

The Attackers: Attack on the Descendants of David: Hezekiah: Hezekiah Withholds Tribute Money to Assyria, Goes into Egypt for Help; Assyria's King Sennacherib's Palestinian Campaign: Seizes Lachish, Sends Emissaries to Jerusalem, the Rabshakeh Addresses Hezekiah's Cabinet, 2 Kgs 18:17–18, 20–21

V. The Attack on the Descendants of David:

b. Hezekiah:

1. King Hezekiah is childless at the time Sennacherib, King of Assyria, brings his army into Judah and maneuvers into a position to threaten the capital city of Jerusalem:

Isaiah 36:1 - Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them.

2. Prior to this campaign, Sennacherib had successfully defeated King Hoshea of the Northern Kingdom and taken many Jews captive back to Assyria and Media.

2 Kings 17:6 - In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria [Shalmaneser V] captured Samaria [capital of the Northern Kingdom] and carried Israel away into exile [first Diaspora] to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes [areas of the future Parthian Empire].

3. This occurred in c. 721 B.C. and there is some controversy as to who took the final victory:

Hoshea was king of Israel in Samaria at the time that Shalmaneser was reigning in Assyria, but decided to make a bold attempt to throw off the yoke. He therefore sought aid from the Egyptian king So (or Seveh), and this was naturally construed as rebellion by the Assyrians (2 Kings 7:4). Shalmaneser invaded Palestine and laid siege to Samaria. The siege continued for three years, and at its conclusion many of the inhabitants of Samaria were carried into captivity. Samaria fell in 722 B.C., and that was the year of Shalmaneser's death. The inscriptions of his successor, Sargon II, claim that the city was taken by him and not by Shalmaneser. This may have been the case. If so, Samaria fell at the beginning of 721 B.C., or it may be merely a boast of Sargon. In any case the historical character of the book of Kings is not impugned.¹

4. Hezekiah ascended to the throne of Judah six years later in 715 B.C. at which time he inherited the foreign policy problem with Assyria that had occurred during his father Ahaz' reign.
5. In the meantime, Sargon had been replaced on the throne of Assyria by Sennacherib. Judah had been paying tribute to Assyria but Hezekiah had spent time and treasure in preparation against a possible Assyrian invasion of Judah:

¹ Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1003.

Hezekiah of Judah ruled from approximately 715–686 B.C. When he ascended to the throne, Samaria had already been destroyed, Judah was severely weakened, and Assyria under Sargon II was the dominant power in the region. Egypt would soon be resurgent under the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. Hezekiah energetically dealt with the situation by beginning a series of religious and military reforms. Jerusalem's fortifications were repaired, arms were manufactured and the Siloam Tunnel dug to ensure a water supply for the city.²

6. These reforms were wise but what Hezekiah did next was not so smart. He went into league with Egypt as an ally against Sennacherib. Wrong move.
7. God defends His people. They are not to depend on heathen for protection but on the God of Israel, a principle proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah in:

Isaiah 31:1 - Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.

After Shabako \shab'-a-ka³ of Egypt became pharaoh in 715 B.C., the smaller nations in Aram (Syria) and Canaan sought his help in a coalition against Assyria. Judah apparently joined in this "alliance" ("Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame", Isaiah 20:5).⁴

8. Isaiah has previously pronounced a prophecy regarding Israelites seeking help from any source beyond the God of Israel. It is actually a direct quote from the Lord in:

Isaiah 30:1 - "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the Lord, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;

v. 2 - who go down to Egypt without consulting Me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.

v. 3 - But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace.

9. Yet this is exactly what Hezekiah did. When Sennacherib's Palestinian campaign completed its siege at Lachish, he sent emissaries to Jerusalem to advise Hezekiah that he could not defend the capital.
10. Hezekiah's reversionism placed him in a no-win situation. He depended upon Egypt for help but Sennacherib defeated the Egyptian and Cushite armies at Eltekeh. His successful siege of Lachish put him at Jerusalem's doorstep.

² NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 558n18:1.

³ "By around 721 B.C. Piankhi \pyan'-kē\, a Nubian king, advanced up the Nile and eventually captured Memphis. Shabaka \shab'-a-ka\, a brother of Piankhi, established the Nubian and Ethiopian Dynasty XXV, c. 712–633" (Merrill F. Unger, "Egypt: The Decline: Dynasties XXI–XXX," in *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1966], 291).

⁴ NIV Archaeological Study Bible, 1106n30:1.

11. Boxed in, Hezekiah tried to buy himself out of the jam by robbing the palace and the temple of its gold and silver holdings:
- 2 Kings 18:13** - Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them.
- v. 14** - Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong [**withholding tribute money from Assyria**]. Withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.
- v. 15** - Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house.
- v. 16** - At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.
12. This might be classified as stimulus money – stimulate Sennacherib to back off. He didn't. Instead he upped the ante:
- 2 Kings 18:17** - Then the king of Assyria sent Tartan [**supreme military commander: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff**] and Rabsaris [**Chief Officer: General of the Armies**] and Rabshakeh [**Director of Secret Service**]⁵ from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a large army to Jerusalem. So they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they went up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the fuller's field.
- v. 18** - When they called to the king, Eliakim [**Chief of Palace Security**], the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna [**Palace Secretary**] the scribe and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder [**Governor**], came out to them.
13. This was a summit meeting among the powers that be from Assyria and Judah. Sennacherib was back at field headquarters at Lachish while Hezekiah was about to have a "come-to-Jesus moment" – literally.
14. Second Kings 18:19–37 documents one of the most profound dressings down in literature. The Rabshakeh not only addresses the palace officials but also the citizens on the walls of Jerusalem. He demeans Hezekiah and his military, and blasphemes the God of Israel. He threatens the Israelites with physical degradation in the most callous terms. He portrays Sennacherib as an infallible enemy and derisively challenges the Judean military to fight the Assyrian army after he provides them with a 2,000-horse cavalry.

⁵ These nouns are not personal names but are Assyrian military titles. I have used positions within the United States military and civilian secret service to best describe the job assignment these three men have and the duties assigned to them. The Rabshakeh is an individual who speaks three languages, understands propaganda, and is articulate in his presentation. "He had, in addition to his official power, dauntless courage, an insolent spirit and a characteristic oriental disregard for veracity" (Walter G. Clippinger, "Rabshakeh," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956], 4:2523).

Insults, pejoratives, and empty promises spice his eloquent but hollow harangue. He rightly belittles Hezekiah's coalition with Egypt and chides him for trusting in Egypt. He actually references the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah in Isaiah 30:1-3 and 31:1 with his analogy in:

2 Kings 18:20 - "You say (but they are empty words), 'I have counsel and strength for the war.' Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me?"

v. 21 - "Now behold, you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, even on Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him."

Hezekiah put his trust in men and not in God. And for this he commits the sin unto death. Leadership must display confidence in God's grace. He must reject confidence in men and rely wholly on divine provision and protection, admonitions given by Jeremiah in:

Jeremiah 17:5 - Thus says the Lord, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord."

v. 7 - "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord."