

Isaiah and the “Syro-Ephraimite War”

Background

- 745 BC: Tiglath-pileser III came to the throne of Assyria and revitalized that “superpower” nation (based in Mesopotamia/Iraq)
- 740 BC: Judean king Uzziah died; Isaiah received prophetic call (Judah = "good guys" in Old Testament after split of Israel)
- 738 BC: Israel and Aram-Damascus became Assyrian vassals (Israel = northern nation after the split of Israel; Aram-Damascus [aka "Syria" or "Aram"] = usual enemy of Israel, except when united against Assyria)

Date: 735 BC

Geopolitical situation described by **2 Kings 16:5-6** (cf. 2 Chron 28); **Isaiah 7:1-9**:

Summary: Aram (under king Rezin) and the northern nation of Israel (under Pekah) united against Judah's king Ahaz. The reader is not told why, but it is apparent from Assyrian records and what comes later that Aram and Israel wished to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian coalition by effecting a "regime change." Apparently Ahaz was unwilling to join a fight against the superpower Assyrians. But, Ahaz was also totally outgunned by the larger Aram and Israel. The prophet Isaiah came to Ahaz and said (in a modern paraphrase): "don't worry, these guys will not overcome you—but you must trust in the LORD to be firmly established."

Diagram:

<u>Aram/Syria</u>		<u>Israel</u> (Northern nation of)/Ephraim		<u>Judah</u> (Southern nation of)
★Damascus	+	★Samaria	vs.	★Jerusalem/Zion
w/Rezin/"son of a nobody"		w/Pekah/son of Remaliah		w/Ahaz/House of David

Ahaz

- His life was threatened by Aram-Damascus and Israel (superior powers)
- Prophet Isaiah preaches trust in the LORD (rather than in human strength)
- What was his action?

The sign of Emmanuel

- Isaiah's offer of a sign to reassure Ahaz was rejected
- As a result, the “sign of Emmanuel” was given
- Best known from quote in Matthew 1:23: related to Jesus' virgin birth
- But, also an immediate context/meaning in the 8th century BC (Isa 7:14-16)
 - ✓ “before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good”
 - ✓ time implications: action by 722/721 BC

Ahaz Rejects the sign

- Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria for aid (2 Ki 16:7-9)
- Isaiah indicated that *the thing Ahaz relied on would itself become his burden* (Isa 7:17-25)

Isaiah 8: the second sign

- Isaiah's attestation (to his prediction?; Isa 8:1-2)
- Isaiah and “the prophetess” (his wife?) and his son, *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*
- The immediate sign and events of the 8th century BC . . .
- Assyria's actions (2 Ki 16:9); Judah's enemies are vanquished . . .
- The cost to Ahaz/Judah (2 Ki 16:10-18)

The fall of Israel/Samaria: 722/721 BC