
2KINGS 18: 1 Now in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

Hezekiah begins to reign; he removes the high places, breaks to pieces the brazen serpent, and walks uprightly before God, 2Kgs 18:1-6. He endeavors to shake off the Assyrian yoke, and defeats the Philistines, 2Kgs 18:7, 2Kgs 18:8. Shalmaneser comes up against Samaria, takes it, and carries the people away into captivity, 2Kgs 18:9-12. And then comes against Judah, and takes all the fenced cities, 2Kgs 18:13. Hezekiah sends a message to him at Lachish to desist, with the promise that he will pay him any tribute he chooses to impose; in consequence of which Shalmaneser exacts three hundred talents of silver, and thirty talents of gold; to pay which Hezekiah is obliged to take all his own treasures, and those belonging to the temple, 2Kgs 18:14-16. The king of Assyria sends, notwithstanding, a great host against Jerusalem; and his general, Rab-shakeh, delivers an insulting and blasphemous message to Hezekiah, vv. 17-35. Hezekiah and his people are greatly afflicted at the words of Rab-shakeh, 2Kgs 18:36, 2Kgs 18:37.

Verse 1

Now - in the third year of Hoshea - See the note on 2Kgs 16:1 (note), where this chronology is considered.

2KINGS 18: 2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah.

2KINGS 18: 3 He did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.

Verse 3

He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord - In chap. 29 of the second book of Chronicles, we have an account of what this pious king did to restore the worship of God. He caused the priests and Levites to cleanse the holy house, which had been shut up by his father Ahaz, and had been polluted with filth of various kinds; and this cleansing required no less than sixteen days to accomplish it. As the passover, according to the law, must be celebrated the fourteenth of the first month, and the Levites could not get the temple cleansed before the sixteenth day, he published the passover for the fourteenth of the second month, and sent through all Judah and Israel to collect all the men that feared God, that the passover might be celebrated in a proper manner. The concourse was great, and the feast was celebrated with great magnificence. When the people returned to their respective cities and villages, they began to throw down the idol altars, statues, images, and groves, and even to abolish the high places; the consequence was that a spirit of piety began to revive in the land, and a general reformation took place.

2KINGS 18: 4 He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah: and he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for in those days the children of Israel burned incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan.

 Verse 4

Brake in pieces the brazen serpent - The history of this may be seen in Num 21:8 (note), Num 21:9 (note).

We find that this brazen serpent had become an object of idolatry, and no doubt was supposed to possess, as a telesm or amulet, extraordinary virtues, and that incense was burnt before it which should have been burnt before the true God.

And he called it Nehushtan - נְהֻשְׁטָן. Not one of the versions has attempted to translate this word. Jarchi says, "He called it Nechustan, through contempt, which is as much as to say, a brazen serpent." Some have supposed that the word is compounded of נחש nachash, to divine, and תן tan, a serpent, so it signifies the divining serpent; and the Targum states that it was the people, not Hezekiah, that gave it this name. נחש nachash signifies to view, eye attentively, observe, to search, inquire accurately, etc.; and hence is used to express divination, augury. As a noun it signifies brass or copper, filth, verdigris, and some sea animal, Amo 9:3; see also Job 26:13, and Isa 26:1. It is also frequently used for a serpent; and most probably for an animal of the genus Simia, in Gen 3:1 (note), where see the notes. This has been contested by some, ridiculed by a few, and believed by many. The objectors, because it signifies a serpent sometimes, suppose it must have the same signification always! And one to express his contempt and show his sense, has said, "Did Moses hang up an ape on a pole?" I answer, No, no more than he hanged up you, who ask the contemptible question. But this is of a piece with the conduct of the people of Milan, who show you to this day the brazen serpent which Moses hung up in the wilderness, and which Hezekiah broke in pieces two thousand five hundred years ago!

Of serpents there is a great variety. Allowing that נחש nachash signifies a serpent, I may ask in my turn, What kind of a serpent was it that tempted Eve? Of what species was that which Moses hung up on the pole, and which Hezekiah broke to pieces? Who of the wise men can answer these questions? Till this is done I assert, that the word, Gen 3:1, etc., does not signify a serpent of any kind; and that with a creature of the genus Simia the whole account best agrees.

2KINGS 18: 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him.

