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Hezekiah Spread the Letter Before the LORD

37: 14-20

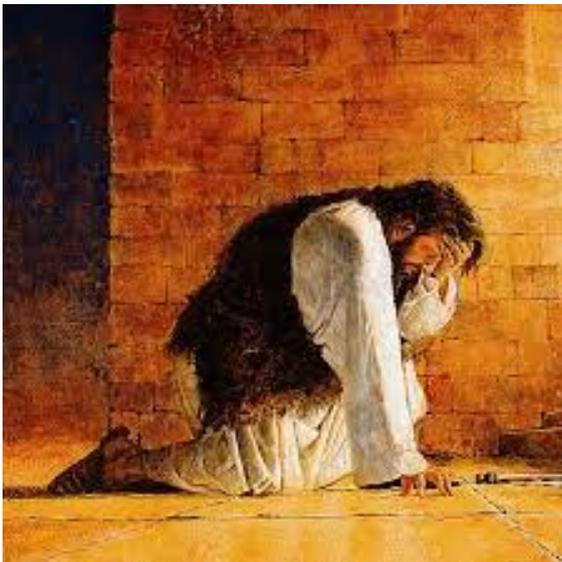
Hezekiah spread the letter before the LORD DIG: On what basis does Hezekiah believe God will help him (see Second Chronicles 32:6-8)? How does Hezekiah's prayer compare to what the LORD had called the leadership of Judah to do all along (see 1:15)? What truths about God does Hezekiah grasp? Why does he dwell on these? How is the point of his prayer like that of the Exodus (see Exodus 15:14-16)?

REFLECT: Hezekiah models how to respond to intimidation. What big threat to Christianity do you worry about? What might intimidate you about that, except for what Hezekiah models for you? What does this prayer have in common with that of the disciples in Acts 4:23-31? What do these prayers show you about God's and Hezekiah's characters? What do you see here about the proper focus of prayer?

Hezekiah, king of **Judah**, had received **Sennacherib's** letter denouncing **the LORD**. This was a critical moment in the history of **Isra'el**. What will **she** do at this time, stripped of all **her** allies, face-to-face with the crushing realities of which the field commander had spoken? Will **she** agree with **the Assyrian** field commander that **ADONAI** is simply one more national god, helpless before **Sennacherib**? Or will **she** admit the foolishness of **her** ways and, for the first time in a very long time, commit **herself** to **God** alone? Had **she** sided with **Sennacherib**, all succeeding human history would have been very different. For **Judah's** unconquerable faith that **the LORD** was unique, was the necessary ground for the coming of **the Messiah**. In fact, that challenge was what made all the difference. It was like a slap in the face. It was as if **Judah** said, "Thanks, I needed that." **She** finally realized what **Isaiah** had been saying all along: **No one can be trusted but God!**

When **Hezekiah received the letter from Sennacherib he read it (37:14a)**. Repentance was in order; not only repentance, but also responsibility. City after city had fallen to **Sennacherib** and long lines of refugees were already snaking their bitter way to exile - and it was all **Hezekiah's** fault. As **king, Hezekiah** was

responsible for leading the people down the wrong path of rebellion with the lunatic alliance with **Egypt**. But **he** doesn't blame anyone else. Rather, it is **he** who must go to the **Temple** and admit the foolishness of his and the nation's dependence on **Egypt**. Whereas Ahaz had refused to even ask for a sign of **God's** help, **Hezekiah** finally realizes that **ADONAI** is **his** only hope. At the end of **his** rope, **he** resorts to prayer. It has finally come to that! So this was a defining moment for **Hezekiah** and for the nation.



Then Hezekiah went up to the Temple of ADONAI. In a crisis, people are normally driven away from **God** or driven to **Him**. They either look to the world for answers, or they are driven even deeper into **the LORD's** embrace. **Hezekiah**, wisely, chooses the latter. **Hezekiah spread it out before ADONAI as a symbolic act, displaying the Assyrian's blasphemies in the presence of God (37:14b).** As with the Maccabees, who spread a copy of the defaced Torah before **ADONAI** (First Maccabees 3:48), this was not an attempt to inform **God** of something He did not already know, but an expression of outrage. He places it before **the LORD** as if to say, "Surely *this* cannot go unanswered."

This was perhaps **Hezekiah's** finest hour. **He** was not perfect. In fact, the mess **he** was in was largely of **his** own making. But in the last analysis, **he** knew that **the LORD** reigned, and therefore nothing was impossible or hopeless.¹³³ Then **Hezekiah** offered a magnificent prayer, proclaiming the basis on which **his** plea for deliverance was made. How feeble it makes our own prayers seem by comparison. **His** prayer was not based on the circumstances in which **he** found **himself**. No, it is

solely based on the character of **ADONAI**. **The king** was not asking that **Sennacherib** be defeated because **Judah** was so righteous. Obviously, it was not. Rather, it was because **the Assyrians** had called **God's** name and reality into question. This is how it should be for us. When it is **ADONAI's** reputation that matters most to us, we are free from the crippling self-concern that will otherwise eat us up. That is what we see in **Hezekiah's** prayer. Here was a man whose personal success and survival are no long the number one thing in **his** life. This was a free man.

And Hezekiah prayed, "ADONAI-Tzva'ot, God of Isra'el, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are YHVH over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, God, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God" (37:15).

Hezekiah's prayer begins and ends with **ADONAI**. Referring to **Him** as the **God of Isra'el**, he recalled the special relationship that **the Jews** had with **ADONAI**. Then **Hezekiah** identifies **the LORD** in two most important ways: as **King** and **Creator**. First, **God's** being **enthroned between the cherubim** refers to **His** presence in the Most Holy Place in the Temple (**First Kings 8:10-13**). **God** was above all because **the cherubim** were the highest order of created beings (**Exodus 25:22; First Samuel 4:4; Psalm 80:1, 99:1**). Secondly, he said **the LORD** is the **Creator over all the kingdoms of the earth**. **Hezekiah** prayed that **God** would both hear and see the words of **Sennacherib** and the defiance to the Living **God**.

It is true, O LORD that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not god but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, therefore, ADONAI our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, ADONAI, are God (37:16-20).

He admitted some truth in **Sennacherib's** boastings. **Assyria** had **laid waste** to **all these peoples and their lands**. **Assyria** had burned up **their gods**. But **their gods** were useless because of what **they** were, **only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands**. As he concluded **his** prayer, **he** asked for deliverance. **He asked God to save Judah on the basis of who He is**. If only we could learn to pray like this, what a difference it would make!