

# **Hezekiah and Sennacherib**

**by: Mark S. Haughwout**

**From the class:**

**Nahum and the Assyrian Tradition in Biblical Prophecy**

**Visiting Professor Peter Machinist - Spring 2003**

**Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**(Rothberg International School)**

**Updated: 20 April 2016**

**Copyright 2016 - Mark S. Haughwout - all rights reserved**

**Please link to this page when quoting.**

## **Outline**

Introduction

The Historical Account Problem

Summary of the Biblical Accounts

Hezekiah's sickness

Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon

The Assyrian Account of Sennacherib's invasion

Comparison of the Accounts

Death of Sennacherib

Reconciling the Accounts

One invasion scenario

Two invasion scenario

The Jubilee

Three invasion scenario

The Chronological Problem: 701 and Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year

The Problem Stated

The Biblical Chronology

The Passover in Hezekiah's 1<sup>st</sup> Year

The Assyrian Chronology

Difficulties in the Assyrian Chronology

Proposed solutions to the chronological problem

715 BC ascension year for Hezekiah

The Length of Sargon II's reign

Alternate dates for the Eclipse of Bur-Sagale

Error in the Assyrian Chronology

Conclusion

Bibliography

## **Hezekiah and Sennacherib**

The Bible records an invasion of Sennacherib king of Assyria, in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah king of Judah. Assyrian records also give account of an invasion of Sennacherib into the land of Judah. Many scholars have noted similarities between the two accounts and desire to link them historically. However the final outcome in the Biblical record does not match perfectly with the Assyrian record. Additionally the Biblical accounts seem to place the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah in c.713 BC whereas the Assyrian record seems to be recounting events of c.701 BC. In this brief work I will firstly discuss the historical accounts and the attempts at reconciling them and secondly I will discuss the specific problem of dating Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year and Sennacherib's 3<sup>rd</sup> year to the same year. And finally I will discuss possible solutions to this problem.

### **The Historical Account Problem**

#### **Summary of the Biblical Account**

Isaiah 36:1-2 “Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.”

What follows is a discussion between the Rabshakeh and Hezekiah's servants who are on the walls of Jerusalem. The servants report to Hezekiah of the Rabshakeh's demand that Hezekiah surrender the city. Hezekiah in turn seeks the LORD via Isaiah the prophet from whom he gets this response:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land’” (Isaiah 37:6b-7)

“Then the Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish. And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, ‘He has come out to make war with you.’” (Isaiah 37:8-9a)

Sennacherib then sends a threatening letter to Hezekiah telling him not to think

that Jerusalem will be saved. Hezekiah again seeks the LORD and Isaiah utters a long prophecy against Assyria which includes the following:

“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria:  
 ‘He shall not come into this city,  
 Nor shall he shoot an arrow there,  
 Nor come before it with shield,  
 Nor build a siege mound against it,  
 By the way he came,  
 By the same he shall return;  
 And he shall not come into this city,’  
 Says the LORD  
 ‘For I will defend this city, to save it  
 For My own sake and for My servant David’s sake’  
 Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the  
 Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose  
 early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king  
 of Assyria departed and went away, returned *home*, and remained at  
 Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of  
 Nisroch his god that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down  
 with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then  
 Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.” (Isaiah 37:33-38)

Next Hezekiah is recorded as becoming sick unto death and then recovering, by the mercy of JHVH. “At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah...” (Isaiah 39:1) Hezekiah shows all his treasures to the Babylonian envoy and Isaiah then prophesies to Hezekiah that the Babylonians will come in the future and carry all the treasure and Hezekiah’s offspring off to Babylon.

For the above summary I have relied on the account in Isaiah 36-39, since this is considered, though not by all, to be the oldest account. Parallel accounts are also found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18-20 and in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 32. Apparently the writer of Kings relied on Isaiah’s account in part and also upon other accounts (for the opposing view see Gallagher p143). This is most evident by the additional information inserted in between 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:13 and 18:17. The Chronicler seems to indicate that for his own account he relied on Isaiah’s account as well as another source. “Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, indeed they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, *and* in the book of the kings of Judah and

Israel.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 32:32) Obviously the ‘book of the kings of Judah and Israel’ is not our present day book of Kings, for the Chronicler includes the Passover celebration of Hezekiah’s day, which is not found in Kings.

### **Hezekiah’s sickness**

Following the account of Sennacherib’s invasion and subsequent retreat, the account of Hezekiah’s sickness is recorded. The text reads “In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death.” (Isaiah 38:1, cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 20:1) Isaiah the prophet tells Hezekiah he will die, but Hezekiah prays to YHVH and Isaiah comes back to him and tells him YHVH has added 15 years to his life.

Since we read in Isaiah 36:1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:13 that Sennacherib came up against Judah in Hezekiah’s 14<sup>th</sup> year and since according to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:2 (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29:1) we know that Hezekiah reigned a total of 29 years, it is assumed by most from simple math that his sickness must have been in his 14<sup>th</sup> year (14+15=29). This may be the proper understanding, especially since the simple, obvious answers are usually the best.

However, the term translated as ‘in those days’ from Hebrew is often used to mean in a large period of years. The term is בְּיָמֵי הַהֵם and is frequently used in the bible. It is used in Judges 18:1 where it is used to say that at the same time that the events of chapter 17 happened that the events of chapter 18 happened. However the events of chapter 17 may well cover a period of more than 10 years and in fact the term may refer to the whole period preceding the monarchy. This seems to be the case as it is used in Judges 17:6. Its use in Genesis 6:4 seems to apply to a time period of at least 120 years before the flood and possibly to a much larger period. In Exodus 2:11 it apparently refers to the period covering Moses first 80 years. The one thing that seems to characterize its use in these and every other place in the bible is that it refers to a general time period of unspecified length when a certain event or chain of events was happening.

