

(From *The Old Testament Made Easy*, by Julie Campbell Tatham)

TWO KINGS OF JUDAH

Father of Hezekiah -- AHAZ (Heb. "he holds"; A-haz)

The son of Jotham was wicked and idolatrous, even causing his "son to pass through the fire." He may not have gone so far as to use the child as a human sacrifice to Baal, but probably passed its body over the flame in a heathen purification rite. Jerusalem was besieged unsuccessfully by Pekah, King of Israel, and his ally, Rezin, King of Syria.

HEZEKIAH (Heb. "strength of God"; HEZ-e-KI-ah)

Wicked King Ahaz was succeeded by his son, who was one of the greatest of the Kings of Judah. Hezekiah instituted a great religious revival, destroyed idolatry and saw to it that Temple worship was restored. He lived in stirring times. The great Assyrian empire in the north was just beginning to wane. Egypt in the south was still powerful enough to resist Assyria. Babylonia was strengthening itself for a final revolt against its Assyrian overlords, and the two little Hebrew kingdoms had so shrunk in size and strength as to be almost helpless. Some of Hezekiah's counselors urged him to form an alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyria. Others urged submission to Assyria. Isaiah urged complete trust in God instead of relying on foreign powers. Shalmaneser V succeeded Tiglath-pileser III and was in turn succeeded by Sargon II, to whom Samaria surrendered in 721 B.C. This marked the end of the Northern Hebrew Kingdom.

Sargon was succeeded by Sennacherib, his son, against whom Hezekiah revolted in an unfortunate alliance with Babylon. Judah was forced to pay such heavy tribute that Hezekiah had to strip the gold plating from the doors and pillars of the Temple. But Sennacherib decided to demand the surrender of Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, whose prayers combined with those of the King saved the city. The besieging Assyrians were stricken with a plague and returned to Nineveh, but Judah remained a vassal state. Later Hezekiah became so ill Isaiah said he could not recover, but the king prayed humbly to God and was healed. When he died several years later, he was greatly mourned.

