

Two Year Bible Trek

Week 60

2 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 28-39; Psalms 46, 76, 80, 135

Key Concepts: The key concept in these readings is that Judah (unlike Israel) will survive the arrival of the Assyrians and Isaiah will play a key role in bolstering their morale.

Stories: 2 Kings begins with the rise of good King Hezekiah, then continues with his religious reforms including the removal of the bronze serpent which Moses had created, the approach of the Assyrians (following Hezekiah's refusal to pay tribute), Hezekiah paying tribute, then Assyria returning to take Jerusalem (this is because Hezekiah once again joined a revolt), Isaiah promising that Judah would survive, and the mysterious flight of the Assyrians. Isaiah making a series of proclamations about Judah's spiritual issues, warnings against being in league with Egypt (first rebellion against Assyria), images of future hope, the destruction of God's enemies, the restoration of Zion, and a retelling of the same history found in the 2 Kings passage. The Psalms are about God's protection of Judah and ultimate victory over God's enemies.

Brief Summary: We enter into one of the most tumultuous times in the history of Judah. On the one hand we witness the rise of one of the best kings Judah ever had, Hezekiah. He initiated religious reforms including the destruction of various shrines established by his father Ahaz (which included removing the Assyrian gods...an act of rebellion) and the removal of cult objects such as the bronze serpent. He also attempted to draw together what was left of the northern kingdom into a single unified nation.

Hezekiah was also a nationalist who was continually looking for ways to become independent of Assyria. Early in his reign he does not move toward independence because Assyria was simply too powerful. But with the death of Sargon (king of Assyria 722-705 BCE) Judah and other nations moved to rebel. This action was opposed by Isaiah as foolishness. As the Assyrians regained their power Hezekiah offered tribute, which meant stripping the Temple of all of its gold and silver. Later around 701, Hezekiah joined another rebellion which was crushed with great ferocity. The only city which survived was Jerusalem, even though many of its soldiers had deserted. While Isaiah was no fan of rebellion he affirmed that on this occasion Assyria would not take the city.

When we read Isaiah what we need to remember is that he is prophesying during this period of great political and religious upheaval. During the reign of Ahaz (as noted in an earlier lesson) Isaiah preached against the religious apostasy of the king and of the nation. During the time of Hezekiah, Isaiah preaches (Isaiah 30:1-17 and 31:1-3) against the nation's tendency to trust in other nations for their salvation. He warns the king and the people that it is foolishness to depend on the Egyptians for assistance (which proved to be true), though the Egyptians did help weaken Assyria for a short time. At the same time Isaiah is offering both criticism of the civil and religious leaders, words of destruction for God's enemies, including Assyria, and words of hope for the nation itself. Isaiah's position of importance is shown in that Hezekiah regularly consulted him on religious/political matters.

The Psalms in this section, though we are not able to accurately date them, offer the same sense of hope that is offered by Isaiah. They speak of God's eternal protection of Judah/Israel (Psalm 46), God as a warrior who defeated Judah/Israel's enemies (Psalm 76), a prayer for deliverance from national enemies (Psalm 80) and praise for God's mighty deeds in protecting God's people (Psalm 135).

1. What would religious reform look like today?
2. How do you balance religious and political obligations?
3. What prophetic word would you bring to our nation?