



## Second Kings - Chapter Eighteen

### Summary of Chapter Eighteen

Just as the northern kingdom was in its death throes, the southern kingdom of Judah finally had a really good king who is described as doing right just as David had done. He set about removing all the elements of pagan worship and the high places that the people had used for illicit worship to the Lord. He refused to submit to the King of Assyria and he won battles against the Philistines.

However, eight years after the fall of the northern kingdom, the King of Assyria attacked Judah and captured many of the cities. Fearing the Assyrians, King Hezekiah paid tribute to the Assyrians. Even though he handed over all the wealth of the nation, the Assyrians still came to Jerusalem and challenged Hezekiah. Did he rely on the Egyptians? Did he rely on God? Surely not God for he had been unable to prevent the Assyrians so far in their campaign.

The representative of the King of Assyria, the Rabshakeh, called out to the people of Jerusalem in their own language not to be taken in by the words of Hezekiah that the Lord their God could save them but that they should accept peace with Assyria and move away to other lands in that empire where they would have their own homes and land. The people did not respond for the king and told them to say nothing.

### **IX 2 Kings 18:1-20:21 - Hezekiah**

A king is now presented who is not merely similar to David, like Asa and Jehoshaphat, but resembles him more closely than any other Davidic king so far. It is this king who reforms Judæan worship, making it what it should be, and whose trust in God is vindicated, as the Assyrians fail to take Jerusalem as they have taken Samaria.

## IX.a 2 Kings 18:1-12 - Hezekiah's Reign over Judah

King Hezekiah is introduced as the good king like his ancestor David. He would not initially submit as a vassal state to Assyria. He also restored the religious life of Judah to one that focused solely on the Lord and at last the high places were removed. Early on in his reign the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians, preparing the way for the Assyrians to come up against Judah in the main part of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah.

### 2 Kings 18:1-2

In the third year of King Hoshea was 729/728 BC and yet most analysts of the timeline of kings of Judah have Hezekiah becoming king in 715 BC. This disparity in the timelines can be easily rectified since Hezekiah became coregent with his father Ahaz in 728 BC and he became the sole king in 715 BC. Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah at the very end of the kingdom of Israel. Three years after the start of his co-reign the Assyrian armies laid siege to Samaria, and three years after that the northern kingdom was conquered, which external sources give as 722 BC. The sad fate of the northern kingdom was a valuable lesson to Hezekiah. He saw firsthand what happened when the people of God rejected their Lord and his word, and worshipped other gods.

Extra-biblical evidence for the reign of Hezekiah comes from a bulla or clay seal bearing his name. It reads, "Belonging to Hezekiah [son of Ahaz], king of Judah." The only other Judahite king whose seal impression has been found is Ahaz; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 16:1-4.

He reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. Hezekiah was one of the better kings of Judah, and thus had a long and mostly blessed reign, including an extension of fifteen years granted to his life by the Lord: <<*Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life*>> (Isaiah 38:5). However, he also had to face many challenges to his faith as the next few chapters will show.

During his reign Hezekiah had the benefit of the wise words of God through his prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Micah.

<sup>3</sup> He did what was right in the sight of the Lord just as his ancestor David had done. <sup>4</sup> He removed the high places, broke down the pillars,

and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan.

#### 2 Kings 18:3-4

He removed the high places. Hezekiah was one of Judah's most zealous reformers. This is a significant accomplishment because even the most righteous of Judæan kings prior to Hezekiah in 1-2 Kings failed to do this mainly because they were popular altars for sacrifice set up as the worshipper desired, and not according to God's direction. Hezekiah also destroys the pillars and the sacred pole, perhaps a particular Asherah that Hezekiah's father Ahaz placed in the Jerusalem temple, just as King Manasseh will later do; refer to 2 Kings 21:3 and 23:12.

