

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 46 – Part 1

Assyria and Judah

I was in eighth grade, at the Sunday night service at my home church in Lubbock, Texas. I was seated midway back on the left side of the auditorium when Joe Barnett started his sermon on Matthew 17, where the disciples were not able to drive a demon out of a boy, requiring Jesus to do so. When the disciples quizzed Jesus over their failure, Jesus responded,

Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you (Mt. 17:20).

I confess I do not remember anything else from the sermon. What I do remember is where my brain went hearing those words at that age. I thought, “I do not have enough faith to move a mountain. I need more faith!”

I then reasoned that faith must be like muscles, you need to start small, exercise regularly, and then grow into greater things. It seemed to me that while I did not have enough faith to move a mountain, perhaps I could move a pencil! I tried... It did not work. I figured I was going to have to start real small! Ultimately, I concluded that my faith was not adequate to move anything that wasn’t already moving on its own.

It was only as I got older that I began to realize the real mountains in life that need moving are not found in the Colorado Rockies, or in Israel, and definitely not in Lubbock! The real mountains in life are the crises that hit us and then either overcome us, or get moved by our faith as our life in Christ overcomes each crisis.

I was a much older man when I came face to face with a crisis that seemed particularly wrong. It was not a crisis that I should have to face. I had not brought it on, I was not responsible, and I thought it was surely not God’s will for me to have that crisis. It was then time for faith! For I could either dispose of God and reason that he had abandoned me (or simply didn’t care for some reason), or I could choose to believe and trust in him even when life was in crisis mode and unfairly out of control.

That mountain moved, although not by my might. By the grace of God, I hobbled through the crisis, holding his hand tightly and praying non-stop about his promises to never leave or forsake his children. I would not have made it through without the Lord, and I regularly thank him for that even these many years later. Faith was not something new to me then.

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Since eighth grade to this day, I have never learned to move a physical mountain or pencil, but over the years, I learned in the smaller things that concern a young man, that God was there – that I could lean on the everlasting arms. Those young lessons learned, grew into the faith that sustained me as an adult in the face of deep crisis. I still see that God is building today!

This lesson, we turn our attention to the crisis that framed the life of Hezekiah, king of Judah from about 715-687 BC. In his life's story, we see how he handled crises of monumental proportions, and how he walked away – scarred, but not defeated. We see a king who learned lessons early and found them sustaining him later.

HEZEKIAH - SYNOPSIS

The Prophet Historian writing 2 Kings gives a wonderful overview of the life of Hezekiah. He gives an epitaph to King Hezekiah's reign in chapter 18 verses 1-7 before delving into the reign in greater detail. In those seven verses, we learn that Hezekiah took the throne at the age of 25 and reigned in Judah for 29 years. The Prophet Historian gives Hezekiah greater praise than he does for any other king who reigned in the southern kingdom of Judah. Not only are we told that Hezekiah did right as King David had, but the writer also emphasizes that Hezekiah even took down the high places of worship, cut down the poles used in idol worship, and even destroyed the bronze serpent of Moses which had been used in the wilderness. Kings then records:

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook (2 Kings 18:5-7).

The synopsis then notes that Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and defeated the Philistines, peeling back their presence in the lower lands of Judah.

After this overview, the Prophet Historian in Kings then begins to give a more detailed accounting of some key moments in the life of Hezekiah. We read about these times from four main sources: 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39:8, and the various records of the Assyrian King Sennacherib now scattered in museums around the globe.¹ Each of these sources records its information for different reasons to achieve different goals. Our goal is to integrate these four

¹ One key source is technically a Neo-Babylonian chronicle rather than one of Sennacherib or another Assyrian.

sources² into one continuing narrative, also noting at least one significant archaeological find relevant to the story line.

