

Part I

The Pre-Exile Period

Events in Hezekiah's Reign

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

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

The Order of Events

A sabbath year and a Jubilee year are revealed in Scriptures and in the histories of the first century C.E. Jewish priest named Josephus as part of their discussion of the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. The order of events are as follows (cf. Chart F):

- “And in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them.”¹
- Hezekiah, hearing that the Assyrians were coming against his country, and knowing full well that Sennacherib’s intention would be to lay siege against Jerusalem, in haste prepared the city for the war, building up the walls, raising towers, cutting off water supplies outside the city, etc.²
- Seeing his fortified cities rapidly falling and fearful of further retribution, Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib, who was now assaulting the Judahite city of Lachish, offering to pay him tribute and to come to terms of peace. Sennacherib agreed and Hezekiah sent the tribute.³
- After receiving the tribute, Sennacherib ignored the agreed peace and sent a large number of troops, his *turtānu* (chief military officer), his chief of the eunuchs, and his chief cupbearer (Rabshakeh) to sack Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Sennacherib took to the field with his main force to prepare his opposition to the arrival of an approaching army of Ethiopians and Egyptians.⁴
- Rabshakeh sent a message to Hezekiah ordering the Jewish people to come out of the city so that the Assyrians could exile them to another land, warning Hezekiah that no one could resist the king of Assyria.⁵

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

² 2 Chron., 32:2–7.

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

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

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

- Upon hearing the message from the Assyrian king, Hezekiah went to the Temple and prayed to Yahweh.⁶

- Hezekiah then sent his servants to the prophet Isaiah. In response, Isaiah sent back to Hezekiah the words of Yahweh, which advised him not to be afraid of the Assyrian king, for the Assyrian would hear a rumor and return back to his own land.⁷ Obeying Yahweh, Hezekiah refused to surrender.

- The chief cupbearer returned to Lachish but found that Sennacherib and his forces had left and were besieging Libnah (shortly after which came the Assyrian victory over the combined Egyptian and Ethiopian army).⁸

- Next, Sennacherib's army, as part of the Assyrian war effort against Egypt—the ally of Judah and sponsor of the Judahite revolt—laid siege against the Egyptian border city of Pelusium, raising earthworks against its walls. At the time when Sennacherib was about to attack that city, his army was struck by a plague.⁹ Immediately after, news reached him that Tirhakah, the king of Kush (Ethiopia, the country later called Nubia), the nation dominating Egypt during these years, was proceeding by a desert route to do battle against the Assyrians.¹⁰

- Hearing that Tirhakah was coming, Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah warning him that Jerusalem would still fall into his hands—an obvious effort to intimidate the Judahite king into surrender.¹¹

- After receiving the message from Sennacherib, Hezekiah went to the Temple both to pray and to present Sennacherib's letter before Yahweh.¹²

- Isaiah the prophet sent Yahweh's reply to Hezekiah, foretelling the downfall of the Assyrian king and the deliverance of Jerusalem without an arrow being shot.¹³ To confirm this prophecy Yahweh gave Hezekiah a sign:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sabbath Year in Hezekiah's Reign

Yahweh's sign to Hezekiah (mentioned in 2 Kings, 19:29, and Isaiah, 37:30, and quoted above) clearly reflects the fact that a sabbath year—"this year"—was currently in progress. It is against sabbath year law to "harvest" that which is sown of itself during the sabbath and Jubilee years.¹⁴ Nevertheless, during a sabbath or Jubilee year the Israelites are permitted to eat directly out of the field from that which is sown of itself,¹⁵ much as the messiah, who never sinned,¹⁶ illustrated that it was permissible to eat directly from the field on a sabbath day.¹⁷

The following year, therefore, was also a sabbath and accordingly the "sabbath of sabbaths," i.e. the year of Jubilee, since this is the only sabbath year that follows a sabbath year. After the Jubilee came a third year wherein the Judahites would return to planting and reaping their crops.

