

# Sennacherib's Second Expedition to the West, and the Siege of Jerusalem.

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## I.

FROM the time of the earliest attempts to decipher the Bab.-Assyrian cuneiform texts, hopes were aroused in the circles primarily interested that the decipherment, when accomplished, would be of essential service to our knowledge of the relations between Assyria and Israel. These hopes rose still more when it was learned that the first decipherers had been able to read the names of various Assyrian kings well known to us from the O.T. Nor were these expectations disappointed, for in the documents of the Sargonides, especially of the king so frequently mentioned in the Bible, Sanherib or Sennacherib, a surprising amount of information was discovered about the relation of both the Israelitish kingdoms to Assyria, nay, we were now put in a position to fix a new basis for checking the Israelitish chronology which hitherto had been exposed to insuperable difficulties. To what an extent the teaching of the O.T. regarding the earliest history of the world comes in contact with the traditions of the Babylonians, has been amply shown by various specimens of translation, but the later history of the O.T. as well receives from the Assyrian cuneiform texts a support which cannot be too highly valued. Dr. Franz Kaulen (*Assyrien u. Babylonien nach den neuesten Entdeckungen*<sup>5</sup>, p. 273 ff.) remarks quite correctly—

‘We have now before us no longer notes by writers belonging to an insignificant people which in an inconsiderable corner of the earth draw up history from hearsay and combination, but we see the evidence written on stone that the Hebrew writers found themselves in direct intercourse with the nations, and have recorded all occurrences with documentary fidelity. The gain thus arising is twofold. In the first place, that which forms the subject of biblical history, especially in all its statements about foreign nations, can only be rightly understood after the biblical narratives have received such unexpected illustration.’

In general the statement just quoted is justified, but in particular cases the cuneiform statements must be treated as giving occasion for a fresh examination of the statements that have come down to us in the biblical tradition, and in this

way we arrive at results which from the standpoint of our previous historical knowledge must be regarded as extremely gratifying. This is true especially of the events of Sennacherib's reign. This haughty conqueror was on the very point of destroying the last relic of the ancient glory of David by the capture of Jerusalem, the necessary consequence of which would have been the conquest of Egypt, when he was checked in his victorious career by a strange occurrence, often explained as a prodigy, and was shortly thereafter murdered by his own son,—thus becoming quite unconsciously the chief cause of the henceforward inevitable decay of the first world empire which the world had seen.

It is natural that, since Sennacherib's inscriptions have become known and the secret of their contents penetrated, information has been looked for especially on the points just referred to. Beginning, in fact, with Niebuhr, the conviction has reigned that the disaster which befell Sennacherib before the gates of Jerusalem constituted a very important turning-point in the world's history, particularly in the history of ancient W. Asia. Hence there was an eager curiosity to learn what the Assyrians said about the matter, the more especially as it became known that the so-called Taylor-cylinder contained a detailed account of the campaigns of Sennacherib against Syria and Egypt, and, amongst others, mentioned by name King Hezekiah and the city of Jerusalem. This eagerness is to be assigned as the principal reason why Assyriologists have accorded to the inscriptions of Sennacherib a relatively premature editing and translation.

Soon, however, it turned out that the biblical account of the events in question does not coincide with the Assyrian, especially as to the siege and the deliverance of Jerusalem. The merit of having recognized the divergence between the two narratives and of having drawn the correct inferences from this, belongs to Sir Henry Rawlinson,

who, with the acuteness peculiar to him, writes (*The History of Herodotus*<sup>4</sup>,<sup>1</sup> p. 484) as follows:—

‘Such is the account which Sennacherib gives of an expedition briefly touched on by Scripture in a few verses (2 K 18<sup>13-16</sup>), an expedition which is not to be confounded with that second invasion of these countries by the same monarch, which terminated in the destruction of his host and his own ignominious flight to his capital. This latter expedition is not described in his annals, and it may perhaps belong to a period beyond the time to which they extend.’

