

Introduction

The so called Syro-Ephraimite War is known solely from biblical sources, but the circumstances surrounding the parties involved are heavily attested in Assyrian records.¹ As minor as this war seems to be in a biblical sense, there has been much discussion concerning this particular conflict going back to as early as 1843 according to Roger Tomes.² The main parties involved were Pekah of Israel (Ephraim) and Rezin of Damascus (Aram) in an alliance against Jotham and his son Ahaz (2 Kings 15:37; 16:5). Almost incidental to the well-known title of this war is the largest player on the world scene at this time, Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria. The fact that Assyria is not referred to in the title is ironic because when one begins to discuss the reasons for the war, it doesn't take long before he becomes a definite player in the ensuing conflict. The threat of the Assyrian Empire provides the impetus for the parties involved to engage in their clash. The purpose of this paper is to briefly summarize a range of the current scholarship as it relates to two particular issues. The first is the Assyrian connection and background information of Tiglath-pileser's westward expansion which eventually intersects with the players of the Syro-Ephraimite War. This will be done by briefly examining the Assyrian records of Tiglath-pileser's conquests which bring him into the vicinity of Israel/Judah/Aram. Secondly, I will attempt to summarize the various models proposed that relate to the cause of the war and their theological implications.

¹ Accepted biblical sources include: 2 Kings 15:37; 16:5-9; Isa 7:1-9; 2 Chr 27:1-9; 28:1-27. However, others such as Irvine extend the prophetic passages to include Isa 8-12 as speaking to the circumstances surrounding the war and its aftermath. Thompson takes it further to include portions of Hosea 5-7 and Cazelles mention loose connections to the prophecies of Amos.

² Tomes, *The Reason for the Syro-Ephraimite War*, 59.

The Assyrian Connection

The late 9th century into the middle of the 8th century saw continued attempts by Assyrian forces to maintain its power base with a central governmental structure.³ However, this began to weaken beginning with an initial decline under Samsi-adad V (823-811). Even though there was a slight recovery under the reign of Adad-nirari III the waning of Assyrian power continued.⁴ During the period following Adad-nirari III, the many instances in the Eponymn list in which the king and the army stayed “in the land,” are indicative of the imperial weakness and explain why Babylon in the south and Urartu in the north dared to encroach on Assyria’s borders.⁵ This period of Ascendancy of Urartu coincided with political shifts in the Levant. During this time there was renewed independence among the Aramean states of the region which provided opportunity for many of the Aramean states to flourish.⁶ Additionally, this provided the Aramean state of Damascus, albeit subjugated under Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25-28), to poise itself to return to influence under the reign of Rezin in 750 BC. As we will see later, the arrival of Rezin at this time coincides closely with the reassertion of Assyria in the west. These factors will lead up to some of the reasons for the Syro-Ephraimite alliance.

The decline of the Assyrian empire came to a halt with the ascendancy of Tiglath-pileser III in 745. This formidable king of Assyria ruled until 727 BC and brought about a resurgence of Assyrian dominance that would last well over a century. In seeking to understand the political and governmental environment brought about by Tiglath-pileser, it’s important to understand the ways in which this policy of conquest demonstrated

³ Rainey, *Sacred Bridge*, 215.

⁴ Younger, *History: Renewed Independence and Conquest*, 1.

⁵ Rainey, *Sacred Bridge*, 216.

⁶ Younger, *History: Renewed Independence and Conquest*, 2.

itself. We know that Tiglath-pileser brought the Assyrian empire to a geographical extent that hadn't been seen in decades. Assyrian policy took one of three tacks, all of them ruthless. Frequently, the policy worked on a three-stage progression: seek voluntary submission of local rulers; conquer by force if voluntary submission does not happen; punish an recalcitrance or rebellion by taking over governmental control and deporting local leadership, while substituting populations drawn from other locales.⁷

The beginning of Tiglath-pileser's reign had him venturing south against the Aramean tribes threatening Babylon.⁸ We know from the Eponym Chronicle that he states to have marched to the territory between the two rivers in the first year of his reign. This first action happened in the fall of 745 and subsequently resulted in him strengthening the central monarchy by stripping the authority from the powerful governors who had been acting before as virtually independent rulers.⁹ Following the listing of the Eponym Chronicle has Tiglath-pileser going eastward into the land of Namri in 744. This allowed him to solidify his base in those immediate adjacent areas to Assyria.

