

## Chapter 5

### *The Syro-Ephraimite War*

Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war. --2 Kings 16:5<sup>1</sup>

The Syro-Ephraimite War was the immediate cause of Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz, as recorded in Isaiah chapter 7, and it was the fear of the Assyrian Empire that precipitated that war. It was also the Assyrian Empire that put an end to it.<sup>2</sup>

#### **A Brief Overview of Assyrian History**

The history of the Assyrian Empire is divided into three broad periods. The Old Assyrian Period begins around 1900 B.C., and the Middle Assyrian Period stretches from 1300-900. However, it is the Neo-Assyrian Period, 900-612, that is important to the history of Israel. This introductory section gives a brief overview of the lifespan of the Assyrian Empire.

##### The Old Assyrian Period

During the Old Period, the cities Asshur, Nineveh, and Calah (modern Nimrud) were united under single rule, but after a successful war by Hammurabi of Babylon, Assyria broke up into small city-states under the Hurrians.<sup>3</sup>

##### The Middle Assyrian Period

The Middle Period began when Assurballit (1365-1330) reunited Assyria. Under Adadnirari I (1307-1275) Assyria regained land westward to Carchemish, with further expansions making Assyria one of the strongest states in the ancient Near East. Tiglath-pileser I (1115-1077) was the first Assyrian king to reach the Mediterranean, though still far north of Palestine. He received tribute from both Byblos

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1 Scripture citations are from the *NASB* unless otherwise specified.

2 Much, though certainly not all, of the material here relating to the history of Assyria and the Syro-Ephraimite War comes from Donald J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *ISBE*, I:332-41. However, it should be noted in what follows that the scholarly literature is not always consistent, especially when it comes to dates for various events, campaigns, battles, and the reigns of some of the Gentile kings. Since there is this diversity of opinions among the scholars, I had to make choices in order to assemble a consistent running history in this chapter. Therefore I have included many more footnotes than would normally be expected, so that anyone can check which scholar made each particular claim that I included in my development of this history.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 333-34. The Hurrians were a non-Semitic people who entered Mesopotamia from the Armenian mountains to the northwest (Frederick W. Bush, "Hurrians," *ISBE*, II:784). However, Charles T. Fritsch, "Nineveh," *ISBE*, III:539, states that after Hammurabi subdued Assyria, he made it a vassal state.

and Sidon and imposed taxes on the king of Hatti (northern Syria). However, he was forced into many campaigns against the emergent Aramean tribes,<sup>4</sup> thus losing his hold over those areas<sup>5</sup> and leaving Assyria impoverished.<sup>6</sup> Toward the end of his reign, the Arameans were once again a real threat to Assyria. The kingdom began a period of weakness and obscurity for about 140 years.<sup>7</sup> Assyrian records indicate that by 1000 B.C., Zobah, a powerful Aramean city-state and leading Aramean kingdom just north of Damascus, extended its frontiers to the Euphrates and began the conquest of Assyrian territory along the upper Euphrates.<sup>8</sup>

This period of weakness continued into the reign of David (1010-970) and allowed him to extend his own territory into Syria; it also provided Solomon (970-931) a peaceful reign. David's conquests even included Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah,<sup>9</sup> and this in turn stopped Zobah's conquest of Assyrian territory.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps an astonishing turn of events in God's providence that David's conquest of Zobah probably saved Assyria from destruction, which in turn enabled it to become a great, but brutal, empire that would in the eighth century destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel and utterly ravage the Southern Kingdom of Judah.<sup>11</sup> In less theological terms, David's conquest of Zobah represents one of the biggest "what ifs" in ancient near-eastern history.

### The Neo-Assyrian Period

Around 900 the Assyrian kings Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-Ninurta began to restore the power of Assyria. Ashurnasirpal II (885-860), son of Tukulti-Ninurta, conquered Aramean territory within the northern bend of the Euphrates, which brought virtually all of Mesopotamia under Assyrian control.<sup>12</sup> The Assyrian Empire is said to have begun with him.<sup>13</sup> Ashurnasirpal laid the foundation for a number of traits that characterized the Assyrian Empire from that time forth.

In a form of braggadocio which typifies the royal inscriptions for the next two and one half centuries Ashurnasirpal describes his conquest of northern Syria, the types and amount of the booty he received, and the sadistic brutality which he visited upon all who refused to submit to him without battle. From this time forth the Assyrian kings describe their exploits in similar vein. Their armies were so powerful that none could withstand them. Their rapacious cruelty was so terrible that the hatred of them spilled over into the literature of a people as far away as Judah (cf. Nahum chs. 2 to 3 and Jonah).<sup>14</sup>

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- 4 The origin of the Arameans is unknown and they appear first in extrabiblical records in the annals of Tiglath-pileser I, who gave them the name Arameans. They were nomads at that time and were troubling his borders. In time they came to occupy the region north and northeast of Palestine to the Euphrates, extending to the land between the Euphrates and Habor rivers, a region generally called Syria. See William S. LaSor, "Syria," *ISBE*, IV:687, and "Aramaic," *ISBE*, I:229.
  - 5 William S. LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," *ISBE*, IV:849; Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 237.
  - 6 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.
  - 7 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849.
  - 8 *WHAB*, pp., 46, 48.
  - 9 William S. LaSor, "Syria," IV:691. David's conquests are recorded in the Bible in 2 Sam. 8; 10; 12:26-31; 1 Chron. 18-20.
  - 10 *WHAB*, p. 46.
  - 11 "It is part of the irony of history that David's subjugation of this kingdom may have saved Assyria and made it possible for her to rise rapidly to power and during the subsequent centuries to conquer the whole of the Fertile Crescent" (*ibid.*, p. 48).
  - 12 *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
  - 13 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 308.
  - 14 *WHAB*, p. 72.

