

Defects in the Second Invasion Hypothesis

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

The two-invasion hypothesis suffers from numerous defects. When pressed with the demand for proof, its advocates admit that any real evidence is lacking. Rather, its premise is a matter of interpretation and possibilities. An examination of the reasoning process and the interpretations of evidence used to support this second-invasion hypothesis reveals that it has little merit. What are presumed as “contradictions” between various ancient sources simply do not exist. Rather, the charge of confusion arises because the ancient accounts do not agree with the two-invasion reconstruction of events. As we shall demonstrate, it is not the ancient writings that fall short but the modern interpretations and reconstructions which have been superimposed upon these ancient records.

Why the Two-Invasion View?

With the ancient accounts so forcefully speaking of only one invasion, why does the concept of two invasions persist? Further, why are there so many variations in the two-invasion view? Leo L. Honor correctly observed that with the story of Sennacherib’s third campaign, “the different conclusions which different writers have reached are not due to differences in the sources employed by them, but to different constructions put upon them.”¹ These different reconstructions have resulted in unceasing disagreement. As John Bright points out:

The question has been a subject of debate for more than a century without any consensus having been arrived at; it is probable that none will be, short of the discovery of fresh extra-Biblical evidence—say, of Sennacherib’s official annals for approximately the last decade of his reign (if such ever existed).²

The heart of these many reconstructions lies in the weight given to the different pieces of evidence. Those advocating two invasions, for example, prefer to give less credit to the scriptural accounts and rely more heavily upon their own understanding of what they believe the Assyrian records affirm.³

¹ SIP, p. xiv.

² AHI, p. 296.

³ This tendency has become well-established on both sides of the debate, to the point of *reduction ad absurdum*. For example, J. Meinhold, who adheres to the view of only one invasion, nevertheless concludes that the story of the defeat of the Assyrian army was fabricated to satisfy the prophecies of Isaiah (DJJ). Fullerton, who supports two invasions, meanwhile, feels it

These historians often concluded that the three scriptural accounts are “confused” or “mistaken,” that they contain “many legendary elements” and reveal “irreconcilable” contradictions, especially when compared with the Assyrian reports.⁴ Secondary ancient sources, like Josephus, Berosus, Herodotus, and the Seder Olam, are almost entirely ignored.

The case for two invasions of Judah rests entirely upon a single issue: the fact that Scriptures mention an army led by Tirhaqah, the king of Kush (Ethiopia), coming against Sennacherib just prior to the destruction of the Assyrian army at Jerusalem.⁵ Without any historical documentation or support, and based solely upon a nearness of time and their similarity in name, King Tirhaqah of the Scriptures is incorrectly identified with Khu-Re’ Nefertem Taharqa,⁶ the Ethiopian monarch of Egypt’s Dynasty XXV, who held a throne in Egypt from 689 until the end of 664 B.C.E., February dating,⁷ Psamtik I succeeding him at the beginning of 663 B.C.E.⁸

With this presumed identification in hand, it is then reasoned that the mentioning of Tirhaqah demonstrates that the destruction of Sennacherib’s army could not have taken place until sometime after this Ethiopian monarch rose to power over Egypt, noting that he was far too young in 701 B.C.E. to lead such an important military campaign. The third campaign of Sennacherib, which matches the 14th year of Hezekiah, therefore, cannot be the same event. It is then assumed that these two separate invasions were falsely merged or telescoped into one story. All other information is rearranged to fit this interpretation.

In later chapters and appendices we shall deal in detail with the issue regarding Tirhaqah, who is the foundation upon which the entire two-invasion hypothesis is built. Before this, we must concentrate upon the validity of the evidence and the chief arguments used to defend and support the results of identifying

necessary to give more credit to the accounts found in Scriptures (BS, 63, pp. 602–607). By doing so, Fullerton realized that he had exposed himself “to attack from two quarters”: from those who contend that the prophecies are not genuine, and from those who will charge him with being influenced by purely dogmatic and subjective considerations, because, as he acknowledges, he is reluctant to admit that Isaiah played such an utterly misleading part in this history (ibid., pp. 606f). One should immediately take notice of the bias against the history found in Scriptures. This bias is so ingrained that historians find the need to apologize for even considering any part of the Scriptures as truthful. Yet the pagan Assyrian documents, written with an Assyrian bias and in the context of their own religious preference, are perceived as nearly unimpeachable.

