The Bible in the British Museum

Introduction

The British Museum houses a good number of objects which confirm many of the events and the existence of many people described in the Bible. The contents section below describes some of those objects, with a brief explanation of how they relate to the biblical events. They will all be covered in more detail in the remainder of this document.

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The Kurkh Stele

A monument found at Kurkh Turkey which includes the first six years of the annuls of Shalmaneser III king of Assyria. In his sixth year he is involved in a battle with an alliance of nations that includes Ahab king of Israel.

The Woman at the Window

The Ivory inlays found at Lachish in Judah and at Nimrud in Assyria.

The Black Obelisk

The Black Obelisk, famous for a relief of the likeness of the Israelite King Jehu.

The Taylor Prism

Details the first eight campaigns of Sennacherib king of Assyria. From a Bible perspective it makes reference to Hezekiah King of Judah and powerfully confirms the accuracy of the Bible record.
The Lachish Relief from Sennacherib’s Palace in Nineveh

One of the most spectacular exhibits displayed at the British Museum is a relief filling a room that depicts Sennacherib’s defeat of Judea’s second city of Lachish, during the reign of Hezekiah in 701BC.

Divination of the Liver

An object on display at the British Museum that confirms the methods of the Babylonians to divine the correct way to go in their campaigns against the countries of the west. Also it give an insight into how God used the superstitions of these great kings to control their actions.

The Lachish Letters

The Lachish Letters were discovered in 1935 by the archaeologist J L Starkey whilst excavating Tell ed-Duweir, which is the ancient city of Lachish. In total 18 fragments were found, of which 8 are on display at the British Museum. The letters are tantalising, in that some parts of the text refer to but do not name “the prophet” which begs the question, is this Jeremiah.

The Babylonian Chronicle and the Fall of Jerusalem.

A Clay Tablet, which is a small section of the Babylonian Chronicle. It details the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. In particular it gives an account of Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year and his campaign against Judah and Jerusalem. This is the year when Jehoiachin is taken captive and Nebuchadnezzar appoints Zedekiah as vassal king to rule the kingdom.
The Kurkh Stele

The Kurkh Stele was discovered in southeastern Turkey at Kurkh on the river Tigris. It shows a relief of Shalmaneser III and details the first six years of his reign. There are images of Assyrian gods curling away from Shalmaneser's raised hand. These are Sin, Anu, Ishtar and Assur. (See the image below)

From a biblical point of view the interest comes in the record of Shalmaneser's sixth year. He details a battle against an alliance of kings from the Levant area at Qarqar on the river Orontes. As you would expect the Assyrian king recounts a famous victory against the alliance with whom he fought. One of the kings in the alliance was "Adad-idri" who is identified as the biblical Ben-Hadad of Syria (2Kings 6v24 and 8v7). Of greater Biblical interest is his ally "Ahaabbu sir ilaaa", Ahab the Israelite. It seems that Ahab was a significant force in the battle. The Assyrian account claims almost total annihilation of the allied forces, however this seems to be an exaggeration as later monuments show that Shalmaneser III needed to return on several occasions and fight the alliance in one form or another over the next several years.

The battle at Qarqar is not mentioned in the Bible, what is interesting however is that this battle must have marked the final year of Ahab's life. The Bible chronology when combined with this monument and the Black Obelisk imply that this is the case. It is possible that Ahab returned with his forces in somewhat better shape than those of Hadadezer. The Biblical record shows that once the battle was over Ahab took the opportunity to fight with Hadadezer and try to recover the territory of Ramoth-Gilead which his "ally of convenience" had taken from Israel at a previous time. Ahab called on his long time ally, Jehoshaphat of Judah for help:

1Ki 22:1-4  Now three years passed without war between Syria and Israel. Then it came to pass, in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went down to visit the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" So he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth Gilead?" Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

1Ki 22:29-35  So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, saying, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "Surely it is the king of Israel!" Therefore they turned aside to fight against him, and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded." The battle increased that day; and the king was propped up in his chariot, facing the Syrians, and died at evening. The blood ran out from the wound onto the floor of the chariot.
A translation from a part of the Kurkh Stele.

From the sixth year of Shalmaneser III (853 BC)

...I approached the city of Qarqar.
I razed, destroyed and burned the city of Qarqar, his royal city.
1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry, and 20,000 troops of Hadad-ezer of Damascus;
700 chariots, 700 cavalry, 10,000 troops of Irhuleni, the Hamathite;
2,000 chariots, and 10,000 troops of Ahab, the Israelite;
500 troops of Byblos;
1,000 troops of Egypt;
10 chariots and 10,000 troops of the land of Irqanatu;
200 troops of Matinu-ba'āl of the city of Arvad;
200 troops of the land of Usanatu;
30 chariots and X,000 troops of Adon-ba'āl of the land of Shianu, 1,000 camels
of Gindibu of Arabia; X hundred troops of Ba'asa, the man of Bit ruhubi, the Ammonite--these twelve kings he took as his allies....

I decisively defeated them from the city of Qarqar to the city of Gilzau. I felled with the sword 14,000 troops, their fighting men. Like Adad, I rained down upon them a devastating flood. I spread out their corpses and I filled the plain. I felled with the sword their extensive troops. I made their blood flow in the wadis. The field was too small for laying flat their bodies; the broad countryside had been consumed in burying them. I blocked the Orontes River with their corpses as with a causeway. In the midst of this battle I took away from them chariots, cavalry, and teams of horses.
The Woman at the Window

The Ivory inlays like the ones below have been found in the area of Israel, although the two here were found at Lachish in Judah and at Nimrud in Assyria. They were used to adorn furniture in wealthy households or in temples. Ahab King of Israel is credited with having a “house of ivory”, which would have been a building full of furniture and ornaments decorated in ivory like the ones below.

1Ki 22:39  Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Plaques like the ones shown here have been found all over Assyria, Syria and Israel. Their exact meaning is not known but they are often thought to represent some of the worst aspects of idol worship, that of a sacred prostitute. There is a reference to something similar in real life in the history of Israel. Jezebel the widow of Ahab when confronted by Jehu at Jezreel presents herself in a similar way.

2Ki 9:30  When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window.

The character of Jezebel is one to be avoided and is in keeping with the representation here. Jehu describes her to Joram the then King of Israel, Jezebel’s son, this way...

2Ki 9:22  And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?"

Jezebel is vilified with good reason in the biblical record for turning both Ahab (who is given the greater responsibility in the bible record) and almost the whole of Israel to the worship of Baal.

1Ki 16:30-33  And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

The following inlays were discovered at the Fosse Temple at Lachish. They are now housed in the British Museum, Levant Room.
The Black Obelisk

The Black Obelisk, housed in the British Museum is famous for its representation of the likeness of a Hebrew king. It was found by Henry Layard in 1846 at the site of Nimrud. It was set up in Shalmaneser’s 32nd year, near the time of his death. This was a period of civil war in Assyria and the monument was probably designed to emphasise the power and prowess of Shalmaneser III. On one of the panels detailing tribute brought from Israel, there is an image of King Jehu of Israel (or one of his ambassadors) who is mentioned in the second book of Kings (Chapters 9 & 10). The event portrayed is not referred to in the bible record, however the timing of the event is very useful in confirming the biblical chronology as it both verifies the dating method used and fixes in time the reigns of Jehu and the earlier king Ahab of Israel. The tribute Jehu brought was delivered in his first year on the throne of Israel.

The text itself does not say when Jehu paid tribute to Shalmaneser III, however there are other copies of the annals, three of which state that Jehu paid tribute in the 18th year of Shalmaneser III.

The kurba ‘il Statue, housed in the Iraq museum records the events from Shalmaneser’s 18th, 19th and 20th years. The record for the 18th year is as follows:

"In the 18th year of my reign I crossed the Euphrates for the sixteenth time. Hazael of Damascus trusted in the power of his forces, marshalled his troops in full strength. He made Senir (Mt. Hermon), the summit of the mountain opposite Lebanon, his stronghold. With him I fought, and defeated him. Six thousand of his soldiers I brought down with weapons; 1121 of his chariots, 470 of his cavalry, together with his camp, I took from him. To save his life he fled; I pursued him; in Damascus, his royal city, I shut him up. His plantations I destroyed. As far as the mountains of Hauran I marched. Towns without number I laid waste, razed, and burnt with fire. There innumerable spoil I carried away. As far as to the mountains of Baal-rasi situated close to the sea (the head land at Dog River), I marched. My royal image I set up in that place. At that time I received the tribute of the Tyrians and Sidonians, and of Jehu the son of Omri."

Compare that with the summary written on the Black Obelisk which reads:

“In the eighteenth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the sixteenth time. Hazael of Aram came out in battle. I captured from him: 1121 of his chariots, 470 of his cavalry, together with his camp.”

The Obelisk has less detail and lists 32 years of Shalmaneser’s reign. The Kurba’il text and other texts give more detail but are clearly the same events. The five tributes represented on the Obelisk are from the farthest reaches of the Assyrian empire and are designed to demonstrate Shalmaneser’s power and prowess.
It seems reasonable to assume that Jehu brought the tribute to Shalmaneser whilst the Assyrians were in the area of Syria. The tribute (along with that of the Tyrians and the Sidonians) being a means of avoiding an attack by the Assyrian army into Israel itself. Effectively buying peace from Assyria.

Information gleaned from the Tel Dan Stela suggests that Jehu was also attempting to buy protection from Shalmaneser against Israel’s northern enemy, Hazael of Syria.

**Black Obelisk: Front.**

The second panel down shows Jehu giving obeisance to Shalmaneser III King of Assyria, surrounded by Assyrian officials.

The inscription in cuneiform reads: “Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.”

