah and I placed Hoshea as king over them" (*ANET*, 284). He goes on to record Israel's tribute to him. Evidently by submitting to Tiglath-Pileser, the pro-Assyrian party in Israel sought immediate recognition of its government and confirmation of Hoshea as king (see also Note on 17:1).

Hobbs, 203, points out that "the name 'Hoshea' contains an ironic twist. It is derived from the root *יָשַׁע* 'to save' and contrasts vividly with the activities of the promised *מוֹשִׁיעַ* 'savior' mentioned in 13:5."

5. The Reign of Jotham in the Southern Kingdom (15:32–38)

COMMENTARY

32–33 Already coregent for at least a decade, during Jotham's reign political and religious conditions remained largely as they were in Uzziah's time. The country's prosperity continued as well (2 Ch 27:1–4). Regrettably that prosperity was to lead, as it so often does, to spiritual neglect (cf. Isa 1–5)—a condition that was to make Judah ripe for open apostasy in Ahaz's day.

34–35 Jotham turned his attention to his country's internal needs. He rebuilt the Upper Gate at the northern entrance of the temple. From the Chronicler (2 Ch 27) we learn much more. Thus Jotham extended the wall of Ophel (2 Ch 27:3; cf. 26:9). He also turned his attention to urban planning, constructing cities in the highlands of Judah that, together with a system of towers and fortifications in the wooded areas, could serve both economic and military purposes.

At the onset of his reign the Ammonites, from whom Uzziah had exacted tribute (2 Ch 26:8), refused to acknowledge Jotham's overlordship, thus occasioning successful campaigns against the Ammonites so that they once again paid their tribute (2 Ch 27:5). The notice that this tribute continued into the second and third year may correlate with the probability that about the year

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736 BC Jotham had turned over the reigns of government to his coregent son, Ahaz, possibly due to some failure in health or to rising international tensions.

36–38 Toward the end of Jotham’s reign, political storm clouds began to appear on the international horizon. The Chronicler speaks of “all his wars” (2 Ch 27:7); and the narrator of Kings notes that Rezin, the Aramean king, and Pekah, Israel’s king, began their incursions into Judah. The issue was designed by the Lord to test the young Ahaz in spiritual things (cf. Isa 7:1–8:10), but there would be no repentance forthcoming.

NOTES

35 For archaeological light on Jotham’s building activities, see E. Oren, “Ziqlag—A Biblical City on the Edge of the Negev,” *BA* 45 (1982): 177–78.

6. The Reign of Ahaz in the Southern Kingdom (16:1–20)

OVERVIEW

Between the accession statement, with its unusually strong negative spiritual evaluation (vv. 1–4), and the brief closing notice (vv. 19–20), the narrator focuses on two areas of concern. (1) In the political realm he provides details of a Syro-Israelite incursion (vv. 5–6), to which Ahaz reacted by bribing the Assyrian king to act as his rescuer (vv. 7–9). (2) He also catalogs Ahaz’s temple innovations, which took the form of a new Damascene type of altar (vv. 10–11) and the religious services there (vv. 12–16). Further modifications included changes in the temple furnishings (vv. 17–18). All these developments in Ahaz’s reign are presented as commentary illustrating the fact that Ahaz “did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God” (v. 2).

COMMENTARY

1–2 The name “Ahaz” is a shortened form of “Jehoahaz” (cf. the similar name “Ahaziah”). Ahaz’s name appears in its fuller form in the tribute lists of Tiglath-Pileser III (Luckenbill, 1:287).

The notice that Ahaz was but twenty years old at his accession and that he ruled sixteen years has occasioned no little difficulty, particularly since, according to 2 Chronicles 29:1, his son Hezekiah was already twenty-five when he succeeded his father. Some manuscripts of the ancient Greek and Syriac versions at 2 Chronicles 28:1 record Ahaz’s age at his accession as twenty-five. While this reading would have the advantage of making Ahaz appreciably older at the time of his son’s birth, the MT’s lower figure is not impossible in the light of ancient Near Eastern marriage practices.

If a sixteen-year independent reign (732–716 BC) for Ahaz is not primarily in view here, the answer to this knotty problem is to be sought in the tangled chronology of the late eighth century BC. Ahaz may have lived four years after handing over the reigns of government to Hezekiah in 720 BC, an event that may be related to the Assyrian-Philistine wars of 720 and 716 BC. Accordingly, the Chronicler’s note as to Hezekiah’s accession is reckoned from the sole reign of Hezekiah in 716 BC. In that case, Ahaz would have been born in 756 and died in 716, while

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Hezekiah was born in 741–740, when Ahaz was fifteen or sixteen. Such a scenario may account for the reading of the Greek and Syriac texts for 2 Chronicles 28:1 that Ahaz was “twenty years old when he began to reign.”

3–4 Not content to continue the standing state policies of limited religious compromise, Ahaz transgressed the bounds of propriety by imitating the idolatrous heathen practices of Israel. Most nefarious of all was his participation in the debased Molech rites (see Notes). He went so far as to send his own son through the sacrificial fires (v. 3; cf. Lev 18:21; 20:1–5; Dt 12:31; 2 Ki 21:6). According to the scriptural data, these rites took place at the confluence of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys in a sacred enclosure known as Topheth (cf. 23:10; Isa 30:33; Jer 7:31).

The exact nature of the sacrifices and the divinities involved has been the subject of much discussion. The same type of sacred place with the same name has been found in the transplanted Phoenician colony of Carthage. That the sacrificial offering was called by a name made up of the same Semitic consonants (*mlk*) contained in the name “Molech” would seem to argue that the god involved was the old Canaanite deity Baal, with human sacrifice made to him called *mlk* (cf. Jer 19:5; 32:35). The rites were heinous and a total defilement of the God-ordained sacrificial service. The later spiritual reformation of Josiah was to bring an end to these sinister proceedings, a judgment Jeremiah utilized in picturing God’s coming judgment on his sinful people (Jer 2:23; 7:30–33; 19:5–6).

The valley’s reputation for extreme wickedness gave rise to the employment of its name as a term for the eschatological place of punishment of the wicked (*1 En.* 27:1ff.; 54:1ff.; 56:3–4; 90:26), a designation confirmed by Christ himself (Mt 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; 25:41).

5–6 The full details of the complex international situation must be gleaned not only from 2 Kings 16 but also from 15:37; 2 Chronicles 28; and Isaiah 7:1–16. These sources show that the Syro-Israelite alliance had been operative against Judah already in Jotham’s day (2 Ki 15:37). The allied attack against Judah was two-pronged. Rezin came along the eastern portion of Judah, drove down to the key seaport of Elath, and took it (v. 6; 2 Ch 28:5). Pekah launched an effective general campaign against northern Judah that resulted in the death of thousands of its citizens and the capture of hundreds of others (though the captives were later granted their freedom and returned to Jericho through the intercession of the prophet Obed; cf. 2 Ch 28:6–15).

Moreover, the newly liberated Edom took the opportunity to strike back and carried away some Judahites to captivity (2 Ch 28:17). As well, the Philistines found the time ripe to make renewed incursions into the western Shephelah and take captive certain cities in southern Judah.

An attack aimed at taking Jerusalem and installing a new king on the throne is described in Isaiah 7:2–6. Surrounded by hostile enemies on all sides, Ahaz received God’s prophet Isaiah. He assured Ahaz that the enemy would fail; God himself would see to that. Ahaz could request any confirmatory sign that he wished, and it would be granted (Isa 7:7–11). Ahaz, with a flare of piety, refused Isaiah’s offer (Isa 7:12); he preferred to rely on his own resourcefulness. God nevertheless gave Ahaz a sign, the prophecy that Matthew associates with the virgin birth of the Messiah (Isa 7:13–16; cf. Mt 1:22–23).

God was superintending the whole complex undertaking. He would deal with apostate Israel (cf. 2 Ki 17:5–18; 18:11–12), thwart the plans of Rezin and Pekah by bringing defeat to them (Isa 7:5–16), and chastise spiritually bankrupt Ahaz (2 Ch 28:5, 19).

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7–9 Ahaz’s request to Tiglath-Pileser III was couched in diplomatic language that displayed his respect and submission to him. The narrator thus shows that rather than trusting in the Lord (cf. Isa 7:10–16), Ahaz put forward a “persuasive effort to draw the Assyrian king into Ahaz’s war, to protect him as a father would a son” (Cohn, 113). Tiglath-Pileser complied all too readily, eventually thoroughly subduing the Arameans, taking Damascus and deporting its inhabitants, and executing Rezin (v. 9). Israel was spared only through Hoshea’s coup d’état and swift submission to Assyria—a takeover that cost Pekah his life (15:29–30).

10–11 According to the records of Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrian king called for a meeting of his new vassals in Damascus. Ahaz was impressed with the type of altar in use there and sent back instructions to Uriah the priest for its construction. The text gives no hint that Uriah objected to Ahaz’s command; rather, the altar’s construction was completed and ready for use by the time the king arrived back in Jerusalem.

12–13 When Ahaz returned he had his daily offerings presented on this new altar, thereby dedicating the altar’s use to the Lord. The offerings that were made were all of the sweet-savor type, expressing the maintenance of the believer’s communion with God. The burnt and meal offerings symbolized dedication and service, the fellowship (peace) offering symbolized fellowship, and the drink offering emphasized the joy of life poured out to God in Spirit-led obedience (v. 13). What a parody of piety! He who knew nothing of genuine godliness would feign his devotion to God—and that via an alien altar!

14–16 The following verses catalog Ahaz’s further religious innovations, all of which speak of his deepening apostasy. The prescribed brazen altar was transferred from facing the sanctuary entrance to the northern side. Accordingly, all future offerings would be made on the recently dedicated Damascene altar. Ahaz would henceforth use the brazen altar in connection with his divination practices, thus indicating Ahaz’s involvement in Assyrian pagan rites.

17 Ahaz went even further. He appropriated the high stands holding the altar for their brass. Likewise he lowered the molten Sea by taking away the bronze bulls that supported it and placed it on a low stone pedestal. The narrator assigns no reason for these actions. Perhaps Ahaz needed the brass for future payment of tribute, or it was simply a matter of streamlining the temple furnishings.

18 Not content with these “reforms” in the matter of ceremonial furnishings, Ahaz went still further. The covered structure that opened to the inner court, together with the king’s private entrance to that place, were removed “in deference to the king of Assyria.” The exact impact of these words is difficult to ascertain. Whether Tiglath-Pileser wanted less prestige to be held by his new vassal or felt that such a special royal place might indicate too close a tie to an established religion that might later foster a spirit of independence against Assyria is uncertain. At any rate, the wholesale changes were either made at the Assyrian king’s suggestion or were done to gain his pleasure.

19–20 Ahaz went yet further in his apostasy. According to the Chronicler (2 Ch 28:24–25; cf. 29:7), he went so far as to desecrate the temple furniture and close the temple itself so that the services within the Holy Place were discontinued. “Worship services” would henceforth be held only in connection with the new altar or at one of the several altars erected throughout Jerusalem or at the high places dedicated to the various gods established throughout Judah by royal edict

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(28:24–25). All his innovations speak volumes as to Ahaz’s depraved spiritual condition. It is small wonder, then, that the Chronicler reports that Ahaz provoked the Lord’s anger (28:25). When Ahaz died, he was not accorded proper burial in the royal tombs. He who was “unlike David” in his relation to the Lord (2 Ki 16:2; 2 Ch 28:1) was not laid to rest beside him.

NOTES

3 The Molech problem is a complex one. That literal human sacrifice was involved (contra N. H. Snaith, “The Cult of Molech,” *VT* 16 [1966]: 123–24) is abundantly shown in the Canaanite literary texts and is elsewhere implied or stated in the OT.

In some cases “Molech” appears to refer to a personal god (e.g., possibly but not certainly Lev 20:1–5), though opinions vary as to the deity’s identity. Some scholars suggest Milcolm, the national god of Ammon (1 Ki 11:7), whose name itself is a deliberate scribal misvocalization of the name based on the Semitic word *mlk*. (For discussion of the nature and function of Milcolm, see W. H. Shea, “Milkom as the Architect of Rabbath-Ammon’s Natural Defences in the Ammon Citadel Inscription,” *PEQ* 111 [1978]: 17–25.) But 2 Kings 23:10, 13 appears to differentiate between the worship of Milcolm and Molech. (Some scholars suggest that “Molech” likewise is a scribal corruption, with the vowels for the consonants *mlk* being supplied from the Hebrew *bōšet*, “shame.”) Others interpreters consider Molech to be Melek Athtar, a well-known astral deity in the ancient Near East of whom several deities (e.g., Milcolm and Chemosh) are local expressions (see J. Gray, “Molech, Moloch,” *IDB* 3:422–23; cf. Am 5:26–27; Ac 7:43).

The name Molech more than likely originates in the ancient Semitic term *mālik*, being the absolute state of a noun meaning “king.” Thus the word was at first an epithet of a deity. Significantly the first reference to God as “king” comes from the mouth of the pagan diviner Balaam (Nu 23:21), as R. B. Allen (“The Theology of the Balaam Oracles,” in *Tradition and Testament*, ed. John and Paul Feinberg [Chicago: Moody Press, 1981], 103, 118) aptly points out. J. J. M. Roberts (*The Earliest Semitic Pantheon* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972], 42–43, 105–6) decides that Dagan was the original deity with whom the term was combined. In time the term split off and became used independently. As this independent unit, the name was utilized throughout the Semitic world. (See further J. Ebach, “ADRMLK, Moloch und BA’ALADR: Eine Notiz zum Problem der Moloch-Verehrung im alten Israel,” *UF* 11 [1979]: 211–26.)

Though the evidence renders certain that the term *mālik* enjoyed widespread use as a divine name, however, the issue is whether an independent deity by that name is intended in the OT and more specifically in eighth/seventh-century Judah. Although George C. Heider (*The Cult of Molek* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985]) argues forcibly for a chthonic deity whose worship was especially observed in Jerusalem, the linguistic and archaeological data as harmonized with the biblical data (cf. 23:10 with Jer 7:31; 19:5–6; 32:35) would appear to favor the idea that *mlk* refers to a type of sacrifice made to Baal in a sacred enclosure known as a “tophet.” (Notice, however, that in Syrian “tophet” means “fire pit.”) For further details see B. H. Warmington, *Carthage* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), 158–60; L. E. Stager and S. R. Wolff, “Child Sacrifice at Carthage,” *BAR* 10 (1984): 30–47.

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10 For Tiglath-Pileser III's inscription listing Ahaz, see *ANET*, 282. The prototype of Ahaz's new altar has been often disputed, with some deciding for an Assyrian-style altar (e.g., Cohn, Gray, Gressman, Kittel, Montgomery, T. H. Robinson) and others (e.g., de Vaux) favoring an Aramean one. The latter position appears to be in harmony with the Chronicler's report that Ahaz was influenced by the "gods of the kings of Aram" (2 Ch 28:23).

דְּמוּת (*dēmût*, "likeness") and תַּבְנִיט (*tabnît*, "shape, pattern") are well rendered by the NIV's "sketch" and "detailed plans." The former word gives the altar's outward appearance and may indicate an artist's sketch; the latter suggests an architect's drawing.

12–13 Whether Ahaz personally offered sacrifices on the new altar or simply supervised Uriah's actions is uncertain (cf. Solomon, 1 Ki 8:62–64; Jeroboam, 12:33–13:1; Jehu, 2 Ki 10:25).

15 The Hebrew verb translated "for seeking guidance" (NIV) bears many nuances. Whether Ahaz intended to use the altar as a place for seeking the Lord's guidance through prayer (cf. Ps 27:4) or for some aspect of syncretistic divination is uncertain.

17 For the Solomonic basins and movable stands and the molten Sea, see 1 Kings 7:23, 27. They are mentioned among the several items that were carried away in the later Babylonian despoiling of Jerusalem (25:13–14; Jer 27:19–20; 52:17–23).

The Hebrew translated "stone base" (NIV; cf. LXX) refers not to the stone pavement of the court as the Vulgate suggests, but, as Keil, 407, decides, to a pedestal made of stones.¹⁷

Old Testament Prophets, part one

The Hebrew word, "prophet" (*nabi*) comes from the verb "to call" (*nabu*). It indicates that the prophet was uniquely called to be intimate with the Lord and to speak for Him. A related word is "seer," one who "sees" the plans and judgments of the Lord.

There had been prophets in Israel ever since the Lord gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai. Moses was the first prophet of the Law, and just before his death he promised that Israel would have a series of prophets after him (see Deuteronomy 18:14–22). The prophets' main job "was to *speak* for God to their own contemporaries." They were His messengers, His ambassadors.

A prophet's task was not so much to predict the future as to contradict the present. "Israel, you think you are doing fine, but in fact you are in sin and ripe for judgment." Or, "You think things are bleak, but fear not: God is at work." The prophet told forth the Lord's assessment of the current situation and foretold how the Lord planned to respond.

¹⁷ Patterson, R. D., & Austel, H. J. (2009). [1, 2 Kings](#). In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Kings (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 3, pp. 886–894). Zondervan.

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The prophets were not radical social and religious thinkers transforming Israel's faith. Rather, from Moses through John the Baptist, they measured justice and religion against the standard of the covenant agreement.

Lesson Five

ISAIAH 7:1–8:22

Facing Danger

Chapters 7 through 12 are the second section of Isaiah's book. His commission in chapter 6 took place in 740 BC, and chapter 7 picks up again in about 735 BC.

Ahaz, Uzziah's grandson, is now king. Isaiah is known to be a prophet; he freely voices his views to Ahaz despite hostility from the rest of the royal counselors. The political situation is precarious: King Rezin of Aram (Syria) and King Pekah of Israel (Ephraim) have allied against Assyria. They are threatening to invade Judah unless Ahaz joins them. Ahaz's counselors are urging him to seek Assyria's help against Rezin and Pekah, but Isaiah foresees disaster on that road. Chapters 7–12 recount Isaiah's attempt to dissuade Ahaz and also include the Lord's encouragement in this situation.

Have you ever been in an impossible situation, where you wish you could just hide and make it go away? Ahaz and Isaiah knew that one wrong move could plunge the nation into bloody war, but Isaiah saw the Lord's hand on the present and the future.

Read 7:1–8:22. The subtitles in this lesson and the outline may help you to orient yourself.

Immanuel (7:1–25)

Head (7:8–9). The capitals of Aram and Ephraim are only Damascus and Samaria. The rulers of those cities are only Rezin and Pekah. Those men are trivial compared to Judah's Head, the Lord.