This observance was seen as a sign that the Assyrian king would not deport the remaining people of Judah, as Sennacherib's messenger boasted to Hezekiah that he was about to do.¹⁸ Against these words of Sennacherib, Yahweh promised the Judahites that they would still be found in their land, long after the downfall of the Assyrian king, observing the sabbath and Jubilee years and sowing and harvesting their crops in the year that followed. That this was the intent of the sign is further supported by the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel (first century B.C.E.). In his version of 2 Kings, 19:29–31, we read:

And this will be the sign for you: Eat in one year that which is sown of itself, and in the second year the third crop,¹⁹ and in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the survivors of the house of Judah who will be left will continue like a tree that sends forth its roots below and raises up its branch above. Because from Jerusalem the remnant of the just ones will go forth and the survival of those upholding the Torah from Mount Zion.²⁰

Josephus, likewise, understood this sign in this way, writing:

And, when he (Hezekiah) offered a second prayer to

¹⁴ Lev., 25:4–5, 11.

¹⁵ Lev., 25:11–12, esp. v. 12, which states, as the NIV correctly translates it, "eat only what is taken directly from the fields." The LXX of Lev., 25:12, reads, "You shall eat its fruits off the fields."

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

¹⁷ E.g. Matt., 12:1–8; Mark, 2:23–28.

¹⁸ 2 Kings, 18:17–37, esp. vv. 31f.

¹⁹ The second year of eating that which is sown of itself is the third crop, i.e. of that which was originally planted and harvested in the year before the sabbath year in question.

²⁰ Targ. Jon., 2 Kings, 19:29–31; cf. Targ. Jon., Isa., 37:30–33.

the deity on behalf of the city and the safety of all, the prophet Isaiah told him that he (Yahweh) had hearkened to his prayer, and that at the present time he would not be besieged by the Assyrian, while in the future his subjects, relieved of all apprehension, would till their land in peace and look after their own possessions without fear of anything.²¹

William Whiston, in his translation of Josephus, writes of the passages found in 2 Kings, 19:29, and Isaiah, 37:30, that these words “seem to me plainly to design a Sabbatic year, a year of Jubilee next after it, and the succeeding usual labours and fruits of them on the third and following years.”²² In another place Whiston gives the following interpretation to Isaiah, 37:30.

You shall be so far from being disturbed by Sennacherib, of whom you are now so terribly afraid, that you shall be able to keep your two years of rest, which are already begun, your ordinary sabbatic year, and your extraordinary year of jubilee, without any molestation from Sennacherib, till you fall to your ordinary occupations the third year, as you were wont to do in times of the greatest peace and quietness.²³

“That night” the angel of Yahweh struck the Assyrian army set against Jerusalem with a plague. Shortly thereafter Sennacherib, who was in retreat from his failed siege at Pelusium, returned to Jerusalem. Finding 185,000 of his soldiers dead, and fearing for the lives of the remaining army, he fled back to Nineveh.²⁴

The Length of the Conflict

It is the common opinion of many present-day biblical scholars that Sennacherib’s destruction occurred in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah.²⁵ This theory rests solely upon the statement, as cited above, that “in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah” the Assyrian king invaded the land of Judah. But the records do not claim that Sennacherib’s army was destroyed during the same year as his initial invasion. This idea is merely an assumption. Close examination of the evidence, on the other hand, reveals that the army of Sennacherib was actually destroyed at the beginning of Hezekiah’s fifteenth year—after, at minimum, a couple of months of war. It is Hezekiah’s fifteenth year that represents the sabbath year; his sixteenth year is a Jubilee.

²¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4(16).

²² Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 213, n.*

²³ Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 701, #41.

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

²⁵ E.g. NBD, p. 1159.

