

Chapter IV

The Assyrian Version

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

The precise dating of the Sabbath and Jubilee of Hezekiah's 15th and 16th years is uncovered in the records of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Sennacherib reports the conquest of the cities in Judah and the reception of tribute from King Hezekiah during his third campaign.

Dating the Third Campaign

Sennacherib's third campaign can be dated by the following information. To begin with, this study is in complete agreement with the accepted dating of the Ninevehite dynasty of Assyria, from Tiglath-pileser III (745/744–727/726 B.C.E.) until the end of that line under Sin-sarra-ishkun (622/621–613/612 B.C.E.).¹ The Assyrians, like the ancient Israelites, reckoned their year from Nisānu (March/April) in the spring.² Their records prove that Sennacherib ascended to the throne upon the death of his father, Sargon, on Abu (July/Aug.) 12 of Sargon's 17th year (705/704 B.C.E.).³ His 1st regnal year (accession-year system),⁴ therefore, began in March/April of 704 B.C.E., being the 1st month of the year. This same month is called "Abib" and, later, "Nisan" in Hebrew. Sennacherib reigned 23 regnal years and died at the hands of one of his rebellious sons on Tebetu (Dec./Jan.) 20, 681 B.C.E.⁵

The *Bellino Cylinder* inscription is dated to the eponymy (year-name) of Nabuli (limmu *Nabuli of Arba'ilu*)—being the 3rd regnal year of Sennacherib.⁶ That Assyrian year began with the month of Nisānu (March/April) of what today is defined as the Julian year 702 B.C.E. It is the earliest record of Sennacherib's first two campaigns. In this document only the first and second campaigns are discussed.⁷

The earliest mention of the third campaign, wherein the expedition against King Hezekiah is given, comes on the *Rassam Cylinder*. It is dated in the

¹ CAW, pp. 7f; and see our forthcoming text GAE.

² ARAB, 2, p. 499; HBC, p. 30.

³ JCS, 12.3, p. 97.

⁴ The accession-year system (AY) counts that portion of the year in which a king ends his reign as his last year. The period of the new king during that same year is reckoned as his accession year. The 1st year of the new king is counted from the arrival of the next New Year's day. The non-accession-year system (NY), on the other hand, counts that portion of the calendar belonging to a king's last year as his last full year, while the remaining portion of that same year served by the new king becomes the new king's 1st year.

⁵ ANET, p. 302.

⁶ ARAB, 2, p. 438.

⁷ AS, pp. 55–60; ARAB, 2, §§268–282.

eponymy of Metunu (*limmu Metunu of Isana*)—being the 5th regnal year of Sennacherib,⁸ which began with Nisânu 1 of 700 B.C.E.

The *Babylonian Chronicles* report that in the 3rd year of the Babylonian king Belibni, Sennacherib invaded Akkad and set his own son Assur-nadin-shumi on the Babylonian throne.⁹ According to the limmu-chronicle, this event took place in the limmu of Metunu—beginning with Nisânu 1, 700 B.C.E.¹⁰ Sennacherib's own records make this event his “fourth campaign.”¹¹

Sennacherib's first campaign began on the 20th of Shabatu (Hebrew “Shebat,” Jan./Feb.).¹² The *Babylonian Chronicles* also state that in the 1st year of Belibni (i.e., the year beginning Nisânu 1, 702 B.C.E.) Sennacherib destroyed the cities of Hirimma and Hararatum.¹³ Sennacherib's own records make this destruction part of his first campaign and part of the same expedition wherein he placed Belibni over the throne of Akkad.¹⁴ Yet the Babylonian kings were not officially recognized with a regnal year until the 1st of Nisânu (March/April), when they took “the hand of Bel.”¹⁵

It is clear from these records that Sennacherib's first campaign extended from the month of Shabatu, near the end of his 2nd regnal year (703/702 B.C.E.), and continued beyond the 1st of Nisânu, 702 B.C.E., the beginning of Sennacherib's 3rd regnal year. His 3rd regnal year, therefore, equals the 1st regnal year of Belibni, who Sennacherib placed upon the throne of Akkad in Babylonia during his first campaign.

Since the second campaign of Sennacherib had to be accomplished after his first (which took place in the first few months of 702 B.C.E.), yet before the *Bellino Cylinder*, which reported the second campaign, was composed (dated to the limmu of 702/701 B.C.E.), it is clear that the second campaign was also completed in the year 702 B.C.E. in Sennacherib's 3rd regnal year. Neither was this a short-lived expedition. Sennacherib not only invaded the land of the Kassites, east of Babylonia, but marched further east into the distant lands of the Ellipi and then into the lands of the distant Medes (regions lying in what is today called Iran), where he received heavy tribute.¹⁶ Considering 25 miles per day as an average march (a liberal figure), and counting in time for sieges, battles, and rest periods, a campaign lasting 3 to 4 months is indicated.

