

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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God's Defence of Jerusalem

Reading: 2 Kings 18:1-16

Today in our lesson we are to consider one of the greatest kings of Judah and yet he made mistakes that we can all learn from.

Remember that the 10 tribes had been taken captive by the king of Assyria. Now how would Judah defend herself against such a great enemy? Firstly I want you to think about the background and think about the layout of the Bible and the books of the Old Testament. Our lesson is taken from 2 Kings 18 and 19, but the book of Isaiah 36 and 37 is also written at this time. Why? Well, the prophet Isaiah was living at this time and in fact was a great help in trying to bring the people back to their God. Also Micah the prophet (this book is almost at the end of the minor prophets in your Bible), prophesied to Judah warning them of the evil of their doings and trying to get them to change their ways. This is a great help to us because when we read all the accounts it helps us to fill in the background to the lesson before us.

It is eight years after Israel had been taken captive, Hezekiah, king of Judah came to the throne. He was a very good king and yet his father was the wicked Ahaz who took the gold and silver from the temple to pay tribute to Assyria hoping to keep peace with them. In the very first year of his reign at the age of 25 years, Hezekiah commenced his reforms. He repaired and cleaned out the temple which had been neglected, set apart priests and gave them instructions to revive the teaching of the law of Moses pointing out that many had already gone into captivity because they had forgotten God's law. Even daily offerings had been neglected for some years. This should have been done so that the people remembered on a daily basis the goodness and constant provision of their God. Hezekiah also revived the Feast of Passover which had been neglected during Ahaz's reign. He cleansed the land from idolatry and established the priests and the Levites in the courses as they had originally been under King David. Many other things he did and God was well pleased with all his efforts we are told in 2 Chronicles 31:20-21. He did it with all his heart and prospered. What a lesson for us. Can we say we do our work for God, our reading and our helping of others with all our heart?

Getting back to the problem of the time ... Hezekiah had be totally committed to cleaning up the nation and its worship and to bring the people back to the worship of the one true God. However there was now a great threat from outside that of the Assyrian power. During the early part of his reign Hezekiah placed his confidence in the Lord, and God kept the enemy away (see 2 Kings 18:7). Notice in the verse, The Lord was with him, he prospered, he would not serve the king of Assyria.

However now in the 14th year of his reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria came again against the nation of Judah. He swept throughout the cities taking many of them. This brutal nation was determined to extend its power over the then known world. They were cruel and ruthless they only knew brute force, their name always echoed torture and cruelty. Assyrian monuments excavated by archaeologists depict scenes of captives being tortured. They were the German Nazis of the ancient world so we can imagine the fear that would be engendered in the hearts of the people of Judah as such an army approached. What should Hezekiah do in time of trouble? He should have taken his problem to God either in prayer or through His prophet (who was that?) but

instead tried to solve the problem for himself. Read what he did in 2 Kings 18:15-16. However in spite of all his efforts, Assyria would not go away.

In Isaiah 22 we are told what the people of Jerusalem and Judah were thinking at this time, some wanted to flee to Egypt, but Isaiah warned them of the folly of this. Others trusted their own strength because of the fortified walls of Jerusalem they were confident they would be able to withstand the siege. The prophet warned them that they had confidence in themselves but did not remember God who had given them all things, He should have been their defence. Yet others in the city took a defeatist attitude and said "Let us eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". A further group headed by Shebna were self-righteous thinking that the rest of the city would certainly be taken captive, but they were too righteous to have that happen to them. (Isa 22:15-19). Finally there were those who supported Hezekiah who trusted that God would deliver them. This time Hezekiah did the right thing, he did not pay tribute to the Assyrians, instead he trusted that God would help him, not putting his trust in flesh. So from this one chapter in Isaiah (ch 22) we have a graphic picture of the reaction of the men of Judah and Jerusalem to this crisis.

