

2ND KINGS

Week 29, chapter 19

We closed out our last lesson in 2nd Kings by reading Ezekiel 38 because it is closely connected with 2nd Kings 18 and 19. If you missed that lesson I suggest you obtain it as we'll not be reviewing its importance today.

As we move forward with chapter 19, let's continue discussing King Hezekiah of Judah's reaction to the 2nd message that King Sennacherib of Assyria sent to him, demanding that Judah submit to Assyria or be destroyed. The first message was delivered orally by the viceroy of Assyria, an unnamed man with the title of Rav-Shekeh. The second message was delivered in written form, thus we see that even though Rav-Shekeh had ample opportunity the first time to embellish and add his own personality to the message that the King of Assyria wanted communicated to *Hizkiyahu*, the written document that was the 2nd message demonstrates that the 1st and 2nd messages were basically identical and thus precisely representative of Sennacherib's demands upon Judah; Rav-Shekeh had been faithful in his duty to not add to or subtract from Sennacherib's intent.

While the content and context of Sennacherib's messages were, on the surface, all about persuading *Melech Hizkiyahu* (King Hezekiah) that he didn't stand a chance against the superior armed forces of Assyria, and that resistance would be foolhardy and counter-productive, there was also a spiritual aspect to it that proved to be Sennacherib's undoing. He directly challenged the power and authority of the God of Israel, and even blatantly blasphemed Him by assigning himself the office of God's agent to destroy what remained of God's Kingdom. It was this display of blasphemy that caused King Hezekiah to tear his clothing and don sackcloth as a sign of mourning. And because Sennacherib's message was mostly one of challenge and profaning the God of Israel, Hezekiah did the right thing by bringing the letter to the Temple and placing it before the Lord for the Lord to deal with it.

Thus in our last lesson I told you that 2 important pieces of information were revealed to us in 2nd Kings 19:14. The first was that by sending the message in writing, Sennacherib laid claim to all blame for his blasphemy; he could not say that the messenger altered the message in some unintended way. Thus the Lord God would deal with him directly. But the 2nd principle is that when someone blasphemes God in your presence, it is best to take the matter to God.

Believers have a tendency to think that part of our job description is to defend the Lord. And while we should not turn tail and run when our Lord is insulted or His Word is misrepresented, at the same time we should not think that somehow we have to be the avengers of God's blasphemers. God does not assign Believers the duty of avenging Him; rather the day will come when the blasphemers who are alive at the second coming will be cut down by Christ, and those who died in earlier days in their blasphemy will personally face the Great Judge and have their just reward meted out to them at that time.

To see what happens when a worshipper decides that he or she is to be God's avenger, look no farther than Islam. It is a basic tenet of Islam that adherents are indeed charged with being the avengers of Allah, and therefore every perceived insult to the Muslim god or to his prophet Mohammed is met with mayhem, violence and at times murder. It is better for a true worshipper of Yehoveh and follower of Yeshua to be well equipped with God's Word, and indwelt by His Holy Spirit, to respond sensibly and without rashness to those who pervert and misuse God's Scriptures or who dispute His nature or even His existence. But if one has little to no actual knowledge of the bible, and no real relationship with God, then all one has to respond with is emotion and often unsubstantiated, although passionate, clichés and manmade doctrines.

Let us vow to be wise in such matters since it is self-evident that the world is rapidly abandoning any notion of an all-powerful, living and active Creator God in favor of an all-powerful human intellect. And that in our time even the Body of Believers has been infected with much apostasy (as predicted by Messiah Himself in Revelation 1-4) such that something as basic as knowing who God is, and what His commandments to us are, and what our obligations to Him amount to, have been greatly compromised and replaced with various denominational creeds and loyalties.

It speaks well for King Hezekiah that he did not personally respond to Sennacherib, and he ordered that neither his royal administration nor even the common citizens of Judah should say a word to Sennacherib's 3 representatives. This was a matter for Yehoveh to deal with as He was the aggrieved party; and any action that humans might take on His behalf would amount not to pious involvement but rather to unwarranted interference on God's turf.