This evidence proves that Sennacherib's third campaign, which included his expedition against King Hezekiah, must have taken place in the period AFTER the *Bellino Cylinder* was published, sometime in the year 702/701 B.C.E., Nisânu (Abib/Nisan) reckoning, yet BEFORE the composition of the *Rassam Cylinder* inscription, published sometime in the year 700/699 B.C.E.—

⁸ ARAB, 2, §§283–284a, and p. 438.

⁹ ABC, p. 77, l. 26–32.

¹⁰ CAW, p. 43.

¹¹ AS, pp. 34f, 71; ARAB, 2, §§241–243.

¹² ARAB, 2, §§255–258; AS, p. 50, l. 20.

¹³ ANET, p. 301; ABC, p. 77, l. 24–28.

¹⁴ ARAB, 2, §§232–238, 270–282.

¹⁵ CAW, p. 7; MBA, p. 480; cf. HBC, pp. 85f.

¹⁶ ARAB, 2, §§236–238, 277–282.

and still before his fourth campaign mentioned in that same inscription and falling within the 3rd regnal year of Belibni of Akkad.¹⁷

Sennacherib's first campaign started in the month of Shabatu and continued until at least the beginning of Nisânu of 702 B.C.E. Therefore, his second campaign must have been 3 to 4 months long during 702 B.C.E., with a reasonable period between each event to allow his army to recoup and prepare for the next expedition. Allowing a minimum of 6 weeks for repose between each expedition, the earliest possible chronology would be as follows:

- After April, 702 B.C.E., Sennacherib returns from his first campaign.
- The month of May, 702 B.C.E., Sennacherib rests and prepares for his second campaign.
- June to September (or possibly until as late as October), 702 B.C.E., Sennacherib conducts his second campaign.
- The month of October (or possibly as late as November), 702 B.C.E., Sennacherib rests and prepares for his third campaign.

These limitations mean that Sennacherib, at the earliest, could not possibly have begun his campaign against Judah before late October or late November of his 3rd regnal year. At the same time—since his army was destroyed on Passover, shortly after the beginning of spring—Sennacherib's great defeat must have occurred in the beginning of his 4th regnal year. These details mean that Sennacherib's third campaign got under way sometime between late autumn of 702 to the early winter of 702/701 B.C.E., an overall period consisting of about 3 months.

These details determine that Sennacherib's third campaign must have began shortly after his second, and therefore continued mainly during the winter, failing in the early spring of the next year. Indeed, even though Hezekiah had revolted from his Assyrian overlord and had not paid tribute, he was nonetheless surprised at Sennacherib's invasion. This fact is indicated when Hezekiah had to hastily build fortifications after hearing of Sennacherib's drive into the region, and even then he conceded in his own mind that it would now be fruitless to continue the revolt.¹⁸ This detail would imply that a strike by Sennacherib would not have been expected until at least the spring, the usual time for military expeditions because of weather considerations.¹⁹

In mid-702 B.C.E. Sennacherib was on his second campaign against the Kassites, Ellipi, and distant Medes far to the east. Hezekiah and the Judahites saw no reason for alarm. They had already been successful in their revolt for several years and in the present year other states in the West were joining

¹⁷ Also see the discussion in CIOT, 1, pp. 307–310; SIP, pp. 2–4.

¹⁸ 2 Chron., 32:2–8; 2 Kings, 18:13–16; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1; cf. CIOT, 1, p. 299; CAH, 3, pp. 72f.

¹⁹ 1 Chron., 20:1; 2 Sam., 11:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 7:6:3; LXX 2 Kings, 11:1; LXX 1 Chron., 20:1.

them.²⁰ They felt secure because of their alliance with the Egyptians and Ethiopians and because they believed Sennacherib's involvement in his eastern wars would, at least for the time being, distract the attention of the Assyrians. Nevertheless, Sennacherib did the unexpected. Upon returning to Assyria from his eastern campaign and hearing of the failure of other western vassals to pay tribute, he did not wait for spring. Instead, he immediately prepared to deliver a massive, surprise winter offensive.

²⁰ The assumption is often made that the nations of Phoenicia, Palestia, and Judah all revolted from Assyria upon the death of Sargon in Abu (July/Aug.) of 705 B.C.E. (e.g., AATB, p. 69; HI, p. 265). This conjecture, however, has no substance. Sargon's records report that it was during his reign that "the lands of the Palestim, Yahudahi (Judahites), Edomites, and Moabites" revolted and sent presents to pharaoh of Egypt to become his ally (ARAB, 2, §195). In response, the Assyrian king crossed the Euphrates at the time of the spring floods (*ibid.*). This expedition took place in Sargon's 11th year (711/710 B.C.E.), see ARAB, 2, §§29f. Since his response to the revolt was in the spring, i.e., at the beginning of his 11th regnal year, the revolt took place sometime before this regnal year began, and most probably in conjunction with the revolt of Israel in 712/711 B.C.E. (2 Kings, 18:9).

