
The Beginning of Hezekiah's Reign and Sennacherib's Attack in 2 Kings 18:1—19:9

Introduction

In order to begin our delineation of the redactional process that led to the mixed biblical tradition about Hezekiah, we first have to determine where to begin our study: Which narrative initiated the series of address and redress that underlies the development of the Hezekiah complex? This chapter will show that 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, which acts as a bridge between the pericope about the fall of the North in 2 Kings 17 and the subsequent narratives in the Hezekiah complex, especially the story of the Assyrian attack, is the natural and logical starting point of the complex. Once we have established 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 as the beginning point, we will proceed in this chapter to analyze and delineate the subsequent series of redactional accretions in the Book of 2 Kings, which, as we will show, is the original context of the Hezekiah complex.

The Summary of Hezekiah's Reign in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12

Leaving aside for the moment the question of which book, 2 Kings or Isaiah, functioned as the original context of the Hezekiah complex, a topic that we will discuss in depth at a later chapter,¹ we begin with the question about which pericope came first in the series of responses and counter-responses that generated the ambivalent traditions about Hezekiah in the Bible. Since 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, the overview and summary of Hezekiah's reign, is the first passage that the reader encounters when they begin the story about this monarch in 2 Kings, it would appear to be an obvious place to start. However, the passage at 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, as well as the relationship between this pericope and the stories that follow, has been largely ignored,² eclipsed by the lengthier and more triumphant story of the Assyrian attack and Jerusalem's salvation in 701 BCE. As a result, most scholarly discussion about Hezekiah begins with the narrative of the attack, and not with the summary of Hezekiah's reign found in this introductory section (2 Kgs. 18:1-12).³ Unfortunately, by starting with an episode that comes in the middle of the biblical narrative about Hezekiah's reign rather than at the beginning, the crucial function that 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 plays as narrative bridge between the

1. This chapter will show that the original context of the Hezekiah complex was in Kings. More detailed arguments against the priority of the Isaianic context are presented in a later chapter.
2. Analyses of 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 are found in various commentaries on the book of Kings. A widely utilized work is that of Burke Long (*2 Kings* [FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 191–204). Two other works also discuss 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 in some detail. John Hull's dissertation provides a thorough literary examination of 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 (*Hezekiah—Saint and Sinner: A Conceptual and Contextual Narrative Analysis of 2 Kings 18–20* [PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1994], 180–216). David Bostock also examines 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 with particular emphasis on the use of the "trust" motif; see David Bostock, *A Portrayal of Trust: The Theme of Faith in the Hezekiah Narratives* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 16–41.
3. The chronology of events in the narratives about Hezekiah in Kings and Isaiah as compared to the historical chronology of events constructed by modern scholars will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

stories that precede and succeed it has been largely missed. As a result, what has been overlooked is the function of 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 as the starting point in the redactional development of the Hezekiah complex.

Let us more closely examine 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, especially with an eye towards how this pericope looks both backwards to the story of the fall of Northern Israel in 2 Kings 17 and also forwards to the succeeding tale of the 701 Assyrian attack. The narrative about Hezekiah's reign in the book of 2 Kings begins with a typical Deuteronomistic introduction (2 Kgs. 18:1-3): the opening summary notes the corresponding king in the North, the age when Hezekiah assumed the throne,⁴ the total years of his reign, and the name of his mother. This summary ends with a Deuteronomistic summation of his rule, which notes that Hezekiah "did what was pleasing to the Lord, just as his father David had done." As we will discuss later, this comparison to David is striking and unique, found only one other time with reference to Josiah at 2 Kgs. 22:2.

An "elongated theological appraisal"⁵ following this quick summary introduction continues with the overall positive assessment of Hezekiah in 2 Kings⁶:

He [Hezekiah] abolished the shrines and smashed the pillars and cut down the sacred post. He also broke into pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until that time the Israelites had been offering sacrifice to it; it was called the Nehushtan. He trusted (*bāṭāh*) only in the Lord the God of Israel; there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him. He clung to the Lord;

4. As stated in the introduction, the exact dates of Hezekiah's enthronement are debated. The dates of Hezekiah reign are either ca. 715-687 or ca. 727-698 BCE; see Mordecai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 228.

5. *Ibid.*, 216.

6. Long, *2 Kings*, 193. Gray believes that this elongated appraisal might have come from an annalistic source (John Gray, *I & II Kings* [rev. ed.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], 670).

he did not turn away from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord had given to Moses (2 Kgs. 18:4-6).

This summation of Hezekiah's cultic acts in 2 Kgs. 18:4-6 provides the first connection forward to the following narrative of the 701 attack, as this reform will receive a brief mention later in the speech of the Rabshaqeh at 2 Kgs. 18:22—an important link, which we will discuss in a subsequent section.⁷

The summary of Hezekiah's actions concerning the cult is followed by an outline of his military and political actions. Political, military, and religious matters are juxtaposed and intertwined in 18:7-8: "And the Lord was always with him [Hezekiah]; he was successful wherever he turned. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He overran Philistia as far as Gaza and its border areas, from watchtower to fortified town" (2 Kgs. 18:7-8). The interweaving of religion, politics, and warfare in 2 Kgs. 18:7-8 offers a second link to the succeeding narrative of the 701 attack where these matters also are closely correlated.

A more direct connection between the introduction in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and the 701 attack is found in the statement that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs. 18:7). This allusion to the relationship between Judah and Assyria provides a reason, not directly stated in the following story of the attack, as to why Assyria came to conquer Judah in 701 BCE. Interestingly, though the mention of Hezekiah's insubordination in 2 Kgs. 18:7 is stated neutrally and without comment as to its success, it occurs in a section of the introduction that describes the success and piety of Hezekiah. By its placement in this section, Hezekiah's rebellion seems to be pictured as

7. Other connections to 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and the following narrative of the 701 attack, such as the recurrence of the word "to trust" and the mention of the Nehushtan, are discussed later in this chapter.

something commendable, an aspect that will become relevant in our discussion of the redactional development of the 701 attack narrative.

Interestingly, this introductory section of the Hezekiah complex in 2 Kings not only references important themes and issues in the succeeding narrative about the 701 attack, but also is intimately linked to the preceding narrative in 2 Kings 17 concerning the fall of Samaria. Indeed, this summary concludes with a short description of the fall of Northern Israel to Shalmaneser V (2 Kgs. 18:9-12). At first, this short account of the downfall of the North seems awkwardly attached to the introductory section, especially since a full account of its devastation is given in the immediately preceding chapter (2 Kings 17). Closer inspection, however, reveals a number of telling connections between the 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and the preceding narrative about Samaria's destruction in 2 Kings 17.⁸ In particular, the description of Samaria's fall in 17:5-7 sounds remarkably similar to the report of this event in the beginning summary of Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kgs. 18:9-12:⁹

8. 2 Kings 17, which concerns the fall of Samaria, is a narrative with complex redactional layers, regarding which, as Long notes, there is little scholarly consensus; see Long, *2 Kings*, esp. 180-90. While there is disagreement as to the redactional history of 2 Kings 17, for the purposes of our argument, what is clear is that at some point in the composition of the Deuteronomistic history, deliberate parallels were made between the fall of the North and the reign of Hezekiah. Hence, even if 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 is not directly responding to the earliest *Urtext* of 2 Kings 17, the fact that some correlation was made between the two events at some point in the composition of the Deuteronomistic history shows that the fall of the North was seen as speaking to the narrative of Hezekiah's reign. The redactional history and layering of 2 Kings 17 is too complicated and large a topic to discuss fully in this work. For the redactional intricacies of 2 Kings 17 see Marc Zvi Brettler, "Text in a *Tel*: 2 Kings 17 as History," in *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 112-34; Iain Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate About the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 70-73; Shemaryahu Talmon, "Polemics and Apology in Biblical Historiography: 2 Kings 17:24-42," in *The Creation of Sacred Literature: Composition and Redaction of the Biblical Text*, ed. Richard Elliott Friedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 57-68.

9. The *Wiederaufnahme* of 17:5-6 at 18:9-11 has led to a suggestion by Talmon that the two notices form an *inclusio* around an inserted narrative (Talmon, "Polemics and Apology," 57-68). Long notes that the use of the *Wiederaufnahme* as a marker of redactional activity is problematic: "Talmon's use of resumptive repetition as a clue to the activity of many editors

Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (2 Kgs. 17:5-7).

In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria, besieged it, and at the end of three years, took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken. The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, and put them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded; they neither listened nor obeyed (2 Kgs. 18:9-12).

Both descriptions state that Assyria besieged Samaria for three years, that Samaria was taken during the reign of Hoshea, and that the Israelites were exiled to Halah, Habor, Gozan, and the cities of the Medes. Most interestingly, both notices juxtapose Samaria's downfall and the Exodus event. 2 Kgs. 17:7 states that the devastation in the North occurred because the Israelites sinned against the Lord who "brought them up out of the land of Egypt," while 2 Kgs. 18:12 maintains that the Israelites transgressed the covenant of the Lord, "all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded." The inclusion of the description of Samaria's fall at the end of Hezekiah's introductory section (2 Kgs. 18:9-12) and its close analogy to 2 Kgs. 17:5-7

rather than a single author falters in this case in asserting that the narration at 17:4 was broken and then resumed at 18:9-11. This ignores the shaping force of the reign-by-reign pattern in ordering the books of Kings; and Talmon needs to explain why an original narrative in reference to Hoshea [17:4] would have continued, or been resumed, by an editor in 18:9 in a way that is totally subordinate to an interest in Hezekiah" (Long, *2 Kings*, 183). For our purpose, the question of whether these two notices form or do not form an inclusio is not important. In either case, the similarity of wording demonstrates that deliberate correlations are made between the fall of Samaria and the early reign of Hezekiah.

strongly suggest that this event was seen as having some bearing on the reign of this king.

