

2ND KINGS

Week 28, chapters 18 and 19

We're in 2nd Kings 18, which is the story of righteous King Hezekiah, King of Judah, who is perhaps best known in modern times as the king that ordered that a water tunnel to be built to protect the water supply of Jerusalem from the Assyrians who had plans to place a siege upon Jerusalem. The result was an amazing excavation that ran from the top of the City of David southward to the bottom of the hill it is built upon. Carved entirely underground through bedrock, this 600-yard long tunnel diverted the water emitting from the Gihon Spring (the primary water supply for Jerusalem) from a stream bed that flowed partially outside the city walls to this new rock-encased aqueduct that then flowed into a reservoir named the Pool of Siloam.

And by the way, most people who walk through a tunnel under the City of David think they are walking through Hezekiah's Tunnel, but they aren't. There are 2 tunnels under that ancient city, and the one that almost all tourists walk through is the one called the Old Canaanite Tunnel, because it is nice and dry. Hezekiah's Tunnel is wet and has several inches of water that flows through it all year long. Also, I've had folks who have been through the wet tunnel ask me why they didn't see the famous carved inscription that told of how the tunnel was built by means of simultaneous excavation from both ends. The reason is that when the inscription was first discovered in the 1880's, a Greek man living in Jerusalem cut the inscription out of the rock walls and tried to sell it. Sadly as he was hammering away trying to remove it, it broke into 6 pieces. Fortunately, just weeks earlier, an archeologist had taken a rub of the inscription (just like when as children we place a paper over some object and scribble with a crayon or a pencil to get an impression of the object transferred to the paper). So once the 6 pieces were recovered they could piece it back together rather easily.

We left off last time as the King of Assyria's 2nd in command, a fellow with the title of Rav-Shekeh, was blustering and thundering away at the small crowd of people who had come to hear the conference between Assyria's 3 representatives and Judah's 3 representatives. This man's arrogance knew no limits (and no doubt he was accurately reflecting the attitude and will of his master, Sennacherib) as he threatened Judah and King Hezekiah with annihilation if they didn't immediately surrender.

The exaggerated and hyperbolic speech is something that in modern times the world has come to expect of Middle Easterners, especially Arabs. Recall Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein threatening America with "the mother of all wars", and telling the media that if he were invaded that not a foreign soldier would leave his nation alive. And of course we see Israel's Palestinian border enemies constantly claiming that they will unleash hell upon Israel or make some other outlandish statement that the Western world can't decide whether to take seriously or not. This is the nature of the speech that Rav-Shakeh was making here in 2nd Kings 18, and it was rather typical for that era.

But then Rav-Shekeh makes a monumental blunder; in 2nd Kings 18 verse 25 he says this:

2 Kings 18:25 *Do you think I have come up to this place to destroy it without ADONAI's approval? ADONAI said to me, 'Attack this land, and destroy it!'"*

Or, as it was more accurately stated in the original Hebrew, “Do you think I have come up to this place to destroy it without Yehoveh's approval? Yehoveh said to me, ‘Attack this land and destroy it!’”

Here we have a pagan stating that the King of Assyria has been having personal communication with the God of Israel, and that the God of Israel has instructed him, and sided with him, to destroy the Kingdom the Judah. Whether this was meant only to scare the Judahites, or it was just more grand exaggeration, or because wars between nations were seen in that era as wars between the gods of those nations, or he seriously thought that the God of Israel was on his side is open to debate. But the fact that he used the God of Israel's formal name, YHWH, makes the statement lean heavily towards it having a literal intent.

The Rabbis of old and of the modern era have seized upon this rash statement of Rav-Shakeh and much commentary has been written about it. I'd like to summarize it because it is an important issue for Believers in all ages, but especially so in ours because of a careless claim that too many Christians make in our speech. In a nutshell: throughout the Bible we'll find dubious statements from bible characters who rationalize their actions by claiming to be doing Yehoveh's will. But this issue of doing what God patently says NOT to do in His commandments, and a Believer saying that but in this case it is because God told them to do it, is age-old.

