

SECTION I

THE PERIOD OF HEZEKIAH

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Chapter III

Events in Hezekiah's Reign

*Part I of the Sabbath and Jubilee
of 701/700 and 700/699 B.C.E.*

The first datable Sabbath year and Jubilee year occurred in the pre-exilic period, during the reign of the Judahite king named Hezekiah (715/714–687/686 B.C.E., spring reckoning). A Sabbath year came around at the time that an Assyrian army, under the command of King Sennacherib, was preparing to lay siege against the city of Jerusalem. This Sabbath year, in turn, was followed by a Jubilee year.

Order of Events

Our first datable Sabbath year and Jubilee year are revealed in both the Scriptures and the histories of the 1st century C.E. Jewish priest and historian Josephus. They are uncovered as part of a discussion regarding the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. The order of events are as follows (cf. Parallel Corpora A):

- “And in the 14th year of Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them.”¹
- Hezekiah, hearing that the Assyrians were coming against his country and knowing full well that Sennacherib’s intention was to lay siege against Jerusalem, in haste, prepared the city for war. Among other things, he built up the walls of the city, raised its towers, and cut off water supplies outside the city.²
- Seeing his fortified cities rapidly falling and fearful of further retribution, Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib, who was now assaulting the Judahite city of Lachish, offering to pay him tribute and to come to terms of peace. Sennacherib agreed and Hezekiah sent the tribute.³
- After receiving the tribute, Sennacherib ignored the agreed-upon peace treaty and sent a large number of troops, his *turtānu* (chief military officer), his chief of the eunuchs, and Rabshakeh (his chief cupbearer) to sack Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Sennacherib took to the field with his main forces to oppose the arrival of the approaching Egyptian and Ethiopian armies.⁴

¹ 2 Kings, 18:13; Isa. 36:1; 2 Chron., 32:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1.

² 2 Chron., 32:2–7.

³ 2 Kings, 18:14–16; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1.

⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1; cf. 2 Kings, 18:17; 2 Chron., 32:9; Isa., 36:2; and AS, pp. 31f, l. 2:73–3:5, p. 69, l. 22–25, where Sennacherib reports his victory over these Egyptian and Ethiopian forces.

- Rabshakeh sent a message to Hezekiah ordering the people of Judah to come out of the city so that the Assyrians could exile them into another land, warning Hezekiah that no one could resist the king of Assyria.⁵
- Upon hearing the message from the Assyrian king, Hezekiah went to the Temple in Jerusalem and prayed to Yahweh.⁶
- Hezekiah then sent his servants to the prophet Isaiah seeking guidance from Yahweh. In response, Isaiah brought Yahweh's words to Hezekiah, which advised him not to be afraid of the Assyrian king, for the Assyrian would hear a rumor and return back to his own land.⁷ Obeying Yahweh, Hezekiah refused to surrender.
- The chief cupbearer, Rabshakeh, returned to Lachish but found that Sennacherib and his forces had already left and were now besieging Libnah (shortly after which came the Assyrian victory over the combined Egyptian and Ethiopian forces near the city of Eltekeh).⁸
- Next, Sennacherib's army, as part of the Assyrian war effort against Egypt—the ally of Judah and sponsor of the Judahite revolt—laid siege against the Egyptian border city of Pelusium, raising earthworks against its walls. At the very time when Sennacherib was about to attack that city, his army was struck by a plague which was brought to them by an infestation of mice.⁹ Immediately after the outbreak, news reached the Assyrian king that תִּרְחָקָה (Tirhaqah), one of the kings of Kush (i.e., Ethiopia, the country later called Nubia), was proceeding out of Kush by a desert route in order to do battle against the invading Assyrians.¹⁰ During this period, Shabaqo, one of the kings of Kush, was also one of the pharaohs of Egypt. Therefore, Tirhaqah, who was another king of Kush, was coming to the aid of his Egyptian and Kushite allies.
- Hearing that Tirhaqah was approaching, and with his army suffering under a plague, Sennacherib abandoned his invasion of Egypt and sent a letter to Hezekiah warning him that Jerusalem would still fall into his hands—an obvious effort to intimidate the Judahite king into surrender.¹¹

⁵ 2 Kings, 18:17–37; 2 Chron., 32:9–19; Isa., 36:2–22; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1–2.

⁶ 2 Kings, 19:1–4; 2 Chron., 32:20; Isa., 37:1–4; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:3.

