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From Jerusalem a Remnant Shall Go Out:
The Siege of Jerusalem
in Biblical Times and the Twentieth Century

A Thesis Submitted in Candidacy for Rabbinical Ordination

By
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Referee, Dr. David B. Weisberg

This work is dedicated to the pursuit and love of truth and every person who has instilled in me truth as a value, including my family, my friends, my teachers, and my tradition.

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Preface

I spent the academic year of 1988-89 living in Jerusalem as a part of my first year of rabbinical studies. That year was the first trip I spent in Israel. I remember my first night in Jerusalem. Upon arrival, I knew no one in the neighborhood or the country, for that matter. My knowledge of Hebrew was limited to the *alef-bet* and a few dozen Hebrew words. My luggage, nearly all of my possessions for the year, had been accidentally sent to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I went for a walk in the Jerusalem neighborhood where I was staying. The sun was setting and I had not yet got my bearings. As I looked around, each structure appeared more or less like the next with every building covered in pinkish-beige Jerusalem stone. After walking about a block or two, I heard a woman singing. I imagine that she was singing to her child. I heard her voice from an open window of a third floor apartment.

"*Bashanah haba'ah neshev al hamirpeset . . .*" my Confirmation class song. My love affair with *Yerushalaim* had been sealed! From that point on my connection with the city continued to grow as it does to this day. This thesis represents one component of that ever-growing relationship.

My approach to this thesis is multi-faceted. I examine sieges of Jerusalem from a number of angles including Biblical text, history, diplomacy, and comparatively. Each

angle provides a new and unique insight to the city, religious history, and human nature. I have only begun to scratch the surface of a treasure trove of material. It is my hope that this thesis will provide the reader with food for thought. If it helps someone reach certain conclusions, all the better.

I wish to express appreciation to a number of persons who helped me successfully complete this project. First, thanks to my advisor, Dr. David Weisberg whose wisdom and guidance were invaluable. Thanks, also are due to the HUC Library staff who aided me in my research. Finally, thanks are due to a number of special friends who provided essential moral support during the months required to complete this project.

Chapter I Jerusalem Under Siege(s)

siege (sēj) *n.* The surrounding and blockading of a town or fortress by an army bent on capturing it.¹

A. Jerusalem & Siege

Siege as warfare has been employed at various times by Israel and its enemies. The goal of the town or fortress under siege is to fend off its attacker(s). The goals of a besieging army vary depending on the political circumstances that led to the onset of the siege. The final goals of that army may change during the siege itself depending on the degree of success they experience. A siege differs from border warfare in that siege entails the surrounding of an enemy while a border war may be fought on a single front, leaving other borders open. I would add to the above definition that an entire country may be besieged depending on the size of the country and the size and strength of the attacking army.

B. Background to The Siege of Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century

The factors leading to the siege of Jerusalem that took place in 1947-48 CE are varied and complex. Motivations for the siege as well as responses to the siege spread across borders and continents. This siege is just one component in the greater War of Independence that took place throughout the newly established State of Israel. Zionism, the Shoah,

¹The American Heritage Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mills Company, 1985).

and international diplomacy are among the primary elements that contributed to the War and the siege as a part of that war.

An understanding of the political and diplomatic forces that preceded the War of Independence will aid in understanding the siege. Jerusalem and its surrounding areas have been a focus of international attention for thousands of years. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all claim the city as a spiritual capitol, while elements in Judaism and Islam also claim it as a geographical capitol. Throughout time persons have taken lives and given their lives for the glory of Jerusalem.

The various claims of ownership made on Jerusalem are disputed as strongly as they are held. The city is the source of religious history and religious myths that kindle the hearts and minds of millions of persons worldwide. While the ancient history and beliefs certainly contribute to the claims and disputes made over modern Jerusalem, here I will deal especially with the modern factors that contributed to the War of Independence and the siege of Jerusalem.

Control over the city has passed through the hands of a number of world powers. Before Israel was established as a modern State, Great Britain was the ruling power in Palestine. Although Great Britain was the ruling power, the region was settled by indigenous Arab and Jewish

populations. Arabs and Jews made conflicting claims for rights and sovereignty in the region. These conflicts occasionally flared up making ruling the area all the more difficult for the British forces. A growing Zionist movement throughout Europe and anti-Semitism served to increase Jewish settlement in pre-War Palestine.

In 1939 the British government passed the White Paper which had provisions that restricted Jewish immigration and was intended to appease Arab tensions in the region. These provisions had the effect of angering Jews and making them mistrust the British government. While the White Paper gave Arabs the upper hand in the region, it was rejected by the Higher Arab Committee. The fact that the White Paper was rejected by both Jews and Arabs in the region had the unusual effect of uniting two otherwise disparate groups in the desire to bring an end to British rule in Palestine.² Still, some claim it had the effect of reducing Arab hostility toward Britain during World War II.³

The organized Jewish settlement in Palestine during this period is known as the Yishuv. From the time of the publication of the White Paper to the outbreak of the war, one of the primary goals of the Yishuv was increased illegal

²Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 241.

³ibid. 240.

Jewish immigration to Palestine.⁴ Life was becoming increasingly difficult for Jews in Europe with the escalation of the program of the Third Reich. With the doors to Palestine becoming ever more difficult to enter due to the provisions of the White Paper, a place considered by Zionists as a sanctuary for Jews in peril, was threatened.

Jews in and outside of Palestine now walked a treacherous course. They wholeheartedly supported the British and the Allies in WWII, yet they rejected and fought against the White Paper. Similarly, Jews in the United States were also walking a treacherous course. They identified with the plight of Jews in Europe. At the same time, they did not wish to appear unpatriotic and risking losing favor in the public eye. As a result, Jews for the most part remained uncharacteristically quiet during WWII until the United States was brought into the war as a consequence of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

While the Yishuv, for the most part, cooperated with the British, ~~not all Jews~~ were willing to do so. *Lehi*,⁵ under the leadership of Avraham Stern, also known as "The Stern Gang," was willing to use methods to establish a Jewish State by any means including terrorist means. At one point, *Lehi* even made Hitler an offer at negotiating a

⁴ibid. 242.

⁵In Chapter V, Dr. Spicehandler notes that he was approached by *Lehi* for recruitment, but rejected their offer.

Jewish State and allowing Jewish immigration. As a result, mainstream Jewish groups in Palestine such as the Jewish Agency did their best to distance themselves from *Lehi*. Though *Lehi* was viewed as extreme at the time, today members of the group are regarded as martyrs and heroes by many Israelis.⁶

The escalation of the war brought about some relaxation of some provisions of the White Paper, probably due to the fact that the British were preoccupied with defending themselves. While defending the home front was of primary concern, the British did maintain an interest in the war front in the Middle East. Following the loss of Greece and Crete to the Axis, the British began training Jewish commando units which were later to become the *Palmach*, the strategic reserve of the *Haganah*, the Jewish military forces in Palestine.⁷ Great Britain was also concerned with the threat of a German attack on Palestine from the Egyptian front. The threat, whether real or perceived was eliminated by autumn of 1942.

The British had largely resisted an alliance with the Jews in Palestine up until this point as they were walking the tight-rope between the Arabs and the Jews. By this time however, the British had begun to take a heavy toll in the

⁶Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 247.

⁷ibid. 249.

war. Furthermore, the British also trained Arab units in the region. Though diplomatically it was risky, the British never completely favored one group over another on an official, diplomatic level. Of course, in the end, both groups were satisfied to be rid of the British and their influence in the area and the British left resenting both groups to some degree.

During WWII there was a somewhat unstable alliance between the Nazis and the Arabs. Both shared a common goal and desire to destroy the Jews. While the Germans and British were enemies, the Arabs always maintained a general mistrust of the British. The Arab leader, the Mufti, openly expressed friendship to the Germans, though this friendship was not returned in kind by the Germans. Following a diplomatic visit with Hitler, the Mufti recorded in his own diary that while the two shared certain ideals, Hitler was unwilling to pledge complete friendship with the Arabs,⁸ probably due to his concerns for racial purity.

As early as 1944 a Partition plan for Palestine was suggested by Winston Churchill. The Zionist leadership had mixed feelings about the Partition Plan, but was prepared to accept it. However, terrorist actions on the part of *Lehi* forced Churchill to withdraw support for Zionism and the Jewish State.⁹ Churchill's withdrawal of support, however

⁸ibid. 252.

⁹ibid. 257.

justified, represented yet another strain in the ongoing relationship between Great Britain and the Jews of Palestine.

Anti-semitism was a major force in shaping the events of history during this period. In the first place, the greatest show of anti-Semitism in the modern world was manifesting itself in the form of the Shoah. Millions of European Jews were destroyed and along with them, their homes, their possessions and their places of worship. The events of the Holocaust shook Jews around the world. Jews who previously felt free of the sting of anti-Semitism could no longer feel completely safe and complacent. As a result, Jews everywhere identified with the need for a Jewish homeland.

When the war ended on May 8, 1945, the White Paper was still in place. The limit on immigration provisions in the White Paper were an increasing source of tension now that it meant that concentration camp survivors were prevented from emigrating to Palestine. As a result, diplomatic pressure was now placed on the government of Great Britain to remove the restrictions from the Yishuv, the Jewish Agency, and the United States government.¹⁰

By 1947 Winston Churchill indicated that British evacuation of Palestine was imminent. He urged the British "place our mandate for Palestine at the feet of the United

¹⁰ibid. 259.

Nations."¹¹ The tension in the region and anti-British sentiment from both Jews and Arabs had become unmanageable. Jewish forces had been responsible for anti-British terrorism and world sympathy for the need for a Jewish state was mounting, due in part to pressure from the United States. On May 14, 1948 Israel officially became an independent state with the recognition of the United Nations. The British mandate ran out on May 19 at 6:00 p.m. When the mandate expired, Israel was immediately attacked by five Arab nations. Jerusalem was, once again, a city under siege.

C. The Concept of War in the Bible:
Yahweh, the Prophet, & the King

Our understanding of war as the Biblical narrative portrays it will be different from our understanding of war as a twentieth century phenomenon. Necessity dictates that some methods of inquiry are more readily available for examination of one siege over another. For instance, the fact that there are living eyewitnesses to the Israeli War of Independence allows us to listen to and record their first-hand experiences. The fact that the Biblical narrative is inextricably tied to the primary religious text of Jews and Christians will effect how one understands the events recorded there.

¹¹ibid. 272.

When trying to understand the Biblical narrative, it is important to remember that the Bible was not written in a vacuum. In other words, in many cases motifs, beliefs, rituals, and observances attributed to the Israelites were shared with Israel's foreign neighbors. Thus, Israelite religion in general was influenced in part by alien forces. As regards war, Israel's understanding of the role of Yahweh as warrior was also influenced in part by Israel's neighbors.¹² The Biblical narrative itself reveals that Assyria had some knowledge of Israelite religion and the religion of other vassals in the Assyrian empire. The Rabshakeh attempts to convince the Judeans to give up faith in Yahweh. The concept of war, faith, and deity seems to be a regional concept and not exclusively an Israelite notion.

The Bible, has war as a major recurring theme of its pages. The word "מלחמה" - war" appears 316 times in the Tanakh while the word "שלום" - peace" meaning the opposite of war in this case, appears a total of twenty times.¹³ While this word count does not, in itself, tell us the whole story about Biblical attitudes to these concepts, it does shed some light on the influences and concerns of Biblical authors and redactors. Just as many persons do today,

¹²Patrick D. Miller, Jr., The Divine Warrior in Early Israel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 164.

¹³Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed. A New Concordance of the Bible: Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible - Hebrew and Aramaic Roots, Words, Proper Names, Phrases and Synonyms (Jerusalem: "Kiryat Sefer" Publishing House Ltd., 1988).

Biblical authors lived with war and its effects as a major component of life. The implication of the above word count is that winning war, surviving war, preventing war, and understanding war are all issues with which persons have grappled for millennia.

Because the Bible is a compilation of stories and historical records collected over centuries, many diverse attitudes towards war are reflected within the text as a whole. Isaiah's attitude toward war and response to war is reflected in the Biblical narrative. As a prophet, Isaiah acts as God's mouthpiece. Thus, Isaiah's oracles and the narrative surrounding them give the reader insight into the theological bent of a particular time period in Jewish history.

War, as represented in the Bible, always has a theological component. Yahweh (God), is the major player either defending or rebuking Israel. Success or failure in a war depends primarily on Yahweh's support or lack thereof, respectively. Sometimes, Yahweh is joined in battle with ministering angels, God's holy army. In the case of this siege, Yahweh sends one angel or messenger to defend Judea. In most cases, Israel mounts its own army in a battle.

One aspect of the siege narrative in Isaiah that is unusual is the fact that while Jerusalem is under siege, we never hear of a military response to the Assyrian offensive. The narrative tells us enough about the Assyrian forces for

us to conclude that they are extremely powerful, having already defeated a number of pockets of rebellion in the Syria/Palestine region. Yet, despite the lack of human military response to the Assyrian siege, the Assyrian forces leave, apparently defeated.

Hezekiah's weapon is an intangible, that is, faith in Yahweh. Upon hearing the news of the siege and the Rabshakeh's threats, rather than garner troops and mount an attack, Hezekiah's initial response is an act of faith. The text reads:

When Hezekiah heard this, he rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the House of the Lord. (Isaiah 37:1)

Similarly, Hezekiah's response continues to consist of prayer and seeking the prophet's counsel and Yahweh's assistance. The only violence against the Assyrians comes from the hands of a מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה, an angel or messenger of the Lord, not a Judean.

Apparently, Hezekiah is taking to heart advice that Isaiah gave in an oracle a few chapters prior to the siege narrative in Isaiah. We read:

¹⁵For thus said my Lord God,
The Holy One of Israel,
"You shall triumph by stillness and quiet;
Your victory shall come about
Through calm and confidence."

God advises, through Isaiah, to have faith in a time of

crisis. Rather than respond to an attack in kind, God advises to remain calm. Isaiah's command to remain passive indicates that a victory would be Yahweh's victory for his people Israel.¹⁴

The theological implications are that faith in the God of Israel is stronger than a human enemy. In addition, the narrative implies that Yahweh's power exceeds the power of all other deities in that only Jerusalem was able to overcome the Assyrian threat due directly to faith in Yahweh.¹⁵

While the implications are not purely monotheistic in that they recognize the efficacy, or at least the existence, of other gods, they seem to move the reader in the direction of monotheism. Yahweh appears as the most powerful, perhaps only powerful, deity in the narrative. The other deities are powerless. When Sennacherib worships his own deity he is killed, a strike not only against him, but against Assyrian religion as a whole.

The siege narrative delivers a message of faith and the power of Yahweh and the prophet. I believe that it would be a mistake to conclude that this narrative is preaching a message of pure pacifism. Rather, the message seems to be

¹⁴Gerhard von Rad, Holy War in Ancient Israel trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 102.

