**Research on Hezekiah and the siege of Sennacherib of Assyria**

**Notes on Hezekiah**

Hezekiah was one of the few [kings of Judah](http://www.gotquestions.org/kings-Israel-Judah.html) who was constantly aware of God’s acts in the past and His involvement in the events of every day. The Bible describes Hezekiah as a king who had a close relationship with God, one who did “what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God”

Hezekiah, a son of the wicked King Ahaz, reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah for twenty-nine years, from c. 726 to 697 BC. He began his reign at age 25 ([2 Kings 18:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.2)). He was more zealous for the Lord than any of his predecessors ([2 Kings 18:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.5)). During his reign, the prophets [Isaiah](http://www.gotquestions.org/life-Isaiah.html) and [Micah](http://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Micah.html) ministered in Judah.  
  
After Ahaz’s wicked reign, there was much work to do, and Hezekiah boldly cleaned house. Pagan altars, idols, and temples were destroyed. The [bronze serpent](http://www.gotquestions.org/bronze-serpent.html) that Moses had made in the desert ([Numbers 21:9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num%2021.9)) was also destroyed, because the people had made it an idol ([2 Kings 18:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.4)). The [temple](http://www.gotquestions.org/Solomon-first-temple.html) in Jerusalem, whose doors had been nailed shut by Hezekiah’s own father, was cleaned out and reopened. The Levitical priesthood was reinstated ([2 Chronicles 29:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%2029.5)), and the Passover was reinstituted as a national holiday ([2 Chronicles 30:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%2030.1)). Under Hezekiah’s reforms, revival came to Judah.  
  
Because King Hezekiah put God first in everything he did, God prospered him. Hezekiah “held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook” ([2 Kings 18:6–7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.6%E2%80%937)).

In 701 BC, Hezekiah and all of Judah faced a crisis. The [Assyrians](http://www.gotquestions.org/Assyrians.html), the dominant world power at the time, invaded Judah and marched against Jerusalem. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and many other nations, and now they threatened Judah ([2 Kings 18:13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.13)). In their threats against the city of Jerusalem, the Assyrians openly defied the God of Judah, likening Him to the powerless gods of the nations they had conquered ([2 Kings 18:28–35](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2018.28%E2%80%9335); [19:10–12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2019.10%E2%80%9312)).  
  
Faced with the Assyrian threat, Hezekiah sent word to the prophet Isaiah ([2 Kings 19:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2019.2)). The Lord, through Isaiah, reassured the king that Assyria would never enter Jerusalem. Rather, the invaders would be sent home, and the city of Jerusalem would be spared ([2 Kings 19:32–34](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2019.32%E2%80%9334)). In the temple, Hezekiah prays a beautiful prayer for help, asking God to vindicate Himself: “Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God” ([2 Kings 19:19](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2019.19)).  
  
God, faithful as always, kept His promise to protect Jerusalem. “That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!” ([2 Kings 19:35](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2019.35)). The remaining Assyrians quickly broke camp and withdrew in abject defeat. “So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. . . .

He took care of them on every side” ([2 Chronicles 32:22](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%2032.22)).  
  
Later, Hezekiah became very sick. Isaiah told him to set things in order and prepare to die ([2 Kings 20:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2020.1)). But Hezekiah prayed, beseeching God to be merciful and to remember all the good he had done. Before Isaiah had even left the king’s house, God told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard and that his life would be extended fifteen years (<http://www.gotquestions.org/life-Hezekiah.html)>

**II Kings 18:13, 28, 29 39**

13 Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.

“*Hezekiah*. A king of Judah, whose reign, beginning in the late eighth century BC, became noted for religious reform, through his efforts to end idolatry.

“*Sennacherib.*

King of Assyria who invaded Palestine in 701 BC, and to whom Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, had submitted and paid tribute”.

“The fall of Samaria is dated 722-721 BCE, both by the Bible and by the Assyrian inscriptions. That year was the sixth of Hezekiah. His fourteenth year, would be 714-713 BCS.

Sennacherib - This is the Greek form of the Sinakhirib of the [inscriptions](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/18-13.htm), the son of Sargon, and his immediate successor in the monarchy. The death of Sargon (705 B.C.) had been followed by a number of revolts. Hezekiah also rebelled, invaded Philistia. . . “ (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

28 Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews’ language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria:

“Rabshakeh had probably been sitting before. He now stood up to attract attention, and raised his voice to be the better heard. Still speaking Hebrew, and not Aramaic, he addressed himself directly to the people on the wall, soldiers and others, doing the very opposite to what he had been requested to do, and outraging all propriety.

