

July 10

2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 32; Isaiah 38

Chapter 20 - The envoys from the Babylonian king would almost certainly have come to Jerusalem during that brief period of independence. Their stated purpose in coming was to inquire about the miraculous cure that Hezekiah had experienced, and since the sign of that cure was the moving of the sun's shadow backward ten steps on the staircase of Ahaz, it is possible that a very great miracle had caught the attention of the whole known world!

It is very probable that the Babylonians had another agenda as well -- that of forming an alliance with Judah, Egypt and anyone else who would join against Sennacherib and the Assyrian empire builders.

One question that rises from the text is with reference to why Hezekiah's unwise, but otherwise seemingly innocent action of showing everything he had to the Babylonian envoys provoked such a harsh response from God. It is possible from the accounts in Isaiah and Kings to suggest that the action of Hezekiah was not inappropriate but that it simply created an opportunity for Isaiah to make an important announcement: that something after the conclusion of Hezekiah's reign, Judah would follow her northern neighbor into captivity, but not to Assyria -- the logical candidate for overlord of the year honors, but to Babylon who at this point in time was a second rate vassal state. It is the Chronicles account, however, that makes it clear that God was displeased with Hezekiah and that the reason for that displeasure was Hezekiah's pride!

The reign of King Hezekiah was a wonderful one -- He was the best Judah ever had. But even righteous kings are susceptible to the subtle sin of pride. After God had miraculously cured Hezekiah and confirmed that healing miracle with another one in the realm of nature, it is quite possible that Hezekiah began to think of himself as something (or someone) pretty special. "God must love me more than others" he may have reasoned, "After all, how many others have had 15 years added to their life and had God bless them as He has me?" The additional flattery of the servants of the Babylonian king would have added to the intoxication of a pride-filled heart and God rebuked his servant.

The Book of Chronicles tells us about some building projects engaged in by Hezekiah in preparation for the defense of Jerusalem. Old walls were repaired, new ones built. Extensive work was undertaken on the water supply system (some of which involved blocking up the springs outside the city wall so that a besieging army would have no opportunity to refresh itself there. Archaeologists have done a great deal of investigation into these improvements to the city's defense. You can see many of these improvements still today.

Next in chapters 18 and 19 we learned about the wonderful deliverance of Judah out of the hand of Sennacherib the latest Assyrian despot.

I want you to notice the intimidation of the field commander in this passage. Surrounded by a massive army, he calls out in Hebrew - so all the common folk can understand. He casts doubt in all they trust - in Egypt, in their strategy, in Hezekiah, in their ability to find riders - even if they had chariots... but most of all, their trust in God. Is it misplaced? Well, the people could give into fear at this time. But they stay silent - wisely.

Next, Sennacherib sends a personal letter to Hezekiah. The whole letter questions God's authority and power to save. "None of the other Gods of the other cities did that! Assyria won all of them. Why should you trust in your God?"

Hezekiah's response to external pressure is a great model for us. 37:14 is a great verse...He took Sennacherib's threats and spread them out before the Lord in prayer in the temple. His response to fear was trust. Notice that he was a realist - the Assyrians are bad boys. Notice that he points out all the other Gods are false. Notice that he ends up pointing everything to God and his glory. Wow.

And here is what happens: In the middle of the night, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers die. No battle, no plague, just massive death. Judah is saved and continues on for another 115 years. Assyria from that moment on begins its decline. And God is glorified before all nations.

So what is bugging you today? What is causing you stress? What is keeping you up at night? Spread it out before the Lord. The Bible teaches that when prayer goes up, fear goes down. God won't always solve your problems, but he will give you peace. Whatever is eating your lunch today... spread it before the LORD!

One last observation and we must conclude. The writer of 2 Kings calls Hezekiah the best king Judah ever had. "There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah either by him or after him." That is a marvelous tribute. Maybe you'll want to name your next child "Hezekiah" after this great man!