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MIRACULOUS FAILED INVASION OF SENNACHERIB

By Joe Spears

One question often heard concerning creation and man's origins, as well as life's origins, is whether Biblical accounts describing man's origins and God's creation of the universe can be trusted. Are the Biblical accounts accurate? Did the creation really occur? Was there really an Adam? an Eve? Was there really a world-wide global flood? There is amazing evidence that many miraculous events described in the Bible actually took place as described by the Bible. In this article we shall look at some of this evidence.

During the time of King Hezekiah, mentioned in the Bible, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, came against Hezekiah at Jerusalem. Sennacherib brought thousands of troops. One event described in the Bible is the destruction of 185,000 of these troops by a "blast" from heaven. Closely associated with this event in time is the miraculous reversal of the sun's motion as indicated on a sun dial, which was a sign for the healing of Hezekiah and the deliverance from those troops. Rabbinical sources put this reversal of the sun on the evening of the destruction of Sennacherib's army by the blast.^{1,2,3}

The event is recorded in several places in the Bible. For the full story, with some context, you can look at 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 37-38. I will briefly summarize the story below as found in the Bible.

Sennacherib, King of Assyria, threatened to come against King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that the city would be protected, and as a sign of this protection (as well as a sign for the healing of Hezekiah), the shadow on a sun dial would move backwards. That same day (or night) there was a "blast" from heaven which destroyed 185,000 troops of Sen-



Clay prism describing Sennacherib's siege on Jerusalem

nacherib. The rest of the army then left, including Sennacherib, who was slain later in his own land as Isaiah had prophesied. The most likely date for this is 687 BC—see section below, Rabbinical Sources, for the reason for this date. Note that Assyria had also come against Jerusalem in 721-722 BC, which ought not to be confused with the 687 BC invasion.

We see two miraculous events in this story:

1. the destruction of 185,000 troops by a "blast" from heaven in a single night
2. the reversal of the movement of a shadow on a sun dial

Now let us see if there is any evidence, other than the Biblical account, that these events occurred.

Rabbinical sources

The Talmud and Midrash claim a blast fell from the sky.³ They also can help pin down the time of these occurrences. There is some debate over whether there were

¹ Johnson K (2006) Ancient Seder Olam: A Christian Translation of the 2000-year-old Scroll, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

² Eusebius (translated by Armstrong JJ) (2013) *Commentary on Isaiah*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL

³ Ginzberg L (2001) *The Legends of the Jews, Volume 4*, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2882>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

one or two incursions against Jerusalem by King Sennacherib of Assyria (not including the 721/722 BC incursion). One article lists two possible dates for these campaigns.⁴ It gives 688-687 BC as the date of a second incursion, the one this article deals with. However, in the first incursion against Jerusalem, Hezekiah agrees to pay tribute. In the second incursion, instead of paying tribute, the Assyrian army is very much decimated.

Both dates are close to the time period supported by our extra-biblical sources. Either date would not invalidate much of the support from these sources that something unusual did happen around this time. However, some sources indicate that something unusual did happen in 687 BC, which is one of the possible dates for the siege of Jerusalem. With this support, the 687 BC date is more likely.

2 Kings 19:9 clinches this. This scripture mentions Tirhaka as the King of Ethiopia. But Tirhaka was not king of Ethiopia in 701 BC; he was king, however, in 687 BC. This indicates the events associated with Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem—the “blast” from heaven, the destruction of 185,000 troops, and the movement of the sun's shadow backwards—could not have taken place in 701 BC; the remaining date is 688-687 BC. So, the Bible seems to be clear that there were two incursions by Sennacherib, not one, and also support the 687 BC date. Other sources support that there were two Assyrian campaigns of Sennacherib against Hezekiah, and also support the 687 BC date.^{5,6}

To further pin down the time of the destruction of the Assyrian army, we look to the Talmud and Midrash, which place the destruction of the Assyrian army on the first night of the Passover, when people began to sing the Hallel prayer.^{1,3,7,8,9} This puts the time at near the vernal equinox, sometime in March - April, since this is when the Passover occurs. So we have a date of sometime from March to April of 687 BC.

