

The Date of the Downfall of Samaria.

PROF. WILLIS J. BEECHER.

AUBURN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, AUBURN, N.Y.

THERE seems to be a practically unanimous consensus of scholars of all schools to the effect that the final fall of Samaria occurred B.C. 722. The marginal chronology of our common Bibles makes the date 721 B.C. Sargon of Assyria says that he captured Samaria 722 B.C. When this latter fact became known, some decades since, it was at once recognized as a striking synchronism between the Bible and the Assyrian records. There is but little difference between 722 and 721. Men who were looking for confirmations of the Bible eagerly seized upon this, and have used it ever since. That the synchronism is inexact, and that, if admitted, it proves several other synchronisms to be inexact, appears to have but little weight with them. It seems to them as close as could be expected. And on the other hand, men who hold that the historical statements of the Bible are only true in a general sense find in these phenomena a distinct confirmation of their opinions. But as to the existence of this particular synchronism, and as to the date B.C. 722 or 721 for the final capture of Samaria, the two parties are in accord.

But this opinion, generally accepted as it is, seems to me so clearly against the evidence, that I half suspect that there is some simple fact which I have overlooked, which, if attended to, would give all the evidence a different meaning. The alternative is that, in the absence of dispute at this point, the evidence has not commonly been weighed with sufficient care. In any case, as the evidence now reaches me, I am compelled to think that the common opinion is incorrect at every point.

First, The Bible narratives do not date the downfall of Samaria about 721 B.C.

Second, The Sargon inscriptions do not date this downfall 722 B.C.

Third, The actual synchronism in the case is that of a series of events rather than of a single event, is centred in a different event from the downfall of Samaria, and is exact.

First, 721 B.C. is not the true biblical date. The year 604 B.C. is now generally accepted as the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, and on this basis all Assyrian dates are computed. But the computation which dates the overthrow of Samaria in 721 B.C. is based on the assumption that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar was 606 B.C., and is stretched a year at that. The true computation is the following:

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar, the fourth of Jehoia-	
kim, was B.C.	604
Add the previous years of Jehoiakim	3
31 years of Josiah	31
2 years of Amon	2
55 years of Manasseh	55
29 years of Hezekiah	29
	724
Subtract 6 years of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 10) . . .	718

The result is that the true biblical date for the final overthrow of Samaria is 718 B.C., and not 721 B.C. There are one or two variations in some Septuagint copies, and some conjectural changes have been suggested. But really there is nothing anywhere to change the result just reached.

Second, The Assyrian records expressly state that the event which they date 722 B.C. was not the final capture of Samaria, but was only one of the preliminaries to the final overthrow. Sargon says that Samaria did not then cease to be a political power. To the contrary, he says that he appointed a general over them, and reimposed the tribute imposed by a former king. He further says that, two years later, in his second year, Samaria was again in arms against him, in alliance with Hamath, Simirra, Arpad, Damascus, with Hanun of Gaza, and with Sebek of Egypt. Yet later Samaria was still engaged in hostilities, in combination with the first four of these powers. That is to say, he expressly informs us that his capture of Samaria in 722 B.C. was not its downfall, but that for some years after this, Samaria remained a political power, able to form alliances against him. In overthrowing this later combination he informs us that he subjugated "the land of the west, the whole of it." He further mentions that in his seventh year, B.C. 715, he planted certain alien tribes in Samaria and the land of Bit-Omri.

Third, What, then, is the true synchronism? Without troubling ourselves minutely to adjust all the points involved, notice that the

Bible and Sargon alike mention a series of events extending over several years. These events are the imposition of tribute on Samaria by a former king of Assyria ; intrigues of the Samaritan king with Sebek (So) of Egypt ; intrigues with Hamath, Arpad, etc. (2 Kings xviii. 34) ; neglect of Hoshea to pay tribute ; his imprisonment therefor (Bible only) ; the capture of Samaria and reimposition of tribute (Sargon only) ; a great invasion by the Assyrian king ; defeat of Sebek (Sargon only) ; three years' siege and capture of Samaria (Bible only) ; final subjugation of the whole region ; general deportation and replacing of the inhabitants.

Now, assuming that Sargon's troops laid siege to Samaria the same year with the defeat of Sebek, the three years of the siege were, according to the account given in the Bible, B.C. 720, 719, and 718, and the defeat of Sebek occurred 720 B.C. This is the date which Sargon himself assigns to it, and here comes in the true central point of the synchronism. There will result from this a readjustment of several other points of synchronism,—a readjustment altogether favorable to the trustworthiness of both sets of narratives.

According to 2 Kings xviii., it was Shalmaneser of Assyria who began the siege of Samaria, B.C. 720. This directly contradicts the ordinary Assyrian accounts of the matter ; but it is capable of being understood as agreeing with the account given on the octagonal cylinder described in George Smith's *Assyrian Discoveries*, chap. 15, and in Schrader's *Cuneiform Inscriptions*, Is. xx. This cylinder assigns Sargon's Ashdod expedition (B.C. 711) to his ninth year, instead of to his eleventh year, the date commonly given ; and thus makes his first year to have been B.C. 719 instead of B.C. 721. One plausible account of these phenomena (I do not say that it is the only plausible account of them) is afforded by the supposal that Sargon was a general of Shalmaneser, and that he came to the throne by a revolution which included a series of events ; that there was a difference of opinion as to which of these events was properly to be regarded as his accession ; that one view counted Shalmaneser's reign as lasting seven years, and dated Sargon's accession 720 B.C., while another view dated back Sargon's accession to 722 B.C., thus ascribing only five years to Shalmaneser. On this supposition, the octagonal cylinder and 1 Kings xviii. follow the first of these two views of the matter, while the second, which was more flattering to Sargon, became the prevalent view among the Assyrian scribes.