

Sennacherib

In 701 BCE Sennacherib invaded the region of Israel as part of his third campaign. Sennacherib defeated an Egyptian force at Eltekeh and then advanced against Judah. A unit under the command of the *turtanu* and *rab shaqe* laid siege to Jerusalem and, while Hezekiah was shut up in the capital, Sennacherib successfully subdued '46 of his strong walled cities as well as countless small villages and their vicinities' (*Annals of Sennacherib*, Forbes, p. 72).

Hezekiah attempted to appease Sennacherib by stating his willingness to submit and pay a heavy tribute (2 Kings 18:13–16) but Sennacherib was intent on punishing Hezekiah further for his leadership of the coalition that revolted against Assyria. Hezekiah received a brief reprieve when Pharaoh Tirhakah launched an attack at the strained forces of Sennacherib. Sennacherib was forced to retreat to face this imminent attack from Egypt.

Sennacherib's annals gloss over the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem but he did boast that 'I shut Hezekiah himself up in Jerusalem, his royal city, as if he were a bird in a cage' (*Annals of Sennacherib*, Forbes, p. 72). Judah remained a vassal state of Assyria and Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was a temporary captive of Assyria (see Chapter 10, pages 93–6).

Table 21.2 Israel and Judah's relationship with Assyria

Events	Biblical references and other sources
In 853 BCE Ahab (Israel) fought in anti-Assyrian coalition against Shalmaneser III. Twelve local states joined forces to fight the rising might of Assyria at Qarqar on the Orontes River. The battle resulted in both sides withdrawing and, although Shalmaneser III claimed victory, he was unable to attempt an attack again for another five years.	Shalmaneser III's inscription on monuments at Calah Monolith inscription: 'I destroyed Qarqar . . .' (Forbes, p. 35)
841 BCE: Shalmaneser III returned to the west and, after defeating Aram under Hazael, he extracted tribute from Israel (under Jehu). Assyria returned home satisfied with tribute but not annexing territory. Jehu lacked economic, military or spiritual strength to resist the Assyrians after his bloody purge of Israel.	Shalmaneser III's inscriptions at Calah Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk Forbes, pp. 27, 29, 30, 33
801–2 BCE: Adad-Nirari III crushed Aram under Ben-Hadad III, which also had an impact on Israel. The Assyrians extracted a large tribute from Jehoash.	Monuments of Adad-Nirari III at Calah Forbes, pp. 40–3
743 BCE: Tiglath-Pileser III conducted raids in the west and came into contact with Uzziah (Judah). Uzziah probably led an anti-Assyrian coalition that fought in northern Aram.	Annals from Calah
738 BCE: Tiglath-Pileser III took tribute from states in the west, including Menahem.	2 Kings 15:19–20 Bas-relief of Tiglath-Pileser III

