



Second Kings - Chapter Nineteen

IX 2 Kings 18:1-20:21 - Hezekiah (continues)

Summary of Chapter Nineteen

Following the devastating words of the Rabshakeh in Chapter 18, King Hezekiah is in distress and he goes into the temple. He instructs his counsellors to seek out Isaiah and they do so. Isaiah tells them to inform the king that he should not worry for the Lord will turn the Assyrian's words back on themselves.

Sennacherib was still fighting against Lachish when the Rabshakeh returned to him. He also knew that the Ethiopians were coming against him and so he sent the Rabshakeh back to Jerusalem to tell Hezekiah he had no option but to comply with the terms offered to him.

On receiving Sennacherib's final demands, Hezekiah went into the temple and prayed to the Lord to save his people from the Assyrians. The response came to him via Isaiah, who told him that not only would he protect Jerusalem, he would prevent the Assyrians from attacking it or even laying siege to the city.

That very night the angel of the Lord struck down the Assyrian army. Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, where he was later assassinated by his sons.

IX.c 2 Kings 19:1-7 - Hezekiah Consults Isaiah

On receiving the demands of the Rabshakeh, Hezekiah goes into the temple to pray. He sends messengers to Isaiah saying that the claims of the Assyrians bring disgrace on the nation as it blasphemes God. Isaiah responds by assuring the king that the Lord will throw the Assyrian words back at them and they will not succeed in their quest to take Jerusalem and its people.

¹ When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. ² And he sent

Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

2 Kings 19:1-2

When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth. The tearing of clothes and the wearing of sackcloth (a rough, burlap-type material) were expressions of deep mourning, usually for the death of a loved one. Here, it is a symbol of the distress they feel because of the threat of the Assyrians. Hezekiah received this report regarding Rabshakeh seriously, knowing how dedicated this enemy was to completely conquering Jerusalem.

Hezekiah's initial reaction was good. He saw the situation for what it really was. Often, when people are in some kind of trial or difficulty, they handle it poorly because they never see the situation accurately. Jerusalem's situation was desperate and Hezekiah knew it. There was good reason for Hezekiah to be so humble before the Lord. City after city has fallen to Sennacherib and long lines of deportees were already snaking their bitter way into exile and it is all Hezekiah's fault! He followed the lunatic policy of rebellion and was bewitched by Egyptian promises. He might as well have sold his people himself. However, even when a matter is a person's own fault they can still pray about it. And the Lord can always be trusted to respond appropriately.

And went into the house of the Lord. Hezekiah's second reaction was even better. He did not allow his mourning and grief lead him into a rejection of the Lord's power and help. He knew this was a more necessary time than ever to seek the Lord.

When it says, went into the house of the Lord, it should not be thought that it means that King Hezekiah went into the holy place itself, which was forbidden for all except priests. It simply means that Hezekiah went to the courts of the house of the Lord, to seek God in the place which was open to him as a man of Israel. A previous king of Judah, King Uzziah, saw his reign effectively ended when he broke this commandment of the Lord to stay out of the holy place of the temple. Scripture states: <<*But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of incense*>> (2 Chronicles 26:16). In response, God immediately struck Uzziah with leprosy and he lived as an isolated leper until his death with his son acting as regent in his place.

The contrast between the wicked King Jehoram in 2 Kings 6:30-31 and the pious Hezekiah is particularly interesting. The besieged Jehoram was unwilling to wait for God and looked instead to remove the head of God's prophet, while Hezekiah humbly sends a message to the prophet Isaiah to request him to pray to God (v.4).

³ They said to him, ‘Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. ⁴ It may be that the Lord your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.’

2 Kings 19:3-4

Children have come to birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. Hezekiah put these words in the mouth of his messengers to Isaiah to express the total calamity of the situation. This was a proverbial expression for a disaster - a woman so exhausted by labour that she could not complete the birth, so it is likely that both mother and child would die. It is a day of great humiliation and powerlessness for the king and all the people of Judah.

It may be that the Lord your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh. Hezekiah knew that their only hope was that God would take offense at the blasphemies of the Rabshakeh and rise up against him.

