

TRUSTING IN GOD

The time was around 826 BC. The King of Judah was Hezekiah and he was just declared to be King at an age of 25. The king of Israel at the time was Hoshea and he would be the last king before Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. In 822 BC the Assyrians started a siege of the capital city of Israel (Samaria) and three -years later it fell and the people were carried off to various places under the control of the Assyrians.

Shalmaneser was the Assyrian king at the time. He had invaded Israel some time before this final siege and forced Hoshea to pay tribute but had to re-invade when Hoshea reneged; it is uncertain whether Shalmaneser or Sargon concluded the siege which finally ended the northern kingdom. Sargon came after Shalmaneser and upon his death Sennacherib came to power. The Assyrians had control of most of the Middle East and they demanded tribute from the nations in the area. After the death of Sargon, Judah stopped paying tribute as did many other nations in that area. The new king, Sennacherib, saw that such loss of revenue would hurt the economy of his nation and went about the task of reestablishing control. Judah as well as most of the nations were forced to start paying tribute again.

Assyria invaded Israel and took control of the border towns as a way to enforce the payment of tribute money. It apparently worked to some extent in that Hezekiah offered to pay them a lot of silver and gold that was taken from the Temple with the provision that they stop attacking and go back to Assyria.

Sennacherib was not satisfied with that, he demanded that Jerusalem completely surrender to him. He sent several of his henchmen to Jerusalem and they made their demands. This delegation was met by a delegation from Hezekiah and they heard the demands of the Assyrians. If Jerusalem did not surrender, then the threat included humiliation of the people and an implication of many deaths. We pick up the rhetoric in 2 Kings 18:30

Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

What do we know about Hezekiah other than he started to reign when he was 25 years old and reigned 29 years? Go back to verses 3-8 of 2 Kings 18.

3 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done.

4 He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)

5 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.

6 He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.

7 And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

8 From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory.

What was the spokesman for the king of Assyria trying to do by telling the people of Jerusalem to not let their king persuade them to trust in God. [Apparently, they had heard of Hezekiah's trust in the Lord and they were trying to undermine the trust of the people in their leader who was putting his trust in God. The use of propaganda has been around a long time.

The people had been instructed to not respond to the words of the Assyrians. The delegation from Hezekiah took the message to him. At this point Hezekiah has several options:

1. He could surrender immediately and no one would be killed but all would eventually be displaced to other lands.
2. He could send back a like response and "rattle the swords" against the Assyrians and call their hand on the threat.
3. He could ask for help.

He had already tried to appease them by giving them the silver and gold from the temple and he did so based on his own idea. He thought he could buy them off but that did not work. [What lessons could we learn from Hezekiah's experience in giving the Assyrians the silver and gold? *Don't act in your own wisdom. Don't give in to the demands of terrorist - they will see that as a sign of weakness and they will make ever more demands.* How do we apply these lessons to what is happening in the world today?]

Option 2 was not a workable solution since Judah was quite weak compared to Assyria. [What lessons can we learn from this non-option? *Be prepared to take care of survival needs.*]

Option 3 was the only option left - If this were "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, then we would say this was the "phone a friend" option. The problem was that all the friends of Judah were not able to help since they had been fighting the Assyrians also.

Hezekiah was at the point that we find ourselves quite often, when all else fails, **then** we call on God or we pray and ask others to pray. We see him taking this step in the first four verses of Chapter 19.

1 ¶ When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD.

2 He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

3 They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them.

4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."

The tearing of clothes was a response to hearing God blasphemed. Putting on sackcloth was to show that he was in mourning. He went to the Temple of the Lord because this was symbolic of God's dwelling place. What do we do when we hear God being blasphemed today? Usually, nothing. It has become all too commonplace. Because there is no reaction from Christians, we have an epidemic of disrespect for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that is evident in television, in print media, and even in so-called works of arts.

We don't normally have special clothes we wear when we are in mourning (some wear black to funerals). Can you think of a situation in the last several years that would have signaled a time of mourning for our nation? [9-11]

People will still gather at the church to pray in times of crises.

While Hezekiah was in the temple, a delegation of high level officials paid a visit to Isaiah, the leading prophet of that time. Their message to him was that it was a time of national crisis and the nation did not have the resources to deal with it. They were hoping that since God had been insulted by the Assyrian king, that maybe God Himself would do something.

5 When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah,

6 Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

7 Listen! I am going to put such a spirit in him that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.'"

God had raised up the Assyrians so they would bring judgement on the nations of that part of the world. However, they failed to acknowledge God as the Lord and (on top of ignoring the Lord) they insulted Him. Therefore, God would take action and He would protect Judah for the sake of Hezekiah who trusted in Him.

The Assyrians did not give up easily. They came back, this time with a letter, that said much of what the delegation had told them earlier. Hezekiah had learned his lesson, he went immediately to the Temple and laid the letter out before the Lord.

14 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.

15 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.

16 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.

17 "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.

18 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.

19 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."

Notice the words and thoughts of Hezekiah's prayer

1. Starts with praise before petition. He acknowledged God as Lord of all and Creator of all things. This is a recognition of the sovereignty of God. God is in control and He is not surprised by anything.
2. This verse can be classified under the heading of proper protocol in making a petition to God. It was not intended to imply that God did not know what was going on, but was a way of expressing humility. Our great problems and crises are insignificant in the grand scheme of things when we consider the greatness of the Creator God who is over all things.
3. Confession and acknowledgment of the reality of the situation in which Hezekiah found himself and his nation.
4. Petition for God to act on our behalf. Notice that the reason stated was not just for selfish purposes but so that God would be glorified by what happened.

What do we do when we are faced with a crisis situation? Usually, if we have any resources available to us, then we will rely on those resources until they are expended. Eventually, we will have a crisis that will go beyond our own personal resources and that is typically when we think to put our trust in God.

What should we do when we are faced with a crisis situation? Trust in God from the very beginning. Start with God and His resources.