

WHEN THINGS DON'T LOOK TOO GOOD

At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel.

Second Kings 18:10

When Isaiah was around, the main threat against Israel and Judah was from Assyria. These people were proud (Isa. 10:12), brutal and godless. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh (Gen. 10:11; 2Kings 19:36).

1. Note how the LORD felt about the Assyrians according to Nahum 1:14 -
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During the time of Isaiah, Israel had survived seasons of civil war by dividing into two nations. To the north was a confederacy of ten tribes, which became known as *Ephraim* or *Israel*. To the south this nation became known as Judah. Each nation had its own king. Judah maintained a royal dynasty with the descendants of King David. Israel however refused to allow the dynasty (or 'House of') David from ruling over them (this had its origins in 1Kings 12:16). Their kingdom was marred by coups and betrayals. The Books of First and Second Kings largely details the history of Israel, whereas the Books of First and Second Chronicles details the history of the kings of Judah. Isaiah is mentioned in Kings and Chronicles.

2. How did Assyria begin its oppression of Israel as implied in 2Kings 15:19-20?

3. According to 2Kings 15:29 was this a good long-term strategy on the part of Israel? Explain-

Even though the kings of Israel had failed to appease the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser, with money, the king of Judah thought he could succeed at winning the favour of the Assyrians using the same method.

4. Note where king Ahaz sourced the money for the king of Assyria (2Kings 16:7-8)
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If we read the following verses after the above reference we see that king Ahaz totally submitted himself to the Assyrians. He changed whatever he could in order to please and impress the Assyrians: *even spiritual things*. Today we must be vigilant not to surrender our finance to the “Assyrians” (the gurus of finance and power) or change our spirituality to conform with their system of worship (impressive and costly shows).

5. Note how Second Chronicles 28:1-2 sums up the life of king Ahaz.
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6. Ahaz did not walk with or trust the LORD God. Having read Second Kings 16:7-8, do you see any irony in the statement found in Second Chronicles 28:5? What can we learn from this? (Note verse 6.)
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Into this environment was born Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz (2Kings 16:20). He would have seen his father do some detestable things (2Chronicles 28:3-4).

7. List some of things mentioned in these Scriptures above that describe the wickedness of Ahaz-
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If anyone was schooled in evil and wickedness (considering the example of his father), it was most certainly Hezekiah. And surely this would have led to Hezekiah to follow in his father’s footsteps. Yet something happened to prevent this.

8. Note how Hezekiah’s life is described in Second Kings 18:1-7. Describe Hezekiah’s character and walk with the Lord based on this passage-
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9. Why did Hezekiah succeed in all he did? (2Kings 18:8)

During Hezekiah's life the prophet Isaiah guided him. Most probably the account of Second Kings, which was probably written and edited by Jeremiah, was based on the records of Isaiah. Many prophets were appointed to serve as royal historians (note 2Samuel 24:11; 1Chronicles 29:29). It is extremely likely that Isaiah was the royal historian. As such he would have been with young Hezekiah as he grew up. He would have been highly qualified to retell the young Hezekiah all that God had done and why He had done it. He may have even warned Hezekiah not to emulate his father's wickedness.

10. Most probably under Isaiah's influence, Hezekiah initiated some radical reforms. List some of those reforms, and what do they tell us about Hezekiah? (2Kings 18:4-8)

At this time the Assyrians came against the northern Kingdom of Israel and besieged it. They took control of its capital at Samaria, and exiled the Israelites to Assyria as captives (2Kings 18:9-11). The Assyrians at this time were the world emperors. Hezekiah initially rebelled against the Assyrians domination (2Kings 18:7). When he realised it was perhaps wiser to pay the demanded tribute than be destroyed, the Assyrians were incensed. In a rather lengthy speech outside the gates of Jerusalem, they did their best to intimidate the people of Judah. Many of their taunts were half-truths and blatant lies.

11. Note their taunts and list some of the half-truths and lies they used to intimidate the people of God. (2Kings 18:17-25)

From this we can also see how the enemy taunts us in our walk with God. He will use lies and half-truths to dissuade us from following God. Hezekiah had done the right thing, but now it looked like things weren't going too good. But with the encouragement of the prophet Isaiah (note 2Kings 19:2), Hezekiah was able to lead Judah into one of the most miraculous military victories in all of history...

12. Read 2Kings 19:3-4. Based on this how was the godly Hezekiah really feeling about the threats from the Assyrians?
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Rather than turn away from God in times of intense pressure, the godly need to turn to Him for strength and provision. This is what Hezekiah did.

13. How would you have felt, and why, if you had received the words that Isaiah sent to Hezekiah if you were in the same situation? (2Kings 19:6-7)
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Hezekiah received a brief reprieve when the Assyrians suddenly left temporarily to attend to another military matter (2Kings 19:8-9). But before leaving, they left Hezekiah an extremely intimidating letter, which greatly distressed him (2Kings 19:10-13).

14. What can we learn from Hezekiah's response to this letter? (Note 2Kings 19:14-19)
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Isaiah is then sent to Hezekiah with an extremely encouraging word from the Lord (2Kings 19:20-28) in response to his prayer. Isaiah also gives him a sign from God, which was shortly fulfilled. God did thwart the Assyrians plans to attack Jerusalem. In one night the Angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2Kings 19:35). Much of the early parts of the Book of Isaiah deal with the threat posed by the Assyrians, and the LORD's response to these threats. Therefore, even when things don't look too good, if we seek and obey God, they can turn out OK.

Amen.