THE STORY LINE

In November 1959, The U.S. Government armed forces instituted a system of levels linked to the country's danger of war. The lowest level of danger is "DEFCON 5" and it stands for the normal state of readiness when nothing extraordinary is going on. The levels progress through DEFCON 4 (increased security measures for above normal war readiness), DEFCON 3 (medium readiness), DEFCON 2 (war readiness where the next step is nuclear war), and DEFCON 1 (nuclear war is imminent). Hezekiah and Judah did not have this designation system in place, but in the king's life and struggles, the system would have served well! (We might add that the United States has seen DEFCON 2 twice, once during the Cuban Missile crisis and once during cold war testing of nuclear devices).³ We will use the system as we consider Hezekiah and his Assyrian crisis.

DEFCON 5

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, was an Assyrian vassal who not only paid taxes to Assyria as overlords, but also mimicked the worship of Assyria's gods. Ahaz jettisoned any vestiges of faith and practice in Yahweh, setting the people on a horrendous course of idolatry and sacrilege (2 Kings 16). Unlike his father, however, Hezekiah had his heart set on Yahweh. 2 Chronicles 29 describes Hezekiah's earliest actions as king. In his very first year, Hezekiah reopened the temple, restoring it for worship of Yahweh. He ordered the restoration of a proper Levitical priesthood and had the priests begin cleaning themselves for service even as they cleansed the temple.

Hezekiah did this recognizing that his father's sins and the sins of the people were responsible for God's wrath. No doubt having lived and observed not only the fall of Samaria, but also the prophetic teaching about that fall impressed Hezekiah. He explained to the priests:

For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God...Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on

² In doing so, it is important at times to consider the purposes of the various writers and the role their stories play. This will help us understand not only the whole story, but also the way certain things are written (especially some of the annals of Sennacherib).

³ See discussion in Sagan, Scott, "Nuclear Alerts and Crisis Management", *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1985), pp. 99-139.

Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us (2 Chron. 29:6-10).

After restoring Temple worship, Hezekiah ordered a long overdue celebration of the Passover. He sent invitations not just to the Judahites, but also to the residue of the ten tribes that either made it to Judah before the Assyrian onslaught of the Northern Kingdom, or had managed to escape deportation and remain in Israel (2 Chron. 30:1, 10-11). The Passover was celebrated in Mosaic form,⁴ with the people being taught anew how Yahweh had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh, how Yahweh had fought their battles, and miraculously provided for the people. From all over Israel and Judah, those in attendance “rejoiced” and “there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 30:26).

It was after this time of intense worship, learning, and building up of faith that the people went throughout the land breaking idols and the poles, pillars, and altars used in the worship of idols (2 Chron. 30:1). The people were renewed in their faith and practice. They began tithing, and honored not just the Lord, but also his priests and people. Surely these were exciting times for Judah. No doubt the people were motivated by the recent upheavals and the Assyrian juggernaut that had destroyed the northern homeland, decimated the population of ten tribes, and subjugated almost all of the known world. In the midst of this was the promise to Moses,

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth (Deut. 28:1).

Somewhere in this time, Hezekiah put his faith into practice. He quit paying his annual taxes to Assyria. As we read through the Assyrian annals, it seems that Hezekiah did not rebel alone, but he led a coalition of other small nations, including Syria (“Hatti” in Assyrian records), Tyre and Sidon, and to some extent Philistia.⁵ The Chronicler makes a point of tying Assyria’s reaction into the time

⁴ The people did not fully keep the Passover as ordered by Moses. Their errors, however, were unintentional and the Lord honored Hezekiah’s prayer, “May the good LORD pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness” (2 Chron. 30:18-19).

⁵ The Biblical text explains that Hezekiah “struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city” (2 Kings 18:8). Assyrian records show that Hezekiah

period after Judah's worship and turning to the Lord, giving the reader pause that things do not always work exactly as we expect them to!

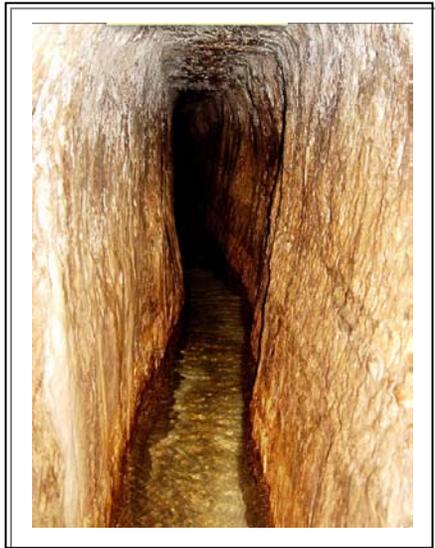
After these things and these *acts of faithfulness*, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself (2 Chron. 32:1).

DEFCON 4

Hezekiah saw that an Assyrian invasion was likely and he moved to DEFCON 4, "increased security measures for above normal war readiness." Certainly, it must have occurred to Hezekiah that his act of obedience had resulted in a crisis, not a readily apparent blessing! Hezekiah began preparing for war by setting up the defenses of Jerusalem. He stopped up the water sources outside the defensive walls, and set up water for those inside (ready to endure a siege). In 2 Chronicles 32, the Chronicler records other measures taken by Hezekiah in this crisis. He re-fortified important walls that had been broken down. He added an additional wall, and made "weapons and shields in abundance" (2 Chron. 32:5). He re-organized his army and spoke encouragement and godly wisdom to his people:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:7-8).

Among the preparations was the building of a conduit to bring water into the city and deposit it into a pool (2 Kings 20:20). James Hoffmeier relates the excitement of the 19th century discovery of this tunnel, which still carries water through the



took over the Philistine city of Ekron, imprisoning its king and getting the remaining Philistines to join his Assyrian rebellion:

The officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron who had thrown Padi, their king, (who was) under oath and obligation to Assyria, into iron fetters and handed him over in a hostile manner to Hezekiah, the Judean, took fright because of the offense they had committed."

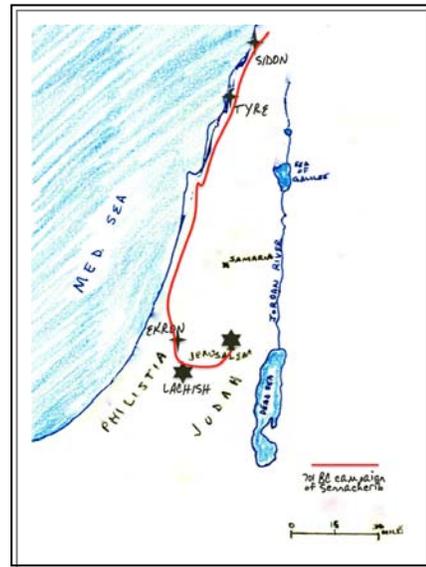
Translation by Cogan, Mordechai, *The Raging Torrent, Historical Inscriptions From Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, (Carta 2008), at 114.

limestone hill of Ophel.⁶ The tunnel is roughly the length of 6 football fields and was dug by workers working from both ends to the middle. An inscription was found on the wall of the tunnel detailing how the tunnel was dug. While the script does not mention Hezekiah by name, it is written in the early Hebrew script that dates to the reign of Hezekiah. If you go to Israel, pay the money and walk this tunnel! Think of the workers working in fear of an invasion, recognizing the need for water to withstand a siege!

The readiness was important for as soon as he could finish his work against a Babylonian uprising, the Assyrian king Sennacherib turned his attention to Hezekiah's organized rebellion. In 701 BC, he started his march southwest toward Judah and the other rebellious kings.

Before reaching Judah, Sennacherib took over the lands and leaders of Hatti, Sidon (the Sidonian king, Sennacherib claims, was so awed by the splendor of Sennacherib and his army that "he fled overseas far-off."⁷), and Philistia. Every step along the way, Sennacherib overwhelmed his enemies. Before long, Judah was the sole member of the Anti-Assyrian coalition still standing.

