

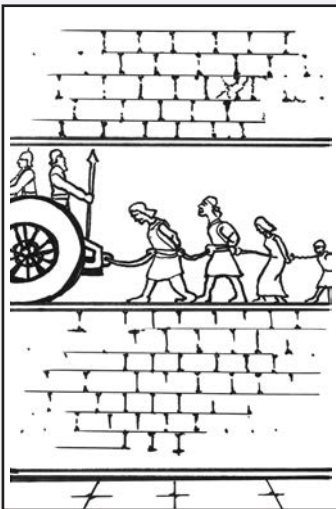
The Assyrians Are Beaten



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 36–39; 2 Chronicles 32:1–22; 2 Kings 18:17 to 2 Kings 20:21; Zechariah 3:1–5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Lord of heaven’s armies, you are the God of Israel. Your throne is between the gold creatures [angels] with wings. Only you are the God of all the kingdoms of [on] the earth. You made the heavens and the earth’ ” (Isaiah 37:16, ICB).



The pictures on the walls of the palace of Sennacherib tell a surprising story about the suffering of the people of God.

MAKE A PICTURE OF THIS STORY IN YOUR MIND. A skinny man walks barefoot with his two sons. Another family loads all their belongings into a cart pulled by an ox. The ox looks as if it has not eaten anything in a long time. Some people do not have a cart at all. So, they carry all that they own on their shoulders. Soldiers are everywhere. They knock down a city gate. Some soldiers shoot arrows at the people on top of the city wall. Dead bodies are everywhere.

Now make a new picture. A king sits on his throne. People bring him treasures and prisoners of war. Some prisoners beg the king for mercy. Men who wrote about this king always started their records with these words: “Sennacherib, king of the whole earth, king of Assyria.” —John Malcolm Russell, *The Writing on the Wall* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pages 137, 138, adapted.

The pictures you made in your mind were real pictures on the walls of the palace of Sennacherib. Today, these same pictures are in the British Museum. They tell a surprising story about the suffering of the people of God.

KING HEZEKIAH GETS READY FOR WAR (Isaiah 36:1)

What happens to Judah? For the answer, read 2 Kings 18:13; 2 Chronicles 32:1; and Isaiah 36:1.

King Ahaz dies. Then his son Hezekiah becomes king. Hezekiah obeys God. The kingdom of Judah is no longer fully free when Hezekiah becomes its king. That is because King Ahaz paid Assyria to protect Judah against Syria and Northern Israel. So, when Hezekiah becomes king, the kingdom of Judah is forced to continue paying “protection money” to Assyria to keep Judah safe (see 2 Chronicles 28:16–21). Then Sargon the Second, the king of Assyria, dies in war. The new king of Assyria is Sennacherib. He becomes king in 705 B.C. Assyria was weak during this change of power. At this time, Hezekiah became the leader of a group of small countries near Judah. Together, they fought against Assyrian control.

But King Hezekiah makes a mistake. He does not think Assyria is very strong. He is wrong. Sennacherib gets control of his kingdom. Then, in 701 B.C., the powerful Assyrian army strikes Syria-Palestine and hits Judah hard.

How does Hezekiah get ready for war with Assyria? For the answer, read 2 Chronicles 32:1–8.

Hezekiah sees that Sennacherib wants to take Jerusalem by force. So, Hezekiah gets ready for war with Assyria. Hezekiah makes Jerusalem and his army strong. Hezekiah also makes sure that the water that flows into the city is protected and safe (read also 2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chronicles 32:30). Today, if you visit the water tunnel of Siloam, you can read a sign about how it was built. A water tunnel is a long pipe or tube that carries water from one place to another. Bible experts believe that the Siloam water tunnel was built during the time that Hezekiah got ready for war with Assyria.

Hezekiah also was a strong spiritual leader at this time. He helped his people to have courage at this awful time. “King Hezekiah makes up his mind to do his part. He will do everything he can to get ready to fight against the enemy. After he does all that he can do, the king calls his army together. Then he tells them to have courage.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 351, adapted.



King Ahaz dies. Then his son Hezekiah becomes king.

