

## Teaching the History of Ancient Israel from an African Perspective: the Invasion of Sennacherib of 701 B.C.E. as an Example

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### ABSTRACT

*In teaching the history of ancient Israel in Africa, the importance of ancient Africa which ancient Israel herself underscored, has not received much attention. In most African higher institutions today, the history of ancient Israel is taught verbatim the way it is taught in Euro-American institutions. The ancient nations of Africa mentioned in the biblical and archaeological texts (such as Egypt, Ethiopia or Kush, etc.) and their roles in ancient Israel should be mentioned and emphasised as part of African contribution to the history of ancient Israel.<sup>1</sup> Ancient Africa and Africans (Egypt, Ethiopia, Punt and others) were mentioned about 1,417 times in the Old Testament scriptures. Africans participated in the battle of Ashdod, Eltekeh and Jerusalem during the invasion of Sennacherib to defend ancient Israel and also to obstruct their rivals, the Assyrians.*

*In teaching the history of ancient Israel in African higher institutions, current problems associated with the identification of Egypt and Ethiopia as African countries, divergent scholars' opinion and the proper definition of history are discussed. Jerusalem could have fallen in 701 B.C.E. during Sennacherib's siege, instead of 587 B.C.E. during the siege by the Babylonians. Thus, the Africans' obstruction of the Assyrians in defence of Hezekiah has delayed the fall of Jerusalem more than 100 years. An example of how the history of ancient Israel can be taught Africentrically in African higher institutions is reflected by the examination of Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C.E.. The way the Old Testament is taught, may to a large extent determine the future of Old Testament studies in Africa.*

### A INTRODUCTION

A close examination of many books and articles on the history of ancient Israel reveals that most authors, in their construction of the history of ancient Israel followed the process that I will like to call "biblical de-Africanization." Despite the fact that no nation was mentioned so frequently (1417 times) in the Old

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<sup>1</sup> When Egypt, Cush and Ethiopia are mentioned in textbooks and essays on the history of ancient Israel, most authors give the impression as if they are not part of Africa.

Testament, like that of Africa and Africans, except Israel themselves, the presence of Africa and Africans and their political, social, religious, military and economic contributions are either neglected or minimised or even reduced to slavery.<sup>2</sup> The history and achievements of Africa and Africans were mostly attributed to other nations. Africa as you will be able to recall, has been labelled a continent without history, a place inhabited by people without history, a place culturally and geographically beyond reach intellectually by the late nineteenth century founders of the discipline of history.<sup>3</sup> In other words, on the ground of race Africa was once excluded from the scope of historical enquiry.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the time, the documents relating to Africa are still regarded as suspects. Material remains of greater antiquities bore witness of ancient Africans' contact with other parts of the world and of their technological proficiency. The biblical record, which actually bore witness to the events pertaining to the history of Ancient Israel, is also a suspect. Those who believe that Ancient Israel once existed, maintain that ancient Israel of the early biblical time is not the same with Israel of the ninth or sixth century. Accordingly, it means that the identity of ancient Israel is not really known and therefore the history of ancient Israel cannot be written.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to join the debate as to whether the history of ancient Israel existed or not, but to challenge the way the history of ancient Israel has been written and taught in Africa, particularly, in African higher institutions. Therefore it is my aim to suggest the way forward or what should be the future of Old Testament in Africa by giving examples of how the history of ancient Israel in the Old Testament can be written and taught Afri-centrally in African higher institutions. Since it is impossible to discuss the entire history of ancient Israel in this paper I shall limit my study to the particular event of the Sennacherib invasion of 701 B.C.E. as an example. Since the

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<sup>2</sup> David T. Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (Eugene, Oregon.: Wipf & Stock Publisher, 2001), 1-6. However, Knut Holter finds Africa and Africans mentioned only 736 times in the Old Testament (*Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* [Nairobi: Acton Publisher, 2008], 56. Yet in Euro-American references in their exegeses, Egypt is mentioned as belonging to Ancient Near East as if it is not really part of Africa. The differences between David Tuesday Adamo and Knut Holter concerning the numbers of references to Africa and Africans in the Old Testament is due to the fact that Holter is a Western African Old Testament scholar who hold the opinion that some terminologies (e.g. Cush, and others) as not referring to Africa and Africans.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph C. Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and history," *AHR* 104/1 (1999): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and history," 1-32.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel. A Study in Biblical Origins* (London: T&T Clark Publishers, 1992), 168; Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel. The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Niels P. Lemche, "Is it Still Possible to Write a History of Ancient Israel?" *SJOT* 8/2 (1994): 163-190.

history of Egypt and Ethiopia has been closely linked with the history of the ancient Near East, and since Egypt and Ethiopia happen to be part of Africa, whenever I mentioned Egypt/Egyptians and Ethiopia/Ethiopians, I will refer to them as Africa/Africans with Egypt/Egyptians and Ethiopia/Ethiopians in brackets.

## **B CURRENT PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL**

No well-informed biblical scholar of the Hebrew Bible will deny the fact that there are currently problems in the academic study of the history of ancient Israel. The depth of these problems has degenerated to a state that some will call a crisis. For a long time many gaps in our knowledge have made it virtually impossible to establish “a master narrative to serve as the basis of our interpretation and integration.” The fragmentary nature of evidence (e.g. partial-textual, epigraphical, iconographical, and archaeological) makes things very difficult for historians of ancient Israel.<sup>6</sup>

### **1 Egypt and Ethiopia as African Countries.**

One of the ways to teach the history of ancient Israel in Africa is to start by discussing the various problems associated with the practice of regarding Egypt and Ethiopia as ancient Near East or Europe. The problem is that the majority of textbooks on the history of ancient Israel and the ancient Near East are written by Euro-American authors who usually present Egypt and Ethiopia as part of the ancient Near East or Europe instead of Africa.

#### **1a Egypt**

Egypt is an African country that played an important role in the history of ancient Israel. Egypt as an African country is mentioned about seven hundred and forty (740) times in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> This tells the important role Egypt played in the life and history of ancient Israel. The implication of this is that the history of ancient Israel cannot be complete without mentioning the African nations especially Egypt and Ethiopia. No wonder, a scholar concludes, “No other land is mentioned so frequently as Egypt in the Old Testament . . . To understand Israel one must look well to Egypt.”<sup>8</sup> The word “Egypt” was originally used to refer to the northern part of the African continent and later extended to the entire land of the black land in Africa. It was referred to as the land of Ham (Ps 105). Ancient historians such as Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch,

<sup>6</sup> Hugh G. M. Williamson, “Preface,” *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii..

<sup>7</sup> David T. Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the New Testament* (Lanham: University of America Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>8</sup> John Patterson, “The Old Testament World,” in *The Bible and History* (ed. William Backley, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 39.

Flavious Josephus, Celsus, Tacitus, and Eusebius, believed that the original Hebrew people were Ethiopians (Africans) and Egyptians who were forced to migrate to the land of Canaan.<sup>9</sup> In the teaching of the history of ancient Israel in African higher institutions, it is important to mention and to emphasise that Egypt is an African country because most of my students (including graduate students) of my universities where I taught in Africa, continue to ask the question whether Egypt is an African country and whether the ancient Pharaohs mentioned in the Bible were Africans or not.<sup>10</sup>

## 1b Ethiopia

The word that was unfortunately translated to “Ethiopia” in the Bible is “Kush.” This word, even in the Modern Hebrew language, still means “black” today as it meant during the biblical period. The translation of the word “Kush” to Ethiopia in the Bible has misled so many people to think that the word “Ethiopia” in the Bible refers to the modern Ethiopia. This was not the case during the biblical period. Up to the time of the classical period, scholars’ consensus was that the word “Ethiopia” originated from the Greeks to designate African people both at home and abroad in terms of the colour of their skins. This term that the Greek geographers generally used to refer to any member of the black people was derived from the words “burnt” and “face.”<sup>11</sup> Ethiopia, therefore, literally means “burnt-faced person” of Africa and African Diaspora. This name was probably chosen by the Greeks to describe Africans according to their “environmental theory” that the dark colour of their skins and the woolly or coiled hair of their heads were a result of the intense heat of the southern sun.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Homeric testimony, the land of Ethiopia is at the remotest border of the world beside the steam of the ocean. It was the place where the “blameless race of men called Ethiopians,” lived and made sacrifices pleasing to the gods, including Zeus.<sup>13</sup> Two Ethiopians exist, the Ethiopians of the rising and the setting sun.<sup>14</sup> The exact meaning of the Ethiopians of the ris-

<sup>9</sup> Patterson, “Old Testament World,” 103. The truth is that when we read about the Pharaohs in the Bible, the impression we usually get is that they belong to other continent.