During this strengthening process, an anti-Assyrian coalition formed under the leadership of Urartu, Arpad, and Cilician states, a coalition that included Rezin of Damascus and Hiram of Tyre.¹⁰ It was this revolt that that brought about a major defeat for this coalition. However, according to the Chronicle, it wasn't a defeat that happened

⁷ Edward F. Campbell, Jr. in *Oxford History*, ed. By Michael Coogan, 237.

⁸ Cazelles, Henri. *Syro-Ephraimite War*, 284.

⁹ Rainey, 225.

¹⁰ Cazelles, 284.

overnight. It begins in 743 and the city of Arpad isn't completely conquered until 740. It is at this time that Arpad is annexed into Assyria as the first full province of Syria.¹¹

Also at this time is when scholars believe Menahem of the Bible gave a tribute to Tiglath-pileser. It is elusive to fix an exact date, but it had to be before Menahem died.

The Bible reads in 2 Kings 15:19-20,

“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 strengthen the kingdom under his control.²⁰ And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.”

Realizing that Pul was campaigning just north of Israel, brought concern for their own security and Menahem acted shrewdly to preserve his own kingdom. Concerning the date, if the siege of Arpad began in 743, then Menahem could have brought the tribute money (bribe) to him during this time. What's more is the inscription of the Iran Stele which describes tribute being imposed. These include the kings of the land of Hatti, the Arameans of the sea shore of the setting sun: the land of Qedar, the land of Arabia, Kushtashpi the Kummuhian, Radian (Rezin) the Damascene, Menahem the Samarian, Itto-Bail the Tyrian, Sipit-Bail the Byblian, Urik the Quian, Sulumal the Melidite.¹² There are those who believe that the tribute by Menahem could be different than the 2 Kings reference and instead could be subsequent tribute altogether.¹³

The important thing about this discussion of Tiglath-pileser's actions during this time is the forced subjugation of Rezin, the Aramean king of Damascus. This most likely

¹¹ Younger, *History*, 16.

¹² Tadmor, *Inscriptions*, 107-109.

¹³ *Ibid*, 276.

begins to give him a resentment towards Assyria which in turn leads to the events and possible motivations for the Syro-Ephraimite war almost a decade later. It was also during this time that there was much going on in the development of Judah and Israel. Jotham was ruling on the throne of Judah and according to 2 Chronicles 27:5, “He also fought with the king of the Ammonites and defeated them. And the people of Ammon gave him in that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand kors of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. The people of Ammon paid this to him in the second and third years also.” These actions by the house of Jotham were solidifying his hold in the Transjordan and setting up future potential conflict with his northern neighbors of Samaria and Syria (Pekah and Rezin).

The years of 743-740 and 738 of the Eponym list had Tiglath-pileser intervening in the vicinity of the Syria. After squashing the coalition and rebellion of Arpad, Tiglath-pileser departs from the region in 739 and the north Syrian states again rebelled against Assyria, this time under the leadership of Tutammu, the king of Unqi, who capital was Kullani. The Assyrian army returned to the region the following year, suppressed the coalition, and received tribute from the rulers as far south as Rezin of Damascus, Hiram of Tyre, Menahem of Israel, and Zabibe the queen of Arabia.¹⁴ It is this return that began a process through which northern Israel, along with most of the Syro-Hittite states to her north, were within a very short period incorporated into the Assyrian Empire. Menahem is described in Kings only as paying Tiglath-pileser tribute to make him a friend rather than an enemy- very likely the aftermath of the successful campaign of 738 BC against Syria and Phoenicia; we know of no direct involvement at all in Israelite affairs during the brief reign of Menahem’s successor Pekahiah, who was, like Zechariah and Shallum,

¹⁴ Irvine, 25.

assassinated.¹⁵ For the next years (737-735), Tiglath-pileser campaigned in the east fighting among the Urartians and Medians.¹⁶

It's during this 2-3 year period of Tiglath-pileser's conquests in the east that a storm begins to build in the vicinity of Judah, Israel and Damascus. Pekah was the ruling king of Samaria due to the assassination of Pekahiah and Rezin was his close ally in Damascus. In Judah, Jotham was reigning strong and had even made attempts at expanding his power base east of the Jordan as mentioned above. Due to Pekah's connection with Gilead (2 Kings 15:25), the potential for conflict with Jotham having gone conquering in his previous base was provocative at the least.