1. Reread 7:1–11. How does God want Ahaz to respond to the threat of invasion?

7:4, 9

7:11

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For Thought and Discussion: Isaiah's name means "The LORD is salvation." Why did Ahaz need to be reminded of this?

For Thought and Discussion: In Luke 11:14–16, 29–32, Jesus is angry at people who ask for a sign to prove He is from God, immediately after He has just healed a mute man. Why was it wrong for those people to ask Jesus for a sign, and wrong for Ahaz not to ask?

Isaiah said (7:13). The Hebrew says "*he said*" (KJV, NASB), but the context suggests that Isaiah is giving God's retort to Ahaz.

2. In 7:10–13, Ahaz's disobedience makes God angry. What choices and attitudes might have moved Ahaz to refuse God's invitation?

Virgin (7:14). The Hebrew word *almah* means "maiden," "unmarried woman." By implication in Hebrew culture, such a woman is a virgin.

The Lord allowed Ahaz to name any sign he wanted, but when he refused, the Lord gave a sign of His choosing (see 7:13–16). Commentators agree that the sign applies in its fullest sense to Christ. Some feel that it applies to Christ alone and was not really a sign for Ahaz. Others feel it had a first fulfillment in Isaiah's day and a second at Christ's birth. The immediate fulfillment may have been that a virgin in the palace was soon to be married and have a son. When the boy reached the age of accountability, about twelve or thirteen years old, he was eating the diet of a herdsman because an invasion had made agriculture impossible (see 7:15). But even before then, Aram and Israel were destroyed (see 7:16).

In fact, the prophecies in 7:8, 15–17 were definitely fulfilled in this sense. Within sixtyfive years, or by 670 BC (see 7:8), Israel had been depopulated of the chosen people and repopulated with pagans from other countries. Within thirteen years, or by 721 BC (see 7:15–17), Israel was devastated and agriculture in Judah was disrupted by the Assyrian invasion.

Optional Application:

- a. Can you identify with Ahaz's fears and attitudes? If so, how?
- b. In what current circumstances do you need to "stand firm in your faith" (7:9)?

For Thought and Discussion: Read 7:13–25. What do you learn about God's character and methods from the way He dealt with Ahaz?

For Further Study: Study more about standing firm (see Isaiah 7:9) in Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 6:10–18, and 1 Peter 5:8–9. How is it possible for Christians to stand firm?

Optional Application: Consider meditating on 7:9b or 7:14.

Optional Application: How is Immanuel's presence with you an encouragement in your situation?

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3. Are God's words to Ahaz (see 7:4, 9, 11, 13) relevant to you in any ways? If so, how?
4. In Matthew 1:18–25 the Lord revealed that the sign He gave to Ahaz's generation had a second fulfillment—the virgin birth of Jesus. “Immanuel” means “God with us.” In the time of Ahaz, God was with His people to protect them from enemies (see 7:7–8; 8:9–10). How is Jesus a still greater fulfillment of the signname, “God with us”?

Study Skill—Poetic Imagery

Isaiah uses some striking images to describe the Assyrian invasion. He says that the soldiers will be like the painful flies that infest the Nile in Egypt, and like bees from Assyria (see 7:18–19). It was a great insult to forcibly shave a man, and Isaiah says that what the Assyrian king will do will be just as humiliating (see 7:20). In 8:6–8, Isaiah uses flowing water as an image to make his point. Watch for other figurative, pictorial language in Isaiah's prophecies—images of light and darkness, sun and storm, trees, axes, and clothing.

For Thought and Discussion:

- a. What is the Lord's point in 8:6–8? (Who do the waters of Jerusalem and the floodwaters of Assyria signify?)
- b. Judah had reason to fear Assyria, but why did Assyria have reason to fear (see 8:9–10)?

God uses Assyria (8:1–10)

Witnesses (8:2). Isaiah 8:1–2 describes a legal transaction. Uriah and Zechariah may be witnessing Isaiah's marriage to “the prophetess” (8:3), or witnessing that Isaiah prophesied the name of his son before Assyria's invasion. Isaiah gave his first son a symbolic name—**Shear-Jashub** means “a remnant will return” (7:3; 10:21–22); Immanuel's name means “God is with us”; and now Isaiah gives his second son a name meaning “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil” (see 8:3). The name prophesies that Assyria will plunder Israel and Judah.

In 8:4, the Lord promises that before the new baby is two or three years old, Assyria will plunder Aram and Israel. The baby was probably born in 733/732 BC, and by 731/730 the Assyrian army had indeed begun to despoil Israel and Aram.

Waters of Shiloah (8:6). Probably part of Jerusalem's water supply.

The Euphrates (8:7). The Euphrates River in Assyria. The Lord is punning in 8:6–8. Because the people have rejected the gentle waters of Jerusalem, they will get the floodwaters of Assyria.

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Fear God (8:11–22)

Conspiracy (8:12). God doesn't specify which of the many intrigues in Jerusalem He means. There were pro-Assyrian, pro-Egyptian, anti-Ahaz, and anti-Isaiah factions. Aram and Ephraim were allied, and Isaiah may have been accused of being a conspirator. God's counsel applies to all of these.

For Thought and Discussion:

- a. Why must the Lord be our fear before He can be our sanctuary (see 8:13–14)?
- b. How can we both fear and love God?

Optional Application: Do you fear the Lord in a good sense (see 8:13)? If so, how do you show it? If not how can you develop a healthy fear of God?

For Thought and Discussion: What kind of fear of God is not good to have?

5. How does God want Isaiah to respond to intrigues, the danger of invasion, and accusations from his countrymen (see 8:11–13)?
6. a. What does it mean to “fear” and “dread” the Lord in a good sense (8:13)?

b. Why is this important for us to do? (*Optional:* See Proverbs 1:7; Luke 12:4–12.)
7. a. The Lord is often compared to a rock in the Old Testament. How is He like a rock for those who fear *Him* (see Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Psalm 62:1–2)?

b. How is He like a rock for those who fear *people and circumstances* (see 8:14)?

Optional Application: How is the Lord like a rock in your life?

For Further Study:

- a. In a concordance, find other references to the Lord as a Rock, such as Isaiah 26:4.
- b. Look at how Isaiah 8:14 is applied to Christ in Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6–8.

Optional Application:

- a. How do people today deal with the uncertainties of the future?
- b. How do you deal with uncertainties? Does 8:16–20 have any lessons you can take to heart? If so, ask the Lord to instill them in you.

For Thought and Discussion: What do light and darkness symbolize in 8:19–22?

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Testimony ... instruction (8:16, 20). Probably Isaiah's teaching about the Lord and his prophecies about the Assyrian invasion. He seals it like a legal document to be held by his disciples as future proof that the Lord planned and brought about the events. God was going to prove Isaiah a true prophet, and the prophecy was going to prove God sovereign over history. *Instruction* can also refer to the books of Moses, or to "teaching, instruction," revelation in general.

I ... children (8:18). In 8:17–20, Isaiah was probably speaking of himself as "I" and his sons or disciples as his "children." However, he was also speaking prophetically of what Christ would say (see Hebrews 2:13).

8. a. How were people in Jerusalem dealing with uncertainties about the future (see 8:19)?
b. How was Isaiah determined to deal with uncertainty (see 8:16–17, 20)?
9. When invasion brings disaster, the prophet and his disciples are signs from the Lord to the faithless nation (see 8:18). How can Christians be signs from the Lord?
10. Does 7:1–8:22 offer any guidance for Christians facing fearful circumstances? If so, summarize the guidance it offers.

For Thought and Discussion: How does 8:18 apply to Christ and the church (see Hebrews 2:11–15)? How does it apply to you?

For Thought and Discussion: What is the Lord's overall point in 8:1–22?

Optional Application: Meditate on 7:9 or 8:12–14 (or some other verses), and make a list of the implications the verses have for your life.

Your response

11. Describe one insight from 7:1–8:22 that you would like to apply to your life.
12. What steps could you take to begin living more in light of this insight?
13. List any questions you have about 7:1–8:22.

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Optional Application: Are you currently faced with any threats, accusations, factions, or conspiracies? How does 8:11–13, 19–20 encourage you to respond? Try planning some specific course of action that includes prayer.

For Thought and Discussion: What themes does 7:1–8:22 have in common with 1:1–6:13? Consider especially 1:24; 2:6–9; 5:21; 6:9–13.

For Further Study: Add 7:1–8:22 to your outline now, or wait to do all of 7:1–12:6 at once.

For the group

Warm-up. Ask group members to think of some situation when they have been faced with a threat to home, job, or other security. How did they feel? How did they deal with the danger? Let one or two people respond briefly.

Read aloud.

Summarize. Ask someone to tell in a few sentences what happens in chapters 7–8 and what the point or message of the chapters is.

Immanuel. Looking for the reason why Ahaz disobeys God (question 2) is not mere speculation. God judges the motives behind outward acts, and while we may never be in Ahaz' situation, we may be able to identify with his wrong attitudes. Suggesting a biblical character's possible motives is proper as long as we are careful not to think that our theories are as authoritative as the passage's plain statements.

Avoid an argument over whether 7:14 had a first fulfillment in Isaiah's time. We include that interpretation as a plausible and widely held one, but still the sign's crucial meaning for us concerns Jesus' identity. Evangelical scholars on both sides of the double fulfillment debate agree that 7:14 points to Mary as a *virgin* when Jesus was born, the debate is whether an earlier virgin married, bore a child in the normal manner, and named him Immanuel.

You might want to summarize 7:1–25 and discuss applications before going on to chapter 8.

Fear God. One of the difficulties of studying prophecies is that they often assume that the hearers know all about the situation being addressed; it is like listening to one side of a stranger's telephone conversation. We don't know what "conspiracy" God meant in 8:12, but Isaiah did. Fortunately, we can guess well enough to see applications for ourselves.

Paint a brief picture of the circumstances Isaiah was facing: Aram and Israel were allied and threatening to invade unless Judah joined in their treaty; Jerusalem was full of political factions, most of whom would gladly have disposed of Isaiah; a treaty with Assyria promised disaster for Judah. The word "conspiracy" in 8:12 could equally mean "alliance," "treaty," or "faction." Try to identify with the emotions Isaiah may have felt in this situation.

Then look at the response God urges (questions 5–10). As chapter 7 focused on Ahaz' response to events, so chapter 8 focuses on Isaiah's. In both chapters, the name "the LORD is salvation" expresses the theme.

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A key concept in chapter 8 is “the fear of the LORD.” For many people, this conjures up the idea of cringing before a tyrant. If “God is love” and “perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:8, 18), then it seems to some people that we should trust God, not fear Him. Help the group see the necessity of a healthy fear of the Sovereign Lord. How can you cultivate this attitude in your group?

Summarize. As usual, summarize both what you’ve learned and how it applies to you. If you have time, it would be helpful to trace common themes from chapters 1–6 to chapters 7–8, because Isaiah’s message is a unity.

Wrap-up. Remind the group that 9:1–12:6 continues the section begun in 7:1. You could plan to discuss this week’s applications at the beginning of your next meeting.

Worship. Thank God for the sign and gift of the Child. Thank Him for being the Rock. Tell Him your current fears, and ask Him to teach you how to fear Him.

(continued from page 58)

Old Testament Prophets, part two

After the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord made a treaty, or *covenant*, with Israel like a treaty between an overlord and a subject people. The people agreed to serve and obey the Lord as God, and to accept the consequences of obedience and disobedience. The agreed consequences of obedience were blessings (see Deuteronomy 4:32–40; 28:1–14), and the agreed consequences of disobedience were punishments (see Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

Because the Lord was patiently training His people as a father trains his children (see Hebrews 12:5–11), He did not simply let the consequences fall on each generation. Instead, He sent prophets in each generation to tell how well He thought the people were living up to the covenant and how He planned to respond. When the nation was disobedient, the Lord sent prophets like Isaiah to warn the people that the agreed results were going to occur unless they repented.

In this way, the people could never accuse the Lord of injustice. They had agreed to the standards of conduct and to the consequences, and the Lord never acted without ample forewarning and second chances.

(continued on page 90)

ISAIAH 9:1–10:34

The Son of David

Chapter 8 ended in the blackness of war, anarchy, and spiritual confusion that consumed Israel and Judah in the eighth century BC. But the Lord gave Isaiah visions of what lay beyond the darkness—the end of Assyria, the survival of a faithful remnant, and a King who would restore peace, justice, and the knowledge of God. As you read 9:1–10:34, keep 7:1–8:22 and the outline in mind.

A child is born (9:1–7)

The Assyrian army overran *Zebulun* and *Naphtali* (tribal territories in northern Israel) within months of Isaiah’s meeting with Ahaz (see 7:1–9). But just as these were the first lands of Israel to fall, so they would be the first to see the “great light.” Zebulun and Naphtali were part of the region called *Galilee*, which became predominantly Gentile after Assyria deported the Israelites and replaced them with pagans. “The Way of the sea, beyond the Jordan” (9:1) was the ancient trade route through Galilee from Damascus to Egypt. (See the map on page 70.)

1. Read Isaiah 9:1–7 and Matthew 4:12–17. According to Matthew, how did Jesus begin to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy?

Map of Isaiah 9:1

Midian’s defeat (9:4). Gideon defeated invaders from Midian and broke their control over Israel (see Judges 7:22–25).

Yoke ... bar (9:4). Slavery to Assyria—or to anyone or anything—is like wearing the yoke of an ox (see Isaiah 10:26–27).

Son (9:6). The Jews understood this to mean a descendant of the royal line of David. Luke 1:26–35 and 3:23–38 tell us more about this Son.

For Thought and Discussion:

- a. Why will warriors’ clothes be burned when the Messiah reigns (see 9:5, 7)?
- b. What else do you learn about the kingdom of God from 9:3–7?

For Further Study: Jesus will consummate Isaiah 9:1–7 when He returns to reign in glory. What do Luke 21:25–28 and Revelation 19:11–20:6 tell you about that final fulfillment?

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2. When Jesus came, the Jews expected the Messiah (the promised King) to liberate their nation from the Romans and re-establish the earthly kingdom of Israel. What parts of 9:3–7 would have led the Jews to expect a Savior like this?
3. Jesus did not meet the Jews' expectations. However, how did He begin to ...
enlarge the nation (see Isaiah 9:3; Ephesians 2:11–22)?

shatter the yoke that burdens His people and break the rod of the oppressor (see Isaiah 9:4; Luke 7:18–23; 8:43–48; Romans 6:6–7; Hebrews 2:14–15)?

reign on David's throne with justice forever (see Isaiah 9:7; Luke 11:20; 18:35–43; Colossians 1:13–14, 18; 2:9–10)?

For Thought and Discussion: An ordinary king may be a counselor, a mighty man, a father to his people, and a prince (see 9:6). What makes this son unique?

Optional Application: How is Jesus' identity and mission as Wonderful Counselor, and so on relevant to your life?

Counselor (9:6). This Hebrew word can mean an advisor, but it can also mean one who plans, purposes, and carries out a plan of action with wisdom.³

Peace (9:6–7). The Hebrew word *shalom* means wholeness and well-being in all aspects of life—health, harmony between people, prosperity, contentment, and so on. It is not just the absence of war.

Justice and righteousness (9:7). See page 83.

4. Choose one of the things Isaiah says about the Son in 9:6–7, and explain why it seems especially important to you.

The Lord against Israel (9:8–10:4)

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4

After a glimpse of the golden future in 9:1–7, we are now back between 732 and 722 BC. Assyria subdued Aram in 732 and turned Aram against Israel (see 9:12). The Philistines, too, are taking advantage of Israel's weakness after the Assyrian onslaught that has left only Samaria unravaged.

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Surely the brush with destruction has taught Israel's leaders in Samaria a lesson. Surely the sudden loss of their mighty kingdom has moved them to humble themselves before the Lord. No, the Lord sees the attitudes in the Samaritans' hearts. In 9:8–10:4, Isaiah speaks God's indictment and proclaims His sentence. The fulfillment will come in 722 when Sargon smashes Samaria and deports its leaders.

For Thought and Discussion: Why does God speak in 9:8–10:34 against Israel and Assyria? How do these judgments fit into the message of chapters 7–12?

For Further Study:

- a. How were Israel's leaders thinking and planning in response to the country's almost total destruction (see 9:9–11)?
- b. Why were the leaders' attitudes so offensive to God (see 9:9–11, 13)?

For Further Study:

- a. Neither Assyrian cruelty nor persistent raids by Aram and Philistia brought Israel to repentance (see 9:9–13). Whom did the Lord blame for the people's failure to repent (see 9:13–17)?
- b. What was the Lord going to do about this situation (see 9:13–17)?

Bricks ... stone (9:10). Bricks made of sun-dried clay crumbled easily, but the stone with which rich people built was expected to last forever.

Fig trees ... cedars (9:10). The sycamore fig was a scruffy tree with small value, but cedar took years to grow and was prized for its wood. It was common for armies to demolish houses and even cut down all the trees in a country to make the people destitute.

The conflagration of 9:18–21 came to pass. Invasions made farming impossible, so famine drove the deprived Israelites to eat extreme things. Leadership in Samaria degenerated into factional intrigue and assassination. Israel's two dominant tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, fought over food and power. Eventually, near anarchy reigned until Assyria stopped it by depopulating the country.

Unjust laws ... oppressive decrees (10:1). "Evil statutes" and "unjust decisions" in NASB. These are rulings by judges, lawyers, and government officials in legal cases.

5. What do you learn about the Lord from 9:8–10:4?

what He expects of His people

His character

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For Further Study: Think about the two causes of the “fire” that consumed Israel (9:18–19). What do these tell you about human choice and God’s sovereignty in history’s events of judgment?

For Thought and Discussion:

- a. Name the four sins the Lord judges in 9:9–10, 13–21, and 10:1–2.
- b. Do these verses contain any warnings for nations or individuals today? If so, what are they?

For Thought and Discussion: Why was it absurd for people to manipulate the law to get rich (see 10:1–4)? What was scheming going to get them?

Optional Application: Does 9:8–10:4 convict you in any areas (consider 9:10, 13; 10:1)? If so, how?

The Lord against Assyria (10:5–34)

The Lord has been using Assyria to punish Israel and Judah, but now He begins to show what lies beyond this use: judgment for Assyria (see 10:5–19); the deliverance of a faithful remnant (see 10:20–23); the aggressor halted at the very edge of Jerusalem (see 10:24–34).

Kalno ... Carchemish ... Hamath ... Arpad ... Samaria ... Damascus (10:9). Cities in Aram and Israel that submitted to Assyria between 732 and 717 BC.

