

CHAPTER  
**4**

**HISTORYMAKERS** **Sennacherib**  
*Destroyer and Builder of Cities*

**Section 2**

*“The flame that consumes those who will not submit.”  
and “He who cares for Assyria.”—Assyrian inscriptions describing Sennacherib*

Sennacherib’s Assyrian army often sent waves of fear through cities and peoples who found themselves in its path. Sennacherib was widely known for brutal treatment of those who would not submit to his will. On the other hand, to Assyrians themselves, Sennacherib was a great leader who expanded Assyrian power and rebuilt the great city of Nineveh.

Sennacherib was the son of Sargon II, who had helped build the Assyrian Empire in Southwest Asia. Under Sargon the Assyrians had captured the ancient city of Babylon. In addition, he had formed an efficient and effective government. Sennacherib, the crown prince, had been part of that government. When his father died in 705 B.C., he took the throne. The new king devoted the first years of his reign to a great building project.

Nineveh, an ancient city, had fallen into disrepair. Sennacherib was determined to make it his capital—and a more glorious city than it had ever been. He made the city’s walls stronger and built new streets. He built a huge palace on eight acres of ground. It included parks and orchards with plants and animals from around the world. The palace was decorated with silver and copper. Copper was also used to make huge statues of 12 bulls and 12 lions. Most important, Sennacherib brought precious water to the city. He built canals to carry water from hills more than 50 miles away. Outside the city walls, he set aside farmland for the city residents. There he introduced an unusual new crop: cotton.

While the king created the capital that was his work of art, trouble brewed in the east. The former king of Babylon—allowed by Sargon to live—decided to reclaim his throne. He attacked in 703 but was quickly defeated by Sennacherib. In response to the threat, the Assyrian king decided to bring the whole area under control. He captured 88 walled towns and several major cities.

Sennacherib also moved to the west. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, had joined in the Babylonian revolt. So, too, had the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. Representatives of the pharaoh of Egypt had also discussed taking part. Sennacherib decided

to attack. In 701 B.C., he captured the Phoenician cities. Then he moved to Judah, where he forced Hezekiah to pay a large penalty. Next came Egypt. As Sennacherib prepared for an invasion, though, he was forced to call a halt. Some disaster—perhaps a plague—struck his army and he had to withdraw.

More military movements were needed in the east. Again, the former king of Babylon began a revolt. Sennacherib used a remarkable feat of engineering to move his troops into position. He sailed ships down the Tigris River to a southern city. Then he had them hauled overland to the Euphrates River. From there they sailed into the Persian Gulf. Sennacherib then easily defeated the allies of the old king of Babylon.

Trouble continued there for many years, however. Sennacherib had tried to maintain Babylon as a separate kingdom, but these attempts failed. The Chaldeans, who lived in Babylon, grew more and more unwilling to recognize Assyrian power. Finally, they captured and killed the king’s son and murdered other supporters of Assyria. Sennacherib led an army back to Babylon in 689 B.C. He quickly destroyed the city, killed his opponents, and flooded the ancient capital.

With his conquests complete, Sennacherib settled down in his capital to rule his empire. He named one of his younger sons, Esarhaddon, as his heir—an act that raised resentment among his other sons. Their resentment combined with a Babylonian conspiracy brought about Sennacherib’s death. In January of 681 B.C., two sons murdered the aged Sennacherib, perhaps while he was at prayer in a temple.

## Questions

- Forming and Supporting Opinions** Which inscription at the top of the page do you think is a better description of Sennacherib? Give reasons for your answer.
- Drawing Conclusions** Do you think that Sennacherib was resourceful? Why or why not?
- Making Inferences** What led Sennacherib to attack other kingdoms?