

Sennacherib Prism (The Taylor Prism)

Byron Holtsclaw

Colonel Robert Taylor discovered a baked clay hexagon prism in 1830 at Nineveh, the ancient capital of Assyria. The six paragraphs on the prism were written during the reign of Sennacherib in cuneiform; the earliest known writing system. Sennacherib's Prism was written in 689 B.C. documenting his military campaign in the Levant. Sennacherib conquered the northern kingdom of Israel with a successful attack on Samaria resulting in the population being deported. He then turned south with his mighty army to besiege Jerusalem ruled by King Hezekiah of Judah. Hezekiah paid a handsome tribute to King Sennacherib of Assyria. Although this agreement preserved Hezekiah's claim to the throne of Judah, the siege greatly compromised Hezekiah's power and wealth.

In 2012, my wife and I were able to view the Taylor Prism in person at the British Museum in London. The British Museum purchased the prism from Taylor's widow in 1855. There are also 2 other known complete examples of the inscription; the Jerusalem Prism and the Oriental Institute Prism on display in Chicago.

II Kings Chapters 18 and 19 give a different account than the Prisms. Verse 35 in Chapter 19 states, "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning-there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there."

The prism does not say that Assyria conquered Jerusalem, just as the Bible explains that they did not. Sennacherib was able to conquer most of the other cities in the region, but mysteriously somehow he was unable to conquer the holy city of Jerusalem. This is a classic example that archaeology does not prove the Bible, however it does add background information. There is proof that Sennacherib ruled Assyria and he conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and exiled its people to a foreign land.

It is disputed if any of the "lost" ten tribes of Israel ever returned to their homeland. Nevertheless, only the remnant of Judah was able to return centuries later during the reign of Cyrus; during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The exiles of Israel and Judah did indeed happen. The Bible as well as additional records such as the Sennacherib Prism clearly document the price Israel paid for its disobedience to its covenant with God.