

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Sennacherib – You don't meddle with God!'
2 Kings 18:1-12
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Hezekiah entered the stage of world history about 700 years before the time of Jesus. At this time Isaiah was God's principal prophet to His Chosen People. Ahaz was king of Judah, the territory of which the Holy City, Jerusalem, was the center. In Jerusalem stood the breathtaking home of God on earth, planned through King David, but constructed by David's son, Solomon, with 1000's of Levite workers. It was here that Abijah brought her baby, Hezekiah, into the world. His father was King Ahaz, king of Judah and a descendant of King David. Hezekiah was born into royalty!

The Bible does not tell us anything about his youth or his education. We can assume that to prepare him for future kingship, he would have been taught the history of the Jewish people from Abraham onward. It would seem very probable that his studies included God's instructions to Moses at Mount Sinai, including the Ten Commandments, the detailed specifications for the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert and the instructions for the style of worship God desired from His people. He would also have heard about God's mighty acts that brought His people to Canaan, the Promised Land. He would have heard how God chose David, his ancestor, through the prophet Samuel, to be King of Israel and of the good times for Israel under King David's reign.

But Hezekiah would not have heard this history from his father. Perhaps his mother, or his grandfather Jotham, a worshiper of Jehovah taught him.

Why did his father not teach him?

His father, Ahaz, had turned away from the one true Creator God, to worship idols instead. Someone wisely observed, *'As goes the leadership, so goes the nation.'*

Ahaz dragged many Israelites away from God, thus bringing the wrath of God upon them.

This must have troubled the young Hezekiah as he matured in his thinking. Seeing his father in his royal robes kneeling with his guards, while burning incense at the base of an Asherah pole just did not seem to fit with the first commandment, *'You shall have no other gods before me.'* Neither did it make sense when Ahaz sent the priests and Levites home from the temple with layoff notices. He was horrified as he watched some members of his father's military spike planks across the Temple doors. Was this not Jehovah's home on earth? Perhaps a week later he saw a couple with 3 children leading a lamb – a Passover lamb – standing bewildered before the locked temple. The man, speaking a back-country dialect, asked hesitantly, *"Didst Jehovah die?"*

Hezekiah replied sadly, *"No, sir! Jehovah is alive – forevermore! I am sorry to tell you that my father, the king, has died – spiritually!"*

Ahaz died physically when Hezekiah was 25. Hezekiah was appointed king. During his first month in power, he sent messages to all the priests and Levites to report for work – all of them. He ordered the doors of the temple to be unbarred and repaired. The priests, Levites, musicians – everyone associated with temple work had to go through a ceremonial cleansing just the way Moses had required when the Tabernacle was ready for Jehovah’s presence. He ordered the Temple to be cleaned inside and out, top to bottom – no small task. It is one thing to open a church that has been boarded up; quite another to clean a derelict slaughterhouse, which in essence, the main part of the temple was. The work progressed quickly. Quite surprising to Hezekiah, who expected much resistance from idol worshippers, most were thrilled that they were once again allowed to bring their sacrifices and worship in Jerusalem.

Encouraged, Hezekiah sent out notices again inviting people for the traditional week-long celebration of the Passover. Although most of the Israelites from the Northern tribes had been carried off as slaves by the cruel Assyrians, notices went to the few who remained. A few jeered at the idea, but a remnant, many more than expected, came. Just as in days gone by, the lamps were lit, water was brought from the Gihon Spring, the musicians played and the choir sang while standing on the curved stone steps leading to the Court of Men. Bulls and lambs were sacrificed on the altar as people repented of their sins. And the offerings ...WOW! Israel had been plundered so brutally by invading nations, Hezekiah wondered if the people would have anything extra to give. There were so many grain, flour and meat offerings, as well as all kinds of fruits and vegetables, that the priests did not know where to put it so it would not spoil. Hezekiah ordered extra rooms to be equipped for proper storage. This was a revival no one, not even Hezekiah, was expecting. After the normal one-week Passover celebrations, the people asked for an extended week.

But trouble was looming on the horizon. The Assyrians had ravished most of the Promised Land. Now their king, Sennacherib, had his sight focused on the last fortification, Jerusalem. He had assembled his vast, powerful and cruel army on a plain not far from the Holy City. He sent messengers to Hezekiah and his aids. The messages were threats. *“No city has been able to stand against us. Egypt – puny Egypt – will not be able to help you, nor any other ally.”* The messages were taunts – *“If you are depending on your god – ha – has he helped other cities before?”*

Hezekiah prayed. 2 Kings 19:14-19.

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: “O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.

"It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Hezekiah sent a message to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah responded with a message from God about Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

He begins: 2 Kings 19:21-22.

*"This is the word that the Lord has spoken against him:
"The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you.
The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee.
Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed?
Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride?
Against the Holy One of Israel!" "*

Read at home 2 Kings 19:23-31.

He concludes 2 Kings 19:32-34.

*Therefore this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria:
"He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here.
He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it.
By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the Lord.
I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant."*

And what happened?? 2 Kings 19:35-37

'That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eight-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning – there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.'

In this 3-week series we have looked at 6 Old Testament instances when God intervened in history to do what man considered impossible.

1. He led His people across the Red Sea as if they were on dry ground; then drowned the Egyptians in the waters.
2. He gave the city, Jericho, into the hands of the Israelites without them shooting one arrow.

3. Against impossible odds, He gave Gideon victory over the vast army of Midianites with only 300 men armed with clay jars, torches and trumpets.
4. God routed the Philistine army by directing one stone thrown by David, a shepherd boy to hit and kill a taunting, conceited giant named Goliath.
5. Deborah, the only female judge of Israel, received a message from God that the Canaanites had plundered God's people for too long. When they assembled their mighty army with 900 iron chariots in the Jezreel valley, God sent torrential rain overflowing the banks of the Kishon river. With war machinery bogged in the mire, they became easy targets for the motley army of the Israelites.
6. When the commander of the powerful Assyrian army insinuated that they were more powerful than Jehovah, Jehovah acted and 185,000 soldiers did not see the light of dawn.

In Malachi 3:6 we read: *"I am Jehovah; I change not..."*

To bolster our faith and calm our trembling hearts in these times of chaos in our world, we do well to remind ourselves of God's past response toward oppressive nations. As He has moved in the past, He can move again!

We also ought to search our hearts making sure there are no idols camped out there. God will not share His glory with another! We cannot expect God to answer our prayers if we divide our loyalty between Him and an idol. So, we repent on behalf of Nations under oppression, and we pray for the remnant of God's people.

And we ask God to remember His power displayed in the past and His promise in Psalm 33:16-22:

*No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.
But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his
unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.
We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts
rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.*

Amen!