Other similarities between 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and 2 Kings 17 lend further support to this conclusion.¹⁰ Hull notes that the phrase “from watchtower to fortified city” in 2 Kgs. 18:8 is repeated in 2 Kgs. 17:9b, and forms “a catch phrase that helps link the two [narratives] together.”¹¹ While in 2 Kings 18 this phrase is used to describe the military success of the pious Hezekiah, in the preceding chapter it describes, by contrast, the impiety of the Northerners who are said to have erected highplaces everywhere “from watchtower to fortified city” (2 Kgs. 17:9b).¹² Indeed, the relationship between 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and 2 Kings 17 appears to be one of opposition. Most notably, the reform of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs. 18:9-12 is painted as antithetical to the cultic activities of the North described in 18:3-4 and 17:7ff.¹³

They [the Northerners] built *bamot* . . . but **he** [Hezekiah] . . . removed them. **They** erected *matsevot* and *asherim* . . . but **he** shattered them and cut them down. They burned incense on all the high places, he cut up the bronze serpent to which the people had been burning incense. They did evil things to provoke YHWH, he did right in the eyes of YHWH (18:3). They served idols, he did not serve the king of Assyria (18:7b).¹⁴

According to Nadav Na’aman, Hezekiah’s reform not only stands in contradistinction to the religious sins of the North, but perfectly and completely fulfills the law in Deut. 12:3 concerning the destruction of non-Yahwistic cult sites: “...you shall tear down their altars, and

10. Hull, *Hezekiah—Saint and Sinner*, 209.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Although some scholars view 2 Kgs. 17:9 as a late, post-Josianic insertion into an earlier Deuteronomistic narrative about the fall of the North, there hardly is a consensus on the dating and division of 2 Kings 17.

13. The relationship between Hezekiah’s reform and that of Josiah will be discussed later in this chapter.

14. Hull, *Hezekiah—Saint and Sinner*, 209 (emphasis in original).

dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; you shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of that place.”¹⁵ Hence, while the Northerners are said to have committed every offense that is warned against in Deuteronomy, Hezekiah, with his reform, takes the very action prescribed in Deuteronomy in reference to these illegal places of worship. Just as the North perfectly and completely disobeys God’s commandments, so in opposition Hezekiah perfectly fulfills them.¹⁶

The specific manner in which the fall of the North is described in the introduction in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12 also serves to distinguish the two kingdoms. The repetition of *Moses* in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12 stresses the contrast. While the North transgressed the covenant that God commanded through Moses (18:12), Hezekiah, the good Judahite king, “kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses” (18:6). Moreover, while the fall of the North in 2 Kings 17 is said to have been caused by cultic sins, such as the making of the calves by Jeroboam (17:21–22), Hezekiah is such a good king that he even removes the bronze serpent, the Nehushtan, that Moses, Israel’s great religious forefather, had made, because the people of Judah had turned it into an object of idolatry (18:4).¹⁷ Hence, if Moses is the

15. Na’aman notes: “When comparing the law of Deuteronomy with the text describing Hezekiah’s reform, it is clear that the latter fulfilled the law in every detail” (Nadav Na’aman, “The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah’s Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research,” *ZAW* 107 [1995]: 181).

16. Martin O’Kane argues that 2 Kgs. 17:2–23 and the speech of Moses in Deuteronomy 31 are directly interconnected: “Moses predicts that they [the Israelites] will worship the gods of Canaan (31.6b), a prediction fulfilled in 2 Kgs. 17.8. Moses foresees that they will forsake the covenant (31.16), a transgression which has come to pass in 2 Kgs. 17.15. He predicts that they will become rebellious (31.27) and will provoke him to anger (31.29) and that he will forsake them (31.17), which in 2 Kgs. 17.11, 14, 17, 18 have all taken place” (“Isaiah: A Prophet in the Footsteps of Moses,” *JSOT* 69 [1996]: 34–35). However, it is evident that the connections between 2 Kings 17 and Deuteronomy 31 are rather less direct.