<sup>10</sup> I have taught in the following universities in Nigeria: University of Ilorin, Delta State University, and Kogi State University. Even at Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya, where I taught between 1991-1993, my students ask the same question.

<sup>11</sup> Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice. Ancient View of the Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 7.

<sup>12</sup> William L. Hansberry, *Africa and Africans as seen by the Classical Writers* (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1977), 74-75. Hansberry quoted Homer, *Iliad*, 1.423-424, 23.205-207.

<sup>13</sup> William L. Hansberry, *Africa and Africans as seen by the Classical Writers* (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1977), 74-75.

<sup>14</sup> Hansberry, *Africa and Africans*, 102.

ing and setting suns has been the subject of debate even among the Homeric scholars. Hansberry, quoting Hesiod in *Work and Days* said that Hesiod referred to the Ethiopians for the first time as black men.<sup>15</sup> Aeschylus is the first Greek writer to place Ethiopians definitely in Africa when he refers to the dark race as Ethiopians who dwell near an Ethiopian river (Nile), the spring of the sun where the Ethiopian river (Nile) is located.<sup>16</sup>

The truth is that the word “Ethiopia” during the biblical and classical periods, referred to black Africa in entirety and not just the modern Ethiopia. Egypt and the Ethiopians of the biblical period were closely connected. In fact, most of the Egyptian soldiers were Ethiopians. That may account for the reasons why most of the time Egypt was not mentioned without Ethiopians.<sup>17</sup> The ancient Egyptians, according to the inscription of Una, enlisted not only the people called Wawat, but also the Tcham, Aman, Kaam, and Tathem from the Kushite people of southern Egypt as servants and police (*medjay*).<sup>18</sup>

In the light of the above facts, wherever Egypt and Ethiopia are mentioned in this article, I will refer to them as “Africa/Africans” with Egypt/Ethiopia or Egyptians/Ethiopians in brackets (Egypt/Ethiopia or Egyptians/Ethiopians) since many scholars may not be yet familiar with simply calling them Africa/Africans.

## 2 Divergent Groups of Biblical Scholars

Some scholars have reported to calling themselves names according to groups. Three major camps can be identified - *maximalists*, *minimalists* and the *centrists*.<sup>19</sup> Minimalists or Revisionists are those who think otherwise and rely on the primacy of extra-biblical records because the Bible is not a reliable document in terms of its historical account. Everything which is not corroborated by evidence contemporary with the events to be reconstructed must be dismissed.<sup>20</sup> To some of these scholars, the history of ancient Israel cannot be

<sup>15</sup> Hansberry, *Africa and Africans*, 102, quoting Hesiod, *Work and Days*, 527.

<sup>16</sup> Grace H. Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization* (Durban: Lutheran Publication House, 1979), 808-809.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 137.

<sup>18</sup> Gaston Maspero, *The Dawn of Civilization* Volume 1; trans. M. L. McClure; (New York: Frederick Ungar Publication Co., 1968), 419; Wilson, *Culture of Ancient Egypt*, 137.

<sup>19</sup> It seems as if calling names are not limited to the three groups mentioned above. Some label other scholars as conservative, ultra conservative, revisionists, and liberals and so on.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst A. Knauf, “From History to Interpretation,” in *The Fabric of History. Text, Artifact and Israel’s Past* (ed. Diana V. Edelman, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 27-34, cited in Herbert Niehr, “Some Aspects of Working with the Textual Sources,” in *Can a “History of Israel” be written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe,

written. Philip Davies, Keith Whitelam, Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas Thompson are representatives of such scholars. Philip Davies tries to demonstrate that the history of ancient Israel represented no more than a phenomenon invented by Old Testament historians because the Israelites were never a historical reality.<sup>21</sup> Keith Whitelam even accuses Western scholars of inventing ancient Israel while silencing Palestinian history.<sup>22</sup> To Keith, scholars should not refer to ancient inhabitants of Palestine as Canaanites and Amorites but Palestinians. According to Lemche, modern scholars should just reconstruct their own history of Israel without paying any special attention to Old Testament records.<sup>23</sup>

Maximalists are biblical scholars who think that the biblical account should be the primary source of the history of ancient Israel and everything that cannot be proved wrong must be accepted as historical. According to them the biblical record must be given priority over other extra-biblical accounts, as far as the reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel is concerned. Examples of such maximalist are Yehezkel Kaufmann, John Bright, Raymond B. Dillard, Gosta W. Ahlstrom, and Herschel Shanks as representative.

The centrists are scholars who acknowledge the value of the biblical texts in preserving reliable evidence on the history of ancient Israel. However, they see the Bible narrative as highly ideological. According to them the Bible was adapted to fit the need of the community when it was written.<sup>24</sup> They read the text in the “reverse direction of the canonical order.” This means that the biblical writers “provide more historical information about the society and politics of the writers than about the times described in them.”<sup>25</sup> William G. Dever, Lester Grabbe and Bob Becking can be classified as representatives of centralists, who think that it is foolish to maintain that there was never an Israelite nation because “Israel” is represented in many ancient documents (examples are Stela of Merneptah and the Moabite Inscriptions). William G. Dever is certain that a historical Israel can be supported by archaeological documents.<sup>26</sup>

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Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 163; Lester L. Grabbe, “Some Recent Issues in the Study of the History of Israel,” in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel* (ed. Hugh G. M. Williamson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”*, 168.

<sup>22</sup> Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 1..

<sup>23</sup> Lemche, “Is it Still Possible to Write,” 163-190.

<sup>24</sup> Israel Finkelstein, “Digging for the Truth. Archaeology and the Bible,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel* (ed. Brand B. Schmidt, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 9-20.

<sup>25</sup> Finkelstein, “Digging for the Truth,” 15.

<sup>26</sup> William G. Dever, *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When did they Know it?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 1-52; William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids:

### 3 Definition of History

Another major problem that students should be acquainted with when taught the history of ancient Israel in African higher institutions is the problem of definition of history. What is history? According to Joseph Miller in his presidential address as the president of American Historical Association, "History is a mode of enquiry in which the experience of the present frames the distinctiveness of lives in the past."<sup>27</sup> In Africa history is not really restricted to the traditional historiographical question of "what did actually happen?"<sup>28</sup> The historian's imagination and empirical evidence play an important complementing role. Historians have to imagine through non-historical ways of knowing.<sup>29</sup> Davies sees history as "not the past" (except in a loose, idiomatic sense) and even not "what we happen to know about the past" but "what we chose to narrate about the past." The meaning is created and not "interpreted by means of narrative. Narrative *generates* "history" by means of artificial selection...." and "unavoidable circumstances," which we know very little about.<sup>30</sup>

Bettler, however, tries to differentiate between history, ideology and literature. History should actually be called historiography or history writing and should be understood as "narrative that presents the past"<sup>31</sup> while ideology is a "specific set of beliefs" different from propaganda which is the method used to disseminate beliefs. To the modern person who is judging the ancient text with modern criteria of history, this may not make sense.

Quoting Huizinga, Bosman says, "History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to its self of its past.... History now becomes the answer to questions such as 'how do you explain the perception of past events?' or 'what was perceived to happen?'"

Another fact is that even the interpretative framework of archaeology still depends on data from the Bible. Historians have the task of recovering and reconciling all the evidence they can imagine as relevant to the questions they ask. The fact is that the densest data do not speak for themselves. "No isolated

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Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). In fact, the entire book answers the question of the existence of Israel.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and history," 1-32.

