

December 23

Scriptures: Read 2 Kings 18 & 19

Key Verse: “For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.” (2 Kings 19:34)

Overview

While Israel was falling into destruction Hoshea, Judah was in a time of revival under Hezekiah, the godliest king since David, for like David, “he did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (18:3). What did he do that was right and pleasing to the Lord? He kept His commandments, which means he must have studied God’s Word. He trusted God more than any other king before or after him, and the account of the Assyrian threat is an illustration of his trust in Him.

Hezekiah not only consistently followed God, he “held fast to Him” (18:6). His love for God led to many reforms in Judah, especially since he had much cleaning up to do after his ungodly father Ahaz had been on the throne. Hezekiah removed all the high places of unauthorized worship which the other good kings had left intact. He must have had a thorough knowledge of the Word of God (a requirement of the king under theocracy, Deuteronomy 17:18-19) and was therefore aware of the requirements concerning sacrifice to God only at the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:5-11). He also destroyed all objects of idolatrous worship, including the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for it had wrongly become an object of worship (18:4; Numbers 21:7-9).

What was the result of Hezekiah’s pleasing the Lord? We read, “The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went” (18:7). He therefore enjoyed the presence of God and God’s power in his life. When he came to power on the throne of Judah, he was able to rebel against Assyria, no longer paying them tribute (18:7). His father, Ahaz, had not trusted God and had subjected his kingdom to Assyria in order to gain their protection against the attack of Syria (Aram) and Israel (16:5-9). It is interesting to note that Hezekiah, the most righteous king, was the son of one of the most wicked kings, Ahaz. This is probably because of the godly influence of his mother and his maternal grandfather Zechariah, who was a prophet of God (2 Chronicles 26:5).

Hezekiah’s godly reign, however, was not without difficulties. God can use adverse circumstances in the believer’s life to test us and build our faith. Assyria proved to be a test to Hezekiah’s faith when they invaded and took some of the fortified cities of Judah. Before they reached Jerusalem, however, Hezekiah prevented Sennacherib’s advance by paying him off. This payment did not hold Assyria off for long, and soon they attempted to take Jerusalem. With confidence in their power, the Assyrian Rabshakeh, chief of the officers, spoke loudly in the vernacular to frighten and demoralize the people. He threw terrible insults at Hezekiah and blasphemed the God of Israel by declaring that He was not able to deliver them. He boasted that if Assyria could defeat every other country that was bigger and stronger than Judah, and the gods of these people had not helped them, how could little weak Judah ever hope to withstand the Assyrian power?

At this point, we are introduced for the first time to the famous prophet Isaiah, whom the Lord used to encourage and strengthen Hezekiah in this time of crisis. After hearing the distressing words of Rabshakeh, Hezekiah's first action was to go directly to God in prayer. Then he asked for Isaiah's prayers as well, for the prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Assyrians would return without taking Jerusalem, something which, on the natural level, appeared impossible. With Hezekiah's refusal to surrender, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, sent a stronger message in a letter, again blaspheming God. Hezekiah laid the letter out before the Lord and, once again, earnestly prayed. The Lord's reply came through Isaiah: He would punish the blasphemy of the Assyrians; they were to know that there was only One true, living, and powerful God, and He Himself would save the city. This He accomplished through His death angel.

The Assyrians had planned to proudly lead the people of Judah as captives back to Assyria, but God intervened in a mighty way, and it was He that led the remainder of the army back in shame to Assyria (19:28). God will not be mocked. He will honour and protect His faithful servants and not allow them to be put to shame. He truly is our defender and our strength.

Prayer

Lord help us, like Hezekiah, to be strong in our resolve to use every effort to put wrongs right. We praise You that You will not allow us to be put to shame. Glorify Yourself in us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.