Verse 5

He trusted in the Lord - See the character of this good king:

1. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel;
2. He clave to the Lord;
3. He was steady in his religion; he departed not from following the Lord;
4. He kept God's commandments. And what were the consequences?
 1. The Lord was with him;
 2. He prospered whithersoever he went.

2KINGS 18: 6 For he joined with the LORD; he didn't depart from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses.

2KINGS 18: 7 The LORD was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and didn't serve him.

2KINGS 18: 8 He struck the Philistines to Gaza and its borders, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city.

Verse 8

From the tower of the watchmen - See the same words, 2Kgs 17:9 (note). It seems a proverbial mode of expression: he reduced every kind of fortification; nothing was able to stand before him.

2KINGS 18: 9 In the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it.

Verse 9

In the fourth year - This history has been already given, 2Kgs 17:3, etc.

2KINGS 18: 10 At the end of three years they took it: in the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

2KINGS 18: 11 The king of Assyria carried Israel away to Assyria, and put them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes,

2KINGS 18: 12 because they didn't obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear it, nor do it.

2KINGS 18: 13 Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them.

2KINGS 18: 14 Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, "I have offended; return from me. That which you put on me, I will bear." The king of Assyria appointed to Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

2KINGS 18: 15 Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the LORD's house, and in the treasures of the king's house.

2KINGS 18: 16 At that time, Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the LORD's temple, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

2KINGS 18: 17 The king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsharis and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great army to Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field.

 Verse 17

The king of Assyria sent Tartan, etc. - Calmet has very justly remarked that these are not the names of persons, but of offices. Tartan, תַּרְתָּן tartan or tantan, as in the parallel place in Isaiah, in the Greek version, signifies he who presides over the gifts or tribute; chancellor of the exchequer.

Rabsaris - רַב סָרִיס, the chief of the eunuchs. Rab-shakeh, רַב שָׁקָה master or chief over the wine cellar; or he who had the care of the king's drink.

From Lachish - It seems as if the Assyrian troops had been worsted before Lachish, and were obliged to raise the siege, from which they went and sat down before Libnah. While Sennacherib was there with the Assyrian army, he heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, had invaded the Assyrian territories. Being obliged therefore to hasten, in order to succor his own dominions, he sent a considerable force under the aforementioned officers against Jerusalem, with a most fearful and bloody manifesto, commanding Hezekiah to pay him tribute, to deliver up his kingdom to him, and to submit, he and his people, to be carried away captives into Assyria! This manifesto was accompanied with the vilest insults, and the highest blasphemies. God interposed and the evils threatened against others fell upon himself.

Manifestoes of this kind have seldom been honorable to the senders. The conduct of Rab-shakeh was unfortunately copied by the Duke of Brunswick, commander-in-chief of the allied army of the center, in the French revolution, who was then in the plains of Champagne, August 27, 1792, at the head of ninety thousand men, Prussians, Austrians, and emigrants, on his way to Paris, which in his manifesto he threatened to reduce to ashes! This was the cause of the dreadful massacres which immediately took place. And shortly after this time the blast of God fell upon him, for in Sept. 20 of the same year, (three weeks after issuing the manifesto), almost all his army was destroyed by a fatal disease, and himself obliged to retreat from the French territories with shame and confusion. This, and some other injudicious steps taken by the allies, were the cause of the ruin of the royal family of France, and of enormities and calamities the most extensive, disgraceful, and ruinous, that ever stained the page of history. From all such revolutions God in mercy save mankind!

Conduit of the upper pool - The aqueduct that brought the water from the upper or eastern reservoir, near to the valley of Kidron, into the city. Probably they had seized on this in order to distress the city.

The fuller's field - The place where the washermen stretched out their clothes to dry.

2KINGS 18: 18 When they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder.

Verse 18

Called to the king - They wished him to come out that they might get possession of his person.

Eliakim - over the household - What we would call lord chamberlain.

Shebna the scribe - The king's secretary.

Joah - the recorder - The writer of the public annals.

2KINGS 18: 19 Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, "What confidence is this in which you trust?"

Verse 19

What confidence is this - מה הבטחון הזה ma habbittachon hazzeh. The words are excessively insulting: What little, foolish, or unavailing cause of confidence is it, to which thou trustest? I translate thus, because I consider the word בטחון bittachon as a diminutive, intended to express the utmost contempt for Hezekiah's God.

