

One or Two Invasions?

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

Historians have for some time now been divided with regard to the question about whether the records found in 2 Kings, 18–20; Isaiah, 36–38; and 2 Chronicles, 32, represent one or two invasions of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Those adhering to one invasion, as this study does, contend that all the events recorded in these above passages belong to Sennacherib’s third campaign. The primary support for this conclusion is the fact that Scriptures and ancient secondary sources, like Josephus and Berosus, acknowledge only one attack against Judah by Sennacherib.

Those holding to the two-invasion hypothesis, meanwhile, dismiss the authority of Scriptures and the statements of secondary non-Assyrian writers. They hold that in the first war, being Sennacherib’s third campaign of 701 B.C.E., the Assyrians received tribute from Hezekiah and then returned home victorious. During the second invasion—which they date sometime after 689 B.C.E., but not later than 687 B.C.E., the year Hezekiah died—Sennacherib is believed to have once again set his army against Jerusalem. This time the Assyrian king suffered a great defeat.¹

Many notable historians have over the years rejected the “two-invasion” hypothesis.² Indeed, we have overwhelming evidence which demonstrates that there was only one invasion by Sennacherib against Jerusalem, and that this one and only campaign ended in a defeat for the Assyrian forces at the beginning of the Sabbath year of 701/700 B.C.E. Nevertheless, it is important to determine if the two-invasion construct has any merit. For if the destruction of Sennacherib’s Assyrian army, as mentioned in Scriptures, took place sometime after 690 B.C.E., the Sabbath and Jubilee years, which are associated with this defeat, would be radically different from those proposed by our study.

The Siege of Lachish

The first item of evidence demonstrating a single invasion comes with the conquest of Lachish during Sennacherib’s third campaign. Confirmation that

¹ Those advocating two invasions by Sennacherib against Judah include Albright (BASOR, 130, pp. 4–11); Barton (AATB, pp. 471–476); Bright (AHI, pp. 277–286, 296–308); Budge (HE, 6, pp. 148–152); Fullerton (BS, 63, pp. 577–634); Horn (AUSS, 4.1, pp. 1–28); George Adam Smith (JTEH, 2, pp. 148–180).

² Those advocating only one invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, his third campaign, include Luckenbill (AS, pp. 9–14); McCurdy (HPM, 2, pp. 276–321); Noth (HI, pp. 265–269); Parrot (NOT, pp. 51–63); Petrie (AHOE, 3, pp. 296f); Schrader (CIOT, 1, pp. 277–310, 2, pp. 1–27); Tadmor (AHJP, pp. 142–146); Unger (AOT, pp. 267–271); Wellhausen (PHAI, pp. 481–484). Others, like Leo L. Honor (SIP) and Childs (IAC), have drawn no conclusion. Their failure to commit themselves to either view is based chiefly upon the identity of Tirhaqah, an issue with many complexities but one that we shall fully examine in Chaps. VIII through XII and App. B–L.

Sennacherib besieged Lachish is found depicted on the walls of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh (now preserved in the British Museum). The inscription found above the scene reads, "Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a *nîmedu*-throne (standing-chair) while the booty taken from Lachish passed in review."³ Only one siege of Lachish is recorded in the Assyrian records, and only one is found in Scriptures.

Scriptures and Josephus point out that, in the 14th year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib came against the fortified cities of Judah and began capturing them (Parallel Corpora A).⁴ As the result of these victories, King Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib, while the latter was at "Lachish," submitting to the Assyrian and paying tribute.⁵ After this submission, the Assyrian king disregarded the treaty and sent a large force against Jerusalem anyway.

And the king of Assur (Assyria) sent the tartan (*turtānu*), and the chief of the eunuchs, and Rabshakeh FROM LACHISH to King Hezekiah, with a heavy force, to Jerusalem. (2 Kings, 18:17)

And the king of Assur sent Rabshakeh FROM LACHISH to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah with a great army. (Isa., 36:2)

After this, Sennacherib the king of Assur sent his servants towards Jerusalem. And HE WAS AGAINST LACHISH and all his power was with him. Against Hezekiah the king of Judah who was in Jerusalem and unto all Judah that were in Jerusalem belonged this saying: Thus states Sennacherib, king of Assur (Assyria), . . . (2 Chron., 32:9–10)

But, when the Assyrian received the money, he paid no regard to the agreement he had made; instead, while he himself took the field against the Egyptians and Ethiopians, he left behind his general Rapsakēs (Rabshakeh) with a large force, and also two other commanding officers, to sack Jerusalem. (Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1)

Rabshakeh (i.e., the chief cupbearer or chief butler),⁶ in the name of Sennacherib, requested much more than tribute. He wanted Hezekiah to submit

³ AS, p. 156, no. xxv; ANET, p. 288 (4); ANETP, #371–373.