Rabshakeh's blasphemous speech... Sennacherib sent his general Rabshakeh with a message of threat to the people of Jerusalem. Notice the place, they came to the "conduit of the upper pool", if you have a margin reference it takes us back to Isaiah 7:3 where earlier God had given the wonderful prophecy of Immanuel which means "God with us" and speaks of the King of Peace which was to come, even the Lord Jesus. The Jews who were spiritually minded must have taken comfort in this but for many the message of the Assyrians brought fear and trembling. The message was very crafty, firstly boasting in the Assyrians power over other nations and how their gods had not been able to deliver them. Then he attacked Hezekiah and tried to undermine the people's allegiance to him by saying he had taken away their altars and established his own in Jerusalem (v22). He mocked them by saying that the weakest Assyrian captain could destroy the best force Hezekiah could assemble on horses provided by Assyria. He even claimed that his exploits against Judah were at the command of Israel's God. I wonder if he had been informed of Isaiah's prophecy about the coming invasion of Israel and Judah by Assyria which are spoken of in Isaiah 8 and 10. However, little did he realise that the same prophecies forecast his own destruction outside the walls of Jerusalem (Isa 10:24-34)

This time Hezekiah commanded the people to utter no word in reply, he knew what he must do and he went into the temple of God and placed the problem in God's hands through Isaiah the prophet. Hezekiah realised that the matter was beyond his power. He instructed his servants to tell Isaiah all about the blasphemy of the Assyrian and ask him to plead that God would show Himself powerful and save them because the people had no strength of their own. How often when we are in terrible trouble do we place our problem in with God know that only He can help and leave it with him in faith, or do we try to work things out for ourselves? Hezekiah's faith and trust was justified because God sent a message to him that the great army of the Assyrians would be destroyed and that Sennacherib the king would return to his own land in disgrace and perish.

The threats from the Assyrians had not worked with the people of Judah, so a letter was sent to Hezekiah setting out the same threat and defying the God of Israel and adding that "Let not thy God deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria". Again Hezekiah took the right decision and turned to God for comfort and guidance.

Hezekiah's prayer in 2 Kings 19:15-19 provides a beautiful pattern for us, it is not unlike the Lord's Prayer in structure. He firstly declares the majesty and power of his God over all nations and kingdoms, because all have come from Him. He then appeals to God to hear the reproach of Sennacherib and lays before God his trust in Him and his own rejection of Sennacherib's claims, saying that they are no gods but the work of men's hands. He concludes his prayer by appealing to God's purpose to preserve Israel so that *all the kingdoms of the Earth may know that thou art the Lord God*. Try to imagine Hezekiah in the Temple with sackcloth on him and his clothes rent (or ripped open as a sign of mourning), uttering this prayer full of meaning.

God will always hear the prayer of the righteous and Isaiah is sent to Hezekiah with the reassuring answer not to be afraid of the words of Sennacherib, God would redeem His people and that Sennacherib would not take the city and in fact he would not even shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield nor cast a bank against it. See verse 34 where God says "He will defend this city to save it for mine own sake and for my servant David's. "

That night God's angels were at work and 185,000 of the Assyrian army lay dead, they went to sleep that night and never woke again. Think of that number 185,000.... God is able to do all things. Sennacherib returned in disgrace to his own land where he was killed by his own sons. I wonder if he reflected on his boasting about Israel's God when he saw his army dead before him. Man is useless against the power of Almighty God. That power is still as great today. However great our problems and difficulties may be, let us remember they can not be as great as 185,000, and if we bother to take our problems and difficulties to God, spreading them out before him as it were, then God can and will help us and our problems can fade away as did the Assyrians, but we must have the faith and confidence in our God as Hezekiah did.

A thought for us today... we have seen the problems in Judah, we have witnessed the power and the might of Almighty God, we have the proof of prayer in action, but what does it mean to you and what affect is all this knowledge going to have in our lives? Here are a few things to consider....

- Make prayer more meaningful and earnest.
- Remember God has the power to help however large our problem.
- We need not fear, God sees and knows all things.
- The angels are working for us today just as they did in the days of Hezekiah.
- Faith... complete trust and confidence in God will always see us through.

Extra work... What would *you* say are the main points we learn from today's lesson?