

## **2 Nephi 17**

### **2 Ne 17-20 Historical context of Isaiah's prophecies**

At the time of Isaiah's ministry, the children of Israel were divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

The northern kingdom was also called the kingdom of Israel or the kingdom of Ephraim (because Ephraim was the leading tribe). The ten tribes lived in the northern kingdom. Since the days of Solomon, when the northern kingdom broke from the ruling family of the tribe of Judah, the northern kingdom had been ruled by wicked men. They had practiced idolatry, rejected the Lord, perverted the priesthood, etc. In chapter 17, one of the kingdom's wicked kings, Pekah has made a pact with the king of Syria, Rezin, to conquer the kingdom of Judah. Any fighting between the northern and southern kingdoms was an abomination to the Lord. They were brothers and should have lived together in peace.

The southern kingdom was also called the kingdom of Judah because Judah was the leading tribe. It contained members of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and some Levites. Since the days of Solomon, the southern kingdom had been ruled, for the most part, by righteous kings. One exception to this rule is king Ahaz, who followed the wicked ways of his northern neighbors (2 Chron 28:2). It was during the reign of Ahaz that Pekah and Rezin came against Jerusalem. Traditionally, the Lord had protected the children of Israel from the military conquests of their neighbors—even if they were vastly outnumbered. This protection required that the people trust in the Lord and not look to other nations for military alliances. At this time, both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom make alliances with their neighbors. The result is war, destruction, and the rejection of their Lord and Savior.

Isaiah's ministry was among the Jews in Jerusalem, although he speaks of events in both kingdoms. The 1981 Book of Mormon Institute Manual discusses his ministry:

"Isaiah lived and prophesied during the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). This period of his ministry spanned from the year King Uzziah died (c. 740 BC) until the end of Hezekiah's reign (c. 699BC). Tradition says he was killed by Hezekiah's son Manasseh...

"Isaiah's call to the ministry came during the decline of Judah's and Israel's power and prosperity. During the reign of Ahaz, a major crisis occurred: the Syro-Ephraimite war (c. 734 BC). Pekah, King of Israel, and Rezin, King of Syria, threatened to capture Jerusalem and replace Ahaz with a king of their own choosing for the purpose of forming a tripartite alliance, consisting of Syria, Israel, and Judah, against Assyria. (See 2 Nephi 17ff.) Isaiah revealed the plot to Ahaz and prophesied that such an alliance would fail; the prophet tried in vain to convince Ahaz to place his trust in the Lord rather than in foreign alliances. Instead, Ahaz made an agreement with the Assyrian monarch, Tilgath-pelezer II (Pul), and Judah became a vassal state, paying tribute to Assyria to escape the threat of Syria and Israel." (*Book of Mormon Institute Manual*, p. 93)

## **2 Ne 17:2 Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved**

The news of an alliance between Syria and the kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) was terrifying to king Ahaz and his people. Both kingdoms were larger and more powerful than Judah. Ahaz's first response was to look to other nations, i.e., Assyria for help.

## **2 Ne 17:3 Who was Shearjashub?**

As the scripture plainly declares, Shearjashub was Isaiah's son. His name means, "the remnant shall return." We learn of another of his sons in Isa. 8:1. Both sons had unusual names with prophetic significance. With his other son, the Lord instructs him to name his son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, signifying the imminent destruction of Israel.

## **2 Ne 17:3 meet Ahaz...at the end of the conduit of the upper pool**

"The conduit or tunnel that carried water from the city's only water source, called Gihon Spring, still exists and is located just outside of what used to be the city wall. This made the city very vulnerable in time of siege. The king might have come to this upper pool of Gihon Spring to consider the means by which the city could be defended. But with his heart filled with apostasy and his mind muddled with anxiety over the imminent attack of a huge army from the north, Ahaz would certainly not be in a mood to feel sympathetic to what Isaiah was about to tell him." (W. Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah speaks to Modern Times*, 201 as taken from *Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. by K. Douglas Bassett, [American Fork, UT: Covenant Publishing Co., 2003], 128)

## **2 Ne 17:4 fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands**

The Lord tells Ahaz, through Isaiah, not to fear the enemy. Why is the enemy likened to "the two tails of smoking firebrands?" A firebrand was a technique used to destroy the crops and vineyards of an enemy. Foxes would be taken, have some sort of torch (firebrand) tied to their tails, and then sent to run through the fields of the enemies. The foxes would scamper around starting fires everywhere they went. Therefore, the phrase 'two tails of these smoking firebrands' refers to Pekah and Rezin as destroyers. The fact that the firebrands are smoking suggests that the fire (representing their strength) has been extinguished. The phrase also carries a certain disdain. A good example of the use of firebrands is found in Judges:

'And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

And when he had set the brands on fire, he let [them] go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards *and* olives.' (Judges 15:4-5)

## **2 Ne 17:7 It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass**

If Ahaz is smart enough to believe in Isaiah, he would not need to trust in the power of another nation. For centuries the Lord had protected the Jews from the military conquests of their neighbors. This was done in spite of huge numerical mismatches. The Lord had demonstrated in the past that He was able to fight their battles for them. Such was His promise again. The tone of the next verses demonstrates that Ahaz lacked faith in this promise.