⁷ 2 Kings, 19:5–7; Isa., 37:5–7; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:3.

⁸ 2 Kings, 19:8; Isa., 37:8. Libnah of Judah was very near Ekron and Eltekeh (cf. Josh., 19:40–45, 21:13, 23; 1 Chron., 6:57; NBD, p. 734, maps 3, 4). Eltekeh was the place where Sennacherib fought the combined Egyptian and Ethiopian forces (see above n. 4). His conquest of Libnah was no doubt in preparation for his meeting of the enemy Egyptian and Ethiopian troops. It was necessary for the Assyrians to clear the immediate area of safe havens friendly to the opposing forces.

⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4; Herodotus, 2:141.

¹⁰ 2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

¹¹ 2 Kings, 19:9–13; Isa., 37:9–13; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

- After receiving the message from Sennacherib, Hezekiah again went to the Temple both to pray and to present Sennacherib's letter before Yahweh.¹²
- Isaiah the prophet sent Yahweh's response to Hezekiah, foretelling the downfall of the Assyrian king and the deliverance of Jerusalem without an arrow being shot.¹³ To confirm this prophecy, Yahweh gave Hezekiah a sign. When this sign came to pass, it would prove to Hezekiah and his subjects that Yahweh had saved them from the hand of the Assyrian king who wanted to exile them into another far away country:

And this is a sign for you: eat THIS YEAR that which is **שָׁפֵךְ** (*saphikh*; sown/grows of itself),¹⁴ and in THE 2ND YEAR that which grows of the same, and in THE 3RD YEAR you shall sow, and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. (2 Kings, 19:29; Isa., 37:30)

This sign informed Hezekiah that both he and his subjects would continue to live in their homeland, proven by the fact that they would be found "this year" keeping the Sabbath year and, the next year, keeping the Jubilee year. In the 3rd year, they would return to their regular duties of sowing and harvesting their crops and vineyards in their land.

Sabbath Year in Hezekiah's Reign

Yahweh's sign to Hezekiah (mentioned in 2 Kings, 19:29, and Isaiah, 37:30) clearly reflects the fact that, by saying "this year," a Sabbath year was currently in progress. It is prohibited by Sabbath-year laws, as it is with Sabbath-day laws, to "harvest" (take out of the field and store up) that which is sown either by the Israelites or is sown of itself during either a Sabbath or Jubilee year.¹⁵ Nevertheless, during a Sabbath or Jubilee year the Israelites were permitted to eat from those crops coming up of their own accord (naturally).¹⁶ The messiah, who never sinned,¹⁷ illustrated this principle when he and his disciples ate directly out of the field on a Sabbath day.¹⁸

¹² 2 Kings, 19:14–19; 2 Chron., 32:20; Isa., 37:14–20; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

¹³ 2 Kings, 19:20–34; 2 Chron., 32:20; Isa., 37:21–35; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

¹⁴ CHAL, p. 259, "aftergrowth, what grows of its own accord during the sabbath-year or fm. grains that have spilled"; HCLOT, p. 593, "corn growing spontaneously from the seed of the preceding year without it being resown"; HELOT, p. 738, "the self-sown, what grows of itself, i.e. grain produced spontaneously from the self-sown kernels of the former year, without new seed"; SEC, Heb. #5599, "something (spontaneously) falling off, i.e. a self-sown crop"; HEL, p. 183, "self-sown grain"; SHL, p. 442, "spontaneous growth, prop. shedding, prob. what grows from the seed that drops or shales out." Cf. LXX 4 Kings, 19:29; LXX Isa., 37:30; LXX Lev., 25:5, 11.

¹⁵ Lev., 25:4–5, 11.

¹⁶ Lev., 25:11–12, esp. v. 12, which states, as the NIV correctly translates it, "eat only what is taken directly from the fields." The LXX of Lev., 25:12, reads, "You shall eat its fruits off the fields."

¹⁷ 1 Pet., 2:21f; 2 Cor., 5:20f; Heb., 4:14f. Sin is defined in 1 John, 3:4, as "transgression of the Law." These passages demonstrate that the messiah never broke the Torah. Therefore, he committed no wrongdoing by eating his meal directly from the field on the Sabbath.