Sargon only mentions the overthrow of Iamani, king of Ashdod, the northernmost coastal city of Palestia, and two nearby cities, Gimtu and Asdudimmu (ARAB, 2, §§29f, 195). [*Gi-im-tu* certainly is not Gath, as Luckenbill and others speculate. The Judahites held Gath at this time (see below). B. Mazar-Maisler connects this name with Gittaim of 2 Sam., 4:3, (JCS, 12.3, p. 83, n. 242); but *גְּבָתָן* (*G-b-t-u-n*; *m* = *b*) of Josh., 19:44, 21:23, located northeast of Ashdod, is phonetically much more suited.] Both the Assyrian accounts and the record in Isa., 20:1, report that Sargon's chief military officer or *turtānu* (*turtan*, *tartan*) overthrew Ashdod. Nothing is mentioned of the recovery of Judah, Edom, Moab, or the other Palestia city-states. This data agrees with the ancient evidence that Hezekiah revolted from Assyria early in his reign (2 Kings, 18:1–9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:13:3). As part of this revolt, Hezekiah seized control of the Palestia (Philistia) states from Gath to Gaza (2 Kings, 18:8; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:13:3, cf. 9:8:4, & 2 Kings, 12:17). For the time being, Judah and the rest of Palestia remained free and their recovery was not undertaken until Sennacherib made the attempt. It was Sennacherib who stripped Judah's control away from the Palestim city-states (AS, p. 33, 3:27–36, p. 70, l. 27–30).

A previous revolt of Phoenicia occurred in 707/706 B.C.E. and lasted for 5 years, until 703/702 B.C.E. (Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:2; and see below n. 38). This evidence reveals that Phoenicia revolted again in 702 B.C.E. Ashdod would also have joined at this time. The revolt of Phoenicia and Ashdod were seen as far more of a concern for Assyria, who up until this time still retained control over them and through them held the Mediterranean Sea and kept Egypt in check. The fact that Ashdod submitted to the Assyrians immediately after the fall of Phoenicia, while the remaining Palestim (Philistine) states held out with Judah, demonstrates that the other Palestim states were in alliance with Judah. The revolt of Phoenicia and Ashdod best fits the description of Leo L. Honor, who admits, "If we assume that the plans for revolt were not made in 705 but in 702–701, it is possible to surmise that Sennacherib learned of the conspiracy that was being planned against him before it was fully hatched; that Sennacherib advanced into Palestine with remarkable speed and surprised his foes before they were fully ready" (SIP, p. 65).

Luckenbill calculates that trouble doubtlessly began in the West as soon as the reports of Sargon's violent death reached these regions. Yet it is also true that, because Sennacherib had been "kept occupied for some time after his accession by events in Babylonia," by the year 701 we find "respect for the Assyrian authority rapidly disappearing" (AS, p. 10). The fact that Sargon died would not, in itself, serve as an impetus strong enough to convince the petty western states to defect from such a powerful overlord as the Assyrian Empire, whose military might during this period was immense. The evidence better suggests that it was only after the revolt of the eastern countries in Babylonia, Merodach-Baladan of Babylon (who formed an alliance with the Elamite Empire), and some tribes east of the Tigris (the Kassi, Iasubigallai, and Ellipi) in late 703 B.C.E. (the nations toward which the first and second campaigns of Sennacherib were directed) that Phoenicia and Ashdod saw a chance. Their opportunity came while Sennacherib was consumed with his second campaign in mid-702 B.C.E.

We also know that Sennacherib was willing to commit his forces during the heart of winter, rarely done by other Assyrian kings.²¹ His first campaign, for example, began in Shabatu (Shebat; i.e., Jan./Feb.) of 702 B.C.E. It was against the districts of Babylonia lying south of Assyria.²² Based upon the records left by both Sennacherib and the Jewish sources, the indication is that Sennacherib's third campaign began no sooner than late autumn, but more probably near the beginning of the winter of 702/701 B.C.E., during the latter part of his 3rd regnal year (i.e., in the months before Abib 1 of 701 B.C.E.). The year 702/701 B.C.E., therefore, is equivalent to the 14th year of Hezekiah, being the 3rd regnal year of Sennacherib.

The year 701/700 B.C.E., spring reckoning, the 4th regnal year of Sennacherib, as a result, is equivalent to the 15th year of Hezekiah. Sennacherib's army was destroyed in the 1st month of Sennacherib's 4th regnal year, in the month of Abib (Nisan), on the 14th day, being the 1st day of Passover, sometime during the first part of that day, i.e., during the night-time (which starts with sunset). This year was a Sabbath. The next year, 700/699 B.C.E., the 16th year of Hezekiah and the 5th year of Sennacherib, was a Jubilee year.

