

2 Kings 18 — Nehushtan — the King Who Broke a Holy Relic, the Kingdom That Fell Next Door, and the Voice at the Wall Asking, On Whom Dost Thou Trust?

2 Kings 18: Hezekiah the son of Ahaz begins to reign in the third year of Hoshea king of Israel and does right as David his father did — removing the high places, breaking in pieces the brasen serpent Moses made, and cleaving to the LORD; Samaria falls to Assyria next door; then in Hezekiah's fourteenth year Sennacherib takes the fenced cities of Judah, and the Rab-shakeh stands at the conduit of the upper pool demanding, in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people on the wall, on whom Judah trusts; Hezekiah's twenty and nine years in Jerusalem, c. 715–686 BC by the scriptural synchronisms (secular chronologies concur), with Sennacherib's invasion in the fourteenth year, c. 701 BC.

Take a breath, because the book of Kings just did. For seventeen chapters the story has been mostly northern — Elisha's miracles, the slow rot of Israel's throne, and finally, in chapter 17, the end: Samaria besieged, taken, emptied, its people marched to Assyria. Now the camera swings south, to the kingdom still standing, and to a new king in Jerusalem. His father was Ahaz — the king who copied a pagan altar out of Damascus to please an Assyrian emperor (2 Kgs. 16:10–18) and, the Chronicler adds, finally shut the temple doors altogether (2 Chr. 28:24). Judah has spent sixteen years under a man who treated the house of the LORD as a diplomatic inconvenience.

Hebrew Word Studies

nachash (H5175) / nechosheth (H5178) / Nechushtan (H5180) (נָחָשׁ / נְחֹשֶׁת / נְחֻשְׁטָן) — **serpent / brass, bronze, copper / Nehushtan — "the bronze thing" v. 4.** Three words, one spine of consonants, and the pun is the sermon. The nachash was the serpent Moses lifted (Num. 21:9); nechosheth is the bronze it was cast from; and Nechushtan, Hezekiah's coinage, welds them into a dismissal — not "the holy serpent of Moses" but roughly "old bronzey," a thing of metal. The name performs the theology: what Israel had been burning incense to was, in substance, an alloy of copper, and everything else it seemed to be was borrowed light from the God who once appointed it. Scripture is candid that the object was never the point — the Wisdom tradition, reading Numbers, insisted that he that turned toward it "was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by thee, that art the Saviour of all" (Wisdom of Solomon 16:7, KJV Apocrypha). The healing traveled through the symbol, never from it. That is the difference between a sacrament and an idol — a sacrament is transparent, an idol is opaque — and the same object can be either, depending entirely on where the worshipper's eyes come to rest. Moses' serpent pointed to Christ lifted up (Jn. 3:14–15; Hel. 8:14–15); the moment Israel looked at it instead of through it, the pointer became the destination, and the destination was bronze. Hezekiah's hammer did not destroy something holy. It ended the impersonation of something holy by its own monument.

dabaq (H1692) (דָּבַק) — **to cleave, cling, stick fast, stay close v. 6.** "For he clave to the LORD." Dabaq is covenant vocabulary's strongest glue: what a man does to his wife when the two become one flesh (Gen. 2:24), what Ruth does to Naomi when she refuses the sensible road home (Ruth 1:14), what Israel is commanded to do toward Jehovah — "him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave" (Deut. 10:20; cf. Josh. 23:8). It is attachment as a way of life, proximity maintained on purpose, through weather. We met this verb's dark twin one book ago, when Elisha told Gehazi "the leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee" (2 Kgs. 5:27): what you cleave to, cleaves back. Kings gives Hezekiah the bright side of the same law — he cleaved to the LORD, and verse 7 reports the reciprocity in four words: "the LORD was with him." Notice what the verse rules out: cleaving is not a feeling of warmth toward God; the text immediately cashes it as "departed not from following him, but kept his commandments." And notice its placement, directly after the smashing of Nehushtan. The narrator draws the contrast deliberately: Israel had cleaved to a bronze souvenir of a past miracle; Hezekiah cleaved to the living God who had worked it. One grip closes on metal, the other on a hand — and the whole chapter, including the Rabshakeh's whole assault, is about which grip holds when the siege comes.

batach (H982) / bittachon (H986) (בָּטַח / בִּטְחוֹן) — **to trust, lean on, be confident in / trust, confidence, ground of hope vv. 5, 19–24, 30.** This is the chapter's contested word — set down once by the narrator as Hezekiah's crown ("He trusted in the LORD God of Israel," v. 5) and then seized by the Rabshakeh and hammered seven times in the taunt: "What confidence (bittachon) is this wherein thou trustest?... on whom dost thou trust... thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed... all that trust on him... We trust in the LORD our God... put thy trust on Egypt... neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD" (vv. 19–24, 30). Batach at root is a posture, not an opinion — to lean your actual weight on something, the way a

lame man leans on a staff; which is why verse 21's image is so exact: lean on the wrong staff and it runs through your palm. The Hebrew Bible's whole doctrine of faith hangs on choosing the object rightly: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5); "some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7). Hezekiah himself, rallying his captains, framed the siege in exactly these terms — "with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God" (2 Chr. 32:8) — and Nephi made it personal for every reader: "cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh" (2 Ne. 4:34; cf. 2 Ne. 28:31; Jer. 17:5–7). The Rabshakeh understood the stakes perfectly — that is why verse 30 names his real objective. Not the city. The trust.

natsal (H5337) (נָצַל) — to deliver, snatch away, rescue, pluck out of the hand vv. 29–35. If batash is the chapter's contested noun, natsal is its contested verb — tagged nine times in seven verses of the Rabshakeh's shouting: Hezekiah "shall not be able to deliver you" (v. 29); "The LORD will surely deliver us," an emphatic doubled Hebrew form, trust talking with its whole chest (v. 30), which verse 33's "delivered at all" throws back in mockery; "have they delivered Samaria... that have delivered their country... that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (vv. 34–35). At root natsal is to snatch something out of a grip — which is why the taunt keeps pairing it with "hand" (yad), five times in three verses: whose hand can take you out of mine? The Rabshakeh has framed the entire war as a contest of grips, and scripture accepts the frame gladly, because that contest has only ever had one outcome. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king" (Dan. 3:17) — and he did (Dan. 3:28–29). David made the verb his biography: "The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion... he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). And the Good Shepherd stated the doctrine in its final form, from the other side of the grip: "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28). One night after this speech, natsal stops being a debate in this story (2 Kgs. 19:35). The hand the Rabshakeh should have worried about was never Egypt's.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Notice, too, what frames the chapter at either end: two objects of false confidence, one broken by faith and one offered by the enemy. It opens with Hezekiah shattering Nehushtan — a true relic ossified into a false god, the idolatry of the pious. It closes with the Rabshakeh retailing his bronze pantheon logic and his land "like your own land" — the idolatry of the fearful. Between the relic that must not be worshipped and the counterfeit that must not be accepted stands the only object of trust the chapter leaves intact: the living LORD — who is, pointedly, silent throughout. That silence is the boldest structural choice in the chapter. God does not say one word in 2 Kings 18. The enemy gets thirty verses of speech; heaven gets none — yet. The chapter ends with rent clothes, a held tongue, and a report on its way to the king, because the narrator wants us to spend a night where Jerusalem spent one: the taunt still ringing, the answer not yet come, and nothing to hold onto except the verb from verse 5. Chapter 19 is the answer. Chapter 18 is the trial of faith that Moroni said always comes first (Eth. 12:6) — printed at full length, so that readers under their own sieges would know the silence is part of the story, not the end of it.