“Hear the word of the great king, the King of Assyria. It is scarcely likely that Sennacherib had anticipated his envoy's action, much less directed it, and told him exactly what he was to say. But Rabshakeh thinks his words will have more effect if he represents them as those of his master” (Pulpit Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“*Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word* of *the great king, the king of Assyria (II Kings 18:28)*

The "Rab-shakeh" was Sennacherib's chief administrative officer. It is a title rather than a name According to NC, in the year 701 B.C., Sennacherib led the Assyrian campaign against the fortified cities of Judah. After besieging and capturing the major military center of Lachish, he sent three top officials to Jerusalem, just 30 miles away, to engage in "psychological warfare, using threats [and] boastings of prowess ....” IB points out that the Assyrian side not only threatened the Judahite court officials, but made “a direct appeal to the common people who [were] standing on the city wall." MH adds, "He endeavours to make them believe that it will be much for their advantage to surrender." By speaking in Hebrew rather than Aramaic, the language used in diplomatic circles, this emissary intended to subvert the people's morale and turn them against their leaders. His purpose was to weaken faith and even ridicule it, since no other nation or its gods had been able to stand in the face of Assyrian onslaughts.” (periodical Bible Notes)

29 Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you:

“There were two grounds, and two only, on which Hezekiah could rest his [refusal](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/18-29.htm) to surrender,

“(1) ability to resist by his own natural military strength and that of his allies; and

“(2) expectation based upon the language of Isaiah Isa 30:31; [Isaiah 31:4-9](http://biblehub.com/isaiah/31-4.htm), of supernatural assistance from Yahweh.

“Then Rabshakeh argues that both grounds of confidence are equally fallacious” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

**II Kings 19:1, 15, 16, 19, 20, 32, 33**

1 And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard *it,* that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.

“**Went into the house of the Lord.**—To humble himself before [Jehovah](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DS2JZbTJlbFVsYkpCTXJyN2s3YnRFSDhLL2xYTVNQeDE2Vktnc1JJblFZNHhqZlB0alJKRGlUbThmOVQvdGUrT3FGRUVBVU9BQVoyL2ZZK1JrcEtmVWo2cHRRcnJwQU5vakhIeSsvNWxCVm1MQjk2bCsyeHBsY0VXdUNnQjFlZHBhZzB2M3dFaXBaTjZtb3NmOXJ5VVg2) and pray for help” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Hezekiah, like his officers, probably rent his clothes on account of Rabshakeh's blasphemies: and he put on sackcloth in self-humiliation and in grief. The only hope left was in Yahweh, for Egypt could not be trusted to effect anything of importance. Rabshakeh's boldness had told upon Hezekiah. He was dispirited and dejected. He perhaps began to doubt whether he had done right in yielding to the bolder counsels of Eliakim and Isaiah. He had not lost his faith in God; but his faith was being severely tried. He wisely went and strove by prayer to strengthen it” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

“*Hezekiah prayed and said, O Lord God of Israel,* — He calls him the God of *Israel,*because Israel was his peculiar [people](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DS2JZbTJlbFVsYkpCTXJyN2s3YnRFSDhLL2xYTVNQeDE2Vktnc1JJblFZNWgybURXTmsxUkExdGlkZG9QRWdWV2tVaEpXdjhlMWgwUytwQnBmc2wrNXVNVjVER3dxNXBSendyeXRpSUU5ZGRYbFBYWXF3K1VONWJ0UHdReFFEUTVWc2kvakVsNWkyOUNmRDhOUjdoTjU2); and the God that dwelt between the cherubim, because there was the peculiar [residence](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DS2JZbTJlbFVsYkpCTXJyN2s3YnRFSDhLL2xYTVNQeDE2Vktnc1JJblFZNnE1Sitla0VHeitrWFExZ1c5T25wY0VKQTFFRDJCV216UUF5eVJscW9FK3hrVjZkNW1KMkNnV1k0R2tFZ0I5cFVBWXpDWFdCOW9MV0dodDUyZkI1YXFsL2hwTUJ1a0FXSjZuNmlITDlzRzRN) of his glory on earth; but he gives glory to him as the God of the whole earth, and not, as Sennacherib fancied, the God of Israel only. Let them say what they will, thou art sovereign Lord, the God of gods, even thou alone; universal Lord *of all the kingdoms of the earth;*and rightful Lord; for *thou hast made heaven and earth —*Being Creator of all, by an incontestable title thou art [owner](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DS2JZbTJlbFVsYkpCTXJyN2s3YnRFSDhLL2xYTVNQeDE2Vktnc1JJblFZNEQrQjBCZkZPZHAwemtTcTUxcHFER3BmL3lzTXZ2LzNhTTVTUGxvK05wOFNoRFFXUlF0eGFYWEtabno1QzFHcEovWGZXRUw1QnkxZnhHRXZhM2dtcXhNeTVYZVlTZjh1RWI2bHQ1b1JFVVFB) and ruler of all” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Which dwellest between the cherubims - The reference is to the shechinah, or miraculous glory, which from time to time appeared above the mercy-seat from between the two cherubims, whose wings overshadowed the ark of the covenant in the Tabernacle-Temple. ([1 Kings 6:23-27](http://biblehub.com/1_kings/6-23.htm); compare [Exodus 25:22](http://biblehub.com/exodus/25-22.htm); [Leviticus 16:2](http://biblehub.com/leviticus/16-2.htm), etc.).