¹⁵Millard C. Lind, Yahweh is a Warrior (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980) 141.

pacifism combined with faith. Though the Judeans appear not to take up arms, the narrative is not completely free of bloodshed. While the king does not take up arms, there is an act of violence against an enemy. This act of violence caps off the passage by figuratively sealing the victory of Yahweh and the Judeans against their foe.

Chapter II
A Study of HUC-MS.12:
Isaiah 36 & 37

A. Introduction

Some historians argue (persuasively perhaps) that the Bible is myth and therefore should not be taken seriously as a legitimate historical record or as a source of any kind of truth. Since some events depicted by Biblical authors have been disproved or, at the very least, are impossible to prove beyond any doubt, they argue, how can we take any single part of the Bible as fact? Still other historians argue that, although we cannot prove beyond all doubt much of Biblical narrative, the Bible still serves as a valuable tool for understanding our past, provides insight into human nature, and serves as a record and guide for our religious development.

In fact, regardless of the Bible's historical accuracy, it does reflect the myths, beliefs, and lifestyles of an ancient people. Therefore, the Bible may serve as a guide to understanding human history and thereby aid us in understanding ourselves in the present. With that in mind, I have chosen to examine the siege of Jerusalem as it is portrayed in the Bible and determine how it might correspond to a more recent twentieth century CE siege of the same area which occurred in the years 1947-48 CE . Through similarities and differences between these two sieges of Jerusalem we may uncover important patterns and insights into the Bible and the nature of warfare in the ancient Near

East.

B. The Masoretes

Biblical MSS tell two kinds of stories; one being the events depicted in the biblical narrative, the other being the history of the MS itself and its creators. Though these are two very different kinds of stories, they are related to one another in an important way. They depend upon one another. A small change in a letter or vocalization may create an even bigger change in translation and narrative and, as a result, may reveal something important about those persons who transmitted the story. A word that is at all ambiguous due to a vowel sign or accentuation, may open up an entire section of narrative to a variety of interpretations.

That seemingly minute details could make such drastic differences in meaning no doubt was a driving force in the effort of the Masoretes to create a single, authoritative text. This was no small task. The Masoretes attempted to make every letter, every vowel, and every accent mark agree with one standard Biblical form. The result would be a universalized text to which all Biblical scholars could refer when making commentary or halakhic decisions. Such a text would serve to support the foundations of Judaism by providing a source book that is consistent in every important way. As with all great scholarly endeavors, there were differing schools of thought on how this task would be

accomplished best.

Masorah is the name of the Biblical text the Masoretes created. The exact meaning of the word *masorah* is uncertain. It may be translated as transmission, sign, or most recently as "count."¹⁶ The Biblical scholar Z. Ben Hayyim translates *masorah* as count from the Hebrew and Aramaic translation and the fact that the masoretic scholars engaged in counting letters, words, and verses of the Bible. In any case, we know that Masoretes were concerned with transmitting text, with textual signs, and with counting textual elements.

In order to understand the Masoretes more fully it may be helpful to try to understand who they were. What were their origins? What motivated them to accomplish this daunting endeavor of Biblical codification? Answers to questions like these may help us to understand the products of their efforts, that is, the surviving MSS we have in our possession today.

My primary text for this project is the product of Tiberian masoretic tradition. The Tiberian school of Masoretes developed in the tenth century. Still, it should be noted that *masorah* in general developed over a period of several centuries and was handed down from scholar to student in a chain of tradition that grew and evolved with

¹⁶Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 34-5.

each new step. As *masorah* developed, it grew, split, and changed into a variety of kinds of Biblical texts.

According to Eliahu ha-Levi from his "third introduction" to the Talmud, "There were hundreds and thousands of Masoretes, generation after generation over a long period, neither the beginning nor the end of which is known."¹⁷ There is no comprehensive history of the Masoretes. Instead, we learn what we can from the products they produced, the MSS. As a result, our knowledge of the Masoretes comes largely from the MSS and fragments as well as Biblical, Talmudic, and Midrashic evidence left to us. The lack of solid historical background on the Masoretes only helps to fuel the debates on their origins and activities.

According to Israel Yeivin, the first persons to devote their efforts to masoretic matters were the pupils of Ezra the Scribe in the early second temple period.¹⁸ They were known as *soferim*, scribes or transcribers, in much the same way the term *sofer*-סופר has come to refer to transcribers of the Biblical text in later centuries. The work of the *soferim* continued through the period of the Talmud (300-600 CE). The work of the Masoretes began after the redaction of the Talmud and preservation of their tradition endures through today.

¹⁷ibid. 137.

¹⁸ibid. 131.

As I state above, it was the goal of Masoretes to create a single authoritative text. However, because there is more than one group of persons who participated in this activity, there was more than one final product given the name *masorah*. As a result, there is no single text that we can honestly call the Masoretic text.¹⁹ Different regions developed different traditions. Even with the same region, there developed different schools of Masoretes, that is, persons who led the effort to compile *masorah*.

Despite the lack of unanimity on masoretic work, there is still a general consensus on which *masorah* is authoritative today. Since the time of Maimonides, the ben Asher school is generally accepted as authoritative. Aharon ben Asher and Mosheh ben Naftali are the latest Masoretes. They lived in the last half of the tenth century and are the Masoretes most often mentioned by name in surviving MSS and geniza fragments.²⁰

Though the ben Asher School is considered authoritative and most widely accepted, modern scholars have a great deal of difficulty in reaching unanimity on the ben Asher school, its system and rules for consistency in MSS. In his article, "The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation," Harry M. Orlinsky traces some of the major disagreements and

¹⁹Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: The MacMillan Co., 1971), "Masorah," by Avraham Dotan.

²⁰Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 141.

critiques these scholars have of each others' works. He concludes:

While it is impossible *a priori* to achieve "the masoretic text" when none ever obtained it, it would seem possible in theory to produce a Hebrew text of the Bible with the claim that it is derived from "a masoretic text," . . .²¹

There is no singularly accepted authoritative text from either the ben Asher or the ben Naftali school. There is more than one MS that is traceable to influences of either school, yet key differences exist among these "accepted" texts. As a result no one scholar can claim to have the text, rather, the claim can be made for a genuine masoretic text among other equally genuine texts.

Another controversial aspect of identifying the Masoretes is the debate over whether they were of Karaite or Rabbinite origin. Although it is generally accepted among Biblical scholars that the Masoretes responsible for what we use today were Rabbinites, some scholars maintain that our *masorah* is of Karaite origin. For centuries Rabbinite Jews have accepted the authority of the work of the Masoretes. These same Jews reject Karaite Judaism for the most part on the grounds that it is not "legitimate" Judaism.

Herein lies the problem. Karaites regard the Bible as

²¹Harry M. Orlinsky, "Prolegomenon: The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation." from The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader. ed, Sid Z. Leiman Ktav Publishing House, Inc. New York: 1974.

sacred and reject talmudic/rabbinic law as authoritative. For the Karaites rabbinical law most always goes outside the bounds of the literal interpretation of the text. The response of Rabbinite Jews to Karaite Judaism has ranged from rejection to qualified acceptance over time. Because of the Karaite rejection of talmudic/rabbinic authority, Rabbinite Jews would not give authoritative credit to Karaite tradition, particularly as it relates to sacred text. Acknowledging that Karaites were responsible for the formation of our *masorah* would thus be unlikely, if not impossible, for most Rabbinite Jews.

The theory that the Karaites are responsible for the masoretic tradition comes in part from the Karaites' deep concern and reverence for the unaltered Biblical text. Also, some scholars note that certain masoretes seem to have Karaite names indicating that they are of Karaite origin or descent. Furthermore, some point out, that while the Rabbis did write concerning activities that are related to the creation of *masorah*, they lived centuries before the actual codification.

While the differences between Karaite and Rabbinite Jews are characterized primarily by Karaite rejection of talmudic/rabbinic authority, one must also examine the areas of common ground in order to fully appreciate the relationship between the two groups of Jews. First and foremost, it is worth restating that both Karaite and

Rabbinite Jews regard the Bible as sacred. Both groups regard themselves as Jews and are regarded as Jews by non-Jews who live among them. While Karaite Judaism emerged much later than Rabbinite Judaism, both have a common ancestry and common geographical place of development. Finally, while there is an identifiable schism between the two groups, it is notable that certain rabbinic laws are accepted by Karaite Jews, though these laws are not given the same elevated status as they are in Rabbinite Judaism.

Though there is evidence to support claims on both sides of the Karaite/Rabbinite *masorah* origin debate, the argument may be impossible to resolve definitively. Still, the evidence seems to point overwhelmingly towards a Rabbinite origin. A prescribed system for writing Biblical texts can be found in Talmud tractate *Soferim* as well as other halakhic writings. These "rules" are known as "הלכות סופר" - rules of writing Biblical texts." These rules include the materials to be used including ink, skin, preparation of parchment; who is permitted to write a Torah; the need to copy from a written text rather than from memory; dimensions of the scroll including size of the sheets of parchment, how sheets are to be joined together to create a scroll, size of columns, the need for rulings for lines and columns, the breadth of the lines, the spaces between the lines and columns, spaces between words and letters; size of script and forms of letters; rules for

correcting scribal errors; rules for proper writing of God's holy names which may not be erased; how to correct errors which might occur in names of God; which names are considered holy. Also, there are rules on how to care for a scroll, what to do with a torn or worn scroll, and what to do with a scroll that has letters which have been rubbed out. In addition to rules on the production and care of scrolls, there are rules on how to read in a synagogue, number of readers, sections to be read, and days to read certain sections.²² Rabbinic writings on *masorah* reflect the rabbis attitude that strict and universal codification was crucial to them. For instance, In *Mishnah Avot* 3:13 Rabi Akiva writes, "מסורה שבעל פה - Masoret (read *masorah*) is a fence for the Torah." One may interpret the words of Akiva to mean that *masorah* is a way of preserving Jewish teaching. Thus the Rabbis saw *masorah* as more than a scholarly endeavor; for them it represented a way of keeping Jewish tradition and teaching alive.

In addition to their prescribing various rules there is also evidence that the Rabbis themselves actually participated in masoretic activity. Though there was no formally accepted system of vowels and accent marks, there is Rabbinic evidence that there was some system employed at

²²Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 36-7.

their time.²³ For instance, in Megillot 32a the Rabbis state that the Bible and Mishnah ought to be read with a melody, indicating that they had a particular melody by which to study the text. Also, the rabbis did participate in activities we normally associate with Karaites such as word counting and attempting to understand the literal meaning of the text.

Not all MSS apply the Rabbinic rules. Still, a scroll must employ certain halakhic guidelines in order to be considered fit for liturgical use. For example, with a few exceptions, only Hebrew letters may be written in a Torah scroll for it to be used in synagogue liturgy. As a result, the masoretic notes, accent signs, and vowel marks that are used in a codex will not be found in a synagogue scroll, also called a *sefer torah*. These marks are crucial in understanding, translating, and interpreting Biblical text. However, the ambiguity resulting from the absence of these marks in the MSS used by rabbis who lived and wrote before the development of the Tiberian masoretic tradition provides for rich and extensive rabbinic commentary.

A manuscript or codex generally had two main contributors, a *sofer* and a *naqdan*. both the *sofer* and the *naqdan* had certain rules prescribed to them by the Talmud that they had to follow to create a fit MS or scroll. The

²³Fred N. Reiner, "Masoretes and Rabbis: A Comparison of Biblical Interpretations" (Rabbinical Thesis, HUC-JIR), 36.

sofer was the primary scribe who would transcribe the Hebrew letters of the text. Afterwards, the *naqdan* would add vocalization and cantillation marks.

Two main schools of Masoretic tradition, ben Asher and ben Naftali, emerged from the efforts of the Masoretes. Differences in the two schools include modes of vocalization and accentuation of the Biblical text. Despite these differences, both ben Asher and ben Naftali fit into the category known as Tiberian Masorah. The differences between these two branches of Tiberian Masorah are minor compared to the products of Masoretic schools such as the Babylonian tradition.²⁴

C. HUC-MS.12

The Biblical siege I am examining occurs in the year 701 BCE. There are three accounts of this siege in the Tanakh. The siege is recounted in Isaiah 36 and 37, II Kings 18:13 ff and II Chronicles 32:1 ff. Each account tells basically the same story with some variations. For instance, variations between Isaiah and II Kings are found partly in the sequence that the story is told. The version in II Chronicles differs the most from the other two versions. II Chronicles leaves out the poetic prophecy of Isaiah and offers a somewhat abridged version of the same

²⁴Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 13.

story.

While each Biblical version of the siege is valuable and worthy of the attention of serious students of the Bible, I concentrate primarily on the account in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. My primary text for this biblical record is HUC-MS 12. This manuscript is kept in the rare book room of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. Our knowledge about the MS is incomplete and speculative due to a lack of reliable background information.

The entire MS is bound in a decorative cover that, like the inner pages, is somewhat deteriorated due to the effects of time. The MS is done in ink on parchment. The ink is a dark brown. Some pages have apparent corrections and chapter markings done in a darker ink in a different later hand. This phenomena occurs especially in the pages of and just preceding the book of Job. Each folio is approximately 28.7 x 22.3 cm. The folios contain two columns of text with twenty-nine lines per column and an average of five words per single line. There are three to four lines of masorah magna below and above each column. The masorah magna sometimes appears decorative in the form of dragons, fish and geometric designs and sometimes appears plain. In addition, there are masoretic notes alongside of and between the columns. Each folio is hand-numbered with arabic numbers in pencil by a much later hand.

Some of the marginal notes indicate the beginnings and ends of haftarot, though the Isaiah section that contains the narrative of the siege is not part of a traditional haftarah reading. The notes as well as some of the text itself are a later addition to the MS.²⁵ Lines of text are sometimes filled out with the first letters of the word from the next line.

HUC-MS.12 reflects some of the differences of opinion on proper Masoretic codification of the Bible. As I stated earlier, today the ben Asher school is accepted by most scholars as being the authoritative Masoretic method of Biblical transcription. Still, according to Dr. Sheldon Blank²⁶, HUC MS.12 reflects much of the ben Naftali tradition. From this we may gather that at the time that HUC MS.12 was first transcribed ben Asher was not universally accepted or, at least, universally recognized among scholars as the dominant Masoretic school. Definite dating of MS.12 is difficult because the original date seems to have been purposefully altered to make the MS seem older than it actually is.

The date may have been altered in order to make the MS seem more valuable to potential purchasers or to give the MS

²⁵Sheldon H. Blank, "A Hebrew bible MS. in the Hebrew Union College Library," Hebrew Union College Annual VIII-IX (1931-32): 14.

²⁶ibid. 15.

more ascribed authority. In any case, Dr. Blank notes an inscription in the MS itself that ascribes the MS to the Hebrew date 4860 AM, 1100 CE. However, noting that the inscription as it currently reads is fraudulent and was probably altered by a later owner of the MS.²⁷ Dr. Blank concludes that it is more likely that the MS was first written down sometime in the 16th century CE.