⁴ 2 Kings, 18:13; Isa., 36:1; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1 §1.

⁵ 2 Kings, 18:14–16; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1 §§2f.

⁶ SEC, Heb. #7262 (7227 & 8248); DB, p. 550. In Scriptures and Josephus this title is used as a personal name of the general, and correctly so. When men rose in rank to such an office they often acquired the office title as their own name (e.g., the office of Pharaoh in Egypt). It was common practice in the ancient world to refer to the individual by his title-name.

his entire nation to an exile into another distant land.⁷ When Hezekiah, under the advice of Yahweh via the prophet Isaiah, refused, the Assyrians blockaded the city. To report Hezekiah's defiance, "Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that HE HAD TRAVELED FROM LACHISH."⁸ It was largely this army, which had been sent to Jerusalem under the leadership of Rabshakeh, that would shortly thereafter be destroyed on the night of Passover.⁹

These data mean that Sennacherib was stationed at Lachish both at the time that Hezekiah agreed to pay tribute and at the time that Sennacherib sent a large military force to blockade Jerusalem. When Rabshakeh returned from Jerusalem, he discovered that Lachish had been captured and that the king's main army had now moved on to Libnah. Later, the army that Sennacherib had stationed at Jerusalem under Rabshakeh was destroyed.

According to the two-invasion scenario, the events at Lachish must be divided between two campaigns.¹⁰ Kemper Fullerton, for example, argues that it was just coincidence that Sennacherib had made his headquarters at Lachish during both invasions of Judah. He then reasons that, because Sennacherib's dealings with Hezekiah happened from Lachish during both invasions, this coincidence accounts for the confusion of the two separate campaigns in the present form of our biblical narrative.¹¹

Fullerton's view is difficult to justify and cannot be substantiated by any known piece of evidence. Scriptures plainly set forth that both the paying of tribute and the force sent against Jerusalem under Rabshakeh occurred while Sennacherib was laying siege to Lachish. At the same time, nowhere is there a source that states that Lachish was the chief headquarters during his western campaigns. It was only one of many cities seized and conquered. We must agree with Eberhard Schrader when he concludes:

Yet it is hardly to be supposed that Sanherib [Sennacherib] on both occasions made exactly the same spot his head-quarters, and also that Hezekiah despatched envoys to him both times just at the moment when the Great King was staying at this place, no earlier and no later!¹²

These events are all centered around the conquest of Lachish. The Scriptures refer to both Hezekiah's payment of tribute and Sennacherib's

⁷ 2 Kings, 18:13f. The act of deportation and exile was a common political tool used by the Assyrians to control rebel populations (CIOT, 2, p. 5). Assyria, for example, had just a short time before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah exiled the entire nation of Israel into distant countries (2 Kings, 15:27–31; 17:1–6; 18:9–12; Jos, *Antiq.*, 9:14:1, 10:9:7, 11:5:2, *Table*, 9:16).

⁸ 2 Kings, 19:8.

⁹ In Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4f, he cites Berosus, the Chaldaean historian, that Rapsakēs (Rabshakeh) was the leader of the destroyed Assyrian army.

¹⁰ See references in above n. 1.

¹¹ BS, 63, pp. 616–618.

¹² CIOT, 1, p. 306.

sending of troops against Jerusalem as part of the same siege and conquest of Lachish. The Assyrians similarly refer to only one conquest of Lachish. The evidence, therefore, points to only one invasion, the campaign in 701 B.C.E.

Hezekiah's Illness

The episode of Hezekiah's illness gives our next confirmation of one invasion. This story immediately follows upon those speaking of the destruction of the Assyrian army and begins with a direct reference back to that same time, i.e., "in those days."¹³ Dated by the *Ascension of Isaiah* to Hezekiah's 15th year, we are told that Hezekiah became sick and was about to die.¹⁴ After praying to Yahweh, a sign was given to the king predicting that the sun would return 10 steps (hours) on the sundial. This sign would verify that in 3 days Hezekiah would recover from his illness and would also live yet another 15 years.¹⁵ Since Hezekiah reigned only 29 years,¹⁶ this evidence proves he was near the end of his 14th year or at the very beginning of his 15th year of reign at the time that the sign was given. Scriptures specifically note that it was in the 14th year of Hezekiah that Sennacherib invaded Judah.¹⁷ This 14th year of Hezekiah, accordingly, was the same year in which the third campaign of Sennacherib began. The end of Hezekiah's 14th or the beginning of his 15th year, therefore, is indicated as the time of the sign.

