

army surrounding the city. **And that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.** Next morning, when Sennacherib and those who survived looked they saw dead bodies everywhere. News came of trouble back home, so Sennacherib left Jerusalem and the city was saved. Sennacherib's campaigns continued, but he never came to Jerusalem again. 20 years later he was murdered by his own sons.

God keeps his promises, whether they are for the immediate situation or the distant future. The first promise of the Messiah – a deliverer – occurs as far back as the Garden of Eden. It is repeated again and again through the Bible story. God does not forget his promise and from time to time reminds his people. Having just celebrated Christmas, we know that the promise was indeed fulfilled. Jesus prayed for protection for his followers, that they be kept safe from the evil one. They may have to go through difficult and testing times, but ultimately they would be kept by the power of God. The promise of Jesus' return has yet to be fulfilled. When we see how many of the promises that God made have been fulfilled, we can be certain that those yet to be fulfilled will take place.

CONCLUSION

“Dear God, what am I supposed to do?” asked missionary Marge Elam. “I am so worried for my little girl. I am not able to hover over her to protect her.” The night was warm and quite dark. I could hear several crocodiles not far from the house calling back and forth in their strange creaky way. Night birds, frogs and other night creatures added their sounds as a background to my prayer. I soundlessly left my bed and felt my way to the hammock where my eight-year-old slept. “Lord, she has to ride her bicycle alone two miles through the jungle to go to school. There are many wild things out there, and always snakes.” While looking down at the faint outline of my sleeping child, a memory went across my mind. It was the other day: her eyes were large with excitement, her voice almost squeaked, ‘Mom, it was the biggest, fattest snake. Its body stretched all the way across the road. I did not know what to do, so I just pulled up my legs and rode my bike over it.’ I could actually hear the thump of my own heart in the darkness. Then, I heard a voice. It almost seemed to come out of the darkness, but I knew it was inside of me. He said, ‘I was able to take care of your daughter in the United States, and I am able to take care of her here as well.’ After that, I was able to sleep the night through and every night since for 17 years. I knew that if He was able to take care of one eight-year-old girl, He was able to take care of everything else.”

GOD PROTECTS 2 Kings 18, 19 2 Kings 19:29-34 John 17:11-15

INTRODUCTION

Among the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, five were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army, another had two sons captured. Nine fought and died from wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight and unwavering, they pledged: “For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

The protection of Divine Providence. King Hezekiah of Judah faced difficulty, hardship and trouble. He, too, was under the protection of Divine Providence.

DISCIPLINE - PATIENCE

Hezekiah was all that a king should be. He was a godly man who resembled David more than any other king of Judah. Early in his reign he had cleansed the temple and restored worship to what it should be after the wickedness and idolatry of his father's reign. The year is 701 BC. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria was expanding his empire. The northern kingdom of Israel was no more and now Assyrian troops were marching into Judah, destroying cities. Jerusalem itself was threatened. Sennacherib demanded tribute from King Hezekiah – the price of not destroying Jerusalem. Hezekiah paid them off, but the threat did not go away.

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea

When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee. (Lord Byron)

Wisely, Hezekiah consulted the prophet Isaiah who assured him that God was looking after his people and his city. Hezekiah must stand firm. The Assyrian envoys would shout insults. They would try to demoralize the people telling them that no nation can stand against the might of Assyria. There had been war with Babylon that ended in the destruction of the city. Sennacherib completed what his father had begun against Israel, totally destroying the country and taking the

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inhabitants away captive, never to be seen again. Hezekiah did not yield. He stood firm. He prayed.

When a blacksmith works with a piece of iron, he holds it in the fire to soften it and make it pliable. In the same way God permits the testing of our faith by temptations and trials. He wants us to acquire patience, to acquire pliability. Out of the fire of affliction, we become stiff and useless.

A woman prayed a great deal for patience. She complained to another Christian that while she prayed for patience, all she seemed to get was trouble. "The Lord is sending you trouble in order to produce patience in you," was the reply. How many times have you prayed for patience, and the Lord sent along your way a child that was naughty, a boss who was demanding, a husband or wife who was exasperating to live with? It was all an answer to your prayer for patience so that you may have the opportunity to exercise and practice it. Accept it from the hand of God, for that is part of your training.

Deliverance did come, but the people of Judah still needed patience. Much of the country had been devastated. Invading armies lived off the land they were occupying. The only crops would be from seed that had been spilled and grown up of its own accord. This would be the situation for two years. Not until the third year after the siege could seed be sown and harvested in the usual way. Everything did not come right all at once. There had still to be patience.

Teach me Thy patience; still with Thee
In closer, dearer, company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong.
In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the future's broadening way,
In peace that only Thou canst give,
With Thee, O Master, let me live. (Washington Gladden)

DUTY – PRAISE

When Hezekiah sent messengers to Isaiah asking what he should do in such a desperate situation, the prophet told the king not to be afraid, God would protect them and the king of Assyria would leave Judah, return to his own land and there fall by the sword. Isaiah also gave Hezekiah a sign that after the siege it would take three years for the land to recover and crops harvested.

2 *Kin* 19:29 ²⁹Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Here is the proof that what I say is true: "This year you will eat only what grows up by itself, and next year you will eat what springs up from that. But in the

third year you will plant crops and harvest them; you will tend vineyards and eat their fruit.

There is more. This is a double sign. Yes, the country will recover, but beyond that although the people of Judah will fail and God will have to punish them and they will go away into exile, there will always be a remnant of survivors. The prophet concludes: **the zeal of the LORD will do this**. In the most difficult of situations, God is still at work and we need to acknowledge this and praise him. Zeal is enthusiasm, passion, keenness; this is what God is like, this is how he is at work. Shouldn't we praise him? Isaiah tells us that he received his call to be a prophet **in the year that King Uzziah died**. King Uzziah's death marked the end of a long period of peace and prosperity for the country. What would the future hold? Would enemies take advantage of the situation? Yes, they did. Young Isaiah goes to the temple and there he has a vision of the exalted undying King with angels praising his holiness.

He wrote some of the greatest music in the history of humanity. Yet his life was full of tragedy. By the age of 10, both parents had died. He was raised begrudgingly by an older brother who resented another mouth to feed. His first wife died after 13 years of marriage. Of 20 children from two marriages, ten died in infancy, one died in his twenties, and one was mentally retarded. Eventually he went blind and then was paralyzed from a stroke. Yet he wrote great music—music of profound praise, thunderous thanksgiving, and awe-filling adoration. He was Johann Sebastian Bach—a Lutheran and perhaps the world's greatest composer of church music. Perhaps it was because Bach knew the depths of tragedy that he also knew the heights of faith and praise. In the depths of despair, look up, for the Lord is going to bless us and others.

DELIVERANCE – PROMISE

Running through all these events is a promise, in fact three promises. (1) The city will be delivered from the enemy. (2) Although the land is devastated there will be harvests again. (3) Whatever may happen in the future there will always be a remnant, there will always be survivors. There will be a people to whom the Messiah will come and deliver. Archeologists have found what is known as *the Sennacherib Cylinder*. It dates from 689 BC and records Sennacherib's military campaigns. One tell of his siege of Jerusalem and says, "Himself (Hezekiah) I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence like a bird in a cage." But it does not mention any capture of Jerusalem, because the city was not captured. Through Isaiah, God told Hezekiah that not an arrow would be shot against Jerusalem. During the night something happened to the