Jehu in the biblical text is not son of Omri but was famous for ending the Omrid dynasty. Omri at the time was well known as a having been successful king, Israel for a time was known as the land of Omri. Added to this, the paying of tribute was paid in Jehu’s first year as king and the reference is easy to understand. It may even be that the Assyrians used the term “Jehu son of Omri” as a deliberate put down, as a show of strength that Jehu could not question or counteract as leader of an inferior kingdom.
Tribute of Sûa, the Gilzânite. I received from him: silver, gold, lead, copper vessels, staves for the hand of the king, horses, two-humped camels.

Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.

Tribute of the land of Musri. I received from him: two-humped camels, a river-ox, a sakêa, a sûsu, elephants, monkeys, apes.

Tribute of Marduk-apal-usur of Suhi. I received from him: silver, gold, pitchers of gold, ivory, javelins, bûia, brightly colored linen garments.

Tribute of Karparunda of Hattina. I received from him: silver, gold, lead, copper, copper vessels, ivory, cypress (timbers).
Black Obelisk: Right Side

The right hand side of the obelisk shows two Assyrian officials leading Israelites who are presenting tribute to Shalmaneser. Included on this panel are a golden goblet, golden bowl and golden pitcher mentioned in the text.

The inscription in cuneiform reads: “Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.”

Black Obelisk: Rear

The rear of the obelisk shows more of the line of Israelites who are presenting tribute to Shalmaneser. Included on this panel are pitchers of gold, a javelin, goblets of gold and staves. Although the representation is by an Assyrian artist, it is interesting to note the appearance and clothing of the Israelites of this period.

The inscription in cuneiform reads: “Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.”
**Black Obelisk: Left Side**

The final relief shows more Israelites presenting tribute to Shalmaneser. Included on this panel are lead carried on the shoulders of two men, more pitchers of gold mentioned in the text. The final tribute bearer seems to be carrying a basket of fruit or some other produce, many of the Israelites are also carrying sacks.

The inscription in cuneiform reads: “Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.”
A Translation of the Inscription on the Black Obelisk
(Annals of Shalmaneser III of Assyria)

(1-21) Assur, the great lord, king of all the great gods; Anu, king of the Igigi and Anunnaki, the lord of lands; Enlil, the exalted, father of the gods, the creator; Ea, king of the Deep, who determines destiny; Sin, king of the tiara, exalted in splendor; Adad, mighty, pre-eminent, lord of abundance; Shamash, judge of heaven and earth, director of all; Marduk, master of the gods, lord of law; Urta, valiant one of the Igigi and the Anunnaki, the almighty god; Nergal, the ready, king of battle; Nusku, bearer of the shining scepter, the god who renders decisions; Ninlil, spouse of Bêl, mother of the great gods; Ishtar, first in heaven and on earth, who fills the measure of bravery; the great gods, who ordain destinies, who have made great my kingdom, I invoke.

Shalmaneser, king of all peoples, lord, priest of Assur, mighty king, king of all the four regions, Sun of all peoples, despot of all lands; son of Assur-nâsir-pal, the high priest, whose priesthood was acceptable to the gods and who brought in submission at his feet the totality of the countries; glorious offspring of Tukulti-Urta, who slew all of his foes and overwhelmed them like a deluge.

(22-26) At the beginning of my reign, when I solemnly took my seat upon the royal throne, I mobilized my chariots and troops; I entered the passes of the land of Simesi; I captured Aridu, the stronghold of Ninni.

(26-31) In my first year, I crossed the Euphrates at its flood; I advanced to the shore of the sea of the setting sun; I washed my weapons in the sea; I offered sacrifices to my gods. I climbed Mount Amanus; I cut cedar and cypress timbers. I climbed Mount Lallar, and set up my royal image.

(32-35) In the second year of my reign, I drew near to Til-barzip. I captured the cities of Ahuni, son of Adini. In his city I shut him up. I crossed the Euphrates at its flood; I captured Dabigu, a fortified city of Hatti, together with the towns of its neighborhood.

(35-44) In the third year of my reign, Ahuni, son of Adini, was frightened before my mighty weapons and retreated from Til-barzip, his royal city. I crossed the Euphrates. I seized for myself the city of Ana-Assur-utir-asbat, which lies on the other side of the Euphrates, on the Sagur river, which the Hittite people called Pitru. When I returned, I entered the passes of the land of Alzi; the lands of Alzi, Suhni, Daiaeni, Tumme, Arzashkunu, the royal city of Arame, the Armenian (king), Gilzânu, and Hubushkia (I conquered).

(45-52) In the eponymy of Daian-Assur, I departed from Nineveh, crossed the Euphrates at its flood, and pursued Ahuni, son of Adini. He made Shitamrat, a mount peak, which is on the bank of the Euphrates, his stronghold. The mountain peak I stormed and captured. Ahuni, together with his gods, his chariots, his horses, his sons, his daughters, his troops, I carried off and brought to my city, Assur. In that same year I crossed Mount Kullar and descended against Zamua, which lies inside. I captured the cities of Nikdiara: the city of Ida and Nikdima.
(52-54) In the fifth year of my reign, I went up against Mount Kashiari. I captured eleven strongholds. I shut up Assur-itti-sheruriai in his city. His many gifts I received from him.

(54-62) In the sixth year of my reign, I drew near to the cities on the banks of the Balih. They slew Giammu, governor of their cities. I entered Til-Mâr-ahi. The Euphrates I crossed at it flood. I received gifts from all the kings of Hatti. At that time Hadad-ezer of Aram, Irhuleni the Hamathite, together with the kings of Hatti and the seacoast, relied on each other's strength and came out against me to make battle and war. At the command of Assur, the great lor, my lord, I fought with them, I accomplished their defeat. I took from them their chariots, their cavalry, and their weapons of war. I slew 20,500 of their warriors with the sword.

(63-72) In the seventh year of my reign, I marched against the cities of Ha-rat, the til-abnêite. I captured Til-abnê, his royal city, together with the towns of its region. I advanced to the source of the Tigris, where the waters emerge. I washed the weapon of Assur in it, I offered sacrifices to my gods, I spread a fantastic banquet. I fashioned a heroic image of my royal personage. I wrote on it the glory of Assur, my lord, all my deeds of bravery which I performed in the lands and set it up there.

(73-76) In the eighth year of my reign, Marduk-bêl-usâte;, the younger brother, revolted against Marduk-zâkir-shumi, king of Karduniash, and they divided the land in its entirety. In order to avenge Marduk-zâkir-shumi, I marched out and captured Mê-Turnat.

(77-84) In the ninth year of my reign, I marched against Akkad a second time. I besieged Gananate. As for Marduk-bêl-usâte, the terrifying splendor of Assur and Marduk overcame him and he went up into the mountains to save his life. I pursued him. I cut down with the sword Marduk-bêl-usâte and the rebel army officers who were with him.

(85-86) In the tenth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the eighth time. I captured the cities of Sangara of Carchemish. I advanced against the cities of Arame. I captured Arnê, his royal city, together with 100 of his small cities.

(87-89) In the eleventh year of my reign, I crossed the euphrates for the ninth time. I captured countless cities. I descended upon cities of the land of Hamath. I captured 89 cities. Hadad-ezer of Aram and twelve kings of the land of Hatti stood by each other. I was successful in overthrowing them.

(89-90) In the twelfth year of my reign, I crossed the euphrates for the tenth time. I marched against the land of Pakar-hubuna. I carried off their spoil.

(90-91) In the thirteenth year of my reign, I went up against the land of laeti. I carried off their spoil.

(92-93) In the fourteenth year of my reign, I mustered my land. I crossed the Euphrates. Twelve kings advanced to meet me. I battled with them and successfully overthrew them.

(92-93) In the fifteenth year of my reign, I advanced to the sources of the tigris and Euphrates. I set up my royal image upon their cliffs.
(93-95) In the sixteenth year of my reign, I crossed the Azaba river. I marched against the land of Manri. Marduk-mudammik, king of Namri, went into the mountains to save his life. I carried his goods, his armies, and his gods to Assyri.

(96-97) In the seventeenth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates. I went up on Mount Amanus; I cut cedar timbers.

(97-99) In the eighteenth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the sixteenth time. Hazael of Aram came out in battle. I captured from him: 1121 of his chariots, 470 of his cavalry, together with his camp.

(99-100) In the nineteenth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the eighteenth time. I went up on Mount Amanus and I cut cedar timbers.

(100-102) In the twentieth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the twentieth time. I descended against the land of Kāue. I captured their cities. I carried off their spoil.

(102-4) In the twenty-first year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the twenty-first time. I advanced against the cities of Hazael of Aram. I captured four of his cities. I received the gifts of the Tyrians, Sidonians, and Gebalites.

(104-7) In the twenty-second year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates for the twenty-second time. I descended against the land of Tabal. At that time I received the gifts of 24 kings of Tabal. I advanced to Mount Tunni, the silver mountain, and Mount Mulî, the marble mountain.

(107-10) In the twenty-third year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates. I captured Uetash, the royal city of Lalla of the land of Milid. The kings of the land of Tabal arrived and I received their gifts.