Sir H. Rawlinson thus recognized nearly forty years ago that the biblical account of the siege and deliverance of Jerusalem refers to a second campaign of Sennacherib not mentioned in the Assyrian records at our disposal. Following the lead of his illustrious brother, G. Rawlinson (*The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*<sup>4</sup>, ii. p. 165 ff.) also distinguishes the two accounts, that of Sennacherib and that of the Bible, and assigns the campaign recorded by the Assyrians to the year 701 B.C., the siege of Jerusalem and the catastrophe that befell the besieging host to the year 699 B.C. The circumstance that the Taylor-cylinder makes no mention at all of a second expedition to Palestine and Egypt, although it gives a detailed and generally graphic account of all important occurrences down to the 20th Adar of the year of the *linu* Bšlimurani (= 691 B.C.), G. Rawlinson seeks to explain by pointing to the well-known fondness of Assyrian tablet-writers for ascribing the glorious deeds of particular generals to the king himself, and for passing over in silence everything which might detract from the fame of the king in the eyes of posterity. G. Rawlinson was led to date the second expedition of Sennacherib to the West in the year 699 B.C., because he identified the Egyptian contemporary of Sennacherib mentioned by Herodotus, namely, the alleged king Sethos, with the second of Manetho's kings of Ethiopian descent, namely, Sebichos.

Another course has been adopted by George Smith in his *Assyria from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Nineveh* ('Ancient History from the Monuments'), p. 116 ff. He holds that the two accounts, the Assyrian and the biblical, have to do with one and the same occurrence, which coincides chronologically and materially with the campaign of Sennacherib against Palestine in

<sup>1</sup> I regret that in this question of priority I am unable to consult the first edition of this famous commentary.

701 B.C. The discrepancy between the two accounts he seeks to explain thus:—

‘We cannot, however, expect to find any direct confirmation of the overthrow of Sennacherib from the Assyrian inscriptions, as it was not the custom of these ancient nations to record their own defeats. Excepting this single circumstance, the agreement between the Assyrian and biblical records is very close, the principal difference being that in the annals of Sennacherib the events are given at greater length.’

The same course is followed by F. Delitzsch and Mürdter (in Mürdter's *Kurzgefasste Gesch. Bab. u. Assyr.*<sup>2</sup>, 1882, p. 201). They, too, are of opinion that Sennacherib's narrative agrees ‘almost entirely’ with the statements of 2 K 18<sup>13-16</sup>; only that the Assyrian text speaks of 800 talents of silver, the biblical of 300. But, according to the calculations of Brandis (*Münzsystem*, 98), 300 Israelite would be equal to 800 Assyrian talents; or it might be assumed, thinks Delitzsch, ‘that the extra 500 talents were a special present of the kind so frequently mentioned in the enumerations of tribute.’ It will be seen that Delitzsch, in order to maintain the coincidence of the two narratives, has recourse to an explanation which is not justified by the sources.

Schrader (*K.A.T.*<sup>2</sup> 306) likewise believes that the two accounts are coincident, but finds himself in consequence compelled to make far-reaching assumptions, which it is difficult to derive from the texts at our disposal. This most reputable scholar misses in the Assyrian inscription a statement of the number of prisoners and chariots captured, etc., such as is not usually wanting in similar accounts of Assyrian victories. There is, further, the circumstance that Sennacherib is still able to overpower the Philistine Ekron and to make Thimnath tributary; while, on the other hand, he is not in a position to take the offensive against Egypt, and as little to compel Jerusalem to surrender. His resolution to retreat may finally have been brought to maturity by an occurrence such as that of which Herodotus tells, or to which the Bible (2 K 19<sup>35</sup>) alludes; most likely the latter, namely, a pestilence breaking out in the army in the course of the war.

Wellhausen (in Bleek's *Einleit. in d. A. T.*<sup>4</sup> 256) reaches the conclusion that Sennacherib's inscription speaks only of the earliest and not of the last and most decisive phase of the campaign. This he holds to be evident, especially from the

localities mentioned—a view which might find its justification in the well-known custom of the Assyrian tablet-writers to ignore the reverses that befell the king in the course of his campaigns.

