

Rel A 304 Reading Questions for Tuesday, October 3

2 Kings 18–20

Edward Stratford, “The Neo-Assyrian Empire,” in *A Bible Reader’s History of the Ancient World*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: The Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, Brigham Young University, 2016), 186–97.

“Divine by Design, Lessons Learned from Washing Hair” [video], The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://youtu.be/_pSAUz2zRMM.

Last week we covered Gen 1 of Isaiah’s ministry, which included people like Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser III. This week we’re going to cover Gen 2, meaning we’re jumping forward a couple of decades to cover the stories of people like Hezekiah and Sennacherib. Isaiah is still alive and playing a part in all these events.



Hezekiah Reigns over Judah (2 Kings 18:1–8)

2 Kings 18 opens with Hezekiah ascending the throne of Judah following the death of his father Ahaz. Hezekiah is righteous but inherited the mess created by his wicked father. Last time you read that Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser III saying, “I am thy servant and thy son” (2 Kings 16:7). *Servant* and *son* were technical terms expressing Ahaz’s desire to make Judah a vassal state in the Assyrian Empire, creating a new relationship where Tiglath-pileser is metaphorically the lord/father and Ahaz is his servant/son. In other words, the deal Ahaz makes is that if Tiglath-pileser comes quickly to take out Israel and Syria/Aram, who were invading Judah’s borders, then Ahaz would voluntarily make Judah a vassal without the Assyrians even having to conquer them. At the cost of giving up Judah’s sovereignty and yoking them to perpetual Assyrian taxes, Ahaz had decided it was worth it for Judah to avoid any fighting while all his troublesome neighbors get taken out by someone else. Isaiah then prophesied that someday the Assyrians would swarm Judah like bees and shave Judah like a razor. This was an ironic twist to the story because at that moment Judah had just signed a treaty with Assyria and

looked to it for protection. Isaiah was warning, however, that in the future this so-called “ally” would turn and attack them. If you make a deal with the devil, sooner or later you’ll regret it ...

1. When Hezekiah comes to the throne of Judah, he inherits Judah’s vassal status because of the deal his father Ahaz had made with the Assyrians. However, Hezekiah was righteous and kept the Lord’s commandments. In 2 Kings 18:3–8, what spiritual reforms and accomplishments did Hezekiah have?

A Recap of Israel’s Fall (2 Kings 18:9–12)

2 Kings 18:9–12 reminds you of what’s going on up north during the early years of Hezekiah’s reign. Hezekiah and Judah could do nothing but watch as the Assyrians sieged the northern kingdom of Israel, with many Israelites exiled to other places in the Assyrian Empire (a major step in “the scattering of Israel”). We know from archaeology in modern Israel that during this time many Israelite refugees also fled the north and came to live in Judah, and Jerusalem greatly increased in size.

That terrible example of what happens to those who rebel against the Assyrians makes it all the more striking what Hezekiah does in 2 Kings 18:7: “He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.” That means Hezekiah finally broke the vassal treaty his father had made. Why would he do that? Were the taxes bleeding Judah dry? Did Hezekiah think his religious reforms would guarantee that Jehovah would stop the invasion? Was Hezekiah trying to take advantage of the fact that a new, unproven king (Sennacherib) had just ascended the throne of Assyria? We don’t know. But in response, the Assyrians decided to do what they always did to vassals who dared break their treaties.

Assyria Destroys Most of Judah and Sieges Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13–37)

2. According to 2 Kings 18:13, King Sennacherib of Assyria came to siege “the fenced cities of Judah,” meaning the fortified cities that had walls. How many of those cities did he “take”? Let that sink in. *This was bad.*
3. The Assyrians saved Jerusalem for their final target, picking off the easier cities one by one. Finally, the army surrounded Jerusalem and began the siege. When an Assyrian official, the Rab-shakeh, taunts the Judahites inside Jerusalem, what does he point out about the Assyrians’ military track record? Does he have a point?



Hezekiah Receives Two Conflicting Messages (2 Kings 19:1–13)

4. After Hezekiah heard about the Rab-shakeh's threats, and faced with the imminent destruction of the city, Hezekiah seeks the Lord's will through the prophet Isaiah. Given the gravity of the situation, the revelation Isaiah receives is remarkably short (just two verses!). What is the Lord's message?

Hezekiah Chooses to Trust in God (2 Kings 19:14–19)

Consequences of Hezekiah Choosing to Trust in God (2 Kings 19:20–34)

Jehovah Saves the Remnant (2 Kings 19:35–37)

5. Hezekiah's expression of trust in Jehovah, combined with the repentance of the remnant that was left, produced the miracle the people most desperately needed. On the night before the final siege of Jerusalem was to occur, how did Jehovah stop the Assyrian army?



A Flashback to Hezekiah's Earlier Illness (2 Kings 20:1–11)

2 Kings 20 contains a sort of epilogue to the life of Hezekiah, and interestingly, it's presented out of order—notice that in 2 Kings 20:6 it speaks of the Assyrian invasion as a still-future event.