Let's begin by re-reading part of chapter 19.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 19:14 – end

What comes next is called the Prayer of Hezekiah. And while to a modern Christian or Messianic or religious Jew there is nothing startling or provocative about this prayer, one must understand that here is the strongest statement in the bible to this point in Israel's history, that not only is God "one", *echad*, in the sense of His nature being a complete unity, but that He is also "one" in the sense of being the ONLY God in existence. In other words, this is the most precise statement of monotheism we have thus far encountered in the Old Testament. In fact it would be fair to say that Hezekiah's Prayer redefines Israel's understanding of monotheism.

All throughout our studies since Genesis I have explained that the Hebrews, along with the rest of the world, fully accepted the notion that there were many gods, and that these gods were territorial. Each

nation had its own set of gods. It's only that Israel was considered to be god-poor in that for some inexplicable reason while everyone else was afforded several gods, Israel had but a single very jealous one that allowed no rivals to rule along with Him in His territory. Thus for Israel, up to King Hezekiah, monotheism meant only one God for the nation of Israel was permitted.

Here we see progressive revelation in action. Suddenly Judah has a king that apprehends an aspect of God's nature and of the spirit world that up to this point has not been understood. Such a revelation could only come from the Lord. And the revelation is that it is not that Israel is to accept no other deity than Yehoveh, it is that there exists no other deity whatsoever than Yehoveh. Thus to worship other gods was to worship a bunch of nothings. No doubt this notion was suspected centuries earlier by God's Prophets and some of God's Judges and probably even King David. But this radical concept of absolute monotheism was for the Hebrews, so far as Scripture tells us, not fully formed and quite fuzzy until this moment that is recorded for us in 2nd Kings 19. And from here forward in the *Tanach* (the Old Testament) we will certainly see that many of God's Prophets and His servants of all kinds began to consciously comprehend that Yehoveh was God of everyone and everything, Hebrew and gentile, of the spiritual and physical spheres, in heaven and on earth. So this had the effect of transforming the concept of idolatry from the fear that other gods could hurt you if you didn't honor them, to fearing that by rebelliously placing loyalty in these false-gods, non-gods, Yehoveh would see your actions as abandoning Him and thus He might do likewise. Now you would have no god to rely upon whatsoever as there was no other god to turn to under any circumstance.

Verse 16 confirms that while *Hizkiyahu* is of course concerned over the survival of his kingdom, his real grief and concern is over the desecration of God's holiness that is contained in Sennacherib's threatening letter. So we hear Hezekiah pray:

2Kings 19:16 CJB

16 Turn your ear, ADONAI, and hear! Open your eyes, ADONAI, and see! Hear the words that Sancheriv sent to taunt the living God.

One thing that becomes crystal clear about King Hezekiah is that his righteousness allows him to view the world as it is and he doesn't seek to candy-coat matters or deny the true situation so as to avoid facing it. In verse 17 Hezekiah openly admits that the part of Sennacherib's letter about Assyria dominating any kingdom they set their sights upon, and destroying any king or nation that resists them too hard, is so. In other words, by its own might Judah has little to no chance of warding off Sennacherib; he can absolutely achieve what he threatens to do to Judah. This is another excellent example of how we ought to approach God. Come to Him honestly and humbly, our eyes wide open. Admit that by all human calculation, by all natural means, our situation seems impossible. How can we break our drug addiction when our best efforts to stay clean, and even the expertise of the most advanced treatment centers, has failed? How can we ever hope for a grown child of ours to come to Messiah when they are living their lives in a degrading, perverse way, denying that God exists, and that they seem to have fully embraced and enjoyed it for the most part? How can we survive an illness that no human scientific means is normally able to conquer? And if we are the nation of Israel, how can we, as so small a nation in landmass and population, withstand the onslaught of scores of millions of sworn enemies that surround us and seek to usher us into extinction if it is not by the might of our advanced military weaponry?

Hezekiah demonstrates that the first step is to bring such an impossible matter before the Lord, acknowledge His sovereignty, admit our helplessness, and contritely declare that He is our only avenue of deliverance on every level.

In verse 18 Hezekiah makes the startling statement (startling in his depth of understanding for his day and age) that these idols that other nations worship are just inanimate pieces of wood and stone. They represent nothing real, and have no inherent power whatsoever. And the proof of that is that the Assyrians could burn-up these many national god-idols at will. After all, if these stone and wood idols really were gods, how could mere humans actually overpower and destroy them? Conclusion: they aren't real, and there are no other gods on earth or in the heavens than Yehoveh. In other words, merely careful human observation of our environment proves that Yehoveh God of Israel is not only real, but that He is the only god. Here is how St. Paul phrased it some 7 centuries later:

Romans 1:18-25 CJB

18 What is revealed is God's anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth;

19 because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them.