At any rate, Ahaz was able to defend his people without the help of Assyria. This is recorded in 2 Kings 16:5-6, 'Rezin...and Pekah...came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome *him*.' In the siege, Rezin is only able to take one city, Elath. Josephus explained that after Ahaz had successfully repelled the Rezin/Pekah alliance, he took all the credit himself, forgetting the help he had received from the Lord. He then considered himself so great that he went to Damascus to attack Rezin and Pekah. This time he did not have the Lord's help and was beaten severely. According to 2 Chron 28:6-7, 120,000 men were killed and another 200,000 were taken captive. These prisoners were later released.

This great devastation happened because of the wickedness of Ahaz. Had he trusted in the Lord and recognized his hand in his military victories, the Lord would not have let this military disaster come upon his people. It was this disaster which prompted Ahaz to get revenge. It was at this point that Ahaz enlisted the help of the Assyrians. The Assyrians then attacked the Syrians and killed Rezin. See *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IX, chapter XII, 2 Kings 16:7-9, and 2 Chron. 28.

## **2 Ne 17:8 within three score and five years shall Ephraim be broken**

A score is twenty years. So Isaiah is prophesying of the downfall of the northern kingdom. This occurs at the hands of the Assyrians during the reign of Pekah's successor, Hoshea. This prophecy is fulfilled well within the 65 year time limit.

'Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years.

In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes' (2 Kings 17:5-6).

"In this prophecy, Isaiah promises that the Syro-Israelite alliance will fail and that Israel will be scattered within sixty-five years. The fulfillment came about in successive stages. First, Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) attacked Syria and Israel in 732 B.C. and took many Israelites captive to Assyria, especially those from the northern tribes. Secondly, in 730-727, Pul annexed the Transjordan area and deported large numbers of the Israelite tribes from that area to the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire. Third, in 726, Hoshea refused to pay Assyrian tribute, and Pul's successor, Shalmaneser, retaliated by attacking Israel and besieging Samaria, which fell in 722 B.C. Thus, within a dozen years of Isaiah's prophecy, the alliance had completely failed, and three major groups of Israelites had been deported. Finally, large groups of the Israelites fled from Assyria to the remote areas northward and became the lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Apparently, within about fifty years of their leaving Assyria, they were scattered so widely that many of them no longer existed as a cohesive group. Thereby Isaiah's prophecy to Ephraim was completely realized." (Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 141 - 142 as taken from *Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of*

*Mormon*, ed. by K. Douglas Bassett, [American Fork, UT: Covenant Publishing Co., 2003], 129-130)

## **2 Ne 17:9 the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son**

This verse and verse 8 parallel each other. These phrases can sometimes be confusing. Isaiah is explaining that the capital city of the kingdom of Israel (or Ephraim) is Samaria and that the king is Pekah (Remaliah's son). In verse 8, we see that the capital city of Syria is Damascus and that the king of Syria is Rezin.

## **2 Ne 17:11 Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God**

Asking for a sign is usually not an act of righteousness. This may explain Ahaz' answer in the next verse, 'I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.' However, when the Lord instructs you to ask, you should ask. That the Lord was wearied with Ahaz and his answer is apparent from the ensuing verses, 'is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also' (v. 13).

## **2 Ne 17:14 Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel**

Doctrinally, this is the pinnacle of this chapter. The Lord gives a wicked king, Ahaz, a kernel of prophetic truth that he most certainly won't understand. The part he understands comes in verse 16, 'the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.'

Some have wrested the scriptures by questioning whether or not Mary was actually a virgin. The scriptures leave no doubt. We also learn that Joseph did not consummate his marriage with Mary until after the birth of Jesus, 'And [he] knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS' (Matt 1:25). All we need to know about how God the Father is the literal and physical Father of Jesus Christ is contained words of the angel to Mary, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God' (Lu 1:35).

The name Immanuel means "God with us." It is given as a title of the Son of God, not as his given name. Isaiah commonly uses titles to describe the Messiah, 'his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God,

The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6). "Immanuel" is also spoken of in Isaiah 8:8.