Hezekiah's Mistake Prefigures the Babylonian Exile (2 Kings 20:12–19)

6. After Hezekiah hosts some ambassadors from Babylon (which is still a century away from becoming an empire), Isaiah gives an ominous prophecy. What will Babylon do to Jerusalem someday?

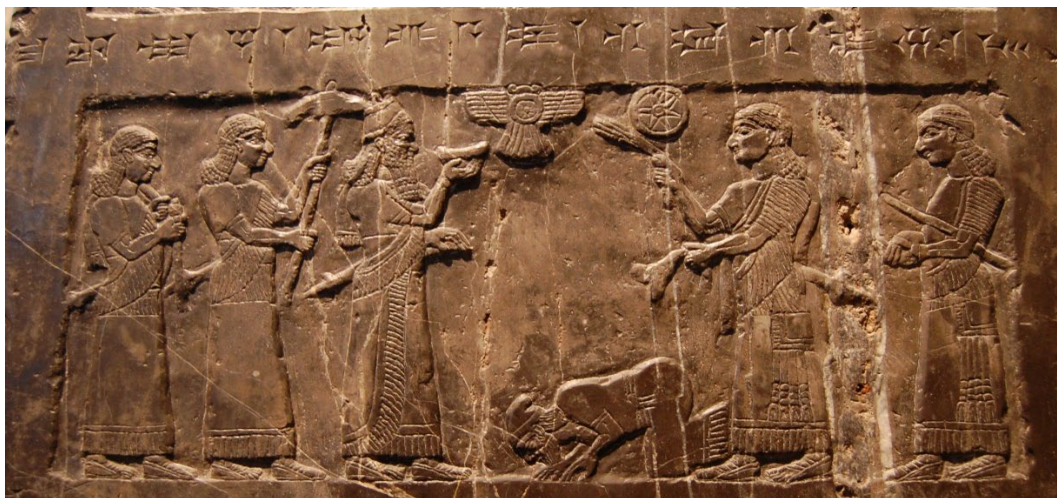
The Death of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20–21)

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Because the Assyrians are so central to Isaiah’s story (especially in the first half of the book), this chapter will help us look at them a little more closely.

Shalmaneser III (859–824 BCE)

Shalmaneser III impacted the history of Israel in various ways. For example, one of the kings in the anti-Assyrian alliance that fought at [the Battle of Qarqar](#) in 853 BC was King Ahab of Israel (the one who married Jezebel and ran afoul of the prophet Elijah). The [Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III](#) shows Ahab’s successor, King Jehu, bowing before Shalmaneser and giving tribute—an unflattering image that is nonetheless the earliest artistic depiction of an Israelite that we have. But while Shalmaneser III is important for Israel’s history in the ninth-century BC, Isaiah lived in the eighth century, so Shalmaneser III is less relevant for our class.



Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC)



7. Tiglath-pileser III was one of those special children who grew up thinking, “When I’m big, I’m going to slaughter anyone who opposes me until I’m king of the whole world.” As he expanded the empire, he sometimes ran into kingdoms or city-states that resisted Assyrian rule, to which Tiglath-pileser III would respond by destroying their cities and deporting large chunks of the population (meaning, he forced them to leave their homeland and resettle somewhere else). From the perspective of the Assyrians, what were the benefits of deportation?

The Fall of Samaria (722 BCE)

8. Little is known about Tiglath-pileser III’s son, Shalmaneser V, who only reigned for five years after his father’s death. What is he most known for?
9. After Shalmaneser V was replaced by Sargon II in an apparent coup, Sargon II completed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. 2 Kings blames the fall of Israel on religious problems (idolatry, injustice, etc.), but from a historical point of view, the immediate cause of Israel’s demise was that it fell victim to playing the pawn in a larger game between the Assyrians and other regional power?

Sennacherib (704–681 BCE)

After Sargon’s II death on the battlefield, his son Sennacherib came to the throne unexpectedly. Both Judah and Babylonia attempted to break away from their vassal status at exactly this time. If these two countries thought that a transition of power was a good time to try to break away, Sennacherib was determined to test their gamble and make an example of them.

10. One factor that played into Judah’s rebellion against Assyria was Egypt’s promise of military aid. As the Assyrians swept into Judah, what happened to this Egyptian support?
11. Sennacherib’s own records say that he destroyed 46 Judahite cities and villages and deported 200,000 Judahites to the eastern parts of the Assyrian Empire, another major step in the scattering of Israel. By the time Sennacherib’s forces left Judah, which Judahite city was the only city of any size left standing?

Ashurbanipal (668–631 BCE)

The Fall and Legacy of Assyria

12. The Assyrian Empire fell quickly at the end of the seventh century BC. The capital of Nineveh was destroyed in 612, and the last Assyrian armies fell at the [Battle of Carchemish](#) in 605. Which city-state then gained many of the lands that Assyria had once controlled, replacing it as the next great Near Eastern empire?

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In Isaiah’s day, certainly some of the Israelites were wickedly rebelling against God, but there were surely others who faced adversity—sickness, death, economic hardship, foreign invasion—despite trying their best to be good. This video explores how we can stay focused on God’s eternal plan even when so much feels out of our control.