Proof of this chronology is found in the length of the conflict. The details are as follows:

- When Sennacherib came out against Judah, he camped “against all the fortified cities of Judah,” “commanded to break them open,” and “captured them.”²⁶
- While Sennacherib was besieging other cities in Judah, Hezekiah had enough time to fortify the walls of Jerusalem and build defense towers.²⁷
- Sennacherib was laying siege to Lachish when Hezekiah sent him tribute. It was at this point that Sennacherib sent an army against Jerusalem to begin a blockade of that city, despite the tribute sent to him and the agreement of peace.²⁸
- After taking Lachish, Sennacherib moved against the city of Libnah and an Egyptian and Ethiopian army (whom he defeated).²⁹
- Later, part of the Assyrian army was sent to build siege works against the Egyptian city of Pelusium.³⁰ According to Josephus, Sennacherib’s army “spent a great deal of time on the siege of Pelusium.”³¹
- The invasion against Judah had broader geopolitical goals than merely a conquest of that state. King Hezekiah had allied himself with the Egyptians (who in turn were dominated by the Ethiopians). In changing his allegiance Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians and discontinued tribute payments.³² Josephus and Herodotus prove that the invasion was actually directed against “the Egyptians and Ethiopians,” not only to recover the rebel Palestinian states but to subdue Egypt.³³ Suddenly struck by a plague, followed by the surprise appearance of the powerful Ethiopian forces under King Tirhakah, Sennacherib pulled back to Jerusalem.³⁴ At Jerusalem, he found that the Assyrian troops left there were also decimated by a plague.³⁵

This data proves that the war was not of short duration. Numerous Judahite cities had been put under siege and the Assyrians had been building siege works at the Egyptian city of Pelusium for “a great deal of time.” The evidence indicates that at least two or more months had transpired from the time Sennacherib invaded until his army was destroyed before the walls of

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

²⁷ 2 Chron., 32:1–8.

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

²⁹ 2 Kings, 19:8; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1; AS, pp. 31f, *l.* 2:73–3:5, p. 69, *l.* 22–25; and see Chart F.

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

³¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

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

³³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1,3–5; Herodotus 2:141.

³⁴ 2 Kings, 19:9, 35–37; Isa., 37:9, 36–38; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4–5.

³⁵ 2 Kings, 19:35; Isa., 37:36; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4–5. The angel of Yahweh smiting the Assyrians with a plague implies being struck with a pestilence (cf. 2 Sam., 24:14–17; Acts, 12:23; Exod., 12:21ff). It is supported by the story in Herodotus (2:141; cf. Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4), which connects the plague at Pelusium with mice (rats and mice being known carriers of bubonic plague).

Jerusalem. Added to this time is at least a month for Sennacherib to march his army approximately 500 miles from Assyria to the region of Judah.³⁶

More evidence that the third campaign of Sennacherib was of considerable length is also found in the Assyrian records. Our study will present the evidence from these documents in our next chapter, in the subsection entitled *The Length of Sennacherib's Third Campaign*. For now, the evidence is sufficient enough to prove that the Assyrian king could not have accomplished all the deeds attributed to him in the matter of two or three weeks.

The Illness of Hezekiah

We are told that before the defeat of the Assyrian army, King Hezekiah of Judah became very ill and was near death.³⁷ After praying to Yahweh, Yahweh responded to Hezekiah that he would heal him and that “on the third day” he would be able to go up to the Temple.³⁸ Josephus translates this verse stating that the king was informed that, “μετὰ τρίτην ἡμέραν (within the third day after), he should be rid of his illness.”³⁹ Yahweh continues, “And I have added to your days fifteen years.”⁴⁰

³⁶ A day's march varied depending upon the terrain, mode of transportation, numbers of military personnel, and other factors. Yet an approximation of travel time for a military expedition during this early period can be determined by the following facts: Ezra and his Jewish companions took about three and one half months to make the journey from Babylonia to Judaea in the fifth century B.C.E. (Ezra, 7:6–9, 8:31). A military expedition on a forced march, of course, would be quicker, but these figures set the outside limits for the journey from Assyria to Judaea, since the distance from Babylonia to Judaea is nearly the same as that from Assyria.