(110-26) In the twenty-fourth year of my reign, I crossed over the Lower Zab River. I advanced through the land of Hashimur; I descended to the land of Namri. Ianzū, king of Namri, was frightened before my mighty weapons, and he went up into the mountains to save his life. I captured Sihishalah, Bit-tamul, Bit-sakki, Bit-shedi, his fortified cities. I slew his warriors; I carried off his spoil. I destroyed, devastated, and burned his cities with fire. The rest of them went up into the mountains. I stormed and captured the mountain peak; I slew their warriors. I brought down their booty and goods. I departed from Namri. I received the gifts of 27 kings of the land of Parsua. I departed from Parsua. I descended to the lands of Messi and the Medes, the lands of Araziash and Harhâr. I captured the cities of Kuakinda, Tarzanabi, Esamul, Kinabilla, together with the towns of their regions. I slew their warriors; I carried off their spoil. I destroyed, devastated, and burned their cities with fire. I set up my royal image in the land of Harhâr. I carried off and brought to Assyria Ianzū, son of Haban, together with his great wealth, his gods, his sons, his daughters, and his many soldiers.

(126-31) In the twenty-fifth year of my reign, I crossed the Euphrates at its flood. I received the gifts of the kings of Hatti, all of them. I crossed over Mount Amanus to the cities of Katei of the land of Kaue; I descended. I stormed and captured Timur, his royal city. I slew their warriors; I carried off their spoil. I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire countless
cities. On my return, I seized as a stronghold for myself Mûru, the royal city of Arame, son of Agusi. I strengthened its thresholds; I built a palace in it for my royal abode.

(132-41) In the twenty-sixth year of my reign, I traversed Mount Amanus for the seventh time; and for the fourth time I marched against the cities of Katei of Kaue. I besieged Tanakun, the royal city of Tulka. The terrifying splendor of Assur, my lord, overpowered him. They came out and seized my fee. I received his hostages; I received from him silver, gold, iron, cattle, and sheep as tribute. I departed from Tanakun and advanced against Lamenash. The people of the land fled; they climbed a steep mountain. I stormed the mountain peak and captured them. I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire their cities. I advanced to Tarzi; they seized my feet. I received silver and gold as their tribute. I set up Kirri, brother of Kattei, as king over them. On my return I ascended Mount Amanus; I cut cedar timbers; I carried them away and brought them to my city, Assur.

(141-46) In the twenty-seventh year of my reign, I mustered my chariots and troops. I dispatched at the head of my armies Dâian-Assur-the Turtan, the commander of my immense armies; I sent him against Urartu. He descended against Bît-Zamâni; he entered by the pass of Ammash and crossed the Arzania river. Sêduri, the Armenian, heard about it and trusted the strength of his many troops. He advanced against me to offer battle. I fought with him; I was successful in defeating him. I filled the wide plain with the corpses of his warriors.

(146-56) In the twenty-eighth year of my reign, while I was staying in Calah, word was brought me that the people of Hattina had slain Lubarna their lord, and had raised Surri, who was not "lord of the throne," to the kingship over them. I dispatched Dâian-Assur-the Turtan, the commander of my immense armies-sending him at the head of my army and camp. He crossed the Euphrates at its flood. In Kinalua, his royal city, he came to a halt. The awe-inspiring splendor of Assur, my lord overcame Surri, who was not "lord of the throne," and he went to the death of his fate. The people of Hattina were afraid before the terror of my mighty weapons; they seized the sons of Surri, together with the "sinners," and gave them to me. I impaled these (rebels) on stakes. Sâsi, son of the Uzzite, seized my feet. I set him over them as king. I received from them: silver, gold, lead, copper, iron, ivory without measure. I fashioned a heroic image of my royal personage; I had it set up in Kinalua, his royal city, in the house of his gods.

(156-59) In the twenty-ninth year of my reign, I dispatched and sent troops and camp against Kirhi. I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire their cities. I overwhelmed their lands like a flood. I poured out awe-inspiring terror over them.

(159-74) In the thirtieth year of my reign, while I remained in Calah, I dispatched Dâian-Assur-the Turtan, the commander of my immense armies-sending him at the head of my armies. He crossed the Zab River; he approached into the midst of the cities of the Hubushkians. I received the tribute of Datana, the Hubushkian. I departed from the midst of the cities of the Hubushkians; I approached into the midst of the cities of Magdubi, the Malhisite. I received tribute. I departed from the midst of the cities of the Malhisites; I approached into the midst of the cities of Ualki, the Mannean. Ualki, the Mannean, became terrified by the splendor of my weapons and deserted Zirta, his royal city, going up into the mountains to save his life. I pursued him. I brought back his cattle, sheep, and property in countless numbers.
destroyed, devastated, and burned his cities with fire. I departed from Manash; I approached the cities of Shulusunu of Harruna. I captured Masashuru, his royal city, together with the towns of its region. I pardoned Shulusunu and his sons; I returned him to his land. I imposed tribute and tax in the form of horses broken to yoke. I drew near to Shurdira. I received the tribute of Artasari, the Shurdirite. I descended upon Parsua. I received the tribute of the kings of Parsua. I captured the rest of Parsua, who were not loyal to Assur; I captured their cities; I carried off their spoil and property to Assyria.

(174-90) In the thirty-first year of my reign, for the second time I set my face toward Assur and Adad. And at that time, while I remained in Calah, I dispatched Dâian-Assur-the Turtan, the commander of my immense armies-sending him at the head of my troops and camp. He approached the cities of Datana the Hubushkian. I received tribute from him. I marched against Sapparia, the stronghold of the land of Musasir. I captured Sapparia, together with 46 cities of the Musasirites. I marched as far as the fortresses of the Urartians. I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire 50 of their cities. I descended against Gilzânu. I received the tribute of Upû, the Gilzânite, of the M[...], the [...], the Harranites, the Shashganites, the Andites, and the [...]: cattle, sheep, and horses broken to the yoke. I went down against the cities of the land of Tabal. I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire Perria, Shitiuaria, its strong cities, together with 22 towns of its region. I poured out awe-inspiring terror over them. He marched against the cities of the Parsuans. I captured Bushtu, Shalahamanu, Kinihamanu, fortified cities, together with 23 towns of their region. I slew their warriors; I carried off their booty. I descended against the land of Manri. The awe-inspiring terror of Assur and Marduk overwhelmed them. They deserted their cities. They went up into the wild mountains. I destroyed, devasted, and burned with fire 250 of their cities. I descended through the passes of Simesi at the head of the land of Halman.
The Sennacherib Prism

The Sennacherib prism is a six sided clay prism detailing the first eight military campaigns of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The prism is also known as the Taylor prism after the discoverer, Colonel R. Taylor who found it in Nineveh in 1830.

The prism is famous for it’s reference to Hezekiah the Biblical king of Judah.

As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke: forty-six of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area, which were without number, by levelling with battering-rams and by bringing up seige-engines, and by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels, and breeches, I besieged and took them. 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. (Hezekiah) himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him- the one coming out of the city-gate, I turned back to his misery. His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land, and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bêl, king of Gaza, I gave (them). And thus I diminished his land. I added to the former tribute, and I lad upon him the surrender of their land and imposts-gifts for my majesty. As for Hezekiah, the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him, and the Arabs and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him. In addition to the thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, gems, antimony, jewels, large carnelians, ivory-inlaid couches, ivory-inlaid chairs, elephant hides, elephant tusks, ebony, boxwood, all kinds of valuable treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians, which he had brought after me to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute and to accept servitude, he dispatched his messengers.
Sennacherib’s boast to have shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem is in complete accord with the Biblical record. It also fits rather well with the proud attitude of the Assyrian kings who could never admit failure or defeat. Sennacherib’s highly understated admission of defeat is deafening...

“(Hezekiah) himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city.”

The biblical record has a different story to tell:

2Ki 19:35 “And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.”

Isaiah 30 & 31 are fascinating in this respect and perhaps explain how “the angel of the LORD” destroyed the Assyrian army. These chapters give the impression that whilst the Hezekiah, Isaiah and the remnant of Judah were celebrating Passover (Passover was the only feast that was kept at night) inside the walls of Jerusalem, outside a violent storm raged, wreaking destruction on the Assyrian camp.

Isa 30v27-33 “Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; 28 his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray. 29 You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. 30 And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones. 31 The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod. 32 And every stroke of the appointed staff that the LORD lays on them will be to the sound of tambourines and lyres. Battling with brandished arm, he will fight with them. 33 For a burning place has long been prepared; indeed, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.”

Chapter 31 of Isaiah has a similar message and is a continuation of Isaiah’s words from God to the remnant of Judah:

Isa 31v4-9 For thus the LORD said to me, "As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. 5 Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it."
6 Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel.
7 For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.
8 "And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour.
9 His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

Both chapters are in the context of not relying on the then superpower of Egypt for protection against the Assyrians, but rather to rely on God.

The table on the next page shows in more detail where the Biblical record and the Assyrian record coincide.

The British Museum also has on display a section of text taken from the base of a winged bull in Sennacherib's palace. The text again contains the annuls of Sennacherib and in content is essentially the same as the Taylor prism. Of particular interest to the Bible reader, the shutting up of Hezekiah in Jerusalem and the tribute he paid to the Assyrian king are mentioned here also.
1 Kings 18 & 19

1Kings 18:7b8: "And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city."

Sennacherib’s Prism

Sennacherib refers to Hezekiah’s control over the Philistine area, an undesigned coincidence that links the two records and demonstrates that both records are talking about the same events.

"The officials, nobles, and people of Ekron, who had thrown Padi their king-bond by oath, and Assyria- into fetters of iron and... ...had given him over to Hezekiah, the Judahite - he kept him in confinement like an enemy..."

He boasts that the cities he has defeated, he gives to the former Philistine kings...

"His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land, and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sili-beli, king of Gaza, I gave (them). And thus I diminished his land.

2Kings 18:13 "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them."

"As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke: forty-six of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area, which were without number, by levelling with battering-rams and by bringing up siege-engines, and by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels, and breaches, I besieged and took them."

2Kings 18:14-16 "And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, “I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear.” And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king’s house.

At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD and from the doorposts that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria."