This brings us to the time frame immediately preceding the Syro-Ephraimite war. We know from the Eponym Chronicle that in the year 734, Tiglath-pileser is noted as going 'against Philistia.' According to the timing of the chronicle there ended up being a series of campaigns that began in Philistia and subsequently continued through to Damascus in the years 733-732. This would show that the conquering of Damascus was completed in 732/731 for the Chronicle has Tiglath-pileser in Sapia in southern Babylon in 731/730.¹⁷

The background into the initial incursion to Philistia seemingly has to do with an alliance of Hiram, ruler of Tyre and Rezin of Damascus. Also, one known as Mitinti of Ashkelon broke his oath of allegiance to Assyria and stirred up Tiglath-pileser to solidify this region. No doubt he would have desired this anyway since the strategic importance of maintaining control of this main coastal thoroughfare from Egypt to northern Syria is

¹⁵ Provan, 270.

¹⁶ Younger, *History*, 16.

¹⁷ Irvine, 25.

obvious. Rainey provides a summary of the main narrative of the military action in Philistia with some minor conjectures:

Hanunu of Gaza feared my powerful weapons and escaped t[o the land of] Egypt. The city of Gaza, [his royal city, I conquered/entered, x talents] of gold, 800 talents of silver, people together with their possessions, his wife, [his] sons, [his daughters....] his property (and) [his] gods [I despoiled/seized]. A statue of the great god, my lords, and my (own) royal image out of gold I fashioned. Within the palace of Ga [za I set it up;] I counted (it) among the gods of their land. [The]ir [regular offerings] I established. As for him, [the fear of my lordship over]whelmed [him]; like a bird he flew back from Egypt. [...I returned him to his position. His...] I assigned [to the customs house of the land] of Assyria. I received [gold], silver, multicolored garments, large [horses...]. My royal stele [I set up] in the city of the Brook of Egypt, a river[bed...X+100 talents] of silver I carried off and I [brought] them to Assyria.¹⁸

It was at this time as well that Tiglath received tribute from Judah, Ammon, Moab, Edom and Arabs.¹⁹ This tribute summary mentions specifically Ahaz the Judean. Now whether this tribute was the inducement for help by Ahaz or a new payment isn't exactly known.²⁰ There seems to be some ambiguity by a variety of scholars as to how exactly the offer of riches to Tiglath-pileser took place. Especially as it relates to reconciling the texts of 2 Kings 16:8-9 where we read that Ahaz offered silver and gold from the treasury and the King of Assyria heeded him by coming and destroying Damascus. Yet 2 Chronicles

¹⁸ Rainey, 229.

¹⁹ Tadmor, 234-235.

²⁰ Rainey, 230.

28:21 mentions Ahaz giving gold from the treasury and Tiglath-pileser did not come help him.

It's after the Philistia campaign that Gershom Galil says the Assyrians returned to their homeland as the campaign ended in 734. Aram and Israel attacked Judah following the departure of the Assyrians from the area because of internal conflicts and the intention of Aram's king to control the kingdom of Judah. At this time Elath was conquered (2 Kgs 16:6) and the Philistines conquered regions in the Shephelah (2 Chr 28:18). Additional monarchs, including Hanun of Gaza, Hiram of Tyre, Shamshi queen of the Arabs, and others, joined the Aram-Israel alliance, which was also supported by Egypt. As a result of the attack on Judah and Jerusalem, Ahaz sent seraphs to the king of Assyria and asked for his protection and intervention in the conflict. This plea, which corresponded with Assyrian interests, apparently had a minor effect on the Assyrian king's decision to shorten his time in Urartu, lift the siege on Tushpa, and direct his forces to the west in order to halt the erosion of the Assyrian position and prevent the expansion of the Aramean-Israelite coalition.²¹

The Eponym chronicle highlights Tiglath's campaigns into the Damascus beginning in regnal years 733-732. Again this seems to fit the time frame and comments of 2 Chronicles mentioning Ahaz's request for help and the king of Assyria's response to this. The first conquest relates to that of Damascus. Tiglath-pileser spends much time in his summary inscription to his defeat of Rezin.²² It's during this time that the Bible also speaks of the defeat of certain geographical areas. 2 Kings 15:29 reads, "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth

²¹ Galil, 519.

