

**The Chronological Problem of Hezekiah**

2 Kings 18:1-12 places Hezekiah on the throne of Judah about six years before the fall of Samaria, which occurred in 721 BC. 2 Kings 18:13 dates Sennacherib's attack to Hezekiah's fourteenth year (c. 713 BC, according to 2 Kings 18). However, Sennacherib's attack on Judah, recorded in 2 Kings 18:17-19:37, Isaiah 36:2-37:38, and 2 Chronicles 32:9-33, is well-established to have occurred in 701 BC. This would place Hezekiah's reign beginning in 715 BC rather than 726 BC.

Actually, Sennacherib attacked Judah twice. He attacked Judah's fortified cities c. 713 BC (Hezekiah's fourteenth year). Hezekiah appeased him with a tribute, and Jerusalem was not besieged. Around this time, Hezekiah became ill, and God granted his prayer by adding fifteen years to his life. Hezekiah also refortified Jerusalem, probably after this initial attack.

The Biblical narratives then jump forward to Sennacherib's second attack in 701 BC. The subtle transition, not unusual in Biblical narratives, led to conflation of the two campaigns in Bible timelines. In 701, Hezekiah resisted, and the Assyrian army initiated its siege by camping around Jerusalem. God destroyed the Assyrian army in one night, and Sennacherib returned home, to later be slain by his sons.

Most Bible timelines place Hezekiah's reign from 715 to 686 BC, explaining away Hezekiah's "fourth" and "sixth" years in 2 Kings 18:9-10 as a co-regency with Ahaz. There are numerous problems with this. First, the same language is used in 2 Kings 18:9-10 and 13, so there is no reason to assume one describes a co-regency and the other describes a sole reign. Second, ten years of co-regencies must be imposed within the next three kings. But if Hezekiah's reign ended around 698, the math works out perfectly. Third, it seems improbable that Sennacherib would've responded to Hezekiah's apology and tribute by besieging the capital. Hezekiah clearly submitted during the first attack and refused firmly to threats of a second.

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An outline of Hezekiah's reign, based on the two-campaign model:

726 – Hezekiah begins to reign, possibly co-regent with Ahaz for a few years

c. 726-720 – Hezekiah's religious reforms in Judah

723-721 – Assyria besieged Samaria and conquered Israel

c. 713 – Sennacherib invaded Judah, conquering several fortified cities, but was appeased by tribute from Hezekiah before reaching Jerusalem

c. 713 – Hezekiah became ill, but God granted him 15 more years

c. 713 – Hezekiah refortified Jerusalem

c. 705 – Hezekiah and other kings revolted against Assyria

701 – Sennacherib invaded Judah and initiated a siege of Jerusalem, but his army was destroyed by God

c. 697 – Hezekiah died and was succeeded by his son, Manasseh

681 – Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons

The fall of Jerusalem occurred in 586 BC. The reigns of Manasseh (55), Amon (2), Josiah (31), Jehoahaz (<1), Jehoiakim (11), Jehoiachin (<1), and Zedekiah (11) total about 110 years.  $586 + 110 = 696$ , which roughly matches the proposed timeline above. Further, Josiah's death corresponds with Egypt's attempt to help Assyria retake Harran in 609 BC. Adding the 88 years of Manasseh (55), Amon (2), and Josiah (31) to 609 yields 697, again placing the end of Hezekiah's reign c. 697 BC.

In the Assyrian records, Sennacherib boasted of conquering 46 fortified cities of Judah, exacting heavy tribute, and trapping Hezekiah in Jerusalem. He never mentioned conquering Judah, however, which would've overshadowed all these.