



GREAT MIRACLES

OLD TESTAMENT

2 KINGS 18–19; ISAIAH 36–37

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

PERSONAL APPLICATION

THE FUTURE IN A DREAM – DANIEL 1–2

82

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*“Now faith is being sure of what we hope
for and certain of what we do not see.”*

HEBREWS 11:1

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THE ANGEL OF DEATH

We move forward in time about one hundred years to marvel at God’s miraculous activity through the prophet Isaiah, who was born in Jerusalem around 765 BC. At the age of 25, he was called by the Lord into the prophetic ministry. It seems that Isaiah became a man of means within the city of Jerusalem, enjoying access to the king and carrying a voice in the politics of his day. He was blessed with a wife and two sons. Most of Isaiah’s life was focused on Jerusalem. During his life, the two small kingdoms of the Hebrews, Judah and Israel, were under constant threat from the larger empires of the day, mostly, Assyria, Aram, and Egypt.

You will notice when you read this lesson’s chapters that the story found in Isaiah is nearly identical to the one found in 2 Kings. The similarities between the two suggest that one of the authors used material from the other. Probably the writer of 2 Kings gained his historical record from the scroll of Isaiah.

The story, as recorded in 2 Kings, begins with Hezekiah gaining the throne of Judah upon the death of his father, Ahaz. Now, many kings in Judah’s history were despicable and faithless. Hezekiah was not one of these. The Bible records Hezekiah as one of the shining jewels of the royal line, placed on a par with King David himself (2 Kings 18:3). Hezekiah began a series of reforms in which he destroyed any emblems associated with pagan worship. This meant the ruin of sacred poles and shrines, and the suppression of pagan cults. One of the heathen icons was the bronze serpent molded by Moses centuries earlier which had been used to deliver sinful Israel from a plague of snakes (Numbers 21:4–9). Somehow even this symbol had been perverted into something



associated with paganism. Snake worship was common among many of Judah's neighbors, and perhaps God's people had been influenced by the false religions around them. They no longer remembered the original intent of the bronze serpent, and perverted its significance into one of serpent worship. Considering that the cause and origin of the "fall" is so deeply associated with the serpent, we can begin to understand how distantly God's people had separated themselves from their Creator. Hezekiah had his work cut out for him.

Unlike his father, Ahaz, who had compromised with the Assyrians in order to gain an alliance against the king of Aram, Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians and refused to continue paying tribute to their king. One of the reasons Hezekiah is praised for his bold rebellion is that when Judah was a vassal to the Assyrians, God's people were forced to recognize some of the Assyrian gods. By breaking the nation's subjection to the Assyrians, Hezekiah was continuing his campaign to rid Judah of paganism. But, of course, the Assyrians didn't appreciate Judah's attempt at independence, and some kind of hostile response was inevitable.

Because Hezekiah realized his policies would cause antagonism to the Assyrians, he began a campaign to build Jerusalem's defenses. He built up the protective wall around the city and erected towers around that wall. He built a second wall further from the city. He strengthened the city's cache of weapons and enlarged the military. Perhaps most importantly, Hezekiah constructed an 1800 foot tunnel from a fresh water spring outside the city into Jerusalem and into the city reservoir called the Pool of Siloam (this reservoir still existed in Jesus' time. See John 9:6–7). At the same time, the cave from which this spring emerged was sealed up so that no enemy could tamper with it. By doing this, the king assured the

citizens of Jerusalem plenty of water should there be a siege of the city.

In 704 BC, Sennacherib ascended the Assyrian throne. After subduing a challenge from the king of Babylon, his armies began marching against the Philistines and the Egyptians, inevitably turning his attention to the land of Judah. Archeological digs have uncovered Assyrian war records which claim the Assyrians occupied 46 Judean cities. As for Hezekiah, Sennacherib bragged, "He himself, I imprisoned in Jerusalem, his residence, like a bird in a cage." Finally, the Assyrians marched against the Judean city of Lachish, considered the last stronghold before Jerusalem. The city was taken, and Hezekiah realized the end was near.

Hezekiah sent an urgent message to Sennacherib, admitting he had been wrong to rebel against his great empire and offering to give the Assyrian king the temple silver and the treasury from the royal palace. He even stripped the gold from the doors of the temple and gave it to Sennacherib. It wasn't enough.