We also must conclude that after Sennacherib's humiliating defeat before the walls of Jerusalem (where he lost 185,000 men) he would need an extended period of time to recoup from his losses in order to commit new troops to his fourth campaign in 700 B.C.E. It is not unreasonable to allow for approximately 9 months to a year to accomplish this task.²³ Interestingly, it was during this post-Jerusalem period that Sennacherib suffered from a major revolt of his Babylonian vassals, i.e., Belibni and the other subkings. This revolt was temporarily successful because of the large military setback suffered by the Assyrian king during the end of his third campaign. Sennacherib's fourth campaign in 700 B.C.E. was, in part, against Belibni to recover Akkad for the Assyrians.²⁴

Length of Sennacherib's Third Campaign

Another item of evidence that substantiates the fact that Sennacherib's third campaign was of no short duration, and therefore extended from the latter

²¹ There is an Assyrian inscription which tells of an expedition by Adad-nirari II against the province of Dûr-Kurigalzu in Babylonia during the month of Shabatu (Jan./Feb.) (ARAB, 1, §390). The region of Babylonia laid in the low country south of Assyria. Therefore, neither distance nor severe climate would have served as too great an obstacle for this isolated event. Otherwise, until we arrive at the time of Sennacherib and his own invasion of Babylonia, which began on the 20th of Shabatu during his first campaign, expeditions at this time of year are practically unknown. Before Sennacherib, no expeditions are reported either for the month of Tebeto (Dec./Jan.) or Addaru (Feb./March). Further, when Sennacherib attempted a march against Babylonia in the month of Tebeto during his seventh campaign, he was turned back by a severe rain and snow-storm (ARAB, 2, §351). His attempt, nevertheless, demonstrates the willingness of Sennacherib to campaign during the heart of winter.

²² ARAB, 2, §§255–267.

²³ E.g., after Nebuchadnezzar II took heavy losses in his campaign against Egypt during his 4th year, he was forced to stay home for the entire part of Year 5 to refit "his numerous horses and chariots" (ABC, p. 101, l. 5–9).

²⁴ CAW, p. 43.

part of his 3rd regnal year into the early part of his 4th, comes from this Assyrian king's own records on this expedition. These inscriptions show that it was not just Judah that had revolted but almost the whole of the Phoenician-Palestine region (Parallel Corpora A).

Sennacherib was forced by strategic considerations to first invade Khatti-land (Syria-Phoenicia), going against King Luli of Sidon and capturing all the fortified cities of his country.²⁵ Coming to Ushû (mainland Tyre), he received heavy tribute from the Phoenician city-states of Shamsimuruni, Sidoni, Arvadi, the Gubli (Byblos), then from the Palestim (Philistine) people of Ashdod, and the Trans-Jordan states of the Ammoni (Beth-Ammoni), the Moabi, and the Edomi (these last three tribes residing just east of Judah).²⁶

Most of the Palestim people living in Palestia (Philistia) and their overlords of Judah, which ruled Palestia at the time,²⁷ still refused to submit. So Sennacherib next marched south along the coast and went to war against the king of Ashkelon. Along the way, he besieged and conquered Ashkelon's tributary cities of Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banaibarka, and Asuru, carrying off their spoils.²⁸ With the submission of Ashkelon or in conjunction with it, the Assyrians were now striking across the borders of Judah.

Sennacherib's attack on Judah was especially violent. The ferocity of his onslaught was no doubt brought on because King Hezekiah of Judah was considered the ringleader of the revolt.²⁹ This fact is revealed when Sennacherib reports that the nobles and people of Ekron in Palestia had delivered up their own king, named Padi, a loyalist to the Assyrians, in iron fetters to Hezekiah to keep in confinement.³⁰

When the soldiers of the Assyrian king came against the land of Judah they captured 46 of its walled cities and innumerable smaller cities.³¹ Among these overthrown fortified cities were Lachish and Libnah.³² Sennacherib then claimed to have shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a caged bird."³³

²⁵ ARAB, 2, §§239, 309, 326, 347.

²⁶ ARAB, 2, §§239, 310; AS, pp. 30, 69.

²⁷ 2 Kings, 18:7-8, reveals that Hezekiah conquered the Palestim country "as far as Gaza and its borders" shortly after he had revolted from the Assyrians. Josephus states that Hezekiah seized all the Palestim cities "from Gaza to Gitta (Gath)" (Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:13:3). In the Assyrian records, Hezekiah is the ringleader of the revolt. Padi the king of Ekron, Palestia, to demonstrate, was thrown into iron fetters and given to Hezekiah to keep in confinement at Jerusalem (AS, pp. 31f, l. 2:73-77, 3:14-17, pp. 69f, l. 22-27).