Thus in the account of Hezekiah’s sickness, this term refers to the whole time period in which the events of the previous verses happened, in other words the time period from Hezekiah’s 14<sup>th</sup> year and Sennacherib’s invasion until Sennacherib’s death and the reigning of his son Esarhaddon in his place. For these are the events that are recorded immediately preceding Isaiah 38:1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 20:1. Thus the term ‘in those

days' allows for Hezekiah's sickness to have occurred any time between Sennacherib's invasion and his death in 681.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:1ff we read "Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem...and he did evil in the sight of the LORD" Thus Manasseh lived a total of 67 years. Yet are we to suppose that righteous Hezekiah lived only 54 years and this after his life was blessed to be extended by 15 years? This is 13 years shorter than his wicked son whereas Hezekiah is recorded as being one of the most righteous kings in Judah. The writer of kings wrote: "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him" (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:5)

Additionally after Hezekiah's recovery, Hezekiah wrote a Psalm recounting the event. It is recorded in Isaiah 38:10-20. In verse 10 Hezekiah says "I am (have been) deprived the remainder of my years." Psalm 90:10, the prayer of Moses, states "The days of our lives (lit. 'our years') are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Hezekiah is complaining using the Psalmist's term 'my years', in other words Hezekiah was saying he was dying in his illness before he reached his full 70 years. If Hezekiah's sickness happened at the end of his 29 year reign it would have been when he was about 54 years old. If his lifespan was extended 15 years from this point he would have lived to age 69, or allowing for partial years being added to each of these rounded figures, he would have lived to the full 70 years. Thus his lifespan would have been longer than his wicked son by 3 years and he would have not been 'deprived of his years'.

Further, since we know that Manasseh began to reign when he was 12 (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:1), he would have been born no earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah's reign. Yet if we are to say that Hezekiah wrote his Psalm (Isaiah 38:10ff) in his 14<sup>th</sup> year, how will it be explained what he wrote: "The living, the living man, he shall praise You, As I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children (lit. 'sons')." (Isaiah 38:19) How could Hezekiah tell anything to his 'sons' if Manasseh wasn't even born yet? Presumably, since Manasseh inherited the throne, he was

Hezekiah's first born. This indicates to me that Hezekiah experienced his sickness some time after he had already born sons and thus some period of time after his 17<sup>th</sup> year.

Since I have just shown that Hezekiah's illness happened some time after his 17<sup>th</sup> year, the connection that many make between his 14<sup>th</sup> year, the additional 15 years, and his 29 year reign is null. Thus Hezekiah could have been sick in his 29<sup>th</sup> year instead. At that point when he thought he was going to die, he would have set his 12 year old son on the throne. When Hezekiah recovered he would not have removed his son, but rather would have experienced a co-regency with him. The years of the co-regency were accredited to Manasseh and not to Hezekiah. Thus Hezekiah reigned 29 years by himself, He and his son reigned together 15 years and then Manasseh reigned another 30 years by himself after his 70 year old father died.

This theory also fits well with the fact that it is unlikely that a 12 year old boy would be accounted as being as wicked as the description we have concerning Manasseh. Thus Manasseh's evil deeds would have started sometime after his father's death, when Manasseh was 27 years old. The deeds of Manasseh as recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21 fit with the works of an adult, not a child. Especially when in verse 6 he makes his own son pass through the fire. Presumably this was his firstborn.

Since Manasseh had apparently sacrificed his first born, his second born would have been the one to inherit the throne. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:19 we read that Amon, Manasseh's son began to reign at age 22. This means he was born when Manasseh was about 45, and thus Manasseh would probably have had his first son in his 40's. This fits well with the idea that Manasseh started going astray at age 27 after his father's death, for it allows him 13 years to develop into such a wicked person so as to 'cause his son to pass through the fire' at about age 40.

After Hezekiah's recovery from illness an envoy from Merodach-baladan arrived to congratulate him on his recovery. The quantity of treasure that Hezekiah possessed, which he showed to this envoy from Babylon does not at all fit with the situation in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year. For in that year, according to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:15ff, Hezekiah gave the king of Assyria all his silver that was found in his house and in the house of the LORD, such that he even stripped the pillars and the doors which he had overlaid. Obviously some time would have had to pass for Hezekiah to again accumulate such a large quantity

of wealth that the Babylonian's were impressed. 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles gives us a clue as to where this wealth came from: "And when he (Sennacherib) had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter. In those days Hezekiah was sick..." (2nd Chronicles 32:21b-24a)

If Hezekiah's sickness was indeed in the 29<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, this would be ample time to regain riches and wealth.

Thus Hezekiah, according to this theory, came to power in 725/6, had his first encounter with Sennacherib in his 14<sup>th</sup> year wherein he lost his treasures, then gained new treasure afterward, as late as 697 became sick, anointed his son Manasseh as king, but then recovered and co-reigned with Manasseh until c.682/1.

I do not see a strong contradiction with 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 32:33 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 20:21 which seem to have Manasseh beginning to reign only after Hezekiah's death. The language used is similar to that of the other cases of succession to the throne recorded in the bible, yet it is not likely that the sons were only enthroned after their fathers died, rather they would have been enthroned during their father's lifetime, when their fathers sensed that death was near. This is the case with David and Solomon and was likely the usual trend. Exceptions to this trend are noted by a statement such as that found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:30: "...And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father's place." This anointing by the people instead of by the father occurred because Josiah died unexpectedly in battle with Pharaoh Necho.

The obvious problem with this theory concerning Hezekiah's sickness is that Merodach-baladan, according to the scriptures was still king of Babylon immediately after Hezekiah's recovery.

Additionally Josephus records that Hezekiah's sickness was shortly after



Sennacherib's invasion, in his fourteenth year, that Hezekiah lived 54 years and reigned 29 years. He also states that Hezekiah at the time of his sickness was childless (Ant. 10.2.1ff). Thus Josephus was apparently not familiar with any tradition that reflected the above theory.

Gallagher places Hezekiah's illness before the invasion of Sennacherib for three reasons. Firstly due to Merodach-baladan being in power as king of Babylon, secondly the promise to save Jerusalem prophesied (Isaiah 38:6) to Hezekiah and thirdly due to the quantity of Hezekiah's treasure at the time indicating that Sennacherib had not yet taken it from him (Gallagher p144 note 5).

To the first I would reply that Merodach-baladan was in power in 722-710, again in 703/4 and again was fighting Sennacherib in 700. To his second proof it is sufficient to say that the prophesy in Isaiah 38:6 would fit more logically with the period after Hezekiah paid tribute, otherwise it might seem like a failure. The promise of deliverance would more logically follow the oppression already experienced including the capturing of many cities in Judah, and Hezekiah's payment of heavy tribute, than to have come before. Concerning his third point, a simple reading of the scripture shows that Isaiah prophesied that the treasure that was shown to the Babylonian envoy would be taken to Babylon, not to Assyria. This necessitates Hezekiah's illness and the arrival of the envoy from Merodach-baladan to have occurred sometime after Hezekiah gave most all his treasure to Sennacherib. As already shown, enough time would have had to pass between Hezekiah's paying tribute and the arrival of the envoy in order for Hezekiah to regain his wealth (even though Sennacherib did not get all of the original as indicated by Isaiah 39:6).