⁴ E.g., CAH, 3, p. 73; LAP, p. 178; SIP, p. 40; HE, 6, p. 149; BS, 63, pp. 578, 587, 604f.

⁵ 2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9.

⁶ The blind acceptance that the Tirhaqah of the Scriptures is to be equated with the Taharqa of Dynasty XXV is nearly universal, held by historians on both sides of the issue. Yet this widely accepted assumption is, in fact, the Achilles’ heel of the entire debate.

⁷ For Egyptian regnal dating during this period, see HdO, pp. 458–469, and its chart on pp. 271–283. Keep in mind that the dating of the kings during this period is 1 year too early, see below n. 8, and see App. C.

⁸ For the calculations of Nefertem Taharqa’s dates, see App. E through G. He is correctly dated by CAW, p. 81; CAH, 3, pp. 287f. For other versions, see LAP, pp. 177f; AATB, p. 21; AUSS, 4.1, p. 3; SIP, pp. 24f, 51f; HE, 6, pp. 148–152; AHI, pp. 297f; BS, 63, pp. 608f; etc. Many have misdated Nefertem Taharqa 1 year too early based entirely upon “a single piece of evidence” (see Leo Depuydt in HdO, p. 267), a single passage in the Demotic Papyrus Berlin 13588. For a discussion of this text, see App. C.

Tirhaqah with the pharaoh of Egypt holding that same name. Our approach will serve to isolate the discussion to the real issue: the identification of Tirhaqah.

Lack of Evidence

The two-invasion hypothesis, unlike the one-campaign view, is erected upon a lack of evidence. Remarkably, even the historians who advocate the two-invasion hypothesis acknowledge that they have no real proof, scriptural or secular, to backup their argument. The idea is built entirely upon “a possibility.” When it comes to the actual evidence for this supposed second campaign, its advocates come up empty-handed. Nothing, for example, is found in the extant *Assyrian Annals* or the *Babylonian Chronicles* that either mentions or even implies a second campaign.

Neither do Scriptures nor any ancient Jewish or Christian work make any reference to a second invasion by Sennacherib. Quite to the contrary, these versions of the story fall under the heading, “in the 14th year of Hezekiah.” There is not even a suggestion in Scriptures or by later Jewish and Christian writings that the Assyrian king successfully returned home after receiving Hezekiah’s tribute or that a new campaign against Jerusalem had later begun. At no time, for example, do these records indicate the passing of years between Sennacherib’s reception of the tribute from Hezekiah, during Sennacherib’s third campaign, and the time when he sent Assyrian troops against Jerusalem who were subsequently destroyed. Neither is anything said to the effect that it was during another year of Hezekiah’s reign that the Assyrian king “once again” came against Judah or Jerusalem.

This lack of internal evidence is further demonstrated by the interpretations as to where one should draw the line in the stories found in Scriptures. For example, some separate these two invasions at the end of 2 Kings, 18:16, and Isaiah, 36:1,⁹ others at 2 Kings, 19:8.¹⁰ The basic idea is to associate the Assyrian version of a successful campaign (Sennacherib’s third campaign) with the humiliation of Hezekiah dated to his 14th year. A break in the story is therefore sought to begin the second and unsuccessful invasion of Judah years later. To accommodate this logic, the abridged version in 2 Chronicles, 32, and secondary sources, such as Josephus, which demonstrate no breaks, are discredited or ignored.

