THE THREAT OF ASSYRIA

Will Judah trust God,
or will it trust in military power and alliances?

853 Battle of Qarqar. The northern kingdom, together with Syria/Aram is part of an alliance of ten kings that seeks to stop the Assyrian advance. Ahab contributes 2000 chariots and 14,000 men. This became a model for later coalition building.

We know from an Assyrian inscription that later in this century king Jehu of Israel paid tribute to the Assyrians.

803 Assyria destroys Damascus. In doing this, it breaks the power of Israel's major enemy of this century. Not long after, Assyria itself enters a phase of weakness.

These developments leaves a power vacuum in the region. Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south take advantage of this and extend their kingdoms until together they occupy or control the area that Solomon had ruled.

Peace and control of the trade routes lead to a significant increase in trade. Great prosperity is the result – for a limited few. Injustice and corruption increase alongside with wealth, and as the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. Idolatry also greatly increases in the land. This development is illustrated in passages like Isaiah 1:4, 21-23; 2:7-8; 5:7-8, 22-23. Judgment becomes inevitable.

745-727 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III (Pul) - Isaiah 1-12

After a period of relative weakness, Assyria revives under Tiglath-pileser and enters an era of vigorous expansion and dominance. Assyrian power and influence become more and more noticeable in the small kingdoms of the Canaan region.

743 "Pul the king of Assyria came up against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power" (2 Ki. 15:19). He claims that he also received tribute from "Azariah of Yaudi".

Ca. 736 Both Uzziah and Jotham followed an anti-Assyrian policy. Ahaz adopts a pro-Assyrian policy.

Because of Ahaz's sin Judah suffers from invasions and raids of the Edomites and the Philistines: "For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried away captives. And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had dealt wantonly in Judah and had been faithless to the Lord" (2 Chr. 28:17-19).

734-732 Pekah is king in the north and Rezin is king of Syria. Together with Ashkelon and Gaza they form a coalition against Assyria (Remember that the Canaan region contained many small nations and city states). Ahaz is invited to join them but he refuses. Pekah and Rezin decide to

attack him in order to replace him by a puppet king (the son of Tabeel) who will support them. This is the background of Isaiah 7 and 8. The war is known as the *Syro-Ephraimite war*: "Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him" (2 Ki. 16:5; also 2 Chr. 28:5, 6).

Faced with this threat, Ahaz turns to Assyria for help: "At that time king Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help" (2 Chr. 28:16; also 2 Ki. 16:7, 8).

Isaiah challenges him to trust in God and offers a sign of Ahaz's choosing to confirm this word. But Ahaz refuses the offer. As punishment for his unwillingness to trust in God, Isaiah announces that God will bring the king of Assyria upon him (Is. 7:17-20; 8:5-8).

"And the king of Assyria hearkened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin" (2 Ki. 16:9). "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 Ki. 15:29). So Tiglath-pileser accepts Ahaz's request and invades Syria and Israel.

During this campaign, Tiglath-pileser also conquers some Phoenician seaports and imposes tribute on Ashkelon, Gaza, Ammon, Edom, and Moab. Unfortunately for Ahaz, but in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy, he also invades Judah and imposes tribute on Ahaz: "So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him, and afflicted him instead of strengthening him" (2 Chr. 28:20). So Ahaz's alliance backfires on him.

732 Hoshea becomes the new king of Israel.

727-722 B.C. Shalmaneser V

Hoshea first submits to Assyria, but later allies himself with Egypt and rebels. Shalmaneser invades what is left of the northern kingdom and after a three-year siege takes Samaria in 722 (2 Ki. 17:3-6). This is the end of the northern kingdom.

722-705 B.C. Sargon II - Isaiah 18-20 (and possibly parts of 28-33)

720 Sargon subdues a revolt in Ashdod, Gaza and other cities. Whatever was left of the northern kingdom apparently participated in this revolt, since Sargon claims to have deported 27,000 people from Samaria. (Many reference works place this deportation in 722. They assume that Shalmaneser died shortly before or after the conquest of Samaria and that his successor Sargon completed it). Judah submits to him.

716 or **715** Ahaz dies and Hezekiah succeeds him.

Ethiopia (southern Egypt) emerges as the champion of the subjugated nations. A new coalition begins to form. Isaiah warns against trusting in Egypt (Is. 20), implying that Judah should not join this alliance (14:28-32). Chapter 18 and 19 may date from this time as well.

713-711 Sargon sacks Ashdod and Gath (20:1). Assyrian inscriptions claim Judah was involved but quickly surrendered. Judah, Moab and Edom pay heavy tribute. Egypt proves to be no help; after stirring up the fires of revolt, it watched as Assyria put out the fires.

705-681 B.C. Sennacherib - Isaiah 22, 28-39

705 On his ascension, Sennacherib faces several rebellions in his kingdom (Assyrian tribute was high, and a change of ruler is always an opportune time to rebel). One of these is in Babylon, where Merodach-baladan seizes power in 705 or 703. During this time, a third coalition begins to arise. Hezekiah gets fully involved now (notice Isaiah 36:6 and 9). Judah actively pursues Egyptian help (see Is. 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Ashkelon and Ekron are also involved. Isaiah's strong warnings against such trust in Egypt are ignored. This is the subject of Isaiah 28-33.

(Merodach-baladan is mentioned in Isaiah 39. After Hezekiah had been ill (probably in 701), he receives an embassy from Merodach-baladan to congratulate him on his recovery. If this happened in 701, Merodach-baladan was no longer king, but his motive would still be to seek allies against his oppressor.)

703 Sennacherib deals with Merodach-baladan and then marches west. He subdues Phoenicia and from there moves south to attack Ashkelon.

701 In the Battle of Eltekeh, Sennacherib defeats the Philistine and Egyptian army.

At about this time, Hezekiah offers submission to Sennacherib, and according to 2 Kings 18:14-16 pays a tribute. But Assyria doesn't withdraw.

Hezekiah makes extensive preparations for a siege of Jerusalem: 2 Chronicles 32:1-8.

Sennacherib also invades Judah; in inscriptions he claims: "I conquered 46 walled cities and took 200,150 captives, and Hezekiah I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city" (in other words: I did not conquer it).

Twice Sennacherib sends messengers to Hezekiah to convince him to surrender. But this time, and against all odds, Hezekiah seeks the counsel of Isaiah and heeds the word of God.

AT LAST SOMEONE LISTENS TO ISAIAH AND DECIDES TO TRUST IN GOD; AND GOD PROVES ABSOLUTELY FAITHFUL! JERUSALEM ESCAPES THROUGH A MIRACULOUS INTERVENTION BY GOD.

> Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning - there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there (Isaiah 37:36-38).

681 Sennacherib is killed by two of his sons.

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