

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings

Lesson 20: Hezekiah's Faith and Deliverance -- 2 Kings 18:1–20:21

The letter arrived from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and it was terrifying. His army had already swept through the region like a scythe through grain. City after city had fallen. His field commander, the Rabshakeh, had stood outside Jerusalem's walls and shouted in Hebrew so the people on the walls could hear every word: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you... Has any god of any nation ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad?' The message was simple and brutal: your God cannot save you any more than the gods of every other nation we have already destroyed. Surrender now.

But Hezekiah was not an ordinary king. He was, the text tells us, a man who 'trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him' (18:5). That is an extraordinary statement placed immediately after the fall of Samaria, almost as if the inspired writer wants us to see them side-by-side: this is what the north chose, and this is what one king in the south chose instead. Hezekiah removed the high places that every previous Judean king had left standing. He cut down the Asherah poles. He even broke into pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness, because the people had been burning incense to it and it had become an idol. Good things can become bad things when we worship them instead of the God they point to.

When the letter from Sennacherib came, Hezekiah did something that sounds simple but is actually rare and profound: he went up to the house of the LORD and spread the letter out before God. He prayed. Not a panicked prayer, not a bargaining prayer, but a prayer that began with the greatness of God: 'O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth' (19:15). He started with who God is. And God answered. The angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib went home in disgrace and was murdered by his own sons.

Then Hezekiah fell ill and was told he would die. He prayed again. God answered again, and gave him fifteen more years. But in those extra years, something subtly went wrong. When envoys from Babylon arrived, Hezekiah showed them everything: his treasury, his armory, his storehouses. Isaiah came with the word of God: everything you showed them will one day be carried to Babylon. Hezekiah's response is chilling in its self-absorption: 'At least there will be peace and security in my days.' The man who prayed for Jerusalem ended by being satisfied as long as disaster came after his death. Even the best of us are capable of exactly this. That is why Hezekiah, extraordinary as he was, still points us forward to the One who is greater: the King who prayed not for His own survival but for the salvation of the world.

Group Discussion: Hezekiah's story moves from sweeping reform and spectacular deliverance to a moment of foolish pride that opened the door to future disaster. What does his whole story

teach us about the nature of genuine faith, the danger of pride even in godly people, and the kind of King God ultimately provides in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection: Think about the 'bronze serpents' in your own life, things that began as good gifts or good practices that have quietly become idols, commanding more of your trust, attention, or identity than they should. What would it look like to 'break them in pieces' this week?

Read 2 Kings 18:1-20:21

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 18:1-8. The text gives Hezekiah an extraordinary commendation: there was 'none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him,' because he 'trusted in the LORD.' What specific acts of reform does the text describe, and what do those acts reveal about what genuine trust in God actually looks like in practice, as opposed to a merely verbal profession of faith?
2. Hezekiah broke into pieces the bronze serpent, a sacred object from Moses' day, because the people had turned it into an idol. Think about the 'bronze serpents' in your own life: things that were originally good (a ministry role, a Christian tradition, a cherished routine) that have quietly started receiving more of your devotion than God Himself. What makes these particularly hard to let go of, and what step could you take to reorder your affections?
3. Read 2 Kings 18:13-37. The Rabshakeh's speech is carefully designed propaganda. He attacks Hezekiah's credibility (18:22), questions whether God has sent Assyria (18:25), promises comfort to the people if they surrender (18:31-32), and argues that no god has ever defeated Assyria (18:33-35). What tactics does the Rabshakeh use to undermine trust in God, and how do those tactics resemble the arguments that erode faith today?
4. The Rabshakeh spoke loudly in a language the people on the wall could understand, targeting them directly rather than just negotiating with the leaders. He tried to separate

the people from their king and from their God. Where do you feel most vulnerable to voices that speak loudly in your everyday language telling you that God cannot really help you in this particular area of your life?

5. Read 2 Kings 19:1–7 and 19:14–19. When Hezekiah received the threatening letter, he ‘spread it before the LORD.’ What does his prayer in verses 15–19 reveal about how he understood who God is, what was truly at stake in the crisis, and what the right posture of a human being before a sovereign God looks like?
6. Hezekiah spread the letter before the LORD before he took any other action. He brought the actual problem, in its actual form, directly into the presence of God. Compare that to your own prayer life. Do you bring your specific, concrete problems to God in prayer, or do you tend to pray in general terms while actually working the specific problem through human means alone? What would it look like to pray more like Hezekiah?
7. Read 2 Kings 19:20–37. Isaiah brought God’s word in response to Hezekiah’s prayer, and God’s answer to Sennacherib’s blasphemy is devastating in its calm certainty (19:21–28). What does God’s response to the Rabshakeh’s taunts reveal about how God regards those who mock His name and His people, and what does the outcome of the siege teach us about the relationship between prayer and God’s action in history?
8. God’s deliverance of Jerusalem was complete and immediate: 185,000 Assyrians struck down in a single night, and Sennacherib returned home and was murdered by his own sons. Yet most of the deliverance God works in our lives is slower and less dramatic. How do you sustain faith in God’s power and willingness to act when the answer to prayer seems delayed or takes a very different form than you expected?

9. Read 2 Kings 20:1–11 and Hebrews 11:1, then consider 2 Kings 18:5 ('he trusted in the LORD') alongside Jesus' own prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46). Hezekiah's faith against Sennacherib is one of the Old Testament's greatest pictures of trust in God's power. How does the pattern of Hezekiah's faith (bringing the impossible situation to God, anchoring prayer in who God is, trusting the word God sends back) point forward to and find its ultimate expression in Christ, who trusted the Father perfectly even through death, and who is Himself the ultimate Deliverer of His people?

10. Read 2 Kings 20:12–21. After miraculous healing and deliverance, Hezekiah showed the Babylonian envoys everything in his house and kingdom, and Isaiah announced that all of it would one day be carried to Babylon. Hezekiah's response, 'There will be peace and security in my days,' reveals a sobering shrinkage of vision: from praying for God's glory and Jerusalem's rescue to being satisfied with personal comfort. As you look back over the whole story of 2 Kings 18 through 20, what is the one most specific truth about faith, prayer, or the character of God that you will carry with you, and how will it change something concrete in how you live this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 36–39, the parallel account with fuller prophetic context and Isaiah's song of thanksgiving; 2 Chronicles 29–32, the fuller account of Hezekiah's reforms including the Passover restoration; Psalm 46, the great confidence of God as refuge that likely reflects this period; Numbers 21:4–9, the original bronze serpent episode whose later corruption Hezekiah addressed; Hebrews 11:1–6, the definition of faith that Hezekiah embodies and that Christ perfects

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com