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left. In effect, Hezekiah was saying, “Isaiah, pray for us. Our nation is devastated by this Assyrian invasion, and Jerusalem alone is left standing. Pray for the remnant that is left.”

The remnant, in this context, likely comprises those from the northern kingdom of Israel who would have sought refuge in Judah, and specifically in Jerusalem, in the face of prior Assyrian aggression, along with those of the southern kingdom of Judah who might survive Sennacherib’s siege, which seemed inevitable if they resisted the Assyrians any longer. The only hope for this remnant is that the Lord, who is truly the living God and not simply one false god among many, will act to defend his name: <<*The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this*>> (Isaiah 37:31-32).

In Micah Chapter 2 the warning goes out to the leaders and influential people who are devising evil deeds for the Lord is devising a plan to come against them. The plan is to take away the land of Canaan that he had graciously given to his people and hand it over to invading armies. There are those who blame this outcome on the Lord but he had sent his prophets to warn them and they had not listened. Thus they will go into exile. However, the chapter ends with a promise go gather back a remnant who will be led by their Shepherd-King: <<*I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the survivors of Israel; I*

will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture; it will resound with people. The one who breaks out will go up before them; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head>> (Micah 2:12-13).

⁵ When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, ‘Say to your master, “Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. ⁷ I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.”’

2 Kings 19:5-7

Thus says the Lord. Isaiah was aware he spoke as a prophet of the Lord. Without hesitation, he spoke as if he were speaking for the Lord God of heaven. The reader can be sure that Isaiah did not take this lightly. The fate of the nation, and his entire credibility as a prophet, was riding on what he said. Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, was about to make a bold prediction. His prophecy would be entirely ‘provable.’ It would either happen or it would not happen; Isaiah would be known as a true prophet or a false prophet very soon.

Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard. There is a sense of a gentle rebuke in these words from the Lord. “Hezekiah, it is good for you to seek me so passionately. But the words of the Rabshakeh are only words. Do not be afraid of them.”

God often told his people not to be afraid in such dire circumstances, for example: <<*The Lord said to me, ‘Do not fear him, for I have handed him over to you, along with his people and his land. Do to him as you did to King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon’>> (Deuteronomy 3:2), and it was the command given to Joshua by the Lord as he prepared to lead the people into the Promised Land: <<*I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go>> (Joshua 1:9).**

With which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. How these words must have cheered Hezekiah! Before, he had hoped: <<*It may be that the Lord your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left>> (v.4). Now the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, saying that he had indeed heard those words. It was evident that God took this offense personally. It is worthy that the Hebrew term for servants here is a particularly and deliberately*

belittling term, showing just how angry God was with them for having the audacity to make such claims.

I myself will put a spirit in him. Here, the Lord God assured Hezekiah that he would indeed deal with Sennacherib. He had heard his blasphemy through the Rabshakeh and would bring judgement against him. According to the prophet Isaiah, the Lord will so influence Sennacherib's thinking that several events will occur. Sennacherib will **hear** (Hebrew *shama'*) a certain **rumour**, abandon his campaign, and **return** (Hebrew *shub*) **to his own land**, where he will meet his death (v.7). However, the timing of this is not clear. Repetition of the pair of Hebrew verbs to hear and to return, found again in vv.8-9, encourages the hope that Sennacherib's doom is imminent: in v.8, Rabshakeh heard (*shama'*) that the king had left Lachish and he returned to him (*shub*); in v.9, the king heard (*shama'*) concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia and sent messengers again (literally 'he returned [*shub*] and sent') to Hezekiah. The ultimate fulfilment of the prophecy does not in fact occur until vv.35-37.

Significantly, in this initial word from the prophet Isaiah, there was no mention of Jerusalem's deliverance or the defeat of the Assyrian army. God focused this word against the Rabshakeh personally.

IX.d **2 Kings 19:8-13 - Sennacherib's Threat**

When the Rabshakeh informs Sennacherib of what has transpired the king tells his commander to return to Jerusalem and give Hezekiah a final warning that there is no way for him to resist the mighty Assyrians and that he should surrender. The gods of the other nations had not saved them, so how could the Lord save Judah?