20 For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse;

21 because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!

23 In fact, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles!

24 This is why God has given them up to the vileness of their hearts' lusts, to the shameful misuse of each other's bodies.

25 They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator- praised be he for ever. Amen.

So, concludes *Hizkiyahu*, in verse 19, the only logical thing left is for him to throw himself upon God's mercy and ask for God to avenge Himself and at the same time to deliver Judah from an otherwise inevitable take-over by the blasphemous Sennacherib and his admittedly unstoppable military power.

Since God always provided a Prophet to communicate His will to the line of kings that had governed

Israel and Judah for the last 300 years, He sent the prophet Isaiah with a message to Hezekiah that his prayer was heard and here is the Lord's answer. It is a powerful and poetic response that can be broken down into 3 parts:

- 1) Verses 21 – 28 addresses Sennacherib directly about his arrogant boastings.
- 2) Verses 29 – 31 are addressed to Hezekiah directly in order to give him reassurances.
- 3) Verses 32 -34 prophesies that God is going to deliver Judah, and that He is going to judge Sennacherib for his blasphemy.

Verse 21 begins by metaphorically referring to Jerusalem as the “virgin daughter of Zion”. The intended picture is of an unconquered young maiden (a virgin), and this metaphorical use of comparing a daughter of Zion to the Holy City is rather common in bible prophecy. The idea is that because a maiden (an unmarried girl) has never submitted herself to a husband and thus has never become physically or spiritually joined to him, so Jerusalem has never submitted herself to an unwelcome foreign king. And this virgin (Jerusalem) looks upon the unwelcome suitor (Assyria) with scorn that only a female can display (and men, you know what I'm talking about). The “shaking her head at you” is a typical Middle Eastern sign of derision and disgust.

But verse 22 quickly gets to the heart of the matter. King Sennacherib, asks YHWH rhetorically, do you have no idea just whom it is that you have taunted and insulted? You think that you can raise your voice and behave arrogantly towards my anointed King and threaten My Holy City and not understand that it is the God of the Universe that you are challenging and blaspheming? Foolish king, do you actually think you are more powerful than the One who created you along with everything else?

Then in verses 23 and 24 the Lord throws Sennacherib's boastful words back at him, and reminds him that he said that he has so many war chariots that no one, and no god, has ever been able to resist them; meaning neither those nations militaries nor their national deities could derail the Assyrian army. Thus neither could Judah's puny army nor Judah's impotent God resist the Great King of Assyria. He claims that his war machine has conquered the highest mountain, and captured the prized forests of Lebanon in order to extract the biggest trees and best timber for himself. His multitudes of soldiers have, at will, marched into foreign nations and dug wells to take their water (in many nations water was their most precious resource). In fact there are so many Assyrian soldiers that when they crossed the rivers and tributaries of Egypt the sandals on the soldiers' feet absorbed so much water that it dried up the water courses.

But in verse 25 the Lord sets the matter straight. Sennacherib, in reality you were no more than My puppet; a useful tool in My hand. Long ago the Lord had planned to turn the wickedness of the Assyrian Empire loose upon nations and kingdoms that the Lord wanted judged. The fortified cities that Sennacherib conquered, the disheartened and devastated citizens of the conquered lands, only happened because the Lord permitted it and essentially orchestrated it all. Your victims, Sennacherib, were defeated before you ever left your palace to lead your army, says God. But instead of giving Me My due honor and glory, you assume it is your cunning, might, and intelligence that has made it all happen and so you take the credit.

Moving to verse 27, the Lord speaks of His own omniscience. He knows everything, He sees everything, and no plan has ever been devised by any man that He didn't know about beforehand. But the Lord also knows when a human being sets out to go against Him, to rebel, to do what the Lord does not want done. This is speaking of what a human secretly thinks, and of the condition of one's heart that is invisible to all but God. And where does all of this raging and arrogance against God come from? Sennacherib's pride. And so now the Lord is going to use that pride that has come from Sennacherib's unprecedented successes to draw the King of Assyria into his own demise.

