

Chapter Four

Isaiah 36-39 vs. II Kings 18-20: Priority and Historical Reliability

I. Introduction

The driving argument in this thesis is that Isaiah 7:14 is first and foremost a prophecy about the birth of Hezekiah and certain historical events that were to unfold during his reign. In chapter two we analyzed the traditional exegetical arguments concerning the variants within Isaiah 7:14 and concluded that, when read within the immediate context of Isaiah 7:13-25 and the larger context of Isaiah 7-12, the most likely candidate for the Immanuel child was a royal child of Ahaz, probably Hezekiah. While there is no *conclusive* proof within the contexts of 7:13-25 and chapters 7-12 that clearly points to Hezekiah being the Immanuel child, there are certainly enough indications that point to such an identification as being probable. After all, the prophecy not only spoke of events that were to happen within the child's lifetime (i.e. the fall of Aram and Ephraim), but it also spoke of the child himself becoming a king. The only candidate that would fit these qualifications would be Hezekiah.

The traditional objection to identifying Immanuel with Hezekiah, of course, was the chronological inconsistencies found in II Kings 18-20 surrounding Hezekiah's reign. This issue was dealt with in chapter three. It was demonstrated that, given the clear chronological error(s) within II Kings, a plausible reconstruction of the timeline within II Kings could be made to allow for the possibility that Isaiah could have uttered his Immanuel prophecy around 742 BCE, early on in the reign of King Ahaz, shortly before

the birth of Hezekiah. In fact, it was demonstrated that such a reconstruction was the most probable reconstruction of the all the options available.

Yet even though the arguments put forth in the previous two chapters advance the ultimate argument that the prophesied Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14 is Hezekiah, more work must be done to solidify such a claim. This thesis asserts that the ultimate proof of such a claim lies, not just within the immediate context of Isaiah 7-12 or a reconstructed timeline of the chronology in II Kings 18-20, but rather in the fact that the overall literary structure of Proto-Isaiah is dependent upon the proper identification of Immanuel as Hezekiah. In other words, the identification of Immanuel as Hezekiah is the key to unlocking the bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah. The ultimate argument of this thesis is that Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39 function within Proto-Isaiah as literary bookends that provide a structure and context to Proto-Isaiah as a whole. Isaiah 7-12 gives us the prophecy of Immanuel and Isaiah 36-39 gives us the fulfillment of that Immanuel prophecy. As we will see in chapter five, the literary connections and parallels between these two literary bookends abound. Yet before we address these synchronic issues, we must first address certain diachronic concerns.

Isaiah 36-39 has proven to be extremely problematic in recent scholarship and has long been the subject of scholarly dispute. There are questions regarding its relationship to II Kings 18-20, its date, occasion, and purpose, its place and function within the book of Isaiah, as well as its historical reliability. It becomes necessary, therefore, to touch upon these issues. This chapter will focus on Isaiah 36-39 to lay the groundwork for the ultimate argument in chapter five that Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39 act as “bookends” within the larger literary structure of Proto-Isaiah that highlight the prophecy (chapters 7-

12) and fulfillment of that prophecy (chapters 36-39). As with the previous chapter, there is a considerable amount of debate regarding not only the relationship between Isaiah 36-39 and its parallel text found in II Kings 18-20, but also the historical reliability of these texts as a whole. Therefore we must wrestle with these questions and achieve a certain amount of clarity before we move on.

Although the argument of this thesis is essentially a literary one, one must also consider the various historical-critical issues surrounding the accounts of Hezekiah's reign simply because literary issues and historical issues are inextricably connected to each other. This is what was stressed in chapter one: there is no single method that can answer all relevant exegetical questions; one must use a variety of methods if one is to come to a full exegetical understanding of any given text. When it comes to Isaiah 36-39, this thesis asserts that the writer of Isaiah 36-39 sought to relate the actual historical events related to Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BCE with the purpose of arguing that these events were a fulfillment of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy of chapters 7-12. This view resulted in the current "bookend structure" within Proto-Isaiah of chapters 7-12 and chapters 36-39. Simply put, the historical events in Isaiah 36-39 inspired the literary structure of Proto-Isaiah. For this reason, it is necessary to address the diachronic issues surrounding Isaiah 36-39, II Kings 18-20, and to a certain extent II Chronicles 29-32. These accounts tell about Hezekiah's religious reforms,¹⁹⁷ the invasion of Sennacherib,¹⁹⁸ Hezekiah's illness and recovery,¹⁹⁹ and the visit of envoys from Merodach-Baladan of Babylon to Hezekiah.²⁰⁰ It is to these biblical accounts we now turn.

¹⁹⁷ II Chronicles 29-31

¹⁹⁸ Isaiah 36-37; II Kings 18-19; II Chronicles 32:1-23

¹⁹⁹ Isaiah 38; II Kings 20:1-11; II Chronicles 32:24-26

²⁰⁰ Isaiah 39; II Kings 20:12-19; II Chronicles 32:27-33

II. Isaiah 36-39 and its Parallels in II Kings 18-20 and II Chronicles 29-32

In chapter three a brief overview of these chapters was given to help address the chronological problems found within II Kings 18-20. In this chapter we must once again turn to these chapters to address the issues of priority, possible sources, literary structure, and historical reliability. To see how these texts relate to each other we must consider the following chart of the three parallel accounts in the Bible of Hezekiah's reign.

<i>Isaiah 36-39</i>	<i>II Kings 18-20</i>	<i>II Chronicles 29-32</i>
	<i>18:1-8</i> : Hezekiah restores the worship of YHWH	<i>29:1-36</i> : Hezekiah cleanses the Temple; restores worship
	<i>18:9-12</i> : Account of the siege and destruction of Samaria in Hezekiah's 4 th and 6 th years respectively	<i>30:1-27</i> : Hezekiah's attempt to invite Israel to Passover <i>31:1-21</i> : Hezekiah organizes the priests
	<i>18: (13)14-16</i> : Sennacherib's invasion and Hezekiah's capitulation	<i>32:1-8</i> : Hezekiah prepares for Sennacherib's invasion
<i>36:1-22</i> : Sennacherib's 1 st taunt by the hand of the Rabshakeh	<i>18:17-37</i> : Sennacherib's 1 st taunt by the hand of the Rabshakeh	<i>32:9-15</i> : Sennacherib's 1 st taunt by the hand of his servants
<i>37:1-7</i> : Isaiah reassures Hezekiah: Sennacherib will not defeat you	<i>19:1-7</i> : Isaiah reassures Hezekiah: Sennacherib will not defeat you	
<i>37:8-13</i> : Sennacherib's 2 nd taunt by the hand of messengers	<i>19:8-13</i> : Sennacherib's 2 nd taunt by the hand of messengers	<i>32:16-19</i> : Sennacherib's 2 nd taunt by letter
<i>37:14-20</i> : Hezekiah's prayer in the Temple	<i>19:14-19</i> : Hezekiah's prayer in the Temple	
<i>37:21-35</i> : Isaiah's 2 nd reassurance to Hezekiah: Sennacherib will not defeat you	<i>19:20-34</i> : Isaiah's 2 nd reassurance to Hezekiah: Sennacherib will not defeat you	
<i>37:36-38</i> : Sennacherib's army destroyed by an angel of YHWH	<i>19:35-37</i> : Sennacherib's army destroyed by an angel of YHWH	<i>32:20-23</i> : Sennacherib's army destroyed by an angel of YHWH
<i>38:1-8, 21-22</i> : Hezekiah's illness and healing	<i>20:1-11</i> : Hezekiah's illness and healing	<i>32:24-26</i> : Hezekiah's illness
<i>38:9-20</i> : Hezekiah's prayer		
<i>39:1-8</i> : Envoys from the king of Babylon	<i>20:12-19</i> : Envoys from the king of Babylon	<i>32:27-31</i> : Envoys from the princes of Babylon
	<i>20:20-21</i> : Hezekiah's death	<i>32:32-33</i> : Hezekiah's death

As one can see from the chart, the bulk of Isaiah 36-39 (with the exception of Hezekiah's prayer in 38:9-20) is identical to II Kings 18:13, 17-20:19. In addition, II Kings also contains an account of Hezekiah's death that is missing in Isaiah. These twin accounts cover the particulars of Sennacherib's invasion, Hezekiah's illness and healing, and the visit from the envoys of Merodach-baladan of Babylon. Just as Isaiah has included Hezekiah's prayer of 38:9-20, II Kings has included three minor accounts unique to his Hezekiah narrative: (a) a brief account of Hezekiah's reforms (18:1-8), (b) information on the destruction of Samaria (18:9-12), and (c) additional information about Hezekiah's attempt to pay off Sennacherib (18:13-16). As one can see, the II Chronicles account of Hezekiah's reign covers the same major events in Hezekiah's reign (Sennacherib's invasion, Hezekiah's illness, and the visit by envoys from Babylon), but clearly is an entirely different written account. In fact, it is generally acknowledged that the account in II Chronicles is the latest of the three accounts, probably written by priests during or after the exile.²⁰¹ Regardless, II Chronicles 29-32 includes detailed accounts of (a) Hezekiah's religious reforms, (b) Hezekiah's attempt to invite those from Israel to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, (c) Hezekiah's organization of the priests, and (d) Hezekiah's preparations for Sennacherib's invasion.

Given the later date of II Chronicles, our primary interest is the parallel accounts of Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20. When comparing these accounts, a number of issues must be dealt with. First, there is the question of priority: does one account hold priority over the other, or do both accounts borrow from an earlier source? Second, there is the question of the literary unity of both accounts. Third, there is the question of the date of

²⁰¹ "Though scholars share no precise agreement as to his date, it seems quite certain that the Chronicler could not have compiled his work much before 400 B.C." William Sanford La Sor, David Allen Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 633.

composition of Isaiah 36-39 and the purpose of Proto-Isaiah as a whole. Finally, there is the question of the historical reliability of the Sennacherib account in Isaiah 36-39. Scholars have been attempting to answer these difficult questions for some time. We will now examine the past scholarship regarding these four exegetical issues.

III. Overview of the Current Scholarship Regarding Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20

Truth be told, it is virtually impossible to analyze and discuss the four major exegetical issues regarding Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20 in isolation from each other. Each individual issue is closely tied to the other three issues.²⁰² For the sake of clarity, we will first outline the prevailing scholarly views regarding these four issues and then analyze each view accordingly. When it comes to the issue of priority, there are three views: (a) II Kings 18-20 holds priority over Isaiah 36-39, (b) Isaiah 36-39 holds priority over II Kings 18-20, and (c) both accounts borrowed from an earlier source and therefore neither one borrowed from the other.²⁰³ When it comes to the literary unity of Isaiah 36-39, the prevailing scholarly opinion, stemming from the view that Isaiah 36-39 got its material from II Kings 18-20, holds that the text in II Kings 18-20 (and subsequently Isaiah 36-39) is a heavily (and somewhat sloppy) redacted conglomeration of two earlier sources. The result of this view is that the text in II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39 does *not* contain a clear literary unity. There are other scholars, though, who hold to the view that Isaiah 36-39 is a highly artistic literary account that holds together as a literary unity.

²⁰² For example, one who holds that Isaiah 36-39 was composed after II Kings 18-20 will also probably claim that the date of composition of Isaiah 36-39 was during the exile. This would, in turn, lead to the view that Isaiah 36-39 should not be seen as part of Proto-Isaiah, or at best an appendix of sorts, and therefore not only would any connections between Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39 would be considered the work of exilic redactors, but the historical reliability of Isaiah 36-39 would be called into question.

²⁰³ Various scholars who hold these three views are discussed in the following discussion.

There have also been a number of proposals regarding the date of composition of Isaiah 36-39. Such views range from dating Isaiah 36-39 during the time of the exile, to dating it during the time of Josiah, to dating it shortly after the time of Hezekiah and Isaiah, sometime during the reign of Manasseh. Finally, when it comes to the question of historical reliability, scholars tend to go in one of two directions. Some see Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20 as fictional accounts of Hezekiah's reign written by exilic redactors who intentionally re-wrote history to suit their theological agenda in which they wanted to show Hezekiah as a righteous king who, because he was faithful to YHWH, was rewarded for his faithfulness. Others hold, while there is no doubt that both accounts (a) are highly stylized from a literary point of view and (b) clearly have a theological point of view, that Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20 provide a relatively trustworthy account of the events during Hezekiah's reign. Not only is each exegetical issue fascinating in and of itself, but taken together, these four issues greatly affect how one views (a) the general *historical picture* put forth in Proto-Isaiah, (b) the overall *literary structure* of Proto-Isaiah, and, as is the focus of this thesis, (c) the *identity and function* of the Immanuel child in 7:14 within Proto-Isaiah. For this reason alone, we are impelled to clearly analyze and critique the exegetical issues surrounding Isaiah 36-39 so that we can further understand Isaiah 7:14.