“Thou art the God, even thou alone - This is the protest of the pure theist against the intense polytheism of Sennacherib's letter, which assumes that gods are only gods of particular nations, and that Hezekiah's God is but one out of an indefinite number, no stronger or more formidable than the rest” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

16 Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

“Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear. "Bow down thine ear" is a Hebrew idiom for "give ear," "attend "(see [Psalm 31:2](http://biblehub.com/psalms/31-2.htm); [Psalm 71:2](http://biblehub.com/psalms/71-2.htm); [Psalm 86:1](http://biblehub.com/psalms/86-1.htm); [Proverbs 22:17](http://biblehub.com/proverbs/22-17.htm), etc.). It is based upon the fact that, when men wish to catch exactly what another says to them, they bend themselves towards him, and bring one ear as near to him as they can. Open, Lord, thine eyes, and see. Take cognizance both with eye and ear; **i.e.** take **full** cognizance - let nothing escape thee. And hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God; rather, **which he has sent to reproach**. The suffix translated "him" in our version really means "it" - **i.e.** the speech or letter of Sennacherib, which Hezekiah has "spread before the Lord."” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it... The report of Rabshakeh's speech, recorded in the preceding chapter:

“that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth; rent his clothes because of the blasphemy in the speech; and he put on sackcloth, in token of mourning, for the calamities he feared were coming on him and his people: and he went into the house of the Lord; the temple, to pray unto him. The message he sent to Isaiah, with his answer, and the threatening letter of the king of Assyria, Hezekiah's prayer upon it, and the encouraging answer he had from the Lord, with the account of the destruction of the Assyrian army, and the death of Sennacherib, are the same "verbatim" as in [Isaiah 37:1](http://biblehub.com/isaiah/37-1.htm) throughout” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

19 Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the Lord God, *even* thou only.

“New therefore, O Lord our God. Hezekiah draws the strongest possible contrast between [Jehovah](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/19-19.htm) and the idols. Sennacherib had placed them upon a par ([2 Kings 18:33-35](http://biblehub.com/2_kings/18-33.htm); [2 Kings 19:10-13](http://biblehub.com/2_kings/19-10.htm)). Hezekiah insists that the idols are "no gods," are "nothing" - at any rate are mere blocks of wood and stone, shaped by human hands. But Jehovah is "the God of all the kingdoms of the earth", the Maker of heaven and earth, the one and only God - answering to his name, self-existing, all-sufficient, the groundwork of all other existence. And he is "our **God"** **-** the special God of Israel, bound by covenant to protect them against all enemies. I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand; **i.e.** "do that which this proud blasphemer thinks that thou canst not do" ([2 Kings 18:35](http://biblehub.com/2_kings/18-35.htm)); show him that thou art far mightier than he supposes, wholly unlike those "no-gods," over whom he has hitherto triumphed - a "very present Help in trouble" - potent to save. That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, *That* which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

“Then Isaiah the son of Amos sent to Hezekiah, saying. As Hezekiah prays, Isaiah is by Divine revelation made cognizant of his prayer, and commissioned to answer it favorably. That he sends his answer, instead of taking it, is indicative of the high status of the prophets at this period, which made it not unseemly that, in spiritual matters, they should claim at least equality with the monarch. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib King of Assyria I have heard. First of all, Hezekiah is assured that his prayer has been "heard." God has "bowed down his ear" to it - has taken it into his consideration, and has sent a reply” (Pulpit Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“If the mighty army of the great Assyrian king were successfully defied by a petty monarch like Hezekiah, it would force the surrounding nations to confess that the escape was owing to the protecting hand of Yahweh. They would thus be taught, in spite of themselves, that He, and He alone, was the true God” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

32 Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it.