Hezekiah takes further action against the bronze serpent named Nehushtan, which Moses had made in the wilderness and which had recently itself become an object of worship, no doubt because of the close association of serpents with the goddess Asherah. The name Nehushtan means 'piece of brass' and is a way to make less of this object that was made an idol. So Hezekiah had it turned from an object of false worship into scrap metal. Numbers 21:1-9 describes how during a time of a plague of fiery serpents upon the whole nation, Moses made a bronze serpent for the nation to look upon and be spared death from the snake bites. This statement in Second Kings reveals that this particular bronze serpent had been preserved for more than 800 years and had come to be worshipped as Nehushtan. Hezekiah, in his zeal, broke in pieces this bronze artefact and put an end to the idolatrous worship of this object.

At the site of Beersheba, archæologists discovered a horned altar. The altar, from the late 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, was built of hewn stones and had a serpent carved into one of its blocks. Obviously, this altar was used at the site in an aberrant cultic worship. It was probably destroyed during King Hezekiah's religious reforms.

This bronze serpent was a wonderful thing - when the afflicted people of Israel looked upon it, they were saved. It was even a representation of Jesus Christ, as Jesus himself said: *<<And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life>>* (John 3:14-15). At the same time, man could take something so good and so used by God and make a destructive idol out of it. In the same way, sometimes good things become idols and therefore must be destroyed. For example, if the true Cross of Jesus or his actual burial cloth were to be discovered, and these objects became idolatrous distractions, then it would be better for those objects to be destroyed. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Although it was an interesting memorial, it must be utterly

destroyed, because it presented a temptation to idolatry. Here if ever in this world was a relic of high antiquity, of undoubted authenticity, a relic which had seen its hundreds of years, about which there was no question as to its being indisputably the very serpent which Moses made; and it was moreover a relic which had formerly possessed miraculous power - for in the wilderness the looking at it had saved the dying. Yet it must be broken in pieces, because Israel burned incense to it." Of course, like all other objects, it did not have any power itself but was used by God's Holy Spirit to impart power.

God's people must likewise be on guard against idolatry today. There are many dangers of idolatry in the modern church:

- Making leaders idols.
- Making education an idol.
- Making human eloquence an idol.
- Making customs and habits of ministry an idol.
- Making forms of worship an idol.

<sup>5</sup> He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him. <sup>6</sup> For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses.

### 2 Kings 18:5-6

He trusted in the Lord. Hezekiah's trust was unparalleled in Judæan history for there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, and was evidenced in the way that he held fast to the Lord, Hebrew *dabaq*, throughout his life; refer to Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22, 13:4 and 30:20, in contrast to Solomon, who in his old age 'held fast' or 'clung' (also *dabaq*; see 1 Kings 11:2) to foreign wives and broke the Law of Moses.

**The words of his ancestor King David come to mind here: <<For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved>> (Psalm 21:7).**

<sup>7</sup> The Lord was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. <sup>8</sup> He attacked the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watch-tower to fortified city.

## 2 Kings 18:7-8

The Lord was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. Because of Hezekiah's faithful trust in the Lord, God blessed him thoroughly. It fulfilled a long standing promise to David and his descendants: that if they obeyed God, their reign would always be secure; refer to 1 Kings 2:1-4. The consequence of Hezekiah's religious faithfulness was that his military exploits paralleled David's in a unique way: the Lord was with him (refer to 1 Samuel 16:18 and 18:12-14; and 2 Samuel 5:10); he prospered in war (1 Samuel 18:5 and 18:14-15); and he struck down the Philistines (1 Samuel 18:27 and 19:8).

He was quite unlike his father Ahaz, for he rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him; refer to 2 Kings 16:7. His rebellious acts may have begun as early as 720 BC, when one of the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Sargon II describes the Assyrian as 'the subduer of the country Judah which lies far away'; but the authors mainly have in mind the events following Sargon's unexpected death on the battlefield in 705 BC, when widespread revolt broke out in Aram-Palestine, leading to an Assyrian invasion of Palestine in 701 BC; refer to the comment made on v.13. Hezekiah's attack on the Philistines was in fact a pre-emptive strike against Assyrian allies in advance of this invasion.