III. 1. The Priority of II Kings 18-20 over Isaiah 36-39

The one who first suggested that II Kings 18-20 held priority over Isaiah 36-39 was Wilhelm Gesenius. He argued that Isaiah 36-39 was drawn from II Kings and that while II Kings 18:13-20:19 fit in with the overall structure of II Kings, its parallel account in Isaiah 36-39 did not fit in with the overall structure of Isaiah. Therefore II

Kings 18-20 was assumed to have priority over Isaiah 36-39. Christopher Seitz summarizes Gesenius' reasons for this as follows:

“Essentially, Isaiah is a text that has smoothed out difficulties in Kings, by means of shortening, consistency of rendering, and generally tidying up. In a classic argument, the ‘difficult text’ has priority, except where clumsy transpositions signal that an original sense has been disturbed. To this, Gesenius added his own logical observations: (1) the narratives conform to the style and larger plan of Kings, not Isaiah; (2) the Book of Isaiah continued to develop after Kings was completed, thus making the direction of dependence from Kings to Isaiah, not the reverse; (3) Isaiah 36-39 is analogous to Jeremiah 52.”²⁰⁴

This has become the dominant view among biblical scholars. Raymond F. Person, Jr., for example, speaking of Isaiah 36-39, states, “Since these chapters were copied from II Kings 18-20, Isaiah 36-39 are assumed to have a literary unity with the exception of the addition of Isaiah 38:9-20, which has no parallel in Kings and is generally assumed to have been added when the Kings passage was inserted into its Isaianic context.”²⁰⁵ Peter R. Ackroyd's belief that II Kings holds priority over Isaiah can be seen when he states, “Narrative and archival material concerning Hezekiah appears in II Kings 18-20, the main part of which is found also, in a partially deviant text, in Isaiah 36-39.”²⁰⁶ H.H. Rowley also acknowledges this common assumption when he states, “Much of this narrative [II Kings 18-19] stands also in Isaiah 36-37, and it is generally believed that it was taken by the compiler of the book of Isaiah from the account in Kings.”²⁰⁷ In addition to these three scholars there are many more who share this assumption.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 49.

²⁰⁵ Raymond F. Person, Jr. “II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39: A Text Critical Case Study in the Redaction History of the Book of Isaiah,” in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, (1999), 374.

²⁰⁶ Ackroyd, *The Biblical Interpretation of the Reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah*, 247.

²⁰⁷ Rowley, *Hezekiah's Reform and Rebellion*, 100.

²⁰⁸ Nadav Na'aman, in his article “Updating the Messages,” identifies even more scholars who have articulated this view of the priority of II Kings: (a) August H. Konkel, “The Sources of the Story of Hezekiah in the Book of Isaiah,” *VT* 43 (1993), 462-482; (b) Hugh G.M. Williamson, “Hezekiah and the Temple,” in *Text, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. M.V. Fox et al; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 47-52; (c) Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to*

III. 2. II Kings 18-20: Sources, Literary Structure, and Historical Reliability

The assumption that II Kings 18-20 holds priority over Isaiah 36-39 has led scholars to view these parallel texts in different ways. In terms of II Kings 18-20, scholars have tended to take up two issues. The first issue is that of the apparent redaction of sources within II Kings 18-20; the second issue is that of the historical reliability of II Kings 18-20. Scholars believe that the material in II Kings 18-20, particularly 18:13-20:21, is really a redacted account comprised from three different sources: 18:13-16 (Account A), 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 (Account B1), and II Kings 19:9b-35 (Account B2).²⁰⁹ Account A is generally regarded as the historically reliable account, whereas accounts B1 and B2 are considered to be theologically-charged, highly legendary accounts that are not historically reliable. How scholars eventually came to these conclusions is rather interesting. Once scholars determined that II Kings 18-20 held priority over Isaiah 36-39, they were faced with a problem: II Kings 18:14-16. Although II Kings 18:13 and Isaiah 36:1 corresponded with each other, and although II Kings 18:17ff and Isaiah 36:2ff corresponded with each other, II Kings 18:14-16 stood entirely on its own. For some reason, scholars surmise, the writer of Isaiah chose not to copy those verses.²¹⁰ According

Prophetic Literature (FOTL, 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 477-483; (d) Raymond F. Person, *The Kings-Isaiah and Kings Jeremiah Recensions* (BZAW 252; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1997), 5-79.

²⁰⁹ Virtually every scholar who has addressed the material in II Kings 18-20 has covered this view. A brief list of scholars is as follows: Mark W. Chavalas, "An Historian's Approach to Understanding the Accounts of Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah." *FH*, 27 (Sum 1995), 5-22. Mordechai Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem: Once or Twice?" *BAR* 27:1 (Jan-Feb 2001), 40-45, 69. A.K. Jenkins, "Hezekiah's Fourteenth Year." *VT* 26:3, (1976), 284-298. Richard S. Hess, "Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18-20," in *Zion, City of Our God*, (ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 23-41. Nadav Na'aman, "Updating the Messages: Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story and the Community of Babylonian Deportees," in *Like a Bird in a Cage*, (ed. Lester L. Grabbe: New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 201-219. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*. Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1967. Christopher Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

²¹⁰ "Because v. 13 has a parallel in Isa. 36:1, the suggestion has been made that v. 13 was originally connected to v. 17, and that vv. 14-16 are an insertion which was not in the manuscript copied by Isaiah." Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 70.

to Gesenius, the reason was that II Kings 18:14-16 provided a problematic and difficult reading, and therefore the writer of Isaiah attempted to smooth out the difficulty. In any case, II Kings 18:13-16 was deemed to be the most historical of the material in II Kings 18-19 because it seemed to coincide with what we are told about Sennacherib's invasion as recorded in the Assyrian annals. "Both sources are agreed upon the capture of the Judaeen countryside, the capitulation of Hezekiah without an assault on the city, and, in general, on the terms of the tribute."²¹¹ Because II Kings 18:13-16 is "verified" by the Assyrian annals, scholars have taken it to be the historically reliable account, as opposed to the narrative that follows it.

When it comes to "Account B" though, further problems arise, for II Kings 18:17-19:37 apparently "makes no reference to the events in A, and, in fact, takes no cognizance whatever of the reported capitulation."²¹² Given this apparent problem, scholars felt that they had to make sense of it. This brought about "a decided interest in strictly historical matters, in isolation from literary developments within Isaiah, to be sure, but also in isolation from literary developments in Kings outside the narrower unit 18:13-19:37."²¹³ Simply put, upon seeing this "problem" within II Kings, scholars have tried to figure out "what really happened" during Sennacherib's invasion of 701 BCE.

Beginning with Stade, scholars eventually accepted the theory that II Kings 18:13-19:37 was a combination of three different sources: II Kings 18:13-16 (Account A), II Kings 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 (Account B1), and II Kings 19:9b-35 (Account B2). Stade was the first scholar who suggested that II Kings 18:13-19:37 be divided up into two separate accounts. Despite the fact that II Kings 18:17-19:37 is presented in the text

²¹¹ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 72.

²¹² Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73.

²¹³ Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, 49.

as a unity, Stade believed that there was evidence of a redactor's seam in 19:9: the expression וַיָּשָׁב ("he returned"). This expression, it was argued, seemed to function as a logical beginning for B2. Based on this perceived seam, the main Sennacherib narrative was thought to be a compilation of two sources, 18:17-19:9a and 19:9b-37. It was argued that these two accounts shared a close parallelism in both structure and content. It seemed highly unlikely to scholars that a single account would repeat itself to the extent found in the Sennacherib account.²¹⁴ The only significant revision has been that of Brevard Childs, who has claimed the two accounts should be divided as follows: 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 and 19:9b-35.²¹⁵ Childs argues that 19:36-37 provides the proper ending of B1. Therefore, the last few verses in "Account B1" (II Kings 19:8-9a, 36-37) look like this:

⁸The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹When the king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia, "See, he has set out to fight against you," ³⁶Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷As he was worshiping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon succeeded him.

There are two nagging problems with this division, though. First, Childs points out that at the very point of this alleged seam at II Kings 19:9 there is a textual variant. II Kings reads וַיָּשָׁב ("he returned"), Isaiah 37:9 reads וַיִּשְׁמַע ("he heard"). What further complicates matters is that in 4QIs^a both variants are retained to where it reads "he heard and he returned."²¹⁶ Secondly, II Kings 19:36 is needed by both accounts B1 and B2. "B1 needs both a destination for Sennacherib's return in 9b as well as a setting for his death in v. 37. B2 requires not only Yahweh's successful defense of the city (predicted in v. 32),

²¹⁴ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73.

²¹⁵ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73.

²¹⁶ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 75.

but also the return of the Assyrian king to his own land (predicted in v. 33).”²¹⁷ To resolve this latter problem, Childs makes reference to Duhm²¹⁸ who argued that II Kings 19:33 was a secondary addition to the original text. His reasoning was that not only is the phrase נְאֻם־יְהוָה (“an oracle of YHWH”) “unexpected for an oracle in Kings which continues,” but that verse 33 is a composite of 19:28b and 32a, and stands in tension with the complete destruction of the Assyrians described in 19:35.²¹⁹

Childs’ ultimate conclusions regarding Accounts B1 and B2 differ slightly with many scholars who claim that both accounts are legendary. When it comes to B1, Childs seems to lean toward the view that at its core, the material in B1 “reflects ancient tradition with a genuinely historical setting.”²²⁰ Nevertheless he also acknowledges that “newer elements have entered into the account and have been formed into a unified story which bears the stamp of the Dtr. author.”²²¹ When it comes to B2, though, Childs claims that the account “has revealed the characteristics of this legendary source...” that contains a clear effort to portray Hezekiah as a type of faithful king.²²² He further concludes that given this understanding of B2 that we should be warned “against a simple-minded historical reading of the text.”²²³

This scholarly division of II Kings 18:17-19:37 has had an astounding effect on the quest to find out “what really happened” during Sennacherib’s invasion. The general understanding of these three sources among scholars has been that II Kings 18:13-16 contains the historically reliable account of Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 BCE, namely

²¹⁷ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 75.

²¹⁸ B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*3, (Gottingen, 1914), 247.

²¹⁹ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 75.

²²⁰ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 93.

²²¹ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 93.

²²² Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 103.

²²³ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 103.

because it seems to agree with Sennacherib's own annals; II Kings 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 and 19:9b-35, though, are considered to be legendary redactions from the exilic period. Therefore, "what really happened" in 701 BCE is that after Sennacherib invaded Judah in response to Hezekiah's rebellion and devastated most of Hezekiah's kingdom, Hezekiah paid tribute to Sennacherib in order to avert the destruction of Jerusalem. Sennacherib accepted Hezekiah's tribute and left Hezekiah on the throne in Jerusalem. Consequently, there was no glorious and miraculous sparing of Jerusalem by YHWH in 701 BCE. Hezekiah actually survived by the skin of his teeth, and Isaiah, far from supporting Hezekiah, actually had condemned Hezekiah's rebellion. This, quite obviously, has led to further skepticism of the biblical portrait of Hezekiah as a whole. Today, not only is the biblical account of the invasion of Sennacherib doubted by scholars, but the very picture the Bible gives us of Hezekiah himself has come under fire. This thesis, as will shortly be discussed in further detail, asserts that such overzealous skepticism has proven to be extremely detrimental to biblical scholarship.

III. 3. Isaiah 36-39: Literary Structure, Date, and Purpose

With the issues of priority and historical reliability already addressed within scholars' treatment of II Kings 18-20, the dominant questions regarding Isaiah 36-39 have tended to be in relation to its date of redaction and its function within Isaiah as a whole. In his work, *Zion's Final Destiny*, Christopher Seitz gives a detailed analysis of the various theories regarding the role of Isaiah 36-39 within the development of the book of Isaiah.²²⁴ Although there are many variations on this issue, essentially, since scholars generally believe that Isaiah 36-39 borrowed from II Kings 18-20, they have tended to

²²⁴ Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

push the redaction of Isaiah 36-39 to sometime long after the time of Isaiah and the first 35 chapters of Proto-Isaiah. Some, like R.E. Clements, claim that, whereas II Kings 18-20 was written during the reign of Josiah, the redaction of that material into Isaiah 36-39 happened after the composition of Isaiah 40-55 and inserted into its present position to act as a transitional bridge between First and Second Isaiah.²²⁵ Other scholars, like John Hayes and Stuart Irvine, hold that virtually all of Isaiah 1-39 goes back to the prophet Isaiah himself.²²⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear, as John Walton and P.R. Ackroyd both have pointed out, that Isaiah 38-39 is out of chronological order. These chapters have been put in their present position in order to look forward to the events of the Babylonian exile and the following chapters of Isaiah 40-66.²²⁷ It is perhaps this clear evidence of redaction that has caused many scholars to argue that the material in chapters 36-39 is the product of a much later time than the events they record. Any connections between chapters 36-39 and chapters 1-35, therefore, are viewed by many scholars as rather artificial attempts by later redactors driven by their own theological agendas.

IV. The Shortcomings of the Prevailing Current Scholarship

The views and opinions discussed above can be seen in virtually every scholarly work on both Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that these views are not unanimously held among scholars. There are dissenting voices, and

²²⁵ R.E Clements, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah." *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 53.

²²⁶ John Hayes and Stuart Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987).

²²⁷ Peter R. Ackroyd, "Isaiah 36-39: Structure and Function." in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala* (ed. W.C. Delsman et al; Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 3-21; John H. Walton, "New Observations on the Date of Isaiah," *JETS* 28 (June 1985): 129-132.

with good reason. As we will now see, these assumptions that are so prevalent in modern scholarship are in reality highly questionable and deeply flawed. Simply put, there are major chinks in the armor of the prevailing scholarship regarding Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20. Not only is it *not* so obvious that II Kings 18-20 holds priority over Isaiah 36-39, but it is also abundantly clear that the reasoning used to uphold the conventional belief that (a) the material in question is a compilation of three sources and that (b) the vast majority of this material is unhistorical and legendary, is highly speculative at best, with very little real evidence to support its arguments.

What one quickly realizes when analyzing these issues is that there is an element of cause and effect at work. The ultimate cause of the debates surrounding the biblical account of Sennacherib's invasion is the assumption that II Kings 18-20 has priority over Isaiah 36-39. The effect of this assumption was twofold: (a) the literary position of Isaiah 36-39 was called into question; and (b) the textual question of II Kings 18:13-16 brought up the question of the literary unity of II Kings 18-19, as well as the historical question concerning what really happened in 701 BCE. This led to the division of II Kings 18:13-19:37 into two separate accounts, which in turn led scholars to postulate that II Kings 18:13-16 was the true historical account, and accounts B1 and B2 were simply later redacted legends of Hezekiah. This dismissal of the historical reliability of 18:17-19:37, in turn, has led to scholars questioning the historical reliability of everything in the biblical accounts of Hezekiah's reign. Over time these *assumptions* are actually put forth as *evidence* to support the prevailing views of (a) the priority of II Kings 18-20, and (b) the historical *unreliability* of "accounts B1 and B2." In reality, though, what we have is a house built on sand. Brevard Childs is undoubtedly correct when he observes that "every

hypothetical reconstruction rests upon unproven assumptions to prevent the degree of historical probability needed to form a consensus.²²⁸

We therefore must question these assumptions made by modern biblical scholarship regarding these biblical accounts of Hezekiah's reign, particularly that of the invasion of Sennacherib. Although the main goal of this thesis is not to *prove* the historical reliability of the biblical accounts regarding the invasion of Sennacherib, it nevertheless asserts that at its core these biblical accounts should be regarded as historically reliable and that the accepted views of modern biblical scholarship regarding the biblical accounts of Sennacherib's invasion are deeply flawed. Simply put, what one believes about the historical reliability regarding biblical accounts of Hezekiah's reign will affect how one will understand the relationship between Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39, as well as the overall structure of Proto-Isaiah itself. While there has undoubtedly been creative literary shaping of the text by later scribal exegetes, to dismiss the majority of biblical accounts as mere fanciful projections by later theologically-biased redactors is very simplistic, naïve, and in actuality, uncritical.

Although this thesis readily admits that its argument for the literary bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah can be made on purely literary grounds, without any consideration of the text's historical reliability, it does not believe such an unhistorical argument would do justice to the integrity of the biblical text. Redaction and scribal exegesis does not mean that the redactors were either ignorant of the historical facts or deliberately trying to obscure them. Rather, it means they were attempting to highlight and explain how YHWH's purpose and covenant with Israel had played out within their history. In other words, what we have in Isaiah 36-39 is the product of later "inner-

²²⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 12.

biblical” exegesis by scribes of the exilic period who took the core historical events and records from the time of Hezekiah, reflected on the theological significance of those events, and re-shaped and edited them in order to bring about a theological reflection and understanding of those critical events of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and the invasion of Sennacherib. Although they obviously re-fashioned, perhaps considerably, these chapters during or after the exile, this thesis asserts that the core story and perspective had its roots in the actual historical events.

An example of the kind of modern biblical scholarship that this thesis is criticizing can be found in the work of R.E. Clements. In his work he clearly shows that he shares these assumptions of most modern scholars: (a) the priority of II Kings, (b) the legendary unhistorical status of II Kings 18:17-19:37, and (c) the late date of Isaiah 36-39 and the impact that has on understanding the book of Isaiah. Before we explore alternative views regarding the Sennacherib account in II Kings and Isaiah, we will first critique the work of Clements in order to show just how much this modern scholarly position is based on shifting sand.

V. R.E. Clements: *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*

In his book, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, Clements developed the prevailing scholarly assumptions regarding II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39 into a further argument regarding what he considers to be the origin of the theological belief of Zion’s inviolability. Although Clements does not specifically comment on the question of priority of either II Kings 18-20 or Isaiah 36-39, his position regarding the dating of this material is that it was composed during the reign of Josiah and therefore could not be considered to be related to the original work of Isaiah. Yet from the very beginning of his

work, Clements makes his position regarding II Kings 18:17-19:37/Isaiah 36-37 clear: it is “a late legendary version of what happened in 701, of which a more accurate historical picture is afforded by the Assyrian annals and the report of Hezekiah’s surrender in II Kings 18:13-16.”²²⁹ The question Clements attempts to answer, therefore, is, given the assumption that II Kings 18:17-19:37/Isaiah 36-37 is an unhistorical legend, how did this story of Jerusalem’s miraculous deliverance come about? Simply put, Clements’ answer to this question is as follows: the material in II Kings 18:17-20:21/Isaiah 36-39 was composed during the reign of Josiah with the purpose of inspiring and encouraging the Judeans at that time to throw off the yoke of Assyria. At that time Assyria’s stranglehold on the area seemed to be at an end, and this gave rise to the hopeful prospect that the kingdom of Judah would once again rise again in power and independence.

In order to prove his overall argument, Clements attempts to establish a number of fundamental points concerning: (a) what he believes Isaiah’s attitude toward Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria was during the years 705-701 BCE, (b) what he believes Isaiah had to say to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, and (c) what he believes Isaiah’s message was concerning Assyria as a conquering power.²³⁰ He attempts to make his arguments by taking his readers through various passages found within Proto-Isaiah that prophesy about Assyria then arguing that significant portions of these prophecies are, in fact, not original to the prophet Isaiah himself, but rather are redactions inserted into the text by later redactors during the reign of Josiah.

Clements first comments on Isaiah 30:1-5 and 31:1-3, passages in which Isaiah clearly condemns the attempt of the “rebellious children” of YHWH (i.e. those in Judah)

²²⁹ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 14.

²³⁰ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 29.

to make an alliance with Egypt. He dates these passages to 705 BCE and claims them as evidence that Isaiah thoroughly condemned and disapproved of Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria. Although Clements calls these prophecies a "clear condemnation of Hezekiah's plan to rebel against Assyria,"²³¹ the question must be asked, "Is it really that clear that Isaiah here is condemning Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria, or is he condemning those in Judah, perhaps even Hezekiah's decision, to appeal to Egypt for help in the rebellion?" Clements rejects this as a possibility when he says, "it cannot be said that it is to be understood simply as a rejection by the prophet of a treaty alliance with a foreign power on the grounds that all such alliances are signs of a want of faith in God."²³² Why not? Clements' reason is that although this condemnation of alliances with foreign powers is "undoubtedly a major theme with the prophet," these prophecies clearly state that the result of such an alliance would spell disaster for Judah and Egypt.²³³

Clements' logic here, though, is not convincing. When one reads these passages it is abundantly clear that Isaiah is condemning the decision to appeal to Egypt for help; it is not so clear that he is condemning the decision to rebel against Assyria. Those are two very different decisions, and Clements is wrongly asserting that they are one and the same. The passages clearly prophesy that such an alliance will bring about "shame and disgrace" (30:5) and that both the helper and those who are helped "will fall" (31:3). And indeed, Sennacherib's invasion did, in fact, devastate a major portion of Judah, and the help from Egypt proved to be ineffective. But there is simply nothing in the passages that clearly condemns the rebellion itself. Clements is forcing an interpretation of these passages that simply is not clearly stated. In fact, Clements further forces his argument

²³¹ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 31.

²³² Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 31.

²³³ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 31.

when he cites Isaiah 31:4 as evidence that Isaiah condemned Hezekiah's decision to rebel against Assyria. It states:

“For thus the LORD said to me,
As a lion or a young lion growls over its prey, and—
when a band of shepherds is called out against it—
is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise,
so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight
upon Mount Zion and upon its hill.”

Clements claims that the phrase “to fight upon Mount Zion” indicates that YHWH's action is directed *against* Jerusalem. Yet he completely ignores 31:5-9 which say:

“Like birds hovering overhead, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it.
Turn back to him whom you have deeply betrayed, O people of Israel.
For on that day all of you shall throw away your idols of silver and idols of gold,
which your hands have sinfully made for you.
Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of mortals;
and a sword, not of humans, shall devour him;
he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor.
His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic,”
says the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

These verses clearly prophesy that YHWH will protect Jerusalem and will turn back Assyria. Yet Clements conveniently ignores the immediate context in which 31:4 is found; and he completely ignores 32:1-8, which quite clearly *contrasts* the plans of the king who will “reign in righteousness” (32:1) with the “fools” who speak folly and “villains” who devise wicked devices. When these verses are considered within their context, Clements' argument that 30:1-5 and 31:1-4 contain blanket condemnations of Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria simply fails to convince. Rather, the impression one gets is that chapters 30-32 contain condemnations of some in Judah whose specific plans for the rebellion contrasted with those of Hezekiah.

Clements then puts forth Isaiah 22:1-4 as a prophecy in which Isaiah “severely castigates the citizens of Jerusalem for their behavior after the deliverance of the city in 701.”²³⁴ He further asserts that this prophecy was added after 587 BCE. What Clements concludes regarding this prophecy is that “it is very clear from this passage that nothing at all is implied about a remarkable and unexpected defeat of the Assyrian army which had been facing Jerusalem.”²³⁵ He also alludes to Isaiah 1:4-8 and claims that this prophecy, like 22:1-4, is a prophecy from 701 BCE, “confidently ascribed to Isaiah [that] offers no support at all to the belief that Jerusalem had been the scene of a quite unexpected defeat of the Assyrians.”²³⁶

Once again, though, Clements’ arguments not only fail to convince, but also are self-contradictory. First of all, he fails to notice that he claims 22:1-4 “was added after 587” then turns around and claims that 22:1-4, along with 1:4-8, are both prophecies from 701 BCE that are “confidently ascribed to Isaiah.” Second of all, one must question his assertion that 22:1-4 is a prophecy addressed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem *after* Sennacherib’s withdrawal in 701 BCE. While no one expects that the chapters in the book of Isaiah are in exact chronological order, one has to wonder why the author (or even final redactors) of Isaiah would put a prophecy that condemns Jerusalem’s joyous reaction after Sennacherib’s withdrawal in chapter 22, a full 14-15 chapters *before* the Sennacherib account is found. Given the fact that a mere one chapter lies between 22:1-4 and chapter 20, a chapter that tells about Sargon’s attack on Ashdod, it seems to be much more logical to assume that the focus of 22:1-4 is on the Ashdod campaign of 714 BCE. Thirdly, Clements once again overstates his case when he so confidently ascribes 1:4-8

²³⁴ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 33.

²³⁵ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 34.