Maspero, at first in his *Hist. ancienne des peuples de l'Orient* (the second edition of which is the basis of Pietschmann's German translation, and in some measure revision, which appeared in 1877, and from which I quote), p. 402 ff., sees in the Assyrian narrative simply supplementary matter to the biblical account. He follows the same course most recently also in his *Hist. anc. des peuples de l'Orient classique*, iii. 293. He distinguishes here already the different strata utilized in the biblical narratives, without, however, drawing his conclusions from this.

Tiele (*Bab.-Assyr. Gesch.* 317) also holds to the coincidence of the two accounts, after he has first discussed in detail the views of his predecessors, especially the brothers Rawlinson. He thinks, however, that in the biblical narrative the order of events was transposed, and seeks to strengthen this assumption by asserting that it was desired on the part of Israel to represent the mishap which befell the Assyrian army as a miraculous deliverance wrought by Jahweh, and as an authentication of Isaiah's prophecy. Thus of course it was necessary that the section relating to this should come in at a late point and the catastrophe overtake that part of the host which lay before Jerusalem. But then there was no more place left there for the story of Hezekiah's message to Lachish and his submission, and this had either to be omitted or placed at the beginning, where it had no right to be. The narrative of the siege of Jerusalem thus fell of itself into the middle. In order to establish a connexion between these purposely mixed up portions of the history, the passage 2 K. 19<sup>8</sup> (= Is 37<sup>8</sup>) was interpolated, in which the Rabshakeh is represented as a simple ambassador who speaks of his commission, and where there is no word of an army at all.

This explanation of Tiele's might possibly be accepted if his theory of two editions of the same account in 2 K. 18<sup>13, 17-20</sup> 19 and Is 36-39 were established.

Duncker (*Gesch. d. Alterthums*<sup>5</sup>, ii. 353-367) discusses with his own fulness of detail Sennacherib's expedition to the West, and strives, by making them mutually supplementary, and by means of various assumptions, to establish harmony between

the two narratives before us. In this way, however, he obscures the real contents of both or robs them of their original characteristics. He seeks at the same time to explain the Assyrian inscription in a way that is illegitimate from the standpoint of historical criticism, by assuming that in the inscription the order of events is reversed, the capture of Ekron, the surrounding and investment of Jerusalem, the assignment of Judæan territory to Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza, and, finally, the paying of tribute by Hezekiah being made to follow the battle at Altau-Kelteke, whereas these events preceded the latter. But even the biblical account is not held by him to have come down to us in its original form; for one can find traces of its being worked over by a prophetic hand, which consistently traces every misfortune which befell Israel and Judah to the apostasy of their kings. All the more readily, on the other hand, might the sudden unlooked-for deliverance of the pious king be attributed to the direct interposition of Jahweh which authenticated on the spot the prediction of the great prophet.

The defects of such a method of explanation did not escape the sharp eyes of E. Meyer (*Gesch. d. Alterthums*, i. § 384), hence the extremely cautious description he gives of the campaign of Sennacherib in question. He simply places the principal points in the two accounts side by side, introducing them with the words, 'the great king relates as follows,' and 'somewhat differently runs the Hebrew narrative'; and he distinguishes in the latter a shorter and a second more detailed version. As to the main point, the deliverance of Jerusalem, Meyer admits that it must really have been a natural occurrence, presumably a pestilence, which compelled Sennacherib to desist from his attack upon Jerusalem and to raise the siege. As to the contribution paid over to Sennacherib by Hezekiah, Meyer's hesitation is noteworthy: 'The 300 Hebrew talents are *perhaps* [the italics are his own] exactly equal to 800 Assyrian talents.'