Sennacherib then began his invasion of Judah.



DEFCON 3

The Prophet Historian writing Kings gives the general statement that,

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them (2 Kings 18:13).

Sennacherib's records go into more detail:

As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I besieged 46 of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number. Using packed-down ramps and applying battering rams, infantry attacks by mines, breeches, and siege machines (or perhaps: storm ladders), I conquered (them). I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses,

⁶ Hoffmeier, James, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, (Oxford 2008).

⁷ Translated by Cogan, *op cit.*, at 112.

mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil.⁸

The Assyrian army went to Judah's second major city, Lachish. At this important defensive point, guarding the route northeast into Jerusalem, Sennacherib wrought such destruction that he made a relief of his battle scenes a centerpiece on the wall of his palace in Nineveh.

At this point, Hezekiah was panicked. He decided he had chosen the wrong course of action and went to work to avert war on Jerusalem. Hezekiah sent a messenger to Sennacherib while the cleanup efforts at Lachish were going on. The messenger conveyed Hezekiah's apology:

"I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear." (2 Kings 18:14).

Sennacherib then demanded so much that Hezekiah had to strip the treasury and the temple, sending silver and gold to Sennacherib at Lachish. Lachish gives the figures of materials given by Hezekiah as larger, including the same 30 talents of gold, but Sennacherib claims the silver was over twice what is listed in the Bible. (As discussed in footnote 7, scholars recognize the exaggeration that was commonplace and expected in these types of records). Sennacherib also claimed as tribute cloth, weapons, chariots, soldiers, and more. Based on the Biblical texts, this was likely Sennacherib listing his spoils of war as payola or tribute to make it look like he had a strong victory over Hezekiah.

In spite of the tribute and apology Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib, his crisis was not over. Sennacherib then sent three officials to Jerusalem with "a great army from Lachish."

DEFCON 2

The United States armed forces define DEFCON 2 as "the next step to nuclear war." Here Hezekiah, the faithful king who led the people in their greatest times of obedience since the kingdoms had divided, was at a crisis of utmost seriousness. His own life was on the line, but more than that, his family, his city, and his country were hanging by a thread. It is one thing to prepare for war; it is another altogether to view the opposing army outside your gate!

⁸ *Ibid.*, at 114-115. We should note that these records are ripe for exaggeration as their purpose is to make the king look as good as possible. The numbers of captives deported exceed the best population estimates at the time. There is a good bit of scholarship describing this practice of magnifying in memorializing the king's achievements. See notes of Cogan at 112, 120.

The Prophet Historian almost sounds like a modern war correspondent as he reported:

And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Washer's Field. And when they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder (2 Kings 18:17-18).

Sennacherib sent three messengers, "the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh" with the army and a personal message for Hezekiah. Each of these is an officer title within the Assyrian army. The Tartan "is generally recognized as the commander-in-chief."⁹ The Rab-saris was the king's chief eunuch who commanded the royal army.¹⁰ The Rabshakeh was the "Chief Cup Bearer," but his role was not one of supplying the king with his morning juice! He was another army commander.¹¹

These high positioned officials with their army came within hearing range of Jerusalem's defensive walls, calling out for Hezekiah. Hezekiah did not come to hear their message. Instead, he assumed a position equal to the king of Assyria, he sent three messengers of his own! The Assyrians then delivered their message of intimidation:

And the Rabshakeh said to them [Hezekiah's three officials], "Say to Hezekiah, "Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. But if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem"? (2 Kings 18:19-22).

⁹ Tartan comes from the Assyrian *turtānu*. Matilla, Raija, *The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, (Univ. of Helsinki 2000), at 153 explains the roles of all three officials.

¹⁰ From the Assyrian *rab ša-rēši*, *ibid.*, at 161.

