

PALESTINE AND ASSYRIA

750 - 700

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PART ONE

THE SETTING OF THE STAGE

CHAPTER I. PALESTINE AROUND 750 B.C.

A. POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

1. The Northern Kingdom

The mid-century found both Israel and Judah enjoying times of prosperity and of considerable political prestige. In the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam II (787-747) was at the height of his career. He had come to the throne in an auspicious moment. King Joash, his father, had driven the Syrians from the cities they had taken from Joash's father.¹ Besides, the Assyrians were occupied on other fronts, and thus were unable to attend the western front. The times were ripe for an ambitious person to head the government. Such was Jeroboam. He took advantage of the opportunity and restored the border of Israel from the Pass of Hamath in the far north to the Sea of Arabah -- as had been foretold by Jonah the prophet, the son of Amittai of Gathhepher.² He was in a sense a real deliverer, for with the exception of Judah, he almost restored to Israel all the former territory of the Davidic domain. This meant that by the time of Amos, about 760-750, a whole generation had risen up which knew not the bitter taste of defeat nor the oppressor's hand. Along with military and political growth, the nation experienced great commercial prosperity under Jeroboam.

2. The Southern Kingdom

The Southern Kingdom under the leadership of Uzziah (785-c.747 or 740) was also walking along the highway of prosperity and political power. This king reorganized the army and strengthened fortifications, defenses, artillery, and the walls of Jerusalem. On the desert frontier he built towers in order to keep the nomads in subjection. He conquered the Philistines, breaking down the walls of Gath, Jabneb, and Ashdod, and building new

¹ II Kings 13:23-25

² II Kings 14:25

cities in the acquired territory. He also conquered the Arabians in Gur-baal and the Meunites, and was receiving tribute from the Ammonites. On the non-military side, Uzziah encouraged agriculture and animal husbandry. The record tells us that "he loved husbandry." He built store-cities in the wilderness, and hewed out many cisterns in order to increase the water supply.³ In short, we can say the under Uzziah Judah had expanded territorially as well as economically and commercially.

As can be inferred from the above statements, Palestine around 750 B.C. was pretty much in the hands of Israel and Judah. During the reign of these two kings, the Hebrews again attained the stature of political greatness, reminiscent of the days of David and Solomon.

B. MORALLY, RELIGIOUSLY, AND SOCIALLY

1. The Prophets Amos and Hosea: the Sources of our Knowledge

The wider history of these times is not presented to us by the historical records. These touch on the political and the economic, and here and there on the religious, as this aspect of the life of the country is related to the reigning monarch. But the moral, religious, and social aspects of the life of the people during these two reigns are left untouched by the historian. The great gulf between the few rich and the many poor, the social injustice and the moral degeneracy of the people as a whole escape the chronicler's pen. For these we have to turn to the prophets and draw from them the real patterns of behaviour of the Hebrew people around the mid-century.

There are two prophets, Amos and Hosea, whose writings depict the aspects of the daily life of the people that we are after. Both of them were contemporaries and eye-witnesses; therefore, their words constitute reliable

³ II Chronicles 26:6-15

and unequivocal sources of information. The milieu in which they moved was one in which wealth, luxury, oppression, and injustice were commonplace, religion a mere formality, and righteousness a sham. Although they are mainly concerned with conditions in Israel, we can safely infer that conditions in Judah were not much better, especially in the light of Isaiah's prophecies (chapters 1-12).

2. The Message of Amos

The keynote of Amos' message is social justice, which justice springs from a concept of God who is righteous and just and demands the same of His people. He charges the government at Samaria "with gross perversion of justice, grinding down of the poor, self-indulgence and drunkenness, hollow mockery in the name of religion; and forecasts punishment for the hypocrites and indifferent, tempered with a constant appeal to them to turn to Jehovah as the real God of Israel."⁴ The words of the prophet are indeed trenchant and sharp:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy,
And would bring the poor of the land to an end,
Saying, "When will the new moon pass
That we may sell grain,
And the Sabbath that we may offer wheat for sale,"
Making the ephah small and the price great,
And falsifying the scales;
Buying the poor for silver,
And the needy in exchange for a pair of sandals,
And selling the refuse of the grain.

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob,
"I will never forget all their deeds!"⁵

This oracle is really revealing. In it we see the real life of the people.

3. The Message of Hosea*

Hosea's message followed that of Amos. His unfortunate marital

⁴ Ira Maurice Price, The Dramatic Story of the Old Testament (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935), 296.

⁵ Amos 8:4-7

* Although Hosea's ministry lasted well beyond the time of Jeroboam II, the picture he gives of Israel is to a great extent the product of the previous fifty years.

experience he took as a lesson of life, and metaphorically he compared the relation of Jehovah to Israel to that of a husband to a wife. To him Israel was the faithless wife and Jehovah the faithful husband, whose love was constantly seeking after Ephraim. His counts against the nation are indeed serious: "violation of all pledges and covenants and of the ten commandments; the perfidy and hypocrisy of the priests who have no respect for the law, and are even robbers (4:6;6:9); wine, drunkenness, adultery, and loss of understanding are everywhere; lies, perjury, deceit, intrigue have permeated all business life; the king, princes, nobles, and the wealthy are given to heavy drinking and debauchery (7:5); life and property are not safe; religion, though plentiful in form, is merely the old Baalism of the Canaanite."⁶

The cause of all this moral degeneracy the prophet traces to a lack of knowledge of God:

My people are destroyed for want of knowledge --
 Because you have rejected knowledge,
 I will reject you from being my priest.
 Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
 I likewise will forget your children.⁷

This brief presentation of the messages of Amos and Hosea gives us the right perspective as we look at the conditions of life in Palestine around 750 B.C. These prophets are like open windows, allowing us to peep into the inner-chamber of the people's heart. That, too, counts in history; and that generation had to pay a heavy price for their moral complacency. George Adam Smith⁸ has aptly said of that generation: "It was a marvellous generation -- so joyous, so energetic, so patriotic, so wonderful! But its strength was the strength of cruel wealth, and its peace the peace of immoral

⁶ Price, op. cit., pp. 297-298.

⁷ Hosea 4:6

⁸ George Adam Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (New York: Harper & Brothers), I, 39.

PART TWO

THE COMING OF THE ACTORS

CHAPTER II. PALESTINE AND TIGLATH-PILESER III (745-727)

A. BEFORE THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITIC WAR (745-735)

1. The Rise of Tiglath-pileser

In the year 746 B.C. a significant revolt took place in Calah, the military center of the Assyrian Empire and at that time the place of royal residence, which resulted in the assassination of Ashur-nirari IV, the last descendant of Ashur-nasir-pal. The following year Tiglath-pileser III ascended the Assyrian throne. "In a single brick inscription Tiglath-pileser claims to be the son of Adad-nirari III, but the general absence of genealogies in his inscriptions would seem to point to a usurpation by him, after some rising which he had fomented."⁹

2. The Consolidation of Babylonian and Eastern Fronts

The task facing the new monarch was threefold: (1) the establishment of order in Babylonia, (2) the guarding of the northern border of the kingdom against Urartu, and (3) the restoration of Assyrian control over Syria.¹⁰

Tiglath-pileser first turned his attention to Babylon. He campaigned there in 745-744, directing his attack against the Aramean tribes which had inhabited the eastern banks of the Tigris but had moved westward and settled around Cuttak and Sippar. The tribes were subjugated and Tiglath-pileser was left free to attack and bring into submission the southeastern part of Urartu, i.e., Manri and the region around Lake Urmia.¹¹

3. The Defeat of Sarduris III and his Syrian Allies (743)

The east and south being more or less held in check, the following year Tiglath-pileser started to move west. He crossed the Euphrates with the

⁹ Sidney Smith, Cambridge Ancient History; The Assyrian Empire (University Press, 1929), III, 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

intention of attacking Syria. By attacking Syria he was indirectly crippling the power of Sarduris III of Urartu. The latter had a firm hold on his allies of Northern Syria. Alarmed at the news of his advance, the Syrian chiefs rallied under the leadership of Mati-ilu, the chief of Arpad, to oppose the Assyrian, summoning at the same time to their aid Sarduris III. The battle was fought between Khalpi and Kishtare districts of Qummuh in the northwest corner of Mesopotamia. The allied forces were completely routed. Sarduris III had to flee for his life, being pursued by the Assyrians to the border of his lands. This defeat ended Sarduris' influence over Syria. He was unable to win a victory under the most favorable circumstances, and besides, had become the object of ridicule for having had to flee on a mare. This campaign ended abruptly and probably because Tiglath-pileser had in mind coming to Syria the following year to inflict a crushing defeat upon Northern Syria.¹²

4. The Fall of Arpad and its Fruits (742-740)

To this task the Assyrian king turned in 742. The fight centered mainly around Arpad, which put up a stubborn resistance lasting for three years. The city finally fell in 740. The terrible torture inflicted on Mati-ilu was long remembered by the Hebrews.¹³ The fruits of Tiglath-pileser's victory, however, rewarded his efforts. Rezon of Damascus, Hiram II of Tyre, Kushtashpi of Qummuh, Uriaik of Que, Pisiris of Carchemish, all submitted to the Assyrian, coming to pay tribute and homage to Tiglath-pileser in Arpad itself.¹⁴

5. Campaign against Urartu (739)

In 739 Tiglath-pileser turned his attention to the northern border. He regained control of the mountain passes of the Nairi country and annexed

¹² Ibid., p. 35

¹³ II Kings 18:34; 19:13; Isaiah 36:19; 37:13.