The weight of the gold is the same but the silver is almost three times more. This makes sense,

Sennacherib is boasting about the whole quantity of tribute, several years after the event. He may be exaggerating but it is also worth noting the trouble Hezekiah took to obtain the gold. It is likely that he had no more gold to give. The silver and other tribute would’ve been taken from cities like Lachish which Sennacherib attacked and defeated. He puts a spin on the story to make himself look greater and Hezekiah appear as weak as possible. After all it was a storm that defeated the Assyrian army whilst Hezekiah was "shut up" inside Jerusalem.

Famously Hezekiah defeats the Assyrian King by faith in the intervention of God. In one night the Assyrian army is decimated. 185 thousand soldiers of the Assyrians are killed.

2K 19:31 “For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD will do this.

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it.

By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD.

For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”

And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people rose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.

And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place."

Chapter 20 of second kings refers to a delegation from Babylon of the envoys of Merodach-Baladan

2K 20:12 "At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

Both Hezekiah and Merodach-Baladan had a common enemy in the King of Assyria at this time. Again evidence that the bible record really is historical and accurate to it's time.

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Merodach-Baladan is referred to in the Taylor prism in both the first and the fourth campaigns of Sennacherib.

"In my first campaign I accomplished the defeat of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia, together with the army of Elam, his ally, on the plain of Kish."

"...That Merodach-baladan, whose defeat I had brought about in the course of my first campaign, and whose forces I had shattered, the roar of my mighty arms and the onset of my terrible battle he feared..."
Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters, the wise shepherd, favorite of the great gods, guardian of right, lover of justice, who lends support, who comes to the aid of the destitute, who performs pious acts, perfect hero, mighty man, first among all princes, the powerful one who consumes the insubmissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt; the god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivalled kinship has entrusted to me, and above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, he has brought the black-headed people in submission at my feet; and mighty kings feared my warfare, leaving their homes and flying alone, like the sidinnu, the bird of the cave, to some inaccessible place.

In my first campaign I accomplished the defeat of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia, together with the army of Elam, his ally, on the plain of Kish. In the midst of that battle he deserted his camp, and he escaped alone, so he saved his own life. The chariots, horses, wagons, mules, which he left behind at the beginning of the battle my hands siezed. Into his palace, which is in Babylon, I entered jubilantly. I opened his treasure-house: gold, silver, vessels of gold and silver, precious stones of every name, goods and property without limit, heavy tribute, his harem, courtiers and officials, singers-male and female—all his artisans, as many as there were, his palace servants I brought out, and I counted as spoil. In the might of Assur my lord, seventy-five of his strong walled cities of Chaldea, and 420 small cities of their area I surrounded, I conquered, I carried off their spoil. The Arabs, Arameans, and Chaldeans who were in Erech, Nippur, Kish, Harsagkalamma, Kutha and Sippar, together with the citizens, the rebels I brought out and counted as booty.

On my return, the Tu’muna, Rihihu, Yadakku, Ubudu, Kibrê, Malahu, Gurumu, Ubulu, Damunu, Gambulu, Hindaru, Ru’ûa, Bukudu, Hamrânû, Hagarânû, Nabatu, Li’tâu, Arameans who were not submissive- I conquered all of them. 208,000 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep, without number- a heavy booty-I carried off to Assyria
In the course of my campaign, I received from Nabû-bêl-shumâte, governor of the city of Hararate: gold silver, great musukkani-trees, asses, camels, cattle, and sheep as his onerous contribution. The warriors of Hirimme, wicked enemies, I cut down with the sword. No one escaped. Their corpses I hung on stakes, surrounding the city (with them). That district I reorganized: one ox, ten lambs, ten homers of wine, twenty homers of dates, its choicest, for the gods of Assyria, my lords, I established for all time.

In my second campaign, Assur, my lord, encouraged me, and against the land of the Kassites and the land of the Yasubigallai, who from of old had not been submissive to the kings, my ancestors, I marched. In the midst of the high mountains I rode on horseback where the terrain was difficult, and had my chariot drawn up with ropes: where it became too steep, I clambered up on foot like the wild-ox. The cities of Bît-Kilamzah, Hardishpi and Bît-Kubatti, their strong, walled cities, I besieged, I captured. People, horses, mules, asses, cattle, and sheep, I brought out from their midst and counted as booty. And their small cities, which were beyond numbering I destroyed, I devastated, and I turned into ruins. The houses of the steppe, (namely) the tents, in which they lived, I set on fire and turned them into flames. I turned round, and made that Bît-Kilamzah into a fortress-I made its walls stronger than they had ever been before-

COLUMNS 2

Land settled in it people of the lands my hands had conquered. The people of the land of the Kassites and the land of the Yasubigallai, who had fled before my arms, I brought down out of the mountains and settled them in Hardishpi and Bît-Kubatti. Into the hand of my official, the governor of Arapha, I placed them. I had a stele made, and the might of my conquering hand which I had established upon them, I had inscribed on it. I set it up in the midst of the city.

The front of my yoke I turned around and took the road to the land of the Elippi. Before me Ispabâra, their king, abandoned his strong cities, his treasurehouses, and fled to the distant parts. Over the whole of his wide land I swept like a hurricane. The cities Marubishti and Akkuddu, his royal residence-cities, together with 34 small towns of their area, I besieged, I captured, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number I carried off. I brought him to nothing; I diminished his land.

Sisirtu and Kummahlum, strong cities, together with the small towns in their areas, the district of Bît-Barrû in its totality, I cut off from his land and added it to the territory of Assyria. Elenzash I turned into the royal city and stronghold of that district. I changed its former name, calling its name Kar-Sennacherib. Peoples of the lands my hands had conquered I settled in it. To my official, the governor of Harhar, I handed it over. Thus I extended my land.

....On my return, I received the heavy tribute of the distant Medes, whose name none of the kings, my fathers, had ever heard. I made them submit to the yoke of my rule.

In my third campaign, I went against the Hittite-land. Lulê, king of Sidon, the terrifying splendor of my sovereignty overcame him, and far off into the midst of the sea he fled. There
he died. Great Sidon, Little Sidon, Bît-Zitti, Zaribtu, Mahalliba, Ushu, Akzib, Akko, his strong, walled cities, where there were fodder and drink, for his garrisons, the terrors of the weapon of Assur, my lord, overpowered them and they bowed in submission at my feet. I seated Tuba’lu on the royal throne over them, and tribute, gifts for my majesty, I imposed upon him for all time, without ceasing.

From Menachem, the Shamsimurunite, Tuba’lu the Sidonite, Abdi-liti the Arvadite, Uru-milki the Gublite, Mitinti the Ashdodite Budu-ilu the Beth Ammonite, Kammusunadbi the Moabite, Malik-rammu the Edomite, kings of Amurru, all of them, numerous presents as their heavy tribute, they brought before me for the fourth time, and kissed my feet.

But Sidka, the king of Ashkelon, who had not submitted to my yoke, the gods of his father’s house, himself, his wife, his sons, his daughters, his brothers, the seed of his paternal house, I tore away and brought to Assyria. Sharru-lu-dari, son of Rukibti, their former king, I set over the people of Ashkelon, and I imposed upon him the payment of tribute: presents to my majesty. He accepted my yoke. In the course of my campaign, Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banaibarka, Asuru, cities of Sidka, who had not speedily bowed in submission at my feet, I besieged, I conquered, I carried off their spoil.

The officials, nobles, and people of Ekron, who had thrown Padi their king-bound by oath and curse of Assyria- into fetters of iron and... ...had given him over to Hezekiah, the Judahite-he kept him in confinement like an enemy... their heart became afraid, and they called upon the Egyptian kings, the bowmen, chariots and horses of the king of Meluhha [Ethiopia], a countless host, and these came to their aid. In the neighborhood of Eltekeh, their ranks being drawn up before me,
they offered battle. With the aid of Assur, my lord, I fought with them and brought about their defeat. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the Ethiopian king’s charioteers, my hands captured alive in the midst of the battle. Eltekeh and Timnah I besieged, I captured, and I took away their spoil.

I approached Ekron and slew the governors and nobles who had rebelled, and hung their bodies on stakes around the city. The inhabitants who rebelled and treated (Assyria) lightly I counted as spoil. The rest of them, who were not guilty of rebellion and contempt, for whom there was no punishment, I declared their pardon. Padi, their king, I brought out to Jerusalem, set him on the royal throne over them, and imposed upon him my royal tribute.

As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke: forty-six of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area, which were without number, by levelling with battering-rams and by bringing up siege-engines, and by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels, and breeches, I besieged and took them. 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. (Hezekiah) himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him- the one coming out of the city-gate, I turned back to his misery. His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land, and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bêl, king of Gaza, I gave (them). And thus I diminished his land. I added to the former tribute, and I lad upon him the surrender of their land and imposts-gifts for my majesty. As for Hezekiah, the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him, and the Arabs and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him. In addition to the thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, gems, antimony, jewels, large carnelians, ivory-inlaid couches, ivory-inlaid chairs, elephant hides, elephant tusks, ebony, boxwood, all kinds of valuable treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians, which he had brought after me to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute and to accept servitude, he dispatched his messengers.

In my fourth campaign, Assur, my lord, gave me courage, and I mustered my numerous troops and gave the command to proceed against Bît-Yakin. In the course of my campaign, I accomplished the overthrow of Shuzubi, the Chaldean, who sat in the midst of the swamps, at Bitûtu. That one, the terror of my battle fell upon him, and tore his heart; like a criminal he fled alone, and his place was seen no more.