⁸ The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹ When the king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia, 'See, he has set out to fight against you', he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ '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. ¹¹ See, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered? ¹² Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?'

2 Kings 19:8-13

The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah.

This must have seemed to Hezekiah to be the fulfilment of the Lord's promise through the prophet Isaiah. The Rabshakeh left Jerusalem and Hezekiah must have thought, "Now he'll go back to his own land and be killed, just like the Lord has promised."

The king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia. While the Rabshakeh was away, the Assyrians learned that Egyptian troops under an Ethiopian king were advancing from the south. This would be the Egyptian intervention Assyria feared, and that many in Judah trusted in. As Isaiah prophesied, it would come to nothing; refer to Isaiah 20:1-6 and 30:1-7. Actually Tirhakah was only a prince at the time, but because he assumed the throne in 690 BC, the title 'king' is used proleptically.

King Tirhakah of Ethiopia commanded an Egyptian army that marched into Palestine in 701 BC to aid the rebels. He would later be a pharaoh of Egypt (690-664 BC). Sennacherib defeated this Egyptian force at Eltekeh, about 12 miles or 19 km east of the Mediterranean Sea on the eastern border of the coastal plain.

Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you. The Rabshakeh was not in Jerusalem, but that did not stop him from trying to build fear, discouragement, and despair in Hezekiah. He sent a letter to the king of Judah to attack him from a distance. The argument is subtly different on this second speech by the Assyrians. In 2 Kings 18:19-35 the Rabshakeh claimed that Hezekiah was deceiving the people about what would happen if they trusted the Lord: *<<Thus says the king: "Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. 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 18:29-30); here he claims that Hezekiah is the one deceived by the God in whom he trusts. This is a God, according to Sennacherib, who is not only weak but duplicitous; and he invites Hezekiah to turn his back on this deity and save himself from the fate of all those other kings who went to their doom clinging to their idols.

Have the gods of the nations delivered them? The Rabshakeh listed many cities that the Assyrian army conquered, destroying them utterly, Hebrew *herem*, which also means exterminated.

IX.e 2 Kings 19:14-34 - Hezekiah's Prayer

On receiving Sennacherib's ultimatum, Hezekiah goes once more into the temple and prays to the Lord, opening his heart and letting God know that he accepts that only he can save his people. The Lord responds through Isaiah, telling the king that

the Assyrians will not succeed and indeed will be totally repulsed without firing a single arrow or laying siege to the city.

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said: ‘O Lord the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. ¹⁷ Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, ¹⁸ and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods but the work of human hands – wood and stone – and so they were destroyed. ¹⁹ So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.’

2 Kings 19:14-19

Then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. Hezekiah did exactly what any child of God should do with such a letter. He took it to the house of the Lord (to the outer courts, not the holy place), and he spread it out before the Lord. In this, Hezekiah boldly and effectively fulfilled the later command: <<**Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you**>> (1 Peter 5:7).

Hezekiah prayed before the Lord. Hezekiah’s response on this occasion is not to send messengers to Isaiah, asking the prophet to pray as he had done in v.4, but rather to pray himself to God, who is here envisaged as dwelling in a special way in the Jerusalem temple and as being invisibly enthroned in the Most Holy Place on two enormous cherubim; refer to the comments made on 1 Samuel 4:3-4 and 1 Kings 8:6-7.

O Lord the God of Israel. This title for God reminded Hezekiah - and the Lord also, in the human way of understanding - that the Lord God was the covenant God of Israel, and that he should not forsake his people. As recorded in Isaiah 37:16, Hezekiah also used another title when he addressed God, crying out “O Lord of hosts.” This title for God essentially means, ‘Lord of armies.’ Hezekiah was in a crisis that was primarily military in nature, so it made sense for him to address the Lord first according to the aspect of God’s nature that was most needful for him, effectively saying, “Lord of armies, send some troops to help us!”