Next, Pharaoh Tuthmosis III records his forced march from Tzru (modern El-Qantara) to Gaza, a trip of about 160 miles, in ten days (ARE, 2, #409). This march resulted in an average of sixteen miles per day. During the fifth century B.C.E., the Greeks retreating from the Persians, as reported by Xenophon, took their march through Assyria, northwards along the Tigris river. Xenophon states that they marched four stages for twenty parsangs (about 70 miles), six stages for 30 parsangs (about 105 miles), and then four stages for another 20 parsangs (about 70 miles) (Xenophon, *Anab.*, 2:4). The total was fourteen stages (or fourteen days of marching) to achieve 70 parsangs, about 245 miles. The average march per day was seventeen and one half miles.

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

Therefore, if the huge Assyrian army under Sennacherib made the excellent time of about 20 miles a day, and without considering their campaigns against the Phoenicians, they would have arrived in Judah in approximately twenty-five days after leaving Assyria. If we add to our equation the fact that Sennacherib first dealt with the Phoenicians, then moved against Palestine and the dozens of fortified cities of Judah, it may have taken his army as long as six to eight weeks before he actually sent soldiers against Jerusalem itself.

³⁷ It is very probable that the illness suffered by Hezekiah was in some way connected with the plague that infected the Assyrian army (see above n. 35).

³⁸ 2 Kings, 20:5.

³⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1, par. 27. The Greek word μετὰ (*meta*) means, “prop. denoting *accompaniment*; ‘amid’ (local or causal); modified variously according to the case (gen. *association*, or acc. *succession*) with which it is joined” (SEC, Gk. #3326); “of Time, *after, next to*” (GEL, p. 501). Therefore μετὰ (*meta*) carries with it not only the idea of being “after” but to be “in association,” “amid,” and “to accompany.” Accordingly, Hezekiah would be cured “within the third day after” the present day. This understanding is also that of the Seder Olam (23).

⁴⁰ 2 Kings, 20:6, cf. Isa., 38:5f.

As a sign that this prophecy was true, Yahweh made the sun recline so that the shadow on the sundial at the house of Ahaz returned by ten steps (hours).⁴¹ Targum Jonathan, for example, states that Yahweh "turned back the shadow on the stone figure of the hours, on which the sun went down on the stairs of Ahaz, backward ten hours."⁴² Josephus notes that this sundial was part of the house that had belonged to Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah.⁴³

This movement of the sun happened on the third day after the prophecy, the same day Hezekiah recovered from his illness. Josephus writes:

And, when the prophet exhorted the deity to show this sign to the king, he saw what he wished and was at once freed from his illness, then he went up to the temple and did obeisance to the deity and offered prayers to him.⁴⁴

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

Importantly, the fact that Hezekiah was granted another fifteen years of life at a point when he was about to die proves that the prophecy had to be given very late in Hezekiah's fourteenth or very early in his fifteenth year of reign. This is true because Hezekiah reigned only twenty-nine years,⁴⁵ and the Assyrians had invaded in his fourteenth year of rule. If the prophecy would have been given earlier in the fourteenth year the time left to Hezekiah would have been more than fifteen years.

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

Nor will the fifteen years' prolongation of his life after his sickness allow that sickness to have been later than the former part of the fifteenth year of his reign, since chronology does not allow him in all above twenty-nine years and a few months.⁴⁶

The prophecy that Hezekiah would be healed in three days carried with it yet another important revelation. Not only had Yahweh added, as of this date, another fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah but he also told him, "And from the hand of the king of Assyria I shall deliver you and the city. And I shall defend over this city for my own sake, and for the sake of David, my servant."⁴⁷ Accordingly, after Hezekiah was to be healed, punishment was to be inflicted upon the army of Sennacherib.