The front of my yoke I turned and and I took the way to Bît-Yakin. That Merodach-baladan, whose defeat I had brought about in the course of my first campaign, and whose forces I had shattered, the roar of my mighty arms and the onset of my terrible battle he feared and he gathered together the gods of his whole land in their shrines, and loaded them into ships and fled like a bird to Nagite-rakki, which is in the middle of the sea. His brothers, the seed of his father’s house, whom he had left by the seashore, together with the rest of the people of his land, I brought out of Bît-Yakin, from the midst of the swamps and canebrakes, and counted as spoil. I turned about and ruined and devastated his cities; I made them like ruin-heaps. Upon his ally, the king of Elam, I poured out my terror. On my return, I placed on his
(Merodach-baladan's) royal throne, Assur-nādin-shum, my oldest son, offspring of my knees. I placed him in charge of the wide land of Sumer and Akkad.

In my fifth campaign, the warriors of Tumurru, Sharum, Ezama, Kibshu, Halgidda, Kua, and Kana-whose abodes... were set on the peak of Mt. Nipur, a steep mountain, like the nests of the eagle, king of birds-were not submissive to my yoke. I had my camp pitched at the foot of Mt. Nipur and with my choice bodyguard

COLUMN 4

and my relentless warriors, I, like a strong wild-ox, went before them.... I surmounted gullies, mountain torrents and waterfalls, dangerous cliffs in my sedan-chair. Where it was too steep for my chair, I advanced on foot. Like a young gazelle, I mounted the highest peaks pursuing them. Wherever my knees found a resting-place, I sat down on some mountain boulder and drank the cold water from a waterskin for my thirst. To the summits of the mountains I pursued them and brought about their overthrow. I captured their cities and carried off their spoil, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire.

The front of my yoke I turned. Against Maniae, king of Ukku of the land of Daie, who was not submissive, I took the road.... Before my day, none of the kings who lived before me, had traveled the unblazed trails and wearisome paths which run along these rugged mountains. At the foot of Mt. Anara and Mt. Uppa, mighty mountains, I had my camp pitched, and on a house-chair I together with my seasoned warriors, made my wearisome way through their narrow passes, and with great difficulty climbed to the highest peak of the mountains. That Maniae saw the clouds of dust raised by the feet of my armies, abandoned Ukku, his royal city, and fled to distant parts. I besieged Ukku, I captured it, and took away its spoil. All kinds of goods and merchandise, the treasure of his palace, I carried away from it and counted it as booty. Furthermore, 33 cities within the bounds of his province I captured. People, asses, cattle and sheep, I carried away from them as spoil. I destroyed, I devasted, and I burned with fire.

In my sixth campaign the rest of the people of Bît-Yakin, who had run off before my powerful weapons like wild asses, who had gathered together the gods of their whole land in their shrines, had crossed the great sea of the rising sun and in Nagitu of Elam had established their abodes; in Hittite ships I crossed the sea. Nagitu Nagitu-di'bina, together with the lands of Hilmu, Billatu and Hupapanu, provinces of Elam, I conquered. The people of Bît-Yakin, together with their gods, and the people of the king of Elam, I carried off; not a rebel escaped. I had them loaded in vessels, brought over to this side, and started on the way to Assyria. The cities which were in those provinces I destroyed, I devasted, I burned with fire. Into tells and ruins I turned them. On my return, Shuzubu, the Babylonian, who during an uprising in the land had turned to himself the rule of Sumer and Akkad, I accomplished his defeat in a battle of the plain. I seized him alive with my own hands, I threw him into bonds and fetters of iron and brought him to Assyria. The king of Elam, who had gone over to his side and had aided him, I defeated. His forces I scattered and I shattered his army.

In my seventh campaign, Assur, my lord, supported me, and I advanced against Elam. Bît-Ha'iri and Rasâ, cities on the border of Assyria which the Elamite had seized by force during
the time of my father—in the course of my campaign I conquered and I despoiled them. I settled my garrisons in them and restored them to the borders of Assyria. I placed them under the commandant of Dêr. The cities of Bubê, Dunni-Shamis, Bit-Risia, Bit-ahlâmê, Duru, Kallate-sulai Shilibtu, Bêt-Asusi, Kar-Zêr-ikîsha, Bêt-Gissi, Bêt-Katpalani, Bêt-Imbia, Hamânû, Bêt-Arrabi, Burutu, Dimtu-su-lai, Dimtu-su-Marbît-etir, Harri-ashlaki, Rabbai, Rásu, Akkararina Tel-Uhuri, Hamranu, Naditu, together with the cities of the passes of Bêt-Bunaki, tel-Humbi, Dimtu-su-Dume-ilu, Bêt-Ubâia, Baltî-lîshir, Tagab-lîshir, Shanakidate, the lower Masutu, Sar-hudiri, Alum-sha-bêlit-bîti, Bêt-ahê-iddîna, Ïitte-uba, 34 strong cities, together with the small cities in their areas, which were countless, I besieged, I conquered, I despoiled, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire, with the smoke of their conflagration I covered the wide heavens like a hurricane. The Elamite, Kudur-nahundu, heard of the overthrow of his cities.

COLUMN 5

The Elamite, Kudur-nahundu, heard of the overthrow of his cities, terror overwhelmed him, the (people of) the rest of his cities he brought into the strongholds. He himself left Madaktu, his royal city, and took his way to Haidala which is in the distant mountains. I gave the word to march against Madaktu, his royal city. In the month of rain, extreme cold set in and the heavy storms sent down rain upon rain and snow. I was afraid of the swollen mountain streams; the front of my yoke I turned and took the road to Nineveh. At that time, at the command of Assur, my lord, Kudur-Nahundu, the king of Elam, in less than three months died sudenly on a day not of his fate. After him, Umman-menanu, who possessed neither sense nor judgment, his younger brother, sat on his throne.

In my eighth campaign, after Shuzubu had revolted, and the Babylonians, wicked devils, had closed the city-gates—their hearts planning resistance; Shuzubu the Chaldean, a weakling hero, who had no knees, a slave, subject to the governor of the city of the city of Lahiri; the fugitive Arameans gathered around him, the runaway, the murderer, the bandit. Into the marshes they descended and started a rebellion. But I completely surrounded him. I pressed him to the life. Through fear and hunger he fled to Elam. When plotting and treachery were hatched against him, he fled from Elam and entered Shuanna. The Babylonians placed him on the throne—for which he was not fit- and entrusted to him the government of Sumer and Akkad. They opened the treasury of the Esagila temple and the gold and silver belonging to Bêl [Marduk] and Sarpanit, they brought forth the property of the temples of their gods. And to Umman-menanu, king of Elam, who had neither sense nor judgment, they sent them as a bribe (saying):"Gather your army, prepare your camp, haste to Babylon, stand at our side, for you are our trust." That Elamite—whose cities I had conquered and turned into ruins on my earlier campaign against Elam—without thinking received the bribes from them, gathered his army and camp, collected his chariots and wagons, and hitched his horses and mules to them. The lands of Parsuash Anzan, Pasheru, Ellipi, the men of Yazan, Lâkabra, Harzunu, Dummuku, Sulai, Samuna, the son of Merodach-baladan, the lands of Bêt-Adini, Bêt-Amukkanu, Bêt-Sillana, Bêt-Sâlatutu-akki, the city of Lahîru, the men of Bukudu, Gambulum, Halatum Ru'ua, Ubulum, Malahu, Rapiku, Hindaru, Damunu—an enormous vassal army he called to his side. The largest portion of them...took the road to Akkad. Closing in on Babylon, they exchanged courtesies with Shuzubu, the Chaldean king of Babylon, and brought their army to a halt. Like the onset of locust swarms of the springtime, they steadily progressed...
against me to offer battle. With the dust of their feet covering the wide heavens, like a mighty storm with masses of dense clouds, they drew up in battle array before me in the city of Halulê, on the bank of the Tigris. They blocked my passage and offered battle. As for me, I prayed for victory over the mighty foe to Assur, Sin, Shamash, Bêl, Nabû, Nergal, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Arbela. They quickly gave ear to my prayers and came to my aid. Like a lion I raged; I put on a coat of mail. A helmet, emblem of victory, I placed upon my head. My great battle chariot, which brings the foe low, I hurriedly mounted in the anger of my heart. The mighty bow, which Assur had given me, I seized in my hands; the javelin, piercing to the life, I grasped. Against all of the armies of wicked enemies, I cried out, rumbling like a storm. I roared like Adad. At the word of Assur, the great lord, my lord, on flank and front

I pressed upon the enemy like the onset of a raging storm. With the weapons of Assur, my lord, and the terrible onset of my attack, I stopped their advance, I succeeded in surrounding them, I decimated the enemy host with arrow and spear. I bored through all of their bodies. Humban-undasha, the field-marshall of the king of Elam, a trustworthy man, commander of his armies, his chief support, together with his nobles who wear the golden belt-dagger... and whose wrists are encircles with thick rings of shining gold like fat steers who have hobbles put on them,

COLUMN 6

quickly I cut them down and defeated them. I cut their throats, and I cut off their precious lives like a string. Like the many waters of a storm, I made their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth. My prancing steeds harnessed for my riding plunged into the streams of their blood as (into) a river. The wheels of my war chariot, which brings the wicked and evil low, were spattered with blood and filth. With the bodies of their warriors I filled the plain like grass. Their testicles I cut off and tore out their privates like the seeds of cucumbers of Siwan. I cut off their hands. The heavy rings of brightest gold which were on their wrists I took away. With sharp swords I pierced their belts and took away the belt-daggars of gold and silver which were on their persons. The rest of his nobles, together with Nabû-shumishkun, son of Moerodach-baladan, who was frightened at my onslaught and had gone over to their side, my hands seized in the midst of the battle. The chariots and their horses, whose riders had been slain at the beginning of the terrible battle, and who had been left to themselves, kept running back and forth for two double-hours; I stopped their headlong flight. That Umman-menanu, king of Elam, together with the king of Babylon and the princes of Chaldea, who had gone over to their side, the terror of my battle overturned their bodies like a bull. They abandoned their tents; and to save their lives, they trampled the bodies of their soldiers; they fled like young pigeons that are pursued. Their hearts were torn; they held their urine, but let their dung go into their chariots. In pursuit of them, I dispatched my chariots and horses after them. Those among them who had escaped, who had fled for their lives, wherever they [the charioteers] met them, they cut them down with the sword.

