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Israel and Judah: 36. King Hezekiah and Assyria

by David Sielaff, November 2019

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for November 2019](#)

Israel and Judah: 36

King Hezekiah
and Assyria

THE SITUATION: King Hezekiah became ruler of the Kingdom of Judah during the last years of the northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah was a vassal kingdom of Assyria when Hezekiah's father Ahaz died and he initially continued Judah's subordination to Assyria. He cleansed the Temple, restarted the sacrifices, and reversed his father's pagan practices. Hezekiah's reforms were not popular with the pagan religious authorities of Judah, some of the Judean nobles, and many of the common people.

It is necessary to review the final years of the Kingdom of Israel. Rather than aiding their fellow Israelites, the Kingdom of Judah under Ahaz became subservient to Assyria. Hezekiah remained an Assyrian vassal for a few years. Hezekiah began to reign in Judah in the third year of King Hoshea of Israel. We are examining a period of the history of Judah when crucial events are told in great detail from several sources.

TEXT: Hezekiah's Trust in YHWH

2 Kings 18:5–8

⁵ In Yahweh Elohim of Israel he [Hezekiah] trusted; and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor was there among those before him. ⁶ He clung to Yahweh and did not withdraw from following Him; he kept His instructions that Yahweh had enjoined on Moses.

⁷ And Yahweh came to be with him; in all wherein he went forth, he proceeded intelligently. He **revolted against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.** ⁸ It was he who smote the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territories, from the tower of field-keepers to the city fortress. [end text]

2 Kings 18:5–6. Hezekiah's trust and faith in YHWH caused him to trust YHWH's help against the Assyrians who had attacked the Kingdom of Israel and destroyed it.

Verse 7. Hezekiah took the radical and dangerous decision to revolt against Assyria. Note that the phrasing: "**He revolted against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.**" His rebellion was not against the Assyrian people, their army, or their empire, but Hezekiah's rebellion was against the king himself. His revolt

was personal, or it was taken personally by the king of Assyria. There may have been a religious aspect to Hezekiah's revolt. Nor do we know when exactly Hezekiah revolted.

Verse 8. "**It was he** [Hezekiah] **who smote the Philistines ...**" The writer wants it to be clear that Hezekiah acted independently without help of any army when he defeated the Philistines. Perhaps the Egyptian army was close to the Philistine territory, we are not told. But we are told Hezekiah's army of Judah smote them recovering from the losses of territory. (The defeat of the Philistines regained territory lost by Ahaz, 2 Chronicles 28:18–19, who had become an Assyrian vassal.^a)

However, even though Hezekiah was victorious over the Philistines, any casualties suffered from those battles would have diminished the army of Judah.

So [1] Hezekiah was faithful to YHWH, [2] "**he revolted against the king of Assyria,**" and [3] he "**smote the Philistines.**" Then the Assyrians moved to attack the Kingdom of Israel and its capital city of Samaria.

TEXT: Review, the Fall of the Kingdom of Israel^b

2 Kings 18:9–12

⁹ It came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, that is, the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that king Shalmaneser of Assyria marched up against Samaria and besieged it.

¹⁰ They seized it at the end of three years. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was seized.

¹¹ Then the king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and had them guided to Halah, and to the Habor, the stream of Gozan, and to the cities of the Medes,

¹² because they had not hearkened to the voice of Yahweh their Elohim, but had trespassed against His covenant — all that Moses the servant of Yahweh had instructed. They neither hearkened nor did them.

2 Kings 17:5–6

(an earlier account in Second Kings)

⁵ *Then the king of Assyria* marched up against the whole land; he came up to Samaria and besieged it for three years.

⁶ *In the ninth year of Hoshea,*

the king of Assyria seized Samaria and deported Israel to Assyria. *He made them dwell in Halah, and at the Habor, the stream of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.* **[end text]**

All verses of Second Kings chapter 17 detail the process leading to the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (also called Samaria), reviewed here in 2 Kings 18:9–10. This was done to take the reader from the story of Israel to the story of Hezekiah and the Kingdom of Judah.

2 Kings 18:9–11 and 2 Kings 17:5–6. These verses tell of the siege of the capital city of Samaria that lasted three years. It took many weeks for all the troops; pack animals such as mules, camels, horses, and oxen; and herds of sheep, goats, pigs and cattle brought for food; all to gather and travel from Assyria to Israel. Napoleon is often credited as saying "**an army moves on its stomach.**"

In ancient times, military campaigns began after spring planting and hoped to be completed before the first harvest every year. Combat was rare in the late autumn, winter, and early spring. Most armies were composed of farmers who had varying degrees of military training and were part-time soldiers. And of course, Assyria had a core of trained warriors that Scripture calls "**mighty men**" (KJV) or "**masters of war**" (CLV).

^a Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 290.

^b These verses are analyzed from a different perspective in "[Israel and Judah: 35. Reforms of King Hezekiah](#)."

The city of Samaria was extremely well defended and provisioned to endure a 3-year siege.^c The Assyrian leaders provided for their troops who, as much as possible, lived off the land, eating the food of the surrounding lands grown by farmers in Israel. Surrounding subordinate kingdoms (like Judah during the reign of Ahaz), north in Syria, and the Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon, and other coastal cities; were all required to provide grain and food animals for the armies of their Assyrian overlords.

Foraging for food on the enemy's lands was crucial for military success by invading armies. A cartload of the enemy provisions is worth twenty carts brought from the attacker's home. Armies did not simply burn and pillage. An attacking army usually would march to a city and threaten to attack if the city did not provide supplies. The leaders of the city, not wanting to suffer a siege and destruction, would open their gates and give hostages to the attackers. Small garrisons from the attacking army would coordinate and ensure that provisions were sent to the attacking army. These were not sieges, but they were submissions to superior force. In ancient times, not all cities had walls or citadels.

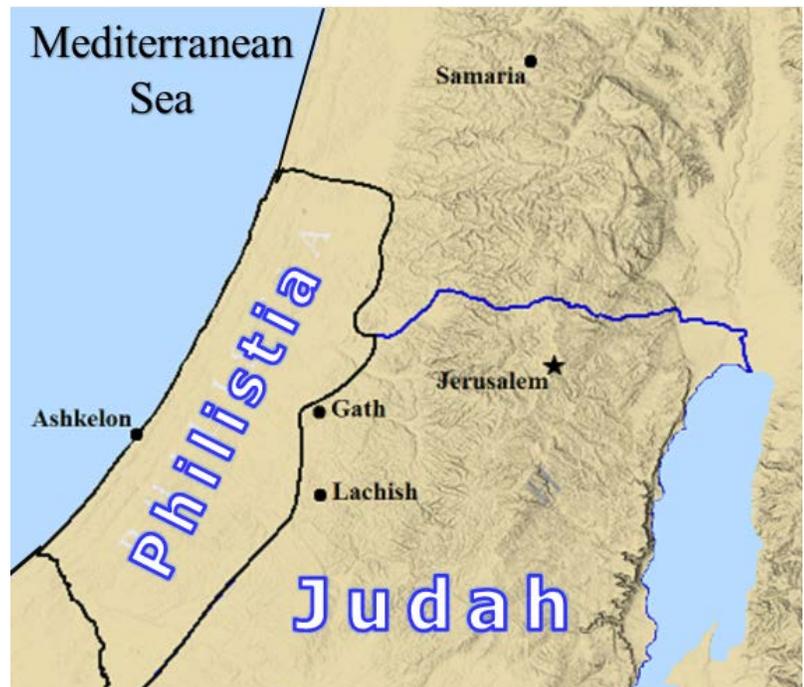
Most descriptions of ancient siege are formulaic, as we read in these three passages. Cities are approached, negotiated with and if they comply, they are allowed to continue living. Some cities resisted: the capital of Samaria in Israel, the fortress city of Lachish, and the capital city of Jerusalem in Judah.^d

If they did not provide supplies, they would be punished, their lands plundered and their cities attacked, perhaps the next year or following years. Hezekiah stopped paying tribute of food or military aid to Sennacherib king of Assyria. This made Judah a future target of Assyrian attack. However, that attack came some years later.

2 Kings 18:12. The reason for the destruction and final deportation of the people of the northern Kingdom of Israel is given only here and is not told in Second Chronicles. Israel was warned by God's prophets many times. It was because of the depravity, idolatry, and rejection of their covenant with YHWH established in the days of Moses by generations of the people, leaders, and kings of Israel, that YHWH imposed the ultimate punishment upon them — total destruction and deportation from the land of God's promise.

The next section begins the narrative of Assyria's attack against Hezekiah and Judah. It came seven years after the Assyrian destruction of the Kingdom of Israel and the final deportation of its people.

Below we have a 3-source account of the attack on the kingdom of Judah by a new Assyrian King Sennacherib who ruled 23 years, and the massive Assyrian army accompanied by military forces from many vassal kingdoms. The accounts in Second Kings and Isaiah are nearly the same. As stated before, Dr. Martin understood that Isaiah wrote and compiled the books of Samuel and Kings.



Judah, Lachish, and Jerusalem

^c Besieging armies conducting multi-year sieges did not always surround the city or fortress they attacked. Food did get through, but not much was delivered during summer campaigns when more attacking troops cut off deliveries of food.

^d Samaria had an internal source of water within its walls. So did the fortress city of Lachish. Jerusalem had inside its walls a water supplied by the Gihon Springs that will play an important part in the story of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. See Dr. Martin's Chapter 20, "[The Original Temple Over the Gihon Spring](#)" from his book [The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot](#).

TEXT: Judah Invaded by Sennacherib, King of Assyria

2 Kings 18:13	Isaiah 36:1	2 Chronicles 32:1
<p>⁹ In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria marched up against all the fortified cities of Judah and <u>took possession of them.</u></p>	<p>¹ <i>It came to be</i> in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria marched up against all the fortified cities of Judah and <u>took possession of them.</u></p>	<p>¹ After these events <u>and this faithfulness</u> Sennacherib king of Assyria <i>came and invaded Judah. He encamped against the fortified cities</i> and thought to get them for himself by <u>breaking through their defenses.</u> [end text]</p>

2 Chronicles 32:1. This passage refers directly to Hezekiah's faithful acts to restore the Temple and sacrifices, destroy pagan altars, and renew YHWH's Covenant with His people of Judah (and no doubt some Israelite refugees from the north). There is a link of the last two verses of Second Chronicles chapter 31 with the first verse of chapter 32, unobscured by a chapter division.

“This is what Hezekiah did in all of Judah; he was doing what was good and upright and faithful before Yahweh his Elohim. In every work that he started in the service of the house of Elohim and in obedience to the law and in the instruction to seek after his Elohim, he did so with all his heart; and he prospered. **After these events and this faithfulness [then] **Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah.**”**

• **2 Chronicles 31:20–32:1**

In fact, the text seems to indicate a causal relationship of Hezekiah's faithfulness, and the Assyrian invasion of Judah. Hezekiah's faithful acts triggered the Assyrian attack. This was done by YHWH to demonstrate His glory and mercy upon His people in Judah. However, many died before God's glory was demonstrated. See my August 2013 Commentary, "[Hatred of Assyria](#)."

2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 36:1 and 2 Chronicles 32:1. The Assyrian attacks were made against the **“fortressed cities.”**^e Unfortified cities were not defended. The army of Judah did not confront the Assyrian army. Hezekiah knew his army was no match for the Assyrians on a field of battle, so he depended upon the system of fortresses built by other Judean kings to wear down the Assyrians. But the Assyrians were masters of the siege and were able to capture each fortress one at a time. In this way all opposition by Judah was crushed.

TEXT: Hezekiah's Preparations for Jerusalem's Defense

2 Chronicles 32:2–8

² When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come with his face set for war against Jerusalem, ³ then he took counsel with his chief officials and his masters of war about stopping up the waters of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. ⁴ Thus many people gathered together and stopped up all the waters of the springs, and the wadi that was overflowing through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come and find abundant waters?

⁵ Hezekiah showed himself steadfast and rebuilt the whole breached wall and set up towers on it. And outside it he built another wall and reinforced the Millo bulwark of the city of David. Furthermore he made

^e The phrase **“fortressed cities”** is translated as **“fenced cities”** by the King James Version and **“fortified cities”** in other modern translations.

javelins in abundance and shields.

⁶ He appointed military chiefs over the people and gathered them together before him in the square of the city gate; he spoke to their heart, saying,

⁷ **“Be steadfast and be resolute; do not fear and do not be dismayed because of the king of Assyria and because of the presence of all the throng that is with him, for with us is more than with him. ⁸ With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Yahweh our Elohim to help us and to fight our battles. And the people were supported by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.”** [end text]

2 Chronicles 32:2–3. Somewhat belatedly Hezekiah reinforces Jerusalem, the capital of his kingdom. Sennacherib sent his officials from Lachish to speak before Jerusalem’s walls, supposedly to negotiate with Hezekiah. Lachish was the last and strongest of Judah’s **“fortressed cities”** outside of Jerusalem.^f The city’s water supply from the Gihon Spring, propelled water up to the Temple, to the palace of King Hezekiah, and to the top of the hill of the city of David.^g From there it would water the lower portion of the city of David to the south, and then the terraced gardens going down the hillside within the walls of the city. This was a major change to a delicate water system that might be ruined if not constructed carefully. A carved inscription tells of the work.^h

Verse 4. The people helped with the construction of the water system. Two other verses give additional information about Hezekiah’s water construction:

“As for the rest of the affairs of Hezekiah, all his masterful deeds, how he built the reservoir [the Pool of Siloam?] and the trench and brought the water into the city, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Judah?”

• **2 Kings 20:20**

“It was the same Hezekiah who stopped up the upper flowing [rising?] well of the waters of Gihon and unleashed them downward to the west of the city of David; Hezekiah prospered in his every work.”

• **2 Chronicles 32:30**

Verse 5. Hezekiah prepared for war, as much as he could, though his armies were defeated everywhere.

Verse 6. New **“military chiefs”** were appointed for the defense of the capital city of Jerusalem. These appointments were necessary because of the Assyrian capture of the unfortified cities of Judah, and all of the **“fortressed cities”** (those with defensive walls around them) throughout kingdom. Hezekiah’s purpose was to

^f Lachish was besieged, assaulted and captured by the Assyrian army and its allies. This feat was memorialized with pride in Assyrian inscriptions and shown graphic stone reliefs, many of which are exhibited at the British Museum. The best graphic representation of Lachish and carved stone reliefs are shown at the website [“Lachish.”](#) There was also an Assyrian inscription: **“Sennacherib, king of the universe, king of Assyria, seated upon a sedan chair, the spoils of Lachish passed before him.”** In W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000), 304.

For other excellent visual presentations and Assyrian account of affairs in Judah and Jerusalem, see the website [“Lachish—Blending the Bible, History, & Archaeology.”](#)

^g The Gihon was a “karst spring.” It was similar to the Old Faithful geyser at Yellowstone Park in the United States, but without the heated steam. See note “d” above, and my March 2016 Commentary, [“A New Temple Fountain Quote”](#) giving secular sources that tell of a fountain inside the Temple sanctuary courtyard.

^h A memorial of this project carrying water from the Gihon to the Pool of Siloam was found near the south end of the tunnel in 1880. An inscription was carved in the limestone commemorating the meeting of two groups digging from both ends. This event was commemorated with an inscription today called, the [“Siloam Inscription.”](#) It reads as follows:

“ ... the tunnel ... and this is the story of the tunnel while ... the axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to [cut?] ... the voice of a man ... called to his counterpart, [for] there was ZADA in the rock, on the right ... and on the day of the tunnel [being finished] the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowed water from the source to the pool for 1,200 cubits. and [100?] cubits was the height over the head of the stonecutters ...”

The tunnel is commonly called “Hezekiah’s Tunnel.” While most archaeologists believe this tunnel was constructed by Hezekiah, some think that the tunnel was carved later. Translation from Ronny Reich, *Excavating the City of David: Where Jerusalem’s History Began* (Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 2011), 313–316 and Hallo and Younger, *Context of Scripture*, xxiv.

encourage them for the coming battle.

Verses 7–8. This was not bravado on the part of Hezekiah. Against all the evidence of total defeat everywhere, how could Hezekiah encourage his military and leaders to continue resisting the mighty King of Assyria, his victorious army, and the allied auxiliary armies of Sennacherib’s vassal kings. It was likely that Sennacherib had Israelite charioteers as part of his army, giving their advice to the Assyrian king, as discussed in [“Israel and Judah: 34. Death of the Kingdom of Israel.”](#)

TEXT: The Account in Second Kings of the Assyrian Invasion of Judah

2 Kings 18:14–16

¹⁴ So Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, **“I was at fault. Turn back from against me. Whatever you may impose on me I shall bear.”** Then the king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

¹⁵ Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of Yahweh and in the treasuries of the king’s house. ¹⁶ At that time Hezekiah cut away the doors of the temple of Yahweh and the doorposts that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave them to the king of Assyria. **[end text]**

2 Kings 18:14. Hezekiah sent a message trying to appease Sennacherib by offering a bribe to leave Judah. Kings invaded other kingdoms for plunder or treasure. One defense strategy was to offer the invaders “tribute” (called “bribes”) so they would go away — always risking that they might soon return. Invaders might accept such a bribe to leave if news came of their territories being threatened by outside attackers or rebels from within their realms. Great empires throughout history constantly played “wack-a-mole,” suppressing rebellions like Hezekiah’s revolt against Sennacherib, and invasions from outside their realms. Hezekiah asked Sennacherib how much? The Assyrian king told him: 300 talents of silver, 30 talents of gold.

Verses 15–16. Hezekiah gathered the money and it was taken to Sennacherib. Hezekiah gathered part of the tribute with **“all the silver”** from both the Temple and his treasury. The gold is not mentioned, so we do not know if that portion was paid, or if paid, where the gold came from. We do know where part of the silver was obtained; it was stripped from the Temple doors and **“doorposts”** (which may refer to the lintels of the doors) that Hezekiah recently repaired and refurbished (2 Chronicles 29:3–19).

TEXT: Sennacherib’s Invasion of Judah

2 Kings 18:17–22	Isaiah 36:2–7	2 Chronicles 32:9–12
<p>¹⁷ And the king of Assyria sent [1] the <i>tartan</i>, [2] the <i>rab-saris</i> and [3] the <i>rab-shakeh</i> from Lachish to Jerusalem to king Hezekiah <u>with a massive army</u>.</p> <p>So they marched up and came to Jerusalem. They went up and came to stand by <u>the trench</u> of the uppermost reservoir that is at the highway of the field of the launderer.</p> <p>¹⁸ They called out for the king.</p>	<p>² And the king of Assyria sent the [3] <i>rab-shakeh</i> from Lachish to Jerusalem to king Hezekiah <u>with a massive army</u>.</p> <p><i>So he stood by the trench</i> of the uppermost reservoir at the highway of the field of the launderer.</p>	<p>⁹ After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, while he was at Lachish and all his chief rulers with him, sent his officials to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all of Judah in Jerusalem, saying,</p>

Yet there came forth to them
[1] Eliakim son of Hilkiyah who
was over the household, and
[2] Shebna the scribe, and
[2] Joah son of Asaph the
recorder.

¹⁹ The *rab-shakeh* said to them,

“Now you tell Hezekiah, Thus speaks the great king, the king of Assyria: What is this trust in which you have trusted?

²⁰ You claim to have counsel and mastery for the war, yet this is only a word of lips. Now on whom have you trusted that you revolted against me?

²¹ Now behold, you, for your part, have trusted on the support-staff of this fractured reed, on Egypt, which, if a man should support himself on it, would enter into his palm and pierce it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all those trusting on him.

²² And in case you should say to me, ‘On Yahweh our Elohim we trust,’

is He not the One Whose high-places and Whose altars Hezekiah took away and said to Judah and to Jerusalem,

‘Before this altar shall you worship in Jerusalem?’”

³ Then there came forth to *him*
[1] Eliakim son of Hilkiyah who
was over the household, and
[2] Shebna the scribe, and
[3] Joah son of Asaph the
recorder.

⁴ The *rab-shakeh* said to them,

“Now you tell Hezekiah, Thus speaks the great king, the king of Assyria: What is this trust in which you have trusted?

⁵ You claim to have counsel and mastery for the war, yet this is only a word of lips. Now on whom have you trusted that you revolted against me?

⁶ Behold, you have trusted on the support-staff of this fractured reed, on Egypt, which if a man should support himself on it, would enter into his palm and pierce it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all those trusting on him.

⁷ And in case you should say to me, ‘On Yahweh our Elohim we trust,’

is He not the One Whose high-places and Whose altars Hezekiah took away and said to Judah and to Jerusalem,

‘Before this altar shall you worship?’”

¹⁰ “Thus speaks Sennacherib king of Assyria: On what are you trusting that you remain in Jerusalem under siege?

¹¹ *Is not Hezekiah alluring you to let you die by famine and by thirst, saying,*

‘Yahweh our Elohim shall rescue us from the palm of the king of Assyria?’

¹² *Is it not*

Hezekiah himself who took away His high-places and His altars and said to Judah and to the dwellers of Jerusalem, saying,

‘Before one altar shall you worship, and on it shall you fume incense?’” [end text]

2 Kings 18:17, Isaiah 36:2, and 2 Chronicles 32:9. Sennacherib remains at Lachish but sends three officials “**with a massive army**” to Jerusalem. Lachish has been captured. The officials spoke openly to the people and the leaders of Jerusalem for them to convince (or force) Hezekiah to surrender the capital, the City of David, to the Assyrian army. Only the titles of the official are given, not their personal names.

All of Judah has been conquered except for Jerusalem. Hezekiah is to blame for this war because of his revolt against Hezekiah’s master, Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:7 above). His suggestion is clear that the people should revolt against Hezekiah, surrender, and save themselves.

The first official, the *tartan*, has a title that means “he who receives gifts.” A second envoy is called “**the rab-saris**” which means “chief of the eunuchs.” The third and spokesperson is titled “**the rab-shakeh**,” which means “the chief cup bearer.” He is in charge of Sennacherib’s personal safety and likely the most trusted official, as well as the most important spokesman Sennacherib could send.

Verses 18 and 3. Three representatives of Hezekiah met the three from Assyria. Their names are given as well as their titles. It is unclear what distinguishes a scribe from a recorder.

Verses 19, 4, and 10. *Rab-shakeh* speaks loudly (as we will learn in the next section) by feigning that he is speaking to Hezekiah when he is really speaking to the people.

Verses 20–21, 5–6, and 11. *Rab-shakeh* makes clear that the Assyrians know about Judah’s pride in their military prowess, and even the words spoken among themselves. He also knows of the relationships Judah has with other kingdoms, particularly with Pharaoh of Egypt.

Verses 22, 7, and 12. These verses confirm that Hezekiah did destroy the high places dedicated to Baal (2 Kings 12:3, 14:4, 15:45, 35, 17:9).ⁱ

The Assyrian Account of the Invasion of Judah

King Sennacherib led his army to invade Palestine. Assyrian accounts of King Sennacherib’s military campaigns are well known. Three almost identical carved stones of the accounts are found at the British Museum in London, the University of Chicago Oriental Institute, and the [Israel Museum in Jerusalem](#). Below is one translation of what is on the carved inscriptions. The numbers denote “line numbers” on different faces the prism.

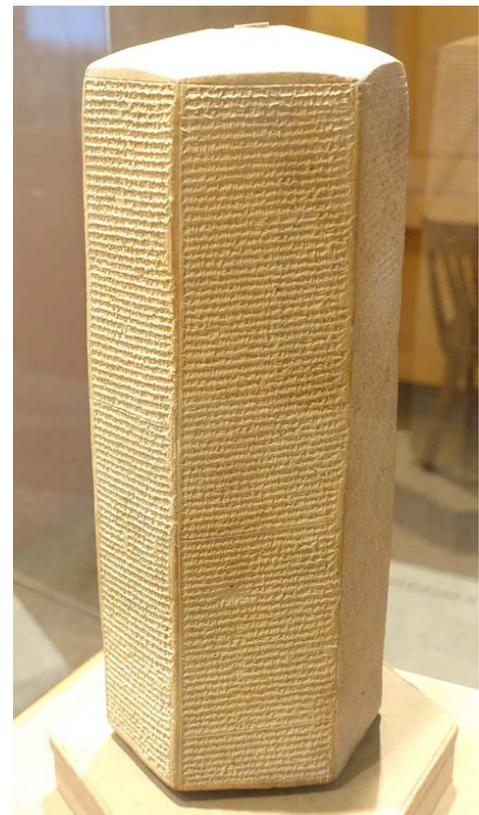
¹⁸ “**As for Hezekiah** the Judahite, ¹⁹ who did not submit to my yoke: **forty-six of his strong, walled cities**, as well as ²⁰ the small towns in their area, ²¹ which were without number, by levelling with battering-rams ²² and by bringing up siege engines, and by attacking and storming on foot, ²³ by mines, tunnels, and breaches, I besieged and took them.

²⁴ **200,150** {alternately translated by some scholars as 205,105 or 2,150} people, great and small, male and female, ²⁵ horses, mules, asses, camels, ²⁶ cattle and sheep without number, **I brought away from them** ²⁷ **and counted as spoil.**

Himself [**Hezekiah**], like a caged bird ²⁸ I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. ²⁹ I threw up earthworks against him — ³⁰ the one coming out of the city-gate, I turned back to his misery. ³¹ His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land, and ³² to Mitinti, king of Ashdod,

³³ Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bel, ³⁴ king of Gaza, I gave [them]. And thus I diminished his land. ³⁵ I added to the former tribute, ³⁶ and I laid upon him the surrender of their land and imposts — gifts for my majesty.

³⁷ **As for Hezekiah**, ³⁸ the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him, and ³⁹ the Arabs and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to strengthen ⁴⁰ Jerusalem, his royal city, ⁴¹ deserted him. **In addition** to the thirty talents of gold and ⁴² eight hundred talents of silver, gems, antimony, ⁴³ jewels, large carnelians, ivory-inlaid couches, ⁴⁴ ivory-inlaid chairs, elephant hides, elephant tusks, ⁴⁵ ebony, boxwood, all kinds of valuable treasures, ⁴⁶ as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female ⁴⁷ musicians, which he had brought after me ⁴⁸ to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute ⁴⁹ and to accept servitude, he dispatched his messengers.”



Sennacherib Prism, University of Chicago, Oriental Institute,

• [“Prism of Sennacherib”](#)^j

ⁱ D.J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 291.

^j This translation is from the website “[LMLK--Non-Biblical Accounts](#),” accessed October 5, 2019.

Line 24. According to the Prism, 200,150 people were deported to Assyria as “**spoil**,” just like the cattle and the precious goods. Many of those people were probably Israelites from the northern kingdom. This is not mentioned in Scripture but it does fit Assyrian practice as what was done with the northern Israelite captives. Below are nearly identical passages in 2 Kings and Isaiah, but not in 2 Chronicles.

Line 42. This differs from the biblical number, although it could have included other silver from outside Jerusalem.

TEXT: Discussion with the Assyrian Envoys

2 Kings 18:23–32

²³ “Now then, negotiate with my lord the king of Assyria. Let me give you two thousand horses, if you are able for your part to put any riders on them.

²⁴ Then how could you reverse [repel] the face of one viceroy of my lord’s least significant officials when you, for your part, trusted on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

²⁵ And now, is it apart from Yahweh that I have come up against this place to ruin it? Yahweh Himself said to me, “March up against this land and ruin it.”

²⁶ Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna and Joah replied to the *rab-shakeh*:

“Speak, we pray, to your servants in Syrian, for we can make it out. Do not speak with us in Judean, in the ears of the people who are on the wall.”

²⁷ Yet the *rab-shakeh* said to them:

“Was it to your lord and to you that my lord has sent me to speak these words? Was it not rather to the men sitting on the wall, who shall eat their own excrement and drink their urine with you?”

²⁸ Then the *rab-shakeh* stood and called out in a loud voice in Judean. He spoke and said,

“Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. ²⁹ Thus speaks the king: Let not Hezekiah lure you, for he is not able to rescue you from my hand.

³⁰ Let not Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, ‘Yahweh shall rescue, yea rescue us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’

³¹ Do not hearken to Hezekiah. For thus speaks the king of Assyria:

‘Make of me a blessing, and come forth to me, and eat each man of his vine and each man of his fig tree, and drink each man the water of his cistern, ³² until I come and take you to a land like

Isaiah 36:8–18a

⁸ “Now then, negotiate with my lord the king of Assyria. Let me give you two thousand horses, if you are able for your part to put any riders on them.

⁹ Then how could you reverse [repel] the face of one viceroy of my lord’s least significant officials when you, for your part, trusted on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

¹⁰ And now, is it apart from Yahweh that I have come up against this land to ruin it? Yahweh Himself said to me, “March up against this land and ruin it.”

¹¹ Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah replied to the *rab-shakeh*:

“Speak, we pray, to your servants in Syrian, for we can make it out. Do not speak to us in Judean in the ears of the people who are on the wall.”

¹² Yet the *rab-shakeh* said:

“Was it to your lord and to you that my lord has sent me to speak these words? Was it not rather to the men sitting on the wall, who shall eat their own excrement and drink their urine with you?”

¹³ Then the *rab-shakeh* stood and called out in a loud voice in Judean. He said,

“Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. ¹⁴ Thus speaks the king: Let not Hezekiah lure you, for he is not able to rescue you.

¹⁵ Let not Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, ‘Yahweh shall rescue, yea rescue us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’

¹⁶ Do not hearken to Hezekiah. For thus speaks the king of Assyria:

‘Make of me a blessing, and come forth to me, and eat each man of his vine and each man of his fig tree, and drink each man the water of his cistern, ¹⁷ until I come and take you to a land like

your land, a land of grain and grape juice, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of clarified olive oil and honey, so that you may live and you may not die.’

Do not hearken to Hezekiah, for he shall allure you, saying, Yahweh Himself shall rescue us.”

your land, a land of grain and grape juice, a land of bread and vineyards.’

18a Beware lest Hezekiah should allure you, saying, Yahweh Himself shall rescue us.”

[end text]

These texts are nearly identical except for minor differences.

2 Kings 18:23 and Isaiah 36:8. The army of Judah was dead, injured, captured, or scattered. The *rab-shakeh* speaks on behalf of Sennacherib, urging negotiation and surrender because of the military weakness of Jerusalem. Judah cannot even seat warriors on 2,000 horses even if the Assyrian king gave them the horses.

Verses 24 and 9. Even the weakest troops with the lowliest Assyrian commander could not be resisted. Egypt’s help cannot be relied upon (repeating from verses 21 and 6 above). Coordinating with Egypt will only spear the hand reaching out for help against Assyria.

Verses 25 and 10. The *rab-shakeh* then says YHWH told Sennacherib to come and march against the land with the purpose to “**ruin it.**” [1] Perhaps YHWH did speak to Sennacherib and the *rab-shakeh* is telling the truth. [2] Or perhaps the leaders of Assyria read Isaiah’s prophecy which was available to all, even travelers from foreign lands.

For example, Isaiah 10:1–4 describes some of the unrighteous behavior of the leaders of Judah during this period. Then in verses 5–11, the threats against Assyria are made to discourage excessive cruelty:

“Woe, Assyria! club of My anger! And a rod is he in the day of My indignation! Against a polluted nation shall I send him, And against a people of My rage shall I commission him, To loot loot and to plunder plunder, And to make it a tramping ground like the clay of the streets.

Yet he is not planning so, And his heart is not devising so, For it is in his heart to exterminate, And to cut off nations, not a few. For he is saying: Are not my chiefs altogether kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Or is not Hamath like Arpad? Or is not Samaria like Damascus?

Just as my hand came upon the kingdoms of forbidden idols, Whose carvings are greater than Jerusalem’s and Samaria’s, Shall I not, just as I did to Samaria and to her forbidden idols, Also do to Jerusalem and to her fetishes?

• *Isaiah 10:5–11, Concordant Old Testament*

Verses 26 and 11. The three representatives of Hezekiah meeting with the *rab-shakeh* then ask him to speak in “Syrian,” usually understood to be Aramean, a cognate commercial language of Hebrew. This was so the people and rulers in Jerusalem would be less able to understand what was being spoken.

Verses 27 and 12. He tells Hezekiah’s representatives that his true audience is “**the men sitting on the wall**” and describes their situation during a long siege. By saying this, the *rab-shakeh* reveals that he does not know about the enhanced water supply of Hezekiah’s tunnel. Except for that point, the Assyrian spy network is efficient and complete.

Verses 28 and 13. So the *rab-shakeh* begins to speak loudly direct to the people.

Verses 29 and 14. In a different sequence of the meeting, the *rab-shakeh* says later in 2 Chronicles 32:15:

¹⁵ “Now let not Hezekiah lure you; let him not allure you like this; do not believe him. For no eloah [god] at all of any nation or kingdom was able to rescue his people from my hand and from the hand of my fathers. How much less then would your elohim rescue you from my hand?”

Verses 31–32 and 16–18a. Twice in these verses, *rab-shakeh* urges them not to listen to Hezekiah, especially when he tells them that YHWH will save Jerusalem. If they submit to Sennacherib’s authority, they will be left in peace.. Then Sennacherib, with *rab-shakeh* speaking, says he will deport them, “**until I come and take you to a land like your land.**” He is giving confusing mixed messages.

Rab-shakeh continues his persuasive speech ...

TEXT: Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah

2 Kings 18:33–35	Isaiah 36:18b–20	2 Chronicles 32:13–14
<p>33 “Did <u>the elohim of the nations</u> rescue, yea rescue any man’s land from the hand of the king of Assyria?</p> <p>34 Where are <u>the elohim</u> of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the elohim of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? When have they <u>rescued Samaria from my hand</u>?</p> <p>35 Which among all the elohim of these lands rescued their land <u>from my hand</u>, assuring you that Yahweh shall rescue Jerusalem <u>from my hand</u>?”</p>	<p>18b “Did <u>the elohim of the nations</u> rescue any man’s land from the hand of the king of Assyria?</p> <p>19 Where are <u>the elohim</u> of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the elohim of Sepharvaim?</p> <p>When have they <u>rescued Samaria from my hand</u>?</p> <p>20 Which among all the elohim of these lands rescued their land <u>from my hand</u>, assuring you that Yahweh shall rescue Jerusalem <u>from my hand</u>?”</p>	<p>13 “Do you not know what I myself and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? <i>Could, yea could</i> <u>the elohim of the nations of the lands</u> rescue their land from <i>my</i> hand?</p> <p>14 <i>Who of all</i> <u>the elohim of these nations that my father doomed, was able to rescue his people from my hand</u>?</p> <p><i>How could your elohim rescue you from my hand?</i>” [end text]</p>

2 Kings 18:33, Isaiah 36:18b, and 2 Chronicles 32:13. Still speaking loud directly to the people in Hebrew, the *rab-shakeh* states the power of the King of Assyria over other peoples and nations. No god has or could stop them. This is arrogant. It goes against Isaiah’s warning in the 9 verses of Isaiah chapter 31. I suspect the *rab-shakeh* may have known about this passage (just as he likely knew about the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 10 above). Both were strong statements that addressed Judah, Assyria, and YHWH’s attitude toward both nations:

“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 [trusting] on horsemen because they are very plentiful; They do not heed the Holy One of Israel, And of Yahweh they do not inquire.

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.

Yet the Egyptians are human and not El, And their horses are flesh and not spirit. When Yahweh, He is stretching out His hand, Then the one helping [Egypt] will stumble, And the one helped [Judah] will fall, And together all of them shall be finished.

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

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

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; His crag, it shall pass away because of shrinking fear, And his chiefs will be dismayed because of the banner, Averring is Yahweh, Whose firelight is in Zion And Whose stove is in Jerusalem.”

• *Isaiah 31:1–9*

Verses 34–35, 19–20, and 14. The *rab-shakeh* lists the major cities conquered the fact that their gods did not appear and stop Sennacherib.

2 Chronicles 32:13–14. The argument is stated differently. Which *elohim* rescued the other nations and “**how could your elohim rescue you.**” This is a different argument from the Second Kings and Isaiah verses. *Rab-shakeh* implies that God cannot save the people of Jerusalem, and continues with his argument.

TEXT: Other Insults by the Rab-shakeh, Tempting the People to Revolt

2 Chronicles 32:15–19

¹⁵ “**Now let not Hezekiah lure you; let him not allure you like this; do not believe him. For no eloah [god] at all of any nation or kingdom was able to rescue his people from my hand and from the hand of my fathers. How much less then would your elohim rescue you from my hand?”**

¹⁶ His servants spoke still further against Yahweh the One Elohim and against Hezekiah His servant; ¹⁷ he 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]

2 Chronicles 32:15. In a different order of statements from the Kings and Isaiah recitation of *Rab-shakeh* words, he continues to speak against Hezekiah and his God. “Eloah” is a singular form of Elohim, similar to El. The question of why El is used versus Eloah, is debated by scholars. Implying that their god or gods are different from Hezekiah’s god, he states that no gods have rescued any nation from Sennacherib’s ancestors and military might. They should not expect rescue.

Verses 16–17. *Rab-shakeh* and his associates continued to speak after Hezekiah’s representatives went back into the city. They also wrote letters? Yes. Perhaps they wrote on leather wrapped around sling balls and threw them over the walls or attached the leather to arrows. Either way would work. Some scribe on the inside could read the message to the people. The writing repeated what the *rab-shakeh* said aloud to the people.

Verses 18–19. They spoke loudly again, “**to intimidate them and to fill them with panic so that they might seize the city.**” They wanted the people to revolt, overthrow Hezekiah, and open the gates. They equated YHWH with other gods. They tried every psychological trick.

TEXT: The People of Jerusalem React to Assyrian threats

2 Kings 18:36–37

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.**”

³⁷ Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah 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*.

Isaiah 36:21–22

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.**”

²² Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah 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*. [end text]

2 Kings 18:36 and Isaiah 32:21. The people responded with silence in verse 36, as Hezekiah instructed them to do. Who was silent? Were the three representatives of Hezekiah silent, or were the people on the wall silent, obeying Hezekiah’s instruction? No doubt the people were in shock at their impending doom, but even they kept silent. Most translations are more forceful than “**the king’s instruction.**” They render the phrase as

“the king’s command,” or as “the king’s order.” *Rab-shakeh* next tempts the people to revolt.

Verses 37 and 22. Hezekiah’s representatives rent their garments as a way of pouring out their shock in emotional agony.

The prophet Isaiah predicted the Assyrian invasion with many allied troops. Read below Isaiah 29:1–24.

TEXT: Prophecy of Isaiah of the Assyrian Invasion of Judah

Isaiah 29:1–24

¹ Woe! Ariel, Ariel, town where David camped, Add year to year, while festivals, they run their cycle.

² Yet I will constrain Ariel, And there will come to be complaint and complaining, And it will come to be to Me like an ariel. ³ I will encamp against you like David, And I will besiege you from a garrison And raise siege works against you.