<sup>28</sup> Hendrik Bosmann, "All Past and Present but Little Future? African and Old Testament Concepts of Time and History," in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (eds. Mary Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkurature, New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 101-112.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and history," 10.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Davies, "Biblical Israel in the Ninth Century?" in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel* (ed. Hugh G. M. Williamson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49.

<sup>31</sup> Marc Z. Bettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 30.

facts can have unambiguous meaning.” The truth is that the historians reach their conclusions by assembling their findings into a holistic past human context. It is within this context that historians reconcile the chaos of evidence at hand.<sup>32</sup> I hold very strongly that scholars should not give up their attempt to write the history of ancient Israel according to all the available documents in their possession, including the Bible. No doubt, the use of biblical texts in writing the history of ancient Israel was a controversial issue among scholars because biblical texts have been widely used and abused in writing history. However, the OT text is still the most extensive collection of data that claims to present the history of ancient Israel.<sup>33</sup> I agree with Amihai Mazar who argues that “removing the connection between archaeology and the Bible would strip our field from its flesh and leave just the dry bones.”<sup>34</sup> I hold very strongly that these problems should be mentioned and that students of the history of ancient Israel be acquainted with them.

With all the above divergent opinions about history and the history of ancient Israel, can we then actually write the history of ancient Israel? Since scholars do not even agree whether the name “Israel” is an invention of biblical and modern historians or not, can we then write and teach the history of ancient Israel? Whether it is possible to write the history of Ancient Israel or not, the answer, according to Lemche, is “yes and no.”<sup>35</sup> According to him it is not known to modern scholars whether the inhabitants of Central Palestine during the time of Omri and Ahab ever knew themselves as “Israelites” in an ethnic and national sense. It may be possible that they merely saw themselves as human beings and only paid some taxes to a king or state called “Israel.”<sup>36</sup> The only thing we are sure of, according to Lemche, is that the OT writers considered the population as Israelites in the ethnic sense of the word however; modern historical research should not be misguided by these considerations.<sup>37</sup> He advised that modern historical researchers should just skip over the biblical historical reconstructions and reconstruct what they think the history of ancient Palestine was. Robert Carroll believes that the history of ancient Israel cannot be written.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Miller, “History and Africa/Africa and history,” 10.

<sup>33</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, “Reflections on the Discussion,” in *Can a “History of Israel” be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 190-191.

<sup>34</sup> Mazar, “On Archaeology, Biblical History, and Biblical Archaeology,” 33.

<sup>35</sup> Lemche, “Is it Still Possible to write,” 163-190.

<sup>36</sup> Lemche, “Is it Still Possible to write,” 163-190.

<sup>37</sup> Lemche, “Is it Still Possible to write,” 170.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Carroll, “Madonna of Silences. Clio and the Bible,” in *Can a “History of Israel” be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 101. According to Carroll most of the influential recent “Histories of Israel”



According to Grabbe, 1) a history of ancient Syria-Palestine-Israel can be written; 2) in writing such a history, the biblical text can and must be used; 3) there are great difficulties in using the biblical text, so the use of the text must to be argued for in each case; 4) the use of archaeological and biblical sources has to be evaluated each in its own right, and we shall avoid mixing textual and other data; 5) imaginative and speculative reconstructions should be admitted and we must indicate the probabilities of any hypotheses.<sup>39</sup> Becking also agrees that there is a possibility for a history of Israel and the use of the Old Testament as one of the sources.<sup>40</sup>

In the light of this, I will attempt to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel in an African perspective below using the biblical text, archaeological and other materials. The Sennacherib invasion of 701 B.C.E. will be used as an example of reconstructing the history of ancient Israel in African perspective.

## **C SENNACHERIB'S INVASION OF 701 B.C.E. IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Scholars who study Sennacherib's invasion of 701 B.C.E. and the reign of Hezekiah, at least, have agreed unanimously concerning the extra biblical documents attesting to the existence of this invasion. Although the biblical and Assyrian records are sometimes contradictory, ideological and sometimes propaganda, the fact that such an event took place, is not a subject of disputation among biblical scholars.

### **1 Historical Background**

#### **1a The Assyrians**

The first real contact between the Assyrians and the countries to its West, including Judah, was in the Battle of Karkar (853 B.C.E.). In this battle, the coalition of the western countries, including Israel and Syria, fought against the king of Assyria, Shalmaneser III. Although the battle appears to be a draw, the Assyrians never stopped their aggressive policy of expansionism, reorganisation, unification, deportation and tribute collection as a mark of subjugation in order to destroy any atom of the spirit of nationalism among the subject people. This aggressive policy of domination toward the western countries was for the purpose of becoming the master of the ancient Near East and continued

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are in substance a rationalistic paraphrase of the biblical texts, therefore he rejects these histories as "bogus history."

<sup>39</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, "Are Historians of Ancient Palestine Fellow Creatures or Different Animals?" in *Can a "History of Israel" be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 19-36.

<sup>40</sup> Bob Becking, "Inscribed Seals as Evidence for Biblical Israel? Jeremiah 40.7-41.15 *par exemple*," in *Can a "History of Ancient Israel" Be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 65-83.

throughout the Assyrian era.<sup>41</sup> In 842 B.C.E., an Assyrian record states that Omri of Israel paid tribute to Shalmaneser III.<sup>42</sup> In 811-784 B.C.E., Adad-Nirari III subjected Damascus and imposed heavy indemnities on Syria. In 745 B.C.E. Tiglath-pileser IV took over the throne and continued the aggressive policy by reducing northern Syria and the Phoenician coast in 743-740 B.C.E. and in 739 B.C.E. he received tribute from Menahem of Israel. When Rezin of Israel invaded Judah, Tiglath-pileser invaded Damascus in 732 B.C.E. and killed Rezin of Damascus. Shalmaneser the V, the king of Assyria (726-722 B.C.E.), also besieged Samaria but Samaria was eventually destroyed by his predecessor, Sargon II of Assyria in 722/721 B.C.E.

After the death of Shalmaneser V (722 B.C.E.), Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) had scarcely mounted the Assyrian throne when he was greeted with rebellion.<sup>43</sup> Marduk Apal-iddina (Merodach-Baladan of the Bible in 2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1) also rebelled with the help of the King of Elam. There was also another revolt in Asia Minor under the leadership of Mita, King of Phrygia Mushki,<sup>44</sup> and one in Urartu (714). Sargon II (722 - 705) also lost the control of Babylon.<sup>45</sup> To establish the Assyrian authority Sargon II had to crush all these rebellions.

After the death of Sargon II in the battle in 705 B.C.E., Sennacherib became his successor. Soon he was also greeted with rebellion in Babylon. Marduk-Apal-idina revolted again and Sennacherib had to face him. In the West there was also a revolt by the Philistines, Ashkelonites, and Ekronites.<sup>46</sup> After the conquest of the above people Sennacherib turned to Judah in 701 B.C.E..

### **1b The Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians)**

Right from “time immemorial, the African (Egyptian/Ethiopians) kings consid-

<sup>41</sup> Coenraad L. Van W. Scheepers, “The Effect of Neo-Assyrian Non-Interference Policy on the Southern Levant. An Archaeological Investigation,” *OTE* 23/2 (2010): 350-366.

<sup>42</sup> Michael D. Doogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 240.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed description of this rebellion and internal affairs during this period see John Bright, *A History of Israel* (3rd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 278-88; Claus Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* (Vol. 4; Staten, N.Y.: Alba House, 1971), 243-264.

<sup>44</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel*, 280.

<sup>45</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel*, 280.