The case for two campaigns, accordingly, relies upon insinuation and the absence of information. The idea of a second invasion is nothing but a conjecture which presumes an identification of Tirhaqah. It is a concept built out of “possibility” and not historical fact. As Delbert Regier points out, “the key to their interpretation is the lack of records from 689 till 681.” He continues:

Since all of Sennacherib’s military activities are not recorded in his annals, there is THE POSSIBILITY of a second invasion. . . . The general admission of those

⁹ JTEH, p. 165; AUSS, 4.1, pp. 23–28.

¹⁰ LAP, p. 178; AATB, p. 474.

who hold to the two-invasion view is that this second invasion after 690 is an argument from silence so far as the Assyrian records are concerned.¹¹

A possibility is not proof; it is only wishful thinking. Even John Bright, who supports the two-invasion hypothesis, after relating his reconstruction and analysis of the event, was forced to conclude:

Let it be repeated that what has been said does not add up to proof. The matter must be left open. But in view of the foregoing lines of evidence, serious consideration should be given TO THE POSSIBILITY that II Kings has telescoped the accounts of two campaigns, one in 701 (ch. 18:13–16), the other later (chs. 18:17 to 19:37).¹²

Indeed, the hypothesis of a second invasion will not stand up to critical analysis. As the well-respected historian Hayim Tadmor concludes:

However, the supposition of two campaigns cannot be upheld. There is no independent evidence from Assyrian sources that could lead us to postulate an additional campaign against Judah on the part of Sennacherib. On the contrary, there is reason to suppose that Sennacherib had no further interest in the west after his campaign of 701. He had abandoned his father's expansionist policies, concentrating on his enormous building projects, especially the transformation of Nineveh into his new capital. Sennacherib consciously acquiesced in the *de facto* independence of Judah and the Philistine cities, being content with their remaining vassal states as a buffer between Assyria and the growing power of the Nubian dynasty.¹³

"Nevertheless," as the noted Assyriologist Daniel Luckenbill states, "its alternative which holds that one campaign, that of 701, is all we need to posit, is easily defended."¹⁴ Indeed, in our last chapter we have already demonstrated overwhelming evidence that there was but 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. That leaves us with the popular speculation regarding the identity of the Ethiopian king named Tirhaqah, who was mentioned in the scriptural story as the opponent of Sennacherib. In later chapters, we shall

¹¹ SIJ, pp. 23, 24.

¹² AHI, p. 307.

¹³ AHJP, p. 144.

¹⁴ AS, p. 13.

identify this Tirhaqah and prove that he was not Khu-Re' Nefertem Taharqa, as popular theory would have it. Before addressing that issue, we must first complete our examination of other evidence showing that the two-invasion hypothesis is untenable.

Propaganda in the Assyrian Records

Another major error in the two-invasion scenario is the reliance on the Assyrian records as if these were the only true primary sources. This approach relegates the three accounts in Scriptures to a secondary role, charged with confusion and errors. The versions found in Scriptures, therefore, are seen as needing corrections and adjustments to bring them into harmony with what the Assyrian inscriptions say. In reality, there is no conflict with the Assyrian inscriptions, only with the two-invasion reconstruction of those records.

The propaganda found in the Assyrian records makes no mention of a great defeat of Sennacherib during his third campaign. Rather, it speaks of this campaign as a great victory. Therefore, it is argued, the context of these records support the idea that such a defeat did not take place until later. The records of this later defeat, the hypothesis reasons, inflicted during the time of Nefertem Taharqa, king of Egypt, have either been lost or were never written because the Assyrians did not feel obligated to report it.

Nevertheless, the circumstance that Sennacherib did not mention a defeat during his third campaign is evidence of nothing. In fact, such a practice was in keeping with official Assyrian policy. In several cases, for example, the Assyrians are known to have lied about the outcome of a battle, claiming victory in the face of defeat.¹⁵ Even Sennacherib is blatantly guilty of this charge. For his eighth campaign, he reports a great victory over the Akkadian and Elamite forces at Halulê.¹⁶ He claims that he "decimated the enemy host with arrow and spear," speedily "cut them down and established their defeat," and "the terror of my battle overturned them."¹⁷ Those who escaped and fled for their lives, when found by his troops, were cut "down with the sword."¹⁸ In another report of this battle, Sennacherib claims that he not only defeated them but cut down 150,000 enemy troops.¹⁹ The report of the Babylonian chroniclers, on the other hand, who give a much more neutral view of these wars, proclaims:

¹⁵ An example would be the well-known attempt by Sargon, the father of Sennacherib, to cover up his defeat by Humban-nikash, king of Elam. Sargon claims that he "shattered the might of Humban-nikash" and "defeated" the Elamite (ARAB, 2, §§4, 55, 92, 99, 118, 134, 137, 183). The Babylonian chroniclers, meanwhile, who gave a much more evenhanded appraisal of such matters, report, "Humban-nikash, king of Elam, did battle against Sargon, king of Assyria, in the district of Der, effected an Assyrian retreat, (and) inflicted a major defeat upon them" (ABC, p. 73, 1:31-35). Interestingly, many of those holding to the two-invasion hypothesis admit to these Assyrian fabrications (e.g., BS, 63, pp. 588, 626, n. 49; AHI, p. 300). Yet they still fail to give the proper weight and consideration to this policy when using the Assyrian inscriptions in conjunction with the history found in Scriptures. This failure reflects their underlying bias against Scriptures.

¹⁶ AS, pp. 41-47, 5:17-6:35, pp. 87-89, l. 27-55.

¹⁷ AS, p. 45, 5:80, 6:1, p. 47, 6:26f.

¹⁸ AS, p. 47, 6:35.

¹⁹ AS, pp. 88f, l. 47f.

In an unknown year [it was 691 B.C.E.], Menanu mustered the armies of Elam and Akkad, made an attack upon Assyria at Halulê and defeated Assyria.²⁰

Luckenbill summarizes Sennacherib's version by stating that it is "the finest rhetorical smoke-screen that has ever been thrown around a monarch retiring with dignity from a situation that had proved to be too much for him."²¹ Sennacherib, accordingly, for his own political purposes, was not shy about reorganizing the facts. His inscriptions must be judged with this proclivity in mind.

André Parrot notes, "The annalists of Nineveh were subject to a censorship and the official records did not tell everything."²² Bright warns, "Assyrian kings did not customarily celebrate reverses, and they often falsified to depict defeats as victories; one ought never to trust their boasting uncritically."²³ Otto Weber, likewise, points out:

All official historical literature of the Assyrians culminates in the excessive praise of the king, and has as its only aim the transmission of this praise to posterity. It is clear that under these circumstances the credibility of royal inscriptions is subject to suspicion. Not one royal inscription admits a failure in clear words; instead we know of cases in which an obvious defeat has been converted into a brilliant victory by the accommodating historiographer. In most cases, however, it was common practice to pass in silence over any enterprises of which the king had little reason to boast. Even where the king was successful, one must not fail to deduct much from the enthusiastic battle reports, and one should not forget to remain critical toward unexpected transitions or sudden breaks in the narrative where the reader hoped to hear much more.²⁴

The reports of Sennacherib's third campaign fit this characterization exactly. As we have already demonstrated in our last chapter, the internal evidence left by Sennacherib's scribes shows that they rearranged the order of events. The failure of Sennacherib to either punish Hezekiah or to enter Jerusalem, as well as other glaring omissions found in these records, testify that a great disaster befell his army before his goals could be realized. Julius Wellhausen observes, "Sennacherib's inscription speaks only of the first and

²⁰ AS, p. 17; ABC, p. 80, 3:16–18, rendering the last verse, "He effected an Assyrian retreat."

²¹ AS, p. 17.

²² NOT, p. 62.

²³ AHI, p. 300.