Wasting disease (10:16). Verses 16–19 were partly fulfilled in 701 BC. King Sennacherib of Assyria sent his army to destroy Jerusalem, but a disease—probably a burning fever—decimated the army as it approached Jerusalem (see Isaiah 37:36). Then, political trouble forced Sennacherib to withdraw his army from Judah. It never returned.

Forests (10:18–19). Tall trees are a favorite metaphor for loftiness in Isaiah (see 2:13; 10:33–34). Assyria finally crumpled before Babylon between 612 and 605 BC.

Remnant (10:20–22). This theme was so important to Isaiah that he named his eldest son ***Shear-Jashub; a remnant shall return*** (7:3; 10:21). Isaiah’s mission was to prophesy judgment until Judah was desolate, yet to affirm that a “holy seed” would survive (6:13). He had already beheld Judah ravaged by war and kept from oblivion only by God’s mercy (see 1:9). And there was worse to come.

The promise of a remnant was based on the covenant. The Lord had made an everlasting treaty with Abraham to bless his descendants in the land of Canaan (see Genesis 12:2–3; 17:1–10; Deuteronomy 7:7–10; Psalm 105:8–11). The Lord swore to be Israel’s God, and Israel would be His treasured chosen people. As a faithful and just God, He would never break His covenant. Yet, as a righteous and holy God, He could not be intimate with corrupt people (see Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 24:3–4; Habakkuk 1:13). Therefore, only faithful members of the covenant nation were truly God’s people. The mass of Israel repeatedly rebelled and was punished,

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but God consistently spared a remnant to inherit the covenant—seventy in Joseph’s day (see Genesis 45:7), seven thousand in Elijah’s (see 1 Kings 19:13–18).

God kept the promise in Isaiah 10:20–23. Many people in Judah and Jerusalem died when Sennacherib invaded in 701 BC, but the city and a remnant of the people were saved (see Isaiah 37:30–32). In 538, 458, and 432 BC, about fifty thousand Jews returned to Judah from exile in Babylon; Ezra 9:8 and Nehemiah 1:2 call these a remnant. The apostle Paul observed God saving a remnant of the Jews in his own day. Most Jews were rejecting the proclamation that Jesus was the Christ, but a few were believing (see Romans 9–11). Paul knew that the Lord would continue to call a remnant of Israel into the family of Christ because of His promise to Abraham (see Romans 11:1–6, 28–29).

For Thought and Discussion:

- a. Did Assyria’s king know that he was the Lord’s tool for disciplining His chosen people? What was the king’s view of his conquests and himself (see 10:5–14)?
- b. How does the king resemble modern rulers? Do you see any of his attitudes in yourself?
- c. What do you learn about the Lord from His use of Assyria and from His words in 10:12, 15–19?
- d. How should Christians think and act in light of 10:12, 15–19?

For Further Study: Study Paul’s whole reasoning about the remnant saved by grace in Romans 9–11.

For Further Study: Do a word study on *remnant*. For instance, study these passages in context: 2 Chronicles 30:6; Isaiah 11:11–16; 14:22; 16:14; 17:3; 37:4; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:7; 40:11; 42:1–22; Micah 2:12; 5:7–9.

6. What do you learn about God from the fact that ...

He decimates Israel when the nation sins?

He never utterly abandons Israel, but always saves a remnant?

For Thought and Discussion: The Jews of Isaiah’s day believed that God would protect them just because they were descendants of Abraham and David (compare Luke 3:7–8). How does Isaiah 10:20–23 disprove that belief?

For Further Study: Does the remnant principle apply to the church? See Matthew 13:24–30.

Optional Application: Pray about the remnant. Ask God to enable you to be one of those who truly rely on the Holy One. Ask Him to be merciful to a remnant of Israel in

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your day. Praise Him for being faithful to His promises and to His own righteous character.

7. King Ahaz relied on Assyria to protect Judah. That alliance proved foolish—Assyria struck and plundered. How does the remnant act differently from Ahaz (see 10:20)?
8. How is Isaiah 10:20–23 relevant to our lives? (Consider your answers to questions 6 and 7.)

Optional Application: The Lord urged His people to have faith and courage as an army marched on Jerusalem (see 10:24–34). Do your circumstances call for any similar response? Explain.

Midian ... burden ... yoke (10:26–27). The Lord enabled a small force of Israelites to defeat the Midianites (see Judges 7:1–25).

Oreb (10:26). One of Midian’s leaders. (See Judges 7:25; Isaiah 9:4.)

Staff ... Egypt (10:26). “When Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea, the waters engulfed the chariots of Pharaoh” (see Exodus 14:26–28).

Aiath ... Migron (10:28–32). Isaiah describes the advance of an army over the last ten miles to Jerusalem. The Assyrian army actually marched from the southwest (see 36:2), but God gave the vision this way because Assyria was the dreaded power of the north. “The aim of the oracle is not, presumably, to inform [of the exact route Assyria was going to take] but to inspire [the people to be spiritually prepared].”

Your response

9. How would you summarize what God is trying to tell His people in 7:1–10:34? (Consider 7:9, 14; 8:9, 12–13, 17; 9:1–7; 10:24–25.)
10. What one truth from 9:1–10:34 seems most relevant to your life?

For Further Study: Add 9:1–10:34 to your outline, or wait until you have finished 11:1–12:6.

Optional Application: Some good passages for meditation are 9:6, 10, 13, 16; 10:3, 12–13, 15, 20–24.

11. How does this truth apply to you? How do you want it to affect your character, thoughts, and actions?

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12. What can you do this week to take this insight to heart and put it into practice?

13. Write down any questions you have about 9:1–10:34.

For the group

This lesson skips lightly over God’s judgment on Israel and Assyria. Repeated prophecies of judgment overwhelm many Christians, and also we have tried to limit the length of this study. If you want to be more thorough, you can take two meetings to cover lesson 6 and have group members answer the optional questions in a notebook.

Warm-up. Ask what “darkness” symbolizes to the group. This will lead into 9:1–7.

Read aloud. You may not want to read all of 9:1–10:34, because the lesson focuses on 9:1–7 and 10:20–23.

Summarize. Ask someone to summarize 9:1–7; 9:8–10:4, and 10:5–34. Then have someone explain as best he or she can how these passages relate to each other and to chapters 1–8. Plan to return to these questions after discussing 9:1–10:34.

A child is born. Questions 1–3 focus on how Jesus fulfilled 9:1–7 in His first coming and is fulfilling it now. If you like, you can discuss how He will consummate that prophecy at His second coming. We have de-emphasized that because there is more debate about events that haven’t happened yet. However, the future fulfillment may be important to your group. Confidence about the future gives encouragement in the present.

Give everyone a chance to share at least one personal insight from 9:6–7 (question 4). You could also discuss what “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” and “Prince of Peace” mean. Be sure to consider how Jesus’ identity and mission are relevant to your lives.

The Lord against Israel. Although much of 9:8–10:34 is optional, these passages are part of Scripture and important to Isaiah’s overall message. Feel free to cover them more carefully. These passages portray aspects of the Lord’s character, and actions and attitudes that anger Him—all of which are still relevant today.

The Lord against Assyria. Here we have focused on 10:20–23 because it is important to both Isaiah’s and Paul’s teaching. Be sure to grasp what the promise of the remnant in Isaiah is, and what it shows about God’s character and plan. Look at Paul’s use of the idea if you have time.

For more information about the remnant, see commentaries on Isaiah or Romans, or ask your pastor to recommend some books. Interpretations of Romans 9–11 vary.

Summarize.

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Wrap-up. The next lesson makes use of the Christian practice of meditating on a phrase of Scripture, thinking about what it means and how it applies personally, and praying about it. Remind the group of the paragraph “Memorizing and Meditating” on page 7. Answer any questions the group has. Lesson 7 should make itself clear, but if you read through it ahead of time, you can warn the group of any potentially confusing parts.

Worship. Praise God and Christ for what 9:1–10:34 reveals about each of Them. Thank Them for the government of peace, the judgment of sin, the remnant. Ask Christ to act in your life as Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, and so on.

Lesson Seven

ISAIAH 11:1–12:6

Salvation

While the Assyrian army was devastating Israel and terrorizing Judah, Isaiah spoke the prophecies of 11:1–12:6. As you read these chapters, imagine yourself hearing them while savage troops are marching toward your border.

For Thought and Discussion: The lofty forest of Assyria will be leveled (see 10:18–19, 33–34), but the stump of Jesse will sprout (see 11:1). What is the Lord saying? Compare 2:11.

The Branch (11:1–16)

Stump of Jesse (11:1). The Lord promised to lay Judah to waste until the holy seed—the faithful remnant—was just a stump in the barren earth (see 6:13). Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah belonged to the royal dynasty of David, the son of Jesse (see 1 Samuel 16:10–13). The family survived the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC by a miracle (see Isaiah 37). It endured the Babylonian exile by another series of marvels. However, after the exile began in 586 BC, there was no Davidic king because Judah was never again an independent state. The line of David lay like a dormant seed, a lifeless stump. But Isaiah promised that the stump would someday sprout a king for Judah.

1. The Son of David differs from Judah’s kings firstly in that “the Spirit of the LORD” rests on Him (11:2). The Spirit equips Him for His mission. What is the Son’s mission (see 11:3–4)?

Counsel (11:2). Related to wisdom and understanding, but the accent in “counsel” is on the ability to plan and strategize, especially in warfare (see 9:6). **Might** is the ability to carry out those plans.

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Knowledge (11:2). In this context, intimacy with God and knowledge of spiritual truths.

Fear of the LORD (11:2–3). A respect and awe of God that grows from intimate knowledge of His justice, holiness, goodness, and worthiness of honor. (See Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Isaiah 8:13.) Beholding the Lord ought to terrify even His faithful servants (see Isaiah 6:1–5; Revelation 1:12–18).

For Further Study: Compare 7:14; 9:1–7, and 11:1–16. Observe how the promised Son is revealed from many angles.

For Thought and Discussion: Why does Christ not judge by what He sees and hears (see 11:3; 42:18–19)? How can someone make right decisions by ignoring what he sees and hears? (See Leviticus 19:15; John 7:24; James 2:1–10.)

For Thought and Discussion: Why does Jesus *delight* in the fear of God (see 11:3)? What are the implications here for us?

2. Why does Christ need the Spirit's three-fold gift (see 11:2–3) in order to fulfill His mission (see 11:3–4)?

wisdom and understanding

counsel and might

knowledge and the fear of the Lord

For Thought and Discussion: To what extent has Christ already brought into being what 11:1–16 says about Him and His kingdom? To what extent are these promises yet to be fulfilled?

Optional Application: Ask the Lord to give you the Spirit's gifts named in 11:2–3. Ask Him to teach you where you fall short in these areas and how you need these gifts to serve Him. Ask Him to teach you deeply what wisdom, counsel, and so on are.

Optional Application:

a. Ask God to teach you to delight in the fear of the Lord. Meditate on reasons to fear Him with delight. Psalms 34 and 130; Isaiah 6, and Revelation 1 may help your meditations.

b. How should the fear of the Lord affect your actions?

Righteousness (11:4–5). The quality of being right is an essential character of God. His nature is the standard of right character and morality, and His will is the standard

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of right events and decisions. He displays His righteousness in the world by giving His righteous Law; being faithful to His covenants, promises, and plans; setting right what is wrong in the world by saving the righteous and punishing the wicked, and making sinners right again by providing sacrifices that atone for sin. The ultimate act of God's righteousness is offering His Son as the true atonement sacrifice and the true righteous ruler.

A human is righteous when he conforms to God's standards of what is right. This includes what is right for all people as well as what is fitting for that person's particular role. For instance, a righteous king implements justice according to God's laws.

God's righteous standard includes humility before God, dependence upon His might to deliver people from affliction, and dependence upon His atoning sacrifice to maintain His people's right relationship to Him. Isaiah 6:5–6 shows that this dependence was important even in Isaiah's time, when Christ's work was only foreshadowed.

3. We are the body of Christ. Jesus has given us His mission and the Spirit to equip us (see John 20:21–23). How is Isaiah 11:1–5 relevant to us? How should it move us to think, pray, and act?
4. What will result when Christ governs justly, punishes the wicked, and models right attitudes toward God (see 11:6–9)?

For Thought and Discussion: Why does peace naturally flourish when people know the Lord intimately (see 11:9)?

Optional Application: In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). Expand on this request from the promises in Isaiah 11:1–12:6.

For Thought and Discussion: What does it mean for the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord (see 11:9)?

For Further Study: Compare Isaiah 11:6–9 to Romans 8:18–25. How should this future hope affect our attitudes and actions today?

5. What else will happen when Christ reigns (see 11:10–16)?
6. In its fullest extent, 11:3–16 has not yet taken place. Still, why is it important for us to know these things? What difference should they make to our lives?

Study Skill—Prophetic Forms: The Promise Oracle

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Isaiah 2:1–5; 4:2–6; 9:1–7; and 11:1–16 follow a form called the *promise* or *salvation* oracle. The form includes reference to the future (“In that day ...,” 4:2; 11:10), radical change (the nations seeking God, the end of war), and blessing. The blessings are the ones promised in the covenant (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14)—life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety. Salvation oracles and woe oracles occur side by side in Isaiah.

These passages do not answer all of our questions about heaven, the millennium, and so on. Therefore, we need to study them for what they do tell us, and look for answers to our other questions in other passages. When the Lord chooses not to satisfy our curiosity, we need to be content to wait.

Also, in promise oracles the Lord frequently uses symbolism to make His point. For instance, beating swords into plowshares (see 2:4) vividly depicts the end of war, and the “Branch” (4:2) symbolizes either Christ or the holy people that grow from Him. On the other hand, the Lord also speaks literally in promise oracles. Therefore, when we try to unravel promise oracles, we should use the Lord’s guidance, other passages of Scripture, and common sense to determine when the Lord is speaking literally and when symbolically, and what the symbols mean. Even if we cannot be certain about our understanding of the details, the overall point of the prophecy is clear enough to motivate us to act in faith today.

Song of salvation (12:1–6)

When the wonders of 11:1–16 have come to pass, what will there be left to do but sing songs of praise? The people of Isaiah’s time were at enmity with God, beset by fears, starving for spiritual and physical nourishment. But observe the changes “in that day.”

7. Read through 12:1–6 meditatively, dwelling on phrases that strike you. What is true of a person God has saved (see 12:1–3)?
8. What does it mean that God is your “strength” and your “defense” (12:2)?

Salvation (12:2–3). Negatively, this means deliverance from danger, sickness, loss, slavery, and all other evils. Positively, it means the restoration and preservation of safety, health, wholeness, and all other blessings.

9. What does it mean to “draw water from the wells of salvation” (12:3)? (*Optional: See Psalm 36:9; Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:10, 13–14.*)
10. What is the natural response to what God has done for us (see 12:4–6)?

Optional Application:

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Meditate on:

- a. how God is your strength, your defense, your salvation.
- b. how He has ended His anger and comforted you.
- c. His wells of salvation.

For Thought and Discussion: How does Isaiah's name ("The LORD is salvation") relate to 11:1–12:6?

For Thought and Discussion: What impressions about God does Isaiah 1:1–12:6 give you?

Your response

11. Because chapter 13 begins a new section, this is a good time to review. How would you summarize God's message in 7:1–12:6? (You might review your summaries from lesson 5, question 11 and lesson 6, question 9.)
12. Summarize what you have learned about Christ from 7:14; 9:1–7, and 11:1–16.
13. What aspect of 11:1–12:6 would you like to concentrate on this week?

For Further Study: Outline 11:1–12:6 or 7:1–12:6.

14. How would you like this insight to affect your life? What implications does it have?
15. What steps can you take to begin letting this insight affect you?
16. List any questions you have about 11:1–12:6.

For the group

Warm-up. Ask group members what ideas or pictures come to mind when they think of salvation.

Read aloud.

Summarize.

The Branch. This lesson is a bit shorter and more meditative than previous ones, so you can catch your breath and practice approaching the Scriptures in different ways. You could cover 11:1–16

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by looking at phrases in turn and discussing what they mean. Then step back and discuss what impressions of Christ and of God's kingdom the whole of 11:1–12:6 gives you.

Remind the group that because you live after Jesus' first coming and before His second, 11:1–12:6 is partially fulfilled and true of the kingdom you inhabit, but it is partly yet to be fulfilled when Jesus returns. Help the group to see the already-but-not-yet aspects of 11:1–12:6. What differences do these promises make to your present lives?

Songs of salvation. This section focuses on God's character and our response in a meditative, personal way. These songs lend themselves to quiet reflection on one phrase at a time. Urge group members to choose a phrase to meditate on during the coming week. You could allow time to share any fresh insights and applications on these phrases at the beginning of your next meeting.

If meditating on a phrase of Scripture is new to some people, refer to the description on page 7. Let group members voice any questions.

Summarize. Because chapter 13 begins a new section of the book, try to summarize Isaiah's message in chapters 1–12. What ideas and topics have recurred? How do the promises fit together with the woes?

Wrap-up. Isaiah 13:1–23:18 is a collection of woes against the pagan nations around Judah. If you would like to do a thorough study of those prophecies, plan a week or two to cover part or all of the Optional Lesson that begins on page 203. If you have had enough of judgment, or if your time is limited, have the group read page 91 and then move on to lesson 8. (Encourage everyone to read 13:1–23:18 if possible.)

Worship. Pray your own songs of praise along the lines of 12:1–6. Focus on the characters of God and Christ as revealed in 1:1–12:6.

(continued from page 68)

Old Testament Prophets, part three

Isaiah's job was to call the nation back to faith. While this included convicting the people of rebelling against the covenant, it also included encouragement to hope in God. Both judgment and promise were essential.

One difficulty we have in understanding Isaiah is that when the Lord gave him visions of the future, He did not tell the prophet how far in the future various events would be. Isaiah wrote as though prophecies of the day of the Lord would all be fulfilled nearly simultaneously. From our perspective, however, we can see long stretches of time between the destruction of Assyria, the first coming of Christ, and His return. So, when we read Isaiah's prophecies we need to ask ourselves what has already occurred and what is still yet to occur.