Human beings love to rationalize. A fairly recent Jewish work called the *Be'er Moshe* (authored in the 1950's) that is essentially Torah commentary makes the editorial comment that many Scriptural cases demonstrate how rationalizations were commonly offered in order to cast what is obviously sin, in a positive or favorable light. And, I might add on my own, that countless rabbinical contributors to the Talmud have done the same in trying to explain away crystal clear divine directives, or Scriptural narratives, that at times paint revered Jewish bible heroes like King David as infallible even in the midst of their committing the worst sorts of sins.

The great Jewish sage Maimonides says in his regulations concerning idol worship that the earliest idolaters in the Scriptures contended that since God created the stars, and the moon, and the sun as well as all the forces of nature like the wind, storms, even fire, that it is only natural and normal that God's people would bow down to these phenomena and pay homage because it is essentially only a sign of respect for the God who created it all. But of course the great Rambam says that such is but rationalization for idol worship, which is to please men, and not gods.

In the *Be'er Moshe*, its author Rabbi Moshe Yechiel concludes that “every manner of aberration and sin is justified philosophically...” And what is philosophy? Human wisdom and intellectual thought. And that the only way that this can be avoided is to study God's Torah, take it to heart, and obey it because it is our fallen nature to do what we want to do, or what seems intellectually logical or pleasurable to us, and then find the most inventive rationalizations to justify it.

To make modern application to this principle: it has become common and careless speech among Christians to say things like “the Lord told me to do thus and so”, or “the Lord told me to tell you thus and so”. It sounds so very pious;

and honestly, once a person says that who can argue against what it is they have determined to say or to do? It is a conversation stopper, and either consciously or sub-consciously the one who pronounces such a statement perfectly understands that and that's usually why they say it. It's the Christian version of playing the race card, except that now we have moved from political and social ideology to spiritual defamation by possibly using the Lord's name in vain to validate our own thoughts and hopes.

My brethren this is a very serious issue in our times. I've cautioned you over and over again about this very thing. First, the Lord is NEVER going to tell you to do something that He has commanded against in His Holy Bible. Second, be very careful about considering yourself a prophet like the prophets of old who make predictions or as messengers of God's oracle to be delivered to others. I'm not saying that there might not be such prophets in our day, but I've never met one. And a true prophet is never self appointed and self anointed. I can't tell you how many links to websites people have sent me, and how many newsletters others have given to me, of purported prophets who either speak in such generalizations that there is no way to know if they were correct or not; or alternatively they will predict the assassination of a world leader, or the annihilation of Israel, or a cataclysmic event on a certain date, and of course it never happens. But that doesn't ever seem to deter them from offering their next prophecy, and their followers often don't seem to notice that many of their predictions never happen.

God's true prophets don't operate on a batting average. They have a 100% accuracy rate. If you think yourself God's prophet, test it. If you EVER tell someone something that you believe is from the Lord and it doesn't work out exactly that way, then you are NOT God's prophet. And to continue to raise yourself up as one is blasphemy of the worst sort and you are victimizing those to whom you give such false messages. The problem is that when these prophecies don't happen, people tend to lose faith in God instead of losing faith in the false-prophet, because too often they can't seem to make the distinction.

And here's the thing: even a non-Believer can commit blasphemy should they foolishly decide to invoke the name of God in what they say or do. That is what Rav-Shekeh did on behalf of King Sennacherib in 2nd Kings 18.

Let's re-read a portion of 2nd Kings 18 and bring it to a conclusion.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 18:26 – end

To my way of thinking, Rav-Shekeh's statements in verses 31 and 32 not only completely destroy his earlier argument that he is actually an agent of God, but also reveals that he is but a stooge bringing the message of the anti-God, which is Satan. And the message is this: don't trust in the God of Israel to save you. Rather, trust in ME to deliver you. Give yourself to ME and serve ME. I will give you peace, a good living, and allow you to stay where you are for a time (on this earth) before I move you somewhere else (to Hell). And like the Evil One, the King of Assyria most certainly can do, to some degree, just what he says he can do.

