

Strength to Bring Forth

It was a dire situation for the nation of Judah. For a change, they had a good king named Hezekiah on the throne. He had broken down idols and shown his devotion to the one true God (II Kings 18:3-4). Of him the writer of II Kings penned the words, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses." (II Kings 18:5-6). Judah prospered under the reign of Hezekiah. That being the case, how could we possibly refer to a situation during this time as "dire"?

A key phrase is found in II Kings 18:7 where it says that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." During this time the Assyrians were the world power. The Assyrian king Shalmanezar and his troops had already routed the northern kingdom of Israel as well as many other nations (II Kings 17). For a king to defy Assyria was to lead his country to certain destruction, or so it seemed.

The pressure that Hezekiah felt from the Assyrians did eventually get to him for we find in II Kings 18:13-16 that he compromised by trying to pay off the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib with silver and gold from the temple after Sennacherib had taken some of the fenced cities of Judah. Hezekiah soon learned however that Sennacherib would not be appeased with a handful of precious metals. The wicked Assyrian king wanted all of Judah, including the city of Jerusalem.

Boldly and arrogantly, Sennacherib sent some of his leaders to Jerusalem to announce his intentions. He did not ask for a private meeting with Hezekiah. Instead he had his leaders stand outside the walls of Jerusalem and shout his message to the people of that city. He challenged the ability of Hezekiah to lead. He even sent the message that God had instructed him to come and destroy Jerusalem. Then he delivered the intended knockout punch by sending the message that since Assyria had defeated all of the neighboring kingdoms and their gods, there was no way possible for Judah to escape their power. That same God whom he had earlier said sent him to destroy Jerusalem, was, ironically, now not strong enough to save Jerusalem if the residents decided to start asking Him for help (II Kings 18:33-35).

In II Kings 19 we find Hezekiah's response to the challenges of Sennacherib. He and his countrymen were in that situation earlier referred to as "dire." They were about to lose everything. Where would they turn? What would their answer be? The people of Judah were anxiously awaiting Hezekiah's response.

Fortunately for Judah, they had a righteous king on the throne. Hezekiah heard the threats and immediately turned to God. In II Kings 19:3 he presented the dilemma to the prophet Isaiah, "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth." The threats of Sennacherib were real and the people were frightened. They did not know what to do. Like the mother giving birth who due to exhaustion has no more strength to push her child from the womb, Judah was mentally, emotionally and even spiritually drained. Their leader made the right move. He did all that he could in going to God, baring his soul before him and asking for help. No nation around him could be of assistance. Compared to Assyria, all of the other countries were inferior in military power. As evidenced by the verse earlier noted in this paragraph, Hezekiah could not at this point rely on his own military might to fend off the Assyrians. His people were too frightened and unsure of what to do.

God's response to Hezekiah through Isaiah was simple and to the point. Sennacherib would fail in his attempt to ransack Jerusalem and then ultimately he himself would fall (II Kings 19:6-7). Later when Hezekiah received another message from Sennacherib, this time in written form, he again went to the Lord and again received the promise of God's protection. In fact, the Lord even went so far as to say "concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it." (II Kings 19:32). In other words, Assyria would not set the first step into the city.

As II Kings 19 concludes we read of how 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died and then later Sennacherib himself was murdered by two of his sons. For all of his boasting and threatening that so unnerved the people of Jerusalem, Sennacherib now lay dead and powerless.

Whenever we feel that we are "up against the wall" so to speak, we should remember the events in II Kings 18 and 19. The strength to bring forth is available to us if we will turn to the source for this strength, the Almighty God (I Corinthians 10:13).