ISAIAH 13:1–23:18

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Oracles Against the Nations

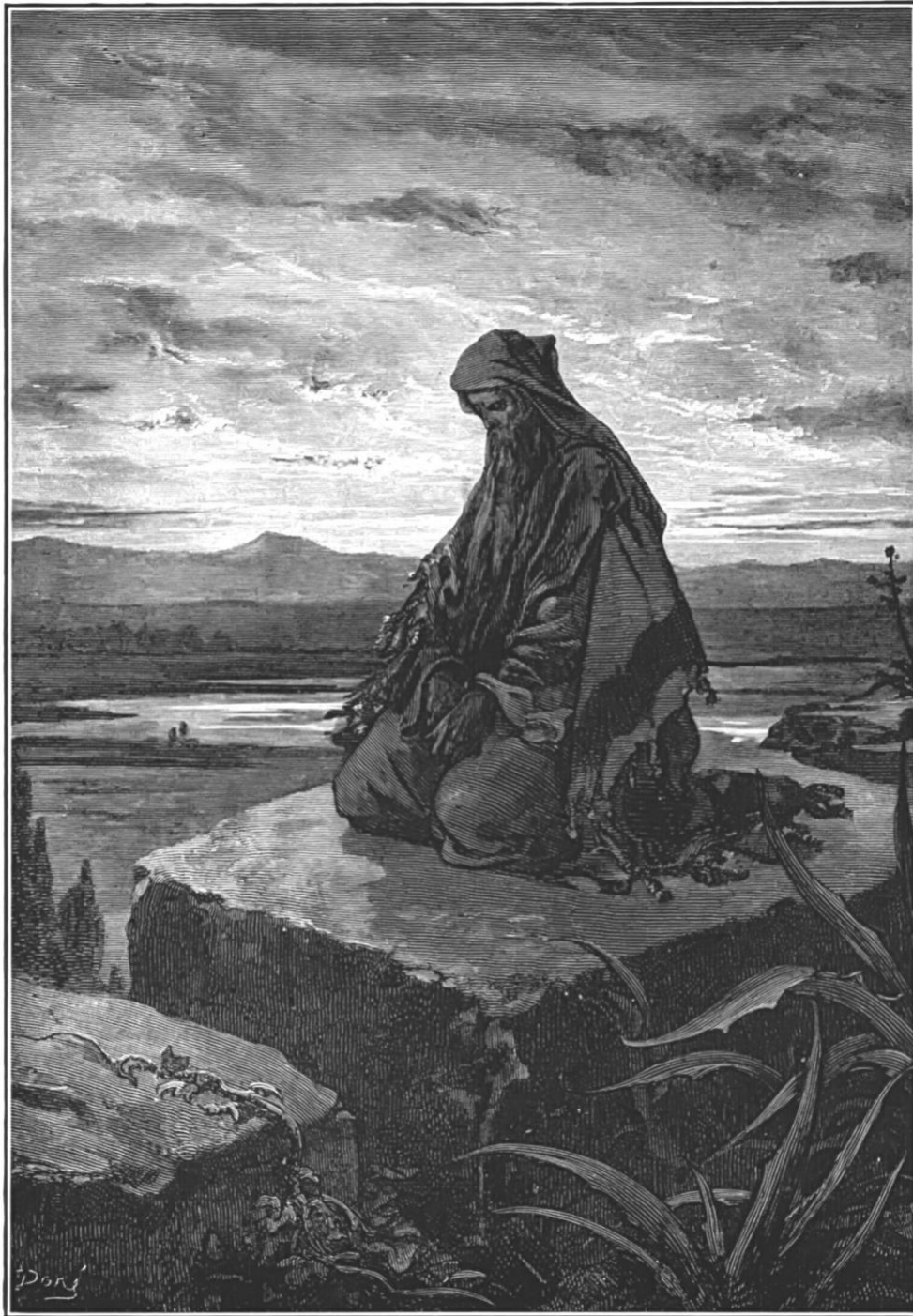
In an era when people believed that each nation had its own gods who could not meddle in other gods' countries, Isaiah proclaimed the Lord to be King over all nations. Moreover, said Isaiah, He is King not just in the abstract but in the specific events of each nation and life. This is the message of 13:1–23:18, a collection of oracles against pagan nations that Isaiah uttered at various times during his ministry.

These chapters can overwhelm us with references to events we don't know and with constant tones of wrath. So, because this may be your first time through the book of Isaiah, we've made a thorough study of 13:1–23:18 optional. In the Optional Lesson on pages 203–210, you will find background on each of the oracles in these chapters to help you understand what Isaiah is talking about. You will also find some questions on each oracle. We hope you will want to work carefully through all the oracles at some time, for each one has valuable lessons about God's character and what He desires of His people. You might enjoy studying at least one or two of the oracles along with lesson 8.

Prophecy (13:1). A “divine declaration.” *KJV* reads “burden.” A biblical prophecy is often, but not necessarily, a judgment.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Navigators. (2013). [LifeChange: Isaiah](#) (K. Lee-Thorp, Ed.; pp. 69–91). NavPress.

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Isaiah Awaits King Ahaz

The second period of Isaiah's mission was in the days of King Ahaz, the grandson of the leprous Uzziah. The period of devastation predicted by the prophet had already begun. The northern neighbors of Judah, the kingdoms of Syria and Samaria were leagued against her, and were

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raving her territory. King Ahaz, faint of heart, trusting neither in the strength of his armies nor in the righteousness of his heart, believing neither in himself, nor his people, nor his God. King Ahaz was planning an appeal to Assyria for help, was inviting in a mightier foe to save him from the lesser on. Isaiah went forth at the Divine command. King Ahaz, perhaps in anticipation of a siege, was going to inspect the reservoir from which Jerusalem drew its water; so Isaiah, setting himself by the silent pool, awaited the coming of the king. Foreseeing all the disaster that would follow, he warned Ahaz against Assyria, and entreated the king to trust in the strength of their own people and the help of God. A wise statesman as well as prophet, Isaiah analyzed the character of their present enemies and showed how little was really to be feared from them. [could not get a footnote reference to print out of logos...just look up the title: Isaiah Awaits King Ahaz]

THE CITIES OF THE PROPHETS

NINTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES B.C.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth ...

(Deuteronomy 18:18)

THE RISE OF THE EMPIRE OF ASSYRIA

NINTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES B.C.

With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon ...

(Isaiah 37:24)

THE CAMPAIGN OF REZIN AND PEKAH AGAINST JUDAH

735 B.C.

Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabel as king in the midst of it" ...

(Isaiah 7:5–6)

2 KINGS 16:5–9; IS. 7–9; 2 CHRON. 28:16–21

The Kingdom of Israel began its disintegration with the assassination of Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, after only six months in office (752 B.C.). His successor, Shallum, lasted only one month (2 Kings 15:8–14). Menahem, the new usurper, reigned in Samaria for ten years and was followed by his son, Pekahiah, for two more years (752–742/741 B.C.; 2 Kings 15:17–26). Meanwhile, Pekah the son of Remaliah began a twenty-year rule in Gilead (see Hosea 5:3–5); he apparently had a presumed reconciliation with Pekahiah but assassinated him and took power

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over all of Israel for another eight years (740–732 B.C.; 2 Kings 15:25–31). Jotham had taken advantage of the divided rule in the north to exert Judean military power against the king of Ammon, thus gaining a foothold in Transjordan.

However, Tiglath-pileser III renewed Assyria's expansionist policy. Unlike most of his predecessors, he was not satisfied with the submission of local kings and the payment of tribute; rather he initiated the annexation of conquered territories, reducing them to provinces under Assyrian governors. Opposition to Assyrian permanent rule was squelched by exiling the upper classes and resettling deportees from some other part of the empire. Tiglath-pileser III avoided long campaigns far from his supply bases. The newly-appointed governors provided logistic support for the Assyrian army when it pushed out in the next step of conquest.

In 743 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III was faced by a coalition of western states surprisingly led by Azariah of Judah. The effort was unsuccessful and Menahem of Israel paid tribute to the Assyrians (2 Kings 15:19–20). The heavy burden that this payment imposed on the nobility of Israel may have engendered the unrest that led Pekah to power in Samaria three years later.

While Tiglath-pileser III was engaged elsewhere, especially in Urartu (Ararat), Pekah made an alliance with Rezin, king of Damascus. They hoped to organize a strong united front against the Assyrians. Jotham apparently shared his late father's anti-Assyrian bias but the leadership in Jerusalem did not. After sixteen years of reign, Jotham was effectually deposed in favor of his son, Ahaz (735 B.C.), who refused to join Pekah and Rezin against Tiglath-pileser III. Jotham actually lived to his twentieth year (732/731 B.C.; 2 Kings 15:30).

Pekah and Rezin immediately declared war on Ahaz in an attempt to depose him in favor of a certain Tabal (probably Tabel, from a Judean noble family recently settled in Transjordan, ancestors of the later Tobiads). Rezin assisted the Edomites in the reconquest of Elath (2 Kings 16:6) and the Edomites attacked Judah from the south (2 Chron. 28:17). Meanwhile, the Philistines invaded the western Negeb and the northern Shephelah of Judah and occupied many towns on the key approaches to the hill country (2 Chron. 28:5–15). Pekah was unable to force his will upon Jerusalem and the prisoners taken during his foray were returned (2 Kings 16:5b; 2 Chron. 28:17–19; Isaiah 7:1–6). Ahaz promptly turned to Tiglath-pileser III for help.

PHILISTINE CONQUESTS IN THE DAYS OF AHAZ

735 B.C.

And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah

...

(2 Chronicles 28:18)

2 CHRON. 28:18

THE CAMPAIGNS OF TIGLATH-PILESER III 734 TO 732 B.C.

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In the days of Pekah king of Israel Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

(2 Kings 15:29)

2 KINGS 15:29; 16:9; 1 CHRON. 5:6, 25; ANNALS, TIGLATH-PILESER III—CALAH; EPONYM CHRONICLE

Tiglath-pileser III responded with alacrity. The dates of his campaigns in the southern Levant are determined in accordance with his annals and the Eponym Chronicle. In 734 B.C. he marched against Philistia. Since the northern Shephelah had recently fallen into Philistine hands (see Map 162), the siege of Gezer depicted on one of Tiglath-pileser's reliefs must have taken place during this campaign. Gaza was conquered next after its king, Hanun, had fled to Egypt. The Assyrian army proceeded into northern Sinai where the Meunites were also forced to submit; a garrison was left at the Brook of Egypt. The kings of Palestine were cut off from any possible help on the part of the Egyptians.

The following year, 733 B.C., saw the invasion of northern Israel. The main course of the campaign can be deduced from 2 Kings 15:29. Tiglath-pileser III launched the attack from the Lebanese Beqa' Valley, first taking Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah. Then he turned westward across Upper Galilee to Janoah, in the foothills above Tyre. Thus he assured his lines of communication with Tyre. Marching back across Upper Galilee, he conquered Kedesh. Yiron and Merom appear in an Assyrian list of prisoners from this campaign, so they were evidently taken at this time. He could now concentrate on the siege of Hazor without fear of harassment from Upper Galilee. Forces were sent into Gilead and to "Galilee, all the land of Naphtali." Isaiah describes these territories, the first to fall under a conqueror's heel, as "The way of the sea, the land beyond Jordan, and Galilee of the nations." Biblical semantics require that "way of the sea" be a route leading to the sea; this fits perfectly the road from Abel-beth-maacah to Janoah. Gilead is, of course, the "land beyond Jordan," and "Galilee of the nations" is literally the "Region of the goiim," mainly the Jezreel Valley (the equivalent of Harosheth-ha-goiim in Judges 4:2).

Damascus was now completely isolated. The following year, 732 B.C., saw its downfall before the victorious army of Tiglath-pileser III. An Assyrian relief from Calah shows the exile of inhabitants from Ashtaroth, chief city of Bashan, one of the cities taken at this time.

In the wake of this crushing defeat, Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea, son of Elah (732 B.C.). Tiglath-pileser III says that he appointed Hoshea as king of Israel and received a heavy payment of tribute from him. This was also the twentieth, and last, year of Jotham (2 Kings 15:30); Ahaz's sole reign of sixteen years is reckoned from this date (2 Kings 16:2; 2 Chron. 28:1).

Exile of inhabitants of Ashtaroth (Relief from palace of Tiglath-pileser III at Calah)

THE ASSYRIAN DISTRICTS IN THE DAYS OF TIGLATH-PILESER III

732 B.C.

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In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

(Isaiah 9:1)

IS. 9:1; EZEK. 47:16–18; EPONYMIC LISTS, ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS—ASSYRIA

Sargon II (Relief from palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad)

Assyrian policy called for the organization of the newly conquered territories into districts under loyal governors. This did not preclude the continuation of some local dynasties in key states such as Tyre and the four main Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron. Ahaz in Judah and Hoshea in Israel were tributaries and were charged with maintaining the loyalty of their subjects. But Damascus had caused too much trouble for its dynasty to survive. Its territory was divided into four provinces. The territory taken from Israel had a similar fate. Upper Galilee, or most of it, was probably assigned to Tyre. An Assyrian governor was installed in the newly rebuilt administrative center at Megiddo. The Megiddo province was mainly the Jezreel and Beth-shean valleys and probably Lower Galilee as well. Transjordan became the province of Gal'azi (Gilead). The Sharon Plain was evidently still part of Samaria, especially the key city of Aphek. Dor may have already been a dependent of Tyre though its territory (Naphoth-dor) might have been assigned provisionally to the governor at Megiddo. It is mentioned in Assyrian records, but only in the seventh century B.C. as the seat of a governor.

THE CAMPAIGNS OF SHALMANESER V AND SARGON II TO THE SOUTHERN LEVANT

724 TO 712 B.C.

Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria ...

(2 Kings 17:3)

2 KINGS 17:3–6; IS. 20; ANNALS, OTHER LISTS, SARGON II—KHORSABAD, ASSHUR

With the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727 B.C., his successor, Shalmaneser V, found it necessary to campaign in the west. Hoshea paid his tribute when the Assyrian threat approached (2 Kings 17:3). However, Hoshea turned to “So, (to) the king of Egypt” for help and ceased paying his tribute to Shalmaneser. So is most likely Sais, the capital of Egypt. The Assyrian king arrested Hoshea and launched his attack on the disloyal kingdom of Samaria in Hoshea’s seventh year (725/724 B.C.). The city succumbed to the siege in Hoshea’s ninth year (723/722 B.C.), and its population was taken into exile. Shalmaneser V died shortly thereafter and was succeeded by Sargon II. Subsequently, Sargon’s scribes assigned the conquest of Samaria to their master.

THE EXILE OF PEOPLES TO AND FROM ISRAEL UNDER THE ASSYRIANS

ISAIAH

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734 TO 712 B.C.

And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel ...
(2 Kings 17:24)

2 KINGS 17:6, 24, 30–31; 1 CHRON. 5:26; ANNALS, TIGLATH-PILESER III, SARGON II

THE DISTRICTS OF ASSYRIA IN THE DAYS OF SARGON II

733 TO 716 B.C.

I reorganized these cities. I settled there people from the lands of the west, whom I had captured. I appointed my officer over them as governor, and counted them as Assyrians, and they bore my yoke.

(Annals of Sargon II)

ANNALS, OTHER LISTS, SARGON II—KHORSABAD, ASSHUR

Conquest of Ekron (Relief from palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad)

Sargon II did have to put down a rebellion in the Levant led by the ruler of Hamath and supported by the remaining population of Samaria (720 B.C.). He then marched southward for a confrontation with the Egyptian army. On the way, he may very well have had to take Gibbethon and Ekron, two Philistine towns whose conquest is portrayed on reliefs from his palace. The decisive battle was fought at Raphia; the Egyptian general, Re'u, fled from the scene and Hanun, king of Gaza, was captured.

Four years later (716 B.C.), Sargon II conducted a campaign against the northern Arabians. After defeating them and forcing them to pay tribute, he came to the Egyptian border at the Brook of Egypt. Sargon's control over the trade routes from Arabia and Philistia was now recognized by Shilkanni, king of Egypt (Osorkon IV), who sent him a rich payment. The "Sealed Harbor of Egypt" was inaugurated as a center for trade and commerce.

While Arabian exiles were being settled in Samaria, Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz on the throne of Judah (715 B.C.). That same year, Piye, king of Cush, campaigned in the Egyptian delta. Since there was no longer a kingdom in Samaria, Hezekiah invited the remaining Israelites to share in his renewed Passover celebrations in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:5–6, 10–11). To strengthen the position of the Jerusalem temple, he then initiated a campaign against the rival cultic centers throughout Judah and Samaria.

Egyptian-inspired unrest continued to fester in Philistia. The disloyal king of Ashdod, Azuri, was replaced by his brother, Ahimitti, in 713 B.C. The following year, a popular revolt broke out in Ashdod, led by a pretender named Iamani (a personal name that might be equated with Hebrew Yavan, Greek Ion). Judah, Edom and Moab seem to have been involved but they evidently paid their tribute in a hurry when Sargon's general arrived with the army. Hezekiah had also been warned by Isaiah not to take part (Isaiah 20). The cities of Gath and Ashdod were conquered. Iamani fled to Egypt; he got as far as Syene but was refused political asylum by the

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Cushite king (Shabako, brother of Piye). Shabako was already in control of Egypt but he was not willing to insult the Assyrians. The Assyrian province of Ashdod was now established although local dynasties continued to rule the city-states.

Meanwhile, an Assyrian commissioner reported to Calah that a certain Ayanur of the land of Tabel had brought news about people of the land of Geder who had attacked a Moabite town. The capital of Tabel was called Tyre; it is known later as the estate of the Tobiads.

In 710 B.C., Sargon defeated Merodach-baladan, the Chaldean pretender to the throne of Babylon. Five years later, Sargon met his death while on a campaign against the Cimmerians in the north.¹⁹

Joppa is the Old Testament port of Jerusalem, residing on the Mediterranean Sea about thirty-four miles (54.7 km) northwest of Jerusalem. The biblical authors mention it as the seaport through which cedar logs passed on their way from the sea to Jerusalem so that they could be used in the building and subsequent rebuilding of the temple (2 Chr 2:16; Ezra 3:7). But its most well-known story involves a prophet named Jonah. The Lord had sent this reluctant missionary to Assyria. But Jonah tried to evade the assignment by getting on a ship that would take him to the other side of the world. Joppa was the seaport from which he sailed (Jonah 1:1–3). Peter ends up here because of an urgent invitation delivered by the friends of Dorcas, a most charitable lady who had died. Peter went to Joppa and called her back to life (Acts 9:36–42). Afterward, Peter remained in Joppa and that is where we find him at the start of our story. At six occurrences (10:5, 8, 23, 32; 11:5, 13), Joppa is the most frequently mentioned of the three locations, providing the setting for fourteen and a half verses (10:9–23a). Like Jerusalem, it is primarily Jewish in orientation in this era.²⁰

DISCOVERING ISAIAH

Isaiah's prophecies are delivered to Israel at three distinct stages of her history: before, during and after the exile in Babylon.