### **Merodach-baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon**

“At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 20:12) The same account is recorded in Isaiah 39:1ff where his name is more properly spelt Merodach-Baladan. According to modern scholarship he reigned in Babylon between 721 and 710 BC, at which point he was driven from Babylon, yet apparently continued as chief of his tribe (Wiseman p162; ISBE p258). He again regained the throne for nine months in 703. (Halla p145) And then

apparently later again attempted some sort of rebellion.

The arrival of letters and a present from Merodach-baladan to Hezekiah may have occurred during the period after Merodach-baladan had re-ascended the throne of Babylon. But this is not very likely, due to the brief period he was again in power. At any rate, even this date of 703 is too early according to modern reckoning which places the invasion of Sennacherib into Judah two years later. However “in the following year (700) Sennacherib returned to Babylonia to put down a rebellion by Bal-ibni and Merodach-baladan. The former was sent to Assyria, and the latter soon afterward died. Ashurnadin-shum, the son of Sennacherib, was then crowned king of Babylon. A campaign into Cilicia and Cappadocia followed.” (ISBE volume 9 p698)

For the previous theory of Hezekiah’s sickness to work Merodach-baladan would have to be alive at very least and preferably still in power.

### **The Assyrian account of Sennacherib’s invasion**

Sennacherib’s own account of this invasion, as recorded in the Taylor Prism, is as follows:

“In my third campaign I marched against Hatti. Luli, king of Sidon...fled far overseas and perished...In the continuation of my campaign I besieged Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banai-Barqa, Azuru, cities belonging to Sidqia who did not bow to my feet quickly (enough); I conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. The officials, the patricians and the (common) people of Ekron - who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters (because he was) loyal to (his) solemn oath (sworn) by the god Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (and ) he (Hezekiah) held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he (Padi) be an enemy-had become afraid and had called (for help) upon the kings of Egypt (and) the bowmen, the chariot(-corps) and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia, an army beyond counting-and they (actually) had come to their assistance. In the plain of Eltekeh, their battle lines were drawn up against me and they sharpened their weapons. Upon a trust (-inspiring) oracle (given) by Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them...I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city...I made Padi, their king, come from Jerusalem and set him as their lord on the throne, imposing upon him the tribute

(due) to me (as) overlord...As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza. Thus I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute and the Katru-presents (due) to me (as his) overlord which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen (it), had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) w3ith ivory, nimedu-chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, box-wood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) m e s s e n g e r . " ( A N E T 1 9 5 0 p 2 8 7 - 8 )

### **Comparison of the Accounts**

Both the bible and Sennacherib's account inform us of some sort of subjugation of the Philistines by Hezekiah and both inform us that this was before Sennacherib's invasion.

Though many similarities between the Assyrian account and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:13-16 can be seen, at least one discrepancy should also be noted. Although the quantity of gold is the same, the quantity of silver is almost triple in the Assyrian account. However its easy to believe that someone fudged the numbers here, this may simply be what Harrison calls "characteristic exaggeration" (1971 p237). The important similarities include the taking of fortified cities, the taking of tribute including matching quantities of gold, the previous subjection of Hezekiah to the king of Assyria and that he rebelled

Though no mention of the devastation of Sennacherib's army is made, this is no

surprise. Harrison states "...defeats or failures were invariably ignored when chronicles were being compiled by Near Eastern nations." (Harrison p237)

It is important to note that all the events that are recorded here most likely did not happen in a single year. For example Padi's exile and arrest by Hezekiah, his being liberated by command of Sennacherib and subsequently being reinstated into power, then Hezekiah's territory being taken by Sennacherib and his giving it to Padi, seem like too many events for one year. Additionally this record states that Hezekiah sent the tribute 'later' after Sennacherib had returned to Nineveh, thus after the campaign was over. It is possible that the events of several years are recorded here.

Also it should be noted that this inscription states at the beginning that it was Sennacherib's third campaign. Yet this is not automatically equivalent to the third year of his sole reign. Nor does anything in the text imply that all the events in the text refer to his third campaign.

### **Death of Sennacherib**

The biblical account gives the impression that Sennacherib died shortly after his retreat from the land of Judah. However this may be explained away as being the fault of the reader and not the writer, in that the writer does not specify an amount of elapsed time. We the modern readers only assume that the events happened back to back. Yet a larger problem remains: "Then the LORD sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he (Sennacherib) had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter." (2nd Chronicles 32:21-23) It seems that for the author to refer to Sennacherib's death as being part of the way the LORD saved Hezekiah, that his death must have been in Hezekiah's lifetime, otherwise this statement would seem illogical.

The solution to this problem may be what I proposed above, namely that Hezekiah's sickness was in his 29<sup>th</sup> year instead of his 14<sup>th</sup>, thus allowing Hezekiah to live until 681, the year of Sennacherib's death. Even so the biblical account does not make it sound as though Hezekiah had to wait for complete deliverance from Sennacherib until the very last months of his life.

### **Reconciling the two accounts**

Many attempts have been made to understand the Assyrian and the Biblical histories in light of each other. Most attempts fall into one of the following categories:

#### **One invasion scenario**

This scenario states that the whole biblical account of Hezekiah versus Sennacherib is that which happened in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year.

This scenario is based on a few similarities between the biblical text and the Assyrian account. These include the 30 talents of gold that are recorded in both and the capturing of the cities of Judah. Also that the Philistines had become some what subjected to Hezekiah. Additionally the Assyrian account agrees with the biblical account in that it specifically excludes Jerusalem as having been captured, though this would fit into the biblical scenario at any point since the Assyrians never captured Jerusalem at any time.

The problem with this scenario is that the bible records a crushing loss for Sennacherib via the angel of YHVH killing 185,000 men in the camp of the Assyrians such that we read, "So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned, and remained in Nineveh." (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:36) After which he was killed by his sons. The statement that he 'remained' in Nineveh would indicate that due to the devastation of his army he didn't go on any more campaigns. While this would fit okay with the later part of his reign, it doesn't fit well with his 3<sup>rd</sup> year for he went on other campaigns after this, or at least it appears so.