As Assyria gained more and more territory, Ashurnasirpal launched a major expedition westward to Syria in 877 and received tribute from Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. With the booty from these campaigns and a prisoner labor force, he returned home and rebuilt the capital at Calah about 875.<sup>15</sup>

Ashurnasirpal's son, Shalmaneser III (859-824), spent the the first 31 years of his reign in campaigns to extend Assyrian rule to Cilicia,<sup>16</sup> Palestine, and the Persian gulf. The first three of those campaigns resulted in the capture of Carchemish and other nearby territories in 856. This greatly alarmed the Syrian states, and they prepared to meet the inevitable advance of Shalmaneser, which occurred in 853.<sup>17</sup>

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) was perhaps the strongest ruler of the Assyrian Empire.<sup>18</sup> He also plays a pivotal role in the events related to Isaiah 7:14. His successors, Shalmaneser V (727-722), Sargon II (722-705), Sennacherib (705-681), Esarhaddon (681-669), and Ashurbanipal (ca. 669-627) were all strong kings, and Assyria reached its zenith under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.<sup>19</sup> All six of these kings had interaction with Israel and Judah.

Assyrian power declined rapidly after the death of Ashurbanipal. Asshur fell to the Medes in 614, and in 612 the capital city, Nineveh,<sup>20</sup> fell to a coalition of the Medes and Babylonians. Assyrian remnants attempted to set up a new capital at Harran west of Nineveh in northern Arabia. After the fall of Nineveh, the Medes went home, but Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, continued to push westward and took Harran in 609. The remnant of the Assyrian forces retreated to Carchemish. Also in 609 Pharaoh Necho of Egypt marched northward to help the Assyrians.<sup>21</sup> However, he arrived too late to enable the Assyrian forces to hold Harran, and he could not retake Harran from Nabopolassar. He set up his headquarters at Riblah, and managed to hold the Babylonians at bay for about three years. However, in 605 Nebuchadnezzar, Nabopolassar's son, marched at the head of his army up the Euphrates River to engage the Egyptian army and what was left of the Assyrian army in the world-changing Battle of Carchemish. The young Babylonian displayed his military genius and defeated the Egyptians. Necho falls back to Hamath, hoping to regroup, but Nebuchadnezzar gives him no opportunity, pursuing him and virtually annihilating the Egyptian force. He pushes Necho all the way back to Egypt. Babylon is now the undisputed ruler of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. Egypt will never again be a world power, and Assyria had ceased to exist.<sup>22</sup>

For over 200 years Assyria had ruled the Near East with unmitigated cruelty. Vicious brutality perpetrated upon conquered armies and populations was the official policy. But peoples who had been so ruthlessly oppressed now turned upon the oppressor. So thorough and devastating was the destruction of the Assyrian capital at Nineveh at the hands of her enemies that for centuries afterward even its location would be unknown. Only in 1845 did Layard identify a site known as Kuyunjik as the remains of ancient Nineveh.

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15 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.

16 The southeast coastal region of Asia Minor.

17 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334. The Battle of Qarqar in 853 is discussed in the next section.

18 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 328. Lasor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849, points out that the Babylonian King List A has the name Pulu for the king before Shalmaneser V. "Thus the name "Pul" in 2 K. 15:19 is explained: it was the Babylonian throne-name of Tiglath-pileser."

19 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 365.

20 Many Assyrian kings built palaces in Nineveh, but it was Sennacherib (705-681) who made it the capital of the empire; Fritsch, "Nineveh," III:539.

21 Josiah, king of Judah, in disobedience to God attempts to stop Necho and is killed in battle against him at Megiddo (see the amazing statement in 2 Chron. 35:20-22).

22 This brief summary is taken in large part from Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 371-73.

The prophet Nahum describes the fall of Assyria, and he ends his book with this word to the king of Assyria:

All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall,  
for who has not felt your endless cruelty?<sup>23</sup>

## Earlier Coalitions Against Assyria

The Syro-Ephraimite War refers to the attack on Judah by a coalition that had been formed to protect the Syro-Palestinian region against the Assyrian threat posed by Tiglath-pileser III. However, there had been earlier coalitions against Assyria of which brief notice should be taken.

### The Coalition Under Ben-hadad II Shalmaneser III: The Battle of Qarqar

After the defeat of King Hadadezer of Zobah by David, Rezon (ca. 925-915), an underling of Hadadezer, retook the Aramean city of Damascus from Solomon; he is often identified as Hezion, grandfather of Ben-hadad I of Damascus.<sup>24</sup> This Ben-hadad, in view of his connection with King Asa of Judah,<sup>25</sup> was ruling in Damascus by 895, possibly as early as 900.<sup>26</sup> Ben-hadad II<sup>27</sup> probably began his reign about 860<sup>28</sup> and was both opponent and ally of Ahab (874/73-853).

As Assyria began its return to power around 900 B.C., two kings played a major role in the ensuing ninth century: Ashurnasirpal II (885-860) and his son Shalmaneser III (859-824). The early campaigns of Shalmaneser III made the Syrian states fearful of a campaign southward. Ben-hadad II was probably the strongest ruler in the Syro-Palestinian region<sup>29</sup> and put together a coalition to stop the southward advance of the mighty Assyrian host. The three most powerful kings in the coalition were Ben-hadad of Damascus, Irhuleni of Hamath, and Ahab of Samaria.<sup>30</sup> According to the annals of Shalmaneser, there were a total of twelve kings allied against him.<sup>31</sup> They also state that "Ahab the Israelite" contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 soldiers to the coalition. This was the first mention of

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23 Nahum 3:19 (NIV).

24 Gregory D. Jordan, "Rezon," *ISBE*, IV:181; the approximate dates of his reign are from LaSor, "Syria," IV:691. See also the biblical record in 1 Kgs. 11:23-25. According to Roland K. Harrison, "Ben-hadad," *ISBE*, I:458, "Hadadezer" (Akk., Adad-ʾidri) was probably a throne name of Ben-hadad I. Also, Shalmaneser consistently refers to Ben-hadad II as "Hadadezer" (*ANET*, pp. 278-80).

25 1 Kgs. 15:16-22.

26 Harrison, "Ben-hadad," I:458.

27 The Ben-hadad of 1 Kgs. 20. It is not certain whether there were two or three kings in Damascus who had the name Ben-hadad. The threefold numbering here follows LaSor, "Syria," and Harrison, "Ben-hadad." If there were only two kings who had that name, the king called "Ben-hadad II" here is the still-reigning Ben-hadad I, and the king called Ben-hadad III here (ca. 796-770), the son of Hazael (ca. 842-798), would be Ben-hadad II. According to Harrison, p. 458, it is also possible that "Ben-hadad" became a general designation for kings of Syria (cf. Amos 1:4; Jer. 49:27).