17. Na’aman believes that the perfect correlation between Hezekiah’s reform with what is prescribed in Deut. 7:5 and 12:3 shows that “there is a firm basis for the claim that the Dtr. Historian composed his account of Hezekiah’s reform in II Reg 18,4 by combing an archival note of the removal of the Nehushtan with the law of Dtn 7,5 and 12,3” (Na’aman, “Debated

reformer who destroyed the calves, Hezekiah nevertheless outdoes him, destroying even that which Moses created. Indeed, Long notes that the same verbal root (*kt*) used of Moses' destruction (*kātat*) of the golden calves in Deut. 9:21 is utilized to describe Hezekiah's demolition (*kittat*) of Moses's Nehushtan in 2 Kgs. 18:4.¹⁸ This emphasis on *Moses*, which is thrice repeated in this short beginning summary of Hezekiah's reign, thus highlights the piety of Hezekiah in contrast to the utter sinfulness of the North.

However, though this forceful emphasis on the piety of Hezekiah seems initially quite positive, it hints of a more complicated attitude. The continual references to the fall of Samaria and the emphasis on the dissimilarity of the two kingdoms in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12 seems to reflect a certain anxiety underlying the account. Indeed, the destruction of Samaria, Judah's sister city, must certainly have raised concerns about Judah's own survival.¹⁹ The threat, however, was more than just that of physical destruction and exile; it also had an ideological and theological component. The fall of the North to Assyria by raising the possibility of Judah's own destruction called into question Zion theology, which promised both the perpetuity of Davidic rule (the House of David) and the divine protection of Jerusalem, the city in which the house of the Lord was located.²⁰ Samaria's fall opened up the possibility that the divine promises concerning Yahweh's chosen city and his kingly line were unreliable

Historicity," 182–83). The destruction of the Nehushtan by Hezekiah is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

18. Long, *2 Kings*, 194–195; Robinson echoes Long's statement: "Hezekiah's zeal was so great that he destroyed even an object associated with Moses since it had been debased by use and had become a stumbling block to true worship" (Joseph Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 167)
19. William H. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.
20. On the development and contours of Judean or Zion theology, see F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 241–73.

or, even worse, untrue.²¹ Hence, the potential for the destruction of Judah, as evidenced by the destruction of its sister-state, Samaria, threatened the theology at the core of Judean identity.

The introductory narrative in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12 is thus simultaneously a reflection on and a response to this theological and ideological threat.²² The reliability of royal theology is asserted through the emphasis on the contrast between Hezekiah's pious behavior and the impiety of the North, which did not obey "all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded" (18:12). In the face of this threat to Judah's physical and ideological existence, the first and most immediate response, therefore, is to stress that the behaviors of the North and the South are utterly different, that the theology of Judah is intact, and that Judah therefore will survive. Hence, the ideological threat is answered by a reassertion of the theology of Judah: Yahweh will indeed protect his royal city and his chosen monarchic line. Long writes: "Recapitulation of Samaria's defeat reinforces a contrastive lesson: the North failed because of its transgression of covenant (v. 12), but Judah will live on because of Hezekiah's 'trust' in Yahweh."²³

However, the question of whether Judah will survive is not merely posed, answered, and then dismissed. Underneath the adamant reassurance that the South and North are dissimilar, an underlying

21. Peter Machinist has written a series of articles about Israel's ongoing ideological and theological negotiations in the face of the Assyrian threat: Peter Machinist, "Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719–37; idem., "The Fall of Assyria in Comparative Ancient Perspectives," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, eds. S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 179–95; idem., "The *Rab Šāqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the face of the Assyrian 'Other,'" *HS* 41(2000): 151–68.
22. Postcolonial research reveals some interesting parallels between Israel's reaction to Assyria and that of modern colonized nations to their colonizers. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Michael Tausig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).
23. Long, *2 Kings*, 198.

hint of uncertainty and hesitancy about the reliability of this theology can be detected. The repetition of *Moses* indicates the actual disquiet undergirding the question of Judah's fate. It is Hezekiah *not* Judah who is said to have acted antithetically to the sinners of the North; he is the one who is said to have "clung to the Lord," keeping "the commandments that the Lord had given to Moses" (18:6). The Judahites, on the other hand, are presented as disturbingly similar to their Northern brethren. Judah's cultic sins are evident not only in the need for Hezekiah's reform (18:4), but also in the statement that the Judahites were offering incense to the Nehushtan (18:4).²⁴ Though incense offerings are not mentioned in relationship to the description of the Nehushtan in Num. 21:9, it is clear that this action is judged negatively in 2 Kgs. 18:4 since it states that Hezekiah "broke in pieces" (*kittat*) the Nehushtan *because* the people were offering incense to it. Since Hezekiah's destruction of the Nehushtan appears here in a list of other actions undertaken by the king during his cultic renovation, it is likely that this deed was part of this religious rejuvenation (18:4).

