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Israel and Judah: 37. Hezekiah and God's Salvation

by David Sielaff, March 2020

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for March 2020](#)

Israel and Judah: 37

Hezekiah
and God's
Salvation

THE SITUATION: The Kingdom of Judah is occupied by the Assyrian army. Most of Judah's army is dead or scattered throughout the land while King Hezekiah, the prophet Isaiah, the nobles of the kingdom, and the people in the capital of Jerusalem are surrounded by the Assyrian army. The Assyrians have not attacked yet, but Jerusalem was offered more chances to escape devastation. The *rab-shakeh*, a spokesman for Sennacherib, calls for Jerusalem's surrender. Hezekiah's messengers report to their king.

King Sennacherib is in the land of Judah southwest of Jerusalem conducting military operations, wary of a possible intervention by a large army from Egypt. Sennacherib thinks he is in control of events but YHWH will intervene to rescue Judah — one more time.

This invasion by Assyria occurred after Hezekiah instituted his religious reforms (2 Kings 18:13–16 and 2 Chronicles 31:20–32:1). The kingdom is devastated with all of Judah's fortified cities attacked and taken. Jerusalem's defenses were strong but Assyrian forces surround the city. No attack on the city has yet occurred.

The situation was tense as the Assyrian envoys spoke with representatives of King Hezekiah outside the walls of Jerusalem. The Assyrian messengers from King Sennacherib shouted their arguments in Hebrew so the people could understand fully their perilous and hopeless situation. They tried to incite the people to rebel against King Hezekiah and surrender the city. The meeting ended and Hezekiah's envoys go to report to their king what was said. All is quiet in the city as we continue the story.

Again, all Bible quotations are from the *Concordant Literal Old Testament* unless stated otherwise.

TEXT: Hezekiah Appeals to God Through Isaiah

2 Kings 18:36–19:7

³⁶ Yet the people kept silence and did not answer him a word; for this had been the king's instruction, saying, "**You shall not answer him.**"

Isaiah 36:21–37:7

²¹ Yet *they* kept silence and did not answer him a word; for this had been the king's instruction, saying, "**You shall not answer him.**"

³⁷ Then Eliakim son of Hilkiyah who was over the household and Shebna the scribe and Joah son of Asaph the recorder came to Hezekiah, with their garments torn, and told him the words of the *rab-shakeh*.

^{2 Kings 19:1} It came to be when king Hezekiah heard it that he tore his garments, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of Yahweh.

² He also sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³ They said to him,

“Thus speaks Hezekiah: A day of distress, reproof and indignity is this day, as when sons have come to the point of breaking forth, yet there is no vigor to give birth.

⁴ Perhaps Yahweh your Elohim shall hearken to all the words of the *rab-shakeh*, whom the king of Assyria his lord has sent to reproach the living Elohim, and He will reprove him for the words that Yahweh your Elohim has heard. Now lift up a prayer in behalf of the remnant that is found.”

⁵ When the officials of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, **“Thus you shall say to your lord,**

‘Thus speaks Yahweh: Do not stand in fear because of the words that you have heard with which the retainers of the king of Assyria taunted Me. ⁷ Behold,

[1] **I am putting a spirit in him** [Sennacherib];

[2] **he will hear a report and**

[3] **return to his land; and**

[4] **I will fell him by the sword in his own land.”**

²² Then Eliakim son of Hilkiyah who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah son of Asaph the recorder came to Hezekiah, with their garments torn, and *they* told him the words of the *rab-shakeh*.

^{Isaiah 37:1} It came to be when king Hezekiah heard it that he tore his garments, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of Yahweh.

² He also sent Eliakim who was over the household and Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³ They said to him,

“Thus speaks Hezekiah: A day of distress, reproof and indignity is this day, as when sons have come to the point of breaking forth, yet there is no vigor to give birth.

⁴ Perhaps Yahweh your Elohim shall hearken to the words of the *rab-shakeh*, whom the king of Assyria his lord has sent to reproach the living Elohim, and He will reprove him for the words that Yahweh your Elohim has heard. Now lift up a prayer in behalf of the remnant that is found *in this city*.”

⁵ When the officials of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, **“Thus you shall say to your lord,**

‘Thus speaks Yahweh: Do not stand in fear because of the words that you have heard with which the retainers of the king of Assyria taunted Me. ⁷ Behold,

[1] **I am putting a spirit in him** [Sennacherib];

[2] **he will hear a report and**

[3] **return to his land; and**

[4] **I will fell him by the sword in his own land.”** [end text]

As you likely noticed, the Second Kings and Isaiah portions presented above have only minor differences between them.

2 Kings 18:36–37 and Isaiah 36:21–22. For continuity, two verses each from Second Kings and Isaiah are repeated from the last episode.

The people responded with silence in verse 36 as Hezekiah instructed. The *rab-shakeh* is an Assyrian title and not a name. It means “head-” or “chief-cupbearer,” a high official in Sennacherib’s court, speaking on behalf of his Assyrian master.

Isaiah outlived Hezekiah and probably compiled Samuel/Kings up to the time of his own death during the reign of King Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son and heir. Note what is written in 2 Chronicles 32:32:

“As for the rest of the affairs of Hezekiah, and his kindness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, the prophet, and on the scroll of the kings of Judah and Israel.”

A later compiler, perhaps Ezra the priest, put the last verses of 2 Kings 25:30 into what the Chronicler termed **“the scroll of the Kings”** which is about King Jehoiachin, the last living king of Judah mentioned in 2 Kings.^a

2 Kings 19:1–2 and Isaiah 37:1–2. Hezekiah’s three representatives (and negotiators) come before their king with their garments torn as a sign of anguish and despair. When they told the message from the *rab-shakeh* of Sennacherib, Hezekiah also **“tore his garments,”** put on a sackcloth garment of rough wool, and went to pray in the Temple. An unknown amount of time passed between verses 1 and 2. The sequence was:

(1) Hezekiah goes to the Temple to cry out to God.