²⁸ ARAB, 2, §§239, 310; AS, pp. 30f, 69.

²⁹ AHI, p. 283; HI, p. 265. Also see above n. 27 and Chap. V, pp. 71f, n. 37.

³⁰ ARAB, 2, §§240, 311; AS, p. 31, 2:73-77, p. 69, l. 22f.

³¹ ARAB, 2, §§240, 312, 327, 347; AS, pp. 32f, 3:18-27, p. 70, l. 27f, p. 77, l. 20f, p. 86, l. 15.

³² Lachish and Libnah are specifically mentioned in 2 Kings, 18:14, 17, 19:8; Isa., 36:2, 37:8; and 2 Chron., 32:9. In place of the discussion of these battles, Josephus only reports that the Assyrian king "took the field against the Egyptians and Ethiopians" while leaving behind Rabshakeh and his forces to sack the city of Jerusalem (Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1). This information reflects the fact that the Assyrian king heard of the coming of the Egyptian and Ethiopian troops as he was taking Lachish and in response sent his troops to Libnah to prepare the region for the upcoming conflict (Libnah being very near Eltekeh and the site of the battle).

³³ ARAB, 2, §§240, 312; AS, p. 33, 3:27f, p. 70, l. 28f.

Hezekiah, of course, had already submitted to Sennacherib before the blockade began. Furthermore, he had already paid the Assyrians a substantial amount of tribute and was forced to release King Padi of Ekron. Some Judahite territory was also taken away and given to the kings of Palestia.³⁴ Nevertheless, Sennacherib reneged on the treaty he had made with King Hezekiah. Instead, he blockaded Jerusalem in hopes of deporting its entire population into another distant country and with an eye towards sacking the treasures of this wealthy city.

When the rebellious people of Ekron had heard that Sennacherib was coming, they called for military assistance from the Egyptians and Ethiopians. It was at this moment that these forces arrived. Sennacherib, therefore, was obliged to meet this “countless host” in battle. He defeated them on the plain of Altakû (Eltekeh)—a claim obviously referring to an initial victory over the Egyptians and Ethiopians, well before his attack on Pelusium, the plague, and the arrival of the army of Tirhaqah, the king of Kush (Ethiopia, Nubia).³⁵ Sennacherib next besieged the cities of Altakû (Eltekeh) and Timnah (Tamnah, Tamnâ), capturing them. He also took the city of Ekron, placing Padi back on the throne.³⁶ At this point, Sennacherib’s records finish, unwilling to discuss the humiliating defeats he suffered at Pelusium in Egypt and then at Jerusalem.

The list of conquests and battles itemized in the records of Sennacherib compels us to conclude that his third campaign could not have been of short duration. When we compare his records with those from ancient scriptural, Jewish, and Christian accounts,³⁷ it is clear that the expedition lasted at least 2 to 3 months. Since Sennacherib’s first and second expeditions took up most of the year 702 B.C.E., we are forced to look for Sennacherib’s third campaign as beginning in the latter part of the king’s 3rd regnal year, possibly beginning his march to the west as early as late autumn (Oct./Nov.). It certainly began well before the month of Shebat (Jan./Feb.) during the winter of 702/701 B.C.E., during the same time of the year in which he had previously and successfully attacked the Babylonians. Once again we are led to the conclusion that Sennacherib’s army at Jerusalem was destroyed during the 1st month of the new year (Abib) of 701 B.C.E., being the 15th year of Hezekiah.³⁸

³⁴ ARAB, 2, §§240, 312, 327, 248, 284a.

³⁵ AS, pp. 31f, 2:73–1:7; p. 69, l. 22–25; ARAB, 2, §§240, 311. A formidable response from the king of Kush came later, when the army led by Tirhaqah came out to fight against the Assyrians (2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4).

³⁶ AS, p. 32, 3:6–17, p. 70, l. 25–27; ARAB, 2, §§240, 312.

³⁷ See below Parallel Corpora A and above Chap. III, pp. 43–45.

³⁸ Support for this arrangement is also found in the reconstruction of the reign of Shalmaneser III, the real conqueror of the house of Israel (2 Kings, 17:3, 18:9), not Shalmaneser V. (This reconstruction shall be demonstrated in our forthcoming book entitled *The Golden Age of Empires* [GAE].) These findings show that the 5-year blockade of Tyre and their king Eluli (Luli), which Shalmaneser III began in 707/706 B.C.E., his 21st year, ended the year prior to Judah’s revolt and its war with Sennacherib (see Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:1f; and cf. Shalmaneser III’s records for his 21st year with those of Sennacherib’s third campaign in ARAB, 1, §§578, 614, 2, §§239, 309, 326, 347, etc.). Also cf. above n. 20.