<sup>46</sup> “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (transl. A. Leo Oppenheim; ed. James Pritchard, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 287-317.

ered themselves as the lord of the world.”<sup>47</sup> Like the Assyrians, they had the policy of expansionism, domination, unification, deportation and tribute collection as a mark of subjugation. This policy automatically made them the rival of the Assyrians in the ancient Near East. As early as the First Dynasty, the Africans (Egypt/Ethiopian) began a large-scale conquest in Western Asia.<sup>48</sup> As early as the reign of Thutmose I, African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) ambition was firstly directed to Western Asia.<sup>49</sup> Thutmose I boasted that the boundary of his empire was set at Euphrates.<sup>50</sup> Sesostros I broadened his vision by expansion through military conquest and occupation of Lower Nubia as far as to the Third Catarat.<sup>51</sup> His successor Sesotrius III can also be remembered for his consolidation of Egyptian hold in Nubia.<sup>52</sup> Around this time, diplomatic and exploration activities into Asia were intense. Importation of livestock, human beings and other Asiatic products were going on. Before Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) became terribly weak in power the entire ancient Near East was once a vassal to Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia).<sup>53</sup> Amenhotep II had a deliberate policy of a mass deportation

<sup>47</sup> George Steindorff and Keith C. Steele, *When Egypt Ruled the East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 82.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, Barry J. Kemp, David O’Connor and Alan B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt. A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 138..

<sup>49</sup> Barbara Watterson, *The Egyptians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 78.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Watterson, *The Egyptians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 78.

<sup>51</sup> William C. Hayes, “Chapter 20. The Middle Kingdom in Egypt. Internal History from the Rise of Heracleopolitans to the Death of Ammenemes III,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Vol. 1 Part 2; eds. Iorwerth E. S. Edwards, Cyril J. Gadd, and Nicholas G. L. Hammond, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 499.

<sup>52</sup> Hayes, “Middle Kingdom in Egypt,” 506..

<sup>53</sup> Steindorff and Steele, *When Egypt Ruled*, 53-93; As early as Thutmose III (1478-1425 B.C.E.) through the reign of Rameses IV (1154-1148 B.C.E.) we have in Egyptian records list of foreigners mostly slaves, who were brought to Egypt as slaves by vassal, as payment of tribute, military conquest, mass deportation, and for financial reasons (Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992), 221. In the Amarna letters, Rib-Hadda who was the ruler of Byblos constantly remind Pharaoh that his own people had sold their children for grain. Akhenaton wrote a letter to the ruler of Damascus requesting the deportation of a group called Apiru to Africa (Nubis) (Redford, *Egypt*, 38, 39). An inscription of Ramesses III boasted of displacing the Asiatics to Africa (Ronald Hendel, “The Exodus in Biblical Memory,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 120/1 (2001): 601-622).

There were specific numbers of human tribute sent to Pharaoh mentioned in the El Amarna (1360-1335 B.C.E.) documents: 10 women sent by Abdi-Astarti of Amuru; 46 females and 5 males sent by Milkilu of Gezer; 8 porters, 10 slaves; 21 girls, and 8(0) prisoners by ‘Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem; 20 girls sent by Subandu; 1 young servants, 10 maidservants sent by unknown ruler; 2(0) first-class slaves along with rulers and daughters in marriage; and 40 female cupbearers by Milkilu of Gezer (Hendel, “The Exodus,” 606-607. Thutmose III, the founder of Egyptian Empire, claims to have more than 7,300 Canaanite prisoners of war and his son also claimed to have taken over 89,600 Canaanites captives, to Africa (Hendel, “The Exodus,” 606).

of Asians to Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia). However, Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) became weak as a result of power struggles (especially between the 22nd and 23rd Dynasties) and the collapse of the Twenty-fourth Dynasty. During these internal power struggles, Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) became vassals to foreign nations such as the Assyrians until there was a radical change in Africa. By 716 B.C.E., Sargon of Assyria appeared in Philistia, and uncomfortably too close to the African (Egypt/Ethiopia) border, where he appeared to have established an Assyrian military garrison. From the fragmentary passage in Sargon's Annals which says, "I opened the sealed [harbour, or border] of Egypt, the Assyrians and Egyptians I mingled to[gether] and I made them trade [with each other],"<sup>54</sup> it seems that the purpose of moving so close to Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) was for economic reasons. The African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) reaction under the weak Pharaoh Osorkon IV, was twofold: acceptance and rejection. One African group sent tribute while the other decided to incite rebellious vassal states bordering Assyria. At this same time, the warlike Ethiopian Dynasty was emerging from the south and destined to extend its rule to the whole of Egypt and to revive Egyptian strength up to the point of challenging Assyrian domination of Palestine.

In 716 B.C.E., Piankhi, from south of Egypt, (Ethiopian) took advantage of the weak royal government and overran Egypt and established the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, commonly called the "Ethiopian Dynasty" or "Kushite Dynasty" (716-715 B.C.E.).<sup>55</sup> "Under Piankhy (Twenty-fifth Dynasty) in 728 B.C.E., the Ethiopians halted Tefnakhte's expansion southwards" into the home territories of Tanis and Leontopolis, where the Twenty Third Dynasties continued to rule.<sup>56</sup> By 715 B.C.E., Shabako, the successor of Piankhy also conquered Delta and made the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty to be recognised as overlords of all Egypt, despite the fragmented political structure which remained unchanged.<sup>57</sup> This powerful king was then able to unite Egypt with Africa to its south (Ethiopia), thereby a powerful kingdom emerged again in Africa that could match the power of the Assyrians.

African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) policies emphasised the ideological and ritual unity of the state. That helped to prepare Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) psychologically for the return to centralised rule because the active African (Egypt/Ethiopian) opposition to Assyria required an unprecedented degree of

<sup>54</sup> Hayim Tadmor, "Judah from the Fall of Samaria to the Fall of Jerusalem," in *A History of Jewish People* (ed. Haim H. Ben-Sasson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 91-158.

<sup>55</sup> See also 2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:11-23.

<sup>56</sup> David O'Connor, "New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period 1552-664 B.C.," in *Ancient Egypt. A Social History*. (Eds. Bruce G. Trigger, Barry J. Kemp, David O'Connor and Alan B. Lloyd, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 242-243.

<sup>57</sup> O'Connor, "New Kingdom," 243.

military and political co-ordination amongst the African (Egyptians/Ethiopians) Dynasties. However the Assyrian policy toward Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) was reluctant to take total control of Egypt (Egypt/Ethiopia) but rather to create a system of disunited vassal states that would make it impossible for them to be strong enough to threaten the Assyrian position.<sup>58</sup> Like the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) forefathers who invaded Asia and made them vassals, Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians) were strongly in favour of aggressive policies toward the Assyrians. That is why they intervened several times against Assyrians in defence of ancient Israel.<sup>59</sup>

Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians) were very active in obstructing the Assyrians and in a way, defending Judah in the battle of Ashdod, Eltekeh and Jerusalem. However, one may be right to say that it might not be so much of the love of Judah that motivated Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians) to have a coalition with Judah and other cities against the Assyrians. It was a power tussle between Egypt and Assyrians and a struggle for domination, expansion and jealousy.

## **D JUDAH'S PARTICIPATION IN THE REVOLT**

The Role that Judah played in the affairs of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.E. is described not only in the biblical narratives of the book of Isa 20:1-6, Isa 18:1-7, Kings and Chronicles, but also in the Assyrian records (Annals of Sennacherib). After Sargon destroyed Samaria, Judah saw herself as the natural successor to the land of Israel. Judah tried to extend her protection and influence over the remaining inhabitants of Israel who had not been exiled. Although Hezekiah, the King of Judah was guided by the policy of extending protection and influence over the remnants of Israel, he was careful at first, not to join the various revolts against Assyria. For example, he did not participate in the revolt under Hoshea ben Elah which brought about the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel in 722/721 B.C.E.. For this reason there was a degree of stability in Judah which enabled her to grow in population and to embark on extensive building. Despite the fact that she was a vassal to Assyria, Judah emerged as the most important state between Assyria and Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia). It was not until the latter part of the reign of Hezekiah that she openly participated in the struggle between Assyria and Egypt over the plain of Philistia and the roads leading to Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia).

### **1 The Battle of Ashdod**

Babylon revolted successfully and sent a messenger to Hezekiah.<sup>60</sup> About this

<sup>58</sup> O'Connor, "New Kingdom," 245.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps, not so much to deliver ancient Israel from the Assyrians but to continue to follow the in-born aggressive policies against the Assyrians.

