

King Hezekiah

Virtual Vestry notes for 22 August

Read [2 Kings 18](#) and also [Isaiah 36](#).

[2 Chronicles 29-31](#) gives an in-depth account of the Hezekiah's actions to tear down the idol worship in Judah and reconsecrate the temple and the priesthood. It's fairly lengthy so feel free to skim.

[2 Chronicles 32:1-19](#) outlines the remaining events of 2 Kings 18, the boastful and demoralising words of the Assyrian Rabshakeh.

Hezekiah was twenty five when he became king. Hezekiah means *Yahweh strengthens*. Three years after Hezekiah came to power, Assyria attacked Israel/Samaria and three years after that, he saw the fall and dispersion of Israel by Assyria. While Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, was one of the most idolatrous kings of Judah, Hezekiah was one of the most faithful.

Hezekiah, in spite of his father, had a number of sources of moral teaching. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah were active during the reign of Hezekiah. Isaiah is noted as possibly having a great deal of influence over Hezekiah. Hezekiah's mother, Abijah, was the daughter of Zachariah. I read one account that said this was Zechariah, King of Israel and son of Ahab, and another account that said it was Zechariah the high priest. Regardless, I believe she had a great positive influence on her son.

Hezekiah reigned for twenty-nine years and tore down all the pagan worship in Judah, including the high places and the Ashera poles etc. Hezekiah also destroyed Nehustan – the bronze serpent that Moses had created and held up in the wilderness (see [Numbers 21:1-9](#)). Originally, when those who were bitten by the serpents in the wilderness, looked on it they had been saved. It was even a representation of Jesus becoming sin for us ([John 3:14-15](#)). Except that now, the people had turned it into an idol and were worshipping it and offering sacrifices to it.

- I believe that there are things from biblical history that God has allowed to disappear so that they don't become an object of worship, e.g. the Jewish temple and the ark, timbers of the cross, 'holy grail', etc. Discuss.
- Is there anything that is part of our faith, or lives, that originally was good but has now become an object of idolatry?

Hezekiah was faithful to God all his life and prospered in all he did.

- Hezekiah cleaned out and reopened the temple his father Ahaz had shut.
- He reinstated the Levitical priesthood and the Passover.
- He subdued the Philistines as far as Gaza

One commenter noted that Hezekiah was able to subdue the Philistines, stating that Hezekiah worked for a strong free and independent Judah.

- These words sound great, but could they be used to justify modern day aggression?

Verse seven says he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. However, in verse thirteen, the King of Assyria attacked Judah's fortified cities. Hezekiah sent a message to the king of Assyria saying he would pay tribute and then took gold and silver from both the temple and the palace treasury.

It has been noted that this was not Hezekiah's finest moment. He paid the King of Assyria instead of seeking God.

- Was this Hezekiah's lack of faith/rationalisation or, as an attempt to avoid war/fighting, good policy given the circumstances?

Yet Sennacherib still threatens Jerusalem

Sennacherib sends a delegation to the walls of Jerusalem: the Tartan, the Rabсарis and the Rabshakeh. These are not names but official titles.

Hezekiah sends a delegation to meet with the Assyrian delegation of which the Rabshakeh seems to be the leader of. The Rabshakeh is in control, walking into Jerusalem and standing at the city's critical water supply.

The Rabshakeh mocks Hezekiah's possible alliance with Egypt. While the Rabshakeh wanted to demoralise Hezekiah and the people, in fact God did not want Hezekiah to turn to Egypt for help either. Isaiah had already been there, discouraging Hezekiah from looking to Egypt for an alliance. See [Isaiah 19:11-17](#), [30:1-7](#).

- Why might God not want Hezekiah to make alliances?
- Have we ever been tempted to trust in the wrong thing?

The words used by the Rabshakeh have similarities to Isaiah's prophecies. In my reading, I found commentary that it was possible that Sennacherib (and probably the Rabshakeh) was familiar with Isaiah's prophecies and in quoting them, presumed he was carrying out the Lord's will by attacking and subjugating Jerusalem. He even implies that Hezekiah's reforms and removal of the high places and other idol worship had displeased God.

The aim of the Rabshakeh was to demoralise Judah and make them give up. He mocks Judah's strength, saying that even if they gave Judah 2000 horses, they wouldn't have riders for them to make an army. The Rabshakeh claims that King Sennacherib was sent by the Lord against Judah to destroy it.

Quite a bit of arrogance and twisting of prophecy.

The delegation from Hezekiah tells the delegation from Sennacherib to speak in Aramaic, not Hebrew, so the men on the wall won't hear the words. It seems like Aramaic is the language of politics and high-level negotiation. This backfires when the Rabshakeh then makes a point of speaking in Hebrew in the hearing of the men on the wall to demoralise them too. He even appeals to them not to trust that Hezekiah will save them finishing with the threat that there has been no nation that God has delivered from the hands of the Assyrian king (which, until now, was true).

- What is the Rabshakeh's aim here?
- Reading the Rabshakeh's words, if you did not know the end of the story, what would you be thinking or planning?
- Has there ever been anything that it would have been better you hadn't heard? How did it affect you emotionally, mentally or spiritually?

But of course, the people respond with silence according to King Hezekiah's command.

- What was the value of silence in this case?

This chapter is a lead up to the rest of the story of Hezekiah so we do not need to make many conclusions about the story yet, however, I would like to revisit the idea that Hezekiah worked for a strong, free and independent Judah. We already discussed how this idea may lead Christians into violence but there is a flip side to this as well. I have wondered why those who are most faithful may get involved in a battle against the forces of oppression, aggression or injustice. Even Jesus ended up in conflict with those who chose to use religious power for personal gain.

As Christians, should we be fighting for the good and against oppression and injustice, and in what way?

- Discuss.