LIES (Isaiah 36:2–20)

The leaders of Assyria are very mean. They also are smart. They want two things: money and power. They do not wish to destroy cities; they wish to control them (compare Isaiah 10:13, 14). Why destroy a city if you can talk its people into surrendering first? This is what Sennacherib thinks. While he is at war against Lachish, Sennacherib sends his “**rabshakeh**” to take Jerusalem. A rabshakeh is a high officer. What weapon does the rabshakeh use to take the city of Jerusalem? A sword? No, he uses lies.

What lies does the rabshakeh use to make the people of Judah afraid? For the answer, read Isaiah 36:2–20; read also 2 Kings 18:17–35 and 2 Chronicles 32:9–19.



The rabshakeh tells Judah to give up now. A rabshakeh is a high officer.

The rabshakeh gives some powerful reasons why Judah should give up without a fight. (1) Judah cannot trust Egypt to help them. Egypt is weak. (2) Judah cannot depend on the Lord to help them because Hezekiah made God angry by removing the high places and altars in all of Judah. Then Hezekiah told the people to worship at only one altar in Jerusalem. (3) The Lord is on the side of Assyria, not Judah. (4) The Lord told Sennacherib to destroy Judah. (5) Judah does not have enough trained men to use the 2,000 war horses the Assyrian king offers to give them.

The rabshakeh tells Judah to give up now. (6) You do not have enough food to eat and water to drink. We will be fair to you. Hezekiah cannot save you. The gods of all the other countries did not save their people from Assyria. So, you can be sure that your God will not save you too.

Is the rabshakeh telling the truth?

Much of what the rabshakeh said is true. Two reasons make his words powerful. (1) The rabshakeh just came from Lachish, only 30 miles away. The Assyrians show at Lachish what they will do to any city that dares to fight against them. (2) The rabshakeh has a powerful part of the Assyrian army with him (Isaiah 36:2). So, in human eyes Judah is in deep trouble (compare Isaiah 10:8–11). The rabshakeh also is right that Hezekiah destroyed the altars. But does this change upset the Lord? The Lord is the only hope His people have left. Will He, and can He, save His people? It is up to God to answer this question!

AFRAID BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
(Isaiah 36:21 to Isaiah 37:20)

How do the clever words of the rabshakeh make Hezekiah and his people feel? For the answer, read 2 Kings 18:37 to 2 Kings 19:4 and Isaiah 36:21 to Isaiah 37:4.

The heart of Hezekiah is filled with fear. He is very upset. So, he turns to God. His heart is empty of all pride. Hezekiah asks Isaiah for help. Isaiah is a prophet. A prophet is a special messenger from God. The father of Hezekiah did not pay attention to advice from Isaiah. But Hezekiah is ready to do what Isaiah says.

How does God encourage Hezekiah? For the answer, read Isaiah 37:5–7.

The message from God is short. But it is enough. God is on the side of His people. Isaiah says that Sennacherib will hear news that will take him away from his attack on Judah. This happens right away.

But Sennacherib does not give up so easily. He sends Hezekiah a message: “ ‘Don’t be fooled [tricked] by the god you trust when he says, ‘Jerusalem will not be defeated [beaten] by the king of Assyria.’ You have heard what the kings of Assyria did to all the other countries. We destroyed them completely. Will you be saved? No! Did the gods of those people save them?’ ” (Isaiah 37:10–12, ERV; read also 2 Chronicles 32:17).

This time Hezekiah goes straight to the temple. He spreads the message from Sennacherib in front of the Lord of angels. The Lord sits “ ‘as King above the Cherub angels’ ” (Isaiah 37:16, ERV; read also Isaiah 37:14, 15).

How does the prayer of Hezekiah show what this fight between Judah and Assyria is really about? For the answer, read Isaiah 37:15–20.

Sennacherib attacks the faith of Hezekiah. Faith in God makes Hezekiah strong. But does Hezekiah lose courage? No. He turns to God. He asks God to show Sennacherib who He is. “ ‘So please save us from the king of Assyria. Then all the other nations [countries] will know that you are the LORD, the only God’ ” (Isaiah 37:20, ERV).



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THE REST OF THE STORY (Isaiah 37:21–38)



Sennacherib brags that he made Hezekiah the Jew a prisoner.

Assyrian records show that Sennacherib took 46 cities. His army attacked Jerusalem. Sennacherib brags that he made Hezekiah the Jew “a prisoner in Jerusalem in his royal palace. I made Hezekiah the same as a bird in a cage.” —James B. Pritchard, editor, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), page 288, adapted. But none of the records of Sennacherib or the carved pictures in his palace show that he took Jerusalem. Sennacherib was a mighty king. People who fought against his power did not live very long. They died very awful deaths. But Hezekiah led countries to fight against him. And Sennacherib did not kill him or take his city.

This shows us a miracle happened. The picture carvings in the palace of Sennacherib show him taking the city of Lachish. Sennacherib wants everyone to see his success. He also wants everyone to see that he was very mighty and important. He hoped that the picture carvings will keep people from remembering that his attack against Jerusalem failed. God is the only reason that Jerusalem did not end up the same as Lachish. Sennacherib does not tell that he lost the fight with Jerusalem. But the Bible does.

What is the rest of the story? For the answer, read Isaiah 37:21–37.

God answers the prayer of Hezekiah. God sends him a message of encouragement. God is very angry with Sennacherib. Sennacherib dared to insult the King of kings (Isaiah 37:23). Then God keeps His promise right away. He defends Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35–37; 2 Chronicles 32:21, 22; Isaiah 37:36–38).

A big problem needs a big miracle. God gives the miracle. Many Assyrian soldiers die: 185,000 men. So, Sennacherib has no choice. He must go home. There, he is killed (compare Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 37:7–38).

“The God of the Hebrews won the war against Sennacherib. The heart of the Assyrian king is filled with pride. God shows His power to the countries around Jerusalem. God wins honor and respect in their eyes. In Jerusalem, the hearts of the people are filled with joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 361, adapted. God saved His people from being destroyed. He kept hope alive.

KING HEZEKIAH ASKS FOR A SIGN (Isaiah 38 and Isaiah 39)

The things in Isaiah 38 and Isaiah 39 happen close to the time that God saves Hezekiah from Sennacherib. As we can see from Isaiah 38:5, 6 and 2 Kings 20:6, Judah is in danger from Assyria. So, this time is just before God saves His people.

“Satan wants to kill Hezekiah and destroy Jerusalem. Satan thinks that if Hezekiah is dead then he cannot make any more changes for the better. Then Jerusalem can be destroyed more easily.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, page 240, adapted.

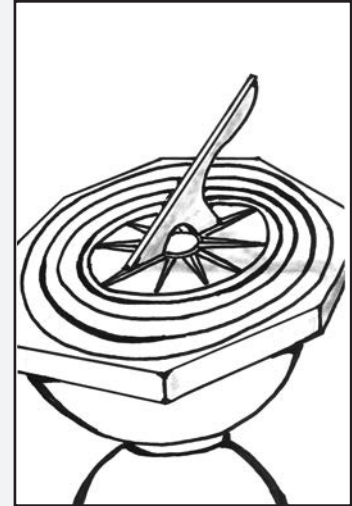
What does the quotation above show us about good leadership? How important is it for the people of God to have good leaders?

What special sign or miracle does God give Hezekiah to make his faith strong? For the answer, read 2 Kings 20:8–11 and Isaiah 38:6–8.

Ahaz refused to accept signs offered by God (Isaiah 7). That led to the trouble with Assyria. But now Hezekiah **asks** for a sign (2 Kings 20:8). So, God makes Hezekiah strong to meet the trouble that his father brought on Judah. Only God can turn back the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz. A sundial was a round disc with a triangle on top that was used in Bible times to tell time.

The Babylonians studied the stars and the way they moved. The Babylonians see the strange behavior of the sun. They wonder what it means. That is why King Merodach-baladan from Babylon sends messengers to visit Hezekiah. Then the Babylonians learn about the connection between the healing of Hezekiah and the miracle of the sundial.

Now we know why God chose this sign. Later, God will use the star of Bethlehem to bring wise men from the East to see Jesus. In the same way, God uses a change in the sun to bring messengers from Babylon to Judah in the days of Hezekiah. This is a special time for the Babylonians to learn about the true God. Merodach-baladan spends his whole time as king trying to win lasting freedom from Assyria. He needs powerful friends. So, that explains why he wants to connect with Hezekiah. The sun itself moves because of the prayer of Hezekiah. So, what can Hezekiah do to Assyria?