<sup>60</sup> When Hezekiah recovered from his critical illness, Merodach-Baladan sent con-

period, Azuri, King of the Philistine's city Ashdod, undertook an anti-Assyrian campaign and in fact, became the leader of the campaign. Sargon II eventually turned to Palestine. Three accounts of this campaign appear in the Annals of Sargon. These inscriptions and Prism A<sup>61</sup> record that Sargon first directed his invasion at the Ashdodites. These inscriptions enable scholars to date the year of the capture of Ashdod to 711 B.C.E. because the capture was accomplished in the 11th year of his reign. It also appears that Judah was drawn into the revolt and she appealed to Piru.<sup>62</sup> Assyrian inscriptions furthermore indicate that the developments concerning the uprising and the suppression of the rebellion in Ashdod actually occurred in three stages and through a long period of time.<sup>63</sup> The first stage has to do with Azuri, King of Ashdod who refused to pay tribute to Assyria and was replaced with his brother Ahimiti by Sargon. An Assyrian document says:

Azuri, king of Ashdod, had schemed not to deliver tribute (any-more) and sent messages (full) of hostilities against Assyria to the Kings (living) in his neighborhood. On account of the misdeed which (thus) committed, I abolished his rule over the inhabitants of his country and made Ahimiti, his younger brother, king over him.<sup>64</sup>

The second stage was when the Anti-Assyrian extremists in Ashdod overthrew the vassal King Ahimiti, and replaced him with Yamani. The leader of the anti-Assyrian extremists, realising Ashdod's inability to face the Assyrian reaction alone, tried to make a broad alliance of vassal states that involved Philistia, Edom, Moab and Judah. He also sought military assistance

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gratulatory messengers to him (2 Kgs 20:12-19; Isa 39:1-18) possibly not only to congratulate him, but also to persuade him to join the anti-Assyrian camp. It is also possible that when King Hezekiah showed them his palace treasury, he was trying to demonstrate that his strength could make him a valuable ally against the Assyrians (Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* 4, 249).

<sup>61</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (*ANET*, 285-287).

<sup>61</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim, (*ANET*, 285-287).

<sup>62</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim, (*ANET*, 285-287). Until the time of the discovery of the Assyrian inscriptions in 1963, this was the only place where the name Sargon was mentioned. The Sargon inscription was discovered in Ashdod in the 1963 archaeological excavation at the site. David N. Freedman, "The Second Season at Ancient Ashdod," *BA* 26 (1963): 134-39. See also Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* (Vol. 1, Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1960), 216.

<sup>63</sup> J. Maxwell Miller and John J. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2nd ed., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 406.

<sup>64</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim, (*ANET*, 286).

from the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) king who happens to be described in the Sargon inscription.<sup>65</sup>

The third stage set off when Sargon heard of Yamani's revolt. Immediately he ordered *Turtanu*, his deputy to quench the revolt. Several fortified cities on the borders of Philistia and Judah were taken by Sargon's army on the way to Ashdod. After a short siege the city of Ashdod was conquered and subdued to an Assyrian province in 711 B.C.E.. Unfortunately the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) Pharaoh could not assist Yamani because of his own internal struggle whereby Egypt was overran by the Ethiopian prince and established Egypt's Twenty Fifth Dynasty. It appears that this African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) prince was well acquainted with the Assyrian King because when Yamani sought asylum from him, he was extradited and sent back to Sargon II in chains.<sup>66</sup> King Hezekiah of Judah probably withdrew his support from Yamani due to fear for the Assyrians and therefore escaped the wrath of Sargon II.<sup>67</sup> But he continued as Assyrian vassal probably with an ultimate aim of waiting for a better time to revolt.

## 2 The Battle of Eltekeh

Although Hezekiah remained a faithful Assyrian vassal, he tried to fulfil his ultimate aim, that is, to seek an alliance with other cities against Assyria when the time was ripe. So remaining a faithful vassal for a while would give him time to prepare. Therefore, when the Ethiopian dynasty began to show a level of anti-Assyrian policy, he did not waste time in moving close. His opportunity came in 705 B.C.E. when Sargon suddenly died in the battle and his corpse was not recovered. This incidence was interpreted as a bad omen by his discontented vassals who quickly sought the opportunity to instigate a widespread rebellion among them. In Babylon Merodach-Baladan, the Chaldean king of Babylon revolted.

In Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) the revolutionary Ethiopian Dynasty also took Sargon's death as an opportunity to reassert African (Egypt/Ethiopia) hegemony in Asia, especially Philistia and Judah. The interpretation of the

<sup>65</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (*ANET*, 285-287).

<sup>66</sup> Tadmor, "Judah from the Fall of Samaria," 139-158..

<sup>67</sup> Scholars are divided as to whether Hezekiah heeded the warning of the prophet Isaiah or not. While John Bright and Stephen L. Harris Platzner believed that, in fact, Judah escaped harm by heeding the words of Isaiah (Hayim Tadmor believes that Hezekiah participated in the revolt, but was forced to submission by the terror of the Assyrians when Ashdod was destroyed "Judah and the Fallof Samaria," 139-158.. A close examination of the Assyrian records seems to confirm Tadmor's opinion. The Nimrod Inscription reports that Sargon was the "subduer of the country of Judah (la-du)... It is also evident that Ashdod was totally destroyed in 711 B.C.E.

Babylonian and African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) kings coincided with interpretation of the king of Judah that the Assyrian domination could not survive the death of Sargon. Hezekiah, king of Judah, therefore swiftly headed an alliance in which Ashkelon and Ekron took an active part. These allies embarked with courageousness on open rebellion against the Assyrian power because they relied on the promised support from the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) king, Shabako when King Hezekiah of Judah enlisted his help. The Annals of Sennacherib report:

The officials, the patricians and the (common) people of Ekron—who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters (because he was) loyal to (his) solemn oath (sworn) by the god of Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (Ha-zaqi-(i) a-u-la-u-da)- (and) he (Hezekiah) held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he (Padi) be an enemy—had become afraid and had called (for help) upon the kings of Egypt (Mus (us) ri (and) the bowmen, the chariot (corps) and the calvary of the king of Ethiopia Meluhha an army beyond counting—and they (actually) had come to their assistance. In the plain of Eltekeh (Al-ta-qu-u), their battle lines were drawn up against me and they sharpened their weapons.<sup>68</sup>

Possibly, while Hezekiah of Judah was contemplating what to do, the Africans under the leadership of King Shabako (710/696) sent envoys (Isa 18:1-7) to Hezekiah promising him to help him fight the Assyrians.<sup>69</sup> It appears that Merodach-Baladan, the king of Babylon was also in alliance with king Hezekiah of Judah as reported by Isa 39 where a diplomatic mission from Babylon to Jerusalem is described.

Since Hezekiah of Judah was certain that the Assyrian army would surely besiege Jerusalem, he embarked on the fortification of the walls of Jerusalem. Food and water supply were secured by building of the famous four hundred metre Siloam Tunnel from the spring of En-gihon to inside the walls in Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup> With the backing of the African army, king Hezekiah made an expedition to the country of the Philistines (2 Kgs 18:8). In Ekron, Padi, king of Ekron, who was loyal to the Assyrians, was delivered to Hezekiah as a prisoner in Jerusalem. With the assurance of the cooperation of the Africans, the Ekronites and the Ashkelonites, and knowing that the invasion of Sennacherib would surely come, Hezekiah embarked on further defense (2 Chr 32:3-5). He strengthened existing fortifications, built walls and raised towers upon them.

<sup>68</sup> “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).

<sup>69</sup> “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).

<sup>70</sup> “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).



He made weapons and shields in abundance and set commanders over the people (2 Chr 32:5-6).