This dating is further verified by the subsequent mentioning of Merodach-Baladan (Berodach-Baladan), king of Bit-Yakin in Babylonia, who wrote Hezekiah a letter after he had heard that the latter had "recovered" from his illness.¹⁸ Merodach-Baladan ruled the city of Babylon from 721/720 to 710/709 B.C.E., spring reckoning, after which King Sargon of Assyria forced him to flee to Elam.¹⁹ Merodach-Baladan, the king of Bit-Yakin, again came to the throne of Akkad and the city of Babylon for 9 months in 703/702 B.C.E.²⁰ Once more he was forced out, this time by Sennacherib. He was succeeded in Babylon by Belibni, a client of Sennacherib's who reigned from 702/701 to 700/699 B.C.E., spring reckoning.²¹

Before Belibni's 3rd year, apparently as a result of Sennacherib's defeat at Jerusalem, and in conjunction with Merodach-Baladan (who was still ruling Bit-Yakin in Babylonia),²² Belibni revolted from Sennacherib.²³ It was during this period that Merodach-Baladan wrote to Hezekiah. In 700 B.C.E. Sennacherib conducted his fourth campaign, setting out against the districts of Babylonia. He defeated Belibni and marched against Merodach-Baladan, who

¹³ 2 Kings, 20:1; Isa., 38:1; 2 Chron., 32:24.

¹⁴ Ascen. Isa., 1:4; 2 Kings, 20:1; Isa., 38:1; 2 Chron., 32:24; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1 §25; S.O., 23.

¹⁵ 2 Kings, 20:1–11; Isa., 38:1–8; 2 Chron., 32:24; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1 §§25–29.

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

¹⁷ See above n. 4.

¹⁸ 2 Kings, 20:12–19; 2 Chron., 32:27–31; Isa., 39:1–8; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:2.

¹⁹ ABC, pp. 73–75; CAW, pp. 7, 42; ARAB, 2, §§31–38.

²⁰ CAW, p. 43; ABC, p. 77.

²¹ CAW, p. 43; ABC, p. 77; ARAB, 2, §§263, 273.

²² ARAB, 2, §§241–243, 313–315.

²³ CAW, p. 43; ABC, p. 77.

once more fled to Elam. Sennacherib then placed his own son, Assur-nadin-shumi, on the throne of Babylon.²⁴

We also know that Merodach-Baladan was dead by 694 B.C.E., for at this time, during Sennacherib's eighth campaign, we find Merodach-Baladan's son, Nabu-shumishkun, now sitting on the throne of Bit-Yakin.²⁵ It is evident, therefore, that the period of Hezekiah's illness cannot be associated with any invasion by the Assyrians after 694 B.C.E.

With the time firmly established as to when Hezekiah recovered from his illness, we now must return to the promises attached by Yahweh to his recovery. To the promise of an additional 15 years to Hezekiah's life, Yahweh adds:

And I shall deliver you and this city out of the hand
of the king of Assyria, and shall defend this city for
my own sake, and for the sake of David, my servant.
(2 Kings, 20:6; cf. Isa., 38:6)

Yahweh gives Hezekiah an assurance of a delivery at the very same time he has granted him 15 more years of life. His words, thereby, are placed within the context of Sennacherib's third campaign in 701 B.C.E.

The question now arises, "If Hezekiah had bought off the king of Assyria by paying tribute, and the king of Assyria victoriously returned home, as the two-invasion advocates contend, why would Yahweh need to deliver the city out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" If the king of Assyria was being bought off with tribute, Hezekiah would not require Yahweh's intervention. If the king of Assyria had already been paid off, there was no need for Yahweh's delivery. Furthermore, if Yahweh was going to deliver Hezekiah before he paid tribute, Hezekiah would not have paid the tribute. No matter which way it is constructed, the details make no sense unless there was just one campaign against Judah by Sennacherib. When Hezekiah paid tribute, Sennacherib simply disregarded the agreement and sent troops against Jerusalem anyway.²⁶

Josephus and the Seder Olam

Josephus and the Seder Olam (the latter being an important source document for the Talmudic writers) also understood that there was but one campaign by Sennacherib against Hezekiah. Josephus, for example, writes that it was during the 14th year of Hezekiah that Sennacherib marched against him and took "all the cities of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin."²⁷ When Sennacherib "was about to lead his force against Jerusalem also," Hezekiah sent word to the Assyrian king promising tribute if he would do no harm and would retire from the Jewish kingdom.²⁸ The Assyrian king agreed to the terms and gave his sworn pledge:

²⁴ ARAB, 2, §§241–243, 313–315, 324, 325; CAH, 3, pp. 65f; ABC, p. 77.