Prophecies to Judah before the exile

Prophecies to Judah and Jerusalem

(1:1–12:6)

JUDAH'S WORSHIP IS FALSE

¹⁹ Aharoni, Y., Avi-Yonah, M., Rainey, A. F., Notley, R. S., & Safrai, Z., eds. (2011). [The Carta Bible Atlas](#) (Fifth Edition, pp. 113–120). Carta Jerusalem.

²⁰ Beck, J. A. (2019). [Peter's Ministry in Caesarea Maritima \(Acts 10:1–11:18\)](#). In B. J. Beitzel, J. Parks, & D. Mangum (Eds.), *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation* (pp. 238–239). Lexham Press.

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Isaiah challenges the credibility gap between the worship people offer and the lives they actually live. God is sick of burnt offerings. They are just a front behind which people commit crime and oppress the poor. And yet God longs that his people should relate to him again:

*'Come now, let us reason
together,' says the Lord.
'Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be white as snow ...
If you are willing and obedient' (1:18–19).*

Today Jerusalem—tomorrow the world

Isaiah exhorts his people, the 'house of Jacob', to live in the light of God's truth. This is the light which will shine out to the whole world (2:5).

God once called Abraham, to make him a great nation and to bless all the nations of the world through him (Genesis 12:1–3). Now he promises to establish Jerusalem as a geographical centre where all may find God's truth.

THE MAGNET OF ZION

One day God will establish Jerusalem as the centre of his universal reign of peace.

Isaiah describes Jerusalem as 'Mount Zion' rising higher than any other mountain. She will be the place where God lives and from which he reigns. All the nations will make pilgrimage to her, and God's wise judgments will be issued from her.

God's wise ruling will bring peace to the nations, so that the weapons of war can be turned into implements for farming and fruit-growing (2:4).

Micah has the same prophecy as Isaiah (Micah 4:1–3). Either one has copied from the other, or both have used a popular poem or song.

WARNINGS OF JUDGMENT ...

Although Isaiah foresees a perfect future for Jerusalem, her present state is compromised and corrupt. She harbours superstition and deals with pagan powers (2:6). She relies on wealth and military might (2:7). She worships gods of human origin (2:8).

Isaiah declares that God will humble these proud and self-important people. Soon they will hide in caves and grovel in the dust, to escape the awesome judgment of God (2:9–11, 19).

Isaiah lists the heights and strengths of the natural world—the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Bashan and all the mountains and hills. He mentions the towers and fortifications built by people, and their powerful ocean-going ships. All will be humbled on God's Day of Judgment (2:12–17).

God is going to bring famine and drought on Jerusalem (3:1), and deprive her of every kind of leader (3:2–3). Instead, her rulers will be immature and ineffective. Her social order will collapse in violence and abuse (3:4–5).

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God stands up in court to accuse his people (3:13). He blames the rulers of Judah for the coming disaster. They have ruined ‘the vineyard’ (the land God gave to his people) and exploited the poor (3:13–15). The women, too, are proud, permissive and self-indulgent. Just as they have spoilt themselves, now he will spoil them (3:16–4:1).

... AND A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Suddenly, Isaiah reveals that God’s Day of Judgment will also be a day of glory. The ‘branch of the Lord’ will appear—that is, a king from the family tree of David (4:2). There will be survivors in Jerusalem whom God will himself cleanse from immorality and bloodshed (4:3–4).

God will make Mount Zion a great landmark, with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night—the signs of God’s presence on Israel’s journey through the wilderness (4:5). Over everything will be a canopy, so that Zion becomes a great tent or tabernacle—a place of shelter where God is present: an image of the perfect temple (4:6).

JUDAH IS LIKE A VINEYARD PRODUCING BITTER GRAPES

Israel and Judah are like a vineyard God has planted (5:1–7). They are a chosen people in a promised land. God has done everything to ensure their safety and success. But when he comes looking for a vintage crop, his hopes are dashed. Instead of righteousness and justice he finds bloodshed and distress.

Surely God is within his rights to abandon such an unrewarding project.

GOD IS GOING TO SHOW HIS HOLINESS BY JUDGING HIS PEOPLE

God is going to judge those who have grown rich at the expense of others, by squeezing them off their land (5:8). He is going to lay waste their houses and bring dearth on their vineyards and fields (5:9–10).

God condemns those who live only to get drunk. Their festivals are music and wine, without any celebration of God’s goodness and purpose in their lives (5:11–12). Because of such people, both rich and poor are starved of the knowledge of God—and Israel will be led away to exile (5:13).

Sheol (the place of departed spirits) is a cavernous mouth, swallowing the leaders of Judah and her people down into death (5:14).

God takes issue with those who have turned his values upside down. They pretend they want the day of God’s judgment to come—as though they welcome his action in the world (5:19). They are liars and posers—brave with the booze and busy with injustice (5:22–23). God will destroy them like a field fire after the good crop has been harvested (5:24).

GOD IS SUMMONING ASSYRIA TO JUDGE ISRAEL

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God is Lord of all the nations. He will summon a nation from far away to execute his judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (5:26–28). This is Assyria—powerful, swift and well equipped—bounding towards Israel like a lion to its prey (5:29). A storm is about to break over God’s people—a destruction which none can escape (5:30).

ISAIAH’S VISION OF GOD AND HIS CALL TO BE A PROPHET

Isaiah is called to be a prophet in 742 BC—the year of King Uzziah’s death. Uzziah has enjoyed a long reign, but lived in isolation as a leper during his last years.

Isaiah has an awe-inspiring vision of God (6:1–13). The Lord is enthroned in his temple, surrounded by seraphs—the winged beings that worship and serve him continually.

God is utterly holy. He is infinitely higher than his creatures. He is completely pure in his character.

Isaiah, in stark contrast, sees himself as a moral leper. He is riddled with sin, and can have nothing to do with this holy God.

But, as Isaiah cries out in despair, a seraph touches his mouth with a live coal from the altar. God in his mercy reaches out to purge Isaiah’s sin and remove his shame. His lips are consecrated to speak God’s word.

When he hears God asking, ‘Whom shall I send?’ Isaiah gives the heartfelt response, ‘Send me!’

God commissions Isaiah to a difficult and unrewarding task. He has to take God’s message to people who will listen but never understand. Their senses will be dulled by self-interest. They won’t allow God’s word to reach their hearts because they don’t want to change their lives. This is the experience of many prophets, from Jeremiah to Jesus (Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Mark 11:17–18).

A SIGN OF HOPE: A BABY CALLED IMMANUEL

A sign of hope for King Ahaz

Isaiah is evidently well respected in Jerusalem, and no doubt a familiar figure at court. Two kings—Ahaz and his son Hezekiah—consult him on important matters of state.

In 735 BC Judah’s northern neighbours, Aram (Syria) and Israel (Ephraim), move to attack Judah. They are putting pressure on Judah to form an alliance with them against Assyria.

Isaiah advises King Ahaz against such an agreement. If Judah is to keep her political independence and her own religion, she must resist all temptations to compromise. She must simply trust God.

A baby called Immanuel

Isaiah invites Ahaz to ask for a sign of God’s protection. The king declines, because he doesn’t want to get involved with God. But Isaiah gives him a sign anyway:

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The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (7:14).

The name means ‘God With Us’—the assurance of victory.

By the time the child is old enough to make choices, Israel and Syria will be deserted. But Judah will have another enemy to contend with—Assyria.

GOD WILL USE ASSYRIA AS HIS WEAPON

Disaster looms

Isaiah predicts that Assyria and Egypt will mass against Judah like swarms of bees and flies. This happens in 735 BC. Ahaz will be humiliated—like having a body shave (7:17–8:4).

Isaiah’s wife gives birth to a son. The prophet gives him the name ‘Quick to the Plunder, Swift to the Spoil’. This will be the Assyrians’ approach when they sack Damascus (capital of Syria) and Samaria (capital of Israel). The name matches that of the baby ‘Immanuel’. One name assures Ahaz of God’s presence and the other of the defeat of his enemies.

‘They will call him Immanuel’

The naming of the baby in Isaiah’s prophecy becomes a pointer to the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:23). There has been much discussion as to whether Isaiah’s baby had a virgin mother. The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible uses a word which means ‘virgin’; but the original Hebrew word means ‘young woman’.

Troubled waters ahead

One of the places Isaiah meets King Ahaz is ‘at the end of the aqueduct’ (7:3). Jerusalem relies on its gently flowing water supply—a symbol of God’s grace. But Isaiah sees that people are rejecting their God—and will soon be overwhelmed by a tidal wave from Assyria (8:5–10).

Fear only God

God tells Isaiah not to be infected with the plans and fears of the people among whom he lives (8:11–12). The only thing that matters is God’s holiness, and to fear him alone (8:13).

God will be a rock of sanctuary for his faithful people, but a stumbling block to the spiritually blind. They will trip over God’s will and fall headlong to their doom (8:14–15).

Isaiah wants his words sealed up and kept by his disciples, so that what he has said will be seen to come true (8:16–17).

LIGHT OR DARKNESS

Isaiah has around him a small community—his ‘children’. Their faith is a sign to the wider community of Israel, because they live with reference to the Lord God of Mount Zion, the true Jerusalem (8:18).

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Many people are looking to spiritualism and the occult for guidance—as Isaiah says, consulting ‘the dead on behalf of the living’ (8:19)! But there is no light in those dark rooms—only spiritual famine, physical exile, exasperated rage and outer darkness (8:21–22).

GOD WILL RAISE UP A KING LIKE DAVID

David was Israel’s greatest king, and there was always hope for another one like him. He combined wisdom and strength with a compassion for people and the ability to establish peace.

Here Isaiah celebrates the birth of a royal heir, or perhaps a coronation (9:1–7). The king’s reign will be an extension of God’s rule. These words enjoy lasting fame as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus. They are a superb description of the Christ.

GOD’S HAND RAISED IN JUDGMENT

Isaiah sees that God is stretching out his hand to judge his people and punish them for their sins.

God spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel through his prophets, Amos and Hosea (9:8). They warned Ephraim (Israel) of judgment and everyone heard; but they were proud and determined to survive (9:9). When the destruction was past, they planned to build bigger and better than before (9:10).

God punished the northern kingdom through her old enemies, the Arameans and the Philistines (9:11–12). Israel was destroyed ‘head and tail’—leaders and prophets, the virile and the defenceless (9:13–17).

Israel was torched for her wickedness (9:18–19). The different tribes consumed each other—even the brother tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which were both descended from Joseph (9:18–21).

Isaiah speaks against the cruel and cunning judges of his day. They twist the law to rob the poor and cheat the helpless (10:1–2). Where will they hide when the judgment comes (10:3–4)?

In all these events God is reaching out his hand in judgment—and he hasn’t withdrawn it yet. There is more punishment to come (10:4).

BUT GOD WILL ALSO HUMBLE ASSYRIA

God is using Assyria as his instrument to punish Israel. Assyria is the club in God’s hands (10:5). But Assyria is arrogant and takes the glory of God’s victory for himself (10:13). Now God is going to rein in proud Assyria, weakening him with sickness and destroying his splendour in the fire of his holiness (10:16–17).

A SMALL PART OF ISRAEL WILL SURVIVE

Isaiah has a son called ‘Shear-Jashub’, which means ‘A Remnant Will Return’ (7:3). By his naming of his son, the prophet expresses his hope that God’s people will survive. Although the coming

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punishment will be terrible, a small group will return from exile and (more importantly) return to the Lord.

COUNTDOWN TO CONQUEST?

The Assyrians are advancing on Judah and Jerusalem from the north—and moving swiftly. Aiath is probably Ai, fifteen miles from Jerusalem (10:28). Supplies are checked and stored at Michmash and the advance continues across a steep valley—over the border of Judah and up to encamp at Geba.

Gibeath is a fortified town which guards the approach to Jerusalem—but its inhabitants have already fled (10:29). Anathoth, five miles north-west of Jerusalem, is captured (10:30), and the Assyrian horde sweeps on to Nob, within a mile of Jerusalem (10:32)!

In the face of the emergency, Isaiah speaks of the sovereignty of God. The Lord will lop off these powerful branches of Assyria and cut down even the tallest trees (10:33). God has set his heart to bless a different stump altogether—the root of Jesse, which is the royal line of David (11:1).

A DESCENDANT OF DAVID

Judah is like a tree about to be felled: cut down by God's judgment because of its disease. There will be nothing left of David's dynasty but a stump—'the stump of Jesse' (the name of David's father).

Isaiah prophesies that, against all the odds, a new shoot will grow from the old stump. It will become strong and significant: a fruitful branch. So he describes the Messiah who is to come (11:1–9).

The Messiah will be endowed with the fullness of God's Spirit—wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and delight in doing God's will.

David's great descendant won't judge by appearances, for he will understand people's hearts. He won't rely on hearsay, because he will know the truth at first-hand. He will find in favour of the poor and needy. He will rule with the authority of his word. Even the divided realm of animals and humans will find peace and harmony under his government.

These words of Isaiah are the Bible's finest description of the leadership style of Christ and the well-being of his perfect kingdom.

A SONG OF PRAISE FOR GOD'S SALVATION

God's people will experience a new exodus. God will rescue them and bring them home from all directions (11:11).

Isaiah allows his future hope to shine into the present crisis (12:1). He will trust in God and take complete comfort in God's protection and salvation (12:2). He calls the inhabitants of Jerusalem to praise God already for what he is certain to do (12:3–6).

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Prophecies against foreign nations

(13:1–23:18)

All nations are under God's rule, and subject to his judgment. He knows their ways, humbles their pride, sets limits on their power and uses them for his own great purpose.

Isaiah shows God's command of all the nations—the whole earth is God's kingdom. He delivers God's judgments of punishment and hope in the form of 'oracles' or public announcements. An oracle is a 'lifting up' of the voice.

PROPHECIES AGAINST BABYLON AND ASSYRIA

Isaiah declares that God will send his armies on the day of his wrath (13:3, 9) to execute his judgment on the nations of the earth (13:5). He will use the Medes to overthrow the terrible power of Babylon (13:19).

Babylon (herself the conqueror of Assyria) will be defeated in 539 BC. In the Bible she is a symbol of all worldly power which is opposed to God, and the spiritual descendant of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).

When God has restored his people to their land, they will be able to sing of Babylon's fall (14:1–23). This is the Lord's triumph (14:24–27).

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS

Isaiah declares God's judgment on the Philistines (14:29–32), Moab (15:1–16:14), Damascus (17:1–14), Ethiopia (18:1–7) and Egypt (19:1–15). However, there is a prediction of hope for Egypt (19:16–25). She will have an altar to the Lord God at her centre and a pillar of the Lord's protection at her border (19:19–20).

NAKED AND BAREFOOT

In 711 BC, an Assyrian force is sent by King Sargon to capture Ashdod. Ashdod is a Philistine city which had revolted against the Assyrian empire and thrown out an imposed king (20:1). Ashdod has hoped for support from Egypt and Ethiopia—and indeed from Judah—but the proposed rebellion never materializes.

At this time, God tells Isaiah to go about Jerusalem naked and barefoot. Isaiah does this for three years—acting the part of a captive (20:3). This will be the fate of anyone who rebels against Assyria or trusts the support of Egypt! Egypt herself will be defeated and her people deported (20:4–5).

DESERT STORM FOR BABYLON

Isaiah delivers further oracles about the surrounding nations.

The first oracle begins with a vision of 'the wilderness of the sea' (21:1). The forces of Elam (Persia) and Media are sweeping up like a desert storm, dark and destructive (21:1–2). Isaiah

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realizes that this is the force that will overwhelm Babylon—and he is appalled (21:3–4). Babylon’s commanders are taken by surprise as they feast (21:5).

Isaiah sees himself as a watchman, on the lookout for invaders (21:8). God tells him that Babylon has fallen and her idols lie shattered (21:9). Isaiah reports Babylon’s fate to Israel, his ‘threshed and winnowed one’. God’s people have suffered so much upheaval and distress at Babylon’s hands (21:10).

THE SILENCE OF NIGHT

Isaiah speaks an oracle concerning Dumah—a place in Edom whose name means ‘Silence’. Someone is asking the watchman what time it is—how long will the night of judgment last? The answer is: ‘Inquire and come back’—which is an invitation to return to the way of God (21:12).

BRIEF RESPITE

Isaiah speaks to the peoples of the Arabian desert. The oasis at Tema must give water to the Dedanites. They are fleeing from the destruction of the Assyrians (21:14–15). But any relief will be short-lived. In 703 BC the whole area of Kedar is conquered by Sennacherib (21:16–17).

CRISIS FOR JERUSALEM

Isaiah has an oracle for ‘the valley of vision’—that is, Jerusalem, where he himself lives (22:1). Jerusalem is surrounded by mountains.

Isaiah weeps for his city (22:4). He foresees an attack and destruction which features Elam, an ally of Babylon (22:6). People are both taking up weapons and partying. The weapons are kept in the House of the Forest—a hall in the royal palace (22:8; 1 Kings 10:17). The partying is a last celebration before people die—or perhaps because there is a lifting of a siege (22:13). Isaiah knows that the fun is out of place because worse is to follow.

Isaiah has messages for two individuals—Shebna and Eliakim (22:15–25). Shebna is the royal steward who has been busy with his status symbols: his chariots and his tomb. Isaiah says that God will demote him and throw him out—far into the desert (22:18).

Eliakim will be promoted in Shebna’s place and people will rely heavily on him (22:24). He will have the authority of the royal key and make high-level decisions (22:22). Even so, he is merely human and will ultimately fail (22:25).²¹

Assyria and Babylon

Judah is a small kingdom, tossed between the superpowers of Assyria to the north-east and Egypt to the south-west. Judah’s twin kingdom, Israel, has rebelled against Assyria and been overrun; her capital city, Samaria, captured in 722 BC and her people dispersed.

²¹ Knowles, A. (2001). [The Bible guide](#) (1st Augsburg books ed., pp. 277–283). Augsburg.

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In the early years of Jeremiah's ministry, Assyria dominates the region. But Jeremiah's message is that Babylon will arise and conquer all.

Judah, too, has defied Assyria during the reign of Hezekiah. Hezekiah formed an alliance with Egypt and rebelled against Assyria, but the punishment was swift and terrible. The Assyrians devastated Judah in 701, although Jerusalem itself was protected by God, thanks to the faith of Hezekiah and his prophet Isaiah.