Events	Biblical references and other sources
737–732 BCE: Menahem submitted to Assyria. Anti-Assyrian elements gained more influence in Israel. Pekah led these forces, and with the help of Aram, seized power from Menahem's son, Pekahiah. Pekah led coalition of Israel, Aram and smaller states, but they needed the support of Judah (under Ahaz). Judah refused to join coalition so Aram and Israel invaded Judah. Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III for help. He destroyed Aram, annexed it into his empire, and reduced Israel's territory. Pekah was assassinated. Hoshea assumed the throne, adopted pro-Assyrian policies, to the satisfaction of Tiglath-Pileser.	2 Kings 16 Isaiah 7, 8:6–10 2 Chronicles 28 Tiglath-Pileser III inscriptions at Nimrud
727 BCE: Hoshea rebelled against Assyria when Tiglath-Pileser III died. In response Shalmaneser V invaded Israel and besieged Samaria. Help from Egypt never materialised. Samaria was able to hold out for two years. Israel was totally annexed as an Assyrian province and most of the population was deported.	2 Kings 17 Isaiah 8:6–10
705–701 BCE: Hezekiah (Judah) led a rebellion of vassal states. Sennacherib invaded, conquered towns and villages, and laid siege to Jerusalem. Egyptians attempted to assist Judah twice but were defeated. Sennacherib was forced to retreat because an epidemic ravaged his army and he was required back at Nineveh.	2 Kings 18, 19 2 Chronicles 32 Isaiah 36, 37 Taylor Prism (Sennacherib's annals)
Esarhaddon invaded Judah c. 674 BCE during reign of Manasseh. Manasseh and others taken captive to Babylon. Manasseh reinstated on throne of Judah and paid tribute to Assyria. Esarhaddon passed through Judah on his way to conquer Egypt 669 BCE.	2 Chronicles 33:10–13 Esarhaddon's annals Nehemiah 9:32 Isaiah 19:4
Ashurbanipal may have been the Assyrian king who released Manasseh. Manasseh joined Ashurbanipal's first campaign against Tirhakah in Egypt (667 BCE). Ashurbanipal took captives to Babylon.	Ashurbanipal's annals, Cylinder C Ezra 4:10–11
Nineveh fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BCE. The decline of Assyria allowed Josiah (Judah) to carry out religious reforms and re-establish the geographical territory of the Davidic kingdom. Josiah tried to intercept Pharaoh Necco's attempt to assist Assyria in its final battle against the Babylonians and Medes in 609 BCE.	2 Kings 23:28–30 2 Chronicles 35:20–36:1

Shishak (Sheshonk)

Shishak I had replaced Pharaoh Psusennes II (959–945 BCE) and his attitude to Israel was not so peace loving. Shishak sheltered the exiled Jeroboam when he fled from Solomon (1 Kings 11:26–40). By sheltering Jeroboam, Shishak indirectly nurtured the future division in Israel and thus connived his own invitation into a weakened Solomonic kingdom. As a result of the civil war and hostilities that

followed Jeroboam's rebellion, both Israel and Judah were easy targets for invasion. Shishak took advantage of the situation and launched an attack in 924 BCE. Using a striking force of chariots with the support of Lydian and Nubian infantry, Shishak advanced north along the coastal plain through the Philistine territory and into central Judah. Jerusalem was partly protected by its isolation in the hill country but Rehoboam was required to pay a heavy tribute (1 Kings 14: 25–8; 2 Chronicles 12).

Shishak continued advancing northward through Tirzah before he crossed the Jordan to Succoth, Mahanaim and Penuel, important towns on the main transport route from Gilead to Samaria. He then crossed back over the river and made his way through towns such as Beth-Shean, Shunem and Megiddo in the north. A fragment of a stele of Shishak has been found in the excavations at Megiddo, indicating that the Egyptians held this important fortress. He also swept down into the southern desert regions and successfully overran the vital sea-port of Ezion-Geber.

Shishak left a weakened Israel behind but, since he did not establish a permanent occupation in the area, his campaign only served as a booty-gathering exercise. An inscription on the south wall of the temple at Karnak shows the god Amon, sickle-sword in his hand, with his wife (the goddess of Thebes), leading conquered cities on cords to present them to pharaoh. (See Chapter 16, pages 160–1, for more information on Shishak.)

Necco

The rise of the Babylonians and Medes on the international scene had reduced the influence of Assyria; Nineveh, its capital, was destroyed. Egypt saw the political turmoil as an opportunity to extend its own dominance and to quench Babylon's aspirations as a world power. In 609 BCE, Pharaoh Necco embarked on his campaign to assist the Assyrians in their final stand against the Babylonians at Carchemish. Why King Josiah blocked Necco's passage along the Judean-controlled highways at Megiddo is one of the puzzles of history. He fatefully refused Egypt's offer of neutrality and set the scene for a military confrontation on the open fields in the valley of Jezreel. As the Egyptian army emerged from the mountain pass near Megiddo, the battle began (2 Chronicles 35:20–27). In the process, Josiah was killed; not only was the battle lost but Judah became doomed for ultimate destruction.

