

Defeat of the Assyrians



SABBATH—MAY 8

ROYAL PICTURE ALBUM. In a picture, a thin man walks barefoot with his two sons. Another family has loaded all their things onto an ox cart pulled by starving oxen. A man leads the oxen while two women sit on the cart. Other people have no cart. So they carry their things on their shoulders

Soldiers are everywhere. A battering ram¹ smashes into the city gate. Archers² shoot at the soldiers who are defending the city's walls. Dead people lie everywhere.

In another picture, a king sits proudly on his throne. He receives booty³ and captives.⁴ Some captives come closer to him and beg for kindness. Other captives kneel with bowed heads. Above the king, the words appear: "Sennacherib, king of all, king of Assyria, sitting on his throne while the spoil⁵ from the city of Lachish⁶ passed before him."

These two pictures were hung on the walls of Sennachereib's "Palace Without a Rival."⁷ But now the pictures are in the British Museum. What a story these pictures have to tell about the suffering of God's people. This week, we will learn more about that suffering and about how God helped His people.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: How hopeless did the situation in Judah appear? How did the Assyrians try to destroy the people's spirit? How did Hezekiah⁸ answer? Hezekiah did well in time of trouble. But what happened to him during prosperity?⁹

¹battering ram—a long, heavy pole used to break down city gates so the soldiers could enter the city and capture it.

²archers—soldiers with bows and arrows.

³booty—things taken from an enemy in a war.

⁴captives—people the enemy captures during a war.

⁵spoil—things taken from an enemy in a war.

⁶Lachish—the second most important city of Judah.

⁷rival—something that could compete with Sennacherib's beautiful palace.

⁸Hezekiah—one of the good kings of Judah.

⁹prosperity—good times.

MEMORY VERSE: “Almighty Lord, God of Israel, seated above the winged creatures [angels], you alone are God, ruling all the kingdoms of the world. You created the earth and the sky” (Isaiah 37:16, TEV).

SUNDAY—MAY 9

STRINGS ATTACHED (Isaiah 36:1).

What happened to Judah? Isaiah 36:1; 2 Kings 18:13; 2 Chronicles 32:1.

Faithless Ahaz died. His faithful son Hezekiah took the throne after him. Hezekiah received a kingdom that had lost full freedom. Judah had asked Assyria for help against Syria and northern Israel. So Judah was forced to continue paying “protection money” in the form of a tax to Assyria (2 Chronicles 28:16-21). But the Assyrian king Sargon II died on a far-off battlefield. Sennacherib succeeded to the throne in 705 B.C. Then Assyria appeared weaker. Assyrian history and the Bible show that Hezekiah took this opportunity to rebel against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7). Sadly, Hezekiah had not completely understood Assyria’s power. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib had defeated other parts of his empire then he conquered Syria-Palestine and made plans to attack Judah.



¹⁰Ahaz—Judah’s 12th king.

How did Hezekiah prepare for a battle with Assyria? 2 Chronicles 32:1-8.

Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib planned to take Jerusalem, the capital city. Hezekiah made careful plans for a battle with Assyria. He strengthened Jerusalem’s walls, organized his army, and increased the protection around Jerusalem’s water supply (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). The Siloam water tunnel has a sign explaining how it was built. The information on this sign points to Hezekiah’s plans for a possible battle with Assyria.

Hezekiah did important work as a military and organizational leader. But more importantly, he gave Judah spiritual leadership. He tried to support the spirit of his people at this frightening time. Hezekiah encouraged them by saying: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast [big] army with him, for there is a greater power [God] with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32:7, 8, NIV).

If Hezekiah trusted God so much, why did he make careful plans

against Sennacherib? **Philippians 2:12, 13.**

MONDAY—MAY 10

PROPAGANDA¹¹ (Isaiah 36:2-20).

The rulers of Assyria were both cruel and intelligent. Their goal was wealth and power. So they did not want to destroy Judah's cities (Isaiah 10:13, 14). Why destroy a city if you can encourage the people to give up without a fight? So when Sennacherib was busy with the siege¹² at Lachish,¹³ he sent his high officer to take Jerusalem by propaganda.

What arguments did the high officer use to scare Judah? Isaiah 36:2-20; 2 Kings 18:17-35; 2 Chronicles 32:9-19.

The high officer made some powerful arguments. He said, "You cannot trust Egypt to help you because Egypt is weak and not trustworthy. You cannot depend on God to help you because Hezekiah has insulted Him by removing His altars throughout Judah. Hezekiah is wrong to tell the people to worship at one altar in Jerusalem. In fact, God is on Assyria's side, and He told Sennacherib to destroy Judah. You do not even have enough trained men to

handle 2,000 horses. Avoid a long battle in which you will starve. Give up now, and you will be treated well. Hezekiah cannot save you. The gods of all the other countries conquered by Assyria have not saved them. So you can be sure your God will not save you."

Was the high officer telling the truth?