At this time Assyria was mighty enough to completely conquer the northern kingdom of Israel. Yet the kingdom of Judah stood strong, because God blessed the trusting and obedient king. Later, Zedekiah was rebuked for his rebellion against the King of Babylon. However, that was a different case, and shows that sometimes rebellion against earthly authority is justified and sometimes it is not. It is never justified against the Lord's overarching authority in all matters.

Through the actions of kings like David and Hezekiah, Jerusalem gained a reputation for rebellion against external pressure, as King Artaxerxes of Persia later noted: *<<So I made a decree, and someone searched and discovered that this city has risen against kings from long ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it>>* (Ezra 4:19).

<sup>9</sup> In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria, besieged it, <sup>10</sup> and at the end of three years took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken. <sup>11</sup> The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, <sup>12</sup> because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God but transgressed his covenant – all that

Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded; they neither listened nor obeyed.

### 2 Kings 18:9-12

In the fourth year of King Hezekiah was 725 BC and is still a reference to the time when Hezekiah was coregent with Ahaz.

King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria. The fate of the northern kingdom at the hands of the king of Assyria is reiterated here (2 Kings 17:1-6) to remind readers of the context in which Hezekiah pursued his bold policy of rebellion. Israel's rebellion met with a devastating response.

This was - and should have been - a sobering experience for the southern kingdom of Judah to see. The cruel devastation brought by the Assyrians showed what calamities could come upon the disobedient people of God.

They neither listened nor obeyed. The people of the northern kingdom were no less Israelites and descendants of Abraham by blood than were the people of the southern kingdom. Therefore, this clearly showed Judah that when they also stopped hearing and doing the commandments of God, they would also face his judgement. This is precisely what would happen but not until a later time and the prophet Daniel noted in prayer that it was their fault: <<*We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. 'Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets*>> (Daniel 9:6-10).

### IX.b 2 Kings 18:13-37 - Sennacherib Invades Judah

The Assyrian army attacked Judah and captured many of its fortified cities. Hezekiah handed over the wealth of the nation including all that from the palace and the temple in order to try to buy off the Assyrian leader King Sennacherib. However, the king of Assyria sent representatives to Jerusalem to demand more. He wanted the people to surrender to him and for them to go in peace to other places in the Assyrian empire, claiming they could not believe their king when he told them to trust in the Lord their God for their salvation.

A six-sided prism has been found that contains the annals of Sennacherib, king of Assyria (704-681 BC). It dates to 689 BC and recounts eight military

campaigns. One of these describes Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in the following way, referring to Hezekiah: "Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence like a bird in a cage." Although this is Sennacherib's account of the siege, it is noteworthy that no Assyrian record mentions any capture of Jerusalem, so these sources are not in conflict with the record of Sennacherib's departure and death in 2 Kings 19:36-37.



Assyria Attacks Judah 701 BC

During the reign of Hezekiah of Judah, Sennacherib of Assyria attacked cities along the western edge of Judah, and he sent officials to besiege Jerusalem and convince Hezekiah to surrender. The Cushite king Tirhakah advanced from Egypt to support Hezekiah but apparently failed. The siege of Jerusalem was broken when the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. Sennacherib withdrew and returned to Nineveh in Assyria, where his own sons later assassinated him.

<sup>13</sup> In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.

### 2 Kings 18:13

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. In 701 BC Sennacherib, king of Assyria, launched a major assault against Judah. Archaeology sheds significant light on this event. The Sennacherib Relief found at Nineveh depicts the Assyrian attack on the Judæan city of Lachish. Sennacherib built a siege ramp on the south western corner of the city and destroyed its defences by using archers, infantry, and siege machines. The Judæans responded by erecting a counter-siege ramp to bolster their defences. It was to no avail: Sennacherib conquered Lachish. Both of the actual ramps have been uncovered. The date of 701 BC is also confirmed in the annals of Sennacherib.

