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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2337 ~ Hezekiah Cleans the Temple.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

The political affairs of the Middle East in 7th Century BC were nearly as complicated as they are today. Alliances were formed and broken. Nations invaded one another for plunder and tribute money. And the day came when the Hebrew people of the northern and southern kingdoms went to war with each other.

King Jotham, son of Uzziah, in Judah worshipped the Lord God as his father had done. But Jotham's son, Ahaz, who ruled from 735 BC to 715 BC, didn't obey the Lord. Instead, Ahaz followed in the ways of the kings of Israel and of the heathen nations. Ahaz even did terrible evil in sacrificing his own son to idols. So the Lord sent trouble on him. But instead of repenting, King Ahaz continued to become more unfaithful to the Lord. Times of trouble will test a person and reveal their character. The true believer will turn to the Lord but the unbeliever will turn against Him. On the outside, the believer and unbeliever may for some time seem to be the same but when testing comes, the difference in their character and source of help becomes obvious. This record of Ahaz is given in 2nd Kings, Chapter 16, 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 28, and Isaiah, Chapter 7.

The war between Israel and Judah resulted in heavy casualties being inflicted on Judah, and the victors from the northern kingdom took 200,000 wives, sons and daughters from Judah back to Samaria as slaves. But a prophet of the Lord, Oded, rebuked the Israelites for killing so many of their Israelite brothers in Judah and taking their families captive. Although God had appointed the Israelites to be instruments of His judgment against Judah, they'd gone too far! They were already guilty of their own sins before the Lord, but now they'd added to them by mistreating their fellow Hebrews afterwards. Fearing the Lord's wrath, the Israelites heeded Oded's words and they allowed their captives to return to Judah; they even assisted those who were hungry, weak and in need of clothing.

King Ahaz of Judah next appealed to the emperor of Assyria for help against more attacks instead of turning to the Lord. And this was another sign of his ungodly heart. Ahaz paid the Assyrian king to defeat Syria, which he did. But this brought Judah under tribute to Assyria, which Judah didn't want. So Ahaz travelled to Damascus to meet the Assyrian king. While he was there, he saw a pagan altar that he particularly liked. He sent the design back to the priest in Jerusalem to have one made exactly the same. When he returned, he had the pagan altar installed in Solomon's Temple. Ahaz defaced and defiled the Lord's temple in other ways as well. In time, he shut the doors of the temple and set up pagan places of worship in every town in Judah.

So evil was King Ahaz that when he died, he wasn't buried in the tombs of the kings. It's all the more amazing that his son, Hezekiah, having had such an ungodly father, turned out to be such a godly king. God was still watching over the house of David and preserving it according to His promises to King David.

DRAMA - The Bible In Living Sound.

King Hezekiah wholly followed the Lord, like his ancestor King David had done, and he ruled from 715 BC to 686 BC. As a result, the Lord blessed Hezekiah's reign and in time, he gained great honour and became very wealthy. Hezekiah's first priority as king was the restoration of worship at the now-disused Temple of God. The people greatly rejoiced. There'd been nothing like this in Jerusalem since the time of Solomon. As the people were leaving the feast, they went throughout the land, destroying the idols and heathen worship places that Ahaz had set up.

In the 4th year of Hezekiah's reign over Judah, the king of Assyria besieged Israel's capital, Samaria, in the northern kingdom, and after 3 years, Samaria was conquered in 722 BC. The people were taken away to Assyria as captives because they hadn't obeyed the Lord.

Hezekiah in Judah realised that the Assyrians would besiege Judah next, so he made preparations to protect his people. He extended the city wall to protect a secure water supply and blocked the outlet of the Gihon Spring outside Jerusalem so that the water was diverted through a tunnel into the city. The tunnel was 530 metres long and carved through the bedrock under the city. According to a written inscription discovered in the tunnel, two teams worked on digging it, with each team beginning at opposite ends and meeting in the middle. This was an amazing feat when you realize that the tunnel was not cut on a straight line but rather, curved back and forth. The tunnel was also cut on a slight slope to ensure that the water ran downhill into the city. These days, tourists can walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel from end to end. And in 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 32, it says that Hezekiah succeeded in all his works.