²³⁶ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 35.

specifically to 701 BCE. As will be argued later, part of this thesis' argument regarding the "bookend" structure of Proto-Isaiah is that chapters 1-6 form a type of prologue to Isaiah, and therefore is meant to act as almost a "thesis statement" that gives an overarching picture of Judah's dilemma during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. To isolate specific passages as originated from specific years (i.e. 701 BCE) is to completely ignore the literary structure of this portion of Isaiah; Clements assumes too much and makes the passages say more than they were intended. Fourthly, when faced with the hopeful verse of 1:9 that says, "If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah," Clements once again dismisses it as a later addition that was inserted sometime after 587 BCE. His reasoning is that since it is *hopeful* in tone it just could not possibly have anything to do with a prophecy that contains *threatening* language. In Clements' view, Isaiah simply could not possibly give threatening prophecies *as well as* give hope for the future.

One final example we will look at from Clements' argument is that of Isaiah 10:5-19. While Clements acknowledges that this passage, along with others throughout Isaiah, does in fact give a "very clear and decided declaration" that there would be a time when Assyria would be punished by YHWH, his treatment of 10:5-19 is rather curious. He first discounts verses 10-12 as separate glosses that were added at a later time in Isaiah's ministry. The "original" prophecy of Isaiah was actually 10:5-9, 13-15. This prophecy, Clements claims, is "a foundation for the belief that Isaiah had foretold that a time would come when the king of Assyria would be defeated and punished, but not that Isaiah connected this in any way with the time or circumstances of Hezekiah's revolt against

Sennacherib, which we know Isaiah condemned.”²³⁷ In other words, yes, Isaiah prophesied that YHWH would punish Assyria someday, but no, Isaiah condemned Hezekiah’s revolt against Assyria. Yet what about 10:16-19, which prophesies that YHWH will “send a wasting sickness” among the Assyrian warriors? Doesn’t that seem to possibly point forward to the events of 701 BCE and therefore seem to approve of Hezekiah’s rebellion? Clements says no; rather these verses as well come from later editors from the time of Josiah’s reign.

Clements’ conclusions, therefore, can be summed up in this way: (a) Isaiah completely condemned Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria; (b) Isaiah condemned the people of Jerusalem for celebrating Sennacherib’s withdrawal, and instead claimed it was a disaster; and (c) although Isaiah prophesied that YHWH would one day punish Assyria, he was definitely not referring to 701 BCE. Clements’ conclusions are quite troubling when one considers the fact that the picture put forth in both Isaiah and II Kings is the exact opposite of everything Clements argues. Yet this does not seem to faze Clements at all. By simply cutting and pasting various prophecies throughout Proto-Isaiah and by dismissing every verse that seems to point to YHWH punishing Assyria and protecting Jerusalem in 701 BCE, Clements has succeeded in reconstructing an account of Hezekiah’s reign that runs completely contradictory to the biblical testimony. What is perhaps even more astounding than this is that when claiming that those passages in Isaiah that seem to support the idea of YHWH’s miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BCE are really the work of redactors working in Josiah’s reign, Clements makes the additional claim that “these passages were never intended to be addressed, even retrospectively, to the events that had taken place in 701 BCE. They merely affirm, from

²³⁷ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 39.

the vantage point of the weakening of Assyrian control of Judah in Josiah's reign, that the final overthrow of that power which Isaiah had announced was now imminent."²³⁸ Lest it be misunderstood, what Clements is claiming is that certain redactors in Josiah's reign looked forward to Assyria's downfall, but intentionally made it look like their redactions were actually from the mouth of Isaiah before the year 701 BCE. What is more, according to Clements, even though these Josianic redactors did this, they didn't really intend for people to think that their redactions that they put in the mouth of Isaiah were actually pre-701 BCE.

The ultimate problem with Clements' argument is not so much that his conclusions run in direct contradiction to the biblical testimony of Isaiah, II Kings and II Chronicles (although they most certainly do), but that his argument begins and ends with assumptions. What he puts forth as evidence is not really evidence at all, but rather fragments of scripture ripped out of the context in which they are presented to us. Clements claims Isaiah completely condemned Hezekiah's actions and points to verses that (a) are *not* clear in any condemnation of Hezekiah and (b) are not convincingly argued to have originated in the years 705-501 BCE. So how can he claim these verses support his argument? Because he is interpreting them in the light of his assumption that Isaiah condemned Hezekiah.

Furthermore, Clements claims that the events of 701 BCE were not seen as glorious in any way, and that in reality it was a humiliating and devastating defeat for Hezekiah who escaped by the skin of his teeth. To support this claim, Clements points to verses that prophesy destruction and doom. Yet when confronted with verses that clearly prophesy that YHWH would turn back and humiliate the Assyrian forces and that clearly

²³⁸ Clements, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 51.

point forward to the events in Isaiah 36-37, Clements casually dismisses them as later additions by redactors during Josiah's reign. How does he know this? Because he has already pre-determined that the events of 701 BCE were not glorious, and that therefore the verses in question had to have been the work of later redactors who were trying to "re-write history" as a means of inspiring Josiah to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Therefore, instead of letting the passages within their context determine his reading of the text and his understanding of the historical events in question, Clements is letting his assumptions and presuppositions of what he feels must have happened in history determine his reading of the text.

Now granted, all reading of all historical texts, be they biblical or not, are determined in some way or another by certain assumptions one has about the reliability and validity of those texts. This takes us back to the foundational argument by Provan and Long that was discussed in our first chapter. Clements clearly feels that the biblical accounts concerning Sennacherib's invasion, as well as many other passages within Proto-Isaiah, are, historically-speaking, untrustworthy. But does he have valid reasons for doubting the historical validity of these texts to the extent that he does? This thesis asserts that, if he has valid reasons, he certainly has not articulated them well. The fundamental problem with the Clements' arguments and Childs' explanations surrounding the biblical accounts of Sennacherib's invasion is that they have rejected any confidence in the *biblical text that we have* and have chosen instead to reconstruct what they believe must have happened *without any real substantial evidence to support their reconstruction*.

We use Clements' work as a mere example of a serious problem within modern biblical studies, for he is not alone in his assumptions and reconstructions of biblical

history. Now it is obvious that within biblical studies scholars must speculate on certain issues. Yet if the goal of biblical exegesis is to try to understand the intended meaning of the biblical text, the honest biblical scholar must question the methods and assumptions of anyone whose reconstruction of a biblical event or a biblical text diverge so sharply from the testimony presented to us in the biblical text itself. Instead of attempting to rationalize our own revisions of the text according to our own assumptions of what must have happened in history, we should attempt to understand and exegete the biblical text on its own terms, the way in which it is presented to us, taking into full consideration historical factors, and possibly using a certain amount of reconstruction to help us more fully understand the message that is presented within the literary structure of the text.

Now this thesis is not advocating what Childs calls “a simple-minded historical reading of the text.”²³⁹ There are very difficult exegetical problems surrounding the Sennacherib accounts and they cannot be easily dismissed. Yet when it is obvious that the scholarly attempts to make sense of a difficult text are, in fact, ten times more difficult and confusing than the text itself, we must take a step back and reevaluate the scholarly assumptions upon which such arguments are based. We must ask four questions: (a) Is it so obvious that II Kings 18-20 holds priority over Isaiah 36-39? (b) Is it so obvious that the Sennacherib account found in both II Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37 is really a compilation of two to three separate sources? (c) Is it so obvious that “Accounts B1 and B2” in II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39 are really later legendary additions? and (d) Is it so obvious that the material in Isaiah 36-39 was written either during the time of Josiah or later during the exile? It is to these questions we will now turn.

²³⁹ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 103.

VI. A Question of Priority: Isaiah 36-39 or II Kings 18-20

As has already been mentioned, the general scholarly consensus is that the redactor of Isaiah borrowed the material in II Kings 18-20 and put it into his own work, thus comprising Isaiah 36-39. We must now ask whether or not such a view is worthy of the virtually universal scholarly consensus it has received. It was Gesenius who first argued for this on the basis that II Kings 18:13-19:37 seemed to be “an integral part of the books, whereas Isaiah 36-37 appear to be an appendage.”²⁴⁰ According to Gesenius, the narrative just seemed to fit better into II Kings, a work that was almost entirely narrative. Such a long narrative found within a book like Isaiah that consists of mostly prophetic oracles seemed rather odd to Gesenius, and thus he concluded that Isaiah borrowed from II Kings. However, in response to Gesenius’ argument, K.A.D. Smelik has made a compelling case for the primacy of the Isaiah text. While admitting that at first glance such a long narrative within Isaiah does seem rather odd, he makes the argument that II Kings 18:17-20:19 does not really fit into the context of II Kings either. He points out that Isaiah is the only prophet from among books of the Latter Prophets who appears in a narrative in Kings.²⁴¹ In other words, it is extremely odd that we find in II Kings such a long narrative in which Isaiah plays such an important role for the simple reason that there is nothing else like this anywhere else in the book of Kings. On the other hand, though, Smelik points out that in the book of Isaiah there are a number of narrative sections that focus on the prophet Isaiah, and even points out that there is a close parallel to Isaiah 7.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ K.A.D. Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy: The Purpose of Isaiah 36 and 37” in *Crises and Perspectives* (ed. J. de Moor, et al. ; Leiden: E J Brill, 1986), 71.

²⁴¹ Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 72.

²⁴² Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 72.

It must be pointed out, though, that not only is there a narrative section in Isaiah 7, but there is also one in Isaiah 20, set during the time of the Ashdod campaign, where Isaiah goes naked through the streets of Jerusalem for three years. Given this fact, we must consider the significance of having the major narrative sections in Isaiah being set (a) during the very beginning of Assyria's dominance over Judah, (b) during Assyria's major military actions of the Ashdod campaign that had tremendous implications for Judah, and (c) during the most significant threat to Jerusalem in 701 BCE. Given the placement of these earlier narratives in Isaiah—the beginning of Assyrian dominance and a major military campaign in the middle of Assyria's dominance in the region—it should not be surprising at all to find a third narrative that tells of a major defeat of Assyria by the hand of YHWH.

Furthermore, note the connection of the first and third narratives to the prophetic role of Isaiah. Immediately after the prophetic call of Isaiah in Isaiah 6, we have a narrative of Isaiah's first recorded prophetic action—his appeal to Ahaz to put his faith in YHWH during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, and Ahaz's subsequent lack of faith in YHWH. Proto-Isaiah thus ends with yet another narrative, one of Isaiah's last recorded prophetic action—his advising Hezekiah to put his faith in YHWH during the time of Sennacherib's invasion. By contrast, when one looks at the narrative of Sennacherib's invasion within II Kings, it seems to be unusually long compared to other narratives of other kings found in the book of Kings. It seems much more likely that II Kings 18:1-12 contain material more in line with the other material found throughout the book of Kings, whereas 18:14-16, copied from another unknown source, or possibly written by the redactor himself, was interwoven with Isaiah's narrative into the larger narrative unit of

18:13-20:19, only to be concluded with the standard conclusion found in the book of Kings in 20:20-21. Under the weight of this evidence, Gesenius' suggestion that the narrative seems to fit better within II Kings seems to crumble.

The argument that the writer of the book of Kings borrowed this material from Proto-Isaiah is further strengthened by following the general rules of textual criticism, which state that it is more likely that a later text adds to an original text rather than subtracts from it. Yes, it is also possible to argue the most difficult reading is usually the earlier reading, and that II Kings 18-20 is more difficult than Isaiah 36-39, but we must ask, "What is it that makes it more difficult? Is it a corruption in the text, or rather scholarly ignorance and misunderstanding of the literary artistry of the writers/scribal exegetes? A simple glance at the parallel Sennacherib accounts in Isaiah 36-37 and II Kings 18-19 will show that the latter is true. Although the literary structure and artistry will be discussed later, one must compare these two accounts on purely textual grounds.

Upon looking at the parallel texts of Isaiah 36-37 and II Kings 18-19, one can see that these "parallel" accounts are not completely identical.²⁴³ First, II Kings 18:1-12, a section clearly in the mold of how other kings throughout II Kings are summarized, is unique to II Kings. In it, we are told about the fall of Samaria during the early part of Hezekiah's reign. As scholars have pointed out, there is a clear shaping of this material along the Deuteronist's view of the history of Israel: bad kings break covenant with YHWH and good kings keep covenant with YHWH. Secondly, II Kings 18:14-16, a brief section that one can argue was inserted between what was originally Isaiah 36:1 and 36:2, is also unique to II Kings. It tells about Hezekiah's payment of tribute to the king of

²⁴³ One can view the chart comparing these two accounts in Appendix C. Sections highlighted in blue represent text unique to II Kings. Those highlighted in red are unique to Isaiah.

Assyria in an attempt to spare Jerusalem from destruction at the hands of Sennacherib. Finally, although the bulk of the narratives are virtually identical, there still are a number of variants found in the II Kings narrative that can best be described as minor elaborations on the Isaiah narrative. Virtually every instance where there is a small variation, we see that the text in II Kings expands and elaborates on the Isaiah text.²⁴⁴

One can reasonably deduce from these facts that the writer of II Kings got his material of 18:1-12 and 18:14-16 from an original source, probably that of the Annals of the Kings of Judah, and then incorporated the material he borrowed from Isaiah 36-39 into his narrative about Hezekiah. The reason for this could very well be that the story of Hezekiah was already so important within Jewish history that the writer felt it was important to give extra attention to Hezekiah within the book of Kings. Yet if Isaiah had copied from the book of Kings, one has to wonder why he (a) chose not to include II Kings 18:1-12, and (b) why he chose to use 18:13, exclude II Kings 18:14-16, and then pick up the story again at 18:17. Simply put, given Hezekiah's status in Jewish history, it would make sense for the writer of the book of Kings to add the Hezekiah material from Proto-Isaiah; yet it would not make sense for the writer of Proto-Isaiah to omit part of the Hezekiah narrative in II Kings.

Given this brief argument that points toward the priority of Isaiah 36-39 over II Kings 18-20, it also must be readily admitted that there is a third alternative. It is quite possible that both the writer of Isaiah and the writer of II Kings borrowed the Sennacherib account from an earlier unnamed source that is completely lost to us.

²⁴⁴ For example, one could see why, in II Kings 18:36, the writer would elaborate on Isaiah 36:21, and clarify that the "they" in Isaiah 36:21 is a reference to "the people" as a whole, and not just Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah; but it would not make sense why the writer of Isaiah would take a clear reference to "the people" in II Kings 18:36 and make it more ambiguous in Isaiah 36:21.

Perhaps this “original account” was comprised of what is found in II Kings 18:13-20:21, and the writer of Isaiah chose to exclude the material that is now II Kings 14-16; perhaps this “original account” was comprised of what is found in Isaiah 36-39, and the writer of II Kings chose to add the material that is now II Kings 18:14-16 and to clarify a number of things throughout the account. The fact is that we simply cannot know for certain. Based on the information we do have, though, we can say for certain that the argument that II Kings 18-20 holds priority over Isaiah 36-39 is by no means a strong argument. To base so much scholarly work on such a weak argument is highly questionable.

Although it is possible that the writers of both II Kings and Isaiah gleaned their material from the same earlier source, this thesis is still inclined to take the position that Isaiah 36-39 holds priority over II Kings 18-20 for essentially two reasons. First, we simply do not have the earlier source. The earlier source hypothesis is an argument from silence. There simply is no way to either verify or falsify the claim that there was an earlier source. It is a possibility that only gains credibility if both of the other two possible explanations fail to convince. This brings us to the second reason. Not only on purely textual grounds does it seem that II Kings 18-20 expanded the material found in Isaiah 36-39, but from a literary point of view, the material in question fits much better into the literary structure of Isaiah, not II Kings. It is this literary argument we will now make as we ask the second of our three questions: “Is it so obvious that the Sennacherib account found in both II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39 is really a compilation of two to three separate sources?”

VII. The Literary Unity of Isaiah 36-39

The argument that has been put forth by scholars like Stade and Childs concerning how the Sennacherib account in Isaiah and II Kings are a compilation of two accounts (B1 and B2) has already been outlined. Although Childs speculated that these two accounts both got their material from a common source²⁴⁵ Smelik suggests that when read from a literary point of view, Isaiah 36-37 does not so much point toward two separate accounts that have been redacted together, but rather to a highly stylized account that uses repetition as a literary device. “Repetition,” Smelik argues, “is a common phenomenon in biblical narrative,” and that such repetition “need not indicate a combination of earlier sources.”²⁴⁶ Smelik makes his argument by pointing to a number of examples of three-fold repetition in the Sennacherib account.

The first example can be found in the three Assyrian messages found within the account: (a) the Rabshakeh’s first speech, (b) the Rabshakeh’s second speech, and (c) Sennacherib’s letter. According to Stade, Sennacherib’s letter is simply a duplicate of the Rabshakeh’s two speeches, and therefore is assigned to account B2. Smelik, though, points out the three-fold nature of the Assyrian taunts. In the Rabshakeh’s first speech, he tries to convince Hezekiah that he has no one to rely on; in the Rabshakeh’s second speech, he tries to separate the people of Judah from their king; and in Sennacherib’s letter, he tries to separate Hezekiah from YHWH, and ends up blaspheming by calling YHWH a deceiver.²⁴⁷ Smelik’s point is simple: “these three messages are not duplicates:

²⁴⁵ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 98.

²⁴⁶ Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 76.

²⁴⁷ Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 81.

each has its own function in the narrative and together they enhance the suspense in the narrative: will the Assyrian king taunt the Living God with impunity?”²⁴⁸

The second example can be seen in Isaiah’s three oracles found in 37:6-7, 37:22-29, and 37:33-35. Each oracle is vital to understanding the overall structure of the Sennacherib narrative. Smelik first discusses the first oracle in 37:6-7, in which YHWH says that he will “put a spirit” in Sennacherib, and that Sennacherib will “hear something to hear,” return to his land, and then fall by sword. This oracle is quite ambiguous and presents a number of questions the reader must wait to get answers for. It does not take long, though, for the reader to understand what kind of “spirit” YHWH will put in Sennacherib. This “spirit” is not so much a spirit of panic as it is a spirit of pride.²⁴⁹ We know this, Smelik argues, because of what comes next in 37:8-9: a three-fold repetition of the phrase “he heard,” the last of which Stade ironically characterized as a “seam” between accounts B1 and B2. In 37:8 we find that the Rabshakeh “heard” that Sennacherib had left Lachish to fight against Libnah. Why did Sennacherib do this? We learn in 37:9 that Sennacherib had “heard” that King Tirhakah had come out to fight against him. We are further told that *when* Sennacherib “heard” about this move by King Tirhakah, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with a letter in which he further threatens Hezekiah with the third message (as discussed above). Now Stade and Childs, by assuming that there is a “seam” in 37:9b, would have us think that in the B1 account, when Sennacherib “heard” about the Egyptian threat, he was filled with a spirit of panic and “returned” to his own land, only to be killed later on (37:37-38). This would seem quite an odd move on the part of Sennacherib, given the fact that the Rabshakeh had

²⁴⁸ Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 81.

²⁴⁹ Smelik “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 83.

mocked Egypt's ability to help Hezekiah earlier in 36:6, 9. Simply put, the proposed reading of B1 does not make sense. On the other hand, if taken as a literary unity, the picture becomes quite clear. Smelik argues, "Instead of withdrawing, Sennacherib continues to taunt the Living God. It is not the Egyptian ally who will silence the Assyrian king, but the Lord Himself, as appears only at the very end of the narrative. By supposing that in the first account the news of Tirhakah's arrival ended Sennacherib's attack, Stade actually walked into the trap the author has set for the reader."²⁵⁰ By the end of the narrative, we see precisely how this first oracle has been fulfilled. YHWH was able to use the very Egyptian alliance which Isaiah had earlier condemned by using it to ignite a spirit of pride and arrogance on Sennacherib's part, which caused him to further taunt YHWH, which ultimately led to his humiliation and death.²⁵¹

In the second oracle found in 37:22-29, we find YHWH's condemnation of Sennacherib's arrogance (so clearly displayed by the Rabshakeh's two speeches and Sennacherib's mocking letter to Hezekiah), and the prophecy that YHWH will turn Sennacherib back on the way by which he came. Not only does this second oracle build off of the first oracle and Sennacherib's blasphemous taunting letter to Hezekiah, but it looks forward to Sennacherib's humiliating failure. The third oracle found in 37:33-35, elaborates on the second oracle by specifically saying that Sennacherib's army would not even shoot an arrow into Jerusalem, let alone enter it, and that he would return on the way by which he came. The reason for this would not be because of some spectacular military defense by Hezekiah or Tirhakah or any other human king. We are told in this third oracle that YHWH Himself would defend Jerusalem.

²⁵⁰ Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy," 77.

²⁵¹ Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy," 84.

All three of these oracles find their fulfillment in Isaiah 37:36-38. These final verses of the Sennacherib narrative “allude to the three oracles together. Therefore it is impossible to divide these verses into two strands without serious exegetical loss.”²⁵² Smelik’s literary reading of the Sennacherib account in Isaiah is a convincing argument that it should be regarded as a single literary unity, and not as two separate accounts that have been redacted together. His exegesis of the narrative makes sense at every point in the narrative. By contrast, the arguments of scholars like Gesenius, Stade, Childs, and Clements appear to be convoluted, confusing, and ultimately incomprehensible.

VIII. The Occasion and Purpose of Isaiah 36-39

The next issue to deal with is the place of chapters 36-39 within the overall structure of Proto-Isaiah. This goes hand in hand with the question of the date and purpose of Isaiah 36-39. We must remember the Sennacherib account of Isaiah 36-37 is not the only narrative that is shared by Isaiah and II Kings. There is also the account of Hezekiah’s illness (Isaiah 38/II Kings 20:1-11) and the account of the visit from the envoys of Merodach-baladan of Babylon (Isaiah 39/II Kings 20:12-19). Not only does YHWH’s deliverance of Jerusalem (chapters 36-37) seem to wrap up so many themes found in Isaiah, but the twin episodes of Hezekiah’s illness and the visit from the envoys of Babylon, which are clearly out of chronological order,²⁵³ act, as so many scholars have already noted, as an “editorial bridge” between Proto and Deutero-Isaiah.²⁵⁴ Therefore,

²⁵² Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 84-85.

²⁵³ It does not make chronological sense to have Isaiah tell Hezekiah that Jerusalem will be delivered from the hand of the king of Assyria (38:6) when it had just taken place in chapter 37.

²⁵⁴ Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy,” 72; John H. Walton, “New Observations on the Date of Isaiah,” JETS, 130: “Speaking hypothetically, if chapters 40-66 had not originally been part of the oracles of Isaiah, that truncated First Isaiah would have had no reason to have the chronological reversal. The reversal only becomes meaningful when chapter 39 introduces chapters 40-66.”

the sheer placement of chapters 36-39 within Isaiah, Smelik argues, points to the fact that these chapters are a key element in the literary structure of Isaiah.²⁵⁵ In other words, one can see why Proto-Isaiah would be concluded with the narrative about the envoys from Babylon; they foreshadow the Babylonian exile that chapter 40 is addressing. Yet there is no logical reason as to why the book of Kings, a narrative that chronologically takes us through the reigns of the kings of both Israel and Judah, would place an episode like the visit from the envoys of Babylon so clearly out of chronological order.

In addition to Smelik's arguments for the primacy of Isaiah, there are also a number of other elements to be considered, such as the dating of each book. While it is true that no one is able to put forth a specific date for the composition of either books of Kings or Isaiah, the general dating for the book of Kings is believed to be anywhere between 561 BCE, the last date mentioned in II Kings (when Jehoaichin was released from captivity), and 538 BCE, the date when Cyrus the Great made the declaration that the Jews were free to return to their homeland.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Jewish tradition holds that Jeremiah was the writer of the book of Kings.²⁵⁷ Many scholars, seeing the similarities between the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, and speculating these works were compiled into a single text, the Deuteronomic history, have speculated on the possibility that the Deuteronomist was, in fact, Jeremiah. That being said, it is also acknowledged that the book of Kings underwent revision during the exilic period.

²⁵⁵ Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy," 72-74.

²⁵⁶ Walton observes the majority of modern scholarship has generally accepted the fact that the author of Kings was the "Deuteronomist," and that the general consensus has been that the "Deuteronomist history" went through two to three stages. David Freedman proposes the three stages as being during the times of Hezekiah, Josiah, and the early exilic period. Frank Cross proposes two stages: the time of the late Kingdom and the time of the Exile. Walton then points out that Childs, Montgomery, Gray, Fohrer and Eissfeldt have all come to this general conclusion. "New Observations on the Date of Isaiah," 131.

²⁵⁷ "Jeremiah wrote the book that bears his name, the Book of Kings, and Lamentations." Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Baba Bathra, Folio 15a.

