



# Enter the Story

## ***Judah's Tale of Two Kings***

A narrative about choosing where to place your trust.

## ***THE BIBLE***

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16; 18-19, Isaiah 7; 36-37  
2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 28-32

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

Trust is hard to come by, but we all trust someone or something. Who in your life do you place a lot of trust in? Why do you trust them? What have they done to earn your trust?

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Jonah – A big fish story
- Amos – A Farmer and a Plumb Line
- Undying Love – Hosea & Gomer
- The Last Kings of Israel – Alliances and Allegiances

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: Ahaz becomes King of Judah**

After the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, life got much more complicated for God's people. Many kings ruled; some did good in the eyes of the LORD, but many did evil.

Because of their disobedience, God allowed other nations to rise up and oppress the people. During the prophet Isaiah's life, the nation that caused the most problems for God's people was Assyria.

Under the previous king, the smaller southern kingdom of Judah enjoyed a great time of wealth and prosperity, but a new king had taken over. His name was Ahaz; he was 20 years old when he became king; instead of following the example of his ancestor David, he modeled his leadership after other kings. He did not do what was pleasing in God's sight; he ignored the LORD's commands and imitated the detestable practices of other nations, making sacrifices to pagan gods, including offering one of his own sons in the fire. When he began to rule, Assyria had turned its focus toward his northern neighbors, attacking both Israel and Aram.

### **Scene Two: Alliances and Allegiance**

So, the king of Israel allied with the king of Aram, and they approached Ahaz, the new king of Judah, with a plan. The plan was that the three smaller nations would join forces to try and defeat the mighty Assyrians.

After hearing their request, King Ahaz refused their offer, so the two nations decided to attack Judah, hoping to have Ahaz overthrown so a new king could be put in place who would join their alliance. Realizing his neighbors were turning on him, Ahaz began to panic.

Then God sent the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz, saying, *"Stop worrying. You don't need to fear the anger of those two-burned-out embers, the king of Israel and the king of Aram. Yes, they are coming against you, telling everyone they will overthrow you, but listen to what the LORD has to say; this invasion will never happen. Aram is weak, and Israel will be crushed and destroyed within 65 years. If you want me to protect you, listen to what I say and learn to believe it."*

But Ahaz did not listen, and instead of trusting in the LORD, he decided that he would broker his own alliance. Instead of partnering with his neighbors, Ahaz joined forces with the Assyrian Empire, hoping to crush both Israel and Aram. In this, the king committed a great sin, trusting the Assyrians instead of the LORD.

### **Scene Three: Ask for a Sign**

Not long after this, Isaiah came with another message from the LORD. The prophet begged Ahaz to reconsider and not join up with the Assyrians. He desperately wanted the king to trust the LORD. God even said, *“Ask me for a sign, Ahaz, to prove I will crush your enemies as I have promised.*

*Ask for anything you like, and I beg you, make it as difficult as you want.”* But the king refused, saying, *“I would never test the LORD like that.”*

Then Isaiah stopped him and said, *“Listen up, you so-called ‘royal descendant of David’! You aren’t satisfied to exhaust my patience, but you wear out the patience of God as well! If you won’t trust God, and ask for a sign, then He will give you a sign.*

*The LORD will bring a terrible curse on you, your nation, and your family. You will soon experience greater terror than anything since Solomon’s kingdom was divided. The mighty king of Assyria is coming, and He will bring His great army! On that day, the LORD will whistle for the Assyrians, and they will swarm around you like flies, like bees they will sting and kill. On that day, the Lord will take this “razor” – these Assyrians you have hired to protect you – and use it to shave off everything: your land, your crops, and all the hair from your people.”*

Even this didn’t change the king’s mind. Ahaz sent word to the Assyrian king, saying, *“I will be your servant; please just come up and rescue me from the armies of Aram and Israel.”* Then Ahaz took the silver and gold from the Temple of the LORD and the palace treasury and sent it as a gift to the Assyrian king.

Not long after, the Assyrians attacked Aram, defeating them and taking their population away into captivity. Ahaz got what he wanted in his protection from other nations, but aligning himself with the Assyrians led to his ruin. He became nothing but a figurehead, a king in name only.

He spent his remaining years doing the bidding of his new master, even building altars to the Assyrian gods inside the LORD’s Temple. Eventually, Ahaz grew old and died, and one of his sons sat on his powerless throne.

#### **Scene Four: Hezekiah, King of Judah**

His son's name was Hezekiah, and he became king when he was 25 years old. Unlike his father, Hezekiah did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight. One of the first things he did was to tear down the pagan shrines and sacred altars that his father had built. He destroyed everything that the people chose to worship other than the LORD. Hezekiah was faithful to the LORD in everything.

He carefully obeyed all of the commands given to Moses, and he was successful in all he did. He led campaigns against the Philistines, driving them from the promised land. He even rebelled against the King of Assyria and refused to pay tribute to him.

During this time, the Assyrians fulfilled their promise to Hezekiah's father. They had already defeated Aram, but during Hezekiah's reign, the Assyrians successfully defeated Israel and took God's people into captivity. After their success, the king of Assyria became insulted that the nation of Judah had rebelled against him and no longer paid him tribute. So, he marched his army into Judah and started attacking its fortified cities.