After that time-after I had completed the palace in the midst of the city of Nineveh for my royal residence, had filled it with beautiful furnishings, to the astonishment of all the people-the side-palace, which the former kings, my ancestors, had built for the care of the camp, the stabling of the horses, and general storage, had no terrace, that its site was too small, that its construction had not been skilfully done, that, as the days went by, its foundation-platform
had become weak, its foundation had given way and its roof had fallen in. I tore down that palace in its entirety. A large tract of land in the meadows and environs of the city I confiscated, according to plan, and added to it. The site of the former palace I abandoned. With the ground of the meadows which I had seized from the riverflats, I filled in a terrace, I raised its top 200 tipki (thickness of brick) on high. In a favorable month on an auspicious day, on the top of that terrace, following the cunning of my heart, a palace of limestone and cedar, of Hittite workmanship also a lofty palace of Assyrian workmanship, which far surpassed the former one in size and beauty, according to the plan of wise architects, I had them build for my royal residence. Mighty cedar beams, the product of Amanus, the shining mountain, I stretched over them. Door-leaves of liari-wood I covered with a sheathing of bright bronze and set up in their doors. Out of white limestone, which is found in the land of the city of Baladai, I had mighty statues fashioned and positioned on the right and left of the entrances. For the equipment of the black-headed people, the stabling of horses, mules, colts, riding camels, chariots, wagons, carts, quivers, bows and arrows, all kinds of battle equipment: teams of horses and mules which possessed enormous strength, and were broken to the yoke. I greatly enlarged its court of the gates. That palace, from its foundation to its coping, I constructed, I finished. A stele with my name inscribed on it I set up in it. In the days to come among the kings, my sons, whose name Assur and Ishtar shall name for the rule of land and people, when that palace shall become old and ruined, may some future prince restore its ruins, look upon the stele with my name inscribed on it, anoint it with oil, pour out a libation upon it, and return it to its place. Then Assur and Ishtar will hear his prayers. He who destroys my inscription and my name—may Assur, the great lord, the father of the gods, treat him as an enemy, take away the scepter and throne from him, and overthrow his rule. The month of Tammuz; eponym of Gahilu, governor of Hatarikka.
Sennacherib and the Siege of Lachish

In 701BC Sennacherib king of the Assyrian empire came against the land of Judah, ruled by Hezekiah, who had years earlier led a revolt against Assyria and refused to play tribute to the king. Perhaps prompted by the death of Sargon, Sennacherib’s father. Of Hezekiah’s reign, in summary we read...

“The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.” (2Kings 18 v 7 - 8)

The siege itself at Lachish is only mentioned in passing in the Biblical record.

From “the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah”...

“And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay." And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. Then the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah.”

(1Kings 18 v 13 to 17)

The parallel account in “The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah” is here, beginning with the words of encouragement to the people in Jerusalem by Hezekiah the King and Isaiah the Prophet...

“Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. With him..."
is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And
the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. After this Sennacherib
king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (but he and all the forces with him laid siege
against Lachish), to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who were in Jerusalem...
(Chronicles 32 v 7 - 9)

There is also an interesting reference to Lachish, and God’s judgement of the city from a
contemporary prophet to Isaiah and Hezekiah, Micah. In what appears to be a list of towns
and cities destined for defeat by the Assyrians, he has this to say about Lachish:

O inhabitant of Lachish, Harness the chariot to the swift steeds (She was the beginning of sin
to the daughter of Zion), For the transgressions of Israel were found in you. (Micah 1 v 132)

Despite Sennacherib’s boasts and threats he was to be defeated and humiliated at Jerusalem
and chose to glory in his success over the rest of Judea and in particular in his defeat of
Judah’s second city: Lachish. The very fact that Lachish is the object of Sennacherib’s boast in
his own palace and he chooses to ignore Judah’s principle city, goes a long way to confirm
the biblical record of his humiliation outside the walls of Jerusalem.
The Siege of Lachish: The Assyrian Army Advance.

Sennacherib was the son of a usurper Sargon II. Sargon had taken the throne by force and set up his own capital in Korsabad, in present day Iraq. When Sennacherib came to the throne he moved a short distance west to his new capital of Nineveh. In his new palace he decorated the walls with stone panel depictions of his conquests in battle. Many of the panels were severely damaged in a fire during the destruction that ensued when the Assyrian empire finally fell to the Babylonians in 612BC. The palace and it’s carvings were rediscovered in the mid 19th century, much of the work being credited to Sir Henry Layard who dispatched many of his finds back to London and the British Museum for display to the public. Of particular interest to Biblical scholars is this room sized depiction of the fall of Lachish to Sennacherib.

The relief tells the story from left to right and is of course from the perspective of and for the glory of the Assyrians.

You are first greeted with a depiction of the formidable force of the Assyrian army as it advances on the town of Lachish.

Although some of the upper parts of the relief are missing, the might of the Assyrian army is still well depicted in this scene. Included are a number of different troops...
Archers were placed at the front of the battle lines. These were forward troops, precision shooting at close range. They are working in pairs. One holds a thick defensive reed shield whilst the archer picks off the defenders of Lachish. Both are protected by tall helmets with hinged ear flaps and are wearing bronze lamellar body armour.

One of Sennacherib’s forward storm troopers. He carries his own light weight defensive shield, a long spear or lance and a short sword for close combat. He is equipped for speed and agility and wears no body armour.

Further back in the ranks are depicted pairs of archers. As these are not front line troops they are not shielded. However they are wearing bronze lamellar body armour. Row upon row of archers shoot a hail of arrows at the defenders of Lachish.

Right at the back of the battle lines behind the archers are shown the slingers. The stones they threw were large, about the size of a cricket ball. Modern day slingers are able to sling a stone over 100 metres (330 feet). These it seems were thrown over the top of the archers and the front line troops, onto the enemy. As seen below, many large slings stones have been found close to the main gates of Lachish.

Below is depicted an infantry guard. He appears to wear no body armour but is otherwise well equipped. The shield would have been made from a leather cone embossed with bronze.
Sling stones recovered from Lachish during the archaeological investigations there in the 1950’s.

Iron arrow heads recovered from Lachish. These are from the arrows the Assyrians would have fired at the Judean defenders in Lachish.
In response there is evidence that the defenders of Lachish were running out of ammunition. Arrow heads crudely made of bone were being manufactured and fired back at the Assyrians.
The Siege of Lachish: The City Attacked

The siege of Lachish itself is shown in the next section of the scene. Lachish is shown under attack, many siege mounds are shown up against the walls. The Assyrians are attacking with their equivalent of the modern tank, the siege engines.

Below is a line drawing of the same scene giving a clearer view of what is going on.

And again here is a closer view in more detail of the centre of the scene. Judean defenders are desperately trying to defend themselves against the overwhelming Assyrian forces.
The scene would have been painted as well as being a carved relief. The section of the scene to the right gives an idea of what this might have looked like on the walls of Sennacherib’s palace. The colours I have used are arbitrary and have not been chosen because I know which colours were used. Archaeologists have on occasion been able to find small traces of the original colour on the stone to establish that the work was coloured and sometimes, what the colour used was.

It is also clear from the fresco that the Assyrians revelled in their ability to be cruel and ruthless. Below the tower shown in the image to the left, captives are being hoisted up onto poles outside to the city walls in order to discourage the defenders of the city. This was a common tactic of the Assyrians and is depicted in other sieges.
Perhaps the most fearful part of the Assyrian war machine was the siege engine. Designed to be portable and assembled on site. It is clearly made of several parts and covered with a leather “coat” which was held together with toggles. The engine attacking the tower in the images above is cut out below. It seems that the defensive tactic was to try to set the siege engine on fire. Many fire brands are being thrown down onto the engine and the attackers. In turn the engine was protected from fire by constant dowsing with water, which would have needed constant re-supply.

This part of the battle scene shows many things happening at once, though this is an artistic representation. Whilst those on the tower defend and the Assyrians attack, other Jews are seen leaving the city, defeated and surrendering to the Assyrian army.
The Siege of Lachish: Defeated!

The last third of this section of wall shows the refugees and captives as they leave Lachish to the relish of the Assyrians.

The Assyrians are also shown removing plunder from the city. Whilst it is difficult to know what was taken, the various stands and staves shown here would be of high value. Perhaps ivory and well crafted furniture.

The soldier at the front carries a sceptre, carried pointing to the ground to symbolize authority defeated. The forth soldier in the line is carrying a chair with a rounded top and armrests. This may well have been the governor of Lachish’s seat of judgement. Behind this is a Judean chariot being pulled by Assyrian soldiers. This is the only image of a Judean chariot known to be depicted, it is of a similar design to the Assyrian chariots of the time.
Back in Nineveh such plunder was so abundant that much of it was placed in store houses never to be used again.