A partial explanation for the falsification of the MS's date may be gathered on the principal that the older something is the more authoritative and valuable it must necessarily be. Israel Yeivin notes that MSS written after 1100 CE "are generally copies based on one or more older MSS."²⁸ Thus, dating the MS back a few centuries may have added to its potential value by suggesting that it may be an original and not a copy of a previously existing MS.

An in-depth analysis of MS 12 was completed by Dr. Sheldon Blank and is published in the Hebrew Union College Annual.²⁹ In the article Dr. Blank examines the orthography, style, and diacritical marks of the MS. Dr. Blank points out that MS 12 is incomplete, but that the missing parts may be traceable to another MS located

²⁷ibid. 4.

²⁸Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 13.

²⁹Sheldon H. Blank, "A Hebrew bible MS. in the Hebrew Union College Library," Hebrew Union College Annual VIII-IX (1931-32).

elsewhere.³⁰

The MS may also be described as a codex which is the name for Biblical MSS that first appeared in book form around the year 700 CE.³¹ The codex did not replace the scroll; rather, Jews continued to use the scroll for religious purposes and the codex became useful as a tool for study. For a time scrolls and codices were used for more ordinary purposes. After some time however, the scroll became reserved especially for liturgical purposes leaving the codex for the more mundane role of study.

In the case of HUC-MS.12, the work of the *sofer*, primary scribe, is fairly easy to read in most cases. Occasionally, letters and vowels are somewhat blurred making a definitive reading difficult. Also, some letters, such as the כ (kaf) and the ב (bet), look similar. In most cases, comparing the MS to a standardized printed Bible eliminates confusion resulting from unclear text.

Blank notes that in the case of HUC-MS.12 the vowels and *masorah* were the work of a *naqdan*, a second scribe. This second scribe made alterations in the text. As noted above, traditionally MSS were written by two scribes a *sofer* and a *naqdan*. In the case of MS.12 the *naqdan* made

³⁰ibid. 3.

³¹Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 7.

alterations in the text in addition to his regular role of adding notes and vowels. These alterations brought the text into agreement with modern printed Bibles.³² An examination of the work of the second scribe, *naqdan*, indicates that he was influenced by the ben Naftali tradition³³ mentioned earlier.

Blank notes that the word "מן" appears in the MS at least 34 times in the notes. There is no definitive explanation of this word, though Blank suggests that it may be an unknown Masoretic authority.³⁴ Exact origin of this MS is impossible to determine due to a lack of reliable evidence.

³²ibid. 9.

³³ibid p. 9 Ben Naftali and Ben Asher are the two main schools of Masoretes. Bibles written today in the Masoretic tradition agree with the Ben Asher school. The schools can be distinguished by variations in vocalization and diacritical marks. Older manuscripts such as MS 12 sometimes favored the Ben Naftali school over Ben Asher.

³⁴Sheldon H. Blank, "A Hebrew bible MS. in the Hebrew Union College Library," Hebrew Union College Annual VIII-IX (1931-32): 23.

Chapter III

The Siege in Isaiah 36-37

A. The Siege as Narrative

The fact that the siege of Jerusalem in the year 701 BCE is portrayed three separate times by the Biblical text, in Isaiah 36-37, II Kings 18:13 ff and II Chronicles 32:1 ff, attests to the significance of the event in the collective psyche of the ancient Israelite people. As I covered in chapter II, for the purposes of this work I am focusing mainly on the Isaiah version of the siege. Still, a look at the other versions may help to provide a better understanding of the siege as a whole. In order to understand the details of the siege, it will be helpful to take a closer analytical look at the Biblical narrative.

The story begins by giving background, a date, the setting, the major conflict, and introducing some of the main characters. The background is that the Assyrians have already marched against and seized all the fortified towns of Judah.³⁵ The date is the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah. The setting is Jerusalem. The major conflict is the impending conquest of Jerusalem. Main characters introduced here include King Hezekiah of Judah - the protagonist, King Sennacherib of Assyria - antagonist, and Rab-shakeh - the antagonist's henchman. The Biblical author conveys all of this information quite succinctly in three brief lines of text.

³⁵Isaiah 36:1

The king of Assyria, Sennacherib, sends his envoy, the Rab-shakeh from Lachish. Lachish was of strategic military importance and was the main Assyrian camp during its Judean campaigns³⁶. The action in the narrative picks up momentum as Rab-shakeh addresses the emissaries of King Hezekiah, Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah. The text tells us that the Rab-shakeh took a position on "the conduit to the Upper Pool, by the Road of the Fuller's Field."³⁷ The text does not provide adequate geographical data for one to locate this site definitively. Various scholars suggest possible locations of the conduit.³⁸

Rab-shakeh's message is that fighting the Assyrian attack would be futile. The Rab-shakeh says in the name of the king of Assyria, "What makes you so confident?"³⁹ The theme of trust and confidence is a common motif in Assyrian historical inscriptions particularly when describing Assyria's enemies.⁴⁰ Much of Rab-shake's message seems intended to break down the psychological resistance of the Judeans.

The Rab-shakeh draws on theological grounds, historical

³⁶Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & Company, 1984), 229.

³⁷Isaiah 36:2 & II Kings 18:17.

³⁸See Appendix 1.

³⁹Isaiah 36:4 and II Kings 18:19.

⁴⁰Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & Company, 1984), 231.

memory, and psychological warfare in order to make his case against the defenders of Jerusalem. On theological grounds Rab-shakeh argues that God is on the side of the Assyrians, so their enemies would not have any chance to defeat them. Regarding historical memory, Rab-shakeh says, referring to Pharaoh:

Look, on whom are you relying, that you have rebelled against me? You are relying on Egypt, the splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it.⁴¹

By recalling Pharaoh and Egypt, Rab-shakeh stirs up the memory of Jewish servitude. The argument suggests that the Jews should not trust an ancient enemy, who has proven to be unreliable in the past. Rather they should surrender willingly to a more powerful enemy, the Assyrians. In this argument there is the added element of psychological warfare as the Assyrians attempt to break down the will of the Jews by making a response other than surrender seem increasingly hopeless.

Next, an exchange between Rab-shakeh and the Judean embassiers continues. The embassiers plead with Rab-shakeh to speak in Aramaic so the citizens of the town will be unable to understand what transpires. Their pleading adds to the sense of futility. Meanwhile Rab-Shakeh continues to press

⁴¹Isaiah 36:5b-6a.

his case against them. Despite the pleas of Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah, Rab-shakeh continues to speak in Aramaic in an attempt to inspire dissention among the Judean ranks. As the chapter closes, the emissaries come before Hezekiah, apparently distraught from their encounter.

Chapter 37 opens with King Hezekiah's response to the news of his emissaries. The king rents his clothes and sends leaders of his court to the prophet Isaiah for aid in the matter. Isaiah assures them that they need not be frightened, that God will protect them and Sennacherib will be defeated. Isaiah tells the emissaries to tell the king that God is in fact, on the side of Judeans.

In the meantime, Rab-shakeh has left the scene temporarily to conquer other towns. However, when he hears the news that Hezekiah is not surrendering Jerusalem, he sends a letter via messengers to the king in order to try to persuade him. Rab-shakeh argues that the Assyrians have been successful in conquering other towns and regions, so Jerusalem will meet the same fate if it does not fall in line. Upon receiving Rab-shakeh's letter, Hezekiah enters the Temple ('ו ב י) and pleads his case before God.

Then Isaiah sends a message to Hezekiah. The message appears in our text in poetic/prophetic form. The prophecy states that God will protect Zion and Jerusalem and that Assyria will not succeed in its attempted siege. Isaiah delivers the oracle.

For a remnant shall come forth from
Jerusalem,/
Survivors from Mount Zion./
The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts/
Shall bring this to pass.⁴²

in attempt to instill hope in the distraught king. Isaiah assures the King that the Lord will protect Jerusalem from the attack mounted by the king of Assyria.

In the final three verses of this section of narrative we read that an angel of the Lord attacks and kills one hundred eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian forces camped around the city's walls. As a result, Sennacherib retreats to Nineveh where he is killed by two of his sons while worshipping his God, Nisroch. Sennacherib's betrayal by his own flesh and blood while worshipping his own god adds to the strength of the message in Isaiah's oracle. That is, that not only will Yahweh succeed in protecting his faithful servants, but also he will strike down those who deny him.

B. The Siege as History

The Biblical narrative provides a single, important record of the siege. Through the Bible we learn especially the attitudes and views of the Israelite participants and observers of the events of the siege. However, in order to broaden our understanding of the siege we must examine the historical and political context in Palestine during the

⁴²Isaiah 37:32

siege and in the years leading up to the siege. If the Bible gave us our only record, we would be limited to it for our source analysis of this event. Yet, in the case of this momentous event we have additional Biblical material, some Assyrian historical records, and some archaeological evidence to fill out significant details of this period in Israelite past aiding us in our efforts to more fully comprehend this siege.

A primary consideration in evaluating the siege ought to be Jerusalem's relationship to Assyria prior to and at the time of the siege. In the year 745 BCE, 44 years prior to the siege, Tiglath-pileser III was the conquering king of the Assyrian empire. Tiglath-pileser made extensive conquests in the region of Syria-Palestine, expanding the scope and influence of Assyria enough to make it one of the great world powers of the time. . As was the case with many regions conquered by Tiglath-pileser and succeeding Assyrian rulers, these conquests are responsible for bringing an end to political independence for Israel, the northern kingdom. Kings of conquered lands were forced to pay tribute to their Assyrian conquerors. Also, as a result of these conquests, Israel's history became inextricably tied to the events of world history. Israel's fate could no longer be seen as isolated from that of the rest of the world.⁴³

⁴³Martin Noth, The History of Israel (London: Butler & Tanner, Ltd., 1960), 254.

This change in scope of Israel's world view is responsible for major shift in the religious history of Israel, namely, it brought on the period of the prophets. Israel, for perhaps the first time, saw that it was at the whim of a foreign power. In order to retain a consistent theology with Yahweh at the helm, some explanation was necessary to understand why Israel's God let the state of affairs deteriorate to the point where a foreign power could have such control over civic and religious life. Assyria had even placed the symbols of its religion in the Temple. The prophets' message was that the events of world history were Yahweh's judgement upon Israel and they, the prophets, spoke in His name. The national God of Israel now became the God of all the world controlling world events⁴⁴, though Israel still saw itself at the center of Yahweh's attention.

Later, following the death of Tiglath-pileser, King Hoshea of Israel gambled by stopping the payment of tribute altogether. In order to gain support for this bold, though unwise move, Hoshea sought an alliance with Egypt with the goal of removing the yoke of Assyrian sovereignty.⁴⁵ This move enraged the Assyrian empire so that by the year 721 BCE Israel was absorbed by Assyria and turned into part of the province of Samaria. While the northern kingdom ceased to exist at all as an independent entity, Judah remained a

⁴⁴ibid. 256.

⁴⁵ibid. 262.

vassal state of Assyria.

In the year 705 BCE, Sennacherib became emperor of Assyria. With the change in leadership in the reigning power came a number of uprising in the vassal states in the Syria-Palestine region, including Judah. At this time Hezekiah was king in Jerusalem. To mark the break in Assyrian dominance, Hezekiah stopped paying tribute. In addition, Hezekiah instituted a number of religious reforms designed to remove any trace of Assyrian influence in the cult and lifestyle of the Judean people. The rab-shakeh makes direct reference to these reforms saying:

And if you tell me that you re relying on the Lord Your God, He is the very one whose shrines and altars Hezekiah did away with, telling Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship only at this altar!"⁴⁶

It is possible that the Rab-shakeh was aware that Hezekiah's reforms did not receive popular support within the city walls and is using that fact to his tactical advantage. It may also be the case that the Biblical author put these words in the mouth of the Rab-shakeh in order to help characterize the Assyrians as enemies of Yahweh.

Previously, the Assyrian cult shared similar status

⁴⁶Isaiah 36:7 and II Kings 18:22 - II Kings adds the words "in Jerusalem" to the end of the line.

with the worship of Yahweh even in the Temple itself.⁴⁷ It is likely that this state of affairs enraged many Israelites. Hezekiah's rebellion against the Assyrian rulers included breaking with Assyria in respect to both economic obligation and cult recognition. Hezekiah's bold moves may have been regarded and supported by the indigenous Israelite population, especially priests and other religious purists.

There is some controversy over the precise date of the siege. The Biblical narrative in both Isaiah and II Kings gives the date as the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah.⁴⁸ Assyrian documents from the reign of Sennacherib render the date of the siege as 701 BCE. Biblical evidence alone, however, might render a different date. Based on a calculation of regnal years from II Kings 18:9-10 one could draw the conclusion that the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah was 713 BCE. One resolution to the ostensible variance in dating is dating the accession of Hezekiah to the throne as 727/26 and assigning "the fourteenth year" to the date of Hezekiah's illness and recovery which occurs in the subsequent section of Biblical narrative.⁴⁹ Another

⁴⁷Martin Noth, The History of Israel (London: Butler & Tanner, Ltd., 1960), 266.

⁴⁸Isaiah 36:1.

⁴⁹For further explanation on the controversy over these dates see Cogan and Tadmor's notes to II Kings in the Anchor Bible, p. 228.

possible resolution to the dating discrepancy is suggested by Edwin R. Thiele.⁵⁰ Thiele pushes back the reigns of Jotham in Judah and Pekah and Hoshea in Israel by twelve years, permitting Hoshea's accession to the throne to synchronize with the twentieth regnal year of Jotham. This calculation apparently is in agreement with Biblical evidence and would make the fourteenth year of Hezekiah occur in 701 BCE, thereby agreeing with the accepted Assyrian sources.

So that Hezekiah might not suffer the same fate as his former Israelite counterpart, Hoshea, Hezekiah sought military cooperation to enhance the chances of withstanding an Assyrian counterattack to his rebellion. In particular, Hezekiah tried to forge alliances with Egypt and some Philistine states. As a result, in the year 701 BCE Sennacherib stepped up his efforts to quash the rebellions in his realm. Our Biblical passage notes that Sennacherib's forces defeated several spots in the region, probably with little or no resistance. These same activities are noted by Sennacherib himself on two recovered clay prisms.⁵¹

Eventually, Sennacherib succeeded everywhere except Jerusalem. Hezekiah was able to hold out in the fortified holy city. Our narrative indicates that Sennacherib's

⁵⁰See The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings. 121ff.

⁵¹Martin Noth, The History of Israel (London: Butler & Tanner, Ltd., 1960), 268.

forces were dealt a deadly blow by an angel of the Lord and retreated from Jerusalem. Thus the reader is left with the impression that Judah was the victor in this conflict.

Still, Hezekiah himself ended up paying tribute to the Assyrian monarch, a fact that is borne out in the version of the siege recorded in II Kings. It reads:

¹⁴King Hezekiah sent this message to the King of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong, withdraw from me; and i shall bear whatever you impose on me." So the king of Assyria imposed upon King Hezekiah of Judah a payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was on hand in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the palace. ¹⁶At that time, Hezekiah cut down the doors and the doorposts of the Temple of the Lord, which King Hezekiah had overlaid [with gold], and gave them to the king of Assyria.