(2) Hezekiah sends Eliakim and Shebna as his messengers (but not Joah the recorder, Hezekiah’s secretary).

(3) **“Elders of the priests”** (verses 2 and 2) put on sackcloth and went with Eliakim and Shebna to deliver Hezekiah’s appeal to Isaiah, hoping or expecting that YHWH would give a reply.

Verses 3 and 3. Hezekiah’s message to Isaiah began with an expression of pain and weakness over the present calamitous situation. There seemed to be no way out of a horrible future. Remember Hezekiah had nothing to offer to bribe the Assyrians to leave Judah. He already gave all the wealth of Judah to Sennacherib as an offer to become the vassal of the great Assyrian king. This wealth included all the silver and gold in the treasury of Judah, and even the treasures of the Temple of YHWH (2 Kings 18:14–16).

Sennacherib’s response was to keep the money, continue the invasion, punish Hezekiah, besiege Jerusalem, and threaten assault, destruction, and mass death — unless Judah surrendered. Hezekiah’s only hope was YHWH, and God’s displeasure with the idolatry of the people did not give him much reason to hope for YHWH’s mercy.

Verses 4 and 4. Nevertheless, Hezekiah reasons with YHWH and asks Isaiah to intercede with YHWH because of Sennacherib’s evil words through the *rab-shakeh*. The Assyrian king criticized YHWH, saying that the God of Israel could not save Judah or Jerusalem. YHWH was a god who lacked power to save His people.

Hezekiah implored YHWH directly and through a message to Isaiah (YHWH’s servant). Hezekiah hoped that YHWH would answer through Isaiah, YHWH’s prophet.

Verses 5–6 and 5–6. The officials sent from the king told Isaiah what Hezekiah said. Isaiah gave them YHWH’s response. Hezekiah should not fear the taunts of Sennacherib’s messengers who actually taunted YHWH, and He will personally act in response.

Verses 7 and 7. YHWH promises four things, given in very few words. The first and the fourth are directly caused by YHWH. The other second and third result after YHWH’s first promise bears fruit.

First, Sennacherib will receive a spirit from YHWH. Is this a spiritual being that YHWH sends to possess him? Or is it the kind of spirit of fear like King Saul received (1 Samuel 16:14–15)?

Second, Sennacherib hears a report. Will it be a rumor or a true report?

Third, he will return to Assyria. Will it be because of the report? That seems likely.

Fourth, YHWH’s final act is specific and in two parts: death by the sword that will occur far from Judah, **“in his own land.”**

^a Dr. Ernest Martin wrote in his book *Restoring the Original Bible*, chapter 12, [“Author of the Book of Kingdoms”](#):

“But what about the part of the Book of Kingdoms that records events after the time of Isaiah? This should give little problem. It was perfectly possible for later canonizers to bring the book up to date. The Talmud says that Jeremiah wrote the Book of Kings, but this could mean that Jeremiah was the one who finished the book. The composition of the main body of the work, however, as stated in the Bible itself, seems to be Isaiah’s.

Why did Isaiah write the Book of Kingdoms? There was a good reason for it. As Fenton said, the historical books preceding Isaiah are a perfectly good introduction to Isaiah’s prophecies. In the original order of the Old Testament, the Book of Kingdoms immediately precedes that of the prophet Isaiah. Would it not be natural for Isaiah to present a continuous history of Israel’s obedience and their later rebellions and punishments before relating his prophecies of what would happen to them should they continue following in the footsteps of their forefathers?”

The first three promises occur soon after they were given, but no time frame is given for the third prophecy or promise. However, secular history reports Sennacherib died some nine years after his last mention of invading and retreating from Judah. Scripture gives us no further information about Sennacherib.

Meanwhile, a different message is going to its destination.

TEXT: The Rab-shakeh Returns to Sennacherib; He Sends a Second Letter to Hezekiah

2 Kings 19:8–13

⁸ Now the *rab-shakeh* had turned back and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he [the *rab-shakeh*] had heard that he [Sennacherib] had decamped [left] from Lachish.

⁹ Yet he heard a report about Tirhakah king of Cush [Ethiopia], saying, “**Behold, he had marched forth to fight against you.**”

Then he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ “**Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying:**

‘Let not your Elohim, in Whom you are trusting, lure you into thinking that Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.

¹¹ **Behold, you yourself have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands to doom them; and shall you be rescued?**

¹² **Have the elohim of the nations rescued them, those which my fathers ruined, Gozan and Charan, Rezech and the sons of Eden who were in Tel-assar?**

¹³ **Where is he — the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?’”**

Isaiah 37:8–13

⁸ Now the *rab-shakeh* had turned back and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he [the *rab-shakeh*] had heard that he [Sennacherib] had decamped [left] from Lachish.

⁹ Yet *the king of Assyria* heard a report about Tirhakah king of Cush [Ethiopia], saying, “**He has marched forth to fight against you.**”

He sent messengers to Hezekiah saying, ¹⁰ “**Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying:**

‘Let not your Elohim, in Whom you are trusting, lure you into thinking that Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.

¹¹ **Behold, you yourself have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands to doom them; and shall you be rescued?**

¹² **Have the elohim of the nations rescued them, those which my fathers ruined, Gozan and Charan, Rezech and the sons of Eden who were in Tel-assar?**

¹³ **Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?’”** [end text]

2 Kings 19:8 and Isaiah 37:8. The exact location of Libnah is believed to be southwest of Jerusalem (Joshua 21:13; 2 Chronicles 21:10). The *rab-shakeh* sought Sennacherib to tell him the king and people of Jerusalem had no answer to the Assyrian surrender demand. Some of Judah’s army still fought at Libnah after Lachish (south of Libnah) was captured with many prisoners who were sent to Assyria.^b

Verses 9 and 9. Next we are told Sennacherib “**heard a report**” about the Egyptian/Ethiopian King Tirhakah moving troops against him. Is this the report YHWH referred to in 2 Kings 19:7 and Isaiah 37:7 above? Did this report cause the Assyrian king to leave the conquered fortress of Lachish and move his army to Libnah to prepare for battle with the Egyptians? We lack evidence to answer these questions.

However, Sennacherib sends different “messengers” to Hezekiah (different from those mentioned in 2 Kings 18:17), again demanding the surrender of Jerusalem with powerful human reasoning. The *rab-shakeh* is not mentioned again in Scripture.

Verses 10–13 and 10–13. In Sennacherib’s message to Hezekiah, the Assyrian king a second time belittles

^b An Assyrian inscription tells of the aftermath of Lachish’s capture (Hallo and Younger, *Context of Scripture*, Volume 2, 304):
“Sennacherib, king of the universe, king of Assyria, seated upon a sedan chair, the spoils of Lachish passed before him.”

YHWH as a lesser *elohim* unable to rescue His people. While Sennacherib does not deny YHWH's existence as a god, he denigrates YHWH's power, that cannot compare with the power of the gods of Assyria.

Sennacherib's history lesson for Hezekiah, along with the fact that his armies already controlled most all of the cities of Judah except Jerusalem, make a compelling argument from a purely human viewpoint.

It is the same argument with many of the same words Sennacherib used in 2 Kings 18:33–35, Isaiah 36:18b–20; and 2 Chronicles 32:13–14 (see "[Israel and Judah: 36. King Hezekiah and Assyria](#)", page 11). He insulted YHWH at that time also.^c

Verses 12 and 12. In this latest warning, Sennacherib added four cities and lands not listed before as victims of Assyrian conquest. All four cities were known to the people in Jerusalem. All four cities were in Mesopotamia and their people were resettled by the Assyrians to replace the Israelites in the former Kingdom of Israel. The people from those cities became known as Samaritans in later centuries.

The four cities or lands were Gozan, Charan, Rezep, and "**the sons of Eden who were in Tel-assar.**"^d These cities were added by Sennacherib to his latest threatening message. **Gozen** was the city some Israelites were exiled to, while its former inhabitants of Gozen were sent to Samaria. **Charan** (Haran in the King James Version) was an ancient city known from the time of Abraham (Genesis 11:31, 29:4; and Acts 7:4). The precise location today of **Rezep** is not known.

The "**sons of Eden**" were from the land of Eden, a territory known for its trees (2 Kings 19:12; 2 Chronicles 29:12, 31:15; Isaiah 37:12, 51:3; Ezekiel 27:23, 28:13, 31:9–18, 36:35; Joel 2:3; Amos 1:5). Several decades later, **Charan** and **Eden** are mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel^e:

"The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they were your traders; for every principal aromatic and for

^c When King Ahab ruled the northern kingdom of Israel, the Syrians attacked and disparaged YHWH, His majesty, and His power, declaring him a minor god. YHWH responded in 1 Kings 20:23:

"As for the officials of Syria's king, they said to him, 'An Elohim of mountains is Israel's Elohim and not an Elohim of vales [valleys]. Therefore they were more courageous than we. Nevertheless, if we should fight against them on level ground, we shall assuredly be more courageous than they.'"

YHWH pronounced the Syrian army's doom in 1 Kings 20:28. God gave the victory to Israel.

Hundreds of years later King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon questioned YHWH's power when Daniel's young friends in exile, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were threatened with death. Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to be thrown into a fiery furnace if they refused to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently, the king of Babylon thought his status was elevated somehow to being a god, an *elohim*. (So much for pagan propaganda.) Note Daniel 3:15:

"... you shall fall down and worship the golden image that I made. And if you should not worship, in the same hour you shall be heaved into the midst of the glowing, flaming furnace. And who is that eloah that shall deliver you from my hands?"

Nebuchadnezzar did not know or did not care that a similar statement was made to Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem. Degrading God is not wise.

^d There is an "Eden" in Lebanon according to Ezekiel 31:16. It is likely that the territory in Lebanon was also named "Eden" because of its rich foliage. It is a poetic reference to a future Assyrian (another name of the antichrist) of Ezekiel chapter 31 where there are other references to a garden and a land of Eden.

(Editor's note: We have some dense and lush forests in parts of Oregon where the ferns give a deep green color and a gentle appearance to the forest floor. It is hard not to think that this would be a hint of what the original Eden must have been like.)

^e See "[Israel and Judah: 34. Death of the Kingdom of Israel](#)," page 12 to learn more about these cities and the people displaced by the Assyrians.



Jerusalem, Lachish, and Libnah

every precious stone and gold they sold your commodities. **Charan** and **Canneh and Eden**, the traders of Sheba, Assyria and Chilmad were your traders.”

• *Ezekiel 27:22–23*

Verses 13 and 13. The Mesopotamian cities of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah were listed in Sennacherib’s prior threat message of 2 Kings 18:34. Hamath, Arpad, and Sepharvaim are mentioned in the parallel verse of Isaiah 36:19. These cities were not mentioned in the third parallel of 2 Chronicles 32:14.