28 Harrison, "Ben-hadad," I:458.

29 This according to *WHAB*, p. 72. Note, however, that previous to this point in time, this Ben-hadad had twice engaged Ahab in battle and lost both times (1 Kgs. 20). After Ahab's second victory, he was particularly lenient to Ben-hadad. Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 312, suggests that with the specter of Assyria on the horizon, Ahab realized it would not be wise to weaken Ben-hadad militarily.

30 *WHAB*, p. 72.

31 *ANET*, pp. 278-79.

Israel in the Assyrian annals.<sup>32</sup>

In 853, his sixth year, Shalmaneser marched south and a full-scale battle was fought at Qarqar on the Orontes River, south of Hamath.<sup>33</sup> With characteristic Assyrian humility, Shalmaneser claims a stunning victory,<sup>34</sup> but "nevertheless he retired from the scene and we may assume that the battle was drawn."<sup>35</sup> Neither Hamath nor Damascus was taken.<sup>36</sup> Although not mentioned in the Bible, the Battle of Qarqar was the first contact either Israel or Judah had with Assyria.

The sequel to the Battle of Qarqar can be briefly summarized as follows.

Shalmaneser did not return until at least his tenth year, possibly his eleventh year,<sup>37</sup> then again in his fourteenth year--all without taking Damascus. However, when Ben-hadad II was assassinated in 842 by Hazael (ca. 842-798),<sup>38</sup> Shalmaneser took that opportunity to march against the new king in Damascus in 841, Shalmaneser's eighteenth year.<sup>39</sup> In the battle Hazael's army was routed, but he took refuge in Damascus and neither he nor Damascus was captured.<sup>40</sup> However, the Assyrians did ravage the surrounding countryside and received tribute from Tyre, Sidon, and Jehu of Israel. On Shalmaneser's famous Black Obelisk, Jehu is depicted bowing low on his hands and knees with his face to the ground before the Assyrian king as he presents his tribute.<sup>41</sup>

After making one more attempt to take Damascus in his twenty-first year, 838, Shalmaneser launched no further campaigns in the west, probable evidence of the growing power of the Syrian city-states.<sup>42</sup> No Assyrian army entered the Syro-Palestinian region for a generation, and this allowed Hazael to regain his strength and inflict significant harm on Israel.<sup>43</sup>

Toward the end of Shalmaneser's reign, his son Assur-danin-apli revolted against him, confining the aged king to his palace in Calah. Another son, Samsi-Adad V fought the rebels for four years and then succeeded his father as king (824/823-811). When he died, Adadnirari III (810-783) ascended the throne, but for several years the queen mother ruled as coregent during the minority of their son. In 806 Adadnirari launched a campaign into north Syria, reaching the Mediterranean. From 805 to 802 he led a devastating campaign against Damascus,<sup>44</sup> then under Ben-hadad III, son of Hazael,<sup>45</sup> taking

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32 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.

33 853 B.C. is one of the anchor dates used by Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new revised ed. [3rd ed.] (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1983), pp. 72-78; Ahab's last year of reign was 853/852.

34 *ANET*, p. 279.

35 *WHAB*, p. 72. However, Harrison, "Ben-hadad," I:458, calls the result of the battle "a decisive defeat on the Assyrians."

36 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.

37 Contrast *ANET*, p. 279, with William S. LaSor, "Shalmaneser," *ISBE*, IV:446.

38 See 1 Kgs. 19:15-18; 2 Kgs. 8:7-15.

39 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334. According to an inscription by Shalmaneser (*ANET*, p. 280), this campaign was undertaken in his eighteenth year (841), and he states that it was against Hazael, rather than Ben-hadad. Therefore, the assassination of Ben-hadad by Hazael probably took place early in 842, which is the date given by Wiseman. 841 is also one of the anchor dates established by Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, pp. 103-104. During Jehu's time, both Israel and Judah used the nonaccession-year system; Jehu's first year, then, was 841/840.

40 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.

41 Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk, discovered in 1846 at Nimrud, is about 2 meters tall. For the text see *ANET*, p. 280, and for pictures see *ANEP*, figures 351-355; Jehu is depicted in figure 355. The inscription uses the phrase "Jehu, son of Omri." Apparently, Shalmaneser was not aware of the violent end of the Omride dynasty; see 2 Kgs. 9:11-10:28.

42 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:334.

43 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 323. There is no biblical record of Hazael's acts against Israel; however, see Wood, pp. 322-23.

44 Merrill F. Unger, "Damascus," *ISBE*, I:853.

45 There is no agreement as to the exact year when the reign passed from Hazael to his son, Ben-hadad III.

spoil from him.<sup>46</sup> Although he was allowed to live, Damascus was greatly weakened, which in turn allowed Israel to begin the long process toward a position of strength. Nevertheless, Jehoahaz (814-798), king in Samaria at this point, is also forced to pay tribute to Adadnirari, along with Tyre, Sidon, Edom, and Philistia.<sup>47</sup>

Adadnirari died young, and the following three kings were his sons, ruling in succession: Shalmaneser IV (782-772), Assur-dan III (771-754), and Assur-nirari V (753-746).<sup>48</sup> All three were weak kings, resulting in Assyrian weakness from the death of Adadnirari (783) to Tiglath-pileser III (745), almost 60 years. During this time both Israel and Judah reached the climax of their powers under Jeroboam II (793-753) in the north and Azariah<sup>49</sup> (791-739) in the south.<sup>50</sup>

### The Coalition Under Azariah

#### Tiglath-pileser III: His First Western Campaign of 743-738

During this period of Assyrian weakness, Urartu (biblical Ararat, in the mountains north of Assyria), had revolted, and a new Syro-Urartian coalition under Mati<sup>3</sup>-ilu of Arpad (north of Phoenicia near the Mediterranean coast) had formed and was growing in might.<sup>51</sup> Babylon had also grown restless.