Furthermore, Sennacherib's own records provide us with further evidence that Hezekiah paid tribute to Assyria. We read in Sennacherib's annals:

He sent me after my departure to Nineveh, my royal city, his elite troops and his best soldiers - which he had brought into Jerusalem as reinforcements - with thirty talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, choice antimony, large blocks of carnelian, beds (inlaid) with ivory, armchairs (inlaid) with ivory elephant hides, ivory, ebony wood, boxwood, garments with multicolored trim, garments of linen, wool (dyed) red-purple, vessels of copper, iron, bronze and tin, chariots, siege shields, lances, armor daggers for the belt, bows and arrows, countless trappings and implements of war, together with his daughters, his palace women, his male and female singers. He (also) dispatched his personal messenger to deliver the

tribute and do obeisance.⁵²

Thus we have two apparently conflicting accounts of the conclusion of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. On the one hand, the Biblical narrative indicates that Assyria was defeated while; on the other hand, the same Biblical narrative and Sennacherib's own account indicates that he defeated Judah.

One possible resolution of this discrepancy is what is known as the two-campaign theory. According to this theory, Sennacherib launched two separate sieges against Jerusalem. In the first one he succeeded and Hezekiah paid the tribute about which we read in the above sources. In the second attempt, Sennacherib was defeated and no tribute was paid. There are a number of problems with the two-campaign theory. First of all, there is no evidence of such a defeat or even a second campaign in the Assyrian sources.⁵³ In addition, the Biblical sources give no indication that they are referring to two discrete campaigns.⁵⁴ This raises the question, why would Hezekiah pay tribute for a conflict from which he emerged victorious?

Another incongruity among the Assyrian account of the

⁵²Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, "The Biblical and Assyrian Accounts of Sennacherib's Campaign Compared," The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & company, 1984), 247-8.

⁵³ibid. 249.

⁵⁴ibid. 249.

siege and the Biblical narrative is the amount of tribute listed (above) paid by Hezekiah to Sennacherib. The Assyrian record lists a higher amount and has a more extensive list than the Biblical narrative. A possible explanation is that the Biblical author did not know the exact amount and his figure was distorted due to poor transmission of the facts. Another possibility is that the Biblical author down-played the amount in an attempt to make the payment of tribute seem lighter. A lighter tribute might appear less shameful to the Judean people with whom the author no doubt had some allegiance. Still another possibility for this apparent inconsistency is that the Assyrian record of precious metals included the metals stripped down from the Temple doors that Hezekiah removes and gives Sennacherib with the tribute⁵⁵. One additional possibility is that the Assyrian records exaggerate the amount of tribute, perhaps to bolster their own image in the historical record.

The contradictions in the different accounts should not surprise us. Still today we hear contradictory reports from battlefields.⁵⁶ For example, current military activities taking place in Iraq and former Yugoslavia are reported differently by the different sides and other observers

⁵⁵Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & Company, 1984), 229.

⁵⁶ibid. 250.

involved. We ought to keep in mind that a completely impartial reporting of this type of intense activity is difficult, if not impossible in our time or at any given time in the past. We are left with the remaining accounts and our good judgement to assess such situations. In the case of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, the two-campaign theory seems unlikely.

C. The Personas

The Rab-shakeh - The Biblical text provides very little information about the identity of the Rab-shakeh. He acts as a military envoy for Sennacherib, King of Assyria. In the Isaiah text he is the only leader mentioned that comes with the Assyrian forces. However, in the II Kings version of the same siege the Rab-shakeh comes with the Tartan and the Rabsaris, other royal staff members.

The word "Rab-shakeh" is from the Akkadian meaning "the chief butler," an official whose duties were usually restricted to the court and the king's person.⁵⁷ Apparently the Rab-shakeh would rarely take part in military campaigns. This raises the question why the Rab-shakeh is mentioned here as serving an integral role in this particular campaign. One possibility is that the Rab-shakeh was fluent in Hebrew and therefore would have been the

⁵⁷ibid. 229-30.

logical choice to address the Judeans⁵⁸. The fact that the Rab-shakeh does play an important role in this episode is supported by the Biblical text. It is possible that the Rab-shakeh was actually of Israelite extraction, perhaps descended from a noble family⁵⁹. As such, he may have served a similar role as Josephus who addressed the Jews in the city walls in Titus' siege of Jerusalem some six centuries later.

The Rab-shakeh is the first individual to speak in this narrative. His opening words are to Hezekiah's emissaries telling them to encourage Hezekiah to give up his rebellion against the Assyrian ruling power.

Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah - the ranking ministers of the king's court in Judah.⁶⁰ The Rab-Shakeh addresses his remarks to this group and tells them to pass his message along to the king. They beg the Rab-shakeh to speak in Aramaic so that the Judean people will not understand his remarks and be swayed by his influence.

Eliakim is identified by the text as "son of Hilkiyah who was in charge of the palace (אשר על-המזכ"ח)".⁶¹ This title appears in I Kings 4:6 as well and may be

⁵⁸ibid. 230.

⁵⁹ibid. 230.

⁶⁰ibid. 230

⁶¹Isaiah 36:3 and II Kings 18:18.

appropriately translated as "royal steward."⁶² The fact that his name is mentioned first may indicate that he was the ranking officer in the palace, or at least, of the three mentioned here.

The names of both Eliakim and Shebna are mentioned are mentioned in a prophecy of Isaiah.⁶³ In this prophecy Shebna has the title "royal steward" (שֵׁבְנָה הַמְּשָׁלָה) in which Isaiah states that Eliakim will replace Shebna in his position as royal steward. It reads:

¹⁹For I will hurl you from your station
And you will be turned down from your stand.

²⁰And in that day I will summon My servant Eliakim
son of Hilkiah, ²¹and I will invest him with your
tunic, gird him with your sash, and deliver your
authority into his hand; and he shall be a father
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of
Judah.

Apparently, by the time of the siege in 701 BCE this prophecy has been fulfilled, at least in part.

The only information available about Joah son of Asaph, the third minister, comes directly from this text; that is that he has the title of "recorder."

⁶²Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & Company, 1984), 230.

⁶³Isaiah 22:15-25.

Chapter IV
Interview with Dr. Ezra Spicehandler
on the Siege of Jerusalem in 1948 CE
Recorded January 6, 1992

A. Introduction

The following is a transcript of an interview with Dr. Ezra Spicehandler. Dr. Spicehandler is currently Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The focus of the thesis is the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE and in 1947-48 CE. Still, Dr. Spicehandler covers a variety of issues, not all related to the actual siege in the twentieth century. Prior to the taping, I asked Dr. Spicehandler to reflect on his role in the siege and how the siege in 1947-48 might correspond to the siege in the Biblical book of Isaiah. Dr. Spicehandler shared some of his own thoughts as well as suggestions for further investigation, many of which I have pursued.

Dr. Spicehandler arrived in Palestine before the siege of Jerusalem in the Israeli War of Independence. He had, by that time, already received his rabbinical ordination from the Hebrew Union College. His purpose for coming to Jerusalem was to engage in graduate studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Dr. Spicehandler notes that his father raised him with Zionist values. So, when the siege began he felt a certain obligation to become a player in Israel's defense. As a result, he became a sergeant in *Haganah*, the predecessor to

the Israel Defense Force, during the siege.

This interview includes accounts of Dr. Spicehandler's many rich experiences during that period as well as his personal thoughts and feelings on Zionism and Israeli politics and history. Dr. Spicehandler gives the listener/reader unique insights into the rise of the State of Israel, war, and Israeli culture.

After I transcribed the tapes, I gave Dr. Spicehandler the draft. He went over the draft and made some corrections, deletions, and additions. Most of Dr. Spicehandler's changes were related to technical points that may have been unclear in the original taping. Also, Dr. Spicehandler removed some material he felt was extraneous or unnecessary.

B. The Interview

S: . . . the literature around the Biblical text, I know the Biblical text, do they interpret that he was able to stop the water coming into the city? Because then there will be an analogy.

K: I don't know. Let me see what the English version says.

S: It simply says, "And he stood at . . ."

K: "He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field." (Isaiah 36:2)

S: Okay now, there's a conduit to the upper pool. Does that mean he stood there meaning he cut it off from the city? Because if it means that, one of the main features of the siege of Jerusalem in 1947-48 was the cutting of the modern conduit, which is not the same conduit, that ran from the coast, actually from the Yarkon river to Jerusalem. And the only water in the city was water in cisterns. And we were without water approximately for four or five months.

That is we had water. There was severe rationing because what the military governor did, the Jewish military governor, is he sealed all the cisterns. People were given ration cards. They got the equivalent of a petroleum tin. I don't know how many gallons it is, maybe one gallon of water per day. And you used the water as one does in the siege. I mean you took off some water for drinking and the rest of the water was used in a very economic way. For example, water for washing, you punctured the sink and you had a tin under the sink and that water was then used for doing your laundry. If you could save some water from doing the laundry, that water was used for flushing the toilets. It's amazing how one got along.

Obviously people did what is called a French bath in the old days. You washed yourself with a washcloth. You couldn't take a shower or a bath. It was amazing. If that would happen today, it would be impossible because the

city's too large.

But you see, in the older parts of Jerusalem that was the source of water supply until the British ran the pipeline from the coast. And you see, the Arabs cut that pipeline. There was no water coming into the city from the coast. And already the population of Jerusalem at that time was over one hundred thousand. But it was enough [water] to keep the whole city going under such circumstances. So that would be an interesting analogy if that's what it means. You might look at a commentary and see.

K: Could you give me some background as to why you were even there [Jerusalem] at that time?

S: Sure. I had finished my first year as a graduate student here [at HUC in Cincinnati]. And I applied for what was called the traveling fellowship.

K: What year was this?

S: This was in the academic year of '47-48. A big fifteen hundred dollars [the amount of the fellowship] which even in those days was not adequate. But, I had some money my wife and I got as wedding gifts. We were married the year before. So, we figured we'd throw that into the pot too. Whatever the case might be.

I applied for admission to Hebrew University and I was admitted, not at all realizing that Hebrew University in those days was still structurally like a medieval university. That is, you didn't have to pay tuition and their bookkeeping was very, very sloppy in terms of credits and courses. There was no compulsory attendance. At the end of the year the professor signed a book and that gave you credit. Of course, he could lay down all kinds of conditions. Usually, the professors were so absent-minded they hardly recognized you. So, they would automatically sign your book. So, a lot of kids who were working for their degree. . . they catch you [the students], because you had to sit for your comprehensives.

It was maybe not a bad system. If you could study on your own and pass the comprehensives, you don't have to go listen to the professor.

Of course, as an American I was so anxious. Comparatively speaking we had some great scholars here, but of course, there they had the big stars like Gershom Scholem and Professor Baer in Jewish history and Klausner, the historian of modern Hebrew literature and Epstein who was a key talmudist. So, to me it was extremely exciting. Top men, so I didn't miss any classes.

Unfortunately, the War of Independence and things broke out in Jerusalem much earlier by December of '47. The U.N. passed the Partition resolution on the 29th of November. By

December 1st the Arabs had decided to go to war. Phase one of the war was with the local Palestinians who, I think, made a terrible mistake by not accepting partition as a fair compromise.

They think so today. They opposed the partition which would which would have given the Arabs almost half of what Israel possesses today. In addition to the West Bank, they would have gotten about thirty to forty per cent more land.

K: The Golan Heights too.

S: The Golan Heights was part of Syria. The Arab states supported the Palestinians. But, technically, with the exception of Jordan Technically, with the exception of Jordan, they did not invade the area of the Mandate until its on May 14th, officially May 15th. On the 14th the British had left and the Jewish state was declared on the 15th.

At that time all the Arab neighbors attacked Israel. It was in a sense a quasi-miraculous achievement. I wouldn't say that it was only a miracle because the Jewish leaders showed a great deal of planning and a great deal of devotion and leadership. From a military point of view, at the start, the Arab states had great armies.

K: What part of Jerusalem did you live in?

S: We lived in at that time at a pension in the northern part of the city. If you know where the new Hebrew University is, that is what was the new University until the old university was joined to the city and its campus rebuilt. I am referring to Givat Ram which is near the K'nesset building. When I call it the new University, it's the old University. Givat Ram, you know where that is? Near the K'nesset.

There were no dormitories at the University. So, foreign students were housed in a pension. It was very inexpensive because the American dollar was very strong and the British pound was the base of the Palestine pound. On paper it was a different currency, but in reality it was backed by the Sterling. It was worth about four dollars then and you could eat a meal for forty-five cents or something like that. At the pension it was even cheaper. I don't remember what we paid. We may have paid thirty or forty dollars a month, having a room without a bath, without central heating and we were fed downstairs in the dining room.

As I said, in December the Arabs attacked the Jewish Quarter and the battle of Jerusalem flared during this period. It was really a kind of guerilla activity at that time, but a lot of people were killed.

K: This was in the Old City?

S: No, both in the Old and New cities. In the Old City there was a small yishuv, mainly Orthodox. They were immediately isolated although while the British were still there, once in a while they would permit a convoy to bring in food, supplies. The problem was geographically Jerusalem was almost totally isolated. There were a few Jewish communities outside of Jerusalem almost within walking distance, most of which are now absorbed by the city. But in those days it took you ten minutes by bus to get there. Then there were only a few settlements until you got to Abu Gosh, or its neighboring village, Malei Chamishah where the swimming pool is and the guest house which is today a twenty minute drive by car but in those days it took you almost an hour to get there. The roads were not very good.

Between there and Jerusalem there were many Arab villages and between Abu Gosh and the coastal plain there were very few Jewish settlements. Strategically, the Arabs could cut the road and the water supply. The major battle had to do with trying to open the road up and supplying Jerusalem from the coast. You had to get food in, you had to get milk in, you had to get supplies in. During the first phase, that is until May 16th, the Arabs succeeded in almost completely blockading the city. After May 15th the strategic situation changed.

On May 15th or May 14th, after the British evacuated Palestine and Jerusalem, the Jordanian legion commanded by a British officer who took the name of Glub Pasha who had become a Moslem and who was really a British agent.

Many of the officers in the Jordanian legion were also British. We now know that the British with their typical realism made the suggestion to the Israelis in early May or late April to allow the Jordanians to take over those parts of the projected Palestinian state assigned to the Arabs with the promise that they, the British, would reign in the Jordanians.

Now the key problem was Jerusalem. King Abdallah wanted to be king of Jerusalem. The Jordanians entered the Old City and also occupied what is known as the *sh'felah*, the low hills west of the city.

There are some parallels to the Assyrian attack in 701 BCE because Jordanian forces moved on Jerusalem from the North and from the East. Because what the Arabs were actually doing is attacking from the north and their strategy was essentially attacking, severing Jerusalem from the coast.

I want to get back to Abdalah. Abdalah came to an agreement in terms of the British suggestion.

K: Under the Partition Plan?

