

INTRODUCTION

For millennia the story of Hezekiah's miraculous deliverance by the Angel of God from Sennacherib (in Isa 36–37/2 Kgs 18:13–19:37), has been perceived as the fulfillment of God's words of salvation to Jerusalem as a reward for the pious king of the house of David.

New perspectives on these events were offered by the discovery and decipherment of the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib at his palace in Nineveh, which were made public in 1851.¹ According to the Assyrian sources, Sennacherib, king of Assyria (704–681 BCE), ascended the throne after the untimely death in battle of his father, Sargon II (721–705 BCE). The Assyrian vassals' immediate reaction to Sargon's death was to rebel against their overlord. After waging war against Babylonia, Sennacherib finally campaigned against the Levant in his fourth regnal year (701 BCE), entitled in his inscriptions his third campaign. According to these inscriptions, the submissive rulers of Phoenicia, Philistia, and Transjordan paid him tribute. He then conquered the rebellious kingdom of Sidon (and Tyre) and replaced its king, Luli, who fled to Cyprus. Sennacherib then marched south, conquered Ashkelon, and deported its king; he slew the officials and nobles of Ekron who had instigated the rebellion and reinstated Padi as its king; he defeated the Egyptian and Kushite forces in a pitched battle. Finally, after devastating most of the kingdom of Judah, its king, Hezekiah, capitulated and paid a huge penalty and tribute. Vast regions in the Judean Shephelah were stripped from the territory of Judah and given to the loyal Philistine kingdoms.

¹ A. R. Millard, "Sennacherib's Attack on Hezekiah," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 61–68; H. Rawlinson, "Assyrian Antiquities," *The Athenaeum* 1243 (1851): 902–903; Rawlinson, "Outlines of Assyrian History, Collected from the Cuneiform Inscriptions," *XXIVth Annual Report of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1852): xv–xlvi.

2 Introduction

According to the Assyrian source, Hezekiah did not win the war against Assyria. A similar description occurs in the opening verses of 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, namely in 2 Kings 18:14–16. Thus, the lack of correspondence between the different described outcomes of the event needed an explanation.² In the following pages I will forward a summary of the book.

Chapter 1: The Problems in Isaiah 36–37

The main intention of Chapter 1 of this book is to detect the problems in the narrative of Isaiah 36–37. These include the existence of an almost identical narrative in 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, recurring repetitions,³ breaks in the narrative⁴, contradictions and inconsistencies, and abrupt grammatical changes in consecutive sentences. I aim to suggest a comprehensive solution for these numerous problems.

Chapter 2: Previous Solutions

Already in 1886, Stade suggested that the Hezekiah-Isaiah narrative is a composite literary creation.⁵ He detected literary seams and suggested a *combination of three sources*. **Source A:** A chronistic record (2 Kgs 18:14–16 which is absent in Isaiah). It is generally taken to be the most historically reliable source in the composition.⁶ Two further independent traditions about the deliverance from the

² See L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine: A Critical Source* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926); also B. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT Second Series 3 (London: SCM, 1967): 12–18, with earlier literature there. A second campaign to Judah in the later reign of Sennacherib was postulated in order to resolve these discrepancies. However, this suggestion should be rejected. See D. Kahn, "Tirhakah, King of Kush and Sennacherib," *JAET* 6, no. 1 (2014): 29–41.

³ By repetition I do not necessarily mean that words, phrases, and ideas have to be exactly repeated word for word, but they can be paraphrased, and refer to a similar or the same situation.

⁴ The breaks in sequence were detected primarily by Wildberger; see H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39: A Continental Commentary*, trans. T. H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002): 359–433.

⁵ B. Stade, "Miscellen 16: Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21. Zu 18, 13–19, 37," *ZAW* 4 (1886): 172–186.

⁶ J. B. Geyer, "II Kings 18:14–16 and the Annals of Sennacherib," *VT* 21 (1971): 604–606; Yoo-Ki Kim, "In Search of the Narrator's Voice: A Discourse Analysis of 2 Kings 18:13–16," *JBL* 127 (2008): 477–489; however, cf. A. Laato, "Hezekiah and the Assyrian Crisis in 701 B.C.," *SJOT* 1, no. 2 (1987): 56–57; C. R. Seitz, "Account A and the Annals of Sennacherib: A Reassessment," *JSOT* 58 (1993): 47–57.