While Josiah is pursuing his reforms, Assyria's power begins to fade. Her strong ruler, Ashurbanipal, has died in 627, and the province of Babylon has broken away as an independent power. Her founder, Nabopolassar, defeats his Assyrian masters in 626 and establishes the beginnings of the Babylonian (Chaldean) empire. His famous son is Nebuchadnezzar.²²

4. *Egypt's fall compared with Assyria's fall (31:1–18)*

1–9 This beautiful poetic message was delivered two months after the previous prophecy concerning the shattering of Egypt's strength (May/June 587 B.C.). The implication was that Egypt was still proud.

Ezekiel used the imagery of a great cedar of Lebanon, the tallest of the known trees, to represent Assyria, which had recently fallen (612 B.C.). Egypt, in turn, would be compared with Assyria (v.2). The great cedar, Assyria (v.3), was well-watered, perhaps an indirect reference to her great water sources in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (v.4). Egypt, of course, equally prided herself in her unending supply of Nile water. The cedar (Assyria) had been higher than all other trees (or nations) (v.5); and she was more beautiful than any other tree, even every original variety of beautiful tree in the Garden of Eden (vv.3, 7–9). Every bird nested in her boughs, and every beast bore its young and was shaded under her branches (v.6). These birds and beasts represented the nations under Assyria's control and in her service (cf. Dan 4:10–12, 19–22; Matt 13:31–32). Assyria was perhaps the greatest nation known to that point in history.

10–17 "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov 16:18) aptly describes the continued imagery. Assyria became proud of her greatness ("height," v.10). For this cause the cedar (Assyria) was handed over to the ruler of nations (Nebuchadnezzar) to treat her as she had treated other nations—ruthlessly (v.11). She was cut down and cast aside by the most ruthless of foreign nations (a phrase frequently used in these chapters to denote Babylon) (v.12). God restrained Assyria's water source (v.15). She was worthless after her fall. All nations (other trees, birds, and beasts) mourned and trembled at the cedar's (Assyria's) demise; they too were equally destined for the pit of Sheol (vv.12–14, 16–17). No other nation of that day would ever reach the height that Assyria had reached (v.14).

18 If Egypt thought she was more majestic and had greater splendor than other nations of her day, the Lord reminded her that she too would descend to Sheol. She would "die" disgracefully as an uncircumcised foreigner without a decent burial—a horrible thought for proud Egyptian

²² Knowles, A. (2001). [*The Bible guide*](#) (1st Augsburg books ed., pp. 297–298). Augsburg.

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royalty that cherished its royal burial and despised foreigners (cf. comment at 29:5). If God brought Assyria down, Egypt could be certain that she, who had never come close to Assyria's greatness, would also fall.

Notes

- 3** Many reject the word אַשּׁוּר (aššûr, "Assyria") from the text on the basis of critical conjecture. There is no MS evidence for such an omission.
- 10** The verb גָּבַחְתָּ (gābahtā, "it towered") is properly a second person form ("you towered") rather than a third person verbal form. Only the Syrian text represents the word as a third person verbal form. This is not sufficient reason to alter the text. The second person is best understood as a statement of direct address that is not out of order in a statement of accusation.²³

EXILE, ASSYRIAN Two deportations, recorded by the biblical narrative, of the Israelites of the northern kingdom to Assyria.

Background

The problem between Assyria and Israel began in the mid-eighth century BC (2 Kgs 15). The biblical account records the king of Israel, Menahem (ca. 745–738 BC), paying tribute to the king of Assyria (2 Kgs 15:19–20). This tribute would have been paid to Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC).

Later on, however, Assyria turned on the northern tribe of Israel. This shift seems to have happened when the kingdom of Judah decided to become a vassal to Assyria in an attempt to fend off an invasion from a coalition from Damascus and northern Israel (735–733 BC). King Ahaz of Judah became a vassal to the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in his effort to save his kingdom (2 Kgs 16:5–18). Judah's agreement with Assyria meant Assyria considering Israel an enemy.

First Deportation

During the reign of King Pekah of Israel, Tiglath-pileser III (Pul) invaded Israel (Samaria). This resulted in the first of the deportations, which occurred in 733/2 BC (possibly 740 BC; see 2 Kgs 15:29; 1 Chr 5:22–26; compare 2 Kgs 15:19–20). Hoshea then succeeded Pekah (after a military coup by Hoshea that resulted in Pekah's death).

Second Deportation

By 727 BC, Shalmaneser V, son of Tiglath-pileser III, was reigning as king of Assyria. Shalmaneser V came against the Israelite king Hoshea. At first, Hoshea paid tribute to Assyria via Shalmaneser V and became the Assyrian king's vassal (2 Kgs 17:3). However, Hoshea eventually

²³ Alexander, R. H. (1986). [Ezekiel](#). In F. E. Gaebelien (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel* (Vol. 6, pp. 899–900). Zondervan Publishing House.

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rebelled against Assyria; he appears to have requested Egypt's help in his rebellion and stopped paying tribute to Assyria (2 Kgs 17:3–4). This resulted in Shalmaneser V arresting Hoshea and besieging Samaria, Israel's capital, for three years until its fall in 722 BC.

The second deportation of the Israelites of the northern kingdom occurred at this point, in 722/1 BC. The biblical account seems to attribute this deportation to Shalmaneser V (2 Kgs 17:1–6; 18:10; the biblical account simply refers to the “king of Assyria”), but this deportation may have been carried out by his son Sargon II, who began to reign early in 721 BC (compare Isa 20:1). Likewise, the actual capture of Samaria may be attributed to Sargon II.

Fate of the Exiles to Assyria

Assyria fell to Babylon a century and a half after Assyria's original invasion of Israel. The captives of the Assyrian exile are not recorded as formally returning to their own land.

Some speculate that the northern tribes of Israel became lost as a result of the Assyrian exile, though the narrative in Chronicles seems to suggest that not all of the northern Israelites were exiled (see 2 Chr 30). The prophets speak of the Assyrians and of the exile as tools of God's punishment (Isa 5:26; 10:5–11; Jer 3:8; Amos 5:25–27; 6:13–14; Hos 10:6).

Ancient Viewpoints on the Assyrian Exile

The Assyrian exile is referenced by Josephus (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11.133), who takes the view that Israel (the northern kingdom and its tribes) were exiled permanently and did not return as the Judean exiles did from Babylon (see also 2 Kgs 17:23). The book of Tobit is set during the Assyrian exile (see Tobit 1:13).

Many inscriptions attest to the Assyrian exile, including inscriptions of Shalmaneser and Sennacherib and the inscriptions of Sargon II, which claim that he carried off 27,000 “Samaritans” from the northern kingdom of Israel.

Related Articles

For further details on the Assyrian exile or the historical period surrounding it, see these articles: Assyria; Assyrians; Palestine, Administration of, Neo-Assyrian.

For further details on the subsequent Babylonian exile, see these articles: Palestine, Administration of, Neo-Babylonian; Exile, Babylonian.

CARRIE SINCLAIR WOLCOTT AND JOHN D. BARRY

EXILE, BABYLONIAN The period between 587/6 and 539 BC, during which most of the people of Judah lived in captivity in Babylon or its territories. The likely time of composition of several books of the Hebrew Bible, and a formative event in the development of biblical theology.

Terminology

The “Babylonian exile” can refer to a number of separate events, though it usually refers to the deportation of most of Jerusalem to Babylon after the destruction of the Judahite capital (including the Jerusalem temple) in 587/6 BC (2 Kgs 25:2, 8–12). Although the poorest of the

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land were left to be vinedressers and plowmen (2 Kgs 25:12), the rest of Jerusalem's population seems to have been deported. However, the biblical text notes that the exile involved "Judah" in general, implying that many others outside of Jerusalem also were deported by Babylon (2 Kgs 25:21).

The term "Babylonian exile" can also be applied to three additional deportations. First, it can refer to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's initial action against Jerusalem in 605 BC, after which Daniel and others were exiled (Dan 1:1). Second, it can refer to the capture of Jerusalem in 597/6 BC, when Jehoiachin and his household and many inhabitants of the city were deposed and brought to Babylon. This deportation included "the mighty men of valor" and all the craftsmen and smiths (Jer 52:28; 2 Kgs 24:12, 14). In 597/6 BC, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah (Jehoiachin's uncle) king and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17). Third, the term "Babylonian exile" can be applied to the 582 BC deportation (mentioned in Jer 52:30), which took place after the destruction of the temple and is related to the assassination of Gedaliah (Middlemas, *Templeless Age*, 12).

History of the Exile

The Judahite rebellion under Zedekiah against Babylonian rule resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of its population, and the exile of most of its people. It was not, however, a complete exodus of all Judahites to Babylonia; rather, some Judahites remained in Judah (Barstad, *Myth of the Empty Land*). After Jehoiachin's surrender to and subsequent imprisonment under Nebuchadnezzar II, Zedekiah was installed in 597/6 BC and served as a Babylonian vassal until his ill-fated rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar II in 587/6 BC.

Both Jehoiachin's and Zedekiah's wars with Babylon resulted in deportations of Judah's people to Babylonian territories, primarily from Jerusalem itself. The deportees lived in various places; the elite were brought to Babylon's capital, while others were resettled in other Babylonian territories (Ezek 1:3; 3:15; Middlemas, *Templeless Age*, 22). The provision of rations for Jehoiachin and his household suggests that they were not treated as common prisoners in Babylon; this is corroborated by explicit recognition of their royal status (*ANET* 308). The treatment of other (non-royal) Judahite exiles is not described.

The Persian conquest of Babylon brought an end to the exile, as Cyrus decreed the return of all captives to their homelands. Although the inscription on the Cyrus Cylinder does not mention the Judahites specifically, it can be inferred from the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative that they were included in his decree (Ezra 1:1–4).

Biblical Descriptions

Primary biblical sources on the Babylonian exile include 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Lamentations. Unfortunately, the Bible contains little about the situation of the exiles themselves, or even of events taking place during the exile, with the exception of Jehoiachin's release and the beginning of Daniel's narrative (2 Kgs 25:27–30; Jer 52:31–34; Dan 1–6; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 72; Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 32). Psalm 137 suggests that the captives' experience was unpleasant to say the least, although it is impossible to say whether the psalm dates to the exilic period (it may be a later reflection on that time). Many of the prophetic

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books were written or edited during exile but do not directly record the experiences of the exiles themselves. Ezra and Nehemiah pick up the story after the end of the exile but do not provide direct historical information for the exile itself. The book of Lamentations is set during the sixth century, and was possibly composed during that time, but is told from the perspective of the people still in Judah (Middlemas, *Troubles of Templeless Judah*, 171).

Archaeological Evidence

Excavated Babylonian material broadly agrees with the biblical description of the exile. Economic records indicate that Judahite deportees resettled around Babylon and Borsippa (Pearce, “Evidence for Judeans,” 400). The Weidner texts list the rations allotted to Jehoiachin and his family during their imprisonment in Babylon (Yamauchi, “Eastern Jewish Diaspora,” 361; *ANET*, 308). The Babylonian Chronicles include a reference to the deposition of Jehoiachin and the capture of Jerusalem, though it does not mention either his name or Zedekiah’s (Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 231). The Murashu documents list the names and occupations of Judahites in Babylon, though they are not contemporary with the exile itself (Middlemas, *Templeless Age*, 23; Coogan, “Life in the Diaspora,” 8). The Cyrus Cylinder mentions the return home of captives from other regions, though Judah is not mentioned in the inscription (Finkel, *Cyrus Cylinder*).

Literary Achievements during the Exile

Several biblical books were composed, and some possibly edited, during the period of exile. Biblical books that can be dated to this time with some degree of certainty include Jeremiah, whose prophecies strongly condemn the Babylonian rulers of Judah; this book may have been heavily edited during the sixth century (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 303–04). The books of Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, and “Deutero-Isaiah” (i.e., Isa 40–55) are similarly regarded as composed—or at least edited—during this period, even if they existed in some form prior to the exile (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 203). The formation of the Deuteronomistic History as a coherent history of the Hebrew people probably also took place during the exile (Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 362).

Impact on Biblical Theology

The Babylonian exile was a crucial event in the development of biblical theology—particularly the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 587/6 BC. The exiles—now lacking a place of worship and desiring to retain their religious affiliation—more readily accepted that Yahweh was not bound to a city or sanctuary (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 435). In this context, the exile came to be understood as a punishment inflicted on guilty people (Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology of Exile*, 117; Ez 9; Neh 9; Dan 9). It was also during exile that Yahweh came to be understood as a God who can shape events and even control empires (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 439); in the context of exile, many of the prophetic books present a vision of a life lived obediently to Yahweh on the basis of His mercy and salvation.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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MARTEN KRIJGSMAN

EXILIC PERIOD The period between 587/6 and 539 BC, during which most of the people of Judah lived in captivity in Babylon or its territories. For further information, see this article: [Exile, Babylonian](#).²⁴

D. Assyria (Zephaniah 2:13–15). Relations between Assyria and Judah went back more than one hundred years prior to the time of Zephaniah. Isaiah had predicted the victory of Assyria over the eastern Mediterranean region. By Zephaniah's time, the Aramean and Israelite kingdoms had been subjugated and their populations exiled. Sennacherib had invaded Judah (701 B.C.) and Hezekiah had been forced to pay tribute. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, spent time in Babylon as a part of a reform program to assure his loyalties to Assyria (2 Chron. 33:11). Josiah had to decide where his loyalties lay. He could avoid political problems by pleasing Assyria, which had been the dominant power for over a century. Due to the length of Assyria's rule, the extent of its military power, and its proximity to Jerusalem, Assyrian influence on Israel's politics, culture, and religion was pervasive. It was difficult for Zephaniah's contemporaries to realize how close Assyria was to its demise.

Zephaniah strongly condemns Assyria's religious influence on Jerusalem as well as its tyrannical power. Yahweh proclaims to the people of Judah that they should neither rely on the superpowers (Ethiopia [= Egypt?]) and Assyria) nor be worried by the coalition of the small nations (Philistia, Moab, and Ammon). All kingdoms, whether great or small, will fall.

The oracle against Assyria is in the form of a message of doom. The great Assyrian power will come to nothing. It will be like a "desolate" place, a "desert." Assyria's power will be dried up like a brook without water.

The presence of animals (v. 14) indicates that life is possible in Assyria; its climate is not altered. Flocks, herds, and wild animals will inhabit Assyria's ruins.

The fall of Nineveh is sarcastically portrayed by a hyperbolic description of its greatness (v. 15). By exaggerating the greatness of Nineveh, its fall is heightened. Nineveh represents the Assyrian Empire. The treasures and booty from conquered nations came to Nineveh and enriched the empire. Because Nineveh had been the capital of the Assyrian Empire for more than one hundred years, its citizens imagined the empire was secure. Zephaniah speaks of the city in its fancied security. Nineveh represented a totalitarian regime where the king was called the "shepherd" of his people. He embodied the divine destiny of the empire. The unique position of the Assyrian king and the pride in their way of life was idolatrous from God's perspective. The prophet sarcastically personifies Nineveh by proclaiming its divine status. For Judah, the phrase

²⁴ Wolcott, C. S., & Barry, J. D. (2016). [Exile, Assyrian](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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I am, and there is none besides me (v. 15a) was a confession of the unique and exclusive claim of Yahweh (cf. Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 45:5, 18, 21–22; 46:9). The mood of the oracle changes rapidly. Sarcasm changes into lament (v. 15b). The end of Assyria will be celebrated by all who pass the ruins of the city. The scoffing and the shaking of the fist are expressions of hatred mixed with joy. The hatred for Nineveh will be turned to joy because she will receive her just rewards.²⁵

ASSYRIA (*Aš-šur*). One of the most dominant ancient Near Eastern empires until its destruction in the seventh century BC; located in modern-day northern Iraq. Assyria was the imperial power that destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. By that point in history, however, Assyria's stronghold in the Near East was nearly over.

Biblical Relevance

Assyria was a dominant power in the Near East for a large portion of the Bible, and the lands of the Bible were within the reach of its empire. Assyria's affairs with biblical characters are recorded in 2 Kgs 15–23 (and in the corresponding stories of 1 Chr 5 and 2 Chr 28–33), in which Assyria is overthrown and Babylonia becomes the dominant Near Eastern power. In the Prophets, Assyria (land and inhabitants) is referred to in a variety of ways: as an object of judgment but also an instrument of judgment, as an example of pride and its consequences, and even an object of God's affection. Assyria also is frequently spoken of in the context of exile and return, as the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria and taken into exile. Ashur is described in Gen 10 as the son of Shem, brother to Elam and Aram, among others (and also in the corresponding 1 Chr 1). Calah and Nineveh are also mentioned in Gen 10 as cities founded by Nimrod, "a mighty warrior on the earth".

Name

By the mid-second millennium, *Aš-šur* (Ashur, i.e. "Assyria") referred to a large area of northern Mesopotamia. In its earliest history, however, "Ashur" was nothing more than the name of a city and its immediate environs. "Ashur" was also the name of the chief god of the city, though the god's name appears later than the city's name in the historical record. Because of this, the god was probably named after the city. In later history, a scribal reference to Assyria was BAL.TIL, which may be a reference to its most ancient name, before Assyrians settled there. To residents, the region was simply referred to as "the land" (*matum*). In the Bible, "Ashur" can refer to the geographical region, its people, or its kings.

Location

"Assyria" can refer to two different entities: the Assyrian heartland and "greater Assyria" (i.e. the outer reaches of its empire). Greater Assyria's size and territory was fluid and depended on Assyrian strength. The heartland region straddled the upper Tigris River, extending west into the Jazirah plains and east to the Zagros Mountains. To the north lay the Kurdish (Taurus)

²⁵ VanGemeren, W. A. (1995). [Zephaniah](#). In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, pp. 679–680). Baker Book House.

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Mountains, and the southern border was marked by the intersection of the Tigris River with the Lower Zab (also called the Little Zab) River.

Though the Assyrian Empire was vast, the heartland was roughly the size of the U.S. state of Connecticut, or the country of Wales in the United Kingdom (Saggs, *Might*). Ashur—its capital city in the central heartland region—was located at the crossroads of critical east—west and north—south trade routes, giving it strategic importance. Assyria’s general accessibility from any direction left it open for infiltrations—both hostile (war) and peaceful (trade, immigration)—which occurred on a regular basis.

Archaeology has been productive with excavations of many of the major Assyrian cities in the last few centuries: Ashur, Nineveh, Calah (Nimrud), Dur-Sharrukin, among others. Excavations have produced many magnificent city ruins, statues, stone reliefs, artwork, as well as numerous written sources. The written sources are comprised of many different genres: royal inscriptions, letters, contracts, administrative records, incantations, treaties, epics, chronographic texts (king lists, court chronicles: *Synchronistic History, Assyrian King List*), as well as foreign writings (*Babylonian Chronicles*, Mari & Nuzi archives). A uniquely Assyrian type of historical record was the *limmu* list, a way of reckoning time whereby the name of an important state official (Akkadian, *limmu*) was used to name a year. These were then compiled into the *limmu* lists (Millard, *Eponyms*).

