

Who was Eliakim son of Hilkiah?

Eliakim son of Hilkiah was an important figure during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. Eliakim was known for his role as royal steward during a tremendous political and military crisis. His service in Hezekiah's administration, particularly during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, reveals his significance as a faithful and trusted leader. Eliakim's actions demonstrate wisdom, loyalty, and trust in God. During his brief but significant presence in the Bible during a challenging time, Eliakim models the steadfastness of those who sought to defend the city and its people.

Eliakim's story is recorded in the books of 2 Kings and Isaiah, where he is described as the steward or palace administrator during Hezekiah's reign. His position was one of considerable influence, as he managed the royal household and served as an advisor to the king. Eliakim is first mentioned during the Assyrian invasion of Judah when the Assyrian army besieges Jerusalem: “[The Assyrian envoy] called for the king; and Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to them” (2 Kings 18:18).

The historical context in which Eliakim son of Hilkiah lived is critical. The Assyrian Empire, under King Sennacherib, had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and was now threatening the southern kingdom of Judah. Sennacherib's army was known for its brutality, and the siege of Jerusalem was part of the Assyrians' broader campaign to subjugate the region. As the Assyrian forces surrounded the city, the Assyrian envoy, the Rabshakeh, delivered a speech intended to demoralize the people of Jerusalem and make them question God and Hezekiah's leadership (2 Kings 18:28-30).

Eliakim and his colleagues were sent to meet with the Rabshakeh. During the exchange,

Eliakim asked the Assyrian official to not speak in Hebrew: “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall” (2 Kings 18:26). Eliakim’s concern was that, if the people of Jerusalem heard and understood what the Assyrians were saying, they would be that much more demoralized. However, the Rabshakeh refused to speak in Aramaic and continued to communicate in Hebrew, further inciting fear among the citizens of Jerusalem.

Eliakim’s actions reflect his commitment to maintaining calm and order in the city. After the meeting with the Assyrian envoy, Eliakim and the other officials tore their clothes in grief and returned to Hezekiah, reporting the blasphemous words they had heard. In response, Hezekiah sought guidance from the prophet Isaiah, who delivered a message of reassurance. Isaiah prophesied that God would defend Jerusalem and that Sennacherib would fail in his siege. In Isaiah 37:6-7, Isaiah tells Hezekiah’s officials, “This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.”

Eliakim’s role extended beyond the immediate crisis. Isaiah 22 contains a prophecy about Eliakim’s future leadership and his authority in Judah: “In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open” (Isaiah 22:20-22). This prophecy foretells Eliakim’s rise to even greater authority, symbolized by his having the “key to the house of David,” which represents the stewardship of the

royal household and the responsibility for guiding the people of Judah.

The description of Eliakim as a “father to those who live in Jerusalem” in Isaiah 22:21 emphasizes his role as a compassionate and caring leader, someone who would lead with integrity and wisdom. His leadership contrasts with that of Shebna, the previous steward, who had misused his position for personal gain (see Isaiah 22:15-19). Eliakim’s appointment to this position was a divinely ordained act that would stabilize Judah. He was not only Hezekiah’s servant but God’s.