¹⁸ E.g., Matt., 12:1–8; Mark, 2:23–28; Luke, 6:1f. In our book entitled *Antediluvian, Postdiluvian, and Post-Exile Chronology* (APPC), we will prove that the year in which the messiah and his disciples ate corn from the field on the Sabbath day was also during a Sabbath year.

In turn, the following year, “the 2nd year,” was also a Sabbath. Accordingly, it was the “Sabbath of Sabbaths,” i.e., the year of Jubilee, since a Jubilee is the only Sabbath year that follows a Sabbath year. After the Jubilee year came “the 3rd year,” wherein the Judahites would return to their regular duties of planting and harvesting their crops.

This observance was seen as a sign that the Assyrian king would not deport the remaining people of Judah, as Sennacherib’s messenger boasted to Hezekiah that the Assyrian king was about to do.¹⁹ Against these words that had come from Sennacherib, Yahweh promised the Judahites that they would still be found in their land, well after the downfall of the Assyrian king, observing the Sabbath and Jubilee years, and sowing and harvesting their crops in the year that followed. That this observance of the Sabbath and Jubilee laws was the intent of this sign is further supported by the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel (1st century B.C.E.). In his version of 2 Kings, 19:29–31, we read:

And this will be the sign for you: Eat in the 1st year that which is sown of itself, and in the 2nd year the 3rd crop,²⁰ and in the 3rd year sow and reap and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the survivors of the house of Judah who will be left will continue like a tree that sends forth its roots below and raises up its branch above. Because from Jerusalem the remnant of the just ones will go forth and the survival of those upholding the Torah from Mount Zion.²¹

Josephus, likewise, understood the sign in this same way. He wrote:

And, when he (Hezekiah) offered a second prayer to the deity on behalf of the city and the safety of all, the prophet Isaiah told him that he (Yahweh) had hearkened to his prayer, and that at the present time he (Hezekiah) would not be besieged by the Assyrian, while in the future his subjects, relieved of all apprehension, would till their land in peace and look after their own possessions without fear of anything.²²

William Whiston, in his translation of Josephus, comments regarding the passages found in 2 Kings, 19:29, and Isaiah, 37:30, that these words “seem to me plainly to design a Sabbatic year, a year of Jubilee next after it, and the succeeding usual labours and fruits of them on the third and following years.”²³ In another place, Whiston gives the following interpretation to Isaiah, 37:30.

¹⁹ 2 Kings, 18:17–37, esp. vv. 31f.

²⁰ The 2nd year of eating that which is sown of itself is the third crop, i.e., of that which was originally planted and harvested in the year before the Sabbath year in question.

²¹ Targ. Jon., 2 Kings, 19:29–31; cf. Targ. Jon., Isa., 37:30–33.

²² Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4 §16.

²³ Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 213, n.*

You shall be so far from being disturbed by Sennacherib, of whom you are now so terribly afraid, that you shall be able to keep your *two* years of rest, which are already begun, your ordinary *sabbatic year*, and your extraordinary *year of jubilee*, without any molestation from Sennacherib, till you fall to your ordinary occupations the *third* year, as you were wont to do in times of the greatest peace and quietness.²⁴

"That night" the angel Yahweh struck the Assyrian army that was surrounding Jerusalem with a plague. Sennacherib, who had retreated from his failed siege at Pelusium, was now outside Jerusalem. Waking up in the morning, he found 185,000 of his soldiers dead. Fearing for the lives of his remaining troops, Sennacherib fled back to Nineveh, his capital city.²⁵ In doing so, Sennacherib abandoned the western districts of his Assyrian Empire, leaving that region to be conquered by Tirhaqah, the king of Kush.

Length of the Conflict

It is the common opinion of many present-day biblical scholars that the destruction of Sennacherib's army outside the walls of Jerusalem occurred during the 14th year of Hezekiah.²⁶ This theory rests solely upon the statement, as cited above, that "in the 14th year of Hezekiah" the Assyrian king invaded the land of Judah. Yet the records do not claim that Sennacherib's army was destroyed during the same year as his initial invasion. This idea is merely an assumption. Close examination of the evidence, on the contrary, reveals that the army of Sennacherib was actually destroyed shortly after the beginning of Hezekiah's 15th year—after, at minimum, a couple of months or more of war. It is Hezekiah's 15th year that represents the Sabbath year; his 16th year was a Jubilee. Proof of this chronology is found in the length of the conflict. The details are as follows:

- The Assyrian records prove that Sennacherib first attacked the cities along the Phoenician and then Palestim coasts (see Parallel Corpora A).
- When Sennacherib turned against Judah, he camped "against all the fortified cities of Judah," "commanded to break them open," and "captured them."²⁷
- While Sennacherib was besieging other cities in Judah, Hezekiah had enough time to fortify the walls of Jerusalem and build defense towers.²⁸

²⁴ Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 701, #41.