A. H. Sayce (*Alte Denkmäler im Lichte neuer Forschungen*, 151; cf. also *The Ancient Empires of the East*, 133 ff.) likewise endeavours to harmonize the data of the two narratives, and accepts of only one campaign of Sennacherib to the West. In his opinion the two accounts supplement and complete one another. Sennacherib of course conceals the mishap which befell him in Palestine, and transfers the payment of tribute from the time when Hezekiah sought in

vain to buy off the siege of Jerusalem to the end of the campaign. He is unable, however, as appears to Sayce, to conceal the fact that he was never able to capture the revolted city or to chastise Hezekiah as he had done the other rebel kings. The final verdict also of the famous Oxford scholar is that Sennacherib undertook no further campaign to the West. In succeeding years we find him indeed in Babylonia and Cilicia, but Sayce holds that he never ventured back to Palestine. 'During his lifetime Judah had nothing more to fear from the Assyrian king.'

The matter is viewed in the same light by Hommel (*Gesch. Bab. u. Assyr.* 705). He too labours to establish harmony between the boastful narrative of the Assyrian and the Jewish tradition. This forms the basis of his discussion, in which he takes the situation after Hezekiah's payment of tribute, mentioned by the Assyrians, to have been that by the latter step the danger was not yet warded off from Judah, and that Sennacherib, who in any case must have thought of utilizing his victory over the Egyptians by an expedition to Egypt, would probably on his victorious return thence have entered Jerusalem after all, had not the threatened danger been averted by some wonderful occurrence which is equally well authenticated by the Bible and by Egyptian records. But farther on Hommel admits that Sennacherib once more appeared in the West at the head of an army, upon the occasion of a campaign against the Arabians, in the course of which an Arab fortress named Adumû was captured. This campaign, the year of which unfortunately is unknown, would have brought Sennacherib at farthest to the East Jordan district, but not to Judah or the Judæo-Egyptian frontier.

The difficulty produced by combining the Assyrian account with the biblical tradition has been observed also by Kittel (*Gesch. d. Hebräer.* ii. 311). He too seeks to reconcile the discrepancy between the two narratives by the process of mutual supplementing, and indeed by supplementing the Assyrian account by the divergent data of that of the Bible. He remarks, however, that in the matter of the alleged victory of Sennacherib at Elteke, the data are mutually complementary, and holds in consequence that Sennacherib did not pursue his victory farther, and thus gave the Egyptians the opportunity to collect their forces anew. It may be suggested, says Kittel, that that

victory cost Sennacherib himself so dear that Hezekiah could venture to continue his resistance. 'The biblical accounts, *if we understand them aright* [the italics are ours], are in harmony with this.' In addition to this whisper of doubt as to the correctness of the methods hitherto employed, Kittel's note (*ad loc.*) is also significant, in which he allows that two parallel accounts which supplement one another underlie the biblical narrative. But, in spite of this well-founded doubt, Kittel reaches the somewhat surprising conclusion that the account thus produced corresponds in all essential points to the real state of affairs, for precisely those elements in it which we might expect to find recurring in the Assyrian story, show, he alleges, the most remarkable harmony with the latter, such points notably as the mention of Sennacherib's attack upon Judah, the submission of Hezekiah, and the siege of Jerusalem. In opposition to this view of Kittel's, it must be pointed out that he succeeds in establishing the harmony of the two narratives only by presuppositions and supplementings, a method of procedure little in place where it is a question of getting at the real state of the case by means of the data at our disposal.

But on no account can we approve of the attitude of Piepenbring (*Hist. du peuple d'Israël,* 337), who expressly glories in following the lead of Stade, and cites the weighty criticisms of Kuenen and Tiele, and yet describes the condition of things in the present case in the fashion that has hitherto been usual, and with altogether disproportionate brevity: 'Les Assyriens durent lever le siège, sans avoir pris la ville' ['The Assyrians had to raise the siege, without having taken the city']! Thus Piepenbring disposes of the detailed narrative of Sennacherib, the biblical story, and the speeches of Isaiah, not to speak of Herodotus' account of the Egyptian king Sethos and the wonderful deliverance of Egypt from the hands of Sennacherib, a story which, notwithstanding its late origin, contains, as we shall presently find, a considerable kernel of truth, and hence deserves to be taken into account and critically examined in seeking the solution of one of the most burning questions in ancient Eastern and especially biblical history.