When Hezekiah heard what was happening, he sent word to the Assyrian king, saying, *"I have done you wrong. I will pay whatever tribute money you demand if you will only go away."* The king of Assyria set an amount, and to pay it in full, Hezekiah had to strip the Temple of all the remaining silver and gold. And even though he sent these tributes, the Assyrian king did not relent. He showed up with his commanders and a considerable army and continued to attack Hezekiah in Jerusalem.

#### **Scene Five: A Message from the King of Assyria**

The Assyrian King sent a message to Hezekiah saying, *"What are you trusting in that makes you so confident? Do you think that you can convince me with mere words to back down? Where is your military strength or your allies? Perhaps you will say, 'We are trusting the LORD our God!' But isn't He the one who should be insulted by you, King Hezekiah? Didn't you tear down His shrines and altars and make everyone in Judah worship only at the altar in Jerusalem? What makes you think that your LORD didn't send us here with directions to destroy you?"*

Then the messenger shouted in Hebrew to everyone listening, *“Listen to this message from the great king of Assyria! ‘Don’t let King Hezekiah deceive you. He will never be able to rescue you from my power. Don’t let him fool you into trusting in the LORD by saying, ‘The LORD will rescue us!’ Have the gods of other nations ever saved their people from the king of Assyria? What god of any nation has ever been able to save its people from my power? Name just one! So, what makes you think that the LORD can rescue Jerusalem?”*

When the people heard all of this, they were silent. And when Hezekiah heard the report, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the Temple of the LORD to pray.

He also sent word for the prophet Isaiah saying, *“This is so discouraging, but perhaps the LORD your God has heard the Assyrians defying Him, and He will punish them for their words. Please pray for those of us who are left.”*

Then Hezekiah took the letter from the King of Assyria and spread it out before the LORD in the Temple. And he prayed this prayer, *“O LORD, God of Israel, you alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. Listen to me and hear my prayer.*

*Open your eyes, LORD, and see! Did you hear the Assyrian’s words of defiance against you, the one true living God? Is it true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations, just as the message says? Have they thrown the gods of the nations into the fire and burned them? But of course, the Assyrians could destroy them; they are not gods at all – only idols made of wood and stone, merely objects shaped by human hands. Now, LORD our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, Yahweh are God.”*

### **Scene Six: God’s Response**

Soon after, Isaiah arrived and said to Hezekiah, *“The LORD has heard your prayer and will protect you and this city from the king of Assyria. His armies will not enter Jerusalem to shoot their arrows. They will not march outside its gates with their shield and lay it under siege. The Assyrians and their king will return to their own country by the road they came. They will not enter this city; for my honor and for the sake of my servant David, I will defend it.”*

Then, that night, an angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian army waiting outside the city and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the surviving troops woke up the following day, they found corpses everywhere. Then, the Assyrian king left camp immediately, and he went back to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there.

Shortly after this, while the Assyrian king was worshipping in the Temple of his god, he was ambushed and murdered by two of his sons. This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that Assyria's king would never step inside Jerusalem.

### *Retell the Story*

- What kind of king was Ahaz?
- Who asked Ahaz to join them in an alliance against Assyria?
- How did he respond to this request?
- How did Israel & Aram react to Ahaz's decision?
- Who did Ahaz choose to trust?
- What was the message Isaiah brought to Ahaz?
- What happened because Ahaz chose to ally with Assyria?
- What type of King was Hezekiah? What did he do as king?
- How did Assyria react to Hezekiah's rebellion?
- What did Hezekiah do when Assyria put them under siege?
- What did God promise Hezekiah? How did He provide this?
- What happened to the king of Assyria?

### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?

- What do you think was more appealing to Ahaz about an alliance with Assyria rather than listening to God and forming an “alliance” with Him?
- How does the prophet Isaiah describe who controls the political situation? Do you believe this is accurate? How does that impact the politics of today?
- What was the cost of Ahaz’s choice to ally with Assyria? Was there more than a physical cost?
- Hezekiah was a different king than his father; what did he do differently?
- In the Assyrian king’s letter, what was said that offended Hezekiah? Why do you think this offended him?
- God supernaturally delivered Hezekiah and Jerusalem; why do you think He did this? What was God trying to accomplish through delivering His people this way?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God’s character or qualities?

## 1) PLACING YOUR TRUST

Trust is a central concept in this narrative. Ahaz chose to put his trust in a political treaty. Hezekiah put his trust in God. How do we know where our trust lies? What can we do that demonstrates who or what holds our confidence and trust?

## 2) OBEDIENCE

Based on the experiences of Ahaz and Hezekiah, what value do you think God places on obedience? Do you think it is reasonable or not for God to expect our obedience? Explain your answer.

## 3) THE SUPERNATURAL

God responds to Hezekiah's prayer by delivering His people supernaturally. Do you think God still works through supernatural means in our world? Why or why not? And if so, then in what ways does He still do this?

## Pray

God,

*Thank you for all You do for us. We recognize today that You are always working for our good and Your glory. We confess that often we find ourselves resisting Your will because it challenges our autonomy and our self-reliance. We also acknowledge that when we have placed our trust in ourselves and others, we have been let down, but You have never failed us. Father, grant us the wisdom and desire to place our trust in You and in You alone. Thank you for the gift of Your scriptures, which help guide us and point us to You in all situations and seasons. Amen.*