



LESSON 17 DELIVERANCE FROM ASSYRIA

Israel		Judah	
Jeroboam	931–910	Rehoboam	931–913
Nadab	910–909	Abijah	913–911
Baasha	909–886	Asa	911–870
Elah	886–885		
Zimri	885		
Omri	885–874		
Ahab	874–853	Jehoshaphat	873–848
Ahaziah	853–852		
Joram	852–841	Jehoram	848–841
Jehu	841–814	Ahaziah	841
		Athaliah	841–835
Jehoahaz	814–798	Joash	835–796
Jehoash	798–782	Amaziah	796–767
Jeroboam II	793–753	Uzziah	792–740
Zechariah	753		
Shallum	752		
Menahem	752–742	Jotham	750–731
Pekahiah	742–740		
Pekah	752–732	Ahaz	735–715
Hoshea	732–722	Hezekiah	729–686
		Manasseh	696–642
		Amon	642–640
		Josiah	640–609
		Jehoahaz	609
		Jehoiakim	608–598
		Jehoiachin	598–597
		Zedekiah	597–586

“For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’ ””

(2 Kings 19:34, NASB95)

Assyria’s rising power has been described in several of our recent lessons, most notably as Israel was taken away captive by this foreign power (see 2Kings 17). However, Israel did not fall because of Assyria’s might, but because of her unfaithfulness to the Lord. Significantly, Judah was not much better (2Kings 17.19), yet the Lord would not allow the southern Kingdom to be subjugated by the Assyrians. As we conclude our study of Hezekiah we will focus on how the Lord delivered the city of David.

Before we begin we need to note some things about the dates of Hezekiah’s reign. We know that he reigned for 29 years (2Kings 18.2), 15 of those coming after a period of profound illness (2Kings 20.6). Furthermore, we know that Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah came in 701 B.C., during the 14th year of Hezekiah’s reign. Thus, Hezekiah’s sickness (2Kings 20.1-11), the visit from the Babylonian emissaries (2Kings 20.12-19) and Sennacherib’s invasion (2Kings 18.13-19.37) occurred around the same time (note the usage of “in those days” in 2Kings 20.1 and “at that time” in 2Kings 20.12). The writer likely organized the material thematically

rather than chronologically, beginning with Assyria’s invasion of Judah to show how the southern kingdom fared after the exile of the northern kingdom. In reconstructing these events, it seems likely that Hezekiah’s sickness and the visit of the Babylonian emissaries led to the invasion by Sennacherib. But first, a note about Hezekiah’s continuing trust in the Lord...

Hezekiah Rebels Against Assyria (2Kings 18.7-12)

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had bought the help of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III to deliver him from Israel and Aram (2Kings 16.7-9), making Judah a vassal state of the Assyrian Empire. When Hezekiah came to the throne he rebelled against Sargon II, the new ruler of Assyria. Significantly, Sargon was very active in the region, a fact mentioned in Isaiah 20.1, but his annals never mention any action against Judah. Hezekiah's faithfulness to the Lord not only allowed him to throw off the Assyrian yoke, but to reclaim Judean territory from the Philistines (vs. 8).

Hezekiah's Life Extended (2Kings 20.1-11; 2Chronicles 32.24-26; Isaiah 38)

The narrative of the text is self-explanatory, but we should note a few things which aid our understanding of subsequent events in Hezekiah's life. First, Hezekiah's illness occurred at a time when Hezekiah was already in rebellion to the Assyrians, as noted in God's promise to "deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria" (vs. 6). This doesn't imply that Sennacherib's invasion had already occurred, but showed how Assyria was hostile towards God's people and intended to use her might to subjugate Judah. Second, the Chronicler notes that "Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem" (2Chronicles 32.25). Hezekiah's overall character was one of faithfulness and righteousness, and as the next verse states he did humble his heart. However, this period of pride would have consequences.


Emissaries From Babylon (2Kings 20.12-21; 2Chronicles 32.27-31; Isaiah 39)

An immediate consequence of Hezekiah's pride was his foolish behavior with the emissaries from the Babylonian king. The text states that the Babylonian king sent gifts upon hearing of Hezekiah's sickness, but these gifts were likely meant to ally the two kingdoms in their struggle against Assyria. Bero-dach-baladan (Merodach-baladan in Isaiah 39.1 and referred to as Marduk-aplaiddina in Assyrian records) rebelled against Assyria numerous times before ultimately being put down by in 700 B.C.

Hezekiah's willingness to ally with the Babylonian king was evident when he showed all of his treasures to the Babylonian emissaries. The Chronicler states that this episode was God's means of testing Hezekiah, "that He might know all that was in his heart" (2Chronicles 32.31). In this case, Hezekiah's heart was lifted with pride and would result in all of his wealth, including his descendants, being taken away to Babylon by a future Babylonian king.