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) was one of the strongest, if not the strongest, of Assyrian kings. Apparently scholars differ on whether there is a change in dynasty here. Two highly respected scholars differ on this question. Wiseman states that he was the younger brother of Assur-nirari V,<sup>52</sup> whereas William LaSor states that since he did not give his ancestry in any extant inscriptions, as was customary, he was probably not of royal lineage.<sup>53</sup>

When Tiglath-pileser ascended the throne in 745, he

took immediate and vigorous action to strengthen the central royal authority by subduing the provinces, thereby giving them the same direct allegiance as the home districts had to the king in person. By reestablishing control over outlying regions he aimed at bringing conquered territories into a close-knit empire.<sup>54</sup>

In 745<sup>55</sup> he marched to the Karûn River to remind Babylon of his superior military power. Tiglath-pileser's first campaign was to the north in 744 against Urartu, which had been taking over northern Assyrian territory, and he defeated its king, Sadur III.<sup>56</sup> He then began his push westward. From 743 to

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46 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335. On Unger's reckoning ("Damascus," p. 853) Hazael ruled from 843 to 801 and was still on the throne in Damascus at this defeat; both Wiseman and Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 324, n. 68, state that it was Ben-hadad. Again, since the dates of their reigns are uncertain, no positive statement can be made.

47 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 324.

48 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, and Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 326.

49 Also called Uzziah.

50 *WHAB*, p. 72.

51 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335.

52 *Ibid.*

53 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849.

54 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335.

55 Scholars differ on the precise dates of the events described in this and the following paragraphs. The sources for the dates given here are found in the footnotes.

56 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849; Samuel J. Schultz, "Uzziah," *ISBE*, IV:961. According to Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 121, Tiglath-pileser was in the area of the Medes, northeast of Assyria, in 744.

738 he conducted a great campaign in the Mediterranean area.<sup>57</sup> Arpad was besieged for three years: 743, 742, and 741.<sup>58</sup> Then Tiglath-pileser moved south and engaged a Syrian coalition whose revolt had been instigated and led, according to the annals of Tiglath-pileser, by "Azriyau of Yauda,"<sup>59</sup> which almost certainly is a reference to Azariah (Uzziah), king of Judah.<sup>60</sup>

Leon Wood offers the following explanation of how the coalition was formed and how Azariah became its leader.

It was following the death of Jeroboam II [754/753]...that Uzziah [Azariah] reached the zenith of his influence. By 743 B.C., the year of the first western campaign of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, Uzziah had become the strongest ruler along the Mediterranean coast. Since the defeat of Damascus by Adad-nirari III a half century earlier, Jeroboam II had been the strongest; but following his death Israel had become seriously weakened by inner turmoil and a rapid succession of kings. Syrian states north of Damascus had long been kept weak by continued Assyrian aggression and could not lead in resisting Tiglath-pileser. Consequently, Uzziah, who had become known because of his success in the south [of Judah], was now recognized by these others and given leadership of a coalition to withstand the coming Assyrian conqueror. Tiglath-pileser himself gives record of this coalition and encounter...Uzziah was no longer young at the time, for this was the forty-eighth year of his rule [744/743], when he was sixty four. It would have been a memorable occasion to find himself thus honored by fellow rulers.<sup>61</sup>

Though Azariah is prominent in his records,<sup>62</sup> determining the year for the battle between Tiglath-pileser and Azariah's coalition is difficult.<sup>63</sup> The annals of Tiglath-pileser mention fighting against Azariah at Arpad.<sup>64</sup> It could be before the siege began (743), at some point during the siege, or after the fall of Arpad (741). For the purposes of this chapter, it is not necessary to enter the debate in any great detail. However, it should be noted that these annals also mention that Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria brought tribute to Tiglath-pileser.<sup>65</sup> Based on the analysis in chapter 4, two important dates were determined: the last year of Azariah's reign was 740/739 and that of Menahem was 742/741. This would seem to argue that the conflict between Tiglath-pileser and the coalition led

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57 Schultz, "Uzziah," IV:961. See also Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, both p. 328, and n. 81; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 121. Other scholars argue that this campaign took place in 738.

58 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335. By contrast, William S. LaSor, "Arpad," *IBSE* I:298, states that Arpad was taken in the third year of Tiglath-pileser; that would be 742 (using accession-year dating). Rabshakeh mentions Arpad as one of the cities Tiglath-pileser conquered (2 Kgs. 18:34; 19:13; Isa. 36:19; 37:13).

59 Noted by Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335; for this section of the annals of Tiglath-pileser, see *ANET*, p. 282.

60 The alternative would be a king by the same name ruling at Ya'diya (Sam'al, modern Zinjirli). However, according to Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 353, n. 44, "Some scholars, because of alleged chronological difficulties and the fact that this encounter transpired far north of Judah, have suggested that this Azariah was a king of some northern Syrian state. However, it is extremely coincidental that there could have been two kings of the same name, from states of the same name and at the same time." Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, agrees: Azariah of Judah is "more likely." A few differing opinions are reviewed by LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850.

61 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 353; brackets added. Wood adds in n. 45, "Uzziah would already have been [in 743] a leper eight years, but evidently not greatly impaired in military skill or leadership ability" (brackets added).

62 Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 159.

63 It is not known whether the annals of Tiglath-pileser "consisted of annual records in an unbroken sequence of years, or whether they were divided into larger sections dealing with the campaigns as they took place in certain broad geographical areas" (Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 145). Thus it is difficult to assign specific years to certain recorded events.

64 Schultz, "Uzziah," IV:961.

65 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850. See also 2 Kgs. 15:19-20.

by Azariah, as well as Menahem's tribute, took place in 743<sup>66</sup> just before the siege of Arpad or early in that siege.<sup>67</sup>

Tiglath-pileser claimed victory over the coalition, although he did not record any tribute received from Azariah of Judah.<sup>68</sup> However, he did record a number of named Judean prisoners that were forcibly resettled at Ullabu (near the source of the Tigris River north of Assyria),<sup>69</sup> and the subjugation of Azariah's allies.<sup>70</sup> It is also probable that Tiglath-pileser captured portions of Israel,<sup>71</sup> but due to the tribute paid by Menahem, Samaria and the rest of the Northern Kingdom did not become an Assyrian province.<sup>72</sup> Tiglath-pileser confirmed Menahem in power.<sup>73</sup> Thus Israel created a buffer zone between the Assyrian king and Judah, allowing Azariah to return to Judah and continue his anti-Assyrian policies until his death.<sup>74</sup>

Before concluding this section, it should be noted that Tiglath-pileser was the first Assyrian king to begin the practice of deportation of native populations in conquered territories.