¹⁴ Smith, loc. cit. Daniel David Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1926), I, 272-274.

the lands of Ulluba and the northern Kirkhu.¹⁵

6. The Syrian Confederacy under Azariah of North Judah and its Break-up
(739-738)

a. Who is this "Azriau of Yaudi"?

In his absence some sort of confederacy was formed in Syria to oppose Assyria. The details of the events concerning this confederacy are not accurately known but there is general agreement as to its existence, its purpose, and its leader, a certain "Azriau of Yaudi". There are two views as to who this king was. The one holds that "Azriau of Yaudi" is none other than Azariah of Judah, who was at this time king of Judah.¹⁶ The other bases its claims on the Aramaic inscriptions found at Zenjirli, dealing with events in Samal at this time. These records show that there was a small independent kingdom of Y'di whose ruler at one time was the same as that of Samal. The second view, therefore, holds that Y'di is the Yaudi of the Assyrian inscriptions, and that in all probability Azriau is the unnamed usurper mentioned in the Bar-Rekub* inscription, that about 739 caused the revolution at which Bar-Sur, the king of Y'di and seventy members of his family perished, Panammu, one of Bar-Sur's sons only escaping. This Panammu, whom we know as the second, Tiglath-pileser put on the throne and treated with unusual kindness. This second view is the most probable.¹⁷ Be this as it may, the fact remains

¹⁵ Smith, loc. cit.

¹⁶ II Kings 15:1 ff.

* Bar-Rekub was a son of Panammu II; very faithful to Tiglath-pileser.

¹⁷ Olmstead follows the second view. A.T. Olmstead, History of Assyria (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), pp. 184-188. Hall follows the first view, reasoning that although there is knowledge of a land of Ya'di in northern Syria, "when a king of Ya'udi mentioned at this particular time bears the same name as that of a king of the land of Judah who actually reigned at this time, we have no option but to conclude that he is this king, and that 'Azriau of Ya'udi' is Azariah of Judah." H. R. Hall, The Ancient History of the Near East (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 463. Smith just presents the two views without deciding for either one. Smith, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

¹⁸ Olmstead, op. cit., pp. 186-187. Ashkenazi

that Tiglath-pileser's efforts were diverted from the north to the west.

b. The Conquest of North Judah

The ensuing campaign brought Syria to her knees. The first object of attack was the land of North Judah. The country was easily reduced and Panammu II, as said before, was put on the throne to replace Azariah. Cities from the territory of Gurgum were added to the territory of the fortunate Panammu.¹⁸

c. The Fate of the Other Allies

Having disposed of Azariah, Tiglath-pileser took up the case of his allies. Kullania, Byblos, and nineteen districts which belonged to Hamath, including the coast cities of Usanata, Shiana and Simirra, and the old city of Hazrek, all were conquered and restored to the Assyrian empire. ~~Eniel~~ of Hamath possessed an extensive kingdom. He made cause with Azariah upon the revolt of his provinces and these were never returned to him. They were organized into four Assyrian provinces: Kullania or ^AĠneh along the south coast of the Orontes, Simirra or Simyra, further south, Hatarikka or Hazrek, and Mansuate in the Orontes valley between Aleppo and Hamath. Simirra was placed under the crown prince Shalmaneser, who had responsibility for North and Central Syria.¹⁹

In his records Tiglath-pileser says that he took 30,300 people from the conquered territories and placed them in the province of the city of Que; 1,233 people he settled in the province of the land of Ulluba, recently conquered by his Armenian generals. Large numbers were brought from the eastern and southeastern portions of the empire as replacements. Twelve

¹⁸ Olmstead, op. cit., pp. 186-187. Tuckenhill, op. cit., p. 274.

¹⁹ A. T. Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 436. Tuckenhill, op. cit., pp. 274-275.

thousand Ahlame from the Zab region were deported to Syria in 739. The governors of Luleme and Nairi sent others. Fifty-four hundred came from the city of Der, sent by the chief commander of the fortress. Smaller groups of a few hundreds were removed from the tribes in the eastern frontier and settled further down the coast in the Phoenician cities.²⁰

d. The Policies of Administration and Deportation

In this campaign the administrative schemes of Tiglath-pileser can be clearly seen. His policy was to divide the west into subject provinces, each with an Assyrian governor. In some kingdoms he left the native monarch in power provided he paid a regular tribute. He also carried further than any of his predecessors the practice of exchanging large sections of the population of conquered territories for the purpose of breaking nationalistic feelings and making the populations less united and more pliable.²¹ These policies made the task of empire building much easier. Olmstead²² has observed that with the aid of the data on deportation given on Tiglath-pileser's records, "we can form some conception of the immense amount of discomfort if not of actual suffering which resulted, the settlement of mountaineers in the hot plains and vice versa, the death from the unwholesome surroundings or from the brutality of the military escort, the complete breakdown of the economic system when highly skilled bankers and artisans were placed in countries which afforded a bare existence and rude nomads took their place in the old culture lands."

e. First Contact with Israel

His campaign concluded, Tiglath-pileser gives a long list of those who brought tribute to him. Among them were Menahem of Israel and Rezan of Damascus, and "every king of importance from Kue in the north to the Phoenician

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 275-276.

²¹ George Ernest Wright and Floyd Vivian Felson, editors, The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 68.

²² Olmstead, History of Assyria, p. 188.

cities in the south and the Arab queen Zabibi."²³

The Biblical record tells us that in the days of Menahem "Pul", king of Assyria, came against the land. And Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to establish the kingdom under his rule. So Menahem commanded Israel, even all the men of wealth, to give to the king of Assyria, fifty shekels of silver each. So the king of Assyria withdrew, staying no longer in the land."²⁴ The amount of tribute in modern exchange would be almost \$2,000,000 and the number of wealthy people taxed nearly 60,000.²⁵

This was, as far as we know, the first direct contact between Israel and the new Assyrian monarch. From now on the contacts were to be more frequent and also more disastrous. The cloud was now almost over Palestine and ready to break. Israel, however, was to have a few more years of outward peace.

7. War on Other Fronts (737-735)

The next few years Tiglath-pileser spent on other fronts. In 735 he tried to break the power of Urartu and succeeded in penetrating to Van, the capital of Sarduris. He was unable to take the stronghold but the country suffered such a blow that we do not hear of Urartu for some years.

In 734 the Assyrian monarch was forced to come west again to deal with a series of circumstances that had developed since he had left in 738.²⁶

B. THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITIC WAR (734)

1. Judah after the Passing Away of Azariah

Azariah of Judah died around 740 B.C., and thus his death ended one

²³ Smith, op. cit., p. 37. Tucknill, op. cit., p. 276.

²⁴ II Kings 15:19-20.

²⁵ Price, op. cit., p. 299.

²⁶ Robert William Rogers, A History of Babylonia and Assyria (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900) II, 123. Olmstead, op. cit., p. 189.

* Pul is the Babylonian name of Tiglath-pileser.

of the glorious reigns of the Hebrew monarchy. He was succeeded by his son Jotham, who had been regent for some time. Jotham died after a few years and left a weakened kingdom to Ahaz, his son, who was only twenty years old when he ascended the throne.²⁷

Ahaz came to the throne c.736. Under his guidance Judah declined not only militarily and politically, but most of all spiritually. He threw overboard the teachings of his fathers and the prophets and adopted the religion of the kings of Israel and of outside nations, as well, not excepting child sacrifice. He robbed and closed up the house of Jehovah, sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and under every green tree. Jerusalem he filled with pagan altars.²⁸ In short, he denied in its entirety the religion of Jehovah. His practices alienated the followers of Jehovah, especially the prophets, and consequently weakened the moral fiber of the nation. We shall see how some of these practices were the direct result of contact with Assyria.