²⁴ DLBA, pp. 227f; English translation in AUSS, 4.1, p. 13, n. 41.

prosperous stage of the expedition, not of the decisive one which resulted so disastrously for him, as must be clear from the words themselves to every unprejudiced reader."²⁵ Jack Finegan was forced to admit:

In view of the general note of boasting which pervades the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings, however, it is hardly to be expected that Sennacherib would record such a defeat. Perhaps the fact that he claims to have shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a caged bird" but does not claim to have taken the city is evidence that he did suffer discomfiture there.²⁶

One cannot claim the lack of Assyrian records as a foundation to set aside hard evidence from Scriptures. The Assyrian annalists left us a report of only one campaign by Sennacherib against Judah. To postulate another in an effort to accommodate a hypothesis is unwarranted. Neither can the Assyrian records be taken at face value. Their hidden agenda and political purpose must be taken into account. It is a fact that the Assyrians politically did not wish to record for posterity a defeat of any one of their monarchs. The fact that Sennacherib would only mention the victorious parts of his third campaign is in keeping with this attitude. On the other hand, the Judahites would certainly feel justified in handing down to their descendants the history of the great victory given to them by Yahweh over their Assyrian foes.

Why Not Invade Egypt?

Another problem with the two-invasion hypothesis surfaces with motive. Why did Sennacherib stop where he did during his third campaign? Having defeated a "countless host" of Egyptian and Ethiopian forces, conquering Sidon, Ashkelon, Ekron, and numerous other cities, as well as devastating Judah, why would he suddenly retreat after receiving tribute from Hezekiah? As Regier comments:

The primary issue involved here is the problem of why Sennacherib stopped where he did and returned home. Since these hold that the miraculous deliverance of II Kings 18:17–19:35 took place during the second invasion, it has been necessary that they construct a legitimate reason for Sennacherib's retreat in 701.²⁷

Siegfried Horn, in response to this dilemma, makes the following typical rationalization:

News from the east, where Elam and Babylonia were ever-festering sores in the Assyrian empire, MAY

²⁵ PHAI, pp. 483f.

²⁶ LAP, p. 178.

²⁷ SIJ, p. 22.

HAVE been of such a nature that it seemed wise to be satisfied with the voluntary submission of Hezekiah, without losing precious time which a prolonged siege and attack of the strongly fortified city of Jerusalem would have taken.²⁸

Not only is this reasoning a fabrication that is built without any historical foundation but it sets against the evidence. If the immediacy of the Babylonian and Elamite problem had been of such magnitude that the Assyrian king felt the need to vacate his western campaign in 701 B.C.E., why did Sennacherib wait an entire year (until 700 B.C.E.) to undertake a campaign against Babylonia?²⁹

Some conclude that Sennacherib may have simply not wanted to invade Egypt.³⁰ This excuse is also unreasonable. Sennacherib knew that trouble would continue in the districts of Syria and Judah as long as the nearby Egyptian and Kushite power exerted itself. That Sennacherib, after defeating a great Egyptian and Kushite army, would, on a whim, give up an opportunity to rid himself of his archenemy and control of at least the northeastern gateways into the Egyptian delta is hard to justify. A defeated Egypt was simply far too tempting a prize. Indeed, the very fact that Assyria invaded Ekron and Judah, allies of Egypt and Kush and considered by the Egyptians as members of their empire, meant that Assyria and Egypt were already at war.

Assyrian motives are clearly spelled out by the actions of their previous and subsequent kings. Sargon (721/720–705/704 B.C.E., spring reckoning), the father of Sennacherib, for example, considered his provinces as extending west to the river of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish).³¹ In his 2nd year Sargon defeated a large Egyptian army at Rapihu (Raphia), under the command of an Egyptian *turtānu* (chief military official) named Re'e, who had come to the aid of the king Hanūnu of Gaza in Palestia.³² During Sargon's 6th year (716/715 B.C.E.), he received a gift of twelve horses from "Šilkanni, king of Muzri (Egypt)."³³ Then, in his 7th year (715/714 B.C.E.), Sargon reports receiving tribute from "Pir'u (Pharaoh), king of Muzri (Lower Egypt)."³⁴

Sargon's threat against Muzri and *Meluh̄ḥa* (Lower and Upper Egypt), was so great that when Iamani, the king of Ashdod, fled from Sargon to Egypt, the

²⁸ AUSS, 4.1, p. 16.