He [Tiglath-pileser] also instituted a policy of exchanging large sections of the populations of conquered territories, to break up nationalistic feeling and to make the population less united and more pliable.<sup>75</sup>

Wood further explains,

Former kings [of Assyria] had been satisfied merely with nominal control and a reception of tribute, but this had resulted in constant revolt. Tiglath-pileser incorporated conquered land as Assyrian provinces and deported native leaders who might instigate revolution. The policy proved effective and was copied by successors.<sup>76</sup>

## The Syro-Ephraimite War

### Introduction

The previous section demonstrated that forming a coalition to counter a third Assyria threat would not be a new idea. Shalmaneser III met a coalition including Ben-hadad II of Damascus and Ahab of Samaria at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. Then in his first western campaign of 743-738 B.C., Tiglath-pileser III met another coalition under the leadership of Azariah of Judah.

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66 In Ahaziah's 48th year, 744/743; see also Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 353.

67 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, states that Tiglath-pileser received tribute from Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria "during the siege of Arpad." However, he also implies that the conflict with Azariah occurred after the fall of Arpad in 741. Wright and Filson, *WHAB*, p. 72, assign Menahem's tribute to 738. Both Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, pp. 142-59, and Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 328, n.82, and 353, believe it to be in 743, at or before the siege was begun at Arpad.

68 Schultz, "Uzziah," IV:961.

69 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335.

70 Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 159.

71 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849-50.

72 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 328.

73 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335; see also 2 Kgs. 15:19-20.

74 Schultz, "Uzziah," IV:961.

75 *WHAB*, p. 72; brackets added.

76 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 328; brackets added. See also LaSor, "Syria," IV:691-92.

During the siege of Arpad in that campaign, Tiglath-pileser received tribute from Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria,<sup>77</sup> making both kings vassals of Assyria. As argued in the previous section, this was likely during the year 743. After receiving that tribute, Tiglath-pileser remained north of those two kingdoms for the remainder of his campaign. When he withdrew from the Mediterranean area in 738, he carried on a series of expeditions in the Zagros Mountains and against the Medes, both east of Assyria,<sup>78</sup> giving the kings of the Syro-Palestinian region a brief respite to plot rebellion.

The Syro-Ephraimite War is the name given to the war waged by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria against Judah.<sup>79</sup> Both Rezin and Pekah took a strong anti-Assyrian stand<sup>80</sup> and wanted Ahaz to join their alliance against the great eastern power. Ahaz, however, was pro-Assyrian, which probably played a role in Ahaz being able to usurp the throne in 736/735 while his father, Jotham, still lived.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Ahaz refused to join Rezin and Pekah, and as a consequence these two kings attacked Judah and put Jerusalem under siege,<sup>82</sup> hoping to place a man sympathetic to their cause on the throne ("the son of Tabeel"<sup>83</sup>). If successful, this would accomplish two goals: protect their southern borders and get Judah into the coalition:

To make sure they [Rezin and Pekah] would not be endangered by a neutral or potentially hostile nation behind them, they declared war on Ahaz, hoping to force Judah into their alliance. Their intention was to place the Aramean ben Tabeel (Isa. 7:6) on the Davidic throne

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77 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335. Note the account of Menahem's tribute in 2 Kgs. 15:19-20. Since Tiglath-pileser did not withdraw from the Mediterranean area as a whole during 743, or even during Menahem's last year on the throne (742/741), it is likely that the reference in v. 20 to withdrawing and staying in "the land no longer" refers to the land of Israel.

78 Ibid.

79 The analysis of the Syro-Ephraimite War given in this chapter is based on the standard view of the war, which is articulated quite succinctly by William F. Albright, "The Son of Tabeel (Isaiah 7:6)," *BASOR* 140 (December 1955):35: "The war itself is recognized by all to have been fought by Rezin and Pekah about 733 B.C. in order to consolidate their forces before the impending Assyrian attack." Regarding this standard view of the war, B. Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 (April 1972):153, states that "on this view, the war had only one aim--to force Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition, so that it should not remain a pro-Assyrian enclave in the area stretching from southern Syria to Egypt." The sources relied on to write this chapter who take this standard view include Wiseman, "Assyria," LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," W. Shaw Caldecott and Samuel J. Schultz, "Ahaz," *ISBE*, I:76-78, Wright and Filson, *WHAB*, and Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*. However, Oded in the article just cited takes a different view. According to it, Rezin was engaged in a campaign to expand into territory held by Judah in Transjordan, which had nothing to do with the formation of a coalition to stand against another Assyrian invasion. In contrast to Oded, the explanation and presentation of the war in this chapter are based on the standard view. However, it is not necessary to enter into the arguments for or against either view. On either view, Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser to save him from the war waged against him by Syria and Israel. Also on either view, as J. A. Thompson notes, "The political causes of the war are unclear, but its divine purpose was retribution on Ahaz and Judah" (1, 2 *Chronicles*, vol. 9, in *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen [Broadman & Holman Publishing, 1994], p. 336).

80 Caldecott and Schultz, "Ahaz," I:77; Wood *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 332

81 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 355. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 133, writes, "It is practically certain that Ahaz was raised to the throne in 735 with the aid of a pro-Assyrian faction..."

