

# What Do You Do With 185,000 Assyrians Breathing Down Your Neck

Text: *II Kings 19: <sup>verse 1</sup> And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. <sup>3</sup> And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy<sup>a</sup>: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.*

Title: What Do You Do With 185,000 Assyrians Breathing Down Your Neck?

In chapter 18, we see how that Hezekiah was a man who did right like David. This has been said only about 3 other kings of Judah: Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah.

Like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah removed the high places. High places were places where the pagans worshipped their false gods. This is also where people tried to worship the true God contrary to the Law of Moses. We must remember that Jesus had not come yet and people were still under the law.

Sadly, under Jehoshaphat, the people built their high places again and they were not removed again until Hezekiah. Human nature is often that way: that no matter how bad a habit may be, we are often blind to its ill effects until we are given some good Holy Ghost guidance. Even at that, some people will rebel against God, but we rejoice nonetheless for those who will obey the Lord.

The bronze snake that Moses made (called Neushtan) had become an idol thought to have magical powers. Isn't it amazing how that people will make idols out of even good spiritual things? God hates idolatry period. So Hezekiah broke it up: this was another sign of good spiritual leadership.

Hezekiah's best quality was that he trusted in God. This is an awesome

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quality to have. To truly trust in God is a quality that we should all desire. Because of this trust quality, Hezekiah was considered to be the best of all the kings in the Southern Kingdom.

Some kings we read about started out pretty good, but apostatized and backslid later in life...not so with Hezekiah...he remains faithful until the end and that is what God wants us to do.

As a result of Hezekiah's faithfulness, the Lord blessed him in all that he did. Hezekiah is famed for cleansing and re-consecrating the temple. His celebration of the Passover and other important feasts also is evidence of the tremendous spiritual leader that he was.

Hezekiah led a righteous indignation against Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. This is what brought on the Assyrian invasion. Hezekiah was anti-Assyrian. He did not want the children of Israel to be in any kind of bondage.

Hezekiah believed in freedom for the people, just as we should. Hezekiah did not want to antagonize the Assyrians, and he was wise in his approach, especially with Sargon II on the throne.

However, when Sargon II's son came to power, Sennacherib, Hezekiah saw that it was now possible to take the Assyrians. Hezekiah joined an alliance with neighboring nations to prepare retaliation.

Hezekiah was a leader with a strong track record of defeating the Philistines.

**However, no matter how good of a spiritual and national leader that Hezekiah was, Israel still fell because of her continued disobedience to the Law of Moses.**

Samaria is captured and Jerusalem is sieged by Assyria. Assyria was a mighty kingdom and they were very difficult to defeat in battle. The only way the Israelites had any hope at all was by the help of Almighty God.

Sennacherib was a less capable ruler than his father. During Sennacherib's first four years on the throne he was occupied with controlling Babylon. During this time an alliance had formed in which cities of Phoenicia and Philistia as well as Egypt (under Shaboka) and Judah (under Hezekiah) joined together to resist Assyria.

Certain that Sennacherib would try to put down this uprising, as Sargon had done, Hezekiah prepared for an Assyrian invasion by fortifying Jerusalem ( [2 Chron. 32:1-8](#)).<sup>1</sup>

Sennacherib led his armies into Judah as expected. On their way to Judah, the armies of Assyria were so fierce that several of the allies of Judah withdrew. Things were not looking all that great for Judah. What were they going to do without their allies?

Then Sennacherib marched his armies down the coast into Philistia where he brought the Philistine cities into line.<sup>2</sup> Next he attacked all the fortified cities of Judah except Jerusalem and captured the people. Sennacherib's inscriptions refer to his conquest of 46 strong cities of Hezekiah plus many villages.

The Assyrian king then set up his headquarters at Lachish, a well-fortified city near the Philistine border in central Judah, in preparation for his siege of Jerusalem.

Understandably Hezekiah did not want to fight Sennacherib, whose armies had been consistently successful against other members of the now severely weakened alliance. So Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib at Lachish.

Judah's king admitted that he had done wrong in allying with the other nations against Assyria. He offered to pay whatever the Assyrian king demanded if he would withdraw and not attack Jerusalem. Sennacherib asked for 300 talents (ca. 11 tons) of silver and 30 talents (ca. 1 ton) of gold.

Hezekiah paid him all the silver in the treasuries of the temple and palace. To gather all the gold the king had to strip off all the gold plating on the temple doors and doorframes.

Talk about feeling hopeless! Things were looking pretty bleak for Hezekiah and the children of Israel at this point, but we must never forget that for the people of God, God always has the final and last word!

