

Lachish Wall Reliefs

While excavating a room in Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh (1845-47), Austen Henry Layard discovered a large wall of stone carvings measuring 39 feet (12 m) high and 16.7 feet (5.10 m) long. Carved around 704-681 B.C., the Lachish Wall Relief depicts the Assyrian army attacking a town, soldiers breaching its walls, and prisoners being taken away.

When Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, began his western military campaign, he took the Phoenician coast and defeated the Egyptians before taking on the Southern Kingdom of Judah and king Hezekiah. Lachish and Jerusalem were Judah's most fortified cities. Lachish would fall after its siege as the Bible records:

Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. (2 Ki 18:13)

After these acts of faithfulness Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities and thought to break into them for himself. (2 Chron 32:1)

After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem while he was besieging Lachish with all his forces with him, against Hezekiah king of Judah and against all Judah who were at Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'On what are you trusting that you are remaining in Jerusalem under siege?'" (2 Chron 32:9-10)

Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. (Isa 36:1)

But Jerusalem would not fall to Sennacherib's siege, because of Hezekiah's preparation in securing the water supply (2 Ki 20:20; 2 Chron 32:2-4, 30) and prayers to God (2 Ki 19:14-19, 32-36; Isa 37:21-22, 33-36).

Given its prominence in the central room of his palace and the only portrayal of his military victory, Sennacherib's Lachish Wall Reliefs indicate the importance he placed on his victory over Judah. This emphasis is seen in Sennacherib's Annals, Akkadian cuneiform inscriptions found on three clay Assyrian prisms (Taylor Prism, Oriental Institute Prism, and Jerusalem Prism), which speak of king Hezekiah:

"As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams. ... I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I gave to the kings of Ashod, Ekron, and Gaza."



Note the tower defense, the Assyrian siege ramps, and people escaping from Lachish



A hypothetical illustration of the assault of Lachish showing a siege ramp against a defensive wall / tower © British Museum

Lachish Wall Reliefs (page 2)

When Layard wrote about his findings, he understood the biblical significance of the Lachish Wall Relief:

“Here, therefore, was the actual picture of the taking of Lachish, the city as we know from the Bible, besieged by Sennacherib, when he sent his generals to demand tribute of Hezekiah, and which he had captured before their return; evidence of the most remarkable character to confirm the interpretation of the inscriptions, and to identify the king who caused them to be engraved with the Sennacherib of Scripture. This highly interesting series of bas-reliefs contained, moreover, an undoubted representation of a king, a city, and a people, with whose names we are acquainted, and of an event described in Holy Writ.”



Prisoners from Lachish
are being led away by Assyrian guards



The horizontal figures are 2 Lachish
leaders being flayed alive

References:

1. Youngblood RF, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, (2014).