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

⁴² Targ. Jon., 2 Kings, 20:11. Cf. Targ. Jon., Isa., 38:8, where it is said that the sun "turned back ten hours by the marking of the stone hours where it had declined."

⁴³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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

⁴⁶ Whiston, *Flav. Jos.*, p. 301, n. †.

⁴⁷ 2 Kings, 20:6; cf. Isa. 38:6.

The Talmudic writers also connect the episode of the sun returning ten steps, when Hezekiah recovered from his illness, with the time that the Assyrians heard the “song of the celestials” and were as a result destroyed.⁴⁸ This information accords with the fact that in the daylight hours, just before the “night” that the Assyrians were afflicted, Hezekiah was found praying in the Temple,⁴⁹ having just that day recovered from his illness.

The Seder Olam, composed in the mid-second century C.E., makes the same conclusion:

Three days before Sennacherib’s downfall Hezekiah became ill. Rabbi Yose says: the third day of Hezekiah’s illness was (the time of) Sennacherib’s downfall. The sun, which had descended for Ahaz his father, stood still for him, as it says, “Behold, I will turn back ten steps the shadow.”⁵⁰

The Assyrian Army was Destroyed Near the Beginning of the Year

In the prophecy given by Isaiah to King Hezekiah just prior to the night of the destruction of the Assyrian army, Isaiah reports that the sign provided by Yahweh was that “this year” the Judahites would eat that which is sown of itself, i.e. it was a sabbath year. “That night” the angel of Yahweh struck the Assyrians.⁵¹ The prophetic nature of the “sign,” indicating an event that was yet to occur, implies that the eating of grain sown of itself was something about to happen, not something that had already been in practice. There would have been no reason for Yahweh to advise the Jewish people to eat “that which is sown of itself” if crops had already been planted before the Assyrian invasion. They could have eaten from their remaining crops.

One might conclude that—if the invasion had taken place during the final few months of Hezekiah’s fourteenth year, prior to spring, and continued into the beginning of his fifteenth year—the Jewish people, restrained within the walls of their cities, would not have been able to plant their winter crops, which could have been harvested in the spring. But more probably, Hezekiah and the Judahites were already observing the sabbath year. Further, the context of the records is that the “sign” was prophetic. Yahweh would not have permitted the Jews to plant crops for a sabbath year. The sign points to the fact that the Jews were about to begin eating from that which grows of itself, thereby indicating that spring had just arrived. It is also certain that at this time the correct sabbath year and Jubilee cycle were being confirmed.

According to the Seder Olam and later Talmudic writers, Sennacherib’s army was destroyed two weeks into the new year, on the first day of Pass-

⁴⁸ LJ, 4, pp. 269, 272–275, and ns. 58, 81.

⁴⁹ 2 Kings 19:14–37; Isa., 37:14–35.

⁵⁰ S.O., 23.

⁵¹ 2 Kings, 19:20–37; Isa., 37:21–38.

over, i.e. the fourteenth of Abib.⁵² The Seder Olam states, "because (the Assyrians) came up (against Jerusalem) in the time before Passover," they were not able to plant and so they ate what grows of itself."⁵³ The Midrash Rabbah reports:

Israel and Hezekiah sat that night and recited the Hallel, for it was Passover, yet were in terror lest at any moment Jerusalem might fall in his (Sennacherib's) hand. When they arose early in the morning to recite the *shema'* and pray, they found their enemies' dead corpses.⁵⁴

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

Rabbi Judan said: While Hezekiah and his followers were still eating their paschal lambs in Jerusalem, eloahim had already wrought (their deliverance) in that night, as it says, And it came to pass that night, that the angel of Yahweh went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians.⁵⁵

The 14th of Abib as the date for the destruction of the Assyrian army also explains why the Judahites had, as of the time of Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah, not eaten that which grows of itself, even though it was already "this year." According to scriptural law, the Israelites were forbidden to eat from the new year's crops (whether harvested or eaten directly from the field) until after the wave sheaf offering from that crop had been accomplished. This offering took place on the day after the weekly sabbath that fell during Passover week.⁵⁶ The people of Jerusalem, therefore, would not partake of this year's crops until after Passover began, and Passover began on Abib 14. This fact brings the words of Isaiah into complete harmony with a destruction of the Assyrian army just after the beginning of the year and during Passover.