As we discussed in our last lesson, especially regarding the war of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38, that war is going to come about because Gog, King of Magog, and in like kind Sennacherib, King of Assyria, are going to have irresistible thoughts supernaturally placed into their minds by the Lord. These thoughts will connect well with the prideful and rebellious natures of Gog and of Sennacherib, so those divinely implanted thoughts will be welcomed by them and thus easily embraced and make their own because it fits their pattern of thinking and meets with their lust for power, wealth, and control.

The result for Sennacherib is that in the end, it will cause him *"to return by the way which you came"*. In other words, some undefined situation is going to cause the King of Assyria to abandon his aspirations of conquering Judah and go back home to his capital city of Ninevah, thoroughly defeated and unable to try again.

Let me pause for a moment and comment that the nature of prophecy is such that only occasionally after pronouncing *what* is going to happen, do we ever learn from the Lord about *how* it is going to happen or what it is going to *look* like. And to a fault, it is virtually unpredictable, and thus difficult if not impossible for the human mind to accurately guess what the circumstances will be that a) causes a prophecy to be fulfilled, and b) what the mechanism and process will be by which it occurs. Not the Prophets, not even John the Baptist who was sent to announce the advent of the Messiah, knew much more than that the time had arrived for it to happen. This is why I have serious reservations about the appropriateness or value of the endless speculations of authors and Pastors about the End Times scenarios. The same thing happened for scores, even hundreds, of years leading up to the birth of Yeshua. Pronouncements that the Messiah had arrived, or where He would be born, or from which family He would come, and the detailed circumstances surrounding His birth and life only served to confuse and mislead the public. And then ultimately because Yeshua's life and person looked nothing like the speculations of the haughty religious authorities, the vast majority of the Jewish public couldn't reconcile what they had been taught to expect with what they had witnessed in Christ's life and death on the cross. So He was rejected, and along with that millions of Jews never accepted their salvation.

I am quite concerned that the many speculations of modern day self-anointed prophets, novelists who write to make money, and Pastors seeking notoriety or are self-deluded into thinking that God has revealed End Times details to them that He has not to anyone else, are going to cause countless Believers to stumble and lose faith, and large numbers of seekers to die unsaved when the anti-Christ arises, when Yeshua returns, when the so-called period of Tribulation beings, and when the sudden disappearance of Believers that has been dubbed the Rapture happens, and it is all ignored or denied because it doesn't fit with the scenarios they've been taught as unassailable church doctrines, in fiction books and in Christian literature as near-fact, or as result of the errant predictions of growing numbers of self-styled prophets.

Like for the Bible characters of old, the how's and why's about divine prophecy are often left out even though it is human nature for us to want to know. But there is never a shortage of folks who somehow feel led to try to fill in the blanks that God has deemed He does not want known. And that rarely turns out for the good. So be alert and don't allow yourself to fall victim to it, or worse, become a participant in it. Learn the Bible so that you can discern what has clearly been written, versus what somebody says is there. Prophecy is useful to tell us what lies ahead, and usually as a warning to prepare, but we only discover the details and the process in retrospect. It has always been that way since time immemorial, and it is a God-pattern that is not going to change just because someone has been given a TV show or a book contract.

In verse 29 the prophetic oracle of Isaiah is directed to King *Hizkiyahu*, and Yehoveh begins by offering a sign of divine guarantee that what He promises will come about. And the sign concerns agriculture. The situation is that Sennacherib's assault on Judah has resulted in the fields going untended and unplanted as the Judeans fled the onslaught. However the Lord says that even though nothing has been planted, the volunteer crops that grow up from the grain seeds that fell off the previous harvested stalks, and even the plants themselves that remained rooted though dormant in the ground, would produce sufficient for the remnant of Judah. But the next year, something even more amazing will happen, a 3rd growth will occur from what was planted 2 years ago. But in the 3rd year, normal farming will begin again, vineyards will be tended and orchards cared for, implying that the war is over, the Assyrians are gone, and peace has broken out.

