

“Hezekiah”

When Ahaz died at age 36, his son Hezekiah succeeded to the kingdom. He was an upright, good-natured, and righteous man, whose first priority was to restore the worship of God. So he gathered the people, the priests, and the Levites, and addressed them as follows: ‘Because my father violated the worship of God and corrupted you in worshiping false gods, you have suffered greatly. But now that you have learned how horrible impiety is, purify yourselves, and let the priests and Levites open the temple and cleanse it with the customary sacrifices. Then God might set aside His anger toward us.’

When the king had finished speaking, the priests opened the temple and prepared the vessels of God. Discarding what was impure, they offered the sacrifices of the law.

Hezekiah also sent out messengers to all his people, and to the Israelites. He told them that the worship of God had been restored in Jerusalem, asking them to come and celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread, which had lapsed for a long time under the lawless kings. But the Israelites laughed at the envoys as fools. When their prophets predicted that they would suffer if they refused this opportunity to return to God, they grabbed the prophets and killed them. However, many in the tribes of Manasseh, Zebulun, and Issachar listened to the prophets and flocked to Jerusalem to worship God. . . After the festival ended, the people went throughout the country and destroyed all pollution from idols. . .

The king of Assyria now threatened to conquer Hezekiah’s realm unless he resumed the tribute his father had paid. But Hezekiah ignored these threats, confident in God and the prophet Isaiah, who provided accurate predictions. . .

In the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, conquered all the cities of Judah and Benjamin. Hezekiah sent him envoys promising to pay whatever tribute he stipulated if he withdrew. Sennacherib accepted 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold, but then treacherously refused to leave. He himself left to fight the Egyptians, but his general, Rabshakeh, was ordered to sack Jerusalem with his large army.

Hezekiah took off his royal garments, put on sackcloth, and fell on his face, imploring God’s help. He also sent priests to the prophet Isaiah, asking for his intercession. Isaiah foretold that God would destroy the enemy without a battle; Sennacherib would also fail against Egypt and would die by the sword when he returned home.

Indeed, Sennacherib quickly retreated from Egypt, having learned that the army of Ethiopia was coming to its assistance, and then joined Rabshakeh at Jerusalem. He discovered that on the first night of the siege, God had sent a terrible plague on the Assyrians, and 185,000 had died. In great anxiety, he fled with what remained of his

forces back to Nineveh, where Sennacherib was treacherously killed by his two older sons.

After offering thanks to God for this extraordinary deliverance, Hezekiah soon became so ill that his doctors gave up all hope of his recovery. Compounding his grief was the realization that he was still childless, and no son would succeed him on the throne. Hearing his plea to live a little longer, God sent the prophet Isaiah, who informed him that within three days, he would recover, and would live another fifteen years and have sons. Freed from his illness, Hezekiah went up to the temple to pray.

Berodach-baladan, the king of Babylon, sent Hezekiah envoys with gifts, suggesting an alliance. Hezekiah received them enthusiastically, and showed them his treasures and arms before sending them back with gifts. Isaiah, however, told him, 'In a short time, that wealth will be taken to Babylon, and your offspring will be made eunuchs to the king of Babylon.' Isaiah had marvelous knowledge of the truth, never speaking falsely, and he wrote down his prophecies in books for future generations.

Hezekiah died peacefully at age 54, having reigned 29 years, and was succeeded by his son Manasseh.

Source:

Josephus: The Essential Writings. An illustrated edition of *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*. Trans/ed. Paul L. Maier. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988.