²² Tadmor, Inscription 23:1'-17'

Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.” This action into Gilead is confirmed by two lines of evidence. First, there is the reference to exiles from the Transjordanian tribes in the genealogical lists of 1 Chronicles: “and Beerah his son, whom Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria carried into captivity. He *was* leader of the Reubenites” (5:6). Also is 1 Chronicles 5:26, “So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan to this day.” Rainey has these conquests as initial in the Damascus campaign and then led to the surrounding of Damascus for the prolonged siege mentioned.²³ Younger has these campaigns going on simultaneously. First, the siege of Damascus which would logically leave open the possibility for conquering the adjacent geographical environs. There would have been a two-pronged attack from the base of Damascus leading to Gilead and Galilee.²⁴

Bringing together the Biblical evidence as well as the inscriptions seems pretty straightforward at this time. According to Annals 23, Tiglath-pileser’s description of his conquest of Damascus has him attacking the city and impaling many of Rezin’s foremost officials while Rezin himself entered the city for a prolonged siege. He describes Rezin as a caged bird and the initial encampment for 45 days. However, it is known that, according to this Annal, the queen Samsi of Arabia becomes involved in the battle. This doesn’t deter the ultimate defeat of Rezin, but simply delays it. There are other summary

²³ Rainey, 230-231.

²⁴ Younger, *Deportations*, 206-208. Also, see *History*, 17-18.

texts which describe the defeat of this queen.²⁵ Although there seems to be some delay, Rezin ultimately falls after a prolonged siege into the regnal year 732/731 and is killed.²⁶

The Bible reads in 2 Kings 16:9-10,

“So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried *its people* captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.¹⁰ Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that *was* at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship.”

This is a insightful verse because it not only describes the killing of Rezin, but also the deportations of Damascus to Kir. This brings the final end to the kingdom of Aram-Damascus. Subsequently, King Ahaz actually went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser and submit to him.

Additional corroboration between the Bible and the inscriptions occurs as it relates to the subsequent events of Pekah and Samaria. 2 Kings 15:30 reads, “Then Hoshea the son of Elah led a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck and killed him; so he reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.” This put an end to Pekah’s reign over Samaria and began the new kingdom of Hoshea. Tiglath-pileser mentions specifically that he did not touch Samaria.²⁷ Although he takes no direct responsibility for the changes in Samaria, he does take credit for the approving and appointing of Hoshea as the new king of Samaria.²⁸ As to the timing of these events, it seems that the slaying of Pekah by Hoshea and the latter’s enthronement

²⁵ Tadmor, 228-229.

²⁶ Irvine, 30.

²⁷ Tadmor, *Summ.* 13:17'-18', 202-203.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Summ.* 4:15'-18', 140-141.

as king of Israel occur subsequent to Tiglath-pileser's campaigns to the west. The Assyrian campaigns against the Syro-Ephraimite allies, Rezin and Pekah, took place in the years 733-732, whereas Hoshea's coup d'état should be assigned to the following year 731-730, the year when Tiglath-pileser was engaging in Babylonia. One may well assume that Hoshea sent his envoys carrying the heavy tribute (10 talents of gold, X talents of silver²⁹) to the Assyrian King immediately after his coronation in order to be recognized by the overlord. After all, any delay on Hoshea's side could have resulted in Assyrian measures against him for having slain a vassal of the Greek King.³⁰

Origins of the Syro-Ephraimite War

After delving into the geo-political backgrounds of Tiglath-pileser, some of the more practical questions arise as to the reasons for the War itself. There seems to be two major propositions as it relates to the War. The first is those who take the War to be an attempt on the part of Rezin to build an international coalition seeking to protect this geographical area from further humiliating subjugation under Assyria. As was mentioned above, Rezin was part of a coalition that was defeated in 743 BC and hence was annexed into Assyrian domination fully in the subsequent years. Was this enough to create resentment in Rezin to seek out a coalition to defend against and possibly remove the yoke of Assyrian control? Did Rezin find himself too tempted to resist a desire for a coalition during the time when Tiglath-pileser was solidifying his kingdom near Urartu and Media in 737-735? It seems to be during this time in the reign of Jotham that Rezin and Pekah were already aligned in some way against Judah (2 Kings 15:37). Does this alignment necessitate an international coalition? No, but it doesn't seem too dubious to believe that

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Na'aman, *Historical and Chronological Notes*, 73-74.