An edition of the *Seder Olam Rabbah*,⁵⁷ on the basis of Isaiah 37:30, also reports that Sennacherib's disaster occurred during a sabbath year.⁵⁸ This tradition supports the conclusion that the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib first struck Judah, had just passed and that the destruction of the Assyrian army took place in the first part of his fifteenth year.

⁵² LJ, 4, p. 268, and n. 54; also see Tosef.-Targum, 2 *Kings*, 19:35–37; J. Pes., 9:36d. The Pharisees of the second century B.C.E. and after altered the observance of the Passover supper from the 14th to the 15th (Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:14:6, 3:10:5, *Wars*, 6:9:3; Jub., 49:1). Nevertheless, the original practice, the one followed in the days of Hezekiah, was to observe the paschal supper the same day as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, i.e. the 14th of Abib. See our forthcoming book entitled *Yahweh's Sacred Calendar*.

⁵³ S.O., 23.

⁵⁴ Mid. Rab., *Exod.*, 18:5.

⁵⁵ Mid. Rab., *Song*, 1:12:3.

⁵⁶ Lev., 23:9–14. Also see our forthcoming work *Yahweh's Sacred Calendar*.

⁵⁷ *Seder Olam Rabbah* (ed. B. Ratner), 23, p. 53a-b; and see below n. 58.

⁵⁸ HUCA, 46, p. 211, n. 30.

The sequence of events occurred as follows (also see Chart F):

- Abib 10. Hezekiah was severely ill and dying. Yahweh answers his prayer and tells him that on the third day from now he will see the sun move backwards, recover from his illness, and go up to the Temple.

- Abib 13...Daytime.⁵⁹ The sun moves back ten steps on the sundial. Hezekiah recovers from his illness. On this day a letter arrives from King Sennacherib notifying Hezekiah that the Assyrians fully expect to take Jerusalem. Hezekiah goes up to the Temple, where he presents the letter and begins to pray. Then, the prophet Isaiah came to him with Yahweh's guarantee that the city would not be taken. A sign was also foretold to the king that this year the Judahites would eat that which grows of itself, do the same the second year, and that they would plant and harvest again in the third year.

- Abib 14, the first day of Passover...Nighttime.⁶⁰ The Assyrian army encamped outside the city is struck down by the angel of Yahweh and 185,000 men are killed.

Conclusion

All of the above evidence points to the fact that, although Sennacherib invaded Judah during Hezekiah's fourteenth year, the war continued for at least a couple of months, if not much longer, until the fourteenth day of the month of Abib, the first month of Hezekiah's fifteenth year (a detail that is supported by the Assyrian records).⁶¹ It would have been impossible for Sennacherib to have accomplished all of the feats attributed to him in only two short weeks and still have his army destroyed on Passover night in Hezekiah's fourteenth year (i.e. on the fourteenth day of the New Year). On the thirteenth of Abib, Hezekiah was told that the sign for the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrian king was that the people of Judah would still be found "this year" observing a sabbath year; and that "the second year" they would still be in the land observing a Jubilee. Accordingly, Hezekiah's fifteenth year was a sabbath year and his sixteenth year was a Jubilee.

⁵⁹ The first half of the Hebrew day began at sunset and the second half with sunrise (EBD, p. 266; DB, p. 140). Also see our forthcoming book entitled *Yahweh's Sacred Calendar*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See Chap. IV, pp. 43f.