²⁵ 2 Kings, 19:34–37; 2 Chron., 32:21–23; Isa., 37:36–38; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:5; Herodotus, 2:141.

²⁶ E.g., NBD, p. 1159.

²⁷ 2 Kings, 18:13; 2 Chron., 32:1; Isa., 36:1.

²⁸ 2 Chron., 32:1–8.

- Sennacherib was laying siege to Lachish when Hezekiah sent him tribute. Ignoring the tribute that was already sent to him and the agreement of peace, Sennacherib sent an army against Jerusalem to begin a blockade of that city.²⁹
- After taking Lachish, Sennacherib moved against the city of Libnah and then confronted an Egyptian and Ethiopian army (whom he defeated).³⁰
- Subsequently, the greater part of the Assyrian army was sent to build siege works against the Egyptian city of Pelusium.³¹ According to Josephus, Sennacherib's army "spent a great deal of time on the siege of Pelusium."³²
- The Assyrian invasion against Judah had broader geopolitical goals than merely a conquest of that state. King Hezekiah had allied himself with the Egyptians (who in turn were dominated by the Ethiopians). In changing his allegiance, Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians and discontinued tribute payments to them.³³ Josephus and Herodotus, in turn, prove that the invasion was primarily directed against "the Egyptians and Ethiopians," not only to recover Judah and the rebel Palestim (Philistine) states but to subdue Egypt.³⁴
- According to the historical records, while laying siege to Pelusium, the Assyrian army was suddenly struck by a plague. This disaster was followed by the surprise appearance of a powerful Ethiopian army under King Tirhaqah. As a result, Sennacherib pulled back to Jerusalem,³⁵ hoping to take that city and hold off the upcoming onslaught from the Ethiopian army. While at Jerusalem, Sennacherib's Assyrian army was decimated by another outbreak of the plague.³⁶ The Assyrian king, perforce, retreated back home to Nineveh.

This data proves that the third campaign of Sennacherib was not of short duration. Numerous Phoenician, Palestim, and Judahite cities had been put under siege and the Assyrians had been building siege works at the Egyptian city of Pelusium for "a great deal of time." The evidence indicates that, at minimum, 2 or more months had transpired from the time Sennacherib actually invaded Judah until his army was destroyed by a plague before the

²⁹ 2 Kings, 18:14–32; 2 Chron., 32:9–19; Isa., 36:2–22; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1–2.

³⁰ 2 Kings, 19:8; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1; AS, pp. 31f, l. 2:73–3:5, p. 69, l. 22–25; and see below Parallel Corpora A.

³¹ 2 Kings, 19:8–13; Isa., 37:8–13; cf. Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

³² Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

³³ 2 Kings, 18:19–21; Isa., 36:4–6; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2.

³⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1, 3–5; Herodotus 2:141.

³⁵ 2 Kings, 19:9, 35–37; Isa., 37:9, 36–38; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4f.

³⁶ 2 Kings, 19:35; Isa., 37:36; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4f. The angel Yahweh smiting the Assyrians with a plague implies being struck with a pestilence (cf. 2 Sam., 24:14–17; Acts, 12:23; Exod., 12:21ff). It is supported by the story in Herodotus (2:141; cf. Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4), which connects the plague at Pelusium with mice (rats and mice being known carriers of bubonic plague).

walls of Jerusalem. Part of this timeline consisted of (1) at least 41 days for Sennacherib to march his army approximately 817 miles by road from Nineveh in Assyria to the region of Judah, (2) at least a 10 days' march from the city of Eltekeh—where he defeated the Egyptian and Ethiopian forces that were sent to give assistance to their allies in Palestia and Judah—to Pelusium on the border of Egypt, and (3), after spending “a great deal of time on the siege of Pelusium,” it would take another 10 days’ march in order to return from Pelusium back to Jerusalem.³⁷ In addition, the Assyrian king invaded and conquered regions in Phoenicia and Palestia, which also took time.