Assyrian Society, Culture, and Customs

Social Structure

Assyria has been perceived—and frequently described—as a militaristic society (Saggs, *Might*; Larsen, “Individual”; Greengus, “Legal”). However, loyalty to one’s tribe and the smaller family unit was also central. Assyria was primarily an agrarian society—growing crops and tending to livestock and trading for many other essentials. In its later history, economic deficiencies were supplemented with the spoils of war. Each outlying village was affiliated with a larger city—paying taxes to it and taking part in religious rituals and festivals—and in turn, the city provided its resources to those villages. Each of the larger cities was linked by an administrative system, and everyone was subject to the king. The king was the focus of all Assyrians, serving as the god Ashur’s representative on earth.

Women had very little value compared to other Near Eastern peoples, as indicated by various collections of laws and palace decrees. They were wholly dependent on their husbands with very little personal or legal freedom. Punishment for transgressing established boundaries was severe and often included body mutilation. All of this could be related to the militaristic nature of culture, as everyone but soldiers were considered “support staff” for the military in some sense.

In terms of what made someone “Assyrian,” it had less to do with a racial distinction and more to do with location, language and religion. Certainly the extensive trade, immigration, and deportation practices (below) contributed to diverse ethnicities and cultures. Because of this, both ethnicity and language changed multiple times throughout Assyria’s history (from Akkadian, to Amorite, to Aramaic). Many aspects of Assyrian culture were simply borrowed and

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adapted from their neighbors to the south: the Babylonians. For example, Assyrian was simply a dialect of the Babylonian language, and Assyrian literature and religious ideas were also closely related to Babylonian.

Libraries

The best preserved collection of Babylonian literature has been unearthed in Assyria. This is probably because libraries were a major institution in Assyria, and it was the king's duty to expand library collections during his reign. Libraries were first founded in Middle Assyrian times, but by the Neo-Assyrian Period they were in all major and many minor Assyrian cities.

The most extensive library ever recovered was Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh. It contained some 5,000 literary and scholarly texts, and it is considered an invaluable source of information for Assyria, Babylonia, and Sumer. Libraries also demonstrate the importance and extent of literary culture in Assyria. They were aware of the cultural debt owed to Babylonia, both literarily and religiously—and made no attempt to incorporate any other culture's literature and religious ideas into their own. Nabu, a Babylonian deity, was the patron god of libraries (and also the god of scribal craft) in Assyria.

Religion

Assyrians were polytheistic, but their pantheon of gods was smaller than that of Babylonia. They were tolerant of other religions and did not impose their religion on others. The king was the chief priest and Ashur's representative on earth. Ashur was Assyria's true king, and ultimately responsible for upholding order. He was the king of gods, followed by Ishtar and Ninurta, Shamash, Adad and Sin. Each god had its own cult, which consisted of a temple complex and ziggurat, priests, and support staff (Livingstone, "New Dimensions"). Like the mythologies of other Near Eastern cultures, the king of the gods had receded into the background and was almost characterless.

Ishtar was much more prominent and colorful than Ashur. She was the goddess of love and battle, and patron of Nineveh and Arbela. Ninurta was the god of warfare and hunting, and the firstborn of Ashur. Adad, god of storm and rain, and Shamash, sun god of justice, were also responsible for divination (discovery from the gods' indications of the future). Diviners were consulted by the king before all major decisions. Babylonian deities Enlil, Marduk and Nabu were also prominent at various times. The most sacred religious ritual was the *Akitu* festival, or New Year's festival. This included a coronation ritual where the king renewed his right to rule for another year, and where other royal figures renewed their loyalty oaths as well.

Military Culture and Warfare

By Neo-Assyrian times, annual warfare was a national institution with campaigns normally beginning in the springtime (Saggs, *Might*; Eph'al, "Ways"). These campaigns were to defend or extend the vast reaches of their empire. Assyria had a standing army of substantial size, but also made use of smaller specialized units. They were also accompanied by a group of army engineers responsible for building bridges, siege ramps, and boats. Scribes and religious officials accompanied the army for record keeping, communication, and divination. Additionally, Assyria created a sophisticated intelligence system by distributing spies throughout enemy territory.

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They did not have a navy, but employed the Phoenicians when they had to take to the seas. The need for military services far surpassed the resources of the Assyrian heartland, so able bodies from conquered territories were incorporated into the army. These soldiers were allowed to preserve their distinctive dress, language, weaponry, and style of warfare. However, the dilution of the army with foreign presence may have in fact contributed to the eventual downfall of the empire.

Later Near Eastern powers would utilize new innovations and improvements made by Assyria's military culture. One example of this was a system of roads with road stations along the way. These were used for trade and the transport of military supplies. Along these routes, a postal system was established as a means of communication—sometimes incorrectly attributed to the Persians (Kessler, "Royal Roads").

Three primary strategies of warfare existed for the Assyrians: pitched battles, siege warfare, and psychological warfare. A pitched battle occurred between two armies in open country. These typically were avoided if possible; they did not last long, and casualties were often high for both sides. Siege warfare was costly and time consuming, and it occurred when an army would surround a city and lay siege to it. This usually involved a blockade, which included cutting off the city from its means of survival: e.g., water supply, food, allies, trade resources, weapons, and medical equipment. Siege warfare also included tactics designed to break through the city walls: ramps, battering rams, digging of tunnels, flaming arrows, or ladders to scale the walls.

To avoid both pitched battles and siege warfare, Assyrians frequently employed tactics of psychological warfare. This involved instilling an "awesome fear" in their opponents—a calculated intimidation meant to convince opponents that the cost of war with Assyria was too great to bear. For example, the army might first surround the city walls and simply shout over to the inhabitants, trying to persuade them to surrender. This was usually the job of certain military officials—such as the *rab-shakeh* (chief cupbearer)—and the city leaders would be called to the wall for negotiations. The practice is recorded in the Bible during Assyria's attempted siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:17–37).

If this method was unsuccessful, the army would target a weaker, nearby city and destroy it instead. The inhabitants would be punished as examples. This often involved torture, rape, bodily mutilation, eye gouging, skinning alive, etc. Towns would be burned, orchards cut down, fields would be salted so they could no longer be used, and so on. Skins, heads, body parts, and mutilated bodies—living or dead—could be gathered and displayed to further convince stubborn inhabitants that submission was the most sensible option. This was an effective way of instilling fear and establishing respect throughout the empire, and the Assyrian reputation was in itself an effective means of control.

Assyria was also notorious for exercising its control through regular deportation of enemies from their homeland to other parts of the empire. Some records suggest that between four and five million people were deported in the final three centuries of the Assyrian Empire alone (Garfinkle, "Assyrians"). This method was effective in quelling any potential rebellions by spreading the conquered peoples out, and placing them in hostile and foreign territories where the deportees needed Assyrian protection. When it was to the empire's benefit, Assyria would

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resettle the regions that were cleared out. When there was no benefit, it would just leave them empty. A noticeable effect of this policy was the mixture of populations and massive demographic changes throughout the Near East.

History

The kingdom of Assyria did not really come into existence until much later (ca. 1300 BC), though the term is used here to describe the area of northern Mesopotamia where the Assyrians would emerge (see Saggs *Might*; Foster *Civilizations*; Hallo & Simpson *Ancient Near East*; Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*; Van De Mieroop *History*. More briefly, see Garfinkle, “Assyrians”).

Prehistory and Early History (ca. 9000–1300 BC): Assyria is Formed

Prehistory. Evidence of settled life in the area dates to the “Neolithic Revolution,” around 9000 (Zawi Chemi and Shanidar are two settlements), and more organized agriculture to around 7000 (the settlement Jarmo). The earliest known farming community of Assyria dates to around 6000 (Tell Sotto), and shortly thereafter a farming culture formed in northern Assyria called the Hassuna culture. Further south, the Samarran culture was forming. This is followed by a distinct, more pervasive culture called the Halaf culture—not at all limited to Assyrian lands. Though these early cultures and their settlements (ca. 6000–4300) cannot be called “Assyrian,” they made up a portion of the later group of people of historical Assyria. In southern Mesopotamia, the Ubaid culture was formed and spread northward throughout the Near East (from ca. 4300–3500).

For around 2000 years (4500–2500 BC), knowledge of Assyrian happenings is extremely limited. The name given to the northern culture is Tepe Gawra—after a settlement near Nineveh—while south of Assyrian lands, the Uruk and Early Dynastic Sumerian cultures were flourishing. Southern Sumerian influence was increasingly pervasive, though some northern distinctives were maintained.

Early Cities and Trade. Evidence states that by 2500, a few independent city-states were firmly established in the area: sites at Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbela (also called Erbil). The region was independent of southern Sumero-Akkadian affairs and governance until the Akkad period (ca. 2350–2100), when Sargon of Akkad united the southern lands and annexed Assyria into his new Akkadian empire. A prominent king of the time was Manishtusu of Nineveh (2300), Sargon’s grandson, who also ruled over Ashur. From at least this time forward, Ashur and Nineveh formed a unified political entity—possibly the first step in moving towards a later united Assyrian people and land.

After the fall of the Ur III Dynasty, Mesopotamian history goes through a “dark age” where fewer historical records are available for study. This period (ca. 2000–1800) is referred to in Assyria as the Old Assyrian Period. From around 2000, we learn of Ashur’s trade interests in Anatolia. Archives found in Anatolia at Kanesh—one of the ancient trade centers (called by the ancients, a *kārum*)—are largely responsible for this. Ashur established a number of merchant colonies in Anatolia from which to trade—primarily textiles and tin—and rose to some prominence from the trade benefits. This trading was carried out by enterprising individuals

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rather than by an organized government, though taxes were levied against the traders by the state.

The Amorites and Shamshi-Adad I (ca. 1813–1781 BC). When the dark age ended and Mesopotamian sources resurface, a west-semitic nomadic people called the Amurru (the Amorites) became in control of many major cities (for more on the Amorites, see, Whiting, “Amorite Tribes”). Large segments of the Mesopotamian population also bear Amorite names. The Amurru are not entirely new to the region, with the earliest textual occurrence coming from around 2600. The Amorite presence in Mesopotamia grew steadily, until early in the second millennium when they were able to establish such widespread control. All capital cities of this period (Qatna, Aleppo, Mari, Babylon, Eshnunna, Uruk, Larsa, Ashur) were ruled by Amorites. However, almost no literature that can be called “Amorite” exists; rather, it seems as though the new rulers assimilated fully into Mesopotamian cultures, and even wrote in their languages.

Ashur’s profitable location and trade network made it a prime target for a nearby Amorite king named Shamshi-Adad I, who was based in Ekallatum (a city on the Tigris near Ashur). After taking Ashur as his own in 1808, Shamshi-Adad established the first united kingdom of upper Mesopotamia and became the best-known leader of his day (Villard, “Shamshi-Adad”). His kingdom eventually stretched as far west as Mari on the Euphrates. From there, he had significant interactions with neighboring Syrian states, such as Yamkhad. Though Amorite, Shamshi-Adad presented himself as a legitimate Assyrian ruler. He appears to have been successful in this regard, as he was incorporated into the later *Assyrian King List* as an Assyrian king.

Like many later Assyrian rulers, Shamshi-Adad was enamored with Babylonian culture. He was responsible for a significant “Babylonization” of Assyria during his rule. His kingdom did not live on much longer after he died, however, and Hammurabi of Babylon—another Amorite—soon eclipsed Shamshi-Adad’s kingdom. Hammurabi initiated what we now call the Old Babylonian period of Babylonian history, during which time Assyria experienced another decline.

The Hurrians of Mittani. The Hurrian peoples had been present in Syria and northern Mesopotamia since at least the Akkad period. They rose to prominence during the dark age—following the breakdown of the Old Babylonian Empire—and their center of power was west of the Assyrian heartland in the state of Mittani (also called Hanigalbat). Their language was neither Indo-European or Semitic, and the nearest related language is the much later Urartian. Much like the influx of Amorites influenced Babylonian affairs, the Hurrians influenced Assyria, as well as a number of other prominent Syrian states over which they governed.

By the time historical sources again become available after the dark age (ca. 1500), Hurrians are one of the most prominent people groups in the Near East. This was known as the Amarna period, with a new international equilibrium reached in the Near East between four great powers: Egypt, Hatti, Mittani, and Babylonia. During this period, Assyria was a vassal of Mittani. By around 1400, however, signs of an Assyrian revival emerge. This revival is directly related to the troubles Mittani was enduring, including internal power struggles and external pressures.

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Mittani began to crumble in 1340 when the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I took the western parts of Mittani, allowing Assyria to regain its political autonomy.

Assyria's Rise (ca. 1363–1300 BC). Assyria emerges onto the international scene as an actual political entity for the first time with Ashur-Uballit I (ca. 1363–1330). His reign is marked by Ashur abandoning its city-state model and becoming a territorial state (Postgate, "Land"). He was the first to take the title "great king" and by the time of his death, Assyria was a power on par with Babylon, Egypt and Hatti. Mittani eventually became a province of Assyria under the rule of Adad-nirari I (1305–1274), perhaps during a time of inner turmoil for the Hittites who did not intervene when Assyria moved in.

Middle Assyrian Period (ca. 1300–1100 BC): The Assyrian Empire Emerges

Middle Assyrian Empire. Shalmaneser I (ca. 1273–1245) conquered all of upper Mesopotamia and created the first Assyrian Empire. His son Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1244–1208) was the first Assyrian king to adopt the title "king of the four shores" and even added Babylonia to Assyria's territory for a short time. From this, Assyria was deeply influenced by Babylonian culture, both religiously and politically. Though Babylon would soon regain its independence, it would continue to hold sway over Assyrian culture in the centuries to come.

Also during this time, Assyria expanded westward—taking all territory up to the Hittite border regions. Though the Hittites remained the dominant Near Eastern power, they did acknowledge the growing might of Assyria with a number of diplomatic exchanges. The Hittite kings even referred to the Assyrian kings as "brother" during this time, evidence that they thought of each other more as equals. Assyria would establish settlements in strategic locations to control travel routes, and deportations were common as a means to control local populations and a way to conscript labor. Assyria also made forays to the north, into regions they referred to as Nairi and Uruatri. Centuries later, this would be where Urartu would develop into a unified political entity, though at this time it was a reference to a geographical area with a federation of only loosely affiliated peoples. During this period, Nineveh also rose to higher prominence than Ashur. Though Ashur would remain the political center until the first millennium, Nineveh became Assyria's most important center, strategically located further to the north.

The Arameans. Though Elam dominated Mesopotamian affairs during through their capture of Babylon (ca. 1158), the influx of the Arameans would impact Assyrian affairs. The Arameans, a nomadic people, migrated from the west, which is perhaps directly related to the migration of the "Sea Peoples" from the Mediterranean. The Aramean migrations were so large that they are now referred to as the "Aramean Invasions." Pastoralists from the regions of northern Syria, they likely took advantage of the weakening of the international state system. They spread out over large parts of the Near East, even rising to political prominence in many places. Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC) encountered both Arameans and Mushki in his westward campaigning, holding both at bay for a brief time. Quickly after Tiglath-pileser's rule, Assyria's territory was reduced to their traditional heartland and the Arameans controlled most of northern Syria. The

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Aramean control of this central region could also have contributed to the decline in many other areas of the Near East during this period, as essential trade networks were broken by their occupation.

Late Assyrian Period (ca. 1000–612): The Age of the Assyrian Empire

Assyrian Revival and Trouble with Urartu (1075–745 BC). Following the brief decline of fortunes after Tiglath-pileser's death, the primary tasks of Assyrian kings were rebuilding the economy and consolidating political power. Ashur-dan II (934–912) and his immediate successors made this their mission, laying the foundations of what would grow into the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The Arameans continued to be a major foreign concern, but most energy was devoted to economic development and re-establishing a strong military.

This revival was not marked by a recovery of lost territory, but the creation of a system of control over the most important trade routes. The reign of Ashur-nasirpal II (883–859) marks the high point of this Assyrian revival. By now, Assyria had regained enough strength to turn thoughts outward. Ashur-nasirpal II and his son Shalmaneser III (858–824) returned Assyria to international prominence. Perhaps related to such quickly regained power, a civil war erupted after the death of Shalmaneser III, leading to a brief period of decline. Though generally thought of as a decline, Assyria did not lose control of the territorial gains of the previous century of expansion.

While Assyria was distracted internally (and perhaps because of this), Urartu emerged onto the Near Eastern stage. They occupied the mountainous regions to the north of Assyria in eastern Anatolia (modern-day Armenia), and rose to such power that they actually eclipsed Assyria for a time. Their political apex was the mid-eighth century, when they were able to expand their borders westward into Anatolia and northern Syria. They also pushed into the Zagros Mountains to the southeast. This activity allowed them to control many important trade routes and gave them access to valuable resources. While Assyria was concerned with defending itself against rival Urartu, both Babylonia and the Aramean states were able to free themselves of Assyrian rule. By the end of this period, another revolt erupted in the capital city of Calah, marking the low point of the Neo-Assyrian period. By many accounts, Assyria was on the verge of losing its independence to Urartu when in 745 Pul, governor of Calah, came to the throne.

Neo-Assyrian Empire (744–612 BC). Pul took the throne name Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) and quickly began work towards restoring order in the empire. His annals are poorly preserved, so a detailed reconstruction of his career is difficult. However, the main storyline is clear: Tiglath-pileser III and his second successor Sargon II (721–705) restructured the Assyrian state and initiated an aggressive policy of military (and thus, economic) expansion that saw the Assyrian Empire rise to new heights (Gitin, "Neo-Assyrian Empire").

Tiglath-pileser accomplished a short-lived victory over Urartu in the Syrian state of Arpad (the siege began in 743 and lasted two more years), also unifying Babylonia and Assyria for the first time in Neo-Assyrian history. His reign was followed by the short-lived reign of Shalmaneser V (726–722), significant for the purposes of biblical studies because he was likely

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the king who overthrew the northern kingdom of Israel. His siege of Samaria lasted two—three years, at which time he was assassinated by Sargon II (721–705). Troubles during Sargon's time involved rebellion of Syrian states, but another major concern was the emerging Phrygian state in Anatolia (called by the Assyrians, Mushki) and their king Mita (or Midas, of Greek mythological fame). Sargon also dealt with the constant Urartian troubles to the north.