82 *WHAB*, p. 72; Caldecott and Schultz, "Ahaz," I:77. Contrary to Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," p. 154, it is to be noted that the Syro-Ephraimite War was from its beginning waged against Ahaz and not his father Jotham. Ahaz usurped the throne from his father in 736/735, though Jotham lived four more years until 732/731; see the dating scheme discussed in the section "The Reign of Ahaz" in chapter 4. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 132, makes a strong argument based on the data in Scripture that Ahaz was on the throne when the attack occurred: "The combined attack on Jerusalem by Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel is mentioned in the account of Ahaz at 2 Kings 16:5-7 and also in a postscript to the account of Jotham at 2 Kings 15:37. That clearly points to an overlap between Jotham and Ahaz. If the attack had come when Jotham was in full control, it would have been reported only in the account of his reign. But the fact that it comes as a postscript to Jotham's account indicates that he was still alive when the attack was made; and the fact that it comes again in the record of Ahaz points to his being at the helm at that time."

83 "Son of Tabeel" is mentioned only in Isa. 7:6. According to K. C. Hanson, "Tabeel," *ISBE*, IV:697, there are at least six theories as to the meaning of "Tabeel" in this phrase. See also Albright, "The Son of Tabeel (Isaiah 7:6)," pp. 34-35.

instead of Ahaz.<sup>84</sup>

There are numerous problems in developing the following sequence of events in the Syro-Ephraimite War, and it should be noted that, as E. J. Young admitted, we have only "meager knowledge of the war."<sup>85</sup>

### The Date of the Syro-Ephraimite War

Menahem's last year of reign was 742/741, and his son, Pekahiah, assumed the throne. However, he was assassinated by Pekah two years later in 740/739.<sup>86</sup> The kings in the Syro-Palestinian region had little doubt that Tiglath-pileser would return. Therefore, possibly early in 734,<sup>87</sup> Rezin and Pekah took the lead in preparing for this by assembling a coalition of all the southern powers to withstand any advance of the great Assyrian king into their territory.<sup>88</sup> However, just as it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of this new coalition, it is also difficult to determine the date of the attack on Ahaz. Unger suggests "ca. 735," but if the date 734 is accepted as the beginning of the coalition, then it would seem reasonable that forcing Judah to join should be close to the beginning of the coalition. This would place the attack on Judah in late 734.<sup>89</sup> But again, these dates cannot be pinpointed. Ronald Youngblood takes a less precise approach: "In 735/4 B.C. they [Rezin and Pekah] slaughtered large numbers of people in Judah and took captive even larger numbers (2 Ch. 28:5-8)."<sup>90</sup>

### The Prosecution of the Syro-Ephraimite War

The most complete account of the Syro-Ephraimite War is found in 2 Chronicles 28.<sup>91</sup> Verses 1 and 5-15 read as follows:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do right in the sight of the LORD as David his father had done.

...

Wherefore, the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram; and they defeated him and carried away from him a great number of captives and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who inflicted him with heavy casualties. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah 120,000 in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the ruler of the house and Elkanah the second to the king.

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84 Caldecott and Schultz, "Ahaz," I:77; brackets added.

85 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), I:268.

86 See the subsection "Pekah's Rival Reign in Gilead" under subsection "The Reigns of Azariah, Pekah, and Jotham" under section "The Proposed Harmonization" in Chapter 4.

87 Wright and Filson, *WHAB*, p. 72, say "c. 734."

88 Ibid. In addition to Syria and Israel, this coalition also included Tyre, Phoenicia, and Philistia (see Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, and Douglas K. Stuart, "Rezin," *ISBE*, IV:180).

89 734 is also the date given for the attack by Stuart, "Rezin," IV:180.

90 Ronald F. Youngblood, "Immanuel," *ISBE*, II:807; brackets added.

91 See also Isa. 7 and 8.

The sons of Israel carried away captive of their brethren 200,000 women, sons and daughters; and they took also a great deal of spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded; and he went out to meet the army which came to Samaria and said to them, "Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a rage which has even reached heaven. Now you are proposing to subjugate for yourselves the people of Judah and Jerusalem for male and female slaves. Surely, do you not have transgressions of your own against the LORD your God? Now therefore, listen to me and return the captives whom you captured from your brothers, for the burning anger of the LORD is against you." Then some of the heads of the sons of Ephraim--Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai--arose against those who were coming from the battle, and said to them, "You must not bring the captives in here, for you are proposing to bring upon us guilt against the LORD adding to our sins and our guilt; for our guilt is great so that His burning anger is against Israel." So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the officers and all the assembly. Then the men who were designated by name arose, took the captives, and they clothed all their naked ones from the spoil; and they gave them clothes and sandals, fed them and gave them drink, anointed them with oil, led all their feeble ones on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brothers; then they returned to Samaria.

Though briefer than 2 Chronicles 28, the accounts in 2 Kings provide a few additional details.

Now the rest of the acts of Jotham and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son became king in his place. (2 Kgs. 15:36-38)

Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and cleared the Judeans out of Elath entirely; and the Arameans came to Elath and have lived there to this day. (2 Kgs. 16:5-6)

To summarize, the combined armies of Rezin and Pekah invaded Judah; how many actual engagements there were is not specified. Keil argues that 2 Chronicles 28 describes the "two main battles."<sup>92</sup> First, Rezin carried many captives back to Damascus, and second, under Pekah's command, his army killed 120,000 valiant men of Judah. He also took 200,000 men and women captive along with much spoil. He took most of the spoil back to Samaria, but in response to the warning from the prophet Oded and the admonition of several Ephraimite chiefs, these 200,000 were allowed to return home to Judah.<sup>93</sup> However, as the account in 2 Chronicles goes on to relate, Judah suffered other military losses as well. Thiele writes,

In the face of a violent anti-Assyrian atmosphere in western Asia, Ahaz pursued a policy that would bring him into serious difficulties with his neighbors, who assailed him from all quarters. In the southeast Edom attacked Judah (2 Chron. 28:17). In the southwest the Philistines invaded Judah and seized much territory (v. 18). In the northeast Aram attacked Ahaz and took

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92 C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, vol 2 of vol. 3, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date, 1865), II:433.

93 Concerning these large numbers, Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 356, n. 55, explains, "To account for this loss of life, certainly large battles were fought sometime during this general time of siege."

many captives to Damascus, and Pekah of Israel came in from the north (vv. 5-8).<sup>94</sup>

According to the shorter account in 2 Kings, Rezin and Pekah laid siege to Jerusalem itself. The siege almost certainly occurred after the two main battles described in the previous paragraph.<sup>95</sup> Their intent, according to Isaiah 7:6, was to depose Ahaz and put "the son of Tabeel" on the throne, but they were unable to overcome Ahaz.