The Assyrians marched on Jerusalem, demanding the city's surrender. Even though Aramaic had become the international language of the Near East, the Assyrian demands were spoken in Hebrew so that all the citizens could hear for themselves the terms of surrender. The Assyrians laughed at Hezekiah's assurances to the people that the Lord would protect them. They mocked the God of Israel, declaring that nothing and no one had yet demonstrated sufficient power to defeat them. No other god was capable of turning them away, and why should the God of the Hebrews be any different? They told the citizens of Jerusalem to surrender peacefully, and they would be taken to Assyria, where they could begin new lives in a land of plenty.

But, the citizens of Jerusalem trusted their king and the Lord. They didn't rebel against their leadership, but stood behind Hezekiah despite the horror which appeared to await their defiance. And Hezekiah was terrified as well. He called for the prophet Isaiah, who in turn, exhorted the king to remain steadfast. Isaiah promised that the Lord would protect Hezekiah and the last remaining Judean city. The Lord would confront Sennacherib with an alarming report, which would indicate the need for his attention elsewhere and would divert his attention. And, sure enough, Sennacherib learned that the king of Egypt was gathering his armies to attack the Assyrians. But, Sennacherib held firm. He merely sent a message to Hezekiah assuring the Judean king this would not deflect the Assyrian king from his determined course of action. Jerusalem would fall.

This really left time for Hezekiah to worry. He prayed fervently to the Lord for relief. And as Hezekiah paced the palace floors wondering how much longer he and his people could last, Isaiah sent a prophecy to him from the Lord. The Lord accused the Assyrians of arrogance, and pronounced words of judgment against them. From long ago, the Lord said, He had ordained the Assyrians' might and power and conquests. But now, because they raged against Him, their defeat was imminent. The sign to Hezekiah that the Lord had fulfilled His promise would be found when the citizens of Jerusalem harvested their own crops (clearly, the Assyrians had already destroyed the crops outside the city walls as they besieged the city). Meanwhile, the Assyrians would never attack Jerusalem, and they would be driven back to their homeland by the power of the Lord.

We have encountered an "angel of death" once

before. The people of Israel were awaiting their escape from Egypt when this dreaded angel swept through the Egyptian households, killing the first-born of each Egyptian family. That gruesome business would be repeated against the Assyrians. Once again, in the darkness of night, the angel descended and massacred the enemies of God's people. When morning came, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers lay dead. The Lord was true to His promise.

After suffering such a tremendous, unexplained disaster, the remaining Assyrians retreated to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The story ends as we learn that Sennacherib, while worshipping one of his false gods in a pagan temple, was murdered by his sons.

"How the mighty have fallen!" One of the marvelous aspects of this miracle is that much of the biblical record can be supported by archeological discovery.

For one thing, the tunnel which stretches from the spring of Gihon outside Jerusalem into the Pool of Siloam still exists. In 1890, an inscription was discovered on the tunnel wall written in perfect Hebrew. The content, script, and style of this writing pointed to the time of Hezekiah. Some of the inscription was missing, but six lines were intact. These remaining lines described how the tunnel was built, using two teams of miners digging from either end of the tunnel and meeting in the middle. The writing is known as the "Siloam Inscription" and is stored at the Istanbul Museum. The English translation is as follows:

"And this was the way it was cut through... each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his fellow,

for there was an overlap in the rock on the right and on the left. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarryman hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, ax against ax; and the water flowed from the spring to the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarrymen was 100 cubits.”

Secondly, the Assyrian Empire was advanced enough, and King Sennacherib enough of an egotist, to carve many of the historical events of his time in stone. In his palace in Nineveh, Sennacherib had a detailed bas-relief made; showing in four panels the siege and capture of Lachish. Amazingly enough, these panels have survived virtually intact and can be found in the British Museum of London. They provide one of the most graphic descriptions of an ancient battle ever found.

Thirdly, there are ancient records which refer to the murder of Sennacherib by an unnamed son in the 23rd year of Sennacherib’s reign. Assyrian inscriptions describe a struggle between Sennacherib’s sons for succession to the throne, but Sennacherib had designated Esarhaddon to succeed him, and Esarhaddon was successful in ruling Assyria for twelve years.