¹¹ From the Assyrian *rab šāqê*, *ibid.*

If you were reading this in Hebrew, then you would be struck by the repeated use of the word *batach* (בטח) translated “trust” or “confidence.” They are asked “on *what* do you trust?” and “in *whom* do you trust?” Trust is a key word in Hezekiah’s crisis management system. The writer of Kings in overview used this same Hebrew word when he said of Hezekiah, “He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel” (2 Kings 18:5). The Assyrian generals challenged the trustworthiness of not only Pharaoh, but also Yahweh! It is mildly impressive, although not surprising, that the Assyrians knew the name of Hezekiah’s God. The way they challenged Hezekiah’s trust in Yahweh, however, speaks the difference between knowing Yahweh’s name, and knowing Yahweh! The Assyrians asserted that Yahweh would not honor Hezekiah’s trust because Hezekiah had torn down the high places of worship! Hezekiah knew the exact opposite to be true!

Hezekiah’s messengers were acutely aware that the intimidating threats of the Assyrians were not only meant to rattle Hezekiah, but could also rattle the defenders of Jerusalem. They urged the Assyrians to speak Aramaic rather than Hebrew adding, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it” (2 Kings 18:26). This suggestion had the opposite effect. The Assyrians were clearly trying to start some kind of on-shore mutiny. The Rabshakeh continued the taunt in Hebrew:

"Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?"

He then tried the carrot and stick routine (actually he placed the stick first and then the carrot!):

"Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die. And do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the

gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" (2 Kings 18:28-35).

Again, the Assyrians as polytheists did not realize that the monotheistic Hebrews would not be challenged by the idea that other gods failed to rescue their people, so surely the God of Judah would fail. The Judahites knew that Yahweh God was the only God so no other god was available to help the other people. The people did not answer the Assyrians, following instead Hezekiah's instructions to stay silent.

Hezekiah's messengers returned and reported the message of the Assyrians. Hezekiah was distressed. He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, a sign of mourning and humility. Hezekiah went into the temple and sent word to the prophet Isaiah, seeking Isaiah's prayers. The men went to Isaiah who sent them back to the king with words of encouragement:

Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, "Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land." (2 Kings 19:6-7).

The Rabshakeh returned without results to Sennacherib, who having finished at Lachish, was now fighting against the Judahite town of Libnah. Sennacherib sent his general back with a further message, again explaining that no other gods have offered other nations protection, so Hezekiah should not trust that his God is any different. The Rabshakeh returned to the siege at Jerusalem and presented the latest word from Sennacherib in the form of a letter. The crisis now heightened.

DEFCON 1

DEFCON 1 is defined as "nuclear war is imminent." For Hezekiah, he had reached that crisis level in his life. The letter conveyed what was coming, from an army that had not known defeat, with the latest and greatest in technology, with superior manpower and resources, and with all the confidence that accompanies such advantages. The only thing Hezekiah had that the Assyrians were missing was the Lord!

Hezekiah took this letter and did not send it to Isaiah asking Isaiah to pray. This time, Hezekiah went into the temple and prayed himself! His prayer was direct and strong:

"O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD,

and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (2 Kings 19:15-19).

In response to this prayer, the Lord sent Isaiah to Hezekiah with prophetic words of prophecy confirming the Lord's protection and the downfall of Sennacherib. In the night of Hezekiah's DEFCON 1 despair, this message came forth and the Lord also sent his angel into the Assyrian camp and killed a great number of soldiers. Thereafter, Sennacherib left and went home. In a matter of years, he was killed as Isaiah prophesied. While worshipping, two of his sons came in and "struck him down with the sword." Later annals of Babylon gave a bit more detail:

The month Tebeth, day 20, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, his son killed him in a rebellion.¹²

Upon his return to Assyria, Sennacherib had much to say about Hezekiah. He was not able to claim Hezekiah as conquered, so instead put his best political spin on things. Sennacherib bragged about holding Jerusalem in siege for a few years! Sennacherib's prism now found in the Israel Museum reads:

As for Hezekiah, the Judean... he himself I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with armed posts, and made it unthinkable (literally "taboo") for him to exit by the city gate."¹³

In a writing known for its puffing and exaggeration, the best Sennacherib can do is claim he put Hezekiah in time out for a while! This is where his annals then begin recounting the booty and spoils of war Sennacherib brought back claiming they were tribute paid by Hezekiah.