²⁹ For the fourth campaign, see AS, pp. 34f, 71. That the fourth campaign occurred in 700/699 B.C.E., the 3rd year of Belibni, the king of Babylon, is confirmed by the Babylonian chroniclers (ABC, p. 77, 2:36–31). Neither is there any immediacy about Babylonia in the records of either the third or fourth campaigns of Sennacherib. If Sennacherib was concerned about meeting a Babylonian threat during his third campaign he would not have waited until the next year. Even then there was no reason for him to expunge all of his troops from the blockade and planned siege of Jerusalem.

³⁰ E.g., SIP, pp. 17f.

³¹ ARAB, 2, §§54, 82, 96, 97, 99, 102, 118, 183. See Chap. XI, n. 27.

³² ARAB, 2, §§5, 55, 80, 92, 99, 118. The name Re'e was previously mistranslated as Sib'e (CAH, 3.1, p. 576).

³³ JCS, 12.3, pp. 77f. Šilkanni is Assyrian for Osorkon (JCS, 12.3, pp. 77f; TIP, p. 143).

³⁴ ARAB, 2, §§18 (cf. 12–18), 55.

Kushite king of Meluhha (Upper Egypt), finding Iamani to be a troublemaker, cast him into chains and sent him back to Assyria.³⁵ Two seals inscribed with the praenomen of Shabaqo (707–693 B.C.E.), the Kushite pharaoh of Egypt at that time, were found among the tablets of the Royal Library at Nineveh, Sargon’s capital city.³⁶ As Budge points out, these “appear to have been attached to some object which Shabaqo sent from Egypt to Sargon.”³⁷ What gifts were attached are unknown, but the fact that gifts were being sent at all reflects the status of Egypt with Assyria during this period. The Egyptians and Ethiopians were behind many of the intrigues and revolts against Assyria in western Asia. Gifts and the return of Iamani were undoubtedly performed to help keep the peace and to avoid any provocation which might lead to an Assyrian invasion of Egypt or her allies.

Egypt and Kush were not, during Sargon’s time, occupied countries or directly subject to Assyria. Nonetheless, they had paid tribute and gifts to the empire on their northeast border. Therefore, when the alliance of Judah and a great part of Palestia changed from Assyria to Egypt during the latter part of Sargon’s reign,³⁸ Sennacherib could only interpret the interference of Egypt and Ethiopia into the western provinces of the Assyrian Empire as an attack upon Assyria. This act was in itself a cause for war between the two empires.

Esarhaddon (681/680–669/668 B.C.E.), the son of Sennacherib, certainly followed up with what Sargon had started. During his 7th and 10th years, he invaded northern Egypt. Esarhaddon drove all the way to Memphis in his 10th year, appointing new kings over that country.³⁹ He died 2 years later of an illness while marching on Egypt after that country had revolted.⁴⁰ Assurbanipal (668/667–627/626 B.C.E.), the grandson of Sennacherib, not only twice conquered Lower Egypt but pressed on into Upper Egypt, sacking Ni’ (Thebes) and causing the Ethiopian king of Egypt to flee back to Nubia.⁴¹ There can be little doubt that it was a mainstay of Assyrian foreign policy to eliminate the troublesome Egyptian and Ethiopian opposition.

Leo L. Honor, although not considering the evidence from Scriptures, as well as the secondary historians like Josephus, Berosus, and Herodotus, nonetheless, on the Assyrian records of Sennacherib’s third campaign alone, concludes:

The object of the campaign is not stated. It is fair, however, to assume, even though it can not be stated with any degree of certainty, that Egypt was

³⁵ ARAB, 2, §§62f, 79f. For the identification of Meluhha (Upper Egypt), see Chap. XI, pp. 173–177 & 175, n. 29.

³⁶ HE, 6, pp. 127f; DRNB, p. 156; AHOE, 3, p. 284. For Shabaqo’s reign, see Chap. X & XII, and App. E, F, & K.

³⁷ HE, 6, p. 128.

³⁸ See above Chap. IV, n. 20.