2KINGS 18: 20 You say (but they are but vain words), 'There is counsel and strength for war.' Now on whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?

2KINGS 18: 21 Now, behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt. If a man leans on it, it will go into his hand, and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust on him.

Verse 21

The staff of this bruised reed - Egypt had already been greatly bruised and broken, through the wars carried on against it by the Assyrians.

2KINGS 18: 22 But if you tell me, 'We trust in the LORD our God;' isn't that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?'

Verse 22

Whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away - This was artfully malicious. Many of the people sacrificed to Jehovah on the high places; Hezekiah had removed them, (2Kgs 18:4), because they were incentives to idolatry: Rab-shakeh insinuates that by so doing he had offended Jehovah, deprived the people of their religious rights, and he could neither expect the blessing of God nor the cooperation of the people.

2KINGS 18: 23 Now therefore, please give pledges to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them.

Verse 23

I will deliver thee two thousand horses - Another insult: Were I to give thee two thousand Assyrian horses, thou couldst not find riders for them. How then canst thou think that thou shalt be able to stand against even the smallest division of my troops?

2KINGS 18: 24 How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

2KINGS 18: 25 Have I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? the LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'""

Verse 25

Am I now come up without the Lord - As Rab-shakeh saw that the Jews placed the utmost confidence in God, he wished to persuade them that by Hezekiah's conduct Jehovah had departed from them, and was become ally to the king of Assyria, and therefore they could not expect any help from that quarter.

2KINGS 18: 26 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, said to Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it. Don't speak with us in the Jews' language, in the hearing of the people who are on the wall."

Verse 26

Talk not with us in the Jews' language - The object of this blasphemous caitiff was to stir up the people to sedition, that the city and the king might be delivered into his hand.

2KINGS 18: 27 But Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to your master, and to you, to speak these words? Hasn't he sent me to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their own dung, and to drink their own water with you?"

Verse 27

That they may eat their own dung - That they may be duly apprised, if they hold on Hezekiah's side, Jerusalem shall be most straitly besieged, and they be reduced to such a state of famine as to be obliged to eat their own excrements.

2KINGS 18: 28 Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spoke, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria.

Verse 28

Hear the word of the great king - of Assyria - This was all intended to cause the people to revolt from their allegiance to their king.

2KINGS 18: 29 Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you out of his hand.

2KINGS 18: 30 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."

2KINGS 18: 31 Don't listen to Hezekiah.' For thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me; and everyone of you eat of his vine, and everyone of his fig tree, and everyone drink the waters of his own cistern;

2KINGS 18: 32 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and of honey, that you may live, and not die. Don't listen to Hezekiah, when he persuades you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us."

Verse 32

Until I come and take you away - This was well calculated to stir up a seditious spirit. Ye cannot be delivered; your destruction, if ye resist, is inevitable; Sennacherib will do with you, as he does with all the nations he conquers, lead you captive into another land: but if you will surrender without farther trouble, he will transport you into a land as good as your own.

2KINGS 18: 33 Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

2KINGS 18: 34 Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?

Verse 34

Where are the gods of Hamath - Sennacherib is greater than any of the gods of the nations. The Assyrians have already overthrown the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Hena, and Ivah; therefore, Jehovah shall be like one of them, and shall not be able to deliver Jerusalem out of the hand of my master.

The impudent blasphemy of this speech is without parallel. Hezekiah treated it as he ought: it was not properly against him, but against the Lord; therefore he refers the matter to Jehovah himself, who punishes this blasphemy in the most signal manner.

2KINGS 18: 35 Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

2KINGS 18: 36 But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Don't answer him."

Verse 36

Answer him not - The blasphemy is too barefaced; Jehovah is insulted, not you; let him avenge his own quarrel. See the succeeding chapter, 2 Kings 19 (note).

2KINGS 18: 37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, came with Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

Verse 37

Then came Eliakim - and Shebna - and Joah - to Hezekiah with their clothes rent - It was the custom of the Hebrews, when they heard any blasphemy, to rend their clothes, because this was the greatest of crimes, as it immediately affected the majesty of God, and it was right that a religious people should have in the utmost abhorrence every insult offered to the object of their religious worship. These three ambassadors lay the matter before the king as God's representative; he lays it before the prophet, as God's minister; and the prophet lays it before God, as the people's mediator.