Sennacherib, the successor of Sargon II (705-681), could not deal with Hezekiah's revolt until he gained control of Babylon in 705 B.C.E.. He decided to lead his army personally for this battle and he advanced along the Phoenician coast. He described the event that followed in his annals: Tyre, Ammon, Moab, and Ashdod, Philistia, Ashkelon, and Jaffa submitted and paid tribute to him.<sup>71</sup> The three great forces (Sennacherib, African (Egyptian/Ethiopia and Judah) met in the Plain of Eltekeh. According to Sennacherib's annals, it was a total victory for the Assyrians, and a total defeat for the Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians) and Judah:

Upon a trust (-inspiring) oracle (given) by Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. In the melee of the battle, I personally captured alive the Egyptian charioteers with the (ir) princes and (also) the charioteers of the King Ethiopia. I besieged Eltekeh (and) Timnah (Ta-ma-na-a), conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed officials and patriicians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city.<sup>72</sup>

Despite Sennacherib's description of the battle as victorious for the Assyrians, it appears that the result was inconclusive because the Assyrians did not pursue the African (Egyptians/Ethiopians) troops.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, instead of the usual reported list of booty after his victory, only the punishment meted on Ekron, Eltekeh, Timnah and the Africans is reported.<sup>74</sup>

### 3 Jerusalem Siege

After the battle of Eltekeh, Sennacherib insisted on punishing Hezekiah by taking Jerusalem. The comparison of this extra-biblical source with the biblical account remains an often-disputed problem in biblical historical research. According to his annals, forty-six strong walled cities were besieged and captured. Although these cities are not listed, Lachish, where Sennacherib set up his military camp, is mentioned. The surviving reliefs from Sennacherib's palace, provide the most detailed description of the conquest of an enemy's territory. Sennacherib claimed to have sealed up Jerusalem and Hezekiah "like a caged

<sup>71</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).

<sup>72</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 285-287).

<sup>73</sup> Tadmor, "Judah from the Fall of Samaria," 141.

<sup>74</sup> Tadmor, "Judah from the Fall of Samaria," 143.

bird” and “the going out of his city gate I made utterly impossible.”<sup>75</sup> Hezekiah, overwhelmed by the awe-inspiring radiance of Sennacherib, decided to submit and reaffirm his vassalage. However, Sennacherib withdrew abruptly from the battle. After his withdrawal, Sennacherib lists a long list of tributes in his annals that Hezekiah sent to Nineveh.<sup>76</sup>

Thirty talents of gold, 800 talent of silver, large blocks of carnelian, beds with ivory, elephant hides, ivory, ebony-wood, garments with multicoloured trim, garments of linen, wool, red-purple, vessel of copper, iron, bronze, and tin, chariots, slings, lances, armour, daggers, for the belt, various kinds of arrows, countless trappings and implement of war together with his daughter, his palace women, his male and female musicians he had sent after me to Nineveh, my royal city, and he dispatched his personal messenger to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance.<sup>77</sup>

Sennacherib’s account of the invasion of 701 B.C.E., leaves one to ask many questions as to why he suddenly left Judah without Hezekiah’s large tribute. Many answers have been suggested. (1) He was possibly weakened by the African (Egypt/Ethiopian) king at the battle of Eltekeh; (2) he heard the rumour of insurrection; the insurrection that eventually led to his assassination;<sup>78</sup> (3) or an epidemic spread through his camp as the biblical story has noted (2 Kgs 19:35-37). It was also suggested that it might have been a bubonic plague usually carried by mice. Whichever way this event is interpreted, the fact that the powerful Assyrians could have devastated most of Judah, and yet did not take Jerusalem despite the siege, can be considered a miracle; (4) it is very likely that he was also attacked by the young African king, Tirhakah, while trying to besiege Jerusalem. Although there is no Assyrian record of the second invasion of Sennacherib toward the end of Hezekiah’s reign,<sup>79</sup> except

<sup>75</sup> “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).

<sup>76</sup> Tadmor, “Judah from the fall of Samaria,” 142-143.

<sup>77</sup> Tadmor, “Judah from the Fall of Samaria,” 142.

<sup>78</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle seems to confirm this incident by saying that “Sennacherib King of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reign in his stead.” M. Pierce Matheney, Jr. *I Samuel-Nehemiah, The Broadman Bible Commentary*, (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1970), 275.

<sup>79</sup> It should not be a surprise that the proud Assyrians failed to record such defeat (Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 218-219). Tirhakah is also represented on the monuments and on the Pylon of the great temple at Medint-Abu as a king who was cutting down his enemies of the conquered lands of Egypt Syria and Tepopa (Tepopa is an unknown land) before the god of Ammon (Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Second Book of Kings*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids:

for the invasion of the Arabs, there is an Egyptian legend which tells of a great defeat which Sennacherib suffered by the hands of the Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians).<sup>80</sup> I am of the opinion that it may be one or the combination of the above suggestions. But it could also be that the mere rumour of the advance of the African king also frightened his forces having experienced how powerful and devastating the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) forces were in the battle of Eltekeh. He thus realised that it will be futile to fight the futility of fighting the Africans and Judah (2 Kgs 19:9) again. I hold the opinion that whichever factor responsible for Assyrian sudden departure, the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) factors must be given a serious consideration.

The implication of these African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) factors is important. Africans (Egyptians/Ethiopians) prevented the Assyrians from the destruction of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E.. Jerusalem would have been destroyed by the Assyrian forces in about 688 B.C.E. instead of 587/86 B.C.E. by the Babylonians. It means that Judah however survived 100 more years - perhaps due to the intervention of Africans (Egyptian/Ethiopian).

#### **E A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BIBLICAL AND ASSYRIAN ACCOUNTS OF SENNACHERIB'S INVASION OF 701 B.C.E.**

Scholars believe that the biblical account is of two sources.<sup>81</sup> The first source is in 2 Kgs 18:14-16. Scholars refer to this account as account A. It is also believed that it came from an excerpt from the Temple Chronicle. This contains the account of monies and objects such as silver that were paid as tribute to Assyria.<sup>82</sup> It is generally believed that this account is historically reliable not only because of the confirmation of the Assyrian record but also because whatever is recorded in negative information in one's own records must be true.<sup>83</sup> It is not likely for anyone to record untrue negative information about himself or herself. Antti Laato was emphatic about the reliability of the first source:

Tradition A (2 Kgs 18.14-16) is generally acknowledged as the most reliable OT source about Sennacherib's campaign in Judah. This is incontestable, since account A tells the dark side from Judah's point

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Eerdmans, 1950), 444).

<sup>80</sup> Norman H. Snaith suggested that it "may be that Sennacherib suffered a disastrous defeat in an attempted invasion of Egypt, if not in 701 B.C.E. or in 691 B.C.E. when he made a successful campaign against Judah's neighbour" (Norman H. Snaith, "II Kings (Exegesis)," in *The Interpreter's Bible* Vol. 3 (ed. George Arthur Buttrick, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 303-304.

<sup>81</sup> Tadmor, "Judah from the Fall of Samaria," 143.

<sup>82</sup> Miller and Mayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 218-219.

<sup>83</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, "Account A and the Annals of Sennacherib. A Reassessment," *JSOT* 58 (1993): 47-57.

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of view concerning the year 701.<sup>84</sup>

The second source account B, is 2 Kgs 18:13, 17-19:37 and Isa 36-37. It contains three prophetic stories from the cycle of prophetic narratives about Isaiah and Hezekiah, namely, (1) Hezekiah's illness and his miraculous recovery (2 Kgs 20:1-11 and Isa 38); (2) the Babylonian delegation to Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah's opposition to Hezekiah's alliance with Babylon; (3) Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and Jerusalem and the miraculous salvation (2 Kgs 18:13; 18:17-19:37; and Isa 36-37).

The above accounts (source 2 or account B) contradict the Assyrian account. This contradiction between the prophetic narrative describing Sennacherib's defeat and his claim of victory in his own account has been a matter of debate among scholars. This contradiction and the mentioning of the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) king (2 Kgs 19:9) Tirhakah, have led several scholars to suggest two different invasions of Judah and Jerusalem. The debate of the single and double invasions of Sennacherib has been one of the most vexing problems in the book of Kings. The majority of scholars believe there was a single invasion, but others believe there were two invasions.<sup>85</sup>

The first invasion was suggested to be in 701 B.C.E. that ended with Hezekiah's submission as described in Sennacherib's annals and biblical source 1. The second expedition was suggested to be in 688-681 B.C.E. that ended in the defeat of the Assyrians as predicted by the prophet Isaiah in the biblical source 2. These scholars who propose double invasions believe that there must have been another invasion of Jerusalem after the first invasion of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. in which the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) king, Tirhakah participated sometimes during 688-681 B.C.E.. One of the reasons for double invasions was the mentioning of the African king, Tirhakah in 2 Kgs 19:9. Another reason is the attempt to reconcile the differences in the biblical and Assyrian accounts of Sennacherib's invasion. However, it may be difficult to uphold this proposal because of the lack of extra-biblical sources to support it.