Table 21.3 Israel and Judah's relationship with Egypt

Events	Biblical references and other sources
After the division of the kingdom, the first Egyptian encounter mentioned is the invasion of Shishak who had earlier given political asylum to Jeroboam I during the reign of Solomon.	1 Kings 11:26–40; 12:20
Shishak (founder of 22nd dynasty) invaded Israel (925 BCE). Rehoboam recognised the vulnerability of Judah and installed a ring of defences on the western, southern and eastern borders. Rehoboam paid an enormous tribute to prevent Shishak overtaking Jerusalem. Egyptians advanced through Israel from north to south. At Megiddo a triumphal stele was erected. Shishak planned a building program but died shortly after invasion.	1 Kings 14:25–28 1 Chronicles 12:1–12 Inscription at Karnak temple of Amon, exterior of south wall Stele of Megiddo

Events	Biblical references and other sources
Zerah, the Ethiopian, possibly under the direction of Osorkon (c. 914–874 BCE), successor of Shishak, attacked Asa of Judah, from the south. He was met near the frontier fortress of Mareshah and soundly defeated by Asa.	2 Chronicles 14:8–15
Ahab and Ben Hadad II became allies in order to repel the Assyrian threat. Various kings of the west also formed a coalition against the Assyrians, including recruits from Egypt. The 1000 troops of Musri mentioned in Shalmaneser III's inscription were probably Egyptians. The coalition met Shalmaneser III at Qarqar and temporarily stalled him.	Shalmaneser III's inscription on Battle of Qarqar
Rezin, King of Damascus, and some Philistines sought to organise a resistance against the Assyrians and finding Menahem unwilling, they attacked Israel and backed Pekah as one amenable to their plans. Israel may have sought for Egypt's help here as they did on a later occasion.	Hoshea 7:11; 12:1 2 Kings 15:27–30
Hoshea looked for Egyptian support to escape Assyrian oppression under Tiglath-Pileser III and then Shalmaneser V. Egypt split into small rival states. Hoshea sought help from So, King of Egypt, who was unable to assist.	2 Kings 17:4
Assyria advanced to Egypt's frontier. Egyptians used Israel as a buffer. In 714 BCE Ashdod and other Philistine towns revolted. Egypt promised them aid but Sargon II suppressed the revolt. Judah submitted under Ahaz and continued paying tribute.	Sargon II's inscription
Hezekiah appealed to Egypt for help with his rebellion in 701 BCE. Twice Egyptian armies failed to save Hezekiah and his allies when Sennacherib attacked in 701 BCE.	Isaiah 39; 30:1–7; 31:1–3 2 Kings 18, 19:9 Herodotus Book 2:141
Manasseh is said to have assisted Ashurbanipal's campaign against Egypt.	Ashurbanipal's annals
In 609 BCE Pharaoh Necco II, concerned at the advancing power of the Babylonians, marched to assist the dying Assyrian empire. Josiah opposed Necco at Megiddo, lost the battle and was killed, leaving Judah under tribute to Egypt. Necco installed Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah.	2 Kings 23:29–35 2 Chronicles 35:20–24 Jeremiah 22:10–12
Zedekiah (Judah) rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, turning to Egypt for support. Nebuchadnezzar attacked and laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 BCE.	2 Kings 25:1–21 Jeremiah 39:1–10 Jeremiah 52:4–27
Babylonian siege of Jerusalem was lifted briefly when Egyptians advanced. Egyptians retreated, siege was resumed, and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE, people taken captive to Babylon for 70 years.	Jeremiah 37:5
Some of the survivors from Jerusalem fled to Egypt.	Jeremiah 41:16–18

The destruction of the kingdom of Israel (722 BCE)

The revival of Assyria during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and the subsequent kings of the Sargonid period heralded a time in the history of Israel and Judah when they regularly succumbed to the influence of Assyria. Israel particularly experienced the effects of the Assyrian policy of deportation, and the kingdom of Israel was finally destroyed by Assyria in 722 BCE.

Table 21.4 Assyria's destruction of Israel

Political events	Historical explanation	Biblical explanation
Invasion of Tiglath-Pileser III who extracted tribute from Israel.	Israel's power declined after the death of Jeroboam II. Manasseh was made to pay tribute. Tiglath-Pileser III annexed Hamath, Philistia, Galilee, Gilead and Aram (Damascus) during reign of Pekah.	2 Kings 17:7 'All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against Yahweh their God.' The people had provoked Yahweh to anger because of their idolatry. They had rejected Yahweh's messages through the prophets and imitated the pagan religious practices of the surrounding nations. (2 Kings 17:7–18)
Tiglath-Pileser III conducted the first Assyrian deportation of people from Israel.	Israel weakened by pro- and anti-Assyrian factions, multiple assassinations, political instability and conspiracy.	2 Kings 17:20 'He inflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers.'
Shalmaneser V laid siege to Samaria.	Hoshea was a traitor by appealing to Egypt for support and refusing to pay tribute to Assyria.	2 Kings 17:24–40
Fall of Samaria to Sargon II. Captives taken and resettled in areas of Assyrian empire.	Sargon II came to the Assyrian throne near the end of the siege and claimed to have carried away 27 290 inhabitants of the city as booty.	2 Kings 17:23 'So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland and into exile in Assyria.'
Other inhabitants from the empire are resettled in Samaria.	Assyrian policy was to repopulate and control areas in the empire.	
Some deportees returned to instruct new settlers on religious practices.	Assyrian acceptance of gods of assimilated nations.	
Attacks by lions were attributed to punishment by gods of the land.	Depopulated areas had begun to revert to natural state, leading to conflict with wild animals when people returned.	2 Kings 17:26 'The people ... do not know what the god ... requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off.'

Table 21.5 Babylon's destruction of Judah

Political events	Historical explanation	Biblical explanation
Destruction of Assyria at the battle of Carchemish, 609 BCE, allowed the rise of Babylon.	Change in the superpowers in the region – from Assyria to Babylon.	2 Kings 24:20 'it was because of Yahweh's anger that all this happened to Judah and Jerusalem'
As Pharaoh Necco returned from the battle, he made Judah a vassal state and installed Jehoiakim on the throne.	Destruction of Josiah by Pharaoh Necco left Judah's monarchy weak and vulnerable.	Jeremiah 34 The people refused to listen to the warnings of Jeremiah the prophet.
Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon.	Nabopolassar died, 604 BCE.	2 Kings 24:2 'Yahweh sent [Babylon] to destroy Judah in accordance with the word of Yahweh proclaimed by his servants the prophets.'
Babylon asserted its power in Judah and made Jehoiakim a Babylonian vassal.	Babylon controlled rebel state's affairs, as the power of Egypt declined.	Jeremiah 22:8–9 'Why has Yahweh done such a thing to this great city [Jerusalem]? And the answer will be: "Because they have forsaken the covenant of Yahweh their God and have worshipped and served other gods".'
Jehoiakim rebelled against vassalage. Nebuchadnezzar invaded.	Babylon subdued revolt and punished rebels.	
Elite people during Jehoiachin's reign taken captive (including him).	Babylon's policy of punishment for uprising.	
Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne.	Babylon asserted its control over leadership.	
Zedekiah made an alliance with Egypt, stopped paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar.	Pro-Egyptian factions influenced Zedekiah to break off Babylonian yoke.	
Nebuchadnezzar invaded, besieged to Jerusalem in 588 BCE for 18 months.	Lack of subjection and failure to pay tribute resulted in an angry response from Babylon.	
Jerusalem fell in 586 BCE; temple destroyed.	Judah weakened by upheavals and tribute payments.	
Zedekiah tried to escape, is captured, forced to watch sons die, and then further punished by being blinded.	Punishment on royalty for their rebelliousness to Babylonian control.	
Zedekiah deported to Babylon, people taken captive.	Babylonian policy.	
Kingdom of Judah dissolved.	Babylon absorbed the territory into borders of its empire.	