

and to put in place of Ahaz a puppet king of their own choosing (Isa. 7:6). In this situation Ahaz was terribly frightened. Isaiah 7:2 says: "his heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."

In the midst of this situation, Ahaz hit upon a clever scheme. It would seem likely that he told some of his leading nobles about the scheme and worked out the details of it with them, but that he kept it secret from the people as a whole. This was a scheme to enlist in his support a very large and powerful nation which was far across the desert beyond Syria. This nation was known as Assyria. Bible readers often confuse Assyria and Syria. In ancient times no such confusion was possible, for at that time Syria was called Aram. Assyria was many times as large and far more powerful than Syria. Its capital originally was the city of Asshur, and from the name of this city and of its god, Asshur, it received the name Assyria. Later on, it conquered Aram and made it a part of its realm. When the Greeks came to the Assyrian empire, Aram was the first portion of it which they entered. Consequently, they spoke of this portion as Assyria, and eventually shortened the name to Syria to indicate that section. It has become customary for us to carry this later Greek name for the region back to the original kingdom of Aram, but it is important that we avoid confusion of Syria and Assyria.

Assyria had for many centuries been carrying on wars with other nations. In the time of Ahab an Assyrian army had come clear into Syria, and had been stopped by a coalition of the kings of Syria, Israel and other neighboring nations at the battle of Qarqar in 853 BC.

The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty. They adopted a deliberate policy of seeking to frighten people so that they would not dare oppose them. If a nation that they had conquered revolted against them, no barbarity was too great for them to use in trying to make an example that would deter others from revolting.

Ahaz knew of this strong aggressive nation far to the east, and of its past endeavors to extend its conquests as far as Syria. He had heard that a new king on the throne of the Assyrian Empire, which now had its capital at Nineveh, was