#### **Two invasion scenario**

Many scholars claim 2 separate invasions are recorded. (Bright p298) These scholars place one invasion in 701 and the other either before or after that time. Generally 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:14-16 is considered as a separate event, usually considered to be the invasion of 701 with 18:17ff being a later invasion not recorded in the Assyrian

annals. Some also make the division of the two accounts to be at 19:9b. Other ideas for divisions are also offered. Gallagher gives a good overview of this theory and the various ways of dividing the Biblical text on pp 145-159. I refer the reader to his work in spite of his annoying habit of quoting from German sources and not providing the English translation. I will therefore only briefly touch on the subject here.

Consistent with this theory, two different events are seen recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18. Verses 13(or14)-16 are the event that happened in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year. The facts are very simple, Hezekiah had rebelled against the king of Assyria (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:7) and therefore the king of Assyria invaded at which point Hezekiah says "I have done wrong..." (18:14) and pays a heavy financial penalty to get out of trouble. Having received the penalty the king of Assyria would have no reason to continue to attack Hezekiah. Additionally at this point in time (712/13 BC according to the Biblical text) the king of Assyria (albeit Sargon II and not Sennacherib) was having trouble with the Babylonians and would have gladly settled the problems with Hezekiah by receiving financial tribute. Verses 18:17ff then record a second incident between the two kings eleven years later in about Hezekiah's 25<sup>th</sup> year (701 BC). This time Hezekiah's reaction is completely different and instead of confessing his wrong, he prepares for battle by stopping up the springs and preparing for war. This would be the account that the Chronicler also records in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 32 and that Isaiah records in chapter 36. Note that Chronicles does not record a date for the events of this chapter.

This idea has immediate appeal due to the fact that it seems illogical that after Hezekiah paid such heavy tribute saying "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay" (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:14b), that the king of Assyria would still want to continue his attack. The natural assumption after reading through 18:16 is that the king of Assyria was pacified and went home. These brief verses fit perfectly with the Assyrian account, whereas the rest of the Kings account through Sennacherib's death in 19:37 has no parallel in the Assyrian account, with the possible exception of the reliance upon Egypt in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:21.

One possible way to divide the text is at 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:9b by saying that the king of Assyria returns at that point to Nineveh. This is based on the translation of the Hebrew word וישב to mean 'and he returned' (home). Normally the word here is translated 'and

he again' (sent messengers). Either way, the parallel account in Isaiah 37:9 does not even contain the word at all. However the fact that the messengers were sent with a letter (Isaiah 37:14) seems to indicate that the high officials that the king of Assyria had previously sent were not used, but rather a long distance communication may be indicated.

The two invasion scenario may find support within the biblical text at 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:36 where it is stated "So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh". By stating that he remained in Nineveh seems to indicate that he did not personally go on any more military campaigns. The author could have simply said that he didn't come into the land of Judah again, but instead he said he remained at Nineveh. Yet from Sennacherib's records we know that he had other campaigns into other lands after his initial invasion into Judah. However we also know that he did not personally take part in two of the later campaigns (Honor p5).

There may be evidence of a second invasion by Sennacherib in one of the Bas-Reliefs which recounts the taking of Lachish. Hallo states "Some scholars, however, have argued that if the siege of Lachish was considered important enough to warrant the fashioning of a series of sculptures, it would have certainly been deemed important enough to have been mentioned in the Annals. Since there is no mention of Lachish in any of the inscriptions, the siege of Lachish, in accordance with this view, could not have taken place during any of the campaigns described in the Annals." (Honor pp9-10) Thus according to Honor, they must consider the Biblical account of the attack on Lachish to be the gloss of a later editor or for Lachish to have been attacked twice by Sennacherib, the first time he won easily and thus it wasn't important enough to record and the second time Lachish resisted harder and was only taken after a long siege. I would note however that the Biblical account does not say Sennacherib took Lachish, but rather simply that he attacked it and apparently had to leave the attack to go to Libnah.

If one fully accepts the Biblical record and the two invasion scenario, the first invasion in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year is then dated to 712/3 BC when Sennacherib is crown

prince and the second invasion is that of 701 BC in Hezekiah's 25<sup>th</sup> year. Hezekiah's sickness then occurs after this 25<sup>th</sup> year and perhaps not event until his 29<sup>th</sup> year (see above). Accordingly the Assyrian records are viewed as referring at least in part to events of Sennacherib's days as crown prince and general in the army.

### **The Jubilee**

The two invasion scenario may also find support from 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:29 (cf. Isaiah 37:30) which is apparently the description of sabbatical year and a Jubilee year. "This shall be a sign to you: You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, And in the second year what springs from the same; Also in the third year sow and reap, Plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them." The Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year are described in Leviticus 20. Though Jones noticed this, he apparently misunderstood the scriptures and calculated the Jubilee year as occurring every 49 years (Jones pp173-6). The Jubilee was supposed to happen every 50 years (Lev. 25:10) from the time the children of Israel entered the 'promised land'. Though the date of the exodus is much debated, most scholars will admit that the picture that Masoretic text presents is that the Exodus occurred in 1491 or 1492 BC. Thus calculations based on the MT places the entrance into the land of Canaan around 1451. Assuming that was the understanding the Jews of Hezekiah's time had of their own history, regardless of its accuracy (which is debated by some scholars), they would have considered 702 BC as a Jubilee year and 703 as a sabbatical year. This then places the biblical account of deliverance from the Assyrians in 703 or only 2 years different from the Assyrian schools reckoning. These two years could easily be accounted for by simply shifting the date of the exodus 2 years, which would not be impossible, or by shifting the Assyrian record 2 years. Either way the Jubilee may point to a second invasion several years after the first invasion in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year. On the other hand one might say this Jubilee theory points to Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year as occurring in 701 and thus only one invasion, and thus a co-regency with his father during the period of the deportation of Israel.

The problem with the idea that the bible describes two invasions is that while this might be possible in the account in Kings, the other records (Isaiah and Chronicles) seem to make the two events into one.

### **Three invasion scenario**



The three invasion scenario sees two invasions of Sennacherib accounted in the bible as does the two invasion scenario above, yet states that neither is that which is recorded in the Assyrian annals. This view is promoted by Floyd Nolen Jones. While this and a number of other scenarios may be possible due to our relative lack of information of all the events that transpired in Sennacherib's reign, it does not have much appeal. Its main point is that there is no overlap at all in the biblical and Assyrian accounts and each is to be treated separately. It also holds that the dates assigned to Sennacherib's reign are not accurate, in other words, Sennacherib was reigning as king, coregent or crown prince in 712 BC (Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year).