The Hebrew survivors will flourish. This includes the Judeans who Sennacherib attacked, and those few remnants that remain from the 10 northern tribes. The imagery is of a fruit tree. And people who know anything about trees know that the spread of the roots is proportional to the spread of the tree branches. Thus the further "down" the roots go, the further "up" the branches grow to provide even more fruit. And it is not going to be according to the merit or the effort of the citizens of Judah that this is going to happen, but rather by the zeal of God to protect His holy name.

And now, in verse 32, is the prophecy itself. Sennacherib will never come to Jerusalem despite his threats, his intentions, and by human standards his certainty to do so. Not a single arrow will be fired towards Jerusalem by the enemy forces. None of the feared siege machines will try to scale or break down the defensive walls. And this is because God has determined it, it cannot happen unless He permits it, and He is fighting for Judah for His own sake and to defend the royal line of David (because as was promised, and has happened, from David's line will come the promised Redeemer).

Without fanfare, in typical subdued biblical narrative, we find that the Lord brought a plague upon the Assyrian army killing 185,000 troops. It says that it was the angel of Adonai, the Angel of the Lord, or better yet the *Malach Yehoveh* that carried out the slaughter. It is the same term used in Exodus for whom it was that killed all the Egyptian firstborn the night of Passover, before the Hebrews left Egypt. Since whenever the *Malach Yehoveh*, the Angel of Lord, is quoted (even though that is not the case here in verse 35), it is always done in the 1st person. That is, *I, me*. So unlike regular-angel angels who say that the Lord sent them, or that they are a servant doing the Lord's bidding, the Angel of the Lord always speaks and acts in His own authority. This is why I suggest that despite the more rigid interpretation of the Trinity Doctrine that says God can ONLY manifest Himself in 3 ways (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the Angel of the Lord certainly seems to be a 4th divine manifestation as opposed to him being some

alternative but undefined spirit being.

The way that the verse is worded sounds as though the 185,000 deaths of the Assyrian soldiers took place in one night. However many excellent Bible commentators say that this can't be, and that the "one night" is just hyperbole, or perhaps was added by some editor at a later date to raise the drama and impact. I don't see any need to do such harm to the Scriptures and adopt that viewpoint. In fact what you'll find is that most of the commentators who do not accept the narrative as written come from what is called the Critical School of bible commentary. And a common thread that runs through the Critical School is the philosophy that all profoundly catastrophic biblical happenings such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the earth opening up under the rebellious Israelites out in the wilderness, the parting of the Red Sea, and more must be accounted for by natural means. Thus the destruction of the twin cities must have been a meteorite shower or the eruption of a volcano. The parting of the Red Sea was actually merely the minor drying up of a mud flat called the Reed Sea, which was but a few inches deep at most. They also view most prophecies as people writing about some event after the fact, but creating a religious fairytale that says that the happening was predicted beforehand. And in our case today, the claim is that the number of 185,000 is either vastly inflated or there indeed was a plague but thousands of soldiers would have died of illness over a period of days and weeks, not in merely a few hours. The Critical School does not accept miracles. But if the bible is left devoid of divine miracles, then we have a deeply diminished bible, and a far less able God. So I dismiss their viewpoint out of hand.

Just like in Egypt on Passover night, thousands of Assyrian troops died in hours. The numbers were so staggering, and the Assyrian army was so decimated, that Assyrian records indicate that they were never the same afterward. They were never again able to mount a serious offensive against what was by now a greatly diminished Jerusalem and Judah. Thus it would eventually fall to the Babylonians to take down Assyria, and then conquer Judah to bring down God's judgment upon His rebellious people.

But not only was the prediction fulfilled that Sennacherib would go home, but also that he would die violently. And sure enough, the Bible record matches with the Assyrian record that his own sons assassinated him as he was worshipping his god Nisrokh. Let me comment on a couple of things to end this lesson. First, there is no other mention anywhere of an Assyrian god called Nisrokh, so this is some type of copyist error or early mistranslation. Second, it was not that uncommon in Assyria for a failed king to be assassinated by his own family. The Assyrian society was based on war and conquest and did not easily tolerate failure. Killing was usual and normal, and when a general or even a king suffered a major defeat, blame was assigned and he often didn't survive it when he returned home.

Thus Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon became the new King of Assyria. Next time we'll close out Hezekiah's reign, but in reality 2nd Kings 20 takes a step back in time of several years from where chapter 19 ends.