Addressing the Opposing Views

Those who will oppose the conclusion that 701/700 B.C.E., Abib reckoning, was a Sabbath year are compelled to argue that instead of the 15th year of Hezekiah, the Sabbath year at question has to be equivalent to Hezekiah's 14th year—702/701 B.C.E. (Abib reckoning, System "D") or 703/702 B.C.E., (Tishri reckoning, System "B"). Both systems require the destruction of the Assyrian army at Jerusalem on the Passover of 702 B.C.E. To do so they must ignore the evidence that the destruction occurred on Passover,³⁹ i.e., on the 14th day of the month of Abib (March / April), in the year 701 B.C.E.

Most experts in Assyrian chronology correctly place the entire episode of Sennacherib's third campaign in the year 701 B.C.E.⁴⁰ Delbert Rieger, for example, remarks that "the generally accepted date of this campaign into Palestine is about 701."⁴¹ Spring of 701 B.C.E. is, as shown, the date also arrived at by this study for the end of Sennacherib's third campaign. Authors of the first edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* went the other direction, Sidney Smith, Harry Reginald Hall, and S. A. Cook all placing this invasion in early 700 B.C.E.⁴² Yet based upon a detailed analysis of the records, it is now universally recognized that this date is far too late.

If the advocates of a Sabbath year for the 14th year of Hezekiah are correct, and the Passover of the spring of 702 B.C.E. is connected with a Sabbath year, then the records are in disagreement with Sennacherib's third campaign, which ended in the spring of 701 B.C.E. Indeed, Sennacherib's invasion could not have taken place during the winter months of 703/702 B.C.E., which is required if Systems "B" and "D" are correct. King Sennacherib was just then completing his first campaign and had not yet started on his second (which began in about May of 702 B.C.E.). It is hard to explain a third campaign, which ends with Passover of 702 B.C.E., taking place prior to his second campaign, which was well after Passover that year.

Meanwhile, the very fact that Hezekiah was unprepared for Sennacherib's invasion, even though Hezekiah had revolted and had allied himself to the Egyptians, would indicate that Sennacherib unexpectedly moved against the West shortly after his return from his second campaign (which had extended into the districts far to the east of Assyria). This detail compels us to conclude that Sennacherib undertook a winter campaign in 702/701 B.C.E. and his army was destroyed at Jerusalem on the Passover which occurred in the early spring of 701 B.C.E.

The truth of the matter is that regardless of which set of facts one wishes to choose, System "B," which would make the Sabbath year extend from Tishri 1, 703 until Tishri 1, 702 B.C.E. has little possibility of working. Under

³⁹ E.g., S.O., 23; Exod. Rab., 18:5; Song Rab., *Song*, 1:12:3. Also see our discussion above in Chap. III.

⁴⁰ E.g., CIOT, 1, pp. 307–310; NOT, p. 55; HBC, p. 198; ARAB, 2, p. 136; AS, pp. 10–14; NBD, p. 1159; etc.

⁴¹ SJJ, p. 20.

⁴² CAH, 3, pp. 72f, 277f, 389f.

their interpretation, for example, the Sabbath year was already underway months before the arrival of Passover and that year would have ended on Tishri 1 of 702 B.C.E. The Passover of 702 B.C.E., the day on which the Assyrian army would have to be destroyed under this construct, would fall between the end of Sennacherib's first campaign and the beginning of his second. There is simply not enough time for Sennacherib to finish his first campaign, carry out a second, and endure a third before the arrival of Passover in 702 B.C.E.

System "D," which makes the Sabbath year extend from Abib 1, 702 until Abib 1, 701 B.C.E., has the same problem as System "B." If the day of Passover on which the Assyrian army was destroyed occurred on Abib 14 of 702 B.C.E., there would be no time for Sennacherib to have completed his first and second campaigns. If the relevant Passover is carried over to 701 B.C.E., then the Sabbath year would no longer be "this year," as twice reported in Scriptures,⁴³ and they would have arrived at their Jubilee year.

The only possibility for either System "D" or System "B" is to dismiss the evidence that the Assyrian army was destroyed on Passover. Nevertheless, dismissing historical records in order to force an interpretation actually weakens the argument. It is also difficult to discount the evidence that the Assyrians invaded Judah during Hezekiah's 14th year followed by Hezekiah becoming ill just before the destruction of the Assyrian forces on Passover in his 15th year. All the evidence taken together speaks of a calculation using an Abib or spring reckoning of the year, not a Tishri reckoning. In addition, both System "D" and System "B" calculations are untenable due to their conflict with the timing of Sennacherib's first and second campaigns.