It is difficult to put all these events in their proper sequence. However, only two questions are really important to this chapter:

- At what point did Isaiah meet Ahaz and make the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14?
- At what point did Ahaz make his plea for help to Tiglath-pileser?

Before answering these questions separately, the relationship between them would seem relatively clear: Isaiah met Ahaz before the king made his appeal to Tiglath-pileser. As Young notes,

It must furthermore be pointed out that the whole purpose of Isaiah's message was to dissuade the king from embarking upon a wrong course of action, namely, that of relying upon Assyria rather than upon the Lord. If, however, the king had already made his appeal to Assyria, Isaiah's prophecy would seem to have come to late. What point would there be in urging Ahaz to trust the Lord rather than man after the king had already placed his trust in Assyria? Why urge him to choose a sign after he had already made his decision and embarked upon his fatal course of action? If he had then reversed his decision he would have Assyria to content with.<sup>96</sup>

Since the Lord had sent Isaiah to Ahaz with a message of reassurance that Rezin and Pekah will fail in their plans<sup>97</sup> and that Ahaz should ask a sign from the Lord to strengthen his faith,<sup>98</sup> his refusal to ask for a sign (with a pretense of piety in his reference to Deut. 6:16) demonstrates a complete rejection of the word of the Lord.

He knew well enough that if he were to ask for a sign, it would be granted to him, and as a consequence he would have been compelled to believe the Lord and to place his trust in him. This he did not wish to do. Not Yahweh but Assyria was his desire.<sup>99</sup>

It would thus seem likely that although Ahaz had not yet sent his appeal for help to Tiglath-pileser when Isaiah met him, he had indeed already made up his mind to do so before that meeting.<sup>100</sup>

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94 Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 133.

95 Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, II:402. It is not possible to determine the length of time between these two battles and the beginning of the siege. Also, whether these two parts of the Syro-Ephraimitic War constitute two "campaigns" or one, a question argued by some scholars, is a matter of semantics of little moment.

96 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:269. Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), p. 139, takes the opposite view: "He [Ahaz] has already summoned the help of Tiglath-Pileser, king of Asshur, and with hypocritical pretenses rejects the offer of Isaiah" (brackets added).

97 Isa. 7:4,7.

98 Isa. 7:10-11.

99 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:280.

100 John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 203, 205: "Isaiah challenges him [Ahaz] to seek evidence that the exclusive trust he is recommending is indeed viable. But Ahaz does not want such evidence. Why? Apparently it is because his mind is already made up....He has already concluded that his only hope is alliance with Assyria" (brackets added).

Now to answer the first question, Isaiah 7:1-7 reads as follows:

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, 'Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.'"

Verse 1 is a summary statement of the Syro-Ephraimite War; the verses following go back in time, giving more detail. According to Isaiah 7:2-3 and 5-6, news of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance and their intent to wage war on Judah caused great fear in Ahaz and his people. Ahaz went out to the "conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field," presumably as part of an inspection of Jerusalem's defenses to meet the attack<sup>101</sup> or to examine the city's water supply.<sup>102</sup> It was there that God told Isaiah to meet Ahaz. Thus, this meeting and Isaiah's prophecy took place before any actual fighting broke out.<sup>103</sup>

The time when Ahaz sent his letter and tribute to Tiglath-pileser is more difficult to pinpoint. However, based on the transition from 2 Chronicles 28:5-15 to 28:16 and from 2 Kings 16:5-6 to 16:7, it would seem that Ahaz sent his plea to the Assyrian king after considerable fighting and the beginning of the siege itself.<sup>104</sup> Wood writes as follows:

The siege came in Jotham's closing years...but since Ahaz had already assumed leadership, the task of resistance was mainly his. Recognizing his inability to meet the combined foe in combat, and wishing to keep in the good favor of Assyria, he sought help from Tiglath-pileser III, the same conqueror against whom his grandfather, Uzziah [Azariah], had led the northern coalition only nine years before. Ahaz now asked this one by letter to enter the region and attack both Damascus and Israel, and to force the two besiegers to return home. He gave the Assyrian monarch considerable gold and silver as an inducement. Ahaz' plan worked, for Tiglath-pileser did come, and Pekah and Rezin were forced to return to their respective

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101 Caldecott and Schultz, "Ahaz," I:77.

102 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:271.

103 Youngblood, "Immanuel, II:807: "It was probably shortly before the Aramean-Israelite invasion of Judah in 735/4 that Isaiah uttered his famous Immanuel oracle to Ahaz (Isa. 7:10-17)." Gary V. Smith, "Shear-jashub," *ISBE*, IV:456 agrees: "Before these battles Ahaz oversaw the military preparations of Jerusalem, including the protection of the city's water supply at the upper pool (Isa. 7:3; cf. 32:2)." By contrast, J. A. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:156, places Isaiah's visit to Ahaz between the initial defeats and the beginning of the siege on Jerusalem. Although Oswalt's discussion is somewhat imprecise, it seems that he also takes that view (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 198).

104 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:269, argues that "both Kings and Chronicles seem to place the appeal for help after the invasion of Judah had taken place."

countries.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, Ahaz' appeal to Tiglath-pileser was made at some point after the siege of Jerusalem had begun. According to the conclusions reached in the previous section, "The Date of the Syro-Ephraimite War," this would place the appeal in late 734 or possibly early 733.

Before concluding this section, it should be noted that some scholars believe that at some point during the hostilities, Ahaz was actually captured and taken to Damascus and then at some subsequent point released.<sup>106</sup> This view is based primarily on 2 Chronicles 28:5:

The LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram; and they defeated him and carried away from him a great number of captives and brought them to Damascus.