Rezin would seek this since he had already shown himself willing to be a part of coalition that was previously defeated by Assyria.

The other viewpoint is that the War was simply an event that was concerned with the inner workings of those geographically close kingdoms of Syria, Israel (Ephraim) and Judah. Roger Tomes does a good job at summarizing the various scholars. He mentions that there are many who attribute the first mention of an international coalition to J. Begrich, but goes on to show that this isn't the case. Tomes shares that Lehmann-Haupt, Guth, Kittel, and Sellin among others all thought this was the right approach³¹. More recently, Irvine agrees with this approach and mentions Donner as well.³² Further, Thompson takes the approach that international politics are at play.³³ The major players as it relates to those taking the position of War with no international intrigues are Oded³⁴ and Tomes himself³⁵.

It's important to delve just a little deeper into the two scenarios mentioned. The summary provided by Irvine of the well-known position of an international coalition by Joachim Begrich is helpful at this point. It happens in six stages: 1) The timing of the war would not have happened while Tiglath-peliser was in the area; 2) The purpose was to draw Judah into an international coalition that already included Samsi of Arabia, Hanno of Gaza, Mitinti of Ashkelon, Edom, Ammon, Moab, as well as Egypt in the background; 3) Ahaz refused because of the lack of potential success and instead appealed to Tiglath-peliser in advance of the expected defeat of the coalition; 4) Tiglath-peliser invaded the west in order to crush the coalition, not necessarily to help Ahaz; 5)

³¹ Tomes, 56-57.

³² Irvine, 104.

³³ Thompson, 107.

³⁴ Oded, *The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered*, *CBQ* 34 (1972)153-165

³⁵ Tomes, 70.

The Assyrians moved down the Mediterranean coast in order to conquer the southern members of the coalition and to preclude any potential aid from Egypt; 6) In 733-32, Tiglath-peliser moved and conquered Damascus, and the rest of coalition bringing full subjugation to the area.³⁶ Donner takes a minor difference to the approach. He maintains that the coalition was not in place until the campaign into Philistia was already underway in 734.³⁷ This certainly doesn't seem to fit the biblical evidence even at the outset. As was mentioned prior the coalition of at least Rezin and Pekah began in the reign of Jotham and Ahaz which would precede the arrival of Assyria into the region.

Bustanay Oded provides a response to this long-held belief of an international coalition. He gives three primary objections: 1) If the primary aim of Damascus and Samaria was to form an alliance of states against Assyria, it not clear they should waken themselves by a prolonged war against Jerusalem, thereby exposing their northern flank to the Assyrian forces.³⁸ Tomes agrees with this by imagining how difficult this would be to expect a potential weakening in anticipation of a conflict with a greater power. He goes on to quote Cornhill as saying, "The doves over which the hawk is already hovering ready for his mortal swoop begin pecking and fighting one another."³⁹ The response to this is that OT does not give the impression of the allies becoming involved in a prolonged siege. Both Isaiah 7:1 and 2 Kings 16:5 say that they were unsuccessful, and one gains the idea that they did not persist long when they found themselves meeting with difficulty.⁴⁰; 2) Normally wars in the Syria region were disputes over borders and

³⁶ Irvine, 96-97. This summary of Begrich is contra to Galil who has the request for help after the Assyrians returned home after the Philistia campaign. Thus returning to crush the coalition. See n. 21.

³⁷ Ibid, 98.

³⁸ Oded, 153.

³⁹ Tomes, 70.

⁴⁰ Thompson, 107.

territories coinciding with grabs for power and influence. There is not a single clear-cut reference to a war happening with these reasons. Oded cites the fact that Jehoshaphat did not take part in the battle against the Assyrians at Qarqar and yet Ben-hadad II and Ahan didn't go to war for that.⁴¹ Thompson replies that this could be the case, but not necessarily so.⁴²; 3) Oded's final objection is the quick dismissal of 2 Kings 15:37 by J. Begrich as being of no value. This seems to be one of those verses that is used by both sides to further their own positions. Oded will say that this is a reference to the inter-struggles that began earlier while others say that this is a reference to the more broader attempts to gain a coalition. There isn't enough in the verse to prove either, but there certainly is enough to show some sort of coalition being formed. Irvine argues that as much as Oded doesn't want an international coalition, the evidence seems to show otherwise. An extended quote seems warranted here:

Oded's interpretation of the war results partly from this narrow focus on Syria, Israel, and Judah. The full body of biblical and extra-biblical evidence suggests a different and more complicated picture. The Assyrian records, as we have seen, document widespread revolt during the late 730s, involving Syria, Israel, Tyre, Ashkelon, Samsi, probably Gaza, and perhaps the Meunites and the Transjordan kingdoms. The inscriptions indicate clearly that Hiram of Tyre was in league with Rezin, and we can reasonably infer the same for Mitinti of Ashkelon. 2 Kings 16:5-9 reports the alliance between Rezin, Pekah, and the Edomites, and 2 Chr 28:18 might indicate the cooperation of the Philistines. If these states and groups, or at least many of them, were in league with Syria and at the same time

⁴¹ Oded, 154.

⁴² Ibid

at war with Assyria, the idea of an anti-Assyrian coalition, coordinated by Rezin, is hard to avoid. Similarly, if Ahaz was the one ruler in Palestine who did not join the rebellion, and if the plan of Rezin and Pekah was principally to replace him (Isa 7:6), it is difficult to view the Syro-Ephraimite War other than as an attempt to depose Ahaz and to obtain a complete Judean participation in the war against Assyria.⁴³

The response by Tomes mentions that many of these *coalition* partners are only associated with Rezin at his final defeat. He goes on to argue that if there was a genuine coalition being formed then it would have been mentioned somewhere in the inscriptions just as it was by Shalmaneser III nearly a century earlier.⁴⁴ I find a lot of supposition and assumption when it comes to denying the more accepted model of a there being an international coalition. Tomes and Oded want to allow for some sort of coalition that is related to the inner-politics that is leading to a potential overthrow of the house of David and the installation of the house of Tabeel and the aim to dislodge Judah from Transjordan,⁴⁵ but is that the sole extent of what is happening? Here the evidence presented by Oded is convincing in that there were a lot of factors at play in the events leading up to the Syro-Ephraimite War. However, he is failing to see the bigger picture. Is it too much to conclude that he is correct in what he affirms, but wrong in what he denies? Was it only about Transjordan or was that just a piece of the puzzle in the overarching aims of Rezin to assemble a coalition to further his own political agenda? It seems evident that the bigger picture of the desire for an international coalition and the

⁴³ Irvine, 103-104.

⁴⁴ Tomes, 65.

⁴⁵ Oded, 161.

resultant desire to remove Ahaz and the house of David for their refusal to join is the primary reasons for the Syro-Ephraimite War.

When one steps back and sees the various reasons and machinations of the parties involved in bringing about the War, those of us who take a more theological approach must consider the message that God wants to teach through these events. Although there are attempts to bring to bear a lot of different passages on this⁴⁶ the most specific passages relate to Isaiah 7, 2 Chronicles 28, and 2 Kings 16. Ackroyd's words are appropriate here, "In the three forms in which we have them, we are offered more elaborate and more relevant statements about the relation between faith and fear, the relation between human disobedience and divine judgment, the meaning which events can have for those who come after and live in other situations."⁴⁷

The message of Isaiah is one of hope. He is bringing to Ahaz the message of encouragement mixed with admonition. This current threat will come to nothing. The House of David will not fail because of God's faithfulness. Ahaz has to make a decision, but should not rely on human power since a human regime cannot initiate political-military movements which, following the concept of cause and effect, are determined by God.⁴⁸ Yet, if Ahaz rejects God, then "Surely he would not be established" (Isaiah 7:9).

According to Thompson, 2 Kings is a reinterpretation of the war for the situation of Judah and Jerusalem after the final collapse of the north in 722 BC. The message wished to convey for his own time was radically different than Isaiah at the time of the war. The Historian wished his readers to learn a lesson from the divine judgment, effected by the Assyrians, upon the northern kingdom. Judgment will come unless Ahaz

⁴⁶ See Thompson and Irvine.

⁴⁷ As quoted by Thompson, 116.

⁴⁸ Y. Gitay, 229.

follows the will of Yahweh. However there is no mention of judgment here, because he is rescued by the Assyrian king.⁴⁹ Even though 2 Kings was meant to bring a more positive spin, the continuity of the kings in this case, the message however, is consistent with Isaiah in that God is faithful, not to Ahaz particularly, but to the house of David.