System "C" (Tishri 1, 702 until Tishri 1, 701 B.C.E.) and System "A" (Abib 1, 701 until Abib 1, 700 B.C.E.), on the other hand, both cover a period of time that would meet the requirements. Yet as we have already pointed out (and shall further prove as we proceed), the Jews of this early period observed an Abib beginning for their year. There is no evidence for the Talmudic interpretation of a Tishri beginning for a regular Sabbath year prior to the 2nd century C.E. This fact gives the initial nod to System "A."

Conclusion

The weight of the evidence strongly indicates that Sennacherib's expedition got underway in the winter months of 702/701 B.C.E., in the latter part of the 14th year of Hezekiah. The Sabbath year, in turn, began in the spring, in the opening month of Hezekiah's 15th year, which began on the 1st of Abib (March/April) of 701 B.C.E. As a result, the year 700/699 B.C.E., Abib reckoning, Hezekiah's 16th year, was a Jubilee. These dates establish the System "A" Sabbath and Jubilee cycle (Chart C),⁴⁴ and, as this study shall demonstrate throughout, this cycle is fully supported by the evidence for a number of other Sabbath years.

⁴³ 2 Kings, 19:29; Isa., 37:30.

⁴⁴ Cf. Chart A.

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CHART C

SYSTEM "A"

FROM 750 B.C.E. TO 150 C.E.

Chart C: System “A” 750 B.C.E. to 149 C.E.

Years begin on Abib 1 (in March/April of Julian Year) and end on the last day of Adar of the following year.

Example: 701 B.C.E. = Abib 1, 701 B.C.E. until the last day of Adar, 700 B.C.E. (see Chart B).