Assyrian threat have been combined into one story: (a) **Source B1**: 2 Kings 18:13, 17–19:9a (Isa 36:1–37:9a); (b) **Source B2**: 2 Kings 19:9b–37 (Isa 37:9b–38). This division put forward only one complete closing for two narratives. Stade concluded that the derisive song against Sennacherib in 2 Kings 19:21–31, with a contradicting prophecy about the fate of Sennacherib, was a late interpolation.

Stade's hypothesis was further refined in 1967 by Childs,⁷ who argued that 2 Kings 19:36–37 is the original ending of the first story, whereas 2 Kings 19:35 is the end of the second.⁸ The historicity of the various putative sources was addressed. The degree of historicity of accounts B1 and B2 vary from reliable to unhistorical theological fictional narrative. Most scholars have accepted the identification of *two* consecutive accounts with an almost similar development of the narrative.

Some scholars suggested different reconstructions of the putative sources. Würthwein, Camp and S. de Jong distinguish many late additions and fragmented the text into a complicated patchwork of six or more strands and additions spanning over a period of hundreds of years.⁹ Hardmeier suggested that the pericope concerning the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs 18:9–12), together with sources A and B1, are a coherent narrative.¹⁰ Evans sought to identify different discrete sources that composed the text according to the historical-critical approach. He identified traces of at least four discrete sources.¹¹

Recently, proponents of the synchronic literary approach analysed the Hezekiah-Sennacherib narrative (Isa 36–37/2 Kgs 18:13–19:37)

⁷ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 69–103.

⁸ R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980): 58, ascribes v. 35 to a later editor.

⁹ L. Camp, *Hiskija und Hiskijabild: Analyse und Interpretation von 2 Kön 18–20*, MThA 9 (Altenberge: Telos, 1990); S. de Jong, *Het verhaal van Hizkia en Sanherib: Een synchronische en diachronische analyse van II Kön. 18,13–19, 37 (par. Jes. 36–37)* (Amsterdam: Centrale Huisdrukerij V.U., 1992); E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: I. Kön. 17–2. Kön. 25* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

¹⁰ C. Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas. Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18–20 und Jer 37–40*, BZAW 187 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990). Against Hardmeier, see C. R. Seitz, Review of Christof Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas: Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremia-erzählungen in II Reg 18–20 und Jer 37 = 40*, *JBL* 110 (1991): 511–513.

¹¹ P. S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19*, VTSup 125 (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 195–196.

4 Introduction

as a *coherent literary composition*; some include the putative Source A, while others exclude it. They are not particularly concerned with its prehistory and stages of development, and are mainly focused on the message, meaning, devices of writing, and form and structure of the narrative as it stands in its final form.¹²

Chapter 3: A New Historical-Critical Solution

It is my contention in Chapter 3 to solve the problems mentioned in Chapter 1, taking a fresh look at the text according to the historical-critical approach, which by careful scrutiny will answer the majority of noted problems, and explain the current state of the narrative.

Before starting, it should be noted that, in the Isaiah text (which will be the starting point for the investigation [see below]), two sources and a later strand exist, which tell different stories. They were composed at different times, for different purposes, describing different historical events and circumstances.

Instead of identifying twofold repetitions, it is possible to recognize threefold repetitions. Furthermore, by delineating the breaks in the sequence of the narrative and mutually exclusive contradictions, it is possible to isolate in Isaiah 36–37 the threads of two¹³ discrete sources and a redactional strand that were actually intertwined in the composition of the narrative.

The narratives include three different Assyrian delegations composed of different emissaries; three different messages conveyed by the Assyrians to the Judeans by different means, possibly at three (?) (different?) locations. There are traces of three different responses of Hezekiah to the Assyrian threat (excluding Hezekiah's submission in putative Source A). Finally, Hezekiah receives three different prophecies concerning the fate of the Assyrian king.

¹² The first scholar to seriously challenge the widely held consensus was K. A. D. Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy: The Purpose of Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii," in *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature. Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at Cambridge, U.K. 1985*, ed. J. C. de Moor et al., OTS 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1986): 70–93; D. N. Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat: Words at War in 2 Kings 18.13–19.37," *JSOT* 11 (1986): 79–90; C. R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

¹³ Three sources and an additional strand in the parallel account in 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37.