2. Anarchy in Israel

In Israel king Jeroboam II died soon after the half-century mark. (747?, 745?) He was succeeded by his son Zechariah, who reigned only six months, to be killed in Ibleam by Shallum the son of Jabesh. Thus "the blood of Jezreel" had indeed visited "the house of Jehu."²⁹ Shallum, in turn, was killed by Menahem, the son of Gadi, after reigning one month in Samaria. We have mentioned above Menahem's contact with the Assyrian king, Pul. He reigned ten years (747?-736?) and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah. The latter reigned scarcely two years and was killed by Pekah, son of Remaliah, in Samaria with the aid of fifty Gileadites.³⁰

²⁷ II Kings 15:7; 15:32-36.

²⁸ II Kings 16:1-4, 10-18.

²⁹ Hosea 1:4.

³⁰ II Kings 15:8-28.

These were indeed times of anarchy in Israel, as can readily be seen in the number of official murders committed. It is not surprising to find social injustice, bloodshed, conspiracy, bribery, and immorality rampant. The prophet Hosea, whose ministry had started under Jeroboam II but had lasted through these times, bears ample testimony to the moral, political, and spiritual decay of the nation.

3. The Ministry of Isaiah Before the Syro-Ephraimitic War

King Uzziah of Judah died in 740 (?). In that same year Isaiah, the son of Amoz, of Jerusalem, received his call to prophesy. The call came in the form of a vision in the temple. He saw the Lord "sitting upon a throne, high and uplifted, with the skirts of his robe filling the temple." And the seraphim that stood over the Lord, covering their faces before His dazzling presence, were saying:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts;
The whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the foundations of the thresholds shook and the house was filled with smoke.

This terrible vision caused Isaiah to realize his own and his people's sinfulness:

"Woe to me! for I am lost;
For I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The Lord of hosts."

But a seraph brought a live stone from the altar and touching his mouth, said:

"See! this has touched your lips,
So your guilt is removed and your sin forgiven."

Then the voice of the Lord was heard:

"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for us?"

Isaiah readily answered:

"Here am I! Send me."

Thereupon he received his commission from the Lord:

"Go and say to ~~this~~ people:
 'Keep on hearing, but understand not;
 And keep on seeing, but know not!'
 Make the mind of this people gross,
 Dull their ears, and besmear their eyes;
 Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,
 And have a mind to understand, and turn, and be healed."

Amazed at the type of message he was to utter, he asked:

"How long, O Lord?"

And he received the awful reply:

"Till cities lie waste, without inhabitant,
 And houses without man;
 And the soil be left a desolation,
 And the Lord have removed man far away,
 And many be the forsaken places in the midst of the land.
 Even if a tenth remain in it,
 This must pass through the fire again,
 Like a terebinth, or an oak,
 Whose stump remains when it is felled."³¹

From this vision, or rather, from this experience with God, springs all the prophecy of Isaiah. His early preaching, in the years before the Syro-Ephraimitic War, resembles the messages of Amos and Hosea. To this epoch belong the following oracles:³² "The Terror of the Coming of the Day of the Lord,"³³ "The Fall of Judah's Wicked Leaders,"³⁴ "The Frivolity and Sensuality of the Daughters of Zion,"³⁵ "The Parable of the Unprofitable Vineyard,"³⁶ and "The Lord's Outstretched Hand against Samaria."³⁷ In these oracles Isaiah emphasizes the common sins of Israel: idolatry, divination, militarism, pride and vain-glory, materialism, sensuality, exploitation

³¹ Isaiah 6.

³² J. M. Powis Smith, The Prophets and their Times (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925), p. 69.

³³ Isaiah 2:5-22

³⁴ Isaiah 3:1-15.

³⁵ Isaiah 3:16-24.

³⁶ Isaiah 5:1-24.

³⁷ Isaiah 9:8-10 and 5:25-29.

of the poor, drunkenness, skepticism, bribery, and perversion of justice.

George Adam Smith finds in this first period of Isaiah's career these leading doctrines:

High above a very sinful people, and beyond all their conceptions of Him, Yahweh, the national God, rises holy, exalted in righteousness. ~~From~~ such a God to such a people it can only be judgement and affliction that pass; and these shall not be averted by the fact that He is the national God, and they His worshippers. Of this affliction the Assyrians gathering far off upon the horizon are evidently to be the instruments. The affliction shall be very sweeping; again and again shall it come; but the Lord will finally save a remnant of His people. Three elements compose this preaching -- a very keen and practical conscience of sin; and overpowering vision of God, in whose immediate intimacy the prophet believes himself to be; and a sharp perception of the politics of the day.³⁸

4. The Intrigues of Pekah the Son of Remaliah and of Rezon of Damascus

While Tiglath-pileser was attending the northern front, things were becoming upset in the west. Forgetful of the Assyrian menace, and probably in defiance of it, Pekah the son of Remaliah of Israel and Rezon of Damascus joined forces against Ahaz of Judah.³⁹ The purpose of this alliance was probably to punish the stubborn Ahaz, who apparently had refused to join an anti-Assyrian movement which was in the making among the western states. They intended to unseat the heir of David and put on the throne an anti-Assyrian man, a certain son of Tabeel.⁴⁰ It would not have been difficult to convince Ahaz of the need of a new alliance against Assyria, but we must keep in mind that he was stiff-necked and unwilling to take counsel, however excellent.

The allies fell upon Ahaz north of Jerusalem and defeated his army. The Bible record tells us that an Ephraimite hero name Zichri slew the king's brother Maaseiah, the chamberlain Azrikam, and Elkanah, second in

³⁸ George Adam Smith, The Book of Isaiah (New York: Harper & Brothers) I, 88.

³⁹ Isaiah 7:1; II Kings 16:5.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 7:6

command under the king. Much spoil and many captives were carried away to Damascus. The spoil and captives of Israel were returned at the intervention of a prophet of God, named Oded.⁴¹

In the meantime, the Edomites had recovered the port of Elath on the gulf of Akabah and invaded southern Judah, taking away many captives. The Philistines did not lag behind. They invaded the Shephelah, retaking the cities which Amaziah had made tributary to Judah, and other Hebrew cities as well.⁴²

Judah was really hard-pressed, and Ahaz was in a terrible predicament. No wonder that the hearts of king and people trembled as the trees of the forest before the wind.⁴³ To whom should he turn for aid?

5. The Intervention of Isaiah

It was at this crucial moment that Isaiah intervened with his counsel. Taking his son, Shear-jashub, with him, as a symbol of one or more sermons of a previous time, he met Ahaz "at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the laundrymen's field" and greeted him with this message:

Take care and keep calm! Do not be afraid or down-hearted because of these two stumps of smoking firebrands, the fierce anger of Rezin (with Syria) and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria has plotted mischief against you, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying, "Let us go up against Judah, and throw it into a panic, and make a schism in it to our interest, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," thus says the Lord God:

"It shall not stand, and it shall not be!

For the head of Syria is Damascus,

And the head of Damascus is Rezin;

And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,

And the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you do not hold fast,

Surely you shall not stand fast."⁴⁴

⁴¹ II Kings 16:5; II Chronicles 28:5-15.

⁴² II Kings 16:6; II Chronicles 28:16-19.

⁴³ Isaiah 7:2.

⁴⁴ Isaiah 7:3-9.

Isaiah is obviously advising Ahaz to trust in Yahweh, the holy and righteous God of his own experience. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. But Ahaz was hesitant to accept such an apparently other-worldly counsel, which, however, proved to be the most practical.

This oracle did not accomplish its purpose. Isaiah visited Ahaz again and said to him:

"Ask for a sign ~~of~~ the Lord your God; make it as deep as Sheol, or high ~~as~~ the heavens."

But Ahaz would have nothing of it. Thereupon Isaiah uttered the famous oracle of "God with us":

Hear now, O House of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to weary men, that you must weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, a young woman is with child, and is about to bear a son; and she will call him Emmanuel /God is with us/. Curds and honey will be his food when he knows enough to refuse the bad and choose the good. For before the child knows enough to refuse the bad and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you stand in dread will be forsaken. The Lord will bring upon you, and upon your people, and upon your father's house, such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim parted from Judah, even the king of Assyria.⁴⁵

This message is clear at least in part. The destruction of Ephraim and of Damascus is to come as surely as that God reigns, and in spite of Ahaz' disbelief.