More evidence that the third campaign of Sennacherib was of considerable length is also found in the Assyrian records. Our study will present the evidence from these documents in our next chapter, within the subsection entitled *Length of Sennacherib's Third Campaign*. For now, the evidence is sufficient enough to prove that the Assyrian king could not have accomplished all the deeds attributed to him against Judah in the matter of only 2 or 3 weeks. It was a campaign that lasted at least 2 months.

Illness of Hezekiah

We are told that before the defeat of the Assyrian army at the gates of Jerusalem, King Hezekiah of Judah became very ill and was near death.³⁸ After praying to Yahweh, Yahweh responded to Hezekiah by saying that he would heal him “on the 3rd day” and he would be able to go up to the Temple.³⁹

³⁷ A day's march varied depending upon the terrain, mode of transportation, numbers of military personnel, and other factors. Yet an approximation of travel time for a military expedition during this early period can be determined by the following facts: Ezra and his Jewish companions took about 3½ months to make the journey from Babylonia to Judaea in the 5th century B.C.E. (Ezra, 7:6–9, 8:31). A military expedition on a forced march, of course, would be quicker, but these figures set the outside limits for the journey from Assyria to Judaea, since the distance from Babylonia to Judaea is nearly the same as that from Assyria.

Next, Pharaoh Thutmose III records his forced march from Tzru (modern El-Qantara) to Gaza, a trip of about 160 miles, in 10 days (ARE, 2, §409). This march resulted in an average of 16 miles per day. During the 5th century B.C.E., the Greeks retreating from the Persians, as reported by Xenophon, took their march through Assyria, northwards along the Tigris River. Xenophon states that they marched 4 stages for 20 parasangs (about 70 miles), 6 stages for 30 parasangs (about 105 miles), and then 4 stages for another 20 parasangs (about 70 miles) (Xenophon, *Anab.*, 2:4). The total was 14 stages (or 14 days of marching) to achieve 70 parasangs, about 245 miles. The average march per day was 17½ miles.

Similarly, we are told that Alexander the Great made the journey from Gaza to Pelusium, Egypt, a distance of about 145 miles, in 7 days (Arrian, 3:1:1; Curtius, 4:7). These numbers give us an average day's march of about 20½ miles. As our final example, we have the history from Josephus recording the forced march of the Roman army under Titus from Pelusium to Rhinocorura (El-Arish), a distance of about 80 miles. Titus accomplished his mission in 3 days, an average of 26½ miles per day (Jos., *Wars*, 4:11:5).

Therefore, if the huge Assyrian army under Sennacherib made the excellent time of about 20 miles a day, and without considering their campaigns against the Phoenicians, they would have arrived in Judah in approximately 41 days after leaving Assyria. If we add to our equation the fact that Sennacherib first dealt with the Phoenicians, then moved against Palestia and the dozens of fortified cities of Judah, it may have taken his army as much as an additional month to 6 weeks more before he could actually send his soldiers against Jerusalem itself.

³⁸ The illness suffered by Hezekiah most likely was not connected with the plague that infected the Assyrian army (see above n. 36). No one in Jerusalem, for example, besides Hezekiah himself, appears to have been taken ill.

³⁹ 2 Kings, 20:5.

Josephus translates this verse by stating that the king was informed that, “μετὰ τρίτην ἡμέραν (*meta triten hemeran*; within the 3rd day after), he should be rid of his illness.”⁴⁰ Yahweh continued by saying, “And I have added to your days 15 years.”⁴¹

As a sign that this prophecy was true, Yahweh made the sun recline so that the shadow on the sundial at the house of Ahaz returned by 10 steps (hours).⁴² Targum Jonathan, for example, states that Yahweh “turned back the shadow on the stone figure of the hours, on which the sun went down on the stairs of Ahaz, backward 10 hours.”⁴³ Josephus notes that this sundial was part of the house that had belonged to Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah.⁴⁴

This movement of the sun happened on the 3rd day after the prophecy was given, the same day in which Hezekiah recovered from his illness. Josephus writes:

And when the prophet exhorted the deity to show this sign to the king, he saw what he wished and was at once freed from his illness, then he went up to the Temple and did obeisance to the deity and offered prayers to him.⁴⁵

Since Hezekiah went up to the Temple the same day that he was both healed and visually saw the sun moving backwards,⁴⁶ the evidence shows that both events had to occur on the 3rd day after the prophecy.