⁴ Bratcher D, *Old Testament History, Assyrian Dominance (745 BC-640 BC)*, <<http://www.cresourcei.org/othassyrian.html>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

⁵ Albright WF (1956) Further light of synchronism between Egypt and Asia in the period 935-685 B.C. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* **141**:23-26

⁶ Bright J (1962) Excursus I, The Problem of Sennacherib's Campaigns to Palestine, *A History of Israel, Fourth Edition*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 298-309

⁷ Steinsaltz A (2010) *The Koren Talmud Bavli: Tractate Pesachim*, Koren Publishers, Jerusalem

⁸ Neusner J (2002) *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew, with a New Introduction*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA

⁹ Freedman H (1992) *Midrash Rabba, III* Soncino Press, Brooklyn, NY

Josephus

Flavius Josephus records that 185,000 troops of Assyria were destroyed in a single night.¹⁰ Josephus, quoting Berosus:

And Herodotus does indeed give us this history; nay, and Berosus, who wrote of the affairs of Chaldea, makes mention of this king Sennacherib, and that he ruled over the Assyrians, and that he made an expedition against all Asia and Egypt; and says thus: “Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, he found his army under Rabshakeh his general in danger [by a plague], for God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army; and on the very first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed. So the king was in a great dread and in a terrible agony at this calamity; and being in great fear for his whole army, he fled with the rest of his forces to his own kingdom, and to his city Nineveh; and when he had abode there a little while, he was treacherously assaulted, and died by the hands of his elder sons, Adrammelech and Seraser, and was slain in his own temple, which was called Araske. Now these sons of his were driven away on account of the murder of their father by the citizens, and went into Armenia, while Assarachoddas took the kingdom of Sennacherib.” And this proved to be the conclusion of this Assyrian expedition against the people of Jerusalem.

Herodotus

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus also tells of the destruction, in a single night, of the army of Sennacherib. Herodotus saw an Egyptian statue of a god with a mouse in the god's hand, which was placed to commemorate the destruction of the Assyrian army. Horus was perhaps this god.¹¹ The mouse was the sacred animal of the Egyptian city Letopolis. The name Letopolis has the same hieroglyph as a thunderbolt. There might be a connection with the thunderbolt and the blast from heaven which destroyed the Assyrian army. An Egyptian text from Letopolis describes a festival celebrating the “night of fire for the adversaries,” which fire was like “the flame before the wind to the end of heaven and the

¹⁰ Josephus F (translated by Whiston W) (1981) Book X, Chapter 1, Section 4-5, *Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus: Complete Works*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI

¹¹ Egyptian Mythology <http://realhistoryww.com/world_history/ancient/Misc/Egypt/Egyptian_Mythology.htm> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

end of the earth."¹² The god with the mouse was a god of fire. Associated with this god is the following statement: "I come forth and go in the devouring fire on the day of the repelling of the adversaries." Some have interpreted the mouse as symbolic of bubonic plague. It is interesting to note that Hezekiah became ill around this time. Isaiah told him a reversal of the sun's motion as shown in the sundial would be a sign that he would recover from the illness. Rabbinical sources put the sign of the shadow on the evening of the destruction of Sennacherib's army by the blast.^{1,2,3}

Chinese Records

Confucius

According to Edouard Biot, Chinese writings attributed to Confucius say that on March 23, 687 BC, there were no clouds but stars were not visible and, in the middle of the night, stars fell like rain. Please note that this time is precisely during the March-April time period during which rabbinical sources claim the destruction of the Assyrian army by the "blast" from heaven took place.

The Bamboo Books (ancient Chinese historical documents) also say that "stars fell like rain. The earth shook."¹³

The Sun in China

Chinese records say something about unusual movements of the sun? Prince Tau of Yin was being held by the king of China when the sun moved backwards, which was taken as a sign to let Tau go home according to Lu-Heng.¹⁴

A second century BC Chinese, Huai-nan-tse, says that during a battle, the sun went down, but then came back: "when the Duke of Lu-Yang was at war against Han, during the battle the sun went down. The Duke, swinging his spear, beckoned to the sun, whereupon the sun, for his sake, came back and passed through three solar mansions."¹⁵

Note, that the time would be 3-6 hours later in China than it was in Jerusalem. So, if in Jerusalem the sun was visible (it was day), in China, where the time was several hours later, the sun might have already set, which

¹² Wainwright GA (1932) *Letopolis, J of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 18

¹³ Legge J (1970) *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, Hong Kong University Press, Vol. III, Part 1, 125

¹⁴ Forke A (1975) *The World-conception of the Chinese: Their Astronomical, Cosmological and Physico-philosophical Speculations*, Arno Press, New York, NY, 87

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

would be consistent with the description from the Chinese accounts.