S: Yes, secretly. The public didn't know that at the time. Almost nobody knew it. The issue was what was going to happen to Jerusalem. Eventually, it is probably accurate, though we don't have all the information yet because, although by now most documents have been published, some have not been released, but it is clear that eventually the Israelis and Abdallah agreed that he would occupy the Old City of Jerusalem while the Jews would get the New City. There are still things that are never released by governments. Eventually, they got to some agreement where Abdalah would occupy the Old City while the Jews get the New City.

It was clear that Ben Gurion, who was a very astute politician, would not admit that to the Jews. Because for the Jews with the Old City and the Kotel were very important as you see now. He [Abdalah] probably at a certain point agreed to a partition. Now, that was the leading Arab backed by Great Britain. And the Jews, more or less backed by the United States, not fully, agreed that they didn't like one part of the Partition Plan and that was the internationalization of Jerusalem. The United States wanted to internationalize Jerusalem so did the British. But they felt that the more realistic compromise was occupying the de facto partition of the city. To this day, neither the United States nor Great Britain recognize Israel or Jordan's presence in Jerusalem. That's why you have a special consul

in Jerusalem to this day. In other words, the embassy is not moved to Jerusalem since official American policy would favor the internationalization of Jerusalem. And that's going to be a major issue if they ever progress [in current Mid-east peace talks].

Today the Arabs seem to be proposing that they receive East Jerusalem and in return they would recognize the Israelis in West Jerusalem. Most Israelis would not accept that proposal. It's hard to know, because the problem with the Arabs is they say one thing to us and another thing to their own people. I suppose all governments do that. But, they seem to be saying, "We'll now take East Jerusalem and not question your being in West Jerusalem."

Many of the Israeli Liberals are saying, "No, we want the united city. But we will give you an enclave in East Jerusalem." There is a proposal by Teddy Kalleck which would divide Jerusalem into boroughs. Residents of Arab boroughs would be granted local autonomy. People could opt for either Jordanian or Israeli citizenship and be allowed to vote in municipal elections. The city itself would remain under Israel's sovereignty, but some sort of vatican-like Moslem enclave would be given special status. Many Israelis would agree to the Kalleck compromise.

These problems did not concern King Hezekiah or the Assyrians. There were not two people vying for sovereignty over areas which they both claimed as their own. There are

very few Israelis, only the extreme left, that wouldn't allow Jordan to occupy all of East Jerusalem.

That was not a problem for King Hezekiah at all, the Arab problem, that is, two peoples vying for sovereignty of areas that they claim is there country, did not exist when the Rab-shakeh attacked Judea.

Another difference in the strategic position is that during the Biblical conflict Jerusalem was not isolated. We know historically that the bulk of the south, the Judean Kingdom, was in the hills, much of the area which is now claimed by the Palestinians. They claim all of Israel, but they intensely claim that part which Israel absorbed in 1967 which Israel has designated as the "held territories." In other words, it has left the door open for final settlement. All governments do that, they leave options.

The structure, therefore was very different in Biblical times in terms of the fact that Jerusalem was in the center of the country, while in '47-'48 Jerusalem was an enclave. Jerusalem and its Jewish population which constituted the majority of its citizens would be outside the proposed Jewish State. The Jewish leaders at the time had agreed to accept the Partition Plan which meant that Jerusalem would be outside the state projected by the United Nations' proposal.

Obviously there were other major differences, namely that when the Arab states did attack they were not Assyria.

Assyria in those days was a world power. Here, in 1948, you had an attack on Jerusalem by Egypt and by Jordan, neither of which was a world power. Again, you have different circumstances in the siege, but there was a siege. That's why I got stuck on at the fact that he was at *ha'breichah ha'elyonah*. (Isaiah 36:2)

Think about people having to eat their shit and drink their urine (a reference to Isaiah 36:12) which means that the water supply was cut off. So, that is one analogy. Although the water supply then, as you know, came from the valley. Silwan is in the valley south of Mt. Zion, the historical Zion. Near where the excavations of the city of David are. Silwan is in the valley. Now in that valley Silwan is the Biblical stream the *Shiloach* where the secret water supply of the city at least existed and as you know, they discovered the tunnel. Water was channeled through the tunnel to the city.

The tunnel was not important in '47, but it (the tunnel) certainly was one of the main sources of water for the city at the time of Hezekiah.

If you wish, you have some analogy, in '48 the pipeline coming from *Rosh ha'ayin*, that is *Ras El Ein* in Arabic, which is along the Yarkon River from which the British used to pump water to Jerusalem. It was built by the British and cut in 1948. To this day Jerusalem is dependant on the pipelines that come up from the coast, because the city

itself never has enough rain-fall. It's a desert city.

Today the strategic position is different because the first thing the Israelis did after Six Day War was build a whole string of settlements protecting the road and water lines leading from the coast. The Arabs in that area all left except the Arabs in Abu Gosh. Today it would have to take an Arab army to attack the area. There are no native people who would cooperate with them disrupting the pipeline.

You remember Bab El Wad, *Shaar ha'Gai* as it is called in Hebrew. It was there that the Arab blocked the road leading to tel Aviv. Some of the Jewish vehicles that were burnt out during the War of Independence still dot the new road between Jerusalem and the coast, kept as a memorial of the war. The road was blocked by February of 1948, that is, before the state was declared by Arab military who were in the hills. When the convoy would come they would attack it. To bring a convoy through meant a military operation and there were two or three successful operations which enabled the city to be supplied in part. One famous one occurred just before Pesach when they brought in plenty of matzahs which was good because matzahs could be stored and there were only a few matzahs in the city. But that took a battle.

Israeli forces were not able to hold the open road and they had to withdraw because of the superiority of the Arab

forces. It was then in April or May of '48 that the Israel general staff decided to build a back-road through the mountains paralleling this road, but away from the Arab villages. Strategically, they could control the hills. It was a terrible road called the Burma Road. You may have seen pieces of it. I remember it took about five hours to go from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv on that road. It was, from a diplomatic point of view, also a victory for Israel because when the cease fire took place in June the Israelis could claim that Jerusalem was not cut off and demanded access to Jerusalem as part of the cease fire agreement. They got access to Jerusalem on the main road with the U.N. convoy. That was the compromise.

Now, the food situation in terms of modern living was ultimately cut down to about eight hundred calories to a thousand calories a day for people. Soldiers got a little more. Water had to be rationed. There was no electricity. It wasn't the siege of Stalingrad where people were really starving to death. There was no starving to death, but that was mainly because of the ingenuity of the Jewish authorities, and particularly the sense of social responsibility which the besieged shared. They were not going to allow the rich to create a black market. There was a little black market, but basically the rationing was strictly enforced. Rich and poor got the same allocation.

It's such a spirit that, in general, which doesn't

exist today in Israel like anywhere in the world. Even the rich shared in the social objectives. They considered it absolutely wrong to cheat on the rationing. This solidarity ended once the state was established, once utopia was achieved. People felt, "Now I can worry about myself." But during the war civilian morale was high. They stuck to the rules which meant that food prices were strictly controlled. Water rationing was strictly controlled. And the distribution of food was equitable. It doesn't mean that people might not have had pantries, but this was exceptional and frowned upon. You see, I remember Jerusalem before the outbreak of the war. We knew some Americans who were more affluent than Israelis. I remember one American lady who had a fur coat about which she said, "I never wear."

The next analogy is, of course, hunger. We have no idea whether this kind of democratic/socialist policy in terms of the war existed in biblical times. I presume, people were left to fend for themselves. I assume that the government was not very concerned about fair distribution. Maybe there was. You have the example of the famine in Egypt where there was a kind of rationing. So maybe there was a kind of rationing [during the biblical siege], but nowhere did they tell you that in the Bible. Now, on the other hand we do find that there was a concern for morale. You remember the Rab-shakeh was implored not to speak רַב־שָׁכֵךְ, i.e. Hebrew, but to speak Aramaic. (Isaiah

36:11 ff.)" [This was] so that the masses in the city would not know what was going on.

Another analogy is that there was contact with the enemy. We know now that the Zionist authorities were in contact with at least Jordan and didn't quite share the information with the public, as governments rarely do in periods of crisis. I remember that I myself was shocked to learn ten years later that there was some sort of a deal struck Ben Gurion and Abdalah. We had no idea that things were being carefully discussed and agreements were being made while soldiers were fighting, which always happened. We now know more. No one knew fully the role that the British played. Today the documentation is out. By May 1948 the British were more friendly to the idea of the Jewish State than the American State department. The American State Department was urging, after the United States government accepted the partition, to delay its implementation and allow the British to establish a trusteeship and try to get to some sort of compromise with the Arabs to the proposal.

Moshe Sharet who was then the head of the Israeli political department at the Jewish Agency in the Zionist organization told a leading American diplomat that the British had made an offer to the Jewish Agency. They agreed to recognize the State of Israel and they've urged us to negotiate with Jordan. This is all in documentation at the

sate department. The American official reports this to General Marshall who was Secretary of State at the time.

Marshall said, "Would you check on him (Sharet)?"

He said, "Well, first of all, Mr. Sharet is a very reliable and honest man." And he was, too clever not to fool the Americans.

"Secondly," he says, "I checked on him anyway." And this is true.

K: Checked on him how?

S: With the American Intelligence in England. I think it was easy for them to get that information. England was very dependant on the United States then. The British confirmed that they are working to get an agreement. That might have changed the attitude of the State Department because the sources contain notes by officials who were not necessarily friendly to Israel saying, "If the British and the Russians are willing to recognize Israel, we would be making a mistake not to recognize Israel. So, there was already a shift occurring in the State Department. Although, George Marshall opposed recognition of Israel with great vigor and threatened to resign as Secretary of State if Truman recognized Israel. Fortunately, Clark Clifford, Truman's advisor, made a deal with George Marshall by suggesting the President recognize Israel de facto and not de jure if

Marshall would not resign and not go public?"

Marshall agreed. The President, over the advice of his Secretary of State, recognized Israel de facto. This at least left the door open for George Marshall to backtrack because he had been so intensely against the idea that this way there was a one year delay before the United States recognized Israel de jure. All this was happening behind the backs of everybody. Nobody knew what was going on except the people dealing with it.

If you wish, Assyria was the America of the 7th century BCE and Egypt was Russia before its disintegration and Judea was in the middle of a power struggle. The Assyrians had nothing against Judah. They just wanted to strengthen their position vis a vis the Egyptians. Since Palestine had the highway, they wanted to take full control. They had already more or less taken control of the area. Israel had gained independence and when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Judea in the year 70, it was a punitive action against the satellite which was trying to get out from under its satellite state. In other words, the idea that Tzedekiah had was to make a deal with the Egyptians. The deal would be that there would be a buffer. That got the Babylonians angry and they went in and finished them off.

Here you have a totally different situation because the two great powers at the time were Russia and the United States who agreed to support Israel, the Russians more

actively than the Americans. A very odd chapter of history because within two years the Russians changed their policy.

The only analogy you do have is what happened in terms of feeding and bringing water to the city under siege. Otherwise I would say that both the strategic and diplomatic situation was rather different.

Except that here you had a situation where a minor power, Great Britain, who originally opposed the creation of the state of Israel and was giving Jordan military backing eventually reconciled itself to the fact that the State of Israel should exist. This happened shortly after the state was declared. You could say that certainly in the period between November of '47 and April of '48 you had the third power of the world after the United States and Russia, [that is] Great Britain, opposing. But its not the same analogy as Hezekiah. And there was no sovereignty, that is, there was a kingdom of Judea with a king that was being attacked. Here was a British mandate under which the Jewish authorities were able to run a clandestine government, but it was not a recognized government.

By the way it's interesting to note from a historical perspective that the status of the P.L.O. [today] is better diplomatically than the status of the Jewish leaders at least in official position. The P.L.O. has a right to have observers at the U. N. The P.L.O. has a kind of a 'recognition by many states. The Jews were really a

committee of negotiators. Because of their ability they were respected in Washington as "ad personam," but they had no official status whatsoever in the eyes of the United States government until the State was declared. And then they were given only de facto recognition which was really a device to get de jure recognition.

K: How about your personal involvement?

S: My personal involvement will have no connection with this.

K: That's alright. I'm curious. Also, how much did Israel anticipate the attack?

S: There is no doubt that Ben Gurion was a political genius. He had his faults. He was pigheaded. He had a certain leadership technique. If you crossed him you were finished. He knew how to inspire people. Basically he believed in democracy. When it came to leadership, he held the cards. He anticipated the war and shocked the Zionist leadership. What you had prior to the establishment of the state were two organizations that were one, the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization. Today the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization are instrumentalities in which the State of Israel has a lot to

say. For example, the Americans in the Jewish Agency have a lot to say [today], while in those days they had far less to say. The Jewish Agency had a political department which became the beginning of the State Department, the Foreign Office of Israel. What Ben Gurion did was when the State was established he took out the whole political department and turned it into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the same man, Moshe Sharet in charge. The same thing occurred in many instances. He took the people who were in the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization and if they were competent he transferred them to the government including their staffs.

At the meeting of the leadership of the Jewish Agency he shocked everybody because he asked for an estimate of the military needs if a war would break out.

When they presented it to him he said, "Multiply it by ten."

He immediately sent out the agents of the Jewish Agency to Europe and the U.S. Among them was a young fellow by the name of Teddy Kollect. Teddy sat in New York and organized financing for the purchase of arms. One of the great diplomatic achievements was the soliciting of the cooperation of the Russian satellites. During the War of Independence the chief supplier of arms was Czechoslovakia. Its Prime Minister who was a Jew by the name of Slansky and whom the Russians later accused of being a Zionist agent.

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Russia did not want to assist Israel directly. So, they ordered Czechoslovakia which had a big arms factory with tremendous military hardware. And the Jews were able to pay in dollars which were very very much needed in the Eastern world. So, the Russian leaders ordered Slansky to sell arms to Israel. Later, in the early 1950's, when Russia changed its policy they accused Slansky. They accused Slansky of being a Zionist agent and had him executed. There is no evidence he helped because of his Jewishness. Being a Communist he was not interested in being Jewish. He might have had some sympathy to the "struggle of the refugees" and he did have a brother living in Israel. But, there is no evidence of his strong sense of Jewish feeling. Certainly, the Russians would not have countenanced what he did. There was an Israeli base in Czechoslovakia where Israeli pilots being trained to fly German Messerschmidts that survived from the Second World War. One of the ironies of the Israel War of Independence is that the arms that the Israeli army used came basically from a factory that had manufactured arms for the German army during the Second World War.

K: So you would say that based on Ben Gurion's attitude that the war was anticipated?

S: He knew there was going to be a war. The problem was, how do you create a state?

There were the agencies of the Jewish Agency which were always called "state-in-the-making." There were also the officialdom of the Mandate. Many Jews who had administrative experience, usually on the middle level. . . I'll give you one example that I remember. The British closed the post Office in Jerusalem on May 14th. By May 20th the Jewish State opened the Post Office. What was discovered was that jewish employees of the Palestine postal system had copied all of the data that enabled them to have lists of the mail routes. they knew the regulations of international postage and so forth. It also became clear that many of them were informants. In other words, they were working for two bosses, for the British government and also for the Jewish authorities.