³⁹ ARAB, 2, §§554–559, 563f, 580, 583–585; ANET, pp. 302f (1. iv), p. 303 (2. rev.).

⁴⁰ ANET, pp. 302f (1. iv), p. 303 (2. rev.).

⁴¹ ARAB, 2, §§770–775, 776–778, 844–846, 875, 892, 897, 900–907; ANET, p. 303 (2. rev.).

Sennacherib's ultimate objective. Egypt was the ultimate goal of Assyria's ambition in the West, not only because of the incentive of rich booty and spoils, but also because Assyria knew that its control in the West would not be complete as long as Egypt remained independent. (The frequent rebellions in the West, 735, 727, 720, 711 and 701, were all due to Egyptian intrigues and stimulations).⁴²

Sennacherib was positioned at Lachish when he set out to oppose a combined Egyptian and Ethiopian force.⁴³ The road through Lachish was ideally positioned to watch the Egyptian frontier and to block any Egyptian assistance to Jerusalem.⁴⁴ There were only two roads by which the Egyptians and Kushites could counterattack: the Palestim coastal road and the Shur road, which stretched through the north Sinai desert.⁴⁵ From Lachish the Assyrians could meet an advance from either highway (Map 1).

Keeping an eye on the Egyptian reaction to Sennacherib's invasion explains his choice of an invasion route, i.e., marching south along the coastal road, the international highway, from Sidon to Ashkelon. This important roadway continued on into Pelusium, being the main highway into and out of Egypt. It was the most likely route that any Egyptian army would use. This highway had to be seized and perpetually secured.

At Ashkelon, Sennacherib made a sharp turn inland against Judah, one of his main objectives. He positioned his battalions at Lachish and, while he personally attacked that city, he directed other units against the walled cities of Judah. The inland cities of Palestia that belonged to Ekron, meanwhile, were encircled. This path allowed the Assyrian king an excellent position to oppose the Egyptian and Ethiopian forces, regardless from which road they came. At the same time, he could block off any attempt of his enemies to join forces with their Judahite allies.

The Scriptures also reveal that Sennacherib's original intent was to oppose the Egyptians. In Rabshakeh's first message to Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem, he scorns the possibility that the Judahites were hoping on assistance from the Egyptian chariots and horsemen.⁴⁶ Josephus states:

Was it perhaps, he (Rabshakeh) asked, because of the Egyptians, and in the hope that the Assyrian army had been beaten by them? (Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2)

⁴² SIP, p. 31, n. 69.

⁴³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1; cf. 2 Kings, 18:17; Isa., 36:2; 2 Chron., 32:9.

⁴⁴ SIP, p. 15; CIOT, 1, p. 299, 2, p. 1.

⁴⁵ There were only two roadways out of Egypt by which any Egyptian army could arrive in Judah or Palestia (Map 1). The first was the Palestim road, which extended from Pelusium on the northeast corner of Egypt along the coast to Gaza in southern Palestia. From Gaza the highway stretched north along the coast to Phoenicia. This was the best and fastest roadway eastward out of Egypt. The second, the Shur road, was much longer and far more treacherous. It left Heroo (Ismailia), located above Lake Timsah, and stretched through the north Sinai and Negeb deserts until it came to Beer-Sheba, located in southern Judah.

⁴⁶ 2 Kings, 18:19–24; Isa., 36:6–9.

These words reflect the belief that a conflict with Egypt was both imminent and expected by the Assyrians. Later on in the story, shortly before the plague struck the Assyrian army that was surrounding Jerusalem, Yahweh relates the attitude of the Assyrian king with regard to his numerous conquests. He cites the Assyrian king as saying, "I will dry up the rivers of Egypt with the sole of my feet."⁴⁷ This statement reveals the intention of Sennacherib and the Assyrians to invade Lower Egypt where the seven great river branches of the Nile flow.