### **The Chronological problem 701 and Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year**

#### **The Problem Stated**

Unfortunately, none of the above theories of how many invasions happened, in any way solves the problem of chronology regarding Sennacherib being called king of Assyria and having his first or only campaign in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year according to the Bible. The Bible seems to firmly place the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah in or about 713 BC. Yet Assyrian records seem to firmly place Sennacherib's first invasion into Judah in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year or later and thus in 701 BC which would have been at least Hezekiah's 25<sup>th</sup> year.

Note that for the purpose of this paper the year for the Babylonian destruction of the temple at Jerusalem is considered to be 586 BC. Other dates have been proposed and may actually be more credible. This date is chosen due to its wide use in many scholarly works.

#### **The Biblical Chronology**

The Northern kingdom of Israel is recorded in the bible as being deported in Hezekiah's sixth year. From that point to the destruction of the temple, the biblical chronology provides about 134 years which is the amount (within a year) of time that is arrived at from extra-biblical records. This number is arrived at by simply adding the remainder of Hezekiah's years to the lengths of the reigns of the Judean kings who succeed him down to the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah. The quantities given for the length of these reigns are the same in the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles.

The chart below gives the reigns of the Judean kings for this period.

<b>King</b>	<b>Reigned</b>	<b>1 and 2 Kings</b>	<b>1 and 2 Chronicles</b>
-------------	----------------	----------------------	---------------------------

Hezekiah	29	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:2	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29:1
Manasseh	55	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:1	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33:1
Amon	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:19	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33:21
Josiah	31	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 22:1	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34:1
Jehoahaz	3 months	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:31	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:2
Jehoiakim (Eliakim)	11	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:36	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:5
Jehoiahcin	3 months (+10 days in Chron)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 24:8	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:9
Zedekiah	11	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kings 24:18	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:11
<b>Total</b>	139 years, 6 months, 10 days		

Since the deportation of the Northern tribes happened in Hezekiah's 6<sup>th</sup> year, the bible provides a total of 133 years 6 months and 10 days, or roughly 134 years between the deportation of Judah in 586 and the deportation of the Northern kingdom of Israel which is thus placed in 720 (a one year variance with modern scholarship).

The following chart reflects what the biblical record seems to indicate concerning historical dates, and is provided for reference. No attempt has been made to reconcile this chart to extra-biblical sources for which it may or may not agree. The date of the Exodus is based on the record in I Kings 6:1 of 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon's fourth year and also upon simply adding the reigns of the kings of Judah. Only 4 years of co-regency are allowed for around the time of Jehoshaphat.

<b>Year BC</b>	<b>Acting Kings / Leader</b>	<b>Event /Situation</b>
1491/2	Moses 80	Egypt suffers plagues, Exodus, Pharaoh dies,
1451/2	Joshua	Invasion of Canaan, Jericho and Ai destroyed
741	Ahaz	
725	Hezekiah 1 <sup>st</sup>	
720	Hezekiah's 6 <sup>th</sup>	Israel deported, normally dated 721
712	Hezekiah's 14 <sup>th</sup>	Sennacherib invades, receives tribute
696	Manasseh	
641	Amon	
639	Josiah	
608	Jehoahaz	Reigns 3 months, removed by Pharaoh Necho
608	Jehoiakim's 1 <sup>st</sup>	Son of Josiah installed by Pharaoh Necho
605 or 604	Jehoiakim's 4 <sup>th</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Daniel deported. Nebuchadnezzar crowned.
597	Jehoiachin	reigns 3 months and is taken to Babylon
597	Zedekiah's 1 <sup>st</sup>	
586	Zedekiah's 11 <sup>th</sup>	Destruction of Jerusalem and temple

Based on the 586 BC date for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the

chronology developed from the Biblical accounts seems to place the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah in 720 BC, and thus the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah in 712. However most modern scholars add an additional year to this chronology and thus the 6<sup>th</sup> of Hezekiah is placed by them in 721 and his 14<sup>th</sup> year in 713. This difference of one year is not very critical and various methods could be used to account for it. The most likely explanation is that when Pharaoh Necho removed Jehoahaz and put him in prison in Hamath, that some time passed till Necho appointed Jehoiakim as king. This is evidenced in two ways. Firstly it is a good distance to Hamath and back. Secondly and more importantly we read that Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he became king, yet Jehoiakim his brother was 25 years old when he became king. Since these two were brothers and since the firstborn was the normal heir to the throne, some time must have passed for Jehoiakim to reach an older age upon his ascension than that of his older brother Jehoahaz, when he was placed on the throne. The difference between their birthdates need not be great if they were born to different wives. Thus a 2 year interregnum may have occurred. This would allow for the 133 ½ years that the bible seems to account between the deportations of Israel and Judah to grow to 135 ½ years. Of course the idea that Jehoiakim was the younger brother is not explicitly stated in the Bible, yet even if he wasn't, some time may have passed before Necho made him king.

What is problematic is the age at which Ahaz becomes father to Hezekiah. "Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he reigned 16 years in Jerusalem..." (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16:2). "So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and was buried...Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place." (16:20) "Hezekiah the son of Ahaz...was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem..." (18:1-2). Apparently Ahaz was only 11 years old when he had Hezekiah. If that isn't difficult enough, apparently Hezekiah may not have been the oldest son. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16:3 Ahaz is recorded as making 'his son pass through the fire'. (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 28:3 makes 'son' plural) It is generally thought that this practice refers to the sacrificing of the firstborn son to a deity. Additionally 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 28:7 states "Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's (Ahaz's) son...". This was in war with Pekah king of Israel. If this was a son who was killed in battle, a longer overlap than 3 years must be assumed between Pekah and Ahaz for Ahaz to have

had a son old enough to go to war. At any rate this son would seem to have been the firstborn and therefore due to these two factors, Hezekiah would have been born in Ahaz's single digit years!! The solution to this may be that Hezekiah was a son by marriage. The idea being that all of Ahaz's sons died childless (in war and human sacrifice), so that Hezekiah became Ahaz's adopted heir by marriage to one of his daughters. Though this does not directly affect our current study, it does affect the impression one gets of the reliability of the text at this point and is therefore included.

### **The Passover in Hezekiah's first year**

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29 and 30 we read of the Passover celebration that occurred in the first year of Hezekiah's reign. It seems obvious that it was held in the first year of his reign due to its being held in the 2<sup>nd</sup> month instead of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, since in the first month the priests were still busy cleansing the temple, as we read "Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. So they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished" (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29:17) Since the cleansing lasted till the sixteenth of the month, it was already too late to celebrate the Passover which was supposed to happen on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the first month. So they celebrated the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the second month, based on Numbers 9:6-13. More importantly, the cause of the delay of the Passover to the second month was that the priests had not all sanctified themselves (29:34 and 30:3). Apparently all the events of chapter 29 happened in either the first month or the early part of the second, as it is written: "...So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly." (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29:35b-36) The statement in both 29:34 and 30:3 about a sufficient number of priests not having sanctified themselves, chronologically places the two verses in the same time period.