Chapters 4–9: The Sources, Strands and Their Historical Background

The following chapters will take a further step in the search to reconstruct and date the different putative sources that form the story of Jerusalem's deliverance. I will attempt to reconstruct each coherent source by tying together the threads of narrative that were detected in the previous chapters. I will address questions of literary composition, narration, continuity of themes and ideas, coherency of the narrative, repetitions, structure, ideological and religious aspects in the story. When considering the composition of these putative sources, the following questions arise: what are the discrete narratives telling us in their different stages of composition and in their final form? For what purpose were the original narratives written? What were their messages? Are they historical or pure fiction? Can it be corroborated by external sources? Why were the narratives written, edited, and updated? Who wrote the texts, integrated, and edited them? When were the texts written, conjoined, updated, and edited? How long after the events was each narrative written down? Did the narratives reflect the periods in which the events occurred or the time of their writing? For whom were the narratives written? Who was their expected audience? Where were the narratives written (in Jerusalem or in exile)? When were the sources combined into a coherent narrative, and why? Although many of these questions cannot be answered with certainty, they should nonetheless be raised.

I will address the question of what the relations between the putative sources are. Can the sources be reconstructed as originally independent coherent sources or are they dependent on the existence of an early original source, reworking, reordering, and re-editing the basic narrative, incorporating fragmentary new material from other sources in order to create a new narrative with a new emphasis? Were these stories parallel versions of the same event, different versions of the same event, or narratives describing different historical situations, which were subsequently appropriated by a historiographer and incorporated into the Sennacherib-Hezekiah narrative in order to drive home a theological message?

According to the fact that the historical events span over a century and a half, I will reassess the time of composition of the different sources and strands. Each discussion of a reconstructed source will be followed by a historical chapter that provides the historical-political *Sitz im Leben* of the narrative. I will suggest a historical

6 Introduction

situation in which the strand could have been written and the *raison d'être* of the composition. In order to do so, I will explore relevant extra-Biblical sources: Neo-Assyrian, Egyptian, Kushite, and Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions and administrative documents, as well as classical historians (Herodotus, Josephus Flavius) and archaeological evidence. I will review the historical setting of the putative reconstructed sources and evaluate whether they are corroborated or contradicted by external evidence, and whether their narratives are historical or fictional.

As a result of this investigation, I will suggest identifying *two* main literary sources, interwoven together by the editor of a third strand in Isaiah 36–37, a suggestion which reflects three different historical periods:

1. From the days of Sargon II's conquests of 720 BCE until early in the reign of Sennacherib;
2. The decade following the murder of Sennacherib (681 BCE–671 BCE);
3. The conquests of Nabopolassar, king of Babylonia from 616–609 BCE, described in retrospect during the siege of Jerusalem in ca. 588 BCE.

I will term these sources BI, BII and strand BIII (to be distinguished from the conventional division of Isa 36–37 into sources B1 and B2). A final editing process marks the incorporation of the story in the book of Kings. A Deuteronomistic editor probably incorporated the narrative in his work from Isaiah (or a common source). He interpolated Source A and made minor changes in the story, mainly in order to stress the centrality of Jerusalem.

Chapters 4–5: Source BI: 701 BCE (Sennacherib's Third Campaign)

In these two chapters, I will show that Source BI reflects the events and atmosphere during the days of the Assyrian campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Isaiah's original message condemned the hubris of the king of Assyria, who claimed that he destroyed many kingdoms and no god could stop him, since the destruction of all the cities was God's doing. Furthermore, Isaiah prophesied that, although Judah was seriously damaged, it would recover from the disaster within three years. The recovery is not described, and the departure of Sennacherib and his army is not mentioned explicitly. The realization of the prophecy was some time in the future.

In the historical chapter, I will demonstrate that the Assyrians devastated Judah in Sennacherib's third campaign – a claim corroborated by the Assyrian records, 2 Kings 18:14–16; Micah 1:10–16;¹⁴ and Isaiah 1:4–9,¹⁵ and the extensive archaeological excavations and surveys of the Judean kingdom.

Chapters 6–7: Source BII: 683–671 BCE (The Decade Following Sennacherib's Murder)

In Chapters 6–7, I shall seek to define the character of Source BII: Source BII focuses on the murder of Sennacherib, on the importance of Egypt as savior and mentions Taharqa,¹⁶ king of Kush, who would cause Sennacherib to retreat.