### *Sennacherib's threat* ([18:17-37](#))

The ransom did not satisfy Sennacherib, so he sent messengers to demand a complete surrender. At first they presented their claims only to Hezekiah's

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representatives but then to all the people of Jerusalem.

**18:17-18.** The three officers sent by Sennacherib were his top men. They went with a large army to intimidate Hezekiah so he would capitulate without resistance. They advanced by way of the road to the Washerman's Field to the aqueduct of the Upper Pool that extended from the spring of Gihon to the field where the people washed their clothes.

This was within earshot of the wall of Jerusalem (cf. v. 26) and was a busy location. The messengers wanted to speak to the king, but Hezekiah sent three of his deputies—Eliakim . . . Shebna, and Joah—to negotiate with Sennacherib's three representatives.<sup>3</sup>

Sennacherib's field commander spoke for his side and repeated his king's message to Hezekiah. What he said was designed to impress Hezekiah with Sennacherib's power and glory, and to intimidate him into surrendering.

He asked the basis of Hezekiah's confidence that he could possibly withstand the great king . . . of Assyria.<sup>4</sup>

Assuming Judah was depending on strategy and force, the commander pointed out the weakness of both these resources. Egypt was the only member of the alliance yet remaining, and she would splinter like a weak reed if any weight of confidence were placed on her.

Rather than helping Judah, Egypt would hurt her by both failing and frustrating Hezekiah. The commander was correct; Egypt was not strong at that time and could not be counted on for help.

If the Judahites' strategy was to rely on the LORD, the commander said they should remember that Hezekiah had incurred His wrath (he supposed) by removing the high places and altars where the Lord had been worshiped throughout the land.

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The Assyrians obviously had information about what had been going on in Judah, but they did not understand that Hezekiah's actions had been carried out in obedience to God's commands, not out of disrespect for Him. Again, God always gets the last shot, always... that is why with God on our side, we have nothing to fear!

**18:23-24.** The commander called on Hezekiah to strike a bargain and surrender. This, the commander reasoned, would be wise. The Judahites had few horses; this was part of the help Hezekiah had hoped to get from Egypt. Even if Sennacherib were to give Judah 2,000 horses Hezekiah could not put trained cavalymen on them.

Judah's army was probably not really that small, but it was small in comparison with Assyria's. From the commander's viewpoint even 2,000 Judean horsemen were no match for one Assyrian officer. In other words Judah's army was inferior in both quantity and quality.

The commander's final appeal was a strong one. He claimed that the LORD had commanded his master to attack and destroy Jerusalem. Though this is improbable it is not impossible (cf. Isa. 45:1-6). The people of Judah had seen Israel fall to Assyria. Could God's plan be the same for Judah?

Hezekiah's three representatives realized that these arguments could make the people lose heart. Since many Jews were perched on the city wall and were overhearing what was being said the three Judean ambassadors asked the Assyrians to speak only in the Aramaic language which only the educated leaders of Israel understood.

The commander refused; he realized the importance of destroying the people's confidence in their ability to succeed in any military encounter against the Assyrian army. The commander replied that he had been **sent** with this message to all the people, not just the leaders of Judah.

After all, it was the common people who would suffer most from a long siege and the resulting famine. The commander wanted the people to conclude that surrender would be better than resistance.

Now the Assyrian top officer called out to the common people standing around, listening in, and peering over the wall. His words were designed to undermine their confidence in their king and to encourage them to oppose Hezekiah's decision to resist.

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He claimed Hezekiah did not have the power or ability to deliver the city and that the LORD would not deliver it either.

It would be better for the people, the commander promised, if they surrendered. Rather than siege and starvation there would be peace and plenty to eat and drink. Each person having his own vine and fig tree is a figure of speech for enjoying peace and prosperity.

When under a siege one of the first needs people faced was water. Hezekiah had provided for this need by cutting a tunnel from the spring of Gihon under the wall of the city to the Pool of Siloam (cf. 2 Kings 20:20) but the Assyrians did not know about this or chose to ignore it. God knows what he is doing!

In time, the commander said, the Assyrians would transport them to other cities. The people had heard that this was Assyrian policy. But he assured them that they would be sent to a land like their own where they would have plenty of their favorite foods and drink.

The commander punctuated his eloquent and attractive appeal with a call to choose surrender and life rather than resistance and certain death. He next focused on Hezekiah's promise to the people that the LORD would deliver them if they trusted in Him.

His ideas reflect a polytheistic and pagan concept of God but his words could not help but raise questions in his hearers' minds. No other gods had been able to deliver their worshipers from the might of Assyria.

