

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WAR

CULTURAL INSIGHT

The term Syro-Ephraimite War is the name that scholars have given to a conflict described in Isaiah 7. Syria (Aram in Hebrew), the Kingdom of Israel (called Ephraim by Isaiah), and the Kingdom of Judah were all under the control of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which collected an oppressive tribute from them. Syria and Israel created a coalition to rebel and wanted Judah to participate. Ahaz, the Judahite king, refused, and so Syria and Israel tried to place a king on the throne who was more amenable to their plans (Isaiah 7:6). Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz that he should not worry because the coup would not work and that Israel and Syria would be destroyed.

The famous Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 has the Syro-Ephraimite War as its immediate context. The birth of the original Immanuel referred to a child born to Isaiah and his wife as a sign this war would be over soon: “For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings [namely, the kings of Syria and Israel]” (Isaiah 7:16). This happened in 721 BC, meaning the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy occurred during Isaiah’s lifetime. Matthew 1:23 cites this verse in reference to Jesus Christ’s birth, showing the layered meaning that often appears in scriptural prophecy. As Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve noted, “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.”¹

¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 79.

Related verses

Isaiah 7:1–16

Matthew 1:23

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