

Hezekiah's Faithful Reign

2 Kings 19 & 20

Key Bible Texts

2 Kings 19 & 20

Key Bible Verse(s)

“Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.” (2 Kings 19:19)

Background to the Study

Chapter 18 ends with the Assyrian officials publicly mocking Jerusalem and belittling the God of Israel. When Hezekiah heard Rabshakeh's blasphemous speech, he was deeply troubled. He put on sackcloth as a sign of humility and grief, went to the Temple, and sent his officials to Isaiah to ask for prayer. The phrase “the remnant that are left” in 2 Kings 19:4 refers to the people still in Jerusalem, since the Northern Kingdom had already been taken into captivity and many towns in Judah had fallen to Assyria.

Isaiah sent back a message of reassurance. God promised that the Assyrians would not succeed. When Sennacherib heard a rumour of an attack from Ethiopia, he sent Hezekiah a threatening letter, reminding him of the nations Assyria had already conquered and implying that the God of Israel was powerless. Hezekiah took the letter to the Temple, spread it before the Lord, and prayed. His prayer acknowledged God as Creator, recognised the truth of Assyria's victories over false gods, and asked for deliverance so that God's name would be honoured.

God's answer, delivered through Isaiah, rebuked Sennacherib, reminded him that his victories had only been possible because God allowed them, and foretold his downfall. God promised that Jerusalem would be protected and that the Assyrians would not shoot a single arrow into the city. That night, an angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, and Sennacherib later died at the hands of his own sons.

Hezekiah had begun his reign at twenty-five and had led Judah in spiritual renewal, removing high places and destroying idols. Chapter 20 opens with Isaiah telling Hezekiah that his illness would lead to death. Since God later added fifteen years to his life, this event took place in the fourteenth year of his reign, around the same time as the Assyrian threat. Hezekiah wept and prayed, concerned both for his nation and for the reforms he had begun. God heard him, extended his life, and confirmed the

promise with a sign: the shadow on a time-keeping device moved backwards ten degrees, a clear miracle.

Later, envoys from Babylon visited Hezekiah. Although they claimed to come because of his recovery, historians believe they were seeking an ally against Assyria. Hezekiah welcomed them and unwisely showed them all his treasures and armouries. Isaiah rebuked him and warned that one day Babylon would carry these treasures away. Hezekiah's response may reflect relief that judgment would not fall in his lifetime, or hope that the delay would give Judah time to repent.

The chapter ends by noting Hezekiah's achievements, including the construction of a water tunnel that brought water from the Gihon spring into the city.

TESTIMONIES FROM OUR DAY

During the Second World War, Eddie Rickenbacker and seven others survived a plane crash in the Pacific. For twenty-four days they drifted in three small rafts with almost no food or water. One man had a New Testament, and Rickenbacker later wrote that watching him read it inspired the group to hold morning and evening prayers.

The sea was calm and the sun relentless. By the eighth day, it seemed certain they would die unless something changed. Shortly after their devotions that morning, a seagull landed on Rickenbacker's hat. He managed to catch it, and the men used it for food and bait, which allowed them to catch fish. That night, clouds gathered. They prayed again, and soon heavy rain fell, giving them the water they desperately needed. Through these and other remarkable interventions, seven of the men survived. They honoured God, and He rescued them in extraordinary ways.

In today's passage, Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem faced a threat that seemed just as hopeless. The Assyrian army surrounded them, and humanly speaking, there was no way out. Yet they cried out to God, and He delivered them with power.

We may also face situations that feel impossible. When we remember God's help for the men in the rafts and His deliverance for Jerusalem, we are reminded that nothing is beyond His reach. He is able to intervene in ways we could never imagine. Like those who trusted Him long ago, we can bring our needs to God and allow Him to work in His perfect way.

A Closer Look

Question 1

How did Hezekiah respond to the threats brought first by the Assyrian diplomats and then by a letter sent directly from Sennacherib? 2 Kings 19:1, 14, 16-19. What does Hezekiah's response to the Assyrian threat teach us about handling fear?

Question 2

Can you describe a time when God has given you a clear or unexpected deliverance, similar to His help for Judah (2 Kings 19:35)? What does this story teach about the power of prayer?

Question 3

God sent word to Hezekiah to “set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Since we do not know when we will step into eternity, how can we “set our houses in order”?

Question 4

Hezekiah received from God what many have wished for – knowledge of the specific time of his death. How did Hezekiah respond to this information, and what was the end result? 2 Kings 20:2-3, 6. An amazing miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 20:9-11. What was it and why was it given?

Question 5

Apparently during his rejoicing over a crisis passed, Hezekiah received diplomatic letters and gifts from Babylon. He proceeded to make Judah vulnerable by exposing the nation’s wealth and military assets to visiting Babylonian diplomats. As a result, God declared that all would be taken away by the enemy. What are some ways that we as Christians might make ourselves vulnerable to Satan’s snares? How can we avoid them? II Kings 20:12-19

Question 6

In our lesson we learned that King Hezekiah faced three different crises: impending invasion/destruction, illness/impending death, and espionage by spies from Babylon. We also will face a variety of crises in our Christian walks. Identify what some of these might be and indicate some ways we can overcome them with God’s help.

Take Home

Whatever circumstances we may face, we can pour out our pleas to God and know that He is able to work marvellously on our behalf. Life will present us with opportunities to look to God. We can know that when we do, He hears our prayers and His answer is coming.