Before the Assyrians attacked Judah, Isaiah wrote down a prophecy from YHWH that Judah and Jerusalem would be saved by YHWH’s actions, without help from Egypt. This was contained in Isaiah 31:1–9.

I repeat here the text of Isaiah chapter 31 (it is also in “[Israel and Judah: 36. King Hezekiah and Assyria](#), page 11). It is formatted differently, with different notes relating directly to new information in 2 Kings chapter 19 and other Isaiah passages.

TEXT: Isaiah’s Prophecy of YHWH’s Deliverance of Jerusalem

Isaiah 31:1–9

¹ Woe to those going down to Egypt for help!

On horses are they leaning, And
they are trusting in chariots because they are many, And
on horsemen because they are very plentiful;

They do not heed the Holy One of Israel, And
of Yahweh they do not inquire.

² Yet indeed He is wise, and He shall bring evil, And
His words He does not withdraw;
He rises against the house of evildoers, And
against the help of those contriving lawlessness.

³ Yet the Egyptians are human [*adam*] and not El, And
their horses are flesh and not spirit.

When Yahweh, He is stretching out His hand,
Then the one helping will stumble, And
the one helped will fall, And
together all of them shall be finished.

⁴ For thus says Yahweh to me:

**“Just as the lion snarls, or the sheltered lion, over its prey
When a full force of shepherds is called against it,
By their voice it is not dismayed, Nor by their clamor is it humbled,
So Yahweh of hosts shall descend to rally His host on Mount Zion and on its hill.**

⁵ Like birds flying, so **Yahweh of hosts shall protect Jerusalem;**
Protecting, **He will rescue**, And
passing over, **He will make a way of escape.**

⁶ Return to Him from Whom they have deepened defection, **sons of Israel!**

⁷ For in that day each one shall **reject his forbidden idols of silver**
And his **forbidden idols of gold**, which your hands have made for yourselves in sin.

⁸ **Then the Assyrian** will fall by a sword, **not of a man**, And
a sword, **not of a human**, it shall devour him; And
he will flee for himself from the presence of the sword,

Yet his choice young men shall be for tributary service;

⁹ **His crag [rock], it shall pass away because of shrinking fear, And his chiefs will be dismayed because of the banner,**

**Averring [declaring] is Yahweh,
Whose firelight is in Zion, And
Whose stove [firepot] is in Jerusalem.”**

[end text]

Isaiah 31:1. Approaches were made to Egypt for help against the Assyrians and Judah’s leaders did so, but without Hezekiah knowing about it. Verse 1 has YHWH pronouncing a “Woe” upon those who would do such a thing. YHWH did not criticize Hezekiah for seeking help, nor did Isaiah. Hezekiah trusted YHWH.

The Assyrians did accuse Hezekiah of seeking Egyptian help. Perhaps some nobles of Judah approached Egyptian leaders to counter Assyrian expansion. At that time their chariots and horsemen (cavalry) were thought to be powerful military units. Yet those speaking with the Egyptians ignore YHWH.

An Assyrian royal inscription of Sennacherib tells of a battle between Egyptian and Assyrian armies:

“The kings of Egypt, (and) the bowmen, chariot corps and cavalry of the kings of Ethiopia assembled a countless force and came to their (i.e. the Ekronites’) aid. In the plain of Eltekeh, they drew up their ranks against me and sharpened their weapons. Trusting in the god Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the Ethiopians, I personally took alive in the midst of the battle. I besieged and conquered Eltekeh and Timnah and carried off their spoil.”

• *Hallo and Younger, Context of Scripture, Volume Two, 303*

The warning in Isaiah chapter 31 was not that Egyptian military was weak, but that YHWH would not allow them to assist Judah. Isaiah warns Judah not to rely on Egypt. Apparently, some officials did not listen, but Hezekiah himself never sought Egypt’s help, even though the Assyrian messengers said he did.

Verse 2. This verse says YHWH **“shall bring evil.”** He does it because He is wise, His words are sure, He punishes evildoers, and He is against lawlessness.

This should not surprise anyone because it says elsewhere in Isaiah, and later in Amos:

“Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of good and Creator of evil, I, Yahweh, make all these things.”

• *Isaiah 45:7*

“Would a trumpet be blown in a city and the people not tremble? Would there come to be evil in a city and Yahweh not have done it?”

• *Amos 3:6*

Verse 3. The Egyptians seem to be fierce warriors, but they are nothing but men, *adam*, the basic word for “human,” and nothing more. Nor are their horses supernatural, no matter what remarkable things they may do. When YHWH acts, nothing can stop His acts, those opposing His acts will fail. This means that even with supernatural help, all such beings are impotent against YHWH’s actions.

Verse 4. Isaiah gives the first of several metaphors, quoting YHWH directly. Assyria is portrayed as a lion waiting to feed, protecting its captured prey. Jerusalem is the prey. Shepherds are symbols of the hosts of YHWH.^f

Verse 5. YHWH declares His future action that He **“shall protect Jerusalem.”** He will also rescue them and with His help, Jerusalem will escape the threats of Sennacherib.

Verses 6 and 7. Another call (one of hundreds throughout the Old Testament) to return to YHWH, repent, and reject idolatry.

^f Why are the hosts of YHWH present when Isaiah says YHWH will do the protecting and fighting for Jerusalem? See my June 2002 Commentary, [“Why Does God Need an Army?”](#)

Verse 8. Next are words directed against “the Assyrian.” Even though there is a definite article, it means the Assyrian as a national symbol. This will be fulfilled, as you will read below. The first segment of this verse happens second. The second segment is fulfilled first.