The fact that Hezekiah invited the Northern tribes to participate is strong indication that they had not yet experienced the deportation of 721 BC and were still living as a separate nation. "And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the

house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem...So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan..." (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 30:1-5)

“So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed at them and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 30:10-11) Verse 18 additionally mentions Issachar. The fact that the Northern tribes were invited and were present at the Passover is clearly seen throughout chapter 30. The fact that they are still described by their individual tribal names further testifies to the fact that the deportation during Hezekiah’s sixth year had not yet happened.

Josephus also testifies that Israel was not yet removed and still had her king (Ant. 9.13.265). The placement of Hezekiah’s Passover of his first year in the period preceding the deportation of the Northern tribes is internal evidence that he was in power before 721BC and thus supports the other straight forward claims to such by the biblical writers.

In the message Hezekiah sent by the hands of the runners, we do read of some of the Israelites from the Northern tribes having been deported at the hand of the kings of Assyria, but this refers to earlier events, especially the following account “In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15:29) This account was about 3 years before Hezekiah’s Passover according to the text.

It should be noted however that during Josiah’s Passover years later, he too gathers people from the Northern tribes, yet at that time the kingdom of Israel had already been uprooted. Additionally during his cleansing of the land he goes to the territory of certain Northern tribes. See 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34:6,9,21 and 35:18.

## The Assyrian Chronology

The Assyrian Chronology for this period is largely based on Eponym lists. These fragmentary records have been checked against Ptolemy's canon, for these two sources overlap in the period from 747-648 BC. (Jones p152) Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. and was a Greek astronomer who believed in a geocentric system for the universe. He carried out his main work in Alexandria Egypt between 127 and 145 AD. (EB 18 p812) He was not concerned with history, but rather used the names of Assyrian kings to mark years in history in line with his interest in astronomical records.

A footnote accompanying the Bur-Sagale eponym states that an eclipse of the sun took place in the month of June. By calculating the year of this eclipse, a supposed absolute date in Assyrian chronology is obtained. Then upon this date is hung the chronology of the Assyrian monarchs whose relative reigns are organized according to Ptolemy's canon and the Assyrian Kings Lists (for Shalmaneser 5<sup>th</sup> and earlier). The generally accepted date for the eclipse of Bur-Sagale is June 15 763 (ABD IV p735). From the Anchor Bible Dictionary and Shigeo Yamada's work I have assembled the following generally accepted chronology:

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Monarch</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1075-934	-	a period of decline for Assyria
934-912	Ashur-dan 2 <sup>nd</sup>	
911-891	Adad-Narari 2 <sup>nd</sup>	
890-884	Tukulti-Ninurta 2 <sup>nd</sup>	
883-859	Ashurbanipal 2 <sup>nd</sup>	
858-824	Shalmaneser 3 <sup>rd</sup>	
823-811	Shamshi-Adad 5 <sup>th</sup>	
810-783	Adad-narari 3 <sup>rd</sup>	
782-773	Shalmanesar 4 <sup>th</sup>	records are wanting here
772-755	Ashur-dan 3 <sup>rd</sup>	records are wanting here
754-745	Ashur-nerari 5 <sup>th</sup>	records are wanting here
744-727	Tiglath-pileasar 3 <sup>rd</sup>	
726-722	Shalmaneser 5 <sup>th</sup>	conquers Israel
721-705	Sargon 2 <sup>nd</sup>	

704-681	Sennacherib	
680-669	Esarhaddon	
668-627	Ashurbanipal	last significant king
612	Fall of Assyria to Babylon	End of the Assyrian Empire

Note that the Assyrian Kings Lists (AKL) only provide information until Shalmaneser 5<sup>th</sup> and are therefore useless in determining the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib. One of the best preserved, the Khorsabad List, specifically states that it itself is a copy of an earlier list. (Yamada p3)

### **Difficulties with Assyrian Chronology**

A. Bernard Knapp in his article on Mesopotamian Chronology in the ABD states “For the historical era, there exist long lists of actual year names, king lists, historical chronicles, building inscriptions, and other written records-often based on or mentioning astronomical observations-that allow *absolute* dating. Yet it must be borne in mind that, for much of Mesopotamian history, accurate dates BC are hard to come by; sources often seem to contradict one another. More recent dates are almost always more accurate and have a lower margin of error.” (ABD IV p715)

Although the Assyrian chronology is often considered absolute, several scholars have noted significant problems or deficits in the Assyrian records.

Shanks states “We have no Assyrian historical records from Shalmaneser 5th's reign, but the general sequence of events can be reconstructed from the Eponym Chronicle, itself poorly preserved at this point, in combination with information that survives third-hand from the annals of Tyre.” (Shanks p171) He goes on to state “Nothing of the Tyrian annals survives in the original Phoenician, but they were translated into Greek by an obscure Hellenistic author known as Menander of Ephesus or Pergamon. Menander's work has also been lost, but portions of his translation of the annals of Tyre are cited in the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. For the background to the fall of Samaria, the relevant passage in Josephus is Antiq. 9.283-287.” (Shanks p327 footnote 107 from p171)

Sargon 2<sup>nd</sup> boasts of having besieged and captured Samaria; however the bible states that it was Shalmaneser. The Biblical account has been shown to be the correct one by comparison to the Babylonian Chronicle, which is a record of annual events begun in the middle of the eighth century BC. (Shanks p172) Here again reliance on the Assyrian records to date events in the ancient near East is entirely misleading. Since Sargon lied about this it is also very possible he lied about being the one to deport the Israelites.