Starting in verse 33 the message to the residents of Judah is that it would be futile and probably fatal to resist the

King of Assyria. No other nations' gods were able to save them. And besides, the northern kingdom of Israel worshipped the same God as does Judah, and look what Assyria did to them.

Verse 36 once again demonstrates Hezekiah's wisdom and gives us a clue that in the midst of all this, he had a plan. Before the Assyrian delegates arrived he had apparently issued an edict that no one from Judah was to respond to them. Not only is it useless to argue with arrogant braggarts, but I can tell you from experience that when you don't give out information or feed-back to your opponent or to your enemy, then they will usually think the worst. It is amazing how much of an impact a non-response can have, because the person that wants or needs a response from you usually has to consider the worst case scenario for themselves if they don't get one. Equally so that is why when something does happen it is important for a leader to give out information to his people as soon as possible, otherwise folks will start filling in the blanks for themselves, imagining all sorts of things and most of the time it isn't good things. It is just human nature to do so. Thus these 3 Assyrian members of Sennacherib went back to their boss only being able to say that the message was delivered, but could offer nothing but speculation to go on as to its impact.

The last verse of chapter 18 says that the 3 men who represented King Hezekiah left their conference shaken and in deep anxiety and grief. That is the meaning of them tearing their clothes (this is literal, but the literal tearing of clothing was a symbolic act of mourning). However the Rabbis do well in pointing out that if these 3 are of the character that we hope they are, the reason for their mourning is because they heard the name of God blasphemed by Rav-Shekeh and deep grief is the appropriate response to that. For Rav-Shekeh to claim that he was Yehoveh's agent, and to compare Yehoveh to the gods of other nations and to compare Judah (God's Kingdom on earth) to any other place or nation on the planet is blasphemy. Remember that the next time you hear a fellow Believer, or a media pundit, or a politician claim that modern Israel is simply a geopolitical issue in our day, and that even handedness between Israel and Israel's enemies is what is called for. The Lord does NOT deal with the world with even-hands. Without apology His chosen people and His chosen land are shown favoritism above all others, even though at times His chosen are severely chastised for their sins. Such a thought of God playing favorites infuriates people all around this world, and coming from all walks of life. Even a large segment of the modern Church doesn't accept that God shows favor to Israel and to His people (and by His people I mean both Israel and Believers in Christ) and demands equal treatment for Israel's sworn enemies.

Just understand that if you think in such a manner, you are in the same boat as Rav-Shekeh and the King of Assyria. With torn clothing *Elyakim*, *Shevnah* and *Yo'ach* went to tell their king the bad news.

Let's see Hezekiah's response in chapter 19.

READ 2ND KINGS 19 all

When *Hizkiyahu* heard from his 3 representatives of the message of Rav-Shakeh, the King responded by tearing his clothes in mourning, and putting on sackcloth. Sackcloth was usually used as the garment of a spouse who had lost their loved one to death, but here it was to show the enormity of Hezekiah's distress. It was the king showing an

unusual humility before God, and it was designed to evoke God's mercy.

But Hezekiah also responded to what lay before him in a way that we all should emulate. He inquired of Isaiah, God's prophet, what to do and what God had to say about it all. In addition verse 1 says he went to the Temple to pray. The Rabbis admit that it is not necessary to pray at the Temple (or for a Christian, at a church) for one's prayers to be heard; however in Hezekiah's case for the king to humble himself and go to the Temple to be nearer to God (in the form of the Ark of the Covenant) faced with such a serious matter, was the wise and right thing to do.