That the primary purpose of Sennacherib was to invade Lower Egypt is also affirmed by the secondary sources. Josephus, for instance, writes that "the king of Assyria failed in his attack upon the Egyptians and returned home without accomplishing anything."⁴⁸ Berosus names Sennacherib and tells "how he ruled over the Assyrians and how he made an expedition against all Asia and Egypt."⁴⁹ Herodotus, likewise, speaks of the time when King Sennacherib came "against Egypt" and laid siege to Pelusium,⁵⁰ the important Egyptian border city located on the main road from Palestine to Egypt.⁵¹ Pelusium was the main gateway city on the "road into Egypt" from the east.⁵²

To march all the way into Palestine, inside the Egyptian Empire and near the border of Egypt, with a massive army, defeat "countless hosts" of Egyptian and Ethiopian troops,⁵³ and then not take advantage of the situation by continuing to march on Egypt is unthinkable. No better moment could present itself. It would have been the most opportune moment to change the war front from Syria and Judah to Lower Egypt. The national interest of the Assyrian Empire demanded dealing with the Egyptian threat. Only a devastating defeat of some great magnitude during Sennacherib's third campaign could politically justify a retreat.

Conclusion

The above evidence reveals that the two-invasion hypothesis has little substance upon which to be based. There is simply no hard evidence of a second invasion of Judah by Sennacherib. Not only do we lack any ancient testimony proclaiming a second invasion but all of the existing records only speak of one

⁴⁷ Isa., 37:25; 2 Kings, 19:24. The verb is pointed future by the Masoretic Text, "I shall dry up," not "I have dried up" (HPM, p. 301). Kemper Fullerton thinks that a future reading is against the context (BS, 63, p. 627, n. 62). His view is not convincing and there is no sound reason for it. Yahweh is merely informing Hezekiah of the attitude of the king of Assyria; he had already conquered many nations and was next intending on the overthrow of Egypt. This passage demonstrates that the defeat of Egypt was Sennacherib's ultimate goal.

⁴⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

⁴⁹ Cited in Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

⁵⁰ Herodotus, 2:141.

⁵¹ Pelusium (Modern *Tell el-Farama*) was located at the mouth of the easternmost branch of the Nile (Dio, 42:41; Pliny, 5:11, 12, 14, 6:33; Strabo, 16:2:33, 17:1:21, 24; Ptolemy, *Geog.*, 4:5 §10–11, Map 3 of Libya).

⁵² Herodotus, 2:141.

⁵³ AS, pp. 31f, 2:73–3:5; p. 69, *l.* 22–25.

campaign. All that is left to the advocates of the two-invasion hypothesis is the unsupported “possibility” that a second invasion might have occurred.

In order to facilitate this supposed second invasion, a bias against the authenticity and reliability of Scriptures is expressed and then an unrealistic interpretation and primacy is placed upon the Assyrian records. It is obvious that the Assyrian scribes rearranged the chronological order of events for Sennacherib’s third campaign. It is also known that it was Assyrian policy to ignore recording humiliating defeats (often rewriting a defeat as a victory). Furthermore, this propaganda dimension to the Assyrian reports of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah is simply not given its full consideration and proper weight. The very fact that Sennacherib admits that he only blockaded Jerusalem and never claims to have conquered it stands as testimony enough that he failed in one of his primary goals for his third campaign. This failure indicates an important defeat for the Assyrians, which is corroborated by Scriptures and other ancient sources.

Finally, that the Assyrians would defeat a countless host of Egyptians and Ethiopians, yet would not follow up with an invasion of Egypt, is not credible. The activities of the Assyrian kings, both before and after Sennacherib, reveal that it was a cornerstone of Assyrian foreign policy to eliminate the Egyptian and Kushite threat to their empire. Therefore, Sennacherib’s failure to seize this golden opportunity and strike a fatal blow by invading the Egyptian delta can only be explained if the Assyrians had suffered some sort of major setback during that campaign. Since only one Assyrian campaign, which ended in failure, is all that is testified to by Scriptures and other ancient writers, there is simply no reason to explain the Assyrian records by postulating a second.

PHOENICIA AND JUDAH: 701 B.C.E.