K: Do you think that happened in lots of places?

S: The rumor going around was that the only place where that didn't happen was in the railway system and the rails didn't run for about a year because they had no trained locomotive engineers who were Jewish. But all through the thing you had the feeling that the people who were taking over had a great deal of administrative experience. In a sense, this is typical of many of the British colonies, the

Jews owed a debt to the British. The British used these people not because they wanted to be nice to the Jews, but because they didn't have the personnel and it would have been very expensive to import them from Great Britain. So, they used native people.

There were two groups in Palestine who were there who could read. Mainly, the Christian Arabs and the Jews. And there were far more Jews than Christian Arabs so that, although the Jews made up one third of the population, I suspect they made up at least forty per cent of the native personnel that was in these various things [administrative positions].

The other area where he [Ben Gurion] could do this, and this was also anticipated is . . . during the war against Germany after much pressure and with the sympathy of Winston Churchill, the Yishuv in Israel was able to convince the British authorities to recruit Jewish soldiers. Originally, they were recruited in units. The British did not want them to have their own distinct designation. But, when the battle of Britain got bad Churchill agreed to allow the Jewish Brigade to be formed. There was a unit officered by Palestinian Jews or British Jews so that you had all of the sudden a core of officers trained by the British to whom Ben Gurion could turn when the war began. By the way, this triggered an internecine political fight between the old leaders of the Haganah who were guerilla leaders whose

military training was not formal, the Haganah did have training up to the level of battalion commanders. It had no people who were trained to be generals except by life itself and their intelligence.

Oddly enough, when it came to supply, when it came to formalizing the army, the trained officers were superior. When it came to fighting, the generals who were the heroes of the war all came up from the guerilla ranks. The two leading ones were Yigal Alon who was a field commander of the Palmach who came up through the Labor movement and had no more training than a battalion commander who proved to be a very competent general and Yadin who was an archaeological student at the time, a doctorate student, but had gone through the training of the Haganah. On the other hand, Chaim Herzog who is now President of Israel was a major in the British army and he did get an appointment as a brigadier general. These people solved the supply problems rather than the strategic problems.

There was an American who was a colonel in the American army, Marcus, whose chief capacity was military engineering and not strategy. He was killed accidentally during the Battle of Jerusalem.

A lot of the younger generals came up, not from the ranks of the men who had served in the British army for four year, but people who had served in the Haganah. Take a

person like Moshe Dayan or Yitzhak Rabin. They were not in the British army. Well, Dayan was for a short time "attached" to the British army. That's another area where they got experience. The British were not above using the Jewish militia when it suited their purposes. For example, Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin were trained by a very famous and very audacious and very crazy British intelligence captain by the name of Wingate who became a brigadier general in the Second World War and was killed in the war. Wingate was a nut, but a military genius, particularly in the area of informal combat, if you want to call it commando combat. He was a Bible nut and he fell in love with these bright Jews. He taught them to be tough and daring officers.

During the Second World War the British used Haganah intelligence units and Haganah military units in the war against Vichy Syria. That's where Moshe Dayan lost his eye. He was a Haganah officer who was attached to a British unit, not as a member of the British army, but as an auxiliary. They were mainly scouts. They knew the territory much better than the British.

There was some training that went on in the old Haganah. But the blockade by the Israeli army, its literal spit and polish were the people who came up from the British army.

K: Getting back to your personal involvement . . .

S: Well, I came to what was then mandatory Palestine in then end of '47. My objective was to be a student. Within three weeks all hell broke loose. Being a Zionist and also a rabbi and in the shock of after-the-Shoah, I was approached by Al Yanow, a Reform rabbi, who asked me whether I'd like to join the Haganah. This must have been mid December of '47.

We were for a short time kind of a reserve unit that was called up from time to time. But by January we were fully mobilized.

The day after I joined, a guy came into my room at the pension where we were staying. He looked very suspicious. And he said, "I come from *Lehi*," that's the Stern gang, a terrorist group.

He said, "We need you. You speak English. You have a University degree."

So I said to him, because my political views were certainly left wing and opposed to the terrorists, I said, "Look, I came here to study and I don't want to get into internal brawls that are going on in this country."

He said, "If that's so, why did you sign up for the Haganah yesterday?"

So, their agents were well informed.

I lied brazenly and said, "I didn't." He realized I

wasn't going to join.

Jerusalem had a peculiar situation. In the first place its status was unclear. With the U. N. agreement that the Jewish leaders had accepted Jerusalem was not to be a part of the Jewish country. On the other hand there were a hundred thousand Jews that had to be defended. The first decision was made to try to recruit the university students in Jerusalem. There were also about seventy-five American students. It was difficult to recruit the reserves because of the economic situation in Jerusalem. Most of these young men were supporting larger families, their parents. It was a Middle-Eastern city in that sense. People retired at fifty and had their sons support them. This was true of the *Edot-Mizrach* people.

University students weren't working. The Americans were natural choices for two reasons. Among the Americans were many veterans of the Second World War. I wasn't. In fact that was one of the "shocks." The second reason was that they also were just students. So, they were not supporting families. What shocked the Israelis, or Palestinian Jews as they were then, were two things - The number of rabbinical students and rabbis who were in the American contingent. They didn't quite know what a Reform or Conservative rabbi was then. About half of us were either graduate students at either HUC or JTS, one or two from the Yeshivah. One of the first Americans killed was

Moshe Perlstein, a student of Yeshivah University which was then Yeshivah College. So, when they took us out for a refresher training course they were shocked to see that most of us had never seen a gun before. One unit was composed of Americans who had military experience. Rabbi Leonard Bierman of Los Angeles was one of them. Leonard Bierman had other problems. He was a committed pacifist. That led to another shock. The Israelis couldn't quite understand somebody who asked the question, "Is this operation a defensive one or an offensive one? Because if it's offensive, I don't want to be in it." And in fact, in the end Leonard left and returned to America, not because he was a frightened man. He isn't. He's a very brave man who took a very unpopular stand. But, he wasn't sure he wanted to be a soldier because of moral reasons. I had no such compunctions. My feeling was that this is the last stand of European Jewry after what happened. I didn't want to get into anything immoral, but there was every justification to shoot at people trying to kill Jews.

By the time the war got underway, most Americans left. Mainly not for Leonard Bierman's reasons. Some for personal reasons. There were one or two whose wives were pregnant and wanted to get out of the city. There were others who were pressured by their parents and left to the United States. I don't imagine that in the Jerusalem forces there

were more than fifteen Americans. In those days there were very few Americans around anyhow.

K: It's interesting what you point out regarding the pressure on rabbinical students because with the recent Gulf War we saw a similar situation. A lot of the people who criticized those students probably didn't think about what happened.

S: I never criticized anybody who thinks that what he's doing is creating terrible problems for his parents or who is afraid of getting killed. I'm afraid of getting killed.

[While I was in Jerusalem as a student] I received a cable from my father who raised me to be a Hebraist and a Zionist telling me that Mother and I believe you surely should return to the United States. I wrote him a letter with all the enthusiasm of a young man saying, How could you raise me to be a Jewish patriot and then ask me to leave the country when the Jewish community here is in terrible danger?

I received a second letter from him saying, God bless you, my son. He said, I didn't want to send the cable, but your mother convinced me to do so with the argument that you might want to leave, but were ashamed to do so because you knew that I would be angry. So, I wanted to give you a way out.

Anyhow, I went into a unit of the Haganah. Since I got married I always had a weight problem, so they put me in a heavy weapons unit . . . (And I lost a lot of weight during the siege in Jerusalem, then promptly put it on again) Heavy weapons you can't run with too much. You don't have to. I was trained as a machine-gunner with Tet Carmi.

Carmi was a younger student. Today he's a man past sixty. Carmi and I went through the training and then we were separated. I think he got sick or something. My unit was assigned to guard the Jewish Agency buildings which were then, so to speak, the capital of the country. At that time they made me a kind of acting sergeant because I had a university degree.

Later, we were transferred to Atarot which is now a suburb of Jerusalem; but was then a flea-bitten Rumanian Jewish village. Three days after we were transferred the Arabs got a car loaded with bombs into the Jewish Agency compound and blew it up. I think six people were killed. A guy sitting in the room where I used to sit was killed. In fact, one of my father's friends thought it was I who was killed, because he didn't know we moved out.

We were in this village outside of Jerusalem for about a month. We had two platoons there and I was in charge of one platoon.

My brother had come up from the kibbutz in which he was living. He had come to Israel a year before me. He said to

me in his typical way, Hey, Ez, how do I get into this? I said, You've been here for a year! He said, Yeah, but I'm a member of the haganah in the Emek, in the Valley of Jezreel. I said, It's very easy. I'll introduce you to my captain, which I did. My captain said, Are you a soldier? My brother was a soldier in WWII. He assigned him to my platoon which was crazy.

We were in this village under total siege. I ordered my brother to take four men to hold a point while we were under attack. My brother said, what the hell do you know about war? I was in the American army for four years. You're sending me to my death! I had the worst four hours of my life after that. What if my brother gets killed now? Fortunately he didn't get killed. He's still alive. When I was able to get in touch with my captain I said, This doesn't go. You pull my brother out because I can't send my brother [into battle] and I certainly can't act in a prejudicial way toward him. So, my brother was removed to another unit.

We returned to Jerusalem and were put up in some commandeered area downtown. I was asked whether I wanted to be paymaster of the battalion. Since nothing really was going on, I agreed. The only trouble is they ran out of money.

In May, the British pulled out and the Jews had a plan for the taking of the whole new city, beautifully executed!

They knew everything the British were doing.

My sister-in-law was working for the telephone tapping unit of the Israeli intelligence. They tapped all the British phones. Some of the British officers also had Israeli girlfriends. So that, although it was a big secret when the British were pulling out the Israelis had all their information and all their battle order. As soon as the British pulled out, before the Arabs moved in the Israelis moved in. There was very little fighting.

K: More evidence that all this was anticipated too.

S: Oh, yes. They moved right in

It was rumored, and I think it's correct, that the British tipped off the Arabs about their leaving Arab parts of Jerusalem and the Arabs were shocked when they got there and found that Jewish troops were there before them.

They [the Arabs] were able to take one section. Do you know where *Shech Jarah* is in the Old City? Well, when you go up to the University, the valley in the East Jerusalem area, outside the wall was a very posh Arab neighborhood. The legion took it back during the fighting in May. Every other area that was an Arab area in the New City was taken over by the Israelis.

With no money to distribute, I went to my captain and I said, "This is crazy!"

He said, "What is your training?"

I said, "Machine gunner."

He said, "Okay," and sent me to the front.

There I met Carmi again. Carmi and I have the dubious distinction of being cited in the crucial battle where the Jordanians probed the Jewish defenses. We were able to stop them. We both suspect that it wasn't our machine gun alone that knocked out two Arab gun carriers (small tanks on wheels). But, at the time it was thought that Carmi and I, we both manned a machine gun, we stopped them. So, we were cited in the dispatch. We were both scared to death.

In fact, by that time I was a hardened soldier and was sure I was going to get killed. I was lucky. In my particular unit one third of the people were killed. In this particular battle there were four men manning the machine gun and two men supplying ammunition. That's usually the way it's done, because the assumption is you are going to get wounded or killed if you're on a machine gun.

One man was killed immediately. Another was seriously wounded. It was an experience because the runners were younger kids. They had to keep supplying us with bullets. I remember the first runner, he must have been about sixteen, he tripped over a dead body and threw up. He had never seen a dead man before.

I don't recommend that anyone go through a battle experience, but it gives you a different perspective.

I came out and when the battle of Jerusalem was over. Because of the networking of the Americans, my brother had been transferred, because he was an air force man in the United States Army, to Tel Aviv. He was ultimately sent to Czechoslovakia to train on a B-17 which was the leading heavy bomber of the Second World War which was smuggled out from the United States. But it was sold to someone legally, who signed that he would not use it for military purposes.

The plane was immediately transferred to Canada. From Canada it was flown to Czechoslovakia. The United States government stripped the plane of all its military equipment. The problem was how to re-arm it in Czechoslovakia with Czech military armor. All the Americans that were involved were trained on American equipment so they had to be retrained in Czechoslovakia. There were three such bombers. One of them is now on permanent display in the War of Independence Air Museum at Ramat Gan in the Emek. My brother was a gunner on one of those.

My brother, when they asked him, "Do you know any competent people?"

He said, "Well, I've got a brother who has a degree in public administration."

I got my B.A. in public administration at the University of Cincinnati which meant I knew how to prepare an income tax forms. But all the laws had been changed because the year I graduated President Roosevelt introduced

a totally new system, a pay-as-you-go system. In the old days you paid at the end of the year. I had absolutely no administrative experience.

I was pulled out and made a staff officer who dealt with personnel. It was a unit that in the British Army was called Posting and Transfers. In every army soldiers come into a pool. This was a miniature [air force]. The total air force was about six thousand people.

They came into a pool. In the pool they're assigned to different units or different functions. How are they assigned? Overall decisions were made by staff, that is, at a meeting of the top officers. There was always a shortage of personnel as there always is in a war.

I could get an order that two hundred people were needed to unload bombs that have come from Czechoslovakia. I would write the orders based on decisions. I had discretion when I had the people beyond the number requested by command. For example, I got a list of four cooks in the camp, and I had a request for ten cooks. So, if there was an order saying give priority, I had to do that. But, if there was no order, I decided. I had tremendous clout with local commanders.

They were always yelling, "We don't have enough cooks, we don't have enough machine gunners, drivers, etc."

My office used to issue every day orders moving men and I used to sign in the name of the Chief of Staff. I didn't

have to go up to staff. I was responsible. If I made a "boo-boo" I'd get help, but I was authorized to sign in his name. I say "in" his name; in Hebrew, בשמו.

Now, a soldier received three of the copies which he gave to his commanding officer if he was in a unit already and the other which he took with him and gave to his new officer. Then the new officer would sign one of the copies and return it to my office and then we would pass it on to the manpower section which had a file for every soldier. This was the procedure.

When I was offered this job, I thought I knew nothing about it. The commanding officer of the air force which I knew through the Zionist youth movement said to me, "I'll give you a good sergeant."

I had a good sergeant.

So, I had a desk job in the second part of the war and there I learned how an army runs, because when you are an ordinary field soldier you don't know what the hell is going on. But there, [in the offices] you had lunch with guys who made the decisions.

In fact, I was once offered the command of a small base in the Negev, but by that time I was a little frightened.. The Negev was pretty isolated and I was a married man.

So, I said, "No, thank you. I'd rather stay in my present job."

I didn't want to go back into a combat unit. I wasn't

that heroic.

That's my personal background which has nothing to do with what you want to know.

What was exciting about the whole thing was not the war itself, but the fact that under pretty dire conditions, most people behaved splendidly. The only thing I could say is that i suspect that the same sort of thing happened during the American War of Independence, at least among the patriots. After all, you had a lot of people who were just recruited. In Israel you had the same thing. There were a lot of people who didn't even know what the hell was going on and there were a lot of people killed.