There was much truth in what the high officer was saying. His arguments were easy to believe. Two arguments supported him. First, he had just come from Lachish, only 30 miles away. There the Assyrians were defeating a strong city that rebelled against them. Second, the high officer had a powerful group of Assyrian soldiers with him (Isaiah 36:2). The people of Judah knew what happened to the other cities (including Samaria, the capital of northern Israel; 2 Kings 18:9, 10) that had fallen to Assyria. They had a good reason to believe that Jerusalem was doomed (Isaiah 10:8-11). The high officer was also right in saying that Hezekiah had destroyed different places of sacrifice so that the people would worship at the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1). But had this action really insulted God, who was the only hope His people had left? Could He save them? Was all hope gone? It was up to God to answer this question!

¹¹propaganda—false information and clever arguments to make people believe a lie.

¹²siege—when an army circles a city for a long time. No fighting happens. But the army makes it difficult for the people in the city to get food and water.

¹³Lachish—the second most important city of Judah.

Have you ever been in a situation where all hope seemed gone? What was your only answer? If willing, be prepared to share with your class how you handled that experience and the result.

TUESDAY—MAY 11

SHAKEN BUT NOT FORSAKEN (FORGOTTEN) (Isaiah 36:21–37:20).

How did the high officer's speech influence Hezekiah and his leaders? Isaiah 36:21–37:4; 2 Kings 18:37–19:4.



Wearing sackcloth showed that Hezekiah was humble before God and wanted His help.

Very much afraid, Hezekiah turned to God. He humbly asked for Isaiah's help. Isaiah was the same prophet whom Hezekiah's father had not listened to.

How did God encourage Hezekiah? Isaiah 37:5-7.

God's message was very short. But it was enough! God was on the side of His people! Isaiah predicted¹⁴ that Sennacherib would hear a rumor that would lead him to drop his attack on Judah. This prediction¹⁵ was quickly fulfilled.

Sennacherib was disappointed. But he did not give up. He sent Hezekiah a threatening message. Read Isaiah 37:10, 12 and 2 Chronicles 32:17.

Again Hezekiah went straight to the temple and spread the message out before the Lord of hosts, "enthroned¹⁶ between the cherubim [angels]" (Isaiah 37:14-16, NIV).

How did Hezekiah's prayer point to the issue in Jerusalem's crisis? Isaiah 37:15-20.

Sennacherib had pointedly attacked Hezekiah's strongest defense: his faith in God. But Hezekiah did not back out in fear. Instead, he asked God to show who He was "so that all kingdoms of the earth may know that you [God] alone, O Lord, are God" (Isaiah 37:20, NIV).

Read Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:15-20. What parts of God's character does the prayer focus on? What principle¹⁷ is in this prayer that

¹⁴predicted—to have said what will happen in the future.

¹⁵prediction—a statement saying what will happen in the future.

¹⁶enthroned—sitting on a throne.

¹⁷principle—a basic rule that guides the making of other rules and that helps us to decide what to do.

can give you encouragement and strength to stay faithful when you have problems?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 12

**THE REST OF THE STORY
(Isaiah 37:21-38).**

Sennacherib wrote that he took 46 strong towns, surrounded Jerusalem, and made Hezekiah “a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence [city], like a bird in a cage” (J. Pritchard, editor, *Ancient¹⁸ Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [1969], p. 288). Sennacherib liked to use propaganda to build up his pride. But he did not claim to have taken Jerusalem. To us, this is surprising because Sennacherib was very powerful and Hezekiah rebelled against him. People who rebelled against Assyria could expect to have short lives and terrible deaths.

Bible scholars¹⁹ say that even if we did not have the Bible, we would have to admit that a miracle must have taken place. Sennacherib lined the walls of his “Palace Without a Rival” with carved pictures showing his successful attack against Lachish. This seems to show that Sennacherib wanted to make himself look good. But without God’s help, these pictures would have shown Jerusalem instead! Sennacherib did

not tell the rest of the story. But the Bible does!

**What is the rest of the story?
Isaiah 37:21-38.**

In answer to Hezekiah’s prayer of total faith, God sent him a message of hope. God was very angry with the proud Assyrian king who had dared to “slap” Him in the face (Isaiah 37:23). Then God went ahead to fulfill His promise to defend Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:36-38; 2 Kings 19:35-37; 2 Chronicles 32:21, 22). A big time of trouble calls for a big miracle. And a big miracle it was! The number of dead people²⁰ was 185,000! So Sennacherib had no choice but to go home. At home, he met his own death (Isaiah 37:7-38).

If Sennacherib had conquered Jerusalem, he would have wiped out the people in such a way that Judah would not have been known as a nation. This is what happened to northern Israel. If Judah had fallen to Assyria, then there would have been no Jewish people, and the Messiah would not have been born. Judah’s story would have ended right there. But God kept hope alive.

What would you say to a nonbeliever who asks if it was fair that 185,000 Assyrian soldiers should die? How do you understand God’s actions here?

¹⁸ancient—very old.

