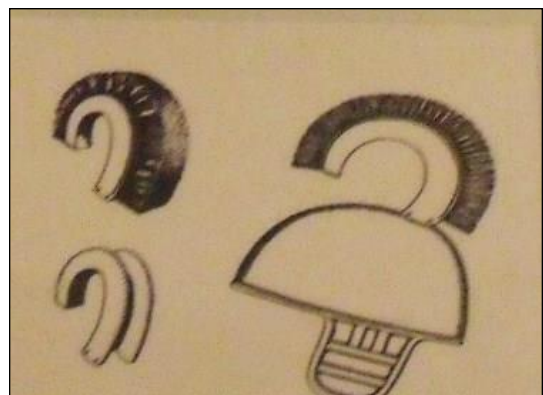


# LACHISH

**Background.** Lachish was located about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem and fifteen miles west of Hebron. The Egyptians knew of the city as early as the fourteenth century B.C., for it appears in the Amarna Letters as Lakisu. Lachish is first mentioned in the Bible about the same time, during the period of the conquest. The Canaanite king of Lachish fought against Israel at Gibeon and was defeated; ultimately he was killed at the cave of Makkedah (Josh. 10:20-26). Joshua later struck the people of Lachish with the sword (Josh. 10:31-33). When the territory was divided, the city was allotted to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:21, 39).

Lachish served as a fortress protecting the region known as the Shephelah (southwestern Judah), especially from the tenth to the sixth centuries B.C. In Judah, the city was second in importance only to Jerusalem. During the Divided Kingdom, Rehoboam fortified Lachish to protect Judah from the Philistines (2 Chron. 11:5-12). Later, King Amaziah tried to escape from conspirators by fleeing to Lachish, but he was unsuccessful (2 Kings 14:19). Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, attacked Lachish in 701 B.C. and then sent his top officials to Jerusalem to convince Hezekiah to surrender (2 Kings 18:13-17; 2 Chron. 32:9). More than a century later, Lachish was the last Judean city to fall to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar before they laid siege to Jerusalem (Jer. 34:7). During the Post-exilic period, the Jews resettled Lachish (Neh. 11:30).



Helmet Crest from Lachish  
8th Century B.C.  
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



Iron and Bone Arrow Heads  
(Israel Museum)



Sling Stones  
(Israel Museum)



Pieces from the Head of a Scepter  
(Israel Museum)

**Excavations.** The excavations at Lachish include Canaanite temples, a governor’s palace, and a casemate wall with strong fortifications. Three levels of gates—one on top of the other—have been discovered. The earliest was destroyed in 701 B.C. by the Assyrians. The next gate was built in the seventh century B.C., prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The third gate was constructed in the Post-exilic period, after the Jews returned to Judah in 538 B.C. The ruins from the tel are similar to the portrayals on the reliefs found at the royal palace in Nineveh.

**Lachish Reliefs.** A relief contains sculpted figures that stand out from the background, having been chiseled from the rock. The Lachish Reliefs depict the Assyrian siege of the Judean city of Lachish in 701 B.C. This event is narrated in both 2 Kings 18–20 and 2 Chronicles 32. It was depicted in art form on the walls of Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh as a means of celebrating his victory. This siege occurred during the reign of Hezekiah, who was the king over Judah.

In 1847, a British archaeologist named Austen Layard uncovered Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh. Excavators unearthed one particular room inside the palace where they found the Lachish Reliefs. The walls of the room were covered with panels about eight feet tall. Scenes from Sennacherib’s victory over the city of Lachish wrapped around the entire room, about eighty feet total.

The Lachish Reliefs provide well-preserved records of the biblical account of Sennacherib’s invasion of the city. The artwork provides many interesting details about the battle, including the military weaponry used, the brutal killing of Lachish’s citizens, and the appearance of both men and women.



Replica of Lachish Relief Panel 3  
(Israel Museum)

[\*The originals are kept in the British Museum in London.]



Enlarged Scenes from Panel 3. (Above) Judeans leave Lachish as exiles, having sacks with their possessions draped over their shoulders. (Lower Left) Assyrians attack the city fortress with a four-wheel battering ram on a log siege ramp. (Lower Right) Assyrians impale three Judeans on stakes (see Deut. 21:23).





Panel 4. Archers give support to the battering ram as they ascend the ramp.  
A large ladle with water is used to extinguish fires on the battering ram.



(Above) Panels 4-5. Assyrian soldiers carry booty from Lachish in their hands and on a cart. The Judeans also use a cart as well as a camel to carry their possessions into exile. (Below) Panels 5-6. The procession includes Judean men (in caps), women (in full length veils), and children. Two of the leaders are being flayed alive by Assyrian soldiers. This scene, along with the previous impalement, testifies to the brutality and intimidation tactics of the Assyrians.



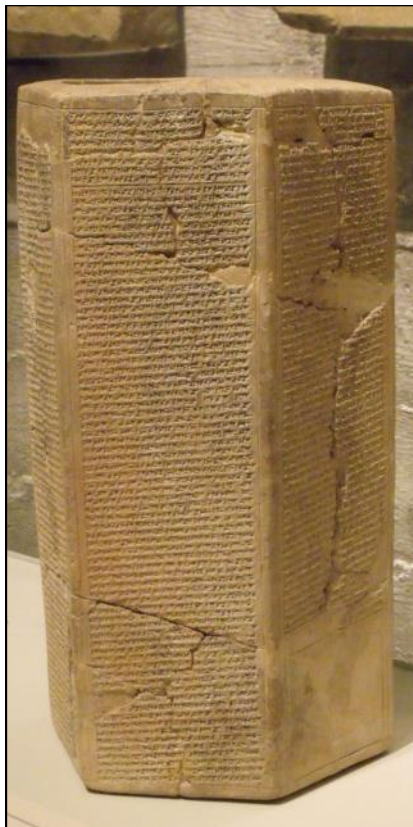


Panels 6, 8. The procession from Lachish approaches Sennacherib, king of Assyria. He is sitting on a throne inlaid with ivory (see 1 Kings 10:18), and his feet are resting on a footstool. The king is being fanned by two beardless eunuchs as he receives a report from his generals. Judeans bow before him in submission, begging for their lives. An inscription overhead in cuneiform reads, "Sennacherib, king of all, sits on his portable throne while the spoil from the city of Lachish passes before him." His face has been destroyed (dishonoring and removing his memory); he was assassinated by his own sons in 681 B.C. (see 2 Kings 19:37).