But the people who were making the decisions, because it was an ideological business, were pretty clean and pretty caring. I remember one great experience I had. I was on a one week course learning how to shoot a machine gun which we never used. We got a new machine gun which we had to learn how to use in the field. We had a meeting with our CO [commanding officer] who was killed in the war, by the way. He was a student at the Hebrew University from the famous Solomon family, one of the founding families of Petach Tikvah, the first new Jewish settlement, an old Jerusalem family.

We were in a little village, *Malei HaChamishah*. Musa, as we called him, his name was Moshe. It's an interesting thing. We used a lot of Arabic words. Musa listened

patiently to soldiers who were poor kids, telling him, "Look at our shoes. Our soles are all shot. Can't you get us shoes?"

Musa looked at them and said, "My dear friends, we're a poor nation. So, many of our people have been slaughtered in Europe and we're fighting for our lives. We don't have money to buy you shoes."

"But," he says, "I met a Russian Jew who told me what to do. Get a hold of a piece of cardboard and put it into your shoe and it will last for a few days. I'll try to get some cardboard."

Then he walked out. I was ostensibly sort of acting sergeant and he turns to me and he says, "I'm a son of a bitch! Look at my shoes and look at the shoes they have. Okay, so I'm a rich kid." He said it with tears in his eyes.

I said, "Look at me. I'm a rich American and I've got shoes without holes too."

This is what was going on at the time.

It was still a guerilla unit. It wasn't a regular army unit. Later officers didn't talk that way.

Were you here when Yehoshafat Harkavi spoke to our students? No.

He's now one of the leading men who favors the recognition of the Palestinian State. He was a captain in our regiment and he later became the head of intelligence of

the whole Israeli army. But, today he's a scholar who teaches military history at the Hebrew University. I guess by now he's retired. That was the level of some of these people. In Jerusalem most of the officer corps was made up of graduate students through the university. They had an ideology which I must say, you don't find anymore among most Israelis today because the social and political situation is very different now.

With all the abnormalities of Israeli life, it's very normal now. You have people who are used to an army, used to bureaucracy and used to a careerism and so forth. In those days it was considered bad taste if you were a careerist to show it. Today, it's considered bad taste to show that you are an ideologue. [It represents] a total shift in mentality.

There are still people in Israel in the army who are really very decent people. But, you don't show your idealism.

What I told you may interest you, but it doesn't really tell you about what was going on then [701 BCE].

K: Another thing I thought of . . . There may or may not be parallels and I don't want to create any where there aren't. But, certainly a big element of the Biblical siege was the religious atmosphere that was present.

S: Well, do you feel it here in the text?

K: Yes, you have the prophet Isaiah . . . And you have the King parading before God . . .

S: Well you do have a number of factors. One is the common, if you want to use the word religion of the soldiers. There was a kind of moral nationalism. Nationalism tempered by a strong ethical and historical sense. Most of them were secularized. I would say that maybe twenty per cent were religious. This included some of the Americans

It's very interesting for example, we [American rabbinical students] used to join the minyan that the Orthodox kids ran because most of the soldiers were students. If you were religious, you were Orthodox, usually and members of the *Poel Mizrahi*, that is, the youth movement of what is now the Maftal of the national religious party.

In those days the Orthodox youth movement had a decidedly religious leftist [slant]. They were going to be Orthodox *Chalutzim*. They were for trade unions, for moderation. Nowadays things have changed, a great percentage of the religious community have become ultra nationalist. They were not then. Many of them were students at the university or students who left the yeshivah and joined the Haganah.

The ultra-Orthodox were not there at all. They stood outside the battle. They had nothing to do with it. They were out of it. The only thing they used to do is when we would come in to defend them on Shabbat they would call us *goyim*.

I remember one guy who later became a professor of physics at Hebrew University saying, "You God damn Orthodox bastards, you say that one more time and I'll shoot you! Here we are coming sacrificing our lives to defend you and your families and you call me a *goy*?"

So we had services for those who wanted them. Of course, with the food there was a problem of *kashrut*, a very funny problem. I remember two incidents.

One was on that fated period of May 14th to the 16th when we took over the new city. We took the Generali building, a building which is still standing. It's where Jaffa Road meets King David. You know where the post office is, in that area. Assuanzia Generali, the General Insurance Company was there. An Italian insurance company that for years had been operating in Jerusalem. At that time it was a comparatively new building. The British had confiscated it and used it as a headquarters for the British police in the city.

■ When the British left they left cartons and cartons of what is called "bully-beef." Sort of a beef Spam. There was no food in the city, no food for soldiers. So the

Haganah command asked the chief rabbinate to give a *heter* and allow the soldiers to eat *treif* meat, because they're young men, they're in battle, and their lives are in danger. Well, the "seven wise men of Chelm" made a decision, not in Seven days and seven nights, a stupid compromise. They said, "Well, not all soldiers are really in danger. So, you may give the beef to soldiers who are in the battle front."

So, in order to feed units, the command kept moving soldier units to the front for lunchtime. They gave them a good meal and sent them back. That was one instance.

End Tape One, Side Two

* * *

Begin Tape Two, Side One

. . . with an appetite even larger than yours. So, one of the soldiers looks at me and says, "How can you eat *treifa*?"

I said, "You smoke on Shabbas. That's a worse violation."

He says, "That's different!"

Another guy said to me, "Now, I know why you are fat."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "You know, meat's very fattening."

■ As it turns out he was right. But that was the age when everybody thought the way to diet was to eat a lot of protein.

He says, "You know we Easterners, we don't eat a lot of meat. It's too expensive. We eat a lot of bread and bread isn't fattening.

What I think the most interesting part was the tolerance with which these very nice *Mizrahi* kids had for these rude rabbis and rabbinical students. As one of them said, "It's not that we disagree with you. But we're not used to your ways. What we admire is that we can talk to you and we can't talk to our fellow Israelis who think religion is the bunk."

It was a very interesting experience at the time.

One of the key problems the Israeli Reform movement has is that there are a lot of people who are sympathetic to its ideas, but don't want to join. One of my biggest disappointments was that my social circle in Jerusalem kept urging me to be militant, but refused to join the fray.

When I asked, "Why don't you show up at Shabbat services?" they replied "Well, we've got theological problems with prayer." They would show up on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In my day the whole service at the College was in Hebrew. My theory was the synagogue should be a model of what a Reform service should be for native Israelis and also, in a sense, a model for our students which would enable them to begin to learn Hebrew and hear a Hebrew sermon every week. Many did and many did not, of course.

I did make one concession, because I was under

tremendous pressure, by the tourists, to give the sermon in English. I used to give a three minute summary of the sermon in English.

Once in a while we got complaints. One of the great complaints was from Mrs. Sulzberger, the owner of the New York Times and the granddaughter of Isaac Mayer Wise. She came to Jerusalem when I was on home leave in the U.S. Dr. Meyer had occupied the pulpit and gave the sermon in Hebrew. Mrs. Sulzberger was shocked. "What kind of Reform service is this?!" She wrote a letter to Dr. Glueck who sent me a copy of her letter. I wrote, first of all apologizing for not being in Jerusalem when she was there. I then explained that, "Dr. Glueck sent me a copy of his reply to you. If your grandfather, of blessed memory, was still alive, he too would agree that one should preach in the language of the country." as he did when he was a rabbi in Cincinnati.

I got a very nice letter back from her saying that while she doesn't fully agree with me, she understands and she respects my point of view and would I be good enough to call upon her when I get to New York City? Well, this was a really important lady. So, I made it my business to call up her home. Of course, I ran into her secretary who ran interference. "Well, Mrs. Sulzberger will not be able to see you now and we'll contact you."

K: Any other thoughts about the religious atmosphere during

the '47-'48 war?

S: Well, as I said, religion at that time in Israel as it still is today, was mainly expressed by Orthodox elements. In the war the majority of the people in Jerusalem, Orthodox or not Orthodox, favored the establishment of Jewish State. The ultra-Orthodox opposed it. We used to call them an enclave of the *galut*. They were out of it. [to them] the Zionists were sinning against God.

I would say the typical Orthodox Jew in Jerusalem was for the establishment of the state. In those circles the religious factor was a major one, almost messianic in its fervor.

The moderate religious elements in those days were on the defensive, because they didn't want to be classed with the anti-Zionist Orthodox elements. The attitude of the secular Israeli soldier was very respectful of Orthodox youth who served in the army, because they could get out, but chose to participate. There were also Orthodox officers in the services.

I remember one particular yeshiva student who was very much admired and liked. In those days, you've got to remember that this was right after the *Shoah*, many of the people in Israel never forgave God for what had happened.

They were

'secularized people who in the camps ate *treif* when they

could get anything to eat and had abandoned Jewish practice.

When it came to death, religion showed itself. In the burial ceremonies . . . mourning for kids who were killed or died natural deaths, they preferred the traditional service. It was a form of expressing your grief and there was no secular substitute for it. If I may jump further down the lane of years, Tabenkin, a leading left-wing Labor Zionist leader died. I went to his funeral at *Ein Harod*. It was a very nice ceremony, but devoid of any religious feeling. All of a sudden the man standing next to me, completely secularized, said, "This is not a Jewish funeral! I'm going to go forward and say *Kaddish* for him. Tabenkin's son who was a leading figure in the kibbutz got tears in his eyes and said, "Thank you, there was something unfinished without the *Kaddish*."

But was that religion? I guess in a sense it was. I don't know.

I had another experience, also later on. I was at a wedding where a German liberal rabbi, who was really right wing Conservative by American standards, performed the marriage. He was the only liberal rabbi who was licensed to perform marriages. After he left Israel to take a job in Stockholm, the rabbinate would not license any Reform or Conservative or even liberal Orthodox rabbis to perform marriages.

The rabbi ran service that no Orthodox rabbi [would

run], a marriage ceremony. There was a girl standing next to me dressed in very very short sleeves and she was wearing shorts, clearly non-religious. She kept muttering, "I'll never have such a rabbi at my wedding, I'll never go through such a ceremony!"

I thought she was a militant atheist and I said to her finally, "Why?"

She said, "Look at him. Is he a rabbi? He has no rabbi? He has no beard!"

I said to her, "Are you religious?"

She said, "Of course, not! But if I get married I want to do it right!" which reflects a certain illogical attitude which is in Israel. You met it, I'm sure.

You take people like Rachamim who worked at school. He smoked a cigarette on Shabbat, but said, "This Reform is not for me." There were two brothers on the maintenance staff. One was Moshe and the other was Rachamim. Both were Yemenites and both looked at what was going on at HUC and couldn't quite understand it. They weren't Orthodox at all, You know. When Rachamim's father died he grew a beard and sat *shiva*. I asked him, we were quite friendly, I said, "Rachamim, you became Orthodox?"

"What do you mean I became Orthodox? Of course, not!"

I said, "I know you smoke and I know you eat non-kosher food. What's all this business?"

He said, "My father dies, I have to be able to

respect."

END

Chapter V

Comparing the Two Sieges

A. The Sieges: In the Bible and in the Twentieth Century

Many groups have attempted to take over the city of Jerusalem, with mixed results. Sennacherib's siege ended in a qualified victory for Assyria. The siege of Jerusalem by Israel's Arab neighbors ended in failure. These two sieges are not even separated by a single kilometer and yet, they are removed from one another by the span of over two and a half millennia. Israel, a tiny spot on the globe surrounded mostly by desert has seen more war and bloodshed than any other space its size elsewhere on the globe. And at the heart of it all has been the holy city of Jerusalem. Ironically, much of this war and bloodshed has been claimed in the name of one deity or another. Unfortunately, the violence continues till this day.

An examination of the two sieges, side by side, may provide us with a fuller understanding of war, religion, and human nature in general. Also, some similarities may point to characteristics of the city of Jerusalem that are unique to that great city. Certain differences may dispel myths about the city or teach us something about the different ways persons respond in the time of war. In any case we are bound to learn something from a close look at these two sieges.

B. Comparisons and Contrasts from the Interview with Dr. Spicehandler

In the very beginning of the interview, Dr. Spicehandler mentions a possible similarity between the siege of 701 BCE and the siege of 1948 CE. He asks if the reference to the Assyrian encampment at "the conduit of the Upper Pool, by the road of the Fuller's Field"⁶⁴ is a reference to the fact that the Assyrians cut off the water to the city. There is some evidence to support this idea. First of all, on its own merit the suggestion that the Assyrians would try to cut off the water supply to the city is logical. As a tactical measure, cutting off the city's water supply is bound to set off panic, or at least deep concern, among the city's residents. Such concern would be likely to put extra pressure to surrender on the city's leaders.

In addition, there is Biblical evidence to support the idea that the Assyrians cut off the water supply. The fact that the Biblical author mentions the conduit to the Upper Pool would seem to point to the fact that it was of some strategic importance. Any position that an attacking army takes or move that it makes is likely to be carefully planned. Though we cannot be certain where this spot mentioned by the Bible is, we can be sure that careful planning went into the decision to camp there. The Bible itself gives no explicit reason for this location, unless we are to assume that by mentioning the conduit, the author

⁶⁴Isaiah 36:2.

thought his readers would draw the conclusion that the water supply would be cut at that point and guarded by the Assyrian forces.

Still another Biblical indication that the Assyrians cut off the water supply comes from verse 36:12 which reads:

But the Rab-shakeh replied, "Was it to your master and to you that my master sent me to speak those words? It was precisely to those men who are sitting on the wall - who will have to eat their dung and drink their urine with you."⁶⁵

So, the Rab-shakeh threatens the Judeans with starvation if they do not surrender. In order to make this threat he must have been secure in the notion that he could enforce this threat. If he was responsible for cutting the city's water supply, he would have this security.

It is also worth noting that in any case, a besieged city is surrounded by a hostile enemy. In the case of Jerusalem, which is in a desert climate, water would be in short supply due to natural circumstances, i.e. extremely low precipitation and high rates of evaporation. A reliable, natural water source within the city walls would be unlikely if not completely impossible. As a result, most if not all the water would either have to be piped in and/or brought in manually. Under siege circumstances one would have to risk his or her life in order to bring water in to

⁶⁵Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 691.

the city from outside. As I mentioned above, it would be a logical tactic for the besieging army to cut off water that is brought in by pipe or man-made channel.

Dr. Spicehandler goes into some detail about the water shortage during the war in '47-48. He says that the only water in the city was water stored in cisterns and that the city was without running water for four or five months. Also, Dr. Spicehandler points out that the water source during the war of independence was probably very different than the water source in 701 BCE.

One could make the argument that the water was not cut off during the Assyrian siege or at the very least, that there was no water shortage during the siege itself. The text never states explicitly that the Assyrians cut off the water supply. Thus we have no direct evidence that such action was taken. In addition, there is no indication that the people in the city were responding to a water shortage. We only hear the implied threat of such a shortage from the Rab-shakeh. Without stronger evidence that the water was cut off, it would be impossible to say conclusively what were the actual course of events.