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<sup>84</sup> Antti Laato, "Hezekiah and the Assyrian Crisis in 701," *SJOT* 2 (1987): 56.

<sup>85</sup> Among those who accept single invasion are M. Pierce Matheny Jr. and Roy L. Honeycutt, *I Samuel-Nehemiah* (Vol. 3, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 272-74; Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* 4, 255-264; Hubert I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History* (Liberty, Miss.: Quality Press, 1982), 237-38; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (2nd ed., New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 265-69; Gottwald, Norman, *The Hebrew Bible. A Social Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 368-369. Those who accepted a double invasion theory include John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 284-288; George W. Anderson, *The History and Religion of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 104-10; John Tullock, *The Old Testament Story* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 223-224.

One of the reasons why scholars believe in a single invasion is that no extra-biblical sources mention the event of the second invasion.<sup>86</sup> The other reason is that Sennacherib had no more interest in the West after the event of 701 B.C.E.. Instead he concentrated on building Nineveh, his new capital. It was his son, Esarhaddon (691-669 B.C.E.) and his successor who continued the Sargonic imperialist expansionism.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, scholars who believe in a single invasion doubt the genuineness of 2 Kgs 19:9. Although it is generally accepted that Tirhakah was an African king, most scholars who accept a single Sennacherib invasion consider this passage as an “error” or “an anachronism,” and therefore “unhistorical.”<sup>88</sup> Pfeiffer was the most emphatic in his denunciation of 2 Kgs 19:9. Otto Eissfeldt<sup>89</sup> sees this passage as having its origin in Isaiah’s legend.<sup>90</sup>

Although source I or account A (2 Kgs 18-14-16) in the biblical account is in striking agreement with Sennacherib’s annals, the late prophetic story of source 2 (2 Kgs 18:13; 18:17-19:37 and Isa 36-37) presents a problem. It confirms the prophet Isaiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem will survive Sennacherib’s invasion. It presents the assassination of Sennacherib at the hands of his son as immediately after his return from Judah to Nineveh (2 Kgs 19: 36-37), whereas it took place about twenty-one years later.<sup>91</sup> The silence of Assyrian records concerning the failure of Sennacherib to capture Jerusalem is a serious problem

<sup>86</sup> Among those who accept single invasion is M. Pierce Matheny Jr. and Roy L. Honeycutt, *I Samuel-Nehemiah* Vol. 3, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 272-74; Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* 4, 255-264; Hester, *Heart of Hebrew History*, 237-38; Noth, *History of Israel*, 265-269; Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 368-369. Those who accepted a double invasion theory include Bright, *A History of Israel*, 284-288; Anderson, *History and Religion of Israel*, 104-110; Tullock, *Old Testament Story*, 223-224.

<sup>87</sup> In fact, Esarhaddon’s first expedition was his attack and conquest of Egypt in 679 B.C.E. (Tadmor, “Judah from the Fall of Samaria,” 139-146.

<sup>88</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 117; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1948), 400; Noth, *History of Israel*, 265-269; Joseph Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 182.

<sup>89</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* trans. Peter R. Ackroyd, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), 296. He maintains that the entire 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19 originated from Isaiah’s legend and was secondarily inserted in the book by Isaiah.

<sup>90</sup> Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 296. Even if one accepts double or single invasion(s) problems still exist as to the exact event in which to place this passage. While some scholars place it in the period of the Philistines’ revolt shortly before 711 B.C.E.<sup>90</sup> others place it in the period shortly before Sennacherib’s invasion of Palestine in 705-701 B.C.E.

<sup>91</sup> Tadmor, “Judah from the Fall of Samaria,” 144.

on the part of the reliability of his annals. The biblical account B or source 2 appears to fill this possible deliberate silence about the sudden departure to Nineveh without the conquest of Jerusalem despite the destruction of the surrounding cities of Judah. This has led some scholars to take another critical look at the Assyrian records and conclude that it is an exaggeration or mere propaganda.<sup>92</sup> This is very likely considering the nature of historiography in the ancient Near East. Kings were regarded as messengers of gods who supposedly supported them in the battle for victory. Any failure in the battle meant the rejection of gods and consequently the rejection from his people and the loss of his throne. It was therefore usual for a king to record victory where he experienced failure for the fear of losing the throne.<sup>93</sup> In this case the biblical account concerning the failure of Sennacherib, despite its long process of redaction should take precedence and be acceptable.<sup>94</sup>

The prophet Isaiah's role during this Assyrian crisis is an important one. He is the foremost of the classical prophets who took an active part in the political life of Israel. He followed the tradition of Amos in protesting against injustice and oppression of the poor. To him Judah should not depend on horses and chariots or aid from Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) but on Yahweh, God of Israel. Hezekiah should not even rebel against Assyria. The whole situation is Yahweh's handwork to use the foreign powers as tools for the punishment of Israel (Isa 30:1-18). On the one hand the prophet Isaiah welcomed Assyria as an instrument of punishment for Judah's iniquities, but on the other hand, when Judah was to be destroyed, he reacted vehemently against *Rab shakeh's* threat and boasted with the promise that Jerusalem will not be destroyed and that Sennacherib will not go unpunished (Isa 37:33-35).<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Antti Laato, "Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History in the Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib," *Vetus Testamentum*, 45/2 (1995): 198-226. Brevard S. Childs also cautioned against many scholars belief that Annals of Assyrian are accurate and therefore historical. (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* [Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1967], 73.

<sup>93</sup> Laato, "Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History," 198-226.

<sup>94</sup> Laato, "Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History," 198-226.

<sup>95</sup> The book of Isaiah has been a subject of controversy despite the fact that the author of the book places the prophet historically during the year of the Assyrian Empire (734-701 B.C.E.). Scholars believe much of the book was composed by authors during the Babylonian Exile and beyond, thus leading majority of scholars to believe that there are multiple authors, at least three different authors: Isaiah of Jerusalem (1-39), Second Isaiah (40-55), and Third Isaiah (56-66). The whole implication is that the book of Isaiah went through a long process. It was propounded that there was originally an Isaiah who had disciples and that this Isaianic school was responsible for the composition and the addition of new material to the original collection of the narratives and oracles of the Isaiah of Jerusalem. These Isaianic disciples did not only add to the earlier materials, but also constantly revised it to make the message relevant

Several scholarly controversies surround Isa 18:1-7. Gray, Hayes, and Winward<sup>96</sup> consider Isa 18:1-7 as part of the authentic oracle of Isaiah. Scott considers only 18:1-6 as authentic.<sup>97</sup> Arthur Herbert<sup>98</sup> divides this passage into three sections - verses 1-3, 4-6, and 7. Verse 7 is considered as a post-exilic commentary of the Isaianic community. Kaiser considers the entire text (18:1-7) as belonging to a late post-exilic redactor.<sup>99</sup>

Another problem concerning this particular text is the proper identification of the subject and the object of this prophecy. Scholars have divergent opinions as to whether the prophet was asking Judah to send messengers to the Assyrians or was addressing the African messengers to return home to their people. Hayes<sup>100</sup> considers the entire passage not so much as judgment against a foreign nation, but as an oracle mainly intended for the prophet's own people - Judah. According to Janzen the prophet Isaiah was summoning divine messengers to go to Assyria to tell the Assyrian ruler what was happening in Jerusalem.<sup>101</sup> Clements, however, thinks that the prophet was summoning the African (Kush) ambassadors to go to Assyria against whom their plan is directed.<sup>102</sup> As Gray, Scott, Kaiser, and Bright have maintained, a very close examination of the text in question shows that the prophet was addressing the African messengers in Jerusalem sent by King Shabako, telling them to go back

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to the later generations. The fact that the content of Isa 1-39 which contains the supposed historical events of the Sennacherib invasion, overlaps with other biblical books (for example Isa 2:2-4 with Micah 4:1-5 with slight variations; Isa 15-16 with Jer 48 and Isa 36-39 with 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19) shows that the book of Isaiah is an anthology and really not an actual history. Caution should therefore be taken when using the historical documents contained in these books. The book of First Isaiah and the books of Kings contain some important facts that deal with the role Judah and the Africans (Egypt/Ethiopia) played in the event of Sennacherib's invasion of 701. Yet I believe that the biblical record should not be summarily dismissed as irrelevant or inappropriate in the reconstruction of the Sennacherib invasion of 701.

