

## What's the Message – Lesson 63

Today we see the contrast between an unfaithful king, Ahaz, and a good king, Hezekiah.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. O Lord, we pray that you would keep your family – the New Testament church – continually in the true faith, so that relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace we may always be defended by Your mighty power. Amen.

Last time we saw the ambitions of the ruthless Athaliah result in her just end, and the Davidic throne was restored in the person of King Joash. As long as the good priest Jehoiadah lived, Joash was true to Yahweh. But after the death of the priest, both the people and the king resumed their idolatry. By the fourth generation after Joash, the king was Ahaz, and trust in the Lord had all but disappeared as Ahaz walked in the way of the kings of Israel.

It was a time of military scheming, with the king of Syria and the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel working together to force Ahaz to join in their plan of getting out from under subjugation to the king of Assyria. And although the prophet Isaiah told Ahaz that the Lord would protect His people, Ahaz chose to put his trust in an alliance with the king of Assyria instead. As we read in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16, verse 7 . . . *So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."* This was an invitation the king of Assyria was only too happy to accommodate. But this now meant that Judah was a tribute-paying vassal to Assyria, and would remain so for 100 years.

Ahaz then tried to model the worship in Jerusalem after the altar and gods of the Assyrian king, and defiled the House of the Lord, leading the people even further astray from worshipping and following Yahweh. But Ahaz soon died, and was succeeded by his son Hezekiah. 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 18, verses 5 and 6 say this about this new king:

*Hezekiah trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him . . .and the Lord was with him; wherever he went forth, he prospered.*

A more detailed account of the good that Hezekiah accomplished is given in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, chapters 29 through 32 in restoring the House of the Lord and the worship there. But Hezekiah also attempted to free Judah from their vassalage to Assyria, and drew the full wrath of the army of Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, as a result. The temple was stripped of all its silver and gold as the price of tribute, but the Assyrian army came into Judah and captured all the fortified cities anyway, and laid siege to Jerusalem.

And Hezekiah prayed to God, saying: *So now, O Lord our God, save us, and deliver us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.* Then Isaiah, the prophet, sent word to Hezekiah: *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 cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.*

The prophecy of Isaiah came true as the Lord delivered Judah. Sennacherib was killed by two of his sons while he was praying in the house of his false god in Nineveh. And though they were still vassals of Assyria, Jerusalem had been spared from destruction.

With that summary of the lowlights of Ahaz, and the highlights of the life of good king Hezekiah, we have but one king left in the descendants of David to review before the fall of Jerusalem, and will save that for next time. Teacher, once again we have seen an exemplary life, this time in Hezekiah, a life of faithfulness to God. But what is the lesson we should draw from this ancient story? What is the message for us?

First, this story is about much more than a life of futility. Being obedient to God will not automatically relieve us from a life of trial, and even tribulation.

Just because Hezekiah was faithful to the Lord, and did good acts that were visible to all, did not mean that he would be free of challenges. Nor will we. We live in a world filled with sin, and Satan challenges us every day. The question becomes: “do you stand alone?” Do you rely only on your own strength? Is the focus on “poor me?” When we pray to God for help and relief, is the focus on me, God doing something for my sake because I have been so good?

Or do we pray like Hezekiah, that any act of God to help us will be to show the mercy of God, so other people will see “that You, O Lord, are God alone.”? SOLI DEO GLORIA. To God alone the glory!

Next time we will focus on the last good king of Judah, Josiah.