Hallo states concerning the history of Assyria in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century “The principle historical source for these years is the Babylonian Chronicle, recently augmented by important new finds. Assyrian royal records are sparse, and even the order of the eponyms is uncertain after 648.” (Hallo p142-3)

Ptolemy’s Canon, which is the basis for reconstructing the Assyrian Eponyms in their proper order marks the years 705-703 as ‘kingless’ (CAH III p62)

### **Proposed solutions to the chronological problem**

#### **715 BC ascension year for Hezekiah**

Based on the modern understanding of Assyrian Chronology combined with two verses that mention Hezekiah’s 14<sup>th</sup> year (which are apparently supported by the account of his illness), one would be inclined to place Hezekiah’s ascension year in c.715 BC. In an attempt not to contradict the scriptures that clearly place Hezekiah’s ascension year before the deportation of the Northern tribes in 721 BC (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:10), some scholars claim some sort of co-regency of Hezekiah with his father Ahaz (Halo p140). This co-regency they claim would have lasted about 10+ years, however this theory seems to throw all the biblical and extra biblical data into nonsense. For according to it Ahaz would have been king of Judah at the time of the deportation of the Northern tribes, and Pekah would have been king of Israel, and apparently Hoshea would never have existed. In other words, to move Hezekiah’s reign around by 10+ years is to force all the other reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel to be likewise adjusted. While this may actually work okay for earlier kings, it is a major problem concerning the reigns of the kings who lived after Hezekiah. Upon close investigation one will realize that those 10+ years will have to be subtracted from Manasseh’s and/or Josiah’s reigns, for the other kings who



reigned after Hezekiah have reigns that cannot be adjusted to be shorter, at least not by more than a few months.

However, upon close examination of the chronological records in Kings, one will find that Pekah king of Israel finished his reign in Ahaz's 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year and Hoshea who murdered Pekah and took the throne didn't come to power until Ahaz's 12<sup>th</sup> year. Since Hezekiah is recorded as coming to power in Hoshea's 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Hoshea likely came to power very late in Ahaz's 12<sup>th</sup> year. Additionally Ahaz seems to have come to power late in Pekah's 17<sup>th</sup> year. Thus there appears to be some sort of 10 year difficulty in the biblical text. Coincidentally this the approximate number of years by which the Biblical account and the Assyrian account differ. Yet I have not found any satisfactory or even less than satisfactory way to implement these years in such a way as to cause Hezekiah to begin his reign in 715 instead of 725/6.

### **Length of Sargon's rule**

The chronological difficulty between the bible and the Assyrian records is centered around the length of the reign of Sargon II between Shalmaneser V who was in power in Hezekiah's 6<sup>th</sup> year and Sennacherib who was in power in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year. The bible only allows a gap of 8 or perhaps 9 years for Sargon II to rule and actually makes no mention of him by name. Since according to the Assyrian records, Sennacherib's invasion was in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year (or later) then only 5 or 6 years (or less) are allowed for Sargon II to rule. The commonly accepted Assyrian chronology gives him about 16 years (ABD IV p744) One solution might be to allow for a co-regency between Sennacherib and Sargon. Though Assyrian scholars may balk at such an idea, it is no more far-fetched than the co-regency between Hezekiah and Ahaz that some claim. Such a scenario would place Sennacherib's third year within the lifetime of his father Sargon II and thus allow for it to also be in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year. Thus Sennacherib would have come to power about 716 as coregent and then became sole regent in 704 upon his father's death. However direct proof for such is lacking, just as it is for the claim of a co-regency between Hezekiah and Ahaz. Perhaps Sennacherib is called king in retrospect though at the time he was only crown prince at the head of the army. We may have an example of this at Daniel 1:1 where Nebuchadnezzar is apparently called king even though at the time he had not yet been crowned. Additionally in Daniel 7:1 and 8:1 and

also in the Babylonian records Belshazzar is called king even though his father Nabonidus was the real king. This was due to his father placing him on the throne while he was away. The idea that Sennacherib was at the head of the army invading Judah in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year (711) seems reasonable since Sargon was apparently in the East dealing with Merodach-baladan in Babylon in that year, and it is known that Sennacherib did indeed lead a separate army in the north while Sargon was fighting at Babylon (Olmstead pp148,156).

### **Alternate dates for the Eclipse of Bur-Sagale**

The generally accepted date for the eclipse of Bur-Sagale, upon which the Assyrian chronology is hung and thus considered absolute, is June 15 763 (ABD IV p735). However other eclipses have also been seen as being the one recorded here. The first is June 24, 791 and the second is June 13 809 (Jones p153). The June 24, 791 eclipse is worthy of consideration. This would change the dates for the Assyrian chronology by 28 years earlier and thus Sennacherib's death would be not in 681 but rather in 709 BC. This fits attractively with the biblical account which seems to have him dying shortly after his invasion which the bible seems to place in 713.

The obvious problem with this scheme is the Assyrian record placing Sennacherib's invasion in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This would place his third year in 729, or before Hezekiah came to power. Yet for Hezekiah's first few years, Shalmaneser V was in power in Assyria. Additionally time must be allowed for Sargon II to reign between Shalmaneser V and Sennacherib.

Interestingly, placing Hezekiah's sickness in his 29<sup>th</sup> year instead of his 14<sup>th</sup> year (see above) places the miracle of the shadow moving back on the sundial of Ahaz at the very same time period that the Babylonian/Assyrian records first mention a 364 ½ day solar year as opposed to their previous calculation of 360 years which had been accepted by them for many centuries. Perhaps something cosmic did happen at that time. Such may be a suitable topic for future research, in a different field, but is beyond the scope of this work. However it needs be mentioned here since the movement of the shadow on the sundial seemed important enough for both the Isaiah and Kings accounts to record and it is obvious that such a thing would have huge impacts on chronological calculations based on astronomical records such as the eclipse of Bur-Sagale which has been considered to

be the eclipse of June 15, 763 BC and upon which absolute dating of the Assyrian chronology is arrived at. Even so, while moving this astronomical event to an earlier date may help reconcile earlier Assyrian chronology to that of the Bible, it does nothing to help our problem, namely the length of Sargon 2<sup>nd</sup>'s reign.

### **Error in the Assyrian Chronology**

Of course the other and obvious possibility is that this particular Assyrian record is misdated. That is to say, that all of it pertains to 713 BC and has nothing at all to do with 701 BC. As established above, the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah cannot be moved from 713 to 701 BC. Therefore if the Biblical account is accurate and it and the Assyrian account record the same event, the Assyrian account must be misdated. I don't observe anything in the Assyrian account itself that requires it to be dated to Sennacherib's third year as king, for he may be recounting his deeds from his third campaign as general and crown prince in charge of the Assyrian army. This is what Jones suggests, calling Sargon a Tartan and viceroy/co-regent (Jones p175). The attractiveness of this idea is bolstered by the epidemic that occurred during Sargon's reign in 707 BC that apparently caused widespread death and may have been the cause for Sargon to remain in Assyria without campaigning in 706 (Gallagher p267). If Sennacherib indeed invaded Judah as co-regent in 713, then the devastation of his army may have happened in the 707 epidemic, yet the nature of the death of the 185,000 Assyrians in the Bible is described as miraculous and as happening in one night (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:35).

