

BaptistWay Bible Series for May 11: When the going gets tough

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When the going gets tough

- 2 Kings 18:1-19, 29-31; 19:1-11, 14-20

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There is an old expression, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” I always have understood it to indicate that tough times reveal tough people. The “tough” are the ones who do not allow hard times to sideline them. In the passage for this week, we see some definite “tough goings” for the kingdom of Judah. The revelation of tough times brings more information about a one-of-a-kind leader.

Chapter 18 of 2 Kings begins with a quick biography of King Hezekiah. The historian is quick to bring the comparison to David, the “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; 2 Kings 18:3). It is a refreshing change from the details of the final kings of the Northern Kingdom. Hezekiah was intent on restoring legitimate worship in Judah. He eliminated places that had been dedicated to the worship of false gods.



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Some that we are familiar with (like the Asherah poles). Then there is a brief mention in verse 4 of the bronze serpent of Moses. If you recall (from Numbers 21:1-9), the bronze serpent was God's remedy for poisonous snakes that had infiltrated the grumbling Israelites' camp. Those that looked upon the serpent with faith would be healed of the venom. Now we find that our short-memored spiritual ancestors had begun worshiping the bronze serpent. What was once the symbol of faith for God's people had become an idol with a name and adorers.

The early years of Hezekiah were marked with spiritual, political, and military success. But then, the "going got tough."

The new king of Assyria, Sennacherib began a systematic assault on the areas around Judah with the intent to overwhelm the little kingdom. The king sent a delegation to prepare the way for the invasion—and if possible, to spare an all-out war. His officials engaged in a dazzling array of psychological warfare to the representatives of Hezekiah as well as to the people who had gathered to see what was going on.

In their logic, no other group of people had stood before Sennacherib. No other god had assisted any resistance. YHWH was just one more god among the local gods and, in fact, Hezekiah had reduced any divine help he could have called on by destroying the high places of idolatry in Judah.

The field commander scorned the treaties Hezekiah had signed with other nations (2 Kings 18:21). He mocked the limited military personnel Judah

had available (2 Kings 18:23).

He then loudly offered to the people listening the “chicken in every pot” promise—that life under Assyrian rule wouldn’t be bad. Everyone would have food to eat and provisions aplenty. Since we have seen before how quickly the opinions of the Hebrew nation change (Numbers 13), perhaps Sennacherib’s officials thought this ploy would work.

For Hezekiah, when the going got tough, he “got going” to pray to his God. Chapter 19 details his response: Sackcloth and ashes. Symbols of mourning. He went to the temple. Demonstration of faith.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states: “It is to Hezekiah’s credit that he realized the deeper spiritual issues involved in the crisis. It was not enough to bring the stated services and religious practices up to standard; God must be a living reality in every believer’s life.”

Perhaps lulled into a false sense of security by early victories, Hezekiah now comes face to face with genuine peril and finds nowhere to turn except to the Lord. During his time of inquiry of the Lord as to the outcome of the crisis, Hezekiah prays before the Lord in the temple. Spreading out the threats from Sennacherib’s officials, the king demonstrates a simple and profound faith in the Holy One of Israel. He closes his time of prayer with a plea for God’s deliverance. But the impetus behind the request is what should get your attention. He wants the deliverance so all people may know YHWH alone is God.

What Hezekiah came to realize is what should resonate in the heart of every believer. As we face crises in our daily lives, we should concern ourselves (and our prayers) that the character and reputation of our God not be disgraced. We should (when the going gets tough) find ourselves “going” to the one who hears our prayers and can intervene for his name’s sake.

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