Verse 9. The word translated “crag” means a large rock. A note from the NET Bible on this verse is relevant: **“The ‘fire’ and ‘firepot’ here symbolize divine judgment, which is heating up like a fire in Jerusalem, waiting to be used against the Assyrians when they attack the city.”** YHWH’s smoldering judgment did not come with fire, which might be expected from Isaiah’s words, but it comes with a silent death in the night, acting when most effective — and deadly to God’s enemies. This was prophesied by Isaiah years before it was fulfilled.

Now we go back to Second Chronicles.

TEXT: Review of Sennacherib’s Acts in 2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 32:17–19

¹⁷ [H]e also wrote letters to reproach Yahweh Elohim of Israel and to talk against Him, saying,

“Just as the elohim of the nations of the lands did not rescue their people from my hand, so the Elohim of Hezekiah shall not rescue his people from my hand.”

¹⁸ They called with a loud voice in Judean to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall to intimidate them and to fill them with panic so that they might seize the city.

¹⁹ They spoke about the Elohim of Jerusalem as they did about the elohim of the other peoples of the earth, the products of human hands.” [end text]

These verses do not synchronize easily with 2 Kings and Isaiah, so I present this review separately.

2 Chronicles 32:17. The compiler of Second Chronicles (likely Ezra the scribe) presents a synopsis of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem. For example, **“letters”** were written. We are told of two letters in Second Kings and Isaiah, and the reader is given details of what each letter contains.

Verse 18. **“They”** were messengers who shouted Sennacherib’s “letters” to Hezekiah, his messengers, and to the people (apparently shouting to crowds listening on the walls of Jerusalem). **“In Judean”** means the Assyrian messengers spoke in the “Judean” Hebrew language to all those listening.

The phrase **“... so that they might seize the city”** makes clear that Sennacherib’s messengers sought to provoke the people to rebel against Hezekiah, and against God. If the gates of Jerusalem were opened, the Assyrians would capture the city with minimal casualties to their own men.

Verse 19. YHWH was said to be a minor gods like other gods of other cities and nations the Assyrians destroyed. That was a mistake.

The concluding verse of 2 Chronicles 32:20 is below compared with 2 Kings and Isaiah texts.

TEXT: Hezekiah Receives the Second Letter from the King of Assyria

2 Kings 19:14–15a	Isaiah 37:14–15	2 Chronicles 32:20
<p>¹⁴ Hezekiah took the <u>scrolls</u> from the hand of the messengers and read them and <u>went up to the house of Yahweh.</u></p>	<p>¹⁴ Hezekiah took the <u>scrolls</u> from the hand of the messengers and read <i>it</i> and <u>went up to the house of Yahweh.</u></p>	
<p>Then Hezekiah spread them out before Yahweh, ^{15a} and Hezekiah prayed before Yahweh and said:</p>	<p>Then Hezekiah spread <i>it</i> out before Yahweh, ¹⁵ and Hezekiah prayed <i>to</i> Yahweh, <i>saying</i>:</p>	<p>²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king <u>and Isaiah</u> son of Amoz the prophet prayed over this and cried out to the heavens. [end text]</p>

2 Kings 19:14 and Isaiah 37:14. The situation has worsened, with every indication that the second letter from Sennacherib was a final ultimatum for Jerusalem’s surrender (likely to include Hezekiah’s torture and death). Hezekiah spread out the scrolls “**before YHWH,**” probably meaning both of the letters during the siege, as well as other correspondence Hezekiah had with Sennacherib, such as the tribute negotiation letters. Remember this sequence of events as seen from the Assyrian point of view:

1. Hezekiah stops payment of tribute to Sennacherib.
2. Sennacherib threatens war if the tribute was not paid.
3. Hezekiah does not pay.
4. Sennacherib invades Judah.
5. Hezekiah sends tribute to Sennacherib (even Temple treasures), asks Assyrians to leave Judah.
6. Sennacherib keeps the tribute, attacked Judah, put Jerusalem under siege, then he disparaged YHWH as a minor god.
7. Hezekiah appeals to YHWH to protect His dignity.

There was correspondence with each move and countermove. Hezekiah put that correspondence before YHWH. The full story is in 2 Kings chapters 19 and 20, the narrative of Isaiah chapters 36 and 37, and an abbreviated narrative in 2 Chronicles chapter 32. All must be studied together.

2 Chronicles 32:20. This verse says that Isaiah joined Hezekiah in petitioning YHWH.

TEXT: Hezekiah’s Prayer for YHWH’s Deliverance, after the Second Letter

2 Kings 19:15b–19

^{15b} O Yahweh Elohim of Israel, dwelling over the cherubim, You by Yourself alone are He, Who is the One Elohim over all the kingdoms of the earth. You Yourself have made the heavens and the earth.

¹⁶ Stretch out Your ear, O Yahweh, and hear! Unclose Your eyes, O Yahweh, and see! And hear all the words of Sennacherib that he has sent to reproach the living Elohim.

¹⁷ It is true, O Yahweh, the kings of Assyria did drain the nations and their land ¹⁸ and put their elohim into the fire and destroyed them; for they were no elohim, but rather the work of human hands, wood and stone.

¹⁹ And now, O Yahweh our Elohim, save us, I pray, from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, Yahweh, by Yourself **alone** are Elohim.

Isaiah 37:16–20

¹⁶ O Yahweh *of hosts*, Elohim of Israel, dwelling over the cherubim, You by Yourself alone are He, Who is the One Elohim over all the kingdoms of the earth. You Yourself have made the heavens and the earth.

¹⁷ Stretch out Your ear, O Yahweh and hear! Unclose Your eyes, O Yahweh, and see! And hear all the words of Sennacherib that he has sent to reproach the living Elohim.

¹⁸ It is true, O Yahweh, the kings of Assyria did drain all the *lands* and their land, ¹⁹ and put their elohim into the fire and destroyed them; for they were no elohim, but rather the work of human hands, wood and stone.

²⁰ And now, O Yahweh our Elohim, save us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, Yahweh, by Yourself **alone** are Elohim. [end text]

2 Kings 19:15b and Isaiah 37:16. King Hezekiah begins by stating that YHWH is unique, the only God and Creator.

Verses 16 and 17. Speaking poetically, Hezekiah introduces Sennacherib’s “**reproach**” and ridicule of YHWH in his public letters.

Verses 17 and 18. The word “**drained**” is usually translated as “laid waste,” even in the Greek LXX translation.

Verses 18 and 19. Hezekiah in his prayer correctly states that all other gods can be burnt up and destroyed, because they are not real but are made of wood and stone. As Assyriologist D.J. Wiseman puts it:

“Once it is recognized that idols are merely fashioned by men’s hands (Deut. 4:28; Acts 17:29), then they can be seen as no-gods and unable to do anything (Isa. 44:9–11; Jer. 10:3–10). The futility of such deities (Psalm 115:3–8; 135:15–18) is a recurrent theme in Isaiah’s teaching (Isaiah 2:20; 40:19–20; 41:7; 44:9–20).”

• D.J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 300^g

Verses 19 and 20. Hezekiah asks for YHWH’s salvation for Jerusalem, then he adds his desire “**that all the kingdoms of the earth**” may know that YHWH is the only Elohim.

TEXT: YHWH’s Response to Hezekiah (through Isaiah)

2 Kings 19:20–34

²⁰ Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, **Thus speaks Yahweh** Elohim of Israel:

“**What you prayed to Me as to Sennacherib king of Assyria, have I heard.** ²¹ This is the word that Yahweh has spoken against him:

She despises you! She derides you! The virgin daughter of Zion. Behind you, she wags her head! The daughter of Jerusalem.

²² Whom have you **reproached** and **taunted**? And against Whom have you **raised high your voice**? And **lifted up your eyes** to the height? Against **the Holy One of Israel!**

²³ By means of your messengers you have **reproached** Yahweh. And you [Sennacherib] said,

‘With the multitude of **my** chariots
I myself have ascended the height of mountains, The flanks of Lebanon, And **I have cut down** its tall stand of cedars, Its choicest firs.

I have entered its outmost height, Its Carmel wildwood.

²⁴ **I myself scooped and drank** alien waters, And **I have drained with the sole of my feet all the waterways of lower Egypt.**

²⁵ Have you not heard?
From of old I purposed it;
From days aforetime also I formed it.
Now I have brought it to pass that you have come into being
To decimate fortified cities into crumbled mounds.

Isaiah 37:21–35

²¹ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, **Thus speaks Yahweh** Elohim of Israel:

“**What you prayed to Me as to Sennacherib king of Assyria, have I heard.** ²² This is the word that Yahweh has spoken against him:

She despises you! She derides you! The virgin daughter of Zion. Behind you, she wags her head! The daughter of Jerusalem.

²³ Whom have you **reproached** and **taunted**? And against Whom have you **raised high your voice** And **lifted up your eyes** to the height? Against the Holy One of Israel!

²⁴ By means of your **servants**, you have reproached Yahweh. And you [Sennacherib] said,

‘With the multitude of **my** chariots
I myself have ascended the height of mountains, The flanks of Lebanon, And **I have cut down** its tall stand of cedars, Its choicest firs.

I have entered its outmost height, Its Carmel wildwood.

²⁵ **I myself scooped and drank** alien waters, And **I have drained with the sole of my feet all the waterways of lower Egypt.**

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From of old I purposed it;
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To decimate fortified cities into crumbled mounds.

^g Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 300.

²⁶ Their dwellers are shorthanded,
Are dismayed and ashamed.
They have become like herbage of the field
And green verdure, Grass of the house-
tops, Blasted before the east wind.'

²⁷ Your rising and your sitting down, Your
going forth and your coming in, I know, And
your ranting against Me.

²⁸ Because your ranting against Me And your
self-satisfaction have ascended into My ears,
So I will place My gaff [hook] in your nose
And My bit in your lips,
And I will reverse you in the way by which
you came. —

²⁹ Now this is the sign for you: Eat this year
the self-sown and in the second year sponta-
neous growth. Yet in the third year sow and
reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

³⁰ The salvage that remains of the house of
Judah will proceed to take root downward
and will yield fruit upward.

³¹ For from Jerusalem shall go forth a rem-
nant, And a salvage from Mount Zion. The
zeal of Yahweh of hosts, it shall achieve this.

³² Wherefore thus speaks Yahweh as to the king of
Assyria:

He shall not come into this city,
Nor shoot an arrow there,
Nor confront it with a shield,
Nor pour out earthwork against it.

³³ By the way which he came, by it he shall
return,
Yet into this city he shall not enter. This is
the averring of Yahweh.

³⁴ I will protect this city to save it on My own
account and on account of My servant
David.”

²⁷ Their dwellers are shorthanded,
Are dismayed and ashamed;
They have become like herbage of the field
And green vegetation, Grass of the house-
tops, Blasted before the east wind’;

²⁸ Your rising and your sitting down, Your
going forth and your coming in, I know, And
your ranting against Me.

²⁹ Because your ranting against Me And your
self-satisfaction have ascended into My ears,
So I will place My gaff [hook] in your nose
And My bit in your lips,
And I will reverse you in the way by which
you came. —

³⁰ Now this is the sign for you: Eat this year
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neous growth. Yet in the third year sow and
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zeal of Yahweh of hosts, it shall achieve this.