Importantly, the fact that Hezekiah was granted another 15 years of life at a point when he was about to die proves that the prophecy had to be given

⁴⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1 §27. The Greek word μετὰ (*meta*) means, “prop. denoting *accompaniment*; ‘amid’ (local or causal); modified variously according to the case (gen. *association*, or acc. *succession*) with which it is joined” (SEC, Gk. #3326); “of Time, *after*, *next to*” (GEL, p. 501). Therefore μετὰ (*meta*) carries with it not only the idea of being “after” but to be “in association,” “amid,” and “to accompany.” Accordingly, Hezekiah would be cured “within the 3rd day after” the present day. This understanding is also that of the *Seder Olam* (S.O., 23).

⁴¹ 2 Kings, 20:6, cf. Isa., 38:5f.

⁴² 2 Kings, 20:1–11; 2 Chron., 32:24–26; Isa., 38:1–8, 22; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1.

⁴³ Targ. Jon., 2 Kings, 20:11. Cf. Targ. Jon., Isa., 38:8, where it is said that the sun “turned back 10 hours by the marking of the stone hours where it had declined.”

⁴⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ This visual regarding the movement of the sun, as seen from the surface of the earth, of course, was not the sun moving out of its place or the earth stopping and going backwards. Rather, simply explained, the surface (crust) of the earth merely slid out of its place, the hard surface (crust), juxtapositioned by the mantle, moving across the earth’s liquid outer core (which continued spinning in its original direction). From the surface of the earth, the resulting visual gave the impression that the sun had moved out of its place and was now rising on the opposite horizon. This rollover of the earth, i.e., the crust turning over the liquid basalt interior, a concept supported by Albert Einstein (see his Forward to ESC), is not as rare as one might think. As a result of this phenomena, there were numerous statements from ancient writers that the sun and the stars had changed their course on at least four occasions since the time of King Menes, the first king of a united Egypt, down until the reign of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria (which event took place in 701 B.C.E.) (see below Parallel Corpora A, n. 60). Herodotus, for example, reports, “Four times in this period, so they (the Egyptians) told me, the sun rose contrary to his wont; twice he rose where he now sets, and twice he sets where now he rises” (Herodotus, 2:141–142). Also see Mela, 1:9 §59; Solinus, *Poly.*, 32:39; Plato, *States.*, 268e–270d; Sophocles, frag. 738; and many others.

either very late in Hezekiah's 14th or very early in his 15th year of reign. This detail is confirmed because Hezekiah reigned only 29 years,⁴⁷ and the Assyrians had invaded in his 14th year of rule. If the prophecy would have been given earlier in his 14th year, the time left to Hezekiah would have been much more than 15 years.

William Whiston (in another edition of his translation of *Josephus*) concludes:

Nor will the fifteen years' prolongation of his life after his sickness allow that sickness to have been later than the former part of the fifteenth year of his reign, since chronology does not allow him in all above twenty-nine years and a few months.⁴⁸

The prophecy that Hezekiah would be healed in 3 days carried with it yet another important revelation. Not only had Yahweh added, as of this date, another 15 years to the life of Hezekiah but he also told him, "And from the hand of the king of Assyria I shall deliver you and the city. And I shall defend over this city for my own sake, and for the sake of David, my servant."⁴⁹ Accordingly, after Hezekiah was to be healed, punishment was to be inflicted upon the Assyrian army of Sennacherib.

The Talmudic writers also connect the episode of the sun returning 10 steps (hours), which occurred on the day when Hezekiah recovered from his illness, with the time that the Assyrians heard the "song of the celestials" and were as a result destroyed.⁵⁰ This information is in accord with the fact that during the daylight hours, just before the "night" that the Assyrians were afflicted, Hezekiah was found praying in the Temple,⁵¹ having just that day recovered from his illness.

The *Seder Olam*, composed during the mid-2nd century C.E., makes the same conclusion:

Hezekiah became ill 3 days before Sennacherib's downfall. Rabbi Yose says: the 3rd day of Hezekiah's illness was (the time of) Sennacherib's downfall. The sun, which had descended for Ahaz his father, stood

The last reversal took place in 701 B.C.E., during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah, and another in the year that his father, King Ahaz, died (e.g., 2 Kings, 20:8–11; Isa., 38:7f; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1; B. Sanh., 46b, 47a, 95a–96a; Hippolytus, *On Isa.*, 1, 3; S.O., 23; Targ. Jon., *Isa.*, 38:8; and many more). The sun also gave the appearance of standing still in the days of Yahushua the son of Nun (Josh., 10:13).