¹⁹scholars—people who earn a living by studying one particular subject.

²⁰dead people—185,000 Assyrian soldiers who camped around Jerusalem were killed overnight by the Lord’s angel.

THURSDAY—MAY 13

**IN SICKNESS AND IN WEALTH
(Isaiah 38; Isaiah 39).**

The events²¹ of Isaiah 38 and Isaiah 39 (2 Kings 20) took place very close to the time when God rescued Hezekiah from Sennacherib. But the rescue (Isaiah 37; also 2 Kings 19) had not yet happened. Isaiah 38:5, 6 and 2 Kings 20:6 show that Judah still faced the Assyrian threat.

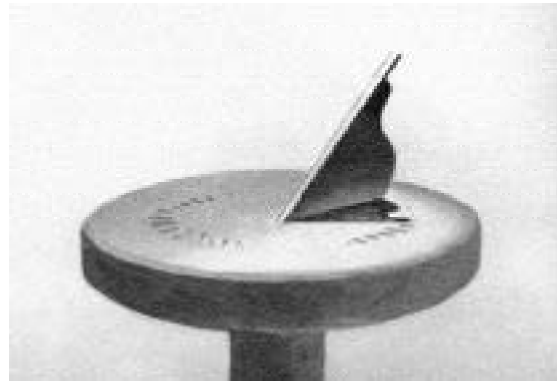
“Satan wanted very much to bring about both the death of Hezekiah and the fall of Jerusalem. Satan probably reasoned that if Hezekiah were out of the way, his efforts at reform²² would fail, and the fall of Jerusalem could happen more quickly.”—Adapted from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 240.

What does the above quote tell us about how important it is for God’s people to have a good leader?

What sign does God give Hezekiah that would support Hezekiah’s faith? Isaiah 38:6-8; 2 Kings 20:8-10.

Ahaz had refused signs offered by God (Isaiah 7). Ahaz had started the events that led to trouble with Assyria. But now Hezekiah had *asked* for a sign (2 Kings 20:8). So God strengthened Hezekiah to meet the time of trouble that

his father had brought upon Judah. The moving back of the shadow on Ahaz’s sundial²³ could only have been a miracle.



A sundial.

The Babylonians studied the movements of the sun, the moon, and stars, they kept careful records of these movements. So they would have noticed the sun’s strange behavior and wondered what it meant. That King Merodach-baladan sent messengers to Judah at this time is no surprise. The Babylonians had learned of the connection between Hezekiah’s cure and the miracle of the sun.

Now we know why God chose this special sign. Many years later, He used the star of Bethlehem to bring wise men from the East. In the same way, God used the miracle of the sun to bring messengers from Babylon. This was a wonderful opportunity for them to learn about the true God. King Merodach-baladan spent all of his career trying to win freedom from Assyria. He needed powerful friends. This explains his reason for trying to get in touch with Hezekiah. If the sun itself moved

²¹events—things that happen.

²²reform—a change for the better; an improved relationship with God.

²³sundial—a plate that shows the time of day when the sun casts a shadow by an object with a straight edge.

when Hezekiah asked for it to move, surely Hezekiah could conquer Assyria!

How did Hezekiah lose a wonderful opportunity to glorify God and point the Babylonians to Him? What was the result? Isaiah 39. What is the lesson here for us?



Do we glorify God? Or do we brag about the wonderful things we have?

FRIDAY—MAY 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Only by the direct act of God could the shadow on the sundial be made to turn back. This was to be the sign to Hezekiah that the Lord had heard his prayer. ‘Isaiah prayed to the Lord, and the Lord made the shadow go back ten steps on the stairway set up by King Ahaz’ (2 Kings 20:11, TEV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 342.

“The visit of King Merodach-baladan’s messengers gave Hezekiah an opportunity to praise the living God. How easy it would have been for Hezekiah to tell

them of God, the Creator of all living things. Through God’s favor, Hezekiah’s own life had been saved when all other hope had failed. . . .

“But pride took over Hezekiah’s heart. So he showed the Babylonians all the treasures God had given His people. The king ‘showed them his wealth—his silver and gold, his spices and perfumes, and all his military equipment. There was nothing in his storerooms or anywhere in his kingdom that he did not show them’ (Isaiah 39:2, TEV). Hezekiah did not show those things to glorify God but to glorify himself to the people of other countries.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 344.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is Satan like the Assyrian high officer (Monday and Tuesday’s lessons)? Does Satan tell the truth when he says you have sinned (Zechariah 3:1)? How does God answer? Zechariah 3:2-5. What is our only hope against these false charges (lies)? Romans 8:1.
2. Does Satan stop his false charges when you are forgiven? Revelation 12:10. So what is the nature of his false charges? Deuteronomy 19:16-21.

SUMMARY: God answered the cry of a faithful king by saving His people and showing who He is. He is the all-powerful King of Israel who controls the future end of earth. God destroys people who try to destroy His people. He also gives opportunities for other people to become His people, no matter how far away from the truth they are.