It is no wonder in another place (the "bull colossi"), Sennacherib described Hezekiah in surprisingly blunt terms:

I destroyed the wide district of Judah; the stubborn (and) mighty Hezekiah, its king, I brought into submission.¹⁴ [At least "time out!"]

¹² Translated by Cogan, at 179.

¹³ Translated by Cogan, at 115.

¹⁴ The "bull colossi" was a massive bull with a human head placed as a guard in the king's palace in Nineveh. After being removed, it is now on display at the British Museum. This translation is by Cogan, at 126.

CONCLUSION

One of the most useful aspects of archaeology and historical studies is their assistance in helping us frame historical events into our modern minds. As with so many Bible stories, it is often difficult to realize how real the events were, how raw the emotions were, and how formidable the fear was. All of us are going to experience crises in life. Some seasons will be DEFCON 5, yet others may reach DEFCON 1. Regardless of where the crises are, we need to remember the trust in the Lord that never fails. This is a trust that can move mountains!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...*He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel*” (2 Ki. 18:5).

This story is a wonderful illustration of the meaning of trust. “Trust” gets translated into the Greek of our New Testaments by the verb “believe.” When Jesus spoke to the crisis of the synagogue ruler Jairus, he told Jairus (whose daughter was just reported dead),

Do not fear, only *believe* (Mk 5:36).

Jesus was giving the same lesson that Hezekiah had before him. The crises of life are the times where we are called to trust in the Lord. It is where the rubber hits the road, or in Biblical-speech, the refining fire that purifies and enriches the one who trusts (*i.e.*, the “believer”). At any DEFCON level, the lesson is the same, put the crisis before the Lord and *trust* him. Even if things do not get immediately better, he will not let you down! He is faithful!

2. “*He held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses*” (1 Ki. 18:6).

Growing up, we had a church song I loved. I can remember being four and walking around the house singing it (I only knew the chorus). “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way. To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” The Prophet historian writing Kings puts these two together thousands of years ago. Hezekiah is the best king Judah ever had as one who both trusted and obeyed. When we think it through, this makes great sense. How could we ever think we truly trust the Lord in crisis (or otherwise) when we do not choose to obey him? Following him and his declared will for our lives is a principle and direct result of trusting him. Disobedience declares a distrust: that God does not know what is best for us after all – or that we know better than God and are hence more trustworthy determiners of our course of action. Surely not! Trust and obey!

3. *“And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out he prospered.”* (2 Kings 18:7).

Here is why our God is trustworthy. His goal is to put us into his plan in the ways that are best for us and for the future of his kingdom. This passage is not a promise of riches. Nor is it a promise of long health (as we will see next lesson). It certainly does not promise a trouble free-life.

What this verse means is that trusting in God, obeying his voice, places us in his will in ways that prosper what we are about for him. Paul saw this, even as he was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. He was able to “rejoice” knowing that Christ would be honored in his body, whether by life or death (Phil. 1:18, 21). For Paul, even being sacrificed for others was a cause for rejoicing (Phil. 2:17). Paul knew that God would supply every need “according to his riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

This then is the final epilogue for Hezekiah and should be likewise for us. Let us seek in our lives (regardless of the crisis level) to trust God, obey God, and see his will prosper in our lives!

WANT MORE?

If you are at a crisis place where you could use prayer, please email me at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com. I will keep your email confidential and be honored to pray for you.