Ovid

As further evidence supporting the Biblical account of the reversal of the sun's shadow, Ovid says that Phoebus, god of the sun, turned around: "wresting his car about turned round his steeds to face the dawn."¹⁶ This is also referred to by Ovid in *Tristia*: "the horses of the sun turning aside."¹⁷

Apollodorus

According to Apollodorus,

Atreus stipulated with Thyestes that Atreus should be king if the sun should go backward; and when Thyestes agreed, the sun set in the east.¹⁸

According to Velikovsky:

Thyestes and his brother Atreus ... living in the eighth century, ... must have witnessed [the events] of the days of Isaiah. Greek tradition persists that a cosmic catastrophe occurred during the time of these tyrants: the sun changed its course...¹⁹

We could claim the stories of the ancients were merely myths, not history, but we would be remiss to not point out the mythical nature of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with their cyclops and other unbelievable monsters and gods; however, the city of Troy, also mentioned by Homer, and once thought to exist only in myth, was actually found.

There is often a mixture of history with the mythological element in the ancient writings. In fact, one ancient writer himself, Euhemerus, pointed this out and claimed it to be true, especially of ancient Greek authors. Euhemerus claimed the Greek gods were exaggerated and distorted versions of real historical people.²⁰

¹⁶ Ovid, *The Art of Love* (translated by J. H. Mosley, 1929), 328 ff

¹⁷ Ovid (translated by Wheeler AL) (1924) *Tristia. Ex Ponto*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 391 ff.

¹⁸ Apollodorus (translated by Frazier JG) (1921) *The Library, Vol. 2*, Loeb Classical Library

¹⁹ Velikovsky I (1950) *Worlds in Collision*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 223-224

²⁰ Spears J (2008 Apr 1) Noah and Family: Myth, Legends, Ancient History and the Bible <<http://tasc-creationscience.org/content/noah-and-family-myth-legends-ancient-history-and-bible-0>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

Other Unusual Events Near the Time of Sennacherib's Siege on Jerusalem

If there was some astronomical event that affected the movements of the earth (or apparent movements of the sun), then this obviously would have been noticed in other parts of the world; it would have affected the entire planet. There are some very interesting observations that can be made, related to the sky, and related to times near the time of the destruction of Sennacherib's army.

The reversal of the sun's movements hint at possible alterations in calendars. In fact, there was a change in many calendars shortly following this time, as though, perhaps, something strange had indeed occurred. We are not stating precisely what occurred, for we have limited information. We can see, however, that the movement of the shadow on a sun dial in a reverse direction would indicate major changes in the heavens, sky, and/or motion of the earth. One obvious concomitant of such change of the earth's motion could easily be a corresponding change in the calendar, which is, after all, determined by the motion of the earth around the sun.

So let's look at the calendar. The following pieces of evidence all pertain to the calendar, and for the most part, all seem to be clustered around or shortly after 687 BC. One thing to note is that if there were changes in the seasons, or if the calendar somehow was off by a day or two, it would not be noticeable for several years. Each year, the error of that year would be added to the errors of all the preceding years, until, finally, after accumulating for many years, people might find themselves experiencing "winter" in the middle of warm summer weather!

So it should not be surprising that some calendrical changes might be implemented years after the events that changed the calendar actually occurred; in fact, this is what we should expect.

Calendar-Astronomical Changes

Strong indications that something unusual indeed did happen in the heavens around 687 BC will be given below. Also, the indication is that this change in the heavens was real, for any change in the heavens, for example, of the length of a day or other time period, would be noticeable world-wide. Non-actual mythical events might influence calendars of one nation, but would be less likely to influence other nations.

No New Year for 20 Years!

Babylon had no New Year festival for about 20 years, after 687 BC.²¹ Why would there be no New Year, beginning the year of the sun's moving backwards?

Altering Israel's Calendar

The Talmud says that Hezekiah, who ruled during this time around 687 BC, doubled the month of Nisan.^{3,22,23} Again, why at this time would there be a change in the calendar?