### **Marion G. Romney**

"Here is another example in which men revise the scriptures without the inspiration of the Spirit. Isaiah, in predicting the birth of Christ, said: 'Behold, a *virgin* shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' When Isaiah used the word *virgin*, he was saying that a woman who had not known a man should bear a son.

"The modern translators say: 'Behold, a *young woman* shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' (Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version of Isa 7:14 [New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952]) You see, they do not believe that Christ was divine, so it does not make any difference to them whether they say a 'young woman' or a 'virgin.'" (*Conference Report*, Tokyo Japan Area Conference 1975, p. 46 as taken from the *1981 Old Testament Institute Manual*, p. 145)

### **2 Ne 17:16 before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good**

The Lord's prophecy has dual fulfillment and probably applies to Isaiah's son. The destruction of Syria and Ephraim are to come before this child reaches the age of accountability.

### **Jeffrey R. Holland**

"There are plural or parallel elements to this prophecy, as with so much of Isaiah's writing. The most immediate meaning was probably focused on Isaiah's wife, a pure and good woman who brought forth a son about this time, the child becoming a type and shadow of the greater, later fulfillment of the prophecy that would be realized in the birth of Jesus Christ. The symbolism in the dual prophecy acquires additional importance when we realize that Isaiah's wife may have been of royal blood, and therefore her son would have been royalty of the line of David. Here again is a type, a prefiguration of the greater Immanuel, Jesus Christ, the ultimate son of David, the royal King who would be born of a literal virgin. Indeed, his title *Immanuel* would be carried forward to the latter days, being applied to the Savior in section 128 verse 22 of the Doctrine and Covenants." (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 79 as taken from *Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of*

*Mormon*, ed. by K. Douglas Bassett, [American Fork, UT: Covenant Publishing Co., 2003], 130-131)

## **2 Ne 17:17 The Lord shall bring upon thee...the king of Assyria**

"With King Ahaz having rejected the word of the Lord, the prophet now proceeds to pronounce the penalties that would befall the king and the people of Judah. Instead of becoming a partner with the Assyrians, Ahaz and his people would become their prey. They would experience a devastation such as they had not seen since the days the northern tribes broke away from the united kingdom of the twelve tribes. Flies and bees would infest the land, and thorns and briars would take over the once-productive land. The people would be taken into captivity, and those who remain would have to forage for food. (Hoyt W. Brewster, Jr., *Isaiah Plain and Simple* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995], 70)

"Ahaz's failure to believe in the Lord led to the devastation of his land by the Assyrians, the same source to which he, in his twisted wisdom, had looked for deliverance. In fact, Isaiah said that God sent the Assyrians against his people to humble them (Isa. 10:5-11). The account of his appears in Isaiah 36-3 and 2 Kings 18-19, in which the writer explains: the 'king of Assyria came against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them' (Isa. 36:1). Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, boasted in his own records about how he conquered forty-six fortified cities plus innumerable smaller cities in their environs and carried their inhabitants into captivity. The kingdom of Judah was devastated. Of its cities, only Jerusalem survived. (Keith A. Meservy, *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4*, ed. Kent P. Jackson [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993], 98)"  
(*Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. by K. Douglas Bassett, [American Fork, UT: Covenant Publishing Co., 2003], 130-131)

## **2 Ne 17:20 shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired**

The Assyrian king and army are likened to a razor. The razor is "hired" because the Assyrians were not the covenant people of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord is using them almost as mercenaries to act as His instrument for a short period of time. The kingdom of Judah is likened to the hair of the head, feet, or beard that is cut down by this instrument. The phrase 'beyond the river' is used because the Assyrians were on the other side of the Euphrates River. The Lord is also making reference to an Assyrian practice of humiliating their enemies by shaving them.

"The humiliation and slavery that will befall the people is represented in verse 20 by the razor cutting off their hair. The Assyrians cut off all the hair from their captives for three reasons: humiliation, sanitation (especially while traveling under crude conditions to Assyria), and separation (if any slaves escaped while being moved from their homeland, they could not blend in with other peoples since their baldness would give them away; thus they usually were quickly recaptured, punished, and returned to their captors.)" (*Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, by Victor L. Ludlow, p. 145)

## **2 Ne 17:21-25 the abundance of milk...and...briers and thorns**

The meaning of these verses seems to be that after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah, the land will be blessed for the raising of cattle and other livestock but will be cursed as to crop production. As it says, 'all the land shall become briers and thorns...but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and the treading of lesser cattle.'