I shall show that these events reflect the period immediately following the murder of Sennacherib in 681 BCE and the defeat of Assyria at the borders of Egypt in 673 BCE. Scholars did not consider the historical reality of Egypt and Kush, which excludes portraying Taharqa as a heroic victorious figure *after* 671 BCE,¹⁷

¹⁴ R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 (Waco: Thomas Nelson, 1984): 20–21; N. Na'aman, "The House-of-No-Shade Shall Take Away Its Tax from You (Micah 1:11)," *VT* 45 (1995): 516–517; M. J. Suriano, "A Place in the Dust: Text, Topography and a Toponymic Note on Micah 1:10–12a," *VT* 60 (2010): 433–446; for different possible dates of this prophecy, see G. Fohrer, "Micha 1," in "*Das ferne und nahe Wort*": *Festschrift Leonhard Rost*, ed. F. Maass, BZAW 105 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967): 67–68.

¹⁵ R. Müller, *Ausgebliebene Einsicht: Jesajas "Verstockungsauftrag" (Jes 6, 9–11) und die jüdische Politik am Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts*, *Biblich-Theologische Studien* 124 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012): 80–84. Cf., however, E. Ben Zvi, "Isaiah 1, 4–9, Isaiah, and the Events of 701 B.C.," *SJOT* 1 (1991): 95–111.

¹⁶ Tirhakah תִּרְחָקָה, King of Kush, is mentioned as the adversary of Sennacherib in Isa 37:9/2 Kgs 19:9. In Kushite and Egyptian inscriptions, his name is spelled Taharqa. In the Biblical text, the letters r and h are in metathesis. The common transcription of Egyptian q into k is erroneous.

For a possible wordplay, explaining the metathesis between r and h, see C. Theis, "Noch ein Namensspiel in der Bibel? Zum Namen תִּרְחָקָה in 2 Kön 19,9 und Jes 37,9," *BN* 162 (2014): 67–74. In my book, I will use the Egyptian spelling except for the Biblical references.

¹⁷ P. Avaux, "La mention de Taharqa en 2 Rois 19:9, Isa 37:9," *AIPHOS* 20 (1973): 39; W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, SHCANE 18 (Boston: Brill, 1999): 220–223; F. J. Gonçalves, *L'Expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la Littérature Hébraïque Ancienne*, *Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain* 34 (Louvain-La-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste, 1986): 443; A. J. Spalinger, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt Preceding the Assyrian Conquest," *CdE* 53 (1978): 40; A. Yun, Il Sung, "Different Readings of the Taharqa Passage in 2 Kings 19 and the Chronology of the 25th Dynasty," in

8 *Introduction*

after which he could not have been lionised as the savior, who would come to the rescue of Jerusalem, since during the period from 671 BCE until his death in 664 BCE he was repeatedly defeated by the Assyrians and his kingdom conquered and subjugated. Thus, only a narrow window of opportunity can be detected for the composition of BII – the years between the murder of Sennacherib (681) and the conquest of Egypt by Assyria (671), a period in which Assyria suffered a disastrous defeat, which might have been portrayed as the intervention of God's angel in Isaiah 37:36. After the conquest of Egypt by Assyria in 671 BCE and the expulsion of the Kushites from Egypt never to return, Taharqa's elevation to the role of savior would be highly improbable.

Chapters 8–9: Redactional (and Incomplete) Strand BIII: 588–586 BCE (during the Final Babylonian Siege of Jerusalem)

In Chapter 8, I will present strand BIII. The editor of the strand raises the following questions: should Judah surrender or oppose the besiegers? Will God protect them? Did the people of Jerusalem offend God? What is the proper way to worship God? How should God be approached to ask for his help? What is the role of the king towards God?

I will show that to answer these questions, the editor of strand BIII combined two earlier sources that were available to him. He integrated Source BI, the siege of Sennacherib, and Source BII, the divine victory over the Assyrians and punishment of their king. The editor described the involvement of God in defense of Jerusalem, consequently promoting the belief in the inviolability of Zion, the protection of the king of Judah and the house of David.