The book of Isaiah, though, tends to be a bit more complex. On one hand, there is virtually universal agreement concerning the division of Isaiah into at least two parts: Proto-Isaiah (chapters 1-39) and Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-66).²⁵⁸ The reason for this is because whereas chapter 39 ends with the reign of Hezekiah and looks ahead to a future Babylonian captivity, chapter 40 begins with a prophetic call to come out of the Babylonian captivity. Given the fact that the last certain event in Hezekiah's reign was Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BCE, and the end of the exile came about with Cyrus' decree in 538 BCE, it is rightfully seen as impossible that one person could have written the entirety of the book of Isaiah. Most scholars attribute the bulk of Proto-Isaiah to the original prophet Isaiah who lived during the eighth century BCE, and Deutero-Isaiah to later exilic and post-exilic writers. As with the book of Kings, the book of Isaiah is seen to have also passed through a number of redactions.

Beyond these general dates, though, not much more can be definitely said concerning the dates of composition of the book of Kings and the book of Isaiah. Given this fact, it is extremely odd that so many scholars have quickly assumed that the book of Kings was composed before the book of Isaiah. If anything, the evidence points in the opposite direction. First, it is generally acknowledged that the bulk of Isaiah 1-39 has its roots in the original prophet Isaiah himself, writing before the exile. Isaiah 1:1 itself begins with the opening, "The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." Furthermore, we know from Isaiah 6 that YHWH called Isaiah to be a prophet in the year King Uzziah died. This would have been somewhere around 750 BCE. We also know that Isaiah 36-39 recounts the events of Hezekiah's reign: Sennacherib's invasion,

²⁵⁸ Some scholars made a further division with Trito-Isaiah (chapters 56-66).

Hezekiah's illness and recovery, and the visit of the envoys from Merodach-baladan. Yet starting in Isaiah 40 we see YHWH calling for the exiles to come out of exile. Hence, there is a gap from roughly 701 BCE to 537 BCE between Isaiah 39 and 40—there is no mention of Manasseh, or Josiah, or the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Since the return from exile happened in the late sixth century BCE, most scholars rightly agree that Isaiah 40-66 were not written by the historical Isaiah of the eighth century BCE, but rather by later exilic redactors, possibly his disciples who prophesied and wrote in his name. In any case, the opening verse of Isaiah that mentions Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah is a clear indication that the material in chapters 1-39 should be seen as a unit. Therefore, although it is true that the book of Isaiah as a whole was not fully compiled and redacted until exilic or post-exilic times, the content found in chapters 1-39 should be considered as having originated in the eighth century BCE. Even scholars who might dispute this must admit that this is the *clear intended impression* given to us by the scribal exegetes who finalized the book of Isaiah, based on the twin facts that Isaiah 1:1 mentions Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and that Isaiah 6 begins with a mention of Uzziah and Isaiah 39 ends with Hezekiah.

The book of Kings, on the other hand, records the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah right up to the time of the Babylonian exile of 587 BCE. Furthermore, throughout the book of Kings there is a familiar refrain that tells the reader that if he cares to know more about any particular king that they are written in either the Annals of the Kings of Israel or the Annals of the Kings of Judah. Quite obviously, the book of Kings was written after the fact—the writer of Kings used these annals in the composition of his own narratives. This places the composition of the book of Kings either during or after

the exile—long after the composition of Proto-Isaiah. While there is no doubt that the books of Kings and Isaiah underwent redaction during the exile, one thing is clear: the scribal exegetes of the book of Isaiah took an already existing Proto-Isaiah (*traditium*) and shaped it into the present final form of Isaiah 1-39 (*traditio*) to fit in with what was written in the exilic work of Deutero-Isaiah. The redactor of the book of Kings, on the other hand, composed his work by taking sections from the Annals of the Kings of Israel and Judah and redacting them within his own exilic composition. Therefore, if we know that he used earlier pre-exilic works, and that Proto-Isaiah was also pre-exilic, it is reasonable to assume that the writer of Kings could very well have borrowed chapters 36-39 from Proto-Isaiah as well.

We also must take into consideration the fact that the writer of Chronicles makes reference to the book of Isaiah. When summing up his narrative about Hezekiah, the writer of II Chronicles states in 32:32 that the other events in Hezekiah's reign "are recorded in the visions of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel." Two points can be made here. First, this "book of the kings of Judah and Israel" is not a reference to the book of Kings, but rather to the source that both the writer of the book of Kings and the writer of the book of Chronicles referred to when writing their respective works. What this shows is that since Isaiah in some form (i.e. Proto-Isaiah) was circulated in the exilic community along with the royal annals of Judah, it was most likely composed before the exile. In fact, most scholars agree to this. Second, we must acknowledge that the fact that the Sennacherib account in II Chronicles shares the same basic storyline as Isaiah 36-37 is further indication that the pre-exilic Proto-Isaiah already contained the account of Sennacherib's invasion found in Isaiah 36-37.

Hence, the material in Isaiah 36-39, though probably *shaped* by the exilic community to act as a literary bridge to Isaiah 40-66, was nevertheless *already present* in Proto-Isaiah text; it was not added to the Proto-Isaiah text by the exilic community.

Furthermore, since this shows that the writer of II Chronicles borrowed from the book of [Proto]-Isaiah, it is not that much of a stretch to assume that that it could have been used in a similar fashion by the exilic or post-exilic writer of the book of Kings. If one accepts the proposal that Isaiah 1-39 was primarily written in the eighth century BCE by the prophet Isaiah himself and that the book of Kings was written in either the exilic or post-exilic period, one can logically allow the possibility that the writer of Kings had Isaiah 1-39 in some form at his disposal as he compiled his own work.

This leaves one final question: when was Isaiah 36-39 most likely written? Most scholars hold that Isaiah 36-39 was added to Proto-Isaiah during the exile, being actually written, if we are to believe Clements, during the time of Josiah. Yet this view is suspect for at least two reasons. First, although it is true that some literary shaping of Proto-Isaiah had taken place during the exile, it is not clear that chapters 36-39 were not already a part of Proto-Isaiah by the time of the exile. Secondly, not only is there no credible historical evidence for Clements' claim that the material now in Isaiah 36-39 was written during Josiah's reign, but the literary evidence Clements offers is nothing more than passages ripped from their context within Isaiah. Nevertheless, both of these reasons are based on the assumption that the Sennacherib account in Isaiah 36-37/II Kings 18-19 is historically untrustworthy and therefore must have been written at a later time when later scribal exegetes could essentially "re-write history" to suit their own agendas. After all, they claim, the Sennacherib campaign was a disaster for Hezekiah.

A different view of this issue can be seen in the work of Christopher Seitz. In his book, *Zion's Final Destiny*, Seitz thoroughly reviews and analyzes the work of many scholars who have wrestled with the issue of the occasion, purpose, place and function of Isaiah 36-39. In the course of his analysis, Seitz puts forth his views regarding the questions surrounding Isaiah 36-39 and their form and function within the book of Isaiah. His views can be summarized as follows:

- (a) The events described in Isaiah 36-39 have their historical roots within the reign of Hezekiah²⁵⁹
- (b) The initial recording and formation of these chapters might have very well happened during the reign of Manasseh, shortly after the reign of Hezekiah, during the later years of the prophet Isaiah himself²⁶⁰
- (c) The purpose of these chapters was to bring to a close the recording of the prophetic career of Isaiah by highlighting the fulfillment of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecies and thus vindicating Isaiah as a true prophet of YHWH²⁶¹
- (d) Both Proto-Isaiah and II Kings used an earlier common source²⁶²
- (e) Later scribal exegetes of the exilic/post-exilic period re-shaped and edited Proto-Isaiah's concluding chapters of 36-39 to look forward to Isaiah 40-66.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Christopher Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 95. "It is most likely that behind this narrative lies an extended oral legend, going back to the miraculous event of 701 themselves. Sennacherib failed to take the city and was forced to return by the way he came, as Isaiah had maintained."

²⁶⁰ Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*. "I see no reason to date the narrative in its present form much later than the death of Sennacherib (681), with which it comes to a stunning close" (117). "Hezekiah 36-37... is not a secondary embellishment from the post-exilic period, but is of a piece with 8:23-9:6, 11:1-10, and 32:1-8. In sum, a strong possibility exists that the initial editorial work on Isaiah traditions came not during the period of Josiah (who is never mentioned in the book), but during the reign of Hezekiah, at the end of Isaiah's own lifetime" (61).

²⁶¹ Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, 147. "It is not Zion's inviolability that is at issue in the Hezekiah-Isaiah narrative traditions, but rather the singular example of divine grace and royal obedience that confirms Isaiah's earlier Zion proclamation and leads to Zion's wondrous deliverance."

²⁶² Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, 141. "In my analysis of the question of priority, I preferred a third alternative: that an original narrative (now preserved in Isaiah 36-37) was composed for *both* contexts, the DtrH and a Proto-Isaiah collection."

²⁶³ Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*, 208. "I have tried to demonstrate the pivotal role the Hezekiah-Isaiah narratives play in the growth of the Book of Isaiah, bringing First Isaiah traditions to their culmination, while at the same time raising theological issues only subsequently worked through in the context of Second Isaiah chapters."

There are three fundamental reasons why Seitz's overall argument concerning the unity of Isaiah 1-39 is more convincing than the prevailing scholarly opinion. First, the way in which *history* is presented in Isaiah indicates that Isaiah 36-39 is to be viewed as a part of Proto-Isaiah. The setting of Isaiah 36-39 is clearly during the lifetimes of Isaiah and Hezekiah, whereas the setting of Isaiah 40-66 is clearly that of post-exilic Judah. Second, the *literary structure* of Proto-Isaiah demands the inclusion of chapters 36-39. This chapter will clearly show that the Immanuel prophecies of Isaiah 7-12 simply cannot be understood correctly without reading them within the context of Isaiah 1-39, for chapters 36-39 essentially "answer the questions" presented in Isaiah 7-12.

Third, Seitz's *historical reconstruction* of the events that brought about the writing of Isaiah 36-39 is simply more believable than the reconstructions of scholars like Clements for one simple reason. If this thesis successfully shows that chapters 7-12 and 36-39 must be read in relationship to each other as "literary bookends" in Proto-Isaiah, the fundamental question that should serve as a guide in determining the historical setting in which Isaiah 36-39 was written and Proto-Isaiah was initially put together is this: "What historical circumstance would most likely bring about the writing of Isaiah 36-39?" Clements has argued that Isaiah 36-39 (or more properly II Kings 18-20) was written essentially as "pep talk" to inspire Josiah to rebel against Assyria, nearly one hundred years after the actual events had happened. Yet not only is such a historical reconstruction completely speculative, it fails to articulate the function of the chapters within II Kings.

On the other hand, this thesis proposes a much more likely historical scenario for the composition of Isaiah 36-39: the time shortly after Sennacherib's invasion and

Hezekiah's death, and somewhat early on during the reign of Manasseh. There is no doubt that Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BCE was a monumental event in the history of the Judean people. Both the biblical accounts as well as Sennacherib's own annals testify that Sennacherib wreaked havoc throughout the Judean countryside: he had devastated 46 towns in Judah and had holed Hezekiah up in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Hezekiah somehow survived and Jerusalem did not fall. If one was able to travel back in time and witness the fallout from Sennacherib's invasion, one would probably find that opinion divided over what had happened in Judah. Yes, there was the survival of Jerusalem, but there was also major devastation throughout Judah. By no means would this have been considered a clear cut cause of rejoicing. Such an event would have undoubtedly gotten mixed reviews by those who lived through it. There were obviously some in Judah, as can be seen reflected in the actions of Manasseh, who not only viewed Isaiah as a trouble-maker,²⁶⁴ but who also saw Hezekiah as a foolish king who had brought disaster on Judah by getting rid of the high places and by provoking Sennacherib. They would have looked at the destruction throughout Judah and concluded that it was *because of* Hezekiah's adherence to only YHWH (and his subsequent demolition of the other gods that his father Ahaz had worshipped) that this "disaster" happened. Given this view, it should come as no surprise to find that after Hezekiah's death, Manasseh and his

²⁶⁴According to JewishEncyclopedia.com, we learn from the Talmud (Yeb. 49b) that Manasseh had Isaiah killed for apparent contradictions between his prophecies and passages like Exodus 33:20, 26, and Deuteronomy 4:7. According to this version, Isaiah uttered the name of YHWH and then disappeared into a cedar tree, which was then ordered to be sawn in two by Manasseh, thus killing Isaiah. In Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin x), we are simply told that Isaiah had hid himself in a cedar tree, but that he was found by Manasseh because the edge of his garment was sticking out of the tree. Manasseh then had the tree sawn in half. Although these stories might be somewhat fanciful, there might be a certain core of historical truth to them. Given Manasseh's whole-hearted devotion to pagan worship, his apparent antagonistic attitude toward his father's religious actions, and Isaiah's obvious age at that time, it is not beyond belief to think that, along with instituting various idolatrous practices, Manasseh had the old prophet of YHWH killed as a means of appeasing the pagan gods that his father Hezekiah had offended by his religious reforms. See Emil G. Hirsch, Thomas Kelly Cheyne, Isidore Singer, and Isaac Broyde, "Isaiah," n.p. [cited 10 May 2008]. Online: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=261&letter=I&search=isaiah#1>.

followers sought to re-establish the worship of the very gods Hezekiah had gotten rid of. Yet there were obviously others in Judah, as can be seen reflected in Proto-Isaiah, who saw Isaiah as a true prophet of YHWH and Hezekiah as a righteous king who had been vindicated by YHWH for his whole-hearted devotion to the one true God of Israel. Furthermore, they clearly interpreted Sennacherib's failure and YHWH's faithfulness to Jerusalem as a fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, in chapters 7-12. It is the latter's interpretation of 701 BCE that we see reflected in Proto-Isaiah and shaped within the "literary bookends" of Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39.