6. Ahaz Pleads the Help of Tiglath-pileser.

Ahaz really had not intention of following Isaiah's wise advice. Who was Isaiah, anyway? Just a prophet of Jehovah, the God whom he had rejected. What did he care about what He had to say, anyway? Following the advice of the Assyrian party in Jerusalem⁴⁶ and the impulse of his own character, he summoned the Assyrian to his aid. Ahaz sent messengers to him saying: "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from

⁴⁵ Isaiah 7:10-17.

⁴⁶ Isaiah 7:13.

the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are besieging me." The message, of course, was not the important thing; along went the silver and the gold found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. The present was truly the sine qua non for help.⁴⁷

C. THE COMING OF TIGLATH-PILESER

1. The Fall of Damascus

The appeal of Ahaz just fitted into the plans of Tiglath-pileser. The Assyrian moved upon Damascus with utmost rapidity. In his records, Tiglath-pileser said the following about the conquest of Damascus and its environs:

Hâdaru, the father's house of Resin of Aram (Syria), [where] he was born, I besieged, I captured. 800 people, together with their possessions ... their cattle, their sheep, I carried off. 750 captives of the city of Kurussâ, ... captives of the city of Irmâ, 550 captives of the city of Metuna, I carried off. 591 cities ... of 16 districts of Aram (Syria), I destroyed like mounds left by a flood.⁴⁸

The Biblical record adds that the inhabitants of Damascus were carried off to Kir and that Rezon was killed.⁴⁹

2. Isaiah and the Fall of Damascus

The fall of Damascus came as a fulfilment of an Isaianic prophecy.⁵⁰ In it the prophet declares the impending fall of Damascus to be followed by that of Ephraim, as well.

"Lo! Damascus is removed from her place among cities,
And will become a heap of ruins, deserted forever.
Her daughter-cities will be given over to flocks,
Which will lie down in them, with none to make them afraid.
So the bulwark will be stripped from Ephraim,
And the sovereign power from Damascus;
And the remnant of Syria will perish --

⁴⁷ II Kings 16:7-8.

⁴⁸ Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 279.

⁴⁹ II Kings 16:19.

⁵⁰ S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 214.

They will be like the glory of the sons of Israel,"
Is the oracle of the Lord of Hosts.

"It shall come to pass on that day,
That the glory of Jacob will wane,
And the fat of his flesh will grow lean;
It will be as when a reaper gathers the standing grain,
And his arm reaps the ears,
As when one gathers ears in the valley of Raphaim;
Or as when an olive tree is beaten, and gleanings are left on it,
Two or three berries on the uppermost branch,
Four or five on the boughs,"
Is the oracle of the Lord, the God of Israel.⁵¹

The ruin of Damascus was indeed total. Ephraim was now without an ally. The fate of Ephraim in the ensuing campaign made for the partial fulfilment of this oracle.

3. Ahaz' Visit to Tiglath-pileser in Damascus and its Religious Implications

After the end of the siege of Damascus, Tiglath-pileser held a review of his vassals, among whom was Ahaz. As was the custom in all the newly-organized provinces, the worship of Ashur and the king had been established in Damascus, and all the vassals were commanded to follow suit.⁵² Ahaz sent a pattern of the altar to Uriah the priest, the one who had witnessed Isaiah's prediction that Damascus would fall. When Ahaz returned, the altar had been finished, and he sacrificed on it. Then the king ordered Uriah the priest, saying, "On the great altar burn the morning burnt-offering and the evening cereal-offering and the burnt-offering of the king and his cereal-offering, with the burnt-offerings of all the people of the land, and their cereal-offerings and their libations, and all the blood of the burnt-offering and all the blood of the sacrifice you shall dash against it."

⁵¹ Isaiah 17:166. Skinner dates the prophecy prior to the Assyrian conquest of Damascus "and since there is no mention of the outbreak of hostilities against Judah, we may fix it in the early days of the coalition." J. Skinner, The Book of the Prophet Isaiah (Cambridge: University Press, 1905), p. 132. Driver also maintains that it is probably a pre-Ephraimitic War prophecy. Driver, loc. cit.

⁵² Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, p. 452.

The bronze altar which stood before the house of the Lord was put on the north side of the new altar, and was to be used for purposes of divination only.⁵³

No longer was Yahweh the king of Judah; he was just a minor deity. The great sea was taken from over the oxen, which represented the power and majesty of Yahweh, and placed upon a stone pedestal. A throne was built in the house of Yahweh for the now divine king and the royal entry was turned about by Ahaz from before the face of the statue of the king of Assyria."⁵⁴

Indeed Judah had sunk to the depth of heathenism, and the chronicler was right, it seems to us, in saying that Tiglath-pileser proved a burden to Ahaz instead of a help, "for Ahaz plundered the house of the Lord and the house of the king and the princes and gave it to the king of Assyria, but it failed to help him. In the time of his distress he acted still more treacherously against the Lord -- this same King Ahaz, for he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus who overcame him, and he said, 'Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me.' But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel."⁵⁵

⁵³ II Kings 16:10-18. Robinson says the following concerning the use of the altar for divination: "What form of divination was intended we are not told, but the obvious is that it should be used for the inspection of entrails. ... Divination by inspection of entrails was developed and studied more completely in Mesopotamia than anywhere else in the ancient world, and the introduction of this method into Jerusalem may well have been one of the innovations which Ahaz owed to the Assyrian supremacy." Theodore H. Robinson, A History of Israel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 377-378.

⁵⁴ Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, p. 452; History of Assyria, p. 198.

⁵⁵ II Chronicles 28:20-23.

Whatever the logic of Ahaz' position, we must realize that here was a crisis of the first magnitude in the development of divine revelation. Had Ashur and the king of Assyria remained in that position, our religion today would be entirely different. To us it seems that the hand of Providence was moving in history and that, though for the time triumphant, falsehood was destined to perish.

4. The Invasion of Israel

Tiglath-pileser now turned his armies against Israel. Very shortly he was in Pekah's home in Gilead. The entire east Jordanic region was conquered and formed into three provinces: Hamath in the Jordan valley, Haurina or Hauran, and Galaza or Gilead.⁵⁶ One of the captives was Beerah, prince of Reuben.⁵⁷

Then the Assyrians crossed the Jordan, and captured Ijon, Abel of Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kadesh, Hazor, Aruma, and Merom and the wide land of Naphtali. This territory west of the Jordan was formed into a province ruled from Megiddo, which served as an Assyrian guard post against Israel, now confined to the few square miles about Samaria. ~~The Andhu~~ ^{Another} province, Dor or Duru, was formed from the entire seacoast as far north as Rashpuna, just north of Joppa.⁵⁸

Tiglath-pileser says in his records concerning the campaign:

The land of Bit-Humria [House of Omri, Israel] ... all of its people together with their goods I carried off to Assyria. Pakaha, their king, they deposed and I place Audi' (Hoshea) over them as king. 10 talents of gold, X talents of silver, as their tribute I received from them and to Assyria I carried them.⁵⁹

As can be seen, Pekah was not spared to enjoy his much-reduced territory. Hoshea, with Assyrian aid, conspired against him. However,

⁵⁶ Olmstead, History of Palestine and Assyria, p. 453.

⁵⁷ I Chronicles 5:6.

⁵⁸ Olmstead, loc. cit. II Kings 15:29-30.

⁵⁹ Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 292.

he had to pay a high tribute and had to see many Israelites deported:
 226 from Gabara, 330 from Hanaton, 650 from Cana, ^{13,520} from Jotapata, 650
 from Iron. ⁶⁰

Great indeed was the ruin of Samaria. The words of Isaiah are most appropriate to describe what took place. (See above, pp. 18-19.)

5. The Attack on Philistia

Passing by the cities of Aruma and Marum, Tiglath-pileser continued south, in order to free Ahaz from the threatened Philistine attack. Mitinti of Ascalon, who, in spite of the oath he had sworn to the Assyrian, had revolted, and on hearing of Rezon's defeat, disappeared. His son, Rukibtu, went to the Assyrian to pay homage and Tiglath-pileser accepted it. ⁶²

Hanun of Gaza had also his share in this campaign. Of him Tiglath-pileser wrote:

Hanunū (Hanno) of Gaza fled before my weapon and escaped to Egypt. The city of Gaza I captured, his goods, his possessions, his gods I carried off. My stele (?) and my royal image I had them fashion, in the midst of his palace I set them ⁶³ up. I counted them as gods of his land . . . I established them.

After the Assyrians had conquered the city, Hanun returned and accepted the Assyrian rule.