After Sargon II's death, the new Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BC) first campaigned in southern Mesopotamia (703-702 BC) against the king of Babylon, Marduk-apla-iddina II (refer to 2 Kings 20:12), before turning his attention to Aram-Palestine in 701 BC; see the map above. The rebellion there quickly collapsed, and Hezekiah found himself without effective allies and without fortresses: <<*Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners*>> (Isaiah 1:7), and: <<*For her wound is incurable. It has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem*>> (Micah 1:9). Sennacherib's own account of the campaign is found in its earliest form on the Rassam Cylinder, which dates from 700 BC, immediately after the events.

<sup>14</sup> King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.' The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. <sup>15</sup> Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. <sup>16</sup> At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the

doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

### 2 Kings 18:14-16

As one of Judah's most important cities, Lachish received particular attention from Sennacherib during this campaign, and after a siege it was eventually captured and burned to the ground. When Sennacherib later constructed his royal palace at Nineveh, he commissioned a set of stone reliefs to commemorate his famous conquest of the city. The choice of the assault on Lachish for this impressive artistic representation is interesting, in that it serves to underline, without intending to do so, that Sennacherib did not capture Jerusalem. On Lachish, refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 14:19 and v.13 above.

The mention of Lachish is important historically. Lachish was thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Archæologists have discovered a pit there with the remains of about 1,500 casualties of Sennacherib's attack. In the British Museum, there is an Assyrian carving depicting their siege of the city of Lachish, which was an important fortress city of Judah.

### I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.

Hezekiah's first response to the crisis is to bargain – a disappointing prologue to what will eventually turn out to be his finest hour. This was a clear - although understandable - lack of faith on the part of Hezekiah. He felt it was wiser to pay off the Assyrian king and become his subject than it was to trust God to defend Judah against this mighty king.

It can be supposed that Hezekiah thought that since the northern kingdom had been recently conquered and that all the fortified cities of Judah had been captured, that God had demonstrated that he would not intervene on behalf of Judah. Therefore, Hezekiah felt he had to do something himself. Perhaps this idea was strengthened in Hezekiah when he remembered the wickedness of his own father Ahaz, and when he considered that because of their prior sin, Judah deserved such judgement.

### Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house.

Hezekiah hoped that this policy of appeasement would make Judah safe. He was wrong, and his policy only impoverished Judah and the temple and made the King of Assyria even bolder and more confident than ever in coming against Judah.

<sup>17</sup> The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the

Fuller's Field. <sup>18</sup> When they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

### 2 Kings 18:17-18

The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. Still besieging Lachish, Sennacherib decides after all not to accept Hezekiah's attempt to persuade him to withdraw, no doubt because Hezekiah was one of the moving forces in the revolt, and he sends an army to Jerusalem to pressure Hezekiah to surrender.

The Tartan, Assyrian *turtanu*, was the commander-in-chief and one of two persons in the Assyrian army with this title who often led campaigns on behalf of the emperor: <<*In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it*>> (Isaiah 20:1), and the Rabsaris was himself often dispatched on campaigns at the head of Assyrian forces.

The Rabshakeh was originally the chief cupbearer and would have accompanied the emperor as a personal attendant. His presence in this delegation is no doubt to be explained in terms of his linguistic abilities (v.19 and v.26). However, many believe that the role had changed to that of a field commander for the army and thus he would have been the right choice of man to conduct such negotiations on behalf of the king who was overall head of the army.

The conduit of the upper pool is of uncertain location, but was just outside the city wall; it is the place where Isaiah had earlier called on Ahaz to exercise faith in the midst of war; refer to Isaiah 7:1-9. It seems likely to have been a major source of water for the city, which the Assyrians could then control if a siege occurred, thus showing the dominant position the Assyrians were in.