Throughout this period, Assyria was surrounded by large, capable states—too powerful to be completely controlled: Babylonia to the south, Elam to the southeast, Urartu in the north, and Egypt beyond Syria/Palestine. The Cimmerians and the Scythians, two nomadic warrior peoples immigrating from the north, gave both Urartu and Assyria problems for many years. Another group of nomads from the deserts west of Assyria, the Arabs, were a constant menace as well.

Special consideration, it seems, was extended when dealing with Babylonia, presumably because Assyria had been so profoundly influenced by Babylonian culture and religion (Brinkman, "Babylonia"). The Assyrians did not seem to bear the same resentment towards Babylonia that they did towards Urartu and Elam—both detested rivals and enemies. Elam and Babylonia frequently allied to resist Assyrian might. The extreme southern parts of Babylonia were marshy, so traditional military tactics could not be employed—giving refuge to a new threat: Chaldeans. The Chaldeans were another tribal people who settled in the southern, marshy regions of Babylonia around 1000 BC and inserted themselves into Babylonian affairs. Soon after, they allied with Elam and Babylonia to combat Assyria.

Sargon II (721–705) dealt the crippling blow to Urartu in 714, and Sennacherib (704–681) was able to finally control Babylonia to some extent. A 15-month-long siege of Babylon reduced Babylonia to a puppet state of Assyria, with a pro-Assyrian ruler on the throne. However, because Babylon was viewed as a cultural and religious center, its destruction was seen as a terrible sacrilege. Esarhaddon (680–669) was even able to conquer Egypt for a short time, though his primary interests were not military, but cultural. His policy towards Babylonia was much less harsh than his father's, and he sought to appease them through rebuilding and proper governing.

During Esarhaddon's rule, the Medes established themselves as a power in northern Iran. A later Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (668–627), was responsible for finally defeating Elam. He led a campaign through Elam that saw the end of Susa in 647, whose capture and destruction was particularly brutal. An unforeseen consequence of wiping out Elam, however, was that it gave a growing Iranian power—the Persians—room to grow. The Persians were still vassals of the Medes, though the newly acquired Elamite territory would form the base of their empire a century later. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was at its zenith during the reign of Ashurbanipal, but decline had already set in. By 640, Assyria was at the height of its power and international influence. Within 30 years, the empire was decimated.

Demise of Assyria: Babylon Supersedes Assyria

Assyria's problems became numerous, as an internal power struggle emerged regarding who would be crowned Ashurbanipal's successor (see Machinist, "Fall"; Melville, "New Look"). This translated into external problems with governing such a large empire, and Assyria quickly lost

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hold of its conquered lands. In 626, a native dynasty arose in Babylon under a former Assyrian official—the Chaldean Nabopolassar—and they were able to regain their independence. This became what is now called the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626–539).

The Medes emerged as a threat during this time, attacking Assyria from the west. They allied with Babylonia and a coalition of Palestinian kings against Assyria, resulting in the complete destruction of important Assyrian cities—Nineveh, Calah, Ashur, and many others were all destroyed between 615–612. A remnant survived the onslaught and briefly fled west to Haran. However, Babylonia’s new ruler Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562) quickly crushed this remnant and established Babylonia as the new supreme power of the Near East.

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Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament

²⁶ Lowery, D. D. (2016). [Assyria](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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PROPHECY	O.T. REFERENCES	N.T. FULFILLMENT
Seed of the woman	Gen. 3:15	Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14
Through Noah's sons	Gen. 9:27	Luke 6:36
Seed of Abraham	Gen. 12:3	Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:8, 16
Seed of Isaac	Gen. 17:19	Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18
Blessing to nations	Gen. 18:18	Gal. 3:8
Seed of Isaac	Gen. 21:12	Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18
Blessing to Gentiles	Gen. 22:18	Gal. 3:8, 16; Heb. 6:14
Blessing to Gentiles	Gen. 26:4	Gal. 3:8, 16; Heb. 6:14
Blessing through Abraham	Gen. 28:14	Gal. 3:8, 16; Heb. 6:14
Of the tribe of Judah	Gen. 49:10	Rev. 5:5
No bone broken	Ex. 12:46	John 19:36
Blessing to firstborn son	Ex. 13:2	Luke 2:23
No bone broken	Num. 9:12	John 19:36
Serpent in wilderness	Num. 21:8–9	John 3:14–15
A star out of Jacob	Num. 24:17–19	Matt. 2:2; Luke 1:33, 78; Rev. 22:16
As a prophet	Deut. 18:15, 18–19	John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22–23
Cursed on the tree	Deut. 21:23	Gal. 3:13
The throne of David established forever	2 Sam. 7:12–13, 16, 25–26 1 Chron. 17:11–14, 23–27 2 Chron. 21:7	Matt. 19:28; 21:4; 25:31; Mark 12:37; Luke 1:32; John 7:4; Acts 2:30; 13:23 Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8 Heb. 1:5, 8; 8:1; 12:2; Rev. 22:1

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A promised Redeemer	Job 19:25–27	John 5:28–29; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:7, 11, 14
Declared to be the Son of God	Ps. 2:1–12	Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Acts 4:25–26; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 2:26–27; 19:15–16
His resurrection	Ps. 16:8–10	Acts 2:27; 13:35; 26:23
Hands and feet pierced	Ps. 22:1–31	Matt. 27:31, 35–36
Mocked and insulted	Ps. 22:7–8	Matt. 27:39–43, 45–49
Soldiers cast lots for coat	Ps. 22:18	Mark 15:20, 24–25, 34; Luke 19:24; 23:35; John 19:15–18, 23–24, 34; Acts 2:23–24
Accused by false witnesses	Ps. 27:12	Matt. 26:60–61
He commits his spirit	Ps. 31:5	Luke 23:46
No bone broken	Ps. 34:20	John 19:36
Accused by false witnesses	Ps. 35:11	Matt. 26:59–61; Mark 14:57–58
Hated without reason	Ps. 35:19	John 15:24–25
Friends stand afar off	Ps. 38:11	Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49
“I come to do Thy will”	Ps. 40:6–8	Heb. 10:5–9
Betrayed by a friend	Ps. 41:9	Matt. 26:14–16, 47, 50; Mark 14:17–21; Luke 22:19–23; John 13:18–19
Known for righteousness	Ps. 45:2, 6–7	Heb. 1:8–9
His resurrection	Ps. 49:15	Mark 16:6
Betrayed by a friend	Ps. 55:12–14	John 13:18
His ascension	Ps. 68:18	Eph. 4:8

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Hated without reason	Ps. 69:4	John 15:25
Stung by reproaches	Ps. 69:9	John 2:17; Rom. 15:3
Given gall and vinegar	Ps. 69:21	Matt. 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23; Luke 23:36; John 19:29
Exalted by God	Ps. 72:1–19	Matt. 2:2; Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 1–8
He speaks in parables	Ps. 78:2	Matt. 13:34–25:34
Seed of David exalted	Ps. 89:3–4, 19, 27–29, 35–37	Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8
Son of Man comes in glory	Ps. 102:16	Luke 21:24, 27; Rev. 12:5–10
“Thou remainest”	Ps. 102:24–27	Heb. 1:10–12
Prays for his enemies	Ps. 109:4	Luke 23:34
Another to succeed Judas	Ps. 109:7–8	Acts 1:16–20
A priest like Melchizedek	Ps. 110:1–7	Matt. 22:41–45; 26:64; Mark 12:35–37; 16:19; Acts 7:56; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:20; Heb. 1:13; 2:8; 5:6; 6:20; 7:21; 8:1; 10:11–13; 12:2
The chief corner stone	Ps. 118:22–23	Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10, 11; Luke 20:17; John 1:11; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4
The King comes in the name of the Lord	Ps. 118:26	Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13
David’s seed to reign	Ps. 132:11 cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–13, 16, 25–26, 29	Matt. 1:1
Declared to be the Son of God	Prov. 30:4	Matt. 3:17; Mark 14:61–62; Luke 1:35; John 3:13; 9:35–38; 11:21; Rom. 1:2–4; 10:6–9; 2 Pet. 1:17

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Repentance for the nations	Isa. 2:2–4	Luke 24:47
Hearts are hardened	Isa. 6:9–10	Matt. 13:14, 15; John 12:39, 40; Acts 28:25–27
Born of a virgin	Isa. 7:14	Matt. 1:22, 23
A rock of offense	Isa. 8:14, 15	Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8
Light out of darkness	Isa. 9:1, 2	Matt. 4:14–16; Luke 2:32
God with us	Isa. 9:6, 7	Matt. 1:21, 23; Luke 1:32, 33; John 8:58; 10:30; 14:19; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 2:9
Full of wisdom and power	Isa. 11:1–10	Matt. 3:16; John 3:34; Rom. 15:12; Heb. 1:9
Reigning in mercy	Isa. 16:4–5	Luke 1:31–33
Peg in a sure place	Isa. 22:21–25	Rev. 3:7
Death swallowed up in victory	Isa. 25:6–12	1 Cor. 15:54
A stone in Zion	Isa. 28:16	Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6
The deaf hear, the blind see	Isa. 29:18–19	Matt. 5:3; 11:5; John 9:39
King of kings, Lord of lords	Isa. 32:1–4	Rev. 19:16; 20:6
Son of the Highest	Isa. 33:22	Luke 1:32; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15
Healing for the needy	Isa. 35:4–10	Matt. 9:30; 11:5; 12:22; 20:34; 21:14; Mark 7:30; John 5:9
Make ready the way of the Lord	Isa. 40:3–5	Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–5; John 1:23
The Shepherd dies for his sheep	Isa. 40:10–11	John 10:11; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:24–25
The meek Servant	Isa. 42:1–16	Matt. 12:17–21; Luke 2:32

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A light to the Gentiles	Isa. 49:6–12	Acts 13:47; 2 Cor. 6:2
Scourged and spat upon	Isa. 50:6	Matt. 26:67; 27:26, 30; Mark 14:65; 15:15, 19; Luke 22:63–65; John 19:1
Rejected by his people	Isa. 52:13–53:12	Matt. 8:17; 27:1–2, 12–14, 38
Suffered vicariously	Isa. 53:4–5	Mark 15:3–4, 27–28; Luke 23:1–25, 32–34
Silent when accused	Isa. 53:7	John 1:29; 11:49–52
Crucified with transgressors	Isa. 53:12	John 12:37–38; Acts 8:28–35
Buried with the rich	Isa. 53:9	Acts 10:43; 13:38–39; 1 Cor. 15:3; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:21–25; 1 John 1:7, 9
Calling of those not a people	Isa. 55:4, 5	John 18:37; Rom. 9:25–26; Rev. 1:5
Deliver out of Zion	Isa. 59:16–20	Rom. 11:26–2
Nations walk in the light	Isa. 60:1–3	Luke 2:32
Anointed to preach liberty	Isa. 60:1–2	Luke 4:17–19; Acts 10:38
Called by a new name	Isa. 62:11	Luke 2:32; Rev. 3:12
The King cometh	Isa. 62:11	Matt. 21:5
A vesture dipped in blood	Isa. 63:1–3	Rev. 19:13
Afflicted with the afflicted.	Isa. 63:8–9	Matt. 25:34–40
The elect shall inherit	Isa. 65:9	Rom. 11:5, 7; Heb. 7:14; Rev. 5:5
New heavens and a new earth	Isa. 65:17–25	2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1
The Lord our righteousness	Jer. 23:5, 6	John 2:19–21; Rom. 1:3–4; Eph. 2:20–21; 1 Pet. 2:5

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Born a King	Jer. 30:9	John 18:37; Rev. 1:5
Massacre of infants	Jer. 31:15	Matt. 2:17–18
Conceived by the Holy Spirit	Jer. 31:22	Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35
A New Covenant	Jer. 31:31–34	Matt. 26:27–29; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:15–20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:8–12; 10:15–17; 12:24; 13:20
A spiritual house	Jer. 33:15–17	John 2:19–21; Eph. 2:20–21; 1 Pet. 2:5
A tree planted by God	Ezek. 17:22–24	Matt. 13:31–32
The humble exalted	Ezek. 21:26–27	Luke 1:52
The good Shepherd	Ezek. 34:23–24	John 10:11
Stone cut without hands	Dan. 2:34–35	Acts 4:10–12
His kingdom triumphant	Dan. 2:44–45	Luke 1:33; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 11:15
An everlasting dominion	Dan. 7:13–14	Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 14:61, 62; Acts 1:9–11; Rev. 1:7
Kingdom for the saints	Dan. 7:27	Luke 1:33; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 11:15
Time of His birth	Dan. 9:24–27	Matt. 24:15–21; Luke 3:1
Israel restored	Hos. 3:5	John 18:37; Rom. 11:25–27
Flight into Egypt	Hos. 11:1	Matt. 2:15
Promise of the Spirit	Joel 2:28–32	Acts 2:17–21; Rom. 15:13
The sun darkened	Amos 8:9	Matt. 24:29; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12
Restoration of tabernacle	Amos 9:11–12	Acts 15:16–18

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Israel regathered	Mic. 2:12–13	John 10:14, 26
The Kingdom established	Mic. 4:1–8	Luke 1:33
Born in Bethlehem	Mic. 5:1–5	Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:4, 10–11
Earth filled with knowledge of the glory of the Lord	Hab. 2:14	Rom. 11:26; Rev. 21:23–26
The Lamb on the throne	Zech. 2:10–13	Rev. 5:13; 6:9; 21:24; 22:1–5
A holy priesthood	Zech. 3:8	John 2:19–21; Eph. 2:20–21; 1 Pet. 2:5
A heavenly High Priest	Zech. 6:12–13	Heb. 4:4; 8:1–2
Triumphal entry	Zech. 9:9–10	Matt. 21:4–5; Mark 11:9–10; Luke 20:38; John 12:13–15
Sold for pieces of silver	Zech. 11:12–13	Matt. 26:14–15
Money buys potter's field	Zech. 11:12–13	Matt. 27:9
Piercing of his body	Zech. 12:10	John 19:34, 37
Shepherd smitten—sheep scattered	Zech. 13:1, 6–7	Matt. 26:31; John 16:32
Preceded by Forerunner	Mal. 3:1	Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27
Our sins purged	Mal. 3:3	Heb. 1:3
The light of the world	Mal. 4:2–3	Luke 1:78; John 1:9; 12:46; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 19:11–16; 22:16
The coming of Elijah	Mal. 4:5–6	Matt. 11:14; 17:10–12

The people in the Dead Sea scrolls were evidently able to combine a dual hope of two Messiahs, one priestly and the second a royal figure. The alternation between a kingly Messiah and a priestly figure is characteristic of the two centuries of early Judaism prior to the coming of Jesus.

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Messiahship in Jesus' Ministry A question posed in John 4:29 (cp. 40–43) is: “Could this be the Messiah?” (HCSB). It is evident that the issue of the Messiah’s identity and role was one much debated among the Jews in the first century. In the Synoptic Gospels the way Jesus acted and spoke led naturally to the dialogue at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” a question to which Peter gave the reply, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29 HCSB). Mark made clear that Jesus took an attitude of distinct reserve and caution to this title since it carried overtones of political power, especially in one strand of Jewish hope represented by the *Psalms of Solomon*. Jesus, therefore, accepted Peter’s confession with great reluctance since with it went the disciple’s objection that the Messiah could not suffer (Mark 9:32). For Peter, Messiah was a title of a glorious personage both nationalistic and victorious in battle. Jesus, on the other hand, saw His destiny in terms of a suffering Son of man and Servant of God (Mark 8:31–38; 9:31; 10:33–34). Hence He did not permit the demons to greet Him as Messiah (Luke 4:41) and downplayed all claims to privilege and overt majesty linked with the Jewish title.

The course of Jesus’ ministry is one in which He sought to wean the disciples away from the traditional notion of a warrior Messiah. Instead, Jesus tried to instill in their minds the prospect that the road to His future glory was bound to run by way of the cross, with its experience of rejection, suffering, and humiliation. At the trial before His Jewish judges (Matt. 26:63–66), He once more reinterpreted the title Messiah (KJV, Christ) and gave it a content in terms of the Son of Man figure, based on Dan. 7:13–14. This confession secured His condemnation, and He went to the cross as a crucified Messiah because the Jewish leaders failed to perceive the nature of messiahship as Jesus understood it. Pilate sentenced Him as a messianic pretender who claimed (according to the false charges brought against Him) to be a rival to Caesar (Mark 15:9; Luke 23:2; John 19:14–15). It was only after the resurrection that the disciples were in a position to see how Jesus was truly a king Messiah and how Jesus then opened their minds to what true messiahship meant (Luke 24:45–46). The national title “Messiah” then took on a broader connotation, involving a kingly role that was to embrace all peoples (Luke 24:46–47).

Messiah as a Title in the Early Church From the resurrection onward the first preachers announced that Jesus was the Messiah by divine appointment (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:3–4). Part of the reason for this forthright declaration is to be traced to apologetic reasons. In the mission to Israel, the church had to show how Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies and came into the world as the “Son of David,” a title closely linked with the Messiah as a royal person. Matthew’s Gospel is especially concerned to establish the identity (Matt. 1:1), but it is equally a theme common to Luke (Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4, 11; Acts 2:29–36; 13:22–23). Paul also saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the messianic hopes of the old covenant (1 Cor. 5:7–8). Peter, too, sought to show how the sufferings of the Messiah were foretold (1 Pet. 1:11, 20; 2:21; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1). Luke stressed the link between Jesus as the One anointed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:16–22) in a way that looks back to Isa. 61:1, and he recorded Peter’s statement (Acts 10:38 HCSB) that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” as a fulfillment of OT prophecy. The letter to the Hebrews is rich in this theme (Heb. 1:9; 2:2–4; 9:14–15).

The final stage of development in regard to the title “Messiah” came in the way that Paul used the word more as a personal name than as an official designation (Rom. 9:5, “Christ”). The reason for this shift lies in the intensely personal nature of Paul’s faith which centered in Jesus

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Christ as the divine Lord (Phil. 1:21; Col. 3:4). Also Paul taught his converts, who were mainly converted to Christ from paganism, that Jesus was the universal Lord whose mission was wider than any Jewish hope could embrace. In Pauline thought, “Christ” is a richer term than “Messiah” could ever be, and one pointer in this direction is the fact that the early followers of the Messiah called themselves not converted Jews but “Christians,” Christ’s people (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16) as a sign of their universal faith in a sovereign Lord. See *Christ, Christology; Jesus Christ*.

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²⁷ Martin, R. P. (2003). [Messiah](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1111–1116). Holman Bible Publishers.