Other kings paid tribute: Matten-baal of Arvad, Sanibu of Ammon, Shalman of Moab, Chemosh-nadab of Edom, and of course Iauhazi or Jehoahaz of Judah. ⁶⁴ Even Shamshi "of Aribi" was forcibly brought under the Assyrian sway. ⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 280. Olmstead, History of Assyria, p. 201.

⁶¹ Isaiah 17:4-6.

⁶² Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, p. 453. Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 280.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 292-293.

⁶⁴ Olmstead, loc. cit.

⁶⁵ Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 229; Hall, op. cit., p. 465.

6. Organization and Deportation

Officials called kîpi or "residents" were appointed to the courts of subject princes. The frontier of Egypt, deserving special attention, was placed under the surveillance "of a certain Idibi-ilu, apparently a Bedouin chief, who was called the Kîpu of Musri' (Egypt)." Governors called shût-reshi (military commandant) or bel pikhâti (district lord) were appointed wherever the territory had actually been annexed to Assyria. This included Philistia "and the whole of Palestine and Syria north of Galilee and east Jordan with the exception of Phoenicia."⁶⁶ About half the population of these conquered territories was taken captive to other parts of the empire, being replaced by captives from Armenia and colonists from Babylonia. The native population was thus weakened. The foreigners usually sided with the Assyrians, due to the fact of hatred on the part of the natives.

Thus ended the Assyrian campaign of 734-732. Palestine had really felt the scourge. New provinces were added to the Assyrian empire; more kings became tributary. In a way, it was all the fault of the western states. Had they all united against Tiglath-pileser and forgotten their internal strife, the story would have been another.

7. Tiglath-pileser's Last Years

The west now subjugated, Tiglath-pileser returned to Mesopotamia to fight a Babylonian usurper named Ukinizu, a Chaldean chief. The war started in 731 and finished in 729. After the conflict was over, Tiglath-pileser became king of Sumer and Akkad (728).⁶⁷ ^{In} ~~To~~ the west there were minor disturbances in Tyre and Damascus, but these were left to the commander-in-chief. Tiglath-pileser died in the month of Tebet of the year 727. He

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hall, op. cit., pp. 465-466

was succeeded by Shalmaneser V, who ascended the throne the same month that Tiglath-pileser died. Shalmaneser had been called from his province of Simirra to be the fifth and last monarch of that name.

CHAPTER III. PALESTINE AND SHALMANESER V (727-722)

A. BEFORE THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

Upon ~~his~~ ascension to the throne, Shalmaneser V was called to the Phoenician coast to quell revolts that had been stirred up by Sibü or So of Egypt, probably one of the Delta kings.⁶⁸ The mere appearance of Shalmaneser was sufficient to bring most of them into submission, except Tyre. This city held out in a long siege and was able to extract a treaty from the Assyrian.⁶⁹

B. THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

At the first appearance of Shalmaneser, Hoshea of Israel paid his tribute. He also complied with his oath the next year (726). But in 725, he neglected to forward his yearly tribute. This is the way the record tells what happened: "The king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and offered no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison."⁷⁰ This was only the beginning of the end. Shalmaneser intended to quell this brood of revolts. He determined to destroy Samaria, the capital, after destroying and laying waste the rest of the country. However, the execution of this plan was not as easy as the capture of the king. Samaria prepared for a long siege.

There is an element of the heroic in the very idea of putting up resistance. Here we have the mightiest army of the known world arrayed against what probably was one of the smallest kingdoms of the time. Yet

⁶⁸ Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, p. 454.

⁶⁹ Olmstead, History of Assyria, pp. 204-205.

⁷⁰ II Kings 17:4.

the city was able to stand a siege of three years, during which Shalmaneser himself died and was succeeded by Sargon II. Had there been such courage in Israel in previous times, perhaps this event would not have taken place.

The Hebrew record seems to indicate that Shalmaneser took Samaria. However, that privilege belonged to Sargon II.⁷¹ Apparently the people in Judea did not even know that a change had taken place on the throne of Babylon. In the next chapter we shall deal with the fall of Samaria and its aftermath.

C. ISAIAH AND THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

An event of such importance as the siege of Samaria no doubt stirred the mind of Isaiah. It was probably due to his influence that Judah stayed out of trouble. We can safely say that he was convinced that any movement of rebellion against Assyria was doomed to fail. There is only one prophecy⁷² of his directed straight to the people of Samaria during the period before their final overthrow.

Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
That rests on the heads of those overcome with wine!
See! the Lord has one who is mighty and strong,
One like a storm of hail, or a destroying tempest,
Like a storm of mighty, overwhelming waters,
That beats down to the earth with violence.
And the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim
Will be trampled under foot;
And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
That rests on the head of a fertile valley,
Will be like the early fig before summer,
Which, as soon as a man sees it,
While it is still in his hand, he swallows.⁷³

Isaiah in this prophecy characterized the people and their leaders as morally degraded and powerless, consequently an easy prey to the Assyrian

⁷¹ II Kings 17:6.

⁷² J. M. P. Smith, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

⁷³ Isaiah 28:1-4.

invader. The characterization seems somewhat overdrawn, since the siege to which the Israelites were subjected was a severe test of character, and they showed beyond question that they had moral strength. On the other hand, we must not forget that times of crisis produce spurts of heroism even from the most degraded people.

CHAPTER IV. PALESTINE AND SARGON II (727-705)

A. THE FALL OF SAMARIA (722-721)

1. The Fall and Deportations

As said before, when Samaria fell Shalmaneser V had passed away and Sargon II was on the throne. Probably Sargon was not even on the western front to witness the event. The job was left for his subordinates.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he said the following in his records about the fall of Samaria:

In the beginning of my reign (722) and in the first year of my reign (721) . . . Samaria I besieged and took. 27,290 inhabitants I carried away, 50 chariots I collected there as a royal force. . . I set up again and made more populous than before. People from lands which I had taken I settled there. My men I set over them as governors. Tribute and taxes like the Assyrian I set over them.⁷⁵

The Hebrew record tells us where the Assyrian took the Israelites: "The king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and settled them in Halak and on the Harbor and the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."⁷⁶ To replace the Israelites, people were brought "from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Shepharvaim."⁷⁷

The system of deportation was at its peak during this time. Following the revolt of Hamath and Gaza in 720, two Aramean tribes from Der were settled in Samaria. Probably that same year, when Hamath fell, some of its captives were placed in Samaria. Three years later captives from two Arabian tribes were settled there, too. The deported persons from Cuthah and Babylon were brought in later times.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Hall, op. cit., p. 472.

⁷⁵ Robert William Rogers, Cuneiform Parallels of the Old Testament (The Abingdon Press, New York, 1926), p. 326.

⁷⁶ II Kings 17:4.

⁷⁷ II Kings 17:24.

⁷⁸ Olmstead, History of Assyria, p. 209.

2. Reasons for the Fall

The reasons given by the Biblical writer for the fall of Samaria are religious. Israel had rejected Yahweh and served other gods, becoming like other nations. She had built high places, set up obelisks and asherim; ignored the warnings of the prophets; inclined to the host of heaven; and even gone to the extreme of burning, or passing her children through fire. However, the immediate cause for its fall was the violation of the oath of fealty by King Hoshea and his rebellious intrigues with Egypt.⁷⁹

3. The Religious Situation in Samaria after the Deportations

The immediate religious fate of Samaria is given to us in Kings. The account referring to the newly brought captives states how "at the beginning of their settling there, they feared not the Lord. Therefore the Lord sent lions among them which were constantly killing some of them. So they told the king of Assyria saying, 'The nations which you have carried away and settled in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them and behold, they are constantly killing them, because they are not acquainted with the custom of the god of the land.'"

Considering this a reasonable request, Sargon gave orders saying: "Send there one of the priests whom I carried away from there; and let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the custom of the god of the land."

The priest came and reorganized the worship of Jehovah in Bethel. The remainder of the high places, however, were consecrated to the gods of the new settlers. "The men of Babylon had made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth had made Nergal, and the men of Hamath had made Ashima, and the Avvites had made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Shepharvites burned their children

⁷⁹ II Kings 17:24.

to Adrammelech and Anammelesh the gods of Sepharvaim." Samaria had indeed become the citadel of prostituted religion. No wonder the chronicler adds: "Thus they came to fear the Lord, but they also continued to serve their own gods."⁸⁰ This motely group became known later as the Samaritans.