This God is God alone, creator of heaven and earth, and therefore God of all the kingdoms of the earth. He is not to be confused with the gods of the nations against whom the Assyrians have known admittedly great success – ‘gods’ who are in fact mere cult images made of wood and overlaid with metal and precious stones. Hezekiah now asks that Jerusalem be delivered for the glory of God himself: that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone. In recognising the Lord God as creator, Hezekiah saw that the Lord had all power and all rights over every created thing. Hezekiah’s rising faith can almost be felt as he prayed this!

God is a simple title for the Lord, but is perhaps the most powerful one. If he is God, then what can he not do? If he is God, then what is beyond his control? Hezekiah realised the most fundamental fact of all theology: God is God, and people are not! God is God, and the Rabshakeh or the Assyrians are not!

Hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. In his prayer, King Hezekiah drew the contrast between the living God and the false gods of the nations the Assyrians had already conquered. Those false gods were not gods, but the work of men’s hands; wood and stone, so they were not able to save them from the Assyrians. However, Hezekiah prayed confidently that the living God would save them.

Introduction to 2 Kings 19:20-28

A second prophecy from Isaiah, in three parts, brings God’s response to Hezekiah’s prayer. This first part concerns Sennacherib’s blasphemy, pride, and ultimate downfall. He thinks of himself as a god, claiming to have brought judgement, as only the Lord can do, on the mighty cedars of Lebanon and on Egypt; refer to Psalm 29:5, Isaiah 2:12-13 and 19:1-15, Amos 2:9 and Zechariah 11:1-3. He has allegedly ascended the heights so that he can look God straight in the face (Psalm 73:8 and 75:4-5, and Isaiah 14:13-15); and he boasts that he has both brought and withheld fertility on the earth, creating water supplies and drying up rivers. Refer to Psalm 36:8-9, Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13 and 51:36, Ezekiel Chapter 31 and Hosea 13:15. His great mistake has been to imagine that what he has accomplished in his military campaigns has been achieved in his own strength. In reality, it was the Lord who determined it long ago. It was God who planned from days of old that Sennacherib would turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins (v.25), so his pride in his mighty accomplishments is foolishness. In fact, Assyria is merely the rod of God’s anger according to Isaiah 10:5-11. Likewise, the Lord will bring an end to his campaigns, causing Sennacherib to turn back on the way by which he came, led like an animal by a hook in the nose and a bit in the mouth (v.28).

²⁰ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I have heard your prayer to me about King

Sennacherib of Assyria. ²¹ This is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him:

She despises you, she scorns you —
virgin daughter Zion;
she tosses her head — behind your back,
daughter Jerusalem.

2 Kings 19:20-21

I have heard your prayer to me about King Sennacherib of Assyria. The glorious answer which fills the rest of the chapter came because Hezekiah prayed. What if he had not prayed? The logical answer is that no answer would have come and Jerusalem would have been conquered. Hezekiah's prayer really mattered as do all earnest words prayed to God.

Virgin daughter of Zion and daughter Jerusalem are frequently used in the OT as a personification of the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Jerusalem is as defenceless as a virgin daughter, but because of the Lord's protection she will not be violated by mighty Sennacherib; in fact, she tosses her head at him, scoffing at his pride.

Jerusalem could be called the virgin, the daughter of Zion for several reasons:

- She was unpolluted with the gross idolatry of the pagans.
- God would defend her from the intended rape by Sennacherib and the Assyrian army.
- She had never been invaded or conquered by another since the days of King David.

The Lord promises that she will rise up once more: <<*Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers*>> (Jeremiah 31:4). Whether this refers to their return from Babylonian exile, the re-establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1947, or to a time yet to come, no one but the Lord knows: <<*So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority'*>> (Acts 1:6-7).

²² 'Whom have you mocked and reviled?

Against whom have you raised your voice
and haughtily lifted your eyes?

Against the Holy One of Israel!

2 Kings 19:22

Whom have you mocked and reviled? The Lord, speaking through Isaiah, simply said to the Rabshakeh, “Do you know whom you are dealing with?” The Rabshakeh obviously did not know: <<**Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises**>> (Psalm 22:3). Curiously, this prophecy may have never reached the ears of the Rabshakeh. After all, Isaiah did not exactly have free access to him. However, perhaps before his terrible end, God found a way to get this prophecy to him. Or, perhaps God had it for this blasphemer as a special message in the next life. At the very least, this prophecy would have been hugely encouraging to Hezekiah and all of Judah, even if the Rabshakeh never heard it on this earth. Sometimes God speaks to the enemy more for the sake of his people than for the sake of the enemy himself.