The Judahites' behavior towards the Nehushtan is thus pictured as some type of cultic deviation, and thereby Judah is presented as alarmingly analogous to Samaria in its violation of the Lord's demands. As such, the question of whether Judah will experience the same fate as Samaria is not conclusively answered. It is uncertain

24. Provan argues that anything after the word in 2 Kgs. 18:4, including the mention of the Nehushtan in the description of the reform, is from a later hand (Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings*, 86). Provan also notes that these verses, though late, are closely related to parts of 2 Kgs. 17:7-17, since *bāmôt*, *maššēbôt* and *'ašērim*, as well as the verb *rtq* in the piel, occur in both (ibid.). Our argument that the South is depicted as similar to the North can stand even if the passage about the Nehushtan was a later insertion, since in 2 Kgs. 18:4 Hezekiah is still credited with reforming the nation—hence indicating that Judah needed reform. As demonstrated by Provan's point about the connections between 2 Kgs. 18:4ff and 17:7-12, at some point a connection was made between the fall of the North and the situation in the South before Hezekiah's reform.

whether Hezekiah's pious actions alone can prevent his country from its deserved punishment.

In conclusion, underlying the introduction in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, which initially appears to be an incoherent conglomeration of summaries, is a struggle about the truthfulness of the royal theology. In this, 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 simultaneously affirms the theology by placing Hezekiah's pious actions in contradistinction to that of the North, yet also questions it by emphasizing the continuing sinful practices of the Judahites. The attack in 701 thus becomes a test case for these unresolved questions: Will Judah survive? Is the theology still intact? Are Hezekiah's deeds good enough? These questions become the central focus of the succeeding narrative of the 701 Assyrian attack. Hence, 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 looks both backwards to the fall of Samaria in 2 Kings 17 and also forwards to the immediately succeeding story of the attack in 701.

Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17–19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2–37:9a, 37)

Source B1 and 2 Kgs. 18:1-12

2 Kgs. 18:1-12, which itself is connected to the narrative in the preceding chapter (2 Kings 17), therefore sets up the theological struggle that the following story about the 701 attack attempts to resolve. By thus bridging the story of Samaria's fall in 2 Kings 17 to events in Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18–19), it is evident that 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 is the appropriate starting point for the delineation of the development of the Hezekiah complex. However, if 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 looks both backwards to 2 Kings 17 and also forwards to the story of the Assyrian attack in 2 Kings 18–19, then to *which* particular story of the attack does 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 look forward? Or to rephrase the question, which story of the attack responds to the unresolved queries in the preceding pericope in 2 Kgs 18:1-12?

This question assumes that more than one story of the Assyrian attack is present in the book of 2 Kings. The story of the attack, which describes the threatening speech delivered by the Rabshaqeh, an emissary of Sennacherib, at the walls of Jerusalem during the 701 Assyrian attack, as well as the aftermath and outcome of this diatribe, spans two chapters in the book of 2 Kings (18–19). As noted in the introduction, the occurrence of repetitions, differences in characterization, and stylistic variations in the story of the attack has led scholars to conclude that this narrative is composed of several redactional layers. Though there is no consensus, majority opinion follows Brevard Childs' modification of Bernhard Stade's tripartite redactional division of the narrative of the 701 attack: Source A (2 Kgs. 18:13–16), Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17–19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2–37:9a, 37), and Source B2 (2 Kgs. 19:9b–35//Isa. 37:9b–36).²⁵ If, as the divisions make evident, there is more than one source of the 701 attack in 2 Kings, how do we know *which* story, which redaction comes next after 2 Kgs 18:1–12 in the development of the Hezekiah complex?

Since the story of the attack in Source A (2 Kgs 18:13–16) is found immediately after the introductory summary in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12, it would seem logical to assume that this is the next narrative. Indeed, as we will discuss later in this chapter, many scholars, for a variety of reasons, maintain that Source A is the most historical and, hence, the earliest redactional source of the Assyrian attack in 2 Kings. The problem with this idea, however, is that Source A does not resolve, let alone refer to any of the unresolved issues in 2 Kgs. 18:1–12, which,

25. For the most part, we follow this majority opinion on the redactional division of the story of 701. We will not repeat here the argument of Stade as modified by Childs. We will, thus, only note and discuss those elements of their argument with which we disagree or to which we have additional contributions. See Brevard Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM, 1967), 69–103; B. Stade, "Miscellen: Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21," *ZAW* 6 (1886): 156–89, esp. 172–78. For a summary of the source divisions of 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37 and various arguments, see Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 240–44.

as we have discussed, was the starting point of the Hezekiah complex. Rather, another source of the 701 attack, a source known as Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17—19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2—37:9a, 37), which is found later in 2 Kings 18,²⁶ better addresses and alludes to the pericope in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12. Indeed, a closer look at Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17—19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2—37:9a, 37) reveals several connections between 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and Source B1 that speak to a particular correlation between the two narratives.

Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17—19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2—37:9a, 37) describes how the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with an army to Jerusalem to punish Hezekiah for his rebellion (18:17). When they arrive, the Rabshakeh lambasts Hezekiah for trusting in Egypt and Yahweh to rescue him from Assyria, even going so far as to state that the Lord himself commanded the Assyrian king to attack Jerusalem (18:25). Fearful that the people in the city will overhear this threat, Hezekiah's representatives at the wall of Jerusalem ask the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic and not in the "language of Judah." Instead of complying, however, the narrator heightens the tension and terror by having the Rabshakeh, in defiance of this request, turn and speak directly to the people. He tells the Judahites that rather than listening to Hezekiah, who maintains that the Lord will rescue Judah (18:30), they should instead capitulate to the king of Assyria who will exile them to a good land similar to their own, a land of oil and honey (18:32).

When the news of what is happening at the city wall reaches the king, in good pious fashion Hezekiah tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, goes to the Temple, and sends servants to the prophet Isaiah for an oracle. When the servants reach Isaiah, the prophet tells them not to be afraid because the Lord will put a spirit in the king

26. The demarcations of Source B1 and Source B2 are discussed in Chapter 2. The dating of Source B1 is discussed later in this chapter.

of Assyria so that he will hear a rumor and leave (v. 7). The story concludes with the notice that the Assyrian king indeed departed from Jerusalem and returned to Assyria (19:36).

Several connections between 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and Source B1 reveal a relationship between the two pericopes. The first is the occurrence of the word *bāṭāḥ* (trust), which Bostock argues is a leitmotif of the entire Hezekiah complex.²⁷ Indeed, the frequency of *bāṭāḥ* in 2 Kings 18-19, a word seldom attested elsewhere in the Deuteronomistic history,²⁸ speaks to an unusual emphasis on this term in the complex.²⁹ Olley notes that there are “ten instances in chapters 18-19 but only three with this nominal or verbal usage elsewhere in all the narrative of Genesis-Kings.”³⁰ Indeed, though Childs argues that *bāṭāḥ* is an important theme in both Source B1 (2 Kgs. 18:17-19:9a, 36//Isa. 36:2-37:9a, 37) and B2 (2 Kgs. 19: 9b-35//Isa. 37:9b-36), most occurrences of *bāṭāḥ* are found in Source B1 (the word appears only once in B2 at 19:10).³¹

Childs contends that Source B1 focuses on the trustworthiness of Hezekiah. If so, then the emphasis of this quality of Hezekiah in Source B1 offers a link back to the introduction (2 Kgs. 18:1-12) where it is stated that Hezekiah was unique in his trust:³² “He trusted

27. Bostock, *Portrayal of Trust*. While Bostock’s work offers some valuable information concerning the use of the *bāṭāḥ* in the Hezekiah complex, it is difficult to come to any clear conclusion just by a study of this leitmotif.

28. *Bāṭāḥ* is found nine times in the Hezekiah complex in Kings (the complex in Isaiah omits only the occurrence in 2 Kgs. 18:5): 2 Kgs. 18:5, 19, 20, 21 (twice), 22, 24, 30; 19:10; *biṭṭāḥōn* also occurs in 18:19. According to Bostock, however, in the Deuteronomistic History, *bāṭāḥ* only occurs in Deut. 28:52; Judg. 9:26; 18:7, 10, 27; 20:36 (Bostock, *Portrayal of Trust*, 31).

29. For more on *bāṭāḥ* and the meanings of *bāṭāḥ* in the Hezekiah complex, see Bostock, *Portrayal of Trust*.

30. John W. Olley, “‘Trust in the Lord:’ Hezekiah, Kings and Isaiah,” *TynBul* 50 (1999): 62.

31. Source B2 and the relationship between Source B1 and Source B2 will be discussed later in this chapter.

32. As Childs notes, by slightly reworking B1, B2 shifts the question of trustworthiness from Hezekiah to Yahweh (2 Kgs. 19:19). The question in B2 is whether Yahweh is really the one true God and whether he can be trusted to protect Jerusalem. The focus in B1, however, is whether Hezekiah can be trusted. See Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 89.

in the Lord the God of Israel, so that there was no one like him among those who were before him” (2 Kgs. 18:5). Since this statement about Hezekiah’s faith in the Lord immediately precedes the notice of the reform in the summary section, it would appear that the action that demonstrated his unique trust was that which was related to the cult.