Deliverance From Assyria (2Kings 18.13-19.37; 2Chronicles 32.1-23; Isaiah 36-37)

With this backdrop, we come to the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. That Hezekiah's pride was still an issue is evident from several points in the text:

1. Rather than trusting in the Lord for deliverance, Hezekiah cut off water from the springs outside the city and directed water from the Gihon spring into the city (2Chronicles 32.2-3,30). "In an amazing engineering feat, workers cut an aqueduct from both ends of the course it was to take, meeting in the middle—all this for almost a third of a mile (about 534 meters long) through solid rock beneath Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:3-4, 30). Excavators coming from opposite directions finally joined their respective courses with only a slight miscalculation of a few inches, possibly because they followed the natural fissures in the limestone." (Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, page 379).
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2. Hezekiah attempted to buy off the Assyrian king by paying vast tribute (2Kings 18.14-16). Note: this argues for the Babylonian emissaries arriving before Sennacherib's invasion, otherwise Hezekiah would not have had many riches to show them.
 3. Hezekiah placed trust in Egypt, hoping for help against Assyria (2Kings 18.21; 19.9-13; see Isaiah 30.1-5). "Egypt did indeed prove to be a 'splintered reed' (18:21): Shebitku and Tirhakah retreated without doing the Assyrians further harm." (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, page 429)

However, Hezekiah's moment of pride would pass and as he humbled himself, the Lord delivered His people as only He could. Once again, the narrative is straight-forward, but take note of the following as you read the text:

- » Lachish (2Kings 18.14): "Lachish was one of the most important cities in Judah, guarding a main route from the coastal plain to the Hebron hills" (Zondervan *Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*). "Although the Assyrian texts do not mention Lachish, Sennacherib pictured this siege with graphic and lavish detail on his palace walls in Nineveh." (Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, page 379).
- » Tartan, Rab-saris and Rabshakeh (2Kings 18.17): "Those in charge of the army sent to Jerusalem are described first as the turtanu (Heb. tartan, "supreme commander")—one of two persons in the Assyrian army with this title who often led campaigns on behalf of the emperor... With the turtanu were the rab-sarîs ("chief officer," lit. "chief eunuch") and the rab-šakah

(“field commander,” lit. “chief cupbearer”)... The “chief cupbearer” did not normally take part in military campaigns, but he would have accompanied the emperor as a personal attendant. His presence in this delegation is no doubt to be explained in terms of his linguistic abilities—he spoke the local language.” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)



- » “We trust in the Lord our God” (2Kings 18.22): Hezekiah’s religious reforms were known to the Assyrian king and he sought to instill doubt in the hearts of the people; not only would trust in Egypt fail, but also trust in the Lord. After all, no other god had delivered its people (vss. 33-35).
- » “tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord” (2Kings 19.1): this is the turning point in the text. Hezekiah’s pride was gone, he would now rely only on the Lord!
- » “reproach the living God” (2Kings 19.16): Hezekiah was aware how other nations had fallen to the Assyrians, but Judah was different; her God was the living God!
- » “My hook in your nose...” (2Kings 19.28): “This metaphor may reflect actual Assyrian practice. After his second campaign against Egypt in 671 B.C., King Esarhaddon erected several victory stelae, the most famous of which was found at Samaal (modern Zinçirli) in the foothills of the Anti-Taurus mountains in south-central Turkey. This Zinçirli Stela (for the text, see comment on 19:37) depicts Esarhaddon as leading two prisoners, apparently Baal I of Tyre and Taharqa of Egypt, by ropes tied to a ring that pierces their lips. Ashurbanipal, his successor, further records an act of humiliation against Uatea king of Arabia, in which he “pierced his cheeks with the sharp-edged spear ... put the ring to his jaw, placed a dog collar around his neck and made him guard the bar of the east gate of Niniveh.” (ZIBBC).
- » Assyria’s defeat (2Kings 19.35-37): “The annals of Sennacherib record in boasting terms his success in shutting up Hezekiah in Jerusalem “like a caged bird,” but in keeping with the normal practice of propagandistic accounts, he fails to utter a word about the outcome of his tragic adven-

ture.” (Merrill, page 433) “Herodotus explained this loss as a result of mice devouring the quivers, bows, and shield handles of the warriors. Whether that is a garbled reflection of a sudden attack of the bubonic plague, which Yahweh may have used as his instrument of judgment, cannot be determined.” (Kaiser 380) Note that Sennacherib, who ridiculed Hezekiah’s faith in Jehovah, was slain in the house of his own god. Jehovah can deliver, other gods cannot!

Future Trouble... And Hope

The Lord fulfilled His word and delivered Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrians. However, we’ve already noted that troublesome times lay ahead for Judah. Recall that after Hezekiah’s pride led him to show the treasures of the kingdom to the Babylonian emissaries, the Lord revealed that those treasures would be taken away to Babylon... nothing would be left (Isaiah 39.5-7). God’s judgment against faithless Judah would be coming soon, but there was still hope for the future. Significantly, Isaiah’s prophecies following this pronouncement of judgment are filled with this future hope: the hope of the Messiah and His Kingdom!

Isaiah 40:1–5 (NASB95)

¹ “Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God. ² “Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD’S hand Double for all her sins.” ³ A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ “Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”