Dr. Spicehandler rightly points out that the political situations were very different in the Assyrian siege as compared with the Arab/Jordanian siege. During the time of Sennacherib and Hezekiah, Assyria was the ruling power in the region. The northern Kingdom of Israel was completely

absorbed by Assyria and the Southern Kingdom, Judea, was a vassal state. The only sovereignty that Judea enjoyed was short-lived and lasted from the time of Hezekiah's rebellion to his apparent surrender.

On the other hand, during the twentieth century siege there was no single ruling power that covered most of the region. Though for political reasons the Arab states surrounding Israel were more or less allied, each had its own separate political agenda as well. Also, the Arab states were independent sovereign entities.

Israel's political situation was much different during the twentieth century siege as well. In 701 BCE Hezekiah was partly responsible for precipitating the siege by rebelling against the Assyrian authority. In the twentieth century the siege was precipitated by Arab neighbors who opposed the establishment of the Jewish State. In the twentieth century, Israel's claim to sovereignty and self-defense was not an act of defiance, but rather a legitimate claim supported by the United Nations. Instead, it was the Arab neighbor's who acted defiantly by attacking Israel.

Dr. Spicehandler points out that during the Arab/Jordanian siege Jerusalem was isolated geographically. There were very few Jewish settlements in the vicinity that could aid Jerusalem militarily or, at the very least, serve as refuges for Jewish soldiers. The existing settlements were often difficult to reach by foot, car, or bus even in

peaceful conditions because the roads were not so good. Dr. Spicehandler points out that the residents of the Old City were especially isolated during the twentieth century siege. This was probably due to the fact that passage in and out of the Old City is restricted mostly to the city's gates.

Dr. Spicehandler makes the claim that during the Biblical conflict Jerusalem was not so isolated. The southern Judean state was probably more greatly settled by an indigenous Jewish population at the time of the Assyrian siege, making Jerusalem somewhat less isolated. Also, Hezekiah did establish alliances with foreign states (i.e. Egypt) in the region in preparation for his rebellion. In addition, during the Biblical siege there was only one aggressor while in the twentieth century Israel had to deal with enemies on each of its borders.

In spite of the factors listed above, I believe that the evidence indicates that Jerusalem was equally isolated during the Biblical siege. Assyrian forces had readily conquered most of the region without much of a fight. In the Biblical narrative the Rab-shakeh provides a list of cities including Hamath, Arpad, and Sepharavaim,⁶⁶ that have rebelled against Assyria in the past only to surrender in the end. Apparently, Jerusalem was the last hold-out and ended up surrendering anyway. Even though Assyria was the only aggressor, the Assyrian forces probably consisted of

⁶⁶Isaiah 36:19.

groups from a number of Assyrian vassal states. Their fighting power should not be underestimated simply because they were one nation rather than a group of nations. Also, there is nothing to suggest that the roads and terrain were any better in Hezekiah's time than they were in 1948. Finally, residents of the City during the time of Hezekiah would be equally isolated as residents of the twentieth century Old City due to the city's walls and gates.

In his interview, Dr. Spicehandler states that:

The only analogy you do have is what happened in terms of feeding and bringing water to the city under siege. Otherwise I would say that both the strategic and diplomatic situation was rather different.*

I would add that there are other components to the strategic and diplomatic situation worthy of comparison. For instance, although, as Dr. Spicehandler mentions, Great Britain was not a world power in the same way Assyria was, it was the sovereign power in the region until the Mandate ran out. Differences arise in the distance between Assyria and Judea and Great Britain and Palestine. Also, the vassal states were on better terms with Assyria than the Jews and Arabs were with Great Britain.

C. Other Similarities

Today many regard the prophets of ancient Israel as our spiritual ancestors. They exhorted Israel when it was falling off the "straight-and-narrow" and they castigated Israel when it appeared morally and spiritually bankrupt..No doubt these prophets were brave as they spoke out against the majority and those in power because they felt so strongly about their message. Yet, one wonders how we might view the prophets were we magically transported back to their time. Might we regard them as bizarre, extreme, or even insane? Some parallel may be drawn here with how many regard *Lehi* during the pre-statehood period of Palestine. At the time, many considered their harsh tactics to be radical and outrageous.

However, the distance that time provides lets us reexamine the role and approaches *Lehi* employed. Some suggest that their ruthless methods were an appropriate response to the ruthlessness of Nazism. Neither *Lehi* nor the ancient prophets were liked by most of the persons whose interests they tried to serve. Today public opinion of both groups has shifted, generally becoming more favorable. Whose view is more accurate, the contemporaries of these groups or the persons who follow them decades and centuries later? We are left to form our own opinions.

The recognized ideological leaders of the Jews in the war period and through the establishment of the State of

Israel were David Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizman. They played a role similar to Hezekiah and Isaiah. They led and exhorted Jews on a global level to support the Zionist cause. Also, the two were often at odds as were the king and the prophet throughout Biblical history.

D. Other Differences

Certain differences may appear obvious, but are worth mentioning nonetheless. For instance, the twentieth century siege took place in a post-diaspora world. As a result, Jews and Jewish concerns were spread all across the world. In addition, the religious mood in the world had shifted greatly since 701 BCE. All the parties in the twentieth century siege were members of some form of world Western religion which was essentially monotheistic and had Judaism as its mother religion.

One notable difference in the two sieges under consideration is in the intended outcome by the aggressor in each case and the actual outcomes of each siege. During the Biblical siege the Rab-shakeh makes the offer that the population will do well to surrender to Assyria. He says that, though the people will be exiled, they will be brought to a land that will be plentiful and much like the one in which they currently are living.⁶⁷ It is likely that this promise was made with honest intent since it would have been

⁶⁷Isaiah 36:17 and II Kings 18:32.

in the interest of the Assyrian conqueror to maintain a mostly positive relationship with its conquered peoples.⁶⁸ In fact, groups deported by Assyria following a military conquest tended to be loyal to the empire since they did receive a number of privileges from Assyria.⁶⁹

The actual outcome of this siege, as I noted in chapter 3, is portrayed differently in the Bible and Assyrian historical record. Taking all sources into consideration, it seems that the outcome consisted of some sort of conditional surrender. No indigenous Judeans were exiled, as was suggested by the Rab-shakeh; yet a fairly high tribute was paid to Sennacherib, probably in order to guarantee the Judeans continued freedom and status a vassal.

In the case of the twentieth century siege, the intended outcome of Israel's Arab neighbors was to eliminate the Jewish state. Still, today that remains the goal of some of Israel's enemies, though some of Israel's neighbors have moderated in their political and diplomatic intentions and aspirations. Also, the actual outcome in this siege was an Israeli victory. No tribute or surrender was arranged on the part of the Israelis and Israel had actually gained territory by the end of the war.

⁶⁸Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, The Anchor Bible: II Kings (Doubleday & Company, 1984), 233.

⁶⁹Bustenay Oded, Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1979), 46.

One could argue that both ancient Jerusalem's security and Israel's security was improved with the outcome of both sieges. Hezekiah was safe so long as he paid the tribute, which according to all sources he did. Though Judea remained a vassal, it was under the umbrella of Assyria's protection. Modern Israel's security was also better off since it had successfully fended off its enemies and gained territory in the process including East Jerusalem and parts of the held territories.

There is no real equivalent to Sennacherib in the twentieth century siege. While most Arabs recognized the Mufti as their leader, they were separate countries with their own individual leaders as well. As a result they did not wield the same kind of power as a united Assyrian empire. The Mufti was the leader of regional opposition, while Sennacherib was the leader of a powerful nation. The Mufti spent many years evading arrest from the British, while Sennacherib ruled outright.

Assyria was the power in the region before, during, and after the siege. Great Britain's rule in the region was always somewhat precarious and, the British gave up any claim in the region before the siege began. The aggressors in the latter siege, five Arab nations, were a much different kind of force than the Assyrian army. They lacked the unity and relative fighting force of the Assyrians. Also, Assyria had conquered much of the region before

arriving at Jerusalem. The Arab nations attacked on a few fronts at one time.

Technology plays a role in setting the twentieth century siege apart from the Biblical siege. Because of technological advancements, the fate of Israel could be of concern to Jews and non-Jews all over the world rather than just in a localized region. Also, because the Assyrian siege occurred in a pre-diaspora world, the Jewish population was localized. As a result, there was not the same kind of international response to the plight of the Jews under siege as there was to the Holocaust and the work of establishing the State of Israel.

Just as the Arab leadership did not share the same unity as the Assyrian forces, the Jewish leadership in the 1948 siege was not as united as the Judean is portrayed in the Bible. The Judean leadership in the Bible includes King Hezekiah, Isaiah, and the emissaries Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah. While the emissaries openly express their concern about the Rab-shakeh's threats, they are not portrayed as being at odds with the king. On the other hand, the Jewish leadership in the twentieth century is characterized more by factional leadership. One faction is represented by *Lehi* who is willing to take extreme measures. Another is represented by the leaders of the Zionist Congresses, particularly David Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizman. Weizman and Ben Gurion, while fighting for similar ideals, often

found themselves at odds as to how to achieve their goals of establishing the Jewish State.

Finally, the political and diplomatic situations leading up to each siege were rather different in ways other than those already mentioned above. There was nothing comparable to the Shoah in the time of Sennacherib. Sennacherib is in no way comparable to Hitler. Though Sennacherib's interests were not necessarily benevolent, his goals were primarily to expand, strengthen, and stabilize his empire. Hitler was primarily bent on destroying the Jews. Though he was interested in extending his control over Europe, when this no longer became feasible for him, he remained intent on destroying the Jews of Europe.

Epilogue

Jerusalem is a city of faith and beauty. Its rich history provides persons of many academic disciplines with a constant source of material with which they may broaden their fields. Archaeologist, historians, authors, clergy, and artists to name a few, will all find inspiration in the special city.

It is unfortunate that military engagements may serve the historian as mileposts in Israel's history. Still today, news stories about Jerusalem and Israel as a whole are characterized by terrorism and violence. A future for peace in that region seems a long way off in the distance, even for the most optimistic observer. It seems that is much easier to wage war than it is to create peace.

My hope is that an understanding of Israel's rich past will aid those interested in contributing to peace in that region. By looking at the Biblical texts and the history of our people and the region, we may better understand the causes of and solutions to war in that area. Also, by closely scrutinizing our past, we may be able to better understand ourselves in the present.

May we take to heart the lessons of the past, so that we may build a better and more peaceful future for ourselves and future generations.

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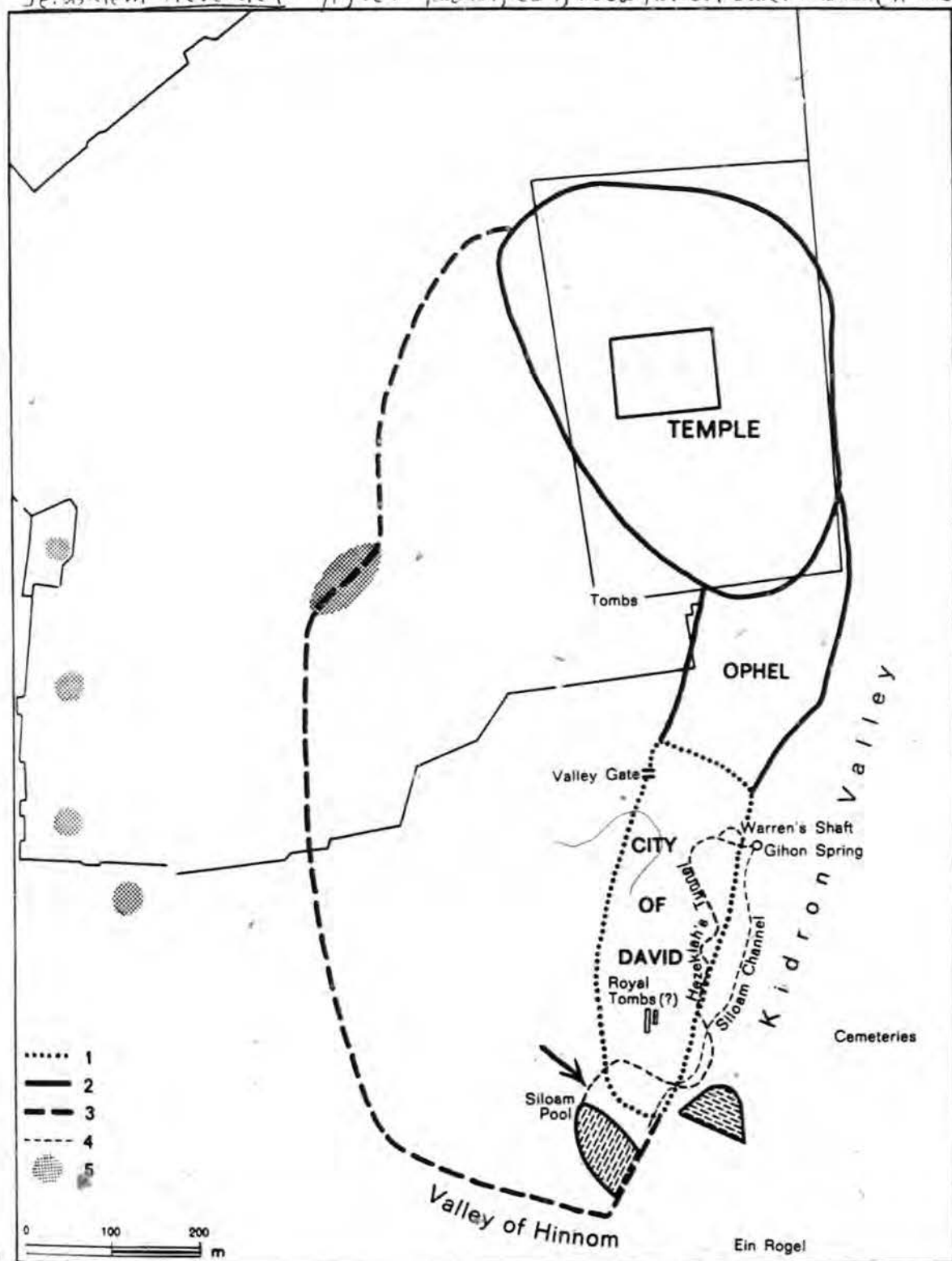
HUC-MS.12 - Latter Prophets and Hagiographa with masora magna and parva. Date uncertain.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

This is a map of Jerusalem in First Temple times. The arrow indicates a possible location of where the Rab-shakeh stood and may have cut off the water supply.





Jerusalem in First Temple times. (1) Davidic wall; (2) Solomonic extension; (3) 8th-7th century extension; (4) subterranean water channels; (5) Israelite remains discovered on western hill

Appendix 2 - HUC-MS.12

This is folio page 18a from HUC-MS.12 containing a page of Isaiah that relates the siege narrative. On the lower right hand side of the page is a tear that has been sown together. The faint marks scattered around the page are mostly pencil marks made by a later owner of the MS. There is a faint chapter mark between the two columns, also in pencil.