In the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, the new king of Assyria, Sennacherib, came against the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Hezekiah sent word to Sennacherib that he would pay him what he asked to leave Jerusalem alone. But King Sennacherib asked for a huge fortune. Although Hezekiah sent silver and gold taken from the Temple of God and his own palace, the king of Assyria still sent an army by his leading officers to besiege Jerusalem.

The Assyrians called out to the people of Jerusalem in their own language as they stood on their city walls. They told the people to surrender and that if they did, they would be given land like their own in exile and be left to live in peace. But they warned the people not to expect the Egyptians to help them or let Hezekiah deceive them by telling them to trust only in the Lord. The Assyrians boasted that none of the gods of the other nations attacked before Judah had been able to stop the might of the Assyrian army. When Hezekiah's officials returned to Hezekiah with this message, Hezekiah told them to dress in sackcloth as a sign of mourning and go to the prophet Isaiah, while he himself would also dress in sackcloth but go to the Temple of God to pray.

Isaiah sent back a message to the king telling him not to believe the Assyrians' message. The Lord would cause Sennacherib to hear a rumour that would send him back home, where he would be killed. When Sennacherib heard that the Egyptian army was coming to attack him, he sent a letter to Hezekiah, telling him not to think that the Lord could deliver him. Hezekiah took the letter, placed it in the temple before the Lord and prayed for help. Isaiah sent another message to Hezekiah from the Lord, which was really a message for Sennacherib. The Lord had planned for Sennacherib to do what he'd already done in bringing the people back to Himself. But because of Sennacherib's boasting, the Lord would take him back home by the same path that he'd come. He wouldn't even come to attack Jerusalem, for the Lord Himself would protect the city.

That same night, the Lord's angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. So Sennacherib returned to his capital city of Nineveh. One day while he was worshipping in the temple of his pagan god, two of his sons killed him and another of his sons became emperor in his place.

Is boasting in oneself, as Sennacherib did, that bad? The Assyrian army had an impressive history of never being defeated before. Boasting is verbal self-praise, and is usually someone claiming to be superior over others in a particular ability, result or possession, which only leads to a good deal of pride. A number of times, the Scriptures tell us clearly that if we want to boast about something, we should boast only in the Lord about what Christ has done for us.

The Bible records that at another time, possibly after the Assyrian siege, Hezekiah became very sick. God's prophet, Isaiah, went to visit him and told him that the Lord said that Hezekiah needed to get ready to die. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for healing because of all the good things that he had done for the Lord, and then wept bitterly. Hezekiah had no son at this time who could be his heir to the throne. Would the godly line from King David now be finished? But before Isaiah had left the palace, the Lord sent him back to the king to tell him that the Lord had heard his prayer. In fact, the Lord would heal him and within 3 days Hezekiah would again be able to go to worship at the temple. The Lord also promised him another 15 years to live and that He would protect Jerusalem from the king of Assyria.

The king of Babylon heard that Hezekiah had been sick, so he sent him a letter and a gift. Hezekiah was pleased and he unwisely showed the Babylonian messengers all of his stores of wealth and military equipment. After the Babylonian messengers had left, Isaiah asked Hezekiah about who they were and what they had wanted. When Hezekiah told him, Isaiah replied that one day, the Babylonians would take away everything in his palace. As God had promised peace in the land while Hezekiah was alive, he knew this time would be after he had died and so he wasn't too concerned about it.

About 3 years after his serious illness, Hezekiah had a son and heir whom he named Manasseh. Manasseh succeeded him as king when he was 12 years old.

With the northern kingdom of Israel totally destroyed and the southern kingdom of Judah less than 150 years away from exile in Babylon, what can we learn from this piece of the history of God's chosen people? God's patience with the good-king/then-bad-king scenario ran out with Manasseh, and He dealt with David's descendants differently from then on. It's the same for us in modern times. When God's Holy Spirit strives with a person to acknowledge their wrongdoing against Him and calls them to repentance and a new life in Jesus, the person may resist continually. There comes a time when the Holy Spirit will strive no longer. Then the person is given over to their delusional beliefs and lies, and their heart is hardened.

Those of us who trust the Lord for eternal salvation are commanded to pray for those in authority over us. In 1st Timothy, Chapter 2, the Apostle Paul says: "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them, intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity – the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone." If the Holy Spirit is convicting you today, turn to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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