²⁵ ARAB, 2, §§252–254, 356–357.

²⁶ Wellhausen writes, "Notwithstanding the recently ratified treaty, therefore, he demanded the surrender of the city, believing that a policy of intimidation would be enough to secure it from Hezekiah" (PHAI, p. 482).

²⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1.

²⁸ Ibid.

So Hezekiah, being persuaded by this offer, emptied his treasuries and sent the money in the belief that he would be rid of the war and the struggle for his throne. And when the Assyrian received the money, HE PAID NO REGARD TO THE AGREEMENT HE HAD MADE; instead, while he himself took the field against the Egyptians and Ethiopians, he left behind his general Rapsakēs (Rabshakeh) with a large force, and also two other commanding officers, to sack Jerusalem. (Jos., *Antiq.* 10:1:1)

The 1st century C.E. Jewish priest Josephus, accordingly, understood the story in Scriptures as referring to one campaign. Josephus adds that after Sennacherib had failed in his war effort against Egypt, he returned to Jerusalem. While there, his army was destroyed outside the walls of the city.²⁹ Again the evidence demonstrates only one invasion.

The Seder Olam agrees with this scenario. It notes, "The 3rd day of Hezekiah's illness was (the time of) Sennacherib's downfall."³⁰ The event of Hezekiah's illness, his recovery 3 days later, the sign of the sun returning ten steps (hours), and Sennacherib's downfall, which accompanied the destruction of his Assyrian army, were understood as all part of the same event.³¹ As previously demonstrated, Hezekiah's 3-day illness occurred in the 1st month of his 15th year and, therefore, during the time of Sennacherib's third campaign.

Assyrian Records Reflect a Defeat

Sennacherib's accounts of his conquest of the cities of Judah and his reception of tribute from King Hezekiah during his third campaign read as a great victory. Yet a closer look at the context, form, and style of these records indicates that, in truth, the Assyrian king suffered a humiliating defeat at Jerusalem. Sennacherib writes:

As for Hezekiah, the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, and the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number,—by leveling with battering-rams and by bringing up siege engines (?), by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels and breaches (?), I besieged and took (those cities). 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep, without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil.

(Hezekiah) himself, like a caged bird, in Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut up. Earthworks I threw up

²⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1–4.

³⁰ S.O., 23.

³¹ Ibid.

against him,—the one coming out of his city gate I turned back to his misery.³² The cities of his, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bel, king of Gaza, I gave (them). I diminished his land. I added to the former tribute, and laid upon them the giving (up) of their land (as well as) imposts—gifts for my majesty.

As for Hezekiah, the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him, and the *Urbi* (shock troops)³³ and his mercenary (or “picked”) troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him.

In addition to 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver,³⁴ [there were] gems, antimony, jewels, large *sandu*-stones, couches of ivory, house chairs of ivory, elephant’s hide, ivory (teeth), ebony (?), boxwood (?), all kinds of valuable treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians, [which] he had [them] bring after me to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute and to accept servitude, he dispatched his messengers.³⁵

Lying within this boast, expressed especially by what is not said and by the chosen order of the events, comes forth what really happened.

To begin with, Sennacherib’s lengthy discussion of Hezekiah and Judah points to the fact that one of the main efforts of his expedition was to defeat this rebel.³⁶ His records clearly refer to Hezekiah as one of the main leaders of the entire western revolt.³⁷ Hezekiah’s treason would certainly not go unpunished. Assyrian policy for leaders of revolts was severe. During the third campaign,

³² This statement shows that the earthworks were thrown up against the various city gates of Jerusalem, and therefore were not siege works. It is now recognized that this statement refers only to a blockade of the city and not to a siege or assault against it (e.g., BS, 63, pp. 592, 626, n. 50). The fact that the Assyrians only blockaded the gates confirms the prophecy given by the prophet Isaiah that the Assyrians would neither enter into the city, build siege mounds against it, or make an assault with arrows or shield (2 Kings, 19:32–34; Isa., 37:33–35).

