



# KING HEZEKIAH: MAN OF FAITH

## מֶלֶךְ הַדִּקְיָה

Church Educational System

*Prepared for the CES symposium on the Old Testament at Brigham Young University*

### READERS' THEATER—2 KINGS 18–19; 2 CHRONICLES 32; ISAIAH 37

#### Production Notes

This story is designed as a readers' theater to be completed in one class period. The addition of music and sound effects can add drama and power to the story, but could also be distracting if not done wisely. You may wish to invite the six students who will be reading the various parts to read over the script the night before so they are familiar with the language and format of the story.

#### Prologue

Invite students to open to Bible map 10 "The Assyrian Empire" (or the corresponding map in the new Bible Maps and Photographs section). Explain that warfare was a science to the leaders of Assyria. Infantry, chariots, calvary, iron armor, siege machines, and battering rams were all developed or improved by the Assyrians. Military strategy and tactics were well understood by Assyrian officers, but the effectiveness of their armies was not the only thing that caused terror in the hearts of their foes—the Assyrians were also savage and brutal (see the commentary for "The Assyrian Conquest and the Lost Tribes" in *Old Testament: 1 Kings–Malachi* [Religion 302 student manual, 1979], 113–14).

#### Cast

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Hezekiah, king of Judah

Rab-shakeh, Assyrian emissary

Sennacherib, king of Assyria

Isaiah, prophet of God

**NARRATOR 1:** As recorded in the Old Testament, the warring nation of Assyria had at one time succeeded in placing its brutal military paw on much of the Middle East. By 724 B.C., there were no independent states from Assyria to Egypt. The kingdom of Israel had been conquered and carried captive to Assyria, and the kingdom of Judah, along with many other nations, had been forced to pay a burdensome tribute. When Hezekiah, king of Judah, ascended the throne, he rebelled and refused to pay the intolerable tribute to the Assyrians. Enraged at this rebellion, Sennacherib, the powerful king of Assyria, swept into the kingdom of Judah in 701 B.C., besieging and subduing all her fortified cities except Jerusalem. Soon, all of Palestine lay at the feet of his ravaging hordes, and his psychological warfare and vast army machine were at Jerusalem's very doorstep.

**NARRATOR 2:** In light of this inevitable assault, Hezekiah made preparations for the defense of Jerusalem. He strengthened the city's walls, built a tunnel to bring water into the city, "made darts and shields in abundance" (2 Chronicles 32:5), and in all other ways readied his people for war. But even his ambitious industry and artful maneuvering did nothing to dissuade the mighty Assyrians' attack. King Hezekiah, having "set captains of war over the people" (2 Chronicles 32:6), gathered them together in the street near the gate of the city to speak to them.

**HEZEKIAH** [*calmly, with granite assurance*]: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:

"With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chronicles 32:7–8).

**NARRATOR 1:** "And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chronicles 32:8). For Hezekiah did "that which was right in the sight of the Lord. . . .

"He trusted in the Lord God of Israel" (2 Kings 18:3, 5), abolishing pagan tyranny and false worship, destroying idolatry, and reenthroning the worship of Jehovah in the kingdom of Judah.

**NARRATOR 2:** When Sennacherib realized that Jerusalem would not yield, he sent Rab-shakeh, a warrior servant, with a message for King Hezekiah. Brazenly standing before those who were upon the city wall, Rab-shakeh delivered the message in the form of a taunting, blasphemous speech, demanding that Jerusalem surrender to the Assyrians.

**RAB-SHAKEH** [*mocking, brutish, intimidating*]: "Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem?

"Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die . . . saying, The Lord our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? . . .

"Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? . . .

"Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?" (2 Chronicles 32:10–11, 13, 15).

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NARRATOR 1: “But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not” (2 Kings 18:36). Sennacherib continued to rail on the Lord God of Israel, declaring that since the gods of the other nations had not delivered their people out of his hands, neither would Hezekiah’s God rescue his people from Sennacherib’s powerful army (see 2 Chronicles 32:17).

NARRATOR 2: For this cause, Hezekiah sent emissaries to the great prophet Isaiah to seek counsel in behalf of himself and his people. Isaiah sent a message back to King Hezekiah.

ISAIAH [*with conviction and authority*]: “Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

“Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land” (Isaiah 37:6–7).

NARRATOR 1: The emissaries returned to King Hezekiah, carrying with them Isaiah’s promise of deliverance and his prophecy of the death of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

NARRATOR 2: Yet the siege wore on. Sennacherib sent Hezekiah another letter reproaching his God and avowing their imminent destruction and the annihilation of his city and people.

SENNACHERIB [*mocking and superior*]: “Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

“Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?

“Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar?

“Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?” (2 Kings 19:10–13).

HEZEKIAH [*repeating, with heavy heart*]: “Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?” (2 Kings 19:11).

NARRATOR 1: Deeply troubled for the welfare of his people, Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord to offer up his heart to God for Jerusalem’s deliverance.

HEZEKIAH [*pleading, intense*]: “O Lord God of Israel, . . .

“ . . . bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

“Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

“And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

“Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only” (2 Kings 19:15–19).

NARRATOR 2: The Lord answered Hezekiah’s prayer through the prophet Isaiah, who sent a letter to Hezekiah, prophesying:

ISAIAH [*with powerful faith and intensity*]: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

“This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him. . . .

“Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. . . .

“Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. . . .

“For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake” (2 Kings 19:20–22, 32, 34).

HEZEKIAH [*repeating, filled with faith*]: “He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. . . .

“For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake” (2 Kings 19:32, 34).

NARRATOR 1: “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand” (2 Kings 19:35) and “cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria” (2 Chronicles 32:21).

NARRATOR 2: And when Hezekiah and his people “arose early in the morning, behold, [the Assyrian warriors] were all dead corpses” (2 Kings 19:35). So, in fulfillment of prophecy, Sennacherib “returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels [his own two sons] slew him there with the sword” (2 Chronicles 32:21).

NARRATOR 1: “Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side” (2 Chronicles 32:22).

The End