Undoubtedly those forceful arguments aroused much heated discussion among the common people after the Assyrian messengers departed.

The summit conference broke up and Hezekiah's three representatives ( v. 18) returned to the king. He could see that they had torn their clothes out of great distress and they faced a very serious situation. Then they told him what the Assyrians had said.

### *The Lord's promise (19:1-7)*

When the king had heard the report of his messengers, he too tore his clothes. He put on sackcloth, coarse goats' hair, clothing that symbolized self-affliction and despair.

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He then went into the temple to seek God's face in prayer. He also sent Eliakim and Shebna (cf. 18:18) and the leading priests, who were also mourning in sackcloth, to the Prophet Isaiah who lived in Jerusalem. Isaiah and Hezekiah knew and respected each other.

The king's representatives conveyed Hezekiah's message that this was indeed a black day in Judah's history. They were distressed, rebuked by God for their sins, and disgraced before their enemies. A crisis had come to a head but now there was not adequate strength to resist the Assyrian invasion.

It was like a pregnant woman who finally goes into labor but cannot deliver her child for lack of strength. It seemed as if the whole nation would die. Hezekiah's hope was that God, having been ridiculed by the Assyrians, would act on behalf of His people and prove that He was the true and living God by granting a miraculous deliverance to His people.

The king called on the prophet to pray for the small remnant of people left in Jerusalem and Judah.

Isaiah responded to the king's request with a message of hope from the LORD. The Lord encouraged the king not to fear the blasphemous words of Sennacherib's men. God would cause Sennacherib to decide to return home when he heard a report (of something God had arranged), and there the Assyrian king would die a violent death.

Evidently Sennacherib's field commander pitched his tents near Jerusalem and waited for Hezekiah to send him a message of surrender. While the commander was there, word reached him that Sennacherib had left Lachish (cf. 18:14). He withdrew from Jerusalem and located his master near Libnah where he was engaged in battle.

Libnah was just a few miles north of Lachish. This is why the field commander removed his large army (18:17) from the walls of Jerusalem.

Evidently while Sennacherib was at Libnah (or perhaps Lachish) he received a report (cf. v. 7) that Tirhakah, the king of Egypt, who was from Cush (modern-day

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southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia), and an ally of Hezekiah, was marching up to fight Sennacherib.

Somehow Sennacherib knew that the king of Judah had been told (by Isaiah) that Yahweh would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. He sent a message to Hezekiah not to believe this prophecy even though it looked as if the Assyrians were withdrawing.

He boasted of previous victories in all the surrounding countries. His armies had destroyed many of them completely. Surely Jerusalem would not be spared, he claimed.

None of the gods of the defeated peoples had been able to deliver them, had they? Sennacherib obviously granted the Lord no greater respect than the idols of the nations.

#### *Hezekiah's prayer (19:14-19)*

When the king had received . . . and read Sennacherib's message which had been carried to him by messengers, he returned to the temple to pray again. His prayer included a recognition of God's sovereignty, he made mention of the defiance of the Assyrians (vv 16-18), and a request to God for deliverance (v. 19).

Spreading the letter. . . before the LORD, Hezekiah addressed Him as Israel's God, whose throne was the atonement cover or ("mercy seat," כִּיב) on the ark of the covenant between the cherubim.

God had said He would dwell between the cherubim in a unique sense in 1 Sam. 4. The king recognized that God is a Spirit, not a piece of wood or stone. He alone was the real Ruler of Judah!, the Sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth including Assyria, and the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth.

Hezekiah besought God to listen carefully to what he would say and to view closely what was happening. He then told God about Sennacherib's blasphemous insults.

Perhaps this should come as a lesson to us to take all problems to God before we bring them to one another...God may give us divine wisdom before we try to handle them!

I love how this unfolds.....

19:17-19. Hezekiah could easily understand why Assyria had successfully

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defeated her foes; the gods in which those nations trusted for protection were mere pieces of wood and stone. They were created objects, not the Creator (cf v 15). So they had no power and were easily destroyed. But Hezekiah appealed to the living God to deliver His people from Sennacherib's hand. Hezekiah believed He could; this was a prayer of faith.

And the objective of the king's petition was God's glory, not primarily his own survival. He asked God to vindicate Himself and to demonstrate that He was not just an impotent idol so that the whole world would acknowledge Him.

Hezekiah's petition is one of the finest prayers in Scripture.

#### *The Lord's answer (19:20-34)*

19:20. The Lord's answer to Hezekiah's request (vv 15-19) came through Isaiah, and was delivered to the king by a messenger. God assured Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard. God then announced a message of judgment against Sennacherib for his blasphemy.

