

God's Way Out

"For Us and For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 9. The Way of Release from Invaders

If you are facing some great danger or an apparently insuperable difficulty, this chapter may give you new confidence and peace in your life.

HERE is a message of hope to all who have alien armies in their land: God has often intervened suddenly to cast out the invaders and to bring relief to invaded countries. He can make a way out of seemingly hopeless situations. One of these amazingly sudden interventions was the judgment on Sennacherib's army when he invaded Judea in the days of the good king Hezekiah.

Sennacherib was the great king of Assyria whose army invaded Judea about 713 BC. A merciless tyrant, he treated with relentless cruelty all those nations which stood out against him. Already the kings of Assyria had crushed every smaller kingdom which had dared to resist them. Gozan, Haran, Arphad, Sepharvaim--no country or city had been able to stand against those cruel, bearded destroyers with their chariots. They would gouge out the eyes of their captives; they would even skin them alive! Brutal, devilish men!

Jerusalem in Peril

And now the great dictator, Sennacherib, had sent a powerful force against Jerusalem. The rest of his army he planted across the road from Egypt so that no possible help should come from the land of the Nile. He would gain such a victory that his sons' Esar-haddon, Adrammelech, and Sharezer, would boast of their father's might forever! While Sennacherib himself watched the Egypt road, Rabshakeh, his fierce general, taunted the leaders of Judah at their very gates, demanding surrender. The situation seemed hopeless! "Let not Hezekiah deceive you," shouted this Assyrian Minister of Propaganda. "He shall not be able to deliver you."

"Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord," he blasphemed. "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria." No, they had not. And Hezekiah's heart quailed. Many a Hebrew face grew pale. Many a breast beat with terror at the thought of those ferocious troops smashing through the gates. The future was dark with fear.

If Hezekiah had been able to get any news from his other towns he might have been still more dismayed. For Lachish, his chief defenced city in the west, had gone--stormed by Sennacherib. And Libnah was now surrounded. [1] How Sennacherib gloried over the fall of Lachish on his return to Nineveh! He had a great series of stone carvings made giving the details of his glorious victory there. These carvings may be seen today in the British Museum. They were transported to London from the ruins of Sennacherib's proud capital many years ago.

Can God's Prophet Hold Out Hope?

Hezekiah sent to the prophet Isaiah. Was there any help in God at this time? he asked. Was there any way out of this trouble? Swiftly came Isaiah's answer--a prophecy of hope in the blackness: "Be not afraid!"

"Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land," continued the prophet. "And I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

Strangely enough, Rabshakeh did "hear a rumor," just as the prophecy had suggested. He heard that Tirhakah, the king of Ethiopia, was advancing across the desert from Egypt to make war with the Assyrian armies. He therefore withdrew his army from Jerusalem so that in union with Sennacherib's main army, they could crush this new foe. Little did his men know they would never reach Sennacherib!

The "rumor" had come, according to Isaiah's words. Would the other part of the prophecy be fulfilled? Sennacherib himself had not the least thought of retreating to his own land. "Just a brief battle with Ethiopia," he reasoned; "of course it will be another victory--then Jerusalem shall be crushed."

Another blasphemous proclamation was sent to King Hezekiah by Rabshakeh as he withdrew. "Let not thy God deceive thee," said the bullying message. "What god has ever been able to stay the conquering might of the king of Assyria."

It Is Good to Take Our Problems to God

Hezekiah took the fearsome document up to the temple. He spread the sheet out before God and earnestly entreated mercy and deliverance. "Incline Your ear, O Lord," he cried. "O Lord, our God, save us from his hand."

And once more came a message from the divine Protector, like a welcome glow of warm light in the darkness! "The Assyrian shall not come into this city nor shoot an arrow there," rang out the new prophecy from the lips of Isaiah. "I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake," said God.

Strange prophecy! To the men and women in the city it must have sounded almost too good to be true. How could it be fulfilled? But God had spoken. Hope lit many a home that evening when Jerusalem mothers pressed their good night kisses on children's lips as they went to bed. "Precious word of prophecy," they must have thought. "No, my darling, the wicked men will not come here. God has promised."

That night Rabshakeh's host lay down to sleep, boastful and confident of victory. But that night the angel of the Lord went, forth through their camp and smote them with the unanswerable stroke of death! They never woke again. The "blast" had come--just as foretold! And what a "blast!" One hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians died that night! One hundred and eighty-five thousand! "All the men of valor, and the leaders and the captains in the camp of the king of Assyria." Rabshakeh's biting tongue was silenced forever! His brutal face lay motionless in death!

"By the way that he came shall he return," had the prophecy declared of Sennacherib. Terror fell upon the great king as he heard of the dread night judgment on his eastern army. In fear, shame, and confusion he turned his remaining forces about and marched ignobly and in haste back to his own country never to return!

Never! The prophecy had predicted that he should die by the sword in his own land. A little while after, while he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch, his heathen god, he was assassinated by Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons. They did not glory in their father's might. They smote him with the sword. And Esarhaddon--he took the throne of the dead tyrant.

"Vengeance is Mine! I will repay!" God declares. Every deed of cruelty, every act of oppression, every lying word shall have its just punishment unless there is true repentance. The light of prophecy, which brought hope to God's people, was the death sentence on the cruel and blasphemous Assyrians.

What a Thanks giving!

In the Judean capital there was rejoicing and amazement light and gladness. How wonderfully the word of prophecy had been fulfilled! "Thanks be to God! Hallelujah!" What happiness and peace came now to hearts so recently dark with fear and foreboding! How the mothers hugged the children to their hearts with gratitude and rejoicing! What laughter was heard! What tears of relief they shed! Yes, in just a few hours God can wonderfully make a way out of the gloomiest situation. And He will work for every trusting soul in these our own momentous

times. Do not fear to turn to Him. "Watchman, what of the night?" The cry goes up in these dark distressful days.

Swiftly the answer comes from the Book of God: "The morning comes! If you will inquire, inquire you! Come!" To the ships steaming up the English Channel shines out one guiding light after another. One from the south, the Griz-Nez lighthouse on the French coast. Another friendly blink comes from the north, the English lighthouse on the white cliffs near Dover. Before these are passed the navigator sees a swinging beam from the South Goodwin Lightship. A red light from Deal pier. Then the North Foreland Light. After that many smaller lights--until the steamer anchors safely in her home berth in the London docks.

So the living light of prophecy shines out on our dark waters in these strange, eventful days. Great lights, smaller lights! Danger signals, safety signals! We ignore them to our loss; we heed them and find a clear course home. "We have also a more sure Word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that ye take heed," said the Apostle Peter. We can know what is coming. The Bible's prophetic lights shine brilliantly in these thrilling days. "Come! Inquire!" is God's gracious invitation.

REFERENCE

1. The Bible Comes Alive, Page 120.