The contrasting use and understanding of Hezekiah’s reform offers another link between the summary pericope in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and Source B1. The Rabshaqeh ironically refers to these themes—cultic activity, trust, and Hezekiah—in Source B1 at 2 Kgs. 18:22//Isa. 36:7.³³ “But if you say to me, ‘We rely (*bāṭāḥmū*) on the Lord our God,’ is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?’” Indeed, the mention of the reform in the introductory section (18:4-5) is phrased very similarly to its reference in the speech of the Rabshaqeh at 18:22//Isa. 36:7^{34,35}:

...we trust (*bāṭāḥmū*) in the Lord, our God, is it not he whose high places Hezekiah has removed... (2 Kgs. 18:22//Isa. 36:7)

...in the Lord, the God of Israel, he trusted (*bāṭāḥ*)...he (it was who) removed the highplaces... (2 Kgs. 18:5a 4a)

33. The speech of the Rabshaqeh in B1 will be discussed in more detail below.

34. Nadav Na’aman argues that this verse is a later Deuteronomistic insertion into the earlier pre-Deuteronomistic speech of the Rabshaqeh in B1. He cites three reasons for his view: 1) all passage in 2 Kgs. 18:19-25 start with the adverb “now” except v. 22; 2) all other passages address Hezekiah, whereas v. 22 addresses the delegation (second-person plural); and 3) other passages refer to Hezekiah in the second person singular, while v. 22 refers to him in the third person (Nadav Na’aman, “Updating the Messages: Hezekiah’s Second Prophetic Story [2 Kings 19.9b-35] and the community of Babylonian Deportees,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, ed. Lester L Grabbe [JSOTSup 363 = ESHM 4; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003], 218; idem., “Debated Historicity,” 183). Provan argues correctly that even if 18:22 is an insertion, “the link between the reform and the deliverance of Jerusalem is consciously made” through the presence of 18:22 in near repetition of 18:4 (Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, 85).

35. Ehud Ben Zvi, “Who Wrote the Speech of the Rabshaqeh and When?,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 85.

If, as Olley writes, “In all the Old Testament narrative only of Hezekiah is it said explicitly that he ‘trusts in YHWH,’”³⁶ then the fact that both 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and Source B1 mention Hezekiah, trustworthiness, and the cult indicates that the two accounts are most likely connected somehow.

Indeed, the irony and significance of the Rabshaqeh’s mention of trust and reform in Source B1 only makes sense in light of the description of the cultic renovation in the summary section in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12. The narrative of Hezekiah’s reform in 2 Kgs. 18:4-5 is surrounded by declarations of Hezekiah’s piety and, hence, is presented as a positive event. Before the account of the reform, in 18:3, it states that Hezekiah “did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (18:3); and in 18:5-6, after the description of the reform, it states that Hezekiah “trusted in the Lord the God of Israel” (18:5), was unique in his faithfulness among his predecessors (18:5), and “did not depart from following” God (18:6). In contrast, in the Rabshaqeh’s speech in Source B1, what was presented as a display of Hezekiah’s piety in the introductory section (18:1-12) is recast as an offense to God and as proof of the untrustworthiness of Hezekiah: “But if you say to me, ‘We rely on the Lord our God,’ is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed...” (2 Kgs. 18:22//Isa. 36:7).

The semantically contrasting yet formally similar statements about the reform in 2 Kgs. 18:4-5 and 2 Kgs. 18:22//Isa. 36:7 have the effect of emphasizing the incorrectness of the Rabshaqeh’s accusation. Its error is stressed in the wording of the statements. First, as we have noted, the important word *bāṭah* appears in both declarations. The deprecation of Hezekiah’s trust and his trustworthiness by the Rabshaqeh, Israel’s enemy, thus subtly reaffirms these very qualities. Second, both statements mention the destruction of the *bāmôt* by

36. Olley, “Trust in the Lord,” 62.

Hezekiah. This notice, Provan and Barrick contend, is very significant.³⁷ They argue that the judgment formulas of kings preceding Hezekiah (1 Kings 5–2 Kings 15) consistently note the kings' failure to remove the *bāmôt* (1 Kgs. 3:3; 15:14; 22:44; 2 Kgs. 12:4; 14:4; 15:4; 15:35a). This pattern of failure to remove the *bāmôt* is given a "perfect conclusion" in Hezekiah's act of reform when he finally and climactically removes the high places in the introductory summary (2 Kgs. 18:4): "*he* (it was who) removed the bamot."³⁸ This important statement about trust (*bātah*) and the removal of the *bāmôt* in 2 Kgs. 18:4—a statement which, according to Provan, signifies that Hezekiah's reign is the high point of a pre-Josianic edition of the Deuteronomistic History³⁹—is the very declaration repeated by the Rabshaqeh as having the opposite meaning, as indicative of Hezekiah's impiety. Not only is the Rabshaqeh wrong in affirming this proposition, but, as shown by the words he repeats from earlier in the summary section at 2 Kgs. 18:4, he is shown as completely and utterly wrong.