<sup>96</sup> John Hayes, "Oracles Against the Foreign Nations in the Old Testament. Their Usage and Theological Importance." (PhD Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary), 1964, 195; Stephen Winward, *A Guide to the Prophet* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), 93-95.

<sup>97</sup> Robert B. Y. Scott, "The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39 (Introduction and Exegesis)" in *The Interpreter's Bible* Vol. 5 (ed. George A. Buttrick, Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 160.

<sup>98</sup> Arthur S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah 1-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 117-119.

<sup>99</sup> Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 1-9, 117-119.

<sup>100</sup> Hayes, "Oracles against the foreign nations," 206.

<sup>101</sup> Waldemar Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (New York/Berlin: BZAW, 1972), 60-62.

<sup>102</sup> Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 165.

home empty-handed because Judah did not need their alliance.<sup>103</sup> Otto Kaiser thinks that this passage refers to Africa south of Egypt (Ethiopia) and gives several reasons for not believing otherwise.<sup>104</sup>

The Hebrew travellers probably brought the news of the wealth of that distant land, the fast and light papyrus boats on the Nile, the physical characteristics (height, and body) of the people, and the power of the nation of Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) when they conquered Egypt.<sup>105</sup> Thus the prophet Isaiah, a well-informed prophet, describes the land as “whirring wings” and the people as “swift messengers.” He describes the boats on the Nile, as they sail they spread and resemble birds with wings.<sup>106</sup> The prophet was probably familiar with the people of Africa and admired their physical make up, describing them as “tall” and “smooth.”<sup>107</sup> Travellers to the land of the Dinka-people of Africa described Africans as “giants,” about seven feet tall, who, like the Nile cranes stand on one foot in the river for hours looking for fish.<sup>108</sup>

The prophet Isaiah, in order to demonstrate that such reliance on the African (Egyptian/Ethiopian) military power would be in vain and that Africa (Egypt/Ethiopia) would be taken into captivity, walked naked and barefoot for three years according the biblical record (Isa 20:1-6). A careful analysis of Isa 20:1-6 makes it difficult to take Isaiah’s passage at face value without critical questions. According to Kaiser, the idea that the prophet walked naked and barefoot for three years is “inconceivable considering the climate of Palestine.” Therefore this text may be a purely narrative theme composed probably after the event of 711 B.C.E. and is of interest to scholars, not because it is historically reliable, but because its theological content is interesting and makes sense.<sup>109</sup> Hayes considers Isa 20:1-6 as a text that has been transmitted as a historical narrative describing the activity of the prophet, and that verses 4-6 rep-

<sup>103</sup> George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1-17* (Vol. 1, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 310-311; Scott, “The Book of Isaiah,” 276-277; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 281, 147; Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 93-94.

<sup>104</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 93-94.

<sup>105</sup> Gray, *Isaiah 1-17*, 310-311.

<sup>106</sup> See Gray, *Isaiah 1-17*, 310-311.

<sup>107</sup> Isaiah 18:2. From this passage, it is evident that ancient people do not share the modern prejudices of some scholars. Gray has this to say: “There is no reason why the Hebrew should have not admired the burnished copper colour of the Ethiopians, for even Jer 13:23 need not be interpreted as though the ancient Hebrew shared the modern white man’s objection to colour” (*Isaiah 1-17*, 311-312).

<sup>108</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972). See also Modupe Oduyoye, *The Sons of Gods and the Daughters of Men. An Afro-Asiatic Interpretation of Genesis 1-11* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1974), 26-27.

<sup>109</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 13:39*, 112-117.



resent Isaiah's original interpretation of his action which was later recast in the form of a historical description.<sup>110</sup>

I believe that despite the long process of transmission of the text into literary form, the biblical text preserves a kernel of original words of Isaiah during the Assyrian crisis. Therefore, it should not be summarily dismissed as irrelevant to the reconstruction of the events of 701 B.C.E..

## F CONCLUSION

What I have done above is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Ancient Israel in the light of the Bible and archaeological documents with emphasis on the role that Africa and Africans played in those events. I may be accused of bias like many scholars have accused the biblical and Assyrian authors of. The fact is that there is no scholar who can rightly boast of one hundred percent objectivity in writing history. It is difficult to be certain that one has recreated the actual past, because the past in actual sense, is a narrative of history, and can never be fully recoverable.

In teaching and reconstructing the history of ancient Israel no ethnic group or nation should be suppressed. Africa and Africans should not be suppressed by modern historians as Hegel and others did in the early period of the discipline. No matter how the authors of the story of Sennacherib's siege (Israel and Assyrian) have embellished the biblical narratives by introducing legendary means, the account of the siege should not be summarily dismissed as un-historical. Instead, it merely tells us the method used by the writers when they constructed their histories.<sup>111</sup> It cannot be denied that throughout the eighth and seventh centuries, African nations (Egyptians and Ethiopians) were the political and military hope of Israel. Israel depended on them for protection. Both the biblical and Assyrian documents are in agreement to this fact. That is the reason why Isaiah of Jerusalem vehemently objected to such dependence on African military might and prophesied against them:<sup>112</sup>

‘Woe to the rebellious children’, says the LORD, ‘who carry out a plan, but not mine and who make a league, but not my spirit, ... who set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my counsel, to take

<sup>110</sup> Hayes, “Oracles Against the Foreign Nations,” 209.

<sup>111</sup> Lemche, “Is it Still Possible to Write,” 171-172.

<sup>112</sup> Randall Bailey, “Beyond Identification. The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives,” in *Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Cain H. Felder, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 173. This long dependence was based on Africa's Egyptian capability of withstanding external military invasion and “its long history of independence.” Bailey has correctly observed that the majority of Euro-American biblical scholars have spent their time on establishing the historical background of these prophecies without seeing or emphasising the extent of Israel's dependence on the African nation for political and military protection.

refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt' (Isa 30:1- 2). Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD. The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. (Isa 31:1-3)

The prophet Ezekiel who spoke during the pre-exilic and exilic periods also prophesied vehemently against Africa (Egypt) that Yahweh would make them so small that they will never rule over the nations and they will never again be the reliance of the house of Israel. The vehemence with which these prophets spoke against Israel's dependence on Africa instead of Yahweh, shows the extent and seriousness of this continuous dependence and the importance of Africa to ancient Israel.

The Assyrian records also mention the experience with African (Egypt/Ethiopian) military might during the battle of Ashdod and Eltekeh. The annals of Sennacherib report as follows:

Upon a trust (--inspiring) oracle (given by Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. In the melee of the battle, I personally captured alive the Egyptian charioteers with the (ir) princes and (also) the charioteers of the King of Ethiopia. I besieged Eltekeh (and) Timnah (Ta-am-na-a), conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, in the process of teaching the history of ancient Israel from an African perspective, an attitude of dismissal of other people's view should be shelved. The tendency to label some people as "maximalists," "minimalist," "nihilists," "Zionists," "radicals," "conservatives," "pseudo-scholars," and others should not be the case. This even goes beyond labelling, is insulting and a way of dismissing the argument of other scholars who differ.<sup>114</sup>

Teaching the history of ancient Israel from an African perspective should include respect and exposure to the various diverse and modern contemporary theories by scholars of the history of ancient Israel irrespective of the nation of origin. Students must be aware of these diverse opinions. The fact that Africa and Africans are part of the history of ancient Israel as demonstrated above should be emphasised.

<sup>113</sup> "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (ANET, 287).

<sup>114</sup> Lester L Grabbe, "Some Recent Issues," 57-67.

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