³³ That *Urbi* is an Aramaic and Hebrew term for shock troops, see AHJP, p. 142.

³⁴ The 300 talents of silver (2 Kings, 18:14), plus all the silver found in the house of Yahweh (2 Kings, 18:15), represent the 800 talents of silver reported in the parallel Assyrian accounts.

³⁵ AS, p. 32–34, 3:18–49, cf. p. 70, 1:27–32.

³⁶ This detail is supported by the F2 Bull Inscription and the Nebi Yunis Inscription, which in both cases only mention the overthrow of the countries of Sidon and Judah for the third campaign of Sennacherib (AS, p. 77, l. 20–22, p. 86, l. 12–15).

³⁷ That Hezekiah was the rebel leader in his region is demonstrated when the people of Ekron, who were allied with Judah, willingly turned their own king, named Padi, a loyalist to Assyria, over to Hezekiah, who kept him imprisoned at Jerusalem (AS, pp. 31f, 2:73–77, 3:8–17; pp. 69f, l. 22–27). This detail is in accordance with the fact that Hezekiah had conquered and was

Luli, king of Sidon, fled to Cyprus rather than fall into Sennacherib's hand.³⁸ Sidka, king of Ashkelon, and his family—minor figures in the revolt and not even referred to as rebels but leaders who simply did not submit fast enough—were deported to Assyria.³⁹ The governors and nobles of Ekron, meanwhile, co-conspirators with and loyal to their leader, Hezekiah,⁴⁰ men who had “committed sin (rebelled),” were murdered and their bodies hung on stakes around the city.⁴¹ Hezekiah could expect no less.

In light of an expected punishment, it is noteworthy that Sennacherib makes his readers believe that the history of this expedition only continued up to the point where Hezekiah had paid tribute. The Assyrian blockade, where earthworks were placed at the gates of the city of Jerusalem to prevent people from leaving or entering, is made to appear as if it resulted in this tribute. In reality, as reported by Scriptures and Josephus, Hezekiah sent the tribute to Sennacherib before the Assyrian army even arrived to begin their blockade of Jerusalem.⁴² This convenient reordering of events indicates that Sennacherib's true effort to overthrow and punish Hezekiah had not been realized.

The next question naturally arises, “If Sennacherib and his huge army devastated most of Judah and then blockaded the city of Jerusalem, and as a result received tribute from Hezekiah, why does he not report capturing this capital city?” Certainly, if Hezekiah had submitted, he would have been required to throw open his gates. The reason can only be that Sennacherib failed in this effort.

It is true that a long blockade and siege would have been probable in order for the Assyrians to take Jerusalem. It took 1½ years for Nebuchadnezzar II to accomplish the same task over a century later,⁴³ and it took 3 years for Shalmaneser to take her sister city Samaria only a few years previous.⁴⁴ Yet this obstacle never stopped the Assyrians before.⁴⁵ In addition, the countless host of Egyptians and Ethiopians, sent to aid the rebels, had just been defeated.⁴⁶ Sennacherib was secure on all fronts and nothing prevented him from leaving

ruling over the Palestim country (2 Kings, 18:7f; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:13:3 §275). The second indication comes with the number of cities attacked by Sennacherib in Judah. He reports the overthrow of only eight cities in Phoenicia (AS, p. 29, 2:38–44) and five cities belonging to the king of Ashkelon (AS, pp. 30f, 2:60–72). Yet for Judah he lays claim to the conquest of “46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood” (AS, p. 32, 2:18–20, p. 70, l. 27–28). Also see AHI, p. 283, where Bright refers to Hezekiah as a “ringleader in the revolt”; BS, 63, pp. 585, 589f, does the same; JTEH, p. 154, where George Adam Smith calls Hezekiah the “head of this coalition.”

³⁸ AS, p. 29, 2:37–40, pp. 68f, l. 18–19.

³⁹ AS, p. 30, 2:60–72, p. 69, l. 20–22.

⁴⁰ AS, p. 30, 2:73–77, pp. 69f, l. 22–23.

⁴¹ AS, pp. 30f, 2:78–3:17, pp. 69f, l. 23–27.

⁴² 2 Kings, 18:13–17; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1 §§1–4.