The first part of God's answer (vv 20-28) gave the reason for His judgment on Sennacherib. The figurative, poetic language was probably used to stress the importance and divine source of the answer.

The Virgin Daughter of Zion suggests that Jerusalem had never been conquered since it had passed into Israelite control. Jerusalem would despise and mock Sennacherib, shaking her head as the Assyrian king fled from her. Sennacherib had raised his insulting voice in blasphemy and pride, not against the city but against her God, the Holy One of Israel.

Though Sennacherib may have literally cut down the trees of Lebanon the description (v 23) probably represents his destruction of various nations' leaders.

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“Lebanon” probably refers especially to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Its choicest trees were its leaders. Assyria had dominated Israel and had killed many of its best citizens. Sennacherib boasted that he had dug up many foreign lands and had taken for himself what satisfied him at their expense.

He had done this to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, here referred to figuratively as Egypt. He boasted that his siege had kept her life-giving resources from flowing.

19:25-26. Addressing Sennacherib in this prophecy, God said that king was not responsible for Assyria’s success. Instead God had ordained . . . planned, and brought . . . to pass all that had happened (cf. Isa. 10:5). The fortified cities were those the Assyrians had destroyed.

The conquered people had no power to resist and in fact could not even attain normal full strength, like the shallow-rooted grass that grew on the housetops but died prematurely. This had been God’s doing.

19:27-28. The Lord knew all about Sennacherib and his proud raging in rebellion against Himself. Because the Assyrian monarch hated God and had spoken insolently against Him, God would take the king captive as Sennacherib had taken so many other people captive.

The hook and the bit, which portray catching a fish and controlling a horse, are uniquely appropriate. On some ancient monuments the Assyrian conquerors pictured themselves as leading their captives with a line that passed through rings that had been placed in the victims’ noses.

God promised to do to them as they had done to others. He would lead them back from where they had come and reduce them to their former humble state.

19:29-31. Through Isaiah God then promised Hezekiah a sign that these predictions (vv. 26, 28) would indeed come to pass. The sign was a near-future miracle that would confirm the fulfillment of the more distant aspects of the prophecy.

For two years the people of Jerusalem would be able to eat the produce of their land. It would not be stolen by the Assyrians who would have lived off the land if they had returned to besiege the capital. The Judeans had not been able to plant crops outside the city walls because of the Assyrians’ presence. But God

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promised that He would feed them for two years by causing the seed that had been sown naturally to grow up into an adequate crop. The third year people could return to their normal cycle of sowing and reaping.

This provision of multiplied food was further designed to illustrate God's plan to multiply miraculously the people of Judah who had been reduced to small numbers.

Sennacherib claimed to have taken 200,150 prisoners from Judah. However, though Judah seemingly might cease to be a nation through attrition, God promised to revive it.

Like the crops, a remnant of people would take root . . . and bear fruit, that is, be established and prosperous. God's zeal on behalf of His people would perform this.

19:32-34. Sennacherib's fate was then revealed. He would not forcefully take Jerusalem, besiege it, or even shoot an arrow against it. Instead he would return to his own homeland without even entering Jerusalem. God promised to defend Jerusalem and save it from Sennacherib's wrath. God would do this for the sake of His own reputation (cf. v. 19) and because of His promise to His servant David.

#### *Sennacherib's departure (19:35-36) - the 185,000*

19:35-36. That very night while the Assyrian army lay sprawled across the Judean countryside the Angel of the LORD EXECUTED 185,000 of their soldiers. When the Jerusalemites arose in the . . . morning they discovered the extent of the catastrophe. Sennacherib no doubt was trembling as he must have recognized this as a supernatural event. He returned to Nineveh in defeat!

#### *Sennacherib's death (19:37)*

19:37. Years later (in 681 B.C.) Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch. This Assyrian deity was represented as being part eagle and part human. The temple was probably in Nineveh, Assyria's capital. There the king fell prey to the plot of assassins, two of his own sons. Ironically his god was not able to deliver him even in its temple. The murdering sons fled to the land of Ararat

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(Armenia), about 300 miles north of Nineveh and the word of the Lord came to pass.

### **Closing:**

I want to tell you tonight that it pays to trust in the One True Living God, the great Creator, Jesus Christ....he will never fail you, He has never lost a Battle, and you can believe in His promise.....perhaps you are here tonight and you need deliverance from some sort of circumstance....I want you to come up front tonight and stand here in the presence of the Lord.....we as a church body are going to pray for you and we are going to watch God unfold a miracle in your life. This is your opportunity to find victory right here tonight....let your miracle begin!