Hizkiyahu's message was sent to Isaiah with the 3 representatives who had met with the Assyrian delegation. The message consisted of 4 elements:

- 1) This was a day of distress. This was because the survival of the nation as a Kingdom of God was at stake.
- 2) This was a day of rebuke. Hezekiah understood that part of what was happening to him and to Judah was due to past sin. But the other part was that Hezekiah was hoping that God would rebuke Assyria for their haughtiness against God's holiness.
- 3) This was a day of disgrace or sacrilege. The idea is that an enemy was emboldened (at least partially because of Hezekiah submitting to Sennacherib's demand of 10 tons of silver and 1 ton of gold) to the point that they felt no fear of Israel's God, such that they would come to His holy city, openly question God's power, and threaten His people.
- 4) This was a day when Judah became as "children ready to be born, but there is no strength to bring them forth". This was an expression that spoke of labor pain at its worst, at the moment the baby is ready to emerge from the birth canal but the mother is in such agony and so exhausted that there is great doubt that she can successfully expel the infant from her womb. The idea is that the baby and probably the mother would die in such a situation.

In verse 4, Hezekiah continues his plea by saying that only a remnant remains in Jerusalem. He is speaking of the fact that only a few of the northern tribes had escaped deportation at the hand of the Assyrians, and that much of Judah had been conquered by these same Assyrians. Generally all that remained of the Promised Land was Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and towns. But this same verse also makes clear the reason for Hezekiah's distress and his donning of sackcloth, when the king speaks of the king of Assyria who sent Rav-Shakeh to insult the living God.

Isaiah responds beginning in verse 5 with the reassuring message, '*al tira* (do not fear). And then the context for God's perspective of the arrogant speech that Rav-Shekeh delivered is set in the words, "by which the attendants of the King of Assyria have blasphemed Me". Hezekiah and his 3 representatives (along with the Rabbis who comment on this section) are surely right: it is God's holiness that is stake above all else. Since the King of Assyria directly blasphemed the God of Israel, Israel's God is going to deal directly with Assyria's King. And God is going to instill in Sennacherib a *ruach* (a spirit) that will cause him to reconsider his invasion of Judah and instead return home to Assyria where he will die violently. This does not mean that God sent a spiritual BEING of some sort (be it good or evil); rather this is meant in the sense of an unction, a thought that seems to overwhelm the king to the point that he cannot do other than to obey the thought. But once he obeys that thought it will lead to his death.

The scene suddenly changes from Hezekiah and Isaiah to the Assyrian viceroy Rav-Shakeh who, after delivering the

message to King Hezekiah, is returning to his own king. But he finds out that Sennacherib and at least part of the Assyrian army has left their siege of Lachish and moved on to Livnah. But while at Livnah he got news that the King of Cush has moved north to attack the Assyrian forces. The King of Cush is actually referring to Egypt because at this time an Ethiopian (a Cushite) was Egypt's king. This Ethiopian's name was Tirhakah. Thus Tirhakah, King of Egypt, was leading his army against Assyria.

What happens next reminds us so much of the Pharaoh of the exodus and how no matter how severely the Lord devastated Egypt, and how each time the Pharaoh would relent and beg for mercy that God would stop, the Pharaoh would turn right around and repeat his reckless blasphemy of Yehoveh and provoke yet another round of divinely inspired catastrophes. So in verses 9-13 Sennacherib digs his own grave a bit deeper: he repeats his blasphemy of the God of Israel. It can only be that the timing is that immediately upon the Lord telling Isaiah that He was going to put a spirit in Sennacherib that would ultimately result in his demise, He did so while Sennacherib was at Livnah. Thus for some reason that would be inexplicable outside of this overwhelming, not particularly rational, thought that God sent to inhabit the King of Assyria's mind, he sends his delegation back to Jerusalem to place the same demands upon Hezekiah (as if Hezekiah didn't already thoroughly understand Assyria's position from the 1st meeting). What makes Sennacherib's actions all the more irrational is that the King of Assyria does this upon hearing that Tirhakah is rapidly approaching the Assyrian forces with bad intentions in mind. Once again he says that *Hizkiyahu* ought to surrender immediately because Yehoveh can't possibly save Judah. Oh yes: it's the Pharaoh story all over again, but we need to recognize the God-pattern because we're going to see it repeat in the End Times.