4. Samaria the Assyrian Province

Bit Humri, "the House of Omri" became an Assyrian province. Its survivors were considered Assyrians and had to pay the usual tribute to the governor.⁸¹

B. THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HAMATH AND GAZA (720)

1. The Seats of Trouble.

With the downfall of Samaria one might have expected peace in Palestine and Syria. But such was not the case. The thirst for freedom was too strong in these small nations to be quenched by tyranny. In the year 720, right after the fall of Samaria, this same city joined with Hamath, Arpad, Simirra, and Damascus in a desperate struggle for freedom. Hamath was the center of this revolt in Syria. In the south, Egypt and Gaza, still ruled by Hanun, and some Arabian tribes formed the center of trouble. The movement was a major threat to the security of the Assyrian Empire. With lightning rapidity, Sargon responded to the menace.⁸² Coming west, he quickly suppressed the rebellion.

2. Sargon's Account

In his annals Sargon II has left us a brief account of this campaign.

In the second year of my reign Ilubidi, the Hamathite . . . collected his numerous troops at Qarqar. The oath [of Ashur he despised]. Arpad, Simirra, Damascus, Samaria, he made rebellious against me . . . Seb'u, his Tartan, he summoned to his aid, and to

⁸⁰ II Kings 17:25-41.

⁸¹ Olmstead, loc. cit.

⁸² J. M. P. Smith, op. cit., p. 82

give fight and battle came into my presence. In the name of Ashur, my lord, I accomplished his defeat. Sib'u fled like a shepherd whose sheep are stolen and escaped. Hanno I caught in my hand and took him bound unto my city Ashur. The city of Raphia I devastated, destroyed, burned with fire. I took captive 9,033 people, together with their numerous possessions.⁸³

The following he wrote about the defeat and punishment of Ilubidi:

. . . The whole army of Ashur I mustered and in Qarqar, his favorite city, I besieged him together with his soldiers. I captured Qarqar, I burned it with fire. His skin I flayed and the partakers of his sin I killed in their cities; I established peace. 200 chariots and 200 horsemen I collected from the people of Hamath, and added to my royal force.⁸⁴

As can be seen from these reports, the Assyrians came into contact with Egypt for the first time and defeated them. However, they failed to follow up the advantage secured, for the reason that Sargon was in Ashur, and no subordinate dared to assume the responsibility. Besides, any further advance was unwise. The affairs in the conquered territory were in a state of flux and time was necessary to get a stronger hold. In the next few years the Assyrians gave much attention to their affairs in the west. The peaceful city-states were allowed to retain their autonomy under their own kings. But in those which were directly involved in the revolt, Assyrian governors were prompt to appear.⁸⁵

C. HEZEKIAH AND REFORM

1. Hezekiah the New King

In Judah, Ahaz had been succeeded by his son, Hezekiah ("Yahweh strengtheneth") (721-693). Ahaz' pro-Assyrian policy had made Judah practically a heathen nation. Yahweh had been shoved out from his ancient abode and replaced by Ashur and the Assyrian king. This, of course, was intolerable to any follower of the Lord. Hezekiah at this juncture took advantage

⁸³ George A. Barton, Archeology and the Bible (Philadelphia: The American Sunday School Union, 1916), p. 370.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 371.

⁸⁵ Olmstead, History of Assyria, p. 208.

of Assyria's trouble in other parts of the empire to declare his independence.⁸⁶

2. The Message of Micah

It was at this moment that the prophet Micah of Moresheth-gath came to the fore, adding repeated emphasis to the message of Isaiah and giving us new insights into the internal life of Judah.

The message of Micah is direct and simple, going to the heart of things, attacking the rich, the city, the leaders of the nation, not because they are such, but because of their iniquities. From his home in the shephelah he no doubt saw the Assyrian army. This was enough to cause him to break his silence. To him the Assyrians were the rod of Yahweh's anger to chastise the rebellious Israelites.

To the rich oppressors he announces oppression.

Woe to them who devise wrong,
And work out wickedness upon their beds.
In the morning light they do it,
Because it is in their power.
They covet fields and seize them,
And houses, and carry them off.
So they crush a yeoman and his house,
A man and his possessions.

Therefore, thus says the Lord:
"Behold, I am planning evil against this family,
Which you will be unable to remove from your necks,
Nor will you be able to walk erect;
For it will be an evil time."⁸⁷

To the wicked leaders of the nation he speaks of the coming destruction of Zion.

Hear this, now, you heads of the house of Jacob,
And rulers of the house of Israel,
Who abhor justice,
And distort everything that is right;
Who build Zion with blood,
And Jerusalem with guilt.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

⁸⁷ Micah 2:1-3.

Her chiefs pronounce judgment for a bribe,
 And her priests declare oracles for hire,
 And her prophets divine for cash.
 Yet they lean upon the Lord, saying,
 "Is not the Lord in the midst of us?
 No misfortune can befall us."

Therefore, because of you,
 Zion shall be plowed like a field,
 And Jerusalem shall become a ruin,
 And the temple hill a high place in a forest.⁸⁸

To the wicked city he announces punishment.

Hark! the Lord calls to the city--
 And 'success' is fearing thy name! --
 "Hear, O tribe, and assembly of the city,
 Whose rich men are full of violence;
 Whose inhabitants speak falsehood,
 And whose tongue is deceit in their mouths.

"Can I forget the wicked treasures in the house of the wicked,
 And the short measure that is accursed?
 Can I treat as pure him with the wicked scales,
 And with he bag of false weights?

"So I will begin to smite you,
 To lay you in ruins because of your sins."⁸⁹

Still in the days of Jeremiah the princes and the people who were defending the life of Jeremiah remembered how when Micah spoke of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Hezekiah and his people hearkened and turned to the Lord.⁹⁰

3. Hezekiah's Sickness

Micah's preaching received powerful support from Isaiah's prediction of the death of Hezekiah while the latter was sorely sick.

"Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live." At such a message, Hezekiah weeping intensely, besought the Lord in prayer. And the Lord sent word through Isaiah saying:

⁸⁸ Micah 3:9-12.

⁸⁹ Micah 6:9-13.

⁹⁰ Jeremiah 26:10-19.

"Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen more years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and will throw my shield over this city."'"

The prayer was heard and Jerusalem was to be delivered from Assyria.

As a sign that this would take place, the shadow should turn backward ten steps on the sun-dial staircase of Ahaz.⁹¹

4. Hezekiah's Great Reform

Thus encouraged by Micah and Isaiah, Hezekiah started a religious reform, which was the logical step to his declaration of independence. Yahweh again became the national God, the high places were removed, the asherah cut into pieces, and the image of Ashur and the king of ~~Babylon~~^{Assyria} broken up. The bronze snake, associated with Moses, and to which the children of Israel burnt incense, was likewise destroyed. The temple, which had been closed by Ahaz, was now opened, and with the altar of holocaust and its vessels, and the table of proposition and its vessels, and all the furniture of the temple was purified from the transgression and desecration of Ahaz. A great passover celebrated the purification of the temple, to which the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were invited. The reforms reached beyond Jerusalem; the shrines outside the city were also destroyed. A certain amount of prosperity returned to the land.⁹²

D. NO ENTANGLING ALLIANCES

1. The Merodach-Baladan Affair*

Shortly thereafter Hezekiah received an embassy from Merodach Baladan, the Chaldean, presumably to congratulate him on his recovery, but indirectly to suggest an alliance. The Chaldean had recently usurped the

⁹¹ II Kings 20:1-11; Isaiah 38:1-9.

⁹² II Kings 18:4-8; II Chronicles 29, 30, 31.

* The date of this event is much disputed. Some put it after 720 but before 714. Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, p. 466. Others put it right after Sargon's death.

Babylonian throne and had been able to withstand the attack of Sargon. Hezekiah showed the ambassadors all the wealth of his country; he opened his treasures to them and they saw everything.

This did not please Isaiah at all. He was anti-Assyrian enough to encourage religious reform but not a bit pro-Babylonian. To his mind Yahweh was the only source of strength for Judah. No human alliance was equal to an alliance with God. He was against any entangling alliance that would compromise the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God. After inquiring and being told about the business of these men, he said to Hezekiah:

Hear the word of the Lord, "Behold, days are coming when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up to this day shall be carried away to Babylon; nothing shall be left," says the Lord. "Also some of your sons who shall be your issue, whom you shall beget, they shall take, and they shall become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Hezekiah acquiesced to the words of the prophet, but selfishly added:

"Shall it not be so, if there be peace and security in my time?"⁹³

2. The Egyptian Intrigues

a. New Signs of Strength

After the settlement of 720, Syria and Palestine remained quiet for six years. In Egypt, however, great internal events were taking place which resulted in the formation of a strong, unified government under Shabaka, a king of Ethiopia. This sovereign, a follower of Amon and whose kingdom had its seat in Napata on the upper Nile, succeeded in getting rid of the Delta kings, and was able once more to make Egypt look like herself. The effect of these signs of strength was immediately felt in the Palestinian and Syrian states. These began to plot rebellion against

⁹³ II Kings 20:12-21; Isaiah 39.