Finally, the approach in 2 Chronicles 28 was meant to demonstrate three points: 1) The religious sins of Ahaz made him the worst king in Judean history; 2) Yahweh punished the faithless king by delivering him into the hands of his enemies; 3) In his time of distress there was no repentance and received his just recompense.⁵⁰ Ahaz's woes are presented as one invasion after another. It begins by listing his sins and his deliverance into the hand of the king of Syria and its serious conquest of many of those in Judea. Ahaz was then given to Israel while these actions are interpreted by the prophet Oded as a judgment of God (28:1-15). The Chronicler then writes that the Edomites and the Philistines attacked and reduced his territory (28:16-19). Even after he requested help from Tiglath-pileser, the writer mentions that the king of Assyria didn't help him, but instead afflicted him (28:20-21). He wraps up the section with a rehash of his further sins against Yahweh (28:22-27). The point of the Chronicler is to highlight the specific theological emphasis of sin and God's judgment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to briefly summarize the range of the current scholarship as it relates to issues of the background information of Tiglath-pileser's westward expansion bringing him into the vicinity of Israel/Judah/Aram as well as summarizing the various models proposed that relate to the cause of the war and the theological

⁴⁹ Thompson, 119.

⁵⁰ Irvine, 93-94.

implications. We have seen that Tiglath-pileser's westward campaigns played a role in the circumstances that led up to the Syro-Ephraimite War. From a practical standpoint, the political machinations that occurred seem understandable in comparison to the great power of Assyria. Yet in a theological sense, the Syro-Ephraimite War is another indicator that God will not be mocked as it relates to sin. God is judge of the earth we are reminded of the cries of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

Bibliography

- Blakely, Jeffery A. Hardin, James W. "Southwestern Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E." *BASOR* 326 (2002) 11-64
- Cazelles, Henri. "Syro-Ephraimite War," *ABD* 5. New York: Doubleday (1992) 282-285
- Cogan, Mordechai. Tadmor, Hayim. *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11. New York: Doubleday, 1988
- _____. "Judah Under Assyrian Hegemony: A Reexamination of 'Imperialism and Religion'," *JBL* 112, 13 (1993) 403-414
- Cogan, Morton. *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* SBLMS 19; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974
- Coogan, Michael D. ed. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998
- Galil, Gershom. "A New Look at the Inscriptions of Tiglath Pileser III." *Biblica* 81 (2000) 511-520
- Gitay, Yehoshua. "Isaiah and the Syro-Ephraimite War," *The Book of Isaiah: Le Livre D'Isaïe*, Leuven-Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1989.
- Irvine, Stuart A. *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*, SBLDS 123; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990
- Millard, Alan. *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire: 910-612 BC*, SAAS 2; Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1994
- Mitchell, T.C. "Israel and Judah from the Coming of Assyrian Domination Until the Fall of Samaria, and the Struggle for Independence in Judah (c.750-700 B.C.)," in John Boardman, et. al. eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 3. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1991) 322-370
- Nadav Na'aman, "Sennacherib's 'Letter to God' on His Campaign to Judah," *BASOR* 214 (1974) 68-90
- _____, "Historical and Chronological Notes on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth Century B.C." *VT* 36. 1 (1986) 71-92
- _____, "Population Changes in Palestine Following the Assyrian Deportations," *Tel Aviv* 20 (1993)
- _____, "The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude," *JSOT* 65 (1995) 37-53;

_____. "Royal Inscriptions and the histories of Joash and Ahaz, kings of Judah," *VT* 48. 3 (1998), 333-349

Oded, Bustanay "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 (1972)153-165

Provan, Iain. Long, Philips V. Longman, Tremper III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003

Rainey, Anson *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2006

Tadmor, Hayim *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria*, Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994

Thiele, Edwin R. "Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns Among the Hebrew Kings," *JBL* 93 (1974) 174-200

_____. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. Grand Rapids: Academic Books - Zondervan, 1983

Thompson, Michael E.W. *Situation and Theology: Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephraimite War*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982

Tomes, Roger. "The Reason for the Syro-Ephraimite War," *JSOT* 59 (1993) 55-71

Younger, K.Lawson. "The Deportations of the Israelites," *JBL* 117, 2 (1998) 201-227

_____. "History: Renewed Independence and Conquest" In *Ugarit at Seventy-Five. It's Environs and the Bible*. Edited by K.L. Younger, Jr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns (in press). (Class notes)

British Museum Relief of Tiglath-peliser's Campaigns