Following the reconstruction of the putative Source BIII, a chapter will follow providing the historical *Sitz im Leben* of the source in the Neo-Babylonian period (the reigns of Nabopolassar and the early years of Nebuchadnezzar II). I will claim that the redactor of strand BIII integrated BI and BII with strand BIII during the period of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 588–586 BCE. The people of Jerusalem decided to oppose the besieging Babylonians and not surrender. Jerusalem withstood a siege for a far longer time than

“From Babel to Babylon”: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckham, ed. J. R. Wood, J. E. Harvey, and M. Leuchter (London: T&T Clark, 2006): 177–179.

any of the nations listed in Isaiah 37:12–13, namely during the conquests of Nabopolassar, king of Babylonia (between 626 and 605 BCE). Therefore, the people of Jerusalem could claim that God was protecting them and Jerusalem.

Chapter 10: The Question of the Priority of Isaiah 36–37 vs. 2 Kings 18:13–19:37

In Chapter 10, I shall discuss the repercussions of my investigation on the question of the priority of Isaiah 36–37 over 2 Kings 18–19. In comparing the Kings and Isaiah versions, Gesenius concluded that the Kings version was the original setting of the Hezekiah-Isaiah narratives. This view began to change with the study of Ackroyd.¹⁸ He noted that the order of events in the narrative (Sennacherib's campaign preceding the Babylonian delegation in Isaiah 39/2 Kgs 20) is not chronological. It may be intended to lead into chapters 40–55. Profiting from Ackroyd's work, Smelik raised several strong arguments for the primacy of the Isaiah text.¹⁹

In the present study, I shall strengthen the suggestion that the Isaianic text is the primary text, which 2 Kings later adopted and transformed. According to my suggested division of the text, the significant variations between the Kings and Isaiah versions can be explained by accepting the priority of the Isaiah version. As a result, I refer to the text in Isaiah, except for cases where the versions differ and the text in 2 Kings is consulted.

Chapter 11: Isaiah 36–37 and Their Location in the Literary Unit Isaiah 36–39

In Chapter 11, I will discuss the relations between chapters 36–37 and the narratives about Hezekiah's illness and recovery (ch. 38), and the Babylonian delegation (ch. 39), which historically preceded Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE by several years. These chapters

¹⁸ P. R. Ackroyd, "An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38–39." *SJT* 27 (1974): 329–352.

¹⁹ K. A. D. Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy: The Purpose of Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii." in *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature: Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at Cambridge, U.K. 1985*, ed. J. C. de Moor et al. (Old Testament Studies 24, Leiden: Brill, 1986): 70–93.

10 Introduction

did not exist as a unit initially but were reworked, and their chronological order has been changed to create the existing unit. Several editorial stages can be detected in Isaiah 38 and 39, which conform to the editorial stages that can be found in Isaiah 36–37.

Chapter 12: The Present Location of Isaiah 36–39 in the Book of Isaiah and the Formation of the Book

In Chapter 12, I will investigate the intertextual relations between Isaiah 36–37 and the rest of the book of Isaiah. First, I will survey the standard terminology that is characteristic of Isaiah 36–39, and the book of Isaiah. Second, I will further inquire into the intertextual relations between Isaiah 36–39 and Proto-Isaiah, mainly the so-called Denkschrift (Isa 6:1–9:6, and especially Isa 7), Isaiah 20, and Isaiah 31. Third, I will revise the claim that Isaiah 36–39 is a literary bridge between Proto-Isaiah (Isa 1–35) and Deutero-Isaiah.

Chapter 13: 2 Chronicles 32 and Its Relation to Isaiah 36–37

The description of Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem in the book of Chronicles differs considerably from the narratives in 2 Kings 18:13–19:37 and Isaiah 36–37. I will claim that the editor of Chronicles drew his information from sources that were not included in Isaiah or 2 Kings (possibly the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel [2 Chr 32:32]). He added to these his own theological perspective. As for the material that resembles the narrative in Isaiah and Kings – the Chronicler used material from the book of Isaiah, and heavily condensed it. Source A is absent; BI is represented only by two verses (Isa 36:19–20); Isaiah's role (and the role of the other minor actors in the narrative) is greatly diminished. The end of the narrative incorporates information about the defeat of Assyria and the murder of Sennacherib. However, it is in a completely different phrasing from the BII version. On the other hand, the Chronicler heavily relied on a draft of the BIII version.

Chapter 14: Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 14 is a summary of this book, reconstructing the process of the creation of the text in its different phases. According to the division of sources and strands, the question of the narrative's original setting may also be answered. I advance a reason for the