Reworking Assyrian Astronomy

Astronomical events, such as movements of planets and precession of equinoxes, were recalculated in the days of Assurbanipal, grandson of Sennacherib.²⁴ If there were indeed changes in the heavens, then calendars might need to be recalculated.

Autumnal Equinox Altered by 9 Days - Israel & Babylon

Both Israel and Babylon made a 9-day change of the autumnal equinox.²⁵

Another 9 Day Difference - Nineveh

Clay tablets from Nineveh (the home of Sennacherib) gave two different dates for a vernal equinox; the difference was 9 days.²⁶

A Statement from Daniel

Daniel said God changed times and seasons: "and he changeth the times and the seasons..." Daniel 2:21

India's Calendar

Calendar changes were made in India around the same time.²⁷

China's Calendar

Calendar changes were also made in China around this time.²⁷

²¹ Smith S (1924) Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon, Methuen, London, 22, 25

²² Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Berakoth. Berakoth 10b <http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_10.html> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

²³ Feldman P, Point by Point Outline. Pesachim 56 <<http://www.dafyomi.co.il/pesachim/points/ps-ps-056.htm>> Accessed 2012 Dec

²⁴ Velikovsky I (1950) 353

²⁵ Ibid., 354-355

²⁶ Ibid., 350

²⁷ Del Mar, Alexander (1900) The Worship of Augustus Caesar, Derived from a Study of Coins, Monuments, Calendars, Aeras and Astronomical and Astrological Cycles, the Whole Establishing A New Chronology and Survey of History and Religion, Cambridge Encyclopedia Co., New York, NY

Egypt's Calendar

A new calendar was started in Egypt by Osorkon, the high priest in year 15 of the reign of Sosenk III. This was about the time of Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem; the exact time for events in Egypt has been debated,²⁸ and arguments have been given that accepted dates of events in Egypt may be in error.²⁹

Rome's Calendar

Around this time in Rome, the calendar was reformed by Numa.³⁰ We know this is near the time of the reversal of the shadow, since he was a contemporary of Hezekiah.³¹

Solon's Calendar

Solon adjusted the calendar around this time, according to Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch.³²

Thales' Calendar

Thales of Miletia, born in 640 BC, adjusted the calendar.³³

Japan's Calendar

In Japan, in 660 BC, a calendar was introduced.³⁴ This is 27 years after 687 BC; the list of emperors starts at this time, 660 BC.³⁵

China's Eclipses

In China, around this time, astronomer Y-hang told the emperor Hiuen-tsong that prediction of eclipses was no longer possible due to changes in the sky.³⁴

Summary and Conclusion

We have agreement on the date of certain events mentioned in the Bible from Confucius and rabbinical sources. These events were a "blast" from heaven, the resulting destruction of 185,000 Assyrian troops, and the reversal of the sun's shadow. That there was some change in the heavens near this time is strongly indicated by the reworking of calendars world-wide and the failure around this time of normal astronomical predictions. Chinese sources also claim the sun reversed its path. The time difference (sunset versus day) between the Biblical and the Chinese accounts, rather than contradicting the Biblical account of the sun's shadow reversing, gives support that the event did occur since the sun would be further along its course in China than in Jerusalem. We cannot therefore say these events described in the Bible were impossible due to contradiction of history; to the contrary, we see history provides evidence consistent with the Biblical account. ☞

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 10, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631

We will take a journey to China, India, Egypt, and other places on a fascinating tour of historical support for the Biblical account of amazing events occurring near the time of Sennacherib's incursion against King Hezekiah. Along the way we will visit ancient authors including Confucius, Herodotus, Josephus and others.

²⁸ The 22nd Dynasty and its Connections <<http://www.specialtyinterests.net/dyn22.html>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

²⁹ Rohl D (1995) *Pharaohs and Kings*, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, NY

³⁰ Plutarch in Eleven Volumes, I, Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola (translation by B Perrin) (1914) <<http://archive.org/details/plutarchslives01plut2>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

³¹ Augustine, Chapter 27. The City of God, Book 18, <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=AugCity.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=93&division=div2>> Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, Accessed 2012 Dec 27

³² Velikovsky I (1950) 359

³³ Thales <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thales>> Accessed 2012 Dec 27

³⁴ Velikovsky I (1950) 360

³⁵ List of Emperors of Japan <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Emperors_of_Japan> Accessed 2012 Dec 27