

“Who are you depending on?” In 730 BC, King Hoshea became the king of Israel—the northern ten tribes—by assassinating the previous king of Israel. The Assyrian Empire had been attacking Israel and so King Hoshea made an alliance with Assyria, paying them to protect Israel and not harm them. But eventually Hoshea no longer liked the deal he had made with Assyria and so he started paying the Egyptian Empire to protect Israel instead. The prophet Isaiah, who was living during this time, gave strong warnings about these alliances, **“Woe to those who go down to Egypt and who look to Pharaoh’s protection and to Egypt’s shelter as a refuge. Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame, Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace.”** And as soon as Israel’s payments for protection to Assyria stopped, the Assyrian Empire captured King Hoshea and threw him in prison. Then in 724 BC, the king of Assyria besieged the city of Samaria for three long and painful years. When the siege was over, Assyria captured Samaria in 721 BC and removed all its people so it could resettle the land with foreigners. Israel had trusted in Egypt to protect them and Egypt had been powerless to do anything to stop Assyria. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed and would never rise again. The Creator declared that this was because **“they did not listen and trust in him.”** The people of Israel did not obey the Creator’s commands and instead they **“imitated the nations around them.”** Israel played the political games of the nations around them and they lost everything because of it. The people of Israel lived as hypocrites, for **“while they were worshipping the Creator, they were also serving their idols.”** The people of Israel were double-minded and were trying to serve two masters, which meant they were not actually serving the Creator at all.

While all this was happening to the kingdom of Israel in the north, Hezekiah was the king of Judah in the south. King Hezekiah was very different from King Hoshea, for Hezekiah **“trusted in the Creator.”** Hezekiah was actually the most faithful king that Judah ever had, he was even more faithful than King David. As the Scriptures declare, **“There was no one like Hezekiah among the kings of Judah, either before or after. He clung to the Creator and did not stop following him.”** Just like King Hoshea, Hezekiah also **“rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.”** But Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria in a very **different** way than Hoshea who tried to meet military strength with military strength. In 713 BC, Assyria attacked Judah and conquered all of their fortified cities, except Jerusalem. Hezekiah did not respond in defensiveness or anger. Instead, Hezekiah admitted his own failures, **“turned the other cheek,”** and offered Assyria **“all the silver of his treasuries.”** He even stripped all the gold from the Lord’s temple and gave it to Assyria. But Assyria did not relent even though Hezekiah **“did not resist the evil person.”** Assyria brought its giant army to the doorstep of Jerusalem. The military commander of Assyria proclaimed to the people, **“What gives you confidence? Who are you depending on?”** He taunted them, even saying the Creator had told him to come and destroy them. He warned that if they turned to and relied on Egypt, like King Hoshea of Israel had done, that they would be destroyed just like him. Assyria’s military commander said, **“Do not let King Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Creator! Make a treaty with me! Choose life and not death! None of the other gods have saved any other land we have attacked! How can the Creator save Jerusalem from my hand?!”**

The people of Jerusalem were spooked and terrified hearing these arrogant boasts from the mighty Assyrian military commander. But King Hezekiah had commanded the people, **“Do not answer him.”** And so the people responded to the threats of Assyria with silence. Nonetheless, King Hezekiah was greatly distressed. He tore his robes and went into the temple of the Lord. Hezekiah called for the prophet Isaiah saying, **“This is a time of distress like when it is time for a child to be born but there is no strength for the birth.”** Hezekiah knew this was the moment of testing, this was the moment when Judah would be revealed to be faithful or not. That moment was upon them and Hezekiah knew he did not have the strength to get through it. The prophet Isaiah came to Hezekiah and said, **“Do not be afraid of the king of Assyria and his words. The Creator will send him back to his own land and there he will be cut down by the sword.”** The strength to get through this moment would not come from Judah or Hezekiah, it was the Creator’s strength that would get them through. Hezekiah told the people and Assyria, **“We are depending on the Lord our Creator!”**

But the king of Assyria did not go back to his own land. He sent another message to Hezekiah and Jerusalem, doubling down on his threats to destroy them. So Hezekiah turned to the Creator in prayer again, saying, **“Oh Lord, our Creator, save us so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone are Lord!”** Hezekiah did not doubt the Lord’s promises even as Assyria’s great army lingered on his doorstep. Hezekiah did not let his trust wander to Egypt like King Hoshea had done. Hezekiah did not turn to himself and his own army to save Jerusalem. Seeing his faith, the prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that the Creator had heard his prayer and had this message for him, **“The king of Assyria will not enter this city. I will defend this city and save it.”** That night the Creator sent the angel of death into the Assyrian camp and 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian army died. When morning came, the king of Assyria was absolutely stunned that most of his army was dead. He was terrified and immediately broke camp and returned to his capital city of Nineveh as fast as he could. But there his own sons turned against him and cut him down with the sword, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold. Yet while this was all happening, King Hezekiah got very sick and was quickly close to death. The prophet Isaiah came to Hezekiah and said, **“You will die and not recover.”** Hezekiah was heart broken and begged to the Creator, **“Lord, remember my faithfulness and my whole-hearted devotion to you!”** And before Isaiah had even left the room, he turned back around and said to Hezekiah, **“The Creator says, I will heal you and add 15 years to your life.”** And Hezekiah was healed that very day.

“Who are you depending on?” Hoshea, king of Israel, depended on his own political savviness, he depended on Egypt’s armies and strength to face the struggles and difficulties of life. Hoshea thought he could stand against Assyria using human strength. On the other hand, Hezekiah, king of Judah, knew he was helpless and powerless. Hezekiah knew that Egypt couldn’t help. Hezekiah knew that his own armies and the walls of Jerusalem could not save him. So King Hezekiah turned the other cheek and turned to the Lord in prayer. Hezekiah trusted in the **Creator** and in the Creator’s power and strength to get him through his troubles. **“Who are you depending on?”** As we go through life there are so many idols, begging us to trust in them and rely and depend on them. Our own intelligence and egos are idols wanting us to depend on them. Our armies and military strength are idols. Our wealth, politicians, and nations are idols. If we trust in and depend on these idols they will **fail** us, just as they did King Hoshea. Both Hamas and Israel are trusting in idols that are going to fail them. America, China, Ukraine, and Russia are all trusting in idols that will fail them. But if we trust in the Creator alone, as King Hezekiah did, we will stand firm, saved by his hand, saved by his strength alone. **“Who are you depending on?”** Many, many times life throws things at us that are too much for us to handle. We will often find that it is the moment of birth and we have no strength for the birth. But we must not turn to and rely on wealth and possessions. We must not rely on politicians. We must not rely on violence and armies. It is only the Creator who has the strength to get us through. We must proclaim today, **“We are depending on the Lord our Creator!”** It is the Creator alone who can get us through this moment of birth that is upon us. So be silent before your enemies like Hezekiah was. Freely give away your wealth and possessions. Remove your walls and lay down your weapons. Trust that the Creator is watching over you. Through Jesus we know that, even though our enemies may kill us, **“the Creator will deliver us!” Amen.**