Perhaps the most distressing scene is the section below. Israelites are marched into exile but as they go they witness the flailing alive of their nobles, rulers from the city who were made examples of for failing to surrender to Sennacherib. Not only adults but children file past as the Assyrian soldiers wreak horrific acts of butchery in the name of revenge. These acts adorned the walls of Sennacherib’s palace.
Below from another part of the relief, Israelite captives are gathered together, some with their hands tied, many with their hands up in sign of submission to their captors.

Many of these captives were being presented before Sennacherib before being deported elsewhere into the empire. Many would be entered into service in the army or else used as labour for the king’s building projects.
The Siege of Lachish: Sennacherib’s Throne

The climax of the scene shows the defeated Judeans being paraded before king Sennacherib. Many are grovelling in fear of their lives as Sennacherib reviews them and passes judgement on their fate. In the register below the throne, an Assyrian soldier is holding a captive by the hair as he stabs him in the shoulder another man in a damaged area of the relief is no doubt being maimed or killed in some gratuitous way for which the Assyrians were both famed and feared at this time.

The drawing below gives a cleared view of the captives before Sennacherib. These particular men have been identified by some as “Hezekiah’s men”. Officers or professional soldiers from Hezekiah’s army sent from Jerusalem to lead the defence of Lachish. Assyrian artists tended to stereotype national characteristics, other reliefs showing slaves building Sennacherib’s palace for instance show that Judean’s captured during these battles were used as forced labour.
Below is a close up of Sennacherib himself. Note that his face has been damaged. This damage was caused in antiquity, it is thought either during the uprisings that followed his death at the hand of his sons or during the sack of Nineveh by the Babylonians, before they set his palace alight and burnt it to the ground.

Above Sennacherib a cuneiform inscription reads: “Sennacherib, King of the world, King of Assyria, on a throne he sat, the spoil of Lachish before him passed it passed”. Sennacherib’s throne is inlaid with ivory figures. Behind Sennacherib two eunuch’s (identified by their lack of beards) fan the the king. In front he talks with the commander of the army, the “Tartan”
The Siege of Lachish: The Assyrian Camp

The final scene is of the Assyrian camp set up before Lachish for the duration of the siege.

The Assyrians made their camp before the city of Lachish on a hillock in front of the main gate. The camp is shown as turreted. A wide road is shown running through the middle of the camp. Either side are tents and animals. Also depicted is a chariot. Some of the insides of the tents are shown, some containing occupants, some perhaps showing offerings in progress to the Assyrian gods.
Divination of the Liver

This object from the British Museum is a model of an animal's liver. It is marked into sections and cuneiform writing explains what the various "signs" mean. The link to the Bible is incidental, but shows how the record rings true to its time. In Ezekiel 21, Ezekiel records a message from God, who for the wickedness of the people and its rulers, has determined destruction on Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. God uses the superstition of the Babylonian King to direct him to attack and take Jerusalem, even though the direction for the King seems to be the wrong one. One of the superstitions mentioned is the divination of the liver.

The word of the LORD came to me again: "As for you, son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come. Both of them shall come from the same land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to a city. Mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah, into Jerusalem the fortified. For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows; he consults the teraphim; he looks at the liver. Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth with murder, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build siege towers. But to them it will seem like a false divination. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be taken. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear--because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him. (Ezekiel 21 v 18 to 27 - ESV)

From a prophetic point of view this passage is very interesting.

- Zedekiah is the "profane and wicked prince of Israel".
- "Ruin, Ruin, Ruin" or "Overturn, overturn, overturn" as the King James Version has it refers to the three defeats of Jerusalem (4th Year of Jehoiakim, the end of the short reign of Jehoiachin and the final destruction of Zedekiah's Jerusalem).

However this can be broken down another way:
1- The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon,
2- The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans on AD 70,
3- And the expected fall of Jerusalem to the surrounding nations and the northern armies just prior to the return of Jesus to the earth (Ezekiel 37 & 38, Zechariah 14)  
• “I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.” (KJV) 
He comes who’s right the kingdom and kingship is, refers to the Messiah, the promised King and descendant of David, Jesus Christ at his return to the earth to establish the kingdom of God.
The Lachish Letters

The Lachish letters are a series of notes written in carbon ink onto broken pieces of pottery for the purpose of communication and/or record keeping. They were discovered in 1935 by the archaeologist J L Starkey whilst excavating Tell ed-Duweir, which is the ancient city of Lachish. In total 18 fragments were found, of which 8 are on display at the British Museum. The letters are tantalising, in that some parts of the text refer to but do not name “the prophet”. They show that even at this late stage in Judah’s history they still had some reliance on Egypt. They also refer to names that are mentioned in the Biblical text, in particular one tiny fragment has the word “Jeremiah” written on it, however the fragment is too small to provide any context for the name, so it cannot be determined if this is the name of “the prophet”.

The best preserved letters on show in the British museum are Letters one and two pictured here. They are written in what could be thought of as a Phoenician style script from the pre Babylonian Captivity period. This is almost certainly the script used to write down the original autographs of Jeremiah’s prophecy, as well as that of other prophets of the time.

Letter One

Letter one is a list of names, Some of the names are familiar from the biblical record though it is impossible to know if these names correspond to people actually mentioned in the Bible.

Letter one pictured to the right reads:

Gemaryahu, son of Hissilyahu
Yaazanyahu, son of Tobshillem
Hageb, son of Yaazanyahu
Mibtahyahu, son of Yirmeyahu
Mattanyahu, son of Neryahu

The names mentioned in the Bible are:

Gemariah is mentioned in Jeremiah 29. He is a son of Hilkiah the high priest of Josiah’s day and took a message from Jeremiah to the Jewish captives in Babylon, when he himself was taken captive.

Jer 29:1 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son
of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;...
...For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. (Jeremiah 29 v 1 - 5 & 10)

Matteniah was the original name of Zedekiah, the puppet king that Nebuchadnezzar placed on the throne after he deposed and carried away captive Jehoiachin in 597BC.

And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father’s brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2Ki 24:17)

This is not the same Matteniah who is mentioned in the letter above.

Neriah was the father of Jeremiah’s faithful scribe Baruch.

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. (Jeremiah 36 v 4 - KJV)

He is also mentioned as the father of Seraiah, who took a message to Babylon for Jeremiah and read it out. It appears that Seraiah may have been brother to Baruch and another of Jeremiah’s small band of supporters.

The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And Seraiah was the quartermaster. So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, 'When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, then you shall say, 'O LORD, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.' Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.' " Thus far are the words of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 51 v 59 - 64 NKJV)

Nowhere in the biblical record does it tell us that Neriah had a son called Mattaniah, though this is of course possible. It is however impossible to know if the Neriah mentioned in the Lachish letter is the same Neriah referred to in the biblical record.
Letter two

Letter two has little to link it with the biblical text and reads as a supplication from a subordinate to his higher officer Ya’osh.

To my lord Ya’osh. May Yahweh cause my lord to hear the news of peace, even now, even now. Who is your servant but a dog that my lord should remember his servant?”

Of greatest interest is the free appeal to the name of God, something that most religious Jews would not do today and also the well preserved script itself as this is the script that Jeremiah and his contemporary’s would have used to write down their prophecies.

Letter three

This letter is not on display at the British Museum, it is however one of the most interesting of the Lachish letters.

Thy servant Hoshaiah writes to inform his lord Ya’osh. May Yahweh give you prosperous tidings! And now, I have written to the prophet, referring to the letter which you sent to me yesterday, and have told him that my heart is sick since I had your letter, and that I declare: "My lord, I cannot read a letter. Yahweh lives, if anyone has tried to read me a letter. I have not read any letter which came to me, nor seen anything of it. And I have been told that the Commander of the army, Khephiriah (or Achhor) the son of Elnathan, has gone down to Egypt, and he has sent an order to take Hodaviah, the son of Ahijah and his men from here. And the letter which Nedabiah, grandson of the King, has brought from the prophet to Shallum, the son of Jaddua, saying, "Beware!" have I sent to you.

The last line of the letter refers to the Prophet, who in summary has sent a letter of warning to those who would go down to Egypt for help. This is very much in line with the message of Jeremiah. One example is below, from the time when the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem was briefly broken in order to deal with the Egyptian army which had come to fight against them.

And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Pray now to the LORD our God for us." Now Jeremiah was coming and going among the people, for they had not yet put him in prison. Then Pharaoh’s army came up from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they departed from Jerusalem. Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Thus
you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: Behold, Pharaoh’s army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their own land.” (Jeremiah 37 v 3 to 7)

The contact with Egypt ties in very well with the alliances of the time recorded in Jeremiah’s prophecy. Interestingly in the time of Jehoiakim, a man called Elath son of Achbor had gone down to Egypt to force the return of Urijah the prophet back to Jerusalem (see Letter sixteen below). It is possible that Khephiriah (or Ahhor, dependant on which translation is used) was the son of the same Elath. Though this cannot be proved, it is an interesting coincidence.

Letter Four

Again this letter is not displayed in the British Museum. However it is again of interest from a Biblical point of view

May Yahweh soon let my lord hear good tidings! I have carried out all the instructions you have sent me, and have recorded on the page all that you ordered me. You instructed me also about the rest house, but there is nobody there. And Shemaiah has taken Semachiah and brought him up to the city (Jerusalem), and I will write and find out where he is. Because if on his rounds he had inspected, he would have known that we are watching for the signal-stations of Lachish, according to all the signals you are giving, because we cannot see the signals of Azekah.

There are two points of contact with Jeremiah that come from this letter and they are both related to the fire signals from Lachish and Azekah. Firstly this method of communication to signal invasion and request help is referred to in Jeremiah 6:

"O you children of Benjamin, Gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, And set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem; For disaster appears out of the north, And great destruction. (Jeremiah 6 v 1)

Secondly the fortified cities mentioned in the letter are those that are described as the last to hold out against the Babylonians by Jeremiah in Chapter 34:

when the king of Babylon’s army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah. (Jeremiah 34 v 7)

It seems that at the time of this Letter that Azekah had fallen and it was only a matter of time before Lachish and Jerusalem fell also.