⁴³ 2 Kings, 25:1–8; Jer., 39:1–3, 52:1–13; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:7:4–10:8:2.

⁴⁴ 2 Kings, 18:9–12; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:1.

⁴⁵ Besides the siege of Samaria (above n. 44), another example for this region is the siege and blockade of Tyre by Shalmaneser III. After retiring from his initial attack he set up blockades at the river and the aqueducts to prevent the Tyrians from drawing water. Menander, cited by Josephus, informs us that the Tyrians endured this state of affairs for 5 years (Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:2).

⁴⁶ AS, pp. 31f, 2:78–3:7, p. 69, l. 22–25.

behind a large siege force while he tended to other affairs. The Assyrian failure to press the blockade and begin a siege against the ringleader of the revolt, therefore, indicates a disaster of major proportions.

Furthermore, if Sennacherib had made peace with Hezekiah during his third campaign, as the two-invasion hypothesis reasons, he would have boasted of forgiving and returning Hezekiah to his throne.⁴⁷ An oath of loyalty to the Assyrian king would also have been in order. Neither do we find the usual procedure followed by the Assyrian kings which would have Hezekiah grab hold of and kiss the feet of his Assyrian overlord as a demonstration of submission.⁴⁸ The act of kissing the Assyrian king's feet is exactly what was required of the other monarchs who did submit during this campaign.⁴⁹ Sennacherib was unable to make such claims because, when he left Jerusalem, Hezekiah was still in revolt and had actually gained freedom from the Assyrians. All Sennacherib could do at this point was put a good face on what ultimately was a great defeat.

Sennacherib's records also conveniently leave out the fact that he had abandoned the war against Egypt and Ethiopia. Having already proclaimed his conquest of a "countless hosts" of Egyptians and Ethiopians at Eltekeh, his next effort would have been to seize the Egyptian delta. The solution regarding why this invasion is not mentioned comes with the fact that, as both Herodotus and Josephus note, a large part of his army was struck down by a plague at Pelusium, Egypt.⁵⁰ Subsequently, as Scriptures and the Chaldaean historian Berosus inform us, this first disaster was followed by an additional one. This time, the Assyrians suffered major losses from a plague that struck the remainder of Sennacherib's army outside the walls of Jerusalem.⁵¹ These losses were so severe that Sennacherib had no option but to return home. We must agree with Schrader when he concludes:

Contemptuous reference is made to Hezekiah's being shut up in Jerusalem by Sanherib [Sennacherib] like a bird in its cage. It is also specially remarked that he had compelled Hezekiah to deliver up Padi, had forced the Jewish king to pay a large sum of tribute, and lastly had received from him through an envoy a vow of submission. He does not intimate by the faintest syllable that he had been obliged to retire

⁴⁷ For example, as Sargon forgave Ullusununu the Manni (ARAB, 2, §§10, 56, 147–149), and pardoned the people of Gurgum (ARAB, 2, §§29, 61).

⁴⁸ For example, ARAB, 2, §§70, 144, 149, 169, 210, which demonstrate that kissing the feet of the Assyrian king was part of the act of surrender.

⁴⁹ AS, p. 30, 2:50–60.

⁵⁰ Herodotus, 2:141; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

⁵¹ 2 Kings, 19:35; Isa., 37:36; 2 Chron., 32:21; Berosus, quoted in Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4f (§§20f), fulfilling 2 Kings, 19:32–34; Isa., 37:33–35. The plague mentioned at Pelusium and the illness of Hezekiah both reveal that plagues had appeared in this general area at the time. Also see Chap. III, n. 36.

from Jerusalem without effecting his object. And it is for this very reason that he purposely shifts the chronological order of events and ends with a reference to the rich tribute, as though this set the seal to the whole narrative.⁵²

Conclusion

The evidence clearly demonstrates that the ancients believed in only one invasion of Judah by Sennacherib—the third campaign of Sennacherib. This is the understanding of the authors of 2 Kings, Isaiah, and 2 Chronicles, as well as extra-biblical sources like those of Josephus and the Seder Olam. The Assyrian records, by their transparent attempt to make a defeat look like a victory, also accommodate the history found in Scriptures. These records indicate that some sort of dramatic calamity was suffered by the Assyrian army at the end of Sennacherib's third campaign. This disaster prevented the Assyrians from laying their hands upon Hezekiah, the chief rebel of the Judah-Palestia region, and from gaining entry into his wealthy capital city, Jerusalem.

⁵² CIOT, 1, p. 301.