The site of ancient Nineveh is known as well, lying across the Tigris River on the east bank. The city’s rise to greatness was due to Sennacherib, and it continued to be the Assyrian capital until the collapse of the empire in 626 BC. The city was finally destroyed in 612 BC.

And what about the slaying of the 185,000 Assyrians? Well, there is no record of this event among the Assyrian records. Should that surprise us? Hardly.

But there is an old Egyptian legend of an

overwhelming defeat which Sennacherib suffered at the hands of the Egyptians. The legend says the Assyrians were defeated when attacked because their bowstrings and the thongs of their shields had been devoured overnight by an army of field mice. Now, do you remember that just before the “angel of death” massacred the Assyrians, Sennacherib had received word that the Egyptians were preparing to battle the Assyrians? It is a well-known fact that rodents often migrate during a time of plague. Thus, the Greek historian Herodotus attributed this massacre to the bubonic plague.

The remarkable aspect of these archeological finds, in this author’s opinion, lies with the realization that the events recorded in 2 Kings and Isaiah were once considered completely mythical by some rationalist scholars. And yet, year by year, more discoveries confirm the historical context of the miracle.

Will we ever be able to confirm the “angel of death’s” presence and activity? I seriously doubt it. You see, the Lord has this remarkable way of leading us through scientific discoveries to the edge of confirming His miracles, but just as we find ourselves on the threshold of such confirmation, evidence begins to dissolve between our fingers. The Assyrians, naturally, wouldn’t record their miraculous defeat. And so much of Judah had already been destroyed by the Assyrians, that independent confirmation will be difficult, if not impossible, to find. Once again the Lord hides His miracles from scientific proof. I know why the Lord continues to work this way:

*“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”
(Hebrews 11:1).*

PERSONAL APPLICATION*THE FUTURE IN A DREAM – DANIEL 1-2*

Father in heaven, one of life's mysteries lies in the existence of our dreams. We praise You for the moments when You have used people's dreams to direct and lead them. But we thank You for knowing that Your most trustworthy direction for our lives can be found in Your words of Scripture. Lead us through that Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Explain how Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonians and what happened to its citizens. (2 Kings 24:8-17)

And what happened again? (2 Kings 25:1-21)

2. Describe how the Bible portrays the appearance of the Lord in Jacob's dream. (Genesis 28:10-22)

What mixed feelings did this give Jacob upon waking? (Genesis 28:16-17, 20-22)

3. How were the following directed by the Lord through a dream?
Judges 7:13-15

Genesis 37:5-11

Matthew 1:18-25

Acts 16:6-10

4. List the qualities desired by Nebuchadnezzar in the young Hebrew men chosen to serve the king's court. (Daniel 1:4)
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5. How were Nebuchadnezzar's dreams affecting him? (Daniel 2:1)
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Do you have a recurring dream? Would you like to share it?

What do you think it might mean?

6. How long did Daniel remain in Babylon? (Daniel 1:21)

What freedom did Cyrus give the captive Jews? (Ezra 1:1–5)

What does this suggest about Daniel's final residence? Where did he probably live out his days?

7. Why were all the enchanters, magicians, sorcerers and astrologers rather uncomfortable at the king's demand to know and interpret his dream? (Daniel 2:1–6)

Who alone do the "wise men" of Babylon believe can fulfill the king's request? (Daniel 2:11)

Why won't they? Where do they live?

God can know and interpret the king's dream. What does this imply about the Lord's presence? (John 1:14)

8. Explain in your own words the vision in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and explain how Daniel interpreted the dream. (Daniel 2:31–45)

9. What single fact would you like to know about the future?

What has the Lord told us about the future? (Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:25–28; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; Daniel 12:1–4)

10. What was Nebuchadnezzar's response to Daniel's successful interpretation of the dream? (Daniel 2:46–49)

Do you think Nebuchadnezzar was eternally saved because of Daniel's witness? Why? (Daniel 4:34–37)

11. What criteria are we to use in determining whether our dreams are from God and how should we gain direction for our lives? (Jeremiah 23:25–28; 2 Timothy 3:14–17)