Letter Six

Letter six is interesting because it refers to “the prophet”. There is some likelihood that “the prophet” is Jeremiah himself, although this cannot be proven conclusively. The tone and the conclusion that the prophet weakens the people is perfectly in keeping with how Jeremiah was perceived and portrayed, particularly by the ruling elite and the princes of Judah.
To my lord Ya'osh. May Yahweh let us see you in prosperity! Who am I, your slave, a dog, that you have sent me the letter of the King and the letters of the princes, saying: "Read, I beseech you, and you will see that the words of the prophet are not good, liable to loosen the hands, to make sink the hands of the men of the city." My lord, will you not write to them saying: "Why should you do this: ... ?"

... Yahweh your God lives, and my lord lives if your servant has read the letter or got anyone to read the letter or seen anything of it.

A clear parallel to this letter is recorded in Jeremiah 38, in the lowest period of his life, when he is thrown into pit with deep mud at the bottom into which he sinks and is left to die. Only the action of Ebed-Melech and Ethiopian, saves his life.

Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.' Thus says the LORD: 'This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.' " Therefore the princes said to the king, "Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm." (Jeremiah 38 v 1 to 4)

Letter Sixteen

Letter sixteen is a broken fragment and therefore some of the text is missing. However, the fifth line reveals a tiny portion of the prophet's name:

[....ijah the prophet.

Sadly this isn’t a great help in identifying which prophet the letters are referring to, although it does also rule many names out. Names ending in “ah” were very common during this period. Of the prophets mentioned in the book of Jeremiah there are three:

- Urijah the prophet is mentioned in Jeremiah 26 v 20 - 23. Urijah however had fled to Egypt and was forcibly returned to Jerusalem by Elnathan son of Achbor at the orders of Jehoiakim the king. On his return Jehoiakim has Urijah executed. It is therefore pretty conclusive that Urijah is not the prophet referred to here.
- Hananiah the prophet in Jeremiah 28. Hananiah however was a false prophet, who was in opposition to Jeremiah. He in the fourth year of Zedekiah’s reign (seven years prior to the writing of these letters) prophesied in direct contradiction to Jeremiah that the yoke of Babylon would be broken. Jeremiah 28 tells us that in response God told Jeremiah to prophecy the early death of Hananiah. He died in the seventh month of the same year. It is very unlikely that Hananiah was the prophet referred to as he at the time these letters were written he was long dead. Beside
which, his message was one of encouragement to break off the yoke of the king of Babylon.

• and of course there is Jeremiah himself. Unless there is a prophet, unnamed in the Bible, with a name ending in “ah” then Jeremiah is the most likely candidate for the prophet referred to in these letters. The message Jeremiah brought of surrender to the Babylonians and an acceptance of the judgement of God fits well with the prophet mentioned in the Lachish Letters.

Letter Seventeen

Letter Seventeen is another tiny fragment. It contains a few letters from three lines of text. Out of three lines the third line is the most interesting because it spells the name:

[....Je]remiah [....]

Unfortunately it is impossible now to know whether this was Jeremiah the prophet, or some other Jeremiah.
The Babylonian Chronicle: The Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar

This section of the much longer chronicle details the events of the last year of Nabopolassar and the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign.

There are a number of interesting sections but the most interesting from a Biblical point of view is the section that details Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year:

In the seventh year, the month of Kislîmu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon.

The second day of the month Addaru can be placed very reliably as the 15th/16th of March 597BC. This is very useful for dating the reigns of the Kings of Judah during this period of time but more than that there is an interesting undesigned coincidence.

The book of 2nd Kings tells us that Jehoiachin reigned for 3 months after Jehoiakim died...

So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. (2Kings 24 v 6-8)

2nd Chronicles is even more specific and tells us that the reign of Jehoiachin was just 3 months and 10 days.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Chronicles 36 v 9)

With this in mind, the date for the fall of Jerusalem and the end of Jehoiachin’s reign tie in very nicely with a comment by the prophet Jeremiah:

“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the people of Judah all the
disaster that I have pronounced against them, but they would not hear." (Jeremiah 36 v 31 & 32)

Three months and ten days before March the 16th takes the date to early December and so Jeremiah’s prophecy of sun by day and frost by night on Jehoiakim’s dead body, which was apparently cast or fell outside the city walls, is accurate and ties in perfectly with the Babylonian Chronicle.

An Apparent Minor Contradiction

When the record in Kings, the record in Jeremiah and the Babylonian Chronicle are compared the date for the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar is different by a year. Both Jeremiah and the Chronicle state that it was Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year, whilst the book of kings states that it is in the eighth year.

At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it, and Jehoiachin the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold. He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained, except the poorest people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon. The king’s mother, the king’s wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, 7,000, and the craftsmen and the metal workers, 1,000, all of them strong and fit for war. And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24 v 10 to 17)

This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year, 3,023 Judeans; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem 832 persons; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Judeans 745 persons; all the persons were 4,600. (Jeremiah 52 v 28 to 30)

In the seventh year, the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon. (Babylonian Chronicle - British Museum)

There is a strong clue, which is in agreement with the Chronicle, in the biblical book of 2 Chronicles:
In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, with the precious vessels of the house of the LORD, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 36 v 10)

Nebuchadnezzar set off in to the West and ‘Hatti-land” in the autumn of his seventh year as the chronicle clearly states. He besieges Jerusalem which falls in March (Adar/Adurru) of the following spring. According to the Babylonian reckoning Nebuchadnezzar’s eighth year began the following month in Nisan but according to Judah’s new year, Nebuchadnezzar did not begin his eighth year until six months later in Kislev, Judah’s new years day. Thus:

- Nebuchadnezzar marched to war in the Autumn of his seventh year (The Babylonian Chronicle)
- Judah fell in the last month of Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year (Babylonian Chronicle)
- Jehoiachin in imprisoned and deported in the Spring (Shortly after the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar begins - 2 Chronicles 36 v 10 & 2 Kings 24 v 12)
- Jeremiah records the same events but uses the reckoning system of the Kingdom of Judah which has New Year beginning in Kislev in the following Autumn. Thus to Jeremiah - this is still the second half and the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, when for the Babylonians the six months from Spring to Autumn are considered the first half of Nebuchadnezzar’s eighth year. (Jeremiah 52 v 28 to 30)

There is no actual contradiction between the records, however the context and the point of view of the writer must be taken into account in each case to ensure a correct reading of the facts recorded is obtained.

A Translation of the Tablet

In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad[Nabopolassar] stayed in his own land, Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown-prince, mustered the Babylonian army and took command of his troops; he marched to Karchemish which is on the bank of the Euphrates, and crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemish. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and beat them to non-existence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country. At that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hamath.
For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been king of Babylon, when on 8 Abu [15th August 605BC] he went to his destiny; in the month of Ululu Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon and on 1 Ululu [7th September 605BC] he sat on the royal throne in Babylon.

In the accession year Nebuchadnezzar went back again to the Hatti-land and until the month of Šabatu marched unopposed through the Hatti-land; in the month of Šabatu he took the heavy tribute of the Hatti-territory to Babylon. In the month of Nisannu he took the hands of Bêl and the son of Bêl and celebrated the Akitu festival.

In the first year of Nebuchadnezzar in the month of Simanu he mustered his army and went to the Hatti-territory, he marched about unopposed in the Hatti-territory until the month of Kislimu. All the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute. He marched to the city of Aškelon and captured it in the month of Kislimu. He captured its king and plundered it and carried off spoil from it. He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Šabatu he marched back to Babylon.

In the second year in the month of Ajaru the king of Akkad gathered together a powerful army and marched to the land of Hatti. [...] he threw down, great siege-towers he [... ...] from the month of Ajaru until the mon[th of ...] he marched about unopposed in the land of Hatti. {About four lines missing}

Reverse

{Several lines missing}

In the third year the king of Akkad left and in the month of [...] on the thirteenth day, [the king’s brother] Nabû-šuma-lišir [...]. The king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched to the Hatti-land. and brought back much spoils from the Hatti-land into Akkad.

In the fourth year the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. In the Hatti-land they marched unopposed. In the month of Kislimu he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard it and mustered his army. In open battle they smote the breast of each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad turned back with his troops and returned to Babylon.

In the fifth year the king of Akkad stayed in his own land and gathered together his chariots and horses in great numbers.

In the sixth year in the month of Kislimu the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. From the Hatti-land he sent out his companies, and scouring the desert they took much plunder from the Arabs, their possessions, animals and gods. In the month of Addaru the king returned to his own land.

In the seventh year, the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king [Jehoiachin]. He appointed there a king of his own choice [Zedekiah], received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon.
In the eighth year, the month of Tebetu the king of Akkad marched to the Hatti-land as far as Karchemish [... ...] in the month of Šabatu the king returned to his own land.

In the ninth year, the month of [...] the king of Akkad and his troops marched along the bank of the Tigris [...] the king of Elam [...] the king of Akkad [...] which is on the bank of the Tigris he pitched his camp. While there was still a distance of one day's march between them, the king of Elam was afraid and, panic falling on him, he returned to his own land.

In the tenth year the king of Akkad was in his own land; from the month of Kislimu to the month of Tebetu there was rebellion in Akkad. With arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy. In the month of [...] he marched to the Hatti-land, where kings and [...]-officials came before him and he received their heavy tribute and then returned to Babylon.

In the eleventh year in the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched to the Hatti-land.