23 By your messengers you have mocked the Lord,
and you have said, “With my many chariots
I have gone up the heights of the mountains,
to the far recesses of Lebanon;
I felled its tallest cedars,
its choicest cypresses;
I entered its farthest retreat,
its densest forest.

24 I dug wells
and drank foreign waters,
I dried up with the sole of my foot
all the streams of Egypt.”

25 ‘Have you not heard
that I determined it long ago?
I planned from days of old
what now I bring to pass,
that you should make fortified cities
crash into heaps of ruins,

26 while their inhabitants, shorn of strength,
are dismayed and confounded;
they have become like plants of the field
and like tender grass,
like grass on the housetops,
blighted before it is grown.

2 Kings 19:23-26

With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains. Here, the Lord described the great pride the Assyrians had in their own conquests. But they forgot that the Lord was really in charge, i.e. I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins, while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded. Even if the Assyrians did not know it, they owed their success to the Lord. God then confronted Sennacherib with that which he had apparently not considered: Sennacherib's successes were foreordained by God. Sennacherib should not boast as though what he had done was either self-generated or self-accomplished. This was humbling for the Assyrians. All along, they thought it was because of their mighty power that they had accomplished so much. Here, God made it plain that it was his power that achieved it using them as his tool.

27 'But I know your rising and your sitting,
your going out and coming in,
and your raging against me.

28 Because you have raged against me
and your arrogance has come to my ears,
I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth;
I will turn you back on the way
by which you came.

2 Kings 19:27-28

But I know your rising and your sitting, your going out and coming in, and your raging against me. God knew how to find the Assyrians, something that David clearly understood: *<<O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.*

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely>> (Psalm 139:1-4). And because Assyria went too far in blaspheming the one who made all their success possible, therefore God said, “I will put my hook in your nose” and “I will turn you back on the way by which you came.” This was an especially dramatic statement, because this is exactly how the Assyrian’s cruelly marched those whom they forced to relocate out of their conquered lands. They lined up the captives, and drove a large fishhook through the lip or the nose of each captive, strung them all together and marched them. God said, “I’m going to do the same thing to you.”

²⁹ ‘And this shall be the sign for you: This year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. ³⁰ The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards; ³¹ for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

2 Kings 19:29-31

And this shall be the sign for you. The second part of Isaiah’s prophecy looks beyond the withdrawal of the Assyrians from Judah. The sign that Judah will recover from the Assyrian assault is to be found in the way that the survivors will be provided for in the short term: initially they will be able to survive only because of the crops that spring up from what is already in the ground, but in the third year they will resume normal agricultural practice, able to bear fruit.

The invasion prevented sowing in 702 BC, but when the threat lifted in 701 BC they would find sufficient growth to preserve life; in 701 BC the withdrawing Assyrians still inhibited agriculture, yet in 700 BC there would still be enough through ‘chance growth’. Thus the Lord would confirm retrospectively that it was his hand that dispersed the threat. When in the harvest of the third year the people ate in abundance, they would know assuredly that God had been in the entire crisis.

³² ‘Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, shoot an arrow there, come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege-ramp against it. ³³ By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says the Lord. ³⁴ For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.’

2 Kings 19:32-34

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria. The third part of Isaiah's prophecy makes explicit the circumstances in which Sennacherib will return home by the way that he came. He will return home before the army encamped outside the city of Jerusalem takes military action against it.

God plainly and clearly drew a line. Although the Assyrian military machine was poised to lay siege to Jerusalem and ultimately crush them, they will not because God will not let them. The king of Assyria would not come into the city because God promised to defend it. It is hard for most modern people to understand the ancient horror of the siege, when a city was surrounded by a hostile army and trapped into a slow, suffering starvation; although it is still seen today in places like Aleppo, Syria. King Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem lived under the shadow of this threat, but God's promise through Isaiah assured them that Sennacherib and the Assyrian army would not only fail to capture the city, but would not even shoot an arrow or build a siege mound against Jerusalem. God promised that they would not even begin a siege.