We have here passed in review all the opinions of scholars which, starting with the assumption that the biblical narrative which has come down to us is a unity, have set themselves to harmonize

the latter with Sennacherib's official account. Now it turns out that this presupposition does not tally with the facts, and we have noticed, in the case of some of the authors cited, that a suspicion of this has floated before their minds; only they have preferred to give expression to their doubts in a

way that affects little the main point, for they have for the most part been content with the assumption that the biblical narrative in its present form has been produced by a redactor from two parallel narratives.

(To be continued.)

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF HEBREWS.

HEBREWS II. 14, 15.

'Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (R.V.).

#### EXPOSITION.

'The children.'—The children are God's children, in the spiritual sense, whom He had given to Him, and as one with whom He presents Himself.—DAVIDSON.

'Flesh and blood.'—Is a designation of human nature as mortal (1 Co 15<sup>50</sup>), or in general (Mt 16<sup>17</sup>, Gal 1<sup>16</sup>). In the O.T. the corresponding expression is simply 'flesh.'—DAVIDSON.

'He also Himself in like manner partook of the same.'—The mere taking part in human nature is not the point which engages the interest of the apostle here. The incarnation in itself probably was not felt to need justification. The incarnation is referred to because it was a necessary preliminary to the sufferings, as the sphere of existence to which the Son essentially belonged made Him incapable of death. In order to be able to die, He must take part in flesh and blood. In another passage (10<sup>5</sup>) the preparing of a body for Him is also said to be in order that He might offer it.—DAVIDSON.

'Through death.'—It was by the death of the flesh that our Lord vanquished this power of the devil; for, as he declared, these two deaths, the voluntary death of the cross, *i.e.* of flesh and self, and the death of the spirit are mutually antagonistic. This distinction of various kinds of death was familiar to Jewish teachers. Philo says, 'There are two kinds of death, one of man, the other belonging especially to the soul. The death of man consists in separation of soul from body; the death of the soul in decay of virtue and assimilation of vicious elements.'—RENDALL.

'He might bring to nought him that had the power of death.'—Christ by the offering of Himself made a perfect atonement for sin, and so brought to nought the power of the devil. It is not said here that he 'brought to nought death' (yet see 2 Ti 1<sup>10</sup>). That end in the full sense

is still to come (1 Co 15<sup>26</sup>); and it is reached by the power of the life of Christ.—WESTCOTT.

'The power of death.'—The devil as the author of sin has the power over death its consequence (Ro 5<sup>12</sup>), not as though he could inflict it at his pleasure; but death is his realm; he makes it subservient to his end.—WESTCOTT.

'The devil.'—The power of death is ascribed to the devil, because he is the tempter to sin which brought death into the world, and the accuser of those who sin, so that they, having sin brought to mind, fear to die.—BRUCE.

'Through fear of death . . . subject to bondage.'

—This was felt, as we see from the O.T. far more intensely under the old than under the new dispensation. . . . In heathen and savage lands the whole of life is often overshadowed by the terror of death, which thus becomes a veritable 'bondage.' Philo quotes a line of Euripides to show that a man who has no fear of death can never be a slave. But, through Christ's death, death has become to the Christian the gate of glory.—FARRAR.

THIS fear of death is not the mere natural recoil of the living from encountering death. It is the moral and religious fear of it.—DAVIDSON.

#### METHODS OF TREATMENT.

##### I.

#### In Bondage to the Fear of Death.

By the Rev. Alfred Ainger, M.A.

Some words of our Lord illustrate v.<sup>14</sup>. He warns His disciples that they will meet persecution. They will carry their lives in their hands. But those who killed them could not touch what was life indeed. 'Fear him,' He says, 'which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.' The meaning is unmistakable, the comparison is between one enemy and another; the enemy to be feared is the enemy whose power is not limited to the body, but who can destroy the soul, who 'has the power to cast into hell.' The writer of our