By reiterating the themes of reform and trust found earlier in the summary section at 2 Kgs. 18:4 in the story of the attack in Source B1 (18:22), the narrator thus effectively nullifies the Rabshaqeh's accusations. Hence, the Rabshaqeh's emphasis on the reform, as proof that Hezekiah is not to be trusted when he states that the Lord will save Judah, in the end conveys the opposite theological sentiment. The Rabshaqeh's utterly erroneous assertions affirm, rather than subvert, the message of 2 Kgs. 18:1–12. The reform of Hezekiah,

37. W. Boyd Barrick, *The Kings and Cemeteries: Toward a New Understanding of Josiah's Reform* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 116ff; Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, esp. 82–89.

38. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, 85.

39. Provan writes, "Careful examination of the *bāmôt* notices for each king, however, indicates it is the former [Hezekiah as opposed to Josiah] who was originally the central figure of the narrative, and whose reign was seen as the zenith of Judaeon history" (Ibid, 82). The question of Hezekiah as the climax of a pre-Josianic edition of the Deuteronomistic History will be discussed later in this chapter.

especially the removal of the *bāmôt*, is evidence that the king can be trusted and that Judah therefore will not suffer the same fate as the North.⁴⁰

Indeed, the mention of the destruction of Samaria in Source B1 provides further support that the B1 narrative is centered on the same question concerning Judah's survival as that found in 2 Kgs 18:1-12. After denouncing Hezekiah's delusional trust in the Lord's ability to save the city (2 Kgs. 18:29-30//Isa. 36:14-15) and declaring, in Deuteronomistic language, the good that will follow from Judah's capitulation to Assyria, the Rabshaqeh lists those cities that have fallen to the great Assyrian king:

Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? (2 Kgs. 18:33-35//Isa. 36:18-20).

In this passage, the Rabshaqeh directly compares the fate of Judah to the fall of Samaria by boasting that, as the Lord did not save Samaria, so he will be unable to save Judah. Indeed, the question about the nature of this correlation between the South and the North, whether it will be that of equivalence, as the Rabshaqeh argues, or divergence, as the notice of the reform in 2 Kgs. 18:4-5 asserts, is *the* question at stake in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 and, seemingly, in Source B1 as well.

However, the description of the North and the South in the Rabshaqeh's speech in Source B1 differs from the description in the introduction summary of 2 Kgs. 18:1-12. In Source B1, the Rabshaqeh explicitly links the fate of the North with that of the South—"Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?" (2 Kgs.

40. Ibid., 85.

18:34//Isa. 36:19)—whereas the correlation in the summary section in 2 Kgs. 18:9-12 is more subtle. We have noted that in the summary section, the repetition of *Moses* and the unflattering portrayal of the cultic piety of the Judahites evinces a certain insecurity in the account. The reason for the more indirect correlation between Judah and Samaria in this section in 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 might stem from a sensitivity to this issue in the passage. The point of 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, as was laid out earlier, is to question and struggle with, not annul, the promises inherent in royal theology. A direct assertion of doubts, from a voice other than that of the enemy, would seriously undermine, and hence endanger, the established theology.⁴¹

Thus Source B1 not only posits a more direct correlation between Judah and the fall of Samaria, but in so doing it addresses and resolves doubts about the theology to which 2 Kgs. 18:1-12 more subtly alludes. First, it puts the questions about the trustworthiness of royal ideology into the mouth of the Rabshaqeh. It is the enemy of Judah who criticizes, taunts, and derides the theology of Judah, and hence, by default, the criticism is presumed to be wrong. Second, the explicitness of the Rabshaqeh's arrogant, blustery declaration in 2 Kgs. 18:33-35//Isa. 36:18-20 that Judah will fall like Samaria—similar to the Rabshaqeh's statement about Hezekiah's reform (2 Kgs. 18:22//Isa. 36:7)—is further utilized to emphasize the erroneousness of the Rabshaqeh's statement. Not only does he question Judean theology, but he does so as insultingly and impiously as possible, provoking Yahweh to respond. Hence, by having the Rabshaqeh directly and arrogantly criticize royal theology, and then by concluding the narrative with Sennacherib's departure from Judah (2 Kgs. 19:36), the narrative dramatizes and affirms the reliability of Judah's theology.⁴²

41. This aspect is discussed in more detail below.