When we look all around today and see the decisions that various world government leaders make, decisions that seem to be so illogical (in some cases bordering on suicidal), we are bewildered. When we see world financial leaders and gurus borrow more money in the name of getting out of debt and suggest that others do the same; when we see banks and nations getting together to throw trillions of dollars into saving other bankrupt nations, made so from incalculable folly that they have no intentions of changing, we are confused. But yet these secular humanists that form the elite intellectual set of all modern societies explain that while their decisions might SEEM to defy common sense and prudence, in fact it is only because the non-elite don't have the brain capacity to understand their brilliant solutions to the world's problems. Why do they think like they do and see their own irrational behavior as the height of wisdom? Look to the Pharaoh and to Sennacherib for the answer.

But then, not too long from now, we hear of this scenario that will sound very familiar when we're done reading. Turn your bibles to Ezekiel chapter 38.

READ EZEKIEL 38 all

Amazing isn't it? It sounds exactly like what we've been reading about with Assyria and Judah, Kings *Hizkiyahu* and Sennacherib. I told you last time that Ezekiel 38 and 2nd Kings 18 and 19 mesh so thoroughly and obviously that the ancient Rabbis deduced that Hezekiah must be symbolic of the Messiah and King Sennacherib the King of Magog. What they missed, of course, is that as these passages of Ezekiel say, it is only AFTER Israel has been gathered together and brought back from far flung places to the hills of Judea and Samaria that the war of Gog and Magog would finally occur. Notice: the hills of Samaria is but another name for the northern kingdom as populated by the 10 tribes. They were conquered by the Assyrians at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, and then the hills of Judea (Judah) would about 125 years later be conquered by the Babylonians. Then only after these 2 groups returned would

Magog come from the north and attack Israel.

Also notice that in Ezekiel God put a spirit, an unction, an overpowering thought into the mind of the King of Magog (hooks in the jaw) to attack Israel, just as He put a spirit, an unction, an overpowering thought into the mind of King Sennacherib in order that he react in a largely irrational way that would lead to his own destruction. Essentially, in both cases, the Lord was setting up an ambush and luring His enemies into it. And He did it supernaturally by putting irresistible thoughts that defy wisdom, common sense, or even self-preservation into the minds of these powerful and revered world leaders.

So, Believers, understand: all of this irrationality and confusion that we see happening is but a playing out of God's patterns. Believers are the ONLY ones capable of discerning what is happening; but only those Believers who study and believe God's Word will know about it. These government and finance leaders don't know God from a potato, despite what a few of them might feign. Don't try to understand it, because it makes no sense from an earthly perspective. Rather, try to help others understand it all from a spiritual, heavenly perspective and recognize that we are witnessing God in action, acting according to His ancient prophecies and promises, bringing the world ever closer to the end of history but also to the goal of final redemption.

We'll close out today's lesson with this thought. Verse 14 says that Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers' hands and laid it before the Lord. There are 2 important pieces of information here: we'll only deal with the first one today. It is that all responsibility for this 2nd blasphemous rant from Sennacherib rests upon him. Rav-Shekeh could have adlibbed to some degree or another, perhaps adding some of his own colorful adverbs and adjectives to King Sennacherib's intent, at that first conference. But this time the message came in the form of a written document from Sennacherib that Rav-Shekeh merely read to Hezekiah. Sennacherib alone (as with Egypt's Pharaoh of the exodus) was responsible and so he would be held personally accountable by the Lord for his attitude and his actions.

We'll begin with the 2nd important piece of information from verse 14 next time, and also deal with Hezekiah's approach to God with it.