### **Conclusion**

The advantage to the Assyrian records is that they are for the most part dated to the period which they record, as compared to the Biblical books for which the earliest copies come from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. However, years of copying do not automatically equal errors, and the Assyrian records themselves are known to be copies of earlier records (though sometimes only a few years earlier). The books of Isaiah and Kings give the same chronological record for King Hezekiah. This would mean that errors or deliberate corrections would have to happen in both books, or for errors to have happened in one book early enough for the author of the second to copy the mistake in his original.

In the Assyrian accounts we know that various monarchs deliberately claimed the deeds of their predecessors for themselves (Sargon 2<sup>nd</sup> is a fine example see Wiseman

p162), while at the same time recording their defeats as victories (Bright p302). The biblical writer's willingness to record both victories and losses should automatically grant them greater trust.

Of the several works I have reviewed in researching this topic, most authors admit that a definite solution can not be now known, though each has proposed his own solution or solutions, which have been more or less noble endeavors ranging from simply rejecting any reliance at all on the biblical text to more serious study at trying to reconcile the two accounts.

At present it seems the solution to the chronological problem can only be solved by one of the following:

- The '14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah' (recorded in Isaiah and Kings) is not correct and should be the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>. The math relating to Hezekiah's illness is thereby null ( $14+15=29$ ).
- The reign of Sargon II is shorter by 11 years than what is currently calculated. But this devastates current Assyriological studies.
- Sargon II and Sennacherib had a co-regency of 11 years.
- Hezekiah had a co-regency with his father Ahaz and began his sole reign in 714/5, but this creates more problems than it solves.
- The biblical and Assyrian accounts record events for Sennacherib that actually happened before he became king, when he was crown prince.

Since the biblical chronology for this period can be understood from one complete text (Kings) and also separately can be checked against another single complete text (Chronicles) and they in turn can be checked against such books as Isaiah, Josephus, etc...and they testify to Hezekiah's ascension before the deportation of Israel and to Sennacherib's invasion in Hezekiah's 14<sup>th</sup> year, it seems this chronology is reliable, thus a co-regency for Hezekiah/Ahaz is ruled out as well as is claiming textual errors (25<sup>th</sup> instead of 14<sup>th</sup> year). The Assyrian records for Sargon 2<sup>nd</sup> and Sennacherib are extensive but non-the less open to misinterpretation. The solution I currently prefer, though not strongly, is that both accounts refer to Sennacherib's deeds as crown prince/general of the army.

For now all we can hope is for some breakthrough, such as a new archaeological

discovery, to be made. Hopefully that discovery will be in the form of a non-Assyrian text that will recount the events for this period.

## Bibliography

The numbers at the end of some of the entries refers to the shelf location in the central library of the Hebrew University Mt. Scopus Campus in Jerusalem, Israel.

ABD *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Doubleday, New York 1992

ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts – Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1950

Anstey, Martin *The Romance of Bible Chronology* Marshall Bros. London 1913 quoted in Jones

Bright, John *A History of Israel -fourth edition* Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2000 (933.1 B 855 Rothberg Library)

CAH *The Cambridge Ancient History – Volume III* Cambridge University Press, London 1954

Clarke, Adam *Clarke's Commentary OT* contained in Books for the Ages, AGES Software Albany, OR USA Version 2.0 copyright 1996, 1997

EB *Encyclopedia Britannica* William Benton, Publisher, Chicago 1972

E.B.D. *EASTONS BIBLE DICTIONARY* by M. G. Easton from Illustrated Bible Dictionary  
Third Edition published by Thomas Nelson, 1897. reproduced in Books For The Ages  
AGES Software • Albany, OR USA Version 2.0 © 1996, 1997

Fausset, A.R. (Jamieson, Robert / Fausset, A.R. / Brown, David), *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids 6, Michigan 1967

Fritz, Volkmar *An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology - Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 172*, JSOT Press, Sheffield 1996

Gallagher, William R. *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah – New Studies* Brill, Boston 1999 (Studies in the history and culture of the ancient Near East; vol 18) (Archaeology library 4600 GAL)

Hallo, William W. / Simpson, William Kelly *The Ancient Near East - A History* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York 1971 (935 H 192 Rothberg Library)

Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1969, reprinted 1977 Inter-Varsity Press (BS 1140.2 H35 - 0164522)

Honor, Leo L. *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine- A Critical Source Study*, Columbia University Press, New York 1926

IBSE, *INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA*, reproduced in Books For The Ages, AGES Software, Albany, OR USA Version 1.0 © 1997

Jones, Floyd Nolen *Chronology of the Old Testament A Return to the Basics* 14<sup>th</sup> edition 1999, KingsWord Press P.O. Box 130220 The Woodlands, Texas 77393-0220

Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews*, and *Against Apion* contained in *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* translated by William Whiston, Hendrickson Publishers 1987

JPS *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation* second edition, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1999. The translators took a lot of liberty with this one.

KJV *King James Version* of the Holy Bible, also called the Authorized Version.

Montgomery James A Ph.D., S.T.D. *The International Critical Commentary*, T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH, New York 1927/1964.

Olmstead, A. T. *Western Asia in the Days of Sargon of Assyria 722-705 B. C.* Henry Holt and Company, New York 1908 (Archaeology Library 4600-O)

Pfeiffer, Charles F. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* Moody Press, Chicago 1966

Schaff, Philip *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Volume* reproduced in Books For The Ages, AGES Software, Albany, OR USA Version 1.0 © 1997

Shanks, Hershel *Ancient Israel - From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple - Revised and Expanded* Prentice Hall, Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington DC 1999 (933.1 S 528 Rothberg Library)

Vaughn, Andrew G. *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah* Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia 1999 (BS 1595.2 V38)

Wiseman, Donald John *Peoples of Old Testament Times* Oxford University Press 1973 (DS 62.23 P47)

Yahuda, A.S. *The Accuracy of the Bible*, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. USA 1935

Yamada, Shigeo *The Assyrian King List: the Editorial History and the Reliability of the Historical Data* (unpublished M.A. thesis, dept. of Assyriology, faculty of Humanities, Hebrew University of Jerusalem), July 1992 (Archaeology library 4600 YAM)