“*Thus saith the Lord, He shall not come to this city —*The king of Assyria shall be so far from possessing himself of the city at this time, that he shall not shoot so much as an arrow into it, much less raise any bulwarks to besiege it. There is a gradation in the words, says Dr. Dodd, as is usual with Isaiah. The first declaration is, that Sennacherib, if he shall attempt to besiege the city, shall never be able to succeed; *he shall not come into this city.*The *second*is, that he shall not bring his army so near the city as *to come before it with shields,*wherewith to defend themselves from those on the wall, or raise a bank against it. The third, that he shall not even shoot an arrow into the city, which might be done from far. It seems the army sent with Rab-shakeh did not form a close siege against it, but only disposed themselves so as to block it up at some distance; possibly waiting till the king of Assyria had taken Libnah and Lachish, (which they presumed he would speedily do.)” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Nor come before it with shield - The "shields" of the Assyrians are very conspicuous in the sculptures, and were of great importance in a siege, since the assailing archers were in most instances defended, as they shot their weapons, by a comrade, who held before himself and his friend a shield of an enormous size. It was made of a framework of wood, filled in with wattling, and perhaps lined with skin; it was rested upon the ground, and it generally curved backward toward the top; ordinarily it somewhat exceeded the height of a man. From the safe covert afforded by these large defenses the archers were able to take deliberate aim, and deliver their volleys with effect.

“Nor cast a bank against it - "Mounds" or "banks" were among the most common of the means used by the Assyrians against a besieged town. They were thrown up against the walls, and consisted of loose earth, trees, brushwood, stones, and rubbish. Sometimes the surface of the mound was regularly paved with several layers of stone or brick, which formed a solid road or causeway capable of bearing a great weight. The intention was not so much to bring the mounds to a level with the top of the walls, as to carry them to such a height as should enable the battering-ram to [work effectively](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/19-32.htm). Walls were made very solid toward their base, for the purpose of resisting the ram; halfway up their structure was comparatively weak and slight. The engines of the assailants, rams and catapults, where therefore far more serviceable if they could attack the upper and weaker portion of the defenses; and it was to enable them to reach these portions that the "mounds" were raised” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

33 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord.

“*By the same shall he return —*Whereas he expected to devour the kingdom of Judah at one morsel, and then to [proceed](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DS2JZbTJlbFVsYkpCTXJyN2s3YnRFSDhLL2xYTVNQeDE2Vktnc1JJblFZN09CaTF2VTZkbEJQL2tXajkwYTVDNGRMYWlGMUxybnhLWmRyaHMxSy9MVVlRazd2eDdlVUdDcElVUnVVazRDN3VaYUpzSzJ0VjBIK0ZXMmhhNVFHQVRaMkF1L0FDbno4S0ZwUzFaRGRxVFM1) farther and conquer Egypt, and other neighboring countries; and *to cut off nations not a few,*as is said of him concerning this very time and design, ([Isaiah 10:7](http://biblehub.com/isaiah/10-7.htm),) he shall meet with so sad a disappointment and rebuke here, that he shall make haste to return with shame to his own country” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“shall not come into this city—nor approach near enough to shoot an arrow, not even from the most [powerful engine](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/19-33.htm) which throws missiles to the greatest distance, nor shall he occupy any part of the ground before the city by a fence, a mantelet, or covering for men employed in a siege, nor cast (raise) a bank (mound) of earth, overtopping the city walls, whence he may see and command the interior of the city. None of these, which were the principal modes of attack followed in ancient military art, should Sennacherib be permitted to adopt. Though the army under Rabshakeh marched towards Jerusalem and encamped at a little distance with a [view](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/19-33.htm) to blockade it, they delayed laying siege to it, probably waiting till the king, having taken Lachish and Libnah, should bring up his detachment, that with all the combined forces of Assyria they might invest the capital. So determined was this invader to conquer Judah and the neighboring countries (Isa 10:7), that nothing but a divine interposition could have saved Jerusalem” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“All Sennacherib's motions were under the Divine cognizance. God himself undertakes to defend the city; and that person, that place, cannot but be safe, which he undertakes to protect” (Matthew Henry Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“*Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. (II Kings 19:32)*

I promise that the king of Assyria won’t get into Jerusalem, or shoot an arrow into the city, or even surround it and prepare to attack.--Contemporary English Version The prophet Isaiah persuaded King Hezekiah not to forge military alliances to defeat Assyria but to rely instead on God’s deliverance.

When the enemy assault on Jerusalem began in 701 BC, Judah’s only hope against such superior forces was divine help. That hope was realized. Though the Assyrians employed every mode of ancient warfare, they could not get close enough to gain access to the city. At the conclusion of the story (verses 35, 36), an angel of the Lord smote the camp of the Assyrians, forcing Sennacherib to retreat to Nineveh in defeat.

The "bank" referred to is the dirt ramp that an attacker would build against the wall of a besieged city to enable the attackers to reach the top. TEV translates God's words: "He will not enter this city or shoot a single arrow against it. No soldiers with shields will come near the city, and no siege mounds will be built around it." As it was the prophet Isaiah who brought these words to Hezekiah, IB concludes, "This deliverance ... was a vivid demonstration of the soundness of Isaiah's message that Israel's hope and salvation are to be found in the Lord alone."  (Periodical Bible Notes)