⁴ Abased, you shall speak from the earth, And from the soil your speech shall be bowed down; Your voice will be like a medium from the earth, And from the soil your speech shall chirp. ⁵ And the throng of your arrogant ones will become like pulverized dust, And the throng of the terrifiers like passing trash; It will come in an instant, suddenly:

⁶ You shall be visited by Yahweh of hosts, With thunder and with earthquake and a great sound, With sweeping whirlwind and tempest and blaze of devouring fire. ⁷ And it will come to be like a dream, a night vision, The throng of all the nations, those enlisted against Ariel, And all the hosts against her and the fastness against her, And those constraining her.

⁸ It will come to be as when a famishing man is dreaming, And behold, he is eating, Yet he awakes, and his soul remains empty, Or as when a thirsty man is dreaming, And behold, he is drinking, Yet he awakes, and behold, he is faint, and his soul is unappeased; So shall be the throng of all the nations, those enlisted against Mount Zion.

⁹ Dally and be amazed! Entertain yourselves and revel! Be drunk, yet not from wine! Sway, yet not from intoxicant! ¹⁰ For Yahweh has libated [poured out] on you a spirit of stupor, And He has sealed down your eyes — the prophets, And has covered your heads — the visionaries. ¹¹ So the entire vision shall become to you like the words of a sealed scroll, Which, when they give it to one acquainted with script [*one who can read*], Saying: “**Please read this, he says, I cannot, for it is sealed.**”

¹² And if the scroll is given to one who is not acquainted with script [*one who cannot read*], Saying: “**Please read this, he says, I am not acquainted with script.**” ¹³ And Yahweh is saying:

“Because this people comes close to Me with its mouth, And with its lips they glorify Me, Yet its heart, it is far from Me, And their fear of Me is becoming an instruction of mortals that is learned,

¹⁴ **Therefore, behold, I am continuing to distribute this people, And I shall distribute them, And the wisdom of its wise will perish, And the understanding of its understanding ones shall conceal itself.**

¹⁵ **Woe to those digging deep to conceal their counsel from Yahweh, So that it comes to be that in darkness are their deeds, And they say, ‘Who is seeing us, And who is knowing about us?’**

¹⁶ **O your waywardness! As the clay should the Potter be accounted? Indeed shall what is made say of its Maker, ‘He did not make me?’ Or does what is formed say of its Former, ‘He does not understand?’**

¹⁷ **Is it not only a little bit now when Lebanon will turn about into cropland And the cropland be accounted as wildwood?**

¹⁸ **The deaf will hear in that day the words of a scroll, And from gloom and darkness, blind eyes, they shall see. ¹⁹ Then the humble shall add to their rejoicing in Yahweh, And the needy of humanity shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.**

²⁰ **For the terrifier will reach his limit, And the mocker will be finished, And all who are alert for**

lawlessness will be cut off, ²¹ Those who make a person a sinner with a word, And for the arbitrator in the gateway they lay a trap And are turning aside the righteous into a chaos.”

²² Therefore, thus says Yahweh to the house of Jacob, He Who parted Abraham [from his family]:

“Not now shall Jacob be ashamed, And not now shall Israel’s face grow pale. ²³ For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, They shall hallow My Name, And they shall hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And before Elohim of Israel they shall be awestricken.

²⁴ Those who stray in spirit will know understanding, And murmurers, they shall learn from monition [instruction].”

[end text]

Isaiah 29:1–24. We are not told when this information was given to Isaiah or made known to the people of Judah, but it was probably given to Isaiah before Samaria was destroyed and dismantled and certainly before Hezekiah took power and stopped serving as Assyria’s vassal.

Verses 1 and 2. Ariel means “lion of God.” The term is used in a dual sense in these verses. The first use in verse 1 and the first use in verse 2 identify “Ariel” with Jerusalem. The second use refers to the altar in the Temple (Ezekiel 43:15, Hebrew).

Verse 3. The phrase “**I will encamp against you like David**” means that YHWH will camp against Ariel (Zion) just as David encamped around Jerusalem.

Verses 6–7. I cannot help but think of Hebrews 10:31: “**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**” Compare verse 6 with verse 8 which uses identical phrasing to identify Ariel with Zion:

“**The throng of all the nations, those enlisted against Ariel ...**” (verse 6), with

“**The throng of all the nations, those enlisted against Mount Zion**” (verse 8).

So, Ariel means “Lion of God” and refers to Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Ariel is the object of an attack by the nations who surround Ariel and Mount Zion.

Verses 14–15. The children of Jacob will continue to receive the ultimate punishment of deportation and exile from the land promised to them. Nothing can be concealed from YHWH. I wonder why they even try.

Verse 24. The word monition means instruction.

Isaiah chapter 29 originally was intended for the time of Isaiah and Hezekiah, but they also may have relevance to a later fulfillment future to us. Greater understanding needs to be learned before we can determine if these prophecies are for our time. Know one thing for certain, YHWH is in total control of events.

Isaiah’s Five Chapters On The Assyrian Crisis

Five chapters in Isaiah relate to the Assyrian crisis. Unfortunately they cannot be easily inserted into a timeline or the narratives of Second Kings and Chronicles. According to Bishop Lowth in a note on Isaiah 29:2, *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* 1830), the subjects of the chapters are:

Isaiah 29 announces the invasion of Sennacherib.

Isaiah 30 is about the distress of the Jews during the invasion continued, criticism of their false hope in Egypt’s help, God’s promise of mercy and His wrath upon Assyria.

Isaiah 31 presents the sudden and unexpected deliverance by God’s immediate and miraculous intervention on their behalf.

Isaiah 32 tells about the future prosperous state of the kingdoms under Hezekiah and later Messiah.

Isaiah 33, according to Lowth is,

“interspersed with severe reproofs and threats of punishment for their hypocrisy, stupidity, infidelity, their want of trust in God, and their vain reliance on the assistance of Egypt; and with promises of better times, both immediately to succeed, and to be expected in the future age.”