**The sun itself moves
because of the prayer of
Hezekiah.**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Only God can cause the shadow on the sundial to turn back ten degrees. [As we saw yesterday, a sundial was a round disc that was used in Bible times to tell time.] This sign showed Hezekiah that the Lord heard his prayer. ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ “Here is a sign from me. It will show you that I will heal you, just as I promised I would. The shadow that was made by the sun has gone down ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. I will make it go back up those ten steps.” ’ ’ ’ ’ So the shadow went back up the ten steps it had gone down’ [Isaiah 38:7, 8, NIV].”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 342, adapted.

“The visitors come from a faraway land. Hezekiah has a very easy chance to tell them all about the living God. God is the One who made everything and keeps it going. God saves Hezekiah from death when he has no hope! . . .

“But the heart of Hezekiah fills with pride. He wants the visitors to honor him. So, he shows them the treasures that God gave His people: ‘the silver, gold, spices and expensive perfumes. . . . He showed them everything in his palace and in his kingdom’ [Isaiah 39:2, ICB]. Hezekiah does not do this to give God glory. Hezekiah shows them his treasures so that they will admire him.”—Pages 344, 345; adapted.



“Hezekiah shows them his treasures so that they will admire him.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① How is Satan the same as the Assyrian rabshakeh? As we saw, the rabshakeh is a very powerful servant of King Sennacherib. Does Satan tell the truth when he says you have sinned (Zechariah 3:1)? How does God answer in Zechariah 3:2–5? What is our only hope against Satan’s words? (For the answer, see Romans 8:1.)

② Does Satan stop blaming you when you are forgiven? For the answer, read Revelation 12:10. After God forgives you, Satan goes on saying that you belong to him because you sinned. Why does Satan say this? (Read Deuteronomy 19:16–21 that talks about the law of a lying and evil witness.)

Summary: Hezekiah cries out to God in faith. God saves His people and shows who He is. God is the all-powerful King of Israel. He controls everything that happens on the earth. God destroys the ones who try to destroy His people. He also invites people who do not know Him to become His people.

THE VOICE THAT CANNOT BE EXPLAINED

Valentina Shlee lives in the city of Pavlodar. Pavlodar is located in the north of the country of Kazakhstan. Pavlodar is not a very large city. 300,000 people live there. But for some reason, Valentina cannot find the time to make a short trip across town to deliver to someone a gift from Germany.

Valentina spends a lot of time caring for her three children. She also helps her husband earn extra money by selling homemade jam and pickles from a table on a city sidewalk. Valentina feels bad that she has kept the gift from Nelly in her house for so long. Nelly asked Valentina to deliver the gift to Olga, another family member.

A month passes. Valentina takes a break from her house chores and rests on the couch. She is surprised when she hears a Voice.

“Stand up. Pick up the gift of videotapes from Nelly. Then go to Olga,” the Voice says.

The Voice is not one that you can hear with your ears. The Voice speaks to Valentina inside her heart.

Valentina is not sure what is happening. But she gets up fast. She puts on her clothes for going outside. Then she picks up the gift from Nelly and goes across town to the apartment building where Olga lives. When Valentina opens the front door to the building, a woman comes in behind her. The stranger follows Valentina up the stairs to the apartment of Olga. When Olga opens the door, she invites Valentina and the stranger into her home.

Valentina wonders what is going on.

“Rosa, this is Valentina. Valentina, this is Rosa,” Olga says. Then she turns to Rosa. “You need to talk to Valentina.”

Rosa starts to cry. With tears in her voice, she explains that she is having a hard time at home. She thinks about killing herself. She also is trying to learn about God. But she cannot understand what she reads in the Bible.”

“Valentina is a Christian,” Olga says. “She can help you.”

Valentina invites Rosa to study the Bible with her. Several months later, Rosa is baptized.

The experience with Rosa helps Valentina to see why we must live close to Jesus. Jesus says, “‘Stay joined together with me, and follow my teachings. If you do this, you can ask for anything you want, and it will be given to you. Show that you are my followers by producing [growing] much fruit [read Galatians 5:22, 23]. This will bring honor to my Father’ ” (John 15:7, 8, ERV).

Valentina says, “When you stay joined to Jesus, He can tell you where to go and who to talk to. He will show you His plan for your life.”

INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



“Stand up. Pick up the gift of videotapes from Nelly. Then go to Olga,” the Voice says.