However, as J. A. Thompson states,

The phrase "given into the hands of" does not appear to mean that Ahaz himself was given physically into the hands of these enemies but rather that his forces were defeated in battle.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, there is no direct Scriptural evidence for the view that Ahaz was taken captive. Assuming, then, that Ahaz is actually captured, taken to Damascus, and then released somewhere amidst two major battles and the siege of Jerusalem itself introduces considerable complexity into this series of events and thus violates Occum's razor, a generally good rule of thumb.<sup>108</sup>

## **Tiglath-pileser's Campaign of 734-732**

The chronology proposed so far in this chapter can be summarized as follows:

- In early 734 (or possibly late 735), Rezin and Pekah took the lead in forming a coalition of all the southern powers to withstand any future campaign of the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser.
- Also in 734, when Ahaz refused to join the coalition, Rezin and Pekah planned to attack Judah.
- When Ahaz heard about this plan, still early in 734, he decided his only hope was to appeal to Tiglath-pileser to save him.
- Isaiah then comes to Ahaz and gives him the reassurance of the Lord that the goal of Rezin and Pekah to replace Ahaz on the throne would not come to pass.
- The attack came and two major battles were fought, followed by a siege on Jerusalem. This also took place in 734.

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105 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 355; brackets added. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, p. 133, seems to take this same order of events.

106 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:266-269, takes this view,

107 J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, p. 336.

108 Occum's razor is a problem-solving principle proposed by William of Ockham (ca. 1287-1347). He was a Franciscan friar, scholastic philosopher, and theologian. The principle states that when several hypotheses or explanations all provide a solution to a given problem, the one with the least number of assumptions, or the one that is least complicated, should be preferred.

- At some point during the siege, late 734 or early 733, Ahaz seeks the help of Tiglath-pileser.
- With the arrival of the Assyrian king in the Syro-Palestinian region, Rezin and Pekah withdrew and returned home to engage Tiglath-pileser.

There are two accounts in 2 Kings of the entrance of Tiglath-pileser, one in the section on Pekah's reign, the other in the section on Ahaz' reign.<sup>109</sup>

In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him and put him to death and became king in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. (2 Kgs. 15:29-30)

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria listened to him; and the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried the people of it away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death. (2 Kgs. 16:7-9)

It is known from external sources that Tiglath-pileser conducted a second western campaign in 734-732.<sup>110</sup> However, it is unknown where the mighty Assyrian king was when he received the plea for help from Ahaz. I have argued in this chapter that Ahaz sent his plea to Tiglath-pileser in late 734 or early 733. But was Tiglath-pileser still in Assyria or was he already engaged in this campaign further north or southwest of Damascus? Based on the conclusions listed above, it hardly seems likely that Tiglath-pileser could lead his army from Assyria to the Mediterranean region in the time remaining in 734. Therefore, his second western campaign must have begun much earlier in 734, and he was already engaged in that campaign when he received Ahaz' plea for help.

Donald Wiseman notes that Tiglath-pileser intervened in Palestine in 734 but initially campaigned down the Mediterranean coast from Tyre and Sidon, through Philistia, and all the way to the Egyptian frontier,<sup>111</sup> all well east of Syria, Israel, and Judah. William LaSor notes that it was during 733-732 that Tiglath-pileser campaigned against Damascus.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, it would seem likely that Tiglath-pileser was already well engaged in the coastal part of his campaign when he received Ahaz' letter. Upon its receipt, Tiglath-pileser then turned his attention to Damascus in 733.

Damascus fell in 732.<sup>113</sup> However, the Bible alone records the fall of Damascus and the execution of

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109 See also 2 Chron. 28:16-21.

110 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, and LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 332, speaks of Tiglath-pileser's "well-known campaigns of 734-732" and cites *ANET*, pp. 283-84, and D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), vol. 1, sections 777-79.

111 Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 356-57, thinks that 2 Chron. 28:16-18 implies that Ahaz' letter to Tiglath-pileser included a plea for help against Philistia and Edom and cites Tiglath-pileser's record of his fight against the Philistines as corroboration. However, this implication is not at all certain. Moreover, 2 Kgs. 16:7 mentions only "the king of Aram" and "the king of Israel" from whom Ahaz asks for deliverance.

112 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850.

113 The scholars seem to agree on this date. See Wiseman, "Assyria," I:335, LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850, and Unger, "Damascus," I:854.

Rezin,<sup>114</sup> although it fits with the record in the annals of Tiglath-pileser.<sup>115</sup> The Bible also notes that Hoshea, a military commander under Pekah, killed him and assumed the throne.<sup>116</sup> Tiglath-pileser's records state that he deposed Pekah and established Hoshea king in his stead,<sup>117</sup> who paid tribute and pledged loyalty to the Assyrian king.

The results of Tiglath-pileser's campaign of 734-732 are summarized by Wright and Filson:

Between 734-732 he conquered Philistia; Galilee and Transjordan were taken from Israel; and Damascus, finally, was destroyed. The whole of this territory was then incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system, ruled by Assyrian officials...The much reduced Israel, as well as Judah, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, he left under their native rulers, whom he required to pay tribute (cf. II Kings 15:27ff.; 16:5ff.; Isa. ch. 7).<sup>118</sup>

As for Ahaz himself, "So Tilgath-pilneser<sup>119</sup> king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him."<sup>120</sup> After the campaign was over, Ahaz was forced to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser over and above the gold and silver he had sent with his original plea for help. Religiously, he degenerated even further.

While meeting with Tiglath-pileser in Damascus, at the close of the conqueror's devastating campaign, Ahaz saw and admired a certain pagan altar there and sent a plan of it home to Urijah the priest to copy for Jerusalem. When he later returned, he established this altar as the official place of sacrifice at the Temple, in place of the brazen altar prescribed in the Mosaic Law.<sup>121</sup>

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114 2 Kgs. 16:9.

115 LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:850. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:17, states that in the eponym list for 733-732 Tiglath-pileser has the note "against the land of Damascus." Tiglath-pileser's records also include the statement that 591 towns of the "16 districts of Aram" were destroyed "like mounds left by a flood" (Unger, "Damascus," I:854).

116 2 Kgs. 15:30.

117 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 330, n. 85.

118 *WHAB*, p. 73.

119 There are alternate spellings for the name of this Assyrian king in the biblical texts. See LaSor, "Tiglath-pileser," IV:849.

120 2 Chron. 28:20.

121 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 356.