The Fuller's Field may plausibly be associated with the spring En-rogel to the south of Jerusalem at the juncture of the Hinnom and the Kidron Valleys – a natural place, because of its water supply, for the Assyrian army to encamp.

During the reign of King Hezekiah, the city of Jerusalem expanded more than ever before. Many refugees from the Assyrian invasion settled on the Western Hill, as the ancient city built by King Solomon on the Eastern Hill was not able to absorb them. New city walls encircled both hills, and thus Jerusalem became <<*a city that is bound firmly together*>> (Psalm 122:3b).



### Jerusalem in the Time of Hezekiah circa 725-686 BC

There came out to them Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder. Three of the most important of the Judæan officials go out to negotiate with the three Assyrian officials; refer also to 1 Kings 4:1-6.

<sup>19</sup> The Rabshakeh said to them, ‘Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours? <sup>20</sup> Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? <sup>21</sup> See, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. <sup>22</sup> But if you say to me, “We rely on the Lord our God”, is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, “You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem”? <sup>23</sup> Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. <sup>24</sup> How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master’s servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? <sup>25</sup> Moreover, is it without the Lord that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.’

## 2 Kings 18:19-25

On whom do you now rely? The matter of Hezekiah's trust (v.5) lies at the heart of this speech. Sennacherib reasons that trust in Egypt would be futile, but so also would it be to rely on the Lord, for it is his high places and altars that Hezekiah has removed, and indeed it is the Lord who has sent Assyria to destroy Judah because of this sacrilege! Or so the Assyrians claimed.

It was a great temptation for Hezekiah during this time to make a defensive alliance with Egypt, which seemed to be the only nation strong enough to protect Judah against the mighty Assyrians. As a prophet, Isaiah did everything he could to discourage Hezekiah and the leaders of Judah from putting their trust in Egypt; refer to Isaiah 19:11-17, 20:1-6 and 30:1-7. The Lord wanted Judah to trust in him instead of Egypt.

In this sense, the Rabshakeh spoke the truth. God wanted Judah to have no confidence in Egypt at all. However, the Rabshakeh did not do it to bring Judah to a firm trust in the Lord God, who can and will deliver them from the Assyrians. He did it to completely demoralise Judah and drive them to despair.

See, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff. Strangely, the Rabshakeh could see the truth of Egypt's weakness better than many of the leaders of Judah could. Hezekiah's trust-in-Egypt policy would indeed be trouble for Judah. Egypt had made its one attempt to redeem its promises and its army had been beaten at El Tekeh. The Rabshakeh had himself seen this, but his words are more far reaching and damaging, exposing the criminal stupidity of Judah's leaders: "surely," he said, "they knew that anyone who ever trusted Egypt suffered for it."

But if you say to me, "We rely on the Lord our God." The Rabshakeh anticipated the response of the leaders of Judah. "Rabshakeh, you say that we cannot trust in Egypt. All right, we will not. But we can trust in the Lord our God."

Is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed? The Rabshakeh knew that King Hezekiah had implemented broad reforms in Judah, including the removal of the high places (vv.3-4). Yet in the Rabshakeh's thinking, Hezekiah's reforms had really displeased God, so he should not expect help from the Lord God of Israel. The Rabshakeh would say, "Look at all the places there used to be where people would worship the Lord God of Israel. Now, since Hezekiah came to the throne, there is only one place. More is always better, so the Lord God of Israel must be pretty angry with Hezekiah!"

The enemy of the human soul has an amazing way of discouraging human disobedience to God. If Hezekiah was not careful, this argument of the Rabshakeh would start to make sense, when really it was demonic logic through and through. The theological misunderstanding shown by the field commander

at this point argues for the authenticity of the speech, which many critics have dubbed a free creation by the author of the narrative.

Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria. This is a reminder of the Rabshakeh's whole strategy, which was to make Judah give up. This was the entire reason the Rabshakeh was at the aqueduct, speaking to these leaders of Hezekiah's government. He had the vastly superior armies; he could have just attacked Jerusalem without this little speech. However, the Rabshakeh would prefer it if Judah would simply give up, out of fear, discouragement, or despair. This would save the Assyrians both time and resources in waging a siege campaign against the city.

The enemy of the human soul uses the exact same approach. Many people picture Satan as 'itching for a fight' with them. Really, Satan does not want to do battle with anyone. First of all, there is the strong chance a Christian would win: <<*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*>> (Romans 8:31). Secondly, win or lose, the battle can draw a believer closer to the Lord. Thirdly, what the Lord does in a person's life through the battle can be a great blessing for other people. No, Satan would much rather not fight a Christian at all! He would much rather try to talk them into giving up! This exact strategy was used against Jesus during his temptation in the wilderness. When Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for Jesus' worship, Satan was trying to avoid the fight, and trying to talk Jesus into giving up; refer to Luke 4:5-8. It did not work with Jesus, and it should not work with his followers.

I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. Here, the Rabshakeh mocked Judah's weak army. He said, "Even if we helped you with 2,000 horses, it would not do you any good." His basic message is, "We could beat you with one hand tied behind our backs!" That is, "How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants?"

Is it without the Lord that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The Rabshakeh saved his best thrust for last: "Admit it, Hezekiah. You know that your God is on my side." Like all good deception, it would have been easy for Hezekiah and his men to believe this one. After all, had not the Assyrians been wildly successful? Surely, God must be on their side. Did they not have the most powerful army? Surely, God must be on their side. The reader can understand their logic.

The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. This was the finishing blow of a brilliant attack. "Hezekiah, God told me to destroy you. I'm just doing his will, and there is nothing you can do to stop it, so you may as well surrender." If this were true then Hezekiah and his people would not have been able to resist the Assyrians, but it was not true and that is where faith comes in.

Significantly, it can be said that the Rabshekah was partially correct! God was with him, and his attack on Judah fulfilled God's prophesied plan. In conquering Aram, in conquering Israel, and in bringing Judah to the brink, the Assyrians did the will of God. God prophesied that all this would happen, especially in Isaiah 7:16-17 and 8:3-4, but also in many other passages in Isaiah. He allowed it to happen so his prophesied plan would be fulfilled.

However, it should never be thought that God tempted an innocent man with an evil plan: <<No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one>> (James 1:13). In fact, even though God predicted and planned this invasion of the Assyrians, the Rabshakeh may have been lying indeed when he said, "The Lord said to me." God did not have to do anything special to direct the bloodthirsty, conquest-hungry Assyrians to attack Aram, Israel, and Judah. He simply allowed the Assyrians to carry out the corrupt desires of their evil hearts. Therefore, the Assyrians could never excuse themselves by saying, "We were doing the Lord's will" even as Judas could never legitimately make that excuse regarding his wicked but necessary betrayal of Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, 'Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall.' <sup>27</sup> But the Rabshakeh said to them, 'Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?'

### 2 Kings 18:26-27

Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language. Aramaic was the language of the Assyrian Empire west of the Euphrates and would have been understood by the educated Judæan royal officials, although not by the ordinary people on the city wall. However, the Assyrians were trying to appeal to the people over the heads of their rulers; therefore, they ignored the request and continued to address the people in Hebrew, the language of Judah.

Aramaic became the diplomatic lingua franca of the Near East in the neo-Assyrian period. That a well educated member of Sennacherib's staff could speak Hebrew and Aramaic as well as Akkadian need no longer be doubted. The language was also in wide usage following the Babylonian exile but it seems that the Persians had not adopted it: <<And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated>> (Ezra 4:7).

Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall? The Rabshakeh did not care if the common citizens of Jerusalem could hear him. That was one of his objectives. The more fear, discouragement, and despair he could spread, the better he liked it.

Who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine. The Rabshakeh pointed forward to what conditions would be like in Jerusalem after an extended siege: <<*Her nobles send their servants for water; they come to the cisterns, they find no water, they return with their vessels empty*>> (Jeremiah 14:3a), and: <<*The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything*>> (Lamentations 4:4). He wanted this to offend and frighten everyone who heard it, and magnify their sense of fear, discouragement, and despair.

<sup>28</sup> Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, ‘Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!’ <sup>29</sup> Thus says the king: “Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. <sup>30</sup> Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the Lord by saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.”

### 2 Kings 18:28-30

Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah. The Rabshakeh deliberately refused the request of Hezekiah’s representative and spoke clearly enough for those on the city walls to hear what he had to say to them. What he said was in clear contrast to what they had been told by their own king.

Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! The Rabshakeh wants to elevate the position of Sennacherib above that of Hezekiah. One was the king over a great army leading a successful conquest of many lands and cities, whereas the other was the one who had recently tried to buy his way out of trouble.

Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. The Rabshakeh equates trust in the Lord with deception; the reader is prepared to see God vindicate that trust. The speech was intended to make God’s people doubt their leaders and was also intended to build fear and unbelief in them. The Rabshakeh would later try the same tactic on Hezekiah in trying to turn him away from God: <<*Thus shall you speak to King Hezekiah of Judah: Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria*>> (2 Kings 19:10).

<sup>31</sup> Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: “Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will

eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern,<sup>32</sup> until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die. Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The Lord will deliver us.<sup>33</sup> Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?<sup>34</sup> Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?<sup>35</sup> Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?”

### 2 Kings 18:31-35

Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern. The Rabshakeh’s speech was intended to make surrender an attractive option. The Assyrian king is presented as a powerful god who is able to provide for his worshippers, in contrast to the allegedly weak God of Israel who is unable to deliver. The language of the false promise recalls the words of Moses: <<*For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper*>> (Deuteronomy 8:7-9).

Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land. Here, the Rabshakeh referred to the policies of ethnic cleansing and forced resettlement practiced by the Assyrians. When they conquered a people, they forcibly resettled them in faraway places, to keep their spirits broken and their power weak. The Rabshakeh’s speech was intended to make this terrible fate seem attractive.

That you may live and not die. The message was “be deported and live or remain in your city and die.” The NIV states: <<Choose life and not death!>>, which is remarkably similar to the message from God for his people before they even entered the land: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? The Rabshakeh's speech was also intended to destroy their trust in God. His message was simple, and brilliant in its Satanic logic: "The gods of other nations have not been able to protect them against us. Your God is just like one of them, and cannot protect you either."

For anyone who had the spiritual understanding to see it, Judah could have started planning the victory party right then. It is one thing to speak against Judah, its people and leaders. It was another thing all together to mock the Lord God of Israel this way, and count him as 'just another god.' As the Lord would later say through his prophet: <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name*>> (Ezekiel 39:25).

Typical of the work of the enemy, the Rabshakeh was going well until he simply overstepped his bounds. There was no way God would let him off the hook for this one. He had offended the Lord God in a way he would soon regret.

<sup>36</sup> But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, 'Do not answer him.' <sup>37</sup> Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

### 2 Kings 18:36-37

But the people were silent and answered him not a word. They did not try to argue with the Rabshakeh. Often, it is useless - if not dangerous - to try and match wits with this demonic logic. It is almost always better to keep silent and trust in God, instead of trying to win an argument with Satan or his servants.

For the king's command was, 'Do not answer him.' King Hezekiah was wise enough to make this command, and his officials and the people were wise enough to obey him.

The three men came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of the Rabshakeh. Although they were silent, they were still deeply affected by this attack. They had the same experience Paul described: <<*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*>> (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Things were bad, but the battle was not lost yet.