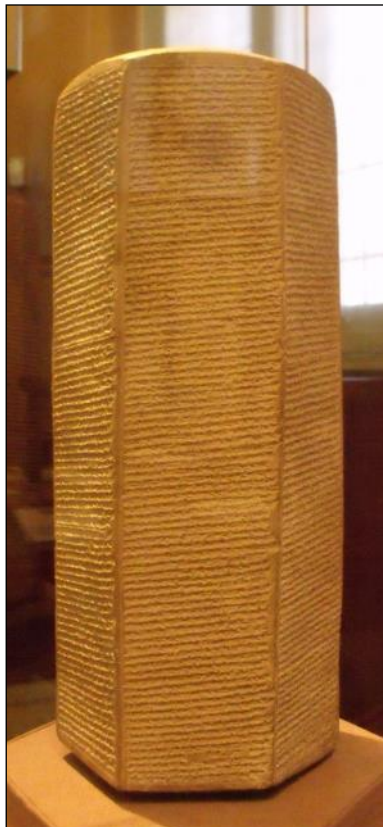


**Sennacherib's Prisms.** In addition to the Lachish Reliefs, archaeologists have discovered written records relating to Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. (see 2 Kings 18; 2 Chron. 32; Is. 36). Sennacherib's Prisms are six-sided baked clay prisms excavated at Nineveh; these are on display at the Israel Museum, the Oriental Institute Museum, and the British Museum. (The one at the British Museum is often referred to as the "Taylor Prism.") These prisms are etched in cuneiform text that record Sennacherib's military campaigns, including his invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. Here is an excerpt from these records:

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breaches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage (*ANET*, 288).



Sennacherib's Prism  
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



Sennacherib's Prism  
(Oriental Institute Museum,  
University of Chicago)



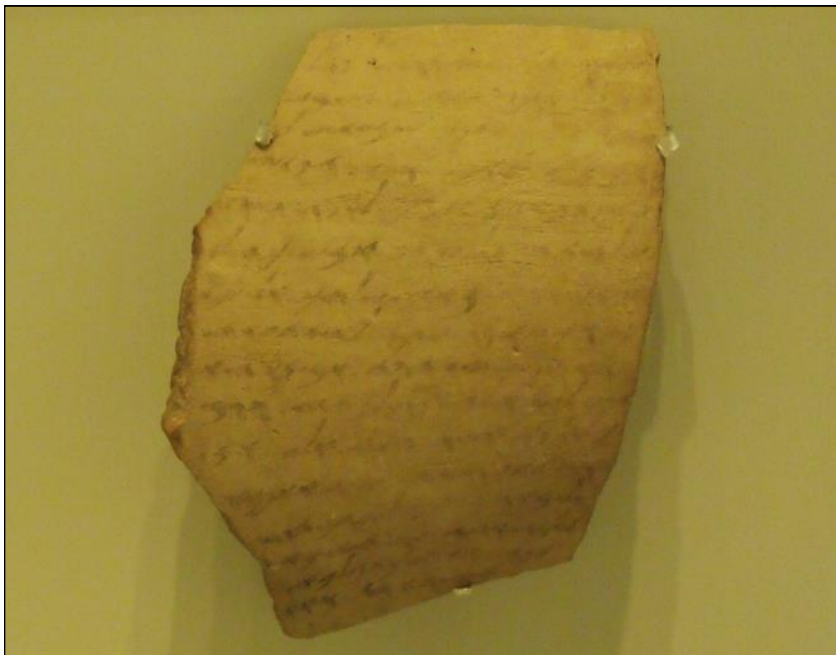
Sennacherib's (Taylor) Prism  
(British Museum, London)



**Lachish Letters.** The Lachish Letters are a collection of eighteen ostraca, that is, clay potsherds with ink writing. These letters, written in an ancient Hebrew script, relate significant details about the final days of the southern kingdom of Judah. They were discovered between 1932 and 1938 at ancient Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) by James Leslie Starkey. The letters comprise a significant collection of Hebrew writing. Apparently, all of them were written during the final phase of Judah's occupation of Lachish, before it was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah (588-87 B.C.).

The collection of eighteen letters was discovered in the ruins of the guardroom at the main gate of the city. The fire that destroyed this area may have been set by the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar in an attempt to bring down the wall, which was connected to the gate. The Babylonian king destroyed the city because it was one of the strongest fortresses in Judah.

The Lachish Letters were written by Hoshai, a Jewish commander, to Yaosh, the commanding officer at Lachish. The Letters reflect the turmoil surrounding the last days of Judah as the Babylonians were crushing the nation. Among the collection, the most important historically are Letters 3, 4, and 6. In Letter 4, Hoshai wrote from his military outpost to Yaosh: "And let (my lord) know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah" (*ANET*, 322). This corresponds to that which is recorded in Jeremiah. The prophet mentioned fire signals in Jeremiah 6:1. In Jeremiah 34:7, he went on to tell how the king of Babylon fought "against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out—Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah."



One of the Lachish Letters  
588-587 B.C.  
(Israel Museum)