Assyria counting on Egyptian support.⁹⁴

6. Isaiah and Egypt

The appearance of strength in Egypt had its special effect in Jerusalem. There was in that city a very active Egyptian party, interested in plotting revolt against Assyria. Isaiah, who was no more pro-Egyptian than he was pro-Babylonian, could not stand the propaganda of this group. He advised Judah not to trust in Egypt but to trust in Yahweh only. He knew that Egypt was not strong enough to be of any help.

"Woe to you rebellious children," is the oracle of the Lord,
 "Who carry out a purpose that comes not from me,
 And who form an alliance that is not according to my mind--
 Adding sin to sin--
 Who set out on the way to Egypt,
 Without asking my advice,
 To take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh,
 And to take shelter in the shadow of Egypt!
 Therefore the protection you seek in Pharaoh shall turn to your
 shame,
 And the shelter you seek in the shadow of Egypt to your con-
 fusion.
 For though his princes be at Zoan,
 And his messengers arrive at Hanes,
 All shall come to shame through a people that cannot
 benefit them,
 That bring no help or benefit,⁹⁵
 But only shame and disgrace."

Of course this preaching was not popular. Men who were placing their trust in Egypt certainly expected encouraging words from the prophet. But Isaiah would have nothing of it. We have given this oracle because it shows Isaiah's statesmanship and foresightedness. Looking back, we can say that he was indeed a keen observer of the international situation. History has given him credit.

Isaiah had to write his message so as to make it a testimony forever. For the people were rebellious, faithless, unwilling to hear the word of the

⁹⁴ Olmstead, History of Palestine and Syria, pp. 467-468.

⁹⁵ Isaiah 30:1-5.

Lord. All they wanted to hear was "smooth things," and "delusions."⁹⁶ But Isaiah warned them not to trust in chariots and horses, for that was rebellion against God.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
And rely on horses;
Those who trust in chariots, because they are many,
And in horsemen, because they are very numerous;
But look not to the Holy One of Israel,
Nor consult the Lord!
Yet he is the wise one, and brings calamity,
And does not recall his words.
He will rise against the house of those who do evil,
And against the helpers of those who work mischief.
Now the Egyptians are men, and not God;
And their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
So, when the Lord stretches out his hand,
The helper will stumble, and the helped one will fall;
They will all of them perish together.⁹⁷

It is only the Lord that is able to deliver from Assyria, and that will come when his people return to Him. ⁹⁸

Shebna, as Aramean chamberlain of the palace, was the leader of the Egyptian party in Jerusalem. Isaiah had no patience with him and poured out his wrath upon him, disdaining his foreign precedence and predicting his downfall.⁹⁹

E. REVOLT AGAIN (714-712)

The Egyptian intrigues had their effect. In 714 Azuri, king of Ashdod, withheld his tribute and disseminated hatred of Assyria in the Philistine cities. But the Assyrians, acting quickly, placed his younger brother, Ahimiti, on the throne. But he in turn was deposed by a certain Yamani, an "Ionian" from Cyprus, who in truth had no claim to the throne. Ascalon remained loyal under Rukibti, but Gath, Judah, and Moab joined the

⁹⁶ Isaiah 30:8-11.

⁹⁷ Isaiah 31:1-3.

⁹⁸ Isaiah 31:6-9.

⁹⁹ Isaiah 22:15-25.

rebellion.¹⁰⁰

Isaiah ^{his} approved Hezekiah's movement and as a sign of the coming deportation he untied his sackcloth from his loins and removed the sandals from his feet and walked naked for the space of three years in the streets of Jerusalem. ¹⁰¹

Sargon immediately sent his turtam, Ashur-isqa-danin, with 420 soldiers of his bodyguard. In his records he has left the following:

Yamani heard of the progress of my expedition from afar and fled to the borders of Egypt, which lies by the side of Melucha, and was seen no more. Ashdod, Gath, Ashdudimmu, I besieged, I conquered. I took as spoil his gods, his wife, his sons, his daughters, his possessions, the treasures of his palace, together with the peoples of his land. I ~~captured~~ ^{retook} those cities anew, and settled in them peoples of lands I had captured from among /the lands/ of the east..... With the people of Assyria I numbered them, and they bore my yoke. The king of Melucha, who among.....an inaccessible place, a road.....whose fathers from ancient days as far back as the moon-god, his father, had sent no messengers to my fathers to pay their respects, heard from afar of the might of Ashur, Nabu, and Marduk; the fear of the luster of my royalty covered him and fright was poured over him. He cast him /Yamani/ into bonds, fetters of iron, and brought him before me into Assyria,-- a long journey.¹⁰²

The Melucha mentioned was a king in the Sinaitic peninsula.

There is no mention of a raid against Judah; undoubtedly the army was too small for such an enterprise.

After the fall of Ashdod and other cities, Sargon II did not come west again. The west remained quiescent till after his death. He died a violent death in 705.

¹⁰⁰ Barton, op. cit., p. 371.

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 20:3-6.

¹⁰² Barton, loc. cit.

CHAPTER V. PALESTINE AND SENNACHERIB (705-700)

A. SENNACHERIB AND HIS PROBLEMS

In the same month (August, 705) that Sargon died, his son Sennacherib ascended the throne and began to direct the affairs of that great empire. In the west Hezekiah, incited by Egypt, defied Assyria in spite of Isaiah's opposition. Syria was also in revolt, Phoenicia following the leadership of Tyre, forgetting for the moment commercial expediency. Padi of Ekron, who remained faithful to Assyria, was handed over by the populace to Hezekiah. Such was the state of affairs. Babylonia was infested with Aramean tribes, and the Babylonians themselves were not satisfied with the new king. In the north, the Cappadocian provinces formed by Sargon slipped away. The northern and eastern frontiers were now open to the Indo-Europeans, after the defeat of the Haldian king. Besides, the Medes were driving the Elamites toward Assyria. There was plenty of work for the new monarch to do.¹⁰³

Sennacherib attended first to the Babylonian and eastern fronts, after which he proceeded to take care of the situation in the west, in 701.

B. THE CAMPAIGN IN THE WEST

1. The Conquest of Sidon and its Environs

In 701 Sennacherib marched west, reaching the Mediterranean coast near Tyre. He did not attack the city proper, for that task required a naval force. However, he ravaged its tributary cities on the mainland and turned to Sidon. The king of Sidon, Luli, fled to Cyprus, and the city surrendered without much effort. A new province was organized with Sidon as center.

¹⁰³ Olmstead, History of Assyria, pp. 283-284.

A certain Ethobal was set up as its king. The success over Sidon brought immediate results, for deputations began to arrive with presents and oaths of fealty from some of the rebellious states.¹⁰⁴

2. Isaiah and the Coming of Assyria

The coming of Assyria was probably viewed by Isaiah with mingled feelings. In part, they were confirming his stand against Egypt, but on the other hand, he was a Judean, a patriot, a lover of his country. It was probably on this occasion that he uttered his famous oracle against Assyria.

The prophet considers Assyria as the instrument of God's wrath:

O Assyria, rod of my anger,
And staff of my fury!
Against a godless nation I send him,
And against the people of my wrath I charge him,
To despoil them, and the prey on them,
And to trample them down like mire of the streets.

But Assyria is not aware of the designs of providence. His thirst for conquest is not assuaged with one victory. Destruction is in his mind; he has no sense of values.

But not so does he think,
And not so does he plan;
For destruction is in his mind,
And to cut off nations not a few.

Inasmuch as my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images were more than those of Jerusalem and
Samaria,
Shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images,
As I have done to Samaria and its idols?

He thinks it has all been the work of his hand.

But when the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria, and his vainglorious pride. For he says,

"By the strength of my hand have I done it,
And by my wisdom, for I have understanding;
I have removed the boundaries of peoples,
And I have plundered their treasures;
I have brought down the inhabitants to the dust.

But the prophet puts him in his place. How can he be so stupid as to ignore the designs of the Maker? The only fate for such a nation is destruction.

Shall an ~~ax~~ boast over the ~~man~~ that hews with it,
Or a saw lord itself over the man that plies it?
As though a rod were to sway the man that wields it,
Or a staff were to wield what is not wood!

Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
Will send wasting sickness into his fat,
And under his glory there will be kindled a kindling
Like the kindling of fire--
The Light of Israel will become a fire,
The ~~Holy~~ One of Israel a flame--
And the glory of his forest and garden land
It will consume, both body and soul,
As when a sick man wastes away;
And the remnant of his forest trees will be few,
So that a child may write them down.

Isaiah projects his imagination and sees the Assyrian advancing.
And again destruction awaits the proud and preeminent nation.

But see! the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
Is lopping his boughs with a terrible crash;
And the lofty of stature will be hewn down,
And the tall ones will tumble.
He will strike down the thickets of the forest with an iron ax,
And Lebanon will fall beneath the blows of a Mighty One.¹⁰⁵

3. Sennacherib Continues his March South

After receiving tribute, Sennacherib continued his march south, not along the path visualized by Isaiah, but "around Carmel and down the plain of Sharon." The cities of Beth Dagon, Bene Barak, and Azur fell without offering a stiff resistance; also the port of Joppa. The Egyptian and Ethiopian army was now in sight under Taharka, Shabaka's nephew, and had taken their position at Eltekah, "back of the stream of Jamnia." The Egyptian forces were defeated. Sennacherib recorded:

The kings of Egypt, the soldiers, bows, chariots, and horses of the king of Meluhu, an unnumbered force, they summoned, and they came to their aid. In the environs of Elteke the battle array was drawn up before me; they asked for their weapons. In the might of Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and accomplished their defeat. My hands took alive in the midst of the battle the commander of the chariots

~~of the king of M~~

and the sons of the Egyptian king, together with the commander of the chariots of the kings of Meluhu. Elteke [and] Timnath I besieged, captured and took their spoil.¹⁰⁶

Ekron was now the next objective. The city was taken, the rebels duly punished and the righteous forgiven. Padi, the prisoner of Hezekiah, was brought down and put on the throne. Ascalon, where Sidqa had deposed the pro-Assyrian Sharruludari, son of Rikipti, was also captured. The former king was restored to the throne, but had to pay a tribute. The deposed king was taken to Assyria with his gods, wife, sons, daughters, and brothers.¹⁰⁷

4. The Incidents in Jerusalem

a. Sennacherib Ravages the Countryside

It is at this point that the Biblical narrative^{*} picks up the story. Sennacherib proceeded to destroy the cities of Judah. In his records he claimed to have besieged and captured forty-six of Hezekiah's strongholds, probably an exaggeration, "and smaller cities of their environs without number, with the onset of battering rams and the attack of engines, mines, breaches and axes (?)." The siege of Lachish took some time and he commemorated the siege with a picture on the walls of his palace.¹⁰⁸

b. The Tribute

While besieging Lachish, the Assyrian received a message from Hezekiah of Jerusalem, saying: "I have offended; withdraw from me; whatever you lay on me I will bear."

The Biblical narrative puts the paying of the tribute immediately after Hezekiah's submission, while the Assyrian accounts place it after

¹⁰⁶ Barton, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 373.

¹⁰⁸ Loc. cit.

* We recognize the critical problems involved in the Biblical records, but for the purpose of this paper, we have chosen to consider the account in II Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37 as referring to one campaign.

Sennacherib's return to Assyria. That latter states that Hezekiah was imposed a tribute of "30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver (the Biblical account says only 300), precious stones, rouge, dakkasi, lapis lazuli, great angugmi stones, beds of ivory, stationary ivory thrones, elephants' hide, ivory, ushu-wood, ukarinnu-wood, all sorts of objects." A heavy treasure indded. Besides, he had to send "his daughters, the women of his palace, male and female musicians" to Sennacherib's capital of Niniveh. In order to pay such a heavy tribute, Hezekiah had to lay hands on all the silver found in the temple and in the royal palace and to strip off the gold plating from the doors and foorposts of the temple. The value in modern exchange of the Biblical 30 talents of gold and 300 talents of silver is \$1,500,000.¹⁰⁹

c. Sennacherib's Envoys

Apparently not satisfied with Hezekiah's submission, and probably not with the tribute, if paid on the spot, the Assyrian sent three of his officers, Tartan, Rabshis, and Rabshakeh, with a great army from Lachish, to demand the surrender of the city.

Sennacherib's men took up their position "by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the laundrymen's field," the same place where Isaiah had spoken to Ahaz on a previous occasion. They called for the king, and he sent out three representatives: Eliakim, the steward of the palace, Shebna, the scribe, and Asaph, the recorder.

The shrewd Assyrian spokesman, in a speech worthy of a modern diplomat, ridiculed their confidence in Egypt, the source of their strength.

"Now in whom do you trust that you have rebelled against me? You have put your trust evidently in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will run into his hand and pierce it." And how could Jehovah rescue a king who had taken away the high places and altar? In order to

¹⁰⁹ Loc. cit., II Kings 18:13-16.

prove their weakness, the Assyrian will furnish two thousand horses, if they are able to set riders upon them. "The Lord himself said to me," concluded Rabshakeh, "'Go up against this land and destroy it.'"

Obviously, the Assyrians were trying to instill fear into the hearts of the people and thus break their morale. Hezekiah's envoys, realizing that, asked the Assyrian spokesman to speak in Aramaic rather than in Judean, so that the people would not be able to understand.

But the officer, disregarding the request, cried with a loud voice in Judean, telling the people not to trust nor listen to Hezekiah, who was saying, "The Lord will deliver us," for none of the gods of the nations already conquered had been able to deliver them; but rather to listen to the king of Assyria who was saying, "Make peace with me and surrender to me; and eat each from his own vine and his own fig tree and drink the water of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die."

That is a very strong argument to present to a besieged city. No doubt some of the people inside the walls were willing to come to terms. But the envoys had orders not to answer and the people did the same. All were silent.

Returning to Hezekiah with rent garments, they told him the words of the field marshal. Hezekiah realized the seriousness of the situation, and sent Eliakim, Shebna, and the oldest of the priests, all covered with sackcloth, to consult the prophet Isaiah. The king himself tore his garments and, covering himself with sackcloth, went into the temple to pray.

d. Isaiah's Answer

The messengers told Isaiah about the precariousness of the situation and asked him to lift up a prayer to his God, for perhaps He would

hear the debasing words of the field marshal. Then Isaiah, taking the situation into his hands, sent this message to Hezekiah:

Thus shall you say to your master: "Thus says the Lord: "Do not be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the menials of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that when he hears a certain rumor he shall return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

Cheered by the support of Isaiah, Hezekiah held out against the Assyrian threats. The Assyrians left Jerusalem and came to Sennacherib, who was storming Libnah, the siege of Lachish now being over.

e. The Letter

From the Bible record, it appears that as soon as Sennacherib heard the report that the Egyptians were coming, he sent messengers with a letter to Hezekiah, who still held out behind his walls. The letter emphasized again the folly of trusting in Jehovah, for of the gods of the conquered cities, none had saved them. "Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and of Ivvah?"

Hezekiah received the letter, and after reading it went up to the temple and agonized in prayer for the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrian destroyer.

Isaiah seemed to be aware of the state of fright of the king, for shortly he appeared with a message of hope. The arrogance and pride of the Assyrian should be countered by the Lord, who says:

I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips,
And I will cause you to return by the way by which you came.

Furthermore, Isaiah assures Hezekiah that Sennacherib

shall not enter this city, or shoot an arrow there; neither shall he come before it with shield, or cast up a mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; but he shall not enter this city.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰

II Kings 18:17 - 19:34; Isaiah 36:4 - 37:35.

It was sometime during this period that Sennacherib had defeated the Egyptian army and taken Ekron. The events are difficult to arrange chronologically. The best we can do is to narrate them in what seems a logical arrangement.

5. The End of the Campaign

Sennacherib had by this time reduced the cities of Philistia and Judah. Some of the cities of Judah along the edge of the Philistine plain he attached to Ekron, Ashdod and Gath. He had practically wiped out all possible centers of revolt. He took many captives, although it seems that his Judean figure of 200,150 is an exaggeration. Hezekiah, he said, was "shut up like a bird" in a cage. Yet it could not be denied that Hezekiah was still on the throne and that Jerusalem had remained inviolable. Thus the words of Isaiah stood the test. Indeed, Jehovah had prevailed over the gods of Assyria.¹¹¹

The Biblical record closes this campaign with the miraculous intervention of the Divine. "That night the angel of the Lord went forth and slew in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when men rose early next morning, they were all dead bodies." Then Sennacherib returned to Niniveh, where he was later slain.¹¹² Thus ended

The fifty years were ended. They had been hectic indeed.

¹¹¹ Barton, loc. cit.

¹¹² II Kings 19:35-37; Isaiah 37:36-38.

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