³³ Wherefore thus speaks Yahweh as to the king of
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He shall not come into this city,
Nor shoot an arrow there,
Nor confront it with a shield,
Nor pour out earthwork against it.

³⁴ By the way which he came, by it he shall
return,
Yet into this city he shall not enter. This is
the averring of Yahweh.

³⁵ I will protect this city to save it on My own
account and on account of My servant
David.”

[end text]

There are two sections in this extended passage. The first is Isaiah’s prophecy. The second is YHWH’s reply to Sennacherib. Hebrews 10:11 (King James Version) tells us, “**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,**” as Sennacherib discovered.

2 Kings 19:20 and Isaiah 37:21. Apparently, Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah. What those words must have meant to Hezekiah; YHWH Himself saying, “**What you prayed, I have heard.**”

Verses 21 and 22. “**The daughters of Zion,**” the most delicate and defenseless, despise and ridicule Sennacherib. The people of Jerusalem were neither dismayed nor overly afraid of him.

Verses 22–23a and 23–24a. Sennacherib has offended “**the Holy One of Israel!**” not helpless ones in Zion or Jerusalem. By Sennacherib’s propaganda YHWH has been “**reproached and taunted**” (criticized and

mocked), “... raised high your voice? And lifted up your eyes to the height? Against the Holy One of Israel!”^h This was all done with mocking disrespect and hatred toward the “minor god” YHWH. Then Sennacherib told his Assyrian messengers to do so publicly to God’s people.

Verses 23b and 24b. Sennacherib’s exploits and boasts are itemized. His conquests are many and God proceeds to mock the Assyrian’s words.

Verses 24 and 25. Cutting down cedars was the object of many Assyrian military expeditions over the generations. The cedar was used in Assyrian temples and palaces like David and Solomon did in their houses and Solomon did in God’s Temple in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:11, 7:2, 7; 1 Kings 4:33, chapters 5–7).

Sennacherib is quoted as exaggerating his boasts about his conquests on the sea (perhaps) and at the Nile River in Egypt.

Verses 25 and 26. Everything Sennacherib did was done according to YHWH’s intent and will.

Verses 26 and 27. “Verdure” means “vegetation.” His boasting continues, likening the many he has killed to dead grass in a field.

Verses 27 and 28. “Your rising and your sitting down, Your going forth and your coming in, I know, ...” YHWH Himself through Isaiah quotes King David: “You Yourself know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought from afar” (Psalm 139:2).

Verses 28 and 29. The phrases: “My gaff [hook] in your nose, And My bit in your lips ...” is what the Assyrians did to prisoners as they transported them to Assyria for resettlement. In other words, YHWH will force Sennacherib to do what YHWH wants and go where YHWH wants.

Verses 29 and 30. YHWH promises that in the third year after the Assyrian invasion, He will restore normal agricultural prosperity.

Verses 31 and 32. Judah is the “remains” or “remnant.” With its refugees from the Kingdom of Israel when it was destroyed and dismantled by Assyria, Judah represents a remnant of all Israel (Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, page 302).

Verses 32 and 33. The formula “thus speaks YHWH” is also in verses 20 and 21 above. Both introduce parts of YHWH’s answer to Hezekiah’s prayer. A list of four things Sennacherib will not do begins this part.

Verses 33 and 34. Repeat the earlier statement:

“By the way which he came, by it he shall return ...” (verses 33 and 34)

“And I will reverse you in the way by which you came ...” (verses 28 and 29).

To “aver” means to state something, therefore “the averring of Yahweh” means “the statement of YHWH.”

Verses 34 and 35. Two reasons are given for YHWH’s actions toward Assyria.

Surprisingly, YHWH will again later use Assyria to punish the king and people of Judah.

TEXT: Death Angel [Messenger] Sent from YHWH

2 Kings 19:35–37	Isaiah 37:36–38	2 Chronicles 32:21
<p>³⁵ It came to pass on that night that a messenger of Yahweh went forth and smote 185,000</p> <p>in the Assyrian camp. When the king’s men rose early in the morning, behold, there were all their dead corpses.</p>	<p>³⁶ Then a messenger of Yahweh went forth and smote 185,000</p> <p>in the Assyrian camp. When the king’s men rose early in the morning, behold, there were all their dead corpses.</p>	<p>²¹ Yahweh sent a messenger who suppressed every masterful soldier and chief officer and chief in the camp of the king of Assyria.</p>

^h Psalm 22:7–8:

“All those seeing me, they are deriding me; They are opening up the lip; They wag their head, saying, ‘He hands over himself to Yahweh; let Him deliver him!’ Let Him rescue him, if He delights in him!”

³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria decamped and went home; he returned

and dwelt in Nineveh.

³⁷ Then it came to pass while he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his elohim that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer smote him with the sword. As for them, they escaped to the land of Ararat; and his son Esarhaddon reigned in his stead.

³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria decamped, went *away* and returned home,

and *he* dwelt in Nineveh.

³⁸ Then it came to pass while he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his elohim that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer smote him with the sword. As for them, they escaped to the land of Ararat; and his son Esarhaddon reigned in his stead.

So he returned with shame of face to his land;

when he entered the house of his elohim, some of the offspring of his bowels fell him there with the sword.