The question stemming from these events would undoubtedly become, "Which interpretation of these historical events would win out in the collective memory of Israel?" This thesis asserts that honest consideration of this question opens the door to dating the composition of Isaiah 36-39 shortly after the death of Hezekiah and shortly into the reign of Manasseh. Since these events happened in 701 BCE and since Hezekiah probably died shortly after (circa 698 BCE), it should not be completely surprising to find out that his son Manasseh turned to other gods—he obviously was one of those who viewed Sennacherib's invasion as a disaster for Judah. His idolatry, therefore, could be seen as an attempt to win the favor of the gods again. Yet we must not think that everyone in Judah, let alone everyone in the royal house, shared Manasseh's view. Many would have seen his actions as sinful and idolatrous.

In light of Manasseh's idolatrous policies, therefore, we can surmise that either the disciples of Isaiah or scribal exegetes faithful to YHWH composed Isaiah 36-39 sometime during Manasseh's reign to counter the view put forth by Manasseh's government that Sennacherib's invasion happened because Hezekiah foolishly destroyed

the idols of the other gods in Judah and foolishly trusted in YHWH, the god of Isaiah, alone. By contrast, the “Isaianic” scribes faithful to YHWH wanted to: (a) to vindicate Isaiah’s prophetic career, (a) to vindicate Hezekiah as a faithful and righteous king, and (c) to vindicate YHWH as the true Redeemer God who was faithful to Judah and who would continue to be faithful to Judah.

This proposed scenario regarding the composition of both Isaiah 36-37 and Proto-Isaiah as a whole seems much more plausible than either a Josianic or exilic scenario, both of which are too simplistic in their reasoning. Neither view allows any room for debate on the interpretation of the historical events surrounding Sennacherib’s invasion. Both assume *everyone* viewed Sennacherib’s invasion as a complete disaster for Judah and that Isaiah 36-37/II Kings 18-19 are nothing more than later re-writings of history by theologically-motivated and highly biased redactors. Neither acknowledges that such a major event would invoke drastically different interpretations as soon the dust had settled and people started asking, “What happened?” Simply put, neither view is realistic. By contrast, dating the composition of Isaiah 36-37 and the formulation of Proto-Isaiah shortly after Hezekiah’s death, early on in Manasseh’s reign, seems infinitely more plausible. The battle over the interpretation of such a major event as Sennacherib’s invasion would have begun shortly after the event had taken place, not almost two hundred years later. In contrast to Clements, this historical reconstruction, while still somewhat speculative, is able to explain the literary function of Isaiah 36-39 within the context of Proto-Isaiah: it is both *historically* plausible and *literarily* coherent. Such an argument not only provides a very credible historical setting in which the formation of Proto-Isaiah possibly came about, it also provides a literary structure that makes sense of

many of the difficult exegetical problems previously surrounding Isaiah 7:14 itself, Isaiah 7-12 as a unit, and Proto-Isaiah as a unified whole.

IX. The Historical Reliability of the Biblical Accounts of Sennacherib's Invasion

One final question lingers: “Even if the material in Isaiah 36-37 was written during Manasseh’s reign to combat his policies and vindicate Isaiah and Hezekiah, can these chapters really be considered to be historically reliable?” There are many factors related to this question, and admittedly, the question of historical reliability of Isaiah 36-37 is not necessarily vital to the argument of this thesis. It is possible to argue for the bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah without ever addressing the question of historical reliability. Nevertheless, since this thesis has so strenuously argued that true exegesis includes a consideration of *both* literary *and* historical concerns, it would be duplicitous if this issue of historical reliability was side-stepped simply because it was rather messy.

When it comes to the question of the historical reliability of Isaiah 36-37, there are essentially three reasons why scholars consider these chapters to be unhistorical and legendary. First, as already discussed earlier, scholars point to the correlation between II Kings 18:13-16 and the Assyrian annals as proof of its historical reliability. Since II Kings 18:13-16 corresponds much more closely to the Assyrian annals and II Kings 18:17ff. (and consequently Isaiah 36-39) does not, 18:13-16 is considered the historically reliable account of Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 BCE, whereas II Kings 18:17-20:19/Isaiah 36-39 should be considered later legendary projections into history by

exilic/post-exilic redactors. Seitz has pointed out that virtually every scholar, with the exception of Provan and Hardmeier, holds this position.²⁶⁵

A second reason as to why so many scholars discount the historical reliability of these chapters is because II Kings 19:36-37/Isaiah 37:37-38 credits the salvation of Jerusalem to YHWH sending his angel to destroy 185,000 Assyrian soldiers outside the walls of Jerusalem. Because this would be considered a “miracle,” most scholars immediately dismiss it as a later legendary account which simply could not be historical. In fact, if truth be told, it is these very verses that have sparked the doubt in scholars’ minds regarding the historical reliability of these chapters.

A third reason as to why so many scholars have doubted the historical reliability of these chapters lies in the fact that they simply do not believe that the Bible’s portrayal of Hezekiah is true. They believe that since the book of Kings and the book of Isaiah underwent their final redactions during the exilic/post-exilic period, they (a) cannot possibly reflect history accurately, and (b) they betray the theological bias of exilic redactors. Simply put, the reason why modern scholars doubt the historical credibility of these biblical accounts (as well as others) is that they are considered to be the later work of biased redactors who were pushing their own theological agenda.

Since these seem to be the basic reasons why scholars doubt the historical reliability of Isaiah 36-39, we must examine these reasons and try to determine whether or not they are legitimate. We must also clarify exactly what is meant by the term “historical reliability.” In terms of the first reason—that II Kings 18:13-16 is more historically reliable than the rest of the Sennacherib narrative because it corresponds to the Assyrian annals—there is an underlying prejudice in favor of the Assyrian annals and

²⁶⁵ Seitz, *Zion’s Final Destiny*, 51.

against the biblical text. The scholarly assumption that the biblical texts are theologically biased whereas the Assyrian records are straightforward and objective, and thus the only part of the biblical text that can be trusted is that which correlates to the Assyrian account, is utterly wrong-minded. As Provan points out, *both* accounts are ideological accounts of the past; *both* accounts are trying to interpret certain events from their particular point of view; *both* accounts have an “agenda,” if you will. To blindly accept the Assyrian account as the “objective” account is highly questionable.

If we realize that the purpose of the biblical texts is to try to show YHWH’s hand at work within the history of Israel, to show how Israel and Judah are accountable to YHWH, and to exalt YHWH as the one true God, then we must also realize that the purpose of the Assyrian annals is “to exalt the reputation of the king concerned, to glorify the gods of Assyria, especially Ashur, and to encourage loyalty and submission among his subjects.”²⁶⁶ Allan Millard further adds, “these compositions had to display the king’s accomplishments in the most glorious terms: he had to appear as a successful viceroy of the gods of Assyria, upholding their honor and power, obeying their commands, and so achieving victory over their common enemies.”²⁶⁷ This is precisely what we see when we look at Sennacherib’s version of the events of 701 BCE:

“As for Hezekiah the Judahite who had not submitted to my yoke, I surrounded 46 of his strong walled towns, and innumerable small places around them, and conquered them by means of earth ramps and siege engines, attack by infantrymen, mining, breaching, and scaling. 200,150 people of all ranks, men and women, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle and sheep without number I brought out and counted as spoil. He himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I put watch-posts around him, and made it impossible for anyone to go out of his city. The cities which I had despoiled I cut off from his territory and gave to Mitinti king of Ashdod, Padi king of Ekron, and Sil-Bel king of Gaza, so reducing his realm. I added to their previous annual tax a tribute

²⁶⁶ Provan, “In the Stable,” 31.

²⁶⁷ Allan Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” *TB* 36 (1985): 65.

befitting my lordship, and imposed it on them. Now the fear of my lordly splendor overwhelmed that Hezekiah. The warriors and select troops he had brought in to strengthen his royal city, Jerusalem, did not fight. He had brought after me to Nineveh, my royal city, 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, best antimony, great blocks of red stone, ivory-decorated beds, ivory-decorated chairs, elephant hide, tusks, ebony, box-wood, valuable treasures of every sort, and his daughters, women of his palace, men and women singers. He sent his messenger to pay tribute and do obeisance.”²⁶⁸

As scholars have long noticed, while there are indeed many points of similarity between this and II Kings 18:13-16, this account does not seem to correspond to the rest of the biblical account. They assume therefore that “Account B” must be legendary because it, not only does not correspond to Sennacherib’s account, but puts Hezekiah in a positive light and praises YHWH for delivering Jerusalem. Yet one must wonder why scholars do not question Sennacherib’s version on the same grounds: it puts Sennacherib in a positive light and praises the gods of Assyria.

The scholar must look at *both* accounts and, while fully realizing that *both* accounts are told from different ideological perspectives and agendas, attempt to come to some sort of conclusion about the historical event in question. So what common ground does the full biblical account and Sennacherib’s version share? Both agree that: (a) Sennacherib invaded and took many fortified cities in Judah; (b) Sennacherib did at one point besiege Jerusalem and Hezekiah seemed completely helpless; (c) the Egyptian army at some point appeared and was dealt with; and (d) Hezekiah eventually paid tribute to Sennacherib. And although the literary structure of Isaiah 36-39 has already been discussed, thereby showing the literary quality and unity of Isaiah 36-37, we must acknowledge the fact that nothing in the larger biblical account contradicts any of these four points. The only glaring difference between the biblical account and Sennacherib’s

²⁶⁸ “Sennacherib’s Account of His Campaign in Judah,” (ANET, 288).

version is, not surprisingly, the conclusion to the matter: the biblical account claims an “angel of YHWH” destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, Sennacherib withdrew, and Jerusalem was spared; Sennacherib’s version makes no mention of this. Yet for that matter, it is very interesting to note that Sennacherib conveniently never tells of the outcome of his siege of Jerusalem. All he mentions is that Hezekiah sent him tribute *once he had returned to Nineveh*. In Nineveh, in the Lachish Room, he celebrated the siege and capture of Lachish; in fact Millard points out that the Lachish Room “stands as the focus of the whole section of the palace.”²⁶⁹ Yet, despite the fact that Jerusalem was the capital, there is surprisingly no celebration over its capture or any mention of the siege of Jerusalem. He does not even mention that he had chosen to spare Jerusalem.

When one considers these factors, one must admit that we have very good reason to be suspicious of Sennacherib’s version of events. Why did Hezekiah send him tribute, not outside Jerusalem, not at Lachish, but only later, after Sennacherib had returned to Nineveh?²⁷⁰ Why did Sennacherib highlight the siege at Lachish and conveniently push Jerusalem to the background? Why, if Hezekiah was the rebel ruler and instigator of the revolt, did Sennacherib choose to leave him on the throne, only requiring tribute? Finally, when one compares Sennacherib’s account of his siege of Jerusalem, one must agree with Millard when he says, “...the note of triumph with which the reports of Assyrian campaigns normally end is absent from this one. True, the list of Hezekiah’s tribute has a note of success, yet it is muted in comparison with the ending of every other one of Sennacherib’s campaigns in which he proclaims what he has done.”²⁷¹ Laato adds that the list of tribute sent by Hezekiah was meant “give the impression that [Sennacherib’s]

²⁶⁹ Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” 68.

²⁷⁰ Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” 71.