⁴⁷ 2 Kings, 18:2, 2 Chron., 29:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:3:1.

⁴⁸ Whiston, *Flav. Jos.*, p. 301, n. †.

⁴⁹ 2 Kings, 20:6; cf. Isa. 38:6.

⁵⁰ LJ, 4, pp. 269, 272–275, and ns. 58, 81. The "song of the celestials" is either (1) a reference to the sounds heard in the air as the earth's crust moved or, more probably, (2) was due to some astronomical phenomenon, such as a large asteroid or some other type of large object passing near the earth. In this regard, a large astronomical object could easily serve as the source for the gravitational disruption which caused the earth's crust to move during this nearby passing.

⁵¹ 2 Kings 19:14–37; Isa., 37:14–35.

still for him, as it says, "Behold, I will turn back 10 steps the shadow."⁵²

That we had reached the 15th year of Hezekiah when he was cured of his illness is further supported by the book entitled *Ascension of Isaiah* (composed at about the end of the 1st century C.E.). It reports:

. . . the words (i.e., promises) concerning the trust in the beloved one (Yahu) which he (Hezekiah) himself had witnessed IN THE 15TH YEAR OF HIS REIGN DURING HIS SICKNESS.⁵³

Since Hezekiah did not recover from his illness until just prior to the destruction of the army of Sennacherib outside the walls of Jerusalem, it is clear that the destruction of the Assyrian forces occurred during the 15th year of Hezekiah, spring reckoning.⁵⁴

Just After the Beginning of the Year

In a prophecy given by Isaiah to King Hezekiah just prior to the night of the destruction of the Assyrian army, Isaiah reports that a sign provided by Yahweh would be that in "this year" the Judahites would eat that which is sown (grows) of itself, i.e., it was a Sabbath year.⁵⁵ "That night" the angel Yahweh struck the Assyrians.⁵⁶ The prophetic nature of this "sign," indicating an event that was yet to occur, implies that the eating of grain sown of itself was something that was about to happen, not something that had already been in practice. This detail points to the early spring of a new year.

According to scriptural law, the Israelites were forbidden to eat from any crop of the new year (whether newly harvested or eaten directly from the field) until after the wave sheaf offering from that first crop had been accomplished. This particular offering took place on the day after the weekly Sabbath day that fell during the 7 days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.⁵⁷ The people of Jerusalem, therefore, would not have partaken of crops of "this year" until the 1st day of the week after the Passover, and Passover began on Abib 14. This fact brings the words of Isaiah into complete harmony with a destruction of the Assyrian army shortly after the beginning of the new year.

In this regard, ancient Jewish writers recorded that the destruction of the Assyrian army took place on the night of Passover. According to the Seder Olam and later Talmudic writers, for example, Sennacherib's army was destroyed 2 weeks into the new year, on the 1st day of Passover (Hebrew

⁵² S.O., 23.

⁵³ Ascen. Isa., 1:4.

⁵⁴ The reigns of the kings of Judah, even according to the rabbinic Jews, were always counted from the spring month of Abib/Nisan (e.g., see R.Sh., 1:1; B. A.Zar., 10a; Philo, *Spec.*, I:35 §181).

⁵⁵ Cf. Lev., 25:2–13, esp. v. 12. The key is that you cannot harvest (reap, gather), i.e., cut down, gather, and place in storage, that which grows of itself, but you can eat directly out of the field from that which grows of itself.

⁵⁶ 2 Kings, 19:20–37; Isa., 37:21–38.

⁵⁷ Lev., 23:9–14. FSDY, 1, pp. 155–167, 245–258, 339–351.

"Phasekh"), i.e., on the 14th of Abib (the 1st month of the year).⁵⁸ The *Midrash Exodus Rabbah* reports:

Israel and Hezekiah sat that night and recited the Hallel, for it was Passover, yet were in terror lest at any moment Jerusalem would fall in his (Sennacherib's) hand. When they arose early in the morning to recite the *shema'* and pray, they found their enemies' dead corpses.⁵⁹

In another place, paralleling the story with the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt at Passover, the *Midrash Song Rabbah* adds:

Rabbi Judan said: While Hezekiah and his followers were still eating their Passover lambs in Jerusalem, *eloahim* had already wrought (their deliverance) in that night, as it says, And it came to pass that night, that the angel Yahweh went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians.⁶⁰

The Targum on 2 Chronicles, 32:21, similar states:

And the word of Yahweh sent Gabriel, an angel, and he destroyed them in the night of Passover with fire pouring out. And he burnt the vital breath within their midst and destroyed all the valiant warriors, and officers, and princes in the camp of the king of Assyria.