[see verses 22–23 below]

2 Chronicles 32:22–23

²² Thus Yahweh saved Hezekiah and the dwellers of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria, and from the hand of everyone; He granted them rest from those round about. ²³ Many [nations and kingdoms] were bringing an approach present for Yahweh to Jerusalem, and costly gifts for Hezekiah king of Judah; thereafter he was lifted up in the eyes of all the nations. [end text]

2 Kings 19:35, Isaiah 37:36, and 2 Chronicles 32:21. YHWH's salvation occurs. I wish for more details, but speculation is useless. An angel of YHWH caused a plague when David performed a census of all Israel (Exodus 12:29–30; 1 Chronicles 21:12–15, 30; Acts 12:23). The 185,000 were probably those **“in the Assyrian camp”** surrounding Jerusalem. That included the vassal allied military units fighting with the Assyrian military. It also would have included merchants, women, servants, slaves, and craftsmen not from Judah.

Where was the camp? I presume it was outside Jerusalem, but we are not told. Was it at the camp where Sennacherib was, near Libnah? Perhaps, but the text does not tell us.

The phrase, **“When the king's men rose ... behold, there were all their dead corpses.”** The **“king's men”** refers to Hezekiah's men, not Sennacherib's men. They were dead. The Assyrian army near the camp could not have been much larger than 185,000. Any survivors must have left in panicked horror. The word spread quickly.

The bodies of the dead had to be disposed of in a timely manner and likely were buried. There is not much wood in that part of Judah to burn so many bodies. This miracle of sudden death provided plunder in the enemy encampment for those in Jerusalem. The dead were stripped of anything useful then transported for burial in mass graves away from the city, probably downwind (as will be done decades later, Jeremiah 41:9).

“Contrary to the biblical texts, Sennacherib's scribes portray Hezekiah as being roundly defeated, submitting to his overlord and sending a substantial tribute payment to Nineveh at the conclusion of the campaign.”

• *Hallo and Younger, Context of Scripture, Volume 2, 302*

Remember what Sennacherib wrote to Hezekiah about those who opposed him? His army suffered the same fate he was celebrating: 2 Kings 19:26 and Isaiah 37:27: **“They have become like herbage of the field, And green verdure, Grass of the housetops, Blasted before the east wind.”**

2 Chronicles 32:21. Something seems to have happened to the best soldiers, officers, and chiefs. The death may have decapitated all the best soldiers and leaders of the Assyrian army, leaving the ordinary, untrained, and less competent soldiers. This would have weakened the Assyrian military considerably.

However, the Assyrian army returns to Judah after Hezekiah dies. As we will see in the next episode, this will happen more than 15 years later in the long 55-year reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh (2 Kings 20:6).

2 Kings 19:36 and Isaiah 37:37. The Assyrian troops in the rest of Judah left, probably in haste, not knowing exactly what happened. News traveled all over the Near East that YHWH indeed fought for His people Judah. Sennacherib returned with the remainder of the army to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Assyrian records make no mention of the disaster before the walls of Jerusalem. How could they? They had no possible explanation from their perspective.

Sennacherib's exploits of the campaign are written in the "[Sennacherib Prism](#)." It tells part of the story:

"Himself [Hezekiah], like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him — the one coming out of the city-gate [negotiating for Hezekiah], I turned back to his misery. His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land ..."

Read the detailed account in "[Israel and Judah: 36. King Hezekiah and Assyria](#)," page 11. Sennacherib does not say he captured Jerusalem, nor that he even attacked it. It is worded so the reader might conclude Hezekiah came out, negotiated, and capitulated, but Sennacherib's Prism does not say that, nor does any other Assyrian document. Sennacherib claimed that Judah continued to pay tribute. Scripture does not mention Hezekiah doing any such thing. In fact, just the opposite.

All the area north of Judah, Phoenicia, Syria, and all across the Fertile Crescent to Mesopotamia were not sorry that it happened. Sennacherib was murdered some 9 years later, according to Assyrian records.

Assyria remained strong and even invaded Egypt under Sennacherib's grandson Ashurbanipal. One wonders if he avoided attacking Judah. Ashurbanipal led a campaign into Egypt and caused the downfall of the city of Thebes (called No-amon in Nahum 3:8).

Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by enemies allied against Assyria, as prophesied in "[The Book of Nahum](#)" (see Dr. Martin's article on that short book of the Bible).

2 Chronicles 32:22–23. This summary of YHWH's miraculous rescue of Judah from the Assyrian invasion notes that the lands around Judah participated in the attack on Jerusalem as indicated by the phrase, **"from the hand of everyone."**

The peoples around Judah heard what happened because, **"Many were bringing an approach present for Yahweh."** They did so out of fear of YHWH's punishing wrath for their role in following Assyrian lead by attacking His people Judah.

The nations **"round about"** (verse 22) had hard decisions to make. If they opposed the Assyrians, Sennacherib might return and devastate or destroy their kingdoms. Now they are threatened by a powerful God. YHWH's retribution might be set against them for aiding the Assyrians attack of Judah. They were damned if they did, and damned if they did not.

They acted in a very practical manner. They sought to return to Hezekiah's, Judah's, and YHWH's good graces. Many nations and kingdoms brought **"approach presents"** to YHWH and **"costly gifts."** They feared doing anything that might offend Judah for a period of perhaps several years.

Even though the country was devastated and many were killed, after a few years (probably the 3 years mentioned in 2 Kings 19:29 and Isaiah 37:30) Hezekiah and Judah became extremely wealthy (2 Chronicles 32:27–29). Though eventually prosperous, Judah must have been in chaos for a considerable period from the death, destruction, and exile of so many people.

Only YHWH can raise the dead. He will raise all the dead and wipe away all the tears since Adam. May God and His Kingdom come soon.

"He will swallow up death permanently, And my Lord Yahweh will wipe away every tear from all faces, And the reproach of His people He shall take away from the entire earth, For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken."

• **Isaiah 25:8** (and see Revelation 7:17, 21:4)