For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. This explains why God promised to defend Jerusalem. God would defend his own glory. Often, believers in the one true God unnecessarily think that they must defend the glory of the Lord. But that is not really the case. God is more than able to defend his own glory. Jeremiah later argued that those who traded on this prophecy as meaning that the temple in Jerusalem would never be taken were superstitious and presumptuous; refer to Jeremiah 7:1-15.

God also does it for the sake of my servant David. King David had died almost 300 years before this, but God still honoured his promise to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:10-17. God defended Jerusalem, not for the city's sake at all - Jerusalem deserved judgement! But he did it for his own sake and for the sake of David. In the same way, God the Father defends and blesses all his children, not for their own sake for they so often deserve his judgement, but he often does it for his own sake, and for the sake of Jesus Christ the Lord of all.

IX.f 2 Kings 19:35-37 - Sennacherib's Defeat and Death

Simply and powerfully, God destroyed this mighty army in one night. One hundred and eighty-five thousand died at the hand of the angel of the Lord. Against all odds, and against every expectation except the expectation of faith, the Assyrian army was turned back without having even shot an arrow into Jerusalem. The unstoppable was stopped, the undefeated was defeated.

³⁵ That very night the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when

morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. ³⁶ Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷ As he was worshipping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him.

2 Kings 19:35-37

The event precipitating Sennacherib's 'return' to Nineveh when he 'heard' about it, refer to the comments made on vv.7-9, involved enormous casualties suffered by his army outside Jerusalem, with one hundred and eighty-five thousand struck down in one night by the angel of the Lord. Here is God's remarkable answer to Hezekiah's prayer: <<*O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand*>> (v.19), and the fulfilment of God's promise in vv.32-34.

The prophet Hosea, a contemporary of Isaiah, made this same prediction: <<But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen>> (Hosea 1:7).

Herodotus, the Greek historian, recorded that one night Sennacherib's army camp was infested with mice or rats that destroyed the arrows and shield-thongs of the soldiers. He probably got this tradition from Egyptian sources, and it could well be a somewhat garbled version of the event recorded here.

When morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. This was not difficult for God to do. In a manner of speaking, it was far harder for the Lord to get the heart and minds of his people in the right place. Once they were there, it was nothing for God to dispatch one angel to do this. Some have speculated that there was a natural means that the angel used. This has been thought to be bacillary dysentery which had a three day incubation period.

Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home. This happened exactly as God had said it would. However, the king left still full of pride. After this retreat from Judah, Sennacherib commissioned a record, which is preserved in the spectacular Annals of Sennacherib known as the Taylor Prism, which can be seen in the British Museum. It shows how full of pride Sennacherib's heart still was; even if he could not even claim he conquered Jerusalem.

As he was worshipping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Between v.36 and v.37 twenty years have passed. Perhaps Sennacherib thought he had escaped the judgement of God, but he had not. He met the bitter end of death at the end of swords held by his own sons.

An old Jewish legend - and nothing more than a legend - says how it was that Sennacherib's sons came to kill him. Sennacherib was troubled at how God seemed to bless the Jews so much, and tried to find out why. Someone told him it was because Abraham had loved God so much that he was willing to sacrifice his son unto the Lord. Sennacherib thought he would be even more favoured by God, and decided to kill two of his sons in sacrifice to the Lord, becoming even more blessed than Abraham and his descendants. However, his two sons learned of the plan and killed him before he could kill them, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord.

His son Esar-haddon succeeded him. Esar-haddon, the youngest son of Sennacherib by his second wife, reigned between 681-669 BC. When Esar-haddon was named successor by his father his elder brothers tried to discredit him. He was in exile but marched back to Nineveh and defeated his brothers in a bloody civil war that lasted six weeks. In the same year he began the rebuilding of Babylon, including the well-known Esagila and the Ekur at Nippur, structures sometimes identified with the Tower of Babel. Apart from here and in Isaiah 37:38, Esar-haddon is not referred to elsewhere in Scripture.