■ = Sabbath year ■ = Jubilee year

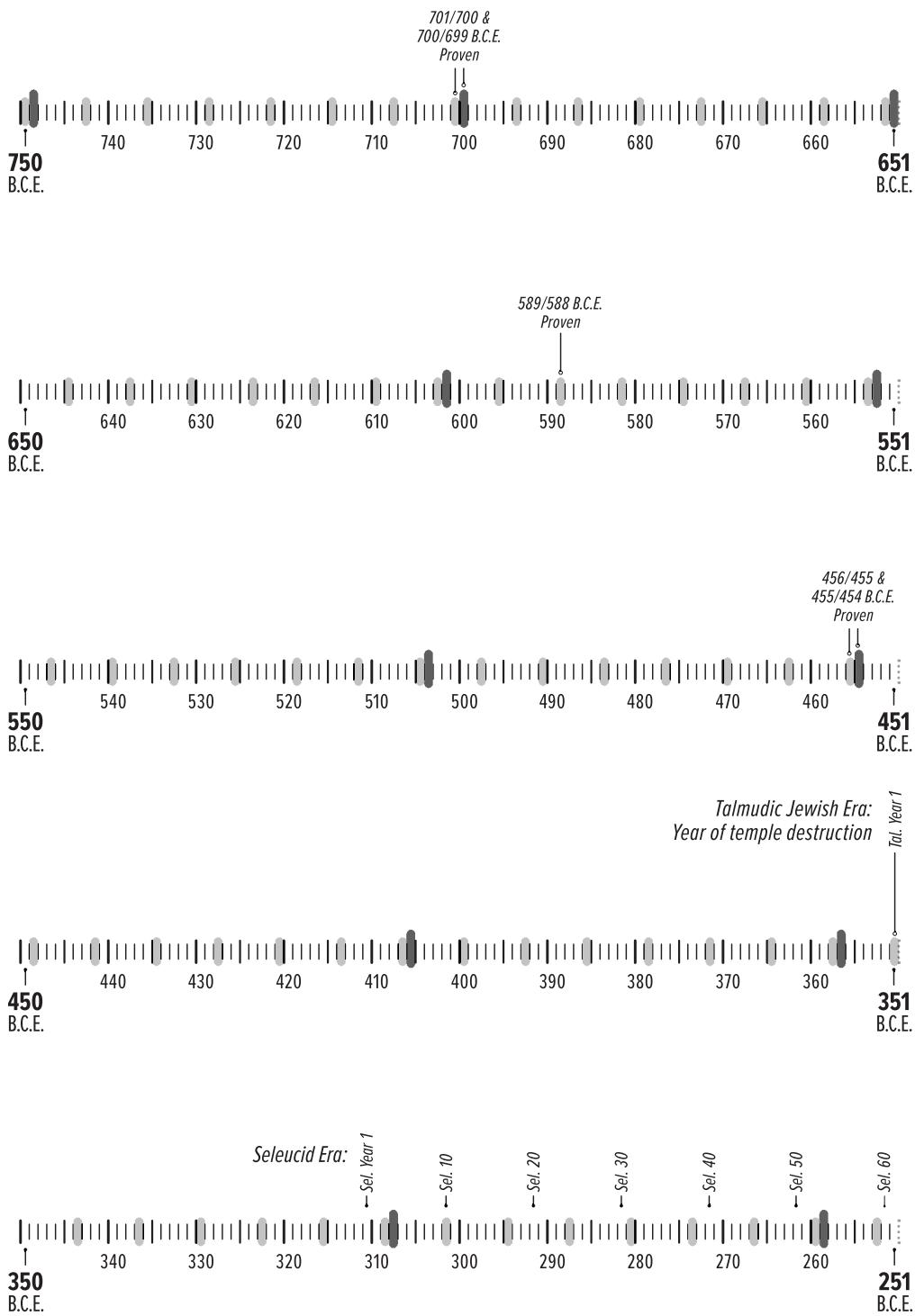
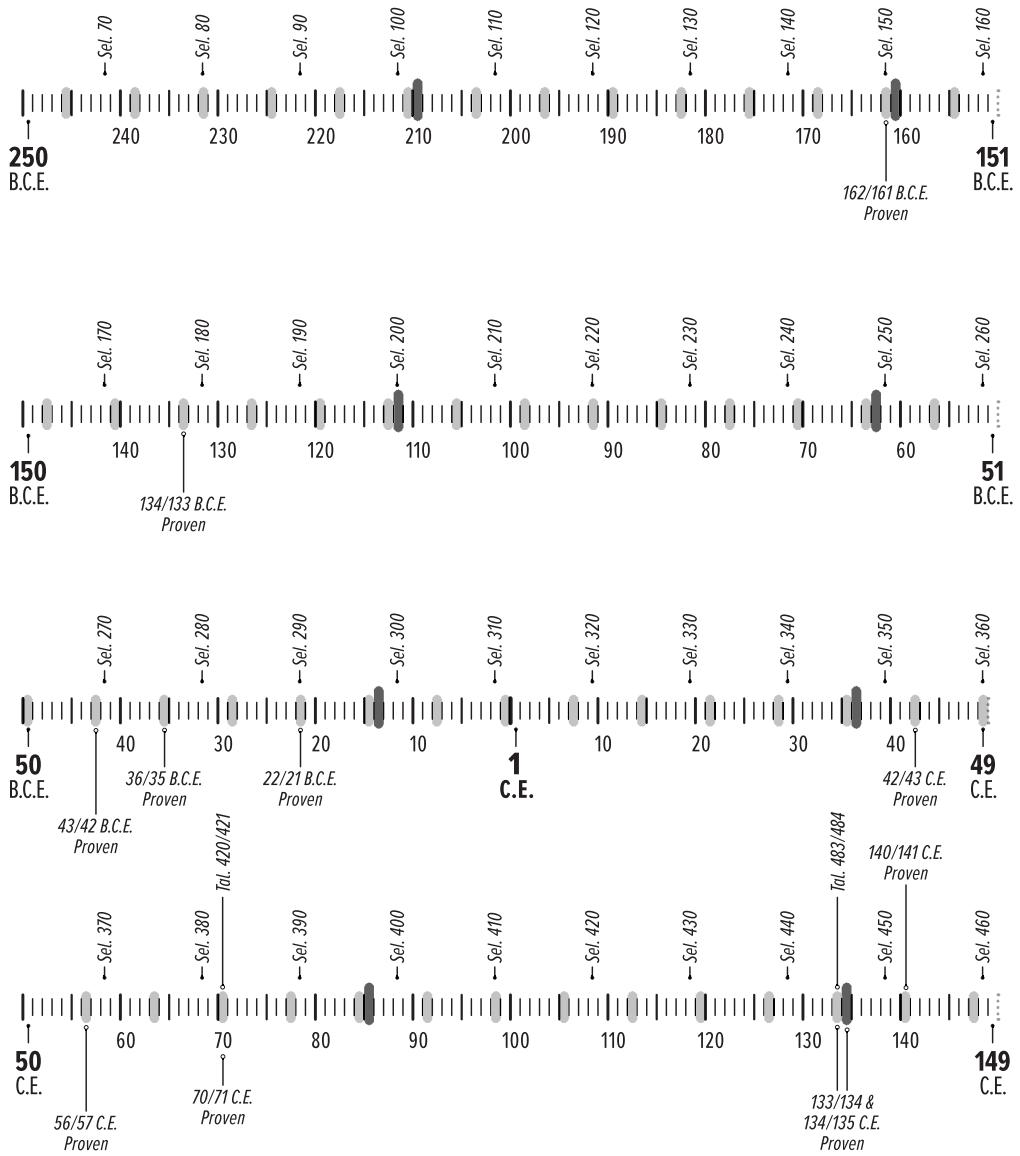


Chart C: System “A” 750 B.C.E. to 149 C.E. (con’t)

■ = Sabbath year ■ = Jubilee year



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