The *Seder Olam* states, "because (the Assyrians) came up (against Jerusalem) in the time before Passover, they were not able to plant and so they ate what grows of itself."⁶¹ The 14th of Abib as the date for the destruction of the Assyrian army also explains why the Judahites had, as of the time of Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah, not eaten that which grows of itself, even though it was already "this year." The wave sheaf had not yet been offered.

An edition of the *Seder Olam Rabbah*,⁶² on the basis of Isaiah 37:30, also reports that Sennacherib's disaster occurred during a Sabbath year.⁶³ This tradition supports the conclusion that the 14th year of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib first struck the kingdom of Judah, had just passed and that the destruction of the Assyrian army took place in the 1st month of Hezekiah's 15th year, during a Sabbath year.

⁵⁸ LJ, 4, p. 268, with n. 54; also see *Tosef.-Targ.*, 2 *Kings*, 19:35–37; J. Pes., 9:36d. The Pharisees of the 2nd century B.C.E. and after altered the observance of the Passover supper from the 14th to the 15th (Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:14:6, 3:10:5, *Wars*, 6:9:3; Jub., 49:1). Nevertheless, the original practice, the one followed in the days of Hezekiah, was to observe the paschal supper the same day as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, i.e., the 14th of Abib. See FSDY, 1.

⁵⁹ Exod. Rab., 18:5.

⁶⁰ Song Rab., 1:12:3.

⁶¹ S.O., 23. Also see App. A.

⁶² Ratner, S.O., 23, p. 53a-b; and see below n. 63.

⁶³ HUCA, 46, p. 211, n. 30.

The sequence of events occurred as follows (also see Parallel Corpora A):

- Abib 10. King Hezekiah was severely ill and dying. Yahweh answers Hezekiah's prayer and tells him that on the 3rd day from now the king would (1) see the sun move backwards, (2) recover from his illness, and (3) go up to the Temple. The *Ascension of Isaiah*, in accord with these details, reports that Hezekiah's sickness occurred during "the 15th year of his reign."⁶⁴
- Abib 13 . . . Daytime.⁶⁵ The sun moves back 10 steps (hours) on the sundial. Hezekiah recovers from his illness. On this day a letter arrives from King Sennacherib notifying Hezekiah that the Assyrians fully expect to take Jerusalem. Hezekiah goes up to the Temple, where he presents the letter and begins to pray. Then, the prophet Isaiah came to him with Yahweh's guarantee that the city would not be taken. A sign was also foretold to the king that "this year" the Judahites would (1) eat that which grows of itself, (2) repeat the same in the 2nd year, and (3) would plant and harvest again in the 3rd year.
- Abib 14, the 1st day of Passover . . . Nighttime.⁶⁶ The Assyrian army is encamped outside the city of Jerusalem and is struck down by the angel Yahweh. A total of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers are killed.

Conclusion

All of the above evidence points to the fact that, although Sennacherib invaded the kingdom of Judah during Hezekiah's 14th year, the war continued for about 3 to 4 months until the 14th day of Abib (the 1st month on the Israelite calendar), in the 15th year of Hezekiah—a detail that is supported by the Assyrian records.⁶⁷ It would have been impossible for Sennacherib to have accomplished all of the feats attributed to him in only 2 short weeks and still have his army destroyed on Passover night in Hezekiah's 14th year (i.e., on the 14th day of the new year). On the 13th of Abib, Hezekiah was told that the sign for the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrian king was (1.) that the people of Judah would still be found "this year" observing a Sabbath year, and (2.) that "the 2nd year" they would still be in their land observing a Jubilee. Accordingly, Hezekiah's 15th year was a Sabbath and his 16th year was a Jubilee.

⁶⁴ *Ascen. Isa.*, 1:4.

⁶⁵ The first half of the Hebrew day began at sunset and the second half with sunrise (EBD, p. 266; DB, p. 140).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ See below Chap. IV, pp. 55–57.