²⁷¹ Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” 71-72.

campaign in Judah had been successfully concluded, even though Hezekiah, the main rebel, was not dethroned.”²⁷² Therefore, it seems that Sennacherib’s account is “less straightforward than it may appear when read in isolation.”²⁷³ There are too many inconsistencies in his account to allow us to naively believe he is being “objective.”

The second reason why scholars discount Isaiah 36-37 as legendary centers on the claim that an angel of YHWH killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Yet not only is it questionable to dismiss the entire account because of one verse, such an action displays a shocking amount of literary ignorance. It does not allow any room for metaphor, symbolism, or creative license in the story. Now, it is very reasonable to ask the question “Was there a literal angel who struck down 185,000 Assyrians?” For that matter, it is very reasonable to ask other questions like, “Did the Rabshakeh really say those exact words in the speech accredited to him?” “Did Hezekiah really say that exact prayer?” “Did Isaiah really utter that prophecy, word for word?” The obvious answer to all of these questions is, “Of course not.” But that does not mean that something quite unusual did not happen that caused the Assyrian army to abandon the siege of Jerusalem, and that was interpreted by the people of Judah as an act of YHWH; that does not mean that the Rabshakeh didn’t taunt Hezekiah in some way outside the walls of Jerusalem; that does not mean that Hezekiah didn’t offer up a prayer to YHWH for deliverance; and that does not mean Isaiah did not prophesy that YHWH would save Jerusalem. In terms of Sennacherib’s abandonment of the siege of Jerusalem, one thing is clear—*something* happened that caused him to do so. The writer of Isaiah interpreted this “something” as an act of God, and couched it in the terms we have in the account. Both Herodotus and

²⁷² Antti Laato, “Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History in the Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib,” *VT* 45:2 (1995): 218.

²⁷³ Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” 72.

Josephus suggest that it was some sort of plague, and indeed that may very well be the case, we simply do not know. In any case, whatever happened, we know that Jerusalem was spared and Hezekiah stayed on the throne. We also know that the biblical testimony presents this event as the glorious deliverance of Jerusalem by YHWH, while Sennacherib's account glosses over and sidesteps the siege of Jerusalem every chance he gets. Must we believe that there was a literal angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers? No. Does this mean we must dismiss the entire account as legendary and unhistorical? No. All it means is that we need to have common sense and be able to recognize literary artistry and metaphor when it appears in a text that relates historical events.

Finally, there is the objection that we cannot believe the biblical portrait of Hezekiah because these stories were written at a much later time, during the exilic period. Yet this objection has already been addressed both back in chapter one as well as earlier in this chapter. Provan, Long, and Longman have already put forth a persuasive argument that mere distance from an event does not automatically mean that the text in question is historically unreliable. We know, for example, that the book of Isaiah probably came into its final form during exilic and post-exilic times. We also can safely assume that the material in Proto-Isaiah had undergone redaction and literary styling during exilic and post-exilic times as the later scribal exegetes shaped the entire book of Isaiah into the form and structure that we have today. Yet we must be very cautious when we attempt to make the argument that large sections in Proto-Isaiah were essentially made up out of whole cloth by later redactors and therefore have no historical basis to them.

X. A Proposed Understanding of Sennacherib's Invasion

In contrast to the general view of Sennacherib's invasion among modern biblical scholars, Iain Provan has put forth a view of the event that fully respects the biblical accounts. According to Provan, once one reads and analyzes all the relevant material, the following outline of events seems very probable. First, Hezekiah was probably one of the "moving forces"²⁷⁴ who, in an attempt to prepare for an expected invasion, made a pre-emptive strike against king Sillibel of the Philistines, and also captured and imprisoned king Padi of Ekron. Second, in light of Sennacherib's taking of forty-six cities, Hezekiah then offered renewed tribute to Sennacherib in hopes that he would withdraw his forces (II Kings 18:13-16). Yet Sennacherib, viewing Hezekiah as the main instigator of the revolt, sent an army from Lachish to Jerusalem and attempted to persuade Hezekiah to fully surrender (II Kings 18:17ff.). Thirdly, all accounts agree that an Assyrian army ended up besieging Jerusalem, that at some point an Egyptian army appeared on the scene, and that Sennacherib defeated this army at Eltekah.²⁷⁵ It is at this point, Provan speculates, that Hezekiah released Padi of Ekron in order to buy more time. In any case, for some reason Sennacherib never took Jerusalem, "nor even to have received tribute from Hezekiah in the immediate aftermath of the siege. He tells us only that after his return to Nineveh...Hezekiah sent tribute."²⁷⁶ Not only does Provan's view clearly take the biblical testimony seriously, it is entirely historically plausible.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Provan, "In the Stable," 31.

²⁷⁵ Provan, "In the Stable," 32.

²⁷⁶ Provan, "In the Stable," 33.

²⁷⁷ The only other thing we might suggest to reconsider is the payment of tribute Hezekiah made to Sennacherib recorded in II Kings 18:13-16. Most scholars suggest these verses are the authentic account, whereas Provan attempts to fit these verses into the rest of the narrative. Yet is it not possible that II Kings 18:13-16 is a summary of the entire invasion of Sennacherib that the writer of II Kings got from an earlier work, possibly the royal annals of Judah? He then borrowed from the account found in Proto-Isaiah and attached it to the end of his account as an elaboration of his original brief summary. Therefore, the tribute

Contrary to many modern scholars who try to caricature the biblical accounts of Sennacherib’s invasions as a legendary “pie in the sky” account that inaccurately portrays Hezekiah as an ideal king who could do no wrong, a clear reading of the biblical accounts gives no such impression. In fact, the biblical accounts give a very honest and straightforward account of Sennacherib’s invasion. First, there are a number of passages in Isaiah that clearly condemn rebellion and reliance on Egypt, both of which Hezekiah seemed to have done at some point in his reign.²⁷⁸ Second, the biblical accounts themselves tell how Sennacherib captured all of Judah’s fortified cities and how many deserted Hezekiah as well. They clearly do not shy away from the negatives during Hezekiah’s reign. Third, the episode concerning the envoys from Babylon highlights a major blunder on Hezekiah’s part as well. Nevertheless, the biblical accounts tell us that in 701 BCE, when Sennacherib was on the verge of destroying Jerusalem, Hezekiah, despite his past flaws, nevertheless displayed great faith in YHWH, and that Jerusalem was indeed spared, although at the same time much of Judah was devastated.

mentioned in II Kings 18:14-16 is not some sort of initial payment Hezekiah attempted to make *before* Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem, but rather the same tribute Sennacherib mentions was paid to him back in Nineveh. Such a scenario is not that improbable. In light of Hezekiah’s rebellion, Sennacherib invaded Judah, overtook 46 of Hezekiah’s cities, and devastated much of Hezekiah’s kingdom. He also laid siege to Jerusalem and it looked as if Hezekiah would face certain destruction. For some reason—unexplained in Sennacherib’s annals and described as the actions of an angel of YHWH in the biblical accounts—Sennacherib failed to take Jerusalem and went back to Nineveh. At this point, although the deliverance of Jerusalem was seen by Hezekiah and the people of Judah as a protective act of YHWH, Hezekiah well knew that much of his land had been overrun by Sennacherib. Therefore, in order to try to avoid any future re-invasion, Hezekiah sent tribute to Sennacherib in Nineveh. This tribute allowed Sennacherib to “save face” and it insured that Judah would not suffer through another full out military assault by Sennacherib. One last speculative note—given the unusual nature of II Kings 18:14-16, a few scholars have suggested that these verses are referring to Hezekiah’s actions during Sargon’s campaign in 711 BCE. We know that Hezekiah took part in the rebellion, and we know that he was allowed to stay on his throne. A possible reason for this might be that he paid tribute to Sargon. One could further speculate that, in light of that, Hezekiah once again tried to pay off the Assyrian king (in this case, Sennacherib). If that was the case, then it would be understandable why Sennacherib would have besieged Jerusalem; he knew of Hezekiah’s past rebellion, and decided that Hezekiah was a king that needed to be severely dealt with.

²⁷⁸ Isaiah 30:1-3; 31:1-3; 36:2, 9

XI. Final Thoughts on Isaiah 36-39 and the Occasion for Proto-Isaiah

The essential problem with historical-critical biblical scholarship that too often scholars simply cannot fathom the possibility that the biblical writers, or any writer for that matter, could use literary artistry and techniques and still present a historically reliable account of the past. This divorce between literary concerns and history simply destroys any meaningful exegesis and understanding of the text. The task of the exegete is to come to a clearer understanding of Israelite history *through* the biblical texts, not *despite* them. Scholarly pre-occupations with fanciful reconstructions of biblical history during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah have nearly rendered any true biblical exegesis of texts like Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39 impossible. What we have shown in this chapter is that the generally accepted opinion that rejects the *historical reliability* of the biblical accounts of Sennacherib's invasion is not only ill-founded and highly questionable, but it ultimately obscures any clear exegetical understanding and vision of the *literary structure* of Proto-Isaiah. We have analyzed the details of the literary structure of Isaiah 36-39, have addressed the issue of priority, and have concluded it is more likely that Isaiah 36-39 hold priority over II Kings 18-20. We have also argued that Isaiah 36-37 should be accepted as containing historically reliable information, though admittedly having gone through later literary shaping. In the next chapter we will analyze the overall "bookend" structure that can be seen in Proto-Isaiah. It will be argued that Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39 have been set up as the two "bookends" to Proto-Isaiah. We know this by looking at the numerous literary and thematic connections between these two sections. The reason why these two sections have been structured this way is because of two historical factors. The prophecies in Isaiah 7-12 were born out of the historical circumstances of the Syro-

Ephraimite Crisis, were focused on the birth of Hezekiah, the Immanuel child, and prophesied about YHWH's future chastening of Judah by the hand of Assyria as well as YHWH's future chastening of Assyria and redeeming of the remnant of his people in Jerusalem. The narratives found in Isaiah 36-39 were born out of the historical circumstances of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, as well as two other events of Hezekiah's reign: his illness and the visit from the envoys from Babylon. These narratives focus on the reign of Hezekiah, the Immanuel child who grew up to be king, and they show how the prophecies of Isaiah in chapters 7-12 were fulfilled.

With all this in mind, the natural question is, "What historical circumstance would have occasioned the writing of chapters 36-39 and the formation of Proto-Isaiah itself?" This chapter has shown the general scholarly view that the exilic author of Deutero-Isaiah incorporated II Kings 18-20 into his redaction of Proto-Isaiah and expansion of the book of Isaiah to be highly questionable and problematic. Furthermore, this chapter has also questioned the general scholarly assumption that the material in Isaiah 36-39 was originally composed around the time of Josiah. It is the opinion of this thesis, given the clear literary unity of Isaiah 1-39 (as will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter), that chapters 36-39 were originally composed to form the conclusion of Proto-Isaiah, and that the most likely occasion for the compilation of Proto-Isaiah was relatively early on during Manasseh's reign, when he instituted policies that sought to undo the reforms that Hezekiah had put in place. Such actions, coming on the heels of an enormous national crisis (i.e. Sennacherib's invasion), would have sparked controversy between the new royal court and the temple priests and scribes loyal to YHWH. Proto-Isaiah, complete

with chapters 36-39, sought to vindicate Isaiah as a true prophet, Hezekiah as a faithful and righteous king, and YHWH Himself as the one true God.

Scholars rightly note that Isaiah 36-39 attempts to put Hezekiah forth as an ideal king; yet they are mistaken when they assume that such an idealization came long after the events themselves and therefore is historically unreliable. The most likely time such questions over Hezekiah's reputation would have been debated would have been during the years shortly after Sennacherib's invasion, when king Manasseh, by instituting his new political and religious policies, essentially declared Hezekiah's policies a failure and Hezekiah a foolish king. Given this situation, those loyal to YHWH, who viewed Hezekiah as a righteous and faithful king, would have attempted to vindicate not only Hezekiah, but also Isaiah and YHWH Himself, by putting forth their interpretation of national events over the last fifty years of Judah's history. In that sense, what we have in both Isaiah 36-39 and Isaiah 7-12 is not "history" per se, but rather *theological interpretations* of historical events. Nevertheless, they are about real events in history, and not simply later projections that have no basis in history. The scribal exegetes who compiled Proto-Isaiah were not interested in abstract theological concepts. They were concerned with showing how the God of Israel had indeed worked in the life and times of their beloved king and their revered prophet. Therefore, their admittedly "literary work" of Proto-Isaiah was intimately tied to historical events and spoke to, what was for them, a hotly-debated current controversy as to how to interpret those historical events.